AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHAUCERIAN CUCKOLD

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by

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Preface

"And if thow take a wyf unto thyn hoold,
Ful lightly maystow been a cokewold."

In The Wife of Bath's Tale, the old hag gives the young knight, whose life she has just saved, a choice:

To han me foul and old til that I deye,
And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf, . . .
Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
And take youre aventure of the repair
That shal be to youre hous by cause of me, ...
(III[D] 1220-1225)

His dilemma is profound; he can have an ugly faithful wife or a beautiful wife who will make him a cuckold. The knight wisely succeeds in acquiring both a beautiful and loyal wife, but many husbands are not quite so lucky, in both art and life. The horns of the cuckold often accompany the wedding vows. In a majority of cases, the cuckold, usually a figure of ridicule and scorn, appears as a humorous joke to everyone but the cuckold himself. However, the cuckold does not always provide merriment and humor; depending on motivation and circumstance, the horned husband is often a tragic figure who deserves sympathy.

In Chaucer's poetry, the cuckold is portrayed as both comic and tragic. The humorous fabliaux of The Canterbury

Tales produce hilariously comic cuckolds. In Troilus and Criseyde, the infidelity of Criseyde creates Troilus, the tragic cuckold. Essentially, this study attempts to detail the roles and characters of the comic and tragic cuckolds which Chaucer so skillfully created. If this work succeeds at all, it is because of Chaucer's artistry rather than my weak explanations of his poetry and characters.

Since Chaucer's comic cuckolds are all found in fabliaux-type tales, a knowledge of the French fabliaux would seem to be a prerequisite to an understanding of the Chaucerian cuckold. The two standard studies of the French fabliaux by Joseph Bédier and Per Nykrog are available only in French, and, while a growing body of English scholarship exists on the subject, it is difficult to gain a complete overview of the fabliaux without reference to these two excellent sources. However, the publication of The Humor of the Fabliaux, a collection of critical essays edited by Thomas D. Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt, gathers together an abundance of excellent scholarship on the subject of the Old French fabliaux. I am deeply indebted to Thomas D. Cooke who was kind enough to provide me with a manuscript of these essays prior to publication. I wish to thank him profusely for the aid that he, the manuscript, and its contents provided me in this study.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Charles E. Walton for his valuable advice and criticism and I would like to

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Michael James Dodge
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Chapter I

The Cuckold and the Fabliaux Tradition

In all likelihood, cuckolds are as old and familiar as the institution of marriage itself. Who could name the first cuckold? Perhaps in a symbolic sense, it was Adam. Eve by listening to the serpent's guile and eating from the Tree of Knowledge was unfaithful to both her husband and God. Mythically, man has been paying for this cuckolding ever since. Particularly in literature, both ancient and modern, cuckoldry has been a recurring concern. The subject of faithless wives and duped husbands is as common in Ovid's Metamorphoses as in John Updike's latest novel. During the Middle Ages, the cuckold was a common figure of entertainment, merriment, and often ridicule and scorn in song, story, and presumably, life.[1] In Chaucer's poetry, the cuckold is

[1]The medieval system of courtly love produced many cuckolds and the base fabliaux employed the cuckold as a standard figure. William Lawrence, "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," Speculum, 33(1958), 56-68, writes that "the cuckold was a common butt of medieval merriment," and John Spargo in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale: The Lover's Gift Regained, FF Com., no. 91, Helsinki, 1930, believes "... there can be no doubt regarding the pleasure which our medieval ancestors took in hearing tales of horns sprouting from the heads of witless husbands." Perhaps one of the most famous medieval cuckolds was also one of the most famous heroes: King Arthur.

represented in two opposing views: comedy and tragedy. In The Canterbury Tales, four fabliaux, the tales of the Miller, Reeve, Merchant, and Shipman, as well as the Wife of Bath's Prologue, explore the comic side of cuckoldry, while the character of Troilus in the romantic Troilus and Criseyde reveals the tragic side of cuckoldry. Through these cuckold figures, Chaucer explores the joyous and sorrowful aspects of sex and love. These horned characters provide the basis for entertainment, both low comedy and high tragedy, and often a certain sense of ethical direction.

To create the figure of the cuckold in literature, sex, especially adulterous and illicit sex, is necessary. The description of the sexual act can be handled in a variety of ways ranging from the very explicitness of hard core pornography to the lyric metaphors and symbolism of romance. As a poet, Geoffry Chaucer was never shy or inhibited about human sexuality and the diverse relationships between men and women. As in many artists, these themes constitute a large portion of Chaucer's work. Throughout his work, Chaucer describes many facets of sex, love, and marriage, from lust and lechery to steadfast fidelity and the joy of true love. Although he is sometimes explicit in his descriptions of sexual activities depending upon the social class and situations of the character and the type of literary genre, Chaucer often couches references to sexual intercourse

in metaphoric and ambiguous terms, "Lest that precious folk be with me wrooth." When Chaucer does incorporate ribald or bawdy language to describe sexual indiscretions and the lives of the common classes, such as in the tales of the Miller and Reeve, the bawdy passages do not show an excessive concern for pornography, abnormal sexual behavior, or scatological themes, but rather, an insight into the lives of the rustic folk and a realistic exploration of the human character.[2] Chaucer uses sex and sexual activity to create the humor of the cuckold and to reveal human follies in the fabliaux. In Troilus and Criseyde, sexual descriptions lend a touch of realism to the passionate physical love of Troilus and Criseyde. In Chaucer's work, sex is not exploited for the sake of prurient interest, but instead, it is shown to be a natural extension of human nature.

As reflected in his work, the cuckold in Chaucer's day was a familiar figure. The first mention of the word in The Canterbury Tales occurs when the drunken Miller addresses Osewold, the Reeve:

> Leve brother Osewold,
> Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold.

[2]Haldeen Brady, "Chaucer's Bawdy Tongue," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 30(June, 1966), 216. For further discussion of Chaucer's bawdy language, see Thomas Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy and Haldeen Brady, "Chaucer—Realism or Obscenity?" Arlington Quarterly, 2(1969), 121-38.

> But I sey nat therfore that thou art oon;
> Ther been ful goode wyves many oon,
> And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon badde.
> (I[A] 3151-55)[3]

But, while he does describe a few good and faithful wives such as Griselda in The Clerk's Tale and Dorigen in The Franklin's Tale, Chaucer devotes four fabliaux to "badde wyves" and their cuckolded husbands. Moreover, in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, Chaucer reveals a strident feminist whose methods of dominating men include cuckolding. These cuckolds create comedy within the context of the humorous fabliaux. In the romance of Troilus and Criseyde, however, the infidelity of Criseyde generates a tragic cuckold because of the idealistic character of Troilus. Criseyde is portrayed as a complexly motivated woman whose cuckolding of Troilus still remains a controversial point in the poem. The Chaucerian cuckold is largely humorous although not strictly confined to comedy. Through the facade of art, Chaucer's cuckolds present the comedy and the tragedy of human nature and sexual relations.

The idea of the cuckold as weak and sexually inadequate, and therefore comic, probably originated in the very beginnings of civilized behavior. Primitive societies

[3]The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, F. N. Robinson, ed., 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957). All subsequent Chaucer quotations used in this investigation are taken from this edition.

often viewed the female as essentially the property of the male.[4] Interference with a man's wife outraged his sense of ownership besides infringing upon his rights. Even though the woman may have consented wholeheartedly to the interference, the protection of property was the prime concern in matters of infidelity. As man grew in civilized behavior, the idea of women as property held to a certain extent. The cuckolding of a man was essentially the theft of his property. Chaucer's Parson strongly supports this view, "Certes, this is the foulest thefte that may be, whan womman steleth hir body from hir housbonde, and yeveth it to hire holour to defoulen hire; and steleth hir soule fro Crist and yeveth it to the devel." (The Parson's Tale, X[I] 877) Although an intangible kind of theft, infidelity was still enough of a theft to anger and humiliate. Thus, cuckolding was looked upon as a form of weakness, shame, and degradation. In this sense, the cuckold is seen as a man who can not protect his property, namely his wife, and as a man who has failed to satisfy the needs of that property. Consequently, the cuckold became a derisive and weak figure, an object of laughter, the ape or horned fool.

As to the whys and wherefores of adultery and,

[4]Edward A. Westermarck, The History of Human Marriage, 5th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1921), I,300.

consequently, cuckoldry, who can say? Recent research into sexual behavior does not add much to the observations of Chaucer six hundred years ago. As one researcher observes, there is a "dearth of information" because of the highly ego-involved aspects of the subject.[5] A study on the sexual behavior of females by Indiana University researchers, including Alfred C. Kinsey, makes the following statement:

> As we have remarked in our volume on the male, the preoccupation of the world's biography and fiction, through all ages and in all human cultures, with the non-marital sexual activities of married females and males, is evidence of the universality of human desires in these matters, and of the universal failure of the existent social regulations to resolve the basic issues which are involved. [6]

The universality of extra-marital relations is not open to question, but the reasons for these sexual relations are. One of the conclusions that Kinsey, et. al., arrive at in their research is that extra-marital coitus often provides a means for one spouse to assert his or her independence over the other partner or over a strict social code. Other reasons are unsatisfactory marriage relationships, absence

[5]Ralph E. Johnson, "Some Correlates of Extramarital Coitus," Journal of Marriage and Family, 32 (August, 1970), 449.

[6]Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, by the staff of the Institute for Sex Research, Indiana University: Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, Paul H. Gebhard, research associates (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company, 1953), p.409.

or illness of the husband, financial advantage, desire for variety, the need for emotional reassurance, emotional attachment to a new partner, and the attempt to help the marriage.[7] Many of these reasons are similar to the motivations of Chaucer's wives in cuckolding their husbands. Apparently, fundamental human nature does not change nor do the basic desires and motivations of mankind.

According to the OED, the noun form of cuckold, meaning a derisive name for the husband of an unfaithful wife, made its appearance in our language during the thirteenth century as cukeweld. The verb form of cuckold was first used during the sixteenth century. Although the word has taken many forms over the centuries, the Middle English cukeweld and cokewold appear to be adaptations of an Old French word, cucuault, which in turn points to an earlier and unsubstantiated form, cucuald. These words were formed on the Old French cucu (cuckoo). Other Old French synonyms, coucuol and couquiol, were apparently derived from the Provencal. The OED attributes the meaning to the cuckoo bird and its curious habit of laying its eggs in other bird's nests. In France and Germany, the words for the cuckold were applied to the adulterer as well as the husband. However, in

[7] Ibid., p.432.

English, where cuckold has never been the name of the bird, it has never been applied to the adulterer. The use of the term for the adulterer is easily traced as a transformation of the biological habits of the cuckoo bird. The source of the word is explained by the fact that the word cuckold originated with the cuckoo and that the term was applied to both the lover and the husband in some cultures, but how cuckold came to refer only to the husband in England is unknown.

A popular expression, especially during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in referring to a cuckold, was "to give horns to." The origin of this saying is obscure. Although labelled as obsolete, the OED acknowledges this sense, "Cuckolds were fancifully said to wear horns on the brow. To give horns to, graft, plant horns on; to cuckold." The phrase occurs in many European languages. Herman Dunger traces the German word for cuckold, hahnrei or hahnreh, back toan original meaning of "capon." He, then, concludes that the cuckold's horns originally referred to the custom of grafting the spurs of castrated cocks onto their heads where the spurs grew into horns.[8] The phrase was known as early as the second century A. D. through Artemidorus of Daldis.

[8]Herman Dunger, "'Horner Aufsetzen' and 'Hahnrei'," Germania, 29 (1884), 59-70.

A Greek author who lived in Rome during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Antonius Pius, Artimedorus refers to the horns of the betrayed husband in his five volume work, Oneirocrita, which dealt primarily with dream interpretation.

Another possibility for the origin of the meaning may be found in the Greek myth of Artemis and Actaeon. According to most sources, Artemis changed Actaeon into a stag because he invaded her privacy by seeing her bathe, "On his forehead/ Horns sprouted, and his hound-dogs came to drink/ The blood of their young master."[9] Although Actaeon was not a true cuckold, his punishment was a crown of horns and destruction at the hands of his own hunting dogs for seeing the wrong goddess at the wrong time.

A further unsubstantiated origin of the phrase may be found in the mano cornuta or horned hand. According to the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, the mano cornuta was ". . . a gesture in which the index and little finger are pointed outwards, the others being folded under the thumb."[10] This gesture was used to combat the evil eye and perhaps also as a derisive gesture toward wronged husbands.

Eric Partridge, in his discussion of Shakespeare, attributes the cuckold's horns to "the legend of amorous

[9]Ovid, Metamorphoses, III, 139-141, Rolfe Humphries, trans., p.61.

[10]J. A. McCulloch, "Horns," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 6,791-96.

Jove self-transformed to the likeness of a bull."[11] As an example, Partridge cites Troilus and Cressida, V,i,52-54, when Thersites refers to Menelaus, "the goodly transformation of Jupiter there, his brother, the bull,—the primitive statue, and oblique memorial of cuckolds." In this sense, the horns have become an indirect reminder to husbands and others of the adulterous Jove. How the horns became planted on the husband, Partridge does not attempt to explain.

A final interesting but unproven and second-hand attribution is given by Alan Brien in the Spectator:

> According to Signor Corrado Pallenburg, the custom arose in the days when witchcraft was a popular cult. The man whose wife had spent the night at the sabbat (and therefore most probably been intimate with the Devil or his impersonation) would be mocked by his neighbors making the two-fingered V sign behind his head. These horns, visible to all but the wearer, marked out the cuckold. . . . Roman crowds practised much the same joke upon the man whose wife had trafficked with Pan or Dionysus. 12

Although the exact source for the phrase, "cuckold's horns," can not be pinpointed, the most plausible origin may actually be opposite of the traditional meaning of the horn symbol. Throughout the ages, horns have served as symbols of divine figures, heroes, and demons. Horns, in various and diverse cultures, have been used for great

[11]Eric Partridge, Shakespeare's Bawdy (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1956), p.129.

[12]Alan Brien, Spectator, 11 September 1964, p.351.

strength or prowess, magical powers, medicinal remedies, and as signs of virility and fertility. Perhaps the subversion of this symbol accounts for the meaning of the cuckold's horns. Since horns can symbolize fertility, it is not unreasonable to view the horns of the cuckold as the ironic attribution of the horns of fertility.[13] The inversion of the horn symbol could be the ironic expression for the fool. The horn as a dual symbol for both virility and the lack of virility may lie in the essence of human nature. The use of horns to show the cuckold may derive from the human pleasure in ironically giving the scapegoat the very quality which he lacks.[14] From this point of view, the cuckold's horns grow out of the irony and humor of his position as a sexually inadequate dupe.

The idea of the cuckold's horns was current in Chaucer's time, but Chaucer rarely if ever makes use of the phrase.[15] In Troilus and Criseyde the idea of the cuckold's horns are hinted at twice. In Book I, Troilus "was tho glad his hornes in to shrinke;" (I, 300) or less presumptuous in his viewing of Criseyde. This reference to horns may hint at Troilus's

[13]Phillip Stevick, "The Cuckold's Horns," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 28(September, 1964), 220.

[14]Ibid., p.221.

[15]Thomas Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy (New York: Dutton,1972), p.111.

coming cuckolding, but such a reading is not particularly likely. Another ironic foreshadowing comes when Troilus speaks to the moon in Book V, "Ywis, whan thow art horned newe,/ I shal be glad, if al the world be trewe!" (V,650-51) Of course, the world is not true and neither is Criseyde. The coming horns of the new moon at least hint of Troilus's cuckolding and his own incipient horns.[16] Otherwise, Chaucer does not refer to the cuckold's horns.

The cuckold is a common figure throughout literature and life. When he is humorous, the cuckold is often duped and foolish, an object of scorn, ridicule, and laughter. Nowhere is this more evident than in the fabliaux. In the Old French fabliaux, from which much of Chaucer's knowledge of that genre undoubtedly came, the cuckold is widely used as a figure of scorn, derision, and, most importantly, humor. The cuckold, while not evident in all of the French fabliaux, provides much of the humor in a large majority of these ribald tales. The cuckold is also present in all of Chaucer's fabliaux save the tales of the Friar and Summoner. Since Chaucer's comic cuckolds are created from and within the context of the French fabliaux, a brief explanation of this literary genre is a useful guide to the understanding of both Chaucer's fabliaux and his comic cuckolds.

[16] Ibid., p.111.

For many years the fabliaux were simply regarded as low, rough, coarse, and/or sordid tales from twelfth- and thirteenth-century France. Concerning this distinctly French genre, early scholars and critics felt that the fabliaux had no proper place in the study of literature. Instead, they placed these tales in the realm of folklore and, therefore, of only marginal interest to the literary scholar. During the nineteenth century, however, the French fabliaux began to arouse more interest and more scholarly study. The Old French fabliaux were first collected by Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud and published from 1872 to 1890 in six volumes.[17] In 1893, the first major literary study of the fabliaux was published by Joseph Bédier.[18] With this work as the starting point, more and more attention has been focused upon the fabliaux in the

[17]Cf. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, eds., Recueil general et comlet des fabliaux des XIII^{e} et XIV^{e} siecles, in 6 volumes (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1872-1890), rpt. (New York: Burt Franklin, n.d., Geneva: Skatline, 1973). This work although sometimes considered to be incomplete, is the standard source for the Old French fabliaux. The most readily accessible collection in French is by Ronald C. Johnston and D.D.R. Owen, eds., Fabliaux (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), and in English by Robert Hellman and Richard O'Gorman, eds. and trans., Fabliaux: Ribald Tales from the Old French (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1965).

[18]Joseph Bédier, Les Fabliaux, 6th ed. (1893; Paris: Champion, 1964). It is generally recognized that Per Nykrog's Les Fabliaux, published in 1957, supercedes this work although both contribute to the study of the genre.

intervening years. Today, the fabliaux are recognized as a distinctly French genre, usually comic in tone and effect, which, to a certain extent, reflect the people and life of the Middle Ages.

The most generally known definition of the fabliaux is Bédier's "contes a rire en vers," or "tales of laughter in verse."[19] Although accurate in essence, this definition is by no means complete. Knud Togeby proposes a modified definition for the fabliaux, "nouvelle de niveau bas du XIII^{e} siecle," or, freely translated, "short stories of low standard from the thirteenth century."[20] To use "a rire" as a strict generic classification of the fabliaux eliminates certain serious and tragic tales which are traditionally classified as fabliaux. However, most critics, if not all, generally concede that the main purpose or function of most of the fabliaux was to produce a comic effect and laughter. Indeed, the fabliaux defy a simplistic classification as Per Nykrog observes:

> In thirteenth-century usage the word fabliau designates a short story, written in rhymed octo-syllables (though a couple of closely related

[19]Bédier, Les Fabliaux, p.6.

[20]Knud Togeby, "The Nature of the Fabliaux," p.8, The Humor of the Fabliaux: A Collection of Critical Essays, Thomas D. Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt, eds. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974). This collection of essays is hereafter referred to as Humor of the Fabliaux.

> tales are in courtly stanzas), mainly of humorous nature (though some are either moralizing or edifying), and intended for entertainment of a certain type. THe corpus of medieval manuscripts contains about 150 tales that correspond to that definition (since the definition is rather vague, exact limits of the "genre" are hard to draw, and only a person who enjoys statistics is in need of them), but there are, in the medieval texts, allusions to a few more. 21

The word fabliaux comes from the diminutive of fable and some critics believe that the fabliaux evolved from or, at least, are closely related to the classical fable.[22] Although similar to the fable, the fabliaux are different in enough respects to assign them a distinct genre of their own. Fabliaux differ from fables in style, content, and purpose. While a fable is usually serious with a pointed moral and overt didacticism, a fabliau is primarily humorous with almost no hint of didactic moralizing. The fabliaux use humans as the principal characters; fables sometimes use humans, but beast characters predominate. The explicit purpose of the fable is to teach with entertainment only as a secondary concern. The fabliaux's primary purpose is to amuse and entertain. Another important difference between the fabliau and the fable is length. While human fables

[21]Per Nykrog, "Courtliness and the Townspeople: The Fabliaux as a Courtly Burlesque," Humor of the Fabliaux, p.61.

[22]See Henry S. Canby, "The English Fabliau," PMLA, 21 (1906), 200-14; Hellman and O'Gorman, Fabliaux, p.182; K. Togeby, Humor of the Fabliaux, p.10.

(as opposed to beast fables) in a work like the Roman de Renard are similar to the fabliaux, the longer length of the fabliaux clearly separates the two types.[23] Other types of literature which show a close relationship in subject and tone to the fabliaux are the folk tale and ballad.[24]

The exact origin of the French fabliaux is difficult to place. There are a few examples of humorous fabliau-like stories from the twelfth century, but the word was not then in use.[25] The flourishing of the fabliaux in France took place from the latter years of the twelfth century to approximately the middle of the fourteenth. As is often the case in medieval literature, the lack of factual information renders at best a sketchy picture of the fabliaux authors and their work. Many of the fabliaux are anonymous works; however, some of the authors and their situations are known either through allusions in manuscripts, other signed works,

[23]The fabliaux average between 200 and 400 lines; the human fable, 30 to 40 lines. K. Togeby provides a discussion of this comparison in Humor of the Fabliaux, p.10.

[24]Walter M. Hart, "The Fabliau and Popular Literature," PMLA, 23(1908), 329-74. Hart views the fabliaux as a development of the literature of the folk, conceivably close to the German schwank. For a more current discussion, see Jurgen Beyer, "The Morality of the Amoral," Humor of the Fabliaux, pp.15-42.

[25]Apparently a controversy exists over a line from the twelfth century Roman de Renart which has in one manuscript the word fabliaux and in another, the word fables. See Jurgen Beyer, p.16 and Per Nykrog, p.61, in Humor of the Fabliaux.

or direct references in the fabliaux. The fabliaux were most often produced by professional entertainers of one sort or another. Wandering students and clerics of the thirteenth century, sometimes referred to as goliards and vagantes, were likely the authors of many fabliaux. Thirteenth-century jongleurs, vagabond poets disliked by most other classes, and minstrels of the early fourteenth century also created many fabliaux. The nomadic lives of these fabliaux authors seem to account for the often kindly treatment of poor students and clerks in the tales.[26]

Most critics unanimously agree that the basic aim of the fabliaux is to produce humor (anyone familiar with the tales can not very well argue this fact), and the distinctiveness of the genre rests in the comic effects produced and the methods used to produce them. The main focus of humor in the fabliaux is the skeletal action or the plot of the story. Often, in fact, a brief summary of a fabliau is as humorous as the tale itself.[27] These humorous plots turn on some joke or trick, generally of a sexual or scatological nature. The focus of the fabliaux is centered on the actions of the characters which arise from a potentially humorous

[26]For a more complete discussion of this subject, refer to Per Nykrog, p.64, Knud Togeby, p.11, and particularly, Stephen Wailes, "Vagantes and Fabliaux," pp.43-58, in Humor of the Fabliaux.

[27]Togeby in Humor of the Fabliaux, p.13.

situation.[28] The characters are often conventionally stock or typed. The settings are minimal and developed only for their functional purpose.[29] The fabliaux are noted for their sparse and economic narrative;[30] extraneous details, character complexity, and other embellishments are seldom seen. The simple plots are based on vices such as lechery, deceit, greed, vanity, and foolishness. Through the actions of the principal characters, the plots explore the resulting cruelty, infidelity, and frequent violence that evolve from the character's vices, but only in such a way as to create humor. The subject of almost every fabliaux is the humorous betrayal of human nature through common vices and faults. The fabliaux's purpose is to ridicule human failings rather than to pass judgment upon them or to moralize about the situation. The exploration of basic human nature, observable in any culture, and the simple aim of laughter enhance the universal appeal of the stories.

Although the basic humor of the fabliaux is contained

[28]Michael McClintock, "Games and the Players of Games: Old French Fabliaux and the Shipman's Tale," Chaucer Review, 5 (Fall, 1970), 114.

[29]For a lengthy and scholarly discussion of the extent and purpose of the fabliaux settings, see Paul Theiner, "Fabliau Settings," Humor of the Fabliaux, pp.119-36.

[30]Walter M. Hart, "The Narrative Art of the Old French Fabliaux," Kittredge Anniversary Papers (Boston, 1913).

in the actions of the characters and the situation of the story, the fableors also incorporated other literary techniques into the tales to add to the humor. One comic technique necessary to the fabliaux is the clear separation of art from reality or the creation of esthetic distance.[31] Since the fabliaux are primarily designed for humor, the author must make sure that the reader or listener avoids identification with any of the characters. While the fabliaux often portray realistic glimpses of medieval society and life, the audience must always be able to see the fiction of the story or joke which creates the fabliaux. To the medieval audience, the word fabliaux immediately brought to mind the idea of a joke; since many of the fabliaux are prefaced with an explanation that they are fabliaux, the audience was aware of the nature of the tale it was about to hear.[32] This preparation helped create the necessary distance. Other methods for the creation of esthetic distance were the incongruities apparent in the various stories. These incongruities were the result of ironic inversions of characters and their actions, the particular situations that involved the characters, and often the tongue-in-cheek morals

[31]Norris J. Lacy, "Types of Esthetic Distance in the Fabliaux," Humor of the Fabliaux, p.107 ff.

[32]Ibid., p.109.

added at the conclusion of the tales.[33] The creation of esthetic distance between the fabliaux and its audience was a vital part of fabliaux humor because, through the successful establishment of distance, shocking and sensitive subjects became the perfect material for humorous stories.[34]

The social background and the specific audience of the fabliaux have been the subject of much debate. Joseph Bédier believed the fabliaux to be a product of the bourgeois and, as such, a bourgeois genre or literature.[35] Others insist that the fabliaux are parodies or burlesques of courtly literature and values.[36] Per Nykrog sees the fabliaux as at least partly a development of the courtly literature of the twelfth century; the fabliaux that the townspeople enjoyed in the thirteenth century are derived in large part from the courtly literature of the previous century and from the

[33] Ibid., pp.110-112.

[34] Ibid., pp.117.

[35] Joseph Bédier, Les Fabliaux.

[36] Per Nykrog, Les Fabliaux, discusses at some length the possible derivation of the fabliaux as a courtly genre and the fabliaux's parody of courtly literature. Togeby also believes the fabliaux to be comic parodies of elevated courtly romances, Humor of the Fabliaux, pp.12-13. Howard Helsinger, "Pearls in the Swill: Comic Allegory in French Fabliaux," Humor of the Fabliaux, pp.93-105, sees the fabliaux as parodies or burlesques of the courtly allegories which dominated much of medieval literature.

writers' carefree days in and around the schools.[37] Many fabliaux, by all available evidence, were composed by the wandering clerics and jongleurs who seem sympathetic to the position of the poor clerk or student. In fact, it is usually the clerk or student who triumphs over priest, peasant, merchant, or whomever, although this is not always the case. Since many of these vagabonds were products of the university, Nykrog sees a revealing pattern in the fabliaux.[38] Most fabliaux show not only an affinity for the student, but also a deference towards the nobility. These fabliaux often reveal a bitter contempt for the middle class which grows in bitterness whenever a bourgeois tries to move upward into the noble class. They also reveal a society still dominated by the old creative bond between the noble class and the men of learning.[39] But to consider the entire body of fabliaux as strictly courtly or strictly bourgeois is too limiting and conjectural.

The most plausible possibility for the development of the fabliaux, may lie in the synthesis of the two prevalent theories. That is, the fabliaux are not strictly a development of either the courtly or the bourgeois alone; they

[37]Per Nykrog in Humor of the Fabliaux, p.64.
[38]Ibid., p.64.
[39]Ibid., p.64.

probably resulted as a combination of the two. The fabliaux may very well have been an independent genre capable of belonging to any class of people.[40] Many fabliaux are stories devoid of subtlety, designed and written for unsubtle people of any class.[41] But there are also effects in some fabliaux which would have been wasted on unsophisticated readers, and some fabliaux do not make sense unless they are seen as comments on courtly customs and literature.[42] On the other hand, numerous fabliaux reflect only the life of the lower classes. Indeed, these tales of the lower classes were probably as entertaining to the nobility as the fabliaux of uncourtly knights were to the lower classes, but the audience who derived the most enjoyment and amusement must have been found in the rising middle class of the thirteenth century. The fabliaux might very well have been a "democratic" genre in the broadest sense of the word.

The fabliaux, whether courtly or common, were certainly designed to entertain and amuse, and they are still very successful. But because of their diverse nature, the fabliaux do indeed defy classification; no formula embraces all of them.[43]

[40]Jurgen Beyer in Humor of the Fabliaux, p.21.
[41]Per Nykrog in Humor of the Fabliaux, p.64.
[42]Ibid., p.64.
[43]Ibid., p.71.

They are literary, but not necessarily literature. Although essentially a written literature, the stories were meant to be ricited to groups whether in the castle or market. They sometimes end with a moral, but never the didactic moral of a fable.[44] Many of the fabliaux are centerd around courtly themes, but they are uncourtly because the arguments of the seducers are incongruous, the erotic triangles are shown from the wrong angle, and the lovers are deservedly excluded from the world of courtly love.[45] In short, the fabliaux do not readily fall into an easy and exact literary category.

While largely concerned with sex and sexual desires, the fabliaux are neither obscene nor pornographic. They may border on the pornographic and make use of obscene language, but their humor saves them from becoming smut. The sexual humor of the fabliaux while often coarse is never prurient nor sensual. When four-letter and taboo words are used in the fabliaux, they are incorporated either for their shock value, comic effect, or graphic realism. The language and action of the fabliaux are similar to that of pornography, but the comic tone of the fabliaux produces a different effect and purpose from that of the pathetic seriousness of

[44] Ibid., p.71.
[45] Ibid., p.71.

pornography.[46] The humor of the fabliaux which often comes from surprise endings channels the would-be pornography into comedy. Perversions, sexual deviancies, and homosexuality are non-existant in the fabliaux.[47] Humor is the main function of the fabliaux, and the comic reversals and tone of the fabliaux do not induce sexual stimulation. The fabliaux do not exploit sex for the sake of sex, but only as a representation of human nature and all the faults inherent in that nature.

In England, the fabliaux tradition was not as widespread or developed as in France, that is, until Chaucer.[48] Chaucer was, indeed, the master of the English fabliaux; in fact, only three pre-Chaucerian fabliaux are still extant. "The Vox and the Wolf," an analogue of the Nun's Priest's Tale, approaches the fabliaux genre, but is essentially a humorous beast fable.[49] This fabliau/fable was composed in the dialect of Kent or Sussex during the latter half of the thirteenth century.[50] Probably taken from the French where

[46]Thomas D. Cooke, Humor of the Fabliaux, pp.137-62. This essay explores the pornographic elements in the fabliaux. While declining to label the fabliaux as pornographic, Cooke does state that the fabliaux move in the direction of pornography and contain motifs similar to hard core pornography.

[47]Ibid., p.161.

[48]Rossell Hope Robbins, "The English Fabliau: Before and After Chaucer," Moderna Sprak, 64 (1970), 235.

[49]Ibid., p.235.

[50]Henry S. Canby, "The English Fabliau," PMLA, 21 (1906), 205.

numerous analogues exist, this tale simply adapted the French wit for an English audience and contains no new characteristics which show a distinct English influence.[51] "The Penniworth of Witte" which survives in a manuscript from 1330 is similar to the fabliaux, but it is really an exemplum with a moral lesson.[52] This exemplum/fabliau may have a possible French source, but adds nothing new to the fabliaux.[53]

The pre-Chaucerian fabliau which comes closest to the definition of the fabliaux is "Dame Sirith."[54] This humorous tale was probably written in the southwest of England sometime during the latter half of the thirteenth century, possibly around 1250.[55] "Dame Sirith" is almost entirely an English tale. The probable source for the plot was a Latin exemplum, but the rest of the tale is strictly English in dialogue, detail, characterization, and setting.[56] The tale is a typical fabliau, revolving around a clerk, Wilekin, whose love is spurned by a married lady. The clerk enlists the aid of an old crone, Dame Sirith, who deceives the

[51]Canby, p.206.

[52]Robbins, p.235.

[53]Canby, p.207.

[54]"Dame Sirith" can be found in The Literary Context of Chaucer's Fabliaux, Larry Benson and Theodore Anderson, eds. (Indianapolis, New York: Bobbs and Merrill Company, 1971) and Middle English Humorous Tales, George H. McKnight, ed. (1913, rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1971).

[55]Canby, p.205; Robbins, p.235, fn. 8.

[56]Canby, p.205.

married lady into accepting the clerk with a clever ruse of a little dog with pepper in its eyes. Dame Sirith informs the unwilling lady that the dog is her married daughter who rejected the love of a clerk and was transformed into a weeping mongrel. "Dame Sirith" contains the essential plot of the fabliaux and many of the same qualities. The tale is humorous, amusing, and based on a deception. It also contains lively and colloquial dialogue. Some of the tale's humor evolves from the use of courtly love techniques and language by non-courtly lovers much as Chaucer incorporated in his fabliaux.[57] Since "Dame Sirith" is the closest thing to an English fabliau before Chaucer and almost a century separates this tale and Chaucer, the question of other English fabliaux is pertinent. Although French fabliaux did circulate in England,[58] there are no other surviving English pre-Chaucerian fabliaux. Have the other English fabliaux been lost or supressed during the ensuing centuries? Were there not any others or were they perhaps part of an oral tradition? The answers to these questions remain matters of conjecture, at best.

[57]Robbins, p.236.

[58]Robbins, p.237. A few French fabliaux are found in surviving English manuscripts. It is fairly certain that at least some French fabliaux were known in thirteenth-century England.

Following Chaucer's artistic development of the fabliaux in the fourteenth century, there were some imitators in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but none that reached the artistic development of Chaucer.[59] These latter fabliaux lack Chaucer's artistic integrity and are imitations rather than distinctly new works. Moreover, these stories often moralize almost to the point of exemplum, they are sentimental, and they lack the complex characterization of Chaucer's fabliaux.[60] While the French produced many fabliaux-type stories, English literature must be content with the comparatively few fabliaux of Chaucer who took the relatively simple French genre and used it in a more complex and artistic fashion.

[59]Robbins discusses more thoroughly some fifteenth- and sixteenth-century analogues which onlyreflect Chaucer's art rather than improve upon it.

[60]Robbins, pp.237-43.

Chapter II

The Comic Cuckold

One of the many reasons Chaucer's works have survived throughout the last five hundred years is found in his skill in creating characters which come alive and reflect real human qualities, a skill which provides a large part of the humor, irony, and reality contained in his poetry. In the fabliaux of The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer uses this skill to fashion in particular one outstanding comic figure--the cuckold. As leading protagonists of the tales, Chaucer's comic cuckolds are primarily four: John the carpenter of The Miller's Tale; Symkyn the miller of The Reeve's Tale; Januarie of The Merchant's Tale; and the merchant of The Shipman's Tale. But these are not the only cuckolds of The Canterbury Tales; the lusty Wife of Bath admits to cuckolding her first three husbands and possibly her fourth.[61] These comic cuckolds, victimized by their own foolish natures, possess comic flaws which not only contribute to their

[61]In the following discussion, these comic cuckolds will be considered in the order in which they appear in F. N. Robinson's 2nd edition of the poet's works.

respective cuckoldings, but also provide much of the humor in each tale. Consequently, the cuckold character in each of these tales contributes much of the comedy therein. These comic cuckolds draw no sympathetic reactions from the audience for the same reason that they produce comedy: their obviously foolish flaws and excessive desires. Although for the purposes of art, their characters are exaggerated and stereotyped to a certain extent, they nevertheless reflect real qualities of human nature. In this way, Chaucer, while creating hilarious comedy, also reveals aspects of man which are continuously true and representative of humanity. In this sense, Chaucer is a poet of realism and even morality, but as a poet, Chaucer never moralizes or passes judgment upon these foolish cuckolds. He allows their actions and characters to speak for themselves.

The first comic cuckold to appear in The Canterbury Tales is John the carpenter of The Miller's Tale, who, like Januarie in The Merchant's Tale, is a typical and humorous senex amans or senile lover. The humor of the figure is seen through both John's character as an old, jealous, and possessive husband and the plot, which includes the realization of his worst fears--cuckolding at the hands of his young wife. In this comic fabliau which has no direct

literary source,[62] the cuckolding of John is only a portion of the plot. The cuckolding, by Alisoun, John's wife, and hende Nicholas, the clever clerk of Oxford, is accomplished through the device of the prophesized second Noah's flood. The rest of the tale concerns Absolon, the squeamish parish clerk, his fervent courtship of Alisoun, and the misdirected kiss. In a sense, both John and Absolon are cuckolded by Alisoun. Although Absolon never receives any sexual favors from Alisoun, the parish clerk vigorously woos the beautiful wife of the carpenter and exhibits the shame and humiliation of a cuckolded husband when he receives Alisoun's "kiss." Absolon's cuckolding comes in the form of the misplaced kiss and the flatulence of Nicholas rather than John's traditional cuckolding.

John, who receives the most grievous retribution, suffers not only cuckolding, but a broken arm and the scorn and laughter of his neighbors. To arrive at this humiliating end, John is portrayed as a certain type of gullible and ignorant man. Besides his duping at the hands of young Nicholas and Alisoun, John is also duped by his age, sexual desires, superstitious nature, and the lack of any real wisdom or common sense. Frequently throughout the tale,

[62] Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds., p.106. While no direct source for The Miller's Tale has been discovered and there is little likelihood that one will be, the tale during Chaucer's time was well established in oral tradition.

John is described as being a "sely carpenter." The word "sely" is significant with Chaucer,[63] whose many meanings for this word include "happy," "innocent," "kind," "poor," "wretched," and "hapless." The narrative shows John to be all of these things at one point or another. He is happy with Alisoun; he is innocent in his reaction to Nicholas's possible death; he is kind in his concern for Nicholas's madness; and he is poor and wretched as the old cuckold at the end of the tale.[64] John aptly fits all of these descriptions, but perhaps the most fitting description is "hapless." Because of his old age and the superstitious nature of his mind, John is an unfortunate victim of youth, but more importantly, he is a victim of his own foolish desires and beliefs. John the carpenter is not so much the victim of circumstance or even the people surrounding him as he is a victim of his own faults including his blindness to the reality of his situation.

The Miller does not dwell on or even provide much explicit physical description of John the "sely" carpenter. He lived at Oxford and was, "A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord,/ And of his craft he was a carpenter." (I[A] 3188-89)

[63]Helen Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality, p.110.

[64]Janet Boothman, "'Who Hath No Wyf, He is No Cokewold': A Study of John and Januarie in Chaucer's Miller's and Merchant's Tales," Thoth, 4(1963), 4-5.

"Gnof" is glossed as a churl, lout, or thief. Although no definite evidence exists in the tale to ascribe these labels to the carpenter, the Miller was perhaps enhancing the carpenter's foolishness from the very beginning, while on another level, Chaucer was setting John up for his final fall, literally and figuratively. Besides this brief opening statement, John is described as being old and jealous:

> This carpenter hadde wedded newe a wyf,
> Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;
> Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
> Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
> For she was wylde and yong, and he was old,
> And demed hymself been lik a cokewold.
> (I[A] 3221-3226)

Because of the difference in age between John and his wife, he already saw himself as a cuckold and this conception, in turn, fed his jealousy. Also, coupled with these familiar faults of the senex amans is the fact that John apparently loved his young and lovely though faithless wife. For all his self-deceptions, he held a genuine feeling of affection and love for Alisoun, but age blinded him to the reality of life. The Miller explains that John's wit was rude and that he had no knowledge of philosophy. John did not even have the common sense to know that "Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,/ For youthe and elde is often at debaat." (I[A] 3229-3230) Even though John's love for Alisoun was real in every sense of the word, this affection only aids in his cuckolding. His extreme jealousy and consequent tight rein keep Alisoun out of the hands of other men, but leave her easy prey for

Nicholas, the carpenter's boarder. Although John is aware of the dangers of having a young wife, he is blind to the dangers of having a resourceful clerk within his own home. His rude wit derives from more than just a lack of education and a superstitious ignorance. His possessive jealousy, age, and rude wit combine to produce the used and abused senex amans of the Miller's fabliau.

Further insights into John's character are revealed by his actions and speech. Even though it is not essentially necessary for Nicholas to plan an elaborate scheme to beguile John, the ruse of the too clever clerk takes full advantage of the "sely" carpenter's gullible and superstitious character. Nicholas is almost too clever for his own purposes. After Nicholas has remained in his room for two days, John becomes anxious to know what ails the lad. Because of John's age and condition, he reveals his own fear of death in terms of concern for Nicholas:

> This sely carpenter hath greet merveyle
> Of Nicholas, or what thyng myghte hym eyle,
> And seyde, "I am adrad, by Seint Thomas,
> It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas.
> God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!
> This world is now ful tikel, sikerly.
> I saugh to-day a cors yborn to chirche
> That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche.
> (I[A] 3423-3430)

John is strongly aware of his own mortality. The abrupt death of an aquaintance underscores this awareness. The carpenter's thoughts upon the instability of the world evolve from his own unstable position in life. The carpenter's

fear of death and loss plays right into the hands of Nicholas. Thus, when John's servant reports that Nicholas is stone still and staring at the moon, John's worst fears are realized, and his superstitious nature is revealed:

> This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,
> And seyde, "Help us, seinte Frydeswyde!
> A man woot litel what hym shal bityde.
> This man is falle, with his astromye,
> In some woodnesse or in som agonye.
> I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!
> Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.
> Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man
> That noght but oonly his bileve kan!
> So ferde another clerk with astromye;
> He walked in the feeldes, for to prye
> Upon the sterres, what ther sholde bifalle,
> Til he was in a marle-pit yfalle;
> He saugh nat that. But yet, by seint Thomas,
> Me reweth soore of hende Nicholas.
> He shal be rated of his studiyng,
> If that I may, by Jhesus, hevene kyng!
> (I[A] 3448-3464)

John prides himself upon being an unlearned man, even contending that ignorance is superior to knowledge of "Goddes pryvetee." John is sure that a knowledge of astronomy is Nicholas's downfall; John also knew that this downfall would eventually happen. Therefore, he intends to let clever Nicholas know the wisdom of ignorance. But, John's concern for the clerk does not create much reader sympathy or respect for the carpenter because of his complacency and self-righteous ignorance. John's sympathetic concern for his cuckolder enlarges his own character and underscores the dramatic irony of the situation, but this concern does not

necessarily create sympathy for the carpenter.[65] John's character also does not evoke pity as an aged victim of youth because he is still strong and active.

After John and his servant break down the door to Nicholas's room, John heartily shakes Nicholas by the shoulders in order to rouse him from his trance:

> And shook hym harde, and cride spitously,
> "What! Nicholay! what, how! what, looke adoun!
> Awak, and thenke on Cristes passioun!
> I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes.
> Therewith the nyght-spel seyde he anon-rightes
> On foure halves of the hous aboute,
> And on the thresshfold of the dore withoute;
> "Jhesu Crist and seinte Benedight,
> Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,
> For nyghtes verye, the white pater-noster!
> Where wentestow, seinte Petres soster?"
> (I[A] 3476-3486)

At this point, John's ignorance and superstition are fully revealed. Believing Nicholas to be under some type of spell, John casts out the demons from the room with his "nyght-spel" or charm in all four directions insuring a complete exorcism. To the gullible and illiterate carpenter, this is the best method available besides the actual laying on of hands to which he first resorts.

When John has finally roused Nicholas from his feigned trance, Nicholas piques the carpenter's interest with an intriguing and ambiguous statement, "Allas!/ Shal al the world be lost eftsoones now?" (I[A] 3488-3489) John's reply

[65] T. W. Craik, The Comic Tales of Chaucer, pp.17-18.

is a reiteration of his belief in the dangers of too much knowledge, especially of God's business where no man belongs, "What seystow?/ What! thynk on God, as we doon, men that swynke." (I[A] 3490-3491) While again showing his superstitious nature, John subtlely chides the clerk for not doing honest work. But, this is as close as John comes to telling the clerk about the cause of his misfortunes, because Nicholas again draws John's interest with the promise of secrets. After John brings ale and swears not to reveal Nicholas's secret on the pain of madness, the clerk informs John of the impending disaster from a second flood which shall cover the earth in less than an hour and "Thus shal mankynde drenche, and lese hir lyf." (I[A] 3521) John's first thought after hearing this baleful news is for his wife and her well-being:

> This carpenter answerde, "Allas, my wyf!
> And shal she drenche? allas, myn Alisoun!"
> For sorwe of this he fil almoost adoun,
> And seyde, "Is ther no remedie in this cas?"
> (I[A] 3522-3525)

John is ever concerned for the safety of Alisoun, but the irony of the situation comes from the fact that Alisoun is also part of the conspiracy to dupe her husband, the gullible carpenter. Consequently, Nicholas's elaborate scheme for the cuckolding of the carpenter is revealed.

Basic to the success of the cuckolding scheme is John's gullible, ignorant, and even vain character. First, Nicholas uses John's limited knowledge of the Bible. John is aware

of how Noah escaped the deluge, but he is ignorant of God's promise never to cover the earth with water again. John's religious knowledge seems to come from the Corpus Christi Cycle Plays because he believes the apocryphal story of Noah's stubborn and shrewish wife. John's ignorance allows Nicholas to proceed with his plan. Then, Nicholas has John hang three separate tubs from the ceiling in order not to disturb the carpenter when Alisoun and the clerk slip away for their night of "myrthe and solas." As the final and master stroke, Nicholas appeals to John's pride and vanity:

> "Men seyn thus, 'sende the wise, and sey no thyng:'
> Thou art so wys, it needeth thee nat teche.
> Go, save oure lyf, and that I the biseche."
> (I[A] 3598-3600)

After having the clerk tell him about his wisdom, John is almost thoroughly convinced and probably would be feeling pleased with himself if it were not for the dire fate that he believes to be hanging over his head. When he consults Alisoun with his new found knowledge, she, knowing the plan full well, says:

> "Allas! go forth thy wey anon,
> Help us to scape, or we been dede echon!
> I am thy trewe, verray wedded wyf;
> Go, deere spouse, and help to save oure lyf."
> (I[A] 3607-3610)

With this statement, John is thoroughly persuaded to fulfill his part in his own cuckolding.

John begins his work and the narrator comments upon his condition:

> Lo, which a greet thyng is affeccioun!
> Men may dyen of ymaginacioun,
> So depe may impressioun be take.
> This sely carpenter bigynneth quake;
> Hym thynketh verraily that he may see
> Noees flood come walwynge as the see
> To drenchen Alisoun, his hony deere.
> He wepeth, weyleth, maketh sory cheere;
> He siketh with ful many a sory swogh . . . .
> (I[A] 3611-3619)

John's first and foremost concern is for his "hony deere;" his imagination has already shown him the impending doom of his sweet wife. What his imagination fails to show is his impending fate--ridicule, scorn, and cuckolding. John is sorely beset with troubles and in the depths of despair, but he goes about his task busily and secretly as his only hope of salvation for himself and his wife. After John, Alisoun, and Nicholas are secreted away in their separate tubs, John falls immediately into a deep sleep because of his labors and Alisoun and Nicholas escape to their night's pleasure. Nothing more is heard from John until the climactic moment of the tale.

John the carpenter does not draw sympathy for his cuckolding because of his many character faults, the least of which is his ignorance and smug complacency as shown in his dealings with the sly Nicholas. His real love for Alisoun does not serve as a redeeming quality because of his ignorance of the theory that men should wed their similitude and also because of his callous attitude toward the fate of his loyal servants. Although John does not

directly exhibits the excessive sexual desires of Januarie, the old knight of The Merchant's Tale, he is highly enamored of the young, fresh, and weasel-like body of his wife. His great concern for her safety is the fear of losing her youth, and in a sense, his own long lost youth. John's lack of sense, his age, and his position at the end of the tale make him a laughable study in the subject of cuckolds.

Absolon, the parish clerk, is an entirely different sort of cuckold though still a comic character. Although not a cuckold in the strict sense of the word, he is nevertheless deceived by Alisoun and reveals the typical cuckold reactions: humiliation and anger. The narrator's description of Absolon portrays him as a fashionable yet squeamish gallant. Physically, Absolon was striking; he had gray eyes, a red complexion, and curly golden hair. His clothing included a flower white robe with red hose, decorative sandals, and a tunic of light blue, "Yclad he was ful smal and proprely." (I[A] 3320) As well as being a barber, a surgeon (in the narrow sense of a leech), and a composer of deeds and charters, Absolon sang and danced, "After the scole of Oxenforde tho," (I[A] 3329) played the guitar and lute, and frequented inns and taverns with pretty barmaids:

> In al the toun nas brewhous ne taverne
> That he ne visited with his solas,
> Ther any gaylord tappestere was.
> But sooth to seyn, he was somdeel squaymous
> Of fartyng, and of speche daungerous.
> (I[A] 3334-3338)

With the final couplet, the narrator shows Absolon's fastidious behavior. This last couplet comes as a surprise. Absolon's delicacy seems misplaced after his conviviality among the lively barmaids and appears to be the affectation of refinement rather than refinement itself.[66]

When jolly Absolon first sees Alisoun, he displays lust rather than love:

> To looke on hire hym thoughte a myrie lyf,
> She was so propre and sweete and likerous.
> I dar wel seyn, if she hadde been a mous,
> And he a cat, he wolde hire hente anon.
> (I[A] 3344-3347)

Nevertheless, he falls promptly into a "love-longynge" which translates into lustful sexual desire. While Absolon becomes an exhuberant, reckless, and perverse type of courtly lover, the object of his love is bound to Nicholas. Absolon's extensive wooing is to no avail:

> But what availleth hym as in this cas?
> She loveth so this hende Nicholas
> That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;
> He ne hadde for his labour but a scorn.
> And thus she maketh Absolon hire ape,
> And al his ernest turneth til a jape.
> (I[A] 3385-3390)

Absolon becomes an ape and the butt of Alisoun's joke which she reveals in a much more concrete way at the climax of the tale.

The ending of the tale brings all four major characters

[66]Craik, p.13.

together and both sides of the double edged plot in one sweeping movement. Absolon returns to the carpenter's house under the assumption that John is out of town, in order to resume his wooing and ease his "love-longynge." After dressing gaily and sweetening his breath, jolly Absolon pleads for Alisoun's love in a "semy soun" while yearning "as dooth a lamb after the tete." (I[A] 3704) Since she refuses his advances, Absolon begs for just one kiss. Alisoun agrees on the condition that Absolon depart afterwards. While Alisoun is warning Nicholas not to laugh too loudly, Absolon is down on his knees explaining his strategy, "I am a lord at alle degrees;/ For after this I hope ther cometh moore." (I[A] 3724-3725) The following lines reveal the irony of Absolon's fastidious character:

> This Absolon gan wype his mouth ful drie.
> Derk was the nyght as pich, or cole,
> And at the window out she putte hir hole,
> And Absolon, hym fil no bet ne wers,
> But with his mouthe he kiste hir naked ers
> Ful savourly, er he were war of this.
> Abak he stirte, and thoughte it was amys,
> For wel he wiste a womman hath no berd.
> He felte a thyng al rough and long yherd,
> And seyde, "Fy! allas! what have I do?"
> (I[A] 3730-3739)

Absolon is so taken by the beauty of Alisoun and his own desire for her that he kisses "ful savourly' without being aware of exactly what he is kissing. Jolly Absolon is no longer as "jollif," "gay," or "amorous" when he realizes what he has kissed. He is angry and humiliated, the typical reaction of the cuckolded husband. His main concern is to

vindicate his foolish position. Returning to the window with a hot iron to brand sweet Alisoun, Absolon calls for another kiss in exchange for his mother's gold ring. This time, Nicholas wants to take part in the sport besides giving Absolon a double dose. Because the night is pitch black, Absolon has a difficult time finding Nicholas, even though in his excitement, Nicholas overextends himself, "And out his ers he putteth pryvely/ Over the buttok, to the haunche-bon . . . ." (I[A] 3802-3803) Absolon calls for some sound, and Nicholas sounds forth with a fart. Absolon is bowled over by the flatulence, but not before he finds his target with the hot iron. Naturally, having been seared to the bone, Nicholas calls for water. Meanwhile, John, lying up in his kneeding trough and believing that Nicholas's cries are the flood, cuts his rope and crashes hopelessly to the floor. Ironically, John proclaims his own cuckolding to the crowd but is not believed because Nicholas and Alisoun are busily explaining to the neighbors that John is "wood" or crazy. The tale ends with a concise summary of the preceding events:

> Thus swyved was this carpenteris wyf,
> For al his kepyng and his jalousye;
> And Absolon hath kist hir nether ye;
> And Nicholas is scalded in the towte.
> (I[A] 3850-3854)

Although each of the male protagonists receives some degrading humiliation and, in at least two cases, if not three, physical suffering, Alisoun receives little retribution

for her actions. In any case, no physical harm has come to her, and she has received nothing but pleasure from both Nicholas and Absolon. The narrator's extended description of Alisoun is very sensual and animalistic both in terms of imagery and action. (I[A] 3234-3270) Her sensuality is the catalyst for all the male desires and consequent actions within the tale. Alisoun's animalistic nature is gratified by both Nicholas and Absolon. Presumably, her only punishment is that she is discovered by her husband in her cuckolding. Alisoun escapes relatively unscathed compared to the misadventures of her male admirers.

If any one can be triumphant in this tale, it is the sensuous wife, Alisoun. Neither John nor Absolon, the comic cuckolds, triumph over anything. Although Absolon does succeed in branding Nicholas, Alisoun's treatment of the jolly parish clerk is a humiliation which can not be wholly wiped away with sand and straw. In these comic situations, there is usually a butt to the joke. In The Miller's Tale, John and Absolon are the butts of two separate jokes both perpetrated, at least in part, by Alisoun. The comedy of the cuckolds is achieved through the flaws in the character of John, the old and jealous carpenter, and Absolon, the amorous and anxious parish clerk. John is old and fully aware of the dangers of having a young wife, but this matter is all that he is aware of. John's love for Alisoun is so great that he thinks of nothing but Alisoun and her well-

being. This great love produces jealousy which in turn takes the form of extreme possessiveness, but his concern works for naught. Alisoun is amorous by nature and does not need much persuasion before she accepts Nicholas's proposition. John is defeated from the first; he would have been wiser to learn of Cato's teachings. Since there is not the slightest wisdom in John's character as evidenced by his superstition and gullibility, his extreme concern regarding his wife's chastity only serves to add to the humor and irony of the tale. Especially when viewed from his foolish and degrading position at the end of the tale, John demonstrates the folly which often accompanies old age. On the other hand, Absolon is young and sociable but too amorous and eager for his own good. Instead of making sure that his love will be returned, Absolon acts impetuously and is rewarded accordingly. His folly is a form of vain conceit. Alisoun destroys his cockiness, and Absolon is shamed, literally brought to his knees. The humor in Absolon's character is especially emphasized by Alisoun's action at the window and Absolon's particular aversion to this bodily orifice. Both cuckolds exhibit very little wisdom or common sense in their actions. Their respective ends are well deserved from the audience's point of view and not the least bit tragic. The two cuckolds of The Miller's Tale create a comedy of folly through their misguided passions and lack of sense.

The second comic cuckold is Symkyn, the miller in The

Reeve's Tale, a character who undergoes a double cuckolding of sorts. This tale is concerned with the proud and disdainful character of Symkyn, a dishonest miller, and the retaliation of two students who are tricked and cheated by him. This tale with the potential to be a bitter and cynical attack on the results of arrogant pride is, instead, a humorous comedy of right over might even though the "right" is simply the revenge of those who have been wronged.[67] The Reeve's Tale has many analogues. In fact, the story exists as a whole with only minor differences in Boccaccio's Decameron; in two French fabliaux, "Gombert and the Two Clerks" and "Le Meunier et Les .II. Clers;" and in two German tales.[68] Although minor differences exist in plot, characters, and motifs, in comparison to these analogues, Chaucer's tale reflects his skill in characterization and the unity of plot and character.[69] The Reeve tells his tale as a rebuttal to the Miller's humorous story of the duped and cuckolded carpenter. Naturally, the Reeve's story is primarily about a rascally and scurrilous miller and his duping and cuckolding.

The Reeve begins his tale with a bitter and unsympathetic description of Symkyn the miller. The first statement by

[67] Corsa, p.120.
[68] Benson and Anderson, p.26.
[69] Ibid., p.26.

the Reeve shows the most predominant and disgusting characteristic inherent in Symkyn, "As any pecok he was proud and gay." (I[A] 3926) The Reeve continues to emphasize this character trait throughout the tale. Symkyn's pride is not an honorable self-respect which stems from some good in his character and thus, elicits reader sympathy or respect. Instead, it is conceited, arrogant, and vain. Symkyn's pride is based upon his own egocentric view of his strength, his skill in cheating people, and particularly his wife's heritage and social position as the illegitimate daughter of a priest. This arrogant and disdainful pride only enhances the reader's delight when Symkyn is cuckolded, in a sense twice, by the two clerks, Aleyn and John. While the wife has no conscious part in the cuckolding, she does enjoy the clerk's attack. Furthermore, while the seduction of Molly is not a literal cuckolding since she is only the miller's daughter, in essence it qualifies as a cuckolding because of the miller's superior attitude toward his daughter and his family's social status. The seduction of his daughter helps destroy Symkyn's haughty and proud demeanor.

The Reeve continues his description of Symkyn as a man of strength and activity, "Pipen he koude and fisshe, and nettes beete,/ And turne coppes and wel wrastle and sheete." (I[A] 3927-3928) Symkyn, according to the Reeve, was always well armed with a sword and two knives. Because of these weapons and his strength, "Ther was no man, for peril, dorste

hym touche." (I[A] 3932) From this brief preliminary description, the reader begins to see a man who is proud, violent, and rough. The physical description, which follows, continues in the same vein, "Round was his face, and camus was his nose;/ As piled as an ape was his skulle." (I[A] 3934-3935) Although there is scholarly disagreement on the meaning of piled,[70] the word ape seems aptly to describe Symkyn, especially combined with the reference to his flat or "camus" nose and the cuckolding he receives later in the tale.

The Reeve, then, proceeds with a description of Symkyn's violent and underhanded behavior:

> He was a market-betere atte fulle.
> Ther dorste no wight hand upon hym legge,
> That he ne swoor he sholde anon abegge.
> A theef he was for sothe of corn and mele,
> And that a sly, and usaunt for to stele.
> (I[A] 3936-40)

"Market-betere" is glossed by Robinson as a "quarrel-some frequenter of markets," but this term also implies a thief which exactly describes Symkyn. Symkyn is pictured as a mean and vicious scoundrel who enjoys causing trouble and stealing from others, but swears revenge at the slightest provocation. These disgusting qualities only contribute to

[70]Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, p.687. The word piled could possibly mean either bald or scanty or covered with hair or fur.

the reader's distaste for Symkyn's character. Besides the numerous other bad aspects of his character, Symkyn possessed a streak of jealousy which could be vented in rage:

> Ther dorste no wight clepen hire but "dame";
> Was noon so hardy that wente by the weye
> That with hire dorste rage or ones pleye,
> But if he wolde be slayn of Symkyn
> With panade, or with knyf, or boidekyn.
> For jalous folk ben perilous everemo;
> Algate they wolde hire wyves wenden so.
> (I[A] 3956-3962)

Symkyn's pride, vanity, thievery, ugly physical appearance, ill-temper, and jealousy all combine to elicit disgust for his character. The Reeve, with the aid of Chaucer, succeeds through narratorial description in creating a portrait of a miller neither flattering nor sympathetic, but only repulsive. To the reader and the other pilgrims, this miller deserves everything that he receives at the hands of the clerks. Symkyn draws no sympathy even from the beginning of the tale.

To stand beside a proud and disdainful peacock like Symkyn, is a wife equally as self-satisfied, "And she was proud, and peert as is a pye." (I[A] 3950) These two proud birds together on holidays were a sight to behold:

> A ful fair sighte was it upon hem two;
> On halydayes biforn hire wolde he go
> With his typet bounden aboute his heed,
> And she cam after in a gyte of reed;
> And Symkyn hadde hosen of the same.
> (I[A] 3951-3955)

The pride and vanity of both Symkyn and his wife are almost immeasurable.

Symkyn's wife was the daughter of a priest and educated in a nunnery. This upbringing contributed to her pride:

> And eek, for she was somdel smoterlich,
> She was as digne as water in a dich,
> And ful of hoker and of bisemare.
> Hir thoughte that a lady sholde hire spare,
> What for hire kynrede and hir nortelrie
> That she hadde lerned in the nonnerie.
> (I[A] 3963-68)

Her background gave her great pleasure even though the narrator implies that her reputation, in the eyes of others, was not the finest. This background also pleased Symkyn immensely, although he too seems to be unaware of her "smoterlich" or besmirched reputation. Her parental background and dowry of "many a panne of bras" satisfied Symkyn's requirements for marriage:

> For Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde,
> But she were wel ynorissed and a mayde,
> To saven his estaat of yomanrye.
> (I[A] 3947-3949)

Symkyn is very conscious of his own social position. He believed that a marriage to the daughter of a priest would save his estate of yeomanry and add to his social respect. His pride forces him to desire a maiden with, what he considers, a position in society, but this same pride blinds him to the fact that she is illegitimate, albeit, the illegitimate daughter of a priest, and somewhat sullied in reputation. Symkyn's own feelings of superiority and his belief in his wife's high social status make him believe that he is a superior member of society. This class

consciousness is another manifestation of Symkyn's overpowering pride.

As the tale progresses, more insight is revealed into Symkyn's character by his thoughts, actions, and reactions. After heartily greeting the two "Yonge povre scolers," Symkyn inquires as to what they will do while their grain is being milled. When Aleyn and John pretend ignorance about milling practices, Symkyn smiles outwardly, but thinks to himself:

> Al this nys doon but for a wyle.
> They wene that no man may hem bigyle,
> But by my thrift, yet shal I blere hir ye,
> For al the sleighte in hir philosophye.
> The moore queynte crekes that they make,
> The moore wol I stele whan I take.
> In stide of flour yet wol I yeve hem bren.
> "The gretteste clerkes been noght wisest men,"
> As whilom to the wolf thus spak the mare.
> Of al hir art ne counte I noght a tare.
> (I[A] 4047-4056)

Through these thoughts, Symkyn reveals more of his disdainful character. He has no regard or respect for the knowledge or learning of the scholars. He believes himself to be the smarter man because he can "blere hir ye." He sees through their feigned ignorance. In fact, he will steal more grain in proportion to the witty tricks of the scholars. To repay the student's trickery, he will also give them bran instead of flour besides stealing more than he usually does. Symkyn's immense pride will not allow him to forgive or forget the student's trickery. His overpowering pride, cunning, and deceit are demonstrated by direct example rather than the

narrator's description alone.

In order to fulfill his promise of beguiling the clerks, Symkyn, knowing full well that the horse will run to where the wild mares roam, releases the clerk's horse. Symkyn realizes that the clerks will have a very difficult time recapturing their horse. This ruse provides Symkyn with the opportunity to steal the clerks' flour. But, in a symbolic way, Symkyn is foreshadowing and portraying his own cuckolding by releasing the horse. For later on, the students will run to where Symkyn's wild mares are sleeping within his own house.

During the ensuing confusion and the clerks' realization that their horse has escaped, both clerks chase after the runaway horse. This gives Symkyn his opportunity and he takes full advantage of it:

> And whan the millere saugh that they were gon,
> He half a busshel of hir flour hath take,
> And bad his wyf go knede it in a cake.
> He seyde, "I trowe the clerkes were aferd.
> Yet kan a millere make a clerkes berd,
> For al his art; now lat hem goon hir weye!
> Lo, wher he gooth! ye, lat the children pleye.
> They gete hym nat so lightly, by my croun."
> (I[A] 4092-4099)

The miller believes that he has bested the "sely clerkes." Symkyn, the miller, has deceived and hoodwinked the brilliant and artful scholars. However, in his opinion, these "sely clerkes" are but children at play in comparison to his own skill in deceit.

After the clerks recover their horse, they are not so

much concerned with the stolen corn as they are with the thought that men ". . . wil us fooles calle,/ Bathe the wardeyn and oure felawes alle,/ And namely the millere, welaway!" (I[A] 4111-4113) It is ironic that the clerks resort to cuckolding the miller in order to avoid being called fools, the same thing that most cuckolds fear. The two clerks then return to the miller's house and beg for lodging. The miller, pleased with his trickery, makes light of the clerks' knowledge and art. But, it is not the scholars' academic learning which will requite Symkyn's treachery. The students' knowledge of "mirthe and revelrye" finally avenges the miller's deceit. Symkyn ridicules the students with his sarcastic speech:

> "If ther be eny,
> Swich as it is, yet shal ye have youre part.
> Myn hous is streit, but ye han lerned art;
> Ye konne by argumentes make a place
> A myle brood of twenty foot of space.
> Lat se now if this place may suffise,
> Or make it rowm with speche, as is youre gise."
> (I[A] 4120-4126)

Indeed, Symkyn ridicules the clerks about the power of their art and in doing so, fulfills their worst fears of being made to look foolish. But, what Symkyn does not realize is that the clerks through their art will convert Symkyn's small house into a literal pleasure palace.

Since the miller believes that he has bested the "sely" clerks, he can afford to show them hospitality, and he does. Symkyn ties up their horse so that it will not escape again,

roosts a goose for the clerks, and makes them beds not too far from his own. After Symkyn "vernysshed his heed" with wine, he falls asleep and begins to snore hideously with his wife joining in on the chorus.

At this point, the miller's cuckolding begins with Aleyn's belief, "That gif a man in a point be agreved,/ That in another sal he be releved." (I[A] 4181-4182) Technically, Aleyn's seduction of Symkyn's daughter is not a cuckolding, but in this case it becomes one. Aleyn decides that he will swyve the miller's daughter as an easement for the stolen grain and the foolishness that the miller has visited upon the two clerks. Aleyn's motive is revenge rather than lust. He wants to make a fool out of Symkyn. Consequently, Aleyn will ruin Symkyn's pride and his daughter's honor in one fell swoop.

John warns Aleyn that the miller is a dangerous man, but Aleyn disregards the warning, and soon he and the daughter were "aton." Meanwhile, John is beginning to feel like more of a fool because he is getting no easement by lying in bed. Aleyn is moved to cuckolding the miller in order to gain revenge, but John is motivated only because he does not want to be labeled more of a fool than he already is, "And when this jape is tald another day,/ I sal been halde a daf,

a cokenay!"[71] (I[A] 4207-4208) John then switches the position of the cradle from in front of the miller's bed to his own. Thus, when the wife returns from urinating, she gets into John's bed and John takes full advantage of this:

> Withinne a while this John the clerk up leep,
> And on this goode wyf he leith on soore.
> So myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yoore;
> He priketh harde and depe as he were mad.
> (I[A] 4228-4231)

Symkyn's wife does not willingly consent to her husband's cuckolding as do the other cuckold's wives, but she certainly does enjoy it. The fact that the wife has not had so merry a fit in a long time implies that the miller, Symkyn, has not been too sexually active of late. Both clerks have now revenged the miller through the double cuckolding of his wife and daughter.

After Aleyn finishes his night's work with Molly, the miller's daughter, he is not content simply to go to sleep, but must boast about his conquest:

> "Thou John, thou swynes-heed, awak,
> For Cristes saule, and heer a noble game.
> For by the lord that called is seint Jame,
> As I have thries in this short nyght
> Swyved the milleres doghter bolt upright,
> Whil thow hast, as a coward, been agast."
> (I[A] 4262-4267)

[71]According to Thomas Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy, p.58, the word cokenay means a milksop or effeminate man. Ross gives no information which would imply a connection with the word cokewold.

What Aleyn does not realize is that he has just told Symkyn about one-half of the twofold cuckolding. The miller's violent outburst is completely predictable:

> "Ye, false harlot," quod the millere, "hast?"
> A, false traitour! false clerk!" quod he,
> Thow shalt be deed, by Goddes dignitee!
> Who dorste be so boold to disparage
> My doghter, that is come of swich lynage?"
> (I[A] 4268-4272)

The fact that angers Symkyn most is not the actual swyving but the disparagement or dishonoring of his daughter, "That is come of swich lynage." Symkyn is distressed not that the clerk seduced his daughter, but that the seducer was of a lower class.[72]

The tale reaches a rapid conclusion after Aleyn's confession and Symkyn's violent reaction. During the ensuing struggle, Symkyn falls on his wife, and she finally knocks him unconscious with a staff. Aleyn and John beat a hasty retreat and recover their stolen grain.

The Reeve then concludes his tale with a pointed moral:

> Thus is the proude millere wel ybete,
> And hath ylost the gryndynge of the whete,
> And payed for the soper everideel
> Of Aleyn and of John, that bette hym weel.
> His wyf is swyved, and his doghter als.
> Lo, swich it is a millere to be fals!
> And therfore this proverbe is seyd ful sooth,
> "Hym thar nat wene wel that yvele dooth";
> A gylour shal hymself bigyled be.
> (I[A] 4313-4321)

[72]Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, p.204.

As the Reeve points out, the miller received exactly what he deserved. The guiler was himself beguiled. The miller is not a victim of circumstance beyond his control, nor is he a victim of the clerks' simple knavery. Because of his pride, Symkyn steals the two clerks' corn. He can not stand the thought of two lowly clerks outwitting him. In Symkyn's opinion, no man is better than he. Symkyn believed that by marrying a woman of what he considered a noble lineage his own social position was improved. Because two lowly clerks succeed in soiling the reputation and high standing of his family through seduction, Symkyn is brought down from his high pedestal. This situation is exactly what provides the humor for the reader. Symkyn is destroyed and outwitted by two lowly clerks, who are, in Symkyn's opinion, beneath his own social position. In the end, Symkyn's pride is shattered and his thievery requited by the double cuckolding of his wife and daughter.

The next appearance of the subject of cuckoldry and cuckolds in The Canterbury Tales comes with the husbands of the lusty Wife of Bath. In the prologue to her tale, Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, explains the uses of infidelity and cuckoldry. This good wife provides a female perspective on marriage, sex, and cuckoldry. Alisoun explores a woman's reasons for making her husband a dupe and a cuckold. The lusty Wife reveals one woman's point of view concerning the

relations between men and women. She is particularly concerned with the woman's triumph in the battle between the sexes. Alisoun is more than the typical shrew. Although when necessary she can be treacherous, beguiling, and dominating, she is also vital, alive, and concerned with the affirmation of the joy within life. Perhaps, her sensuous nature and pervasive sexual attitude toward life are the most influential aspects of her character. Her joy in life emanates from sex and the power in it. Alisoun's endurance in the woe of marriage comes from her joy in sex. Sex has given her control over the hostile forces which threaten her. These forces include society which forced her to marry; men who have used her body for their own pleasure; the Church which frowned upon fleshly pleasures; and the self which sought love through lust; sex is Alisoun's identity.[73] Alisoun uses sex and the natural human desire and need for sex to attain her goals and win her battles in the arena of marital struggles. The pleasures and powers of sex are the moving forces behind her character. She shows a constant delight in sexual relationships with no desire to limit them.[74] But she also represents more than just a licentious woman. The Wife of Bath is an antagonist in

[73]Corsa, p.140.

[74]Eugene E. Slaughter, "'Allas! Allas! That Ever Love Was Sinne!'" MLN, 49(1934), 84.

three parallel medieval controversies.[75] She stands for practical experience against received authority, female freedom against male domination, and abundant sensuality against emotional austerity. She lives a life centered around sex and sensuality, but, even more importantly, she is her own woman and she controls her own life.

On the subject of marriage, the Wife of Bath qualifies as experienced, "For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age,/ Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve," (III[D] 4-6). To the Wife, this experience is enough of an authority to speak upon the woe that is in marriage; no other authority would impress her. Practical experience is the best teacher. In fact, the good Wife knows the woe in marriage because she has caused so much in her five marriages.[76] She states that she had three good husbands and two bad, but in all five cases she dominated or prevailed over each spouse. To gain superiority over her husbands, she used her wiles and her "queynte." In Alisoun's view, the wife's power over her husband resided in the use of her sexual instrument:

> In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
> As frely as my Makere hath it sent.

[75]Muscatine, p.204.

[76]Britton J. Harwood, "The Wife of Bath and the Dream of Innocence," MLQ, 33(September, 1972), 258.

> If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!
> Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,
> Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.
> An housbonds I wol have, I wol nat lette,
> Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
> And have his tribulacion withal
> Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.
> I have the power durynge al my lyf
> Upon his propre body, and naught he.
> (III[D] 149-159)

The Wife controls her husbands as debtors and slaves. At least for Alisoun's three good husbands who were old and rich, sex was one method for domination and control. These husbands paid their wifely debt in more ways than one:

> As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke
> How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!
> And, by my fey, I tolde it of no stoor.
> They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;
>
> But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,
> And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond,
> What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese,
> But it were for my profit and myn ese?
> I sette hem so a-werke, by my fey,
> That many a nyght they songen 'weilawey!'
>
> I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,
> That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe
> To brynge me gaye thynges fro the fayre.
> They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire.
> For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.
> (III[D] 201-204,
> 211-216, 219-223)

The Wife, in other words, used her husbands to acquire material possessions, for her own sexual pleasure, and for the pure joy of domination. In accordance with her sexual nature and attitude, Alisoun used her body for profit:

> I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
> If that I felte his arm over my syde,
> Til he had maade his raunson unto me;

> Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.
> And therfore every man this tale I telle,
> Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;
> With empty hand men may none haukes lure.
> (III[D] 409-415)

To Alisoun, sex was pleasurable, but it was also a means to achieve her desired ends, whether material goods or control over her spouses. With the Wife of Bath, "al is for to selle" and prostitution occurs both in and out of wedlock.

But, dominating wifehood involves more than the use of sex. The cunning wiles which are inbred in all women provide another means for the control of the male, at least in the Wife of Bath's view, "For half so boldely kan ther no man/ Swere and lyen, as a womman kan." (III[D] 227-228) For the good Wife of Bath, women's cunning was a God-given part of their characters and a tool to be used in the control of their husbands:

> For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;
> Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive
> To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.
> (III[D] 400-402)

Alisoun used her craft and wiles to berate and deceive her first three husbands. She even cuckolded them under the cover of jealousy:

> Yet tikled I his herte, for that he
> Wende that I hadde of hym so greet chiertee!
> I swoor that al my walkynge out by nyght
> Was for t'espye wenches that he dighte;
> Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.
> (III[D] 395-399)

Alisoun's feigned jealousy pleased the egos of her three old

husbands since they were two old to commit adultery. She was then able to indulge her own fleshly desires. These cuckoldings were more than just wanton sexuality, however. Alisoun gained control over her husbands with her wit. With this control, she was free of the usual male domination. The cuckolding of her husbands was the assertion of her domination. The cuckolding of these old husbands was finally the expression of her freedom as a woman.

While completely dominating her first three husbands, Alisoun used the pretense of cuckoldry to dominate her fourth husband, a "revelour" who kept a "paramour" or mistress. This situation was misery to Alisoun, "I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit/ That he of any oother had delit." (III[D] 481-482) She stopped his philandering not by actually cuckolding him but by giving the impression that she was cuckolding him:

> I made hym of the same wode a croce;
> Nat of my body, in no foul manere,
> But certainly, I made folk swich cheere
> That in his owene grece I made hym frye
> For angre, and for verray jalousye.
> By God! in erthe I was his purgatorie,
> For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
>
> Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wist,
> In many wise, how sore I hym twiste.
> (III[D] 484-490, 493-494)

For all of Alisoun's joy in sex, it is ironic that she would pretend to cuckold this philandering husband when she cuckolded her other husbands who were unable to indulge in extra-marital

sex. But, whether truth or illusion, Alisoun used sex and cuckoldry as the means for gaining freedom and dominance over her spouses. Alisoun, through her deceit and cunning, made her fourth husband's life as miserable as she had her first three husbands, and she saw him to his grave as she did her first three husbands.

Her fifth husband was married, "for love, and no richesse." Jankyn, a former clerk at Oxford, was twenty years younger than Alisoun. She states that she married him for love which indicated that she enjoyed his sexual prowess:

> But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,
> And therewithal so wel koude he me glose,
> Whan that he wolde han my bele chose,
> That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
> He koude wynne agayn my love anon.
> (III[D] 508-512)

Alisoun met Jankyn while she was married to her fourth husband. During one Lent while her husband was in London, she enjoyed "swich daliance" with Jankyn and even spoke of marriage, "I spak to hym and seyde hym how that he,/ If I were wydwe, sholde wedde me." (III[D] 567-568) During her fourth husband's funeral, she pretended to be sorrowful, but as she remarks, "I wepte but smal." At the funeral, the sight of Jankyn's legs aroused the Wife:

> After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
> Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
> That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.
> (III[D] 597-599)

Alisoun, smitten by Jankyn's legs, shows her lusty nature which she freely admits, "As help me God! I was a lusty oon."

(III[D] 605) After their marriage, Alisoun gave Jankyn control of her wealth and property, but as she says, "afterward repented me ful soore;/ He nolde suffre nothyng of my list." (III[D] 632-633) Jankyn would not submit to her wishes or pleasure. She then started to defy her husband, "Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,/ And of my tonge a verray jangleresse," (III[D] 637-638) Eventually, their marital strife provoked Jankyn into striking Alisoun on the ear. He was immediately repentant and begged forgiveness. She forgave her husband, but only on the condition that she have control over the property, the wealth, and Jankyn himself:

> He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
> To han the governance of hous and lond,
> And of his tonge, and of his hond also;
> And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.
> And whan that I hadde geten unto me,
> By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,
> And that he seyde, 'Myn owene trewe wyf,
> Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;
> Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat'—
> After that day we hadden never debaat.
> (III[D] 813-822)

She dominates and controls each of her husbands. She lives her philosophy of female freedom and sovereignty in marriage. Her main weapons are sex, cunning, and deceit. Even the husband she married for love finally submits to her dominance. She provides the example of women's power and the use of that power over men.

Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, unfaithfully uses sex for her own purposes. Her reasons for cuckolding her husbands are simply to assert her own dominance and control. With

her first three husbands, Alisoun had complete control. She controlled their money, their land, and their behavior. She worked them mercilessly in bed for her own pleasure and for their torture. They were old and in all likelihood she became dissatisfied with them because of their age. Alisoun cuckolded these old husbands under the cover of jealousy, but these cuckoldings were to prove her freedom and dominance besides providing pleasure. Alisoun's fourth husband was unfaithful to her. Instead of actually cuckolding him, she made his life a hell or as she says, "By God! in erthe I was his purgatorie," (III[D] 489) by pretending to cuckold him. Without actually engaging in extra-marital sexual intercourse, she made her fourth husband believe that he was a cuckold and stopped his infidelity besides asserting her own dominance. She hints that she may have cuckolded her fourth husband while he was still alive. When he was out of town, she admits to "swich daliance" with Jankyn, her soon-to-be fifth husband, and even proposes marriage. Although she does not admit to sexual relations with Jankyn, she does have the desire to be unfaithful. In regards to Jankyn, her fifth husband, Alisoun does not give any hint of cuckoldry. She is extremely satisfied with his sexual prowess. Although she is not completely happy until she gains control over this husband, she does not have to resort to cuckoldry to gain control. She uses sex and cuckoldry for her own purposes: the domination and control of her spouses and freedom as a

woman and a wife.

The Merchant's Tale explores in depth the blind and foolish nature of Januarie, a supposedly wise and noble knight. The tale carefully details the folly of this old knight and the eventual cuckolding that this folly brings upon him. No direct source is known for this tale, but numerous analogues exist in Italian, High and Low German, Latin, French, and English literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[77] The opening parts of The Merchant's Tale reflect the situation throughout Deschamps's The Miroir De Mariage especially the contradictory advice about the marriage.[78] The Miroir also offers parallels to the blind husband and the pear tree episode as do the numerous analogues. The description of Januarie is similar to Agape's picture of her husband in Boccacio's Ameto and probably not accidental if Chaucer knew this work.[79] The narrative tone of the tale is characteristically negative and perverse,[80] reflecting the character of the Merchant and his own troubled marriage. (IV[E] 1213-1239) When the Merchant interrupts his tale at the beginning to speak on the joys of married life (IV[E]

[77]J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale," MP, 33 (1935-36), 367.

[78]Sources and Analogues, p.333.

[79]Ibid., p.333.

[80]Muscatine, p.231.

1267-1392), his speech seems to reflect a bitter and sarcastic irony because of the reader's knowledge of the Merchant's own unhappy marital situation.[81] Thus, the foolish character of Januarie and his cuckolding come as no surprise because of the narrator.

Januarie serves as perhaps the outstanding of Chaucer's comic cuckold figures. He possesses every fault typical of the cuckold. He is obviously the most despicable of the cuckold characters. He is old, jealous, foolish, and blind to his wife's infidelity. Besides these characteristics, he is extremely lecherous and egotistical. Compounded with his age and foolish behavior, his lechery and egotism create a disgusting figure who more than deserves his fate. He is another example of the _senex amans_ similar to John the carpenter of _The Miller's Tale_,[82] and the Wife of Bath's first three husbands, but different in a more complex and revealing way. He is jealous, foolish, and old as is the carpenter of _The Miller's Tale_, but Januarie reflects a different position in society and is a figure of irony as a supposedly wise and noble knight who is actually a foolish and lecherous man. From the opening lines of the tale (IV[E]

[81]Janette Richardson, _Blameth Nat Me: A Study in Imagery in Chaucer's Fabliaux_, p.133; Muscatine, p.232.

[82]For a comparison of the characters of John and Januarie, cf. Janet Boothman, "'Who Hath No Wyf, He is No Cokewold': A Study of John and Januarie in Chaucer's Miller's and Merchant's Tales," _Thoth_, 4(1963), 3-14.

1245-1266), Januarie's character and marital attitude, which provide the humorous basis for the plot, are revealed in an irony which slowly unfolds as the tale progresses. He is described as a "worthy knyght" who lived in "greet prosperitee." (IV[E] 1246-1247) For sixty years, he was a lusty bachelor who "folwed ay his bodily delyt/ On wommen, ther as was his appetyt." (IV[E] 1249-1250) Along with this lustful nature which is an important feature of his character, his extreme age increases the irony of the tale. His age places the main emphasis of the tale on men's incurable folly rather than on women's depravity.[83] Furthermore, his senile lechery adds to the repulsiveness of his character.[84]

As the story progresses, the narrator's (and Chaucer's) irony regarding Januarie's character is revealed, but at the beginning, Januarie's attitude toward marriage is the most essential part of his ironic character. In Januarie's opinion, marriage is paradise:

> "Noon oother lyf," seyde he, "is worth a bene;
> For wedlock is so esy and so clene,
> That in this world it is a paradys."
> Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so wys.
> (IV[E] 1263-1266)

The irony lies in the fact that it took approximately forty years of sexual sampling before he came to this conclusion.

[83]Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer, p.48.
[84]Tatlock, p.368.

It is also surprising that a "worthy" knight would be so licentious. Januarie shows a "hypocritical sanctimoniousness" when after a life of lust he comes to believe that marriage is an earthly paradise.[85] Actually, he is in a fool's paradise, and his cuckolding is richly deserved. The narrator can not definitely state what motive lies behind Januarie's newly found marital position, but he is definitely obsessed with the idea of matrimony:

> Were it for hoolynesse or for dotage,
> I kan nat seye, but swich a greet corage
> Hadde this knyght to been a wedded man
> That day and nyght he dooth al that he kan
> T'espien where he myghte wedded be,. . . .
> (IV[E] 1253-1257)

Januarie even resorts to prayer as a means for achieving his paradise on earth (IV[E] 1258-1260). For whatever reason or motive, Januarie is thoroughly convinced as to the importance and need for marriage. The only problem with Januarie's new-found insight is that he is forty years too late and does not realize or even consider the dangers of marrying a young wife.

Although Januarie is referred to as wise, a label which seemingly befits his age, experience, and station in life, he is actually an old fool who constantly ignores the obvious and disregards common sense. When he announces to his friends his forthcoming plans to wed, he reveals his foolish and

[85]Craik, p.139.

egotistical character.[86] He absurdly rationalizes his aging lust which in turn makes him both a repulsive and pitiable figure.[87] In his marital announcement (IV[E] 1400-1468), he outlines his reasons and requirements for marriage. He begins his speech by admitting with sad face his advanced age and his concern for his soul. He exhibits a tone of "solemn sanctimoniousness."[88] He acknowledges the foul treatment of his body, but states that his sin shall be amended by marriage as soon as possible:

> He seyde, "Freendes, I am hoor and oold,
> And almoost, God woot, on my pittes brynke;
> Upon my soule somwhat moste I thynke.
> I have my body folily despended;
> Blessed be God that it shal been amended!
> For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,
> And that anoon in al the haste I kan.
> (IV[E] 1400-1406)

The only condition that Januarie places on his marriage is that he must have a young wife no older than twenty years. To him, a woman of thirty is "but bene-straw and greet forage." (IV[E] 1421) Older widows are so cunning and crafty that he could never find any rest or contentment. A young and impressionable maiden is the only kind that he will accept as a wife. His reasoning is proud and simple and egotistical, "But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,/ Right as men may

[86]Tatlock, p.369.
[87]Corsa, p.158.
[88]Craik, p.140.

warm wex with handes plye." (IV[E] 1429-1430) Januarie believes that he can mold his wife into the ideal mate. There is nothing humble or subservient about his character which befits his station in life, but at the same time, there is nothing wise or intelligent about his character. Furthermore, he requires a young wife because an old wife might not be able to satisfy his lust, in turn, forcing him to commit adultery (IV[E] 1431-1436). He may have spiritual needs for getting married, but his lecherous character naturally asserts itself. His motives for marriage are definitely mixed. He also reflects upon two reasons for marriage (IV[E] 1441-1455): one, for procreation to honor God and avoid lechery, and the other, for companionship and chastity. But, Januarie's motives for marriage do not conform to either of these two reasons. He definitely is not marrying for companionship or chastity. Although he is concerned about fathering an heir to carry on his name and receive his wealth (IV[E] 1437-1440), his prime motivation is the satisfaction of his lust. Januarie begins his speech by acknowledging his advanced age, his approaching end, and the foul use of his body. Through marriage, he believes that his past sins will be amended. But, Januarie ends his speech with exactly the opposite tone, intention, and statement; he will not live in chastity because he is still strong, vigorous, and lusty:

> For, God be thanked! I dar make avaunt,
> I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt
> To do al that a man bilongeth to;
> I woot myselven best what I may do.
> Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
> That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
> And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.
> I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed;
> Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
> As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.
> (IV[E] 1457-1466)

Though he is white-haired, Januarie believes that he still has life flowing in his veins and is ready and willing to function as a husband, especially in sexual matters. He appears to be eager to waste more of his body in a foul manner; in fact, his motive for marriage is to prove that he is still strong, masculine, and virile. The inappropriateness of his green tree image contrasted with his age and white hair reflects the foolishness of his character on both figurative and literal levels. Furthermore, trees are supposed to have more blossoms the year before they die, and a laurel which is green throughout the year is thought to be in poor condition.[89] Januarie, while trying to prove his vitality, unknowingly describes himself as the old fool. This whole speech reveals his folly and lack of consistent logic. When he says, "I woot myselven best what I may do," he actually does not have the first idea of what he should do, although he is firmly convinced that he knows what he

[89]Dempster, Dramatic Irony, p.53, fn.108.

is doing. By this point, it is becoming increasingly clear that Januarie is not the "wys" and "worthy" knight described in the beginning of the tale.

When Januarie finishes his announcement of marital intentions with the line, "I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente," he shows that he has already convinced himself by his own faulty wisdom. But, as the reader knows, Januarie has little wisdom. This fact is confirmed by his reaction to the advice of Placebo and Justinus. Placebo simply applauds Januarie's false judgment and says, "That I consente and conferme everydeel/ Youre wordes alle and youre opinioun." (IV[E] 1508-1509) The courtly Placebo gives no advice to Januarie, but only echoes his feelings. It is the prudent Justinus who shows the real wisdom. Justinus warns Januarie against rushing into marriage especially with a young wife:

> Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres thre,—
> This is to seyn, to doon hire ful plesaunce.
> A wyf axeth ful many an observaunce.
> I prey yow that ye be nat yvele apayd.
> (IV[E] 1562-1565)

Since Justinus does not concur with Januarie's plans, the old knight reacts angrily, "Straw for thy Senek, and for thy proverbs!" and again asks for Placebo's opinion which Placebo readily supplies. Januarie is convinced by his own arguments since Placebo is essentially an echo. Justinus's wisdom falls on Januarie's deaf ears.

As Januarie proceeds in the search for his new bride, his character is colored with "heigh fantasye and curious

bisynesse." When Januarie makes his final decision, of course by his "owene auctoritee," he dismisses all other women from his mind and dwells only on the fair qualities of his chosen one. After his flights of fantasy convince him that his choice is correct, absolutely no one could sway his decision:

> For whan that he hymself concluded hadde,
> Hym thoughte ech oother mannes wit so badde
> That inpossible it were to repplye
> Agayn his choys, this was his fantasye.
> (IV[E] 1607-1610)

But one thing bothers Januarie about his marriage. He believes that a man can not have perfect bliss in heaven and on earth. Since to him marriage is paradise on earth, "Yet is ther so parfit felicitee/ And so greet ese and lust in marriage," foolish Januarie is worried about receiving his proper happiness in heaven. Justinus, who hates Januarie's folly, reacts with bitter irony (IV[E] 1655-1688). Justinus warns that marriage may turn out to be purgatory rather than paradise and Januarie's only hope, if he does get married, is to be temperate in his lust with his wife. Of course, Justinus is right about Januarie's marriage, but since he is naturally lecherous, Januarie has no intention of following this piece of advice.

When it becomes evident that Januarie is stubbornly set in his plans to marry, the wedding is soon arranged "by sly and wys tretee," to fresh May, the chosen object of Januarie's affections. After the wedding Januarie is eager to expend

his lust that he has been saving for this very occasion:

> This Januarie is ravysshed in a traunce
> At every tyme he looked on hir face;
> But in his herte he gan hire to manace
> That he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne
> Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne.
> (IV[E] 1750-1754)

While he is ready to play the great lover, Januarie is also concerned that sweet young May might not be able to withstand the full brunt of his lust, "Al my corage, it is so sharp and keene!/ I am agast ye shul it nat susteene." (IV[E] 1759-1760) Along with his concupiscence, Januarie again reveals his egotism. He is extremely anxious for the feast to finish and the guests to leave in order that he may satisfy his lust. When the time finally approaches for Januarie to consumate his marriage, he takes all available precautions:

> He drynketh ypocras, clarree, and vernage
> Of spices hoote, t'encreessen his corage;
> And many a letuarie hath he ful fyn,
> Swiche as the cursed monk, daun Constantyn,
> Hath writen in his book De Coitu;
> To eten hem alle he has no thyng eschu.
> (IV[E] 1807-1812)

Outwardly, Januarie has great faith in his virility, but privately he resorts to powerful aphrodisiacs to reinforce his sexual prowess.[90] After the bride is brought to the bed chamber, the priest has blessed the bed, and the others have departed, Januarie proceeds to expend his lust:

[90]Paul Delany, "Constantinus Africanus and Chaucer's Merchant's Tale," PQ, 46(1967), 560-566.

> And Januarie hath faste in armes take
> His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.
> He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
> With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,
> Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere—
> For he was shave al newe in his manere—
> He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face,
> (IV[E] 1821-1827)

Januarie's marital paradise is sex. The contrast between him with his rough beard and young May with her tender face points out the folly of his marriage and even more so his extreme lust and lechery. At this point, his character passes from the portrait of a foolish old man obsessed with sex to a revolting lecher in action. His lecherous character becomes even more revolting when he expresses his idea of conjugal relations:

> A man may do no synne with his wyf,
> Ne hurte hymselven with his owene knyf;
> For we han leve to pleye us by the lawe.
> (IV[E] 1839-1841)

Januarie believes that a man can do no sin with his wife, but this is simply his rationalization for lechery. As Chaucer's Parson later says:

> And for that many man weneth that he may nat synne, for no likerousnesse that he dooth with his wyf, certes, that opinion is fals. God woot, a man may sleen hymself with his owene knyf, and make hymselve dronken of his owene tonne. . . .Man sholde loven hys wyf by discrecioun, patiently and atemprely; thanne is she as though it were his suster.
> (X[I] 858, 860)

But Januarie's lust overrides all spiritual considerations. He is thoroughly a lecher and labors all night in wanton lust. He is still active in the morning:

> Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe;
> And thanne he taketh a sop in fyn clarree,
> And upright in his bed thanne sitteth he,
> And after that he sang ful loude and cleere,
> And kiste his wyf, and made wantown cheere.
> He was al coltissh, ful of ragerye,
> And ful of jargon as a flekked pye.
> (IV[E] 1842-1848)

Januarie is a revolting lecher and an old man. Even though at times he is a humorous figure ("The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh,/ Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh." IV[E] 1849-1850), on the whole, he is disgusting and grotesque. As a "wys" and "worthy" noble knight, Januarie fails miserably.

After his marriage, Januarie's lust and sexual misconduct become even greater, if that is possible, than on his wedding night. One scene takes place during an afternoon nap:

> Adoun by olde Januarie she lay,
> That sleep til that the coughe hath hym awaked.
> Anon he preyde hire strepen hire al naked;
> He wolde of hire, he seyde, han som plesaunce,
> And seyde hir clothes dide hym encombraunce,
> And she obeyeth, be hire lief or looth.
> (IV[E] 1956-1961)

Exactly what his "plesaunce" included is left for the reader's imagination, but the sight of old Januarie awaking with his cough and immediately taking his pleasure increases the disgust for his character. Januarie also built a beautiful and private garden:

> So fair a gardyn woot I nowher noon.
> For, out of doute, I verraily suppose
> That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose
> Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse. . . .
> (IV[E] 2030-2033)

In this fair and beautiful garden, he practiced his lechery in privacy:

> And whan he wolde paye his wyf hir dette
> In somer seson, thider wolde he go,
> And May his wyf, and no wight but they two;
> And thynges whiche that were nat doon abedde,
> He in the gardyn parfourned hem and spedde.
> (IV[E] 2048-2052)

Although the garden will eventually serve as the scene of Januarie's cuckolding, at this point, it serves only for Januarie's lust. Januarie's actions in the garden only hint at perversion, but the hint is enough to degrade further Januarie's already degraded character.

Fortune soon steps into Januarie's "parfit blisse" and steals his eyesight and his joy:

> Allas! this noble Januarie free,
> Amydde his lust and his prosperitee,
> Is woxen blynd, and that al sodeynly.
> He wepeth and he wayleth pitously;
> And therwithal the fyr of jalousie,
> Lest that his wyf sholde falle in som folye,
> So brente his herte that he wolde fayn
> That som man bothe hire and hym had slayn.
> (IV[E] 2069-2076)

Januarie's paradise has vanished. His lust and happiness are interrupted by blindness which creates an obsessive jealousy. His jealousy soon turns into complete possessiveness:

> Which jalousye it was so outrageous,
> That neither in halle, n'yn noon oother hous,
> Ne in noon oother place, neverthemo,
> He nolde suffre hire for to ryde or go,
> But if that he had hond on hire alway. . . .
> (IV[E] 2087-2091)

Januarie's faults which include lechery, jealousy, and above all, foolishness, preclude any reader sympathy. He is a

despicable character in all respects. There is nothing noble, worthy, or wise in his character. When his cuckolding does come, Januarie receives the treatment that he obviously deserves.

Januarie's cuckolding comes at the hands of his fresh young wife and his own squire, Damyan. Regarding May, the narrator carefully refrains from describing her feelings toward Januarie and his excessive sexual desires:

> But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte,
> Or wheither hire thoughte it paradys or helle.
> (IV[E] 1851, 1964)

May passively submits to Januarie's lust, but her feelings toward her husband are never revealed. May's character is submissive and ambiguous until she finds out about Damyan's love. Damyan is smitten by Venus's fire brand on the wedding night and is so enraptured by May's beauty that he takes to a sick bed like any good courtly lover. Damyan's recovery is miraculous, "Up riseth Damyan the nexte morwe;/ Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe." (IV[E] 2009-2010), when May finds pity in her heart for his plight:

> But sooth is this, how that this fresshe May
> Hath take swich impression that day
> Of pitee of this sike Damyan,
> That from hire herte she ne dryve kan
> The remembrance for to doon hym ese.
> "Certeyn," thoghte she, "whom that this thyng displese,
> I rekke noght, for heere I hym assure
> To love hym best of any creature,
> Though he namoore hadde than his sherte."
> Lo, pitee renneth soone in gentil herte!
> (IV[E] 1977-1986)

With Januarie's blindness and, literally, lecherous hold on her, May is filled with sorrow, "She wayteth whan his herte wolde brest." (IV[E] 2096) Nevertheless, by letters and "privee signes," May and Damyan communicate their love and plan Januarie's cuckolding. May makes a key from warm wax for the garden, presumably not the same wax that Januarie planned on using to mold the young May into his ideal mate. The key is given to Damyan, "that knew al hire entente." Since Januarie is blind, the lovers can fulfill their tryst in the garden, literally right over Januarie's nose.

When Januarie takes May to the garden to indulge his lust, Damyan is already concealed and awaiting his lust. Januarie introduces a speech of humble prayer and elaborate encouragement for May to remain faithful (IV[E] 2160-2184), but ironically, all the while May is signaling Damyan into the pear tree.[91] As it happens, Pluto, the king of fairies, and Proserpyna, his queen, are enjoying the garden and see the cuckolding of Januarie about to take place. Pluto, taking the side of Januarie as the wronged husband, promises to give back his eyesight so that Januarie may know the villainy of his wife. But Proserpyna takes offence at her husband's male righteousness and promises to give May sufficient answer for

[91]Dempster, Dramatic Irony, p.56.

her actions. With this exchange, the scene is set, and the climax approaches.

May desires a pear to appease her condition:

> Now sire," quod she, "for aught that may bityde,
> I moste han of the peres that I see,
> Or I moot dye, so soore longeth me
> To eten of the smale peres grene.
> Help, for hir love that is of hevene queene!
> I telle yow wel, a womman in my plit
> May han to fruyt so greet an appetit
> That she may dyen, but she of it have."
> (IV[E] 2330-2337)

Whether is actually pregnant is irrelevant, what she really desires is Damyan, the fruit in the tree and of her eye. Januarie regrets that there is no servant to climb the tree for her while Damyan anxiously awaits May in the tree. May suggests that she climb the tree by stepping on Januarie's back. Januarie gladly assents, "Certes," quod he, "theron shal be no lak,/ Mighte I yow helpen with myn herte blood." (IV[E] 2346-2347) Blindly, Januarie is helping May to her heart's desire while helping himself to his own cuckolding. When his eyesight is restored and he sees exactly what May desired up in the tree, Januarie is noticeably upset:

> And up he yaf a roryng and a cry,
> As dooth the mooder whan the child shal dye:
> "Out! help; allas! harrow!" he gan crye,
> "O stronge lady stoore, what dostow?"
> (IV[E] 2364-2367)

But May has a ready answer as promised, "Was no thyng bet, to make yow to see,/ Than struggle with a man upon a tree." (IV[E] 2373-2374) Januarie still does not accept her answer, "'Struggle!' quod he, 'ye algate in it went!/. . .He swyved

thee, I saugh it with myne yen.'" (IV[E] 2376-2378) May acts as if she is hurt by her husband's disbelief:

> "Thanne is," quod she, "my medicyne fals;
> For certeinly, if that ye myghte se,
> Ye wolde nat seyn thise wordes unto me.
> Ye han som glymsyng, and no parfit sighte."
> (IV[E] 2380-2383)

At this point, Januarie's certainty starts to waver and his reaction begins to change, "And by my trouthe, me thoughte he dide thee so." (IV[E] 2386) May then says that she is sorry that she was kind enough to help Januarie regain his sight. In strict accordance with his foolish nature, Januarie attempts to mollify the hurt May, although he is still not thoroughly convinced of her innocence:

> "Now, dame," quod he, "lat al passe out
> of mynde.
> Com doun, my lief, and if I have myssayd,
> God helpe me so, as I am yvele apayd.
> But, by my fader soule, I wende han seyn
> How that this Damyan hadde by thee layn,
> And that thy smock hadde leyn upon his brest."
> (IV[E] 2390-2395)

May then explains to Januarie that a man whose sight suddenly returns to him may not see too clearly for a while. She also cleverly adds, "Til that youre sighte ysalted be a while,/ Ther may ful many a sighte yow bigile." (IV[E] 2405-2406), implying that there might be other "illusions" which Januarie will not see too clearly. Januarie is fully satisfied with May's answer and is still revealed as a blind old lecher and fool:

> This Januarie, who is glad but he?

> He kisseth hire, and clippeth hire ful ofte,
> And on hire wombe he stroketh hire ful softe,
> And to his palays hoom he hath hire lad.
> (IV[E] 2412-2415)

Januarie is doomed by his own folly and blindness to the truth; he is doomed by his refusal to see reality. The events in the garden should have destroyed Januarie's concept of the perfection of marriage, but his acceptance of May's answer for her actions shows that Januarie will never give up his illusions about marriage. Januarie's earthly paradise in marriage becomes hell and his refusal to see the truth damns him completely.[92] Thus, in the end, Januarie is still the lecherous and blind old fool. Though he has regained his sight, Januarie can still not see. The cuckolding of Januarie is finally the result of his own foolish flaws and blindness to reality.

The final comic cuckold of The Canterbury Tales is found in The Shipman's Tale which portrays the cuckolding of a wealthy merchant by his faithless wife and cousin, a monk. This tale is a fabliau based on the motif of the "lover's gift regained." Although no definite source has been pinpointed, mumerous analogues exist which are based on the same motif.[93] Boccacio's Decameron, VIII, 1, and Sercambi's

[92]Richardson, pp.140-141.

[93]John Spargo, Chaucer's Shipman's Tale: The Lover's Gift Regained, pp.5-55.

Novella, XIX, are close analogues to The Shipman's Tale but were probably not Chaucer's source.[94] Boccacio's tale was not necessarily Chaucer's source because it reveals a more complicated plot and very little characterization while Chaucer's tale reveals a minimal plot and a maximum of characterization. It is likely that Chaucer's source for The Shipman's Tale came from an Old French fabliau, although no such work has been found to prove this assertion.[95] Chaucer's exact source is also difficult to place because of the vast separation and diffusion of similar analogues in diverse cultures and times.

Most critical estimations of The Shipman's Tale agree that Chaucer's story is essentially a humorous view of married life which relies more upon characterization than upon plot. The characterization is achieved mainly through dialogue which in turn provides a distinctly dramatic quality.[96] Through their speech the characters reveal themselves. Some critics view the tale as simple entertainment with the sole purpose of amusement.[97] On the other

[94]Spargo, pp.11-15.

[95]Ibid., p.5.

[96]William W. Lawrence, "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," Speculum, 33(1958), p.57. The Shipman's Tale contains 434 lines; 237 of these lines are in dialogue.

[97]Gardiner Stillwell, "Chaucer's Sad Merchant," RES, 20(1944), 1-18; Spargo, p.8.

hand, it is seen as producing a sardonic or cynical humor.[98] The tale is amusing and entertaining mainly through the duping and cuckolding of a supposedly wise and noble merchant, but it, simultaneously, produces a cynical view of wives and marriage as strictly a business arrangement.

In The Shipman's Tale, money and business provide the necessary metaphor and motives for the cuckolding of a wealthy merchant whose primary concern in life is money and business. As the merchant is primarily a businessman involved in a materialistic world of profit and loss, the tale, itself, is a sexual metaphor of business and the resulting profits and losses. In The Shipman's Tale, marriage is a business arrangement for merchant and wife. The wife wants money and clothes for her own pleasure and to attract the attention of others. The merchant wants an attractive and impressive wife as an asset for his business dealings.[99] Both the merchant and his wife use their marriage as a means for materialistic profit and pleasure. Their marital relationship is simply a means to an end, whether it is in bed or in society. The ironic point of the tale is "the commercialization of the marriage relationship."[100] This

[98]Albert H. Silverman, "Sex and Money in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," PQ, 32(1953), 329-336.

[99]McClintock, p.119.

[100]Silverman, p.330.

argument is based on the possible puns at the end of the tale:

> I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille. . . .
> (VII[B^2] 416)
>
> Thus endeth now my tale, and God us sende
> Taillynge ynough unto oure lyves ende. Amen.
> (VII[B^2] 433-434)

The words, "taille" and "taillynge," are possibly <u>double entendres</u> with sexual implications. Although no definite proof exists that Chaucer was aware of these meanings or implications,[101] the wife's statement to her husband seems to help substantiate this position, "Ye shal my joly body have to wedde;/ By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde!" (VII [B^2] 423-424) The wife of the merchant uses sex as money with her husband just as she used sex for money with the monk. The wife's offer of her sexual pleasures as repayment for the borrowed money is bitterly ironic because of her act of prostitution with the monk. The irony becomes even more bitter because sex is finally the merchant's compensation for his cuckolding.[102] The identification of sex with money is the central metaphor of the tale; along with the commercialization of marriage, it provides the basis for the sexual business metaphor of the tale.

[101]For further discussion on the possibility of these puns cf. Claude Jones, "Chaucer's <u>taillynge ynough</u>," <u>MLN</u>, 52(1937), 570; Robert A. Caldwell, "Chaucer's <u>taillynge ynough</u>, <u>Canterbury Tales</u>, B^2 1624," <u>MLN</u>, 55(1940), 262-265; Thomas W. Ross, <u>Chaucer's Bawdy</u>, p.218.

[102]Silverman, p.330.

The Shipman's Tale also explores two concepts: one, a true fabliau where deception "achieves the ignoble ends without exposure" and two, the merchant's philosophy of money.[103] The merchant's pervasive mercantile philosophy and total concern for materialistic profits and losses blind him to the higher spiritual potentialities which elevate man over animals. Throughout the tale, the characters are constantly concerned with animal instincts such as food and sex, and materialistic values, especially in regards to money and trade. By exploring the animal and material concerns of these characters, Chaucer pronounces a moral judgment on the mercantile and materialistic philosophy of all the characters, especially the merchant.[104] The merchant's total concern for business to the total exclusion of all else demonstrates the basic flaw in his character and the irony of his cuckolding.

As The Shipman's Tale opens, the narrator describes the nameless merchant as rich, noble, and generous, a perfectly respectable and successful member of the bourgeoisie. Although the amount of the merchant's wealth is never explicitly stated, he was rich enough, "for which men helde

[103]Richardson, Blameth Nat Me, p.102. The same discussion is also available in Janette Richardson's article, "The Facade of Bawdry: Image Patterns in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," ELH, 32(1965), 303-313.

[104]Ibid., p.114.

hym wys." (VII[B^2] 2) Consequently, he had acquired the respect of his neighbors and acquaintances because of his financial ability. But, opinions are not always correct, and the possession of a large amount of money does not always produce a wise man. In fact, the merchant is not a wise man. He ransoms his wife's debt unknowingly with his own money. He is also made an unwitting cuckold by his wife and false cousin, the monk. The wisdom of the merchant is certainly ironic because of this very ignorance. "This merchant, which that was ful war and wys," is finally a poor judge of human nature, especially in the case of his wife and cousin, Dan John, the monk.

The merchant, a serious businessman caught up in a world of profits, losses, and material goods, is cautious and discreet about his wealth or "tresor." He keeps the counting house door shut from prying eyes when he figures his accounts. He is also aware of the slippery road that fate can provide for the unwary merchant. After his wife belittles him for spending so much time in his counting house, the merchant delivers a short and serious lecture on the perils of "chapmanhede":

> "Wyf," quod this man, "litel kanstow devyne
> The curious bisynesse that we have.
> For of us chapmen, also God me save,
> And by that lord that clepid is Seint Yve,
> Scarsly amonges twelve tweye shul thryve
> Continuelly, lastynge unto oure age.
> We may wel make chiere and good visage,
> And dryve forth the world as it may be,

> And kepen oure estaat in privetee,
> Til we be deed, or elles that we pleye
> A pilgrymage, or goon out of the weye.
> And therfore have I greet necessitee
> Upon this queynte world t'avyse me;
> For everemoore we moote stonde in drede
> Of hap and fortune in oure chapmanhede,
> (VII[B^2] 224-238)

The possibility of losing his position and wealth through the perils of fortune and fate is a constant source of worry to the merchant. The dread of hap and fortune makes the merchant cautious and prudent, at least in money matters. However, since sex and money are equated in this tale, it is ironic that the merchant is very careful and jealous about his money and property but not about his wife's sexuality.

The merchant lives his life by the sober and serious awareness of the need for caution, prudence, and thrift. On his business trip to Brugges, he leads a sober and thrifty life:

> Now gooth this marchant faste and bisily
> Aboute his nede, and byeth and creaunceth.
> He neither pleyeth at the dees ne daunceth,
> But as a marchaunt, shortly for to telle,
> He let him lyf, and there I lete hym dwelle.
> (VII[B^2] 302-306)

By avoiding the revelry and gambling, he is not tempted to squander any of his hard earned money. Before he leaves on this business trip, the merchant beseeches his wife to govern wisely their house and goods and informs her that, "Thou hast ynough, in every manner wise,/ That to a thrifty houshold may suffise." (VII[B^2] 245-246) To the merchant, this is a simple statement of good business sense, but to the wife, "ynough,

in every manner wise," includes more than the silver in her purse.

Although the merchant indulges in two days of "ete and drynke and pleye," with the monk before his business trip to Brugges, the real pleasure for the merchant comes after he has made a thousand franc profit in his second trip to Paris. When the merchant arrives home, his wife greets him at the gate, "And al that nyght in mirthe they bisette;/ For he was riche and cleerly out of dette." (VII[B^2] 375-376) The merchant's pleasure is inextricably connected to his success in business. The merchant is a man who seems to believe in work before pleasure; business before love. He is sexually aroused only after he has made a profit. His business affairs have priority over everything else. He is devoted to his counting board and profits, but he is also described by the narrator as a man of "largesse" or generosity. Because of his generousity, his house was usually filled frequent guests, but his generosity simply serves as good public relations, an important asset to any businessman. Every move that he makes is directed toward furthering his "chapmanhede," except for the money which he loans to the monk.

Although the merchant's primary concerns are for his business affairs, like other men, he desires friends and companionship. When the monk, who was born in the merchant's village, claims kinship, the merchant never denies the fact:

> The monk hym claymeth as for cosynage;
> And he agayn, he seith nat ones nay,
> But was as glad therof as fowel of day;
> For to his herte it was a greet plesaunce.
> Thus been they knyt with eterne alliaunce,
> And ech of hem gan oother for t'assure
> Of bretherhede, whil that hir lyf may dure.
> (VII[B^2] 36-42)

These two men assure each other of mortal brotherhood, but their brotherhood is more like that of Cain and Abel than of Castor and Pollux. There may also be a pun in the word "cosynage" which means a relationship or kinship, but, at the same time, very similar to the word "cozenage" which means cheating.[105] Since the monk is the merchant's cousin, Dan John has access to the merchant's house and wife, but the monk also "cozens" or cheats the merchant out of his wife's favors. While the merchant is faithful to their friendship, the monk is an entirely different creature. When he asks the merchant for a loan of one hundred francs, the merchant does not hesitate to grant the loan:

> My gold is youres, whan that it yow leste,
> And nat oonly my gold, but my chaffare.
> Take what yow list, God shilde that ye spare.
> But o thyng is, ye knowe it wel ynogh,
> Of chapmen, that hir moneie is hir plogh.
> We may creaunce whil we have a name;
> But goldlees for it to be, it is no game.
> Paye it agayn whan it lith in youre ese;
> After my myght ful fayn wolde I yow plese.
> (VII[B^2] 284-292)

[105]Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy, p.65.

The merchant gladly offers to loan his gold and property, pausing only to explain his position as a businessman--a position that he never seems to forget. He proves his generosity to his cousin and also proves that he is a faithful friend. What he does not realize is that the monk will use the loan to purchase the merchant's own goods: his wife.

In his loan to the monk, the merchant did not intend to make a profit. This loan came strictly from his generosity. In his desire to be a faithful friend and brother to the false monk, he loans the hundred francs as a favor not as a business deal. The monk, on the other hand, claims kinship with the merchant as a means of enjoying the latter's hospitality and goods, especially his wife. As the monk relates to the wife in secrecy:

> He is na moore cosyn unto me
> Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!
> I clepe hym so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce,
> To have the moore cause of aqueyntaunce
> Of yow, which I have loved specially
> Aboven alle wommen, sikerly.
> (VII[B^2] 149-154)

While the merchant is faithful and generous in his friendship, the monk is underhanded and devious. The merchant's loyalty, kindness, hospitality, and generosity are repaid with a cunning ruse to gratify the monk's own sexual desires and turn the merchant into an unwitting cuckold.

However, the merchant's seemingly noble qualities do not necessarily elicit the reader's sympathy. From the basic

description of the narrator and the examples of his hospitality and generosity, the merchant seems to justify the braod characterization of noble, but his almost every action is motivated by his materialistic philosophy. The sober and serious concern of the merchant for his "chapmanhede" reinforces the picture of a shrewd and careful man of affairs. This concern seems to lend credence to the merchant's wisdom; however, this wisdom is continually thrown up to doubt and ridicule. As the tale progresses, the audience begins to see the flaws in the merchant's character and, consequently, his wisdom. He is so occupied in his counting house that his wife and cousin are able to plan his cuckolding, literally, right under his nose. The merchant welcomes the monk to his goods, "And nat oonly my gold, but my chaffare." But while the merchant probably does not include his wife as part of his goods or wares, the monk certainly does. Finally, at the end of the tale, the merchant forgives his wife, but actually does not know that he is condoning his own cuckolding. The merchant's lack of wisdom with regards to his faithless wife and false cousin produces the comic irony apparent to the reader.

The wife of the merchant also provides another picture of her husband's character through her conversation with the monk in the garden. The merchant's wife's main complaint about her husband is his parsimony with both sex and money.

But since the wife has her own motives, her description of the merchant can hardly be trusted. She employs devious techniques which are similar to those of Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, and her philosophy of the uses of sex. According to the Wife of Bath, the use of sex as the means for gaining material comforts and possessions is an important asset for any woman's survival in the male dominated world. The wife of the merchant uses sex and manipulation in order to acquire money without her husband's knowledge. Through her conversation with the monk, the wife carefully and slowly elicits a declaration of love and a final show of lust from Dan John. (What the wife does not realize at this point is the devious ingenuity and cunning of the monk.) In the first step of the wife's deception, she lets the monk know that her sex life is no joy:

> For, by that God that yaf me soule and lyf,
> In al the reawme of France is ther no wyf
> That lasse lust hath to that sory pley. . . .
>
> Dar I nat telle how that it stant with me.
> Wherfore I thynke out of this land to wende,
> Or elles of myself to make an ende,
> So ful am I of drede and eek of care.
> (VII[B^2] 115-117, 120-123)

This statement lets the monk know that she might be looking for new sexual horizons and also piques his interest in her dramatic announcement of possible suicide or exile. After the wife and the monk swear oaths of secrecy, she begins her attack in earnest by telling of her woe-filled life with the

merchant. But suddenly she stops because of the kinship of the monk and the the merchant. This hesitance draws from the monk a denial of kinship and a declaration of love for the wife.

The wife then, begins her explanation of the merchant's character after she has snared the monk's interest, sympathy, and love. She explains, first, that her husband is "to [her] the worst man." She hesitates to explain how he is the worst man, but she does use innuendo:

> But sith I am a wyf, it sit nat me
> To tellen no wight of oure privetee,
> Neither abedde, ne in noon oother place;
> God shilde I sholde it tellen, for his grace!
> A wyf ne shal nat seyn of hir housbonde
> But al honour, as I kan understonde;
> Save unto yow thus muche I tellen shal:
> As helpe me God, he is noght worth at al
> In no degree the value of a flye.
> But yet me greveth moost his nygardye.
> And wel ye woot that wommen naturelly
> Desiren thynges sixe as wel as I:
> They wolde that hir housbondes sholde be
> Hardy, and wise, and riche, and therto free,
> And buxom unto his wyf, and fressh abedde.
> (VII[B^2] 163-177)

In the wife's opinion, the merchant is worthless and niggardly. He also apparently does not possess the six qualities which the wife and other women find desireable. However, from all of the available evidence within the tale, the merchant is rich and hardy and even fresh abed, if not too regular, as shown by his return from Paris. But, perhaps, he is not as obedient and generous to his wife as she would like him to be and since he is not nearly as wise as he is made out to

be, the wife may have some grounds for her complaint. Nevertheless, with the rest of her speech, the wife's real motives become clear:

> But by that ilke Lord that for us bledde,
> For his honour, myself for to arraye,
> A Sonday next I moste nedes paye
> An hundred frankes, or ellis I am lorn,
> (VII[B^2] 178-181)

As the narrator says in the beginning of the tale, the wife is beautiful, companionable, and revelous:

> Which is a thyng that causeth more dispence
> Than worth is al the chiere and reverence
> That men hem doon at festes and at daunces.
> Swich salutaciouns and contenaunces
> Passen as dooth a shadwe upon the wal;
> But wo is hym that payen moot for al!
> (VII[B^2] 5-10)

(The merchant finally does pay "moot for al," although he is never aware of the cost.) From this brief statement by the narrator and the wife's engaging conversation with the monk, it comes as no surprise to finally hear about the wife's money problems. In fact, the reader is forewarned by the narrator's preamble and shown by the wife's step by step seduction of the monk. The wife's seduction or deception reinforces the monk's desire and provides the wife with the necessary means of acquiring her badly needed money. By selling her body, she can avoid the shame that she would have to endure if her husband found out about her frivolous buying habits. Apparently, to the wife, material possessions are more important than her virtue. By encouraging the monk's desire for her, the wife is able to arrange a business deal

with him: her sexual favors for his one hundred francs.

At this point, the monk becomes devious. By borrowing the money from the merchant, he can enjoy the merchant's wife for naught. He simply explains to the merchant that the loan has been repaid to his wife. Since the wife can not deny that she has received the money, the monk enjoys even more of the merchant's hospitality and goods for absolutely nothing. The monk appears to be the shrewdest businessman of all, although the wife does not fare too badly either. When the wife learns that she has become a victim of the unscrupulous monk, she, like May in The Merchant's Tale, cleverly turns her defeat into victory with her ready wit:

> This wyf was nat afered nor affrayed,
> But boldely she seyde, and that anon;
> "Marie, I deffie the false monk, daun John!
> I kepe nat of his tokenes never a deel;
> He took me certeyn gold, that woot I weel,--
> What! yvel thedam on his monkes snowte!
> For, God it woot, I wende, withouten doute,
> That he hadde yeve it me bycause of yow,
> To doon therwith myn honour and my prow,
> For cosynage, and eek for beele cheere
> That he hath had ful ofte tymes heere.
> (VII[B^2] 400-410)

It is the merchant, the shrewd and wise man of business, who profits nothing save cuckolding and loses his hundred francs besides.

The comic aspects of The Shipman's Tale are produced in large part by the merchant's oblivious attitude to the events in his household. The merchant is made a fool and a cuckold mainly because he is so immersed in materialism and his business affairs. He may be very wise and proficient in

making money and transacting business deals, but in his own home, he becomes a cuckold without ever knowing or suspecting it. The merchant, a shrewd businessman, is never aware of the business deal between his wife and cousin and losses that he accrues from that business deal. The humor and satire of the tale revolve around the ironic wisdom of the merchant, an oblivious and unsuspecting cuckold. His ignorance of the sexual business between his wife and Dan John serves to enhance the irony of the merchant's otherwise cautious concern for money matters. The merchant is not duped by pride or jealousy as in the case of the other cuckolds, but by his own lack of insight or understanding of his wife and her frivolous spending and his misplaced loyalty and faith in Dan John, the monk. The lack of any real wisdom provides the means and opportunity for the merchant's cuckolding. The merchant's total concern for commerce and materialism, his parsimony with both sex and money towards his wife, and his misplaced trust in the monk, all combine to make him the unwitting and humorous cuckold of The Shipman's Tale.

All of the comic cuckolds are duped and cuckolded, at least in part, because of their own character flaws and inadequacies. John the carpenter of The Miller's Tale is old and jealous with an ignorant and superstitious mind. At first, John has little respect for the knowledge of Nicholas, the clerk, but, because of his superstitious mind, the carpenter believes the treacherous clerk's flood story.

John is duped not only by the clerk's guile and deceit, but by his own ignorance and superstition. John deeply loves his young wife and when he believes that danger is near, his first thought is for her safety. This true affection and undying love actually provide the opportunity for the carpenter's cuckolding. In other circumstances, John's deep love for his wife might have produced a sympathetic reaction towards his character, but his gullibility destroys any sympathy that this love might have created. John is an old, jealous, and ignorant fool who more than deserves the fate that he receives. These same qualities make him a comic figure.

In The Reeve's Tale, Symkyn, the scoundrelly miller, is a totally despicable character, an ill-tempered and belligerent thief, but his most dominant character flaw is his immense pride. Since this pride is founded on conceit, arrogance, and vanity, he possesses no redeeming qualities, and the audience delights in his misfortunes including the swyving of his wife and daughter. This arrogant pride of the miller comes from the belief that he is of a superior social rank and character. Part of this belief is based on his own egocentric view of himself. The rest results from his wife's parental background, the illegitimate daughter of a priest and, therefore, in Symkyn's eyes a person of worth in society. When the two clerks, who as Symkyn believes are of a lower social position, requite his treachery through a form of cuckoldry, his pride and superiority are destroyed.

He is brought down from his high pedestal which in turn provides the comic focus of the tale.

The merchant of The Shipman's Tale is a wealthy and successful businessman, but his complete concern for business affairs and lack of concern for the affairs of his wife provide the means and opportunity for his cuckolding. Since he was wealthy, men naturally thought him to be wise, but his wisdom was limited only to the world of commerce. He is so concerned with making profits that he is oblivious to the business affairs in his house. He may be adept at turning a profit, but he is no judge of human nature, especially in the case of his false cousin, Don John, and his faithless wife. He is jealous as are the other cuckolds, but his jealousy is pointed toward his money rather than his wife. His major flaw is his parsimony with both money and sex, especially towards his wife. It is significant that the only time that the merchant is interested in sex is after he has completed a successful business deal. The merchant can not indulge in pleasure before his business is finished. In dealing with his wife and his cousin, he does not exhibit any business sense; this is evident to everyone except the merchant himself. His oblivion to his wife's affair and his own cuckolding create the humor and irony of The Shipman's Tale.

Januarie, lecherous senex amans of The Merchant's Tale, is both literally and figuratively the blindest of cuckolds.

His age, extreme jealousy, and licentious and foolish behavior combine to create a portrait of the typically comic cuckold. Januarie is the perfect example of the lecherous old man. Supposedly a wise and noble knight, Januarie is in fact a wanton libertine who marries a young girl in order to indulge his lascivious nature. One would expect Januarie to be wise as befits his age and station in life, but he demonstrates the follies which often accompany old age. He is an old fool concerned only with indulging his bodily pleasures on a young maiden. He ignores all reason and common sense. He foolishly rationalizes his decision to marry a young girl. Even when he is confronted with the fact of his cuckolding, he still refuses to believe the truth. Although May's answer is provided by supernatural forces, he still foolishly accepts his wife's infidelity and his own cuckolding. Because of his blindness or refusal to see the truth, he is doomed to be the cuckold forever. The foolishly blind character of Januarie provides the humorous impact of The Merchant's Tale.

The comic cuckolds, while they do not exhibit all of the same flaws, hold some foolish character traits in common. Perhaps the one basic thing that the comic cuckolds, including the first three husbands of the Wife of Bath, all share is a blindness to their marital situations. John the carpenter and Januarie are blind to the fact that "man sholde wedde his simylitude." (I[A] 3228) Consequently, they are both duped

by their young wives. Alisoun, the carpenter's wife, is very sensual and animalistic. It is only natural that she would become dissatisfied with her old husband, no matter how vigorous he is. When Nicholas propositions her, she wastes little time in giving her consent to the cuckolding of her husband. May, Januarie's wife, is married to the lecherous knight by arrangement. Therefore, her real pity and love go to her husband's young and love-sick squire, not to her old and lecherous husband. The merchant of The Shipman's Tale is blind to his wife's careless spending and his cousin's faithlessness. This merchant's concern for his business affairs and profits blinds him to his own cuckolding. His frivolous wife prostitutes herself in order to pay her debts without her husband's knowledge. She dupes him in both the cuckolding and the debt. Her poor and "sely" husband is blind to both and accepts her sexual favors as payment for the lost money and his cuckolding. Symkyn of The Reeve's Tale is not blind in the same sense as any of the other cuckolds. His blindness evolves from his over-powering pride and arrogance rather than his marital situation. He delights in the fact of his wife's parental heritage. His pride in his social standing and reputation is ruined by the seduction and trickery of the two students. His arrogant and dishonest character allows him to be satisfied with his own deceit, but blinds him to the student's power to deceive and revenge. Each of these comic cuckolds is blinded by some

flaw in his character which, consequently, provides the means and opportunity for their respective cuckoldings.

Jealousy also plays an important role in the character of the comic cuckolds. All are jealous men. John and januarie, the aged cuckolds, are extremely jealous and possessive of their young wives. But their extreme caution and care in gaurding their wive's chastity are to no avail because both of their cuckolders come from within their own homes and both of their wives freely consent to the cuckoldings. A man can not protect his wife's chastity if she does not want to be chaste. In their old age, John and Januarie fail to realize this fact. Symkyn's jealousy is not so much for his wife as for his wife's reputation and social status. Symkyn's jealousy is a natural offshoot of his excessive pride. When he is cuckolded for his knavery by two lowly clerks, his pride and jealousy contribute to his fate. The merchant of The Shipman's Tale is also not as jealous of his wife as he is of his money. It is ironic that as an astute businessman, he should be unaware of the transaction between the monk and his wife. The irony of the tale also lies in the fact that the shrewd merchant loses his money and receives little in repayment except for cuckolding.

All of these comic cuckolds possess basic human flaws which create the humor in their their respective tales. In fact, their flaws are not far removed from sin, and if they were not comic, these cuckolds might become tragic. The

comic cuckolds portray at least one, and often more, of the seven deadly sins. John the carpenter is marked by a possessive jealousy. Symkyn's pride, the worst sin of all, controls his character and makes his cuckolding all the more humorous to the reader. The merchant of The Shipman's Tale approaches avarice in his quest for profits and materialism. Finally, Januarie, the worst of these comic cuckolds, exhibits at least four of the seven sins directly, and possibly, all of them. He is primarily lecherous, but he also is jealous, proud, quick to anger, and in all likelihood, gluttonous, slothful, and greedy. Since these cuckolds are flawed comically in their characters, they create humor not sympathy. the audience can not identify or sympathize with the plight of any of these characters because their defects are portrayed as humorous rather than serious. All of these cuckolds in one way or another deserve their fates. They are blind and foolish men. These comic cuckolds reveal a wide range of humorous shortcomings and personalities.

Perhaps, the most apt description for these comic cuckolds is to be found in Chaucer's own word sely in the sense of poor, wretched, and hapless. Although each of these comic cuckolds is wealthy in terms of money and material things, each is poor in redeeming human qualities. They are wretched through their own foolishness and they are hapless dupes at the hands of their wives and cuckolders. Their flawed qualities create the humor of the comic

cuckold figure and a large part of the fabliaux. Chaucer writes in The Merchant's Tale, "He that mysconceyveth, he mysdemeth," for the comic cuckolds, this statement is an apt description. These comic cuckolds fail to realize the realities of their marital situations and their flawed characters which in turn produces the comedy of their cuckoldry.

Chapter III

The Tragic Cuckold: Troilus the Idealistic Lover

The comic cuckolds were primarily comic because they were created within the humorous context of the fabliaux, a genre designed to exclude all pathos and tragedy. However, in his masterpiece, Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer explores the eternal theme of love and the tragic possibilities of cuckoldry. Troilus, the noble knight and idealistic lover, reveals the tragic side to cuckoldry. "The double sorwe of Troilus" involves first of all, attaining Criseyde's love and finally, losing that love. Throughout the poem, Troilus exhibits a completely idealistic attitude toward life and love. Although this idealistic stance plays a vital role within the system of courtly love which permeates the poem, Troilus extends his idealism to all of his actions especially concerning his love for Criseyde. On the other hand, Criseyde lives according to the reality of her immediate situation. Because of her position as a woman and her fearful nature, Criseyde finally deals with love and life pragmatically in order to survive. The other two main characters of the poem, Pandarus and Diomede, also live according to the dictates of reality and pragmatism. Neither Pandarus nor Diomede display

an ounce of idealism within their characters. The courtly Pandarus skillfully manipulates his neice, Criseyde, into accepting Troilus as her lover by playing upon her emotions and exploiting her fearful nature. Diomede, an opportunist of the highest degree, gains Criseyde's pity and consequent affections by also playing upon her fears and emotions. These men use whatever means are available to achieve their desired ends. To Pandarus and Diomede, love is seen as basically sexual.[106] To Troilus, love is an ideal quality and state. Troilus is constantly faithful to his ideal notion of love and life. The tragedy of the poem evolves from the destruction of the ideal by the necessities of reality.

Most of Troilus's idealism towards love is based on the tenets or conventions of courtly love. Courtly love which was primarily a manifestation of the nobility during the middle ages evolved during the twelfth century from the French court of Eleanor of Aquitaine.[107] French troubadours in their love lyrics and Chretien de Troies in his romances of the Round Table refined the courtly love practices of the nobility into an art with strict doctrines of behavior.[108]

[106]Alfred David, "The Hero of the Troilus," Speculum, 37(1962), 568.

[107]William George Dodd, "The System of Courtly Love," in Chaucer Criticism, II: Troilus and Criseyde and The Minor Poems, pp.1-2.

[108]Ibid., pp.1-2.

Andreas Capellanus in his *De arte honeste amandi* (*The Art of Loving Decently*) thoroughly analyzed and classified the system of courtly love.[109] According to Capellanus, courtly love is by nature sensual, secret, illicit, and usually adulterous. Furthermore, the love of a lady must not be too easily obtained by her admirer. According to the practices of courtly love, the male is subservient and completely submissive to the will of his chosen lady. The courtly lover is often required to admire his lady from afar for great lengths of time. To admire his lady's beauty and perfection and to serve her as a slave are the primary functions of the courtly lover. Women were placed on a lofty position and adored for their beauty and grace. In fact, they were represented as always beautiful and perfect in all their attributes. Ideally, love, especially of the courtly variety, should be ennobling of character and improve the virtue of all practioners. In theory, courtly love approached the ideal except for the erotic sensualism. Although courtly love advanced adultery and conflicted with the teachings of the Church, fidelity between the illicit lovers was extremely important. Infidelity was a terrible sin and strictly against the doctrines of courtly love. While Troilus is loyal and faithful to Criseyde and obeys the dictates of the courtly love system, Criseyde

[109] *Ibid.*, pp.3-7.

under the pressure of reality commits the most grievous sin and worst crime of courtly love: faithlessness.[110] Troilus is faithful to the ideal throughout the poem, but seldom does the ideal function in the hard light of reality.

In Troilus and Criseyde, the idealism of Troilus defines his emotions and actions. His idealistic attitude toward love makes Criseyde's infidelity a mortal blow to his spirit and his life. His cuckolding drives him to a tragic death on the field of battle, but throughout all he continues to love Criseyde. Troilus, in all his idealism towards love and lovers, cannot accept the reality of Criseyde's betrayal. He is cuckolded because the other characters who influence his life do not accept the same ideal standards. A possible cuckolding is averted in The Franklin's Tale for the opposite reason that Troilus is cuckolded. The characters of The Franklin's Tale all accept the ideal standards of "gentilesse." Indeed, nobility and gentilesse guide and control the actions of the characters in this tale. While courtly love conventions play a major role in this story, the noble idealism of each character saves Arveragus from becoming the cuckold. Arveragus and Dorigen are blissfully happy because gentilesse rules their love and marriage. Arveragus will not take sovereignty

[110] George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, p.130.

or mastery over Dorigen after they are married. In return for his gentilesse, Dorigen promises obediance and fidelity to her husband. They are ideally happy in their love. When Dorigen foolishly promises Aurelius love if he can protect her husband's homecoming from the treacherous black rocks, Aurelius enlists the aid of a sorcerer-clerk to gain her love. The sorcerer is successful in causing the apparent removal of the rocks, and Dorigen curses fate and her misfortune. When Averagus returns and learns of his wife's promise, he exhibits more of his noble and knightly character by making his wife fulfill her promise, even though his sorrow is immense. Arveragus acts in strict accordance with the ideal nobility that all knights should exhibit, "Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe." (V[F] 1479) When Arveragus's noble sacrifice is made known to Aurelius, he, too, acts according to the noble and ideal virtue and releases Dorigen from her promise. (V[F] 1514-1540) Even the clerk absolves Aurelius from his debt because of the noble and ideal virtue of the others. In this tale, nobility resides in all ranks of society. Nobility or gentilesse rules all of the characters' actions in The Franklin's Tale. This gentilesse is based on ideal human qualities which are put into practice. The Franklin relates a tale which shows the ideal love and marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen, but it also reflects the results of idealism put into action. The idealism or gentilesse on the part of all the characters

avoids the cuckolding of Arveragus and provides a happy ending.

In Troilus and Criseyde, however, the characters are not all idealistic nor do their actions, except for those of Troilus, reflect ideal human qualities. Consequently, the cuckolding of Troilus must occur when reality confronts idealism. By comparison, the fabliaux contain only artificial situations or jokes designed solely for humor. The comic cukolds possess absolutely no idealism or reflect reality to any great extent. Their actions, characters, and cuckoldings serve only to further the humor. In the comedy of the fabliaux, there is no confrontation between idealism and reality because there is no reality or idealism.

The idealism of Troilus is confined not just to his actions and emotions. Troilus is pictured as the ideal courtly lover besides the ideal warrior. Troilus is strong, brave, gallant, and generous. He is the bravest warrior in Troy next to his brother, Hector. As Pandarus tells Criseyde, Troilus is one of the worthiest of men:

> And ek his fresshe brother Troilus,
> The wise, worthi Ector the secounde,
> In whom that alle vertu list habounde,
> As alle trouth and alle gentilesse,
> Wisdom, honour, fredom, and worthinesse.
> (II, 157-161)

While Pandarus has his own ulterior motives for building up Troilus, nevertheless, Troilus exhibits these qualities in his character and actions:

> And Troilus wel woxen was in highte,
> And complet formed by proporcioun
> So wel that kynde it nought amenden myghte;
> Yong, fressh, strong, and hardy as lyoun;
> Trewe as stiel in ech condicioun;
> Oon of the beste entecched creature
> That is, or shal, whil that the world may dure.
> (V, 827-833)

Troilus is represented as the ideal knight, but, by modern standards, he is often considered to be too sentimental, a weakling, or a lovesick boy.[111] Nevertheless, Troilus is a brave and gallant warrior and wise except for his initial scorning of love.[112] When Troilus accepts his lovesickness, he becomes the perfect courtly lover. In fact, he is almost too perfect.[113] In the beginning, he scorns love and lovers, but the power of love destroys his arrogance:

> So ferde it by this fierse and proude knyght:
> Though he a worthy kynges sone were,
> And wende nothing hadde had swich myght
> Ayeyns his wille that shuld his herte stere,
> Yet with a look his herte wax a-fere,
> That he that now was moost in pride above,
> Wax sodeynly moost subgit unto love.
> (I, 225-231)

The first sight of Criseyde immediately arouses Troilus, "'O mercy, God,' thoughte he, 'wher hastow woned,/ That art so feyr and goodly to devise?'" (I, 276-277) Troilus

[111] C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition, p.195.

[112] Kittredge, p.122.

[113] Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, p.137. "In [Troilus] convention has taken on the superior purity that is only possible in nostalgic retrospection."

first admires Criseyde's beauty as a courtly lover should do. He even hides his new found love from public scrutiny as a good courtly lover should do, but he also "softe sighed" in order to save his pride and avoid ridicule. With his rapturous new love, he performs the role of a good courtly lover:

> And whan that he in chambre was allone,
> He doun upon his beddes feet hym sette,
> And firste he gan to sike, and eft to grone,
> And thought ay on hire so, withouten lette,
> That, as he sat and wook, his spirit mette
> That he hire saugh a-temple, and al the wise
> Right of hire look, and gan it newe avise.
> (I, 358—364)

The suffering and sorrow of Troilus are perfectly in keeping with the system of courtly love.[114] He falls in love with her at first sight because of her beauty, "honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse." He lowers himself to his lady and is humble and subservient. He is completely loyal and faithful to Criseyde throughout the poem. He exhibits all of the earmarks of the perfect courtly lover. However, Troilus also represents the exaggeration of the courtly lover when seen from a more realistic light.

Troilus's love is almost adolescent in nature. When

[114]Kittredge, pp.123-124. "Weeping and wailing were to be expected. Humility was a cardinal virtue. The lover must feel convinced of his unworthiness and not expect his chosen lady to stoop down to his level."

he falls in love, his reactions are self-centered and full of self pity. He hides his love from Criseyde, the object of his affections. He fights bravely to impress Criseyde, but he never makes an attempt to inform Criseyde of his feelings, "Ne of his wo ne dorste he nat bygynne/ To tellen hir, for al this world to wynne." (I, 503-504) Instead of asserting himself to win his love, he longs for death as an easement for the pain of love. Idealistically, death is the perfect answer. Realistically, however, Troilus does not consider that death can only stop his pain and not further his suit to gain Criseyde's affections. Throughout the poem, he idealistically uses the threat of death or suicide as an escape from the problems of his love. Ironically, at the end of the poem, death is the only answer for Criseyde's inconstancy in the idealistic view of Troilus. He also makes loud long solitary complaints:

> He spak, and called evere in his compleynte
> Hire name, for to tellen hire his wo,
> Til neigh that he in salte teres dreynte.
> Al was for nought: she herde nat his pleynte;
> And whan that he bythought on that folie,
> A Thousand fold his wo gan multiplie.
> (I, 541-546)

Even though he realizes that his actions are foolish, Troilus is caught in the web of his own idealistic notions of love. While the ideal courtly lover is supposed to be afraid to declare his passion for his loved one because of his humility, Troilus is partly afraid of what others will think and say:

> "What wol now every lovere seyn of the,
> If this be wist? but evere in thin absence
> Laughen in scorn, and seyn, 'Loo, ther goth he
> That is the man of so gret sapience,
> That held us loveres leest in reverence.
> Now, thanked be God, he may gon in the daunce
> Of hem that Love list febly for to avaunce."
> (I, 512-518)

While playing the part of the courtly lover, Troilus at the same time reveals his pathetic waekness as a lover when his actions are seen from a realistic perspective.[115] He manifests both the ideal practice of the code of courtly love and the sentimental and impractical weakness of a lovesick and romantic fool.

Furthermore, Troilus is incapable of attaining his love or at least reluctant to assert himself in gaining Criseyde's favor. At this point, Pandarus, pragmatic and full of platitudes, enters with worry and concern for Troilus's condition. A manipulator skilled in the practical necessities of life, Pandarus contrasts Troilus's exaggerated commitment to love, while at the same time, Troilus's idealism contrasts Pandarus's commitment to reality.[116] Pandarus also serves to show the practices of courtly love when approached from a

[115]Muscatine, pp. 136-137. "Depending on perspective, Troilus can be viewed as an ideal hero of romance, or as an ancestor of Don Quixote."

[116]Robert O. Payne, The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics, p. 209.

realistic perspective.[117] Pandarus, a mover of men and events, knows the rules of reality besides the rules of the court. Troilus is weak and indecisive about his new-found love; his only action is to entertain thoughts of suicide. Pandarus, the practical man of courtly affairs, convinces Troilus that service is better than death in the eyes of any lady:

> "What? sholde he therfore fallen in dispayr,
> Or be recreant for his owne tene,
> Or slen hymself, al be his lady fair?
> Nay, nay, but evere in oon be fressh and grene
> To serve and love his deere hertes queene,
> And thynk it is a guerdon, hire to serve,
> A thousand fold moore than he kan deserve."
> (I, 813-819)

Troilus sees the truth in Pandarus's counsel, but feels that Fortune is his enemy:

> For wel fynde I that Fortune is my fo;
> Ne al the men that riden konne or go
> May of hire cruel whiel the harm withstonde;
> For, as hire list, she pleyeth with free and bonde.
> (I, 837-840)

Pandarus dissuades Troilus from this idea by explaining that Fortune may be ready to help ease his love. Pandarus, then, commits himself to help Troilus achieve his love, if only he will reveal her name. When Troilus says that Criseyde is the one, Pandarus is overjoyed, partly because he knows her and partly because she is gracious and beautiful, "For of good name and wisdom and mannere/ She hath ynough, and ek of

[117] Muscatine, pp. 138-139.

gentilesse." (I, 880-881) Pandarus quickly chides Troilus for his previous attitude toward love and lovers but promises to do all in his power to secure Troilus's love. Troilus's first concern is for himself, "But, deere frend, how shal my wo be lesse/ Til this be doon?" (I, 1017-1018) Next, he worries about Criseyde's reaction to Pandarus's overtures, "How wiltow seyn of me and my destresse,/ Lest she be wroth--- this drede I moost, ywys---" (I, 1018-1019), but Pandarus indignantly advises Troilus to mind his own business, "For Goddes love, I bidde the a bonne:/ So lat m'alone, and it shal be thi beste." (I, 1027-1028) Troilus reemphazies his extreme courtly nature and <u>gentilesse</u> by warning Pandarus not to offend Criseyde in any way:

> "But herke, Pandare, o word, for I nolde
> That thow in me wendest so gret folie,
> That to my lady I desiren sholde
> That toucheth harm or any vilenye;
> For dredeles me were levere dye
> Than she of me aught elles understode
> But that that myghte sownen into goode."
> (I, 1030-1036)

Troilus has only the most honorable of intentions, but Pandarus has other motives. Although he entrusts his fate to Pandarus, with hope Troilus changes his mood and character:

> For he bicom the frendlieste wight,
> The gentilest, and ek the mooste fre,
> The thriftiest and oon the beste knyght,
> That in his tyme was or myghte be.
> Dede were his japes and his cruelte,
> His heighe port and his manere estraunge,
> And ecch of tho gan for a vertu chaunge.
> (I, 1079-1085)

Troilus has felt the pain of love and is beginning to feel the joy, but only because of Pandarus and his practical view of things. Troilus's idealism, which can be both a strength and a weakness, makes his love for Criseyde noble and gallant, but this idealism also hampers the fulfillment of his love.

Troilus desperately needs Pandarus, the practical and skillful manipulator, to achieve Criseyde's love. In Book II, Criseyde begins to pity Troilus because of the skillful manipulation of Pandarus who devises a cunning scheme to gain Criseyde's affection for Troilus. Criseyde, however, is constantly afraid for her safety, honor, and reputation. She is deathly afraid of the Greeks and the war raging outside the city walls, but she also has reason to fear the people of Troy. When her father, Calkas the prophet, deserted Troy for the Greek camp, Criseyde, being alone, feared for her safety because of the Trojan's adverse reaction to his treason. Through Hector's protection, she is saved from any harm, but her fear and insecurity are constantly present. Throughout the story, her main flaw is her overpowering fear,[118] "Criseyde which that wel neigh starf for feere,/ So as she was the ferfulleste wight." (II, 449-450) Pandarus, in telling Criseyde of Troilus's love, uses her fearful nature for his own ends. He builds up his revelation with ambiguous

[118] C. S. Lewis, pp. 183-190.

platitudes and reassurances to insure that Criseyde's interest and fear are aroused. (II, 278-308) His manipulation is successful as Criseyde responds, "Say on, lat me nat in this feere dwelle." Pandarus then reveals his true reason for coming to Criseyde, "The noble Troilus, so loveth the,/ That, but ye helpe, it wol his bane be." (II, 319-320) But, Pandarus does not stop with this simple revelation:

> Do what yow lest, to make hym lyve or deye.
> But if ye late hym deyen, I wol sterve—
> Have here my trouthe, nece, I nyl nat lyen—
> Al sholde I with this knyf my throte kerve.
> (II, 322-325)

In order to gain Criseyde's pity for Troilus, Pandarus, weeping crocodile tears, places the responsibility for two lives in Criseyde's hands. Pandarus continues his speech by denying that he is a "baude" or procurer and allaying her fears for her reputation, "That every wight, but he be fool of kynde,/ Wol deme it love of frendship in his mynde." (II, 370-371) But, Criseyde does not immediately swallow the bait; she is wary of Pandarus and his sudden revelation. Criseyde asks Pandarus for his opinion, and Pandarus advises her to love while she is still young and beautiful. Criseyde cries and bemoans the false world. Immediately, Pandarus vows to die along with Troilus because Criseyde will not have pity on him. Criseyde's fear begins to work on her, and she consents to accept Troilus so long as her honor and reputation are secure:

> But that I nyl nat holden hym in honde;

> Ne love a man ne kan I naught, ne may,
> Ayeins my wyl; but elles wol I fonde,
> Myn honour sauf, plese hym fro day to day.
> (II, 477-480)

Criseyde consents to save the lives of Pandarus and Troilus, but at this point, she refuses to go farther, "Though al the world on o day be my fo,/ Ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe." (II, 488-489)

After Pandarus leaves, Criseyde begins to ponder the sudden rush of events. Criseyde realizes the power of women in matters of love:

> And wax somdel astoned in hire thought,
> Right for the newe cas; but whan that she
> Was ful avysed, tho fond she right nought
> Of peril, why she ought afered be.
> For man may love, of possibilite,
> A womman so, his herte may tobreste,
> And she naught love ayein, but if hire leste.
> (II, 603-609)

At the same moment, Criseyde sees Troilus, the valiant warrior, return from battle to the admiration of the crowds. With the sight of him, Criseyde begins to have real pity and mercy on Troilus:

> Criseÿda gan al his chere aspien,
> And leet it so softe in hire herte synke,
> That to hireself she seyde, "Who yaf me drynke?"
>
> And gan to caste and rollen up and down
> Withinne hire thought his excellent prowesse,
> And his estat, and also his renown,
> His wit, his shap, and ek his gentilesse;
> But moost hir favour was, for his distresse
> Was al for hire, and thoughte it was a routhe
> To sleen swich oon, if that he mente trouthe.
> (II, 649-651, 659-665)

With her first sight of Troilus, Criseyde begins to fall in

love, but she is not immediately stricken with an overpowering emotion like Troilus. Criseyde carefully considers both sides to making a commitment of love (II, 694-805), but she can come to no conclusion, as to the best course of action:

> And after that, hire thought gan to clere,
> And seide, "He which that nothing undertaketh,
> Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere."
> And with an other thought hire herte quaketh;
> Than slepeth hope, and after drede awaketh;
> Now hoot, now cold; but thus, bitwixen tweye,
> She rist hire up, and wente to pleye.
> (II, 806-810)

Criseyde, hearing her innocent neice, Antigone, extoll the virtues of love in a song (II, 827-875), asks if love can create such bliss. Antigone answers that love often does create happiness but not always; one must find out about love for himself:

> Men mosten axe at seyntes if it is
> Aught fair in hevene (why? for they kan telle),
> And axen fendes is it foul in helle.
> (II, 894-896)

Criseyde does not reply, but she does lose some of her terror of love:

> But every word which that she of hire herde,
> She gan to prenten in hire herte fast,
> And ay gan love hire lasse for t'agaste
> Than it dide erst, and synken in hire herte,
> That she wex somwhat able to converte.
> (II, 899-903)

Before she falls asleep, Criseyde hears a nightengale's song of love which "made hire herte fressh and gay." As she sleeps, Criseyde dreams of an eagle that painlessly tears out her heart and replaces it with his (II, 925-931). Criseyde's

fear of love is diminishing. She has seen Troilus and his nobility and gentilesse. She is slowly falling in love, but she has not yet made a full commitment to Troilus. Criseyde does not exhibit the idealism towards love which controls Troilus. She tries first to avoid the complications of a love affair. After she consents to friendship and sees Troilus, she realistically considers the advantages and disadvantages to love. She admires Troilus for his nobility, but she does not fall instantly in love. For her the process of falling in love is more than just a matter of the heart; Criseyde also uses her head.

As the ideal courtly lover, Troilus constantly experiences rapid changes of emotion depending on the course of events. When Pandarus reveals that Criseyde has granted her friendship, Troilus is overcome with joy, "Lo, myn herte,/ It spredeth so for joie, it wol tosterte!" (II, 979-980), but with a little hope, Troilus becomes impatient, "But, Lord, how shal I doon? How shal I lyven?/ Whan shal I next my deere herte see?" (II, 981-982) Pandarus then reveals the next step in his scheme. Troilus will write Criseyde a love letter and, while Pandarus is delivering the letter, Troilus will ride by Criseyde's house. Troilus, a "dredful lovere," does not know what to write and is deathly afraid of offenfing Criseyde. However, he does manage to write a letter in the finest courtly tradition, full of humility and his overpowering woe (II, 1065-1084). Troilus bathes the letter with

his tears and bemoans the fact that the letter will see his lady while he will not. When Pandarus returns with Criseyde's answer, he finds Troilus alone and in bed, "That lay, as do thise lovers, in a traunce/ Bitwixen hope and derk disesperaunce." (II, 1306-7) Troilus does not know what to make of Criseyde's answer, "But ofte gan the herte glade and quake/ So as the wordes yave hym hope or drede." (II, 1321,23) Criseyde's letter is ambiguous, but Troilus takes it for the best, "So thorough this lettre, which that she hym sente,/ Encressen gan desir, of which he brente." (II, 1336-37) Through Pandarus's advice, Troilus continues to send missives detailing his "sorwes soore." Troilus's hope is kindled by Criseyde's answers, but he still fluctuates between hope and despair, "And after swiche answeres as he hadde,/ So were his dayes sory outher gladde." (II, 1350-51) He manifests the qualities and actions of the ideal courtly lover, but he is completely dependent upon his go-between, Pandarus.

As a consequence of Troilus's inability to act in his own behalf, Pandarus sets up the first meeting between Troilus and Criseyde at Deiphebus's house advising Troilus to feign a fever, but Troilus replies:

> "Iwis, thow nedeles
> Conseilest me that siklich I me feyne,
> For I am sik in ernest, douteles,
> So that wel neigh I sterve for the peyne."
> (II, 1527-30)

When Pandarus first brings the lovers together, Troilus is blind and speechless. He completely forgets his previously

rehearsed speech, the only words that he can utter are "mercy, mercy, swete herte." In a moment, however, he regains his wits and pledges himself to Criseyde. He even offers to kill himself if Criseyde desires it. (III, 106-12) Troilus is in the extremest throes of emotion, "Therwith his manly sorwe to biholde,/ It myghte han mad an herte of stoon to rewe;" (III, 113-14), but Criseyde is cautious and reasonable, "I wolde hym preye/ To telle me the fyn of his entente./ Yet wist I nevere wel what that he mente." (III, 124-26) Troilus replies according to the strict code of the courtly lover: he pledges his service, "In trouthe alwey to don yow my servise,"; he pledges complete loyalty, "And that ye deigne me so much honoure,/ Me to commanden aught in any houre;" and he pledges perfect behavior as a courtly lover:

> "And I to ben youre verray, humble, trewe,
> Secret, and in my paynes pacient,
> And evere mo desiren fresshly newe
> To serve, and ben ay ylike diligent,
> And with good herte al holly youre talent
> Receyven wel, how sore that me smerte,-"
> (III, 141-46)

After Troilus pledges himself, Criseyde makes her first verbal commitment with a condition:

> "Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely,
> And in swich forme as he gan now devyse,
> Receyven hym fully to my servyse," (III, 159-61)

Although she is concerned for her honour and reputation, she is also concerned about her freedom:

> "A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,
> Ye shal namore han sovereignete
> Of me in love, than right in that cas is;

> N'y nyl forbere, if that ye don amys,
> To wratthe yow; and whil that ye me serve,
> Chericen yow right after ye disserve."
> (III, 170-75)

She will accept Troilus's service, but not his control. After she leaves, Pandarus warns Troilus to protect her reputation by keeping their love secret. Meanwhile, Troilus is ecstatic:

> His olde wo, that made his herte swelte,
> Gan tho for joie wasten and tomelte,
> And al the richesse of his sikes sore
> At ones fledde; he felte of hem namore.
> (III, 347-50)

Although Troilus has attained his lady's pity and affection, he is still the perfect courtly lover and gentleman:

> But Troilus, though as the fir he brende
> For sharp desir of hope and of plesaunce,
> He nought forgat his goode governaunce.
> (III, 425-27)

As Troilus and Criseyde meet secretly for short periods of time, Criseyde begins to see the true gentilesse in Troilus's character:

> It seemed hire he wiste what she thoughte
> Withouten word, so that it was no nede
> To bidde hym ought to doon, or ought forbeede;
> For which she thought that love, al come it late,
> Of alle joie hadde opened hire the yate.
> (III, 465-69)

Troilus as the ideal lover provides Criseyde with love and, even more importantly, with security:

> For whi she fond hym so discret in al,
> So secret, and of swich obeisaunce,
> That wel she felte he was to hire a wal
> Of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce;
> That to ben in his goode governaunce,
> So wis he was, she was namore afered....
> (III, 477-82)

The love between Troilus and Criseyde is blossoming, but Pandarus wants it to mature. In order to achieve this end, he devises a scheme for Troilus and Criseyde to spend the night together. While Criseyde is staying with Pandarus, he tells her that Troilus believes Criseyde loves another. She is first indignant and then sad. She bemoans the fugaciousness of joy and the wickedness of jealousy. (III, 813-40) Pandarus convinces Criseyde that she must see Troilus immediately, although Criseyde is reluctant to do so. When Troilus enters her bed chamber, their positions and reactions are reversed from those of their first meeting. Criseyde, lying in bed, is speechless at the sight of Troilus. She speaks of Troilus's goodness and nobility and the evils of jealousy. (III, 987-1050) She then begins to cry and says, "Now God, thow woost, in thought ne dede untrewe/ To Troilus was nevere yet Criseyde." (It is interesting that Criseyde qualifies her answer with <u>yet</u>!) Troilus, overcome by grief and remorse for the deception, falls into a swoon. Pandarus quickly throws him into bed with Criseyde, and she revives and comforts him. Troilus and Criseyde thus spend the night together in bed and reach the final fullfillment of their love:

> And now swetnesse semeth more swete,
> That bitternesse assaied was byforn;
> For out of wo in blisse now they flete;
> Non swich they felten syn that they were born.
> (III, 1219-22)

They have reached the culmination of their happiness, joy, and love. They are both deeply in love and can think of

nothing but each other. While Pandarus continues to orchestrate their affair, Troilus and Criseyde live in perfect bliss, "And thus Fortune a tyme ledde in joie/ Criseyde, and ek this kynges sone of Troie." (III, 1714-15) Through Criseyde's love, Troilus becomes braver on the field of battle, more gallant, and worthier in every respect. According to the theory of courtly love, love should increase the virtue of its practioners. In Troilus's case, ideal love ennobles an already noble character. For Troilus, the consummation of his love is morally and intellectually fullfilling.[119]

However, the Wheel of Fortune does not stand still and reality and external events begin to intrude upon the "parfit blisse" of Troilus and Criseyde. Calkas persuades the Greeks to exchange the Trojan Antenor for Criseyde. When the subject of the trade is broached in the Trojan parliament, Troilus is once again stricken with sorrow, but also once again does nothing:

> For which ful soone chaungen gan his face,
> As he that with thow ordes wel neigh deyde.
> But natheles he no word to it seyde,
> Lest men sholde his affeccioun espye;
> With mannes herte he gan his sorwes drye,
> (IV, 150-54)

Troilus is torn between love and reason:

> Love hym made al prest to don hire byde,
> And rather dyen than she sholde go;
> But resoun seyde hum, on that other syde,

[119]David, p.573.

"Withouten assent of hire ne do nat so,
Lest for thi werk she wolde be thy fo,
(IV, 162-66)

Troilus listens to his reason and decides to tell Criseyde before he takes any action. His decision would seem to mark the first instance in which he abandons his idealism for a realistic stance, but idealism is so deeply ingrained in his character that it controls his reason. He will not interfere until he consults with Criseyde and she tells him what to do. In order to protect her honor, her reputation, and the secrecy of their love, he does not take any direct action to stop the prisoner exchange. This refusal to act is completely in accord with his idealistic attitude toward love and his position as a servant to his lady.

After the decision is made to exchange the prisoners, Troilus again returns to his bed, but, instead of exhibiting the ailments of the courtly lover, he wallows in self pity. Troilus is full of sorrow, anguish, and despair:

Right so gan he aboute the chaumbre sterte,
Smytyng his brest ay with his fistes smerte;
His hed to the wal, his body to the grounde
Ful ofte he swapte, hymselven to confounde.

His eyen two, for piete of herte,
Out strmeden as swifte welles tweye;
The heighe sobbes of his sorwes smerte
His speche hum refte; unnethes myghte he seye,
"O deth, allas! why nyltow do me deye?
Acorsed be that day which that Nature
Shop me to ben a lyves creature!"
(IV, 242-52)

He continues to do nothing except curse life and fortune for this evil turn of events. Troilus is soon so overcome with

sorrow and anguish that, "He feleth non, but lith forth in a traunce." At this point, he is heart-stricken by his own emotions and self pity, but when Pandarus suggests that he forget Criseyde, Troilus consistent with his idealistic position toward love, vows eternal faithfulness to Criseyde:

> But fro my soule shal Criseydes darte
> Out nevere mo; but down with Proserpyne,
> Whan I am ded, I wol go wone in pyne,
> And ther I wol eternaly compleyne
> My wo, and how that twynned be we tweyne.
> (IV, 472-476)

Next, Pandarus advises Troilus to run away with Criseyde, but Troilus refuses. (IV, 541-574) He does not want to cause more trouble for Troy by "ravysshyng" another woman. He does not want to ask his father for Criseyde's safety because the decision has been made in the parliament. Finally and most importantly, he does not want to disturb Criseyde with violence and besmirch her reputation, "Hire honour levere than my lyf to save!" Troilus's reason rules his desire,[120] but his reason is completely dependent upon his idealistic nature. Troilus stays true to the ideal of his own gentilesse and his love for Criseyde.

At the same time that Troilus is stricken with sorrow and is remaining ideally loyal to his lady's honor and reputation, Criseyde thinks of Troilus and her deep love for him

[120]Siegfried Wenzel, "Chaucer's Troilus of Book IV," PMLA, 79 (1964), 543.

> As she that hadde hire herte and al hire mynde
> On Troilus iset so wonder faste,
> That al this world ne myghte hire love unbynde,
> Ne Troilus out of hire herte caste,
> She wol ben his, while that hire lif may laste.
> And thus she brenneth both in love and drede,
> So that she nyste what was best to reede.
> (IV, 673-79)

Criseyde's love for Troilus is sincere. She exhibits her own sorrow in much the same way as Troilus did:

> Hire ownded heer, that sonnyssh was of hewe,
> She rente, and ek hire fyngeres long and smale
> She wrong ful ofte, and bad God on hire rewe,
> And with the deth to doon boote on hire bale.
> (IV, 736-39)

She does not think of her honor or reputation, but only of the painful separation from her lover. Like Troilus, Criseyde is overcome with sorrow and anguish, but her thoughts are for Troilus, "Gret is my wo.../ But yit to me his sorwe is muchel more,/ That love hym bet than he hymself, I gesse."(IV, 897, 899-900) Pandarus convinces Criseyde to put up a strong front for the benefit of Troilus. When Troilus and Criseyde meet, they are both overcome by sorrow. Criseyde faints and Troilus is convinced that she has died. As the ideal courtly lover, Troilus decides to follow her in death, "Syn Love and cruel Fortune it ne wolde,/ That in this world he lenger lyven sholde." (IV, 1189-90) But, during Troilus's long farewell speech (IV, 1192-1210), Criseyde awakes and sees that Pandarus was right about Troilus's intentions to die for her and his sorrow. Criseyde takes the initiative and proposes a plan where she will return to Troy ten days after

the exchange has been completed. Criseyde is confident that she will be able to return, "For who may holde a thing that wol awey?" (IV, 1628). But Troilus has grave misgivings about Criseyde's ability to return. Troilus is worried that Criseyde will find a Greek lover and forget the Trojans and especially Troilus. For the first time, Troilus suggests direct action---the lovers should run away. But Criseyde will not flee because she feels that they would eventually regret their action, "But afterward, ful soore it wol us rewe." Criseyde is worried about Troilus's honor, reputation, and what others would say:

> They wolden seye, and swere it, out of doute,
> That love ne drof yow naught to don this dede,
> But lust voluptuous and coward drede.
> Thus were al lost, ywys, myn herte deere,
> Youre honour, which that now shyneth so clere.
> (IV, 1571-75)

Criseyde is also concerned for her own reputation and honor:

> And also thynketh on myn honeste,
> That floureth yet, how foule I sholde it shende,
> And with what filthe it spotted sholde be,
> If in this forme I sholde with yow wende.
> (IV, 1576-79)

Criseyde will not destroy both of their honor and reputation by running away. As it turns out, she only destroys her honor by deceiving Troilus. As Book IV comes to a conclusion, Criseyde vows to return without fail, "The tenth day, but if that deth m'assaile,/ I wol yow sen, withouten faille." (IV, 1595-96)

As the prisoner exchange is being made, Troilus is questioning his actions:

"Whi nyl I make atones riche and pore
To have inough to doone, er that she go?
Why nyl I brynge al Troie upon a roore?
Whi nyl I slen this Diomede also?
Why nyl I rather with a man or two
Stele hire away? Whi wol I this endure?
Whi nyl I helpen to myn owen cure?
(V, 43-49)

But Troilus is not as ardent and forceful a lover as Paris or Menelaus and, according to his idealistic nature, Troilus is worried for Criseyde's safety. After the exchange, Diomede, the practical opportunist, immediately begins his courtship of Criseyde. Diomede's approach is essentially the same that Troilus used except that Diomede has no need for a middleman and he uses experience and quick action to gain Criseyde's pity and trust. Diomede offers his loyalty and friendship to Criseyde. He reassures her that she has nothing to fear from the Greeks. Diomede also immediately pledges his love for Criseyde, "I am, and shal ben ay,/ God helpe me so, whil that my lyf may dure,/ Youre owene aboven every creature." (V, 152-54) Even though her thoughts are occupied elsewhere, Criseyde unconsciously encourages Diomede by accepting his friendship. (V, 176-82)

Meanwhile, Troilus again immerses himself in sorrow and woe in his bed chamber, "Who koude telle aright or ful discryve/ His wo, his pleynte, his langour, and his pyne?" (V, 267-78) Troilus even makes plans for his death because of his sorrow and woe. (V, 295-322) In Book I, Troilus's pain and misery represented courtly love practices and the sorrow

of a love unfulfilled, however, it is now the sorrow of a love fulfilled and then torn asunder. If Troilus did not possess the extreme idealism of his character, his sorrow and pain would never have been so great. Pandarus suggests pleasure and activity so that Troilus will not dwell on his sorrow and misery, but Troilus knows no pleasure without Criseyde:

> For evere in oon his herte pietous
> Ful bisyly Criseyde, his lady soughte.
> On hire was evere al that his herte thoughte,
> Now this, now that, so faste ymagenynge,
> That glade, iwis, kan hym no festeyinge.
> (V, 451-55)

During Criseyde's absence, Troilus makes his sorrow worse by dwelling upon his past happiness. He re-reads old love letters and visits places that remind him of his happiness with Criseyde He spends his time at the city gates or pining upon the walls of the city. Throughout his separation from Criseyde, he experiences rapidly changing moods. He fluctuates between violent passion, tearful nostalgia, restlessness, jealousy, wistful optimism, and listless depression,[121] but his idealistic faith and love for Criseyde never waver.

Criseyde, on the other hand, finally exhibits a fatalistic attitude toward her situation and her infidelity. She wants to return to Troilus, but she is afraid. Diomede allays

[121]David, p.579.

Criseyde's fears by providing security and eases her pain by providing a substitute for Troilus:

> So wel he for hymselven spak and seyde,
> That alle hire sikes soore adown he leyde.
> And finally, the sothe for to seyne,
> He refte hire of the grete of al hire peyne.
> (V, 1033-36)

Criseyde accepts Diomede as her lover because she realistically has no other choice, . . .she was allone and hadde nede/ Of frendes help. . . ." (V, 1026-27) Criseyde's nature is ruled by fear. In a strange and frightening place like the Greek camp, Criseyde has no use for idealistic fidelity to Troilus. She is full of remorse for her betrayal of Troilus's love, but she fatalistically accepts her situation. Since she can not right the wrong that she has done to Troilus, she pledges to be true to Diomede:

> But syn I se ther is no bettre way,
> And that to late is now for me to rewe,
> To Diomede algate I wol be trewe.
> (V, 1069-71)

She survives by acting within the practical necessities of the reality that she must face.

When Criseyde does not return on the tenth day, Troilus believes that he has miscounted the days and still retains hope. By the sixteenth day, Troilus still had faith in Criseyde's return, but he was beginning to doubt, "Bitwixen hope and drede his herte lay,/ Yet somwhat trustyng on hire hestes old." (V, 1206-07) When the truth comes to Troilus in the dream of a boar kissing Criseyde, Troilus is ready to

believe that his lady has been unfaithful, but Pandarus convinces him that dreams are not the truth. After receiving an ambiguous letter from Criseyde, Troilus falls into a deep depression:

> Encressan gan the wo fro day to nyght
> Of Troilus, for tarying of Criseyde;
> And lessen gan his hope and ek his myght,
> For which al down he in his bed hym leyde.
> He ne eet, ne dronk, ne slep, ne no word seyde,
> Ymagynyng ay that she was unkynde;
> For which wel neigh he wex out of his mynde.
> (V, 1436-42)

Troilus is torn with doubt, but he will not accept the fact that Criseyde will not return. Even after Cassandra has correctly interpreted his dream, Troilus will not believe that Criseyde is perfidious. Even with Criseyde's final letter asking only for friendship, Troilus refuses to see the truth. His final realization of Criseyde's infidelity only comes when he sees physical evidence--Criseyde's brooch on Diomede's captured cloak. At first, Troilus bemoans Criseyde's lack of faith, but his final reaction is one of anger. He vows to die on the battlefield and does, although he can never forget or betray his love for Criseyde. He is the noble and idealistic knight to the very end of his earthly existence.

Troilus is bound to love by his idealism. In order for him to become a cuckold, this bondage must be present because without it, Criseyde's infidelity would have been meaningless. He is a slave to love because of his idealism. This extreme idealism not only enthralls him unto his lady,

but also blinds him to a highly abstract idea of love and lovers. His idealistic view of love acts as both a strength and a weakness. His idealism, on the one hand, makes him weak, pitiable, and ineffectual as a lover, but on the other hand, this idealism also makes his character more noble and virtuous. In a sense, his tragic error was the fact that he loved Criseyde, a human being caught up in a web of weakness and frailty, with an ideal spiritual love.[122] Because of his idealism, he was the most faithful lover, even with the knowledge of Criseyde's inconstancy:

> "Through which I se that clene out of youre mynde
> Ye han me cast; and I ne kan nor may,
> For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde
> To unloven yow a quarter of a day!
> In corsed tyme I born was, weilaway,
> That yow, that doon me al this wo endure,
> Yet love I best of any creature!
> (V, 1695-1701)

Troilus possess an eternal devotion to his ideal of love and woman hood, but even this most perfect love is no safeguard against betrayal. To the ideal lover, betrayal demands only one action--death. Troilus for all his idealism can not deny his love, nor can he continue to live. His death on the field of battle is the logical extension of his ideal character; he actually has no other alternative.

Criseyde is not the ideal woman that Troilus loves or

[122]David, p.578.

believes her to be. Throughout the poem, she is haunted by forces larger than she whether they be Fate, the love of Troilus, the crowds of Troy, Pandarus's and Diomede's skillful manipulations, or even the Trojan war itself. She lives in fear for her safety, honor, and well-being. As Fate tosses her about on the stormy tempest of existence, Criseyde must adapt to the realities of her constantly changing situation. She can not afford to live and love by the idealistic notions of Troilus, but she must survive by a pragmatic approach to reality. Criseyde constantly demonstrates her ability to survive, regardless of her situation and fear. When her safety in Troy is threatened, she seeks out Hector's protection. She accepts Troilus as her lover because he provides strength and security, "he was to hire a wal of stiel. . . ." In the strangeness and terror of the Greek camp, she accepts Diomede's overtures because she again needs protection and security. She lives according to the dictates of reality and not idealism. Although her infidelity to Troilus was a grievous sin in the tradition of courtly love and in the eyes of Troilus, realistically, she had no other choice. Her betrayal of Troilus's love was necessary because of the intrusion of external events and the necessities of survival.

Troilus and Criseyde live by completely different visions of existence; it is no small wonder that their love goes as far as it does. Without the influence of Fate or Fortune,

perhaps their love would have survived as long as the walls of Troy, but the Wheel of Fortune creates their love and later destroys their happiness together,"For as hire lest, she playeth with free and bond ." (I, 840) Fortune controls Troilus in his bondage to idealistic love and Criseyde in her freedom to realistic love. Fortune can separate the lovers and aid in Criseyde's betrayal, but it can not destroy Troilus's ideal love for Criseyde. Indeed, Fate acts as the supreme cuckolder of Troilus and as the creator of earthly tragedy. In fact, the tragedy of the poem comes from Criseyde's inconstancy to her noble and devoted lover. It evolves from the destruction of the ideal by reality in the earthly realm of human affairs, but the ultimate ending of the poem is not tragic. In his ascent to heaven, Troilus sees the vanities of the mortal world. He understands the true joy of heavenly bliss and the futility of earthly existence:

> And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
> This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
> Embraced is, and fully gan despise
> This wrecched world, and held al vanite
> To respect of the pleyn felicite
> That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
> Ther he was slayn, his lokyng down he caste.
>
> And in hymself he lough right at the wo
> Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste;
> And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
> The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
> And sholden al oure herte on heven caste.
> (V, 1814-1825)

In the spiritual world, Troilus realizes the foolishness of

all his earthly sorrow and pain. The ultimate ending of the poem reveals the ideal as finally triumphant in the higher spiritual realm. The tragedy of Troilus only exists in the earthly realm of human affairs where all is vanity. The final triumph of the ideal reveals Troilus not as the pathetic victim of worldly vanities and lusts, but as the hero of a higher Christian sphere.

Chapter IV

The Chaucerian Cuckold: Conclusion

Chaucer's comic and tragic cuckolds differ in almost every way save the fact that they both possess the requirement of the cuckold: faithless women. The comic and tragic cuckolds differ in character and situation. The motivations for their respective cuckoldings are varied and different according to their wive's and their own characters. The revelation of their cuckoldings and the cuckolds' reactions produce different effects. Troilus learns of Criseyde's infidelity and his thoughts and reactions are an integral part of the story and the tragedy. In fact, Troilus's awareness of Criseyde's infidelity and his reaction to that infidelity provide the penultimate ending for the story. The comic cuckolds only learn of their cuckoldings, if they are ever aware of them, towards the end of their stories and their reactions and emotions to their cuckoldings are not extensively explored. However, their reactions do affect their respective tales to some extent. In learning of their cuckoldings, the first three comic cuckolds reveal a progression in the knowledge that they are cuckolds and their reactions to this knowledge. The first two, John the old

carpenter, and Symkyn, the proud miller, learn at the end of their tales that they have been duped and cuckolded. John attempts in vain to explain how he has been deceived, but his neighbors only laugh because they believe that he is crazy. Besides the shame and humiliation of being called a lunatic, John suffers doubly with the label of cuckold. In The Reeve's Tale, Symkyn suffers both the shame and humiliation of being a cuckold and of being tricked and cheated. Symkyn learns that his daughter has been seduced and his reaction is violent. Although he does not know that he has been cuckolded twice by the students, Symkyn's reaction to the swyving of his daughter brings the beating that he so richly deserves. In The Merchant's Tale, January learns of his cuckolding but refuses to see or believe the truth. This blindness in turn reveals Januarie's foolish and ego-centric character. His refusal to see the truth when it is staring him in the face shows him to be perhaps the most foolish of cuckolds. The fourth and final comic cuckold, the merchant of The Shipman's Tale, never learns the truth of his cuckolding. He is oblivious to everything that passes between his wife and cousin. This oblivious man shows that the cuckold can be a humorous figure even without the knowledge that he is a cuckold.

The system of courtly love affects the tragic cuckold and to some extent the comic cuckolds but in different ways. According to the conventions of courtly love, the courtly

lover usually loved and worshipped a married lady. Thus, cuckoldry was an inherent aspect of courtly love. In Troilus and Criseyde, Criseyde happens to be a widow, so there is no husband to be cuckolded by the courtly lover Troilus. Whereas a husband in Criseyde's life might have detracted from the purity and nobility of Troilus and Criseyde's love and added to the scorn for Criseyde's character, the fact that she was a widow gives her the freedom to love Troilus while not detracting from her character at all. In the fabliaux, courtly love conventions are evident in a tale such as the Merchant's, but the purpose of these conventions is always for humor and satire.

The comic and tragic cuckolds differ with respect to money and materialism and the attitude created by money and materialism. With the comic cuckolds of the fabliaux, money is always involved either directly as in The Shipman's Tale and The Reeve's Tale or indirectly as in The Miller's and Merchant's Tales, but, with the tragic cuckold, money has no place in the story for a variety of reasons. In the fabliaux, money often provides part of the humor. The Merchant's wife in The Shipman's Tale cuckolds her husband in order to pay off a debt for her finery. The fact that the Merchant is rich yet his wife needs more money than he allots her provides part of the irony in his cuckolding. In The Reeve's Tale, Symkyn's pride and thievery bring on his cuckolding and negate any sympathy for the disdainful miller.

In The Miller's and Merchant's Tales, money plays an indirect role. Both John and Januarie were rich old men. Although money is not a motive for cuckoldry in these tales, the fact that these rich old men possess young wives and are blind to the cuckolders within their own homes reveals that the acquisition of money does not necessarily prove intelligence, insight, or awareness. As in The Shipman's Tale, wealth is no protection against infidelity. The oblivious attitudes of these rich men to their wives' infidelity helps to create the humor within each tale. In the tragic cuckold, money is not involved because of the setting and time in which the story takes place and the central concern of the story itself. In the ancient system of Troy, wealth was a matter of birth and class. This is not to say that the comic tales are not concerned with the equation of wealth and class. The rise of the bourgeoisie with their newly acquired wealth and the decline of the nobility are part of the humor in the fabliaux. But, in ancient Troy, there were no bourgeoisie and wealth was more or less an accident of birth. Furthermore, the story of Troilus and Criseyde is primarily concerned with their love and her subsequent infidelity to Troilus. Money is not a concern of their noble and serious love. The time, setting, primary concern of the story, and the genre of romance itself work to keep money and crass materialism out of the story of Troilus and Criseyde, while, conversely, the genre of the fabliaux works to keep money and materialism in

the respective tales.

However, the comic cuckold is not completely different or separate from the tragic cuckold. In some instances, the comic cuckold comes very close to becoming a tragic figure. The final picture of John the carpenter in The Miller's Tale dazed with a broken arm and being laughed at by his neighbors would be a pathetic and tragic sight if it were not for the previous knowledge of the carpenter's character and actions. In The Merchant's Tale, May's brazen explanation of her actions in the pear tree might produce sympathy for an old and noble knight if we did not know about Januarie's lecherous and ego-centric character. The basic thing that keeps the comic cuckolds from becoming tragic figures is the obvious and robust humor of the fabliaux. The excessive desires, follies, and flaws within the characters of the comic cuckolds create no sympathy for these horned husbands. These same desires, follies, and flaws help to generate the humor of the fabliaux. The comic cuckolds in any other situation, with other characteristics, or in a different type of story would probably be seen as tragic figures deluded and duped by fickle and faithless women and unscrupulous men, but in the fabliaux, these vain and foolish men are deluded and victimized by their own foolish flaws.

While the comic cuckolds verge on the tragic, Troilus, the tragic cuckold, reveals certain aspects of comedy. In his idealism, his strict adherence to the code of courtly

love, and even his self-centered and adolescent reactions to love, Troilus often produces comedy and amusement, especially to the modern reader. But even more importantly, Troilus in his ascent to heaven at the end of Book V looks down on the futility of earthly existence and laughs at the foolishness. Troilus realizes "the blynde lust, the which that may nat laste." He realizes the perfection of the ideal in the higher spiritual realm. The blind lust which is so fleeting reveals the world as truly a human comedy and his own death and cuckolding as meaningless. Troilus is blind in the earthly world, but he realizes the blindness of humanity, a fact which the comic cuckolds never know. The comic cuckolds are "sely" and completely unaware of their foolishness. If anything truly makes them tragic, it is their continual blindness to their own excessive follies and flaws.

A final discussion of cuckolds would not be complete without some consideration of the faithless women. Perhaps the Wife of Bath provides the model, or at least, the supreme example of the cuckold's wife. Dame Alice is sensuous, cunning, forceful, and dominating. The Wife of Bath uses sex and cuckoldry for her own purposes--profit and pleasure. She uses sex to control and dominate the behavior and wealth of her five husbands. While actually cuckolding her first three husbands under the pretence of jealousy, Alisoun only pretends to cuckold her fourth husband in order to make him

jealous. The wives of the comic cuckolds reveal many of the same qualities and motivations of the Wife of Bath. Alisoun in The Miller's Tale is sensuous and animalistic. She accepts Nicholas's seduction with little hesitation. In going along with Nicholas's outrageous plan instead of taking the first opportunity to cuckold her husband, Alisoun appears to enjoy the duping as much as the seduction. Although Symkyn's wife in The Reeve's Tale does not know that she is being swyved by the clerk, she, nevertheless, enjoys the pleasure of the sudden attack, "So myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yoore." Her daughter enjoys her "myrie fit" enough to tell Aleyn where the stolen grain is hidden. Like the Wife of Bath, these two women enjoy the sexual act for the pleasure it brings. May, virtually an enigma throughout most of The Merchant's Tale, shows that she, like the Wife of Bath, can make her husband's life a purgatory on earth and perhaps even a hell, although foolish Januarie would never even be aware of it. The wife of the merchant in The Shipman's Tale is, like the good Wife of Bath, concerned with material goods, especially of a fine quality. The merchant's wife also uses her body and sex to acquire the material possessions that she desires.

Criseyde, on the other hand, is an entirely different matter. Her character is more complex in development and motivation. Criseyde is motivated by fear and concern for her security. She later comes to love Troilus deeply, but

her main reason for accepting him in the first place was his strength and the security that he could provide for her. As Fate would have it (and art too), Troilus could not provide her with all of the security and strength that she needed. Consequently, Criseyde is forced to shift for herself in a strange and frightening world. Criseyde cuckolds Troilus not for money, nor for sexual pleasure, nor for love, but because she needed protection and security to allay her fears in the strangeness of the Greek camp. Her betrayal of Troilus is largely a matter of pragmatic survival in the uncaring world of hard reality. The unfaithful women of both the comic and tragic cuckolds are motivated by different reasons (as are all unfaithful women.) In his work, Chaucer shows only a few examples of unfaithful women, but their characters and motivations provide humor, create sympathy, and reflect the human condition.

The comic and tragic cuckolds differ not only because of their respective characters, situations, and women, but even more basically because of the different literary genres from which they spring. In Chaucer's work, the comic cuckold is created in the context of the humorous genre of the fabliaux; the tragic cuckold is a product of an heroic narrative, the medieval romance. These genres differ in function and purpose. They produce different characters, actions, and effects upon the audience. In the fabliaux, the main purpose is humorous amusement and entertainment as

a reflection of man's follies. While romance may include humor and irony as in the Troilus, the romance primarily deals with heroic deeds, knightly activity, and noble love. Within the scope of these subject matters, the romance reveals idealism and often tragedy. While the romance can be every bit as entertaining in its own right as the coarse fabliaux, the elevation of subject matter in the romance produces a more ennobling type of entertainment. In Troilus and Criseyde, the serious idealism and nobility of the characters[123] and their motivations, especially in the case of Troilus, creates serious consideration of the story. When Fortune and people destroy the noble and ideal, tragedy is often the result. In the Troilus, earthly reality, including Fate and man, destroys the heroic ideal. This is the earthly tragedy of the poem. In the earthy fabliaux, very seldom is anything or anyone ideal, noble, or heroic, even the nobility. The very baseness of all people is a basic part of the humor within the fabliaux.

Both the fabliaux and the romance of Troilus and Criseyde

[123]Although some may consider neither Criseyde nor Pandarus as noble, arguments can be made either way. Karl Young, "Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde as Romance," PMLA, 53, p.60, quotes E. Legouis, Chaucer (Paris, 1910), pp. 121-125, as saying that Pandarus degrades the Troilus to the level of the fabliaux. Although I believe this tends to exaggeration, Pandarus definitely reflects certain characteristics of fabliaux characters.

reveal the artistic development of Chaucer's work. In the fabliaux, Chaucer began with a humorous and rather simplistic French genre and transformed it into an artistic whole. Chaucer's fabliaux contain more than the functional requirements of the French fabliaux which use only enough detail and characterization to further the action. While he made use of the simple humor and poetic justice found in the French fabliaux, Chaucer enlarged his fabliaux in terms of plot, setting, and particularly characterization. The French fabliaux are based on simple plots usually of a humorous and sexual nature. While Chaucer employed plots concerned with humor and sex, the plots in his fabliaux become more complex and more tightly knit than the French fabliaux because of added elements of irony, imagery, symbolism, and physical description of setting and character. For example, in The Reeve's Tale, Chaucer took a simple French fabliaux and converted it into a completely English tale in action, setting, and characterization.[124] In the French fabliaux, characterization is usually simple and direct consisting of typed characters. Perhaps, Chaucer's greatest contribution to the development of the fabliaux was his depth of characterization. Chaucer used types in

[124]Muscatine, pp.198-207.

his fabliaux such as the senex amans or old and jealous husband, but his characters are more than types. Through physical description of the characters' natures and plausible human motivations, Chaucer's characters come alive. No where is this more evident than in the cuckolds of the fabliaux. In the French fabliaux, the cuckold is found frequently but not always. Many fabliaux deal with other aspects of sexual behavior. However, with Chaucer his best fabliaux employ the cuckold figure. Chaucer also fused into his fabliaux abundant details of setting and character, more complex plots and character motivations than most of the Old French fabliaux. Chaucer took the simple joke and the basic action of the French fabliaux, added his own skill as an artist, and created meaningful poetry which at the same time is humorous and entertaining.

Troilus and Criseyde represents Chaucer's most masterful finished work. This long narrative poem is the manifestation of Chaucer's artistry. Often called a great psychological novel because the poem reveals many of the characters' inner thoughts and much of the psychology of love, the Troilus is also closely related to and descended from the romantic narrative, or medieval romance.[125] Chaucer's Troilus is

[125]G. L. Kittredge, among others, has hailed Troilus and Criseyde as a realistic and psychological novel. Karl Young in "Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde as Romance," PMLA, 53 (1938), pp. 38-63, argues that there is much to be gained by considering the poem as a medieval romance.

taken in large part from Boccaccio's Il Filostrato; however, Chaucer moved backward toward romance while Boccaccio moved closer to reality and realism in his work.[126] Boccaccio shows more of his own personal experience and the life in Naples during his time. On the other hand, Chaucer attempts to disassociate himself from the poem and to transport the reader back to a distant and romantic Troy in the attempt to convey an effect of glamor and strangeness. Although Troilus and Criseyde is more complex than a simple romance of heroic valor and love, the understanding of its romantic qualities and magical moments is an essential aspect of the work. The complexity of the poem in terms of romance and novel qualities and characters and motivations serves to show again the artistic greatness of Geoffrey Chaucer, English poet.

In the fabliaux, the cuckolds create humor. These comic cuckolds also reveal the follies and foolish desires of old men, jealous men, proud men, noble men, and business men. These cuckolds present a broad sampling or variety of all men and the foolish desires and actions that often afflict

[126]Young, p.46. Also see by C. S. Lewis, "What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato" Studies by Members of the English Association, 17(1932), pp.56-75, and The Allegory of Love.

them. In Troilus and Criseyde, the tragic cuckold serves to show the futility and vanity of earthly endeavor including physical love. Through this pagan love story, Chaucer reaffirms Christian doctrine and teachings and the hope of salvation from God Almighty in a higher and better spiritual realm. The cuckolds both comic and tragic provide different types of entertainment through poetry of different genres, but they indirectly, as all good art must do, provide an ethical and moral outlook on life as Chaucer lived it and as we live it today.

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