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SLANDERING WOMEN: LITERARY AND ECCLESIASTICAL MISOGYNY IN HIGH TO
LATE MEDIEVAL FRANCE

by

Kevin Johannes McCoy

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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ABSTRACT

This work examines literary and ecclesiastical misogyny in high to late medieval France. It explores how two popular French genres, *pastourelle* and *fabliaux*, reinforced negative female stereotypes and perpetuated misogyny by slandering women. In order to contextualize the misogyny in those terms, this thesis also conducts an examination of contemporary ecclesiastical literature and thought as well as a few popular, secular works.

The approach first analyzed in-depth the *pastourelle* and *fabliaux* and connected those works to contemporary society in its treatment of women. Next, it analyzed ecclesiastical misogyny in both the literature and society and compared those forms of misogyny by showing parallels with the secular literature. The main findings were that literary gender relations and treatment of women in the period reflected, influenced, and reinforced misogyny in society, primarily by slander. The conclusions are that through slander, misogyny became more entrenched and engrained in the medieval mind and society.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this thesis I argue that misogyny was pervasive in France in the high to late medieval period, reaching its apogee in the thirteenth century. The virulent misogyny which permeated France during this period had its roots in the form of slander that was seen especially in the secular and ecclesiastical literature. I use the term 'slander' as it best defines a chief method of how misogyny was meted out. According to Oxford Dictionaries, the legal definition of slander as a noun is: "The action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's reputation", while as a verb it means to: "Make false and damaging statements about (someone)", with its origin, "Middle English: from Old French *esclandre*, alteration of *escandle*, from late Latin *scandalum*."¹ This thesis will show how slander is ensconced in the misogyny of the period, both in the literary and ecclesiastical tradition. Moreover, tracing the historical and lexical connection between slander and scandal fits in with the contents of this thesis as they coexisted during the period.

I analyze misogyny in high to late medieval France with a primary focus on the thirteenth century as that is the century when the popular literature genres *pastourelle* and *fabliaux* were at their acme in northern France and also when hagiography was increasing in prevalence. I investigate the popular and ecclesiastical literature of the period as it was rife with a brand of misogyny that overlapped different genres and which represented itself in French society of the time as well. I use the *pastourelle* and *fabliaux* as a starting point due to its aforementioned heightened popularity during the thirteenth century in France. From there, I will explore other elements and genres of literature.

¹ Retrieved from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slander>.

From a contemporary standpoint the high and late Middle Ages in Europe has become an increasingly integral part of feminist historiography as analyses of that period offer insight into the deep history of how gender relations played out in a western context. In feminist theory, Joan W. Scott posited concrete definitions of gender which are applicable for historians and pertinent to this thesis. She argued that using gender as a term for analysis allows the historian to include information about women and men in their discussion, as opposed to excluding either one, for example, as the term "women's studies" implicitly does. Hence, about gender, Scott asserts, "This usage insists that the world of women is part of the world of men, created in and by it. This usage rejects the interpretive utility of the idea of separate spheres, maintaining that to study women in isolation perpetuates the fiction that one sphere, the experience of one sex, has little or nothing to do with the other. In addition, gender is also used to designate social relations between the sexes."² Discussing the theory of gender as a useful social scientific framework including gender relationships regarding class, race, and ethnicity; even more importantly to Scott is the theorizing of gender as it "is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."³ Though Scott examines gender and class in periods after the scope of this thesis, her work is still relevant in part because her cultural foci expertise is France. The following passage examines France in the 1830s but could be applicable to the views and treatment of peasant women - a group which will be explored in depth in this thesis - in France six hundred years earlier:

The interchangeable usages of *femmes isolées* suggested that all such working women were potential prostitutes, inhabiting a marginal and unregulated world in which good social order - social, economic, moral, political - was subverted. Rhetorically, then, the use of the term *femmes isolées*, with its ambivalent references, had a double effect: it conflated certain types of working women with prostitutes and it also identified sexual license with poverty. The ambivalent causality (poverty or bad morals?) was less important than the association itself because there was only one

² Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 5, 1986, pp. 1056. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1864376.

³ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 44.

cure for sexual license and that was control.⁴

The ways and dynamics in which women were treated in terms of work, the home, political life, and under the law during medieval times provides paradoxes and parallels which can uncover insights about the age we currently live in. Judith M. Bennett wrote not long ago, "Most modern people seem to waver between seeing medieval women as hopelessly oppressed or wonderfully free. In either case they usually assume that the experiences of medieval women are distant, arcane, and irrelevant to the challenges of the present. Yet the Middle Ages have been and remain highly significant to modern times."⁵ This prevailing thought sheds light onto why modern historians have turned back to Old French literature, specifically the pastourelle and the fabliaux to understand the complex dynamics of gender relations. Along with Scott, Judith Butler wrote extensively on gender from a modern perspective and her work serves to add another layer of feminist theory to this thesis which examines a range of literature and specifically the language in it. Aligned with that, Butler argues, "The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture. . . . These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality."⁶ In the Old French literature analyzed in this thesis, Butler's theory of gender will be seen. In a medieval age full of paradoxes, especially regarding women and the treatment of gender in the literature, modern feminist Luce Irigaray provides insightful philosophical depth to this subject. Paraphrasing the argument in Irigaray's book, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Butler relates, ". . . Luce Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradox, if not a contradiction, within

⁴ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 143.

⁵ Bonnie G. Smith, *Women's History in Global Perspective* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 139.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 13.

the discourse of identity itself. Women are the "sex" which is not "one." Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity. Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignatable. In this sense, women are the sex which is not "one," but multiple."⁷ In both language and society, I have found that Irigaray's analysis encompasses the issue of sex and gender and this thesis will reflect such themes.

One of the subjects which becomes clear in the course of this thesis is how to a large extent sex was "freer" in high to late medieval French society and the literature compared to modernity. With that said, however, there was rampant misogyny intertwined in this which connects to Irigaray's theory outlined above. Michel Foucault's writing on this subject adds some further insight into the matter. He argues that in precapitalist society sex was more part of the public domain and that by the nineteenth century, no longer were ordinary people able to discuss and practice sex as freely as they once did, especially during the high and late Middle Ages. The sexual mosaic hypothesis which Foucault described in modern society bears resemblance to what I have found in thirteenth century France in terms of gender, class and power. He argues, "The manifold sexualities – those which appear with the different ages (sexualities of the infant or the child), those which become fixated on particular tastes or practices (the sexuality of the invert, the gerontophile, the fetishist), those which, in a diffuse manner, invest relationships (the sexuality of doctor and patient, teacher and student, psychiatrist and mental patient), those which haunt spaces (the sexuality of the home, the school, the prison) – all form the correlate of exact

⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 14.

procedures of power."⁸ Foucault's repeated use of diametrical contrasts to depict psycho-sexual clash struggles is reminiscent of the opening chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*: "Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."⁹ The class, gender, and culture conflict among knight and peasant, clergy and anticlericalists, nobility and non-nobility, and men and women, will be shown in this thesis as binary oppositions to one another.

In conjunction with modern feminist theory, I explore the imbalance and inequality among men and women in thirteenth century France and to a lesser extent wider Europe through the examination of literary and ecclesiastical misogyny. During this period there was a marked increase in both writing and reading, with new forms of arts and literature impacting European society, notably among the nobility. Moreover, with increasing literacy rates among the general population, the dissemination of such material shaped and affected attitudes and social norms. Discerning how misogyny worked within these new literary contexts is another aim. The antifeminism present in these works centered around a set of negative stereotypes. Such misogynistic qualities attributed to female characters included lascivious, shameless, deceitful, adulterous behavior, among many other derogatory terms. There were clear enough patterns in these works and these will be addressed in detail. 'Antifeminism' is a term used in its relation with the 'protofeminism' evident in the period and relevant to the contents of this thesis. Just as

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction: Volume I* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1978), 47.

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Jeffrey C. Issac (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 74.

the foundations of civilization are based on the subjugation of one class by another, in line with Marxist theory, gender oppression rests on the same plane. What Friedrich Engels argues about in the following passage concerning class could just as easily be claimed about and substituted with gender: "Since the exploitation of one class by another is the basis of civilisation, its whole development moves in a continuous contradiction. . . . And while among barbarians, as we have seen, hardly any distinction could be made between rights and duties, civilisation makes the difference and antithesis between these two plain even to the dullest mind by assigning to one class pretty nearly all the rights, and to the other class pretty nearly all the duties."¹⁰

According to Oxford Dictionaries, the definition of misogyny is: "Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women", with its origin, "Mid 17th century: from Greek *misos* 'hatred' + *gunē* 'woman'."¹¹ I connect misogyny's origins with the dawn of patriarchy during the onset of pastoralism and the taming of animals in prehistorical times. In addition, I subscribe to Engels' assertion that the switching of inheritance from the mother-right gens to the father-right gens was a revolution, ". . . one of the most far-reaching ever experienced by mankind . . ."¹² and that "The overthrow of mother-right was the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*. The man seized the reins in the house too, the woman was degraded, enthralled, became the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. This humiliated position of women, especially manifest among the Greeks of the Heroic and still more of the Classical Age, has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in part, clothed in a milder form, but by no

¹⁰ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1972), 218.

¹¹ Retrieved from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/misogyny>.

¹² Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 66.

means abolished."¹³ I construe Engels' conclusions into the concept of misogyny and this thesis will display elements of the passage above.

Hagiography became quite prolific in Western Europe by the high Middle Ages. Hagiography of the period is an important area of study for this thesis since the hagiographer served as a type of historian. Although hagiographers were prone to embellishment, their vitae on the saints' lives of the period provided me comparative contemporary insight into gender attitudes and sketches of the lives of actual people. A number of the secondary sources which I used included sections on hagiography and so my thesis includes analysis into this area as well.

I will draw upon a few secondary sources which will help frame my argument around gender analysis, particularly focusing on the portrayal of women in medieval literature. Some of the secondary sources cited will lend the necessary historical background to illustrate the laws and attitudes of the times while other sources will provide literary analysis to aid and facilitate the texture of this thesis. The secondary sources will differ from each in terms of focus, from emphasizing the female voice to rape and the law to societal attitudes of the period. In addition, the secondary sources used have overlapped with my own research on the primary sources. That was by design so that I could use their findings to serve as a confirmation, complement, and counter to my own. Taken together, the primary and secondary sources used are aimed to present an interwoven picture of misogynistic duality among the secular and ecclesiastical literature in France of the period.

I will now provide a brief literature review that highlights specific secondary sources most salient in my work. Geri L. Smith's work, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition: Poetic Motivations and Generic Transformations* provided me with numerous renditions and analyses of thirteenth century French pastourelles. Her analysis of gender within the pastourelle

¹³ Engels, 67.

as well as voice proved invaluable to my outlook on this genre tradition. Smith also examined the use and non-use of voice in the French pastourelle, which allowed me to focus on the narrator, first-person point of view, and the audience. Next, Kathryn Gravdal's work, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* closely examines rape and sexual violence against women in both the literature and law in society, along with contemporary and historical perspectives of this subject. Her work allowed me to have a much better feel for contemporary attitudes towards rape and sexual violence than I otherwise would have. Gravdal's detailed statistical analysis was also very useful, in addition to her extensive writing on hagiography and the pastourelle. Shulamith Shahar's *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* put forth a comprehensive picture of the status of women in Western Europe between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries which lay within the scope of my work. Her detailed study of women's legal rights and status, female nobility, and female peasants were especially valuable in advancing my research aims. Natalie Muñoz's *Disabusing Women in the Old French Fabliaux* covered much of the primary sources and some additional fabliaux which I too studied. As she covered the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, her work comfortably overlapped with the time period of my thesis. The analysis in this work helped me to further consider and frame my own arguments on this genre. Ruth Mazo Karras' *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* uncovered the complicated nature of sexuality in the Middle Ages in Europe. Karras' nuanced take was extremely beneficial for my deeper understanding of the complexities of this subject. Her study of women in particular, concerning sexuality in and outside of marriage, including chastity and virginity, made it possible for me to better understand the medieval mindset and attitudes on an otherwise taboo subject in Christendom. Lastly, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell's work, *Saints and Society* provided the most comprehensive account of

medieval hagiography. Their examination of saints spanned a long period, some of which coincided with my own period of study. The stories they related furthered my knowledge and understanding of both hagiographers' viewpoints and of the lives of female saints relevant to my thesis.

I have organized my thesis structurally following the introduction in chapter 1 with close examinations in chapter 2 of the two most popular literary forms in France during the thirteenth century: the pastourelle and the fabliaux. Within this brief introductory examination I consider class status in relation to the two genres. I carry out an in depth examination of one popular thirteenth century lyric pastourelle, *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, to forward my arguments in chapter 3. In chapter 4 I consider class, status, gender, and violence in both literature and society as a way in which to more clearly understand the medieval mindset on these topics. In particular, I analyze rape in the literature and society as one of the more pertinent points of discussion. In chapter 5 I examine medieval attitudes towards feminine attributes in the pastourelle and society, providing a comparative analysis of medieval thought on this matter. In chapter 6 I interpret the significance of the French fabliaux of the period in relation to misogyny, while also considering canon law, gender relations, and noblewomen. In chapter 7 I take a close look at slander in courtly literature and the fabliaux, and the response to literary misogyny. In the final chapter I analyze ecclesiastical misogyny, with a focus on the Church, hagiography, and anticlericalism. I also include a section in this chapter on the origins of misogyny to the medieval present.

Chapter 2

Introducing the *pastourelle* and *fabliaux*

This first section of the thesis will focus on exploring selected works of two nascent forms of literature in medieval French history: the *pastourelle* and the *fabliaux*, due to the inherent connection with misogyny in these genres. How women and men and gender as a category were portrayed in these works is to some extent a reflection of French society during the thirteenth century. What is clear is that slandering women was a basic component of literary misogyny in thirteenth century France and a reason why this thesis seeks to explore the presentation of the systemic imbalance and inequality among women and men at that time. Sexual violence, often in the form of rape, was an integral part of the French *pastourelle* and *fabliaux*. It will be closely examined in this thesis via gender analysis and its overall connection with literary misogyny. The light treatment of rape, particularly in the French *pastourelle*, will also be discussed as it is relevant in terms of how audiences of the time received and reacted to it and in its embedded ties with class struggle.

Introducing the *pastourelle*

Two of the primary literary forms that I will be focusing on are the French *pastourelle* and the *fabliaux*, each of which were at their respective peak in terms of production in France during the thirteenth century. In general, the medieval French *pastourelle* (a term which translates to 'shepherd girl' in English) tradition was set in the French countryside, in bucolic fields during the springtime, involving shepherds and shepherdesses in addition to one, usually unnamed, knight. William D. Paden provides a concise, yet detailed definition of the genre:¹⁴

¹⁴ William D. Paden, ed. and trans., *The Medieval Pastourelle, Volume I* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), ix.

1. The mode is pastoral, commonly realized in a country setting and in the description of the heroine as a shepherdess.
2. The cast includes a man and a young woman.
3. The plot comprises a discovery and an attempted seduction.
4. The rhetoric involves both narrative and dialogue.
5. The point of view is that of the man.

Although pastourelles were written in other European languages in later centuries, the original pastourelles date to the thirteenth century in France, written in the Old French. Compared to an earlier form of French literature, the *chanson de geste*, which focused on same-sex relationships, i.e. between two men, the genres maintained at least one key difference. One of the most famous and popular epic poems of the older genre was *The Song of Roland*, composed over time during the eleventh and twelfth century.¹⁵ The *pastourelle* squarely fits into the romance genre and is seen as a development of the earlier, more formulaic *chanson de geste* which relied on real past or legendary events in history with battle scenes and so forth. In this way, it is also true that the latter was essentially devoid of the sexism and patriarchy which the *pastourelle* and *fabliaux* each contained within the associated romance genre. Furthermore, the *chanson de geste* evolved over time as did the *pastourelle*, making a chronologically concrete definition difficult to generate. Geri L. Smith explains on this matter, "With a fixed definition remaining elusive, the constellation of critical issues surrounding the pastourelle becomes infinitely complex and impossible to pin down to universal satisfaction. . . . Over the years, there have been numerous studies, many contradictory, concerned with defining the pastourelle and its variations or subgenres."¹⁶ Nonetheless, it is still possible to provide a narrow enough and acceptable definition which will serve this thesis topic well. Smith writes, "We can glean that the majority

¹⁵ Gerard J. Brault. *The Song of Roland*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978. *UofM Libraries*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 14, 2018).

¹⁶ Geri L. Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition: Poetic Motivations and Generic Transformations* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009), 7-8.

of pastourelles involve an encounter that brings into play differences of gender and social status, with the masculine and the aristocratic privileged both within the story and as the poem's controlling voice and perspective."¹⁷ Other sources provide similar definitions, however, the target audience of the pastourelle remains difficult to neatly pin down. Some were performed for the aristocracy as a play with music, while others were read by both women and men.

The social order

Social status and its relevance in feudal thirteenth century France was exceedingly important in society and in the contemporary literature examined in this thesis. It was constructed according to the feudal hierarchical order that had evolved and changed with the increasing urbanization which began in the twelfth century in Western Europe. Without question, the landscape remained quite rural. Writing in regards to Europe in the twelfth century, John D. Cotts states, "... urbanization served as a way of unifying disparate parts of Europe, as families of town law extended for hundreds of miles. The extent of urbanization ought not to be exaggerated. Europe was still overwhelmingly rural..."¹⁸ Nevertheless, the growth of towns was occurring and it did have an effect on the social order which included an impact on women. Margaret Schaus argues that the results could be seen as both positive and negative. It was generally good for noble women. Schaus posits, "Women of the urban elite certainly benefited from the wealth and power accrued by their family. But, like queens, the wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of the urban elite seldom enjoyed official power."¹⁹ Lower class women in

¹⁷ Smith, G. L., *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition*, 10.

¹⁸ John D. Cotts, *Europe's Long Twelfth Century: Order, Anxiety and Adaptation: 1095-1229* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 94.

¹⁹ Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 300.

urban society also benefitted from increased commercialization and urbanization according to Schaus, however negative circumstances also arose. She writes, "While "town air" could make serfs free, it could also create another form of subjection for women as they ended up in occupations, as servants or prostitutes, resulting in their economic and physical exploitation."²⁰ With the onset of the petite bourgeoisie during this time, the nobility saw an emerging middle class of merchants and traders as a threat to the old order. This tension can be seen in the *pastourelle* and especially the *fabliaux*, as an additional layer in the tension between the sexes. The feudal system would not incur a seismic change until the Bubonic Plague outbreak spread throughout Europe during the mid-fourteenth century. The societal perception of knighthood had been waning following almost two hundred years of mostly failed Crusades beginning in the late eleventh century and culminating in the late thirteenth; and with that, a sharp decline in the number of knights left in Europe. Despite the sad demise of the importance of the knight, they retained a key (albeit less than previously) role in their service to the nobility and their stature was incomparable to that of the peasantry. The system of vassalage based on official contracts was strictly adhered to in thirteenth century France and is clearly evident in the *pastourelle* and *fabliaux*. In the *pastourelle*, male peasant characters fit the stereotype of uneducated, burly, obedient and deferential to authority; namely when encountering a knight. Conversely, shepherdesses in *pastourelles* were described more for their feminine etiquette rather than class characteristics. They were depicted as young, generally pretty, and desirable fodder for the masculine, higher-ranking knights. Though the perception of knighthood was not as estimable as before the Crusades, a point which will be discussed later, they still maintained a rung higher in the feudal pyramid order than the peasantry. Disparity in the social status of the protagonists

²⁰ Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, 300.

shaped the meaning of their interactions, making such constructions pertinent here. It also bears mentioning that in French hagiography, which will be discussed further on, of the thirteenth century, class, age and appearance features a marked role for the female heroines; they were seemingly without exception: beautiful, young, and of noble birth.

Introducing the fabliaux

Another high medieval French literary genre will be analyzed in detail in this thesis: the fabliaux. The fabliaux were ribald tales from the Old French and typically satirized the church and the nobility. Much like the pastourelle, there are approximately 160 extant fabliaux. Also similar to the pastourelle, these works enjoyed their apex in France during the thirteenth century. Edward Dowden maintains, "The fabliaux, as we can study them, belong especially to the north and north-east of France, and they continued to be put forth by their rhymers until about 1340, the close of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century being the period of their greatest popularity."²¹ The similarities between the two genres make the fabliaux a good complement of study for this thesis. The fabliaux, like its counterpart, was overwhelmingly set in the countryside, also predominantly in the French language, however, unlike the pastourelle, it lacked seasonal importance. The springtime, a time of nature's blossoming, while a critical element to the pastourelle, was not a requisite for the fabliaux. Given that gender relations were a focal point of all fabliaux, this literary genre is of significant importance to this thesis.

²¹ "Project Gutenberg," accessed June 28, 2018, <https://www.gutenberg.org/>.

Chapter 3

Le Jeu de Robin et Marion: a pastourelle case study

The pastourelle experienced its heyday in France during the thirteenth century and this genre is uniquely distinct in its stark class divisions, notably along with gender tensions. Of the roughly 160 poems that could fall under the genre of French pastourelle, I will focus primarily on one well-known play, *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, for a number of reasons. First, *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* placed a greater than usual emphasis in the pastourelle tradition on Marion, the main female character. The significance of Marion is that she was one of the rare female characters in pastourelles who speaks and, moreover, she was the first to enter the play, serving as the protagonist for *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*. The author of *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, Adam de La Halle, led an existence of which little is known, but with much conjecture according to the critical edition of the work from which I cite his biographical information. He was most likely born in the middle of the thirteenth century in Arras, a town in northern France, close to the Belgian border. Around 1282 or 1283 Adam wrote *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, shortly before his death, which occurred somewhere between 1285 and 1289. In addition, Adam was thought to have been in the service of a count of Artois and known to have composed a large body of work, including 36 chansons in the lively literary scene in Arras. Furthermore, he was probably a jongleur there, a group that was banished for a time by the aristocracy due to the latter not wanting to be equated with lowly poets. Lastly, the critical edition used for this thesis notes that, "Most scholars accept the (unprovable) theory that *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* was also composed during Adam's stay in Italy, presumably for the entertainment of homesick troops."²² It has been speculated that the play was performed, "On a stage possibly at the Angevin court in

²² Adam de la Halle, *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, ed. and trans. Shira I. Schwam-Baird (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1994), xv.

Naples in 1283. . ."²³ According to a recently published scholarly article, "the Italian Angevins were a dynasty for whom the personal (in the sense of the familial) was intensely political."²⁴ It also notes that there was an explosion of literary production in Naples during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, so it may be that Adam was drawn to Naples and the Angevin court for this reason. Smith suggests something similar when she states, "If, as many believe, Adam composed *Robin et Marion* during his time in Italy, his original audience likely consisted of displaced nobles and knights living the stresses of life in exile and the social tensions of the Angevin court in Naples in the late thirteenth century."²⁵ Assuming the speculations are correct about the whereabouts of the play's production, writing a pastourelle of this nature makes sense. The play is about a shepherdess, Marion, who rebuffs the advances of a knight, as she maintains one true love, a shepherd named Robin. The play also contains several scenes of peasantry interaction, mainly at a picnic, with much ensuing banter among them. The obligatory knight in *Robin et Marion* can be construed by some as chivalrous, especially to knights themselves. Composing a cowardly peasant main male character is also a logical part of the plot, something which a courtly audience, including knights, would appreciate. Not surprisingly, there is no rape in this pastourelle, which would have been taken in bad taste by Adam's Italian audience.

The secular play is well-known in part because it is the earliest known pastourelle with music, and as such, converts the poetic genre into a dramatic performance.²⁶ What really sets this play apart and why it has been so heavily examined and scrutinized is that unlike most

²³ Finn E. Sinclair and Rebecca Dixon, *Poetry, Knowledge and Community in Late Medieval France* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 73.

²⁴ Jane Gilbert, Catherine Keen, and Ella Williams, "The Italian Angevins: Naples and Beyond, 1266–1343." *Italian Studies* 72, no. 2 (2017): 121-27. doi:10.1080/00751634.2017.1306941, 124.

²⁵ Smith, G. L., 108.

²⁶ Sinclair and Dixon, *Poetry, Knowledge and Community in Late Medieval France*, 174.

pastourelles which rely on the poet-narrator to dictate events, "Adam's theatrical version erases the controlling narrative perspective of the *chevalier*, relegating him to the role of one of many characters in the play. When Marion enters this play singing, then, she is singing in her own voice for the first time in the history of the *pastourelle* genre."²⁷ The poet-narrator is absent, thus giving the female character a voice of her own. Indeed, it is Marion who opens the play singing a refrain about her love. Adam's most famous play therefore serves the purpose of allowing for comparatively more gender analysis than other pastourelles, in that the heroine was given a voice of her own, albeit in a work of fiction written by a man. Furthermore, the play provides a point of comparison with its contemporary fabliaux.

Analyzing *Le Jeu De Robin et Marion* in conjunction with other pastourelles

The immoral behavior of the knight in Adam's play is enabled by the frequent absence of witnesses to his less than chivalric behavior. Without a knight's peers to witness rude aggression towards a shepherdess made life all the more dangerous for young women as the former had the freedom to behave indecently. The "hidden" nature of the act as portrayed in the pastourelle is utilized and acceptable for a few reasons. In society and in the literature it is evident that no one wanted to be a witness to rape, a gruesome act and heinous crime. Secondly, in the lawless countryside rape was an expected, if unfortunate part of a woman's potential fate. Next, aristocratic women were too high on the social strata to be raped by any acceptable norms of the time. As Smith states, "The pastourelle is not the only place in medieval literature where rape can be found - rape or the attempted rape of an aristocratic woman is not unheard of, but such behavior casts the perpetrator in a strongly negative light."²⁸ Lastly, the glorification of rape in

²⁷ Sinclair and Dixon, 174.

²⁸ Smith, G. L., 31.

the countryside can be viewed as titillating fantasy for the largely male readership. In another vein, parallels can be made with the fact that prostitution was acceptable outside of the city walls and courtly dalliances were deemed appropriate at a safe distance from court. According to Smith, "It is perhaps relevant that medieval society tolerated prostitution outside city walls, marking such marginalized landscapes as morally other in the real world, a circumstance that would have informed the audience's reception of the pastourelle. In romance, too, the occasional departure from *courtoisie* generally occurs at a distance from court, suggesting the inherent lawlessness of remote places. Bucolic appearances aside, therefore, these places can be downright dangerous."²⁹ It was rarely the wild wolf which posed the danger in these otherwise bucolic settings so much as it was the marauding knight. Smith explains, "While a small number of pastourelles feature the natural danger of a marauding wolf that comes out of the woods to attack the flock, the most prevalent incarnation of danger is the knight penetrating and disrupting this space only to go away again, often if not always sated. In sum, the shepherds tend their flocks in a world somewhere between the court and raw nature, vulnerable from both sides. Danger lurks here, especially for a solitary woman."³⁰ According to Smith, most pastourelles contained violence that was used for entertainment value. Based on Smith's analysis and my own interpretation, it must be the case that violence, especially against women, was a fact of medieval life, especially in rural settings. It is probable that sexual violence against women in the countryside is connected with the notion that women who were out in public put themselves at risk by being on display for sexual purposes. Ruth Mazo Karras writes, "The fear that women who go out in public put themselves on display for sexual purposes could be taken to extreme

²⁹ Smith, G. L., 21.

³⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

which required women to remain in the house. . . . there was always a suspicion that they were doing it for display, as the fable of the singed cat, re-told throughout the Middle Ages, indicates. A cat complains to another that his wife will not stay at home but is always roaming around, and his friend tells him to singe her fur."³¹ The point here is that rural French women in the pastourelles took inherent risks when roaming alone in basically the middle of nowhere. And when one considers that this includes young and pretty maidens, all the more likely for the odds of violence to occur.

In Adam's play the protagonist is a woman, which was noteworthy in that it was atypical for the lyric genre. What sets this play even further apart from others of the genre is that by having a female protagonist meant that there was a female voice. Typically, the pastourelle genre served the audience tales strictly from the male narrator's point of view, centering on the knight's perspective. Thus, the pastourelle platform was at once class based and gender based, as noted earlier. The misogyny rests on such power relations, showing imbalance and inequality. For example, financial imbalances between men and women facilitated bribery in the form of transactional arrangements: material and sexual. In one early thirteenth century pastourelle by Renart le Bestourné, *In May in the sweet new season*, the shepherdess, who initially tells the chevalier-poet that she won't be his sweetheart as she loved another better, is then proposed with a bribe:

To get her love all the quicker
I gave her some of my wealth
 And my alms-purse,
And told her that love of her
Made me suffer morning and night,
 I held her so dear.
She accepted my gift at once,

³¹ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 90.

Then sang with a smile
Her refrain:
"I have loved and I shall love,
O dorelot!
And I love yet,
God! with a pretty, graceful heart."³²

Tellingly, Adam's play opens with Marion singing:

*Robin loves me, Robin has me;
Robin asked for me, and will have me.
Robin bought me a dress
Of good cloth, fine and fair,
A long gown and a little belt,
A leur i va!
Robin loves me, Robin has me,
Robin asked for me and will have me.*³³

Robin and Marion are class equals and she appreciates the fact that Robin spends seemingly hard earned cash on his sweetheart. Such pure peasant love showed not only class equality, but some form of class solidarity among the lovers. The Paden pastourelle snippets cited earlier include class stratification minced with sexual bribery. The knight sometimes used his higher social rank to try and curry sexual favor from the lower ranking member of the peasantry. Nevertheless, as Smith points out, bribery could be used by both genders. For instance, a shepherdess could solicit a bribe in return for her body:

"Cabrote, don't be silly,
Don't be angry,
But become my sweetheart
And kiss me.
I'll give you pleasing pay,
An alms-purse or a hood;
I like much better chasing girls
Than harp or song."
I never heard such a fuss.
I was very courtly;

³² Paden, *The Medieval Pastourelle*, 105, 107.

³³ de la Halle, *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, 5.

Under her trellis in bloom
 On the grass
I played the game for her three times;
 Then I raised her straight.
Then she told me, "Friend, friend,
 This is a pleasing tune."

When I had got satisfaction,
 As much as I pleased,
She rounded up her goats;
 She went back to them with a smile.³⁴

That pastourelle by Hue de Saint Quentin from the early thirteenth century entitled, *At the beginning of the wild season*, depicts the case of a young woman dealing with misogynistic societal conditions to the best of her ability with the intent to reap some material reward for her apparent desirable beauty. This passage illustrates what little choice women had due to the closed door of power and the inability to acquire a higher status because of their gender.

Ultimately, it appeared on the surface at least that many girls and women realized that to gain material possessions which they coveted, they would be forced in an exchange medium to submit their bodies. To the extent which this was a literary myth driven by a male writer's preferred view as sex as transactional is debatable. My view is that with most professions and trades closed to women, this seems to be a comprehensible scenario for women who were in want of fine luxury.

Most French pastourelles were written during the thirteenth century as contemporary tales, serving as a reflection of society. These instances show how there was little recourse for females in high medieval French society. They could submit to the power and desire of men and receive a gift in return or accept a desired gift by giving up their body. There is no clear evidence that male peasants in medieval European society procured such services in exchange for a material reward in the literature or other source material regarding the period. These are forms of

³⁴ Paden, 99, 101.

slander and misogyny insofar as women were certainly more vulnerable and susceptible than men by being put in positions requiring such difficult choices. The term 'slander', explained earlier, translated from the Old French can also mean 'alteration of' and from Late Latin 'cause of offense, snare' and from Middle English 'to cause to lapse morally, bring to disgrace, discredit, defame.'³⁵ In Adam's play, the knight displayed textbook signs of misogyny, just as was the case in other medieval French pastourelles. The debasement of Marion by the knight as well as hostility towards her is explicit misogyny. He shows his contempt for Marion in reference to her as a mere creature; he continually makes entreaties towards her despite her rejections; and in their final encounter he threatens to take her away with him by force.

Despite the occasional acts of resourcefulness on the part of the woman in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, the power ultimately rests with the knight. When such power is blundered away, as is the case in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, it is typically a plot device for comic relief and in jest rather than a depiction of any power held by women. Insofar as the power rests with the knight, the shepherdess, regardless of her astuteness, wit, or moral constitution, is the object of male power. The power of the bribe was alternately wielded between the material and the monetary. Female agency became conjoined with bribe power dynamics, such as in *May in the sweet new season*. Finally, there were also false promises of marriage by deceitful knights.

Consider this scenario from an anonymous source called, *When the cold had departed*:

Then I promised

To marry her,
And then I embraced her
And did everything
I wanted, and she cried out,
"May any woman who refuses
Such sport and such joy

³⁵ Retrieved from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slander>.

Be put to shame by God!"

Then I teased her:
You've been fooled!"³⁶

The false promise of marriage, which will be a subject returned to later in the thesis, was a common occurrence during the high and late Middle Ages in Europe, principally as a means for a man to get a woman to submit to him sexually. Smith provides a reasonable conclusion to such knight-shepherdess interactions in the French pastourelle when she relates, "Although the shepherdess ends up stating her contentment that [the handsomest man in the empire has taken my virginity], the knight has already demonstrated his self-serving, underhanded methods, the result of exploitation only possible because the economic power is tipped so starkly in his favor. And the speaking persona in the poem, for his part, is fully aware of, and pleased to talk about, his social dominance and the material trump card he holds."³⁷ It is evident that young women of the countryside were at the power and mercy of higher class men, specifically knights. They were propositioned through both subtle and explicit means of coercion. As in Adam's play, the knight gravitates from a tactic of gentle pleading to more forceful demands. Sometimes the knight eventually gave up after his advances were rebuffed. In other situations, the knight enjoyed a successful conquest through acquiescence. These scenes, though difficult to say with certainty, imply actual occurrences in rural settings in medieval France. Sexual innuendo and harassment resume after the initial meeting when Robin, Marion and their shepherd friends have a small party in the fields. Marion's friend, Peronnelle, the only other female character in the play, answers a question in a game about her greatest joy from love. When she gives an innocent reply about a male friend giving her just his heart and company in the fields next to her sheep,

³⁶ Paden, 115.

³⁷ Smith, G. L., 31.

two of the young male peasants chime in with 'that's all?' and, 'she's lying', as if to say that such a chaste scenario was hardly possible. Marion is next up and asks for a nice question. Again, she politely requests that men in her midst refrain from rudeness towards her sex. Further instances of lewd behavior appear in the play when Robin's friend asks him how one knows when a creature is born whether it's a female. When Marion supports Robin's refusal to answer it, Marion is dismissed by Robin's friend who wonders aloud why she cares. Marion snaps, "I care because the question is ugly."³⁸ Such depictions of male ribaldry paint a portrait of an andocentric society.

The female voice in the pastourelle

The female voice in the French pastourelle is a subject which Smith explored extensively. I interpret that work in this section. The sheer bravado displayed by the knights in pastourelles depicts a social milieu in which men could show their misogynistic nature without much to lose, while avoiding any shame in a rustic setting sans the possibility of peer rebuke. As in Adam's play, despite the cleverness and wit in standing up to the knight and avoiding violence because of this elusiveness, Marion is the object of slander and misogyny. Smith's account of other pastourelle passages further proves this point. She argues that silencing the lady in courtly literature and the pastourelle serves a purpose, which is to allow the masculine voice to control the narrative. Without a female voice the imbalance of power among men and women in pastourelles becomes more acute and the impact on the readership would not have been insignificant. It is much easier through omission to accept the narrative with less empathy towards female characters when they are rendered voiceless. Marion's fictive voice represents an idea that gives her character strength in the play. This allows her character to survive the play

³⁸ de la Halle, 57.

unscathed, while in other pastourelles where the feminine voice is absent, it is much easier and more likely for the poet-author to allow the maiden to be raped. Marion has a voice and strength of character in the literary realm, necessary assets which were needed to survive in her world controlled by men.

The presence of a female voice in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* is both useful and important to an understanding of gender dynamics since it allows the women in the play to resist misogyny, illustrating another aspect of how Adam's play marked a departure from the typical pastourelle narrative. Jane E. Burns asserts, "Offering lessons of difference in response to the texts' predominant logic of the same, women's voices here show how the essential lack of Old French farce and fabliau is not the woman's lack of a phallus, but man's lack of knowledge about women. As if answering to the male protagonists whose remarks about female sexuality often sound a tone of negative discovery as if to say in anger or astonishment, "why, women aren't men!" we can hear the voices of knowing women who explain sexual difference affirmatively, telling in varied ways simply "why women aren't men."³⁹ The male peasants in Adam's play appear to show a lack of understanding of the female sex and resort to scurrilous behavior. This could well be due to authorial class bias by playing on the medieval stereotypes of peasants as coarse creatures. Nonetheless, time and again the female characters are forced to deal with such coarse behavior even among their closest acquaintances. In the following scene, Robin's cousin has touched his sweetheart inappropriately, eliciting a sharp response from Marion: "Hey! Gautier, what are you thinking about?"⁴⁰ He brashly explains that he finds his cousin's sweetheart good-looking and says to another friend what a figure she has. These words echo what many of

³⁹ Jane E. Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 49.

⁴⁰ de la Halle, 77.

the knights say to shepherdesses. Robin interjects belatedly as usual with a request that his cousin remove his hand. Were it not for others being present, one can only speculate what violence may have ensued between Gautier and Marion. In sum, different groups make advances on women in the pastourelle. Ultimately, the level of misogyny is tempered among the peasantry due to class solidarity. After all, whenever possible, peasants, usually in a horde, come to the aid of their damsel in distress, cowardly Robin aside in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, of course. Thus, class struggle, which runs throughout history in most societies, was very clear in pre-Plague thirteenth century France where feudalism was deeply entrenched. The knight was never going to marry a shepherdess in reality and the pastourelles reflected this. False promises of marriage by knights were quite common in that period in France and elsewhere and some women were indeed fooled. Just as in the pastourelle, some women rejected knightly entreaties, including those that tried to woo her into becoming his sweetheart, which meant the expectation of marriage in that era. The interactions and sexual innuendo between the knight and the shepherdess were merely games being played and had such encounters happened in reality, the scene would have played out much the same as in the literature. Class struggle in the pastourelle simultaneously overlapped with misogyny. Class solidarity mitigated misogyny, though did not eliminate it, as evidenced in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*.

Alternative voices

Alternative voices, or resistance to the patriarchy, could occasionally be found in the literary profession. One of the most notable of the era was Frenchwoman Christine de Pizan. Christine de Pizan's early fifteenth century pastourelle, *Dit de las pastoure*, uses a thirteenth century setting, intently done by authorial design to place it in the heyday of the French pastourelle tradition. *Dit de las pastoure* sought to offer a radical transformation of the French

pastourelle by overturning the usual parameters of the poem by not only allocating the first-person voice to the shepherdess, Marote, but also by using herself as the feminine-poet author, who introduces the play in the prologue. This play depicts lost love and feminine desire from a distinctly feminine narrative, utilizing feminine voices and their related experiences within the courtly tradition of which de Pizan was herself a part of a century later. There is also no rape scene or threat of it involving a knight and shepherdess. Furthermore, as Smith states, "Christine's amplified pastourelle also includes a proliferation of couples beyond the requisite knight and shepherdess, starting with the prologue's sentimental couple of the narrator and her lost lover, and the professional couple of poet and patron."⁴¹ de Pizan was by her own admission an anomaly to the literary profession as a woman in her day, yet she exposed the blatant misogyny in the literature by upending it with her own rendition of the French pastourelle. de Pizan sought to reverse the obligatory masculine controlled narrative to show how a pastourelle could provide storylines which did not adhere to the usual misogynistic stereotypes so pervasive in the genre. Lost love and feelings and emotions from the female protagonist's perspective are presented in *Dit de las pastoure*.

Chapter 4

Class, status, gender, and violence in literature and society

Rape in the pastourelle

One of the significant dangers facing women in the predominantly rural, feudal society was the threat of rape. Life in the medieval countryside meant that gender relations could more easily turn violent than in the few urban centers which existed. Rape in the pastourelle

⁴¹ Smith, G. L., 200.

represented an important dimension in terms of gender relations and how it was interpreted in society. One of the ways in which rape was treated in the pastourelle was how the girl dealt with it. On that subject, Smith posits, "Poems that defuse or justify rape and coercion through the shepherdess's expression of contentment after the fact promote the notion that "le vout bonement" [she really wanted it], anesthetizing one to violence just displayed."⁴² Assuming that a young girl wanted to be raped or enjoyed rape is a form of slander when one considers that the female is predominantly the voiceless Other in the pastourelle tradition. It is slanderous considering such malicious and false states were reported in these instances. In the following late twelfth century tale, *The other day I had got up*, by an anonymous source, the shepherdess repeatedly rebuffs the knights advances and informs him that he will be beaten by the other shepherds if he continues. As the pastourelle draws to a close, these scenes unfold:

Then I drew her near me;
She gave out a cry
But no one heard it.
She was not very hostile,
Rather she gave me a compliment:
"Sir, I was sad
When you came here.
Now my heart is glad;
Your game has cured me.

"Perrin has deceived me,
For never in his life
Has he served me so well;
Therefore I condemn him
To a month of cuckoldry!"

And Perrin cried aloud,
"I've served you too well!
You've paid me back badly--
You've put me to shame before my eyes.
I'll never have a sweetheart!"

"Quiet, boy, God curse you!"

⁴² Smith, G. L., 36-7.

If I've offered company
To this knight,
How have I shamed you?
He's not taking me away!"⁴³

The whole chain of events is stunningly paradoxical like so much about the Middle Ages, especially gender relations in print and reality.

Akin to post-colonial feminism which critiques Western feminists for ignoring the plight of non-Western women, Smith and de Pizan attempt to breathe life into such forgotten voices. Smith points out how some critics of the pastourelle dismiss rape scenes as unproblematic when there is comic effect involved or the young girl is charming. As Smith observes, "The problem is that the charm of the young girl is often experienced by force."⁴⁴ The following two pastourelles exemplify this assertion. In one anonymous pastourelle, Version A, called, *In May, when both leaf and fruit*, the chevalier poet adds sharp interjections in between the storyline. The last two stanzas unfold thusly:

"Lady, please embrace me
So the frolic may begin."
"Sir," said she, "I shall not,
For iniquity is wicked."
But I embraced her, and she me;
Affection became apparent.
Never have I seen so fair,
O blessed light, O trinity!

Quickly on her grey fur cloak
I made her deceptive promises,
And I put her on the grass,
Gave her a thousand kisses;
I did to her my folly
In the middle of her stronghold,
Taught her how to enjoy love--

⁴³ Paden, 63.

⁴⁴ Smith., G. L., 37.

*Blessed was our joy!*⁴⁵

The ambiguity of rape is present with a dash of bribery at the end. In the next anonymous pastourelle called, *I entered the forest the other day*, a knight approaches a lone shepherdess.

Below are the final three stanzas:

Beside her, I sat under the orchard,
And said, "Shepherdess, listen to me,
 And don't be surprised;
If you want to do something for me,
 I'll make you my sweetheart."

"Noble knight, let me be,
I don't like [you] to make fun of me;
 Dark night is coming on.
Leave me to watch my lambs;
 I don't care about your game."

When I heard her speak that way,
I sat beside her without delay;
 I grasped her by the sides,
And kissed her and embraced her
 Until she became my sweetheart.⁴⁶

Smith maintains, "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."⁴⁷ In her discussion of one of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, "Reeve's Tale", which was based on the French fabliau, "Le Meunier et les Deux Clercs", Karras argues a similar point when referring to a peasant wife and daughter being raped by two clerics respectively: "The women's consent is irrelevant; they end up enjoying the encounter, and Chaucer does not pay any attention to whether they welcomed it in the first place. This is

⁴⁵ Paden, 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁷ Smith., G. L., 37.

obviously not a reflection of the actual attitudes of non-elite women but rather an indication of how women's consent gets lost because they are always perceived as passive."⁴⁸ Nor does the anonymous French author pay any attention to the women's consent. In the pastourelle, it is nearly always the knight who speaks, controlling what the shepherdess says and how her attitudes will be conveyed. Viewed from another angle, rape in the pastourelle can be construed as little more than male fantasy and a plot device to pique reader interest. Smith states, "In short, the poem can only be an insight into a man's fantasy and his expectations of audience reception. At the very least, rape is treated casually in the pastourelle, as if not only acceptable, but unsurprising in an encounter between a man and woman so distant from each other with respect to power."⁴⁹ Knights too used their higher power status to try and coerce a shepherdess into giving him what he wants, even mocking her class position. Moreover, fear and the threat of rape were also not unusual plot elements in the pastourelle. These two stanzas from the anonymous pastourelle, *When I rode out the other day*, illustrate this:

"Pretty little girl,
You know how to express your thought well.
But drop this talk,
For you have found [in me] a companion
Who will honor and serve you
Much more than Robezon.
You won't find elsewhere, as long as you live,
[A man] who would reward you as quickly
As I will, if you oblige me,
Since I'll get you a pardon for it."

"Sir, I haven't the slightest intention
Ever to give myself to you.
You may indeed ask for such a gift,
But I would surely tell you no.
May it never please God that I commit such a wrong,

⁴⁸ Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 99.

⁴⁹ Smith., G. L., 37.

And if I do, may He not give me pardon
Because you say you picked me out.
Indeed, though I have not been raped,
You have attacked me today so nastily
[That I pray] God to come spurring in haste."⁵⁰

It can be deduced that rape, while not being socially permissible, was merely a regrettable possible outcome in medieval life. Despite the relatively low statistical instances of rape in the pastourelle, they are still meaningfully significant and offer a snapshot into the somewhat seldom but real possibility facing rural young French women in the thirteenth century. Contemporary hagiography offers a literary parallel to the pastourelle and demonstrates a strong relationship between fictional accounts and real lives of the authors. Contextually speaking, medieval literature rooted itself in its immediate social framework. For instance, in medieval hagiography in Europe, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell point out, "Saints' vitae nearly always include some reference to the familial and societal contexts in which people found themselves at the point of their conversion to unusual holiness ... The written record of the call to holiness, whether sudden or protracted, even when related by a clerical hagiographer well aware of the didactic conventions of his profession, is a rich source for exploring the social history of the medieval and early modern family."⁵¹ In that regard, throughout Europe the conditions in the French countryside as depicted in the pastourelle bore a strong resemblance to the one lived in the high to late Middle Ages. To this end, Kathryn Gravdal reports, "In recent works on sex crimes in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy, Guido Ruggiero has found that rape was there treated as an extension of the customary victimization of women, that is, as a fact of life that was accepted

⁵⁰ Paden, 97.

⁵¹ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints & Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17.

and not considered particularly troubling in fourteenth-century Venice."⁵² Hence, the casual nature of acceptance of countryside rape in the French pastourelle.

Differences in rank in Adam's play are crucial as explained earlier regarding the pastourelle tradition. Such differences signify class struggle and the audience is reminded of the superiority in class rank by his speech and actions towards Marion and Robin. The knight is clearly depicted as one belonging to a higher social class than the shepherds and his ostentatiousness is on full display. In the plot, there includes a knight, presumably of the upper class, encountering a young shepherdess, Marion, in the fields. Thus, true to form, superiority of rank is a recurring theme throughout the knight's appearance in the play, not just in social standing, but also intellectual. The condescending tone is quickly apparent when the knight tells Marion: "Would you think yourself worse off with me, you who reject so decidedly my entreaty? I am a knight and you, a shepherdess."⁵³ Despite Marion's initial and repeated rejections of the knight's verbal harassment, he wields his perceived intellectual superiority, class status, and power against her, daring her to reject him. After the first morning encounter, Marion and the knight meet again in the fields by happenstance. After telling the knight she has nothing to say to him, he self-deprecatingly calls himself a wretched fool to lower his wit to her level.⁵⁴ Following the knight's beating of Marion's sweetheart Robin, the knight proclaims that he wants to carry Marion off on his horse, to which she replies, "Indeed, then you will be doing me violence. Robin, why don't you rescue me?"⁵⁵ Moments after the cowardly Robin does nothing but hide

⁵² Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 123.

⁵³ de la Halle, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

rather than rescue Marion, she implores the knight, "Fair sir, withdraw from me; it will be wiser", to which he responds, "Young lady, I shall do no such thing; rather I will take you away with me, and I know what you shall have. Don't be so haughty towards me!"⁵⁶ When the knight finally accepts the fact that he cannot please her with anything, he insults her backhandedly by calling himself a simpleton, having wasted his time with this "creature." The italicized word choice must not go unheeded. The image of the medieval peasant as creature characterized as something subhuman or animal-like was common in the period. The medieval peasant was held in contempt and subjugation by those among the higher classes. Paul Freedman explains, "The rustic or *vilain* was a literary type for the base, the ridiculous. He served as a model of how *not* to act, epitomizing qualities opposed to the virtuous chivalry of the knight."⁵⁷ Angela N. H. Creager and William Chester Jordan go into great detail about the bestial nature of medieval peasantry. Subordination, lowliness, and so forth were standard notions in medieval society among the higher classes with regards to the peasantry. They write, "Representing peasants as animals could thus denote a general lowliness, or evoke images of dangerous, wild rage, or finally symbolize a utility achieved with the aid of coercion."⁵⁸ The knight infers that Marion is less than human and therefore not worth his time in the least. She is a pretty creature, in his eyes, who he felt was meant for his pleasure and only chivalric code kept him from violating her as he otherwise would in his own mind felt justified in doing. Marion's victory lies in the fact that the knight, who had total control over how to handle the situation, made a belittling judgment upon her character that she was simply unworthy of his overtures and that he was foolish to even bother in the first

⁵⁶ de la Halle., 37.

⁵⁷ Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 133.

⁵⁸ Angela N. H. Creager and William C. Jordan, *The Animal-Human Boundary: Historical Perspectives* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 34.

place. Michel Zink hypothesizes that the reason why a shepherdess is chosen in the pastourelle as the object of male desire is because "she is the human creature closest to nature and to beasts, to creatures without a soul, the mythic lascivious "femme sauvage" who can thus be approached as the object of [male] carnal desire in its purest state"⁵⁹, hence the reference to the shepherdess as a creature. On rustic women, Freedman adds, "The females (especially when young) were comely enough to be the objects of rather predatory seduction."⁶⁰ The fact that the setting is the bucolic French countryside in the springtime provides a ripe, pure setting, paving the way for the knight to act with impunity should he wish to. On the other hand, the scene also suggests the latent sexuality of the situation and interaction, a potential plot embellishment on the part of the author. Smith adds, "Ultimately, just as the pastourelle world is intertextually coded as dangerous and knights as threatening, the feminine figure's potential promiscuity is an element of this generic landscape, and undoubtedly the audience's expectations as well. The bottom line is that the controlling poet manipulates the shepherdess's words and actions, painting her as ripe for the pursuit, even implicating her in her own victimization when he reveals, on his terms, "de quel maniere ele fu" (*Chansons* 161: 60) [what she was like] in the first place."⁶¹

Class structure, gender status, and rape

The preceding episode described above from Adam's play is reminiscent of the rigidly ordered structure of class and gender in this period. The knight maintains an intellectual and moral balance, showing readers that there was a fine line between chivalric behavior and violent rapist. Connected to this idea, Smith muses, "It is perhaps ironic that the knight's own runaway

⁵⁹ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 166-7.

⁶⁰ Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 163.

⁶¹ Smith., G. L., 59.

sexual desire and brutish behavior, boastfully depicted in the pastourelle, are characteristics he would typically attribute to shepherds as evidence of their lower standing."⁶² Meanwhile, Marion's behavior illustrates how a shepherdess could navigate the situation as best she could to avoid sexual assault, though ultimately she would decide her own fate. It also shows how alone and seemingly vulnerable young women could be in the countryside. Where was Robin? He was nowhere to be seen when she most needed it, implying that young women were frequently operating under the threat of assault in rural thirteenth century France.

These medieval tales represent expressions of anxiety of the existing social strata beginning to crack. The fact that there was an overt disparity in class in the literature served to disguise the real breakdown in the urban social order. The readership of these tales was considered to consist of largely the urban literate middle and upper classes. The growth of towns which had started to become more and more established by the thirteenth century led to merchants and traders gaining not just wealth but increased status, which was seen as a threat to the landed gentry. The blurring of class lines was abhorrent to the nobility who had no wish to share or cede control to an upwardly mobile merchant or aspiring knight. The fabliaux and pastourelle typecast the characters along strict, disparate class lines.

Coming back to the theme of gender and violence, the knight in Adam's play does not rape the shepherdess. The fact that the knight does not rape Marion shows that he escapes the situation with his "aristocratic dignity intact"⁶³, as Shira Schwam-Baird puts it. Adam may well have considered his audience by withholding a shocking rape scene, which surely would have upset and offended many, as rape was reputed to be unbecoming of proper aristocratic behavior.

⁶² Smith, G. L., 51.

⁶³ de la Halle, xx.

Rape was not acceptable courtly behavior but it was an unfortunate fact which persisted in the wild and unruly rural parts of France. Hence the reason why rape occurred in approximately twenty-percent of the *pastourelles*, depending on any given researcher's tally. Medieval people appeared to have conflicted attitudes about rape, with some specifics dealt with later in the thesis.

Misogynistic violence in the literary tradition of thirteenth century France could be portrayed in graphic detail and the *pastourelle* stories provide numerous instances of coercion and violence as this thesis has already shown. Power, gender relations/conflict, class conflict, and (unequal) status led to misogyny which was carried out in the form of sexual violence. Hence the reason why a fair number of stories from the period contained instances of rape. Smith posits, "When violence does erupt in the *pastourelle*, sexual aggression is its most common manifestation, of which rape is the most extreme."⁶⁴ Smith further describes how rape can combine violence, fear, and inflamed desire, with an explicit focus on the woman's body. *Pastourelles* that depicted the shepherdess as enjoying rape are, unlike previously mentioned generated forms of behavior, a reflection of medieval social mores.

Paden explains rape in the French *pastourelle* as akin to erotic fantasy, while also pointing to the fictionality of the characters and events.⁶⁵ The parallels between the genre and French society are too striking to be readily dismissed. Furthermore, Paden expresses a curious fear when he argues, "... that if we study the sexual violence in the genre we will have to stop reading it, and "in doing so we would risk losing a rich genre that contains poems of violence but

⁶⁴ Smith., G. L., 31.

⁶⁵ de la Halle, xx.

even more poems of delightful *jouissance*."⁶⁶ Even if Paden's worry that if the pastourelle interpretations turn out to be a "celebration of rape"⁶⁷ as he called it, there are still troubling signs of misogyny emanating from the minds of the pastourelle poet-writers and its male audience. Similarly, Karras states bluntly, "The pastourelles, twelfth-century French poems that celebrate the seduction of rape of a shepherdess by an aristocrat, assume that she would be sexually involved with a man of her own class as well - in a number of them she calls upon her lover to rescue her."⁶⁸ Describing rape scenes in the French pastourelle, "Paden argues that in many songs "the woman appears to be happy" and concludes that the existence of such happy poems "precludes a view of the whole genre as a 'celebration of rape.'⁶⁹ Thus, Gravidal and Paden seem to agree that rape was a game of sorts, with the former even naming a chapter of her related book "The Game of Rape." One final point on this topic is the question of why there is such a high depiction of rape in the pastourelles of northern France. By lowering his own estimation of rape in the pastourelle from 18 percent to 13 percent by including all languages, Paden pushed Gravidal to counter, "To do so (lowering the percentage) is to erase a key question: why are the texts of northern France more devoted to the representation of rape than those of any other country or language?"⁷⁰ The answer may lie with Zink's belief in "how the pastourelle became the literary expression of sexual desire in the north."⁷¹ Incidentally, Karras puts the figure of pastourelle rape at just under 24% when she writes, "The pastourelle, a genre of medieval French

⁶⁶ Gravidal, 109.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁸ Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 99.

⁶⁹ Gravidal., 113.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁷¹ de La Halle, xx.

literature, eroticizes the idea of rape across class lines. In this type of poem, a knight meets a shepherdess and tries to seduce her. In some, she consents; in others, he attempts to rape her but a shepherd defends her; and in thirty-eight of the one hundred and sixty extant pastourelles, he rapes her."⁷² Gravdal comes up with the exact same number - 38 rapes out of 160 texts.⁷³

Pastourelle rape scenes frequently involved comic effect to turn attention away from the societal taboo to present it in a more acceptable way. There was no gratuitous violence in the pastourelles, so comedy, rather than aiming to depict violent acts against women, could well have been the author's aim. On this subject, Gravdal cites Norman Holland's work, *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, in which he argues, ". . . how a male audience enjoys watching forbidden scenes if the text manages the taboo in an acceptable way. Through highly formalized, esthetic devices such as meter or music, through the use of character and narrative as intellectual defenses, and through the formulation of moral and political problems, the pastourelle authors allow the audience to overcome their own inner censors or scruples and to contemplate rape with pleasure."⁷⁴ French writers understood their audience and knew what was palatable. They understood the permissible limits of misogyny and pushed it to its apex without offending people.

Societal violence and rape

France in the early thirteenth century was composed of disparate parts. Moreover, it was an area of tremendous violence and warring upheaval which was also depicted in the pastourelle. The Albigensian Crusade (1209 - 1229) was one such violent event in France. Called by Pope

⁷² Karras, 126.

⁷³ Gravdal, 105.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

Innocent III, the goal of this crusade was to eliminate the renegade Cathars in southern France. Innocent III was arguably the most important and influential pope of the medieval period, calling for not only a major crusade, but also the all-important fourth Lateran Council. Among the significant features of the Albigensian Crusade was the fact that it was the first time a crusade was directed against Christians and the armies came from northern France to put down the "heretics" in the south, marking it as an internecine conflict. William Chester Jordan states, "The war was to drag on for twenty years and its fortunes would profoundly affect the development of the French monarchy, for northern Frenchmen by and large made up the armies that fought in the crusade."⁷⁵ Famed pastourelle author Jean Bodel from Arras, writing in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, describes violence in the final two stanzas of a French pastourelle entitled,

Around the sweet new season:

"The shepherdess had a bright face
And rosy color.
I said to her, "Pretty one, your lover
I am if you please."
"Sir, I have promised my heart
And given my love
To Perrin, whom I like a lot;
I am to be married,
But we are laid under an interdict
In this country.
Dorenlot aé!
The French have been here
And laid it waste.
"Sir, are you one of the enemies
Who have crossed the water,
Who on the other side of the Lys
Are assembling?
Deceivers and breakers of oaths
And perjured people,
dorenlot aé!
They will all be disinherited

⁷⁵ William Chester Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2001), 204.

In proven shame!"⁷⁶

That pastourelle serves as a rare reference to the violence of the outside world affecting the lives of the rural folk.

Rape was treated differently in the Middle Ages in European courts. In her research, Shulamith Shahar finds, "In England and France it was a criminal act and by law a rapist might be blinded, castrated or even put to death."⁷⁷ Such punishments were not always carried out so harshly. Shahar continues on the subject stating, "In England and France, despite the laws of the land and the rulings of the jurists, which imposed very severe penalties for rape where members of the peasant class were concerned, the actual punishment was usually a monetary fine. Marriage sometimes followed rape, and the court encouraged these unions by pardoning the rapist if he married the victim."⁷⁸ Rape laws appeared to have been largely theoretical in France and applied on a case by case basis with class being a relevant factor. Some deductions become clear- a woman's case against her accuser required a large burden of proof; the marriage option reduces the seriousness of the jurists in prosecuting the crime; and most importantly, that the female victim probably enjoyed it. Shahar recounts a case that "In southern France in the thirteenth century a woman testified before the court of Inquisition that she had been raped by one of the guests at the castle while her husband was visiting the stables. She said she had not told him about it, because she feared that he would accuse her, as men were wont to do, of enjoying the act. The woman was voicing her fear of what her husband might think of her, not merely as his own anticipated reaction, but as the common one, which suggests that the idea

⁷⁶ Paden, 69, 71.

⁷⁷ Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1983), 16.

⁷⁸ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 16.

would not have seemed novel to judges."⁷⁹ That case ties in with slander and misogyny in that the woman immediately feared that her reputation would be sullied in the eyes of her husband due to her knowledge that men in thirteenth century France would automatically suspect their wives of being concupiscent and unrestrained the moment an opportunity arose. As Shahar stated, it would not only have been the husband's likely reaction, but common to all. The woman feared that her own husband would slander her rather than support her. Furthermore, the medieval notion held that a woman could only conceive if she secreted a certain seed, which would only occur through enjoyment of the act. Thus, Shahar writes, "In England in the thirteenth century, judges would dismiss a charge of rape brought by a woman if she conceived as a result. . . . If men in the Middle Ages were quite clear in their minds about the pleasure felt by a rape victim, they laid down a definite yardstick which, at least by law, narrowed the assumption of pleasure to a particular case."⁸⁰

The previously mentioned case in southern France concerned Church law and it is necessary to try and distinguish between how rape was treated in the two dominions. In her extensive research into rape and the law in medieval France, Gravdal found major disparities in the treatment of rape between secular and Church law. She states, "Throughout the Middle Ages, northern France continued the legal tradition of imperial Rome: rape, referred to as *fame esforcier*, by which was understood forcible coitus, was punishable by death."⁸¹ Gravdal makes the point clear: "Canon law was well known to be more lenient than civil law with regard to rape."⁸² Compare the possibility of death via civil law to canon law, in which though the

⁷⁹ Shahar, 16-7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁸¹ Gravdal, 123.

⁸² Ibid., 127.

punishment was excommunication, the fine was equated to no more than the fine for insulting or slapping someone.⁸³ The experts researched and presented conflicting images of how rape was treated in the courts, with variances from case to case, depending on circumstances, and especially differences between the secular and clerical courts. It appears to be that the Church was simply more sympathetic to the male perpetrators than the civil courts. These immoral crimes were punished, but punished lightly to preserve the dignity of the Church or a particular Order. Secular courts passed down typically harsher crimes as a means of keeping the peace. Gravdal notes that the difference in secular versus ecclesiastical court treatment was deliberate - citing the 'Father of Canon Law' Gratian who said, "... that if the abductor and his victim took refuge in a church, the perpetrator must be granted immunity from capital punishment."⁸⁴ This point leads to who possessed jurisdiction. Since there were actually more than two legal systems in the later Middle Ages,⁸⁵ with ecclesiastical on one end and civil or criminal dealing with royal, feudal, regional, and municipal courts on the other end, it was not always clear where a rape case ended up, except that cases were treated more leniently under Church law. The anecdote about being in church as a shelter provides a small glimpse into the rationale of medieval thought on rape. It also seems that one could not be punished by more than one court, judging by the cases described in the sources. In addition, I conclude that the Church sought to protect its own and when the perpetrators were under the employ of the Church they tried their own cases. This may explain why many of the accused came from the clerical class; they knew that they could get off lightly. Gravdal discusses an 85-year period in fourteenth century France in which records of

⁸³ Gravdal, 127.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 122.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

twelve rape and attempted rape cases were reported. She explains, "The figure is low, partly because in the Middle Ages, as at present, many rapes went unreported and also because only virgins or high-status rape victims actually had their day in court."⁸⁶ The records of the case provide a telling portrait and meaningful insight into this subject. Gravdal states, "In ten of the twelve trials the accused rapists were churchmen. Frequently the accused appear to be young clerics: their age is not given but their fathers step forward to pay their fines for them. The presence of the fathers and their willingness to pay for their sons' crime also suggest that these collective rapes may have been a sexual rite of passage, fairly well accepted in the community. Since the medieval Church was more clement than the state in its dealings with rapists, it is not surprising to discover the leniency with which the Church courts treated their own clergymen in rape cases."⁸⁷ In the fabliaux, the sexual transgressors were typically clergymen, which will be discussed later in the thesis. It can be reasoned that the Church was downplaying the seriousness of the crime while simultaneously distancing itself from the problem by exclusion. Even though Church law was notoriously lax and forgiving about sex crimes committed by the clergy, it is questionable as to the level of enforcement of state law for such crimes. As Gravdal notes, "One must ask whether legal texts have a privileged status as factual, that is, whether or not they represent the true practices and attitudes of society."⁸⁸ It appears the laws on the books were sharper than the justice meted out. The evidence leans towards the conclusion that the sexual assault of a young woman was merely considered a transgression that was bound to occur from time to time in medieval Europe. It was treated lightly by society with small fines doled out to

⁸⁶ Gravdal, 125.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Gravdal, 123.

the perpetrator, similarly to how such acts were treated in literature, especially the pastourelle, in which it truly came across as a game played about between a man and a woman. Even in those cases where rape was able to be proven, it was rare that a man convicted of rape was subject to punishment by death. As a result, the punishment did not fit the crime, adding further proof of the blatant misogyny of the era. Curiously, Gravdal references that "Philippe de Beaumanoir, a major thirteenth-century expert on customary law in northern France, states in the *Costumes de Beauvaisis* that the punishment for rape is the same as reserved for the most serious crimes, such as murder and treason, namely, to be dragged through the streets and hanged."⁸⁹ Despite this reliance, punishment by death was much more of a theoretical notion. Moreover, the double standards at play were obvious as related above, and not just in the clerical courts. In examples of two cases tried in the French civil courts, complicit women as abettors for male rapists were burned at the stake. In one case there was no mention of the rapist soldier in the court documents.⁹⁰ Gravdal compares, "But in a remarkably similar case tried in the Paris court of Châtelet in 1389, the wrath of the court focused entirely on the female accomplice while the rapist was ignored. Katherine du Roquier was sentenced to death for procurement of her eighteen-year-old sister-in-law. In this instance, the rapist was one Jean Braque, "chevalier, maître des eaux et forêts en Normandie, maître d'hôtel et chambellan du roi, conseiller et gouverneur des finances de Valentine, . . . seigneur de Saint-Maurice sur l'Averon." Braque was not even arrested; his career continued to ascend after Katherine was burned alive."⁹¹ That was a classic case of class, status, and gender winning on leverage in a misogynistic environment. Even though there is enough evidence to show that the ecclesiastical courts tended to be more lenient

⁸⁹ Gravdal, 123.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 128.

⁹¹ Ibid.

than its civil counterparts, misogyny in medieval law permeated all the courts when it came to rape cases. In the aforementioned early thirteenth century pastourelle, *When I rode out the other day*, the original language of the tale was Occitan. When the shepherdess tells the knight '...even though I have not been raped' the technical term in Occitan used is *forçada*, meaning 'to force' in English and is similar to the Vulgar Latin term *fortiāre*. Paden translates *forçada* as 'raped.' The etymology of the term 'rape' saw lexical carryover from codes to vernacular. In sum, the terms came to mean some variation of 'to force'.

Pastourelle violence

Returning to Adam's play, Marion does not succumb to either the knight's chivalric seduction attempts or his veiled and later not-so veiled threats of violence. The play illustrates the potential hazards faced by young women alone in the countryside. That is part of what the pastourelle tradition makes readily apparent for the reader to come to understand. The encounters between the knight and Marion also show a battle of wits between the genders. Time and again, Marion skillfully maneuvers herself out of difficulties she faces in the verbal exchanges with the knight. There are three possible outcomes for Marion and other female characters in pastourelles: shepherdess's refusal of the knight, a consensual sexual encounter, or rape. While the threat of violence is apparent here, unlike most pastourelles, no rape or successful seduction occurs. Still, the threat of violence in the countryside was very real, especially for a woman in that time and place. The raw nature of the unrefined lower class peasant contrasts with the sword-brandishing knight. In Adam's play, the knight wields the physical power over the cowardly Robin, but this was not always the case in every pastourelle as sometimes it was the knight who got taken to the woodshed. In this scene in one pastourelle, *When I hear the skylark singing*, the chevalier-poet

describes such an instance of shepherd wrath after boasting to the shepherdess that he would
vanquish more than ten peasants:

"Fair sir, God see me,
You are speaking in vain.
You'll never get joy from my love,
For I've made a gift of it to another.
If Simon found you here
Who flaunts my love,
I couldn't help you
Not to get killed
With a club on this path
Or torn apart by mastiffs."

...

Behold the shepherd full of wrath
Who was jealous of his love;
He came toward me, and looked at me
Like a man full of great madness.
Then he told me in anger,
"Go your way, sir;
May the Lord God curse you
If you beg her for love any more,
For so help me our Lord,
You may stay a long time!"

...

The peasant with great strength
Bent his crossbow and shot,
With a bolt he nearly killed me--
And I mounted and fled.
But I can assure you
That I never had so great fear.

She began to tell me,
"Come back, fair sir,
I grant you my love!"--
But for all the gold in the empire
I would not have returned to them!⁹²

"Violence was a staple in the pastourelle and it heightened the dramatic effect. The dangers of
rurality and the aggressiveness of the peasantry are important themes. Smith notes, "Shepherds
carry flutes and pipes, but in this precarious place they carry instruments of self-defense as well,

⁹² Paden, 101, 103.

often wielding sticks, stones, and clubs."⁹³ Adam's play also mentions how the shepherds always carried clubs everywhere they went for protection and indeed, the knight uses violence against the male protagonist shepherd, Robin. Upon learning of the knight's advances towards Marion, Robin's cousins go and get their weapons. One, Gautier, in reference to the knight, exclaims, "If he comes, he will pay for it!"⁹⁴ The weapons described are serious, with Gautier pronouncing, "And we'll go that way by the path towards the Pierre; and I'll bring my pitchfork", with another cousin proclaiming, "And I, my big hawthorn cudgel, that's at my cousin Bourguet's house."⁹⁵ This pastourelle and others point to a period of lawlessness and violence in the countryside where there would often be no witnesses. The best defense was to protect themselves and their kin. The array of cousins in the play depict strong kinship ties with familial fraternity extending widely. The peasant as a "beastly" creature has an unmistakable air in the pastourelle writings of the poet authors. In protecting a shepherdess from harm at the hands of a knight, for example in the scene with Perrins, shepherds dealt with it through sheer force. It could be seen as their form of chivalry in the literary world where their class came across as ungraceful brutes.

Referencing class and gender in the pastourelle, Gravidal maintains, "The pastourelle genre mediates class conflict by displacing it onto a sexual axis where its violence can be directed at the figure of the woman."⁹⁶ Through the use of power, the male gender is able to project that concept onto the female gender to achieve his violent ends. To conclude this section, a brief mention of a passage from the twelfth century author of gender, social class, and courtly love, Andreas Capellanus, also known as André the Chaplain, is apt:

⁹³ Smith, G. L., 25.

⁹⁴ de La Halle, 25.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁶ Gravidal, 105-6.

And if you should, by some chance, fall in love with some of their women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take 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.⁹⁷

The passage was expanded in the thirteenth century by another author, Drouart La Vache, and the reaffirmation of what a man of high status should do to a peasant woman is no less blunt:

And if it should happen that a desire seizes you to love a peasant woman, and if you can go all the way, you should not control yourself. On the contrary, you should take your pleasure on the spot, without seeking further permission, and force yourself on her to the best of your ability. . . . For this is the custom of peasant women, who never want to grant their love. Despite a man's skill in eloquent pleading with her, the more elegantly he pleads, the more churlish he will find her. Therefore he will have to use a little force.⁹⁸

Chapter 5

Feminine attributes in the pastourelle and medieval thought

Virginity and chastity

In this section I analyze a variety of feminine attributes which were described in the literature of the period. I cite a number of secondary source experts, namely Karras and her work *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*. To begin, the fact that these women in the pastourelle, and indeed young, unmarried women in society, were ostensibly virgins is part of the paradoxical nature of the genre and a point of significance in terms of gender identity. The notion of purity meant that these young women were more desirable on the text pages as well as in the audiences' minds. The largely male readership would have expected the pastourelle women to be virgins in keeping with the aesthetic appeal. The innocence of the female characters in the pastourelle was always on display. The paradoxical nature of the encounters between shepherdess and knight represented psychological anxieties which compared with the idea of the biblical Fall and

⁹⁷ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Perry (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1960), 150.

⁹⁸ Drouart La Vache, *Li Livres d'Amours*, ed. Robert Bossuat (Paris, FR: Champion, 1926), 130.

Original Sin. Barbara Tuchman explains, "Theology being the work of males, original sin was traced to the female. ... In Genesis, original sin was disobedience to God through choosing knowledge of good and evil, and as such the story of the Fall was an explanation of the toil and sorrow of the human condition."⁹⁹ The Garden of Eden and its inhabitants contained important paradoxes, such as the tree of knowledge of good and evil and Eve being the one to first commit the forbidden act: eating the fruit. Henceforth, sexual relations including matters of marriage and procreation between man and woman, whether in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve, or with others after the Fall held intense interest and prolonged debate among the Patristic fathers through to theologians in the high Middle Ages. Saint Augustine, an early theologian and influencer of later Church doctrine, posited "earthly sexuality is the result of the sin that brought about Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise. . . . there was indeed sex in the Garden of Eden, but it was sex without pleasure. Edenic sexual intercourse would have been unemotional and purely for reproductive purposes. . . . since lust is the direct consequence of the Fall, then avoidance of lust - virginity - becomes the way to reproduce Edenic conditions on Earth. Finally, Augustine, and subsequent theologians such as Alexander of Hales (ca. 1185-1245 CE), held that human reproduction in the Garden would have further preserved perfect "innocence" because there would have been no breakage of the hymen."¹⁰⁰ By the pastourelle period, views on human sexuality and chastity, namely female perceptions of virginity, had become cemented in the medieval mindset. In the pastourelle, the shepherdesses were deemed to be virginal, celibate and chaste. In fact, "virgin" as a term was largely reserved for women. Karras notes, "Someone who

⁹⁹ Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York, NY: Random House, 1978), 225.

¹⁰⁰ Michelle M. Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic), 2015. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 18, 2018), 49.

had not taken a vow but simply had not yet gotten married was more likely to be called simply a youth, or (if female) a virgin, since it was assumed that women's sexual activity began with marriage. The term "virgin" was rarely used of men."¹⁰¹

When the knight in the pastourelle eyes and tried to seduce a young maiden, the paradoxes commence. To put it in a proper context, as Karras notes, "Of course, in a normative sense, celibacy implied chastity, because medieval people were not supposed to have sex unless they were married."¹⁰² The knight is breaking or attempting to break the rules of chastity but not celibacy in his seduction efforts. Both the knight and the shepherdess in the pastourelle are presumed to each be in the unmarried state. At this point, chastity is on the line but not celibacy, and these differences are important. One, according to Karras, "Celibacy meant and means the unmarried state. It is not oxymoronic, although it may be sinful, to be celibate and engage in sexual activity; a cleric who does so violates his chastity, not his celibacy."¹⁰³ Along these lines, Heloise, French writer and abbess, famously wrote in a twelfth century letter to her lover Abelard, "The name of wife may have the advantages of sanctity and safety, but to me the sweeter name will always be *lover* or, if your dignity can bear it, *concubine* or *whore*."¹⁰⁴

The knight was not expected to hold the same level of moral standards as a cleric and so it can be deduced that any sexual activity between he and a shepherdess left his celibacy intact but not his chastity, which leads to this next point. It was much more important for medieval women to keep their virginal purity, or chastity, intact before marriage than it was for a man. As

¹⁰¹ Karras, 29.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Abelard & Heloise, *Abelard & Heloise: The Letters and Other Writings*, trans. William Levitan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 2007, 55.

Karras explains, "It's important to remember, though, that chastity as a life phase loomed rather larger for women than it did for men, because it was considered much more important for them to abstain from sexual activity during the time that they were not married."¹⁰⁵ In the pastourelle tradition, sometimes, as in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, the shepherdess successfully resisted the knight's advances, while in others, for various reasons, she did not. More specifics on that subject will be discussed later. These outcomes were paradoxical in nature especially when the shepherdess willingly submitted herself to the knight. She in essence was deviating from the socially acceptable norms of what was expected behaviorally of unmarried women. On the other hand, female desires were seen as strong and easily manipulable as which occurred in the biblical exchange between Eve and the serpent. The mental struggle between body and mind was a major theme in Christianity, allowing for paradoxes to emerge. As Michelle M. Sauer wrote in reference to Augustine's take, "Concupiscence, the chaotic consequence of the original sin, shows the great distance between the soul and the body."¹⁰⁶ Although women were expected more than men to remain chaste before marriage, some medieval writers, especially from the medical field, found women less restrained in terms of controlling lust than men. Freedman writes, "The emblem of embodiment in medieval condemnations of women was their sexuality. Women were regarded as sexually insatiable and as temptations to male sinfulness. In accord with Galen, the medical school of Salerno taught that women were more lustful than men, an opinion that was sometimes challenged but remained dominant throughout the Middle Ages."¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Karras states, "Women's lust was also seen as harder to control because of women's innate weakness. It was more difficult for women to remain chaste than for men, and therefore

¹⁰⁵ Karras, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Freedman, 159.

they had to be more strictly controlled; on the other hand, when they did remain chaste, it was more praiseworthy than for men, because they had overcome greater obstacles. As Peter Abelard wrote, "a woman, being the weaker sex . . . her virtue is more pleasing to God as it is to man."¹⁰⁸

Youth and beauty

Youth and beauty are staple attributes of shepherdesses in the pastourelle just as the lady was depicted as such in medieval courtly literature. The paradox is that as stated earlier, the medieval peasant was treated as animalistic and base in the literature. The shepherdess symbolized youth and beauty, the latter of which belied her class, but not necessarily gender status. Class-wise, there is no explicable reason why the knight should pursue any shepherdess. As shown in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, the knight reminds himself and the shepherdess of their respective class statuses. He tells her she is beneath him as a knight and is a mere creature, perpetuating the period stereotypes of the peasantry as beastly. The conclusions are that the shepherdesses were just fictive creatures of the male imagination and that they served as objects of burning knightly desire. The medieval images of women as inferior and sexually insatiable, as well as fickle and treacherous relates here. Not only would the shepherdesses have been inferior as per gender, but also inferior in class status in relation to the knight. The question of why the knight routinely broke protocol was because her youth and beauty proved to be curiously sacrosanct, with the simultaneous maintenance of misogyny consistently on display in the pastourelle. Before examining this theme in the pastourelle, fourteenth century French poet Eustache Deschamps's "*Suis-jebelle?*", a poem inspired by "The high-born maiden of seventeen

¹⁰⁸ Karras, 39.

who seduced the elderly, gouty Guillaume de Machaut for the renown of having that celebrated poet and musician as her lover was said to have been Agnes of Navarre, sister of Charles the Bad,"¹⁰⁹ will be considered. There is an immediate portrait of the class and mentality of the girl and her supposed behavior as a seductress of an elderly man. The poem is of course written by a man, but in the form of the female first person; in this case, a fifteen-year-old heroine. This poem epitomizes images of medieval women from the eyes of men. Since the poem was supposedly based on a real, contemporary experience as outlined above, the credibility of the work in terms of real life attitudes is that much securer. Moreover, this poem, an appeal to chivalry, contained all the elements of discussion in this thesis regarding the female: youth, beauty, virginity, chastity, regality, materialism, seductress, temptress, duplicity, inconstancy, disloyalty. Hence the need to relay its translated content in its entirety:

Am I, am I, am I lovely?
In my own view, it seems to me,
my brow and face are sweet to see,
and my mouth is red and feminine:
tell me if I'm lovely.
My eyes are lively; I've cute brows, 5
white neck and shoulders, a straight nose,
and hair that's blond, and a good round chin:
am I, am I, am I lovely?
My breasts are firm, and they are high,
slim arms and fingers, by the by, 10
and my small waist is very fine:
tell me if I'm lovely.
My hips are good, it seems to me;
good back, good Paris butt on me,
and my legs and thighs are just divine: 15
am I, am I, am I lovely?
My feet are plump and dainty,
I've clothes and shoes in plenty,
and I am gay and pretty:
tell me if I'm lovely. 20
My coats are fully lined in fur;

¹⁰⁹ Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, 222.

I have good prospects, I aver,
 and hats, and many silver pins:
 am I, am I, am I lovely?
 I've cloth of silk and of samite 25
 I've cloth of gold, and brown and white.
 I've got so many little things:
 tell me if I'm lovely.
 And I've now reached my fifteenth year;
 with all my lovely treasures here 30
 which I guard with a little key:
 am I, am I, am I lovely?
 Those who'll be lovers of mine one day
 will need their courage, I would say,
 to catch a young Miss such as me: 35
 tell me if I'm lovely.
 But I'll be loyal, by the Lord,
 as I live, I give my word,
 I will be loyal, unless I waver:
 am I, am I, am I lovely? 40
 If he shows all the courtesies,
 is valiant, puts me at my ease,
 he'll court me, and will win my favor:
 tell me if I'm lovely.
 It is an earthly paradise 45
 to have someone so fresh, so nice,
 a lady in her bloom, so new:
 am I, am I, am I lovely?
 Among yourselves, you who are shy,
 think about all this, say I. 50
 And now my little song is through:
 am I, am I, am I lovely?¹¹⁰

This poem was clearly an embellishment and may be that Deschamps was imagining himself, a well-known poet, wishing to be in the place of the Guillaume de Machaut, also a famous poet in his own right. In the original Old French, Deschamps used the term *clavette* on line 31, to indicate that the maiden possessed a chastity belt of which she kept the key to unlock for a lucky lover. This was written matter-of-factly as if a chastity belt were a familiar item for a damsel to

¹¹⁰ Eustache Deschamps, *Selected Poems*, ed. Ian S. Laurie and Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi, trans. David Curzon and Jeffrey Fiskin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 103-6.

wear, although there is scant evidence of it being in use during the Middle Ages in Europe.¹¹¹ This poem's depiction of a youthful, beautiful maiden as described through the words of a male French poet nearly mirrors that of a male poet's knightly description of a shepherdess in one pastourelle: "She had a fresh color, white as a flower; sparkling, smiling eyes, face colored just right, shiny blond hair in fine curls, red mouth; little teeth close together, neatly ordered; dark eyebrows arched and nicely shaped."¹¹² The descriptive similarities abound and are nearly interchangeable - the red mouth, white skin, eyebrows nicely shaped and sweet, and face colored just right and sweet to see. The sexualized male view of a blossoming maiden was ubiquitous in the period's literature.

The class paradox in the pastourelle connected with the theme of youth and beauty intersect with class inequalities. The next two pastourelles illustrate this as the knight addressed a shepherdess: "Sweet thing, courtly, and wise creature, become my sweetheart. You seem to me a young woman of great nobility. It does not suit you, endowed with such beauty, to tend animals."¹¹³ Again, the higher ranking knight was equating the peasant girl to something non-human, a creature (animal), as if she could only rise to the rank of a lady if she distanced herself from animals by consummating a union with him. Class superiority was on full display in the lines of the second pastourelle: "It would be a pity, shepherdess, if a peasant touched your chin. What eyes, what a mouth, what a cheek! It would be fitting for a baron."¹¹⁴ Other pastourelles looked at class differences from the shepherdess' viewpoint, which varied by degrees. For

¹¹¹ Tuchman, 223.

¹¹² Smith, G. L., 54.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

example, "It is not at all appropriate that such a lord have love for a shepherdess."¹¹⁵ In another one, "Knights are tremendous tricksters. I love my shepherd Perrin more than a lying rich man."¹¹⁶ That scenario is akin to how Marion handled the knight's overtures in Adam's play. In the next pastourelle, the shepherdess decided that upward mobility was her best option: "I grant you my love. I do not want to tend sheep any longer, rather, we will go around the country living a fine life you and I, from now on."¹¹⁷ Finally, a more lengthy response from another pastourelle: "Indeed, sir knight, even if I have poor clothing, for that reason I surely do not think that I will ever accept your plea . . . and never has it been wise to become acquainted with a high love only to grieve in the end."¹¹⁸ The false promises of marriage was a common refrain in the period. Tuchman's research found that one battle tested feudal lord, Geoffroy de la Tour Landry, commonly went around making false promises to deceive young ladies, just as in the pastourelles. She claims, "Many a gentlewoman was taken in by the "foul and great false oaths that false men use to swear to women."¹¹⁹ In Julie Peakman's essay on medieval desire she references the same knight's book, *Book of the Knight of the Knight of the Tower*, and it was laden with misogyny. Peakman states, "The underlying morality of the book suggested that woman's uncontrolled desires needed to be restrained through marriage or religion. He warned of maids 'young and lusty' who possessed 'lyghter courage' and had 'more feeble' natures,

¹¹⁵ Smith, G. L., 52.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Smith, G. L., 58.

¹¹⁸ Smith, G. L., 52.

¹¹⁹ Tuchman, 72.

susceptible to falsehood and flattery. Good husbands were needed to temper them."¹²⁰ Given that Geoffroy de la Tour Landry acknowledged treacherous young men deceiving young girls, while promptly blaming the girls, tells us much about the culture and mentality of the era. Peakman notes, "The fact that women were wooed with promises of marriage was recognized and condemned by the church authorities, but they punished men as well as women. In manorial courts only women seem to have been penalised for succumbing to declarations of love and marriage - and poor women at that."¹²¹ Tuchman compares the idealism of chivalry and courtly love with that of the ideals of Christianity. She argues that such tenets that were to be aspired to were unreachable and that most certainly was an accurate portrayal of reality. The hard truths were that women faced deceit, sexual violence, and physical violence, more often than being the receiver of romantic chivalric love. Furthermore, the class differences shown between the knight and shepherdess have proved that the inferiority of the female gender coupled with the inferiority of the peasantry meant that neither her opinions nor consent to anything mattered much, if at all. Thus, a woman's chastity in the pastourelle was of little concern to the poet author, as she was of little value being from the lower class. Karras confirms this assertion when she writes, " ... not all of medieval society bought into the notion that women's chastity was the most important value; to the upper class the chastity of artisan or peasant women was largely inconsequential."¹²²

Returning to the idea of shepherdess as "creature" connected to youth and beauty I move further along in history to pre-Revolutionary France. French folklore would become captivated by a mysterious creature preferring the flesh of women and children, especially young and pretty

¹²⁰ Julie Peakman, "Poise and Passion in the Middle Ages," *History Today* 61, no. 8: 36-41. *Readers' Guide Full Text Mega (H.W. Wilson)*: 37.

¹²¹ Peakman, *Poise and Passion in the Middle Ages*, 38.

¹²² Karras, 99.

peasant girls, as described in Jay M. Smith's, *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast*. Medieval knight attacks on young women in the countryside would be supplanted by wolf attacks on the peasantry, especially vulnerable women and children, in southern France in later centuries. The print media by this time had developed as a recognized medium and took an interest in this subject. Smith relates, "The newspapers pressed the theme insistently, however, and all recognized the disproportionate price being paid in this tragedy by women and children, including in early January one "eighteen-year-old shepherdess celebrated for her rare beauty." She had been devoured in a field several leagues from Rodez, and her demise was followed in February by that of another young girl known as the "the beauty of her canton." Many other notably "beautiful" maidens would eventually meet the same tragic fate."¹²³ The literary interest in female danger and beauty would persist in France for some time and the gratuitous depictions of wolf attacks on young maidens remind one of the literary depictions of rape in the French medieval pastourelle.

Chapter 6

French fabliaux

Rape in the fabliaux

This chapter will examine several aspects of the fabliaux and related genres which revolve around issues of misogyny. In this chapter I interpret to a large degree the work of Natalie Muñoz's recent work, *Disabusing Women in the Old French Fabliaux*, which provides a very modern re-examination of the genre. I begin by analyzing rape in the fabliaux. The legal questions about rape impacted the stories which comprised the fabliaux. Rape laws, as have been

¹²³ Jay M. Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 80-81.

earlier discussed, tended to be rather ambiguous in mid to late medieval France. While not acceptable acts to the courts, the punishments typically did not fit the crime and so too in the fabliaux rape seemed to play out in such a manner that the perpetrator knew that the risk of getting caught and punished severely was low enough to allow deviant behavior to go virtually uninhibited. Unlike the pastourelle, which relied primarily on stock female characters in the form of a shepherdess, the fabliaux women ranged from rural peasantry to the urban middle class and to the noble elite. The biggest difference of rape in the fabliaux compared to the pastourelle was that the legal status of it came into the picture as well as the reactions of the victim. This section of the thesis will focus on that. In one unnamed story related in, *Disabusing Women in the Old French Fabliaux*, the scene involves a young lady dreaming that her young lover sleeps next to her, and at this juncture, an intruder breaks into her room and rapes her several times without her knowledge.¹²⁴ Muñoz describes the blatant misogyny within the text, explaining, “The text describes the culprit very generously: “Gros avoit et carré lo vit/Et mout ert cointes lo ribaut” (Noomen and Boogaard 4: 54, v. 10-11). The ribald fellow is well-endowed (“gros” and “carré”) and very powerful (“cointes”). The text in no way condemns him for this horrendous act of rape.”¹²⁵ This may not be all that surprising considering the blurry lines between rape and consensual sex which still exist in modern societies. Moreover, rape laws had grown weaker since the end of the early Middle Ages in Europe. Medieval courts routinely pardoned rapists if he agreed to marry his victim.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the notion that women or girls may have enjoyed the rape was commonly held in those times much like the pastourelle commonly did. Shahar

¹²⁴ Natalie Muñoz, *Disabusing Women in the Old French Fabliaux* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2014), 104.

¹²⁵ Muñoz, *Disabusing Women in the Old French Fabliaux*, 104.

¹²⁶ Muñoz, 105.

explains, "There can be no doubt that women did sometimes falsely accuse men of raping them, as the court records show. But the court not only took pains to verify, as the law required, whether rape had in fact been committed, but even where there was no doubt as to the fact, there was a suspicion that the woman had enjoyed the act."¹²⁷ This element of thought corresponds to what Gravdal termed "the game of rape" in the *pastourelle*. If rape was not taken seriously by the courts or society at large, why should it be punished severely? In fact, it was not taken seriously nor punished severely. Noteworthy is an Italian study about legal rape cases from this period, which revealed that, "Although cases involving minors, the elderly, or incest were taken seriously, cases involving girls of marriageable age, married women, widows, or lower-class women received only token punishment."¹²⁸ In other words, all of the females who fall within the latter category represent the entire spectrum in the *pastourelle* and the *fabliaux* while the former category of females is noticeably absent. This is telling as it explains the light-hearted tone in which rape was expressed in the *pastourelle*. Given that courts and society did not take the subject of rape seriously, the authors similarly saw no need to treat the subject differently.

Returning to the aforementioned *fabliau*, when the young lady wakes up and finds herself being assaulted, she protests and verbally attacks her assailant, threatening to bring charges against him to the bishop of Paris. She never wants to see her parents again after being "despucelee" - deflowered. The young lady is not married and states that he has abused his power.¹²⁹ She also refers to him as cowardly by attacking a helpless woman repeatedly, who is defenseless due to her sleeping. Then something strange happens. Rather than bring charges

¹²⁷ Shahar, 16.

¹²⁸ Gravdal, 123.

¹²⁹ Muñoz, 105.

against him to the Church, the young lady convinces the rapist to stay and have sex with her “for a just reward.”¹³⁰ Is this simply another case of blatant misogynistic stereotyping or is there something deeper involved? In this case, the complexities of rape in the Middle Ages require further analysis. As already noted, the lines between forced and voluntary sex were vague, as were the lines between love and violence. Gravdal asserts, "In twelfth-century canon law, as in literary texts, we see a blurring of distinctions between forced and voluntary sex, between love and violence. If, in legal text, *raptus* can be the legal prelude to marriage, and if the victim could conceivably consent to marry her rapist, just how serious was this crime? If, in the literary text, the violence of the *raptor* can be construed as an expression of conflicted desire, the rape plot can become the basis of a romantic narrative."¹³¹ The terms in which Gravdal cites are indeed fuzzy and the lexical carryover from codes to the vernacular reflect this. The example I illustrated earlier with terms amounting to 'forced' were much clearer in the association with rape. The blurring of the vernacular with terms such as *raptor* and *raptus* meant that legal punishments and the burden of proof was not an easy process and left the female victims with an uphill battle in any quest for justice. The young lady in the aforementioned fabliau is a literary symbol in which the author characterizes her as having assumed that her attacker would not receive proper justice and, with that assumption in mind, decided to take control of the situation and get enjoyment from it. However, when the young lady was ready to have sex, the villain was no longer up to the task. After a stinging diatribe against her attacker, the young lady ordered him: “And now, quickly get on the ground, because I have decided to be on top: it is not

¹³⁰ Muñoz, 105.

¹³¹ Gravdal, 11.

shameful, it seems to me, if a woman gets on top when a man fails!"¹³² The character shaming described in that final scene illustrates that in instances when men did not use their privileged power status to control and complete the process of the situation in an expected fashion by the audience - society, and most importantly, the object female involved, meant that the tables were typically turned. It is a tale meant to be humorous by overturning gender norms. These scenes are indicative of the misogynistic violence and objectification of women. From the author's perspective, he presents a situation where the young lady could see that she was going to be sexually assaulted, and in her case, the circumstances were such that there would be insufficient evidence to bring her assailant to a deserved justice, so she decided to go ahead with the act to try and enjoy it. Literary fantasy and/or humor seem to be at work here, but nonetheless, the stereotypes of both masculine and feminine behavior are quite overt. The lascivious, oversexed female is on display as is the male character's behavior of acting with unrestrained force towards a woman. This theme will be returned to later.

Medieval attitudes to rape in the literature, church and society

It is noteworthy that in late medieval France, a woman's character and her ability to resist the attacker went far in terms of how the male rapist was treated in the courts. In the late fourteenth century in the north-western French town Cerisy, a young widow was fined three times more than her two male attackers "for *allowing* the two men to have carnal knowledge of her."¹³³ It is hardly a surprise that women in the fabliaux and pastourelle were depicted making immediate determinations as to how best to navigate the perilous situations in which they found themselves. The absence of at least one witness meant that a rape victim's case would be

¹³² Muñoz, 106.

¹³³ Gravidal, 127.

difficult to prove. When the authors of such plots were nearly all men, it is difficult to ignore the inherent misogyny in their work. It is possible that such literature influenced behavioral patterns among the lay reading public, but even more likely that what happened in society was reflected in the literature. Rape, sexuality, misogyny, and power are (and were) all interconnected concepts. With the late medieval Church adhering to extremely misogynistic views on gender as doctrinal, referring back to ancient Greece as well as early Church biblical interpretations, thirteenth century France was bound to be ensconced in gender strife. Furthermore, the Catholic Church was still in the midst of its dogmatic stranglehold in the region, before its descent after the Black Death and the advent of the printing press and subsequent Reformation. Thus, there was little hope of any strong resistance to the power of misogyny, both literary and ecclesiastical, in thirteenth century France. Despite appearances of anticlericalism in lay literature, especially in some fabliaux, the conditions remained ripe for misogyny to endure and pervade both secular and ecclesiastical literature. Put another way, anticlericalism did not decrease the level of overt antifeminism in that literary period.

Medieval canon law and society

Examining the background and development of the law in medieval France is prudent. In looking at France in the thirteenth century, Charles Donahue Jr. and Sara McDougall found, "By the end of the century, many, if not most French dioceses, had officers known as 'officials' who presided over institutions that performed three separate but related functions: (1) hearing disputes that were within the cognizance of the bishop in his capacity as ordinary rather than in his capacity as secular lord, (2) enforcing ecclesiastical discipline by means of bringing criminal proceedings against delinquents, and (3) putting a seal that served as the bishop's seal on a large

group of transactions, all of which had some specifically legal content."¹³⁴ Such descriptions provide some clarity as to the structure of the court system in the period. In addition, the above mentioned case in Cerisy is known because it was there that a large and thorough body of court records has been preserved. Donahue Jr. and McDougall write, "The register contains material dating from 1314 to 1485, but not every year is covered. . . . Sexual offenses predominate throughout, although a wide variety of ecclesiastical offenses (defamation, witchcraft, striking a cleric) may be found."¹³⁵ Turning to the basis on which medieval canon law in France, among other regions, was founded, Gratian's twelfth century the *Decretum* is it. As John C. Wei notes, "Almost immediately after its publication, the *Decretum* became the foundational textbook for a new academic discipline of canon law and a valid law book in Catholic ecclesiastical courts."¹³⁶ At around the exact same time of the publication of the *Decretum*, James A. Brundage reports, "From the middle of the twelfth century onward, litigants inundated the church's legal system with a mounting deluge of legal actions."¹³⁷ What this all meant was that the entire legal apparatus became increasingly bureaucratic and delegated. A huge increase in the number of lawyers, jurists, and cases meant that bishops passed along cases to trained legal advisors versed in the increasingly complex canon law. The delegated officials who handled legal cases were still under the jurisdiction of the bishop, and as Brundage explains, "While the bishop retained the

¹³⁴ Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington, eds., *The History of Courts and Procedure in Medieval Canon Law* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 305.

¹³⁵ Hartmann and Pennington, eds., *The History of Courts and Procedure in Medieval Canon Law*, 310.

¹³⁶ John C. Wei, *Gratian the Theologian* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 1.

¹³⁷ James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 126.

power to dismiss an official and replace him with another, he could not overrule him."¹³⁸ So while Roman law's revived interest coincided with Gratian's *Decretum*, and the legal profession and number of courts grew exponentially, the Church ultimately continued to exert its power, influence, and control under the auspices of the bishops.

Gratian's influence had a profound impact on attitudes to medieval rape in law and society. Gravdal provides some gender-related examples of rape law in medieval society. She explains, "Gratian's new specification that the victim was protected only when abducted from the house of her father underscored the patriarchal nature of this medieval law: it was concerned primarily with the protection of the father's rights, not those of his daughter."¹³⁹ The power rested with the household patriarch/ruler and any violation which occurred to the contents within his domain was a violation of his property. Hence the reason why property crimes were typically punished more harshly than sex crimes. Abduction which led to rape was a disruption of the feudal order but not so much a heinous crime against the woman herself.

Fabliaux gender relations

Like so many fabliaux, it is the man who is the foolish one, and ultimately loses the upper hand to a woman. The antifeminism in the fabliaux, while often blatantly apparent, is frequently a paradoxical genre where the female protagonist ultimately becomes the (feminist) heroine, garnering readers' sympathy and affection over all others. Indeed, these opposites are a key element in contemporary French literature. Katherine Adams Brown argues, "Reversal in the fabliaux brings together linguistic and thematic opposites, such as truth and lies or life and death, and interchanges them in order to show that these opposites offer equally valid positions from

¹³⁸ Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession*, 143-4.

¹³⁹ Gravdal, 9.

which the stories can be interpreted."¹⁴⁰ This argument can be extended to gender reversals, particularly in the fabliaux, a genre in which the audience usually saw the female heroine as the 'winner' coming out on top. It's a striking paradox given that the fabliaux were rife with misogynistic elements. Chivalric values and the courtly audiences would have surely rejected coarse literary plots and so author-poets treaded a fine line as to what was and what was not acceptable to produce in the literary form. Gratuitous violence in the rape scenes would have alienated audiences. Rape as comedy was one thing, and the way it was presented in both the pastourelle and the fabliaux was acceptable in that the former genre always involved bucolic natural settings with a pretty maiden who sometimes even wanted or enjoyed the sexual encounter, while in the latter genre the scenes were meant to convey bawdry humor involving seemingly unrealistic scenarios. Allowing for the occasional heroine in the pastourelle or the 'turn-the-gender-tables' plot narrative in the fabliaux provided works of a class-based, socially acceptable nature, of which were upheld the misogynistic norms of the day. Finally, while much of the French pastourelle showed the myriad ways peasant girls and women were willing (or not in the case of rape) to give up their bodies for sex, the fabliaux provides a rich source of information into the lives of not only country folk, but also urban dwellers and thirteenth century French nobility – a group which will be discussed in detail shortly.

French fabliaux analytic samples

As previously noted, the French fabliaux enjoyed its heyday in the thirteenth century and served as cautionary tales of male and female social behavior. Despite both men and women being objects of ridicule among the approximately one hundred and sixty extant fabliaux, there is

¹⁴⁰ Katherine Adams Brown, *Boccaccio's Fabliaux: Medieval Short Stories and the Function of Reversal* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), 2, *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 3, 2018).

a strain of misogyny that cannot be overlooked. Women who are criticized are done so as indicative of their sex and the failings and weaknesses that are symptomatic of merely being women. Whenever a moral is presented, women are typically the objects of criticism by the author in comparison to men. In many countries throughout Europe, a wildly popular fabliau, *The Snow Baby*, was told and retold in similar fashion, merely varying in length and minor twists. In the thirteenth century French version, an industrious merchant leaves his wife at home to go abroad for two years, during which time she bears a son from her lover. When her husband returns, she informs him that the child was conceived when she randomly ate a falling snowflake. Fifteen years later the merchant takes the hardy boy on a business trip to Genoa and sells him into slavery, claiming a handsome sum, and promptly returns to his wife to inform her that the boy was born of snow melted into the hot sun. The closing of the tale explains, "The merchant's wife understood then that her husband had tricked her and turned her own weapon on her. The husband was well avenged on her for her foul betrayal, both in word and in deed. And surely no one can blame him for what he did or say that he wronged his wife. For all her wrongs came only to this: that she had to drink what she herself had brewed."¹⁴¹ This tale retained its popularity, arguably due to its biting cynicism and revenge element. It also represented a warning sign in terms of gender relations. The traveling merchant gone for extended periods can expect an unchaste wife and the real possibility of coming home to an illegitimate child. Having legitimate heirs was a matter of great importance in Christendom, so one taking long leave of his wife did so at their own peril. Conversely, the woman in the tale receives her just payback for her transgression in a Hammurabi-esque manner. The misogyny is rooted in the late medieval, Churchdriven view that women's inconstancy was both emotionally and biologically related, the

¹⁴¹ Robert Hellman, Richard O'Gorman, and Ashley Bryan, *Fabliaux: Ribald Tales from the Old French* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 19-20.

latter of which Muñoz discusses: "Biologically, women represent an inferior, passive creature contrasted with the superior, active male. Their biological inferiority and uncontrollability coincide with their insatiable and uncontrollable desires, which men always felt the need to keep in check."¹⁴² In early thirteenth century France, sex was a major subject on people's minds and ecclesiastical law regulated it, while several literary traditions spoke about it. Muñoz concludes that, "The various medieval discourses surrounding women and sexuality indicate that while women are necessary and useful, men must control and direct women."¹⁴³ The prevalence and diversity of discourses surrounding sex point to a reality outside the literary texts. R. Howard Bloch maintains, "... the conception of romantic love was not so much the product of ecclesiastical pressure upon a licentious aristocracy to respect the institution of marriage as it was a reaction on the part of a marriage-minded nobility against the increasing economic power of women ... given the fact that a courtly conception of love has lasted for over eight hundred years, while the economic gains for women that occurred beginning in the last quarter of the eleventh century were essentially lost in the last quarter of the twelfth."¹⁴⁴

Misogyny in relation to noblewomen

This next fabliau epitomizes the misogynistic elements of the genre and is an example of misogyny in relation to noblewomen, the primary subject in this section. This section shows how misogyny knew no class bounds. The lady in "*Un chevalier et sa dame et un clerk*" is a beautiful and pious noblewoman married to an equally noble and good knight. The village priest's cleric acts as a courtly lover as the son of a knight whose parents died. The knight's sister, one hundred

¹⁴² Muñoz, 25.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 195-6.

times less beautiful than the lady, but still beautiful, becomes jealous of her sister-in-law. The cleric falls for the lady and confesses this to the jealous demoiselle. He then feigns illness and people take pity on him. When the lady eventually visits the bedridden cleric he tries emotional blackmail by asking her to relieve him of his lovesick pain. In the text, the cleric implores the lady:

"- De saunté, fait il, ceo ne est rien:
De ma saunté sai très bien
Ja mes saunté ne averai
Ne lunges vivre ne porrai
Si vus ne eiez merci de moi.

-Jeo merci! fait ele, de quei?
Ne jeo vers vus; ceo savez bien.
De vos pecchez vus face merci
Deu meïmes, kar ceo est en li."¹⁴⁵ (Noomen and Boogard 10: 135, v. 279-88).

The cleric counters her claim with emotional blackmail and indecent choices:

"Kant faireme poez aleggance
Si issi morir me lessez,
Apert homicide serrez !
Le main mal deit hom eslire
Pur eschure cel ke est pire."¹⁴⁶ (Noomen and Boogard 10: 136, v. 316-20)

The cleric is admitting that what he is requesting is an evil, just the lesser of the two as he reasons that her adultery is not as wrong as her murder. Of course, he's not going to die from her refusal of sex. It is hard to imagine that the lady does not realize this and she agrees to grant the cleric his wish and they arrange for a rendezvous. However, the demoiselle witnesses the scene between the lady and the cleric and tells her brother. The husband plots to catch her by dressing up in disguise as the real cleric, but the discerning wife immediately notices this and outsmarts

¹⁴⁵ Muñoz, 43-4. Translated from the French: 'My health,' he says, 'is nothing. I know very well that I will never have good health nor will I live very long if you do not take pity on me.' 'I, pity' she says, 'for what? You have never done anything wrong towards me, nor I towards you. This I know well. For your sins, you must ask pity from God himself, because only He can give it.'

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 45. Translated from the French: "When you can give me relief [from my suffering] but in this manner leave me to die, you will commit a veritable homicide. Man must choose the lesser evil in order to avoid that which is worse."

him by telling him to wait awhile so she can deal with other guests. Next, she meets the real cleric in the agreed upon room and they proceed to have sex six or seven times until he cannot continue. Finally, she tells him:

"Ele li dist: 'Or levez sus!
Alez tost hors de cest mes amis,
Tost serriez vus tut afolé,
De male gleive tut détrenché.'"¹⁴⁷

To get back at her husband, the lady orders her servants to beat him, feigning like he is the lewd cleric. Ultimately the husband praises the lady for her virtue and reprimands his sister for relaying false information. This tale's lovesick theme was present in other fabliaux, too. Beyond lovesickness there was treachery and trickery employed. While the lady can be viewed by the audience as exceedingly clever and the cleric and husband as weak, foolish, and easily outwitted, the story is an example of literary misogyny that was present in medieval societal attitudes. The lady was presented with bad choices frankly, such as not knowing what the unscrupulous cleric would do to her character had she not agreed to sleep with him. Still, she chose to commit a sinful marital act in what had otherwise been described as a happy and loving marriage. By having the plot unfold as it did, the author is showing that women are cunning, duplicitous, and unfaithful. This tale also displays specific traits attributed to noblewomen and noble life in general. The noblewoman seemingly possesses the right qualities that a woman of her high social standing ought to possess and then some. She is not only very beautiful, but one hundred times more so than her lady-in-waiting, a girl also described as beautiful in her own right. The noblewoman also loves the Church and goes to mass every day, " ... often arriving before the priest."¹⁴⁸ She need not succumb to the blackmail in which she was forced to deal with. Yet she

¹⁴⁷ Muñoz, 46. Translated from the French: "Get up now and leave this country entirely, because if my friends knew of this, you would be beaten and your "lance" would be cut off."

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 42.

does so willingly. She outwits her husband who tries to catch her in the act, thereby demonstrating inconstancy, profligate behavior, seemingly unbecoming of a courtly lady who otherwise expressed piety. The demoiselle's own treacherous behavior shows how untrustworthy even side character women were depicted in the literature. In the end of this fabliau, there are no winners; every important character in it somehow loses something; dignity, honor, respect, virtue, and trust. Yet it ends with the husband foolishly trusting his wife's apparently virtuous behavior, which the audience has seen to be her own ruse.

Further striking examples of slander and misogyny against noblewomen occur in the tale of "*Le chevalier qui fist sa fame confesse*", which contains a plethora of parallels to "*Un chevalier et sa dame et un clerk*." In it, the plot features a couple supposedly representing the noble ideal. The story opens with the poet-narrator announcing:

"Une merveille j'oï dire
D'un chevalier et de sa fame,
Qui mout proisie en sa contree:
A la meillor estoit contee.
Et le sires tant se fioit
En sa moillier et tant l'amoit
Que da rien cure ne prenoit"¹⁴⁹ (Noomen and Boogaard 4: 236, v. 2-9).

When the knight's wife suddenly becomes ill and everyone including herself thinks that death is near, she requests a confessor as had become the norm in thirteenth century French society in such circumstances. Just as in "*Un chevalier et sa dame et un clerk*," the husband questions his wife's moral fiber when she says she has something big to tell the confessor monk. Instead of retrieving the monk as requested by his wife, he disguises himself as the monk confessor, reminiscent of the script in the other fabliau where the distrustful husband disguised himself as the cleric and would-be lover. At this point in the tale there is absolutely no reason for the

¹⁴⁹ Muñoz, 54. Translated from the French: "I heard an astonishing story about a knight and his wife, who was highly praised in her county. The best was said about her. And the lord had complete confidence in his wife that he had no cares at all."

husband to question his wife based on his own personal experiences with her and her impeccable regional reputation as a lady of the first order. I can only assume that the tale's misogyny connects to the perceived distrust of *any* woman by her spouse due to the indoctrination of such female slander starting with Church doctrine. Continuing with the tale, this time the husband succeeds in deceiving his wife and she reveals to her husband that she had a lover for five years who happened to be his nephew, thereby committing a double sin of adultery and incest. What is more valuable to the scholar is that she makes remarks about the society in which she lives. The lady states:

"-Sire, se Dieus conseil m'envoie,
C'est la coustume de nous femmes,
Et de nous aaisies dames;
Quar cels dont l'en mains garde avra,
Entor cels plus se tornera.
Por le blasme que je cremoie
Le neveu mon seignor amoie,
Quar a mes chambres bien sovent
Pooit venir, veant la gent:
Ja n'en fust blasme ne parole"¹⁵⁰

The revelations are clear. Her high social status not only permitted but expected her to take a lover of a lower rank, i.e. a young knight. Likewise, her stellar reputation meant that no one would chatter about it. Here is an example of gender portrayal in which we see noblewomen taking advantage of their situational status to overcome the patriarchy and turn the tables in their favor. What makes this scene so striking and another example of misogyny is that the women who practiced such lifestyles upheld the paradigm that women were oversexed, duplicitous, and immoral – in other words, not to be trusted by men. In a telling display of aristocratic living, during her confession she states:

¹⁵⁰ Muñoz, 55. Translated from the French: "Sir, God help me, it is the custom of us women, and of us affluent women; because those (men) which she guards against the least, she will turn around them the most. For this fault, I fear, I love my lord's nephew, because he came to my room very often; he could come at the view of everyone with never an accusation or word."

"Quant ceenz vienent chevalier,
 Si com droit est, por herbregier,
 Lors demanent il a noz genz:
 Ou est la dame? - Ele est leenz!
 Ja le seignor n'ert demandé,
 Quar je l'ai tout aneanté.
 Ne ja ostel n'ert a honor
 Dont la dame se fet seignor.
 Et fames ceste coustume ont,
 Et volentiers toz jors le font
 Qu'eles aient la seignorie
 Sor lor seignors; por c'est honie
 Mainte meson qu'est sanz mesure,
 Et fame avoire par nature."¹⁵¹ (Noomen and Boogard 4: 241, v. 195-208).

The scene reveals much about the way of life of the nobility, at least according to its author. Not only does it show the supposed common practice of noble women sleeping with other men, but also the slippery line between honor and dishonor and the ruler of the household - man or woman. The last lines indicate that the woman is admitting that she and her fellow noblewomen bring dishonor to the household by sleeping with other men, which results in the loss of household 'respectable order'. Lastly, the concluding sentiment presents the audience with a stinging indictment of the female sex from the mouth of a female character.

"*Guillaume au Faucon*" again puts a noblewoman in an awkward courtly love triangle of sorts, while portraying the lady as duplicitous. It's a familiar plot with William, a handsome young squire madly in love with the beautiful wife of the castellan, going on a hunger strike until death, averted only unless his love is reciprocated and consummated by the lady. Once again, the would-be male lover eschews the ordinary chivalrous protocols of wooing a noble lady as was the norm in courtly romance. But, this being a fabliau, meant that cowardice and betrayal would define the narrative. As usual, the noblewoman is forced to make quick and calculating decisions and she does so by protecting the squire. The noble, yet unwittingly foolish husband, takes pity

¹⁵¹ Muñoz, 56. Translated from the French: "When knights come here looking for lodging, as it is right, don't they ask "where is the lady?" She is inside! The lord is never asked for, because I have conquered him. There isn't an honorable home where the lady doesn't make herself lord. Women are of this custom and do it willingly every-day, that they have lordship over their lords; it is because of this dishonor that many homes are without respectable order and that women make themselves known by their true nature."

on William and offers him his prized falcon, his wife having lied to him about what caused the young squire's distress. In the end, the castellan loses his cherished falcon and beautiful wife, despite having done nothing in the story to have warranted such betrayal. This tale and others described paint the thirteenth century Frenchwoman in a shameful manner in the literature. Considering that medieval authors typically wrote about what they knew, the conclusion is that misogyny had been cemented in that period.

These three fabliaux provide a rather definitive taxonomy on misogyny. Noblewomen were depicted as shrewd, deceitful, inconstant, shameless, and manipulative. Tuchman relates a passage in *Speculum*, the work of the greatest of the thirteenth century French encyclopedists, Vincent de Beauvais, as he put it regarding women: "The confusion of man, an insatiable beast, a continuous anxiety, an incessant warfare, a daily ruin, a house of tempest," and finally the key-"a hindrance to devotion."¹⁵² The literary perception met the historical reality in thirteenth century France. de Beauvais's line of reasoning could be applied to the noblewomen of the fabliaux as well as the non-noblewomen as shall be shown. The link to the pastourelle is also evident. The reference to woman as 'insatiable beast' is reminiscent of shepherdess depictions by the knight. The last admonition of woman in the preceding quote provides the purview of ecclesiastical misogyny in thirteenth century France.

The lady in the aforementioned fabliau had upset the social order and exposed the hypocrisy of knighthood, which may have been the chief aim of its author. However, despite the lady having shown a strong resolve and even protofeminist inclinations, such as her claim that the lady, not the lord, was head of the manor, she was still depicted as an untrustworthy, adulterous, and of a duplicitous character. Even having garnered the sympathies of the reader as Muñoz proclaims, as a victim of her husband's wrath following her shocking revelations, and

¹⁵² Tuchman, 224.

spreading gossip throughout the county regarding his treachery and lies, it is still evident that she can be viewed as the much bigger schemer. Much like other fabliau plots referenced earlier, here the tale showed the husband as the laughingstock of the entire county and the clear loser. Nonetheless, in her victory, the lady is just another pawn used for the male gender's slandering of women. Character debasement of female protagonists may have been a subtle plot implementation, but it was consistently employed and similarly expressed as the next tale for analysis will reveal.

Chapter 7

Slandering women: misogyny in print

Slander: debasement, virtuosity, and the profligate female

This section of the thesis analyses the slanderous traits attributed to women in the fabliaux. The next work to be analyzed is entitled, *The Woman Who Hanged Her Husband's Body*, a thirteenth century shortened retelling of a timeless story of woman's inconstancy. (Incidentally, the French version was written by a woman, Marie de France). In the tale, a woman mourning her husband's death night and day at his grave is met by chance there by a knight. Prior to the encounter, the knight had buried a relative of his who was accused of being a thief and subsequently hanged in public. Knowing that his own action of removing a dead body was illegal and that he would be hanged if apprehended, the knight decided to save himself by wooing the mourning widow. She cheerfully agrees to love him when he asks her, and when hearing of his plight, she says that they should dig up her dead husband's body and hang him in the thief's place. In the editors' notes following this fabliau, they write, "In Old French a longer version is found in a fabliau of the latter half of the thirteenth century, "The Woman Who

Fornicated on Her Husband's Tomb"; this fabliau was probably the source of the story incorporated by Jehan Lefevre into his *Lamentations de Matheolus (Lamentations of Matthew; 1370)*, a violent attack on women and marriage."¹⁵³ The connections made in the editors' notes offer logical connections into the slander and misogyny of women in both the literary and ecclesiastical tradition. *The Woman Who Hanged Her Husband's Body* illustrates that the fabliaux included un-virtuous women even in (a husband's) death.

A theme that I have touched on briefly thus far and one that is perhaps the most recurring and common of all the misogynistic themes in the literary and ecclesiastical traditions was that of the oversexed female. The idea that a woman was simply too incapable of controlling her desires permeated medieval society and sex was continuously being addressed and regulated by the Church. Historical context is necessary to explain contemporary attitudes of the time, and it is useful to refer to the recognized experts of the day. Capellanus, writing in Book Three: *The Rejection of Love*, maintains, "I will go even further (than Ovid) and say that in old or young, clerk or layman, footman or knight, man or woman, men praise chastity and virtue and bodily purity and condemn the corruption of the flesh."¹⁵⁴ With that thought in mind he continues onward, arguing, "Indeed, although in men an excess of love or lechery is tolerated on account of the boldness of the sex, in women it is considered a damnable offense; a woman's good name is ruined by it, and every wise person looks upon her as an unclean harlot and holds her in utter contempt."¹⁵⁵ He has now put woman in an impossibly unenviable perspective with his contradictory assertions. Following a compendium of female vices which amounted to a drawn

¹⁵³ Hellman and O'Gorman, *Fabliaux*, 96.

¹⁵⁴ Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, 192.

¹⁵⁵ Capellanus, 193.

out diatribe, Capellanus returned to his oft used slanderous adjective for women: wanton. He wrote, "Every woman in the world is likewise wanton, because no woman, no matter how famous and honored she is, will refuse her embraces to any man, even the most vile and abject, if she knows that he is good at the work of Venus; yet there is no man so good at the work that he can satisfy the desires of any woman you please in any way at all. Furthermore, no woman is attached to her lover or bound to her husband with such pure devotion that she will not accept another lover, especially if a rich one comes along, which shows the wantonness as well as the great avarice of a woman."¹⁵⁶ Capellanus suggested that women ought to beware of the perils of excess love/sexual desire since their reputation was at stake, a position taken up in fabliaux plots, while at the same time he forthrightly insisted that it was impossible for women to maintain their virtue. According to Muñoz, Capellanus, also known as André the Chaplain, states, "André the Chaplain, a knowledgeable scholar who was thoroughly familiar with the theological and medical doctrines of his time, was a spokesman for Ovid in the twelfth-century."¹⁵⁷ Capellanus moved into a quizzical paradox. He claimed that "female desire is like burning coals covered with ashes. They burn with greater heat, intensity, and duration than the more open passions of men. . . . the thirteenth-century vernacular glossator simply affirmed that women are "hotter" (*plus chault*) than men."¹⁵⁸ That assertion rejected the taxonomic classification established from Aristotle, continuing through to medieval thinkers. Due to the medieval thinking that there were great differences between the sexes, Nancy Caciola posits, "In the thirteenth century, theologians and natural philosophers did question whether women were part of the human species, or

¹⁵⁶ Capellanus, 208.

¹⁵⁷ Muñoz, 95.

¹⁵⁸ John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 143.

whether they belonged to some other taxonomic group."¹⁵⁹ The ancient Greek medical theory developed by Hippocrates was similarly viewed by the medieval medical establishment. Caciola writes, "According to the medical theories of materialism, all of creation was formed from the four universal elements of fire, air, water, and earth. These were arranged in a hierarchy of descending nobility, with the more immaterial elements (first fire and then air) taking priority over those of grosser substance (water and, lastly, earth). . . . In medical terms, the four universal elements were said to be carried by the four humors, or physiological fluids: yellow bile (in which the element fire was dominant), blood (dominated by air), phlegm (primarily water), and black bile (mostly earth). The balance of the four humors within the body was determined partly by sex, with males usually being dominated by yellow bile and blood, and a little phlegm and black bile; and women characterized by a high admixture of phlegm and black bile, and secondarily blood and yellow bile."¹⁶⁰ Women's menstrual blood was associated with not being able to absorb as much blood as the male body and the thickness was attributed to its debasement and women's excess phlegm.¹⁶¹ Thus, not only were women aligned with the more colder and wetter qualities and men with hotter and drier, this also meant that women were seen to be a part of "grosser" elements, while men with "nobler" ones. The medieval take on the fourfold system went farther to add gender complexion to the mix. Using the four universal elements and fluids, Caciola concludes, "Thus the masculine complexion was primarily hot and dry, while the feminine complexion was primarily cold and moist: they are opposites."¹⁶² Going even further

¹⁵⁹ Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 140.

¹⁶⁰ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 142.

¹⁶¹ Caciola, 143.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

than gender complexions was the parlaying into personality types. Caciola states, "The typical female temperament types were the "phlegmatic" and the "melancholic," as opposed to the typical male personality types, which were the "choleric" and the "sanguine." The phlegmatic personality was essentially sleepy, sluggish, and dull, while melancholics were described as self-centered and prone to hysterical delusions."¹⁶³ With so much attention paid to women as cold, moist, melancholy, and so forth, all leading to negative attributes about their character and disposition and men placed in the opposite light, Capellanus' 'burning heat' portrayal of feminine desire is a curious one, amounting to selective hypocrisy. The medieval medical adherence and interpretation of the theory of the four humors helps explain and connects to the thought process of the male authors who wrote the pastourelle and fabliaux. They simply took for granted the falsities of Aristotelian thought on all things concerning women, which went unquestioned by the theologians and so-called medical experts of the Middle Ages, and they turned this into slander and misogyny in their writings. An excellent example of ecclesiastical misogyny emanated from thirteenth century French theologian, Jacques de Vitry. "De Vitry wrote in *Sermons for All*:

It is clear that however much a married couple is equal as regards the carnal debt, in other things the husband is his wife's head, to rule her, correct her (if she strays), and restrain her (so she does not fall headlong). For hers is a slippery and weak sex, not to be trusted too easily. Wanton woman is slippery like a snake and as mobile as an eel. (Blamires 146).¹⁶⁴

The above passage is indicative of one of the dominant themes in the Middle Ages: some women are good, but mainly they are untrustworthy. Capellanus opened up the standard critique of women in one paragraph when offering a character summarization: "Furthermore, not only is every woman by nature a miser, but she is also envious and a slanderer of other women, greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle in her speech, disobedient and impatient of restraint,

¹⁶³ Caciola, 143.

¹⁶⁴ Muñoz, 96-7.

spotted with the sin of pride and desirous of vainglory, a liar, a drunkard, a babbler, no keeper of secrets, too much given to wantonness, prone to every evil, and never loving any man in her heart."¹⁶⁵ *The Art of Courtly Love* spread throughout Europe and its influence and impact on the author-poets of the ensuing century is palpable. The fabliaux and pastourelle, with very few exceptions, represent typical misogynistic fare, even when, as is more often the case than not in the fabliaux, the woman comes out on top. In addition, as in the lyric pastourelle tradition, sometimes even the cleverest and most intelligent among all the characters is a woman, as in the case of Marion. Still, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, the play included many instances of misogynistic elements. Noblewomen in the fabliaux were written descriptively possessing many desirable traits, including exquisite, incomparable beauty, quick wit, grace and elegance. Yet in every fabliau outcome, though often portrayed and considered the heroine of the story, these noblewomen engage in cunning duplicity, marital betrayal, and even retributive aspects that signify misogyny of the genre given the frequency of such storyline occurrences. The plots signaled warning signs for men, despite all of the bawdry humor they meant to impart. There are dozens of fabliaux, a few of which have been discussed in this thesis, which conform to the stereotype of the oversexed woman. Despite the fact that such women used creative ingenuity to dupe their husbands or extricate themselves from a difficult situation, I agree with most critics who view such fabliaux as misogynist. Muñoz, whose work explores the ways that women challenged the system and status quo using clever techniques, writes that these women in such fabliaux are, "Seen as adulterers, liars, gossips, schemers, or prostitutes..."¹⁶⁶

In general in medieval European society, the prevailing views of women brought forth

¹⁶⁵ Capellanus, 201.

¹⁶⁶ Muñoz, 63.

negative characteristics, expressed in many forms, including integrating gender with class. Shahar describes it as, “Being thus ranged together as a class, women, like the other classes, have special faults and sins attributed to them.... Among the faults and sins attributed to women as such are: vanity, pride, greed, promiscuity, gluttony, drunkenness, bad temper, fickleness, and more. The authors also declare that women must be kept out of public office, must not serve as judges nor wield any kind of authority, may not take part in councils or public assemblies, and must devote themselves to their domestic functions. A good woman is one who loves and serves her husband and brings up her children.”¹⁶⁷ Only in the spiritual Church were women and men typically treated equally, that is, after they died. The temporal Church, like society and state, pushed gender inequality. Shahar provides a fitting synopsis: “Nevertheless, a twelfth-century ecclesiastical author, Abbot Hugh of the Flavigny monastery, in describing the metaphysical hierarchy, placed women separately at the bottom of the list as shown in his celestial hierarchy chart, listed in order of importance: Peter and Paul, the other Apostles, the saintly hermits, the perfect monks living in communities, good bishops, good laymen, women.”¹⁶⁸ In such a lowly position on the social pecking order, these attitudes on the female gender are conveyed in both the secular and ecclesiastical literature. When women were at the top of the social class hierarchy, as noblewomen, the male authors engaged in character debasement. Controlling, beautiful, and manipulative were some of the traits written into the storylines to create the persona of women who had what it takes to achieve the highest social status available. In the courtly romances noblewomen were expected to have male lover(s), typically a younger knight or squire who earned the lady's (carnal) love through acts of chivalry and/or bravery. In the *fabliaux*, such men forgo these acts by scheming in acts of emotional blackmail and in every

¹⁶⁷ Shahar, 3.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

case, the lady in one way or another, complies, thus showing the reader the sinful and immoral nature of women, which equates to literary misogyny. The paradoxes, or reversals, as Brown termed it, in the fabliaux are striking, especially with noblewomen. At once she is described as pious and sinful, monogamous and pure of heart, to virulent adulterer.

Courtly literature, slander, and connections with the fabliaux

To gain a fuller picture of the period literary misogyny, a closer examination of the courtly literature is necessary. While Capellanus' work in the twelfth century left an indelible impact, the thirteenth century gave the region arguably the most famous and important long poem of medieval Europe: the allegory of courtly love and satire, *The Romance of the Rose*. It was begun by Guillaume de Lorris as a courtly romance and later continued and finished by Jean de Meun, who turned it into a satire on medieval life. I will focus on the parts written by de Meun, using an unabridged and unexpurgated translation. Editor Charles W. Dunn describes Jean de Meun in the introduction as "a scholastic poet ... he strives to see life whole; and, as a consequence, his *Romance* is itself a whole."¹⁶⁹ Of note, de Meun directed his wrath against the Mendicants and women, while favoring the secular clergy in the form of parish priests and teachers in the University.¹⁷⁰ Of further interest, *The Romance*, according to this translation's back cover, was copied repeatedly in manuscript and, in its time, was probably one of the most widely distributed works of literature. It is not a stretch to say that it shaped the culture of the time and beyond. Using some excerpts will provide useful parallels to the courtly writing of Capellanus and to the treatment of women in the fabliaux. A good place to begin is a section of

¹⁶⁹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1962), xxii.

¹⁷⁰ de Lorris and de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, xxii.

the poem called, "The Friend tells how a Jealous Husband abuses his wife." With the husband as speaker, he accuses his wife of having an affair. In his accusations, he hurls this at her:

*To see you carry on shamelessly
Must necessarily incite my rage.
By God, who lies not, if again you talk
With him, I'll give you wherewithal to blanch
Your face or make it black and blue. By heavens,
Unless you leave this dissipated life,
Such blows I'll give, so hard I'll slap your cheeks,
With all the libertines now think so sweet,
That you'll be coy and quiet for a while.¹⁷¹*

Violence against women, both threatened and imagined, as depicted in *The Romance of the Rose* by jealous husbands appeared in several fabliaux, lending the appearance that this was a threat many women had to contend with in reality. In *The Peasant Doctor*, a rich boorish kulak quickly becomes jealous of his new, young and beautiful, dutiful wife. He decided to beat her soundly every morning to keep her from attracting any positive attention from anyone while he was away in the fields. Apologizing at night, he repeats the physical abuse every morning until she devises a plan to stop the daily assaults. When she meets the king's messengers randomly by her home, they say the king needs a doctor urgently. The wife explains that her husband is a fine physician who only works well after being thrashed violently. In the end, the peasant returns to his wife and never beats her again, but nonetheless, he had previously done so to the point of almost crippling her. This fabliaux is chock full of satire like the latter part of *The Romance of the Rose*, yet the realism comes through. Often in the fabliaux, the wife is able to avoid violence through clever deceit, implying that women had to employ creative ingenuity to escape the reality of violence. In *The Petticoat*, the adulteress is lying in bed with her lover when the husband returns home unexpectedly from a business trip. With the lover hiding under the covers still in bed, the

¹⁷¹ de Lorris and de Meun, 173.

wife asks her merchant husband what she would have done if he had caught her in bed with a man by her side. Jean de Condé relates, "The merchant answered: "With this sword I would have cut off his head, and I would have killed you beside him.""¹⁷² Pulling a petticoat over her husband's eyes as a supposedly playful trick allowed her lover to unknowingly escape and the story ends without further ado. In *The Wife of Orleans*, just as in *Un Chevalier et Sa Dame et un Clerk*, the major theme is one of the beaten cuckold. However, the other motifs are extreme violence, duplicity, and adultery. The female protagonist in *The Wife of Orleans* agrees to a rendezvous with her lover in the garden, not knowing that her husband's niece had tipped him off about her young scholar lover. The husband, pretending to be the lover, is unknowingly found out by his wife and she has him locked up in the loft, pretending to go meet him later. After having pleasure with her lover in the bedroom, she explains to her servants and others present that a young scholar is in the loft waiting for her, a pesky man who had been bothering her for a long time, and so on. They are ordered to go and beat him and then enjoy as much food and drink as they please. They do so and the unknown author writes, "And when they were done with him they dragged him out like a dead dog and threw him on a dung heap."¹⁷³ Returning to her lover and spending the rest of the night with him, the injured burgher husband ends up foolishly happy when he hears from his servants that they beat the young scholar. The story ends with the husband thinking his wife wise and virtuous, "And she never gave up making love to her young scholar until he returned to his own country."¹⁷⁴ The woman is portrayed as clever, yet in an entirely deceitful manner, while simultaneously abandoning her virtue for the sake of

¹⁷² Hellman and O'Gorman, 69.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

outsmarting her husband and gaining sexual satisfaction from a younger lover. The main difference between this fabliau and *Un Chevalier et Sa Dame et un Clerk* is that in the latter, as Muñoz explains, "The text tells us that the lady loved the knight more than ever and did penance for her sin. The couple lives happily until the lady renders her soul to God."¹⁷⁵ Even though the husband and wife are described to have excellent character, both pious and charitable, the latter freely chooses to make love to the cleric six or seven times until *he* cannot continue and then promptly pays him money to be gone and stay gone. Certainly she displayed a degree of extremely clever resourcefulness in the wake of a difficult triangular situation. Nonetheless, her behavior ultimately begs the conclusion that she is neither a virtuous nor a loyal woman.

Melding typecast misogyny in the fabliaux with Giovanni Boccaccio's seminal work, *The Decameron*, allows for connecting analyses. Boccaccio, writing a century after the height of the fabliaux, wrote his own versions of the genre and was heavily influenced by it. Specifically, on the seventh day in *The Decameron*, Boccaccio writes a string of tales which have telltale trademark influences of the preceding century's French fabliaux. It is remarkably similar in nature to *The Wife of Orleans*, including the violence, with linkage to slanderous treatment of noblewomen on display. The preface explains the events succinctly: "*Lodovico discloses to Madonna Beatrice how deeply he loves her, whereupon she persuades her husband to impersonate her in a garden, and goes to bed with Lodovico, who in due course gets up, goes into the garden, and gives Egano a hiding.*"¹⁷⁶ That scenario is set up by the noblewoman who tells her lover what wonderful joy and amusement it would bring to them both by her husband's beating. In Boccaccio's tales he uses the lower class servant as the lover in many instances. The

¹⁷⁵ Muñoz, 47.

¹⁷⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (London, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), 518.

older nobleman is always fooled, mirroring plots in the fabliaux, with the noblewoman depicted as unscrupulous to the core. Two stories later in the work, Boccaccio adds to the plot a noblewoman who ups the ante by promising her otherwise loyal-to-his-master lover that she will show her sincerity of affection to Pyrrhus, the servant, by making love to him in her husband's presence. She conceives of an illusory trick to pull it off, and as usual at the end of the story, the audience is told the lovers continue to meet again at regular intervals.

In a section of *The Romance*, entitled, "The Jealous Husband recalls the war between Beauty and Chastity", the scene is reminiscent of elements of Chapter 5 of the thesis. de Meun writes:

*Like crazy fools they are, who're not content
With that degree of beauty God bestowed.
Each one must crown her head with silk and gold
Or floral wreath in which she takes much pride
As simpering she shows herself in town.¹⁷⁷*

Here it is evident that de Meun is criticizing beautiful women who are not content merely with natural beauty. Rather, they need, seek, and require the adoration of men and material items all in the name of pride and vanity. The poem's blatant slanderous misogyny continues a few lines later accusing 'she' of despising God and insulting Him with feelings of dissatisfaction upon being given beauty alone. Thus, one can see how women of remarkable beauty were construed as temptresses, seductresses, and shameless, ungrateful materialists. Unsurprisingly, the poem turns towards female deceitfulness with fury spilling onto the pages. Alluding to the misogynistic Hippocratic theory of four humors, the poem tells:

*You cool my heat with looks as black as hell,
Then you pretend you're ill, and sigh and groan,
And so impede my efforts that I fail,
Nor try again for fear of like success,
Not even in the morning when I wake.*

¹⁷⁷ de Lorris and de Meun, 182.

*But much I wonder if your lovers fail,
 When in their arms they take you fully clothed,
 If when you play with them you twist and turn-
 By day vex them as you vex me by night!
 I don't believe your practice that would be
 When you go tripping through the garden lanes
 Or singing through the fields with traitors vile
 Who, though the green grass glistens wet with dew,
 Chase after you, who are my wedded wife,
 Voicing among themselves contempt of me:
 'Here's how we trick the dirty, jealous wretch!'
 May wolves devour the flesh, dogs gnaw the bones
 Of those by whom I am so cuckolded.
 Foul woman, ribald hussy, lecherous bitch,
 By you and your vile ways I'm put to shame.
 May you not live one year beyond the day
 When you bestowed your body on such curs!
 Your lechery has leagued me with the band
 Of cuckolds whom Saint Arnold dominates,
 From whom no married man can e'er escape,
 In my opinion. Though a million eyes
 He had to guard and spy upon his wife,
 If she's assailable, and freely gives
 Herself, no guard can make a wanton safe.¹⁷⁸*

The vicious assault on the female character is on full display in the above passage. The poem purportedly served as an allegory of courtly love and as a satire on love and marriage, however the verses seem to go beyond satire and are anything but an instructional guide about the art of romantic, courtly love. Corresponding with themes in Book Three of *The Art of Courtly Love*, it is a visceral attack on the female character in the heart of thirteenth century French literature. Moreover, the parallels to the misogyny laid bare in the French fabliaux tradition of the thirteenth century and repeated again in *The Decameron* in the fourteenth century are transparent. They complement each other. The fabliaux, pastourelle, and 'love poems', as *The Romance* purported to be, all served as warnings to men about trusting women's character. They were full of slander and misogyny served up for the audience to make of it what they will. One

¹⁷⁸ de Lorris and de Meun, 184.

last passage to be discussed in this section provides a fitting conclusion into the thought process of de Meun on women and by extension the widely held views of the day:

*Stupration is the least of women's sins,
Whose nature urges them to greater crimes.
We read how mothers-in-law cooked poison broth
For daughters' husbands, and with spells and charms
Worked many other mighty deviltries
Unthinkable, which I cannot rehearse.
"All women are, have been, and e'er will be,
In thought if not in deed, unvirtuous;
Though some may hesitate to do the act,
None can restrain their wish. All women have
This great advantage: they their purpose hold.
Scolding and beating will not change their minds;
He'd rule their bodies who could rule their wills.
Let's talk no more of things that ne'er can be!"¹⁷⁹*

The opening line is a justification of rape and blaming the victim. It continues on debasing women's character and virtue and indicts the entire female sex as irredeemable sinners, incapable of goodness, deserving of beatings, though even that would serve no rectifying purpose. These sections of the poem exemplify the slandering of women which could not be completely ignored.

A response to literary misogyny

The first professional woman writer in Europe, Christine de Pizan, took note of literary misogyny and thus started a debate of *The Romance of the Rose* when she wrote a letter to the provost of Lille. In Part I of early fifteenth century, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, de Pizan asks Reason,

"But please tell me exactly what it is that makes so many different authors slander women in their writings because, if I understand you correctly, they are wrong to do so. Is it Nature that makes them do this? Or if it is out of hatred, how can you explain it? Reason answered my question saying: 'My dear daughter, in order to help you see more clearly how things stand, let me carry away this first load of earth. I can tell you that, far from making them slander women, Nature does the complete opposite. There is no stronger or closer bond in the world than which

¹⁷⁹ de Lorris and de Meun, 184-5.

Nature, in accordance with God's wishes, creates between man and woman. Rather, there are many other different reasons which explain why men have attacked women in the past and continue to do so, including those authors whose works you have already mentioned. Some of those who criticized women did so with good intentions: they wanted to rescue men who had already fallen into the clutches of depraved and corrupt women or to prevent others from suffering the same fate, and to encourage men generally to avoid leading a lustful and sinful existence. They therefore attacked all women in order to persuade men to regard the entire sex as an abomination.¹⁸⁰

de Pizan succinctly uncovers the reasons for literary and societal misogyny, showing a deep understanding of the period in which she lived as well as the preceding ones. She was the first woman in Europe to publicly challenge misogyny in print while opening up the topic for debate. A literary pioneer through and through, de Pizan's grace and eloquence stands on its own.

Chapter 8

Ecclesiastical misogyny

Ecclesiastical misogyny, hagiography, and society

Medieval society exhibited misogyny through religion, in what may be deemed ecclesiastical misogyny. In this chapter I mainly focus on the work of Weinstein and Bell's *Saints & Society* and Nancy Caciola's *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. With the clergy playing such a pivotal and recurring role in the fabliaux, it is useful to see how women and the Church were related in the period. Women bore the brunt of the blame on any number of issues. The failure to produce a child, for example, was always blamed on the woman. In *Saints & Society*, the authors relate, "According to historical demographers, at least 10 percent, perhaps 20 percent, of married couples in premodern societies remained childless, a condition the culture invariably blamed on the wife. To the childless woman and her family, miraculous fertility offered a sustaining hope; but to their more fortunate neighbors the

¹⁸⁰ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999), 17.

mother's barrenness appeared to be due to some hidden sin, or at least to a lack of religious fervor."¹⁸¹ Sexual purity was tested and used against women in every possible way. For example, Catherine of Sweden, the daughter of a popularly recognized saint, St. Bridget, "Put to a wet nurse, she refused to suckle because of the woman's sinful life. Bridget then took the babe to her own breast, only to find that her infant daughter was now a judge of her mother's conduct: Catherine nursed happily when Bridget had been sexually continent but refused the breast "as though it were absinthe" when the saint had had sexual relations."¹⁸² A mother's conduct, even a married one, was considered better and purer when chaste. This belief was magnified when saints were the subject. However, if female purity and chastity were of utmost importance, this was not the case with males, and curiously, for devout males who sought purity and chastity for their own lives, society sought for them a girl to alter this course by having her body used for unwanted sexual intercourse. A late medieval Polish prince provides a case in point. Prince Casimir had early on dedicated himself to the veneration of Christ and refused to take a bride, meanwhile during his youth he fell chronically ill. Physicians prescribed sexual intercourse as a remedy and his parents ordered a beautiful virgin to his bed. He refused, subsequently died, and posthumously was made a saint.¹⁸³ When girls exhibited such behavior the last remedy that would have been offered to cure her illness would be a virgin boy. The hypocrisy within the medieval Church pervaded life and maintained the misogyny throughout the period over Europe. Women were to remain chaste, but as the fabliaux, the pastourelle, and other major period works showed, women were easily swayed into violating this sacred virtue. As the story of Prince

¹⁸¹ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints & Society*, 22-3.

¹⁸² Weinstein and Bell, 24-5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Casimir exhibited, boys and men were able to show remarkable restraint even when practically forced into sexual relations with a beautiful young maiden by family members. The idea of inconstancy was most often a label ascribed to females.

Female saints of the medieval period typically practiced extreme chastity and austere behavior, which helped lead them to eventual sainthood. In different regions of what is now present-day Italy, visionary girls who led ascetic lives were not too uncommon. One intriguing case involved the thirteenth century saint, Serafina (Fina): "the beautiful but grave girl, avoided children's games, and abhorred vanity. Fina wore a hair shirt, devoted herself to chastity, and practiced the usual penitential routines. But she also struck out in the newer directions of thirteenth-century female piety, laboring with her hands, nursing the sick, and cultivating celestial marriage."¹⁸⁴ The intensity of chastity among girls is noteworthy. Weinstein and Bell write, "From the age of four Chiara di Montefalco was gripped by divine love. When she was nine her older sister reproved her for leaving her bare foot partly uncovered while she slept, an instance of immodesty for which Chiara suffered great shame. Shortly after this Chiara followed her sister into a local hermitage, and in 1291 she became its head. Austerity, silence, and even flagellation continued to be the main preoccupation of Chiara's religious life well into adulthood, but, as with other thirteenth-century Umbrian and Tuscany holy women, private penance was less an alternative than an avenue to fame and public influence."¹⁸⁵ Common themes bore out. Weinstein and Bell conclude, "The lives of Bona, Gerardesca, Sperandea, Serafina, and Chiara have much in common. Most obviously, the stories all have female heroines, and the theme of

¹⁸⁴ Weinstein and Bell., 33.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

guilt-ridden childhood is more frequently associated with girls than boys, ..."¹⁸⁶ Hagiographers' accounts of saints' lives depict a gender dichotomy which illustrate a form of misogyny that began in childhood and become clearer in adolescence and adulthood. Girls and women were given bad choices and the hagiography noted this. The fabliaux did as well, but that genre created heroines out of seductresses, adulteresses, scheming wives, usually stuck with an older rich man in want of a young, virile lover.

Nowhere was the idea of woman as lewd temptress mores strongly conveyed in the medieval literature than among hagiographers. The motives in such stories surely would have had a partial purpose of gaining the saint more respect and sympathy from their followers, but also the accepted misogyny was palpable. Weinstein and Bell explain, "While the stories of saints who struggled with their sexual desires in the context of marriage show the interplay among religious ideal, hagiographic convention, and social reality, a similar interplay occurs in the life of the celibate male who is assaulted by lewd women, a story so common as to suggest that this was another standard topos of medieval hagiography. It was a form of spiritual heroism particularly relished by hagiographers, virtually all celibate clerics, who loved to dwell on the length and persistence of the attacks, the voluptuousness of the women, the difficulty of resisting."¹⁸⁷ Despite being shallow in nature, which in my view they were and concurred by Weinstein and Bell, they cannot be dismissed as merely tales of male suffering and torment or even a form of pornography. These stories appeared over and over again in the literature so much so that Weinstein and Bell argue at length:

"Like accounts of miracles, stories of heroic resistance to blatant sexual seduction could never be repeated often enough. ... Even trite priests' tales may provide insight into broader social perceptions. The stories are premised upon a set of

¹⁸⁶ Weinstein and Bell, 34.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 81.

attitudes toward women that clerics shared with the laity they instructed. Women were sexually charged and morally lax, ready agents for the devil's work. Celibate males were fair and delectable game, not only for prostitutes and outwardly lewd women, but even for normally respectable matrons. Any woman might suddenly become inflamed by a man's looks, or even by his aura of innocence, and scheme to encounter him alone so she could seduce him. The drama of the story lay in the hero's anguished trial and his victory over temptation. If the woman is presented as a stock figure whose behavior is entirely conventional for her sex, the man is treated with more depth and individuality. We are made to feel his torments and understand the heroism of his resistance."¹⁸⁸

The important points from the extract lie in how society was influenced by these widely read tales. Hagiographic tales were written and even spoken publicly for the masses. Furthermore, these stories were told as instruction. Brigitte Cazelles maintains, "Hagiographic production during the early period of French literature did not serve as a means to achieve artistic renown; the poets' aim was, in principle at least, to edify rather than to entertain their public."¹⁸⁹ The works aimed to establish learned attitudes among lay people with the purpose of absorbing them as more or less factual, despite the unbelievable nature of many of the plots. The same was true of the French pastourelle and fabliaux tradition. The stories were similar enough in nature, with many of them retold across the centuries in other European languages, so that the morals became part of the cultural fabric of society. Furthermore, because these stories were so pervasive and repeated so often, regular folk could easily be swayed to accept such descriptions as factual gendered norms. Ultimately, medieval misogyny became engrained as part of the psyche and culture through dogmatic means.

Fanciful tales which outwardly seemed preposterous nonetheless revealed societal attitudes. One story regarding thirteenth century theologian Thomas Aquinas should be taken seriously if only for the fact that he is one of the most important saints in Church history. The

¹⁸⁸ Weinstein and Bell, 81.

¹⁸⁹ Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as saint : a collection of French hagiographic romances of the thirteenth century* n.p.: (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), *UofM Libraries*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 17, 2017), 7.

story goes that Thomas' mother had him kidnapped as a young man upon hearing of his plan to join a low ranking religious order. Imprisoned in a family castle, Thomas' family sent a beautiful girl to his chamber to break his chastity. Weinstein and Bell write, "The woman, made up lasciviously, entered the youth's room and tried by looks, caresses, and other unspecified "tricks" to lead him to sin."¹⁹⁰ Eventually angels come to his rescue with a spiritual girdle and he emerges victorious in his struggle to fight off his seductress. Promising to maintain his chastity until death, the famous saint-to-be, according to Weinstein and Bell, "From then on Thomas abhorred the sight of women and avoided their conversation."¹⁹¹ Again, the spiritual battle was won by the latter day saint. Aquinas was not a revered religious man, but had he been a lowly, nameless cleric in the fabliaux, he would have succumbed to the charms of a woman or wantonly seduced her himself. In reality, Aquinas was driven to misogyny following the episode in which he was forced to use all his mental faculties to resist being driven into lust. Aquinas incorporated the ancient Aristotelian theory of the four humors into his misogynistic view of woman in God's creation when he argued: "As regard the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist ..."¹⁹² Furthermore, Aquinas believed in the notion of the irrational female. When discussing subjection after sin and the superiority of the male, Aquinas wrote of woman: "So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason

¹⁹⁰ Weinstein and Bell, 82.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province accessed July 6, 2018, [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_\[1\],_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_[1],_EN.pdf), 2090.

predominates."¹⁹³ It is noteworthy that his seminal work was written after his harrowing experience in the cell alone with a woman.

Anticlericalism and the fabliaux

Though there was much thematic overlap between the fabliaux and clerical misogyny, there was a strain of anticlericalism in works such as *The Romance of the Rose*, *The Decameron*, and several fabliaux. Nonetheless, even when the fabliaux, for instance, espoused anticlericalism, it practically always did so more forcefully in its antifeminism. An example is in *Les Braies le Priestre*, a tale in which the cuckolded peasant provides entertainment for his coworkers when he accidentally wears the breeches of the priest who is sleeping with his wife, unbeknownst to him. The priest lover even got to keep the purse full of money which was in the peasant's breeches that he wore out of the peasant's house. Having no money meant that the peasant was unable to even buy the beast which he sought out at the market. The author, Jean de Condé, makes explicit how pervasive the transgressions were of the clergy in the diocese of the story. At the end of the fabliau, he reports, "The news of it got abroad, and when the bishop heard of it, he forbade all priests to hang their seals on their breeches."¹⁹⁴ When the peasant in the aforementioned fabliau, *The Peasant Doctor*, embarks on his paranoid thoughts, the priest is there: "... perhaps when he was away from the house, the priest would come to visit, today, tomorrow, and the day after, until he had seduced his wife."¹⁹⁵ Regardless of the genre, from the hagiography to the fabliaux, there was only one logical conclusion to make on women: that they were lascivious, lustful seductresses. The hagiography which detailed male saints' lives portrayed heroic sexual sacrifice

¹⁹³ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, 2090.

¹⁹⁴ Hellman and O'Gorman, 103.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

in the face of extraordinary odds by fending off tempting women, whereas the secular literature illustrated a more realistic account of religious men, in that they were also conniving, corrupted sinners. The material was a slanderous indictment of women read from any angle. Sometimes, though, the supposed pious holy man cast aside his morals and took advantage of the girl and situation for his own sexual gratification, eschewing the standard ecclesiastical misogynistic plot and replacing it with a different kind of literary misogyny. In *The Decameron*, Boccaccio tells the story of a young and exceedingly pretty girl, Alibech, of maybe fourteen years old who went searching for a way to serve God, having recently been inspired by Him. When she was passed along by two previous holy men seeing that she was temptingly too pretty, she eventually arrived at the abode of a reclusive monk named Rustico. To help her in her quest, the latter decided he would try to seduce the girl instead, especially after he ascertained her virginity. Concocting a long speech describing the powerful enemy devil tormenting him, Rustico explained to the girl that the only way to ease his pain was by putting the devil which had inflicted him into Hell, something which she possessed but not he. Putting the devil back into Hell was a game of sex, which the girl was seemingly unaware of even by the story's end. She enjoyed putting the devil back into Hell so much, several times a day, that eventually Rustico got worn out. Her sexual appetite was insatiable and she started complaining to the point where not only was she ever willing to put the devil back into its place in her Hell as God wanted, but now her Hell was burning and needed to be tamed, which had occurred because of the infrequency of sex. Finally, circumstances arise so that Alibech marries a young man who will be able to once again provide her with her sexual needs. The story reminds one of the fabliaux where the sly man through violence or trickery tries to take advantage of the woman only to receive more than he bargained for. It is also reminiscent of the innocent shepherd girl in some of the pastourelles who falls for

the knight's little game and enjoys it, begging for more. Boccaccio's tale shows that the depiction of women in such tales did not change from one region and century to the next. The oversexed female was omnipresent in the literature of the period. The tale is also an indictment on the Church and hermetic religious orders. Their hypocrisy is exposed out in the open with Rustico taking the role of the most honest hypocrite by following through with his inflamed sexual desires. Alibech is a pawn in the misogynistic literary game as she is used to expose the bad acting behavior of the religious monk. Her insatiable sexual appetite is in line with the fabliaux of which Boccaccio was so heavily influenced by.

The thirteenth century French poet Rutebeuf penned *Frère Denise* which contained a similar storyline with related misogynistic themes. After a beautiful young girl had "... consecrated her virginity to God and to Our Lady"¹⁹⁶ and having rejected more than twenty offers of marriage from noblemen, she seeks out to join a Franciscan order. As a prerequisite for admission, she promises a lecherous monk named Simon that she would always maintain her virginity if he allowed her to join. Once her hair gets chopped off and she poses as a male monk in order to enter the Franciscan order, Denise fits in with the friars and soon gets converted not only into the order but to Brother Simon's pleasure and he has his way with her. While this fabliau is a scathing attack on the Franciscans, its author, Rutebeuf, much like Jean de Meun, had a beef with the order. Hellman and O'Gorman in the tale's afterword state that the fabliau was "... a pointed satire on the mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans, at a time of tensions between the latter and the faculty of the University of Paris, a subject which Rutebeuf was to exploit in numerous other poems."¹⁹⁷ Still, Brother Simon pays the price for his misdeeds and hypocrisy. When the game between the two false friars ends, having been caught by an astute

¹⁹⁶ Hellman and O'Gorman, 136.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 142.

knight's wife who lodges them, Simon gets shamed into providing a handsome dowry for Denise to marry a reputable knight of her social class. The girl is guilty, too. She lies her way into the strictly male order and knowingly breaks her vow of chastity, which she made to the blatantly hypocritical Simon. This comes after she turned down over twenty marriage offers from among the nobility. Rutebeuf is able to discredit the Franciscans while simultaneously upholding the female literary stereotypes of the licentious young woman. This story and its author show clear signs of sympathy for knighthood. Denise's father had been a knight and it takes a knightly household to rescue her from her life of sin until finally she marries a knight. She moves from a girl of tough resolve, having committed herself to a chaste life while having rejected a bevy of suitors only to reducing herself seemingly too easily to one depraved monk. Lastly, this tale presents another branch of literary misogyny, that of the female rescue, which will be discussed shortly.

Ecclesiastical misogyny, prostitution, and the Church

The story of the holy man encountering a prostitute, sometimes prostitute-turned-saint, with chastity winning out over lust and seduction, was standard misogynistic fare in the period. In a court tale involving William of Montevergine appearing at the court of Roger II dating back to the eleventh century, Weinstein and Bell relate, "Jealous courtiers persuaded Roger to let them test the holy man by sending a prostitute to his chamber. The woman tried to tempt him into fornication, whereupon William walked calmly to the flaming hearth, parted the coals with his bare hands, lay down in their midst, and invited the woman to join him. The prostitute took this as a miracle and gave up her evil life to become a nun."¹⁹⁸ In keeping with the theory of the four

¹⁹⁸ Weinstein and Bell, 82.

humors, the imagery of the man handling burning coals to keep the heat while preventing the cool, moist woman away from him is logical here. The overall story's general theme was such a typical one and also compares to what Aquinas and Prince Casimir endured, and furthermore was a subject expounded in Karras' paper, *Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend*.¹⁹⁹

The primary source extracts in the paper are about six prostitute saints. The paper provides a key to understanding the subject of medieval prostitution and a prescriptive formula to the proper roles and functions of women (and men to a lesser extent) in decent Christian society. The primary sources within Karras' paper analyzes Mary of Egypt, Thaïs, Pelagia, Mary the niece of Abraham, Afra of Augsburg, and Mary Magdalene of Jesus fame, otherwise known as The Magdalen to people of the medieval era. Most of the prostitute saints who repented to lead lives of desert dwellers began their sinful lives as young, beautiful seductresses, sometimes charging men, other times not. Some of them were driven by money, many by lust, and also pride was a factor in some cases. Karras sheds light on when the extracts were written and updated, which is especially helpful for gaining insight into the medieval point of view on this subject. The intended audience include the clergy and literate laypeople in the Middle Ages, which means they were almost exclusively male with an inherently female bias. Speculating about the authors' places in society, they included Greek playwrights and writers, while a plethora of versions on all six of these women were updated as the centuries progressed. Greece in antiquity harbored a deeply embedded misogyny, indeed the very term stems from ancient Greek. Women in the city-states (Sparta was a special case) were house-bound, expected to be modest while rearing children and managing the household. Moreover, Athenian citizens were

¹⁹⁹ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend*. Source: *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jul., 1990), 3-32.

not allowed to be hetairai, meaning only the lower classes citizens performed this very public work. This fits in line with the primary resource extracts found in Karras' paper. Mary Magdalene was a unique case among the six women, being the most popular saint of the Middle Ages, a follower of Jesus, the patron saint of all prostitute saints, and one who hailed from the nobility. It is no accident that the most revered prostitute saint was a member of the upper class, as a commoner would never have been allowed to be written into this role. As Weinstein and Bell note, "The tale of the husband who wanted to live in a chaste marriage is characteristically a story about a noble or a prince. In the few cases where it concerns common folk it lacks the note of heroic sacrifice that inspired the self-denial of a noble. Bourgeois or peasant husbands who gave up the pleasures of the marriage bed, or went so far as to put aside their wives, generally did so after they had reached middle age."²⁰⁰ The noble sacrifice of the nobleman shows that within medieval misogyny, class was still always a factor.

Returning to the tales of prostitute saints, it is evident that the authors took these stories and translated them into Latin and other languages with their own view of them to reinforce the Christian paradigm and what the proper roles and judgments were to be. These sources show Christian doctrine at work. Medieval people reading these sources would learn or be reminded that women, especially pretty ones who liked sex outside of marriage were the worst sinners and exuded one or all of these three characteristics: beauty; avarice; pride. The women of the pastourelles and fabliaux too exhibited these traits. They would lead men into Hell and before that poverty or murder/murdered if they weren't careful. The audience of these sources through the ages from the original stories to the medieval translations were all (or very nearly) men, so very few would have questioned the validity. Therefore, these six stories with their updates and twists and translations represent powerful stereotypes about women and men, as well as the

²⁰⁰ Weinstein and Bell, 80.

institution of prostitution and brothels. As Karras discusses in her paper, medieval Europe was misogynistic and these stories helped to reinforce those notions. The sources compare remarkably similarly to each other. The scripts can almost be swapped and one would scarcely notice the differences. The dangerous beauty turned damsel in distress, the monk/man as savior because she is too weak to change, and then decades of penitence following removal from public life; in other words male society. It must be stressed that decent, modest, respectable females did not go out in society to mingle as these six saintly women did. Once they did mingle with men, it meant they broke all the rules and norms of society, whether in Alexandria or Augsburg. These sources served as a warning on multiple fronts to readers about pretty girls and prostitution. For men, they were warned not to succumb to these temptresses as they could kill or be killed by another rival customer, or go broke, and worst of all end up in Hell (popularized by the High Middle Ages) for their sins. For women, it was a clear warning about what happens when they make their own decisions about what to do with their bodies. When they were not married they must remain virginal and when they did not cede control of their bodies to men after marriage they were at high risk of becoming prostitutes, whether they took payment or not. Such renegade women making their own decisions about their life, their job, their body, or their money were seen as the lowest females in society. They were expected to make no decisions about their own life, including love, relinquish control of their bodies to one man, and finally, have their profession and earnings dictated and handled by men.

Violence and brutality, including murder, are described in *Saints and Society*, showing how misogyny could at times turn deadly. One of many examples is, "Margaret of Roskilde, a twelfth-century Danish noble murdered by her adulterous husband who tried to make her death

appear a suicide and buried her on unconsecrated ground."²⁰¹ This passage from Weinstein and Bell sums up this topic clearly:

The vitae of female saints convey a picture of women's place in society that can only be described as dismal. They show women to have had little control over their lives and bodies and few defenses against neglect and oppression. However unwillingly or unready, they were married when and to whom their fathers chose. Subject to their husbands, they could scarcely expect sympathy and support from their parental families, and they were lucky if they were not blamed for their own suffering. Marriage was no guarantee of security, for they had little recourse against being divorced, abandoned, or disowned. They were obliged to submit to their husbands' sexual demands, and they had little recourse against rape. Occasionally their physical subjection went beyond sexual oppression to assault and even to murder.²⁰²

Tracing the origins of misogyny to the medieval present

The question to be posed is where did this high medieval period misogyny stem from? *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* provides some answers. First, author Caroline Walker Bynum explains, "... the decline and disappearance of quasi-clerical roles for women, and the increased suspicion, from the early fourteenth century on, of exactly those prophetic and visionary powers of holy women that contrasted sharply with male clerical authority, based as it was on ordination. In the church of the tenth to the twelfth century, women did exercise some "clerical" roles: preaching, hearing confessions from nuns under them, bestowing blessings, and sometimes administering communion to themselves in rituals known as "masses without priests." But such things were increasingly criticized and suppressed."²⁰³ The so-called twelfth century renaissance for women in Europe of the period was comparatively better than for women of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Connected to the idea of suspicion, Bynum writes, "Suspicion of prophetic women reflected the general

²⁰¹ Weinstein and Bell, 96.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁰³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 21.

fourteenth-century suspicion of popular religious movements and of mysticism. The period was one of deep hostility to visionary and mystical males as well. But the ambivalence of church authorities and theologians about women mystics also reflected virulent misogyny - a misogyny that issued both in the actual witch accusations and in the witch-hunting theology of the fifteenth century."²⁰⁴ It was not just men upholding clerical misogynistic traditions, Bynum argues it occurred among women, as well. She explains, "A study of women's own writings suggests that women who lived *in* the world (either as tertiaries and beguines or as laywomen) and women who converted as adults differed from nuns raised in convents by having a sharper sense of male/female differences, a sense of "the female" closer to the negative stereotype found in the misogynist clerical tradition, and a less intense sense of community. They were more aware of the prohibition of sacramental functions and teaching to women, more likely to see the female as weak and vulnerable, more male-oriented (i.e., more dependent on the confessors or powerful male religious leaders, not to mention husbands and fathers), and more concerned with male power and male roles (although the concern was often a critique). For example, the thirteenth-century Italian tertiary Angela of Foligno spoke far more frequently of her spiritual "sons" than of any female companions."²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Bynum argues that the sentimentalizing ways in which medieval men indulged with regards to women does not present woman's self-image and her work explores how they resisted. She believes that rather than look at medieval women's asceticism and spirituality through fasting and mutilation as forms of hatred and masochism, another way of seeing it is more on point. That is, women were attempting to gain control of their lives and give them meaning. She states, " ... the central theme in women's visions,

²⁰⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 23.

²⁰⁵ Bynum, 27.

increasing from the thirteenth to the early fifteenth century, was fusion with the crucified body of Christ. These visions stream with blood. And in the frenzy of trance or ecstasy, pious women sometimes mutilated themselves with knives, as Mary of Oignies did, or, like Beatrice of Nazareth and Elizabeth of Spalbeek, drove themselves to what they and their companions saw as "insanity."²⁰⁶ What lends credibility to Bynum's overarching argument is in her maintenance that for these religious women to resist the patriarchy that was both in the Church and the society around them, not least of all their own family, taking extreme measures was their only viable path. There were no other plausible options. It might have been the only way to avoid a bad marriage, which were arranged, often very early in adolescence for girls. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, dowries inflated wildly according to Bynum and resentment and abandonment of being sent off to a foreign land caused despair in girls. Bynum writes, "Such social facts suggest that some girls may have seen betrothal and marriage as abandonment by their own families. It is thus not surprising that adolescents such as Francesca Romana, Lidwina of Schiedam, and Catherine of Genoa reacted with wild anger, which turned inward toward themselves as self-hatred or despair, when suitors were proposed."²⁰⁷ The fabliaux and *The Decameron* are full of stories of women, typically of noble birth, trapped in hated marriages, and thus take solace in taking a lover. As an example, in the eighth story of the seventh day in *The Decameron*, the cheating wife verbally turns the tables on her husband by explaining to her family slanderous lies about her husband: "The worthy gentleman, to whom I had the misfortune to be given by you in marriage, who calls himself a merchant and wants people to think he is more temperate than a monk and more chaste than a virgin (as indeed he should be) goes

²⁰⁶ Bynum, 209.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 226.

carousing nearly every night in the taverns, and consorting with one harlot after another;"²⁰⁸ and one truth: that she despised being married to him.

Another factor as to why women of the late medieval era resisted their misogynistic environment through extreme measures is because these were learned women. They knew and understood not only their own circumstances but the plight of women overall. Women of all social classes turned to religiosity, including many from the wealthier, educated families. What was said about their gender by men would have dampened many female spirits. For example, on why there were more cases of demonically possessed women than men, Caciola explains, " ... one commentator, speaking of the multitude of women vexed or possessed by demons, confessed: We believe in fact that, by the hidden and just judgment of God, women are brought to this sorry state by an excess of illicit temptation"²⁰⁹ and similarly, Bynum states, "Male biographers romanticized and sentimentalized female virtue far more than male, especially by describing it in heightened and erotic imagery. They were also far more likely to attribute sexual or bodily temptation to female nature than to male (men's sexual yearnings could always be blamed on the presence of women as temptress) and to see women struggling unsuccessfully to overcome the flesh."²¹⁰ At every turn, women could see that they were blamed on the simple account of being the victims of their birth gender. With so much misogyny in their midst, one could contemplate that women were not even really human. This question is addressed in Caciola's work. She provides the historical backdrop dating back to Greek antiquity:

If the female body was not in the image of God, then the physical differences between men and women were of paramount importance for understanding the ordering of creation. The notion that the word *homo* did not include women in

²⁰⁸ Boccaccio, 130-1.

²⁰⁹ Caciola, 40.

²¹⁰ Bynum, 29.

their physical existence raised questions about where to place women's bodies in the scheme of nature. The fact that women's bodies were not in the image of God subtly suggested that women were not as fully human as men. Yet women could not be considered nonhuman - or could they? In the thirteenth century, theologians and natural philosophers did question whether women were part of the human species, or whether they belonged to some other taxonomic group.²¹¹

Despite medieval thinkers answering against classifying women as a separate species to this Aristotelian question, they clearly inferred that women and men not only have fundamental differences, but that women were deemed biologically inferior to men, a subject previously discussed in this thesis. The well-documented and public nature of the dissemination of these medieval beliefs, many of which had their foundations in antiquity, would have affected contemporary women, albeit in varying ways. Hence the reason why some women, such as Angela of Foligno, seemingly embraced the misogyny that professed female inferiority or others to lament that they were financial burdens to their families and should automatically accept a life of marital servitude. Whatever the responses may have been, women did have voices of their own and opinions about their lot in life, the manifestations of which have been reexamined by modern historians such as Bynum and Caciola.

Conclusion

Over the course of my research I have found a convergence of misogyny across French literature. Such convergence overlapped with contemporary societal misogyny in France and beyond its borders. The pastourelle and fabliaux traditions in thirteenth century France upheld the misogynistic stereotypes regarding women, despite implementing a number of positive elements into their female characters. The popularity of this genre shows that misogyny was deeply rooted within medieval European society. In addition to the fabliaux and pastourelle,

²¹¹ Caciola, 140.

misogyny was laden within the great works of the time: courtly romance literature, hagiography, sermons, and the Church. The prevalence and ready acceptance of misogyny stems from an array of historical factors, with Church doctrine wielding significant influence. This thesis has aimed to illustrate how men and women were portrayed through the spectrum of gender in the thirteenth century and the binary representations that went with it. Additionally, this thesis analyzed similar and recurring themes of misogyny in the wider literature and regions of Europe in the high to late Middle Ages. Patterns of misogyny were pervasive due to current contemporary historical conditions, including a longstanding tradition of misogyny in Europe dating back to antiquity. This engrained, comprehensive mindset allowed distinct forms of misogyny to flourish in the literature and society. Despite this, there were some women who were able to resist this through their own, often courageous and creative means.

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