THE DISCOURSE OF MARRIAGE IN THE FRENCH FABLIAUX AND CHAUCER'S *SHIPMAN'S TALE*

BY

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Abstract

The Discourse of Marriage in the French Fabliaux and Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*

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Fabliaux are short comic tales in verse that appeared in twelfth century Northern France. Most often anonymous, they circulated orally before they were compiled in manuscripts. The fabliaux were no longer written in fourteenth century France, but Chaucer used the form in the *Canterbury Tales*. The fabliaux, situated mostly in the towns of Northern France, Picardy and Flanders where the economic expansion of the twelfth century started, portray the lives of merchants, craftsmen, and rich peasants, members of the emerging bourgeoisie. During this time, the definition of a Christian marriage based on consent, affection, and indissolubility was finalized. The fabliaux address the concerns, anxieties, and identity development of this emerging group of people, as they adapt to a new economy as well as a different understanding of marriage.

Studying the fabliaux in the context of their production and applying concepts from conflict and relationship equality theories, makes it possible to evaluate the quality of the fabliaux marriages in the context of the new discourse of the church. The romances of Chrétien de Troyes (*Cligès*, *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*) and the *Lais* of Marie France, especially *Le Frêne*, show how the aristocracy is adapting to the new emphasis on consent and affection. Similarly, the fabliaux offer the emerging bourgeoisie possibilities to rethink marital relationships in the

context of the market economy by depicting these unions as exchanges whose ultimate goal is the satisfaction of both parties. This understanding of the fabliau is reinforced in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*, which, using the same form, imagines the internalizing of the mercantile ethos in marital relationships.

The texts analyzed here contrast two kinds of fabliaux marriages: the successful partnerships based on consent and affection where the characters learn to accommodate each other's needs versus the ones where one spouse is always dissatisfied. While the marriages based on consent and affection achieve equity, the characters enact traditional roles for husbands and wives. Going further, the *Shipman's Tale* offers the possibility for equality in marriage as the wife manipulates her husband into agreeing to her terms for repayment of a debt. The merchant and his wife's relationship exemplifies a marital partnership framed by the new understanding of marriage and the values of the market economy, providing a model for the emerging bourgeoisie.

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To Yetta
(1924-2012)

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Introduction

The word "fabliau" refers to a corpus of one hundred and forty popular[1] French texts written between 1159 and 1340. Derived from "fable," these stories were told by "fableors." The definition encountered most often in scholarly works was given by Joseph Bédier in 1893: fabliaux are "*contes à rire en vers*." – tales for laughing in verse – to which Per Nykrog in 1957 added that a fabliau must belong to French medieval literature and must be relatively short, or that, in general, it must be limited to one incident and its immediate consequences. Not unique to France, the fabliau exists in other oral traditions. The novellas in *The Decameron* are fabliau-like tales. Written in German the "schwank" also a short comic tale was a popular genre from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century[2]. Although there is no English tradition of the fabliau, Ian Short and Roy Pearcy gathered a collection of eighteen fabliaux written in Anglo-Norman and argued that they constitute a corpus of their own even though they are traditionally included in anthologies of French fabliaux. Because a story is considered a fabliau when it is self-identified or when scholars, based on its form and/or content call it a fabliau, considerable scholarship has been devoted to the ways in which five of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* can be categorized as "fabliau." The scholarship on the fabliaux will be analyzed more deeply in Chapter Two; however, for the purposes of this introduction, it is important to note that an examination of the French fabliaux reveals that three elements are prevalent in the majority of the texts: the characters are married, live mostly in towns, and are merchants, tradesmen or rich peasants, and the plots revolve around love-triangles.

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[1] Jean Dufournet evaluates the number of fabliaux at 1,000 with only 150 left. See Anne Cobby "the fabliau as popular literature" for a history of the editions and translations of fabliaux.
[2] See Nykrog, 257-259.

The period of the popularity of the French fabliau coincides with two major changes in the organization of society. First, the beginning of a market economy triggered the emergence of a new social class, the bourgeoisie[3], associated with the development of towns in Northern France where the fabliaux were written. Second, the concept of a Christian marriage was created as the Church gained control over the lay system of marriage, confirmed it a sacrament that required the consent and affection of both future spouses, and made the marriage indissoluble once consummated. The changes in marriage and the economy are well documented by historians, especially scholars in legal history and in economic history, but how these changes have shaped the French fabliaux is what this dissertation will explore.

As will be more fully explained in Chapter Two, it took two centuries before the fabliaux were recognized as a legitimate corpus of texts worth studying. Scholarship concentrated on questions of origins, genre, and comedy. Regarded by scholars as too obscene, the fabliaux did not interest French or English scholars until the end of the nineteenth century. It also took a long time to undo the idea that the fabliaux were faithful representations of the behaviors of medieval people. As a literary genre, the fabliau was mostly compared to the romances and understood as a parody of their courtly attitudes as non-courtly people try unsuccessfully to emulate the behaviors of the courtly (Nykrog). Because of its subject matter and its comic aspects, the fabliaux characters were mostly considered stereotypes: the stupid husband, the lecherous priest and the unruly wife thus making it difficult for earlier scholars to explore these characters as representatives of the different classes in medieval society.

[3] Simone Roux in *Les racines de la bourgeoisie* and other scholars use the term "bourgeois" and "bourgeoisie" to refer to the townspeople of the 12th century "bourgs." Other scholars prefer the word "burgher" or the "patrician" derived from the Latin.

Inspired by new historicism and its premise that literary texts are embedded in a culture and therefore reflect and influence the society in which they are produced, and also inspired by feminist, gender and queer theories, the fabliau scholarship has developed in new directions.The study of marriage had so far been the purview of legal historians[4] and more recently cultural historians. However, with an increased interest in interdisciplinary studies, both literary scholars and historians have used sources across their disciplines to discuss marriage.[5]

Taking into account the socio-economic and historical context of the production of the fabliau shed a different light on the meaning and importance of these texts. Simon Gaunt, Jane Burns and other scholars in gender studies posit the fabliau as a genre that subverts the hierarchies of power. Beyond being a genre, John Baldwin includes the fabliau as one of the five voices in Northern France and David d'Avray refers to the fabliau as a discourse that must be considered in the context of the dissemination of the discourse of the Church on marriage. Situating the fabliau in the context of other non-literary productions shows that the fabliaux are not simply a mirror of the medieval era in which they were written and performed, but also effect the society in which they were produced and its people.

Prior to the relatively recent development in fabliau scholarship, the representation of marriage in the fabliaux is analyzed only as it relates to the study of women. From a narrative perspective, marriage is necessary for the comical development of the story because it makes cheating and adultery possible. In the fabliaux containing a love triangle, the lovers are sometimes caught by the husbands and punished; when they are not caught, the husbands are ridiculed for not being able to control and/or satisfy their wives. Therefore, many scholars have

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[5] Among many, see Georges Duby *Le chevalier, La femme et le prêtre* with a chapter devoted to literary texts, or the *Nouvelle Histoire de la France Médiévale* which weaves literary and traditional historical sources together.

tried to argue that the fabliaux are either pro or anti-feminist since women always get away with cheating on their husbands (Spencer, Eichmann). For Norris Lacy, it is difficult to generalize for the fabliaux because of the variety of the texts (70). Set in opposition to the passionate love in the romances, fabliaux marriages are not based on love, but are "reasonable" (Strasser). Yet the emphasis remains on women, not on what it means to be a merchant's wife or a rich peasant's wife, and no attention was given to the institution of marriage in the context of twelfth century France.

To theorize marriage, in *Chaucer's Queer Nation*, Glenn Burger offers the concept of conjugality as a way for the emerging bourgeoisie to create its own values and identity regarding marriage through the lay appropriation of what had been so far a clerical discourse. Drawing mainly from Burger's argument, this dissertation will historicize the French fabliaux in an attempt to show that while they expose the problem of understanding marriage to be a container of sexual impulses as well as a sacrament based on consent and affection, the fabliaux also suggest new possibilities of conceiving the relationships between husbands and wives as partnerships where equality can be achieved.

Traditionally, the fabliau is opposed to the romance as a lesser genre, but with respect to marriage, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France's *Lais* also envision a world where marriage can be an equal partnership. As explained in Chapter One, in *Erec et Enide* and Marie de France's *Le Frêne*,conventional marriages are replaced by different arrangements that privilege individual over family interests. Even though, families continued to exert pressure over their children to marry the one chosen for them for lineage and inheritance purposes, thus impeding the Church's efforts, described in detail below, to take over the institution of marriage,

the romances and lais always show members of the high-clergy present at weddings in accordance to Church recommendations.

While the romances portray the resistance of the aristocracy to integrate the new Church rules for marriage and redefine the relationships between the husbands and wives of the aristocracy, the fabliaux offer a new emerging class of merchants and craftsmen possibilities to define its own identity through a new understanding of marriage. This is still relevant two hundred years later in the*Shipman's Tale,* as the fabliau form provides the perfect frame for a tale exploring the impact of the new understanding of marriage and partnership in a merchant household.

Starting in the twelfth century, Northern France experienced a growth in population, economic development and an increase in cities and towns that changed the organization of society and led to the creation of a new socio-economic class made of merchants, craftsmen and rich peasants who supported the economic expansion. As explained in Chapter Three, the increased use of money and the multiplicity and instability of the currency made exchanges more complex and alsocalled into question the concept of value. Joel Kaye in *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century* explains in detail how medieval scholars,drawing on the newly rediscovered texts of Aristotle, theorized money in order to reconcile the new market economy with Christian values. Merchants, money- changers, and later bankers who were making money with money, forced the Church to re-examine its position regarding usury and accept trading as work. Along with the peasants who became wealthy, craftsmen and merchants who became the elite of the cities created a group known as the bourgeoisie.

At the same time, in 1215, marriage became a sacrament indissoluble and based on consent. Emma Lipton in *Affections of the Mind* shows that the new discourse of marriage

promoted by the Church offers a different way to envision spousal relationships. Whereas the old way of marriage fit the vertical organization of aristocracy, a marriage based on consent promotes a more horizontal organization through a somewhat equal partnership that fit the organization of the emerging bourgeoisie. In *The Marriage Exchange*, Martha Howell shows that as marriage became a contractual exchange, it changed gender relations. These major changes in the economy and in Church dictates are expressed in the fabliaux as they reflect the concerns of the emerging class both in twelfth century France and two hundred years later in fourteenth century England. In order to understand the importance of marriage in an analysis of the fabliaux, we must first see how the different customs of marriageparticularly with regard to consent, consummation, and affection developed, intersected, and combined throughout the centuries to create a Christian marriage, and then examine the economic changes that supported the emergence of a new class.

The Christianization of Marriage

It is easy to agree with George Duby who described the history of marriage as a "gradual process of acculturation" (17). The practice of marriage existed both before and during the development of Christianity, but the process of creating a Christian marriage took centuries, culminating when marriage was decreed a sacrament during the Council of Trent 1563 (24th session). Before that, Lateran IV in 1215 had prohibited marriage within the fourth degree of consanguinity and required that marriages be announced and performed publicly. The union was based on consent and affection and made indissoluble through consummation. The only reasons for annulment or divorce were impotence, incest, and adultery. This definition resulted from the combination of different concepts of marriage from Scriptures, Roman law, and custom law, and evolved over a very long period of time.

Consent, consummation and the concept of a marital bond[6] were not new ideas; they were already part of what marriage was like before 1215, and outside of Christianity. What Christianity added was indissolubility and the sacramental nature of marriage as an act conferring grace[7]. While scholars such as Philip Reynolds in *Marriage in the Western Church* and Korbinian Ritzer in *Le mariage dans les églises chrétiennes du Ier au XIe siècle* argue that it is difficult to assess precisely how Christianity influenced and was influenced by existing customary laws, it is possible to trace the concepts that became the tenets of Christian marriage back to the Bible and to the laws that were enacted throughout the centuries in different communities to legislate on marriage. In all the different codes, customary laws pertaining to marriage were primarily concerned with the legitimacy of the union because of its consequences on children and property, especially regarding inheritance.

In the New Testament, the basis for indissolubility is established when Jesus said, "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female'. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt 19:6). This is reinforced in Mark 10:12, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her" (Mark 10:12). In Ephesians, Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and… husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies (5:25-28). While this gave marriage a sacred dimension, for the early church fathers,

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[6] "maritalis affectio" has been translated as "marital bond," "affection," "regard." Michael Sheehan in "Maritalis Affectio Revisited" in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe* Collected Studies ed. James K. Farge (University of Toronto Press, 1996) studying varied sources, recognizes the difficulty to define this expression, but states that the spousal relationship "cannot be described as on that 'only engages the personality in a relatively superficial way."

[7] See Michael M. Sheehan "Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages; Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage" 87-117 in *Marriage, family, and Law in Medieval Europe*. Sheehan calls this new Church theory "revolutionary."

marriage is seen mostly as a remedy for those who cannot be celibate. Paul argues that it is better "to marry than to burn in passion" and that because husbands' and wives' bodies belong to each other, spouses should not "deprive each other except by mutual consent" (1 Cor 7:1-11). Yet, virginity remains a superior state to marriage: "those who can accept this [renouncing marriage] should" (Matt.19:11).

The discussion over the value of virginity and celibacy versus marriage led to a clear distinction between laity and clergy. Marriage became associated with the laity and celibacy with the clergy thus placing the clergy above the laity. The early church fathers continued to advocate strongly for virginity and celibacy over marriage. Tertullian (160-230CE), in a letter to his wife, follows Paul and argues that marriage is good to avoid "burning" but what is best is to avoid burning and marrying by maintaining virginity and celibacy. He also acknowledges chaste marriages but disagrees with remarriages (*On Exhortation to Chastity ch.1*). Ambrose (337-397CE) also considers virginity a higher state than marriage (Ch.6-24), but does not condemn marriage because it is necessary for procreation (Ch.VII-34). Jerome also places a higher value on virginity, but recognizes the difficulty of living a virginal life. Pope Siricius (384-399 CE) asked the clergy to refrain from conjugal relations and later Gregory the Great (590-604 CE) asked clerics to avoid cohabitation. Finally, in 1050, Pope Gregory VII made the requirement for celibacy for the clergy official. The anxieties created by the celibacy of the clergy are clearly expressed in the fabliaux where most lovers are persistent young priests.

The place of sexual relations in marriage is problematic for the Church[8]. In "On the Good of Marriage" Augustine argues that both virginity and marriage are good. Marriage is good for natural reasons and for companionship. Because Augustine understands "the disease of desire"

[8] See Pierre Payer *The Bridling of Desire* for a more "positive" view of medieval thought on sexiuality.

(*On Concupiscence and Marriage*, 1.9), he considers lust within marriage a venial, not a mortal, sin (16.1). Nevertheless, marriage is the union of a male and a female for the purpose of procreation (Book 1 ch.5). But procreation is not the only reason for marriage because when procreation is no longer possible, the couple should stay married for companionship. Thus Augustine argues that sexual relations are not necessary for the existence of marriage. He cites the case of Joseph and Mary's marriage and the belief in Mary's permanent virginity (Reynolds 254). Referring to Ephesians 1:25: "love your wives even as Christ loved the Church," Augustine expresses the sacramental aspect of marriage in that a man and a woman become one through marriage (1.11).

While the early church fathers were concerned with the divine aspect of marriage, custom laws were concerned with the legal or civic aspects of marriage. In the ancient law of Rome, there were two different statuses for married women: *in-manu* or not *in-manu* or "free marriage." Under *in-manu*, the wife went from being under the control of her father to being under the control of her husband. In a free marriage, the woman remained under the control of her father. There were three ways for women to become *in-manu*: *usus*, *confarreatio* and *coemptio*. In the case of *usus*, after a year of living together, if there is doubt about the relationship, the woman has the option of leaving for three nights and then either coming back to her husband for another year or separating from him. The advantage of this status is that her property would not be transferred to her husband but would remain with her father (Treggari 21). *Confarreatio* involved a religious ceremony and *coemptio*, a symbolic buying of the woman. In a free marriage, spouses did not have legal obligations toward each other, but were to treat each other with "conjugal regard," the translation Reynolds gives for *maritalis honor et affectio* (14). By the time of Jesus, *manu* had disappeared. As Rome expanded, the question of who qualified to be married became

more important for Romans as questions of citizenship affected the legality of unions (Treggari 35).

The Corpus Juris Civilis, a compilation of laws dating back to Hadrian (111-138) and written at the time of Justinian (539 CE), became the universal law for the Roman Empire. The *Corpus* is composed of three texts: the *Codex* (imperial decisions), the *Digest* (texts from different jurists) and the *Institutiones* – a student textbook (Halsall). One of the first articles in the *Digest* provides the reason for marriage: in nature, male and female join and procreate, so humans should do the same (D.1.1.1.3). The rules of Ulpian 5.2 state that marriage can happen if both man and woman are legally able (*conubium*) to get married, with respect to age and degree of affinity, are citizens and both consent (D.23.1.12). Sexual intercourse and/or cohabitation were not required for the marriage to be recognized, but the "marital frame of mind" (*affectio maritalis*) was (D.24.1.32.13). Consent by all parties was necessary and to enforce it, Augustus (63-14CE) decreed a law that forbade fathers to oppose the marriage of their daughters and refuse them a dowry. To prove the existence of the marriage, the spouses' testimony was enough because there was no required ceremony. However, a public commitment to marry would have been made during the betrothal. Individual consent and affection were required for marriage, but consummation was not.

During his reign, Justinian also wrote laws called "novels." In Novel 22 (533CE) he agreed that marriages could be dissolved by mutual agreement or if one of the spouses had a good reason, but later in Novel 117 (542CE), he abolished divorce by mutual agreement. Justin II, his successor, reinstated the right to divorce by mutual agreement. The prohibition against remarriage was an application of divine law and Jesus' precepts. Since it was contrary to the civil law of the Romans, these marriages were considered adulterous but not illegal. The

indissolubility of marriage was the major difference between the divine laws and the civil laws that permitted divorce and remarriage.

In the eighth century both Pepin the Short and Charlemagne contributed to the alignment of divine law with secular law by allowing priests to make sure that age and degree of affinity would not constitute an impediment to marriage. In the ninth century, Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, also advocated for secular law to be "consonant" with divine law and not the other way round. Divine law on marriage became an instrument of unification during the Carolingian Empire as it started to take precedence over local civil laws (Reynolds 254). As emperor, Charlemagne encouraged couples to receive a benediction at their wedding. From then on, the Church increased its participation in marriage by getting more involved in the ceremony and the requirements for marriage.*Chansons de geste* and romances, which usually celebrate weddings among the aristocracy, always include a blessing by a high clergy member.

Throughout the centuries, ecclesiastical authorities, meting in synods and councils produced canons, but it is in the twelfth century that these canons were compiled into a body referred to as canon law. Peter Landau in "Gratian and the *Decretum Gratiani*" confirms that Gratian is the father of the discipline of canon law. The *Decretum* is a collection of texts from the early church to the twelfth century that Gratian analyzed and to which he gave unity by reconciling the contradictions in the sources. Because it demonstrates the Church's emerging position on the elements that constitute marriage, it is worth quoting Gratian at length:

> [after c.35]:It should be known that a marriage is begun by betrothal and completed by intercourse. Whence there is marriage between the betrothed, but only its beginning; between those who have couple there is a ratified marriage. [after c.39]: According to this distinction is to be understood the authority of Augustine, "There is no doubt that a woman is not married of whom it is learned that there was no mingling of the sexes." It is to be understood that this refers to a completed marriage that contains in itself a symbol of Christ and the church. Thus also the text of Pope Leo is to be understood. [after c. 45] John Chrysostom, "Will, not coitus, makes a marriage," and Ambrose, "The deflowering

> of virginity does not make a marriage but conjugal agreement does" are to be understood like this. Coitus without the will to contract marriage or the deflowering of a virgin without conjugal agreement does not make a marriage. But a preceeding will to contract marriage and a conjugal agreement bring it about that the woman, in the deflowering of her virginity or in coitus, is said to marry the man or to celebrate marriage (Tierney 192-3).

Thus, for Gratian, consent makes marriage and sex sanctions it. Understood in this way, Mary and Joseph's marriage even without consummation remains a valid union. In Distinctio 24, Gratian mentions "marital affection" as part of marriage. Much like in Roman law, consent and affection are important aspects of marriage. Added to these components, Gratian confirms the sacramental nature of marriage. James Brundage in *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* surmises that Gratian chose to emphasize consummation rather than consent because it would be somewhat easier to prove than whether consent had been uttered in the present or the future tense if at all (238). Gratian was associated with the "Italian solution" while the "French solution" explained below emphasized consent (236).

The theologians associated with the development of scholasticism, such as Yves de Chartres, Anselme de Laon, Hughes de Saint-Victor and Pierre Abelard agreed that consent in the present constituted marriage, not the consent in the future usually associated with the act of betrothal. Peter Lombard, whose *Four Book of Sentences* became the standard reference for scholastic thought, also argued in Sententiae in *IV Libris Distinctae* that consent in the present, articulated in a speech act, the importance of which is further explained in Chapters One and Two, makes marriage (Ritzer 375-6):

> But the efficient cause of marriage is consent, not any consent, but expressed in words; not concerning the future, but in the present tense. For if by consent in the future tense, saying:" "I will accept you as my husband, and I you as my wife, this consent does not effect marriage. Likewise, if they consent mentally, and they do not express consent through words or other clear signs, neither does such consent effect marriage. But if it is expressed in words, which nonetheless are not heartfelt, provided there is no duress or

> deceit present, that pledge of words through which thy consent, saying: "I accept you as my husband and I you as my wife," makes marriage" (McCarthy 62-3).

About the role of sex in marriage, Peter Lombard says; "If the first human beings had not sinned, they and their progeny would have joined with the urging of the flesh and the heat of lust. Just as some good deed is worthy of a reward, so their coitus would have been good and worthy of a reward. But, because of sin, the deadly law of concupiscence is inherent in our members, without which there is no carnal union. Their coitus is reprehensible and evil unless it is excused by the goods of marriage" (Murray 171). Gratian in Causa 27, Quaestio 2 c.28 emphasizes the concept of marital debt and the fact that the husband does not own his body but his wife does and vice and versa to explain that continence can only happen with the consent of both spouses.

Both Gratian and Peter Lombard stress the importance of free consent. Gratian in Causa 31, Quaestio 2 c.2 and Peter Lombard in Book 4 D. 29 give the same examples of a ruling by Pope Urban who writing to Sanchez, King of Aragon, states that if his daughter has refused to marry the knight chosen by her father, he should not force her to do so (Murray 175 – Tierney 190). In stressing consent, under the purview of the Church marriage became an individual decision rather than a family affair (Sheehan 92). Both Peter Lombard and Gratian also reinforced the idea that marriage was a sacrament not only because it existed in paradise, but also because Jesus had endorsed it when he turned water into wine during the wedding at Cana.

By the mid thirteenth century Church law on marriage is established with the impediments regarding age and consanguinity clearly defined. Marriage is based on consent in the present tense, *affectio maritalis* (understood as marital respect, affection or regard), and conjugal rights. It is also a sacrament and therefore indissoluble. Since sexual relations are considered necessary for procreation but are also allowed to satisfy natural desires, they are considered only marginally sinful.

In theory, consent was the main requirement for marriage; however, it took longer for the laity to accept this practice. Kings and the nobility continued to use consanguinity as a way to dissolve marriages. In 1191, using close parentage, Philip II Augustus asked for an annulment of his marriage to a Danish princess for what Baldwin and others assume was sexual incompatibility based on the fact that he never granted her conjugal rights, and took another wife. When Philip II Augustus ignored Pope Innocent III's request to take back his wife, the Pope ordered an interdict on the royal domain, closing all churches until the king agreed to reunite with his wife (xiii-xiv). D'Avray argues that by the end of Pope Innocent III's pontificate in 1216, which supported the Franciscans and Dominicans who helped "broadcast marriage doctrine to the laity through preaching" (4), the nobility had finally accepted the Church's marriage requirements.

As marriage comes under the control of the Church, Chrétien de Troyes' romances, Marie de France's lais, and the fabliaux begin to explore the implications of the new requirement of consent and affection. In their own style, these texts surface the anxieties of the men and women of the time. If consent is necessary for marriage, what are women agreeing to and how is the marital bond expressed in a relationship? In the romances and the lais explored in Chapter One, the young women who are forced to get married against their will are given ways to escape their situation, and new forms of partnerships are envisioned. With more emphasis on the relationships between husbands and wives, the fabliaux, in a comical way, show that when a woman does not agree to become a wife, when there is no affection, and the husband and wife do not satisfy each other's needs, then there is no harmony and these unions are not successful.

As detailed in Chapter Three, I will use conflict theory to evaluate the success of the relationships depicted in the fabliaux. By looking at the way conflicts are handled, we can assess

how healthy a relationship is. *Sir Hain et Dame Anieuse*, *Berengier au long Cul*, *Le vilain mire* et *La bourse pleine de sens* all explore the roles of husband and wife and the way spouses resolve conflicts and learn to satisfy each other's needs. In the context of the economic expansion in Europe, this new emphasis on consent, marital bond and affection provides a different basis on which to build a new kind of marriage for the emerging class.

Economic Expansion in Twelfth Century France

The economic growth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is attributed to several different factors. Philippe Contamine sees the market expansion as the result of a pattern of long-term growth that started in the eleventh century when an increase in population gave impetus to both the greater production of goods, and to the exploration of new technologies to support that production. Consistent population growth, climate change, the clearing of land for agriculture, as well as an increase in spending by the aristocracy contributed to the steady expansion of economic growth in the twelfth century. Furthermore, the discovery of the new silver mines, which provided the metal needed to meet the demand for currency as the number of exchanges and trades increased, supported the economic progress that led to the expansion of urban centers (Spufford 110).

Replacing the ard, and turning the soil more efficiently, the plow, which began to be used extensively in the Lorraine, Artois, Picardy, Ile de France, and Normandy, helped increase agricultural yield (Contamine 143-7). Different kinds of mills produced finer grains. In Champagne and Flanders, the production of wider pieces of cloth was made possible as the loom developed from the warp-weighted loom to the horizontal loom. Rather than one person doing everything, these new technologies encouraged the division of labor. Hunt and Murray argue that the stimulus for these transformations was the increase in spending by the aristocracy whose

demand for luxury goods was a driving force in the development of business and trade (Hunt 11). We can see examples of these developments in several of the fabliaux. In *La bourse pleine de sens, la borgoise d'Orliens, Le sacristain, le sohait desvé*, the merchants are described as travelling far and wide to buy and sell the goods their customers want.

As exchanges became widespread and fairs and markets expanded, the demand for money, especially in small denominations, increased. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Freiberg mines in Germany produced and exported silver throughout Europe to minting centers (Spufford114). These centers were complex operations. They played a role in determining the quantity of coins to be minted, the technical processes to be used, and the percentage of silver in the coins as well as managing the profit made by the center (Contamine 254). Controlled by local authorities, each minting center produced its own coins. The development and the use of money resulted in what Contamine calls the emergence of "une conscience économique et monétaire" manifested in an interest in numbers and value and a need to define and explain money (251). The fabliaux explore the role and fluidity of money and value in the stories. *Le Prestre et Alison, Le sacristain, Le bouchier d'Abeville* highlight the difficulty of setting prices for services and objects.

Even though most important payments were still made using weighted metal, money replaced other kinds of exchanges. In Picardy, for example, records of peasants paying their rent in cash and not in labor date back to as early as 1170 (261). These peasants had probably bought their freedom from their lords and settled on lands they could cultivate for profit. Out of the ninety per cent of the population that constituted the peasant class, between five and ten percent headed communities of other peasants who cultivated smaller areas, and thereby constituted a sub-class

of rich peasants (Murtaugh 28). In the fabliau, *Le vilain mire*, a peasant who has been successful in farming finds himself in a position to "buy" a wife.

The fabliaux clearly show the anxieties triggered by the economic expansion, the increasing use of money, and the uncertainty of the value of the currency. Peasants who became rich are able to marry women from the aristocracy, but they do not know how to function in their new environment. Everything can be bought and sold, including body parts as in *Le sohait desvé*, sex in *LePrestre et Alison* or *Celle qui fut foutue et desfoutue pour une grue* and the value given to objects shifts depending on the role of the object and its owner like the fleece in *Le bouchier d'Abeville*, the flour, and the ring in *Le Meunier et les deus clers*. While the French fabliaux are at the onset of the economic expansion and explore its immediate influence on the lives of people, Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* fully articulates how the relationship between the merchant and his wife, envisioned as trading, is renegotiated following the rules of commerce.

Any attempt to compare the French and Chaucerian fabliaux must consider the social and economic conditions prevalent in the societies in which these different fabliaux were produced. Therefore, it is important to note the differences between the fourteenth century England of Chaucer and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' Northern France of the fabliaux. In the fourteenth century, the great expansion of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Europe was replaced by what Hunt and Murray have called the "great dying" because of the impact of famines, the plague and the Hundred-Years War.

Out of the estimated eighty million inhabitants of Europe in 1346, twenty-five million died after the first plague between1347-1351. Further plague epidemics occurred thirty-one times between 1348 and 1485 in England (Jordan 296). Fewer people to work meant higher wages, resulting in the necessity to calculate time more accurately and to measure and report the

amounts of goods produced. The invention of the mechanical clock facilitated the organization of the working day (152-3), leading merchants to develop and adopt accounting practices that would allow the consideration of depreciation and other complex transactions rather than relying on simple cash flow bookkeeping.

The Hundred-Years War that preoccupied England and France between 1337 and1453 made it difficult to sustain long distance and international partnerships. To finance the war, governments increased taxes and/or debased money regularly, resulting in a negative impact on commerce. Embargoes and raids also disrupted the economy. For example, the English did not allow shipments of wool to Flanders and raided the French countryside for goods; in turn, the French hired Genoese ships to raid the English ports (Hunt and Murray 127). Merchants were given safe-conducts to travel safely, but mainly the French army requisitioned what it needed from local authorities. At the national level, the levying and paying of taxes became accepted practice in both England and France. When direct taxes could not be justified, indirect taxes were established, such as the gabelle (tax on salt) in France and heavy export taxes in England. In people's minds, taxes became closely associated with war (Allmand 97-98). On the other hand, war also permitted the land owning class to recoup money, lost in revenues during times of low production, through salaries paid by the king. The demand for male soldiers increased, so lower-ranking nobles became "professional soldiers" and earned money to maintain their estates (Allmand 71).

In this general climate of uncertainty, merchants started to think more about assessing and managing risk, and created forms of insurance, especially maritime insurance and methods for insuring cargo, to minimize the risks involved in transporting goods during wartime. With the recurring debasement of coins, counterfeiting developed and states started to forbid the import of

foreign coins (Munro 543-4). To increase safety, the bill of exchange, first used in the thirteenth century, proved to be a useful tool as it allowed the transfer of funds without the actual transfer of money. As the society became primarily organized around a money economy, and relationships were getting redefined by these changes and the Church's new discourse on marriage, the *Canterbury Tales* offered a study of what scholars refer to as the middle group that emerged as a result of these changes. For this new class made of merchants, craftsmen and other professions associated with the development of trade and commerce, the new concept of marriage based on consent and partnership provided a way to anchor its identity as a group. In conceiving of marital relationships as fair exchanges, this lay group appropriated a clerical discourse to assert its place in society.

This is clearly illustrated in the *Shipman's Tale*. As explained in Chapter Four, according to equity theory the goal of marriage is to achieve equity or fairness so each spouse is satisfied. When applied to the *Shipman's Tale*, this theory shows how the text provides the merchant and his wife a space to redefine their marriage. As they solve their conflict, the husband realizes the importance of treating his wife as an equal partner to protect his/their reputation and his/their wealth.

It is impossible to determine if the fabliau would have appeared and enjoyed such popularity had it not been for their role in articulating the anxieties medieval people faced with understanding and adapting to the profound changes that happened in twelfth century France, in the economy and the new discourse of marriage promoted by the Church. The reason for the disappearance of the fabliau is rarely explained; critics note only that as a literary form, the fabliaux may have morphed into the genre of the short story as the time of the jongleurs came to an end (Balachov 29). The romance, on the other hand, enjoyed a much longer life possibly

because its portrayal of knights and ladies and love never lost its appeal. By the time of the *Canterbury Tales*, no new French fabliaux were being created. Yet it is the form Chaucer chooses for the *Shipman's Tale*. As will be seen in Chapters Two and Four, the form of the fabliau is ideal for exploring a society in transition. Just as in twelfth century France, in fourteenth century England, the fabliaux form is used to describe the emerging bourgeoisie and depict characters who rethink their identities and marital relationships in light of changes in the Church dictates as well as in the new market economy.

Chapter One: The Romances

Romances in Context

The term romance comes from the old French "mettre en romanz" a phrase, which means that the story was told in a vernacular language, not in Latin. Romances emerged in twelfth century Europe as a result of the development of a lay aristocratic culture in the courts and a non-aristocratic wealthy class in the towns. Romances were written over several centuries and across Europe, forming a composite of narratives that range from the chivalric romances of twelfth century France and England such as those of Chrétien de Troyes, described below, and - Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* c.1138, to the realistic romances produced in Spain in the seventeenth century, for example, Cervantes'*Los trabajos de Perisiles y Sigismunda* c.1617, and include the Middle English family romances of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

As a genre, the romance dealt primarily with the concerns of the nobles and the aristocracy during the feudal period. The earliest romances were translations of Latin epics into Anglo-Norman, a form of Old French. Other narratives dealing with the story of the origins of Britain (matter of Britain), including lais, and of Rome (matter of Rome) were composed in octosyllabic couplets first, and then later in prose. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the subject and concerns of the romances also shifted as this way of life became ever more removed from the experience of the audience. In addition, the production of literature also moved from the castles to the towns where a new class of bourgeois and merchants with different interests was emerging. Eventually the romance was displaced by the novel and romances started to be seen as a genre of imaginary

landscapes and fairy tales. But a closer look at the medieval romances reveals that these narratives tackled seriously the issues of their time (Krueger 1-9).

The romance genre was established through a process of differentiation from the early medieval genre of epic poetry: the chansons de geste. The chansons were tales of heroic deeds taking place during the time of Charlemagne composed in decasyllabic stanzas or laisses. There are distinct differences between the form of the chanson de geste and that of the romance. Where the chansons de geste celebrate men and their prowess in battle in the service of a king or kingdom, romances tell the stories of knights going on quests to find themselves and find love. Thus, the romance shifts the emphasis from the interest of the collective to a celebration of the individual; furthermore, the romance incorporates love as a constant theme as opposed to the chansons emphasis on heroic deeds and battles. In addition, through the use of the first person pronoun "I", in the romances, the author/narrator establishes a personal relationship with the reader/audience (Harf-Lancner 28). With the romances, we are moving away from stories where the purpose of the hero is to serve his king and kingdom to stories where the purpose of the knight is to serve a lady.

Since romances emerge as a narrative genre at the same time as the fabliaux and are found in the same manuscripts, they have often been analyzed together. Joseph Bédier points out the differences between the two genres, comparing "l'esprit réaliste" of the fabliaux and l'esprit idéaliste" of the romances. There is no doubt in his mind that the romances are a higher literary genre than the fabliaux. He attributes the fact that the fabliaux have "infecté" 'infected' and "contaminé" 'contaminated' the romances and other court narratives to the authors of the fabliaux who needed to perform different narratives

for different audiences while assuming that the aristocracy enjoyed the romances and the bourgeoisie and the peasantry the fabliaux (382-387). Attempting to narrow the gap, Per Nykrog argues that the fabliaux are burlesque and therefore their authors consciously wanted to create such an opposition between the two genres (176-192). John Baldwin considers the relationship between the fabliaux and the romances in terms of "action/reaction"; the fabliaux react with obscene language to the polite language of the romances. It is also possible that the romances were reacting to the fabliaux, which probably circulated orally long before they were written down (Baldwin 41). To appreciate the intertextuality between these different genres and understand the intent of the scribe who compiled the manuscript, scholars recommend the study of these texts in the context of their manuscripts (Revard, Busby)[9]. However, since the purpose of this chapter is to explore the impact of social changes, we will explore how the same themes, those of love, marriage, and the relationship between men and women, are developed in these different genres at the time of their production.

Beyond the differences in language, structure, characters and story lines, the fabliaux and the romances both explore love and matrimony. Where marriages in the chansons de geste were celebrated to strengthen alliances or make peace, marriages in the early romances are a celebration of love and the individual. The shift, from considering marriage as a family affair to treating it as an individual decision, parallels the Church's emphasis on individual consent, consummation and partnership. Among all the romances written in French at the time of the fabliaux, Chrétien de Troyes's stories and Marie de

[9] Busby argues that we must read these texts in the context of their manuscripts to fully understand their meaning in *Codex and Content: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscripts*. 2 vols. Faux Titre: Etudes de langue et de littérature françaises, 2002.

France's lais are the most interesting because they offer different possibilities for reconciling love and marriage.

Not much is known about these two authors except what they say about themselves in their stories. Marie introduces herself as "de France" possibly to indicate that she was from France and may have lived and written at the French speaking court of Eleanor and Henri II Plantagenet, the "noble roi" to whom the *Lais* are dedicated. She is probably also the author of Fables written circa 1180 and *l'Espurgatoire*, after 1189 (Harf-Lancner 11). It is possible that she lived in England at the court. She composed her lais around 1170-75 and tells us in the Prologue that she heard these stories and decided to write them in rhyme. Only one mid-thirteenth century manuscript, British Museum, Harley 978 (H), contains the twelve lais and the prologue; another manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale, nouv. acq.fr. 1104, contains nine lais. Individual lais are located in three thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscripts (Hanning 25). Most editions of the lais are based on the (H) version.

Chrétien's identity is as mysterious as Marie's. "De Troyes" may mean that he was from that city, possibly a converted Jew, since "Chrétien" was a common name given to those who converted and Troye was a city with an influential Jewish community (Poirion xii). Adding to fictional elements to existing stories, he introduced the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table in the five romances based on the legend of King Arthur: *Erec et Enide* (c1169-70), *Cligès* (c1176-77), *Le Chevalier de la Charrette/Lancelot* (c1174-81), *Le Chevalier au Lion /Yvain* (c1175-81), and *Le Conte du Graal/Perceval* (c1181-90). Chrétien spent part of his life at the court of Marie de Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, whom he acknowledges in the introduction of Lancelot as the person who gave him the idea to write the story. Later, he moved to the court of Philippe of Alsace,

Count of Flanders, where he wrote *Le Conte du Graal*. Although no manuscripts of these romances dating back to when they were written have been found, there are eight copies and fragments or excerpts from the three stories we will explore, *Erec et Enide*, *Cligès*, and *Yvain* are found in twelve manuscripts from different areas in France (Busby 67).

The reasons why Marie and Chrétien's works were and are still popular are not easy to establish. Keith Busby remarks that as the work gets transmitted, we cannot be sure that what Chrétien or Marie intended to say is what later audiences found appealing (65). Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante argue that we get a picture of Marie as an author as her ideas emerge throughout the lais. Norris J. Lacy, using the argument that, as a religious and moral person, Chrétien could not finish Lancelot after he wrote the section on the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere, reminds us that an author does not have to agree with his/her characters (56). While trying to understand the authors' motivations gives some insights into the works, it is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of such analyses. Therefore, the analyses below will focus on how the struggles of the knights and the tension between their individual desires and the interests of society are symptomatic of important historical changes especially the changes in the understanding of marriage.

The tension between the desires of the individuals and the interests of society is represented in the opposition between love and marriage depicted in the lais, in the romances and, as will be shown in Chapter 2, in the fabliaux. In most cases, marriages were intended to secure alliances and protect status and inheritance, but the new emphasis, advocated by the Church, on consent and partnership opens a space for individual choice based on love. The kind of love described in the romances is what Gaston Paris called

"amour courtois" "courtly love" in his 1883 discussion of Guenevere and Lancelot in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*"*The Knight of the Cart."* Paris believed that courtly love implied adultery based on concepts he learned from *The Art of Courtly Love* written by Andreas Capellanus around 1174. Inspired by Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, in three books written in the form of dialogues between men and women, *The Art of Courtly Love* reinforces the idea that love is an art that must be practiced according to certain rules.

One of the dialogues is of particular interest to this thesis because it puts love at odds with marriage. In Book I, Chapter VI, seventh dialogue, the man and the woman who disagree on whether love can exist between husband and wife decide to submit the question to the Countess of Champagne. Her response is that "love cannot exert its powers between two people who are married to each other. For lovers give each other everything freely, under no compulsion of necessity, but married people are in duty bound to give in to each other's desires and deny themselves to each other in nothing"(106-7). In courtly love, a knight will fall in love with a married lady of a higher rank and, to win her love, will accomplish chivalric deeds.

Since Gaston Paris, scholars have questioned both the idea of courtly love and the purpose of *The Art of Courtly Love*. Jacqueline Murray mentions that regardless of the historicity of the *Art of courtly Love*, courtly love's ideology was "frankly erotic, adulterous, and subversive in a way that threatened the very fabric of noble society and the moral framework established by the Church" (79). Larry Benson and other Chaucer scholars think that Capellanus' work cannot be read at face value because the idea that adultery is necessary in courtly love is false (239). In reality, the chastity of the queen was paramount to the legitimacy of heirs. Even though Eleanor of Aquitaine and Louis VII

were reconciled by the Pope, after her alleged love affair with her uncle Raymond of Antioch, they divorced three years later in 1153 on grounds of consanguinity (McCracken 2). Twenty-five years later, as Chrétien was writing the romance centered on the affair between Guenevere and Lancelot, Philip Count of Flanders (1168-1191) upon discovering his wife, Isabel of Vermandois, had been unfaithful had her lover beheaded (Kay 82). The fact that it is at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie de Champagne that romances flourished supports the belief of scholars who argue that romances express the fantasies of the people of the time as well as their anxieties in a changing world (McCracken 20, Krueger 7).

Rather than choose between focusing on the aristocracy's understanding of marriage as the way to protect lineage and property and the Church's new emphasis on consent and partnership, both Marie de France and Chrétien's stories explore the conflicts created by this new conception of what marriage is and how it occurs. In *Etymologies and Genealogies*, Howard Bloch calls *Erec et Enide*, *Cligès* and *Yvain*, "matrimonial" romances because each story is "haunted by problems related to desire, marriage and succession" which are reflected in the structure of the texts themselves. When these romances explore issues of lineage and succession, they follow the pattern of the chanson de geste, but the heroes' individual desires are expressed in long inner monologues, reminiscent of the form of the lyrical love poems (186). Comparing Chrétien and Marie de France's narratives, Bloch acknowledges the diversity of matrimonial situations that are found in the lais and concludes that while they are difficult to analyze as a whole, it seems that Marie de France is more interested in the impact of marriage than in its contractual nature (190). Looking only at *Le Frêne*, in "I do, I do" Hurtig suggests that Gurun and

Frêne's union represents a "revolutionary concept of marriage" because in the end the marriage is acceptable by the aristocracy – Frêne is of a noble family – and the Church since Gurun and Frêne have chosen each other (365). Both Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, therefore, offer possibilities for new roles for husbands and wives that reconcile the individual's interests with those of the larger society.

As reflected in the titles of most of Marie and Chrétien's stories, the emphasis is mostly on the men's experiences and struggles with desire and matrimony, and it is clear that men have an advantage over women. When marriage takes more of a center stage, the romances and the lais offer women agency and ways to turn the fact that they are still the objects of men's desires to their own advantage. The range of options explored in the stories unsettles the relationships of power imposed on women. (Leicester 161). *Le Frêne* and *Erec et Enide*, analyzed below, are probably the two romances that best exemplify the rethinking of matrimony and the role of women typical of the romance genre.

Strategies and Tactics in Romances

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau calls "strategies:"

> …the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed (35-36).

The idea that marriage was sacred was not new, but the fact that the Church chose to forbid clandestine marriages and to change the degree of affinity can be conceived of as a strategy, as defined by de Certeau, designed to regain control of the institution of marriage, prevent the marriage annulments which had become prevalent, counter the heretics' discourses against marriage, and decrease clandestine marriages by requiring the

publication of banns. Considered one of the seven sacraments, marriage not only conferred divine grace on both parties but also created an indissoluble union. Peter Lombard, who had argued that consent validated marriage, also described it as a "conjugal partnership" in which the wife is considered "not mistress, not servant, but spouse" (Book 4, Distinction 28, 3.2). This would seem to confer more equality on women, but during that same period, the status of noble women in Northern France was deteriorating for three main reasons: the reorganization of family through primogeniture reduced the importance of women in extended families; the impact of the Gregorian Reform and the establishment of an all-male clergy reduced women's participation in the Church; and, finally female students were barred from the nascent universities (Krueger 19-20).

Caught between the Church and the aristocracy's strategies of control, the men and women of the romances use what de Certeau calls "tactics." A tactic "must make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is at least expected. It is a guileful ruse" (37). As an emerging literary genre, the romances envision possible tactics for the men and women of the time to test and rethink the meaning of marriage. Like tales and legends, tactics "frequently reverse the relationships of power, and like the stories of miracles, ensure the unfortunate in a fabulous utopian space. This space protects the weapons of the weak against the reality of the established order" (23). For the audience of the romances, Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes' narratives offer tactics to understand and cope with the strategies of the aristocracy and the Church regarding marriage. As the aristocracy's use of marriage to protect lineage and property conflicts with the Church's idea of marriage as an individual commitment based on consent and

partnership--both strategies of control--the heroes and heroines of the romances find tactics to redefine and shift their roles as husbands and wives.

Marie de France's *Lais* and Marriage

The tension between love and marriage runs through the twelve lais of Marie de France, but when love cannot survive within the established order of the society, that is in marriage, the lovers die (*Equitan*) or they leave (*Lanval-Guigemar*).[10] Equitan falls in love with the seneschal's wife and because the wife has no good reason to fall in love with someone else, they both plot to kill the husband, but end up killed by him. In *Guigemar*, the husband disappears, but we do not know what happens to him, so the story ends with Guigemar and his mistress leaving together because technically she is still married. In *Yonec*, the ring makes the husband forget his wife's infidelity so she can go back to live with him after her lover dies. If all the lais end by reinforcing the morals of the time, love, including adulterous love, is a tactic that relies on consent while circumventing the indissolubility of marriage.

Interestingly enough, only in *Yonec* and *Guigemar* do we have young women who would have a reason to fall in love with somebody else. Starting with the well-known motif of the mal-mariée, the young wife in *Yonec*, curses her parents for marrying her to a man she did not love, "Maleeit drient mi parent/ e li altre comunalment,/ ki a cest gelus me donerent/ e a sun cors me mariërent!" 'A curse on my family,/ and on all the others/ who gave me to this jealous man,/ who married me to his body' (85-88; Hanning and Ferrante 81-84). In Guigemar, "Li sire, ki la mainteneir,/mult fu vielz huem e femme aveit,/une

[10] See Saray-Jane Murray for a reading of Laustic that shows Marie de France's condemnation of "selfish earthly relationships" in Marie de France, Ethicist: Questioning Courtly Love in *Laüstic*" *Modern Philology* Aug. 1 (2011): 1-16. Web 18 Jan 2013.

dame de halt parage,/franche, curteise, bele e sage./Gelus esteit a desmesure;/ car ceo purporte la nature/ que tuit li vieil seient gelus;/mult het chascuns que il seit cus:/tells est d'eage li tespas." 'The lord who ruled over that city/ was a very aged man who had a wife,/a woman of high lineage,/noble, courteous,/ beautiful, intelligent;/he was extremely jealous,/ which accorded with his nature./All old folk are jealous;/everyone of them hates the thought of being cuckholded,/ such is the perversity of age' (209-215; Hanning and Ferrante 209-216). In both stories, the husbands are old men who were able to "buy' young women because they had money. In *Yonec*, the husband guards his wife to make sure the children who inherit his fortune will be his own. In *Guigemar*, the wife is locked up, but the only reason given is that her husband is jealous. In these two stories, love is again the tactic used by these wives to fight the strategy of marriage imposed upon them by their families through a shift in the meaning of consent.

Rather than consent to marry, women freely give their consent to love men who are not necessarily their husbands.For example, in *Guigemar*, "e li otreie senz respit l'amur de li, e il la baise" 'and immediately granted him her love; then he kissed her' (528-9;). In *Le Frêne*, "qu'ele otria ceo que il quist" 'she granted him what he desired' (283-84; Hanning 80) in *Lanval*, "s'amur e sun cuer li otreie" 'she granted him her love and her body" (133; Hanning 108). In *Les Deux Amants*, "li otria sa drüerie" 'she granted him her love' (69; Hanning 128). In most cases, consent is obtained after the suitor has pleaded his case. First the young women must say no, but the no is only an invitation for the ensuing pleading (Sylvester 129). In *Equitan,* "Tant a li reis parlé/ e tant li a crié merci/que de s'amur l'aseüra, e el sun cors li otria" 'The king pleaded with her, begged her so often for mercy,/that she promised him her love/ and granted him possession of her body' (181-185;

Hanning 65). In *Guigemar*, "La Dame comprend qu'il dit vrai/et sans plus tarder, elle lui accorde/son amour, avec un baiser." 'The lady realized he was telling the truth,/and immediately granted him her love; then he kissed her' (527-29; Hanning 45).

As Sylvester notes, the switch from dialogue to reported speech in both these examples suggests that women's desires are controlled and that only men's are freely expressed (129). Even in *Milun* where it is the young woman who offers her love to the knight, it is not she who speaks; rather, it is the narrator. Only in *Lanval* is the woman completely free to express her desire, but as we know, she is a fairy. Her status as an outsider allows her to speak of her love more freely than other women. The fact that women are not voicing consent seems to silence the love they consent to. But the unspoken consent can also be seen as a tactic women use to subvert the original meaning of consent as consent to marriage. By silencing consent, the narrator and the text itself try to conceal the fact that, in most cases, what these women consent to is sex, which, in these cases, amounts to adultery.

Once consent is given, the licit or illicit love can last for many years (*Equitan*, *Guigemar*, *Le Frêne*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Milun*) before the story offers a resolution. For unhappily married wives, the resolution will be to make the illicit love possible as in *Yonec* and *Milun*. For unmarried women the situation is a little different because by consummating their love, the partners are considered in fact married even if the family does not agree. In *Milun*, the young woman has a child that she must abandon because her family thinks the knight is not a good enough match for her. In the fight for the control of marriage, the strategy put in place by the aristocracy to protect lineage and power by completely disregarding the desires of individuals is undermined by the Church's strategy

of enforcing consent. In these lais, Marie de France's tactics consist of using love to promote consent and expand the understanding of marriage that in effect undermine the discourses of both the aristocracy and the Church.

Le Frêne depicts three types of marriage: the marriage of Frêne's parents, Frêne's "marriage" with Gurun and the almost marriage between Gurun and Frêne's sister. In this lai, when Frêne's mother gives birth to twins, because she had criticized her neighbor who also had twins by saying that she had been with two men, the only way she has to preserve her reputation is to get rid of one of her twins. Frêne is wrapped up in a blanket with a ring and left in an ash tree (frêne). Brought up in a convent, Frêne grows into a great beauty. Gurun, a local lord, falls in love with Frêne and asks her to come live with him in his castle, but because she is supposedly not from a noble family, he cannot marry her. His court wants him to marry and he finally agrees to marry whoever is chosen for him. His vassals find Hazel, who happens to be Frêne's twin sister, and tell him that he must leave Frêne arguing that the hazel tree bears fruits but not the ash tree. Frêne prepares the bedchamber and places on the bed the blanket into which her mother had wrapped her before abandoning her. After the marriage is celebrated and right before the union is consummated comes the recognition scene. Hazel's mother recognizes the cover and Frêne, the daughter she had abandoned. Then Gurun's marriage to Hazel is annulled and Frêne can finally marry Gurun.

The first marriage mentioned in this lai is that of Frêne's parents. We do not know much about it except that it needs to exist to give Frêne a legitimate birth. The husband is described along with his friend as "Riche hum furent e manant, e chevalier pruz e vaillant" 'both were rich men, brave and worthy knights' (5-6; Hanning and Ferrante 73) but the

wife was “kar ele ert feinte et orguilluse” ‘deceitful and proud, evil-tongued and envious’ (27-28; Hanning and Ferrante 73). Yet at the end of the lais, when Frene’s mother asks her husband to forgive her wrongdoing, this is what he says, “Dame,’ fet il, ‘que dites vus?/Il n’a se bien nun entre nus./Quan que vus plest, seit pardune!/Dites mei vostre volunté!” ‘“Wife,” he said, “what are you talking about? There’s been nothing but good between us. I’ll pardon you as much as you please! Tell me what’s bothering you’ (471-5; Hanning and Ferrante 85). The wife then reveals what that she had abandoned Frêne and rather than be angry at her, the husband says, “De ceo sui liez;/unkes mes ne fuit si haitiez./ Quand nostre fille avun trovee,/ grant joie nus a Deus donee,/ ainz que li pechiez fust dublez.” ‘I’m delighted by this news; I was never so pleased. Since we’ve found our daughter, God has given us great joy, instead of doubling the sin.’ (495-500; Hanning and Ferrante 86) Although the husband recognizes his wife’s abandoning of Frêne as a sin, he is happy that Frêne will not be wronged again.

Consent constitutes marriage; therefore, Gurun is married to Frêne. “A la dameisele parla:/ tant li preia, tant li premist,/qu’ele otria ceo que il quist.” ‘he pleaded so well, promised so much/that she granted him what he desired.’ (282-285; Hanning and Ferrante 80) In addition, once Gurun is sure of Frêne’s love, he asks her to come live with him. One of his arguments is: “Saveir poëz, jol quit e crei/se vostre ante s’aparceveit,/mult durement li pesereit, s’entur li fussiez enceintiee; /durement sereit curuciee.” ‘I’m sure you know/that if your aunt found out about us/she’d be upset, /especially if you became pregnant right under her roof.’ (280-285; Hanning and Ferrante 80). Frêne agreed to live freely with Gurun in a kind of “union libre” (Hurtig 368). In this lai, Marie de France shows how Gurun and Frêne circumvent society’s expectations and manage to live together. It seems

that nobody in Gurun's court minded this arrangement until he needed an heir. Then, preserving lineage and inheritance prevailed over personal happiness. Since Gurun does not want to choose another "wife," as noted above, he agrees to marry whoever is chosen for him.

The last marriage described is the wedding of Gurun and Hazel. Gurun's vassals took care of everything "La pucele purchaceruns: se Deu plest, si la vus durruns." Cel marriage unt purchacié/e de tutes parz otrié. 'Let us make the arrangements for the daughter; God willing, we will get her for you.' They arranged the marriage,/obtained everyone's promise' (351/354; Hanning and Ferrante 82). We do not know if Hazel consented, but "Les noces tindrent richement;" 'they held the betrothals in grand style;' (383; Hanning and Ferrante 83) and the archbishop is there to bless the newlyweds in bed. Everything proceeds according to the tradition even though the marriage should not be allowed since Gurun is already married to Frêne. Sharon Kinoshita argues that the fact the Church agrees to bless the marriage between Gurun and Hazel shows that Marie de France advocates for the power of the feudal aristocracy and its view of the primacy of lineage over the clerical view of marriage based on consent and partnership (50). But this lai also points out the difficulty of enforcing individual consent and how easily it can be ignored.

The recognition scene happens right before the consummation, so the marriage can be annulled. "L'erceveskes a cunseillé/que issi seit la nuit laissié;/el demain les despartira, lui e celi espusera. Issi l'unt fet e graanté./El demain furent desevré./Aprés a s'amie espusee, et li pere li a donee,/ ki mult ot ers li bon curage. Par mi li part sun heritage." 'The archbishop advised/that things should be left as they were that night;/in the morning they would separate/the knight from the woman he had married. Next morning, the marriage

was annulled/and the knight married his beloved; she was given to him by her father, who was well disposed toward her; he divided his inheritance with her.'(509-18; Hanning and Ferrante 86-7).At the end, the clerical view of marriage and the aristocratic view are reconciled. Like Griselda, Frêne endures hardship in silence and gets rewarded at the end by being reunited with Gurun officially.

While the marriages in *Le Frêne* may be there because they are necessary for the story to progress, the union of Gurun and Frêne is a tactic that undermines the strategy of the Church. This type of secret union is what the Church was trying to eliminate by requiring the publication of banns that made a wedding public rather than private. Even though this lai depicts a secret union based in love as an accepted way of life for two people for many years, the role of the spouses remained very traditional with Gurun in charge and Frêne as the obedient wife. As mentioned above, even when women redefine consent as consent to love rather than consent to marry their consent is never spoken. In all these stories, women are never the speakers of that particular utterance so that their dissenting voices are only heard indirectly. The first and last time Frêne speaks is to Hazel's mother when she explains where she got the ring that identifies her. Like other heroines, Frêne only speaks in the company of other women and in a space traditionally occupied by women.

Women are usually referred to as "dame" "espuse" or "pucele" "dameisele" "meschine." They become "socially constituted" by the law (Butler 121-3) and in relation to men with these words. On the other hand, men are not only named, but also inscribed in their family lineage. Since women are given to their husbands by their father, all we need to know is who those fathers are. This explains why women are rarely named in these

stories. By breaking the law and living with Gurun, Frêne cannot overtly inhabit the word "spouse" or "wife", so she is actually named. In naming her, Marie de France defines her in terms of her own story she was found in an ash tree (frêne) – and not in relation to any man or any socially accepted status except that the ash tree does not bear fruit whereas her sister who almost becomes Gurun's wife is called Hazel, a fruit bearing tree.

Marriage, in Marie de France, is not yet what the Church would like it to be because of courtly love and the idea that love cannot happen within marriage. In the lais marriage is an institution that controls people's lives and serves to inscribe women into the existing structure of lineage. Even when through the resistance of women, love triumphs, the heroines' re-appropriation of consent and consummation does not change the relationship between the spouses. Men/husbands speak most of the dialogue, continuing to control space and speech while women/wives comply. Yet, through their focus on how love undoes loveless marriages, and through their depiction of tactics to cope with unhappy marriages, the lais of Marie de France successfully point out the contradictions between what women desire and what the aristocracy still sees as their place in society, and offer some possibilities to reconcile both.

Chrétien de Troyes and Marriage

As in the *Lais*, in his three romances about marriage, Chrétien de Troyes also explores the tension between individual desires and societal obligations. *Cligès* follows the traditional pattern of the romance narrative with the knight in love who continues to fight to prove his worth and merit the love of the lady. But rather than wait patiently for Cligès, Fénice takes charge twice to protect her love for Cligès; first by refusing to consummate her marriage with Alis and second by simulating her own death to allow herself to escape

the marriage she was forced into. In *Yvain* and *Erec and Enide*, both Yvain and Erec are already married and are torn between their responsibilities as knights and as husbands. While *Erec et Enide* was written before *Cligès* and *Yvain*, it is the romance in which Chrétien de Troyes successfully reconciles individual desires and societal obligations by rethinking the meaning of husband and wife. Chrétien's tactics consist of breaking the roles and spaces traditionally associated with these two categories: husband with public space and public speech and wife with private space and private speech thus making consent and the protection of lineage and property possible, as well as promote the more difficult concept of partnership that the Church was also trying to promote.

Marriage and Lineage in *Cligès*

The first third of the romance *Cligès* is about his parents. Cliges's father, Alexandre, the son of the Greek emperor decides to go to Arthur's court to become a knight. He falls in love with Soredamour but never dares to reveal his love for her for fear of being rejected. Finally they get married and Soredamour gives birth to Cligès. Cligès falls in love with Fénice who is promised to his uncle, Alis, so Cligès decides to follow in his father's footsteps and goes to Arthur's court. Fénice admits her love for Cligès to her maid who has Alis drink a beverage so after the wedding, Alis would only touch Fénice in his dreams. This way Fénice could remain a virgin until the day she could be united with Cligès. To escape her husband, Fénice decides on the best way to fake death and disappear with Cligès. She drinks a potion that makes her look dead and after she is buried, Cligès rescues her and they leave. When Fénice's husband finds out he has been tricked, he decides to find Cligès, but he dies from the pain of not finding them. Finally, Cligès and Fénice can be married.

In *Cligès*, Chrétien opposes the aristocracy's desire to preserve lineage and land over the individual desires of the lovers through textual opposition between the narrative story line and the monologues of Cligès and Fénice when they express their love (Bloch 186). Howard Bloch considers the inner monologues, written as lyric poetry, to be the expression of the individual subject. As such, the monologues disrupt the linear story, which follows the narrative structure of the chansons de geste and serves to establish Cligès' lineage and worth (187). This kind of structural shift also occurs in the telling of the story of Cligès' parents, which takes up a third of the romance. Alexandre and Soredamour fall in love with each other, but dare not reveal their love to each other for fear of being rejected. We hear them lament in long inner monologues, but since their love is not illicit, the hesitation is also the pretext in the narrative that allows Alexandre to prove himself at Arthur's court. While in *Cligès*, by making happy marriages possible, Chrétien reconciles the interests of the individuals and the interests of the collective in the text itself, the emphasis on the preservation of Cligès' lineage over Alis' shows that the concerns of the aristocracy still drive the story.

The scene where Alexandre and Soredamour admit their love for each other is moderated by the queenwho encourages them to reveal their feelings to each other. She is sitting between the two of them and speaks first. Here, the queen embodies both the interests of the individual and the interests of the collective. "Par marriage et par enor/vos antraconpagniez ansanble;/Ensi porra, si com moi sanble,/Vostre amors longuemant durer./Je vos os bien asseürer,/Se vos en avez corage, J'asanblerai le marriage" ' Marry so your love, it seems to me, will last forever. I can assure you that if your hearts desire/that I will arrange the marriage' (2288-94). Then Alexandre speaks and reveals his love from

2296-2313 to the queen never addressing Soredamour directly. As for Soredamour, her reaction and words are reported in the third person from 2214-2223. The queen concludes the "ceremony" by saying: "An riant die: "Je t'abandon,/ Alixandre, le cors t'amie;/ bien dai qu'au cuer ne fauz tu mie./Qui qu'en face chiere ne groing,/L'un de vos dues a l'autre doing./Tien tu le tuen et tu la toe" 'She said smiling; Alexandre, I give you the body of your love;/ I know you already have her heart./People will think what they want/I give you one to the other./here is yours and here is yours' (2326-31). While we know Soredamour agrees with the marriage, we do not hear her consent to anything; she is given to Alexandre by the queen without a word. This concludes the marriage ceremony between Alexandre and Soredamour. Both the marriages of Alexandre and of Cligès are described in a few lines whereas the marriage between Alis and Fénice includes the blessing of the nuptial bed by the bishop. This reinforces the idea that consent, which can be said privately, prevails over the public display of the Church's blessings. As in *Le Frêne*, here is another marriage blessed by the Church, and agreed to by the families, that will not be consummated. In this case, what will free Fénice is Alis' death, not an annulment as in *Le Frêne*. In *Cligès*, the emphasis is on lineage and a knights's worth. The worth and continuity of their lineage is twice confirmed when Alexandre marries Soredamour and Cligès marries Fénice.

At the end of the romance, Cligès returns to Greece with Fénice where he is made emperor. The coronation takes place at the same time as their wedding. Cligès has proved with his prowess as a knight that he deserves the throne and Fénice. The story mentions that they were both crowned together, that their love grew everyday, and that Cligès never fought with her or kept her prisoner. But, the story concludes in an interesting way: Since Cligès trusts Fénice, he does not need to keep her in a prison, but since she had tricked

Alis, it is implied that women should not be trusted. And because emperors are always suspicious of their wives and therefore will keep them captive in a room, and to avoid any possibility for falling in love, only eunuchs will be allowed to be with them. At this point, the narrator takes control of the story and decides what the audience will remember: not Fenice's loyalty or how she refused to consummate her marriage with Alis out of love for Cligès, but her ability to trick her husband. The image of women as conniving and not worthy of trust reinforces the aristocratic view of marriage in which control of lineage is more important than consent and women's own desires, but at the same time Fénice's insistence on legitimacy and her condemnation of Tristan and Yseult's adulterous love show that a woman can also promote the same values.

Marriage and Honor in *Yvain*

In *Yvain Le Chevalier au Lion*, Fredric Cheyette and Howell Chickering argue that the focus is on Yvain's inability to keep his word and the far-reaching impact of his action by replacing the story in its twelfth-century historical context. Less centered around love, marriage is defined in terms of honor and respect. Yvain falls in love with Laudine whose husband he has killed. After his wedding, and encouraged by Gauvain, he decides to leave to look for adventures. Laudine agrees to let him go for one year, but he fails to come back within the year, and the rest of his adventures are a path to forgiveness and regaining his credibility with Laudine. Lunette acts as the intermediary to solve the dispute between her mistress and Yvain and the story shows the protagonists going through the different steps of dispute resolution. When Yvain comes back, Laudine shows coldness toward him as she is expected to do since he is the one who broke his promise. The reconciliation scene between Yvain and Laudine is only possible because Laudine was tricked by Lunette into

promising that she would help the knight who would come to defend her fountain. She did not know that the knight was her husband Yvain, so at the end she must honor her promise and agree to make peace with Yvain, "Et s'il ne fust de parjurer/Trop leide chose et trop vilainne,/Ja mes a moi, por nule painne/Pes ne accord ne trovast" 'If perjury was not as shameful and vulgar, never, at any cost, could he pretend to peace or to being on good terms with me.' (6770-73).

The marriage between Laudine and Yvain gets a second chance once Yvain understands that a promise to a woman must also be respected. The same way he honored the promise he made Gauvain to join him after the wedding, Yvain should have respected the one he made to his wife (Germain np). Honor and respect are not only chivalric values to be upheld among knights, they are values on which a marriage partnership can be built.

Before Yvain learns the importance of marriage, it conflicts with his knightly pursuits. For most of the story, Yvain is torn between his love for his wife and his love for Gauvain. "Amor" is used both to describe Yvain's feelings toward his wife and toward Gauvain. Yvain does not seem to be able to choose between the masculine space of homosocial friendships and the heterosexual space of matrimony. The reconciliation scene between the two knights is reminiscent of a reconciliation scene between lovers: "Einsi parlant sont descendu;/S'a li uns a l'autre tandu/les braz au col, si s'antrebeisent,/Ne por ce mie ne se teisent,/Que chascuns oltrez ne se claint" 'As they are speaking, they got off their horses, threw themselves in each other's arms and embraced each other. Each wanting to be the loser of the fight.' (6310-6315). On the other hand, as explained above, the reconciliation scene between Yvain and Laudine is less emotional and rests on Laudine's willingness to accept him rather than on a reciprocal desire to be together.

The irony that scholars have noticed in Yvain rests on the descriptions of the relationship between Yvain and Laudine and Yvain and Gauvain. By framing Yvain and Laudine's marriage as a contract based on honor and respect to be granted by both parties, Chrétien gives it the same legitimacy as the relationships among knights. Ironically, in describing the relationship between Yvain and Gauvain, using the same terms as used for love relationships, Chrétien undermines the importance of the bond between knights. It is never clear that Laudine falls in love with Yvain, but she does consent to become his wife, so Chrétien offers another possibility of a marital union based on honor and respect rather than love.

Marriage and Partnership in *Erec et Enide*

In *Erec et Enide*, Erec has proven his worth and has chosen to embrace and enjoy married life. It is the threat to his reputation that will force him out of inactivity. But what makes *Erec et Enide* such a different story is that rather than going back to fight as a single man, he takes his wife along with him. With Enide, a married woman, entering a man's world of adventures, Chrétien offers another possibility for envisioning the roles of husbands and wives. The romance starts in a fairly traditional way with a hunt at King Arthur's court. Erec sets out to pursue the knight who had hurt the queen's damsel. Since Erec has the reputation of being a worthy knight, this action is in line with the kind of behavior expected from him. He catches up with the offending knight in a city where everyone is gathering for the custom of the hawk. A hawk is to be placed on a perch, and any knight bold enough to say that his lady is the most beautiful one will have her get the hawk unless another knight challenges him.

Erec finds lodging at the house of a knight who introduces him to his daughter. Enide is described in all the traditional terms associated with pretty young maidens, "Povre estoit la robe defors,/Mais desos estoit beax li cors" 'Poor, indeed, was her garb without, but within her body was fair." (409-10; OMACL). Then her hair and face,"De cesti tesmoingne Nature,/Qu'onques si bele creature/Ne fu veüe an tot le monde./Por voir vos di qu'Iseuz, la blonde,/N'ot tant les crins sors ne luisanz, Que a cesti ne fu neanz./…Plus ot, que n'est la flors de lis,/Cler et blanc le front et le vis./…Onques dues ne sot feire miauz/Le nez, la boche ne les iauz." 'Nature bears witness concerning her that never was so fair a creature seen in all the world. In truth I say that never did Iseut the Fair have such radiant golden tresses that she could be compared with this maiden. The complexion of her forehead and face was clearer and more delicate than the lily…God never formed better nose, mouth and eyes.' (421-437; OMACL). The first time they see each other, Enide blushes and Erec is dazzled. Over dinner, Erec discovers that the knight who claims that his lady is the fairest and the most irreproachable will fight to win and keep a hawk. He tells his host, Enide's father, that he wants to challenge the knight. The host offers him weapons and Erec decides to capture the hawk for Enide, and thus reveals his identity as a knight of King Arthur's court. The father agrees to let Erec capture the hawk for his daughter and puts Enide's hand into Erec's. After winning the contest, Erec, who is in love with Enide, offers his host two castles to marry Enide, the center of their bargain. Her father helped Erec; in return he will take care of his daughter. Without uttering a word of consent, Enide is given to Erec by her father.

So far, this is a typical romance with a fairy tale like plot. Erec fights to win and get a beautiful lady that he will marry. From the beginning, Enide seems happy about her

future, “Et la pucele ert tote coie, Mais mout estoit joianz et liee/Qu’ele li estoit otroiee, Por ce que preuz ert et cortois. Et bien savoit qu’il seroit rois/Et ele meïsme enoree,/ Riche reïne coronee.” ‘The maiden sat quiet: but she was very happy and glad that she was betrothed to him, because he was valiant and courteous: and she knew that he would some day be king, and she should receive honour and be crowned rich queen’ (684-90; OMACL).

As Roberta Krueger explains: “From rags to riches, from lowly pucele to noble wife and, finally, to powerful queen: Enide’s trajectory will be that desired by numerous puceles in Arthurian romance” (Krueger 162). We know from her father that many other suitors have asked for her hand, but that he was waiting for somebody better for her, not only because she is beautiful, but also because of her intelligence: “Moult est bele, mes mialz assez/Vaut ses saviors que sa biautez./Onques Dex ne fist rien tant saige/Ne qui tant soit de franc coraige.” ‘Fair, indeed, she is; but yet greater far than her beauty, is her intelligence. God never created any one so discreet and of such open heart.’ (537-539; OMACL). But somebody better is related to status, “Ou roi ou conte” ‘a king or a count’ (532; OMACL). Therefore, when Erec reveals his heritage, the father is more than willing to give him his daughter.

When we meet Enide, like Frêne, she performs the tasks expected of her silently. We only know of her reaction to being married off to Erec, but we do not hear her voice. The first time we know she speaks is when she thanks the queen for the clothes she has been given. She also asks for her tunic to be given to the poor (1638-1643). Yet this is reported speech that happens in private chambers and among women. While we know her name from the title of the story, her name, “Enide,” does not appear until line 2021 when

she gets married. As the text tells us, a woman cannot be married if she does not have a name.[11] The marriage takes place as expected with lots of witnesses and before they can be alone, the bishop and the archbishop bless them. The description of the wedding night is as follows, "Tot sofri, que qu'il li grevast.Ençois qu'ele se relevast, Ot perdu le non de pucele; Au matin fu dame novele" 'regardless of pain, she suffered all. Before she rose, she no longer bore the name of maid; in the morning she was a new-made dame.' (2065-2068; OMACL). With marriage, she becomes an individual and a woman. To show complete transformation and "acquisition" by Erec, Enide leaves her father's house with only her old tunic on as the symbol of her poverty. Erec is true to his word; he said he would make her queen and he does. Enide's path to marriage is similar to Frêne's except that Le Frêne ends where *Erec et Enide* starts. The lai finishes with Gurun and Frêne's wedding; *Erec et Enide* really starts after the wedding.

After the wedding, while still with King Arthur, Erec participates in a few tournaments, but then asks to leave the court and to go back to his own kingdom. As readers, we expect Erec to continue being the great knight he has proven himself to be and Enide to take on her role as a wife and fulfill it as well as she fulfilled her role of daughter. But instead, Chrétien de Troyes departs from the tradition and explores how marriage can be a partnership when traditional boundaries of space and speech are crossed.

Howard Bloch showed that the narrative pattern of the story, alternating monologues – usually associated with the narrative pattern of the lyric, and the traditional event-driven plot common to the chanson de geste – allows Chrétien to let the audience participate in the self-realization of his characters. Erec is bound to extremes: first leaving

[11] Jane Bliss argues that Enide is a fairy so she only gets named when she becomes fully human. *Naming & Namelessness in Medieval Romance.* D.S Brewer, 2008. 57.

everything aside to be a husband and then going back to a life of adventures to save his reputation. It is only at the end that he is able to balance both and finally can become a king and a better husband. This is shown in his speech pattern. While at the beginning he barely speaks, at the end he tells his own story to the court of Arthur (189). Jane Burns, looking at Enide, shows how she tries to become a different kind of wife by not conforming to the traditional behavior of a wife, but by combining the attributes of both "feme" 'wife' and "amie" 'lady-love' (181). Putting both together, one can see how Chrétien offers a new possibility for marriage not only by giving Enide more agency as a wife but also by allowing Erec and Enide to spend more time together in each other's space and to use speech as a way to create a partnership.

As in *Le Frêne*, there are three different marriages in *Erec et Enide* which represent there different kinds of union and partnership. Typically, when women evolve in their own circles they can speak freely, but when they are in public spaces –usually the domain of men – they are supposed to be silent. This can be explained by the fact that women create and maintain relationships by speaking to each other; men, on the other hand, maintain relationships through actions and use speech to maintain status by attempting to surpass one another (McConeghy 772; Tannen 1). The first marriage we encounter in the story is that of King Arthur and Guenevere. When Guenevere tells King Arthur to wait for the return of Erec, he agrees and later in the story acknowledges that listening to Guenevere was the right thing to do. Throughout the story, Guenevere and Arthur are shown in their respective spaces: Arthur is hunting with his knights while Guenevere follows behind with a small escort. Later, during the preparations for the wedding, Arthur is with the knights while Guenevere attends to Enide. King Arthur and Guenevere represent the traditional

aristocratic model of a husband and wife, at least in this story, for we know that Guenevere will have an adulterous relationship with Lancelot, which some argue is the reason for the downfall of Arthur's court. The other two unions – Erec with Enide and Mabonagrain with Enide's cousin – push the traditional understanding of marriage in different ways. Erec and Enide's marriage is untraditional in the way they use space and speech; Mabonagrain and Enide's cousin were never married, and it was Enide's cousin who asked Mabonagrain to be with her.

After their wedding, Erec and Enide spend all their time together. Erec's behavior is considered scandalous because he spends most of his time with his wife in bed. The domestic space that Erec now occupies is not traditionally a space for a knight and it is starting to tarnish his reputation. Enide who, so far, has been praised for her behavior and manners starts worrying about him. She is torn between telling him what is being said and keeping her place. She finally expresses her anxieties to herself, but loudly enough for Erec to hear (Bloch 189). When Erec sees that she is sad, he encourages her to share her concerns with him, and she reports what is being said about him.

Erec decides to go and do what a knight is expected to do, but rather than leave his wife at home – in her space – he takes her with him. Because this is not expected, Enide thinks that he wants to get rid of her. While Erec had encouraged Enide to speak about what was bothering her within the confines of their bedchamber, he takes control of both the space and the speech and now commands her not to speak to him at all. "Alez, fet il, grant aleüre,/Et gardez ne soiez tant ose/Que, se vos veez nule chose,/ Ne me dites ne ce ne quoi./Tenez de vos de parler a moi,/Se ge ne vos aresne avant " 'go ride fast, and do not you dare if you see anything to tell me anything. Do not talk to me unless I speak to you

first' (2780-2785). Enide was allowed to cross the boundary of space, but she is still not allowed to speak.

Disregarding Erec's command, Enide speaks three times, each time to warn him against danger. At the end of their adventure, he forgives her saying that it was a test meant to show her love for him. Enide through her actions has proven her worth to Erec much like a fellow knight would have. We also see Enide speak willingly. When they leave to go to Erec's land, "Enide ne rest mie mue Au congie prendre des barons: Toz les salue par lor nons, Et il li tot communement" 'Enide, for her part, is not silent when she takes leave of the nobles. She salutes them all by name, and in turn they do the like'(6394-6399). The fact that the author mentions that she is not silent acknowledges the importance of her presence and action alongside Erec.

As for Erec who at the beginning needs to ask Enide why she is sad because he cannot really see it, at the end, he is able to read her. "…Bele douce suer,/Gentix dame lëax et sage,/Bien conuis tot vostre corage: Peor avex grant, bien le voi,/Si ne savez ancor por coi 'Fair sister dear, gentle, loyal, and prudent lady, I am acquainted with your thoughts. You are in fear, I see that well, and yet, you do not know for what;' (5830-34; OMACL). As true partners, Erec and Enide have learned from each other. As Bloch remarks: "Here the notion of synthesis is crucial, for Erec, the hero who is initially too passive in his erotic attachment to Enide and then too active in his quest for honor, eventually manages to integrate both: and Enide, excluded at first from action, similarly learns to mobilize a more energetic self" (189). Away from the dichotomies - knight versus husband - woman versus

wife – "fame" versus "amie"[12], this romance imagines a different masculine and feminine identity that illustrates the possibilities of a more equal marriagedepicted in the breaking of the boundaries of space and speech. The story shows how Erec and Enide complement each other to protect Erec's reputation thereby earning the right to live their lives as they wish.

Chrétien had emphasized their likeness from the beginning: "Si estoient igal et per De cortoisie et de beaute Et de grant debonairete Si estoient d'une matiere, D'unes mors et d'une meniere, Que nuns, qui le voir en vuet dire, N'en porroit le meillor eslire, Ne le plus bel, ne le plus sage. Mout estoient d'igal corage Et mout avenoient ensamble. Li uns a l'autre son cuer emble; Onques dues si beles ymages N'asambla lois ne marriages" 'A perfect match they were in courtesy, beauty, and gentleness. And they were so alike in quality, manner, and customs, that no one wishing to tell the truth could choose the better of them, nor the fairer, nor the more discreet. Their sentiments, too, were much alike; so that they were well suited to each other. Thus each steals the other's heart away. Law or marriage never brought together two such sweet creatures' (1500-1512; OMACL). If consent is the most important element of marriage for the Church, compatibility may be even more so for Chrétien de Troyes.

Erec and Enide's marriage is set in opposition to the union between Enide's cousin and Mabonagrain (Duggan 62-64). Erec asks King Evrain to let him get the "Joy of the Court." Erec fights the tall Mabonagrain and wins. He does not kill him, but rather asks him to tell him the story of the Joy of the Court. Mabonagrain explains that people called the "Joy of the Court" the day when Mabonagrain, who is Evrain's nephew, will be free to

[12] Burns argues that by calling herself both Erec's wife and lover, Enide shows the idadequacy of the terms to describe her situation as a "speaking subject" in "Enide's Disruptive Mouths" in *Bodytalk* (183).

leave because he will have been defeated. Mabonagrain recounts that he fell in love with a young girl who returned his love and asked him to make her a promise. He agreed without knowing what he was promising. After he was knighted, the girl reminded him of his promise. What he had agreed to was never to leave until a knight defeated him. Once he has finished the story, Erec blows the horn to alert the town to his victory over Mabonagrain, and they both return home.

Mabonagrain's story illustrates the downfall of the concepts of honor and pride. Like Erec, he did not want to be called "recreant" and therefore kept fighting every knight who challenged him. As a knight, he could not break his promise, nor could he fake losing. Now he can acknowledge how happy he is to have lost especially to Erec. The text acknowledges his similarity to Erec during the battle as every move they make is described using "ils" 'they' as if they were fighting together rather than against each other. Only toward the end, when Erec is about to win does the narrative switch to naming each fighter. But the dialogue establishes Erec's superiority when he addresses Mabonagrain using "tu" whereas Mabonagrain uses "vous" as a sign of respect. In addition, since Erec has won the fight, he does not need to assert himself by telling a story that would make him look better than Mabonagrain, so after Mabonagrain reveals his name and lineage, Erec just listens to him. In this situation again, Erec's actions speaks to his valor more than his words even though he will finally tell his whole story at King Arthur's court. As young knights, Erec and Mabonagrain both went to look for adventures and found love. But Enide had to force Erec out of his voluntary retirement to preserve his reputation, whereas Mabonagrain had to remain Enide's cousin's prisoner to maintain his.

The story Enide hears from Mabonagrain's lover, who happens to be her cousin, is quite different. She tells Enide how she met Mabonagrain. "Ancor estoie anfes asez,/ Et il ert biax et avenanz;/ La feïmes nos covenanz/ Antre nos des, tex con nos sist./ Einz ne vos rien q'il ne volsist,/ Tant qu'a amer me comança, Si me plevi et fiança/Que toz jorz mes amis seroit/Et que il ça m'amanroit;/Moi plot et lui d'autre part./Lui demora et moi fu tart/que ça m'en venisse avoec lui.Si nos an evenimes andui/Que nus ne le sot mes que nos." "…and I was still but a child. He was very handsome and attractive. There we had an understanding between us that pleased us both. I never had any wish but his, until at last he began to love me and promised and swore to me that would always be my lover and that he would bring me here; that pleased us both alike. He could not wait, and I was longing to come hither with him; so we both came away, and no one knew of it but ourselves (6270-6283; OMACL). This is an example of a clandestine union where both partners consent but there is no wedding and no witness.[13]

On the other hand, this is how Enide describes meetingErec, "Bele cosine, il m'espousa/ Si que mes pere bien le sot/ Et ma mere qui joie en ot./Tuit le sorent et lié an furent /Nostre parent, si com il durent." 'Fair cousin, he married me in such a way that my father knew all about it, and my mother was greatly pleased. All our relatives knew it and rejoiced over it, as they should do.' (6286-6290) Enide's account stresses the public aspect of the consent and the wedding. Yet, because there is consent, according to the precepts of the Church, Mabonagrain and Enide's cousin are also legally married.

[13] Neil Cartridge describes Mabonagrain's relationship as "immature and infantile" and Enide's as a "much more adult, responsible" relationship in "Literary Paradigms" *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300.* D.S Brewer Cambridge, 1997. Print.

Enide's cousin says that she agreed to be with Mabonagrain, whereas Enide says her father consented to the union. Yet, the kind of union the Church wants to impose is that of Erec and Enide not of Mabonagrain and Enide's cousin. Rather than condemning this kind of marriage, in this romance, Chrétien simply leaves Enide's cousin nameless. Unlike Enide, she cannot be named since she was never "officially" married and therefore cannot be inscribed in Mabonagrain's lineage. She disappears shortly after they all go back to Arthur's court (Burns 193). Almost like a parenthesis, Enide's cousin tells her story, but the parenthesis is closed and the narrator reappears to take control of the narrative.

When Enide starts telling her story by mentioning how she never gets tired of recounting how she became Erec's wife, the narrator interrupts her to tell us that repeating the same thing makes the story longer and boring. Therefore, we only know the story from the narrator, not even through Enide's reported speech. Later, when Erec and Enide arrive at the castle where King Arthur is staying, Erec is asked to tell everybody his adventures. Again the narrator explains that it would be tedious to retell the whole story, but still proceeds to offer a summary, recounting Erec's major chivalric deeds but leaving out Enide's role in helping him. Enide's speech, which was first encouraged in the privacy of her home, has now been erased twice: first when she was forbidden to speak and second when she could not tell her story again. Despite the attempt of the narrator to control women's speech, the fact that Enide never tires of telling her story implies that she has and will keep doing so, thus making it impossible to contain. If it does not become the official version, it will continue to circulate the same way a rumor or gossip does. In this case, the propensity for gossip usually attributed to women is a known tactic used to undermine dominant discourses. In this case, it serves to counter the official story of Erec.

In a few lines, the narrator takes care of Erec and Enide for a few years until Erec's father dies and Erec becomes king. The description of Erec's coronation is very similar to the description of his wedding. The witnesses come from all parts of the kingdom and each knight's presence is acknowledged. As expected, Erec and Enide are anointed by the representatives of the Church and thus, become part of a long line of kings. As David Jeffrey points out, the parallel indicates that marriages are unions between individuals and that kingship is also a marriage (525). Rather than two people, kingships unite many in a common destiny. Both are performances aimed at establishing or reinforcing people's status in the world. By juxtaposing the images of Erec and Enide's wedding and coronation, "le romancier démontre la compatibilité entre les relations chevaleresques idéales, figurées par l'amour fin, et les relations hiérarchiques, qui organisent, dans la réalité, les rapports de vassalité et sont représentées, dans la lyrique comme dans le roman par la relation matrimoniale" 'the author shows the compatibility between the ideal chivalric relationships embodied by fin amor, and the hierarchical relationships that organize, in reality, the relationships of vassals and are represented, in the lyric and the romance by matrimony' (Sot and al. 225). We know about Erec and Enide's marriage, but we will not find out how they will perform their role as king and queen. In creating the parallel between marriage and coronation, perhaps Chrétien is alluding to the possibility that they could/should model their reign on their marriage, that it could/should be also conceived as a partnership[14].

[14]For Maddox, both Erec and Enide grow and can assume their place in society once they have larned how to lserve the others. "Erec et Enide: The First Arhturian Romance" in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*. Eds. Norris J. Lacy and Joan T. Grimbert. Cambridge, 2008. Print.

Conclusion

Marriage in the *Lais* of Marie de France remains a prison for women from which they want to escape. It is not the place for love and companionship but for forced acceptance of a system based on protecting lineage and inheritance. Based on this premise, the lais show the tactics wives use to deal with their unhappy situations. Even if the stories end by reaffirming consent, indissolubility, and faithfulness, the narratives have questioned the meaning of these concepts and offered new interpretations that undermine the strategy developed by the Church and the aristocracy to assert their own understanding of marriage.

On the other hand, Chrétien's romances offer ways in which marriage can include the Church' vision of love and companionship and preserve the interests of the aristocracy. Rather than oppose the aristocratic understanding of marriage as necessary to guarantee lineage and protect land to the Church's ideals of a union based on consent and partnership, Chrétien's romances reaffirm the validity of the needs of the aristocracy while at the same time acknowledging the needs of the individual. Chrétien goes further than Marie de France by rethinking the roles of husband and wife and their relationship as a way to reexamine the meaning of marriage.

If the new definition of marriage imagined, especially in *Erec et Enide*, can be understood as both inspiration and a means for the aristocracy to rethink its understanding of love and marriage, this romance could also provide a model for the literary form of the fabliaux which show how the emerging class of town craftsmen and merchants will establish their own norms, values and behaviors, and define marriage.

Chapter Two: The Fabliaux

Fabliaux and Genre Criticism

Fabliaux appear in Northern France around the end of the twelfth century amidst other vernacular genres, such as the romances, lais, fables and dits, and disappear toward the end of the fourteenth century.[15] Since the sixteenth century, the scholarship on the fabliaux has wrestled with the definition, origins, purpose and audience for this new genre, but not with the cause of their disappearance.[16] Up until the first major study on the fabliaux by Joseph Bédier, most scholars understood the realism of the fabliaux to be proof of their faithful portrayal of the life of the lower classes in Northern France in the middle ages. In the long tradition of fabliau scholarship, marriage has not been the focus of any particular study because it was seen as a necessary background for depicting love triangles. In addition, most of the scholarship on marriage was done in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies by legal historians and only started to interest literary scholars recently.

Bédier's study in 1895 not only provided a long-lasting definition for the fabliau -"un conte à rire en vers" 'a short comical tale in verse' (36) - but also discussed the origins and the audience of the fabliau extensively by comparing them to audiences for the other contemporary genres. His argument regarding the audience and the content of the fabliau is always the starting point for discussions on the fabliaux. For Bédier, fabliaux were written for the bourgeoisie since

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[15] 13 manuscripts contain 5 to 59 fabliaux and 23 contain 1 to 3. BNF, fr837 contains 57 fabliaux. Ingrid Norton
mentions 120-160 fabliaux and 276 manuscripts in *Engendering Vice: The Exemplarity of the Old Frenh Fabliaux.*
University of Kansas, 2008. Web 14 Jan 2012.

[16] For a detailed survey of the early scholarship on the fabliaux, see Mary Jane Schenck "The Genre and Its History" in *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception*Purdue University Monographs in Romance Languages. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987. Print.

their appearance coincides with its establishment and reflect its taste, whereas the romances reflect the tastes of the aristocracy even if both aristocrats and the bourgeoisie both listened to, and possibly read, romances and fabliaux. The fabliaux make fun of the society and the people of the time reflecting "l'esprit gaulois, fait de gaiété facile, libre jusqu'au cynisme, réaliste sans amertume, optimiste, au contraire rarement satirique" 'the French spirit, made of easy joy, free to the point of cynicism, realistic without bitterness, to the contrary rarely satirical' (19). Bédier does not discuss marriage specifically; he demonstrates that the fabliaux are not sympathetic to women and portray them as naturally bad. This seems to contradict his idea that the fabliaux do not mock categories of people but rather individuals, even though the peasants and the husbands in general are always the victims of the jokes. His main conclusion is that the fabliaux are not serious; they are simple tales made to amuse their audience. In general, to the scholars following Bédier, the fabliaux continue to be seen as a lesser genre, an obscene one that is not really worthy of literary inquiry.

Seeking to establish the value of the fabliaux, Per Nykrog in 1957 writes: "on ne peut pas comprendre le XIIIeme siècle litteraire sans avoir compris le fabliau" 'one cannot understand the thirteenth century and its literature without an understanding of the fabliaux' (Iv). Concentrating on the same arguments about the genre and the audience of the fabliaux, he refines Bédier's definition by adding "il doit appartenir à la literature française médiévale et qu'il doit être relativement court, tout au moins qu'il doit en principe se borner a raconter un seul incident et ses consequences immédiates" 'it must belong to French medieval literature and be relatively short, or at least be concerned with only one incident and its immediate consequences' (15). Compared to Bédier's list of 150 fabliaux, Nykrog removes fabliaux taking place in a Breton environment and adds twenty stories including some of Marie de France fables calling them

"fabliaux avant l'heure" 'proto-fabliaux' since those lais, which are short and focused on a single incident, fit his description. Although Marie de France wrote in Anglo-Norman, her lais and fables are usually included in French literature.

Nykrog argues that the fabliaux should be studied as a courtly genre because they were read by the aristocracy and also that the way they are written shows the influence of courtly genres (18). He demonstrates that fabliaux are found in manuscripts probably belonging to aristocrats, and printed together with other genres. As further proof of the centrality of fabliaux in medieval literature, Nykrog also notes that one finds fabliau-like episodes in romances, for example, in the lai of *Le chevalier a l'espee* (96), which prompts him to see the fabliaux as counterparts to the romances. In terms of style, he rejects the idea that fabliau content was intended for the bourgeoisie and romances for the aristocracy because both genres are concerned with the same themes of love and marriage that neither genre depicts in a very positive way.

Nykrog grounds his understanding of the fabliaux in the ideal of courtly love according to which true love cannot exist in marriage and in comparing fabliaux to romances writes that a passionate relationship outside the bond of marriage is certainly more interesting than the adventures of a married couple regardless of the personalities qualities of the husband and wife (189). While the romances describe the actions of the nobles and the fabliaux the actions of the non-nobles, this does not mean that the real nobles were as lofty in their love pursuits as the characters in the romances, or that the non-nobles behaved the way the fabliaux describe them. Nykrog believes that the fabliaux are a representation of the erotic mores of the non-courtly as the courtly world imagined them to be (92). What surprises him is why the courtly milieu would have been interested in the fabliaux stories. His study remains influential because he is the first one to give the fabliau a serious place in the literature of the time. After Nykrog, studies on the

fabliaux move away from the audience and the questions of genre and become more limited, focusing simply on the comic aspects of the tales.

Looking at the comic aspect of the fabliaux Philippe Ménard in *Contes à Rire du Moyen Age* shows how "ces contes traduisent les pulsions éternelles du rire" 'these tales convey the eternal impulses of laughter' and allow people to forget "les inquiétudes et les souffrances de la vie humaine" 'the worries and sufferings of human life' (233). Ménard agrees that the fabliaux give us a lot of information on the everyday life in the bourgeois and working milieu. Overall, like Bédier, he considers the fabliaux to be quite trivial reflecting "natural" people and revealing their instincts in a not very sophisticated way. Marie-Thérèse Lorcin in *Façons de Sentir, Façons de Penser* situates the fabliaux in their historical context by comparing the world of the fabliau and the "real world" of places and objects and anthropology. With regard to marriage, neither Ménard nor Lorcin tries to theorize it, because for them it is simply what people did.

Charles Muscatine in *TheOld French Fabliaux* also recognizes the corpus as rooted in some sort of reality and adds, "fabliaux suggest that people are responding to a newly ambiguous atmosphere of social change, competition, and social hostility." (17) While Muscatine does not discuss marriage per se what could be inferred from his statement is that marriage may be a locus of anxiety for the people of the time because of the changes imposed by the Church.

All these studies look at the fabliaux as more than a literary genre, but in *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*Howard Bloch rejects that kind of approach because it takes away the literary value of the fabliaux and makes them mere testimonies of a past era. Instead, he proposes to think about the tales in literary terms and with a literary frame. Thus, focusing on the language of the fabliau, he shows that the subject of the tales is poetry itself, and that this may be what unifies

this corpus rather than their origin, audience, or purpose (19). Bloch's argument stresses the importance of understanding fabliaux as a genre with distinct literary value."

In feminist and gender studies of the fabliaux, the scholarship shifts from a study of the genre into a study of the way fabliaux view women and sexuality. Therefore, these studies pay closer attention to the role of marriage in the fabliaux. Jane Burns in *Bodytalk*examines how women, who are in all areas of life subservient to men who possess knowledge and power, manage to be heard and in the fabliau question this hegemony. This is the first major study theorizing the fabliaux from a feminist perspective, examining "how the stereotypical reduction of female voice to body in medieval literature also stages key moments of resistance to that stereotype." (19). Although Burns mentions marriage, she is more interested in women than in wives and especially in how women's desires are redefined and negotiated by women themselves.

Furthering this type of analysis, in *The Language of Sex*John Baldwin situates the discourse of the fabliaux among four other discourses on sexuality of the time: three in Latin: the Church Fathers writings, the medical discourse, Ovid and love poetry; and one in the vernacular: the romances. He argues that since the fabliaux is the last of these five discourses to appear in writing, it should be read with the genre of the romance as a game of action/reaction aimed at shocking the audience and might even be the response the fableors gave to the "outbreak of decency" in the romances (40). The fabliau discourse shows sexual desire as positive, enjoyable, without suffering, and not bound by marriage. Extending the examination of the offer and refusal of sex, Louise Sylvester shows how the two genres contribute to the construction of the cultural norms of heterosexual behaviors (160).

Bringing together gender and genre studies Simon Gaunt introduces the idea that the fabliaux destabilize both categories. In terms of gender, his argument is based on Judith Butler's idea that gender is performed, not natural. Fabliaux characters actually allow the audience to rethink categories of men, women, husband, and wife through the fluidity of the genre of the fabliaux especially as it parodies other genres. Gaunt's contribution is essential because it considers the fabliaux as a place where the established order of the society is questioned: "Where the dominant culture, and in this I include other vernacular genres, aspires to static and discrete categories, the fabliaux offer mobile and fluid boundaries which are transgressed, eluded or shown to be inadequate" (239). This is interesting for the discussion of marriages especially in the stories where the spouses are not from the same social class. The fabliaux show how those who can afford to climb socially are confronted with the long lasting barriers set by the traditions and behaviors of the aristocracy.

Pushing the idea of mobility further, Holly Crocker in the collection of essays *Comic Provocations*, describes the corpus of the fabliaux as a "body with a fluid, moving, corporeality" "unstable in terms or authorship, audience, purpose"(1) and concludes that the fabliaux are almost impossible to see as a coherent creative corpus. In the same vein and referring to Nykrog's argument, Keith Busby in *Codex and Content* suggests reading fabliaux in relation to the other texts that accompany them in manuscripts rather than to each other. He shows how manuscripts make arguments by developing themes treated from different points of view in different genres (443).

The scholarship on fabliaux started with a desire to group and provide a unifying definition for a variety of text, but then exploded that notion of genre to explore the meaning of the fabliaux with a particular attention to their connection to all other contemporary texts, thus

giving them an important place in the literary landscape of the time. While the fabliaux are pieces of fiction, designed to provide images of a society and social class, they are not meant to be factual. Rather, they represent the preoccupations and concerns of the men and women of the time. That is what makes these stories so popular in a specific place, at a specific time.

Fabliaux and Historical Context

Whether they are authored or anonymous, as noted above, the language used in the fabliaux places them in Northern France from the end of the twelfth century to the beginning of the fourteenth century. This is where and when we see the beginning of what can be called a market economy in France that also brought about changes in the social order of the society. Many factors came together at that time cause the transformation of medieval society from a feudal system to this new economy. The increase in mining that allowed the minting of coins, the diversification of food consumption and the increase in population all combined to create a new social category of people – craftsmen and merchants - who did not belong to the three part society consisting of those who fight, those who pray, and those who toil (Duby 9).

Historians after Henri Pirenne disputed his theory that merchants were only displaced peasants who came to the towns and entered the trades, adding that they were also rich peasants with capital to invest, and sons of the aristocracy who inherited money instead of land thus creating merchant "classes" rather a unified merchant class (Hunt 26). Craftsmen were also merchants selling their wares in their stores in emerging towns and so were food distributors such as, butchers and millers (Hunt 54). Trading merchants sold everything, loaned money and also travelled to the fairs that developed in the Champagne area and internationally (Bourin-Derruau 140). Strategically located between the Flanders and England to the north and Italy to the south, the Champagne became the main center for exchange between the merchants from

Lombardy and the merchants from the Flanders. Local fairs became international places of exchange where people from different nations mixed and traded goods. These are the people and places that inspired the creators of the fabliaux and since the jongleurs performed their stories at the fairs, we can assume that this was one of the places where the fabliaux were also disseminated (Vitz 7).

Made of people from different socio-economic backgrounds brought together by the opportunities of commerce, this new emerging class established its own codes of behaviors and developed its own identity. The guilds – trade organizations – were created to codify work and business and control competition; its members also became active in city governments. Women belonged to the food and clothing guilds; they also inherited their husbands' businesses (Fiero 39). In addition, this newly formed urban bourgeoisie contributed to an expansion of the literary production of the time and to a dissemination of an urban-based knowledge (Bourin-Derruau 142). For example, in Arras, in the north of France, the "Carité Nostre Dame des jogleors et des borgois," a guild of bourgeois and jongleurs, to which Jean Bodel, a fabliau author belonged to, was created (Sot et al.230) to promote diverse literary genres. The jongleurs extended their repertoire to include lives of saints, profane tales, epic poetry and lais for a more diverse audience and thus in the thirteenth century emerges a "culture bourgeoise" grounded in the cities rather than in the castles where the courtly culture prevailed (Bourin-Derruau 144)[17]. The fabliaux along with sermons and the conduct literature that would appear in the fourteenth century are the vehicles for the dissemination of this new idea.

[17]Evelyn Birge Vitz in *Orality and performance in early French romance* D.S Brewer Cambrige, 1999 refutes Faral's idea that the jongleurs were professional entertainers trained as clerks because romances and fabliaux were written in the vernacular and clerks were trained in Latin. In her opinion, writing in the vernacular was a "higher-order skill" because of the lack of rules. 51.

Fabliaux, Sermons, and Conduct Literature: The Role of Sex and Marriage

As comic tales, the fabliaux play on the excesses of human behaviors and on the ambiguity of the Church's attitude toward sex, women, and marriage. Sex is owed according to the marital debt following Paul "Let the husband render the debt to his wife and the wife also similarly to her husband" (Corinthians I,7), but following St.Augustine, marriage is considered a sin if it is not for procreation. At the same time as the Church is trying to promote a sacramental marriage based on consent and partnership, men are still expected to control their wives who cannot control their mouths or their sexual desires (Paul). In *Le Chevalier qui fit sa feme confesse*, the wife about to die confesses her sins and justifies cheating on her husband because like other women her needs cannot be fulfilled by her husband alone. Since women cannot discuss with their husband their desires because the men will think their wives are whores, they "are forced to be served by others" 'Que n'aions d'autrui le servise' (NCRF 33 144-60).

Out of 147 fabliaux, 81 involve a married couple and an extra-marital relationship (Lorcin 21). Most plots are based on the premise that women's sexual desires are too great, and that their husbands are inadequate, so the wives will cheat, preferably with a younger single man. Usually the husbands are ridiculed, the lovers – especially when they are clergymen –get punished, but the wives always get away with the cheating. This is what has prompted some scholars to consider the fabliaux subversive. Yet, even if we accept that the fabliaux subvert and question the accepted norms of behavior, especially when allowing women to own and express their sexual desires, I would agree with Keith Busby that, in light of the Church's attempt to

establish a new idea of marriage based on consent and affection, the depiction of marriage and married couple in the fabliaux also provide negative exempla (437).[18]

Exempla were stories inserted in sermons or religious texts as illustrations for the ideas exposed and were composed of three elements: ”un récit ou une description, un enseignement moral ou religieux, une application de ce dernier à l’homme” ‘a narrative or a description, a moral religious teaching and a possible application to men’ (Welter 3). This definition also describes the structure of genres like the fables and the fabliaux. It is not, therefore, surprising that the fabliaux plots were used as exempla and, while criticized by most of the ecclesiastical writers for their raciness, made their way into the sermons of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century (Welter 102).

For example in the fabliau, *Le vilain mire*, a *vilain* marries a beautiful young woman and for fear that she will cheat on him while he is gone to the fields, he beats her every morning, asks for forgiveness in the evening, and starts again the next day until one day two young knights come looking for a doctor. She tells them her husband is a doctor but he will only perform if he is beaten. So the knights beat the husband and take him away by force while he screams that he is not a doctor. When he gets to the king’s court, he is asked to cure the king’s daughter, but first gets beaten. He cures the daughter, is praised for his work, and is asked to cure all the king’s subjects. The only way he can do that is by scaring them away. The king is happy, makes him rich and sends him home. “Puis est a son ostel venu/Et richemennt el païs fu;/N’onques puis ne

[18] See Busby’s study of fr.837 and his interpretation of text sequences. See also Richard Trachsler for a history of the evolution of the study of manuscripts. For a long time a manuscript was viewed as ‘the material support of the work of art” and is considered helpful in understanding the text in *“How to do things with Manuscripts: From Humanist Practice to Recent Textual Criticism”* in Textual Cultures 1-1 (Spring 2006): 5-28 JSTOR. Web 6 Dec. 2010. See alsoTracy Adams’s study of BNF fr 19152 in The Cunningly Intelligent Characters of BNF fr 19152. *MLN* 120.4 (2005): 896-924. *MUSE.* Web 24 Jan 2007.

fu a charue,/Ne puis ne fu par lui batue/ Sa fame, ainz l'ama et chieri. /Einsi ala con je vous di:/Par sa fame et par sa boidie/Fu puis bon mires et sanz clergie!" 'He went back to his house/he never went back to the plough, never beat his wife again, but loved and cherished her. Everything went as I am telling you: thanks to his wife and his ruse, he became a good doctor without studying' (NCRF 2-13) In Jacques de Vitry *Sermones Vulgares*, the moral of the story is "sont plus misérables ces homes estropiés par le péché, qui sauront fuir les feux de ce monde, mais que ne craignent pas les feux d'enfer" 'are more miserable the crippled men who know how to escape the fires of this world, but do not fear the fires of hell' (Levy 312). Although we may understand the moral of the story to be a different one, we can nevertheless see that both the sermon and the fabliau strive to teach.

Sermons and fabliaux are organized differently but the intent to promote moral behavior is present in both. There can be many exempla in a sermon but they are always used to wake up the audience by presenting plausible examples. The exemplum is told in the past tense by the preacher who, like the fableor, acknowledges the origin of the story. The preacher will then use the imperative to command the audience to follow or not to follow what is in the story, thus establishing a relationship of authority between the preacher and the audience (Bremond 163). The fableor also starts by situating the story and also concludes by encouraging the audience to behave in a certain manner. The difference is that the moral of the fabliau is a general statement, not stated in the imperative, since the fableor does not speak from a position of authority. However, both the sermons and the fabliaux tackle the issue of marriage, and follow a similar literary pattern of story followed by moral.

While the sermon dictates norms of behavior, it is also concerned with the fact that it is very difficult to follow what the Church prescribes as an ideal form of marriage. The sermons

written for a lay audience tend to discuss marriage in a more pragmatic way than the texts written for the clergy (Schnell 771). Using marriage sermons from a collection of sermons written by Peregrinus, a thirteenth century cleric, and by Robert de Sorbon, Schnell shows how a typical sermon text gives more importance to the issues that arise in everyday married life and to the husbands and wives rather than to the institution of marriage (772). So the sermon starts its topic with what is expected: for example "a husband should love his wife and without speaking any evil words to her or striking her," but also discusses the possibility that some husbands will hit their wives and offers practical advice (772.) Peregrinus's sermons overall argues that a successful marriage is the one where spouses can deal with each other's weaknesses (775) and so do Robert de Sorbon's sermons. He also advocates for a partnership and does not blame either men or women, but recognizes that both have flaws. These examples show that the new discourse on marriage is different from the medieval misogynistic discourse on women because it makes husbands and wives equally responsible for the success of their relationship and encourages them to find ways to live together in harmony (Schnell 786). Yet, we cannot forget that since divorce is not allowed, one may wonder what else spouses could be advised to do if they are in an unhappy relationship.

Since the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) made yearly confessions a requirement, priests needed guidance on how to advise their parishioners about marriage. In his *Manual for Confessors*, Thomas of Chobham argued that women could positively influence their husbands' behavior: "…no priest is able to soften the heart of a man the way his wife can" and that husbands should show restraint in disciplining their wives: "for the [husband] should employ greater diligence in guarding this wife than in guarding any earthly possession, because nothing should be dearer to him than his wife" Women – especially usurers' wives - could guard their

husbands from greed, oppression of the poor and avarice, three sins attributed to the beginning of the money economy, and they could use any methods to persuade them :

> "Even in the bedroom, in the midst of their embraces, a wife should speak alluringly to her husband, and if he is hard and unmerciful, and an oppressor of the poor, she should invite him to be merciful; if he is a plunderer, she should denounce plundering; if he is avaricious, she should arouse generosity in him, and she should secretly give alms from their common property, supplying the alms that he omits. For it is permissible for a woman to expend much of her husband's property, without his knowing, in ways beneficial to him and for pious causes" (Farmer 517-8).

Both Peregrinus and Thomas of Chobham think of marriage as a partnership with both spouses responsible for the success of the marriage, which balances the traditional representation of women as having a negative impact on men because of the association with Eve.

Sermons are not the only texts where fabliau-like storylines are found. One genre called conduct literature, made of texts aiming to codify men and women's behaviors and written by a wide variety of authors from clerics to knights to wealthy bourgeois, develops later in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. As Kathleen Ashley explains, changes in the practice of literary criticism with a shift toward the historicizing of texts, the acceptance of everyday life history as a legitimate way of making history as well as the theories emerging from cultural studies have made conduct books an excellent site for the examination of cultural practices (x-xii). These "how-to" books give advice about achieving successful marriages to both young men and young women. For example, one of the earliest books of conduct, Etienne de Fougère's*Le Livre des Manières* (1170) praises the joy of marriage, affection, and the raising of children after exposing the damage that non-virtuous women and ill-tempered men can do to each other and to marriage (Murray, 198).*Le Menasgier de Paris* is a book written by a rich bourgeois to his wife as a manual for how to be a good housewife especially since he is much older than she is and therefore will not be her only husband. Geoffroy de La Tour Landry in *Le livre du chevalier de*

la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles instructs his daughters on how to become proper ladies through giving examples of historical women who were either good or bad wives.

What these books have in common is the kind of stories used to support their morals. *Le Menasgier de Paris* uses the Griselda motif found in many romances to show that patience with a husband will result in good for the wife, but also a fabliau-like motif to convince a wife to obey her husband even if the order is trivial (262/3). Etienne de Fougère uses a fabliau-like story as an example of a bad wife, who prefers to be with her lover and pretends that she needs to go to Church in order to meet with her lover and deceive her husband. *Le livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry* also shows that women who do not treat their husbands well are chastised. But the chevalier is also questioned by his wife in his portrayal of women, and the end of the book lets us hear his wife's voice and her opinion. That the behaviors of husbands and wives are codified in books of conduct, fabliaux, and sermons attests to the importance of marriage especially as consent and companionship come to define it.

The fact that sermons advocated patience and tolerance in marriage could indicate that consent, while required by the Church, was not always implemented. Was free consent obtained from the young women who were asked to marry to save their father's land or were they expected to be patient and try to make the most of these unwanted marriages? Many aristocrats short of money welcomed the idea of marrying their daughters to wealthy men who had made their fortune in the trades or even in the fields. Acquiring land or by marriage is is how merchants, wealthy peasants and lawyers could join the rank of the nobility by (Perroy 25-38). The fabliaux explore different marital situations and offer possible solutions that may or may not reinforce the discourse of the church. In the fabliaux, as in *Berengier au lonc Cul* and *Le vilain mire*, marriages made out of convenience and/or for money are not consensual, and are usually

unsuccessful. The remedy is for the wife to cheat on her husband and not be punished. Other fabliaux such as, *Le pretre teint, Le pescheor, Le sohait desvé, Le vilain mire,* and *La bourse pleine de sens* show how the spouses resolve problems in a way that exemplifies the love and affection the Church was trying to promote. Below, I will examine how the fabliau is constructed and, using two key aspects of communication theory, speech act and negotiation, analyze how the way characters address each other marks the status of both husband and wife in the marriage.

Speech Acts, Negotiation Theory, and Perfomativity

In *How to do Things with Words*, JL Austin studied and categorized speech utterances. He called "illocutionary acts" the speech acts that "do" rather than describe an action and "perlocutionary acts" the effects produced by speech acts (101). While Austin's theory is problematic because not all utterances neatly fit into these two categories, it can be used for discussing marriage as depicted in the fabliaux. The Church leaders agreed with Peter Lombard that consent in the present form is all that was necessary to make a marriage rather than with Gratian who believed that true marriage required both consent and consummation. Since the medieval people still trusted spoken words more than written words (Ong 93), there are many examples of illocutionary acts in the fabliaux especially in make-believe situations. For example, in *Le vilain de Bailluel*,the wife makes her husband believe that he is dead by simply telling him "tu es mors" 'you're dead' (NRCF 49 60) and in *Le prestre qui abevete*the priest convinces the husband that what he sees is not what is happening. The priest does this by telling the husband that the priest had just looked through a keyhole and seen the husband having sex with his wife. This is clearly false as the husband was eating dinner with his wife, not having sex with her. Obviously, this fact causes the husband to doubt the priest's words. So, the priest tells the husband to go and look through the keyhole for himself. The husband does so, and sees the

priest having sex with his wife. Now the husband can be tricked to believe that the priest is right when he asserts what you see is not necessarily what is happening.

In addition to Austin's distinction, Judith Butler's notion of performativity as it relates to the construction of identity can help us see how fabliau characters embody the categories "husband" and "wife." For Butler when we are named into categories such as "husband" or "wife," we acquire the past scripts of these categories as well, but as we keep performing these categories, we can resist and shift their meanings (122). The ideal husband in the thirteenth century would be: good to look at, strong, rich, noble, generous, kind, and would live long (Beriou 34-36). The good wife would: "honor her mother-and father-in-law, love her husband, look after the family, run the house, and behave irreproachably at all times" (Vecchio 105). Are the characters in the fabliaux performing their role as "husband" and "wife" according to the authority – the Church – who defined these terms, or are they engaging in "disobedience" by shifting how they perform those roles? Examining the way the characters talk to each other and how they solve conflicts, reveals the characters perform marriage and their roles as "husband" and "wife" according to the Church precepts, and we come to understand how the way marriage is performed helps define the characteristics of the bourgeoisie emerging at that time.

Spouses in the fabliaux are very often in situations of conflicts. In communication, conflict is defined as "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals" (Folger, Poole, Stutman 402-10). In the stories, conflicts are usually triggered by some inequity in the relationship. "Equity theory predicts that when individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationships, the more distressed individuals will feel" (Davidson 93). In the fabliaux, the inequity is the result of unwanted marriages and/or

unrequited sexual needs. Negotiation theory suggests there are four possible outcomes in a conflict: win/win – win/lose – lose/win and lose/lose; the best one is win/win in which both parties are satisfied with the result of the negotiation. The following examples will make the argument that a marriage based on consent and partnership is one in which spouses respect each other and, in case of the conflicts that are depicted, both spouses are satisfied in the end. When the marriage is forced and/or unequal, it leaves both partners unsatisfied.

Fabliaux and the Performance of Marriage

Before there is a dialogue between the characters, the fableor sets the frame of the story. In every case of misalliance, the story starts with the genesis of the marriage and points out the age and/or social differences between the spouses. The husbands are usually portrayed as inadequate in manners and behaviors. *Berengier au lonc Cul* is the story of a rich villain who marries the daughter of a knight. In *De Jouglet* the daughter was given to repay a debt. In *Auberee*, a young woman loved a knight, but was forced to marry an older man to please her father. In *Le vilain de Bailluel*, the husband is described as "granz et merveilleus, et maufez et de laide hure" 'tall and arrogant, and evil and ugly' (V 49 8-9) and about his wife, "Sa fame n'avoit de lui cure, quar fol sert et de lait pelain" 'his wife did not care much about him because he was stupid and ugly' (10-11). In *Le prestre qui abevete*, we are told of a "un vilain qui ot femme prise,/Sage, courtoise et bien apprise./ Biele ert et de grant parenté" 'a villain who took a wife who was skillful, courteous and well-brought up./She was beautiful and from a great family' (VIII 88 5-7). The differences are not only physical; they highlight the fact that the spouses come from different classes.

Based on the descriptions of the husbands and the different backgrounds, we can also assume that the young women probably did not freely consent to the marriage. In *Le vilain mire*

"La pucele, qui mout fu sage/ Ne vot escondire son pere,/Car orfeline estoit de mere/Einz otroi ace qu'i li plot," 'The maiden who was very kind dared not contradict her father for she was an orphan/so she granted him what he wanted' (II 13 26-29). *In Berengier au lonc Cul*, "Et li chastelains li devoit/Tant que paier ne le pooit,/Ainz dona a son fil sa fille " 'And the chastellain owed him so much/That he could not pay/Thus he gave his daughter to his son.' (IV 34 21-23)

Once the background is set, we can see how these marital conflicts develop and, through the use of language, get resolved to the advantage of one of the spouses or both.In *Berengier au lonc Cul*, the husband is asked by his wife to prove that he can fight, so he goes with his horse and pretends to fight by hitting his sword against a tree. When he comes home, he asserts his authority by telling his wife not to come near him or touch him: "Traiez vos tost, fait il, "arriere!/Que sachiez:n'est mie droiz/qu'a si bon chevalier tochoiz/ con je sui, ne si alosé." 'go away, he said, back off!/Know that you have no right/To touch such a good knight/With such fame'(IV 34 118-21).The perlocutionary effect of these utterances is that the wife is so surprised that not knowing what to believe, she does not say anything. As the husband feels empowered by his deceit and the effect of his speech, he continues to assert his authority by shifting the way he addresses her: he no longer calls her "Dame" but simply orders her what to do.

On one occasion as the knight comes home with all his equipment ruined but no trace on his body of any fight, his wife becomes suspicious and decides to follow him the next time he goes out. Dressed as a knight she discovers that all he does is simply hit trees. She pretends he is on her land and gives him an alternative: fight or kiss her behind. He chooses the latter and before he leaves asks for the knight's name. The wife answers "Berengier s au Long Cul" 'Long-Ass Berengier' (IV 34 258). Then she goes home and openly goes to bed with one of her knights. When the husband comes back and finds his wife, he says: "Sachiez point ne li abeli!" "Dame,

fait il isnelement,/Vos me servez vilainement," 'Know that this is not agreeable to me!/Lady, he says promptly/You serve me badly,' (274-76). The listeners know that the perlocutionary effect of these utterances is zero because he is not in a position to execute his threats. The context of the situation has changed and this speech act, which could have been very effective in another situation, is now comical because the husband has lost the upper hand.

Now it is the wife's turn to show her power, so she orders him: "Taisez vos an, fait el, malvais" 'be quiet, she says, pathetic one' (281), and asks him if he will complain to a Long-Ass Berengier. The story ends with the husband feeling shame and anger, and unable to speak. The fact that the husband remains speechless underscores the victory of the wife. In such a marriage, the one who has the upper hand is also the one who controls speech, not the one with the title or the money. But the fight for the control of speech reinforces the fact that the marriage does not work because the story starts with an unhappy wife and ends with an unhappy husband. We started with a win/lose situation and ended with a lose/win.

Sire Hain et Dame Anieuse also starts with a dissatisfied husband and we end up with a dissatisfied wife. This fabliau portrays marriage as war with a winner and a loser. Sir Hain is not happy with the way his wife treats him and feels that he needs to regain control of the situation and show everyone who is wearing the pants. So he agrees to fight her in front of witnesses and as a symbol, the witnesses hang his pants on a line. To start with, the fableor tells us: "Que cil qui a fame rubeste/Est garnis de mauvèse beste" 'The one who has a bitter wife has a bad beast' (II 5 3-4) As listeners, we can anticipate that by the end of the story, the wife will have changed and will be nicer to her husband. Before they start fighting, she calls him "beaux douz sire" and he calls her "Douce amie." When he asks for fish, he asks sweetly and when she comes back with the fish, he welcomes her. But the fish is rotten and when he tells her it stinks, she throws

everything away. He then says to her: ”Dieus! fet Hains, com tu me tiens cort!/A paines os je dire mot!/Grant honte ai quant mon voisin m’ot,/Que tu me maines si viument” ‘God! said Hain, how you consider me!/I hardly said a word/I have great shame when my neighbor sees/ that you treat me so rudely.’ (II 5 76-9) To that she simply answers: “Ba! Si en prenez vengement,/Fet-ele, si vous l’osez fere!” ‘Avenge yourself, go ahead/ if you dare’ (80-81). This is when he decides to fight her with the neighbors as witnesses.

As the fight proceeds, the insults increase: Sire Hain calls Dame Anieuse “fame de put afère” “bad woman.” Dame Anieuse tells him she hates him: “Vilains, dist-ele, je tehaz;” and later on “filz à putain, vilainz pullenz” ‘son of a bitch, stinking villain’ and then finally they vow to kill each other until Dame Anieuse trips and falls in a basket. While she is down, Sir Hain grabs the pants and puts them on. Before the witnesses and Sir Hain help her out, she has to promise to all of them that she will be a better wife.

Since Dame Anieuse is aware of the illocutionary power of her promise, she asks whether she will be tied to that promise if Sire Hain hits her. The witnesses laugh at her for daring to question the promise, so she finally pronounces the words. Not only does she promise to obey her husband, but she also promises to keep her promise. The fact that she lost the fight is not enough. When she pronounces the words of the promise, her marriage changes. As the fableor notes: “Que puis ce le nuit en avant/Onques ne s’ala percevant/Sire Hain qu’el ne li feist/Tres tout ce qu’il li requeist:” ‘from that night on, she always did everything Sir Hain wanted her to do.” While the fabliau resolves the issue of the war and brings peace to the couple, the woman only complies because she is scared of getting beaten. In this example, marriage is a power struggle but even though at the end of the story one of the spouses, in this case, the husband, is vindicated, nobody really wins.

Both fabliaux end with recommendations to the husbands to be firm and assert their authority over their wives. In *Sire Hain*,"se voz fames mainent bufoi/Deseur vous nul jor par male art,/Que ne soiez pas si musart/Que vous le souffrez longuement,/Mes fetes aussi fetement/Come Hains fist de sa moilier/Qui ainc ne le vout adaingnier/Fors tout le mains que ele pot,/Dusques atant que il li ot/Batu et les os et l'eschine!/Tout issi cis fabliaus define" 'if your wife has the insolence to want to wear the pants, do not be stupid enough to tolerate for too long. Do what Sire Hain did with his wife, who mistreated him, until he managed to break her back and bones. Here ends my fabliau' (II 405-411). In *Berengier*, only one line: "A mol pastor chie lo laine" 'When the shepherd's weak, the wolf shits wool.' (Harrison 61) Both these fabliaux show how in marriages where spouses are in conflict because of personal or class differences, the marriage gets reshaped in favor of the other spouse and some kind of peace is restored. But there is no equity. In each marriage one of the spouses is still not satisfied, so these marriages fall short of the model marriage the Church is trying to promote. Partnership and affection will not be achieved using force and power even when a semblance of peace is restored.

On the other hand, even when the husband and wife are from different classes, it is possible to create a happy marriage. In *Le vilain mire,* described earlier, there is not much dialogue between husband and wife. Both talk to themselves and dialogue is replaced by physical force. The villain beats his wife in an attempt to force her to remain faithful. But he gets beaten by knights, and is forced to perform the role of the doctor. The wife uses speech better than her husband and she is able to convince the two knights that he is a doctor. The perlocutionary act of calling the villain "mire" makes the villain a doctor. The king's men cut his hair and shave his beard and give him clothes to lend him the physical appearance of a doctor. After the villain, acting as a doctor, cures everybody, the king sends him home and tells him "Et

ne vos ferez plus ferir,/Car grant honte ai de vos laidir." 'Do not get yourself beaten anymore/because I am ashamed to mistreat you.' What the king is saying is that a doctor should not have to get beaten. This sends the villain the message that he shouldn't beat his wife either. The misalliance that was at the origin of the unhappy marriage is resolved by making the husband a doctor. Unlikethe villain in *Berengier au lonc Cul* who will never become an aristocrat except in name, the character in *Le vilain mire* is able to adopt the behavior of the doctor. Even though the villain in *Berengier* dressed as a knight, he never became one, but the villain mire becomes a doctor as soon as he is dressed as one. It may be acceptable for a villain to beat his wife but it is not for a doctor. It could be that the fabliau is arguing that identity is constructed and performed rather than innate.

The fabliaux also show how spouses in marriages based on love and affection are able to eliminate threats to their marriages. For example in *Le prestre teint* et *Du segretain moine II* a priest is after the wife, but together with her husband they manage to get rid of the priest. In *Le prestre teint*, the husband is a generous man; "Li borgeis n'eüst ja bon vin/Ne bon mengier dont il menjas/Que au prestre n'en envoiast." 'Never did the bourgeois drink good wine/or eat good food/without sending some to the priest' (VII 81 35-6). His wife is beautiful and courteous. The fableor tells us how she refused the priest's advances: "la bone dame dist ja n'iert qu'ele face a son mari tort/–S'el en devoit prendre la mort – /Ne vilainie ne hontage" the good lady said that she would never wrong her husband/ even if she were to die/No mistreatment no dishonor' (VII 45-8). The priest sends Dame Hersent to obtain the favors of the wife. The latter refuses and hits Dame Hersent on the face. Dame Hersent complains to the priest who then tells the husband he has to pay a fine tocompensate Dame Hersent for his wife's action. The husband agrees but asks his wife to tell him what happened "sanz mençonge et sanz boisdie" 'without lying or deceit'

(236). She answers: “Cele respond: Tout vos diré,/Ja de riens ne vos mentiré,” ‘she answers that she will tell everything/that she would never lie to him’ (229-30). The husband tells his wife to agree to the priest’s request for money. The priest comes to the house and as the wife pretends to be surprised that her husband is back, she sends the priest to hide in a die bath and she and her husband can enjoy dinner together. Working together allows them to save their reputation especially the honor of the wife that the priest was about to ruin.

In *La bourse pleine de sens*, the only fabliau where a husband cheats on his wife, the couple is described: “De Nevers I riche bourjois Qui mout fut sages et courtois./Cil bourjois estoit marchaans/Et de feires mout bien chaans,/Qu’il iert sages et bien apris./Et si ot fame de haut pris,/La plus bele que l’en seüst/el païs, ne que l’en peüst/Trover, tant seüst l’en cerchier./ La dame ot mout son seignor chier/Et il li, mes que tant i ot Que li bourjois une amie ot,” ‘In Nevers there was a rich bourgeois/who was wise and courteous. This bourgeois was a merchant, and was quite lucky at the fairs,/he was wise and learned./He had a high prized wife, the most beautiful known/in the country, that one would not/find as far as one would search’ The lady loved her husband very much and he loved her too/And he loved her but yet he took a mistress,’(NRCF III-8 8-12) When she finds out he has a mistress, she confronts him and he denies the affair. “Biau sire, a mout grand disonour/Usez vostre vie les moi!/N’avez honte? – Dame, de quoi? – De quoi? Si vos i prenez garde,/Vos meintenez une musarde,Qui vos ocit et vos afole;/ Et tot li mondes en parrole,/Car tote la vile le set.” ‘Dear Sir, with much dishonor/you live with me!/aren’t you ashamed? – Lady, of what?/of what? Be careful/ you support who kills you and makes you crazy/And everyone talks/Because the whole town knows about it’ (II 8 22-29). What is interesting in this exchange is that the wife is worried about her husband and their reputation, not about herself.

In the romance, *Erec et Enide*, Enide was concerned about Erec's reputation when she overheard his men criticize him for staying at home with his wife rather than fulfilling his duties as a knight. Similarly, the wife in this fabliau is concerned about what the townspeople are saying about her husband and decides to speak to him. Like Erec, the husband does not listen to his wife. The next day as he is going on a trip, he asks her what she would like and she asks for a purse full of good sense. When he asks where to find the purse, he is told by an old merchant to pretend to both his wife and his mistress that he has lost everything to see who will still love him. When he goes to his see his mistress, she tells him to leave, but his wife welcomes him and tells him he can sell everything she has to pay his debt. She tells him to get changed and makes him dinner. She treats him like a king. When they are done eating they rest until the next morning when the townspeople wake up. In this fabliau, the wife wanted to control the rumor and spare her husband's reputation, so she sent him looking for his senses. The wife in this fabliau embodies the good wife as described in sermons, and later, in conduct literature. She also follows the advice given by Thomas of Chobham that women can change their husband's behavior by speaking to them (Vecchio 117). The fabliau concludes by urging men who have faithful wives not to go for loose women who have no faith and no morals. In all these examples, the bond between the spouses is based on respect and affection, so they can solve problems and end with a solution described in negotiation theory as win-win, which means that the solution benefits both.

While the ambiguous attitude toward women and sex is present in a lot of the fabliaux, *Le sohait des vez* shows how a married couple can solve a situation without the husband being inadequate and ridiculed. The fableor describes the couple as follows: "-Preudefame ert et il prodom-/Mais tant vos os bien afichier/Que li un sot l'autre mout chier" 'She is an honest

woman and he is an honest man/and I can assure you that they loved each other' (NRCF VI 70 6-8). The husband comes home after a three months absence and his wife is very happy to see him. Even the narrator says: "Ne cuidiez pas que il anuit/Sa fame, qnat ele lo voit;/Tel joie come ele devoit/En a fait com de son seignor:/Ainsi mais n'en ot joie graignor" 'Do not think she was irritated to see him/such joy as she should/she expressed toward her husband/she could not have greater joy' (16-20). So she feeds him but when they go to bed, he falls asleep.

The wife is angry, yet she falls asleep and has a dream. She is at a market that sells penises. She chooses one, and when she is about to slap the hand of the seller to seal the deal, she in fact slaps her husband on the cheek. He wakes up and asks her why she slapped him: -Tot par amor et tot en pais,/Par la foi que devez mon cors./Me dites que vos sambla lors:/Ne lo laissiez por nule rien"all out of love and in peace,/out of loyalty for me/Tell me what happened then:/Do not leave anything out' (158-161). She tells him the story willingly 'volantiers' and then adds: "Por Deu, ne vous coreciez mie,/Que se je ai folie faite,/Et je m'an rant vers vos mesfaite,/Si vos en pri merci de cuer!" 'By God/Do not be angry at me/I know that I have been foolish/And I am guilty/I ask for your forgiveness' (176-9). Then he kisses her. Later, he asks her how much his penis would cost and she answers that nobody would have looked at his or made an offer. He just tells her to keep the one she has –his – until she can do better. The fabliau concludes: "La nuit ils furent mout bien ensanble!" 'That night, they were very happy together' (206).

In this fabliau, the wife feels free to tell her husband what happened, and rather than becoming upset, he just tries his best to please her. The way they address each other shows honesty and understanding. Even though "Mais ne l'esvoille ne ne bote,/Qu'i la tenist sanpres a glote!" 'But she does not wake nor kick him/For he would think she is a gluton' (65-67). She still feels free enough not to lie and tell him the story. Again the story ends with a negotiated solution

that is agreeable to both partners. At the end, though, the fableor does not comment on the wife's sexual desires, which could be expected based on the reputation women had for desiring too much, but only says that he finds the husband a bit stupid for having told his story to everyone. The fablaeor has us wonder why a husband would spread a story that undermines his own sexuality.

Conclusion

The examples above show that marriage is a concern in the fabliau and is much more than a comic device necessary to justify love triangles. Affairs are funny because the husbands get ridiculed while the wives get away with cheating on them, but the way some of these marriages work does not seem to be satisfying for either spouse. Since the fabliaux became popular at the same time as the concept of marriage based on consent and affection was being developed, I think the fabliaux do more than just provide laughter, negative exempla to promote the discourse of the Church and be read as pre-conduct books for a new emerging class of merchants and craftsmen. Even if the husband and wife are from different social classes, being able to understand each other's needs and solving conflicts is what makes a successful marriage. As such, the fabliaux should help establish the categories 'husband" and "wife" as viewed theoretically by the Church. Yet, for the most part, the stories show characters who are not able to embody these ideal categories, but who try to find their place through compromise and negotiation.

The market expansion of the twelfth century and the emergence of an urban bourgeoisie coincide with the Church's attempt to promote this new idea of marriage based on consent and affection. Since lineage is not such an issue for this urban class and since men and women, at least in the crafts, often work together, marriage, envisioned as a partnership, becomes an

essential component of the identity formation of this new social class. The fabliaux, along with sermons and conduct literature, constitute some of the ways these new ideas get explored and tested. The fabliaux in some ways reinforce the concepts of good husband and good wife since when the spouses show these qualities, the marriage is usually a better one.

Yet, the semblance of equality that results in the marriage because of consent and affection does not mean that women were completely equal. While the husbands have to provide for their wives, they are also supposed to control them, so the fabliaux point out the contradictory nature of the different discourses related to marriage. As such, the fabliaux may also contribute to the shifting of the meaning of "wife" by showing how the wives do not passively accept their roles but actively renegotiate their position within the society. In addition to offering us a way to understand how thirteenth century people reacted to the new discourse of marriage promoted by the Church, the fabliaux also show how the emerging market economy affected all aspects of the relationship between people and objects.

Chapter Three: Fabliaux, Money, Marriage, and Exchange

While it is not possible to date each of the fabliaux precisely, 1180-1330, the approximate period in which they were composed (Bidon-Lorcin 33), coincides with what historians have called the "long thirteenth century." From 1200 to 1330, profound changes affected Europe: the population increased, new technologies were developed, and economic exchanges and the use of money became widespread (Bourin-Derruau 9). These changes not only resulted in the emergence of both a new market economy, and a new social class known, in the fabliaux, as the bourgeoisie, but also influenced the Church to rethink its ideology with regard to time, work, and trade in order to address both the new organization of society and the spiritual concerns of the emerging class.

Scholars have tried to understand how the changes in the economy and the social fabric of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Northern France are reflected in the fabliaux. For Simon Gaunt, the fabliaux destabilize and expose the artificial nature of all hierarchies by showing that class and gender are constructs that are constantly manipulated (236). Furthering Gaunt's argument, Kiril Petkov added that the fabliaux "are on a quest to define a social order that would substitute for the destabilized society" (114). Like Keith Bushby, who considered the fabliaux negative exempla, Petkov argues that the "fabliau ethos", based on utility and equality, is reaffirmed through the defeat of arrogance. Arrogance is not bound by gender or class but by individual interests that go against the common good (120). Unlike Mary Jane Schenck, Petkov does not believe that the fabliau merges the peasant mentality with the money economy, but rather that the stories describe the movement toward a class-based society.

I will add that the fabliaux provide the nascent bourgeoisie with a model for a code of behavior based on the principle that the ultimate goal of exchange and marriage is to establish

equality. In Chapter Two, we looked at how the new discourse of the Church helps prevent the excesses that result from unions not based on consent and affection by promoting marriages where both spouses are equally satisfied. In this chapter, we will see how the fabliaux extend the ideal of equality by establishing a parallel between exchanges in marriage and exchanges in trade that the emerging bourgeoisie can identify with. As seen for the bourgeoisie, marriage is a partnership based on consent.

The Creation of the Urban Bourgeoisie

The economic growth and the development of new technologies brought about the expansion of urban areas and the division of labor into occupations and trades (LeGoff 167). Until the tenth century, craftsmen had limited opportunities for expanding their practice. They only served the people within their reach and only produced what they could with the tools they had. The centers of activity were the towns where episcopal sees were located and craftsmen and merchants supplied the bishops and their entourages with what they needed. Roux argues that the development of these cities was still largely linked to the needs of the Church although Baker and Holt think it is difficult to determine how much of a town's growth is linked to Church activities (1).

With new technologies, craftsmen were able to use better tools and also increase their productivity. With the increase in production and exchanges, other centers of activity directly linked with commerce were developed along rivers and/or roads. Innkeepers, merchants, and craftsmen settled in these places to accommodate the needs of travelers and merchants (Roux 22-23). The development of international trade made possible the expansion of the Italian ports, which controlled trade toward the East. Flanders grew as an industrial area buying wool from England. Paris, for example, which was only the Ile de la Cite, expanded in different directions

during the eleventh century: to the North, the abbey of Saint Denis became a center of pilgrimage. The right bank was where the merchants settled and traded toward Rouen to the West, and schools were established on the left bank (Morris 39-40).

The merchants, who served as middlemen between those who supplied and those who demanded, were instrumental in the expansion of trade. Some merchants were craftsmen who tried to sell their products and services, some were the sons of landowners who could not inherit lands, and others were wealthy peasants with capital to invest. While the name "merchant" implied an "urban dwelling, profit seeking individual trader of goods," the term also included the local producers who sold their wares at the local markets (Hunt and Murray 27). Later on, merchants divided into two categories--the sedentary and the travelling merchants. As the cities grew and developed an internal organization, merchants who were sedentary took on prominent roles in the administration of the cities. Along with the craftsmen, they fought to acquire charters and independence from the lords to establish independent urban areas. However, the relationships between the merchants and the craftsmen were dependent on status; the wealthier merchants associated with the wealthier craftsmen rather than with other less wealthy merchants, each being interested in what the other had to offer (Lopez 123).

As a group, the craftsmen and merchants became known as the "bourgeoisie." To be called a bourgeois, one had to own a house and be the resident of a city for a year (Roux 49). The term first appeared in legal documents to designate a group of urban dwellers whose status was below that of the nobility and the clergy, but above the common people. By the middle of the twelfth century, "bourgeois" defined a group of people whose main activity was commerce (Roux 32-37). More importantly, the term questioned the hierarchical organization of the society based on the three categories: oratores, those who pray; bellatores, those who fight; and,

laboratores, those who do agricultural work. This new class of townspeople became so important that by the middle of the thirteenth-century the King of France, Philip the Fair, asked that they be represented at the first Estates General in 1302 along with the representatives of the aristocracy. As the feudal system was slowly being replaced by an economy in which relationships and influences extended beyond the boundaries of the castles, Philip's decision shows the extent to which he understood the potential power of this new class. In a society strongly influenced by religion, this new emerging class also needed to be accepted by the Church so that its members would merit salvation.

Theorizing Money

In considering how to understand and integrate this emerging class of merchants and tradesmen, the main issue for the Church was to reconcile the new model of exchanges based on trade and money with Christian principles. Jesus had thrown moneychangers out of the Temple accusing them of being thieves. For the Church, any activity involving money carried with it the idea of stealing, especially usury, since it was considered a sin against nature. Jacques de Vitry wrote that usurers were stealing time, which did not belong to them, but to nature and by association to God (LeGoff 1287). The Church fathers also considered trade evil because its purpose was acquisition, a practice linked to greed and deceit, rather than fair exchange.

The problem for the Church, then, was the role of money and especially usury. Augustine, St Jerome and St Ambrose defined usury as the practice of getting back more than the amount lent. But this definition made all merchants usurers, since they all expected to make a profit from a sale (Kaye 79-80). The translation of Aristotle's Politics, which appeared in 1260, became the basis for the medieval lawyers and canonists' rethinking and re-evaluation of the implications of a trade-based economy. In the discussion on property, Aristotle makes a

discussion between the "art of household management" and the art of "money-making." For Aristotle, since households do not produce everything they need, exchanging goods is acceptable to acquire what is necessary. This type of exchange is not part of "the money-making art is not contrary to nature, but is needed for the satisfaction of men's natural wants" (1256a). With the invention of currency, came the concept of money making. Aristotle makes a distinction between making money to satisfy the needs of the household, even if he questions whether or not there should be a limit and making money for the sake of it. For Aristotle, it is "natural" to make money to satisfy needs, but "unnatural" to accumulate money and the most "unnatural" way to make money is "usury." The Greek word for usury means "the birth of money from money" and is considered "unnatural" because "the offspring resembles the parent" (1258b). However, money also "acts like a measure: it makes goods commensurable and equalizes them. For just as there is no community without exchange, there is no exchange without equality and no equality without commensurability" (Nicomachean Ethics 1133b). As Farber commented, Aristotle's reservations about money and the acquisition of wealth and his positive attitude toward trade as good for the community are reflected in the works of the thirteenth-and fourteenth-century thinkers (19-21).

It is not until Gratian that usury came to mean the selling of money specifically (Vitullo 41). Both Gratian in the *Decretum* and Peter Lombard in the *Sentences* agreed that it was difficult for merchants not to sin because of the nature of their trade. But Gratian included in his work arguments from the pseudo-Chrysostom that were more tolerant of trade. The pseudo-Chrysostom only considered sinful the buying and selling of products that had not been altered in any way except in terms of the price (Farber 15). Work, which so far was not valued by the Church because, according to Genesis, it was penitence for the original sin, regained value with

the newly founded religious orders. The Chartreux, in their statutes recognize the importance of work: "The sweat and fatigue of their labor are a participation in the cross of Christ, whereby, through the light of the resurrection, they become sharers in the new heavens and the new earth" (15-1). The Cistercians too, following the rule of St Benedict acknowledge the benefits of work, "If, however, the needs of the place, or poverty should require that they do the work of gathering the harvest themselves, let them not be downcast, for then are they monks in truth, if they live by the work of their hands, as did also our forefathers and the Apostles." (Ch.48). These new orders, reacting to the excesses of Cluny understood the concept of work before the Fall when Adam was put in the Garden of Eden to "work it and take care of it" and therefore advocated work as part of the life of a monk (LeGoff 163-168). As a result, most of the occupations or trades that the Church had condemned because they were connected to the seven sins were now acceptable. The work of craftsmen was honorable since they used their craft and skill to make and/or repair products. Gratian concluded that the trades were not sinful in themselves, but the way people practiced them could be. Thomas of Chobham also argued that merchants performed a useful service to the community by making goods available where they may not have been and, therefore, their labor deserved to be compensated (Farber 16). The same theory could be applied to moneylenders who took risks by lending money and consequently should be compensated for having done so (Kaye 83).

Aristotle and the scholastic thinkers were mostly concerned that trade and exchanges bring equality. Aristotle thought of exchange as a four sided geometrical form where A (the builder) and B (the shoemaker) represent the producers and C (the house) and D (the shoe) their respective products. The point where the diagonals meet would be the point of equality in the exchange. Because a house has a different value than a shoe, one would have to calculate how

many shoes a house is worth. Since it would be difficult to make that sort of calculation, Thomas Aquinas argued that money was a good medium because it could measure everything and promote equality:

Again the quantity of a thing that comes into human use is measured by the price given for it, for which purpose money was invented, as stated in *Ethics v.5*. Therefore if either the price exceeds the quantity of the thing's worth, or, conversely, the thing exceed the price, there is no longer the equality of justice; and consequently to sell a thing for more than its worth, or to buy it for less than its worth, is in itself unjust and unlawful (ST II-II 77).

Aquinas and Albert Magnus agreed that money, as an invented measure, does not represent the value of an object in itself, but only its qualities and quantities in relation to those of other objects. This means that in terms of exchange, all values are relative values. For Aquinas, need or necessity determines value and the satisfaction of needs is what unites people in a community. But since money is the medium for exchange, Aquinas and Albert concluded that it is money that binds communities. With the increased use of money, Aristotle's geometric model of exchange became less centered on the individual. The value of an item for exchange was not determined by the interest of the individual buyer or seller but rather by the need of the community. Equality will be achieved despite the changes in value as long as a just price can be determined.

According to Thomas Aquinas, equality is defined in three ways: equality of need between the buyer and the seller; equality of benefit from the transaction; and, equality between the value of the object and its price. The question then was how to determine equality. Magnus believes that equality was achieved through the just price, which is determined by the market. Because of theological concerns, Aquinas conceives of equality as agreeable to God and

following the principles of justice and virtue. Thomas Aquinas and Albert Magnus' different views about money and equality are reflected in the fabliaux in their representation of relationships (Kaye 96-101). Relationships and marriages are successful when they are organized according to a system of exchanges with an emphasis on virtue and justice, but they do not succeed when the only aim is to satisfy needs.

Fabliaux and Social Mobility

Using examples from how Chrétien de Troyes portrays the bourgeois in *Le Roman du Graal*, Simone Roux in *Les Racines de la Bourgeoisie* argues that the aristocracy despised the bourgeoisie for its money, but many nobles contracted marriages to bourgeois because they desperately needed money to maintain their lifestyle (43). With money as the medium of exchange, this type of trade should bring equality, for both parties will be satisfied. But in the fabliaux, money is not the great equalizer the medieval thinkers thought it would be (Sheridan 101). Although An Smets suggests that money is used fairly in the fabliau and somewhat positively, revealing that people were comfortable with that new medium of exchange (187/8), the consequences of using money are not to the advantage of women. When young aristocrats are married off to rich vilains for economic reasons, the inequality created by the difference in status and value does not make a happy marriage.

This is stressed at the beginning of *Berengier au lonc Cul* and *Le vilain mire* when the fableor discusses the social origin of the characters and the setting of the story to gain the attention, and perhaps the approval, of the audience. In *Berengier au lonc Cul*, the story starts with the backgrounds of both the young woman and the young man:

> ”Or oez que je voil retraire!
> Que il avint en Lombardie,
> O la gent n'est gaires hardie,
> D'un chevalier qui ot pris fame

Ce m'est vis, une gentis dame
Fille d'un riche chastelain.
Et cil estoit fiz d'un vilain,
D'un usurier riche et comblé,
Qui mout avoit vin et blé;
Brebiz et vaches, et deniers
Ot a monciaus et a setiers.
Et li chastelains li devait tant/
Que paier ne le pooit,
Ainz dona a son fil sa fille. (NRCF 4-34 10-23)

Here it good people!
Guerin will sayWhat happened once in Lombardy,
Where men aren't known for bravery
To a knight errant who' been wed
To a fine lady, purely bred
And daughter to a landed earl.
The young knight's father was a churl
Who'd gotten rich by usury.
His cellars were full; his grainery
Held all it could.
He had cows and goats,
Dollars, deniers, marks, sous, and groats.
And the earl was deeply in his debt
With nothing left to pay, except/
To give the rich man's son his daughter (Harrison)

The fableor concludes the introduction by saying:

"Einsi lo bon lignage aville,
Et dechiet tot et va a honte
Que li chastelain et li conte
Se marient bas por avoir;
Si doivent grant honte avoir
Et grant domage si ont il:
Li chevalier mauvais et vil
Et coart issent de tel gent,
Qui miauz aiment or et argent
Qu'il ne font chevalerie.
Einsi dechiet enor et pris! (NCRF 4-34 24-35)

That's how good blood thins down to water,
How counts and earls and all their race
Decline and finish in disgrace.
If people wed to get out of debt,
Disgrace is what they ought to get.
The harm they do cannot be told:

> From those who covet silver and gold
> More than nobility, a race of foolish, good-for-nothing, base
> And chickenhearted knights descends.
> Thus chivalry declines and ends. (Harrison)

For Guerin, the fableor who signed this fabliau, these marriages are detrimental to the nobility because the people entering its rank do not have the same ethics. The father is called a "vilain" and "usurier." Vilain denotes that he is a farmer and usurier that maybe he lends money, too, as the different type of coins in his possession would indicate. But usurier also implies laziness and accumulation of money, stressing the opposition between the vilain and the wife's father, a castellan, whose trade is bravery measured in chivalric deeds and largesse. While the fableor makes it clear that the earl does not have a choice, his disdain for these transactions is expressed when he concludes that shame and degradation are what the nobles deserve if they are more interested in money than in nobility.

Money allowed the father to buy his son a wife and status, but it did not buy the son courage and knightly prowess. When the son is challenged by his wife who is disguised as a knight, he offers money to get himself out of the fight (Eichmann 50). This fabliau sides with the nobility against an emerging new class that it cannot even name. The only name given to the young man is "chevalier" which defines him by what he is not; i.e. he is not a noble, and not a knight. He is not even called "husband" since he does not fit that category either. According to Robert de Sorbon, a husband should be strong, rich, noble, generous, kind and wise (Beriou 38). The husband's lack of all the qualities that would give him an identity in the class he is now part of is reinforced at the end of the fabliau as his ability to pay the conjugal debt is questioned. When he gets home to find his wife in bed with a real "chevalier," he has no value left whatsoever and he is left speechless, "Oncques plus ne li osa dire,/Desconfit se sant et maté./Et cele fait sa volanté,/Qui ne fu sote ne vilaine:/ He never dared say anything again/as he felt

defeated and subdued/And she did whatever she wanted since she was neither foolish nor ugly." (NRCF 4-34 292-5 Harrison). Money cannot erase the inequality inherent in the difference in the value of each individual, for the husband is worth nothing except for his money, which is not even his own but his father's. In the introduction to the fabliau, the nobility is blamed for wanting that type of alliance with the rich peasants but at the end, the husband is ridiculed because his money cannot make him a knight or even a husband.

Berengier au lonc Cul points out the differences between a world of fixed values and a more fluid world. As an immovable good, land has an intrinsic value that money does not have. The value of money is not tied to its content in metal and coins can be melted into others coins with a different value. While the ownership of land also means that one belongs to a class with a set of values such as bravery and largesse, the ownership of money only means the accumulation of a moveable good. In some ways, Berengier offers a criticism of the aristocracy "selling out" to the mentality of the marketplace. What the wife does to restore her position is not "brave," it simply plays on the fears of the husband and relies on the assumed qualities of a knight. This would then imply that the husband could have become a knight and that these qualities are not as fixed as the land associated with them.

Le sot chevalier shows right in its title the clash of these two competing worlds. The use of the adjective 'sot' to describe a chevalier is unusual. *Vilains* are usually stupid not knights. What makes the knight stupid is his lack of understanding on how to exploit what is on his land. The knight enjoys his property but should – according to the fableor – think about the money he could make by selling the fruits of his trees and the fish on his pond and the meat of his animals. As the disrupting agent, money also allows the breaking of class boundaries because it can change hands much faster than any other commodity.

In *Le vilain mire*, also discussed in Chapter Two, a vilain who has become rich through hard work is convinced by his friends to find a wife. Here *vilain* denotes peasant but its connotation is rough, stupid, hairy and ugly. Combined with "rich" the expression rich vilain highlights the incongruity created by money now that these men are able to buy their way into the aristocracy. In this fabliau too, money allows a vilain to buy himself the young daughter of an old knight, but the ending is different from *Berengier au lonc Cul*. The fabliau concludes with "Par sa fame et sa voisdie/Fu bon mestres et sanz clergie" 'This happened just as I said:/ Through his wife and wile, he came to be a fine physician sans degree' (NRCF 2-13 391-392). There are different possible readings of this fabliau. One is that the fableor may be saying we should not trust doctors because anybody can be one. Second, we should be careful with appearances; unlike the husband in *Berengier*, this one is able to fool everybody and is rewarded for it. Third, social classes are boundaries arbitrarily constructed and, given the opportunity, anybody can become somebody else, even a doctor.

The strict sumptuary laws of the late thirteenth century, designed to differentiate classes through clothing, cannot contain class line crossing especially if people can acquire the characteristics of the class they are trying to enter. In this case, since the *vilain* was already wealthy at the beginning of the story, the fact that he went from "poor" to "rich" at the end may also imply that he went from a poor marriage to a rich marriage. His experience at the king's court transformed him. When he went back home, he stopped beating his wife and took good care of her instead. He is worth even more now that he is a better husband.

These two fabliaux illustrate both the power and the limitations of money. While it makes social mobility possible since vilains can enter the aristocracy, money also undermines the Church's discourse on marriage because consent can be bought. On the other hand, by showing

that money in itself does not transform individuals, the authors seem to side with the Church to reinforce the idea that successful relationships cannot be based on the partners' monetary worth alone, but rather require both consent and partnership. At the end of *Berengier*, the husband and wife are still a mismatch even though the wife is now in control of the relationship. On the other hand, in *Le vilain mire*, the husband has learned his lesson and now can be a partner to his wife and treat her equally. Beside the role of money in exchange, the fabliaux stories also explore how relationships, posited as the exchange of sex and affection in or outside marriage, can result in equal partnerships and marriages.

The Trading of Sex Outside of Marriage

In the economy of the fabliaux, the most valued commodity to exchange is sex. In general, sex is a source of pleasure. Unlike the heroes of romances, fabliaux characters do not pine for love; they just fulfill their sexual desires. There is no courtship. Instead, women simply bathe and feed their husbands or their lovers before receiving sexual favors (Baldwin 284). In non-marital relationships, sex follows the laws of supply and demand. The more the person is desired, the more the buyer is willing to pay in money or in goods. Between spouses, sex is like money: it has intrinsic value; it is a medium of exchange; and, it measures wealth in the relationship. In addition, sex may also be a source of profit or loss for people beyond the two individuals directly involved.

For example, in two similar fabliaux, *Le meunier et les deus clers* and *De Gombert et des deus clers*, one of the two young clerks tries to buy the favors of the young girl. In *Le meunier*, the father knows that his daughter is valuable so he locks her up at night. In both fabliaux, the young clerk takes the ring from a pan and makes the girl believe it is a valuable ring. In *Gombert*, he offers to give it to her pretending that it is worth a lot of money: "Grant bien vos en

vendra encor,/ Et s'avrés jam on anel d'or,/Qui plus vaut de quatre besanz. Sentez mon com il est pesanz:" 'And you will have my golden ring,/Which is worth more than four besants./Feel how heavy it is" (NRCF 4-35-65-8). In *Le meunier*, he tells her that the ring is magical, so that she will remain a virgin even if she has sex with him: "La pierre en est de tel vertu/ - Bien l'ai esprové et seü -/Qu'il n'est souz ciel fame legierre,/Qui tant par eit esté corsiere,/Se l'anelet a en son deit,/ Que toz jorz pucele ne soit." 'That its stone has such power/That any woman, no matter how easy in virtue,/Nor how often she has whored about/Will yet be chaste and a maiden/If she has this on her finger in the morning" (NRCF 7-80-201-207). As an object, the ring functions in both the gift and the market economies. As a present, it is like a wedding ring that represents the clerk's commitment to the young woman. But it also has the value of the gold it is supposedly made of. While she traded it for sex, if the girl were to sell it or to melt it, she would get a lot of money for it. In this case, the ring is payment for sex, not unlike the priest in *Le Prestre et Alison*, who gives presents to secure a night with a young virgin. The made-up value of the ring is determined by the market value of sex with a virgin.

As these examples show, sex is a valuable commodity. Its worth is based on the interest of the buyer and the seller. In *Gombert*, the clerk tells the girl the ring is worth four besants. Does this amount represent the ring's intrinsic value or is it the amount the clerk thinks the young girl will accept for her virginity? In *Le meunier*, there is no money attached to the ring, only a value. The fact that the young woman will preserve her virginity if she wears the ring is ultimately more valuable than money for the society of the time. However, the price a young woman sets for her virginity is not important and her individual needs are not taken into account in this trade. What counts is what the community, especially the parents and the Church, think virginity is worth.

In *Le meunier*, the trade that occurs between the clerk and the young girl and the wife are part of a larger trade between the men – the clerks and the miller - where the commodity exchanged is the girl. Realizing that they were cheated on the amount of flour they received, the two clerks decide to sleep with the miller's wife and his daughter. The clerks use sex to get back at the miller. What they did is more damaging to the miller than what he had done to them. The clerks lost their flour and their mare, but the miller lost a good marriage for his daughter. The story ends with the clerks getting back their possessions and leaving. The fableor concludes they did well later in their career as a sign of approval for their actions because the girl and the wife were fair payback for what the miller had done; they redressed the injustice done to them.

On the other hand, in *Gombert* the ending warns all men who have beautiful daughters not to give shelter to young clerks because they cannot be trusted. It is difficult for the fableor to justify the actions of the clerks. They had no reason to take advantage of Gombert who had been a good host, giving them food and shelter. In both fabliaux, the value of the objects traded for sex does not make up for the value of what is lost because virginity is worth much more than what the clerk and the knight can afford. In *Le meunier*, the exchange results in equality only in the clerks' minds, not in the miller's. The clerks, like stereotypical merchants, were able to pitch their sale and get the young women to believe what they promised.

Demonstrating the logic of trade, in *Celle qui fu foutue et desfoutue*, a young wife is led to believe that she can get her virginity back. An old man marries a young woman and keeps her captive in a tower. When the nurse who takes care of her has gone out, a young valet comes by with a crane. The young woman wants to buy it from him. He agrees if she gives him "un foutre" - a fuck. She believes she does not have one to give, so the valet comes in to show her. When the nurse finds out what the young woman did, she gets really angry and faints because she

understands the effect the young woman's actions will have on her marriage. Later, the young woman sees the valet outside the window and tells him she needs her fuck back. He agrees to "defoutre" – "unfuck" her by having sex with her again. Then he leaves taking the crane back with him. The valet takes advantage of the young woman's ignorance the same way the young clerks did in *Le meunier*.

In all these fabliaux, the exchanges do not result in equality because the young women are deceived by the young men or they do not possess the necessary knowledge to understand the impact of the trade. The fact that in this fabliau, virginity is worth a crane not a ring demonstrates that values are always relative to needs. In addition, this fabliau comically stresses, to the point of absurdity, that one of the consequences of the market economy is that anything, including a fuck, can be traded and traded back as long as the parties agree.

Le bouchier d'Abeville combines all the elements of trade we have seen so far. On his way back from a fair, a butcher asks a priest for shelter, offering to pay for his stay. The priest tells him that he will not allow laics to sleep at his house and sends him away. On the butcher's way out of town, he notices a flock of sheep, and when he finds out that they belong to the priest, he steals one during the night. He then goes back to the priest's house and tells the priest that he will share the sheep if he is offered lodging. The priest agrees to kill the sheep, divide the meat and keep the fleece. After dinner, when the priest and his concubine go to bed, the butcher offers to give the maid the fleece if she has sex with him. The next morning after the priest has gone to Church, the butcher goes to the priest's concubine and offers her the fleece if she has sex with him. She agrees although she knows if the priest finds out, she will have to leave. On the butcher's way out of town he goes to the Church and sells the fleece to the priest. After his

departure, the priest, his concubine, and the maid argue over the fleece. The fabliau concludes by asking the audience who should get the fleece.

Christopher Sheridan has argued that the way the fabliaux characters use the different economic models –gift, barter, and money--represent the "mutability of the fabliau as a genre and the mobility of their audience(s)" (97). David, the butcher, is successful because he knows which economic model of exchange will satisfy each of his customers (97). The fleece is bartered among the butcher, the wife, and the maid. All of them are satisfied with the trading of the fleece for sexual favors. But the value of the fleece changes as the story unfolds. For the maid, it is just a fleece. For the priest's concubine the fleece is worth enough to alleviate her fear that the priest will get rid of her if she has sex with the butcher. For the priest the fleece is worth its weight in wool. The same object is traded three times and takes on a different value that expresses the desire of each of the participants in the exchange (Sheridan 108). That this type of transformation is possible illustrates the shift from a world of fixed values to a world of changing values (Kaye 1).

In addition, the concubine, the maid and the fleece are also the objects of an exchange between the priest and the butcher. The butcher was refused shelter even after he offered money, so he pays the priest back by having sex with his concubine and with his maid, and by stealing his sheep. The payback is fair because the priest has broken at least two of the rules associated with his profession. He should have offered shelter to the butcher, and he should not have a concubine (Eichmann 14).

The priest is like his own shepherd, not very good at protecting those in need. The same way the shepherd should have saved the sheep from being killed by David, the priest as the shepherd of his parishioners should have protected David by offering him lodging. Blinded by a

potential gain, the priest fails to recognize his own sheep when David brought it to him and he does not realize that he has seen David before. As David walks in the priest's house carrying the sheep on his shoulders, the roles are reversed: David is the real shepherd, not the priest. He will do what David did to the lions and the bears that attacked him: "When it [lion or bear] turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it" (Samuel 17:34). David will "kill" the priest by killing and eating one of his sheep and having sex with both his concubine and his maid.

In these fabliaux, sex is used to redress injustice; therefore, the perpetrators are not punished for trying to obtain what they want or feel they deserve especially when they find clever ways to go about it. As a tool for revenge, sex is fair game. But fairness is not equality unless there is consent without deception. When individuals agree on the value of sex, the exchange may result in equality provided there is no deception, but when the value of sex is set by the community, it never results in equality because the interests of the community are not the same as the interests of the individuals. When sex is directly traded for money, the moral implications of trading are made apparent.

Trading Sex and Money

In *Le prestre et Alison*, the priest is willing to pay a lot to get to spend a night with Mahaus's daughter. The mother is outraged by the fact that the priest thinks he can buy her daughter. So she fakes acceptance, and after making him pay a heavy price, she tricks him into spending the night with Alison, a prostitute. The fableor lists all the things, linens and coats, plus the money that the priest must bring to the mother in order to have the daughter. The priest does not know how to price the favor and how much a night with the young daughter is worth, so he says: "j'aporterai les deniers ci,/S'en prenez a vostre talent!"' I will bring you the money and you will take whatever you want' (NRCF 8-91 116-7). The mother knows that the priest really wants

her daughter and is willing to pay whatever it takes, so she tries to get as much as she can. Yet, money is not used to give an object or a service a definite value; it is bait to trick the priest into thinking that he will obtain what he wants. As in a market economy, the aim is to agree on a price that will satisfy both parties regardless of the good being traded. Yet, the more the buyer wants the item, the more he is willing to pay. In this fabliau, sex is worth a lot more than the fleece of a sheep. Mahaus's daughter is worth more than the maid in *Le boucher d'Abbeville* because she could probably make a good marriage.

Similarly in *Le sacristain*, the priest offers money for Ydoine's sexual favors. The story starts with the description of Ydoine and Guillaume: "Ydoine fu bien ensaigniee/Et cortoise et bien affaitiee,/Et Guillaumes sot bien changier,/Molt s'entremist de gaagnier./ Assez estoit preuz et cortois:/N'aimoit pas escot de borgois." 'Ydoine had been brought up with care,/was courteous and debonair;/ Guillaume in changing used his brains/and worked hard extremely hard for gains./A man of dignity and note,/he did not care for table d'hôte' (NRCF 7-74-5-12). But after being robbed of his gains on the way back from a fair, they are left with no money. Since they are good Christians, Ydoine goes to church to pray, but the chaplain who is aware of their misfortunes, offers her a lot of money if she agrees to sleep with him. In this story, the amount of money offered is linked to how much the couple needs to recoup their loss, not to how much a night with Ydoine could cost. In these two examples, the value given to sex depends on the desires of the buyer and the willingness of the seller to settle for a price. At the end, the priest and the chaplain do not get what they want and they both lose their money. The same is true in *Le prestre teint* where the priest offers money to the wife, but ends up by losing that money and more.

In both these stories, and in many other fabliaux, the fact that the buyers are members of the clergy highlights the negative effects of clerical celibacy. The clergy are desperate to satisfy their sexual desires and are ready to pay any price. The back and forth to determine price shows that buying or exchanging for sex is not an easy task, but one that is becoming more common with the increasing use of money. By showing the difficulty of pricing, the fabliaux use sex to raise the question of the moral implications behind the logic of the market economy. Will money make it possible to transform anything into a commodity? Paying for sex is prostitution, but with the spreading of the logic of trade, the fabliaux show that sex could become an acceptable commodity to trade as long as the exchange results in equality. However, to safeguard morality, there is usually deception, so trading sex as a commodity is possible but not ethical or just.

Trading Sex and Marriage

In fabliaux marriages, husbands and wives are entitled to sex because of the concept of marital debt. Phrased using the vocabulary of finance, marital debt is based on Paul's idea that the husband's body does not belong to him and the wife's body does not belong to her. Each spouse has to repay the debt whenever the other one wants. Even if the expression "marital debt" is not used in the fabliaux, it is clear that it is generally the wives who expect their husbands to repay their debt. This depiction is not surprising since women had the reputation of having greater sexual desires than men and, as a result, except in one story, women are the ones who seek sex outside of marriage when their husbands cannot repay their debts as often and/or as well as the wives expect them to. Sex is compared to work; it must be done well. It is not only the quantity, but also the quality that matters. As suppliers of sex, the fabliaux husbands are expected to perform well.

In *Gombert*, one of the clerks falls in love with Gombert's wife, and keeps looking at her

during dinner. There the fableor mentions that Gombert is oblivious to what is happening and places the bed for the two clerks next to his. When the clerk finds his way to the wife's bed, Gombert's wife says:" "Sir Gombert, fet Dame Gille,/Si vieus com estes et usez,/ Trop ests anuit eschaufez!/Ne sai de quoi il vos sovint:/ Grant piece a mes ne vois avint./ CUidiez vos qu'il ne m'en anuit?/Vos avez fet ausi anuit/Com s'il n'en fust nul recovriers;/ Trop estes anuit bons ovriers:/N'avez gueres esté oiseus!" ""Sir Gombert," said Dame Guile, "For so old and weak a man as you are, /You have been very hot tonight; /I do not know what you are thinking of; /It has been a long time indeed since you have been like this; Aren't you afraid you will tire me? /You have done as much tonight /As if our salvation depended on it; /You have been a very good worker, /You have not been lazy." (NRCF 4-35 120-129 Benson) The description of Gombert as old and weak implies that he is not able to satisfy his wife all the time, yet unlike other fabliaux wives, she does not cheat on him. That night she is not aware that the man in her bed is not her husband.

In *Le sot chevalier*, the husband does not know how to have sex with his wife so he needs to be taught. The fabliau does not indicate whether the marriage was arranged for financial reasons but first establishes the worth of the knight and stresses his ignorance. After a year of waiting for the knight to have sex with her, the young woman decides to ask her mother to teach the knight;

> Qant il l'eut esposee et prisse,
> Il le tint plus d'un an pucele.
> Mout en pesa le jovencele,
> Qui vosist ses deduis avoir;
> Mais cil n'avoit tant de savoir
> Qu'Il seüst au con adercier
> Ne le pucelage perkier:
> Non por uec l'avoit il tenue
> Ta maintes fois en ses bras nue!
> Tant estoit cele a plus male aisse

Qant elle sentoist le pasnaisse
Sor ses cuisses et sor ses hances,
Qui mout erent soés et blances.
Quant ne le peut mais consentir
De si faite uevre consentir,
sa mere mande et ele i vint. (NRCF 5-53-38-53)

When she'd been wedded, carried off
and kept a virgin past a year,
the maiden was of sorry cheer,
because she needed some relief.
However, he was too naïf
to know how cunts should be approached
or maidenheads may be best broached,
and yet he had the habitude
of hugging her, while in the nude,
an act which caused her great distress,
for she could feel his penis press
against her smooth white hips and thighs;
when she could not in any wise
go on this way and suffer through
the agony he put her to,
she had her mother come, and when
she got there, hear what happened then.(Harrison).

The detailed description shows how unhappy the young woman is and emphasizes the ignorance of the knight in sexual matters, paralleling his ignorance in matters of money.

The knight is portrayed as a freak ignorant in all aspects of life including the fact that he could be richer if he had more sense. The fableor reproaches him for his lack of understanding of the new market economy. The knight enjoys his land the way the aristocracy used to but does not see its potential in terms of the money he could make from its exploitation:

D'une part estoit li estans:
Plains ert d'oiseaus et de poisons;
S'estoit sire des venissons,
S'avoit ses ciens et ses oiseaus.
Mout estoit sire et damoiseaus
De tos les biens que tere porte.
Ses molins ert devant sa porte.
Se il fust sages et sense,
En grant anor fust asenés, (NRCF 5-53- 14-26)

> for over here his orchard lay,
> entirely of selected trees-
> he'd make a fortune our of these
> assoon as springtime cane around-
> and over there, his fishing pound
> was filled with fish, and he could claim
> dominion over much wild game,
> and hunting dogs and birds as well;
> the puissant lord and damoisel
> of all the products of the wood.
> Beside his door a gristmill stood,
> and if he'd had a grain of sense
> he might have know great affluence; (Harrison)

The knight has everything he needs to be successful but does not know how to make his land or his body productive. The fableor clearly explains what he could do with every item on his property. His lack of knowledge about sex and nature prevents him from using his land and his body to their full capacity.

Once his wife's mother teaches him what to do, the knight goes back to his wife to have sex with her. Here too, sex is described as a "besogne/duty" to be performed with "ostius/tools" and "harnas/gear." "Si a tant et boté et empoint/ Que li cosse est venue a point/ Et que li sos fist se besogne,/ Si com li fabliaus nos tesmogne,/Plus de deus fois en un randon,/ Car tot li fu mis a bandon:/ Et li harnas et li ostius/ Qui mout estoit entalentius./he poked and prodded her with might/until the job was done up right./The fool performed his duty now (so goes the story, anyhow) more than [two times with impetuousity]/for he was utterly obsessed/with tools and gear, and in this fashion/showed his amatory passion."(NRCF 5-53-249-256 Harrison). The story concludes that the knight "eut apris a foutre" "learned of fucking though." (NRCF 5-53 322 Harrison). The fabliau is not just about satisfying his wife but also about reinforcing hetero sex in marriage as prescribed by the Church. As shown above, the detailed description of the way the knight embraced his wife before he met with her mother, the fact that she makes it clear that anal

sex is "just not done," and the misunderstanding later on in the story, leading his guests to fear that he was homosexual, all point to the fact that sex is not only for pleasure but must be productive too -- a dimension that was not present in fabliaux describing sexual encounters between non-married people. Sex for pleasure in marriage is not a mortal sin because it helps contain concupiscence, but everyone needs to be reminded that the ultimate goal of sex is procreation.

When conducted only for pleasure, sex is similar to usury. The church condemned usury because money was being made without the creation or transformation of a product. While sex satisfies the needs of the individuals, it does not do anything for the common good. When it is used for procreation, sex benefits the whole community. In a new economic model where production is valued more than holdings, the fableor hopes that the knight has gained some knowledge, and will be both a better cultivator of his lands, and a husband better equipped to discharge his marital debt.

In *La sorisete des estopes*, the premise is also the husband's lack of knowledge, "Après vos cont d'un vilain sot/Qui fame prist,/ et rien ne sot/ De nul deduit q'apartenist/A fame, se il la tenist,/ C'onques entremis ne s'en fu./ Mais sa faime avoit ja seü/Tot ce que home sevent faire,/ Que, à la verité retraire,/Li preste son boen en faisoit,/Qant il voloit et li plaisoit." ' I'll tell you about a foolish peasant, who took wife and knew nothing about the amusement which goes with taking a wife, because he had never been involved with it before. But his wife already knew how to do all that people should know, because, to tell the truth, the priest used to have his way with her, when he wished and it pleased her."(NRCF 6-66 -1-10 Nicholson) The husband is not able to repay his marital debt because he does not know where to find his wife's vagina, but unlike the wife in *Le sot chevalier*, she teaches him in such a way that she will always be able to see the

priest without her husband becoming suspicious. The foolishness of the husband is mentioned twice: at the beginning when the fableor tells us we do not know why the peasant married the woman, and at the end, when husbands are strongly encouraged to control their wives because they can make them believe anything. In this story, sex is represented by the vagina which is the commodity traded between the wife, the husband, and the priest. As long as all the parties involved are satisfied with the trade, there is equality. The husband can have his wife's vagina when he wants, and the wife uses it to repay her debt when she wants and only to make sure her husband does not discover her affair with the priest.

Body Parts as Moveable Goods

Martha Howell in *The Marriage Exchange* shows that an urban economy thrives on movable goods whose value is based on their production, circulation, and consumption. Unlike land which is permanent and set in space, movables appear, disappear, and depreciate in ways that land does not. The instability created by the shift in moveable goods also provided the drive to change the marriage property laws, which unexpectedly resulted in creating a space for the Douai bourgeois to make affection a real part of the marriage (169-71). While Howell studies Douai from the mid-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth century, we can see the beginning of the shift to moveable goods in the way body parts are counted as moveable assets in the marriage and along with sex are the commodities most traded in relationships and the embodiement of marital affection.

In *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, the husband wants to find out if his wife only loves him for his penis. He asks her if she would still love him had he lost his penis. She keeps telling him his penis is not the reason she loves him because she is not that interested in it. When he comes home pretending his penis was cut off, she sends her maid to gather her things and gets

ready to leave. As he realizes she would leave him, he tells her to search his pockets for half the money that belongs to her. When she puts her hand in his pocket, she feels his penis. He calls it a miracle. He tells her God helped him because he did not want her to leave, so she decides to stay. The money turning into the penis shows that it has the same value as cash. Yet, her husband's penis is the only asset she cannot take with her when she leaves. She is entitled to take cows and produce as well as money probably because her marriage was formed under the "equality" regime by which she is entitled to half of what her husband owns (Howell 10). The story proves the husband right and concludes with the common assumption that women would prefer a husband who can satisfy them sexually to the most accomplished knight. When her husband is not able to supply what she needs, she is ready to leave him.

In the logic of trade, the penis is another asset in the marriage along with the money and "cinc vaches et vint berbiz/five cows and twenty ewes." (4-5) Yet, beyond the fact that her husband's penis is the most important thing for the wife, this fabliau shows what a good marriage means. When he asks her why she loves him, she includes all the material things he has given her. "Einz vos aim por ce que m'amez!/ Vos me chaucez bien et vestez/Et donez assez à mengier,/ Et si m'achetastes l'autrier/ Bone cote et bon sercot bleu."'I love you because you love me/You buy me shoes and clothes/You feed me well/You bought me the other day/a nice coat and a blue surcoat." (NRCF 4-28-37-41) These show that he cares about her. In addition the fabliau mentions at the beginning: "C'un pescheour de Ponz sur Saine/Espousa fame baudement." 'A fisherman from Pont sur Seine/happily married his wife' (2-3) "La meschinete et ses maris/S'entramerent de bone amour" 'the young girl and her husband liked each other with good love' (6-7). "Et la fouti au mieus qu'il pot:" 'he screwed the best he could' (16-17). There is consent and affection, and conjugal rights are respected.

Le sohait desvé, also discussed in Chapter Two, is another example of the value of body parts as movable assets in a marriage. The wife dreams that she is at a market buying penises. There are a lot of choices, and when she picks one and asks for its price, she manages to bargain the seller down to the price she thinks the penis is worth. When she tells her husband about her dream and he is curious to know how much his penis would cost at the market, she implies that nobody would buy one like his. The husband replies that his is all she has and the fableor concludes they spent a good night together.

Les quatre sohais Saint Martin goes further and shows that the accumulation of that type of movable asset is not necessarily beneficial. St. Martin gives a husband four wishes to thank him for always invoking the saint every morning before starting work. When the husband tells his wife about this arrangement, she asks him for one of the wishes and he agrees reluctantly, not trusting that, as a woman, she would make a good choice. She wishes for him to be covered with penises because one is not enough to satisfy her. When she sees the result, she considers herself "wealthy" because he will always be ready for her. The husband uses the second wish to cover her with vaginas. When they see the monsters they have made of themselves, they both decide to use the third wish to get rid of everything, thinking that they would have the last wish to get rich. Realizing their mistake, they use the fourth wish to get back to the way they were originally. The fabliau blames the husband for listening to his wife, but what is more interesting is the idea that more is not necessarily better. Describing extensively the penises and vaginas covering the bodies shows the excess that sexual desire can trigger. Yet, the absence of sexual organs is not a solution since they will not be able to procreate. Once they have exhausted all their wishes, they have lost and gained nothing except possibly a better understanding of what they had all along.

In La bourse pleine de sens, "sens/sense" is the moveable commodity that one can buy along with dresses and jewelry. When a merchant asks his wife what she would like him to bring her back, she asks for "une bourse pleine de sens/a purse full of sense" because she knows that he is cheating on her and she would like him to realize that his mistress is not good for him and the affair not good for their reputation. Since "bourse" also means testicles, the point is that the wealth of a marriage does not depend on money or sex only but rather on how sensibly both are used.

The fabliaux make sex the medium of exchange among people whether as a commodity to be traded or, like money, as a medium for exchanges. As a commodity, sex follows the laws of supply and demand. The more it is wanted, the more it costs as in *Le prestre et Alison* or *Le Sacristain*. If the supply is limited or if the quality is not satisfying, the "client" will go to another supplier as in *La sorisete des estopes*, *La borgeoise d'Orliens* and many other fabliaux where the sexual inadequacy of the husband is the cause for cheating. Following the strict logic of trade, it makes sense that the morals in these fabliaux never mention that women are committing adultery and the young men who are their suppliers are committing lechery, both sins condemned by the Church. Getting what one wants regardless of morality is what the new market economy is also making possible but these types of exchange in marriages do not make for successful unions.

On the other hand, fabliaux such as *Le sacristain*, *Le sohait desvé*, *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, et *La bourse pleine de sens* reaffirm moral marriages by depicting relationships using the principles of a market economy that strives for equality as its end result. However, Martha Howell argues that the marriage customs in Douai privileging the conjugal pair instead of the respective families of the spouses or even the children only creates a semblance of equal

partnership not only based on property but also on the bonds created in the marriage. During the lifetime of the spouses, the husband controlled the assets and could do anything with them. Only after the death of the husband would the widow be in charge of the couple's assets (27). Howell attributes the shift to a new marriage law to the temporary nature of the assets linked to commerce. As opposed to the fixed nature of land, the fact that money and moveable wealth could be disposed of much faster forced Douaisiens rethink how births, marriages, and deaths affected their property (70-1). Since the fabliaux originated in the area of Flanders, we can see how the anxieties triggered by the new market economy are expressed in stories where the concept of mobility is taken to the extreme as body parts can be detached, circulate and reattached at will.

Fabliaux and Language

All these stories offer the possibility for a more flexible world. The fixity and permanence associated with the ownership of land is slowly giving way to a more fluid society where money, people, and goods circulate more easily. This shift is also reflected in the constant play between signifier and signified. In *La bourse pleine de sens*, the other meaning of the word "bourse" becomes visible to the merchant at the end once he comes to his "senses." In *La sorisete des estopes*, the wife's vagina becomes a mouse when it is "detached" from its owner and then vanishes when supposedly it has gone home. In *Celle qui fu foutue et desfoutue pour une grue*," the word "defoutu is created with the prefix "de" following the pattern of "faire/do" and "defaire/undo" as if regaining one's virginity is made possible by the creation of the word. *In Le Meunier* and *Gombert*, the ring comes to exist when the clerk calls the round piece of metal attached to a pan "ring." As such, it takes on other meanings associated to a ring: a gift that secures a commitment and/or a valuable object. Identities are also unsettled through the use of

language. In *Le bouchier* it is the meaning of sheep that changes as the plot unravels. We may believe that David is the wolf the priest/shepherd lets inside his house, but in the end David is the shepherd and the priest more like a wolf. The titles of both *Le sot chevalier* and *Le vilain mire* name other possible identities that shake the fixed order of the society. By unsettling defined categories, the language of the fabliaux like money offer new possibilities for a new emerging class.

Conclusion

Depicting an emerging class creating its own space within the existing order of the society, the fabliaux constitute a literary genre where the main actors of the stories belong to the bourgeoisie. While the nobility is still held in the highest esteem and the lower clergy is always mocked, the bourgeoisie is both praised and mocked. "Bourgeois" indicates an economic status but not a code of conduct, so usually the bourgeois are mocked as husbands, not for their occupation. On the contrary, as a group, the rich *vilains* remain the least attractive characters of the fableors maybe because they retain a peasant mentality in a money economy (Schenck 120). This explains why characters are called *vilains* even when they are not peasants. The fact that the fabliaux are comical explains the strong emphasis on sex as the main commodity to be traded within marriage. Yet, beyond the love triangles, the stupid husbands, and the voracious wives, the fabliaux promote relationships in which both individuals are satisfied. The fabliau is the genre that explores how the new market economy and the new discourse on marriage provide a code of behavior for the emerging bourgeoisie. By 1400, the bourgeoisie is an established class, but the issues and problems related to marriage i.e; sex, money, and exchange remain. Therefore it is not completely surprising that Chaucer chose the fabliau form for some of the tales exploring marital relationships.

Chapter Four: The *Shipman's Tale*

The socio-economic changes that occurred in France in the twelfth century and the new discourse of the Church on marriage promoting consent and partnership were depicted in the literature of the time. As seen in Chapter One, Chrétien de Troyes' romances and Marie de France's lais explore possibilities for husbands and wives to rethink their roles and redefine their relationships. With *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien de Troyes offers a new kind of partnership in which Erec manages to satisfy his desire to be with his wife as well as his duty a knight. By entering each other's traditional space, Erec and Enide redefine the roles of husband and wife. Erec spends more time at home in his wife's space than at tournaments and Enide, clearly stepping out of the traditional role of a knight's wife, enters her husband's space by going on a journey with him and warning him of dangers. Marie de France's lais offer alternatives for young women in unhappy marriages; Frêne shows that relationships can be based on consent and affection. However, the lais and romances promote the values of the aristocracy and are set in the world of the aristocracy. They do not reflect the economic changes of the time. While money may be mentioned, it is usually in the form of gifts but not in terms of commercial activities (Eberle). Knights go through cities and towns but rarely mingle with their residents and never engage in commercial activities.

The French fabliaux, on the other hand, reflect the world of commerce and the emergence of the mercantile class. The stories portray merchants, craftsmen, and rich peasants actively participating in the new economy described in Chapter Three. Personal relationships are often treated like business exchanges. Sex and affection are commodities traded in and outside of marriage and, are used to measure the quality of marital unions. Some fableors anticipate that social mobility will bring chaos as they ridicule the rich peasants who marry the impoverished

sons and daughters of the aristocracy. As discussed in Chapter Two and Three, other fableors offer possibilities to examine the roles of husbands and wives in light of the new market economy and depict the emergence of new values. Although the fabliaux scholarship has mostly been concerned with analyzing the portrayal of comical love triangles, another important aspect of the fabliaux genre is the way in which the fabliaux problematize the new discourse of marriage and the impact of the new market economy on a heterogeneous group of people identified as the emerging bourgeoisie.

The greatest development of the fabliau in English occurs in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Even though Chaucer did not call them fabliaux, six of the tales—the *Miller's Tale*, the *Reeve's Tale*, the *Cook's Tale*, the *Friar's Tale*, the *Summoner's Tale*,the *Merchant's Tale*, and the *Shipman's Tale*—are all representative of the genre. According to Joseph Dane, scholars began to call these tales "fabliaux" after the translation of anthologies of "contes et fabliaux" into English in the nineteenth century and the publication of scholarship by Cohen, Paris and Reynaud, and Bédier on the French fabliaux. Before that, Chaucer's fabliaux were rarely studied and often referred to as "obscene" or "scurrilous" (Dane). Utilizing Bédier's definition, scholars have agreed that Chaucer improved the fabliau. Larry Benson says that the *Miller's Tale*, is the best of any fabliau, French or English. He goes on to note that Chaucer added an intellectual dimension to the *Reeve's Tale* that made his tale "superior" to its French analogues, *Gombert et les deus clers* and *Le Meunier et les deus clers*. However, the necessity for arguing that the *Canterbury Tales*' fabliaux are better than the French fabliaux is also linked to Chaucer's image as the "father of English poetry." To support the construct of Chaucer as the national poet, scholars like Fichte, Nicholson, and McClintock strived to demonstrate the superiority ofthe *Shipman's Tale* and the other fabliaux by emphasizing the depth of the characters, the

complexity of the plot, and the lack of vulgarity. In the process, they failed to recognize that Chaucer used the fabliau because it is the genre whose actors are the members of the middle strata and where, as will be described below, the mercantile, marital and relationship values are clearly exposed.

This chapter argues that we must read the *Shipman's Tale* as a fabliau if we are to understand the complexity of its depiction of the emerging bourgeoisie, the new market economy, and the way in which the roles of husbands and wives were evolving and moving towards more equal relationships based on consent. For this tale offers the emerging middle group in late fourteenth-century English society—whose members are both characters in and the audience for the *Canterbury Tales*—the possibility to think of marriage as a partnership. Whereas the traditional organization of society had always been represented in the romances and the lais that portrayed the world of the aristocracy, as the new market economy was developing and marriage was redefined by the Church in twelfth century France, the genre of the fabliau, appeared and described the concerns and anxieties. Although by the time Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, the popularity of the fabliaux had passed, it was still the perfect literary form for Chaucer to use to describe the emerging middle group in fourteenth century England whose concerns were similar to their French predecessors.

With the expansion of cities and towns and with money becoming the preferred means of exchange, a new class of people involved in all the activities needed to support the new market economy emerged. The organization of the cities allowed for this middle group --variously referred to by scholars as "the middle strata," the "middling group," and the "burgeiserie"--to get involved in political affairs. In addition, money afforded them the possibility to join the ranks of the aristocracy whether by buying land or by making rich marriages. A different kind of

community was created, one not completely based on servitude and vassalage, but rather on a web of professional and personal relationships. This new structure, combined with the understanding of marriage as an indissoluble partnership based on individual consent, offered the emerging middle group possibilities to define their own values and behaviors. Honor, still associated with reputation, is no longer the domain of the aristocracy but rather than expressed in battles is now represented by a good wife and good household.

While the French fabliaux try to destabilize the hierarchy of power within marriage, men and women's behaviors remain assigned to specific gender roles. Even in successful relationships, in the fabliaux, men and women's domains remained separate. What the *Shipman's Tale* accomplishes is to break gender role specialization by showing a woman stepping out of her role as a wife and entering her husband's world. When the merchant's wife takes control over her finances, she shows that she understands commerce. When they both agree that she will pay her debt in sex, we understand that marriage is an exchange based on the same principles as a trade with the satisfaction of all parties as its ultimate goal. As a microcosm of society,the *Shipman's Tale* proposes a more equal partnership where women are equal participants in their husbands' affairs.

Chaucer and the "middle-strata" in The *Canterbury Tales*

Sylvia Thrupp coined the term *middle-strata* to describe a large group of people, representatives of the emerging market economy and mercantile class, that did not fit the traditional three-estate division of society " those who fight - those who pray - those who toil." To show that this group is not formed yet, Paul Strohm refers to it as the *middle-group*, Glenn Burger as the *middling group* and Felicity Riddy as the *burgeiserie* (20) to avoid the word *bourgeoisie*, which, to modern readers, clearly defines the middle class that does not exist yet in

the *Canterbury Tales*. As Paul Strohm described in *Social Chaucer*, the fourteenth century marked the transformation of the hierarchical system of vassalage into a different type of social organization that bound people together with contracts and money and for definite periods of time. Strohm notes that, "vertical ties of domination and subordination – while by no means wholly superseded – were everywhere set in competition with lateral ties among people in similar social situations" (1). Both money and marriage represent the "lateral " ties and serve to anchor the values of the new "middle strata" described in the *Canterbury Tales*.

As Patricia Eberle remarks, Chaucer's own professional situation and life reflect the changes in the organization of society as nobles become involved in traditionally non-noble occupations such as trade, and non-nobles were occupying important positions in city governments (164). Chaucer was born into a family of wealthy merchants around 1340 and died in 1400. He had a varied professional life, occupying many administrative positions in the service of the king, such as controller of export tax and customs in the port of London, clerk of the king's work, and justice of the peace in Kent, and he was also elected to Parliament. For Strohm, Chaucer's social status as an esquire put him in the category closer to the aristocracy, but his finances and his lack of land left him with the non-gentils. Chaucer's situation was not unique; he and others like him were becoming a social group of their own, the "middle strata" that is portrayed in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer's divides his pilgrims between gentils and churls but as Paul Strohm and Carl Lindahl argue, the divisions are more complicated. In *Social Chaucer*, Paul Strohm shows that there are three pilgrims, the Knight – the Parson – and the Plowman, who clearly represent the traditional three estates of feudal society. However, they do not provide an accurate or proportional representation of the society since only one knight represents the highest category

and only the plowman represents 90-95 percent of the population. The rest of the pilgrims are associated with a middle group. For Carl Lindahl in *Earnest Games*, the gentils and the churls both belong to a "middle class" that was becoming more important especially in cities. Apart from the knight that Lindahl puts in the lesser nobility and the plowman whom he places among the servants, he divides the middle strata into the upper middle class, which included the clerical officials, and the lower middle class, which included the rural elite (29-30). Based on the assumption that the narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* is Chaucer the poet, Lindahl puts him in the upper middle class along with the Sergeant of Law, the Merchant, the Host, the Franklin, the guildsmen, and possibly the Shipman (22).

While Lindahl draws on the records of parish guilds to show that such an eclectic assembly belonged to the same associations and that a pilgrimage could have also brought them together, Strohm thinks that the diversity of the pilgrims and their tales also serves Chaucer's literary project of presenting to an audience composed of mixed social classes a collection of tales told by representatives and about characters belonging to those same mixed social classes with which they would identify (70-1). According to Strohm, Chaucer's real audience, like Chaucer himself, would have been mainly gentils and esquires, rather than non-gentils (65-68). For Eberle, the constant references to commerce show Chaucer's intention to also address an audience familiar with the world of commerce (169). Starting in the *General Prologue*, Eberle argues that the best representative of the "commercial outlook" is the host Harry Bailly. Not only does the pilgrimage start and end at his tavern where the pilgrims are spending money, his constant reminder of time passing and his ability to assess people's commercial worth reflect some of the values of the mercantile class (169). However, the tale that represents the concerns

of the mercantile class the best is The *Shipman's Tale* as the merchant tries to control his wealth and his reputation.

The *Shipman's Tale* and the Mercantile Class

As seen in Chapter Three, Aquinas agreed that merchants, representatives of the emerging mercantile class, served the common good because they provided people with goods they would not have gotten otherwise. In the thirteenth century, Albert Magnus had argued that since merchants transport goods that people would otherwise not be able to access and often take risks in the process, they should be compensated for taking those risks. The issue at stake for both Aquinas and Albert Magnus is the extent to which merchants can be compensated before that compensation is considered usury. While canon lawyers provided exceptions so some business dealings would not be considered usury, merchants continued to devise ways to hide aspects of their transactions that might have been considered "usury" by the Church.

According to Sylvia Thrupp, at the end of the fourteenth century, the category "merchant" included both the merchant-bankers and the merchant-craftsmen. The merchant in the *Shipman's Tale* appears to be of the first category as there is no indication of him being a craftsman. Apart from Herman who considers the merchant a "wheeler-dealer" because he makes quick money by borrowing to repay a debt (320) and Fulton thinks that a merchant saying that "hir moneie is hir plogh (288) and comparing himself to a ploughman to indicate his usefulness for the common good just points out the irony of his trade in that it does not produce anything but more money (320). But, most scholars agree that the merchant does what a merchant is expected to do. Cahn (1980) argues that the merchant in the*Shipman's Tale* is not a usurer, but a wealthy merchant who had to borrow money (118). Parker also thinks that the fact that the*Shipman's Tale* merchant was in debt is just part of the practice of being a merchant, along with selling goods

and making a profit (98). Munro argues that the fact that the merchant is described as "wys" "noble" "a goode man" that he has good credit, goes to mass before dinner, and tells his wife to be careful when he is gone attest to the good reputation he is trying to maintain.

While the merchant may serve the common good by selling wares that people need, Carolyn Collette in *Performing Polity*, demonstrates that good marriages and especially good wives were seen as important contributors to the stability and the well-being of society. Philippe de Mézières' *Livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage* and Christine de Pizan *Cité des Dames* develop examples of women who use agency to serve the common good through their behavior as wives, and others who do not. Good wives protect their husband's reputation and the common good (14-15). In addition, as Antoine Destemberg shows while discussing universities in medieval France in the thirteenth century, scholastic writers of that era discussed honor and its association with appearance. Aquinas said that "honor is an attestation to someone's excellence, as stated above (Question [103], Articles [1],2). "But one attests only to what one knows; and the internal choice is not made known save by external actions. Wherefore external conduct has the character of honesty, in so far as it reflects internal rectitude. For this reason, honesty [honestas] consists radically in the internal choice, but its expression lies in the external conduct."Destemberg adds that « on ne peut que contaster que dans la pensee Thomiste, mais également dans celle d'une large part de la société médiévale, une des clefs de voute de ce sytème de l'honneur repose sur la nécessaire adéquation entre l'être et le paraître (134) [we can but notice that in Aquinas' thinking but also in the thinking of a large segment of medieval society, one of the keystones of this understanding of honor rests on the necessary adequation of being and seeming.]This is reflected in the sumptuary laws and books of conduct that served to elaborate a bourgeois identity whose external signs reflect its internal values.

Sumptuary laws were promulgated by the English Parliament throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They were meant to control excess and vanity with regard to theconsumption of food and clothing. Claire Sponsler remarks, using the word "sumptuary" to discuss these laws reveals the desire to control vanity and excess even though, in reality the laws, were an attempt to maintain a distinction among people. As social mobility and money allowed people to buy more expensive items, the lines between classes were blurring so the nobility felt the need to reinforce status through external appearance (272). The 1363 English sumptuary laws state that "merchants, citizens, and burgesses, artificers, people of handicraft, as well within the city of London, as elsewhere, which have clearly goods and chattels, to the value of £500, and their wives and children, may take and wear in the manner as the esquires and gentlemen which have land to rent to the value of £100 by year;" (Amtower, Vanhoutte 94). What the law reflects is that status is no longer given by birth but can be acquired by money.

Written by an old Parisian bourgeois for his wife, the book of conduct titled *Le Mesnagier de Paris* (1393) is a manual describing the role and duties of a bourgeois wife. The husband states that he writes to help his wife so after his death, when she remarries, she will know what to do. Through the different "articles" the young wife is taught how to manage the household and be responsible for the well being of her husband. If she does not obey, he will "correct" her. In *Le Mesnagier*, the bourgeois keeps his wife in her role as the guardian of their house; she is not at all involved in his work. However, we know that married women were also involved in business to earn additional income. In her study on women's brewsters, Judith Bennett shows that married women usually made ale at home but mostly used their husbands' capital (41) thus limiting their independence. In marked contrast, the wife in the *Shipman's Tale* breaks all the main rules of behavior as she acts outside her domain and such prescribed roles of

a wives in marriages, but, as described below, gets away with it because of her understanding of the world of commerce. As will be argued below, in choosing to write a fabliau, Chaucer allows the wife to escape punishment, and teach her husband a lesson about forgiveness and the importance of fair and equal exchanges in relationships.

The *Shipman's Tale*: Money, Sex, and Exchange

As a microcosm of the new market economy, the *Shipman's Tale* applies the lessons of the market economy to the exchanges that characterize marital relations. Everybody trades and everything including sex is a commodity that can be traded. Lee Paterson in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, deplores the fact that the "natural" relations between men and women are seen as commodities, but argues that the *Shipman's Tale* is the only tale that successfully negotiates marital relations in bourgeois terms following the practice of the bourgeois world (356). Albert Silverman characterizes the tale as "sordid" especially the end where the merchant, who has been so careful with his money, ends up with a marriage based on commerce and where his wife, like a prostitute, repays him with sex (335-336). On the other hand, for William Rogers and Paul Dower, the use of money simply reflects the new market economy; they do not see any moral judgment being made. For them, the attention paid to money is a reflection of our own attitude toward money rather than a concern in the tale itself. Sex as a commodity to be exchanged is a feature of many of the French fabliaux such as *Le sohait desvé, le prestre et Alison, la bourse pleine de sens,* and *le bouchier d'Abevlle*. Choosing this genre makes it possible for Chaucer to explore these issues in the *Shipman's Tale*.

Although Larry Benson and other scholars have also seen similarities between the *Shipman's Tale* and *Le bouchier d'Abeville,* the base plots of these stories are quite different. In *Le bouchier d'Abeville*, David, the butcher, gives a fleece to the priest's concubine, then the

maid, and finally ends up selling the fleece to the priest. In both the first story of the eighth day in *The Decameron* and *Le bouchier*, the gift is taken back; but in the *Shipman's Tale*, there is no gift to give back. The monk borrows the money from the merchant to lend it to the wife and then tells the merchant he gave it back to his wife. While the wife tells her husband she thought it was a gift, she knows that she got the money because she agreed to spend a night with the monk. The exchange between the wife and the monk and the merchant is not a gift; rather it is a business transaction that serves to show how the new market economy influences private relationships.

The merchant, his wife, and the monk are all sellers and consumers but their business relationships end up reshaping their personal relationships. The merchant is selling goods and his wife is both selling services and consuming goods, but the monk is only a consumer (Parker 104). However, the monk is also a trader and possibly the one engaging in usury. He borrows money from the merchant not for his own purpose but to "sell" it to the wife. His commission is a night with the wife. The monk's action represents the ambiguity of usury. Since he does not do anything with the money apart from transporting and transferring it, one could say that his profit is usury. On the other hand, one can argue that like any merchant, he deserves to be paid for his work as an intermediary in the same way that the merchant made a profit when he borrowed money in Paris to repay someone in Bruges. The wife is the only one who hasn't gained anything from her transaction. She borrowed the amount she needed without making any profit. But could she have made a profit? Was a hundred francs more than she needed for the clothes she needed to buy or already too much to pay for a night with her?

Based on what the monk had told the merchant what he wanted to do with the money, Peter Beidler, for example, thinks that the cost of the night was equivalent to five thousand

dollars in 1996[19]. He considers this amount enough to accuse the wife of pride for wanting to spend that much money on clothing, to determine that the merchant is a generous man as he easily forgives her even though it was a large amount, and to make sure the story works since it would change the tone if the wife was selling her favors for very little money. But as Dale Buckmaster remarked, sex is not necessarily worth one hundred francs because that amount only represents what the monk decides he wants in exchange for the money. The hundred francs is what the wife needs, not what the monk is ready to pay for sex (122).

From the point of view of exchange, what matters is the outcome of the trade. Since both the monk and the wife are satisfied with the exchange, the exchange is understood to be fair. In this case, therefore, the price attached to sex is not really relevant; the idea of the "just price" and the value of a night with the merchant's wife are not applicable to this transaction because it is a one-time deal and will not be used as a reference in another exchange. In any case, the husband must have thought it a fair price since he agreed to repayment in bed. With the concept of marital debt, the husband should not have to pay anything for conjugal rights, so the fact that he agrees shows his generosity as well as his understanding that the money is lost.

Maintaining a good relationship with his wife is worth more than one hundred francs. By not making an issue of it, the merchant is investing in the idea that his wife will be more conservative with his money in the future. The merchant's forgiving attitude towards his wife is the result of his good business sense. He follows the advice given by the husband in *Le Mesnagier de Paris*, when he recommends that husbands should forgive and cover their wives' mistakes to protect the reputation of the couple -even though, by sharing her husband's secrets with the monk, his wife did not protect her husband (317-21). So the merchant agrees to cover

[19]$7,309 in 2013.

her debt even if according to the law he was not required to do so. According to the law, a husband is responsible for what his wife borrows if a husband and wife are on good terms, and she was “cohabiting” with him at the time of the loan. But the husband would not be responsible for the loan incurred by his wife if she did it deceitfully and/or by saying that she is not on good terms with her husband (Braswell 299).

Looking at women's participation in courts in Northern England, Emma Hawkes shows that although women were not present in the courts, their legal choices reflected knowledge of the law (160). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the wife knew enough about the law to protect her husband from being responsible for her loan. By lying to the priest about the state of her relationship with her husband, she takes full responsibility for her loan and thus discharges her husband from having to repay her debt. Reading the *Shipman’s Tale* this way shows that the wife knows as much as her husband about business and that she can be more than a “business assistant” in running the household (Hume 152). Like several of the other *Canterbury Tales*, the *Shipman’s Tale* portrays an evolving understanding of marriage and advocates for more equality between husbands and wives.

The *Canterbury Tales* and Marriage

While the *Shipman’s Tale* was not included in George Lyman Kittredge’s "marriage group," possibly because it is a fabliau, like the other tales in the “marriage group,” it also explores what "soveraynetee" means in the new mercantile economy. The idea of a “marriage group” was developed in 1912. Kittredge argued we should look at the tales not as distinct and isolated stories but as part of a ”Human Comedy” and pay attention to the relationships between the pilgrims and their tales and the overarching organization of the *Canterbury Tales*. Kittredge's discussion on marriage includes four of the seven tales from Fragments III, IV, and V. The first

tale of the group is the *Wife of Bath,* which argues for women's sovereignty and describes how difficult it was for her husband to agree to it. The second is the *Clerk's Tale*, which tells the story of Griselda that shows no sovereignty, but rather depicts complete obedience to the husband on the part of the wife. The third is the *Merchant's Tale*, which shows the conflicts created when old men marry young women. Finally after the franklin interrupts the squire, he presents the ideal marriage in the story of Dorigen and Arveragus and show that "sovereignty" is the love and respect that should be the basis for a successful marriage. According to Mark Allen and John Fisher's summary of the scholarship, the discussion of Kittredge's marriage group ended in the late nineteen seventies. Some critics agreed with his idea (Murtaugh – Kaske-McCarthy) while others continued to question whether or not the marriage group really tells us Chaucer's opinion on marriage (Hodge) and whether other tales should be included in the group (Silvia). Their analyses have not ended the discussion of marriage especially since scholars such as Lee Patterson, Paul Strohm, and Glenn Burger have been exploring the connections between the middle strata and the new discourse of marriage.

As explained in the Introduction, in the thirteenth century, marriage came to be defined as a partnership based on mutual consent in clerical and lay discourses. Lateran IV made marriage a union based on consent and indissoluble to emphasize its sacramental nature. Sermons to the laity also encouraged husbands and wives to respect each other. As Lee Patterson, points out many of the books of conduct beside *Le Mesnagier,* came from the bourgeois milieu. This leads him to argue that the *Canterbury Tales* is an example of late medieval bourgeois literature that exposes the contradiction between the idea of marriage based on mutual consent and partnership and the traditional superiority of the patriarchal ideology that placed husbands in charge of their wives (347). In *Chaucer's Queer Nation*, Glenn Burger argues that with the influence of

feminist and gender studies, it is problematic to see Chaucer's discussion on marriage the way Kittredge conceived it as a progression ending with the "ideal" marriage in the *Franklin's Tale*. With conjugality in the process of being developed, the marriage described in the *Franklin's Tale* cannot be seen as the "ideal" form of marriage.

Even though, with the help of the Church, ultimately, the ideal marriage portrayed in the *Franklin's Tale* will become the dominant discourse of marriage, it is still not portrayed that way throughout the *Canterbury Tales* because identities such as man/woman, husband/wife, lay/clergy, gentil/churl are reinterpreted and renegotiated at that moment in time (Burger 40-5). Examining the *Wife of Bath* and the *Franklin's Tale*, Burger demonstrates that "conjugality - as it is articulated in late medieval redefinitions of the state of marriage - empowers many of marriage's lay participants as equal to or better than previously superior clerical and aristocratic elites"(58). Looking at marriage as a sacrament based on consent and partnership, Emma Lipton uses the *Franklin's Tale* to demonstrate that marriage not only re-imagines the relationships between husbands and wives but also serves to reformulate relationships in the society in general, moving from a hierarchical society in which subjects obey kings to a more horizontal view of community as city and local governments are created (17). For the middle strata, being a good husband or a good wife comes to mean a lot more than a commitment to another individual. It includes showing the rest of society what a good marriage is.

As Burger explains, the knight presents a traditional view of marriage with masculinity and femininity defined within the confines of the gendered body of men and women, and the *Miller's Tale*, which opens up these categories, also ends up forcefully reinscribing men and women in their supposed sexuality at the end of the tale (23-24). Like many romances, the *Knight's Tale* ends with Palamon's and Emily's wedding although there is no direct consent,

"And thus with alle blisse and melodye/Hath Palamon ywedded Emelye./And God, that al this wyde world hath wrogh,/ Send hym his love, that hath it deere aboght;" (3097-3100).

The description of their union does not give Emily much agency even if the union should be based on consent. Yet, at the end all the "gentils" agree the knight's tale was a "noble storie" as if to condone the order that the Tale has established. And before the monk can answer the invitation to tell the next tale, the miller proposes to also tell a 'noble tale' "Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf,/How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe." (3142-43) First the host tries to stop him, then the reeve who wants to avoid "to bryngen wyves in swich fame." The miller agrees that "ther been ful goode wyves many oon,/And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon bade."(3154-55) and proceeds to tell his story. The miller's comment at the beginning is that the carpenter should have known better than to marry a younger wife implying that her wanting a younger lover is to be expected. At the end of the story, Nicholas the lover, is branded to "seal" his body as if to seal his sexuality; John the husband becomes aware of the reality of his inability to control his wife while Alison's body remains uncontrolled (Burger 24). The reeve's attempt to contain scandal failed as the failed marriage is exposed.

On the other hand, the *Reeve's Tale* offers a marriage that supports the idea of partnership if not of consent. Although the miller and his wife are well matched, it is clear that the wife had nothing to do with agreement and that the marriage is the result of a deal between the father and Simpkin: With hire he yaf fyl many a panne of bras,/For that Symkyn sholde in his blood allye."(3944-45)Although they are portrayed as conceited and full of themselves for no reason especially since the wife is the daughter of a parson who should have been celibate, they are partners in crime and together steal the grain from the two clerks. Compared to *Gombert* and *Le Meunier*, when at the end, the wife beats her husband on the head by mistake, there is no name-

calling or blame since both conspired to cheat the clerks. Yet, the reeve only blames the miller for being a crook, not his wife thus refusing her agency in the theft and showing the limitation of partnership. In addition, mentioning that the wife enjoyed her night with the clerk emphasizes the inadequacy of her husband.

In the *Reeve's Tale*, the scandal is not on the wife since she did not know the man in her bed was not her husband, but on the reputation of the miller. In contrast, *t*he *Shipman's Tale* shows that thinking of marital relations as trade can protect one's reputation and foster equality. The merchant readily agrees to forgive his wife because he needs her to be in charge of the household when he is away to maintain his wealth. The wife shows that she understands the rules of trade and therefore can be her husband's equal.

The *Shipman's Tale*: Equity versus Equality

According to Daniel J. Canary and Laura Stafford, two communication scholars who study interpersonal relationships, "Equitable relationships exist when the ratio of rewards to costs is equal for both partners" (230). Canary and Stafford explain that when people are in an equitable relationship, they are more willing to make efforts to maintain the relationship (230). There are five behaviors that measure what is called "relationship maintenance": positivity, assurances, network, tasks, and openness:

> Positivity involves interacting with the partner in a cheerful, optimistic, and uncritical manner. Openness refers to directly discussing the nature of the relationship and disclosing one's desires for the relationship. Assurances include messages that stress one's continuation in the relationship. Use of social networks includes interacting with or relying on common affiliations and relatives. Finally, sharing tasks are attempts to maintain the relationship by performing one's responsibilities, such as household chores (Stafford 243-244).

In the French fabliaux analyzed in Chapters Two and Three, we can see demonstrations of equity and the different aspects of relationship maintenance when the stories end with both partners

satisfied rather than with a winner and a loser.

Le sohait desvé exemplifies the concept of openness. The wife is able to discuss her dreams and her desires to her husband "Tot maintenant, ce sachiez bien,/Commança la dame son conte,/Et mout volantiers li reconte/ - O volantiers o a enviz – Conmant ele sonja les viz," 'right away you should know/she started her tale/and told voluntarily – voluntarily or despite herself – how she dreamt of the penises" (162-164). "Volantiers" indicates that the wife can speak freely to her husband. *Le sacristain* provides a good example of sharing tasks: acting as a team, the husband and wife plan to put an end to the priest's advances. In these fabliaux, the couples manage to solve conflicts and restore peace in their marriage. The marriages are natural relations based on reciprocity, in which husbands and wives each fulfill their duties (Farber 69).[20] Husbands provide for the household and women take care of the home. In that model, satisfaction is achieved when each spouse fulfills his or her assigned role to a degree that is acceptable to the other. These marriages show equity, but not equality because what the women do is what is expected of women and because they do not have as much control as men especially when it comes to money.

In *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, when the husband asks his wife why she loves him, she answers because he gives her food and clothes "Vos me chacez bien et vestez/Et donez assez a mengier," (NRCF 4-38-9). In *La bourse pleine de sens*, the wife realizes her husband is spending money on his mistress. Since she cannot take his money away, she manages to make him understand that the mistress is not good for him. "N'avez honte? – Dame de quoi?? –De quoi? Si vos I prenez garde,/Vos meintenez une musarde, Qui vos ocit et vos afole;/Et tot il

[20] Farber rejects the idea that "natural relations" between husbands and wives are becoming "commodified" in this new world. Instead, she argues that the tale shows that the world is already commodified once "we admit merchants and a mercantile ethos in it."

mondes en parole,/Car tote la vile le set." (NRCF 2-24-29). The wife is concerned about their reputation as a couple and the fact that the lover only cares about him for his money. In *Le sacristain*, even if the husband has lost all his money, he is not ready to let his wife have sex with the priest for money. The women in these fabliaux lack financial control, but they seek to be treated fairly indicating the importance of equity in relationships.

Although the French fabliau, *La bourse pleine de sens* is not an analogue to the *Shipman's Tale*, because the plots are very different, the exchanges that take place in both tales do result in the spouses' satisfaction and illustrate the theory of relationship maintenance and equity, but also allude to a possibility for equality. Relationship equity helps the couples work together to maintain their reputation and avoid scandal. In La bourse pleine de sens, the wife tells her husband to stop seeing his mistress because it is not good for him and detrimental to their reputation, but here refuses to listen to her. When he asks her what she wants from his next trip, she asks for a "bourse pleine de sens"/a purse full of sense.

After he has finished his business, he asks around to find out where he can get what his wife requested. A merchant tells him to pretend he has lost everything to see how his mistress and his wife react. His mistress throws him out, but his wife takes him in. When he admits tricking her, she tells him how happy she is that he has found 'la bourse pleine de sens.'

The beginning of *La bourse pleine de sens* and the *Shipman's Tale* is similar. In *La bourse pleine de sens*: "un riche bourjois,/Qui mout fut sages et courtois./Cil bourjois estoit marchaans/Et de feiresnout bien chaans,/Qu'iliert sages et bien apris./Et siot fame de haut pris,/La plus bele que l'en seüst/El païs, ne quel'en peüst/ Trover, tant seüst l'encherchier'" 'a rich bourgeois, wise and cortous/this bourgeois was a merchant/lucky at the fairs/who was wise and educated/ he had a high-valued wife/the most beautiful one could find in the country and as

far as one could seek (NRCF 2 -3-11). In the *Shipman's Tale*, attention is drawn to the fact that it takes money to keep a wife like the merchant's but the couple gets compliments for her behavior. "A marchant whilom dwelled at Seint-Denys,/That riche was, for which men helde him wys./A wyf he had of excellent beautee;/And compaignable and revelous was she,/ Which is a thing that causeth more dispence/Than worth is al the chiere and reverence/That men hem doon at festes and daunces (1-7). In both stories, the husbands are merchants who have married beautiful wives of whom they take good care.

Both couples demonstrate behaviors that portray the principles of equity defined by Canary and Stafford. In the*Shipman's Tale*, the merchant and his wife address each other courteously. She calls him "sire" (215) and he calls her "my deerewyf" (241). In *La bourse*, she calls him "biau sire" and he calls her 'bele dame,' in both cases, these expressions show "positivity." "Openness" is shown when, at the end of the *Shipman's Tale*, the merchant expresses politely his dissatisfaction with his wife's actions: "I am a litelwrooth/With yow, my wyf, although it be me looth." (384). Similarly, at the beginning of *La bourse*, the wife tells her husband about his mistress, 'Vos meintenez une musarde, Qui vos ocit et vos afole; Et tot li mondes en parrole,/Car tote la vile le set." When the merchant in the *Shipman's Tale* returns home, "His wyffulredymettehym ate gate,/As she was wont of oold usage algate,/And all that nyght in myrthe they bisette" (373-5). These statements show a degree of continuous intimacy that represents Canary and Stafford's concept of "assurances."

In *La bourse pleine de sens*, while the wife knows her husband is having an affair, she still treats him with respect and care, which shows both "positivity" and "assurances." "Sire, fet el, or sociés fis: S'il i avoit dis mile livres,/S'en serez vos par tens delivers. Aiez bon cuer et bon corage,/Et vendez tot mon heritage,/"sir, she said as she saw him worried:/ if there were ten

thousand pounds/you would be able to repay/Have heart and courage/And sell all my inheritance' (285-88). The wife welcomes and encourages her husband even when he comes home having lost everything.

The shared friendship between the merchant and the monk in the *Shipman's Tale* shows "common affiliation" even if the monk is presented as being closer to the husband than the wife. In terms of the sharing of tasks, there is a clear delineation between the wife's role and the merchant's. Before the merchant goes away, he gives his wife instructions, "For which, my deere wyf/I thee biseke,/As be to every wight buxom and meke,/And for to kepe our good be curious,/ And honestly governe wel oure hous. Thou hast ynough, in every maner wise, /That to a thrifty houshold may suffise." (231-246). Also indicative of "common affiliation," in *La bourse pleine de sens*, the merchant asks a grocer, then a mercer where he can find a 'purse full of sense.' In the end it is a merchant from Galicia who understands what he wants and tells him to pretend he has lost everything to see the reaction of both his mistress and his wife.

Much like in *Le Mesnagier de Paris* mentioned earlier, the concept of "task sharing" is clear in both tales. The task of both merchants is to make a living by traveling to buy and sell goods. The husband in the *Shipman's Tale* expects his wife to be generous, to entertain well, and to be careful with money in order to preserve his status. The merchant concludes: "Thee lakketh noon array ne no vitaille;/Of silver in thy purs shaltow nat faille." (247-80). Here is clearly expressed the fact that he controls the money and decides how much his wife needs to spend. Even more so than in the French fabliaux, the role of the wife is to make sure that her husband and the household's reputation remain intact. This is reinforced by the fact that she is left out of the counting house and that the merchant discusses his business with the monk, not with her. Like the wife in *Le Mesnagier*, her role is limited to traditional concepts of gender role. In *La*

bourse, the wife waits at home until her husband's return. Unlike his mistress who got rid of him, when the merchant arrives home, his wife dresses him, feeds him, and comforts him as a good wife should. However, in both stories, it is possible to see how the wives cross the boundaries assigned to their gender to create more equality in the relationship.

Lucia Gilbert, Janice Steil, Clyde Hendrick, scholars in close relationship theory, have defined equality in relationships in two dimensions: "power: the extent to which the husband is more dominant than the wife, and role specialization: the extent to which responsibilities are assigned on the basis of gender" (Steil 44). They have concluded that marriage equality is impossible to achieve within gendered roles (Hendrick; Steil). In practice, traditional gender roles prevent women from accessing "universally valued resources such as job prestige and income" (Hendrick). As long as women are responsible for most of the housework and the men control the finances, it is difficult to measure equality because the work women do is not measured in terms of money. But, as Roberta Krueger points out, the husband in *Le Menasgier* tries really hard to teach his wife how to be a good housewife because he knows that if she does not do what needs to be done at home especially with regard to cleanliness, his life will be miserable and uncomfortable(26).

Although life in *La bourse pleine de sens* seems to be tied to the home, it does not preclude the wife from exercising "power". In this fabliau, while the wife is a good wife, she is also the one who has the money; since the wife has the money, she does not need to have to gain prestige outside the home. She tells her husband to sell everything she owns: "vignes, mesons, et prez et terres,/Betes, muebles, et cles et serres, 'vineyards, houses, fields and lands/animals, wardrobe, jewelry'" to pay his debts. The wife secures the marriage by teaching her husband solidarity. In addition, she is the one who needs to control her husband. While sex is never

directly mentioned, the word 'bourse' also means testicles so she is indirectly asking him to contain and bring his sexual desires home. Written in the thirteenth century, *La bourse pleine de sens* already represents the kind of marriage where the traditional distribution of power and role specialization is destabilized to create a different more equal and stable relationship fit for the emerging middle group.

In the *Shipman's Tale*, the wife's actions also show that she is trying to gain independence both in relation to "power" and "role specialization." Throughout the tale, the merchant is both a husband and a merchant whereas his wife is simply a wife. Yet, she creates for herself a parallel world where she conducts business the same way her husband does. The merchant keeps his wife out of the counting house to keep her out of his business in the same way that she goes out to the garden to keep him out of her own transactions. While he has locked himself in the counting house, his workspace, she is at work making a deal with the monk in the garden – her workspace.

She has spent money she did not have and must repay it. Therefore, she asks the monk for a loan that she can repay by spending a night with him. She is able to convince the monk by telling him how miserable she is with her husband and since she is beautiful and the monk knows her, he is easily convinced. Following her husband's advice, 'And keepen our estaat in pryvetee,"(232) she only mentions her situation to the monk. But she is not as careful a planner as her husband is. When he says, "And therefore have I greet necessitee/Upon this queynte world t'avyse me,/For evermoore we moote stoned in drede/Of hap and fortune in our chapmanhede." (235-238) She does not anticipate that the monk will betray her. She is happy after she concludes the deal, "And forth she gooth as jolif as a pye" (209). Like the magpie – a smart, vocal bird that steals shiny things to make its nest and is a good mimic (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) – she has

used her beauty and her good standing to persuade the monk to lend her the money; the same way her husband uses his good credit to obtain a loan from his friends. When the merchant is done with his business, "And hoom he gooth, murle as a papejay" (369). Like the parrot, social, smart and vocal, the merchant has successfully completed his business (Cornell Lab of Ornithology). When he meets his wife again, they are happy to be reunited, "And al that nyght in myrhte they bisette;/For he was riche and cleerly out of dette."(376).

While the last sentence stresses his accomplishment, it also describes the status of the wife; she thinks she has repaid her loan too. Finally, the two worlds will meet when the husband tells his wife she should have warned him that the monk had repaid the hundred francs he borrowed from the merchant to her. The wife is quick to retort that she thought the money was a gift to her, and rather than apologize she takes the position of the debtor and tells her husband "Ye han mo slakkere dettours than am I!" This move places her as an equal to her husband. She is now interacting with him like any other business partner. She pledges to pay him, and if she fails, she tells him "I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille" (416). Critics have interpreted the word "taille" meaning 'tally" or "waist." "Score" refers to the way debts would be carved in notches and split between the two parties. "Scoring" on her waist indicates that he could punish her physically.

What is important is that she has no money to repay him, and is probably not going to borrow again after what just happened, so she can only pay him in bed. "Ye shal my joly body have to wedde;/ By God, I wol nat paye yow but abede!" (423-4). When she asks the merchant to forgive her, he accepts because he is savvy enough to know that it is good to forgive a debt or make a deal to protect future investments. The merchant knows he needs to trust his wife when he is away. As for the wife, she has gone beyond her role as a wife and has entered her husband's

world thus breaking the role traditionally assigned to her. Her understanding of commerce and the law allows her to save herself from a tricky situation.

When the merchant and his wife disagree on how much money she needs for herself, she tries to get it herself, thus asserting her ability in commerce the same way her husband does. She can also argue that the money she spent benefits their household the same way his business does. "For by my trouthe, I have on myn array,/And nat on wast, bestowed every deel;/And for I have bestowed it so weel/For youre honour, for Goddes sake, I seye," (418-421). The story shows that she is as able as he is to secure a loan; the ending shows that she knows how to make a deal to her advantage. In the end, the marriage is more equal. Unlike the wives in the French fabliaux who remain controlled by role specialization in their marriages, the wife in the *Shipman's Tale* steps outside her role and is able to gain some control over financial matters. At the end, the merchant forgives her but at the same time orders her to "keep bet thy good, this yeve I thee in charge" (432). Although asking his wife to be less generous seems ironic since it is the quality that has made the merchant's reputation, it shows that the concept of largesse has to remain the husband's prerogative not the wife. It is the merchant's way of regaining some of the power his wife had undermined.

Conclusion

The *Shipman's Tale*, the last fabliau in the *Canterbury Tales*, proposes a more equal type of marriage based on consent and partnership to the emerging middle group. Appearing when a new market economy started to develop in twelfth century France, the genre of the fabliau represents the concerns of an emerging middle group of merchants and craftsmen the same way the romances and lais portray the world of the aristocracy. Although the popularity of the French

fabliau had passed when Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, it remained the most appropriate form to describe the concerns of a similar emerging group in fourteenth century England.

Combining the new discourse on marriage with the new demands of a society moving toward a market economy, the *Shipman's Tale* offers the emerging middle group one possible way to express its own behaviors and values. Money and social mobility made this emerging group visible and more powerful, so as cities developed, the members of the middle group became the main actors in the local governments. This new system of organization based on a more horizontal web of professional and personal interactions started to replace the more vertical system of lord and vassalage. At the same time, marriage redefined as a partnership based on consent and partnership, provided a model for thinking about new models of private relationships.

Although the French fabliaux question the hierarchies in place, women remain bound by gender roles and can only improve their situation as wives. What the *Shipman's Tale* offers is a possibility for the merchant to understand that his wife can be a partner in all his activities, not just in maintaining the household. The merchant's wife shows her husband she understands trading and commerce and while she is not successful, she makes her husband realize that he should count her as a equal partner if he wants to secure their good reputation and their wealth. The ending of the *Shipman's Tale* clearly shows that marriage is like trading, for the ultimate goal of both is the satisfaction of both partners. By rethinking marriage as a partnership in the context of the new market economy, the *Shipman's Tale* provides the emerging middle group a way to anchor its values and behaviors.

Conclusion

After a long period of neglect, the fabliau has finally gained credibility and achieved recognition as a genre central to understanding life and society in the middle ages. The fabliaux are embedded in their cultural time and space, as is the scholarship that examines them. The fact that these short comic tales, written between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, barely interested anybody until the 1920s is a reflection on what scholars thought about the subject matter and literary value of the fabliaux. That marriage in the fabliau was not a focus for the scholarship until the 1980s may be attributed to the fact that marriage was not in question for the male scholars who looked at these texts. Our contemporary concerns about marriage, equality, and other types of partnerships may explain why we are now more receptive to examining how the fabliaux portray marriage. Certainly the emergence of literary theories such as feminism, genre theory and deconstruction, have encouraged us to look at the socio-historical contexts of textual productions in such a way that it is now impossible to ignore that the fabliaux were produced during the renaissance of the twelfth century at the time when the Church finally codified marriage as a Christian practice.

It is in that era that individual consent, indissolubility, and the importance of affection redefined marriage. By depicting situations where these concepts are tested, the fableors explored their effect. The texts that portray married couples describe marriage in different ways. In some, it is a terrible union where one of the spouses always gets the upper-hand as in *Sir Hain et Dame Anieuse* or *La borgoise d'Orliens*, while in others such as *Le sohait desvé*, or Le *pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, the spouses find a way to accommodate each other's needs, and thus create a union that is closer to what the Church envisioned. The fabliaux, however, are not simply promoting the discourse of the Church because their focus is also on sex; fulfilling a

spouse's needs often equates to taking care of his/her sexual desires. The traditional image of women as being insatiable is present in the texts to highlight the inadequacies of the husbands and the reasons why the wives often take lovers. Recognizing that there is no way out, since marriage is now indissoluble, the fabliaux women never get punished for trying to get what they need.

The fabliaux are not the only texts where marriage is explored. Marie de France's *Lais* and Chrétien de Troyes' romances, set in the world of the aristocracy and the feudal system, also discuss marriage. As in the fabliaux, in the *Lais*, women are offered ways out of their miserable unions since indissolubility has made annulments almost impossible once there is consummation. Going against the Church's ban against clandestine marriages, Frêne agrees to live with Gurun without getting officially married. Even if the lais focus on love and the fabliaux on sex, these stories show the characters' desire for satisfying marriages. Similarly, in the romance *ErecetEnide*, the charactersmanage to combine love and marriage in a partnership based on consent, and the story portrays an attempt at some level of marital equality. By the end of the story, Erec and Enide have managed to go beyond their prescribed roles as husband and wife and have created a partnership on which to model their roles as king and queen. Since the values of the aristocracy are already established, the lais and romances show the struggle to accommodate the new Church discourse, whereas the fabliaux depict the struggle not only with the Church's new discourse, but also with the emergence of a new social class, the bourgeoisie, and the resulting need to create identity, based on a new understanding of marriage as partnership.

The development of a new market economy in the twelfth century and the concurrent emergence of the bourgeoisie allowed the fableors to conceive of marital relationships as exchanges on par with trade. Rather than copy the behaviors of the aristocracy, marriage

understood as a partnership based on fair exchange set this class apart by replicating the values of commerce at the personal level. For the group of rich peasants, merchants and craftsmen that emerged as a consequence of the expansion of cities and the development of the market economy, a good marriage is a way to build a good reputation and create an identity and value system different from that of the aristocrats. Just as the end result of trading is the satisfaction of both partners, in the fabliaux that portray good marriages, husbands and wives achieve equity in their relationship, but, because their tasks are bound by prescribed gender roles, they do not necessarily achieve equality. What the Shipman's Tale in particular adds to the discussion of marriage, and the 'sovereignty' raised by the Wife of Bath, is the notion that spouses deserve equality not just equity. When the merchant wanted his wife to take care of the home while he is away, through her own commercial transaction with the priest, she demonstrates that she is capable of much more since she understands the world of commerce. As the end of the Shipman's Tale shows, the wife quickly agrees to pay her husband back and he quickly accepts her deal because it is better for him in the long run.

Looking closely at relationships between men and women using concepts and methods of analysis such as conflict theory, discourse analysis, equity theory, and nonverbal communication offers different ways of studying medieval relationships. For example, in *Medieval Romances and the Construction of Heterosexuality,* analyzing the speech exchanges between knights and ladies, Louise Sylvester, shows how women were expected to first refuse the advances of a man before accepting. Utilizing discourse analysis opens many possibilities for further research on the fabliaux especially since these texts are part of an oral tradition at a time when the spoken word was more trusted than the written word. Even if a literary form conveys ideas that contribute to the formation of an identity, we cannot really tell how the fabliaux were transmitted

and received by their audience. The number of manuscripts can attest to the extent of the production of the texts, but the fact that we know the stories were spoken by jongleurs, whether performing in castles or later in market places, only tells us that the audience was diverse. Jongleurs were mostly men so our interpretation of the texts rests somewhat on the idea of a male narrator. But what if the fabliaux were also told by women?[21]

In *La Chamelle*, Nora Aceval compiles erotic tales currently told by women in the Maghreb, and compares them to the French fabliaux with regard to both their content and their format. She identifies some identical stories but argues that these tales were probably circulating before the fabliaux. Aceval suggests that studies should be done to trace the dissemination of these tales. Employing discourse analysis to study the impact of the female narrators on the oral interpretation of these tales could open new paths for the research and interpretation of the French fabliaux. While these fabliau-like stories are still told today in the Maghreb, there is no report that the fabliaux are still circulating orally in France, reinforcing the theory that the appearance of the fabliaux is linked to the socio-historical context of twelfth century France. As discussed throughout this dissertation, the fabliaux offered a space to rethink the organization of society and to renegotiate marital relationships following the changes brought about by economic development, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the creation of the Christian marriage. Once these changes were complete, the fabliau had run its course but the discovery of twenty-first century women telling these tales in the Maghreb points not only to the power and importance of these tales, but also, as noted above, avenues for further comparative studies.

[21] Faral mentions "jongleresses" and William Chester Jordan in his review of William J. Courtenay's *Parisian Scholars in the Early Fourteenth Century: A Social Portrait.* New York: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1999 tells the story of Symonette, a jongleuse, who claimed to have been raped by a student at the Université de Paris. *Project Muse*. Web 1 Apr. 2013.

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