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Women in Circulation: Tracing Women and Words in Medieval Literary Economies

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Women in Circulation: Tracing Women and Words in Medieval Literary Economies

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Dedication

For My Mother and Father

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Women in Circulation: Tracing Women and Words in Medieval Literary Economies

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The dissertation centers on representations of women in the genres of romance, pastourelle and fabliau and explores how female characters are often more than the formulaic renditions of a singular masculine view would have them be. I base my argument on instances of social and verbal influence possessed by female characters in genres that represent three distinct classes of medieval society. Although this study is by no means able to offer a thoroughly exhaustive consideration of all classes and statuses that women in the Middle Ages inhabited, the noble lady of the romance, the shepherdess of the pastourelle and the bourgeois women of the fabliau present important examples of medieval women. Furthermore, this dissertation considers the social influence of literary women in light of the historical and cultural trends that would have affected real women in the Middle Ages. In considering these different portrayals of female characters, I argue for a dynamic representation of women that exceeds a passive and rigid place in medieval literature, particularly one that is centered immovably in a mindset of misogyny. The varied faces of medieval women will not be the only the fragments of misogynistic representation, but a multiple and divided self that is powerful in its resistance to the limits of categorizations of gender. When these female characters speak, they do so not from the same mouth, but from an abundance of mouths. In direct opposition to a

constructed unity of representation, the feminine self is multiple and divided. In the fluid representation of women in medieval texts, even through the voices of their male authors, medieval women break through the reflective mirror to reveal glimpses of the feminine that is anything but marginal.

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Introduction

In the Old French romance *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion* written by Chrétien de Troyes in the late twelfth century, the audience is presented with a secondary female character whose name is not immediately revealed, but whose actions have a curious and important impact on the narrative. Referring to her at first only as *damoisele,* Chrétien takes great pains to describe the subtle influence her orchestrations have on the romance between the lovers Yvain and Laudine. When the author does reveal her name as Lunete, he does so only as a complement to the introduction of the knight Gauvain, who is companion to the knight Yvain, much as the *damoisele* is companion to her lady Laudine. Almost as if to deny her former effect on the narrative, Chrétien situates her firmly in a passive feminine role by constructing the binary of masculine sun and feminine moon. Lunete is an obvious reference to the moon, presented in direct contrast to the masculine sun by which her lover Gauvain is symbolized. And if Gauvain is characterized as the sun that illuminates the best of chivalry:

> Que de lui est tout autressi,
> Chevalerie enluminee
> Con li solaus, la matinee,
> Espant ses rains et clarté rent,
> Par tout les lieus ou il resplent (v.2404-2408)
>
> (For chivalry is enhanced by him just as when the morning sun sheds its rays abroad and lights all places where it shines.)[1]

then Lunete as his female counterpart is defined by her feminine traits of devotion and good reputation that are linked to the moon:

> Et de cheli refais la lune,
> Dont il ne puet, estre que une,

[1] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le chevalier au lion ou le romain d'Yvain*. Ed. David Hult (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994). English translation: Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances,* trans. William W. Comfort (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 1991).

De grant foy et de grant aÿe.
Et ne porroie dire mie,
Solement pour le lonc renon,
Mais pour che que Lunete ot non (v.2409 -2014)

(And I call her the moon, who cannot be otherwise because of her sense and courtesy. However, I call her so not only because of her good repute, but because her name is, in fact, Lunete).

When Chrétien asserts that Lunete is a woman of great constancy, this image of devotion is immediately colored by medieval conceptions of the mutability of the moon and it seems incredible that this figure could be defined as both constant and changeable.[2] The name also sits awkwardly on Lunete as her quasi-authorial agency is at odds with the author's move to situate her in a passive role. But Lunete is perfectly representative of the paradoxical nature of female characters in the literature of the French Middle Ages in that these literary representations of women are often grouped into such categories as lady, virgin or whore and yet often succeed in defying the limits of the role they are expected to inhabit. This can only speak to historical examples of medieval women who were doing exactly that.

[2] The link between feminine traits, including that of inconstancy, and the moon was an established trope carried from the Classical Age into the Middle Ages. As early as the seventh century, Isidore of Spain wrote in his *Etymologiae* on the topic of the moon and how it was linked to the feminine *menses*: "The *menses* consist of an overflow of women's blood. They are called 'menses' (*menstrua*) after the cycle of moonlight in which this flux regularly comes to pass." (Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 240) Isidore of Seville. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). It is perhaps unsurprising that the moon was also closely linked to madness; Isidore comments on how "common people call epileptics 'lunatics,' because they think that the insidious forces of demons follow them in accordance with the course of the moon" (Isidore, *Etymologies*, 111) and John Trevisa writing in the 14th century observed how certain types of madness were regulated by the lunar cycle. John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour et al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975-88) 1:175. Dante in his *Paradiso* wrote of the moon as the realm of the inconstant, where the waxing and waning of the moon is associated with inconstancy and exemplified by two women. The first shade he sees is Piccarda, who explains, "These are true substances you see, relegated here because of vows not fulfilled.'" Ronald L. Martinez, trans., *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 3: Paradiso* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011) 67. To stress point this Piccarda reiterates later in the *canso* "'This lot, which seems so humble, is given to us because our vows were neglected and in some respect unfulfilled.'" (Dante, *Paradiso*, 69) It is also interesting to note that only women are identified in the realm of Dante's inconstant moon, Piccarda Donati, a nun who was not true to her vows and Constance of Hauteville who was taken from the cloister to marry.

On the surface, Lunete is many things. Her name would suggest that she is a secondary female character destined to fade behind her male counterparts, or a representation of feminine passivity serving only to illuminate masculine dominance, or an observer and not an actor. But Lunete exceeds the limits of the role that her name would imply. And in contradicting her characterization as the inconstant woman, Lunete ironically reveals the difficulty of considering female characters from a static perspective, individually and where genre is concerned.

Genre plays an interesting part in shaping textual representations of women in the High Middle Ages, as well as in our own interpretations of these medieval women today. However, genre itself is problematic in the medieval context. Even if authors wrote within frameworks of vague categories and resulting generic expectations, our modern tendency to define genres in strictly defined terms results frequently in problematic groupings of medieval texts that inadequately convey the diversity of a vast and nebulous body of work.[3] Still, modern theory addressing the importance of genre in the construction of gender identities, specifically the work of Simon Gaunt, concludes that the construction of gender is important in "understanding the underlying ideology […] but none of these genres can be properly understood without taking its representation of gender into account."[4] If there is a link between gender and genre, it is by no means a fixed one and Gaunt concludes, "the texts […] do not treat gender as a rigid, immutable, or 'natural' phenomenon. The roles ascribed to men and women, the meanings attached to categories like 'masculine' and 'feminine' are not stable in Old French and medieval Occitan

[3] Paul Zumthor, *Histoire Littéraire de la France médiévale*. (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1981), 37-41. See also Alistair Fowler for a discussion of medieval genres: *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985) 142-147.
[4] Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17.

literature."[5] It is certainly difficult to separate the construction of gender from the genre in which it is found, particularly when medieval women are often defined by virtue of their role in society.

Women are categorized as Lady, Shepherdess, Wife, or Whore, to name a few, and thus have the potential to be perceived as nothing more than the role by which they are defined. It is difficult to escape such categories, particularly when they would seem to be inscribed into the very nature of genre in the Middle Ages.[6] As George Lakoff writes: "Categorization is not a matter to be taken lightly. There is nothing more basic than categorization to our thought, perception, action, and speech. Every time we see something as a *kind* of thing… we are categorizing."[7] Thus women in these medieval texts are often superficially understood as inhabiting a rigidly defined role. But to link rigid constructions of gender identity to genre would seem to conclude that genre itself is rigid in its parameters and this simply is not the case. Even as there is a necessary understanding that categorization exists and lends some structure to the creation and interpretation of a text, these categorizations, according to Derrida, are highly unstable. Derrida's theory on genre, particularly his idea that texts participate in genres, rather than belong to them, is particularly noteworthy. Within this framework of genre we can consider each representation of medieval women as contributing to and participating in a wider construction of feminine representation in medieval literature, rather than belonging to and thus being rigidly constrained by, the limits of a fixed idea of medieval women prescribed by genre. If, as Derrida claims, that the law of genre is an impossible one, and contains the "principle of contamination"[8] in that every moment of exception further contributes to redefine the category.

[5] Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 286.
[6] One need only consider the Pastourelle, a genre based purely on the construction of women in a particular role. While this role is obviously more nuanced than fixed it is certainly telling that such a categorization of women and genre are so closely linked.
[7] George, Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 5.
[8] Jacques Derrida and Avita Ronell, "The Laws of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7(1980): 57.

Wai Chee Dimock writes on the subject: "Genres have solid names, ontologized names. What these names designate, though, is not taxonomic classes of equal solidity but fields at once emerging and ephemeral, defined over and over again by new entries that are still being produced."[9] This perfectly describes women in medieval literature. Defined by solid names, they are yet ephemeral in their construction, with an incredible variety of historical factors informing their construction and the way in which they were and continue to be considered. Instead of considering gender as rigidly determined by genre, or even that genre influences gender without considering the reverse, I propose to explore the way in which these fictive medieval women redefine generic expectations in exceeding the roles assigned to them. As you will see, they can occupy surprising and unexpected places in the narrative as they move fluidly through the limits that genre would seem to assign them.

The dissertation centers on representations of women in the genres of romance, pastourelle and fabliau and explores how female characters are often more than the formulaic renditions of a singular masculine view would have them be. I will base my argument on instances of social and verbal influence possessed by female characters in genres that represent three distinct classes of medieval society. Although this study is by no means able to offer a thoroughly exhaustive consideration of all classes and statuses that women in the Middle Ages inhabited, the noble lady of the romance, the shepherdess of the pastourelle and the bourgeois women of the fabliau present important examples of medieval women. Furthermore, this dissertation considers the social influence of literary women in light of the historical and cultural trends that would have affected real women in the Middle Ages. In considering these different

[9] Wai Chee Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," *PMLA*, 122:5, Special Topic: Remapping Genre (Oct., 2007): 1379.

portrayals of female characters, I argue for a dynamic representation of women that exceeds a passive and rigid place in medieval literature, particularly one that is centered immovably in a mindset of misogyny. As Gaunt and others have explained, the genre of a text shapes a female character, with the elevated distance of the courtly lady, or the rustic allure of shepherdess, or even the unabashed lust of the lowly common wife. But in addressing representations of women from three distinct social situations in the Middle Ages that offer seemingly disparate experiences of the medieval woman, modern criticism often finds common thread in the marginalization of these figures. However, in considering these literary representations individually, it becomes clear that the medieval women in these texts exceed the expectations that their labels would confer. If the women found in these texts are varied in their representation, it speaks to the complex relationship authors had with concepts of the feminine, far beyond simple exaltation or debasement.

So much of modern theory, including feminist theory, focuses on the misogyny of medieval texts. This dissertation in no way refutes that dominant masculine discourses were the rule in medieval literature, nor yet denies the widespread violence against women and the paucity of social and judicial avenues available to women. But this can only be but one, albeit substantial, facet of the construction of women that is present in a body of work that is as varied as it is expansive. To look to the texts themselves is to discover a vast diversity of representation that cannot be explained by a single perspective. There is a diversity of representation of women found within every genre that suggests a medieval literary body constantly in dialogue with conceptions of the feminine. This interaction with the feminine is by no means limited to an exaltation of women, nor to their debasement. Instead, in these genres, I demonstrate that the

highest representations of women are no more uniform than portrayals of their rustic or poorly counterparts. And even as the genres would seem to present an array of strictly categorized versions of the medieval woman, the individual representations of these female characters are fascinating in their differences from one another. At every turn these literary women resist a too facile grouping, whether it be the cleverly outspoken maid from the romance, or the shadow of the courtly lady behind the eyes of the shepherdess, or even the quick cunning of the wife in the fabliau. This fluid and changing face of the medieval female character shows us that authors produced more than mere stereotypes in their otherwise highly masculine narratives.

The women in these texts defy effacement and do not sit quietly in the dark corners of these texts. In the story of Yvain, Lunete, perhaps in spite of her name, is portrayed to be anything but passive and through both her actions and her speech contributes actively to the progression of the narrative. Indeed, without her machinations the titular hero would never have met his lady fair, much less embarked on the adventures that would make him a knight of renown. Much like Lunete pushing the story of the two lovers along, women demonstrate that they can play an important role in texts that goes beyond the function of stock characters. This potential on the part of women to significantly influence the society around them is not only present within the texts of the Middle Ages. Indeed, it becomes clear that the social conditions of the historical medieval woman perpetuated such textual representations. Women were not without avenues of influence, even if it was at times peripheral to the official power held firmly in the hands of men. But if a woman was restricted from the overt structures of powers available to men, she could still attain a measure of social influence. This influence comes largely by means of her speech. When Lunete manipulates the lives of those around her, she does so

through spoken manipulation, in an obvious foil to the physical prowess exhibited by the knights of the tale. The clashes that occur between knights are unambiguous and open encounters that seek to determine the right to rule through might. But in the tale of Yvain, this masculine exertion of dominance is insufficient to bring about a rise to power and Yvain finds himself dependent on the words of Lunete to machinate his union to the wife of his fallen foe and thus establish his primacy in society. Lunete's subtle manipulations are a necessary component of his ability to circulate his renown and ensure his ascent in the ranks. This manner of influence is not unique to Lunete and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. I am particularly interested in how social and economic factors influenced gender and how these influences shaped women in both the historical and literary sense.

We have in Lunete a complicated figure that on the surface is presented in the strictest categorizations of feminine passivity and inconstancy. In breaking the mold of a static, effaced femininity to reveal a woman who is anything but generic, she challenges and redefines how genre considers the courtly lady in the romance. She carries in her name the very inconstancy of her own literary representation and as such paves the way for considering how generic categorizations are at work in the representation of medieval woman. For in the paradox of the figure of Lunete there is space to consider the instability of such classifications of genre and binary constructions of masculine and feminine roles. The ambiguity of Lunete's name is but a hint at the broader instability of the representation of women across literary genres, where they are anything but unified in their representation. In this way, I propose to challenge the idea that women in medieval texts are purely marginal, passive and effaced creatures that are born from a space of homogeneous male misogyny. I will argue that the truth is much more complex. Even

when denied access to official and public avenues of power, women in these texts are represented as actively interacting with their male counterparts, and even challenging traditional male arenas of control and influence. And bereft of the tradition avenues of physical confrontation that typify masculine interaction, women achieve their goals principally by means of speech alone. I would refer here to Irigaray when she begs the question "must the multiple nature of female desire and language be understood as the fragmentary, scattered remains of a raped or denied sexuality?"[10] This speaks to the heart of the representation of medieval women. The varied faces of medieval women will not be the only the fragments of misogynistic representation, but a multiple and divided self that is powerful in its resistance to the limits of categorizations of gender. When these female characters speak, they do so not from the same mouth, but from an abundance of mouths. In direct opposition to a constructed unity of representation, the feminine self is multiple and divided. In the fluid representation of women in medieval texts, even through the voices of their male authors, medieval women break through the reflective mirror to reveal glimpses of the feminine that is anything but marginal.

Misogyny and Economy: The Circulation of Women in the Middle Ages

If one is to consider medieval women from a historical perspective, it is important to address one of the most obvious aspects of their lives, that of misogyny. It is incontestable that women led hard lives and were often oppressed and exploited. They came second economically to their fathers, their husbands and their heirs and could expect inequality in laws and in practice.

[10] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 30.

They had no official political power, being barred from city councils and courts.[11] Poor and unmarried women of the working class in cities could expect lower wages and jobs in lower-paid industries and women's salaries were so low that many were required to practice prostitution, which opened them to more violence and health issues.[12] Married women in the working class fared better, if only by association with their husbands. In marriage, if a woman found some measure of power in the laws regarding consent, once inside the marriage she was expected to obey her husband and bend to his wishes.[13] Violence against women, rape in particular, was not uncommon, but neither was medieval culture indifferent to it.[14] It would seem that the Middle Ages were a harsh time for a woman to be alive and this is certainly an aspect of the period that has acknowledged many modern medievalists. Critical considerations of medieval women have often focused on the misogyny that surrounds representations. This misogyny is overtly manifested in scenes of violence towards women that are not uncommon in medieval texts, but feminist critique has also focused on subtler forms of misogyny, which is often identified in the economic construction of masculine social interactions that valorize masculine relationships while effacing the women who are ostensibly central to masculine discourses. While these women are considered essential to these interactions on the surface, it has been theorized that a

[11] Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Life in a Medieval City* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1965), 52-53.
[12] Sharon Farmer, "Down and Out and Female in Thirteenth-Century Paris" *The American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 354-355.
[13] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 64. In the twelfth century, in response to a number of marital scandals in royal families, most notably that of Philip I of France, the Christian Church found itself struggling with the concept of marriage, divorce and consent. Two works appeared at this time to address the problem, the *Concordia discordantium canonum* by Gratium, also known as Gratian's *Decretum* and Peter Lombard's *Sententiarum Libri IV* grappled with the theory of consent. Gratian concluded that there must be active, mutual consent and physical consummation. In Gratian's eyes consent was the essential variable in a marriage agreement. Lombard differed from Gratian's concept of consent in that physical consummation should not be a requirement and that the concept of *present consent* or a declaration of sorts must be uttered, without the need of formality or rites. Either way, both intellectuals agreed that consent was at the heart of the marital bond (Gies and Gies, *Life in a Medieval City*, 134-139).
[14] Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 1-2.

much more deep-seated misogyny plays out in the sublimation of the noble lady into an object of faceless masculine desire.

This sublimation takes place in the economic construction of the medieval woman, most apparent in the lyric tradition, where women, as the ostensible addressees in many examples of male-authored poetry, are the foundation for an economy of poetic production that circulates largely between men. Even when a particular poem is not addressed to the lady herself, the lady is always the subject of the poem, the object that circulates between men, its faceless and voiceless raison d'être. Despite her seemingly central role in lyric poetry and in the broader cultural ideal of 'courtly love', a growing number of critics have come to the conclusion that troubadour love lyric is not an expression of love addressed to a woman, but "a representation of a man, talking about himself or other men to a male audience"[15] and that women were deliberately excluded from the poetic representation of love; as an utterly masculine representation of love that clearly excludes any feminine participation her strictly cast role as love object excludes her from participating as an agent. In lyric poetry, as well as in other genres, female characters, or addressees, are what ground the very possibility of poetic production and communication between men, but in doing so, they seem to disappear in the process. Indeed, demonstrations of poetic prowess are not intended to impress the courtly lady, but rather other men, and any imagined relationships to women within the poems come secondary to

[15] Simon Gaunt, "The Poetry of Exclusion: A Feminist Reading of Some Troubadour Lyrics," *Modern Language Review* LXXXV (1990): 311. Julia Kristeva argues for a vanishing lover in her *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1983). E Jane Burns also argues for the transparent representations of women who function only as a fictive persona through which to express the identity of a poetic (masculine) voice in her article "The Man behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric" *Romance Notes* 25 (1985). Jean Charles Huchet argues for the non-person of the "elle" in troubadour lyric poetry in his text *L'amour discourtois: La "Fin'Amors" chez les premiers troubadours* (Paris: Bibliothèque Historique Privat, 1987).

relationships and comparisons with other men.[16] Guillaume, the Duke of Aquitaine, often regarded as the originator of the courtly love lyric, begins many of his poems with an address to his *companho,* or his male companions, and the poems themselves contain boastful comparisons of virility and other masculine attributes. Marcabru, another important troubadour poet of the twelfth century, often refers to other men in his poetry while boasting of his sexual and poetic prowess in loosely veiled terms and even imploring 'starlings' or 'nightingales' to act poetically as his messengers and fly away to sing his tale so that many others (presumably men) may hear of his exploits.

These examples abound in lyric poetry and one can imagine with little difficulty an ongoing exchange of masculine poetic production both within and without the text. Furthermore, this poetic production and the resulting communication, or circulation, can always, without exception, be imagined in economic terms. However, the 'economy' evoked is one that has little to do with monetary transactions; the material exchange of goods or money is far less important than that of poetic production and circulation and at the heart of troubadour literature is the struggle to gain *renommé* or honor, and recognition for the work accomplished. The poets exchange poems instead of real coin and pursue poetic recognition instead of monetary wealth. And at the heart of this exchange is the courtly lady.

As an object of exchange, she has been interpreted as a sort of coin, traded between men and reflecting back the value of the male poet who constructs and addresses her. Eugene Vance asserts:

[16] Gaunt, "Poetry of Exclusion," 314.

> Not only does Lunette reflect images of lovers back and forth between each other, but when she herself becomes an object of love for Gauvain, who is Yvain's closest friend, we are told that Gauvin's glory is like that of the sun itself, and that Lunette is the 'moon' of this cosmic couple – hence Gauvin's mirror […] In my eyes, Lunette looks and acts very much like a coin.[17]

This image of woman as a shiny coin, reflecting masculine value where she has none, describes the commodity that Luce Irigaray recognizes as the mirror of masculine value.[18] As such, she is the highly polished mirror image reflecting back masculine value, while holding no intrinsic value of her own. This female character thus takes on a dual role in lyric poetry; she is both the "gold standard," (in other words, the guarantor of value and meaning) and the object of exchange.

To pursue the image of woman as coin, I refer here to Marc Shell who discusses the visible substance of an exchange, or the *symbolon* of the transaction, referring to a piece of coin used in ancient Greece as a sort of down payment of trust between those who are engaged in the exchange. This token of agreement was necessary as a visible aspect to an exchange, in other words, to legitimize and cement the transaction between two men. Just as the *symbolon* is the witness to the exchange in ancient Greece, so too is the Lady a witness to the transaction of lyric poetry in medieval culture. Without her, there is no legitimacy to the exchange. It is interesting

[17] Eugene Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986): 55.

[18] Irigaray comments unambiguously about the function of a woman in a system of masculine exchange, designed to be a reflecting mirror in a masculine system of exchange that results in the fragmentation of feminine sexuality: "Must this multiplicity of female desire and female language be understood as shards, scattered remnants of a violated sexuality? A sexuality denied? The question has no simple answer. The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) "subject" to reflect himself, to copy himself. Moreover, the role of "femininity" is prescribed by this masculine specula(riza)tion and corresponds scarcely at all to woman's desire, which may be recovered only in secret, in hiding, with anxiety and guilt" (Irigaray, *This sex*, 30). Irigaray's reading of women in systems of masculine exchange aptly parallels the fragmentation of the medieval woman that commonly occurs in Old French texts. This fragmentation, the woman's circulation, constitutes the essence of her representation. Luce Irigaray *This sex which is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

to note that a unique aspect of the *symbolon* is that it is often a coin broken in half, whose worth is less monetary than symbolic. As Shell states:

> "*symbola* were often 'halves or corresponding pieces of a coin, which the contracting parties broke between them, each keeping one piece'. As a *symbolon*, the broken coin did not function as money, which derives its worth from the material of which it is made or which transactors suppose that it represents. Not itself one of the goods transferred, the coin as *symbolon* merely provided the necessary symbol of credit or trust. It was only the symbol of the contract."[19]

Just as the *symbolon* was an object, or token, used to institute relations between men, it is easy to apply the image of the broken coin to that of women who are fragmented in a similar manner. The lady herself is not the material object of transfer, which is to wit the poem exchanged between men. Instead she functions as an object whose value lies in what her body represents. And in that sense she is halved, broken in two, for each man to have a piece with which to cement the true transaction at hand, that of poetic production and circulation. This understanding of woman as broken coin also reflects the image of the splintered feminine self upon which Irigaray and other feminists have focused. In the context of trade, it would appear that all economies are masculine constructs wherein all exchange takes places between men and women who are bound as objects to be circulated endlessly among men in fractured form. Within these homosocial bonds, women become further fragmented as they assume a masculine identity the moment they speak and the moment they desire, for they do so only by way of masculine language and within structures of masculine exchange. It is an image fraught with a quality of violence. However, this understanding of a fragmented female subject also contains the implication of fluidity in the feminine figure, a fluidity that is useful as means of resisting the phallic unity. While acknowledging the violence of this feminine fragmentation, it is equally possible to concede resistance in the feminine figure in flux. She is neither one nor two, neither

[19] Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 33.

the phallus nor not the phallus, and thus it is impossible to contain her and repress her completely within the masculine exchange that would efface her completely.

If this image of the reflective woman as a blank shiny coin is provocative, it still does not adequately represent the historical economic conditions that shaped women's lives during the high Middle Ages. To cast women as the faceless object in masculine transaction is to ignore her actual role and condition in medieval society. If she certainly experienced periods of marginalization and misogyny, she also saw great leaps in opportunity. Furthermore, transactions in the Middle Ages were not always based on a system of coinage and thus the theory that a woman, or the idea of a woman, could be traded and circulated as easy as a medieval coin becomes problematic. To our modern sensibilities informed by a monetary economy, the image of the coin is a particularly satisfying one. Nevertheless, the analogy is somewhat anachronistic as it does not account for the historical lack of coins that was the norm in the tenth through the fifteenth centuries in Western Europe.[20] Far from a rigid and unchanging system of exchange that defined medieval economies, this period of medieval history saw an immense upheaval in the way in which people perceived the economic world around them. If a woman was an object of exchange between men, in this new and evolving world she could very well have exceeded her role as object that would limit her gender. The example of Lunete is appropriate here in that the *damoisele* is invested in the valorization of her male counterparts, but she does so actively and with greater investment in the circulation of honor at stake. In this way Lunete goes beyond the limits with which her own name would constrict her. Thus the fragmented coin of the medieval woman is perhaps better explained by a new and emerging system of barter and trade

[20] Carlo M. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy, 1000-1700* trans. Christopher Woodall (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 199.

that was emerging in city centers beginning in the eleventh century. In this system the images of medieval women are still fluid but have the potential to be more than shiny blank surfaces reflecting the value of men.

Previous to the eleventh century, Europe was made up of a system of rural microcosms in the form of manors characterized by political, social and economic isolation.[21] But between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, as a result of population growth and migration, urban populations began to grow as they experienced an influx of people from rural areas. This move can be attributed partially to the redistribution of property that took place, a redistribution that was largely due to a system of allodial ownership and partible inheritance that had prevailed previous to the eleventh century. Under the system of partible inheritance, property could and was distributed among multiple heirs, daughters and wives included.[22] Under this system husbands and wives could own their own estates and sell them without authorization from the other. Because much of this land was in the form of allods, or tracts of land and property not contained within the feudal structure but owned outright, once grand estates were rapidly fragmented and as a result many descendants of great families "sank into minor nobility."[23] This, paired with other changes in the form of technological innovation and an emerging credit system in which investments accumulated in saved wealth, led to changes in power structures that occurred largely within the growing cities. [24]

[21] Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution*, 144.
[22] Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1987), 123.
[23] Gies and Gies, *Marriage and the Family*, 124.
[24] Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution*, 146.

In this urban revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries every sector of social and economic life was altered. Cities saw the political and social triumph of the urban middle class and horizontal relationships of economic interdependence prevailed, in contrast with the vertical system of feudal hierarchy that had previously dominated medieval society.[25] This decline of the great families and estates in the Early Middle Ages that led to the social conditions that made the growth of the city possible also prompted the laws of primogeniture beginning in the eleventh century. This was primarily in an attempt to safeguard what inheritances remained but this had a pronounced impact on the family dynamic of aristocratic families where sudden shifts in control of resources marked the decline of the power of women to independently control properties.[26] Because it was in the interest of the family to consolidate authority to better support a single heir, the status of women was diminished and noblewomen found themselves increasingly dependent on their families.[27]

This shift in laws toward primogeniture would seem to indicate a dark moment in the condition of women in the Middle Ages but represents in fact only one of the many situations that a woman in the eleventh and twelfth centuries might find herself. If aristocratic women found themselves in a weakened social and economic position it was only during the natural lives of their husbands and heirs. Women in the higher ranks were still eligible to receive at least a third of their dowries on the death of their husbands, and were often rewarded more, giving them a measure of economic control of their lives once they were widowed.[28]Given the high mortality rate of medieval Europe, it was not uncommon for women to outlive their husbands

[25] Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution*, 148.
[26] Gies and Gies, *Marriage and the Family*, 128.
[27] Gies and Gies, *Marriage and the Family*, 132-134.
[28] Gies and Gies *Life in a Medieval Town*, 69.

and aristocratic widows rarely remarried. As such they were able to enjoy a remarkable degree of freedom in controlling their own estates.[29] This economic freedom, only available through widowhood in aristocratic circles, was more widely available to women in the working class that was emerging in city centers. Because lineage and extended families were becoming increasingly unimportant to the nuclear family that was becoming the standard in cities, women were often looked upon as business partners in their husbands' endeavors and enjoyed a level of economic collaboration that was unknown to the aristocracy.[30]

These examples of aristocratic and working class women in urban centers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries are but a sample of an incredible diversity of experience that was occurring during this period in history. The level of empowerment or marginalization of women in official and unofficial capacities varied widely from region to region. If these shifts in the economic and social statuses of women resulted in what Penny Gold identifies as a complexity of conflicting attitudes toward women, then the modern critic must move away from the idea of a fixed and immutable condition for them.[31] This complexity of medieval attitudes is mirrored in critical theory, and a proliferation of opinions continues to enrich modern study on the subject of the medieval woman. Critics struggle with the representation of women in light of the multitude of historical changes that were taking place, with many focusing on the economic conditions of women to then speculate on their status in medieval society. But in considering these incredible changes, it is important to understand that the circumstances surrounding these women were far from uniform and that this widespread diversity of experience resulted in equally complex

[29] Gies and Gies, *Marriage and the Family*, 150.
[30] Gies and Gies, *Marriage and the Family*, 150.
[31] Penny Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 145.

conceptions of the economic and a woman's place in this evolving system of exchange. Exchange as the medieval person would recognize it was neither uniform nor entirely stable, and like the rest of the social and political influences affecting the population, was highly variable from region to region. If critics have often approached medieval women in terms of a single economic trend that is purportedly the standard in the Middle Ages, in doing so they disregard the fact that exchange itself was an evolving concept in which new and important players in the form the emerging bourgeoisie would begin to play an important part. This is especially significant for the consideration of women in that the rising working class of women saw social and economic equality that noble women had seemed to lose in the movement toward primogeniture.

The critical perception that seeks to identify the misogyny of the Middle Ages and to confront head on the negative portrayal of medieval women has unwittingly stripped these female characters of the wealth of historical and cultural influences that inform her literary representation and rendered her static. It is certainly important to acknowledge the extent to which female characters are caught up in masculine economies, and might be said, in fact, to be inseparable from the very discursive construction of the "economic" in Old French texts. Indeed, a large part of feminist theory concerning medieval literature has approached female characters from critical points of view reliant on economic terminology. However, as indispensable as the economic is to understanding the status of women in Old French literary texts, one of the limitations with framing a feminist study using economic terms is that all too often female characters are only construed in such a way that they become, in a sense, invisible as soon as they are defined in relation to the masculine economies (literary and otherwise) that sustain

them. When she takes her place as the mediator that substantiates masculine worth, the female character becomes an object that critics often describe as effaced, and some go so far as to note how she "disappears" within a text.[32] In this way, the female character is reduced to the exchange itself, destined to enable and enhance a system that circulates her body but unable to make any qualitative mark on the exchange into which she is written.

For this reason, I argue that these medieval women, while grounding the exchange upon which medieval literary economies are based, cannot be considered only in terms of pure economic exchange. Indeed, the works themselves suggest as much. When considering the female characters in various medieval genres, we see examples of women who exceed their economic roles and who resist critical readings that reduce them to objects of exchange. To understand the way in which female characters exceed their economic roles it is necessary to understand how different theories of the economic apply to these female characters. If we consider the female character in a strictly economic light, in Marxian terms, for example, she becomes a fetish-object that, in being exchanged, manifests only the power of the masculine phallus. It is necessary then to move beyond a purely Marxian consideration of economy to that of Pierre Bourdieu, who focuses on social economies and the distribution of cultural capital within these economies. When considering female characters from the point of view of social economies, we see that their position as object is no longer quite so rigidly defined as a passive and effaced counterpoint to an active and visible masculine subject. As an object of exchange,

[32] Jean Charles Huchet argues for the non-person of the "elle" in troubadour lyric poetry in his book *L'amour discourtois: La "Fin'Amors" chez les premiers troubadours* (Paris: Bibliothèque Historique Privat, 1987) and Julia Kristeva argues for a vanishing lover in her *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1983). E Jane Burns also argues for the transparent representations of women who function only as a fictive persona through which to express the identity of a poetic (masculine) voice in her article "The Man behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric" in *Romance Notes* 25 (1985).

within Bourdieu's theories of social economies, the female character is still able to accumulate some measure of cultural capital for herself, even as she is circulated among men. To take this theory even further, as a character speaking and interacting with her male counterparts, the fictive medieval lady can be seen entering the medieval economy as a player in her own right.

Thus, when considering the potential cultural capital that is available to a female character, she can no longer be considered in economic terms that reduce her to a mechanism of exchange. This new approach to the figures of women found within masculine economies, literary or otherwise, helps explain some of the characters in Old French literature who resist the more rigorously structuralist, Marxian interpretations of women circulating in seemingly masculine dominated economies. Once a more active textual presence is posited for the fictive medieval woman, she is able to move from a static place in masculine exchange to occupy a dramatically more ambivalent and less deterministic position: that of a speaking, acting character with a stake in the narrative. This feminine resistance occurs at the textual level, but carries important historical implications as well.

It is this ambivalence that has made medieval women the topic of discussion in feminist and other critical theory. And if medieval thought links the mutability of the moon to the perceived inconstancy of women, perhaps we might link this mutability to the ever shifting position of female characters. This link manifests in a multitude of representations that constitute the often conflicting but always provocative image of the female character in medieval literature. To return to the figure of Lunete, one must consider the inconstancy signaled by her name as both a prison and as an opening to a multiplicity of feminine embodiments and feminine forms of

agency. This complicated version of the feminine reflects the historical reality of medieval women and as much as Lunete is informed by genre, so too does she vocally participate and contribute to the construction of the feminine in the genre of the romance.

Powerful Words: Speaking Women and Social Capital

Critics have often pointed to specific historical instances of economic empowerment or disempowerment to inform theories about medieval attitudes towards women, referring to laws concerning inheritance and proprietorship that often spoke unambiguously as to the rights of wives, widows and heirs, both male and female. [33] Nevertheless, the fluctuating economic status of medieval woman reveals the impossibility of approaching the medieval woman from a single perspective, even if this perception might be attributed to certain literary representations of women that focus on the anxiety-inducing image of an economically powerful woman.[34] But in conceding the precarious economic power of women, considerations of strong representations of women necessarily open a path of inquiry for other potential means of empowerment. When a medieval woman was unable to gather 'economic capital' in the truest sense, was it possible at all for her to acquire other means of capital? I will argue that this is indeed the case of these

[33] For further reading on the interaction of women with medieval law, see Noël James Menuge's anthology, *Medieval Women and the Law* ed. Noël James Menuge (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000). For historical examples of the lives of women in medieval Europe, as well as a compilation of laws that referred specifically to women, see Emilie Amt's *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York: Rutledge, 1993). Amt presents laws from the Middle Ages alongside letters, written predominantly by women, to reveal an authentic picture of the "real" life of medieval women at different levels of society. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage discuss sexual practices, including the topics of marriage and prostitution, in canonic law in their book *Sexual Practices & The Medieval Church* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994).

[34] Notable examples of this do exist in the fabliau where representations of economically powerful women are often portrayed as in possession of, quite literally, a devastating power of castration. This embodiment of male anxiety at its most basic levels is unambiguous on the surface of these texts and it is necessary to delve further into the material to ascertain the effect of these images. Refer to Chapter Three in the dissertation to see a full discussion.

female literary figures, much like the historical women that inspired them. If women were excluded from political spheres, they could still "play political roles, often with distinction."[35] Such examples as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne, to name only two of many, wielded considerable influence in their political and social circles.[36] But even if women were not in such positions of visible political influence as these historical women whose personal endeavors were recorded, the multiple faces of all medieval women are inscribed into every text that speaks of women or casts a female character in its narrative. Other notable examples of women with a broad range of influence were women writers. Marie de France, Héloïse d'Argenteuil of Abelard and Héloïse fame, and Christine de Pizan are several examples of French women writers who were widely read in their time. Marie de France's lais were popular enough that they were read by those in the courts and translated into Old Norse, Middle English, Middle High German, Italian and Latin. [37] Christine de Pizan's works were "not only highly acclaimed by her French contemporaries but were translated into English at the request of Henry VII."[38] These women are seen influencing the people around them and the narratives within which they find themselves, often without economic capital or official avenues of power. It is precisely the

[35] Gies and Gies *Life in a Medieval Town*, 54.
[36] Gies and Gies *Life in a Medieval Town*, 54. See also Ralph V. Turner on Eleanor of Aquitaine. He presents the medieval queen as a considerable force in the world of politics in the Middle Ages: "Her lifespan of eighty years encapsulates many great moments of medieval history to which she had to adapt herself as her circumstances rapidly changed. The part that Eleanor was called to play mutated almost every decade." Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 3. Indeed, as heiress to a vast duchy and married young to King Louis of France, Eleanor would take the role of his chief councilor. When their marriage dissolved in scandal she married Henry of Anjou who would become Henry II, King of England during their marriage. After surviving another tumultuous relationship with her second husband, she would go on to play "an important political role in the reigns of her two surviving sons, Richard Lionheart and John Lackland." (Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 2). While Eleanor of Aquitaine was the most visible and famous, perhaps even notorious woman of her time, she demonstrates the ability of a woman to shape the world around her even from the exterior of official political structures.
[37] Katharina M. Wilson, "Introduction," *Medieval Women Writers* ed. Katharina Wilson et al. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), vii.
[38] Wilson, "Introduction," viii.

various alternative means of influence that medieval women wielded that I will explore in evoking the theory of social and cultural capital.

According to Bourdieu, alternate kinds of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) would be impossible to sustain without a certain investment on the part of the players.[39] As John B. Thompson elucidates in his introduction to Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power*, "all participants must believe in the game they are playing, and in the value of what is at stake in the struggles they are waging […] The conduct of struggle within a field, whether a conflict over the distribution of wealth or over the value or a work of art, always presupposes a fundamental accord or complicity on the part of those who participate in the struggle."[40] Thus if the medieval woman was represented in literature as having the potential for social, cultural or symbolic gain, it was only because she was historically perceived as being able to do so, based on examples of women living in the Middle Ages and the legal, religious and economic considerations that pertained explicitly and specifically to her. This perception is reflected in medieval attitudes that would have allowed changes in the status of medieval women to occur in the first place. Even if historical instances validating these perceptions were isolated, the economic and legal empowerment of women points to medieval attitudes that would have not only recognized instances of economically powerful women but would have also been receptive to them. This recognition of the power of medieval women also speaks to other forms of feminine empowerment that would have manifested in less public spheres.

[39] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 14-15.
[40] John B. Thompson, introduction to *Language and Symbolic Power*, by Pierre Bourdieu (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 14.

This is particularly important when considering the role of the female character in medieval literature, as any capital that she might gain can only exist as capital because the characters surrounding her in the narrative, but also the author who writes her and the audience who reads her are able to imagine it as such. In other words, and to apply the exchange of capital to the tale of *Yvain*, a knight in the court of King Arthur would be unable to acquire and then profit from symbolic capital, which in this instance would be chivalric honor, if the other knights of the court, and the populace surrounding the court, did not participate and were not invested in a system of belief that recognized this honor. A knight's valorous actions and chivalric code would hold no meaning for one whose beliefs did not accept this symbolic capital and thus the knight would be unable to profit from actions geared toward the gain of this kind of capital. Furthermore, without being born into a habitus in which the perception of such a social economy existed, there would be no incentive to gain honor, nor would there even be an inherent understanding of the necessity to do so. And because these dispositions are ingrained into the very fabric of the character of an individual, they act on these dispositions even when they find themselves outside of the habitus that instilled them with those selfsame dispositions. The knights of the court travelling abroad are honor-bound to uphold the principles that govern them from birth, principles that are inculcated in the very fabric of courtly life.

If this constitutes the exchange of chivalric symbolic capital from within the narrative, it is important to determine how historical perspectives external to the narrative would have exerted pressure on representations within a text. In considering attitudes of author and audience, it stands to reason that the symbolic exchange that profited the medieval lady would only have occurred if the author could imagine it occurring and the audience could accept representations

of medieval women becoming empowered. Even if the eleventh century saw a decrease in the power of inheritance, this did not preclude women from the domains of economic and social influence entirely. As previously discussed, a vibrant city life contributed to the nascent equality of bourgeois wives in their husbands' businesses and high mortality rates often left widowed women in control of their deceased husbands' estates. These phenomena would have been widespread enough to make an impression on the medieval mind, including those of authors constructing fictional women in their narratives.

The medieval women written into these stories would be unable to acquire or profit from symbolic capital if they were not inspired by an environment that could and did perceive her as capable of not only navigating such symbolic transactions, but also able to use these transactions to her advantage. The decisions and words and movements of the female character in the medieval narrative are not only recognized as being the legitimate and appropriate actions of an agent seeking some form of profit in the interactions and transactions she is involved in, but are also recognized as being a source of profit and potential empowerment for the female characters themselves. Thus the figure of the medieval woman could not hope to exceed a role as pure object of masculine exchange unless the social order in which she was engaged in allowed her to behave in such a way.

Bourdieu also recognizes the possibility for women to engage in the struggle for symbolic profit, or distinction, in their use of language. His interpretation of feminine linguistic utterances may be problematic from a feminist perspective[41], but it is useful to apply his theories

[41] Bourdieu's insistence on feminine docility in a masculine dominated discourse based on the division of sexual labor is but on example of a larger theory of social order that is often a point of contention with feminists who find

on language to seek feminine agency in speech, even if it is within a masculine dominated discourse. If Bourdieu does not challenge male dominance in social orders, and in fact attributes the possibility of the feminine speech act to masculine dominance,[42] he does allow for the possibility of a female agency where linguistic utterances are concerned and even posits the potential for symbolic profit in the form of cultural capital. It is the very division of labor between the sexes that drives women to seek social mobility by means of language, and for this reason they are inclined and in fact able to acquire linguistic competences.

Bourdieu's theory on the symbolic power of speech specifies that "the constitution of a linguistic market creates the conditions for an objective competition in and through which the legitimate competence can function as linguistic capital, producing a *profit of distinction* on the occasion of each social exchange."[43] Linguistic exchange is thus also an economic exchange in which a symbolic relation of power is established between a speaker, who is endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer, or receiver of the utterances. This exchange is capable

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his studies of gender, while at times useful, to rely too heavily on binary structuralism with an androcentric perspective and an overreliance on the doxic order of gender relations. For a more complete discussion on Bourdieu at work in feminist theory see Anne Witz, "Anamnesis and amnesis in Bourdieu's work: The case for a feminist anamnesis," *The Sociological Review, Special Issue: Feminism After Bourdieu* (2005): 211-223, Jo-Anne Dillabough, "Class, culture and the 'predicaments of masculine domination': encountering Pierre Bourdieu," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 25 (2004): 489-506, Toril Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture," *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 1017-1049.

[42] Bourdieu identifies a "docility" in women when it comes to adopting "legitimate language" to the dominant discourses, as women are restricted to an acquisition of capital in the market of symbolic goods (Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 50). He goes on to assert that women, "destined, by the division of labor between the sexes, to seek social mobility through their capacity for symbolic production and consumption, they are even more inclined to invest in the acquisition of legitimate competences." (Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 83) That is to say, women are well-versed in the masculine system of exchange that defines their speech production as it is necessarily through submission to this system of symbolic acquisition that they can hope to attain some measure of symbolic capital. While I subscribe to Bourdieu's ideas of the entrenchment of women in masculine modes of symbolic production, particularly in submission to the dominant discourses of "legitimate speech" I would suggest that this submission holds the possibility for a feminine reappropriation of these same speech acts. When a woman speaks, even if her words constitute participation in masculine dominated constructions of linguistic exchange, she is inserting a feminine subjectivity into the prevailing and dominant discourse, an act that subtly resists being passively determined by masculine speech.

[43] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 55.

of generating symbolic profit, and utterances can be understood as 'signs of wealth' and 'signs of authority', to be evaluated and appreciated, and believed and obeyed, respectively.[44] Far from pure communication, language often functions as the pursuit of symbolic profit, or distinction. Thus, whenever the character of a medieval woman speaks in a text, regardless of her words, she enters into a struggle for linguistic dominance that has very real consequences on the world around her. Even if holding nothing of value in a strictly monetary sense, the medieval woman still has at her disposal a means of generating symbolic profit. When a female character such as Lunete, from Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, speaks with another individual in the text, be it a male or female speaker, there is an unmistakable effort to gain some kind of influence or authority in every word. Because Lunete speaks and because her suggestions are followed, she is operating at a legitimate and appropriate level of symbolic production and her utterances must be considered an example of linguistic competence that will result in accumulation of symbolic capital. The symbolic capital in this case is an acknowledgement of her wit and cleverness and in the realization of her goal, that of uniting Yvain and Laudine in marriage. Lunete not only speaks as an active individual vying for symbolic linguistic accumulation, but ultimately acts as catalyst for the action of the romance.

Authors and the Importance of Perspective

For all that the moments of her empowerment, economic and otherwise, were subtle and perhaps fleeting, these moments have informed literary representations that are symptomatic of a changing historical perspective. This would most certainly have produced reactions of uncertainty and no doubt fear and anxiety as well, but there is the case for a greater ambivalence

[44] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 66.

in medieval considerations of women that suggests a greater range of attitudes. This complexity of reactions to the medieval woman is certainly indicative of a society in full dialogue with a range of perceptions surround medieval women. Reading medieval attitudes towards women as continuum rather than a fixed idealization of the feminine paves the way for a less deterministic reading of female characters in medieval texts. At the intersection of debased misogyny and abstracted idealization, the medieval woman finds herself at a moment in history when attitudes toward the feminine were in constant flux. And at the heart of these constantly changing attitudes, it can be argued that a medieval reader may have been able to imagine positive feminine influence and voice in Old French texts, even if the effect of such had to be tempered or disavowed elsewhere.

To further explore the idea of influence and the possibility of feminine agency, I will refer here to the work of Jane Burns and her interpretation of the role of women in medieval texts. Burns defines a method of actively reading the possibility of resistance in the liminal space that exists between a more traditional reading of prescribed feminine objectivity in medieval texts and an alternate reading of possible feminine subjectivity.[45] It is precisely in these spaces where women can be found actively speaking that the reader is presented with moments of female influence and empowerment outside the traditional masculine avenues of control and legitimacy that still have an important impact on the surround society. It is precisely in these liminal spaces that the cultural capital of women can become significant. For if it can be argued that a female character is active and engaged in masculine structures of exchange, it follows that a medieval reader would have been able to recognize and admit a greater verbal and economic

[45] Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

agency for women. It is in this way that the potential for a feminine subjectivity becomes possible. Rather than directly opposing a masculine subjectivity, female characters can be shown as having a subjectivity that is recognized as distinctly feminine, and a subjectivity that can be recognized by those who read her.

But how does this resistance manifest in the text and how can it be read as such? And to what end? Jane Burns argues for a feminine subjectivity that arises through 'bodytalk', or the doubled discourse that arises from speech emitted from the female body. Her research carefully extracts instances of feminine resistance to literary norms contained within the fabliau and the romance, and shows how, even when written by men, female literary characters subtly challenge the unity of the phallus with the multiplicity of their sex or resist their total inscription into courtly codes of silence and passivity. Burns is for the most part interested in listening to the bodies of women speak, and what happens when they do. So what happens when women speak? It is true that in most cases when women in the medieval text speak, there is a masculine voice who must speak through her, who must represent her voice in order to appropriate and to silence.[46]

As tempting as it might be to speculate on the 'feminism' of Chrétien de Troyes,[47] it is impossible to read any medieval author as having feminist intentions and so any reading of feminine voice in a medieval text must be done carefully. The question thus arises: how can women speak? From the place of object of exchange, from the marginalized and distant space of

[46] Shoshana Felman. "Review: Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 4.
[47] Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," 50-51. Vance states that in *Erec et Enide*, when Enide is almost forced into marriage with the Count of Oringle, Chrétien rejects this older concept of marriage based on coercion or the right of a man to claim a woman. Vance recognizes this as Chrétien's move to favor consent as the only valid criterion of marriage. This apparent feminism however is but a trend of its time as canon laws addressing marriage were evolving to valorize consent over coercion.

the feminine Other? Jane Burns argues that for the female character this shift to discourse outside of the phallogocentric structure can happen only partially, incompletely; the female voice is necessarily multiple and fractured, an embodiment of the fluid and multiple representation of feminine sexuality proposed by Irigaray. Because women speak with the voice of a masculine author, and thus through dominant cultural discourse, it cannot be assumed that their voices are only informed by an internalized system of masculine fantasy completely lacking in complex historical context. Furthermore, it cannot be presupposed that all male authors would have assumed a fully patriarchal voice. Some may have had a feminine identification that would produce an authorial position more closely aligned to the feminine. Thus, it is also dangerous to assume that a feminine subjectivity is completely absent from representations of women in these texts.

Female characters within Old French texts must be considered more than simply conduits for male-male relationships, and one way to account for this irreducibility is to consider how female characters are largely the products of medieval male authors. When producing representations of women, does the male author simply reproduce misogyny that he himself is witness to? Or beyond a purely mimetic representation, must the male author be considered in a psychoanalytic light in which representations of women are ciphers of fear and desire? In texts such as *Yvain*, a careful reading can demonstrate that neither category can fully account for these representations. The character of Lunete comes once more to the forefront here, and as Jean Frappier states in his analysis of the characters of the romance, Lunete is above all Chrétien's creation. Her psychological rendering in the text is one that manifests as a character who finds pleasure in the artistic maneuvering of the two lovers Yvain and Laudine: " elle […] trouve un

plaisir d'artiste à ourdir ses ruses et à corser le spectacle pour son propre divertissement."[48] Frappier identifies Lunete as the brilliant character whose representation is most near to Chrétien's own identity as author. In this case, the author identifying as feminine would seem to imply that female characters are not as effaced or as invisible as feminist theory often calls for. If a masculine author imagines a female character that has the power to create with some measure of artistic empowerment, she must be read as exceeding her role of as courtly lady and thus exceeding her role as conduit for masculine relationships. The question becomes then, in these texts when women are represented as empowered beings, how to understand their representations without fully prescribing to theories of castration anxiety on the part of a male author. While the theory of castration anxiety is a useful and important way in which to consider themes of medieval masculine views toward women, this anxiety does not fully explain their representation in Old French texts. It is thus necessary to pursue a less reductive approach to female medieval characters, one that does not assume that women are always at the interior of masculine exchange as object. Based on Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, without a set of dispositions on the part of the author that allowed him to envisage the medieval woman as rising above the level of object of exchange, there would be no representations of women that defy objectification.

Conclusions

This dissertation does not argue against the fact that structures of masculine domination are predominant in medieval literature or even that the real medieval woman can hope to hold

[48] Jean Frappier, *Etude sur Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris : Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1969), 127.

some kind of inherent feminine power through which she prevails against her male counterparts and reverses the effects of masculine domination in their entirety. Rather, in this instance, my goal has been to understand these structures as they exist and to then look further into the condition of the medieval woman and read there a possibility of what Jane Burns did in her book *Bodytalk*, that is, "constructing gender on different terms."[49] Just as Burns cautions, it is not the aim of this dissertation to either fully subscribe to existing ideas of masculine domination and subjectivity, nor to "thoroughly repudiate the culturally constructed female"[50] but rather to interpret gender, whose variations are endless in their constructions and contradictions,[51] in a different and more fluid light. I would like to push harder against the culturally constructed female and, without doing too much violence to the original medieval texts, identify a gender identity that has traces within the texts themselves and finds its source in historical medieval women. The goal of this dissertation is to consider how genre affects constructions of gender, but in turn how representations of gender render unstable the very limits that would define them. Above all, this is a discussion of how women in these medieval texts exceed the gender roles assigned to them and resist the marginalization and objectification. To this end I concentrate not only on the medieval woman's words and the possibility of finding traces of true historical experience therein, but to also consider their words as actions and to envisage a possible agency as a characteristic of feminine subjectivity in the medieval text.

Most important for my research is the theory of objectified cultural capital and what it means for a possible feminine resistance to the dominant masculine economies because it is

[49] Burns, *Bodytalk* , 6.
[50] Burns, *Bodytalk* , 18.
[51] Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16 (1990): 130-131.

critical that we read medieval women beyond the limitations of their place as object, as conduit, as medium of exchange. Irigaray explains the way in which women are marginalized in terms of oppositions, in which man and woman are aligned on opposing binary poles. The association of the masculine with reason, activity and subjectivity is contrasted with the association of the feminine with emotion, passivity and objectivity. When the masculine subject speaks, he affirms his existence. In her silence is a feminine object validated. As object of masculine desire and as object of masculine exchange, woman can have no claim to desire, for this would remove her from her position as object to that of subject. This means that the passive object cannot actively desire and still be an object, but if she cannot desire, she is unable to extricate herself from the commerce of herself. The solution would seem to be a complete excision from masculine phallogocentric structures (i.e. structures of exchange, or masculine economies). But this is a difficult solution that requires not only a reinvention of social structures, but also that of language itself. If removing herself completely from the phallogocentric structure of exchange is an impossible task, the question must be asked if there is the possibility of a rereading of feminine agency, both economic and verbal.

The chapters that follow present an exploration of how representations of women vary from genre to genre and how these generic differences impact their interactions not only with their male counterparts, but also with the world into which they are written. I have chosen to look at speaking, acting women of the courtly romance, pastourelle and fabliau. This progression of these chapters is deliberate as I intend to trace the variation of representations from the highest of courtly registers to the lowest in the sexually charged fabliau. In each genre I consider texts in which there are speaking women who are central to the narrative. Beginning with the romance,

where idealized representations of the noble lady are the stuff of Arthurian legend, the focus will be on two Arthurian romances, *Le Chevalier au Lion* and *Erec et Enide*. In these two romances we find examples of women speaking and acting within prescribed structures of King Arthur's court. Female characters such as Lunete and Enide provide examples of women speaking and acting in ways that are often surprising as they step outside of traditional roles of silence and passivity. Women in the romances, particularly those set in the high courts, participate in economies of masculine value in ways that are at once subtle and yet central to the structure of the courts. In a setting where honor and chivalry are the currency that can determine and define a knight, women are the arbiters of exchange that give meaning to a knight's *renommé,* while also resisting a masculine system of exchange that would cast them as passive objects of exchange. In negotiating and circulating masculine worth in the courts, these women reveal that the representation of a speaking woman that actively engages in the structures of symbolic exchange. The representation of the courtly lady is most sensitive to examples of women exerting active and public power in the Middle Ages. The romance responds to the influences of and reactions to such figures as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne whose visible power would have impressed indelibly on the medieval mind.

I continue with the genre of the pastourelle, which, I argue, contains a deep-seated masculine response to the idealization of the courtly lady. In the poems of the pastourelle, the knight rides out to escape the constructed system of symbolic goods in which his value is tied irrevocably to his interactions with the courtly lady. In moving beyond the city walls and beyond the knowing gaze of the speaking lady, the knight seeks the simple pleasures of peasant life and love. However, even as he rides away from the court, he cannot escape the lady (and it is implied

he cannot escape the system of symbolic exchange that determines his worth) as she is revealed in the doubled image of the lowly rustic shepherdess. The knight's interactions with the shepherdess are the material of the pastourelle, in which he stages his response to the figure of the medieval woman. In a genre that is deceptively uniform in theme, the knight's interaction with the shepherdess reveals an incredibly diversity of content that speaks to fluctuating notions of what constitutes the feminine. This diversity is demonstrated in the shepherdess's many voices that can resist or acquiesce, or berate or tease the knight.

I conclude with the fabliau, a genre that contains the most divergent representations of medieval women as well as the lowest register of literary representations of women. These farcical, scatological and overwhelmingly sexual tales are some of the most provocative examples of medieval literature for the unapologetically explicit depictions of the carnality of the gendered body. I focus on these texts, not only for the sexually active and dominant representations of women, but also because in many examples of the fabliau there are strong speaking women enter into economic encounters with men, and actively participate in the exchange that takes place. The women figure not as objects being exchanged, but are suddenly recognized as actors participating in and advancing the exchange. These women speak, act and pursue their desires in an active way that is not always represented in the shadow of misogyny. Indeed, the low register of the fabliau seems to reveal opportunities for women who are judged not only for their gender, but on their ability to speak cleverly and demonstrate their intellect and wit.

Whether subtly or palpably present, more than the passive object and more than the site of medieval misogyny, these female characters present instances of masculine negotiation with a changing and developing feminine presence in medieval life, a negotiation that reveals a complex range of medieval attitudes toward women. The way in which male authors respond to historical changes in the status of women manifests in the often ambiguous representation of women in both positive and negative lights and I would argue that there is the possibility for a reparative feminist reading even in the most misogynistic of representations of women. This reading must come with an unambiguous recognition of these moments of misogyny in order to assess them within the context of a less deterministic reading of medieval women. Above all, these medieval texts represent an incredible range of attitudes that inform a varied and constantly evolving concept of the feminine. In considering all of her representations, there is the possibility to read the literary medieval woman as the distillation of a panoply of historical influences and attitudes. Far from being defined by a strict dichotomy of male power and female passivity, medieval women are the invention of a medieval world that contains in its imagination representations that embody both masculine dominance and the possibility of feminine resistance. More than just resisting the phallic unity, female characters reveal an unending dialogue concerning what constitutes the feminine in the medieval mind.

Chapter One

The Voluble Ladies of King Arthur's Court

Introduction

I begin my consideration of representations of medieval women with the medieval courtly romance, perhaps one of the best known genres in medieval literature. These stories of love and chivalry have captivated a modern audience as much they did a medieval one, for the themes of love, honor and tragedy that remain potent to this day. In the works of Chrétien de Troyes, arguably some of the most popular romances of the twelfth century, the audience is presented with the Arthurian court, where the figures of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere reign over a vibrant gathering of knights. The knights of the romance typically emerge at the forefront of these tales and as they gallivant across the countryside, while their ladies fair are considered on the periphery of the narrative. Traditionally, in contemplating these romances, the place of the lady is considered at best secondary to the feats and exploits of the knight and she is subject to the whims of a society dominated by masculine codes of conduct. Against the backdrop of the Arthurian court, there appears to be little room for women beyond the presence of the always ambiguous figure of Guinevere,[52] and the knights of the court revel together in constant

[52] The figure of Guinevere holds an ambiguous place in Chrétien's romances, shifting from a portrait of courtly inspiration in *Erec et Enide* to one more nuanced by the adultery she is so often associated with, as a sexually charged figure. Her libidinous portrait is suggested in *Yvain,ou le chevalier au lion* when it is implied that she has exhausted the king sexually to the point that he cannot perform his masculine duty and join his knights as they swap tales of valor. This image of the erotically charged Queen is confirmed in Chrétien's *Lancelot*, a romance that presents the tale of the adulterous love between Guinevere and Lancelot, a well-known theme in the Arthurian culture. Peter Noble discusses the variations of her representation in Chrétien's romances and concludes that the variation is due to external conflict on the part of his patroness, Marie de Champagne. "The Character of Guinevere in the Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes" in *Lancelot and Guinevere : a casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters **(**New York: Garland, 1996): 201. This illicit sexuality is further suggested in Marie de France's *lais* where most notably in the tale of *Lanval*, the Queen is presented as a jealous woman who, when rejected by Lanval, accuses him

masculine camaraderie while their ladies fade against displays of valor designed to reinforce and strengthen the homosocial bonds of the knights.

But if one considers more closely the romances themselves, it becomes apparent that the ladies of the court do not fade so easily into the background and are at times essential to the narrative. I introduced this dissertation with the figure of Lunete, an intelligent and vocal example of a medieval lady in the romance, and it is examples such as these that make the romance so compelling. The deeds of the knight and his place in the court mean little without the lady; he engages in heroic feats to win her over and then fights for her love against all odds. But even beyond this role of masculine valorization, the reader is presented with examples of female characters that are central to the progression of the narrative itself. Lunete is a powerful illustration of a literary woman speaking and acting beyond the limits of an objectified vessel of masculine valor, but she is not the only example of an active feminine presence in the romance of *Yvain*. She is joined by other women, both named and anonymous, that inhabit this masculine world. These women might be examples of noble women but they are hardly figures cast from the same mold. Lunete is markedly different from Laudine, the woman she serves, and both are distinct from Queen Guinevere, whose presence bookends the action of the romance. Each of these women play a distinct and important role in the narrative and are not the marginal and effaced creatures of a misogynistic system of courtly love that can only disregard or tremble at their influential role in the courtly setting.

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first of having no desire for women, and then in front of the court accuses him of shaming her. Jeanne Wathelet-Willem explains this negative portrayal of Guinevere in "Le Personnage de Guenièvre chez Marie de France." Marche Romane 13 (1963): 119–31 where he attributes her destructive and illicit behavior to previous Celtic representations.

In considering the individual roles of Guinevere, Lunete and Laudine, I will address the way in which genre is at work in constructing these courtly women in order to demonstrate how they succeed in breaking through the limits and limitations of their roles and how they are seen interacting with conceptions of the feminine in the romance genre. In her complexity the literary courtly lady informs her audience that she is a product of her time. If she is treated with ambiguity, it is because she inhabits a tenuous and varying position in a changing world. At the core of their representations, these women speak with voices informed by a complex medieval perspective of women, and I would argue that in their voices it is possible to identify a female agency that suggests that these courtly ladies are informed by historical perspectives of real medieval women.

As much as misogyny did constitute a large part of the medieval attitude toward women, the evolution of theoretical, economic and cultural trends at work in the twelfth century Middle Ages can leave little room for doubt that any interpretation of medieval women must take into consideration a multitude of conflicting and constantly evolving attitudes. In a new world of unprecedented considerations of the individual, the medieval lady is found at a curious intersection of powerful cultural forces. For every instance of misogyny she encounters, there are conflicting historical examples of an active feminine presence in political, economic and social spheres. These women were not marginalized figures on the periphery of changing societies, but fully invested players who would not have gone unnoticed by a male-dominated society. While sometimes at the mercy of fluctuating trends of renewed subjugation and disenfranchisement, these women resulted in textual representations that give important insight into a masculine consciousness in constant dialogue with the concepts of the feminine. The romances of Chrétien

de Troyes in particular present a particularly compelling moment in medieval history when definitions of the masculine were suddenly construed in terms of courtly relationships to noble women. I would argue that these women contain within their representations a medieval culture in dialogue with itself as to the new and emerging concepts of the self and the individual. These representations, far from being static images of distanced, monstrous women, are the result of evolving and constantly fluctuating notions of the feminine in the Middle Ages. Thus any reading of these literary women must be more nuanced in its approach and consider their interpretation through a less deterministic lens.

Genre and the Construction of the Courtly Lady

The status of the women in Chrétien de Troyes' romances has been long debated in critical works, and much ink has been spilled debating whether these women were empowered or denigrated, coveted or dismissed. To situate the figure of the medieval lady of the courtly romance in this long history of critical study it is important to establish the paradoxical and often contradictory places a woman holds in the court of King Arthur. The usual impressions that superficially emerge from the study of women of this medieval genre are impressions of dramatic love stories set against the framework of a splendid court where heroic knights and elegant noblewomen interact. These images come to us through the lens of history that has seized upon the theme of courtly love, a now much debated notion that informs the way in which medieval women were and continue to be considered. But as courtly love continues to be defined and redefined, the women of romance occupy a dramatically ambivalent space.

The genre of the romance necessarily defines the courtly lady in a complementary position to the knight to whom she is linked. Wai Chee Dimock asserts that, "far from being a neat catalogue of what exists and what is to come, genres are a vexed attempt to deal with material that might or might not fit into that catalogue."[53] This assessment is compelling when considering the courtly lady because as much as authors and critics alike attempt to identify her role as marginal, passive and objectified, the courtly ladies of the romance constantly challenge the limits of the roles assigned to them and ultimately have as much of an impact on the construction of genre as genre has on their own construction. This is most apparent in the complex way in which courtly love is dissected and categorized. Such notable theorists as Gaston Paris, Georges Duby and C.S. Lewis have grappled with the concept of courtly love and how it applies to medieval women, only to have to create exceptions when a succession of female characters defy the rigid structure of the system of love. Critics have had to concede that most romances don't have all the necessary components of courtly love, mostly because the strict parameters are difficult to follow. The genre of the romance, I would argue, is in actuality the medieval attempt to "deal with" the range of positively disparate examples of historical medieval women that would have influenced their understanding of women and their roles in courtly society and politics.

Chrétien, writing in the court of Champagne, would certainly have been witness to the importance of Marie de Champagne, particularly in the absence of her husband, Henry I, as he departed on pilgrimage. She would first rule the county in the absence of her husband, and later,

[53] Dimock, "Genres as Fields of Knowledge," 1383.

after his death, would act as regent for two of her sons, Henry II and Thibault III.[54] As regent, she "ruled vigorously and alone" and engaged in all the activities of a ruler: "She received petitions, arbitrated disputes, made benefactions to the church, confirmed private transactions, received homages, confiscated fiefs, and granted new ones."[55] She would have provided Chrétien with the example of a powerful woman who successfully ruled for long periods of time in the absence of her husband and the minorities of her sons. As his patroness, she would provide the author the means to write his romances. This paired with the increasing presence of women as fiefholders in Champagne could very well have informed the presence of powerful, politically and socially active women in the romances of Chrétien, women not bound entirely to their secondary roles as wives and daughters.

It is interesting then, to note how modern criticism has interpreted the women of Chrétien's romances. Simon Gaunt defines genre directly in terms of gender, where the "differentiation of the male individual and the concomitant problem of otherness"[56] manifests in distinct generic approaches to representations of interactions between men and women. Gaunt posits that the genre of the more historical *chanson de geste* represents a construction of masculine identity in terms of relationships with other men, while the construction of the hero in the romance is defined in relation to women and the exchange of women. In much of criticism, the female character is considered only in her role as a marginal element in the construction of male fantasy, male misogyny, or masculine bonds.

[54] Theodore Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne, 1100-1300* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 24.
[55] Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 24.
[56] Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 73.

As such, the rosy image of perfect courtly love gives way to considerations of the medieval lady as a demanding woman wielding capricious power over a love-sick knight. It is undeniable that one potent response to female power would have been one of reactionary misogyny. But this does not account for a surprising amount of theoretical focus on medieval misogyny, to the exclusion of anything else. The critics themselves have sometimes indulged in an overly reductive stereotyping of the fictive characters they are studying. Philippe Ménard comments coyly on the fickle nature of Laudine, the epitomical lady, "N'est-elle pas femme? Ne montre-t-elle pas la mobilité de son cœur ?"[57] To this rather unenthusiastic point of view, we must also add that of Jean Frappier, who comments on the *orgueil* or pride, of the lady in her dealings with the knight,[58] as well as Slavoj Zizek who situates the Lady as someone who subjects the knight to "senseless, outrageous, impossible, arbitrary, capricious ordeals."[59] Each, in considering the interaction of lady and knight in the realm of courtly love, concedes a sort of power the lady holds over the knight, but all seem to conclude that this power is senseless, selfish, and even potentially monstrous. While admitting the position of authority that the lady holds over the knight, there is an implicit judgment, with varying degrees of condemnation, in regards to the power these women possess and the manner in which they wield it. Zizek offers the works of Lacan[60] to explain this terrible, inhuman representation of the Lady as a sublimation of poetic creation. This Lacanian subversion of the idealized Lady into a figure imbued with an "uncanny, monstrous character"[61] relegates her to a place of Otherness, where she functions as "a mirror onto which the subject projects his narcissistic ideal."[62] Zizek would then consider the

[57] Philippe Ménard, "Les rires et les sourires dans le roman du *Chevalier au lion*" *Du Chrétien de Troyes au 'Tristan en Prose'* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1999), 19.
[58] Frappier, *Étude sur Yvain, ou Le chevalier au lion, de Chrétien de Troyes,* 46.
[59] Slavoj Zizek, "Courtly Love, or Woman as Thing" in *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (London: Verso, 1994), 94.
[60] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge 1992), 149.
[61] Zizek, "Courtly Love," 90.
[62] Zizek, "Courtly Love," 90.

courtly lady as devoid of historical context, where she is merely a construct of the poet's creative process, and an empty vessel that exists only to reflect masculine creativity and worth.

This Othering of medieval women finds its source in the economic construction of the courtly lady. In his study of the status of women in the genre of troubadour poetry Jean-Charles Huchet adds to this vein of criticism that views the lady as an empty reflective vessel. Huchet evokes the highly masculine nature of social rapports in medieval culture, relationships are chiefly between men, where women necessarily fade into the background in a society determined and sustained by men, relegating women to mere social currency to be exchanged in a masculine economy of worth: "Les femmes sont ainsi appelées à circuler. Et cette circulation peut se réduire à sa plus simple expression : au don d'une femme par un homme (le frère, le père ou le seigneur) à un autre homme."[63] Huchet's work is highly evocative of Eve Sedgewick's text *Between Men : English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* which offers a feminist perspective of this valorization of male bonds to the exclusion of women. These texts offer insight into the culture of romantic literature, in particular the setting of the Arthurian court and the knights that live, love and do battle within its courtly construct. It is then unsurprising, as the perception of the distanced, ambiguous and potentially monstrous figure of the literary medieval lady becomes prominent, that critical approaches have reduced these women to faceless objects of circulation.[64] This trend in critical theory would then seem to maintain that medieval women

[63] Huchet, *L'amour discourtois*, 20.
[64] Julia Kristeva argues for a vanishing lover in her *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1983). E Jane Burns also argues for the transparent representations of women who function only as a fictive persona through which to express the identity of a poetic (masculine) voice in her article "The Man behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric" *Romance Notes* 25 (1985). I have previously referenced Jean Charles Huchet's article that argues for the non-person of the "elle" in troubadour lyric poetry in his text *L'amour discourtois: La "Fin'Amors" chez les premiers troubadours* (Paris: Bibliothèque Historique Privat, 1987)

of the romance mattered little in the face of the homosocial bonds between knights and that the women themselves included little in the way of historical representations medieval women.

To support this multitude of theories on the preeminence of male bonds is Duby's consideration of the importance of male relationships for the medieval man, even in the context of courtly love:

> Dans cette société militaire, l'amour courtois ne fut-il pas en vérité un amour d'hommes? Je donnerais volontiers au moins une portion de réponse: servant son épouse, c'était, j'en suis persuade, l'amour du prince que les jeunes voulaient gagner, s'appliquant, se pliant, se courbant.[65]

It is absolutely essential to recognize the importance and even the predominance of masculine bonds, but there has been a curious tendency to focus on the historical actualities of medieval men, while minimalizing or discounting the role their female counterparts played.[66] While much of modern criticism points to this or that point in history to justify a certain point, many point to unequivocal instances of the absolute status of medieval women that deny the complexity of this historical period.

These considerations of the roles of medieval men and women in courtly love and romance in a greater historical context brings us to Eugene Vance's vision of women, Lunete in particular, as objects of exchange, units of currency in the courtly tradition. Vance explains that this circulation of women fits into the larger schema of mercantilist discourse that pervaded courtly tradition in the twelfth century; he readily superimposes the new bourgeois attitudes on

[65] Georges Duby, *Mâle Moyen Age: De l'amour et autres essais* (Paris: Editions Flammarion), 82.
[66] Judith Bennett points to this willful ignorance in the case of David Knowles' exclusion of nuns in his study of English monasticism, an absence that was readily challenged by Eileen Powers in her text *Medieval English Nunneries* that considered a wealth of information from various archives. Judith Bennett, "Medievalism and Feminism," *Studying Medieval Women*, ed. Nancy Partner et al. (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1993): 23-24.

top of the old courtly traditions, stating "the *fictive* errant knight of romance is strikingly similar to the *real* travelling merchant as a new and important person in the social horizon."[67] Vance's notions of mercantilism and trade are useful when considering the cultural changes that were occurring at in twelfth century France, and it is useful to analyze Chrétien's romances in terms of currency and agency, but this analysis of the courtly woman circulates her into near invisibility. Indeed, feminist criticism has made much of this effacement of the literary medieval women, often as proof of the misogyny that typically pervaded medieval thought, culture and literature. But this kind of categorization of the medieval woman is reductive to say the least, and leaves little room to consider these figures beyond the lens of an overwhelming and unmitigated male dominance. It is difficult to reconcile a historical period filled with important and powerful women, some of whom had a direct impact on the lives of authors such as Chrétien, with the critical designation of these female characters as flat, secondary figures devoid of substance. And when these women speak and act in the romance, I would argue that it becomes impossible to deny that there are very real traces of historical perceptions of medieval women. These representations are certainly informed by a certain amount of authorial fantasy and an interaction with the misogyny of the Middle Ages, nonetheless, fantasy and misogyny cannot account for the incredibly complex and diverse figures of women found in romances.

Historical Women and the Vicissitudes of Representation

Writing as an author in the court of Champagne, Chrétien de Troyes was witness to what would have been a strong female rule in the figure of Marie de Champagne. The effects of her personality and patronage can be seen from within the texts themselves; Chrétien makes specific

[67] Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," 48.

reference to his patroness, Marie de Champagne in his romance *Lancelot, ou le chevalier de la charrette* and Gaston Paris attributes to Marie a defining role in the rise of the courtly romance.[68] The effects of this patronage can be seen in Chrétien's romance *Lancelot* where the illicit, adulterous love of Guinevere and Lancelot is staged, most conspicuously at the request of his patroness, Marie de Champagne:

> Des que ma dame de Chanpaigne
> Vialt que romans a feire anpraigne,
> Je l'anprendrai mout volentiers (v.1-3)[69]
>
> [Since my lady of Champagne wishes me to undertake to write a romance,
> I shall very gladly do so].

Chrétien goes on to state explicitly that his patroness is responsible for both the material and his treatment of it:

> Comance Crestïens son livre ;
> Matiere et san li done et livre
> La Contesse, et il s'antremet
> De panser, si que rien n'i met
> Fors sa painne et s'antancion.(v.25-29)
>
> [Here Chretien begins his book about the Knight of the Cart. The material and the treatment of it are given and furnished to him by the Countess, and he is simply trying to carry out her concern and intention].

Because of this rapport between Chrétien and his patroness, there has been some speculation as to whether Chrétien would have frequented the court of Marie de Champagne's illustrious mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, in her court at Poitiers. These women constituted a powerful voice in literary production beginning in the twelfth century and the effects of their

[68] Gaston Paris, "Etudes sur les romans de la table ronde. Lancelot du Lac: II. Le Conte de la Charrette," *Romania* 12 (1883) : 523.
[69] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, ed. Alfred Foulet et Karl D. Uitti (1989) All references come from this edition. English Translation: Chrétien de Troyes: *Arthurian Romances,* trans. William W. Comfort (London: Everyman's Library, 1914). All translations of *Lancelot* come from this text.

patronage were an important influence in the orientation of literature in the twelfth century.[70] While, there is little to suggest that Eleanor herself was a patroness of the author's works, it stands to reason that Chrétien would certainly have heard of Eleanor and the dissolution of her first marriage and subsequent marriage to Henry II of England.

Ralph Turner contemplates the possibility that a medieval audience would have drawn parallels between Eleanor and Guinevere, concluding that "it is not implausible that a romance seeming to sanction adulterous love should have drawn inspiration from the English queen's life."[71] Chrétien's opinions on the subject matter of *Lancelot* might also have been influenced by Eleanor's scandalous representation by her chroniclers, who recorded rumors of an adulterous passion between the queen and her uncle and "transformed Eleanor's close relationship with her uncle into a scandalous, adulterous passion for a Muslim sultan."[72] These elaborations on the part of the chroniclers are typically considered fictitious and of little historical accuracy, however they do point to an interesting interaction of the medieval perception of the queen. Peggy McCracken maintains that the queen's "scandalous desire is recounted not only as a displaced representation of cultural anxiety about queenship but as an exemplary tale that represents the queen's power to corrupt government."[73]

[70] For further reading on the impact of women as patrons see Rita Lejeune, "Rôle littéraire de la famille d'Alienor d'Aquitaine," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 3 (1958) : 324-328; John Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center" *Speculum* 36 (1961) : 551-591; Françoise Bibolet, "Marie, comtesse de Champagne," *Almanach 1957 de l'Indépendant de l'Aube* (1957) : 64-73.
[71] Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 202.
[72] Peggy McCracken, "Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Parmi Carsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 247.
[73] McCracken, "Scandalizing Desire," 259.

Myths surrounding the queen multiplied in her lifetime and positively flourished after her death, and Eleanor of Aquitaine finds herself in the company of Marie-Antoinette as the most maligned queens in history, a link that John Carmi Parsons explains by "the precarious relationship between women's sexualized bodies and the body politic."[74] Still, even as Eleanor was vilified and as tales continued to contribute to a mythologizing of her scandalous reputation into a "black legend" she was not completely without her champions.[75] An unequivocally positive presentation of Eleanor is given by William Marshall who in his thirteenth-century biography *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, "creates the impression of a great queen who practiced the aristocratic virtue of liberality, gave wise and prudent counsel, and valued and reciprocated the loyalty of a man like William Marshall."[76] Eleanor is a compelling example of how women could suffer as a result of negative representation, but as a highly recognizable figure she is at the center of a masculine discourse that recognizes the importance of an active, speaking woman. If she is objectified into a sexualized body, she still resists a role of passivity and marginalization. Chrétien de Troyes would thus have been subject to a dizzying amount of rumor and contradiction when it came to the queen and it is not incredible to believe that such an important historical figure could have inspired the author's ambivalent representation of an equally powerful and sexualized queen within his romances.

Moreover, while the hostility surrounding Eleanor is often attributed to her anxiety-inducing ability to corrupt the king and government with her sexualized body, the scope of her influence on politics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in undeniable and would have left an

[74] John Carmi Parsons, "Damned If She Didn't and Damned When She Did," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Parmi Carsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 285.
[75] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 313.
[76] Evelyn Mullally, "The Loyalty of Eleanor and William Marshall," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Parmi Carsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 245.

indelible impression on the medieval mind as to the potential power of women in political and social spheres. Chrétien's varying descriptions of Queen Guinevere could very likely have been in response to the different faces of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne, for Chrétien wavers between the dangerous, seductive force that she represents in *Yvain*, and the empathetic figure of support that she is in *Erec et Enide*. This along with Marie's patronage reveal the reality of a feminine influence that, while an extraordinary example of active feminine participation in the predominantly masculine public spheres, was still significant as a counterpoint to theories of the absolute subjugation of the medieval woman. Krueger also argues compellingly against the power of Marie de Champagne's feminine influence through patronage, citing the fact that by the end of the only romance dedicated to her, *Lancelot* that references to her had vanished, mirroring the disappearance of the feminine subject. But this mystification of the feminine into nothingness is challenged by Lancelot's uneasy relationship with his female dependents. Krueger thus concludes that "if the image of female influence, power, and resistance is recuperated *within* the text, female critical reflection on the tensions of gender is pointedly invited *by* the text."[77] It is the very nature, equivocal as it might be, of the genre of the romance as regards the construction of identity through the dialogue of gendered relationships that suggests a more complicated engagement with notions of gender, functions and identity on the part of the audience.

In the figures of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne, Chrétien would have found conspicuous examples of female power in the public sphere of politics. But this still does not speak to the condition of women from other levels of society and their economic and social conditions. As a member of the court of Champagne, Chrétien would have been most sensitive to

[77] Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 65-66.

examples of noble women, but it is impossible to discount the possibility that he would have been fully aware of the changing fortunes of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie alike. Indeed, Eugene Vance argues that Chrétien was very aware of the economic changes that were occurring in city centers, an awareness that is revealed in Yvain's adventure of the Château de Pesme Aventure, in which he delivers a "thinly veiled criticism of the exploitation of labor in a nascent textile industry lying just to the west of Champagne."[78] In this episode, Yvain comes to the rescue of three hundred women held captive and forced to weave beautiful silk cloth. His descriptions of the women at work:

> Mais tel poverté y avoit
> Que desliees et deschaintes
> En y ot de poverté maintes;
> Et les mameles et les keutes
> Paroient par leur cotes routes,
> Et les chemises as cols sales.
> Les cols grelles et les vis pales
> De fain et de mesaise avoient.
> Il les voit et eles le voient,
> Si s'enbronchent toutes et pleurent;
> Et une grant pieche demeurent,
> Qu'eles n'entendent a riens faire,
> Ne lors iex ne püent retraire
> De tere, tant sont acourees.(v. 5194 – 5207)
>
> [But such was their poverty, that many of them wore no girdle, and looked slovenly, because so poor; and their garments were torn about their breasts and at the elbows, and their shifts were soiled about their necks. Their necks were thin, and their faces pale with hunger and privation. They see him, as he looks at them, and they weep, and are unable for some time to do anything or to raise their eyes from the ground, so bowed down they are with woe.]

While Chrétien condemns this new exploitation of labor, he reveals that he is mindful of the economic shifts that occurring beyond the realm of the court and with this awareness, new concepts of the possible condition of women in cities would not have been unknown to him.

[78] Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," 59.

The critical evaluation of the historical changes in the High Middle Ages is variable in the extreme, as is the way in which these same critics are prone to the fallacy of incomplete evidence. Pointing to specific regions or even to particular laws, these critics construct a vision of medieval women that reflects an undeveloped medieval concept of the feminine. Some critics would seek to exclude women from the march of history altogether. Joan Kelly-Gadol argues that "to take the emancipation of women as a vantage point is to discover that events that further the historical development of men, liberating them from natural, social or ideological constraints, have quite different, even opposite effects on women."[79] Bloch asserts that theoretical change in the rights of women rarely led to any real change in social practice, while still instisting these changes were the very cause of medieval misogyny. He concludes that it is the perception of an increase in the economic power of women that resulted in the invention of western courtly love that sublimated her out of the realm of possible threat. While it is certainly true that courtly love is not an all-powerful vessel of feminine empowerment, Joan Kelly-Gadol offers important insight as to another function of courtly love. While courtly love did serve as means for objectifying women, it also "gave women lovers, peers rather than masters; and it gave them a justifying ideology for adultery which, as the more customary double standard indicates, men in patriarchal society seldom require." Kelly-Gabol concedes that courtly love was only able to persist because it ostensibly sustained a masculine-dominated society, not because it represented a stance against it. Still, she maintains that courtly love took on a certain attitude of gallantry precisely as a result of the fact that women could hold lands and properties.[80]

[79] Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 176.
[80] Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" 181.

Martha Howell suggests that the values of the new merchant society stressing individualism might have hastened the exclusion of women from the public and political realm[81] but this does not account for instances of women having conspicuous and central roles in the city center that were not without influence. Indeed, William Chester Jordan finds that in certain regions "pre-industrial forms and networks of credit usually provided a vital and important place for women."[82] While these were typically localized systems of credit and exchange, women still played an important part in city centers where strong bonds of "kinship, friendship and respect" characterized their interactions.[83] Furthermore, the networks of credit could and did often extend to aristocratic families in and around the cities, as "inflationary pressures undermined the wealth of a noble class that earned the largest portion of its income from fixed rents."[84] If not in an official capacity, these women would still have commanded respect as well as inspired fear. The women who acted as creditors were both "a bane and a godsend" but were increasingly vital in periods of noble and gentry indebtedness.

If women were excluded from public and political roles, this does not preclude the ability of these women to turn to other spheres of influence, out of the public eye or peripheral to it. The dichotomization of public versus private spheres has often been critiqued, particularly as pertains to the rigid polarity of masculine versus feminine spaces. Bourdieu, in recognizing the pervasiveness of the subjugation of the feminine to masculine domination through the constant reinforcement of the internal and private and inferior spheres of femininity, inculcated from the

[81] Martha C. Howell, "Citizenship and Gender: Women's Political Status in Northern Medieval Cities" in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 37-60.
[82] William Chester Jordan, *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial and Developing Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 125.
[83] Jordan, *Women and Credit*, 26.
[84] Jordan, *Women and Credit*, 41.

earlier age, still gives us the key to the ways in which feminine power can subtly resist these modes of domination and systematic oppression. Because women are largely exiled into the private sphere, their work is defined as such:

> A very large part of the *domestic work* which falls to women is, in many milieu, aimed at conserving the solidarity and integration of the family by maintaining kin relationships and all the social capital through the organization of a whole series of social activities […] designed to ritually celebrate the bonds of kinship and to ensure the maintenance of social relations and the prestige of the family.[85]

Bourdieu argues that because this domestic work has no monetary value, it is devalued in relation to masculine labor that equates to real market value. But it is precisely this means of controlling and circulating of symbolic goods that women can resist a wider political and public disenfranchisement. Even if, as Bourdieu state, this social world of symbolic goods is still dominated by the masculine vision, there is a space for feminine resistance, particularly in the romance, for in the courtly structure it is not the symbolic worth of the courtly lady that is circulated, but that of the knight. As the knights engage in activities that produce symbolic capital, the women are assigned to manage it and it is here they find means of influence in maintaining and enhancing "the social capital of relationships and the symbolic capital" of the court.[86]

While I apply Bourdieu's theories of the dichotomization of private versus public spaces as linked to concepts of feminine passivity and masculine activity, I must pause to acknowledge the critical reservations that come at subscribing to what amounts to a wholehearted affirmation of an overly simple polarity of functions based on biological determinacy. Critics have expressed reservations about the applicability of the private/public model, and Michelle Rosaldo maintains

[85] Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001), 97.
[86] Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 100.

that it might be concept too-enmeshed in "oppositional modes of thought." Rosaldo continues with the following warning about the dichotomization of gender roles:

> By linking gender, and in particular female lives, to the existence of domestic spheres, we have inclined, I fear, to think we know the "core" of what quite different gender systems share, to think of sexual hierarchies primarily in functional and psychological terms, and, thus, to minimize such sociological considerations as inequality and power. We think too readily of sexual identities as primordial acquisitions, bound up with the dynamics of the home, forgetting that the "selves" children become include a sense, not just of gender, but of cultural identity and social class.[87]

With this warning, Rosaldo questions the legitimacy of linking female biology to the necessity of the domestic sphere, and states that a "woman's place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she does […] but of the meaning her activities acquire through concrete social interactions."[88] This has important implications for the women of the court; we can read their positions in the relatively private spheres of personal influence to be less deterministic than the actions she performs within that private sphere. Even if courtly women were at times restricted to a limited sphere of influence, she still has access to considerable influence in the relationships she forges at court. Rosaldo's reading of sexual identities is significant in that it allows a reading of these medieval women that considers more their "cultural identity and social class" than their gender.

[87] M.Z. Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding" *Signs* 5 (1980): 400.
[88] Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology," 400.

Words in Circulation: Speaking Women in Romance

The exchange of tales, or of words, is essential in considering the place of women in the court. As courtly ladies unable to accomplish great and heroic feats of knightly prowess, they are still able to engage in acts of speech, maintaining their own agency and thriving in a male-based culture. Even as women are excluded from many of the male-based activities central to a knight's existence and status in the court, this is the manner in which they can successfully insert themselves into the courtly society. As Joan Tasker Grimbert comments, "la parole est l'un des principaux ressorts de l'intrigue,"[89] indicating the necessity of speech for the plot, and the vitality of words in this culture. Women, who are often marginalized in the court as mere décor and objects of trade, can fully assume their own places in the court with words, for they are the ones that transmit and receive the tales of knightly valor, thus housing in their reception and circulation of *les paroles* the essence of the knight's courtly value.

This currency of entertainment and honor was circulated between knights and it was by virtue of chivalrous deeds, spoken and traded, that a knight could gain eminence among his peers. Indeed, we see in the works of Chrétien again and again the evocation of a knight's value in terms of his *renommé*. But if the value of the knight was achieved through the highly visible circulation of tales of honor and words of bravery, then the medieval lady was the arbiter of this worth. It is true that in the courtly romance women are circulated within tales as much as outside of them. In Marie de France's lai *Lanval*, the young knight gains the love of a beautiful fairy woman, but the relationship is incomplete and unsatisfactory as he cannot tell his comrades of his adventure with his fairy lover. While Lanval flourishes in his newfound riches, he still lacks

[89] Joan Tasker Grimbert, "Le Sens de la *Courtoisie*" in *Yvain dans le Miroir*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988), 106.

the public devotion of his lady, an absence that brings the attention of the queen down upon him. The implication is that even with riches abundant, Lanval is still incomplete in the system of courtly love for he has no lady to complete the picture of his masculine prowess.

Furthermore, the legitimacy of his love is thwarted by his inability to circulate tales of her and thus tales of his own adventures. In much of courtly literature there exists the implication that a lack of this circulation of honor is a dangerous thing. Lanval is targeted by the machinations of the jealous queen who, in the face of his rejection of her amorous advances, challenges Lanval's knighthood:

> La reine se curuca,
> Iriee fu, si mesparla.
> 'Lanval', fete le, 'bien le quit,
> Vus n'amez guaires tel deduit.
> Asez le m'a hum dit sovent,
> que de femme n'avez talent.
> Vaslez amez bien afaitiez,
> ensemble od els vus deduiez.
> Vileins cuarz, malvais failliz,
> Mult est mis sire malbaiz,
> kip res de lui vus a sufert,
> mu nescient que Deu en pert!' (v.277-288)
>
> [The queen was angered, she who was furious and disappointed. "Lanval," she said, "I believe that you must not like this kind of pleasure. I have heard it often be told that you are not interested in women. You prefer to take your pleasure with handsome young men. Miserable coward, unworthy knight, my husband is mistaken to suffer you near him, I fear that he lose his salvation!"][90]

Lanval's rejection of the queen, would have been prevented if he had been able to evoke his lover, but unable to do so, he incurs the queen's ire. She not only threatens Lanval's honor, but also condemns his lack of honor, an accusation that threatens those around him, even the king. The fact that it is the queen who is at the root of all his troubles only further indicates the

[90] Marie de France, *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. Judith Sloaf (Paris: Librairie Generale Francaise, 1990).

potential that powerful women held over the men in their courts. It is not implausible to think that this vision of the capricious and dangerously powerful queen would have been informed by historical instances of powerful women. Marie de France wrote under the reign of Queen Eleanor, who would have provided a wealth of material to properly nuance the wickedness of the queen in *Lanval*.

This theme of the danger of not participating appropriately and correctly in the courtly system is not unique to Lanval by any means. The same dangers apply to lovers in Chrétien's romance, the most notable example being Yvain's descent into madness, a state that stems from his over-valorization of the battle ethic, subsequently leading to an inability to maintain an appropriate relationship with his lady. But other examples exist that hint as the inherent danger of the knight's deviance from the prescribed social norms. In *Erec et Enide,* Erec feels the pressure of this social necessity when he, contrarily to Yvain, indulges in too much love, and his place at the court becomes shaky as he succumbs to the idleness of carnal love. Even Lancelot in *La Charrette* faces a moment when he must balance knightly honor with his adulterous love for Guinevere, a struggle that is captured in his debate to ride on the cart for which the romance is named. Eventually Lancelot chooses to climb onto the cart, which carries criminals, and thus sacrifices all honor for love of his lady. The implications of danger are clear, and the knight's constant duty is to balance the conflicting desires of battle and love. But even this struggle to maintain equilibrium in the ways of courtly love is not quite enough. The knight must also be sure to make sure his stories are told and retold, circulating and accumulating symbolic power. It is only in this way that the knight can truly shine in the courts of love. This too is exemplified in Chrétien's romances, when Yvain can only reclaim his rightful status as knight when his

anonymous identity as the Knight of the Lion is revealed and his deeds are properly attributed to him. This central component is evident in many of the romances, where the narrative almost always opens with a gathering at the court where the knights boast of their tales and words are traded and evaluated. This circulation is almost always done with the participation and the direction of the women in the court, and the figure of Guinevere in particular commands a central role in the distribution and circulation of tales.

In many of Chrétien's romances, the stories open with Queen Guinevere asking the knights for a tale of their bravery, or inviting them to describe an adventure they have experienced. In an uncanny parallel to the historical world that produced the courtly romance, the female figures found within these literary texts cannot access honor or status in a public way, but must resort to more subtle avenues of influence. When Guinevere invites the knights to speak, she represents the reception of an audience upon which the knight's worth is determined. She subtly plays to the power she does have access to, even if it is not overt, and far from being marginalized and disempowered, the Queen sets the tone for the narrative, in inviting one knight's tale while gently disapproving another's. It is this manner of feminine influence that we see these medieval women not only resisting the circulation that traps and effaces them, but appropriating these means of empowerment for their own uses.

The ladies of the court are clearly imbued with some manner of social influence as they are often presented in the romances of Chrétien as arbiters of knightly honor, judging a knight's value and overseeing its circulation. This is precisely the function that Guinevere plays as she invites this or that knight to share his adventures. Without her, the ties between men would

slowly deteriorate and there would be an eventual disintegration of the very substance of the court. This returns us to the idea of the danger of abstaining from the symbolic circulation of honor in the knight, a danger that stems from the necessity to preserve the intricate web of relationships and interactions in the court. But the knights themselves are strangely ignorant or blind to the delicate balance of chivalry and love that sustain the court. They stray dangerously close to the edge, as it were, in terms of their interactions with the court, and it seems that it is always the courtly lady that returns them to the fold with her knowing gaze and her cunning mouth.

This is clear in examples such as the madness is clear in examples such as the madness of *Yvain* where the knight forgets his promise to his Lady, who painfully reminds him in a public scene of vocal shaming. We see a similar occurrence in the romance of *Erec et Enide* where the knight, in becoming too lax in his courtly duties, is carefully informed by his more socially perceptive wife that he risks everything in not maintaining an appropriate chivalric behavior. Enide understands the social requirements that define the knight spark a sort of madness in her new husband as well, for he has been revealed as lacking in both chivalric and husbandly duties. As Enide reminds Erec of this he will punish her with silence, a reaction that only points to the knight's awareness that his wife holds the key to his honor in her mouth. As the two adventure together, the audience is presented with a strange moment in which a woman is privy to the masculine sphere of wandering adventure and it becomes obvious that Erec is very much in need of Enide's knowing mouth. Not only does she speak against his commands, but she saves him in doing so. Erec fails to punish her for these infractions, showing another significant

To conclude that women were completely without status or influence is dissatisfying in the face of examples of women who did circulate publically and with great influence among their masculine peers. While these instances of powerful medieval women are largely restricted to the aristocratic class, the fact that these women were able to hold such sway in a masculine dominated society is perhaps indicative of a wider trend of change in the consideration of women in the Middle Ages. Still, I would argue that it is not the sudden emergence of the woman as a powerful economic figure that lead to her positive representation in literature. Indeed, many of the socioeconomic and historical changes that are often referenced as means of interpreting the medieval woman in a more positive light, including references to rights of choice in marriage and rights of inheritance and dowry, were highly variable and women overall were seeing a decrease in their potential for public power. However, these same changes that would seem to specifically disenfranchise women were also placing new and important focus on the individual. Rather, the seemingly conflicting historical movements of feminine disempowerment and individual empowerment resulted in a strange moment for the medieval woman. If women were seeing their rights reduced as a result of wider historical political trends, then in the private sphere of individual representation, women could still find venues for empowerment.

The problem is then the ambiguity of women in Chrétien's courtly tradition of love and chivalry, are they figures indulging in capricious and senseless power plays over the knights that serve them, or are they merely symbolic units of exchange, stripped of any real agency, acting as simple pieces of currency that uphold and strengthen the bonds that hold together male interaction in the courtly setting. I propose that the women in Chrétien's work, *Le Chevalier au Lion* present elements of both these visions, but not so with the negativity that is often associated

therein. While there has been elaborate discussion as to the true meaning and merit of the term, I use it here principally to foreground the status of the medieval woman as Gaston Paris imagined it, as the exalted and elevated lover for whom the knight toils and labors. And so while the romances of the 12th century would often seem to revolve around the chivalrous escapades of the knights after whom the tales are often named, at the heart of the romance is the figure of the medieval lady, a figure who ultimately initiates the action that serves as the basis of the narrative. I would argue that far from holding senseless power over the knights they interact with, or being completely divested of any influence within a text, the ladies in these romances wield a sophisticated and necessary influence through which the narrative progresses. Without the actions and delicate manipulations of these courtly ladies, there would be no love story to speak of. In particular in the case of Chrétien's romance, *Yvain*, women stand as the arbiters of love and it is their words and actions within the text that reveal and make possible the conditions for love. Through their subtle and yet sophisticated manipulations of the knights around, performed largely through the medium of spoken words, the women of courtly literature speak their way into narratives in which at first glance they seem to be marginal figures. Even as critics would argue that courtly love would seem to focus on men at the expense of women, with the exploits and the interactions of the knights prevailing at the forefront of the narrative,[91] I would argue that love in Chrétien's courtly romances is a delicate balance of knightly and amorous duty, and knights who fail to maintain both passion and honor are punished for their transgressions. Courtly love is nothing so simple in these romances and it is perhaps unsurprisingly the female characters that are represented as possessing a unique understanding of the varied dimensions of

[91] Jane E. Burns, "Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition" *Signs* 27 (2001).

love. Even as the courtly lady would seem to be effaced and invisible within the text, I would argue that she resists or even exceeds her role as passive object.

There are three women in Chrétien's romance *Yvain* that are often at the center of the narrative and come from three different levels of aristocratic society. Guinevere, as queen, is at the pinnacle of the courtly system, Laudine is one of the multitude of noble women that are found in the courtly romances, and Lunete is a noble lady of lesser standing, in her role as maidservant to Laudine. The ways in which these women are represented suggest the importance of reading female characters beyond the rigid structures of courtly love and economic exchange that would define them.

The women in Chrétien's romances perform several functions within the construct of the court on both narrative and structural levels, the most ostensible of which are their role as reflections of masculine value. This function categorizes women as the typical other, with no function beyond her utility to her masculine counterpart, and always imagined and defined in this context of reflectivity. But this effacement of women, even in the system of courtly love, is at odds with the women of the romance. Chrétien's romance *Yvain* has an abundance of women who are either central to the narrative or operate at its margins and provide an important look at literary representations of noble women in the Middle Ages. Figures such as Lunete, while seemingly on the periphery of the narrative, prove themselves to be essential to the progression of the story, while other representations of women, such as Guinevere and Laudine provide important contextualization for the court that functions as the setting against which the adventures of the knights are performed. If these women are presented as the ostensible centers

of the intrigue that occurs in *Yvain* they also occupy an ambiguous place of feminine power, as their impact on the narrative is often performed in private spheres of influence. The public power of these women is notably lacking, and yet they still succeed in delicately manipulating those around them with their most effective tool: words.

If words are a woman's weapon, then it is the manner in which she wields them that will determine her place in the Arthurian court. Throughout *Yvain*, the audience is presented with examples of women who speak openly and as a result, insert their feminine subjectivity into the system of the court. The effects of this assertion of the feminine voice are most noticeable at the level of the narrative, where instances of speech, such as when Guinevere's call for Calogrenant's story prompts Yvain's own adventure, or Laudine's denouncement of Yvain that prompts his descent into madness, or most significantly, Lunete's subtle manipulations that drive the actions of all those around her. However, as critical as feminine speech is to the advancement of the narrative, their words also establish a system of exchange that valorizes and circulates symbolic worth in the form of masculine honor. To better understand how this construction works, it is useful to consider the relationship commonly imagined between the knight and the lady. With interactions informed by courtly love, their every move would seem to be dictated by their involvement in the courtly system and all that it entails.

Within the narrative, Yvain is clearly a servant of love; he falls promptly in love with Laudine, and in failing her, carries out knightly endeavors until he can win back her love. Chrétien emphasizes this role of servitude from the first meeting between the two characters, Laudine interrogates the knight in her chambers, away from the eyes of all others, and her grief

of her husband is dismissed and his murderer forgiven, but perhaps mostly due to Yvain's perfect willingness to serve:

> Ice mout volentiers sauroie,
> Dont celle force puet venir
> Qui vous commande a consenter
> Touz mes vouloirs sanz contredit.
> Tout torz et touz mefaiz vous cuit,
> Mes seez vous, si me contez
> Comment vous estes si dontez.
> - Dame, fet il, la force vient
> De mon cuer, qui a vous se tient ;
> En cest voloir m'a mon cuer mis. (v. 2010 – 20 19)
>
> [But I should be glad to learn whence you derive the force that bids you to consent unquestioningly to whatever my will may dictate. I pardon you all your misdeeds and crimes. But be seated, and tell us now what is the cause of your docility?" "My lady," he says, "the impelling force comes from my heart, which is inclined toward you. My heart has fixed me in this desire."]

This passage reveals the very structure of a typical courtly love, the knight before his lady, professing a deep love that pushes him into sacrifice and servitude for his lady. The question of protecting the landholdings is not even mentioned in this context, it is Laudine's "vouloirs" that are emphasized here, she is asking him to take on her every whim, and Yvain replies with a heartfelt answer that his heart compels him to do just that.

The irony here is that in order to become the most perfect of knights, it is also necessary to become the most perfect of servants, sacrificing life and love to what many critics label the capricious lover. But no matter the character of the lover, the knight is often in a position of supplication, even passiveness, to the demands of his lady, and this necessarily bestows upon him a position of weakness in the relationship. He must prove, again and again, that he is worthy

of his lady and her love. And so, perhaps paradoxically, it seems that a knight, to achieve perfection, must lower himself to the demands of a lover, putting himself in a position of submissiveness and servitude. This servitude is obviously paralleled in subservience to a lord or king, given the nature of the feudal system, however, the fact that such servitude must also be bestowed upon a woman adds an interesting dynamic to the agency of a knight who seems, overall, powerless to act for himself in any kind of effective way. But the romance puts into question the feudal structure, a moment in the text that perhaps reflects the instability of feudal structures that were emerging. If Chrétien does not present a blatant critique to the figure of the king, he still describes a king whose weakness is detrimental to the court. At the beginning of *Yvain* King Arthur is delayed by his wife and refrains from joining the court, causing much discussion and uneasiness among his knights. Chrétien places this subtle observation after he has just finished lauding the great and worthy heroes of times past, "Mais chel jour ainsi li avint/ Que la royne le retint/ Si demoura tant deles li/ Qu'il s'oublia et endormi" [But this day it came about that the Queen detained him, and he remained so long at her side that he forgot himself and fell asleep] (v. 49 – 52). While Chrétien makes no explicit reference to the encounter, one can easily imagine the king's sexual indulgence. It is also telling how the knights react to this absence on the part of their king. As they express much astonishment, "mout s'esmerveillierent" (v.42) at the king as he is weak to the desires of his lady.

This perceived weakness and sloth on the part of the king might speak to the general perception of kings in the Middle Ages, when political power was a constantly shifting territory. Geoffrey Koziol comments on this instability inherent in the medieval political terrain, where rebellions abounded and the smallest of provocations could spark a "testing of limits an, quite

often, civil war."[92] If the traditional image of the king was one of weakness, it can be understood why the knights make much of the king's sloth and apparent weakness initially, but subsequently never mention it. This is also perhaps in part due to the fundamental nature of the political atmosphere of unrest in which the slightest challenge to authority could have great repercussions. Koziol explains:

> Why did kings and kingdom remain intact when kings were weak and the kingdom disunited? The most elemental reason is that a duke or margrave could not repudiate the legitimacy of a king's office […] without repudiating the very basis of his own authority over his own subalterns. And a society without any foundation for any authority – that was an anarchy dreaded by all, for it could have no winners.[93]

This anarchy could potentially have weighed on Chrétien's mind as he wrote Yvain's tale, and also possibly explains another aspect of Yvain's failure at the court and subsequent madness. As Yvain initially goes off to adventure on his own, rejecting the male camaraderie of the court as they ride together to see the marvels of the fountain, he establishes his individual needs over those of the court. In declaring his individual need for revenge, Yvain has thrown off the shackles of the court and embarked on a journey that he will need to take perilously alone. His knightly prowess only takes him so far before he stumbles as a fugitive in the castle of the knight he has just slain and it will only be Lunete who is able to rescue him from himself. The implication here is clear, alone a knight risks everything. The shackles of the court, though binding, are a comforting one. Yvain once again goes against courtly norms when he rides off with Gawain for a year, ignoring his duties as a husband and the needs of his castle and lands. This comes crashing down on him with Laudine's public denouncement and Yvain is exiled far

[92] Geoffrey Koziol, "Political Culture," in *France in the Central Middle Ages, 900-1200*, ed. Marcus Bull, *The Short Oxford History of France*, gen. ed. William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 55.
[93] Koziol, "Political Culture," 55.

from the reach of the court. Only through a painful fall and slow reconstruction is Yvain able to rejoin the court and take his rightful place among his fellow knights. Thus, while Yvain's story is a tale about the individual exploits of a knight, I would argue that it is also a reflection on the inherent danger in rejecting the norms of the courtly system, no matter how flawed they may be.

Roberta Krueger notes that the figures of Guinevere and Laudine, while seemingly central to the plot of tales such as *Lancelot* and *Yvain* only remain long enough to provide context for a knight's adventures before disappearing completely within the text.[94] This displacement would seem to confirm arguments placing the courtly lady in the realm of the distanced and effaced Other, but both of these women perform important functions in the context of the court that goes beyond their circulatory function of a passive woman designed to receive and reflect male desire. This function is even more significant in light of the fact that the status of the masculine figure in the romance is one that can also be considered in more ambiguous terms. Not only are they presented as witnesses of masculine honor but when necessary these women are cast as arbiters of the same. And whereas Guinevere and Laudine might function as arbiters and witnesses in the court system, characters such as Lunete function as active participants in the adventures of the knights they serve and love. To refer to Bourdieu's classification of women as the safeguards of kinship bonds, these women often determine and circulate the social worth of the men around them. While this would seem to sustain a reading of these literary women as no more than objects caught up in a system of masculine exchange, there are opportunities to read feminine resistance in the words and the actions of these female characters. When they speak and when they act, these women resist the role of passive and silent object.

[94] Krueger, *Women Readers*, 37.

Guinevere, Keeper of Tales

The most telling examples of this are found in *Yvain*, where the question of honor is first put into circulation by Guinevere, whose presence at court is peripheral. Even if the queen of the court is a marginal figure in most of the romances, the effect of her presence is evident even in her brief appearances in the narrative. One of the moments most suggestive of her position as negotiator of masculine value comes in the tale of Yvain, a romance populated by multiple women. Chrétien's romance *Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion* opens with the court of King Arthur, called together for the feast of Pentecost. The knights mingle with their ladies and tell stories of their adventures in love, its trials and sorrows as well as the blessings it gives, and for a moment Chrétien laments the loss of the great order of courtly love, that now, he says, has but few worshippers:

> Li chevalier s'atropelerent
> La ou dames les apelerent
> Ou damoiseles ou pucheles.
> Li un recontoient nouveles,
> Li autres parloient d'Amours,
> Des angousses et des dolours
> Et des grant biens qu'en ont souvant
> Li desiple de son couvant (v. 9-16)
>
> [The knights betook themselves whither they were summoned by the ladies, damsels, and maidens. Some told stories; others spoke of love, of the trials and sorrows, as well as of the great blessings, which often fall to the members of its order.]

This opening signals the theme of the tale, as well as situating the characters firmly in the rich culture of circulating stories that constitutes much of life at court. When not travelling abroad and engaging in brave deeds, the knights and the women of the court speak of them, circulating them in a system of exchange that values words as coin. It is important to note the

inclusion of the feminine in this circulation, an inclusion that is in distinct contrast to the male camaraderie of the *chansons de gestes,* where the women are situated far from any interaction with their lovers. If the women of the romance do not necessarily engage in brave acts themselves, they are still present to witness the performance of the acts, becoming witness, judge and guarantor of the knight all in one. While a necessary element of the Arthurian court, this feminine inclusion is not always welcome. This is clearly demonstrated in *Yvain* in the moment when Queen Guinevere is introduced into the narrative. As Guinevere comes unnoticed into a circle of knights as they trade tales she becomes witness to Calogrenant, who is identified as Yvain's charming cousin, as he recounts a failed adventure to a group of fellow knights. The knights are startled by the sudden appearance of the queen and the knight Kay is quick to comment on her presence with his usual venom:

> - Dame, se nous ne gaagnons,
> Fait Keu, en vostre conpagnie,
> Gardés que nous n'i perdons mie (v.92-94)
>
> ["My lady, if we gain nothing by your company," said Kay, "at least let us lose nothing by it.]

This statement is a telling sign that the presence of the women in the court is not always a comfortable one, for reasons that will soon become clear. Kay himself is the ultimate representation of a domineering masculine dominance, offered in distinct contrast to the courtly knights surrounding him, and is portrayed as an unpleasant and often cruel knight who has little cares for the presence of the courtly ladies around him. But even as he represents this, Kay uses the moment to his advantage, and insists that Calogrenant continue his shameful story, even in the presence of the queen. He cunningly uses the moment to publicize the telling of Calogrenant's tale and the moment of masculine camaraderie becomes suddenly charged with tension. This moment is significant in the romance, as it situates the effect of the female audience

on the male knights, an effect that is hardly cheerful. In a world marked by the necessity of interaction with their feminine counterparts, Krueger attributes this to a sexual tension,[95] but I find that there is more than sexual tension at work. To be sure, the Queen's sudden presence accentuates Calogrenant's defeat and his shame, but it is in her circulation of the tale that Calogrenant's shame becomes complete. Kay must recognize this as he gleefully urges Calogrenant to reveal the nature of his humiliation, a humiliation that he must know will devalue the knight. The queen, seemingly impervious to the distress of the knight, urges him to tell his story and to ignore Kay's hostility:

> Ne pour lui ne laissiés a dire
> Chose qui faiche a oïr,
> Se de m'amor volés joïr;
> Si conmenchiés tout derechief. (v.138-141)
>
> [I command and request you not to be angered because of him, nor should you fail on his account to say something which it will please us all to hear.]

The importance of speech is emphasized here, and the queen reminds the knight that a good story that should be told must be told in the presence of the court. It is a subtle reminder to both the knights and the audience that these stories of valor function as social currency in the court. With obvious reluctance, Calogrenant does exactly as the queen bids him and tells an incredible story of a magic fountain and his humiliating defeat at the hands of an unknown knight. It is in this moment that Yvain enters into the narrative and sets out to redeem his cousin's honor, and to avoid the stain on his honor that the familial relation brings. To be sure, at the end of Calogrenant's recital of the whole affair, Yvain reacts with shock to his cousin's shame:

> - Par mon chief, dist mesire Yvains,
> Vous estes mes cousins germains,
> Si nous devons mout entr'amer;

[95] Krueger, *Women Readers*, 37.

Mais de che vous puis fol clamer
Que vous le m'avés tant chelé.
Se je vous ay fol apelé,
Je vous pri qu'il ne vous en poist,
Car se je puis et il me loist,
G'irai vostre honte vengier. (v.579-587)

[By my head, said Sir Yvain, You are my first cousin and thus we ought to love each other well. But I must consider you mad for having concealed this from me for so long. If I call you mad, I beg you to not be offended, for if I am able and I have the opportunity, I will avenge your shame.]

As the knights around him absorb the meaning of the story, the king emerges and Guinevere wastes no time in telling him word for word Calogrenant's tale. Chrétien comments on the verbal capacity of the queen, expressing how well and in what detail she repeats the story: "Et la roÿne maintenant/ Les nouveles Calogrenant/ Li reconte tout mot a mot/ Que bien et bel conter li sot" [the Queen, who repeated to him word for word, with her customary skill, the story of Calogrenant] (v.655 – 658). Arthur, so enthralled with the story of the fountain, decides that he must see it for himself and plans to take the whole court to see it. It is in this moment that the humiliation of Calogrenant is complete and his place in the court sadly diminished. Every knight of the court and every lady is aware of his failure and the spectacle the king plans in uprooting the entire court to the marvelous spot only exacerbates this shame. Furthermore, it is the queen's intrusion into the male sphere of exchange that results in this public shaming. The knight's tale is no longer a private tale of humiliation, and Guinevere, far from passively listening to the story, has taken an active hand in its circulation. As such, it is impossible to consider the women of the romance merely as passive objects of currency exchanged between men. Guinevere has demonstrated the important, if perhaps damaging, role a woman can play in this system of circulating courtly honor.

Guinevere is an odd figure in the romance precisely because she inhabits a space of obvious power over all others at the court, and, it is sometimes implied, even over the king himself. As King Arthur becomes an increasingly weak figure throughout the course of Chrétien's romance, it can be attributed internally to the figure of Guinevere whose concupiscence lies at the heart of his weakness. Guinevere herself, though a secondary characters in most of Chrétien's romances, is still a figure that is portrayed with considerable charisma, and in particular her role in the romance of *Erec et Enide* is a positive one in which she is a champion of Erec and the voice of reason and peace at the court. She is described as noble and sensible, "La reïne fu franche et sage" (v. 1206)[96] and she is described as kindly dressing Enide in the finest of her own clothes when she first comes to court. If in *Yvain* her presence is less comforting, it can be attributed to the role she plays in circulating tales of knightly honor or shame at the court. The ambiguity of her figure might be attributed to greater historical considerations, in particular the figures of powerful women that Chrétien would have been familiar with while writing his romances.

It is all too easy to imagine Chrétien at the courts of love that Eleanor of Aquitaine supposedly ruled over at her court in Poitiers[97] and seeing in the vibrant queen the basis for the figure of Queen Guinevere. So too would Chrétien have been familiar with the whirlwind of politics surrounding Eleanor and her two husbands. The political strength of the queen and her sway over the king as well as her subjects would also have been publically visible in the form of her right to the lands to which she was heiress. Such was her authority over these lands that she

[96] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. Michel Rousse (Paris: Flammarion, 2008).
[97] For a look into the basis for Andreas Capellanus's *Tractatus de Amore et de Amoris Remedio* and the courts of love he discusses, see Amy Kelly's article on Eleanor of Aquitaine and her courts of love, where supposedly Eleanor, along with her daughter Marie de Champagne and various other noble women listened to the love plights of men. Amy Kelly, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Courts of Love," *Speculum* 12 (1937): 3-19.

forced her increasingly estranged second husband, Henry II to confirm upon her favorite son, Richard Lion Heart the succession to the rich patrimony of Poitou and Aquitaine, even though Richard was himself the second son. The scandal of Eleanor's love life would have been visible to all as well, and might have informed a vision of the eroticism of Guinevere's representation. If Guinevere was defined by her adulterous relationship with Lancelot, the source material would have informed his depictions of their interactions, but it was Chrétien's story of the adulterous love affair that would enter into the canon as definitive aspects of both characters. This reflects the *bele conjointure* that Chrétien speaks of when describing his romances, a weaving together of diverse narrative elements into a grand narrative.[98] While Chrétien refers explicitly to this *bele conjointure* in the *Erec et Enide*, it is not far-fetched to see him applying this method of literary composition to work in all his romances. Indeed, the source material providing the characters and setting of the Arthurian cycle would have been coupled with a great many influences, not the least of which would have been Eleanor and her family of active patrons. While Marie de Champagne is cited as providing the inspiration for *La Charrette*, Chrétien, well aware of Eleanor of Aquitaine's tumultuous love life, may have been influenced in his vision of the Arthurian queen. It would have been difficult to be ignorant of Eleanor's conspicuous and publicized love life. Having been granted a divorce from Louis VII of France, she married Henry II, a moment in time characterized by the question of Eleanor's lands and inheritance and whether they would pass to Henry with the queen. Later in her life, Eleanor would become the stuff of quite a few interesting and quaint legends, and inevitably at the center of these were the

[98] For a complete discussion of Chrétien's methodologies of literary composition, see Douglas Kelly, *Sens and Conjointure in the Chevalier de la Charrette* (Paris:Mouton, 1966) and Norris J. Lacy's *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes: An Essay on Narrative Art* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1980). Jane Burns also provides an interesting feminist commentary on Yvain's assertion of conjointure in the sense of coupling, in which "we see the romance author has metaphorically transferred the act of coupling with a woman, with her enigmatic *chose*, into the realm of literary creation that it is his alone." (Burns, *Bodytalk*, 162).

topic of her love life. Henry II's infamous affair with Rosamund Clifford would become a highly publicized episode in Eleanor's personal life, as well as her legendary attempt to elope with Saladin.[99] Still, these considerations of her love life would only embellish the fact of her visible political power. Amy Kelly discusses the queen's maturation into a fully capable political figure in the latter part of her life, when estranged from Henry II she would retreat to Poitiers to install Richard Lion Heart as ruling duke and take control of her patrimony. Kelly notes of this third phase in her life:

> She was the pawn of neither prince nor prelate, the victim of no dynastic scheme. She came as her own mistress, the most sophisticate of women, equipped with plans to establish her own assize, to inaugurate a régime dedicated neither to Mars nor the Pope, nor to any king, but to Minerva, Venus, and the Virgin.[100]

This description of an infinitely capable woman, conspicuously and competently wielding power in her own right must have weighed heavy on the minds and hearts of those around her. This political powerful image of Eleanor is most apparent in the figure of Guinevere presented in *Erec et Enide* where the queen acts as champion to the young knight and his lady. When Erec goes off to avenge the honor of Guinevere during the hunt for the white stag, it is the queen who delays the court's declaration of the champion of the hunt until Erec's return, demonstrating her public power over the entirety of the court.

> "Sire," fet la reïne au roi,
> "Antandez un petit a moi!
> Se cist baron loent mon dit
> Metez cest beisier an respite
> Jusqu'au tierz jor qu'Erec revaigne"
> N'i a cel qu'a li ne se taigne
> Et li rois meïsmes l'otroie (v. 335-341)

[99] For two interesting articles concerning the off legends that have accumulated around the figure of Eleanor of Aquitaine, see Robert Chapman, "A Note on the Demon Queen Eleanor" *Modern Language Notes* 70 (1955): 393-396 and Frank McMinn Chamber, "Some Legends Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine" *Speculum* 16 (1941): 459-468.
[100] Kelly, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Courts of Love," 10.

> ["Sire," says the Queen to the King, "listen to me a moment. If these knights approve what I say, postpone this kiss until the third day, when Erec will be back." There is none who does not agree with her, and the King himself approves her words]

The queen's power is obvious, for not only has she understood the camaraderie that will make her proposition to Erec's fellow knights appealing, but has the good sense to delay the king's bestowal of the fated kiss that will identify the loveliest and courtliest woman at the court. With every knight's honor at stake, the court is in a state of tumult that the king has caused in agreeing to such an event. Arthur only seems to become aware of the turmoil when his nephew Gawain points it out to him, and Arthur asks the knight to council him as to how to avoid the fight that will surely result of the kiss. But it is Guinevere who sweeps in and provides the king with the perfect way in which to delay the event. She also provides a way in which to circumvent the fighting among the knights, for as Erec returns from battle, victorious and with a beautiful maiden in tow; the knights are appeased when it is Enide who receives the king's kiss, a relative unknown at court. As Erec returns, the queen is sure to remind Arthur of her previous advice that has ended well for all:

> Et dist: "Sire, avez antandu?
> Or avez vos bien antandu
> Erec, le vaillant chevalier.
> Mout vos donai buen consoil ier,
> Quant jel vos loai a atandre.
> Oir ce fet il buen conseil prandre" (v. 1217-1222)
>
> [The Queen said: "Sire, did you hear? You have done well to wait for Erec, the valiant knight. I gave you good advice yesterday, when I counseled you to await his return. This proves that it is wise to take advice."]

Arthur readily agrees that his queen that her advice was good, "ceste parole est veritable" (v. 1224), thus affirming not only the truth and the power of her speech, but also admitting to her influence over the court.

Later representations of Guinevere are not as rosy, but she still maintains her stance a powerful and influential figure in Arthur's court. One need not look far to see the shadow of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her conspicuous power over the court at Poitiers to see a similar presentation of female political power. The link between Eleanor and Guinevere is also a potent one considering the role of both in the creation and circulation of tales in their courts. Eleanor was a noted patron of the arts and whose influence in the arts would pass down to her family, including the notable figure of her daughter Marie de Champagne, who was also an important patron of not only Chrétien but also of such figures as Andreas Capellanus.[101] While I would not make the argument that any figure in Chrétien's romances are based explicitly and solely on the figures of Eleanor of Aquitaine and the women of her court, the obvious intertextuality and the *bele conjointure* that Chrétien himself boasts in his romances could account for a certain amount of influence from his contemporaries as he penned descriptions of powerful women. The fact that the queen in Chrétien's romance is flawed is perhaps less an indication of misogyny on the part of the author, but perhaps points more to his interaction with highly visible women who were as powerful as they were human. Guinevere presents an interesting figure that suggests an evolving perception of the power and the flaws of the aristocratic women Chrétien interacted with, and if she is sometimes threatening and sometimes benevolent, her representation is never static. Far from being typecast as one particular rendition, Guinevere is a powerful woman in all her incarnations, from the most elevated representation of the wise and kind Queen, to a woman who is not immune from the impulses of the body. In any manifestation, she constitutes an

[101] See Rita Lejeune and her discussion of the patronage of Eleanor's family in "Role Littéraire de la famille d'Alienore d'Aquitaine" *Cahiers de civilization medieval* 3 (1958): 324-328.

essential part of the makeup of Chrétien's works, and she is a woman whose words and whose actions have a definite and important effect on the workings of the court.

Two Sides of One Coin: Lunete and Laudine as the Courtly Lady

There are two other women that play an important role in *Yvain*, and they present different faces of the same coin: the courtly lady as the capricious arbiter of social worth, and the lady as courtly partner who reflects the worth of the knight and augments his value. Yvain is presented as linked to two women; Laudine, who will be his love interest and his wife, and Lunete who will be a truer partner to Yvain as he navigates the tricky waters of chivalric duty. Lunete would seem to be a more ideal match for Yvain, guiding him in his quest for honor, much as Enide does for Erec. And yet Laudine is presented as a necessary element of the romance, and a representation of an entirely different category of medieval lady. If Guinevere represents the woman of the court, then Laudine is the woman of the castle and her devotion to the castle will provoke her love for Yvain even as he is still fresh from killing her husband. In terms of the narrative, Laudine represents the importance of duty to one's lands and vassals, a duty that is tied closely to the system of courtly love that sustains the bonds not only between lovers but also symbolizes the knight's ties to the court. The love that Laudine and Yvain share is one that requires commitment on the part of both lovers, and in fact constitutes one of the major elements of courtliness: the sacrifice of oneself to the responsibilities of the land and the court. But if Laudine is a representation of the vassalic duties inherent in the position of the knight, what role does Lunete play? The two women are inextricably linked throughout the story and through a sophisticated interplay of power they both emerge at the end with the best interests of all

preserved. Still, if Laudine plays the part of the courtly wife to perfection, Lunete better embodies the figure of the courtly companion, first exemplified in Enide's selfless devotion to her husband's honor. So too is Lunete's raison d'être enmeshed with that of Yvain, and we will see that when Yvain's fortunes waver, so too with Lunete's.

Lunete aptly reflects the ambiguity of the female character down to her very name. As Lunete, or the moon, her name evokes the notion of reflection: not a source but a conduit, Lunete reflects the brightness of the masculine sun. In the narrative of the romance, she reflects the brightness of Yvain, the main heroic character of the romance. However, during the course of this romance, Lunete is also a major driving force of the plot, and her words and intellect push much of the story forward. In a presentation of feminine power, Lunete is first introduced when she saves Yvain from detection after he has slain the knight that was the husband of Laudine, whisking him away from peril and leading him to safety. Yvain here is confined, in essence a prisoner, and he must remain concealed, in hiding, while Lunete ensures his safety. While locked away in the castle of his enemy, Yvain falls in love with Laudine, but here his dilemma is aggravated by the fact that he must find a way to tell the tale of his victory and thus preserve his knightly renown, but at the same time, if he sneaks away, no one will know or believe that it was he who conquered the knight and at the same time he is held captive by his one-sided love for the widow of his fallen enemy. Unable to make a decision, Yvain wavers in despair and prefers to die than make a choice.

And here the hero would probably remain were it not for the machinations of Lunete, who recognizes the necessity of love for both Yvain and Laudine. For Yvain the only way to

secure the renown of slaying his foe is to marry the widow and parade her before the court, and Laudine, in a suddenly precarious position herself, must marry soon to appease her late husband's vassals. It is Lunete who not only recognizes the complicated requirements of social standing, but also deftly arranges the meeting and subsequent love between Yvain and Laudine With her words, Lunete cleverly manipulates Laudine into accepting Yvain as a husband and lover. It is she who understands how to manipulate the two protagonists in order to ensure the success of a love with so tumultuous a beginning. It is also strange to note that while this marriage is one that is economic, political and strategic in nature, but Lunete still works to cultivate love as a prolonged state of longing, lack, and suffering in both parties. The intersection of love with economic need is an interesting dynamic that perhaps gives insight as to medieval connections of love. If courtly love, necessitated not only by individual longing, but by confirmed by service of the self to the greater system at work, suggests medieval attitudes toward marriage that also carry important considerations of the self. Lunete's labor to unite the two lovers can perhaps be attributed to her anthropologically feminine role of maintaining kinship structures, to use the theoretical framework established by Bourdieu. But I would suggest that in submitting to her feminine role as arbiter and safeguard of social relationships, she shows incredible sensitivity to the social stakes around her. As much as Yvain is a slave to the code of knightly conduct that demands certain behaviors from him, so too does Lunete seem imbued with a certain function in the narrative, but this function exceeds the role inhabited by characters such as Guinevere and Laudine.

Lunete is a deeply provocative character because in many ways she is an unusual representation of the courtly lady. She speaks much more than Laudine and speaks to men more

than she speaks to women in ways that exceed the usual bounds of courtly interaction. She allies herself with Yvain and grants him her loyalty as a reward for a previous favor she has long remembered. But her seeming empowerment also brings harsh repercussions as she is also punished by Laudine when the results of this alliance turn sour. When Yvain breaks a vow made to Laudine, Lunete will also feel the brunt of his transgression. She is cast out by Laudine and will need rescuing by Yvain when her exile turns deadly. Lunete clearly inhabits an ambiguous position here, in which she is seen operating in masculine structures, but only on the periphery, and with great consequence. Lunete operates as a social go-between in the text, and never acts on her own behalf and her role would seem to confirm that female characters in medieval literature can only be seen as a form of mediation, figures operating without independent will and ever dependent on masculine strength. In this light, Lunete could be considered a mere reflection of masculine values. However, Lunete does not always fit the mold of a passive mirror of masculine value; she is a character, a woman, who does speak and who does act.

It is important to note that in stark contrast to the efforts of Lunete, Yvain, when left to his own devices, fails as a lover, forgetting his romantic duties in his pursuit of chivalric renown. He must be reminded by Laudine and Lunete and subsequently falls into madness as a result of his lost honor. Love here is a delicate balance between passion and chivalry and to stray too far from either is to invite tragedy. To be a true and honorable knight, Yvain may no more neglect his ladylove than his knightly duties. And this is where the crisis of love, so deliberately regulated can truly be seen. At the first instance of error on the part of the knight, he is so traumatized by the denouncement, made no less in front of the whole of King Arthur's court, that he instantly goes mad, losing his humanity and absconding to the uncivilized wilderness of the

forest. To come back to his original standing in the court, he must undertake a grueling series of tasks and labors and prove again that he is a worthy knight, and a worthy lover. And so while it would seem that Yvain's actions brought him to a crisis of love, it is also a crisis of his social position, as he must flounder in madness and wild anonymity until he can again prove his worth as a knight. Love then is the trigger for a catastrophe of subjectivity, represented in Yvain's descent into madness, but it can also be argued that what the lovers experience is not truly courtly love until it has achieved the perfect balance of chivalry and passion. Thus, while Yvain often struggles in his interactions with love, the women of the romance, Lunete in particular, maneuver deftly through its risks and hazards. This is not to say that the women escape completely unscathed, Lunete herself faces mortal danger until rescued by Yvain. But her ability to create love between Laudine and Yvain is only surpassed by Yvain's inability to maintain it.

It is interesting to note the position of Lunete here, in the interaction between Yvain and Laudine. If one is to concede that she is a mere intermediary between the two lovers, a position which perhaps does not give her due credit, it is then useful to characterize the nature of her status as a relay between the two protagonists. Eugene Vance notes that Lunete can be considered the coin by which the two lovers communicate; however, I propose here that the metaphor of a lyric poem is even more fitting. Lunete is in a sense the poem composed by the knight by which to supplicate his lady, she is the physical manifestation of the knight's desire to please the lady, she is the carrier of sweet and convincing words that are delivered often anonymously to the lady in question. This metaphor becomes even more pertinent in considering the verbal wiles that Lunete employs to engage Laudine on behalf of Yvain, she skillfully maneuvers her mistress into positions that she would perhaps not have taken without this subtle

manipulation; it is Lunete's mastery of words and wiles that eventually bring the two lovers together, and it is her ruse in the end that will once again reconcile the lovers after the long separation due to Yvain's failure in the realm of courtly love. Vance's argument of the role of Lunete's mediation between the two lovers seems to fall short in the fact that it considers Lunete only as a passive structure through which the agency of two other equal characters passed, completely dismissing the fact that Lunete seems to have more agency than either Laudine or Yvain. He states that Lunete "reflect[s] images of lovers back and forth between each other,"[102] an observation that seems to relegate Lunete to a purely passive standing, completely devoid of agency, when in fact it is she who so skillfully negotiates a new economic place for both Yvain and Laudine. While each of these other characters languishes in indecision, she, all in one masterful maneuver, delivers Laudine from her problematic solitude and procures a protector for her estate, as well as saves Yvain from the vengeance sought by the wife of the knight he has slain and delivers to him a highly desirable woman and vastly rich domain. If one must think of Lunete as a coin, then it must be conceded that she is also the one who enables the very value of the coin she embodies.

Furthermore, in considering Lunete's role in this courtly love and the metaphor of Lunete as a lyric poem, it seems inappropriate to credit Yvain with the intelligence and spirit that belong to Lunete alone. In this sense, it is interesting to note Ellen Germain's depiction of Lunete as filling roles that are purely masculine, and indeed it is Lunete who better embodies notions of honor and chivalry from the male point of view than even Yvain is able to. Germain states that Lunete "actually plays male roles in the romance, rather than female ones. She often participates in and upholds honor and chivalry from the male point of view […] in most […] ways Lunete is

[102] Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," 55.

the equal of men such as Yvain and Gauvain."[103] I would argue here that Lunete is perhaps even more adept at these roles of chivalry and honor than Yvain, considering the fact that she who carries these masculine roles with such ease, and does not fail in her "knightly endeavors". Lunete is, in this sense, not only the eloquent poem itself, but is also the author of the poem, because it is from her that such eloquence is born. In this sense, Lunete could be considered a better knight than Yvain, and perhaps even a better lover; she is better able to fulfill male roles of chivalry and honor and is also able to woo and supplicate the lady, Laudine, with eloquence and ease.

The currency of words exists along two themes in the Arthurian: words as grand tales of courtly adventures, and words as promises given. The strength or weakness of each notion of the word is equally important for a knight's standing in the court. Yvain can be considered the epitome of a courtly servant of love and even if he stumbles on his path to perfect servitude, it is precisely this nature of courtly servitude that elevates Yvain to the highest of social strata in the court. His clear authority, as well as the important linguistic interaction that takes place between knights of the court is demonstrated in Yvain's battle with Kay. As the king and his court have arrived at the magical fountain, they are confronted with the figure of the mysterious knight, who is Yvain in the armor of his slain opponent. The knight Kay, who has previously shown his spiteful nature in forcing Calogrenant's tale of shame in front of the Queen and the court, claims the right of fighting the mysterious knight in the name of king, still unaware that it is Yvain. Yvain's task is thus twofold, he must not only defeat the challenger as the new lord of the castle to establish his supremacy, but he must also defeat Kay to restore the honor of his cousin and his family. In the scene that ensues, Yvain defeats Kay in the service of Laudine, and the implication

[103] Ellen Germain, "Lunete, Women, and Power in Chrétien's *Yvain*," *Romance Quarterly* 38 (1991): 1-2.

is that Yvain is a better knight for being a true and devoted lover. After their battle and the revelation of Yvain's identity, Keu is immediately seen as an inferior knight, "S'en fu Keus de honte asommés/ Et mas, et mors, et desconfis/ Qu'il dist qu'I s'en estoit fuis" (v. 2282 – 2284). Kay's shameful defeat is exacerbated by the fact that he prior to his battle with the Yvain, the knight unleashed a torrent of words that maligned and belittled his fellow knight. Kay's rant shows the danger of poorly circulating one's words for he will come to regret his tirade:

> "Aÿ! Qu'est or devenuz
> Yvains quant il n'est sa venuz,
> Qui se vata* aprez mengier
> Qu'il yroit son cousin vengier?
> Bien pert que ce fu aprez vin!
> Fuiz s'en est, je le devin,
> Qu'il n'i osast venir por l'oil.
> Mout ce vanta de grant orgueil.
> Mout est hardiz qui louer s'oze
> De ce dont autre ne l'alose,
> Ne n'a temoig de sa losenge
> Ce n'est par force de loenge.
> Mout a entre mauvez et preu,
> Que li mauvayz delez le feu
> Dist de lui unes grans paroles,
> Si tient toutes les genz a foles
> Et cuide qu'on ne le congnoisse.
> Et li preuz avroit grant angoisse
> Se il ooit dire autrui
> Les proesses qui sont en luy.
> Et pour ce, certez, bien m'acort
> Au malvaiz, qu'il n'a mie tort,
> Et cil se prise et cil se vante,
> Qu'il ne trueve qui pour li mente.
> Se il n'en dit, qui l'en dira?
> Tuit se taissent, ne li ira
> Et des vaillanz crie le ban
> Et les mavaiz giete a un van." (v. 2181-2208)
>
> [Ah, what now has become of Yvain, who after his dinner made the boast that he would avenge his cousin's shame? Evidently he spoke in his cups. I believe that he has run away. He would not dare to come back for anything. He was very presumptuous to make such a boast. He is a bold man who dares to boast of what no one would praise him for, and who has

> no proof of his great feats except the words of some false flatterer. There is a great difference between a coward and a hero; for the coward seated beside the fire talks loudly about himself, holding all the rest as fools, and thinking that no one knows his real character. A hero would be distressed at hearing of prowess that is his related by someone else. And yet I maintain that the coward is not wrong to praise and vaunt himself, for he will find no one else to lie for him. If he does not boast of his deeds, who will? All pass over him in silence, even the heralds, who proclaim the brave, but discard the cowards.]

The very length of Kay's speech is surprising, and his intense focus on the importance of words as relates to one's honor. Furthermore, he speaks ambiguously of the role of circulating tales in the courtly system. It is given to the coward then to boast loudly of his own great feats, while a true knight knows that a good tale must circulate on its own. This further emphasizes the important place of women at the court, for even if the herald is tasked with an official proclamation of a knight's adventures and deeds, it is the women who circulate this worth among the court and bring honor to the knight. Even as he himself spends words without thought to their value or their effect on him, Kay provides valuable insight to the significance of words in the court.

So we see clearly how words have the ability to empower the speaker, or to diminish him or her. Yvain, contrary to Keu, can bring something of true value to the court, the tale of his great adventure in acquiring the lands and the lady Laudine. The king and the court all want to hear Yvain's story told, and he willingly obliges them. "Et li rois li requiert et prie/ Së il li plaist, quë il li die/ Comment il avoit exploitié" [And the King requested him urgently to tell him, if it be his will, how he had fared; for he was very curious to learn all about his adventure] (v. 2293 – 2295). At this point in time Yvain's power is great, and his status as servant of love is strong, he willingly yields his entire being to Laudine and commits himself to the protection of her castle

and her lands. In this sense, Yvain is the very model of a courtly servant, as is also seen in many examples of troubadour poetry; he supplicates his lady, through the medium of Lunete, and eventually commits himself, body and soul to the loving and protecting of Laudine. However, Yvain is not exempt from the rules of the court, and he too risks devaluation at court if he fails to accomplish knightly deeds. It is fear of this obscurity, of this anonymity, that pushes him to leave his new wife to travel about with Gauvain, accomplishing deeds of great renown. Gauvain persuades Yvain to join him with the infallible logic of the court: "Qui pour empirier se marie? Amender doit de bele dame/ Qui l'a a amie ou a femme/ Ne n'est puis drois quë ele l'aint/Que ses pris et les los remaint" [Whoever has a fair lady as his mistress or his wife should be the better for it, and it is not right that her affection should be bestowed on him after his worth and reputation are gone] (v. 2488 – 2492). The emphasis here is clearly on the knight's "pris et ses los" or his value as a knight and his fame. The importance of fame is as important as his honor, because if one is to achieve great deeds and have them unsung, is to never have accomplished them at all. Fame is the incorporated into the currency of words; one's deeds must be spoken of to have true value. Gawain warns his friend that should his fame diminish, he shall no longer be worthy of his wife. Thus Yvain agrees to ride out with Gawain to preserve his honor, while promising to his wife that he will return in no more than a year. However, the price of one's speech will become clear, and when Yvain breaks his word and fails to return to Laudine, the currency of his word devalues greatly. In other words, his word, or his promise, has little value and thus his status is greatly diminished.

Lunete, on the other hand, maintains a steadfast currency in terms of her words. Time and again Lunete enters the scene to save the more hapless Yvain, maneuvering and manipulating

Laudine on more than one occasion on behalf of the knight. The only moment in which Lunete's currency is devalued is when Yvain's poor currency pollutes her own. Vance justly states here that "if Lunete is a mediatrix of exchange, she becomes, herself, unjustly devalued by Yvain's breach of credit and is condemned by Laudine to be burned as a traitor"[104] then comments ironically about how bad coins are always returned the fires of the mint. It is true that here, Lunete is quickly devalued by her proximity to Yvain's currency, but she will all too soon regain her steady currency when she once again enacts her own agency and resumes control of the value of her own currency. Only when polluted does the currency of Lunete's word fail her, and she quickly acts to reestablish her own value and the power of her words, showing that when taken in and of itself, Lunete's currency is a force to be reckoned with.

The two women also share in a particularly empowering moment in which words play a key part. Laudine, via the intermediary of Lunete, publically denounces Yvain before the entire court of King Arthur. The power of words here is unmistakable and Yvain's stock, or his currency, in the court soon plummets. It must be noted that never have Lunete or Laudine's currency been stronger, with their words. In one fell swoop have they undermined Yvain's own currency and completely devalued his existence at court, and on top of everything else, they have denounced him in terms of his value and in terms of his word, or his promise. One must wonder, if the currency of words is what makes a knight at court, then not only does Lunete truly embody masculine roles of prowess at court, but so too does Laudine manage to make a considerable name for herself in the setting of the court. Both are strong players in the game of courtly love and tradition and it seems hard to imagine either of the two women as weak figures with no agency of their own. To imply that these women exist merely as currency to be bandied about by

[104] Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," 55.

the stronger male agency of knights is simply to ignore the fact that these women are not at all mere pieces of coin that are traded about, but that they themselves are often engaged in the game of currency, in which they have their own agency and are fully capable of controlling the currency of words, as opposed to being themselves the symbolic currency of the court.

An interesting detail is also pertinent here: when Lunete comes to denounce Yvain on behalf of Laudine, she speaks with eloquence and at length, indulging in a lengthy discourse on the faults and failings of Yvain. To this Yvain is unable to offer one word of response, Lunete has been empowered with the power of words, and Yvain has suddenly been stripped of it, "Yvains responder ne li puet/ Que sens et parole li faut" [Senseless and deprived of speech, Yvain is unable to reply] (v. 2774 – 2775). He has lost not only his speech, but also his reason, indicating and interesting correlation between the power of speech and the power of reason, leading on to speculate as to the power that women hold in this text, given their obvious skill with words. It is only when he reenters the system of servitude, as seen with his exchanges with the old man in the forest does Yvain start to regain a measure of his true self, and that he will even be able to speak again. Even more interesting is the fact that Yvain's full rehabilitation comes at the hands of a woman, who in covering him with an onguent restores his sanity. She also bestows upon the ragged knight a chance to return to the position of servitude that he held before with Laudine; the lady has need of Yvain's defense. As such, Yvain will once again his position of serving the needs of a lady, a task he will have to repeat again and again in order to obtain the pardon of the lady he truly desires.

Lunete and Laudine both prove themselves as strong in the currency of words. Lunete, as we have seen, is able to deftly maneuver courtly traditions with her quick witted words, but Laudine too is strong in terms of the currency of her word. In contemplating the power of feminine speech in the romance, it is important to note that Yvain does not maintain the honor of keeping his word, while Laudine clearly does. In her promise to Lunete to do anything to help the mysterious *Chevalier au Lion* reconcile with his *dame* she unknowingly commits herself to forgiving the lover who so terribly scorned her in breaking his knightly vows to her. However, even in realizing the consequences of such a vow, Laudine is not even tempted to break her word, even though it was gained through ruse and willing manipulation. She obviously takes the concept of her word more strongly than does Yvain and in the end, one cannot doubt that Laudine, for all her potential feminine caprice, has more honor than Yvain: "'Se dieu me saut/ Bien m'as a tes paroles prise/ Que chelui qui riens ne me prise/ Me fera amer mal gré mien/ Or as tu esploité mout bien" [God save me! You have caught me neatly in a trap! You will make me love, in spite of myself, a man who neither loves nor esteems me. This is a fine piece of work, and a charming way of serving me!] (v. 6750 – 6754). Her power, although implicit and veiled in the structures of courtly love, is firm and manifests itself in surprising ways, such as in her forgiveness of Yvain in the end. She states that " Et se ne fust de perjurer? Trop laide chose et trop vilaine/ Jammais a moi pour nule paine/ Pais në acorde ne trouvast" [And if it were not a mean and ugly thing to break one's word, he would never make his peace or be reconciled with me] (v. 6758 – 6761). The idea of taking back the man who so failed her is a terrible thought, but Laudine is unwilling to break her word, such an act would be "trop laide chose et trop vilaine" and one cannot help but notice the difference in attitudes toward the value of one's word. One cannot fail to notice either the power of Laudine's forgiveness in this text, twice does she pardon

the terrible deeds of Yvain, first in killing her husband and then in breaking his promise to her. In each situation, Yvain's existence is contingent on her forgiveness, he must be forgiven to live in the first situation, and he must be forgiven to fully return to his position of honor

Returning to the notion of Yvain as courtly servant, one might argue that this characterization of Yvain as a perfect servant of love is contradictory, given that all too soon he falls terribly in his status as such, failing his *dame* at the most critical of moments. Yvain, in breaking his word to Laudine, has not only shattered his status as a perfect servant of love, but has also ruined his standing in King Arthur's court, rendering him a true outsider, not fit to participate in any sort of courtly tradition. Ironically, it is at this moment that Yvain will start to truly embody the ideal of the knight as a servant of love, struggling terribly and without respite to regain the status he once held and to regain the trust and love of his *dame.* When Yvain first sets out with Gauvain to win fame and fortune, there are several elements at play, he is attempting to fulfill this status as servant of love by undertaking great tourneys in the service of his lady and he is also attempting to maintain the currency of his existence at court, the currency of words is higher when there are more words, or tales, to be released into circulation in the market of courtly story-telling. Yvain clearly fails at both of these, but paradoxically, this is also the moment that he will tap into the highest of ideals. Yvain must go through a period of trials and tribulations to win back his lady and, once regaining his sanity, will set out to serve his lady loyally and without wavering once from his course, his entire existence is devoted to the service of his lady. So great is Yvain's commitment to becoming once again a perfect servant of love, that along the way, he endeavors to help every lady and maiden that falls across his path.

In contemplating the lot of women in the world of Chrétien de Troyes, it is necessary to understand the complex structures that govern such an environment. The value of words, outweighing any riches, is tantamount to one's very worth, and women show themselves, time and again, through many different situations, able to maneuver deftly in the economy of speech. Women such as the queen, Lunete, and Laudine are all credited with the gift of words, a skill that gives them a position of power in the court that is often overlooked. It is fallacious to assume that these women are without agency, or to categorize them in the stereotypical image of a capricious and unstable woman, women obviously hold the possibility of great influence and even power and when necessary, they can use these words, this power, to affect the world around them. These women, while defined from within the theme of courtly love, find ways in which to resist the dominance of the masculine structures that would define and constrain them.

So love it would seem is always grounded in various social realities and tied to the more economic origins of highly regulated social interactions between the lady and the knight. To respond to the image of the knight on bended knee and lady first evoked, I would then say that this romantic ideal would seem to be completely unconvincing when considered through a more critical light, not only for the misogyny inherent in the texts, but also for the socially acquisitive nature of love matches. But at the core of medieval romance is a more complicated face of love, problematic perhaps to our understanding of the romanticized love suggested by a 19th century informed Gaston Paris, but nevertheless a compelling example of love, and a love maintained by the very women who were said to be most excluded from it. While stepping away from the ideal, I would argue that female characters cannot be defined by strict dichotomies of male power and female passivity. More than just resisting the phallic unity, female characters such as Lunete act

in a way that makes possible a reading of women that recognizes her economic and verbal agency and it is this agency that is integral to the very progression of the narrative.

Chapter Two

The Many Faces of the Shepherdess

Introduction

In troubadour lyric poetry and courtly romance the lady is usually of noble standing, a figure of values and speech informed by her courtly setting and her interactions with knights and other aristocracy. However, the aristocratic medieval lady does not constitute the entirety of feminine representation in the literature of the Middle Ages. So the question must be asked, what happens in those instances when the medieval lady is not a lady at all, but a shepherdess? How does the circulating feminine body function when the body itself is that of a lowly peasant? To answer these questions I will look at how the figure of the shepherdess is represented in the lyric poems known as the pastourelle and I will examine what happens when she speaks and interacts with her male counterparts in these narratives.

The story of the shepherdess in medieval French lyric is a fairly unambiguous one on the face of it. In the pastourelle, a knight[105] rides out into the country on a beautiful spring day and stumbles upon a shepherdess singing or weaving flowers as she tends to her sheep. He is immediately captured by the fresh bucolic appeal of her beauty and in the most typical examples of the genre, he propositions her. The importance of the pastourelle for this study is found in the action that ensues, where the shepherdess often strikes up a spirited and intelligent conversation

[105] The pastourelle is recounted in the first person by a poet-narrator, who is also typically assumed to be a knight. Although the knight here rarely if ever refers to himself explicitly as knight or poet, it is obvious that the narrator is both, in the way he is addressed in the poem and in some examples where the poet as knight makes mention of his lord and patron. As William P. Jones explained, it is natural that the gallant who rides out should be a knight, for it is the poet himself who was envisioning himself in these adventures. Also the troubadours who wrote pastourelles often were knights, some of them high-ranking. Michel Zink explains that although he would not refer to himself as knight in the pastourelle, he was sometimes addressed as such by those he encountered. Michel Zink, *La Pastourelle: Poésie et Folklore au Moyen Age* (Paris: Bordas, 1972), 28-29.

with the knight in which she, with varying degrees of effort and success, resists the advances of the gallant who has approached her. In the most lively and provocative examples of the pastourelle the shepherdess spurns the advances of the knight with nothing more than her sharp wit and sharp tongue and sends him on his way; in extreme examples of failed resistance that are equally provocative, even as the shepherdess bests the knight at verbal sparring, he disregards the realm of rational discussion and rapes her. This is the substance of the genre of the lyric pastourelle, a genre that takes its name from what William P. Jones identifies as "the principal actor, the shepherdess herself."[106]

The importance of the shepherdess to this discussion of the speaking woman in the context of medieval literature becomes clear as one encounters a voluble shepherdess whose words, while heeded as often as not, are always heard. In stark contrast to the tradition of the lyric poetry of the troubadours where the women are the distant and intangible, faceless and voiceless objects of desire, in the pastourelle the shepherdess is almost always speaking and interacting wholeheartedly with the knight who propositions her. This peasant girl speaks her mind with a clarity and reason that seem often to elude the knight, and interestingly, the shepherdess often speaks intelligently of the social structures that necessarily define their relationship, as opposed to the knight, who resorts to bribes or promises or violence to achieve his desires in a willing disregard of the prescribed social constraints that he has attempted to circumvent in his excursion to the country. Obviously his physical inferior, the shepherdess avails herself of her wit and words to position herself against his desirous advances. But the variety of her response must carefully be considered: armed with her clever words, she

[106] The Old French for shepherdess is *pastoure*, whereby the *pastourelle* derives its name.

sometimes resists the knight only to praise him at the end of a violent encounter; other times she gives in to his advances, accepting his offers of riches or trusting his promises of affection.

This chapter will consider in part how the shepherdess speaks and what her words mean, while also addressing her sexuality and her ability to act in the face of choices offered in the pastourelle. While obviously a masculine construct (the pastourelles were written largely by the male-dominated troubadours and trouvères) the shepherdess flings away the role of a passive, silent female character with her biting wit. The issue of genre, perhaps because it is so particularly tenuous when considering the medieval lyric pastourelle, offers a particularly interesting angle with which to approach this feminine figure. Far from a fixed character, she varies from poem to poem and continues to surprise with each interpretation. As part of the tradition of lyric poetry, one would expect the shepherdess to be circulated into invisibility, but within the flowing parameters of the pastourelle, her voice emerges and enters the reader's field of vision as an important representation of a broader medieval perception of the feminine. The very fact that the figure of the shepherdess gave rise to its own genre is a testament to the importance of the women presented in these texts and generic categorization will be particularly important in considering how the varied faces of the shepherdess offered a representation of the feminine that is at once distinct from her courtly counterparts and yet strangely haunted by the women she seems so different from.

The shepherdess is such a provocative figure precisely because the variety of representation that results in the instability of the genre. Furthermore, the medieval fascination with this woman beyond the city limits once again cues the reader to consider the historical

movements at play in the representation, and to study the women in these poems through a historical lens. She demands attention not only for her role in a genre that flourished briefly, yet intensely, amidst the lyric production of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and echoes of which resonated in the literature of the later Middle Ages with such prominent authors as Adam de la Halle, Jean Froissart, and Christine de Pizan[107] and continued to reverberate through popular French song and literature[108], but also for her representation as a speaking, cogent literary figure that not only interacted actively with the masculine world around her, but acted and spoke in way that prompted an array of responses from her knightly counterpart.

The Fantasy of the Woman Beyond the Walls

The locus of the pastourelle is key, wherein the knight has ridden far beyond the city and the court to engage a feminine figure that is seemingly far from the rigid social structures that typically define and guide the knight's actions. It is the knight's reaction to the speaking shepherdess that often determines the outcome of the pastourelle, and the many poems that constitute the genre of the pastourelle present numerous and different examples of these solitary encounters far beyond the castle walls. If the courtly romance is defined by highly choreographed interactions between knight and lady, then in riding beyond the gaze of the court, the knight would seem to have freed himself from social convention to indulge in his most latent sexual desires. But far from an easy conquest of a simple peasant girl, the knight's encounters

[107] See Geri L. Smith's work about the pastourelle as genre where she discusses at length the afore-mentioned authors' encounters with the pastourelle. Geri L. Smith *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition: Poetic Motivations and Generic Transformations* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2009).
[108] The subject of William J. Powell's book *The Pastourelle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931) has for point of departure the popular song *La bergère et le loup* and he traces with great depth its origins and variations throughout the centuries.

with the shepherdess are often sophisticated verbal sparring matches that present a fascinating portrait of male and female interaction.

The knight's fantasies are presented as a nuanced, fluctuating and diverse masculine reaction to what would seem an essentialized female form, and thus it is perhaps surprising when the audience is presented with a female character that speaks, acts and resists the knight in a representation that is far from static. Indeed, the figure of the shepherdess changes from poem to poem and no two women are the same. I would argue that the pastourelle presents an intricate and important look at male fantasy that is confronted with its own fluid perception of the feminine and the manner in which the knight reacts to the shepherdess is the masculine response to conflicting preconceived ideas of what the feminine embodies. The dialogue presented in these poems is significant not only for its representation of individual male response to the figure of the woman, but more broadly mirrors a wider masculine response to evolving concepts of women and femininity in the Middle Ages. In an interesting parallel, the medieval man's wider interactions with women are staged in the witty back and forth that occurs at the narrative level in the pastourelle between two seemingly isolated individuals.

While it is the knight's reaction that can often set the tone of violence in the pastourelle, the shepherdess is hardly mute, and her actions and reactions are equally essential to the conversation that takes place. The representation of the dialogue, and often the struggle, between the two characters varies widely from poem to poem. Within the simple construction of the pastourelle, a genre that is conceived specifically for one seemingly uniform type of encounter between two very specific players, there is a surprising variance in the portrayals of knight and

shepherdess and an equally surprising number of divergent themes present in the genre. Foremost among these themes is the sexualized body of the woman, subjected to the male fantasy that would seem to define her; but perhaps surprisingly from a genre that objectifies the shepherdess figure, the theme of a speaking woman is equally vital in the genre since her very resistance makes the shepherdess a figure of great ambiguity and fluctuation.

As a figure constructed in the image of male fantasy, the resistance that the shepherdess offers to the knight seems typical of the masculine construction of the unattainable woman that sublimates the figure of the women into the realm of alterity and alienates even as it exalts. This dynamic is presented in countless troubadour lyric poems with the distant lady, inaccessible and severe, and again in the courtly romance where the path between two lovers is often obscured by a profusion of courtly strictures. In a curious rendering of the woman that would only recast her in the image of her courtly counterparts, the knight constructs the shepherdess within a framework of masculine fantasy that is founded in resistance and alienation. Thus as the knight rides far from the court that defines his existence and his interactions with all those around him, he carries the weighty constructions of preconceived fantasies of the feminine. The escape is not an escape at all, but a relocation of the male fantasy. The question must then be asked, to what purpose this relocation?

The answer lies perhaps in the same codes of conduct that the knight tries to flee, but to which he is irrevocably linked, even at the level of subconscious male fantasy. Joan Ferrante's work suggests that the knight would ride out beyond the castle wall, beyond the courtly structure, to find an easy fling, but would write encounters with a shepherdess who in many instances

parallels all too well the lady the knight has left behind.[109] His encounter, following Ferrante's reading of the Pastourelle, is part fantasy of an encounter with a lady of the court, without all the trappings of the court, and part desire for the carefree, light-hearted encounters the lower classes would seem to enjoy. Unlike the courtly lady, who is safely ensconced in the rigid rules of courtly conduct, the shepherdess is not protected by the constraints of a courtly setting, and the knight seems to find himself free of the shackles that restrict his behavior at court. Beyond the castle walls in the open fields of the pastourelle the woman is vulnerable and easily at the mercy of the knight's lust. But his subconscious is still enmeshed in the courtly system that defines his being, that of a knight. And in a subconscious rendering of fantasy that is written into the very heart of his existence, the knight only recreates the image of male fantasy that is an unconscious, subconscious simulation of the world with which he is familiar.

In a surprising way then, the knight's interactions with the courtly lady are "real" interactions, while those with the shepherdess, as a means of escaping the perceived reality of the court, are but a simulation of the real, designed to cater specifically to male fantasy while circumventing the codes of conduct that prevail at court. Still, even within this construct the knight can only recreate the figure of the woman that is at the heart of his fantasy, a woman that, paradoxically, must be unattainable to truly be desirable. What is most compelling is that the doubled desire that occurs within the pastourelle at the level of the narrative also defines the genre as it relates to medieval conceptions of women. These poems present perceived representations of real women, as in historical medieval women, while also necessarily defining them in the context of the manner in which they are perceived by the masculine gaze. Nicholas Oberly provides insight into this somewhat problematic shift from the perceived "real" woman to

[109] Joan Ferrante, "Male Fantasy and female reality in courtly literature," *Women's Studies* 11 (1984): 67-97.

her literary representation: "The simulation is characterized by a blending of 'reality' and representation, where there is no clear indication of where the former stops and the latter begins."[110] We must consider the genre of the pastourelle as another intersection of male fantasy with female reality, and in the very substance that constitutes the basis for his fantasy, the woman's resistance is the site of an important and ongoing dialogue, a dialogue that is reproduced conspicuously in the knight's colorful exchanges with the shepherdess from within the poem. In reading the shepherdess's encounters with the knight, where usually the court would regulate her interaction with a member of the opposite sex, for the shepherdess, her wit would serve as her shield and her resistance.

In writing the resistant shepherdess, the poet has inscribed in the figure of the woman all the traits he is seemingly trying to escape by riding beyond the castle walls. The shepherdess's linguistic resistance mirrors the resistance he finds at court, and his fantasy is thus achieved by the very process in which it is often thwarted. But it is here that the great diversity of the genre of the pastourelle further complicates the matter, while also revealing the highly changeable nature of each author's work. The knight's reaction to the resistance offered by the shepherdess varies by poem, and if in some examples of the pastourelle the knight reacts violently to the shepherdess's refusal, in others, there is neither resistance nor forced sex. There are even examples in which a knight, having just approached a shepherdess, professes love and loyalty for another:

> "Bele, je vos mentiroie
> se-l vos avoie en convent,
> car mes cuers aillors s'otroie,

[110] Nicholas Oberly "reality/hyperreality," http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/realityhyperreality-1/. Oberly provides an interesting discussion of the concepts of reality versus hyperreality, referring to works by Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard to explain the construction of representations of reality.

sachiez, tot entierement;
maiz sachiez a escient
que volontiers le feroie
se j'eüsse pensement
de mon cuer qui aillors tent." (n.61.17-24)

[Pretty one, I would lie to you If I promised you that, For my heart is given elsewhere, You should know, quite utterly; But know for sure That I'd do it gladly If I had control of my heart, That yearns for another."][111]

In some poems it is the shepherdess who invites the knight to her side with a song proclaiming her availability and her willingness for a lover or, in a moment of ironic reversal the shepherdess is the one to rape the knight "Voirement de moi fist tout son talent et me descouvri et me foula et ledi plus que je ne di" [In truth She had her way with me And laid me bare And crushed and abused me More than I can say] (n. 37.41-45).[112] There is such variance in the pastourelle that it is difficult to ascribe any firm or overarching themes of feminine resistance versus feminine accessibility to the genre.

In the most extreme instances, her words fail to thwart the advances of an amorous knight and he either threatens violence or succeeds in raping her. When this occurs, it points not to an absence of resistance on the part of the shepherdess, but instead to the overwhelming desires of the knight who rapes her, who ignores her moral and rational arguments to take, with violence, that which he desires. In these extreme cases of violence critics are often torn when presented

[111] All versions and translations of the pastourelle are taken from William D. Paden's compliation *The Medieval Pastourelle* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987) unless otherwise noted. He includes all known versions of the classical pastourelle including those found in the editions by Bartsch and Rivière whose compilations include the northern Old French pastourelle. He also crosses the linguistic barrier including, and most important for this study, poems in Occitan, including those found in Audiau; he also includes examples of the pastourelle found in Latin, German, and Castilian. His book is the only edition to compile such a wide and complete range of pastourelle along with a unified voice of translation.

[112] Paden ascribes to this instance of the pastourelle as an ironic reversal of roles wherein the poet was likely hoping to provoke humor at the reversal of a known convention. Kathryn Gravdal attributes to this moment an admission of masculine awareness that the genre itself is a celebration of rape and the moment of reversal is a knowing, ironic nod at the moment of reversed assault.

with a shepherdess who, immediately after a scene depicting her rape, is no longer presented as the resisting woman, and who instead takes a moment to compliment the knight on his performance, often exclaiming that he is a marvelous lover indeed.

This post-coital reversal has been read in several ways, from William Paden who suggests that the initial resistance was a façade that the knight was easily able to see through[113] to Katherine Gravdal who argues that it is only by fact of a male-authored representation of male fantasy that the shepherdess is represented not only as enjoying her rape, but indeed thanking the man for having raped her.[114] In both arguments, one must contend with the nature of the knight as both actor and creator, as he is often the projected figure of the poet who writes the story of his own imagined encounter with a shepherdess. This knight as the thinly veiled persona of the poet-narrator, unable to best the shepherdess verbally, sometimes resorts to such brutal tactics as violence and rape. However shocking this rape might seem in the lighthearted atmosphere of the pastourelle it becomes even more significant in that we know it is rape because the shepherdess has clearly vocalized her resistance against her assailant. Still, it must be noted that rape is not the standard conclusion for most pastourelles, however provocative it might be, and to concentrate only on rape in the pastourelle is to preclude the countless variations that abound in the genre, including those where the shepherdess might initially resist but eventually concede to an amorous union with the knight, for whatever reason, and then walk away none the worse for

[113] William Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," *Romanic Review* 80 (1985). Paden also speaks to the theme of rape obliquely in his article "The Figure of the Shepherdess in the Medieval Pastourelle" in which he argues that the figure of the shepherdess is a completely imaginary one with a biblical basis and a holy representation. Paden reads holy, even saintly elements in her representation, and thus the acts of rape performed against her become a sort of exemplum against despicable behavior. William Paden, "The Figure of the Shepherdess in the Medieval Pastourelle," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 25 (1998).

[114] See Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) and "Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle," *Romanic Review* 76 (1985).

wear. In other examples of the pastourelle the woman is either tempted by riches that the knight offers her in exchange for her sex, or makes the suggestion herself that her situation is poor and that the knight may improve it if he desires her. This element of prostitution, where the woman is seen bartering for her sexuality is yet another theme present in the nebulous genre of the pastourelle, in which the reader cannot expect a standard form of behavior from either actor, knight or shepherdess. If she sometimes refuses the gifts (or bribes, or payments) then she is equally likely to accept them and the two engage in an act of mutually beneficial exchange.

In these versions of the pastourelle, the shepherdess is not presented a victim, unable to speak or act for herself. Far from it. Quite to the contrary, she proves instead to be an example of a medieval woman written as capable of making a deliberate decision about her own sexuality. While it is true in some of the lyric pastourelles that the shepherdess has the choice taken out of her hands, it is compelling to note that in the majority of the poems the female character actively expresses her desires and oftentimes she linguistically dominates the dialogue that occurs between her and the knight. In the instances of rape, when they do occur, it is a shocking moment where the knight discards reason and courtly convention to take what he desires savagely. This frequently produces a disconnect in the pastourelle where at one moment the shepherdess and knight spar verbally and at the next moment the poem moves suddenly to a physical description of force as the knight abandons words and describes only his actions as he takes the shepherdess. The tremendously articulate nature of the shepherdess is often set in stark contrast to these silent moments of rape and violence, and this makes the instances of her speech all the more compelling. While it is certainly one of the most visible and shocking themes in the pastourelle it is important to note that rape does not occur in many of the poems. Even the

element of resistance is not always present. But in the overwhelming majority of the poems the shepherdess does speak and interact with the knight in a way that contrasts the shepherdess with the typically silent and faceless lady of the troubadour lyric poem. If the genre of the pastourelle is inherently diverse in representation of a singular content, I would suggest an approach that does not focus only on extreme examples. In reading the pastourelle as a constantly changing dialogue between male perception and female reality, then it only makes sense that every response is an individual one. The poems, in their very singularity, grant the method by which to consider them as a whole. I would argue that it is precisely because the genre is so diverse that it can be considered an important representation of medieval attitudes toward women, attitudes that were not uniform by any means.

Generic Conventions and the Problem of Origins in the Medieval Lyric Pastourelle

In order to situate the shepherdess as a speaking figure, it is useful to understand the pastourelle as a genre with a specific set of conventions. The pastourelle is generally most recognized in medieval literature as a type of lyric poetry, composed first in Provençal in the south of France and then in the Old French dialects of northern France, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Arguments have been made on both sides as to whether the pastourelle originated in the south of France with the Provençal troubadours, or in the north with the trouvères; some posit that the pastourelle originated in the middle region of France, or even that the genre arose independently in both north and south[115]. Even the Classical antecedents of the

[115] For a discussions on the origins of the pastourelle see W.P. Jones who traces the argument through various critical cycles, including the arguments of Maruice Delbouille and Edmund Faral where Delbouille remains noncommittal on the origins of the Latin songs and Faral posits that the medieval Latin pastourelle imitated the

pastourelle have been a place of critical dispute, and have been traced either to Ovidian Latin love lyric[116] or to Virgil's *Bucolics*[117] with little sign of conciliation between the two theories. Most critics concur on the hazy past of the pastourelle and suggest that more work need be done to reach a more complete understanding.

The prevailing opinion, however, is that the pastourelle originated in the Provençal language with the troubadours of southern France in the twelfth century but then rose to preeminence in Old French in the northern regions in the thirteenth century. Incidentally, the north of France produced the larger corpus of pastourelle lyric, some 160 texts compared to the approximately thirty texts found in Provençal.[118] Differentiating between the poems of the two regions is important in that the two are distinct in character if not content. Although the pastourelles from both regions demonstrate similarities in the broad strokes, the Provençal corpus is considered generally more sophisticated and refined compared to the later Old French poems.[119] Furthermore, the Provençal poems are traditionally considered more closely linked to courtly culture, while the Old French poems are generally presented as more of a counterpoint to courtly convention than an extension thereof. This distinction accounts for the use of violence and sexuality as vehicles of humor would seem to emphasize their distance not only from the Provençal pastourelles, but also from the knight's principal setting in the aristocratic courtly milieu.

French. Michel Zink also comment on the origins of the genre, mostly arguing against Faral's work and William Paden comments on the ties between the pastourelle and the Old French *bergerie*.

[116] Maurice Delbouille, *Les Origines de la pastourelle* (Bruxelles: Lamertin, 1926).

[117] Edmond Faral, *La pastourelle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1923).

[118] Bartsch and Rivière published editions containing the Old French examples of the pastourelle while Audiau published the Occitan poems. Paden's *Medieval Pastourelle* contains all examples from both subgenres and also include poems from other languages.

[119] William Powell discusses the nature of the earlier Provencal pastourelle as far more refined than their northern counterparts that circulate widely later in the thirteenth century.

This distinction between the two types of lyric pastourelle is also important in that there is a noticeable increase in the number of violent encounters, including those that end in rape, from the earlier Provençal poems to the later Old French poems. In the Provençal corpus, only one of the thirty texts ends in rape, compared to the Old French corpus in which, depending on the critical perspective, rape occurs in no less than twenty but perhaps in as many as thirty-eight of the Old French pastourelles[120]. This sharp increase in the number of violent encounters from the Provençal to the Old French corpus explain William P. Jones's characterization of the pastourelle as a genre "while… fresh and vigorous in its inception, lost, in extreme verse forms[121], all its emotion of incident and character, until it finally became the excuse for licentious and indecent narrative songs."[122] The number of violent incidents also spurred Kathryn Gravdal's important article "Camouflaging Rape" in which she argues that the pastourelle as a genre celebrates rape. One of Gravdal's most interesting contributions to the discussion of the pastourelle is her criticism of the acceptance and tolerance of rape in current critical work. Indeed many critics seem to gloss over the presences of rape in the pastourelle; they ascribe such violence to the nature of the genre itself, referencing Andreas Capellanus's *De amore* in which he offers the following advice for a man who falls in love with a peasant woman:

> And if you should, by some chance, fall in love […] be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate what you seek and to embrace them by force. For you can hardly soften their outward inflexibility so far that they will grant you their embraces quietly or permit you to have the solaces you desire unless first you use a little compulsion as a convenient cure for their shyness. We do

[120] See Kathryn Gravdal v. William D. Paden in their *querelle* on the topic of rape.
[121] See Christopher Callahan's article "Hybrid Discourse and Performance in the Old French Pastourelle," *French Forum* 27 (2002): 1-22. Callahan argues that the later pastourelle, in opposition with the earlier Occitan *pastorela* were a site of increasing experimentation where courtly dialogue was interspersed with refrains highlighting the rustic nature of the subject matter, in a word, the shepherdess herself.
[122] Jones, *The Pastourelle*, 23.

> not say these things, however, because we want to persuade you to love such women, but only so that, if through lack of caution you should be driven to love them, you may know, in brief compass, what to do.[123]

It should come as no surprise that critics have often associated this passage from Capellanus with the pastourelle, often to explain the presence of rape in the genre. This designates the pastourelle not only as a place where the elevated conventions of courtly love do not apply, but also helps to situate the genre firmly as an aristocratic one. If the first person narrator as poet and knight usually serve to substantiate the theory of its elevated origins (in spite of its popular content), the attitude of the narrator toward the shepherdess can only reinforce the belief that the pastourelle originated in aristocratic spheres for the pleasure of its courtly members. Thus the theme of rape not only underlines the courtly conventions of the genre, but would have been deemed an appropriate manner of interacting with the titular subject of the pastourelle, who herself is a peasant. This would also explain a critical interpretation that accepts at face value the presence of rape in the pastourelle rather than balking at the easy violence that becomes the unquestioned outcome in many examples of the pastourelle. Among these are Paden, who suggests that the brutality of the pastourelle is exactly what the author makes of it, as is the reaction of the shepherdess to the rape. While Paden makes a valid point that rape does not occur in every poem in the genre, he takes her words at face value while ignoring the possibility of a more nuanced interpretation. While it is difficult to subscribe wholeheartedly to Gravdal's assertion that modern criticism is completely blind to the rape that occurs in the pastourelle, or that it is a genre that celebrates rape in its entirety, there is a disconcerting tendency in critical approaches to the pastourelle to relegate the episodes of rape to mere devices of humor.

[123] Andreas Capellanus, *De arte honeste amandi*,, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

These differences in reception point to the difficulty of understanding the pastourelle as a genre at all. The pastourelle resists typical categorizations of genre in terms of form, or expectations as to content beyond the presence of the shepherdess. If critics have circumvented serious considerations of rape as a defining theme of the genre, it is probably due the fact that in many poems, rape is completely absent. Gravdal attributes this to a willful blindness on the part of these critics, who touch on rape but do not consider it with the depth that Gravdal offers. It is necessary, however, to understand that any approaches to the pastourelle that seek to attribute uniformity to the genre is problematic when considering the poems as a whole. Rape is no more a defining feature of the pastourelle than is the form of the poem, or its representation of a single type of men or women. Rape and the threat of violence do occur in an important number of the pastourelles, but it is by no means an overwhelming theme that dominates the substance of the genre. In the majority of the Provençal and Old French pastourelles the only unifying theme would seem to be a minimal narrative structure: that of a knight out in the country stumbling upon a shepherdess. But even this encounter varies highly from poem to poem. The most notable variation of the "classical" example of the pastourelle is the bergerie in which the knight serves merely as spectator to the principal action that occurs among the shepherds themselves. Other variations include poems in which the knight encounters not a shepherdess but a shepherd to whom he either reveals his woes in love, or who in return seeks guidance on the subject of love from the presumably more experienced knight-poet who is well-versed in the art of courtly love. The pastourelles considered in this chapter belong exclusively to the lyric realm, but the pastourelle as genre overflows into a variety of forms, including those undertaken by later medieval authors, such as the aforementioned Adam, Froissart and Christine.[124] Its popularity

[124] These three literary figures lend vibrancy to the pastourelle in melding the concept of the pastourelle to new literary forms. Adam de la Halle does this with theater in *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, Jean Froissart couples politics and

was so widespread that the pastourelle as a thematic device persists today in modern representations of the shepherdess figure in both song and other artistic media.

William D. Paden tackles the problem of the genre's origins when he argues that the shepherdess as a historical, cultural figure was nonexistent and merely the construct of the genre itself.[125] He rejects the historical reality of the shepherdess to argue for a figure with saintly or religious overtones originating in biblical representations of women tending to sheep. This suggestion of religious origins works well enough with the earlier Provençal poems, which are more sophisticated and less aggressive in nature, but the association dissolves with the eroticism of the later Old French poems and Paden himself admits that the holy origins and nature of the shepherdess fade quickly in the twelfth century to be completely absent from the shepherdess by the fourteenth century. However, in rejecting any possible historical referent to the figure of the shepherdess, Paden subscribes a little too wholly to an opinion he expresses elsewhere, in which he unequivocally states that the "the woman is not a real shepherdess and never has been; she is a character, and if the male poet whose erotic fantasy she embodies chose to think of her as bouncing back with a grin, then that is what the fictional shepherdess did."[126] Paden is of course referring here to the occurrence of rape in the pastourelle and perhaps as a justification thereof completely denies any possible real feminine referent in the poems beyond the spectral shadow of a biblical shepherdess. Still, as he finishes an interesting foray into the textual origins of the shepherdess, Paden himself does not seem to know what to do with such an interpretation, concluding that the "reminiscence" of holiness or saintliness "subtly alters the meaning of the

history with the genre in examples of *grand chant courtois*, and Christine de Pizan recasts the shepherdess as poet in her *Dit de la pastoure*.

[125] Paden, "The Figure of the Shepherdess in the Medieval Pastourelle," 5.

[126] Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," 344.

songs" but with no comments as to how or why. And if the shepherdess is pure fiction as he argues, it problematizes the instances in the pastourelle in which she thwarts the knight's desires. Paden ascribes this resistance to the fundamental nature of the pastourelle. Calling on Freud's analysis of sexual repression[127] he states that if the pastourelle "expressed sexuality outright it would not be a poem at all; rather, on such a model the poet should have set about directly raping his female listener." He continues by defining the genre as a series of poetic jokes from vulgar to refined that play on themes of repressed sexuality, with varying balances of sexuality and repression, *id* and *superego*, that correspond resultingly to variations in the female figure within the poems.

This leads to an interesting conclusion that the knight's personal, individual reaction to his own sexuality, as well as to feminine sexuality, would result in varying responses from the shepherdess that would change from poem to poem, depending wholly on the knight. While laying this framework for an interpretation of the knight and shepherdess, Paden still stops short of considering the broader implications of the shepherdess as male fantasy. For Paden, she is a figment of the knight's sexual imagination and nothing more, with little basis in anything but an isolated male fantasy. What Paden fails to consider is that the very fluidity of the knights as they interact with the shepherdesses they encounter speaks to more than just variations in sexual fantasy. I would argue that these fantasies are as a result of the narrator-poet's interactions with and perceptions of medieval women.

Furthermore, in recognizing the shepherdess's resistance as typical of the genre, Paden identifies an important aspect of the pastourelle, but fails to take the interpretation further,

[127] Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," 345.

instead isolating this resistance to the narrative itself. He attempts to place the figure of the shepherdess firmly in the realm of abstracted fantasy, arguing "that such behavior occurs only in faraway places."[128] But this does account for the representation of an articulate, sophisticated construction of the figure of the shepherdess. Paden himself concedes that the shepherdess is a more "elemental version" of the courtly lady, but many critics have taken this further, stating that there is little difference between the shepherdess and lady in many of these poems. I would argue that Paden's reading of resistance and rape is undeniably useful in considering the figure of the shepherdess, but his reading of her falls flat when he relegates her to the realm of pure fantasy without the slightest trace of a historical referent to be found in her. Far from being a pure construct of the poet/knight's imagination, the shepherdess stems from images of the courtly lady that the poet as knight cannot escape, even riding beyond the castle walls.

This very resistance is informed by the doubling of the courtly lady over the shepherdess's rustic image, and necessarily provokes considerations of the shepherdess as a more nuanced figure. Far from being a simple, unambiguous creation of male desire, the shepherdess represents a complex image of the medieval woman that is influenced by social structures and cultural models not in evidence. Furthermore, while female resistance would seem to be an essential element in the construction of many of these male-wrought fantasies, it does not explain the great number of pastourelles that end in the knight's own humiliation, in which he is fooled, mocked, or chased away by the shepherdess and her companions. I would argue that the genre, as fluid and elusive as it is, presents instead a dialogue between masculine and feminine realities, with no one poem able to give a definite representation of gender relations. Each poem's approach to the shepherdess exemplifies an author's interaction with the

[128] Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," 348.

representation of women in a space perceived to be free of courtly direction. That the knight can still not escape his own connection to the court does not prevent the poem from revealing a masculine reaction to the feminine that is seemingly unfettered by the society around him. But even as the knight feels himself free of the court and thus able to enact fantasies on abstracted female body, he is unable to avoid constructing a fantasy of the very thing he thought to flee. So too in the pastourelle does the poet as narrator attempt to construct a vision of pure fantasy, but is unable to prevent the image of real historical women from coloring his depictions of the shepherdess. If each pastourelle is different, it is because each poet perceives women differently, having been influenced by any number of historical examples that have the potential to greatly affect his attitude toward and his depictions of the medieval woman. This great diversity of historical influences account for the problem of generic categorization and feminine representation in the pastourelle. But this diversity also demonstrates how the pastourelle is well-situated to respond to the effect of social and cultural realities. Because of the relatively unadorned content and the freedom of form, complex manifestations of cultural and social attitudes find their place in the deceptive simplicity poems of the pastourelle genre.

The knight's interactions with the shepherdess seem complicated enough, but it is important to add yet another layer to this nuanced feminine figure. If critics do not agree on the origins of the pastourelle, one thing they are able to agree on is the fact that the lyric pastourelle is most commonly an aristocratic genre.[129] This facet of the pastourelle adds an important

[129] Geri Smith asserts that while the pastourelle is almost universally accepted as an aristocratic form, "enjoyed in the courts by the same audiences who fostered love poetry and romance" these same critics admit that the pastourelle at was probably influenced by popular songs and customs, citing Alfred Jeanroy, Joseph Bédier "Fêtes", Zink *Pastourelle* Gaston Paris and Maurice Delbouille as the main proponents of this theory. William Paden is a notable and more recent exception, positing that the influences of the pastourelle may have been biblical rather than popular in nature, in his article "The Figure of the Shepherdess in the Pastourelle".

dimension to the seemingly low stature of the shepherdess. If the shepherdess is not all she seems to be what does that mean for the knight who desires her?

Who's Who in the Mirror? The Lady as Shepherdess or the Shepherdess as Lady

A significant aspect of this consideration of the shepherdess as a figure of feminine resistance is her dual nature. It is precisely because the shepherdess is imbued with the character of the courtly lady that the audience cannot assume a too facile reading of her character. Thus, while I have made pains to distinguish between the courtly lady and rustic shepherdess, the aristocratic authorship that constructed the silent figure of the courtly lady used the same brush strokes in creating the shepherdess, with physical and social traits that would evoke the image of a refined aristocratic lady more than a crude peasant girl.

The shepherdess and the pastourelle are important for this study for the audience and authorship they share with the troubadour love lyric and courtly romance. Indeed, it was the troubadours and trouvères who were imagining and writing these pastoral encounters and it was an aristocratic audience that was consuming them. The pastourelle, far from being a genre of rustic origins, is considered by critics to be a refined form of aristocratic artistic expression, where the poets, headed by such notable members of the high aristocracy as Thibaud de Champagne, expressed a very courtly vision of the countryside and those who inhabited it.[130] This, along with the fact that many of the southern troubadours and northern trouvères, among them Marcabru and Colin Muset, respectively, and to name but a few, were also authors of

[130] Edmond Faral, reinforced by Per Nykrog in his work on the Fabliau, a similarly aristocratic form that addresses content of a more rustic nature, both being widely accepted as aristocratic inventions.

important examples of love poetry, links the genre of the pastourelle firmly to that of the lyric love poetry, another aristocratic form. The shepherdess thus finds herself in circulation alongside the noble lady, who herself has sparked such fervor in literary criticism. In spite of the similarity of origins that binds them, and to which I will later return, in the courtly imaginations from which both figures of shepherdess and lady love arise, the shepherdess becomes distinct from her lyrical, aristocratic counterpart in an important way. Far from the distanced and effaced medieval lady of the lyric love poetry, the shepherdess is an active and vocal presence in the pastourelle. As mentioned before, the entire genre derives its title from this central character and with good reason. While the fact of her modest status may be secondary to the action that takes place within the lyric, the pastoral device has provided the backdrop against which a proliferation of artistic variation occurs, including variations in interpretation of the genre's namesake. From poem to poem she is either pale and slender or rosy and robust; sometimes she wields a stick and chases away her pursuer, oftentimes she is only equipped with her sharp wit; sometimes she gladly accepts offering of riches, other times she spurns them as false gifts from a deceitful man. Sometimes she resists his advances, and sometimes she does not. But, as varied as the figure of the shepherdess might be, one of her most consistently defining traits is her ability to resist verbally the poet's intentions from within the poem.

It is certainly interesting to consider how the shepherdess is described in these poems and how close readings blur the lines that would distinguish her from the courtly lady. In many of the pastourelles we find examples of the knight stumbling across a shepherdess with hands and face white as snow: "Et una bergeira / la vi, ab la fresca color, / Blanca cum nevieyra" [And I saw a shepherdess with rosy cheeks and white as the snow] (Audiau 21: 14-16); "blanche ot la gorge et

le menton / plus que noif seur gelee" [Her throat and chin were whiter than snow over frost] (n. 34: 9-10); "bele estoit et blanche" [She was beautiful and white] (n. 76: 13) in both Provençal and Old French poems. Her pale white skin is often noted at the beginning of the poem, serving as an immediate and noticeable referent of beauty to the aristocratic crowd that was the audience of the poem. But with equal frequency, the white skin of the shepherdess is revealed in the intimate climax of the pastourelle, where the knight, in laying the girl down in the grass or under the trees, in the midst of taking his pleasure, would observe her aristocratic pallor: "E quant el l'en vit anar, / Met se apres ela, / Pres la per la blanqua man, / Gieta l en l'erbeta; / Tres vetz la baizet" [And when he saw her go, he followed her, took her by her white hand, and threw her in the grass. Three times he kissed her](Audiau 18: 37-41); "La pastourelle enbraissai / ki est blanche et tendre / desor l'erbe la getai" [I kissed the shepherdess, who was white and tender, and threw her down into the grass] (Bartsch II 8: 45-47); "couchai la a terre tout maintenant, / levai li le chainse. / si vi la char si blanche, / tant fui je plus ardant" [Now I laid her down on the ground, lifted her skirts, and seeing her white flesh, I was all the more passionate] (Bartsch II 62: 26-29). The last example is most telling as to the effect of the whiteness of her skin on his desire. The knight declares that it is the whiteness of her skin that makes him even more ardent in his love, signaling again to the audience that there is more to this shepherdess than meets the eye. When she does have color it is a delicate blush, akin to the rose "la colour / ot freche com rose en mai" [Her color was fresh as a rose in May] (n.82: 5-6). Absent here is the image of a hardy, rough peasant girl. One Provençal poet even goes so far as to remark that the girl resembles those he is accustomed to seeing, and there can be little doubt that he refers to the courtly ladies that are his usual companions: "Encontra'l prim ray del solelh, / Una toza que'm ressemnblet / Sylh

cuy ieu vezer solia" [In a delicate ray of sunlight, I saw a girl who reminded me of her whom I used to see](n.27: 4-6).

In very few of the pastourelles do we find the image of a tanned and healthy peasant girl, an appropriate feature given her profession. One example stands out in the Provençal corpus when the poet Giraut de Bornelh comments on the bronzed face of the shepherdess he has encountered, but only to comment that he is not propositioning her.

> Mas vos, an la senha nieira,
> Non crezatz que pus vos qieira.
> Per so qar gen m'aculitz,
> Vos serai francs e chauzitz;
> Quar coven que us en refieira
> Merces quar no us en fugitz :
> De lonh m'avisetz primieira. (n.11.44-50)
>
> [But you, with your dark complexion, Don't think I'll ask you more. Since you welcomed me so nicely I'll be polite and nice to you, For I really should be thankful That you didn't take flight : You saw me first from far away.]

This pastourelle is remarkable in that it is one of the few instances in which the shepherdess is described to look as she should, blackened as though marked by the sun. Not only this, but the knight in the poem is at first uninterested in her, but sighs and laments instead for the courtly lady he has left behind. It is up to the shepherdess to proposition the knight, all the while commenting on the fickle and terrible nature of the lady of "high condition".

> Senher francs, ja qui que s'ajost
> Ab ric' amor non er, per Crist,
> Sitôt s'a pro auzit e vist,
> Ses clam; qu'una cavalieira
> Vol ben qu'om en fag li mieira
> Sos bes el mals si'oblitz ;
> Qu'ades non siatz garnitz
> Tornara us d'autra manieira !
> Qu'estas autra camjairitz

Segon tost autra carrieira. (n.11. 31-40)

> [Noble Sir, whoever gets involved in too high a love will never, by Christ, Be uncomplaining, even if he's heard and seen A lot ; for a noblewoman Wishes to be paid in action For her good deeds and the bad to be forgotten. If you don't humor her caprices Soon she'll try another tack, For all those fickle ladies Often change their ways.]

While in most of the pastourelles the shepherdess is described as white as snow in face and hands, here she is not only at odds with the typical representations of shepherdesses, but is presented structurally in opposition to the courtly lady. Her dark face and forward manner might appropriately reflect the image of a peasant girl, but this places her suddenly at odds with her fellow shepherdesses in the pastoral tradition. She is distinct from them in a way that only serves to emphasize the very courtly nature of most of the women found within the pastourelles. But if the skin of the shepherdess is a visible sign of her nebulous identity, her voice, always problematic, distinguishes her markedly from a peasant.

Joan Ferrante points out this subtle deception, "the peasant actually speaks in too polished a way with too much knowledge of courtly traditions and literature to be anything but a figure for the courtly lady; and the courtly lady, when finally allowed to speak for herself, is more than a match for her would-be lover. The fiction of the genre is that she is a peasant whom the knight tries to flatter by addressing as a lady, a present essential to *his* game, which she refuses to play." Ferrante concludes that the lady as shepherdess exists to show the hypocrisy of courtly rhetoric and that the poet would be all-too aware of his own position of ridicule. To set aside the function of the lady in shepherdess's clothing for the instant, it is useful to further explore the context of an aristocratic audience keyed into the constructions of feminine identity in the pastourelle. Stephanie Thompson Lundeen makes a similarly compelling argument for the

shepherds and shepherdesses found in Adam le Halle's *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*. She explains that the literary choices made by Adam, including sophisticated representations of wordplay imply an aristocratic audience that, "in watching the play, this audience was watching itself."[131] Far from implying the possibility of a higher social status for the shepherds and shepherdesses in *Le Jeu*, Lundeen states that "a series of aristocratic assumptions underlies the portrayal of these 'simple peasants,' suggesting that a more sophisticated identity is here constructed."[132] The aristocratic audience of the play, similar to that of the pastourelle, would not question the farcical nature of the pastoral content, but would undoubtedly be aware of the carefully constructed "portrait of aristocratic identity in proletarian dress."[133] Thus, upon closer inspection it becomes obvious that the shepherdess is not a shepherdess at all, but a lady. What then to do with this courtly lady in disguise? Even as the shepherdess is too polished to be truly considered a peasant, Gale Sigal considers the knight in what can only be a compelling counterpoint to the lady in disguise: "Away from the commanding ethic of the court, when 'no one' (except, of course, the shepherdess and us) is looking, the pastorela knight is anything but courtly. Underneath the courtly façade and bearing, his behavior is indistinguishable from that of a crude, boorish peasant."[134]

Far from the courtly setting, both knight and lady, shepherdess and peasant, find themselves in an upheaval of class and gender relations. For even if as the shepherdess, the female character finds herself far from the security of courtly mores that shelters medieval ladies,

[131] Stephanie Thompson Lunden, "Dressing Down: Aristocratic Identity in Le Jeu de Robin et Marion" *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 71.
[132] Lunden, "Dressing Down," 71.
[133] Lunden, "Dressing Down," 71.
[134] Gale Sigal, "The Pit or the Pedestal? The Dichotimization of the Lady in Troubadour Lyric," *Romanic Review* 84 (1993).

the knight, garbed in the social mores of a peasant, and liberated from the constraint of courtly conduct far from the castle walls, cannot deny the fact that the court has followed him to the country. And if he finds himself beyond the ostensible scope of the court, the knight still knows that the lady and all the social strictures that surround her observe him from the deceptively simple gaze of the shepherdess, for he himself has written her there. Ferrante asserts that the man attempts to deceive himself in his writings but is ultimately always aware of the construct he has created. It is in this way that the pastourelle entangles class and gender issues to a state of mystifying complexity. This explains perhaps the shepherdess who is able to so handily defeat the knight in verbal contests, not only because she wields the deft tongue of a courtly lady, but also because the knight has been reduced to the level of an unsophisticated peasant. The shepherdess then once again returns to a complex place of both opposition and complicity with courtly convention in that she cuts through his courtly rhetoric, showing its hypocrisy, while doing so in the polished voice and logic characteristic of an aristocratic lady. And as, Sigal points out, however courteous or virtuous the shepherdess as lady might be, she is still fair game. For as he has abandoned the courtly imperatives that keep him in check within the castle walls, in the country the knight has constructed a fantasy of the shepherdess that caters specifically to his desire. Because it is the wilderness of the country it will not matter if she is courtly or not. However, even this reading of the shepherdess as lady is problematic in its generality, for it does not account for the instances of smiling resistance that end in friendly capitulation to the knight's desires, or even the moments when the shepherdess subtly, or perhaps not so subtly barters her sex for the knight's riches, gladly accepting his offers in return for a quick tumble in the grass. The registers of high and low in the pastourelle are as provocatively jumbled and it is difficult to narrow down where the shepherdess fits in the spectrum of medieval literary representations of

women, or if it is even possible to assign her a static place in medieval literature. To begin this process of understanding her position, one must look to the society surrounding the poem, its author and audience, as well as the literary form that such a milieu would provoke.

Christopher Callahan comments on the socially complex subject matter of the pastourelle, noting the difference between the Occitan *pastorela* versus the French *pastourelle* and stating that in the latter we find a conscious injection of non-aristocratic lyric forms in the aristocratic narrative. The fusing of the two registers, high and low, account for the wide variation of the genre and also explain the critical response to the French pastourelle as rougher and less refined than their Occitan counterparts. The possibility of unrestrained lyric and linguistic experimentation that Callahan identifies in the pastourelle lead to his argument putting forward the "social and discursive hybridity" of the genre wherein the lyric refrain "echoes rustic revelry" while also adopting the "bonds of courtly restraint […] in order to then be transgressed".[135] Thus, the shepherdess is described with elements of rustic simplicity in the lyric refrains where she is often singing unsophisticated refrains, that are sometimes nothing more than meaningless vocalizations "O,o,o,o,o,o, dorenlot" (n.40.14-15); "Cibalala, duriaus duriaus, Cibalala durie" (n. 65.14-15); "A e o, O, Dorenlot!" (n. 75.5-10); "Teirelire don […] Tierelire un don tridon" (n. 100.5-8), etc. But she is also seen as imbued with elements of courtliness in form and behavior: "Face ot clere et pure et gente faiture" [She had a bright, clear face And a noble form] (n. 35.13-14); "et elha-m respos tost e vil, cossi fos dona de castelh" [And she answered me promptly, As though she were the lady of a castle] (n.144.24-25); "Bele fu et coloree, cortoise, sage et senee" [She was pretty with a ruddy complexion, Courtly, wise and sensible] (n.151.6-7).

[135] Callahan, "Hybrid Discourse and Performance in the Pastourelle," 7.

Callahan's argument is very important here as it leads to an understanding of the importance of the highly diverse nature of the pastourelle. It is the very hybridity of the verse form of later poems, initiated in the earlier Occitan *pastorela* and fully developed in the later French pastourelle, that allowed for such diversity of artistic interpretation. No longer held to strict examples of courtly conduct and freed from expectations as to the figure of knight and lady, it undermined the power relationships with which it was originally concerned. The hybridity of the pastourelle that led to its evolving nature led it further and further away from the traditional lyric poetry of the troubadours and trouvères. It was the experimental nature of the pastourelle that allowed for the shepherdess to occupy a new and unexpected place of power.

Sylvia Huot discusses this intersection of two worlds in her article on the intergeneric nature of the pastourelle as it assumed the motet form, or the singing that is often seen in the French pastourelle. The juxtaposition of the rustic and the courtly is brought into contrast with what Huot identifies as the polyphonic form of the motet. Indeed the layering effect of the form of the pastourelle was paralleled in the intersection of two registers, high and low. As Huot states, "their juxtaposition in the motet allows for an intergeneric dialogue, as the two amorous codes associated with the two social classes are brought into confrontation."[136] With this new form, no longer is the medieval woman bound and gagged by the conventional lyric that silences and effaces her. In this new form where authorial invention sought new and greater heights, the shepherdess emerged as a shining example of a new and complex form of lyric poetry that cast aside many of the conventions of earlier lyric poetry. Whereas many critics would lament the lower form of the newer French pastourelle, I would argue that it is the experimental nature of

[136] Sylvia Huot, "Intergeneric Play: The Pastourelle in Thirteenth-Century French Motets," in *Medieval Lyric: Genres in Historical Context*, ed. William D. Paden (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 301.

the verse form and the sometimes unsophisticated and coarse nature of the later poems that contribute greatly to the increasing vivacity and fluency of the shepherdess. However, to focus only on the later representations of the shepherdess would do a great disservice to her earlier incarnations. If the later French pastourelle shepherdess seems to shine with the fervor of her contest with the knight, one must not overlook the Occitan shepherdess whose eloquent and intelligently argued clashes are the focus of most critical study. If I focus more on the later French pastourelle, it is only because of the wealth of regard given to the Occitan poems, which are generally considered the higher form of the pastourelle.

While arguing for the hybridity of the genre that frees it from earlier convention, Callahan subsequently excludes the shepherdess from the courtliness that he recognizes in the pastourelle, arguing instead that she is situated firmly in the rustic elements of the pastourelle while the knight represents the courtly perspective. He identifies the shepherdess as the "exotic, 'primitive' other" against which the knight uses his own "powerful, 'cultivated' tool of courtly lyric." This would seem to efface and silence the shepherdess much as troubadour lyric does, to emphasize only the value of the knight's speech and the knight's actions. Callahan discounts the majority of the shepherdess's utterances, characterizing them as marginally inspired but generally lacking in refinement. He states that she is thus unable to fend off, linguistically, the knight's more polished words. He places her soundly in the realm of the unrefined, the peasant, the primitive Other, while elevating the knight to that of the charming and gallant noble out to conquer the lowly peasant and largely succeeding. This reading seems to disregard not only the manner in which the knight often describes the shepherdess, as a fine woman of refined face, bearing and speech, but also the number of poems in which the shepherdess repudiates the

knight, displaying a social awareness and linguistic cunning that eludes the knight. Even if Callahan identifies the shepherdess as occupying the lower register in this "lyric-narrative experiment", this does not account for her sophisticated speech and the layers of courtliness that imbue her with varying degrees of depth. I would argue that instead of "othering" the shepherdess to the great and distant heights of the lady, the pastourelle not only doubles the shepherdess as lady, but also the knight as shepherd. Both occupy a vastly unstable position, which not only accounts for the shepherdess's refined wit, but also the knight's crude and unrefined violence toward the shepherdess. Neither is possessed of the features of a single milieu, both are infused with the low and high registers of their immediate rustic setting, and the courtly convention that rules them.

In fact, it is often the lowly shepherdess who displays the most class conscientiousness. In multiple examples of the pastourelle, shepherdesses make mention of the difference in class that complicates a union between two people of different stations. She cuts through the courtly rhetoric and shows the impossibility of the love proposed by the knight:

> "car je sui autrui amie;
> n'a teil signor n'aifiert mie
> k'il ait a bargiere amor" (n.84. 25 – 27)
>
> ["For I am someone else's girlfriend; and it's not fitting for such a lord To have love for a shepherdess"]

Still other shepherdesses speak of the consequences of such a love, with all its hypocrisy

> "Je n'ai de vostre amor cure,
> car je seux toute seure
> et bien fie
> ke se vos m'aviés honnie
> et si tolue n'onor,
> bien tost m'averiés guerpie
> et j'en remainroie en plours." (n.86.27 – 33)

["I've no care for your love, For I am completely safe And quite sure That if you put me to shame And taken my honor, Right away you would abandon me And I would stay behind in tears."]

The examples of the socially conscientious shepherdess, while not uncommon in the French pastourelle, positively abound in the Occitan *pastorela*. The most famous example of this is in Marcabru's *L'autier, jost' una sebissa* where the knight enters into a compelling exchange with a shepherdess whose social awareness is far more developed than that of the knight. In response to the knight's flattery, the girl remains unmoved, instead taking the opportunity to chastise the knight.

"Senher, mon genh e mon aire
vey revertir et retrayre
al vezoich et a l'arayre,
senher, so dis la vilayna ;
"mas tals se fay cavalguaire
C'atretal devria fayre
Los seyx jorns de la semayna!" (n.8.36 – 42)

["Sir, I know my conduct and descent Go right back and return To the bill-hook and the plough, Sir," said the girl; "But some people pretend to be knights Who ought to be doing the same Six working days of the week!"]

For all her protestations of differentiations in class, the knight fully describes the girl as one would a noble lady. He remarks that she is a girl of noble conduct, a "toza de gentil afaire" (n. 8.29) and insists on her "beutat esmereda" [refined beauty] (n.8.45) and critics agree that this representation is an obvious superimposition of the courtly lady on the shepherdess. While this does point to an overarching feminine awareness of social class and importance that seems to largely escape the knight as he propositions her, it does not completely account for the courtly lady who speaks in polished turns behind the mask of the shepherdess. Why is she there in the first place and why does she speak so knowingly against the knight, impeding his attempts at seduction. The poet, of course, can claim no such ignorance, as it is he who puts pen to paper the

argument of social division, but again, one wonders why he adheres to social convention in this fantasy of his own making. It is one thing to write resistance into the female characters he creates on the page as an instrument of repression that spurs the fantasy, but it quite another to focus so firmly on an element of reality that might derail his efforts.

> ‘Avoi, sire chevalier,
> Se je ai povre despuille
> Ja por ce vostre poier
> Ne cuit pas qu’en gré recuielle,
> Car j’ai choisi mon bregier
> Qui je aim mout et tieng chier
> Si com mon dru ;
> ne onques savoirs ne fu
> de haute amor acointier,
> por c’on en la fin s’en deuille.’
> […]
> ‘Sire, mout vos voi gaillart
> Et parler par grant mesure;
> Maiz j’ai trop le cuer coart
> D’entrer en autrui pasture,
> Car semence de Renart
> s’estent par tot tempre et tart
> ore a parmain.
> Mout dout le col premarain,
> que par engien ne par art
> n’iere vers Robin parjure.’(n.76)
>
> [‘Hey, now sir knight, Even if my clothing is poor I don’t think I’ll ever Welcome our request, For I have chosen my shepherd, Whom I love well and hold dear, As my lover, And it never has been wise To get involved in a high love Only to grieve in the end.’[…] ‘Sir, I see you’re jovial And you speak impressively, But my heart is too cowardly To enter someone else’s pasture, For the seed of the fox Spreads everywhere, early and late,
> From one day to the next. I greatly fear the first time When by wile or art I break my oath to Robin.’]

In this particular poem, written in Old French by Ernoul de Gastinais in the 13th century, the shepherdess alludes to the danger of love between the classes. The shepherdess spurns the knight’s offer of riches, preferring her poor clothing and her poor shepherd to the richness of the

knight, stating that "high love" cannot end in anything but grief and underlining the fact that she is fully aware of the situation and its consequences that she will feel far more acutely than the knight. She then makes mention of speech, complementing the knight on his persuasiveness in a manner that the audience can only recognize as ironic. If the knight's speech and station were as impressive as the shepherdess expresses, one would assume that he could succeed in seducing her. The shepherdess, however, is unmoved by his richness and deflects both the "wile and art" of the knight in attempting to seduce her. She skillfully avoids any direct insult, instead evoking her own cowardice as the reason behind her refusal. All the while, she focuses the audience's attention to the argument of class, declaring that she fears to "enter someone else's pasture, for the seed of the fox spreads everywhere." With this statement she subtly categorizes the knight's attempts as far from courtly, but rather as clever as the *vilain,*or lowly-bred Renart.[137]

Here it is difficult to say which woman is speaking and with what effect. She is on the one hand the lady of the court, reviling the knight's deceitful attempts to seduce her; on the other she is the fearful shepherdess who fears involvement with a man above her class. She is one and both, and she is unified by the feminine fear that any involvement with the knight will tarnish her worth and strip her of all her feminine value. This is perhaps the most important link between the lady as shepherdess and the shepherdess as lady, the ultimate fear that whenever the masculine aggressor is finished with her, she will be left with nothing but the tatters of a reputation. For

[137] The medieval bestiary provides great insight as to the diabolical nature of the fox in medieval culture. As a figure with his own cycle of stories detailing his clever exploits in *Le Roman de Renart*, the reference to the fox would have been understood as a negative one. The bestiary details:

> The fox [... .] is a clever, cheating animal. If it is hungry and cannot find anything to eat, it rolls in red earth, so that it seems as if it is spotted with blood, and lies on the ground holding its breath, so that it is hardly breathing. The birds see that it is not breathing, and is lying there spotted with blood with its tongue hanging out, and think it is dead. They fly down to perch on it, and it seizes them and devours them. The fox is the symbol of the devil, who appears to be dead to all living things until he has them by the throat and punishes them.

Bestiary (English version of MS Bodley 764), trans. by Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993) 65.

these women all have in common the fear of losing their chastity and maidenhood, without which they hold no value. The poet must recognize this social condition, even as the knight he constructs does not, and the poet's awareness is embodied in the shepherdess's fears. It is at this moment that the poet gives the power of social awareness to the woman: she largely controls the interactions between the knight and shepherdess because she is the one who has the most to lose. If the knight disregards her resistance, it is because he has let the fantasy consume him and because he is operating fully beyond the realm of all courtly convention and only further emphasizes his ignorance as to the reason behind the necessity of courtly convention and his relative immunity from the consequences of his actions.

If the shepherdess holds within her the constraints of the court, it is because she has never ceased to hold within herself the mirror of value endowed by the structure of the court. In a very real sense, the pastourelle mirrors the value of the poet who writes it. If he writes rape, he disregards the system and thus disdains the system by which he gains his poetic reputation. In writing the resistant shepherdess, the poet as knight is allowed to indulge in his fantasy of the unobtainable woman, all the while reinforcing the structure of the court. Without the knowing shepherdess to stand in his way, the poet destroys the very structure that sustains his desire, and thus his fantasy would be perhaps too close to the reality of non-consensual, brutal sex with a peasant. In the poems where rape does occur, the poet often quickly reassures the audience that she did in fact enjoy it, or veils the episode of rape in courtly language to ensure that nothing so ugly as rape happened.

"Franc chevalier, lessiez m'ester […]
Lessiez moi mes aigniax garder,
De vostre gieu n'ai cure."
Quant je l'oi ensi parler,

lez li m'asis sanz arester ;
par les flans l'ai saisie,
tant la besai et acolai
qu'ele devint m'amie.

["Noble night, let me be {…}Leave me to watch my lambs;I don't care about our game." When I heard her speak that way, I sat beside her without delay; I grasped her by her sides, And kissed and embraced her Until she became my sweetheart.]

Here the knight makes no mention of her reaction to his seduction, but one must assume by her resistance and subsequent silence that the knight took what he wanted. However, he covers the rape in courtly language, telling of how he kisses and embraces her, making her his sweetheart ("amie"). The knight forgoes all speech in his assault, and, having nothing to say that will persuade the girl, he takes her by force. If the shepherdess is here the lady, the knight is no better than the lowest *vilain* and he must somehow correct the offense. The poet does this linguistically by masking the nature of the encounter and covering it in terms of courtly seduction. But did the audience know better?

If the poet could subscribe to the convention of a medieval woman intelligent and well-spoken enough to argue for her own sexual choices, especially in a context where women were part of the courtly audience who enjoyed performances of the pastourelle, it follows that such women might well have existed historically. The resisting, speaking shepherdess, even if she is a lady in disguise, points to a medieval perspective that could imagine and accept instances of a female speaker holding verbal power over her masculine counterpart. To be sure, the shadow of rape still colors this representation of the lady as shepherdess, but now, the poet-knight is no longer interested in demonstrating sexual primacy over a simple peasant, a desire deemed healthy and even desirable in Andreas Capellanus' comments on the matter, he is expressing

fantasies of rape involving ladies of his social milieu. But this only makes the speaking lady more provocative. Silenced for so long in love lyric poetry, the lady is given the garb of a peasant and the freedom to speak, and she runs with it. She resists his attempts at subjugation, at supremacy, at rape, and responds instead with a voice overflowing with her desire for autonomy, for sexual freedom, for an identity unstained by the misogyny that so often defines her. When the shepherdess resists the knight's amorous advances, even if subsequently she falls prey to his desire, she has still clearly vocalized her choice. And when rape does occur, she cries out against it, struggling against the knight who has knowingly abandoned all rules off courtly conduct in raping the lady that he himself brought with him on his pastoral escapade. As the seat of reality in masculine fantasy, she watches with knowing eyes and if at the end of her rape she praises the knight, the reader must wonder at the thin veneer of joyful exultation at the end of an assault. It is here the doubled discourse of the feminine voice is that most compelling. For if the fractured voice of the shepherdess both cries out against and then rejoices in the assault then it is from within the masculine construction of the pastourelle that shows the conflicted nature of her construction as an intersection of sometimes violent male fantasy as it collides with the inescapable reality of the feminine.

To only consider the shepherdess as mere mouthpiece for terrible male fantasy is to deny the traces of feminine subjectivity that emerge through her words. As the male poet writes his own fantasy, he surrenders some of his masculine autonomy in allowing the shepherdess to speak and in her voice are traces of a feminine subjectivity that resists the masculine construct from within which it was conceived. Every interaction with a woman must have colored the medieval man's conception of the feminine. Georges Duby offers a detailed look at women as

wives, women as lovers, women as mothers and women as widows. He looks at the unforgettable figures of women whose images would have left an indelible mark on the minds of medieval men: figures such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen and politician, biblical and religious women such as Mary Magdalen and Héloïse, and popular literary figures such as Iseult. The voices of these women, both on a personal and cultural level, would have had a shaping on the influence of his desire. He would not be able to escape the vision of these women in his own constructions of male erotic fantasy, accounting for much of the conflict of representation in the pastourelle.

If the shepherdess speaks, if she resists, it is necessarily as an element of the male fantasy that has created her. But as she speaks, she does so with the voices of mother, lover, wife, and daughter. He is no more able to separate these influences from his fantasy than he is able to forget every woman that has ever shaped his life in even the most subtle of ways. The resistance of the shepherdess thus acts as more than mere function of male desire; she contains from within her representation images of speaking, acting women that successfully resist a monolithic, phallocentric vision of the feminine figure. She is necessarily doubled, layered, hidden and flickering, the ghostly traces of the feminine that resist concrete interpretation and tangible representation. Her obfuscation in the guise of a simple and unthreatening peasant girl, idly tending to her sheep, is male fantasy at work, but feminine empowerment is contained within her many faces. The fact that she succeeds in resisting rape should not just be read as an ingredient in a recipe for masculine eroticism that requires resistance but should also be understood as an indication of the reality of feminine resistance.

Rape or Prostitution? Women and Sexuality in the Pastourelle

Contained in the lines of the pastourelle is an incredibly potent view of sex and courtliness in medieval literature. Far from the perceived romanticism and subtle sexuality of courtly romance, the pastourelle confronts the desires of medieval men and women explicitly. The most shocking and extreme examples of this sexuality are of course the moments of rape in the pastourelle, when the knight discards honor and courtliness to seize that which he desires. The theme of prostitution, which emerges to further confuse the issue of sexuality in these poems, is also a potent undertone in many of the poems. The explicit subject matter of the pastourelle speaks to a medieval fascination with women's bodies and sexuality and a potent desire to define and limit that sexuality in a systematic way. Ruth Mazo Karras states, "women's sexual activities outside of marriage did not receive anything like the same toleration or acceptance that men's did"[138] but then goes on to stipulate that restrictions on unmarried women were not as harsh. Still, Karras reveals that the distinction between a prostitute and a sexually active single woman is largely undefined in medieval texts, an ambiguity that appears also in the pastourelle.

While never quite explicitly stated there is an undeniable aspect of bartering material good in exchange for sexual favors present in a good number of the pastourelles. Furthermore, not all offers on the part of the knight are rejected by the shepherdess. Often she will accept his gifts, or payments of belts, robes, capes and other riches before engaging the knight sexually. Both themes, of rape and prostitution, resonate strongly with a modern audience, but what would these representations have meant to a medieval audience? I would argue that the diversity of

[138] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 87.

representations of sexuality found in the pastourelle must characterize a similar diversity of thought in a medieval audience that held a wide range of conflicting views of a woman's sexualized body. Furthermore, I would argue that the rape that occurs in the pastourelle is as a result from a conflicted vision of the shepherdess that results from a complicated masculine perception of the medieval woman. If the knight rapes the shepherdess in the face of her protestations, he reveals a fundamental truth about very real historical interactions that took place. So too does the implied prostitute in the guise of a shepherdess provide real context for a medieval man's experience with medieval women. As a construction of male fantasy, it is unsurprising that the pastourelle should contain within its parameters a fluid concept of what it was to interact sexually with a woman. It is in this way that the pastourelle gives insight into the day to day sexual life of the medieval man in a way that courtly literature cannot. The genre also presents important examples of a masculine figure that is reacting directly to the construct of the courtly lady and her milieu. This reaction is as varied as it is unpredictable and one never can tell from the start of a poem where the interaction between shepherdess and knight will ultimately lead.

Paden's statistics on the topic reveal that rape occurs in 18% of the 109 French poems in the extant pastourelle and in 6% of the poems in other languages, Occitan included.[139] 18% is not an insignificant number and of this percentage, there are poems that feature a knight who cheerfully rapes or attacks the shepherdess he encounters. This alone has provoked much critical

[139] Paden includes poems from various languages, loosely and widely applying the category of the genre to poems in German, Latin, French, Occitan and Italian, so as to cast a wide net over all possible representations of the genre. His text *The Medieval Pastourelle*, showcases the incredible variety of the genre across cultures and languages in the Middle Ages.

debate on the topic of the pastourelle and Geri L. Smith situates the traditional feminist response to rape in the pastourelle as thus:

> Even if simultaneous or after-the-fact consent were not self-contradictory concepts, the pastourelle's privileging of masculine perspective and voice strongly problematizes any depiction of the woman's acquiescence. Such readings seem to give too much credence to the narrator's supposed innocence or obtuseness and treat the shepherdess's words and actions as somehow autonomous, an insight into her psychology, rather than a function of a self-serving tale. It is always the knight who is speaking, controlling what the shepherdess says and how her attitudes will be conveyed. In short the poem can only be an insight into a man's fantasy and his expectations of audience reception. At the very least, a rape is treated casually in the pastourelle, as if not only acceptable, but unsurprising in an encounter between a man and a woman so distant from each other with respect to power.[140]

I would contend, in response to Smith's assertion that the poem is only an insight into male fantasy, that male fantasy is in fact structured and influenced by real women, and there is a way to trace the voices and subjectivities of "real" women through the distorted lens of male fantasy. Smith's argument closely follows Kathryn Gravdal's assessment of the pastourelles and seems to be the standard opinion of feminist readers of the pastourelle. However, even as Smith makes these assertions, she seems to contradict her comments on the fluidity of the genre. She states previously in her comments on genre that, "the multiplicity of variations among pastourelles precludes any simple, all-inclusive definition"[141] but follows with a critical argument that focuses only on what she perceives to be overarching themes of coercion in the poems. It is true that even as Paden would argue that rape does not occur with quite the frequency that some have charged the genre with, it is still an event that transpires in a notable percentage of the poems that are categorized as pastourelles.

[140] Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition*, 37.
[141] Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition*, 7.

Smith's statements as to the discrepancy in power also do not address the complicating factor of the shepherdess being a cipher for the lady, which problematizes the rape and coercion argument by simple right of social standing. The knight has fled the walls of the castle in order to indulge in a moment of unthinking pleasure, but it is obvious by his descriptions of the shepherdess in many of the poems that the knight has brought the lady with him. If it is true that medieval sources considered rape in terms of violence against women, but not as violence in a sexual act, they also "drew little distinction between rape and heterosexual intercourse generally."[142] Still, medieval considerations of rape centered on the idea of taking by violence something that did not belong to the rapist.[143] In legal terms, the medieval concept of rape did not speak to the sexual ravishments of the woman's body but rather to the act of *raptus* referred to the theft of an object, or piece of property; in essence a wrong against the man who held legal power over the woman raped.[144] However, John Brundage points to an important change in the legal concept of rape that occurred with the appearance of the *Decretum Gratiani* in 1140[145], in which canon law became more organized and coherent, leading to a transformation in the legal definition of rape. Rape slowly emerged in the late twelfth century as a crime of violence against a person rather than a crime of property. The definition of the crime would still be considered incredibly restrictive if considered through a modern lens, and while medieval jurists were concerned with seeing justice done, cases of rape were rare. [146]

[142] Karras, *Medieval Sexuality*, 113.
[143] Karras, *Medieval Sexuality*, 86.
[144] John Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, 141.
[145] Gratian compiled the *Concordia discordantium canonum*, often referred to as the Decretum Gratiani, around 1140. This forms the first part of the *Corpus juris canonici* , six legal texts used by canonists of the Roman Catholic Church. Gratian is a Camaldolese monk who is often referred to as the "Father of the Science of Canon Law" based his research on Roman law, canons of the Church councils and penitential texts.
[146] See Brundage's discussion on the definition of rape and the definitions and limitations of medieval rape.

This is what complicates the issue of rape so much in the pastourelle and why the poet can be read as denouncing rape as a *vilainie*. The poet can fully understand that at the heart of rape is an act of violence toward a woman. Thus, I would point to a much more ambiguous relationship with rape that suggests anything but a casual view of rape in the pastourelle. The pastourelle does privilege the masculine perspective and voice because it is the locus of male erotic fantasy. And it is unquestionably erroneous to assign complete autonomy to the voice of the shepherdess as the words of a living, breathing, historical medieval woman. However, even as the knight seems to control the interactions between him and the peasant woman he has come across, the interaction is necessarily informed by external social pressures that nuance the fantasy, and later in this chapter I will consider historical considerations of rape that speak to a medieval understanding of rape, an understanding that is hardly an indifferent endorsement of the act.

Evelyn Vitz, while perhaps reductive in her indictment of Gravdal's work on rape in the Middle Ages, does raise a valid point when she warns against the anachronism of considering rape in from a medieval perspective and that it is necessary to avoid psychologizing themes of rape as overarching medieval male fantasy.[147] Even in arguing for broad reaching misogyny in the Middle Ages, it seems implausible to assume that misogyny equates a desire to see, experience and circulate images and themes of rape.

[147] Evelyn Birge Vitz, "Rereading Rape in Medieval Literature: Literary, Historical and Theoretical Reflections." *Romance Review* 88 (1997): 1-26.While some of her arguments are valid in considering the anachronism of medieval considerations of rape, some arguments in her article are troubling nonetheless. Vitz argues that some modern women fantasize about rape, and so it is not out of the realm of possibility to assume that some medieval woman may have had the same fantasies, similar to their male counterparts. But with this argument she does gloss over the more prevalent misogyny in the Middle Ages that would have made violence against women a more common occurrence. I agree more with her arguments that both medieval men and women were open to erotic fantasy and that literature from the Middle Ages assumes not an entirely masculine audience, as is evident from the not-uncommon presence of medieval women as patrons of the arts and literature.

The pastourelles themselves offer examples that counter this assumption that all pastourelles stage male rape fantasies, and if many of the poems do cheerfully narrate explicit scenes of rape explicitly, a fact that Gravdal's argument relies on, I would disagree and suggest a closer reading of particular poems in which rape is discussed but not applauded.

In a poem by Jean Erart, the audience is presented with a knight who has ridden out in the typical fashion and encounters a shepherdess alone in a field (n.64) The entirety of the poem is a dialogue between the two where the shepherdess resists the knight, fending off his advances and refusing his offers of riches to win her "love". She does so with words and does most of the speaking in the poem, declaring her love for Robin instead. The most significant part of this poem is the refrain, repeated six times in 72 lines. As the knight approaches her and through various parts of the poem, the girl begins to sing, "Et la bele tout ensi enprint a chanter, '*Robin cui je doi amer, tu pués bien trop demourer*'" [And the pretty girl began To sing this way: "*Robin whom I should love, You can surely wait too long!*"] (n. 64. 9-10). This refrain with subtle variations, is repeated again five times, at the end of each stanza. It is a lament that punctuates her pleas with the knight to leave her in peace, pleas that fall on deaf ears. There is no humor in the poem, and at the end, after the knight has taken her, "mie ne faille, mon bon aconpli" [I didn't fail, I had my way] (n. 64. 55-56) the refrain brackets her denouncement of the knight as he rapes her. "'Sire de Loncjamuel, n'auront recouvrier ne ja n'auront leur avel li couart lasnier.'" ["Sir from Longjumeau, Cowardly wretches will get no help and will not get their way."] (n. 64. 61-64). This condemnation is unanswered by the knight, who merely

continues with his efforts and then departs. There is no victorious exclamation in which he crows his sexual prowess and the shepherdess does not bounce back with a grin and a compliment. Instead the refrain is the last thing the audience hears, where the girl again laments her lover who did not come soon enough to prevent her assault. Initially presented as a simple song that Robin has waited too long to take his pleasure with her, it takes on the additional meaning that Robin has taken too long in saving her from the Sire de Loncjamuel. Her words and her protestations echo through the poem, foreshadowing the events to come. Even before the knight speaks to her, the young girl sings this refrain and the audience can be left with little doubt as to the outcome of the encounter. There will be no Robin to rescue her, no trickery or wit or bravery that will save her. One interpretation of the refrain could be admonishment for her lover, but the lament falls only on the ears of knight and the audience.

In this poem there is no laughing reversal on the part of the shepherdess, no avowals of love for the knight, and the knight himself goes about the act of raping the shepherdess with an unspeaking single-mindedness. She is far from a resilient and laughing lover whose spirited argument will hold her pursuer at bay. The final refrain, rebuking and lamenting her lover's absence is a solemn parting song for the knight. It is not his name or his deeds on her lips as he rides away; it is her song of regret. The language of the refrain is also telling in regard to the girl's social awareness. As is all too common in the pastourelles, the shepherdess knows how much more she has to lose. When she states over and again, "*Robin, whom I should love*" she informs the audience that the Robin whom she should love is obviously not her lover. She should have loved

him, should have been his lover, but with the end of this pastourelle, the knight has stripped her of her chastity and her honor and the man she should have loved will no longer be available to her as she is now "damaged goods". So even as the subject of this poem is rape, I would argue that it is not presented as a cheerful tale of careless and violent assault. While it is impossible to divine authorial intent, the form and the content of the poem suggest that if not openly condemning rape, the author does little to applaud it either. Rather, this poem presents the sobering narrative of a girl whose voice, while compelling, is still not enough to save her. This is the regrettable condition of the medieval woman that cannot be ignored regardless of efforts to give meaning to her voice. In the end, without her lover to rescue her and without the honor of the knight to spare her his own worst intentions, she falls prey to the violence and brutality that is all too often a component of medieval literature.

But in spite of the outcome of this poem, there is still room for optimism in considering the voice of women in the pastourelle. If this girl falls prey to the knight, in other pastourelle, the shepherdesses succeed in driving the knights away. Sometimes she does this with the help of her lovers or her fellow shepherds, sometimes she succeeds only by way of trickery, and sometimes she defies the knight with a club and a dog. In any case, while largely dependent on masculine restraint, the shepherdess is still sometimes able to overcome the mountain of odds against her. The fact that the pastourelle provides this context only serves to underline again the incredibly diverse nature of the pastourelle, where in one example a knight can gleefully rape a girl and in another can be beaten and humiliated.

Gravdal's argument does account for the absence of rape in the majority of the pastourelle. In her words: "the circumvention of rape in the majority of the texts suggests to the audience that Marion is a plucky wench, not helpless victim. The corpus functions intertextually to create a familiar female character and the corresponding implication that Marion precipitates, and enjoys, the game of rape."[148] On the surface this could very well be the case for some poems, a fact reinforced by some rape poems in which the shepherdess is raped and then returns with a grin and a laugh, commenting on how lucky she is to have had such a lover as the knight or how much she now loves the knight:

> ele dist, "Fui de moi!"
> Més onc pour ce ne laissai
> quant l'oi rigotee,
> s'amour mi pramet
> et dit, "Sire biau valet,
> plus vous aim que Robinet." (n. 159.27-32)
>
> [She said, "Get away from me!" But I never stopped for that. When I caressed her She promised me her love And said, "Sir, you handsome vassal, I love you more than Robinet."]

It is of course difficult to understand exactly what the intentions of the author are with this reversal. While they disagree on its effect, both Gravdal and Paden agree that this cheerful response to rape is characteristic of the male fantasy. But if the fantasy ends in refusal as often as capitulation or force, then one can only assume that the male interaction with a speaking, acting woman is multi-dimensional. In imagining a shepherdess that argues and often successfully spurns his attentions, there is the possibility for a context that affirms and substantiates the vision of an intelligent, speaking woman whose words carry weight. To argue that all of Marion's pluckiness is

[148] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 115.

but the context to legitimize her own rape is problematic in that it doesn't consider the variations in tone and theme that abound in the pastourelle, as well as the class divisions that are continually challenged in the flickering faces of the shepherdess as lady and the knight as peasant.

To return to question of how rape would be perceived in the Middle Ages, I refer to examples of the pastourelle that suggest an awareness of the ruinous results of the loss of virtue. In one poem the shepherdess fends off the knight with cries of "'*Douce mere Dé, gardez moi ma chastée'"* ["Sweet Mother of God, Protect for me my chastity!"] (n.67.11-12) to which the knight responds,

> "Ma douce amie, tesiez,
> car ja suer vostre vouloir
> n'aurai seur vous nul pouvoir,
> car tel vilainie
> ne feroie mie." (n.67.52-56)
>
> ["My sweet friend, hush, For never against your will Shall I take any power over you, Since I would never Do such a craven deed."]

This statement by the knight assures the audience that he too is aware of her position and what he can take from her. Thus it must be acknowledged that rape is not always the humorous and marginalized issue that some critics have claimed it to be. Another knight says to a resisting shepherdess "'c'amor no te pro, forcada'" ["For love is no good taken by force"] (n.141.68) and in yet another, a knight declares:

> "Na toza, de tozas say ver
> que us pert hom ab destreyner
> ez examen ab trop plazer,
> que nuylls homs no-s pot feyner
> que-us pusca sobra ne saber,
> ne, can fuyetz, ateyner,
> c'om no-us deu, si-us vol retener,

afluxar ne extreyner."

['Girl, I know in truth, about girls, That a man loses you with force And also with too much pleasure, For no man can pretend That he can dominate you or understand you, Or catch you when you take flight, Because if he wants to keep you, He must neither slacken nor tighten your rein."]

While this description of his approach to women might seem condescending, it is also conveys the thoughts of a medieval man who is not set on a course of brutality and violence against women. This poem also recalls Capellanus again in the sense that it seems to have a didactic function and to be speaking to other men about how to cultivate courtly love. These excerpts certainly do not represent the entirety of medieval masculine views on women, nor do they necessarily apply to all women (one must never forget the shadow of the lady behind the shepherdess) but they indicate an atmosphere of interaction between medieval men and women that was far from uniform. It can also be argued that these words, uttered in courtly tones by a knight might be nothing more than the stuff of illusory courtly love tradition, they still present a notable counterpoint to instances of rape in the pastourelle.

Furthermore, the shepherdess was not exempt from the expectations of material gain through the circulation of her body in terms of marriage. Several poems show a woman who understands all that she has to lose and soundly rejects the knight who approaches her.

La pastore ert sage,
si me respondi:
"Sire, en mon eage
tel folor n'oi.
ce seroit folage,
se perdoie ensi
le mien pucelage
pour autrui ami.
Par cest mien visage,
ce seroit damage,

qu'a bon mariage
auroie faille." (n. 145.49-60)

> [The shepherdess was sensible, And she answered me: "Sir, in my life I have not heard such foolishness. It would be folly If I lost this way My virginity For someone else's lover. *By my face, It would be too bad For I would have missed A good marriage*.]

The knight himself describes her as sensible and if he does not satisfy his lust for the girl, he still recognizes her good sense in rejecting him and leaves it at that. Another shepherdess defends herself against a knight stating that her father has made an advantageous match for her that will be ruined if she surrenders to the knight's desires:

"Seinher, no-m fassas honor
perdre per follage;
mon paire-m vol maridar
al mieu agradaje,
mot de gran linhaje
segon lo mieu barnage." (n. 165.51-56)

> ["Sir, don't make me lose Honor for foolishness; My father wants to marry me off To my liking, Into a great family Compared to my standing."]

This exclamation reveals a social condition for the shepherdess that, while not as highly structured as the courtly tradition, is still informed by a necessary circulation of the female body in terms of marriage. One is unable to consider these poems from a purely modern feminist view, where the act of rape would be detestable on the grounds of the assault performed on the woman's body. But if the medieval knight did not fully comprehend the effect of rape on a woman's body and soul, he could certainly understand the *vilainie* of honor lost and property damaged. It is thus impossible to argue that rape would evoke the same shock and revulsion in a medieval audience as it would be sure to provoke in a modern reader, but critics are perhaps too quick to dismiss the medieval knight's actions as an acceptable form of the typical misogyny of the Middle Ages. Even with limited examples of historical cases of rape, medieval attitudes

toward rape were changing and with them the ideas of how women were perceived as individuals. The pastourelle may contain certain examples that were indicative of a casual attitude toward rape, but I would argue that this notion of rape was far from uniform, as seen in examples from the poems themselves.

To move now to the theme of prostitution that has also been identified as a key theme in the pastourelle, it is useful to understand what prostitution in the Middle Ages comprised. Geri L. Smith cites the work Andreas Capellanus as a way in which the shepherdess would unambiguously be identified as a prostitute, referring to his work that identifies any woman who accept gifts from her lover as a prostitute, as concerned as she is with questions of avarice. Smith uses this association, stating "this is another way in which a poet can justify whatever may occur during their encounter"(57). She implies then that the poet could justify his mistreatment of the shepherdess given that she was a mere prostitute. Paden would turn the focus of the pastourelle away from themes of rape toward themes of prostitution in his article *Rape in the Pastourelle,* his response to Gravdal's article on the same. Paden argues that the image of the prostitute as yet another variation of the shepherdess indicates a limit on a unifying theme of rape in the pastourelle, suggesting instead that the "bribes" received by some shepherdesses indicate a literal transaction between knight and shepherdess.

But not every knight who rides out encounters the shepherdess as prostitute and not every encounter in which the knight offers riches implies that the shepherdess will accept. Critics have argued that the overarching themes of prostitution would cast the shepherdess in the role of prostitute and thus legitimize any actions performed against her. But this argument once again

points to uniformity in the genre that simply does not exist. If the shepherdess is peasant, prostitute, and lady all in one then she is without a doubt an incredibly complex construct that speaks to a masculine perception of the medieval woman that defies simple interpretation. The increasingly multiple face of the woman in these poems speak of a genre whose namesake, while the unifying theme, is no more unified than the poems themselves. But if the shepherdess also wears the visage of prostitute it only reinforces a masculine vision of the feminine that encompasses acutely different cultural representations of women. Why else would the knight boast a casual erotic encounter with a prostitute? True, the typical narrative tended to be veiled in courtly rhetoric that would preclude an uncensored account of male desire consummated in the most unromantic of ways. But there might have been a more fundamental reason for the knight to only hint at the shepherdess being a prostitute with oblique references to payment and consummation. Brundage states that while women were held to higher standards in refraining from sexual act, "conversely […] the women who fell into a life of prostitution was not overtly punished by harshly repressive measures, while men who frequented prostitutes were subject to more numerous and more sever punishments than were the ladies of joy whom they patronized."[149] There were thus social stigmas attached to the act of prostitution that penalized the man even more so than the prostitute. But if prostitution is the illicit and highly unromantic encounter the legal canon makes it out to be, why does it appear in the idyllic and courtly landscape of the pastourelle? Paden turns our eyes to the socioeconomic context of the latter half of the twelfth century, indicating external concepts of exchange that played out on a narrative level from within the pastourelle. Seen from this perspective, it is important to understand the historical context of the pastourelle from an economic perspective.

[149] James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law," *Signs* 1 (1976): 844.

Change and Exchange in the Pastourelle

As mercantile interests began to invade discourses in late twelfth-century France, interests that would slowly erode the economic structures present in the so-called feudal state[150]. This view of the three-tiered system has been challenged in more recent historical theory and Constance B. Bouchard states that this idealized picture is not an accurate description of how people actually lived and interacted. Rather, it is a model first created in the eleventh and twelfth centuries based on how theorists thought society *should* be structured. Even if this was not the reality of medieval social structures, it is telling that theorists of the Middle Ages subscribed to this view of their own society; they would thus have been sensitive to perceived changes and fluctuations in the boundaries they had designated, no matter how imperfectly they were conceived. In the late twelfth century the boundaries were further blurring as the peasant and noble classes became increasingly invested in the success of the other. With new technological developments resulting in more efficient agricultural practices and a corresponding augmentation in wages for the peasant class, particularly in northern France where laws restricted a rise in rent prices, the nobles in turn sought to expand their holdings and enhance their agricultural production.

Bouchard concludes of this time that "landlords and peasants assisted each other, even if not always intentionally; the development of the agricultural surplus and the flourishing of the

[150] Feudalism as a term is problematic in itself, refer to Constance B. Bouchard, "France in the Central Middle Ages," in *France in the Central Middle Ages, 900-1200*, ed. Marcus Bull, *The Short Oxford History of France*, gen. ed. William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

market economy required the participation of both."[151] This increasing interdependence between the noble and peasant classes is particularly compelling in considering the intersection of peasant and noble classes in the pastourelle. It would not be farfetched to assume that these mercantile interests and the progression toward what Vance refers to as horizontal exchange system[152] would have been present in the minds of the poets of the pastourelle or that they had an impact on the content of the pastourelle. The first pastourelle emerged in the north of France in the late twelfth-century, in the full flush of agricultural innovation and the slow progression of the peasant class. This adds more depth to an already layered representation of the peasantry and nobility embodied in the form of the shepherdess.

With the trend toward horizontal exchange, the concept of marriage also underwent a radical change in the last half of the twelfth century. The knight was suddenly subject to a new economy of gender relations, specifically the matter of consent. John T. Noonan refers to the *Decretum Gratiani*, in which he refers explicitly to the necessity of consent between spouses. Noonan states:

> Gratian recognized the place of individualistic, unsocial decision-making in the choice of spouses. Underlying this deference to the individual was the conviction that 'consent makes marriage' – not any consent, not merely lustful consent to intercourse, not merely intellectual consent to a shared life, but consent inform

[151] Bouchard, "France in the Central Middle Ages," 98.

[152] Vance juxtaposes the previous economic system of vertical (transcending) mystic transactions with an emerging natural horizontal system of exchange based on the concretization of the value of money in a profit-motivated monetary economy. The previous structure valued projection into the metaphysical realm in which mystical transactions upward and downward comprised the hierarchy of being. This evolved slowly into a horizontal exchange system transpiring in and through physical nature, and not in the axis of vertical ascendance. The corollary is that this would result in a new valorization of physical and earthly relationships where economic values, based on but not limited to monetary currencies would be valued over the less tangible economies of mystic transcendence. Vance suggests the change took place partly in effort to tame the bellicose nature of a lesser nobility obsessed with warfaring to create a space dominated by prosperous, commercial peace, upon which, consequently, wars such as the Crusades depended. He refers to Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae* to trace this change in the medieval mentality.

> with that special quality that Gratian […] denominated 'marital affection'" (425).[153]

Noonan goes on to emphasize that this consent was not one-sided; the woman had as much of a right to choose her partner as did the man. Gratian's approach to marital consent is curiously devoid of medical and scientific theories of female inferiority, instead finding basis in the sexual equality of the New Testament. In this standard, Noonan cautions that free choice was far from wide-spread and external pressures would still play an overwhelming part in the marriage of two individuals. But the world was changing rapidly and the laws with it, and suddenly in theory, if not yet wholly in practice, women found themselves identified as individuals with free choice in respects to certain areas of their lives where before they had been nothing more than commodities, objects of exchange solely for the economic benefit of the men around them.

The knight's changing perceptions would be assaulted on two fronts in that not only were women become more empowered legally and socially but so too were the peasant class becoming an important and challenging sector of society. Of course, this courtliness has been challenged as an all too thin veneer covering a deep-seated masculine anxiety at the change in the status of women and by no means would free consent in marriage have resulted in real and immediate equalities or freedoms for the medieval woman. Rather I would suggest that the prospect of an empowered woman and the resulting male anxiety are reflected in the ambiguity of feminine representations in medieval texts. But this also leaves room for changing masculine perspectives as well. For if in some instances the male anxiety that is often recognized as resulting in the rankest misogyny, it is also possible that this new awareness of the power of women could result in a more positive feminine interpretation and representation.

[153] John T. Noonan, Jr., "The Power to Choose," *Viator* 4 (1975): 425.

This change in the status of women as it pertains to marriage and consent therein is not an entirely aberrant phenomenon. While it is true that women suffered much at the hands of scientifically and socially informed misogyny[154] there were still examples of strong women in medieval history that work against a completely uniform vision of medieval misogyny. Even if the prevalent theme of feminine inferiority saturated much of medieval discourse, women still found power in certain social, political and economic structures that prevent them from being rigidly categorized as wholly marginalized beings. Historians that approach women from a feminist perspective have previously argued as to the subtle power medieval women were often endowed with. Georges Duby refers to the fact that women were certainly dominated and perhaps even feared, but that they occupied a position of power in relation to their male counterparts, be they fathers, husbands or sons.[155] He refers to the fact that even as these women were dominated, they held a singular power over men who feared them and who asserted their natural superiority over them all the while trusting them with their lives. And even as men in the twelfth century often disdained and subjugated women, they began also to consider them in a new light, a light of feminine autonomy and power. Even if this power and autonomy were considered dangerous, and was often suppressed, women began to slowly extricate themselves

[154] It is useful to refer again to Bloch and Gold and the trends they identify of women as objects of exchanges in terms of social objects, and also as inferior due to their physical susceptibility to sexual impulses.

[155] Duby writes eloquently in his conclusion to *Women of the Twelfth Century*:

> In the twelfth century, priests and warriors expected a woman, to be a docile daughter, a lenient wife, and a prolific mother, and then, in her old age, by the fervor of her piety and the rigor of her renunciations, to bring a whiff of sainthood into the house which had received her. This was the ultimate gift she made to the man who had deflowered her as a young girl, who had mellowed in her arms, whose piety had been rekindled by her own and how had many times deposited in her womb the seed of the sons who would later, when she was a widow, support her, and whom she would assist by her counsel to lead a better life. She was dominated, certainly; but she was also endowed with a singular power by these men who feared her, who reassured themselves by proclaiming their native superiority at the top of their voice, but who believed her nevertheless to be capable of healing bodies and saving souls, and who entrusted themselves to women so that their mortal remains, after they had breathed their last, would be properly prepared, and their memory faithfully preserved forever and ever. (149)

from the bonds of masculine power. [156] In a collection of essays designed to explore the possibilities of women and power in the Middle Ages, Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski discuss in the introduction to the collection the meaning of power in the Middle Ages and how the functional division of human activities into private and public spheres accounts for gender asymmetry, particularly in the perception of power in public versus private spheres. It is for this reason that women are often considered disempowered in critical theory, for there is little in the way of "real" feminine power in the public sphere. When a woman does gain access to or demonstrates some measure of public power, it is often considered illegitimate, or based solely on the power of the male members of her family. But this interpretation of problematic feminine power in public spheres does not preclude her empowerment in private spheres and within feminine networks of influence and persuasion. Simply because she could not publicly demonstrate power does not mean the medieval woman was without certain autonomy from and influence over her male counterparts. Joan Ferrante speaks of the subtle or hidden ways in which medieval women exercised power both in historical instances and literary examples.[157] The sphere of this power is, Ferrante admits, limited, but the way in which the medieval woman subtly used her intellect and her words to manipulate reality. But she also points out that for all the masculine posturing that occurs, particularly in the realm of medieval literature, it is often the most subtle of words from the figure of the woman that greatly impacts the plot.

[156] Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century, Women of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Jean Birrell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Duby uses the examples of powerful, dangerous women to argue for a growing change in medieval perceptions. He argues that these women, both historical and literary, provide a hazy image of what the medieval man considered woman to be. The representations are not always positive, but did contain highly popular and highly recognizable images of women that held with themselves conflicting but important elements of an emerging notion of the medieval woman as more than mere object. He takes examples of women such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Iseut, using both historical and literary representations to suggest a complicated and complex view of medieval women.

[157] Joan Ferrante, "Public Posture and Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play," in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 213-329.

If the pastourelle is often unclear and contradicting in its representation of women, it no doubt echoes a masculine uncertainty as to the new place of women in a changing socioeconomic structure. Even as the poet presents a powerless woman in an environment designed to cater to the knight's desires, there are numerous examples of the knight bested by the shepherdess. His defeat can be construed as the result of a changing power struggle in which the knight is no longer the default victor due to his masculine superiority. This subversion of masculine might as right is explicitly addressed on more than one occasion in the pastourelle, perhaps none so clearly as in one poem when the shepherdess laughs her pursuer away:

> "Sire, me samblez cortoiz;;
> mais si folle
> ne me troverez des mois
> ke je faice vos voloir.
> Poc vos vaut
> biaus proiers, ce Dex me saut,
> ke force n'est mie drois." (n.33. 26-31)
>
> ["Sire, you seem courtly; But you won't find me In months so foolish That I'd do your wish. Pretty prayer Does you little good, so God save me, For might does not make right."]

The shepherdess here voices evidence of a changing dynamic. She warns the knight that his strength is not all he holds it to be, and that for all his courtliness she is unmoved by his displays of passion. This particular shepherdess's success in driving off her suitor is by no means the standard for the genre and in just as many instances the knight will use his "might" to violently satisfy his fantasy. But these instances of rape can also be attributed to the same anxiety that manifests in another knight being shamed away from his fantasy. Once again the flowing parameters of the genre reinforce the concept of a masculine constructed fantasy in peril as each knight responds differently to the change in dynamic. Paden's attributes the conflicting impulses of the knight to Freud's model of the dirty joke in that it presents a balance of sexuality and

repression in order explain instances of rape when they do occur, but also to explain that rape is not always the assumed outcome.[158] This is a point to which Gravdal adds nuance when she suggests that Paden does not take the analogy far enough in its interpretation. Gravdal asserts that in Freud's model the act of aggression performed by the teller on behalf of the listener at the expense of another would indicate that the rape scenes of the pastourelle would be an act of rape by the poet on behalf of the male audience.[159] Both points are interesting when considered in the light of masculine anxiety at work in the fantasy scenario of the pastourelle. For if the masculine fantasy itself is under attack by external cultural and economic changes, I would argue the poet would in fact be imposing external anxieties on the body of the shepherdess within the structure of the fantasy. Depending on the balance of sexuality and repression the author enacts this anxiety on her fictive body, either raping her or acknowledging from within the poem her changing place. If this anxiety is presented as a dirty joke that sometimes ends in rape, but sometimes does not, then it allows the contemplation of unsettling socioeconomic change in a way that once again empowers the masculine poet who feels the ground moving beneath his feet. From within his fantasy the poet is able to control his actions and reactions while also acknowledging the changes around him. This devalorization of the knight in combination with the rise of the merchant class must have contributed further to a position of economic and social instability for the knight. Paden applies the themes of dissatisfaction and devalorization to explain the presence of prostitution in the pastourelle, which functioned as an expression of the disillusionment with the current socioeconomic system. But to push this interpretation further I would suggest that it is no surprise that the intersection of class, economic exchange and a vocal

[158] Paden uses the model of Freud's jokes and their relationship to the unconscious to explain that the reason the pastourelle does not express sexuality outright is that without the balance of repression versus sexuality, there would be no reason for the poem at all, the poet would directly set about raping his female listener. Instead, because this sexuality is repressed, it must be expressed in fantasy form. Hence the pastourelle.
[159] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 109.

feminine presence in the pastourelle produce varying reactions, some brutal and some resigned, on the part of the knight. If Gravdal argues that the poet contemplates acts on the body of the shepherdess on behalf of his masculine audience only for the purpose of illicit erotic pleasure, I would suggest that while these fantasies were certainly erotically charged, they carried within them a deeper expression of a masculine poet in dialogue with changing perception of the society around him.

The knight's embodiment of masculine anxiety is evident in other poems, in particular when the knight attempts to indulge in his fantasy. In several of the pastourelle the knight assaults the shepherdess only to be driven off.

> Devant moi lors la montai
> de maintenant
> et trestout droit m'en alai
> vers un bois verdoiant.
> Aval les prez regardai,
> s'oï criant
> deus pastors par mi un blé,
> qui venoient huiant
> et leverent un haut cru.
> Assez fis plus que ne di.
> Je la les si men foï –
> n'oi cure de tel gent! (n.43. 49-60)
>
> [In front of me I mounted her At once And went straight Toward a blooming wood. I looked down through the meadows and heard two shepherds Yelling in a field of wheat who were coming with shouts And raising a loud cry. I did much more than I say. I left her and fled – I had no care for such people!]

This poem presents an odd moment in which the knight presumably succeeds in raping the shepherdess - he hints that he did much more than he says - but his fantasy is interrupted as two shepherds come running to the rescue of the shepherdess. It isn't clear how much the knight accomplishes, his elliptical statement about his actions leaves the audience to wonder what truly

happened, but he is forced to make a hasty and rather ignominious exit. It is clear the fantasy has fallen short of expectation; there is no adulation on the part of the shepherdess, no boasts from the knight, and one can only imagine how he must look fleeing the scene. This is hardly the amorous encounter he must have imagined as he wandered the countryside, thinking of making a song – "pensant a fere une chançon" (n.43.3-4). Furthermore, the whole episode has clearly left a bad taste with the knight as he exclaims his dislike for "tel gent!" The knight's interactions with the peasant class have left him unsettled and difficult to read satisfaction in the culmination of desire in this particular fantasy. Rather, he has come into contact with something over which he was not entirely in control and while availing himself sexually of the shepherdess he is nevertheless ambivalent as to the nature of his interactions. In assaulting the shepherdess the knight has attempted to restore the balance of order to his world in asserting his masculine dominance over her, an attack that has ambiguous results. The poet himself foreshadows the outcome of the poem with the shepherdess's own words. In the beginning of the poem she warns the knight, "Se vous venez plus avant ja auroiz la tençon." [If you come any closer, you will have a fight.] (n.43.19-20) and later in the poem, "Nou faites pour la gent!" [Don't do it, because of the people!] (n.43.48). Both these statements show an awareness on the part of the poet, and thus the knight, that any actions he takes will have consequences and that his fantasy does not exist in a vacuum of society and graces. Furthermore, the second statement warns the knight that those around him will object to what he does. The shepherdess functions as the social and moral voice of the poem.

If the shepherdess is constructed by and speaks through the masculine poet, she still presents the very real interaction of the poet with historical conceptions of the feminine. The women of the pastourelle are not the silenced ladies of troubadour lyric, and thus I would argue present compelling instances of authorial creation that recognizes and contributes to the complexity of medieval conceptions of sexuality. The voice, functioning as resistance, as acquiescence, as moral compass, indicates an author who did not consider the response of a woman to be uniform in response to masculine advances and aggression. Smith identifies part of the complexity of the shepherdess as "her audacity to speak and even to articulate desire."[160] Her resistance, while essential for the masculine construction of erotic fantasy has the unfortunate side-effect of being delivered in her feminine voice. If only her body resisted she would easily assume the role of mere object, passively resisting and fading into a fetishized and silenced masculine construct. But her voice problematizes her role in this masculine fantasy because it resonates from within her gendered body. For even if the construction of her body and her resistance is male fantasy, as Burns argues, her "speech more staunchly resists colonization and appropriation; her constructed voice cannot be fetishized as easily as her fictive flesh."[161] Gravdal has formed her argument around the fact that the shepherdess is given a voice only in order to reconstruct the paradigm of male force and female subjugation, and that the cost of her voice is high.[162] Smith refers to the fact that it is often the shepherdess's voice, her singing or lamenting or laughing voice that attracts the knight's attention, often to her detriment.[163] Her voice does indeed lead her into horrific instances of violence and rape, and it is the trend to lament the female voice that serves as the mouthpiece that not only contains within it expressions

[160] Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition*, 62.
[161] Burns, *Bodytalk*, 158.
[162] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 119-120.
[163] Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition*, 63.

of masculine fantasy but then also glorifies the ensuing violence. I would argue that the shepherdess is not powerless and her voice is not devoid of all feminine subjectivity. If she sometimes falls victim to the knight and his brutality, then just as often she uses her words to counter his attempts of acting out his rustic fantasy, either reminding him of the social implications of any encounter between them, or warning the knight away with threats of her companions, her dog or even herself. In some examples the shepherdess tricks the knight:

> "Sire, bien m'avez conquise;
> fetes de moi vo plesir.
> G'irai mes bestes acueillir,
> et vous remandrez un pou ci."
> Cele s'en entre en un essart,
> et cil li gete un douz regart;
> vers son pere s'en va la bele,
> et il demeure conme musart.
> L'arme de lui soit la honie
> quant la bele li eschapa! (n. 150.29-38)

> ["Sir, you have won me over quite; Do your pleasure with me. I'll go gather my animals, And you stay here a little while." She went into a cleared field And he gave her a sweet look; the pretty girl went to her father, And he stayed behind like a fool. May his soul be put to shame, Since the pretty girl escaped him!]

In this poem the girl cleverly turns his use of courtly words against him, making sweet promises she has no intentions of keeping. In this way the shepherdess reappropriates the knight's words for her own uses and subverts the courtly tradition in reversing the expectations of resistance and acquiescence. The ironic tone is clear when the poet juxtaposes the images of the shepherdess running to her father while the knight smiles sweetly at her. He suspects nothing, assuming that his dominion over the girl is unquestionable. The moment is so shocking for the poet that he consequently switches from the first person to the third as narrator. When beginning the poem he says, "Lez li m'assis o lie chiere" [Beside her I sat with a happy look] (n. 150.5). In the first person he recounts the first happy look he gives her, but by the end of the poem he has

had to distance himself from the situation, and tells of the happy smile the knight gives in the third person. The shepherdess's words have clearly had an impact not only on the knight, but on the form of the poem, and it is a unique example of the knight backing away from the action in which he previously was centered. In other examples the shepherdess laughs off her admirer with some witticism or a biting remark, "Quant ele m'en vit aler si me dist par ramposner, 'Chevalier sont trop hardi!"" [When she saw me leaving She said sarcastically, "Knights are very brave!"] (n.44. 51-53). In examples of the Occitan *pastorela* Marcabru's shepherdess cogently argues against every one of the knight's attempts to seduce her. In Girard Riquier's series of six poems detailing encounters with the same shepherdess, the knight fumbles about his seduction with laughable results, all the while the shepherdess handily reminds him again and again of why she will never be his lover. The multitude of examples of the shepherdess handily thwarting her courtly suitor presents examples that are more nuanced than the construct of a woman constructed merely to be ravaged.

Against the wit and charm that are often characteristic of the peasant girl, the knight often fumbles and fails, often resorting to bribes, offers of riches, or threats of violence. All the while the shepherdess most commonly employs subtler tactics relying on her speech as an entreaty toward interaction mediated by reason and not brute force and base desire. She bargains and argues for her own sexuality and her own autonomy against masculine desire, and she succeeds as often as she does not. And if the shepherdess desires the knight, she is just as ready to bring him to her with her wit and a knowing smile. She contains within her representation the subtle signs of a masculine awareness of the layered image of the medieval woman as lady and peasant, lover and prostitute, virgin and whore. If she is all these things in the pastourelle, then she

reminds the knight of it with her words, laughing and mocking, loving and soothing. And it is her words that bring the knight down upon her, but that also elevate her into our field of vision.

Courtly Love, Medieval Misogyny and the Spaces in Between

In establishing the pastourelle as a place of tension in gender and class relations, it becomes necessary to reevaluate the tropes of love and desire found therein. If the knight is constructing fantasies of the medieval lady in a setting more agreeable to his erotic endeavors, he cannot easily fall back on Andreas Capellanus' advice regarding desire for a peasant. On some level he has constructed a feminine figure of incredible ambiguity that fluctuates from poem to poem. If the shepherdess is not just a peasant, but a lady, and a virgin and a prostitute, then her many faces and voice color his interactions with her in these pastoral encounters. But it is important to acknowledge the tenuous nature of a woman's position, in the court and away from it. To attempt an argument that contains a modified view of the medieval woman's relationship with the ostensibly overwhelming misogyny of the Middle Ages it is important to first understand how the figure of the woman was confronted with misogyny in literary spaces. Geri L. Smith refers to the theme of violence that pervades the pastourelle, where aggression is a fundamental element of the world. And while the shepherdess is sometimes presented as prepared to protect herself physically, her strategies of confrontation rely largely on verbal tactics, in stark contrast with her male counterparts whose reliance on verbal tactics soon falls to the wayside in favor of an easier tactic of physical persuasion. Smith identifies the bergeries as the most common locus for violence and maintains that the violence of the readily combative

shepherds contrasts distinctly with the "refined social politics of the poet's milieu"[164] but this would seem to disregard the highly violent nature of knightly endeavors that make up much of the system of honor that comprise the knight's socio-political milieu. It would perhaps be more appropriate to identify violence with the masculine figures of the pastourelle, where both knight and shepherds readily resort to violence, but where the feminine figure of the shepherdess prefers to engage in rational dialogue.

Within the fluid parameters of the pastourelle, the lines between classes become blurred and gender roles take on new meaning. Even while maneuvering through the hazards of love both courtly and unrefined, there is the potential to find a positive space for the feminine figure of the shepherdess in the very multiplicity of her representation. The pastourelle no more presents a unified attitude of misogyny then does medieval literature or culture as a whole. In a time of increasing economic, political and social change, perceptions of women were evolving rapidly. Because these perceptions did carry misogynistic tendencies does not imply that misogyny was the overwhelming and impenetrable norm. Indeed, historical evidence of the fluctuating nature of a woman's power and influence are testament to the instability of her position. But just because her place in medieval society was sometimes tenuous does not mean it was always dire. It is in the spaces in between misogyny and exaltation that the true figure of the medieval woman emerges.

The fluidity of the genre itself is compelling in terms of a feminist approach. Carolyn Burke discusses Luce Irigaray's interactions with the dominant masculine psychoanalysis of the day, seated most comfortably in the theories of Freud and Lacan, and reveals how Irigaray's

[164] Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition*, 49.

theory of the fluidity of female language can be used to deconstruct dominant masculine discourse from within. She states: "female language flows beyond the boundaries of logical discourse, it is seen as unstable, in excess of solidifiable sense, and therefore outside the discourse of the Master [Lacan]"[165] and this language comes ultimately from a plural, multiple feminine identity that resists the phallic monolith of masculine discourse. The multiplicity of the female figure in the pastourelle is also one that speaks, so what to do with her voice? For it is safe to assume that when she speaks in the poem, it is with the mouth of a male poet and ultimately a male performer. This provocatively brings us again to the fractured image of the feminine sex that Irigaray presents, the sex of the woman that is both open and closed. Just like this vaginal image of a multiple feminine identity, the shepherdess in the poem is both speaking and not. Her mouth while open, is not her own and thus the feminine mouth still remains closed. Through these lips "flows the current of what 'woman' is saying"[166] but as Irigaray states, "one must know how to listen otherwise than in good forms to hear what she is saying."[167] This to say that language is always at the seat of the feminist dilemma, for when a woman speaks it is never completely with her own voice. But if we find even traces of the feminine in the masculine construction of her voice, it is because there was a very real, historical basis to the fact that women were resisting marginalization and domination on different levels in society. Even if this move was slow and perhaps at moments almost imperceptible, she is still there, speaking doubly through a male-voice that empowers her even as he places himself over her. For in giving her a voice, any voice, the masculine author admits the very fact that there is a feminine voice and that it does speak in and react to the world around it in a way that is not fully informed by male-dominated discourses.

[165] Carolyn Burke, "Irigaray through the looking glass," *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981): 300.
[166] Burke, "Irigaray through the looking glass," 301.
[167] Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'est pas une*, 109.

The shepherdess is an incredibly provocative intersection of representations of the medieval woman. She is virgin and rustic, lady and lover. She contains within herself the highest registers of courtly love and ignoble representations of sexual abandon. She is the fantasy that both "asks for it" and resists masculine dominance. She contains within her flickering representation the faces of all medieval women. The pastourelle as genre represents an ongoing dialogue between masculine dominance and feminine resistance as the knight attempts to interact with the medieval lady outside of the social strictures where she retains her power publically and privately. Even if the sublimation of the courtly lady is perceived as an indicator of a larger medieval misogyny at work and her effacement is designed to alleviate the resulting masculine anxiety, the knight cannot escape the subtle power of the lady as she holds power over the system of symbolic capital that he is so reliant on. To deny the power of social capital is to fall into madness, out in the wilderness.

The tamed scene of the rustic countryside is thus a compromise on the part of the knight who attempts to subvert the homosocial ties that bind him, ties that are largely in the power of the lady of the court. He goes beyond the castle walls in order to escape this form of subtle feminine resistance and influence and yet he cannot escape the vision of the lady behind the eyes of the simple shepherdess. She haunts him as he wavers between the need for the social environment that gives him meaning and between a desire to escape the same social environment without the punishment that so many heroes of courtly romances endure. This moment of crisis in the person of the medieval knight is obvious in his interactions with the shepherdess. Unsure of his status he approaches the shepherdess and attempts to interact with her as he would a lady

of the court. But as the shepherdess often reminds him of the social bonds that he struggles against, he reacts in a number of ways. Many of the knights flee, chased off by threats of violence. Some succeed in wooing their shepherdesses and thus the fantasy of an encounter unencumbered by the instability of a court system is complete. Some rebel entirely against the feminine pressure that holds the key to their symbolic success and rape the shepherdess in an attempt to subjugate her and assert masculine dominance over the feminine sphere of her influence. But as each knight approaches each shepherdess in a different way, he is still impossibly caught up in a system of symbolic capital that demands circulation. Thus, each tale is written and circulated so that the knight may increase his symbolic capital. But with each variant of each poem, the knight enters in dialogue with his own perceptions of how his social capital must be circulated and his individual response is contained in the wit and speech of the shepherdess who defies, repels or satisfies him.

The construct of the shepherdess is a masculine one, but one that nevertheless is in dialogue with very real social structures at work in medieval society. Inherent in each girl tending to her flock is the image of a woman who stands at the core of social interactions. Hers is not a public place, nor is it one of active feminine empowerment. Rather it is the site of an important feminine resistance to a masculine dominated society. Because the worth of the man is inscribed in her very essence, she cannot be silenced and she cannot be circulated into anonymity. As the author of the pastourelle seeks to turn her again into an object of masculine exchange, rendering her written body into the circulating words that would give him knightly worth, the shepherdess speaks back and reminds the knight that no honor that he can accrue is devoid of her influence. His response to her is what informs his every move and even in trying to

escape the scope of her influence, he inevitably brings her with him. The genre of the pastourelle is thus reflected in its very form; the knight in riding out beyond the castle walls is still inevitably in dialogue with the social norms that control him, social norms largely maintained and influenced by the women around him. Every word and sentence uttered between knight and shepherdess is indicative of a wider conversation at work, between the knight and his recognition of and resistance to the courtly norms that define him. And in bringing the lady of the court with him and by giving her a voice, the knight recognizes the sphere of her influence and the subtle power she wields from her position of ostensible feminine inferiority. For even as masculine constructed fantasy that polarization of the sexes relegates the woman to a private, closed sphere, she wields an important influence from within.

Chapter Three

In the Marketplace: Women of the Fabliaux

Introduction

The medieval women considered in the romance and the pastourelle have presented examples of women who, on the surface, represent the highest and lowest levels of society in the Middle Ages. The noble ladies of the romance are firmly situated in a courtly tradition that shapes every move they perform and word they utter and they have long been considered through the conflicting lenses of divine love and monstrous splendor. The representations of these women are necessarily informed by their masculine authors but figures such as Lunete and Enide still succeed in resisting complete effacement by speaking their way into the social economies of honor in the court. At the other end of the spectrum is the shepherdess of the pastourelle, a figure that inhabits a tenuous position outside the city and castle walls. Far from the structure of the court, the shepherdess is nevertheless imbued with characteristics of the noble woman and from this dual representation she finds her voice to speak against a univocal masculine figure that would silence her socially and sexually. As the shepherdess speaks against the roving knight of the pastourelle, she resists the role of passive, open and silent woman. But if the noble lady and rustic shepherdess, often more alike than dissimilar in their representations, characterize the highest and lowest classes of medieval society, the woman of the fabliau contains all these representations and more.

The women found within the seemingly low humor of the fabliau are at once women of the courts, the marketplace and the field. She is every woman on every level of society and when she speaks it is with libidinous glee and virginal reserve. The overwhelming diversity of the genre of the fabliau is fertile ground for the worst examples of misogyny found in medieval literature, but also present startling moments of women who resist disappearing into a phallocentric world by trading, dreaming and speaking their way into the eye of the public. These moments of resistance are at once subtle and dramatic and are often situated in the sexuality that would seem to be the very site of feminine passivity and submissiveness. But far from submitting, sexually, socially, verbally, the women of the fabliau are often resisting through the very flesh that would render them silent and effaced. It is through the preoccupation, indeed, the obsession with the physical body in the genre of the fabliau that the figure of the medieval woman finds her voice. In asserting her own desires and the importance of her pleasure, she resists representation through an unequivocally masculine voice. Even written as she is by male authors, the woman of the fabliau resists definition on only masculine terms and contains within her multitude of renderings the possibility for a less deterministic interpretation of the medieval feminine figure.

To understand how it is possible to come to a more positive interpretation of the woman in the fabliau, it is necessary to consider not only the dominant themes at work in the genre, but also to understand the historical influences that produced such a widely divergent grouping of texts in the first place. While representations of women are certainly not static in the many examples of fabliaux, there is still the perception, based on certain popularized texts, that the fabliaux contain the least positive representations of women. As such, the fabliau has long been

considered through the lens of misogyny, with numerous examples of brutality against women that are shocking to a modern audience. While the critical approach to such misogyny sometimes takes on an anachronistic indignation at a perceived medieval acceptance of such representations of violence against women, it is often difficult to determine the effect of this violence on a medieval audience. Still, medieval misogyny is a recognized element in medieval literature that would seem to be most explicitly exemplified in the fabliau. While the misogyny of the fabliaux is often identified in the farcical representations of blundering virgins and oversexed housewives, there is still room to question the place of the female character in the text and why she is able to resist the open misogyny of the fabliau tradition, even when that misogyny borders on the violent. Even as these humorous renditions of the female condition would seem to speak to a condescending male view of the same, a wholly antifeminist reading of women in such a widely diverging genre is too simplistic and when women play a conspicuous role in these narratives, it is rare for their performances to be simply condemned.[168] To concede that there is a lack of overwhelming condemnation for the conduct of most female characters in the fabliau still fails to account for the way in which these fictive women are represented as thinking, speaking actors. Far more than the women of romance and pastourelle, the women of the fabliau act on their wants and desires and successfully insert themselves into masculine economies. They are often represented as doing such in highly corporal ways. If the bodies of medieval women are typically the seat of their marginalization, in the fabliaux it is the sexualized and speaking feminine body that resists effacement and demands our attention.

[168] Lesley Johnson, "Women on Top: Antifeminism in the Fabliaux?" *Modern Language Review* 78 (1983): 298 – 307.

Jane Burns notes an important distinction in the fabliau from its courtly counterparts: its obsessive focus on the gendered body. In contrast with courtly romance and lyric poetry, and even the more sexually charged pastourelle, where sex acts are alluded to and veiled in the language of courtly love, the fabliaux openly and explicitly address masculine and feminine sexualized bodies. The fabliaux contain tales not only readily exposing the sex acts between men and women, but also speak unambiguously, and often with humor well-situated in the obscene, about the human genitalia involved in the various sexual encounters found within examples of the fabliau. This open sexuality is usually considered in the light of the overwhelming misogyny of the genre, a charge that is still commonly accepted from a critical standpoint. To be sure, scenes of misogyny abound in the fabliaux, from tales cheerfully recounting the horrible mutilation of women, to their casual, disembodied representations as mere sex organs. But for the seemingly uniform misogyny of the genre, there is no easy representation of women in the fabliau. Payen echoes Nykrog when he comments on the treatment of women in the fabliau: "Son antifeméminisme traduit moins une mentalité bourgeoise qu'une reaction contre les snobismes de la *fin'amor*."[169] If the ladies of the courtly romance are the faceless, silenced noble women of the aristocracy, and the shepherdess of the pastourelle is the multiple, overlaid image of the rustic peasant and the courtly lady, then the medieval woman found in the fabliau is all this and more. If the women in the fabliau are representations in reaction to courtly norms, to a perceived snobbism of courtly tradition, then they must be contemplated in the light of social reactions about their social status as well as their gender. This, however, is no easy task, as there are a multitude of varying faces of women in the fabliaux. Contained within its verses are divine fairies, deceitful noblewomen, naïve peasant girls and lustful bourgeois wives. The fabliau, due to the widespread audience of nobility and emerging bourgeoisie, contains a boundless stream of

[169] Charles Payen, *Histoire de la littérature française: Le Moyen Age* (Paris : Flammarion, 1997), 180.

changing images of the medieval woman. These representations cannot be categorized in any set social stratus, instead defying social structures and gender stereotypes and revealing the absolute impossibility of reducing the medieval women to one face, and one interpretation. As with all medieval genres, the problem of a modern feminist critical approach lies in the always present shadow of medieval misogyny in which the feminine literary figure is cast. In the case of the fabliau the women, be they wives or virgins or fey, would seem to be at the mercy of a laughing masculine gaze that reduces them to the fleshly orifice. But as the women of the fabliau flicker through representations both elevated and profane, she also speaks confidently and deftly maneuvers her way through a diverse economy of exchanges and interactions. This speech might occur unwillingly through her appropriated sex organs as seen in *Le chevalier qui fist parler les cons*, but as often as not she turns those same orifices against her masculine counterpart, as can be seen in *Berangier au lonc Cul*. And if the exchanges she makes are not always to her advantage, as can be seen in *Cele qui fu foutue et defoutue por une Grue*, then she often seizes her own economic and sexual destiny in tales such as *Le sohait des vez*. It is the very diversity and the impossibly of a single perspective that make the women of the fabliau such powerful and compelling figures. We cannot turn our gaze away from them because they speak so clearly and engage in these tales so authoritatively. It is difficult of course to avoid surrendering to assertions of the blanket misogyny of the fabliau, or to indulge in a romanticisation of the potential for empowerment and agency in these same representations. But if one is careful, there is room in these texts to reach a middle ground that both acknowledges the medieval misogyny at work while also recognizing that misogyny is not the only lens through which these women must be considered. To evoke again the trend of economic and social change occurring in this time period, and to subscribe to views of the historical realism of the genre while still understanding

the fragility of such a critical approach, I hope to reveal the face of the medieval woman through her literary representation.

Tales of High and Low: Situating Genre and Audience in the Fabliau

The medieval fabliaux are perhaps the least elevated and most comic examples of interactions between medieval men and women. Appearing toward the end of the twelfth century and reaching the height of its popularity in the thirteenth century, the fabliau is one of the most provocative examples of medieval French literature. It is a genre that has attracted attention not only for its content but also its origins, and there has been much debate as to the authorship and audience of the fabliau. The genre faded after 1330 but its theme and spirit continued to reverberate in texts by Boccaccio and Chaucer, whose works embody the comic and obscene tones first popularized in the Old French fabliau. Typically avoiding traditional notions of "courtly love" the fabliaux are often scandalous examples of male and female interaction, with comic tales of indiscrete and blatant sexual encounters. These detailed encounters reveal narratives in which conventional gender roles are the stuff of ridicule and sexual and economic exchange takes place against the framework of a multitude of social settings. Scholars have often attributed a tone of medieval realism to the genre for this very reason; because the fabliau offers such diverse representations of men and women, and cuts across social economic boundaries to present "faithful" representations of human nature, critical theory was apt to conclude that the fabliau, more accurately mimetic of day to day life in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, offered an authentic counterpoint to the "idealism of courtly forms."[170] Ferdinand Brunetière

[170] Howard Bloch, *Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 4. For further reading on the social realism and the mimetic nature of the fabliaux, see Bloch's discussion in *Scandal of the Fabliau*, 4-7, Per

commented that the authors of the fabliau as excellent historiographers of everyday life and J.B.B de Roquefort-Flaméricort agreed that the genre was a faithful mirror of the civil and private life of the French.[171] Edmund Faral commented on the fabliau as realistic sketches of human nature[172] and Philippe Ménard further evokes the image of the fabliau as a mirror of its time, commenting on the authenticity of geographic representation in the genre as well as the details of daily life, including descriptions of food, wine and clothing.[173] As much as critics readily enjoy identifying the realism of medieval life in the fabliau, this categorization also oddly contributed to a corresponding dismissiveness as to the literary import of the genre.

Now recognized as a genre also appreciated by the aristocratic audiences of courtly romance and lyric poetry, the fabliaux were once thought to be literature solely intended for a more bourgeois and rustic audience, given the rather indelicate subject matter and content. This theory of audience perhaps unintentionally contributed to a fine line in critical theory that wavered between admiration for the simple, natural tone of the fabliau and disdain for these texts without artifice or mystery. Before this shift in critical theory occurred, the fabliau was often relegated to a place of literary insignificance; as Zumthor once claimed, the fabliaux were often considered of almost no literary interest and a genre of and for the city bourgeois.[174] This dismissal of the literary value of the fabliau, and indeed much of the earliest critical theory

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Nykrog *Les Fabliaux: Etude d'histoire littéraire et de stylistique médiévale* (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1957), 303-308 and Philippe Ménard *Les Fabliaux: Contes à rire du moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983).

[171] Brunetière "Les Fabliaux du moyen âge et l'origine des contes," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 119 (1893) : 189-213; J.B.B de Roquefort-Flaméricort *De l'Etat de la poésie francoise dans les XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fournier, 1815), 188.

[172] Edmund Faral, *La Vie Quotidienne au temps de Saint Louis* (Paris : Hachette, 1942), 48.

[173] Ménard, *Les Fabliaux*, 47-72.

[174] Zumthor , *Histoire Literaire de la France médiévale*, 138.

surrounding the genre[175], is undoubtedly at odds with the wealth of critical theory inspired by these bawdy tales that does not limit focus to a historical perspective; included are such works by Joseph Bédier and Per Nykrog that painstakingly analyze the depth and breadth of the genre to find in it some unifying thread by which to define it, stylistically or otherwise. All the same, even Bédier characterizes the genre as devoid of all literary pretention[176], a categorization that at once celebrates the *esprit gaulois* that he recognizes as the soul of the genre and yet circumvents questions of the importance of literary representations of the culture in which he delights. Nykrog is the first provide an in-depth argument as to the possibility of a noble audience of the fabliau, one that would have recognized the ironic reversal of courtly themes found within the genre, or even one that enjoyed a literature of *gauloiserie* that provided a pointed alternative to the idealism of courtly themes.[177] In considering genre, it is also important to understand the historical and social origins of the genre that in turn inform the question of audience. Bédier argued that the fabliaux were written for an up and coming bourgeoisie of Picardy while Nykrog contended that the fabliaux were intended for aristocrats and wealthy bourgeois who could afford the patronage of the authors and the purchase of the manuscripts.

Even with his alternative theories of audience, Nykrog also subscribes to the theory of the natural text, and is insistent on the lack of literary artifice of the genre. Charles Payen is unable to draw conclusion as to the intended audience of the fabliau, but imagines that the progress of the bourgeois class helps in the diffusion of the genre.[178] Michel Zink states that the proof of a

[175] Brunetière states that the literary value of the fabliau is nul, and that the genre's value is purely historical. (Brunetière, "Les Fabliaux," 192).
[176] Bédier, *Les Fabliaux*¸341.
[177] Nykrog's theory is that even nobles could find attraction in the *esprit gaulois* of the fabliau, particularly in the fact that it avoided the courtly sensibilities that recognized the superiority of courtly love, embodied in the figure of the noble woman. (Nykrog, *Fabliaux*, 223-224).
[178] Payen, *Littérature française*, 180.

noble audience is in the theme of the fabliaux, where courtly themes are borrowed and placed in contexts that would render them humorous to an audience that fully recognized the appropriation of content and theme.[179] But for all this debate concerning the fabliau, the audience of the fabliau is now recognized as a widespread one, with elements to please a multitude of individuals in a changing world. The question of audience also serves to examine the different themes and motifs at play in different fabliaux, which would have been easily recognizable to an audience well versed in a multitude of genres, including romance, lai and lyric poetry. Not only do the fabliaux share many elements with other genres of the Middle Ages, but they in presenting satirical and comedic representations of interactions between the sexes that often rely on established gender roles found in other genres, reveal an incredible intertextuality. The men and women of the fabliau cleverly turn such traditional roles on their heads but in doing so reveal a dynamic intersection of themes and people. The flowing boundaries of the genre of the fabliau suggest the possibility of reading these stories through multiple lenses, with the possibility of socioeconomic and historical readings that can inform a feminist interpretation. As economic changes slowly pervaded society, triggering shifts in socioeconomic status resulting in changing notions of class, the fabliau was perfectly suited to please an audience comprised of a rising bourgeois class as well as their noble counterparts, as well as depict characters, both male and female, that were not restricted to any set representation. Thus, in order to fully appreciate the nature of the fabliau it is necessary to understand not only the generic conventions at play in the category of the fabliau, but also the economic underpinnings of the sexual exchanges found not only in the fabliau but in a medieval literature in general.

[179] Michel Zink, introduction to *Fabliaux érotiques*, ed. Luciano Rossi (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 1993).

To speak to the problem of the instability of genre, Norris J. Lacy argues that it is problematic to try to consider the fabliau as a homogenous genre and comments more generally on the fragility of medieval categories and terms. But while he states that the uncritical acceptance of traditional terminology is indefensible, it is often necessary and convenient to use the generic terminology in order to speak of a particular grouping of texts. Lacy uses this line of reasoning to make the argument that one cannot assume an inherently misogynistic fabliau, but concedes that the tendency toward negative representations of women loom large. He maintains that while the men of the fabliau are found individually reprehensible and personally responsible for their actions, the women of the fabliau are often found to contain negative representations of their sex generalized as a whole. I would argue that while certain instances of women portrayed in the fabliaux do contain messages warning of the intrinsically depraved and unsympathetic nature of women, the very instability of the fabliau as genre that Lacy himself points to is important in considering the presumed and overwhelming negativity of the representation of women in the fabliaux. To only read the fabliaux through a lens of misogyny or to disregard the important and multiple representations of women found within an abundance of varying narratives, is to disregard the very diversity that makes generic categorization so difficult, a diversity that also lends such vibrancy to the genre itself.

While it is impossible to claim that the audience of the fabliau was a universal one, it is safe to assert that the considerable diversity of theme and content would have inspired delight and recognition at all levels of society. From narratives satirizing courtly love to more ordinary scenes of exchange in the marketplace, the fabliau contains within the limits of its genre a strange new mix of the noble and the rustic, the courtly and the everyday, the sacred and the

profane. Indeed, it is a strange mix of high and low humor that infuses the genre, but almost always with the tendency toward the sexual or the scatological. If there is a unifying element that would seem to characterize the fabliaux more than any other, it would be the obsession with bodily representations, usually at their most vulnerable and ridiculous. The unveiling of the body, usually so tightly concealed, is an incredibly candid perspective that is most unique to the fabliau. Unlike the contemplation of the body that usually occurs from within a religious or courtly framework, the fabliau takes casual and humorous representations of the body, complete with all their associated functions, and lays them bare.

This open contemplation and acceptance of overtly sexual narratives, ones that often border on the extreme, as seen in examples of dismembered body parts that circulate or speak, would seem at odds with the possibility of a noble audience. And yet, side by side with talk of *cons* and *culs*, there are social interactions at play that would seem at odds with an entirely rustic or bourgeois audience. As Jean Rychner points out in his study of *Berangier au long cul*, the fabliau contains within one variant a diatribe against noble families that dilute noble blood by allowing their daughters to marry *des villains* or those not of noble blood, an element of social satire that would have resonated most clearly with a noble audience. The fabliau tells the tale of a rich count who has become greatly indebted to a merchant and gives him his daughter in marriage as payment. This intersection of social classes constitutes the setting and the framework of humor contained within the fabliau:

> Ainsi bons lignaiges aville
> et li chastelain et li conte
> declinent tuit et vont a honte:
> se marient bas por avoir,
> et grant domaige, si ont il.
> Li chevalier mauvais et vill

et couart issent de tel gent,
qui covoitent or et argent
plus qu'il ne font chevalerie:
ainsi est largesce perie,
einsi dechiet enor et pris! (v.24-35)

[It is such that a good lineage falls into decline and that chatelaines and counts deteriorate everything and lose all their honor: They marry below their rank for money and they must suffer the terrible consequences and the prejudice; this is the effect of what happens. Incapable knights, worthless and cowardly come from such families: they covet gold and riches more than they devote themselves to knighthood. This is how largesse perishes; and it is thus that honor and value fall into decline!]

This commentary on the part of the jongleur reflects not only the clash of two social classes, but indicates a larger socioeconomic upheaval at work. The very substance of each class is here revealed: the merchant class with its preoccupation with money and the noble class with its obsession with honor. The merchant husband, become knight, and his preoccupation with money, make for a very poor knight and when challenged to prove himself worthy of the title by his discontented wife, the husband goes off and feigns encounters, while in fact uncaringly breaking his spears on trees in the forest. The wife catches on to this ruse and follows him into the forest one day, in the guise of a knight herself. Challenging her husband, who does not recognize her under the armor she has donned, she quickly reveals his cowardice when faced with a true opponent and forces him to kiss her suspiciously long *cul* as punishment. She then rushes home and wastes no time in calling to her side a knight she has long admired and proceeds to make a cuckold of her husband. The story culminates in a scene of confrontation when the husband returns home to find his wife with another man. Fearless, the wife explains that the husband will suffer this indignity or all shall know of his cowardice, for the man she is with is none other than Berangier of the long ass, the one who humiliated him earlier. The story ends with a final statement that speaks not only to class, but also to interactions between men and

women: “A mol pastor chie lous laine” (v. 300) [When the shepherd is soft, the wolf shits wool]. The husband is obviously inadequate in his role as husband or knight, and thus the wolves shall play. The allusion to the husband as shepherd can hardly be accidental, particularly given the context of class divisions, but it is unclear who the wolf is. The wife, who has so cleverly tricked her husband, merits the title of the clever wolf, but in the traditional sense the metaphor would seem to cast her as the sheep that has been carried off by the wolf, or the challenging knight. It is an odd moment for the narrative, for in essence the lady in disguise has carried herself away, with no help necessary, and thus she is both wolf and sheep. The tale centers around the unsuitability of the merchant for a noble living, but also reveals the wife as more than capable of taking charge of her sexual life, for it is she who invents the scenario of his humiliation. In any case, this narrative explicitly addresses the aristocratic anxiety resulting from the upward mobility of the merchant class, as well as the recognition of the inevitability of such interactions. If the knight is cuckolded and embarrassed at the end of the tale, there is still no true change in the marriage. The fabliau ends with the husband’s humiliation but there is nothing to suggest that the marriage might be dissolved, regardless of its apparent social unsuitability.

Rychner concludes that the moment of social commentary in which the jongleur speaks to the horror of polluting noble blood, and which is excised from later variants, offers evidence that the *jongleurs*, writers of the fabliaux, changed the themes and content of the tales they were performing to suit the audiences they encountered, but most importantly this analysis offers further evidence that the fabliaux were in fact performed before noble audiences as well as bourgeois and rustic ones. D.D.R. Owen refutes this assertion of authorial intent in Rychner’s analysis of *Berangier*, concluding instead that differences in the manuscripts resulted from

personal preference and sometimes even waning fervor for a text rather than conscientious molding for a particular audience. While Owen's analysis lacks the depth with which Rychner approaches *Berangier*, his insistence on the widespread appreciation of the fabliau, including such social commentary as found in *Berangier*, is consistent with the fact that on the surface the tale is about a clever wife getting the better of her undeserving husband, a narrative that would have found resonance with a bourgeois audience as well as a courtly one. If the tone of *Berangier* tends to favor a noble perspective, there is still room for appreciation of the general message around which the tale centers, that when a husband, any husband, is unsuitable for the task, the wolves shall indeed play.

Thus we see at work an important element in this particular fabliau that also expands more generally, if not universally, to the genre: the *mise en scène* of intersecting perspectives, be they social, sexual or economic. The conflict generated by these clashing perspectives is often the source of humor found within the fabliau. Even so, it would be overly reductive to claim that the heart of the fabliau lies in the conflict found within. Within the corpus of 165 texts[180] there exists such a multitude of themes and settings that it is difficult to assign one unifying element. Critics have attempted to categorize the fabliaux in general terms[181] but most tend to focus on singular elements of origin or audience or on particular fabliaux. Either way, it is not the purpose of this discussion to comment on universal themes or to address the fabliau as a unified genre with a single voice, but rather to look to the texts as individual representations of an interesting

[180] This number comes from the compilation of 165 tales referred to as fabliaux in the *Recueil general et complet des fabliaux du XIIIe et du XIVe siècles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, 6 vols. (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1872-90).

[181] Joseph Bédier and Per Nykrog have both studied the genre as a whole in order to establish a fixed definition, while others have commented on the various aspects of the fabliau including their function and form. John T. Noonan refers to the possibility of the fabliau as exempla, Mary Jane Schenck comments on the action of the fabliau that follows a certain formula and the characters that assume certain functions within the text.

moment in medieval history and the resulting influences that can be found within the texts themselves. My focus is on four fabliau in particular *La dame escolliee, Cele qui fu foutue et defoutue por une Grue, Le sohait des vez,* and *Le chevalier qui fist parler les cons*.[182] My focus in each of these fabliaux is the role a speaking woman plays in the narrative, and how she moves and speaks in the tale and to what effect. If her blatantly sexualized body is often the crux of the narrative and the source of humor in the tale, as seen in the tale of *Berangier* in which her *con* is humorously presented as a "lonc cul" or long ass, then her voice presents the strange moment when the *con* or the *cul* speaks, as we will encounter in the fabliau *Le chevalier qui fist parler les cons*. If this is most explicitly demonstrated in fabliau that has talking *cons* and *culs*, then it is but a humorous rendering of the typical masculine gaze that considers women in light of her orifices and nothing more. It is important to note the ironic parallels here of woman who are contemplated in terms of their orifices versus representations of those physical orifices speaking.

It is important to note here the terminology used within the fabliaux and the implications such word choices might have had on a medieval audience. As shocking and provocative to our modern ears would have been these open discussions of *cons* and *vez* and *cus*, or quite literally cunts and pricks and asses. The titillating aspect of hearing such words spoken freely and out loud would have only rendered the fabliaux more diverting and more suggestive. Howard Bloch speaks to the frankness of the texts, long assigned to the theory of the fabliau as a "natural text", a fact that have led many critics to dismiss the possibility of reading the fabliau as anything but what it is on the surface: a gratuitous, humorous text designed to entertain and nothing more, or

[182] In order, The Gelded Lady, The Girl who was Screwed and Unscrewed for a Crane, The Dream of Pricks, The Knight Who Made Cunts Speak.

as the often-referred to categorization by Joseph Bédier as "des contes à rire en vers."[183] But, as Bloch questions, to accept the text as a natural representation of a happy unthinking *esprit gaulois* is also to accept the "scandal" of the fabliau – "the excessiveness of their sexual and scatological obscenity, their anticlericalism, antifeminism, anticourtliness, the consistency with which they indulge the senses, whet the appetites (erotic, gastric, economic) and affirm what Bahktin identifies as the 'celebration of lower body parts.'"[184] It is certainly interesting to note that the proliferation of critical analysis that focuses on the mimetic spirit of the fabliau readily suggests carefree representations of "real" medieval settings and characters, while avoiding analysis of the social implications of the same. Critics such as Gaston Paris define the fabliau as a direct and ingenious observation of men of all social conditions[185] or as

As Charles Muscatine points out, "we cannot speak of simple, homogenous social classes, nor of simple social attitudes, in discussing fabliau origins or audiences."[186] But if Muscatine identifies the historical climate of the fabliau, he is quick to condemn it, a fact that Mary Jane S. Schenck points out and criticizes in her analysis of the subject and the ethos of the fabliau. If Muscatine seems offended by the hedonism of the fabliau, then Schenck would defend the fabliau ethic as "natural, healthy, even admirable"[187] and goes on to point out that the emphasis in these texts is on "intelligence and their implied values of spontaneity, naturalness, and even a belief in individual freedom." Schenck's argument is supported by the development of canon law from the same timeframe that was placing increasing importance on the individual,

[183] Bédier, *Les Fabliaux*, 30.
[184] Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*, 11.
[185] Gaston Paris, *Contes Orientaux dans la littérature française du Moyen Age* (Paris : Librairie A. Franck, 1875), 20.
[186] Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliau* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 21.
[187] Mary Jane S. Schenck, *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception* (Philadephia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1987), 111.

a move, as I discussed earlier in Chapter 2, favored women. Indeed, if the fabliau values cleverness and intelligence, it is not solely the masculine kind. If in fact intelligence functioned as currency, as Schenck would argue, then women had the potential to gain from their cleverness and their wit, and we see such examples from the texts themselves. For all the misogyny that is present in the fabliaux, there are also moments of incredible feminine agency, in which a female figure acts, speaks or plots to her own great advantage. The potential for reading the agency of women in the fabliau is supported by the valorization of the individual that was occurring at that moment in history. If the individual was appreciated a newfound regard, then it stands to reason that individual traits might be valued above such considerations as class and sex. Not to say that a complete equalization of society was occurring at this point in time, historically or in literary representations, however, the seed of change was at hand.

This blurring of social lines in the reception of the fabliau adds nuance to a critical reading of the texts when considering the widespread popularity of these tales of sexual and scatological comedy, particularly in regards to the representation of women within the genre. It is difficult to establish the value of the fabliau by linking it to a particular audience, and yet when faced with representations of women in the fabliau, the question of audience and reception is crucial. One need only look to critical theory to understand how importance medieval women were to considerations of audience. Nykrog situates the question of audience completely around the figure of the medieval lady, commenting that the noble audience of the fabliau would have been driven to such low humor as a means of escape from the terrible figure of the superior medieval lady. Aristocratic men, he states, would have reveled in representations of women that included heinous crones and lecherous housewives; thus the brutality against women and their

negative representations were all to escape the phantom of the idealized lady.[188] Nykrog's argument, while an overly reductive characterization of medieval attitudes toward women, still underlines the fact that the fabliau represented an important masculine reaction to perceptions and portrayals of their feminine counterparts. If the romance contains the doubled image of the monstrous and the divine medieval lady, and if the pastourelle embodies an underlying male anxiety in response to the changing status of women in late-twelfth century northern France, then the fabliaux, with their numerous settings and social situations reflect the increasing movement between social classes that was characteristic of the thirteenth century, a movement that often favored the individual. This reflects an important moment in the historical consideration of women as well, for we see in a number of examples of the fabliau women from different social classes maneuvering around their male counterparts in an important and sophisticated way. And if the women of the fabliau are not always endearing, then they are still considered through the lens of the individual, a distinct move from the more generic figures of the courtly lady in the romance and the rustic shepherdess of the pastourelle. Even as these literary representations of medieval women, in romance and pastourelle, are anything but flat and can be read as subtly nuanced figures, the women of the fabliau defy any sort of characterization. Seated in her fleshly, sexualized representations is the figure of a medieval woman that defies effacement and defies typecasting. She is anything but typical and she is always changing.

The Castrated Lady: Misogyny in the Fabliaux

The first fabliau I consider, *La dame escolliee*, is recognized in particular as being an incredibly brutal account of misogyny. Sharon Collingwood discusses the distressing popularity

[188] Nykrog, *Les Fabliaux*, 235-236.

of this particular fabliau, evident by fact of the six manuscript versions, given the content and theme of the tale. Indeed, on the surface, the fabliau would seem to be a straightforward narrative asserting the necessary and natural masculine dominance over feminine subservience.[189] To this end, the fabliau contains multiple scenes of brutal beatings and the climax of the narrative is the orchestrated "castration" of the mother-in-law figure of the tale. Norris J. Lacy analyzes the text for the literary value of its complex narrative construction. Condemning the misogyny he finds within, he concludes that the tale is an interesting portrayal of courtly values that also contains "an unadorned hatred for women"[190] but that this misogynistic perspective is by no means a universal one in the incredible diversity of the genre. Collingwood, while also acknowledging the absolute misogyny of the scenes that occur, argues that the scenes of brutality are more of a *mise en scène* of the male protagonist's unreasonableness, rather than an unadulterated celebration of violence against women and that these moments of violence might have been as shocking to a medieval audience as to a modern one. Collingwood's argument is part of a larger critical movement that has shifted toward a more sympathetic view of the genre, with new considerations of women in the fabliau occupying more positive spaces. This being said, there are moments of incredible violence against women that make it difficult to refute all claims of misogyny. But where does this leave the women of the fabliau? The diversity of the genre precludes a reading of these women that gathers them into a homogenous grouping. As varied as the abundance of themes and characters, so too do the attitudes of authors toward women change from fabliau to fabliau. In this multiple and sometimes fragmented image of the medieval women, she finds room for resistance and paves the way for a more positive interpretation. But

[189] Sharon Collingwood, "Sagesse and Misogyny in the fabliau La dame escoillee," *Florilegium* 18 (2001).
[190] Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux* (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1999), 62.

in searching for the positive face of the medieval woman in the fabliau, it is necessary to situate the misogyny of the genre as well and what it means for a feminine representation.

In many examples of the fabliaux there are examples of disembodied sex organs that function in any number of ways. In the first fabliau I will consider, *La dame escoliee*, we see not the male phallus at play, but rather the testicles, which are placed in direct opposition with the representation of submissive feminine sexuality embodied in an open, bleeding, genital wound, inflicted by a man. But it is important to understand the elements at work in this tale that culminates in a bloody scene of castration. The fabliau differs somewhat from other fabliau in that it contains a tripartite structure and is unusually long, elements that underscore the courtly nature of the tale. The fabliau also contains easily recognizable elements of courtly literature, opening with a young count riding about the country side and, being separated from his hunting party, seeks shelter in a castle. The knight of the castle and his lady wife predictably have a beautiful daughter waiting to be introduced and married off, but before the daughter is appears, the author reveals the parodic nature of the tale. The knight, too much in love with his lady fair, has lost his natural masculine dominance over his wife.

> Chevaliers ert, tint grant hennor.
> Mais tant avoit amé s'ossor
> que desor lui l'avoit levee,
> et seignorie abandonee. (27-35)
>
> [He was a knight who led a noble life, but because he so loved his wife he raised her above him and abandoned his lordship over her]

This is an obvious reference to courtly literature and the specter of the monstrous lady who runs her faithful lover ragged. The knight's wife has taken to contradicting everything her husband says or suggests, and in a comical sequence of events, the knight cleverly but quietly

manipulates her domineering nature by suggesting the very opposite of his true intentions and thus achieves exactly what he desires. Echoing Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, the knight seems to have lost his knightly honor in loving too much, but unlike Erec, the knight has found a balance of power in his position of seeming subservience and inferiority. Thus the wife, in contradicting her husband's cleverly inverted suggestions, invites the young count to stay at the castle and subsequently offers him her daughter's hand in marriage. As the count prepares to ride off with his new bride, the young girl's mother offers her an important piece of advice: to always contradict that which her husband says or asks.

> Prenez essample a vostre mere
> qui tos jors desdit vostre pere:
> se vos volez avoir henor,
> si desdites vostre seignor,
> metez l'arriere et vos avant (231-231)
>
> [Take your mother as example, every day I override your father: If you wish to have honor, speak up to your husband, and put yourself first and put him last.]

Given the subtle manipulations of the knight, his wife's suggestion to their daughter is an ironic commentary on the true nature of power and reveal how laughably the mother's domineering ways are susceptible to the manipulations of the father. It is an odd moment of role reversal as the fabliau plays with concepts of gender. Taking the typically masculine role of the loud and dominant personality is the mother, while the father adopts the more typically feminine role of subtle manipulation. Thus ends the first part of the fabliau, with the final moral as yet unclear, but the implications of the dangers of capricious power are clear.

The second part of the fabliau follows the count and his new bride on their journey to the count's home. The bride's father has given the count a fine palfrey and two hounds as wedding

gift and it is upon these gifts that the count enacts his assertions of dominance. The count, pondering on how to ensure his new lady wife will not end up like her mother, sees the perfect pretext in the "misbehavior" of the gifts bestowed upon him. The two dogs, in failing to catch a hare the way in which the count has ordered them, are promptly beheaded. Shortly thereafter, the horse, in not hearing the count's order to the contrary, stumbles once, then twice, and is also beheaded. Although the animals clearly have no way of understanding the count, or much less carrying out the outrageous demands, make for a shocking demonstration to the new bride. Furthermore, the arbitrariness of the count's actions are emphasized by the fact that the author of the fabliau quite explicitly states that the horse "ne l'entendi" (257) did not hear the count. Collingwood comments on the fact that the wife's shock to her husband's overreaction would have mirrored the audience's own reaction. As she exclaims her shock at the count's poor treatment of her father's gift, she expresses the medieval attitude toward the importance of such wedding gifts. In killing the beasts offered to him by his bride's father, the count has not only rejected an important gift, but also capriciously destroyed expensive signs of rank. Collingwood comments that the count's behavior must at this point be understood as unreasonable. In his attempts to prevent his wife's disobedience with exaggerated displays of his masculine dominance, the count has departed the realm of courtly logic in a moment of brutality that distinctly lacks humor. However, the count's warning to his wife that the beasts suffered this fate because they disobeyed him seems to have little lasting effect on the young bride. As they arrive at her new home, the bride, remembering her mother's advice, is quick to contradict her husband's order to the cook and instructs him to spice heavily with garlic all the foods being prepared for the welcoming banquet. After the banquet, the outraged count confronts the cook that has countermanded his orders and learning of the reason behind this affront, quickly

punishes both the cook and his wife. He puts out one if the cook's eyes, cuts off a hand and an ear and exiles him. His wife, he beats so badly that she to the point of death and is bedridden for three months. Lacy and Collingwood, as well as other critics[191] have commented on the count's use of courtly language as he violently beats his wife, with the former suggesting that, given the count's subsequent and tender ministrations in the aftermath, the count truly loves his wife and only wishes to lead her to the path of correct obedience, and the latter arguing that the vocabulary is merely a parodic reference to the courtly tropes that are evident in the narrative and an ironic reversal of the courtly ethic. I would agree with Collingwood, as the count's actions never touch on the realm of tender emotion and stem rather from his overwhelming desire to correct his wife's errors and mold her into a perfect figure of feminine submission. Furthermore, the count's use of such terms as "dame", "douce amie", and "bele" only seem to underscore the absolute violence of the scene and the count's overwhelming distance from courtly ideals.

But the tale does not end here and the author of the fabliau continues with the third and final lesson. Upon learning of the impending visit of his in-laws, the count devises a plan to strike at the root of his wife's disobedience. In a moment that only serves to further underscore the count's lack of courtliness, he feigns a headache to get out of a hunt and far from the gaze of the rest of his court, confronts his wife's mother. In preparation for the moment of confrontation he has a servant bring him the fresh cut testicles of a bull, with the guts still attached and bleeding. Hiding them, he begins to question the woman and asks her why she is so prideful that she must always contradict her lord husband. As the lady answers him, he quickly signals four strapping servants to seize the woman and claims he will look for the source of her terrible pride.

[191] See Jean-Pierre Martin, "La Male Dame, ou la courtoisie renversée," in *Comique, satire et parodie dans la tradition renardienne et les fabliaux*, éd. Danielle Buschinger et André Crépin, Göppingen, Kümmerle (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 1983), 71-80.

The men flip her over, expose her naked rear and the count quickly slices two six-inch gashes into each buttock and pretends to castrate her by shoving his hands into the wounds and "removing" the bull's testicles he had been hiding. With the woman trembling before him, the count brings forth a hot iron and threatens to cauterize the root of the testicles where he fears the source of her pride still remains. With this new threat of mutilation, the count effectively breaks the will of the lady, if he had not done so with the initial brutality. But as he threatens burning with her with an iron unless she proves herself subdued, the woman wails and promises her obedience and her submission. The startling image of the mother, bent over, face down, her buttocks exposed to the merciless attention of the count is not one that sits easily with a modern reader, but it's effectiveness as a self-proclaimed exemplum against overly impertinent feminine domination of men is immediately felt at the level of the narrative, where the lady is immediately subdued and her daughter effectively chastened into appropriate feminine submissiveness. The abundance of detail with which the scene is painted, the splattering of bloody and the ripping out of the testicles, paints a grizzly scene, but to what purpose? If the count has attempted to legitimize his domination over his mother in-law and his young wife, then he chooses to do so far away from the bulk of his courtly entourage. Within the parameters of courtly conduct, acts must be performed in front of an audience to be legitimized. The count, in conducting the castration in secrecy, far from the gaze of his peers, threatens the legitimacy of his actions. It is this same code of conduct that drives the courtly romance. Yvain, in *Le chevalier au lion* bemoans the lack of recognition when he defeats the knight of the fountain and only gains complete access to his honor when his deeds are recognized at the court. His anonymous deeds as the Knight of the Lion are also only fully legitimized when he reveals himself to Gawain at the end of the romance, and it is only then that his metamorphosis from madman back to knight

if fully achieved. Another example of the separation of private and public spaces occurs in *Erec et Enide*, when Erec prefers the secrecy of enclosed private spaces, spaces that are considered predominantly feminine spheres. If the masculine sphere is the open, public realm, then the count of the fabliau has excused himself from courtly honor and conduct himself in feminine spheres of subterfuge and secrecy. This is not the only moment when the count waits for a private moment to exercise his notions of masculine dominance over his wife. When she contradicts his orders to the cook, the count bears with the result through the banquet, and only after all his guests have departed does he confront his wife and the cook. Even before that, when the two are travelling to the count's home, it must be assumed that he is alone with his new bride, as he stumbled upon her parents' home as a result of being separated from his hunting party. Thus, the examples he makes of his hounds and horse are also done privately and without witness. At each turn the count chooses the private realm over the public one, leading the audience to wonder at the legitimacy of his actions. It is interesting to note that he is not the only masculine figure to do so in this fabliau, we also see the father figure, that of the knight, use subtlety and manipulation to achieve his goals. Thus the gender roles in this tale are in a constant state of flux, and it is only with extreme displays of cruelty and violence do the roles return to their "natural" order.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the fabliau also presents a startling variation on the theme of castration anxiety that is an often-commented upon source of medieval misogyny. Here the count's zealous pursuit of masculine dominance plays out on the body of his wife's mother and focuses not on any feminine sex organs, but rather implanted male ones. The anxiety of being castrated in his own right by the daughter of the knight, much as the mother has done to the father, drives the count to react violently against any and all perceived threats to his masculinity.

Because the count had to give the mother testicles in order to cut them out, it begs the question of where the true seat of masculine power resides, and how easily it is transferred to a feminine vessel. Of course when the count "gives" the mother testicles in a bizarre ritual that both empowers and brutalizes her, there is no mistaking that in taking the testicles away, he has resoundingly put the mother in her right and natural place as the submissive wife. But this still leaves open-ended the figure of the father, who has no more been given testicles than he has corrected his own wife.

But it is an odd moment in the fabliau as well, when the daughter asserts her submissiveness in an attempt to avoid fate suffered by her mother. When the count suggests searching for testicles on his wife, she quickly assures him that she is nothing like her mother and that he need not look for she does not possess the character, or the testicles of which her mother has so recently been divested. Instead, she insists, she is more like her father, of his nature and character and distinctly lacking in testicles. But in asserting her lack of pride, lack of testicles, and lack of dominance, the daughter would also seem to imply that she possesses her father's skill of manipulation and even her deference subtly challenges her husband. She implores her husband to cut off her head if she misbehaves again, subtly evoking his earlier actions with the horse and hounds and reminding the audience yet again of his immoderate attempts to impress his dominance over her. Having been so thoroughly beaten before, it can only be assumed that she will continue in this vein and tread lightly around her husband and use wit and subterfuge to achieve her desires rather than direct opposition. Furthermore, this statement made by the daughter also problematizes the act of castration that just occurred. If she is like her father and lacks testicles, then she intimates that the count has only equalized the

knight as his wife, as they are now both devoid of testicles and presumably the masculine domination that is embodied in them. And, in a moment of irony, the knight, in an attempt to sublimate his own castration anxiety, has effectively performed the very act he so fears. In the albeit "unnatural" dynamic between the knight and the mother figure, the woman is the one that most resembles the count, though her domineering behavior, and figuratively through her castration; effectively the count has performed a castration on a masculine dominance that parallels his own, thus accomplishing the very act he fears the most.

Sarah Melhado White comments on the fact that the mother is made to believe that she possesses testicles and when they have been removed she ceases to act as if she is in possession of them[192], but I would suggest that it is equally possible that the her apparent change in attitude comes not as a result of a perceived physiological lack of the testicles, but rather as a result of the act of brutality she has just endured. Bleeding and half-naked, it is impossible to say what the knight's wife believes, but it is all too understandable if she agrees to anything to appease the count that has just brutalized her. Instead of attempting to psychologize the feminine figure of the mother and her beliefs or lack thereof, I would suggest that what the mother believes or doesn't believe is less important than the "lesson" she has been taught. As a result of her attempt to assume a masculine role in the narrative, the mother has been roundly punished and at the threat of further violence, both against herself and her daughter, she assumes the "appropriate" feminine role. Still, the misogyny and the violence displayed against her do not result in a happy reversal of roles, for the reasons mentioned above. It must be assumed that because the daughter claims to possess the unassuming character of her father, the knight has not changed, has not

[192] Sarah Melhado White, "Sexual Language and Human Conflict in Old French Fabliau," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (1982): 186.

asserted any newfound dominance over the wife he still loves. And yet he never needed to assert dominance, having always held the upper hand over his wife, though through subtle manipulation rather than overt displays. This is an important distinction to make at the level of the narrative as it leads to a characterization of power and domination that resides in neither singularly masculine nor female form, but in mutated, aberrant representations of the physical body. It is implied that the mother is not a powerful figure because she is womanly, but because of her mutated form. The count is obviously aware of the deception, as is the audience, but it is difficult to say what the knight and his daughter believe. However, even as the count perpetrates the myth of the aberrant female as the only possible locus of feminine power, the audience must know better, as it is presented with the powerful (and implied feminine) manipulations of the father that the daughter is also presumed to possess.

It is useful here to understand how the characters' assertion of power functions by means of speech. If the knight's wife is shown exerting dominance over her husband, it is at the level of speech that she opposes and negates her husband's masculine dominance. The wife countermands her husband at the level of his speech, contradicting everything he says and thus achieves a seeming dominance over him. But even in this exertion of apparent feminine dominance there is a balance achieved. The husband, although lacking in overt masculine control, resorts to a more subtle kind of control over his wife. In her predictability at negating his every word, the wife has given the husband a way to circumvent her every move. When the mother is effectively castrated, she relinquishes any pretentions of overt (said masculine) power, but this leaves two feminine figures in the marriage, where neither exerts the overt masculine dominance the count has worked so hard to affirm. This is a subversion of the "natural" order of

marriage, where the assertion of masculine dominance is defined in opposition to feminine acquiescence. And yet, the knight's control over his wife's actions while not overt is still effective. At a certain level what is being portrayed is not feminine domination at all, but a strange mutation of feminine agency that only exists because of the presence of a masculine power, embodied in the testicles. The figure of the mother in this sense is not a representation of the opposition between masculine and feminine power, but rather what occurs when a perceived aberration of nature occurs, that of a dominant woman. But if this is the case, then it must be assumed that the knight is equally aberrant. His lack of overt dominance reads into a lack of testicles, a fact that is suggested by his inability to truly dominate his wife appropriately, and confirmed in his daughter's attestation that, just like her father, she lacks the testicles and dominant personality of her mother.

Still, the count's overt attempts at masculine domination and the extreme violence that he inflicts on the knight's daughter and those around her all fail to ultimately secure her obedience. It is only in her active, spoken acceptance of feminine submission, in her vocal declaration of her feminine lack, that the count's position as the dominant, masculine force in the marriage is assured. Prior to this, the count's wife is seemingly shocked but otherwise little affected by her husband's easy violence against animals in butchering the hounds and horse that disobeyed him and her submission is not even secured by the maiming and exile of the cook or even her own beating. It is also interesting to note here that when the count kills the dogs and horse that were a gift from his father in law, he shows little regard for the esteem bestowed by the knight and thus emphasizes the lack of regard in general for the knight as an effective masculine figure.

Speech works again at the very end of the fabliau, however, and whatever newfound dominance the knight may or may not have found with the apparent castration of his wife, the author notes at the end of the fabliau that she now supports him in her speech, with everything he said, she agreed. The role of this particular comment about her speech would not be as notable if it were not for the previous dynamic of speech versus action presented in the first part of the fabliau. If the knight's wife has changed and her speech has changed, it is still never confirmed that the knight has made any change. Rather, it would seem that his own power over his wife has been subverted in that now he is only legitimized by the fact that his wife agrees with his every word. Critics seem little to know what to do with the husband, on the one hand stating that he is the more interesting masculine figure who effectively controls his wife, on the other hand reading him as a pathetic, emasculated figure that wields little authority in his marriage, making him not quite a man. I would read the knight as not a completely ineffective representation of masculine authority, but rather one imbued with more feminine characteristics, appropriate given that he serves as a counterpoint to his overly dominant, masculine wife. He wields power from the background and with wit rather than force. This subtle manipulation of power far from the spotlight is a place typically reserved for female characters, as seen with such figures as Lunete in the romance and the wit with which the knight maneuvers his wife echoes the guile of the shepherdess in the pastourelle.

The fabliau ends with a moral that warns against wives who disrespect, but the moral is somewhat weak in the face of the unbalanced power relationships that are slowly revealed through the fabliau. If the young bride is to her father, the knight, as her mother is to the count, then, with the father suddenly empowered while having done nothing, while her mother's

overbearing ways have been punished, the audience is left to puzzle over the fate of the new couple and what roles each will assume. It might be assumed that the mother was punished for her overbearing attitude merely by fact of her gender, but it doesn't account for the moments of shock produced by the count's high-handed behavior and brutish responses to minor infractions. Furthermore, even if the father previously held the upper hand with the mother, it is through feminine ruse that he does so. The moral seems to denigrate shameful, wilting husbands almost as much as it castigates their overpowering wives, but even this conflicts with the count's overbearing adulation for his new father in law, a man that is obviously a "shameful" husband under the thumb of his wife. The conclusion of the fabliau and the moral that it espouses does little to clarify the tale of the two couples, but does seem to underline the existence of multiple kinds of power, including ones not typically found in masculine physiology. Here the historical economic changes occurring may speak to the opaque view of masculinity presented in this fabliau. If the father figure is feminized and the mother figure rendered masculine, so too is the figure of the husband put in question. If, as Mary Leech states in her article of the performance of masculinity in this fabliau, the husband is "a harsh and exaggerated form of masculinity that insists on a narrow construct of maleness that destabilizes the very structures it seemingly tries to preserve."[193]

Love for Sale: Exchange in the Fabliaux

If the dominance of the masculine phallus is put in question in the very motifs of misogyny and violence against women that would seem to most confirm it, it is important then to

[193] Mary E. Leech, "The Castrating of the Shrew: The Performance of Masculinity and Masculine Identity in *La dame escolliee*," in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages,* ed. Larissa Tracy (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 210.

consider how else traditional and historical norms of masculine power are being considered and possibly challenged in other examples of the fabliau. In previous chapters I have argued that by speaking their way into systems of exchange, figures of medieval women have had the potential to be read as more than marginal, effaced representations of feminine submissiveness. But what happens when it is the woman dictating the conditions of exchange?

Exchange is one of the many aspects of the social interactions that take place within the fabliau. This exchange is demonstrated most visibly in a monetary economy, where the worth of certain objects and services is established by means of pecuniary exchange; but as can be seen with numerous examples of the fabliau, exchange becomes sexually charged when situated in the humorous realm of physical human interaction. The genre presents an interesting intersection of economic exchange, social interaction and the representation of an often sexualized human body. All these elements come together in a supposedly "natural" and mimetic representation of the average medieval person.

In the fabliau *Cele qui fu foutue et defoutue por une Grue*, the audience is confronted with a story very different from the heavy overtones of violence found in the Gelded Lady fabliau. In *La Grue*, the themes and players are more characteristically light-hearted and farcical of the fabliau genre. The moments of misogyny speak less of masculine brutality than tongue-in-cheek condescension for the simplicity of the feminine figure. But even within a tale designed to provoke masculine laughter at the foibles and faults of the female character, there are important moments of a woman's tangible entry into the realm of masculine exchange as more than an object of exchange herself. In *La Grue* there is a woman, an arguably naïve woman, who not

only initiates a moment of exchange, but also accesses a form of masculine dominance in acquiring through her exchange the symbolic phallus. The concept of the circulation of an effaced feminine figure is one that has long informed feminist considerations of the medieval literature, but it is the very reversal of this dynamic of exchange that leads me to believe that there is the possibility of a more positive reading of the female characters found within the fabliau. To fully appreciate this reversal, one must look to the text itself.

In the story of *La Grue*, we are presented with the story of an innocent young woman, whose father, a nobleman,[194] has locked her away in a tower in order to preserve her chastity and keep her unwed.[195] Although guarded attentively by her old nursemaid, she is left alone one day when the nurse must fetch an item from the main house. In departing, the nursemaid makes the mistake of leaving the door open, a moment of lapse that will quickly be exploited. A young man walks by holding a large bird in his right hand and intrigued by his prize, the girl strikes up a conversation with him, admiring the bird and eventually inviting him into the tower to make a trade for the creature that he has identified as a crane. The use of this particular bird is particularly ironic when considering that in medieval imagery the crane represents vigilance.[196]

[194] It is interesting to note the social and economic status of the family of the young girl who serves as protagonist of this tale. As a member of the higher social order, the concept of bartering would have been as a result of the growing influence of the bourgeois and merchant classes on the aristocracy.

[195] These questions of genre and audience all serve to examine the different themes and motifs at play in *La Grue*. Luciano Rossi in his introduction to the *Fabliaux Erotiques* comments on the parallels between *La Grue* and the lai of Marie de France *Yonec*, in which is found similar themes of sexual imprisonment, although in *Yonec*, the lady is held trapped by the jealousy of her much older, much uglier husband, whereas in *La Grue* the young girl is locked away by her courtly father and guarded by her old nurse. Nevertheless, the courtly audience of the lais would be familiar with the motif of the young woman kept in a tower in order to preserve her sexual purity. And just as in Marie's tale of Yonec, in the story of *La Grue*, her imprisonment will predictably be penetrated and her sexuality unleashed. In *La Grue*, this occurs without all the courtly trapping of love and romance and with all the comedy expected of a fabliau.

[196] See the works of Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*, Book10,30), Isidore of Seville, (*Etymologies*, Book12, 7:14-15), St Antony of Padua (*Sermons*), and Bartholomaeus Anglicus (*De proprietatibus rerum*, Book 12). All speak to the nature of vigilance in the crane, where one crane will keep watch while the others in the flock sleep, or keep watch over members of the flock while in flight.

The implications of failed vigilance aside, the obvious phallic implications of the bird, with its long neck, are only emphasized by the discussion between the young girl and the man concerning the quality of the animal, “c’est une grue gente et bele” [It is a gracious and beautiful crane] (v.45). This phallic imagery is only further confirmed when in asking to buy the bird, the young man readily agrees, but asks for a *foutre*, or a screw, in exchange, “Dame, por un foutre soit vostre!” [My lady, it is yours for a screw!] (v. 53). The incredible innocence of the girl plays out in a laughable manner as she replies that she is unsure whether or not she has a *foutre* but invites him to come into her tower to look for one wherever he may find it and if there is one to be found, it will most certainly be his. The scene plays out laughably as the man, at the invitation of the young lady, searches for the *foutre* high and low, under the benches, under the beds, everywhere in her room. Her eagerness to own the crane is evident in her enthusiastic exchange with the man, “partot querras se foutre i a, tu le verras!” [You will look in every direction and if there is a screw you will see it!] (v.67-68). Unsurprisingly the man finds what he seeks under her skirts and proceeds to avail himself of the *foutre* he has found. The narrative at this point steps back from the girl’s naïveté and crudely describes the scene at hand, “les jambs li leva en haut, au con trover mie ne faut, lo vit i bote roidement” [He lifted her legs up high, didn’t hesitate to find her cunt and roughly pushed in his prick] (v.81-83). This coarse rendering of the sex act seems at odds with the laughing tones previously established and reminds the audience of the girl’s virginity and innocence. When the girl comments on his exertions, the man laughs and responds that she may have his crane, for she has well deserved it.

> "Vaslez, tu quiers trop durement!"
> Fet la pucele, qui sospire.
> Li vaslesz commença a rire,
> qui est espris de la besoingne.
> "Drois est, fet il, que je vous doingne
> ma grue: soit vostre tot quite!

> ['Young man, you seek too roughly !' said the young woman, who sighs. The young man starts to laugh, he who was impassioned with the work. 'It is right', he said, 'that I give you my crane : that it is yours without contest !']

The use of the possessive as the man hands off *his* crane is also telling and there is no doubt that while the girl has given up a *foutre* the man has surrendered something of his own. The story certainly takes an interesting turn as there is a disconcerting moment of implied castration when the man leaves the crane, which acts as a stand-in for his phallus, with the girl and proceeds on his way. This moment of castration is an odd enough when considering the separation of the *grue* from the man, wherein the bird contains within itself the representation of masculine virility, but is also startling in that the man has endowed the girl with the representation of his own virility. The implication of castration is not a subtle one, and yet the man cheerfully makes the trade, stating that the girl has well deserved it.

The girl has given up "her sex" in the act of the *foutre*, but in an ironic parallel, so too has the man and it is difficult to say which is a more significant loss. For if the girl has lost her sex, or her virginity, in the sexual act she has given up the most important aspect of her feminine body in terms of social bartering. But in return she has gained the phallus lost by the man, a gain that parallels her initiation of the act of exchange, an act typically reserved for a masculine figure. The fear of castration is perhaps indicative of masculine anxiety that results from the very fact of a woman who initiates instances of exchange, even if her attempts seem innocent and fumbling, she quickly relieves the man of his phallic unity, and thus reverses the mechanisms of social exchange founded on the circulation of a fractured, multiple, and faceless female form. The bizarre moment of implied castration is further complicated by the return of the nursemaid to the discovery of the *grue* and her newly deflowered ward. The return of the nursemaid brings

the return of social values and the moment of exchange is situated in the reality of the feminine condition. The young girl's feminine value, determined by her marriageability, of which her virginity is a factor, has been compromised and it would seem that her innocence has damaged. Along with her lost virginity the young lady is also threatened with the possibility of impregnation, a fact that cannot be lost on her very wise and knowing nursemaid. The nurse is distraught enough at the implications of the bird and the story recounted by girl, but recovers long enough to come to the decision to make the most of the situation and cook the *grue* for their dinner that night. But the seeming good sense of the nurse is perhaps not as superficial as taking advantage of a free meal. Indeed, the nurse is adamant about cooking the crane with pepper, a fact that is perhaps bizarre unless one looks to the fact that medieval women were well-versed in the realm of contraceptives. In his book on abortion and contraceptives in the Middle Ages, John M. Riddle discusses how medieval peoples "knew and used contraceptives and birth control, and they employed them sufficiently well to limit births."[197] He continues by stating that it was medieval women who held much of this knowledge concerning contraceptives and that birth control was largely a "woman's secret" but that men would have been sufficiently aware of the practice to include references to it in several manuscripts prescribing methods by which to "stimulate" menstruation, a wording that Riddle identifies as indicative of abortion. Interestingly enough the recipe for this method of contraception includes the primary ingredient of pepper, a substance that Riddle states is known to cause abortions in animals and humans. It is difficult to claim with absolute certainty that the author of the fabliau would have had knowledge of this ingredient for this specific purpose, or that he would have knowingly included the reference, but

[197] John M. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

it is interesting to note that the nurse specifically changes what can only be her usual recipe of garlic to cook the bird with pepper.

> Ja n'i fera, ce dit, aillie
> Ainz en voudra mengier au poivre (v.116-117)
> [She would not do it, she said, with a seasoning of garlic but rather she would eat it with pepper]

This culinary decision is followed by the nursemaid preparing the *grue*, whether or not her young ward is agreeable and the audience is necessarily mindful of the good sense of the nursemaid, who seeks to make the best out of a bad situation, but who also might be suspected of cleverly disposing of the evidence of her lacking vigilance, embodied in the crane on multiple figurative and literal levels. If the nurse can cook the *grue*, she succeeds in disposing of the proof of her ward's lost virginity, as well as preventing any possible outcomes of the girl's sexual encounter.

In any case the nursemaid sets about plucking and preparing the bird but must soon again leave the tower to find a knife in the house with which to open up the *grue*, "puis se reva querre un cotel/ dome le vialt ovrir la grue" [She returned to search for a knife with which to cut up the crane] (v. 124-125). The symbolic phallus, in the hands of the female figure, is threatened and risks becoming split and fractured in a figurative parallel to the multiple nature of the female genitalia, which is always presented in contrast to the phallic unity. It is also at this moment that the figurative castration becomes all too literal. The nursemaid's plans to dismember and skewer the bird would render complete the act of castration initiated by the young woman and in not only appropriating the male phallus but also reappropriating it on feminine terms the exchange would effectively seize masculine dominance from the man. But in allowing the woman to initiate the trade and set the terms of the trade, the fabliau carries the implication that the

exchange of the *grue* only confirms the man's lack of masculine dominance. The language used to describe the treatment of the *grue* underlines the woman's rough handling of this seat of masculine power. By turn the nursemaid plucks the bird (*a plumee*), seeks to cut it up (*ovrir*) and then to skewer it (*enhaster*). In the end, it must be noted, it is not even the young woman who handles the *grue* the most. Even as the woman attempts to gain access into the masculine realm of exchange and phallic dominance, the nursemaid brings the *grue* to the feminine space of the kitchen and in preparing the bird, threatens to completely convert the phallic symbol of the crane into something more recognizable as feminine sexuality and power. It is thus the audience is confronted with different ways in which women are able to pierce the phallic unity of masculine dominance, although each woman takes a different approach. Both methods of appropriating the male phallus, however, are equally dangerous to the young man's projected dominance, and it is no surprise that the author of the tale is sure to rescue what can only now be the pathetic image of a lifeless, plucked crane. This image of vulnerability, the deplumed, naked crane as the threatened phallus, adds another layer of humor to the tale that has nothing to do with the young woman's laughable innocence.

It would certainly be a different story were the two women to cook the bird to their satisfaction and eat it, but quite luckily the young man returns just in time to make another exchange to regain his lost *grue.* This moment could perhaps undo all the anxieties of castration initially evoked if it were the man who initiated the second exchange, but this is not so. In a moment of perfect social awareness, the girl calls out to the man as he walks along again and requests the exchanged be reversed, for she senses the instability it has caused.

> "Vaslez, venez tost ça!
> Ma norrice se corroça

de ce que mon foutre enportastes
et vostre grue me laissastes.
Par amor, venez lou moi render;
Ne devez pas vers moi mesprendre! (v.131-136)

[Young man, come here quick! My nursemaid is angry that you have carried off my screw, and left me with your crane. Please, come return it to me. You should not act improperly toward me.]

On the surface, the humor of the fabliau prevails in that the man is presented as cleverly takes advantage of the girl's innocence to indulge in a second sexual act. But the humor of this exchange is overshadowed by the fact that it is she who initiates both instances of exchange and while the young woman has lost something in the way of honor, the man has not escaped unscathed, as his masculinity is traded, threatened, and traded again. In the end the man walks away with a used and abused *grue*. The dismemberment and circulation of the bird indicates a fracture in the masculine phallic unity that suggests the possibility of a much more nuanced interpretation. Furthermore, instead of the faceless feminine figure in circulation, we are presented with the circulation of the symbolic phallus, threatening in that it presents a compelling reversal to the literary exchange of feminine features, where the masculine poet trades on words of faceless lips, disembodied hands, anonymous skin. But the implications for the woman, even as she seizes a moment of masculine agency in her subversion of the process of exchange, are not entirely advantageous. In this exchange the girl must obviously receive what she has traded and so the man accordingly unscrews her, *la desfout*. Here again the surface humor of the fabliau resides in the obvious fact that unlike the man, the *foutre* that the girl exchanged for the bird cannot be regained in the same manner. Her sex, quite unlike the man's phallic crane, cannot be separated and circulated and returned. Ironically, the phallus operates quite well as an object of exchange, but the virtue of the girl can only be lost and never regained. Her capital as an object of social exchange, one guarded so jealously by her father, is irrevocably

lost. Even so, it is interesting to note that the phallus does not escape unscathed. The crane is plucked and almost dismembered at the hands of the nursemaid and only by the initiative of the girl does the unwitting man regain the seat of his masculinity. In an interesting parallel to the scene of castration in the Gelded Lady, the male characters willingly hand over symbols of male dominance to the women they encounter. If, as Leech claims, "male power in these fabliaux is directly connected to control over male genital performance"[198] then in both these fabliau we see instances of women granted access to male genitalia and through it, male power. If the gelded woman of the first fabliau is attributed the testicles only to be castrated, then the young woman of *La Grue* exchanges her own marginalized sexuality for the empowered phallic dominance. And it is through this physical exchange, and the figurative exchange of feminine objectivity for masculine subjectivity, that the young woman resists being reduced to an object whose only value lies in the property value of her virginity. She becomes more than the object of exchange and more than that, she exchanges positions with the masculine phallus to become the unified sexuality. The juxtaposition of the phallus, separated, circulated and fractured, with the sex of the woman that cannot be separated from her and cannot be physically circulated in the same way as the phallus is a striking reversal to conventional notions of masculine and feminine sexuality.

When the second exchange is complete, the nursemaid returns to find her ward proud to have regained her *foutre* in return for the troublesome *grue*. The nursemaid is again the rational voice that laments the girl's second sexual encounter, but also represents the higher social awareness that women often bring to the table in medieval stories. Whereas the men of medieval literature often blunder through their social graces, the women skillfully navigate through a sea of ritualized social customs and expectations. This is seen most distinctly in the romance where

[198] Leech, "The Castrating of the Shrew," 220.

male characters such as Yvain and Erec fail at their courtly expectations, only to be led back into a position of honor by the women that surround them. Even in the pastourelle the knights must often be reminded by the lowly shepherdesses of the ignobility of their lustful advances. In carelessly taking the *foutre* of the young woman, the man in *La Grue* has opened himself to retribution from her family, for her virginity is considered the property of her father.[199] But it is the young woman who is sensitive enough to the social pressures exerted by the nurse; she corrects the imbalance in gender construction that the man has triggered in surrendering his masculinity. For in the possibility of splitting apart the *grue*, there is the explicit threat to masculine dominance. The girl relinquishes her grasp on the symbolic masculine dominance of the *grue* but the audience cannot help but be aware that the trade occurs on her terms, both times.

In this tale of love for sale, the question of prostitution also arises. In a moment of historical change, when bourgeois principles were slowly pervading society and marriages to lowly merchants were common enough to provoke complaint in popular literature, as seen in examples such as *Berangier*, the theme of love and marriage for sale seems common enough. But in this instant, the young woman secures no future with the man, and in fact loses the payment she initially exchanged in return for the *foutre* or the sex act. The proliferation of women engaging in prostitution during the Middle Ages came largely from a religious acceptance of prostitution as a distasteful but necessary "lesser evil" that kept medieval men from engaging in assault and rape due to a buildup of uncontrollable lust.[200] The young woman in *La Grue* could be interpreted as an example of a masculine uneasiness in the face of a woman

[199] Vern Bullough, "Formation of Ideals: Christian Theory and Christian Practice," in *Sexual Practices & The Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), 21.
[200] For the "lesser evil" argument, see James A. Brundage on the canonical theory behind prostitution as well as Ruth Mazo Karras's discussion on the role and representation of prostitutes in the Middle Ages.

in control of her sexuality and who also controlled the resources of the men around her, resources that were also embodied in the *grue* serving as symbolic phallus. For if the man has happily given the woman an object of monetary value, in return for a sexual act that will benefit him in no other way but in easing his lust, then the woman has demonstrated her potential dominion over not only the symbolic phallus, but also over his very real property. Even so, I would consider this tale to be less the representation of a prostitute in virgin's garb than a tale that superficially warns of the necessity of vigilance over one's daughters, while also contemplating the dangers of a woman's sexuality that appropriates and subverts the masculine phallic unity.

Thus we find in this fabliau, examples of a woman who actively enters the realm of economic exchange, exchanges that are bodily and sexual in nature. In *La Grue,* not only does the girl initiate and enter into an economic encounter with a man, she has an active hand in the exchange that takes place. The woman figures not as object being exchanged, but is suddenly recognized as an actor participating in and advancing the exchange. This distinction, which takes place most explicitly in fabliau, is but inferred in romance and lyric poetry. The deep-seated ambivalence toward this active feminine presence manifests in the transparent castration anxiety present in this fabliau but is a theme that reverberates in other examples of fabliau as well. In each fabliau the phallus, usually presented in terms of stable phallic dominance, is severed quite obviously from the masculine character. In *La Grue*, it is most obviously the long-necked crane that represents the severed phallus being traded between man and woman, while in the following fabliau I consider, where a woman enters a dream in which she shops for a phallus at a market catering explicitly and only to such merchandise, there is nothing so subtle as an implied phallus.

Women in the Market Place: The Castrating Power of Choice in the Fabliau

The characters of the first two fabliaux considered in this chapter were of noble background, influencing the setting and tone of the action as it unfolds. But a great number of the fabliaux contain scenes of the daily lives of the lower classes, including the rising bourgeois class. In the next fabliau I will consider, the main characters are a merchant man and his wife. The profession of the man sets up the structure of the narrative, for it is in the husband's long absence abroad to procure merchandise for his shop that causes his wife's desire and provokes her fantasies of a marketplace catering to very specific needs. The exchange seen in *La Grue* is a sexual act traded for a token of symbolic masculine dominance. The masculinity only implied in the *grue* is replaced in the fabliau *Le sohait des vez* by explicit and disembodied representations of *vez* or pricks. The currency of exchange is a revealing image of sexuality in the form of circulating pricks, and the tale contains less than subtle implications of the transferability of masculine power as it is the wife in the fabliau that dictates the terms of transaction in the tale. Not only is the wife unabashedly vocal about her sexual desires, but she also seizes control of her own desires and sexuality when her husband is revealed as incapable of satisfying her. If the women in *La Grue* are seen as initiating exchange and taking control over a single man, the woman in *Le sohait* not only creates an entire dream market of pricks at her disposal, but also asserts her authority over her husband.

In this particular fabliau the importance of social value is imbued with the importance of human relationships. The transformation that occurs at the crux of this intersection of human and

monetary interests is presented in the reification of human rapport. That is to say that human interaction, both sexual and emotional, are rendered material in a manner that is evident when seen from within the marketplace of this fabliau. The relationship between man and wife is reconfigured, even if in an intangible dreamlike manner, in a way that underlines the material aspect of social relationships. People, and even parts of people, become objects of exchange in a way that oddly parallels the circulation of the troubadour lady from within lyric poetry. Just as we see the lips, hair and hands of the faceless troubadour lady in circulation, so too here do we see parts of the body circulated in a way that is designed to accumulate worth, but of what kind?

The sexual act becomes a *thing* whose worth is always in question, and manifests itself in the disembodied *vez* that can be easily obtained at a marketplace designed to cater to such a want. In a contrasting fabliau *Du moine*, a monk dreams of a market where female genitalia are sold, and we see the feminine *con* put into circulation, but the parallel of a circulating female sexual organ is not as effective an image as that of the unified phallus. For if the phallus is a unified entity that may in an admittedly strange moment of castration, separated from the masculine body, the separation of the *con* from the feminine body is problematic in that the feminine sex, so denigrated in that is does protrude as does the masculine phallus, is contained within the female body. It is difficult to imagine the shape such a disembodied *con* would take, as the multiple lips and inverted receptacle of the feminine sex hardly offers the same imagery as the detached phallus. Here the multiple nature of the feminine body precludes its easy separation and the multiple, fluctuating nature of the feminine sexualized body resists detachment more so than the monolithic, inflexible masculine phallus. The evidence of this is the well-known trope of

masculine castration and the variety of information on the manner and results of the act,[201] while accounts of female castration are rarer and refer uncertainly to instances of female genital mutilation or other means of avoiding pleasure in the sex act.

In the tale of *Le sohait des vez* a wife awaits her merchant husband who has long been away on business. The day he returns, she eagerly sets the scene for their reunion, laying out a splendid table:

> De servir fu la dame engrande :
> son seignor donoit dou plus bel
> et lo vin a chascun morsel
> por ce que li plus atalant (v. 33 – 35)
>
> [The lady endeavored to serve her lord husband, giving him the best morsels, and wine with every mouthful, so that he could have more pleasure.]

The reason for the meal is not without expectations, the wife, having waited three long months expects the same pleasure from her husband that she is presenting him at the table, and she hopes for her own pleasure in return.

> Mout ot la dame bon talant
> de lui faire auques de ses buens
> car ele i ratandoit les suens
> et sa bienvenue a avoir (v. 36 – 39)
>
> [The lady wanted very much to please her husband and make him as happy as possible, for she was waiting for the same, and was counting on being satisfied in return.]

The woman, in fulfilling her responsibilities as a dutiful wife, hopes to be rewarded with another kind of pleasure, but is soon to be disappointed. The humor of the fabliau asserts itself with the wife's overzealous attempts to please her husband that only result in getting him so

[201] See Mathew S. Kuefler and his discussion on castration in his article "Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996).

inebriated that he in unable to give her "l'autre delit" or the other pleasure (v. 44). It is an interesting juxtaposition of male expectation of feminine subservience versus female expectation of fulfilled desire. The exchange of household duties for the sexual act casts the wife as the client who supplies payment (in the form of wifely services) in exchange for the male phallus, a dynamic that will be repeated later in her dreams of a marketplace filled with *vez*. When the husband falls drunk into bed, his wife joins him without invitation and contemplates the sleeping figure of her husband. Frustrated and plagued by desire and ennui, the wife falls into a troubled sleep that is beset by the dream of a strange marketplace, containing none of the usual places or items, listed with meticulous and humorous detail. The humorous buildup to the punchline of the fabliau is obvious and one can only imagine the effect on the medieval audience as the jongleur claimed:

> Ainz n'i ot estal ne bojon,
> ne n'i ot loge ne maison,
> changes, ne table, ne repair,
> o l'an vandist ne gris ne vair,
> toile de lin, ne draus de laine,
> ne alun, ne bresil, ne graine,
> ne autre avoir, ce li ert vis,
> fors solemant coilles et viz. (v. 75-82)
>
> [There was neither a table nor a measuring rod, neither shacks nor stores, nor banks of moneychangers, nor tables, nor stalls where one would sell grey or multicolored furs, nor canvases of linen or fabrics of wool, nor tanning acid or Brazilian wood, nor cochineal or any kind of foodstuffs, in this way she imagined it, and only were there pricks and bollocks.]

The market contains "solemant coilles et viz" [only balls and pricks] (v. 82) that are brought in abundance by porters that fill the shops and the streets with the disembodied male genitalia. In a moment of democratic hilarity, the author declares that while some of the merchandise is expensive, there were even some for the poor: "si ot viz a povre gent" [there were pricks for the poor] (v. 94). As the woman peruses all the pricks at her disposal, she ascertains

that size does matter, as "li meillor erent li plus gros, li plus chier et li miauz gardé" [The best were the biggest, the most expensive, and the best-guarded] (v. 98-99), an observation that will come back to haunt her troublesome husband later. She wanders about the market until she finds one to her liking. The fabliau spares no detail in the description of the penis, commenting on its incredible length and size, as well as other elements of its construction. The woman quickly bargains with the vendor, haggling slightly but offering "lo denier Deu" or the denier of God, or God's penny, an offering that appeared in the thirteenth century that was indicative of good will between the participants in the act of exchange. This offering on the part of the woman is a significant moment not only because it displays the familiarity with which the woman enters in the act of exchange, but also because the offering is accompanied by a religious statement that is rather out of place in the context of the dream. The woman declares, "que Deus m'an doint joie certaine" [for God certainly wants me to enjoy myself with it] (v. 129). This assertion rings with religious authority and hints at the legitimacy not only of the woman and her place in the market, but also her dominance over the array of phalli displayed before her. The evocation of God also speaks to the validity of feminine pleasure and desire, and human desire in general. The dangers of excessive sexuality is a theme that weighs heavy on the medieval mind, where the acceptable form of feminine sexuality was conceived only in reproductive terms.[202] Views on feminine sexuality inherited from the ancient medical world, drawing on Aristotle and Galen in particular, argued the importance of female pleasure in the process of reproduction, a controversy that would help shape medieval views of women as libidinous creatures caught up in their own carnality, a representation of excessive sexuality that informed the medieval trend of gendering

[202] Joyce Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," in in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996).

sexuality.[203] Medieval views of female sexuality tended toward negative representations as can be seen in the aggressive and destructive sexuality of such female characters as Guinevere whose relationship with not only Arthur but also her lover Lancelot is obviously harmful to the workings of the masculine court. But the fabliau offers a surprisingly ambiguous look at feminine sexuality that moves between violently misogynistic representations and remarkably receptive views. The latter can be seen in the example of the first fabliau presented in this chapter, *Berangier*, in which the noble woman, dissatisfied with her low-bred husband, takes matter into her own hands, including the issue of her pleasure. In *Le sohait dez vez* the woman's declaration, "que Deus m'an doint joie certaine" implies that not only does God recognize her right to procure her own pleasure, but that he wants her to revel in it, is a remarkable statement that could be attributed the humor of the fabliau (for what could be more amusing than the thought of a divine endorsement of feminine sexuality?) but this interpretation seems reductive in the face of the outcome of the fabliau, which does not reproach the woman for her dream but instead mocks the husband.

Rather than condemning the woman and her overt sexuality, the fabliau applauds her through the figure of the humiliated husband, ironically enough. As the wife concludes her dealings with the vendor in the market of the pricks, she reaches out and slaps hands with the vendor to seal the deal, as it were. But at this moment the dream world and reality intersect as the woman instead slaps her husband in the face, hard enough to leave the imprint of her five fingers on his cheek. This moment of accidental physical contact can be read as the wife's latent aggression toward the husband that cannot fulfill her desires, a belligerence that is further

[203] For more information on female sexuality in the Middle Ages see Monica Green's article "Female Sexuality in the Medieval West" and Joyce Salisbury's books on the topic, *Medieval Sexuality: A Research Guide* and *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*.

confirmed when the wife recounts the details of the dream to her husband. As she describes the range of pricks available for purchase, the husband predictably demands where he fits into the pricks of her dreams. The wife tells him with pitiless honesty that even the poorest and least expensive of the pricks in her dream would still be worth two of his, "nes li vit a la povre gent/ estoient tel que uns toz seus/ en vaudroient largement ces deus" [Even the pricks of the poorest people were such that even one would be worth two of one such as this] (v.196-198). She goes on to tell him that his would not even be looked at in the market of her dreams, and the husband understands full well the extent of her irritation. But all this he takes in good humor and says that while he can do nothing for the state of his own prick, she should take it until she finds something better. Furthermore, the husband is so taken with his wife's dream that he spreads the tale far and wide, so that it reaches the ear of the author of the fabliau, Jean Bodel, who calls the husband an idiot for delighting in the story: "lo tieng a estot" [I find this man an idiot] (v. 207). The fabliau has nothing to say on the subject of the wife's sexuality, but rather finds humorous fault with the husband for being so enthusiastic over his physical lack. This masculine lack is of course mirrored in the wife's dream, where the disembodied pricks have little to do with the masculine bodies from which they originate. Thus the focus of sexual individuality, while seemingly seated in the phallus, actually resides in the feminine form. The pricks and bollocks offered in the market are the very picture of passivity, and it is an active female sexuality that not only appropriates the dominant power of sexuality contained within the symbol of the male phallus, but also assumes the dominant role of actively pursuing and fulfilling sexual desire. It is the power of the woman to choose.

Furthermore, this is an instance in which a female character loudly and vocally asserts the importance of her pleasure and her sexuality. The tale itself is an implicit endorsement of her assertion, as she is neither punished nor condemned for these words and the evocation of a divine interest in feminine pleasure is hardly refuted. It is only as the woman concludes her dealings in the market that she is brought back into the harsh reality of her husband's less than satisfactory endowments, but even as she is seemingly disappointed by her departure from the dream world she just left, she still comes out on top as her husband agreeably satisfies her desire until she can find something better. The power of words in this fabliau also becomes apparent at the end of the tale, for in circulating his wife's account of her dream, the man is not only providing a humorous look at the interchangeability and anonymity of the masculine phallus for female pleasure, but also gives power to her representation of a feminine sexuality independent of masculine interference. However, it is problematic to consider the possibility of such an active feminine pursuit when it comes from within a dream state whose dissipation would seem to indicate the ephemeral nature of an active feminine presence and voice.

To better understand the nature of dreaming in this fabliau it is useful here to turn to considerations of sexuality and dreaming as set forth by Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*.[204] Taking the *Interpretation of Dreams* by Artemidorus, a writer from the second century, as the platform from which to launch his analysis of the "dreaming of one's pleasures", Foucault considers how the dream reflects the dreaming subject's position as a social subject, that is how the dreamer perceives of him or herself in relation to others. This social positioning that Foucault recognizes in dreams includes considerations of superiority versus inferiority, passivity versus activity. In the context of *Le sohait dez vez*, this becomes particularly relevant as the question of

[204] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

typical feminine passivity is reversed in the representation of an undeniably passivity of the detached penis. Artemidorus interestingly only conceives of the act of pleasure in terms of penetration, which Artemidorus identifies as the defining essence of sexual practice and that Foucault agrees is the qualifier of sexual acts, given the implications of passivity and activity inherent in the act of penetration. The obsession with the act of penetration is never fulfilled in *Le sohait dez vez,* but even if penetration were to occur, it would be impossible to establish masculine dominance over the receptive feminine passivity as the entire act would be more masturbatory in nature than a traditional sexual encounter between active, penetrating male and passive, receiving female. Thus the opposition of masculine domination versus feminine submission is rendered null as the possibility of masculine domination is precluded by the fact of the disembodied penis. Foucault would also confer on the penis overarching powers of representations. At the intersection of all levels of society and status, he identifies the penis as representative of self-mastery, superiority over others, status and privilege; the penis itself is representation of the entirety of society for it is from the penis that all peoples are derived, it is thus, Foucault claims, the signifier for all levels of kinship and social activity.[205] This obvious phallogocentric positioning of the penis is a representation that feminist theory has long struggled against. But if the penis is suddenly detached from the masculine figure to which it endows such superior activity, it is suddenly caught in a limbo of meaning where its very nature is in sudden conflict. The penis in *Le sohait dez vez* does not exist to make children, does not inhabit an active place of dominance and is bereft of the enabling power of masculine self-mastery and mastery over others. It is a floating object that is conceived for the purposes of

[205] This approach to the historical centricity of the phallus is a problem considered by Victor Zeidler in his article "Reason, Desire, and Male Sexuality". Zeidler observes that in the *History of Madness,* Foucault considers (masculine) rationality as means of asserting sociopolitical superiority, while failing to consider how reason is also linked to historical definitions of masculinity (i.e. Aristotle, etc.). This tendency overflows into his considerations of sexuality and subjectivity as considered in his treatment of dreams.

penetration, yes, but penetration that only exists in the context of feminine pleasure. The implications of subjectivity in the form of the detached penis are surprising and important, particularly when one considers the social implications offered by Foucault. If the penis is at the heart of the sexual dream, it is because it constitutes the dreamer's perceived position as a social subject. This manifestation of subjectivity through sexual dreams is further discussed by Charles Stewart who, in his article on sexuality in dreams in the Middle Ages, offers a corollary to Foucault's analysis of dreams and sexuality, stating, "sexual desire became the indicator of the truth about one's self, and thus a fundamental constituent of one's subjectivity."[206] This fabliau, with the dreaming woman taking the dominant position of dreamer and possessor of the phallus, would then seem to imply recognition of a wider female agency than is suggested from within the traditional contextualization of feminine representation against the construct of the masculine. That this assertion of feminine activity is recognized from within the dream world necessarily includes social elements from without that are aware and accepting of an active female presence in the marketplace. That this recognition is also steeped with predictable moments of castration anxiety manifested in the disembodied pricks of the dream market only serve to underscore a masculine awareness of the potential power of women in these settings.[207]

[206] Charles Stewart, "Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8 (2002): 279-309.

[207] For a greater discussion of the role and capacity of merchant class medieval women, see "The Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick Maker: Working women in Medieval Cities" in *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages*. Examples abound of women who worked alongside their husbands, or even alone as *femme sole* to ply their trade. Many gained entrance into guilds or worked from their homes. There are examples of widows inheriting businesses from their husbands or women starting their own trades. While rules and regulations were often more severe towards women, particularly in the context of the guild, women are seen as having considerable influence on their trade, as can be seen in the example of cloth workers in fourteenth century London who were able to influence legislative decisions concerning their trade. While these instances of female influence were not the predominant norm, the fact that women comprised a sizeable and potentially influential part of the merchant class in medieval Europe is consistent with the representations found in this fabliau.

The significance of gender roles as pertains to formation of the social subject, as conceived through Foucault's analysis, also becomes apparent in this fabliau as the wife's dealings in the reverie of the marketplace mirror her husband's profession outside of her dream. Her understanding of her husband's work would seem to manifest in the dream, and also points to a broader depiction of the woman as fully cognizant of her social standing, even from within the dream. And in each instance, it valorizes the woman as an important actor in the system of exchange. The woman's dreams of herself, in full control of her sexual and economic destiny, reflect a wider trend in medieval history that recognized the subjectivity of the feminine figure in terms that extended beyond traditional notions constrained by the absolute polarity of the sexes.[208] This is further reflected in the manner in which the woman acquires by legitimate means (i.e. her purchase of) the phallus. She has come into the possession the seat of male dominance, power, activity and centricity. As the now legitimate owner of the phallus, her obvious intent is pleasure herself with it, leading to further considerations of the manner in which she will absorb the detached member into her own orifices and thus complete the appropriation of masculine power into a feminine one by transforming the phallus into the object/instrument of feminine desire. One can read this moment of intended absorption not as a feminine desire to become a man, but rather to usurp the dominant masculine activity and superimpose her own feminine desire. The woman here is not defined in relation to the man attached to the penis she seeks to purchase, but is defined by her own sexual desire and her dreamed ability to fulfill that desire. Even if the dream cannot represent the reality of the woman's actual sex life and her powers in the marketplace, it points to an important shift in perception that women could and did imagine their own subjectivity in sexual and economic terms.

[208] The most telling historical example of this new subjectivity would have been the fluctuation of feminine power in the realm of marriage, discussed at length by Howard Bloch (*Medieval Misogyny*) and Penny Gold (*Lady and Virgin*).

The Speaking *Con*: Women and Words in the Fabliau

In the last fabliau I will consider, the feminine body is anything but silent, instead speaking from any and all orifices. That this speech takes place at the behest of the male protagonist of the story does not take away from the fact that the female voice here erupts in a defining moment in the narrative that shapes the fates of all those around her. In the fabliau, *Le Chevalier qui fist parler les Cons*, literally the Knight Who Made Speak Cunts, we find the quintessential tale of courtly adventure. Perhaps the first rendition of a literary trope that will continue most famously in Denis Diderot's *Les bijoux indiscrets* and the more modern and feminist *Vagina Monologues*, the speaking cunts of the fabliau establishes a literary convention of female genitalia uttering undeniable truths. While this representation of an involuntary and forced feminine speech would seem typical of the misogyny of humor elsewhere discussed, these speaking cunts offer instances of feminine speech that even when in seeming complicity with the knight who forces their speech, represent the necessity of a woman who speaks for herself, regardless of the outcome. This fabliau also presents a woman whose need to speak erupts from every possible orifice and offers the vision of a woman overflowing with words. This fabliau is also important in that it offers a presentation of female speech completely without the intrusion of the male phallus. Here the exchanges occur only by way of the feminine lips, all of them. Whereas the previous examples of the fabliau considered in this chapter all considered exchanges and speech that originated as a result of feminine interaction with detached and disembodied male genitalia, in this fabliau it is the *con* that speaks and acts without being informed by its contrast to the masculine phallus. Indeed, while the main protagonist of the story

is certainly male, the narrative advances on the actions and words of the women of the tale. It is useful here to consider the context of the narrative, particularly its roots in courtly literature.

In this fabliau a down on his luck knight sets about regaining his fortune by travelling to the next town with his faithful squire, Huet, to participate in a tourney. With little to his name, the knight still maintains his honor and when the unscrupulous squire steals the sumptuous robes of three bathing ladies, the knight at once orders him to return the dresses. The tale makes little effort to conceal the fact that these three ladies must be fairies in mortal disguise; their robes are of the richest material the knight and squire have ever seen, and they are so wise and beautiful that one cannot imagine anything but their magical origins:

> En la fontaine se baignoient
> trois puceles preuz et senees :
> de beauté resanbloient fees. (v.114-116)
>
> [In the fountain bathed three maidens, wise and shrewd who by their beauty, resembled fairies]

The tale of a knight encountering a fairy to his great benefit is a construct well known to those versed in courtly literature, the tale echoes the lai of Marie de France, *Lanval*, in which a similarly down on his luck knight gains access to incredible fortune in meeting a fairy, and elements of magic and folklore permeate the courtly romance, from Lancelot's fairy mother to the magic fountain in *Yvain*. The audience, understanding that this courtly setting is the context against which the humor of the tale will be juxtaposed, has not long to wait for the comedic intervention. The fairy women, wanting to reward the knight's high honor bestow upon him three gifts, one from each woman. The first begins with a fairly common gift, one that further confirms the ladies fairy status:

> "Et ge vos donrai riche don,

et sachiez que ja n'i faudroiz.
Jamais en cel lui ne venroiz
que toz li monz ne vos enjoie,
et chascuns fera de vos joie,
et si vos abandoneront
la gent trestot quanqu'il aront:
ne porroiz mais avoir poverte." [206-213]

[I will give you a rich gift and know that never will you be in need: never will you arrive at a place without everyone giving you a warm welcome; all shall be joyous thanks to you and people will give everything to you : never will you be able to be poor.]

It is the second gift that firmly situates the tale in the realm of farce and the scandalous nature of the fabliau, for the second lady says:

"Li miens dons ne riert pas petiz,
fait l'autre pucele en après.
Ja n'ira mes ne loig ne prés,
Por qu'il truisse feme ne beste
et qu'el ait deus elz en la teste,
s'il daigne le con apeler
qu'il ne l'escoviegne parler:
iteus sera mais ses eurs;
de ce soit il tot aseurs
que tel n'en ot ne roi ne conte." (v.216-225)

[My gift from me will not be small either, said the other maiden after. Everywhere he goes, and where he meets a woman or a beast – as long as she has two eyes in her head – if he deigns to call her cunt, it will be forced to speak: This will be his magic power that surely never king nor count has had.]

The third lady only continues the farcical tone of the previous gift-giver:

"Quar bien est raison et droiture
que, se li cons par aventure
avoit aucun enconbrement
qu'il ne respondist maintenant,
li cus si respondroit por lui,
qui qu'an eust duel n'ennui,
si l'apelessiez, sanz aloigne." (v.231-237)

> [It is just and reasonable that if by chance the cunt is impeded in some way, and it is impossible to immediately respond, the ass will answer for it, without delay if you call for it, whether it takes pleasure from it or not.]

And thus the knight is bestowed with the power to force words from the cunts and asses of those women he encounters. In the tale that ensues, the knight tries this power on the vagina of a priest's horse, and truthfully the feminine lips tell him of the priest's journey to visit his mistress. The knight continues on to the castle of a count. The countess, enamored with the knight, sends one of her handmaidens to spend the night with him, instead of going herself, constrained as she is by the presence of her husband. The knight readily receives the handmaiden into his bed but then speaks to her cunt, asking it for the truth of why the woman is there. When her cunt speaks, the terrified girl runs off and informs the countess of the "truth" of the matter, which is that the knight can force cunts to themselves speak truthfully. In front of the court, the countess challenges the knight that he cannot truly make her cunts speak, and in moment of duplicity, stuffs her *con* with cotton in an attempt to avoid the knight's appropriation of her feminine speech. In this moment the knight fails to make the *con* speak, but then appeals to the *cul* or her ass, who then reveals the truth as to why the *con* is silent. It is an interesting moment of reversal in which it is the female figure that attempts to silence her feminine lips, implying that the truth of her feminine body should come at her own behest and that such a reappropriation on the part of the knight is an illegitimate attempt to control her lips and her mouth. As Jane Burns concludes of the tale, "women's mouths, both private and public, should tell their story not someone else's."[209] I would argue that this moment of feminine speech is not what Laurence de Looze identifies as the insertion of phallic discourse into the feminine lips[210] but utterances of "true speech" that de Looze recognizes as so important for the medieval

[209] Burns, *Bodytalk*, 60.
[210] Laurence de Looze, "Sex, Lies, and Fabliaux: Gender, Scribal Practice, and Old/new Philology in "Du Chealier Qui Fist Les Cons Parler." *Romanic Review* 85 (1994): 499.

mindset. De Looze discusses the medieval world's nostalgic desire for "true speech", a desire that is presented here as issuing from the female body, ironic, given that the speech of women is historically considered the most unstable of utterances. This is discussed at length by Etienne de Bourbon, whose treatment of women's uncontrolled speech as the site of "diabolic utterances" leads him to assert the need for a silent woman. De Looze characterizes the insertion of male phallic discourse into the vaginal utterances of the countess in the fabliau as further proof of an attempt to silence feminine discourse, but this argument falls short in light of the fact that "true speech" is only able to be uttered from the feminine orifice. Even this power over her cunt, seemingly by a male actor in the tale, is only possibly by means of a feminine gift. The gift of the three women at the start of the fabliau bestows this ability on the knight. In this light, the knight succeeds only through the active utterances of the women surrounding him. Even when the knight has the opportunity to call upon his own genitalia, he prefers instead to turn to feminine discourse, because this is where the truth of the fabliau lies. When the young woman offers herself to the knight, he caresses her obligingly but then, instead of taking the moment assert his active male dominance over her, prefers to call upon her *con* to speak. This circumvention of the phallic intrusion to instead valorize feminine speech is a moment that has troubled critics, who call it a masculine appropriation of the feminine lips and speech. But by the very fact that the knight has chosen to forgo the typical subjugation of the feminine orifice to then call upon it to speak, while certainly a masculine attempt to control the feminine lips, still prioritizes the female genitalia over that of the male. And in the face of male appropriation of the female lips, the feminine response is one of resistance, even if this resistance proves unsuccessful in the end. The young girl runs from the knight in the instance to speak tell the countess what has occurred and when confronted with this masculine appropriation the countess tries to silence herself, pointing

to further resistance to the masculine appropriation of her feminine speech. She does not try to silence herself because she does not believe that her cunt can speak or that it speaks the truth, but rather that she resists the masculine attempt to assume the power of her speaking cunt.

Furthermore, the truth uttered by the *con* is inscribed in the language that pervades the fabliau. De Looze himself comments on the overwhelming occurrence of assonance with the word *con* in the text. The fabliau opens with an introduction addressing the genre of the fabliau. The author, Garin, speaks of how recounting the fabliaux (*les content*) is very much in vogue and how it gives great comfort (*confortement*) to those who hear it. Garin goes on to say how this particular tale (*conte*) will not lie, a clever reference to the substance of the tale and an assertion that the truth spoken, both in the tale and by the *cons* is the absolute truth:

> Ce dist Garin qui pas ne ment,
> Qui d'un chevalier nos raconte
> Une aventure en icest conte,
> Qui avoit merveilleus eür. (v. 12-15)
>
> [Garin tells us, he who does not lie, and who brings us, in this tale, the adventure of a knight with a marvelous destiny.]

The repetition of the sound of the *con* resounds through the rest of the tale as well, and is particularly compelling in the figure of the count and countess with whom the knight demonstrates his unique ability: "Ne sai que feisse lonc conte: en cel chastel avoit le cont, et la contesse avuec, sa feme" [I will not make a longer tale of it: in the castle there was a count, with the countess his wife] (v.337-339). Thus the language of the *con* permeates the tale, and the language, Garin has assured us, does not lie. I find that the prevalence of the *con* is what distinguishes this tale, for it is in the absence of contextualization through the phallus that feminine speech finds its truth. Irigaray's work on feminine sexuality as perceived through the

female lips is particularly compelling here. Indeed, as Diana Fuss states in her article "Essentially Speaking": "a woman's exchange of herself with herself, without the agency of the literal penis or the Symbolic phallus, is exactly what puts into question the prevailing phallocratic and specular economy."[211] I do not question that the author would have been entrenched in such ideologies of feminine passive reception versus masculine active penetration, but in the instances where this polarity is unbalanced, as seen in the case of an active, speaking *con*, one must consider the possibilities for new interpretations of feminine representations in these texts.

What is so interesting in this fabliau is not the misogynistic representation of a man forcing actions upon the sexual orifices of a woman, but rather that the measure of truth is seated in these same feminine orifices. Truth is not seated in the masculine phallus but rather the female body, a body that is typically considered as silenced and effaced. Furthermore, this speech, while detrimental to the countess's wager with the knight, does not result in any overt punishment or elements of misogyny. The countess loses her wager and while she suffers some in the way of humiliation, there is no other penalty for her actions beyond the payment that was wagered. Even in losing her wager with the knight, the countess is neither punished for her actions nor her lust for the man, and furthermore has made a compelling statement about the speech of her *con*: "ja mes cons n'ert si fous ne yvres/ que por vos parolt un seul mot" (v. 502-503) [Never would my cunt be so mad or so drunk that it would say a single word for you]. This would indeed be true if it weren't for the previous words of the three women, who bestowed the gift upon the knight. While the outcome of the power of this speech might not always be beneficial to the women it is

[211] Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

enacted upon, it cannot be denied that the power of speech resides with woman, who resist silence and speak, for better or worse.

The fact that this narrative is set on a backdrop of courtly convention only serves to reinforce the images of noble women who speak and successfully navigate their way through courtly society. Just as Lunete and Enide represent the respective truths of the court for the male protagonists of their romances, these speaking *cons* of the fabliau establish a truth that can be accessed by their male counterparts, but is still envisioned as seated within the female body. The multiple speaking lips resists the phallomorphic referentiality that Irigaray also struggles against. In attempting to resist definition by masculine parameters, the feminine body resists definition as contrasted with the masculine body, and its subsequent representation as disempowered, castrated and lacking. This fabliau, while addressing the attempts of the male figure to appropriate feminine speech, also presents an important moment when the female body talks back and when the countess declares that her *con* will say nothing for the man who would order it to speak, one can read a feminine resistance that challenges the perceived phallocentric truths of the medieval world.

Far from being a victim of an inescapable misogyny in all fabliaux, women are often depicted as readily seizing control of the sexual destinies, and while these female characters can be mocked and condemned for their actions, there is an acute awareness of an active and influential femininity on the part of her masculine authors. It is easy to assume a too facile reading of feminine empowerment that shows a woman in full control of her sexual needs and a medieval author and audience that attributes her such, but it is also fallacious to assume that

there is no room for any female agency in the fabliaux. Jane Burns argues that when the "socially constrained, philosophically silenced, metaphorically decapitated" woman speaks, in asserting her sexual desire, she is an object of desire that is also a speaking subject and that in asserting her own sexuality, she resists and confronts the "monolithic phallus, […] the phallocentric world view."[212] I would argue that not only does the speaking fictional woman resist a monolithic phallic economy, but she points to a wider society that largely recognizes and acknowledges this resistance. A careful reading of the texts offers ways in which to recognize a distinct form of female agency, outside of courtly norms, suggesting that variations in attitudes toward women can be postulated at all levels of society. When the woman speaks in the fabliau, she speaks as all medieval women and she speaks with all the voices available to her, high and low. It is the diversity of women in the fabliau that gives her such strength, for it is in the multiplicity of her representation that the female medieval figure asserts a multitude of voices against the monolithic, phallocentric masculine domination that would seek to define, constrain and silence her.

[212] Burns, *Bodytalk*, 64-65.

Conclusion

To consider female characters in medieval French texts is to arrive at a fascinating intersection of exaltation and misogyny, history and theory. Authors and critics alike are often at a loss when trying to situate the role and meaning of these female characters. If, historically speaking, authors treat medieval women in their texts with ambivalence, it must be understood that this perspective is but a reflection of a turbulent period of history in which class and gender roles were being transformed. This ambivalence speaks to the way in which medieval culture at all levels of society was experiencing tremendous change that would have challenged the very notions of the self, a shift that undoubtedly contributed to an evolution in the way in which women were perceived, from the most noble of ladies to the lowliest shepherd girls. It is for this very reason that this dissertation has approached the topic from the perspective of class divisions. Each level of society experienced different interactions with the feminine and yet, while these interactions are often distinct, each contributes to a collective of images of medieval women that are uniform only in their diversity. It is impossible to assign an overarching medieval sentiment toward women for this very reason. And if, critically speaking, the root of medieval misogyny can be found in both the empowerment and the marginalization of women, it speaks to a continuous dialogue of critical thought as pertains to the history of women. Much like medieval authors struggled with concepts of the feminine, so too today do critics struggle with interpreting these authors and the historical forces at work on their texts.

I have approached the women in these texts in a way to avoid some of the more rigid categorizations that surround them and in the multiple faces of these female characters I would

argue is the concept of the fractured feminine self that has long haunted feminist studies. This approach seems particularly compelling as feminist studies have struggled with reconceptualizing the specter of the scattered and marginalized woman into a shifting, fluid subject. Much work has been done in feminist writings on language and speech acts with particular focus being given to how exactly women can speak in what is widely considered a masculine dominated language. Indeed, there is a diversity of thought on the subject of language as a masculine construct, from Bourdieu, who considers language from an anthropological perspective in which masculine/feminine binaries construct social orders in which women are often inclined to docility when it comes to dominant usages in language,[213] to the French feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, among others, who find language not only to be masculine, but also assert the impossibility of a female voice. While the male gender is associated with language, women find themselves trapped in silence. For even when women do speak, not only can they not speak as women, as they must enter male-dominated discourse to perform any linguistic utterance, but they are often not even given the possibility of an authentic voice. The disappearance of women within masculine dominated language is an idea that has long been posited in feminist discourse, but with important dissentions. Feminists such as Irigaray would argue for the need for a completely new feminine language, one in which the dual and fragmented nature of woman was embodied (in the two speaking/labial lips of women that is whole but not one), and theorists such as Shoshana Felman argue that in order to speak, the woman must completely reinvent not only language, but speaking itself. If a woman speaks in the place of opposition to the phallogocentric structure and also outside of this structure, only then can she escape definition by the structure of the phallic binary.

[213] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 50.

Others would argue that texts cannot be read as completely unaffected by women and by this influence can women appropriate in language Adrienne Munich recognizes as "half ours anyway."[214] While Munich's argument for reading a real female power in the text might be a somewhat excessive interpretation of a feminine presence in literary texts, her final conclusion is not. She argues for a reading of the feminine that goes against the strict boundaries of a polarized masculine/feminine dichotomy that elevates the masculine while effacing the feminine. E. Jane Burns argues for the same, even while refusing interpretations of real female power, she too would see a different construction of gender in medieval women who speak against dominant masculine discourses, "turning their borrowed speech into something else."[215] Thus, drawing on Munich's example of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist critic in *The Yellow Wallpaper* one is able to see "the female behind the crumbling paper of the patriarchal text."[216] This places the feminine outside the binarism that so often confines her, critically interpreting her in a space that is complex and disunified, a space that is at once contradictory to and concurrent with the dominant masculine discourse. Teresa de Lauretis would argue that this is where the character of feminist theory resides, "at once inside its own social and discursive determinations and yet outside and excessive to them."[217] She also envisages the subject in a vein similar to that of the French feminists, where the fractured, fragmented woman is still whole despite the multiplicity of her nature as woman. The reconceptualization of the woman in feminist theory sees the subject as "shifting and multiply organized across variable acts of difference" and dispels the

[214] Adrienne Munich "Notorious Signs: Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticisms*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London and New York: Methuen: 1985).
[215] Burns, E. Jane. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 17.
[216] Munich, "Notorious Signs," 257.
[217] Teresa De Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness" *Feminist Studies* 16 (1990): 116.

conception of the feminine, or feminism, as singular or unified.[218] This has important implications for the medieval woman, who is often interpreted as the fractured being in the mirror, the marginal object that is not whole. The female character can occupy in this manner a distinctly feminine position, and in occupying a fractured subjectivity, she can resist or exceed the dominant phallic unity. But the very multiplicity of her interpretation is where one can read the potential for a more positive feminine agency, because the woman behind the man is speaking and her words must be heard.

My intention is not to contend that a feminine subjectivity asserts itself through a masculine text, merely that when a character such as Lunete speaks in a text such as the Chevalier au Lion, she is actively engaging in masculine structures of exchange and the masculine figures around her must recognize it. Just as important is the way in which Chrétien de Troyes must admit to this feminine agency in writing a character such as Lunete. Not only does Chrétien understand and illustrate a woman of impressive intellect, he writes this figure of women for a larger medieval audience that, we must imagine, is apt to accept such a representation. Lunete does have access to social capital that medieval men and women can recognize, and she uses it intelligently. However, due to the ambiguity of her rising position as a powerful female, she is not able to fully appropriate the same space as would the male heroic character. A character such as Lunete is ever defined by her position vis-a-vis these masculine structures, but all the while her active and feminine voice can be read as a resistance to the very structures she operates within. The medieval ambivalence toward the place of women within structures of exchange is the site of much critical discussion on Old French texts. While aspects of the interpretation of woman as an effaced object of exchange have been contested and

[218] De Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects," 116.

competing theories suggesting a greater degree of female agency have been posited[219], I argue that more than reading a subtle resistance to gender roles and fixed objectivity in medieval texts, female characters should be read in a less deterministic light, in which the reader can understand how the presence of women within masculine economies is mobile and polymorphous. Within this fluidity of interpretation, there is the potential to read important verbal and economic agency in the female character, which has long been read as nothing more than a flimsy representation of masculine desires and anxieties.

It is in emphasizing the importance of a feminist reading that I have approached these different texts, while also resisting certain limitations of the same. It is precisely the fractured nature of the fictive medieval lady that readily lends to interpretations of her marginalization, but I would argue quite the opposite. In the multiple faces of the lady, the shepherdess and the bourgeois woman there lay the potential to read for a powerful feminine presence. The instability of generic divisions that would seem to codify marginalization and misogyny in fact reveal the cracks in the uniform façade of the monolithic masculine primacy and in these gaps women prove that they are more elusive than rigidly determined.

The ladies of Chrétien's romances are a reflection of a vast well of historical medieval women that could very well have been monstrous, as can be seen with the demonization of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, but are also colored by less notorious examples as Marie de Champagne, whose successful rule was a counterpoint to the restless campaigns and pilgrimages

[219] Burns, E. Jane. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Krueger, Roberta L. "Love, Honor, and the Exchange of Women in *Yvain*: Some Remarks on the Female Reader." In *Romance Notes* 25 (1985) . Jane Burns and Roberta Krueger have both argued for greater female agency in medieval literature. See also Sarah Kay in *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

that marked the life of her husband, the King Henri of Champagne. Chrétien surely struggled with the different faces of the royal women of his time as surely as the faces of Queen Guinevere shift between motherly benevolence, emasculating sensuality and adulterous carnality. There is no fixed role for the women in these romances, no matter how alike these women might seem on the surface. In considering the social realities of knight and lady in the context of the romance, we see a situation in which there is a kind of necessary interdependence; the knight is characteristically presented as possessing a manner of sovereignty over the lady, who needs a knight in order to protect her holdings and herself against assault, but simultaneously there is a dynamic of servitude in the knight's agency in terms of his relationship to the lady that comes as a direct result of his need for her substantiation of his worth. Even if this relationship could have inspired masculine anxiety at the prospect of feminine power, it is also indicative of a power structure that is not fixed in binaries of masculine dominance and feminine passivity.

This interdependence is seen across the boundaries of genre as well, where in the pastourelle the social interactions between lady and knight influence the way in which the he approaches the shepherdess. In a very real way the shepherdess is the site of the medieval author's reaction to conceptions of the feminine in the wider world around him. Seemingly unbound by the strictures of the castle wall, the knight reacts viscerally to the figure of the woman. This reaction can be one of brutality, or of carnality, or of grudging respect. Oftentimes the knight rides beyond the court only to find that he is still entangled in the facets of society that he seeks to escape, and it is the voice of the shepherdess that serves as constant reminder: Women are not faceless, voiceless dolls that serve only to satiate male fantasy. Even if she is written as the embodiment of empty feminine objectification, she reminds the knight that he

belongs to a system from which there is no escape, but in doing so also reaffirms the knight's place in the courtly system. In resisting his fantasy, she becomes the symbol of his belonging. It is in the multiple voices of the shepherdess that male authors fully explore their own notions of the feminine and as such their interactions with society as a whole. Implicit in these encounters is a male perspective in crisis. One can only assume that as each author explores his relationship with a lonely girl far from the city center, he is negotiating the terrain of a changing world.

And if the pastourelle presents a deep-seated psychological response to evolving notions of the feminine, then the fabliau is in open dialogue with evolving conceptions of class and gender. If the fabliau contains representations of women from all levels of society, it is still a genre that speaks directly to the increasingly important locus of the market place. This was in direct response to the growth of cities and the changing structures of noble families. Women in these fabliaux are represented as fully capable actors in the markets of a new world. If these women do suffer from misogyny they also revel in a surprising sexual freedom. Only hinted at in the shadow of the prostitute that lurks in the shepherdess, the women in the marketplace of the fabliau loudly negotiate their sexual, economic and social roles. Female sexuality, while sometimes derided, is never dismissed, and authors seem to revel in female characters that seize control of their sexual destinies.

The women in these genres present an important look at a dynamic and evolving medieval culture. And as they speak they reveal a medieval society in dialogue with itself. Far from the violently fracture objects of an immovable and overwhelming male dominance, these women represent an immeasurable diversity of culture and influences. From region to region and

city to city, medieval men and women are constantly negotiating their place in society and this negotiation is reflected in representations of women in the Middle Ages. It is impossible to assign a singular view of these women to a medieval perspective and in acknowledging this it is possible to being to reconfigure the strict binaries that have traditionally been theorized. In challenging these binaries, we find ourselves in a very different place when considering female characters in these texts. Instead of prescribing to fixed notions of gender divisions, there is room in these texts to consider a more fluid female presence that does not sit quietly and disappear into masculine fantasy and discourse. These women speak and they are heard, they act and are heeded. In doing so, women in Old French texts continue to contribute to the compelling and evolving of study of the feminine. Their voices add to an important diversity of representation for women and in listening to them we can begin to grasp more fully a history that is not characterized by strict binaries, but is as fluid and dynamic as the women themselves.

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