

**REPRESENTATIONS OF MEDIEVAL WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER
AND DANTE**

The Canterbury Tales

And

The Divine Comedy

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by

Hafza Girdap

Fatih University

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For Zeynep Begum, Zehra Hansa and Yavuz Girdap

APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Hafza GIRDAP
Institute: Institute of Social Sciences
Department: English Language and Literature
Thesis subject: The Representations of Medieval Women In The Works of
Chaucer and Dante: *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Divine Comedy*
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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. Visam Mansur
Head of Department

This is to certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Assist. Prof. Kevin Joseph McGinley
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Assist. Prof. Kevin Joseph McGinley

Assist. Prof. Vassil Hristov Anastassov

Assist. Prof. Mustafa Uslu

It is approved that this thesis has been written in compliance with the formatting rules laid down by the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences.

Assist. Prof. Gokhan Bacik
Director

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.
2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:
 - i) Research Methods course during the undergraduate study
 - ii) Examination of several thesis guides of particular universities both in Turkey and abroad as well as a professional book on this subject.

Hafza Girdap

February, 2009

University: Fatih University
Institute: Institute of Social Sciences
Department: English Language and Literature
Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Kevin Joseph McGinley
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ABSTRACT

THE REPRESENTATIONS OF MEDIEVAL WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER AND DANTE: *THE CANTERBURY TALES* AND *THE DIVINE COMEDY*

Hafza GIRDAP

This study will make the reader to acknowledge about the background of middle ages. In this thesis; medieval society, way of their lives, important happenings and issues of those times will be presented.

Additionally, literature given in medieval age will be examined through the language, themes and genres. The works of that time consisted of mostly theological items. Besides courtly love was a part of medieval literature.

Since this study is made from a feministic point of view, women literature – works given by women and on women – will also be analyzed. To reveal the position and representatives of medieval women, the works of Chaucer and Dante will comparatively be applied. The lives and other themes in the works of these authors will be placed in this study as well as their approaches to woman figure in literature.

The first chapter will deal with the position of women presenting a relevant glance at the literature given by and on women as well as giving information about genre of those

times. To help this analysis from theoretical point of view a section about feminist criticism will also be placed in the first chapter.

Along with introductions to the works that are going to be examined in this paper, The Divine Comedy and The Canterbury Tales, women in these works will be analyzed from the points of allegory, gender discourse, power structure, virtues and having a voice.

In the conclusion part the two works will be evaluated comparatively regarding to the statements in the previous chapter and to the feminist point of view.

Key Words:

Chaucer, Dante, Medieval Literature, Position of Women, Medieval Women, The Canterbury Tales, The Divine Comedy

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KISA ÖZET

HAFZA GIRDAP

Bu çalışmanın ana amacı ortaçağ toplumunda ve edebiyatında kadının yerini incelemek ve bu toplumun genel özelliklerini edebi metinler vasıtasıyla ortaya koymaktır.

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Bu çalışma ilgili eserleri karşılaştırmalı kısa bir değerlendirmeye sonuçlandırılacaktır.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER:

ORTAÇAĞ, KADIN, CHAUCER, DANTE, CANTERBURY HİKAYELERİ, İLAHİ
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CHAPTER I- MEDIEVAL WOMEN LITERATURE AND FEMINISM

1.1. THE POSITION OF MEDIEVAL WOMEN

In analyzing the representations of women in *The Divine Comedy* and *The Canterbury Tales*, which are among the most influential works of medieval literature, beginning with an explanation of the positions of women and attitudes to them that determine their status makes the reader comprehend these literary milestones better.

It was the Church who influenced the position of women most. According to the Church's primary approach to her, women were the evil instruments of the Devil. Even though this religious consideration may not have been so directly felt in the daily lives of ordinary people in actual marriages, the Church's judgement of women was influential in society as a dominant ideology that supported patriarchal social order: the representatives of the Church, who were acknowledged as the intelligentsia and endowed with the power to determine moral standards among the community of those times, were regarded as the exclusive doctrine to determine the position of women by all of the society (Tierney 203).

From another angle, it was acceptable for writers outside the monasteries and the priesthood to spread misogyny. These people defined woman as intellectually and morally inferior, and the dominant approach was the idea of the need for women's subjection by men. The moral works of medieval times about the position of women—which focused on the world of married life—emphasized that the key thing to be demanded from women was absolute obedience. Extending this idea, obedience was even said to be the key feature of a woman which made her feminine.

The dominant opinion of women, emphasizing her degraded and inferior side, was acceded by both the Church and the Aristocracy who were the most influential authorities in the medieval society. Nevertheless, the Church and aristocracy, which claimed women to be evil creatures who had to be controlled, at the same time also presented a kind of praise of women by bringing the cult of Virgin Mary and the cult of chivalry together (Tierney 206). Since the early ages of literary history, especially related to Christian doctrines, Virgin Mary is applied as a very important figure by emphasizing her superior aspect giving birth to Christ without losing virginity. Similar with her influential and divine feature, in courtly love tradition women are regarded as the creatures who should be worshipped and whose love should be taken as the love of God. This idea, showing a holy woman and medieval women abreast, constituted the basis of chivalry and courtly love. In other

words, embracing the Virgin Mary in those times brought a new and better vision in for the medieval women. The ornaments of Mary figures in the temples and pilgrimages to her chapels affected the position of women in medieval society. This new form of devotion was also essential in forming the medieval aristocracy's ideals of chivalry, which was the earthly version of the cult of Virgin Mary. The dedication to woman was connected with devotion to God in chivalry. The ideal of courtly love influenced many poets such as Dante and Troubadours of those times (Tierney 206).

However, although such glorifying of women seemed much better than the alternative insulting approach to her, this situation could not alter the reality. The impact of the chivalric ideals of the aristocracy was restricted and the values of courtly love remained much more significant and influential in the literary world rather than in social life. It can even be said that this elevating approach to woman was, in fact, only a cover for the grimmer reality.

This idea, which presented woman just a physical merit under the surface of glorification of women; even though it had a pragmatic and nourishing side, was condemned by a medieval feminine voice, Christine de Pisan, as will be discussed below.

In short, the representation of medieval women was inconsistent, pointing out the superiority of women on one side, and putting forward her deficiencies on the other. It should be specified that this situation was cogent for just the tenets of the Church, the Aristocracy and for the literary world as well. But within a study of medieval women, it is not the theoretical but practical approach to her that we should actually focus on. In daily lives neither superiority nor inferiority was important for woman.

Along with the deaths of men in the crusades and wars the population of women became more than men in the medieval society (Tierney 212). Notwithstanding that this situation seemed to provide equality for women in labour, in fact, it gave more responsibility. The women had to work as men to provide livelihood while also carrying the burdens of their families. It was the lower wages which complicated the situation of women while carrying this burden. Actually this condition was very parallel to the approach in chivalry which pretended to elevate the women; in fact, it did not go beyond a theoretical and physical glorification. The economical power, which seemed as if it should present medieval women with equal opportunities to improve their position in the society, in fact obtained physical labour from them without paying the actual right of wages (Tierney, 214).

In a study of women, after mentioning the position of women in the literary and economical platforms, their position in social life should also be

dealt with. It is the marital institution that comes to mind as soon as social role was mentioned. In medieval society, women wedded at a very early age, around the age of fifteen. Women also had to obey the preferences of their fathers about the spouses: the main motives behind early and compulsory marriages were financial. The families, who saw their daughters as burdens, wanted them to get married as soon as possible. As can be seen in Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale" the same situation is cogent for rich and urban women as well (Herlihy 15).

While examining a society the characteristics of a specific period can be confronted in the literary works of that period best. For this reason the next step will be appropriate to have a glance at the literature given by both medieval men and women about the concept of women after pointing to the position of women in medieval society.

1.2. GENRE IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

While doing a literary study, literary theories, the status of a work in the historical period, the social influences the work causes and is affected, the aim of the work and the genre of the work are among the points that are taken into consideration.

An approach with a generic point of view to a work of art, in fact, means examining it from many perspectives. However it helps to more clearly understand a work regarding which genre it belongs to or which genre it has the characteristics of, to consider that the genre of this work may change in accordance with the view and reception of the reader (Guerin 309). In other words, even though a genre possesses its own peculiarities each work of art has individual characteristics that might be classified in different ways. This situation can be interpreted with the statement that there are not apparent distinctions between genres. A literary work might be taken as epic for some critics whereas it is actually a dramatic one, for instance. This is caused by the relative nature of the literature itself (Guerin 310).

The “reception aesthetics” school of Hans Robert Jauss emphasizes the “function, reception and influence” of genre and literature in the social and historical senses. Gunkel’s phrase “locus in life” mentions the influences of a certain society and period on a work pointing to the same properties of genre

as Jauss puts forward. Both these understandings present genre as a tool that serves not just as a body, namely a structure of a text, but also as carrier of a sociological, historical or psychological meaning. (Duff 127). In medieval literature the concept of style is added to the study of genres in the classical division including lyric, epic and drama. Here style goes beyond its usual meaning which proposes the presentational type of a work, namely structure. Furthermore it also deals with the objects in the work such as characters and the society in which they dwell. In the light of these ideas it is inevitable for genre in medieval literature to be inspired by the Bible since the influence of theological scholarship is pretty intensive. The structural and conceptual qualities of medieval genres correspond with this theological tradition. That is to say, both thematic and typological effects of the Bible on the literature of middle ages put forward a didactic formation. There seem to be parallels between the worldly and spiritual lyrics, legends of martyrs, genealogies and biographical texts in the Bible and the medieval wisdom literature (Duff 137).

The generic categories of medieval literature depended on the function rather than genre since they are nourished from theological sources. Nevertheless in the later times of medieval period, through Renaissance, by means of a “generic consciousness” and awakening of “literarization” the literature goes beyond the distinction between being worldly or spiritual and furthermore get freer. This change not only means the start of a new movement of “literarization” and “generic consciousness” but also replacing

of dominant genres (Duff 138). Here an evolution of genre can be mentioned. Since within the change of influential motives on the society the ideas go through a new shape the works of this society also go through a change. Literature, one of the most significant cultural and artistic means of expressing self, ought to refresh to reflect the new face of changing doctrines and changing society. Gradually in medieval, as well, literature gets away from the influence and restriction of the Church regarding a more literary desire.

Along with the change in the conception of genre in medieval literature the hierarchy of genre undergoes an alteration, too. Directing to the romances, which carry courtly love themes, from *chanson de gestes* could be shown as an example for that generic and hierarchic kind of transformation.

In the light of these ideas about medieval genres it can be said that the change in the structure and the style of literature affects the representation of women in the literary works. Medieval writers steer their stylistic and thematic approaches in this direction parallel with the ideal reformation of the society to reach their reception. In other words the works of medieval literature develop in the sense of characters and themes shifting from being Biblical based to a more worldly understanding. Instead *chanson de gestes* including martyr legends; more humorous and satirical works such as courtly-knightly romances, *dits* and *fabliaux* are given far from the reach of the Church fathers (Duff 141).

In addition to a look at the genre of medieval literature it will be helpful for appreciating the main point of this thesis to examine the relation between literature and women as writers and readers.

1.3. A GENERAL SCOPE OF MEDIEVAL LITERATURE BY AND ON WOMEN

Women were often seen as marginalised from literary activities as they were viewed as inferior and having a low status in medieval society. Literary works that emphasize women's mediocrity and determine them as "wicked wives" were widespread and common and in addition women were being kept away from the right and chance of reading and writing. The main motive behind this approach to women seemed to be the interpretation of misogynistic doctrine which classified female education as disobedience (Krug 1).

Another argument to support the negative view of female interest in literature -both for reading and writing- was the thought that women did not have the ability and adequacy for this. Misogynistic ideas asserted that for women to be involved in literature was presenting something valuable to those that could not understand its value. Women, instead of this, had to focus on the religious duties that depended on obedience and they solely had to devote themselves in this way according to the misogynistic thought which emphasised Eve's influence in Adam's exile from paradise as evidence of women's inferiority (Krug 1).

In the light of these remarks on women it can be proclaimed that women engagement in literature, not just as readers but also as writers, was a

resistance, challenge and even a revolution. In spite of all doctrines and works of art denigrating woman, the effort of medieval women to have a place in literature for reading and writing was, in fact, an enunciation of female insubordination against social pressure of male authority (Krug 4).

The medium that women preferred to resist the oppression which kept them away from being literate and from having a role in the society was the same as that which the opposing forces of male dominant community used against women—literature. For this reason; before examining some samples of literature by and about women, whether for or against them, it will be useful to mention the themes emphasised by medieval women who grasped the right to be literate and engaged in the literature world (Krug 2).

Some of the women writers chose didactic and devotional styles that included Christian doctrines, theological issues and spiritual relationships between them and God to challenge the misogynistic intellection using religious arguments (Petroff 3). The main reason for their involvement in this kind of literature was the fact that medieval women could not have education since they had to marry in a very young age and often the only women who could read and write were the ones that participated in a religious community instead of marrying. Furthermore, women writers of medieval literature deciding on devotional styles as a reply against the ideas presenting them inferior and offensive used theological themes such as virginity and divine visions in their works (Petroff 20). Hildegard of Bingen was among these

women who will be dealt with in the following paragraphs of this chapter. Medieval women writers pointed out the negative sides of the clerical platform while condemning the unjust criticism about them. In this sense, along with Hildegard of Bingen, Christine de Pizan is one of the milestones of this area with her well known works *City of Ladies* and *The Debate over the Romance of the Rose* which will be examined within this study.

Another point about medieval literature by women in addition to its thematic aspect is language and genre. It gave the chance to have a wide range of readers to women writers of that period since they were not in an elite part of the society and used vernacular rather than Latin—even sometimes both. Moreover, unlike the Church and Aristocracy's elite view of the society, medieval women's empathic and participatory approach to their works served them to reach this wide range of readers. This is because of the fact that the style and also the language the women writers choose to give works have a relation with the social status of them.

In addition language preference of an unusual genre in medieval literature proved an impulse for women in their works. Different from the poetics which emphasised only traditionally high-culture genres in the early period of medieval literature and drama, epistolary and autobiographical genres provoked an intensive effect for medieval women writers while expressing themselves (Petroff 21) and assisted women authors in their ironic challenges to misogyny..

This introduction to the medieval literature by and about women can be made more concrete by presenting examples of writers and points of view, by means of references to influential works by them. A selection of both men and women having again both feminist and antifeminist recommendations such as Christian de Pizan, Boccaccio and Hildegard of Bingen will maintain a balance in this study.

Feminist literary studies aim to create a new genealogy for women writers, which challenge the role of women in male dominated societies. Christine de Pizan is one of the writers who deserve to be in such a genealogy, even at the top. The main motive behind her status is her fame throughout medieval literature and her gaining this fame through resisting the misogynistic understanding of the Church about females that presented them as inferior and sinful. Consequently Pizan can be represented as having a very crucial standing (Grant 1).

Christine de Pizan chooses writing as a medium to teach her considerate of morality and Christian discipline. By means of written works Pizan helps to redefine the image and position of women in the medieval period, for she associates lean virtue and other positive characteristics with femininity as well, as a way of objecting to the idea that man solely has these. The literary strategies Pizan adopts to criticize male dominance and to emphasize women's accomplishment play a great role in helping her to gain success and a wide spread fame. Since the most influential doctrines of

medieval era are accepted to be Church discipline and literature, Christine disputes medieval misogyny by means of the same weapons. In other words, she, with religious features but different genres than the ones in the male dominant literature, aims to teach her readers (Blamires 278).

Christine de Pizan not only criticizes and condemns the antifeminist tradition but also motivates her female readers to reject the role that male dominant and misogynistic belief imposes on them and to re-identify themselves. Pizan's status in feminist literature as well as in medieval literature depends on her effort not only to attack the antifeminist movement and the unjust and oppressive approach to women—especially to women who want to have a role and word in the society—but also to advise women to give up the adoption of the idea claiming their inferiority and represent themselves confidently (Petroff 52). It is worthwhile to analyze *City of Ladies* and the letters for *The Debate over the Romance of the Rose* which she writes in the sense of this development of a women's movement.

Since her family background and level of knowledge is different than the other contemporary women Pizan chooses companions from other periods in the history such as Hildegard of Bingen and Heloise (Petroff 304). Christine, because of the hard luck of her, takes all the responsibility of her family by writing and by the same way means (writing) she defends the position of medieval women and inspires them (Petroff 53).

Pizan criticizes an allegorical work of art in that period by means of an epistolary form. Putting forward the antifeminist discussions in her condemnation of Romance of the Rose serves her didactic purpose. In Romance of the Rose it is claimed that no women have virtues and good natures and they are all inferior and immoral. Pizan adjudges this idea in her letter to the writer of this poem (Petroff 304):

Actually, since he blamed all women in general, I am forced to believe that he has never made the acquaintance nor known the company of an honourable and virtuous woman, but rather has frequented only dissolute and disreputable ones – has self-indulgent men are wont to do and thus claims that all women are of the lowly kind, since he has never known the other. If only he had criticized the dishonest ones and had advised the avoidance of this sort alone, his teachings would be good and just. But no! He accuses all women without exception (Petroff 344).

Pizan accuses these antifeminist writers and his followers of lying and being far from the reality about women and, to destroy their thesis, sets forward stereotypes that possess wisdom and courage from the Bible that is accepted to be an impeccable source.

Along with *A Debate over the Romance of the Rose*, *City of Ladies* puts forward a very strong virtuous and moral figure of woman instead of common pessimism of woman portrait. Her effort to defend women to bring away the dark label of female is encountered in the dialogues with three crowned and lightgiving women called Reason, Rectitude and Justice. In *The City of Ladies*, by means of dialogue technique, Pizan responds to all antithetical ideas. For example the answer to the suggestion that there may be a well-intentioned motive behind the antifeminist understanding is striking. Upon the statement “Causing any damage or harm to one party in order to help another party is not justice” (Petroff 304). Pizan emphasizes the injustice and unreality of the argument over women. In the light of these ideas, just like in *The Debate over Romance of the Rose*, this woman writer responds to misrepresentation of women with intellectual and qualified stereotypes.

Henceforth, let all writers be silent who speak badly of women, let all of them be silent – those who have attacked women and who still attack them in their books and poems, and all their accomplices and supporters too- let them lower their eyes, ashamed for having dared to speak so badly, in view of the truth which runs counter to their poems; this noble lady, Carmentis, through the profundity of her understanding, taught them like a schoolmistress- nor can they deny it- the lesson thanks to which they consider themselves so lofty and honoured; that is, she taught them the Latin alphabet (Blamires 296).

Pizan plays a moral instructing and educating role to help medieval women in re-exploring themselves by using didactic and self-confident statements in *City of Ladies* and in her other works. She explains the reasoning of antifeminist and misogynistic movement as hypocrisy. Christine accuses male dominance of hypocrisy by claiming that they, in fact, veil the fear of women's potential pretending to be devotional and to be the gender that God has made superior

Hildegard of Bingen, picked as a fellow by Pizan in the mission of attacking antifeminism, situates herself in defence of women with stating to be inspired by God. Pizan argues women not to be inferior but even to be superior creatures, giving evidence from virtuous women examples from the Bible. Similar to this, furthermore, with a style going beyond disputing the medieval idea of women, Hildegard utters the thought that her sex possess divinity and divinity not only belongs to men.

Thou art timid, timid in speech, artless in explaining, unlearned in writing, but express and write not according to art but according to natural ability, not under the guidance of human composition, but under the guidance of that which thou seest and hearest in God's heaven above. (Petroff 151)

The educational deficiency of medieval women causes writing and giving works of art to be identified as a preserve and privilege of men. For this reason; occupied with theology, Hildegard, like other women writers of

medieval visionary literature, focuses on “visionary experiences” in her writings rather than rhetoric. Moreover she considers and declares herself to have prophetic gifts since God speaks to her (Petroff 152).

One of the most well-known writers having antifeminist and misogynist understanding is Boccaccio, a contemporary of Dante who is going to be analyzed in this study in the sense of his approach to women. Boccaccio, in *The Corbaccio*, emphasizes his belief in the fact that the love for a woman makes a man a lower person as women own wicked and inferior natures:

“No other creature is less clean than woman: the pig, even when he is most wallowed in mud, is not as foul as they. If perhaps someone would deny this, let him consider their childbearing; let him secret places where they in shame hide the horrible instruments they employ to take away their superfluous humours” (Blamires 167).

Mentioning the thought that women, both in worldly and spiritually meanings, are offensive by means of these statements, Boccaccio serves medieval misogyny and claims that a woman is a dirty creature who leads men into foolish situations by veiling her real inferior face. A reverse parallel is encountered between this claim of Boccaccio and the assertion of Pizan which presents hypocrisy as the main motive behind misogyny.

Boccaccio gives voice to correspondent thoughts with the idea of “subjection of women”. He not only alleges them to be created as servants and

to aim at higher positions than they deserve by pretending to be obedient wives, but also labels women as immoral (Blamires 169). This antifeminist writer supposes female sex to try to control other people after they gain a certain place and the trust of their husbands.

Boccaccio points to the nobility and privilege by emphasizing his claim that even the worst man who feels love and respect for a woman—simply because he is male—is better than an excellent woman. By means of these words, “A most noble thing, therefore, is man, who was made by his creator a little lower than the angels”, he draws attention to the divinity of men, in contrast to Pizan (Blamires 173). Boccaccio strengthens his assertion with examples from high positions such as papacies and emperors in an exactly similar way to Pizan. Thus, Boccaccio, like many of his contemporaries, examines the subjection of women and puts forward the medieval point of view about women with clear expressions. Antithetical to Dante, he becomes a medieval representation of antifeminist tradition.

It is the marital institution which is one of the most significant places to observe the position of women in the society. The demands upon women in families just as in financial platforms seem to be very high and this situation is referred to in literary works. This case corresponds to the reality which is emphasized in this study, that literature is the most relevant source to find out the position of women in medieval society. Above all if a work of art is given by a man, the approach to women can be clearly seen.

When we have a glance at medieval texts, we find many deportment books (Eileen 94). Having didactic characteristics, these works explain to women how they should behave in every part of their lives. In this sense, the medieval idea “subjection of women” is confirmed. Taking into consideration that medieval women get married at a very early age, it can be said that these kinds of guidance of women are about marriage. *The Menagier’s Wife* is not only one of these kinds of works but is also a concrete example of a real marriage since it is not fictitious (Eileen 94).

Medieval literature works touch on religious and moral concepts since the most influential doctrine of that period is considered as the Church. *The Menagier’s Wife*, dictating the responsibilities of a woman as a wife, mentions her religious and moral duties that her husband demands in the first section (Eileen 99). It is worthwhile to quote these statements:

The first section is necessary to gain for you the love of God and the salvation of your soul, and also to win for you the love of your husband and to give you in this world that peace which ought to be had in marriage. And because these two things, to wit the salvation of your soul and the comfort of your husband, are the two things most chiefly necessary, therefore are they placed first. (Eileen 99)

As we can see in these statements, it is the religious argumentation which is applied to emphasize the message and its rightfulness.

In the second and the largest section of this work, which is written from the medieval male point of view about women, the wife's responsibilities to her husband are emphasized. While expressing these, the writer makes use of Biblical style. In other words, by means of stories just like exempla in Bible, he expresses his message about household management by illustration.

By means of whether example stories or didactic similes, Menagier's Wife helps the reader to comprehend the position of women in the sense of medieval understanding.

Of the domestic animals you see how a greyhound, or a mastiff, or a little dog, whether on the road, or at table, or in bed, always keeps near to the person from whom he takes his food.....and if the dog is afar off, he always has his heart and his eye upon his master. ...Wherefore for a better and stronger reason to women, to whom God has given natural sense and who are reasonable, ought to have a perfect and solemn love for their husbands." (Eileen 100)

These statements of the Menagier, with an example of a loyal animal, put forward the idea of obedience and subjection of women in a very concrete way.

In the light of the idea that a medieval woman is also expected to be cheerful and pose in public very well, the third section of *The Menagier's Wife* mentions the topics of amusement, hawking, riddles and games (Eileen 101).

Here women are confronted as an object who functions only for the sake of her husband and the husband, as a masculine, is presented as a master.

Since *The Menagier's Wife* presents medieval life in details it depicts both medieval woman and male attitudes to her and helps the readers of this study have an idea about that period and society (Eileen 122).

1.4. FEMINIST CRITICISM

In a study of the representations of women within literary texts the most appropriate theory to be applied is feminist criticism. Since the main matter confronted while analyzing texts by male authors is a masculine point of view, in dealing with the female characters or the approaches to femininity, especially if they are misrepresented or represented according to male definitions, feminist criticism is the right way to reveal this fact.

In the light of these ideas having introductory information about feminist literary criticism will help to analyze the representations of women in *The Divine Comedy* and *The Canterbury Tales*. To begin, it can be said that feminist criticism has a wide range of meaning including the attitudes to literature as well as culture in the sense of the interest in women. As a further description of this criticism it is worthy to quote Annette Kolodny's words:

What unites and repeatedly invigorates feminist literary criticism ... is neither dogma nor method but an accurate and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed or (encoded) within our literary inheritance [and] the

consequences of that encoding for women- as characters, as readers and as writers. (Bressler, 168)

The main aim of feminism is to criticize patriarchal assumptions about women, that is, the objective of feminist approach can be asserted to respond to the masculine determination of what is feminine.

In addition to interpreting masculine discourse, feminist criticism aims to resist and challenge by means of changing the dogmas apparent in male dominant doctrines. Judith Fetterley supports this fact with her claim that feminist analysis encourages one “to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us.” As the declaration of modern feminist thought these words have a parallel with the attitude of Christine de Pisan whose aim is to motivate women against patriarchal oppression as well as to reveal the real thoughts behind the patriarchal approach (Guerin, 196).

Along with these depictions of feminist criticism it can be argued that the quest for equality among sexes must attack the claim that womanhood is a secondary and even an inferior situation. This thought has a basis from very early times. The doctrines of the ancient Greeks, which are regarded by Dante and Chaucer, represent women as having a potential of offensiveness

(Bressler, 171). But it is not only male writers who place this thought which relates to Christian notions in literary works but also women, who give a space to them however much they challenge them. Christine de Pisan, for instance, criticizes misrepresentation of women using the same sources and arguments as the anti-feminists, such as religious sources, including the fact that both sexes are equal in front of the God.

Following the same path with Pizan, there comes Elaine Showalter who should be mentioned within a study of feminist criticism because of her suggestions of phases of feminism. Briefly she asserts that there are three stages in the history of female writing that are, in order, “feminine phase”, “feminist phase” and “female phase”. In the first phase a number of female writers, such as Bronte and George Eliot, participate in literature although they write in the same way as male writers. During the second stage women writers just depict and reveal the male approach to women, whereas their colleagues challenge this approach by resisting the inferior position it presents in the third phase (Bressler, 176).

In association with the conclusive statement of this study the main point of feminist criticism can be defined as claiming that male and female individuals are equal in all areas of the life and this assertion is an answer to

the representation of women as the “other”, the “not-male” and the representation of men as “privileged” (Bressler, 182). It is challenging as well as examining the works of male dominant doctrines to substantiate this aim.

As an example of feminist criticism the way that is going to be followed in this study is to analyze women stereotypes in *The Divine Comedy* and *The Canterbury Tales* and to reveal their representations as serving the masculine superiority. To do so the female in relation to the male regarding marriages, courtly love tradition, and allegorical functioning of male mind will be dealt with.

CHAPTER II- *THE DIVINE COMEDY AND THE CANTERBURY TALES*

2.1. INTRODUCTION TO *THE DIVINE COMEDY*

One of the most famous works of medieval literature, *The Divine Comedy*, consists of three parts: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, which in fact can be said to be three different books. Since the first publication, this poem has been analyzed in countless works regarding both its historical and literary values. Among the main motives behind Dante's writing *The Divine Comedy*, criticizing and even challenging particular medieval notions, such as theological and poetic, come first. A parallel with *The Canterbury Tales* is confronted in the sense of using stereotypes as mouthpieces to give voice to the writers' own thoughts. In his tales, Chaucer's ideas about the medieval doctrines are reached via the symbolic characters just as the symbolic figures in *The Divine Comedy*.

Before analyzing the work deeply, an interesting point draws attention at its very beginning: the title. The words "divine" and "comedy" together. Even though the whole title gets this shape after Dante, it reflects his intention to write it. That is to say, some other writers of later times add the word "divine" and the reason for those writers to choose it seems to be scholastic reasons- Dante challenges- and for the word "comedy" the happy ending lies as a reason in spite of a very dismal beginning in *Inferno* (Varoglu, XXXIII).

While studying *The Divine Comedy* from both historical and literary points of view, three different senses can be applied to understand it in the best way. Morally, the work conveys an aim of showing the ways to reach the God, whereas, politically, there is an intention of condemning the theological and governmental doctrines of those times in which Dante lived. The allegorical success of the writer to present his ideas is the literary feature which is going to be regarded to analyze the representation of women in this chapter.

As the work is a combination of three separated books it will be appropriate to have a glance at *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradiso* separately to make the study clearer in the sense of understanding the women that are represented in them.

In accordance with the explanation of Lino Pertile in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, from the pronoun “I” we understand that both the narrator and the main character are the same person. Furthermore, it is known that the events and the people are from the real medieval Italy, Dante himself is the narrator and the character. His journey from the darkness of Inferno to Empyrean, to God in other words, has double metaphorical meanings. In accordance with Christian belief, that Adam and Eve are exiled from the

paradise, humankind is an exile and they are pilgrims as well. Another metaphorical meaning of his journey is Dante's going back home from his real exile. In *The Divine Comedy*, the writer also implies a travel to his spiritual home as well as to his real home from the exile.

Setting forth to Empyrean, where he can find salvation, a guide is needed and in *Inferno* it is Virgil who directs Dante in the darkness which is an obstacle to go ahead. Like Beatrice, who is the main subject of this study as a women representative of the writer, Virgil has also a symbolic meaning. He is a milestone of poetry that is respected by both Dante and his era. As a poet, this guide in *Inferno* gives a clue about the way through which Dante can proceed to salvation. That is to say, the writer finds truth by means of his poetry.

It is not solely Dante who engages with poetry about religious doctrines and afterlife in medieval literature. Many other allegorical and visionary works, relating to the Bible, can be confronted while studying the literature of the Middle Ages. Hildegard of Bingen, who claims that God speaks through her, puts visions into use in her writings. Beatrice, an image of Dante, has a similarity with the visionary literature of Hildegard. Furthermore, in being concerned with stereotypes from the Bible Dante is working in the same way as Christine de Pizan as well as Chaucer. They all give places to

Biblical characters in their works for symbolizing various ideas such as typical virtues and vices.

In his *Inferno*, Dante expresses every sin with a real representative of his time, as well as symbolizing virtues by means of vivid characters in *Paradiso*. Along with symbolizing real characters with either good or bad characteristics it should be noticed that it is Dante who affects the readers' perception of them. Whereas the poet makes use of real tales, the stories are conveyed to the reader from the viewpoint of Dante. This is also similar with *The Canterbury Tales*. The didactic intention, seen in these true stories that are pretended to be spoken from the characters in these two works, *The Divine Comedy* and *The Canterbury Tales* evidences the writers' purpose of putting forward their own ideas.

The last thing that can be said about *Inferno* is that despite the gloomy atmosphere of Hell, with the assistance of the guides in the book, Beatrice and Virgil, who have certain allegorical meanings, even sinful souls can reach salvation as long as they are Christians. Although Dante places some souls like Virgil, the guide himself, in *Inferno* since they lack the Christian faith he includes a domain for Christian but evil souls to be purified on the way to Paradise. This province is called Purgatory, which is a term considered by a

number of theologians of medieval era before Dante displays it in *The Divine Comedy*. Purgatory's literary meaning as a transition can be understood with the words of Jeffrey T. Schnapp in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*: "The transition from Virgil to Beatrice encapsulates the poem's overall movement from time to eternity, nature to the supernatural, Latin to the vernacular, and (for the *Commedia*'s author) poetic apprenticeship to poetic mastery."

Purgatory is not only a transition realm from Inferno to Paradise or from sins to purification. Underneath this surface meaning a further conversion is eventuated. A shift, in the sense of guidance from Virgil to Beatrice, that is, from masculine to feminine, seems to be experienced. But in fact, Dante, by the aid of typological examples, stressed a shift from feminine to masculine. The advent of Beatrice in Purgatory stands for the appearance of Christ and her personification in Christ reveals the fact that even her earthly existence as well as her divine one symbolizes her as an incarnation of Christ for the salvation of Dante. While giving utterance to his ideas about Beatrice's arrival, Dante brings some Latin verses which emphasize the transition in the meanings of allegory and gender. The reference to the statement of Schnapp in his "Introduction to Purgatory" which says that the verse "Benedictus qui venis!" refers to the verse "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini"—chanted by the crowd when Christ arrives in Jerusalem to be crucified—which means "Blessed are you (a male) who come!", reveals that the advent of Beatrice

signifies the metamorphosis from feminine to masculine. The change of guidance from Virgil to Beatrice also represents Dante's creating a vernacular poetics based on Christian notions regarding a bond between the ancient and contemporary (Reynolds, 300).

Paradiso is the final province that the poet as a pilgrim accesses which stands as a climactic stage and in which there seem to be more didactic elements than the previous cantos of Inferno and Purgatory. Inferno is defined as the place in which evil and wicked souls are punished and in Purgatory a kind of refinement takes place. After passing through these places, the poet reaches Paradiso where souls identify with the one creator, God. To wit, Dante gets prepared to attain Empyrean and Vision of God gradually through the previous parts before *Paradiso* and through the sequential levels of Paradiso which means nine spheres. Experiencing an intrinsic metamorphosis the poet asserts himself going beyond mortality in a sense with the assistance of Beatrice who allegorizes Divine Love leading the soul to God.

Dante, as a pilgrim on his way to salvation accompanied by Beatrice who is in possession of a symbolic meaning in this poem, gains knowledge by means of metaphorical senses that are explained by Beatrice with these verses:

“ ...The stream, the jewels you see
leap in and out of it, the smiling blooms
are all prefigurations of their truth

The things are not imperfect in themselves;
the defect, rather, lies within your sight,
as yet not strong enough to reach such heights.”

(Aligheri, Paradiso 354)

Stating that the function of Beatrice as an allegory is going to be deeply analyzed later in this chapter it can be disclosed that Dante maintains the salvation and Vision of God by both the eternal mercy of God and his own ability since it is, in fact, himself who gives the guides voice.

2.2 THE FUNCTION OF BEATRICE AS AN ALLEGORICAL FIGURE

Before Dante experiences his metaphorical journey, namely before writing *The Divine Comedy*, he meets Beatrice who is a very beautiful lady and falls in love with her but has no response. This brief information about this woman character provides the thought that she is an earthly woman, eminent for that fact as well as being a divine figure in the poem. Dante reveals his amazement and devotion to her as a motivation to quest for knowledge through love.

By way of explanation, Beatrice is an allegory of virtue, blessedness and even divinity and even though she does not love her earthly derivation in Dante's mind, through both her beauty and wisdom he sets forth towards knowledge, power, salvation and in the end to God (Williams, 7).

Before her death Dante, in the real world, falls into desperation because of his thwarted love for Beatrice and he has a vision while experiencing this depression (Williams, 22). As with Hildegard of Bingen's visions that make her speak and write, an image of love comes into sight to Dante to motivate him writing about this love since it is not love which causes

Dante to be unhappy but is the attitude of the beloved. This explanation of the poet about his writing of *The Divine Comedy* evidences the assertion that it is his consideration of the masculine superiority of love, not the femininity of Beatrice, because the quality of love he maintains embodied in Beatrice is a divine glory of Dante. What Beatrice does is to inspire the heart and mind of the poet for the search for final truth (Williams, 23).

In addition to Beatrice some other women, poets, philosophers and further groups greet the reader as a background to the character Dante in the poem. This situation is confronted in some other poets like Virgil, too. For Virgil the exhibition of such figures which assist the aim of the artist to motion and transformation is actualized by means of a city, whereas, it is maintained throughout the agency of personification in *The Divine Comedy*. Beatrice stands for eternal virtues and divinity as Virgil signifies poetry, philosophy and reason. Likewise, many other features, both wicked and virtuous or both material and spiritual, are personified in *The Divine Comedy* (Williams, 69). Comparing with *The Canterbury Tales* allegory, one of the main subject matters of this study, is going to be evaluated regarding its all manner of references.

Along with the allegory theme there enters the term nobility into *The Divine Comedy* attributing the idea that the symbolical figures serve to reveal the poet's superiority. Examining Beatrice as a representative of women in the

poem whose purpose is to expose the nobility of Dante supports the assertion of this study which suggests that underneath the virtuous woman characters both authors, Chaucer and Dante, put forward male superiority. Beatrice carries a duty in the poem and fulfils it with an allegorical existence. In fact she seems to be breathed as summoning all the virtues allegorized in other bodies in the poem and at the end this woman evokes the perfection in Dante's nature by making him gain salvation and divinity. Taking the fact about the position of women in medieval era and literature of those times into consideration, Dante emerges as having a great "valour", nobility in other words; by virtue of centralizing a woman figure and making her speak as a guide. As a matter of fact, it is not Beatrice, as a woman, who is heightened here, but is the love of the poet and his gracious manners. Subsequently the impact of Beatrice on Dante can be claimed to stir the "valour" or "nobility" in Dante (Williams, 72).

From another point of view on Beatrice's leading the character Dante to blessedness, the reader encounters another allegorical aspect of her. In spite of being in Heaven, not every human receives the same level of grace from God. That is, the degree of blessedness depends on the soul's capability. Beatrice, who functions as the provider of Dante to gain bliss stands for the poet's own ability. Barbara Reynolds in her book "Dante: The Poet, The Political Thinker, The Man" speaks of Dante's statement about nobility with

these words: "It is a grace received by the individual soul direct from God. Virtue is derived from nobility, but the reverse is not true." Claiming nobility as the source of virtue Dante sets forth the power of his own nobility reflected in the blissful rhetoric of him through the allegory of Beatrice (Reynolds 408).

2.3. INTRODUCTION TO *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

Along with *The Divine Comedy*, *The Canterbury Tales* stands as a milestone of medieval literature because of how Chaucer reflects important themes and issues of the time. Similar to Dante, Chaucer makes use of the pilgrimage notion as a frame narrative to gather different stories of different social classes told in multiple generic kinds. Among them are romances, fabliaux, and saints' lives. Through these tales, the poet successfully makes people from both high and low classes with many different viewpoints come together. For this reason the Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* can be termed "a human comedy" in its qualities as a social document. Connections between the tales told by pilgrims are maintained by the arguments and comments that surround each tale.

The subject of some tales is based on the storyteller pilgrim aiming to make fun of another pilgrim's job. The protagonist of "The Friar's Tale" is a summoner, for instance, and the summoner makes a friar the main character of his tale. The same situation is confronted in "The Miller's Tale" in which a carpenter is humiliated and this tale annoys a steward who is an ex-carpenter and causes him to have fun with a miller in his tale.

Along with the idea about how the tales related to each other, the theme of the several tales is associated with the concept of women regarding her status in marriage and in the society. In the tales of Wife of Bath, the Merchant, The Clerk, and The Franklin the matter of woman can be examined to make a deep analysis.

Employing stereotypes instead of individual characters in some of the tales, like Dorigen as a virtuous woman in the Franklin's Tale, Chaucer applies to almost all genres of medieval literature. *The Canterbury Tales* includes romances which are based on courtly love stories, fabliaux that are comic versified stories experienced by the characters from the middle and low classes, legends, fables, and saints' lives. (Agil, 15)

To go beyond about the generic view of *The Canterbury Tales* a further explanation about some example tales can be presented in this step. "The Knight's Tale" conveys the characteristics of romance, a popular genre of fourteenth century literature, which include the tales of knights and their relationships with women and with some other knights. Chaucer deals with romances sometimes by a mocking approach like in "The Miller's Tale". When we come to fabliaux, in which the plot climaxes around the most ridiculous feature of the story, the tales of the Merchant,

the Shipman, the Friar and the Summoner can be presented as examples. Similar with the allegorical writing of Dante, Chaucer also represents some saint-like women by means of allegorical stereotypes such as Constance in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and St. Cecilia in “The Second Nun’s Tale”. (Agil, 10)

Subsequently, via these different genres of tales, representations of women of the medieval period hint at the superiority of masculinity over femininity much as do the allegorical woman figures in *The Divine Comedy*. Both wicked and virtuous woman stereotypes serve the patriarchal ideas of the poet.

2.4. GENDER DISCOURSE

Even though there can be diverging approaches to the terms masculinity and femininity it is certain that medieval doctrine possesses a characteristic gender perception which can be observed in the institutions of education, religion, economy, marriage, and law.

A closer examination dealing with the terms masculinity and femininity will be appropriate while studying the representations of women in *The Canterbury Tales* as a work of medieval literature. The “heroic male” stereotype is a literary discourse that highlights masculine power. In this type of discourse men are demanded to reveal their skills and power by means of encounters with other male companions to evidence their superiority.

“If that you liketh, take it for the beste:

That everich of you shall goon where him leste,

Freely, withouten raunson or daunger,

And this day fifty wikes, fer ne neer,

Everich of you shall bring an hundred knightes,

Armed for listes up at alle rightes,

All redy to darrein hir by battaile.
And this bihotel I you withouten faile,
Upon my trowth and as I am a knight,
That whether of you bothe that hath might-
This is to sayn, that whether he or thou
May with his hundred as I spak of now
Sleen his contrary, or out of listes drive-
Than shall I yive Emely to wive.”

(Chaucer, “The Knight’s Tale”, 66)

Among with the discourse of the “heroic male” which regards worldly eminence, a spiritual male discourse based on honour in the afterlife takes place in the discussion of masculine power. In contrast to heroic males, the men of spiritual discourse are required to obtain an intrinsic glory leading them to a heavenly recognition. The motivation of these two discourses seems different; however, the main objective is the same: to emphasize male power and make them gain superiority.

The position of women in medieval times was at a very low level because of the negative approach of the church presenting her as an inferior, evil and wicked creature. However, a conflicting attitude comes to scene

which seems to exalt the women: courtly love. According to this new literary notion, in contrast to the Church's anti-feminist literature, the beloved lady should be worshipped and served almost as God. Everything is acceptable when love is taken into consideration in the literary courtly love tradition. The love for a married woman or for a widow, for instance, can be substantiated as it is courteous. From a feministic point of view this chivalrous attitude, in fact, is claimed to have a masculine purpose of challenging superiority. That is to say, through this exaggerated version of love men acknowledge their power since characterizing women with extraordinary virtues make them get stuck in an absurd position (Williams, 105).

“This music raised my soul to heights of love’

Until that moment nothing had existed

That ever bound my soul in such sweet chains

But this, perhaps, may seem too rash a statement,

Forgetting, as it were, those lovely eyes,

The source of bliss in which my gaze finds rest,

But since those vivid crowning beauties grow

In strength the higher they ascend”

(Dante, *Paradiso* 172)

The courtly love discourse, in addition to the notions of the heroic and spiritual male, can be dealt with as a controversial term. Like the man in the heroic conception, the courtly lover seeks for glory in struggling against both physical and psychological obstacles, and like the male in Christian doctrine, the knight is required to exhibit obedience to his love. Although the women seem to be at the centre in the courtly love understanding, they just play their roles as being stimulus and being a medium for men to reveal their power and superiority. In other words women are objectified in the courtly love tradition, even though, on the surface, they are presented as if praised. From this perspective, courtly love discourse, serves the masculine doctrine which is apparently noticed in *The Canterbury Tales*.

“For par amour I loved hir firstare thou.

What wiltou sayn? Thou woost not yet now

Wheither she be a woman or goddesse:”

(Chaucer, “The Knight’s Tale”, 46)

Beyond this assertion about courtly love lies a similar reality which can be explained through the figure of Beatrice. The vision of this woman is presented by both earthly and divine images. That is, she is the same woman with whom Dante falls in love in Florence while alive and by means of whom Dante obtains salvation. With regard to the courtly love

idea, the poet describes the beauty of Beatrice and makes her speak with noble and virtuous words. What is striking at this point is the fact that she speaks what Dante wishes, she behaves as Dante wishes evidencing the statement of masculine power over the femininity in the name of courtly love.

“...The grace that lovingly
Speaks with your mind, parting your lips, till now
has let them speak the way they should, and I
approve of what I heard come from your mouth.
But now you must declare your creed to me,
And then tell me the source of your belief.”

(Dante, *Paradiso* 286)

This situation that can be seen in both works has a relationship with Pizan's idea of hypocrisy, but in the opposite direction. Dante, seeming to give a high degree to his woman and Chaucer, giving voice to woman characters and woman narrators intend to reveal the masculine demand from the feminine.

“The mind of man, in love, is bound to move,
More than toward any other, once it sees,

The truth on which this loving proof is based.”

(Dante, *Paradiso* 307)

Through the end of the medieval period the masculinist discourse is provided with another approach which boasts knowledge instead the bodily power, the superiority of spirituality and the notion of love. In this type of understanding, the intellectuality of men is put forward as a challenge. That is to say, the means of control and superiority is replaced by the virtue of knowledge. Women, in this sense, are lowered in status more and more since they are not allowed to have education in the medieval society (Laskaya, 15).

Beatrice has been said to have various functions in the *Comedy* while guiding the poet to reach salvation. The main meaning behind her allegorical body seems to be Love; love beginning as an earthly one that develops through a spiritual love which is like a way to God. As it is asserted in this study, Beatrice and many other symbolic figures in the poem underline the superiority of Poetics and mind of Dante. In the *The Figure of Beatrice*, the following statement hints at this reality: “She is the superior in the poem, but it is Dante’s poem and, Dante chooses that she should be.” Along the journey he takes from Inferno to Paradise and to divinity at the end, distinct motives role play a part in his purgation such as love and reason. The privileging of masculinity over femininity here can be observed when the words uttered by Beatrice are taken to consideration.

Her role, which in this sense is seen especially in *Paradise*, is to act as a mouthpiece of masculine authorities. There stand St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Paul, and so on as examples for this assertion. One of the main challenges Dante sets forth in *Paradise* is the versification of Christian doctrines. Beatrice's function in this stage as a representative of Dante's understanding is to reflect his "intellectual inebriation" with regard to these concepts (Reynolds, 389). To wit, speaking through Beatrice, Dante reveals his mind as purged and saved from wrong ideas while arguing the matter of creation with reference to the thoughts of those who are milestones in the Christian belief. As a result Dante, the character, is provided with a new force that is "a sense of rising above his usual power" (Reynolds, 390).

"No sooner had these brief, assuring words

Entered my ears than I was full aware

My senses now were raised beyond their power

The power of new sight lit up my eyes

So that no light, however bright it were,

Would be too brilliant for my eyes to bear"

(Dante, *Paradiso* 354)

The reader is presented by the poet with the superior point he grasps and the expansion of his mind going beyond the usual power of consciousness. By means of a balance, hinting at his power of control over narration, between deficiency and perfection, Dante, in fact, challenges with the idea that he does not lose (Reynolds, 399). In other words, despite he is exiled in his earthly life and has many negative reactions from the authorities Dante wants to evidence that it is not him who is wrong by means of using a perfect narrative which praise himself in front of both the God and the literary world.

At this point I admit to my defeat:

No poet, comic or tragic, ever was

More outdone by his theme than I am now;

....But now I must stop trying to pursue

Her beauty in my verse, for I have done

As much as any artist at his best.

(Dante, *Paradiso* 353)

Guided by the vision of his love, Beatrice, the poet claims that he grasps the final point in the spiritual sense. Beatrice, as an exponent of his power declares that they together have gone beyond “the light of intellect

expression and mind”, “the light full of love” and “love of the true good” (Reynolds, 400).

Taking all these discourses about masculinity into consideration it can be said all the institutions of medieval age function to set a patriarchal hierarchy and keep women far from the rights of speaking and acting. The chief motivation behind this understanding is the church, namely the Christian doctrine of those times. Just as it can be observed in *The Divine Comedy*, the assertion of masculine power is supported by the words of the religious men such as Thomas Aquinas in *The Canterbury Tales*. In *Chaucer’s Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales*, the following statements reveal the poet’s approach to this discussion.

The depiction of men in the Tales demonstrates that Chaucer knew quite well how men exerted their power and control over the world using physical strength, military might, money, rhetoric, law and religion, not to say the arts to effect their own aims. In so far as Chaucer raises the question of male rule, his text reinscribes the cultural discourse surrounding men.

(Brewer, 20)

2.5. POWER STRUCTURE OF GENDER

Both the canons of law and religion are a basis of masculine discourse which gives many rights to men over women. This fact means that male power has all the freedom to act. That is, medieval culture presents the men the power to rule and the women the obligation to obey. Imposing diverging terms of behaviour in all those discourses of masculinity, such as showing power over other men, over the souls and spiritual understandings of other people, and over knowledge, male superiority can be claimed to be at the centre of medieval culture. Additionally, as a common point of all those doctrines, women are represented either bodily or spiritually.

Along with the narration, a medium providing the masculine power over feminine, the change of guides in *The Divine Comedy* demonstrates the gender hierarchy. The journey, experienced by the character as well as the poet Dante through salvation, is maintained by means of distinct allegorical figures. At the beginning Virgil, sent by Beatrice to help the pilgrim, stands for the notion of reason and the poetic challenge. He is then replaced by Beatrice, of whom Dante's praise comes with the statement "she who imparadises (his) mind". What in her allegorical figure plays the role of taking the poet to salvation is the sense of love, the love that motivates him to write, to set forth through knowledge, to raise his mind.

That is, Beatrice functions as the voice of Dante's intellect based on his love since she becomes an image of creation glorified by love. In her book *Dante: The Poet, The Political, Thinker, The Man*, Barbara Reynolds states that "This is Beatrice of Dante's early love poetry, in whom he perceived the immanence of divine glory and who continues to inspire some of his most exalted lines in *The Commedia*." When they reach the *Paradiso*, the meaning of Beatrice's allegorical function shifts into a more honoured type. After standing for love, including both earthly and then divine understandings, she comes to represent Dante's intellect. As mentioned before about his comprehension of Christian doctrines such as St. Aquinas, Beatrice's appearance turns the occupation of the figure of Beatrice as standing for not only a love relationship but also for further relationships regarding spirituality and intellectuality. That is to say, in *Paradiso*, especially through the last verses, Beatrice is concerned with revealing the association of the human with another human and God as well. More than being a woman, she is an image of Dante's path, as the poem itself is about the way towards understanding what love is, what it depends on and in what it results. To sum up, Beatrice can be defined as Dante's knowledge inspired by love. Hence it is not her femininity heightened here but the poet's understanding and perception are emphasized as superior. The personification of God to direct the earthly man towards spiritual love gradually via physical love is substantiated via the allegorical figure of Beatrice.

However, the guidance of that woman ends and this role shifts to a man, or it should be explained with a more appropriate acclaim such as her function *is ended* and *is shifted* to a more esteemed soul whose appearance is considered as more dignified to reach the last point aimed in this poem since knowledge can be obtained by bliss and meditation. Behind this replacement of Beatrice by St. Bernard, two explanations can be put forward (Reynolds, 400).

Although Beatrice fulfils her duty of “Divine Revelation”, Dante, the character, still can not arise enough to see the God. St Bernard, as a representative of “mystical contemplation” enters the scene to complete the last step of the journey. In “Introduction to Paradiso” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, Rachel Jacoff interprets this fact with this statement: “Dante’s commitment to scholastic intellectuality, his insistence that intellection precedes love, is balanced by the presence of Bernard, one of the great poets of the affective tradition.” Therefore, one explanation of the situation that St. Bernard takes place as the final guide is that they have similar experiences to arrive at the vision of God through love.

Rapt in love’s Bliss, that contemplative soul

Generously assumed the role of guide

As he began to speak this holy words:

The wound which Mary was to close and heal
She there, who sits so lovely at her feet,
Would open wider then and prick the flesh.

(Dante, *Paradiso* 376)

Along with the similarity between these two men as a motive for Dante, the poet, in his choice of St. Bernard as the final guide, there enters the gender-hierarchy.

What I expected was not what I saw!
I thought to see Beatrice there but saw
An elder in the robes of Heaven's saints
His eyes, his cheeks, were filled with the divine
Joy of the blest, his attitude with love
That every tender-hearted father knows.
...The holy elder spoke:" That you may reach
Your journey's perfect consummation now,
I have been sent by sacred love and prayer.

(Dante, *Paradiso* 367)

The word “consummation” in these verses highlights the patriarchal power at a subconscious level. To support this assertion the reactions of the character Dante when his guide disappears can be put forward. When Virgil abandons him, Dante falls into a very pessimistic mood whereas he just experiences surprise when he is left by Beatrice. Furthermore when Virgil is replaced by Beatrice, Dante gives the angels the voice to welcome the lady by these Latin words “Benedictus qui venis (Blessed art thou who dost come)” in which the masculine ending (-us) represents her as of non-feminine gender (Reynolds, 311).

Chaucer’s position is relevant to this discussion since he engages with all parts of medieval society such as clergy, bourgeoisie, and middle class. This comment, noted in *Chaucer’s Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales*, is a connected assertion: “These overlapping venues of identity most likely created tensions as well as opportunities and would, therefore, contribute to Chaucer’s complex vision of gender, particularly masculinity.” (Laskaya, 145)

Along with the assertion of Christine de Pizan that it is their sex that plays a role as the determiner of women’s position, the medieval female body is a source of both praise and inferiority. Shulamith Shahar explains this fact “Chastity appears as the most important trait of all women, irrespective of their social class, vocation, or marital status.” As it is apparent in *The Canterbury Tales* as well, even though virginity is a virtue

for both men and women, the medieval doctrine stresses it as an essential inquiry for women more.

“But natheless yet have I lever to lese
My life than of my body to have a shame,
Or know myselfen false, or lese my name;
And with my deeth I may be quit, ywis.
Hath there not many a noble wife ere this,
And many a maid y-slain hirself, alas,
Rather than with hir body doon trespass?”

(Chaucer, “The Franklin’s Tale”,
303)

A parallel with Boccaccio’s approach to femininity can be observed in this sense. He claims women to be so low creatures, as is stated in the first chapter of this study, that to love them lowers men’s position too.

2.6. THE VIRTUES OF WOMANHOOD: OBEDIENCE, SILENCE AND VIRGINITY

Identical with the hypocrisy thesis of Pizan, femininity is such a major topic in literature because of the fear of women. The masculine doctrine represents women in works of art as examples of both good and bad. To wit, they determine what is good and what is bad to define virtue, and an emphasis on virginity, namely on sexuality, is given. What is striking in that point is the focus on women's bodies within this approach.

Alongside an overall review of the position of women in literary realm, shifting attention to marriage, a further analysis can be done. Parallel with their social statuses in the society, women have the same situation at home. They are ruled by fathers and then husbands; that is, patriarchal hegemony is experienced in medieval life. The dominance of masculinity over femininity within the familial relations is reflected in the works of medieval literature as well.

“A wife- a, Sainte Mary, benedicte!

How might a man han any adversitee

That hath a wife? Certes, I can not saye.

The blisse which that is bitwix hem twaye,

There may no tonge tell or herte thinke.

If he be poor, she helpeth him to swinke.

She keepeth his good and wasteth neveradeel.

All that hir husband lust hir liketh well.

She saith not ones “Nay” whan he saith “Ye.”

“Do this” saith he. “All redy, sir,” saith she.”

(Chaucer, “The Merchant’s
Tale”, 251)

What is more important than the obedience requirement from women is the obligation to be silent. Once more the influence of Christian doctrine which is accepted as the basis of the Church’s approach can be confronted while dealing with the notion of silence. A citation from the Biblical source makes this statement clearer: “Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak... I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” Because of this point of not speaking, some of the women characters in literary works are made to speak with words of male authority.

It is repeatedly religion that is applied to strengthen the oppression on women, stressing the ideas of virginity, obedience, and silence. Biblical stereotypes such as the Virgin Mary especially, along with other saintly women, are presented in the literary texts as models that contemporary women should imitate. The aspects of those virtuous women that are emphasized are their self-sacrificing, suffering, being mothers and bearers of prophets. That is to say, they are merely creatures whose role is determined not by themselves but by males just like the women characters in *The Canterbury Tales*_who are created by men or speak with the mouths of men (Laskaya, 149).

2.7. SPEAKING WOMEN- ON BEHALF OF WHOM?

The fact that the desire for power and the effort to gain superiority brings the idea of rivalry is obvious in some tales of *The Canterbury Tales* and even in the frame of this work. The reason for the narration of the tales is a competition to determine the best tale and the idea of this competition indicates the notion of superiority exposed in the heroic, spiritual, courtly love, and intellectual discourses.

When the ratio of women and men participants in the storytelling contest is taken into consideration, it shows that that writing and speaking are masculine rights, even if women can be employed in it. Moreover, the message of the tales told by women and the narrative being supported through the sayings of male authorities evidence the patriarchal dominance in *The Canterbury Tales*. A noticeable connection with the figure of Beatrice who functions to reveal the poet's male superiority is encountered in this study.

Furthermore, Chaucer's choice of a man (the Host) as the moderator of the competition in *The Canterbury Tales* discloses his attitude in the medieval gender discourse which places men in a controlling position. Even though the women seem to be engaged in the tales and in the storytelling, their narrative is interpreted by men under the control of,

again, a man. Consequently the tales in this book represent the perfection of men with regard to the gender hierarchy; that is, they are written from a man's point of view by means of ideas from male doctrine.

The female characters, whether the characters in the tales or the narrators in *The Canterbury Tales* are replaced in the structure through the thoughts of obedience and rebellion in accordance with the medieval approach to femininity. Parallel with the thesis in this study, the viewpoint on femininity in this book is that women are represented from the perspectives of men. That is, male narrators form the female characters, woman narrators and their representation of women are formed by a male poet with a masculine view. As evidence, the reactions to challenging women in the tales as well as to challenging female narrators are disapproving and condemning. The Sultanness and Donegild in "The Man of Law's Tale" can be given as examples. These women are such strong characters that they challenge their sons about the choices of spouses and intrigue for their purpose. While obedient women, on the other hand, are praised throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, these powerful women are criticized by presenting them as wicked characters causing trouble for other people. In other words strong women are not good examples in the tales. They are all representatives of evil natures on contrary to obedient and silent characters.

Since this study is substantiated from the point of feminist critique it is worthy to have a deeper look at the representations of women in the tales of men. It is noted in *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales* that "The more extreme the suffering and the more absolute the obedience, the better the woman." The fundamental feature of a virtuous woman is claimed to be obedience, which is the basis of masculine discourse offering the idea that women should be ruled by men or else they are wicked. Along with the obedience assumption, women are demanded to be silent as is apparent in the tales of the Clerk, the Physician and the Man of Law. The female characters in these tales Custance, Virginia and Griselda are the ones who avoid resisting their fates and even avoid speaking. Emphasizing the religious doctrine about Virgin Mary, these representatives are shown as virtuous because of their silence under all terrible circumstances and this approach comes from male's minds. These women are just acting as puppets.

On the other hand there is the character Prudence in the Tale of Melibee. She is different since she is speaking. What is relevant in her character to the masculine superiority is the source of her words. She seems to be an assertive woman but her strength is not based on her own ideas but the male authority her ideas are inspired by. She is carrying a duty to quote male authorities' words to her husband.

After focusing on the women representatives in some tales of male narrators, a shift to female narrators and their representation of women will help to analyze Chaucer's perception of femininity. As stated before in this study, an intense male influence on the female characters is encountered since they are represented within male narratives and moreover, these tales are written by a male author. When the turn comes to female narrators, only the poet's influence remains. This situation still evidences the thesis of this study that the women representations in *The Canterbury Tales*, just as in *The Divine Comedy*, promote the understanding of the writers of these works. That is to say, even though these women have the appearance of taking place in a work of art as given voices, they speak and act in accordance with the wish of their creators, namely the writers. Furthermore, virtue of St Cecile—the female character of a female narrator in “The Second Nun's Tale”—is emphasized through her dying for the sake of her virginity. Supporting the fact of male thought dominating Chaucer's representations, the description (or non-description) of the Second Nun, namely non-description, hints at this appropriation of female voice.

Along with the Second Nun, the Prioress is a representative who gives messages about the male doctrine's perception of women. The description of those women regarding mostly her worldly appearance hints at thoughts on virtuous and wicked features. Her name is also relevant. Madame Eglentyne is rather confronted in the romances of medieval

literature than as a Nun's name. Just like Dame Prudence in the tales of Melibee, told by the narrator Geoffrey, the positive woman image of St. Cecile and even the negative nunnery image of Madame Eglentyne, still carry out patriarchal notions since they are mouthpieces of the thoughts of male authorities.

Contrary to those women mentioned previously, the wife of Bath appears as a powerful and challenging character. She does not keep silence and obedience like other female characters. On the surface this situation seems to be providing a feminist approach, however the presentation of her as a ridiculous image of sexuality and greed and her showing off via wealth and carnality instead of other virtues such as knowledge, intellectuality, or nobility reveal the actual attitude of the poet in a humorous style. To wit, "the Wife of Bath is a man's depiction of a female's challenge to cultural gender prescriptions" (Laskaya, 178).

A further antifeminist comment on the Wife of Bath is the situation of her deafness. Very briefly it can be said that her deafness is a concrete result of speaking and resisting. To sum up Lee Patterson's statements on this issue will be to the point:

The tales tell us, first, that the husband who abandons *maistrye* will receive in return a wife who will fulfil his every wish ..., and second, that what women most desire is to be just this sort of obedient wife. The feminine desire that is anatomized throughout the Tale is here

revealed to be, in its authentic form, determined by a desire that is not only masculine but is beyond scrutiny. The Wife's 'queynte fantasye,' in short, is a masculine wish-fulfilment, and one in which she appears to be fully complicit. (Laskaya, 184).

However much the women in all generic categories of *The Canterbury Tales* have the chance to speak, the antifeminist approach that tends to "quiet" them is felt clearly. Concerned more with sexuality, the fabliaux has an insulting sense of humour, while the attitude in romances compels the women to sense the obligation of obedience. In addition, saint tales encourage repression under a disguise of spiritual rectitude.

To cover *The Canterbury Tales* in the light of the references to Eve's sin will be relevant to the "quieting" fact. The connection with that stereotype of wickedness is maintained by means of the Sultanness and Donegild characters whose purpose in the tale is to harm the virtuous and religious character Custance in the Man of Law's Tale. Jankyn's action of reading a "Bokke of Wikked Wyves" which begins with the story of Eve, attempts to make a remark on the topic in the tale of Wife of Bath. Emily in "The Knight's Tale" is presented as defeated by masculine power not through physical force but by being given no right to utter her own choice. The revenge of the two clerks on a Miller is substantiated through raping his wife and daughter in The Miller's Tale. In "The Merchant's Tale", the adultery in the garden of January and the consequent happenings recall Eve and Adam by

comparing marriages and the wife's deception to Eden where the original sin is supposed to have been committed.

Therefore a notable repression on women to make them silent or speak on behalf of masculine doctrine, whether foregrounded or in the background, as well as representation by focusing on her through the body, namely through sexuality, are overt in *The Canterbury Tales*. In all three categories of genres in which the tales are told; romances, fabliaux and saints' lives, some sort of declaration about the positions, the rights and the roles of women is given. In the lights of these ideas this discussion can be concluded with the fact that the representations of women in this work are in the accord with the dominant medieval antifeminist doctrine even though they seem to have a central place and manipulating roles.

2.8. TWO WOMEN STEREOTYPES EMINENT IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

The Virgin Mary, whose love is intervened by St. Bernard through the true love just as Dante's love for Beatrice, is a holy woman whose superiority is emphasized in the last cantos of the *Paradiso*. Parallel with this study's thesis about the dominance of masculinity over femininity which is shown through Dante's superiority being promoted through allegorical figures such as Beatrice, the Virgin Mary is presented as the medium of perfect love.

“Oh Virgin Mother, daughter of your son,

Most humble, most exalted of all creatures

Chosen of God in His eternal plan

You are the one who ennobled human nature

To the extent that He did not disdain,

Who was its Maker, to make Himself man.

Within your womb rekindled was the love

That gave the warmth that did allow this flower

To come to bloom within this timeless peace.

(Dante, *Paradiso* 390)

It is Christ who gives true life, namely the essential meaning to Mary as well as to Celestial Rose. That is, the Virgin Mary is the way leading to the Empyrean, the trinity, like it is expressed by St. Bernard as calling “Empyress”, “the roots of the rose” (Reynolds, 404).

The seed of the judgement of medieval women which presenting them as notorious and immoral is the situation of Eve. Disobedience is claimed to have come from her eating the banned apple and the epithet of “temptress” recalls her action in leading Adam to eat the apple. That is to say, the fall of Eve and Adam in the paradise, based on Eve’s moral weakness, is the origin of wreckage and evil.

Subsequently the extent of this understanding causes medieval women to be exposed to repression and even physical attacks in their domestic lives. As well as being silenced in the social environment, women are “quieted” in medieval literature. By means of the dominant generic conventions of those times, the positions of women are declared by presenting them according to the dominant conception of male-female power relations in the medieval period.

CONCLUSION

The representative of women in medieval antifeminist and misogynist doctrine is an agent of the Devil who deceives Adam and causes the Fall and who, as a result of this, has to be punished through repression, abuse and marginalisation in the society. The only way to escape from this situation is claimed to be keeping virginity.

On the other hand, in the courtly love tradition, women are represented as bodily objects. Their bodily features cause them both to be inferior about the sexuality and to be an inspiration for literary works. Both works that degrade and praise women determine her position, her role and her rights.

In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer seems to give women a voice and the right to compete to be the winner among the pilgrims. However, the extent of the women narrators has no equality with men. Actually, as it is studied deeply in this paper, both wicked and virtuous female characters in the tales told by either male or female narrators are represented in terms of the masculinist thought of medieval times, and by means of women stereotypes masculine demands are emphasized.

Beatrice, a positive woman image in *The Divine Comedy*, is denoted not by her own personality but allegorically by the virtues that Dante regards. That is to say, provided with virginity and divine features just like Mary, and

parallel with Chaucer's representations of women, Beatrice is called superior not because of her womanhood but because of the divinity that the poet gives her. She symbolizes the spiritual love that leads Dante to God.

As a concluding statement, it can be said that the obvious thing about the women of these two works is the fact that they have extreme, whether high or low, positions in literature which do not provide ordinary rights for their daily lives. The female stereotypes in these two literary works reflect the masculine comments and the masculine challenge to women's freedom.

One suggestion to overcome the status problem of women is the idea that God creates everything as couples and that means nothing apart from God is a whole on his own. Two parts make earth a whole and many living things have both female and male members. Moreover women and men are halves of a whole, which come together and form humanity. Both are equally necessary. The most important point is that it is God who determines the sex.

Adam and Eve were created subsequently together, they were placed in the paradise together, and at last they committed a sin again together. Intrinsic feelings such as sexual desire exist in both men and women. The fact that each sex has different characteristics causes them to be considered together since a whole occurs solely when its parts come together.

A woman is woman and likewise a man is man. An apple is not equal with a peach, but it does not mean apple is more superior than peach. That is superiority is relative. Whereas men have power about certain issues women possess abilities, too. Hence woman, as a human being is equal to man. They have the same roots in the sense of creation being created by the same God from the same substances. Just like women, men become sinful if they behave evil or gains the salvation if he is obedient to God. Therefore it is not only women go to hell or heaven.

Consequently it can be said that women should not be claimed to be difference in the senses of crime and punishment, success and failure. The concept of justice applies when situations in which women and men are considered to be not equal, are mentioned. The statement that two things are not equal does not mean one of them is superior. In the light of these ideas it is apparent that women and men are physically and psychologically different just as their duties are not same.

That is to say, in the relationship of men and women it is not superiority but job-division that should be taken into consideration. Instead of restricting women with extreme approaches such as medievalism did, making a judgement of sexes with a regard to their own characteristics and personalities is more logical. The most helpful solution for the problem of the claim that women are offensive is dealing with her as one half of the whole.

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