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## Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature: Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan

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WOMEN'S HISTORIOGRAPHY IN LATE MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN  
LITERATURE: GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, GEOFFREY CHAUCER, AND

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN

BY

EVA M. JONES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

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## ABSTRACT

*Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature: Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan* considers the ways in which the textual generation of women's historiography correlated with women's social access in late medieval Europe, 1361-1405. I examine Boccaccio's authoritative and Latin *Famous Women* (1361) and its reworkings in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* (1386-1394) and Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). I argue that Chaucer's and de Pizan's vernacular versions revise Boccaccio's exclusive Latin, which demonstrates a correlation between the consistent documentation of women and possibilities for women's social opportunities. Moreover, de Pizan's participation in the production of women's historiography demonstrates the ways in which the possession of a documented past promotes the recognition of female social contributions and counters perspectives in previous, male authored accounts. Although divisions of periodization and national literatures have separated de Pizan from Boccaccio and Chaucer, this project employs literary and historiographic analyses in order to allow de Pizan's accomplishments to stand beside those of her male contemporaries. Such a pairing not only confronts disciplinary inaccuracies, but also seeks to advance studies of women's historiographies, to appropriate de Pizan's accomplishments for women today and to further an understanding of the ways in which the politics of language affect socio-political gains, especially for women.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although authors Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, and France's first professional woman of letters, Christine de Pizan, all share biographical and textual overlaps, traditional scholarship separates all three authors by language and generation. Vittore Branca's extensive work on Boccaccio set the stage for later scholars such as David Wallace, Piero Boitani, and others to draw shared connections between Boccaccio and Chaucer.<sup>1</sup> Christine de Pizan studies draw attention to her use of Boccaccio as a source and the fact that she and Chaucer participated in some of the same social circles, but these studies still hold Chaucer as de Pizan's predecessor rather than her contemporary.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, however, Teresa Coletti's "Paths of Long Study': Reading Chaucer and Christine de Pizan in Tandem" (2006) considers Chaucer and Christine de Pizan as contemporaries. There is no concrete evidence that Chaucer knew of de Pizan, or vice versa, but the two shared many courtly and literary ties. For example, the French poet Eustache Deschamps wrote poems celebrating the literary prowess of both Chaucer and de Pizan.<sup>3</sup> Following these common ties, Coletti's article points out that

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<sup>1</sup> Vittore Branca (1913 – 2004) spent his career studying the works of Giovanni Boccaccio and produced several foundational works on Boccaccio's works, especially *The Decameron* (1349-1351), during the years of 1936 – 1997. While there is no direct proof that Chaucer read the works of Boccaccio, both *De mulieribus* and *Genealogia* were very popular. Versions of several stories in *The Canterbury Tales*, such as "The Knight's Tale," can be found in Boccaccio's vernacular masterpiece, *Decameron*. Furthermore, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (written after 1380, but before 1388, see *Riverside Chaucer*, 471) follows Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* (1339). For other studies that provide information on the pairing of Chaucer and Boccaccio, see Wallace, Boitani, Thompson, Edwards, Ginsburg, Hagedorn, and Clarke.

<sup>2</sup> Charity Canon Willard's (1914-2005) work on Christine de Pizan serves as a foundation for Christine de Pizan studies and English translations of de Pizan's work. See *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* and *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*.

<sup>3</sup> Deschamps, documented his acquaintance with both Chaucer and de Pizan in his poetry. See *Œuvres Complètes d'Eustache Deschamps*, Volume 2 for Chaucer (138-140) and Volume 6 for de Pizan

“The texts and careers of Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan crisscross each other with dizzying complexity” and her article provides a “provisional map” of these crisscrosses (2). My study seeks to expand Coletti's map by adding the Boccaccian element in order to yield further studies. More specifically, this project, *Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature: Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan*, focuses on women's historiographic literature and the ways in which each author's version of such historiography highlights a correlation between women's social access and women's historiographic literature.

For late medieval Europe, historiographies, or historiographic literature, provided information about past people, places, or events. The specific genre that engaged the textual documentation of women was the encyclopedic compendium.<sup>4</sup> The encyclopedic compendium genre provides a collection of narratives from mythology or history and biographies of exemplary people in one thematically driven volume. Such collections defined patterns regarding the people or events that formulated a social history. As I use it here, the term “women's historiographic literature” refers to collections that provide tales or biographies focused on the lives of women throughout time. Within forty-four years, conceivably one person's lifetime,

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(251-252).

<sup>4</sup> The term encyclopedia in the Middle Ages covers a large body of works, primarily any work that has to do with education. Giuseppe Mazzotta, in a lecture series entitled *Dante in Translation*, explains the implications of Dante's *Commedia* being an encyclopedia, as he states, “the aim of the encyclopedia is really to educate the reader” (“Introduction”). In fact, the *Middle English Dictionary* reflects that the verb, *compilen*, in its second and third definitions refers to the act of compiling sources for the purposes of education. These definitions are, “To collect and present information from authentic sources, as in an encyclopedia or a comprehensive treatise; compile; ~ **togeder**; (b) to codify (statutes)” and “(a) To tell or state (sth.), as in a story or chronicle; (b) ~ **lif**, to tell or write the history of (a saint's) life; (c) to foretell or prophesy (sth.)” (“Compilen,” 2 and 3). Both definitions bear connection to the use of encyclopedic compendia for educational purposes and as a means to compile and document history. Later uses of the term encyclopedia, as reflected in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, also carry education within the definition as early as 1531, which states, “The circle of learning; a general course of instruction” (“Encyclopedia,” 1).



each of these three authors produced such a women's historiography: Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*) (1361-1362), Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* (1386-1394), and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames* (1405).<sup>5</sup> This project focuses on the textual overlaps among these three volumes of women's historiography. Focusing upon this forty-four year period, I assess the ways each author communicates women's historiography in order to consider the correlation between their tactics and women's social access. More specifically, I seek to consider the ways in which Christine de Pizan, as the only woman in this group, participates in the literary documentation of women's historiography.

A major focus of this project is a study of the ways that encyclopedic compendia, particularly historiographies of women, served late medieval European society. In Chapter Two, I argue that encyclopedic compendia contributed to the formation and maintenance of public memory. The contributions of books, such as encyclopedic compendia and other forms of documentation, allowed the documented past to inform the present. As tangible documentation of the past, books formed a public memory by communicating what the public, as in anyone who could read the books, should know about the past. As important means of informing the public about the past, books also served as a rubric to assess the present and future. As a result of

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<sup>5</sup> For Boccaccio, these dates come from Virginia Brown's Introduction to *Famous Women* (xi). In the foundational work for Boccaccian studies, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work*, Vittore Branca notes that Boccaccio began the *De mulieribus* a few years after 1355 (109). For Chaucer, these years come from Robert Frank Worth's *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women*. Lisa Kiser, in her study on Chaucer's *Legend, Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women*, reports dates for both the F and G versions of the Prologue as 1386 and 1394 (19). *The Riverside Chaucer* notes that no conclusive dates can be assigned to much of Chaucer's work, but that some of the *Canterbury Tales* indicate that some of the legends from *The Legend of Good Women* were complete during Chaucer's writing of the *Canterbury Tales* and possibly prior to the *Legend's* Prologue (Benson xxviii). For de Pizan, this date comes from Charity Cannon Willard's *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, 135.

such assessment, books provided a way to shape present and future social norms, ideals, or values. With very few books devoted to women and their historical existence, textual documentation of women's social contributions were minimal in comparison to those of men. As a result, women did not have much of a place within public memory to inform either their present or their future.

Boccaccio addresses the limits of women's place in public memory in the Preface to *Famous Women*, the work that begins the forty-four year literary history under study here. He calls attention to the lack of historical or literary works on women and claims to be first to provide women with a history in the Latin, encyclopedic compendium form.<sup>6</sup> Boccaccio states that his work is necessary in order to remedy this lack by “venit in animum ex his quas memoria referet in glorie sue decus in unum deducere (honoring their [women's] glory by assembling in a single volume the biographies of women whose memory is still green)” (9).<sup>7</sup> Although women have been part of societies since the beginning of time, Boccaccio's call not only identifies a lack of women's historiographic literature, but also identifies a lack of public memory regarding women's social contribution and aptitude.

The lack of public memory for women also correlates with the lack of genealogical, as in ancestral, documentation for women. The work of Christiane Klapisch-Zuber demonstrates that women were omitted from family trees, or

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<sup>6</sup> In *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work*, Vittore Branca notes that Boccaccio began the *De mulieribus* a few years after 1355 (109). Plutarch did write *Mulierum virtutes* (120 AD), but both Stephen Kolsky and Margaret Franklin, in their studies on *De mulieribus claris*, argue that Boccaccio did not know of the work. See Franklin, *Boccaccio's Heroines*, 1,n.2; Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women*, 42. Following encyclopedic form, Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* contains 104 biographies of primarily classical and pagan women (Brown xi). Despite the fact that the contents lists 106 biographies, Brown notes that chapters XI-XII and XIX-XX are combined despite the individual numbering of each legend in the Table of Contents, which results in the number 104 rather than 106 (xxiii).

<sup>7</sup> All translations from the Latin of *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*) are from Virginia Brown.

genealogies, in late medieval Europe, particularly in Italy where both Boccaccio and de Pizan were born.<sup>8</sup> Such a focus on men in family genealogies is similar to the focus on the men in literature that constitutes the majority of public memory. Both points demonstrate a maintenance of patriarchal order. As a result, a body of traditional scholarship assumes that women were illiterate and relegated only to domestic realms of late medieval society simply because women were not documented. Conversely, recent literary and historiographic studies claim, as do Laurie Churchill, Phyllis Brown, and Jane Jeffery do in *Women Writing Latin* (2002), that more women than previously assumed were Latin literate (1-2).<sup>9</sup> Such recent assumptions find support in Robert Black's *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (2001), which claims that scholars find high percentages of Latin literacy rates in medieval and renaissance Italian societies (3). Black's work, however, displays the problem regarding women's silence because there is little to no mention of women throughout his work (16). The male focus of Latin curricula, despite the findings that women were more literate than previously thought, demonstrates the ways in which language, specifically Latin, served to maintain patriarchal order and targeted male audiences. Such findings raise questions with regard to women's silence and their limited space within late medieval Europe's public memory.<sup>10</sup> These questions not

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<sup>8</sup> See Klapisch-Zuber's *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy; La maison et le nom. Stratégies et rituels dans l'Italie de la Renaissance, A History of Women: Silences of the Middle Ages, L'ombre des ancêtres. Essai sur l'imaginaire médiéval de la parenté, and L'arbre des familles.*

<sup>9</sup> *Women Writing Latin, Vols. 1-3* assesses women who wrote in Latin from antiquity to the Renaissance. See also Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (2005).

<sup>10</sup> See also Kelly-Gadol's "Did Women Have a Renaissance" in which she argues that women's social abilities were greater than those portrayed in literature. Kelly-Gadol recognizes, however, that these abilities differed socio-economically. As a result, a woman of higher socio-economic status had

only address medieval literature, but they also address the traditional scholarship that separates de Pizan from her male contemporaries. Such separation repeats the patterns and effects of patriarchal order that reinforce women's silence.

The male focus of the encyclopedic compendia and the Latin curricula also calls attention to linguistic tensions between Latin and the vernacular throughout late medieval Europe. The works of both Dante and Petrarch serve as a foundation, linguistically and textually, for Boccaccio, Chaucer, and de Pizan. Dante Alighieri's support for the rise of the Italian vernacular provided legitimacy to literature written in the mother tongue.<sup>11</sup> Such a rise began in the thirteenth century with the *Dolce stil novo*, or the "sweet new style," that prized the use of vernacular for poetry and created an opening for Dante's work, which ultimately argued for the legitimacy of the vernacular because it allowed all people access to knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, Francesco Petrarca, also known as Petrarch, the first poet laureate of Italy since antiquity, also began his literary career by writing in the vernacular, but openly favored Latin due to its exclusivity.<sup>13</sup> Integral to this study is Petrarch's cultural movement known as

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more privilege than a woman of a lower status.

<sup>11</sup> Dante terms the vernacular the mother tongue in *Il convivio* (1.13). Many scholars note references to the term throughout *The Divine Comedy* and it is important to note that Dante supports the nobility of the Italian vernacular above all others. . . For instance, Dante argues against using the Provençal in *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Il convivio*, which shows that the French vernacular was used throughout Europe and that it was more highly regarded than other vernaculars. Furthermore, the Avignonese court in Naples (Heirs of Charles I of Anjou, who conquered Naples in the late thirteenth century) also adds a political dimension to the French and Italian linguistic tension that influenced vernacular use. For further reading, see Morreale, "French Literature, Florentine Politics, and Vernacular Historical Writing, 1270-1348."

<sup>12</sup> *Dolce stil novo* refers to the rise of Italian vernacular poetry in the thirteenth century. Traditionally, Italian poet Guido Guinizelli is held as the leader of the *Dolce stil novo*, but such claims are not fully supported due to a lack of information on Guinizelli or the existence of the *Dolce stil novo* during his time (Edwards xliii-xliv). For more information on Guinizelli, see Edwards, "Introduction" *The Poetry of Guido Guinizelli*, i-liii. Dante begins *Il convivio* with a notion of civic responsibility in vernacular use. He quotes Aristotle and states, "tutti gli uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere [all men naturally desire to know]" (1.1; English translation is mine).

<sup>13</sup> Petrarch earned the Laurel in Rome on April 8, 1341 after a three-day examination in Naples by King Robert I (Hainsworth xiii-xiv). Petrarch's *Il canzoniere* (1356-1374) is a vernacular work that he

Petrarchan-humanism, within which Petrarch pioneered the late medieval encyclopedic compendium style.<sup>14</sup> Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* (1338/9 -?) is an incomplete Latin compendium on ancient, Roman, and biblical men that began a renewed interest in the genre of historiographic literature. In fact, Boccaccio not only notes the lack of women's historiographic literature, but also opens the Preface to *De mulieribus claris* with praise for Petrarch and Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*. He states "latiori tamen volumine et accuratiori stilo, vir insignis et poeta egregius Franciscus Petrarca, preceptor noster, scribit; et digne [and in our day that renowned man and great poet, my teacher Petrarch, is writing a similar work that will be even fuller and more carefully done]" (8-9). Boccaccio's praise for Petrarch demonstrates the ways in which his work subscribes to patriarchal order and also confirms the influence of the Petrarchan encyclopedic compendium style throughout *De mulieribus*. Since Chaucer and de Pizan wrote similar historiographic works in the vernacular, the Dantean and

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revised until his death in 1374 (Hainsworth xviii). Hainsworth notes that Petrarch worked on *Il canzoniere* until the day of his death and many manuscripts of the work exist. The first version, according to Hainsworth, was composed in 1356-1358 (xvii). The final two versions, the Chigi version believed to be Giovanni Boccaccio's hand was from 1362-1363; the final manuscript in the Vatican Library was the version that Petrarch worked on until death, which was written half in his handwriting and half in the hand of his scribe (xviii). Petrarch preferred Latin because it remained a fixed language, unlike the vernacular. Hainsworth states, "Petrarch and his contemporaries reveled in the exclusiveness of Latin, which preserved the secret treasures of learning for those who could appreciate them, and deplored the way in which vernacular writing was available to women and the uneducated" (xi). See Petrarch's Letters, *Letters of Familiar Matters, XXI.15; Letters of Old Age, V*. Dante also argues that Latin bears a fixed nature in *De vulgari eloquentia* (20-23). Scholars, particularly Wallace, claim that Petrarch used Latin in order to escape time, which would allow his work to remain unchanged forever. See Wallace's "Whan She Translated Was: Humanism, Tyranny, and the Petrarchan Academy" in *Chaucerian Polity*, 265-269. See also Baranski and Cachey (eds), *Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*.

<sup>14</sup> In "Whan She Translated Was," David Wallace terms the cultural movement inspired by Petrarch, "the Petrarchan Academy" (*Chaucerian Polity* 265). Throughout this project, I refer to it as Petrarchan-Humanism, which I use to refer to the stylistic and cultural influence of Petrarch. Issues of periodization surface with regard to Petrarchan-humanism because the term sometimes suggests that Petrarch was the founder of humanism. This assumption results in two major problems: first, there were several humanist movements throughout the medieval period and throughout different European cultures; second, the term also allows Petrarch to be considered a Renaissance figure when those who lived during or after his lifetime are often considered medieval, like Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer. Scholars, such as Ron Witt and Giuseppe Mazzotta, also note that late medieval trends of humanism, especially in Italy, were well underway before Petrarch.

Petrarchan ideals significantly influenced the continuation of this genre, as well as the ways in which the language of historiographic literature contributed to public memory and ultimately helped to shape social structure.

The divide between Latin and the vernacular created a divide in the presentation of women's historiography and the legitimacy of each version. Determination of such legitimacy, to some degree, remains within the author's work. For instance, Dante names himself the sixth of the great authors ranging from antiquity to his present.<sup>15</sup> Dante's claim demonstrates the ways in which authors inscribed themselves within public memory. As a result, these inscriptions create a genealogy of literary masters, in both Latin and the vernacular. Although Dante's work is in the vernacular and more accessible to all people, his genealogy of literary masters, similar to the creation of familial genealogies and public memory, excludes women. Such exclusion of women upholds the ways in which literature supported the maintenance of patriarchal social structures, regardless of language. Ultimately, this project considers the ways in which historiographic literature, particularly women's historiographies, follow and adhere to the structures of familial genealogies in order to maintain patriarchal social structures.

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<sup>15</sup> In Canto XXX of *Purgatorio*, Beatrice appears and Virgil no longer guides Dante. After Virgil disappears, Dante weeps; in response Beatrice states, "Dante, perche Virgilio se ne vada,/ non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;/ che pianger ti conven per altra spada [Dante, because Virgil leaves you, do not weep yet, do not weep yet, for you must weep for another sword]" (55-57, translation by Charles Singleton). In his commentary on *Purgatorio*, Charles Singleton notes that this passage is the only place in the entire *Commedia* that Dante names himself (742, n 55). Scholars have investigated Dante's use of his own name and the ways in which Dante names himself as one of the great authors. For further reading on recent studies see Marks, Levenstein, and Nohnberg. Scholars also connect Dante's use of naming and literary genealogies to the works of Chaucer and Christine de Pizan. For Chaucer, see Boitani, "The Fourteenth Century: Fame of Fame" in *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*; Wallace, "The General Prologue and the Anatomy of Associational Form" in *Chaucerian Polity*; Ginsburg, "Dante's Ovid: Allegory, Irony, and the Poet as Translation" in *Chaucer's Italian Tradition*. For Christine de Pizan see Brownlee, "Literary Genealogy and the Problem of the Father: Christine de Pizan and Dante" in *Dante Now*.

Throughout this project, the definition of genealogy relates to the documentation of ancestry, or as *The Oxford English Dictionary* states, an “enumeration of the intermediate persons; a pedigree” (“Genealogy,” n. 1a). This differs from the philosophical use of genealogies, per Nietzsche and Foucault. The Nietzschean and Foucauldian use of genealogy explores the ways in which larger ideologies, or beliefs, came into existence and maintained precedence within a society at a given time.<sup>16</sup> While the philosophical use of genealogy may provide for interesting future explorations of the issues set forth in this project, the concerns in this project are linear. The basis of genealogy in *Women’s Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature: Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan* serves to map out patterns within the women’s historiographies of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and de Pizan within forty-four years to show how genealogical patterns within these historiographic works, in both Latin and the vernacular, mimic the familial genealogies of late medieval Europe. These similarities also demonstrate the development of social patriarchal structures: as women eventually find more documentation in families, they also find more documentation in public memory and in books. The primary focus in the genealogies and in public memory, however, remains on men and the aptitude of men, even within women’s historiographies.

With a focus on men, even within women’s historiographic literature, I suggest that historiographic content creates bonds between men to maintain patriarchal social structure. As a result, such maintenance requires men to bond with other men in order to maintain the status quo. This status quo not only appears within the literary

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<sup>16</sup> For further reading see: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic Tract*; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”

tradition, as mentioned above regarding Dante's inscription of himself among the great male authors, but also within the genealogies that documented only the males within each family. Furthermore, the domestic focus on men also existed within European social institutions that excluded women, such as education and government. Since historiographic literature contributes to public memory, the paucity of women's historiography reinforced exclusive social practices and set a standard for male bonding. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of the erotic triangle informs several of the following chapters and provides a means to question whether women's historiographic literature fulfills patriarchal or individual agendas. Ultimately, such exploration considers the ways in which women's historiographic literature works within and challenges the structures of social patriarchy set forth by the literary tradition and the traditional scholarship that separates de Pizan from her male contemporaries.

The fulfillment of a patriarchal as well as an individual agenda is central to *De mulieribus*. The Preface concerns Boccaccio's service to women as he declares:

ubi illarum merita, nullo in hoc edito volumine speciali – uti iam dictum est – et a nemine demonstrata, describere, quasi aliquale reddituri premium, inchoamus [The merits of pagan women, on the other hand, have not been published in any work designed especially for this purpose and have not been set forth by anyone, as I have already pointed out. That is why I began to write this work: it was a way of giving them some kind of reward]. (12-13)

Although Boccaccio claims to reward women with a collection of tales of famous women, this claim focuses more on Boccaccio's authorial achievement than on



providing women with a history. Boccaccio's focus on his literary and scholarly prowess exploits the problem that women in his society had no textually documented past in either Latin or the vernacular. Although Boccaccio declares his service to women, his exploitation of women's lack and lower social position shapes the historiographic portrayal of women toward male interests, which compromise women textually and socially. Ultimately, Boccaccio's claim and his use of women's historiographic literature demonstrates the ways in which male authors exploited or neglected women's place in historiographic literature throughout fourteenth-century Europe. Such exploitation and neglect only promoted the social subjugation of women and, as this project will explore, also highlights the relationship between social access, education, and textual/historiographic representation that is still relevant for minoritized groups today.

While Boccaccio provides a foundation for women's historiographic literature with *De mulieribus claris*, many of the same tales appear throughout Chaucer's and de Pizan's vernacular works. The two later, vernacular versions challenge the legitimacy of Boccaccio's Latin. Such a challenge, demonstrated by a rise of vernacular use during this forty-four year period in part due to Dante's work, affects the encyclopedia produced by all three authors. Due to tensions between Latin and the vernacular in late medieval Europe, the choice of language is key to all three authors, particularly to Boccaccio whose literary career is split between the vernacular and Latin. Initially following the vernacular ideals of Dante, Boccaccio's career began with vernacular works, and his first major work was *Caccia di Diana* in 1335. Boccaccio, however, turned to writing in Latin after his meeting with Petrarch in 1350, and wrote his last

vernacular work, *Corbaccio*, in 1365 (Branca 42/88-89 and 142).<sup>17</sup> Although Boccaccio's career counters the social use of the vernacular, both Chaucer and de Pizan display the ways in which the vernacular employs Latin structures in order to expose its exclusivity and challenge its legitimacy. To think through the ways in which vernacular authors applied Latin structures within their work, I turn to Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (1991). Copeland's work explores the ways in which vernacular authors, specifically Chaucer, used translation to usurp or challenge the information provided in prior, Latin works.

Since both Chaucer and de Pizan use translation to trump Boccaccio's Latin, my project engages the ways in which each version of women's historiography tells or translates the same story differently. As Boccaccio's Preface indicates, historiography, or a literary past, has the ability to communicate overarching social structures. Such communication is dependent upon audience in order to fill public memory. As mentioned earlier, Latin, the ecclesiastical and legal language of late medieval Europe, addressed a more exclusive, but often more privileged audience. As I will discuss in Chapter 1 and throughout the project, Boccaccio's use of Latin targets a male audience in order to reinforce the aptitude of men rather than women and his own authorial accomplishment. Each vernacular version addresses a larger audience and engages the content of Boccaccio's version in different ways. As a result of these differences, the

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<sup>17</sup> Boccaccio's vernacular works in chronological order: *Caccia di Diana* (1334), *Filocolo* (1336), *Filostrato* (1339), *Teseida* (1339-41), *Commedia delle Ninfe Fiorentine* (1341-2), *Amorosa visione* (1342), *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* (1343-4), *Ninfale fiesolano* (1344-6), *Decameron* (1349-1352), *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (1351), *Corbaccio* (1365 or 1355). According to G.H. McWilliam scholars dispute the date of *Corbaccio* (xlvi). Boccaccio's Latin works in chronological order: *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus et de nominibus maris liber* (1355-7), *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1350-1360), *De casibus virorum illustrium* (1355-1374), and *De mulieribus claris* (1361). Dates come from "Translator's Introduction" to *Decameron* by G.H. McWilliam and "Chronology of Giovanni Boccaccio" by Jonathan Usher.

content of each version bears different points of focus, which serve to make different contributions to public memory. Each chapter of this study considers the ways in which each author uses translation in order to target an audience and shape public memory. For de Pizan, this engagement and participation documents women in a way that works with the overarching patriarchal social structures while at the same time earning women more space within public memory.

The overlap between the three authors is not only textual, but, as mentioned earlier, biographical. In *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work*, Vittore Branca asserts the possibility that Chaucer not only heard of Boccaccio, but also possibly attended one of Boccaccio's public lectures on Dante, and had access to libraries that would possess Boccaccian work during the years 1373-1374 (184).<sup>18</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer* (1987) supports Branca's assertions, noting that Chaucer served as a king's esquire from 1367-1374 and traveled to France and to Italy. Scholars believe that these trips may have allowed Chaucer to visit Genoa and Florence, and attend the wedding of Prince Lionel to Philippa Visconti, daughter of Galeazzo Visconti of Milan (Crow and Leland xviii - xix).<sup>19</sup> These trips and Italian connections provide the possibility for Chaucer's access to manuscripts of works by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio; furthermore, they provide the possibility for Chaucer's familiarity with the Italian Trecento while both Petrarch and Boccaccio were still alive. Such possibilities provide a strong foundation

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<sup>18</sup> Many of the sources for major Chaucerian works, such as several of *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, comes from Boccaccio's *Teseida*; other tales also pull from Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. "The Knight's Tale," and various other tales from *The Canterbury Tales* can be traced back to Boccaccio's *Decameron*. For the emergence of such studies, see: Boitani, Ginsburg, Wallace, Thompson, Hagedorn, Frese, and Calabrese.

<sup>19</sup> Chaucer may have made a trip to Italy in 1368 in order to serve as a messenger for Prince Lionel and his marriage to Philippa Visconti, daughter of Galeazzo Visconti of Milan (Crow and Leland xviii). However, Crow and Leland note in "Chaucer's Life" that this 1368 trip may "have gone no farther than France or Flanders" (xix).

for Chaucer's familiarity with Boccaccio, the Italian language, Italian culture, and the literature of the Italian Trecento, which substantiate connections between the works of both authors.

Just as textual and biographical connections exist between Boccaccio and Chaucer, there are similar connections between both male authors and Christine de Pizan. To start, de Pizan was born in Venice in 1363/4, and was the daughter of a doctor/astrologer who gave her access to an education many women of her time could not have (Willard 16-17). In *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (1984), Charity Cannon Willard provides a brief sketch of Tommaso de Pizan, a doctor of medical studies at the University of Bologna. His academic circles would have included acquaintance with both Petrarch and Boccaccio, although Willard notes that the depth of their acquaintance is unclear (17-19). In 1368, de Pizan's father moved his family to Paris because he served the court of Charles V (Willard 20). De Pizan grew up in the French court and eventually married a royal secretary at the approximate age of sixteen (Willard 34-35). Unfortunately, de Pizan was widowed after ten years of marriage when her husband suddenly died in the fall of 1390 (Willard 39). Widowhood, for de Pizan and some widows of her time, led to economic hardship, which required de Pizan to find work as a writer and scribe, a difficult task for women in late medieval Europe (Willard 44-45).<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, de Pizan's work earned her

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<sup>20</sup> Much of de Pizan's work describes her experience as a widow who suffered financial losses as a result of being excluded from financial and legal affairs. Willard discusses this in "The Wheel of Fortune Turns" in *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, 39-40. Christine de Pizan also notes this hardship in *Le livre de trois vertus* (1405) and *Le livre du corps de policie* (1407). With regard to writing for a living, Willard states, "Even writers as relatively successful as Chaucer or Eustache Deschamps were unable to support themselves by writings alone. Those who were not members of religious orders were usually employed in some sort of government service or attached to the court of a prince. Careers such as these, however, were simply not available to women at the beginning of the fifteenth century" (44). Willard's account of the state of earnings from writing would follow

patronage by French loyalty, first within the House of Orléans from 1399 – 1404, then within the House of Burgundy in 1403 (Willard 52 and 169). De Pizan’s hardships, which she documents throughout her oeuvre, actively draws attention to the social limitations for women of her time and the connection between these limitations and the inaccuracies of historiographic works, such as Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*.

Although the lives, texts, and literary influences of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and de Pizan overlap, traditional literary scholarship separates them by period.<sup>21</sup> This scholarship thus neglects not only the extent to which shared languages and literary traditions existed throughout medieval Europe, but more importantly it overlooks the changes that occurred within women’s historiography in just forty-four years.

Furthermore, such separation fails to assess the lives and social contributions of medieval women documented in historiographic literature. Periodization thus intensifies the patterns of exclusion that still exist in historiographic literature today. The chapters in this project attempt to counter the pitfalls of periodization through a reliance on historiographic study and a focus on the historiographies produced within forty-four years in order to inform the literary analyses of each historiographic work.

Lastly, my project seeks to explore the ways in which the translation of women’s historiography from 1361 – 1405 calls attention to women’s social access.

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*The Riverside Chaucer* and the long list of public service jobs Chaucer held in addition to writing. Furthermore, Willard’s statement attests to the gender divide in labor, which restricted female access to income and independence.

<sup>21</sup> Periodization is the historical process of grouping and assigning a timeframe and name to historical events, figures, texts, etc. For the Middle Ages, a period of time far removed from modern times and one for which much is unknown, periodization presents a number of problems: 1) It groups the Middle Ages into a large period of time that consists of a thousand years. 2) This grouping results in an inaccuracy with regard to when certain works, events, figures, and texts existed and began. 3) Such inaccuracies plague modern understandings of the workings of medieval societies. 4) Periodization imposes canonical definitions of works, events, figures, etc and excludes others. For further reading on periodization and medieval literature/studies, see: Besserman Davis, Cole and Smith, Cummings and Simpson.

By social access, I specifically mean women's access to social institutions. Historical studies, particularly those focused on women throughout medieval Europe, report that women faced social limitations and a lack of representation in law, in government or public office, in education, and in labor.<sup>22</sup> In terms of education, women were educated differently than men were. Many historical studies detail that women in late medieval Europe received a more domestically focused education, although women from merchant or noble families often received more education in order to help their families, to which de Pizan and other upper-class women serve as an example.<sup>23</sup> The domestic focus of such education provided limitations that excluded women from participation in labor or legal affairs. For instance, in *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, Willard details that women received a more domestic education and notes that de Pizan "complained that she had not been able to spend her early years learning what would have been useful to her later on, particularly how to look after her husband's financial affairs after his death" (33). De Pizan's own autobiographical information details the hardships she faced as she provided for her family as a widow. De Pizan's experience demonstrates that although women may have been more literate than prior scholarship thought, they still faced limitations with regard to curricula,

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<sup>22</sup> For historical studies on women and work in late medieval Europe see the work of Judith Bennett for England, *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages, Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300 to 1600*, and *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250 to 1800*. See also Hanawalt's *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London*. For France, see Bernardi, Furió, and Béghin. See also work by Joëlle Rollo-Koster.

<sup>23</sup> For further reading on women in the late medieval period and their education, see Ajmar-Wolheim (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (2006). In *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Work*, Charity Canon Willard also notes the general status of education for de Pizan's time as she states, "By the second part of the fourteenth century, more girls were literate than had been the case earlier, especially young noblewomen and also the wives and daughters of Italian merchants, who were frequently taught to read and write so that they could assist the men of their families with bookkeeping and correspondence" (33). For a general standing of the mercantile society, see Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (2011). Although this source specifically looks at the economic growth of the Florentine merchants, the scholarship demonstrates the privilege within the mercantile class and mercantilism.

which limited them in terms of labor, finances, ownership, and matters of the law. Since de Pizan is the final author within this chronological study and the only woman, her participation serves as an example of the ways in which the possession of a documented past correlates to opportunities of social privilege and access. Using Boccaccio's model for providing women with a history, de Pizan not only earns more space for women within public memory, but she also becomes a part of it as one of the few female medieval authors and the first professional female author. Such existence within public memory both documents and communicates the aptitude of women of the present and future.

The first chapter, "Failure to Bond with A Brother: Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* and the Dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli," explores Boccaccio's dedication of the Latin *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*) to Andrea Acciaiuoli, sister of the Neapolitan Grand Seneschal. I consider the political ramifications of this dedication and the ways in which Boccaccio uses such praise in order to bond with Andrea's brother, Niccolò. Considering historiographic information regarding women and their documentation, via the work of Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of the erotic triangle, I argue that Boccaccio aims to form a homosocial bond with Niccolò, which textually traffics Andrea between both men. Such an aim not only exploits Andrea for Boccaccio's benefit, but it also sets a standard for the traffic of women within historiographic literature. This standard poses a problem within women's historiography because rather than document a past of women's prior social contributions, Boccaccio uses the lack of women's textual

past to socially limit and subjugate them. Ultimately, I argue that Boccaccio's use of Andrea highlights the ways in which historiographic literature sets social limitations.

The second chapter, "Remembering Alceste: Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* and a Critique of Medieval Women's Historiography" examines Chaucer's use of the mythological wife Alceste within both Prologues to *The Legend of Good Women*. I argue that Chaucer's Prologues, F and G, to *The Legend of Good Women* refer to Alceste's inconsistent appearance throughout women's historiographic literature, specifically within Boccaccio's Latin encyclopedic works. For example, while Alceste appears in Boccaccio's encyclopedia of mythology, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, she is omitted from his encyclopedia of pagan women, *Famous Women*. Through an exploration of the constructs of medieval memory, guided by Mary Carruthers's *Book of Memory* (2008), and the patterns for medieval historiographic literature, I assert that Chaucer's Prologues demonstrate linguistic and literary limitations within women's historiography. Both sets of limitations affect Alceste's remembrance and prevent her consistent inclusion within women's historiographic literature. I argue that Alceste's inconsistent remembrance bears a larger social implication for the contributions of women, which also prevents consistent remembrance of women and their social contributions.

My third chapter, "44 Years of Medea: Boccaccio, Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, and the Correction of Women's Historiography," examines the ways in which all three authors engage the tale of Medea. I argue, however, that both Chaucer and de Pizan use Boccaccio as a foundation on which to structure and challenge Latin through the vernacular. More specifically, Chaucer's and de Pizan's vernacular legends



demonstrate the instability of historical accounts as both authors omit Medea's murders from their legends, which, as I argue, draws attention to Boccaccio's focus upon upholding social and traditional patriarchal structures within historically concerned literature.

The fourth and final chapter, "Writing Women Into Male Genealogical Progression: Valentina Visconti's Historical Importance Within Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*" concerns the ways in which de Pizan historiographically documents Valentina Visconti, a contemporary, French female leader. De Pizan's documentation counters the ways that traditional historiographic literature excludes or negatively portrays women, in order to document Visconti, a member of the famous northern-Italian tyrant dynasty, who married into French Royalty in 1389. Ultimately, I argue that de Pizan's work includes women within the male-genealogical structure of historiographic literature in order to more positively account for female social contributions and to advocate for female inclusion within historiographic literature.

Overall, my project seeks to enrich scholarship concerning women's historiographic literature, and thereby to present a number of future, inter-disciplinary opportunities that deal with diversity and gender. Furthermore, my work helps to confront disciplinary inaccuracies that marginalize women in today's scholarship, and thus to increase women's visibility in, and access to, social institutions. My broad consideration of historiography also expands the basis of understanding gender history, the history of women's social positions, and the ways in which literature contributes to the formation of social structures and institutions. These understandings

will result in a deeper, more accurate comprehension of gender issues and a broader platform on which to think about them.

**CHAPTER ONE: FAILURE TO BOND WITH A BROTHER: BOCCACCIO'S  
*DE MULIERIBUS CLARIS* AND THE DEDICATION TO ANDREA  
ACCIAIUOLI**

Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*, 1361-1362) contains 104 biographies of famous women, known mainly from classical literature, an accomplishment that Boccaccio claims is the first to provide women with a history. Since women had previously been deprived of an official history, Boccaccio also claims that his Latin historiographic collection fulfills a social service. He states,

ubi illarum merita, nullo in hoc edito volumine speciali – uti iam dictum est – et a nemine demonstrata, describere, quasi aliquale reddituri premium, inchoamus [The merits of pagan women, on the other hand, have not been published in any work designed especially for this purpose and have not been set forth by anyone, as I have already pointed out. That is why I began to write this work: it was a way of giving them some kind of reward]. (12-13)

Boccaccio's reward, providing women with a history of famous foremothers, acknowledges a correlation between women's lower social position and a lack of women's historiographic literature. Ultimately, for women, this lack did not provide documentation of a textual past to credit their role and their social contributions, which prevented such credit in the present.

Boccaccio dedicates his historiographic compilation of and for women to Andrea Acciaiuoli, sister to the Grand Seneschal of the Kingdom of Naples and a life-

long friend of Boccaccio's, Niccolò Acciaiuoli.<sup>24</sup> Such a dedication highlights Boccaccio's long and turbulent relationship with Niccolò, which allows, as I argue, the dedication of *De mulieribus claris* to carry two historiographies: one that reveals limitations in women's social access and another that reveals Boccaccio's personal history with Niccolò Acciaiuoli. Although Boccaccio provides women with a history, he uses his work to contribute to existing social structures that subjugate and traffic women. Ultimately, Boccaccio sets a standard for historiographic literature and the ways it parallels and contributes to limitations in social access.

My argument relies on the disciplinary tools of both history and literature. Gabrielle Spiegel's *Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (1997) helps to uncover the ways in which genealogical structure in medieval historiographic literature transmitted disparities in social institutional access, not only for women, but also for men. Although women had lower social standing, Andrea's familial affiliations gave her sustained access to the Angevin Court at Naples, whereas Boccaccio had only a temporary affiliation with the Angevin court.<sup>25</sup> Despite Boccaccio's social inferiority, Andrea, as a woman, bore a lower social status.

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<sup>24</sup> I could not find an exact date of birth or death for Andrea Acciaiuoli, which might result from the lack of information on women in the late medieval period, see the analysis of Klapisch-Zuber above. Many of the records and information from the Kingdom of Naples was also destroyed during World War II and since Andrea, Niccolò's sister, was a member of Joanna's court, it is likely that her information was destroyed. Furthermore, Andrea had a cousin also named Andrea (the cousin bore the nickname Andreola), daughter of Jacopo di Donato Acciaiuoli whose second husband was Mainardo di Cavalcanti (the man to whom Boccaccio dedicates *De casibus virorum illustrium*). For information on Andrea Acciaiuoli, Niccolò's and Andrea's cousin, see Heller. See also Tocco who writes that Jacopo di Donato Acciaiuoli was Niccolò's cousin, which makes Donato a brother to Acciaiuolo, Niccolò's and Andrea's father (8). Niccolò lived from 1310 – 1365.

<sup>25</sup> The Angevin court at Naples is also known as the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. The kingdom began with Normans, Roger I (Count of Sicily) and his son, Roger II (the first king of Sicily) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. From 1266-1285, Charles I of Anjou was king of Sicily and Naples, which begins the Angevin rule under which both Boccaccio and Acciaiuoli lived and worked (Setton 35 and 753). Additionally, despite the term "Kingdom of Sicily," the island of Sicily was not always part of the kingdom and slipped back and forth between the Angevins and the Aragons. For further reading, see Setton, Wieruszowski, and Croce.

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (1985) explores the status of medieval women in fourteenth-century Italy and provides historical evidence of women as "passing guests" within male genealogies or lineages. Thus they carried the reputations of their families without benefiting from them (118). Klapisch-Zuber's findings substantiate evidence of the traffic in women and limitations in the creation of gendered knowledge. I also refer to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) to argue that the social traffic of women from family to family allows Andrea Acciaiuoli to be Boccaccio's socially suitable point of attack or praise for the family.<sup>26</sup> By contributing to the socially oppressive structures within historiographic literature, Boccaccio, as a social inferior to the Acciaiuoli family, aims to improve bonds with other men, specifically Niccolò. While Stephen Kolsky, in *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's De mulieribus claris* (2003), also identifies Boccaccio's dedication as an appeal to Niccolò, but in a Christian sense, I argue that the appeal is grounded in an effort to maintain male social privilege. Overall, the documentation of the references to Andrea Acciaiuoli provides a historiography of Boccaccio's turbulent relations, failed ambitions, and frustrations with the Acciaiuoli family, within which he sets a patriarchal structure for women's historiographic literature.

Linguistic hierarchies also help communicate Boccaccio's relations with the Acciaiuoli because these references appear in both Latin and the vernacular throughout the Boccaccian canon. Split between the vernacular and Latin, the Boccaccian canon also demonstrates a split between two different styles of writing:

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<sup>26</sup> The term "traffic" comes from Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." Sedgwick cites Rubin as a source for her erotic triangle model.

Dantean and Petrarchan. The *Amorosa Visione* (1342), in which Boccaccio first refers to Andrea, is a Dante-inspired dream vision written in the terza rima that demonstrates Boccaccio's devotion to the Dantean vernacular in his early career. Dante's defense of the vernacular carries a civic responsibility to transmit knowledge to all, and encouraged a rise of the vernacular throughout Europe, which rivaled Latin, the more noble and legitimate language at the time. In 1350, however, when Boccaccio met Petrarch, he began writing only in Latin, which resulted in several encyclopedic compendiums like *De mulieribus claris*, but limited Dantean civic ideals, especially the transmission of knowledge. Boccaccio's employment of both the vernacular and Latin serves to appeal more to men rather than to women due to the genealogical structure inherent within historiographic literature. Such patriarchal appeal promotes male bonds that maintain the transience of women within male lineages regardless of language. Boccaccio's move from vernacular to Latin demonstrates an appeal to men, which results in limits communicated within women's historiography. Overall, Boccaccio's canon demonstrates how both languages establish social, patriarchal legitimacy through historiographic literature. Such use, especially as vernacular use increased throughout Europe, serves as a model for future vernacular authors of historiographic literature.

Grave economic conditions, war, and plague characterized late fourteenth century Italian society. Although Boccaccio textually contributes to the social oppression of women, the documentation of his relations with the Acciaiuoli family, especially Niccolò, demonstrates Boccaccio's own social limitations within the Neapolitan Court. Vittore Branca, in *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work* (1976), notes

that Boccaccio met Niccolò when they were children in school, and they maintained a friendship for the bulk of their lives (Branca 12, 23). Born as illegitimate children with fathers who worked in the banks, Boccaccio and Acciaiuoli had much in common, but Acciaiuoli rose in the ranks of the Neapolitan court and ultimately became Grand Seneschal in 1352 (Branca 103). Boccaccio's references and appeals to Niccolò demonstrate Boccaccio's inability to meet Niccolò Acciaiuoli as a social equal and his inability to achieve a position within the Angevin court, which ultimately presents a historiography of Boccaccio's own social inferiority.

### **Forging Male Homosocial Bonds: Medieval Historiography and the Traffic of Women.**

As Boccaccio specifically notes in the Preface to *De mulieribus claris*, little to no work on women's history existed at the time of the work's inception. Such a lack of history for women perpetuated a male, genealogical pattern simply because the few works that existed were male authored. In *Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (1997), Gabrielle Spiegel argues that medieval conceptions of history, or historiographic literature, follows a genealogical structure. This genealogical structure produces, as Spiegel argues, a version of history that allows the past to inform the present and future.<sup>27</sup> Genealogy, according to Spiegel, materializes itself in the form of people, more specifically families (97).<sup>28</sup> The function of genealogy grows and also serves to document and legitimize the history, or lineage, of

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<sup>27</sup> For further reading, see Spiegel, "Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch" within *Past as Text*, 83-98.

<sup>28</sup> Spiegel states, "Genealogy transforms the connection between the political past and present into a real one, seminally imparted from generation to generation" (97).

nations. Ultimately, these genealogical practices resulted in the production of history.<sup>29</sup> Spiegel states,

Whether aristocratic or royal, genealogies were expressions of social memory and, as such, could be expected to have a particular affinity with historical thought and, at least to a certain extent, to impose their consciousness of social reality upon those whose task it was to preserve for future generations images of society in the record of history... Through the imposition of genealogical metaphors on historical narrative, genealogy becomes for historiography not only a thematic ‘myth’ but a narrative *mythos*, a symbolic form that governs the very shape and significance of the past. (104)

Spiegel finds that this governing function of narrative communicates social norms and values, and enables historiographic literature to preserve traditions that privilege some genealogies or lineages over others, such as royal or noble families. It also allows for the formation of larger groups, such as nations, to endure in the future. The result of genealogical structuring, as communicated within historiographic literature, is a social hierarchy. The disparities within this hierarchy become historical tradition and affect

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<sup>29</sup> Spiegel explores genealogical literary structures in the Chronicles of Saint-Denis, particularly in Part II of *Past as Text*. There are several studies on the ways in which ruling families make connections to past events or dynasties. See also Klapisch-Zuber’s *L’Ombre des ancêtres: Essai sur l’imaginaire médiéval de la parenté*, which analyzes genealogy and the ways genealogies affected individuals and the larger society. Federico’s *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* discusses England’s mythical and genealogical connections to Troy (xiii). Staley’s *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard III*, specifically “Inheritances and Translations,” considers the tactics employed within translation to mythically include ruling families, namely Charles V of France and Richard III of England, in order to influence social structure (76-147). In *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*, R. Howard Bloch also identifies genealogical structures within Old French texts that also bear a family structure. Works such as *Chanson de Roland* and *Conte du Graal* communicate authority through genealogy. Genealogical literary structures appear in texts as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in Brownlee’s “Literary Genealogy and the Problem of the Father: Christine de Pizan and Dante.”



both men and women to different degrees. Although men make up the focus of historiographic literature, which echoes patriarchal social structures that actively exclude women, they too endured oppression, but not to the degree of women.

The social stigmatization of men affected both Giovanni Boccaccio and Niccolò Acciaiuoli; as both were illegitimate children and were raised by their fathers, they were socially marked by the absence of their mothers. Ultimately, both men strove to overcome that social stigma. Branca notes that illegitimacy plagued both men for much of their lives and, for Boccaccio in particular, this struggle spurred his interest in rewriting the past. Branca states,

The shadow of illegitimacy cast itself on the origins of Niccolò as well as Boccaccio. (The elder Acciaiuoli was an illegitimate son, but Acciaiuoli reacted by aspiring to draw ‘his generation from the gods of Phrygia’, and by talking about his Trojan descent, which he inferred from the use of the name of Dardano in his family.) With a similar genealogical snobbism, Boccaccio, weaving in those very years the fine fable of his royal birth, claimed to be descended, through his unknown mother, from the kings of France and thus to trace his lineage back to Hector and Dardanus. (28)<sup>30</sup>

Branca’s statement not only illustrates the ways in which both Acciaiuoli and Boccaccio, as men, were socially oppressed as a result of their illegitimate births, but it also demonstrates the function of genealogy in social structure throughout fourteenth-century Italian society. In addition, Branca’s note regarding Boccaccio’s

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<sup>30</sup> Tocco, throughout *Niccolò Acciaiuoli*, also notes that Niccolò struggled against social judgments regarding not only his birth, but also his father’s, Acciaiuolo’s, illegitimate birth, which helps qualify Branca’s statement regarding the elder Acciaiuoli (8).

writing practices also shows how common mythical connections were within genealogies, as well as historiographic literature more generally, and that these connections perpetuated disparities in privilege and maintained patriarchal genealogical structures. Yet, although men like Boccaccio and Acciaiuoli met with social scorn for their illegitimate births, they were still treated better than women, as both men had greater social access than most women.

With such a reliance on historiography and genealogy, particularly for men and male lineages, the lack of historiographic literature for women is no surprise. The exclusion of women and the maintenance of patriarchal social structure are clarified by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's discussion of women's role as "passing guests" within male genealogies (118). Since women were passed from male to male, father to husband, they joined genealogies; as Klapisch-Zuber states, "Shunted between two lineages – her father's and her husband's – a woman was not a full member of either" (285). Such shunting between lineages, for medieval women, prohibited their historical presence within genealogy and, as a result, within history and historiographic literature.<sup>31</sup> This lack of stability within genealogy and this lack of history also resulted in a lack of social privilege, which limited female access and participation within social institutions such as education and law.<sup>32</sup> While Boccaccio

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<sup>31</sup> Klapisch-Zuber's work specifically on widows reveals that women of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence often had more than one husband due to short life-spans and generational gaps. This means that one woman can help promote several genealogies. Many of Klapisch-Zuber's studies include a second marriage. For further reading see the following essays within *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*: "The Cruel Mother": Maternity, Widowhood, and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries" (117-131); "The Griselda Complex: Dowry and Marriage Gifts in the Quattrocento" (213-246); "An Ethnology of Marriage in the Age of Humanism" (247-260); "The Name 'Remade': The Transmission of Given Names in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries" (283-309).

<sup>32</sup> Women were not as socially privileged as men in late medieval European society and they were barred from receiving a formal education as well as pursuing professional careers in law, or public

claims to provide women with a social service in *De mulieribus*, the provision still carried limitations for women imposed by the patriarchal genealogical structure within historiographic literature.

As women move from one lineage to another, they are trafficked in order to promote male genealogies. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores this exchange of women in “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles.” Sedgwick explores the homosocial bonds that ground patriarchal culture through a model called, the erotic triangle. The erotic triangle consists of two men at the base of the triangle in a competition for a woman at the tip (Sedgwick 21).<sup>33</sup> The gendered positions within the triangle result in the positioning of the men against the woman (Sedgwick 24-25).<sup>34</sup> As a result of the male opposition against the woman, the men form a relationship, which within genealogy most often involves marriage and the fusion of two genealogies. Sedgwick observes that the distributions of power within these erotic triangles depend upon male homosocial relations, which not only illustrate a social design, but also, as Sedgwick suggests, “a special relationship between male homosocial (*including*

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office. The collection, *Women Writing Latin from Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe* asserts that many more women were literate, particularly in Latin, than what previous studies claim. The editors Churchill, Brown, and Jeffrey note, however, that despite those higher literacy levels, cultural barriers still existed to restrict women socially (2).

<sup>33</sup> Sedgwick borrows the erotic triangle from René Girard and she notes that Girard’s use of the triangle depends upon Freud’s Oedipal triangle (22). Sedgwick also further notes that neither Girard, nor Freud, note changes within power distributions and treat the triangular distributions of power as symmetrical (23). Sedgwick notes that both Girard’s and Freud’s treatment of symmetry with regard to these triangles demonstrate both a bravery, “but a historical blindness as well” (24).

<sup>34</sup> To explain this, Sedgwick discusses Lacan and his identification of “power, language, and the Law itself with the phallus and the ‘name of the father’” (24). Sedgwick asserts that Lacan’s identification of the phallus, or maleness, with power allows “a space in which anatomic sex and cultural gender may be distinguished from one another and in which the different paths of men’s relations to male power might be explored...In addition, it suggests ways of talking about the relation between the individual male and the cultural institutions of masculine domination that fall usefully under the rubric of representation” (24). Sedgwick’s use of Lacan allows her to use the erotic triangle in order to assess patriarchal power structures and the difference of power distributions according to gender. Historians also report male sexual bonding, particularly in medieval Florence, see Roche’s *Forbidden Friendships*, Rossiaud’s *Medieval Prostitution*, and Trexler’s *The Women of Renaissance Florence: Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence*.

homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). As a result, the erotic triangle and the location of power within male homosocial bonds always imply that there is a desire for the maintenance of patriarchy in order to benefit the men at the base of the triangle. Such abundance of power also reinforces and maintains male-to-male genealogical progressions not only within genealogical lines, but also in social practices that govern the production of historiographic literature.

Essential to the maintenance of patriarchal culture, as demonstrated within the erotic triangle, is woman. Sedgwick cites Gayle Rubin’s notions regarding the traffic of women as “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (25-26). Sedgwick goes further to demonstrate that the use of women improves male bonds through the act of marriage, which implies that the marriage act occurs between men (26).<sup>35</sup> Without the exchange of women, male bonds lose the ingredient that allows them to establish homosocial relations, to further their genealogical lines, and to maintain patriarchal social structures as communicated within history or historical literature. Although Sedgwick discusses the erotic triangle in order to assess male homosocial bonds in modern society, the same graphic schema can work to assess similar bonds and power distributions in late medieval European historiographic literature. I suggest that Boccaccio’s dedication of *De mulieribus* to Andrea Acciaiuoli and his claim that

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<sup>35</sup> In this instance, Sedgwick cites Lévi-Strauss’s observations regarding women in marriage. Sedgwick also notes that in Lévi-Strauss’s theory, man uses woman “as a ‘conduit of a relationship’ in which the true *partner* is a man” (26). As a result, the use of women only solidifies male bonds with each other. Such bonds serve to maintain and ground patriarchal power within individual families as well as the larger society.

the text provides women with a history serve to forge bonds with the men genealogically connected to Andrea Acciaiuoli.

If Boccaccio's text serves to forge bonds with the men in Andrea Acciaiuoli's life, then the male production of women's historiography presents a problem with regard to perspective. In *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), Joan Scott argues for gender-focused historical study to explore the ways in which history "operates as a site of the production of gender knowledge" (10). Medieval historiographic literature, particularly within *De mulieribus*, produces information on the traditions regarding the social roles that men and women fulfill. The problem within *De mulieribus claris* is that the production of gender knowledge comes from a male author and remains within the boundaries of a male historical perspective. While many critics both qualify and critique the resulting history about women for men, they overlook the fact that this produces another site for gender production, and for males to use history in order to appeal to other males, or as Sedgwick's work states, to forge male homosocial bonds.<sup>36</sup>

With specific concern to *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio's dedication to Andrea Acciaiuoli served as a means to please the powerful men in her life: her husband(s) and, more importantly, her brother.<sup>37</sup> In *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's De mulieribus claris*, Stephen Kolsky also argues that the work is entirely focused on men and that the dedication of the work to Andrea serves more to

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<sup>36</sup> For critiques, see Jordan's "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in the *De mulieribus claris*." Most critics, such as Kolsky and Franklin, argue that Jordan's analysis is overly negative. For another negative critique of *De mulieribus* see Benson.

<sup>37</sup> Andrea Acciaiuoli had two husbands, but like the dates of her birth and death, I could not find any concrete dates of marriage: her first husband, Carlo Artus, Count of Montedodorisio, and her second husband, Bartolomeo di Capua, Commander of the Neapolitan military and Count of Altavilla (Tocco 286).

appeal to Andrea's brother, Niccolò (114).<sup>38</sup> Kolsky states, "It is difficult, if not impossible, for the refined male to live up to traditional expectations of his gender. In these circumstances, exemplary biographies of famous women are a subtle reminder to men of their gender" (116). Kolsky recognizes that Boccaccio targeted men for his history of women, which locates the history of women within the boundaries of a male historiographic perspective. Kolsky's argument also notes that Boccaccio communicates an expectation for the target audience, men (and especially the powerful men in Andrea Acciaiuoli's life), to support the maintenance of male privilege. Kolsky argues, however, that the maintenance of male privilege within the dedication of *De mulieribus* relies upon the maintenance of Christian ideals.<sup>39</sup> My argument differs with Kolsky's in that I find the dedication does not rest on Christian ideals, but solely on the basic maintenance of male privilege, and, more specifically, I argue that Boccaccio's expectation originates from his personal history with Niccolò Acciaiuoli.

In *Boccaccio's Heroines* (2006), Margaret Franklin agrees that Boccaccio's choice to dedicate the work to Andrea Acciaiuoli serves to appeal to the men in Andrea's life, but Franklin argues that the dedication serves to appeal to Queen Joanna I more than to Niccolò Acciaiuoli (23-27). While this possibility exists, this argument undermines Franklin's initial assertion that Boccaccio dedicates *De mulieribus* in order to appeal to the powerful men connected to Acciaiuoli. Franklin further argues that *De mulieribus* is a "treatise concerning the appropriate functioning of women in

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<sup>38</sup> In *Boccaccio's Heroines* (2006), Margaret Franklin critiques Kolsky's work for overlooking "the lengths to which the author went to discredit women who conceived and pursued political ambitions" (8).

<sup>39</sup> See Kolsky Chapter 6, "The Dangers of Dedication: *De mulieribus claris* and Contemporary Politics" 109 – 123.

society” (2), which parallels Kolsky’s argument regarding men and their social responsibilities. In contrast to both Kolsky and Franklin, I propose that the dedication to *De mulieribus* provides expectations and boundaries for both men and women that require the traffic of women in historiographic literature in order to maintain male social privilege. Ultimately, Kolsky and Franklin overlook the historiography that details the relationship between Boccaccio and the Acciaiuoli family, which outlines Boccaccio’s expectation for upholding male homosocial bonds.

**Torn Between the Ideals of Dante and Petrarch: Vernacular and Latin in the Boccaccian Canon.**

Language plays a large role in the communication of historical content. With the rise of the vernacular in the thirteenth century, tensions between the use of the vernacular and Latin existed not only throughout Europe in the fourteenth century, but also in the Boccaccian canon. As the studies of Vittore Branca point out, Boccaccio wrote a multitude of vernacular works prior to the *Decameron* (1349-1351) (“Vita e Opere” xlv). After the *Decameron* and his first meeting with Petrarch in 1350, Boccaccio wrote his last vernacular work, *il Corbaccio*, in 1365 (Branca 142). The ideals regarding linguistic use govern Boccaccio’s work and its split between the vernacular and Latin. This divide between the vernacular and Latin contributes to Boccaccio’s personal history with the Acciaiuoli family simply because he writes of them, specifically Andrea, in both linguistic phases of his career.

Throughout the production of these works, Boccaccio remained an avid translator and worked with different vernacular forms that encompassed not only Italian, but also Latin (in the sense that it was a vernacular in ancient Rome), Greek,

and French (Branca 32-38). With access to King Robert I's library in Naples, Boccaccio had access to a wealth of literature (Branca 37-38).<sup>40</sup> Such influence throughout Boccaccio's early career accompanies his practice of vernacular Dantean forms (Branca 32-37). Branca also notes that Boccaccio's return to Florence from Naples in 1341 demonstrates an outright dedication to Dantean style with regard to themes of love and virtue (*Boccaccio* 63). Such devotion to the practice of Dantean style and forms characterizes Boccaccio's vernacular career.

Dante Alighieri wrote primarily in the vernacular, and he first defends vernacular use in an unfinished work, *De vulgari eloquentia* (1303-1305). Dante argues that the vernacular is more noble than Latin for three reasons,

tun quia prima fuit humano generi usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobilis, cum illa potius artificialis existat (first, because it was the language originally used by the human race; second, because the whole world employs it, though with different pronunciations and using different words; and third, because it is natural to us, while the other is, in contrast, artificial) (2-3).<sup>41</sup>

Dante's preference for vernacular language rests on natural acquisition, which makes the language accessible to all of humanity. Though all humans speak a vernacular, Dante points out that various vernacular forms exist through different pronunciations

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<sup>40</sup> This French influence appears in many of Boccaccio's early works such as *Filocolo*, *Filostrato*, and *Teseida*, which originate from the French poems: *Fleur et Blanche fleur*, *Le roman de Troie*, and *Le roman de Thèbes* (Branca 38).

<sup>41</sup> All Latin translations of *De vulgari eloquentia* come from Steven Botterill.



and words. Despite the fact that these vernaculars change with culture or location, Dante favors such diversity because it is a natural human condition.<sup>42</sup>

Although Dante never finished *De vulgari*, he returned to the same argument and claims the vernacular as a civic responsibility in *Il convivio* (1304-1307), a treatise defense of the vernacular in the vernacular. Dante begins the work with a reference from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and states, "tutti gli uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere (all men by nature desire to know)," which emphasizes an imperative that language and knowledge should be accessible to all (4/3).<sup>43</sup> In "Translation as rhetorical invention: Chaucer and Gower," Copeland argues that Dante, in *Il convivio*, "rehabilitates" a rhetorical function with his use of the vernacular, which breaks the exclusivity of academic culture and allows the transmission of knowledge a wider scope, or audience (182).<sup>44</sup> The structure of *Il convivio* completes this mission: the work consists of four tractates, with the first part introducing the entire work, and the remaining three parts bearing canzoni and commentary of the canzoni. Not only does Dante declare his mission, per Aristotle, but he also exemplifies the completion of his

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<sup>42</sup> In *De vulgari*, Dante explains the invention of Latin as, "Hec cum de comuni consensus multarum gentium fuerit regulata, nulli singulari arbitrio videtur obnoxia, et per consequens nec varibilis esse potest (Its rules having been formulated with the common consent of many people, it can be subject to no individual will; and, as a result, it cannot change)" (20-23). As a result of its constancy, Latin connects the many vernaculars of the world. Dante's distinction in *De vulgari*, between the vernacular and Latin, indicates that both languages are necessary to humanity. However, Latin's ability to connect vernaculars, as a separate and artificial language that requires education, provides Latin with precedence over the vernacular. The necessity of education in order to use Latin results in restrictions of social use, which withholds the language from the uneducated. In *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Rita Copeland argues that Dante's definition of Latin restricts his argument for the nobility of the vernacular as she states, "But in attempting to theorize a place for the vernacular in a hierarchy of languages, Dante seems to accept rather than challenge the given terms of that hierarchy" (180-181).

<sup>43</sup> All translations of *Il convivio* come from Richard Lansing.

<sup>44</sup> This analysis comes from a subsection of the essay entitled "Dante's Vernacular Hermeneutics and the Rehabilitation of Rhetoric," 180-186. Copeland states, "In the *Convivio*, the job of rhetoric is to break down the exclusiveness of academic culture and give the widest possible access to an enabling body of knowledge. In this venture, the tool of rhetoric is the vernacular" (182-183).

mission, through the vernacular, which ultimately demonstrates the vernacular imitating an academic discourse, specifically Latin.<sup>45</sup> This imitation, Copeland argues, relies on rhetorical function, which allows the content to be more socially accessible than that of Latin (184). Dante's push for vernacular translation as a social service influences Boccaccio's early career, particularly *Amorosa visione*, which has been consistently critiqued for its devotion to Dantean poetics.<sup>46</sup> Boccaccio's first reference to Andrea Acciaiuoli appears in the *Amorosa visione*, but she still meets linguistic and social subjugation due to the social structures, such as the erotic triangle, that hold her subordinate to men.

After Boccaccio's meeting with Petrarch in 1350, his devotion to humanistic erudition intensified and Boccaccio wrote more in Latin, and less in the vernacular (Branca 108-112). Unlike Dante, Petrarch favored the exclusive use of Latin. Although Petrarch's career began with writing in the vernacular and he revised his vernacular poems until the end of his life.<sup>47</sup> Petrarch discusses his choice to write in Latin rather than the vernacular in two of his letters, within *Rerum familiarium libri*

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<sup>45</sup> Copeland states, "Real power lies, not in status, but in effective, persuasive communication, and here the vernacular is clearly in charge... In the *Convivio*, the vernacular is the medium of public enlightenment, which is constructed as the highest good. The job of realizing this highest good is given over to rhetoric, as teaching is accomplished through the office of persuasive eloquence, embodied here in the charm or winning eloquence of Dante's own *canzoni*" (183-184).

<sup>46</sup> Many critics note *Amorosa visione* as a mediocre poem due to its forced terza rima structure and heavy-handed focus on Dantean ideals. See Wallace, "Accommodating Dante: The *Amorosa Visione* and *The House of Fame*," in *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio* (1985), 6 n.9. Wallace provides a record of the *Amorosa*'s major critiques. In the Introduction to Hollander's translation of the *Amorosa Visione* (1986), Vittore Branca states that, "the reader may often have a feeling that the artist has failed to define and design the moral sense of his work carefully enough from the outset" (xviii). Branca later notes, in this same Introduction, that the *Amorosa* was the first Boccaccian work that Petrarch read (xxiii).

<sup>47</sup> Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (1356-1374), is a collection of 366 vernacular poems. Although Petrarch overtly preferred Latin over the vernacular, he worked on *Canzoniere* for the bulk of his life. See Musa's and Manfredi's Introduction, *Canzoniere or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (1996); Hainsworth, Introduction, *The Essential Petrarch*, 2010. Additionally, *Trionfi* (began in the 1340s and revised until he died) is also one of Petrarch's famous vernacular works.

(*Familiar Letters*) and *Rerum Senilium libri* (*Letters of Old Age*), both addressed to Boccaccio. Ultimately, Petrarch provides three reasons for his preference of Latin: his fear of becoming an imitator, the fact that he felt his “own talent sufficient for that kind of writing without anyone’s aid,” and his fear of having his work misused (*Familiar Letters*, XXI.15, 204-205).<sup>48</sup> Petrarch’s last fear, the misuse of his work, appears again in the *Letters of Old Age*. This letter concerns a rumor that Boccaccio burned all of his early vernacular works. Though Petrarch first fears that Boccaccio possibly committed this act out of pride, he reasons with it and admits, “Certainly, I have sometimes had the idea of doing the same with my vernacular writings...although those brief and scattered vernacular works of my youth are not longer mine, as I have said, but have become the multitude’s, I shall see to it that they do not butcher my major ones” (V.2, 162-163). Ultimately, Petrarch prefers Latin due to its limited audience. As the letters disclose, Petrarch believed that the accessibility of his vernacular work allowed society to own it, which removed the work from his control and subjected it to social ruin.

Although scholars recognize that Boccaccio never expressed a dislike for the vernacular as Petrarch did, he produced few vernacular works after 1350. Despite a focus on the production of Latin works, Boccaccio remained devoted to Dante and gave public lectures on Dante during 1373-1374 (Branca 182-184). Ultimately, Boccaccio’s relations with the Acciaiuoli bear documentation in both vernacular and

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<sup>48</sup> *Familiar Letters*, XXI.15 discloses an argument that Petrarch and Boccaccio have with regard to Dante and Dante’s work. Boccaccio (supposedly) accused Petrarch of disliking Dante out of pride or detraction from “his [Petrarch’s] personal glory” (202). Petrarch dismisses these accusations and admits “his [Dante’s] style is unequal, for he rises to nobler and loftier heights in the vernacular than in Latin poetry or prose” (206). Petrarch also states family connection with Dante as Petrarch’s father and Dante were exiled from Florence on the same day (203).

Latin phases of his canon. The consistency of this documentation solidifies not only Boccaccio's turbulent relationship with Niccolò, but also his social inferiority that resulted from his consistent attempts to build homosocial bonds through the subjugation and traffic of women, specifically Andrea Acciaiuoli.

### **The Traffic of Andrea and the Turbulent Relationship Between Boccaccio and the Acciaiuoli**

The Acciaiuoli family, originally from Florence, was a powerful banking family. Francesco Paolo Tocco states, in *Niccolò Acciaiuoli: vita e politica in Italia alla metà del XIV secolo* (2001), that the Acciaiuoli family had a slow rise to power throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and they earned most power and prestige during the last two decades of the thirteenth century (5).<sup>49</sup> Due to relations with the Angevins of Naples, the business acumen of Acciaiuolo Acciaiuoli (father to both Niccolò and Andrea), and the Acciaiuoli family's prominence in the Guelf party, the Acciaiuoli Bank spread throughout Europe.<sup>50</sup> Tocco reports the date of Niccolò's birth as 2 September, 1310, but Andrea's date of birth does not appear (1).

In *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work*, Branca reports that Boccaccio was born in 1313 to Boccaccino, an associate for another powerful Italian banking family, the Bardi (5).<sup>51</sup> As with Niccolò and Andrea, there is no mention of Boccaccio's mother. Both Niccolò and Giovanni studied under Giovanni Mazzuoli da Strada in Florence as

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<sup>49</sup> Tocco states, "L'ascesa ai vertici economico-politici della città fu lenta e si concretizzò definitivamente a partire dall'ultimo ventennio del XIII secolo, nel contesto dell'esautorazione progressiva delle famiglie magnatizie con la riforma istituzionale che vide l'istituzione dei sei priori, e del rafforzamento del legame tra gli Angioini e gli ambienti guelfi fiorentini, con la conseguente diffusione della *societas Acciaiuolorum* in tutta Europa e, in particolare nel meridione d'Italia e nel Mediterraneo orientale." (5).

<sup>50</sup> See Renouard on Florentine Merchants.

<sup>51</sup> Branca notes that the exact date of Boccaccio's birth is not known and he surmises that Boccaccio was born in June or July (5).

children (Tocco 17; Branca 9 and 23). After his childhood move from Florence to Naples in 1327, Boccaccio served as an apprentice in banking and merchandising at the Bardi Bank, while Niccolò also fulfilled his apprenticeship at the same place and time (Branca 12-17; Tocco 19). Although both men had much in common, specifically being illegitimate children, Boccaccio remained the socially inferior of the two simply due to the fact that his father did not own a bank.

After serving apprenticeships, Boccaccio learned that he was not interested in business and changed the focus of his studies to Latin (Branca 31). Niccolò, on the contrary, continued to study law and became an adviser for Catherine de Valois-Courtenay, Empress of Constantinople in 1334, solidifying his alliance within the House of Taranto (Branca 24; Tocco 23-33).<sup>52</sup> A year later, in 1335, Niccolò was knighted while Boccaccio wrote his early vernacular poems, such as *Il Filostrato*. In 1341, due to a rise in royal debts from England and Naples, many Italian banks collapsed, which drove Boccaccio's family, as part of the Bardi, out of Naples (Branca 54).<sup>53</sup> After returning to Florence, as Janet Levarie Smarr states in *Eclogues* (1987), Boccaccio had "his hope that Niccolò Acciaiuoli, who desired for the sake of his own prestige to have a man of letters in residence at the court, would set him up in the style which he so fondly recalled" (xi). After financial crises of 1341, Boccaccio's access and affiliation with the Neapolitan court ended. As a result of the termination of this

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<sup>52</sup> Catherine de Valois-Courtenay (1301-1346), daughter of Charles de Valois, was the wife of Phillip, Prince of Taranto (d. 1331) and King Robert I's brother. Scholars, including Tocco, surmise that Niccolò and Catherine had an affair, see Tocco, 24. Niccolò's alliance with the House of Taranto helped secure land in Greece, particularly in Achaia, see Tocco 28-33. For more information on the Acciaiuoli (also Acciajuoli) in Greece, see Setton, *A History of the Crusades, Volume III* (1975).

<sup>53</sup> For more information on the Italian Economic Crisis of the 1340's see Tocco, 41-87; the work of David Abulafia also examines various facets of the crisis. Specifically, Abulafia's article, "Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy, 1265-1370," provides good information regarding the relations and interdependence between Florence and the Kingdom of Naples.

courtly affiliation, Boccaccio held hope that Niccolò Acciaiuoli would grant him a post within the Angevin court and Branca notes that Boccaccio was dissatisfied with the move to Florence, primarily because he was unable to secure a post within the Angevin court (59).<sup>54</sup> Boccaccio's aspirations turned to frustration with the Angevin court and such frustration is present in Boccaccio's early writings, especially in *Amorosa Visione*, which was written a year after Boccaccio returned to Florence (Branca 52-54).

Boccaccio's expressions of frustration with Naples in *Amorosa* contain an early reference to Andrea Acciaiuoli. Due to poor Florentine and Neapolitan relations that resulted from the financial crisis, Branca and Smarr assert that the Florentines perceived King Robert I as an avaricious man; the Acciaiuoli, particularly Niccolò, who was on a quick rise in rank, were also depicted as such (65, xii). As the *Amorosa*'s plot features a dreamer searching for true love, an anonymous female guide leads the narrator to see people that appear within Boccaccio's biographical life. Discussion of the Acciaiuoli, specifically Andrea, occurs as the narrator recounts visions of women whose reputations were marred by their families' avaricious aspirations. The narrator states,

Riguardando oltre, con sembianza umile  
venia colei che nacque di coloro  
li quai, tal fiata con materia vile  
agguzzando l'ingegno al lor lavoro,  
fer nobile colore ad uopo altrui,

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<sup>54</sup> Branca notes that Boccaccio held out hope through 1347 and Boccaccio "claimed that he was persecuted by misfortune" (72).

moltiplicando con famiglia in oro.

Tra l'altr'è nominate da colui

che non Cefas abbandonano le reti

per sguitar il gran Mastro, per cui

i tristi duoli e gli angosciosi fleti

fur tolti a' padre antichi

[Looking farther on, I saw approaching, humble

in her looks, the one born of those who,

sharpening their wits to their

work, at times with base matter, gave

themselves to noble colors through others,

multiplying their riches by family alliances.

Among the others, she was named after him

who with Cephas abandoned the nets

in order to follow the great Master through whom the ancient

fathers were freed from sad sorrows and anguished tears]

(XLII.28-33)<sup>55</sup>

Most critics, including Robert Hollander, note that this passage is a reference to Andrea Acciaiuoli, which means that it refers directly to her family and their avarice (242). The narrator observes a woman, Andrea, who initially approaches with a humble appearance, but upon looking closer, she bears the visual marks of her family's ambitions. Such observations follow the late medieval European practices that value male genealogies and reinforces Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's findings of

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<sup>55</sup> All translations from the *Amorosa Visione* come from Robert Hollander.

women in fourteenth-century Italy as “passing guests” in their families. As a result, Andrea’s male family members define her and she carries the reputation of her family. Although Andrea is the socially acceptable target for her family, her reputation suffers from her family’s pursuit for power, despite her humility, and this impression results from Boccaccio’s personal interactions, observations, and frustrations with her family, specifically Niccolò. At a time when he failed to gain entry within the Angevin Court, the *Amorosa Visione* allows Boccaccio to use Andrea’s social inferiority in order to document his frustrations with the Acciaiuoli family.<sup>56</sup>

Boccaccio’s frustrations with Niccolò Acciaiuoli grew further although Boccaccio served as a Florentine diplomat and continued to write.<sup>57</sup> At this time, Italy did not only deal with poor economic conditions, but King Robert I of Naples died in 1343 and Queen Joanna I, at age 15, took the Neapolitan throne. Unfortunately, Joanna’s reign was a turbulent one that began with her inheritance of the throne as a teenager. Scholars claim that Joanna’s inheritance was the result of the death wish of her grandfather, King Robert I, to keep the Neapolitan throne from his Hungarian relatives (Goldstone 66).<sup>58</sup> King Robert’s death and wish exacerbated conditions in

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<sup>56</sup> Boccaccio’s *Eclogues*, pastoral poems, also document his frustrations with the Angevins and Acciaiuolis, among other things. Poems that express frustration with the Angevin court at Naples, see III “Fanus” and V “Silva Cadens.” For poems that express frustrations over the Acciaiuoli family, particularly Niccolò, see VIII “Midas.” For poems that express frustrations on both the Angevins and the Acciaiuoli, see IV “Dorus” and VI “Alcestus.”

<sup>57</sup> Branca approximates that Boccaccio began missions of diplomacy for Florence in 1349 (86-87). Branca also notes throughout *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work* that Boccaccio and Niccolò Acciaiuoli occasionally met for both business and friendship during missions.

<sup>58</sup> Robert, son of Charles the Lame or King Charles II of Naples, inherited the throne because Carobert of Hungary, the son of Charles Martel – Robert’s older brother, was too young. Carobert was sent to grow up in Hungary, and Robert’s other older brother, Louis, renounced his inheritance and gave it to Robert. In this way, Carobert’s removal of the throne was treated as though he rejected his inheritance, when he did not. Once Carobert came of age, he actively attempted to reclaim the Kingdom of Naples. See Goldstone, *The Lady Queen*, 21-23; 35-47. In order to assay Carobert’s claim, Robert agreed to the marriage of Carobert’s son, Andrew and Joanna (Goldstone 78). However, on his deathbed, Robert’s dying wish requested that Andrew never have sole rule over the



Italy as tensions inside and outside of the kingdom flared.<sup>59</sup> Such tensions worsened in 1345 with the murder of Joanna I's husband, Andrew of Hungary, which led to Hungarian invasion and the flight of the Queen with her cousin and second husband, Louis of Taranto (Tocco 71-74).<sup>60</sup> Since Niccolò was an ally to the House of Taranto, he aided Louis and the recapture of Naples for Joanna and Louis, which resulted in his appointment to Grand Seneschal in 1352.<sup>61</sup> To make matters worse, the Black Death spread throughout Italy, which served as Boccaccio's backdrop for his masterpiece, *Decameron* (1349-1352) (Branca 77). Throughout all of Italy's turmoil, Boccaccio still held hope that Acciaiuoli would help him earn a court position in Naples, but such hopes were dashed in 1355 when Boccaccio visited Naples and Niccolò ignored him (Branca 103-104).<sup>62</sup>

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Kingdom of Naples (Goldstone 66). This wish made Joanna the sole ruler over the kingdom and gave no ruling agency to Andrew. Also see Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, XII–XIII. For an account of Robert's death wish, see XIII.LI (416-417). For Villani's report on Andrew's death, see XIII.LII (420-421).

<sup>59</sup> Tensions within the kingdom existed between the warring Houses of Durazzo and Taranto, who vied for power of the throne. Other tensions throughout Joanna's reign: the Neapolitan Financial crisis; a number Papal disputes; the murder of Andrew of Hungary (her first husband); the blame for her husband's murder; Hungarian invasion; Joanna's second marriage to Louis of Taranto; the death of her child; the suspension of her rule; the plague; the death of her second husband; the acquisition and loss of Sicily; the marriage and death of her third husband; constant threats of invasion by France, the Visconti, and Hungary; the marriage of her fourth husband; and it all ends with her assassination in 1382. For more information regarding the reign of Joanna I, see Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, XIII, Goldstone, *The Lady Queen*.

<sup>60</sup> For more information on the murder of Andrew of Hungary, see Goldstone, *The Lady Queen* (94-110); Smarr, "Historical Background" in *Eclogues*, 201-206; and Housley.

<sup>61</sup> This was a turbulent time for the Kingdom of Naples that involved not only war, but also papal intervention. Although Joanna and Louis returned to Naples in the spring of 1348, Hungarian troops remained and a second invasion occurred in 1350, which resulted in a papal investigation of Andrew's murder and a suspension of Joanna's rule. The papal investigation claimed Joanna innocent and allowed her to rule Naples once again, but Louis and Niccolò commandeered a coup d'état, which resulted in Louis's acquisition of the crown in 1352, which aligns with Niccolò's promotion. For a brief synopsis of these events, see Smarr, "Historical Background" in *Eclogues*, 201-206; Goldstone, *The Lady Queen*, 111-180.

<sup>62</sup> Branca admits that there is little information on this trip and that Boccaccio, although irritated by Niccolò's behavior, enjoyed the presence of other friends such as Zanobi da Strada, son of his former schoolteacher, who was crowned with the laurel some months prior. See also Tocco (206–207).

Approximately twenty years later, Boccaccio wrote *De mulieribus claris* and Andrea Acciaiuoli makes a second appearance in the Boccaccian canon, as Boccaccio dedicates the work to her. By this time, Boccaccio wrote primarily in Latin and this dedication correlates with Boccaccio's interest in an available Apostolic Secretary position within Angevin court of Robert I's successor, Joanna. In 1361, Niccolò had been Grand Seneschal for nine years, which demonstrates, as many critics assert, the Acciaiuoli family's power within the Kingdom of Naples (Kolsky 114, Brown xii). In order to earn the favor of the Acciaiuoli family, as Branca states, Boccaccio initially dedicated *The Fates of Illustrious Men (De casibus)* (1355-1360) to Niccolò, and *De mulieribus* to Andrea (135). Niccolò Acciaiuoli finally granted Boccaccio the Apostolic Secretary position in 1362.<sup>63</sup> Boccaccio accepted and reported to Naples, but the undertaking was a disaster, which caused Boccaccio to leave the position and Naples in 1363 (Branca 134-137). Similar to the inclusion of Boccaccio's frustrations in the *Amorosa*, his desires to work within the Angevin court and to earn social leverage with the Acciaiuoli family, serve as the foundation on which *De mulieribus* rests.

Boccaccio begins the Dedication to *De mulieribus* and explains why he chooses Andrea Acciaiuoli for the work. Boccaccio admits to choosing Acciaiuoli because "adverteremque satis non pincipi viro, sed potius, cum de mulieribus loqueretur, alicui insigni femine destinandum fore [Since women are the subject of the book, I saw that it ought to be dedicated, not to a prince, but to some distinguished lady]" (2-3). Clearly, Boccaccio's former, vernacular judgments changed to consider

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<sup>63</sup> Branca reports that Niccolò first offered the position to Petrarch, who, at this time, worked for the Visconti in Milan (133).

Acciaiuoli worthy of dedication because she is simply some distinguished lady. Boccaccio is clear that his choice of Acciaiuoli, however, was second to the reigning Queen Joanna I, as he states, “exquirenti digniorem, ante alias venit in mentem ytalicum iubar illud prefulgidum ac singularis, non tantum feminarum, sed regum gloria, Iohanna, serenissima Ierusalem et Sicilie regina [As I searched for a worthy recipient, the first woman who came to mind was that radiant splendor of Italy, that unique glory not only of women but of rulers: Joanna, Most Serene Queen of Sicily and Jerusalem]” (2-3). Although Boccaccio chooses to dedicate the work to Acciaiuoli, he makes it clear that she is a second choice to the queen, which is similar to her secondary status in the earlier and vernacular *Amorosa*. Furthermore, Boccaccio places focus on *his* choice, which reflects his judgment regarding the dedication and his relations with the Acciaiuoli family. After declaring Acciaiuoli his second choice, Boccaccio discusses Joanna’s worthiness before stating that his work would pale in comparison to Joanna’s power (2-3). Boccaccio’s choice, and documentation of it, communicates a decision to maintain the loyalty to male homosocial bonds rather than to the Neapolitan crown. Although the choice rests between two women, his choice of Andrea, the socially inferior of the two, Boccaccio not only demonstrates his loyalty to his relationship with Niccolò Acciaiuoli, but also maintains his aptitude for homosocial bonding.

Only after explaining that he discounted Joanna because she would overshadow his work, does Boccaccio begin to compliment Acciaiuoli,

Nam, dum mites ac celebres mores tuos, dum honestatem eximiam,  
summum matronarum decus, dumque verborum elegantiam mente

revolverem, et cum his animi tui generositatem et ingenii vires, quibus longe femineas exedis, adverterem videremque quod sexui <in>firmiori natura detraxerit, id tuo pectori Deus sua liberalitate miris virtutibus superinfuserit atque suppleverit, et eo, quo insignita es nomine, designari voluerit – cum Andres Greci quod latine dicimus homines nuncupent – te equiparandam probissimis quibuscunque, etiam vetustissimis, arbitratus sum [For as I reflected on your character, both gentle and renowned; your outstanding probity, women’s greatest ornament; and your elegance of speech; and as I noted your generosity of soul and your powers of intellect far surpassing the endowments of womankind; as I saw that what nature has denied the weaker sex God has freely instilled in your breast and complemented with marvelous virtues, to the point where he will you to be known by the name you bear (*andres* being in Greek the equivalent of the Latin word for ‘men’) – considering all this, I felt that you deserved comparison with the most excellent women anywhere, even among the ancients]. (2-5)

Boccaccio’s slew of compliments all concern Acciaiuoli’s character, which he does not discuss much in *Amorosa*. From her physical appearance, to her intellect, to her virtuous soul, Boccaccio claims in *Famous Women* that Acciaiuoli is of the most excellent women; he does not say she is the best, and she, because she is a woman, still pales in comparison to men. As a man who enjoys male privilege in the social gender hierarchy, Boccaccio emphasizes Acciaiuoli’s secondary status. Such considerations reflect Boccaccio’s subscription to the textual traffic of women within

historiographic literature and confirm that *De mulieribus* rests strictly within a male perspective of women's history. Boccaccio concludes his compliments by explaining that Andrea is better than other women because the root of her name bears the Greek word, *andres*, for man. Ultimately, Andrea is better than most women, but still not a man, which holds her in a secondary place to other men, especially to Boccaccio. Despite the honor of dedication, and similar to the reference in the *Amorosa*, Boccaccio still subjugates Acciaiuoli based upon her gender. Although she no longer carries the physical stain of her family's avarice in the Latin *Famous Women*, her secondary social status to Boccaccio remains. Ultimately, Boccaccio expresses an expectation regarding the reinforcement of male social status, which privileges the bonds between men above those between men and women.

Unfortunately, Boccaccio's Latin dedications to the Acciaiuoli family did not result in Boccaccio's favor. Branca details that Boccaccio's disastrous trip to Naples in 1362 included poor accommodations: first Niccolò Acciaiuoli put Boccaccio in a dirty bilge, and then, after Boccaccio complained, in a villa that was undergoing renovation (136-137).<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Boccaccio expresses disappointment in Niccolò's general neglect, to which Branca states, "Acciaiuoli must have had neither time nor desire to closely attend and render homage to his old companion, who for twenty years had pursued him with requests both plaintive and imperious. Acciaiuoli would have respected a man of Petrarch's stature, but he did not judge Boccaccio to be of that caliber" (138). Ultimately, Boccaccio's disappointment results in Acciaiuoli's neglect to reciprocate in the formation of a homosocial bond with Boccaccio. In *Eclogues*,

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<sup>64</sup> Branca excerpts this information from letters that Boccaccio wrote to Francesco Nelli, Niccolò Acciaiuoli's steward (135-139).

specifically in the notes to references made in Eclogue VIII, “Midas,” Smarr indicates that even Andrea Acciaiuoli met Boccaccio’s scorn as a result of his terrible trip to Naples in 1362 as she states, “that she [Andrea] was not grateful for the offering [of *De mulieribus*] and did not look out for Boccaccio during his miserable sojourn” (225). Although Boccaccio attempts to praise Andrea Acciaiuoli, and thereby praise the Acciaiuoli family, his subscription to the maintenance of male homosocial bonds also documents, in the vernacular and Latin, his consistent failure to earn a post within the Angevin court at Naples. After the Apostolic Secretary disaster of 1362-1363, Boccaccio wrote of Niccolò as a man “long on promises and short on deliveries” (Branca 139) and gave the dedication of *De casibus* to Mainardo de Cavalcanti, the man who married Andreola/Andrea Acciaiuoli, cousin to Niccolò and Andrea, in 1372 (Branca 136/174).

### **Conclusion**

Regardless of language, vernacular or Latin, Boccaccio’s consistent traffic of Andrea, as a woman, not only demonstrates the social subjugation of women within historiographic literature, but it also serves as a historical record of Boccaccio’s failed attempts to work within the Neapolitan court and his turbulent relationship with Niccolò Acciaiuoli. Boccaccio uses his work to textually exert judgment over the Acciaiuoli, because he could not do so socially. Within this attempt, Boccaccio outlines social expectations for women, to remain socially and historically within the boundaries of male social dominance, and for men, to uphold male homosocial bonds through the traffic of women. Since Boccaccio’s canon and references to the Acciaiuoli family appear both in the vernacular and Latin, Boccaccio provides a model

for historiographic literature in both languages. For later vernacular authors, such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan, who translated parts of *De mulieribus claris* into the vernacular, Boccaccio sets a standard for the ways in which historically concerned literature communicate social limitations that plagued both men and women.

**CHAPTER TWO: REMEMBERING ALCESTE: CHAUCER'S *LEGEND OF  
GOOD WOMEN* AND A CRITIQUE OF MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S  
HISTORIOGRAPHY**

The figure of Alceste in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* (1386-1394) has spurred critical investigation throughout the twentieth century to the present.<sup>65</sup> In fact, much of Chaucer's *Legend*, specifically his use of Alceste as a dream vision guide, leaves scholars and critics searching for classical and medieval sources to make more sense of the *Legend's* structure, style, and status of completion.<sup>66</sup> While such critical studies assess a variety of possible influences from various works and authors, I will consider how Alceste in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* calls attention to the inconsistencies in women's historiography and in the encyclopedic compendium genre of late fourteenth century Europe.<sup>67</sup> With specific regard to Alceste, such inconsistencies occur within Boccaccio's Latin historiographic collections *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1350-1360) and *De mulieribus claris* (1361-1362), which rely on a Petrarchan style.<sup>68</sup> I argue that the F and G Prologues to

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<sup>65</sup> For general studies on *The Legend of Good Women* (excludes studies on specific legends), see Lowes, Goddard, Payne, Frank, Kiser, Allen, Rowe, Taylor, Hansen, Delany, Hanarhan, Seymour, Percival, McDonald, Palmer, Collette, and Getty.

<sup>66</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer* notes "Unfinished" at the end of "The Legend of Hypermnestra" (630). M.C.E. Shaner's introduction to *The Legend of Good Women* within *The Riverside Chaucer* also notes the unfinished condition of the work, "The unfinished condition of the poem as it has come down to us is no more an indication that Chaucer abandoned it in distaste than is the unfinished state of *The House of Fame* or, for that matter, of *The Canterbury Tales*" (587).

<sup>67</sup> For readings on *The Legend of Good Women* and its sources, see Lowes, Connely, and Meech. For sources on Chaucer and Virgil, see Baswell. For sources on Chaucer and Boethius, see Jefferson and Minnis. For Chaucer and French influence, see Muscatine and Wimsatt.

<sup>68</sup> These years come from Vittore Branca's *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work*. In fact Branca asserts that the *Genealogia*, "was begun before 1350 at the request of Hugo IV of Lusignan, King of Cyprus, to whom it is dedicated; the first draft must have been finished about 1360, but the revision and correction, by the evidence of the autograph *Laur.* 52,9, were continued down to the author's death" (109). Branca later notes Boccaccio's death in the year 1375 (191). In the "Introduction" to



Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, a vernacular compendium of exemplary women, demonstrate the ways language and tradition impose limitations upon historiographic literature about women. Such limitations, particularly those concerned with remembrance, articulate the social practices by which groups are socially defined, privileged, or oppressed.

With *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio claims to be the first to write a compendium on famous women and the first to provide women with a history. Approximately twenty years after Boccaccio's *De mulieribus*, Chaucer wrote the *Legend*, which follows a similar encyclopedic compendium structure. Chaucer's *Legend*, however, begins with a Prologue, rather than a dedication, which sets a trajectory for the legends of good women.<sup>69</sup> While Alceste appears in the *Legend's* Prologue, she is not included in *De mulieribus*, but appears in another popular Boccaccian encyclopedic compendium, *Genealogia*, a Latin historiographic collection on mythology.<sup>70</sup> Although it is not certain that Chaucer read or knew of Boccaccio, the similarities to Boccaccio's work within Chaucer's suggest a strong possibility that Chaucer was familiar with Boccaccio.<sup>71</sup> I argue that Alceste's inconsistent textual

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*Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, Solomon notes that there is no definite start date for the *Genealogia* and that the work spanned throughout four decades (viii-ix). Dates on *De mulieribus claris* come from Virginia Brown's translation (xi) and the dates run concurrent with Branca's (109).

<sup>69</sup> The legends within Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* are as follows: Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle and Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis, and Hypermnestra. Only three of the nine legends listed above are not within Boccaccio's *De mulieribus* and they are the legends of Ariadne, Philomela, and Phyllis.

<sup>70</sup> Branca also notes that the popularity of *Genealogia* lasted well into the nineteenth century, "Indeed it [*Genealogia*] was so comprehensive that it constituted one of the most famous reference works down to the nineteenth century, and it was reprinted continually and translated into all of the languages of civilized Europe" (109). Solomon remarks in his "Introduction" to *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, was the leading resource for mythology until the nineteenth century (x-xii). Boccaccio's *De mulieribus* was also popular as Virginia Brown notes, in the Introduction to *Famous Women* that more than one hundred manuscripts of the work exist, which demonstrates that "it was among the most popular works in the last age of the manuscript book" (xii).

<sup>71</sup> While there is no direct proof that Chaucer read the works of Boccaccio, both *De mulieribus* and

remembrance, as demonstrated within the Boccaccian encyclopedic compendia, is a concern expressed in both versions of Chaucer's Prologue, F and G. The F Prologue demonstrates the limitations imposed by language, while the G Prologue shows the limitations of the literary tradition. Overall, both Prologues demonstrate how a reliance upon memory, or remembrance, produces inconsistent historiographic information that limits social knowledge of women.

In order to think through medieval conceptions of memory, I consult Mary Carruthers's *Book of Memory* (2008) to explore the ways in which encyclopedic compendia communicated historiographic content and how public memory stored such content for the present and future. I also consult Gabrielle Spiegel's *Past As Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (1997) to consider the implications of history's function in medieval European historical texts and documents. Spiegel's work provides insight to the temporal constructs of medieval histories within late medieval European historiography.

The popularity of the encyclopedic compendium style in late fourteenth-century Europe concerns the work of Petrarch, who, according to many scholars, reshaped the genre and tradition.<sup>72</sup> Petrarch's celebration of the Roman past set a

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*Genealogia* were very popular, as stated above. Several of *The Canterbury Tales*, such as "The Knight's Tale," can be found in Boccaccio's vernacular masterpiece, *Decameron* (1349-1351). Furthermore, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (written after 1380, but before 1388, see *Riverside Chaucer*, 471) follows Boccaccio's *Filostrato* (1339). Although these strong similarities exist, it is not certain that Chaucer read Boccaccio, but it is very possible that Chaucer heard of Boccaccio, possibly even attended one of Boccaccio's public lectures on Dante, and worked with access to libraries that would possess Boccaccian works. Branca provides the possibility of such occurrences during the years 1373-1374 (184). For other studies that provide information on the pairing of Chaucer and Boccaccio, see Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio and Chaucerian Polity*; Boitani's Introduction to *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*.

<sup>72</sup> In "Petrarch, the Father of Humanism?" within *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, Ron Witt evaluates the ways in which Petrarch redefines humanism through a historical examination of his life and work. In "Antiquity and the New Arts," within *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Giuseppe Mazzotta assesses the ways in which Petrarch set himself apart from prior Italian Humanists to create a "new"

tradition that authors such as Boccaccio and Chaucer used within their encyclopedic compendia. With the rise of the vernacular throughout Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Chaucer's use of the vernacular, rather than Petrarch's preferred Latin, demonstrates how language use also limits the communication of historiographic content, which defends or promotes specific cultures, nations, or groups of people. I turn to Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (1991) to consider the ways in which the rise of the vernacular bore political implications tied to nationalism, which resulted in the revision of historiographic content to earn legitimacy for vernacular languages, cultures, and nations (186-202).<sup>73</sup> These methodological considerations help to think through the ways in which late medieval European authors sought to earn authority for their work in order to accord with, or in Chaucer's case complicate, their society's political aims and hierarchies.

Before offering any assessment of *Alceste*, (also known as *Alcestis*), a basic understanding of her story is essential background for my study. *Alceste* is the wife of Ademetus, King of Thessaly, who is suddenly slated by the Fates for death.<sup>74</sup> The conditions of Ademetus's death, however, allow for someone to take his place; as a

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art. Both scholars also note that late medieval trends of humanism, especially in Italy, were well underway before Petrarch.

<sup>73</sup> In Chapter 7, "Translation as Rhetorical Invention: Chaucer and Gower," Copeland investigates how Chaucer and Gower use the vernacular in order to earn agency for their works. In particular, Copeland studies Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and argues that he invents "vernacular ascendancy" and recovers translation practices according to Cicero that results in an "empowered hermeneutic" (202).

<sup>74</sup> Ademetus is the king of Thessaly who was protected by Apollo when Apollo suffered a punishment from Zeus. Zeus, angered by Asclepius, the founder of medicine and Apollo's son, who used his powers to resurrect a human being, destroyed Asclepius. Apollo sought revenge for Zeus's destruction by killing Cyclopes and was punished with servitude to a mortal, Ademetus. The partnership between Ademetus and Apollo allowed Apollo to work with the Fates and arrange for an extension of Ademetus's life in the event that Ademetus finds a volunteer to die for him (Mitchell-Boyask xx). In the Euripidean version, Ademetus's day of death comes randomly, while in other versions it occurs on his wedding day.

result, that volunteer would die and go to hell for him, and he would live. The only person who offers to make such a sacrifice for Ademetus is his wife, Alceste. Unlike most characters who choose to die, or in this case go to the underworld, Alceste's selfless sacrifice saddens all of Thessaly and beyond. As a result of such sadness, Alceste returns to the mortal world after Hercules rescues her.

As L.P.E. Parker finds in his study "Alcestis: Euripides to Ted Hughes" (2003), the tale's origin is Balkan, but most attribute it to Euripides's *Alcestis* (1). In the time between Euripides and Boccaccio, Alceste appears in the works of Plato, Ovid, Statius, Valerius Maximus, Fulgentius, Lactantius Placidus, and Hyginus (Parker 2-3).<sup>75</sup> The sources for Boccaccio's Latin works are extensive, particularly for *Genealogia*, which include many of the authors in Parker's study on Alcestis. Jon Solomon, in his "Introduction," writes that Boccaccio pulled from sources "from Homer to Boccaccio's mid-fourteenth century Greek contemporary Leontius Pilatus" (xiii). While Parker notes that Alceste's entrance into English literature starts with Chaucer and Gower, he speculates that Boccaccio's *Genealogia* was the source for both English authors (4-5). To further the connection between Chaucer's *Legend* and Boccaccio's *De mulieribus*, David Wallace argues in *Chaucerian Polity* (1997) that "Boccaccio's *De mulieribus* is Chaucer's most obvious inspiration" for *The Legend of Good Women* (337). With such a wide range of work, both major and minor, it is difficult to pinpoint direct sources for the tale of Alceste in either Boccaccio or Chaucer. Although many of the Alceste tales concern being a good wife, my investigation analyzes the ways in which Chaucer provides two versions of the

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<sup>75</sup> Parker notes that the moral ambiguities of the Euripidean play are problematic throughout each of the versions that follow it. Some of the authors, such as Ovid, make reference to Alcestis in poems.

*Legend's* Prologue to demonstrate the ways in which an obscure female character's remembrance can frame a historiography for women.<sup>76</sup>

### **Lost in the Vast Past: The Encyclopedic Compendium and the Maintenance of Public Memory in Late Medieval Europe.**

Full of examples from the past, the fourteenth-century encyclopedic compendium served to document the people and events that preceded and produced fourteenth-century Europe. Such documentation helped inform the people of Europe, at least those who could read it, and inspire them to achieve the greatness of the past. Ultimately, these compendia served as thematically driven history books. In *The Book of Memory* (2008), Mary Carruthers provides a detailed study on the processes of memory in late medieval Europe and how the practice of memory governed the literary processes of reading and writing. Carruthers reports that memory and memorization practices, were a part of the medieval reading process. As a result, memorization practices required a good reader to internalize texts, which not only served as a foundation for reading, but also as a foundation for the stages of early composition and writing.<sup>77</sup> Carruthers reports that two memory processes were required in the production of an authoritative text. She states, "the first is the individual process of authoring or composing, and the second is the matter of authorizing, which is a social and communal activity. In the context of memory, the first belongs to the domain of an individual's memory, the second to what we might

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<sup>76</sup> For studies on Alceste and studies on wives in Chaucer, see Galway, Kiser, Laird, and Frese.

<sup>77</sup> See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, Chapter 5, "Memory and the Ethics of Reading" and Chapter 6 "Memory and Authority." Carruthers states, "For composition in the Middle Ages is not particularly an act of writing. It is a rumination, cognition, dictation, a listening and a dialogue, a gathering (*collectio*) of voices from their several places in memory" (244). Such practices of memory match monastic studies of liturgical literature, see Smalley.

conveniently think of as public memory” (234). Ultimately, memory and memorial practices inherent within medieval reading and writing served a social goal: the formation of a public memory.

Although there were many contributors to public memory, one of the concrete and tangible ways to shape public memory was through the production of books. Carruthers claims that book production “supports *memoria* [medieval memory practices and memory cultivation] because it serves its requirements, some of which are biological, but many of which, in the memorial cultures of the Middle Ages, were institutional and thus conventional, social, and ethical” (240).<sup>78</sup> The institutional, social, and ethical nature of books, particularly encyclopedic compendia, governs the breadth of historiographic content. Such governance included the ways in which these works use the past to express social values, ideals, or norms. As a result, through the use of historical exempla, encyclopedic compendia keep a consistent focus on the past in order to influence the present and the future. This consistent focus and contribution to public memory allows the past, as Carruthers asserts, to consistently “mediate” the present (239). The consistent mediation within encyclopedic compendia includes examples not only of what would modernly be considered historical, but also those of legend and myth.<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, the content of encyclopedic compendia, such as *The*

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<sup>78</sup> See Rollo-Koster’s “Forever After: The Dead in the Avignonese Confraternity of Notre Dame la Majour (1329-1381),” for a discussion regarding lists of the dead. Rollo-Koster argues that these lists worked similarly to the liturgical calling out of names and were believed to bear an eternal place in public memory. See also McLaughlin and Geary.

<sup>79</sup> Regarding the history/legend divide, Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (2003) defines the difference between history and legend by finding that legends stylistically follow Homer, while history structurally follows the same traditions and conventions of the Bible (16). Within each structure, the content works toward two different ends: legends are fictitious events or accounts that “detach” themselves from any “contemporary historical context” (16). Auerbach further states, “The historical event which we witness, or learn from the testimony of those who witnessed it, runs much more variously, contradictorily, and confusedly; not until it has

*Legend of Good Women*, served to provide a past full of mythological or legendary examples in order to formulate a public memory substantiating past social contributions for the audience of a text. Such an effort sought to encourage future, similar contributions from that very audience.

The use of the past to inform the present and future serves as a way to convey social ideals for audiences of historiographic texts. In “Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch” (1997), Gabrielle Spiegel assesses the ways medieval historiography employed both history and legend to promote particular nations, cultures, religions, etc.<sup>80</sup> Spiegel ultimately argues that medieval historiography functions within a Ciceronian definition of history, so that history is “a form of moral exhortation and employs horatory devices that move men to assent to its precepts” (87). Such use of historiographic content implies a moral responsibility, and rhetorically promotes specific social ideals, norms, or values from the past.<sup>81</sup> The implication of the past's hold on the present and future, according to Spiegel, provides a certain immortal, or anti-temporal, component to historical content, which begins within the classical period. Spiegel states:

History for the Greeks and Romans is essentially heroic, a way of measuring man's capacities against those of the universe. As the record

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produced results in a definite domain are we able, with their help, to classify it to a certain extent...Legend arranges its material in a simple and straightforward way; it detaches it from its contemporary historical context, so that the latter will not confuse it” (16). History, on the other hand, is always pointed to fit within the Biblical structure, which requires manipulation of content in moral and religious ways. In *Past as Text*, Spiegel deals with medieval historiography and its contribution to Christianity (89-93).

<sup>80</sup> This essay appears as Chapter Five of Spiegel's book *Past As Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (1997).

<sup>81</sup> Spiegel, however, looks more deeply at the functioning of this Ciceronian concept of history to find that it is functionally tied to rhetoric (87-88). The connection between history and rhetoric solidifies the moral responsibilities of the historical content to persuade men of the present, or future, to behave according to the precepts set in the past, regardless of how legendary or historical.

of human greatness, it shields mankind from the destruction of time, bestowing on him eternal fame and glory. Once written down, memory preserves this immortality from generation to generation. (86-87)

Historiographic literature, as Spiegel asserts, always serves as a contribution to public memory. The past consistently serves as a precedent and a standard for the present and future, while allowing both legendary and historical matter to articulate and define social standards eternally, or as long as the written word lasts. This means that although a given event or person may not be consistently documented, any type of documentation, in any language, serves as a contribution to that public memory. As a result, it is possible for that inconsistently documented event or person, such as Alceste, to serve as an exemplar, eternally.

This eternal quality of the past and the written word was crucial to Petrarch and Boccaccio, in whom scholars locate a reshaping of the Italian Humanist tradition.<sup>82</sup> With a consistent focus on time, the connection between history and memory in Petrarch's work, as Giuseppe Mazzotta claims in *The Worlds of Petrarch* (1993), reshapes late medieval humanism and the encyclopedic compendium genre.<sup>83</sup> Mazzotta argues that Petrarch's letters, poetry, and encyclopedic compendia

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<sup>82</sup> For more information regarding Italian humanists before Petrarch, see Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*.

<sup>83</sup> See Witt (290); Mazzotta (17). Both scholars consider the ways in which Petrarch's work with history and memory differs from past Italian humanists such as Lovato and Mussato. Most scholars recognize that any discussion on Petrarch in combination with history and memory deals with Petrarch's obsession or preoccupation with time. Witt calls Petrarch's preoccupation with time an "unceasing" one (276). David Wallace, in "Humanism and Tyranny" within *Chaucerian Polity*, notes that part of Petrarch's works "tend to escape or erase the specific moment of their historical origin", which marks Petrarch's cultural movement, which he terms the Petrarchan Academy (266). Wallace claims that "The formation of the Petrarchan Academy, then, represents an attempt at self-classicizing, of exempting texts from the erosions of time" (266). Wallace goes further to elaborate on Petrarch's personal habits to most efficiently use his time (266). Petrarch's own letters provide details of his obsession with time and his habits in order to use his time efficiently, see *Rerum familiarium libri* and *Rerum senilium libri*.



demonstrate “In a primary way...[that] history is memory, the poetic recollection of the legends and the realities of Rome, whose ground is hallowed by its antiquities” (21). Mazzotta’s argument that Petrarch’s technique allows history to generate from memory is consistent with the findings of both Carruthers and Spiegel. Such generation contributes to the eternal quality of the past and textual versions of it, but such generation also implies a certain degree of selection. As Mazzotta notes, Petrarch specifically focuses on Rome, which promotes only the use of specific Roman historiographic content. For instance, *De viris illustribus* is Petrarch’s encyclopedic compendium on only illustrious, Roman and Biblical men – not women.<sup>84</sup> The result produces a textual historiography of a specific demographic, men, and fills public memory with information about men, which also carries social ramifications for the maintenance of the social gender hierarchy that ranks men over women.

Petrarch preferred to write in Latin, the ecclesiastical and legal language of authority in late fourteenth-century Europe. Ron Witt discusses Petrarch’s preference in “Petrarch, The Father of Humanism?” and states that according to Petrarch, “Only intensive study of the great works of Latin antiquity, which imparted moral lessons with an almost irresistible eloquence, could bring about moral reform” (240). Witt’s assertion about Petrarch’s views correlates to Spiegel’s finding regarding the function of medieval historiography and the moral influence of the past. Such a perspective also matches Carruthers’s notions regarding the acts of reading and writing as ethical

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<sup>84</sup> *De viris illustribus* (1338/9 -?) is an incomplete compendium on ancient (Roman) and biblical men. Dates for *De viris* come from Peter Hainsworth’s “Introduction” in *The Essential Petrarch*, xiii. There are two books within the compendium: Liber I, which contains only biographies of Roman men; Liber II, which focuses only on Biblical men.

contributions to public memory. We see, then, that Petrarch's linguistic preference becomes part of the communication of historiographic content. Witt further notes,

For Petrarch, by contrast, the vernaculars could never serve as vehicles for truly elegant speech. A moral philosopher devoted to the reform both of himself and of his audience, Petrarch honed his language and his character through the study of the great writings of the ancient Romans. He hoped that by imitating their Latin speech he in turn might guide his readers to virtue. (240).

In contrast to the rise of the vernaculars and authors like Dante who purported that vernacular use serves a responsibility to educate all, Petrarch's use of Latin requires readers to be disciplined.<sup>85</sup> This discipline is part of the moral and ethical training imparted within historiographic literature. As a result, Petrarch's Latin historiographic literature, poetry, and letters provide a tradition not only for readers to absorb, but also for poets and authors to follow. For authors, this training involves a tradition of revision, even after a work was published or completed.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Witt asserts that Petrarch "freely acknowledged the difficulties of his style and the demands it made of the reader...He [Petrarch] had taken great pains with constructing his prose and the reader should expect to invest time in understanding what he had written" (266-267). Such expectations speak to Petrarch's demand for discipline in reading and writing. Petrarch addresses his choice to write in Latin rather than the vernacular in two of his letters, within *Rerum familiarium libri* (*Familiar Letters*) and *Rerum Senilium libri* (*Letters of Old Age*), both addressed to Boccaccio. Ultimately, Petrarch provides three reasons for his preference of Latin: his fear of becoming an imitator, the fact that he felt his "own talent sufficient for that kind of writing without anyone's aid," and his fear of having his work misused (*Familiar Letters*, XXI.15, 204-205). Petrarch's last fear, the misuse of his work, appears again in the *Letters of Old Age*. This letter concerns a rumor that Boccaccio burned all of his early vernacular works. Though Petrarch first fears that Boccaccio possibly committed this act out of pride, he reasons with it and admits, "Certainly, I have sometimes had the idea of doing the same with my vernacular writings...although those brief and scattered vernacular works of my youth are not longer mine, as I have said, but have become the multitude's, I shall see to it that they do not butcher my major ones" (V.2, 162-163).

<sup>86</sup> For more information on the tradition of revision see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 196 – 202. Carruthers intimates that activities such as "frequent consultation of indices, thumbing books to pick up previously marked passages, writing citations onto parchment slips, even 'scissors-and-paste' composition – have all been presumed by many medievalists to have been the methods by

Petrarch's foundation for writing begins with memorized reading, which, according to Carruthers, creates an internalization that allows the content to become the individual's (203-205).<sup>87</sup> Such internalization allows for an ongoing and consistent revision process, of which many Petrarchan works bear evidence.<sup>88</sup> The practice of consistent internalization and recapitulation of older readings calls attention to Petrarch's use of imitation. For Petrarch, as Witt states "Imitation, therefore, constituted a form of dissimulation or paraphrase by which, like the bee, the writer transformed the words and voices of ancient authors into his own 'honeycombs' through the chemistry of his own talent. Here again, in formulating an account of imitation, Petrarch was a pioneer" (264).<sup>89</sup> Witt's observations of Petrarch's theory of imitation set his practices apart from the general reading, memory, and composition practices of the late medieval period. Through selection and imitation, Petrarch recapitulates historiographic material, without a consistent credit of older sources. Such a practice allows newer versions, or revisions, of older tales to take precedence

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which scholarship was conducted during this period" (198).

<sup>87</sup> Carruthers discusses this process in terms of Petrarch's study, or reading, of Augustine (203 – 205). She analyzes an excerpt from Petrarch's *Secretum* in which he writes of a conversation with St. Augustine. Within this excerpt Augustine informs Petrarch of his reading practices and how reading should be done. Ultimately, Carruthers analyzes this process and states that the act of reading "is, to make something familiar by making part of your own experience. This adaptation process allows for a tampering with the original text that a modern scholar would (and does) find quite intolerable" (204-205). Smalley's work regarding the way the monks read the bible bears similarities to Petrarch's process.

<sup>88</sup> In the "Introduction" to *Canzoniere*, Mark Musa also comments on Petrarch's revision practices as he states, "the *Canzoniere* was anything but casually put together. It came into being as a carefully wrought collection of lyric poems... The poems themselves had been written over many decades, then revised, polished, and gathered by Petrarch from time to time into manuscripts which he sent out to patrons and friends" (xi). In the "Introduction" to *Letters of Old Age*, Aldo S. Bernardo indicates that Petrarch carefully chose and compiled all of his letters. Bernardo states, "Although Petrarch included 128 letters in the *Seniles*, it is certain that he wrote many more. In *Sen. XVI, 3*, written in 1372, he states that he has collected more than four hundred letters in two thick volumes, discarding a thousand others for lack of space" (xviii).

<sup>89</sup> This passage correlates strongly with Carruthers in the chapter entitled "Memory and the Ethics of Reading" in *The Book of Memory*, in which the metaphor of the bee gathering honey stands for the act of reading. Carruthers states, "Reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud, or like a bee making honey from the nectar of flowers" (205).

over previous ones. As a result, Petrarch's consistent revision of his own Latin allowed for a more legitimate and complete work.

Following Petrarch's stylistic lead and after meeting him in 1350, Boccaccio wrote mainly in Latin and produced several compendia.<sup>90</sup> As stated earlier, two of Boccaccio's compendia, *Genealogia* and *De mulieribus*, inconsistently document Alceste.<sup>91</sup> Alceste's inconsistent appearances within fourteenth-century encyclopedic compendia call attention to the ways in which the genre operates selectively. Such selectivity demonstrates that the historiographic tradition attends more to the maintenance of existing traditions and social hierarchies in order to form public memory. The first mention of Alceste in vernacular English, within Chaucer's Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, I suggest, calls attention to the ways in which literary traditions and language produce historiographic inconsistencies that maintain the existence of social limitations for some people, specifically women.

With rising vernaculars, like English, the need to form a public memory in different languages prompted an adherence to existing social, literary, and historiographic traditions. In *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Rita Copeland explores the ways Chaucer's *Legend* "redefines" academic

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<sup>90</sup> The first sentence of *De mulieribus claris* expresses a reverence for Petrarch as the leader of the encyclopedic compendium genre at the time. Boccaccio states, "Scripsere iamdudum nonnulli veterum sub compendio de viris illustribus libros; et nostro evo, latiori tamen volumine et accuratiori stilo, vir insignis et poeta egregius Franciscus Petrarca, preceptor noster, scribit; et digne [Long ago there were few ancient authors who composed biographies of famous men in the form of a compendia, and in our day that renowned man and great poet, my teacher Petrarch, is writing a similar work that will be even fuller and more carefully done]" (8-9).

<sup>91</sup> The *Genealogia*'s reference to Alceste reads, "Quod cum audisset Alchista coniunx non dubitavit vitam suam pro salute viri concedere. Et sic, ea mortua, Admetus liberatus est, qui plurimum uxori compatiens Herculem oravit, ut ad Inferos vadens illius animam revocaret ad superos, quod et factum est. [When he heard that the wife, Alceste, did not hesitate to concede her life for the health of her husband; and in this manner once Admetus died and was set free, those who prayed that Hercules would go to hell and bring her back so her soul would be with the gods again, and so this was done]" (*Genealogie* XIII, 29-33; English translation mine).

discourse in the vernacular in order to promote a legitimate use of English for historiographies (179). Copeland argues that this redefinition occurs through a process called secondary translation, which allows the rhetorical motives within a text to develop “to such an extent that their exegetical service becomes full-fledged rhetorical appropriation” so that the most recent, vernacular translation trumps all prior versions (179). Copeland defines the result of this secondary translation process as vernacular ascendancy, because it allows a vernacular text to rise to the level of an academic one (197).

Copeland argues that Chaucer's *Legend* is a prime example of vernacular ascendancy because it demonstrates how translation works exegetically to earn authority. With two versions of the Prologue, F and G, Copeland argues that the F version addresses stylistic or language concerns, while the G version addresses issues regarding the literary tradition (190-192). Both versions, as Copeland argues, reveal different uses of translation, which impact the transmission of any content and serve as the basis of vernacular ascendancy. Copeland states,

The *Legend of Good Women* constructs its relationship to the *auctores* out of the conventional postures of exegesis, service to and conservation of the authoritative text; but it also finds a way of stressing or insisting upon its difference from its sources, making that very difference the explicit subject of rhetorical invention. (197)

Copeland argues that Chaucer's *Legend* provides two versions that demonstrate how vernacular language can imitate the official discourse, or Latin tradition, in order to assume authority. Not only do both versions of the Prologue carry remembrance of

Alceste and her inconsistently remembered tale, but the Prologue also revises itself in order to stress different issues with regard to language and literary tradition. Per Copeland's findings in the use of translation, Chaucer's translations demonstrate that not only do more recent versions of any given text usurp previous Latin texts, but these more recent versions also usurp previous vernacular ones. Copeland's theory of secondary translation and vernacular ascendancy considers the way in which Chaucer's *Legend* contributes to the rise of the English vernacular and how the *Legend*, particularly the Prologue, applies Latin revision practices in order to promote certain social trajectories.

Overall, the late medieval encyclopedic compendium genre, the one to which Chaucer's *Legend* contributes, relies on medieval conceptions of memory to communicate historiographic information. Such conceptions of memory govern traditions of reading and writing, as well as past norms and values. Such traditions also uphold revision and translation practices that allow new versions of old tales to trump previous ones – regardless of language: Latin or the vernacular. Arguably, the F and G Prologues of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* draw attention to the relation between memory and limitations inherent within language and the literary tradition. Within the character of Alceste, these limitations are present as she personifies her own literary past, and they demonstrate how remembrance based upon Petrarch's and Boccaccio's selective use of language and content could socially define groups of people, especially women.

## Two Ways to Remember Alceste: The Linguistic and Traditional Critique of the Encyclopedic Compendium Genre

At the start of *The Legend of Good Women's* Prologue, Chaucer, the narrator, has a dream vision in which he falls asleep and his guide, Alceste, rises from a special daisy. The narrator, in both versions of the Prologue, states that this daisy is a "floure's flour," but once the flower turns into a woman, the narrator does not initially name her, which implies a lack of remembrance (F 54; G55).<sup>92</sup> The narrator's lack of remembrance presents an irony as the beginning of the poem emphasizes the importance of remembrance and the narrator's love of books. The narrator states,

And yf that olde bokes were aweye,	And if that olde bokes weren aweye,
Yloren were of remembraunce the keye.	Yloren were remembrance the keye.
Wel ought us thane honouren and beleve	Wel oughte us thane on olde bokes leve,
These bokes, there we han noon other preve.	There as there is non other assay by preve.
(F 25-28)	(G 25-28)

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<sup>92</sup> The Prologues begin with the narrator's profession of love for books, which he foregoes in May for the springing flowers (F 29-39; G29-39). However, out of all these springing flowers, only one daisy, a "floure's flour," catches his attention and not only rises each day, but enters the narrator's dream and rises to transform into Alceste, Chaucer's guide and defender (F 54; G55). Chaucer's discussion of the daisy's daily bloom in both Prologues fuses Alceste's resurrection with "olde stories" by other "autors," which keeps his introductory comments regarding the formation of history and its truth present throughout the Prologues' events (F98; G80). In *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, Florence Percival notes that the daisy and author connection connects both the tradition of French *marguerite* poetry, and the daisy's ability to resurrect also emphasizes the Christian content of these poems (51). Connections to French Marguerite Poetry are widely documented and include, but are not limited to Wallace's *Chaucer and the Writings of Early Boccaccio*, 13; Frank, 21; Payne, 107; Kiser, 20; Rowe, 21. Many critics have linked Chaucer's use of Alceste to other sources. Both Kiser and Percival link Alceste and the daisy to Dante, though they do so differently. Kiser links Alceste to truth through sunlight and the daisy's response to it. According to Kiser, this response reflects human limitation because it presents an epistemological paradox similar within the work of Dante that people are dependent upon truth, but cannot receive it (36-37). Percival connects Alceste to Dante through the structure of the dream reflection, which acknowledges literary inheritance from both French and Italian traditions (52). To further these notions of Chaucer's diverse set of sources, Wallace notes "the centrality of French literature" throughout fourteenth century Europe as *Le Roman de la Rose* was "of seminal importance for Italian as well as for English writers" (*Early Boccaccio* 9). The centrality of French and Italian literature notes a trans-cultural formation of history that remains at the base of all translations or all revisions of tales.

The narrator's comment on the importance of books reflects their necessity in terms of remembrance, which refers to the formation of and contribution to public memory. Historiographic literature in books documents history and transmits what is, or should be, known. Remembrance, as the narrator remarks, is necessary in order to access historical information. Although in both Prologues the narrator stresses a dependence upon books for historical knowledge, the final two couplets differ in the F and G Prologues. In the G version, use of the terms "leve" and "assay by preve" emphasize an official or authoritative quality to the historiographic content within books. While "preve" appears in both versions, the accompaniment of "leve" and "assay" provides an official, authoritative, or religious connotation to the G version.<sup>93</sup> Overall, the dependence on old books in both versions stress the ways in which the past, through documented memories, forms a public memory, to which both Carruthers's and Spiegel's work speaks. Since books relay historiographic information, the hypothetical situation of lacking such books presents a problem within the formation of public memory because the information within books supports specific groups, genealogies or social trajectories. As a result, the narrator notes the selectivity of public memory, which also allows for a lack of remembrance. Despite the narrator's dependence upon books, he does not initially remember Alceste and she remains an anonymous figure until a book, or another source, recalls and reports her history.

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<sup>93</sup> According to the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), the word, "leve," comes in three forms. The first two definitions, religious faith and (official) permission or authorization, most directly address the context of this passage, as old books faithfully permit, or authorize, knowledge of the past ("Leve," n. 1 and 2). "Assay by preve" indicates that there is no other way to test the quality, accuracy, or effectiveness of "preve," which means either obscured or recorded evidence and documentation of truth ("Assaien" and "Preve").



After considering the origins of historiographic information, each version of the Prologue elaborates on a different limitation to historical accuracy as the narrator describes the daisy. In the F version, the narrator states, “Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose, / Suffisant this flour to preyse aright!” (66-67). The narrator admits that English, in this instance, limits a full communication of the content. In the G version, however, the narrator states, “For this werk is al of another tonne, / Of olde story, er swich strif was begonne” (79-80). This statement locates limitation not in the language, as the F version does, but in the literary tradition. The narrator claims that this version, or revision, differs from the tones of prior, or older, versions of the same story. Such an assertion calls attention to traditions and practices of revision and imitation employed within the compendia of authors such as Petrarch and Boccaccio. These traditions and practices also correlate with Copeland’s assertions regarding secondary translation and vernacular ascendancy, which allows the vernacular English to take the place of an academic discourse.<sup>94</sup> The focus on limitations of language persists throughout the F version, and the focus on limitations of the literary tradition remains throughout the G version, which also accords with Copeland’s findings. Although these limitations are different in nature, the implication for the remembrance of Alceste, I suggest, is the same.

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<sup>94</sup> Four lines later in this passage the narrator states, “For myn entente is, or I fro yow fare, / The naked text in English to declare / Of many a story, elles of many a geste, / As autours seyn; leveth hem if yow leste” (G 85-88). Many scholars use this passage to push their arguments. Copeland argues that it is an example of secondary translation that speaks to the responsibilities of authors and translators (192-193). In *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (1989), Carolyn Dinshaw’s second chapter, “The Naked Text in English to Declare’: *The Legend of Good Women*,” refers to this passage to argue that a good woman is a boring one – often a dead one – which eliminates problems of female agency in a patriarchal society or text. The line also appears in the title of Sheila Delany’s *The Naked Text: Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women*, which assesses the ways that Chaucer’s *Legend* speaks of the poetic process and the treatment of women from a feminist perspective and for feminist ends. While Delany’s work has been a foundation to medieval scholarship, her work is feminist focused and she studies Chaucer’s work in conjunction with later works, such as those of Virginia Woolf.

While most of the major events in the Prologues match up, the naming of Alceste differs between the F and G versions, demonstrating that both language and literary tradition bear different limitations within historiographic literature, even though both prevent her remembrance. As the daisy turns into a woman in the narrator's dream, the narrator describes a woman, clothed in green with a white, daisy-like crown, who accompanies Cupid, the God of Love (F 214-220; G 145-153). In the F version, the narrator does not name the woman, and refers to her as a lady or a queen. In the G version, the narrator states,

Hire name was Alceste the debonayre.  
I preye to God that evere falle she fayre,  
For ne hadde conford been of hire presence,  
I hadde be ded, withouten any defence,  
For dred of Loves wordes and his chere,  
As, whan tyme is, hereafter ye shal here. (G 179- 184)

The narrator names his guide and makes it clear that he is telling the story after it happened and that he knows, now, who Alceste is. Unlike the F version, in which the narrator and reader remain ignorant of Alceste's identity until the end, the G version provides a clue that Alceste is important to the narrator in terms of a defense. The G narrator plays with time, as the G version was written later than the F version, and he demonstrates, like many of the authors of the encyclopedic compendia, that he can revise the past to shape historical content communicated within. While the F Prologue simply does not provide the language to trigger remembrance, the G version shows that even if the language, or name, appears, complete remembrance does not

necessarily occur. Although both versions demonstrate two different limitations within historiographic literature, both still result in a lack of remembrance.

As the Prologue continues, Chaucer the narrator finds himself standing before Cupid, the God of Love, and in trouble.<sup>95</sup> The angry Cupid feels betrayed by Chaucer's work, as though he were Chaucer's patron, and states,

And thow my foo, an al my folk werreyest,	Thow art my mortal fo and me werreyest,
And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest,	And of my olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
And hyderest hem with thy translacioun,	And hynderest hem with thy translacyoun,
(F 322-324)	(G 248-250)

In both versions, Cupid declares Chaucer his foe as a result of his translations, specifically the *Romance of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. Claiming that Chaucer was one of his servants who falsely represented him, the God also claims that Chaucer's translations deter people from love (F327-328; G 252-253), and he demands examples of people, specifically women, who are true in love. Such a demand calls attention to the themes or trajectories of encyclopedic compendia. Holding firm to the limitations of language in the F version, Cupid simply states his complaints with Chaucer's works and that Chaucer must repent (F 339). By contrast, in the G version, Cupid questions, "Was there no good matere in thy mynde, / Ne in alle they bokes ne coudest thow nat fynde/ Som story wemen that were goode and trewe?" (G 270-272).<sup>96</sup> Cupid's questioning directs Chaucer to the literary tradition

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<sup>95</sup> In late medieval literature, Cupid is often portrayed as an immature, selfish, and sometimes spiteful character. Many portrayals, particularly within the works of Dante and Boccaccio, demonstrate a duality between Cupid's regality as a god and his immaturity. Often, the god is portrayed as a child, or childish, and such portrayals are in effect within Chaucer's work. For further reading, see Kiser "Metaphor, Alceste, and the God of Love," in *Telling Classical Tales*; Rowe, "The Order of Justice," in *Through Nature to Eternity*.

<sup>96</sup> This example is not in the earlier, F version.

and to existing works that comprise public memory in order to find examples of true women in love.

Cupid's inquisition in the G version goes further to question Chaucer's translation practices and to elaborate upon his dissatisfaction with Chaucer's work.

Cupid states,

Yis, Got wot, sixty bokes olde and newe  
Hast thow thyself, alle ful of storyes grete,  
That bothe Romayns and ek Greeks trete  
Of sundry wemen, wich lyf that they ladde,  
And evere an hundred good ageyn oon bade.  
This knoweth God, and alle clerkes eke  
That usen swiche materes for to seke.  
What seith Valerye, Titus, or Claudyan?  
What seith Jerome agayns Jovynyan?

(G 273-281)

Cupid declares that in all the books from ancient period to the present, there must be good examples of women in love. Such a suggestion refers to the introduction of the poem and the narrator's acknowledgment regarding a social dependence upon books. Cupid's scope includes both good and bad examples of the ancients, and refers to sources that all clerks use for historical information, some of which Petrarch and Boccaccio use in their Latin compendia. This use of other sources refers to Petrarch's practices of reading and imitation, which allows work read to be internalized, then recapitulated or imitated as one's own work. Such practices occur within Boccaccio's

compendia too, and these compendia inconsistently remember to include Alceste. Cupid's criticisms in the G version of the literary tradition therefore adhere to the encyclopedic compendium genre and its ability to selectively contribute to and form public memory.

In response to the God of Love's criticism, Alceste (whose identity is still unknown to Chaucer) comes to Chaucer's defense. In both versions, Alceste makes the connection to translation's political impact. Alceste states,

To translaten that olde clerkes written,  
As thogh that he of malice wolde enditen  
Despit of love, and had himself yt wrought.

That shoolde a ryghtwis lord have in his thought,  
And nat be lyk tirauntz of Lumbardye,  
That han no reward but at tyrannye.

(F370-375)

To translate that olde clerkes wryte,  
As thogh that he of maleys wolde endyte  
Despit of Love, and hadde himself ywrought.

This shulde be a ryghtwys lord han in his thought,  
And not ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye,  
That usen wilfulhed and tyrannye.

(G350-355)

Alceste's defense demonstrates Chaucer's innocence against Cupid's accusations, on both levels of language and tradition. Alceste makes it clear that Chaucer's translation of other clerks' work does not imply Chaucer's intentional malice. Both language and tradition bear limitations that create inaccuracies in historiographic literature. At this point, Alceste embodies the limitations of both language and literary tradition as her own literary past still remains to be remembered. Although Alceste exists within public memory, remembrance of her specific story as a selfless wife is inconsistent, as the works of Boccaccio show. Overall, Alceste's personification of her own literary past demonstrates how the different limitations of both language and tradition contribute to problems regarding remembrance and historical accuracy.

Furthermore, in the G Prologue, Alceste declares that Cupid's demands are tyrannical. She describes such consideration with the word "wilfulhede," or as the *Riverside Chaucer* indicates, "willfulness" or "arrogance," (599) which further asserts Alceste's conclusions because only arrogant authority manipulates literature and the resulting history in order to retain control. The use of the word "tyrant" and Alceste's reference to the tyrants of Lombardy, the Visconti of Milan, reflect a thirteenth and fourteenth-century European definition.<sup>97</sup> In "Whan She Translated Was': Humanism, Tyranny, and the Petrarchan Academy," David Wallace investigates such use of the term to find that tyrannical behavior works only to serve one's own good, rather than a common good (*Chaucerian Polity* 280). Similarly, the limitations that language and tradition carry within historiographic literature do not work toward a common good, but support specific groups, genealogies, or versions of history, and this occurs linguistically and traditionally. Since encyclopedic compendia produce selected, specific, and thematically organized historiographic information, the charge of tyranny calls attention to Petrarch's linguistic and literary practices and his work for the Visconti.<sup>98</sup> When it comes to Petrarch, the author whom Boccaccio notes as the

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<sup>97</sup> The Visconti was a powerful northern Italian family that took control over Milan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Their reign began with Ottone, the Archbishop in 1277 and ended with Filippo Maria in 1447 (Dates from Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*). During this time eleven members of the Visconti family ruled over the city (some overlapping or sharing their reign) and constantly threatened Italy's mercantile cities, particularly Florence. Many of the Visconti rulers were considered tyrannical for their governing practices. For further reading on the Visconti, see Muir, DeMesquita, Chamberlin, Lanza, Dale, and Black. Petrarch seeks patronage within the court of Archbishop Giovanni Visconti in 1353, despite previous disapproval and accusations of Visconti as a despot (Branca 98). David Wallace provides a great wealth of information on Petrarch's service with the Visconti and Boccaccio's disdain of it in "Whan She Translated Was': Humanism, Tyranny, and the Petrarchan Academy." Wallace also provides information on the famous tyrannical rule of Bernabò Visconti and Chaucer's connections/work in Milan in "All that Fall: Chaucer's Monk and 'Every Myghty Man'" both essays can be found in *Chaucerian Polity*.

<sup>98</sup> Petrarch served as a ambassador or diplomat for the Visconti from 1353 – 1361, see Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 268-271; Chaimberlain, *The Count of Virtue*, 29-31; Hainsworth's Introduction to *The Essential Petrarch*, xv. Petrarch began his service under Archbishop Giovanni Visconti, and

inspiration for *De mulieribus claris*, his preference for the exclusive Latin mixed with his practices of reading, imitation, and revision all detract from promoting the common good. Ultimately, Alceste's reference to the tyrants of Lombardy calls attention to the ways in which Petrarch's linguistic and traditional selectivity privileges a select group of people, but also oppresses others. Such privilege and oppression is clear, as Boccaccio also notes in the Preface to *De mulieribus*, with the lack of women's historiographic literature.<sup>99</sup>

In Chaucer's *Legend*, Cupid further complains that there is an abundance of negative female examples, which he claims is inaccurate. Due to a lack of historiographic literature on women, and the narrator's introductory comments regarding the ways in which books provide historiographic proof, Cupid bases his claim regarding omissions in both language and tradition. As a woman who exists in public memory and is inconsistently documented, Alceste names herself in both F and G versions, "I, your/youre Alceste, whilom quene of Trace," but the narrator still does not exactly know who she is (F 432/G 422). Alceste's name alone insufficiently communicates her mythological identity because her literary past is inconsistent, which prolongs the narrator's ignorance. This ignorance does not only apply to

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stayed through the shared leadership of Galeazzo II (Gian Galeazzo's father), Matteo II (who died in 1355), and Bernabò. Most scholars report that Petrarch overlooked the cruelty of the Visconti while he served them. Wallace states, "Petrarch claimed that the Visconti had offered him patronage and protection without formal responsibilities" (269). Wallace details Petrarch's duties, 269-270; Chamberlain reports that Petrarch aided in the early education of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who became the first Duke of Milan in 1385. Wallace also provides details on Petrarch's critique of the Visconti prior to his service in 1353 and Boccaccio's disappointment and critique of Petrarch for taking the Visconti position (270-271).

<sup>99</sup> On the lack of women's historiography, in the Preface to *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio states, "ubi illarum merita, nullo in hoc edito volumine speciali – uti iam dictum est – et a nemine demonstrata, describere, quasi aliquale reddituri premium, inchoamus [The merits of pagan women, on the other hand, have not been published in any work designed especially for this purpose and have not been set forth by anyone, as I have already pointed out. That is why I began to write this work: it was a way of giving them some kind of reward]" (12-13).

Alceste, but also to other women lost in public memory within the few works of women's historiography.

In order to resolve the lack of women's historiography at the end of the Prologues, Alceste provides Chaucer with a penitential sentence that requires him to make a compendium of good women. She states,

Thow shalt, while that thou lyvest, yer by yere,  
The moste partye of thy tyme spende  
In makynge of a glorious legende  
Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,  
And telle of false men that hem beytraien  
That al hir lyf ne don nat but assayen  
How many women they may doon a shame;  
For in youre world that is now hold a game.  
(F 481-489)

Thow shalt, whil that thow livest, yer by yere,  
The moste patrye of thy tyme spende  
In makynge of a gloryous legende  
Of godde women, maydenes, and wyves,  
That were trewe in lovyng al here lyves;  
And telle of false men that hem betrayen,  
That al here lyf ne don nat but assayen  
How manye wemen they may don a shame;  
For in youre world that is now holden game.  
(G 471-479)

Alceste articulates the mission of Chaucer's *Legend*, which is to emphasize good women in love and their betrayal by men. Alceste's penitential sentence requires Chaucer to do just as the literary traditions that produce encyclopedic compendia have done: write to endorse a specific group of people, namely good women, maidens, and wives. The penitential sentence recognizes the lasting and defining quality of historical writing as the last three lines indicate a disdain with current legends regarding women, maidens, and wives. Alceste states that women, those documented throughout historiographic literature, are "holden game," which, according to the Medieval English Dictionary, means beheld as a game ("Holden"). Alceste's recognition of women's historiography as a game takes shape within the



inconsistencies of her own literary documentation despite her eternal existence within public memory.<sup>100</sup> Alceste, like Cupid, recognizes how texts shape history; her sentence seeks to set the record straight and combat the inconsistencies she suffers from being inconsistently included within historiographic literary works such as Boccaccio's *Genealogia* and *De mulieribus*. Ultimately, the game that Alceste refers to is an author's selection of historiographic content, which forms public memory.

Despite her efforts to set the record straight, Alceste cannot erase her inconsistently documented past. Such limits and problems, as Edwards in *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (2002) argues, are irreversible,

Though the narratives recounted in the *Legend* cannot reverse history, they can offer a view of it that locates the causes of catastrophe internally – that is, within characters and within ideology, institutions, and cultural values. The women of antiquity demonstrate the vulnerability of the dominant position... Through them, Chaucer shows us antiquity from the short side of history. (76)

The temporal endurance of medieval historiography allows all of the different versions and accounts of historical or mythological events to thrive. The key, as Chaucer notes in the beginning of the Prologue, is remembrance. Edwards's notion regarding Chaucer's use of antiquity serves to demonstrate Alceste's dependence upon translation; if her story is not told, or revised and translated into the rising vernaculars, her existence wanes. Alceste, when neglected, does not completely disappear because her story has been previously documented. Until remembered, however, she remains,

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<sup>100</sup> For studies on *The Legend of Good Women* as a game, see Percival, McCormick, and McDonald's "Games Medieval Women Play," in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*.

as her story indicates, waiting to be rescued, remembered, and included within literary history. Although she chastises the God of Love for the purpose of imposing upon Chaucer's translation practices, she recognizes that translation by an author, for any means, will ultimately keep her remembrance within historiographic literature, and more specifically within women's historiography, from which she was previously excluded.

Toward the end of the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer finally gives Alceste complete remembrance. After Alceste provides Chaucer with a penitential sentence, Cupid asks Chaucer if he is familiar with her,

The grete goodnesse of the queen Alceste,	Hast thou nat in a bok, lyth in thy cheste,
That turned was into a dayesy;e;	The grete goodnesse of the queene Alceste,
She that for hire housbonde chees to dye,	That turned was into a dayesy;e;
And eke to goon to helle, rather than he,	She that for hire housbonde ches to dye,
And Ercules resowed hir, parde,	And ek to gon to helle rather than he,
And broght hir out of helle ageyn to blys?	And Ercules rescued hire, parde,
(F 511-516)	And broughte hyre out of helle ageyn to blys?
	(G498-504)

Despite already knowing her name because she names herself, the narrator only remembers exactly who Alceste is when the God of Love informs him (F517; G505). In the G version while holding consistent to his prior remarks, Cupid once again questions Chaucer's literary practices by questioning whether or not he has consulted an appropriate number of sources in order to know of Alceste's tale. Cupid's question calls attention to the necessity for consistent, comprehensive literary practice, especially when compiling works of a historical nature. The identification of Alceste briefly recounts her trip to and from hell, but, as Cupid states, she returns "ageyn to

blys” rather than to life or to the mortal world. The phrasing recognizes Alceste’s eternal existence within public memory because of the timelessness and adaptability of texts that carry historiographic content. While Alceste’s restoration to “blys” refers to her permanent textual existence, the insufficiency in language and the practices of a literary tradition that manipulates historiographic content to fit a trajectory, her remembrance bears an eternal potential for inconsistency. Actual women, who suffered from a sparse or negative historiographic remembrance in fourteenth-century Europe, also suffer a lack of remembrance.

Ultimately, as the Prologues to Chaucer’s *Legend* show, the more Alceste and other good women are consistently remembered, the more language and literary traditions can carry a more complete account of women and their social contributions. With male authors dominating women’s historiographies of late medieval Europe, the two versions of Chaucer’s Prologue to his *Legend* stress the need to remember women within public memory. Since public memory relies on the production of books to inform audiences about the past in order to shape the present and future, limits or lacks in the production of books about women can produce social limits for women, or any minoritized group, in both the present and the future. In turn, the existence of more women’s historiographic literature, such as Chaucer’s *Legend*, provides more opportunities for the consistent social remembrance of women, which provides more opportunities for women in the present and the future. The dominance of male authors throughout the encyclopedic compendium genre also stresses the need for female authors to round out historiographic accounts, which finally occurs within the

accounts of mythological, classical, and contemporary women in Christine de Pizan's  
*Le livre de la cité des dames* (1405).

**CHAPTER THREE: 44 YEARS OF MEDEA: BOCCACCIO, CHAUCER,  
CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, AND THE CORRECTION OF WOMEN'S  
LITERARY HISTORY**

The years between 1361 and 1405 brought forth three different versions of the Medea tale: Boccaccio's version, in the Latin *De mulieribus claris* (1361-1362), Chaucer's, in the vernacular English *Legend of Good Women* (1386-1394), and Christine de Pizan's in the vernacular French *Le livre de la cité des dames* (1405). As part of a larger collection of biographies, also known as encyclopedic compendia, each version of the Medea tale contributes to defining a pattern of women's historiography. Although critics consider all three authors to be from different periods, the similar styles of each work and the short span of forty-four years suggests otherwise. The Latin encyclopedic compendium form, pioneered by Petrarch in Latin, served to celebrate the past, and specifically, the accomplishments of antiquity. The celebration, however, was limited to educated men, those who could afford Latin education and those who wrote laws and histories in Latin; although women could read Latin at the time, I suggest that Boccaccio's women's historiography targets a male audience. Such use of Latin promoted male privilege, which shaped the content of his women's historiography. While Boccaccio's version of Medea follows Petrarch's Latin model, Chaucer's and de Pizan's vernacular versions challenge Latin's exclusivity, its stronghold on historical legitimacy, and its social exclusions. The vernacular versions, I suggest, challenge the male domination of women's historiography and expose the active exclusion of women from their own history.

Ultimately, the formation of historiographies within Chaucer's and de Pizan's versions of Medea work to subvert Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, which claims to be the first to provide women with a history. This chapter will consider the ways in which the vernacular versions of Medea employ the tactics of Boccaccian Latin in order to reveal inaccuracies in the tale and to trump Latin's hold on historical legitimacy. In contrast to her male counterparts, I will argue that Christine de Pizan contributes to this historiography in a way that exemplifies how vernacular forms of women's historiography help to increase women's social access.

During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century in Europe, Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* was certainly popular, and Virginia Brown's "Introduction" notes the existence of "more than one hundred manuscripts" (xii). Although critics have noted similarities between the canons of Boccaccio and Chaucer, it is not certain as to whether Chaucer actually read Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, or any of the Boccaccian canon itself. The same lack of certainty limits connections between Chaucer and Christine de Pizan. However, Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* provides seven out of nine tales that also appear in *De mulieribus*, despite lack of a direct citation of the Boccaccian work. Conversely, de Pizan both cites Boccaccio as a source and declares the intention to correct Boccaccio's version of women's historiography. Throughout this chapter, I suggest that both Chaucer's and de Pizan's versions rely on Boccaccio's version and adhere to its basic structure, but differ in content to allow the use and scope of the vernacular to challenge the limited scope of Latin.<sup>101</sup> As a result, Chaucer's and de Pizan's vernacular legends demonstrate the

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<sup>101</sup> Boccaccio's basic structure for encyclopedic compendium form follows Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*. According to Branca, Boccaccio turned to writing exclusively in Latin after meeting

instability of historical accounts because both versions omit Medea's acts of murder. These omissions, as I suggest, expose Medea as a woman who defies social patriarchal structure and tradition. The omission of this focus, particularly in the case of de Pizan's revisions of Boccaccio, draws attention to the ways in which patriarchal structures in historiographic literature manipulate information in order to justify the exclusion of women from social or public affairs.

Since medieval translation practices are key to transfers of historical information from the vernacular to Latin and vice versa, it is important to consider the political struggle between Latin and the vernacular throughout fourteenth and early fifteenth century Europe. Ultimately, this linguistic struggle affected the legitimization of historical content and historical documentation. For this, I turn to Rita Copeland's notions of rhetorical and vernacular ascendancy in her work *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (1991), which documents how the vernacular gained agency and trumped Latin in the late Middle Ages. As one of the first defenders of the vernacular, Dante Alighieri lays a foundation for future vernacular authors, such as Chaucer and de Pizan. While Dante's vernacular carries a mission to educate all, Copeland argues that some of Dante's defense, particularly within *De vulgari eloquentia*, serves to keep Latin as the more legitimate language, despite the fact that he later advocates for the vernacular with *Il convivio* (181). Ultimately, as Copeland's findings show, Dante's subscription to Latin's legitimacy

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Petrarch around 1350, beginning with the composition of *Genealogia deorum gentillium* (108-109). Such a turn from the vernacular to Latin prompted Boccaccio to translate his own and other work into Latin, which, in a way, allowed for a re-invention of self. Evidence of such translations is within Petrarch's letters, the *Familiar Letters* and the *Letters of Old Age*. For further reading, see Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Work*; Wallace "Whan Translated She Was': Humanism, Tyranny, and the Petrarchan Academy" in *Chaucerian Polity*; Ginsberg, "Dante and Boccaccio, Boccaccio and Petrarch: The Italian Tradition" in *Chaucer's Italian Tradition*.

still adheres to a male, genealogical literary structure that undermines his vernacular mission, and subscribes to the exclusion of the lower classes and women. Dante's use of the vernacular is crucial because both Chaucer and de Pizan, as vernacular authors, use the vernacular style pioneered by Dante in order to document history and critique the exclusive, Latin tradition.

Subscribing to Petrarch's exclusive use of Latin, Boccaccio's Preface to *De mulieribus* states,

ubi illarum merita, nullo in hoc edito volumine speciali – uti iam dictum est – et a nemine demonstrata, describere, quasi aliquale reddituri premium, inchoamus [The merits of pagan women, on the other hand, have not been published in any work designed especially for this purpose and have not been set forth by anyone, as I have already pointed out. That is why I began to write this work: it was a way of giving them some kind of reward]. (12-13)

Boccaccio recognizes the lack of a history for women and states his intention to write women's history as a reward, a gift, or recognition for women. Despite Boccaccio's claim to provide women with a history in the *De mulieribus* Preface, the vernacular alterations of his Medea tale provided by Chaucer and de Pizan expose the Latin tradition's adherence to a patriarchal genealogical progression, which limits the communication of knowledge only to men. Such selection of audience, in the case of Medea's tale, not only demonstrates a clear exclusion of others, but also demonstrates selectivity regarding the tale's content and sources. Authorial choice in selection of source and content allows the tale to fit a moral trajectory that holds the compendium



together. Boccaccio's selections within *De mulieribus*'s tale of Medea, I will argue, actively exclude women, textually and socially. The exclusion occurs in language, ambiguity of source, and content, all of which serve as points to be challenged by the later, vernacular versions by Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan.

Although I focus only on the three versions of the Medea tale by Boccaccio, Chaucer, and de Pizan, it is important to note that the tale's literary history prior to 1361 is extensive; however, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and de Pizan all use the basic plot of Euripides's play, *Medea* (431 BC).<sup>102</sup> Although there are versions that pre-date Euripides's play, his work serves as the leading canonical source for the tale.<sup>103</sup> Later versions, particularly those of Ovid, do present differences, which will be discussed later on, but the basic plot of the tale still remains Euripidean. Ultimately, the tale concerns Medea, Queen of Colchis, who falls madly in love with Jason, the Argonaut, who arrives in Colchis on a mission to win the Golden Fleece. Guarded by dangerous and deadly obstacles, the Fleece was under protection in Colchis, which was governed by Medea's father. All prior attempts to win the Fleece had ended in death and allowed Colchis, specifically Medea's father, to keep the agency that came with housing the treasure. Medea loves Jason so much that she promises to protect him with her skills in the sciences and arts as he attempts to obtain the fleece. Jason accepts Medea's protection and promises to marry her. Medea protects Jason, and Jason wins the Golden Fleece, which undermines the rule of Medea's father. After Jason

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<sup>102</sup> The date of Euripides's *Medea* comes from Michael Collier's and Georgia Macheimer's 2006 translation (Burian and Shapiro 4).

<sup>103</sup> Medea's extensive history, for the purposes of this study, includes authors such as Pindar, Sophocles, Seneca, Apollonius Rhodius, and Ovid. While other authors and philosophers wrote about the tale, these authors appear as sources for many medieval authors. Boedeker asserts that the Euripidean version "gives Medea her canonical identity," and that there are earlier versions of the tale (127). See Boedeker, pages 127-148.

possesses the Fleece, both he and Medea flee to Corinth, but kill Medea's brother as a tactic to stall her father and to ensure a safe exit from Colchis. Once in Corinth, Medea and Jason have two sons, but Jason soon abandons Medea for another woman. Jason's abandonment drives Medea mad and leads her to kill her two sons before fleeing Corinth and returning to Colchis. Although their versions of the Medea tale differ, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan rely upon these events to document Medea within their versions of women's historiography.

### **Historical Documentation: The Dominating Genealogy of Latin and the Vernacular Triumph Through Dante**

As one of the first collections of biographies devoted to women in literary history, Boccaccio's Preface to *De mulieribus claris* opens with praise for Petrarch, who wrote a similar compendium for famous men. Boccaccio states "latiori tamen volumine et accuratiori stilo, vir insignis et poeta egregius Franciscus Petrarca, preceptor noster, scribit; et digne [and in our day that renowned man and great poet, my teacher Petrarch, is writing a similar work that will be even fuller and more carefully done]" (8-9).<sup>104</sup> This praise for Petrarch signifies a dedication to what many critics deem Petrarchan-humanism, which is stylistically characterized by encyclopedic compendia of classical biographies driven by a specific theme or moral in an effort to collect classical examples, document history, and celebrate antiquity. Such documentation, as discussed in the prior chapter, seeks to provide women with a Latin historiography, which also provides them more space within public memory.

Petrarch's use of Latin served as the means to celebrate antiquity because it was the language, or vernacular, of the Roman era. Copeland's *Rhetoric*,

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<sup>104</sup> The work Boccaccio speaks of is *De viris illustribus*.

*Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* explains how translation practices dating from the Roman period allowed Latin to dominate through Cicero's "non verbum pro verbo" ["not word for word"] notion that attributes faithful translation not to the source, or original text, but to the target language (33). According to Copeland, this attribution constitutes an act of "resignification" that provides the target language with primary status that "supplants" the original (34). Ultimately, Copeland finds that according to Roman translation theory, translations of a text into Latin allowed the Latin text to supplant, or replace, the original. Such replacement results in a domination of Latin over the originating languages, especially Greek (Copeland 34-35). Within the case of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus*, the Latin not only supplants the original language, but it also supplants itself in order to maintain legitimacy as the leading text for women's historiography.

Such domination through the use of Latin not only celebrates antiquity, but also provides a linguistic link to Roman society. R. Howard Bloch's *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (1983) considers how medieval texts use genealogy in order to form a history, which Bloch argues also adheres to the linear structure of language (41). In fact, Bloch states, "The history of human language is that of genealogical succession: from the first universal syllable, the name of God, to the most particular patois; and from God the universal father to the last sons of his line" (43). The concept of a line governs genealogy and language through grammar, which prizes "straightness" (52). Bloch notes that grammar, or *grammatica*, which is also another term for Latin, signifies its fixed structure.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante defines Latin (termed *grammatica*) as a constant language; in fact, one that connects all the vernaculars. This argument surrounding the Latin becomes problematic

Bloch's work reinforces the importance of structure, in which lies a foundation for male bonds in a patriarchy. Furthermore, Bloch's findings recognize a genealogical structure for language, one that mimics the structures for documenting ancestry, which also structures the history communicated within.

The genealogical structure within the literary tradition, particularly Latin literature, focuses only on the bonds between father and son, or just between men.<sup>106</sup> These male connections speak to Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's findings regarding the exclusion of women from Italian genealogies in fourteenth century Italy. The male connections also speak to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of the erotic triangle and male homosocial bonds, as discussed in Chapter One. Ultimately, the genealogical structure of the Latin, literary tradition follows the male, genealogical progression, which means it focuses on men. Similar to the ways in which Boccaccio uses dedication, as also discussed in Chapter One, *De mulieribus* purports to provide women with a history, but due to its subscription to male genealogical structure, *De mulieribus*'s target audience is primarily male.<sup>107</sup> Ultimately, Boccaccio's provision of

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because it undercuts his argument for the vernacular throughout *De vulgari eloquentia*. Dante states, "Hinc moti sunt inventores grammatice facultatis: que quidem gramatica nichil aliud est quam quedam inalterabilis locutionis ydeptitas diversibus temporibus atque locis. Hec cum de comuni consensus multarum gentium fuerit regulata, nulli singulari arbitrio videtur obnoxia, et per consequens nec varibilis esse potest (This was the point from which the inventors of the art of grammar began: for their *grammatica* is nothing less than a certain immutable identity of language in different times and places. Its rules having been formulated with the common consent of many people, it can be subject to no individual will; and, as a result, it cannot change)" (20-23 italics original; translation by Stephen Botterill).

<sup>106</sup> In "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles" in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that imperative to the maintenance of patriarchal culture, as demonstrated within the erotic triangle, is woman. Sedgwick cites Gayle Rubin's notions regarding the traffic in women as "the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (25-26). One could argue that the erotic triangle is in existence within the Medea tales, as Medea is passed between men. Such an endeavor could be a future exploration, but in this study, my aim is to focus on what the pattern of tales presents to document women's history and what it is left out.

<sup>107</sup> While a large body of work on women and literacy exists, *Women Writing Latin from Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe* asserts that many more women were literate, particularly in

history to and for women excludes them and upholds a male-to-male connection through a linguistic connection to the Roman Era.<sup>108</sup>

Medea is neither Roman nor Greek, but she is a well-educated and skilled woman who interrupts the male-to-male succession in Trojan mythology (the lineage that connects to Rome and later European dynasties) through her act of infanticide.<sup>109</sup> The record of Medea's infanticide, particularly in the records of Ovid and Seneca, describe her as a witch, which negatively illustrates her character and allows her to be the focus of many cautionary tales for men.<sup>110</sup> Since Petrarch's use of Latin served officially within his work and to celebrate antiquity, Boccaccio's version of the Medea legend uses Latin to protect the male-to-male transmission of knowledge, or message of caution, about Medea and women.<sup>111</sup>

Ultimately, as Boccaccio preserves the exchange of knowledge along male genealogical lines, he also furthers the connection of Troy's legacy through the Romans to fourteenth century Europe. Sylvia Federico's *New Troy: Fantasies of*

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Latin, than what previous studies claim. The editors Churchill, Brown, and Jeffrey note, however, that despite those higher literacy levels, cultural barriers still existed to restrict women socially (2). See Introduction, p. 4-5; notes 21 and 22 also bear pertinent information on this topic.

<sup>108</sup> In "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women" (1987), Jordan argues that the *De mulieribus claris*'s target audience is men.

<sup>109</sup> For further reading and an overview of the Medea tale throughout western literature, see Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*. See also Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's "The Cruel Mother" in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*.

<sup>110</sup> In the Introduction to *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, Sarah Illes Johnson asserts that Sophocles and Seneca "portray Medea as a famous witch, adept in herbal poisons and surrounded by snakes," which serve to paint a negative portrait of her character (5). In the same collection, Newlands provides an essay "The Metamorphosis of Ovid's Medea" in which Medea transforms from a good woman to a bad one from the beginning to end of Ovid's canon (178-208). For more reading on Seneca and his condemnation of Medea, see Nussbaum "Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*" also in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*.

<sup>111</sup> Petrarch was a cleric and took orders in 1328 (Hainsworth ix).

*Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (2003) considers late medieval Europe's fascination with the myth of Troy.<sup>112</sup> Considering history and genealogy, she states,

The symbolic appropriation of Troy is at once a means of creating a past, present, and future in accord with specific ideals and is also a means of mobilizing that imagined historicity in gestures of self-invention and self definition...The appropriation of the Trojan past was always an imperial gesture for the European present. The emperors Constantine, Theodosius, and Charlemagne were linked to Troy through mythic genealogies that claimed Aeneas as their common forefather. (xii)

Federico's finding supports the patriarchal genealogical succession that Bloch finds within medieval literature. The difference, in Federico's case, lies in the actual creation, or textual forging, of such genealogical succession.<sup>113</sup> Within the legend of Jason, unlike that of Aeneas whose line later serves to establish European nations, Medea serves as an obstacle to his heroic genealogical succession because she kills her sons and stops the progression of Jason's genealogical line. While other versions of the tale may exist, the popular and enduring perception of Medea as an obstacle articulates the female threat to male genealogical succession, defines Medea's

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<sup>112</sup> While there are a number of key sources that focus on Chaucerian and Boccaccian uses of the Trojan myth, the following provide a current overview of the Trojan myth throughout medieval Europe: Benson, Battles, and Solomon.

<sup>113</sup> Federico's Introduction notes, "In England, Geoffrey of Monmouth's treatment of legendary history made popular the idea that London had ancestral ties to Troy," which links the national origin of England to Troy genealogically (xiii). Bloch's work finds similar links within Old French texts, which bear structure of family in *Chanson de Roland* and *Conte du Graal*. These links provide authority through genealogy, which appear in texts as late as the early 15<sup>th</sup> century as Kevin Brownlee finds in Christine de Pizan's *Le livre du chemin de long estude* which employ her Italian ethnicity both biologically, through autobiographical content, and literarily to Dante in order to claim authority linguistically (208).

character, favors its connection to Troy, and considers the end of Jason's heroic genealogy as a tragedy. Ultimately, the Trojan conception of Medea provides one way of reading and interpreting the legend, which also demonstrates the legitimacy of certain genealogies.

Similar to the social favoring of specific Trojan genealogies, only specific versions of Trojan mythology are considered legitimate.<sup>114</sup> The most legitimate version of Troy, according to Federico, is Virgil's *Aeneid*. Federico states,

History is opened specifically toward the political future through the adoption of this Virgilian perspective; its narrative is one of old empires lost, and more importantly, of new empires won. The return of Virgil, or of the Virgilian mode of historiography, allows for a self-consciously political present, one that looks backward at the past and forward to the future – and that imagines itself in relation to both. From this secular historiographical perspective comes the idea not only of nation but also of empire. (xv)

Federico's observation regarding the social favoring of Virgilian historiography demonstrates the domination of Latin translation, which structures not only history, but also concepts of nation and empire. Through genealogical structure and the domination of Latin, fixed concepts of history emerge, and these concepts communicate fixed ideals of legitimacy, which exclude or condemn women like Medea.<sup>115</sup> This genealogical structure depends upon Latin's rigidity and exclusivity,

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<sup>114</sup> Federico offers the example of Guido delle Collone's *Historia Troiana* and the critical dilemma as to whether it is history or literature; more specifically, the dilemma surrounds considerations of fact or fiction (xvi-xvii).

<sup>115</sup> Medea does not appear in Virgil's *Aeneid*, but studies have found similarities between Virgil's Dido

which imparts only one way to read Medea. The rigidity and exclusivity, however, changes with the rise of the vernacular after the work of Dante.

Copeland locates the use of the vernacular as a means to effectively and responsibly communicate knowledge within Dante's *Il convivio* (1304-1307) and she assesses how Dante's use of the vernacular works against Latin through the vernacular's occupation of a rhetorical position (183). She argues that the "rhetorical purpose" in *Il convivio* is a result of its "vernacularity," which requires a larger audience, of men, whom Dante initially addresses (182). Because *Il convivio* is a defense for the use of the vernacular instead of Latin, *Il convivio*'s purpose is to persuade, which substantiates the work as a rhetorical project. Copeland argues, "By introducing the possibility of extending the academic discourse beyond the protective enclosure of the academy and its Latinity, the *Convivio* works as a critique of the ideological system that sustains the institutional power of the academic tradition" (182). Copeland's argument notes that Dante achieves the implicit political agenda of *Il convivio* through its vernacularity, which counters the social exclusivity of education and the exclusivity of Latin.

Dante's use of Latin as a model for the vernacular allows for a subscription to Latin's genealogical structure. For example, Dante's vernacular masterpiece, *La Commedia* (1321), places Dante within the genealogy of authors because two of his guides throughout the piece are Virgil and Statius.<sup>116</sup> David Wallace, in *Chaucerian Polity* (1997), observes Dante's inscription of himself after Virgil within the literary genealogy, which sets a model followed by the later vernacular French author, Jean de

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and Apollonius Rhodius's Medea in the *Argonautica*. For further reading, see Nelis and Beye.  
<sup>116</sup> This is the year of Dante's death. Most critics and scholars report that Dante died shortly after completing *La Commedia*.



Meun, and by Boccaccio during his vernacular phase (80).<sup>117</sup> Dante's use of the vernacular coupled with his use of the genealogical paradigm for his work subscribes to the traditional passing of knowledge from man to man; ultimately, he employs a literary history that upholds male bonding in the vernacular and mimics the traditions of Latin literature, which undermines the vernacular's ability to educate all people.

The exclusion of women in the vernacular presents a paradox because Dante associates women with the vernacular. In *La Commedia*, Dante's ultimate guide is Beatrice, a woman and object of love who resides in Paradise beside God.<sup>118</sup> While Dante exalts Beatrice, in his unfinished Latin treatise and defense of the vernacular, *De vulgari eloquentia* (1303-1305), he also states that vernacular language is the language naturally acquired by imitation of "nurses" (I.i).<sup>119</sup> This definition associates the acquisition of vernacular language with women. Dante further elaborates on this association as he describes the history of vernacular language, which comes from Eve, the woman, or human, who spoke the first vernacular utterance to the serpent in Eden (I.ii).<sup>120</sup> This assertion, coupled with Dante's definition of vernacular language

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<sup>117</sup> Dante's inscription of himself as the "sixth of six *topos*" produces a number of studies with regard to Dante and fame, for further reading, see Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*; Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*.

<sup>118</sup> In the Introduction to *The Body of Beatrice* (1988), Robert Harrison provides an overview of the evolution of Dantean criticism and the treatment of Beatrice (1-13). For further reading on studies on the figure of Beatrice, see: Harrison, Caesar's (ed) *Dante: The Critical Heritage* for a specific reading on the Italian Risorgimento and Beatrice (61-65), Cachey (ed), Barolini and Storey, and Williams.

<sup>119</sup> This dating comes from Stephen Botterill's "Introduction" (xiv) and all Latin translations of *De vulgari* come from Botterill. Dante states, "quod vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infants assuefiunt ab assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipient; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus [I call 'vernacular language' that which infants acquire from those around them when they first begin to distinguish sounds; or, to put it more succinctly, I declare that vernacular language is that which we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our nurses]" (I.i).

<sup>120</sup> In Book I,ii, Dante discusses the origin of speech (vernacular speech) and argues that speaking is relegated to humanity rather than to animals. This explicitly concerns the communication between the serpent and Eve in Genesis, about which Dante asserts that the serpent did not speak, he hissed, but the human response was in the vernacular (I, ii, 6-8). In I.iv, Dante specifically investigates the

acquisition as resulting from imitation of nurses or mothers, ultimately associates vernacular language with women. While Dante stresses that the vernacular's nobility is located in its natural acquisition and that its existence precedes Latin, the origin of the vernacular forges a negative female association, which references the fall from Eden and keeps the vernacular subordinate to Latin.<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, Dante's subscription to the traditional, genealogical literary pattern also excludes women from what he ascribes to them as their natural language.

Despite Dante's points of exclusion with regard to the vernacular's social responsibility, Copeland argues that *Il convivio* paves the way for the use of the vernacular to function in the same ways that Latin does, which, as Copeland's argument shows, exposes Latin's exclusivity and inequity (182). With a critique of the traditionally Latin system, Dante rehabilitates the function of rhetoric through the use of the vernacular (182-183). Through this rehabilitation of rhetoric, Copeland argues, "Real power lies, not in status, but in effective, persuasive communication," which the vernacular, based on the fact that it reaches more people, naturally does (183). Copeland labels this process "rhetorical ascendancy."

The vernacular's adherence to Latin's genealogical structure, through Copeland's findings in Dante, allows the vernacular to dominate through rhetorical

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first vernacular utterance and states, "Secundum quidem quod in principio Genesis loquitur, ubi de primordio mundi Sacratissima Scriptura pertractat, mulierem invenitur ante omnes fuisse locutam, scilicet presumptuosissimam Evam, cum dyabolo sciscitanti respondit [According to what it says at the beginning of Genesis, where sacred scripture describes the origin of the world, we find that a woman spoke before anyone else, when the most presumptuous Eve responded thus to the blandishments of the Devil]" (I.iv, 2).

<sup>121</sup> Dante's associations between the vernacular and woman also undercut his mission in *Il Convivio*, which quote Aristotle in order to declare, "tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere/all men naturally desire/wish to know," (I.i, 1; English translation is mine). Such a declaration states the responsibility of the vernacular, according to Dante, to educate all people. If the vernacular remains subordinate to Latin, as it does in Dante, then Dante does not completely subscribe to this own mission for language.

ascendancy and provide an opportunity for larger readership. For Dante, however, Latin still reigns as the supreme language; but for later vernacular authors, specifically Chaucer, the vernacular usurps Latin. Copeland finds that Chaucer's vernacular employs a rhetorical invention different from Dante's that results in vernacular ascendancy (183-184). In fact, Copeland argues that Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is a prime example of vernacular ascendancy because it demonstrates how translation works exegetically to earn authority.<sup>122</sup> With two versions of the Prologue, F and G, Copeland argues that Chaucer's use of language, albeit both versions appear in vernacular English, reveals different uses of translation, which impact the transmission of any content, especially historical content.<sup>123</sup> The differences in use, as Copeland argues, serve as the basis of vernacular ascendancy. Copeland states,

The *Legend of Good Women* constructs its relationship to the *auctores* out of the conventional postures of exegesis, service to and conservation of the authoritative text; but it also finds a way of stressing or insisting upon its difference from its sources, making that very difference the explicit subject of rhetorical invention. (197)

The difference that Chaucer's *Legend* provides from its sources in both versions demonstrates how vernacular language can imitate the official discourse, or Latin tradition, in order to assume authority. Not only does the translation revise the Latin, but the difference from the original text also trumps the previous version and allows

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<sup>122</sup> Copeland argues that both versions of the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* demonstrate two types of translation. The first type of translation, primary translation, concerns inscription of the content within the structures of the official tradition or discourse. The second type, secondary translation, allows the content, or in this case the vernacular text, to be an "official discourse" (197).

<sup>123</sup> Copeland argues that the context for the G version subscribes to translation in a primary fashion, which means that the content adheres to the official tradition or discourse. The F version, according to Copeland, bears a stylistic concern, that of the French *marguerite* style (190-192).

for the vernacular versions to take precedence, which shows a similarity to the ways in which Latin sought domination per Ciceronian translation methods mentioned earlier. For example, the Prologues' closing couplets demonstrate the ways in which more recent vernacular versions bear both revision and legitimacy concerning the narrator's charge to write the *Legend*. At the end of both versions, the narrator states,

And with that word my bokes gan I take,	And with that word, of slep I gan awake,
And ryght thus on my Legende gan I make.	And ryght thus on my Legende gan I make.
(F 578-579)	(G 544-545)

The closing couplet in the F version states that the narrator turns to his books, or the literary tradition, in order to begin the *Legend* at Alceste's and the God of Love's command. In the later, G version, the narrator wakes from sleep, from his dream vision and begins to write the *Legend*.<sup>124</sup> This example demonstrates a difference in stress. The F version relies on the authority of the existing Latin tradition, while the G version assumes that authority and does not rely on the existing tradition.<sup>125</sup> Per Copeland's findings in the use of translation, Chaucer's translations go a step further than Dante's *Convivio* because this example shows that the most recent versions not only usurps previous Latin texts, but also previous vernacular ones. Overall, Chaucer's use of the vernacular in the Prologue to his *Legend* exemplifies the legitimate use of the vernacular in a way that authoritatively trumps prior versions, including Latin ones.

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<sup>124</sup> There are many differences between the F and G Prologues of Chaucer's *Legend*, many of these differences are discussed more so in Chapter 2.

<sup>125</sup> Copeland cites these two examples in a longer close reading in which she argues that the difference in reliance on the tradition locates itself in the God of Love's prior command to "rehearse" (195-197).

Copeland's point with regard to how Chaucer's *Legend* uses language and translation to form rhetorical invention is key to how both Chaucer and de Pizan revise the tale of Medea in order to supersede prior documentation. Boccaccio's biography of Medea, I argue, adheres to the traditional genealogical structure that portrays her as a monster who breaks patriarchal genealogical progression. Chaucer and de Pizan use the vernacular to rival Boccaccio's Latin in order to question Medea's historical portrayal.

### **Boccaccio's Medea: The Voracious Devourer of the Father and Son**

Chapter 17 of *De mulieribus claris* focuses specifically on Medea, Queen of Colchis, and follows Boccaccio's tale of Hypsipyle.<sup>126</sup> This order thus chronicles Jason's marriages, first to Hypsipyle, then to Medea. Immediately, this order puts the focus on Jason and, like much of *De mulieribus*, Medea's biography is devoid of any specific source credit, although, as noted earlier, Boccaccio's Preface clearly declares devotion to the Petrarchan-encyclopedic compendium style.<sup>127</sup> While other Boccaccian works note familiarity with classical sources for mythological knowledge,

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<sup>126</sup> Boccaccio's biography "Hypsipyle, Queen of Lemnos," is Chapter XVI in *De mulieribus claris*. Boccaccio's focus regarding Hypsipyle's fame is her devotion to her father (*FW* 70-75). The tales of Hypsipyle and Medea are not explicitly associated, but Jason appears in both and they are sequenced one after the other. Hypsipyle is the Queen of Lemnos, and as the myth details, the Lemnian women killed all of their husbands and sons. Hypsipyle was the only one who saved her father, Thoos. See Pindar's *Pythian* 4 and 5, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XIII, and Apollonius Rhodius's *The Argonautica*. The Lemnian women in the murders of the Lemnian men certainly break the male-to-male genealogical progression, which villainizes them in mythology and historiographic literature. Boccaccio also subscribes to that villainization in Hypsipyle's biography as he describes Jason's arrival to Lemnos "frustra prohibenitibus feminis [despite the women's opposition]." He reports, "a regina hospicio atque lecto susceptus est [The queen received him [Jason] into her house and into her bed]" (*FW* 72/73). In this instance, Boccaccio places all the responsibility on the sexual encounter on Hypsipyle even though, as the tale goes, Jason's arrival was against the Lemnian women's will.

<sup>127</sup> Many critics note Boccaccio's dedication to Petrarchan style over that of his sources, see Jordan "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women," (35); also Franklin, *Boccaccio's Heroines*, (4). Kolsky also argues that *De mulieribus claris* is Boccaccio's effort to "extend and expand" Petrarch's practice of humanism (39).

it is very probable that Boccaccio was familiar with a multitude of sources that comprise Medea's literary history.<sup>128</sup>

Boccaccio's legend of Medea begins with a focus on Medea's great ability in the sciences and arts, which he notes as extraordinary. However, Medea's knowledge and skill are not positive attributes, as Boccaccio considers Medea "malefitiorum longe doctissima [the cleverest of witches]" (74/75). Such considerations link up with later Roman considerations of Medea as a witch per popular versions by Ovid and Seneca.<sup>129</sup> Boccaccio then associates her abilities with her character, "Nec illi – quod longe peius – ab artibus fuit dissonus animus; nam, deficientibus eis, ferro uti arbitrabatur levissimum [Far worse, her character was in keeping with her arts, for, if those failed, Medea thought nothing of resorting to the sword]" (74-75). Boccaccio's description of Medea is clearly not a positive one, and in fact, she comes across as something violent, unwomanly, or evil, and voraciously so. From the start of Medea's biography, it is clear that she serves as a negative example within this collection of women's history despite the fact that knowledge and education are generally positive attributes.<sup>130</sup>

To further Medea's negative qualities, Boccaccio also lists Medea's beauty as a contributor to her violent and voracious devotion because it contributes to her

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<sup>128</sup> Several of Boccaccio's vernacular works, including *Genealogia deorum gentillium* and *De casibus virorum*, cite or discuss various ancient or classical sources including Seneca. For an article that connects Euripides, Boccaccio, and Chaucer, see Parker, "Alcestis: Euripides to Ted Hughes." For recent explorations of Boccaccio and Seneca, see Usher. Seneca's influence has also been studied throughout Boccaccio's work with Fiammetta.

<sup>129</sup> Ovid documented Medea several times throughout his oeuvre; this negative assessment comes from *The Metamorphoses*.

<sup>130</sup> Kolsky argues that *De mulieribus's* examples articulate "a condemnation" of politics for women (58) and the exemption of women from public affairs (128; see also 143-167). Such an argument implies that women had no place in education, which further implies that an educated woman, like Medea, is bad.

insatiable lustfulness.<sup>131</sup> According to Boccaccio, Medea's insatiability starts when she sees Jason and does not end after she achieves his love. Boccaccio describes Medea's wrongdoing this way:

Quis hoc etiam sensatus arbitr<ar>etur homo quod ex uno oculorum intuitu opulentissimi Regis exterminium sequeretur? Eo igitur patrato scelere, cum dilecti iuvenis meruisset amplexus, cum eodem secum patriam substantiam omnem trahens, clam fugam arripuit; nec tam grandi facinore contenta, in peius trucem divertit animum [What person of sense could imagine that a simple glance would result in the destruction of a powerful king? Medea committed the crime and so earned the embraces of her young lover. She fled with him in secret, taking with her all her father's wealth. But she was not satisfied with even this terrible action and turned her cruel powers to hatching still worse schemes] (74-75).

Boccaccio's description begins with the glance shared between Medea and Jason, however Jason is not guilty for meeting Medea's glance and the responsibility for the interaction falls completely on Medea. This responsibility allows Medea to be the cause not only of Jason's fall, but also of her father's fall. Medea's glances begin all of the evil that follows within her tale: her lustful love of Jason, her betrayal of her father, her murder of her brother, her use of magic to have Pelias's daughters kill their

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<sup>131</sup> These considerations are based on social fears regarding female sexuality and the belief that sex was necessary for men in order to preserve the social order. Such a belief pardoned men for sexual misconduct and allowed women to bear the brunt of acts such as rape and adultery. The fact that men were pardoned for acts of sexual misconduct due to a need for sexual release was furthered by the belief that women naturally possessed a lustful nature, which forced the men to sexual ends. This social belief and the sexual responsibility put on women led to a social blame of women for this lack of male sexual control, which resulted in a fear of female sexuality and its capabilities. For further reading see Brundage (71,462), Rossiaud (29), and Karras (108).

father, and her murder of her sons (74-77). Each evil that Boccaccio lists demonstrates an interruption in male genealogical progression, and, according to Boccaccio, illustrates Medea's voracious personality. More importantly, Medea's evils, within a collection dedicated to providing women with a history, allows her voracity to serve as an example of destructive tendencies in women that endanger men.

Boccaccio focuses on Medea's insatiability in order to adhere to the moral trajectory of *De mulieribus* and to teach a distrust of the eyes because they reject what is sacred or virtuous. He states, "et cum indocti sint iudices et superficiebus rerum tantummodo credant, sacris ignominiosa, ficta veris et anxia letis persepe preficiunt [since, however, the eyes are unlearned judges and trust only the outward appearance of things, they often prefer the shameful to the sacred]" which, according to Boccaccio, is Medea's problem (78-79). Ultimately, Boccaccio declares Medea's eyes as the source of her voracity.<sup>132</sup> According to Boccaccio, Medea's eyes allowed her to greedily learn the sciences and arts in order to be wickedly clever, to focus on Jason, and to commit all the crimes against male genealogical progression, in general. The interruption of the male-to-male genealogical bond, for Boccaccio, is the worst of all. Had Medea respected the sacred bond between men, rather than interrupt it, she would not have committed the numerous acts of paternal betrayal, which stunts both her father's and Jason's genealogical progression. The focus on Medea's consistent

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<sup>132</sup> Medea's problem of the eyes can be connected to the visual culture of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, such connections may also point to sexual promiscuity, specifically for women of the late Middle Ages. In "From Prostitutes to Brides of Christ: The Avignonese Repenties in the Late Middle Ages," Joëlle Rollo-Koster states "Beauty was identified with temptation, seduction, and all the danger that women represented" (130). This conception of beauty and the problem of feminine sexuality also taps into late Medieval European views of sexuality, for which the feminine was the cause of male sexual deviance. See Karras and Brundage.



interruption of the male to male genealogical progression reinforces the social patriarchal structures that exclude women from participating in social institutions.

Despite Boccaccio's dedication of *De mulieribus* to women, Medea's tale demonstrates a catering to men, more specifically their concern for the preservation of the traditional male-to-male genealogical line. First, in the Latin, Medea's name appears only three times, while Jason's appears nine times. Counter to Boccaccio's claim that *De mulieribus* provides women with a history, the repetition of Jason's name keeps him, rather than Medea, the focus of the biography.<sup>133</sup> In "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women" (1987), Constance Jordan finds that *De mulieribus* seems to honor women, but actually insults them through the use of irony that exposes Boccaccio's interest in a male, rather than a female, audience (26). In *The Genealogy of Women* (2003), Stephen Kolsky argues that the *De mulieribus* is essentially directed toward men, more specifically "to grant space to the intervention of humanists' hall of fame, hitherto exclusively the domain of men" (3). This means that the history provided to women within *De mulieribus* is subordinate to that of men, which sends a social message of female subordination and inferiority. Although Boccaccio claims to dedicate the work to women, Kolsky asserts an underlying concern for men: "It is difficult, if not impossible, for the refined male to live up to traditional expectations of his gender. In these circumstances, exemplary biographies of famous women are a subtle reminder to men of their gender" (116). Ultimately, Kolsky argues that *De mulieribus* serves to remind men to behave as men, which also implies that women are historically and famously imperfect. Such a conclusion can certainly be drawn from

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<sup>133</sup> For this observation, I counted how many times Medea's name appeared in the Latin within Virginia Brown's translation. In the English translation, Medea's name does appear more than three times due to the need to supplement it in translation.

Medea's tale; however, both Jordan and Kolsky overlook the dominating function of Latin in forging a patriarchal genealogy within Boccaccio's *Medea*.

More recently, Franklin's *Boccaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society* (2006) argues that, like Boccaccio's vernacular works, his sources in *De mulieribus* are "muddled" because he speaks for himself, not for or directly to women (8-9). Franklin asserts that Jordan's reading of *De mulieribus* is fraught with present imposition of modern understanding (7). In fact, Franklin argues that Boccaccio judges the women within *De mulieribus* according to contemporary Italian standards and mores of his time to define "the conditions under which it is suitable for a female to wield power within a patriarchal society" (8). Such an argument engages the social implications of historiographic literature and parallels limitations of women's social access in late medieval Europe. On this point, Franklin argues that Kolsky overlooks Boccaccio's discredit of women with political ambitions (8). Franklin, like Jordan and Kolsky, also overlooks Boccaccio's use of Latin, a male language, to connect to other males and to dominate women's historiography.

Critics also have difficulty deciphering Boccaccio's sources in *De mulieribus*.<sup>134</sup> Other than the Preface remarks in favor of Petrarch, Boccaccio provides no specific source credit for Medea's tale. The compilation of *De mulieribus* makes it clear that Boccaccio has a solid background in mythology, and throughout the Medea canon, the endings are contingent upon the frame and portion of the tale told.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> In general, due to the ambiguity of Boccaccio's sources, many critical studies deal with Boccaccio's treatment of sources.

<sup>135</sup> For instance, the Euripidean version concludes with a meditation, "Who won? Who lost?" before Medea leaves Corinth with the protection of Aegeus's chariot (82). See Collier and Machemer's translation of *Medea*. Ovid provides two different perspectives of Medea within his *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*. In the *Heroides*, a letter from Medea to Jason details the hurt that Medea suffers as a result of Jason's abandonment, so no documentation of Medea's end appears. Furthermore, Ovid

Regardless of the various endings available for the Medea tale, Boccaccio recounts that Medea returned to Colchis and restored the throne to her father, but “Quid tandem egerit quove sub cello seu mortis genere diem clausurit, nec legisse nemini nec audisse [I do not remember having read or heard what Medea did later, or where or how she died]” (76/77). With this statement, Boccaccio admits that Medea’s tale has been previously documented, but that he has single-handedly compiled all of those previous versions into his version, which not only earns agency for his version as the leading and most legitimate, but also supports his claim that *Famous Women* is the leading source of women’s historiographic literature. Such authority demonstrates Boccaccio’s adherence to the Petrarch’s stylistic use of Latin while also fulfilling the trajectory of *De mulieribus* to transmit knowledge strictly to men.

Boccaccio’s subscription and dedication to men, through the use of Latin, trumps all previous versions of Medea’s tale and allows his version to serve as the most recent and most legitimate source for Medea and women’s historiography. Despite Boccaccio’s claim to provide women with a history, his Latin restricts them from their own history and upholds Latin’s ability to bind men genealogically. In turn, Boccaccio provides a women’s historiography that serves to remind men of their superiority over women. More specifically, Boccaccio’s focus within the legend allows Medea’s knowledge to ruin a hero and a heroic genealogy, which also serves to justify the domination of women’s historiography. The manner in which Boccaccio identifies

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also provides Hypsipyle’s letter to Jason in which she condemns Medea as a criminal (Isbell trans. 129). Later in Ovid’s career, *The Metamorphoses* provides an end similar to Euripides’s version in which Medea kills her sons, leaves Corinth, and marries Aegeus, but unlike Euripides’s *Medea*, the *Metamorphoses* does not provide the Euripidean ending. Unlike both Euripides and Ovid, Seneca’s version ends promptly after Medea murders her sons. While it is possible that all versions listed could be sources for Boccaccio’s version of Medea, none are specifically cited.

Medea's character as an obstacle to male genealogical succession within a moral trajectory presents a standard for encyclopedic compendia to come, particularly the later vernacular versions of Medea by Chaucer and de Pizan.

**Chaucer's Medea: Jason the Devourer of Love and Medea the Martyr**

Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* follows Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* chronologically and in overall structure. Combined under the title, "The Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea," the subtitled legends "The Legend of Hypsipyle" and "The Legend of Medea" also follow Jason's marital order. Throughout the ninety-nine lines of Chaucer's "Legend of Medea," Medea's name only appears four times, while Jason's appears twelve. Not only does Medea's name appear less often than Jason's does, which follows Boccaccio's pattern for naming Jason three times more than Medea, but Jason's story also dominates the beginning of the tale. The narrator states:

To Coclos comen is this duc Jasoun,  
That is of love devourer and dragoun.  
As mater apetiteth forme alwey  
And from forme into forme it passen may,  
Or as a welle that were botomles,  
Ryght so can false Jason have no pes. (1580-1585)

While Medea is not mentioned until line 1599, The *Legend's* narrator focuses on Jason and Jason's appetite, or voracity, thus reversing Boccaccio's attribution of these characteristics to Medea. The narrator judges Jason, calls him a dragon, and describes him as a man plagued with an endless appetite, over which he has no control. The endlessness of Jason's appetite parallels Boccaccio's report of the endlessness of

Medea's trust in her eyes. Ultimately, Chaucer negatively focuses on Jason in a way similar to Boccaccio's negative focus on Medea.

Although Chaucer follows Boccaccio's general structure, he deviates by condemning Jason, the supposed hero in most traditional versions, including Boccaccio's. In *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (2002), Robert Edwards finds that Chaucer's depiction of Jason is a feminization and shows the Latin tradition's ability to short-change women of antiquity, which results in praising men, like Jason, even though they do wrong. Edwards argues that Chaucer's use of Jason in "The Legend of Medea" is an act of feminization that connects to Boccaccio's biography of Cleopatra in *De mulieribus* rather than to the biographies of Medea or Hypsipyle, in which Jason is directly involved.<sup>136</sup> Although Edwards does not connect the legends of Medea to each other, his finding is key because Boccaccio claims to provide a history to and for women, as stated earlier, but in turn upholds the progression of male genealogical structure, within which Medea is an obstacle. With Medea as an obstacle, Boccaccio's support of male genealogical progression pardons Jason of any responsibility throughout the legend's events. In contrast to Edwards, I argue, however, that Chaucer does not feminize Jason, but rather that Jason's insatiable appetite parallels Boccaccio's portrayal of Medea in *De mulieribus*. Just as Medea's trust in her eyes destroys the progression of the paternal genealogical structure and rejects all that is sacred in Boccaccio's account, Chaucer demonstrates that Jason's appetite is just as destructive as Medea's eyes, if not more so because his

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<sup>136</sup> Edwards argues that Chaucer's portrayal of Jason "calls into question a fundamental value of Chaucer's classicized aristocratic culture" and Edwards points to Chaucer's use of Guido delle Collone and Ovid's *Heroides* to pose the issues surrounding public and private deception through Jason's transformation from hero to traitor (88). For the most part, Edwards locates this transformation not within Chaucer's "Legend of Medea," but within "The Legend of Hypsipyle."

appetite is the origin of all the horrors in the legends of both Hypsipyle and Medea. From this perspective, Jason bears responsibility in Medea's crimes, which counter Boccaccio's claims in *De mulieribus* and Jason's traditional, historiographic portrayal as a hero.

Most studies on Jason and Medea neglect the connection between Chaucer's *Legend* and Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, which leads to an oversight of the parallels between Boccaccio's Medea and Chaucer's Jason. Piero Boitani's important *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (1984), however, argues that Chaucer's dependence upon Boccaccio shows an irony in the love of name, which refers to the process by which names, or a consistent naming in literature, leads to historical fame (152). Such consistent naming forms a glory-fortune-death sequence, a pattern of events that allows one to earn glory, fortune, and death. Boitani argues that this pattern forms a conflict between fortune, fame, and Christian ideals (152). Boitani asserts that the sequence presents "two complementary solutions – praise of the divine or saintly glory and condemnation of vain glory" (153). Death follows for those who are innately good, which follows Christian ideology, as martyrs and saints die and go to heaven. In Boccaccio's and Chaucer's versions of Medea, neither Jason nor Medea die, thus proving that they are not divine or saintly. Jason's fame, however, differs from Medea's as he is consistently hailed as a hero throughout historiographic literature, which reveals a disparity within the glory-fortune-death sequence based on gender.

This disparity, for women in the glory-fortune-death sequence, requires death in order to earn positive, historical fame, while for men like Jason, such fame does not

require death. As Carolyn Dinshaw finds in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (1989), Chaucer's *Legend* demonstrates the pattern that "Good women gain their identity – become significant – only by dying" (76).<sup>137</sup> Despite the fact that neither Medea nor Jason die at the end of their legends, the glory-fortune-death sequence, as both Boitani and Dinshaw find, supports the patriarchal genealogical structure through privileging men like Jason with endless heroic glory, while women (saintly men and children too) only earn that glory because they die. As Boccaccio's version of Medea shows, however, Medea does not die. Medea's lack of death in her tale places her squarely and infinitely as a historical obstacle, or negative agent, according to the traditional glory-fortune-death sequence that upholds the male-to-male bonds throughout historiographic literature. Conversely, in *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer's focus on Jason draws attention to Jason's active role in the events of Medea's legend as well as his exemption from such responsibility simply because Jason is consistently hailed as a male hero in historiographic literature.

Chaucer's focus on Jason's exemption from the glory-fortune-death sequence throughout his "Legend of Medea" leads to Elaine Tuttle Hansen's argument in *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (1992) that Chaucer's *Legend* is about two types of men: those who cannot help loving women and those who traffic stories about women (2-3). In the *Legend*, these two types of men, Hansen argues, are emasculated heroes due to their abandonment of women (7). Although Hansen argues that Jason is an example of a man who suffers from innate weakness in Chaucer's *Legend of Good*

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<sup>137</sup> In "The Naked Text in English to Declare": *The Legend of Good Women*," within *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, Dinshaw further argues that the lack of history for and of women allows them to "only try to regain themselves, paradoxically, in death or metamorphosis" (80). See also Rollo-Koster and Reyerson, "For the salvation of my soul": *Women and Wills in Medieval and Early Modern France* for work regarding wills and women's agency gained both in life and afterwards.

*Women*, she overlooks the literary traditions that consistently hail Jason as a hero and consistently hold Medea as a villain. Hansen's finding regarding the men in Chaucer's *Legend* implicates both the male characters within the *Legend* and the male authors who write about women, but fails to make the connection to the traditions of historiographic literature, and specifically to Boccaccio's *De mulieribus*.

Edwards's *Chaucer and Boccaccio* most closely links Chaucer's Jason to the Latin works of Boccaccio. As stated earlier, the feminization of Jason, which Edwards also finds in all of Chaucer's men throughout the *Legend*, depends upon Jason's consistent hero status as recorded in the western literary tradition (88-90). Such consistent chronicling of Jason as a hero and Chaucer's revision of it, as Edwards argues, allows Chaucer to expose the courtly tradition of "accepting appearance at face value, without the interference of ambiguity, irony, or dissembling" (88). Edwards's finding is key because it considers the historical patterning of Jason's literary and textual portrayal as a hero, which taints women, specifically Hypsipyle and Medea, and it considers how Chaucer responds to that tradition.<sup>138</sup> Edwards's findings lead up to, but stop short of completely connecting to *De mulieribus*, although Edwards argues that Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* (1355-1374), rather than *De mulieribus claris*, is a major source for Chaucer's *Legend* (84).<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, Edwards's use of the term "feminization" still supports the social stigmatization of women in literature by suggesting that feminine qualities negate the heroic attributes of a character like Jason.

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<sup>138</sup> For studies on The Prologue to *Legend of Good Women* and the critique of tradition, see: Frank, Kiser, Rowe, Delany, Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, Benson and Ridyard (eds.), and Collette (ed).

<sup>139</sup> The dates for *De casibus* come from Branca. A first copy of the work was complete in 1360, but Boccaccio revised in 1373 and 1374 (109-110).



Although nobody knows for certain exactly what sources Chaucer relies upon throughout his *Legend*, Chaucer acknowledges Ovid's *Heroides* as a source at the end of "The Legend of Medea."<sup>140</sup> Ovid's *Heroides* provides letters to Jason from both Hypsipyle and Medea, both of which communicate the pain that Jason caused them. Within Ovid's work, however, these letters do not directly follow each other.<sup>141</sup> Ovid's order still follows the progression of Jason's wives, Hypsipyle then Medea, but they are not put directly together as in both Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works. Chaucer's pairing of Hypsipyle and Medea follows Boccaccio's patterning more so than Ovid's, but in contrast to Boccaccio's lack of source credit throughout *De mulieribus*, Chaucer credits Ovid's "Medea to Jason."<sup>142</sup> Chaucer concludes "The Legend of Medea" with a quote from the *Heroides*:

And therefore in hire letter thus she seyde  
 Fyrst, whan she of his falsnesse hym upbreyde:  
 "Whi lykede me thy yelwe her to se  
 More than the boundes of myn honeste?  
 Why lykede me thy youthe and thy fayrnesse,  
 And of thy tonge, the infynyt graciousnesse?  
 O, haddest thou in thy conquest ded ybe,

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<sup>140</sup> At the start of "The Legend of Hypsipyle," the narrator states, "In Tessalie, as Guido telleth us" which refers to, as the *Riverside Chaucer* states, Guido delle Collonne (1396). As stated earlier, Federico's observations regarding the tension between Virgil and Guido delle Collonne's versions of Troy show Virgil as the more preferred version and Guido as the less preferred version (xv-xvi). Ultimately, the sources that Chaucer cites throughout "The Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea" seem to be the less preferred ones, or the ones neglected by Petrarch's humanist circles. Copeland asserts that Ovid's *Heroides* "exerts the strongest and most consistent influence for structure and design" for Chaucer's *Legend* (187).

<sup>141</sup> "Hypsipyle to Jason" is letter VI, while "Medea to Jason" is letter XII.

<sup>142</sup> Critics debate whether Ovid's *Heroides* is truly sympathetic to women or if it is satiric. For further reading on Ovidian female sympathy in conjunction with Boccaccio, Chaucer and Christine de Pizan, see: Calabrese, "Feminism and the Packaging of Boccaccio's Fiammetta" and *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love*.

Ful mikel untrouthe hadde ther deyde with the! (1670-1677)

The narrator indicates that he is quoting the *Heroides*, and while the Ovidian version does imply Chaucer's content throughout the letter, Chaucer manipulates the content – he condenses it to fit the overall trajectory of displaying Medea's sacrifice as a result of Jason's appetite.<sup>143</sup> Chaucer's passage focuses on the hurt that Medea suffers as a result of Jason's untruthful tongue. Such a focus, coupled with the focus on Jason throughout the legend, places a good portion of the responsibility for Medea's wrongdoing on Jason, but not all of it. Medea's use of "ful mikel untrouthe" cites not only Jason's untruthfulness but also the untruthful accounts of her life in the future.<sup>144</sup> The use of the hypothetical situation at the end of this excerpt considers all the fallacy

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<sup>143</sup> It is important to understand that Chaucer's translation could very well be an example of *translatio studii et imperii*. In the Grant Showerman translation of the *Heroides*, the letter begins with Medea reminiscing about her offer to help Jason, which leads her to wish things happened differently. Medea concludes this wish and states, "tum potui Medea mori bene! Quidquid ab illo / produxi vitam tempore, poena fuit {Then could Medea have ended well! Whatever life has been lengthened out for me from that time forth has been but punished}" (5-6). She continues to state, "cur mihi plus aequo flavi ;lacuere capilli / et décor et linguae gratia ficta tuae? [Why did I too greatly delight in those golden locks of yours, in your comely ways, and in the false graces of your tongue?]. . .quantam perfidiae tecum, scelerate, perisset, / dempta forent capiti quam mala multa meo! [How much perfidy, vile wretch, would have perished with you, and how many woes been averted from my head!]" (11-20). In the Harold Isbel translation, the letter states, "And why did I take too much pleasure/ in your golden hair, your fine ways and the lies/ that fell so gracefully from your tongue?...What great treachery, / wretched man, would then have died with you and what/ awful grief would have been turned from me." (106). To address the point regarding Jason taking Medea's virginity/innocence, in Showerman's version Medea states, "virginitas facta est peregrine praeda latronis; [My maidenly innocence has become the spoil of a pirate from overseas]" (111). In the Isbel translation, Medea states, "My girlish innocence belongs now/ to a brigand who came from foreign places" (109).

<sup>144</sup> Medea's awareness of her future historical representation bears similarity to that of Chaucer's Criseyde, as described by Carolyn Dinshaw in "Reading Like a Man: The Critics, The Narrator, Troilus, and Pandarus" in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. Dinshaw references Criseyde's famous lines, "O, rolled shal I ben on many a tongue! / Throughout the world my belle shal be ronge! / And woomen moost wol haten me of alle." (*Troilus and Crisedye*, V, 1061-1063). Dinshaw argues that Criseyde's statements reports an awareness of her future in which "Male *auctores* – this narrator included-who write 'these bokes' present readers with final castigations of Criseyde: literary tradition represents Criseyde as a traitor to be turned away from; and 'wommen' have no access to her other than through this authoritative lens, as Criseyde well knows" (54). Dinshaw's argument applies to Chaucer's account of Medea's letter to Jason as Medea is also cognizant of how the literary tradition will chastise her, rather than Jason, for the tragedies that resulted from their relationship.

that would have died with Jason if he had been unsuccessful in earning the Golden Fleece. In order to earn authority for such an insight, Chaucer cites Ovid, who, according to Petrarch, was not a credible source. Michael Calabrese notes, in *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love* (1994), that despite Ovid's popularity in fourteenth century England, Ovidian works were not considered serious works of literature and Petrarch, specifically, considered the works lascivious (8). In this case, Chaucer's concluding use of Ovid, an author disapproved by Petrarch, counters the imperatives of Petrarch's use of Latin, which includes *De mulieribus*, and questions the authenticity of the content provided within Latin encyclopedic compendia and traditional historiographic literature.

In addition to Chaucer's provision of source credit, which Boccaccio lacks, Chaucer also considers Medea a martyr. The only Latin in the tale appears at the beginning and end of the legend, stating "Ysiphile et Medee, martirum" (614, 617). The sparse use of Latin in this vernacular tale both recognizes and employs the socially legitimizing and official regard for Latin to declare and document Medea as a martyr, not a witch. Such considerations oppose Boccaccio's earlier account of Medea in *De mulieribus* as an aggressor and allow Chaucer to document Medea as a victim to both Jason and the literary tradition as Boccaccio documented her. In order to propel considerations of Medea as a martyr, Chaucer leaves out all the gruesome and evil life events that Boccaccio lists, such as Medea's fratricide and infanticide. The omission of these events allows a reader to accept Medea as an example of a good woman. This acceptance is key because like Boccaccio's, Chaucer's version of Medea is part of a larger collection, the *Legend of Good Women*, bound by a moral

trajectory. In the Prologue to the *Legend*, the narrator's penitentiary sentence, given by Alceste is: "In makyng of a glorious legende / of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves, / that weren trewe in lovyng al hire lyves" (F 483-485). The adherence to the moral trajectory in *The Legend of Good Women* requires stress on the goodness of women like Medea. Such stress allows for an exposure of Jason's wrongdoing and the injustice of the genealogical structures that wrongly hail him as a hero, to which Boccaccio's version strictly adheres.

Ultimately, Chaucer's overhaul of Medea from monster to martyr certainly opposes the portrayal given within Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*. Linguistically, Chaucer uses the vernacular to counter Latin's limited audience, and convey the tale beyond an audience of educated men. While Boccaccio upholds the patriarchal genealogical structure that absolves Jason of all responsibility, Chaucer's focus on Jason exposes his wrongdoing as well as that of the literary traditions that blame Medea for all the evil in her tale. In doing this, Chaucer uses the structure of Boccaccio's biography of Medea and neglects pieces of her tale in order to adhere to the *Legend's* moral trajectory, just as Boccaccio does in *De mulieribus*. Although it is not certain that Chaucer read *De mulieribus claris*, Chaucer's points of focus and omissions within the "Legend of Medea" match Boccaccio's version in a way that exposes what Boccaccio leaves out of his women's historiography.

### **Christine de Pizan's Medea: A Double Take**

Medea appears twice and in two different sections of Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*, a book dedicated to reforming the history of women. As part of a dream vision, these two sections on Medea also come from two different

guides, Ladies Reason and Rectitude, for two different reasons. In both instances, Medea's knowledge and constancy serve to attack assertions made in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* and to expose the social limitation of women encouraged by Latin historiographic literature.

Prior to Medea's first appearance in *Cité*, Lady Reason discusses the subject of female capability in learning. More specifically, Lady Reason mentions Boccaccio's approval of women of great learning as she states,

Boccace dit encore, se portant garant de la thèse que je t'exposais, que Dieu leur a donné – si elles le veulent – une belle intelligence pour s'appliquer à tout ce que font les hommes les plus renommés et les plus illustres. Car si elles veulent étudier, cela ne leur es pas moins permis qu'aux hommes, et elles peuvent par un travail honnête se faire une renommée éternelle, comme celle que se plaisent à gagner les plus grands hommes [Boccaccio says again, that God has given them such beautiful minds to apply themselves, if they want to, in any of the fields where glorious and excellent men are active, which are neither more nor less accessible to them as compared to men if they wished to study them, and they can thereby acquire a lasting name, whose possession is fitting for most excellent men]. (93-94/65)<sup>145</sup>

Although Lady Reason seems to use Boccaccio in a way that positively promotes women and their ability to learn, *De mulieribus* clearly holds women second to men,

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<sup>145</sup> The page numbers reflect the French version of *La Cité des dames*, edited by Thérèse Moreau and Éric Hicks and the English translation *The Book of the City Ladies*, translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards. All English translations by Earl Jeffrey Richards.

as discussed above.<sup>146</sup> Lady Reason overlooks Boccaccio's implementation of the gender hierarchy and his subscription to male genealogical progression in *De mulieribus*. In the Preface to *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio defines "famous" in a way that includes both virtuous and non-virtuous women.<sup>147</sup> Embracing this inclusive definition of famous, Lady Reason asserts that all women can earn a "renommée éternelle," or a lasting name, like many men do. Lady Reason's reading of Boccaccio breaks the double standard set in the glory-fortune-death sequence because women who earn a lasting name do not have to die. As a result, women could exist in the same eternal fashion as Jason does. Although Boccaccio's definition subordinates women, Lady Reason ironically reads it as support for female learning, which allows women in historiographic literature the same privileges as the men. Twisting Boccaccio's use of "famous" further, Lady Reason offers Medea as an example of great female learning.

Lady Reason's discussion of Medea serves as an example of female capability for learning within science and art (98/69). Ironically, as stated earlier, Boccaccio also addresses Medea's great ability for learning, but his perspective on it is negative. Lady Reason notes the broad expanse of Medea's abilities, and states that this ability includes the use of herbs and potions, "Elle connaissait les vertus des plantes et tous

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<sup>146</sup> In the Preface of *De mulieribus claris* Boccaccio discusses women as beings and states, "quibus fere omnibus a natura rerum mollities insita et corpus debile ac tardum ingenium datum [almost all of whom are endowed by nature with soft, frail bodies and sluggish minds]" (8-9).

<sup>147</sup> In the Preface to *De mulieribus*, Boccaccio defines his use of the word famous as "Non enim est animus michi hoc claritatis nomen adeo strictim sumere, ut semper in virtutem videatur exire; quin imo in ampliorem sensum – bona cum pace legentium – trahere et illas intelligere claras quas quocunque ex facinore orbi vulgato sermone notissimas novero [It is not in fact my intention to interpret the word 'famous' in such a strict sense that it will always appear to mean 'virtuous'. Instead, with the kind permission of my readers, I will adopt a wider meaning and consider as famous those women whom I know to have gained a reputation throughout the world for any deed whatsoever]" (10).

les sortilèges possibles: elle n'ignorait rien de ce que l'on peut savoir [she knew the powers of every herb and all the potions which could be concocted, and she was ignorant of no art which can be known]" (98/69). Lady Reason acknowledges Medea's ability with what could be considered as witchcraft, which Boccaccio considers as such, but spins it as an example of female aptitude within the sciences and the arts. Furthermore, de Pizan's account of Medea opens with the same point that Boccaccio's does in *De mulieribus claris*, which begins a pattern of revisions that parallel Boccaccio's structure. Just as Boccaccio uses the traditional structure of historiographic literature to encourage the exemption of women from social institutions like education, de Pizan uses the same structure to argue for women's educational aptitude.

After clarifying Medea's expansive abilities within the sciences and arts, Lady Reason concludes "Ce fut elle qui par ses enchantements permit à Jason de conquérir la Toison d'or [It was thanks to the art of her [Medea's] enchantments that Jason won the Golden Fleece]" (98/69). Lady Reason's conclusion attributes the glory and honor of Jason's heroic feats to Medea's knowledge and intellectual abilities within science and the arts, not to Jason at all. While Boccaccio states that Medea's great abilities contribute to the great amount of evil events throughout her life, de Pizan neglects to include those events, such as Medea's paternal betrayal and infanticide, and finds Medea's intellect responsible for one of the greatest heroic feats recorded in literary history, the capture of the Golden Fleece. Although this heroic feat is traditionally Jason's, de Pizan discredits his part in the capture of the Golden Fleece in a way similar to Boccaccio's pardon of Jason's part in the evil events of Medea's biography.

Giving Medea credit for the Golden Fleece in this first discussion, de Pizan structures the tale to parallel Boccaccio's and she corrects traditional, negative judgment of Medea's abilities and provides Jason with responsibility throughout the tale's events. Unlike traditional versions of Medea's tale, the *Cité's* focus is on Medea's positive abilities and the heroic result of her pairing with Jason. Lady Reason reminds the reader that without Medea, Jason would neither have captured the Golden Fleece nor earned his historic, heroic status.

At the conclusion of Lady Reason's exempla in defense of great female learning, she returns to Boccaccio as a source. Lady Reason states, "Que l'on ne me rétorque pas que mon discours est de parti pris; je rapporte ici les propres paroles de Boccace, dont l'autorité bien connue est tenue pour irréprochable [And let no one say that I am telling you these things just to be pleasant: they are Boccaccio's own words, and his credibility is well-known and evident]" (106/78). Despite the fact that de Pizan's tale of Medea completely opposes that in *De mulieribus*, Lady Reason still cites Boccaccio as a proponent for female learning, because, according to Lady Reason, Boccaccio's authority results from his fame and his encyclopedic works including *Famous Women*. Certainly a point of irony, Lady Reason's remark regarding credibility and evidence attacks Boccaccio's authority because he claims to write the leading and most legitimate source of women's history, and yet, according to Lady Reason's findings, it is inaccurate. Such inaccuracy, as discussed earlier, privileges the male-to-male genealogical bond and the limitation of women's social access not only in education but also within the institution of marriage. This claim makes way for Medea's second appearance in the *Cité* as an example of female



constancy in love, while also exposing the social pardon for men like Jason, who are consistently unfaithful.

Not only is Medea given credit for her intellectual abilities in de Pizan's *Cité*, but Medea also serves as Lady Rectitude's example of female constancy in love. Two sections prior to Medea's second appearance, Lady Rectitude addresses the anti-feminist belief that few women are faithful in love. Rectitude's discussion centers on Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. About these authors, like Ovid and Boccaccio, who purport that females are faithless, Lady Rectitude states,

Car ces auteurs ne s'adressent pas aux femmes pour les conseiller de se méfier des pièges que leur tendent les hommes. Pourtant, il n'est que trop certain que les hommes trompent fréquemment les femmes par leur ruse et leur duplicité [For these authors never address women nor warn them against men's traps even though it is certain that men frequently deceive women with their fast tricks and duplicity].

(211/187)

Lady Rectitude's statement addresses a body of literature that undoubtedly supports the male-to-male genealogical progression and structure of literary history.<sup>148</sup> Such anti-feminist literature, like *Le roman de la rose*, relies upon assumptions made regarding women, but these works address men.<sup>149</sup> Lady Rectitude is keen to note that none of these anti-feminist works consider women as part of their audience, even if the

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<sup>148</sup> Medieval anti-feminism is a term that concerns works against women. These works can include, but are not limited to, the promotion of female subordination, the degradation of women (sexually, intellectually, physically, etc.), and the exclusion of women (politically, professionally, educationally, etc.). For further study, see Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*.

<sup>149</sup> In 1401, Christine de Pizan engaged in a debate over *Le roman de la rose* against those who praised the work and its treatment of women and morality. For further reading, see: Willard, "The Quarrel of the Rose," in *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, 73-89; Fenster and Erler, *Poems of Cupid, God of Love*.

content of the work purports to address women, as *De mulieribus* does. Not only is the content of anti-feminist literature deceptive, but the authors are as well. The deception produces an inaccurate women's historiography and it produces parallels to laws that restricted the rights of married women.<sup>150</sup> As a result, the assumption of women's inconstancy throughout Latin historiographic literature bore tangible social limitations for women, which de Pizan exposes and refutes.

As in the previous two versions of Medea, insatiability also appears in de Pizan's version. In contrast to Boccaccio, but like Chaucer's "Legend of Medea," de Pizan considers Medea a woman defamed at the hands of an insatiable Jason and a deceptive literary tradition. Lady Rectitude describes Jason's response to the challenge of the Golden Fleece as, "Jason l'apprit et, toujours avide d'accroître sa renommée, quitta la Grèce avec de nombreux compagnons dans l'intention de tenter cette épreuve [On hearing this, Jason, eager to increase his fame even more, left Greece with a large company seeking to test himself in such a quest]" (214/189). According to Lady Rectitude, Jason was only interested in earning the Golden Fleece for an excessive amount of fame. Just as Boccaccio considers Medea's personality as insatiable, de Pizan's account exposes that quality in Jason. As a result, this exposure counters the Latin historiographic tradition's claim of Medea as the reason for Jason's fall, and allows Jason, a man consistently susceptible to instability, greed, and excessive ambition, to take responsibility for his actions.

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<sup>150</sup> Such laws are well known and are exemplified by Salic Laws in France that restricted women from inheriting the French crown or male primogeniture laws throughout Europe. For further reading on the limitations of marital laws and women see: Brundage, Amt, Stuard; for England, see Hanawalt; for Italy, see Klapisch-Zuber.

As a result of Jason's insatiability and after he wins both the Fleece and Medea, Lady Rectitude states, "Mais après avoir obtenu d'elle tout ce qu'il voulait, il trahit son serment, car il l'abandonna pour une autre [Jason lied about his promise, for after everything went just as he wanted, he left Medea for another woman]" (214/190). In this conclusion, Lady Rectitude points out that Jason's insatiability lies not only in his quest for fame, but for everything, which parallels Boccaccio's claim about Medea. In all, Lady Rectitude claims Medea's downfall in her life was that Medea "aima Jason d'un amour très profond et fidèle [loved Jason with too great and too constant love]," which left her despondent and miserable when Jason betrayed her (213-214/189-190). Ultimately, de Pizan's account portrays Medea as a woman full of good intentions and constancy, which contrasts with Boccaccio's account of an insatiable monster. This juxtaposition bears two results: first, it exposes Jason as a voraciously fame-hungry and deceptive being. Second, it exposes the deception of authors, like Boccaccio, who incorrectly credit Jason at Medea's expense. This second critique of the literary tradition also exposes the ways that inaccurate historiographic literature encourages social limitations for women, not only in education, but also within the institution of marriage. The exposure of Jason and the literary tradition's deceptive practices also implicate fame-hungry authors, especially Boccaccio, in the provision of a deceptive and inaccurate record of women's history.

Many critical studies have focused on Christine de Pizan's ability to correct women's historiography and Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* by showing Medea as a victim to Jason's greed. First, de Pizan's uses the vernacular, and as Quilligan asserts in *The Allegory of Female Authority* (1991), such use earns de Pizan authority through

her employment of Dante's use of the vernacular, which works against antifeminist authors such as Jean de Meun and Boccaccio (42).<sup>151</sup> Quilligan's finding with regard to de Pizan's use of Dante in order to subvert the authority of Boccaccio is important because Boccaccio was the first academic lecturer on Dante, and in *De mulieribus* Boccaccio counters Dante's inclusive ideals (Branca 182).<sup>152</sup> Although my study does not specifically explore the specific ways that Christine de Pizan employs Dante's vernacular practices, it is important to acknowledge that de Pizan's *Cité des Dames* is a three-part dream vision, which bears similarities to Dante's *Commedia*. Such an acknowledgement is key to de Pizan's use of the vernacular French in contrast to Boccaccio's Latin, which, through the vernacular ascendancy documented by Copeland, earns her work legitimacy. Ultimately, like Chaucer's vernacular, de Pizan's vernacular reaches a wider audience, which counters Boccaccio's exclusive Latin-literate audience.

In *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women* (1999), Rosalind Brown-Grant furthers Quilligan's findings regarding de Pizan's use of Dante and asserts that the use of the Dantean dream vision allows de Pizan to foster a progressive view of history, rather than the negative, humanistic view purported by Boccaccio's Latin work (157-159).<sup>153</sup> The vernacular carries de Pizan's progressive account, or

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<sup>151</sup> Quilligan provides an in-depth analysis of how de Pizan employs Dantean poetics for authority in "The Name of the Author" in *The Allegory of Female Authority*. Several studies analyze how Christine de Pizan employs Dantean use of the vernacular in order to earn authority. Kevin Brownlee, suggests that Christine de Pizan's Italian ethnicity adds to such authorial credit.

<sup>152</sup> Boccaccio took a position with the Council of the Commune to publicly lecture on Dante. In *Boccaccio: the Man and his Works*, Branca notes that this began as a one-year appointment with the first reading on Sunday, October 23, 1373 held at The Church of Santo Stefano Di Badia (a church very near the homes of the Alighieris) (182).

<sup>153</sup> To elaborate here, Brown-Grant finds that de Pizan's collection of women's history focuses on the progression and contributions women have made rather than the failures. It is important to remember that Boccaccio's works *De casibus virorum illustrium* and *De mulieribus claris* employ a

correction, of history. However progressive de Pizan's outlook on history, de Pizan follows Boccaccio's structure; she too picks and chooses her content in order to fit an overall trajectory and to complete the correction of history. I argue that de Pizan's historical perspective allows for the exposure of other historiographic perspectives not only within the content of the Medea tale, but also within the active deception of authorship and the practices of the Latin literary tradition. Such exposure is key to women's social access, since the consistent privileging of the male genealogical progression in historiographic literature not only textually excludes women, but also shapes social structures that encourage the exclusion of women from and/or within institutions, such as education and marriage.<sup>154</sup>

Ultimately, de Pizan parallels Boccaccio's structure in *De mulieribus* through a focus on Medea's positive attributes, which exposes both Jason's negative attributes and the historical inaccuracies regarding women within the Latin literary tradition that parallel limitations of women's social access. De Pizan's correction of Medea finally allows for an inclusion of women, in general, within the literary tradition, particularly in women's historiographic literature. De Pizan's focus on what Boccaccio denies in the Medea tale also demonstrates a flaw in the moral within Boccaccio's biography of Medea. As Boccaccio claims that Medea's problem lies solely within her eyes, de Pizan's version of Medea's story demonstrate Boccaccio's deceptive and voluntary

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moral trajectory within which the tales serve as examples. For instance, Medea was a famous woman who trusted her eyes too much and such trust led to other moral pitfalls such as lustiness and greed.

<sup>154</sup> Charity Cannon Willard, in *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (1984), notes that education for women grew in 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, particularly for those of nobility or merchant families (33). Luckily, for de Pizan, her father was an academic who supported her education, while her mother "was more conventional in her outlook and believed that her daughter should tend to her spinning" (33). Such an outlook on de Pizan's parents demonstrate the limitations of educational access for women in fourteenth century France.

blindness on behalf of the literary tradition that hails Jason a hero and considers Medea a monster.

### **Conclusion**

The versions of the Medea tale by Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan demonstrate a challenge to Giovanni Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, through vernacular ascendancy, in order to ultimately correct the tale. The challenge that these two vernacular pieces pose to the Latin literary tradition exposes the patriarchal genealogical structure that dominates historically concerned literature, in particular women's historiography. Through the parallels to Boccaccio's biography of Medea, both Chaucer's and de Pizan's versions identify different points of exclusion and adherence to the patriarchal genealogical progression, but they revise them in the vernacular. These revisions oppose Boccaccio's identification of Medea as a villain and hold her a martyr who has suffered from Jason's insatiability and from literary tradition's misrepresentation. Copeland's theory of vernacular ascendancy demonstrates that Chaucer's and de Pizan's work gained authority by mimicking Boccaccio's Latin structure and adhering to a moral trajectory that binds the tale within a compendium. The use of the encyclopedic compendium style in the vernacular also opens knowledge up to all, per Dante's mission for vernacular use, and allows for a difference in perspective on Medea as a historical and mythological figure. On a social level, the use of the vernacular in the communication of women's historiography allows women to engage their own history. Such inclusion opens social access in order to speak out against social limitations in education and other institutions, for which de Pizan is both a proponent and an example.

Ultimately, the difference in perspective that the vernacular revisions of Medea offer demonstrate the changes to literary history that occurred between the years of 1361 and 1405 and show all three authors engaged as contemporaries. Although Chaucer and de Pizan engage the same legend and both use the vernacular, de Pizan, as the only woman within the group, exposes how patriarchal literary structures encourage social structures that prevented women access to various social institutions. While this is only a glimpse at how these three tales overlap, further study will promote the ways we understand medieval historiography and formation of literary histories, especially for women.

**WRITING WOMEN INTO MALE GENEALOGICAL PROGRESSION:  
VALENTINA VISCONTI'S HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE IN CHRISTINE DE  
PIZAN'S *LE LIVRE DE LA CITÉ DES DAMES***

In Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* (1386-1394), Alceste defends Chaucer's translations and warns Cupid to "nat be lyk tirauntz of Lumbardye" (F 374) referring to the famed tyrants of Milan, the Visconti. Despite the geographical space between England and Italy, the reference demonstrates the expanse of the Visconti's negative and tyrannical renown. Approximately eleven years after Chaucer's reference in his *Legend*, Christine de Pizan refers to the Visconti again, but she does so in a positive fashion. More specifically, de Pizan cites Valentina Visconti, daughter of the first duke of Milan, as an exemplar of contemporary French, female leaders. This study explores de Pizan's positive reference to Valentina Visconti, despite Visconti's genealogically tyrannical and negative ties, as an act to include women within the genealogical structure of late medieval, historiographic literature.

Arguing against the exclusion of women throughout late medieval historiographic literature, de Pizan's *Cité des dames* seeks to correct traditional historiographic perceptions regarding women's social contributions and aptitude. Following popular models for historiographic literature, including Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (1361-1362), de Pizan concludes Book II of *Cité des dames*, an account of noble, virtuous, generous, and experienced women, with contemporary examples.<sup>155</sup> Within this listing of her female contemporaries, de Pizan includes

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<sup>155</sup> Boccaccio concludes *De mulieribus claris* with a biography of his own queen, Joanna I of Sicily. Scholars also find correlation between de Pizan's work and Dante's *Commedia*. In particular, the work of Kevin Brownlee assesses the ways in which de Pizan refers and connects her work to Dante's *Commedia*. In "The Image of History in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*," he assesses the ways de Pizan creates a mimesis of history. Second, in "Literary Genealogy and the Problem of the Father: Christine de Pizan and Dante," Brownlee argues that in



Visconti, who by 1405 had been villainized by historiographic literature and exiled from the French court. Despite Visconti's negative reputation, the *Cité des dames* focuses on her positive attributes, neglects mention of negative events, and begins with two questions, "Que dire de la fille de feu le duc de Milan, Valentine, duchesse d'Orléans, épouse de Louis, fils du roi de France Charles le Sage? Pourrait-on trouver femme plus prudente? [What could I say about Valentina Visconti, the duchess of Orléans, wife of Duke Louis, son of Charles, the wise king of France, and daughter of the duke of Milan? What more could be said about such a prudent lady?]" (236/212). Such an inclusion, as I will suggest in this chapter, models a way to positively include women within the genealogical structure of late medieval historiographic literature.

My argument relies on Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's findings regarding the exclusion, or invisibility, of women in late medieval Italian genealogies. In previous chapters, I refer to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of the erotic triangle in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) to demonstrate that the bonds formed between men require the traffic of women, which also promotes the exclusion of women from genealogy. In this chapter, I argue that de Pizan's reference to Valentina Visconti allows for the inclusion of women within male genealogical progression because it gives them visibility as connectors between genealogical lines. Ultimately, with such genealogical presence, Valentina Visconti is not just a pawn between men, but also an important connection between her father's and her husband's genealogies, which produces that of her son.

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*Chemin de long estude*, de Pizan uses her place within her father's genealogy in order to establish an Italian ethnicity. De Pizan's Italian ethnicity and her employment of *translatio studii* with respect to *La commedia* connects to Dante in an effort to claim authority as an author working against the misogynist tradition.

Genealogies were also important to the formation of public memory. The lack of women's historiographic literature, as discussed in prior chapters, is evident in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, in which he claims to provide the first encyclopedic compendium on women. The lack of a written history supported the exclusion of women from ancestral genealogies, an important element of public memory. Christine de Pizan's inclusion of women highlights the ways, as Joan Wallach Scott observes in *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), that gender-focused historical study can produce a more balanced understanding of women of the past. For instance, de Pizan's demonstration of women's participation in history and her inclusion of women within genealogy and historiography allows for a start of women's production of knowledge about women, rather than man's production of knowledge about women. Although de Pizan essentially upholds the structures of male genealogical progression, the inclusion of women helps to expose the discrepancies of these genealogies, such as the silence or the invisibility of medieval women, and the ways in which male-authored historiographies portrayed women in socially limiting ways, as in the case of Valentina Visconti.

For example, some contemporary accounts dwell on the tensions between Visconti and her cousin, Isabeau of Bavaria. Their tensions began with the overthrow and murder of Isabeau's grandfather, Bernabò, by Valentina's father, Giangaleazzo. Other historical accounts focus on Valentina and Isabeau as social foreigners; combined with the mark of tyranny that their familial origin carries, these accounts result in exaggerations and fabrications regarding their reigns in France.<sup>156</sup> Despite

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<sup>156</sup> For instance, Isabeau of Bavaria, wife of Charles VI of France, suffers accusations of infidelity (with Valentina's husband, Louis D'Orléans), child neglect, and an insatiable hunger for power; while,

Visconti's maternal, Valois heritage, her paternal ties to tyranny allowed her to suffer from exaggerations and fabrications that resulted in her exile from the French court.<sup>157</sup> Although Visconti was not the only woman to suffer from a negative historical account, her history demonstrates how inaccurate or fabricated portrayals of foreign, female leaders in France, authored by men, imply not only that foreign women, but *all* women, are unable to lead and govern. In this way, contemporary historiographic literature contributed primarily to the formation of a negative public memory for Valentina Visconti.

In addition to possessing knowledge of the leading works on women's historiography of her time, de Pizan also had many social connections to Valentina Visconti. First and foremost, both women were Italian immigrants to France, and thus shared associations in both Italy and France. De Pizan frequented the Court of Orléans, and although Visconti had already been exiled from the Court, de Pizan was indirectly in her service and had access to the Italian holdings in the Orléans library, which were materials that Visconti helped to acquire. These materials helped the career of Charles d'Orléans, Valentina's son, which also serves to boost Visconti's genealogical importance. Overall, de Pizan's positive inclusion of Valentina Visconti within *Cité des dames* allows Visconti, a woman genealogically scarred by tyranny, to have a place not only within her father's genealogical structure, but also within the French court and the genealogy from which she was exiled.

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Valentina suffered exile from the French court in 1396 (Chamberlain 179).

<sup>157</sup> Valentina's mother was Isabella de Valois, daughter of King John the Good of France in 1360 (Chamberlain 31).

## Medieval Historiography and the Exclusion of Women

As Christiane Klapisch-Zuber shows in *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, women of late medieval Europe were “shunted” between the genealogies of their fathers and husbands, which prevented their full membership within genealogical progression in general (285). Furthermore, in prior chapters I demonstrate the ways in which medieval historiographies not only support, but also imitate the structure of male genealogical progression. This genealogical structure within medieval historiographies, reproduced in books, aids in the shaping of public memory, to which Mary Carruthers speaks in her *Book of Memory*. Such memory bears an eternal quality, which allows a book’s content to last as long as the artifact does, or whenever remembrance of the content occurs. The shunting of women between fathers and husbands within male genealogical progression and the imitation of that structure within late medieval historiography ultimately dominates women’s historiographies, which by 1405, were male-authored.

The shunting of women between genealogies also plays a large role in the social institution of marriage. As I argue in Chapter One above, the passing of women between genealogies is a necessary component in the maintenance of patriarchal social structure. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes, the distributions of power within “erotic triangles” depend upon male homosocial relations, which, as a result, always implies a reinforcement of male-to-male genealogical progression (25). Such an implication, as Spiegel’s *Past as Text* demonstrates, also governs the production of historiographic literature. Unlike the ways in which Boccaccio actively traffics Andrea Acciaiuoli, which I trace in Chapter One, Christine de Pizan’s reference to Valentina

Visconti does not completely overturn male genealogical progression, but rather allows women recognition within genealogical connections. Although women are still passed between men, their recognition in genealogy allows them to carry their father's genealogy and positively impact their progeny. Such inclusion differs from the exclusive male homosocial bonding observed in Chapter One, and still works within the patterns of male genealogical progression even as it recognizes the role of women.

Although de Pizan still upholds and adheres to male genealogical progression socially and literally, the inclusion of women and the female authoring of women's historiographic literature allows her to expose the inaccuracies of male-authored historiographies. More specifically, de Pizan's account of Visconti counters male-authored accounts and exposes the ways in which male-authored historiographies actively exclude or inaccurately portray women. In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Wallach Scott asserts that gender-focused historical study "becomes not just an attempt to correct or supplement an incomplete record of the past but a way of critically understanding how history operates as a site of the production of gender knowledge" (10). For instance, de Pizan, as a woman, reflects not only on her own social limitations, but also upon similar limitations for other women, such as Visconti.

To be clear, however, I do not argue that de Pizan is a feminist or that such inclusion of women within late medieval historiography is a feminist act. While I do argue that de Pizan, as the first woman to author a women's historiography, provides a way to use the structures of genealogy within historiography to include women within the production of historiographic literature, I do not necessarily argue that she was a

feminist.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, I also acknowledge the fact that de Pizan's inclusion is limited, in that she upholds various nationalistic, patriarchal social constructs, such as French Salic Law and the prohibition of women from public office. The observation and maintenance of French Salic Law ultimately served to prevent the English King, Edward II, from claiming the French throne through his mother.<sup>159</sup> In light of many of the trials and tribulations surrounding the French throne during 1405, critics suggest that de Pizan's comments regarding women and public office require caution. Ultimately, I argue that de Pizan's inclusion of women within late medieval European historiography, through her reference to Valentina Visconti, uses male genealogical patterns in historiographic literature in order to provide positive accounts of women who have been vilified by historiography's focus on male genealogical progression.

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<sup>158</sup> The early 1990s produced a number of feminist studies on Christine de Pizan that spurred a controversy regarding whether de Pizan can be considered a feminist. Shiela Delany's "Mothers to Think Back Through': Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan" began the controversy arguing that de Pizan was not a feminist due to conservative stances on women and their social boundaries. This essay received many scholarly responses, see *Politics, Gender, and Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, edited by Margaret Brabant. For other responses to the de Pizan feminist controversy, see Quilligan, Brown-Grant, Forhan, Nowacka, and Holderness.

<sup>159</sup> In I.11 of *Le livre de la cité des dames*, Lady Reason explains that God made men and women to do different jobs, and that legal counsel is a job God designed for men. She states, "Et cela, ils doivent le faire pour maintenir la justice dans ce monde, car si quelqu'un refuse d'obéir à la loi établie, promulguée conformément au droit, il faut le contraindre par la force et la puissance des armes; les femmes seraient incapables de telles voies de contrainte [And for this reason, men with this nature learn the laws – and must do so – in order to keep the world under the rule of justice and, in case anyone does not wish to obey the statutes which have been ordained and established by reason of law, are required to make them obey with physical constraint and force of arms, a task which women could never accomplish]" (62/31). In this instance, Lady Reason argues that women are not to participate in public, legal, or governmental office. This passage has divided Christine de Pizan studies, particularly regarding those who claim feminist arguments against those who claim conservative or religious arguments. Later on in this same passage, Lady Reason argues that although women are completely incapable of serving in public, legal, or governmental office, some do possess a "disposition naturelle pour la politique [a natural sense for politics and government]" (63/32). Some scholars, in particular, Craig Taylor in "The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages," *French Historical Studies*, 29.4 (2006), argues that de Pizan's stance regarding women and politics serves to support French Salic law, which prevented women from the acquisition of the French throne. Such a law served to support France and to keep the throne from England, which would plausibly earn de Pizan's support as a citizen of France and an avid supporter of the descendants of Charles V.

Such use allows for the positive inclusion of women not only within the boundaries of male-genealogical structures in historiographic literature, but also within public memory.

### **Writing a Woman into Exile: The Historiography of Valentina Visconti**

As noted in E.R. Chamberlain's *The Count of Virtue: Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan* (1965), Valentina Visconti was the daughter of Giangaleazzo Visconti, the first Duke of Milan and Isabella of Valois, the daughter of John the Good (31).<sup>160</sup> Émile Collas, in *Valentine de Milan, Duchesse D'Orléans* (1911), reports that Valentina was born in Pavia and she was the only child for Giangaleazzo and his first wife (Collas 30; Chamberlain 67).<sup>161</sup> Although the Visconti had been a ruling force in Lombardy for 170 years, Giangaleazzo's rise to power and dukedom involves the deposition of his uncle, the famously tyrannical Bernabò Visconti in 1385.<sup>162</sup> The tensions surrounding Bernabò's deposition, however, did not die with Bernabò, but continued with his granddaughter, Isabeau of Bavaria, wife of King Charles VI of

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<sup>160</sup> The Visconti's reign began with Ottone, the Archbishop in 1277 and ended with Filippo Maria, Giangaleazzo's youngest son and Valentina's half-brother, in 1447 (Dates from Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*). During this time eleven members of the Visconti family ruled over the city (some overlapping or sharing their reign) and constantly threatened Italy's mercantile cities, particularly Florence. Giangaleazzo reigned over Milan from 1385 – 1402 and he died from plague (Black 68-70).

<sup>161</sup> Valentina's year of birth is uncertain and Collas notes that she was born in either 1370 or 1371 (31). Giangaleazzo married Isabella de Valois, daughter of King John the Good of France in 1360 (Chamberlain 31). With his first marriage to Isabella, Giangaleazzo was the Count of Virtù, and after his father's death he was Count of Pavia beginning from 1378 (Chamberlain 62-63). Furthermore, Isabella died at the age of twenty-four during childbirth (Chamberlain 67).

<sup>162</sup> After Giangaleazzo's father, Galeazzo died in 1378, Bernabò and Giangaleazzo entered a struggle for political power over the shared state of Milan, which ended with Giangaleazzo's coup d'état in 1385 and the capture and death of Bernabò (Chamberlain 62/75). Bernabò had a reputation for being cruel, which can be found in any work on the Visconti. In *Chaucerian Polity*, David Wallace provides some analysis on tales of Bernabò Visconti in "All That Fall: Chaucer's Monk and Every Mighty Man" (299-336).

France. These continued tensions adversely affected Valentina, Isabeau's cousin and sister in law.<sup>163</sup>

Prior to Giangaleazzo's coup d'état in 1385, Bernabò arranged to have Valentina marry his son.<sup>164</sup> As power struggles between Bernabò and Giangaleazzo grew, Bernabò broke the marital arrangements in order to forge relations with the House of Anjou, relations that also interested Giangaleazzo (Chamberlain 71). The marriage between Isabeau of Bavaria and Charles VI occurred in 1385, which allowed Bernabò's family the acquisition of a powerful Valois marriage, but Bernabò's imprisonment and disappearance at the hands of Giangaleazzo prevented Bernabò's revelry in the event (Adams 4). After the marriage between Isabeau and Charles VI, Giangaleazzo also aimed to forge Valois relations to temper the powerful one arranged by his deposed uncle's family. After several tries and financial hardship, Valentina was betrothed and married to Louis of Orléans in 1389, a relationship Bernabò had tried to secure for his own daughter, Lucia (Chamberlain 89-93; Adams 4).<sup>165</sup>

Following late medieval Italian marriage customs, especially for noble or governing families, Valentina's father arranged her marriage in order to align himself with France; thus, Valentina was a pawn that bonded Giangaleazzo to Louis. Although Giangaleazzo arranged a strong marriage for his daughter in terms of male genealogical progression, this very arrangement marred Valentina's reputation in both

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<sup>163</sup> Charles VI is brother to Valentina's husband, Louis I of Orléans.

<sup>164</sup> The son in question varies within sources. Chamberlain states that Valentina was betrothed to Carlo (71), but in *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*, Black asserts the betrothal was to Ludovico (53). Black also notes that the betrothal of Valentina was Bernabò's plan to end Giangaleazzo's possibility of forging betrothal agreements with Sicily. Black also notes that Ludovico disappeared after the 1385 deposition, presumably with Bernabò (53). Carlo remained and waged many wars, with his surviving brothers, against Giangaleazzo.

<sup>165</sup> Valentina married Louis I of Orléans (1372-1407) also referred to as the Duke of Turrene or Touraine.



Italy and France. Chamberlain notes that Giangaleazzo's triumph in arranging his daughter's marriage with the House of Orléans was a failure due to the immense financial hardship and war it caused in Milan.<sup>166</sup> He states, "Three hundred years later Giulini remarked that 'the wars which Lombardy suffered because of her (Valentina) have made her name odious among us'" (91). Despite the fact that she had no choice in the matter, Valentina's arranged marriage earned the scorn of Milan for hundreds of years after it happened. Moreover, she also incurred the tensions of the Visconti family, more specifically her father's part in Bernabò's deposition. As Giangaleazzo formed a homosocial bond with Louis, he destroyed any hope for a bond between Valentina and Bernabò's granddaughter, Isabeau of Bavaria.

To no surprise, although Valentina and Isabeau married the sons of Charles V and participated within the same court, the women were not amicable. In *Valentine de Milan*, Collas describes the relation between the two girls as one of "antipathie et d'eloignement [antipathy and dislike]" (86).<sup>167</sup> Isabeau's dislike for Giangaleazzo, in particular, not only influenced decisions to work against Milan, but also shaped her treatment of Valentina. Collas notes that Isabeau aligned politically against Giangaleazzo, which also meant she aligned against both Louis and Valentina (188).<sup>168</sup> Valentina, despite the pressure from the Queen, remained politically loyal to her father, which ultimately incurred rumors and accusations of sorcery (190).<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> For more information on the wars in which Giangaleazzo faced during his reign as Duke of Milan, see Black, "Giangaleazzo's Investiture and Legacy" in *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*, 68-72. Black highlights the fact that Bernabò's deposition came at a cost to Giangaleazzo, specifically with regard to claiming Bernabò's lands, which were maintained by Bernabò's children. Black notes that 1390 – 1397, in particular, were fraught with wars between Giangaleazzo and Bernabò's sons, Carlo and Mastino, who allied with Florence against Giangaleazzo and the expansion of his rule.

<sup>167</sup> Froissart details the arrival of Valentina and Isabeau in *Chroniques IV*. 1. Collas also notes the same in Chapter 5 of *Valentine de Milan*, 85.

<sup>168</sup> Collas states, "Il en fut autrement lorsque éclata al folie du malheureux Charles VI Isabeau se

To add to the tensions between Valentina and her cousin, Isabeau, Charles VI suffered from bouts of madness, which created disruptions in his reign.<sup>170</sup> The king's inability to lead consistently sometimes required Queen Isabeau to govern in place of her husband. The king's periodic afflictions, more importantly, also led to a power struggle throughout the French court.<sup>171</sup> Specifically, Louis of Orléans, Valentina's husband, and his uncles, Phillip of Burgundy and John of Berry, vied for power over the kingdom.<sup>172</sup> The dispute ended in 1407 when Phillip's son, John the Fearless, murdered Louis, which led the House of Berry to ally with the House of Orléans against that of Burgundy.<sup>173</sup> The king's illness and the troubles throughout the houses of the French court were well known and fueled the production of rumors regarding royal relations.<sup>174</sup>

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préoccupa des questions extérieures, de celles surtout qui touchaient directement aux intérêts et aux passions de sa famille de Bavière. A la haine que son père et ses parents portaient à Jean-Galeas, elle s'efforça d'assurer l'appui de la politique et des armes de la France Lancée dans cette voie, elle rencontra devant elle, lui faisant obstacle, entravant ses projets et déjouant ses desseins, le duc d'Orléans et Valentine [It was different when Charles VI's madness broke, Isabeau was preoccupied with external issues, especially those that affected the interests and passions of her family in Bavaria. A hate for Valentina's father, Giangaleazzo, Isabeau endeavored to ensure that the support of policy and the arms of France launched before Valentina, obstructing, impeding the projects and foiling the plans of the Duke of Orléans and Valentina]" (188-189). In *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria*, Adams also notes that Isabeau's alliance with Louis was strained, if not non-existent, prior to 1402-03 (9).

<sup>169</sup> Collas states, "Il fallait venir a bout de la duchesse d'Orléans par d'autres moyens, par des moyens spéciaux. On en trouva. On l'accusa de sorcellerie: on l'accusa d'avoir envoûté le roi [The end had come for the Duchess of Orléans by other means, by special means. One found that she was accused of witchcraft and having bewitched the king]" (190).

<sup>170</sup> See Froissart, *Chronicles*, Book Four (392).

<sup>171</sup> For more information regarding Isabeau's reign in lieu of her husband, see Adams.

<sup>172</sup> There were other factors involved within this dispute such as the support for the Church (whether it be in Rome or at Avignon), relations with the English, relations with the Italians, and other matters. Charles VI's ability to consistently reign was a matter for which a new council of advisors, the Marmousets, formed. The idea behind the Marmousets served to ensure that Charles VI was sane in his governance and to minimize the impact of the feuding French court. The Marmousets were not successfully received by portions of the French court and ultimately fell. For further reading, see Froissart's *Chronicles*, Book Four; Knecht, Chapter 3 of *The Valois: Kings of France, 1328 – 1589*. Adams also provides extensive information regarding Isabeau of Bavaria and her involvement with the multitude of matters surrounding her husband's madness.

<sup>173</sup> For the murder of Louis d'Orléans, see Monstrelet, Chapter 36.

<sup>174</sup> Froissart states "news of the French king's illness spread far and wide" (398). Most studies

Such textual accounts of rumors and accusations exist not only for Valentina, but also her cousin, Queen Isabeau. A popular and well-documented rumor, according to Chamberlain in *The Count of Virtue*, involves the supposed affair between Isabeau of Bavaria and Louis of Orléans, Valentina's husband (178). Froissart's *Chronicles* documents Louis's infidelities and the fact that he was not faithful to Valentina.<sup>175</sup> Isabeau was also alleged to be promiscuous. Rachel Gibbons, in "Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France (1385-1422): The Creation of a Historical Villainess," contends that there is no evidence an affair between Louis of Orléans and Isabeau of Bavaria (57). Both Gibbons's work and Tracy Adams's *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (2010) argue that an alliance between Louis and Isabeau was necessary in order to govern while Charles VI was indisposed with illness (Gibbons 57; Adams 7).<sup>176</sup> Adams further argues that Isabeau's career is misunderstood and that no "official" evidence of Isabeau's promiscuity exists (xxi). Although this chapter does not explore the ways in which Isabeau may be historically misrepresented, the scholarship presents proof of such falsehoods, which also presents evidence for the ways in which Valentina and other women were historically misrepresented.

Such discussion of Louis's infidelities with Isabeau also appears in *The Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, as Monstrelet provides a note in favor of Valentina after she died. Monstrelet comments on Visconti's good nature, which calmed Charles VI during his bouts of madness. Monstrelet states, "Whilst her

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comment on the fact that Charles VI's condition and the disputes between the houses of France were well known. Adams documents that Christine de Pizan and other members of the French court were well aware of the issues and perhaps protected Isabeau of Bavaria throughout the trials and tribulations (240).

<sup>175</sup> See Froissart, *Chronicles*, "The Duke of Touraine in Trouble" (382 – 385); Collas, *Valentine de Milan*, Chapter VII, "Une Aventure de Louis de Touraine" (140-150).

<sup>176</sup> Adams further notes the political rivalries with the House of Burgundy, see pages 7, 9, and 21.

[Valentina's] husband, the duke of Orleans, was occupied in gallantries with Queen Isabella, his gentile wife was soothing the paroxysms of the afflicted king, who, in such cases, could only be calmed by her voice" (131, n\*). Although Monstrelet positively mentions Visconti, his use of the term "gallantries" implies the possibility that Louis paid Isabeau romantic attention.<sup>177</sup> Assumptions of the affair between Louis and Isabeau fueled the tensions already between Valentina and Isabeau. In *The Count of Virtue*, Chamberlain reports that Isabeau began to spread the news of Louis's infidelity to embarrass Valentina, which developed to rumors of Valentina causing Charles VI's madness (179).

Valentina Visconti, however, did not only suffer from textual documentation of her husband's infidelities. Froissart negatively documents Visconti as he states, "The daughter of this Sir John Galeas, duchess of Orleans, inherited more of the dispositions of her father than her mother, who was a princess of France for she was envious and covetous of the pomp of this world" (245). Furthermore, Froissart's introduction of Valentina demonstrates a negative attitude toward Italians and the Visconti, as Froissart eschews the possibility of Valentina's inheritance of Valois traits from her mother. Such a comment illustrates the rising French tensions against the Italians, and the low, French regard for Giangaleazzo Visconti.<sup>178</sup> Adams notes that political troubles between France and Milan marred Valentina's image in the French court. She states, "Anger against Giangaleazzo turned on Valentina, who was

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<sup>177</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides two definitions that bear the implication of amorous involvement. The first states "Courtliness or devotion to the female sex, polite or courteous bearing or attention to ladies" ("Gallantry, n" 5a). The second and final definition for the word states, "Amorous intercourse or intrigue" and "An intrigue with one of the opposite sex" ("Gallantry, n" 8a and b).

<sup>178</sup> See Chamberlain (179) and Collas (225-227).

obligated to leave the French court sometime before April 1396, chased out by accusations that she had been bewitching the king” (7). Collas also documents similar accusations that Valentina used sorcery to cause Charles VI’s madness, although Collas notes that accusations of sorcery were common in fourteenth century France (190-194). From Louis’s infidelity to rumors of sorcery, the male bonds that surround Valentina encourage negative textual representation, which pose her as a threat to the king and to France.

Monstrelet later documented the prejudice that plagued Valentina as he documents her death. He states,

This unfortunate princess, who was subjected to so much obloquy from vulgar prejudices, was one of the most amiable women of her time. She was loudly accused of having practiced arts learnt in Italy, where the preparation of poison was best understood, and its use most frequently practiced, for the destruction of the king. Witchcraft was also imputed to her, but the only arts she practiced were spells of a gentle and affectionate disposition. (131, n\*)

Monstrelet’s epitaph for Visconti notes the social scorn she received and that such scorn involved accusations of witchcraft, or sorcery. Although Monstrelet regarded Visconti well, his work supports the social assumptions of his time regarding Italians as being well versed in sorcery or witchcraft. Furthermore, Monstrelet does not absolve Valentina Visconti of practicing sorcery or magical arts, but he states that she practiced benevolent arts, rather than the malevolent ones socially attributed to Italians of his time. Ultimately, even Monstrelet’s sympathetic entry regarding Valentina

Visconti acknowledges her negative historiography, but also bears a negative connection to Italian sorcery and witchcraft.

In addition to accusations of sorcery, Froissart documents another rumor regarding Valentina's harm and ill will toward Charles VI and his son. Froissart states,

Valentina duchess of Orleans had a handsome son of the age of the dauphin of France, and while these two children were playing together in the chamber of the duchess, a poisoned apple was thrown on the floor, near the dauphin in hopes he would take it, but, through God's providence, he did not. The son of the duchess thinking, no harm, ran and [ate] it, but he had no sooner put it into his mouth than death followed in spite of every care to prevent it. Those who had the government of the dauphin carried him away, and never allowed him afterward to enter the apartments of the duchess. This story caused great murmurings in Paris and elsewhere, and the people were so enraged against her, as to occasion the duke to hear of it: they publicly said in Paris that if she was not prevented from being near the king, they would come and take her away by force and put her to death, for that she intended to poison the king and all his family, having already made him suffer by her enchantments. (245-246)

Froissart's account is certainly negative and accuses Visconti of attempting to kill both her nephew and the king with sorcery, or malevolent abilities. Furthermore, the account claims that Visconti killed her *own* son in the process of plotting against the king. Froissart's account discusses the public opinion of Visconti and that it was

socially believed that Visconti was responsible for Charles VI's madness. As a duchess and a mother, the accusations surrounding infanticide and assassination of the king, bore socially damaging repercussions.<sup>179</sup> Most sources speculate that these rumors originate from Isabeau of Bavaria, however, such speculations further negate Isabeau's character and, as discussed earlier, may also be textual misrepresentations or rumors. Ultimately, Valentina Visconti's male-dominated historiography bears a similar pattern of historical misrepresentation as that of her cousin, Isabeau of Bavaria.

As a result of the rumors of sorcery and infanticide, in the Spring of 1396 Chamberlain claims that a mob rushed the House of Orléans to remove Visconti because she was Italian and caused Charles VI's madness (179).<sup>180</sup> Froissart's account above supports this public response, as he indicates that the public made such threats to the Duke of Orléans. Valentina Visconti endured exile from the French court in April of 1396 and lived the rest of her life at Château des Montils in Blois (Collas 235; Chamberlain 179). Although Valentina never appeared in the court again, Collas reports that many of the poets, including Eustache Deschamps, who frequented the Court of Orléans, defended Visconti against the rumors that supposedly caused her exile (231).<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Collas notes that Valentina's first child, Louis, died young (103). Valentina reared three boys and one girl to adulthood: Charles d' Orléans (the poet), John d'Antonlême, Philip of Vertus, and Marguerite of Vertus. In the Introduction to *The Poetry of Charles d' Orléans and His Circle*, Arn and Fox report that Valentina Visconti raised another son, also named Jean/John, for a temporary amount of time. This son was the product of one of Louis d'Orlean's extra marital affairs and later turned out to be Jean, Batard d'Orléans (Joan of Arc's companion) (xxviii).

<sup>180</sup> At the time of Valentina Visconti's exile, the relationship between Italy and France was strained. Events such as The Great Schism and problems within the Kingdom of Sicily created social difficulties for Italians in France. Despite these issues Collas reports that many Italians resided in France at the time (138). For Valentina, according to Collas, her difficulties were exacerbated because the French Court denied Milanese ambassadors permission to help her (221). Adams, in *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria*, confirms the Court's unwillingness to acknowledge the possibility of Valentina Visconti's innocence (262, n. 34).

<sup>181</sup> After the murder of her husband, Visconti did attend the public ceremony for Louis in Paris and she

Although Visconti was exiled from the Court of Orléans by the time de Pizan frequented it, the connections between the two women were many. Charity Cannon Willard's work certainly substantiates that the women knew each other, if only as acquaintances. Both women were born in Italy and had many common Italian associations, considering that Visconti's father was the first duke of Milan and de Pizan's father and grandfather were both esteemed scholars (Willard 48). By 1399/1400, after Valentina's father, Giangaleazzo Visconti, invited Christine de Pizan to his court as a resident, but such conditions changed after his death in 1402. Furthermore, de Pizan's desires to work within the Court of Orléans in order to secure a post for her son Jean took precedence, and she turned down the offer from Milan (Willard 165-169).<sup>182</sup>

Willard states that de Pizan frequented the Court of Orléans from 1399 to 1404 (52).<sup>183</sup> Since Valentina was exiled in 1396, de Pizan was not directly in Valentina's courtly presence unless de Pizan attended the Court in Beaumont, where Visconti resided post-exile (Collas 227).<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, Visconti's education and literacy resulted in cultivation in the arts, literature, and culture. Such cultivation, also supported by Louis, allowed the House of Orléans a great library, which included Italian texts, and a consistent presence of poets, such as Eustache Deschamps (Willard

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also attended the hearings for his murders. See Monstrelet, Chapters 43, 44, and 45.

<sup>182</sup> In *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, Willard describes Giangaleazzo's invitation to Milan as a "tempting" one, which "she might have done had it not been for Giangaleazzo Visconti's unexpected death in September 1402" (165). Willard further elaborates and claims that de Pizan blamed Fortune for this missed opportunity despite some reluctance to leave France. Willard also notes that the onset of the invitation is unclear, but asserts that a number of possibilities grew out of the marriage of Valentina Visconti and Louis of Orléans, which "encouraged new contacts between France and Italy" (165).

<sup>183</sup> Collas also notes that Christine de Pizan frequented the Court of Orléans to prove that Louis and Valentina were "précurseurs de la renaissance" (121).

<sup>184</sup> Information on Charles d'Orléans, Visconti's son, states that Valentina and her children did not remain in one place post-exile, but as Arn and Fox state, "For eleven years, she [Valentina] moved from château to château" (xxix).



52).<sup>185</sup> Collas asserts that Louis D'Orléans sought to formulate a library like his father's, Charles V, and that Valentina was a supporter of such an achievement (125).<sup>186</sup> In fact, the library at the Court of Orléans held some of de Pizan's works, which Willard surmises came from Valentina Visconti (214).<sup>187</sup> While the library made the Court of Orléans an attractive patronage option for de Pizan, Willard reports that de Pizan was "disenchanted" with Louis d'Orléans because he did not find work for her son, Jean, and de Pizan questioned whether Louis took her poetry seriously or held it as a novelty (52).<sup>188</sup> De Pizan later ceased her visits at the Court of Orléans and frequented that of Burgundy, which Willard asserts began around 1403 (169).<sup>189</sup>

Possible agitations with Louis aside, de Pizan writes well of the exiled Visconti in *Le livre de la cité des dames* in 1405 (Willard 169-170). De Pizan's work

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<sup>185</sup> Collas also states that Deschamps was a regular at the Court of Orléans (122).

<sup>186</sup> Collas states, "La bibliothèque créée au Louvre par Charles V est célèbre et a été célébrée par tous les historiens. Le duc de Touraine, suivant l'exemple de son pere, reunite une bibliothèque fort belle pour l'époque. Valentine s'y interessait et s'occupait comme lui de l'accroître et de la completer [The library created by Charles V at the Louvre is famous and has been celebrated by all historians. The Duke of Touraine, following his father's example, assembled a great library for the time/period. Valentina was interested, like him {Louis}, and took care in the growth and completion {of the library}] (125).

<sup>187</sup> Willard states, "Marie, duchess of Orléans, who was the third wife of the poet Charles of Orléans and mother of King Louis XII, was Philip the Good's niece and had been reared at his court, where her literary tastes had first developed. She had a copy of *Othea's Letter to Hector* prepared for her personal library in 1475, although she may have also inherited copies of one or two others of Christine's works from her husband's mother, Valentina Visconti" (214).

<sup>188</sup> Willard notes that Jean's service with the Duke of Salisbury, de Pizan's first patron, kept him in England for three years. Upon Jean's return around 1400, de Pizan appealed to Louis d'Orléans to employ Jean within his household, but Jean's English service may have served against Louis's favor (164-166). Willard also notes that de Pizan, one of the few female authors, might have been a novelty to some courts, and Willard suggests that Louis's interests in creating a cultural center within his court and Italian culture through the possibility of earning governance through his wife, might have stirred Louis's interests in de Pizan (51-52). De Pizan dedicated three of her minor works to Louis d'Orléans (*Othea's Letter to Hector*, *The Debate of Two Lovers*, and *The Tale of the Rose*) in which she places pleas to the duke, to which Willard notes that "there is no evidence that the duke paid any attention to Christine's plea[s]" (167). Willard also notes that de Pizan questions Louis's motives and expresses her disappointment with him in *Le livre de trois vertus* and *L'advison* (169). Ultimately, Willard asserts that de Pizan's questions and doubts come from Louis's known generosity to poets and entertainers (52-53).

<sup>189</sup> Willard notes that John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy, showed a genuine interest in Christine de Pizan's talents and repaid her father's debts (170). *Le livre de la cité des dames* was written in the Court of Burgundy in 1405 (Willard 171).

and praise of Visconti in *Cité* counters Visconti's prior historical portrayal. Until 1405, male-authored historical accounts of Visconti have little to do with Visconti herself, but focus on the tensions between her father and his uncle, which also resulted in tension between Isabeau and Valentina. Valentina's male-authored historical definition seems to also rely upon the tyranny of her father, the price of her marriage paid by the citizens of Lombardy, and the infidelities of her husband. Prior to de Pizan's positive reference to Visconti in the *Cité des dames*, historiography demonstrates the social repercussions of the ways in which male homosocial bonds trafficked women between genealogies, especially within the historiographic inaccuracies that detail Visconti's move from Italy, to France, and into exile.

***Le livre de la cité des dames and the Genealogical Recognition of Women within  
Historiography***

Throughout the second book of *Le livre de la cité des dames*, the allegorical Lady Rectitude guides Christine de Pizan as they begin to populate the City of Ladies. With Lady Reason's guidance, de Pizan constructs the foundation of the city's walls through the examination of examples regarding female aptitude in terms of intelligence, education, and in other social institutions, with the exception of limitations on public leadership.<sup>190</sup> Lady Rectitude's work concerns women's inner virtue, not simple aptitude or ability, and she gives examples throughout history as well as the present that demonstrate women's ability in religious devotion or prophecy, parental devotion, and chastity. Lady Rectitude and de Pizan explore and refute prior, male arguments against women's ability for secrecy, credibility, education, chastity, romantic devotion and constancy; they also refute arguments

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<sup>190</sup> See note #5.

concerning women's manipulation of coquettishness, the value of female beauty over virtue, and women's natural greediness. In an effort to counter these male dominated arguments, Book II concludes with a list of current examples of female virtue and generosity within the royal women of France, which includes Valentina Visconti. This conclusion allows women, like Visconti, who suffered historical slander to enjoy positive documentation of their social contributions. Furthermore, in documenting the social contributions of her female, contemporary leaders, de Pizan allows them to be present within the genealogical structures of late medieval historiographic literature.<sup>191</sup>

De Pizan's list of great, contemporary, female, and French leaders begins with Isabeau of Bavaria, the reigning Queen of France, who "règne en toute bonté et en toute bienveillance à l'égard de tous ses sujets [reigns with only great love and good will toward her subjects]" (236/212). Despite the harsh historiography that precedes Isabeau, de Pizan provides only the positive. De Pizan focuses upon how Isabeau rules as Queen, and upon her name, Isabeau of Bavaria, which indicates that the Queen is not native to France. De Pizan offers no mention of Isabeau's father or husband. The second contemporary female leader is the Duchess of Berry, to which de Pizan states, "La belle, jeune, vertueuse et sage, Jeanne, duchesse de Berry, épouse du duc Jean, fils

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<sup>191</sup> De Pizan's provision of contemporary exempla parallel Boccaccio's *De mulieribus* in which Boccaccio concludes the work with a biography of his present day ruler, Queen Joanna I. Although France did not allow females to inherit the throne, The Kingdom of Naples had their first Queen, Joanna I (1343-1382). Unfortunately, Joanna's reign was a turbulent one that began when she was just a teenager and her grandfather's, King Robert I's, death wish to keep the Neapolitan throne from Hungary (Goldstone 66). These tensions color the events of Joanna's reign: the Neapolitan Financial crisis; a number Papal disputes; the murder of Andrew of Hungary (her first husband); the blame for her husband's murder; Hungarian invasion; Joanna's second marriage to Louis of Taranto; the death of her child; the suspension of her rule; the plague; the death of her second husband; the acquisition and loss of Sicily; the marriage and death of her third husband; constant threats of invasion by France, the Visconti, and Hungary; the marriage of her fourth husband; and it all ends with her assassination in 1382. Although Joanna did much to build Neapolitan Universities, she was unable to produce an heir and her reign was plagued with political trouble that adversely affected the kingdom's safety and economy. All of this turbulence inspired negative accounts of her rule.

de feu le roi Jean le Bon, frère du roi Charles le Sage, ne mérite-t-elle pas d'aussi hautes louanges? [The beautiful, young, virtuous, and wise, Jeanne, Duchess of Berry, wife of Duke John, son of King John the Good, brother to King Charles the wise, doesn't she too deserve high praises?] (236/212). While de Pizan praises the Duchess of Berry's character, the focus falls on the genealogy of her husband. Although the Duchess of Berry came from nobility, she was the daughter of John II, Count of Auvergne and Boulogne, she was the Duke of Berry's second wife and she bore him no children.<sup>192</sup> Such a focus follows traditional, medieval historiography that views women as passing guests within the progression of male genealogy. Unfortunately for the Duchess of Berry, her lack of progeny provides an obstacle for male, genealogical progression. These two examples demonstrate two different ways to represent women historiographically. Although de Pizan credits both women, the reference to Isabeau bears no mention of the marital inheritance of her title. The Duchess of Berry, however, only bears description hinging upon her marriage to the Duke and his royal ancestry.

Lady Rectitude's third example of a great, contemporary female leader is the Duchess of Orléans, Valentina Visconti. Lady Rectitude states,

Que dire de la fille de feu le duc de Milan, Valentine, duchesse  
d'Orléans, épouse de Louis, fils du roi de France Charles le Sage?

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<sup>192</sup> In *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, Willard notes that the Duke of Berry's library held several manuscripts by de Pizan, one being *Cité des dames* (212). Willard also notes that de Pizan was disillusioned with the Duke of Berry, "who was notorious for not paying his debts" (163). Furthermore, Willard notes that de Pizan, "reserved special praise" for Marie de Bourbon, the Duke of Berry's daughter from his first marriage, who Willard asserts "seems to be one of Christine's favourite patronesses" (143). Later in the passage, de Pizan does complement Marie de Bourbon at length, in the same fashion as she does Visconti. The lack of focus on Joan II, Countess of Auvergne is unclear, but could be related to de Pizan's disappointment with the Duke of Berry and her allegiance to Marie de Bourbon. For further reading, see Knecht and de Saint Armand.

Pourrait-on trouver femme plus prudente? Tout le monde reconnaît la constance de son noble courage, le grand amour qu'elle porte à son époux, l'excellente éducation qu'elle a donnée à ses enfants, la bonne direction de ses affaires, sa justice envers tous, la sagesse de sa conduite et sa vertu en toutes choses [What could I say about Valentina Visconti, the duchess of Orléans, wife of Duke Louis, son of Charles, the wise king of France, and daughter of the duke of Milan? What more could be said about such a prudent lady? A lady who is strong and constant in heart, filled with devotion to her lord and good teaching for her children, well-informed in government, just toward all, sensible in her conduct, and virtuous in all things – all this is well known].

(236/212-213)<sup>193</sup>

Although Valentina Visconti had been exiled from the French court nine years prior to this reference, Lady Rectitude does not mention it at all. Furthermore, there is no mention of the exile-inducing rumors regarding infanticide and attempted murder as expressed in prior, male-authored, historiographic accounts of Visconti. The *Cité's* reference to Visconti is positive, similar to the reference to Queen Isabeau, Visconti's cousin. Both references provide a focus on the ways in which these women make positive social contributions to France. In fact, de Pizan focuses on Visconti's good deeds and aptitude, not only as a citizen, but also as a faithful wife (to a famously unfaithful husband) and mother, which serve as the main points of the criticism of

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<sup>193</sup> The French lacks use of Valentina's last name, but the English translation by Earl Jeffrey Richards provides both Valentina's first and last name.

Visconti's in prior, historical accounts.<sup>194</sup> Furthermore, Visconti's reference in *Cité* also declares that Visconti's goodness is well known by all throughout Europe. Such a statement buttresses historiographic claims that Visconti was not only hated in France, but also in Italy.

With a focus on Visconti's social aptitude, Lady Rectitude also mentions Visconti's paternal link to Visconti tyranny, but states that Valentina is the daughter of the Duke of Milan. By referring to Giangaleazzo Visconti's ducal title, de Pizan legitimizes the Visconti family rather than condemning them as tyrants. This reference, however, does more than simply legitimize the Visconti family; it includes Valentina Visconti within her father's genealogy. Although Valentina connects her father's genealogy to her husband's, as patriarchal genealogies demand, the mention of both genealogies allows Valentina to carry her father's nobility, and to be as genealogically important as her husband within genealogical progression. Such progression helps connect Valentina Visconti to the literary success of her son, Charles d'Orléans, who greatly benefited from the libraries built by both of his parents.<sup>195</sup>

The provision of Visconti's presence within historiography's male genealogical structure, especially concerning the benefit to her son, allows Visconti

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<sup>194</sup> Louis d'Orléans was assassinated in 1407, which goes beyond the temporal scope of my study. The assassination was the result of a feud Louis had with the Duke of Bourgogne, John the Fearless. This feud was connected to the power struggles resulting from Charles VI's madness and issues regarding religion and the Great Schism. Following the death of Louis d'Orléans, John the Fearless had Louis denounced for a host of atrocities. Most sources concerning both Valentina Visconti and Louis d'Orléans report that Valentina fought vigilantly to clear her husband's name from those accusations, which further speak to the great length of Valentina's faithful character.

<sup>195</sup> For more information on Charles d'Orléans's literary and artistic influences, see Arn and Fox (eds.) *The Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle, A Critical Edition of BnF MS. fr. 25458, Charles d'Orléans's Personal Manuscript* (2010). See also Harrison's "Charles d'Orléans and the Renaissance." Most biographies on Charles d'Orléans also discuss the Italian influence of his mother with regard to artistic development.

visibility in both of the historiographies, or great genealogies, of France and Italy. Christine de Pizan's recognition of the fact that Visconti hails from Italy, the same country from which de Pizan immigrated, allows Visconti's foreign status to serve as a benefit to her future male progeny, rather than the quality that helped promote her exile. Despite the fact that de Pizan's support also implies a support for the exclusion of women from royal inheritance and public office, she models how women can be historiographically and positively documented within the boundaries of male-genealogical progression. Ultimately, de Pizan's support for Visconti, and the other contemporary women listed, calls for inclusion and accurate recognition of women within historiographic literature, not an overhaul of patriarchal social structures.

At the end of Book II, Lady Rectitude states the intention to counter historiographic negativity for women. She states,

Il y a, quoi qu'en dissent les calomnieurs, bien d'autres femmes belles et bonnes parmi les comtesses, baronnes, dames, demoiselles, bourgeoises et femmes de tous les états. Que Dieu soit loué qui protège leur vertu! Qu'il daigne venir en aide à celles qui défont! Cela tu ne dois point le mettre en doute, car je m'en porte garante face à tous ces envieux et médisants qui prétendent le contraire [In spite of all the slanderers, there are so many good and beautiful women among the ranks of countesses, baronesses, ladies, maidens, bourgeois women, and all classes that God should be praised who upholds them all. May he correct those women with shortcomings! Do not think otherwise,

for I assure you of its truth, even if many jealous and slanderous people say the opposite]. (237/214)

Book II's conclusion clarifies that the women listed within had been subject to some kind of negative or unjust historiographic account. Furthermore, Lady Rectitude states that the slander results from jealousy, and that those responsible for such slander are envious and fearful of the victims. For Visconti, who suffered exile on the basis of rumors, foreignness, and slander, such is true. Through the provision of the counter arguments, such as Visconti's faithfulness as a wife and a mother, her artistic interests and prudence, de Pizan demonstrates and counters the ways in which the historiographic tradition excludes women and promotes slander. Ultimately, Lady Rectitude's concluding declaration allows Visconti to enjoy a positive historical reference, which also imparts Visconti's genealogical importance. Furthermore, de Pizan demonstrates the openings for positively documenting women in public memory, even within the framework of male, genealogical progression. By neglecting the negative and only recording the positive, de Pizan allows one of her contemporary female leaders, with whom she shares an Italian ethnicity and Italian associations, reprieve from the slander of male-authored, medieval historiography.



## CONCLUSION

*Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature* considers how Giovanni Boccaccio's, Geoffrey Chaucer's, and Christine de Pizan's encyclopedic compendia communicate the social struggles embedded within dominant male genealogical progression. Furthermore, this project charts the ways in which the encyclopedic compendium documents and translates the lives of important people in order to communicate social ideals or norms. Each chapter shows that such documentation, translation, and communication, specifically for late medieval Europe, transcended national and linguistic differences. This study thus counters the divides that traditionally separate the three authors in question, and reinforces the need for future comparative studies.

More specifically, this dissertation has focused on the ways that women's historiographic literature identifies a literary past in order to define society, nations, or people. This literary past ultimately contributes to a public memory that justifies social structures, goals, values, and norms, and as several of these chapters demonstrate, not only celebrates past accomplishments, but also sets standards for the present and the future. These standards shape societies and their institutions; more importantly, these standards provide parameters for culture, practices for cultural traditions, and development of cultural attitudes that determine the treatment of men and women.

Boccaccio began the chain of women's historiography, but despite his efforts to provide women with a history, his contributions remain firmly within the boundaries of upholding male genealogical structures and appeasing male homosocial

bonds. As Chapters One and Three explore, Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* emphasizes the importance of maintaining the patriarchal status quo more than providing women with a documented past. Such maintenance reinforces the ways in which historiographic literature informs public memory ultimately to shape social practices, such as oppression.

While there were other contributors to the shaping of public memory and its social standards, the encyclopedic works considered within this project articulate the triumphs and pitfalls of the past in order to define the behaviors of men and women within a given society, nation, culture, or group. Ultimately, the encyclopedic compendia provide literary examples in order to encourage people of the present and future, on individual and social levels, to achieve success and to avoid failure. This documentation of the past also serves as justification for the disparities of social privilege. For instance, a lack of exempla or documentation for any given group, results in a lack of social privileges. As many of the chapters above note, the lack of women's historiography in late medieval Europe demonstrates the parallels between a documented past and social privilege: women had limited space within public memory and inconsistent ancestral documentation. Although the degree to which medieval women were socially limited may be contested, the correlating lack of documentation and privilege follows women today as they still face social limitations and oppression.

The works of Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan also demonstrate the ways in which public memory relies on language and translation. Although Latin dominated literary contributions to public memory in 1361, Chaucer's and de Pizan's vernacular contributions expand upon this tradition. This expansion, despite its

adherence to the male genealogical progression, spurred inclusion not only of past women, but also of contemporary women. While Chapters One, Two, and Three call attention to the ways in which language and translation expose the fixed content of prior women's literary historiography, Chapter Four demonstrates the ways in which de Pizan includes and recognizes women within the male genealogical progression. Such a change, within just forty-four years, demonstrates historiography's impact within both public memory and society.

*Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature* also begins to consider the ways in which genealogical study expands both literary and historical investigations. Future, genealogical study might consider the ways in which ancestral genealogies influence philosophical genealogies in order to ultimately form social ideologies. Since genealogy remains a staple in modern society, such studies offer an opportunity to explore the evolution of genealogical structures and how genealogies may still function today.

Ultimately, this dissertation emphasizes the need to consider de Pizan with her male contemporaries, Giovanni Boccaccio and Geoffrey Chaucer. In contrast to prior periodic and national separations, *Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature* demonstrates that all three authors share many of the same tales and grapple with some of the same issues. As the only woman in the group, de Pizan both speaks out against her social limitations and serves as an example of the ways in which the possession of a historiographic past correlates to social privilege. Such grouping opens up more opportunities for Christine de Pizan studies through a pairing of her work with other male contemporaries throughout late medieval Europe.

Furthermore, such pairing offers ways to consider how de Pizan's work contributes to different forms of women's historiographies, which ultimately helped to shape public memory religiously, politically, and legally. Further investigation might consider how de Pizan and other women of her time used the patriarchal structures as an avenue for resistance. Such a line of inquiry might generate information regarding not only the behaviors of late medieval society, but also the degree of impact such historiographic works actually bore upon social structures. These possibilities not only help de Pizan studies move beyond feminist debates, but they also provide opportunities for future inter-disciplinary studies.

Lastly, *Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature*, as a dissertation project in English, considers the ways that literature serves a vehicle for historiography to communicate information about the past in order to impact nations, societies, and groups of the present and the future. Such impact occurs through literary content, or alterations to that content. It also exposes particular social structures that establish patterns of privilege and oppression by defining groups, such as men and women. De Pizan's work and participation with her male contemporaries demonstrates the ways that the possession of a textual past allows minoritized groups to expose and to document structures of exclusion, both textually and socially. Although this project focuses on three authors from medieval Europe in 1361 to 1405, *Women's Historiography in Late Medieval European Literature* demonstrates that the need for such exposure through literature and literary historiography still exists today.

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