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(*Masculinity* in *Femininity* in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales:* the Rehabilitation of Chaucer's Emelye as a Heroine in the Light of Boccaccian and Chaucerian Androcentric Representations of Femininity)

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Masculinity in *Femininity* in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*: the Rehabilitation of Chaucer's Emelye as a Heroine in the Light of Boccaccian and Chaucerian Androcentric Representations of Femininity

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

The first point of interest of the present research is the question of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's representations of genders. This study relies on five major observations. Firstly, gender analysis has been one of the major concerns of various comparative studies on Boccaccio's and Chaucer's writings since the twentieth century. Secondly, Chaucer's and Boccaccio's works have been compared through various types of intertextualities. Notably, on the one hand, many scholars have based their studies on the types of transformations Chaucer brought to Boccaccio's *Teseida* when he drew on it to write his "Knight's Tale". On the other hand, researchers have also made comparisons between Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* in terms of gender issues. Thirdly, whereas Robin Kirkpatrick (1983) and other scholars have admitted that Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* were two works with similar narrative and thematic structures, they have not found any proof that the two works could be directly linked to each other. As Kirkpatrick himself points out, even the famous story of Griselda, which appears in the two collections, is not a story for which Chaucer drew on Boccaccio's writings. Such a story had become famous in the fourteenth century thanks to Petrarch's Latin text about it and Chaucer had had access to Petrarch's writings. Therefore, while scholars have evoked the possibility of comparing the *Decameron* with the *Canterbury Tales*, they have neglected an area of research grounded in the idea that Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective representations of gender could be explored and compared through these two collections. Fourthly, such scholars as Susan Crane (1994), Patricia Clare Ingham (1998) and Peter Godman (1983) have compared Chaucerian texts with the Boccaccian works on which Chaucer had (effectively or supposedly) drawn and their conclusions about Chaucer's and Boccaccio's representations of gender put forward important differences between the writings of the two authors. However, the problem with such scholars remains that they have analysed Chaucer's and Boccaccio's works with the intention to criticise the two medieval authors themselves in response to the latter's mere compliance with the decrees of Christian patriarchy about men's supremacy. Still, when reading

important and successful works such as Boccaccio's and Chaucer's, one should not forget that the feminism of our time did not exist in Chaucer and Boccaccio's century. In order to avoid anachronistic views, the members of a modern lay society should only cautiously judge the compliance of medieval male authors with patriarchy. Fifthly, modern scholars have often tended to boldly consider that Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" in particular conveyed the idea of a *gender war* epitomised by his characters *to the detriment of* the powerful heroines he had borrowed from the *Teseida* for the composition of his *tale*. Nevertheless, it remains problematic to conclude that Boccaccio's and Chaucer's Christian views on gender can be understood on the sole basis of modern feminist theories on the *Teseida* and the "Knight's Tale". In that tale, there is no textual evidence that Chaucer aimed at denigrating powerful women. Chaucer's text merely presents itself very logically as a short version of a longer text, whose contents could not be entirely reused in a collection of short stories. In fact, though this study is not about the *Teseida* itself, it actually aims at showing that brief comparisons between the heroines of the *Teseida* and those of the "Knight's Tale" do not provide us with unquestionable truths about how Chaucer and Boccaccio generally depicted masculinity and femininity. Therefore, on the basis of various reliable studies about gender roles in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, the present study proposes to move towards a comparison of *androgynous* female figures of the *Decameron* with Chaucer's Wife of Bath and Emelye as women kept in polemical interactions with masculine authority. Whereas Boccaccio's androcentric representations of women appear to be significantly different from Chaucer's, in our views, such a comparison permits to stress that Boccaccio's androcentrism is part of the norms of his time, but remains more critical of femininity than Chaucer's. This can be observed through a network of comparisons between different pieces from the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Decameron*, the *De Mulieribus Claris* and *The Legend of Good Women.* Actually, this study will be about distinguishing the features of a Boccaccian literary androcentrism from those of a Chaucerian one without considering the two authors of the fourteenth century as *misogynists* or as *feminists.* Notably, though Peter Godman (1983) accurately distinguishes the femininity of Boccaccian female characters from that of Chaucerian ones, his precious study conveys his own judgmental perceptions of two authors who lived at a time when every Christian author was expected to believe that Eve was the cause of the original sin.

Furthermore, beyond the obvious fact that we are not living in the highly traditionalist Christian medieval societies Boccaccio and Chaucer lived in, as Pamela Benson (1992), Jill Mann (2002) and other scholars have shown, Boccaccio, Chaucer and their contemporaries did not look at women as we are expected to look at them nowadays. In the light of the studies of such scholars, it seems obvious that women were not really expected to be men's equals in the fourteenth century. They were considered as beings that men were allowed to define in their writings. Therefore, this study aims at gradually putting aside the notions of *misogyny* and *feminism* in order to analyse Boccaccian and Chaucerian figures rather through the characteristics they have in medieval texts than through the psychological characteristics modern scholars tend to attribute to such figures. On the one hand, the present study will argue that there are between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* major differences similar to those that various scholars have made emerge between *The Legend of Good Women* and the *De Mulieribus Claris* in terms of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's representations of gender. On the other hand, this study will show that the apparently boldest heroines of the *Decameron* are more representative of the idea of a strict respect of men's authority than the female figures of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and the "Knight's Tale". In this way, above all, this study proposes to demonstrate that Chaucer's Emelye is a heroic female character, though various scholars of the twentieth century have neglected the importance of that figure of the "Knight's Tale".

Chapter I

Something like *Misogyny* and *Feminism* through Boccaccio's and Chaucer's Experiences?

The discussion proposed in this first chapter relies on different levels of intertextuality that scholars have established between Boccaccian and Chaucerian writings from the twentieth century to our time. Effectively, within that period, scholars have found different reasons to link such a collection as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to such Boccaccian works as the *Teseida* or the *Decameron*. Notably, what mostly caught the attention of too many scholars such as Susan Crane (1994) and Patricia Clare Ingham (1998) is the idea that genders were represented differently in Geoffrey Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" than they appeared to be in the *Teseida*, which Chaucer had used as a source of inspiration for the composition of that specific tale. Actually, Crane's and Ingham's studies on Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" are the starting point of the present study on Boccaccian and Chaucerian representations of masculinity and femininity. Effectively, Crane's and Ingham's complementary theses about the "Knight's Tale" create contrasts between the English short story and Giovanni Boccaccio's "poema in ottave" and suggest that there is a problematic *involvement* on Chaucer's part in terms of the writer's representations of genders. For Crane, Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" associates *womanhood* with "irrationality and timidity" (Crane 1994, p.20). For Ingham, through that same text, Chaucer has *deliberately* transformed Boccaccio's *Teseida* in such a way as to "[eliminate Boccaccio's] representations of [the Amazon] Hippolyta as a soldier like Theseus" (Ingham 1998,

p.29). Actually, whereas Crane and Ingham establish contrasts between presupposed Boccaccian and Chaucerian representations of genders through their interpretations of the *Teseida* and the "Knight's Tale", other studies help to nuance their perceptions of Chaucer's and Boccaccio's conceptions of genders. Peter Godman's 1983 study notably distinguishes Chaucer's descriptions of women in *The Legend of Good Women* from Boccaccio's in *De Mulieribus Claris*. According to him, *unlike* Chaucer's, Boccaccio's texts "[bear] the stamp of misogyny" (Godman 1983, p.274). Whereas the idea of distinguishing Chaucer from Boccaccio through their *degrees* of *misogyny* must in itself be called into question throughout the present study, Godman's approach brings forth relevant differences between the two medieval authors in terms of their descriptions of genders in two works, which can actually help to link the *Decameron* to the *Canterbury Tales*. As Godman shows, in his *Canterbury Tales* and in his *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer depicts female figures that Boccaccio also depicts in his own writings. Actually, thanks to such studies as Godman's, there can be comparisons between Chaucer's and Boccaccio's representations of genders through the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* itself, though the idea of comparing such works in such terms has not been explored very deeply until now. Whereas Robin Kirkpatrick (1983 b) has brought forth that there could be analogies between the narrative and thematic structures of the two collections, scholars have not tended to compare the representations of genders that those two works convey. In fact, in terms of the conceptions of genders they respectively convey, the *Decameron* resembles the *De Mulieribus Claris* and the *Canterbury Tales* resemble *The Legend of Good Women*. In order to understand how genders are represented in the *Canterbury Tales* and in the *Decameron*, it is necessary to understand how Chaucer and Boccaccio regularly represent women in

works which are exclusively dedicated to women. Therefore, comparisons between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* are to be made throughout the other chapters of this study, for these medieval collections of stories both contain problematic cases of female figures confronted with men and masculinity and likely to reveal typical traits of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective representations of genders.

I.1. Gender in Boccaccio's Works and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; Previous Scholarship

Academic research has revealed different sorts of direct or indirect points of contact between Boccaccian works and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. To cite but one example of an indirect point of contact between the two medieval authors, it can be noted that Robin Kirkpatrick (1983 a) has compared the narrative and thematic structures of Boccaccio's *Decameron* as a whole with those of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a collection. In fact, as Kirkpatrick himself points out, "[t]here is no clear evidence that Chaucer ever used the *Decameron* as a source of material" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.201).[1] Still, like Kirkpatrick, various scholars of the twentieth

[1] Kirkpatrick (1983 a) prudently concedes that "on examination [Chaucer's] work reveals itself to be consistently different in character from Boccaccio's" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.201). Still, he associates the *Decameron* with the *Canterbury Tales* by basing his analysis on the fact that both collections have similar narrative systems. Effectively, in the *Decameron* and in the *Canterbury Tales*, there is a group of storytellers who, as Kirkpatrick shows, are gathered to ensure the thematic and ideological cohesion of a collection of stories, which are contained in a frame story. In the famous *Decameron*, there is a *brigata* (a *group* or a *brigade*) of storytellers who run away from Florence and from the plague and go to the countryside. On the other hand, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, several Christian pilgrims tell short stories in turn. Actually, while presenting the structure of the frame story of the *Decameron*, Kirkpatrick points out that "the young people of the *brigata*, from their first appearance surrounded by the horrors of disease, display a vital instinct for orderly behaviour" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.206) and he notes that "[e]very aspect of their behaviour [as storytellers of the *Decameron* at their country house] is governed […] by conventions and ceremonies of their own devising, which maintain and enhance the social bond that the plague had threatened" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, pp.206–207). On the other hand, Kirkpatrick analyses the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* and he argues that through the idea of placing storytellers in the context of a pilgrimage Chaucer "expresses a precise understanding of how the schemes of nature, society and devotion govern the lives of individual beings" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.205). For Kirkpatrick, "in [the] pilgrimages [evoked in that General Prologue,] the social order is soon in evidence" (ibid). According to him, "within the framework of the

and twenty-first centuries have shown themselves unable to avoid pointing out analogies and differences between specific texts written by the two famous authors of the fourteenth century, even when more scholarly caution would have been required.

Actually, if Kirkpatrick's analysis is mainly based on apparent analogies between the structures of the Boccaccian collection of stories and those of the Chaucerian one, other scholars such as Susan Crane (1994) and Patricia Clare Ingham (1998) rather chose to analyse one specific *Canterbury Tale* directly in relation to its well-known Boccaccian source in order to point out formal and thematic differences between the *Canterbury Tale* in question and the source. Indeed, knowing that Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" is an abridged version of Boccaccio's epic poem *Il Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia*, Crane (1994) and her follower Ingham (1998) view Chaucer's transformation of the long Boccaccian poem as the result of a decision to affirm his own theoretical position about genders and to oppose Boccaccio's. In fact, before Ingham expressed her own position on the matter in 1998, Crane had notably claimed that Chaucer had transformed the female and male protagonists of the *Teseida* by "[choosing] traits specific to masculinity in [a] binary paradigm that exile[d] irrationality and timidity to an idea of the feminine" (Crane 1994, p.20). To demonstrate this, Crane has mainly analysed the characters of the Amazons Emelye and Hippolyta in the "Knight's Tale" and she has compared them with the female figures of Boccaccio's *Teseida* as well as with the Chaucerian character of Theseus from the "Knight's Tale".

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pilgrimage [undertaken by the fictional storytellers of Chaucer's collection], the tales sketch an arc of spiritual movement that runs from the secular virtue of the knight to the religious virtue of the Parson" (ibid). In short, in Kirkpatrick's approach the most obvious point of contact between the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* is the presence in their frame stories of a narrative system underlain by notions of *social* and *moral* rules.

Actually, such a point of view as Crane's remains questionable for various reasons. On the one hand, whereas her perspective assumes that Chaucer has had a clear intention to denigrate *femininity* and favour *masculinity* through the "Knight's Tale", it has to be noted that Chaucer is not particularly known for having despised femininity through his writings, though he was a medieval author. On the other hand, Crane's analysis suggests that Chaucer has selected a Boccaccian story in order to transform it into a tale in which women were rendered "timid" and "irrational", but Boccaccio's writings have not generally been considered excessively more tolerant towards influent female characters than Chaucer's. Furthermore, as opposed to Crane's and Ingham's views, points of contact and intersections between Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works are varied and other perspectives can lead to very different conclusions. It is not merely through the "Knight's Tale" that Chaucer's representations of genders can be discussed in the light of Boccaccio's. Notably, as various scholars have shown, both Chaucer and Boccaccio have composed works which put forward the features they respectively, recurrently and specifically attribute to *Womanhood*. Scholarly research on such works can actually help to add nuances to Crane's theses about the perception of genders she attributes to the author of the *Canterbury Tales* in the light of Boccaccian writings. Indeed, Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* are the major works through which scholars have put forward the most explicit and typical Chaucerian and Boccaccian literary choices about the attribution of characteristics to women and men.

Notably, before Crane's and Ingham's studies were published, Peter Godman (1983) had accurately compared Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* with Chaucer's *Legend* of *Good Women* and had come to radically different conclusions about

Boccaccio's and Chaucer's representations of *masculinity* and *femininity.* For him, as opposed to the author of *The Legend of Good Women* and of the *Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio has written texts that "[bear] the stamp of misogyny" (Godman 1983, p.274). Actually, the Chaucerian and Boccaccian mentalities Godman reconstitutes through his reading of *The Legend of Good Women* do not resemble the Chaucerian and Boccaccian mentalities that Crane and Ingham reconstitute through their interpretations of the "Knight's Tale", as long as one admits that Chaucer and Boccaccio had persistent ways of defining genders from one work to another. It is an indisputable fact that Chaucer used the *Teseida* as a source, but claiming that he wished to modify his pre-text in order to convey a different view of the reciprocal position of the feminine and the masculine remains an unreliable assumption. In particular, we are convinced that the confrontation between Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works especially dedicated to the descriptions of *famous women* can allow to verify Crane and Ingham's postulate. For instance, an analysis of both the "Manciple's Tale" and *The Legend of Good Women* was published in 2002. If associated with Godman's, Mann's research can demonstrate that Chaucer's representations of women in *The Legend of Good Women* and in the *Canterbury Tales* themselves are more flexible than Crane's and Ingham's.

Logically, if gender has to be analysed in Boccaccian and Chaucerian texts in relation to Chaucer's and Boccaccio's *personal representations* of men and women, it is necessary to verify if there is rational consistency in different Chaucerian and Boccaccian works in which significant recurrences may reflect characteristic representations of genders from one work to another. Indeed, unlike Boccaccio and Chaucer, Crane, Ingham and Godman had been exposed to feminist ideas when they wrote their texts in the late twentieth century. Their perceptions were not

influenced by Boccaccio's and Chaucer's traditionalist Christian cultures. Therefore, in order to try to avoid modern prejudices against medieval authors while comparing Chaucer's writings with Boccaccio's, the present study must progressively involve distinctions between the preoccupations of modern researchers about gender and those of such male Christian medieval authors as Boccaccio and Chaucer.

In other words, it is one specific fact to recognise that Chaucer drew on the *Teseida* to write the "Knight's Tale", it is a second one to apply gender analysis to two stories on the basis of the first fact and it remains a third and distinct one to compare two medieval writers in terms of their respective *perceptions* of genders through their writings. That is why these three levels of intertextuality between Boccaccio and Chaucer will be taken into account separately in the present study, which mainly aims at forming a network of comparisons between *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Legend of Good Women,* the *Decameron* and the *De Mulieribus Claris*. Through the exploration of these four different works, Boccaccio's and Chaucer's rational consistencies about genders can be detected and compared beyond the mere frameworks of Chaucer's direct borrowings from Boccaccio's works.

I.2. The Disgrace of Chaucer's Emelye as an Inflexible Commonplace for Modern Scholars

As mentioned hereabove, the first and most direct[2] point of contact between Boccaccio's writings and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* lies in the fact that the

[2] Of course, the presence of the figure of Griselda in Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works could somehow mislead readers into hoping for a direct connection between the writings of the two authors. Nevertheless, though Griselda appears in the *Decameron* (X, 10) and the *Canterbury Tales* ("Clerk's Tale"), J. A. W. Bennett (1983) and Robin Kirkpatrick (1983 b) point out that Chaucer's source for the story of Griselda has not been Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Petrarch having written a version of the story of Griselda in Latin, Bennett, who has paid particular attention to the "Prologue to the Clerk's Tale", notes that the "Oxford man [Chaucer's Clerk] who (significantly) names Petrarch as a worthy 'clerk', claims to have learned his tale of Griselda at Padua" (Bennett 1983, p.91). As Bennett shows, it is not Boccaccio's, but Petrarch's name that appears in the introduction to the "Clerk's Tale" to orient the reader towards Chaucer's source. Furthermore, while comparing different stories of Griselda whose

"Knight's Tale" is an abridged version of Boccaccio's *Teseida*.[3] It is also a well-known fact that the Boccaccian figures of Teseo, Palemone, Arcita, Ipolita and Emilia helped Chaucer to create his own Theseus, Palamon, Arcite, Hippolyta and Emelye. Scholars have actually frequently associated that first point of contact with a second one, which relies on the problematic question of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective conceptions of gender roles in the *Teseida* and in *The* "Knight's Tale".

Effectively, throughout the twentieth century, women's rights defenders have not favourably perceived Chaucer's transformation of such Boccaccian female characters as the Amazons Ipolita and Emilia. Notably, Stuart Robertson (1915) merely perceived Chaucer's Emelye as "a pathetic figure" (Robertson 1915, p.241) and stressed that "no one [in the "Knight's Tale"] thinks of consulting her wishes as to the man she would prefer as a husband" (Robertson 1915, p.241). In an antimisogynistic gesture, Robertson moreover wrote that Emelye's presence in the tournament scene of the tale reflected "the mediaeval view of woman to put her on a pedestal in public and, at the same time, absolutely disregard her individuality" (Robertson 1915, p.241). Piero Boitani (1983 b), who equally compared Chaucer's Emelye with Boccaccio's Emilia, had a perception of Chaucer's heroine that was even harsher and more reductive than Robertson's. For Boitani, in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale", Emilia "loses all individual depth and becomes a pretext, a romance

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publications preceded that of Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale", Kirkpatrick (1983 b) notes that "[i]t "is unlikely that Chaucer was acquainted with Boccaccio's version" (Kirkpatrick 1983 b, p.231) and he adds that "it is clear from the Prologue to the *Clerk's Tale* [that Chaucer] regarded Petrarch as his primary source" (ibid). Though Griselda is a point of contact between Boccaccio and Chaucer, she seems to remain an extremely indirect one.

[3] Scholars have clearly identified Boccaccio's *Teseida* as the main source of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale". David Wallace (2003) notably places the *Teseida* among the "Boccaccian texts which [Chaucer] may have brought back from [a stay at] Florence in 1373 or acquired a few years later" (Wallace 2003, p.43). In the late twentieth century, Wallace (1983) had already put forward that Boccaccio had spent a period of his life at the Neapolitan court and that the *Teseida* "date[d] from Boccaccio's years at Naples" (Wallace 1983, p.145). Wallace had moreover referred to that Boccaccian epic poem as one of "the Italian works that Chaucer [had] made most use of" (ibid). It is a well-known fact that Boccaccio's texts were major models for Chaucer.

device, the 'fair unknown'" (Boitani 1983 b, p.195).[4] Unwilling to analyse further the characteristics of Chaucer's Emelye, neither Robertson nor Boitani viewed her as something else than an inconsistent version of a Boccaccian female figure.

Those scholars did not even pay attention to the fact that Emelye has a singular voice in the "Knight's Tale" and is the only indispensable figure of love in Chaucer's text. When obliged to marry a man, she wishes to have "hym that moost desireth [her]" ("Knight's Tale", l.2325). She desires to choose her fate. Above all, unlike Arcite and Palamon, she is the element of the love triangle of the tale whose role and survival as a lover are not threatened. On the one hand, unhorsed by Pluto's "furie infernal" (l.2684), Arcite is mortally wounded and dies before he can become her husband. On the other hand, Palamon does not marry Emelye because he has won the right to do so at the close of the tournament, but because the gods have decided to kill Arcite, the true winner of the joust. In the "Knight's Tale" no one's actions determine his or her own fate. This fact does not depend on the genders of Chaucer's characters.

Still, far from contesting the points of view of their male predecessors on Chaucer's Emelye, Susan Crane's and Patricia Clare Ingham's feminist approaches are largely more detailed than Robertson's and Boitani's brief observations about femininity in the "Knight's Tale". In fact, the two scholars of the 1990s do not find more substance in Chaucer's Hippolyta as a heroine than in his Emelye. For Crane (1994), Boccaccio's Emilia is "more aware and resourceful" (Crane 1994, p.81) and,

[4] Nine years after the publication of Boitani's text, Elaine Turtle Hansen (1992) provided a list of scholars who had equally expressed reductive opinions about Chaucer's Emelye. She first noted that "[J. R. Hulbert had said that] we [had] in Emelye 'a heroine who is merely a name'" (Turtle Hansen 1992, p.216). She also remarked that "[Jerome] Mandel [had] point[ed] out that 'For all courtly intents and purposes of love, Emelye [did] not exist in [Chaucer's] tale.'" (ibid). She added that "Charles Muscatine [had] view[ed] Emelye as 'merely a symbol of the noble man's desires' [whereas] E. Talbot Donaldson [had] stresse[d] that '[Emelye] ha[d] no character,' and Donald Howard [had] note[d] that 'the lady herself [was] a distant and unreal figure'" (ibid). Manifestly, medievalists have traditionally considered Chaucer's Emelye as an uninteresting, ornamental female element of the "Knight's Tale".

by comparison, the scholar considers Chaucer's Emelye as the image of a "beauty […] so consonant with passivity that her status as Palamon and Arcite's beloved diametrically reverses her status as Amazon" (Crane 1994, p.81).[5] As for Ingham (1998), interested like Crane in Chaucer's representations of gender roles in the "Knight's Tale", she remarks, on the one hand, that "Boccaccio's *Teseide* […] could have supplied images of valiant, brave, and impressive fighting women" (Ingham 1998, p.29). On the other hand, she notes that "Chaucer decided to begin his story after Theseus's battles with the Amazons are over" (ibid). Therefore, Ingham claims that the author of the "Knight's Tale" had planned an "elimination of [Boccaccio's]

[5] One of the first questions Crane asks in *Gender and Romance in the Canterbury Tales* is that of "[h]ow rigid […] the binary contrasting masculine to feminine [is in French and English medieval romances]" (Crane 1994, p.4). Actually, Crane establishes accurate links between the "Knight's Tale", four other *Canterbury Tales* and medieval romances as a genre. On the one hand, she is interested in the idea that romances are "the medieval genre in which courtship, marriage, lineal concerns, primogeniture, and sexual maturation are most fully at issue" (ibid). On the other hand, she mentions that her research focuses on the problem of "[w]hat differentiates men's values and comportment from women's" (ibid) in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the light of various medieval romances. Crane's argumentation about gender in the specific case of the "Knight's Tale" includes a particular example through which she shows that a significant distinction between masculinity and femininity appears very early in that tale. In the first of the four parts of the "Knight's Tale", as all readers of Chaucer know, the Duke Theseus appears and he is on his way back to Athens. Beside him are his captives the two sisters Hippolyta and Emelye. Hippolyta is the queen of the Amazons and Theseus has recently won a war against her and married her. On the basis of the descriptions of Hippolyta and Theseus provided by Chaucer in that part of the tale, Crane actually argues, on the one hand, that "[i]n the *Knight's Tale* the two qualities assigned to Hippolyta, that she is 'faire' and 'hardy' (l.882), refer as briefly as possible to the contradictory feminine attractiveness native to her and the masculine courage she adopts [as a female warrior]" (Crane 1994, p.19). On the other hand, she claims that "[Chaucer's] notation that Theseus conquered Scythia [Hippolyta's kingdom] 'with his wysdom and his chivalrie' (l.865) chooses traits specific to masculinity in the binary paradigm that exiles irrationality and timidity to an idea of the feminine"(Crane 1994, pp.19–20). Actually, it is only Crane who finds those asymmetrical oppositions between *masculine* "wysdom and chivalrie" and *feminine* "irrationality and timidity" in Chaucer's tale. Chaucer does not use such terms to describe Hippolyta. Still, Crane concludes that "[a]lthough brief, the *Knight's Tale's* first episode invokes a familiar instance of defining gender by differentiation" (Crane 1994, p.20). By bringing forth the idea that the "Knight's Tale" is a story in which Chaucer evokes the *masculinity* of the Amazons "as briefly as possible", Crane clearly puts forward the notion of *gender binarity*, which is a major point of her argumentation and serves to support her thesis that women's heroism is diminished in favour of Theseus's in Chaucer's tale. In fact, her theory of a form of *discrimination* against the female characters of the "Knight's Tale" is also adopted by Ingham (1998), who notably remarks that "[w]hen Chaucer's text begins by contrasting Theseus's conquering power with his new wife's victimisation, it offers, as Susan Crane has put it, 'a familiar instance of defining gender by differentiation'" (Ingham 1998, p.29). Ingham even notes that "by the time we hear the Amazon queen's name, Theseus has already "weddede" her, figuring her position in a way that emphasises both Hypolita's subjection to Theseus's rule, and Theseus's gendered difference from her" (ibid). That is why Ingham adds that "[we] are not encouraged to dwell long upon Theseus's similarities (as warrior, as ruler) with 'his' Amazonian Queen" (ibid).

representations of Hippolyta [Emelye's sister] as a soldier like Theseus" (Ingham 1998, p.29), who, as the scholar points out, is presented by Chaucer as the "Conqueror of "a regne of femenye"" (ibid). Furthermore, determined to attribute discriminatory intentions to Chaucer, Ingham claims that "he [was] not as interested in comparisons between Theseus and his Amazonian adversaries as he [was] in their contrasts" (ibid). Clearly, like Crane, Ingham views the "Knight's Tale" as a story in which the combativity of female warriors is deliberately devalued, *unlike* in Boccaccio's *Teseida*.

Actually, for Ingham, men's authority seems to be *overrepresented* in the "Knight's Tale". Effectively, for her, Chaucer's Theseus "stands as the male husband whose rule domesticates [such] aggressive soldiers [as Emelye and Hippolyta] into respectable Athenean wives" (Ingham 1998, p.29). Moreover, through her reading of the "Knight's Tale", she suggests that gender *discrimination* does not only seem to be displayed through the social roles and physical abilities attributed to Chaucer's characters, but also through the *expression* of their *emotions*. Ingham notably argues that "Theseus's moderate mourning, in contrast to Emelye's woeful shrieks, comes to seem both productive and masculine [after Arcite's death]" (Ingham 1998, p.33). Theseus, according to her, "comforts [the grieving Emelye] […] [and] plays the compassionate, resilient, and wiser paterfamilias" (Ingham 1998, p.33). Definitely, like Crane, Ingham suggests that Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" is particularly *phallocentric* and that Chaucer himself had reasons to consider that his Boccaccian source was *excessively* supportive of powerful female characters.

Crane's and Ingham's arguments could obviously seem unassailable to anyone who would be willing to admit that the sole "Knight's Tale" plausibly represents Chaucer's personal conception of gender, that Boccaccio's writings were more likely

to praise combative female figures than Chaucer's and that Chaucer was an author of the fourteenth century who radically aimed at discriminating against women in the *Canterbury Tales.* Still, Crane's and Ingham's feminist views may be considered too modern to reveal Chaucer's and Boccaccio's conceptions of masculine authority because Crane and Ingham perceive womanhood outside the field of the Christian faith of traditionalist societies. In Chaucer's and Boccaccio's conceptions of the world, it remains clear that the Christian faith in itself favours men over women. According to the Book of Genesis, "the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (*King James Version*, Hendrickson Publishers 2011, Gen. 2.22). The idea that man is by definition the measure of the world is consubstantial with the faith of Christian traditionalist societies. In medieval societies, it was moreover clear that Eve was responsible for the fall of man because the Scripture said that "the woman saw the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes" (*King James Version*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2011, Gen. 3.6). She was the one whom the serpent had tricked. In any case, in the Middle Ages, the status of a woman was systematically considered more problematic than that of a man. Therefore, rather than believing that the interest of such medieval authors as Boccaccio and Chaucer lay in the idea of ensuring *discrimination*, it would be more plausible to ask the question of the extent to which each of them sincerely detached himself from Christian ideas he would not have contested in his century.

I.3. The Problematic Question of Chaucer's Androcentric *Intentions* in the Twentieth and in the Fourteenth Centuries

Actually, the boldness of some aspects of Crane's and Ingham's feminist theories can be pointed out in this study by confronting those theories with other

modern theories, as well as with medieval literary perceptions of gender and social power. Before Ingham adopted a similar approach in 1998, Crane (1994) had argued, on the one hand, that "[i]n the *Knight's Tale* the two qualities assigned to Hippolyta, that she is 'faire' and 'hardy' (l 882), refer[red] as briefly as possible to the contradictory feminine attractiveness native to her and the masculine courage she adopts [as a female warrior]" (Crane 1994, p.19). On the other hand, she had claimed that Chaucer's "notation that Theseus conquered [Hippolyta's kingdom] "with his wysdom and his chivalrie" (l.865) [chose] traits specific to masculinity in [a] binary paradigm that exiles irrationality and timidity to an idea of the feminine" (Crane 1994, pp.19–20). She had thereby suggested that military achievements were the values through which Chaucer had magnified Theseus as a man and despised women's roles in the "Knight's Tale". Actually, nothing is less sure than this last point. They were probably not considered as a threat in this domain. In Chaucer's androcentric time, women were not likely to have usurped men's military power. Even the conceptions of power were purely androcentric by definition.

As Stephen H. Rigby (2009) has shown, in the Middle Ages, the value of such a male sovereign as Chaucer's Theseus would not merely be measured through a display of military power as a means to *dominate* women. Rigby puts forward that "interpretations of the actions and philosophy of Duke Theseus in the "Knight's Tale" have paid increasing attention to the political theory of Chaucer's own day" (Rigby 2009, p.13). He mentions that this *theory* "was set out in contemporary "mirrors for princes" (*Fürstenspiegel* or *Speculum Principum*)" (ibid) and points out that those medieval treatises "offered guidance on the qualities expected of a virtuous ruler and contrasted them with the vices of which tyrants were guilty" (ibid). In this perspective, Rigby brings forth that Theseus can be "judged–by medieval standards if not ours—

to be a noble, wise, chivalric and heroic figure" (Rigby 2009, p.4). Clearly, where Crane and Ingham see *male chauvinism* and the disparagement of *female combativity*, in Chaucer's time, English readers may merely have focused on Theseus's characteristics as a sovereign, without asking themselves to which extent a ruler may have been something else than a male (and heterosexual) being. It is a well-known fact that the general conception of political and military power was consubstantial with masculinity in Chaucer's time. Therefore, Rigby's remarks about Theseus as a ruler may help to put forward that it was not specifically the gender of the sovereign (which was simply unquestioned in the fourteenth century), but the nature of his governance that was at stake at the time. Rigby notably refers to "Giles of Rome's *De Regimine Principum*, which was originally composed *c*. 1280 for the future King Philip IV of France (1285–1314)" (Rigby 2009, p.13). He notes that this work "was one of the best-known and most widely-quoted political treatises of the later middle ages" (ibid). The success of such texts at the time shows that proposing models for sovereigns to imitate was a big issue. It is in this context that Rigby places the fact that Chaucer's Theseus "attempts to resolve [Arcite and Palamon's] conflict by arranging a tournament" (Rigby 2009, p.4). He also puts forward Theseus's compliance with his role as a sovereign by mentioning the episode in which the latter "is called upon to come to the aid of the Argive widows who have suffered at the hands of Creon" (Rigby 2009, p.4). Thus, Chaucer's Theseus does not appear to be a sovereign who specifically controls women's fates. He controls women's and men's fates, since he is the one who tries to end Palamon and Arcite's quarrel. Men and women are under his guidance because they all have to obey social rules.

Furthermore, it seems that the values underlying Chaucer's representation of manliness within the frameworks of the "Knight's Tale" rather associates masculinity

with humility than with male chauvinism and boastfulness. In the General Prologue, even Chaucer's Knight is presented as a "wys [and] obedient" (Gen. Prologue, l.851) man, who religiously prepares to tell his story "a Goddes name" (l.854). He is depicted as the humble member of a feudal society and not as a *dominant man* who tends to *despise* women and to present *dominant male characters*. In such conditions, if women are not specifically mentioned, the readers of the most explicitly metaliterary part of the *Canterbury Tales* may as well conclude that a representation of *femininity* is not questioned through Chaucer's male characters at all. Like Theseus's, the Knight's *masculinity* may not necessarily reflect Chaucer's *opposition to female power*, but Christian feudal rules to which pious men were not less subject than pious women.

Still, both Crane and Ingham place the characters of the "Knight's Tale" in a modern feminist paradigm to which those figures do not belong. Beyond the fact that Ingham visibly agrees with Crane's thesis that Chaucer had created his Theseus by "[choosing] traits specific to masculinity in [a] binary paradigm that exiles irrationality and timidity to an idea of the feminine" (Crane 1994, pp.19–20), Ingham has her own approach to Chaucer's presentation of genders in the "Knight's Tale". She views Chaucer's Theseus as a "compassionate, resilient, and wiser paterfamilias" (Ingham 1998, p.33) and uses a significant verb when she ironically notes that Theseus "plays" (Ingham 1998, p.33) such a role. Furthermore, for her, after Arcite's death, "Emelye's […] mourning is [uncontrollable and] useful to Theseus's masculinity because [as a compassionate warrior] he can […] merge gender difference with gender similarity" (Ingham 1998, p.33) by "[being] marked as both sensitive and

manly" (Ingham 1998, p.33).[6] However, when placed in the medieval, feudal context that Rigby evokes, the masculine ruler of the "Knight's Tale" does not seem to have to prove that he is a man. He merely may have to prove that he is a righteous ruler.

If, as Rigby notes, "mirrors for princes" indicated the "qualities expected of a virtuous ruler and contrasted them with the vices of which tyrants were guilty" (Rigby 2009, p.13) and if, as he suggests, Theseus's character can be analysed in the light of such medieval treatises dedicated to men, Theseus's magnanimity and quietness do not necessarily aim at making us question the *nature* of his *masculinity*. Therefore, whereas Ingham views Chaucer's Theseus as a "paterfamilias" who "plays" his part, it has to be noted that the "sensitiveness" she detects in that figure may not be viewed as a *feminine aspect* of that figure. It may rather be perceived as a proof of his magnanimity as a sovereign who does not rule over women, but over humans who were likely to hate their congeners. As Rigby notes, Theseus "attempts to resolve [Arcite and Palamon's] conflict by arranging a tournament" (Rigby 2009, p.4) and his "arrangement of the marriage alliance between Thebes and Athens, along with the philosophical rationale which he provides for it, [can be seen] as evidence that Chaucer's duke is the embodiment of the prudence and virtue expected of a medieval ruler" (Rigby 2009, p.4). In this perspective, Theseus is neither a particularly *feminine* figure nor an *excessively patriarchal* one, as long as

[6] According to Ingham, Theseus is "neither overrun by the lethal excesses to which mourning women like Emelye are subject, nor coldly immune to their pleas" (Ingham 1998, p.33). Actually, for Ingham, Emelye is not the only interesting *weeping* lady of the "Knight's Tale". The scholar also analyses the scene in which Theseus meets and rescues the "sorrowing Argive widows at the beginning of Book I" (ibid). In Chaucer's tale, Theseus learns that the husbands of a group of Argive women have been murdered by the tyrant Creon, who does not want to let these women bury the corpses of their spouses. Theseus accepts to help these widows and to defeat Creon because the women beg him to do so. Therefore Ingham states that "Theseus […] requires a compassion borrowed from a woman's heart to sustain his difference from the tyrant Creon" (ibid). Whereas Theseus and Creon are effectively two different types of rulers, it is a bit more delicate to support the idea that Theseus's quietness indicates a difference between the male and the female characters of the "Knight's Tale". Indeed, unlike Emelye and the Argive widows, Theseus has not lost his spouse or his freedom. It is not because he is a man that he does not need to weep. It is because he is not a victim.

one admits that magnanimity was expected from a medieval male sovereign and that patriarchy was the norm in Chaucer's time. In short, Crane and Ingham's idea to consider Chaucer as an author who aimed at depicting a *dominant male* probably exceeds Chaucer's medieval perceptions.

In fact, if Crane and Ingham are concerned by the androcentric aspects of the "Knight's Tale" and seem to consider Chaucer as a writer who insistently and intentionally *conceals* the potential of female warriors *for the sake of* a male sovereign, it is certainly because the two scholars view Chaucer through a specific feminist theoretical background.[7] In fact, one of Crane's major references is the feminist Judith Butler and according to Crane, "Butler argues against treating sex difference as the verifiable basis for gender, noting that humans experience their bodies through the conceptual processes that have elaborated ideas of gender" (Crane 1994, p.5). Clearly, this definition of gender through its association with "elaborated ideas" underlain by "conceptual processes" conveys a sense of artificiality and of creativity. Indeed, if the notions of genders are not immutable, it suggests that the person who embraces a concept of gender has chances to question its legitimacy. Still, if Chaucer effectively relied on the masculine models given by "mirrors for princes", it suggests that he might have adhered to such models without questioning their legitimacy through gender analysis. In this case, it can be claimed that the affirmation of Theseus's masculinity in the "Knight's Tale" does not specifically depend on the image of his female royal captives, but on a mere ability to position himself as a male sovereign in accordance with Chaucer's English cultural

[7] Inspired by the theories of the feminist Judith Butler, Crane notes that "[a] way of conceiving gender is to contrast it to sex [and that in] that contrast, gender is the exterior, social interpretation of sexual practices specific to a particular culture" (Crane 1998, p.4). In this way, she puts forward that there are modern definitions of *gender* according to which *gender* is socially fabricated and she uses the term *interpretation* to suggest that perceptions of *gender* are mutable. Still, such theories did not emerge in the fourteenth century, but in the twentieth century.

medieval paradigm, where rulers were necessarily male. In Chaucer's time, England had not had any queen regnant. Why would Chaucer have elaborated the images of the queen of the Amazons and of her sister when the latter did not represent concrete examples for English rulers? To compose the "Knight's Tale", as an English medieval writer, it seems logical that he merely may have spontaneously aligned his narrative with the mostly androcentric perceptions of monarchy that England had at the time.

Yet Crane does not embrace the mere idea that Chaucer could have presented in the "Knight's Tale" a Theseus whose features corresponds to the mere standards of the English monarchy of his century. Actually, by approaching the *Canterbury Tales* through the scope of the medieval romance genre, she quickly manifests the radical ambition to reconstitute Chaucer's literary intentions in terms of his own views on gender roles as they appear in the "Knight's Tale", the "Wife of Bath's Tale", the "Squire's Tale", the "Franklin's Tale", the "Tale of Sir Thopas".[8] In fact, while assimilating the "Knight's Tale" and four other *Canterbury Tales* to the romance genre, she suggests that medieval romances "place themselves in their time […] through their participation in forming, playing out, and disputing interrelated beliefs that have meaning for their authors and audiences" (Crane 1994, p.6). Actually, for her, like romances and the four other *Canterbury Tales* she analyses, the "Knight's Tale" is likely to display Chaucer's own "beliefs" about gender. Indeed, when arguing that "[the] romance genre is a particular vehicle among many for the expression, perpetuation, and critique of gender in the culture as a whole" (Crane 1994, p.6), she

[8] Crane claims that "[s]o rich are the implications of gender for romance that [her] discussion only begins to indicate the questions gender can illuminate in the five *Canterbury Tales* most indebted to the genre, the Knight's, Wife of Bath's, Squire's, and Franklin's tales and the *Tale of Sir Thopas*" (Crane 1994, p.4). Still, the present study will only discuss the cases of the "Knight's Tale" and the "Wife of Bath's Tale". The two tales display extremely different images of *femininity*, as long as one considers that the Wife of Bath herself represents a Chaucerian image of *femininity* opposable to Emelye's portrait.

sparingly notes that there are in Chaucer's writings "certain sensibilities that are less obviously consonant with [his] sex" (Crane 1994, p.6), she points out that "critics have traced conventionally masculine orientations in Chaucer" (Crane 1994, p.5) and she mostly maintains that there are "predictable alignments [with gendered conventions]" (Crane 1994, p.6) on Chaucer's part. In this perspective, it becomes obvious that she expresses her own belief in Chaucer's lack of auctorial impartiality as a man when she argues that Chaucer's transformation of the *Teseida* is underlain by a desire to favour images of Theseus's *powerfulness* over those of the *powerfulness* of the Amazons.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, for Crane and Ingham, who share the idea that Chaucer had clear intentions when he transformed Boccaccio's *Teseida*, the nature of Boccaccio's "beliefs" about gender also matter in the case of the "Knight's Tale". However, if one wishes to understand Chaucer's approaches to gender, it is not enough to evoke some aspects of a Boccaccian work as opposed to a selection of sequences from the "Knight's Tale". Actually, if Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective perceptions of gender should be *deciphered*, this could probably be done through works that reflect some of their regular positions more explicitly than a brief comparison between the "Knight's Tale" and the *Teseida.*

I.4. A Third Level of Intertextuality between Boccaccio's and Chaucer's Writings

When Chaucer started composing his *Canterbury Tales* at the very end of the fourteenth century,[9] he had already written a collection of stories especially dedicated to illustrious women. It was the famous *Legend of Good Women*. The deceased Boccaccio had also left behind him his *De Mulieribus Claris*, a collection written after

[9] Huppé writes that "[s]ometime about 1387 Chaucer began the *Canterbury Tales*" (Huppé 1967, p.3).

the *Decameron*. Actually, whereas both the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* contain stories in which interactions between men and women determine the characteristics of each group, the portraits of famous pagan and Christian women of *The Legend of Good Women* and of the *De Mulieribus Claris*, especially put forward the characteristics of *masculinity* or *femininity*. Furthermore, through his *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, Boccaccio had proposed texts specifically dedicated to famous men. It is actually through the *De Mulieribus Claris*, the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, *The Legend of Good Women* and the "Monk's Tale" that Peter Godman (1983) has compared the characteristics Chaucer and Boccaccio had conferred on such illustrious women as Cleopatra and Zenobia in their respective works. More precisely, in his study Godman has chosen to analyse female figures Chaucer had depicted either after reading Boccaccio's texts about the same figures or independently from Boccaccio's versions of those figures.

On the other hand, without comparing the two authors of the fourteenth century, Jill Mann (2002) has dedicated part of her study on gender to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and Claudia Zudini (2016) has paid particular attention to *De Mulieribus Claris* and analysed the features of Boccaccio's version of the figure of Dido in terms of *masculinity* and *femininity*. Actually, thanks to Mann's and Zudini's theses, it globally appears that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *The Legend of Good Women* are particularly supportive of heroic women, whereas Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* appears to have negotiated the limits of women's abilities. Whereas Godman's study must be solicited in the present chapter because of the directness of the links on which his comparisons between Boccaccian and Chaucerian writings rely, Mann's and Zudini's studies are to be discussed in the other chapters of the

present study. Indeed, Mann and Zudini clearly reveal points of view that Chaucer has adopted about women in his texts independently from Boccaccio's writings.

In fact, in the present study, Godman's, Mann's and Zudini's works are all to be solicited as part of a third and last level of intertextuality between Boccaccio and Chaucer. Whereas it is clear that Chaucer knew the *Teseida* when he wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, it remains uncertain that Chaucer's transformation of the *Teseida* was based on gender representations. In order to discuss Boccaccio's and Chaucer's approaches to gender, the third level of intertextuality solicited is to be conceived as an analogical one, which admits that Boccaccian texts may be compared to Chaucerian ones as long as there are strong thematic or formal resemblances between them and despite the fact that Chaucer may not have had access to the Boccaccian writings with which his own texts echo to some extent. Nevertheless, defending an approach based on such a broad field of intertextuality involves the establishment of some limits in order to compare one author to the other in relation to the conclusions brought forth until now about representations of genders in Boccaccian and Chaucerian texts. Crane's and Ingham's theories have been the starting point of the present analysis of Chaucer's and Boccaccio's representations of genders in specific texts. Therefore, it is beyond their theses about gender issues in the "Knight's Tale" and in the *Canterbury Tales* that the third level of intertextuality chosen here must be explored. Indeed, Crane and Ingham have clearly defined the gender issues they saw in the "Knight's Tale", but their studies have not brought forth substantial generalisations about Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective definitions of genders.

I.5. Chaucer's and Boccaccio's Portraits of Zenobia, Chaucer's Emelye and the *Perceptions* of Gender that the two Authors Convey

Crane claims that "the *Knight's Tale's* first episode invokes a familiar instance of defining gender by differentiation" (Crane 1994, p.20) and she denounces the *deliberate* presence in that specific text of a "binary paradigm that exiles irrationality and timidity to an idea of the feminine" (ibid). Actually, such a *paradigm* is far from appearing in all of Chaucer's texts about heroic women. In fact, as Godman (1983) shows, if Chaucer's texts about famous women do not radically oppose the idea that men and women have distinctive characteristics, it remains tricky to agree with the thesis that Chaucer's writings are generally more likely to despise intergender competition than Boccaccio's. As Godman's analysis equally shows, it also remains tricky to admit that the author Chaucer himself was particularly prone to advocate the idea that women should be considered as men's inferiors. In fact, Godman's reading of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and "Monk's Tale"[10] accurately reveal a Chaucer whose writings did not tarnish the reputations of famous women at all. By comparison, Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* and *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* rather helped Godman to demonstrate that Boccaccio was not the greatest defender of illustrious women at all.

By making comparisons between versions of the figure of Zenobia from the *De Mulieribus Claris*, the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, the "Monk's Tale" and Boccaccio's major source of inspiration *Historia Augusta*,[11] Godman convincingly

[10] Julia Boffey & A. S. G. Edwards (2003) note that *De Mulieribus Claris* is "a work that Chaucer clearly knew by the time he came to write his *Monk's Tale*, when he drew on it for his account of Zenobia (VII, 2247–374) [in the *Canterbury Tales*]" (Boffey and Edwards 2003, pp.117-18). On the other hand, Peter Godman (1983), for his part, remarks that "[t]he Zenobia episode is the only instance in the *Monk's Tale*, or in the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, where Chaucer relies upon the Latin works of Boccaccio [*De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* and *De Mulieribus Claris*]" (Godman 1983, p.272). The figure of Zenobia is a direct link between *De Mulieribus Claris* and the *Canterbury Tales*.

[11] Peter Godman notes that "Boccaccio treats of Zenobia in Chapter C of *De Mulieribus Claris* and at *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, VII, 6" (Godman 1983, p.272). According to the medievalist, Boccaccio

uses intertextuality to defend his thesis that "Boccaccio's account of Zenobia, and other famous women, bears the stamp of misogyny [in *De Mulieribus Claris*]" (Godman 1983, p.274). Actually, Godman analyses Boccaccio's versions of Zenobia with the explicit intention to show that the Italian author "speaks in the austere tones of a puritanical antifeminist [in *De Mulieribus Claris*]" (ibid). Manifestly, such a claim is extremely important for the present study since the famous Zenobia is a female warrior like Boccaccio's Emilia and Ipolita. She is equally a queen like Ipolita. If Boccaccio and Chaucer really have attempted to debate on such a *type* of women, it is logically in works specifically dedicated to women that potentially personal gender bias can appear, as long as one admits that Boccaccio's and Chaucer's writings involve personal commitment on the part of these medieval authors.

In fact, Godman himself clearly believes and shows that Boccaccio's personal points of view about women appear in the *De Mulieribus Claris* and the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*. At least, he clearly points out that Boccaccio's writings constantly denigrate illustrious women. The medievalist accurately[12] argues that "[f]or the Roman writer [of the *Historia Augusta*] Zenobia mattered primarily as a political figure [, whereas] Boccaccio, in *De Mulieribus Claris*, is concerned less with politics than with [Zenobia's] morality" (Godman 1983, p.274). Godman precisely notes that "the chief example set by Zenobia's career [is] her [sexual] continence" (ibid) in the *De Mulieribus Claris* and he remarks that this characteristic "[makes] her an exception to the general run of women [for Boccaccio]"(Godman 1983, p.274).[13] In other words,

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had "[b]efore him […] the text of *Historia Augusta*, XXIV, 30" (ibid) when he wrote about that woman in the *De Mulieribus Claris*.

[12] See Godman 1983, p.273.

[13] Godman's main argument is that "Boccaccio lays stress on the importance of procreation and condemns sex to any other purpose as vicious lust" (Godman 1983, p.274) in *De Mulieribus Claris*. He pays particular attention to Zenobia's behaviour as a wife in *De Mulieribus Claris* and notably uses the following lines from Boccaccio's text: "'O what admirable judgement that woman had! It is very clear that she thought sexual passion was sent to mortal men by nature for the sole purpose of providing for

Godman's text shows that Boccaccio does with his portrait of the legendary Zenobia – a queen and a conqueror – what Ingham accuses Chaucer of having done with the Boccaccian figures of Emilia and Ipolita. For Ingham, Chaucer's version of the *Teseida* conveys the idea of a "[domestication of] aggressive [female] soldiers into respectable Athenean wives" (Ingham 1998, p.29). As Godman demonstrates, on the other hand, in *De Mulieribus Claris* the author of the *Teseida* suggests that free women are unreliable and that their bodies should therefore be placed under control.

Actually, for Godman, Zenobia even appears to be more devalued in *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (VII, 6), where, as he puts it, "all is subordinated to the central fact of Zenobia's final defeat, itself the subject of a sententious admonition on the folly of ambition and the deceptiveness of Fortune" (Godman 1983, p.274).[14] Effectively, especially concerned by Boccaccio's description of Zenobia after she was captured by the Roman emperor Aurelius in the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, Godman accurately argues and shows that "[t]he interest in qualities of Zenobia's character or in details of her career found in *De Mulieribus Claris* is largely absent from *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*" (Godman 1983, p.274). Notably, when analysing Zenobia from one Boccaccian version of that character to the other, Godman's presentation of *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* reveals a Boccaccio who, as Godman notes, insists on "Zenobia's humiliation in the triumph of Aurelius" (ibid) through "a series of rhetorical contrasts between her past glory and her sudden reversal" (Godman 1983, p.274).[15] Manifestly, as Godman shows, Boccaccio seems to have

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future generations with new supplies of children and that all else was sinful, if not superfluous. […] You will find very few women of her mettle!'" (Godman 1983, pp.274–75).

[14] According to Godman, "[p]erceived by a partisan witness in the *Historia Augusta*, [the military carrier of Zenobia has been] recreated […] to suit moralistic and misogynistic biography in the *De Mulieribus Claris* and summarised with almost homiletic style in *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*" (Godman 1983, p.275).

[15] Godman uses the following lines from *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*: "'Once admired by emperors, she is now pitied by commoners. She once accustomed to wear a helmet and to make speeches to soldiers, is now forced to don a veil and listen to the prattle of trivial women. She who once, bearing a

deliberately evacuated the idea of Zenobia's capacity to compete with male warriors and conquerors. Of course, this does not mean that Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" avoids conveying judgmental theories about women. Notably, when Arcite wins the tournament and the right to marry Emelye and she "agayn hym caste a freendlich ye" ("Knight's Tale", l.2680), Chaucer's Knight immediately remarks that "wommen, as to speke in comune, / Thei folwen alle the Favour of Fortune" ("Knight's Tale", ll.2681–82). Nevertheless, Godman's analysis proves that the Boccaccian repertoire on which Chaucer could have (or has) drawn does not lack pieces much more explicitly likely to advocate that women's fates and bodies should be kept under men's control.

Though Godman does not show interest in Chaucer's representations of genders in the "Knight's Tale" itself, it is nevertheless among the *Canterbury Tales* themselves that he perceives a Chaucerian portrait of Zenobia that he finds more tolerant than Boccaccio's. He precisely finds it in the "Monk's Tale". In fact, though Godman has to admit that "Chaucer dwells, as does Boccaccio, upon Zenobia's continence" (Godman 1983, p.277), the medievalist does not view Chaucer's version of that female character as he views Boccaccio's versions. On the one hand, while presenting his reading of the "Monk's Tale", Godman remarks that "[Chaucer] discusses [Zenobia's] refusal to allow Odenake [her husband] to make love to her until she had ascertained that she was not pregnant from the last occasion" (Godman 1983, p.277), but on the other hand, Godman also discusses how Chaucer describes Zenobia's amorous negotiations with her husband at lines 2283–6 in the "Monk's Tale" and the medievalist argues that those lines are "made unabashedly sexual"

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sceptre, ruled over the East, is now at Rome reduced to carrying a distaff and spinning like other women'" (Godman 1983, p.274).

(Godman 1983, p.277).[16] By noting moreover that "[n]either Zenobia nor Odenake […] is treated […] with total seriousness" (ibid) when she defends her chastity in Chaucer's text, Godman does not fail to notice that Chaucer's Zenobia has a "wish for independence" (Godman, p.277) and "a mind of her own" (ibid).[17] Clearly, if one considers that Chaucer's "Knight's tale" can be read through the question of gender inequality, as Godman's study proves, it is not the case for all the *Canterbury Tales.* Supporting gender discrimination is not necessarily the major intension that Chaucer expresses throughout that collection.

I.6. Chaucer's and Boccaccio's Portraits of Cleopatra

As mentioned above, in his text, Peter Godman (1983) equally proposes an edifying comparative reading of different Boccaccian and Chaucerian portraits of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. More precisely, the portraits of Cleopatra Godman refers to appear in *The Legend of Good Women* and in the *De Mulieribus Claris.* Actually, Godman (1983) remarks that "Cleopatra does not appear in Middle English literature before Chaucer's [first story of the] *Legend of Good Women*" (Godman 1983, p.285) and he furthermore claims that "Boccaccio served as its principal source" (ibid). Still, whereas he compares Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, for their part, Julia Boffey & A. S. G. Edwards (2003) note that "[the]

[16] See Godman's comparative reading of the "Monk's Tale" and *De Mulieribus Claris.* Godman uses the following lines from the "Monk's Tale": "'And also soone as that she myghte espye *I* That she was nat with childe with that dede, / Thanne wolde she suffre hym doon his fantasye / Eft-soone, and nat but oones, out of drede.' (2283–6)" (Godman 1983, p.277). These are lines on the basis of which the scholar distinguishes the sexuality of Chaucer's Zenobia from that of Boccaccio's Zenobia in the *De Mulieribus Claris.*

[17] Godman stresses this idea of a Chaucerian Zenobia with a strong character. He notably refers to lines 2274–8 of Chaucer's "Monk's Tale", where, as he remarks, it appears that "Odenake (Odenatus, prince of Palmyra) […] was a fitting match for [Zenobia] in more senses than one" (Godman 1983, p.277). The lines he uses are the following ones: "'And ye shul understonde how that he / Hadde swiche fantasies as hadde she. / But natheless, whan they were knyt in-feere, / They lyved in joye and in felicitee, / For ech of hem hadde oother lief and deere.' (["Monk's Tale",] 2274–8)" (ibid). Godman refers to these lines while discussing Zenobia and Odenake's marriage in *egalitarian* terms. In Godman's approach, that husband and his wife are on an equal footing in the "Monk's Tale". As, Godman notes, "their marriage was a success" (ibid) and Odenake "shared [Zenobia's] views" (ibid).

possible function [of *De Mulieribus Claris*] as a model for Chaucer's *Legend* [*of Good Women*] cannot be certainly established since there are no evident traces of its influence in this work" (Boffey & Edwards 2003, p.118). However, uncertainties about the origins of Chaucer's inspiration in this case do not undermine the relevance of Godman's comparisons. On the one hand, his conclusions about Chaucer and Boccaccio as two different authors with different perceptions of a same historical character reveal the respective literary habits of these authors in terms of their respective descriptions of femininity. Actually, though they are sceptical about the potentially Boccaccian origins of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Boffey & Edwards have not failed to notice that similar structures and similar themes can link two works like the *De Mulieribus Claris* and *The Legend of Good Women* to each other. On the one hand, the two scholars remark that "[t]he idea of a collection of narratives organised around principles related to gender ha[d had] few precedents in medieval literature [when Chaucer's *Legend* first appeared]" (Boffey & Edwards 2003, p.117). On the other hand, they admit that "[t]he most obvious [of those precedents] is Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, a collection of Latin prose lives of famous women, completed in 1361" (Boffey & Edwards 2003, p.118).[18] Moreover, according to them, there could be direct links between the *De Mulieribus Claris* and the *Canterbury Tales* since they claim that "Chaucer clearly knew [*De Mulieribus Claris*] by the time he came to write his *Monk's Tale*, when he drew on it

[18] Boffey and Edwards do not consider that "precedent" as an obviously influential work for Chaucer. It is exclusively through its genre and structure as a collection of biographies of women that the two scholars admit that *The Legend of Good Women* resembles Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris.* Actually, to mention a work which truly might have influenced Chaucer for the composition of his *Legend*, Boffey and Edwards claim that "[m]ore relevant may be the *Confessio Amantis*, the long collection of narratives by Chaucer's contemporary, John Gower" (Boffey and Edwards 2003, p.118). The two medievalists actually prove this while referring to a specific *Canterbury tale*. They remark that "[t]he Man of Law speaks in the Prologue to his tale of Chaucer's 'seyntes Legende of Cupide' (II, 61), mentioning […] a number of figures in the surviving part of the *Legend,* and contrasts these with tales of incest represented by Canace and Apollonius of Tyre, both of whom figure in the *Confessio*" (ibid).

for his account of Zenobia (VII, 2247–374) [in the *Canterbury Tales*]" (Boffey and Edwards 2003, pp.117–18). Therefore, on the one hand, while dealing with two collections – *De Mulieribus Claris* and *The Legend of Good Women* – with similar structures, Godman's study appears to reveal how two medieval authors individually chose to represent femininity through the characteristics each of them conferred upon politically influent female figures like Zenobia and Cleopatra. On the other hand, as mentioned above, Godman's study shows how Chaucer has directly revisited a harsh Boccaccian representation of such an influent woman as Zenobia in the *Canterbury Tales.* As clearly seen above, Chaucer's representations of Zenobia are far from being like Boccaccio's.

Actually, while comparing the Boccaccian and Chaucerian versions of Cleopatra, it is once again Boccaccio whom Godman presents as a purveyor of *misogynistic* images. In the light of the classical sources on which Boccaccio drew to write his *De Mulieribus Claris*, Godman actually notices that Boccaccio did not reproduce images of famous female figures without modifying those figures as he pleased. Effectively, after pointing out that Boccaccio had found a figure of Cleopatra in Hegesippus's *History*,[19] Godman argues that that classical text is a work in which Antony appears to be "enslaved by his lust for Cleopatra [and] depicted with cordial distaste" (Godman 1983, p.282), while "the full force of Hegesippus'[s] animus is directed at Cleopatra, who united avarice with ambition and corruption with cruelty in

[19] Peter Godman notes that "[o]ne of the points at which Hegesippus offered Boccaccio information unavailable to him from elsewhere is his account of Cleopatra's ambitions in Arabia and of her dealings with Herod, King of Judaea, at *Historiae*, I, xxxii, 1–2" (Godman 1983, p.282). Furthermore, Godman proposes the following translation of Hegesippus's text: "Antony became a mere bondsman to his love for Cleopatra and slavishly ministered to her lusts, but he was incapable of overcoming her feminine greed and especially the zest of that woman for slaughtering her kinsmen… She greedily thought that the kingdoms of Judaea and Arabia should be joined to her realms, after their rulers had been killed. But, at least in this respect, Antony came to his senses, although drunk with lust and heavy with sleep, and refused to slaughter men of such quality and powerful kings to enlarge the empire of a headstrong woman" (Godman 1983, pp.282–3).

her plans to annex Judaea and Arabia and to murder their kings" (Godman 1983, p.282). For Godman, moreover, "[t]hroughout Hegesippus'[s] work a specific hostility to Cleopatra is linked to a deeper indignation at her presumptuousness in trespassing beyond what was expected of her as a woman" (Godman 1983, p.283). Actually, whereas Godman's analysis of Boccaccio's source manifestly reveals that Hegesippus himself had already displayed a lot of hatred towards such a woman as Cleopatra, in the light of Godman's study, Boccaccio does not merely appear to have been a faithful follower of Hegesippus. He rather appears to have had his own views of Cleopatra. Indeed, Godman notes that "[Boccaccio] surpass[es] Hegesippus in venom and bile" (Godman 1983, p.283) in *De Mulieribus Claris*. The scholar notably remarks that "Boccaccio revels in imagining [Cleopatra] as a whore" (ibid) who, "[a]fter poisoning her young brother, seducing Caesar and securing the Egyptian throne, […] set about winning Antony's favour when her previous protector had been murdered" (ibid). Furthermore, Godman accurately argues that Boccaccio's Cleopatra is a "mild picture of feminine seductiveness at LXXXVIII, 7"[20] (Godman 1983, p.283) in *De Mulieribus Claris* and that that image of the queen "[s]oon gives way to [her] biting contempt [at] LXXXVIII, 9" (ibid).[21] Thus, whereas Crane and Ingham merely evoke one specific Boccaccian text to make Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" appear as a degrading representation of Boccaccian female figures next to whose heroism Chaucer's Theseus could have seemed *less impressive*, Godman's analysis reveals a Boccaccio who is relentlessly and deliberately involved in the extreme

[20] Godman translates and cites this passage of *De Mulieribus Claris* as follows: "'She seduced the ruler of the world, since she was very beautiful and, by her artful, sparkling eyes and the eloquence of her words, could win over whoever she wanted'" (Godman 1983, p.283).
[21] Godman translates and cites this passage of Boccaccio's text as follows: "'So Cleopatra gained her kingdom by a two-fold crime and gave free rein to her lust for pleasure, becoming a kind of whore to the kings of the East, greedy for gold and enjoyment...'" (Godman 1983, p.283).

disparagement of imposing famous female figures from one portrait to another in the *De Mulieribus Claris*.

Actually, whereas Godman clearly shows that Boccaccio openly despises Cleopatra as he despises Zenobia, once again, he proves that Chaucer's Cleopatra is not the creation of an enemy of imposing female figures. Whereas Godman is obliged to note that Cleopatra is explicitly presented as a "whore" (Godman 1983, p.283) in *De Mulieribus Claris*, it is quite easy for him to prove that Chaucer's Cleopatra is "a paragon of feminine fidelity" (Godman 1983, p.289). Effectively, Godman's close reading of the writings of the two medieval authors makes him state that "[i]n his legend of Cleopatra […] Chaucer transforms the envenomed narratives of Boccaccio, abbreviating and expanding them to present the queen in a favourable light" (ibid),[22] but beyond the idea of a mere "favourable light" in Chaucer's text, the medievalist demonstrates that Chaucer's Cleopatra appears to be an image of "loyalty, constancy and 'wyfhood' ([*Legend*, ll.] 681–95)" (Godman 1983, p.289). Godman notably defends this last point by mentioning three episodes of the "Legend of Cleopatra". First, he remarks that Chaucer's Cleopatra "kills herself not by applying serpents to her veins, as in Boccaccio's version, but by walking, naked and willing, into a pit of adders ([*Legend*, ll.] 696–700)" (Godman 1983, p.289). Second, he puts forward that Cleopatra's "grief and her suicide after Antony's death become the subjects of an expostulation on women's loyalty" (Godman 1983, p.289).[23] Obviously, what Godman's analysis of Chaucer's Cleopatra helps to prove is the fact that Chaucer was extremely prone to sublimate a famous female figure and intensively

[22] Godman actually suggests here that the Cleopatra of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* was directly borrowed from the *De Mulieribus Claris* and transformed. His theory takes the idea of a direct link between Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* for granted, but Boffey and Edwards (2003) do not confirm the existence of such a link (see note 18).

[23] Godman shows this by citing lines 665 to 668 from Cleopatra's *Legend*: "'But herkeneth, ye that speken of kyndnesse / Ye men that falsly sweren many on oth / That ye wol deye, if that youre love be wroth. / Here may ye sen of wemen which a trouthe! '"(Godman 1983, p.289).

transform her into a lover without depriving her of reactivity since Chaucer's Cleopatra appears to choose a heroic death for love and she sacrifices her own life to her love.

In this perspective, if one considers that Chaucer recurrently uses characteristics to define *female heroism*, it can be noted that some aspects of his Cleopatra and his Zenobia echo with some aspects of his Emelye. Like the Chaucerian Zenobia of the "Monk's Tale", Emelye is a warrior, who also has the role of a happy wife. As Godman has pointed out, Chaucer's Zenobia and her husband "lyved in joye and in felicitee" ("Monk's Tale", 2274). It can be noted that Emelye finally "loveth [Palamon] so tendrely" ("Knight's Tale", l.3103). In more than one *Canterbury Tale*, a woman's happiness appears to be a value consubstantial with the idea of a successful marriage. On the other hand, like Chaucer's Cleopatra, Emelye epitomises the compatibility of female heroism with a role as a lover. Unlike Palamon and Arcite, who fight each other, in the "Knight's Tale", Emelye does not have the role of a warrior who could kill for love. While falling in love, she forgets her desire "to walken in the wodes wilde / And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe" ("Knight's Tale", ll.2309–2310) and without using physical violence, she gradually renounces the lawlessness of a wild life. She is first sacrificed to love, but love becomes her happiness, which preserves the idea that women's desires are important in Chaucer's texts, as well as the idea that peaceful love is a sacred value for Chaucer's characters, for those who do not fight merely avoid the risk of deliberately destroying the others in the tale. In this way, women appear to be the purest figures of heroic love in the "Legend of Cleopatra" and the "Knight's Tale". They are not valued through their ability to fight their congeners, but through their ability to find happiness through love. On the one hand, Chaucer's Emelye, Zenobia and Cleopatra

have to be wives. On the other hand, they have to be satisfied with that status and happy about it.

Therefore, though Godman has shown that Chaucer and Boccaccio used radically different strategies to define female rulers and warriors through their very different interpretations of the lives of the same famous women, it remains an infelicitous process to compare Chaucer and Boccaccio in terms of *misogyny* and of the contraries of such a notion. For feminists or women's rights defenders, the complexity of defining Chaucer's descriptions of women lies in the fact that the writings of the medieval author do not aim at advocating that women should either be emancipated or that they should be deprived of the possibility to question their own fates. Chaucer himself could not be viewed as a *feminist* in the modern sense of the term. As seen above, he notably assumed a theory implying that women were a specific category of humans, who "folwen alle the Favour of Fortune" ("Knight's Tale", l.2682). It therefore remains difficult to know whether Chaucer meant thereby that women were rather excessively compliant or rather resilient when confronted with their incapacity to reject a suitor. Emelye is a figure who is maintained between the social necessity to get married and the desire to be happy. It is also difficult to know if what Chaucer's Knight says about women is what Chaucer actually thought, but what is clear is that Chaucer has displayed such ambiguous opinions about women in his "Knight's Tale". On the other hand, as also seen above, it is Godman himself who notices that the Cleopatra of *The Legend of Good Women* "kills herself not by applying serpents to her veins, as in Boccaccio's version, but by walking, naked and willing, into a pit of adders" (Godman 1983, p.289). He thereby draws attention to the fact that Chaucer's Cleopatra is endowed with the ability to make significant decisions for herself after Antony's death. Still, her final decision is that of a woman

who is defined in relation to her male lover. As women and *wives*, both Chaucer's Cleopatra and his Emelye have roles strictly associated with marriage, but unlike Boccaccio's Zenobia and Cleopatra, the actions and desires of Chaucer's female characters are valued through the fact that sacrificial love finally becomes an expression of their own desire. Thus, at the end of this chapter, what is clear is that the views of powerful women that Boccaccio conveys in his writings about famous female figures are resolutely harsher than those conveyed in Chaucer's. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Chaucer seems to have had an ambiguous ability to maintain his descriptions of *femininity* between a certain notion of female autonomy and equivocal comments about women.

Chapter II

Chaucer's Polemical Androcentrism in *The Legend of Good Women* and the *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's Inflexible Androcentrism in the *De Mulieribus Claris*

Brought forward in the previous chapter of this study, the question of the *involvements* of Chaucer's and Boccaccio's own views in their writings about imposing women is the central point of the present chapter. More precisely, generalities must be presented in order to understand the global influence of androcentrism on Boccaccio's and Chaucer's ways of representing genders from one work to another. As previously mentioned, this study is about the establishment of a network of comparisons between two Chaucerian collections and two Boccaccian ones, in terms of the representations of genders they convey. However, at this stage of the research, comparing gender roles between the *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* remains a complex process since clear thematic ties have not been established between these two collections until now. To compare gender roles between these two works, it is necessary to refer to the characteristics of genders appearing in Chaucerian and Boccaccian works more explicitly comparable. It is now clear that feminist approaches to the "Knight's Tale" as a version of Boccaccio's *Teseida* cannot enable us to assert that Chaucer's Emelye is either the symbol of a Chaucerian *disdain* for *masculine* female figures or the expression of Chaucer's desire to be considered less tolerant than Boccaccio towards influent women. Moreover, as previously seen, even if it had been the case, a comparison of gender

roles between the "Knight's Tale" and the *Teseida* could not reflect Boccaccio's or Chaucer's respective ways of describing men and women in general. On the other hand, it has also become clear now that *misogyny* and its contraries are not the values through which the two medieval authors should be compared, as long as Chaucer can be considered as a complex writer who was naturally prone to be influenced by his androcentric values, but did not systematically use these ones to despise female figures likely to challenge men's power. In order to make direct comparisons between gender representations in the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* in the third and fourth chapters of this study, the present chapter proposes to initiate a discussion about more generalisable features of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective definitions of *masculinity* and *femininity* by referring to the *Canterbury Tales*, *The Legend of Good Women* and the *De Mulieribus Claris.* In fact, by doing this, it is equally important to show that Boccaccio himself cannot be constantly considered as an enemy of femininity. Such a Manichean modern conception of Boccaccio himself would involve that his female characters lack complexity and this would be wrong. Notably, it is not easy to determine the extent to which the actions of the female figures of the *Decameron* can be considered reprehensible.[24] Therefore, it is only by comparing Boccaccio to Chaucer that their respective specificities as medieval authors can be rendered clearer.

[24] In the case of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, to some extent, different interpretations of gender characteristics are left to the judgement of the reader. For instance, some famous female characters can raise questions about Boccaccio's definition of womankind and the ideas he displays in his collection in relation to women's rights. Robin Kirkpatrick (1983 a) notably discusses the case of *Dec.* VI,7, whose heroine Madonna Filippa, as he writes, is "charged on pain of death with adultery" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.213). In Boccaccio's story, that lady is not sentenced to death because, as Kirkpatrick also notes, she "utters a well-time witticism that reveals to the court, precisely at the moment of their laughter, that their statutes against adulterous women are unjust" (ibid). Clearly, Kirkpatrick views the adulterous Madonna Filippa as an admirable figure. Effectively, he notes that her *witty* gesture to save her life implies (within the context of the *novella*) that "the law is revealed to be no absolute construction but a system of human conventions – a tissue of words – which can and must be readjusted to meet the impact of the new circumstances" (ibid). If one agrees with Kirkpatrick's interpretation of Madonna Filippa's character, it could be imagined that such a favourable – and even seductive – perception of an adulterous woman undermines the idea that Boccaccio

II.1. The limits of the Access of Modern Approaches to Chaucer's Representations of Gender Roles in the *Canterbury Tales*

Analysing Chaucer's representations of gender roles in the *Canterbury Tales* can be very problematic nowadays because the perceptions of modern scholars may be different from those of Chaucer's first readers. Modern Scholars may presuppose that Chaucer's system of values was similar to theirs or that all of his first readers had had access to the sources he had used to write his tales in the fourteenth century. On the other hand, one may as well presuppose that Chaucer meant to represent genders differently from one story to the other, that modern scholars actually make extrapolations when they see gender discrimination through some aspects of a Chaucerian text or of another. One may equally suggest that Chaucer did not exclusively write the "Knight's Tale" for English readers who knew such an Italian text as the *Teseida*. Such facts can set the stage for different approaches to the *Canterbury Tales.*

For instance, whereas Chaucer's medieval readership might have had naturally androcentric perceptions of a text, modern feminists may recreate Chaucer's characters by attributing them discriminatory functions on the basis of a modern system of psychologising values whose effects could actually be reversed. If one

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personally aimed at encouraging female fidelity in the *Decameron*. On the other hand, such an interpretation as Kirkpatrick's can merely put forward that death penalty is finally considered as an excessive punishment for adultery in Boccaccio's story, though the status of adultery as a crime is not specifically questioned. The story of Zinevra (*Decameron*, II,9) equally conveys equivocal lessons about wifely duties. It is not totally certain that Boccaccio wished wives to follow Zinevra's example. Though she has a cruel husband who places a price on her head and wants his servant to assassinate her because he is tricked into believing that she is an adulterous woman, the faithful Zinevra does everything in her power to recuperate him and respect the moral rules of marital bonds. As opposed to Filippa's, Zinevra's case, if resituated in the context of a Boccaccian universe in which skilful women can gain freedom of action and enjoy sexuality as they please, could be viewed as a case of naivety. Unlike Madonna Filippa, who immediately uses speech to survive by assuming her desires and her illicit actions and is thus unpunished for her malice, Zinevra stays away from men's sexual solicitations while her husband lives abroad as a merchant, she endures years of misadventures and plays the role of a man because of her husband's false accusations of adultery and she forgives him when she is given the occasion to let a Sultan sentence him to death. Zinevra's very moral actions may therefore be as well considered as proofs of unwitty faithfulness. This shows the moral complexity of the *Decameron* in terms of its representations of femininity.

reads the “Knight’s Tale” nowadays, it may be problematic to support Crane’s idea that Chaucer “chooses traits specific to masculinity in the binary paradigm that exiles irrationality and timidity to an idea of the feminine” (Crane 1994, p.20). Indeed, as previously seen, Chaucer does not exclusively define his Theseus in contrast to female figures, but also by opposition to the tyrant Creon and to all the men and the women who are under his responsibility in the “Knight’s Tale”. Actually, in the “Knight’s Tale”, it is more problematic for Theseus to prevent Creon, Arcite and Palamon from causing disorder and conflicts than it is for him to marry Hippolyta or make Emelye become a spouse. In the “Knight’s Tale” in itself, she is not a warrior and Theseus does not need to prevent her from attacking her congeners. Hippolyta does not represent a danger either. In this sense, it seems that the idea of considering that women are more *irrational* than men in the “Knight’s Tale” is a matter of interpretation. Unlike men, Chaucer’s Amazons do not commit problematic acts.

Actually, other aspects of Chaucer’s text may render Crane’s and Ingham’s interpretations of the “Knight’s Tale” problematic. On the plane of the possible comparisons of gender roles between the “Knight’s Tale” and the *Teseida*, the lack of scenes of battles between male and female soldiers would not necessarily have reminded Chaucer’s first readers of Boccaccio’s *Teseida*. Chaucer’s text can be read independently from the contents of its source. To understand it, it is not necessary to speak Italian or to know Boccaccio. The reason why Chaucer did not choose to reuse Boccaccio’s scenes of war in the “Knight’s Tale” is clear. Chaucer’s Knight says that the “remenant of the tale is long ynough” (“Knight’s Tale”, l.888) and he can “nat letten eek noon of this route” (“Knight’s Tale”, l.889). He wishes to “Lat every felawe telle his tale aboute” (l.890) and to “se now who shal the soper wynne” (l.891). The

Knight's fellow pilgrims will also have stories to tell. He merely wishes to tell a short story in order to make sure that every member of the company will have the time to present his or her own tale and win a supper if that story is the best of all. Above all, it is obvious that Chaucer would not have had the possibility to place such a long epic poem as the *Teseida* in a collection of short stories.

Actually, when he composed the *Canterbury Tales*, the modern idea of advocating gender discrimination was probably not Chaucer's concern. From one *Canterbury Tale* to another, from one storyteller to another and from one Chaucerian collection to another, different representations of the world and of gender roles appear. Notably, as Jill Mann (2002) shows, in the "Manciple's Tale" and in the *Legend of Good Women*, instead of questioning or reaffirming *gender inequality* or men's supremacy, Chaucer's specificity is rather to allow female figures to position and affirm themselves as women by admitting that those female figures could have a say within the frameworks of men's decrees.

II.2. The "Manciple's Tale", *The Legend of Good Women* and the Nature of Chaucer's Androcentrism

Unlike Crane and Ingham, such a scholar as Jill Mann (2002) could be placed among those who believe that Chaucer clearly takes the side of women, either in the *Canterbury Tales* or in the *Legend of Good Women.* She notably chooses to discuss the case of the "Manciple's Tale", a story about the jealousy of the god Phoebus, who kills his adulterous wife with an arrow. Moreover, Mann assumes that there is a firmly oriented perception of gender in *The Legend of Good Women* and in the "Manciple's Tale" and her views do not let Chaucer pass as a writer who systematically advocated gender discrimination.

Actually, when discussing the case of the "Manciple's Tale", Mann specifically explores the storyteller's comments on his own story as well as his conclusions about Phoebus's wife's unfaithfulness. In this perspective, she notably puts forward that some of those comments consist of "a long digression on the impossibility of eradicating natural characteristics" (Mann 2002, p.16),[25] which draws attention to the idea that the "Manciple's Tale" conveys a resilient perception of *human nature*. However, Mann does not merely consider that this tale is about *human nature*, but points out a complex Chaucerian description of intergender relations. Effectively, on the one hand, she notes that one image used by Chaucer's Manciple to represent female adultery is that of "a she-wolf [which] characteristically expresses her 'vileyns kynde' by choosing the 'lewedeste wolf that she may fynde'" (["Manciple's Tale"]160–86)" (ibid). Mann specifies that this image "was a favourite with antifeminist writers" (Mann 2002, p.16) and has to concede therefore that "one [could await] – given the nature of the story Chaucer is telling – the inevitable conclusion on female lustfulness" (ibid). Nevertheless, she also has to point out that "the trait that Chaucer identifies as naturally implanted in human beings is not lust, but 'newfangelnesse',[26] and [, according to Mann,] it is not women whom [the storyteller] identifies as most tainted with it, but *men*" (ibid).[27] Clearly, Mann's reading of the "Manciple's Tale" allows for an understanding of the complexity of the *Canterbury Tales* as a collection.

[25] For Mann, it is "Chaucer [who] swerves aside into a long digression on the impossibility of eradicating natural characteristics" (Mann 2002, p.16). Her approach does not distinguish the teller of the "Manciple's Tale" from the author of the *Canterbury Tales*.

[26] Mann finds the term "newfangel" at line 193 in the "Manciple's Tale".

[27] Mann uses the following lines from the "Manciple's Tale": "'Alle thise ensamples speke I by thise men / That been untrewe, and nothing by wommen. / For men han evere a likerous appetit / On lower thyng to parfourne hire delit / Than on hire wyves, be they never so faire, / Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire. / Flessch is so newefangel, with meschaunce, / That we konne in nothing han plesaunce / That sowneth into vertu any while.' (187–95)" (Mann 2002, p.16). She furthermore claims that the pronoun "'we'" means ""we men"" (Mann 2002, p.16) at line 194 in the "Manciple's Tale". According to her, "Chaucer delicately negotiates the problems of a male author telling a story of female betrayal [, a]cknowledges his own masculinity, rather than dissolving it in the impersonal authority of the invisible author, and deflects the moral of his story on to the sex of which he can speak with personal authority" (Mann 2002, pp.16–17).

If there is, as Crane suggests, "a familiar instance of defining gender by differentiation" (Crane 1994, p.20) in the *Canterbury Tales*, in the light of Mann's study, it appears at least that that *differentiation* does not necessarily turn in favour of men.

Actually, Mann even demonstrates that Chaucer's writings rather tend at times to favour women over men when he specifically dedicates a collection of stories to women. Notably, if she writes that "[i]n the *Legend of Good Women*, there are no warnings against generalising about a whole sex on the basis of an individual case" (Mann 2002, p.26), it is to point out that it is not women but men who are singled out in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women.* She mainly shows that "the falsehood and treachery of men is reiterated with a vigorous monotony" (ibid) in Chaucer's collection and she argues "that the *Legend* can only be understood *as* a riposte to misogyny – as adopting a single-mindedness and refusal of compromise which mirrors its own intransigence" (ibid). In this perspective, Mann states that "[t]he word 'pite' […] is a leitmotiv in the *Legend*" (Mann 2002, p.32)[28] and she claims that "[t]he 'pite' which prohibits [Chaucer's] Hypermnestra from murdering her husband is presented as characteristic of her sex" (Mann 2002, p.32).[29] For Mann, moreover, "[Chaucer's Dido's] pity is generalised to her sex" (ibid).[30] According to the scholar, "Chaucer emphasises that it is pity rather than sexual attraction, which draws […] women to love" (ibid) in his *Legend of Good Women*[31] and she proves it by pointing out that

[28] She specifies that she also takes into account the "cognates and synonyms" (Mann 2002, p.32) of the term.

[29] To prove this, Mann refers to the two following lines from the "Legend of Hypermnestra": "'Pyëtous, sad, wis, and trewe as stel, / As to these wemen it acordeth wel.' (2582–3)" (Mann 2002, p.32).

[30] Mann cites the following "wondering lament" (Mann 2002, p.32) from Chaucer's text: "'O sely wemen, ful of innocence, / Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience, / What maketh yow to men to truste so? / Have ye swych routhe upon hyre feyned wo, / And han swich olde ensaumples yow beforn? / Se ye nat alle now they ben forsworn?' (1254–9)" (ibid).

[31] According to Mann, in that collection, "'pite' is the quality that dominates in the women, and the quality that is totally lacking from the men" (Mann 2002, p.32). Different examples of *feminine pity* from *The Legend of Good Women* are cited in Mann's discussion. She notes that "Ariadne and Phaedra

"[a]lone with Dido in [a] cave, [Chaucer's] Aeneas pleads on his knees for her love until she takes pity on him ("rewede on his peyne": 1237)" (Mann 2002, p.32). Clearly, the examples provided by Mann prove that Chaucer was far from embracing definitions of gender that minimised women's roles.

What is obviously proven here thanks to Mann is the fact that the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Legend* display polemical types of distinctions and relations between *femininity* and *masculinity* rather than merely discriminatory ones. In Chaucer's *Legend*, as Mann shows, famous women's characteristics – their emotions in Mann's approach to the *Legend* – have a weight in the sense that men's survival may depend on women's decisions and charity. As Mann equally shows, in the "Manciple's Tale", like men, women are allowed to be vulnerable when faced with their own sexual curiosity.

II.3. Androcentric Generalisations about Genders in *De Mulieribus Claris*

As previously mentioned, according to Godman (1983) and Boffey & Edwards (2003), *The Legend of Good Women* can relevantly be compared to the *De Mulieribus Claris* to some extents. In this sense, *The Legend of Good Women* can be considered as the Chaucerian equivalent of the *De Mulieribus Claris* in terms of the genre and the themes that the two collections represent. On the other hand, Crane and Ingham's common theory is that Chaucer has transformed the Amazons of the *Teseida* in such a way as to reinterpret the power relations that existed in Boccaccio's text. Still, as frequently mentioned hereabove, the idea of considering the "Knight's Tale" as a means for Chaucer to advocate discrimination against female

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have 'compassioun' for the imprisoned Theseus and think his fate 'gret pite' (1974–6) […] when he is brought before them [and] begs for 'mercy' and looks so pitiable that anyone seeing him would have wept for 'routhe' (2073, 2076–7)" (ibid). Mann also notes that "[a]t their first meeting Aeneas's misfortunes elicit [Chaucer's Dido's] 'routhe and wo', and by an inevitable progression, her love" (ibid). Here, Mann refers to lines 1078–81 from Dido's *Legend*.

figures is a questionable idea because of three major facts. Firstly, traditionalist Christian thinking defines in itself the social roles of men and women. Chaucer was the member of a traditionalist medieval Christian society and it is natural that his work reflects the mere androcentric points of view of his time and values such a sovereign as Theseus. Secondly, the “Knight’s Tale” does not contain explicit elements likely to suggest that it was composed to contest Boccaccio’s definitions of genders. Typically Boccaccian representations of genders are not even significantly referred to in the “Knight’s Tale”, though Chaucer knew how Boccaccio could represent genders when the former wrote his tale. Thirdly, as Mann (2002) has shown, in *The Legend of Good Women* and in the “Manciple’s Tale”, gender discrimination does not necessarily target women. In this sense, in terms of Chaucer’s presentations of genders, significant differences already appear between two *Canterbury Tales* and between the “Knight’s Tale” and *The Legend of Good Women.* Thus, Chaucer’s androcentric representations of genders appear to be extremely flexible, even when they are considered separately from Boccaccio’s.

Actually, it is Boccaccio’s androcentrism that is not as flexible as Chaucer’s. Though the *De Mulieribus Claris* shares generic similarities with the *Legend of Good Women*, scholars have never been able to demonstrate that Boccaccio’s collection seriously aimed at valuing women’s aptitudes. Notably, while they try to claim that Boccaccio’s *De Mulieribus Claris* confers some remarkable aspects upon *femininity*, such studies as Constance Jordan’s and Pamela Benson’s are also solidly grounded in the idea that a strict type of androcentrism predominates in the Boccaccian equivalent of the *Legend of Good Women*. Effectively, Jordan (1987) and Benson (1992) are systematically obliged to deal with the fact that the androcentrism displayed in *De Mulieribus Claris* rigorously keeps female figures under the yoke of

patriarchy. Of course, patriarchy in itself was the norm in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, for a medieval author, there were possibilities to give more weight to men's supremacy in a work and Boccaccio seems to have used some of them persistently.

On the one hand, whereas Constance Jordan (1987) notes that Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* "recognises that eloquence is the skill that might enable women most directly to participate in public life" (Jordan 1987, p.29), she however has to remark that "[t]he simplest of [Boccaccio's] strategies is to term the eloquent woman a "man" and thus to deny her sex" (ibid). Indeed, Jordan argues that Boccaccio's "histories reveal [in part] his fear that a woman's cultivation of eloquence jeopardises the least stable of […] specifically womanly virtues: silence" (Jordan 1987, p.29).[32] In other words, according to Jordan, through an obviously *masculine* perception of *femininity*, Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* poses the question of the *differentiation* of *femininity* and *masculinity* in order to glorify the *masculine* and render the idea of women's self-affirmation completely *incongruous*.

On the other hand, whereas Pamela Benson (1992) accurately argues and demonstrates that there is "[in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* a] persuasive and sensitive profeminist voice […] that admires female political, moral, and physical

[32] Jordan points out that, in *De Mulieribus Claris*, "[t]he Roman Hortensia is praised for arguing in the Senate against a tax levied on Roman women 'with such an inexhaustible and effective eloquence that to her admiring audience she appeared to have changed her sex and spoken as her father, [the orator] Hortensius reborn' (lxxxiv:332)" (Jordan 1987, pp.29–30). Jordan also mentions the case of the poetess Proba, who, as she notes, "became so adept at writing Vergilian poetry that her metrical version of the Vulgate, pieced together from scraps of the *Eclogues, Georgics,* and the *Aeneid*, is said to be indistinguishable from the verse of her master [in *De Mulieribus Claris*]" (Jordan 1987, p.30). The scholar argues that "Proba conforms to the conception of woman proposed in [Aristotle's] *Pseudo-Economics*, in which woman is portrayed as conserving what her husband has invented or acquired" (ibid). Jordan concludes that "Proba's poetic function is limited to re-presenting what male poets have written and does not extend to changing the canon" (ibid). In no case does she perceive such Boccaccian heroines as women whose femininity can render them as skilful as men.

strength" (Benson 1992, p.18),[33] she cannot and does not avoid taking the clear limits of this idea into account. If Benson uses the term "profeminist", it does not mean that Boccaccio can be perceived as an author who questions the idea of women's *inferiority.* It is through this fact that Boccaccio's androcentrism in *De Mulieribus Claris* differs from Chaucer's in *The Legend of Good Women.*

In fact, to defend her thesis, she notably claims that the dedicatory letter of *De Mulieribus Claris* expresses Boccaccio's "need [to protect this text] from those who would pollute it in their thoughts [through t]heir masculine readings of it" (Benson 1992, p.11). More precisely, she states that Boccaccio had thought a man "would in some way denigrate the women presented in [*De Mulieribus Claris*], as a male observer may degrade a woman with his gaze" (ibid).[34] Therefore, though Pamela Benson herself does not explicitly put the following point forward in such terms, her defence of the *profeminist* aspect of *De Mulieribus Claris* has therefore to be partly

[33] Benson mentions "[t]he story of Rhea Ilia, a woman who prostituted herself after having been forced to become a vestal virgin at a young age" (Benson 1992, p.18). She point out that this episode of *De Mulieribus Claris* "yields the lesson that parents ought not to consecrate their daughters to God when they are young but instead ought to allow their mature daughters free choice of marriage or the cloister" (ibid). Among the cases that she considers as proofs of the presence of a "profeminist voice" in *De Mulieribus Claris*, Benson also places and discusses the "example [of] the prostitute Leena who valiantly refused to reveal the names of her revolutionary accomplices under torture" (Benson 1992, p.18) and she notes that the latter heroine "is said to have ended up in her profession not because she is naturally inclined that way, but because her parents indulged her (109; 204)" (ibid). This second example, as Benson puts it, shows that "Boccaccio [does not] entirely [abandon] the motion that women naturally tend in the direction of *luxuria*" (ibid). Benson's study cannot (and therefore does not) avoid putting forward the idea that women are depicted as hardly tameable creatures in *De Mulieribus Claris.* Thus, as Benson's text itself shows, the notion of *male perception*, which she mentions herself, is not really evacuated from the *De Mulieribus Claris.*

[34] The dedicatory letter of *De Mulieribus Claris* is addressed to Countess Andrea Acciaiuoli. Benson actually explores the following excerpt from that part of Boccaccio's work: "'Some time ago, illustrious lady, while away from the crude multitudes and almost free of other concerns, I wrote a little book in praise of women, more for the pleasure of my friends than as a service to the state' (xxxiii; 18)" (Benson 1992, p.11). After she has noted that "Boccaccio alludes [in this passage] to the genesis of [his] book in a period of his life when he had withdrawn from public affairs" (ibid), Benson's interpretation of that excerpt is directly put in relation with gender issues. She remarks that "[r]ather than fulfilling the masculine office of serving the state, [Boccaccio's letter shows that his collection of female portraits] will fulfil the feminine one of giving pleasure (or comfort) to friends" (ibid). Benson furthermore notes that "Boccaccio immediately goes on to say [in his letter that his text] can be escorted into public by a female patron who will provide it with safety" (ibid). In this way, Benson's text indirectly suggests that Boccaccio distinguished a *female way* of perceiving a text from a *masculine* one. In any case, though Benson does not say that, her interpretation presupposes that such a male writer as Boccaccio considered himself able to define femininity for women.

nuanced through the idea that the reception of *De Mulieribus Claris* can only be perceived through the prism of masculine views of *femininity*. Even if *De Mulieribus Claris* is dedicated to a woman,[35] the relevance of Benson's use of the terms "profeminist voice" (Benson 1992, p.18)[36] remains particularly questionable because what finally matters here is a man's decision to impose his own notions of femininity in his work by deciding in advance how men should be expected to conceive and judge femininity. While it is an established fact that the dedicatory letter of Boccaccio's collection was meant to be brought to Countess Andrea Acciaiuoli's attention and though *De Mulieribus Claris* is a book about women, it does not mean that the contents of the book encourage women to educate themselves or to consider themselves as autonomous thinkers.

As Benson herself points out, Boccaccio's heroines "[do not] have the capacity to do great deeds without male guidance and governance [or] without an infusion of male spirit" (Benson 1992, p.18) in *De Mulieribus Claris*.[37] That is one reason why the androcentric perspective conveyed in *De Mulieribus Claris* is different from that conveyed in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. On the one hand, as seen hereabove, Jill Mann (2002) has largely shown that several female figures of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* have a *typically feminine* type of *compassion* when they are in a position of power in front of men. Though Mann does not analyse the *De Mulieribus Claris* itself, she puts forward an aspect of *The Legend of Good Women* that reveals that, unlike Boccaccio's collection, Chaucer's confers an important status on femininity itself. On the other hand, as Benson points out, only masculinity can be viewed as the measure of humanity's importance in *De Mulieribus*

[35] See previous note about the dedicatory letter of the *De Mulieribus Claris* and P. Benson's discussion on that letter.
[36] See note 33.
[37] Also see note 32. Constance Jordan supports a similar idea.

Claris. Thus, without calling Chaucer or Boccaccio *misogynists* or *feminists*, it appears that Chaucer's *Legend* opens a debate about the importance of women's *nature* as opposed to men's, whereas the *De Mulieribus Claris* limits the debate.

II.4. Dido's *Gender* in *De Mulieribus Claris*

Actually, in order to see to which extent *De Mulieribus Claris* and *The Legend of Good Women* respectively concede ground to the empowerment of femininity in relation to men's authority, a comparison of studies by Jill Mann (2002) and Claudia Zudini (2016) can help to fix important distinctions between Boccaccio's and Chaucer's representations of femininity through the famous figure of Dido. Indeed, whereas Mann has analysed the figure of Dido depicted in *The Legend of Good Women*, Zudini has turned her attention to the Dido that Boccaccio describes in the *De Mulieribus Claris*.[38] As Jane E. Everson (2001) has actually put it, the "*Roman d'Enéas* […] had an immense circulation in medieval Europe including in Italy" (Everson 2001, p.45). Furthermore, Everson has pointed out that Virgil's Aeneid itself "was throughout the period one of the most read and studied of all texts" (ibid). Thus, it is clear that Mann's and Zudini's studies about Dido as a female character are also about a figure that Boccaccio's and Chaucer's readers might have known perfectly well in the fourteenth century. In such a perspective, it seems clear that every particular version of Dido's story might have had an important meaning at the time. Of course, those who knew the version of one of the two authors did not necessarily know the version of the other one. Chaucer was English and Boccaccio was Italian.

[38] In her study on gender in *De Mulieribus Claris*, Zudini argues that there is a "*topos* […] che implica una allusione alla differenza fisica dei generi [[a] *topos* […] involving an allusion to physical differences between genders]" (Zudini 2016, §.7). Zudini's text is exclusively written in Italian. The English translations accompanying her terms in the present study are especially made by Wellan Bolanga for the study,

Nevertheless, for each author, associating such a famous figure with his own definition of femininity was certainly not an unimportant gesture.

Actually, as Zudini shows, Boccaccio avoids representing his Dido as an example of female powerfulness. Zudini remarks that in *De Mulieribus Claris*, "[l]a capacità decisionale di Didone pertiene alla sovrapposizione che in lei si attua di qualità muliebri e qualità virili [Dido's decisional capacity pertains to the superposition that is achieved in her both by female characteristics and virile qualities]" (Zudini 2016, §.7).[39] In this perspective, in Zudini's approach – as in Jordan's and Benson's – women's potentials in *De Mulieribus Claris* clearly appear to be dependent upon an authority external to themselves. Still, unlike Benson's analysis of gender in Boccaccio's collection of portraits, Zudini's analysis of Boccaccio's Dido does not suggest that the male author seeks to valorise any concept of femininity itself through his female characters. As Zudini shows, Boccaccio's text rather confirms his intention to use masculinity as the instrument through which gender discrimination *systematically* occurs at different levels of his representations of female characters.

For Zudini, the first level is that of the body. She notes that "la corporeità femminile [female corporeality]" (Zudini 2016, §.4) is depicted "secondo due principali articolazioni [according to two main articulations]" (ibid)[40] in the *De Mulieribus Claris*. The first *articulation* Zudini identifies is, as she writes, "il rapporto di rivalità di genere tra corpo maschile e corpo femminile, che permette al narratore di vantare l'autarchia del primo rispetto al secondo" (ibid).[41] The second *articulation* she mentions is "il

[40] All the English translations of Zudini's text appearing here are especially made by Wellan Bolanga for the present study.
[41] Translation: "[the gendered power relationship between the male body and the female body, which enables the narrator to boast about the self-sufficiency of the former in comparison to the latter]" (Zudini 2016, §.4).

rapporto gerarchico che giustappone il corpo all'anima, funzionale, nel *De mulieribus*, ad affermare la rappresentatività del corpo rispetto all'anima, ma sfruttato a volte dal narratore anche come dissociazione dell'uno dall'altra" (Zudini 2016, §.4).[42] In fact, Zudini's idea that Boccaccio was prone to create *oppositions* and *hierarchies* between the *masculine* and the *feminine* and placed the *male body* and *soul* above the *female* ones can be seen through the concrete example of Boccaccio's Dido, which Zudini discusses in her theory. Before observing her description of Boccaccio's Dido as opposed to Mann's description of Chaucer's Dido, it has to be noted that such powerfully created *hierarchies* as those that she mentions show that Boccaccio strictly aimed at avoiding polemics about the status of *womanliness* as a foil to masculinity.

II.5. The *Virile* Name of Boccaccio's Dido

In the story of the Dido of *De Mulieribus*, Zudini actually finds a turning point at which it can be noticed that Dido's *femininity* is clearly dismissed, whereas *masculinity* is rendered sublime by Boccaccio. While analysing the episode in which Boccaccio's Dido asserts herself as a heroine after the murder of her wealthy husband Sicheus by her greedy brother Pygmalion, Zudini notes that Boccaccio tells us in his Latin text that "la giovane vedova si oppone a Pigmalione 'posita feminea mollicie et firmato in virile robur animo' [the young widow [Dido] opposes Pygmalion 'posita feminea mollicie et firmato in virile robur animo']" (Zudini 2016, §.7).[43]

Actually, Zudini also mentions the idea of a "superiorità della fisicità virile che il narratore concederà, infatti […] a eroine specialmente notevoli [[a]superiority of virile physicality, which is granted by the narrator [of *De Mulieribus Claris*] […] to particularly remarkable heroines]" (Zudini 2016, §.4).

[42]Translation: "[the hierarchical relationship which juxtaposes the body with the soul [and] serves, in the *De Mulieribus Claris*, to affirm the representativeness of the body in relation to the soul, but [is] sometimes also exploited by the narrator to dissociate them one from another]" (Zudini 2016, §.4).

[43] Here, Zudini refers to *De Mulieribus Claris*, XLII, 32–33. Elissa (Dido) had married the wealthy priest Sicheus, who has been murdered by her brother Pygmalion, a greedy man who coveted Sicheus's wealth. However, knowing Pygmalion's greed, Sicheus had buried his treasure before being assassinated. First eager to lose her life after Sicheus's death, his widow finally overcomes her pain.

Actually, it is Boccaccio's use of the terms "posita feminea mollicie et firmato in virile robur animo" that strikes Zudini in this episode in which Dido ceases to mourn the death of her murdered husband and courageously decides to fight Pygmalion though her brother could kill her and steal her riches. Effectively, before this episode, Dido was named Elissa. As Zudini points out, in Boccaccio's story "tale forza maschile guadagnerà a Elissa il soprannome di Didone, equivalente fenicio del latino 'virago' [it is thanks to her masculine strength that Elissa gained the nickname of Dido, which is the Phoenician equivalent of the Latin term 'virago']" (Zudini 2016, §.7)[44]. By referring to those events of *De Mulieribus Claris*, Zudini clearly puts forward the idea that the heroism of Boccaccio's Dido is the result of her acquisition of capacities considered *masculine* in *De Mulieribus Claris*. Thereby, it even appears that Dido's struggle with her brother marks the effacement of her femininity as well as the emergence of a sense of *uselessness* associated with femininity. Effectively, Boccaccio's Dido will remain chaste until her suicide and the debate about her female nature is closed.

As opposed to the Chaucerian Dido analysed by Jill Mann (2002), in the light of Zudini's analysis, Boccaccio's version of Dido does not propose a debate about the nature of the characteristics Boccaccio attributes to *masculinity* and *femininity.* Indeed, on the one hand, Mann has perceived a contrast between the

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To avoid getting herself killed by her greedy brother, Elissa (Dido), who knows where Sicheus's gold is, takes the riches left by her deceased husband, steals her brother's ships and goes away with companions. At sea, she throws her husband's gold overboard, forcing thereby her companions to keep travelling with her instead of going back to Pygmalion, who would kill them because of the loss of the treasure.

[44] Here, Zudini refers to *De Mulieribus Claris*, XLII, 33–35, which is the part of the narrative in which Dido receives her nickname because she shows herself ready to meet with her brother or to confront him after her husband's death, though she risks getting killed as well. According to Zudini, in this episode, Boccaccio depicts Dido as a woman endowed with "un animo che può, malgrado uno statuto fisico solo femminile, vantare una rara completezza [a soul that can boast a rare completeness, despite a physical status which is only feminine]" (Zudini 2016, §.7). In other words, once again, Zudini's analysis clearly involves the idea that Boccaccio needed the *worthiest* part of Dido's characterisation to be *masculine* because he did not believe women's inferiority to be questionable, but rather affirmable.

compassionate femininity represented by Chaucer's Dido and Aeneas, who as Mann notes, "pleads on his knees for her love until she takes pity on him" (Mann 2002, p.32). It clearly emerges from such a contrast that the power game between a male and a female character allows *femininity* to have a position in relation to *masculinity* and to have a value in itself in Chaucer's "Legend of Dido". On the other hand, it clearly emerges from Zudini's analysis that Boccaccio did not wish to get *overly* interested in the potential qualities of Dido's femininity itself in *De Mulieribus Claris* since the idea of a usefulness of *femininity* is evacuated in favour of masculinity through the internalised gender war embodied by his Dido.

This is an aspect of Boccaccio's androcentrism that equally appears in the *Decameron*, where female figures may acquire social power by disguising themselves and by pretending to be men, as for instance in the *Ninth Story* of the *Second Day*, the *Ninth Story* of the *Third Day* or the *Third Story* of the *Second Day*. Frequently, in Boccaccian texts, the masculine comes before the feminine. The frequency of the occurrences of such a narrative process in Boccaccio suggests that he might have found the *characteristics* of *masculinity* more advantageous than those of *femininity*.

II.6. Types of Androcentric Perceptions, *Feminism* or *Misogyny*? A question of Terminology

Then, what should one think about Chaucer's and Boccaccio's respective exploitations of gender *binaries* in works especially dedicated to gender issues? Should such explorations be considered *misogynistic* or *feminist*? Part of the two questions have found answers hereabove. As seen through Mann's reading of *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer's text seems to have been prone to favour some aspects of *femininity* over those of *masculinity* in different stories of his collection and

therefore, Crane and Ingham's interpretation of the sole "Knight's Tale" is not representative of his literary habits. As for Boccaccio, the mere presence of strong female warriors in the *Teseida* does not enable us to consider that this point reflects his *perceptions* of *femininity* in general. With Zudini, we have admitted that he did not question the idea of *masculine supremacy*.

Actually, there are accurate reasons why thinking about Chaucer's and Boccaccio's writings in terms of their *types of androcentrism* is more practical than using such modern notions as *misogyny* and *feminism*. To avoid terminology issues, it is important to distinguish modern feminist thinking from Boccaccio's and Chaucer's. Indeed, in *What is Feminism?* (1999), one of Chris Beasly's first move to define the basics of modern feminism is his association of feminist theory with "a view [of traditional social and political thought […] [that] involves a critique […] of misogyny" (Beasly 1999, p.4), on the one hand. On the other hand, Beasly notes that feminism relies on the idea that "[m]ainstream social and political theory today[45] is characteristically generated at a distance from feminist thought" (Beasly 1999, p.4). As seen above, *De Mulieribus Claris* does not reconsider men's and women's traditional statuses. *Femininity* is anyway considered *inferior* to *masculinity* in Boccaccio's collection and Dido is not the only female figure of that collection whose *femininity* is despised. The case of Iole, the daughter of King Eurytus of Aetolia, confirms that femininity is constantly considered unreliable in *De Mulieribus Claris.* To avenge her father's death, Boccaccio's Iole does not kill Hercules, who is Eurytus's murderer. She rather chooses to seduce him and makes him get rid of the clothes and attributes that characterise him as a hero and symbolise his masculine power. She notably makes him "remove the skin of the Nemean lion, which [is] a sign

[45] Beasly's text was first published in 1999, but there is no evidence that these theoretical grounds of feminism have been modified since that time.

of his strength" (*On Famous Women,* trans. of Boccaccio's text by Guido A. Guarino 2011, p.45), she makes him "adorn himself with girlish garlands" (ibid). According to Boccaccio, Iole even leads Hercules to "sit like a woman among other common women and tell the story of his labours" (ibid) because he has "given up himself to luxury" (ibid). Whereas the courage of Boccaccio's Dido is *improved* by *masculinity*, *femininity* degrades the *masculinity* of his Hercules because of the latter's love for a woman. Thus, unlike Chaucer with his "Manciple's Tale" or with his "Legend of Dido", Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* takes it for granted that women and *femininity* in itself drive men to their ruin.

Presented as an "example of […] the trickery of women" (*On Famous Women,* trans. of Boccaccio's text by Guido A. Guarino 2011, p.46), Iole's story is clearly reminiscent of such biblical episodes as those of Eve's or Delilah's betrayals. However, while Boccaccio's androcentrism draws on common traditional Christian images of his time to define women, for modern feminists of our time, this androcentrism may be assimilated to conscious discrimination against women because it denigrates women with insistence. Still, Boccaccio's definitions of womanhood were *mainstream* ones in his own time, though he did not choose the softest images to describe women. He merely did not embrace the same perspectives as Chaucer in his writings. Modern women's rights defenders may not accuse Boccaccio of being either particularly *patronising* or supportive of a cause similar to theirs. He was a Christian traditionalist writer who made artistic choices we may consider harsh in our time, but he was not a man of our time.

As for *The Legend of Good Women*, it is through another point that its approach to gender mostly escapes (modern) *feminist* views. Beasly notably points out that feminists base their theoretical background on approaches put in relation to the

principle that there are in Western *mainstream* cultures, as he notes, "three on-going processes: excluding, marginalising and trivialising women" (Beasly 1999, p.4).[46] Clearly, if Mann (2002) perceives the heroines of *The Legend of Good Women* as *models* of *compassion*, as mentioned above, she also notes that their "'pite' is the quality that [specifically] dominates in the women, and the quality that is totally lacking from the men" (Mann 2002, p.32) in Chaucer's *Legend*. She thereby implicitly admits that Chaucer's Phaedra and Dido are specifically meant to be defined as figures of *womanhood* in contrast to standard perceptions of *manhood*. Therefore, it is clear that those Chaucerian heroines are not considered as men's equals in *The Legend*. They are rather considered as part of a *particular category* of humans. Men are part of another one. Chaucer may give the same weight to the definitions of the respective characteristics of both categories. For him, they are two different groups of humans. As a Christian medieval author, separatism is part of his androcentrism. The *good women* he describes are expected to have defined characteristics.

Furthermore, in *The Legend of Good Women*, a female figure may be praised above all for her role as the faithful companion of a man. As previously mentioned, as Godman (1983) remarks, Chaucer's Cleopatra merely represents "loyalty, constancy and 'wyfhood' ([*Legend of Good Women*, ll.] 681–95)" (Godman 1983, p.289). Her role appears to be in conformity with a spontaneously patriarchal reasoning. Therefore, while reading Chaucer, one should avoid being trapped in the idea that the characterisation of one heroine or another is meant to bypass or oppose decrees of male authorities in general. Though these women appear to be powerful heroines in Chaucer's text*,* they are not associated with the modern idea to consider women

[46] In this context, Beasly points out that "[t]rivialising occurs when women's experiences are reinterpreted in terms of those associated with men, when feminist writers are said not to talk about the 'big issues' or when feminist writers are shown 'respect' in a patronising way" (Beasly 1999, p.4). Here, we are close to Crane and Ingham's preoccupations and far from Chaucer's and Boccaccio's.

and men as similar human beings. This is not even at stake in his writings, where men have their functions and women have theirs. As with Boccaccio, women are represented as a particular *species* in Chaucer's texts. Nevertheless, what mainly differs from Boccaccio's representations of heroic women in Chaucer's is the fact that Chaucer may allow women's *own characteristics* to be the driver of their own actions without denigrating those actions.

II.7. The Ambiguity of Boccaccio's Androcentrism

Actually, it would be a mistake to define *De Mulieribus Claris* either as a tribute to femininity or as a work meant to demonise women, though modern scholars have tried to choose one option or the other. As seen above, Pamela Benson proposes to associate the term "profeminist" with the narrator of Boccaccio's collection, but Zudini's analysis of *De Mulieribus Claris* (and in particular of the *femininity* of Boccaccio's Dido) renders Benson's use of such a term problematic. Clearly, Boccaccio inflexibly maintains his androcentric perspective through his representations of womanhood as a literary abstraction. Furthermore, as previously seen, according to Benson herself, the heroines of *De Mulieribus Claris* "[do not] do great deeds without male guidance and governance [or] without an infusion of male spirit" (Benson 1992, p.18) and today's feminists could therefore easily consider the Boccaccio of *De Mulieribus Claris* as an enemy of women because he avoids depicting *femininity* outside the field of a judgemental and *patronising masculine* point of view.

However, beyond the fact that Boccaccio merely aligns his texts with Christian commonplaces and cannot be judged for it, other elements can demonstrate that such a feminist perception of Boccaccio would be completely anachronistic. *De Mulieribus Claris* is above all a work of the fourteenth century and should be

considered as such. In Boccaccio's time, that work had its own specificities. Effectively, written around 1375,[47] *De Mulieribus Claris* was received, as Benson shows, as "an anomaly […] because of the importance it attributed to women and because of the evidence it presented that women had often demonstrated skill in areas of behaviour previously considered to be exclusively male" (Benson 1992, p.33). In this sense, Boccaccio appears to have been more audacious than his Italian contemporaries. Benson moreover points out that Boccaccio's Latin work served as a model for several works in Latin and Italian throughout the fifteenth century.[48] Therefore, if placed in the context of his own time, Boccaccio can be viewed as a writer who revisited the androcentric standards of his century and reshaped the contours of *femininity* and *masculinity* through his nevertheless deeply *androcentric* writings of *De Mulieribus Claris*. Obviously, though he conveyed the common idea that women were dangerous and that *masculinity* could be threatened by *femininity*, he showed that *women's* potentials were important enough to draw men's attention.

II.8. The Major Distinctions between Chaucer's and Boccaccio's Types of Androcentrism

As previously seen, Godman (1983) gives an extremely accurate account of the main differences between Chaucer's Zenobia and Cleopatra and Boccaccio's and he uses the term *misogyny* to discuss the content of the *De Mulieribus Claris*. That term

[47] Boriaud, Jean-Yves. Introduction. *Les Femmes Illustres* (*De Mulieribus Claris*). By Giovanni Boccaccio. Trans. Jean-Yves Boriaud. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013. vii–xxviii, p.vii.

[48] Benson notes that *De Mulieribus Claris* "was soon translated into Italian [and that] no original works in the genre were written until 1467, when Antonio Cornazzano wrote his *De mulieribus admirandis* [, which] was followed by Vespasiano Da Bistici's *Il Libro delle lode e commendazione delle donne* (c. 1480) and Giovanni Sabadino Degli Arienti's *Gynevera de le clare donne* (1483)" (Benson 1992, p.33). Benson's list definitely shows that Boccaccio's collection of female portraits has opened the way for other Italian writers of his time to celebrate femininity. Still, Benson points out that such texts "neither offer means for women of their own time to enter the public arena nor […] offer means for society to exclude them" (Benson 1992, p.47). She furthermore remarks that the writers of those works "[did] not imagine that the equality they [had] discovered [between men and women's capacities] might make the hierarchical structure of society untenable" (ibid).

appears to be very well chosen for a study written in the twentieth century, but in the fourteenth century, as seen above, such writers as Boccaccio certainly did not consider themselves as *misogynists* or *feminists* since they did not think about women's rights and autonomy, but were rather interested in defining the contours of *feminine nature*. Therefore, while comparing Boccaccio's and Chaucer's respective definitions of the characteristics of *womanhood* through works especially dedicated to famous women and beyond that type of works, it is more practical to use the term *androcentrism* in order to account for the complexity of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's literary habits in terms of discussions about gender issues. Notably, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, femininity is not constantly denigrated and masculinity is not constantly praised. In the *Decameron*, a woman may trick and challenge her husband (*Dec.* II,9; III,9 & VI,7) or her father (*Dec.* IV,1 & II,3) without being demonised. She may commit adultery, win her case (VI,7) and be praised by her congeners. Unlike that of *De Mulieribus Claris*, the texts of the *Decameron* do not systematically condemn women. It is because of such differences between two Boccaccian collections that a comparison may be tricky. Still, in the *De Mulieribus Claris* and in different stories of the *Decameron*, either men's power or masculine decrees take precedence over the femininity of the most imposing Boccaccian female figures. This fact links the *Decameron* to the *De Mulieribus Claris* and is to be explored in the next chapters of this study.

Actually, unlike the *De Mulieribus Claris* and in *The Legend of Good Women*, the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* do not mainly focus on *female figures*, but also on interactions between men and women. Furthermore, unlike the *De Mulieribus Claris* and *The Legend of Good Women*, the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* are not collections of summaries of lives with explicitly moralising sentences. They

are collections of complex stories in which female and male figures are characterised by their actions, their own speech and that of the narrators who tell the stories. Therefore, analysing genders in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* is more about finding clues than about assimilating lessons. Reading those two works offer more possibilities of interpretation than reading the *De Mulieribus Claris* and the *Legend of Good Women.*

Yet the third and fourth chapters of this study propose to demonstrate that the *Decameron* does not differ so much from the *De Mulieribus Claris* and that the *Canterbury Tales* are not completely different from *The Legend of Good Women* in terms of the characteristics Boccaccio and Chaucer respectively confer on women. What emerges above all from this second chapter is that Chaucer and Boccaccio used specific strategies in specific stories and made *femininity* and *masculinity* interact with each other in different ways. Whereas Boccaccio has androcentric representations of gender through which the *masculine* invades the *feminine* in *De Mulieribus Claris*, Chaucer adopts an androcentric perspective through which both the *feminine* and the *masculine* are questioned in his *Legend of Good Women* and in the "Manciple's Tale". It is now clear that Chaucer lets *femininity* have some space in his two collections. On the other hand, it is now certain that the Boccaccian androcentrism of the *De Mulieribus Claris* recurrently and persistently valorises masculinity and strongly relies on the biblical idea that women and femininity are meant to cause suspicion. Actually, in the *Decameron*, a man may be tricked by his wife (*Dec.* III,9 & VI,7) or his daughter (II,3 & IV,1). Thereby, the idea that women are prone to manipulate or surpass men is as constant in the *Decameron* as in the *De Mulieribus Claris*. These elements are the ones through which Boccaccio's androcentrism can be referred to in the next chapters.

Chapter III

Androgyny in the *Decameron* and in the *Canterbury Tales*

As previously seen, whereas Chaucer's androcentrism is partly rooted in the idea that *femininity* is as important as *masculinity*, Boccaccio's androcentrism inflexibly places *masculinity* above *femininity* and thereby scrupulously aligns itself with traditional biblical images in relation to the idea that women are *naturally prone* to betray men. In the light of these facts, the present chapter proposes to undertake a comparative approach suggesting, on the one hand, that gender roles in the *Canterbury Tales* are somehow similar to gender roles in *The Legend of Good Women*. On the other hand, this approach also relies on the idea that the importance of the masculine systematically overrides that of the feminine in the *Decameron*, though some of its female characters may seem as powerful as men to some extent. Actually, one way of approaching the different concepts of femininity appearing throughout the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* is to consider the fact that different women can use similar means to interact with men in one collection. On the one hand, in the *Canterbury Tales*, there is the case of the Wife of Bath, who is famous for her liberal speech about the Bible and its androcentric decrees about female sexuality. As a female storyteller, the Wife of Bath may be considered as an influencer who questions men's decrees. In fact, in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" itself, there is an ugly heroine who leads an unwise knight to marry her by saving his life. Above all, she makes him fall in love with her through her speech. In this sense, the Wife of Bath's heroine can be considered as an important female figure because she

seduces and influences a powerful man despite her appearance. As previously seen, there is also Emelye, who, after being a soldier, becomes a wife in the “Knight’s Tale”. As mentioned above, Emelye tries to control her fate as much as possible by praying for a loving husband in the temple of Diane. In fact, in all of these cases, it appears that Chaucer’s female figures try to have their own voices despite men’s decrees and these female figures question men’s decrees and try to be spiritually free. On the other hand, in the *Decameron*, there are notably six female figures who represent different ways for Boccaccio to define interactions between the *masculine* and the *feminine*. There is a proud adulterous woman (in *Dec.* VI,7), a noblewoman who has a secret lover without the consent of her father (in *Dec.* IV,1) and a young widow who fights a magistrate who wants to rape and marry her (in *Dec.* IV,6). Faithfully in love with her deceased husband, she cannot be another man’s wife and therefore enters a convent. In the *Decameron*, there is also a princess who disguises herself as an abbot because she wishes to run away from an old king whom her father wants her to marry (*Dec.* II,3). She finally asks the Pope to let her be a young man’s wife. In Boccaccio’s collection, there is a wife who disguises herself as a merchant and lives as a man for six years until she can recover her status as a wife (in *Dec.* II,9). Moreover, there is a modest young woman who forces a nobleman to marry her and makes him fall in love with her (*Dec.* III,9). In all these stories, there are strong interactions between *femininity* and *masculinity*. Nevertheless, what mostly distinguishes Boccaccio’s female characters from Chaucer’s is the nature of the power relations between genders epitomised by those female figures. In the *Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath, the heroine of her tale and Emelye question their condition as women and as spouses. Boccaccio’s female figures, on the other hand, preserve their statuses as wives.

III.1. Six *Bold* Female Figures of the *Decameron*

As mentioned above, Zudini (2016) has shown that *virility* was the source of Dido's powerfulness in *De Mulieribus Claris.* Actually, the idea that a woman may acquire masculine power is equally important in the *Decameron.* Notably, as mentioned above, six particular female characters of the *Decameron* epitomise different aspects of Boccaccio's definitions of intergender relations. Whereas some of those female characters have attracted the interest of various scholars, some others simply need to be evoked in order to see to which extent they may be associated with *masculinity.* Furthermore, it is equally important to see to which extent their characterisations may distinguish them from the masculine, for *masculine* attributes often reveal something about Boccaccio's definitions of womanhood itself in the *Decameron.* Actually, in the perspective which is chosen in this study, defining *masculinity* relies on various criteria depending on various schemes Boccaccio uses in his *Decameron*. In Boccaccio's collection women may disguise themselves as men and thereby acquire a man's social status, as in *Dec.* II,3 and II,9. Women may seduce men and lead the latter to have sexual intercourse with them, as in *Dec.* III,9 and VI,7. A woman may engage in a physical fight with a man who wants to rape her, as in *Dec.* IV,6. A noblewoman may question the authority of a father who does not let her love a servant, as in *Dec.* IV,1. In all these stories of the *Decameron*, women take charge of their own sexuality and therefore seem to exceed the limits that Christian men set for them. As previously mentioned, women are not expected to be men's equals.

In fact, even when women acquire masculine aspects in the *Decameron*, they do not become men's equals. The *English king's daughter* from *Dec.* II, 3 disguises herself as an abbot, runs away from her father's kingdom to avoid an arranged

marriage and succeeds in seducing the young Alessandro, despite the fact that he believes at first that she is a man “in the throes of some unnatural kind of passion” (*Dec.*, II,3, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.94). The rebellious aspect of the princess lies in the fact that she decides to make love to Alessandro after letting him know that she is actually a woman. Before getting married, she offers him her virginity, which seems to be a transgressive act. Still, her rebellion and her audacity have limits. As a Christian woman, she is meant to become a wife above all. It is the Pope himself who will allow her to be Alessandro’s wife, whereas her father had planned to make her marry the old king of Scotland. Thus, though the English princess audaciously adopts the appearance and the status of a powerful man to defy the desires of her father the king, underneath the abbot’s clothes, there is above all a catholic woman desirous to become a woman again in order to marry a man. In this case, though she disobeys her father, the English princess does not completely usurp men’s right to determine her fate. Such a powerful man as the Pope must render her love legal. She respects masculine authority as a value which is consubstantial with her faith.

Like this princess, in *Dec.* II, 9, a woman disguises herself as a man. Unfairly accused of adultery by her husband Bernabò and his treacherous fellow merchant Ambrogiuolo, Zinevra risks getting killed. Obliged therefore to leave the city of Genoa to save her life, she embraces the role of a man and works as a merchant for the powerful Sultan of Alexandria, remaining under the latter’s protection for six years. Extremely resourceful and active, the androgynous figure of Zinevra has actually caught the attention of different scholars. Notably, Christopher Nissen (2003) considers her as a “a model of cleverness and self-control” (Nissen 2003, p.202) and for Marilyn Migiel (2003), that figure is “a heterosexual woman with the particular

qualities and life experiences she, as a fictional character, is said to possess" (Migiel 2003, p.100). It is above all Zinevra's *masculine nature* that Migiel has denied, whereas Nissen has put forward the *reactivity* of that Boccaccian figure. Still, Zinevra's misadventures aim at proving that she is the perpetual instrument of her husband's happiness. Though Bernabò has wished to kill her in order to save his honour, as it is written in *Dec.* II,9, Zinevra does not wish to punish him, but is rather "[a]nxious to give Bernabò clear proof of her innocence" (*Dec.*II,9, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.184). On the one hand, Zinevra is able to pass as a man for several years. On the other hand, her main concern is to be loved again by her cruel husband. Therefore, it can be noted that Zinevra is a mix of *wifely* submission and *masculine* audacity.

Other female figures from the *Decameron* are in similar cases. Even more audacious than Zinevra and the rebellious *English king's daughter* of *Dec.* II,3, Giletta di Narbona (*Dec.* III, 9) is a very reactive doctor's daughter who heals the king of France of a tumour and therefore claims the right to marry the young Count Beltramo of Roussillon, who does not wish to be her husband. Giletta also successfully administers Beltramo's properties when he gives up his lands and refuses to live with her. Persistently in love with him, she finally tricks him into getting her pregnant and he accepts to come back to his lands and to recognise his twin sons. Beltramo finally falls in love with Giletta and accepts her as his wife. In fact, according to Anthony Cassell (2014), that Boccaccian heroine "is the power that forces the immature Beltramo to recognise his own male, phallic powers of begetting and that re-masculinises him into accepting his place as a patriarch" (Cassell 2014, p.197). Here again, it clearly appears that Giletta's *femininity* has to be analysed in terms of the alignment of her character with features associated with *masculinity.* She assumes

Beltramo's role as a landlord when he is away from Roussillon. She satisfies her own desire to become Beltramo's wife and takes charge of his destiny by enabling him to become a father. However, the fact of claiming that she "re-masculinises" him is extremely problematic. Without Giletta, Beltramo himself is depicted as a warrior so "honoured" (*Dec.* III,9, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.282) that he becomes "the captain of a company of men" (ibid). Giletta is above all a woman who gets into the bed of another one with whom Beltramo really wishes to make love and Giletta deceives Beltramo in order to get pregnant by him. Therefore, as a woman, she may be considered either treacherous or bold. In any case, her boldness serves her mere desire to be the wife of a man at all costs.

Actually, a fourth female figure of the *Decameron* similarly appears to be extremely bold and desirous to place herself under the normative supervision of men at the same time. In *Dec.* IV,1, after her husband's death, the noblewoman Ghismonda remains without a lover. Boccaccio clearly stresses that she desperately needs one, since he writes that she "[looks] over all the men, both noble and non-noble, who [frequent] her father's court" (*Dec.* IV,1, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.309) until she falls in love with the servant Guiscardo. Soon, her father Tancredi discovers that she is in love with his servant and Guiscardo is arrested and executed. Deprived of her lover's affection, Ghismonda finally commits suicide. In fact, F. Regina Psaki (2015) has devoted a great deal of attention to the power relationship that Boccaccio creates between Ghismonda and her father Tancredi in *Dec.* IV,1. Actually, while Psaki's analysis of those Boccaccian characters involves the question of their relation as a parent and his child, it is also obvious that gender is a factor through which this relation can be defined. In particular, Psaki analyses a scene in which Tancredi blames his daughter for having set her sight on a valet, despite the

fact that she is a noblewoman. Whereas the scholar notes that Tancredi's daughter "is not moved by [the latter's] reproach" (Psaki 2015, p.106), she puts forward that "Tancredi […] takes on the role of 'a child who had been soundly beaten' […]" (Psaki 2015, p.106). For Psaki, furthermore, "Boccaccio has Ghismonda assume the imposing mantle of parental authority, applying in [a] stern monologue the principles [of] reason, empirical evidence, and rhetorical refinement" (Psaki 2015, p.106). Actually, if the roles of the father and of the daughter are *reversed* here, it goes without saying that their roles as a man and a woman are equally overturned. Indeed, Ghismonda's speech in itself brings forth Boccaccio's definition of genders in his novella. On the one hand, Ghismonda argues that she fell in love with Tancredi's servant because she has "womanly frailty" (*Dec.* IV,1, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.313). On the other hand, to justify the fact that she illicitly chose to have a lover after becoming a widow, she points out Tancredi's "lack of concern to see [her] married" (ibid). She suggests that women need men, that men have to find husbands for their daughters and that she was compelled to assume Tancredi's role as a father by choosing a man for herself. Therefore, though Ghismonda's argumentation is more powerful than her father's in that scene, Boccaccio suggests that a woman needs to be guided and loved by men. Though Ghismonda confronts her father, she does not really reject masculine authority, but indirectly asks for it.

Yet Ghismonda is not the sole woman who falsely rejects masculine authority in the *Decameron*. As Mathias Schonbuch (2012) notes, in *Dec.* IV,6, the young widow Andreuola "doit se défendre *virilmente* [has to defend herself *in a manly way*]" (Schonbuch 2012, §. 22) in front of a podestà who tries to rape her. Her "virile energy […] [drives] him off" (*Dec.* IV,6, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.355). Later, the podestà asks for her hand in marriage and though Andreuola's father himself

“[discusses] the matter with his daughter” (*Dec.* IV,6, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.357), she resists her father. Of course, Andreuola is not a self-determined woman. The reason why she struggles with two representatives of masculine authority (the father and the magistrate) is not a rejection of masculine authority in itself. She is merely faithful to her deceased husband Gabriotto and therefore enters a convent. She is characterised by her obedience to her husband. Even though the latter has died, she has to remain chaste.

In fact, in the *Decameron*, at least one female character may be considered as the antithesis of a chaste, faithful heroine like Andreuola. Indeed, Madonna Filippa (*Dec.* VI,7) is representative of a completely different system of values. She does not resist men’s sexual solicitations. Very sexually active, this adulterous woman claims that women “are much better than men at giving satisfaction to a whole host of lovers” (*Dec.* VI,7, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.496). In fact, Madonna Filippa lives in Prato, a city where adulterous women risk being condemned to the stake and her taste for lust is as extreme as the fact of facing death penalty for such a *crime*. In front of her judge, of her husband and of the people of Prato, she challenges masculine authority by bragging about her ability to please men. For Psaki, Filippa may even be considered as an “effective rhetorician” (Psaki 2015, p.105) because, as the scholar points out, during her trial, the adulterous woman defends herself by “[urging] the judge to ask her husband whether she had always fulfilled her marital obligations” (ibid). Furthermore, Psaki shows the extent to which she finds that Boccaccian female figure seductive by remarking that “Filippa verbally transforms her excess sexual capacity into a concrete item which can not only be ‘surplus’ from her husband’s consumption, but can actually go bad or be thrown to the dogs” (Psaki 2015, p.105). Unlike the five other female characters of the *Decameron* mentioned

hereabove, Filippa is not prone to defend monogamous love as an ideological concept. She clearly claims the right to enjoy lust like men and even beyond her husband's desires. However, though she looks powerful and though her sexuality is her way to challenge men, she obviously remains a female character through which Boccaccio mocks women. Like the five other Boccaccian female characters presented hereabove and in her own way, Filippa represents an ambiguous Boccaccian definition of *femininity*. On the one hand, those six female characters of the *Decameron* appear to be able to challenge men's authority. On the other hand, the legitimacy of their powerfulness is only effective through some aspects of the masculine. As for Filippa, what links her to the masculine is the fact that her body is available to anyone. Rather than challenging men through her intellect, she offers her body to men's lust. Her reasoning is based on her own taste for lust.

III.2. Extremely Distinct Images of Masculinity in *the Canterbury Tales*

As seen hereabove, women's *nature* is double in the *Decameron*. On the one hand, they seem to defy men's decrees. On the other hand, while challenging men, Boccaccio's female characters are likely to remain prisoners of men's decrees and desires. From this point of view, Boccaccio's androcentrism seems to be very monolithic, despite the differences that exist between the six female figures presented hereabove. Women are constantly brought back to the idea of men's greater importance in Boccaccio's texts. In the *Canterbury Tales*, *femininity* may not be so subservient to masculine authority. *Femininity* may at times be significantly distanced from men's decrees in Chaucer's collection and *femininity* in itself takes different forms depending on each female character. On the other hand, there is a lack of moral uniformity in the characterisations of *femininity* and *masculinity*. Notably, whereas Crane, Ingham and other scholars mainly perceive the heroine of

the “Knight’s Tale” as a female warrior who is *defeated by* a *male* one,[49] Emelye is only one specific female character of the *Canterbury Tales*. The Wife of Bath is equally a female character of the *Canterbury Tales* and the latter represents a radically different type of *femininity*. In general, scholars do not view her as a female figure overshadowed by men’s *supremacy.* In fact, even Crane concedes that the Wife of Bath herself epitomises a type of “[individual] transgressiveness” (Crane 1994, p.31), which, according to her, “contrast[s] with romance’s relatively positive vision of identity’s contingency on shared chivalric principles” (ibid). Such an opposition between the Wife of Bath and the *chivalric values* conveyed in romances is actually extremely significant in terms of Crane’s views of Chaucer’s representations of *genders.* Indeed, for Crane, “[r]omances specify that the collectivity does not simply recognise but generates masculine identity and that the social constitution of individuals is a positive cultural pattern” (Crane 1994, p.31), which, as she puts it, “sustains community by bringing men into its law and ultimately by reproducing its law within masculine consciousness” (ibid). In other words, Crane’s terms imply here that the figure of the Wife of Bath cannot be perceived as a *suitable* female character for the *masculine* universe of the *romance genre*, whose *masculinist* dimension should be considered as the measure of the *positive* actions of Chaucer’s characters.

In this perspective, Crane’s perception of the Wife of Bath even contrasts with her own perception of Chaucer’s Emelye. For Crane, the Boccaccian portraits of the Amazons Ippolita and Emilia have been sacrificed to Theseus’s *image* as an *illustrious knight* in the “Knight’s Tale”. Still, Crane’s idea of *positive patterns* associated with masculinity in Chaucer’s collection may be nuanced by noting that

[49] See chapter I.

the fact of being a knight involves various characteristics in relation to that function in at least two *Canterbury Tales* and from one masculine figure to another in a same tale. On the one hand, Palamon and Arcite have different ways of embracing a knight's career in the "Knight's Tale". The two knights do not represent the same values. As a mere lover, Palamon wishes to be at Venus's "servyse" ("Knight's Tale", l.2243) and is given the right to marry Emelye without winning this right during Theseus's tournament. As a mere warrior, Arcite has the desire to conquer Emelye "with strengthe" ("Knight's Tale", l.2399). He rightfully wins the right to marry Emelye at the close of the tournament, but he dies and loses this right. On the other hand, while the hero of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" is a knight, the latter is also presented as a "lusty bacheler" ("Wife of Bath's Tale", l.883) who rapes a maiden. Between these three figures of knighthood, it is difficult to imagine how a Manichean system of chivalric values could be unequivocally associated with masculinity in the *Canterbury Tales*. Though he is a successful fighter, Arcite's bravery and ambition are left unrewarded since he dies. As for Palamon and Emelye's marriage, this one results from Arcite's accident, which was caused by the gods and therefore cannot be merely defined in terms of *positivity* or *negativity*. On the other hand, the hero of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" rapes a woman, but is saved by the queen, who prevents King Arthur from condemning him to death. It is moreover his ugly wife who gives him a chance to redeem himself by reminding him of his duty as a nobleman. Clearly, analysing gender relations in these two *Canterbury Tales* requires an acceptance of the fact that the finalities of the behaviours of the male and female characters are not associable with a stable type of *masculine* morality. Interpreting the results of their actions is not simple. In relation to the men's behaviours, different moralities can

emerge from the two tales mentioned hereabove. In such texts, men's supremacy is not merely the measure with which women's reactions are aligned.

III.3. The Wife of Bath and Madonna Filippa

As previously mentioned, Crane herself admits that the Wife of Bath is an outstanding female figure of the *Canterbury tales*. Still, unlike such scholars as J. A. Burrow (2003), C. David Benson (2003) or Robin Kirkpatrick (1983 a), Crane does not pay particular attention to the characteristics Chaucer confers on the Wife as the narrator of a *Canterbury Tale* or as a *thinking* character. Such points are not taken into consideration in Crane's approach, which focuses on Chaucer's use of genres and on the representations of gender that she associates with those genres. Actually, while Kirkpatrick, Benson and Burrow show interest in the singularities of the Wife of Bath's character as a speaker, only Burrow (2003) analyses her in relation to the verbal content of her tale and he explicitly contributes to revealing how that character questions power relations between men and women.

Concretely, Kirkpatrick does not seem to focus specifically on the fact that the Wife is a female character. He analyses her as a character among other (male and female) characters.[50] For him, the Wife is above all a character endowed with an ability to cite the Bible in such a way that "[t]ext after text is smartly paraphrased and then either dismissed out of hand or dextrously perverted and misapplied" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.215). In fact, Kirkpatrick does not only pay attention to Chaucer's Wife of Bath's character in the light of her outstanding speech. He notably compares her with Boccaccio's Madonna Filippa and argues that they both have

[50] Kirkpatrick's study does not specifically focus on female figures. He also evokes the "Yeoman's Tale" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.215) and the figure of Ceperello, a dying man who, in the very first *novella* of the *Decameron,* tricks a clergyman and an entire population into thinking that he has had a saint's life, whereas he has actually lived that of a criminal. On his deathbed, Ceperello invents coarse lies, but his confessor believes him and after passing away, Ceperello is buried and venerated like a saint.

“verbal dexterity” (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.213). Moreover, in Kirkpatrick’s approach, it is mostly Filippa who clearly appears to be defined as a woman who challenges masculine authority. On the one hand, he remarks that the Wife of Bath shows “herself able to turn judicious scholar […] and [concentrates] wholly on the letter of the law [to] deny that there is any textual authority either for marriage or virginity” (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.216). Obviously, these aspects of the Wife’s speech do not specifically refer to gender issues, but to the skills a man could as well have had. For him, on the other hand, Madonna Filippa appears to be a figure thanks to whose words an “[unjust law against adulterous women] is revealed to be no absolute construction but a system of human conventions – a tissue of words – which can be and must be readjusted to meet the impact of new circumstances” (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.213). Clearly, Kirkpatrick’s theory considers Filippa’s speech more *gendered* and more opposed to men’s decrees than the Wife of Bath’s, but this theory does not exclude the possibility to view Chaucer’s Wife as a woman who sincerely challenges masculine authority. Still, unlike the Wife of Bath, Madonna Filippa does not have the role of a storyteller, but that of a mere character, who as mentioned above, belongs to a collection in which women’s sexuality or love can be above all at the service of men’s desire. Unlike Madonna Filippa, as a speaker, the Wife of Bath is a female figure on which the author of a collection imposes the responsibility of many lines about complicated religious topics.

Notably, C. David Benson’s approach to the Wife of Bath’s speech raises the idea of an opposition between that Chaucerian female figure and men more explicitly than Kirkpatrick’s does. Effectively, Benson does not only point out that “the Wife produces a travesty of traditional Christian teachings about marriage with her brilliant

spoof of medieval logic and biblical quotations" (Benson 2003, p.134).[51] He calls that Chaucerian figure "an intellectual *manqué*" (ibid) and "a would-be clerk, who […] is fully powerful only in discourse" (Benson 2003, p.134) and he even remarks that the Wife has "terrifying fluency when she repeats a speech used to overwhelm her old husbands that masterfully blends false reasoning" (Benson 2003, p.134). Thereby, he puts forward that she is an impressive contradictor of *male thinkers.* Unlike Madonna Filippa, who gladly offers to please "a whole host of lovers" (*Dec.* VI,7, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.496), the Wife of Bath has constantly been presented as a character who seriously questions men's influence on women's behaviours.

Actually, as Burrow shows, the Wife's tale contains subtle arguments that are linked to representations of men's and women's sexualities. Unlike Kirkpatrick, who focusses on the "Wife of Bath's Prologue", Burrow turns his attention to the "Wife of Bath's Tale" itself. More precisely, he perceives the Wife of Bath as a narrator who conveys critical views and revels in irony while telling her story. Given that the "Wife of Bath's Tale" itself is a about a knight who redeems himself after raping a woman, Burrow's analysis makes the Wife appear as a figure who questions men's sexual behaviours throughout her own story in relation to the rape of women. Furthermore, the effects of this analysis extends beyond the frameworks of the tale itself and links the Wife's tale to her own relation with men. As Burrow notes, the Wife places her story in the context of "Arthurian times [and suggests that] women lived in continual

[51] Benson summarises the Wife's famous argumentation as follows: "Question: Should one marry more than once? Answer: Christ's views on this are difficult to understand, but certainly God's 'gentil text' bidding us to 'wexe and multiplye' is clear enough – and look at all Solomon's wives (III, 9–44). Question: is virginity commanded? Answer: If so, where would new virgins come from? And does not a household need wooden vessels as well as gold? And why then were humans given 'members of generacion' (62–134)?" (Benson 2003, p.134). By presenting these argumentative phases of the Wife's "Prologue", Benson manifestly highlights the licentious skilfulness of that fictional woman, who relativizes the importance of the patriarchal sacralisation of the limitations of female sexuality and of the unquestionability of the association of women's sexuality with marriage and monogamy.

fear of being raped by the 'elves' or fairy creatures with which the land was then filled [in those days]" (Burrow 2003, p.144). Through these words, according to Burrow, the Wife seems to insinuate that the "incubi [who lived in Arthurian times] have been driven out by the pious activity of the friars [and that] 'Wommen may go saufly up and doun' [in her own time]" (ibid). Still, for Burrow, the "Wife does not in reality treat modern friars as an improvement on their elvish predecessors" (Burrow 2003, p.145). As he puts it, there is "deceptive sweetness [in the Wife's] tale's opening" (ibid). That is why he argues that the Wife herself actually means that "[n]or are women […] actually safe with friars from sexual attack [in her time]" (Burrow 2003, p.145).[52] In such a perspective, perceived as a complex storyteller who creates distance between the contents and the meanings of her story, the Wife appears to represent a clear point of view about *masculine* violence. However, if Burrow's analysis puts forward a Wife of Bath who criticises rapists, it does not mean that she is afraid of men's desires. Chaucer's readers know that the Wife has had five husbands and will "nat kepe [her] chaast in al. / Whan [her] housbonde is fro the world y-gon" ("Wife of Bath's Prologue", ll.46–47). Merely, whereas the Wife is clearly a lustful female figure, throughout her tale, it appears that criticising and controlling men's sexuality are predominant ideas.

Actually, it is by referring to Burrow's theory about the "Wife of Bath's Tale" that Kirkpatrick's *gendered* theory about Madonna Filippa can be nuanced. Effectively,

[52] In his study, J. A. Burrow takes the opportunity to "remind us that the Wife of Bath belongs to [the] class of 'worthy wommen of the toun' with whom the Friar on the pilgrimage was especially 'wel belovid and famulier', according to the *General Prologue* (215–17)" (Burrow 2003, p.144). Thereby, Burrow obviously raises questions about the seriousness of both the Wife and the clergyman by pointing out that both figures appear to be sexually liberated. Still, he mainly argues that the Wife's tale suggests that "[women's] only comfort is that the friar has not inherited the elf's power of infallibly causing conception [, for as the Wife herself says,] 'he ne wol doon hem but dishonour'" (Burrow 2003, p.145). Therefore, through the idea that the Wife's tale ironically highlights Chaucer's Friar's taste for lechery, Burrow claims that "the olden days of King Arthur emerge as something like a golden age for women [in the Wife of Bath's time]" (ibid). Kirkpatrick's interpretation of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" is manifestly one through which it is not *women's sexuality*, but *men's incontrollable* desires that mostly appear to be problematic.

according to Kirkpatrick (1983 a), in Boccaccio's story, Filippa wins her case in proving that "statutes against adulterous women [can be considered] unjust" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.213). Kirkpatrick may thereby suggest that Boccaccio presents Filippa as a victim. Unlike the Wife of Bath's, Madonna Filippa's speech is not really critical of men's sexual violence. Of course, condemning adulterous women to the stake when adulterous men are not is unfair. Nevertheless, while Madonna Filippa challenges a law that unfairly distinguishes women's lustfulness from men's, Boccaccio creates another injustice by insisting on the fact that women are less able to resist men than men can resist women. Whereas Chaucer's Wife of Bath creates a balance between men's and women's sexualities through her ability to elaborate a debate about sexual behaviours, Boccaccio's Madonna Filippa is a woman whose thoughts do not prevail on her body. As with his Ghismonda, who is driven by her "womanly frailty" (*Dec.* IV,1, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.313), Boccaccio aims at showing through his Madonna Filippa that women's flesh is *weaker* than men's.

III.4. A Closer Look at the "Wife of Bath's Tale"

As mentioned above, like Chaucer's Emelye, the Wife of Bath has aroused Susan Crane's interest. Actually, in her study, Crane establishes links between the "Knight's Tale" and the "Wife of Bath's Tale" through the romance genre and imageries of courtly love. Effectively, on the one hand, Crane approaches the question of Chaucer's definition of genders in the "Knight's Tale" by comparing that specific tale with medieval romances in which, according to her, Amazons are depicted "as objects of heterosexual courtship" (Crane 1994, p.80).[53] On the other

[53] In her discussion, one of Crane's arguments consists of showing that writers of medieval romances progressively ceased to portray Amazons as fighters and turned such female characters into figures of courtly love. According to her, "[a] shift from warfare to courtship [occurred with] a generic shift from epic to romance" (Crane 1994, p.80). She actually notes and demonstrates that "[t]he *Roman d'Alexandre* dramatizes this shift by juxtaposing the Amazon queen who swears fealty because of

hand, she analyses the "Wife of Bath's Tale"[54] by claiming that this one presents "arguments for living by internalised standards" (Crane 1994, p.86) and in Crane's approach, these "standards" are precisely imageries underlain by idealistic rules of chivalry through which the *masculine* and the *feminine* are *associated* with *specific roles*.

In fact, inspired by one of Edmond Faral's theses, Crane remarks that "the static portrait of [the woman warrior's] beauty […] becomes paradigmatic rather than her prowess [for later medieval romances]" (Crane 1994, p.82). As Crane shows, writers of medieval romances who drew on epic poetry have gradually avoided depicting female warriors as combatants in order to portray them as female lovers. For Crane, Chaucer's transformation of Boccaccio's Emilia into Emelye is similar to that progressive transformation of images of female warriors by romance writers. She therefore argues that "Emelye is conspicuously inactive throughout the tale except for unknowingly wounding her lovers with her beauty" (Crane 1994, p.81). By presenting Emelye as a *passive* pole of attraction for two knights, the scholar actually puts forwards that the beauty of that figure is a major source of problems in the "Knight's Tale". For her, whereas Palamon and Arcite's characters are merely defined through

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Alexander's military superiority and her very young emissaries Flore and Biaute who fall in love with two of Alexander's followers" (ibid).

[54] In this tale, a knight is sentenced to death by King Arthur after raping a young woman, but the queen gives the rapist a chance to save his life through a challenge. If the latter does not want to be beheaded, he has one year to learn what women's greatest wish is. Thus, in order to solve this enigma and have his life spared, the knight travels around the kingdom and remains unsuccessful in his quest until he meets an ugly old woman who shows herself willing to let him know what women most desire if he accepts to give her whatever she will ask from him in return. The desperate knight accepts the woman's proposal and they both go to the king's court, where the queen accepts to let him live because he has told in front of the court that women most desire to dominate the men they love. Since it is the ugly old woman who has told him about women's greatest desire and has thereby saved his life, the knight is forced to accept to marry her when she publicly surprises him by asking his hand in marriage. In bed with his old wife, the knight shows himself unhappy because of her ugliness. Therefore, the ugly woman makes him admit that the grandeur of the heart should be considered most important and that an ugly faithful woman is a better match than a beautiful and unfaithful one. The knight surrenders to his wife's reasoning and thereby accepts to be under her governance. Suddenly the ugly old wife turns into a beautiful gentlewoman and the knight and his lady live a happy life together.

an “affective conflict over Emelye” (Crane 1994, p.81), “Emelye's effect on them accomplish in turn her displacement from warrior to courted lady” (ibid).[55] Indeed, Crane points out that the beauty of Theseus’s captive is the reason why “Palamon and Arcite’s experience of love […] expands and complicates their chivalric relation to one another” (Crane 1994, p.81).[56] In other words, Crane’s analysis of Emelye does not only render that figure inconsistent as a character through the prism of an imagery of courtly love. It also renders her dangerous and inconsistent as a female lover since what matters to Crane in the “Knight’s Tale” is the way Emelye’s beauty is perceived by men and how that heroine causes problems despite herself.

Actually, for Crane, like Emelye and her suitors, the hero and the heroine of the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” are rendered distinct from one another by *gendered* traits borrowed from *courtly imageries*. Crane notably pays attention to the scene of the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” in which the old heroine tries to reason with her young husband, who does not appreciate her company, but was merely obliged to marry her after being saved from death penalty thanks to her. In that scene, the heroine reminds her husband of his duties as a knight. On the one hand, in order to associate the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” with a courtly *paradigm*, Crane convincingly demonstrates how the speech of the ugly heroine “[links] the normative behaviour of ‘every knyght’ to the ‘lawe of kyng Arthures hous’” (Crane 1994, p.36) in that specific scene of the “Wife of Bath’s Tale”. Crane therefore notes that “the old wife [of the “Wife of Bath’s Tale”] has talked [her knight] into loving and respecting her” (ibid), that the knight “accepts her culturally authoritative arguments concerning the regulated behaviour of true

[55] Crane reminds us “that Palamon is ‘hurt right now thurghout myn eye’ by ‘the fairnesse of that lady that I see’ and Arcite agrees that Emelye's ‘fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly’ (l.1096, 1098, 1118)” (Crane 1994, p.81). According to the scholar, “Palamon and Arcite's experience of love […] expands and complicates their chivalric relation to one another, but the experience of their courtship does not similarly enlarge Emelye's Amazonian identity” (ibid).

[56] It is a well-known fact that Palamon and Arcite are extremely close friends who become enemies after having fallen in love with Emelye in the “Knight’s Tale”.

gentility" (Crane 1994, p.36). Clearly, Crane could have merely concluded that the chivalric values conveyed by the "Wife of Bath's Tale" conferred a crucial role on the wise heroine of that story since the knight finally falls in love with his unattractive wife. However, the scholar does not choose such an option. As mentioned above, for Crane, "[r]omances specify that the collectivity does not simply recognise but generates masculine identity and that the social constitution of individuals is a positive cultural pattern" (Crane 1994, p.31). Furthermore, for her, such a *gendered pattern* "sustains community by bringing men into its law and ultimately by reproducing its law within masculine consciousness" (ibid). Crane thus keeps associating Chaucer's male characters with a notion of *positive social collectivity* and she keeps suggesting that he displays *negative* images of *femininity* in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" itself.

Effectively, Crane goes on to analyse the transformation of the knight's ugly wife into a beautiful lady at the end of the tale and the scholar views that transformation as a "representation of two female bodies [which] denies the complete veracity of either and contributes to constituting both as masquerades of womanliness" (Crane 1994, p.89). Crane even talks about "exaggerated facades reflecting back to the knight his own standards of repulsion and desire" (ibid). For her, moreover, Chaucer's tale conveys a sense of "[feminine] masquerading and mimicry" (Crane 1994, p.92), which she associates "with a language in which [Chaucerian female characters] reconsider their place in courtship and the identity courtship assigns them in romance" (ibid). However, as seen hereabove through Mann's analysis of the "Manciple's Tale" and of Chaucer's description of "newfangelnesse" as a penchant *shared by men and women*, the complexity of Chaucer's exploration of gender issues in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" or in the

Canterbury Tales in general goes beyond a Manichean dichotomy distinguishing the *positive images* of *patriarchal values* from *negative images* of women unable to comply with such values. On the other hand, it should be recalled here that the Wife of Bath herself is a representation of *femininity* in the *Canterbury Tales* and as Burrow, Kirkpatrick and C. D. Benson have demonstrated, she is a *thinker.* Therefore, Chaucer cannot be considered as an author who deliberately and merely associated female protagonists with *physical appearances*.

Like the old wife of her tale and like Emelye, the Wife of Bath is a fictional woman whose characteristics are part of a continuum through which Chaucer's images of *femininity* suggest that womanhood itself cannot be reduced to a limited set of features merely based on physical descriptions. Though she has a restrictive feminist approach to the Wife of Bath, even Crane has to take the ambiguous instability of the latter's characterisation into account. For instance, while Crane concedes that the Wife of Bath shows "resistance to social rank as well as gender constructions" (Crane 1994, p.72), the scholar remains critical of Chaucer's description of femininity through the figure of the Wife of Bath herself and compares the Wife with images of women conveyed by *Estates literature*, a genre of the fourteenth century.[57] Notably, according to Crane, the "greater fragility [of women in

[57] While associating the "Wife of Bath's Tale" with the romance genre, Crane equally tends to associate the prologue to that tale with Estate satires, another medieval genre. She notes that "[e]states literature beyond antifeminist satire […] delineates women in general (and wives in particular) according to their sexuality, their bodily relation or absence of relation to men" (Crane 1994, p.118). For Crane, the "*Wife of Bath's Prologue* exemplifies the estates conception in substituting for the cloth-making trade of her portrait a "sexual economics" by which she extracts wealth from her husbands in exchange for domestic peace" (ibid). Crane actually points out that "[r]omance poets and satirists agree in conceding women a potential for excellence in domesticity and love" (ibid), adding nevertheless that "satirists make the failure of that potential a chief argument for avoiding women [, for in the latter's literary conception of love relationships,] contrary to what the suitor expects, a woman will not delight him" (ibid). According to her, furthermore, "the qualities that in romance contribute to women's emotional excellence define their unworthiness in satire" (ibid). In this respect, Crane notes that the "greater fragility [of women in estates satires] manifests itself in weeping and clinging, [that] their capacity for love leads to torments of jealousy and sexual conflict, and their irrationality tyrannises men like a child's or a badly trained animal's" (ibid). In order to demonstrate that the Wife of Bath resembles women as they are described in Estates works, Crane uses the following o the *Wife of*

estates satires] manifests itself in weeping and clinging, their capacity for love leads to torments of jealousy and sexual conflict, and their irrationality tyrannises men like a child's or a badly trained animal's" (Crane 1994, p.118). Above all, Crane notes that the Wife defines herself through "a "sexual economics" by which she extracts wealth from her husbands in exchange for domestic peace" (ibid). Thereby, Crane's perception of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and "Prologue" and of the Wife of Bath as a woman obviously suggests that Chaucer *negatively* associated womanhood with materialism through that female storyteller and the heroine of her tale.

Yet, as a woman and as a storyteller, the Wife remains more complex than Crane's theory lets her appear to be. Chaucer actually dispatches various *characteristics of femininity* in a continuum of moral aspects that goes from the old heroine who tricks the knight of the Wife's tale into marrying her to the different facets of the Wife of Bath herself. On the one hand, though Crane notes that the transformation of the old hag into a beautiful lady "[reflects] back to the knight his own standards of repulsion and desire" (Crane 1994, p.89), Crane herself cannot deny that it is not a beautiful woman, but an old one who, as she notes, "[talks her knight] into loving and respecting her" (Crane 1994, p.36) in the "Wife of Bath's Tale". It therefore has to be remarked that the physical *desire* of the knight for his wife is not caused by the physical beauty acquired after the woman's transformation, but by her reasoning and the effect that the latter has on the knight before the old wife is transformed. The Wife of Bath's speech suggests that the value of a woman's intelligence precedes that of her beauty, even though the beauty comes afterwards. It

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Bath's Prologue: "'For as an hors I koude byte and whyne. / I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt, / Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt' (III 386-88)" (ibid). As a feminist reader of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and "Prologue", she argues that both estates satire and romance "engage the issue of woman's power through her sexuality rather than through socioeconomic measures of achievement and skill" (ibid). Through this argumentation, it can be merely seen that the feminism of the twentieth century was not known in the Middle Ages and that the question of women's emancipation through *socioeconomic* power was not at stake in medieval literary pieces.

is not merely the *corporeal* that defines women in the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” and “Prologue”. Moral questions are clearly at stake.

Furthermore, the Wife of Bath is not a Manichean storyteller who condemns women more than men. In her tale, men and women have faults and qualities. For instance, in that story, the queen and “other ladyes mo / So longe preyeden the kyng of grace” (“Wife of Bath’s Tale”, ll. 894–5) that the life of the knight was spared, even though he had raped a woman. In this respect, in the “Wife of Bath’s Tale”, the gentleladies who protect the violent knight echo with the images of *female pity* that Jill Mann (2002) has found in *The Legend of Good Women.* Actually, there is a significant contrast between the Wife’s description of the behaviour of the ladies of King Arthur’s court and the specific terms the Wife uses to present men in her tale. At the beginning of her tale, the knight who rapes a maiden is depicted as a “lusty bacheler” (l.883) and in a digression, the Wife remarks that a “man shal wynne [women] best with flaterye” (l.932). In the “Wife of Bath’s Tale”, it is recognised that a man can be judged and this suggests that women are as complex as men and that spirituality and corporeality have to be negotiated in women and in men.

It is only one facet of that same complexity of the Wife of Bath that Kirkpatrick points out and he cannot be proven wrong when he notes that that figure seems to be a “scholar […] [who concentrates] wholly on the letter of the law [to] deny that there is any textual authority either for marriage or virginity” (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.216). The Wife is neither only the *materialistic* figure Crane sees in her nor the “scholar” Kirkpatrick sees in her. Rather than the *negative image* of *femininity* Crane describes, the Wife is a mix of contradictions that place themselves above such a naïve concept as the moralisation of the *feminine* through androcentric views. For instance, the mere fact that Chaucer presents the Wife as a woman able to

understand that “man shal wynne [women] best with flaterye” (“Wife of Bath’s Tale”, l.932) does not convey a simplistic perception of genders on his part at all. While Chaucer’s Wife of Bath admits that women can *easily* be tricked by men and thereby endorses an androcentric view that is critical of her own kind, she remains critical of *masculine* behaviours. In this sense, while the Wife claims that unaware women may be blamed for their unawareness, she suggests that men can be considered unreliable and blamed therefore.

Manifestly, the clearest advantage Chaucer could seek while he was creating such a figure as the Wife of Bath and such a collection as the *Canterbury Tales* was the possibility to avoid the unicity of a single concept of *femininity* which could have limited his debate about the characteristics of *masculinity* and *femininity.* Actually, by presenting the Wife as a female figure capable of embracing and revisiting the thinking of those who were entitled to entertain discussions on women’s fate by invoking the rules of a deeply androcentric religion, Chaucer went beyond the mere idea of creating a *negative* or a *positive* female figure. After knowing five husbands, the Wife can rationally justify her sexuality by referring to the Bible. She cannot be blamed for remarking that “Men may devyne and glosen, up and doun” (“Wife of Bath’s Tale”, l.26) and that “of no nombre mencion made [God] / Of bigamye, or of octogamye” (“Wife of Bath’s Tale”, ll.32–33). She does not frontally oppose men’s authority, but thinks for herself as a *patriarch* would do for himself. Here again, Chaucer’s typical way of representing womanhood appears. As seen with Mann, Chaucer’s female figures may have typical moral characteristics making them surpass *manhood* in *The Legend of Good Women*. They have, as Mann has shown, *compassion* and men do not. Similarly, in the *Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath, the old heroine and the queen of her tale are images of femininity through which Chaucer

suggests that women's voices may be considered as voices of *wisdom* when they distance themselves from men's absolutism. Chaucer's female characters are therefore given space within the limits of men's official authority in the *Canterbury Tales*.

The religious codes that the Wife of Bath uses are *patriarchist* by definition. Chaucer nevertheless suggests that a woman is able to understand them and question them without acquiring the social status of a man and without belonging to men since the Wife does not show herself indebted to such institutions as marriage and fidelity. As a Chaucerian female character who does not humbly accept men's decrees as they are, the Wife differs from Boccaccio's Andreuola, who is a figure of fidelity. Unlike Boccaccio's Ghismonda and his English king's daughter, who do not distance themselves from the idea that women should be under men's control, the Wife of Bath represents a sense of distrust towards men. She also differs from Boccaccio's Zinevra and Giletta, who temporarily adopt some *masculine characteristics* in order to find their place as devoted wives. She advocates for unfaithfulness. However, unlike Madonna Filippa, when the Wife defends her sexuality, her speech is not merely about her physical needs. She directly uses the androcentric basis of the Christian faith, on which the spirituality of medieval societies relies. In this sense, unlike Boccaccio's six female figures, Chaucer's Wife of Bath deeply mocks the inflexibility of men's decrees

Chapter IV

The Freedom and the Captivity of Chaucer's Emelye's as Opposed to the False Rebellion of Six Boccaccian Female Characters of the *Decameron*

As seen in the previous chapter, as a female figure through which Chaucer plays with the androcentric dimension of the Christian faith, the Wife of Bath epitomises a dynamic Chaucerian representation of femininity, which is distinct from Boccaccio's strictly androcentric representations of women in the *Decameron.* While gender distinctions are by definition meant to favour the masculine for Christian traditionalists, Chaucer depicts the Wife of Bath as a female figure who revisits androcentric rules in order to detach femininity from the absolutism of Christian men's traditionalist decrees. Actually, this assumed detachment of *femininity* from men's decrees within an androcentric context is typically Chaucerian, if one compares Emelye and the Wife of Bath with the aforementioned six female figures of the *Decameron* in the light of Zudini's analysis of the *De Mulieribus Claris.* As seen hereabove, Zudini and other scholars have shown that the *De Mulieribus Claris* is a collection in which the *masculine* is the measure through which a character may be considered *glorious* or *inglorious*. In addition to this, the example of Boccaccio's story of Iole shows that the *femininization* of such a man as Hercules is considered as a degradation of *masculinity* in the *De Mulieribus Claris*. On the other hand, it is easy to see that Emelye and the Wife of Bath represent very distinct types of *femininity* in the *Canterbury Tales.* As seen with Crane and throughout this study, unlike Emelye,

the Wife of Bath herself is far from being a monogamous figure of courtly love. Such a silent and chaste Amazon as the Emelye of the “Knight’s Tale” and such a talkative and sexually active figure as the Wife of Bath are obviously dissimilar. Chaucer has created enough differences between those female characters of the *Canterbury Tales* to avoid letting his readers form radical and monolithic opinions about his female figures as representatives of *womanhood*. Therefore, the present chapter proposes to show to which extent Boccaccio’s Zinevra, Giletta, Andreuola, Madonna Filippa and English king’s daughter represent a Boccaccian androcentrism that, unlike Chaucer’s, does not specifically create a significant distance between *men’s decrees* and *feminine heroism* or *boldness.* It is precisely through this fact that Boccaccio’s androcentrism in the *Decameron* differs from *Chaucer’s* as it appears through the figure of Emelye in the “Knight’s Tale”. All the aforementioned female figures of the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* may either be considered as androgynous figures or as figures who cross lines that separate *men’s characteristics* from *women’s*, according to Christian traditionalist societies. Notably, as seen above, the Book of Genesis suggests that women were created *for* men and that they are prone to betray the trust that men place in them. That is why this chapter also proposes to pose the question of the features through which *masculinity* and *femininity* are actually defined in the *Canterbury Tales* as opposed to Boccaccio’s androcentrism, as the latter has been conceived in this study until now. Effectively, whereas the six aforementioned female figures of the *Decameron* are able to challenge men, Boccaccio systematically finds a way to put them back to their place or to mock them. On the other hand, though Chaucer’s Emelye seems to be discreet, as opposed to Palamon and Arcite, she remains the most stable heroic figure of the “Knight’s Tale”.

IV.1. Masculinity in Femininity in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*

Hereabove, on the one hand, we put forward that such female characters of the *Decameron* as Andreuola, Zinevra, the English king's daughter, Giletta di Narbona, Ghismonda and Madonna Filippa seemed to represent different forms of overlapping between *masculinity* and *femininity*. Still, as long as Boccaccio's six female characters could be considered as rebels in the *Decameron*, it has also been pointed out that their opposition to the *masculine* was systematically limited because of the nature of Boccaccio's inflexible type of androcentrism. Actually, a closer look at the motivations of those six Boccaccian female figures can show that their actions and desires are consubstantial with Boccaccio's literary androcentrism.

On the other hand, previously in this study, it has frequently been put forward that for Crane and Ingham, Chaucer's Emelye was above all a *tamed* female soldier. Clearly, for them, the major criterion through which Chaucer had transformed the *Teseida* was the idea of ensuring distinctions between male and female figures *in favour of* such a male warrior of the "Knight's Tale" as Theseus. As shown above, Crane and Ingham assumed that Chaucer had had the intention to transform a *Boccaccian representation of women* appearing in the *Teseida* in such a way as to show in the "Knight's Tale" that *masculinity* and *glory* were *consubstantial with an ability to defeat enemies.*[58] Therefore, if Chaucer's Emelye should be perceived as an *androgynous* character in the light of Crane's and Ingham's theories, it would be in terms of her *background* as a soldier and her *present* as a gentlewoman. Nevertheless, Crane and Ingham clearly suggested that androgyny had been evacuated from the "Knight's Tale" by arguing that men and women had been *rendered very distinct* in Chaucer's story. Obviously, in such a perspective, Emelye

[58] See notably chapters I and II.

herself was not analysed otherwise than as opposed to the male characters of the "Knight's Tale" and to Boccaccio's Emilia. Emelye's motivations and the context in which she is placed as a figure of Chaucer's tale itself were not taken into account.

As with the aforementioned six female figures of the *Decameron*, Emelye's fate depends on men's decisions, but not to the same extent. In fact, Boccaccio's female characters are free to make decisions for themselves to some extent, whereas Emelye is Theseus's prisoner. Actually, this fact equally reveals a degree to which Chaucer's and Boccaccio's types of androcentrism can be explored between the *Decameron* and that *Canterbury Tale*, in which the importance of men's supremacy seems to be more frontally questioned by a Chaucerian female figure than by several female figures of the *Decameron.*

IV.2. Docility as a Guarantee of Andreuola's *Virtue* in the *Decameron*

As previously mentioned, Schonbuch (2012) has noted that Boccaccio's Andreuola (*Dec.* IV, 6) has some *virile courage*. As he puts it, Boccaccio used the adverb "'*virilmente*'" (Schonbuch 2012, §.22) to describe Andreuola's reaction in front of the podestà who wants to assault her after the death of her husband Gabriotto. On the other hand, however, Schonbuch also has had to note that "les rapports de force s'arrêtent là, puisque le podestat demande officiellement sa main à son père [et] Andreuola refuse […] et se retire du monde : non par la mort mais par la vie monastique" (ibid). Schonbuch's terms are perfectly clear. As a woman, Andreuola has only few options in a Christian traditional society. She may marry the podestà, die or become a nun. This lack of options could have involved the idea of Andreuola's victimisation as a woman who is at the mercy of men if the choice of an option had not been hers, but men's. Still, she is the one who makes the choice for herself and that choice is a significant one since she deliberately becomes a nun and

thereby ceases to be a potential lover and deprives herself of the potential pleasures of the secular life.

In various tales of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio seems to suggest that a woman can only be completely magnified and considered exceptional if she is a one-man-woman. Unlike Ghismonda (*Dec.* IV,1), the widow Andreuola does not allow herself to have a second husband and she does not kill herself. Considering that the choice of an entirely monogamous life is left to Andreuola after the death of her husband Gabriotto, she appears to epitomise a sort of wifehood based on the androcentric idea that fidelity and obedience to a husband can spontaneously be rooted in a woman's character. Merely defined in relation to men's desires, she is not heroic enough to die, but docile enough to decide to remain chaste for the rest of her existence.

In this perspective, her moment of *virility* appears to confirm her position as a female representative of extremely androcentric values. As Schonbuch has pointed out, Andreuola's acquisition of *masculine* qualities is very occasional and exclusively occurs when she needs to protect her honour as a wife. Like Boccaccio's Dido's actions, Andreuola's heroism is motivated by the *masculine spirit* that Zudini has put forward in her study on *De Mulieribus Claris.* Andreuola is therefore very Boccaccian when put in relation with Zudini's theory. She is only consistent as a character as long as she reflects Boccaccio's exclusively androcentric point of view.

IV.3. Women for Men in the *Decameron*

In fact, like Andreuola, the English king's daughter of *Dec.* II,3 and Ghismonda (*Dec.* IV,1) are false rebels. Unlike Chaucer's Wife of Bath, they do not intensely question such Christian principles as marriage or female fidelity. They actually merely claim the right to choose the kind of monogamous wives they will be. Clearly, the

English king's daughter of *Dec.* II, 3 did not run away from her father's kingdom to avoid marital life or to be completely free to disguise herself as an Abbot and decide what she was going to do with her own body. If she ran away, it is because her father wanted to force her to marry the "very elderly" (*Decameron*, II,3, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.95) king of Scotland, but in her case, the facts of rejecting a patriarch's decision and of having sexual intercourse with the young Alessandro do not mean that she rejects paternal authority as a whole. Her father's authority is merely transferred from one man to another.

Effectively, as soon as she is in front of the Pope, she asks him to let her become Alessandro's wife and the night she has spent with her lover is referred to as a "marriage [they] have contracted in the sight of God alone" (*Decameron*, II,3, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.96). In other words, after challenging her father's decision, she spontaneously comes under the protection of another one in order to align herself with the androcentric laws of the Catholic Church. From this point of view, the episode in which she is in the position of an Abbot does not reveal a wish for freedom on her part. Disguised as a man, she merely has a chance to find a man she falls in love with. Her temporary *masculine* appearance is merely a narrative device through which she is transferred from the situation of a recalcitrant fiancée to that of a wilful wife. By becoming an Abbot, she does not acquire the power to challenge her father, but the possibility to travel freely and to find happiness in compliance with men's decrees.

In fact, the limitation of women's freedom of action is considered as a principle of the *Decameron* from the beginning of the frame story, as soon as the ladies of the future *brigata* decide to leave Florence and run away from the plague. Effectively, the female storytellers of the *Decameron* immediately admit that they cannot leave the

city without men. In the Introduction to the *First Day* of the *Decameron*, Elissa declares “that man is the head of woman, and [that] without a man to guide [them], only rarely does anything [women] do accord [them] praise” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, Day I, Intro., p.17). Deliberately put in the mouth of a female storyteller of the *Decameron*, such words provide a guideline through which Boccaccio’s androcentrism is fixed in his collection.

Therefore, like Andreuola and the English king’s daughter of *Dec.* II,3 and any other woman of the *Decameron*, Ghismonda (*Dec.* IV,1) had to be defined through the principle evoked by Elissa. As Psaki (2015) puts forward, it is “[because of Tancredi’s refusal] to give his widowed daughter a second husband [that] Ghismonda chooses [Guiscardo,] a secret lover of high merit but low birth” (Psaki 2015, p.106). With these terms, Psaki clearly presents Boccaccio’s Ghismonda as a woman who absolutely needs a husband. By virtue of Elissa’s principle, Ghismonda’s *rebellion* against Tancredi appears to be the *rebellion* of a female character who can either be considered as a daughter or as a wife.

After Tancredi’s guards have imprisoned Guiscardo, a verbal confrontation between the father and the daughter highlights the role that Boccaccio attributes to Ghismonda as a woman. As Ghismonda herself says when confronted with Tancredi, she is “filled with carnal desires whose force has been enormously increased by the fact that [she] was once married and [has] known the pleasure that comes from satisfying them” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.314). Ghismonda is a typical female figure of the *Decameron*. She *has to be* controlled by a man and it is because her father does not let a man be in charge of her sexual desires and her need for love that she loses her reason for being and finally commits suicide. In other words, like such female figures as Andreuola and the English king’s daughter,

Ghismonda is a figure Boccaccio uses to foster the idea that women should unquestionably dedicate their lives to a man.

IV.4. The Constant Restriction of Female Autonomy in the *Decameron*

In fact, to some extent, Boccaccio spreads confusion by displaying a sense of *female autonomy* in the *Decameron*. He actually does this by expanding or reducing the field of action of his female characters in relation to men's power. Either *heroic* or *trivial*, either *moral* or *immoral*, the actions of the six figures of the *Decameron* mentioned hereabove are never truly detached from a highly androcentric point of view. It has already been seen that neither Andreuola nor the English king's daughter or Ghismonda seek *autonomy* for themselves. Their characterisations revolve around different aspects of the masculine in any case. Their *rebellions* against the *masculine* are therefore illusory.

Actually, these three female characters are not the most sophisticated examples of the illusion of *female autonomy* Boccaccio displays in the *Decameron.* Three others are apparently more resourceful than these three, but the resourcefulness and the elaborated tricks of those three others do not transcend the frameworks of Boccaccio's androcentrism either. Firstly, as shown hereabove Madonna Filippa (*Dec.* VI,7) is depicted as a proud adulterous woman in the *Decameron*, but she cannot be considered as a rebel since her taste for lust makes her serve men. Secondly, falsely accused of adultery, Zinevra (*Dec.* II,9) tricks her husband into believing that she was killed by his servant, she disguises herself as a man, becomes a traveller, lives a man's life for several years. She works as a merchant for a Sultan who finally allows her to prove that she is a faithful woman and restores her honour in making her wealthier when her husband has become poor. Still, her autonomy is limited. She merely becomes a wife again after her heroic

adventures because she has been more successful and heroic as a merchant than her husband and she may no longer be presented as a female figure who surpasses a male one in his own area of expertise. A sort of *Christian social order* is finally restored. This is how Boccaccio maintains a hierarchy between the man and the woman. Thirdly, Giletta di Narbona (*Dec.* III,9) heals the king of France of a tumour, forces the man she loves to marry her and astutely conquers him. Still, all her extraordinary abilities are merely at the service of her desire to become a wife. All these Boccaccian figures reflect the idea that the most extraordinary women are meant to serve men, even when they seem to fight the latter.

Actually, Boccaccio's Madonna Filippa, Giletta and Zinevra have been celebrated through various studies. Notably, two scholars have literally praised the meritorious *qualities* of these characters of the *Decameron* and their praises would probably have made Boccaccio pass as a feminist if he had lived in our time. On the one hand, for instance, Anthony Cassell (2015) suggests that "Madonna Filippa's comically twisted legal excogitations in *Decameron* VI.7" (Cassell 2015, p.198) are "antifeminist reversals" (ibid). He furthermore claims that "Chaucer later takes up this world-upside-down trick in the prologue of the Wife of Bath, turning the scurrilous into boast" (ibid). As for Giletta di Narbona, according to Cassel, "[t]o a great extent, [her] travels and deeds adhere to [a] pattern of reversing misogynist slander, leaving a cloud that colours her heroics in the plot" (Cassell 2015, p.198). On the other hand, according to Christopher Nissen (2003), Zinevra is above all "a model of cleverness and self-control" (Nissen 2003, p.202). Obviously, according to Cassel's approach, Boccaccio's Giletta and Madonna Filippa almost reflect a type of Boccaccian *feminism.* According to Nissen's approach, Zinevra seems to be a complex and *autonomous individual.*

Yet the characters of Filippa, Giletta and Zinevra are actually not the exception to Elissa's rule, which considers "man [as] the head of woman" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, Day I, Intro., p.17) in the *Decameron.* In fact, by virtue of that Boccaccian *law* of *genders*, it can be noted that Boccaccio's androcentrism firmly associates those three female characters with a sense of submissiveness beyond their combativeness. When they are not as laughable as Madonna Filippa, the *bravery* of those women merely reflects their desire to situate their lives in relation to men's. This suggests that *brave* women may not detach themselves from men and that their incredible resourcefulness should meet the interests of their husbands above all.

IV.5. A Closer Look at Madonna Filippa

As seen in the previous chapter, Boccaccio's Madonna Filippa is a woman who proudly assumes her taste for lust during her trial. She asks the judge the rhetorical question of whether or not she "should have thrown [the leftovers of her sexual capacity] to the dogs" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, VI,7, p.496). She furthermore forces her husband Rinaldo to admit that "she [has] always satisfied his every desire and given herself to him whenever he requested it" (ibid). As also seen, according to Kirkpatrick, "verbal dexterity" (Kirkpatrick 1983 a, p.213) is Madonna Filippa's major characteristic. In this sense, Kirkpatrick suggests that Boccaccio aimed at presenting Filippa as a bright character. Does it mean that Boccaccio aimed thereby at defending adulterous women and that he wished Filippa's speech to be admired? Nothing is less sure. To some extent at least, Boccaccio suggests that Filippa is remarkable. She is presented as a woman who has a "lofty spirit" (*Dec.* VI,7, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.495) and "a pleasant voice" (ibid) and is "firmly resolved to appear in court, confess the truth and die

bravely rather than flee like a coward and live in exile because she [has] defied the law" (*Dec.* VI,7, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.495). Such details could lead the readers of the *Decameron* to think that Boccaccio describes Madonna Filippa as a tragic heroine, though her case is quite trivial.

Still, Boccaccio's text also conveys a sense of irony that can as well enable his readers to understand that Madonna Filippa is not a serious character. Actually rather than a *skilful* one, she could be taken for a naïve woman. Indeed, the tone of *Dec.* VI,7 seems to be falsely tragic and falsely heroic. Filippa is guilty and wrong and, as it is written in Boccaccio's *novella*, "many of her friends and relations [have discouraged] her from [confessing the truth]" (ibid) about a behaviour that is morally problematic for a respectable Christian woman, beyond the fact that death penalty would have been radical in her case. From this point of view, her stubbornness appears to go against common sense. Logically, her defence could have made her situation worse and she could have been burned at the stake because of the law of the city of Prato. Though she rightfully challenges an excessive law, Filippa gives the stick to be beaten with and discredits women. Effectively, Boccaccio's deeply androcentric reasoning about women clearly takes back its rights when his Madonna Filippa claims that adulterous women are "poor" (*Dec.* VI,7, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.496) creatures. Through Filippa's voice, Boccaccio states that women "are much better than men at giving satisfaction to a whole host of lovers" (ibid). The narrator of *Dec.* VI,7 having previously asserted that Filippa was "truly in love" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.495) with a man named Lazzarino, by making Filippa admit afterwards that all women need several lovers, Boccaccio makes that female character laughable. It is especially for the love of Lazzarino that she has accepted to be tried by the podestà at the peril of her life, but she unwillingly makes a mockery of

this love because she is a woman and, therefore, *unlikely to be faithful*, according to her own words.

In this sense, Filippa's victimisation and the arguments she uses for her defence cannot confirm the thesis that she is a *clever* figure since Filippa and women in general are presented as victims of their own *nature* and desires through her speech. According to Cassel, Madonna Filippa and Giletta di Narbona are figures of the *Decameron* through which Boccaccio "reversed antifeminist charges as praise" (Cassell 2015, p.197). Still, *as a woman*, Madonna Filippa appears to be irresponsible and unable to set limits for herself, in terms of her sexuality, of her morality, of her talkativeness and of her logic. Unlike the Wife of Bath, who claims that a "man shal wynne [women] best with flaterye" (l.932), Filippa is not a woman endowed with an ability to question her *own characteristics*. She is merely a victim of her instincts.

If Filippa's words save her and other adulterous women from death penalty, it is not necessarily because these words lead her audience to think about the depth of her arguments, but firstly because the judge is seduced and the audience is entertained. On the one hand, as soon as he sees her, the judge first "[notes] that she [is] […] very beautiful and extremely well mannered" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, VI,7, p.495). That is why he "[begins] to feel pity for her and [is] afraid that she [will] confess to something for which, if he [wants] to do his duty as a judge, he [will] have to condemn her to death" (ibid). In other words, he is bewildered and fears for her life. Thus, it appears that Filippa's seductiveness strikes and influences the judge before her *wit* does. On the other hand, when Filippa talks about her inability to control her sexuality, she causes the "good laugh" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, VI,7 p.496) of the citizens of Prato. The emotional

reaction of those citizens may have been caused by Madonna's Filippa's animality, by her skilfulness or by the humiliation she has inflicted to her husband. In any case, alongside with the improbable logic conveyed by Filippa's argumentation itself, Filippa's sexual availability and her seductiveness can be considered as major causes of the happy outcome of her trial. Filippa therefore represents the kind of femininity against which Elissa warned the other female storytellers of the *Decameron* when they were about to form the *brigata. Untamed* by Rinaldo, Filippa's seductiveness has become incontrollable.

IV.6. The Ambiguous Giletta di Narbona

Even though both of them are female figures of the *Decameron*, Giletta di Narbona (*Dec.* III,9) is clearly different from Madonna Filippa. Indeed, Giletta is an example of monogamy and she needs to elaborate complex strategies in order to conquer a man. Though Count Beltramo of Roussillon resists Giletta's love and runs away from her, this undesired wife finally conquers his love after becoming the ruler of his estates and giving birth to his twin sons. Giletta is the most active character of *Dec.* III,9 and it is perfectly understandable that Cassell claims that Giletta's "travels and deeds adhere to [a] pattern of reversing misogynist slander, leaving a cloud that colours her heroics in the plot" (Cassell 2015, p.198). It is equally understandable that he considers her as "the power that forces the immature Beltramo to recognise his own male, phallic powers of begetting and that re-masculinises him into accepting his place as a patriarch" (Cassell 2014, p.197). Beltramo finally "[embraces Giletta] and [kisses] her, and [recognises] her as his wife, at the same time acknowledging that [her] two children [are] his own" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, III,9, p.288). Giletta's actions are rewarded.

Yet though Cassell is right to write that Giletta is the one who brings Beltramo to "his place as a patriarch" (Cassell 2014, p.197), in *Dec.* III,3, the nature of Giletta's *feminine heroism* remains problematic and Cassell probably shows himself a bit too bold when stating that Giletta's husband is originally "immature" (Cassell 2014, p.197) and needs to be "re-masculinised" (ibid). Actually, whereas Cassell points out that Giletta can be defined as a "power" (ibid), it has to be noted that she remains a Boccaccian image of deceitful *female power*. It is not his own *maleness* that Beltramo rejects throughout the *novella*, but Giletta's untameable and undesired love for him. In a sense, Giletta is a permanent conspirator and Beltramo is her victim. On the one hand, it is Giletta who compels Beltramo to marry her and who, unhappy to be abandoned, takes the place of a noblewoman with whom Beltramo really wishes to make love. It is also Giletta who tricks Beltramo into believing that she is that same noblewoman in order to become pregnant by him and to ask him to give her the ring he wears on his finger.

On the other hand, in *Dec.* III,9, Beltramo is not explicitly described as an "immature" or a "de-masculinised" figure. Actually, throughout *Dec.* III,9, Beltramo is rather depicted as a worthy knight and the young noblewoman he favours over Giletta is depicted in quite a complimentary manner. After running away from Giletta, Beltramo goes to Florence because he wishes to support the Florentines, who are at war with the Sienese. In that part of the story, Boccaccio presents a Beltramo so brave that he is "honoured" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.282) and even becomes "the captain of a company of men" (ibid). In *Dec.* III,9, his *masculinity* is not questioned at all.

In fact, in *Dec.* III,9, Beltramo's bravery echoes particularly well with the qualities of the woman with whom he falls in love when he decides to dwell in

Tuscany before Giletta decides to go Italy and to try to conquer him. Disguised as a pilgrim in order to avoid being seen by Beltramo, the repudiated Giletta discovers that she has a rival while questioning a Tuscan innkeeper about her husband's reputation in Florence. The innkeeper's answers to Giletta's questions are actually clear enough to highlight the social contrast that exists between the modest Giletta and Count Beltramo. On the other hand, those answers reveal that Beltramo could be likely to find a better match. Effectively, while hearing from the Tuscan innkeeper's mouth that Beltramo is considered as "a pleasant, courteous nobleman" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.284) in Florence, Giletta also learns that her husband is "head over heels in love with a […] very honest young lady" (ibid) who "sill lives with her [very wise and virtuous mother]" (ibid). Manifestly, both Beltramo and the noblewoman on whom he has set his sights have the qualities of perfect courtly figures.

Actually, among the social characteristics Boccaccio confers on Giletta's husband and to her rival, none are meant to suggest that Giletta should either have naturally become a Countess or gained Beltramo's love without her tricks. Whereas Giletta is only a humble physician's daughter who was raised in the house of Beltramo's noble father without the status of a noblewoman, in his text, Boccaccio chooses to stress that Giletta's rival is "a woman nobly born, but living in reducing circumstances" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, Norton, p.284). He also mentions that it is "because of poverty [that that very honest young woman] has not gotten married" (ibid). Furthermore, according to Boccaccio's writings, "if her mother [were not] there, perhaps [that fallen young noblewoman] would have already given [Beltramo] just what he would be pleased to get from her" (ibid) and the extent to which Beltramo loves Giletta's rival is not questionable. In Boccaccio's story,

Beltramo makes love to Giletta and gives her his ring because he believes that he is in bed with the other woman. If the latter had effectively been in bed with him, it is Giletta's noble rival who would have received the ring Giletta finally receives. In this sense, though Giletta's artfulness cannot be denied, she is not merely an admirable character. She also has the skills of a cunning usurper who deprives Beltramo of his role as a landlord and of his right to choose a wife by himself and to control his own power of procreation. Thus, it can be claimed that Beltramo's masculinity is stolen from him until he recognises Giletta and his sons as his family.

Giletta's actions thereby align themselves with Elissa's thesis that women can be dangerously unpredictable and therefore need to be controlled by men. On the one hand, Boccaccio presents her as a woman who leads a man forward by the nose as long she is not considered as his legitimate spouse. Beltramo has to marry her because she has saved the king of France. As a subject, Count Beltramo has to obey his sovereign, who wants him to pay his own debt. On the other hand, throughout the *novella*, all of Giletta's achievements as an active woman are oriented towards the idea that she is in love and needs to be a wife and a mother. Her *heroism* therefore reflects Boccaccio's androcentrism through the fact that she does everything in her power to have a husband. Unlike Madonna Filippa, who is a childless incontrollable wife, Giletta is *tamed* as soon as she is recognised as the origin of a lord's dynasty.

IV.7. Giletta di Narbona and Zinevra

On many fronts, the story of Zinevra (*Dec.*II,9) seems to be at least as problematic and complex as that of Giletta di Narbona. Effectively, between the plot of *Decameron* III, 9 and that of *Decameron* II,9, Boccaccio has produced extremely clear mirror games. Like Giletta, Zinevra is a traveller. After being falsely accused of adultery, Zinevra is obliged to leave Genoa and works as a merchant for the Sultan

of Alexandria. When she is abandoned by Beltramo, Giletta goes to Tuscany in order to conquer him. Like Giletta, who disguises herself as a pilgrim before going to Florence, Zinevra has to wear a costume and to adopt an identity that is very different from her own. Above all, like Giletta, Zinevra has to remain unseen from her husband and to plot in the shadows in order to be recognised as a *good* wife. In Tuscany, Giletta "[plays] the part of the poor pilgrim [in order] to hear news of her lord" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.284) without being recognised. In this sense, as with Giletta, the measure of Zinevra's actions is her husband, though Zinevra is a childless woman.

Falsely accused of adultery by the merchant Ambrogiuolo, Zinevra has to run away and she equally conceals her real identity. Her husband Bernabò has ordered his servant to assassinate her, but the servant lets her live and accepts to give her his clothes. Thanks to him, she has a chance to run away from Bernabò's anger, but she has not been told why her husband wants her to die. For six years, she adopts the identity of a male merchant, is called Sicurano and works for the Sultan of Alexandria. Zinevra's false masculine identity will enable her to be protected from Bernabò's anger until she leads him and Ambrogiuolo to appear before the Sultan, who becomes their judge. It is only by proving her innocence that Zinevra can come into contact with her husband again and regain her female identity and her status as a wife. Before the restoration of her honour, she had ceased to be a respectful wife and even a woman. Thus, like Giletta, Zinevra has to save her couple and prove that she is a *suitable* wife.

Furthermore, like Giletta, before conquering her husband, Zinevra acquires an important social status. On the one hand, Giletta administers Beltramo's estates in France when he decides to run away from her and stays in Tuscany. When he is

away from Roussillon, she “restore[s] order in the region” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.283). Therefore, “[her] subjects […] [cherish her and love] her with real devotion” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.283). On the other hand, Zinevra’s false masculine identity is a source of socioeconomic power for her and in *Dec.* II,9, though all of Zinevra’s power is dedicated to the restoration of her honour as a woman and of her status as Bernabò’s wife. Effectively, it is because Zinevra has become the merchant Sicurano that she can convince Ambrogiuolo and Bernabò to come to Alexandria, where the Sultan will be asked to try them for having unfairly destroyed her reputation and her life. They both are tricked into believing that they have a chance to make a fortune there. As Sicurano, Zinevra meets Ambrogiuolo by chance in Acre and she discovers that he is the one who has disparaged her. Ambrogiuolo is tricked into believing that Sicurano is a fellow merchant who will help him to settle down in Alexandria thanks to his friendship with the Sultan. As written in *Dec.* II,9, As Sicurano, Zinevra has the possibility to “[place] a great deal of money at [Ambrogiuolo’s] disposal” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.184) in order to gain his trust and take him to the Sultan. It is also “with the help of several influential Genoese merchants […] [that Sicurano gets Bernabò] to come to Alexandria” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.184), where he will also be tried. Until Zinevra reveals her real identity in front of the Sultan, Bernabò and Ambrogiuolo, none of the three men really know why they are gathered. Manifestly, like Giletta, Zinevra shows her potential through social positions which are traditionally associated with masculinity. However, in the *Decameron*, the idea of *masculinity* in a heroine serves to reinforce the idea that *good* women need to be at the service of men and are naturally likely to please men and to be the instruments of the latter’s satisfaction.

IV.8. Giletta di Narbona and Zinevra's Resources at the Service of Their Husbands

Zinevra and Giletta do not exactly use their tricks in the same way. Zinevra's tricks notably differ from Giletta's through the fact that Zinevra is defending herself from an unfair husband and his treacherous fellow merchant whereas the modest Giletta freely manipulates a nobleman who simply does not want to be hers and has some good reasons to do so. If Beltramo refuses to live with Giletta in Roussillon, it is because "although he [finds] her very beautiful, he [knows] that her lineage [is] by no means a match for his nobility" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.282). Unlike Zinevra's, Giletta's husband does not threaten to murder his wife. Giletta's life does not depend on Beltramo's decisions, but on the idea that she is in love and absolutely wishes Beltramo to be her lord and master. Therefore, it is for more legitimate reasons that Zinevra needs to manipulate men. Still, both female figures are fully and spontaneously at the service of men and, by extension, at that of Boccaccio's androcentrism. On the one hand, Giletta worships a man even if he does not love her and she needs to be his wife at all costs. On the other hand, Zinevra is not merely forced to save her life, but needs to be a wife at all costs, though she is able to be more successful as a merchant than her husband is. Unlike Bernabò, Sicurano works for a sovereign, but Zinevra needs the Sultan to protect her and defend her.

Actually, despite Zinevra's relative freedom of movement, the weight of Boccaccio's androcentrism is extremely important in *Dec.* II,9. Effectively, it can be noted that a bad trick played on a woman appears to entertain all men in *Dec.* II,9, as long as that woman is not considered precious for the men who laugh. Notably, in the scene of Ambrogiuolo and Bernabò's trial, the Sultan of Alexandria does not know immediately why Sicurano brings Ambrogiuolo to him and, of course, he does not

immediately know that Sicurano is in fact Zinevra. Before Bernabò's arrival, it is Ambrogiuolo that Sicurano first brings to the Sultan. Aware of the fact that it is Ambrogiuolo who has ruined her reputation as a woman and convinced her husband to put her to death, Sicurano (Zinevra) encourages Ambrogiuolo to let the Sultan know how he broke into Bernabò's house, stole some of Zinevra's belongings while she was asleep and brought those objects to Bernabò in order to let the latter believe that his wife had been unfaithful. Since he won a bet on Zinevra's unfaithfulness with his trick and believes that Sicurano and the Sultan are reliable male fellows who both enjoy his story, Ambrogiuolo proudly tells them about this joke. On the other hand, unable to realise immediately that the tricked woman of Ambrogiuolo's story is actually his Sicurano, the Sultan does not immediately have the reaction of a man who defends women. After letting Ambrogiuolo boast about his misdeed, the Sultan is not immediately touched. Indeed, according to Boccaccio's account of that trial scene, before Bernabò's arrival, "Sicurano [induces] Ambrogiuolo to tell his story to the Sultan [and this one appears to be] very amused by it" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.184). Since he is not immediately disturbed, but rather entertained by Ambrogiuolo's cruelty towards a woman, the Sultan's spontaneous reaction reveals a sense of masculine solidarity in *Dec.* II,9, as long as the *feminine* remains an abstraction and does not become a well-liked person. It is only when the Sultan discovers that Sicurano was the tricked woman of Ambrogiuolo's story that he will try Ambrogiuolo and Bernabò. In this perspective, Zinevra is important because she was *his* Sicurano. Therefore, like Giletta's, Zinevra's story is definitely a male-centred story whose androcentric perspective is reinforced by a woman's actions when the latter is placed in a social situation in which powerful men are traditionally placed. Though Zinevra is a woman, her *value* is that of a man and Giletta is partly in a

similar case because the latter's *female* part has problematic aspects in Boccaccio's *Dec.* III,9.

Whereas Zinevra has to wear masculine clothes in order to have a chance to prove that she is *useful* in the masculine world of the Sultan of Alexandria, Giletta does not even need to be disguised as a man to be remarkable. Still, like Zinevra's, Giletta's qualities are only revealed when a man is betrayed. Effectively, after marrying Beltramo, Giletta stays in Roussillon without him. Boccaccio tells that she administrates his estates as "an intelligent woman" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.283) and "with the utmost diligence and care" (ibid), because Beltramo has "been absent from the area for a long time" (ibid). In this sense, her qualities as a surrogate lord in Roussillon repay the fact that she has compelled Beltramo to marry her and to run away and her actions therefore prove to Boccaccio's readers that she is not simply a treacherous woman who has usurped the masculine authority of a doctor and used that authority to choose a spouse after healing the king of France. In this perspective, it can be claimed that Boccaccio *masculinises* a woman in *Dec.* III,9 to play with the idea that a woman who challenges and tricks a man and exercises functions reserved to men has to justify the *masculine* position she adopts by proving that she is not fundamentally a man. Every time Giletta acts as a treacherous woman and takes a man's place, she has to prove that she is a wife above all. She heals the king as if she were a doctor, but asks to become Beltramo's wife in return. She administrates Beltramo's lands, but has to bring him back to Roussillon because she is not a lord, but a lady. She treacherously compels him to marry her and to make love to her, but redeems herself by giving him two male heirs.

In fact, Zinevra is also a wife who has to justify her social positions at all costs, despite the fact that it is not her, but Bernabò and Ambrogiuolo who play the parts of

the offenders in *Decameron*, II,9. Boccaccio only allows Zinevra to be Sicurano by virtue of the fact that she absolutely has to become a *good* wife again. Indeed, Zinevra's opportunity to take revenge on the two men is only sparingly seized and this confirms that her position as a wife is crucial for Boccaccio. On the one hand, the malicious Ambrogiuolo is finally "tied to the pole and smeared with honey" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.187) and stays in this position until insects "[devour] every last bit of his flesh" (ibid) and "his whitened bones, hanging from his sinews, [remain] there without being removed" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.187). On the other hand, the cruel Bernabò remains unpunished.

This favourable treatment reminds us of the fact that, unlike Ambrogiuolo, Bernabò is Zinevra's husband and Boccaccio does not want her to be without a husband. Unlike Ambrogiuolo, Bernabò does not pay for impulsively attempting to put an end to Zinevra's life. Effectively, as written in *Dec.* II,9, it is "[i]n response to the request she [has] made [that the Sultan pardons] Bernabò, sparing him the death he [deserves]" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.187). After all, according to Elissa's principle, Zinevra could only have been considered *dangerous* without a man, though her husband is unreliable.

Earlier in the text, Boccaccio had even indicated that his Zinevra could have by no means desired to get rid of such a bad husband. Indeed, as written in *Dec.* II,9, before Ambrogiuolo and Bernabò's trial, Zinevra was "[a]nxious to give Bernabò clear proof of her innocence" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.184) and Bernabò was "living in poverty" (ibid). Unlike Bernabò, after her misadventures, Zinevra has a newly acquired socio-economic power thanks to her skills as a merchant and thanks to the Sultan, who, according to Boccaccio, "[bestows] money, jewels, and both gold and silver plate on her, all of which [are] worth more than another ten thousand

doubloons" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.186). Still, Boccaccio does not let Zinevra enjoy such a power all alone without a husband who is ruined and useless and could have been executed. As an extremely devoted wife, Zinevra has to defend the values of marriage at all costs and she needs to exist again through her status as a *woman* in order to maintain the inflexibly androcentric tone of Boccaccio's *novella*. Effectively, it is above all Zinevra's status as a wife that Boccaccio praises at the end of *Dec.*II,9. As written in Boccaccio's text, after asking the Sultan to forgive her husband, Zinevra gives the latter "a tender, wifely embrace" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.186) and lets him share the glory of her new status as "the most courageous of women" (ibid) and "worthiest and most virtuous of women" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.187). In *Dec.* II,9, Bernabò himself is finally considered as the "husband of Madonna Zinevra" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.186). In this way, despite the offences committed by Bernabò, the woman shares her new fortune with her ruined husband, who had wagered on her fidelity and pitilessly sentenced her to death. Thus, she finally adopts the position of a useful wife who is used by an undeserving man, who benefits from her exceptional achievements. In other words, beyond her *heroic* actions, despite the six years during which she convincingly presented herself as a man, Zinevra's character appears to be bound to follow the rules of an androcentric social order because she is *fundamentally* a *woman* in the Boccaccian sense of the term.

IV.9. Boccaccio's Zinevra, Chaucer's Emelye, Authority and Masculinity

Actually, to some extent, Chaucer's Emelye resembles Boccaccio's Zinevra. Clearly, in *Dec.* II,9 and in the "Knight's Tale", Boccaccio and Chaucer explore the same topic of the definitions of womanhood through androgyny. As seen hereabove, like Zinevra's, Emelye's character is torn between the necessity to be men's

opponent and the idea that women should embrace wifehood. From this perspective, it is obvious that the weight of Christian androcentrism is the first feature of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's perceptions of *femininity* in the sense that the *feminine* endorses the decrees of the *masculine* and is not expected to radically defy it in the "Knight's Tale" and *Dec.*II,9. Still, as also seen hereabove, the figures of Zinevra and Emelye transcend the limits attributed to *masculinity* and *femininity*. One of them lives as a man for six years and the other is an Amazon. Furthermore, as mentioned in this study, various scholars have argued that Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" *intentionally* conveyed the idea of women's *physical* and *intellectual inferiority as opposed* to Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Until now, however, the present study has rather put forward that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* conveyed very distinct and subtle images of women. Above all, for Chaucer, independently from *manhood*, *womanhood* itself is an important notion, as well as the characteristics that can be associated with women. On the other hand, we argued hereabove that, unlike Chaucer, the author of the *Teseida* systematically favoured the *masculine* over the *feminine* in the *Decameron* when the *Decameron* was explored in the light of various studies about gender in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris.* In *Dec.* II,9, as shown in this chapter, androgyny was an efficient means for Boccaccio to define the *feminine* through the idea of its devotion to the *masculine*. In *Dec.* II,9, the *feminine* structures itself around the *masculine*. In the "Knight's Tale", unlike in *Dec.* II,9, the *feminine* and the *masculine* are not actually irremediably opposed. They are complementary and finally come together to oppose *masculine* violence.

In fact, Boccaccio's and Chaucer's representations of intergender relationships can be approached through three major points of comparison between the "Knight's Tale" and *Decameron* II,9. The first point of comparison chosen here is the gendered

distribution of social authority between the *male* and *female* characters of each story. Notably, as seen in chapter I, Crane and Ingham have put forward Theseus's role as the *major male* sovereign and warrior of the "Knight's Tale" as opposed to the defeated and captured Amazons of that same story. As Theseus in the "Knight's Tale", the Sultan of Alexandria influences the fates of the main characters of *Dec.* II,9. Notably, in *Dec.*II,9, it is through the Sultan's decisions that Zinevra's most important choices can have a concrete effect on the course of events. It is him who decides if her wish to kill or spare the lives of her enemies is acceptable or not. The Sultan equally ensures Sicurano (Zinevra)'s social success.

Indeed, the Sultan clearly appears to be the main male figure of the *Decameron* because he finally decides that Ambrogiuolo has to be punished, that Bernabò can be forgiven and, thereby, that Zinevra may be an *honourable* wife again. At the end of *Dec.* II,9, the Sultan's *natural* masculine authority replaces Sicurano's limited masculinity. Even disguised as Sicurano, Zinevra alone is unable to make Ambrogiuolo admit to his crime in front of Bernabò. She needs a true male intermediary between men and herself. Therein lies a resemblance between *Dec.* II,9 and the "Knight's Tale". As previously seen in this study, according to Ingham (1998), in the "Knight's Tale", Theseus seems to be a "compassionate, resilient, and [wise] paterfamilias" (Ingham 1998, p.33) in front of the crying Emelye after Arcite's death. Actually, to a certain extent, the Sultan of Alexandria *plays* such a role in *Dec.* II,9. Notably, in Boccaccio's text, the Sultan has the image of a *paternalistic* figure to whom a desperate woman turns when she cannot be strong anymore. As written in *Dec.* II,9, feeling finally allowed to become a woman again, Sicurano "burst[s] into tears and [throws] himself down onto his knees before [the Sultan of Alexandria], at one and the same time losing both the masculine voice and the masculine

appearance she had long yearned to cast off" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.185). What clearly appears here is the fact that Sicurano's "masculine" heroism and temperance fades away as soon as she becomes a woman again and places her fate in the hands of the Sultan. Boccaccio's Zinevra is manifestly unable to assume Sicurano's role without faltering. Boccaccio thereby suggests that Zinevra's *female nature* leads her to delegate the *masculine* power she has artificially assumed for six years to a true *male* character. Thereby, the author of the *Decameron* suggests that Zinevra is *naturally* prone to place herself under men's protection. Unless she is obliged to assume it, a man's freedom does not suit her.

In this sense, part of Zinevra's character may definitely remind us of the Boccaccian Dido of *De Mulieribus Claris*, who is a character that Zudini (2016) has analysed, as mentioned in the second chapter of this study. As a female figure strengthened by an acquired male identity, Zinevra resembles Boccaccio's Dido as far as the latter is, as Zudini points out, empowered by *masculine courage*. Of course, unlike Dido, Zinevra is not a famous queen, but a *mere* merchant's wife who does not want to be killed and therefore accepts to become a man, as long as it does not everlastingly hinder the restoration of her *wifehood.* Boccaccio's Dido does not merely save her own life. She founds the city of Carthage and dies as a tragic heroine. Still, female fidelity is a value both Dido and Zinevra represent at all costs. To remain faithful to her deceased husband Sicheus, Boccaccio's Dido defends her chastity by committing suicide because she does not wish to marry Aeneas. Therefore, the narrator of *De Mulieribus Claris* calls her "O viduitatis infracte venerandum eternumque specimen, Dido!" (XLII, ll.124–5). To some extent, Boccaccio's praise of Dido's *wifely* sacrifice echoes with Zinevra's immutable love for her bad husband. Between the *Decameron* and *De Mulieribus Claris* Boccaccio's

androcentrism transcends literary genres and forms and it keeps the *heroism* of *androgynous women* within the confines of an unquestionable sacrificial necessity to obey a husband. In this respect, in Boccaccio's texts, Giletta, Dido and Zinevra's most prominent characteristic is their desire to celebrate men's authority. Their husbands are literally their idols.

IV.10. Boccaccio's Zinevra, Chaucer's Emelye, Courage and Physical Freedom

Unlike Boccaccio's Dido, Giletta and Zinevra, Chaucer's Emelye is literally a man's captive. Her obedience to masculine authority is not merely a question of choice or of character. Emelye has therefore more reasons to agree to dedicate her life to a husband than Boccaccio's Giletta, Zinevra and Dido do. She is a war prisoner in Athens and is, of course, physically contained in Theseus's city. Theseus and his army would not allow her to be free again. Still, though Emelye has much less power than Zinevra, Giletta and Dido, she tries to show resistance in her own way. When addressing a prayer to the goddess Diane, she expresses the desire to "be no love ne wyf" ("Knight's Tale", l.2306). Therefore, it is not so much through Emelye's lack of physical actions that Emelye can be defined. She rather could be viewed through her reactions to the fact that a male soldier has concretely deprived her of her freedom of movement. Effectively, Emelye is not under Theseus's rule like Zinevra is under the Sultan's and this somehow renders Emelye spiritually freer than Zinevra, in terms of their degrees of compliance with the idea that *womanhood* has to be *consubstantial* with *wifehood*.

Here, a second point of comparison can actually be chosen in order to distinguish Zinevra's *femininity* from Emelye's. Again, it is partly on Chaucer's Theseus and on Boccaccio's Sultan of Alexandria that that second point of comparison relies, for that point consists of the analysis of the possibilities each of

the two heroines has to explore her world and influence the course on her own evolution as a woman. Effectively, as frequently mentioned hereabove, in *Dec.* II,9 as well as in the "Knight's Tale", there is a male figure to set the limits of the field of actions through which a heroine can make decisions for herself as a woman. As we have also mentioned in the present chapter, in *Dec.* II,9, Boccaccio depicts Zinevra as a woman who is unwilling to question her love for a husband whose life is graciously spared and improved by a wealthy wife whom he tried to put to death. This fact goes hand in hand with the idea that Zinevra is not able to choose to be continually in charge of her own fate without the interventions of a man, especially without those of the Sultan of Alexandria. In fact, as opposed to Boccaccio's *Dec.*II,9, Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" suggests that a heroine may consider various options for herself, even when she is in exile and rendered powerless by such a male sovereign as Theseus.

On the one hand, even though Sicurano is a more resourceful and successful *man* than the merchants he/she meets in *Dec.*II,9, Zinevra never acts without *another* man's help. Even disguised as a man, her life depends above all on men's willingness. Firstly, as soon as she becomes Sicurano, Zinevra also becomes the servant of the Catalan sailor Segner En Cararh, thanks to whom she travels to Alexandria and meets the Sultan. Sicurano is so useful to the Catalan that when he has to give Sicurano to the Sultan, the Catalan "[finds] it distressing" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.182). Here again, Zinevra's main quality is her ability to serve and please men. Secondly, though it appears to be clear that Sicurano is a skilful merchant, Sicurano remains unable to make a fortune by himself. In Alexandria, Sicurano has to obtain "the favour and affection of the Sultan" (ibid) and it is only thanks to the sovereign's trust that Zinevra (Sicurano) becomes a merchant

and is sent to the city of Acre to hold a fair for the Sultan. Thirdly, as mentioned hereabove, at the end of Bernabò and Ambrogiuolo's trial, Zinevra has to beg the Sultan to spare her husband's life. She thereby confirms that the Sultan is almighty and that she needs a husband at her side. Even the actions Zinevra deliberately plans are meant to make men successful. The Catalan, the Sultan and Bernabò benefit from her skilfulness and from her docility.

On the other hand, unlike Boccaccio's Zinevra's, Chaucer's Emelye's freedom of movement is extremely limited since she is a prisoner and cannot leave Athens. Therefore, unlike Zinevra, Emelye cannot concretely avoid marital life. However, Emelye tries to resist the inflexibility of men's decrees more than Boccaccio's apparently very free heroine does in *Dec.* II,9. Indeed, whereas Zinevra's *masculinity* is not persistent enough to surpass her *feminine wifely* desire to please and save her husband at all costs, Chaucer's Emelye's famous prayer to the goddess Diane confirms that her androgynous character opposes the idea of forced marriage or, at least, that of one-sided love.

As every reader of the "Knight's Tale" knows, before the tournament at the end of which either Arcite or Palamon is expected to gain the right to marry her, Emelye stays in Diane's temple and asks the goddess for the permission "to ben a mayden al [her] lyf" ("Knight's Tale", l.2305) and to "be no love ne wyf" (l.2306) "for to walken in the wodes wilde / And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe" ("Knight's Tale", ll.2309–2310). In rejecting maternity and marriage, Emelye's prayer clearly attacks the fundamentals of Christian androcentric thinking. Furthermore, through that prayer, as an Amazon and as a captive, Emelye spiritually appears to be still at war with Athenian society, whose ruler is a male soldier.

On the other hand, as the readers of the *Canterbury Tales* may well know, in case the goddess Diane should not grant her the right to avoid marriage, Emelye confesses that she still would not consider marrying any suitor. She explicitly tells the goddess about her wish to have "hym that moost desireth [her]" ("Knight's Tale", l.2325). Whereas Boccaccio's Zinevra constantly shows a desire to become a wife again and to get rid of the obligation to be *virile*, Chaucer's Emelye keeps negotiating her status as a female captive and remains more resistant than Zinevra, whose major problem is her masculine identity. Therefore, it becomes manifest that Emelye's position as a woman is that of an ambivalent Chaucerian female figure depicted through *virile* characteristics in a polemical Chaucerian collection of stories, whereas Zinevra is a submissive female figure in a Boccaccian collection where the apparently most *virile* female figures do not really try to question men's superiority, even if they are free to challenge men's authority. In Emelye's case, her desire to accept a husband is conditioned by her position as a prisoner and it is underlain by the hope to be loved rather than simply acquired by a man.

IV.11. Boccaccio's Zinevra, Chaucer's Emelye, an Asymmetrical Love Story as Opposed to a Symmetrical One

This last point is precisely what the third point of comparison between Emelye and Zinevra is made of in the present study. Effectively, though the triumph of love is rendered problematic in both stories, the nature of the feeling of love itself appears to be more instable in *Dec.* II,9 than in the "Knight's Tale", in terms of the status a woman receives as a wife in each story. In this respect, as often, Boccaccio's androcentrism strikingly differs from Chaucer's. On the one hand, Bernabò and Zinevra's love relationship is extremely asymmetric for it is mainly the wife who is

devoted to the husband. On the other hand, at the end of the “Knight’s Tale”, Emelye and Palamon’s marriage finally appears to be a very symmetrical marital union

On the one hand, in *Dec.* II,9, two episodes notably show that it is not Bernabò, but Zinevra who really represents marital love and loyalty. Actually, as opposed to Zinevra, Bernabò does not explicitly appear to be in love. As the final and the initial episodes of the *novella* prove, Bernabò’s love has a materialistic dimension, whereas Zinevra’s love is blind and disinterested. In this sense, Zinevra is depicted as a lover and Bernabò merely has the characteristics of a merchant.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, as written in *Decameron* II,9, when she is exiled in Alexandria, Zinevra is “[a]nxious to give Bernabò clear proof of her innocence” (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.184) and she therefore has to succeed in making her pitiless husband come from Genoa to Alexandria in order to win his love back. As also mentioned hereabove, Bernabò is “living in poverty” (ibid) in that episode of the story. Knowing that Zinevra will be given riches at the end of the story, the display of Bernabò’s “poverty” appears to be Boccaccio’s means to put forward Zinevra’s *female* servility since she will share the riches with her husband despite his cruelty. She thereby appears to be a wife who faithfully and naïvely brings back to her household the fortune her husband had lost because he had agreed to bet on her fidelity when his malicious fellow merchant Ambrogiuolo had encouraged him to do so. Thus, Zinevra’s sincere love for Bernabò merely seems to be a *good investment* for him.

Secondly, it has to be noted that there is a sense of mercantilism in the terms Bernabò uses to describe his wife in front of his fellow merchants in the episode of the wager itself. Effectively, at the beginning of *Dec.* II,9, Bernabò’s description of Zinevra in front of his fellow merchants associates his own wife with qualities that do

not appear to be those of a beloved companion, but of a slave, an animal or an object. Effectively, in that scene of *Dec.* II,9, according to Bernabò, his wife is "[s]till quite young" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.175), "physically attractive, lithe and lively" (ibid), "there [is not] any type of woman's work, such as silk embroidery and the like that she could not do better than the other members of her sex" (ibid). Furthermore, Bernabò "[says] it [is] impossible to find a squire or a servant […] who [could wait] at a gentleman's table better or more skilfully than [Zinevra] could" (*Decameron*, trans. A. Rebhorn 2013, p.175). Through such a list of *characteristics*, Boccaccio's Bernabò even shows that he does not only admire his wife's practical qualities, but also the idea that "she [is] a model of intelligence, discretion [and] manners" (ibid). In other words, at the beginning of *Dec.* II,9, Zinevra already appears to be merely at Bernabò's disposal and even after her six-year exile, at the end of the day, her role as Bernabò's *useful* wife will be maintained when she ceases to be Sicurano. Zinevra's love for Bernabò ensures her status as a wife and Bernabò's undefined attachment to Zinevra ensures his survival and prosperity.

On the other hand, at the end of the "Knight's Tale" and unlike in *Dec.* II,9, man and woman do not merely seem to rely on each other, but to love each other. Indeed, Chaucer's Knight ends up telling his fellow pilgrims that Emelye finally "loveth [Palamon] so tendrely" ("Knight's Tale", l.3103), and Palamon "hire serveth so gentilly" (l.3104). Therefore, unlike with Boccaccio's Dido and Zinevra, in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale", wifehood is not associated with the sacrifice of female heroism and spiritual freedom to a man's prosperity and welfare. Reciprocal feelings place the lady and the knight at each other's service and thereby on an equal footing in the "Knight's Tale". Though Emelye's wish "noght to ben a wyf and be with childe" (l.2310) remains unfulfilled, Chaucer maintains the idea that her feelings are as

important as Palamon's love for her. She is Palamon's companion and he is her companion and all conflicts are solved in the tale and all its protagonists have ceased to be soldiers.

In fact, considering that it follows the hostilities that led to Arcite's death, Emelye and Palamon's idyll appears to be a representation of their triumph over various tribulations that had been exclusively caused by *masculine* violence. Indeed, though Palamon and Arcite's love for Emelye led the two men to fight each other, Emelye's love itself has never been associated with violence in Chaucer's text. Her love emerges at the end of the tale and it peacefully transcends her wish to "be no love ne wyf" (l.2306). As it has frequently been pointed out from the first chapter of this study, according to several scholars, Emelye has not been physically involved in a conflict in the tale. Therefore, as a woman, it is actually to her own advantage that she ceases to be a warrior before Arcite and Palamon do. Chaucer's Emelye does not embrace violence and is not deliberately responsible for its adverse consequences. This distinguishes her from the two major male protagonists of the "Knight's Tale", who are themselves distinctively positioned in relation to their respective acceptances of the violence of the joust at the close of which one of them is expected to earn the right to marry Emelye.

As all the readers of the "Knight's Tale" know, before that joust, Arcite places himself under the protection of the god of war and Palamon chooses the goddess of love as his patroness. Palamon's humble prayer in the temple of Venus clearly shows that he is the goddess's true representative. Unwilling to be a warrior and desirous to be loved, he asks not "to have victorie, / Ne renoun in this cas, ne veyne glorie / Of pris of armes blowen up and doun" ("Knight's Tale", ll.2239–41). He merely wishes to "have fully possessioun / Of Emelye, and dye in [Venus's] servyse"

(“Knight’s Tale”, ll.2242–43). On the other hand, unlike Palamon’s, Arcite’s prayer to Mars is that of a man who wants to be an accomplished warrior and to conquer Emelye. He asks Mars to let him “with strengthe wynne hire in the place” (“Knight’s Tale”, l.2399). Arcite therefore clearly epitomises the *male brutality* that Palamon rejects through his own prayer, as well as the violence that Emelye does not embrace in the tale. In this sense, love’s final triumph at the end of the tale echoes with the illegitimacy of Arcite’s ambition in a tale in which war is the source of all problems. The suitor who has defied the goddess of love is also logically the one who dies after being attacked by a “furie infernal” (l.2684) “[f]rom Pluto sent at requeste of Saturne” (“Knight’s Tale”, l.2685) because Palamon’s defeat made Venus weep “for wantynge of hir wille” (l.2665). The suitor who survives is the one who did not fight for Mars.

In this perspective, Emelye seems to be an exemplary figure in the “Knight’s Tale” since she progressively acquires softness through love and agrees to be a lover, whereas men in love remain warriors in the tale and therefore represent discord. As seen in the first chapter of this study, Crane (1994) considers Chaucer’s Emelye as a figure of “irrationality and timidity” (Crane 1994, p.20), but her quietness is not actually incompatible with heroism, as long as love is considered as a safeguard against violence in Chaucer’s text. In the “Knight’s Tale”, unlike men’s brutality, women’s lack of ferocity is not problematic. In Chaucer’s text, Emelye and Hippolyta’s status as peaceful and permanent figures of love opposes Palamon and Arcite’s status as lovers whose survival is threatened by their reactions to their own desire until the end of the tale. When the tale began, Hippolyta had already joined the camp of the lovers by marrying Theseus. Later, in the temple of Diane, Emelye showed through her prayer that she was prone to renounce the camp of the warriors

and to welcome the lover “that moost desireth [her]” (“Knight’s Tale”, l.2325). Meanwhile, Palamon decided to serve the goddess of love, whereas Arcite entered the service of the god of war. Thus, from this perspective, in the “Knight’s Tale”, the progression of the characters from warriors to *lovers* does not necessarily appear to be a question of gender, but a question of values conveyed beyond the framework of gender issues in order to celebrate love. If an opposition between the qualities of male or female warriors had been at stake in the “Knight’s Tale”, Chaucer’s short version of the *Teseida* could have contained more fierce figures of war. Nevertheless, only one male figure of Chaucer’s tale represents a persistent warrior spirit, which is not rewarded. It is finally Saturn who, for the love of Venus, causes an earthquake that kills the warrior Arcite and allows Venus’s champion to become Emelye’s husband.

Thus, dissociated from the desire to fight men, Chaucer’s Emelye is not an anti-Boccaccian female figure because she is less prone to defend herself against male warriors than Boccaccio’s Emilia. In such a tale as Chaucer’s, violence is not the main value. She is an anti-Boccaccian female figure because, unlike many Boccaccian female figures, she is not endowed with *masculine* characteristics that aim at overshadowing her *femininity.* Emelye is a woman and as a woman, her acquisition of her position as a figure of love is part of a polarisation of the heroes of the “Knight’s Tale” around the pacifying dimension of that feeling. In the “Knight’s Tale”, neither love nor war are either men’s or women’s exclusive privilege. Even though Chaucer’s female characters become peaceful lovers more fluidly than male characters do in that tale, male warriors are also progressively struck by love. However, since Palamon and Arcite defend love through discord and violence in the “Knight’s Tale”, the importance of the male characters is more precarious. If one of

them survives when the other dies, it is merely because one of them has to epitomise the pacifying aspect of love and the other has to represent the incapacity of being in love without violence. As for the Amazons of the “Knight’s Tale”, they are the most important figures of that story because they do not need to prove that they are peaceful lovers. They are constant examples of resilience and love.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, comparing representations of gender between the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* appears to have been a very rewarding exercise, though Chaucer may not have drawn on Boccaccio's collection when he composed his own tales. Chaucer had been undeniably exposed to Boccaccian works such as the *De Mulieribus Claris* and the *Teseida* when he composed the *Canterbury Tales*. Therefore, Chaucer knew how Boccaccio had described gendered power relations in his writings and Chaucer knew as well that images of androgynous women were curiosities for Christian traditionalist male readers. Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works are obviously grounded in the idea that women may be considered as phenomena if they fight men, question their own social statuses or advocate polygamy. For us modern readers of Boccaccio and Chaucer, it may be disturbing to embrace the androcentric representations of the world they convey through their writings. We may also find difficult to admit that their literatures present women as *pieces* of general concepts of *womanhood* rather than as individuals with personal abilities. Beyond such concepts, however, as seen with various scholars such as Crane, Ingham, Mann, Benson, Godman and Zudini, there is the idea that Chaucer and Boccaccio, as medieval authors, knew how to select the sources they wished to revisit and place in thematically coherent collections.

Still, such authors do not take us by the hand throughout their writings in order to tell us explicitly if they agree or not with the gendered social schemes their collections explore. That is why, after having been exposed to such notions as

women's rights, patriarchy, *laicity*, *atheism*, *freedom of religion*, *feminism* or *gender war*, we tend to consider Chaucer and Boccaccio either as women's friends or as their enemies. As seen hereabove, modern scholars have applied their own perceptions of the world to their own readings of the *De Mulieribus Claris* and *The Legend of Good Women* and have categorised the two authors by using categories that Chaucer and Boccaccio's male contemporaries may not have found relevant. As modern feminist readers, Crane and Ingham have notably adhered to the premise that distinguishing women from men was a major concern for such an author as that of the "Knight's Tale", but such a distinction was part of his culture. He merely might have been male-centred, rather than prone to discriminate against women at a time when Christian traditionalists could only believe that women and men were not two equal sides of the same concept of humanity. Furthermore, while drawing on text written by Boccaccio, Chaucer probably knew how constantly conservative Boccaccio had generally shown himself, but did not generally show himself as conservative as Boccaccio. Godman (1983) was probably extremely aware of this fact when he compared the two authors. Still, unlike Godman, Boccaccio and Chaucer themselves might not have perceived their writings either as *misogynistic* pieces or as *progressive* ones. There may have been more nuances in the perceptions of each author. We do not know the extent to which they aimed at entertaining or at teaching serious lessons. We do not know to which extent the two authors had embraced the thinking of the classical authors or of the contemporaries on whose texts they drew. We do not know to which extent their writings have captured the mentalities of their time or the mentalities of the times in which the texts they used were rooted. What we know is focused on some aspects of their works. For instance, thanks to the recurring representations of gender found in their writings,

we know that it was the norm for Boccaccio and Chaucer to be male-centred in their own time, we know that Chaucer's androcentrism aimed at depicting the *feminine* as an entity as interesting as the *masculine*, whereas Boccaccio's very traditionalist androcentrism aimed above all at structuring the feminine around the *masculine*.

As seen above, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, while women may be given the ability to compete with men and even surpass the latter, Boccaccio frequently associates a sense of *unnaturalness* with the competences of such women. In Boccaccio's texts, a woman who defies her father does it because she needs to be sexually satisfied and loved by a man. A woman who challenges a cruel law does it by proving that she cannot get rid of her own *natural* lustfulness. A woman who conquers a man does it by manipulating him. A woman who shows herself more skilful than her cruel husband loves him so much that she forgets that he has had the intention to kill her and she even shares her wealth and her social success with him. A Boccaccian female figure also decides to become a nun because her husband is dead and she does not wish to enjoy the secular life, for her life without her husband would be meaningless. A princess decides to challenge her father's decision to give her in marriage to a man and she places herself under the protection of the Pope, who allows her to have another husband. While it may potentially remain a very modern approach to analyse such stories through the idea that these female figures are tricked by men, it is, in any case, certain that Boccaccio and Chaucer display distinct literary habits in the collections mentioned hereabove. Boccaccio's *Decameron* is more traditionalist than Chaucer's aforementioned *Canterbury Tales* in terms of their representations of women dealing with *masculine* power.

As seen above, the Wife of Bath, the heroine of her tale and Emelye rely on their own *female* spiritual resources to surpass the androcentric limits of their fictional

worlds. Though the Wife of Bath is a provocatively sexually active Christian female figure, she also brings back her debates to the question of men's responsibilities. Women are not presented as saints through her speech, but men may nevertheless appear to be more dangerous than women when Chaucer makes the Wife speak. As for Emelye, her role as a chaste female figure of love does not discredit her heroic dimension. In the fourth chapter of this study, after determining the extent to which men benefitted from women's resourcefulness in the *Decameron* through the perfect devotion of Boccaccio's *boldest* female characters to the defence of androcentric Christian values, we have notably made comparisons between the androgynous female figure of *Decameron* II,9 and the androgynous heroine of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale". Given that the two figures are torn between the necessity (or the desire) to be wives and the *masculine* aspect of their character, analysing and comparing them has helped us to reveal that Boccaccio's exploration of the theme of androgyny insists on the idea that a woman *could not wish* to assume a man's powerfulness and prefers to be a faithful wife at all costs and in the name of love. On the other hand, we have also seen that Chaucer rather used androgyny in such a way as to represent love as a value through which men and women previously driven by violence may be tamed and rewarded. Furthermore, as seen above, while women get rid of their desire to commit acts of violence and become lovers before men in the "Knight's Tale", they also become the main figures of love in Chaucer's tale. War meanwhile becomes men's concern. We have noted that Chaucer thereby renders his female figures extremely exemplar, since his tale structures itself around love. Thus, though many scholars have viewed Emelye as an *inconsistent* female figure, which they distinguished from the male figures of the "Knight's Tale" and from Boccaccio's Emilia, Emelye remains a heroic female figure of the *Canterbury Tales*,

whose author knew the nature of Boccaccio's androcentrism when he wrote the "Knight's Tale".

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