

ENGENDERING VICE: THE EXEMPLARITY OF THE OLD FRENCH FABLIAUX

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The medieval image-world was, like medieval life itself, rigidly structured and hierarchical. For this reason, resisting, ridiculing, overturning and inverting it was not only possible, it was limitless. Every model had its opposite, inverse model.

Michel Camille *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* p.26

Overview

During the nineteenth century, the fabliaux were rediscovered at a time when Romance scholars, particularly German, advocated categorizing different types of literature into a coherent system and rigid taxonomy. They created a hierarchy of genres shaped according to criteria related to language, register and formulae, as well as other structural and thematic considerations. Their rewriting of medieval literature also resulted in an altered perspective of the period. As the canon coalesced, certain texts did not fit into the assigned scheme, especially not the fabliaux. The fabliaux became a genre by default: if a short narrative was deemed somehow anti-courtly or immoral, it became a fabliau, and the genre is not alone in being over-determined by this initial redefinition. Having designated the fabliaux as anti-courtly and using it as a catch-all for many disparate types of texts, scholars have had to cope with the question of audience, a major problem as we continue to try and accommodate these texts.

Early scholars equated vulgarity with the lower classes and the urban bourgeoisie, whereas refinement was associated with the aristocracy, and this led

to assumptions about for whom these texts were written and how they were received. We now rightly believe that audiences for, and authors of, these texts were as familiar with romance, lyric and exempla as well as fabliaux.¹ This, however, problematizes the previously accepted view that these were marginal tales.² Because our view of the interface between and definition of fabliaux and courtly literature has evolved and changed, we now think that the fabliaux audience was rather broad, and we include these tales in the canon instead of exiling them.

We still need to consider looking at the fabliaux as a genre in order to determine how they were viewed and read. In addition, we should contemplate not only the sociological and historical contexts of fabliau production, but also delve a bit deeper into these aspects by looking at the liturgical, literary and artistic trends which coincide. According to Joseph Bédier, a fabliau is a short, funny story written in verse (30). As Norris Lacy notes: “No one accepts his definition as conclusive, everyone has something to add or alter, but we continue to quote him and take him as a point of departure” (*Reading Fabliaux* 24). Still, defining the extent of the fabliaux corpus poses a problem for scholars because as one modifies or amends Bédier’s definition, the number of texts included either

¹ See Bédier, Joseph. *Les Fabliaux*. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1925.; Nykrog, Per. *Les Fabliaux*. Genève: Librairie Droz, 1973.; Muscatine, Charles. *The Old French Fabliaux*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.; Bloch, R. Howard. *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.; Lacy, Norris J. *Reading Fabliaux*. Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, Inc., 1998.; Levy, Brian. *The Comic Text: Patterns and Images in the Old French Fabliaux*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2000.

² The pre-Bédier critics.

increases or decreases. For example, some fabliaux are clearly not funny³ so that humor may not be the determining factor; sometimes they are didactic, but not always; some have a moral, but not all; many are misogynistic; others lampoon men; many deal with class conflict; some include deception or mistaken identity, but not each one; there is no one determining factor. The amount of variation in the fabliaux poses taxonomy problems, some of which I will discuss. In as much as general difficulties of definition exist, individual texts complicate issues further. The fabliaux contain a minefield of variants, permutations and clashes in register, and it thus becomes more difficult to decide what to include and what to omit. It is impossible to establish an all-inclusive description of the fabliaux without completely over-defining the genre. In attempting to construct an over-rigid taxonomy however, the risk is being too permissive, which gives way to yet another set of problems. I intend to work between both my own and others' definitions in order to contest and explore the many aspects of the fabliaux that are crucial to reshaping our understanding for a twenty-first century audience. My working definition of a fabliau is that it constitutes an exemplary narrative exploring themes of class, gender, sex and language, and that it was conceived as performance. Themes may frequently be expressed with metaphors of economy, consumption and digestion. They are variously comic, vulgar, obscene, violent and grotesque. Utilizing the representation of the vices in sculpture and religious texts as a framework, I seek to analyze the use of the body in the fabliau, its

³ *La housse partie.*

corpo-reality. I would also like to explore the notion of textual distortion that occurs when the body is reengineered.

Depending on critical opinion and the individual editor, there are anywhere from 120-160⁴ fabliaux issuing from 276 extant manuscripts.⁵ Despite the variety of manuscripts and texts available, many critics and editors choose to work with BN MS 837 due to its clarity and because it contains a convenient digest of many important texts. At the same time, we should note that this document was compiled and copied from earlier manuscripts (Ménard 152-53). While BN MS 837, a manuscript dating from the thirteenth century, remains a valuable and accessible compendium of fabliaux texts, and while I will discuss some of them in my dissertation, I intend to use an assortment of less canonical fabliaux to support my assertions. One of the problems with BN MS 837 is, perhaps, that it has limited our understanding of how fabliaux function; while the selection of fabliaux is representative, it is instructive to revisit less anthologized fabliaux to test our assumptions about the genre as a whole. I have consulted a variety of manuscripts, including MSS 375, 1553, 1593, 2168, 1635, 2188, 2173, 12603, 12581, 24432, 25545, 19152, 14971 and nouv. acq. fr. 934 and among the many fabliaux, I have selected a corpus for analysis.⁶ What interests me about these fabliaux is their physicality, including their manuscript context, their

⁴ Bédier, 147; Nykrog, 160; Noomen and van den Boogaard, 127 (Muscatine 171 note 3).

⁵ The fabliaux on which I will concentrate exist in the following manuscripts: Paris BN MSS 837, 1593, 19152, 12603, 12581; Rothschild 2800; Arsenal 3524, 3114; Berne, Bibl. de la Bourgeoisie, 354; Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibl., Hamilton 257; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86; London, British Library, Harley 2253; Nottingham, Univ. Library, Middleton L.M. 6; Geneva, Bibl. publ. & univ. fr 179 bis.

⁶ *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides*, *Connebert*, *La dame escoillee*, *Le foteor*, *Le moigne*, *Les perdris*, *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, *Richeut*, *Les quatre sohais saint Martin*, *La saineresse*, *Les tresces*, *Les trois dames de Paris* and *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit*.

language in the body of the text and their language of the body. Furthermore, I intend to examine how exaggeration, parody, use of comedy and generic boundaries which are overstepped lead to slippages in register and narration and how these shifts often lead to comedy. In addition, I aim to analyze the way in which the fabliau acts as *host* to other registers, becomes parasitic, invading epic (*Le Moniage Rainouart*) and courtly romance (*Tristan et Iseult*). And finally, can we discern a pretext or subtext in these slippages?

The first major critic and editor of the fabliaux, Joseph Bédier, believed that, due to their less than noble nature, they were intended for bourgeois ears (371). On the other hand, writing in the nineteen fifties, Per Nykrog, in one of the first important works on fabliaux, alleged that because they mock the bourgeoisie, it was the aristocracy who enjoyed them (104). Although it is practically impossible to determine for whom these texts were written, it is now generally accepted that they were intended for all audiences. In addition, certain authors of fabliaux crossed generic boundaries. Rutebeuf, writing between approximately 1245 to 1285, for example, penned fabliaux as well as hymns to the Virgin, *complaintes* and the history of Alexander. As proof of a mixed audience, many jongleurs address nobles,⁷ while others request a drink from the bar as payment for entertaining the audience with his story.⁸ Therefore, it is highly unlikely that their reception was limited to one social class or another. Composed by a variety of authors, their appeal was universal across class lines.

⁷ *La dame escoillee, Le sacristain, La male honte, Les trois boçus.*

⁸ *La bourse pleine de sens.*

Although it is impossible to ascribe definite authorship to the majority of the fabliaux, these narratives were written mostly by anonymous clerks, and perhaps by a few learned nobles, during the thirteenth century. Despite the anonymity of most of the fabliaux, a few names of either the authors or jongleurs who performed them have survived: Gautier le Leu, Rutebeuf, Eustache d'Amiens, Jehan le Galois, Jean de Condé, Jean Bodel, Colin Malet, Henri d'Andel, Enguerrant le Clerc d'Oisi, Milles d'Amiens, Hues Pioucele, Watriquet de Couvin, Douin de l'Avesne, Jakes de Baisiu, Richart Banier and others known only by one name, Garin, Guillaume, Durand, Haiseau, Courtebarbe and Guerin. Coming mostly from Paris and northern France, these names record but a fraction of original authors and give glimpses into those behind the composition of the fabliaux.

The production of fabliaux texts coincides with the rise of urbanization in the thirteenth century. As the power of the cities increased and the socio-economic system evolved, a weakened monarchy found itself more dependent on the money of the bourgeoisie. Due to the waning economic power of the nobility, the feudal system slowly but surely declined, leaving many knights without lords, and hence, no means of income. The bourgeoisie, however, became increasingly rich and with this wealth came power. Consequently, the previously well-established roles of the three orders were no longer so strictly defined. The fabliaux exploit and mock these permeable boundaries, presenting a social model which has become more complicated. In an attempt to assess to what extent they represent a fairly accurate picture of daily life, fabliaux critics have previously

been (and still are) interested in the sociological, economic and historical information reflected in the texts.

During the height of fabliaux production, courtly literature was, of course, predominant and the fabliaux include parody and satirize elements of courtliness.⁹ Although the courtly canon proved useful for mockery, the fabliaux had their own formulae, stock characters and characteristic discourse. Just as courtliness permeated the fabliaux, the fabliaux behaved as a parasitic register corrupting the refinement of courtly romance and epic. These often consist of vast, open cycles linked by metatexts and unified by a floating discourse and signifiers. For example, the *Moniage Rainouart* in *Le cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* exhibits components that are more germane to fabliaux rather than the epic. In this episode of the cycle, Rainouart, one of Guillaume's warriors, mourns the loss of his wife and son, and repenting his murderous ways, decides to dedicate his life to God. Yet the monks fear him and he does not adapt well to such an austere life, preferring to eat to his fill and plunder to benefit the abbey. Furthermore, he is unable to attend mass, as he must pass by a crucifix that he believes to be a living being that he greatly fears due to its silence. After a while, the Saracens invade Guillaume's land and he sends for Rainouart to help fight them. He does so, but only after combating in comic fashion a fierce horse belonging to one of the Saracens. This portion of the cycle is very unrepresentative of the *chanson de geste*.

⁹ For example, *Le chevalier qui fist parler les cons*, *Cele qui fu foutue et desfoutue*, *Guillaume au faucon*, *Le sentier batu*.

Whether or not it was thought that the genre belonged in the canon, the fabliaux exhibit complex connections to other registers. The genres of medieval literature are subject to mutability and cross-fertilization and so it is for the fabliaux. We should remember that the fabliaux were conceived as performance, recited by a jongleur. As the voice of the author, or as the author himself, the narrator often interrupts the tale to make a judgment and address the audience. A typical narration puts two protagonists in conflict, be they lovers, husband and wife, or two feuding males. This third person narration ventriloquizes the voices of the characters.

In terms of social class, typically, it is peasants and/or the bourgeoisie that are represented, with occasional guest appearances by nobles. This cast of characters includes clerks, merchants, knights, scholars, wives and lusty women. The conflict is always caused by inequality of intelligence, power, class or money, and habitually concerns either a physical, sexual or financial exchange. Central themes prevalent in these tales involve sex, love, marriage, adultery, business, hypocrisy, anti-clericalism, cuckoldry, avarice, generosity, death, dismemberment and *memberment*/remembering. Furthermore, these texts share common elements that comprise money, clothes, mistaken identity, cheating, hiding, violence, *le bas corporel* and the distortion that occurs when order becomes chaos and Nature becomes *dénaturée*. Each of these ingredients contributes in some way to the humor of the fabliaux.

To date, studies on the fabliaux have sought to explore and accommodate these texts using a variety of approaches. Joseph Bédier, Per Nykrog, Charles

Muscatine, R. Howard Bloch, Norris J. Lacy and Brian J. Levy have written full-length critical studies of great importance to fabliaux criticism. Joseph Bédier, as we have seen previously, could be regarded as the father of modern fabliaux criticism. Per Nykrog seeks to establish the literary value of the fabliaux by viewing them through historical lenses. Charles Muscatine, on the other hand, uses an historical approach with a sociological edge for these subversive tales. R. Howard Bloch focuses on the absences predominant in the fabliaux. Hoping to introduce the world of the fabliaux to a more general audience, Norris Lacy examines their humor, citing specific texts to illustrate his points. And finally, Brian Levy aspires to accommodate these tales by analyzing their various themes.

Before Bédier, the fabliaux were not deemed worthy of attention. Yet his book, *Les Fabliaux*, proves such estimations wrong. As I have indicated, this study is one of the first to systematically treat the fabliaux. After defining the fabliaux as “...des contes à rire en vers,” (30) he then dissects his definition and cites specific texts to justify each element. He then takes on the difficult task of situating fabliau composition on the medieval timeline: “Le plus ancien fabliau qui nous soit parvenu est celui de *Richeut*: il est daté de 1159. Les plus récents sont de Jean de Condé, qui mourut vers 1340” (40). He thus shows that the span of fabliaux production covers approximately two hundred years. As well as exploring their chronology, Bédier also outlines the geographical locations of their composition.

In the first part of his book, he underlines the universality of the fabliaux by showing that such stories occur not only in France, but also in other countries

such as India and Japan. Furthermore, these tales date back to antiquity and beyond. He exposes and comments on contemporary theories regarding the composition of bawdy tales; some held that their origins were Aryan (from India), others believe that they come from further East, while others turn to anthropology for an explanation. Bédier also examines the idea of polysemy. Through all this consideration, Bédier demonstrates that these tales are not only universal but also specific.

The second part of his book is devoted to showing “...que chaque recueil de contes et chaque version d’un conte révèlent un esprit distinct, significatif d’une époque distincte” (289). Examining certain fabliaux, he demonstrates the way in which each reveals a different spirit. He believes that: “D’où qu’ils [les fabliaux] viennent, on peut y étudier les mœurs du temps...” (302) because: “...nous sommes à une époque semi-primitive, où l’influence du milieu social est prépondérante et surtout celle du « moment »” (302). What interests him is not the universality of the fabliaux but their specificity. He analyses not only the spirit present in the fabliaux, but also their versification, composition and style. For the most part, he illustrates the fabliaux’s imperfections in these areas vis-à-vis other contemporary genres. He believes that such deficiencies indicate an insouciance of tradition. And finally, he brings up the question of audience. He contends that the fabliaux are originally the work of the bourgeois intended for a bourgeois public (371).

Although thorough in his historical examination, he depends too much on speculation. Focusing on the internal logic of the fabliaux, he avoids other

important areas of study such as sociological and economic influences, word play and fabliaux themes, and thus, makes assumptions based on an incomplete picture of these texts and their contexts. In addition, he attempts to analyze the fabliaux conventionally rather than valorizing their lack of convention.

Per Nykrog's approach in *Les Fabliaux* challenges his predecessor, and he does this by redefining the genre and contesting Bédier's theory of the fabliau audience. He states: "L'étude qu'on va lire se propose un but principal, qui est de démontrer que les textes ainsi déterminés, non seulement étaient lus et goûtés dans les milieux courtois, mais qu'ils sont si profondément pénétrés de la façon de penser de ces milieux que pour les bien comprendre il faut les considérer comme une sorte de genre courtois" (18). He thus aims to accommodate the fabliaux within the spectrum of courtly literature. By studying their various themes, he attempts to defend their literary value. Nykrog nevertheless takes a rather conservative approach, and correctly predicts that future fabliaux studies will be devoted to three areas: literary judgment, historical interest and the study of themes (xviii). Evaluating the obscenity in these tales, he seeks to explain it away, examining "les types d'effets obscènes," "points de vue médiévaux sur l'obscénité" and "réflexions générales" (208). He downplays obscenity by saying that it is "...une phase primitive de l'opposition entre la grivoiserie et la décence..." and simply part of a tradition to which one can testify throughout the ages (226) just as *vilain* is pitted against *courtois*. He does this in order to incorporate the fabliaux into a courtly canon. Of Gautier le Leu he states: "Gautier le Leu est un conteur affreux" (170), because he finds his use of the

obscene and the scatological offensive: “...Gautier sait l’art de rendre l’histoire à la fois obscène et scatologique au point que le tout devient d’une saleté puante” (172). In addition, taking his cue from André le Chapelain, Nykrog’s conservatism shines brilliantly when he defines the role of women in the fabliaux by their vices: infidelity, lying, duplicity, extravagance, fickleness, pride and disobedience. Nykrog’s concentration on limited areas does not allow him to take into account language (except for four key obscene words: *vit*, *con*, *foutre* and *coilles*), the role of the human body, social or economic context.

In *The Old French Fabliaux*, Muscatine begins his study with a discussion of the genre and its literary background, viewing the fabliaux through both socio-historical and economic lenses and examining representations of medieval town life and its commercial activity. He continues with a survey of the social background of these texts, and highlighting the fabliaux preoccupation with material things, he demonstrates the possibility of social mobility, both upwards and down. He analyzes plot and style, the fabliaux ethos, sexuality and obscenity, and the fabliaux in medieval French culture. Muscatine hopes that his approach opens doors for those who find the fabliaux intimidating or overly vulgar. He hence gives them context in a socio-historical frame.

His analysis of the function of the obscene differs from Nykrog’s as he seeks to initiate new readers of the fabliaux by rationalizing that the sexual abandonment and its resulting comedy expressed in these texts are a representation of a more general cultural attitude, stating:

...the sexual humor of the fabliaux has some special historical interest. It suggests that the fabliau audience did not take very seriously the medieval Christian-ascetic injunctions against sexual pleasure, for it rarely seems to be playing with taboos that come principally from that direction. Its basic sexual humor seems to come, rather, from an older and perhaps deeper source—the inherent frustrations of sexuality itself: the perennial problems (and thus the comedy) of sexual opportunity, privacy, potency, compatibility, rivalry—and any other obstacles in the way of sexual satisfaction (109).

These texts do not present frustrations experienced only in the Middle Ages, but universally. Furthermore, Muscatine claims that although not the source of the humor, obscene language is used to break down taboos and barriers set up by both the feudal and religious authorities whose power was beginning to waiver. He states: “...the fabliaux do not seem to be contemplating obscenities newly flung into the face of long-established standards so much as the reverse: they seem to be responding to an outbreak of decency. We can readily identify this historically as the radical strengthening of certain linguistic taboos in the thirteenth century by the spread of the ethic of courtliness or gentility” (133). He thus shows that this was a socially determined phenomenon. Yet despite their use of salacious language, he asserts that the composition of these texts is very sophisticated because clerks wrote them.

One feature of the fabliaux is its patriarchal conservatism and institutionalized misogyny. Some of the texts even end with conclusions warning about the deception of women; Muscatine, however, seeks to reinterpret fabliaux misogyny by maintaining that “...most of the antifeminist conclusions ... appended to tales ... celebrate female ingenuity” (104). As well as examining misogyny, Muscatine also treats eating: “Eating habits are a trait of characterization in the fabliaux” (73). Thus, one’s personality is described in the food and drink given to guests and friends. What he hints at here, yet does not fully develop, is the idea of consumption, which I will discuss later.

Bloch, in his *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*, classifies this “scandal” as “... the excessiveness of their sexual and scatological obscenity, their anticlericalism, antifeminism, anti-courtliness, the consistency with which they indulge the senses, whet the appetites (erotic, gastronomic, economic) and affirm what Bakhtin identifies as the ‘celebration of lower body parts’” (11). He believes that the excess of sexuality and scatology accompanies an absence or poverty of language. In his introduction, he uses the dialogue between the two protagonists in *Le roy d’Angleterre et le jongleur d’Ely*, to establish his view that such texts are “narratives of absence” (22). In concentrating on language, Bloch notes that this absence or deficiency results from a “...series of slippages, tautologies, misunderstandings, substitutions, and complete disjunctions in which language ... is at every turn emptied of sense” (16). In the illogical world of the fabliaux, lack of sense is an unfortunate characteristic of poetry and/or linguistic expression, an idea also expressed in Alain de Lille’s *De planctu naturae*, which

he believes to be “ ... a treatise on the relationship between poetry and perversion” (41). He further states: “They [the fabliaux] explicitly reveal not so much a moral as a poetic derogation—poetry as derogation” (35). By denaturing language, poetry in the fabliaux disguises its true substance.

In the body of the fabliau text, the body becomes meaningful. According to Bloch, the transgression of a mutilated body present in many fabliaux reflects a fragmentation of meaning. “The body is a shifter. As it circulates and reforms itself it derives its significance from the subject with which it comes in contact, [it is] the subject who is obligated to invest it with meanings” (67-68). Just as bodies are truncated, exaggerated or over-blown, so is language, hence, it is denatured. Further explaining this idea of the *unnatural* [sic] frequenting these texts, he equates absence of meaning with castration. Yet despite nature’s absenteeism, “[t]he fabliaux make such absences speak...” (105).

Bloch’s quasi-Freudian treatment of the body predicates a system of signs and/or the lack of them. Bodily mutilation is indicative of an absence of a whole, which mirrors the fragmentary nature of the fabliaux and their meaning. I find his approach interesting, however, I cannot agree about the lack of meaning in the language of the fabliaux due to the way in which they are constructed. They are in fact, full of meaning and sense. One must focus on what is presented and how it is presented rather than on what is not there. In tackling the issue of absence and presence in the fabliaux, Bloch departs from traditional approaches and focuses on language. In basing his analysis on Alain de Lille’s treatise, he adheres to a rather normative way of viewing language. Although grounded in

medieval scholastics, he enhances his study with the post-modern approaches regarding fragmentation and contested meaning. By meshing both medieval and modern modes of constructing language however, he does not account for the internal illogic of the fabliaux world and its expression.

In his *Reading Fabliaux*, Lacy also provides us with an instructional guide on how to read them. Dividing his chapters into specific questions or points of interest, he employs individual fabliau to illustrate his argument. Addressing the problem of genre, he states:

Whereas I may appear to be destroying a useful and accepted generic label without replacing it by anything concrete, I believe there is good reason to expand the borders of the form. The label and the distinctions that go with it appear to be misleading and critically indefensible, and they are certainly more damaging than useful. They confine us to the study of an artificially limited number of texts, thereby excluding a large number that may be very similar and the study of which would be quite revealing (29).

On this premise, Lacy utilizes *La veuve* in order to redefine the parameters of the genre with the purpose of creating what he calls a “workable definition” (32):

“...a brief narrative text composed in a low or middle style and intended for amusement” (32). Yet, although this description seems general enough to accommodate the multitude of fabliaux characteristics, it actually excludes those

that are not necessarily amusing or brief.¹⁰ Furthermore, it does not account for courtly elements present in many fabliaux. It is important to note that Lacy is aware of his definition's limitations, and with it, seeks only to increase the number of those reading these texts and the number of texts being read.

Lacy maintains that rather than representing an immoral and transgressive universe, these texts reflect a very strict and traditional morality. Maintaining conventional patriarchal and feudal values, they demonstrate that there is a natural order both in human relationships and social classes. As an example of this, he uses *Du vilain asnier*, in which a peasant, accustomed to the smells of the animals with which he works, faints at the scent of herbs and spices at market and can only be revived by holding manure under his nose. This fabliau shows that any deviation from one's allotted station in life could result in disaster (or, for the audience, humor). In fact, what appears as the most transgressive of genres ends up being highly conservative.

Furthermore, Lacy believes that the courtliness predominant in the literature at that time is excessive, and that the fabliaux mock and do away with its conventions in order to return to a more natural or realistic narrative state. He uses the example of *Du chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa dame* to illustrate his point. This fabliau tells the tale of a knight who, in love with a married woman, wishes to prove his worthiness to her by participating in a tournament. Winning the competition against her husband, the knight awaits his reward from his lady. Until this point, the story adheres to courtly conventions. While waiting however,

¹⁰ For example, *La housse partie* and *Richeut*.

the knight falls asleep. Here is where the chivalrous principles fade away to reveal a fabliau. Insulted, the lady refuses him; yet he still manages to obtain his reward by pretending to be the ghost of a knight killed in the tournament and claiming his prize before the eyes of her husband. This tale turns the concept of *amor de lohn* in upon itself. This courtly tale trumps courtliness by subverting its own devices. In the world of the fabliaux, norms or conventions must be shattered in order for comedy to result. Although not exactly satire, this text demonstrates how what is unnatural or unrealistic is parodied in these texts. In addition, Lacy notes that in the fabliaux, the moral, if there is one, is neither relevant nor related to the humor.

In his chapter on fabliau language, Lacy explores the manner in which words and connotations are manipulated. He demonstrates that “...*L’Esquirielle* teaches us that rhetoric leads to sex” (84). This account describes a discussion between a mother and daughter. The mother believes that a woman must avoid talking too much as it tends to lead to depravity. Thus the mother refuses to call the male organ by its proper name and instead, uses metaphors, which have the opposite effect that she desired. She only raises the girl’s curiosity, and when she learns the correct name, she becomes enthralled by repeating it incessantly. Overhearing the girl’s tirade, a young man approaches her, and seduces her using the metaphors used by her mother to avoid just such behavior. Lacy explains:

The taboo proscribes not a particular word, but a *way of using language*. That is, almost as a matter of principle, it imposes a system of lexical substitutions and outlaws *every* word that simply

and directly designates an object or organ. It is not simply a question of euphemistically naming that which ought not be said, but instead a matter of metaphorical language in which *everything* must be given another name (87).

In a sense, trespassing taboos simply gives the language more power so that it can make its point more efficiently and effectively.

By using individual texts, Lacy better explains his approach and illustrates his definition of the genre. Although aware of the shortcomings of making global statements about the fabliaux, he does so anyway in order to open up this type of text to those avoiding them due to their bad reputation. Lacy's pursuit of a more nuanced definition of how fabliaux is helpful in opening new critical directions for individual texts, and other groupings of tales.

As stated in the title of his book, *The Comic Text: Patterns and Images in the Old French Fabliaux*, Levy explores various motifs in the fabliaux, such as the Wheel of Fortune, games and gambling, water, damnation, the bestiary and fable traditions, dancing and death. Yet despite this assortment of themes, he is careful to limit his subject to that which "...add[s] layers of ironic patterning to the essential subject matter and narrative progression of each fabliau" (27-28). Using his predecessors as a foundation for his work, he avoids making any conclusions that may contradict theirs. In highlighting the physical comedy of the texts, Levy disregards the language used to create this humor and underscores the issue of transgression using traditional notions and genre theory. He opts for looking at the fabliaux as a universal genre rather than at its specifics. For

example, he states in chapter one on the fabliau bestiary: “...in fables animals behave like humans, while in the fabliaux humans so often behave like animals” (34). His explanation for this savage behavior of man is simply: “...[i]ts role is to add an extra layering of irony to the comic narrative” (77). In fact, he applies this conclusion to each of his thematically based chapters.

Furthermore, because Levy focuses on theatrical elements of each fabliau, his ideas are flexible and not restricted to the fabliaux. One could also apply his theories to any play by Molière. In fact, Molière’s *Le médecin malgré lui* is essentially a theatrical representation of the fabliau, *Le vilain mire*. Rather than use the customary approaches, Levy experiments with selected themes, ideas and mechanisms, and circumvents issues like the socio-historical context, body, class and gender. Levy’s thematic presentation of the fabliaux is also limited in scope and application.

All these critics have contributed greatly to fabliau studies; and after having surveyed major book length studies and articles linking them, I have witnessed how these studies are illustrative of the development and evolution of fabliaux criticism. Each has a distinct way of analyzing the genre; Bédier accommodates the texts to create a corpus; others, such as Nykrog and Lacy, break down the definition in order to broaden the genre; some focus on language (Bloch); while others concentrate on themes (Levy). What one seems to overlook, another takes up. The problem of definition, however, persists due to the tendency of generalizing the fabliaux as a whole and due to the fragmentation of the corpus. It is also surprising that criticism to date remains so conservative

when it concerns such allegedly transgressive texts. These critics have successfully dealt with the fabliaux in a systematic way by examining their place in the canon, genre, style, theme and language which is rather difficult in a corpus that is by nature a rule-breaker.

I believe that the language itself plays into the humor of the fabliaux and has yet to be fully examined. Not only is the body of the text unaccounted for in these critic's works, but also the human body in all its variations. Despite their invaluable work, they have left out elements of the fabliaux which I believe are fundamentally important to their very nature. Language has been discussed to some extent (Bloch, Muscatine and Lacy), yet how this language is manipulated and becomes an accomplice to the humor in the fabliaux has not been fully explored. Also, the unnatural reengineering of the human body indicates that these texts have an internal logic of their own, not subject to any external reality. This upside-down, vice-driven microcosm depends on audience familiarity with convention in order for its humor to succeed. By examining the *fableor's* exploration of *real life* examples of vice which are echoes of the representations of vice in art and religious texts, I seek to study not only the body in the fabliaux but also the fabliaux body. Furthermore, I would like to expand the idea of economy in the fabliaux discussed by Muscatine to include consumption, both physical and monetary. And finally, I intend to show that these transgressive texts should not be set apart from other medieval genres, but deserve to be considered along with them.

Aside from the question of genre, one must also consider the use of language in the fabliaux as well as the romance, epic, lyric and pious registers. While these are very distinct entities, they also tend to mix. For example, this occurs rather subtly in *Guillaume au faucon*. This tale contains nothing to mark it as a fabliau until almost the very end of the text when the lady uses a *double entendre* to fool her husband. It recounts the woes of a lovelorn squire who pines after his master's wife. For seven years he remains in his master's service in order to be close to the lady. Taking advantage of his absence, Guillaume, after a long internal debate, decides to open his heart to the lady. One day, when she is alone, she invites him to sit with her and they carry on a lengthy conversation. Finally, Guillaume musters up the courage to ask her advice about what a man should do when he is in love with a lady. When she replies that the devotee must disclose his sentiments to the lady, he then does so. The lady, however, is outraged and wants nothing to do with him. Guillaume rises to leave; yet before leaving, he proclaims that he will fast until she consents to grant him her love. Unmoved by his desperation, the lady replies that he will have to fast for a long time before he receives her love and he begins a hunger strike. Upon the return of her husband, the lady begs Guillaume to eat before his master discovers the reason for his illness. He refuses, and as she feared, her husband notices that his squire is not at the feast celebrating his return. Together, they go to visit him, and the lady declares that she knows the nature of his malady. She begins to recount Guillaume's visit, hoping all the while that he will give in and eat before she reveals his secret. She is, however, unsuccessful and instead of telling her

husband that Guillaume asked for her love, she says that he asked for an ambiguous *faucon*, understood by the audience/reader as both a bird of prey and a bodily euphemism. She asserts that she refused because she was not in a position to give away what belonged to her husband. Her husband tells her to give him what he wants and upon hearing this, Guillaume is immediately cured. When the lady finally gives the squire the bird, she lets him know that he will also receive her *faucon* as she has fallen in love with him. The fabliau ends with the moral that lovers must prove themselves worthy and persevering in order to attain their goal.

For readers of romance and lyric poetry, André le Chapelain and his literary master, Ovid, set the standard both for understanding and satirizing courtliness and *Guillaume au faucon* follows much of André's teachings. For example, both of the lovers are described as exceeding handsome or beautiful. In fact, for such a short text (approximately fifty-five lines), many of its lines are dedicated to the description of the lady's beauty. In addition, there is an undercurrent of cynicism that is not apparent until the end of the text. The fabliau uses the courtly canon, making sure to adhere strictly to its doctrines, in order to exceed and enhance the kind of subversion already present in Ovid. After reaching the end, one must reread the tale to understand that the exaggeration (already existent in Ovid and André le Chapelain) of the qualities of the characters and their misadventure is a parody and not an homage to all that is courtly. Courtly language itself has become an accomplice to the humor of this story. There is a horizon of expectation of courtliness that is shattered by the

intrusion of the fabliau. By channeling Ovidian love theory, the author of *Guillaume au faucon* is setting up a rather elaborate body joke.

As I have previously mentioned, fabliau comedy relies on the listener's/reader's familiarity with the high-style tradition of lyric, romance and epic. One staple found in the courtly canon is the image of the bird. This symbol is obviously the focus of this particular fabliau, yet it is used in a very different way. In courtly texts, such as Marie de France's *Le Laiüstic* and *Milon*, the bird embodies the ideal of sublimated love. Yet, in *Guillaume au faucon*, the bird symbol has fallen back down to earth and is now used literally. The lady gives Guillaume a falcon but she also gives him a *faucon*, and one does not need to go far to separate the syllables to understand its more carnivalized meaning.

Guillaume au faucon is the perfect intersection of courtliness and fabliau. It incorporates aspects of both in its treatment of language and the body. In fact, I contend that, despite the various bodily configurations in the fabliau, what courtly literature does to the body is vastly more offensive. The body is no longer a body, but an ideal that is impossible to attain or even an absence, as exemplified in the romance which glamorizes *amor de lohn*.

The fabliaux utilize many different means of evoking laughter from the audience/reader: word play, satire, parody or transgressive language. Many use any combination of these tools. In fact, for fabliaux authors, these resources function metaphorically as instruments used to redress an imbalance or to inject some needed humor where there was too much gravity, i.e. the courtly and pious registers. Although Michel Camille's quotation at the beginning of this chapter

refers to marginal images in manuscripts, the same applies to medieval literature, especially the fabliaux. With their strict formulae, lyric, romance and epic literature made breaking the mold of the canon difficult. In addition, these genres focus on an elite leaving little room for other estates: aristocrats are elevated to an otherworldly status, to a level completely unattainable for the *laboratores*. Thus, not only was the genre limited, but also class. The effect of the fabliaux is to challenge the dominance of the courtly register and class and provide comic relief, with much of the humor predicated on excess and *démesure* that proves a foil for the *mesure* and purer forms. Using the canon and register, they gain comic strength, exploding and exaggerating generic formulae which results in a sort of hypertrophy, a distortion of both the generic and registral boundaries. And as Camille states, this distortion is limitless. By examining various representative fabliaux, I seek to show that their comic and textual distortions embody real social concerns.

Another tendency in the romance, epic, pious and lyric literatures is the use of language to create a distance between the audience and the tale. The characters or their deeds are elevated to a sublime status by employing an exclusive register. Other genres position language and the reader/audience in distinct and exclusive ways. Whereas these literatures tend to keep the audience on the outside looking in, the fabliaux draw one in by using more inclusive strategies when it comes to language and register. Occasionally, the audience is even asked to pass judgment on either the tale itself or on an event occurring in

the tale.¹¹ In asking for the audience's opinion, its complicity is evoked and they are allowed to shape the creation of the story. In the fabliaux, the audience is addressed on its level and is often folded into the narrative, positioned in a kind of superior complicity. As Elder Olsen notes: "Ridicule is a particular type of *depreciation*. We cannot ridicule someone by showing that he is extremely *good*, or *better* than most, or even ordinary; we must show that he is *inferior*..." (12). In fact, most fabliaux depend upon this sense of inferiority for their humor. Yet instead of moralizing, elevating and distancing the audience from the tale, the listener is raised above the level of the person being belittled by being made an accomplice to the jest.

By aiming to satirize more central genres, the aim of the fabliaux is not to destroy them but to subvert them by exaggerating literary formulae. As Camille indicates, those in the margins represent the anti-model. The fabliaux, however, do not attempt to break the mold; they simply aim to reshape it. The fabliaux authors manipulate and exploit the canon in order to take it in an entirely different direction. Michael Camille explains: "The medieval artist's ability was measured not in terms of invention, as today, but in the capacity to combine traditional motifs in new and challenging ways" (*Image on the Edge* 36). The same can be said of medieval literature. The fabliaux employ some of the same stock characters and situations; they just present them in a very different manner. Furthermore, they act in a different way by commenting on, deflecting, reflecting

¹¹ For example, *Le bouchier d'Abeville*.

and combining traditional motifs of other genres and mixing them into the fabliaux.

Central to this body of texts is the body itself, a site of transformation. One way in which the author/jongleur of fabliaux texts accomplishes such a feat is through the use of transgressive language which tends to lead to absurd situations. For example, where courtly literature uses metaphors to represent an idealized human body, the fabliaux employ terms to describe not the body as a whole, but just the relevant parts.¹² In addition, these texts specifically call both the male and female body parts by their *proper* or vulgar names.¹³ The outbreak of decency which Muscatine describes is of course reflected in the exempla, romance, lyric and epic. As I have mentioned however, the fabliaux in their indecency lampoon these models while at the same time utilizing and inverting them to create comedy. Not only are certain body parts not so subtly evoked, but they are often multiplied, exaggerated, distorted and truncated, as if the vice that taints them leaves a physical indication of its presence. This chaotic treatment of the body results, of course, in humor which masks and stages deeper social issues. The fabliaux are vehicles for social commentary on topics such as the economy, the clergy, sex, and other personal and private conflicts, including those inflicted by the vices which frame the discourse of the body. These tales convert the battle

¹² It is important to note that some fabliaux such as *L'esquiritel* and *La dame qui aveine demandoit pour Morel sa provende avoir* do use euphemisms, but not to avoid vulgarity as their use tends to lead to the unmentionable act, i.e., the euphemism increases the vulgarity.

¹³ Let us not forget Raison's insistence on calling objects (especially *coilles*) by their true or appropriate name in *Le roman de la rose*.

between the virtues and vices from static figures in art and sculpture into narrative figures.

In the Middle Ages, the concern with the representation of virtue and vice materializes predominantly in patristic literature,¹⁴ sculpture and other religious art.¹⁵ Visually available to the public, the façades of numerous medieval cathedrals illustrate in detail the fight between the virtues and vices.

Katzenellenbogen explains the origins of this leitmotif:

The representation of the conflict between the virtues and the vices received its decisive impulse from the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, an early 5th century work. In a graphic and telling manner the author depicts the battle for man's soul; he develops the Pauline thought that the Christian must arm himself with spiritual weapons in order to face successfully the forces of evil, and deepens and expands the well-known parable of Tertullian, of the victory of the virtues over the vices, into an allegorical epic (1).

Prudentius graphically recounts the battle between *Fides/ Fidem Veterum Cultura Deorum*, *Pudicitia/ Libido*, *Patientia/ Ira*, *Spes/ Superbia*, *Sobrietas/ Luxuria*, *Operatio campum/ Avaritia*, *Concordia/ Discordia*, and other virtues and vices.

The virtues triumph over the vices, frequently dispatching them in a rather violent

¹⁴ For example, Thomas Aquinas' *De Malo*, Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones Vulgares* and the sermons of Gueric of Igny, Julien de Vézelay and Bernard de Clairvaux.

¹⁵ For example, painting, manuscript, fresco, stained glass, metalwork and enamel.

manner, by choking or piercing their throat with a sword.¹⁶ This *psychomachia*, along with the sermons and writings of the Church Fathers, underpins the concern of the Church to teach about good behavior and the consequences of bad conduct. An example of this concern is reflected in Guillaume de Deguileville's *The Pilgrimage of Human Life* when Reason tells the pilgrim:

Now I will tell you how to keep my love, if you do not know. You must drink and eat more temperately than others, for drunkenness and gluttony soon make me turn and fly away. Unbridled anger and violent rage make me leave the house they dwell in. Carnal love drives me out completely and makes me leave immediately ... Now I ask you to keep yourself from these vices, and from all the others as well, if you love me, for I do not consider friends those who abandon the good and give themselves up to vice (14).

Thus, giving in to vice not only goes against Church teachings, but also against Reason itself. The medieval expression of these ideas, however, is not restricted to patristic writings and architecture; they also occur in secular literature, appearing frequently in narrative, prose romance, theater and even the fabliaux. It is important to note that while moralizing literature is interested in the outcome, the fabliaux are interested in the process or battle. We should be aware that fabliaux authors shy away from representing any type of victory and show only

¹⁶ For an analysis of this phenomenon, see Nugent, S. Georgia. "Virtus or Virago? The Female Personifications of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*." *Virtue and Vice: The Personifications in the Index of Christian Art*. Ed. Colum Hourihane. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000: 13-28.

the battle.¹⁷ Whereas the conflict in Prudentius' tale is fraught with drama, the fabliaux present the fight in a humorous manner. In addition, imbued with the powerful imagery depicted on the exterior of churches, frescoes, caskets, paintings, manuscripts and other religious art, fabliaux authors add their own spin to the conclusion of this epic battle: at the end of each fabliau, the natural order of things seems to be restored (as in the *Psychomachia*). Eschewing the subject of virtue, they focus on vice as that which is taboo is infinitely more interesting and potentially humorous.

This does not mean, however, that virtue has no place in the fabliaux; by focusing on the characters' conflict with vice, they (for the most part) are led back to virtue. I have chosen seven vices, lust (*Luxuria*), gluttony (*Gula*), greed (*Avaritia*), debauchery (*Libido*), anger (*Ira*), discord (*Discordia*) and pride (*Superbia*) to show how the fabliaux exploit the ambiguous ground between virtue and vice and the comedic repercussions which result when combined with the discourse of the body. Using these seven vices as a framework, I will examine in depth thirteen representative and sometimes less studied texts: *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides*, *Connebert*, *La dame escoillee*, *Le foteor*, *Le moigne*, *Les perdris*, *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, *Richeut*, *Les quatre sohais saint Martin*, *La saineresse*, *Les tresces*, *Les trois dames de Paris* and *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit*. These fabliaux all demonstrate the precarious interface of sex, desire and appetite and the conflict of body politics. I hope to demonstrate that the fabliaux are more complex than they at first appear to be and

¹⁷ There are, of course, exceptions. For example, *Richeut* and *La saineresse*.

that they express more than an adolescent clerk's (for it is most likely clerks who penned or transcribed these tales) fantasies. My aim is to show that despite the outrageous story lines and language, the fabliaux are not scandalous but exemplary, and that due to their comic exemplarity, they should in fact be considered alongside other genres such as lyric, romance, epic and the pastourelles. Just as these other genres teach by example, so do the fabliaux. I will first begin by looking at two texts that treat the subject of lust in very different manners: one, *Le moigne* mocks those who attempt to suppress their desires, while the other, *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, condemns women who do not; both, however, examine the male fear of female sexuality. Second, I will look at two fabliaux, *Les perdris* and *Les trois dames de Paris* that explore the theme of gluttony in women. Both of these tales demonstrate the male preoccupation with female appetite. Third, I will consider the vice of greed in *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit* and *Les quatres sohais Saint Martin*, which focus on the question of authority. Fourth, *Le foteor* and *Richeut* demonstrate debauchery and question gender roles. Fifth, I will examine anger in *Connebert* and *Les tresces* with an introduction to anger's cousin discord in *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides*. All three fabliaux expose the effects of female power on the patriarchal system. And finally, pride, the worst of all vices, is evident in *La saineresse* and *La dame escoillee* where the male-dominated hierarchy is exposed as artificial. Although seemingly about vices, most of these fabliaux have

exemplary value. We will see just such an example with our hapless monk in *Le moigne*.¹⁸

¹⁸ Please note that all translations from Old French to English are my own.

*Fugite fornicationem omne peccatum
quodcumque fecerit homo extra corpus est
qui autem fornicatur in corpus suum peccat*
1 Corinthians 6.18¹⁹

Chapter One

Lust's Intrusion

One theme that many fabliaux have in common is that of lust, not just lust itself, but also the excesses to which it leads. In his article, *Gothic Signs and the Surplus: The Kiss on the Cathedral*, Michel Camille asserts: “Although it had a very clearly demarcated set of meanings related to the vice of sexual excess, the kiss is an example of the ambivalence of visual images in which the excess, the *surplus*—spills in many more directions than the usual polar opposites of the sacred and the secular” (154). The same can be said for *luxuria* in the fabliaux. The more it is suppressed or unsatisfied, the more it overflows. For example, in *Le peschoer de Pont seur Saine*, the wife equates pleasure with prosperity. In this tale, a fisherman and his wife live a comfortable and sexually satisfied life. One evening, the fisherman accuses his wife of only loving him for his male body

¹⁹ “Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside of the body; but the fornicator sins against the body.”

parts. She denies this claim, but the fisherman resolves to test her sincerity. While fishing, he comes across a dead corpse with an erect member that he cuts off. He returns to his wife claiming that some knights threatened him and he had a choice of losing his life or his manhood, so he chose the latter. Upon seeing the disembodied member, she decides to leave him because her sexual pleasure is compromised. Then, *miraculously*, the husband's manhood is restored because according to the fisherman, God does not want her to leave him, and the wife, of course, opts to remain with her husband. In this case, the wife's fear of losing an outlet for her lust drives the action of the fabliau.

For *Le moigne*, the mere sight of women incites such intense, uncontrollable passion and shame that misfortune ensues. In this case, the action is determined by the monk's wrestling with lust. Although lust is the mechanism for the humor in these fabliaux, it, in and of itself, does not inspire laughter, for, as Olsen notes about humor: "It is primarily man who is laughed at, and it is only man who laughs ... the comic is only a particular sort of relation among human beings" (24). Hence, it is the character's reaction to this longing and his misadventures that result in comedy.

Lust has a long tradition of representation in art and religious writings. Thomas Aquinas (c.1224-1274) declares in his *De Malo* that "[s]exual lust is a sin contrary to temperance insofar as temperance moderates desires for things pleasurable to touch regarding sex ... And so sexual lust indeed chiefly signifies a disorder by reason of excess regarding desires for sexual pleasures" (775). His assertion mirrors the *sorplus* of Camille's kiss on the cathedral. In architecture as

in doctrine, lust appears mostly in opposition to its opposing virtue, chastity. Cathedrals such as the one at Chartres often depict the two antagonistic figures with virtue already having won the victory over vice. Mâle, however, notes that the two are portrayed in very different manners:

La vertu est donc représentée dans son essence et le vice dans ses effets. D'un côté, tout est repos; de l'autre, tout est mouvement et lutte. Le contraste fait naître dans l'esprit l'idée que les artistes ont voulu exprimer: ces calmes figures nous enseignent que seule la vertu unifie l'âme et lui donne la paix, et que hors d'elle il n'y a qu'agitation (216).

This notion is narrated in the fabliau *Le moigne* in which the comic struggle between virtue and vice takes place within the mind and soul of a Benedictine monk. This monk, desperate to return to his abbey, spies some girls in a house, the sight of which causes such physical excitement that he falls off his horse into some mud. Taken in by a kind bourgeois, he reflects upon the day's events before retiring for the night. He then has a fantastical dream of a market selling only female sex organs.²⁰ After choosing one to his liking, he goes to slap the hand of the merchant to seal the deal, yet, instead of slapping the merchant's hand, he inadvertently smacks the pile of thorns next to his bed. Hurt, he awakens with a cry and, as it is dawn already, then continues his journey to his abbey. The monk's struggle to contain his sexuality expresses in a narrative Camille's kiss on

²⁰ Markets that sell sex organs also appear in *Le souhaits desviz* and *Alda*.

the cathedral that overflows into other areas. This fabliau testifies that the Church's strictures on lust do not work so well in practice.

Le moigne

Found in only one manuscript,²¹ *Le moigne* presents the case of a priest who is shown to be, in Olsen's terms, inferior and thus subject to ridicule because he does not know how to properly express or contain his sexuality. The tale begins with the monk's hasty and seemingly frenzied flight. Although the tale does not give reason for his rush, after the misfortunes that follow, one can only assume that he aims to avoid unnecessary contact with the world outside his monastery. Katzenellenbogen explains the psyche of a medieval monk: "The monk ... leaving all worldliness behind, must strive to climb ... a ladder [of virtue]. It is his task first of all to overcome his sinful desires, then to achieve the virtues, if he wishes to attain in the end the topmost rung and there join the Pauline trinity of virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity" (22). Similarly, our humble monk must first conquer his natural urges for sexual satisfaction in order to locate the ladder and begin his ascent. His urgency to return indicates his already tumultuous disposition. Aware of the potential harm of an uncontrolled environment, he races to the protective womb of the religious community. However, unfortunately for the monk, trying to evade the sinful world does not entirely work. Despite his rush, the monk manages to catch a glimpse of some girls through some open doors and windows of a house. Here is the mechanism

²¹ Paris, BN MS Rothschild 2800

for the humor for the rest of the fabliau. The monk needs no physical contact with the corrupt secular world to suffer from one of its vices. The concept of sin is sublimated in the women for, as Michael Camille notes: “[a]ccording to misogynistic medical discourse, their [women’s] bodies overflowed their boundaries and they could infect others with their venomous menstrual looks” (*Image on the Edge* 53). Similarly, in *Le moigne*, although within the confines of a house, their malignance flows from them, through the windows and doors and penetrates the pious monk’s soul, immediately causing great turmoil:

Qui plus desire le peleus
Que chiens ne fait char ne os tendre.
Li commenche si fort a tendre
C’a pau qu’i ne li saut du cors (12-15)²²

Rather than noting the beauty or elegance of these girls, his mind, distracted by their sexual promise, at once thinks of their sex (*peleus*). He considers them not in terms of individuals, but as sexual organs, organs that displace the rest of the body and remain uppermost in his mind as representative of gratification, something forbidden to him by the Church. Yet it is important to note that the representation of sex organs in the Middle Ages was not necessarily intended to imply the sex act or sexuality:

Like so many other motifs and themes, those of a sexual and scatological nature have a twofold significance: they are at once

²² “He desired their sex just as a dog does meat or a tender bone. It (his organ) began to stretch forth so much that it almost jumped off his body.”

hostile and lucky. In the religious imagery of later periods they signified insult and mockery, a way to depict the depravity of the enemies of Christ and Christianity. But they also served as apotropaic protection, an ancient role that developed from their association with fertility, and thence the assurance of safety, good fortune, and abundance for humankind. As a kind of indecency associated with fertility magic, they conversely served to ward off malign influences. Remnants of pagan fertility cults, these powerful sexual symbols survived, deeply embedded in Christian society (Mellinkoff 124).

So rather than recoiling from these images, perhaps the monk should use them as protection from the demons that tempt him.

For our hapless monk however, the constant suppression of his sexuality leads only to that which the Church seeks to avoid: powerful cravings for the forbidden fruit. In the case of the monk, not allowing him to express his sexuality in any way results in an exaggerated reaction when confronted with the object (and images) that he seeks to shun. Due to his inability to appreciate beauty rather than vilify it, the monk becomes so sexually excited that he does not know how to respond. He sees these girls but cannot touch them, even though they have touched him without intending to do so. It is important to note that the women are not engaged in any activity aimed at enticing the monk; nevertheless, their presence produces a violent sexual reaction. In my estimation, this is a brief, but effective parody of *amor de lohn* and a burlesque of the common notion that it

is impossible for any man to contain his desires. Yet, in this case, there are no lovers spying each other across a crowded court and falling in love. In fact, we are not made aware of the girls' perspective at all. We see only the monk who catches sight of the girls and promptly falls into lust rather than love. However, for our monk, this vision leads to fantasizing about the female sex rather than actual physical contact; nonetheless, this is also a sin in the eyes of the Church.

The monk's haste is also unbridled lust. His life is fraught with tension, reflected in the fact that the jongleur warns of the monk's forthcoming predicament by explaining that his approach by horse is "par grant esfroi." This detour from his religious zeal is predicted in the first few lines of the fabliau when the author explains: "C'uns noirs moignes par grant esfroi/ Chevauchoit sur son palefroi" ("A Dominican monk was riding speedily upon his horse.") (5-6).

These lines contain three rhymes: *esfroi*, *palefroi* and *chevauchoit*. Although not unusual, I believe that the word at the beginning of a line (*chevauchoit*), which rhymes with the two rhyming words (*esfroi* and *palefroi*) at the end of the verses, is significant. In the last part of the word *chevauchoit*, we find *choit*, from the verb *choir* meaning "to fall." Although a common imperfect ending, it does suggest that, in advance, the audience is made aware of the priest's fall from his horse as well as his fall from the righteous path. Rather than keep the audience on edge waiting for the comedic action, they know what is about to occur and hence, are in a way, in on the joke against the monk.

Another implied premise that becomes an in-joke between the author and audience in this fabliau is a general fact noted by Muscatine: that the "...fabliaux

audience did not take very seriously the medieval Christian-ascetic injunctions against sexual pleasure...” (*The Old French Fabliaux* 109). For them, the fact that this ridiculous monk is actually earnest in his quest to uphold the Church’s command prohibiting physical gratification only renders him even more ridiculous and, consequently, likely to fail. For Hutton, there are two strategies of understanding and dealing with the world in the fabliaux: *avoir* and *savoir* (112). In the case of our woeful monk, he has neither. He does not have the experience (*savoir*) to tackle different situations that may arrive and thus never even approaches profiting from these circumstances either materially or intellectually (*avoir*). In fact, the monk’s lack of experience could explain his body’s reaction to the glimpse of the young ladies; it seems as if his lack of physical control is all the more inevitable on account of the moralizing strictures of the Church. Furthermore, because his job most likely entails telling others to avoid lustful thoughts, he essentially embodies the Church discourses and is thus rendered even more ridiculous. Although the monk may attempt to remain loyal in his mind to his vows, his body cannot obey. For the audience, this results in humor, but for a monk in his situation, it indicates the physiological and psychological distress caused by such severe injunctions against any type of sexual thought or longing. Yet, rather than sympathizing with the monk’s plight, the account exposes the absurdity of denying one’s sexuality and confirms a sense of anti-clericalism inherent in many fabliaux.

Although the monk removes himself physically from the vicinity of the lust-provoking girls, he is still not purged of the toxins that have such a powerful

effect on him. Instead, “...il repense a la folie” (23). Now that he has had a glimpse of what is taboo, he cannot erase it from his mind. Even the author of the fabliau refers to the monk’s thoughts as *folie*. However, for anyone but a man of the cloth, such ruminations are not considered extravagant but normal.

Commenting on the predicament of the medieval clergy, Lacy remarks: “...the priesthood itself is an unnatural condition in which a man may find himself. In any contest between the priest and the man, between the cloth and the flesh, the latter wins; sexual appetites are normal, and a situation in which those appetites are supposed to be suppressed only sharpens them” (*Reading Fabliaux* 44). This idea is also reflected in *Le roman de la rose* when Genius (the priest) condemns those who go against Nature by not using what she gave them and encourages them instead to sow their seeds to ensure the continuation of their lineages. Thus, what is questioned is not what is normal, but what is natural. And, as the monk is expected to deny nature, these thoughts disturb him greatly and he is distracted from his mission. As if the horse senses his rider’s unsettled mind, the horse stumbles, throwing the monk into a puddle of mud. The horse’s misstep reflects that of the monk and, almost as if the horse acts as the monk’s conscience, he throws him into mud, covering him in shame.²³ It is interesting to note that the vice of pride is often represented on cathedrals and other religious art as a man falling off a horse. Could our monk be guilty of more than just the sin of *luxuria*?

²³ This also reminds us of Villard de Honnecourt’s sketchbook that contains similar representations of pride falling from a horse.

His tumble brings the monk back to reality. His dirty thoughts are now exposed to the outside world.

Despite finding a place to stay and clean up, line thirty-nine warns “Cui avient une, n’avient seule” (“One misfortune follows another”). In addition, this inn provides little shelter from the woes of the outside world: the bed in which he is to sleep is situated next to a pile of thorns that is a reminder of his religious duties. Even at rest nature encroaches upon the monk. Yet, one must ask if this could this also be a reference to the crown of thorns worn by Jesus? Must our monk also suffer the pain and humiliation inflicted upon Christ? Perhaps the monk sees himself as a sort of martyr, enduring the perils of the outside world in order to prove his faith? We also should not forget that in at least one version of the *Ave Maria*, Mary is referred to as a *rosa sine spina*. So if that which is without thorns is virtuous, then do the thorns next to which his bed sits warn of his imminent sin? In any case, the thorns contrast greatly with the bed next to which it sits, described as “biaus et gens fais” with “blans dras” and “bone couche.” Comfort and its binary opposite are side by side. This is a metaphor for the way in which the Church handles the issue of sexuality. By commanding complete chastity of body, mind and spirit for its faithful, the Church denies them the appropriate coping mechanisms needed and hence, when such erotically charged situations arise, the result in the fabliau world is comic distress. In addition, the author of the fabliau warns that, although he has washed his body, the monk’s thoughts remain dirty: “Ou li dans demoignes se couche” (52). The

word *demoignes* simultaneously enfolds the monk and demon, indicating that he has yet to purge himself of lustful thoughts.

This demon rematerializes in the monk's thoughts in that semi-conscious state one experiences before drifting off to sleep. He reflects back upon the day's events, reciting a sort of sermon against the treachery of women. His homiletic monologue echoes the claim of the medieval Church that "...the desire that women aroused in men originated with the devil..." (Gregg 87). Yet, this moralizing seems to serve another purpose: to excuse the Benedictine's bodily reaction to the sight of the young women. Gregg notes such tendencies in medieval sermons:

While the ubiquity of male sexual desire compelled acknowledgement, it was intolerable to the male psyche that his own concupiscence should condemn him. Culpability, therefore, had to be placed elsewhere: on women, who were the visible proximate source of sexual desire, and on the devil, who could serve as the instigator that would partially excuse women by presenting their lust-arousing conduct as involuntary. Women became the screen upon which the fleshy passions could be safely projected (93).

In addition to this censure by the Church, the monk echoes the belief that women could ensnare a man with a look:²⁴

Qu'ele l'a es ieus et el vis,

²⁴ We should also not forget the medieval notion that one falls in love through sight.

Car d'un regart ou d'un seul ris,
Ou d'un petit de biau semblant
Vait ele si un cuer emblant
Que chius qui le samblant rechoit
De maintenant s'en aperchoit
Qu'il est sans cuer et sans amie:
Et pour ce ne l'aime ele mie,
S'ele li a sen ceur emblé (61-69)²⁵

Could the monk be speaking from experience? Did he become a monk due the devastation of a woman? This is very possible considering that the idea of a fall is again indicated in lines sixty-five and sixty-six with the rhyme of the last syllable *choit*. The narrator illustrates the danger to one's life and heart, and even faith of one look or smile, ascribing to women an immense power that rivals that of any great army. According to the monk, it is for this reason that he was so completely overwhelmed and humiliated by these young women. Not only did they thrill his heart, but also the physical consequences of lust are manifest in his bodily reaction...consequences over which he has no control due to their corrupting nature.

While reflecting upon these lust-provoking women, the monk falls asleep, and begins a dream in which he returns to the greatly feared world outside the cloister. White notes: "...the monk fantasizes buying his way sexually into the

²⁵ "That she has eyes and the face because with one look or one single laugh or a bit of friendliness, she is capable of ravishing his heart to the point that he to whom she is friendly realizes that he no longer has a heart or a friend: and if she stole his heart from him, she does not love him as much as he loves her."

secular world that humiliates and excludes him because of his vows of chastity” (202-03). He imagines a market where all that is sold is “cons fendus.” Again, for the monk, women are reduced to just their relevant parts. In addition, these parts are for sale to anyone who can afford them and thus does not exclude the clergy. The market setting allows our monk entry into a both secular and sexual world normally prohibited to him. To emphasize this detail the market is described as having a “largue entrée.” We could understand this feature as free entry to all or as a reference to women’s bodies. In fact, the entrance seems to be a sort of devouring mouth/genitalia awaiting the intrusion of the monk in order to consume the monk just as he means to consume the sexual organs within (Burns 189). Yet, this market of female body parts does seem to be missing something: the presence of women. In fact, the clientele consists of nothing but monks and chaplains. Thus, the Benedictine does not find himself alone in his longing to satisfy his sexual desire.²⁶ In addition, the monk and the other clergy can satisfy their desire without having to bother with the awkwardness of courtship or with the embarrassment of being caught. Just as he had hoped to hide his desire and shame in his waking hours, he seeks to accomplish this also in his sleep.

This market in which he finds himself evidently has a great demand. In their haste to purchase carnal pleasure, the clerics, much to our monk’s dismay, procure all of the most beautiful merchandise offered at the stall: demand surpasses supply. All that remains is what nobody else wants. Of such situations

²⁶ See Jennifer Thibodeaux’s article “Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy” in *Gender and History* 18.2, 2006, pp. 380-390 for historical examples of the sexual escapades of various members of the clergy.

in the fabliaux, Muscatine explains: “Sexual humour deals with the perennial problems (and thus the comedy) of sexual opportunity, privacy, potency, compatibility, rivalry—and any other obstacles in the way of sexual satisfaction” (“Courtly Literature and Vulgar Language” 5). Our poor monk encounters nothing but deterrents when attempting to act upon his desires, which, of course, results in humor for the audience. His much yearned-for sanctuary continues to elude him. He reveals his desperation when he says to a merchant:

De par tous les cors sains de Rome
Le marcheant tantost conjure
Que il li vende un con sans hure (109-11)²⁷

Placed in opposition in these lines are “les cors sains de Rome” and “un con sans hure.” For the monk, actual relics are synonymous with what he considers as relics. He believes that the female body parts are objects of veneration capable of providing miracles or even relief to ailing individuals, just as the relics of saints are purported to do. Although seemingly dejected, the monk still does not want to settle for just any type of product: he seeks a virgin. In fact, after the vendor offers him many unacceptable products, he describes specifically his ideal purchase:

Je voeil un con qui soit puchiaus,
Se je le truis, souef et net,
Ausi blanc com un herminet,

²⁷ “By all the saintly bodies of Rome he begged the merchant to sell him a hairless pudendum.”

A dous pous, a souef alaine,

Et le poil souef comme laine,

A gros bauchet, a haut debout (145-50)²⁸

The reverence with which he describes this living relic reminds us of a saintly relic that does not change in death and emits an odor of sanctity. It represents the Benedictine's idea of sanctuary.

Upon hearing the monk's request, the vendor searches everywhere for something that would meet the Benedictine's requirements. Finally, he finds something even better, an exotic example from England. In fact, in line one hundred fifty-four appears the only mention that the items at the market ever actually belonged to anyone. However, the young girl is quickly forgotten as she is not what is being sold, just the part that stands as a metonymy for the female body as a whole. The merchant describes its attributes (157-60). Although it does not meet all of the specifications designated by the monk, compared to the others, it comes the closest. As if testing the goods, the monk makes sure no one notices him then touches both himself and the item to determine its effectiveness. Of this particular gesture, Mellinkoff notes that it has existed since ancient times (and still exists today in Italy and the Mediterranean) as a protective measure (127). Knowing that he is about to do something against his teachings, he resorts to a gesture originating with pagan fertility rights to shelter him from any evil that may befall him due to his actions. Finding the merchandise adequate, he decides

²⁸ "I want a virgin pudendum, if I find it, soft and clean as white as ermine, from gentile origins, with sweet breath, and the hair soft like wool, with a large clitoris and a high bump."

to purchase it, even though he finds the price rather high. It seems as if the merchant tempts the monk just as Jesus and St. Anthony the Great were enticed by the devil. Yet, the monk makes no attempt to resist the seduction, but embraces it gladly. Not once does his conscience invade his dream to remind him of his vows of chastity. Nevertheless, in his reverie, he is still a monk and thanks the vendor by telling him “Vous acompaign a mes biens fais/ A mes proieres, a mes saumes” (“May my good wishes accompany you as well as my prayers and my psalms.” 180-81). Aside from paying the amount demanded, the only means the monk has of showing his gratitude is remembering the merchant in his prayers.

Unfortunately for the monk, his dream spills over into reality when he goes to seal the deal by slapping the vendor’s hand:

Estendi li moignes sa brache;

En dormant saut, et si embrache

Le grant fais d’espines trenchans (182-84)²⁹

Instead of the merchant’s hand, the monk hits the pile of thorns beside his bed. The slapping of the thorns could be considered a sort of mortification of the flesh, his conscience seeking the redemptive power of pain. The monk’s rude awakening echoes his otherwise jumpy nature: his haste on his horse and the nervous, uncontrolled physical response he has to the sight of the women. According to the fabliau, the Benedictine jumps more than “trente lius.”

²⁹ “The monk extended his arm and jumped from his sleep and touched with an open hand the great pile of cutting thorns.”

However, his cries are masked by the rooster crowing at dawn and awakening those in the house. The rooster's crows are reminiscent of those that sounded each time Peter denied Christ (Mark 4.69-72). One wonders: does this mean that he will also deny (or has denied) Christ?

Although he returns to the monastery, the question of victory remains unanswered. The Church has failed in providing the monk with the proper weapons to fend off temptation and, by promoting denial of one's sexuality, only ends up disarming him. In the mishaps of the monk, we are confronted with a comic psychomachia. Rather than a great battle for the soul, we see a clumsy monk with few life skills attempting to fight a demon he cannot control, his own body and subconscious. We should remember that, despite the obvious anti-clericalism prominent in many fabliaux, clerks penned many of the texts.

Although authorship of fabliaux is often difficult to confirm, we can see that such tales offer a comic catharsis for both the audience and author. Elder Olson notes in his book *The Theory of Comedy*: "...comedy often produces its characteristic relaxation by treating lightly things which we take most seriously" (39). For the medieval public, lust is a natural occurrence, and although it may occasionally complicate matters for the laity, it does not tend to cause the great difficulty experienced by the Benedictine. Still, the humor that results greatly amuses. Rather than teaching the consequences of giving in to lust, this text celebrates the dilemma it causes in a community where it is suppressed. This fabliau shows that the representation of the battle for man's soul is not limited to religious texts or the exterior of cathedrals. Rather, the struggle is presented in a more realistic

setting with humorous results. And finally, it leaves the audience, both medieval and twenty-first century, to wonder about the fate of the monk: which prevailed, virtue or vice?

Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine

On the other end of the spectrum from the monk's quest for chastity is the wife in *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, a fabliau found in three different manuscripts,³⁰ one of which³¹ is a later copy dating from the fifteenth century (Noomen and van den Boogaard 109). This wife appears as one of the many incarnations of the lusty woman stereotype in the fabliaux. While the exploitation of this convention could be understood as misogynistic, Muscatine believes that: “[w]hile it is likely that some forms of medieval antifeminism *are* based on fear of female sexuality ... the so-called ‘antifeminism’ in the fabliaux is so various in its quality and tone as more often to support the claim of admiration for women than fear and hatred” (*The Old French Fabliaux* 121-22). Thus, while criticizing women for their overactive libido, the male narrator also attempts to demystify both their language and sexuality.

The tale begins by recounting the abundance of food and drink at the wedding of the fisherman to his wife. Although such copious meals are expected at weddings, and this one is no exception, we should remember Muscatine's observation that, in the fabliaux, eating patterns are indicative of character (*The*

³⁰ Paris, BN MS 837; Berlin Deutsche Staatsbibl. Hamilton 257; Genève Bibl. Publ. et univ. fr 179 bis.

³¹ Genève Bibl. Publ. et univ. fr 179 bis.

Old French Fabliaux 73). Accordingly, the theme of abundance manifests itself from the beginning of the tale, setting the tone for the couple's marriage:

Asez en bevoit et menjoit,
E en pessoit mout bien sa fame.
Li valet si la fesoit dame
De li et de quant qu'il avoit:
A son poeir la meintenoit.
Et la fouti au mieus qu'il pot (12-17)³²

This description indicates that the husband does everything within his power to provide for his wife in every conceivable way, guaranteeing the two a certain social status. However, until line seventeen, this tale seems like a pleasant account of a happily married and prosperous bourgeois couple. In fact, the story before this line is almost boring; yet, the jongleur awakens the audience and renews their interest when he adds a tidbit about the couple's sex life to this bland narrative. After revealing such a private issue, the jongleur voices his belief, which he passes off as general wisdom, that if a husband does not keep his wife sexually satisfied, she will no longer love him. Could the narrator be projecting his own experiences with love and lust onto women, proclaiming his experience as a general rule for all, male and female? According to his assumption, women equate lust with love; if there is no lust, there is no love. In addition, he points out: "Car jane fame bien peüe/ Vdroit sovent estre fotue" ("Because a well-fed

³² "He ate and drank copiously and he fed his wife very well. He was master and she, his lady and all that he had, he protected to the best of his abilities. And he screwed her as best as he could."

woman would like to be screwed often.”) (21-22). Food and sex thus go hand in hand. Once a woman is satisfied gastronomically, she also must be satisfied sexually. Burns notes that the fabliaux give “...us a view of the female body as it is defined and constructed by anonymous narrators who purport to ‘know’ what women are like” (188). This fabliau proves no different as, according to this narrator, the stomach and sex organs of a female are somehow connected; hence, armed with this advanced knowledge of the female anatomy, he uses his purported expertise in order to further promote his misogynistic theory.

After this revelation, the jongleur gives a *real life* example to support his theory:

Au bachelor tendi le vit,
Que il avoit et lonc et gros;
El poing sa fame l’a enclos:
El nel senti ne mou ne vein.
‘Sire, fet ele, plus vos ain
Que je ne faz Perrot, mon frere,
Voire, par Deu, ne que ma mere,
Ne que mon pere ne ma suer’ (24-31)³³

The description of the husband’s sexual organ and the wife’s actions are rather pornographic. Cooke notes: “In the usual pornographic work there is an overwhelming concern with the physical aspects of sex, particularly with the

³³ “The phallus that was long and thick stretched from the young man; his wife held it in her hand: it felt neither soft nor flabby. ‘Sire, she said, I love you more than Perrot, my brother, truly, by God, more than my mother, my father and my sister.’”

penis, its size and potency” (“Pornography, the Comic Spirit and the Fabliaux” 138). Therefore, in their attention to detail, descriptions like this add to the pornographic spirit, no doubt destined for shock value and humor. Still, there is an undeniable celebration of masculinity. In addition, once we look past this act, we notice that the wife seems to be swearing her unerring love upon a holy object or relic. For the wife, her husband’s member is an object of veneration. Just as one would swear on a Bible or holy relics to indicate that what one says is true, the wife swears upon her husband’s sex. It is also important to note that the link between prosperity and potency is a reflection of the fisherman’s character in general: he never fails to provide for the wife in every way indicating both his ability and success as a man. It is also ostensibly a symbol of lust as well, yet not just the lust of a man projected upon a female character, but that of a woman and the power that such lust wields over her character. His maleness is the instrument of the wife’s sexual pleasure. Potency and prosperity are irrevocably linked. The woman is not only guilty of lust, but of idolatry as well, worshipping the sexual object that gives her pleasure. However, we must remember that this ever-powerful symbol of manhood is being held in the hand of a woman, illustrating not only her carnal desire but also her wish to wield its power as well.

While swearing her undying love for her husband, she claims to love him more than her family, her father, her mother, her sister and her brother, whom she names specifically. This family represents unconditional love, much different than the conditional love she feels for her husband, which is based upon sexual pleasure. The beginning of the fabliau establishes a link between material and

physical satisfaction that will become important as the narrative unfolds. For the wife's satisfaction to continue, her husband's ardor must never falter, just as he never fails to provide for her materially. The narrator tells us the husband is aware of the deceit of women and that they will say anything to obtain what they desire; after all, one cannot believe a woman's words but her actions. In the case of this couple, it seems that conventional roles are reversed; traditionally, men are known to say anything in order to sleep with a woman, but in this fabliau, it is the woman who will say anything to get what she wants. We find here yet another example of a male author projecting his ideas upon a female character, demonstrating his ideal of women's sexual behavior.

The wife claims to love her husband because he shows love for her and buys her nice things. Therefore, according to the wife, it is not lust that prompts her affection, but fulfillment of his spousal duties as a provider. Still, no matter what her reasoning, satisfaction is obviously her *raison d'être*. Yet, when questioned about her love for her spouse, she behaves defensively. Could it be that she does not fulfill her duties as a wife? Perhaps the reason for his doubt is that he sexually satisfies his wife, but she does not sexually satisfy him. Or perhaps she simply uses sex to obtain the things that she wants. If this is the case, then any warmth that she shows to her husband is nothing but a subterfuge aimed at maintaining a certain standard of living. Still, despite her protests to the contrary, the husband insists upon his position that she only loves him because of the sexual gratification that he supplies:

Tu m'amerioies, fet it, peu,

Se plus ne te savoie fere:

D'ailleurs convient l'amour atrere

Se je ne te foutoie bien,

Tu me harroies plus c'un chien! (42-46)³⁴

This opinion reiterates the author's theory that a husband must keep his wife sexually satisfied or she will end up despising him. Because the husband meets his wife's wants in all other aspects of their life together so well, she expects carnal fulfillment also. She is thus not only lustful, but also greedy. In his efforts to fulfill his spousal duties, the husband has undermined his own authority. The couple's happiness relies on the wife's satisfaction; if she is not satisfied, the relationship is in jeopardy.

The wife's reaction to her husband's claim is both comical and over-exaggerated: she grimaces. Not only does her pained expression indicate feigned displeasure on her part but also it may indicate her frustration. Gaunt remarks that "...female desire is ... only acceptable if it is orientated towards satisfying the male, otherwise it is castrating" (241). By mocking his manner of lovemaking, the wife refutes her husband's rationale because she is not at all sexually fulfilled and as a result, denies him his own sexuality. In her opinion, his case is completely invalid. Through the wife's response to her husband's claim, the narrator indicates the castrating effects of not only female desire but also female speech. Her counter-point indicates not only her sexual dissatisfaction,

³⁴ "You would love me little, said he, if I didn't know how to do more to you: moreover, you would seek the love of another if I did not screw you well, you would hate me more than a dog!"

but also insults her husband at the same time by inadvertently challenging his sexual prowess. When she does show him affection, it is simply out of duty and not because she receives any pleasure from his maleness, which she refers to as a “longaigne de bouel” or a filthy sausage or intestine. The wife links sex with food, but not in a good way. She goes on to say: “Mengié l’eüst ore une truie/ Mes que n’en receüsiez mort!” (“If a sow happened to eat it, it would die from it!”) (56-57). Thus, his member is so revolting and toxic that it would kill a pig that can pretty much eat anything. We can understand this image of a sow in various ways. One interpretation is that it evokes the pig kept by the Greek goddess Demeter that came to symbolize fertility along with the goddess. Thus, a sow dying from having eaten the husband’s member questions the husband’s sexual ability. Another way to view this image is through a Biblical lens. The pig is declared unclean and unfit for consumption in both Leviticus 11.7 and Deuteronomy 14.8. So not only is pork unacceptable sustenance for humans, but according to the wife, her husband’s member is unsuitable for consumption by a swine as well. She thus proclaims her husband’s sex organ a menace to all with which it comes in contact. Or the sow could represent the wife herself, whose overactive sex drive devours her husband’s sexuality and, thus, his power. By attempting to conceal her own lustfulness, she negates both her husband’s sexuality and gender, stripping him of his masculinity and rendering him an asexual entity.

Still, the husband insists upon the allure of his manhood. In fact, he claims that were he to somehow lose it, she would leave him, because it is his

only redeeming quality. Judith Butler notes: “... ‘the body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (*Gender Trouble* 8). Applying this notion to the text, the husband’s member has become a metonym for his identity as a man and husband. When his wife once again counters her husband’s claim, the jongleur points out that the woman is lying, thus letting the audience know a bit about the woman’s psyche and putting forth once more the belief that women are lascivious creatures. Muscatine, however, notes that this motif is just a subterfuge: “... *Le Pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, which, in the course of showing that the wife will desert the husband if he loses his penis, actually celebrates the husband’s sexuality” (*The Old French Fabliaux* 122). The husband’s member has become a valuable asset to the wife and the thought of losing it and the sexual pleasure that it provides causes enough distress to the wife that she would leave him and seek another to fulfill her desires.

Still vehemently denying the allegations, she goes on to insult her husband’s body calling his member a “deable de pendeloche” (“dangling demon”) (65). By calling it a demon, she suggests that its purpose is evil. In line sixty-six however, she repeats the fact that it hangs, thus insinuating that it is a flaccid member that she despises as it brings her no pleasure. In fact, she is so repulsed by a hanging, lifeless sex organ that she hopes that a dog chokes on it. She seems to separate the sexual organ from the person as if the two could function independently from one another.

Resolved to test his wife's honesty on this matter, he happens upon an opportunity while fishing on the Seine: a dead priest, who serendipitously still has an erection, floats towards him. Even before the *mise-en-abyme* of the priest's tale is recounted, we can guess his last moments from the state of his sexual organ. The priest is caught cheating with a knight's wife. He is so frightened when he realizes that he has been discovered that he jumps into the water. Thus, the knight does not kill him, but the priest's own fear of what the knight may do to him does. Even death does not free the priest from his shame because his body still discloses the sin he has committed. Levy notes that "...the same waters of the Seine that have caused the undoing of the priest will represent for the fisherman the very source of his redemption, his way to salvation..." (128). While I have to agree that the Seine provides the husband with the means of testing his wife's love, I have to question why Levy believes that the priest's member is a source of salvation and redemption for the husband. From what does he need saved? His wife's lies? Her castrating speech? I believe that Levy implies that the husband's ruse will restore the patriarchal power in his household; his redemption and salvation will be in the recognition of his masculine power.

Remembering his wife's claim that she does not desire the sexual pleasure he provides, the husband decides to cut off this priest's member to pass off as his own to his wife. Levy remarks that "...[the priest's member] appears for all the world like an obscene and absurd parody of the classic Arthurian rite-of-passage imagery of the Sword in the Lake. The fishing expedition will have become a Quest; and by plucking the penis from the water our fisherman Lancelot will have

performed the deed on which his fortune depends” (128). Placing the severed appendage in his sack of fish as if it were the catch of the day, it is now he who will mislead with the priest’s sex organ acting as an instrument of deception.

Upon arriving home, he pretends to be suffering greatly and tells his wife that three knights accosted him and told him that he could chose which member he would like to lose. He explains that were he to have chosen to have his ears cut off, everyone would think that he had committed a crime and gossip about it. Were he to lose his eyes, he would lose all joy in his life. Thus, as she told him that she did not like his sex organ, he sacrificed it. The fisherman’s story seems to attest that even when confronted with physical danger, he thinks only of his wife’s approval and happiness. To prove that the damage has actually occurred, he pulls the priest’s detached member out of the bag:

Le vit a geté enmi l’ere.

Et ele l’a bien regardé,

Si le vit gros et reboulé,

Et connut bien que ce fut vit (126-29)³⁵

It is interesting to note that, while the wife recognizes the object in front of her as a male member, she does not take the time to inspect it and verify that it indeed belongs to her husband. Because she has no reason to suspect her husband of trickery, she believes that the item in front of her is, in fact, her husband’s. Her reaction to his misfortune (as predicted by the *fableor*) is that of a selfish,

³⁵ “He took the member to the middle of the room and she looked at it and saw it thick with the foreskin rolled back and she recognized it as a member.”

libidinous woman. She does not ask after her husband's well-being, but thinks only of the pleasure of which she will be deprived. I believe that she also laments the loss of influence in the relationship. She controlled her husband through sex; without this means of manipulation, she is powerless.

The wife curses her husband's sexless body using similar language that she used earlier in the fabliau to describe her disdain for his member. I find her subsequent behavior interesting: she begins to leave him in order to seek another husband, presumably one who does not have the physical challenge that her current one has. However, in reality, a woman in her position in the thirteenth century would not have the right to leave her husband until she has brought her case to a tribunal (Dauvillier 175-82). She behaves as if this has already occurred when in fact it has not. In any case, she orders her maid/niece to gather up her belongings, including the animals and some freshly cut beans. She seeks to leave her husband humiliated and without sustenance, depriving him in turn, as she feels she has been. She feels shamed to have a husband who is not whole and intends to get revenge and make him feel the embarrassment she experiences. She is, in fact, so disgraced that she intends to leave by the back door in order to avoid scandal.

Despite the wife's obvious callousness toward her husband's welfare, the fisherman still pretends to think only of her in light of his hardship:

Douce amie, quant je t'oi prise,
Je te pramis a seinte iglise
Que je te porteroie foi.

J'ai bien vint et deus sous sor moi;

Vien avant, s'en pren la moitié:

Je cuideroie avoir pechié

Se je t'en toloie ta part (159-65)³⁶

Although he offers her half of the money he has, it is important to his ruse that he does not hand it to her; she must take it from his pants. Of course, when she reaches inside to seek the money, she finds a surprise: the sex of her husband that moves when she touches it. Levy notes:

...there is a hint of the sexual healing motif right at the end, as the husband who has made his wife believe that he has been castrated finally reveals to her his evident virility, and claims that he has been miraculously cured ... In fact, this fabliau contains a further little medical twist since the husband ... may at the beginning be said to have played the part of 'surgeon', by cutting off the drowned priest's penis to show his aghast spouse (229).

She even tests it out to make sure that what she is feeling is what she thinks it is. The husband, however, does not act surprised at all, claiming that God did not want her to leave him thus, he performed a miracle and returned his masculinity to him. Bloch notes: "Through an initially metaphoric castration and the literal return of the phallus the entire household is recuperated under paternal law..."

(122). However, I would disagree with this observation. By depriving the wife of

³⁶ "Sweet friend, when I took you [in marriage], I promised to the holy Church that I would be faithful to you. I have twenty-two sous on me; come and take half: I would consider it a sin to withhold your half from you."

pleasure, the husband subjects her to paternal law, but by returning it to her, he allows her sexuality to rule the household again. No longer confronted with a future without pleasure and love, the wife immediately begins to kiss her husband and recalls her maid/niece along with the beasts and beans she had intended to take. Line one hundred eighty-four indicates both her joy and passion by describing specifically the way in which she kisses him: “langueter.” (“to kiss with the tongue.”) I believe that this is a reference to a woman’s speech (*langue*) that is often a manifestation of her sexual energy. In addition to kissing him, she holds her husband’s member in her hand and talks again, not necessarily to her husband, but to the member:

Ha, beau frere, beaus douz amis,
Vos m’avez hui mout esfreee!
Onques puis l’eure que fui nee
Ne fu mon cuer plus en malese! (186-89)³⁷

She consequently cements the author’s Ovidian assertion that women are licentious. It is, however, important to note that the pretended return of the husband’s manhood also reaffirms both the wife’s sexuality and her social station.

Although the title *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, suggests that this fabliau concerns a fisherman, the true protagonists of this tale are female sexuality and speech. Although the narrator purports to condemn them both, he seeks at the same time to shed some light on them so that they do not appear so mysterious. He does this by exposing female lust as an extension of masculinity and female

³⁷ “Oh, dear brother, dear sweet friend, you scared me so! Never before has my heart been so unhappy!”

speech as an expression of this lust. This fabliau could thus be considered a sort of instruction manual for husbands. The fisherman in our tale discovers the influence that his manhood has over female desire when its status is doubted. Although the husband fears both feminine language and desire, he learns to accept them in order to manipulate them.

Conclusion

In her book, *Bodies in Pieces*, Deborah A. Harter notes of Guy de Maupassant's "La chevelure" that, "[n]ot only is the part enough to complete the picture, anything more would be too much" (56). The same can be said for the fabliaux *Le moigne* and *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*. For the monk and the wife of the fisherman, their desire is stimulated not by the opposite sex, but by the particular body part that they believe constitutes gender; all else is superfluous. Thus, Butler's assertion that gender is culturally constructed is exemplified in these two fabliaux.³⁸ For our two lustful creatures, the monk and the wife, gender lies in the genitals, which stand as a metonym for sexuality and power. It is this streamlined definition that leads to their misadventures.

Katzenellenbogen observes that the representation of lust appears on the cathedral as a woman looking in the mirror (12). We should note that when an individual examines his image in a mirror, he sees not only his reflection but also his surroundings, which we could consider a sort of *sorplus*. Just as Michael Camille indicates with the kiss on the cathedral, the excess, which in the case of

³⁸ See *Gender Trouble* p. 8.

our two fabliaux is lust, overflows and spills out into countless directions. In *Le moigne* and *Le pescheor de Pont seur Saine*, it is not the acceptance or rejection of lust that incites laughter, but the way in which each character copes with its aftermath. Indeed, this vice seems to act as a force of nature that swoops into one's life and attempts to annihilate sacred vows. Yet, interestingly enough, in the end, this vice guides both the monk and the fisherman's wife back to their oaths. Lust and the excesses to which it leads are but mere detours on one's way to virtue. It is in this way that these two fabliaux are exemplary of the conservative thrust of the genre as a whole. Although the fabliaux incite laughter by showing the audience the inferiority or fallen nature of its characters,³⁹ is it possible that, by demonstrating the folly of vice, they were also seeking to lead the audience toward virtue? This question of virtue is echoed in *Les perdris* and *Les trois dames de Paris* where gluttony overcomes four unsuspecting women.

³⁹ Also seen in the exemplum, sermon and parable, but as pitiful, not comical.

*Quorum finis interitus quorum deus venter
et gloria in confusione ipsorum qui terrene
sapient Philippians 3.19⁴⁰*

Chapter Two

Gluttony's Gall

Another vice frequently shown in both medieval art and architecture and discussed in religious texts is gluttony or *gula*. In his *De Malo*, Thomas Aquinas declares “...the first prohibition enjoined on human beings concerned the sin of gluttony, as Gen. 2:17, where God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, makes clear. Therefore, the sin of gluttony is the first and greatest sin...” (755). He also observes that “...gluttony chiefly regards emotions and is contrary to moderation regarding the desires and pleasures of food and drink” (749). Often depicted as a woman, *Gula* is illustrated in the *Psychomachia* as “...stuffing food into her insatiable mouth” (Katzenellenbogen 12). This depiction demonstrates the excess to which this vice leads and echoes Aquinas’ assertion that it is a vice of immoderation. However, the intemperance

⁴⁰ “Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.”

need not be only with food, but any bodily desire. Lorcin notes: “[t]ous les besoins du corps doivent être satisfaits, puisqu’ils sont naturels...” (“Le corps a ses raisons” 439). She further states that “...les besoins du corps sont légitimes, les plaisirs sensuels ne sont pas condamnables si l’homme sait garder une certaine mesure” (“Le corps a ses raisons” 434). Still, “[c]’est à l’homme de fixer la juste mesure, et non à la femme dont le tempérament est trop ardent et la raison trop chancelante” (“Le corps a ses raisons” 442). Thus, it is no surprise that, when it comes to gluttony, the fabliaux almost always portray a woman with a voracious appetite because as Lorcin indicates, only men are able to control their desires. For example, in *Les perdrix*, a peasant captures two partridges and hopes to share his good fortune with the village priest. He gives the two birds to his wife to roast and sets out to fetch the priest. The birds, however, finish cooking long before the peasant returns with the priest. His wife, unable to control her appetite takes a small taste from an unnoticeable area. Yet, her *gourmandise* soon overcomes her and she eats both partridges, making it necessary to fabricate a ruse to avoid her husband’s fury. In this case, the wife’s lack of control dictates the direction of the fabliau.

In *Les trois dames de Paris*, the ladies’ drinking leads them to disrobe, roll around in the mud and lose consciousness in the street. The next morning, the townspeople find them in such a state that they are believed dead and are subsequently interred. Awakened in a shallow grave, they dig themselves out and, believing that they are still in the tavern, begin drinking yet again until they pass out for a second time in the street where they are discovered the next

morning. Once more mistaken for dead, they suddenly wake up and request more food and drink. Thinking this the work of the devil, the crowd that had gathered around them quickly retreats. Finally sober, the three women return home. For this fabliau, the humor results not only from the gluttony of the women, but also from their supposed deaths and rebirths. For both *Les perdris* and *Les trois dames de Paris*, the problems experienced by the gluttonous women pale in comparison to those that they cause for others.

On the cathedral, gluttony is often represented as already defeated by its opposing virtue, temperance. In the above-mentioned fabliaux, the men embody parsimony and the women, gluttony, and the conflict between virtue and vice develops into a battle of the sexes. An excellent example of this struggle is found in *Les perdris*, where the wife leads both the priest and her husband to excessive behavior in order to hide her own intemperance.

Les perdris

It is interesting to note that in the French word for partridge (*perdris*), one distinguishes the French word *perdre* (to lose). In fact, this fabliau is, to a great extent, about losing: the wife loses self-control; the husband loses the dinner that he had procured; and the priest loses his trust in the husband. The text, found only in Paris BN MS 837, begins with the jongleur recounting that a peasant named Gombaut has managed to capture two partridges. To demonstrate the appreciation that Gombaut and his wife have for these fortuitous birds, the author describes the care that is taken when preparing them:

En l'atorner mist mout sa cure:

Sa fame les fist au feu metre.

Ele s'en sot bien entremetre:

Le feu a fet, la haste atorne (6-9)⁴¹

These four lines are particularly intriguing as they are bursting with double meaning. One way of understanding the text is to take it at face value; however, when one examines more closely the language used, one detects more subtle undertones. For example, line eight (“Ele s’en sot bien entremetre”) appears to point out that the wife was adept at roasting partridges; yet at the same time, it could be a sort of inside joke that she knew what to do with two such lovely birds, i.e. eat them. This is the first indication of the wife’s gluttony. In addition, line nine also contains a word that could be understood two different ways: *haste*. At first, the feminine noun seems to indicate that the wife is preparing the spit for the birds; yet, there is another possible and more evident suggestion: *haste*. Hence, instead of understanding the line as “she was preparing the spit,” one could read the line as “she was preparing to make haste,” yet another sign of her excess.

Wishing to share his good fortune, the peasant leaves his wife to the preparation of the partridges to fetch the village priest for dinner. The fact that he leaves his wife alone with the birds demonstrates that he does not suspect any excessive behavior on her part and expects her to simply roast the fowl.

Reinforcing the idea of the wife’s celerity in their preparation, the birds finish

⁴¹ “She took great care in preparing them: his wife put them on the fire. She knew how take good care of them: she made the fire and prepared the spit.”

cooking before her husband returns with their dinner guest. The fabliau recounts that he takes too long in returning; yet surely the wife, who reportedly is experienced in the roasting of partridges, is aware of how long his journey would take and of how long the birds would need to cook. It seems that this indicates that gluttony overtakes the wife long before the fabliau gives any overt clue of her true character.

Allowing her craving to rule her, she:

S'en pinça une peletüre,
Quar mout ama la lecheüre:
Quant Dieus li dona a avoir
Ne beoit pas a grant avoir,
Mes a toz ses bons acomplir (15-19)⁴²

These lines not only mention clearly her gluttony, but because she treasures fulfilling her desires over material things, they also suggest the sensual nature of her gluttony. This vice embodies not only a tendency toward excess but toward narcissism as well. It is interesting to note that the Old French word for gluttony, *lecheüre*, is related to the Old French verb meaning to lick (*lichier*, *lechier* or *loichier*). A common representation of a person who is coveting food is of one who is licking his/her lips. This is exactly the mental picture produced when one imagines the wife standing over the succulent partridges, revealing her excessive fondness for the cooked birds. As suggested by Lorcin's above-mentioned

⁴² "She pinched off a piece of the skin because she loved gluttony: when God was giving out assets, she was not interested in accumulating wealth but to satisfy all her desires."

observation about women in the fabliaux, the wife does not know how to show restraint nor does she make any such attempt but instead gives in to her physical urges. In addition, of the act of eating and drinking in the fabliaux, Lorcin remarks: “Les passages où il est question de manger et boire, même lorsqu’ils sont des redites ou des pastiches, contribuent à une démonstration. Leur première fonction est de contribuer à caractériser des types humains” (“Manger et boire dans les fabliaux” 230). It is important to note that the wife’s propensity for food is not simply a gastronomical indulgence but a sensual one as well. The pleasure that she gets from sampling the skin of the partridge is derived not from the body’s need to nourish itself but from the aroma of the cooked bird and the taste and texture of the flesh in her mouth. Of gluttony, Thomas Aquinas notes: “...gluttony is a form of idolatry” (755). This is true for the wife, who worships the sensations offered by the delicacy. This mouthful, however, acts as a sort of forbidden fruit for the wife, whose eyes are opened to the joys of the bird’s flesh, and she subsequently yearns for more.

Thinking only of satisfying her craving for the meat, she eats one of the birds. Perhaps aware of her husband’s impending return, she devours only the smallest partridge. Yet, she is still not satisfied as line twenty-seven indicates: “Mal du morsel qui remainsist” (“Cursed be the portion that remained”). The thought of the other partridge overtakes her senses and she invents a very feeble lie about cats entering their home and stealing the birds to explain their disappearance. Assured that her husband would believe her fabrication, “La langue li prist a fremir” (“Her tongue began to quiver.”) (40). Not only does her

tongue begin to quiver in anticipation of the flesh she is about to ingest, but also from the lie that she intends to tell her husband. Schenck notes in “Functions and Roles in the Fabliau” that “[t]he deceptive act is not an end in itself, however, but rather a function used as a means to accomplish or cover up a Misdeed [sic]. It is usually a deliberate attempt to deceive someone although it may be inadvertent...” (26). However, in the case of the wife, the subterfuge is calculated. In addition, the excessive behavior caused by the wife’s gluttony has spilled over into her relationship with her husband and to cover up her overindulgence, she must lie to her husband, something with which she seems to have no problem.

Drunk with the anticipation of consuming the fowl, the wife finishes the second bird. It is not until she licks the remaining juices from her fingers that she awakens from her gastronomical intoxication and realizes the trouble her misdeed will produce. Once the birds are consumed, temptation no longer compels her and her senses return. The jongleur explains: “Tant dura cele demoree/ Que la dame fu saoulee” (“Her wait lasted so long so the woman ate her fill.”) (53-54). Thus, the wife is not, in fact, insatiable, but simply lacks self-control, unable to resist the partridge’s inebriating effects. She must now tell her husband the fabrication concocted while still enraptured by the fowl. Regarding women and their cleverness in the fabliaux, Lesley Johnson notes: “The women demonstrate ... a striking ability to turn a dangerous situation, often involving the threat of discovery, to their advantage and thus to come out on top” (299). However, the wife’s story of the cats stealing the birds does not result with her on top; in fact,

she almost winds up on the bottom. Her husband, furious at her carelessness, reaches to strike her. But before his blow hits its target, she proclaims that she was just joking and that the partridges are safe under the cover keeping warm. To forestall the discovery of her gluttonous indiscretion, she sends Gombaut off in another direction to sharpen his carving knife. Having momentarily avoided disaster, the wife must now contrive another stratagem to prevent him from learning the truth and truly receiving the promised beating.

While her naked husband sharpens the carving knife,⁴³ the priest finally arrives for the sumptuous meal to which he was invited. Forgetting that “...la femme est un être inférieur dont il faut se méfier car, descendante d’Eve elle incite au péché...” (Verdon 5), he greets the wife with a very friendly and familiar gesture: he hugs her. The priest obviously knows the couple well and feels comfortable with such a welcome. It is perhaps this intimate greeting that inspires her ruse. Pretending to fear for the priest’s welfare, she exclaims:

Sire, dist el, fuiez, fuiez!

Ja ne serai ou vous soiez

Honiz ne malmis de vo cors!

Mes sires est alez lafors

Por son grant coutel aguisier,

Et dist qu’il vous voudra trenchier

Les coilles, s’il vous puet tenir! (83-89)⁴⁴

⁴³ Please note that this is also a metaphor for sexual intercourse.

⁴⁴ “Sir, she said, run, run! I refuse to witness the shame of the mutilation of your body! My husband went outside to sharpen his knife and he said that he would cut off your balls if he can restrain you.”

Her pleas seem to come out of the blue. After all, the priest had spoken with the husband earlier when the dinner invitation was extended, and he had no indication that Gombaut was vexed in any way. What could he have done to provoke such a threat to his health? Nonetheless, he does not question the wife, but trusts her, and the sight of the husband outside naked and sharpening a large knife only serves to reinforce her assertion. Thus, he flees, convinced that if he does not, he will suffer physical harm. One must wonder if the priest is actually guilty of some indiscretion that could incite someone to wish to castrate him. After all, aside from the wife's claim and the husband sharpening the carving knife, what else could make him believe that Gombaut is acting as the instrument of his retribution?

As the priest makes his escape, the wife points him out to her husband alleging that he has stolen the birds. She is now accusing the priest not only of gluttony but also of theft. In the priest's case, encountering this woman does not cause him to sin, but rather to be charged with it. Her excess has overflowed to invade and sully the priest's reputation with false accusations, not only tainting her relationship with both her husband and the priest but also that of the priest with the husband and perhaps with the rest of the community once word of his alleged larceny spreads.

Believing the priest is making off with his dinner, Gombaut runs after him shouting:

Ainsi nes en porterez mie!

.....

Bien les en portez eschaufees,
Ça les lerez se vous ataing!
Vous seriez mauvés compaing,
Se vous les mengiiez sanz moi! (116, 118-21)⁴⁵

Because the two men presume two very different motives for their chase, the above lines take on an entirely different meaning for the priest than what the husband intends. The priest understands that the *les* to which Gombaut is referring are his testicles. Not only does the priest believe that if caught, he will suffer bodily harm, but also that Gombaut intends to consume what he severs from his body. The priest can only conclude that the partridges were a ruse to entice him to come to the house and that he was to provide the main course: his male body parts. Furthermore, judging from Gombaut's words, he assumes that he would have been expected to ingest them as well. Or perhaps, the priest understands the threats as a metaphor, equating eating with sex. In this case, the husband is thus seeking revenge because the priest has made him a cuckold. Lacy comments on this narrative manipulation:

The ambiguity of *Les Perdrix* is verbal—the husband's reference to partridges is misunderstood as a threat of castration—but that verbal ambiguity depends on a physical or visual one, the husband's sharpening the knife, as he thinks, to carve the partridges or, as the priest believes, to carve the latter's anatomy.

⁴⁵ "Do not take off with them! You took them all warmed up, you should leave them if I catch you! You would be a bad friend if you ate them without me."

But, unlike many fabliaux, this one offers ambiguities that are not simply misunderstandings, and they are not accidents. They are a consequence of design, by the wife in collusion with the narrator ... She controls *almost* every element of the situation, and the joke is dependent on her manipulating the situation as to create the ambiguity ... But as ingenious as the woman is, there is an additional element that she cannot control—an element of apparent chance—and that involves the words her husband will shout at the priest ... Fortunately, the narrator ... at this point ... steps in to assist (152-53).

The celebratory dinner of partridges imagined by the priest has turned into a horrific, cannibalistic nightmare. The flesh of the partridges has been replaced with the flesh of the priest. With this image in his head, the priest reaches his house and securely locks himself inside, safe from the knife-wielding barbarian.

Unable to catch the priest, Gombaut returns home empty-handed. He then asks his wife how exactly the priest managed to steal the birds. Fabricating yet another lie spawned by both her gluttony and her fear of being beaten, she explains in detail what supposedly took place: that the ravenous priest tricked her into showing him the partridges and when she did, he snatched them and ran. Thus concludes the story of *Les perdrix*. So, in the end, the wife does win, having devoured the partridges and avoided a beating from her husband. Of the women in the fabliaux, Lesley Johnson remarks: “We are not encouraged to laugh at the wives in these narratives, nor to condemn them; rather we are invited to laugh

with them and to view their success with considerable esteem” (229). Not only are we invited to laugh along with the wife, but also to laugh at those she has duped. In addition, the wife has over-turned the traditional hierarchy where the man is the consumer; in this case, it is the woman. Of audience laughter, Elder Olson, notes: “... comic quality is dependent upon the relation of the one who laughs to the one he laughs at” (62). The jongleur specifies this relation of the audience to the characters in the story when he closes the fabliau by explaining that the wife victimizes these two men so easily because women have a mystical power to make the truth lies and lies truth:⁴⁶

Fame est fete por decevoir;

Mençonge fet devenir voir

Et voir fet devenir mençonge (151-53)⁴⁷

The jongleur thus purports this narrative to be a cautionary tale directed toward men. Of laughter in medieval comic literature, Lisa Perfetti notes: “When a woman outwits her husband, a man in the audience can laugh because he judges himself to be superior to the man who has let a woman usurp his authority or because he recognizes that his own fears about his masculine role are not his alone” (25). The jongleur places the men in the audience above the men in the tale in order for them to learn by laughter and example.

But what about the women, what knowledge do they gain from the story?

Ostensibly, they learn that they are gluttonous, conniving liars. But if one looks a

⁴⁶ This claim is obviously inspired by Ovid.

⁴⁷ “Woman is made to deceive; she will make a lie into truth and truth into a lie.”

bit deeper, one could understand the fabliau as a sort of instruction manual on how to get one's way with one's husband. Women are at such a disadvantage in a male-dominated world that deception is the only means of getting ahead and grasping at even the minutest bit of power. If a wife must lie to avoid a beating, then so be it, especially if it is at the expense of another man. If by lying, she obtains what she wants (in the wife's case, the partridges), then that is what she must do. Rather than laboring over a hot spit for the satisfaction of two men, the wife chooses her own fulfillment. Why should she not enjoy the fruits of her labor? After all, she gives such attention to the birds in their preparation, why should she not give them just as much attention when they are done? Yet, I would like to point out that these partridges might not be partridges at all, but a displaced symbol of the wife's sexual desire. Unable to receive any satisfaction from her husband, she takes what she can get from him. If he prefers to hunt rather than attend to her, then she will take pleasure in the fruits of his hunting expedition. The enjoyment that she receives from the birds replaces the void left in her sex life.

Misogynistic lessons appear frequently at the end of the fabliaux as if almost to excuse having told such a tale. Gastronomical excess and its spawn generate the comedy in *Les perdrix*, amusing the audience to no end. In this tale, gluttony is not only a vice of consumption but also of production; laughter is not only provoked by the wife eating the partridges, but also by what this act inspires in order to cover itself up. Unlike the representations on the cathedral, temperance does not defeat gluttony, but just the opposite. Not only does this

vice triumph; it also thrives in the heart (belly?) of the wife to cause future chaos for the men that cross its path.

Les trois dames de Paris

Found in only one manuscript,⁴⁸ this fabliau is one of the few that can be attributed to an author, Watriquet de Couvin. Although his name is not specifically mentioned in the text, the fabliau is incorporated into a collection of his tales. Thus we can assume that he penned this narrative as well (*NRCF X 99*). *Les trois dames de Paris* also makes a cameo appearance in Maurice Druon's *Lelis et le lion*.⁴⁹ It surfaces in a scene where one of his main characters, Robert d'Artois, wishes to be entertained and has Watriquet de Couvin come to his court, specifically requesting *Les trois dames* because it is his favorite. Although a work of fiction, Druon is not wrong in placing this minstrel at the court of the high aristocracy for, as Jacques Ribard points out: "Watriquet de Couvin ... se présente explicitement comme au service de deux grands seigneurs" (277-78). Thus, it is not a far stretch to place him at court performing for a nobleman. After all, what man, noble or not, does not want to hear about a story of three women getting drunk and subsequently naked?

Simon Gaunt observes that "...the prime motivation in the *fabliaux* is its interest in mutability..." (235). This tale is a perfect example of this tendency toward metamorphosis. Not only do the principal characters seemingly change

⁴⁸ Paris, Arsenal 3545

⁴⁹ *Les rois maudits*, book 6.

from proper ladies to corpses, to prostitutes, to corpses, to the devil's minions, and finally, to proper ladies again, but the text itself shifts from parody to allegory and finishes with the burlesque (Pearcy "Realism and religious parody" 748). But what exactly prompts these transformations? I believe that it is the vice of gluttony. Vincent-Cassy notes: "Drunkness, defined as losing control from excessive drinking, is one of the two forms of gluttony, the other being excessive eating" (393). She also notes that "[t]he specific nature of this sin of drunkness can be found in its temporality" (401). Thomas Aquinas warns that: "...drunkness is the root of all kinds of sins" (767) and that it has five daughters: "...improper joy, rudeness, garrulousness, sexual impurity, and dullness of the senses in relation to the use of intelligence" (769). Gluttony serves as the impetus of both the women and the comedy in this fabliau, which begins as a parody of the knightly quest for the Grail. The jongleur sets the scene very specifically by stating that the narrative takes place during Epiphany, which commemorates the arrival of the wise men bringing gifts to Jesus and thus revealing him as the son of God. The fabliau indicates that it is a very solemn time, yet judging by the ladies' impending behavior, they do not seem to take this event very seriously. We thus have a comedy of transposition. During this holy time before high mass, two of the women, Madame de Gonnesee and her niece, Maroie Clippe, have a craving for tripe; they thus set out in the pursuit of this delicacy. Pearcy notes: "The coarse commonplaceness of tripe works ... to invite identification with the mundane but familiar in opposition to the spiritually elevated but remote, so that the humor has exactly the provocative irreverence

typical of parody” (“Realism and Religious Parody” 749). It seems to me that the ladies’ craving mirrors the divine inspiration experienced by the Knights of the Round Table to find the Grail. However, “[a]s has so often been remarked about the fabliaux, mirrors distort” (Tudor 37). Thus, the Grail quest for spiritual enlightenment is twisted into a more selfish search for gastronomical gratification. We should note that the two women still intend to attend high mass; they will simply stop at a tavern along the way to satisfy their hunger beforehand. After all, one must not forget that the Grail is a form of the horn of plenty and feasting is part of the Grail adventures; so calming their appetites before mass is not such an outrageous deed.

Before reaching the tavern, the two women encounter Dame Tifaigne, the hairdresser. Looking for drinking companions, she informs them of a place that has wonderful wine:

Je sai vin de riviere
Si bon qu’ainz tieus ne fu plantez.
Qui en boit, c’est droite santez,
Car c’est uns vins clers, fremians,
Fors, fins, fres, sus langue frians,
Douz et plaisanz a l’avalier:
A celui nous couvient aler,
Autre vin goust ne nous ara (30-37)⁵⁰

⁵⁰ “I know of a wine from Rivière, the best ever planted. Drinking it leads to good health because it is a clear, shining, strong, delicate, fresh wine, fizzy on the tongue, sweet and pleasing to swallow: we should go there because not other wine will have such a taste.”

Emerging like a snake from the grass, this hairdresser tempts the two women into making a brief stop at the tavern on their way to mass, away from their intended destination. Percy notes a similar situation in Book V of *Piers Plowman* when the Seven Deadly Sins make their confessions featuring “...an allegorical figure called Gluttony waylaid en route to church...” (“Realism and Religious Parody” 749-51). Vincent-Cassy observes that the tavern was notoriously known as the church of the devil (412) where sin is not only encouraged but also thrives. In addition, “[d]runkness and prostitution have always been associated with taverns” (Vincent-Cassy 419). Thus, the women would be wise to avoid such an establishment. Appealing to their taste buds however, Dame Tifaigne specifically describes (line thirty-four) the sensations that this exotic wine produces in the mouth. We should remember that original sin originated with the mouth. Eve, coerced by the smooth tongue of a serpent, took a bite of the forbidden fruit and encouraged Adam to do the same. It is also the words of Dame Tifaigne that make the two church-going women deviate from their objective. Thus, instead of spending the two deniers on the tripe, each woman will be obligated to spend at least ten sous for the wine alone. Easily swayed, Maroie proclaims that God has sent Dame Tifaigne as a messenger to lead them to the inn that has the wonderful wine; after all, who could speak so well except one inspired by God. She thus appears as a sort of priest at a drinker’s mass.⁵¹ Of wine, Vincent-Cassy remarks: “...wine was considered good because it came from the vine that God gave

⁵¹ See Martha Bayless’ *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*. Chapter Four specifically treats liturgical parody.

human beings when he created the Earth, and in the image of God, Noah had been able to transform it into a divine beverage according to the order of Creation” (395). Therefore, indulging in a little wine before mass is not such a great deviation from the path of God. The three ladies’ *route divine* becomes a *route du vin*.

At the tavern, the three ladies eat and drink to excess, spending an entire fifteen sous. The divine beverage, however, has a more earthly effect upon the ladies: they become ravenous and crave an interesting array of comestibles. Maroie now has a hankering for a wonderfully fatty goose accompanied by bowls of garlic. Seeing that the ladies are not wanting for money, Druin, the innkeeper, leaves to acquire that which the ladies crave and then some: he returns with two geese, an entire tray of garlic and a warm cake for each of them. The ladies’ vice has inspired another vice in Druin: greed. Knowing that the more they consume, the more he will profit, he encourages them to devour as much as possible. The three ladies attack the food as if it may somehow get away from them. In no time the women finish the food, looking like predators after the kill, all covered in goose fat, garlic and cake. This feast leaves Maroie sweating as if she had just participated in some type of strenuous exercise, so she begins to drink wine by the chopine (half pint), guzzling three all by herself. I find it interesting that the number three is an overlying theme throughout the story (the three ladies, the three magi, three chopines). Isaacs notes that, in the Bible, the number three expresses “...the notion of completeness, since it has a beginning, middle, and end” (17). This sense of completeness is reflected in the women’s adventure,

where they start out on their way to mass, take a detour and then return from whence they came. The repetition of the number three also reinforces the parody of the three Magi or even is perhaps a burlesque of the Holy Trinity, the Father being the tavern, the Son being Druin, and the Holy Spirit would, of course, be the wine.⁵²

Thus, one overindulgence leads to another; drinking leads to eating which leads to more drinking. Of drinking and eating in the fabliaux, Marie-Thérèse Lorcin notes: “[b]oire à en perdre l’esprit n’a pas donc bonne presse dans le petit monde des fabliaux. Le plaisir de boire reste un plaisir s’il est modéré et s’il accompagne la nourriture. «boire sanz menger est past a grenouilles» dit un proverbe” (“Manger et boire dans les fabliaux” 234). Yet these women prove Lorcin’s statement incorrect. Drinking to excess gives them pleasure and incites them to find even more joy in wine and food. In addition, these women do not seem too worried about their reputation; they are more concerned with quenching their temporal desires. Their consumption has nothing to do with nourishment and everything to do with amusement. Although the wine was allegedly of good quality, imbibing mass quantities of it has a rather unpleasant result for Maroie:

Dame, foi que je doi saint Jorge,
Dist maroclippe, sa commere,
Cis vins me fait la bouche amere;
Je veul avoir de la garnache:

⁵² For more instances of the number three in the Bible, see *The Jewish Book of Numbers* by Ronald H. Isaacs, pages 17-20.

Se vendre devoie ma vache,

S'en avrai je au mains plain pot (76-81)⁵³

This excellent wine has left a bitter taste in her mouth and she now craves something sweet to offset the bitterness...or at least, that is her excuse. Although drunk, she craves something even more alcoholic, a Grenache that, although still a wine, is stronger than the refined wine she is currently consuming. It is interesting to note that she invokes Saint George, who is often invoked when one has a fever. In fact, she is suffering from a sort of a fever; a fever that can only be quenched by a Grenache. Sending the innkeeper out for some of this luxurious vintage, she also commands that he return with other delicacies such as peeled almonds, cheese and pears. Her craving for sweets has turned into a frenzy of all that is sweet. She is not concerned with expense for she claims that she has enough money to pay for it all and more. Their gastronomical excess has turned into financial excess. In addition, it is not as if the money promised to Druin the innkeeper will be given to him immediately, because she does not carry that amount in her person when going out to church...even if stopping for tripe along the way.

After having consumed the newly acquired Grenache along with even more wine, the desire to continue their bacchanal in the streets overcomes Dame Maroie. Druin the innkeeper consents, yet, because they are in debt to him, he asks that they leave their clothes as a guarantee of payment. Seeking to make

⁵³ “Lady, by the faith that I owe St. George, said Maroclippe her friend, this wine has left a bitter taste in my mouth; I would like a garnache: do I have to sell my cow to have a full pot in my hands?”

even more money from the unrestrained women, he goes to dance in the streets with them, offering them even more wine throughout the night; after all, dancing and singing do give rise to thirst. At this point, the women's decision-making abilities are rather non-existent, so into the streets they go wearing not a stitch, dancing and singing without a care in the world. By removing their clothes, they also cast off any societal constraints associated with their attire. Simpson warns, however, that “...[t]o be uncovered in public was to be proclaimed a public woman...” (200). Not only have they freed themselves of their class, but they also have lowered their status more than a few notches to the level of a prostitute, at least in the eyes of the community.

Due to their extreme inebriation, they are unable to maintain their balance while dancing and frequently tumble rather heavily onto the ground. Not only do they take quite a beating due to their falls but they also wind up covered in both mud and blood, resembling pigs rather than women. Battered, bruised and coated with sludge, the women pass out. Because they are no longer in any condition to be consuming any more of his wine, Druin leaves. At daybreak the result of the night's overindulgence is brought to light:

La jurent a mout grant vilté
L'une sus l'autre comme mortes,
Tant que par tout guichez et portes
De la cité furent ouvertes,
C'on vit les merveilles apertes.
Chascuns y acourt pour veoir,

Car n'avoient sens ne pooir
D'eles tant ne quant remuer,
Qui la les vousist partuer (184-92)⁵⁴

Because they are unable to get the women to react, and because they are so badly beaten, the townspeople believe that the three women have been murdered.

Pearcy comments on the parodic significance of their adventure thus far: “The three women enjoy the pleasures of a *paradis terrestre*, they sin, in punishment they are expelled from the place of their contentment, and finally they suffer death (“Realism and Religious Parody” 750). In addition, “...the nakedness of the women follows their fall from grace in the tavern, and while they are too far lost in drunken stupor to feel shame for their nakedness, the spectators, particularly their husbands once they have been summoned, certainly feel shame for them” (“Realism and Religious Parody” 751-52). Interestingly enough, medieval moralists believed that “[d]runkness can not only damage the health ... but it can also shorten one’s life” (Vincent-Cassy 400). One can find an example of just such a case in *Les chroniques du roi Charles VII*, where German soldiers are reported to have died from imbibing too much Italian wine (159). In addition, “[t]he gravity of this sin ... stems from its effects. Drunkenness is a capital vice because it gives rise to mortal sins—even if it is not sinful” (Vincent-Cassy 405). Thus, by indulging in too much wine the women have been cast out of their earthly paradise, reduced to the rank of prostitutes and subsequently, die. Lacy

⁵⁴ “They laid there in great filth one on top of the other as if they were dead until all the doors to the city were reopened and one saw the supernatural phenomenon. Everyone ran to them to see because they were unconscious and they could not move no matter who tried to make them do so.”

helps us understand this sequence of events by explaining that the fabliaux “...construct a fictional universe in which events obey the imperatives of a logic that we happen to not share” (*Reading Fabliaux* 121). Therefore, the humor in this fabliau results from preposterous events created by the women’s gluttony.

Of course, these effects are not so humorous for the three ladies’ husbands who believe their wives to have been gruesomely killed and their bodies disposed of “comme merdes en mi la voie” (“like shit in the street”) (209). When their pious wives did not return, they naturally assumed that they had gone off on a pilgrimage. And, in a sense, they are not wrong. The wives did have a spiritually significant destination in mind when they left the house; they just got sidetracked along the way. Vincent-Cassy notes that this was a frequent occurrence in the Middle Ages: “The tavern was truly the anti-church of the devil, where demons reigned. Moreover, when it was time for mass, more people were at the tavern than at the parish church” (421). Thus, these three women are not alone in their misadventure.

Doing what one typically does with dead bodies, the supposed corpses are buried at the cemetery of the Innocents. According to Duby, in the Middle Ages one believed that “[l]a mort est un sommeil” (110). Although a philosophical observation, in the case of the three ladies, it is true, for they are, in fact, sleeping. Under normal circumstances, being buried alive would be very terrifying, but these three ladies are still so drunk when they finally awaken that being buried alive is of no consequence to them. In fact, they do not even notice anything out of the ordinary. Climbing out of their shallow graves like rotting zombies and

thinking they are still in their paradise on Earth (the tavern), they request for more food and wine of Druin, who is nowhere in sight. The women are in such a state after having being buried alive that it seems as if their bodies have begin to decompose. In fact, they also smell as if their bodies were decomposing due to the fact that “...[n]oisy and malodorous evacuations [are] also a part of drunkenness” (Vincent-Cassy 400). This bodily decomposition is a reflection of their moral degradation. Speaking of bodies in the fabliaux, Marie-Thérèse Lorcin remarks: “... le corps de la femme est présenté avant tout comme objet de consummation” (“Le corps a ses raisons dans les fabliaux” 451). I agree with this statement, but would like to add that not only is the feminine body an object to be consumed but also an object that consumes, and in the case of the three ladies, what they consume begins to consume them from the inside out. Cooke notes that “...comic pattern is structured on a movement of birth-life-death-rebirth, either symbolic or spiritual (*The Old French and Chaucerian Fabliaux* 149). Yet, in the case of the three ladies, this movement is literal. Naked and seemingly decomposing, they wander the streets like common ladies, their status, morals and minds haven completely left them:

Qu’a paines pooient parler;

Ne poïssent mie aler

Deus pas ou trois sanz trebuschier(239-41)⁵⁵

Unable to walk or talk properly, the three ladies behave as toddlers just learning to master these feats. So, in a sense, they are reborn and must relearn all that the

⁵⁵ “They could barely speak, nor could they take two or three steps without falling.”

wine has erased. Unlike toddlers however, they do not regain their innocence, but continue in debauchery.

Their resurrection does not last long, for a strong and cold wind blows through causing them to lose consciousness again, their cadaverous bodies again exposed to the elements and the world:

N'orent bouche, oil ne nes ne face

Qui ne fust de boe couvers

Et toutes chargies de vers (256-58)⁵⁶

Their bodies have transformed into objects of disgust and strangely, food for worms. Of the image of women in the Middle Ages, Caviness observes:

“...a new cosmic order is brought about by the destruction of a woman, whose unstable body does not reproduce itself but breaks down into other physical forms” (134). The three women in this fabliau are reduced metaphorically to piles of compost used to fertilize the poet’s comedic garden. Much as a corpse returns to the earth, so do these three women’s bodies. Covered in mud and worms, the earth begins to reclaim their bodies even though still occupied by their souls. They experience a premature biodegradation.

The next morning, the townspeople find the three ladies they had buried out of their graves and in the streets. Frightened by this spectacle, they can only conclude that it is the work of the devil and flee. Of the sin of intoxication however, Vincent-Cassy points out: “It was never a sin against any of God’s commandments, but one against society, whose inegalitarian function was

⁵⁶ “Their mouths, eyes, noses and faces were covered in mud and full of worms.”

supported by the church” (430). Their sin is not only to have skipped out on church, but also to have caused the townspeople such distress and insulted their class by discarding it along with their clothes. The ladies who were intending to attend mass just two days ago have now become the devil’s minions. Their bodies and their souls are now Satan’s playthings; gluttony has triumphed and their souls now belong to it. To drive this point home, the ladies awaken again and ask for food and wine. Now, completely refreshed and sober after their mock near-death experiences, they return home to their husbands to resume life as normal.

With its parodic circle complete, the fabliau *Les trois dames de Paris* ends in a very similar fashion to its beginning, rather banally. If the downfall of man was decided upon tasting the forbidden fruit, then according to this fabliau, that of woman is the consequence of ingesting wine and food. This view confirms the clerical view of women as intemperate and having excessive appetites. Both wine and food are gifts from God that human kind succeeds in misusing and, in the case of the three women, abusing. The difference between the two, however, lies in the result of each action. For man, he was cast out of paradise and forced to brave the hardships that lurked outside of the sacred garden; all in all, a lamentable ending. Yet when woman falls, the outcome is not at all dire, but rather humorous. Through this parody of the Fall of Man, the audience can find comedy in their own human condition.

Conclusion

Although on the surface, the idea of virtue never seems to enter the picture in the fabliau world, *Les perdris* and *Les trois dames de Paris* demonstrate that the fabliaux illustrate vice in a moralizing way. They very adequately divulge *gula*'s negative yet humorous consequences, proving that it is not the vice alone that produces comedy, but also its effects. Whether it be too much food or too much wine, gluttony always leads to other indiscretions. In addition, it also commands those that are already rather egocentric, indulging their vice to the detriment of others. All four women in these two fabliaux have cravings, but unlike men, they have no inner voice to hold them back. These tales thus support Lorcin's observation that its opposite, temperance, only exists in men. It is evident that gluttony creates domestic conflict; however, as demonstrated in these narratives, oftentimes the male counterpart has no idea that any conflict exists because his wife has done such a good job covering up her misdeed. Thus, if it is the job of the men in their life to make sure that the women do not go overboard, how can we expect them to carry out this task if they have no idea that a problem even exists? The issue then becomes their ignorance. Lesley Johnson explains the roles of the male and the female in the fabliaux: "Sexual roles are used in the fabliaux not necessarily to confirm or promote sexual stereotypes but as a valuable means for overturning conventional relationships or subverting appearances in the interests of comic action" (303). In this comedic battle of the sexes, the men are defeated because they do not even know that there is a fight. The overlying theme for both of these fabliaux is loss: loss of control, loss of

trust, loss of faith, loss of social status and loss of money. Although on the surface, gluttony appears to be a vice of acquisition, it is, in fact, one of loss. The same can be said of greed.

*Qui se iactat et dilatat iurgia concitat
qui sperat in Domino saginabitur*
Proverbs 28.25⁵⁷

Chapter Three

Greed's Incursion

Katzenellenbogen describes an interesting rendering of greed or *Avaritia* found in the *Hortus Deliciarum* of Herrad of Landsberg dating from the late twelfth-century. *Avaritia* is depicted riding in a chariot pulled by both a fox and a lion, which denotes both her courage and her craftiness. Surrounding her are beasts associated with her various other qualities: the eagle representing *Philargyria* (love of money); the pig, *Sorditas* (moral depravity); the dog, *Tenacitas* (tenacity); the ox, *Fames acquirendi* (hunger for acquiring); the wolf, *Rapacitas* (rapacity); and the bear, *Violentia* (impetuousness) (61). In order for *Avaritia* or material greed to succeed, a good amount of skill in both deception and collection is required. While Prudentius' work personifies *Avaritia* as a man with a purse around his neck, by the Middle Ages, this image morphed into that of

⁵⁷ "The greedy person stirs up strife, but whoever trusts in the Lord will be enriched."

a miserly woman.⁵⁸ This transition is undoubtedly due to the Church Fathers' condemnation of women and of their proclivity for wresting power from men. It is thus not surprising that two of the fabliaux expressing greed depict women as those who are afflicted with this vice. In the first fabliau that I will discuss, *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit*, three women on a pilgrimage to Mont Saint Michel find male genitalia. Unable to agree that it should be shared, they decide to allow an abbess to judge which of them shall be allowed to keep it. After seeing the object, the abbess claims that it is the missing bolt to the door at the abbey. She thus confiscates the item and the women leave empty handed.

The second fabliau that I will discuss, *Les quatre souhaits saint Martin*, deals with a very similar subject, but in a very different manner. A peasant devoted to Saint Martin goes out to begin his daily work when the saint himself appears. To reward the peasant for his loyalty, he grants him four wishes. Excited by his good fortune, he runs home to share the good news with his wife. Instead of a welcome greeting upon his arrival however, she admonishes him for loafing. After learning of the reason for his early return, she warms up to him and requests that she be allowed to make the first wish. At first hesitating, he gives in and grants her the first wish. Her wish is for her husband's body to be covered completely with male body parts. Angry at his predicament, he wastes the second wish on revenge, covering his wife from head to toe with female body parts. He realizes that he acted rashly and that he must use his third wish to reverse the first two wishes. His third wish, however, is as much a disaster as the first two

⁵⁸ For example, this representation appears on the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

because he did not specify that their original body parts should be kept in place. He must then use his fourth wish to restore both of them to the gendered individuals they were before the wishes entered their lives.

What these two fabliaux have in common is that they both problematize gender and sex and express the need for an outlet for the characters' sexual energy or frustration. In this chapter on greed, I intend to show that it is accompanied not only by an intense longing to amass wealth or symbols of wealth, but also a fear of losing that wealth. This vice tends to blind an individual to the reality of his or her situation; they believe that they are lacking and must stockpile to make up for the perceived deficiency. As with gluttony, greed can lead to conflict with others or exacerbate an already existing problem. A case of the first instance occurs in *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit*.

Les trois dames qui troverent un vit

Despite being one of the shorter fabliaux (one hundred twenty-eight lines), *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit*⁵⁹ has no problem in conveying its message. Eschewing double entendres or any play on words to enhance the story or provoke laughter, it employs simple and concise language that any audience would have no trouble understanding. We should not, however, consider this a fabliau *manqué* as in the opening lines, the jongleur indicates that is precisely his intention: "A conter un fabliau par rime/ Sanz colour et sanz leonime" (3-4).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ This fabliau exists in two manuscripts: Paris BN MS 1593 and London, British Library, Harley 2253.

⁶⁰ "I will recount a fabliau in verse, without rhetorical terms and without Leonine verse."

He thus wants his story to speak for itself, without any embellishment. It is interesting to note that in the entire fabliau, the word *vit* is used only twice and *coiz* once. Despite their vulgarity, they help fulfill the jongleur's goal of recounting a tale in simple language. Rather than allowing the words themselves to entertain, he allows the narrative to serve this function. Baldwin has another possible explanation for the use of obscenity in the fabliaux: "By employing *vilain* vocabulary about the sexual body the *fableors* were, in effect, not only ignoring Augustinian modesty but also proclaiming a linguistic challenge to refinement of clerical, Ovidian, and the romance traditions" (*The Language of Sex* 113). Although performing no linguistic or structural acrobatics, the jongleur remains defiant in his choice of terms. He further asserts that some may find his succinct phraseology wanting, but that he cannot please everyone, so he will tell his tale as he sees fit. This stance articulates the overall perspective of the fabliaux. Aware that both language and subject matter may offend, the *fableors* rejoice in this prospect and use it to their comedic advantage.

The fabliau begins by relating that three women of unknown origin are making their way to Mont Saint Michel. As with many fabliaux, the number three plays an important role here (three women on a pilgrimage, three sighs of the abbess). As we have seen, this mystical number mirrors the frequency of the number three in the Bible: the three wise men; the Trinity; Christ's three temptations in the desert and three days in the tomb, to name but a few. Reinforcing this quasi-religious theme is the fact that the women are on a pilgrimage. Although a pilgrimage to Mont Saint Michel may not be as lengthy

as one to Santiago de Compostela or Jerusalem, their journey is nonetheless fraught with peril. In the Middle Ages, the hike up to the monastery was rather dangerous due to the tides that are famously known to rush in like horses, not to mention the quicksand. Many people died at Nature's hands while seeking to put their lives in God's; thus, the journey on which these three women embark is not a frivolous one. By committing themselves to such an undertaking, they have proved that they are willing to brave the hazards to cleanse their souls.

The elements, however, are not the only risk encountered en route to their destination. Like the three ladies of Paris, they are distracted from their objective when they spot some curious objects in the road: "Que deuz coiz et un vit mout gros/ Troverent, ou il n'ot point d'os" (13-14).⁶¹ Their pious mission is interrupted by the disembodied metonymic representation of male sexuality. Like the female in *Le moigne*, the male is reduced to just the relevant elements. Leaving its patriarchal baggage with its owner, the finder, assuming it is a woman, is free to enjoy her sexuality without fear of male reproach. In deconstructing the male body, a new, less accusatory male sexuality is offered to its finder. In a case of role reversal, the female now determines how and when male sexuality can be expressed: female sexuality is repressing male sexuality. Commenting on sexuality in the Middle Ages, Karras states: "Sexuality threatens human salvation: it is a nearly irresistible force, but a force for evil. The devil is always to the ready to use temptation to drag humankind to destruction and damnation" (*Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 1). The body parts discovered along

⁶¹ "They find two testicles and a very thick phallus that were not attached to a body."

the edge of the road are a great example of Karras' observation. The items that the women find are instruments of the devil who seeks to keep them from purifying their souls so that he may thus claim them. Unable to resist their allure, the lady leading the group recognizes what the objects are, collects just the phallus and conceals it in the space between her garment and her chest. The care that she takes in hiding the item demonstrates that it is precious to her and that she intends to protect it. It is almost as if she is treating the object as a precious pilgrim's badge, hoping that it will both ward off evil and bring luck.⁶² Like our monk's dream market in *Le moigne*, she has, in fact, stumbled upon something very unique: something to give her pleasure without having to navigate a complicated relationship between a man and a woman.⁶³ The lady's infatuation is the first indication that greed has gotten its claws into her for she is exhibiting the signs of *Fames acquirendi* (acquisitiveness).

Another companion in *Avaritas'* chariot, *Sorditas* (moral depravity), makes an appearance as well in the form of the male body parts. One wonders: how did the detached objects end up at the side of the road? Howard Bloch offers some insight when, regarding such events in the fabliaux, he notes "...mutilation is the direct result of transgression..." (*The Scandal of the Fabliaux* 83). Based upon this observation, one can only suppose that the former owner of the items in question had committed some sort of sexual indiscretion, and that his punishment

⁶² See Ruth Mellinkoff's *Averting Demons: The Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes* which explores obscene pilgrim's badges.

⁶³ This motif also occurs in Guilhem IX's *Farai un vers pos mi sonelh* in which the protagonist remains mute to avoid having to complicate the sexual adventure with two women.

was dismemberment. Thus, the object picked up by the lady is already tainted with sin, not including the lust and greed it triggers in the lady.

A firm believer in “finders keepers, losers weepers,” the lady has no intention of sharing her new acquisition with her fellow pilgrims. In addition, *Avaritas*’ traveling companions *Tenacitas* (tenacity) and *Rapacitas* (rapacity) have now joined the ladies’ expedition. Thomas Aquinas warns: “...avarice leads to restlessness, since avarice brings unnecessary anxieties...” (729). This fabliau is an excellent example of Aquinas’ warning, for, upon learning that her friend refuses to share her good fortune, one of the ladies exclaims:

Coment, fet ele, dis tu droit?

Ne dis je tantost: ‘Part i aie’?

Et nos somes en ceste voie

Compaignes et bones amies! (22-25)⁶⁴

One should note that the second lady does not really ask for her portion of the goods, but rather demands it. It seems as if the three ladies split everything else amongst themselves, so why should the male body part be an exception to this rule? Eager to get her portion, the second lady appeals to the first’s sense of friendship. However, the narrator never indicates that the other two ladies are able to identify what was found. All they know is that one of them has something that she refuses to share and they want their portion. The first lady’s power over the others comes from both knowing (*savoir*) and having (*avoir*) (Hutton 112).

⁶⁴ “How, she said, are you in the right? Did I not say immediately ‘I want my share’? And here we are on this journey, companions and good friends!”

Despite the first lady's insistence on keeping the item to herself, the second maintains that she will have her portion. Before the object entered their lives, the women were friends, sharing whatever each one had and in true equality, there was no source of conflict, making their journey to Mont Saint Michel a relatively peaceful one. Now, however, the male body part has infected their harmonious existence with greed, envy and strife.

The three eventually agree upon one thing: their situation requires arbitration. Aware of a nearby convent, they decide to go there to present their case to the abbess, believing that she, a woman devoted to God, would be incapable of injustice or trickery. I find it interesting that the ladies do not await their arrival at Mont Saint Michel for their case to be heard before the abbot there. It could be that they have distrust for male judges who would not take a complaint from women very seriously, especially considering the item in dispute. It is very possible that they fear the patriarchal repression of dominating males. Grosz explains:

Patriarchal oppression, in other words, justifies itself, at least in part, by connecting women much more closely than men to the body and, through this identification, restricting women's social and economic roles to (pseudo) biological terms. Relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynist thought confines women to the biological requirements of reproduction on the assumption that because of particular biological, physiological,

and endocrinological transformations, women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal and *more* natural than men (14).

Thus, the abbot would consider their request for arbitration as proof of their lustful nature and maybe even confiscate the object from them to keep them from fulfilling their biological imperative. In addition, because her post is one to which she is elected, an abbess obviously has the trust and confidence of others (including men), so the three women deduce that they could put their trust in her as well.

Arriving at the convent at an hour when the abbess is attending mass, they must wait her to speak with her. Of this detail, Lacy notes: “...the abbess’s attendance at Mass emphasizes her piety and contributes further to the humor of the less-than-devout interest she will show in the penis” (133). When she finally arrives, the lady bringing up the rear of the pack speaks first:

...Dame, de noz maisons
En proieres et en oroisons
Alions moi et ma compaigne.
Mes droiz est que de li me plaingne,
Car ele a tel chose trove
Dont ne m’a pas ma part donee:
Et por ce si la li demant (65-71)⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “Lady, my companion and me left our houses in prayer. I am pleading my case against her for my rights because she found something and did not give me my share: it is for this reason that I am now asking for it.”

It is interesting that she does not expect each one of the ladies to take their turns with the member, but for it to be divided up physically. Yet, were the object to be sliced as she suggests, it would no longer be able to serve its purpose. For the other two ladies, it is not a matter of fulfilling any sexual desire but a matter of allocation. Reinforcing this idea, she uses the word right (*droiz*) to describe her claim to the dismembered phallus; not just anybody's right but her (*mes*) right, rather than their right. She does not appeal to the abbess on behalf of both herself and the other lady, but only on her own behalf. Without even necessarily seeing or touching the object, she has become infected with vice of greed as well.

In order to be able to properly determine the fate of the disputed object, the abbess must examine it. Upon setting her eyes upon it, she has a rather surprising reaction:

De l'abaesse dire vueil,

Qui mont l'esgarda volentiers:

Trois sospirs fist lons et entiers (80-82)⁶⁶

Obviously the abbess recognizes what the object is, yet her vocalization is very strange. Does she know to whom it belonged? Is she pining for a lost love? Was she, having broken her vow of chastity, the cause of the mutilation? Or is she simply overcome by sexual desire or disgust? Coincidentally, the abbess's name is Dame H el ene, a name that suggests classic beauty and love. Whatever the reason for her lament, *Violentia* (impetuousness) overtakes her and she decides

⁶⁶ "I want to tell the truth about the abbess who very gladly looked at it: she let out three deep and long sighs."

that she must possess the male member. In order to remove the item from its current owner and to keep it from any further mutilation that would render it useless, she proclaims that it is, in fact, the bolt from the abbey's door that had gone missing. Lacy believes that "...the image of 'the bolt on the abbess's door' to designate genitals is a metaphor not unlike those in a number of other fabliaux, where the penis is presented, for example, as a colt protected by two guards and the vagina as a fountain in a meadow (*La demoisele qui ne pooit oïr de foutre*)" (134). Commenting on doors in medieval art, Michael Camille notes: "Openings, entrances and doorways, both of buildings and the human body . . . were especially important liminal zones that had to be protected" (*Image on the Edge* 16). The same can be said for doors in the fabliaux, especially this one. The door to the convent must be locked not only to keep *out* intruders but also to keep *in* the women of God inside. Prone to sin due to their libidinous nature, were the entrance not locked, the women could escape at night and visit their lovers. Penetrating the protection offered by the gate denotes not only a physical threat but also a spiritual one. The abbess mocks her vocation by proclaiming the member to be the bolt to the convent entrance, illustrating not only her desire, but also her lack of concern for the souls of the women living at the abbey because she is allowing an object of sin to enter the sacred walls of the abbey which, as seen with the three ladies, has the potential to infect others with its sin without needing to come into direct contact with it.

Regarding the abbess's judgment, the ladies know full well that the abbess is lying. Yet, due to her position of power and the fact that they got themselves

into this situation due to their greed, they must submit to her authority. Dame H  l  ne abuses her influence to obtain an item that is forbidden to her. Not only is she guilty of greed, but, like the three women, idolatry as well. She reacts to the sight of the object as if she were looking upon the Holy Grail. And perhaps, in a sense, it is for her: something that she has sought for a long time and suddenly, it appears to her as if by an act of God (Satan?). However, we should remember that this image is that of yet another male writer projecting his vision upon a female character. The *fableor* believes that he knows what women want, which is to be as sexual as possible. He is more concerned with his pleasure than that of his female characters. Still, in spite of the vice that guided her decision in the three ladies' case, the abbess's judgment actually does resolve the conflict between the women. Lacy remarks: "Not only does the abbess's invention force a resolution of the dispute, but the euphemism suggests the particular use she may have for the object, with her 'door' secured by this promising 'bolt'" (134). Of resolution in the *fabliaux*, Schenck observes: "The Resolution [sic] is an action which resolves the tension, not by a countervailing power, but by eliminating the source of conflict" ("Functions and Roles in the *Fabliau*" 28). Due to the confiscation of the member for her personal use, the ladies no longer have anything about which to fight. They are, however, aware that they have been tricked and they leave the convent disgruntled, a bit wiser to the ways of the world and empty-handed.

Instead of ending his *fabliau* with the typical misogynistic monologue about the evils of women, the *jongleur* calls upon the audience to learn from the

tale. Just in case the language was too complicated or the story too convoluted, he spells out the moral very specifically, occasionally using common proverbs that most, if not all, of the audience would know. For example, “Cil qui tot convoite tout pert” (“He who covets all, loses all.”) (128). In addition, he condemns those who are appointed as arbitrators:

Convoiteus sont, jel sai de voir;

Ja povres hons qui n’a avoir

N’avra par eus droit en sa vie (111-13)⁶⁷

He believes that because these people often come from wealthy families they will abuse their authority to make themselves richer and the ones for whom they are arbitrating poorer, and this is exactly what happens to the three ladies; greed is therefore ubiquitous. He also encourages the audience to be better humans than those that judge and to share what they have when they are expected to do so in order to keep situations like that of the three ladies from happening to them.

Les trois dames qui troverent un vit demonstrates the damage that *Avaritas* can cause, not only to one’s immortal soul but also to one’s mortal life. Grosz notes: “Within the Christian tradition, the separation of mind and body was correlated with the distinction between what is immortal and what is mortal” (5). For the women in this fabliau, they are not able to make such a distinction for it is their bodies that are guiding their minds and all are therefore in danger of eternal damnation. The more immediate effect of this lack of propriety however is that

⁶⁷ “I know it as true that they are covetous; never in his life will a poor man’s rights be recognized by them.”

the three ladies learn how cruel *Avaritas* can be when one is on the losing end. “Thus, the experience has had didactic value for the women ... the person who wants too much for himself and who wants another to have nothing ends up by losing everything” (Lacy *Reading Fabliaux* 138). Once great friends and traveling companions, the ladies must now cope with the rift that has come between them due to this vice. Not only have they lost the object found at the side of the road, but also they have lost trust in one another and perhaps even their friendship. Like gluttony, although seemingly a vice of acquisition, for these three women, greed has proven to be a vice of loss.

*Les quatre souhaits saint Martin*⁶⁸

Extant in four manuscripts,⁶⁹ this fabliau demonstrates how greed can exacerbate an already existing problem.⁷⁰ It is also a great example of a parody of the traditional miracle tale that recounts events in the lives of saints. As clearly expressed in the title, the saint treated in this tale is Saint Martin,⁷¹ who, during his life, was known for his sharing and generosity, and in death, became patron saint of France and of the impoverished (Guiley 228-30). This last quality could be the reason for which he makes a cameo appearance in this fabliau, aside from being the granter of wishes. In addition to its parodic design, the fabliau also lampoons the social classes, demonstrating that those who are given the

⁶⁸ In 1986, this fabliau was made into a short animated film by Michel Ocelot entitled *Les quatre voeux du vilain*.

⁶⁹ Paris BN MSS 837 and 12603, Berne, Bibl. de la Bourgeoisie, 354 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86.

⁷⁰ For the many variations and forms of this fabliau, please see Bédier's graph on pages 220-221.

⁷¹ He was the first non-martyr to reach sainthood (Guiley 228-30).

possibility to climb the social ladder do not always succeed due to both greed and ignorance.

Seeking respite from his destitution and contentious relationship with his wife, a peasant invokes Saint Martin for each task that he does. In fact, he has called on the saint so often that the two have become dear friends. By calling out the saint's name in front of his cattle, the beasts are inspired to work. It is as if the animals aspire to help the peasant to better his situation by working harder so that he may earn more money and at the same time content the peasant's wife, who is never satisfied with either the amount or quality of work accomplished. One day, after having spurred the animals into action, Saint Martin appears before the peasant. Commenting on the representation of saints in tales of vice and virtue, Tudor notes:

Saints and mythical Christian figures are described in human and familiar settings: there would be no barrier commensurate to our own alterity with the Middle Ages for a contemporary audience.

There is no doubt that these mythical characters are held as models for the audience of the text, but they also talk and act like the audience's neighbours (28).

The saint thus emerges as an ideal for both the audience and the fabliau characters to attain, but he is not so idealized that an ordinary person would fail to relate to him; instead, he is much more approachable.

The saint, in order to compensate the peasant for his loyalty, offers him four wishes. We should note that instead of bestowing the peasant with the gift of

a peaceful and auspicious afterlife, he chooses to reward him in the peasant's mortal life. With these wishes, he is expected to improve his situation so that his life is not so encumbered with hard work:

Laisse ton travail et ta herte
Et si soies joianz et gaiz.
Je te donrai quatre sohaiz:
Ja ne t'estuet mais traveillier,
Ne matin lever ne veiller.
Or t'an reva tot lieemant:
Je te di bien veraiemant,
Ce que tu ja sohaideras
Par quatre foiz que tu l'avras.
Garde toi bien au sohaidier,
Tu n'i avras nul recovrier! (20-30)⁷²

By means of these four wishes, the peasant has the possibility to make his life easier and improve his social status through the acquisition of wealth. He has long dreamed of a more carefree existence, and now, thanks to the saint, this fantasy can become reality. This episode recalls the one in *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, where the genie offers Aladdin wishes which he uses to lighten both his and his poor mother's burden and to advance his station in life by marrying a princess. For the peasant, the improvement in his life would come

⁷² "Leave your work and your herd and be happy and gay. I will give you four wishes: Never will you have to work or get up in the morning or supervise your herd. Now you will have all that want: I am telling you the truth that you have four wishes that you can make. Be careful how you wish for you can get nothing back!"

strictly from the wishes for wealth and not from marrying upwards as he already has a wife. Yet, as Sarah Melhado White remarks: “Wishes, by their very nature, deal with the extravagant, not the real. The average peasant is fortunate not to be granted magic wishes” (*Sexual Language and Human Conflict* 195). The reason for this we shall soon see.

Aside from his poverty, another difficult situation in the peasant’s life is his marriage. Schenck observes that “...the only aspect of marriage important in the fabliau is the establishment of sexual rights” (“Functions and Roles in the Fabliau” 30). In the fabliau world, this indicates a male’s sexual rights, and hence, power over a woman. Yet in this fabliau, the wife has managed to gain control of the relationship. She thus succeeds in reversing the sexual prerogatives established upon her marriage to her husband. Although the situation is much more favorable for the wife, for the peasant it causes much chagrin because his wife is rather disagreeable and malicious, as, according to the fabliau, women are wont to be when in a position of authority that they do not deserve. To illustrate this point, the narrator relates that when the peasant returns home to tell his wife of his good fortune, she does not allow him to explain his premature reappearance but instead immediately begins to scold him for neglecting his work, loafing and having an excessive appetite. This attitude towards the male and his role as laborer has its basis in the Bible:

The complex dynamics of representing the male body in the Middle Ages are in no small measure due to the responsibility of production and labor given to the male body. Labor and the marks

of labor are the double aspects of the curse God placed on the male body: Adam will eat his bread in sweat until he returns to the earth of which he is made, says God (Genesis 3: 9) (Smith 4).

The wife is thus correct in scolding her husband for disregarding his duties as husband and male. It is, however, important to note that she typifies women in the fabliaux who gain power in the household and do nothing but belittle their husbands, as we shall see in *La dame escoille*. Judith Butler observes “[d]omination occurs through language which ... becomes social reality” (*Gender Trouble* 118). This is true in the case of the peasant and his wife. Through repeated verbal abuse and aggressive behavior, the wife has managed to reduce her husband to the submissive role in the relationship. Believing herself superior and hard working, she cannot tolerate a husband whose perceived sloth does nothing but cause her more work and keeps them in poverty. Convinced that her husband is the cause of all her misery, she seeks to make him suffer for it. The fact that he enters the house in an excellent mood makes her even more vexed and unhappy.

The wife’s duplicitous nature is revealed when she finishes degrading him and listens to what he has to say; she quickly changes her tune and all of a sudden, the peasant becomes her beloved:

Huimain encontraï saint Martin:

Quatre sohaiz me dona ore;

N’an fu nul soaidié encore,

Devant q’aüsse a toi parlé.

Selonc ce que m'avras loé

Demanderai isnelement:

Terres, richece, or et argent! (50-56)⁷³

Not only does he wish to share his good news with her, but also he wants to ask her advice before he makes the wishes. Having been reduced to the submissive role in the relationship, he fears taking action without consulting her first. Of reversed gender roles in medieval literature, Lisa Perfetti notes:

...laughter produced by the image of a woman beating her husband or cuckolding him before his very eyes is often directed at the husband, who has received his due by letting her violate the natural order. Laughter is thus ... a correction of aberrant behavior: although man is ridiculed, the figure of the unruly woman is used to reassert social norms (15).

Thus, by judging the husband's submission both ludicrous and pathetic, the audience learns a lesson in proper marital relationships. By placing the audience in a superior position to the husband, they are able to laugh at him.⁷⁴ Regardless of the frequent reversal of gender roles in the fabliaux, the audience grasps that, although a very amusing tale, it should not be allowed to occur in their own lives.

Another mistake that the husband makes is telling his wife that he intends to wish for four things: land, riches, gold and money. These four things could

⁷³ "This morning I encountered St. Martin: he gave me four wishes; I did not want to make any of the wishes before consulting you. You will tell me your opinion and I will immediately ask for lands, wealth, gold and money!"

⁷⁴ Let us not forget Olsen's theory that we must feel superior to the person mocked in order for the comedy to work.

better their situation, ending the struggle to make ends meet. Having presented his plans to his wife, she promptly asks if she can make the first wish.

Commenting on beliefs surrounding women in the Middle Ages, Verdon remarks:

Les théologiens médiévaux considèrent la femme avec autant de défaveur, à en juger par certains passages de saint Thomas d'Aquin. Pour lui la génération d'une femme est le résultat d'une déficience ou d'un hasard. L'homme plus doué intellectuellement doit normalement dominer. Il est roi de la création, alors que la femme est née de l'homme et pour l'homme (*La femme au moyen âge* 5).

Verdon's observation indicates that the peasant's situation is the opposite of the established and accepted order. By giving the peasant four wishes, Saint Martin has not only given him a means of improving his financial plight, but his marital one as well. Armed with the wishes, the peasant now has regained power in the relationship. It is for this reason that the wife changes her tune when she hears her husband's news. She understands that she has lost the upper hand and attempts to cajole him, tricking him into handing over the power he has to her, just as he had done before. However, as the old adage states: once bitten, twice shy. Doubting her sincerity, he subscribes (albeit briefly) to Thomas Aquinas' belief that women are inferior creatures and subject to frivolous behavior:

Taisez, fait il, ma bele suer,

Je ne lo feroie a nul fuer!

Fames ont mout foles pansees:

Tost demanderiez fusees
De chanve o de laine o de lin.
Bien me manbre de saint Martin,
Qui dist que tres bien me gardasse,
Et que tel chose demandasse
Qui nos poïst avoir mestier.
Je les voldrai toz sohaider:
Car ce sachiez que je crainbroie,
Se lo sohait vos otroioie,
Que tel chose ne deïssiez
Que vos de moi ne joïssiez.
Je ne conois pas vostre tor:
Se disiez que je fusse or
Une chievre o une jument,
Gel seroie tot auramant.
Por ce redot je vostre otroi! (67-85)⁷⁵

Completely aware of his wife's unpleasant nature and of her animosity towards him, he fears that if he gives her the first wish, she would use it against him rather than to better their financial situation. In addition, he does not wish to go against Saint Martin's directive. Were he to give the first wish to his wife, he could not

⁷⁵ "Be quiet, he said, my dear sister, I would not do that for anything in the world! Women have crazy thoughts: you would ask for spindles, hemp, wool or linen. I remember well the advice of St. Martin who told me to only wish for things that could be useful to us. I want to make all of the wishes: Know that I fear that if I grant you one wish, you would wish for something from which we would end up suffering. I do not know your intentions: you could turn me now into, a sheep or a mare, I would be something else promptly. This is why I fear granting you a wish."

guarantee that Saint Martin's orders would be carried out, as he does not know for what she would wish. After all, the wife has no allegiance to anyone, but herself; why should she do anything in anyone's best interest but her own?

Another interesting point brought up by the peasant is his apprehension about being turned into some sort of animal. I find it interesting that the animals that he mentions in his speech about his misgivings on conferring to her the first wish both have a feminine gender. It is as if he dreads a sort of metaphorical castration, placing him again in the traditional role of a woman, i.e., the subordinate one. He has, in a sense, regained his manhood via the four wishes of Saint Martin and he is well aware that he must carefully guard his newfound status from his over-zealous wife. The peasant, however, may have already compromised his position by revealing his designs for the wishes. As mentioned before, this is his first mistake regarding his new gifts. His second mistake occurs when he voices his concern about his wife's possible foolish use of the first wish. Such a statement could only serve to annoy her even more. Although he is telling the truth, what he is telling her is rather insulting. Aware of her greed and possible cuckolding, he does not trust her with either the money or his person. Unfortunately for the peasant, he is not very intelligent, but what he lacks in smarts, he makes up for, thanks to Saint Martin, in resources.

Despite his reservations, with a simple vow from his wife to always be submissive and a profession of her undying love, the peasant relents. It seems as though the peasant just does not want to believe the duplicity of his wife. He would like to think that he married a good woman who loves and respects him.

However, in spite of proof to the contrary, he forgives her wicked past treatment of him and gives her the first wish. This is his third mistake in the handling of Saint Martin's wishes. As if to prove that she is not in fact foolish and, at the same time, confirm his misgivings, she uses the wish to both mock him and injure him: "Je di, fait ele, de par Deu/ Que tot soiez chargez de viz" (94-96).⁷⁶ With these words, the wife expresses much: her dissatisfaction with her sex life, her disdain for her husband, his inadequacy in all that he does as a husband, the fact that she is probably already cuckolding him (two of the members are on his head and standing straight up, resembling horns), and that she has regained the power in the relationship. Simon Gaunt notes: "The multiplicity of the penises on the peasant's body undermines the singularity of the phallus as transcendental signifier and opens the way for a new mode of signification. Thus the penis, sign of male authority, in this text becomes the sign of subverted male authority as the erect penis on the peasant's forehead is implicitly likened to the cuckold's horn" (261). In a sense, the peasant's fear of castration is not realized but goes horribly in the other direction. He is not turned into a metaphorical woman but a sort of *über* male, covered in male members of all shapes and sizes to please any woman, no matter what her taste; however, at the same time, his transformation turns him into a sort of *untermensch*. The overabundance of male potency has rendered him impotent. Still, we should note that such a representation of a male body that exceeds its traditional parameters is not limited to the fabliaux. "Illustrations of the male body in medical treatises, even in discussion of the most undignified

⁷⁶ "I say, she said, that by God, you will be completely covered in penises."

aspects of corporeal existence, show him as a macrocosmic giant, spilling over the bounds of the text, signifying more than physical dimensions, or at least more than the physical dimensions of the individual body” (Smith 6). The wife thus has made him into an entity from which not only she may benefit, but also others. With the multitude of sexual appendages, not only will the peasant’s sexual prowess snowball, but also his production in the field; his newfound virility will transcend his own household and spread to that of the neighbors, making him and his wife pillars of the community.

Yet, at the same time, the wife also reveals her true nature; she does not seek to better their lives through financial gain, but rather exact her own revenge on a husband whom she believes has made her life miserable by not adequately fulfilling his spousal obligations, both material and sexual. It is possible that others consider him as a responsible individual who works hard to make a living, despite the poor return; however, she wants others to view him as an object of ridicule as she does and for the others to pour the admiration on her for tolerating such an oaf. She does not appear concerned that his appearance could reflect negatively upon her. In addition, I believe that the narrator’s use of the word *vit* is intended as a double entendre. Aubailly comments that frequently in the fabliaux “...le jeu sur les mots est lié au thème de la sexualité: il est métaphore du jeu sexuel...” (106). This fabliau is no exception. As a noun, *vit* means phallus, but as a verb, it is the third person, singular of the verb to see. Thus, by covering him in male members (*vits*), she has exposed him as a dolt for the entire world to behold (*vit*). She also states that she would charge a fee for those who would like

to come and glimpse the member-covered deformity living in her house. This way, not only does she improve her sexual situation, but her financial one as well.

Another word used by the wife in her description of her husband's current state is *cornu*, which could have several connotations. This could, as mentioned earlier, indicate that he is, in fact, a cuckold, or it could denote his resemblance to either a demon or devil or even to the stupid beasts with which he spends so much time. Additionally, if one separates the two syllables of the word to make two words, one ends up with the words *cor nu*, meaning naked body. When one reflects upon the idea of a naked body, the word vulnerable comes to mind. And the peasant is, in fact, left in a defenseless state, a potential target for abuse not only from his wife, but also from the outside world. No matter what the implication, the result is the same: he is uncovered for the entire world to taunt.

Surprisingly, despite the history of his wife's antagonistic behavior toward him, the peasant is shocked:

Suer, fait il, ci a mout mal plait!

Por quoi m'as tu si conreé?

Assez m'amasse miauz tué

Que sor moi fuissent tant de vit.

Onques mais nus hom tant ne vit (128-32)⁷⁷

The peasant, disturbed by his newfound excessive fertility, also feels covered with shame. In addition, he is completely perplexed as to why his wife would turn on

⁷⁷ "Sister, he said, this greatly displeases me! Why have you outfitted me so? Better to have killed me than cover me in penises. I have never seen such a man as I."

him after having just pledged her undying love and allegiance. Our dim-witted peasant simply does not want to admit that his conniving wife has duped him yet again. He still believes, however, that he has the upper hand thanks to the three remaining wishes; but in his current state, what good are wishes when one is so hideously adorned? After all, who would associate with him (especially men) in such a condition? The wife smugly responds to his amazement by explaining that his single male member does not suffice and that someone of her sexual appetite requires many.⁷⁸ Not only does the wife suffer from the vice of greed but of gluttony and lust as well. From her point of view, he is now a marvelous creature that is equipped to serve her sexual desires at her every whim. She has, in fact, turned him into a sort of beast of burden, confined to working in the house much as she has done during the course of their marriage. In addition, his body will make any type of movement at all more difficult. His manhood is nothing but a handicap, leaving him vulnerable to his wife's urges. Still, the wife claims that he should not be angry, as she has, in fact, made improvements upon him. The peasant, beside himself, makes his fourth mistake in the form of his first wish (the second of the four given by Saint Martin). He takes into account the adage: "do unto others as they have done to you." Outraged at what his wife has done to him, he makes his wish in retaliation, wishing for her to be covered just as he is in a complementary way. She is now, as the fabliau states, "bien connue." This usage of the word *connue* is a play on words indicating that she is not only covered in female body parts but also well-known, meaning that her cuckolding

⁷⁸ See *Le vallet au douze fames* for a male character that claims that one wife is not sufficient.

will be acknowledged to all and she will now also suffer in shame; the peasant for his physical state and the wife for her moral one. Burns observes:

In female protagonists, association with rational mind is denied as the female mouth is reduced—by association with the eroticized female body—to a wholly sexual orifice. Women of the *fabliau* narrative lose their heads metaphorically to the extent that their mouths are shown to function as vaginas. Instead of bearing two distinctly different mouths—one facial and one vaginal, each with independent functions—the sexualized female is shown to have only one kind of orifice. Whether it appears on her face or between her legs, the female mouth is erotic and wholly corporeal (197).

Thus, this hypersexual female becomes oversexed. If her one orifice, which according to Burns is both mouth and vagina, was not satisfied with one male member, how could the rest that envelop her body ever hope for proper pleasure? In addition, with the placement of several of the cavities on her face, the peasant exposes his wife's fetiched speech to the world. The wife does not like the taste of her own medicine and is furious: "Por coi m'as tu ensi navree?/ Ja mais jor ne serai senee!" (163-64).⁷⁹ In spite of her viciousness toward her husband and the wicked trick she played on him, she cannot believe that her husband would ever have the gall to lash out at her. Yet, it was, in fact, she who compelled the emergence of this characteristic in him. Symbolically, and overloaded with

⁷⁹ "Why have you hurt me so? I will never be cured!"

symbols, a great rush of anger empowers him, provoking him to punish his wife for her cruelty. Yet, by exacting his revenge, he has also wasted yet another one of his wishes.

In response to his wife's indignation, the peasant states that now each male member on his body has a container, which he calls a *borse* ("Car or a chascuns viz sa borse" ("Because now each penis has its sack") (168). This is a very unusual (if not unique) use of the word *borse*, which is customarily employed as a metaphorical reference to the scrotum. One explanation for this unconventional use is that his statement is simply reflecting a widespread medieval medical belief that the woman was simply an inverted male (Verdon, *La femme au moyen âge* 12). If this is the case, then it would make sense that the body parts covering the wife are considered inverted testicles by the peasant. Still, there are other ways of viewing this reversal of genital appellations. By enveloping his wife with *borses*, he is now making her responsible for supporting the family, freeing himself up for leisurely activities. Having insulted her husband's moneymaking abilities, he now exacts revenge by placing her in the traditionally male role. The empty *borses* also could also signify his opinion of her role in the relationship, suggesting that she is nothing but a money hungry, cash-sucking creature. Covering her in empty *borses* exposes her true nature. Burns comments on the image of female body parts in the fabliau: "...different from the visible, public mouth, the vagina bears no necessary connection to the brain. Rather than emitting words or sound, it takes in the penis in a wholly corporeal gesture that could not be more mindless" (198). The peasant has thus

reduced his wife to a non-speaking, non-thinking entity, forcing her into the submissive role again and rendering her an object for his and his appendages' exploits. As Levy remarks however, none of the extra extremities are intended for use (*The Comic Text* 236). Thus, although all of the members covering the peasant are erect, they will not fulfill their biological function to fill the *borses* on the wife's body. This reference has not only biological implications, but a metaphorical one as well. Like Colin Muset's frequently empty *borse*, the couple's will remain empty as well, having gained nothing from the wishes offered by Saint Martin.

The peasant's fifth mistake results when he again listens to his wife and uses the third of the four wishes to remove all of the female and male body parts from them both:

Et li prodom sohaide et dit
Q'ele n'ait con ne il n'ait vit.
Lors fu la jantis dame irie
C'on de son con ne trova mie,
Et li prodom, qant il revit
Qu'il n'avoit mie de sont vit (181-86)⁸⁰

It is important to note that he did not chose his words carefully, but repeats his wife's request: "Soaidiez que plus viz n'aiez/ Ne je cons..." (177-78). He wishes away all of the extra appendages, male and female, including the originals. The

⁸⁰ "And the man wished that she would not have any pudendum and that he would have no penis. And the wife was very angry to discover that she no longer had any pudendum and the man realized that he had no phallus."

pair has turned from oversexed beings to sexless ones. Although their shame is no longer visible to the outside world, they are no longer as God intended. In order to remedy this situation, the peasant must use the last wish to re-member the pair. The couple thus find themselves in the same situation as they were before Saint Martin bestowed the peasant with the wishes. Due to stupidity, greed, lust and gluttony, the peasant no longer has any means to improve his financial and marital circumstances except hard work. In addition, the wife will inevitably revert back to her old, spiteful self and, nothing in the peasant's life will have improved. Furthermore, despite his intention of doing exactly as Saint Martin commanded, the peasant, tricked by his wife and his own gullibility, will have disappointed the saint and will most likely never again be rewarded for his loyalty.

Grosz makes a key observation when she states that “[t]he body has been regarded as a source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason” (5). This remark especially rings true in *Les quatre souhaits saint Martin* where, as we have just witnessed, the wife, due to her malicious spirit and sexual greed, misleads her husband in his quest to fulfill Saint Martin's instructions. Reason (and Saint Martin) dictates that he should use the wishes for material and financial gain; but unfortunately for our dim-witted peasant, he listens to his wife who seeks revenge for having married a lackluster husband. Hafner notes:

Ultimately, *Les quatre Souhaits saint Martin* is a story about control: Controlling with whom your wife sleeps, controlling what she looks at while she is doing it, and controlling what she is thinking

while she is doing it. Her thoughts, her fantasies, and her desires, however, defy control, and this is the terrifying energy behind the fabliau (41).

Although he has the means to climb the social ladder in his hands, he allows this chance to slip away in the hopes of placating his demanding and dominating wife. Burns makes another important observation about language in this fabliau: “‘Les Quatre Sohais’ ... makes especially clear the link between what was perceived to be medieval female nature and the woman’s genital orifice by exploiting the linguistic homophony between the Old French verb to know (*conoistre*) and the noun meaning vagina (*con*)” (188). It is thus not only the wife’s oral cavity which betrays her greed but also the one belonging to her pudendum. This fabliau demonstrates not only the excess to which *avaritas* leads but also the waste. Although amassing money or symbols of wealth seems like a good idea, if one does not have the skills or experience to manage what one has accumulated, one will lose everything, leaving him not with wealth, but regret.

Conclusion

Both *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit* and *Les quatre sohais saint Martin* demonstrate, along with the images on the medieval cathedral, the misogynistic view that women are the instruments through which greed operates. They allow their voracious sexual appetites to escort them to the ways of extravagance. Greed is thus irrevocably tied to a woman’s desire. This desire is

not just a wish for sexual satisfaction but for power as well, illustrated by the yearning for a particular male body part, a symbol of authority. In this case, it is not so much a question of sexual longing, but a desire for power over the male. Not only do the women's bodies subjugate others, but also language. Schenck notes that the "...power of language is so great that there seems to be no defense against it..." (*The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception* 102). Both of these fabliaux corroborate this idea. For the three ladies, they are powerless against the judgment of an abbess; whereas for the peasant, granting his wife the first of four wishes proves disastrous for regaining his position of authority in the household. Despite all of the minions working for the side of *Avaritia* (*Philorgyria, Sorditas, Tenacitas, Fames acquirendi, Rapacitas* and *Violentia*), the three ladies, the peasant and his wife fail in their desire for acquisition. Contrary to the moral at the end of each fabliau, the lesson seems to be a rather different one. By demonstrating the futility of putting a great amount of effort into amassing material things, the warning proves to be not against judges or women, but greed. Acquisition is, however, not a problem for the title characters in *Le foteor* and *Richeut*.

*Et non propter malitiam tuam plurimam
et infinitas iniquitates tuas Job 22.5⁸¹*

Chapter Four

Debauchery's Onslaught

Depicted in Prudentius' poem and on the cathedral at Laon as a man threatening *Pudicitia* with a flaming torch (Mâle 208), the scorching effects of debauchery (*libido*) are felt especially by fabliaux women, because in opposition to these representations, the *fableors* follow the medieval trend of vilifying women by attributing to them all that is evil.⁸² The fabliaux turn the menace from what can be represented and seen (the flaming torch or the metaphorical phallus) into that which is hidden and difficult, if not impossible, to represent (the vagina). Gregg observes: "Pauline commentary on womankind's weak reason and spiritual defectiveness would later lend support to the inferiorization and demonization of women that began in the patristic period and shaped the medieval

⁸¹ "Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities."

⁸² The exception being Samson in *Richeut*, and even with this exception, it is Samson's mother who guides her son to his life of immoderation and is thus considered the wicked one.

perspective” (90). Embodying the indefinable, this absence/inversion terrifies the male. Rather than admitting the unmasculine trait of fear, men turn women into the evildoer and denounce them for vices that they themselves possess. No longer terrorized by a flaming torch, *Pudicitia* (now a male entity) is now threatened with being devoured by an insatiable mouth/vagina. Butler notes that such exaggeration of gender differences permits the creation of order (131). If this is true, then the above-mentioned phenomenon reflects the desire of the clergy to establish the Church as the means to achieve order; and, if one deviates from this inherently patriarchal system, chaos ensues. Examples of such instances are found in *Le foteor* and *Richeut*, where debauchery’s reign causes turmoil. In discussing these two fabliaux, I would like to explore the sensuous nature of debauchery, for its driving force is not only a yearning to break with convention for amusement’s sake, but also a desire to experience pleasurable sensations. Julien de Vézelay warns of the bad influence of the senses:

J’ai cinq amis avec lesquels j’entretiens des relations personnelles et très intimes de familiarité et qui, sans discontinuer, s’emploient à me faire admettre leur propre conception du bien. Partisans de la doctrine d’Épicure, ils prétendent que le seul bien pour l’homme c’est le plaisir. Si l’homme supprime ce dernier, affirment-ils, l’existence devient terne, et il devient pire de vivre que de mourir. Ils tournent en risée le principe de Cicéron selon lequel la nature n’a rien donné à l’homme de plus absurde que le plaisir: il effémine la vigueur morale, émousse les facultés intellectuelles et

empêche l'homme de pratiquer la tempérance et la moderation.

Mes cinq amis, si gravement dévoyés sur les chemins de la morale, ce sont les cinq sens corporals que tout le monde connaît bien: la vue, l'ouïe, le goût, l'odorat et le toucher (541).

Thus, behaving badly is not the only goal, but also feeling good and enjoying life. Closely related to lust and gluttony, debauchery does not limit itself to one particular sensation, but seeks to revel in them all, as much as possible, without discovery or punishment.

The first fabliau that I will examine is *Le foteor*. This fabliau features a young man who, having no means of making a living, profits from the good faith and vices of others. While traveling to Soissons, he stops at an inn where he has a copious meal, assuring the owner of payment. On the pretext of being a musician, he asks the owner to indicate the house of the most beautiful woman in the village, for he must take her a message. Leaving his sword as a guarantee of payment, he goes to the house where he finds the doors still locked. He waits outside until the lady of the house awakes, sees him outside and sends her maid to discover his purpose. At first scandalized then intrigued by his response that he is a *foteor*, the lady accepts the price for his services and invites him into her home. She asks the maid to prepare a bath; yet, the maid, disgusted by the young man's trade, refuses. Seeing her in a foul mood, the young man offers her his services, stating that he could improve her mood. After deciding upon a price, she pays him in advance and the servant is pleased twice; afterwards, she happily prepares the bath for the young man and her mistress. Paid in advance by the

mistress, he performs his service and subsequently, returns to the bath. While he is bathing, the lady's husband returns. When the husband finds him, the young man explains who he is and what he intends, but states that he has yet to be paid or perform his service. The husband pays him to leave, satisfied that his wife has yet to be violated. The young man departs having earned seven pounds, enough to pay his debt to the innkeeper and recover his sword.

When examining debauchery in the fabliaux one should not overlook *Richeut*. As immoral as the fabliaux claim to be, this is one of the few that predominately feature a prostitute. In addition, although the fabliaux rarely mention the result of sex (i.e. children), this one breaks many fabliaux conventions and features Richeut's son, Samson, as a main character. This tale recounts the life of a prostitute who uses men to her advantage. She does not discriminate between classes, for she dupes a nobleman, a bourgeois and a clergyman into believing that they are the father of her son, whom she conceived on purpose because she believed that they were no longer paying her enough attention. All three lavish her and her son with gifts to the point of ruining themselves. Her son, Samson, grows up with all of the privileges that money can buy. Bored by his surroundings, he boasts to his mother that his education is complete for he can easily lead any woman into his bed and, subsequently, into the whorehouse. His mother ridicules him and warns him of the treacherous ways of women. Slighted, Samson claims that no woman will ever make a fool of him and leaves. Along his journeys, he conquers women of all nations and cheats men at dice, even becoming a monk at Clairvaux for a brief period of time. After

twelve years of deflowering, pimping and dicing, he returns to his mother's hometown. Although he does not recognize her, she knows him and sets out to prove wrong his last boast to her. She tricks him into believing that Herselot, her faithful servant, is a young virgin whom he could never convince to go to bed with him. Intent upon proving her incorrect, he sets out to triumph over the unconquerable and believes to have succeeded. During the act however, he discovers that she is no more a virgin than he is. In the meantime, Richeut convinces seven men of her acquaintance to beat her son, but not kill him; after all, Samson is still her son. Before Samson can leave Herselot's bed, the men beat him with Richeut intervening, pretending to save him from these men. His boast of twelve years earlier has thus been proven wrong.

These two fabliaux have much in common, especially when it comes to the male protagonists. Firstly, they are guilty of much more debauchery than the women, but the women are still portrayed as more permeated by this vice. Secondly, they live off of others. Thirdly, they lead women into debauchery. And lastly, they are both silver-tongued, able to dupe both men and women alike. Yet, there is an importance difference in their education; Samson is highly, if not overly, educated, whereas the valet has neither education nor trade. Despite the acts against women in both of these tales, the fabliaux indicate that the women are guiltier because it is men that they deceive or cuckold; their crime is against manhood. By participating in the women's vice, the men seek to expose the women's sensuous nature. But is this truly the case? What purpose does this serve except to provoke laughter at the women's expense? What do the *fablours*

prove in recounting such misogynistic tales? Are they simply following tradition? Or is there something else at play here? I believe that it is the latter. By analyzing *Le foteor* and *Richeut*, I hope to show that both of these fabliaux could be viewed as warnings for women against the tendency of men use sex to defraud, defile and ruin their reputations and, in the case of *Richeut*, an illustration for women on how to use the same tool as a defense. In addition, both of these fabliaux demonstrate how the hegemonic view of masculinity can corrupt those without any true worldly power.

Le foteur

Although this fabliau appears in two manuscripts, only BN MS 19152 (D) contains the tale in its entirety; the manuscript (B) found in Berne (354) is missing the ending. Still, the texts are for the most part similar, except for one important word in the introduction. They both indicate that the tale that follows is a fabliau, but text B states that if one wants to relate a fabliau, one should not have to claim that the story is “veritable” (B). Text D replaces “veritable” with “desresnable.” This is an interesting difference because text B indicates that the story to be related is not outlandish and possibly true. But on the other hand, text D specifies that the story is not true and can be as outlandish as it wants because it is a work of fiction. Whichever the case, in both manuscripts, the narrator indicates that the tale is for the audience’s listening pleasure and does not include, like many fabliaux, a moral lesson, although, as I will show, I do not necessarily agree with this assertion.

The fabliau begins by recounting that it concerns a young man of twenty-two years, hardly a novice in the medieval world, yet not quite at his full potential. Although out in the world for a while, he has yet to accumulate any assets with the exception of his attire. Still, in spite of his lack of money, he has a great understanding of how to use his worldly knowledge to his advantage. In his case, his *savoir* trumps his *avoir*; but he uses his *savoir* to gain (*avoir*).⁸³ Thus, although he lacks the means to gain power in the conventional sense, he exercises a power that he does have: his masculinity. By virtue of his gender, he has power over others, especially women. It would, in fact, be appropriate to call him a parasite, making no distinction between classes when it is a question of profit. Both his handsomeness and his fine attire give him the appearance of a nobleman or, at least, one who is in a nobleman's service. He represents a perfect example of the proverb *l'habit ne fait pas le moine*. It is this façade that disarms his victims; he could not get away with his tricks were he dressed any meaner. This exterior of fine clothes and equipment reinforces the idea of the sensuous nature of debauchery while at the same time strengthening the pretense of a dominant male.

Fashionably clad in a tunic and coat made of the same fabric along with his sword and white gloves, this young man requests a very sumptuous meal. Based solely on the apparent gentleman's appearance, the innkeeper does not doubt that he will receive payment for the provisions. Although he currently has no money to offer the innkeeper, he knows that he will be able to procure the

⁸³ See Hutton's explanation of these two fabliaux tools (112).

amount needed to quit his debt, as this is not the first time he has found himself in such a situation and it will undoubtedly not be the last. In addition, he knows exactly the means to obtain his funds: a ruse. He asks the innkeeper who is considered the most beautiful woman in town for he is a musician and has been sent to deliver her a message; it is from this woman that he will receive the money. It is interesting that he does not ask who is the richest woman in town, but who is the most beautiful. He knows that a beautiful woman is more likely to be vain, rendering it easier for him to take advantage of her. In addition, if imbued with this character flaw, she will undoubtedly possess others to exploit as well. However, his question also indicates his narcissism as well. Although in need of money, he is not willing to sacrifice his ego and have sex with a woman whom he considers less than desirable. For him, it is a way of maintaining some type of control over his aimless life. It also is much more of a challenge to conquer a beautiful woman, as he believes that an ugly one would be happy to have anyone pay attention to her. A pretty one (even if married) would have many suitors and is more likely to be discriminating. When a pretty woman agrees to his services, his ego gets an unnecessary boost. The innkeeper, to ensure that he gets paid, supplies him with the information needed and more:

Certes, sicom l'en fait acroire

Moi et toz cels de ceste ville,

Madame Margue qui ne file,

La feme Guion de la Place,

C'est la plus avenanz de face:

Nes ses mariz bien lou tesmoigne,

Qui ne l'aimme une eschaloigne

Mains qu'el fait li, mes plus encore (34-41)⁸⁴

Thus according to all the men in the town, Dame Margue, a merchant's wife, is the most beautiful, even according to her husband whom she does not love. She is thus a perfect target for our young man.

The innkeeper continues his gossip about the couple:

Biaus osten, c'est uns marcheanz

Mout larges et mout despendanz,

Et sa feme rien le l'en doit:

Bien vos fera s'elle vos voit (49-52)⁸⁵

He thus innocently gives away even more valuable information for the young man, revealing that the merchant is not only successful but also very generous and his wife even more so. Additionally, the innkeeper claims that she will be very happy to see him. This statement could imply several things; either she is often left alone in the house while her husband is away on business and she gladly welcomes guests, or she is a patron of the arts and supports struggling artists, or she has welcomed such entertainers before in her house. Whatever the case may be, the young man learns enough to determine that this is the house to target.

⁸⁴ "Certainly, if you are inclined to believe me and the rest of the men in this town, Madame Maruge, wife of Guion de la Place, she has the most attractive face: even her husband who loves her slightly less than she loves him attests to it."

⁸⁵ "Dear guest, he is a merchant who is very successful and generous, and his wife is just as generous: she will do well by you if she sees you."

A master of double entendre, the trickster divulges his intentions when he relates that his will deliver his message “en mon latin” (54). It is most likely that the innkeeper understands this statement to mean that he will transmit the message in the elaborate language used by minstrels. The young man’s intent, however, is rather more nefarious: he will use flattery and his attractive exterior to acquire money from the woman. In addition, he reveals that he intends to call on her in the morning, selecting this time of day so as to not arouse suspicion regarding his designs with the lady.

In the interim between the young man’s conversation with the innkeeper and his encounter with Dame Margue, an interesting sort of pastiche of *amor de lohn* occurs. After his meal, the young man goes to sleep; however, his sleep is disturbed with thoughts of the beautiful lady. What he is experiencing is not necessarily *amor de lohn* but more *luxure de lohn*. Through only hearing about her beauty, he falls not in love, but in lust for her and her money. The very thought of her intensifies his desire and this pseudo-agony mimics the suffering experienced by the lover in romance and lyric when he is away from his beloved. His distress, however, is only fleeting as when he gets up the next morning, he goes directly to Dame Margue’s house and sits outside its doors. Because the merchant is away (presumably on business), the servant and her lady are in no rush to rouse themselves from bed. This could also be an indication that, as Julien de Vézelay’s friends warn, sensory deprivation has led to a monotonous existence, making them especially vulnerable to the sensuous attack planned by the young man. In the meantime, the trickster’s suffering is prolonged by the

women's laziness. Despite the long wait, he still does not leave and seek out another victim: he has chosen his mark and does not give up. Brusegan makes an interesting observation about doors in the fabliaux: a closed door signifies that the seduction is unachieved; however, once that door is open, the seduction has been accomplished ("La représentation de l'espace dans les fabliaux" 60). This is exactly the case for our young man, and as long as the door to the house remains closed, he has no way of charming the lady or of obtaining the money needed to pay his debt to the innkeeper. But as soon as it opens, he knows that he has managed to break through the boundaries protecting the women and his scam will succeed.

When at last the servant awakes and begins the daily preparations, she notices the handsome young man sitting in front of the house:

Cil qui devant l'uis ert seant,
Qui en ses mains vait tornoiant
Uns blans ganz que il enformoit
Et toz jourz ers l'uis regardoit (97-100)⁸⁶

What the maid notices when she first spies him from inside of the house are his white gloves with which he plays, all the while staring at the closed door. His display recalls that of a peacock, spreading his beautiful feathers in an attempt to catch the eye of a female. His tactic works, for, due to his attire and attractiveness, she surmises that he is not a thief; but if he is not a thief casing the

⁸⁶ "He who is sitting in front of the door who is holding his white gloves and looking constantly at the door."

joint, who is he? It is not as if he were hiding, but instead is in plain sight for all to see. In my opinion, this is the first sensation experienced on one's way to debauchery: sight. The young man knows that his presence in front of the house will arouse curiosity, so he looks as good as possible to increase the ladies' inquisitiveness.

His instincts are correct and the lady, who experiences pleasure by simply looking upon this vision of manly perfection, sends her maid out to discover his identity. When the maid finally does open the door to greet the stranger, she neglects any politesse and asks him directly: "Quieus hom iestes vos, biaux amis/ Qui ci avez tote jor sis?" ("What man are you, dear friend who has sat her all day?") (125-26). Overcome by her curiosity, she does not try to strike up a conversation with him to slowly learn who he is, but simply asks him point blank, not addressing him as a servant would a nobleman, but as an equal. Thus, despite all of his adornment, I do not believe that she is completely fooled. The young man answers the maid as bluntly as she had addressed him: "Je sui fouteres, bele suer/ Que bone joie aiez au cuer!" ("I am a fucker, dear sister. I wish you all the joy in your heart!") (127-28). We should note the structure of his sentence "Je sui fouteres." The lack of an article indicates that this is his trade. He does not refer to himself as a male prostitute but a *foteor*. It is as if he attended some school or was in some apprenticeship where *foteors* such as himself are trained and then sent out in to the world to practice their craft. His statement also indicates the purpose for his presence. Of course, he is only seeking female clients, as he expressly states to the maid that he is there for her happiness. The maid is

insulted at his implication that first, she is in need of his services; second, he can satisfy her; third, she would be able to afford his services; and fourth, she would even want to employ him versus another in his line of work. But despite her offense, she is slightly intrigued, a fact that she hides to avoid encouraging the young man. For the moment, she retains her *sang froid*, ignoring her senses or bodily desires. In a pseudo-affronted mood, she returns to Dame Margue and recounts her conversation. Finding her reaction amusing, the lady decides to play along with the young man's game and goes to him herself, supposedly to discover his identity and purpose. I use the word *supposedly* because I believe that she knows that he is there to woo her and is anxious to discover how he intends to do so. This is obviously not the first time a handsome stranger has called at the house when her husband was away; being the most beautiful woman in town has made her the object of conquest for many a young man. In addition, I think that the lady's amusement at her maid's ire stems from her belief that, being but a simple servant, the maid misunderstood the strangers' words or intent. She thus goes to speak with him herself to learn the true nature of his presence as only a woman in her position could understand the elaborate language of a suitor.

When she approaches the young man alone (the maid refuses to accompany her) he repeats what he told the maid. Like the maid, she fakes indignation at what she assumes is a joke. Nonetheless, in a move that reveals her sense of adventure, she elects to play along with his game to see exactly where he intends to go with it:

Ne por quant, est ce a tote jor

O en tasche que vos ovrez?
Se vos ma beasse servez
Et el vostre servise taigne,
Quatre deniers de ma gaaigne
Avroiez por li mout bien servir,
Se vos lou volez deservir (181-87)⁸⁷

Her counter offer brings into question not only the young man's skill but his social class as well. While she pretends to believe that this is truly his trade, she insults him by insinuating that he is neither worthy nor capable of pleasing her. Seeing that words will get him no further with Dame Margue, he chooses a silent action to advance his ruse: he makes as if to leave. This also gives him another opportunity to strut like a peacock, almost daring Dame Margue to decline such a fine specimen of manhood. It works; finally convinced of his vocation and of the wonderful opportunity before her, the lady stops him and asks how much he charges by the day and how much he would charge her. He replies:

Dame, selonc que chascune est
Me puet trover de marchié prest:
La laide me met ainz en place
Cent sous que je por li riens face,
Mais la bele me done mains

.....

⁸⁷ “Nevertheless, do you work by the day or by the task? If you would serve my maid and if my maid would have you, I would give you four deniers for your good service.”

Se je vint sous a vos gaaing,
Avec mon conroi et mon baing,
Mout les voudrai bien deservir!
Car je sai bien et bel servir
Une dame, quant je m'en painne

(196-200, 204-08)⁸⁸

He thus finds the information given to him by the innkeeper valuable. Appealing to her vanity by claiming to charge beautiful women less than ugly ones, she blindly succumbs to his flattery and agrees to hire him. She even tells him that he is courtly for having such a screening system! Although her sudden change of heart may seem odd, Karras reminds us that “[w]omen were constantly in danger of falling away from appropriate feminine behavior and into unbridled promiscuity” (“Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe” 170). This is true for Dame Margue who, through sight and well-chosen words (hearing), is well along the path to debauchery. The bath and the good meal will also prod her towards debauchery by stimulating her senses of touch, smell and taste. Already a *débauché* himself, the young man must also corrupt others in order to maintain his life of immoderation. Of sexuality, Grosz notes: “As a concept, sexuality is incapable of ready containment: it refuses to stay within its predesignated regions, for it seeps across boundaries into areas that are apparently not its own. As drive, it infests all sorts of other areas in the structures

⁸⁸ “Lady, the market price depends upon the woman’s appearance: an ugly lady would pay one hundred sous before I would do anything for her, but a beautiful lady would give me less. If you would give me twenty sous along with dinner and a bath, I will do my best to deserve them. For I know how to please a lady when I set my mind to it.”

of desire ... It is excessive, redundant, and superfluous in its languid and fervent overachieving” (viii). This is especially true in the case of our young man. He uses his sexuality not only for erotic exploits but also for financial and gastronomical gain. We should note, however, that the *fableor* seems purposely to portray those whom the young man is corrupting as already depraved, and the young man is just bringing their *libido* and their true nature to the surface.

Apparently angered that the lady allowed the young man into the house, the maid refuses to prepare the meal and bath. Her ire could also stem from the fact that Dame Margue’s husband was out for the day, and the two had planned a leisurely day; Dame Margue has obviously ruined this plan by employing the young man. The ever-charming young man offers to please the maid beforehand to put her in a better mood. The lady is astounded: “Comment? Porriez deservir/ Fait la dame, double loier?” (“What? You could, said the lady, earn double the pay?”) (233-34). Evidently basing her response upon her own experience with men, she questions his ability to rise to the occasion twice in so little time. Yet, interestingly, she words her misgivings in economic terms. She may also be taking insult at the fact that he is offering to please the maid first; or perhaps she believes that he will charge the maid the same amount as he would her, when she believes that she is being charged less because of her beauty. Convinced that the young man’s display was all to entice her, his proposal to the maid deflates her ego a bit, making her rather resentful of his attention to the maid. She also fears that if he exhausts himself with the maid, he will have nothing left for her. He reminds her however:

Si feré s'il vos plest, ma dame,
Que ja n'i perdroiz rien, par m'ame!
Je sai lo mestier par usage,
Si n'a soz ciel oisel volage,
Colon ne moiniau, qui tant oevre
Com je faz quant je sui en oevre (242-47)⁸⁹

I find his comparison with birds interesting. Just as the dove and the sparrow have multiple partners, he does not limit himself either. In this manner, he purports to be in tune with Nature. Another important point to consider in the above text is that Dame Margue is a discriminating consumer. The very thought of her merchandise being used by her maid before she even gets a chance to sample it is disturbing to her. The young man, however, assures her that as a professional, he is accustomed to multiple assignations on the same day. At the same time, the deal with Dame Margue is for a bath, a meal and a *foutre*, without the first two, the lady will not get her *foutre*; thus, the young man's offer to improve the maid's disposition is but a means to an end.

An interesting economic exchange occurs and the image of an open-air market is evoked when the maid and the young man begin to bargain on the price:

-Certes, hui cest jor avriez
Grant solaz de moi por dis livres.
-Qu'avez dit, sire, iestes vos ivres,

⁸⁹ "I will do it if it pleases you, my lady. You will lose nothing, by my soul! I am in the habit of practicing my trade. There is not a bird in the sky, neither pigeon nor sparrow that works as well as me."

Qui dis livres me demandez?

Mais moins ! - Se vos lo commandez:

Sis livres soient. –Mes trois, sire,

Je n’oseroie de moins dire.

-Bele, cent sous donroiz au mains!

-Tenez donc ça, sire, vos mains,

Si sera la paumee faite

Car cist marchiez mout bien me haite,

Si avroiz l’argent en baillie (255-66)⁹⁰

This is an opportunity for the young man to earn more money, so he may have taken even less had they continued to quibble; however, the maid simply agrees to an amount when they arrive at a price that she can pay. Another interesting point is the pleasure that the maid gets in haggling. It is as if the haggling were a sort of foreplay for her; the verbal play between the two excites her to the point where she is willing to hand over one hundred sous for the pleasure of having him ply his trade. It is also surprising to the lady and to the reader that the maid has managed to save up so much money considering her meager salary. She was obviously saving for a very special occasion, but in her enthusiasm and lust, she forgets all of this and hands all her savings over to the young man in exchange for sexual pleasure. The simple opportunity for pleasure seems enough to convince both Dame Margue and the maid that they should employ him.

⁹⁰ “Certainly, today you will have great pleasure from me for ten livres. What did you say, sir, are you drunk that you asked ten livres? But less! I will ask from you six livres. Three, sir, I would not dare to say less. Dear, you will give one hundred sous at least! Here then sir, thus the deal is struck because this bargaining pleases me and you will have the money at your disposal.”

After pleasing the maid twice, he relaxes and enjoys a good meal with the lady while bathing. The combination of the bath and meal evokes sight, taste, touch and smell.⁹¹ Of this particular bath, Levy notes: "...the bath remains a constant element throughout, like some centre-stage prop, symbolizing the hero's sexual prowess and involving all four characters, one after the other, in the fabliau's erotic quadrille" (*The Comic Text* 147). Lorcin remarks: "Le summum du plaisir est atteint si l'on peut avoir un bon bain chaud et un succulent repas en compagnie de la dame avant de passer aux ébats amoureux" ("Le corps a ses raisons dans les fabliaux" 441). For the lady, the bath and the meal serve as foreplay, before going off to bed:

Tant que il ot por son loier
Vint sous toz contez en sa main.
Et quant el li out fait son plain,
Si sont andui entré el lit.
Mout plaisaument fist son delit
A la dame une foiz sanz plus.
A tant rest do lit saillis sus,
Si entre el bain tot de rechief (293-300)⁹²

Although he charges less for beautiful women, he still requires them to pay up front. As for the lady, the fabliau does not mention if she was as happy as the maid afterwards. Of sexuality in general in the Middle Ages, Karras observes:

⁹¹ Note that the bath is often synonymous with sexual encounters in medieval literature.

⁹² "He soon had his payment, twenty sous in his hands. And when he had fed himself well, the two went to the bed. He very gladly pleased the woman, one time, not more. He got up from the bed and went to the bath again."

“Mutuality was not important in the medieval conceptualization of sex. Since it was most often the case that the two partners were of different sexes, it follows that medieval people understood men’s and women’s experiences of sex acts as quite different” (*Sexuality in the Middle Ages* 4). For the young man, he is pleasantly practicing his trade and earning money to quit his debt with the innkeeper, whereas the lady is hoping to gain (physically) from the exchange.

In typical fabliau fashion, the husband returns home from his business trip. Although warned of his arrival by the maid, the young man appears to have no concern about his own well-being, for he does not even get out of the bath, but remains there for the husband to find him. It is as if he wants to be discovered. He does not fear a beating or worse, but remains confident in his ability to get out of this sticky situation, with no care of his presence leading the women to trouble. In addition, this is an opportunity for his game to continue in order to further prove his superiority over others. When the husband finds him, he plainly explains his reason for being there:

Je sui icil qui a valu
Plus as gentiz dames do mont
Que tuit cil qui o siegle sont,
Car je sui foutere si mestre
Que nul ne porroit mellor estre!
Vint sous doi ci gaaingier hui:
Bien les i avra saus ancui
La dame qui m’a aloé,

Car bien la cuit servir a gré.

Mais n'ai encor a li jeü,

Si n'ai pas mon loier eü:

Si fust bien tens de commencer (335-46)⁹³

He thus does not misrepresent his identity or his purpose, even flattering the husband on his very noble wife. He does, however, lie about not having been paid and pleasing the wife. Still, he speaks to the husband as an equal: one businessman to another. By making the husband believe that his status as man of the house had yet to be compromised, the young man avoids the husband's wrath and receives twenty sous more from the husband. Despite his lack of worldly goods or a title, the young man uses the trappings of those that have such things against them. Living on the outskirts of society, he infiltrates civilization and mocks those that are considered civilized by exploiting their ignorance and vices.

Although the *fableor* ends the tale by stating that there is no moral and that it is intended for entertainment purposes only, I disagree. I think that there is a subtler lesson to this fabliau that goes against the traditional misogynistic discourse. It demonstrates the extreme misogynous tendency of hegemonic masculinity. In Olsen's terms, the women are inferior because they are subject to their desires or vices; whereas men are superior because they know how to harness their vices to their advantage.

⁹³ "I am he who is useful to many noble women in the world that are all on this earth because I am a fucker by trade, there is no one better! I will earn twenty sous today, and I will have them yet for the lady has employed me and I know how to pleasure her. But we have yet to play the game and I have yet to be paid: it is time to begin."

Le foteor demonstrates very vividly the sensuous nature of *libido*. By means of the senses and the body, any man has the means of seducing a woman of any class. Brusegan makes another important point when she notes that “[d]ans les fabliaux à séduction et dans ces fabliaux qui mettent en scène des lecheors, des foteors, ce qui est affirmé est le triomphe du principe du plaisir et la non intégration dans un système social déterminé” (“La naïveté comique dans les fabliaux à séduction” 27). This is exactly the case of the young man who operates outside of the social system, only feigning belonging to any class in order to take advantage of it. Having no family and no status allows him to float freely from place to place, person to person with no societal or even moral obligations restricting his behavior or supreme masculinity. Everything and everyone are fair game for him. Despite the assertion of Text B that the story is true, it seems that Text D is more accurate in describing it as *desresnable*, for the fabliau is truly outlandish on many levels. Aside from the outrageous trade of our young man, who proves to be a clever tradesman, his treatment of others is appalling as well. A colossal misogynist, he views his power over women as not only a privilege but also a right. Although Dame Margue is socially and monetarily superior to the young man, by virtue of being a man, he believes that he is still superior to her and proves it by exposing her to his debauchery and spreading the vice to both her and her maid. This fabliau shows hegemonic masculinity at its worst, if it ever has a best.

Richeut

Another fabliau character who functions outside of all social hierarchies is Samson, the title character's son in the tale *Richeut*. This fabliau proves unique in many ways. First, it mentions the outcome of the sexual encounter. Second, it breaks the taboo of incest. Third, it is unusually long, containing one thousand nineteen lines. Fourth, it does not use octosyllables, but a tailrhyme strophe. Fifth, it describes sex more graphically. And lastly, it has character development. Despite its apparent differences from a conventional fabliau (if one could say that such a thing exists), it still employs the same tactics in subverting and exploiting traditional literary models. In addition, the tale has an interesting structure: both the beginning and ending concern Richeut, while the middle deals with the exploits of her son, Samson. This framing of Samson's story with that of his mother's signals the theme of bad education by the mother; his debauchery begins and continues with her. The *fableor* asserts that all Samson does is a direct result of the libidinous nature that Richeut passes on to her son.

Yet another trait that makes this fabliau unique is that the Richeut and Herselot characters exist outside of this text. It could be argued that Richeut was one of the few women to have her own series in the Middle Ages. Vernet has identified two textual fragments that attest to what the narrator states at the beginning of the fabliau: "Sovante foiz öi avez/ Conter sa vie" ("You have often heard her life recounted.") (3-4). In addition, both of the fragments seem to have

connections to *Richeut* itself. The first fragment discussed by Vernet contains only five lines, yet they are nonetheless revealing:

Richeut lor mist l'amour el ventre.

Au prouvoire pas n'atalente

Tele assamblee:

A Richeut donne tel colee

C'a la terre chaï pasmee⁹⁴

This public slap by the priest could be the reason that she has him killed (*Richeut* l. 42-45). It is important to point out that this fragment is currently lost to us and its existence is only known from a description in a Sotheby's catalogue announcing the sale of the manuscript (Vernet 587). The second fragment, although obviously the ending of one of Richeut's adventures, recounts her beginnings as a prostitute. In addition, it refers to a "viu" which leads one to assume that this is the same old man whom she dupes in *Richeut* (Vernet 591). It is very possible that she exists in other texts that have been lost to us in addition to the fragments that remain. One could conclude that she is used as a reoccurring character in different stories because she was to be held up as an example of moral depravity and as a lesson on how not to behave. Still, we should not forget that Richeut never suffers any consequences for her actions.

⁹⁴ "Richeut put love in their stomach. Such a spectacle was not pleasing to the priest: he gave Richeut such a slap that she fell to the ground."

As indicated earlier, the story of Samson is framed by that of Richeut, thus the tale begins by reminding the audience of her nature and even of one of the stories told of her:

Maistresse fu de lecherie,
Mainte fames ot en baillie
Qu'elë atrait tot à sa guie
Par son atrait.

Encor nule ne s'an retrait,
Et chacune Richeut se fait
De sa voisine.

.....
Nostre Sires Richeut confonde
Qui tant mal fist,
Car de nonain reçut l'abit,
Mais ele lo tint mout petit.
Escotez, se Dex vos äit,
Qu'ele devint:
Fors de l'abäie plus de .xx.,
N'i vost plus estre,
Ainz en mena o soi lo prestre,
El li toil regne celestre,
Car il fu pris

O li, desmanbrez et ocis (5-11, 34-45)⁹⁵

These lines establish the great power that this woman has over both men and women. In fact, Keller remarks that “[l]e nom *Richeut* provient du germanique *Richild*, mais il est évident que ce nom propre a été influencé par le germanique *rîki* ‘puissant’” (249). Thus, her very name exudes power, but it is a malevolent one, as she is almost a sort of Eve figure. She is much like Gueric of Igny’s description of Eve: “The first Eve is not so much a mother as a stepmother since she handed on to her children an inheritance of certain death rather than the beginning of light” (168). Through her beauty and eloquent speech, she convinces others to leave behind their former lives and convictions and take up new ones with her. I find it interesting that line nine indicates that none can escape Richeut’s hold, but one should bear in mind that her influence is not as repressing as the system to which medieval women were subjected. Through Richeut’s persuasion, they are now free to live independently of any man or classification. Muñoz states: “It is knowledge of their bodies and desires that allow women to claim a certain degree of independence in the fabliaux” (91). Rather like the male parasite in *Le foteor*, they have become, like Richeut, parasites, thriving at the expense of others, especially men. Although requiring a host to exploit, the donor does not control their behavior or beat them when they

⁹⁵ “She was the mistress of debauchery. She had many women under her influence. She brought them all to her suite by means of seduction. None gets out of the situation and each one makes a Richeut of her neighbor. Let God expose Richeut who has engineered so much evil, for although she became a nun, she left the habit rather quickly. Listen, let God keep you, to what happened to her: she left the abbey where there were more than twenty nuns, she did not want to be there anymore. She also took the priest with her and took away from him the kingdom of heaven because she had him dismembered and killed.”

are deemed unruly. Prostitutes (like our *foteor*), while living independently of the social hierarchy, penetrate it to get what they require, taking advantage of the corrupt ones living within it. Another interesting point is that prostitution was tolerated because it was thought a necessary evil because, as Karras points out:

Regular ejaculation in men might be necessary to maintain the balance of humors within the body. Medieval medical theory held that there were four humors, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, and that their balance within the human body determined both personality and health. Semen was thought to be a product of blood ... and to allow it to build up created an imbalance of the humors, although nocturnal emission might help alleviate the problem (*Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 50).

Thus, the nuns that Richeut convinces to leave the abbey still serve a greater purpose; their focus has just changed.

After presenting the title character, the fabliau begins a sort of vita of her son Samson, beginning with his conception. Angry at being spurned by the priest, Richeut forms a plan to get back at him: she will become pregnant and tell him that it is his child, forcing him to support her by threatening to expose his illicit activities. In order to aid her fertility, she takes an infusion of mandrake and hellebore. Baldwin notes that “[a]t the height of her career the prostitute Richeut has as yet no offspring ... This concoction is apparently deemed necessary to produce pregnancy, thus acknowledging her previous infertility” (217). Karras adds: “Twentieth-century studies showed that many prostitutes were infertile

because of repeated venereal infections, and this may have been a factor in the Middle Ages also” (*Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 108). Thus, this seemingly unimportant bit of information regarding Richeut’s methods for conceiving reveals a true problem for the medieval prostitute. Along with the mixture, she begins to have sex as she has never done before:

Tant a alé desus desoz
Et a retraiz sofert et boz
Qu’ele est enceinte.
Or a la face megre et tainte,
Des or viault faire sa complainte (149-53)⁹⁶

She thus endures much physical punishment simply to get revenge upon the priest. This abuse to her body and the pregnancy has the result of rendering her face skinny and pale, and in addition, she makes no attempt to apply makeup so that she seems even more pitiful to the priest when making her complaint against him. She tells not only the priest that the child is his, but also a bourgeois and a knight. She takes full advantage of all social classes, substituting a bourgeois for a peasant, as a peasant has no money to give. It is interesting the lengths to which she goes in order to trick these men. After all, the two drugs that she imbibes in order to conceive could very well kill her if taken in too large a dose. In addition, the number of men with whom she sleeps in order to become pregnant could have the opposite effect by rendering her even more irreparably sterile. She also runs

⁹⁶ “She went at it so much in all sorts of manners and she suffered so many comings and goings that she became pregnant. Now her face is thin and pale, she wanted immediately to plead her case.”

the risk of losing money both during and after her pregnancy because she will not be able to practice her trade. How could she be so confident that her ruse would work? The answer is that she could not; however, she is so practiced in taking advantage of others that she knows that were her initial plan to fail, she would be able to find other, more gullible victims.

When she goes to the priest claiming, that he is the father, he naturally refuses to believe her, given her chosen profession. In addition, it would be rather unseemly for his parishioners to find out about his indiscretions, even though such occurrences were frequent in the Middle Ages.⁹⁷ Still, she insists:

Richeut respont: Je'l sai de voir;

Ja ne puisse je bien avoir,

Ainz coie ocisse,

Se je n'an portoie .i. jöisse

Que de vos fu dedans moi mise

Iceste chose

Don me veez ençainte et grosse.

Ne cuidiez pas je'l giet en fosse

Në en mostier

Se vos ne me volez aidier (185-94)⁹⁸

⁹⁷ See Jennifer Thibodeaux's article "Man of the Church, or Man of the Village?" for examples of the clergy behaving badly.

⁹⁸ "Richeut responds: 'I know it to be true, I could lose everything, become silent and be killed if I do not swear that you put your thing inside me that made me fat and pregnant. You had better believe that I would put it in a ditch or a monastery if you do not help me.'"

Thus, when refused, she resorts to threats, not against the priest, but the unborn child, playing upon his good nature and charity as a man of God. Furthermore, we should note that she insists that her pregnancy is something that he did to her. By appealing to both the priest's emotions and Christianity, she sways him and he hands over all that he has. But she does not stop there: in addition to duping the priest, she claims that the child is also the result of trysts with a banker and a knight. These two men also give her money, food and clothes; in fact, she takes so much from all three that she leads them all into ruin. This is not only a satire of the men's weakness, but of hers as well.

Periodically re-inserting himself into the story, the narrator makes it perfectly clear how he feels about Richeut. After recounting how she baits the priest and the others, he refers to her as an eel and then a she-bear. She now lives in luxury while they live in abject poverty, luxuriating even more after the birth of a son:

Or a Richeut sa volanté
Et Herseloz la sert à gré
De char, de vin et de claré
Et de pevrees,
De fruit, de nieles et d'oblees
Et de parmainz.
Bien se cotëist en ses bainz,
De tote parz vient li gaainz.
Richeut se jut,

A grant joie manja et but
Jusq'au terme quë ele dut
A messe aler.
Ele ot lo vis vermeil et cler,
Mout entant à soi acesmer
Fresche color.
Richeut s'acesme au merëor,
A messe en vait.
Mantel a ver, grant cõe trait.
.....
Richeut devenue est meschine
Par son tripot (454-71, 481-82)⁹⁹

In my opinion, this passage is a direct attack upon those who behave badly but pretend to be a pillar of morality when attending church. Clothes, however, do not make the man (or woman) in the eyes of the Church for as Gregg notes: “Just as the Virgin’s raiment and accoutrements were viewed symbolically as manifesting her various virtues, the fashionable woman’s attire also signaled her inner qualities: frivolity, spiritual insouciance, and even uglier vice” (96).

Reflecting back to the narrator’s earlier insinuation that Richeut is a sort of changeling, she transforms herself yet again; however, this time it is from a

⁹⁹ “Now Richeut has all that she wants and Herselot serves her meat, wine, claret, pepper sauce, fruit, pastries and apples. She primps in her bath, money comes from everywhere. Richeut stays in bed, joyfully eating and drinking until it was time to go to church. Her face was red and bright because she knows how to put on makeup. Richeut prepares herself in front of the mirror and goes to mass. She has a multi-colored coat with a train. Richeut has become a young lady through her trade.”

meretrix to a *meschine*, from a whore to a young lady. One must not forget that in the fragment in which Richeut recounts the end of one of her adventures, she relates that she was, in fact, of noble birth. To her misfortune (or fortune?), she was driven from the convent due to an act of sorcery. Finding herself a woman without means, she turns to prostitution to maintain the life to which she was accustomed. By dressing in a lady's garments, she has, in a sense, come full circle. Moreover, the lady's attire that she chooses to display her newfound wealth and status seems rather ostentatious (like that of our *foteor*). She does not seek to prove herself as good as the nobles, but even better. If they wear colorful finery, then Richeut will wear vestments with many colors. If their coats have trains, then she will sport one with a train so long that it stirs up the dust. In order to advance socially, she must exaggerate her makeup and apparel to cover her true nature. However, this appearance of a lady is just that, an appearance, for she is still the same she-bear described by the narrator. She has simply changed disguises.

Another modification that the narrator points out is the one in her demeanor:

Richeut se tint et baude et fiere.

«N'i valdroit rien, fait el, proiere

Que nus me croisse.»

Sanblant fait qu'an ne la conoisse (487-90)¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ "Richeut parades around, arrogant and proud. 'I do not want to', she says, 'if someone asks ne to make love.' She pretends to know no one."

This change in her attitude indicates a return to her former conduct as a daughter of a nobleman. She dresses and behaves (at least in public) as a proper lady, even obtaining a wetnurse for her son. She experiences a sort of reverse debauchery, at least on the exterior. Rather than the image of *Libido* chasing Chastity with a flaming torch, this reflection of debauchery is Chastity (feigned) chasing *Libido* with a cross. In an attempt to recover her status, she outwardly rejects the means that have brought her to this hypothetical end. Rather than falling from grace, Richeut appears to have risen up to it. Her lustful nature, however, cannot be suppressed for long and she soon resumes her habitual craft.

Having secured both her and her son's future, the fabliau switches to a sort of *roman d'apprentissage avant la lettre*, recounting Samson's education:

Por la parole
Fu Sansonez mis à escole.
Mout ot cler sans,
N'ot si sotil en tot les rans:
Son sautier sot en po de tans,
Chanta .ii. anz,
Voiz ot sor les autres enfanz,
Mout sot et conduiz et sochanz.
Vait à gramaire,
En .i. en sot bon ditié faire.
Con plus aprant et plus esclaire,
Tant a fait vers

Qu'il en set faire de divers.
N'ot en l'escole si porvers,
Mout bien aprant,
Et li maistres bien i entant
Por lo grant loier qu'il en prant
Del prestre fol (555-72)¹⁰¹

One now witnesses that, although a pawn in her revenge against the priest, Richeut actually passes down the benefits she receives from her patrons to her son. The priest sacrifices his wealth and his own needs to cultivate his child. And, Samson not only learns, but flourishes; he excels in music, composition of both music and verse and eloquent speech. He is especially talented in the art of persuasion. Hunt indicates: "...la satire dans *Richeut* peut bien constater un acte de r cusion contre les vains imitateurs de la courtoisie, et plus pr cis ment, ceux qui voudraient voir dans la *clergie* l'apanage glorieux de cette courtoisie" (158). In addition to expounding upon Samson's gifts, the passage addresses the question of nature vs. nurture regarding child rearing.¹⁰² In spite of genetics predisposing his noble companions to succeed, Samson surpasses them by acquiring intellectual abilities through proper (and expensive) training. In the case of this fabliau, nurture has momentarily triumphed over nature.

¹⁰¹ "To learn proper speech, Samson was sent to school. He was very intelligent, more than those from the upper classes: he learned his psalter in very little time, he sang for two years. He had a voice much better than the other children. He knew very well both conductus and accompaniment. He studies grammar, and in one year could create beautiful compositions. As he learns more and becomes more intelligent, he could make compositions from various genres. No one at school was more talented, he learns so well that the teacher became rich from the fees he charged the foolish priest."

¹⁰² See *Le Roman de Silence* for a similar, but more extreme example.

At school, Samson's successes give him the appearance of a noble boy. However, outside the classroom, the intemperate nature inherited from his mother takes over, and he becomes a master of dice and flattery. At a young age, he learns what beautiful words and composition can get for him and he, of course, takes full advantage. Yet, if his mother's situation represents a sort of reverse *libido*, he is its very incarnation:

Sanson revate,
N'i a si roide qu'il n'abate
Ne si cointe quë il ne mate.
Mout set caraudes,
Les fames fait plus que feu chaudes;
Les plus cointes fait ester baudes
Et envoisiees.
Soz soi les fait ester enragiees.
Au bordel en a envoiees
Plus d'un millier
Quë il amises au mestier.
Mout par les set bien engignier
Et bareter.
Desi à Bar n'en a son per
De lecherie,

Car il li vient d'ancesserie (631-46)¹⁰³

Just as his mother, Richeut, was driven to a life of prostitution by witchcraft, Samson uses the same means (*caraudes*) to convince even the noblest woman to a life in the sex trade. I find these lines particularly interesting as they remind me of the description of an epic hero. Specifically, it brings to mind Roland who conquered the Saracens by the thousands and converted thousands as well. In fact the word, *per*, a rather epic word, is utilized to describe Samson, recalling the twelve pairs that accompanied Roland, or even the Knights of the Round Table. Samson, whose name evokes another hero of the same name in the Bible, is depicted as a mythical conqueror, but instead of subduing the Moors, he dominates women, converting them to a life of whoring.

The tale then changes from a pseudo epic to a pseudo romance when Samson decides that he has no more to learn by staying in the area and must leave to seek out new adventures and new experiences:

En cest päis plus n'en estois,
Aler m'an voil,
Ja n'iert prodom dedans son soil.
As riches cors panré escoil
De cortoisie.
Une masse sai de clergie,

¹⁰³ “Samson goes out into the world, there was no woman so strict that he could not defeat her or so wise that he could not break her. He knows many spells, to make women hotter than fire; the most uptight he makes bold and playful. He knows how to make them burn with desire. He sent more than a thousand of them to the whorehouse and put them to work. He knows how to trick and cheat them. From here to Bar, he has no equal in debauchery, this gift comes from his ancestry.”

Connoistre voil chevalerie;
S'avré les fames
Et les cortoisés riches dames.
Mout les metrai encore en brames
Et en error,
Se puis encore avoir del lor
Et par boidie et par amor (675-87)¹⁰⁴

He thus seeks to enrich his knowledge and increase his scope of debauchery. He considers *courtoisie* as a means of tricking women into sin and not as a code of values to be maintained; he thus subverts the paradigm. He no longer desires to learn from books, but from experience. I believe that he also hopes to escape the influence of his mother. By virtue of being male, he should have more power over his life, but the repressive atmosphere in Richeut's house keeps him from realizing his full potential. Upon hearing of Samson's desire to leave, Richeut laughs, exclaiming that he knows nothing of women and they are very treacherous souls who do nothing but dupe men. It is obvious that she speaks from personal experience. Although he has witnessed first-hand the ruining of three men by his mother's duplicity, he has evidently learned nothing from her behavior. He surmises that all he needs to know about women he has learned from Ovid. Richeut, however, is completely aware of the shortcomings of Ovid's highly misogynistic instruction. Just as Eve considered herself God's equal in

¹⁰⁴ "I no longer want to stay here but to leave for no one succeeds in his own territory. I will learn chivalry from the noblest courts. I have learned enough from the clergy, I want to learn chivalry. I will have the richest and courtliest women. I will make them cry and lead them to lust, and then I will have their money through trickery and love."

knowledge after eating the forbidden fruit, Richeut believes that, in the art of love, she is Ovid's equal, if not his superior; for, although he claims to speak from experience, she is aware that love does not last as Ovid claims. Unable to convince her son to stay, she decides to give him a crash course on women. As Bédier notes, Richeut reacts to the situation as a mother in the epic: "Dans les nobles chansons de geste, quand un chevalier nouvellement adoubé quitte le château paternel et s'en va chercher les aventures par le vaste monde, il est d'usage que sa mère lui dicte ses nouveaux devoirs, l'endoctrine avant le dernier adieu et le *chastie*" (307). But rather than lecturing him, she chooses to educate him by the direct method: she has sex with her own son to show him how to please a woman and have her in his sway. Although this incident is extremely shocking, I believe that it is another instance of the *fableor* borrowing from other genres in order to exploit and mock them. In this case, the narrator is ridiculing the exempla, some of which represent

...the victimization of a hapless male by a sexually aggressive female [which] is particularly evident in the incest narratives that appear in the medieval exempla collections, for these turn almost entirely on incidents of mothers' illicit sexual relations with their sons in the face of the contradictory reality that the reverse molestation [sic] is far more common ... On the one hand, such tales indicate a deep anxiety of the male narrators that even the mother role—the most beneficent one women can play—is but another guise for the sexual corruption of men that is an ineradicable

element in the female nature. Such exempla warn that beneath the loving female that the mother *ought* to represent lies a ‘bad mother’: an unregenerately sexual woman who leads the vulnerable male astray. Mother-son incest tales project the ultimate impurity of women, a projection that reverses the guilty secret of the male’s desire for his mother which he has not successfully resolved” (Gregg 94-5).

The fabliau, however, does not condemn Richeut for having initiated her son, but the opposite. Through exploiting the traditional exempla motif, the narrator demonstrates that Richeut is in fact a good mother for having relations with her son in an effort to keep him from the evil ways of the world, especially those of women.

The tale alters its tone yet again (while still remaining a sort of *roman d’apprentissage*) and becomes a sort of odyssey. From line eight hundred twenty-five to line nine hundred seventy-seven, the story recounts the adventures of Samson. He goes out on a twelve-year journey (however, unlike Odysseus, Samson’s Odyssey is self-driven), traveling all over Europe, Ireland and India, seducing and pillaging along the way. We should note the significance of the number twelve. Making a frequent appearance in the Bible, this number can only be a reference to its biblical connotations (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles of Jesus, Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit, the crown of twelve stars worn by the Virgin Mary in the Book of Revelation, to name a few). The number is also significant in classical literature; aside from the twelve-year Odyssey, one should

not forget the twelve labors of Hercules. Of these Big Twelves, I find the Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit the most significant for our fabliau. The Twelve Fruits are: Charity; Joy; Peace; Patience; Kindness; Goodness; Generosity; Gentleness; Faithfulness; Modesty; Self-Control; and Chastity (*The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* 547). What Samson accomplishes on his twelve-year odyssey is to poison all of the above fruits with his debauchery. Like the *foteor*, “Sansons nē a terre ne feu/ Mais des fames quialt lo tonleu” (“Samson may have no land or fief, but he collects a toll from the women.”) (862-63). In fact, these two have much in common:

Ce set il bien qu'en pechié maint,
Mais li deliz do mont lo vaint
Qui mout li plaist.
De ce ce vit, ce ce paist
Richemant; ja ne cuit qu'il laist
Iceste vie (886-92)¹⁰⁵

One could consider him a sort of avenger of men, especially considering his namesake who was emasculated by Delilah.

Seeking to expand his enterprise, Samson finds other ways to exercise his malevolent influence and to increase his wealth: he becomes a monk or a priest and then pillages the treasury. Bloch observes that “Sansons’ robbing depends on his robing” (37), meaning that he dresses like his targets. Although educated by

¹⁰⁵ “He knows well that he leads a very sinful life, but the pleasure overwhelms him. It pleases him a lot. He lives and eats well from it. He never wanted to give up this life.”

the clergy, Samson feels no guilt in stealing from them because “Desor toz autres lechëors/ Iert il lechieres” (“Of all the corrupt ones, he was the most corrupt.”) (937-38). The narrator gives an account of such occurrences at both Clairvaux and Winchester. Not only does he rob his brothers in the cloth, but he also takes advantage of an abbess who subsequently finds herself pregnant. Unable to stay at the convent, she turns not to a life of prostitution, but to one of a *jugleresse*, which, judging from the narrator’s tone, is just as bad. It seems to me that the narrator is making a commentary on his profession. To be a jongleur means that one is basically relegated to the status of a beggar. Yet, instead of a plea for money from passersby, a jongleur’s or jongleuse’s plea for money comes in the form of a fabliau which hopefully an audience will appreciate and pay if they liked the tale. I believe also that the narrator implies that the abbess seeks sanctuary amongst those who do not concern themselves with morals, i.e., the traveling entertainers. Thus, while condemning the scruples of women, the *fableor*, in an ironic and playful manner, condemns those in his line of work as well.

According to Muscatine, the true fabliau of *Richeut* does not actually begin until line nine hundred eighty-five (*The Old French Fabliaux* 19). It is at this point in the tale that the downfall of Samson’s reign of terror begins. As for the preceding nine hundred eighty-four lines, they merely serve as background information for what is about to occur. I somewhat agree and believe that he is correct in that, if we were to excise lines nine hundred eighty-five to one thousand eighteen from the rest of the tale, we would, in fact, have a fabliau that could

stand on its own. These lines, however, are included with the tale and should not be considered as separate from the rest of the story. The tale in its entirety comprises the *Richeut* cycle along with Vernet's two fragments. Rather than singling out lines nine hundred eighty-five to one thousand eighteen as the true fabliau, one should consider it a part of the whole, or perhaps even a mise-en-abyme. Although these last lines may constitute a fabliau proper, it does not render the rest of the story insignificant. As there were no templates or instructions on how to write a fabliau, we can only imagine that much experimentation took place. In fact, Muscatine describes the structure of *Richeut* as more of a "mock-heroic romance than a fabliau" (The Old French Fabliaux 161). Some of these experiments (*Trubert*, *Richeut*) have survived; others, obviously, have not. Still, just because these longer fabliaux are few in number, this does not mean that they are any less fabliauesque than their shorter counterparts.

After traveling the world and corrupting thousands if not millions of women, Samson finally returns home and seeks his mother to show her that she was wrong about his education being unfinished and that he did, and still does, know all that he needs to know about women:

Richeut lo voit,
A lui est venue tot droit;
El lo salue,
Il li rant mais ne se remue.
Sansons ne l'a pas conëue

Car .xii. anz a ne l'ot vëue.
Richeut se rit
Des deduiz que faire li vit.
A soi mëismes panse et dit:
«Si m'ait Dex,
De nos .ii. est li plus crüex
O je vers omes,
O il vers fames? Car mout somes
Saje de l'art.
Sansonet escot et esgart
En cel carroge!»
Richeut n'atant plus ainz s'aproche,
Vient à l'ostel,
Herselot trova la jäel.
Tote jor n'antandoit à el
Fors au panser
Conmont porroit Sanson gaber
Et engignier (1019-35)¹⁰⁶

One would think that after twelve years, a mother would be happy to see her son;
however, Richeut still has not forgotten, or maybe not forgiven, what Samson said

¹⁰⁶ “Richeut sees him and goes straight to him and greets him, and he greets her back without knowing who she is. He did not recognize her because he had not seen her for twelve years. Richeut laughs to see him so in the influence of pleasure. She thinks and says to herself: ‘God help me, between the two of us, who is the most cruel, me towards men or him towards women? We are both highly skilled in the art. Let little Samson beware and be on his guard in this place!’ Richeut does not wait, but goes home to find Herselot. All day she thinks to herself and ponders how she could trick and fool Samson.”

to her about knowing all he needed to know about women. Seeing him so engrossed in his gratification inspires her to prove him wrong after all of these years. Recognizing the great pleasure he derives from women, Richeut uses this shortcoming to engineer his downfall. Although up until this point, he has managed to escape being trapped by any woman's ruse, he has now met not his match, but his superior in his mother; he may be king of all lechers, but Richeut is the king's mother. Richeut is the ultimate trickster, an occupation which, as remarked by Gravdal, encompasses more than proving to her son that she is crueller than him.

The trickster is the collective unconscious that is inimical to boundaries. He is notorious for his infinite disguises, his insatiable hunger, his unbridled sexuality, and his scatological obsessions. Obeying no rules, the trickster refuses the constraints of established society; in so doing he renders helpless those who obey the rules and subscribe to society's values. Furthermore, the trickster represents the life of the body, the sphere that a strict social order constantly attempts to control (*Vilain and Courtois* 117).

For Richeut, this strict social order is one dictated by men, and it is thus all men, even her son, whom she seeks to victimize just as she was victimized in her youth. Despite seeing a reflection of herself in her son, he is simply a reflection, and not an equal; thus Richeut intends to show him just how inadequate he is.

She does not seek to do him any harm, just offer a bit of tough love and finish the lesson that began twelve years ago.

Another interesting taboo presented in this fabliau is yet another result from having sex: disease. As mentioned earlier, Richeut was barren due to the many sexually transmitted diseases that she most likely contracted during work, and she had to take a potion in order to be able to become pregnant. However, for her servant and partner in crime, Herselot, the results of her illicit activities are much more apparent. Her face is pockmarked by some form of disease. In order to pass Herselot off as a young virgin, Richeut slathers her face in make-up. She dresses up the old prostitute as one would a porcelain doll:

Au col li mist bon mantel chier,

D'orfrois li lace

Les .ii. costez et en rebrace.

De blanchet li poroint la face

Et lo menton.

El vis asist lo vermeillon

Desor lo blanc,

Por ce que del natural sanc

Po i avoit (1037-45)¹⁰⁷

Decking her out as a reputable girl, Richeut covers up Herselot to disguise her true nature and profession. Karras relates that in fifteenth-century Dijon, one

¹⁰⁷ “She puts a fine, expensive coat around her neck, lacing the two sides with orfray. She puts some white makeup on her face and chin. Over the white makeup, she put some red for she had little natural coloring.”

could make an accusation of social immorality simply by removing a woman's headdress ("Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe" 164). What Richeut seeks, however, is the opposite, covering up Herselot to give her an appearance of sexual morality; rather than taking off the mask, she applies it. She is such a master of disguise that she succeeds in fooling her son who, upon spotting Herselot from a distance, falls immediately in love with her. Of course, this is just one of his many fabrications as all he sees is a young lady who is most likely a virgin and aims to conquer her like the many thousands of women before. The fact that Samson claims to have fallen in love by the very sight of this girl is a pastiche of courtly love. The language he uses, however, to convince Richeut to help him win her is far from courtly:

S'amor, dist il, lo cuer m'estraint

Desoz l'aissele.

Desi qu'à Rome n'a si bele,

Non desi q'as porz de Bordele.

Florie, va, del jeu l'apele;

Se tant fais que mete ma sele,

Je sui tes hom (1135-41)¹⁰⁸

Richeut, along with Herselot, has also taken on another identity as far as her son is concerned: that of Flora, the woman who will help him win the alleged knight's daughter. I find her choice of monikers interesting. Flora, in Roman

¹⁰⁸ "'Her love,' he said, 'wrenches my heart under my armpit. From here to Rome, there is none so beautiful, nor from here to the ports of Bordeaux. Flora, go and call her to the game; help me to place her in my saddle, I am your man.'"

mythology, was the goddess of the blossoming flowers of spring. Thus, even her chosen pseudonym gives the impression that she will introduce Samson to a wonderful, spring virgin. We should note that she is not the goddess of *spring* flowers, but of *blossoming* flowers. He thus must pick the flower while it is still in bloom, or it may become old, wither and die. Although he begins his argument with a profession of love, it soon turns to a rather vulgar declaration. He refers to his potential association with the virginal daughter as a *jeu* or game. He does not specifically indicate that he wants to have sex with the young girl, but he tells Flora/Richeut that he would like her to help him get in the saddle, using the riding euphemism to describe what he intends. Interestingly enough, despite breaking many fabliau taboos, this tale does not once use the word *con* or *vit*. Yet, despite this linguistic absence, these items are obviously textually present. The virgin's sexual parts are a saddle that Samson would very much like to mount.

Just as Richeut anticipates, Samson falls for her ruse:

Sansonez l'ot,
Bien aperçoit qu'ele l'anclot
Puis que do suen viault faire escot,
Mais lui sovient
Qui ne done ce que chier tient
A ce qu'il aime à poine vient.
Sansons foloie,
.V. sous li done de monoie.
Et si li dit que plus acroie

S'an a mestier,
Il sora tot au repairier.
Sanson la cuidë engignier
Et el Sanson (1169-81)¹⁰⁹

He has fallen for a woman, just has his mother predicted before he set out on his journey. Fortunately, for him, it is his mother who tricks him. Despite the fact that he is aware that Flora/Richeut is simply fleecing him, he still pays her for the privilege of sleeping with the supposed knight's daughter. He seems to suffer from *amor de lohn*. He is aware that his love/lust for this girl is leading him down a foolish path, but he cannot suppress his ridiculous behavior. As lines one thousand thirty-five to one thousand forty indicate, he is not thinking with his brain, but his loins.

Another interesting point about this passage is that Samson has now becomes "Sansonez," a diminutive of his former self. Although the two forms of one's name is often found in other genres such as the pastourelle, because we do not find this form of Samson's name anywhere else in the fabliau except upon his return, I believe that it is significant. Faced with their mothers, men always revert to a child, and Samson is no exception. Even though he has no idea that Flora is actually his mother, he still regresses to a boy-like state. He is no longer the great epic hero Samson who conquers women far and wide, converting them to a life of debauchery and prostitution, but Little Samson who attended school in town and

¹⁰⁹ "Samson hears her and recognizes that she is rolling him because she wants his money, but he remembers that he who refuses to give what he holds dear so that he may love is doomed to suffer. Samson goes nuts and gives her five sous. He even agrees to give her more money, if she need it, upon his return. Samson thinks that he is fooling her, but it is she that is fooling him."

who played with the neighborhood children. The male power that he believes to wield withers in the presence of his mother. Unbeknownst to him, he reverts into a pupil who is in for a very hard lesson. In fact, he ebbs so much that he begins to remember the lessons taught to him as a child, especially the proverb: “Qui ne done ce que chier tient/ A ce qu’il aime à poine vient” (He who refuses to give what he holds dear so that he may love is doomed to suffer) (1173-74). However, as Richeut knows, these lessons were and are folly. What he learned at school was theory, what she knows is through practice; and what works in theory does not always work in practice. When it comes to courtly love, the theory is definitely more attractive than its actual practice.

At the allotted time, Samson arrives to find Flora/Richeut and Herselot still disguised as the virginal knight’s daughter. In front of someone he believes to be noble and chaste, Samson reverts to his courtly education:

Mais vostre amor mout me favele;

Li cuers m’estrainet desoz l’aissele

Por vostre amor.

Se je pert vos, n’en ai retor

Ja n’avrai mais joie nul jor (1231-35)¹¹⁰

What I find interesting about this passage is that there is an important repetition (l. 1232-33 and 1135-1136). It is as if this is Samson’s standard pick-up line. What is more surprising is that it actually works (or at least he thinks it does). In

¹¹⁰ “But your love flatters me greatly; my heart aches under my armpit for your love. If I would lose you, I would not recover, I would never again have any joy.”

addition, his courtly monologue employs a rather uncourtly image: his heart does not make his chest ache, as one would expect, but his armpit. He thus renders the lofty ideals of courtly love more down-to-earth, for courtly love mostly concerns women who are unattainable, but for Samson all women are within reach. He does not exactly lie to these women, but they are so taken in by his eloquent words that they are blinded to his true intentions. On the other hand, as the tale's alleged goal is to show the libidinous and sinful nature of women, the women that Samson seduces may very well understand his purpose and see through his eloquent words; they are just so prone to sin that any bit of much-needed attention throws them in to a carnal stupor which compels them to do exactly as Samson requests. Another interesting point in this passage is the fact that he assumes that she loves him before she declares any affection for him. I believe that he actually means that her beauty attracts him, but fails in his words. He seems to have forgotten his lessons and has lost the ability to use his words appropriately.

At first, Herselot plays the virgin, but the truth quickly comes to light:

Si estoit ele nequedant
En grant engoisse
De'l recevoir plus que n'est moisse.
A deslacier Sansons s'esloisse;
Par lo peignil, qui sanble moisse,
Li mist l'outil,
Car la pute ot tot son penil.
Des qu'il s'ahurtë au dusil,

Au corz abrive;

Il n'i trova ne fonz ne rive

Plus qu'i fëist en une hive (1271-81)¹¹¹

The indicator of age and usage is not her face that has been artfully covered with make-up, but the state of her pubic area (see *Le sentier batu*). Appearances, however, are deceiving and Samson does not truly discover the real state of her virginity until he has commenced intercourse. Second, in a continuation of the horse-riding euphemism, Herselot is described as a mare and it is not until afterwards that Samson discovers that she is highly experienced. She is described as a sort of cavernous hole in which Samson could very well fall, never to be seen again. Recalling *Le moigne's* dream-market, this is an obvious reflection of the male fear of the devouring female orifice. He realizes at that moment that he has been duped more than he initially believed. Aware that Flora/Richeut was using him to make money, he still believed that the product he was purchasing was genuine. Yet, after recognizing that this virgin is no such thing, he still does not comprehend the ramifications of what has just occurred. Believing simply that two wenches have taken him for a ride instead of the other way around, he threatens Herselot. However, before he can cause her any harm, the men whom Richeut had hired to rough up her son as a sort of climax to her wicked trick storm in to the room and assault him, but cause him no real harm. Flora/Richeut pretends to convince the men to hand him over to her custody, and the story thus

¹¹¹ She was, however, more eager to receive him than a fly. Samson hurries to undress her; in to her mound, which seemed wet, he places his tool because the whore had all of her pubic hair. As soon as he falls upon her faucet, he gallops away; he finds there neither bottom nor sides any more than he would have on a mare.

ends, with a sort of “and they lived happily ever after” ending. Like many fabliaux, there is no resolution to the story; it simply ends. Yet, it does end on an important note: Samson’s apprenticeship is now complete. Once he learns the lesson that his mother attempted to teach him twelve years ago, there is no more to tell; his education and life have come full circle, it begins and ends with his mother, Richeut.

Despite living outside of the social structure, Richeut clearly exploits it and its mores to suit not her needs but her whims. Karras points out that “[i]t was not prostitutes’ promiscuity but the fact that they operated outside of the system of male dominance, exercising both sexual and financial independence, that led them to be so identified” (“Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe 165). What Richeut represents is a sort of warped proto-feminist. But we must also wonder: how does she compare to other fabliaux women? Is she more prone to vice due to her vice-dependent trade? I would have to say no. She is exactly on par with other fabliaux women. Her means of making a living does not render her any more depraved than the wife in *Les quatre sohais saint Martin* or the knight’s wife in *La dame escoillee*. In fact, I would say that the two wives in these fabliaux are even more wicked than Richeut as one expects such behavior from a prostitute, but not from a wife, be she noble or bourgeois. Bloch notes:

The word ‘menestrel,’ like ‘jongleur,’ stands not only as the designation of the performer, but as equivalent to ‘the deceiver’ or ‘liar.’ Richeut, the ‘master of lechery’ who represents ‘the height

of debauchery,' is also the 'menestrel'; and her alternate appellation—Richart—suggests that she is literally 'Rich(en)art.' The association of poetry and prostitution is, moreover, doubly significant, since there is no difference finally between the art of the 'menestrel,' the glorification of trickery within the fabliaux, and the idea of 'turning a trick' (99).

The framing of Samson's tale with that of Richeut's allows the narrator to demonstrate the lengths to which women would go when in the throos of debauchery. For although Samson may surpass his mother in the quantity of his debauchery, Richeut eclipses him when it comes to quality. In the battle of the sexes, finally, we witness a win for the ladies, but not in a positive light.

Conclusion

The two fabliaux, *Le foteor* and *Richeut*, represent debauchery in females, but in very different ways. In *Le foteor*, it is the male who prostitutes himself out to make a living; whereas in *Richeut*, it is the female. However, the main goal for each character is not sex, but survival and power. Both the *foteor* and Richeut live in a world where, under the patriarchal class regime, they do not count, i.e. they have no means of getting ahead. But, by working outside of the system and exploiting the weaknesses of those who subscribe to it, they are able to thwart the system's influence over them and live by their own rules. Still, despite the *foteor's* occupation, it is still the women who are condemned for their lecherous behavior and not the male who takes advantage of their uncontrollable desires. In

Richeut, both mother and son are shown to suffer from the vice, but because Richeut's assault is on men, the male author of course represents her as the wicked one. The narrator has turned the battle of the virtues and the vices into the battle of the sexes, with the male given the victory in the case of the *foteor*. In fact, it is the subjugation of the female body to male desire that leads to the acquisition of power for all three of our characters. As Simon Gaunt astutely notes: "The principal preoccupation of the genre [fabliau] is ... an impulse to overturn perceived hierarchical structures of all kinds, to reveal them as artificial and susceptible to manipulation" (*Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* 235). I can think of no other two fabliaux that so successfully achieve this goal. All three main characters operate outside of the established social structure, but still manage not only to succeed but also to thrive. These two tales demonstrate that the sex trade is dependant upon the vice provoked by such a strict social system and that it is the female body in particular that suffers from such strictures. The female body suffers even more abuse and suppression in *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides*, *Connebert* and *Les tresces*.

*Qui autem fortiter premit ubera ad
eliciendum lac exprimit butyrum et
qui vehementer emungitur elicit
sanguinem et qui provocat iras producit
discordias Proverbs 30.33¹¹²*

Chapter Five

Anger's Assault

In his *Psychomachia*, Prudentius personifies Anger (*Ira*) in a way that demonstrates its destructiveness: “...c'est la Colère (*Ira*) qui, désespérée de ne pouvoir triompher de la Patience, se donne la mort” (Mâle 225). One finds a reflection of Prudentius' literary creation on a stained glass window at Lyon, which shows a youth piercing himself with a sword (Mâle 226).¹¹³ These two representations demonstrate an emotion so intense that one's only recourse is suicide. Anger is a thus self-defeating vice. Literary counterparts to the above personifications of *Ira* can be found in the fabliaux *Connebert* and *Les tresces*.

The first depicts the classic fabliau theme of adultery. A smith becomes enraged because a priest repeatedly defiles his wife and with the complicity of his valet, he devises a plan to catch and emasculate the priest. After catching the

¹¹² “For as pressing milk produces curds, and pressing the nose produces blood, so pressing anger produces strife.”

¹¹³ This same image appears elsewhere as Despair (*Desperatio*) committing suicide in front of *Patientia*. However, for my analysis, I intend to remain faithful to Prudentius' characterization.

priest and the wife in the act, the smith and the valet capture the priest and secure him to an anvil by nailing his testicles to it. The smith then leaves a razor next to the priest and sets his forge on fire, forcing the priest to castrate himself in order to save his life. After having recovered, the priest takes his complaint to the court whose judge deems the priest's punishment fitting because of the wrong to which he has subjected so many men (and women) in the village.

Les tresces, exists in two versions and, while the core of the action remains the same, a few details such as the social status of the protagonists and the impetus for the wife leaving after the discovery of the supposed intruder are changed. This tale too depicts an adulterous wife. One night, the wife's husband awakes to find her lover in bed with them. Believing him a thief, the husband entraps his wife's lover in a tub and leaves his wife to guard the intruder so that he may fetch a candle. The wife, of course, lets her lover get away, which greatly angers her husband. To escape her husband's foul mood, she leaves the house for a while to join her lover and when she decides to return, she devises a ruse to avoid her husband's rage. Through the enticement of money, the wife convinces another woman to get into bed with her husband. When the husband remarks that someone whom he believes to be his wife has returned, he beats her and cuts off her braids. The beaten woman leaves and joins the wife, who attempts to console her. The wife then returns to the bed, where her husband is fast asleep. She replaces the braids with a horse's tail. In the morning, the evidence of the husband's violence is gone and all that is left is the horse's tail, leading the

husband to believe that he had a nightmare or hallucination that caused him to cut off his horse's tail. He subsequently apologizes to his wife for his behavior.

These two fabliaux show two different types of anger. *Connebert* demonstrates an anger that festers over a long time and leads to a calculating, vicious revenge. As for *Les tresces*, this fabliau illustrates an anger that is immediate, quick to act, yet later remorseful. The two fabliaux also differ in their victims: in *Connebert*, the priest bears the brunt of the betrayal; whereas in *Les tresces*, it is intended for the wife. Despite their differences, both fabliaux show the destruction and conflict that occurs when *Ira* rules. They also illustrate that it is men who are prone to anger, especially when an adulterous wife jeopardizes their status in the household or their masculinity. Their *Ira* leads them to outrageous violence that only serves to damage their authority even more.

Before examining the two above-mentioned fabliaux, I would like to analyze the appearance in the fabliaux of *Ira*'s close cousin, *Discordia*. Anger is often confused with discord, which is more properly defined as a direct result of anger. Although the two are closely tied, enough nuances exist to differentiate them from each other. As I will show, discord can be righted, but anger has no resolution.

Discord's Disturbance

In Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, the Virtues return to their camp after the battle with the Vices, believing that they have won; however, *Discordia*, disguised as a Virtue, infiltrates the camp for one last attack on *Concordia*. But

before she can reach *Condordia*, *Fides* intervenes and pierces *Discordia*'s tongue (327-29). When translated to static figures on the cathedral, a fighting couple represents discord (Mâle 246). I find these illustrations very revealing because they both indicate that the source of discord is the tongue, i.e., speech. This idea, of course, does not begin with Prudentius, but with Genesis, where the silky tongued serpent convinces Eve to consume the Forbidden Fruit, placing in peril of damnation the mortal souls of all humanity.

We should note that discord comes in many forms: physical, linguistic, social, national, psychological and academic, to name a few. Thomas Aquinas notes: "Anger only in conjunction with vainglory causes contention and discord, when persons do not wish to seem inferior by subjecting their wills to the will of others or by having their arguments seem less valid than those of others" (639). Discord, by definition, results when one individual does not see an issue in the same manner as another and feels strongly enough about that issue to attempt to convince the other that he or she is wrong. However, two or more people are not always necessary for discord to occur, just two different ideas or feelings. Thus, discord can occur when a person has an internal debate with himself or herself, even when unaware of the nature of the problem. An example of this occurs in *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides* where a bishop does not understand that the troubling phenomenon vexing his body is happening because of his attempt to frequent a class or society to which he does not belong. This fabliau demonstrates how social discord can manifest itself bodily.

L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides

Found in only one manuscript, BN MS 1593, the fabliau attributes the text to Haiseau; however, we are unsure of exactly what role he had in the distribution of this fabliau (jongleur, *fableor* or scribe). Along with the fabliaux written by Gautier le Leu, Nykrog has a difficult time appreciating this text: “Je ne sais pas au juste que penser du conte de l’*Anel qui faisoit les Viz grans et roides* ... [l]e conte est très mauvais et à peine compréhensible” (81-82). Nykrog apparently has a difficult time suspending his disbelief when confronted with a tale featuring a ring of unknown origin to which special properties are ascribed.

L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides demonstrates well the great schism between social orders while mocking the clergy’s suppression of nature at the same time. In addition, it is a subtle examination of the shaky foundations of masculinity and its definition by the man in the tale, who hypocritically condemns the bishop for sharing the same weakness. The comedy hinges upon the bodily discord that occurs when the bishop unknowingly becomes part of a world to which he does not belong. I find the following statement by Butler particularly pertinent to this fabliau: “...women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity. The female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignable” (*Gender Trouble* 9). Despite the overwhelming female guidance in this fabliau, the word female or woman is never mentioned. She has been reduced to her bare essence and represented simply as a ring. Yet, in spite of her absence, she is still metonymically very present. With the essence of femininity reduced to a ring, masculinity is allowed to dominate and subjugate.

Connell's observation regarding semiotic masculinity applies wonderfully to this fabliau: "The phallus is master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack" (70). As we shall see, this "master-signifier" causes difficulties for someone who has renounced his masculinity.

Although only fifty lines, the text says much in few words. As Eichmann indicates, the fabliaux do not require length or verbosity to convey their message: "The narrator's art will not consist in trying to enchant the audience by strange, mysterious and unfamiliar happenings, as the romance writer would strive to do, but in willfully guiding the public along a much-traveled road strewn with evocative signposts" ("The Artistry of Economy in the Fabliaux" 70). For example, "[w]hen at the beginning of a fabliau, we hear of a merchant, a peasant, or a priest we know immediately that he cannot be a successful suitor whereas a clerk or a knight is likely to be drawn more sympathetically" ("The Artistry of Economy in the Fabliaux" 71). Thus, when the *fableor* indicates at the beginning of *L'anel* that there was a man who was riding a horse, one assumes that this man is no ordinary peasant or merchant but a nobleman, perhaps even a knight. The suggestion of a man on horseback acts as a signal that evokes a certain expectation of this individual, leading the audience to a conclusion that will dictate its attitude toward the rest of the fabliau. In addition, it gives the fabliau an air of a courtly tale featuring a knight-errant.

It is this man on horseback who possesses the ring in question that renders his member both long and hard as long as he wears it. We should note the degradation of this common romance motif. For example, in *Yvain*, a ring renders

him invisible, offering protection. The ring in this fabliau does exactly the opposite. Of the absence of obscene words to indicate physical traits in *L'anel*, White remarks:

Throughout the text, the more polite work, *membre*, is used to mean penis. This restraint is almost certainly for comic reasons. The euphemistic penis corresponds to the euphemistic vagina in the tale, that is, the ring, which is fraught with literary parody as well as sexual double entendre: rings play an important role in feudal ceremony and in the lore of courtly love (204).

As she notes, one does not require a highly active imagination to understand that this “anel” represents a subjugated and objectified woman. It is a woman reduced to her essence which men consider important. Like the monk’s dream in *Le moigne*, the man does away with bothersome relationships and quarrelsome women and profits from sexual activity without the usual necessary other. But in this case, the woman has been reduced even more to just a representation. We could understand this ring as a pilgrim’s badge, protecting the rider from demons along his journey, while safeguarding his fertility as well.¹¹⁴ Still, as White indicates, in giving a woman a ring, a man is making a commitment to the woman in marriage and establishing sexual rights over her body. The fabliau reverses this representation of commitment; the ring now signifies unfettered promiscuity. By sidestepping the requisite female partner, the man seeks to avoid the discord that

¹¹⁴ In *Averting Demons*, Ruth Mellinkoff notes the apotropaic significance of sexual symbols, including those on pilgrims’ badges (141-43).

often occurs between the sexes as exemplified on the cathedral. Also, it is the man who controls the activity with the ring, only wearing it as often as he likes, or not, for the fabliau indicates that “Quant il li plut, si s’en leva...” (“When it pleased him, he took it off.”) (11). This seems to be an attempt to argue that the man was not so dependent upon the ring and could take it on and off at will, or as the fabliau indicates, “when it pleased him.” However, his constant wearing of the ring suggests otherwise. If he were really in such control, he would put the ring on when it pleased him and take it off when he had his fill. I believe that he constantly wears the ring because it provides proof of his masculinity and defines him through a hypersexuality; however, he requires a feminine symbol to define his masculinity. It is this symbol that makes him function in the comic way he does; without it, he is just another man on a horse. His virility depends upon this inanimate object that has presumably delivered him from the mandatory marital bonds. He has given in to the vices of lust and pride and cannot escape their hold. Thus, rather than freeing him, the ring accomplishes exactly what he wants to avoid: bondage, but of a different kind; he is enslaved to his vices. This type of bondage, however, seems to be preferable to him over a potentially quarrelsome mate.

In a scene reminiscent of the fountain scene in *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion*, the man encounters a fountain while riding one day. He stops at the fountain and removes the ring to wash his face and hands, taking off one symbol of femininity to dip his hands into another, the water in the fountain:

Descenduz est quant il la vit,

Et les la fontaine s'asist;

Si lava ses meins et son vis (7-9)¹¹⁵

Levy, along with Nykrog, believes that the word “vis” in line nine is an obscene double-entendre with “vis” not only meaning face but also phallus (Nykrog 211-12). Levy explains the difference that such a double-entendre makes upon the image produced by this line: “So the potentially courtly image of a knight errant taking his ease at a fair fountain is metamorphosised by wordplay into quite a different image: that of male in the act of washing his erect penis” (137). He further states: “The resulting obscenity (quite appropriate, given the already explicit nature of the story’s title) is reinforced by a no less ambiguous *locus amoenus* ... of the image of the mysterious fountain as a barely euphemistic symbol of vulva and vagina” (137). I agree with this observation, but would go a step further and take into account the environment of the fountain and the place where the man leaves the ring (the grass).¹¹⁶ These three items, the ring, the fountain and the grass, together seem to be an attempt to reconstruct the female sex; the fountain representing the giving of life, i.e., the womb; the ring, a vagina; and the grass, pubic hair.¹¹⁷ Thus, Nykrog and Levy’s masculine image of the male cleansing his member disintegrates into a male entering a completely female territory. We could also consider this image as one giant pilgrim’s badge intended to protect the individual who enters its area by deflecting evil at its

¹¹⁵ “He dismounted from his horse when he saw it, sat down at the fountain and washed his hands and face.”

¹¹⁶ We should remember the site of the garden as a site for lovers, a tradition beginning with the Song of Songs.

¹¹⁷ For a debate on female grooming, see *Le sentier batu* where the presence or lack of pubic hair indicates the frequency of use.

boundaries.¹¹⁸ Or we can take this image at face value: as an extremely sexually charged environment, like the natural setting in the Song of Songs, romance, lyric and *pastourelle*.¹¹⁹ In the case of this fabliau, the garden is a site for transfer of the ring: the man leaves the definer of his masculinity behind, continuing his journey and temporarily exiting the story, allowing for the entrance of the bishop who, much like the monk in *Le moigne*, unconsciously attempts to participate in a world that he has rejected.

The bishop's story begins similarly to the man's, on horseback:

Un evesque par la passoit.

Si tost com la fontaine voit,

Il descent et trova l'anel

Por ce que il le vit si bel... (13-16)¹²⁰

Although these lines seem to convey a rather innocuous situation, they are filled with signifiers marking class difference. First, the use of the verb *voir* in lines fourteen and sixteen evokes the scene where the man notices the fountain, reinforcing the idea of the natural setting as a transitional space. We should note, however, that the bishop only sees the fountain, but he does not wash his hands or face in it, avoiding the life-giving liquid and instead going directly to the ring. He does not make use of the water because vanity and greed overtake any desire for cleanliness. Second, the scene recalls the romance motif of the knight who

¹¹⁸ See Ruth Mellinkoff, who notes the image of the vulva on pilgrim's badges on pages 141-143.

¹¹⁹ There is a parallel scene in *La demoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre* where young girl describes her female body parts as a fountain and a prairie where her new husband can allow his "horse" to graze.

¹²⁰ "A bishop was passing by and saw the fountain. He descended from his horse and found the ring because he thought it very pretty."

experiences magical events after drinking or washing in the fountain. However, again, the bishop is not aware of what he has discovered. It is as if his body directs him to the desired object, despite the fact that the bishop long ago refused his bodily yearnings. In this feminine surrounding, the bishop's body reacts by instinct and he is oblivious to its impulses. In fact, the rhyming words, "anel" and "bel," indicate that the bishop does not see the ring in a sexual manner, but simply as a beautiful adornment and not the item that it represents. Giving in to his vanity, he immediately places the ring upon his finger in a symbolic gesture the audience should interpret sexually. The ring does not take long to display its effects. What I find interesting about this event is that the bishop does not equate the two occurrences. He is so detached from his surroundings and his body's nature that, when his suppressed masculinity begins to manifest itself, he does not entirely understand what is occurring. Although he experiences "tres grant mesese" ("a great discomfort") (21), he does not make the connection, despite the severity of his situation:

Ençois aloit tor jors croissant:

Tant crut et va tant aloignant

Que ses braies vont derompant! (24-26)¹²¹

The bishop has literally become too big for his britches! The pride that he has from wearing the ring has swelled more than his head. In addition, the three rhyming words "croissant", "aloignant" and "derompant" indicate just exactly how large of a problem the bishop has. The ring is intended for those who know

¹²¹ "It thus continued to grow: it grew so much and so much longer that he pants began to tear!"

how to harness and use its abilities, not for a religious man who must deny his masculinity. White similarly notes: “The person who has trouble with the ring is the one who does not understand its properties” (204). Again, the ring’s effects dictate the wearer’s masculinity, but because the bishop has suppressed his, both psychological and bodily discord occurs; the one (bodily) causing the other (psychological).

An interesting textual play on word occurs in lines thirty-one and thirty-two that indicate: “Tant crut qu’i li traïne a terre/ Par conseil commanda a querre” (“It grew so much that it dragged on the ground and he decided to seek advice). The first word to consider is “crut.” While indicating that his problem grew, it also resembles the past tense of the verb *croire*, to believe. This word indicates both the physical and psychological burden that this ring has caused him. The second interesting item occurs with the rhyme “terre” and “querre”. In my opinion, the rhyme “erre” indicates not only error (*erreur*) but also the French verb *errer* that recalls the questing of the romance knight-errant. Yet the bishop is far from a romantic hero; he is instead a sort of damsel in distress and must seek help outside of his kingdom to procure a cure for his predicament. However, his situation is a reversal of the damsel in distress motif. Usually the knight not only wins the damsel’s freedom, but also her heart and hence, rights over her sexuality. The bishop, on the other hand, seeks to be freed from this all-encumbering sexuality. Because a bishop has no place as a hero in romance, much of his distress emanates from the fact that he has penetrated into a world which consciously excludes him, just as his world excludes females and sexuality.

Still, he considers consulting women, if necessary, to bring him back to his normal state.

The original owner of the ring hears of the bishop's plight and goes to him to relieve him of his burden. He not only wants the ring back, but also expects interest as well: "Si demanda qu'i li donroit/ Du sien, s'i le peoit garir" ("He asked if he would give him his wealth if he could cure him") (38-39). He does not tell the bishop that the ring belongs to him or that he lost it, but poses as someone who can heal him and expects compensation. Not only does the man need the ring to restore his masculinity, but he also feels compelled to rob the bishop. He takes advantage of the bishop's ignorance of the outside world and demands one hundred pounds and two sheep for the service of returning him to normal, thus removing the burden of masculinity. In fact, the text says that the bishop is "delivres." He is, in fact, delivered from many things: his own sexuality, the sin that it implies and the onus of dealing with an object from the outside world. This symbolic castration results not in shame, but succor to an ailing soul. Despite the malicious intent of the man in punishing the bishop for overstepping his social bounds, the bishop is content that he is no longer an outcast in a community of outcasts. And, he is not the only one who is pleased: "Et cil marchié fu bien seanz/ Comme chascun en fu joianz!" ("The deal was concluded and everyone was happy with it") (49-50). Everyone is happy, but this happiness is derived from the fact that class norms have been restored. The man is content because his ring was returned and because he managed to dupe the bishop out of one hundred pounds and two sheep. Of this type of humor, Elder

Olson notes: “...we enjoy malicious wit when the victim seems to deserve it ... only we must be made to feel that object deserves what he gets” (62-63). Thus, when the man dupes the bishop out of his wealth, it is because the man and the audience feel he deserves it. By taking the bishop’s wealth, the man rights the wrong and places the bishop back in his correct place. The man can leave knowing that he has remedied the problem with the bishop and that the bishop will never again attempt to access a world that he has renounced.

Although intended as a means to avoid the marital discord represented in popular iconography, the ring actually causes other types of discord when handled by one who does not understand its properties. In a world where class distinctions are blurred, the man seeks to reestablish those boundaries and seems to have succeeded. On the other hand, one must examine why the ring and its effects caused such distress for the bishop. As stated at the beginning of the section on discord, this vice often emanates from the tongue. The bishop cannot handle the effect of the ring on his body because he has been taught to refuse it. Thus, his discord originates with the words from his teachings, contrasted with dictates and his physical self. Although this bishop’s discord is not a direct byproduct of anger, it is created by the battle between the spirit and the body. Masculinity and its physical manifestation in virility and wealth cause distress not only for the bishop, but also for the owner of the ring. In order to reestablish his masculine superiority over a celibate clergyman, he must not only retrieve the ring, but also strip the bishop of his wealth. This fabliau demonstrates the reaction of both

religious and secular men when their status in society is challenged. The same occurs in *Connebert*, but on a much more violent scale due to *Ira*'s involvement.

*Connebert*¹²²

This fabliau is attributed to Gautier le Leu, whom Nykrog calls “un conteur affreux” because “...il donne avec un goût morbide dans ces deux manières [sexual obscenity and scatology] et c’est là ce qui, avant tout, frappe le lecteur qui parcourt ses contes pour la première fois ... Au premier abord c’est un personnage singulièrement antipathique” (170-71). Considering the violence, maliciousness and title character of just one of Gautier’s fabliaux, *Connebert*,¹²³ it is not difficult to see how Nykrog came to this conclusion. Livingston adds to Nykrog’s sentiment, but with less judgment passed on the jongleur:

Connebert et le Prestre taint ... présentent des variations sur un même thème, et tous deux manquent presque totalement de la bonne humeur qui caractérise en général les fabliaux. *Connebert* en particulier exhale une brutalité et une haine qui atteignent à leur maximum dans les derniers vers (303 et s.) et qui en font le plus violent des fabliaux. C’est l’un des rares poèmes de ce genre où l’intention satirique soit évidente (219).

¹²² Although this name obviously echoes the word *con*, it is not completely the invention of Gautier’s imagination: this name exists today as a surname in France.

¹²³ Muscatine considers this name an animal motif “... derived from the commonplace pun on *con/connin* (rabbit), and ‘Morel’, a name for a black horse” (114), as in the fabliau, *La dame qui aveine demandoit pour Morel sa provende avoir*.

Although I agree with Livingston, I would not say that the fabliau is completely devoid of humor; I simply believe that the violence at the center of the fabliau overwhelms the two humorous minor scenes that do exist in the text.

Another feature of this fabliau that separates it from the majority is the fact that the end result is revealed at the beginning of the story in lines three to six:

D'un autre prestre la matiere,
Qui n'ot mie la coille antiere,
Qant il s'an parti de celui
Qui li ot fait honte et enui¹²⁴

Muscatine indicates that this is not the only fabliau with such a structure, as *L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil*, *Estormi*, *Le prestre et Alison*, *Le meunier d'Arleux* and *Le prestre et le chevalier* all also reveal their climax before it occurs (52). He believes that “[t]he announcement has something of the character of an advertisement for the remainder of the story, but it also creates irony at the expense of the victim—along with the grisly process of his punishment—that the audience is expected to enjoy more than it would a surprise at the plot’s climax” (52). Thus, the anticipation of the denouement (the shame and pain felt by the priest) enhances the audience’s experience. He has theoretically renounced his sexuality by taking the cloth and should not be concerned that what made him a man no longer exists, for his vocation prohibits him from behaving as a layman.

¹²⁴ “I would like to tell a story of another priest who did not have all of his testicles. When he was separated from them, he experienced great shame and pain.”

In fact, our poor monk in *Le moigne* would be happy to be relieved of such sinful thoughts. Although these four lines indicate that the priest will be castrated, the reason for his treatment is not revealed. Of course, given that the fabliaux frequently exploit the theme of the lecherous priest, the audience would not have to stretch their imagination too much to guess the motive.

The introduction to the fabliau very briefly touches upon a very interesting theme but never fully exploits it. In line fourteen, one finds the word *dame* to indicate *dommage*. This suggests that it is not the husband or the castrated priest who causes the pain and hurt recounted in this tale, but the wife: woman equals suffering. It is her very existence and her need for sexual gratification that trigger the events. The priest, tempted by her beauty and her willingness to be a sexual partner, humiliates the husband by bragging of his adventures with his wife. The husband avenges himself not by punishing the wife, but by forcing the priest to castrate himself in order to escape a fire set by the husband. It is, however, important to note that not only did he set the fire, but he also burnt down his own forge. Thus, the image of anger thrusting himself upon his sword on the cathedral at Lyon comes back to mind. In his anger, the husband becomes self-destructive, causing himself financial loss, as he will have to rebuild his forge to be able to continue making a living and will lose business during the time that it takes to build another. Again, the impetus for his actions originates with the wife's pleasure. Thus, despite her seemingly minor appearance in the tale, it is in fact she who is the catalyst of such destruction in the eyes of the narrator.

The fabliau explains that Tiebaut the smith seeks to take a stand against a priest who has made a cuckold not only of him, but also of the majority of the men in town. Realizing that he cannot stop the priest alone, he appeals to his relatives to join him in his quest for revenge. Although the priest has had encounters with their wives as well, they see the matter a bit differently: “Chastoeiez vo fame, la fole/ Qui tot vos destruit et afole” (“Punish your crazy wife who destroys you and does you harm”) (61-62). This reaction from the crowd reflects the medieval approach to Eve as the cause of humanity’s woes. In the case of Tiebaut, the crowd indicates that his wife, like Eve, is the source of his troubles. Percy notes: “The smith ... finds himself victimized by a system in which the dictates of civil justice may be subverted through an appeal to benefit of clergy, and by the fear generated among his family and friends that the ecclesiastical authorities will exact retribution for any offence against a church officer” (“*Connebert* and Branch I” 79). They thus attempt to take Tiebaut’s focus from the priest and encourage him to punish his wife who welcomes the priest into her bed. They believe that it is the wife, Mahalt, who is causing his humiliation and not the priest who is simply behaving as Nature intends. Thibodeaux notes that the subject of the sexually active priest was not just a literary occurrence, but a historical one as well:

...there were numerous opportunities for them [priests] to express their sexuality and adopt the trappings of secular manhood by committing adultery and fornication with women in their communities. Adultery provided an opportunity for sexual

conquest, one that was based on competition with other men for their own wives. For the insecure priest, one who felt vulnerable to accusations of effeminacy, adultery provided the ultimate victory. For someone who had been seemingly emasculated by Church rules on celibacy, a priest who committed adultery demonstrated that his sexual prowess exceeded that of the cuckolded husband (390).

This is exactly the situation in which Tiebaut finds himself. He is the only one bold enough to combat the priest and reclaim his manhood. He also has the courage to confront his relatives with the truth of their situation as well:

Vos estes cous, que bien lo sai!

Li prestes toz nos desenore:

Tel i a son anfant enore,

Mout m'an sui bien aparceüz!

.....

Mais cil n'est pas cortois ne frans

Qui set que il est cous sofranz:

Puis qu'il lo set et il lo sofre,

L'an lo devroit ardoir en sofre (68-71, 73-76)¹²⁵

¹²⁵ “You are all cuckolds and you know it! The priest has dishonored us all: you honor his child, I have seen it! ... He who tolerates being a cuckold is neither noble nor honest: Because he know it and makes us suffer, we should burn him in sulfur.”

Tiebaut shames his relatives. He implies that if they were to fight against the priest, they would not only regain their honor, but their station in life would be elevated. He seeks to regain his masculinity, not only for himself, but also in the eyes of others. He realizes that others mock him and he cannot tolerate his inferiority anymore. Still, the others are scared to attack a priest, and although the fabliau does not specify the reason, we can imagine that they fear eternal damnation, punishment in a court of law, or, as Percy indicates, ecclesiastical retribution. They view the priest as a despot against whom they have no power or voice. In front of this man of the cloth, they are rendered impotent. In addition, they could be following the advice given by Proverbs 22.24-25, which states: "Do not associate with a man given to anger, or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself." Like the priest after Tiebaut exacts his revenge, their manhood suffers, both literally and metaphorically. Yet in spite of the possible eternal damnation and the possibility of being placed in prison, Tiebaut does not waiver in his desire for revenge. He may rot in Hell or in a jail cell, but he will have reclaimed his dignity and most importantly, his manhood. In addition, he will do the community a service, as others will benefit from his actions as well: he would be considered as a sort of savior and martyr.

Finding no help from his relatives, Tiebaut finally locates a willing participant in his servant, who offers to kill the priest for the agony that he has caused his master. However, as indicated at the beginning of the fabliau, the smith does not intend murder but a more humiliating punishment: castration. He will emasculate him, just as the priest has emasculated the local community. That

is Tiebaut's ultimate revenge: cutting off the despot from his power.¹²⁶ He will put the priest back in his place. The priest dares to overstep his bounds and attempts to behave immorally when his religious duties should prevent him from doing so. His arrogance and sinful pride, which eventually lead to his downfall, fool him into believing that he is safe from harm or punishment from the men he dishonors.

Tiebaut devises a ruse to catch the priest. His stratagem relies on the fact that one cannot enter his house without first passing his forge. Thus, not only does he observe all who pass, but also the passersby hear the great noise made while Tiebaut works. He makes so much noise that the priest is convinced that he is hard at work and that the wife is available for a tryst. Interestingly enough, although Tiebaut sees the priest go by and knows full well his intent, he does not stop the priest from entering the house and having his way with the wife. In fact, he even listens in on the couple's pillow talk:

Don estes vos trestote voie?

Ele respont: "Se Deus me voie:

Vostre est mes cuers, vostre est mes cors,

Et par dedans et par defors,

Mes li cus si est mon mari,

Cui j'ai fait mainte foiz marri!

--Dame, fait cil, li cus soit suens

¹²⁶ Let us not forget that Saturn overthrew Uranus' reign by castrating him in a major narrative thread in the *Roman de la Rose*. In addition, the count in *La dame escoillee* makes a similar threat when attempting to subdue an overly proud mother-in-law.

Et toz li autres cors soit miens,

Mais je lo li batrai sovant,

Ce li met je bien en covant (174-83)¹²⁷

Just as woman corresponds to suffering earlier in the tale, here, husband (*mari*) is matched with being mistreated (*marri*). Once one marries and takes on the title of husband, he should expect betrayal by his wife: to be a husband means to be abused. She designates the parts of her body that she deems the most important to the priest and the least important to her husband.

Still, the question remains: why does the smith wait until the two have sinned before he strikes at the priest? Although one can only speculate as to his reasoning, I would say that there was just a hint of hesitation left in him. In order to avoid harming an innocent man, he allows the two to meet, thus removing all doubt of the priest's innocence and strengthening his resolve. Seizing the priest, Tiebaut and his servant tie him up with his hands attached at his neck. This interesting way of binding the priest makes it seem as if he were praying (Noomen and van den Boogaard VII 391). The purpose of this unusual fettering is to coerce the priest back into a contemplative life rather than an active one: it is a forced reminder of what the priest's duties should consist. Legros notes of the clergy in the *fabliaux*:

...le prêtre ou le moine sont affublés de nombreux vices ou de défauts tels que l'ignorance, mais leur sacerdoce ou leur vocation

¹²⁷ "In all circumstances, where do you stand? She responds: 'By God, my heart is yours, my body is yours, inside and out, but my ass is my husband's who I have often mistreated.' 'Lady,' he says, 'let your ass be his and the rest of your body be mine, but I will hit it often, of this I should warn him.'"

ne sont jamais critiqués en eux-mêmes. Il n'y a aucune attaque ni contre la religion, ni contre la fonction cléricale; ils sont critiqués sur un plan individuel parce qu'ils exercent mal leur rôle et ne respectent pas leurs engagements ... les fabliaux respectent les croyances religieuses (37).

This is exactly the case for *Connebert* where Gautier does not critique religion itself, but just this particular priest:

Seignor, fait il, qui preste ocit
Il ne puet mie preste randre!
Se vos me laissez a reanbre,
Je vos donrai bien deus cenz livres,
Si les avroiz demains delivres (203-07)¹²⁸

He begins his plea with a sort of threat, while at the same time deferring to the smith's current superior position by referring to him as "Seignor." The priest may know how to sweet-talk a woman, but flattery accompanied by a feeble shot at intimidation is no way to talk oneself out of a bad situation. He tries another tactic in the form of a monetary incentive. Although he may be experienced in the ways of women, he has no idea how to relate to secular men, especially one he has wronged. He assumes that, like himself, Tiebuat suffers from the vices, especially greed; but he is wrong. The priest does not understand that money cannot buy back Tiebaut's dignity or masculinity. Tiebaut tells him "...maintes

¹²⁸ "'Sir,' he said, 'he who kills a priest cannot return a priest! If you let me redeem myself, I will give you two hundred livres, they will be delivered to you tomorrow.'"

foiz/ Me bat **mon cul** [my emphasis] sor mon defoiz” (“Many times, you have beaten my ass to my displeasure”) (210-11). He turns the wife’s words that the two had used to mock him into a justification for his actions. By punishing the priest, not only will he regain his masculinity and self-respect (along with the respect of others), but also he will end the abuse done to his property (his wife’s *cul*).

In a violent scene which reminds one of *La dame escoillee*, to be discussed below, Tiebaut says:

Don li va la coille enhaper
Que il avoit au cul pandue;
Sor l’estoc li a estandue,
Si a feru cinc clo par mi (233-36)¹²⁹

He thus treats very savagely the culprits that had so frequently and enthusiastically mistreated his property. In addition, the number of nails that he places in the priest’s body have religious significance, something that should not be lost on the priest: there are five points on the cross; Christ sustained five sacred wounds; and there are five books of Moses. The number could also represent the five senses that, as we have seen with *Le foteor*, lead one into sin. Tiebaut thus takes the teachings taught to him by the priest at church and puts them to a rather sadistic use. These lines also reveal the importance of the anvil in Tiebaut’s revenge. A key tool in a smith’s trade, it is also one of the priest’s

¹²⁹ “Thus he grabbed forcibly the testicles that the priest had hanging from his ass; he spread them out on the anvil and put five nails in them.”

accomplices in his illicit acts.¹³⁰ When he hears the noise from the forge, the priest knows that the coast is clear for entry into the smith's house. However, the smith converts the anvil from the priest's partner-in-crime to his own, for it is impossible for the priest to run away.

Having rendered escape impossible, Tiebaut and his servant untie the priest and place a razor next to him. Under the pretext that it is old and no longer serves him well, Tiebaut then sets the forge on fire, creating a living Hell for the priest. Instead of castrating the priest himself, he forces the priest to do it in order to avoid being burned alive. This is even more sadistic than Tiebaut removing the offending items himself, yet as Percy points out, necessary: "The ruse whereby the priest is compelled to castrate himself sophisticatedly distances the smith from responsibility for physical assault on a member of the clergy. Nevertheless, the violent act of self-mutilation ... clearly punishes with castration the crime of adultery" ("*Connebert* and Branch I" 79). He forces the priest to make a hasty decision, and either way, it will lead to suffering. He chooses life and leaves behind him two body parts:

Autresi granz com deus roignons;

La pel est si grant et si rosse

Q'an en poïst faire une bourse (273-75)¹³¹

The greater the size, the greater the loss. The word *bourse* in line two hundred seventy-five is obviously meant as a double entendre. As we have seen, although

¹³⁰ Note the parallel between Tiebaut's anvil and that of Nature's in *Le Roman de la Rose*.

¹³¹ "As big as two kidneys, the skin is so big and ruddy that one could make a purse out of it."

frequently used to refer figuratively to a man's scrotum, it was also literally a purse or a man's wealth. In addition, by stating that one could use the skin as one would use a calf's or a sheep's skin to make a purse, his symbol of power has been reduced to an object of everyday use. Nykrog finds Gautier's treatment of the priest excessive: "...Gautier le Leu a manqué de goût en faisant châtrer ses prêtres paillards: un poète correct se contente de les faire rouer de coups" (233). In order for Gautier's Tiebaut to help both himself and other cuckolded men, there is no other choice for the pragmatist except castration: a permanent solution to a long-standing problem.

Although most fabliaux would end here, with this literal denouement and a moral, *Connebert* is exceptional in that the text recounts the priest's medical treatment for his injury:

Puis li covint mander un mire,
Qui lo sena mout longuement
Par la force d'un oignemant (293-95)¹³²

The fabliau thus continues in its sadism by relishing in the fact that the priest was long in healing from his self-inflicted wound. Muscatine notes that "[t]he sadism in his [Gautier le Leu's] *Connebert* is remarkably insistent, as if to conjure up by its own violence a vision of the moral system it outrages" (160). Yet, it is only through such horrible cruelty that Tiebaut can regain his masculinity. In addition, when the priest seeks justice at a secular court, the judge decides that the punishment fits the crime and condones Tiebaut's aggression:

¹³² "Then he sent for a doctor who took care of him for a long time with the help of an ointment."

Si s'an ala clamer a cort;
Mais il n'i ot ne lonc ne cort
Qu'il ne deïst trestot a hait:
"Si lor aïst Deus, bien a fait:
Car fussent or si atorné
Tuit le prestre de mere né
Qui sacremant de mariage
Tornent a honte et a putage! (298-305)¹³³

As a final indignity, dogs consume the priest's remains, completing the fabliau's sadistic cycle.

Regarding masculinity, Connell notes: "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). For Tiebaut, his masculinity is based upon his relationship with the female sex, i.e., his capacity to make his wife submit to him, and his status in the community. For the priest, the basis of his masculinity is his ability to infiltrate the conjugal beds of the village men. Despite this female influence on masculinity, the tale remains one of male power mediated by a woman's body. It is this body that is the source of marital and societal discord that evolves into anger for Tiebaut. It is the overturning of the hegemonic, masculine hierarchy

¹³³ "He went to make his claim at court; but he was not there for very long when the judge happily said: 'By the grace of God, good has been done: may they be so mistreated, all of the priests born of a mother who violate the sacrament of marriage by shaming and debauching it!'"

that so greatly angers the smith. Yet, in spite of his wife's collaboration with the priest, he punishes the priest for the usurpation and violation of his property. One reason for his violent attack on the priest is that it is much easier to castrate a priest than to keep his wife from misbehaving. Although his anger serves to dispose of one suitor, how many more forges must he burn before all of his wife's lovers are thwarted?

Les tresces

This fabliau proves just as violent and sadistic as *Connebert* and, in this case, it is the adulterous wife that the husband seeks to correct, not the person with whom she is committing adultery. The male protagonist subscribes to the hegemonic version of masculinity that assures the continuation of patriarchy. However, through the cleverness of his wife, patriarchy is overturned. The tale demonstrates the futility of anger-fuelled violence. Like the figure on the cathedral of the youth committing suicide, the husband's anger only renders him even more ridiculous, and the damage is not done to his wife or her lover but to himself. His violence only leads the wife to invent more creative ways of avoiding her husband's rage and retaining the upper hand in the relationship, all the while making it seem as if her husband still rules the roost.

Les tresces exists today in three manuscripts and in two different forms that have many details in common.¹³⁴ Noomen and van den Boogaard have made

¹³⁴ Berne, Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie, 354; Paris, BN MS 19152; Paris, BN MS 12581. *Les Tresces I* is based upon the texts in Berne 354 and Paris, BN MS 12581, whereas *Les Tresces II* is based upon the text in Paris, BN MS 19152.

the distinction between the two by naming one *Les Tresces I* and the other *II* (VI 209). For the sake of my analysis, I will use *Les Tresces I* because as Noomen and van den Boogaard note: “Il [*Les Tresces II*] semble avoir subi plusieurs altérations. Sa langue se caractérise par une tendance à la contamination” (VI 210).

At the beginning of the fabliau, the *fableor* indicates the time and effort that he put into creating this tale: “Ai mis de mon tens un petit!” (“I have put a fair bit of time into it”) (5). I find that the contradiction (*mon tens* meaning “for a long time” and *un petit* meaning “a bit”) in this line echoes throughout the fabliau. For example, the carelessness of a lover who does not want to be caught or the wife sending a friend to her husband to receive the beating intended for her. The author also links the violence (*destresces*) that will soon occur to something so innocuous as the friend’s hair (*tresces*). He thus introduces the image and idea of hair early on in the tale. Although not specifically mentioned, the *fableor* is referring to women’s hair, often used in the art of seduction. At the beginning of his essay on hair in the Middle Ages, Rus reminds us: “Je rappelle à témoin ... le cas de la prostituée, qui, dans l’iconographie, a fréquemment les cheveux longs, dénoués et ondulants—comme Marie-Madeleine et Marie l’Egyptienne” (386). Hair can also represent power as in the case of the Biblical Samson. Laurent points out yet another interesting element of the word *tresces*:

Dans la langue médiévale, «tresser» signifie en effet «danser la farandole», et la «tresse» y désigne une sarabande ou une ronde à laquelle les participants s’agrègent ou dont ils sortent

successivement. De ce divertissement quelque peu pervers qu'est le récit, la bourgeoise aux tresses sacrifiées sera exclue, elle sera littéralement «hors de tresce», c'est à dire, en *escourtant* le cheval de son mari, va, suivant le sens médiéval de l'expression «couper queue», y mettre un terme (241).

In the offense that the woman's hair suffers, one can deduce that there is a power struggle about to occur in the fabliau.

When introducing the bourgeois in the tale, the *fableor* ascribes noble traits to him: *preuz, hardiz, sages et en faiz et en diz, de bones taches entechiez*. Although not a knight in this version (*Les Tresces I*) of the fabliau, he could definitely be described as knightly. He embodies the ideal of chivalric behavior and the above description gives no indication of the cruelty to come. In fact, if the *fableor* did not indicate that his tale was, in fact, a *fabliaus* or *fablel* (repeating this detail two times in six lines as if to warn the audience that it is really a fabliau), we could mistake the beginning of this tale for a romance. The audience thus expects the tale to quickly turn from the ideal to the more real fabliau world.

After the husband falls asleep, the cause of the couple's dispute appears through the window:

Son ami [the wife's] anmi la maison,
Qui entroit par une fenestre;
Comme cil qui bien savoit ester
Il vait au lit, si se deschauce,
Qu'il n'i laissa soller ne chauce,

Cote ne braies ne chemise (18-23)¹³⁵

As Michael Camille points out, windows are one of the places that must be protected (*Image on the Edge* 16). In this case, the window is a reflection of the windows in the romance that represent unattained desire. However, by penetrating the perimeter of the window, the lover not so subtly announces that his desire will be realized and probably has been satiated many times before with this particular woman. By falling asleep, the bourgeois has neglected that which he should have tended and protected, leaving the way for others to do so in his place. Not only does the lover quench his desire, but also he is so comfortable in the presence of his lover's sleeping husband that he completely disrobes. If caught, he leaves absolutely no opportunity for a quick and less embarrassing escape. This is obviously not the first time that he has visited the wife. Through trial, the lovers have discovered that they can enjoy each other in the bourgeois' bed without waking him. It is for this reason that the lover is so confident that he removes even his shoes for his visit to the wife who, when she senses him getting in to bed, turns her back to her husband. I believe that this simple act is indicative of not only her attitude towards her husband, but towards others in general. She is fundamentally one who discards those for whom she has no further purpose. Of gender roles in the fabliaux, Johnson notes: "Sexual roles are used in the fabliaux not necessarily to confirm or promote sexual stereotypes but as a valuable means for overturning conventional relationships or subverting appearances in the

¹³⁵ "Her friend entered the house by the window; as he frequently did, he went to the bed and took off his clothes, and his shoes."

interests of comic action” (303). Thus, by turning her back to her husband, she is subverting his authority and taking matters into her own hands. Because her husband chooses to sleep rather than cater to her sexual desires, she takes on a lover who is so careless as to fall asleep after he has pleased her. Although the dispute expressed in the tale has yet to be specifically described, the wife turning her back to her husband indicates that strife existed in the marriage long before this particular incident.

The bourgeois, of course, awakens first in the morning “Com cil qu’an iere costumiers” (“as was his habit”) (36) and discovers the extra body in bed. He grabs the lover by the neck and places him in a tub that was sitting at the foot of the bed. The bourgeois thus imprisons the intruder in an everyday object used for both washing and bathing. When used as a bath, it has the potential for romantic encounters; when used as a washtub, it is an item used to wash away unwanted grime and purify the body. And in this case, the unwanted object is the intruder. The husband does not know why he is there, but he does know that someone has entered the house that should not have. This certainty of the intruder’s presence comes in to question later in the fabliau.

Awakening his wife, he instructs her to hold on to the trespasser by the hair while he goes to fetch a candle to unveil the unwanted houseguest. His request is interesting for two reasons. The first concerns the manner in which he tells her to restrain the intruder. He estimates that his wife can properly restrain him or her by holding on to his or her hair. This gesture is a rather humiliating one for the person being controlled. If it is a man, it is an affront to his

masculinity and strength; if it is a woman, it is an insult to her femininity. In both cases, it reduces the individual to the status of a non-entity, an object to be dragged around by the scruff of the neck. The second reason is that he does not ask the wife to fetch the candle, but chooses to go himself, leaving his wife to tend to the prowler. He seems to suspect that his wife may be a co-conspirator and by fetching a light for the candle himself and leaving her with the trespasser, he tests her loyalty. He warns his wife:

Gardez que il ne vos eschap;

Vos n'i porriez avoir rachap

Que vos n'i morissiez a honte! (66-68)¹³⁶

The husband's fears are revealed in these lines. By ending two of the lines with the sound *chap* one understands *chape*, the medieval French word that has the possible meaning of shame. Finally in line sixty-eight, he expresses the word out loud, but in the context of his wife's shame, not his own. I would add, however, that he is worried that word of the incident will get out and he will be shamed for not being able to properly protect his home or control his wife. Escape is equated with shame for both parties involved.

Just like the wife in *Les perdris*, this fabliau indicates "Comant fame set decevoir/ Et mançonge dire por voir!" ("Women know how do deceive and turn lies into truth!") (78-80). Seeking to save her lover from harm, she sends him off on his way and substitutes a calf in his place, an animal typical in religious

¹³⁶ "Take care that he does not escape, you will not be able to escape punishment and you would die of shame!"

sacrifice in the Bible. Yet in this case, the animal is not used for a religious sacrifice, but a sexual one. She means to make her husband believe that it was the calf that he captured and not another human being. Yet, the bourgeois is not so dense for he knows that the being with which he grappled was a person and he curses his wife for her deception: “Vos i mentez com delloiaus/ Dit le borjois, mais vos, puste orde!” (“You treacherous liar, said the bourgeois, you filthy whore!”) (114-16). In the blink of an eye, the bourgeois’ contentment at the beginning of the fabliau turns to disdain. He realizes that he does not have the control that he thought he had and that he is just like any other cuckold. His identity, his male pride, rested upon his superiority, but he realizes that was just an illusion. Not only has she cuckolded him but has done so in his own bed while he slept. This makes him even more of a fool. His nobleness, his bravery, his good deeds are all for naught. He erroneously believed that behaving nobly and as a good Christian would bring him rewards and love. For all the good that he has done, he only receives pain and shame in return. It is for this reason that he allows his anger to take over and calls his wife a filthy slut.

At these words, the wife leaves the house to join her lover for the night. I find it interesting that the bourgeois does not stop her from leaving. He seems to have given up, for the moment, and allows his wife to do as she wishes. He simply returns to bed. Yet all he really manages to accomplish is to allow his anger and humiliation to turn to furor that leads to an act of extreme violence that he hopes will aid in recapturing his masculinity. Barton reminds us of Cassiodorus’ distinction between *ira* and *furor*: “Despite generally condemning

anger as a sin, Cassiodorus noted a difference between *ira* and *furor* in his exegesis on Psalms: *ira* was prolonged indignation, which, he thought, ought to be contrasted to the brief blaze of *furor* that refused to be placated or reasoned with” (383). Although one may believe that the bourgeois’ violence demonstrates a greatly sadistic man, I would argue that the wife who sends her friend to take a beating meant for her is even more sadistic. The wife fears punishment and looks for a way out of it, and she finds one in a greedy friend whom she bribes to take her place next to her husband in bed. What I find most appalling is the wife’s selfishness. She does not care for the well being of her friend; she only cares that she comes out on top in the dispute. The fabliau audience expects the wife to deceive the husband and for the husband to react violently, and the text demonstrates that not only are the marital boundaries violated, but so are the limits of friendship. Most often, the friend or servant is an accomplice to the wife’s infidelity, but in this case, the friend is a victim and an unknowing accomplice to the wife’s deception.

The friend goes to the house, undresses and enters the bed, waking up the bourgeois as she does so. The scene that follows displays the cruelty to which the bourgeois’ furor leads him:

Se ja mais ai de vos merci,
Dont soie je honiz en terre!
N’ala pas loig un baston querre,
Qu’a son chevet en avoit deus.
Lors la saisi par les cheveus

Que ele avoit luisanz et sors

Tout autresi comme fins ors:

Le chief sa fame resambloit.

.....

Et quant dou batre fu lassez,

Ne li fu mie ancor asez:

Son cotel prist isnelement,

Puis a juré son sairement

Que il la honniroit dou cors.

Lors li tranche les treces fors,

Au plus pres qu'il pot de la teste

(155-62, 168-72)¹³⁷

The husband mistakes his wife's friend for his wife because of the similarity of their hair. Rolland-Perrin notes: "C'est au milieu de cette scène conjugale que s'inscrit une description élogieuse des cheveux assortie d'une comparaison conventionnelle, comme si la beauté de la chevelure confirmait la luxure. Comme si la femme adultère se reconnaissait à ses splendides cheveux..." (342). He thus treats her body as she has treated his masculinity, a sort of eye for an eye, something that is reflected in the text (58-59). The two verses end with the sound *eus*, the medieval French word for eyes. This theme will come into play later

¹³⁷ "If I ever have mercy for you who has shamed me on this earth. It did not take him long to find a stick for he kept two at the head of the bed. He grabbed her by her hair which was shining and blond, much like fine gold: she resembled the wife in this manner ... And when he had finished beating her, it was not enough: he immediately grabbed his knife, then swore a sermon that he would dishonor her body. He cut off her hair very close to the scalp."

when the husband decides that seeing is believing and that all that occurred must have been a dream as his wife insists. But he goes one step further: just as he has been emasculated by his wife's infidelity, he takes away her femininity by cutting off her hair so close to the head that she is essentially shorn and must now show herself in the street as a shamed woman. One should recall the medieval practice of shaving an adulterous woman's head and parading her through the streets for all to see and scorn. The husband acts as judge, jury and executioner by committing such a violent act against her femininity. Houdeville points out that in a Samson-like act of shearing, " ...l'homme cherche, en privant son épouse de ses tresses, à détruire son pouvoir mais il obtient en fait, le résultat inverse puisqu'elle sort triomphante de l'épreuve" (197). Her ability to cuckold him lies in the beauty of her hair and its attractiveness. Without it, she is no longer attractive to others and will not be able to cuckold him due to her ugliness. " ... [L]a perte de ses cheveux longs ne représente pas pour une femme, loin s'en faut, une simple modification physique mais est ressentie comme un avilissement d'autant plus intense qu'il ne peut pas facilement être caché à l'opinion publique, une vraie mortification que répète la fin du texte" (Rolland-Perrin 342). He essentially performs a sort of female castration.

After suffering the atrocities of the husband, the friend leaves the house in such haste that she leaves her clothes. By exiting the privacy of the house and entering into public space completely naked, she marks herself as a public woman. As indicated in the analysis of *Les trois dames de Paris*, clothes are a defining factor of status and lack of them labels a woman as a prostitute (see

Simpson 200). The friend returns to the wife all battered and shorn and recounts her story; the wife immediately goes back to the house and does away with the evidence of the violence by removing the friend's clothes and the hair that the husband hid under the pillow, substituting it with the tail of her husband's palfrey.

Laurent points out a parallel incident in Bérout's *Roman de Tristan*:

Iseut la blonde, Iseut la guivre, fille d'une reine magicienne, pourrait être le modèle de la femme aux tresses, quand, trompant le roi «aux oreilles de cheval», elle se fait remplacer par sa servante dans le lit nuptial et qu'elle accueille Tristan dans la couche royale. Ou encore, quand après avoir transformé son amant en monture lors de l'épisode du Mal Pas ... elle manipule les signes pour échapper au châtement et s'offrir pure et innocente aux regards de Marc et la cour arthurienne (250).

Awakening, the husband, of course, finds the room in order with not a scratch on his wife. When he seeks further proof of the night's brutality by reaching for the hair that he so ferociously sliced from his wife's friend's head, he finds instead the substituted tail of his horse. Houdeville explains the significance of the wife's substitution:

...ordinairement, l'assimilation de l'être humain à un animal apparaît comme une insulte, une dévalorisation. Ici, elle est revendiquée par la femme qui, en plaçant sous l'oreiller une queue d'animal ... revendique ce que la sexualité peut avoir de bestial par opposition avec l'idéalisation courtoise. Il y a donc là perturbation

des conventions sociales et esthétiques de l'époque, une rupture avec l'art de la représentation contemporaine. La femme se veut, à l'évidence, charnelle, sensible et animale et nargue l'homme qui prétend lui imposer une discipline du désir. Ce qui est normalement tu ou caché est ici mis brutalement en lumière, par dérision et le phénomène de métaphorisation homme/animal amène un regard neuf sur le monde et les rapports entre les deux sexes. Contre l'ordre social traditionnel, le droit au plaisir de la femme est revendiqué (197-98).

He does not understand how she shows no signs of the beating that she received or how the horse's tail ended up under the pillow. He has no choice but to believe his wife's lies:

Cil li prie que li pardoint
Merci li crie et ses mains joint:
Dame, fait il, se Dieus me voie,
Je vos cuidai bien toute voie
Avoir honie a touz jors mais
Et les trecos cospees pres,
Mais je voi bien que c'est mançonge:
Ainz ne sonjai mais si mal songe!
Com j'ai mon cheval escoé,

Don j'ai forment le cuer iré! (252-62)¹³⁸

The bourgeois thus believes that his angry heart gave him such a nightmare that he cut the tail off of his horse while sleepwalking. His anger has turned from an outward focus to an inward one. It is in this way that the wife turns lies into truth and truth into lies, proving that truth is relative. The bourgeois must believe his wife because the proof is in front of his very eyes: he believes it because he sees it.

Although referring to *Les Tresces II*, Duval and Eichmann's observation about the fabliau applies well to its variation: "The fabliau itself should have been entitled 'The Substitutions,' for at the climaxes of all three episodes, the lady provides a replacement for the object under contention ... Like a magician, she substitutes everything so that her victim is totally under her power, confused and incapable of discerning between illusion and reality" (*Cuckolds, Clerics, and Countrymen* 66). *Les Tresces I*, while ostensibly demonstrating the anger-fuelled violence of the husband, also reveals that anger can have some positive outcomes if used properly as does the wife. Through substitution, the wife subverts a system intent upon making her submit to a man. Of trickery in the fabliaux, Lorcin indicates: "Arme du faible contre le fort, la ruse permet à la femme de prendre de temps à autre une revanche sur l'ordre établi, sur l'autorité maritale, surtout si cette dernière lui est imposé par l'autorité paternelle" (*Façons de sentir et de penser* 180). In order to overcome a male-dominated system of rule, the

¹³⁸ "He begged her to forgive him, asking for mercy with his hands clasped together: 'Lady,' he said, 'by the grace of God, I believed that I had damaged you forever and cut off your hair close to the scalp, but I see that is a lie: it was thus just a bad dream! I have cut off the tail of my horse and I am very angry about it!'"

wife must both pretend to submit and subvert it at the same time. The balance between the two is actually aided by the husband's brutality rather than hindered. Like the image of *Ira* on the cathedral, the husband sabotages his own authority rather than repressing that of his wife. Whereas the wife's calm and calculating anger produces results favorable to her, the husband's fierce, spur-of-the-moment furor burns him and leads to the opposite of the intended result. This could be the reason that narrator seems to admire the wife. Condemning the husband's ignorance and violent reaction to a challenge of his authority, the *fableor* allows the overturned hierarchy to continue at the end of this fabliau rather than the traditional fabliaux restoration of social norms.

Conclusion

Simon Gaunt remarks that "...the *fabliaux* offer mobile and fluid boundaries which are transgressed, eluded or shown to be inadequate" (239). This is true for all three fabliaux, *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides*, *Connebert* and *Les tresces*, because each, in both similar and different ways overstep literary and societal restrictions. *L'anel* uses traditional romance and lyric devices against an unwitting bishop. In *Connebert* and *Les tresces*, the husbands employ anger-fueled violence against both literal and metaphorical sex organs in an attempt to regain their authority over their cuckolding wives. These fabliaux assert that both masculine and feminine power is wholly sexual; and when there is a power struggle, the threat of castration is apparent. Dismemberment of the sex organs equates a detachment from the source of

authority, and the body exhibits the environmental dissonance because in the fabliaux, social angst is displaced upon the body; what is felt is made visible, and exposing it to the outside world is the first step towards mastering it. All three fabliaux demonstrate that the male-dominated social structure cannot withstand any sort of challenge to its power. When such a confrontation does occur, men behave badly due to their fear of female sexuality. According to the fabliaux, female sexuality usurps male authority and, thus, must be repressed. They also show that it is men who are prone to anger and poor conduct. Although the phallus is a signifier of masculinity, that masculinity is wholly dependent upon the female attitude towards it; for a man to be manly, a woman must desire him. We shall see another definition of one's manhood in *La saineresse* and *La dame escoillee*, where gender is the determinant of power.

*Et conteram superbiam duritiae
vestrae daboque caelum vobis
desuper sicut ferrum et terram
aeneam Leviticus 26.19*¹³⁹

Chapter Six

Pride's Blitz

As noted in the discussion of *Le moigne*, pride (*Superbia*) is represented on the cathedral and in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* as a man falling off of a horse. Gueric of Igny also makes reference to this image in his *Third Sermon for St. Benedict*: "The vain man is lifted up in pride, and by the vanity of his senses is brought to ruin just like the stumbling horse" (20). Of this vice, one also should note that it is at the root of all the other vices, because as indicated by Thomas Aquinas in Question VIII, which treats capital sins: "...pride destroys all virtues and powers of the soul" (589). With virtue obliterated, vice is free to reign. In each of the vices discussed in the previous chapters, lust, gluttony, greed/avarice, debauchery, anger and discord, pride plays a considerable, although not always evident, role. For example, for the monk in *Le moigne*, it is his overconfidence in the solidity of his faith that leads to his lustful downfall. In *Richeut*, Samson's

¹³⁹ "I will break your proud glory, and I will make your sky like iron and your earth like copper."

presumption that a woman can never fool him leads him to succumb to his mother's ruse. In each fabliau discussed, pride plays some sort of role, most often comedic. The problem with *Superbia* is that it tricks one into a sense of superiority and comfort. No longer on guard, when one is knocked off of his/her pedestal the shock is palatable. Such is the case for both of the fabliaux to be examined, *La saineresse* and *La dame escoillee*. In the first, the husband foolishly boasts of his superior intellect over women, and believes they could never trick him.¹⁴⁰ In the second, it is the wife of a knight who, believing herself more qualified to run a household, imprudently usurps her husband's authority and contradicts him at every turn. One should remember that pride appears often in romance and epic as a positive trait, leading the knight/warrior to victory.¹⁴¹ The fabliaux, however, seem to choose to exploit its negative uses, most probably because it is more humorous.

In both of the fabliaux treated in this chapter, one of the protagonists gets his or her comeuppance, one without even realizing it. In *La saineresse*, the husband foolishly boasts that no woman could ever fool him within earshot of his wife, who vows to prove him wrong. An opportunity comes in the form of a man disguised as a healer who the wife invites to her bedroom supposedly to both cup and bleed her. Afterwards, the wife relates in detail the sex with the fake healer. Her discourse, however, is so couched in medical terms that the husband does not realize that she is describing the sexual experience she just had. Using language

¹⁴⁰ See *Richeut's* Samson for a similar boast.

¹⁴¹ At the same time, it can be depicted negatively as well, when a knight becomes too prideful. For example, Yvain forgets his vow to his wife when he becomes engrossed in winning tournaments.

as her ruse, she thus cheats on her husband with his unwitting consent and takes great pleasure in telling him about it. For *La dame escoillee*, the lesson is a much more violent and harsh one.

A knight has allowed his wife to take over the ruling of the household to the detriment of himself for she opposes all that he commands. They have a daughter with whom a young count falls in love by simply hearing about her beauty. While hunting one day, this count gets caught in a rainstorm. Seeing the knight's manor, and he goes to ask the knight for lodging. The knight hesitates, explaining that if he agrees to accommodate him, his wife would resist. Instead, he creates a ruse where he refuses to lodge the count within earshot of his wife. Of course, the wife, hearing this rejection, invites the knight to stay. At dinner, the count encounters the girl with whom he had fallen in love and offers to marry her. Knowing that if he agrees, the knight's wife would contradict his wish, the knight refuses. As he predicted his wife countermands his order and consents to the marriage. She offers the count a large dowry that he refuses, stating that he loves her for her beauty and not for her wealth. After the marriage ceremony, the knight advises his daughter to honor and respect her new husband; his wife recommends the opposite. On the return journey to his castle with his new wife, the count worries that his wife will behave as her mother and ponders how to avoid this. To show her his loathing of insolence, he demands impossible tasks of the knight's gifts to him, a horse and two dogs, and has them killed when they fail. When they arrive at his castle, the count orders a meal comprising several sauces for their marriage feast. Unfortunately, the countess did not take a lesson

from the slain animals because behind his back, his bride orders only garlic sauces. During the meal, the count notices the substitution and asks the cook to explain himself. He states that the countess had ordered the garlic sauces. For disobeying the count's orders, the cook is mutilated and sent from the castle. The count's ire then turns to his wife who is beaten so badly that she cannot get out of bed for three months. When the countess' mother visits, the count decides to put her in her place as well and to restore the authority to the knight. The count receives his mother-in-law very coldly, but welcomes very warmly his father-in-law. This behavior continues throughout the visit with the count placing his wife and mother-in-law at the servant's table for dinner. The next day, the count invites his father-in-law to hunt, but stays behind himself. He then asks his mother-in-law why she always contradicts her husband. When she responds that she is more intelligent than her husband, the count counters that the reason she behaves so is that she has male body parts. He thus performs a mock castration of the knight's wife, causing her so much trauma that she vows never to overstep her boundaries again.

Like many of the fabliaux, these two tales concern excess: the first of verbal extravagance and the second of extreme violence. One excess is used to usurp authority while the other is used to restore it. The thread, however, that links these two fabliaux together is misplaced pride, which is shown to be a male trait.

La saineresse

This fabliau occurs only in BN MS 837, a manuscript “[c]ontaining sixty-two fabliaux, by far the largest representation per manuscript ... it is the most widely consulted medieval manuscript since its compilation in the thirteenth century” (Eichmann and Duval *The French Fabliau B.N. M.S. 837* xiv). Noomen and Van den Boogaard also note that the manuscript “...en offre un texte homogène et d’une allure fort correcte. La copie a été exécutée avec soin et ne contient guère de négligences” (IV 305). Thus, with such an easily approachable text, it is no surprise that many read and critique this fabliau. Although a rather short tale (one hundred sixteen lines), *La saineresse* is heavy with double entendre and comedy. Exploiting the pleasure of specific yet ambiguous language and mocking a husband who does not participate in the comedy, this fabliau is a perfect example of Gravidal’s assertion that “...it is often the language, not the narrative, that tells the tale” (*Vilain and Courtois* 117). In this fabliau, the excess lies not only in the husband’s pride, but also in the wife’s language when describing her treatment by the *saineresse*.

The fabliau begins with no introduction, but dives right into the heart of the dispute:

D’un bourgeois vous acont la vie

Qui se vanta de grant folie:

Que fame nel porroit bouler (1-3)¹⁴²

¹⁴² “I will tell you the story of the life of bourgeois who foolishly bragged that a woman could never deceive him.”

The bourgeois has thus placed himself on a pedestal from which there is only one rather unpleasant way down. Subscribing to a hegemonic form of masculinity, he considers himself superior not only to his wife, but to all women by virtue of his gender. In addition, although the fabliau describes just one incident of the husband's boasting, the *fableor* indicates that such arrogance is an ongoing problem with this man when he points out that he "vous acont la vie"; he is not just relating one episode, but his entire life. It is therefore not surprising that his wife, who is fed up with his pretentiousness, vows to "le fera mençoncier" ("make him a liar") (7) and to put him in his place once and for all. Yet, interestingly enough, it is not a public humiliation that she seeks for him, but a private victory for herself. In her aspirations to depose her husband's hegemonic masculine ideas, the wife in this story reinforces Gaunt's observation that the main goal of the fabliaux is to reveal hierarchical classifications as unnatural and easily manipulated (235). Contrary to other fabliaux women who turn lies into truth, as in *Les perdris* and *Les tresces*, she seeks to prove her husband a liar.

Her opportunity arrives in the form of a male dressed as a female healer:

Ez vous un pautonier a l'uis,
Mout cointe et noble, et sambloit plus
Fame que homme la moitié,
Vestu d'un chainsse deliié,
D'une guimple bien safrene;e;
Et vint menant mout grant posnee:

Ventouse porte a ventouser (13-19)¹⁴³

Seeing the accoutrements of a woman, the husband does not look any further to identify this stranger; the clothes indicate to him that the person standing in front of him is his inferior.¹⁴⁴ Were he to examine the visitor more closely, he would discover that the person's gender is not so clearly defined, despite the affected mannerisms and dress. Of this medicine woman's dress, Noomen and Van den Boogaard note: "...les vêtements colorés au safran étaient de grand luxe. La mode des guimples jaunes était critiquée par les prédicateurs de l'époque, qui conseillaient aux femmes d'en abandonner le port aux juives et aux femmes publiques ... Ce détail ajoute une note piquante à la scène: le mari aurait dû être sur le qui-vive" (IV 431). The husband is thus given an indication that something could be amiss but does not catch the hint. Despite the delicate fabric of the healer's overgarment and the cupping accessories, the colored wimple, which would have been a luxury that any true healer could not easily afford, should be a dead giveaway that this person is not suitable company for his wife. The fact that this telltale sign escapes him indicates that he is not as astute as he claims and opens the door to his wife's subsequent adventures.

Indicating to the husband that his wife had summoned him/her, the healer tells the wife "Or me dites vostre plesir!" ("Now, tell me your pleasure!") (30).

The faux doctor does not ask what ails her or the reason for which he/she was

¹⁴³ "A very handsome and noble vagrant came to the house, but he looked more like a woman than a man, dressed in a loose dress with a saffron-colored wimple; and he had a presumptuous attitude: a bleeder carried bleeding cups."

¹⁴⁴ This confusion with gender identities recalls the ambiguous gender of Jean de Meun's Bel Accueil in *Le roman de la Rose*. We should also remember that Bel Accueil receives rather fabliauesque advice from La Vieille.

sent, but commands her to tell her pleasure. This simple phrase will have a much greater significance later in the fabliau when the wife literally tells her husband about the pleasure she has just received. But in its current context, it still has a double meaning. The husband understands that the fake healer is asking the wife what ails her whereas the wife understands the healer to ask what he/she can do to pleasure her. The wife responds in equally veiled language:

J'ai goute es rains mout merveillouse,
Et por ce que sui si goutouse,
M'estuet il fere un poi sainier (37-39)¹⁴⁵

In *The Comic Text*, Levy observes:

Although medically speaking, all of this is highly realistic in medieval terms (since gout was reckoned a disorder of the blood, cupping and bleeding would be the proper remedy for the lady), her words here are as equivocal as is the figure of the false physician, for ... the kidneys were considered in the Middle Ages to be the seat of sexual desire: so the lady has a mighty itch rather than real pain, and her desire for a good 'bleeding' sets up an extended double entendre that will occupy much of the rest of the fabliau (223).

As the pseudo doctor commanded, she states what will please her: a little sex.

This overabundance of frustration is obviously due to the fact that the bourgeois is

¹⁴⁵ "I have a great gout in my kidneys and it is for this reason that I am gouty, they will feel better after a bit of bleeding."

not fulfilling his husbandly duties. Although one may take her for the typical lusty wife of the fabliaux, I would beg to differ. She has obviously exercised some restraint in not cheating on him before. Moreover, her goal in sleeping with the fake healer is not necessarily to cuckold her husband, but more to prove him wrong. Still, if she is going to such trouble to make him a liar, she should at least take care of a problem caused by her husband's doing (or not doing).

The fabliau's description of the encounter between the false doctor and the wife is very brief, yet explicit, stating simply that "il l'a trois foiz foutue" ("He screwed her three times") (44). After the stranger has finished his task, they both return to the husband, the wife out of breath and the fake healer in a hurry to leave. Solberg notes:

Having fulfilled 'her' function in the tale, the doctor departs, but not before a brief conversation between the husband and the wife confirms what the tale's audience might have already inferred—the motivating force in this tale is not primarily sexual, but is, rather, economic. Debts incurred, whether monetary or psychological must be paid—and by those that owe them (119).

The husband pays for his imprudent boasting via the description of the wife's treatment. The account of the wife's activities is probably the most explicit in all of the fabliaux. One should remember that although the fabliaux frequently mention that sex occurred, it normally does not go into much detail. Although it is tempting to include the entire passage because it is so delicious, I will restrict myself to excerpts:

Sire, merci por amor Dé,
 Ja ai je esté trop travaillie!
 Si ne pooie estre sainie,
 Et m'a plus de cent cops ferue,
 Tant que je sui toute molue

 Et a chascune foiz m'assist
 Sor mes rains deus de ses peçons;
 Et me feroit uns cops si lons
 Toute me sui fet martirier,
 Et si ne poi onques sainier

 Et quant m'ot tant demartelee,
 Si m'a après ointes mes plaies,
 Qui mout par erent granz et laies

 L'oignement issoit d'un tuiel,
 Et si descendoit d'un forel
 D'une pel mout noire et hideuse,
 Mes mout par estoit savoreuse

(68-72, 76-80, 86-88, 93-96)¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ “Sir, thanks be to God, I have never been worked so much! I could not bleed so she hit more than a hundred times, so much that I am now soft ... And each time she placed on my kidneys two of her instruments; she struck me with such long blows that I was almost made a martyr, and I still would not

The above lines demonstrate well Schenck's assertion that in the fabliaux "[l]anguage is, in fact, the primary tool of the duper" (*The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception* 101). Also, as Brian Levy indicates, the symptoms and treatment the wife explains above are completely medically possible. However, because the audience is in on the joke, they know that medicine is not the subject matter here. Duval and Eichmann further note that "[t]he two highpoints of the fabliau, the cuckolding of the husband and the allegorizing of the event by the lady, are thus identically marked by a crescendo rhythm, mounting to a frenetic pace" (*Cuckolds, Clerics and Countrymen* 106).

In her description, she indicates how difficult it was to please her, mentioning the struggle three times, the same amount of times that she was pleased, creating a sort of ternary rhythm to her experience: "Si ne pooie estre sainie" (70), "C'onques sans en peüst issir" (74), "Et si ne poi onques sainier" (80). She had such a buildup of sexual frustration that the fake doctor had to go above and beyond the call of duty to attain his goal. Not only that, but as witnessed from the sample texts given above, she describes the events, euphemistically couched in medical terms, in such detail that little is left to the imagination. The report crosses over into the realm of pornography. Although the goal of the description is not to cause sexual arousal, the account is still typical of the male gaze upon women. The *fableor* (a male) wants the wife to enjoy the rough encounter because that is his fantasy, not the wife's; and the fact

bleed ... And after she had hammered me so, she applied a salve to my wounds which were deep and wide ... The salve came from a pipe and descended down a sheath of fur that was gross and black, but the salve still felt good."

that the act is accomplished under the nose of the her husband feeds even more into the male fantasy of his hypersexuality.

The husband, who congratulates his wife on her cure, does not understand his wife's double entendre. Brian Levy notes:

After this brilliantly obscene metamorphosis into a heroic surgical operation of the full coital act of penetration, vigorous intercourse and ejaculation, medical reality has become so interwoven with the fiction of the deceit that the deluded husband can do nothing but heartily approve his wife's treatment ... In this fabliau, which opens with a rash denial of deception, all is falsehood and mockery: physician, gender, illness, cure, terminology itself' (224).

Furthermore, the fabliau indicates that her wounds were large and wide; although this is an obvious reference to her pudendum, we should be aware that her psychological wound was rather large as well. The false healer helps her cure this injury by proving that her husband is a fool and making him a liar. Solberg observes: "...the wife's true pleasure comes in speaking openly to her husband. Given that he completely misses the point of her story, she ultimately fools him not by lying, but by telling the truth" (121). The fabliau itself states this detail:

Por tant le vout bien essayer:

Ja n'en fust païe a garant,

Se ne li contast maintenant (104-06)¹⁴⁷

For her satisfaction to be complete, the wife has to relate every detail of the pleasure she has enjoyed, the same pleasure offered by the healer on his arrival.

Although the *fableor* did not make his opinion known at the beginning of the tale, channeling Ovid, he does so at the end,:

Mes il n'est pas en cest païs

Cil qui tant soit de sens espris

Qui mie se peüst guetier,

Que fame nel puist engingnier,

Quant cele qui ot mal es rains

Boula son seignor premerains! (111-16)¹⁴⁸

His conclusion is that women are superior in fooling men and that no man should brag that he is above them in this way, thus overturning the husband's hegemonic view of masculinity: women *are* superior at duping. Yet, it is important to note that it is the husband's *superbia* that leads to this entire incident. It is his pride that leads to his downfall at the hands of a woman. And not only was he fooled by a woman, but he was fooled by a man dressed as a woman. It is as if feminine trappings make him stupid. I also believe that the last lines in the above passage refer to the Biblical Eve. After all, it was she who first tricked man into eating the forbidden fruit. And evidently, man has not learned his lesson because women are still duping him.

¹⁴⁷ "For though she had tested him, she did not feel victorious until she had told him of her encounter."

¹⁴⁸ "This country does not have, however, a man so intelligent, who, although he may pry, can never be tricked by a woman; for, she who had pain in her kidneys, tricked her husband first."

Proverbs 11.2 states: “Pride comes first; disgrace soon follows.” This is true for the husband whose *superbia* leads to his wife cuckolding him and subsequently telling him about it in detail. His arrogance, however, is such that it does not even occur to him that his wife has not only cuckolded him but also made him a liar. His pride blinds him to his surroundings. The wife thus proves hegemonic masculinity as a false construct. Yet Solberg believes: “Her victory could indeed be seen as hollow, because her act of subversion reinforces the medieval view of women as licentious and requiring strict control” (123). On one hand, I agree with her assessment, but on the other, I do not. As stated before, the wife has obviously exercised much restraint by not cuckolding her husband before this incident. It is not particularly sex that is her goal, but proving her husband wrong, and she does just that. Sex is simply a means to an end. Thus, her victory is not so hollow, for although she does feed into the misogynistic view that all females are deceitful, at the same time, she uses that view to her own ends. Just as the fake doctor commands, the wife tells her pleasure, much to the audience’s pleasure.

La dame escoillee

As we have seen, the fabliaux are often the site of contest and experiment when it comes to gender roles and *La dame escoillee*, an anonymous fabliau found in six different manuscripts,¹⁴⁹ and seeming bastard child of Judith Butler’s

¹⁴⁹ Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibl., Hamilton 257; Paris BN MSS 19152, 1593, 12603; Nottingham, University Library, Middleton L.M. 6; and Paris, Arsenal, 3114.

Gender Trouble, is no exception. As with many fabliaux, this tale seems at first to transgress the norm, but in the end, the male hegemonic order is restored. Indeed, as we have already established, fabliau humor is often derived from an imbalance of this order which is not really natural at all, but man-made. The feudal system, which encourages both masculine superiority and behavior, stands out as a shining example of this so-called natural order. But what exactly should we consider masculine? Connell is typical in stating that “[m]asculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’” (68). He further attests that “[i]n the semiotic opposition of masculinity and femininity, masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority.” (70). Thus, masculinity or masculine behavior can be defined as that which is not feminine or felt pertinent to women, such as submissiveness. Sometimes these roles are subject to reversal. Yet such an upset is not limited to the fabliaux: examples of such conduct can be found in both troubadour poetry with the third gender of *midons* and in romance with Lancelot’s submission to Guinevere. Romance, then, posits a view of women as temporarily more powerful than men when they are in love. However, the parodic *La dame escoillee* uses the fabliau to challenge the preconceived notion of masculinity versus femininity in order to provoke humor. Its author is a typical parodist: Kathryn Gravdal notes in *Vilain and Courtois*: “...in transgressing and distorting literary rules of social representation, the parodist makes light of the literary model, but also of the medieval mental habit of conceptualizing in terms of models, of encoding all signs with heavily determined meanings, social, linguistic and moral” (3). This fabliau not only violates the

feudal ideal of male dominance over women, but also the courtly love tradition that posits the reverse. Through a close reading of this text, I intend to examine the way in which gender, both literal and metaphorical, creates a horizon of expectation that is not met.

This fabliau begins as many do: with a misogynistic speech, warning men against courtly love's elevation of a lady to a superior station over her male admirer. Of courtly love, Michel Camille notes in his article, "Gothic Signs and the Surplus: The Kiss on the Cathedral:" "Courtly love is an ideology constructed ... out of the fragmented connotational authority of other systems, secular and spiritual. Its visual and verbal vocabulary is a self-conscious inversion, which, like all parody, draws attention to the inadequacy of the systems it has appropriated" (162).

The author of this fabliau suggests that courtly love does a grave injustice to men by encouraging them to worship a lady excessively.¹⁵⁰ If a man allows himself to be reduced to the status of a servant, rather than retaining that of a master, he will be dishonored. Instead of empowering women, one must discipline them and teach them that they must not show excessive pride (*enorguillir*) towards their lord. Nor must they try to reign, but instead cherish, love, obey and honor their lord. If a man cannot achieve this, he will be disgraced (11-16). It is important to note that *enorguillir* enfolds the concept of pride, the most severe of the seven deadly sins.

¹⁵⁰ See Richeut's questioning of Ovid in *Richeut*.

In his article “*La Male Dame, ou La Courtoise renversée*” Jean-Pierre Martin notes: “[u]ne femme dotée de vertus masculines les change automatiquement en vices, puisqu’elle les emploie à l’envers, contre l’autorité de l’homme” (77). Thus, when a lord raises his wife to the rank of master, the wife inadvertently falls victim to vice as well, and in the case of *La dame escoillee*, that vice is pride. In addition, the language of this warning focuses on four important words found in the text: *seignor*, *honir*, *deshonor* and *honte*, words that carry a strong feudal charge. Thus, although the courtly love conceit is a poetic expression of the feudal system, it threatens, in however temporary or delusional a fashion, the patriarchal hierarchy. In order to dismiss the idea that women could possibly have any rights over men and to illustrate the embarrassment that such a situation brings, the jongleur demonstrates the absurdity of the courtly love archetype in a more realistic setting by using its own conventions to turn the ideal in upon itself in his tale.

The jongleur starts his tale in a very similar fashion to many courtly romances: by establishing the hero’s worth.

Un riches hom jadis estoit

A qui grant richece apendoit:

Chevaliers ert, tint grant hennor (25-27)¹⁵¹

Hence, this knight has achieved great worldly success. Like Adam, however, his world is upset when he experiences a loss of his patriarchal power due to a woman whom he loves too much and marries. This love renders him powerless

¹⁵¹ “There once was a rich man to whom great wealth belonged: he was a knight who had much honor.”

and he concedes all of his rights as lord of a manor to his wife. However, the wife in this fabliau manages not only to dominate him, but also to make him so submissive that he becomes a sort of metaphorical female. By giving her his lordly power and becoming nothing but a meek entity roaming the manor, the knight has, in a sense, handed over his manhood. This is how the *dame* in the title of this fabliau becomes *coillee*, revealing her gender as behaviorally constructed. Judith Butler observes that “... ‘the body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (*Gender Trouble* 8). Thus, gender does not determine one’s role in society, but culture does; and in this case medieval cultural law dictates that the person who rules is male. In unmanning himself, the knight has manned his wife, turning her into an extremely disagreeable master of the household, a status that she does not merit, according to the jongleur. The wife, with the complicity of the knight, usurps the natural order, becoming a petty feudal lord whose whims rule her decisions.

After describing this complete reversal of gender roles in the knight’s house, the tale introduces a count on the opposite end of the spectrum. This man represents the quintessential bachelor: he is young, single, sensible and knowledgeable, and participates in manly activities such as hunting, much like the knight before marriage. He has a rather typically constructed medieval romance style of masculinity. These two opposites, emasculated male and *über* male meet: one day, while out hunting, the count and his entourage are chased by a storm to

the house of the knight. When the count requests lodging for the night, the knight replies that he does not dare:

...Por ma moillier,
Qu'a nul fuer ne velt otroier
Chose que face ne que die;
Desor moi a la seignorie,
De ma maison a la justice,
De trestot a la conmandise,
Si ne li chalt s'en ai enuie:
Ge ne i sui for chape a pluie,¹⁵²
A son bon fait, noient au mien,
De mon comant ne feroit rien (93-102)¹⁵³

Despite the humiliation of being subservient to his wife, he still does not wish to appear inhospitable. The knight, perhaps recognizing the ghost of his former self in the count, explains his situation. He wants the count to know that if it were in his power, he would be more than happy to lodge him and his men. In addition to having to expose his shameful predicament, the knight must behave as the misogynistic tradition says stereotypical woman do and create a ruse to trick the wife into allowing the count and his men to stay the night. Knowing that his wife

¹⁵² In the *Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux*, Noomen understands this line as such: "Elle ne tient compte de moi que quand cela lui convient" (VIII 349). He states that "L'emploi au figure de *chape a pluie* repose sur sa qualité d'objet qu'il est utile de posséder, mais qui n'a de valeur autre qu'utilitaire..." (VIII 349).

¹⁵³ "Because of my wife who at no cost wishes to agree with anything I say or do; she has over me lordly power and she exercises the power over the manor, she is completely in command. If she does not care for it, then I am in trouble. She does not pay me any attention unless it suits her; she does all for her benefit and not for mine; She will not listen to my command."

will countermand any order that he gives, the knight pretends to refuse lodging and sustenance to the count and his entourage within earshot of his wife. His subterfuge works, and the wife invites the knight and his men to stay the night and dine with them. Upon seeing the couple's daughter, the count falls in love with her and makes it known that he would like to marry her. With this simple request however, the poor knight's dishonor is furthered. In front of a man who will be his son-in-law and who should respect him, the wife makes it known to the count that the knight has no rights over his own daughter or over her dowry; it is she who will give both away. Yet, the count refuses the wife's offer of a dowry, stating that he already has enough wealth and that the only thing that he would like to add to it is a good wife. To prove his point, he recites the proverb: "Mout a qui bone feme prant/ Qui male prant, ne prant nient" (215-16).¹⁵⁴ Although the count relates this proverb in the context of his own situation, it also applies to the knight's marriage. Furthermore, when the knight offers the count the gifts of a horse and two hunting dogs, the count accepts them. In an effort to restore the knight's power, the count refuses to recognize the inverted hierarchy that has occurred in the knight's household, acknowledging only the male authority of the knight, and not the illegitimate power of the wife.

Before the newlyweds leave for the count's land, the wife takes her daughter aside and gives her advice on how to overcome her husband's authority:

Vers vostre seignor soiez fiere;

Pranez essample a vostre mere,

¹⁵⁴ "He who takes a good wife has much/ he who takes a bad one takes nothing."

Qui toz jors desdit vostre pere:
Ainz ne dist riens ne desdeïst,
Ne ne conmanda c'on feïst.
Se vos volez avoir henor,
Si desdites vostre seignor,
Metez l'arriere et vos avant,
Petit fait de son coumant:
S'ainsi faites, ma fille estrés,
Se nel faites, vos conparrez! (226-36)¹⁵⁵

White remarks that women's speech is an articulation of their sexual energy ("Sexual Language and Human Conflict in Old French Fabliaux" 197). In this case, the energy expressed by the wife's advice is a very masculine energy. She encourages aggression, rebellion, insolence and domination. If the daughter does not do as the wife has done, she will suffer greatly, such that she will not have the liberty to do as she wishes and will be subject to a man. By instructing her daughter to usurp the count's authority, she is encouraging her to take on masculine behavior that she perhaps has not exhibited before, even though she has witnessed it with her mother. After all, it is much more agreeable to be the oppressor than the oppressed.

¹⁵⁵ "Be proud towards your lord; follow your mother's example for she always contradicts your father: before he says anything, contradict it, let him make no order that you will carry out. If you want to be honored then contradict your lord, put him behind and yourself in front, make light of his order: if you do this, you will prove yourself worthy of being called my daughter, if you do not, you will suffer the consequences."

On the ride back to the count's estate, the count ponders the potential conduct of his new wife: he fears that she will be as proud as her mother. For although pride in a man is tolerated, in a woman it is considered a great vice. The count has accomplished much and is respected at his manor, and he does not want the introduction of his new wife to his household to sully his reputation. His fear evolves into a deep-seated anger that manifests itself in violence. To demonstrate to the countess that he does not tolerate impudence of any kind, he commands impossible things of the animals that her father offered as gifts, and when these animals do not follow his orders, he puts them to death. For example, the knight sees a hare and sends the two hunting dogs to snare it within three fields; when they bring back the rabbit after catching it in the fifth field, he decapitates them. Connell remarks: "[v]iolence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate" (84). The count's basis for male supremacy is not that he has earned his wife's respect and obedience, but that he can do her bodily harm if she does not bow to his command. Martin explains the count's excessive behavior: "...ce qui autorise l'excès des châtements, c'est l'énormité même du Monde à l'envers. La parodie de l'Autre Monde met ici en question le système même des valeurs courtoises" (76). The threat of bloodshed, however, does not dissuade his proud wife from disobeying his orders: at their reception banquet, the countess insists that only a strong garlic sauce be served, instead of the various savory sauces ordered by the count. The count's fears have been realized and his pride has been bruised: the countess is as arrogant as her mother. His

wife's insolence throws him into such a rage that he punishes the cook with dismemberment and banishment and then he beats the countess so badly that she is bedridden for three months.

When the countess' parents decide upon a visit, it is the knight's wife who goes against convention and announces herself. Upon their arrival, the count treats the knight's wife coldly, yet treats the knight with the utmost respect:

Li quens tient son seignor mout chier:
Delez lui l'assist hautement
Mout furent servi richement,
Mout ont bons mes et bons viez vins,
Et bons morez et clarez fins.
La fiere dame et li sien sis
Sont en un banc en loig assis;
Ne furent pas si bien servi:
Ce fist li quens tot por celi
Qui a son seignor ert contraire (414-23)¹⁵⁶

He refutes women's authority by embarrassing them, treating them as inferiors. Deeming herself a lord, the knight's wife does not receive the respect or the welcome that she thinks she deserves: she believes it should be she who is set at the head of the table and served the sumptuous meal rather than her husband. We should remember that one of the representations of pride on medieval cathedrals

¹⁵⁶ "The count held his lord very dear: he sat him in the place of honor next to himself, they were very richly served and they had a great amount of food and a wonderful old wines, good morels and fine clarets. The proud lady and her household were seated on a long bench; they were not so well served: the count did this on account of she who rebelled against her lord."

is a fallen monarch. The knight's wife, whose reign is not recognized in the count's house, could also be deemed a sort of deposed ruler. The count's siege upon her reign, however, is not complete.

The count devises a stratagem that will put this mere woman in her place once and for all and will dissuade his wife from ever challenging his authority again. He has a bull castrated and the testicles and blood brought to him in a barrel along with a very sharp razor. While the other men are out on a hunt, the count asks the knight's wife how she became so proud. She claims that her self-importance comes from the fact that she knows more than her husband. The count replies:

Dame, bien sai dont ce vos vient:

Ceste fiertez es rains vos tient,

Ge l'ai bien veü a vostre hueil

Que vos avez de nostre orgueil;

Vos avez coilles comme nos,

S'en est vostre cuers orgueilleous (465-70)¹⁵⁷

It is interesting to note that the count says that she has *our* pride, meaning masculine pride. He thus insinuates that pride is an acceptable trait in men as it is physically bound with their gender. He further claims that the wife's masculine behavior emanates from body parts that women are not normally supposed to

¹⁵⁷ "Lady, I know from where this comes: you hold this pride in your genitals, I have seen it in your eye that you have our pride; you have testicles like us, this is why you have an overly-proud heart."

possess. To prove his point and restore the patriarchal hierarchy to the knight's household, the count has his servants hold the knight's wife while he makes incisions on her buttocks. He then stealthily reaches into the barrel and takes out the bull's testicles and shows them to the wife, claiming that he has castrated her. Martin explains the count's choice of site for the wife's castration: "... la féminité se fixe exclusivement dans les fesses: c'est par là qu'on la punit et qu'on la rend à elle-même par l'extraction des organes virils" (77). It is interesting to note the inversion of courtly romance tradition in regards to the physical location of masculinity and femininity. In tales such as *Guigemar* by Marie de France et *Tristan et Iseult*, the hero sustains a wound to his thigh, where his masculinity resides. In order to be cured, he must travel to a far away land where the care of a woman restores his manhood. In the case of the knight's wife, she must travel to a far away land in order to be purged of vice. Because she no longer possesses the body parts that were the source of her male pride, the wife no longer has authority over her husband and must revert to the submissive role of the woman. Mary Jane Schenck notes that "...physical violence is a form of conflict resolution" ("Orality, Literacy, and the Law" 68) and for the count this brutality does resolve the conflict within the knight's household: the knight's wife is so traumatized by this act of physical violence and so greatly fears that the count will inflict more that she agrees that she has truly been castrated and will not longer behave as a male. By unmanning the wife, the count has essentially remanned the husband and restored the natural order.

Baldwin contends that “... a woman is simply an inverted man” (90). The count exploits this belief, pretending to amputate the male parts of a woman that trigger masculine behavior in order to right the inverted hierarchy in the knight’s household. For the count, who equates *orgueil* with *coilles*, gender is biologically determined. Desperately trying to maintain the patriarchal order, he uses brute force to stifle any possible lasting change. The count takes advantage of the fact that masculinity is socially constructed, determined by the manipulation of power, actions and language. This fabliau also reveals that pride really does come before a fall... but only if you are a woman.

Conclusion

In his Sermon I, Bernard de Clairvaux notes: “Cultivé, l’orgueilleux ne supporte pas d’égal. Habile «dans les affaires du monde», il voudrait être sans pareil” (67). Such is the case for both the husband in *La saineresse* and the count in *La dame escoillee*, who specifically cannot tolerate any women as an equal, let alone one who is superior to them. This fanaticism indicates a fear of losing their masculine power over women. Their pride will not allow them to accept the subservient role in the male/female relationship. Both fabliaux also show that *superbia* requires extreme measures to correct that result in some sort of fall from grace. These extreme measures are usually in the form of mutilation or violence against the female body. This misogynistic tendency indicates that the female body was considered the site of vice and chaos and the only way to correct this

aberration is to subject the female body to male authority. However, as we have seen, this tactic often winds up usurping the male authority even more.

In the fabliaux, misplaced pride leads to misadventure and hence humor for the audience. Moreover, as indicated by Aquinas, pride encourages other vices such as debauchery, discord and anger. Yet, despite their humorous nature, the fabliaux do in fact treat serious social concerns, such as marital problems and violence against women.¹⁵⁸ Lacy notes: “Fabliau characters spend a good deal of time in compromising positions and situations, and a number of the authors appear to have understood the comedic value of observation by a third person, who is witness to a humorous stance or action without always understanding its genesis and meaning” (“Subject to Object” 22). This third person could be either another fabliau character or the audience. In the case of *La saineresse* and *La dame escoillee*, the third person is the audience, who recognizes that, humor aside, the tales are intended as examples. Although intended as lessons in humility for a medieval audience, these lessons in modesty are not lost on the twenty-first century audience.

¹⁵⁸ See also *Le pescheor*, *Les perdris*, *Les quatre sohais*, *Connebert* and *Les tresces*.

Travesty, profanation and sacrilege are essential to the continuity of the sacred in society.

Michael Camille *Image on the Edge* p. 29

Conclusion

By approaching these thirteen representative fabliaux¹⁵⁹ in both similar and different manners to Nykrog, Lacy, Levy, Muscatine and Bloch, I hope to have expanded upon their insightful research by examining the body in the fabliaux in all of its incarnations and its implications rather than its obscenity. Demonstrating various incarnations of vice, these fabliaux disclose much about the milieu in which they were produced. First, in opposition to the vices in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and medieval art which suffer violent deaths at the hands of the virtues, the vices in the fabliaux almost always find themselves in the winning position. This does not mean, however, that we should consider them as antitheses of the *Psychomachia*. On the contrary, the *fableors* use the metaphorical images like those of the vices in Prudentius' work and transpose them onto a more relatable narrative setting for the medieval audience. Rather

¹⁵⁹ *Le moigne; Le pescheor de Pont seur Seine; Les perdris; Les trois dames de Paris; Les trois dames qui troverent un vit; Les quatre sohais Saint Martin; Le foteor; Richeut; L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides; Connebert; Les tresces; La sainereses; and La dame escoillee*

than presenting the triumph of the virtues over the vices, the fabliaux show only the battle. Not only does this provide comic relief from the portentous and censoring literature of the time but also it offers a strange sense of hope for the audience. Rather than rotting in hell, the vice-ridden fabliaux characters continue with their lives, some even prosper; thus despite any moral shortcomings one may have, there is always hope for salvation, as in *Le foteor*.

Furthermore, the fabliaux expose those who criticize and censure, i.e., priests, as just as full of vice as the lay people, if not more so. Thibodeaux reminds us that the reason for the clergy's indiscretions is that, after taking up the cloth, a man no longer feels manly and must act out to feel vindicated against his symbolic castration (390). The fabliaux thus paint a more accurate picture of a medieval priest who was perhaps not exactly prepared to give up certain aspects of secular life. This depiction, while vilifying the priest, also renders him more human and, possibly, even more accessible. In an effort to maintain order and impose its doctrines, the Church placed a great deal of emphasis on suppressing vice. Yet, as the fabliaux illustrate, and in particular *Le moigne*, vice is part of human nature and any effort to stifle one's nature only leads to a more extreme manifestation; thus according to the fabliaux, those who attempt to contain it are subject to ridicule. The fabliaux reject the tradition of condemnation and propose instead acceptance and sometimes even encouragement for he who is imbued with vice is infinitely more fun and more interesting. The battle between virtue and vice in literature and art becomes a battle between Church theory and its practice and actual practice, a fight that exposes the clergy as hypocritical. We should not

forget that often those who took orders were of noble descent, illustrating that corruption starts at the top. This is in stark contrast to romance, lyric and epic literature that shows nobles as the epitome of chivalry and virtue.

Second, although the Church purports that the body is the site of origin for vice, we should not forget that the body parts that are supposed to incite vice appear on religious objects such as the cathedral and pilgrim badges. Thus, if they are so evil, how does one justify their use as religious objects? Mellinkoff notes: “Twelfth- and thirteenth-century churches teem with sexual and scatological sculptures ... Exposed sexual organs were believed to generate protective power. The phallus and the vulva were utilized as remedies for driving away dark force, including demons. This explains why sculptures of male and female genitalia are so ubiquitous” (137). Therefore, the church teachings contradict traditional apotropaic motifs. It is then no surprise that the fabliaux, heavily influenced by its surroundings, both secular and religious, also display genitalia, not necessarily as protection from evil forces, but as a source of humor.

Third, the fabliaux prove that the more one attempts to maintain the patriarchy the more the system is usurped. Although the fabliaux most often present a hegemonic masculinity, they do not shy away from a semiotic one either, as we have seen in *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides* and *La dame escoillee*. However, this masculinity is proven artificial because it does not withstand any type of challenge. In addition, its legitimacy is subject to the female gaze: how can a man consider himself masculine if there is not a female to attest to his masculinity? The fabliau male does not accept that his masculinity

is established through deeds as in the romance, epic and lyric, but from his desirability to the other sex. Female lust thus determines masculinity, not gender or actions. These tales also demonstrate that men will give up their power to make themselves more desirable to females; however, such a strategy tends toward the opposite result, as in *Les quatre souhaits Saint Martin* and *La dame escoillee*. This phenomenon suggests that females are drawn to men who possess power and that they like to be dominated. In these instances, it is, of course, the male gaze fantasizing that women enjoy their submission. This, however, cannot be further from the truth, especially for fabliaux women themselves seek some sort of power for themselves within a system that is intent upon controlling them. The fabliaux construct to deconstruct; they set up a system based upon the norm and then show its faults. It is a sort of veiled rebellion without any actual revolt. Still, if the female determines masculinity, then the reverse could be said for femininity, at least on a superficial level.

Fourth, the fabliaux are a site for the battle of the sexes, even when one of the contenders is theoretically *in absentia*.¹⁶⁰ Although the fabliaux seem to indicate that this struggle is over who is more intelligent or more deceitful or more lustful, the actual point in dispute is power. Men want to retain their superior position over women, and women do not wish to submit. With the phallus as master-signifier and the feminine defined as lack (Connell 70), female lust for the male sex is transformed into female lust for power. This struggle for

¹⁶⁰ For example, *L'anel qui faisoit les vis grans et roides* and *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit*.

supremacy creates an environmental dissonance that is expressed in the various mutilations that both female and male bodies experience in the fabliaux.

Fifth, we also cannot deny the overwhelming sense of more than one point of view in these tales. For the fabliaux, there are actually three: the audience, the narrator and the other fabliaux characters. For example, a case of the gaze of the other fabliaux characters exists in *Connebert*, where Tiebaut attempts to rally his relatives to fight the offences of the priest, but they refuse out of fear of ecclesiastical judgment. This tale also exposes the shaky foundations of the patriarchal system by insinuating that one must at least give the illusion that the patriarchy is safe in the household or suffer ridicule, loss of status in the community and possibly monetary loss. Weakness in one area equals weakness in another. If a smith cannot control his wife, how could he possibly succeed in properly making a horseshoe or nail?

We find another such example in *Le moigne*, where a monk, due to his lust, is literally and metaphorically covered in shame when falling from his horse into a pit of mud.¹⁶¹ He is not only aggrieved for the welfare of his immortal soul but also for his image as an austere monk who controls the reins on any bodily need or want. This concern with the gaze of others reflects a concern with exposure of one's vulnerability to the outside world. Demonstrating vice or a lack of control over a situation opens one up to a host of other problems such as mockery, theft, loss of status or even condemnation to hell if others discover it.

¹⁶¹ We should remember that the image of pride in medieval art is that of a man falling off a horse.

Another, oftentimes more evident, point of view in the fabliaux is that of the narrator whose gaze is intimately tied to that of the audience, who is witness to these tales because the narrator hopes that they will learn a lesson from them, be it that women are lustful or that priests are lecherous. This masculine gaze controls the flow and presentation of the fabliau. He often intervenes to pass judgment, comment or bring something to attention so that the audience can make its own judgment. Still, more often than not, the narrator attempts to sway the opinion of the audience to his standpoint. For example, in *Richeut*, the narrator frequently inserts himself in the story to condemn Richeut, prostitutes and women in general. His fear and condemnation of women and prostitution especially are felt throughout the tale and in recounting it, he hopes to influence others, especially men. The narrator's gaze is made even more obvious in the morals that are frequently given at the end of some of the fabliaux. For example, at the end of *Le pescheor de pont seur Saine*, the narrator states:

Cil fablel nos raconte et dit

Que por la coille et por le vit

Tient la fame l'ome plus chier" (197-99)¹⁶²

Thus, just in case the audience did not get the message through the recounting of the fabliau, the narrator spells out his message specifically. In this case, the message is that women are lustful creatures and only want one thing from a man. Again, this is more of a fantasy of the male narrator than a reality. But if he can

¹⁶² "I recount and tell this fabliau so that you can see that women hold men dear due to their male body parts."

create just a hint of doubt in his male audience, then he has succeeded. Even for the narrator, the opinion of others matters. If they do not find his tale to their satisfaction, then they will not stay to hear his fabliaux and tip him. Thus, although the narrator may seem to state a firm opinion, it could be that he is just telling the audience what he thinks they want to hear in order to please them and earn more money. The misogyny of his fabliau may simply reflect the overwhelming misogyny of his Ovidian and clerically-influenced public. So one could say that the more misogynistic, the more materialistic the *fableor*.

On the other hand, there are some narrators who seem to sympathize or admire the women, despite the tale's misogynistic tendencies. Take for example the wife in *Les perdris*. Although the fabliau demonstrates that she is gluttonous, a trickster and, perhaps, even an adulteress, there seems to be a sort of appreciation for the way in which she tricks her husband and gets away with it. The same can be said for the wife in *La saineresse*, who does not lie to her husband at all, telling him everything about the tryst that she just had under his nose, but whose veiled language keeps her husband from completely understanding her message. One possible reason for this admiration is that the clerks identified with the woman's submissive status. Via the clever housewife, the clerks express their frustration with their position and the fantasy of winning over those who exploit them.

And finally, because they look like moral tales and because they use vice like moral tales, I assert that the fabliaux are simply more elaborate (and vulgar) exempla. My claim stems from three key fabliaux features: one, many of the

tales end with a moral; two, many end with the dominant order reestablished; and, three, many fabliaux are also considered exempla.¹⁶³ If one examines carefully the flow of the fabliau, one sees that despite the chaos, all returns back to order at the end. Through the outrageous guiding of vice and the constant shifting of the moral center, one is led back to virtue. Whereas the exempla recount tales of virtue to arrive at virtue, the fabliaux recount tales of vice to arrive at virtue. The end is the same; the means are completely different. Or are they? If one examines a few exempla, one finds the same themes: the adulterous wife, the incestuous mother, the greedy priest, the drinker's mass and the devil who tricks unwitting peasants into rendering their souls to him, to name a few. The duplication is not limited to exempla written in Latin but also occurs in those written in Old French. For example, *Le pacte des trois avertissements*¹⁶⁴ is known as *Du vilain qui donna son ame au deable* in the fabliaux corpus; *La femme qui graissa la patte son avocat* which is known as the fabliau, *La vieille qui oint la palme du chevalier*; *La vache au prêtre* known as the fabliau, *Brunain, la vache au prestre*. Although admittedly, these are some of the more tame fabliaux, these genre clones should not be ignored. The fabliaux exploit the narrative techniques of the exempla and have a similar aim to catch the attention of the audience. After all, tales of virtue are not that entertaining, but if one can catch the audience's attention with a tale of vice, one can then make the tale evolve into one of virtue. And, with a few exceptions, this is exactly what the fabliaux do. Even

¹⁶³ In Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones vulgares* alone, I find at least four that are fabliaux (CCLXXXVIII, CCXXXI, CCXXXVII, CXCI), not counting those with fabliauesque tendencies which are too numerous to list.

¹⁶⁴ See *Ci nous dit: Recueil d'exemples moraux*, volumes I and II for the Old French exempla mentioned.

the *foteor*, king of debauchery, ends his life in virtue. It is as if one must be purged of vice before one can accept virtue. In order to be truly virtuous, one must have lived the life of vice to experience firsthand its wicked ways; rather than rejecting vice, the fabliaux embrace it as a possible, but not always effective, pathway to virtue. They are thus negative exempla. For such notoriously scandalous tales, the fabliaux are extremely conservative with very few operating outside of the patriarchal norm to the end.¹⁶⁵ Although treated as texts *à part*, the fabliaux should actually be included with the more mainstream texts such as romance, epic and lyric.

¹⁶⁵ For example, *Richeut*.

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