

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



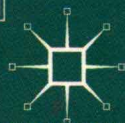
*The* GENRE *of* MEDIEVAL  
PATIENCE LITERATURE

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DEVELOPMENT, DUPLICATION,  
*and* GENDER

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Robin Waugh



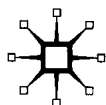
# THE GENRE OF MEDIEVAL PATIENCE LITERATURE

DEVELOPMENT, DUPLICATION, AND  
GENDER

*Robin Waugh*



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THE GENRE OF MEDIEVAL PATIENCE LITERATURE

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# THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which generously provided a Standard Research Grant in support of the research for this book. The Research Office, the Faculty of Arts, and the Department of English and Film Studies, all at Wilfrid Laurier University, each provided help in a variety of ways, including funding for research trips, funding for travel to academic conferences in order to present research results, and funding for preparation of the index. I also acknowledge the helpful comments of anonymous reviewers, though I am of course responsible for any errors that remain in this volume. My gratitude goes out to the graduate students in Wilfrid Laurier University's Masters Program in English Literature and in the University's PhD Program in English and Film Studies. I have found that being part of a graduate program that specializes in issues of gender and genre has had many positive effects on the paths of inquiry for my research, while discussions with graduate students both within and outside my classes have nearly always been both gratifying and inspiring.

I had valuable help from several research assistants. Dr. Ronald A. Ross performed computer analyses of the various words denoting "fame" and "women" in the *Patrologia Latina*. This groundbreaking work drew my attention to several texts, passages, and approaches that proved to be essential to my arguments. Ms. Susan Henry and Ms. Tina Garbas researched images of Lot's wife and the locations of important shrines to female saints in Southern Europe. Ms. Natalie Boon prepared the index. The Oral Studies Research Site at Wilfrid Laurier University provided the use of computer equipment essential to the completion of this project. I am deeply indebted to colleagues in the Faculty of Arts at Wilfrid Laurier University who were generous with their time and help: Dr. Anne Russell, Dr. Chris Nighman, Dr. Eleanor Ty, Dr. Maria DiCenzo, Dr. Viviana Comensoli, Dr. Jonathan Finn, and Dr. Andrea Austin. The editorial team at Palgrave Macmillan has been wonderfully easy to work with: supportive, genuinely helpful, and sympathetic.

Research results for this project were orally presented at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, the Biennial Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America, the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association, the Canadian Society of Medievalists Conference, and various local colloquia at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Guelph. Parts of chapters 5 and 6 first appeared as "A Woman in the Mind's Eye (and not): Narrators and Gazes in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and in Two Analogues," *Philological Quarterly* 79 (2000): 1–18. The editors of *Philological Quarterly* have kindly agreed to allow material from the article to appear in this book.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, Dr. Frederick P. Waugh, who constantly inspired me through being fascinated by all kinds of cultural material, and who died while the volume was receiving its final touches.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library, London (in citations of manuscripts)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
FC	Fathers of the Church (series)
LA	<i>Legenda Aurea</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> . Ed. J. P. Migne et al. Paris, 1857–67, cited by volume and column.
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> . Ed. J. P. Migne et al. Paris, 1857–91, cited by volume and column.
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

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## INTRODUCTION: CLARISSIMUM IN FEMINIS

*The critical task is . . . to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by . . . constructions [of identity], to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them.*

—Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*  
(New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 147

*In your patience you shall possess your souls.*

—Luke 21:19

The main argument of this book is that, in certain medieval compositions, women become famous for patience in the way that men are famous for the traditional heroic virtues, such as physical strength and courage, and that this new kind of fame leads to a recognizable and specific genre of medieval composition: patience literature. Although scholars have long acknowledged that many and varying kinds of works emerged from the popularity of martyrs and from early accounts of these figures, many gaps remain in the account of how these emergent works then developed into stable and recognizable forms, with conventions and traditions all their own. The genre of patience literature, thus, demands a sustained attempt to record its literary history. It also demands a critical assessment that would trace its development from passions in the early martyrologies or passionals through to the works of writers such as Margery Kempe, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan (to name but three possible subjects for the moment) because, for instance, the trials that Margery describes in her *Book* become more comprehensible if one treats them as self-conscious attributes of the patience genre, Grisilde's outrageous passivity in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* is less alienating if one recognizes the tale as a sophisticated *reductio ad absurdum* of the patience genre, and Christine's moral fundamentalism is less paradoxical if one interprets her version of the Griselda story as a precise satire of male-centered interpretations of



patience literature and of knightly romances. Yet no-one to my knowledge has defined the genre of patience literature before, or described its history. Previous researchers have examined the patience of martyrs in a general fashion, but, surprisingly, no-one has attempted to define hagiography as a kind of literature of patience, despite many patristic writings that suggest this strong connection, and despite the fact that such a definition would (ideally) contribute to the increased recognition of specific roles for women in medieval literature, to further reassessment of the traditional canon, and to further (re)discovery of neglected works.

My idea for the genre of patience literature came from examining passages such as this one from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* (written c. 1390, and appearing in Fragment IV of *The Canterbury Tales*):

Men speke of Job, and moost for his humblesse,  
As clerkes, whan hem list, konne wel endite,  
Namely of men, but as in soothfastnesse,  
Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,  
Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite  
As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe  
As wommen been, but it be falle of newe.<sup>1</sup>

A reader is likely to interpret this passage as merely a contributor to the development of an important theme in this tale: the heroine Grisilde's fame for patience. When the passage compares women's fame for being "true" and "humble" with men's reputations for (presumably) traditional heroic deeds, it assumes a competition among reputations and implies also a competition between men and women for the rewards of reputation, as the lines that immediately follow the passage indicate: "Fro Boloigne is this Erl of Panyk come, / Of which the fame up sprang to moore and lesse" (939–40). The poem's switch to the earl is unexpected. His role in the story is tiny, and most readers would consider his fame irrelevant. So, Chaucer seems to mention the earl's reputation specifically in order to point up the contrast between fame for men versus women, while the extreme events and attitudes that *The Clerk's Tale* exhibits suggest a revision of the prevailing masculinist ideas concerning fame into a kind of heroism of patience. Not surprisingly, then, many critics deem Chaucer's Grisilde to be "heroic."<sup>2</sup> However, none of them takes the next logical step and proposes that Grisilde's heroism of patience builds on the conventions of a significant genre of medieval literature; nor do they recognize, even when they acknowledge and refer to the many sources and analogues for *The Clerk's Tale*, that the story of patient Griselda, which appears in several languages and in a variety of versions, is a remarkably popular and resilient example of this genre.<sup>3</sup>