

*Manufacture in the Archive: Impingham's Chaucer  
in MS BL Harley 7333*  
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By standards of literary criticism or book history Harley 7333 is an immaterial manuscript. John Manly's dismissal of its potential for Chaucer scholars says much about the manuscript's broader lack of importance: "[Harley 7333] has suffered so much from editing in its own text and in the texts of its exemplars that it is of no authority."<sup>1</sup> Written in six to nine hands, containing various works by Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, and Lydgate, seemingly the most distinctive aspect of this fifteenth-century "library of secular literature" is the light it casts on John Shirley's role in the formation and transmission of the Chaucerian corpus.<sup>2</sup> Yet the material construction of Harley 7333, which uses textual compilation to figure gender as a naturalized effect of readerly reception, suggests the promise and the necessity of the archive for feminist medieval scholarship.<sup>3</sup> As I shall argue, Harley 7333 puts together a gendered version of Chaucer's poetic corpus through its material constitution. Using its literary compilation, this manuscript forms a body for Chaucer that is distinctively masculine, insofar as its material construction puts together attitudes about women that set up femininity as a differential category against which this Chaucer is defined.

To adapt Seth Lerer's phrasing, Harley 7333 shows that even the miscellaneous construction of a body of literature creates an "anthologistic effect," the impression that certain works are joined to form a whole that implies and therefore produces an interpretive design.<sup>4</sup> As Harley 7333 indicates, this process of compilation is an engendering practice. The portion of the manuscript that contains Chaucer's works also includes a collection of thirteen proverbs that imitate Chaucer. Signed "Quod Impingham," these couplets consist largely of Chaucerian lines redeployed in a context that makes them an interpretation, if not an impersonation, of Chaucer's masculinity:

Proverbes:

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Next þe derke nyght þe g[r]ay morow,  
So is ioye next the ende of sorow.  
Yf a man be in @ poynt agrevid  
In a noer he may be relevid.  
Gode it is a man to bere him even  
For al day men mete at vnset steven.  
Wyne and women make men folls  
Ofte men falle betwixst two scoles.  
Beware of hem that can no shame  
Women's tonges be neuer lame.  
Wylde bestes men may meke,  
But women answeris ben neuer to seke.  
Yf a woman be fresshe arrayed & gay  
Sche ne wille hir howse kepe a day.  
erfore bete wel hir skynne.  
And than she wolle kepe hir erin.  
A man shulde wedde aftir his estate

For yought & age be ofte at debate:  
 For the fresshe month of May & Janyuer  
 Ofte ben at debate & gretlye they ware.  
 Be ware the wele whan wemen wepe,  
 þt women wot not for consel thei kepe.  
 Lo! She that ee have hard telle  
 þt caused Adam to go to helle,  
 Also sche made oure Lorde God to dye.  
 Lo! Such a craft a woman can pleye!

Quod Impingham<sup>5</sup>

[Proverbs:

After the dark night comes the g[r]ay morning,  
 Just as joy comes at the end of sorrow.  
 If a man is in one point aggrieved,  
 In another he may be relieved.  
 It is good for a man to bear himself evenly,  
 For people always meet with unexpected time[s].  
 Wine and women make men fools,  
 Often men falle between two s[ch]ools.  
 Beware of them that know no shame  
 Women's tongues are never (lame) stilled.  
 Wild beasts men may tame,  
 But they should never seek women's answers  
 If a woman is freshly arrayed and gay  
 She will never keep to her house for a single day.  
 Therefore beat well her skin  
 And then she will keep herself therein.  
 A man should wed after his estate  
 For youth and age are often at debate:.  
 For the fresh month of May and January  
 Often are at debate (cross-purposes) and greatly they war.  
 Advise yourself well when women weep,  
 Since women do not know how to keep counsel.  
 Lo! She of whom you have heard about  
 Who caused Adam to go to hell,  
 Also she made our Lord God die,  
 Lo! Such a craft a woman can ply!]

Staged as an act of reception, these twenty-six lines make visible the contours of Chaucer's manhood by representing reception as an act of material compilation. These proverbs, furthermore, recast the Chaucerian booklets to figure the contours of Chaucer's masculinity in a way that is

specific to this textual rendering. For, if we acknowledge that the construction of the medieval book creates the unique volume, we should also recognize that this process generates a distinct Chaucer—one who reflects the anthologistic impulse of the proverbial reader.<sup>6</sup>

The commitments that emerge from the proverbs reflect a reading position, but because these verses trade on the authority of the recognizably Chaucerian, they provide an interpretive boilerplate that figures Chaucer's gender by shaping his reception.<sup>7</sup> Even if we recognize that the proverbs included in Harley 7333 are a particular rendition of Chaucer that stand quite apart from the poems they co-opt, these verses nevertheless demonstrate that such a reading of his works can pass itself off as culturally authoritative. By taking up the form of the proverb, Impingham suggests that these Chaucerian couplets are the commonplace truisms that emerge from the poems they engage.<sup>8</sup> No longer a reflection of a particular reader, this compilation of adages outlines the borders of the Chaucerian in broad interpretive terms. Despite the fact that its selective construction reduces a variety of Chaucerian masculinities to a single model, the generalities of the couplets themselves give this form of masculinity a universal cast.

As the opening couplet demonstrates, "Next þe derke nyght þe g[r]ay morewe / so is ioye next the ende of sorow" (1-2), it is the common, even

borrowed, status of these adages that makes them resonate more widely than their specific Chaucerian contexts. A version of the initial couplet appears in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, but even its more clearly drawn antithesis, "And next the derke nyght the glade morwe; / And also joie is next the fyn of sorwe" ([And after the dark night comes the glad morning/ And also joye is after the end of sorrow] *T&C* I.951-52), functions as one cliché amongst a litany of contrasts that Pandarus uses to bolster Troilus in his nascent dedication to Criseyde (*T&C* I.946-52). Couplets two and three, appearing in the *Reeve's Tale* and the *Knight's Tale* respectively, join with the first proverb to invest masculine power in a pragmatic system of aggression. The second adage is a legalistic proverb in its own right, but readers of Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* will remember that Aleyn deploys this maxim to justify the violent revenge that he and John extract from the bodies that constitute Symkyn's household (I.14181-82).<sup>9</sup> This ready toughness is qualified, however, by the third axiom, "Gode it is a man to bere him even/ For al day men mete at vnset steven" (5-6), which in the *Knight's Tale* explains the outrageous happenstance that lands Palamon in the very grove where the disguised Arcite recites the events of his life and love that have transpired since the sworn brothers/enemies were parted (I.1523-4). A measured character, which is ever prepared to administer violence, is the

masculine temperament that this trilogy figures.

While we may agree that this general outline of a masculinity is indeed a figure Chaucer promotes through his poetry, the following proverbs illustrate the miscellaneous process of material compilation that is required to make this manly vision coherent. The first three proverbs combine features from a multiplicity of Chaucerian masculinities (Chaucer, Knight, Reeve, Troilus, Pandarus, John, Aleyn, Symkyn, Palamon, and Arcite) to form a composite whole that "shrinks" these varied instantiations to fit one mold. This contraction of the Chaucerian horizon, however, only works because this domain is simultaneously widened by its connection to proverbial truisms not present in Chaucer's poems. The extra-Chaucerian verses in this collection associate the manhood that emerges from Chaucer to common cultural ideas about women. These beliefs are presented as masculine attitudes, and as such, they are deployed to animate the Chaucerian body constructed through this manuscript. In other words, through the joinings of compilation, Chaucer is made to take up and perform a series of masculine attitudes that have no substantive place in his poetry. The opposition "Wyne and women make men folls/ Ofte men falle betwixst two s[c]oles" (7-8), situates the remainder of the proverbs, all of which attribute manly weakness to feminine intractability.

Through his proverbs,

Impingham uses Chaucer to suggest that violence is the most effective means to curtail even the perception of feminine insubordination against men's assertions of control. After suggesting that "Women's tonges be neuer lame" (10), the collection asserts the fragility of masculine regulation in a couplet whose validity the Wife of Bath's fifth husband Jankyn learns through experience: "Wylde bestes men may meke, / But women answeris ben neuer to seke" (11-12). While Alisoun claims "Stibourn I was as is a leonesse, And of my tonge a verray jangleresse" ([I was stubborn as a lionesse, and of my tongue a very jangleresse] III.637-8), the following two couplets refigure in disturbing wise both the challenge that the Wife poses to her clerical husband and the means by which he seeks to assert his husbandly authority when his invocation of patriarchal authority fails. Impingham's proverbial commonplace, "Yf a woman be fresshe arrayed & gay / Sche ne wille hir howse kepe a day" (13-14), is borne out by Alisoun's fine clothing and her continual roaming. However, Jankyn's use of violence to curb Alisoun is also represented as a typical manly response to such wifely disobedience: "þerfore bete wel hir skynne / And than she wolle kepe hir þerin" (15-16).

While Jankyn's loss of composure takes on a more calculated appearance, the Wife's ability to answer her husband, or to hit back in a struggle for "maistrie"

illustrating Jankyn's lack of measure (III.818), is erased by this axiom. Impingham's couplets, therefore, conjoin Chaucerian moments that obscure the consequences of feminine challenge. Women may be the cause of masculine sorrow, but men nevertheless beat back disruptive feminine agency using physical force. These verses, then, only focus on the advantage that a man derives from the increased power his physical might gives him over an adversary, whether that opponent is a man, in the case of Symkyn, or a woman, in the case of Alisoun. These proverbs ignore the potential for violence to compromise or undermine the masculine authority of the perpetrator. While we might see John and Aleyne's abuse of the two women of the *Reeve's Tale* as its own attempt to pass off a counterfeited manhood, or we might see Jankyn's attack against his wife as part of the account that Alisoun unfolds in her Prologue to explain the fractious equilibrium she achieves with her young husband, the proverbs strip away these contexts, setting up a new framework of wifely disobedience in which to read these maxims as prescriptions.

In putting these stories together, Impingham's proverbs suggest that masculine control depends upon complete intolerance of women's agency. These proverbs pass over details of womanly action that might argue for its legitimacy, even superiority. This set of verses, therefore, expresses an absolutist view of feminine agency,

insisting that women must be man-handled, becoming visible only as passive components in masculine displays of power. If there is a danger that a woman's will cannot be reduced, the following proverbs suggest, a man would do better to avoid alliances with women altogether. By routing a proverb from Cato through its familiarizing context in the *Miller's Tale* (and this MS also contains a version of Cato in an early booklet), Impingham suggests that men should avoid marriage with young wives because their will is too hard to beat out of them: "A man shulde wedde aftir his estate / Ffor yought & age be ofte at debate" (17-18). Pairing this couplet with the conflict that organizes the *Merchant's Tale*, "For the fresshe month of May & Janyuer / Ofte ben at debate & gretlye they ware" (19-20), these proverbs advance the argument that women's agency leads to the fragmentation of masculine authority.

But as we see with Impingham's proverbs, textual making may cover up the manly charades of power that undo many of Chaucer's men. As a gathering of poetic adages, the proverb collection fragments and reconstructs the Chaucerian corpus to hide those variations on masculinity that invest value in feminine agency. Impingham instead uses his Chaucerian allusions to open the way for a more elaborate yet reductive condemnation of women's activity than any poem by Chaucer would allow on its own. Although the means by

which the Miller's Alisoun and the Merchant's May bring about the humiliations of their aged husbands vary considerably, the verses in this collection lump these women together as examples of unruly young wives whose agency destroys the manly stature of their respective husbands. Because Alisoun's disruptive vivacity and May's performative passivity are invisible in this proverbial rendering, joining them through textual pastiche also erases the variations in masculine folly that motivate, perhaps validate, these very different scenes of "feminine" betrayal. In other words, grouping these very different wives together makes their adulterous conduct appear to be unmotivated by anything other than the essentially unmanageable appetites of young women. We may recognize this Chaucer as a product of a person(a) called "Impingham." But if we register this assemblage as a *Chaucer at all*, its creation of a limited masculinity gains traction.

As a result, we are asked to accept that Chaucer's poetry promotes masculine power by condemning feminine will. To ground this contention, the remainder of these proverbs uses what I call "Chaucerian resonance" to condemn women's agency, employing the connections between Chaucerian moments already invoked to grant the closing couplets comprehensive scope. The warning against women's tears, "Be ware the wele whan wemen wepe" (21), is perhaps

a saw that January would have done well to heed since May “first and forward [...] bigan to wepe” as a strategem to allay January’s suspicions about her dedication to him ( [first and foremost [...] began to weep] IV.2187). Yet since the context of this compilation only recalls May’s duplicitous design to cuckold her blind husband, and not January’s outrageous demand that his young wife remain an unmarried widow, it recasts this story to substantiate the misogynist commonplace that women use tears to cover their indiscretions.<sup>10</sup> Read in light of the adage from the *Miller’s Tale*, this proverb suggests that January’s only mistake is to wed a young bride. His narcissistic projections and jealous manipulations are not manifest here, which means that the youthful intractability of “fresshe May”(IV.1859) is solely responsible for her husband’s downfall.

Using textual compilation as a means to obscure the details of manly folly, Impingham’s proverbs give cover to men who are held up for ridicule in Chaucer. As such, this combination of verses accomplishes what men like Chaucer’s Merchant cannot: reinventing the *Merchant’s Tale* as a successful punitive exposure, this poetic assemblage asserts that woman’s agency is the only cause of a man’s failure to exert mastery. Through the claim that a woman “causid Adam to go to helle” (24), these proverbs define a woman’s activity exclusively as an index of

manly ruin. And, by connecting common domestic experience with the original fall of man, “Also sche made oure Lorde God to dye / Lo! Such a craft a woman can pleye”(25-6), these verses universalize the threat that feminine agency poses to manly authority. Because agency makes women dangerous, this collection seeks to deny them a legible role in the everyday hierarchy of marriage except that which husbands beat into wives.

Insofar as genders must be made to matter in persuasive ways, they necessarily utilize what Kathleen Biddick elsewhere calls “technologies of the visible.”<sup>11</sup> As I believe Impingham’s proverbs demonstrate, one of the most immediate of these technologies is the textual apparatus itself, the literal and figurative fragments that may be combined and recombined to forge a written body of work.<sup>12</sup> In Harley 7333, representing a reader’s material compilation of Chaucer’s poetic corpus authorizes a masculine attitude defined by its condemnation of women’s activity. To produce a masculinity for this Chaucer, therefore, Impingham’s proverb collection also constructs its own representation of femininity. This femininity, I submit, is a formulaic distortion of Chaucer’s representations of women. More troubling, however, is that the authority this misogynist series gains from its reconfiguration of Chaucer’s corpus restricts the range of femininities that are imagined for actual, not just literary, women.<sup>13</sup> For

feminist medieval scholars, then, the archive is a locus of gender difference that we should attend to, not just to discover or recover the traces of women's lives. Rather, because women's lives are materialized through the textual arrangements that constitute the remains of the medieval past, feminist scholars should also address the ways in which the archive naturalizes particular genders through its processes of *manufacture*.

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### NOTES

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All Chaucer quotations are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1986) unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>1</sup> John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, ed., *The Text of The Canterbury Tales Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts*, vol. 1 p.(Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1940), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Manly and Rickert, 207. Linne R. Mooney, "John Shirley's Heirs," *YES* 33 (2003): 1-17, suggests that Harley 7333 was written by "at least eight scribes" (190). Since many of John Shirley's copies of vernacular literature in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century, particularly his productions of poetry by Geoffrey Chaucer and John Lydgate, constitute

the only extant versions of such texts, his importance as a literary "maker" should not be overlooked. For a full treatment of his life and influence, see Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998). Connolly discusses Shirley's exemplars of Chaucer in Harley 7333 at pp. 173-5. <sup>3</sup> Manly and Rickert suggest that Harley 7333 was probably copied at Leicester Abbey in the fifteenth-century, offering evidence documenting the increased participation of religious houses in the production of vernacular literature. For discussions of this trend, see A.I. Doyle, "Publication by Members of the Religious Orders," *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge New York: Cambridge UP, 1989): pp. 109-123; Christopher Cannon, "Monastic Productions," *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999): pp. 317-48. In the case of Harley 7333, Doyle cautions against too comfortable an assumption that the manuscript was produced at the Abbey, since the spelling has been associated with North Hampshire by Jeremy Smith (Connolly, p. 186, n. 21). From the names and rebuses in the manuscript, however, it is clear that the manuscript was among the Abbey's holdings by the late fifteenth-century. From the state of its booklet construction (it evidently lay unbound for a number of years), it is also clear that the MS was compiled there. Since Leicester itself was a locus of royal power during the last years of Henry VI's reign, most scholars who have considered this manuscript believe the Shirley exemplars would have come into the hands of the Austin Canons through such contact, if not patronage.

Ralph Hanna, "Augustinian Canons and Middle English Literature," *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna (London: British Library, 2000), pp. 27-42, suggests that Shirley might have spent time at Leicester Abbey, perhaps among a group of long-term guests that Hanna describes as "Augustinian groupies" (34).

<sup>4</sup> Seth Lerer, "Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology," *PMLA* 118 (2003): 1251-67, uses "anthologistic impulse" to describe "the distinguishing feature of manuscripts or sections of manuscripts guided by a controlling literary intelligence [...] [as] a moment when the idea of the anthology is thematically present in the texts" (1255).

<sup>5</sup> This collection exists uniquely in MS. BL Harley 7333, fol. 121v-122r. Although the transcriptions I use in this article are my own, R.H. Bowers prints these proverbs and traces the circulation of the Chaucerian proverbs and non-Chaucerian verses in his useful piece, "Impingham's Borrowings from Chaucer," *MLN* 73(1958): 327-9. My departures from Bowers deal with spelling and punctuation. The translation is my own, though it only illustrates the idiomatic difficulty involved in rendering proverbial expression.

<sup>6</sup> See Ralph Hanna III, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and their Texts* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), pp. 1-34, who argues that unique volumes belie a "range or spectrum of literary communities" (p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> Lerer, pp. 1254; 1261.

<sup>8</sup> See Julia Boffey's and A.S.G. Edwards's article, "'Chaucer's Chronicle,' John Shirley, and the Canon of Chaucer's Shorter Poems,"

*SAC* 20(1998): pp. 201-18, which discusses other proverbial renderings of Chaucer in several manuscripts, particularly BL MS Additional 16165, as part of what they describe as "the gradual establishment, through the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of Chaucer's reputation for gnomic wisdom" (p. 213).

<sup>9</sup> The margins of Ha<sup>4</sup> and Ht include the Latin legal maxim: "Qui in uno gravatur in alio debet relevari."

<sup>10</sup> See *Juvenal, Satire VI, Juvenal and Perseus*, ed. and trans. G.G. Ramsay (London: Routledge, 1918), p. 82; Jacques de Vitry, "Sermon 66," *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992): pp. 146-47; and Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Corbaccio*, trans. Anthony K. Cassell (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1975), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68(1993): 389-418.

<sup>12</sup> As Roger Chartier reminds us, "Texts, Printing, Readings," *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989): pp. 154-75, "In contrast to the representation of the ideal, abstract text—which is stable because it is detached from all materiality, a representation elaborated by literature itself—it is essential to remember that no text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read" (p. 161).

<sup>13</sup> The copyists' alterations to Shirley's versions of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* betray their ecclesiastic investments more widely than this brief series might imply: the manuscript expunges all indications of priestly corruption in the *Reeve's Tale* by removing the parson (Symkyn's wife becomes the daughter of a "swanherd"), it omits the *Shipman's Tale* altogether as a way to erase Daun John's exploitation of his religious

office, and it cleans up the Pardoner's theological disruption, ending his tale with the pious comment, "And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche, / So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve, / For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve" (VI.916-18). To adopt Ralph Hanna's term, the "miscellaneous" construction of this text shows the circulation of copies of vernacular poetry outside of a London literary circle or book market, as Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson observe in their essay, "Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts," *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), pp. 279-315 (esp. p. 280). We therefore cannot assume that its engendering constructions would have influenced its immediate audience alone. This is particularly true since this manuscript, like many others, took a wholly secular trajectory after the Dissolution, when it was used to record personal information (including inscriptions about and possibly by women) of the Ithell family from the mid-sixteenth- to the early-seventeenth-century.