Gender and Transgression in the Late Medieval English Household

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Abstract

The household was one of the fundamental structures for late medieval social and cultural organisation. This thesis uses the concept of 'transgression' to explore the part the household plays in articulating ideologies of gender in late medieval England. Transgression designates both movement across the boundaries of the house and the breaking of rules that govern behaviour. I focus on a body of texts that are rarely studied but which were very popular in their own time. These include a group of lyrics known as 'the betrayed maidens' laments', comic tales descended from the fabliaux, anti-feminist entertainment printed by Wynkyn de Worde, and popular romance. My approach pays close attention to the specific production and reception contexts of each text I discuss, in order to probe how they may have been understood by medieval audiences in light of the prevailing norms of gender. I examine how tropes that were in many cases already old, staples of the fabliau genre, manifest themselves in particular fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century texts and manuscripts and how they interact with prevailing social and historical conditions.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore the trope of the clerical seducer, through the linked figures of the young clerk and the more established priest. Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the counterpart of the cleric in the fabliaux-like narrative - the weak or duped layman. These figures are used to give voice to anxieties about household governance and control of women's sexuality. By focusing on how tropes circulate between different kinds of sources, and how narratives are constructed, I provide valuable insight into the resonances of the household in late medieval culture. The late medieval English household was a potent imaginative space that was used to articulate anxiety about gendered behaviour and the dangerous potential for boundaries to be crossed.

Contents

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The Late Medieval Household and The Academic Discourse of

Transgression: Medieval Context, Modern Concept

The household was one of the fundamental structures for late medieval social and cultural organisation. It was the place where people lived and worked, and one of the major environments in which texts were produced and read. In this thesis, I use the concept of 'transgression', which designates both movement across the boundaries of the house, and the breaking of rules that govern behaviour, to explore the part the household plays in articulating ideologies of gender in late medieval England. 'Trangression' is a modern idea that has been created and shaped by developments in literary scholarship. I reconsider what it might mean for how we read texts produced in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. I focus on a body of texts that are rarely studied but which were very popular in their own time. These include a group of lyrics known as 'the betrayed maidens' laments', comic tales descended from the fabliaux, conduct literature, anti-feminist entertainment printed by Wynkyn de Worde, and popular romance.

As well as contributing to the scholarship on a broad variety of understudied texts, this thesis develops an innovative methodology for resituating texts in their medieval context. My approach pays close attention to the specific production and reception contexts of each text I discuss, in order to probe how they may have been understood by medieval audiences in light of the prevailing norms of gender. My focus on manuscripts and performance possibilities avoids the pitfalls of unthinkingly applying concepts developed by modern academic criticism to medieval texts in a way that oversimplifies them.

This introduction serves to establish the two major concepts that underpin the rest of the thesis, that is, the household and transgression. I begin by introducing the concept of the 'household' and what it meant to medieval people, and the idea that a distinctive household ideology developed in the period under discussion. I identify space and order as two important elements of this ideology, and discuss the debate among historians as to whether the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries were characterised by an increased concern about order and anxiety regarding transgressive behaviour. A case from the borough court of Nottingham provides a useful way to set up the concerns that will inform the rest of this thesis. I use the case to begin to build on the ideological ideas introduced to this point, and explore how the idea of the household was used in late medieval texts alongside a concern with boundaries and transgression. This opens up the question of whether the boundary-crossing observed in this case is the same as the modern concept of 'transgression' used in academic criticism. Since transgression will be such an important concept for the rest of the thesis, I establish what it means by tracing its theoretical roots in the works of Bataille, Foucault and Bakhtin, before discussing how the concept was popularised in literary criticism from the 1980s onwards. In order to begin to address the question of how far this modern concept overlaps with medieval ideas, I return my focus to the late Middle Ages to explore how 'transgression' fits with the vocabulary and concepts available to fifteenth- and early-sixteenth century readers. I conclude by setting out my agenda for the rest of the thesis, and providing an overview of my chapters.

0.1 The Household

0.1.1 The Ideology of the Late Medieval Bourgeois Household

This section will establish what the household was and how scholars have talked about the ideological underpinnings of the late medieval household. Felicity Riddy draws attention to the first recorded example of the word 'household'. It appeared in the 1380s and was used to refer to a co-resident group of people.[1] The household was comprised of the head, and the 'meinie', who were the dependents of the household.[2] 'Household' was not synonymous with 'family'. Jeremy Goldberg's work on the practice of life-cycle service and apprenticeship demonstrates that it was common for many young people in late medieval England to spend their teenage years and early twenties in the homes of those who were not their parents.[3] The members of a household would not all have been related to each other and servants would have had relations who were members of other households. As well as referring to a group of people, by the mid-fifteenth century, 'household' might also refer to the physical place in which these people lived, that is, the house.[4]

In her 1989 book *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg*, Lyndal Roper argues that a particular ideology concerning the household grew out of values that had their origin in the craft workshop of the late-fifteenth century. This ideology exalted male authority over the household and encouraged anxiety regarding the control of women's movement and sexuality. This was linked to a corresponding suspicion of the sexual appetites of the clergy and how they might co-operate with women to

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[1] F. Riddy, 'Looking Closely: Authority and Intimacy in the Late Medieval Urban Home', in M.C. Erler and M. Kowaleski (eds.), *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003), pp.212-228 (p.213); cf. P.J.P. Goldberg and M. Kowaleski, 'Introduction', in M. Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2008), pp.1-13 (p.2).
[2] *Middle English Dictionary* (hereafter *MED*): **hŏuse-hōld**, (n), 1a.; **meinē**, (n.).
[3] P.J.P. Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History 1250-1550* (London, 2004), pp.22-23.
[4] *MED*: **hŏuse-hōld**, (n.), 2.

undermine the authority of the household. The place of women was to be in the house and properly obedient to the male head.[5] These values were then used as the basis for civic government.[6]

Roper dates the period when this ideology had a strong influence in Augsburg firmly in the 1530s and 40s. She argues that although this ideology grew out of values that had been held for some time by guildsmen, its full flowering belonged to the first third of the sixteenth century, when it was given strength and divine legitimacy by Reformed religion. However, Shannon McSheffrey has described a concept of 'good governance' that existed much earlier, in late medieval England, and which shares many features with Roper's household ideology. McSheffrey argues that the household was supposed to be ruled competently by the male head. He was responsible not only for his own behaviour, but also for that of his household members. This meant teaching and guiding his charges, preparing them for full adult life, but also regulating their conduct. The good householder not only prevented wrongdoing, he also took charge of the religious instruction and moral guidance of his charges.[7] Whether they went elsewhere or stayed in their natal home, unmarried people were implicitly not their own master, being under the government of either their parents or a master or mistress who was expected to act *in loco parentis* to those employees who resided in their home.[8]

Although her husband was the head of the household, the mistress was expected to support and assist him. Households often combined a workshop and living quarters, so

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[5] L. Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Moral in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford, 1989), pp.17-18, 27, 31.
[6] *Ibid.*, p.27.
[7] S. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia, 2006), pp.137-138.
[8] P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Masters and Men in Later Medieval England', in D.M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 1999), pp.56-70 (pp.56-57).

men and women might work and live under the same roof. Wives were expected to add to the household economy by engaging in their own business ventures such as spinning, weaving or brewing, and by assisting their husband in running the workshop or family business.[9] The conduct poem *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter* provides a useful summary of how the ideal wife should behave. This poem enjoyed popularity over a long period and it survives in multiple manuscript copies. The earliest surviving copy dates from the mid-fourteenth century, but it continued to circulate long after this date, making it a useful guide to the bourgeois ideals of feminine behaviour.[10] The poem advises the young woman on her duties as a wife and household manager. The wife should make sure servants were not idle, but govern them with care and set a good example:

> Wysely loke thi hous and meneye,
> The beter to do thei schall be
> …
> Loke what most nede is to done,
> And set thi mené therto ryght sone
> (ll.125-126, 129-130)[11]

Felicity Riddy argues that this poem emerges from a changing urban context and articulates a 'bourgeois ethos' that is specifically urban and privileged, in which the household had a crucial function.[12] Riddy suggests that the advice contained in the text is intended to provide a substitute for parental guidance and control for young women who had migrated

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[9] *Ibid.,* pp.62-67.

[10] E. Salisbury (ed.), *The Trials and Joys of Marriage* (Kalamazoo, 2002), p.225. Riddy emphasises the variety of usage contexts for this poem, suggesting it originated in clerical culture (the earliest surviving copy is in what she calls a 'friar's handbook') but moved into lay hands in the fifteenth century (F. Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum* 71 (1996): 66-86 (p.70, p.80, p.83).

[11] *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, p.222. Cf. *Ibid.*, ll.135-154. Cf. G.L. Greco and C.M. Rose (eds.), *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book* (Ithaca, 2009), pp.217-218, 222.

[12] Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best', p.67.

to towns, perhaps as servants, and that it expresses anxiety about the ungoverned woman in this context.[13]

The issue of space and movement is one particular area where concern about female behaviour manifests in *How the Good Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*. The young woman is warned not to wander from house to house looking for amusement, to beware of going to the market or the tavern, or to public events like wrestling or cock-shooting (ll.61-64, 73-74).[14] She cannot avoid meeting men in the street, but is advised to limit such encounters to a polite greeting, and particularly not to be alone with a man in a place where any impropriety could occur (ll. 32-33, 84).[15] The poem seems hyper-aware of the potential dangers of space outside the house for women, and its philosophy is most succinctly summed up in two lines: 'byde thou at home, my doughter dere' and the assertion that the woman who goes to wrestling and cock-shooting will be branded a 'strumpet other a gyglote' [loose woman] (ll.75, 77).[16]

Scholars have recognised the importance of space when considering appropriate gendered behaviour for women in connection with the household. Sarah Salih cites the Book of Proverbs, which presented portraits of the good wife occupying herself in the home and the harlot out wandering the streets. Salih argues that medieval household ideology made use of these models to define female virtue and vice with reference to domestic space. The consequence of this ideology was that being outside the home without good cause, particularly at night, became synonymous with being a sexually transgressive

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[13] *Ibid.*, pp.71-72, 77.
[14] *How the Good Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.220-221.
[15] *Ibid.*, pp.219, 221.
[16] *Ibid.*, p.221. *MED*: **ğigelot**, (n.).

woman.[17] This also had dimensions of status. Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy have argued that in the late Middle Ages, the trend was for more affluent households to live in multi-room houses adapted to service their needs, whereas poorer people lived more communal lives, a large proportion of which were spent outdoors since they lived in small houses with few facilities.[18]

This is not to say that ideas of place and work could be easily split into the male outside the home engaged in wage labour or running a business and the female inside the home engaged in domestic tasks. This is a division of labour that may be more characteristic of the nineteenth century than the fifteenth.[19] In late medieval England, whether a person spent their working day in the same dwelling in which they slept depended on the type of work undertaken and the social position of the worker. Labourers worked outside the home, and this included women, for example hucksters and other petty traders.[20] Jeremy Goldberg has suggested that ideas about where men and women should spend their working day were strongly status-dependent, with the bourgeois ideology that

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[17] S. Salih, 'At home; out of the house', in C. Dinshaw and D. Wallace (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge, 2003), pp.124-140 (pp.125-126). For the biblical passages, see Proverbs 31:10-31 (The Good Woman) and Proverbs 7:10-12 (The Harlot). Riddy makes a similar point in ''Burgeis' domesticity in late-medieval England', in Goldberg and Kowaleski (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity*, pp.14-36 (p.15).

[18] The lives of the poor 'spilled onto the public streets' (S. Rees Jones and F. Riddy, 'The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere', in A.B. Mulder-Bakker and J. Wogan-Browne (eds.) *Household, Women and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2005), pp.215-60 (p.238)). Jane Grenville notes that the hall was an exception to this trend towards small rooms in affluent urban homes, with the open hall persisting in an urban context where 'it could well have seemed, in functional economic terms, a waste of space' because of the opportunity the hall gave for oversight of household members and social control (J. Grenville, 'Urban and rural houses and households in the late Middle Ages', in Goldberg and Kowaleski (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity*, pp.92-123 (pp.114, 123).

[19] Goldberg and Kowaleski, 'Introduction', p.12.

[20] P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Household and the Organisation of Labour in Late Medieval Towns: Some English Evidence', in M. Carlier and T. Soens (eds.) *The Household in Late Medieval Cities: Italy and Northwestern Europe Compared* (Leuven, 2000), pp.59-70 (pp.59-60).

women should remain largely within the house predicated on a difference from the lower echelons of society where women were much more mobile in the course of their work.[21]

As well as governing their dependents, the heads of the household had responsibilities to the wider community. Vance Smith notes that by the late Middle Ages, the house was more than a place where people lived, it was the fundamental unit on which the economic, political, and legal organisation of society rested.[22] The household came to be conceived of as a sub-unit of civic government. As such, the good government of the household was essential to the smooth functioning of the community.[23] Sarah Rees Jones argues that the ideology of the household, with its expectation that a householder would take responsibility for the behaviour of his 'meinie' had mostly superseded the earlier system of frankpledge in an urban context by the late Middle Ages.[24] Frankpledge grouped together all adult laymen into units of ten or twelve who were responsible for regulating the behaviour of their fellows and reporting any offences.[25] This created a system of interdependence and accountability, in which these men had a responsibility to answer for each other's behaviour. Rees Jones argues that reorganisation of civic government and changes in the land market privileged householding groups, who rose to a dominant position in urban government.[26] The regulation of behaviour became increasingly 'privatised', with householders expected to know of misbehaviour in their house and deal

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[21] *Ibid.*, pp.60-61.

[22] D.V. Smith, *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary* (Minneapolis, 2003), pp.1-2.

[23] McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Governance*, p.138. All neighbourhoods were required to present offenders to a leet court twice a year (S. Rees Jones, 'The Household and English Urban Government in the Later Middle Ages', in M. Carlier and T. Soens (eds.) *The Household in Late Medieval Cities: Italy and Northwestern Europe Compared* (Leuven, 2000), pp.71-86 (p.78); S. Rees Jones, 'The Regulation of Labour', 'Household, Work, and the Problem of Mobile Labour: The Regulation of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England', in J. Bothwell, P.J.P. Goldberg, and W.M. Ormrod (eds.), *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.133-153 (p.135)).

[24] Rees Jones, 'The Regulation of Labour', pp.144, 149.

[25] Rees Jones, 'The Household and English Urban Government', p.76.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp.79, 83.

with it themselves rather than allowing the issue to come before the public courts.[27] The obligations and responsibilities contingent on being a householder meant that the position was associated with maturity and good financial standing. Rees Jones argues that, for artisans, householding became synonymous with attaining the position of master craftsman, with journeymen being restricted from forming households of their own.[28]

To summarise, the ideal household was ruled responsibly by the male household head, supported by his wife. For bourgeois women, scholars have suggested that space played a key role in dictating the norms by which they should behave. The household heads had a responsibility to regulate the behaviour of their dependents so that the household operated in a productive, orderly fashion. They also kept watch on other households in the community and reported any misbehaviour, and knew that they in their turn were watched by others.

0.1.2 The Debate About Order

I mentioned previously that space was an important consideration when discussing the ideology of the household. The second important element to this ideology was order. The good household was well-ordered. There is an ongoing debate among historians about the issue of 'order' in this period, which is largely divided along the lines of continuity or change. That is, one side argues that the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries were a period of increased concern with maintaining order which was linked to increased social conservatism and narrowing opportunities for women. The other side argues that there was little real change in this period, with enduring attitudes simply becoming more visible. I

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[27] Rees Jones, 'The Regulation of Labour', p.149.
[28] Rees Jones, 'The Household in English Urban Government', p.73.

will outline the arguments in favour of increased anxiety about order before moving on to an overview of dissenting positions.

Marjorie McIntosh, based on her study of the records of local courts in villages and market towns, and manorial courts, argues that the percentage of courts in her study which reported people for being 'badly governed, living suspiciously, or of evil reputation' began to rise in the 1440s-50s and grew to a high of 21 percent of all courts under observation in the 1520s-30s.[29] She argues that there was a campaign by many communities to maintain good order and limit misbehaviour in the late-fifteenth century.[30] One area in which this manifested was through increased anxieties about uncontrolled women, which were not new, but were intensified in this period by economic changes and narrowing opportunities for women.[31] She identifies the period 1460-1539 as one in which women formed a higher proportion of those brought before the local courts for what she labels disorderly behaviour, than had previously been the case. Those behaviours she labels as 'disorder' include sexual misconduct and being of bad governance or evil reputation.[32]

In the same year that McIntosh's 1998 monograph appeared, Karen Jones and Michael Zell likewise published an article that used records from the borough of Fordwich in Kent to make a case that the later decades of the fifteenth century and the years around 1500 witnessed a concern about disorder and immorality. They argue that this concern was driven by local elites who were worried about the behaviour of the young, women and those of lower station. Their study of the borough between 1450 and 1570 led them to

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[29] M.K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.78-79.
[30] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, pp.70-72, pp.110-111.
[31] M.K. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005), p.41.
[32] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior,* p.160.

suggest that there was evidence for a 'campaign of moral regulation' in the reign of Henry VII and that female offenders appeared to occasion greater anxiety than male ones.[33]

Both McIntosh and Jones and Zell use borough records, and read a rise in prosecutions for sexual misconduct, gossip, and scolding, and the more broadly defined offences of being of bad reputation or evil governance, as evidence for an increase in concern about these behaviours. Other scholars have turned to ordinances produced by civic authorities as an indication of the issues that concerned those in power. Jeremy Goldberg argues that a more conservative gender ideology, emphasizing women's place within the home and under the government of men and valorising male labour over that of women, is evident in the records of late-fifteenth-century urban government. For example, the civic government of Coventry ordered in 1492 that no single woman under the age of fifty should be allowed to live alone. Instead she should go into service until marriage.[34] The London authorities also made attempts to regulate sexual misconduct in the city, as described by Stephanie Tarbin, Shannon McSheffrey, and Frank Rexroth. Tarbin identifies the decades before 1470 as a flashpoint, particularly for the prosecution of adultery, and argues that between 1400 and 1530 women were presented for sexual misconduct twice as often as men.[35] McSheffrey and Rexroth both discuss the fervour of the fifteenth-century city authorities for making an example of incontinent priests.[36]

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[33] K. Jones and M. Zell, 'Bad Conversation?: Gender and Social Control in a Kentish Borough, c.1450-1570', *Continuity and Change* 13 (1998): 11-31 (p.17, p.28).

[34] P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Coventry's 'Lollard' Programme of 1492 and the making of Utopia', in R. Horrox and S. Rees Jones (eds.), *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200-1630* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.97-116 (p.97). For ordinances from Bristol (1461) and Norwich (1511), see p.98.

[35] S. Tarbin, 'Moral Regulation and Civic Identity in London, 1400-1530', in L. Rasmussen, V. Spear and D. Tillotson (eds.), *Our Medieval Heritage: Essays in Honour of John Tillotson for His 60th Birthday* (Cardiff, 2002), pp.126-136 (pp.132 & 134).

[36] F. Rexroth (trans. P.E. Selwyn), *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.291-295; S. McSheffrey, 'Whoring Priests and Godly Citizens: Law, Morality and Clerical Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval England', in N.L. Jones and D.R. Woolf (eds.), *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early*

These arguments for a change in social attitudes may be supplemented by the work of economic historians. Christopher Dyer identifies the atmosphere of the late Middle Ages as one of 'moral panic' prompted by more flexible employment practices, and a more assertive and mobile work force. He identifies the second half of the fifteenth century as a period when many experienced economic hardship, when overseas trade suffered, and when the Wars of the Roses caused periods of civil unrest.[37] These changes manifested as a fear of those who appeared marginal, out of place or uncontrolled. I do not intend to imply that the work of those historians I have mentioned to this point is homogenous. They use different types of sources and different interpretative models (economic, demographic, etc). They do, however, seem to share a conviction that the later-fifteenth century experienced economic and social difficulties that manifested themselves as an increased concern with order and social control, and increased anxiety regarding those who appeared transgressive. This scholarship implicitly challenges the arguments of early modernists such as Roper who locate these changes in the mid- or late-sixteenth century and consider them distinctly non-medieval, a marker of the difference of the Early Modern period from the Middle Ages.[38]

However, Judith Bennett has provided a dissenting voice, and attempted to discount this model of increased concern about order. Bennett's focus is primarily on the issue of women's status, but she emphasizes continuity between the medieval and early modern periods. She argues that although changes may have taken place in some communities,

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Modern England (Basingstoke; New York, 2007), pp.50-70 (pp.55-60). This punishment of incontinent priests is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

[37] C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c.1200-1520* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.27, 194, 210. Cf. A.D. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns, 1400-1640* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.25,33; Goldberg, *Medieval England*, pp.200, 210.

[38] Roper, *The Holy Household*, pp.3, 27; D. Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England', in A.J. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.116-136.

these were neither sufficiently permanent nor widespread enough to justify the arguments made about increased conservatism in the later Middle Ages. She discusses some of the same late-fifteenth-century guild ordinances against women's work that Goldberg uses to argue for a more conservative gender ideology. Bennett reads them instead as responses to short-term local situations rather than evidence of larger cultural anxieties. She argues that the characteristic features of women's work: lower pay than men, low-status and low-skilled occupations, and insecurity were a constant across centuries rather than a feature of a particular period.[39]

The historians discussed above use a wide variety of different sources: borough court records, poll tax records, civic ordinances, etc. However the majority of this evidence is quantifiable and many of these arguments are based on statistical analysis. Each scholar makes arguments based on the evidence provided by his or her own body of statistical evidence. Since there is so little of this evidence surviving it is extremely difficult to make comparisons between what does survive. This has resulted in a debate that is largely static. My own work does something profoundly different by opening up a different way of looking at the issues about order and gender ideology in the later Middle Ages. I focus primarily on narrative sources, both those usually considered 'literary' and those usually considered 'historical', and bring to bear ways of reading developed by literary scholars that emphasise the text as a window onto the cultural values of the society that produced it. An example of this type of approach is the work of Natalie Zemon Davis, who analysed the 'fictional' qualities of royal letters of pardon and remission in her 1987 monograph, but

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[39] J.M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Manchester, 2006), p.84, pp.86-87, p.95, p.97. Her article, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide' provides an earlier version of this argument (in D. Aers (ed.), *Culture and History, 1350-1600: essays on English communities, identities, and writing* (Detroit, 1992), pp.148-175), pp.151, 162, 164.

argued that the letters could be a valuable source for information about contemporary attitudes and social and cultural norms.[40] Those involved in drafting the letters had to present an account that would appear convincing to the audience. They may not tell us exactly 'what happened', but they tell us what was within the compass of belief for their audience.[41] The ways in which the narratives are shaped can tell us about the cultural assumptions on which they rest.[42]

Paul Strohm also argues that legal and administrative records are subject to a high degree of narrative shaping and use of fictional devices. By examining how these narratives are constructed, we can gain valuable insight into 'the imaginative structures within which … participants acted and assumed their actions would be understood.'[43] Strohm argues that subjecting historical texts to the techniques originally developed for analysis of literary texts can allow them to 'offer crucial testimony on other, though no less historical matters: on contemporary perception, ideology, belief'.[44] Texts offer us valuable information about the ideological context in which they were produced and read. My intention is not to confirm or refute the arguments of the historians discussed above, but to make a contribution to a better understanding of the prevailing cultural and ideological conditions of late medieval England. My research offers a new perspective on issues that have hitherto largely been dealt with in narrow ways in which statistical evidence plays a large role, by exploring the deeper cultural resonances that lie behind that evidence, which are not usually noticed or explored. I also offer something new to literary scholarship, as the debates about

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[40] N.Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1987), pp.2-3. Davis glosses fictional by connecting it to the verb '*fingere*' and using it to refer to the crafting of a narrative through 'forming, shaping and moulding elements', rather than the more conventional sense of something that is 'not true' (*Ibid.*, p.3).
[41] *Ibid.*, pp.3, 15.
[42] *Ibid.*, p.35.
[43] P. Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992), p.4.
[44] *Ibid.*

order mentioned above have been largely the province of historians. My research connects the particular circumstances of production and reception of each medieval text I discuss, with the wider cultural issues concerning the development of household ideology and anxiety about order.

0.2 An Initial Case Study

At this point I want to pause to introduce a case study to demonstrate the type of analysis I describe above, and the results that it is capable of producing. This case also serves to raise the issue of transgression, which is one of the major theoretical tools with which I interrogate the idea of the household in this thesis. The case, which came before the borough court of Nottingham in October 1389, features two main protagonists: a man named John Bilby and a cleric named Roger Mampton. Bilby's wife is also mentioned, but she plays a secondary role. Bilby alleged that Mampton had been twice found in Bilby's home without Bilby's consent or knowledge. He also alleged that Mampton was responsible for the destruction of household goods, including sheets, tablecloths and towels, for which he claimed a hundred pounds in damages. Mampton claimed innocence of all charges.

On the 1st of August 1387 Mampton was found hiding under the bed curtains in Bilby's chamber in Bridlesmithgate in Nottingham. Bilby was not present at the discovery but was attending to his affairs at nearby Ratcliff.[45] It is likely that Bilby was the same man who is identified elsewhere in the records of the borough court as a burgess of Nottingham

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[45] W.H. Stevenson (ed.), *Records of the Borough of Nottingham, being a series of extracts from the archives of the corporation of Nottingham* (London, 1882-9), 1:241. The text is unclear about who did discover Mampton, saying simply 'inventus [est]'.

('*burgensis Notingham*').[46] The language of the case is striking in the way it emphasises

how Mampton crossed the boundaries of the house to reach the place where he was

discovered. We are told that he entered onto Bilby's property, with the use of the phrase

'he broke his close' ('*clausum suum fregit*'). The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from

British Sources* defines *clausus* as 'close, enclosure', and states that *frangere* can be used

to mean 'break into' as well as simply 'break'.[47] In other words, the record alleges that

Mampton enters the enclosed space of Bilby's property without the householder's

permission or knowledge. He then 'entered into his chamber' ('*cameram suam …

intravit*'), and more than this, into the space enclosed by the hangings of the bed. We are

told that 'he was found under a curtain of the bed of the aforesaid John' ('*sub uno curtino

lecti praedicti Johannis inventus* [*est*]'). Shannon McSheffrey has drawn attention to the

fact that although medieval houses were generally more permeable than modern domestic

spaces, with thinner walls and more porous borders between the interior and exterior, the

bedchamber was seen as a particularly private space, associated with sexuality and

intimacy.[48] As such, when it is emphasised that the bed belongs to John Bilby, this draws

attention to the fact that Mampton is taking advantage of Bilby's absence from the house to

intrude into his most private space, which can be read as an act of symbolic penetration.

It is strongly implied later in the record that Mampton was engaged in an illicit

relationship with Bilby's wife, which may also explain the focus here on Mampton's

uninvited presence in Bilby's bed, a metaphorical representation of how he has supplanted

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[46] *Ibid.*, 1:258. This John Bilby was fined for contempt of court for refusing to swear an oath.
[47] R.E. Latham and D.R. Howlett (eds.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources, vol I, A-L* (Oxford, 1975-1997), pp. 356, 1002.
[48] S. McSheffrey, 'Place, Space and Situation: Public and Private in the Making of Marriage in Late Medieval London', *Speculum* 79 (2004): 960-990 (pp.977-978). Goldberg also suggests that the late medieval fashion for bedcurtains and screens was a response to a desire for greater privacy (Goldberg, 'The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity in later medieval England: a material culture perspective', in Goldberg and Kowleski (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity*, pp.124-144 (p.136).

Bilby's sexual role. Bilby's absence from the house is presented as proper and industrious -- he is at Ratcliff engaged in business -- in contrast to Mampton's presence in the house, which is presented as unwarranted and suspicious since he is found hiding under a bed curtain. The record recounts that Bilby interrogated the intruder personally when he returned. He warned Mampton to stay off his property and away from his wife. Bilby is presented as a capable husband and householder, who firmly expels Mampton, but acts with moderation, not impulsively or driven by anger. However, the case does not end there.

Although he had been warned off once, Mampton was discovered almost two years later, in late June 1389, at Bilby's house in Stoney Street ('*ad domum praedicti Johannis in le Stonstrete*'). He had 'broken the wall of the aforesaid John, and leaped over it to the houses of the aforesaid John Bilby where his secret places were' ('*murum praedicti Johannis ibidem fregit, et supra saltavit ad domos praedicti Johannis de Bilby ubi secreta sua fuerunt*').[49] The household is presented as a place in which there are secrets that should not be exposed to prying eyes. It is strongly implied that Bilby's wife was involved in Mampton's access to the house, and thus he likely did not have to physically break in. However, in order to bring an action of trespass it was necessary to argue that a wrong had been done to either the body, the lands or the goods of the plaintiff, and this wrong had to involve some level of violence or force, however small.[50]

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[49] Stevenson (ed.), *Records*, 1:243: The property in Stoney Street is referred to as Bilby's 'home' ('*domus*'), whereas the chamber in Bridlesmithgate is 'his chamber' ('*cameram suam*'). This, combined with the reference to Bilby's secret places in connection with Stoney Street but not with Bridlesmithgate, suggests that the house in Stoney Street was his main residence.
[50] F. Pollock and F.W. Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* (Cambridge, 1898), 2:166, 2:511.

In their discussion of medieval English law, Frederick Pollock and Frederic Maitland argue that an accusation of violence in cases of trespass, particularly the ubiquitous phrase 'by force and by arms and against the king's peace' had become a legal formula rather than a true reflection of events.

> In the course of time these sonorous words will become little better than a hollow sound; there will be a trespass with force and arms if a man's body, goods or land have been unlawfully touched.[51]

According to Pollock and Maitland, cases of this sort usually contained two accusations – firstly, the allegation that the defendant had invaded land that belonged to someone else, invoking the notion of the entry and breach of a close, and secondly the destruction of goods.[52] The importance of the element of forced entry was demonstrated by the fact that those who later bought goods that had been stolen could not be charged, but only the person who broke in to steal them.[53] Since a person could not be charged for the destruction of goods that were not considered to belong to anyone, such as wild animals, it was necessary to emphasise that the goods destroyed belonged to the property owner and not the person who appropriated them.[54] When these conventions are taken into account, the emphasis of the case on the ways in which Mampton intrudes into the private space of Bilby, 'where his secrets were' ('*ubi secreta sua fuerunt*'), makes more sense. It is necessary to underpin the allegation by making clear Bilby's ownership of the property and goods and Mampton's 'violence' in breaching the wall, entering the property without Bilby's consent.

The presence of Bilby's wife with Mampton introduces a further element to his flouting of Bilby's authority. He not only enters his property without his consent, intruding

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[51] *Ibid.*, 2:526.
[52] *Ibid.*, 2:166.
[53] *Ibid.*, 2:167.
[54] *Ibid.*, 2:498.

into his 'secret places', he also lives in the house with Bilby's wife for a year, implicitly

enjoying an adulterous relationship with her and thus supplanting Bilby's sexual role and

leading his wife to live outside Bilby's authority. The length of time between the first

incident in Bridlesmithgate and the second in Stoney Street, along with Bilby's explicit

warning that Mampton stay away from his wife, suggests that the wife and the chaplain

had a long-standing illicit relationship. The first part of the action concerns illicit entry, the

second is the claim that 'through the coming of the aforesaid Roger the goods and chattels

of the aforesaid John were and are expended and wasted in evil ways' ('*per adventum*

praedicti Rogeri bona et catalla praedicti Johannis in malis visibus expendita et alienata

fuerunt et sunt'). This reflects the conventional structure of forced entry and destruction of

goods discussed above. In order to proceed against Mampton with the best chance of

securing damages, Bilby's case had to focus on the issues of illicit entry and the monetary

loss that Mampton had supposedly caused him. Although the case implies that Mampton

committed adultery with Bilby's wife, this is not mentioned directly in the record of the

case. This is probably because this offence was under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical

courts, not the borough court in which Bilby brought the action. An action in the borough

court allowed Bilby to claim financial restitution for the goods that Mampton supposedly

used while in the house without admitting he had been cuckolded.

However, it may be significant that the items listed are mainly linen articles (sheets,

tablecloths and towels), since linen had a particular association with the wife's exercise of

her duties to provide hospitality and household comfort.[55] Felicity Riddy has argued that

'the language of everyday life was saturated with a sense that women, home and bodily

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[55] V. Sekules, 'Spinning Yarns: Clean Linen and Domestic Values in Late Medieval French Culture', in A.L. McClanan and K. Rosoff Encarnación (eds.) *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation and Marriage in Premodern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp.79-91 (p.79).

needs go together'. The role of the wife was, according to Riddy, to ensure that the bodily needs of other household members were met and her actions were important in creating a sense of intimacy in the home.[56] The articles mentioned in the case point towards the domestic rhythms of the house: sheets which would be used for bedding, tablecloths which would used when dining, and towels which were likely used after washing and thus connected with cleanliness. It emphasises how far this wife is from fulfilling the responsibilities contingent on her position. Whatever the motivations behind the list of spent ('*expendita*') goods, the result is that the bounds of the house are presented as dangerously porous. Mampton is able to intrude, even into the bedroom; Bilby's wife does not reside with her husband but instead in an illicit situation of concubinage with a chaplain; the goods and chattels belonging to Bilby are used by others 'without the permission and consent of the aforesaid John' ('*sine licentia et voluntate praedicti Johannis*').

My discussion of the case up to this point has established its preoccupation with the crossing of boundaries, both the spatial bounds of the house and the proper roles of the husband and wife within the conjugal household. The case presents a situation in which Bilby's role is usurped, his goods appropriated, and the physical space of his house is subject to intrusion. It is probable that a man who let such a situation run unchecked would be subject to a loss of standing for his inability to control his wife and put a stop to her adultery, particularly since he had previously warned Mampton. He needed literally to put his house in order, so he brought an action to the borough court for damages to the value of a hundred pounds. Mampton's response took the audacious step of defending his actions as part of his parochial duties. He claimed that his presence in Bilby's house was for the

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[56] Riddy, 'Authority and Intimacy', p.216, pp.220-221

purpose of distributing holy water: 'he, as is the custom with parochial clergy to go through their parish with the holy water, went to the house of the aforesaid John with the aforesaid water in good manner' ('*prout mos est clerico parochiali cum aqua benedicta in parochia sua ire, ipse ad domum eiusdem Johannis in bono modo venit cum praedicta aqua*').[57] Given that Mampton and Bilby's wife later lived together at Stoney Street, it seems likely that the first time he was caught Mampton was doing a lot more than sprinkling holy water. Mampton's brazen reply appears to be an attempt to thumb his nose at John of Bilby, simultaneously using his office to escape punishment while engaging in innuendo about his sexual relationship with Bilby's wife. The *MED* cites examples of 'water' being used to refer to many different types of bodily fluid and secretions; the Middle English translator of Guy of Chauliac's *Grande Chirugie* used it specifically to refer to 'þe water of sperme'.[58] Mampton completely denied the second accusation, that he had lived with Bilby's wife or used his goods. He attempted to present himself as a diligent parish clerk, going about his duties, which gave him sanctioned access to the house. However, this does little to explain his alleged presence hidden beneath a bed curtain in Bilby's chamber or his extended sojourn with Bilby's wife at the house in Stoney Street.

The outcome of the case suggests that the jury of the borough court were similarly unconvinced by Mampton's plea of innocence. The case consists of two charges. On the first, that Mampton entered Bilby's chamber and house and illicitly breached Bilby's wall, the jury found him guilty and fined him. They ordered him to be imprisoned until he paid

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[57] Stevenson (ed.), *Records*, 1:243.
[58] *MED*: **wāter** (n.), 7a. For Chauliac see 7a.(g). The *MED* suggests the scribe has made a mistake, writing 'water' where 'mater' was meant. Although this may be the case, that the mistake was made suggests that 'water' was a plausible substitution that was connected with 'sperme' in the mind of the scribe.

the fine.[59] The jury did not, however, find Mampton culpable for the second charge, the

destruction of goods. This meant that he escaped paying the substantial damages that Bilby

had claimed. The next mention of a 'Roger of Mampton' in the borough court is in the roll

for October 1396, in which he is named as parson of the church of St Nicholas. He appears

again in 1402 and twice in 1414.[60] All these mentions concern grants of land made to Roger

Mampton. If it is the same man, it appears that his early indiscretions and punishment did

not harm his career prospects or future prosperity, since he was able to be appointed rector

of a substantial church. He was later buried in the chancel, suggesting he remained in this

post until his death c.1427. The fact that he remained alive for nearly forty years after the

case suggests that he was a relatively young man when Bilby took him to court.[61]

This case depicts a disordered house. The husband is unable to contain his

adulterous wife and may be afraid of public ridicule. Rather than our modern anxiety that

clerical sexuality might manifest as the sexual abuse of children, the usual medieval trope

was that supposedly celibate clergy would take advantage of the opportunities their duties

gave them to seduce the wives and daughters of the parish. The cleric takes advantage of

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[59] *Nottingham Borough Court Rolls 1378-1397*: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ucn/documents/online-sources/1396-97__burgess_pleas___ca1296_.pdf, p.197. This is part of a web-based calendar of the borough court rolls from 1303-1457, compiled by Trevor Foulds and J.T. Hughes as a joint research project of the University of Nottingham Institute for Medieval Studies (now Institute for Medieval Research) and Nottingham City Council. The specific language used is that Mampton 'defrauded' Bilby's wall ('*defraud' muri*') but the meaning seems to be that he breached the wall and entered the house without Bilby's permission, possibly with the implication of 'cheating' his way past the boundaries of the property.
[60] *Ibid.*, p.388; *Nottingham Borough Court Rolls 1402-1403:* http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ucn/documents/online-sources/1402-03__ca1300_.pdf, p.8; *Nottingham Borough Court Rolls 1413-1414*: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ucn/documents/online-sources/1413-14__ca1308_.pdf., pp.4, 22-23.
[61] J.H. Walker, 'St. Nicholas' church, Nottingham', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society* 44 (1940): 51-67. Walker includes a Roger Bampton (or Mempton) in his list of rectors of St. Nicholas' and states he was buried in the chancel. He fails to provide exact dates for Mampton's tenure as rector, but locates it in the final decades of the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth century. It is clear that Mampton was not rector of St Nicholas at the time of the Bilby case, because the rector is named as 'John' in the borough court records for 1390. The next rector in the list was appointed in 1427, suggesting that Mampton held the post for about 30 years, from the mid-1390s to c.1427. However, this list does not mention 'John' as the rector previous to Mampton, suggesting that it is less than perfect and there may be names missing. The fact that Mampton was buried in the chancel suggests that his association with St Nicholas' was a long one.

the husband's absence from the home and his own privileged position to gain access to the vulnerable house, the boundaries of which are too easily crossed. The case also displays features that are guaranteed to arrest the attention of the modern reader, which is of course partly why I have used this example of a naughty clerk who is pursued through the courts by a jealous husband. The most literal meaning of 'transgression' is boundary-crossing. In this sense the text is certainly transgressive in that it depicts people crossing the physical boundaries of the house. It introduces a concern with controlling access to the house that will become familiar in the analysis that follows. Yet it is also transgressive in a secondary sense, as it involves people breaking the rules that should govern their behaviour. The thesis will explore how these two meanings, the physical, and the behavioural, interact in connection with the ideology of the household. What 'actually happened' is less important than how the narrative of the case is constructed, and what this reveals about the anxieties of the culture that produced it, the imperatives that required it to be constructed in this way.

One final and important point to note about the case is the relative focus on the clerical malefactor and the wronged husband, and corresponding lack of attention to the wife. John Bilby's wife has allegedly had an affair with a member of the clergy, invited him into one of her husband's properties, and has spent a long time living with him as her lover and 'wasting' her husband's goods on him. Yet she is almost peripheral to the case. She is never named and her motivations are never explored. The case gives us little on which to base any conclusions about her.

The silence of the Nottingham borough case regarding John Bilby's wife is in many ways emblematic of the ways in which this thesis developed during my period of research. I began with the idea of 'transgression', in the sense of rule-breaking, particularly in

connection with women. I knew that late medieval society prescribed particular gendered behaviour for women and I wanted to investigate the ways in which women might have negotiated their behaviour within these models. Most women did not engage in out-and-out rebellion, but did they push against the boundaries of acceptable behaviour while maintaining an outward appearance of compliance? I began by identifying texts that seemed to provide examples of women transgressing normative behavioural codes, for example the young, pregnant, and abandoned women found in a number of fifteenth-century lyric poems. These were women flouting their roles as industrious servants and dutiful daughters to dance and display their bodies and engage in pre-marital sex. The lyric poems did go on to form a key part of my research, and are the subject of my discussion in Chapter 1, but not in the way I anticipated when I began working on them. However, the more work I did on these texts, the more evidence I found that they could not give me much access at all to authentic women's experiences. Some of them were written by clergy for clergy, or from a predominantly male perspective. These were not evidence of transgressive women, but rather fictionalised tales about women breaking the rules. It is questionable how much they can tell us about how women actually behaved.

Far from being a dead end, however, this led me to consider that I might be asking the wrong questions. Rather than asking what these texts could tell us about women in late medieval England, I began to question what these images of transgressive women were doing if not representing the behaviour of women. By analyzing the manuscript and print context in which they appeared, I started to consider what type of readers might have encountered them and how might they have read and responded to these women. I began to move away from the question of lived experience towards a consideration of the underlying

cultural anxieties that produced these texts and the ideological function they were performing. What cultural work did the idea of the transgressive woman and the connected idea of the sexually voracious cleric perform?

This did not mean giving up on transgression completely. By changing the questions I was asking, by shifting my focus from the text to the reader, and by considering performance possibilities and manuscript and print contexts, I began to develop new insights on the texts. I realized that although it was the behaviour of the female protagonists that had drawn my attention in the first place, their depiction of gendered roles was much more complex than simply focusing on female misbehaviour. I began to be more alert to the fact that 'transgression' had several connected meanings. First of all it literally described movement across physical boundaries. Secondly it referred to rule-breaking, i.e. moving across the bounds imposed by society.

The more I read scholarship that used the word 'transgression', the more I became aware that the term had a specialised sense in academic discourse, that grew out of the concept of rule-breaking but was firmly rooted in particular developments in late-twentieth-century society and scholarship. I realised that our modern critical concept of transgression could not always be mapped simply onto medieval texts. The Nottingham case has pointed to a concern with movement across boundaries, but how does this relate to the ways in which the concept of 'transgression' has been used in academic discourse? I began to consider where the idea of 'transgression' came from, why it had become popular and how it had been applied to medieval texts by other critics. It is at this point that I will leave the late medieval text and reader aside for a time to consider the modern reader and

how his or her concept of 'transgression' influences what he or she brings to a reading of the medieval text.

0.3 Transgression

0.3.1 Theories of Transgression and Developments in Literary Criticism

The fascination of literary studies with transgression stems from a combination of influences from French theory, the political and social changes of the 1960s, and the changes in the profession that have taken place since this time. It may not be coincidental that the *OED* first records 'trangressive' to mean something 'that violates or challenges social, moral, or artistic conventions; subversive, experimental' with a quotation from 1969.[62] The 1960s were dominated by a celebration of transgression-as-liberation. The counter-cultures of the decade were characterized by a deep ambivalence toward authority and power and a belief that rebellion against traditional values and authorities was a positive step towards an alternative and better world.[63] There is a sense in which the post-1960s world was radically different from what had gone before, and the changes that took place during that decade had a permanent effect on the intellectual climate. In some cases these changes can be tied to a particular event, such as the strikes and student riots of May 1968 in France, whereas other changes, such as the sexual revolution, the decay of authority, and the weakening of institutional religion evolved over a longer period.

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[62] *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://oed.com (hereafter *OED*). **transgressive**, adj. This sense is a draft addition from December 2006, not a part of the second edition of the dictionary that was published in 1989, again pointing to the recent nature of this sense of the word.
[63] J. Van Engen, 'Agenda Paper: The Future of Medieval Studies', in J. Van Engen (ed.), *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies* (London, 1994), pp.1-5 (p.3); A. Tauchert, *Against Transgression* (Oxford, 2008), pp.62 & 67.

Transgression as a critical concept has its roots in the work of the French writer

Georges Bataille. The work from which many of Bataille's ideas on transgression are

derived, *L'Erotisme*, was published in French in 1957 and translated into English in 1962,

the same year that Bataille died. The period in which he was writing was largely before the

social and intellectual changes of the 1960s, but critics first became familiar with his ideas

through writers such as Michel Foucault who readily acknowledged his debt to Bataille.[64]

Michael Richardson argues that it was not until the late 1970s and the 1980s that Bataille's

own work became fashionable, by which time the belief that rebellion against authority

could lead to revolutionary change had turned to disillusionment and the permissive attitude

to sexuality that was fashionable in the 1960s had fallen out of favour.[65] It was in this

climate that 'transgression' became a popular academic discourse.

Chris Jenks also makes the link between an interest in transgression and a sense of

disillusionment and anxiety. He argues that the narrative of the West in the last fifty years

is that of a progression from a mostly shared common culture to a patchwork of smaller

groups defined by identity politics.[66] A society where collective identity is precarious and

where there is no confidence in a shared system of values produces a fundamental

insecurity and anxiety.[67] Transgression performs an important function in a fragmented

environment. Bataille argued that transgression served to draw attention to and reinforce

prohibitions. Jenks extends this idea to its logical conclusion; we *desire* transgression

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[64] M. Richardson (ed.), *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings* (London, 1998), p.xiv; M. Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', *Critique* 195-196 (1963): 751-770, reprinted in D.F. Bouchard (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews,* (New York, 1977), pp.29-52.
[65] M. Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London, 1994), pp.1-3, 10.
[66] C. Jenks, *Transgression* (London, 2003), p.5.
[67] *Ibid.*, p.6.

because it reveals where the limits are and shared consciousness of limits links us together.[68]

For Bataille, transgression was meaningless without the accompanying concept of the taboo. Without rules to prohibit certain activities, there could be no transgression. In *L'Erotisme*, he argued that transgression does not deny the taboo but 'transcends and completes it'.[69] This meant that transgression and boundaries were interdependent. Without boundaries, we could not experience transgression, but without transgression we would not know where those boundaries were located. For Bataille, our humanity and the functioning of society were dependent on limits, but occasions when these limits are transgressed reveal the taboos governing that society. This interdependence between taboo and transgression meant that Bataille was not, despite first impressions, an advocate of uncontrolled disorder. He describes transgression as the experience of controlled and ritual times and occasions when taboos can be broken. This prevents stagnation and maintains the stability of society.[70]

The Middle Ages plays a formative role in the work of Bataille, who was trained as a medievalist. He produced an edition of the thirteenth-century French poem, *Ordene de Chevalrie* for his postgraduate diploma in palaeography at the École des Chartres and made numerous contributions to French medieval studies from the 1920s to the late 1950s.[71] Bruce Holsinger argues that this was part of a 'sustained, rigorous and remarkably productive engagement with the medieval' that lasted throughout Bataille's career.[72]

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[68] Jenks, *Transgression,* pp.7, 20, 67, 89-90.
[69] 'La transgression n'est pas la négation de l'interdit, mais elle le dépasse et le complète'(Georges Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes* (Mayenne, 1987), 10:65).
[70] F. Botting and S. Wilson (eds.), *The Bataille Reader* (Oxford, 1997), p.249
[71] B. Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (London, 2005), pp.1-2, pp.28-29.
[72] *Ibid.*, p.30.

Bataille's thesis about transgression and limits had similarities to the work of other scholars such as the Russian writer, Mikhail Bahktin, who had also developed a theory about the interplay between prohibition and controlled ritual transgression. The medieval was central to Bakthin's theory of the carnivalesque, which was most fully developed in *Rabelais and his World*, written in the 1930s and 40s but only published in 1965 and translated into English in 1968.[73] In Bakhtin's model, transgression in the form of carnival was a temporary and predictable eruption in medieval life, a carefully controlled space within which disorder, inversion, and challenges to authority could be played out. Medieval people did not experience anxiety about this transgression, he suggests, because it was not a real threat to dominant discourses, but served as a 'safety-valve', allowing disorderly energies to be expelled in a controlled way. In Bakhtin's model, when the carnival was over, transgression was put away until the next period of licensed misrule.[74] Transgressive behaviour was clearly separated from the mainstream of medieval life and confined to permitted contexts and occasions.[75]

Bakhtin's model denies a nuanced selfhood to medieval people and they are categorized in a simplistic way, as only being capable of full conformity or complete disorder at any one time. Chris Humphrey has provided a recent critique of Bakhtin's model. Humphrey argues that although Bakhtin uses the medieval in his discussion of carnival, his theory is not really concerned about historical accuracy or about close study of the Middle Ages. Rather, Bakhtin uses medieval carnival as a prop to highlight certain

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[73] It was first published in Russian as M.M. Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i Narodnaia Kultura Srednevekovia i Renessansa* (Moscow, 1965).
[74] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (trans. Helene Iswolsky) (Bloomington, 1984), pp.5, 89.
[75] M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (trans. and ed. C. Emerson) (Manchester, 1984), pp.129-130.

aspects of post-medieval culture.[76] Bakhtin's thesis, of course, was developed through work on the French Renaissance writer Rabelais, rather than through work on medieval writers.

Much modern work on transgression and boundary-crossing is indebted to the seminal 1966 work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*. Douglas and those who followed her repositioned rule-breaking as an issue that was central to a society's self-fashioning, although the activities labelled as transgressive occurred at the margins. Douglas argued that disorder and transgression may appear to spoil the pattern of social control, but in fact they provide the material for that pattern; 'abomination' is 'the negative side of the pattern of things approved'. Society is vulnerable at its margins, both from external dangers and from those within the system transgressing behavioural rules. Consequently, fears about disorder will focus on marginal members of society and points of entry and exit, such as bodily orifices.[77]

The idea that transgression was ultimately part of society and implicated in structures of authority and prohibition was one that was highly influential on subsequent critics. Foucault, for example, was heavily indebted to Bataille's expression of these ideas. In 1963, just after Bataille's death, Foucault published 'A Preface to Transgression' as part of an issue of the French journal *Critique* dedicated to Bataille.[78] In the 'Preface', Foucault ties transgression together with sexuality and underlines the extent to which the concept of transgression is influenced by, and is a substitute for, Christian ideas of sin and punishment: 'Profanation in a world which no longer recognizes any positive meaning in the sacred – is this not more or less what we may call transgression?'[79]

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[76] C. Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester, 2001), p.99.
[77] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966), pp.49, 117-118, 150-152.
[78] Foucault, 'Preface', p.37. For Bataille's influence on Foucault, cf. Tauchert, *Against Transgression*, p.50.
[79] Foucault, 'Preface', pp.29 & 37.

For Foucault, the importance of sexuality in modern culture was inextricably linked with the death of God, that is, the weakening of the concept of authority. Foucault's work questioned the timelessness and neutrality of social institutions and practices, arguing that behind these was the 'will to power', and that such institutions and practices were designed to act as a means of social control.[80] Foucault's most influential work, including *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, posited the Enlightenment as the key period in which the institutions that control and define 'normal' social and sexual behaviour (primarily the state, the penal system and the medical profession) were developed, thus creating the conditions necessary for modern self-consciousness and sexual identity. The Middle Ages thus became the 'other' in Foucault's thought, based on assumptions about the period, rather than independent research. He presented the Middle Ages as homogenous so that they could serve as a contrast to the modern, as is so clearly argued by Karma Lochrie in her 1997 article, 'Desiring Foucault'.[81] The Middle Ages were important to Foucault, because without them change could not be demonstrated, but they were also peripheral. They were the 'not-modern'. Lochrie argues that Foucault was almost nostalgic for the Middle Ages as a time when sexuality was uncomplicated and unitary, free from the surveillance and regulation of the state. This leads, she suggests, to a misrepresentation of the Middle Ages in his thought because he essentialised pre-modern sexualities.[82]

After Foucault's 'Preface', the next major work on transgression was *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, which appeared in

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[80] P. Freedman and G.M. Spiegel, 'Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies', *The American Historical Review* 103 (1998):677-704 (pp.696-698).
[81] K. Lochrie, 'Desiring Foucault', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997): 3-16.
[82] Lochrie, 'Desiring Foucault', pp.5 & 9.

1989.[83] Stallybrass also edited a volume of the *Stanford French Review* in 1990 titled

Boundary and Transgression in Medieval Culture.[84] Whereas Foucault had focused on the

Enlightenment, Stallybrass and White presented the Renaissance as the defining moment in

which 'pre-modern' culture began to develop into 'modern' and placed transgression at the

centre of their thesis. They argued that dominant groups in the early modern period

attempted to confine transgression to clearly demarcated occasions, by excluding the

grotesque from the social body.[85] In other words, by labelling the excluded transgressive as

'polluting' or 'filthy', Stallybrass and White argue that the dominant discourses of the

Renaissance effected an association of moral wickedness and physical filth.[86] Stallybrass

and White's 'bourgeois subject' is defined by the attempt to exclude the transgressive, an

attempt which simply internalises it and makes it the object of bourgeois fascination and

desire.[87]

     The work of Stallybrass and White appeared around the time that transgression

really began to become a hot topic in academic publishing, the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The *International Medieval Bibliography* (*IMB*) records ninety-two articles that use the

words 'transgression', 'transgressive', or 'transgressing' in their titles. The first example

dates from 1984, from an article on the narrative of the French romance *Mélusine*.[88] There

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[83] P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* (Ithaca, 1986).
[84] P. Stallybrass (ed.), *Stanford French Review* 14 (1990) (titled *Boundary and Transgression in Medieval Culture*).
[85] Stallybrass and White, *Poetics and Politics*, pp.191-193.
[86] In fact, this association existed long before the period that Stallybrass and White discuss. Their discussion focuses on the Renaissance, but the association between filth and wickedness, and the fear that both could pollute those around them can be seen, to cite only one example, in the fourteenth century Plea and Memoranda rolls for the City of London. Cf. A.H. Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall : A.D. 1413-1437* (Cambridge, 1943), pp.127 & 154.
[87] Stallybrass and White, *Poetics and Politics*, pp.191-193.
[88] J. Vicensini, 'Le motif mélusinien et la transgression', in D. Buschinger and A. Crépin (eds.) *Amour, mariage et transgressions au Moyen Age. Actes du colloque des 24-27 mars 1983* (Göppingen, 1984), pp.225-237.

are eight further examples between 1980 and 1989, but transgression really took off in medieval studies in the 1990s, with forty-eight uses of the above words in titles between 1990 and 1999. The total for 2000-2009 suggests that the trend has slowed down to some extent, but it still remains popular, with thirty-five examples from books and articles published between these dates. This measure is of course crude and probably significantly underestimates the popularity of transgression as a topic, as it excludes any publications that do not explicitly use the word 'transgression' or its derivatives in their titles, but may still demonstrate engagement with the issue. The *IMB* also only covers articles and not monographs. Despite its drawbacks, this analysis gives an idea of the chronological shape of an important trend in medieval studies, although it may underestimate its true popularity.

An analysis of books and articles on the late Middle Ages in the *MLA Bibliography* leads to a similar conclusion.[89] Of the ninety-four articles containing 'transgression', 'transgressive' or 'transgressing' in their titles, twelve were published in the 1980s, thirty-seven in the 1990s and forty-five from 2000 to the present. Again, the 1980s appears to be the period in which the trend began to emerge and the 1990s was the period when it became popular. However, the figures from the *MLA Bibliography* contradict the notion of a slow-down suggested by the *IMB*, actually showing an increase in 'medieval transgression' publications in 2000-2010 when compared to 1990-1999. Both the *IMB* and the *MLA Bibliography* are unlikely to be completely up to date, meaning that there may also be additional publications in the last year or two that have not yet been entered in the bibliography.

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[89] I searched for entries that focused on the period 1300-1499 and contained the words 'transgression', 'transgressive' or 'transgressing' in their titles.

Why might the 1980s and 1990s have provided a climate hospitable to an explosion in transgression studies? The effects of the political and social changes ushered in by the 1960s had completely changed the make-up of the Academy. And, in short, the professional medievalists of the last two decades were less likely than before to be white, straight, males from a Christian middle-class background. The effects of feminism, gender studies, queer theory, new historicism, and post-modernism all contributed to the development of new interpretative models. Essentialism, grand narratives, and the reification of literature were exchanged for a focus on textuality, performance, historicism, and the construction of (often minority) identities. Canonical texts were reassessed from new perspectives and the work or experience of those who had been excluded from the canon was rehabilitated.[90]

At the same time, the emphasis on the text and the textuality of all sources led to a willingness to import ideas from other disciplines. Literary scholars became more comfortable using theories developed in history, anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and philosophy. For example, the anthropological work of Mary Douglas, which I mentioned previously, came to be influential on ideas of transgression in other fields. The conviction that 'traditional' scholarship was unduly focused on the canonical and the elite was used to justify scholarship on the marginal, the excluded, and the oppressed.[91] Theories such as Douglas' argued that the study of what was transgressive or marginal had a wider relevance because it was essential to understanding how society worked as a whole.

Some scholars saw this kind of research as particularly appropriate to them, as they considered themselves as occupying a marginal position in the Academy. An example is the

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[90] Freedman and Spiegel, 'Medievalisms Old and New', pp.694-697.
[91] A parallel development took place among historians with the turn towards social history and a broadening of focus to include those outside the elite, e.g. workers and women, but this shift was not focused on 'trangression' the way that literary studies was. Cf. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1963), p.12.

Society of Medieval Feminist Scholarship, who recently published an issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum* reflecting on its own history and how feminist scholars perceive their position in the Academy.[92] It is obvious, both through a consideration of this self-reflexive issue and the early issues of *MFF*, that on the Society's inception in 1985 its members considered themselves doubly marginalized, both as feminists within a medieval studies that was patriarchal, positivist, slow to change, and allergic to theory, and also as medievalists within an Academy that saw their subject as dated, irrelevant, and indulgent. By producing work that was alert to theory and social change they sought to move feminism closer to the centre of medieval studies, and medieval studies closer to the centre of its respective disciplines (literature, history, etc.).[93]

Queer scholars similarly found themselves outside the mainstream of an academic culture which was largely straight, white, and male. They had many concerns in common with feminist medievalists; and in fact The Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages grew out of conference sessions organized by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and then split off to form a separate organization.[94] As such, the development of queer medieval studies can be dated slightly behind that of feminist medieval studies, but by the late 1990s it was a thriving field. In medieval literary studies much of the work in this vein has clustered around the sexually ambiguous Pardoner of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[95] There have also been readings that 'queer' Margery Kempe,

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[92] *Medieval Feminist Forum* 42 (2006).

[93] C. Lees, 'Medieval Feminists in the Academy: A Response from the Center?,' *Medieval Feminist Forum* 15 (1993): 4-7; E. Robertson, 'Twenty Years of Medieval Feminist Scholarship: Reflections on the Foundation of the Medieval Feminist Newsletter, the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship, and the Medieval Feminist Forum,' *Medieval Feminist Forum* 42 (2006): 14-25.

[94] Robertson, 'Twenty Years of Medieval Feminist Scholarship', pp.17-18.

[95] For example: C. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989); S.F. Kruger, 'Claiming the Pardoner: Towards a Gay Reading of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*', *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 115-139; G. Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis, 2003).

medieval romance, and the body of Christ.[96] Several essay collections focusing on the

Middle Ages have been strongly influenced by queer theory: *Premodern Sexualities* (1996),

Constructing Medieval Sexuality (1998), *Same-Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the*

Middle Ages (2001) and *Queering the Middle Ages* (2001) are just a few examples.[97]

I have used feminist and queer scholarship as examples to demonstrate how

scholars' political self-fashioning and sense of where they stand in the Academy has

inflected their work. Transgression was a good 'fit' for those who considered themselves in

some way out of the mainstream of academic culture. An interest in transgression in

medieval studies has in part developed because of the changes in society, politics, and the

Academy that I have noted above; that is, for same reasons that it developed in other areas

of literary criticism. However, there are some who claim that transgression's moment has

passed and that it is time to leave it behind. Ashley Tauchert recently argued that

transgression is exhausted as a critical concept, and that since 'criticism has long been

seduced by transgression, it might be time to shake ourselves out of this particular

intoxication'.[98] Any further critical work on transgression can only be 'wallowing', she

suggests, adding nothing fresh or new to the debate.[99]

Tauchert's impatience with the critical focus on transgression is likely prompted to

some extent by the chronological boundaries of her own research interests, which lie in late

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[96] K. Lavezzo, 'Sobs and Sighs Between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,' in L.O. Fradenburg and C. Freccero (eds.) *Premodern Sexualities* (New York, 1996), pp.175-98; S. Delany, 'A, A and B: Coding Same-Sex Union in *Amis and Amiloun*', in N.McDonald (ed.), *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance* (Manchester, 2004), pp.63-81; G.P.J. Epp, 'Ecce Homo', in G. Burger and S.F. Kruger (eds.), *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 2001), pp.236-251.
[97] Fradenburg and Freccero (eds.), *Premodern Sexualities*; K.Lochrie, P. McCracken and J.A. Schultz (eds.), *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (Minneapolis, 1997); F.C. Sautman and P. Sheingorn (eds.), *Same-Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2001); Burger and Kruger (eds.), *Queering the Middle Ages*.
[98] Tauchert, *Against Transgression*, pp.94 & 97.
[99] *Ibid.*, p.59.

eighteenth-century literature and Romanticism. The period from 1800 to the present has produced a profusion of scholarship on trangression. In my search of the *MLA Bibliography* I found 504 books and articles based on research on the period 1800-2009 that mentioned 'transgression' in the title. By focusing only on the period post-1800, we risk underestimating the formative role that ideas of the Middle Ages had to scholars such as Bataille, Bakthtin, and Foucault, who have had such an influence on subsequent writing about transgression. The Middle Ages has often been used as an important pivot in theories about transgression (i.e. it is the 'not-modern' against which the 'modern' can appear), without much sustained attention to medieval texts and contexts. The most glaring example is Bakhtin, who constructed a theory of the carnivalesque that relied heavily on ideas about medieval transgression, despite the fact that his research focused on the French Renaissance writer Rabelais, rather than medieval texts. Work on transgression by medievalists has the potential to revitalise the field by using primary research to test and question the assumptions about the Middle Ages that underlie theories of transgression. This is preferable to assuming the Middle Ages was either full of transgression or had no transgression at all based on the function the critic needs that Middle Ages to serve in the narrative he or she constructs. There is still a lot of work to be done regarding what transgression might mean in a medieval context, which can contribute to the long historical view of the topic.

For medievalists themselves, an interest in transgression may be propelled by an element of political self-fashioning, a desire to distance themselves from earlier more conservative scholarship that promoted the idea of a unified, Latin Europe heavily influenced by the Church. Transgression may be used as a way to produce a Middle Ages

that is more nuanced, less remote, and thus a valuable subject of study, worthy of continued investment of time and resources. It may involve nostalgia for a society in which it is believed that there was a clear sense of what constituted transgression. My discussion regarding the 'modernity' of transgression as a concept does raise the question of whether it is productive to apply it to medieval texts. Is it anachronistic to talk about 'medieval transgression' and would medieval readers have been familiar with the concept at all?

0.3.2 Medieval Transgression?: Grappling with the Vocabulary of Late Medieval Texts
I discussed earlier how my assumptions were subject to revision when I tried to find transgressive women in late medieval texts. The results were often not what I expected and I found that my idea of 'transgression' and the concept I was finding in medieval texts were often subtly different. I attempted to interrogate what 'transgression' meant to people in late medieval England by considering the vocabulary that was available to them. When I began to investigate the use of the word 'transgressioun' and its antecedents in Anglo-Norman (*transgression(e)* / *transgressioun*) and Latin (*transgressio*), I became aware that medieval writers (not surprisingly) used the word much less frequently than modern academics and when medieval people did use it, they used it in ways that were quite distinct from the use of the term in modern scholarship.

The word 'transgressioun' did exist in Middle English, but it was used mainly in contexts where it was obviously a coinage from the use of the word *transgressio* in medieval Latin, that is, in the Wycliffite Bible and in legal contexts. The first example of the word recorded by the *Middle English Dictionary* is from the Wycliffite Bible, Joshua

22:16, and dated to 1382, viz. 'What is þis transgressioun?'[100] The text in the Vulgate reads '*quae est ista transgressio*'.[101] *Transgressio* is derived from the verb *transgredior* and in Classical Latin meant literally a crossing or passing over something. The way in which it is used in the Vulgate demonstrates that it also acquired figurative senses referring specifically to rebellion against God and turning away from the correct path to become impure.[102] Augustine took this one step further when he used illicit sexual behaviour as an analogy to describe man's disobedience to God. He began by defining the root of transgression as man's desire, which caused man to exceed the limits placed on his behaviour: 'sin is known to be transgression, when a man, in seeking something 'more', exceeds the rule of justice'. He then described the man who sins as 'a soul who is fornicating away from God' ('*animae a Deo fornicanti*').[103] It will be apparent in the following chapters that this habit of linking sin, disobedience, and illicit sexual behaviour had serious repercussions for judgements of women's conduct.

As well as a use in devotional texts, *transgressio* had significance in legal discourse but it was ubiquitous rather than specific. It was used to refer to any offence below the level of a felony. According to Pollock and Maitland 'trespass' ('*transgressio*') is the most general term that there is; it will cover all or almost all wrongful acts and defaults'.

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[100] *MED*: **transgressioun,** n.(a).
[101] http://www.latinvulgate.com. Accessed 26 Sept 2011.
[102] The Biblical uses of *trangressio* are: Joshua 22:16, Ezra 9:2, Ezra 9:4, Ezra 10.6, Isaiah 59.13, Lamentations 3:19, Galatians 3:19. *Transgressor(es/em/orum)* is used five times: Ezekiel 20:38, Isaiah 24:16, Isaiah 48:8, James 2:9, James 2:11. Forms of the verb *transgredior* (e.g. *transgressus, transgressi*) are used eleven times, of which only four refer to having passed (over) something (Genesis 32:31, Numbers 35:10, Joshua 4:1, 1st Machabees 5:52). The other seven examples use it in the more familiar sense of law-breaking and rebellion against God (Ecclesiasticus 31:10, Malachi 2:11, Hosea 6:7, Isaiah 24:5, Nehemiah 1:8, Ezra 10:10, Numbers 5:6).
[103] Augustine, 'Sermon 51: Section 23', *Patrologia Latina*, 38: 353: '*intelligentur peccatum esse transgressio, cum aliquid amplius homo appetens, justiciae regulam excedit.*'(*Patrologia Latina*: http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk. Accessed 19 Jan 2011). Translation by R.G. McMullan in P. Schaff (ed.), *The Early Church Fathers and Other Works* (Edinburgh, 1867). Online version: http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/fathers/view.cfm?recnum=3362. Accessed 04 August 2011.

Trespass is used 'in a narrower sense … as a contrast to *felony*'.[104] 'Bref de trespas' and 'bref de transgressione' are both used interchangeably in the Anglo-Norman yearbooks of Edward II to refer to a writ of trespass.[105] Today, trespass is most often used in connection with property, to refer to unlawful entry onto land that belongs to someone else, but it had a much wider application in the Middle Ages. Cases of trespass that appeared before the royal courts followed a set formula that made extensive use of the word *transgressio.* The defendant would protest that he was 'not guilty of the aforesaid transgression'; details would be given of where and when 'the said transgression was committed'; and it would be emphasised that 'this transgression was committed with force and arms and against the peace of the King'.[106] The word was also used in the records of the manorial courts. In 1281, in the Abbey of Bec manorial court for Bledlow in Buckinghamshire, Hugh Churchyard was amerced sixpence 'for trepass in [cutting] thorns' and Agnes Rede sixpence 'for her daughter's trespass in the corn'.[107]

Despite the fact that the use of '*transgressio*' or 'transgression' would have been a common part of devotional and legal discourses, particularly in Latinate texts, this does not automatically mean that it was common in vernacular and everyday usage. Even for those who did encounter the word, 'transgression' was labelled primarily as an infraction against God or the law. Although medieval people did not use the word 'transgression' to discuss the norms governing acceptable gendered and sexual behaviour, this does not mean that

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[104] Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, 2:510.
[105] G.J. Turner and W.C. Bolland (eds.), *Yearbooks of Edward II: 9 Edward II, A.D.1315-1316* (London, 1929), pp.27-30, 69; P. Vinogradoff and L. Ehrlich (eds.), *Yearbooks of Edward II, A.D.1312-1313* (London, 1918), pp.144-146, 223.
[106] M.S. Arnold (ed.), *Select Cases of Trespass from the King's Courts, 1307-1399* (London, 1985): '*Et dicit quod ipse in nullo est culpabile de trangressione predicta*', '*predictam transgressione ei fecit*', '*vi et armis...fecerunt ei transgressionem predictam contra pacem Regis*' (*passim*).
[107] F.W. Maitland (ed.), *Select Pleas in Manorial and Other Seignorial Courts*: *Reigns of Henry III and Edward I.* (London, 1889), p.30: '*Hugo de Cimiterio in misericordia pro transgressione in spinis vi.d*', '*Agnes la Rede in misericordia pro transgressione filie sue in blado vi.d*'.

they had no concept of how behaviour, particularly that of women, might be what *we* would

call transgressive in relation to gender norms. In fact, in the anti-feminist literature of the

period women were frequently characterized as naturally transgressive, almost

constitutionally incapable of obeying rules, usually with reference to the example of Eve.

For example, Andreas Capellanus argued in the third book of his *De Amore* that:

> *Inobedientiae quoque vitio mulier quaelibet inquinatur, quia nulla in orbe adeo sapiens et discreta femina vivit, si ei rei cuiusque interdicatur abusus, quae contra vetitum toto corporis non conetur adnisu et contra interdicta venire* (*De Amore, Liber Tertius: De Reprobatione Amoris,* section 89).[108]

In his 1982 translation, P.G. Walsh renders the passage as follows:

> Every woman is further polluted by the vice of disobedience. There is no woman alive in the world so wise and circumspect that, if she is forbidden the improper use of something, she does not fight the prohibition with all the strength of her body, and set out to transgress it.[109]

Andreas Capellanus does not use the verb '*transgredior*'. A more literal translation of his

assertion is that a woman will 'come against' what is forbidden to her ('*contra interdicta*

venire'). Walsh renders it in English as 'to transgress', because the concept in the text

corresponds to the modern critical understanding of transgression.

What English words then did people in late medieval England use to describe

behaviour that transgressed *social* boundaries that fell outside norms? Such behaviour

might be labelled by reference to the rules it transgressed, for example as being 'out of

ordinaunce'.[110] It might be placed outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour by being

labelled 'outrage', 'abhominable' or 'unkinde', that is, unnatural.[111] Persons who behaved

in such a way might be characterized as 'froward', 'contrarious', 'unbuxom', or

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[108] Andreas Capellanus, *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. P.G. Walsh (London, 1982), pp.312 & 314.
[109] *Ibid.*, pp.313 & 315.
[110] *MED*: **ordinaunce** (n.), 1(a).
[111] *Ibid:* **ŏutrāǧe** (adj.); **abhomināble** (adj.), 2; **unkīnd(e** (adj.).

'shrewed'.[112] There was a whole host of words that people in late medieval England used to label behaviour that we would consider socially transgressive and it is clear that they did not use the word 'transgression' in the same sense we do. However, they had a clear sense that some forms of behaviour were acceptable and proper and that some individuals transgressed these codes of conduct.

Where, then, does this leave the modern reader? It is clear that the academic concept of transgression is in some ways very modern. It has dual roots, both in the theoretical writings mentioned previously, and in the social upheaval of the 1960s. These two elements came together when the concept of transgression developed to the height of its critical popularity from the 1980s onwards. The above discussion regarding vocabulary has opened up a gap between the modern critical terminology of transgression and medieval uses of the word. However, I do not believe these problems are insurmountable. If we limited ourselves only to using words and concepts that absolutely overlapped with medieval understandings, scholarship would be undeniably impoverished. It is often necessary to use words and concepts when analysing medieval texts that would not have been current at the time of their composition. That transgression is a modern critical concept constructed by particular developments in twentieth-century scholarship and society does not render it useless to the medievalist.

0.4 Research Agenda

Now that I have established the concepts of the household and transgression that form the basis of the rest of the thesis, it remains to lay out my research agenda, the questions I am asking and the means by which I hope to answer them. I have outlined a particular

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[112] *Ibid*: **frōward** (adj.), 1; **contrāriŏus** (adj.), 4; **unbuxŏm** (adj.), (a) & (b); **shreued** (adj.), 1 & 3.

household ideology that has been claimed by scholars such as Roper for the early modern period, but which medievalists have identified occurring much earlier. My chapters will explore how this household ideology figures in a wide variety of texts across several genres: lyrics, fabliaux-like tales, anti-feminist entertainment, and romance.

The eclectic nature of this study, which ranges across a variety of genres and textual environments, may raise questions about why these texts should be considered alongside each other. I would argue that the decision to follow tropes as they migrate across generic boundaries should be seen as one of the strengths of this approach, rather than a potential weakness. Several of the tropes I focus on in this thesis, such as the seductive cleric, the jealous husband, and the sexually transgressive woman, have been popularly associated with the fabliaux, but they had a much wider cultural currency.

The variety of the texts that I discuss pays testament to this broad appeal. My thesis encompasses a variety of textual situtations, ranging from miscellanies to single-text manuscripts, as well as early print. Many of the texts I discuss have been unfairly neglected and dismissed as ephemeral. I attempt to demonstrate at several points in this thesis that they share elements with texts that have been embraced by the canon, such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

The organising principle of the thesis, rather than a rather artificial classification formed by divisions along authorial or generic lines, is the subject matter. All the texts I discuss deal with how the household plays a central role in the articulation of norms of gendered behaviour, particularly the role of household boundaries and how those boundaries are crossed. The case from the Nottingham borough court that I discussed in this introduction demonstrated a particular focus on movement in and out of the house. My

chapters will explore the relationship between this physical movement and the norms of behaviour connected to gender. I will attempt to provide a window into the cultural and ideological environment within which these texts were produced, and how they articulate concerns about gender roles that intersect with the issues of boundaries and order. In my chapters I will examine how tropes that were in many cases already old, staples of the fabliau genre, manifest themselves in particular fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century texts and manuscripts and how they interact with prevailing social and historical conditions.

In order to do this, I will pay close attention to the specific circumstances in which medieval texts were produced and read. Instead of attempting a synthesis that moves indiscriminately from one text to another, my thesis is structured around a series of case studies that each provide a close reading of a particular text, group of texts, or manuscript. I focus on the particular manuscript or print context of each text, while considering how it fits into the wider historical and cultural context. By examining the specific medieval contexts in which these texts were produced and read, I minimise the risk of simply imposing modern critical ideas regarding transgression onto medieval texts. It is necessary to be conscious of this potential gap between 'transgression' as we use it and elements within medieval texts. What we label as 'transgressive' about a text may not have been the most obvious or the only element that medieval readers would have considered as existing outside the behavioural norms of their own period.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the misbehaving cleric and the sexual access he has to the household. Both chapters discuss the wide appeal of texts about the seductive cleric and the extent to which texts circulated between lay and clerical audiences in this period. Chapter 1 explores a group of lyrics in which a young woman is seduced, made pregnant, and

abandoned, often by a man in minor clerical orders. Criticism has generally grouped these lyrics together, focusing on their authorship and the question of whether the women in the poems are intended as a satirical warning.[113] I move beyond this to discuss the variety of manuscripts in which these lyrics appear, presenting different possibilities for their reading by medieval audiences.

Chapter 2 takes a different approach by focusing on a manuscript that contains just one of these lyrics, Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.5.48, and on the figure of the incontinent priest, who appears in this manuscript in the lyric *The Betrayed Maiden's Lament* and in the comic tale, *The Tale of the Basin*. Unlike the young clerk of Chapter 1, the priest is threatened with the consequences for his actions. I question the certainties of previous interpretations of the manuscript that have argued that it is assuredly clerical, based mainly on its inclusion of Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the figure of the weak or duped layman, his inability to control the transgressive woman and the consequences for his gender identity and public reputation. Chapters 3 and 4 make a shift away from the physical movement in and out of the household that dominates chapters 1 and 2. Instead I focus on texts that are concerned with the movement of words in the form of gossip and slander. Chapter 3 focuses on two texts printed by Wynkyn de Worde in the first decades of the sixteenth century -- *The Gospelles of Dystaues* and *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* -- and how these texts play on misogynist stereotypes about women's talk in order to present networks between women as threatening and disruptive.

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[113] J.F. Plummer, 'The Woman's Song in Middle English and its European Backgrounds', in J.F. Plummer (ed.) *Vox Feminae: Studies in Medieval Woman's Songs* (Kalamazoo, 1981), pp.135-154 (pp.149-150); J.M. Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms: When Maidens Speak in Middle English Songs, c.1300-1550', in A.L. Klink and A.M. Rasmussen (eds.) *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp.187-204.

In Chapter 4, I consider the ways in which the association of garrulousness as well as gossiping with women can be used to question the gender identity of men. My discussion focuses on *The Romans of Partenay* and the manuscript in which it appears, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.17. Most scholarship on the Melusine romances, of which this is an English version, has focused on the monstrosity of Melusine, the central female character. I focus instead on *The Romans of Partenay*'s obsession with judicious and injudicious male speech and consider how the romance might have been read by late medieval English readers within the context of late medieval ideas governing speech and gender.

My conclusion draws together the issues raised in the previous chapters. I discuss the importance of the household for late medieval culture and the reasons why the household has become a popular topic of research in recent years. I present my conclusions about how the concepts of the household and transgression intersect in this period, and I evaluate the contribution of my thesis to scholarship. I also point towards some avenues for future research.

Clerks, Maidens and Angels: Reading the Betrayed Maidens' Laments in Their Manuscript Contexts

"Alas, I go with chylde!"[1]

"my gurdul aros, my wombe wax out"[2]

"sone my wombe began te swelle / A*s* greth as a belle"[3]

These sound like women's voices. The three poems from which these quotations are taken belong to a subgenre of late medieval lyric that shares a common narrative, in which a young woman is seduced, often by a cleric, made pregnant, then abandoned. This chapter will explore the subgenre, which I refer to as 'the betrayed maidens' laments', both through close reading of the poems themselves and a consideration of ways in which they might have been read and performed by late medieval readers. The protagonist of these poems is a young woman who transgresses the norms that attempted to keep women within the household. By wandering outside the house, meeting men, and engaging in sex before marriage the young woman flouts the strictures that should govern her social behaviour.

However, before I discuss the poems themselves, I locate them within the context in which they were produced. This is an important part of my attempt to bring a fresh critical perspective to the lyrics. The vogue for transgression has mainly bypassed these short texts, as it has late medieval lyric poetry in general.[4] The major editions of the late medieval English lyrics were published in the mid-twentieth century and scholarship of this period

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[1] R.L. Greene (ed.), *The Early English Carols,* 2nd ed (Oxford, 1977), p.278.
[2] *Ibid,* p.277.
[3] *Ibid,* p.276.
[4] A notable exception is S. Stanbury, 'The Virgin's Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion', *PMLA* 106 (1991): 1083-1093. Stanbury discusses the power of the female gaze in the Passion lyrics which appropriates the visual assertiveness and possessiveness normally associated with the masculine position.

favoured the religious lyric and often considered the poems in isolation from their generic antecedents and the manuscript contexts within which medieval readers encountered them.[5] In recent decades the amount of work on the secular lyric has increased, and scholars have recognised the importance of manuscript context for reading the lyrics.[6] If the poems are reconsidered in their context of production, they have the potential to inform us about how gender roles were constructed, performed, and transgressed in late medieval England. Accordingly, my discussion of the modern critical reception of these poems and the medieval context of their production occupies the first half of this chapter, and I proceed to the poems themselves only after I have set the stage in this way. I use a small subgroup of lyrics to argue that despite the perception of lyric as a genre that has traditionally attracted formalist readings and philological research, more recent critical preoccupations such as gender, book history and performance can produce fruitful new insights into these enigmatic texts.

I begin by clarifying the terminology we can use to discuss the lyrics and by briefly listing the poems and the manuscripts in which they can be found. I then consider the critical history of late medieval lyric. I discuss the extent to which the lyrics are often highly formulaic, relying on tropes inherited from the fabliaux, from continental lyrics, and

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[5] Major editions: Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols* (1st edition, 1935. 2nd edition, 1977); G.L. Brook (ed.), *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS Harley 2253* (Manchester, 1948); C. Brown (ed.), *Religious Lyrics of the XIV*th century, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1952); R.H. Robbins (ed.) *Secular Lyrics of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1955); C. Brown (ed.), *Religious Lyrics of the XV*th century, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1962). Two of the most important studies on the religious lyric were R. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968) and D. Gray, *Themes and Images in the Middle English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972).

[6] For discussions focusing on the secular lyric, cf. J. Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985); G. Margherita, 'Woman and Riot in the Harley Lyrics', chapter 2 of *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia,1994); K. Boklund-Lagopolou, *'I have a yong suster': Popular Song and the Middle English Lyric* (Dublin, 2002).For examples of manuscript-based readings of lyrics, cf. Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics*; A. Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript'. *Speculum* 66 (1991): 43-73 (p.65); D. Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing: Three Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century Norfolk', *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 9 (2006): 25-49.

from earlier English literature. By paying attention to the manuscript context in which they are found, I address the question of how they may have been read and understood by their original audience. In this chapter I will offer an innovative response to these lyrics that remains alert to the both the particularity of each lyric and the way it reuses common late medieval tropes.

1.1 Terminology, Scholarship, and Genre

1.1.1 The Subgenre and The Limits of Terminology

The extant subgenre consists of six poems, fully in Middle English, which follow the narrative of seduction, pregnancy, and abandonment. The manuscripts and poems are as follows: Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 383/603, p.41 (*The Serving Maid's Holiday*, *A Midsummer Day's Dance*) ; Cambridge, St John's College, MS S. 54 (otherwise known as MS 259), fols.2v-3r (*The Wily Clerk*); Cambridge, University Library, MS F.f.5.48, fol.114v. (*A Betrayed Maiden's Lament*); London, British Library, MS Sloane 2593, fol.34r. (*Jolly Jankin*); London, British Library, MS Additional 5665 (otherwise known as Ritson's MS), fol.14r.; and London, British Library, MS Egerton 3002, fol. 2v. (*In wyldernes / Ther founde I Besse*).[7]

In addition to these six poems, there is a macaronic betrayed maiden's lament in English and Latin (*Up Y Arose in verno tempore*) and four Middle English lyrics that present variations on the basic narrative.[8] In these, either the young woman is abandoned

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[7] For the sake of clarity, I have referred to the poems by their titles in Robbins (ed.) *Secular Lyrics*, unless they were excluded from this collection, in which case I refer to them by the first line of the text. Throughout the thesis, the first reference to a manuscript will be in full (e.g. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61), but, where indicated, subsequent references may be in shortened form where there are many references to the same manuscript (e.g. Ashmole 61). A full list of the manuscripts cited can be found in the bibliography.
[8] The macaronic poem is *Up Y Arose in verno tempore*, found in London, British Library, MS Additional 5665 (Ritson's MS), fol.145v., and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 176, fol.98v. The variant poems

but not pregnant, or she has a clerical lover but is not abandoned, or there is a pregnancy but the lyric is told from the perspective of the man and does not emphasise abandonment. A full list of these lyrics and how they vary from the basic pattern can be found in tables 1-5 (in appendix A). I will focus on the main group of lyrics in the subgenre, those that follow the narrative of seduction, pregnancy and abandonment, that is the six English lyrics and the macaronic lyric (*Up Y arose in verno tempore*). The exception is *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament*, which will not be discussed in this chapter, for two reasons. Firstly, *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament* is slightly different from the other lyrics in that the initial encounter between the young woman and the man who impregnates her is explicitly presented as a rape and the perpetrator is a priest named 'Sir John' rather than the young layman or holy water clerk of the other lyrics. Secondly, the manuscript in which it is found (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.5.48) is the subject of an extended case study in Chapter 2. The lyric will be discussed in the context of the analysis of the manuscript's potential readership that takes place in Chapter 2.

It is clear that these poems share a narrative and form a recognisable subgenre, but there are problems when considering what terminology to use when discussing them. Rosemary Greentree notes that the term 'lyric' is one that was not used in the Middle Ages and the poems to which this label is attached show wide variation in form and content.[9] Rather than being an original and personal outpouring, the Middle English lyrics rely on literary conventions and familiar tropes. They are largely anonymous and many of the texts

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are as follows: Gonville and Caius College, MS 383/603, p.210 (*A Forsaken Maiden's Lament*); Cambridge, University Library, MS Additional 5943, fol.178v. (*Careless Love*); San Marino, California, Huntington Library, MS EL.1160, fol.11r. (*Our Sir John*); British Library, MS Sloane 2593, fol.11v. (*Love in the Garden*). Full details of the variations these poems make from the group of six standard poems are supplied in tables 1-5 (in appendix A).
[9] R. Greentree, *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem* (Woodbridge, 2001), p.6.

are 'marred by textual corruption' or are written in dialects that are more difficult for the modern reader to decipher.[10] Within the larger genre of lyric, it is possible to use more specific terms such as 'carol', which was a term used in the Middle Ages.[11] Richard Greene defines the carol as 'a song on any subject, composed of uniform stanzas and provided with a burden'. Those texts without a burden he defines as simply 'songs' or 'lyrics'.[12] By these definitions, five of the poems in the subgenre are carols and one is a lyric with no burden (*In wyldernes / Ther founde I Besse*). The carol originated as a type of dance song, but Greene argues that by the time most of the carols he includes in his comprehensive edition were written down, dancing was not part of their performance.[13]

There are thus several options when discussing the subgenre of late medieval English poems involving seduction, pregnancy, and abandonment. 'Carol' describes most of the poems in the subgenre, but one of them does not fit the technical definition. 'Lyric' is, as discussed above, very vague. Greentree uses a combination of lyric and short poem. John Plummer and Neil Cartlidge, who wrote two of the most influential recent articles on these poems, label them 'women's voice songs' and 'late medieval pregnancy lyrics' respectively.[14] In the course of my own writing I have found the use of 'lyric' unavoidable, despite its shortcomings, in part because of the weight of critical precedent attached to the term. I do, however, use both 'carol' and 'song' where appropriate. I have also found it necessary to fix on a term to distinguish my particular subgroup of lyrics, marked out by their shared narrative, from other related poems. Analogues to these poems exist in

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[10] T.G. Duncan (ed.), *A Companion to Middle English Lyric* (Cambridge, 2005), p.xvi, xxi.
[11] Greentree, *Middle English Lyric and Short Poem*, p.6.
[12] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, pp.xxii-xxiii
[13] *Ibid.*, p.lxxix.
[14] Plummer, 'The Woman's Song', pp.135-154; N. Cartlidge, ''Alas, I Go With Chylde': Representations of Extra-Marital Pregnancy in the Middle English Lyric', *English Studies* 79 (1998): 395-414.

continental poetry. For example, Pierre Bec, in his typology of twelfth- and thirteenth-century French lyric poetry classifies this genre, which he calls '*la fille enceinte abandonée*', as a subgenre of the *chanson d'ami,* in which a young woman laments for her lost lover.[15] Since 'poems containing pregnant and abandoned women' would be too unwieldy for repeated use, I have chosen to adapt an editorial title Robbins gives to one of these poems: *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament*. This seems to emphasise the aspects of abandonment and outraged virginity that are central to the poems' narrative. In the following discussion therefore I refer to the poems as 'the betrayed maidens' laments'.

1.1.2 Folk Songs or Satire?

Although I discuss the betrayed maidens' laments as a group, this is not intended to imply that they are homogeneous. Rather there is considerable variation in the context in which they are found and the ways in which the sexual activity and pregnancy are presented in each of them. The content will be dealt with more fully when I come to a close reading of the lyrics themselves, but it is worth mentioning here that the manuscripts in which they appear include a university exercise book, a pocket book of carols, a household miscellany, and a codex of church music. The lyrics share a common narrative, but it is not to be expected that they had the same meaning in each of these contexts. Julia Boffey has argued that the context in which a lyric is copied is vital for understanding in what ways it might have been read. The scarcity and cost of paper meant that lyrics were often copied in the margins or on a flyleaf of a manuscript that contained many other, unrelated texts, but there were also entire codices that were ordered around the genre of the lyric and into which texts

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[15] P. Bec, *La lyrique française au moyen age, XIIe-XIIIe siècle, vol I: études* (Paris, 1977), p.62.

were copied in a planned way.[16] The marginal position of many lyrics on the page or in the manuscript did not imply that they were not valued. The fact that they were recorded at all indicates that someone wished to preserve them, but the experience of reading a lyric alongside Latin grammar exercises or specimen letters must have been different from reading it as part of a group of other lyrics.[17]

There has not been much scholarship on the betrayed maidens' laments and a large portion of what has been produced has largely focused on questioning their authorship or performing a close reading of a particular lyric. Until the middle of the twentieth century, scholarship on Middle English lyrics focused on cataloguing the poems and producing editions.[18] While these editions remain a valuable resource for work on the lyrics, the way in which they present the betrayed maidens' laments often guides reading of the poems in a misleading way. Rossell Robbins, in *Secular Lyrics of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, groups the betrayed maidens' laments together with other texts under the heading 'love songs', a label that occludes much of their frank sexual content and draws emphasis away from the abandonment aspect of the poems. He takes them at face-value, reading them as simple and rustic, based on his assessment of both their style and their manuscript context:

> These love poems … are among the freshest and most charming of all early English compositions. They are genuinely popular, as is shown by their realistic content, their simple form, and their casual manner of preservation.[19]

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[16] Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics*, pp.7 & 34.

[17] This argument only applies to the segment of the audience who actually encountered the lyric visually on the page rather than having it read to them. As Joyce Coleman has argued, many medieval people preferred to experience texts aurally. The lyric as a genre seems to particularly lend itself to performance. Cf. J. Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.85-6, 93.

[18] See note 5 for a list of major editions of the lyrics.

[19] Robbins (ed.), *Secular Lyrics,* p.233, note 15.

Robbins' assessment of the lyrics in his edition is representative of the air of nostalgia that suffused early scholarship on these poems. Scholars sought to use them as representative documents, providing access to a lost medieval 'folk' culture, even if that culture was filtered through the hand of a literate person who recorded the lyric in the pages of a manuscript. Later critics were more cautious about the poems' superficial simplicity. John Stevens conceded that many Middle English carols were found in manuscripts with a clerical, even monastic, background, but still argued for their underlying popular origin. The poems were, according to Stevens, 'the written residue of a vast body of popular tunes now lost'.[20] In this model, the literate elite, including the clergy, preserved the lyrics simply because they were the most likely to write things down in manuscripts, but they did not compose them.

Richard Greene, in his introduction to *The Early English Carols,* presented a more nuanced perspective on the lyrics by distinguishing between the circumstances of their composition and their intended audience. The lyrics were 'popular by destination', not 'popular by origin', that is, although they may have been composed and recorded by clerics or literate laypeople, they were intended - particularly the religious carols - for the education of broader audiences, particularly the majority of illiterate lay people. An illiterate person might not be able to read the manuscript itself, but, once taught the lyric, he or she could easily pass it on to others.

Criticism on these lyrics has tended to be highly polarised between considering them as 'popular' or 'folk' productions that offer us access to a lost oral culture and reading them as examples of satire that was part of a long tradition stemming from Latin poetry. This debate over whether the lyrics are 'popular' or 'elite', 'lay' or 'clerical' assumes that

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[20] J. Stevens (ed.), *Mediaeval Carols*, 2nd ed., *Musica Britannica* 4 (London, 1970), xiv.

these were distinct categories. It further assumes that there were easy boundaries between popular and elite texts, and between clerical and lay audiences, a notion that Richard Greene challenges in the introduction to his edition of the carols. He argues that even those who entered the clergy were raised in lay communities and that those secular songs that they were exposed to during this period did not simply disappear from their memories. This being the case, 'secular' songs could never have been 'the property of lay people alone', just as the clergy did not have a monopoly on devotional material:

> One must remember that every monk or nun or other professed religious was a boy or girl before joining the clergy, and ... had a memory filled with non-religious ditties learned in childhood.[21]

Despite the usefulness of Greene's argument for thinking about potential audiences for the lyrics, the language of his description still trivializes them by associating them primarily with childhood and 'folk' practices, a body of 'ditties' that existed only as memory once a person entered adulthood, and particularly if he or she gained access to 'literate' culture.

It was John Plummer's assessment of the women's voice lyrics in his 1981 essay, 'The Woman's Song in Middle English and its European Backgrounds', that would radically change subsequent critical responses to the lyrics, arguing as it did for a completely different literary background for them. Plummer argued that despite the apparently simple style and everyday subject matter of the lyrics, they were a satirical production, humour at the expense of women written by clerics and intended for a clerical audience. He read them as ironic, noting the stock characters, the unsympathetic treatment of the young woman (who is usually presented as deserving what she gets) the artifice and the verbal playfulness of the poems. Plummer found it 'nearly inconceivable that a young woman could have sung this song in leading a carol on the village green' and instead

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[21] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, cxli-cxlii.

situated the lyrics within a long satirical tradition with its origins in Latin poetry and within a late medieval period that saw a surge in antifeminist literature being produced in England and Scotland.[22]

This reassessment of the lyrics as an offshoot of the tradition of Latin satirical poetry exemplified by the *Carmina Burana*, rather than as part of a folk tradition, has led some scholars to reposition them as moral or didactic literature by accepting Plummer's attribution of the material to clerical producers who were well-versed in Latin culture, but by imagining the target audience as lay people who needed moral instruction.[23] For example, Bernard O'Donoghue dismisses the surface 'rudeness' of the poems, arguing that their obscenity operates 'within a narrow conventionalised compass' and that the formulaic punishment of pregnancy for all sexual transgression is 'tedious and moralizing'.[24] It is possible to read the lyrics as extremely conservative in nature – what transgression they contain is usually punished. Taken at face value, they appear to be morally straightforward: the young woman is punished with abandonment and an unwanted pregnancy. The end of the poem presents the moment in which she realises her predicament and often anticipates the social disgrace to follow from the revelation of her condition to the community at large. Judith Bennett reads the poems as didactic literature for young women, arguing that these songs 'scripted the proper passage of young women through adolescence and into marriage', and she imagines them being performed at 'ales, saints' feasts, and markets' before an audience that included the 'young singlewomen' at whom their didactic message

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[22] Plummer, 'The Woman's Song ', pp.149-150.

[23] The *Carmina Burana* contains a betrayed maiden's lament entitled *Huc usque me miseram*, which has a much bleaker tone than the Middle English examples of the genre.

[24] B. O'Donoghue, 'Cuius Contrarium: Middle English Popular Lyrics', in Duncan (ed.), *Companion*, pp.210-226 (p.222).

was primarily directed.[25] Felicity Riddy's work on *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, a conduct text that circulated at the same period as the lyrics, demonstrates that the 'folk' appearance of such literature can be deceptive, and that even when written in the female voice, it was often authored by clerical men and directed at a female lay audience as an instrument of social control.[26] If the lyrics are read as didactic, texts such as *How The Good Wife* and the lyrics may be regarded as two sides of the same coin; in one the young woman is promised rewards for chastity, industriousness and obedience, and in the other the consequences of her fall from grace are held up as a deterrent.

My own response to the lyrics is somewhat different. I argue that, despite the initial impression that these lyrics create of rather heavy-handed didacticism, they reward further study. The seminal editions in which the betrayed maidens' laments appear tended to categorise them with labels such as 'love songs'and 'amorous carols' that occluded their potential for innuendo and satire.[27] This encouraged criticism that largely ignored the extremely varied manuscript contexts in which they are found. The diverse contexts in which they appear do not support an assessment of them as instructional texts emerging from 'the clergy' and directed at 'the laity' and specifically at women. In some cases they were written to be read in an environment that was mostly male and at least nominally 'clerical', and were unlikely to have been read by women at all. At other times they were written in manuscripts that have little obvious connection with the clergy and may very well have been written, read, and owned by laypeople. On top of this, there are those

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[25] Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms', p.194.
[26] Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best', pp.72-73. For the text of *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, and information on the manuscripts in which it is found, cf. Salisbury (ed.), *The Trials and Joys of Marriage* (Kalamazoo, 2002), pp.219-31.
[27] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, pp.268-288 are labelled 'amorous carols'; Robbins (ed.), *Secular Lyrics*, pp.11-30 are labelled 'love songs'.

manuscripts that present instances of crossover between several different reading communities. The lyrics resist any easy attribution to a single group of readers.

There has been some scholarship that attempts to analyse the readership of lyrics based on the manuscripts in which they appear. Although his main focus is discussing the possible connection of many different types of manuscript with minstrels, Andrew Taylor provides an important perspective on the temptation to make assumptions about readership based on the physical appearance of a manuscript:

> Arguments based on the poor condition of a manuscript sometimes make it sound as if the only people in medieval England who ever took a book on a journey, shoved it into the bottom of a pack, or otherwise abused it were minstrels.[28]

In his discussion of the lyric manuscripts, he argues that they were probably written by and read by clerics, and that assumptions about clerical reading tastes that exclude apparently simple, popular or obscene texts should be avoided. We cannot assume that every 'clerical' reader was the same and read in the same way, and that 'clerics' were a distinct group of people, clearly separate from lay readers. Daniel Wakelin also approaches the lyrics from a codicological perspective. He notes that the lyrics in larger anthologies such as London, British Library, MS Sloane 2593 are not jotted down haphazardly, but copied in uniform and coherent ways, and that the manuscript is planned as a unit. Wakelin argues that rather than recording a lost oral culture, these lyric manuscripts *script* it, providing a written basis for performance.[29]

The majority of this scholarship deals with fifteenth-century lyric poetry as a whole, or more specifically with those lyrics which are presented in the voice of a woman. There is very little research on the betrayed maidens' laments specifically. Neil Cartlidge's 1998

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[28] Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p.65.
[29] Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', pp.29-30, 38.

article is the most recent substantial assessment to consider them as a group.[30] Cartlidge

will prove a useful antecedent in my discussion of *The Wily Clerk*, as he focuses on

potential ambiguities of meaning in the texts and the implications for considering late

medieval ideas about maidenhood and premarital pregnancy. However, he makes almost no

examination of the manuscripts in which these lyrics are found.

It is important to avoid as much as possible imposing our preconceptions about the

type of audience who might have enjoyed these lyrics and the ways in which they read. The

surface rusticity of their subject does not mean the lyrics must have had a folk origin, nor

does the satirical reinterpretation of their content mean that they were always intended as a

clerical in-joke. Medieval readers would not have encountered most of the lyrics as modern

readers do, in collections that range across lyrics of all types and subjects. Although the

manuscripts that contain the betrayed maidens' laments do include 'lyric-only' manuscripts

such as London, British Library, MS Sloane 2593 and Cambridge, St. John's College, MS

S.54 (hereafter Sloane 2593 and St John's S.54), most of the manuscripts are miscellanies

of various kinds, where the lyrics appear alongside material that is generically completely

different. Also, even though Sloane 2593 and St. John's S.54 are alike in only containing

carols, their appearance, process of composition and intended use are very different, as will

be seen when I come to discuss them in more detail.

The majority of critical responses to the betrayed maidens' laments have wrestled

with the question of whether their apparent female voice should be taken at face value or as

a satirical construct by a male author. This scholarship is important, but it does not

represent the limits of the value of these poems. Even if it is accepted that the poems were

written by men, and intended to satirize the hapless maiden, they can still be a valuable

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[30] Cartlidge, 'Alas, I go with Chylde', pp.395-414.

source of information about the cultural context in which they were read. John Dagenais provides a useful summary of the kind of reading practices I intend to adopt in my discussion of the lyrics. Dagenais argues that our need for coherent texts is often at odds with the way medieval texts are presented. Rather than considering the individual quirks of each manuscript as an impediment to getting at 'the text', we should consider each manuscript as a textual performance with which readers can engage.[31] In this way, a text can be read in different ways depending on its readership and the way in which it interacts with the surrounding texts in the mind of the reader. Each of the manuscripts I touch on in the following discussion can tell us different things about the potential audience for these lyrics. Through the use of a paradigm that focuses on the reader and the diversity of situations in which these lyrics are found, I hope to address the polarisation of existing scholarship. Before I proceed to analyse these possibilities by a discussion of the manuscripts and a close reading of the lyrics, it will be necessary to outline the main features of the subgenre and its antecedents.

1.1.3 Generic Antecedents

The heyday of the betrayed maidens' laments in England appears to have been the fifteenth century as all the manuscripts containing Middle English examples date from this period. However, some caution is required in making such statements as there are simply more manuscripts of all types surviving from this period. Although the standard narrative of the betrayed maidens' laments, that of a young pregnant woman abandoned by her lover, does not appear in Middle English before the fifteenth century, there are elements of the genre

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[31] J. Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de Buen Amor* (Princeton, NJ, 1994) pp.16-18.

that come from texts that were circulating in England in earlier centuries. In terms of the plot, with its emphasis on illicit sex, often involving guile and trickery and featuring a clerical participant, the fabliaux are an obvious influence. Daron Burrows has argued that the stereotypes at work in the fabliaux are of interest because of what they can tell us about the beliefs of the intended audience and what they expected of their priests, husbands, and wives.[32] The decadent priest was not an indication of anticlericalism, but a natural satirical counterpoint of the idealised image of the priesthood and the social and spiritual powers connected to the office. Likewise the weak and duped husband and the adulterous wife were the opposites of the ideal husband and wife.[33]

London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 features several Anglo-Norman fabliaux alongside pastourelle poetry, which also appears to have had an influence on the betrayed maidens' laments.[34] *In a fryght as y con fare fremede* (titled *The Meeting in the Wood* by Brook), which begins on folio 66v., narrates an encounter between a young woman and a man, in which he overcomes her resistance. *My deþ y loue my lyf ich hate for a leuedy shene* (titled *De Clerico et Puella* by Brook), which begins on folio 80v. is a dialogue rather than a lyric as such, but presents the characters of the articulate wooing clerk and resistant but then acquiescent young woman that are common to the later betrayed maidens' laments.[35]

Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* provide the most well-known examples of fabliaux in late medieval England, but the genre did make earlier appearances in English. *Dame*

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[32] D. Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest in the Old French Fabliaux: Anticlerical Satire and Lay Identity* (Bern, 2005), p.30.
[33] *Ibid.*, p.61.
[34] For a list of contents, cf. N.R. Ker (ed.), *Facsimile of British Museum Harley 2253* (London, 1965), ix-xvi. Ker dates the manuscript to the 1330s based on the characteristics of the hand.
[35] *Ibid*., pp.xi-xii.

Sirith, which appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86 boasts the stock features of absent husband, amorous clerk, and gullible wife, also featuring the titular character who acts as a pander between the clerk Wilekin and the object of his desire. A similar (although incomplete) dialogue can be found in London, British Library, MS Additional 23986, titled *Interludium de Clerico et Puella.*[36] It is difficult to know how familiar English readers were with fabliaux tropes prior to *The Canterbury Tales*, but the popularity of this work ensured their dissemination. By the fifteenth century, when the genre of the betrayed maidens' laments began leaving its mark in manuscripts, the basic elements of the genre were already present in literary culture. It is clear however that there are some important differences between the betrayed maidens' laments and the fabliaux. The lyrics focus on maidens, not wives. The clerical seducer escapes unpunished, whereas several fabliaux relate the gruesome punishments that wronged husbands exact on the priest.[37] Pregnancy as a consequence of sexual transgression is ubiquitous in these lyrics in a way it is not in the fabliaux. Despite these differences, it is clear that the broad tropes and characters found in the betrayed maidens' laments are heavily influenced by the fabliaux.

Apart from the fabliaux priest, there is a second influence on the depiction in the betrayed maidens' laments of quasi-clerical figures who transgress household boundaries. This is the stereotype of friars as damaging interlopers, most famously demonstrated by the figure of 'Sire *Penetrans-domos*' [Sir Piercer-of-homes] in Passus XX of Langland's *Piers Plowman* (l.341).[38] The name comes from a discussion in the Vulgate of how man will be

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[36] Texts of *Dame Sirith* and *Interludium de Clerico et Puella* can be found in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.29-60. The poems are titled by incipit in the manuscript.
[37] Cf.Burrows' discussion of punishment in Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest*, pp.161-200.
[38] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. Ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London, 1995), p.359. The translation of Sir *Penetrans-domos* is from Schmidt (ed.), *Piers Plowman*, p.359, n.341, and Schmidt recognises this as a possible sexual pun.

led astray in the last days. The *penetrans-domos* will be one of these deceivers: 'For of this sort are they who creep into houses [*qui penetrans-domos*] and lead captive silly women laden with sins, who are led away with divers desires'.[39] The depiction of the *penetrans-domos* in *Piers Plowman* emphasises both the spiritual danger he poses and his reputation for adultery with men's wives. Some find the penance mandated by Shrift too onerous, so Sir *Penetrans-domos*, otherwise known as 'Frere Flaterere', is allowed entry (ll.307-311, 324).[40] He takes money to give lighter penances, and as a result the people are enchanted and 'drede no synne' (ll.365-380).[41] We are also told of a similar friar who attended a lord at court and took advantage of his position of access to women: 'though my lord was oute / He salvede so oure women til some were with childe'. It is implied that all friars are to be suspected of this behaviour (ll.347-48).[42]

Penn Szittya argues that the friar was seen as dangerous because he penetrated into the material house of the Christian man, but also because he was an 'ecclesiastical house-breaker', usurping the function of the secular clergy as confessor.[43] The depiction of Sir *Penetrans-domos* in *Piers Plowman* plays on both aspects of the anti-fraternal stereotype. It is an important antecedent of the betrayed maidens' laments but there are some key differences. The betrayed maidens' laments focus almost exclusively on the penetration of the material house, rather than the spiritual implications, as well as depicting male protagonists who are not friars but young laymen, holy water clerks, and priests.

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[39] 2 Timothy 3:6: '*ex his enim sunt qui penetrans-domos et captivas ducunt mulierculas oneratas peccatis quae ducuntur variis desideriis*'. Translation is Douay-Rheims edition from www.latinvulgate.com. Penn Szittya discusses how this verse was linked with the friars via William of St Amour's *De Periculis Novissimorum Temporum* (Concerning the Perils of the Last Times), written in 1254 (P.R. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, 1986), pp.4, 56). See also D. Pearsall (ed.), *Piers Plowman by William Langland: An Edition of the C-Text* (London, 1978), p.375, n.340.
[40] Schmidt (ed.), *Piers Plowman*, p.359.
[41] *Ibid.*, pp.360-61.
[42] *Ibid.*, p.360.
[43] Szittya, *Antifraternal Tradition*, pp.58-59, 285).

1.2 Reading the Betrayed Maidens' Laments in Late Medieval Oxford

1.2.1 Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 383/603

My explanation of my methodology up to this point has emphasised the importance of context for readings of the lyrics. The remainder of this chapter will put that into practice by considering the manuscript context in which several of the lyrics appear, while also engaging in a close reading of the lyrics themselves. I begin with Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 383/603 (henceforward Caius 383/603), in which two betrayed maidens' laments appear. Robbins titles these two poems *A Midsummer Day's Dance* and *The Serving Maid's Holiday*. The references to place names in the manuscript suggest that it was written in Oxfordshire, and Richard Greene suggests that it originated at Oxford around the middle of the fifteenth century as a student's workbook or commonplace book.[44] Its other contents are mainly grammar exercises in Latin, specimen letters, accounts and legal documents in French, and glosses on some liturgical offices. This suggestion is supported by a possible link with Magdalen College. The name 'Wymundus London' occurs on several pages of the manuscript, with the fuller declaration at the top of page 149 that '*Wymundus London Dominus Bondon exemit gladium suum*'.[45] A 'W. London' appears in the bursary book of Magdalen as a demy (a scholar whose allowance was half that of a Fellow) in 1485.[46]

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[44] M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Gonville and Caius College, Vol II* (Cambridge, 1908), pp.435-37; Greene, *Early English Carols*, pp.323-324. Place names mentioned are mostly from Oxfordshire (including Oxford, 'Hanlee' (Henley-on-Thames), 'Wyttely' (Wheatley), Beckley and Tadmerton), but places in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire also appear.
[45] James, *Descriptive Catalogue of Gonville and Caius*, p.437.
[46] A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500, vol. II (F to O)* (Oxford, 1958), p.1158; *OED*: demy, n. 4. (http://oed.com), accessed 11 March 2011; for demies, cf. J. McConica, 'The Rise of the Undergraduate College', in J. McConica (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol III: The Collegiate University* (Oxford, 1986), pp.1-68 (p.4).

There are ten English lyrics in the manuscript, of which three could be classified as 'betrayed maidens' laments', however only two end with pregnancy. Both these lyrics, which are so similar in plot and subject matter, are copied on the same page of the manuscript, which suggests that the scribe recognised them as two examples of the same genre and chose to group them together. The manuscript is paginated rather than foliated. The fact that two betrayed maidens' laments are even present in the same manuscript is unusual. The only other example of this is London, British Library, MS Additional 5665 (otherwise known as the Ritson MS), and in that case, the two lyrics appear on different pages of the manuscript.

In his discussion of the medieval English universities, Alan Cobban notes that pre-1500 there were very few books available at the universities. Only about ten percent of Oxford students are known to have owned books before this period. Undergraduates would have had occasional access to books through fellows and graduates, but for the most part would have relied heavily on oral instruction.[47] Malcolm Parkes argues that although undergraduates did not require a base text to study from, they might use books to record their notes on the lectures they attended, or note down model disputations and grammatical exercises.[48] The contents of Caius 383/603, with its grammatical exercises, sample letters and accounts, seems like it could have been this sort of student commonplace book.

The contents of the manuscript provide some assistance in determining what type of reader might have found it useful. Although the beginning contains mainly grammar exercises, which would seem to fit with the idea that it originally belonged to a student, a

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[47] A.B. Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c.1500* (Aldershot, 1988), pp. 378 & 381.
[48] M.B. Parkes, 'The Provision of Books', in J.I. Catto and Ralph Evans (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol II: Late Medieval Oxford* (Oxford, 1992), pp.407-484 (pp. 407, 424-427).

large proportion of the manuscript is devoted to what seems to be a guide to writing various kinds of legal documents and letters. The '*Statute quia emptores terrarum*', which was enacted in 1290 by Edward I and dealt with the buying and selling of land, is mentioned on page 127.[49] The explicit on page 161 summarizes the content of the intervening pages: '*Explicit modus faciendi cartas obligaciones aquietantias secundum usum mordernum*'. Towards the end of the manuscript specimen accounts are provided in French preceded by a Latin title: '*hic incipit modus qualiter clericus vel expendit pecuniam domini sui*'. The fact that the manuscript contains this type of material as well as grammatical and rhetorical exercises, suggests that it was used by readers who required an education that ranged outside what was taught in the university schools. Although being a member of the university conferred clerical status upon a student, this did not necessarily mean that he was preparing for a life in the church. Moreover, many students who attended university left without a degree. A period of time spent at one of the universities was seen as beneficial in itself, and it was likely that many of those who attended had no expectation of ever taking a degree.[50] Ruth Karras has argued that 'the skills, credentials, and connections' acquired at university were at least as important as the educational experience itself, and might help students advance in lay as well as clerical careers.[51]

There were students in Oxford whose primary goal was to gain the administrative, linguistic, and technical skills that would allow them to seek out employment in the royal, legal or ecclesiastical bureaucracies. Cobban discusses the existence of schools at the

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[49] *Quia Emptores* 1290: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aep/Edw1/18/1. Accessed 29 April 2011.
[50] T.A.R. Evans, 'The Number, Origins and Careers of Scholars', in Catto and Evans (eds.) *The History of the University of Oxford*, pp.485-538 (p.497).
[51] R. M. Karras, 'Sharing Wine, Women and Song: Masculine Identity Formation in the Medieval European Universities', in J.J. Cohen and B. Wheeler (eds.) *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997), pp.187-202 (pp.187-88).

fringes of the university devoted to this type of practical training, including drafting charters, wills, letters, conveyancing, keeping accounts, court procedure, heraldry, estate management and husbandry, as well as training in French and Latin.[52] These schools were not part of the formal university, but enjoyed semi-official recognition and 'formed a link between the official teaching regime and the concerns of the business world.'[53] These schools were phased out in the second half of the fifteenth century with the emergence of the Inns of Court in London which offered a similar training programme.[54] It is clear that even if we suggest Oxford as a plausible place of origin for Caius 383/603 and students as likely readers, this does not mean that the manuscript is 'clerical' in any straightforward sense.

1.1.2 The Context of the Late Medieval University

Why might the lyrics have been copied down alongside the instructional material? We can begin to speculate about the answer to this question by knowing more about the environment in which fifteenth-century students lived and worked and whether their status as students set them apart from the larger community of medieval Oxford. The average student was younger than today, usually beginning his university studies in his mid-teens, although the actual age could vary.[55] In the early years of the universities, most students had lived in small halls or boarded with townspeople, the most famous literary example

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[52] A.B. Cobban, *English University Life in the Middle Ages* (London, 1999), pp.146-147.
[53] *Ibid.* Thomas Sampson, a teacher of this kind taught in Oxford from c.1350 to 1409. Sampson is discussed in H.G. Richardson, 'Business Training in Medieval Oxford', *American Historical Review* 46 (1940-41): 259-80.
[54] *Ibid.*, p.148.
[55] Evans, 'The Number, Origins and Careers of Scholars', p.499.

being Nicholas in Chaucer's 'Miller's Tale' (ll. 3187-3232).[56] These type of students, who did not live in colleges, were known as 'chamberdekyns' and their supposed neglect of study in favour of frequenting taverns, rioting, and theft was a source of concern for university authorities who were anxious to impose discipline on their members.[57] In 1421, Henry V proclaimed that all scholars and servants should be under the government of some principal and that scholars should not be allowed to dwell in the houses of laymen.[58] The fact that a similar statute was enacted in 1521 demonstrates that this problem was not easily solved.[59] The attempt to pressure students to live in colleges was part of a wider concern with order in fifteenth-century Oxford. There was a difference between how students actually lived and behaved and how the university authorities envisaged the academic environment. Cobban argues that the statutes attempted to impose a way of life that mirrored the ecclesiastical denial of bodily pleasures and organised levity.[60] They attempted to limit contact between the students and women and to forbid non-academic activities such as games and entertainments. The university statutes, and particularly the aularian statutes of the fifteenth century, demonstrate an overarching concern with order and discipline. Gossiping and laughing at the table were forbidden, along with singing that could disrupt study or sleep, immoral tales, and musical instruments.[61]

There is evidence to suggest that this repressive attitude drove students to attempt to flout this control. Of particular concern to the authorities was the patronage by students of brothels and taverns. The university did attempt to suppress prostitution, and there was an

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[56] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1988), p.68. All future references to Chaucer are from this edition (*RC*).

[57] J.A.W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Oxford, 1974), pp.34-35.

[58] H. Anstey (ed.), *Munimenta Academica, or Documents Illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford, Part I: Libri Cancellarii Et Procuratorum* (London, 1868), p.277.

[59] Anstey (ed.), *Munimenta Academica*, p.320.

[60] Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities*, p.361.

[61] S. Gibson (ed.), *Statuta Antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford, 1931), pp.575-577.

inquiry in Oxford in 1443-44 that implicated scholars as customers and pimps.[62] These

attempts had a limited effect. Prostitution flourished as a consequence of the combination

of a large population of young unmarried men with some disposable income and the

difficulty women may have faced in finding licit employment in this period.[63]

Taken at face value, the university statutes suggest that contact between scholars

and women was highly discouraged and the colleges were imagined as an all-male clerical

environment. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the wishes of the university

authorities and the realities of life for the students themselves. The question of how much

contact the scholars had with women is a difficult one. The statutes attempt to limit contact

with women as far as possible by stipulating that servants must be male and scholars are

forbidden from keeping women in their lodging by day or by night.[64] The one exception

was the laundress, but care was to be taken that she be old, so as not to inspire temptation in

the scholars.[65] Despite this, the university could not be the sealed environment that its

authorities might have liked. John Fletcher and Christopher Upton have used the early

sixteenth-century accounts of Merton College, Oxford to question how far the college could

be considered 'monastic' or 'open', particularly in relation to women. They argue that the

idea of isolation is oversimplified and although the college statutes demonstrate an

obsessive concern to limit contact between the scholars and women, by the end of the

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[62] *Ibid.,* pp.363.-364.
[63] T.A.R. Evans argues that the majority of students were from comparatively comfortable backgrounds (Evans, 'The Number, Origins and Careers of Scholars', in Catto and Evans (eds.), *History of the University of Oxford, Vol II*, pp.485-538 (p.511)). P.J.P. Goldberg argues that women may have turned to prostitution in times of economic recession (P.J.P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c.1300-1520* (Oxford, 1992), pp.149 & 155).
[64] Gibson (ed.), *Statuta Antiqua*, pp.81-82
[65] Cobban, *Medieval English Universities*, pp.341 & 378.

Middle Ages this separation was difficult to maintain.[66] The colleges had expanded to such

an extent that they were heavily involved in the life of the town as employers, property

owners, and customers. Laypeople, including women, were linked to the university as

benefactors, founders, tradespeople, and servants. There are records of women working as

casual labourers, cleaners, seamstresses, and laundresses.[67] Those students who did not live

in college might encounter women as landladies.[68] It was laypeople who supplied the

university with goods, who built and maintained its buildings, and who worked as college

servants.

1.2.3 Performance Possibilities

If the university environment were truly as austere as the statutes attempted to make it,

there would have been little room for the performance of lyrics such as those that appear in

Caius 383/603. However, as suggested above, there was probably a difference between how

the authorities wanted students to behave and how they actually behaved. In addition to

this, there were particular times in which deviation from the statutes was allowed and even

encouraged. During the principal festivals of the ecclesiastical year the repressive stance

towards recreation was relaxed somewhat and temporary inversions of authority were

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[66] J.M. Fletcher and C.A. Upton, ''Monastic Enclave' or 'Open Society'?: A Consideration of the Role of Women in the Life of an Oxford College Community in the Early Tudor Period', *History of Education* 16 (1987): 1-9 (p.3).
[67] *Ibid.*, pp.4-7.
[68] Cobban, *Medieval English Universities*, p.378, Cobban, *English University Life*, pp.121, 137-138.

permitted.[69] There is no specific reference to the performance of lyrics at the colleges, but other entertainments such as minstrel performances and plays have been recorded.[70]

The late medieval university was an environment in which young men were placed in a liminal position. 'Cleric' might mean nothing more than 'learned' or 'literate' (i.e. Latinate), which all university students would be without any formal ecclesiastical role.[71] They were often 'clerics' only by virtue of their membership in the university; by leaving it they could easily rejoin the lay world and proceed to a lay career and marriage if they wished to do so. It is likely that most university students had some clerical standing, but the majority were unlikely to have been in major orders.

Gaining a university education was something men did mainly in the company of other men. They also had to contend with the attempts of the university authorities to control their behaviour and limit their interactions with women as much as possible. Lyrics depicting the seduction of young village girls may have been popular in this environment because the sexually successful protagonist could serve as a surrogate for the readers themselves and the lyrics as a form of fantasy literature.[72] The male protagonist of the betrayed maidens' laments is presented as confidently masculine; like Nicholas in 'The Miller's Tale' he is easily able to seduce women. This was a way in which the young man could assert his masculinity and his heterosexuality. Mariah Burton Nelson observes this effect of a heavily male environment in relation to modern sports' teams, focusing her

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[69] Cobban, *Medieval English Universities*, p.373.

[70] The records of the King's Hall demonstrate that minstrels visited the college regularly on the main ecclesiastical festivals, especially Epiphany, The Purification of the Blessed Virgin, Easter, All Saints, Christmas and Holy Innocents' Day (Cobban, *Medieval English Universities*, p.375). Cobban lists the specific terms used in the records. For evidence of plays at the colleges in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, cf. F.S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age*, ch 1 (Oxford, 1914).

[71] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford, 1993), p.226.

[72] Even pornography; for this argument regarding the records of the church courts, cf. P.J.P. Goldberg, 'John Skathelok's Dick: Voyeurism and "Pornography" in Late Medieval England' in N. McDonald (ed.) *Medieval Obscenities* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 105-23.

discussion on American football. She claims that in order to counteract the potential homoerotic undercurrent of the locker room, a 'highly gendered space', athletes tell stories and jokes that reinforce their interest in women as sexual objects.[73] Peggy Sanday has made a similar argument in relation to the types of gender performance found among men in elite fraternities in American universities. Although the main focus of her work is actual rape, she also discusses how the perpetrators talk about and rationalise their behaviour through narrative. In these exclusive and privileged communities, young men who are away from home bond by engaging in excessive drinking and sexual aggression towards women and objectification of them.[74] They glorify their sexual conquests and dismiss responsibility for their actions by laughing and telling stories about their exploits, which allows them to rehearse their dominance and control and induct new members of the group.[75] Although Sanday's research focuses on fraternities, she states that evidence of similar behaviour has been found in many other contexts where groups of young men gather together, such as sports teams, military units and work-related groups.[76] Although it would be rash to assume that what is true of the modern univerisity must be true of the medieval one, the betrayed maidens' laments contained in Caius 383/683 would fit well into this homosocial model. They were being read in a highly male environment, comprised of young men living away from home, in which the authorities attempted to control and limit their contact with women. The lyrics themselves generally absolve the young male seducer of responsibility for his actions, presenting it as the maiden's 'problem'.

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[73] M.B. Nelson, *The Stronger Women Get, The More Men Love Football: Sexism and the Culture of Sport* (London, 1996), p.242.
[74] P.R. Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (New York, 1990), pp.xiii,.xxiii, 20, 182.
[75] *Ibid.*, pp.8-9, 18.
[76] *Ibid.*, p.4.

Although the primary function of the lyrics may have been a textual performance of seduction that allowed students to demonstrate their own virility and rebel against university strictures regarding entertainment and sexuality, they also contain the potential for transgressive play in performance that undermines their surface heteronormativity.[77] In an environment that was largely male, both the young man's and the young woman's parts would have to be played by men. Lyrics that on the page appear to celebrate heterosexual sex could have had homoerotic overtones in performance. The text which has been preserved in the manuscript is only half of the story. For these lyrics, the meaning must have been nuanced by the performance context. The identity of the performer and the composition of his or her audience was important, as well as the choices the performer made in tone, gesture and facial expression. Judith Bennett recognises that transgendered performance may have served to render the lyrics humourous or ridiculous:

> The saddest forsaken maiden could have been rendered ludicrous by a male singer affecting a high falsetto, just as the most culpable could have been somewhat redeemed by a sympathetic performance.[78]

Unfortunately, it is this performative layer to the lyrics' 'meaning' that is most elusive and difficult for a modern researcher to access, but some progress can be made by suggesting plausible choices that might be made or meanings intended by a performer based on the likely context of the performance and composition of the audience. It is for this reason that I pay so much attention in this chapter to the milieux in which these lyrics circulated and to the possibility for play and innuendo based on ambiguous language. My intention is not to argue for my reading of the lyrics as the only one possible, but to make a plausible

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[77] Cobban argues that the repressive attitude of the university authorities actually accentuated the libertarian tendencies of some of the student population, exacerbating the problems of excessive drunkenness, gambling, prostitution and crime (Cobban, *Medieval English Universities*, p.363).
[78] Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms', p. 190.

argument combining what we know about the context and close reading of the poems themselves.

The majority of the lyrics have no manuscript music alongside them. Why then might we assume they were performed at all? Perhaps they were intended for private reading by the owner of the manuscript. However, Joyce Coleman's work on the connection between reading and performance has highlighted that medieval people continued to enjoy reading aloud and being read to, long after many of them became literate. Silent and private reading was not the norm.[79] This preference for the communal reading of texts and the scarcity and expense of manuscripts both encouraged the oral performance of texts. The lyrics as a genre are particularly suited to performance; their brevity, repetition, and use of familiar characters and narratives must have made them easy to memorise. In the case of the carols the repetition of a burden seems to encourage audience participation. Damian Riehl Leader describes the environment of a late medieval college in his history of the University of Cambridge. Riehl Leader notes that most scholars' chambers did not have fires or glazed windows and the absence of heat and light in these chambers would have encouraged them to gather in the communal hall, thus creating a perfect environment for songs, story-telling, and other group entertainments.[80]

Recent scholarship on medieval music and other types of performance has emphasized that the absence of specific instructions regarding performance in a manuscript is no guarantee that it was not intended to be used in this way.[81] The lyrics were not, on the

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[79] Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*, pp.85-86, 93.
[80] D. Riehl Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge, Vol I. The University to 1546* (Cambridge, 1988), p.67.
[81] Cf. C. Symes, 'The Boy and the Blind Man: A Medieval Play-Script and its Editors', in S. Echard and S. Partridge (eds.) *The Book Unbound* (Toronto, 2004), p.105-153 (p.114), for this argument regarding a possible play-text.

whole, recorded with music, which suggests that the reader was either expected to know the tune already, or that he would be instructed by someone else. In general, we do not have much manuscript music from the fifteenth century, particularly secular music. Julia Boffey suggests that most musical performances of lyric would have been informal, amateur, and domestic. Performers, instead of relying on written music, would draw on a memorised stockpile of pre-existing melodies, which could be adapted and attached to different written lyrics.[82] Without writing any actual music, scribes and readers used this method to suggest that a lyric should be sung using a familiar tune. This is a practice in evidence in Caius 383/603, where beside the text of several of the poems, someone has written the title of another lyric, indicating the tune to which it should be sung. Unfortunately this type of informal performance would leave little documentary evidence, such as there would be in the form of, for example, records of payment, if professional entertainers were involved.[83] Some of the larger and more formal lyric anthologies (e.g. the Ritson MS) do have accompanying music. This manuscript is usual in this respect, and it is significant that Greene links it with Exeter Cathedral, suggesting that its users may have been musical performers in a liturgical context and perhaps more used to reading and writing musical notation.[84] The performance contexts of lyric are largely unrecorded and thus difficult to reconstruct, but the absence of written music does not preclude musical performance of them.

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[82] For this argument, cf. Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics,* p. 95; J. Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London, 1961), pp.8 & 43.
[83] Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics*, p. 101.
[84] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, pp.307-8.

1.2.4 'Sey thou stronge strumpeth, ware hastu bene?': The Maiden Outside the House[85]

Now, having explored the possible readership and performance possibilities of the lyrics in

Caius 383/603, I will examine the two betrayed maidens' laments it contains more closely.

A Midsummer Day's Dance (*IMEV* 1849) opens with a young woman who, while leading

the Midsummer dance, catches the eye of the holy water clerk.[86] There were originally four

distinct minor clerical orders with different duties.[87] The holy water clerk (*acquaebaialu*s)

was responsible for travelling the parish on Sundays to distribute water that had been

blessed by the priest. The clerk was unpaid but might receive gifts from the parishioners.

When he was not performing his duties he supported himself through work or engaged in

study.[88] Peter Heath notes that by the time of the Reformation, the four distinct orders had

evolved into the catch-all title of 'parish clerk' who was responsible for many duties

beyond the distribution of holy water. These might include preparing the church for

services, reading and singing, assisting in the bell-ringing, and responsibility for the lights,

books, and vestments.[89]

 In *A Midsummer Day's Dance*, the holy water clerk dances with the young woman,

entices her to his house with gifts, and then spends the night with her. She returns home in

the early morning light to her angry 'dame' (either her mother or her mistress), who

upbraids and beats her, and the poem ends with her unhappy realisation that she is

pregnant; 'my gurdul aros, my wombe wax out' (st.9, ll.1-3). At first glance the poem

seems simple, the characters are formulaic, almost fabliaux-like - clerical seducer and

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[85] *Ibid.*, p.277.
[86] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, pp.276-77. Further quotations are referenced by stanza number and line number in brackets, e.g. st.2, ll,3-4).
[87] P. Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969), p.14.
[88] P.H. Ditchfield, *The Parish Clerk* (London, 1913), pp.28-29, 36.
[89] Heath, *The English Parish Clergy*, pp.19-20.

sexually-available young woman - and the ending appears to moralise the actions of the young woman by presenting her pregnancy and implied social disgrace as the consequences of her sexual activity. The lyric is actually heavily structured. It consists of nine stanzas of five lines each (eight of which are rhymed aaaab), and a five-line burden (rhymed aabab). The final line of each stanza is 'thout y on no gyle' and is followed by the repetition of the burden:

> Alas, ales, þe wyle!
> Thout Y on no gyle,
>   So have Y god chau*n*ce.
> Ala*s*, ales, þe wyle
>   Th*at* eu*er* Y cowde dau*n*ce! (burden, ll.1-5)[90]

The burden plays on the common medieval use of dancing as a metaphor for love or sex (i.e. 'the olde daunce').[91] This is fitting since it is the young woman's dancing which first attracts the clerk to her, leading to their later sexual encounter. Her satisfaction in her skilled dancing (the 'smale trippus') and position as leader of the dance contrasts to her later dismay at her pregnancy. The repetition of the burden, with its protestations of ignorance ('thout Y on no gyle') becomes increasingly hollow as the direction in which the poem is heading becomes ever more obvious. There are two possibilities for how this section of the poem might be read. Either we take the maiden's claim to be ignorant of the consequences of the clerk's interest in her at face value, or we consider it unbelievable and almost ridiculous when juxtaposed with her narration of entering the clerk's chamber, and her appreciation of his sexual prowess; 'Yt was the murgust nyt [merriest night] that euer Y cam ynne' (st.6, l.4). We either end up with a knowing maiden, who is adopting the pose of

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[90] The burden is written out in full at the end of the first stanza. After the second stanza, the repetition of the burden is indicated by 'þout y on no g' or 'þout y'.
[91] For this usage, see Chaucer, 'The General Prologue', l. 476, 'The Physician's Tale', l. 79; *Troilus and Criseyde* 3.695, (*RC,* pp.31, 191, 523).

innocence to elicit sympathy, or a knowing reader, who is more aware than the protagonist of the narrative imperatives of the genre and what inevitably happens to such young women when they associate with young clerks. It may seen unbelievable that a young woman could be ignorant of the possible consequences of going alone with a man to his home, but the explanation given by a young servant in the London letter-books for her involvement in prostitution makes use of the idea. In 1385, Johanna, servant to Elizabeth Moring, was brought before the Mayor and Aldermen in the Guildhall.[92] She testified that her mistress had ordered Johanna to accompany a chaplain to his room at night. The ostensible purpose was that Johanna was carrying a lantern in order to light his way, but the chaplain and Moring intended that Johanna should spend the night in his room. Johanna did spend the night, but claimed to know nothing of this plan in advance. Johanna had reasons to adopt a pose of innocence, given that she had spent two nights with the chaplain, and on the second occasion had stolen a book from him, but it would have been pointless to use this defence if it was not at least potentially believable that her naivety was abused.

A Midsummer Day's Dance is divided into three distinct movements. The first three stanzas narrate the maiden's dance, the clerk's flirtation with her, and culminate with their kiss. Stanzas four to six tell of their agreement to rendezvous at the clerk's room and conclude with them having sex. The final group of three stanzas narrates the subsequent night spent together, the young woman's return home and encounter with her dame, and her realization of the consequences in the form of pregnancy. Stanza six serves as the climax of the poem, and is highlighted by a break in the rhyme scheme. In all the other stanzas the first four lines have a single rhyme (aaaa) but stanza six instead breaks into two couplets

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[92] H.T. Riley (ed.), *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth centuries* (London, 1868), pp.484-486.

(bbcc). Until this point in the poem, the flirtation of Jak the clerk and the young woman builds tension, but the stanzas which follow undercut their 'murgust nyt' with the subsequent events and consequences. This change in rhyme disrupts the expectations of the reader regarding the poem's form which have been constructed in the previous five stanzas, while simultaneously presenting a narrative development that is the anticipated conclusion of the flirtation to this point. This combination of formal change and narrative predictability points to more sophistication than this type of poem is often credited with.

The maiden herself is an intriguing combination of willingness to transgress and to enjoy it and moralizing regret. The poem opens by emphasizing her willingness to display her body to the gaze of the clerk and her enjoyment of being the centre of attention as she leads the dance, 'for the chesoun of me he com to the ryng' (st.2, l.2). The second and third stanzas, where Jak stands on the narrator's foot, winks at her, and kisses her serve as foreplay, and when they turn the dance together 'in a narw place' it foreshadows the other dance they will soon engage in, in his bed. The clerk is represented as predatory, circling, first approaching from outside the ring of the dance, then joining the dancers, then getting close enough to stand on her foot, then close enough to kiss her and whisper in her ear. After this they move completely away from each other, only to repeat the movement after evensong in private. However, the maiden is willing to accept the gloves, and accompany Jak to his room, where she proves an enthusiastic and appreciative sexual partner.[93] Her protestations of ignorance ('thout Y on no gyle') and implied resistance ('from hym mytte Y nat go') can be read as her knowing lip service to the discourse of pre-marital virginity

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[93] Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle* (Oxford, 1992), p.239. Goldberg notes that gloves were a common gift exchanged when marriages were formed, to represent the formation of a contract. The choice of gloves as a gift in this lyric may be meant to imply that the maiden has justification to regard Jak's actions as a prelude to or form of betrothal. This would reinforce her claims of having been deceived.

and an attempt to illustrate the virility of the clerk (*passim*; st.5, l.4). Directly after this she

says that 'Jak and yc wenten to bedde', demonstrating that whatever resistance she had has

been overcome and she now consents (st.6, l.2). From the perspective of the poem, the

resisting maiden is truly sexually desirous; all she needs is the skilled attentions of the clerk

to convince her to stay all night:

> Al nyght ther he made me to dwelle;
> Of y trewe we haddun yserued the reaggeth [shaggiest] deuel of helle (st.7, ll.2-3).[94]

Jak is not content with one sexual encounter; 'tho he rong the bell', he insists she

stay all night, only letting her return home 'at prime' the next morning (st.7, l.1; st.8, l.1).

The *MED* does not testify to any other examples of 'ringing the bell' being used as an

innuendo for orgasm, but it is difficult to see what else could be meant here. The phallus

that appears on many late medieval pewter badges is commonly depicted with a bell.[95]

Ringing the bells for divine service could be part of the duties expected of the parish

clerk.[96] The writer is clearly referring to the clerk's success in taking the maiden's virginity.

The use of this phrase is particularly fitting however because it is commonly used to refer

to the spreading of news or scandal, particularly that which might damage a reputation. For

example, Chaucer's Criseyde laments that 'rolled shal I ben on many a tonge! Thorughout

the world my belle shal be ronge!' (Book 5, l.1061-2)[97] The maiden's indiscretion, although

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[94] *MED*: **ragged(e)**, adj.
[95] H.J.E. van Beuningen and A.M. Koldeweij (eds.), *Heilig en Profaan 1000 Laat-Middeleeuwse Insignes* (Cothen, Netherlands, 1993), pp.260-261; H.J.E. van Beuningen, A.M. Koldeweij and D. Kicken, *Heilig en Profaan 2 1200 Laatmiddeleeuwse Insignes uit openbare en particuliere collecties* (Cothen, Netherlands, 2001), p.411. Malcolm Jones highlights a badge depicting a wild man and woman engaged in intercourse, in which the woman holds a bell in one hand, 'which would presumably jangle loudly given the vigorous intercourse suggested by the badge'. Jones suggests this may be connected to the expression 'ring the bell' referring to sexual climax (M. Jones, 'The Sexual and Secular Badges', in Beuningen et al, *Heilig en Profaan 2*, pp.196-206 (p.199, a photograph of the badge is on p.408). Examples of the belled phallus badge found in London are referred to in B. Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 2010), p.317.
[96] Heath, *The English Parish Clergy*, p.20.
[97] *MED:* **belle** (n.(1)), 9b. Cf. **ringen** (v.(2)), 4 a; Chaucer, *Trolius and Criseyde*, 5:1061-2 (*RC*, p.574).

it is now between her and her clerical lover, will soon become common knowledge. Although she attempts to 'ber it priuey wyle that Y mouth' [while I may], the evidence of her own body will soon give her away through her pregnancy, 'Euel yspunne yern, euer it wole out' (st.9, ll.2 & 4).

The addition that their sexual encounter continued for the rest of the night plays into the archetype of the sexually voracious clerk and his attractiveness to women. Holy water clerk was a position associated with youth. If he chose to pursue an ecclesiastical career, Jak would expect to advance to a more senior position, but equally he might marry and never progress to major orders. His job as holy water clerk is repeatedly mentioned in the poem, not because of specific attributes of the job, but to mark him out as a young cleric. It may also be a form of innuendo, as it appears to be in the case from Nottingham that I discussed in the introduction to my thesis. The holy water clerk might be granted access to the house in the course of performing his duties, but was he spreading more than holy water once he gained entry? The transgression enabled by the clerk is contrasted to the figure of the dame, who reinforces the control of family and household over the young woman's behaviour. The clerk tests household boundaries, the dame reinforces them. The response of the dame makes it clear that the reputation of the household is tied up with the public fame and sexual availability of its female members. The young woman's choice to display her body in the dance and stay out all night endangers this reputation, 'Sey, thou stronge strumpeth, ware hastu bene? / Thy trippyng and thy dauncyng wel it wol be sene' (st.8, ll.3-4).

The second betrayed maiden's lament in the manuscript is *The Serving Maid's Holiday*, which proceeds along very similar lines.[98] In the poem, a servant girl has left her chores undone as she anticipates attracting the attention of 'Jakke' at the evening's 'ale-scoth'. The scot-ale was a community gathering at which ale was sold to raise money, often for the benefit of the parish church or to aid those in need of charity, but here it serves as a pretext for flirtation between the servant and Jakke. Although ales had a charitable purpose, they could also be associated with the trouble caused by public drunkenness. Judith Bennett has argued that women were particularly active in connection with these ales, both as organizers, guests, and beneficiaries.[99] The Jakke in this poem is not identified specifically as a clerk, but it may be that the name was intended to serve as short-hand for the stereotype of a young clerk. Such figures are invariably called 'Jak' or 'Jankin' in these poems, just as members of the clergy who are older and in major orders are usually called 'John'.

The dame appears again as an instrument of social control. In this case she is only mentioned by the servant as the person who would normally have oversight of the moral behaviour of the household staff and does not appear in the poem herself. The dame's control over the household is temporarily suspended as a consequence of the holiday: 'Of my dame stant me non eyghe', 'Durst Y nat my dame telle / Wat me betydde' (st.6, l.3; st.10, ll.9-10). The addition of alcohol to the narrative adds a dimension of satire on gluttony as well as lechery to the poem. Jakke loosens the servant's inhibitions by making sure to 'sowse wel my wroch' with ale. (st.7, l.3) This goes directly against the advice in poems such as *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, which counsels the young

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[98] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, pp.275-276.
[99] J.M. Bennett, 'Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 134 (1992): 19-41 (pp.35 & 40).

woman to avoid drunkenness as shameful ('Wherever thou comme at ale other wyne, / Take not to myche, and leve be tyme; / For mesure therinne, it is no herme, / And drounke to be, it is thi schame', ll.69-72).[100] The word 'sowse', means to drench, plunge or pickle, and 'wroch' (wrot) is generally used in connection with animals to refer to the 'snout'. The use of these two words in conjunction suggests both an excess of liquid and indulgence in alcohol and also establishes an unflattering and animalistic portrait of the young woman.[101] It may even be likening her to a pig, an animal that can, Jeremy Goldberg has argued, be associated with gluttony and lechery. Goldberg cites an ordinance that draws an analogy between pigs and prostitutes based on their transgressive wandering and threat to the good moral order of the city.[102] The poem ends with sex which, unlike *A Midsummer Day's Dance*, appears mostly unenjoyable to the woman, and a subsequent pregnancy.

> In he pult, and out he drow,
> And euer yc lay on hym y-low:
> By Godus deth, thou dest me wow (st.9, ll.1-3).

Based on the conclusions I have drawn about the manuscript's readership, these two betrayed maidens' laments appear to have been written and read initially in a university context. If this was in one of the university colleges, it would be easy to make the assumption that it was a mainly male and somewhat 'clerical' context. This is one possibility, but the discussion above regarding the complex environment of the fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century university opens up other reading contexts. Many students were still lodging outside the colleges, either in halls that were under less disciplinary control

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[100] *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, p.220.
[101] *MED* : **sousen (v.)** (a); **wrot (n.)**. 'Ch' is commonly used in the poem where a 't' would be more standard, particularly at the end of words: eg. 'wroch' (wrot), 'ale-schoch' (ale-scot), 'yech' (yet). 'V' is also commonly substituted for 'f': eg. 'vlech' (flet, i.e. floor), 'vond' (fond, i.e. found).
[102] P.J.P Goldberg, 'Pigs and Prostitutes: Streetwalking in Comparative Perspective', in K.J. Lewis, N.J. Menuge and K.M. Phillips (eds.), *Young Medieval Women* (Thrupp (Stroud), 1999), pp.172-193 (p.173).

than the colleges or residing in the houses of townspeople. This introduces the possibility that men and women unconnected with the university could be part of the audience for these lyrics in a household context. Even if the lyrics' primary audience was male, this does not prevent the lyrics from telling us about the behaviour of young men and women, the strictures governing this behaviour, and how they were perceived, but this behaviour is described from a male perspective, despite the narrator being female. On one level, the transgressive content of the lyrics operates against a background in which the forces of authority, in this case the university, were attempting to impose order and regulate behaviour. They celebrate the sexual virility of the young clerk and his disregard of household boundaries and strictures against pre-martial sex. In the end, it is only the young woman who is punished for her indiscretion.

1.3 'With the seid child, quid faciam?': Responses to Illegitimate Pregnancy[103]

The Wily Clerk (*IMEV* 3594), another betrayed maiden's lament, relies on some of the same tropes and tells us more about late medieval concerns about illegitimacy and premarital pregnancy, as it contains several striking references to what a young woman might do when she found herself pregnant.[104] This lyric is in a manuscript that can less easily be placed within an all male context, meaning there is a possibility it may have been heard or read by young women themselves. *The Wily Clerk* appears in Cambridge, St. John's College MS S.54 (also known as St. John's College MS 259 in James' catalogue and hereafter referred

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[103] Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, p.349.
[104] Greene (ed.) *Early English Carols*, p.277.

to as St. John's S.54).[105] This manuscript dates from the late fifteenth century and is

composed entirely of carols, the majority of which are religious, mainly relating to the

Nativity. The appearance of the manuscript is completely different from Caius 383/603. It

is small (146mm x 105mm), extremely worn and enclosed in a contemporary vellum

wrapper. The outer leaves are badly damaged, with only fragments remaining, but the

manuscript seems to have originally contained sixteen leaves. This might suggest that it

was used frequently, by someone who had cause to sing carols often and it was designed to

be carried around.[106] The word that jumps most easily to mind is 'minstrel', however, as

Taylor's work has demonstrated, knowing what types of manuscripts minstrels read and

performed from is not a simple task.[107] Given the scarcity of surviving manuscript music

from this period and the likelihood that many performances took place in an informal,

domestic setting, it is perhaps more likely that these carols were collected by an individual

who performed them as an amateur, rather than a professional 'minstrel'.

In their recent work on the manuscript's physical appearance, Daniel Wakelin and

Christopher Burlinson have gone further, noting the frequent changes between the two

scribes (A + B) and the changes of ink even within the work of one scribe. Wakelin and

Burlinson conclude that this implies that the two scribes engaged in multiple short stints of

copying, in an environment in which this copying was frequently interrupted, and that they

were working in close proximity to each other so the manuscript could be easily passed

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[105] M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of St John's College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1913), pp.294-5. The entire manuscript has now been photographed by the University of Cambridge and is available at http://scriptorium.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/images/index.php?ms=S.54&page=1. Accessed 17 April 2010.
[106] All subsequent description of the manuscript is based on the description available at the Scriptorium website: http://scriptorium.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/fulldescription.php?ms=S.54, and on my own observations.
[107] Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p.65. Cf. note 28 of this chapter for Taylor's argument.

between them.[108] Wakelin suggests that they were 'members of some steady community such as a religious house, school, household or lay guild', but this is a rather sweeping statement.[109] A communal environment would be just the place in which a manuscript of carols would be of use, but the variety of these communities available in late medieval England does not allow us to conclude much about who constituted the manuscript's audience. The manuscript's physical appearance suggests that it was compiled by scribes with a particular interest in and use for carols and that it was particularly suited to being transported from place to place, which the damage it has sustained seems to support.

The narrative of *The Wily Clerk* is basic, providing little more than what is required by the genre: a young woman meets a clerk, he persuades her to have sex with him, and she ends up pregnant. In *A Midsummer Day's Dance*, Jak persuaded the young woman to go with him by whispering in her ear, but in this poem much more is made of the clerk's skill with language. Almost the entirety of the first two stanzas is devoted to a description of his attempts to persuade her. He is 'wylly', he asks her to listen to him and heed his counsel, and she argues that he is greatly skilled with 'gramery' (st.1, l.2, st.2, l.1). The meanings of this word included 'grammar', referring to his learning as a clerk, but also 'magic' or 'enchantment' giving his eloquence an almost bewitching quality and presenting the maiden as unable to resist him, 'to warne hys wyll had I no may'.[110] Like Jak the holy water clerk, this man persuades young women to fall into bed with him through the power of his tongue. When the maiden says 'I trow he cowd of gramery', since 'cowd' could mean

[108] D. Wakelin and C. Burlinson, 'Evidence for the Construction of Quires in a Fifteenth-Century English Manuscript', *The Library, 7th series* 9 (2008): 383-396 (p.394). Cf. Wakelin's article which is available alongside the description of the manuscript on the Scriptorium website: 'Cambridge, St. John's College Library, MS S.54'.
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *MED* : **gramarie** (n.) 1a.

'knows how to do' as well as 'has knowledge of', it is not difficult to see how, using tone of voice and gesture, a performer of this lyric could convert it into a knowing and anticipatory aside by the young woman on her perception of the clerk's likely sexual prowess (st.2, l.1).[111] Through making different performance choices, the singer of this lyric could have us conspiring with the clerk and laughing at the gullibility of the maiden, or playing along with the maiden's pose of innocence, while knowing that she is really not as ignorant as she appears. It could be enjoyed by a group of men, egging on the clerk, or read as a counsel to young women to avoid the sexual advances of clerics. In the final line of the first stanza, the clerk asks her 'hys cownsell all for to lene' (st.1, l.4). The *MED* glosses the meaning of 'lene' in this quotation as 'conceal' (i.e. the verb 'leinen') but the spelling allows for confusion with to 'lie down' (the verb 'lenen'). This ambiguity is fitting since the clerk's counsel will quickly lead to the two of them being 'browt un … the shete' (st.3, l.1).[112] Greene, in his edition of this text tentatively inserts a letter here, making it 'le[r]ne', but this has no basis in the manuscript. Greene appears to have read the unclosed upper portion of the first 'e' as an abbreviation for 'er', but it seems to me to be simply a careless rendition of the letter by the scribe. James and Macaulay concur in their transcription of the whole manuscript, where they note it as 'lene'.[113]

The difficulties regarding this word aside, the fact that the potential for double-entendre occurs elsewhere in the poem seems to imply that 'lene' is not a misreading or scribal error. Neil Cartlidge, whose article is the most recent assessment of the betrayed maidens' laments as a group, engages in a provocative analysis of this lyric which focuses

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[111] Compare, for example, the different uses of 'cowd' / 'koude' in Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', l.3193 (*RC*, p.68) and 'The General Prologue', l.652 (*RC*, p.33).

[112] *MED:* **leinen** (v.), b. (to conceal); **lēnen** (v.(1)), 3.

[113] Greene (ed.) *Early English Carols,* p.277; M.R. James and G.C. Macaulay, 'Fifteenth Century Carols and Other Pieces', *Modern Language Review* 8 (1913): 68-87.

on the use of ambiguous language in the poem. He presents several instances in which he

argues that the maiden's protestations of weakness in the face of the clerk's linguistic

onslaught are cleverly undercut through the author's use of ambiguous language. Cartlidge

reads the burden of this carol as a masterpiece of ambiguity which can be seen to imply the

possibility of reintegration into the community for the sexually compromised young

woman. Where most commentators have read, 'A dere God, qwat I am fayn!- / For I am

madyn now gane' (burden) as a lament for lost virginity (i.e. reading 'gane' as a form of

'gone'), Cartlidge is right in pointing out that this interpretation, while it may seem to fit

the general style of the genre ('lament for past mistakes') makes no sense when the actual

words are considered. If this is an expression of regret, why does the narrator say she is

'fayn', since this 'can only be read as an expression of satisfaction, or even joy'?[114]

Cartlidge reads 'gane' here as an abbreviated form of '[a]gain', that is 'I am now a maiden

again'. I agree with Cartlidge that this word presents a puzzle. The language of the poem is

problematic and seems to conflict with the expected resolution based on the narrative. Both

'again' and 'gone' are grammatically possible as readings of 'gane', but 'gone' seems more

likely.[115] The poem's strength is that both readings are possible. If this happened once it

could be explained away as the result of variation in spelling and dialect. The fact that the

poem has three separate examples of words that can be read in more than one way (lene,

lete, gane) suggests that it is intentional. In a poem of this type the young woman would be

expected to display regret and contrition, not express that she is 'fayn'. The only example

in the *MED* to use the construction 'maydyn gone' refers to the state of remaining a

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[114] Cartlidge, 'Alas, I go with Chylde', p.396-7.
[115] Cf. the examples provided for *MED*: **gōn** (v.).

maiden, not the act of losing virginity.[116] So in the space of two lines, we have the girl

appealing to God, 'A dere God' which suggests regret, using the word 'fayn' which

suggests happiness, and employing a phrase more often used for preserved virginity when

her own is clearly lost. Rather than being a simplistic form in which tired archetypes

recycle a familiar plot, the motivations of the protagonist in this lyric are impenetrable.

> The final stanza continues in this vein:

> I xall [shall] sey to man and page
> That I haue bene of pylgrymage;
> Now wyll I not lete for no rage[117]
> With me a clerk for to pley (st.4, ll.1-4).[118]

Cartlidge argues that this solution may open the door to further sexual transgression. The

final two lines of *The Wily Clerk* reinforce the potential for a dual reading. When the

maiden says she will not 'lete' a clerk 'to pleyn' with her again, the most obvious reading is

that she has had a close call, and will not engage in such transgressive and potentially

disastrous behaviour again. However, 'lete' as well as the obvious meaning of 'allow' can

also mean 'prevent'. So the line could also be read as 'I will not prevent a clerk from

playing with me again'.[119] In the context of the lament genre, the first reading, that she will

not allow this to happen again, is more likely, particularly when 'lete' is used earlier in the

poem to mean 'allow' ('Of all hys wyll I hym lete', st.3, l.2). However, when one considers

that the maiden has escaped all infamy or punishment as a result of her actions, the second

reading, the idea that she jubilantly got away with it and would be tempted to play with a

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[116] *MED*: **gōn** (v.), 15c (d).

[117] *MED*: **rāǧe** (n.), 1a, madness, insanity, but also 6, a fit of carnal lust or sexual desire.

[118] Literally 'to play' but can also refer to sexual intercourse (*MED*: **pleien**, 2a). I have followed Cartlidge's edition of the poem here. Greene reads the last word of line three as "q[w]age", but the sense still seems to be 'Now will I not allow any madness to lead me into playing with a clerk'. See *MED*, **rāǧe** (n.), 1 & 5.

[119] Cartlidge, 'Alas I Go With Chylde', p.397. *MED:* **letten** (v.) (to hinder, to prevent); **lēten** (v.), 8 & 9 (to allow).

clerk again haunts the edges of the text. When considering young women getting away with sexual transgression, it is worth remembering, that in 'The Miller's Tale', the adulterous wife, Alison, is the only one who escapes unscathed, while both the clerks and her husband are punished.[120] In *The Wily Clerk*, the most obvious reading of the poem is the one which emphasises regret and determination to learn from past mistakes, but this does not prevent the alternative reading of resourcefulness and hints at further transgression from existing alongside it. This potential double reading opens up the possibility for a female audience to respond in ways that go beyond absorbing the ostensibly didactic message of the poem. The playfulness of the young woman's attitude, and her celebration at escaping punishment may have been shared by the women who heard or read the poem. It also provides an excuse for the young male reader to enjoy the clerk's antics without dwelling unduly on the consequences of his sexual relationship with an unmarried woman. It results in pregnancy, but the ruse of pilgrimage allows this pregnancy to be dealt with without social consequences for either party.

Susan Signe Morrison describes pilgrimage as a transgressive space, into which 'sexual looseness' might be displaced and dealt with.[121] Pilgrimage was often presented as, and probably was in fact 'a major pretext for travel'.[122] Of course there were people who undertook pilgrimage for truly pious reasons, but there must have been many who saw it as a temporary escape from the pressures, responsibilities and rules of home life. The implication here seems to be that the young woman will go away and have her child secretly, using the devotional excuse of pilgrimage, then return to the community. She

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[120] Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', ll.3840-3854 (*RC,* p.77).
[121] S.S. Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety and Public Performance* (London, 2000), p. 114.
[122] D.Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage* (Basingstoke, 2002), p.93.

appears to be intending to conceal the pregnancy completely. The apparently illogical joy of the burden becomes a celebration of the fact that once it is over she is able to return to her previous life – now she is a 'maiden' again, at least in the eyes of the community. As long as no one knows about her pregnancy, she can be reintegrated and, despite not actually being a virgin, she can at least reclaim her 'social maidenhood'.[123] Rather than the spiritual benefits that were the stated aim of pilgrimage, she uses it to 'heal' her reputation. Although she laments her pregnancy, she is far from being a social outcast because of it and will continue to play the part of a 'maiden', an outward performance of virginity, which does not necessarily depend on physical reality.

This reading adds an extra layer of complicity between the teller and the audience. Listeners are now privy to the 'maiden's' secret; what appears to be a very public declaration, in song, is recast as something that the young woman and the audience know, but is different from the story that she tells 'man and page'. Rather than a straightforward lament, there is an undercurrent of relief that she got away with it. Might female hearers interpret this lyric as a warning against transgressive behaviour, or react with a knowing smile when a young woman in their village said she had 'bene of pylgremage'? Could this be an allusion to a common innuendo regarding illegitimate pregnancy?

The Book of Margery Kempe depicts a confrontation between Margery, who has just returned from pilgrimage to Rome, and an anchorite who was previously her supporter but has heard bad reports of her behaviour. His accusations towards her when they meet seem to play on the idea that pilgrimage could be used as a pretext for illicit sexual behaviour, and specifically that returning pilgrims would attempt to hide illegitimate pregnancies: 'He wolcomyd hir hom schortly and askyd wher sche had don hir chylde, the whech was

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[123] Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms', p.257.

begotyn and born whil sche was owte, as he had herd seyde'.[124] Margery denies the accusations, stating 'I dede nevyr sithyn I went owte wherthorw I schulde have a childe', but the exchange indicates that the connection of pilgrimage and pregnancy had a wider cultural currency than as a genre-specific trope of the betrayed maidens' laments.[125]

Attempts to conceal illegitimate pregnancy were not unknown. Alice Ridyng came before the Church court of Lincoln in 1517 and confessed that she had borne a child to the local chaplain. She killed the child soon after birth and buried it 'in a dung heap in her father's orchard'.[126] Alice had told no one of her pregnancy and had managed to conceal her condition from her parents. Perhaps, like the narrator of *The Wily Clerk,* she thought she had gotten away with it. However, she was ultimately unsuccessful; the 'women and honest wives' of her community, suspecting she had been pregnant, took her by force and 'inspected her belly and her breasts by which they knew for certain that she had given birth'.[127] The physical evidence of her body thwarted Alice Ridyng's attempt to hang on to the community's perception of her as a maiden, but by going 'on pilgrimage', by removing herself from the judgement of the community, the narrator of our lyric might be attempting to circumvent this kind of local surveillance.

This case and the betrayed maidens' laments may point towards a hardening of attitudes regarding illegitimacy and premarital pregnancy in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. All the manuscripts containing betrayed maidens' laments are from this period. The transgression and subsequent despair of the young woman would make no

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[124] B.A.Windeatt (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe: annotated edition* (Cambridge, 2004), p.216.
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] P.J.P Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England, c.1275-1525: Documentary Sources* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 119-20.
[127] *Ibid.*

sense in a culture where illegitimacy and premarital pregnancy were unstigmatised.[128] In this sense, the lyrics are very different from the fabliaux in which they have their roots and which had their heyday several centuries earlier. The punishments meted out in the fabliaux are not only a consequence of sexual misbehaviour. Either the sexual transgressors are punished for adultery or the wronged party may be punished for gullibility. The punishments range from castration to loss of reputation to financial loss. Pregnancy is not usually among these punishments and it is not even introduced as a possibility. In the betrayed maidens' laments it is an inevitability, and becoming pregnant *matters* in the world of these poems. It is implied that it leads to loss of social standing for the woman and her household unless it can be concealed. Another of the betrayed maidens' laments, *In wyldernes / Ther founde I Besse*, which appears in London, British Library, MS Additional 5665 (the Ritson MS) seems also to gesture towards a young woman's attempts to hide her pregnancy when she is abandoned by her lover:

> Now may I wynd
> Withoute a fryend
> With hert onfayn;
> In ferre cuntre
> Men wene I be
> A mayde agayn. (st.5, ll.1-6)
>
> Men tellyth yn town
> When clothis be downe
> The smocke ys hyd. (st.6, ll.3-6).[129]

The final two lines quoted above appear to be an allusion to bulky outer clothing being used to conceal what is underneath, usually the 'smocke' or undergarment, but in this case also

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[128] Cf. for example the case of Agnes Plumridge (1520), who was ordered to do penance by the bishop of Lincoln for becoming pregnant by her husband before their marriage. In this case even the subsequent marriage was not sufficient to erase the stain of the previous fornication. Agnes was ordered to go round her neighbours on the feast of the Purification of Mary carrying a candle (*Ibid.*, p.121).
[129] Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, p.347. *MED*: **smok** (n.).

the growing evidence of pregnancy. It is significant that speculation about what lies beneath

the outer clothing is placed in the mouths of the community, 'men tellyth in town'. The

young woman has to find a way to counteract the public talk about her condition by moving

to somewhere where she is unknown. The importance of reputation in shaping a person's

social standing is emphasised by the implication that by silencing the talk of her pregnancy,

she can attempt to erase it, 'in ferre cuntre / Men wene I be / A mayde agayn' (st.5, ll.3-6).

If no one talks about it, it is as if it did not happen.

The speaker of *Up Y arose in verno tempore*, which also appears in the Ritson MS,

contemplates a more violent solution to her problem:

> With the seid child, *quid faciam*? [what should I do?]
> Shall Y hyt kepe *vel inferficiam*? [or destroy it?]
> Yf Y sley hyt, *quo loco fugiam*? [where shall I flee to?]
> I shall lose God *et vitam eternam*. [and eternal life] (st.4, ll.1-4).[130]

It is worth noting that although this is a macaronic lyric, it is not necessary to understand

the Latin in order to understand the narrative. The Latin expands upon the English, but the

basic elements of pregnancy, panic, and contemplation of infanticide are apparent from the

English alone. This is quite unlike those macaronic lyrics which rely on mockery of women

who are ignorant of the fact that the Latin section of the poem is designed to insult them.[131]

Cartlidge suggest that the Latin may be used because it creates a 'greater rhetorical impact'

and emphasises the seriousness of the girl's situation.[132]

The Wily Clerk, *Up Y Arose in verno tempore*, and *In wyldernes / Ther founde I*

Besse are quite different from the two betrayed maidens' laments that appeared in Caius

383/603. In those, the maiden's only response was to lament impotently her predicament

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[130] *Ibid.*, p.349.
[131] Cf. 'Abuse of Women', in which verses in praise of women alternate with the burden 'of all creatures
women be best: / *Cuius contrarium verum est*' (Robbins (ed.), *Secular Lyrics*, p.35).
[132] Cartlidge, 'Alas , I Go With Chylde', p.399.

and anticipate her loss of reputation. In these lyrics, the protagonist is similarly dismayed at her pregnancy, but appears to be actively seeking to deal with it in a way that preserves her social status by secretly disposing of the child. These lyrics are more than cynical productions designed to emphasise and ridicule the gullibility and promiscuity of these women. Although they were most likely written by men and not primarily intended for women as an audience, they may provide a window into one of the ways in which premarital sexuality and illegitimate pregnancy may have been dealt with in late medieval England. At the very least they give us access to a powerful cultural fantasy about the responses of young women to unwanted pregnancy.

1.4 The Sacred and Obscene: Innuendo Around The Annunciation in Jolly Jankin.

Like St John's S.54, London, British Library, MS Sloane 2593 (hereafter Sloane 2593) is composed almost totally of lyrics and carols, but there are striking differences in appearance and composition. Sloane 2593 is a much more capacious manuscript from the first half of the fifteenth century containing thirty-seven folios.[133] Wakelin points out that despite the manuscript being large, the carols are transcribed in a uniform way throughout and by the same hand.[134] It appears to have been planned as a carol anthology rather than simply a collection of items that were assembled over time in a haphazard way. The majority of the carols are on devotional topics or events, with a particular focus on the Nativity. In this section of my argument I concentrate on the importance of the Annunciation to understanding the betrayed maidens' laments and the ways in which the realisation of pregnancy for the young women in these lyrics forms a counterpart to the

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[133] These include notes, medical recipes and scribbles (Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols,* pp.306-7).
[134] Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', pp.29-30.

Annunciation that allows their authors to engage in obscene play around the concept of the virgin birth. In the remainder of this chapter I will examine the lyric *Jolly Jankin* and, by noting the use this carol makes of the structure of the mass and observing some correspondences between this poem and an Annunciation lyric in the same manuscript, I will demonstrate that there was not a clear line between sacred and secular, or even between reverent and obscene.

Jolly Jankin is another lyric concerning the 'clerical seducer', copied on fol.34r.[135] Boklund-Lagopolou classes sixty-three of the seventy four items in the manuscript as religious or didactic, leaving eleven items that are mostly comic.[136] *Jolly Jankin* is narrated from the perspective of a young woman, as she watches her lover Jankin go about his duties during the mass, and concludes with her lamenting her pregnancy using phrases from the liturgy. The asides that follow Alison's descriptions of Jankin make it clear that she is satisfied with more than his singing abilities ('yyt me thinkyt it dos me good: I payid for his cote', st.4, l.2). *Jolly Jankin* is structured according to the stages of the mass. Each stanza narrates a part, first the procession, then the singing of the Office, the reading of the Epistle, the *Sanctus*, the *Agnus Dei*, and the closing phrases of the mass. Each stanza begins with Alison's description and appreciation of Jankin's current actions ('Jankyn red the Pystyl ful fayre and ful wel', st.3, l.1, 'Jankyn at the Sanctus crakit a merie note', st.4, l.1). Although she narrates the poem, he is the focus of attention, of her gaze, and five out of the seven stanzas begin with his name. Based on the activities Jankin performs during the mass, he appears to be a subdeacon. This was an office that occupied a liminal space between major and minor orders, and it was somewhat ambiguous whether men such as Jankin were

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[135] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, p.278.
[136] Boklund-Lagopolou, ''I have a yong suster'', pp.64-66.

enjoined to celibacy or not.[137] However the use of the diminutive 'Jankin', rather than

'John', suggests youth. He is certainly not a priest.

The poem juxtaposes the discourses of the liturgy and sex, most strikingly by the

word play between the homophones 'eleison' (the part of the office Jankin sings) and

'aleyson' (the name of his lover). This pun first occurs in the burden, and is repeated after

every stanza.

> 'Kyrie, so kyrie,'
> Jankyn syngyt merie,
> With aleyson.

Just as the *kyrie eleison* allows a penitent to ask mercy of Christ, the lover might ask mercy

of his lady. The metaphorical link between Alison and *eleison*, between singing and sex,

established in the burden, structures the rest of the lyric. The 'religion of love' is by no

means unique to this lyric.[138] It is present in the climax to the *Romance of the Rose*, where

the pilgrim-lover comes to adore the 'reliquary' containing the rose, representing the

genitals of a young woman. The act of adoring relics is used as a metaphor for sex. Oxford,

Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16 (ff.314r.-317v.) contains a Lover's Mass (*IMEV*

Supplement 4186), which uses the stages of the mass to structure a poem in which the lover

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[137] Jankin reads the Epistle and sings the Office, duties that the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* ascribes to the subdeacon (T.J. Riley, 'sub-deacon', in Editorial Staff of the Catholic University of America (eds.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* (Washington D.C., 1967) 13: 756. Cf. P. Heath, *English Parish Clergy,* pp.14-15). It is difficult to be certain about this however, the lines between various orders are blurred and duties might be performed by different people depending on the size of the ecclesiastical establishment. The argument that the status of subdeacon was an ambiguous one is based on personal communication with Patricia Cullum. Cullum suggests that the issue was debated and though the official position was probably that subdeacon was a major order, subdeacons themselves may sometimes have considered themselves only in minor orders.
[138] Alcuin Blamires states that this expression was coined by C.S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1936), p.2, pp.18-22 (in A. Blamires, 'The "Religion of Love" in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Medieval Visual Art', in K. J. Höltgen, P. M. Daly and W. Lottes (eds.), *Word and Visual Imagination: Studies in the Interaction of English Literature and the Visual Arts* (Nuremburg, 1988), pp.11-31 (p.11)).

promises to serve the god of Love.[139] In *The Lover's Mass*, Cupid occupies the role of God, Genius is his bishop, Venus stands in for the Virgin Mary, and famous lovers such as Troilus, Dido, Tristram and Isolde for the saints and martyrs. The conceit also made its mark in late medieval art. Alcuin Blamires has discussed examples in which imagery familiar from depictions of the Adoration of the Magi, Pentecost and the Assumption of the Virgin is mirrored in the artists' rendition of subjects including prayers to Venus and offerings from a man to his lady.[140] Medieval readers do not appear to have regarded the use of religious imagery and ritual as a metaphor for love as particularly blasphemous. The controversy generated by the *Romance of the Rose* may be an exception to this, indicating it went farther with the metaphor than was acceptable. Blamires argues that the limits to what one could get away with probably varied according to region or country.[141] The obscene nature of *Jolly Jankin* is not a result of the mass structure, but of other implications in the text, linking it to the Annunciation.

The two sets of events; the singing of mass and a sexual relationship, exist side by side. As for Jankin's performance of his duties in the mass, his elaborate singing ('Jankyn crakit notes, an hundrid on a knot', st.5, ll.1-2) is designed to draw attention to himself and impress women such as Alison. Jankin's singing engages in the sort of elaboration of the divine service criticised by Lollard writers:

> proude and lecherous lorellis [rogues] schullen knacke [trill, ornament] the most
> devout service that noman shal here the sentence … and thane strumpatis and
> thevys preisen sire Jacke … the proude clerk, how small thei knacken here notis …
> they dispisen God in his face.[142]

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[139] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. F. Horgan (Oxford, 1994), ll 21553-21713 (pp.333-335); E.P. Hammond, 'The Lover's Mass', *Journal of English and German Philology* 7 (1907-8): 95-104 provides a transcription of this text.
[140] Blamires, 'The "Religion of Love"', pp.17-22.
[141] *Ibid.*, p.24.
[142] [Pseudo-Wyclif], *Of Feigned Contemplative Life*, in F. Harrison, 'Music at Oxford before 1500', in Catto and Evans (eds.) *History of the University of Oxford: Vol II*, p.360. All glosses are Harrison's.

Of course this represents a Lollard, rather than an orthodox view of clerks such as Jankin, but it is clear that Alison's mind in the poem is not on the divine service, and that Jankin uses his ecclesiastical duties as an excuse to flirt with the women of the congregation.

'Cracken' refers to the practice of trilling a note, but when combined with 'notes' could also refer to cracking nuts, emphasising the frivolousness of Jankin's performance.[143] It may also be a sexual metaphor. This possibility has been suggested in relation to seal-matrices that depict a squirrel and the motto 'I CRAKE NOTIS'.[144] Alexander and Binski argue that squirrels were sometimes seen as women's pets, and that a bawdy meaning could be read into the inscription, although the cracking of nuts may also be an analogy for breaking the seal on a letter.[145] There is also evidence of squirrel seals being owned by men.[146]

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[143] *MED:* **crāken** (v.), 2b.

[144] P. Ottaway and N. Rogers, *Craft, Industry and Everyday Life: Medieval Finds From York* (York, 2002), pp.2940-2942. There is an illustration of the seal matrix on p.2941. It was found in Bedern, the residence of the Vicars Choral of York Minster. Like Jankin, they had a reputation for being less than diligent in their duties and having sexual relationships with women, including prostitutes (B. Dobson, 'The English Vicars Choral: An Introduction', in R. Hall and D. Stocker (eds.), *Vicars Choral at English Cathedrals: Cantate Domino: History, Architecture and Archaeology* (Oxford, 2005), pp.1-10 (pp.7-8)). Rogers has suggested that the squirrel seal, from the location in which it was found, may belong to a vicar (N. Rogers, 'Wine, Women and Song: Artefacts from the Excavations at the College of Vicars Choral at the Bedern, York', in Hall and Stocker (eds.), *Vicars Choral at English Cathedrals*, pp.164-187 (p.169)).

[145] T. Alexander and P. Binski, *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England* (London, 1987), p.277. Alexander and Binski provide another example of the squirrel seal matrix, c.1300, 'I CRAKE NUTIS SWETE', Society of Antiquaries of London, provenance not known. They cite the example of the Chertsey tiles (1293-1298), in which a queen is shown holding a squirrel as evidence of their association with women (p.367). Another example of the squirrel seal appears in A.B. Tonnochy, *Catalogue of British Seal-Dies in the British Museum* (London, 1952), p.153. Early fourteenth century, 'I KRAK NOTIS', found in London. The innuendo regarding the cracking of nuts also occurs in *The Gospelles of Dystaues*, in the discussion of an old woman's continued sexual desires. She protests that although she can still lie on her back, 'notwithstandynge that I maye cracke no nuttes / for she had but one tothe' (D.3).

[146] R.H. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office: Personal Seals II* (London, 1981), p.36 (1303, owned by Peter de E … one, without inscription), p.88 (1347, owned by Adam Raymond, 'A NOT IS GODE'); W. Greenwell and C.H. Blair, 'Catalogue of the Seals in the Treasury of the Dean and Chapter of Durham', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 3rd series, 7 (1910): 268-360 (p.292). (3 squirrel seals belonging to John Benet of Darlington, first half of fourteenth century, one with inscription 'I CRAKE NOTIS HER').

Jolly Jankin is not the only lyric in Sloane 2593 that relies on double-entendre. *The Minstrel and His Wares* plays on the double meaning of 'ware', i.e. the merchandise offered by the travelling salesman and the penis.[147] The chapman offers a powder that causes 'maydenys wombys to swelle' (st.4, l.3).[148] He has a 'jelyf' which 'can stonde', which James Hala has explained as 'a gelatin used in cooking, which is to say something soft that gets hard' and a 'poket' with 'tweyne precyous stonys' (st.3, l.1, st.2, l.1).[149] This is an obvious innuendo for the male genitals, in fact, Hala describes the poem as an 'extended metaphorical comparison between the sale of domestic goods and sexual seduction.'[150] *My Gentle Cock*, also found in Sloane 2593, plays on the use of the cockerel as a metaphor for the penis.[151] At the end of the poem the 'gentil cook' perches in the lady's chamber. *Love in the Garden* is the poem in Sloane 2593 that is most similar to *Jolly Jankin* in that it ends with a young pregnant woman, but it is told from the perspective of the young man. The young woman is depicted as initiating their encounter when she euphemistically asks him to give her a graft from his pear tree, which he does:

> & I gryffid [grafted] her
> ryȝt vp in her home
> & be þat day xx wowkes
> it was qwyk in her womb (st.5, ll.1-4).[152]

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[147] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, p.247. *MED*: **wāre** (n.(2)), 1(a), 3. 'Chap-man' can mean simply merchant, but it is clear from the poem that here it refers to a peddlar (*MED*: **chap-man**, n., 1a (a)).
[148] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, p.247.
[149] *Ibid.*
[150] J. Hala, 'We Ben Chapmen', *Explicator* 46 (1988): 3-4.
[151] Robbins (ed.), *Secular Lyrics*, pp.41-42; L. Vasvári, 'Fowl play in my lady's chamber: textual harassment of a Middle English pornithological riddle and visual pun', in J.M. Ziolkowski (ed.) *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1998), pp.108-135; M. Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Thrupp (Stroud), 2002), pp.50-51; *MED*: **pil-cok** (n.)(a) (penis), **cok** (n.(1)), 1a.(a) (cockerel).
[152] Robbins (ed.), *Secular Lyrics*, pp.15-16.

The poem celebrates the young man's fecundity through the use of fruit imagery rather than focusing on the woman's response to the pregnancy, as the other betrayed maidens' laments do.

It is clear that these 'double-entendre' poems form a significant subgroup within the secular items in the manuscript. Karin Boklund-Lagopolou states that Sloane 2593 contains seventy-four items, of which only eleven can be classed as neither devotional nor didactic, four of which are the innuendo poems discussed above.[153] The rest of the manuscript contains poems (mainly carols) that focus on Biblical history, Christ, Mary, and the saints, as well as exhortations to repentance and meditations on death.[154] It is evident that Sloane 2593 was produced for readers who saw no incongruity in placing sexual innuendo and devotional material side by side.

The metaphor of mass/sex works well in *Jolly Jankin*, since the mass is structured around the climactic moment of the elevation of the host. The structure of the lyric, progressing as it does through the various stages of the mass, mirrors the movement towards the pivotal moment of the mass, just as it stands in for the sexual activities that have implicitly occurred between Jankin and Alison. When Jankin carries the 'pax-brede', a small plaque or board that was kissed by each member of the congregation during the mass, he steps on her foot and winks. This indication of their sexual relationship reveals the gulf between the surface meaning of their interaction (the celebration of mass through the kiss of peace) and what it represents (the more carnal kisses they have engaged in before).

The definitive rupturing of the metaphor occurs in the final stanza. The '*benedicamus domino*' and '*deo gracias*' were sung at the end of the mass. This is the only

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[153] Boklund-Lagopolou, ''I have a yong suster', pp.64-66.
[154] *Ibid*.

stanza in which Latin words from the liturgy are used. However it is also the stanza that

reveals most explicitly the sexual relationship between Alison and Jankin by focusing on its

consequences ('alas, I go with chylde'). The incongruity between the thanksgiving implied

at the end of the mass and the dismay experienced by Alison at her pregnancy exposes the

distance between the discourses of 'mass' and 'sex', which have stood for each other

throughout the poem. The language used here may be intended to bring to mind other

associations, particularly for those readers who were in holy orders and thus familiar with

the liturgy of the mass. The celebration of mass would have been a part of their daily lives.

It is clear from the opening of the poem that it takes place 'on ȝol day', and this is

reinforced by the fact that the *Benedicamus Domino* was used to conclude Christmas

midnight Mass, rather than *Ite Missa Est*, since Lauds immediately followed.[155] The

pregnancy of a young girl at Christmas calls to mind the Virgin Mary, and the tension

between sacred and secular, between the incarnation of Christ and Jankin the clerk

impregnating Alison that this association would create, fits well with the overall tone of the

carol and its parody of the mass. In fact, the language of the final stanza, where Alison

laments her situation, has direct verbal parallels with the first stanza of another lyric in the

same manuscript. *Mary moder, meke and mylde* is a lyric of the Five Joys of Mary, of

which the first stanza deals with her pregnancy and the Annunciation:

> Mary moder, meke and mylde,
> Fro shame and synne that ye us schyllde,
> For gret on grownd ye gone with childe,
> Gabriele nuncio (st.1, ll.1-4).[156]

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[155] C. Kelly, 'Benedicamus Domino' in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2: 270.
[156] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, p.154.

Here the speaker is asking Mary to shield him or her from shame, just as the pregnant girl in *Jolly Jankin* asks this of Christ ('Benedicamus Domino: Cryst from schame me schylde', st.7, ll.1-2). The shift between a young pregnant woman being asked for help to avoid shame, and a young pregnant woman asking for this help herself both highlights the differences between Alison and Mary's situations, and serves to draw attention to the similarities that remain despite this. The link between the image of hapless Alison, impregnated by her wily clerical lover at Christmas, and the holiest image of conception in medieval culture, along with the fact that Jankin and Alison's flirtation is conducted mainly in church, would have emphasised the transgressive nature of their sexual relationship. It had the potential to create a risqué atmosphere of naughtiness when *Jolly Jankin* was performed.

The burden of *Mary moder* adds to this atmosphere, 'Nowel, el, el, el….. / Mary was gret with Gabriel'. The obvious reading of these lines is 'Mary was greeted by Gabriel', with the Noel summarizing the greeting.[157] However, it could also be read as a version of the phrase 'great with child', as it is in the first stanza, 'gret on grownd … with childe'. 'Greten' also appears in the *MED* meaning 'to become larger or advance in pregnancy'.[158] In other words, if Mary was 'gret with Gabriel'; perhaps her pregnancy was not so pure after all.[159] Medieval readers and audiences, although they may have believed in the reality of orthodox religious doctrines regarding the Virgin, were willing to enjoy playing on the obscene possibilities of religious narratives. Sloane 2593 was composed in

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[157] *MED:* **grēten** (v.(2)), 1a.
[158] *MED*: **gōn** (v.), 15c, **grēten** (v.(1)), a.
[159] The TEAMS edition of this lyric also recognises that this may be a pun on great/greeted (K. Saupe (ed.) *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, (Kalamazoo, 1998), p.177. The *MED* lists these two senses of the word as **greten**, v.1(a) - To become larger, grow; of a woman: be pregnant, advance in pregnancy, and **greten,** v.2 (a) -To greet (sb.), pay one's respects to; send greetings (to sb.).

the first half of the fifteenth century, but the implication that possibly Mary engaged in adultery also appears in later texts such as the mystery plays. Joseph is cast in the role of the cuckolded old man, who refuses to believe his young wife's claims of virginity: 'It was sum boy began þis game' ('Joseph's Doubt About Mary', l.75).[160] The possibility of the angel's involvement is even directly referenced in the York version of the play by the maid's insistence that no man has come to see Mary, save an angel once a day, and Joseph's subsequent exclamation, 'Then I see well your meaning is, / The angel has made her with child' ('Joseph's Trouble About Mary', ll,134-135).[161] This allegation has a long history. Stephen Spector, who edited the N-Town play, traces Joseph's anger and incredulity back to its roots in the *Protoevangelium* and *Pseudo-Matthew*.[162]

The same obscene implication may lie behind the choice of hymn Chaucer has the clerk Nicholas sing in 'The Miller's Tale'.[163] It is *Angelus ad virginem*, which lends itself well to an erotic interpretation. This is the text of the first stanza:

> Angelus ad uirginem
> Subintrans in conclave
> Virginis formidinem
> Demulcens inquit, "Aue!".

> The angel, entering by stealth the chamber of the virgin, allaying (literally, stroking caressingly) the virgin's fear, said, "Hail!".[164]

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[160] D. Sugano (ed.) *The N-Town Plays*, (Kalamazoo, 2007), p.113. The manuscript of the N-Town plays was composed between 1468 and the early decades of the sixteenth century but it continued to be revised and expanded after this period (S. Spector (ed.), *The N-Town Play: Cotton Vespasian D.8* (Oxford, 1991), p.xvi).

[161] R. Beadle (ed.) *The York Plays* (London, 1982), p.120. The manuscript of the York Plays dates from 1463-1477, but the earliest evidence for their performance dates from 1376 and the last mention of the manuscript being used was in 1579 (R. Beadle (ed.), *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290* (Oxford, 2009), pp.xii, xix, xxii).

[162] Spector (ed.), *The N-Town Play*, p.463: 'Why do you mislead me to believe that an angel of the Lord has made her pregnant? But it is possible that someone has pretended to be an angel of the Lord and has deceived her ('*Ut quid me seducitis ut credam vobis quia angelus domini impraegnavit eam? Potest enim fieri ut quisquam se finixerit angelum domini et deceperit eam.*' (*Pseudo-Matthew* in C. Von Tischendorf (ed.), *Evangelia Apocrypha* (1876), Cap X, p.72)).

[163] Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', l. 3216, (*RC*, p.68).

[164] For versions of this argument cf. Gray, *Themes and Images*, (London, 1972), p.100; B. Rowland, 'Chaucer's Blasphemous Churl: A New Interpretation of the Miller's Tale', in B. Rowland (ed.) *Chaucer and*

Chaucer appears to be hinting at the obscene potential of the Annunciation scene, by having his lusty clerk, who seduces the young wife of an old man, sing it. This plays on the obscene implications of the virgin's 'chamber' and the allusions to stroking and stealth.

Sylvia Huot, in her discussion of the motet, another genre which juxtaposed sacred and profane texts, underlines the fact that such innuendo was meant to be humourous and titillating, but not truly blasphemous. The motets allow multiple readings, parodying texts that for the clerics who wrote the motets were 'virtually second nature'. They were 'a sort of clerical game – a joke for the educated preacher who exists at the cross roads of two languages and two cultures'.[165] It was only because the rituals of the church and the events of scripture were such a central feature of their lives that they could parody them with impunity, and even without much serious obscene intention. Sacred and profane could easily slip into one another.

Elements of this mixing of modes can also be seen in London, British Library, MS Additional 5665 (the Ritson MS). I have already mentioned briefly the two betrayed maidens' laments it contains (*Up Y Arose in verno tempore* and *In wyldernes / Ther founde I Besse*), and I will close this chapter with a discussion of the manuscript itself, as it provides a good example of the protean nature of the readership of these manuscripts. The Ritson manuscript was composed over an extended period from the mid-fifteenth- to early-sixteenth centuries, and it is the only manuscript containing betrayed maidens' laments that

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Medieval Studies in Honour of R.H. Robbins (London, 1974), pp.46-7; T.W. Ross, 'Notes on Chaucer's Miller's Tale', *English Language Notes* 13 (1976): 256-8. Rowland goes so far as to argue that the whole of 'The Miller's Tale' is a parody of the Annunciation scene, with John the carpenter standing in for Joseph and Nicholas and Alison for Gabriel and Mary. The text of *Angelus ad virginem* and translation are from Ross, p.256.

[165] S. Huot, *Allegorical Play in the Old French Motet: The Sacred and Profane in Thirteenth-Century French Polyphony* (Stanford, 1997), p.61.

also provides musical notation. This makes it a valuable resource for information on how the lyrics were performed, and confirms the assumption that although the other manuscripts do not contain music, the lyrics in them were meant to be sung, and were not simply for recitation. The lyrics are in two or three voices, suggesting group performance was the norm. However, the music in the Ritson manuscript is not uniform in character. The contents of the manuscript range from sophisticated and probably professional liturgical compositions in Latin, to carols and lyrics based around simple melodies for two or three voices. In the case of the betrayed maidens' laments, full musical notation is provided for the first verse, and for the remaining verses the text only is squeezed in a block at the bottom of the page.[166]

The two betrayed maidens' laments, *In wyndernes / Ther founde I Besse* and *Up Y Arose in verno tempore*, both appear near the end of the manuscript. John Stevens suggests that the manuscript changed ownership, with the untidy final section representing a phase where it fell into the hands of 'some amateur music-lover' in the early-sixteenth century.[167]

The manuscript has many connections with Devon, and some of the composers Lane, Sandon and Bayliss identify for the liturgical polyphony of the early sections have connections with Exeter Cathedral as vicars-choral or chantry priests. It seems likely that the manuscript originated here or in a similar large ecclesiastical establishment and then changed hands over the fifty years in which material was being copied into it. It is not clear who composed the betrayed maidens' laments.[168] There are several legal documents

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[166] For a facsimile of *In wyldernes / Ther founde I Besse*, cf. J. Stevens (ed.), *Early Tudor Songs and Carols, Musica Britannica* 36 (London, 1975), p.xxiv.
[167] Stevens (ed.), *Early Tudor Songs and Carols*, pp.xvii-xviii.
[168] For details of these men, cf. E. Lane, N. Sandon and C. Bayliss (eds.),*The Ritson Manuscript: Liturgical Compositions, Votive Antiphons, Te Deum* (Newton Abbot, 2001), pp.ii-iii. Cf. Greene, *Early English Carols*, p.308, who also suggests a connection with Exeter Cathedral.

(receipts, marriage banns, etc) copied in blank spaces that suggest that the manuscript remained in Devon at least until 1510. Lane, Sandon, and Bayliss suggest many ownership possibilities, including the Franciscan house at Exeter, Exeter cathedral, the college of vicars choral, the household chapel of one of its bishops or even an aristocratic household.[169] It is impossible to be sure, and if we accept the argument that it changed hands, this manuscript to some extent provides a demonstration of the heterogeneous audience of these lyrics. It moved from a context of formal ecclesiastical musical performance to one in which copying occurred much more informally. The type of material that was copied changed, as did the appearance of the copying. As it accrued material, by the early-sixteenth century its owner possessed a manuscript that contained both songs that depicted young pregnant women agonising over how to dispose of an unwanted child and an abundance of songs on the Incarnation and the Trouble of Joseph.[170] Reading them in concert may have produced the same kind of obscene implications that were present through the juxtaposition of *Jolly Jankin* and *Mary moder, meke and mylde* in Sloane 2593.

1.5 Conclusion

The subgenre of the betrayed maidens' laments appears at first glance to tell us about the sexual transgressions of young women. However by looking at the manuscript contexts in which they appear, it becomes apparent that what they actually tell us about are images of women's sexual transgression that appealed to audiences who were often largely male. They have been largely ignored by scholars interested in medieval ideas of gender and

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[169] Lane, Sandon and Bayliss (eds.), *The Ritson Manuscript*, pp.v-vi.
[170] Cf. *Marvel not, Joseph*, *Make us Merry*, *Have Mercy of Me*, *Nascitur ex virgine*, which place particular stress on the concept of the Virgin's intactness, despite her pregnancy. All these carols are edited by John Stevens (Stevens (ed.), *Mediaeval Carols*).

transgression, despite the fact that the betrayed maidens' laments are full of protagonists who break the rules intended to govern their behaviour. I have attempted to move beyond the limiting polarisation of critical views that either reads the lyrics as popular folk songs or as satirical productions by a clerical elite. The interesting question regarding these lyrics is not whether they give us straightforward access to late medieval women's experiences regarding pre-marital sex and pregnancy. As literary texts, and particularly as poems that show the influence of satirical Latin poetry and continental lyrics, they are to some extent shaped by the formula of the genre. However, this does not mean that they can tell us nothing about late medieval England. The number of betrayed maidens' laments that survive across a variety of manuscripts suggest that they were popular with fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century readers. They can tell us about attitudes to premarital sex, responses to unwanted pregnancy, and late medieval anxieties about the figure of the seductive cleric. By moving away from the tired debate over the origin of these lyrics, and considering instead how they may have been read and performed, it becomes apparent that they can be a valuable resource to consider ideas of gender and anxieties about control of the behaviour of the household and its dependents. They reflect the co-existence in medieval culture of the obscene and the sacred. These texts *were* transgressive, but in a different way, and for a different readership than they first appear to be. The diversity of the manuscripts in which they appear demonstrate their appeal to a heterogeneous readership and underlines the importance of considering each lyric in the context in which it appears. By grouping the lyrics together in editions and in scholarship, commentators have smoothed out the differences between them, in a way which creates a distorted impression of how medieval readers would have encountered and interpreted them.

Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.5.48 and Its Readers[1]

In Chapter One I explored the subgenre of the betrayed maidens' laments and argued that

attention to the manuscript context in which these texts appeared was vital to an

understanding of their significance to late medieval readers. These texts point to a concern

with access to the house and control of female sexuality – women move outside the house

and interlopers such as the seductive clerk get in. This chapter develops that argument by

focusing on a single manuscript containing a betrayed maiden's lament, Cambridge,

University Library, MS Ff.5.48 (hereafter CUL Ff.5.48), in order to explore the

intersections between lay and clerical readers in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries.

I will consider the attempts made by modern scholars to label manuscripts as 'lay' or

'clerical', and the ways in which these attempts do not do justice to the fluidity of late

medieval textual culture.

2.1 'A Betrayed Maiden's Lament': Holding the Clerical Seducer Accountable

CUL Ff.5.48 contains a betrayed maiden's lament which is different from the examples I

discussed in the previous chapter. In those poems, the consequences for sexual

transgression in the form of pregnancy and potential social disgrace were a matter of

concern for the young woman only, while her lover escaped unscathed. The poem in CUL

Ff.5.48, entitled *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament* by Robbins, differs from the standard model

in several ways.[2] The young woman has a forceful practical response to her unexpected

pregnancy. Unlike the women in *The Wily Clerk* and *Up Y arose in verno tempore* whose

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[1] J.Y. Downing, 'A Critical Edition of Cambridge University [sic] MS Ff.5.48' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1969). A list of the manuscript's contents can be found in appendix B.
[2] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, p.278. The poem appears on f.114v. of the manuscript.

response consisted of plans to conceal the pregnancy or engage in infanticide, this young

woman places the blame squarely on the man who impregnated her and considers ways to

make him pay.[3] This man appears to be, unlike the other examples I have considered, a

priest rather than a clerk in minor orders, and their encounter is not presented as a seduction

by a charming and articulate suitor, but rather as a rape. In this poem, a young woman

wanders off alone while participating in a 'well-wake'. Neil Cartlidge reads the young

woman's participation in the custom of well-waking, 'a seasonal celebration which was

probably a rural survival of pagan rites' as a possible marker of her rusticity.[4] She is set

upon by 'Ser John' (presumably a priest), who forces her to swear 'be bel and boke' (the

instruments of excommunication) that she will tell no-one of their encounter. He then rapes

her: 'he leyde my hed agayn the burne; / He gafe my maydenhed a spurne [blow] / And rofe

my bell[-ey]' (st.2, ll.2-4). The *MED* provides this line as the sole example of '**bell**, (n)',

which it interprets as 'maidenhead/vulva' and suggests that it could be an abbreviation of

'bele chose', but elsewhere in the dictionary 'belle' is defined as a type of cloak or tunic.[5]

From the context it could refer either to the tearing of the maiden's tunic or the loss of her

virginity. In any case it is evident that the initial encounter is presented as violent and Sir

John abuses his clerical privileges (the 'bel and boke') and the young woman's awe of his

sacerdotal power to facilitate the rape. The idea of the cleric as a smooth talker who has

uncommon access to women comes into play in their subsequent interactions. The girl

describes how 'wond*u*r copious' (i.e. fluent, talkative, garrulous) Sir John is; he announces

that she 'was gracious / To beyre a childe'; and he is able to spend the entire night at the

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[3] A full discussion of these poems, their manuscripts and my arguments regarding readership can be found in chapter one. All quotations from *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament* are from the edition in Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols,* p.278.
[4] Cartlidge, ''Alas, I go with Chylde', p.404.
[5] *MED:* **bell** (n.), **belle** (n.(2)).

young woman's house, 'to play / Fro euensong tyme til light of the day', emphasising that

he has access to the house (st.4, ll.2-4; st.3, ll.1-2). The use of the word 'gracious' to

congratulate a pregnant woman, which can mean either fortunate or well-disposed, may

also be intended to recall the Annunciation (*Ave gratia plena*), as did the lyrics, such as

Jolly Jankin, discussed at the end of Chapter 1. 'Gracious' may also be used to describe

gifts from or the influence of God. Thus the text may imply that the priest is playing upon

the sexual naivety of the young woman by convincing her to regard her illicit pregnancy as

a source of joy.

   The young woman does not play along. Unlike the young woman of *A Midsummer*

Day's Dance, who impotently laments her past actions, the narrator of *A Betrayed*

Maiden's Lament reacts vehemently and with surprising pragmatism,

> I go w*ith* childe, wel I wot;
> I schrew the fad*ur* th*a*t hit gate,
> W*ith*outen he fynde it mylke *and* pap
> A long while-ey (st.5, ll.1-4).

The emphasis here is not placed on her actions, but on those of the father who 'gat' the

child, perhaps reflecting her unwillingness and the fact that initially she was raped. The

appearance of this line in the manuscript suggests that this was a surprise to the scribe as

well. He originally wrote 'I schrew the child', and then crossed out child and amended it to

read 'I schrew the fad*ur* þt hit gate'. He was evidently anticipating a narrative similar to

other betrayed maidens' laments in which the young woman curses the situation and the

child and may contemplate infanticide. The woman in this poem directs her anger to the

father of the child and is unusual in her determination that she will make him share the

consequences of her pregnancy by demanding support. 'Pap', spelt in this way, is glossed

by the *MED* as 'gruel or porridge, baby food'.[6]

The true transgressiveness of her behaviour in this poem is not the young woman's

sexual behaviour but her determination to demand restitution from Ser John. In demanding

'pap' she may intend simply money for child support, which was not an unheard of

arrangement. In 1347, John Walder and Paulina Galeweye appeared before the Bishop of

Rochester charged with fornication. They wished to marry, but were forbidden because

John had previously had intercourse with a cousin of Paulina's in the third degree. Instead,

Paulina asked for financial support for John's child -- '*dicta Paulina peciit subsidium a

dicto Johanne pro sustentacione prolis per ipsum ab ea suscepte*' -- and he agreed to pay

her a penny a week.[7] R.H. Helmholz presents evidence that the church courts routinely

required the father to support illegitimate children, and cites examples of support orders

from nearly all the dioceses where any medieval records remain.[8] Helmholz argues that

these orders were sometimes difficult to enforce, and that claims for arrearages when

fathers fell behind in payment appear frequently enough to assume this was a common

problem.[9] However, sometimes the father was willing and it was his unorthodox methods to

provide for his child, rather than his failure to do so, that drew the attention of the courts.

The records of the Lincoln church court in 1519 mention a father who is specifically

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[6] *MED*: **pap** (n.).

[7] C. Johnson (ed.), *Registrum Hamonis Hethe, Diocesis Roffensis A.D. 1319-1352,* Vol. II, (Oxford, 1948), p.951. Ralph Houlbrooke also lists some later cases from the 1530s and 1540s in which weekly sums were to be paid from two years old until the child could earn its own living. He also argues that the records suggest that 'pregnant girls were often packed off to underground 'maternity homes' whose disreputable proprietors were ready, for a consideration, to help women in need and perhaps to take their children off their hands'. (R. Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People During the English Reformation, 1520-1570,* (Oxford, 1979), pp.76-78.

[8] R.H. Helmholz, 'Support Orders, Church Courts and the Rule of *Filius Nullius*: A Reassessment of the Common Law', *Virginia Law Review* 63 (1977): 431-448 (pp.432-433, p.439).

[9] *Ibid.*, pp.443 & 445.

identified as a member of the clergy, who is engaged in an *ad hoc* child support arrangement, 'John Asteley, [rector of Shepshed] confessed that he had made Agnes Walles, unmarried, pregnant and that … he had supported the child … from his tithes'.[10] In this case, the court's concern was not with the fact that he was supporting an illegitimate child, but rather that he was using his parishioners' tithes to do so. Nevertheless, the record allows us to conclude that sometimes mothers might be able to secure support for their children from the father, even if he was a member of the clergy. The lyric's focus on the young woman's desire to hold the predatory priest accountable for his actions and gain some financial restitution appears puzzling in light of the insistence of some of the scholarship on CUL Ff.5.48 that the manuscript was a clerical commonplace book. If this was the case, why would a lyric about clerical misbehaviour have been of interest to the reader and how would he have used it? The following section provides a brief introduction to the manuscript, outlines the argument for clerical ownership and questions how far it can stand up when recent scholarship on late medieval manuscript culture is taken into account.

2.2 'A sad little quarto': The Appearance and Composition of CUL Ff.5.48 [11]

When they referred to CUL Ff.5.48 as 'a sad little quarto', Bradford Fletcher and Leslie Harris were referring to its damaged physical appearance and lack of sophisticated decoration. Despite these external features, frustrating as they are for modern scholars attempting an evaluation of the manuscript, CUL Ff.5.48 stands as a fascinating example of late medieval English miscellaneous book production. Julia Boffey and John Thompson argued that the 'composite anthology … dominated the field of English poetic manuscripts

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[10] Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England,* p.120.
[11] B.Y. Fletcher and A.L. Harris, 'A Northampton Poetic Miscellany of 1455-56', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, vol.7 (1998) : 216-235 (p.223).

during the later fifteenth century'.[12] They popularized the use of the term 'household miscellanies' to refer to anthologies of (mainly) poetry, commonly combining devotional, instructional and moral verse with texts intended for entertainment purposes such as romances and saints' lives. These miscellanies were commonly read by readers 'from the middle strata of medieval society' and did not normally contain poetry of the sort that was popular among more elite readers, such as the work of authors such as Chaucer or Gower.[13] Boffey and Thompson suggested that the owners of these household miscellanies were 'pragmatic owner-producers' who aimed to produce manuscripts that provided a balance of texts that served their utilitarian and recreational interests.[14] Carol Meale and Julia Boffey have cited the wide geographical range of the provenances of these miscellanies, and the fact that they were compiled well into the era of printing as evidence of their widespread appeal.[15] Although CUL Ff.5.48 shares many features with this model of the household miscellany, commentators on the manuscript have argued that it proceeds from a clerical milieu and that it is certainly a commonplace book used by a cleric in order to carry out his office of instructing the laity. These include J.Y. Downing, who produced a critical edition of the manuscript in 1969, and most recently Thomas Ohlgren, who claimed in 2004 that he had definitively identified the manuscript's 'scribe-owner'.[16] My discussion will return to the question of a clerical producer, engage with the debate surrounding its production, and

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[12] J. Boffey and J.J. Thompson, 'Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts', in J Griffiths and D. Pearsall (eds.), *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.279-315 (p.289).
[13] *Ibid.*, pp.292 & 297
[14] *Ibid.*, pp.297.
[15] C.M. Meale and J. Boffey, 'Gentlewomen's Reading', in L. Hellinga and J.B. Trapp (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 3: 1400-1557* (Cambridge, 1999), pp.526-40 (p.537).
[16] Downing, 'Critical Edition'; T. H. Ohlgren, '*Robin Hood and the Monk* and the Manuscript Context of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.5.48', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 48 (2004): 80-108. All quotations from the manuscript are taken from Downing's critical edition unless otherwise indicated. All text titles are editorial, rather than from the manuscript, unless indicated in appendix B.

challenge the certainty of these conclusions in favour of a clerical origin. Rather than claiming the manuscript for a particular reading community, I will discuss the extent to which clerical and lay reading practices and materials overlapped in late medieval England. CUL Ff.5.48, with its eclectic mixture of genres and styles, is a representative example of miscellaneous production. First, I will discuss the physical appearance and composition of the manuscript itself, before proceeding to an analysis of its authorship and readership.

CUL Ff.5.48 is a small paper quarto, written in several hands of the second half of the fifteenth century.[17] Carol Meale provides the most precise dating, of c.1475, but concedes that neither the features of the handwriting, nor the evidence of paper-stocks allows any greater precision than this. The hands are certainly late-fifteenth-century and the manuscript shares a number of texts with a group of other manuscripts from this period (see note 23 below for a full list). The manuscript is severely damaged, particularly in the later sections.[18] The first folio is missing, but presumably contained the missing fifty-six lines from the beginning of the first text in the manuscript, an excerpted version of John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests.* Folios 93 and 94, which fall between 'The Southern Passion' and *The Anonymous Short Metrical Chronicle of England* are also missing, with only the stubs visible.[19]

The manuscript is divided into five sections. Furrow uses the term 'booklets' to describe these units as 'groups of gatherings in which the end of a poem coincides with the end of the last gathering', but does not go so far as to imply prolonged independent

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[17] The following discussion of the manuscript's appearance is based on Downing, and on two more recent descriptions of the manuscript: in M. Furrow (ed.), *Ten Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems* (New York, 1985), pp.45-52; C.M. Meale, 'Romance and its Anti-type? *The Turnament of Totenham,* the Carnivalesque, and Popular Culture' in A.J. Minnis (ed.), *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp.103-127.

[18] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xxiii.

[19] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xii; Furrow, *Comic Poems,* p.47.

circulation of the sections before they were bound into the manuscript. These sections (1-5)

and their contents are marked on the summary of manuscript contents in appendix two.

Downing identified only two hands, Scribe A, who wrote most of the manuscript, and

Scribe B, who wrote folios 79r-92v (i.e. section 3). The section she labels as being copied

by 'Scribe B' contains mainly material from *The South English Legendary*, including 'The

Legend of Saint Michael', 'The Southern Passion', and poems on various feast days. This

section is clearly in a different hand from the rest of the manuscript and uses different

abbreviations and contractions.[20] The uniform generic composition of the section suggests

that it may have been copied as a block and interpolated into the manuscript, although it is

difficult to say at what point in the manuscript's history this occurred. Furrow and Meale

both disagree with Downing's estimate of the number of scribal hands, arguing that there

are certainly more than two, but differ from each other on exactly how many. Furrow

suggests five, meaning that each section of the manuscript was written by a different hand,

whereas Meale argues for four, with the first and the fourth sections being written by the

same hand. Both Furrow and Meale note that paper from the same stock is used in sections

two and four.[21] These connections between sections in the same hand and in different

hands implies that two of the scribes were working in some sort of contact with each other,

and that 'there may have been a degree of planning in the codex's composition'.[22]

 CUL Ff.5.48 forms part of a group of miscellaneous manuscripts that share texts

with it: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61 (six items); Cambridge, University

Library, MS Ff.2.38 (five items); London, British Library, MS Harley 5396 (three items);

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[20] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xvii.
[21] Furrow, *Comic Poems*, p.48, Meale, 'Romance and its Antitype', pp.111-112 (note 30).
[22] Meale, 'Romance and its Antitype', p.112.

and Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee.4.35 (two items).[23] Some of these manuscripts

also share texts with each other as well as CUL Ff.5.48. The number of texts these

manuscripts have in common suggests that they may have been owned by readers with

similar reading interests. Despite this, these other manuscripts have not been labelled as

'clerical', but rather are more often categorised as miscellanies which were probably

prepared for lay readers of middling social status and which may have been read in a

household context. George Shuffeton, who recently produced an edition of Oxford,

Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61 (henceforward Ashmole 61), dated it to c.1500 and

suggested that the owner-scribe was 'an amateur used to keeping...accounts rather than

copying literature', and 'a reasonably proficient amateur copying for his own use' rather

than a professional scribe.[24] The scribe signs his name as 'Rate' after nineteen of the forty-

one items in Ashmole 61. The contents do display some differences from CUL Ff.5.48, as

Ashmole 61 contains romances, a genre which is completely absent from CUL Ff.5.48.

Shuffleton suggests, however, that based on texts such as *The Tale of the Incestuous*

Daughter, *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire*, and *The Lamentation of the Blessed Virgin*,

Ashmole 61 displays concern with family relationships and seems 'perfectly suited for the

spiritual nourishment and entertainment of a household.'[25] These are all texts shared with

CUL Ff.5.48. Shuffleton argues that what is left out of Ashmole 61 is as important as what

is included in making conclusions about its intended audience. It has no indexing system

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[23] These are: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61 – *Wounds of Christ, Tale of an Incestuous Daughter, Story of the Adulterous Falmouth Squire, An Orison to the Blessed Virgin, Lamentation of the Blessed Virgin, Northern Passion*; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38 – *Wounds of Christ, Story of the Adulterous Falmouth Squire, Lament of the Blessed Virgin, Lamentation of the Blessed Virgin, Lady who Buried the Host*; London, British Library, MS Harley 5396 – *Turnament of Totentham, Story of the Adulterous Falmouth Squire, Lament of the Blessed Virgin*; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee.4.35 – *Story of the Adulterous Falmouth Squire, Lady Who Buried the Host.* Cf. Downing, 'Critical Edition', Appendix A, p.574.
[24] G. Shuffleton, *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular English Verse* (Kalamazoo, 2008), pp.2 & 5.
[25] *Ibid.*, p.11.

and an 'extremely rudimentary' table of contents, making it unwieldy for use as a reference work. It contains little on English history, contemporary politics, specialized subjects such as medicine or law, or practical information, and it displays no familiarity with fifteenth-century humanism. Its concerns are domestic and quotidian rather than cosmopolitan.[26] All these conclusions could also be applied to CUL Ff.5.48.

Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38 (henceforward CUL Ff.2.38) also dates from the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century, and like Ashmole 61 it contains a mixture of devotional and didactic material alongside romances. The texts are grouped systematically, with meditative and didactic material placed at the beginning, followed by exempla, and then romances.[27] The editors of the manuscript facsimile make some conclusions about its intended audience that place it in the same reading context as Ashmole 61. They describe it as a 'one-volume library ... ideally suited to the instruction, edification and entertainment of well-meaning, devout readers of modest intellectual accomplishments.'[28] Their reading of the manuscript places it firmly in a lay context, as precisely the sort of codex that emerged to service the demands of a newly literate bourgeoisie for religious instruction and entertainment in the vernacular. CUL Ff.2.38 shares five texts with CUL Ff.5.48.

London, British Library, MS Harley 5396 (henceforward Harley 5396) can be dated more precisely to 1455-56 because of various mercantile memoranda and accounts contained within it. The manuscript is composed of four distinct sections that probably originally circulated separately. It is only the fourth section that is in English and is of interest here for comparison with CUL Ff.5.48. Bradford Fletcher and Leslie Harris have

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[26] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[27] F. McSparran and P.R. Robinson (eds.), *Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38* (London, 1979), vii.
[28] *Ibid.,* vii.

suggested that this section is 'the work of a merchant early in his career, or the employee of

a merchant', and the section contains a draft letter to the scribe's parents stating that he has

'ben at wryting scole and þis letter ys of myne owne wrytyng'.[29] The religious material

contained in this section is accessible rather than theologically sophisticated and the

manuscript itself is of poor quality and crudely executed.[30] Fletcher and Harris use the same

approach as Shuffleton by considering what Harley 5396 does not contain as a clue to what

kind of reader might have read it. The manuscript contains no poems that are attributed to a

named author, nor have any authors been identified, except for a single poem by Lydgate.

Harley 5396 contains no courtly love poetry, no romances, and no long narratives of any

kind.[31] It seems to fit into a similar milieu to the other manuscripts with which it shares

texts. These manuscripts would have appealed to readers who were interested in religious

texts but of the devotional, meditative, and catechetical kind rather than scholastic. Carol

Meale also discusses Harley 5396 and concurs with the suggestion of a bourgeois, possibly

mercantile milieu, a conclusion that she also applies to CUL Ff.5.48.[32] The final manuscript

that shares items with CUL Ff.5.48 is Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee.4.35, a

manuscript that bears the merchant's mark of Richard Calle, and is therefore also from a

mercantile context.[33]

 As my summary of the scholarship surrounding these manuscripts has shown, they

all show signs of being produced and read by lay people, and they all share texts with CUL

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[29] Fletcher and Harris, 'A Northampton Poetic Miscellany', p.216.
[30] *Ibid.,* p.221.
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] Meale, 'Romance and its Anti-type?', p.113.
[33] *Ibid.,* p.116. Carol Meale and Julia Boffey rule out the possibility that this is the husband of Margery Paston, based on a comparison of the manuscript signature with that Richard Calle's handwriting. He may have been another member of the same family (C. Meale and J. Boffey, 'Selecting the Text: Rawlinson C.86 and some other books for London readers', F. Riddy (ed.) *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts* (Cambridge; Rochester, NY, 1991), pp.143-169 (p.160, note 54)).

Ff.5.48. Some of them have clear signs that point to a connection with mercantile readers such as memoranda and accounts. For those manuscripts which do not contain such evidence, the inclusion of similar texts points towards a similar readership of bourgeois or gentry status, as members of the gentry were also responsible for producing miscellaneous manuscripts. Boffey and Thompson cite the example of Roger Thornton, a North Yorkshire gentleman who produced two miscellanies, London, British Library, MS Additional 31042 and Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91 in the mid-fifteenth century. They argue that Thornton gained access to a large range of material 'through links with family, friends, local religious houses and other contacts'.[34] Meale and Boffey, when discussing the reading interests of gentlewomen, argue that by the fifteenth and early-sixteenth century there was a significant overlap between the gentry and the upper echelons of urban society. The families of professional administrators, merchants, aldermen, and lawyers were of equivalent status to the gentry and had similar cultural interests, including their reading material.[35] The texts that CUL Ff.2.38, Harley 5396, Ashmole 61, and CUL Ee.4.35 share with each other and with CUL Ff.5.48 are largely devotional in nature, yet they have not led to a conclusion in favour of clerical ownership for any of the other manuscripts. The inclusion of the *Instructions to Parish Priests* and the colophon by Gilbert Pilkington in CUL Ff.5.48 have swung the opinions of scholars towards the idea of a clerical readership, although this goes against the evidence provided by many of the other texts and their inclusion in other, apparently lay, manuscripts.

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[34] Boffey and Thompson, 'Anthologies and Miscellanies', pp.298-300.
[35] Meale and Boffey, 'Gentlewomen's Reading', pp.526-527. Cf. Meale and Boffey, 'Selecting the Text' for a perspective on this phenomenon in a London context, which argues for the 'intermingling civic and social circles in which court functionaries and members of merchant families moved together' (p.160).

Meale describes CUL Ff.5.48 as 'undistinguished', Downing as 'carelessly executed' particularly in section three, and Fletcher and Harris, as previously mentioned, as 'sad'.[36] Despite these discouraging pronouncements, the manuscript's appearance and lack of decoration is not that unusual for a fifteenth-century vernacular miscellany of its type, and the interest of its contents far outweighs its unassuming appearance. A large proportion of the critical discussion of the manuscript has concentrated on attempts to identify its scribe and to extrapolate from these conclusions to make judgements about the manuscript's uses and readership. It is this argument, and its conceptual flaws, to which I now turn.

2.3 Will the real Gilbert Pilkington please stand up?

> *Explicit Passio Domini Nostri Ihesu Christi Quod Dominus Gilbertus Pylkyngton ... Amen.* (f.43r)

This colophon, appended to *The Northern Passion* in CUL Ff.5.48, has been the source of much of the belief that the manuscript was written by a cleric and led early scholars to assume that someone called Gilbert Pilkington was the author of the entire manuscript.[37] There is no evidence to support the authorship theory but there are several alternatives as regards scribal identity. Firstly, Pilkington may have been the scribe who transcribed the portion of the manuscript that includes *The Northern Passion.* In other words, he is Downing's Scribe A, who is responsible for most of the manuscript under her model, or Furrow and Meale's Scribe 1, who is responsible for either fols.2r-66r (Furrow) or fols.2r-66r and fols. 95r-114r (Meale). Alternatively, the scribe of CUL Ff.5.48 may have simply

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[36] Meale, 'Romance and its Antitype', p.110, Downing, 'Critical Edition', xvii, Fletcher and Harris, 'A Northampton Poetic Miscellany', p.253.
[37] Downing summarizes this discussion ('Critical Edition', xxviii-xix) and judges it 'clouded by a great many mistaken assumptions'.

transcribed *The Northern Passion* text as he found it, including a colophon originally

written by the scribe of one of his exemplars.[38] This option removes any necessity for the

scribe of CUL Ff.5.48 to be a cleric at all and is supported by the fact that the colophon

occurs on only one text. This can be compared to a manuscript like Ashmole 61, which

shares several texts with CUL Ff.5.48. The scribe of Ashmole 61, who calls himself 'Rate',

as we have seen, signs nineteen of the forty-one items in the manuscript.[39] Other evidence

from within CUL Ff.5.48 demonstrates that the scribe was a slavish copyist. After *A*

Betrayed Maiden's Lament, he has written 'Bryan hys my name iet', which although it is

usually printed in editions as if it were part of the poem, has no connection with its

contents. On fol.32v, the scribe has written a list of actors and their wages alongside the

text of *The Northern Passion*, interrupting the text of the poem with what Meale suggests

were originally 'marginal annotations in his, or a preceding exemplar'.[40] Given these other

examples of extra-textual material that has been simply transferred from an exemplar, it is

extremely likely that the scribe of CUL Ff.5.48 did the same with the colophon to T*he*

Northern Passion.

Despite the implication that the scribe copied things that were left behind by

previous scribes, which consequently tell us nothing about the scribe of CUL Ff. 5.48

himself, some scholars have concluded that Gilbert Pilkington was the main scribe of the

manuscript. This has led to the further conclusion that since Gilbert Pilkington titles

himself '*dominus*' in the colophon, that CUL Ff.5.48 was therefore a clerical

'commonplace book'. Although she notes the scribe's tendency towards slavish copying,

Downing ultimately concludes that Pilkington was the owner-scribe of the book, and a

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[38] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xxx.
[39] Shuffleton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, p.2.
[40] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xxx-xxxi; Meale, 'Romance and its Antitype', p.115.

cleric.[41] The most forceful recent reiteration of this argument was made in 2004 by Thomas

Ohlgren who stated categorically that the manuscript was 'a clerical miscellany', and that

he had identified the scribe-owner:

> The entire matter [that is, the debate regarding the colophon] is now moot because, as we will see next, the man behind the colophon has been identified, and we now know who the scribe was, and where, when, and why the Cambridge manuscript was produced.[42]

My point is not to argue that the scribe of CUL Ff.5.48 could not have been a cleric,

but rather to question the certainty with which Ohlgren asserts this conclusion as a fact. It is

a certainty which is misguided on several counts. Accepting that Gilbert Pilkington was the

author of the colophon does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that he was the scribe of

CUL Ff.5.48 for the reasons I have discussed above regarding the possibility that the

colophon was transferred from an exemplar.[43] Ohlgren dismisses this argument with the

assertion that 'the positing of now lost manuscripts amounts to pure speculation', but the

reality of late medieval manuscript studies is that the manuscripts we now have are a tiny

proportion of those which were produced. Arguing with this amount of certainty that the

name of the scribe was Gilbert Pilkington based on a single colophon has as much

foundation as arguing that his name was 'Bryan' based on the colophon to *A Betrayed*

Maiden's Lament. The second leg on which Ohlgren's identification of the manuscript as a

'clerical miscellany' rests is a consideration of its contents. He makes a list of fourteen

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[41] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xxxi-xxxii.
[42] Ohlgren, '*Robin Hood and the Monk*', p.91.
[43] Douglas Gray's entry on Gilbert Pilkington in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) demonstrates his skepticism about Pilkington's authorship of any of the texts in the manuscript. Gray argues that 'he seems in fact to have been simply the scribe' (Douglas Gray, 'Pilkington, Gilbert (*fl. c.*1450)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22268, accessed 23 August 2011]). Since this conclusion is based on a colophon appended to a single text in the manuscript (*The Northern Passion*), my argument takes this one step further. This connects Pilkington to *The Northern Passion* but not to any of the other texts. The tendency of the scribe of CUL Ff.5.48 to slavish copying complicates the issue, by increasing the probability that the colophon was simply copied from an exemplar.

items that he characterizes as 'catechetic, meditative, or didactic' out of the twenty-eight

items in the manuscript.[44] This constitutes only half the contents of the manuscript, and the

other half includes such apparently 'secular' materials as *The Tale of a Basin*, *The

Turnament of Totenham*, *The Short Metrical Chronicle of England*, and *A Betrayed

Maiden's Lament*. Ohlgren's argument makes the assumption that only a cleric would have

an interest in a manuscript with such didactic materials in order to use them for sermon

composition, that is to say, the only way the laity would be in contact with such materials

was through the conduit of a priest. This is an assumption that is manifestly untrue, as

evidenced by numerous other late medieval vernacular English miscellanies containing

devotional material that can be positively identified with lay owners.

Ohlgren does identify a Gilbert Pilkington, who was 'ordained as a subdeacon,

deacon, and secular priest over a two year period from 1463 to 1465', in Lichfield. He

argues that this man fits with CUL Ff.5.48, because 'the contents of his clerical miscellany

are exactly what we would expect a secular priest to collect and copy for his own pastoral

and personal uses'.[45] The conclusion that Pilkington was the main scribe of CUL Ff.5.48

does not necessarily follow from this, as I have suggested in my discussion of the colophon

above. It is not proven to the level of certainty that Ohlgren seems to suggest. In order to

define the manuscript as a clerical miscellany designed for the purposes of pastoral

instruction of the laity, it is necessary to somehow explain away those items in the

manuscript that appear to be included solely for entertainment value. This leads Downing

into speculating on the uses Gilbert Pilkington could have made of these items, suggesting

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[44] Ohlgren, '*Robin Hood and the Monk*', p.88.
[45] *Ibid.*, pp.93-94.

that he was 'doubtless pious', but also 'a man who loved a good joke', even at the expense of his own profession.[46]

This portrait may be appealing, but it is purely speculative. It is one that is greeted with a large dose of scepticism by Meale. She points out that the manuscript has too many hands involved in its composition to fit the definition of a commonplace book, which is usually understood to be the work of a single owner who adds items of interest over a period of time, as the London grocer Richard Hill did to Oxford, Balliol College, MS 354 in the early sixteenth century. She also disagrees with Downing's characterisation of the manuscript as a clerical manual, as this would assume a unity of purpose that belies the extremely diverse contents of the manuscript.[47] My response to the evidence regarding the scribal and readership context of CUL Ff.5.48 tends to accord more with Meale's assessment than those of Downing and Ohlgren. However, I would not go so far as Meale in arguing the extreme unlikelihood of a clerical provenance for the manuscript. The first owner *may* have been a cleric, but unlike Downing and Ohlgren I do not believe the available evidence leads to the conclusion that he *must* have been so. The argument for clerical ownership rests on a fundamental assumption that devotional or catechetical material in a manuscript indicates that it was intended for the use of clerics. One of the most significant texts in the manuscript supporting this conclusion is the first item, John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, which as Ohlgren argues 'clearly indicate[s] that the book was owned by a priest'.[48] Therefore, it is to this text that I now turn to question whether its inclusion is really so conclusive.

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[46] Downing, 'Critical Edition', xxxii.
[47] Meale, 'Romance and its Antitype', pp.115-116.
[48] Ohlgren, '*Robin Hood and the Monk',* p.88.

2.4 John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests: Clerical Texts and Lay Readers

When I first encountered CUL Ff.5.48, it was in the catalogue of manuscripts in Cambridge

University Library that was compiled by Henry Luard in the 1850s. The terse descriptions

of some of the manuscript's contents, which overemphasise the codex's focus on the

clergy, and the fact that the first item in the manuscript was Mirk's *Instructions for Parish*

Priests led me to the assumption that the manuscript was clerical.[49] A more detailed

consideration of the version of Mirk's text that appears in the manuscript has caused me to

rethink this initial categorisation of the manuscript. The text that appears in CUL Ff.5.48 is

a heavily excerpted version of that which appears in other manuscripts containing the

Instructions for Parish Priests. By comparing Gillis Kristensson's 1974 edition of the

Instructions, edited from seven different manuscripts, with the version in Downing's

edition of CUL Ff.5.48, I will consider in what ways the latter presents an extremely edited

version.[50] From this I will argue that the rationale behind which portions of text were

chosen for inclusion point to an editing of the text that would make it more useful for a lay

reader rather than a member of the clergy.

John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests* survives in seven manuscripts, of which

CUL Ff.5.48 is one. The two major manuscripts on which Kristensson's edition is based are

London, British Library, MS Cotton Claudius A II (henceforward Cotton Claudius A II)

and London, British Library, MS Royal 17 C XVII (henceforward Royal 17 C XVII). The

Instructions occupy fols.129r-154v of Cotton Claudius A II and are accompanied by some

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[49] H.R. Luard, *A catalogue of the manuscripts preserved in the library of the University of Cambridge,* vol.II
(Cambridge, 1857). For the misleading effects of titling in this regard, cf. *The Betrayed Maiden's Lament*,
which is summarized by the catalogue as 'a ballad on an incontinent priest'. The lyric could just as easily be
read as being about the unfortunate woman who is raped by the priest, and the reasons for her misfortune, but
the title obscures this possibility. In the manuscript itself, the vast majority of the texts are untitled.
[50] G. Kristensson (ed.), *John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests* (Lund, 1974).

basic rubrication.[51] The other contents of the manuscript are Mirk's *Festial* (a sermon collection aimed at improving the quality of pastoral provision by parochial clergy), an order for pronouncing excommunication, a list of months of the year with feasts and ordinances of the popes.[52] In other words, this manuscript does seem to deserve the label of clerical manual much more than CUL Ff.5.48. There is no content that is not devotional, catechetical or of use for pastoral care. The contents of Royal 17 C XVII include Latin vocabulary, verb tables, and grammatical rules as well as sermons, prayers, saint's lives, and poems on the mass.[53] Again, there is no wholly secular material, and the grammatical contents suggest that this might be a schools text.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 196 (henceforward Tanner 196) contains only lines 1765-1934 of the *Instructions,* which are concerned with problems the priest may encounter in administering to the sick and dying and performing the mass. Although CUL Ff.5.48 is also abridged, the sections it includes do not overlap at all with those in Tanner 196, with the latter focusing more on the specific difficulties facing the priest exercising his duties, and the former on more general issues regarding baptism and confession. The version of the *Instructions* in Tanner 196 is marked as '*Pars oculi in anglico*', suggesting that the reader was expected to be aware of the Latin text of which Mirk's version is an adaptation. The manuscript also seems to be more heavily rubricated than the others. The *Instructions* occupy fols.241r-243v of the manuscript.[54]

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[51] *Ibid.,* p.14.
[52] J.A. Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2006), p.12. Ford suggests that the primary intended audience of the *Festial* was less educated priests working in rural parishes, and that the secondary audience who gained access through these priests was probably rural, uneducated, and largely illiterate.
[53] Kristensson, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, pp.15-16.
[54] *Ibid.,* p.17.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Greaves 57 contains only the *Instructions,* so it is difficult to make any conclusions regarding its readership. The scribe has added a number of Latin titles that are not found in the other copies of the *Instructions,* suggesting that a reader might have been someone who needed to find his way quickly around the manuscript, using it as a kind of reference book. The remaining two manuscripts, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Douce 60 and Douce 103 (henceforward Douce 60 and Douce 103) share the same scribal hand for the sections containing the *Instructions.* In Douce 60 the *Instructions* are accompanied by Mirk's *Festial,* a treatise on the seven deadly sins and a form of confession in English. The contents of Douce 103 include an explanation of words used in the Psalter (in Latin), an English grammar, rules of prosody and a list of feasts.[55] This overview of the manuscripts of the *Instructions* demonstrates that the texts which accompany the *Instructions* are quite different to CUL Ff.5.48. None of these manuscripts contain the comic tales that are an important part of CUL Ff.5.48. Instead, in Douce 60 and Douce 103, the *Instructions* appears alongside material that is largely pastoral in nature, in some cases with added rubrication that would be useful for a priest using the text as a clerical reference manual.

None of the other manuscripts excerpt the *Instructions* in the same way that CUL Ff.5.48 does. The versions of the *Instructions* that appear in Cotton Caligula A II and Royal 17 C XVII consist of 1937 lines and 1935 lines respectively. CUL Ff.5.48 includes only 395 of these, and rearranges the material that it does include, creating an abridgement so drastic and highly focused that it is in effect a different text. The line numbers from Kristensson's edition of the version of the *Instructions for Parish Priests* contained in Cotton Claudius A II can be used for comparison. CUL Ff.5.48 includes only the lines that

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[55] *Ibid.*, pp.20-22.

form ll.57-185, 643-848, and 274-301 (in that order) of Cotton Claudius A II. Lines 1-56 were probably contained on the missing first folio of the manuscript, but the other lacunae and rearrangements are deliberate choices on the part of the compiler.[56] CUL Ff.5.48's first section concerns childbirth and midwifery (that is, ll.21-88 of Ff.5.48). Mirk discusses the importance of pregnant women being shriven before they give birth, in case they die. He also delivers a set of instructions for the midwife regarding what to do if it is a difficult birth and laying out the correct words for her to baptise the child if necessary. This is information that a parish priest might be expected to relay to women as part of his pastoral care, but it is also the type of guide that a woman might want to have access to herself. The main focus of the text here is on the actions of the woman, what she should do in these situations, rather than the priest's responsibilities to her. The priest is imagined as absent, requiring the woman to step in to baptise the child. This is just one example of the focus in this excerpted version of the *Instructions* on the duties of the parishioner, shifting the attention from the priest who is the intended recipient of Mirk's original text, and making the excerpted version a useful guide to a lay reader. For example, the original version also rehearses the words the priest should say at the baptism (ll.562-614 of Kristensson), whereas the excerpted version focuses on the role of the godparents and the role of the baptism ceremony in creating ties of affinity. One might imagine this listing of who is now spiritually related to the baptised child and consequently to each other in their roles as godparents would be useful for laypeople in order to determine who they are now forbidden to marry.

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[56] For a line by line comparison of which parts of the Cotton text included in CUL Ff.5.48, cf. Downing, 'Critical Edition', Appendix C.

The long section in the original text about wedding procedure and restrictions, which appears in both Cotton Claudius A II and Royal 17 C XVII, is also cut, perhaps because the absolute nature of clerical attitudes on pre-marital sex (for example, that it is a deadly sin, even between a single man and woman) conflicted with more permissive lay views. Topics that were forbidden for the laity to know were excised from the text, for example the section advising the priest what to do regarding 'synne aȝeynes kynde' (Cotton Claudius A II, l.223), in which the priest is instructed not to mention it to his parishioners, even in order to preach against it. Strictures against games and singing, particularly in the church and churchyard, and the reaffirmation that the church is solely a place for prayer (Cotton Claudius A II, ll.333-345) are all likewise cut from the text. This sort of asceticism did not accord well with trends in late medieval spirituality towards the domestication of religious space and observance. The church was a place of devotion but it was also the centre and focus of the community. Some parts of the church building, such as the nave, were formally the responsibility of the parishioners, whereas the chancel was the domain of the clergy.[57] John Schofield has argued that parishioners used the churchyard as a secular meeting place.[58] Katharine French's work on churchwarden's accounts has demonstrated that the laity might spend large amounts of time in the church and its environs not engaged in prayer, but in other activities that contributed to the devotional life of the parish –

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[57] B.A. Kümin, 'The English Parish in a European Perspective', in K.L. French, G.G. Gibbs and B.A. Kümin (eds.), *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1997), pp.15-34 (p.24); J.A. Ford, 'Marginality and the Assimilation of Foreigners in the Lay Community: The Case of Sandwich', in French, Gibbs and Kümin (eds.), *The Parish in English Life*, pp.203-216 (p.206), note 23 – Ford argues that the nave-laity / chancel-clergy division probably dates from the early thirteenth century, but it was formalised at the Synod of Exeter in 1287.

[58] J. Schofield, 'Medieval Parish Churches in the City of London: The archaeological evidence', in French, Gibbs and Kümin (eds), *The Parish in English Life*, pp.35-53 (p.53).

cleaning, decorating, fundraising.[59] These sorts of parishioners would be unlikely to respond well to the suggestion that the parish church was only intended for devotional purposes. French argues that the ecclesiastical authorities envisaged a clear distinction between religious and secular activities, demonstrated for example by criticism of the celebration of ales in church and the use of the churchyard for secular occasions, but that this distinction was less obvious to parishioners.[60]

As well as excluding material that might be less amenable to lay sensibilities or unsuitable for their consumption, the version in CUL Ff.5.48 cuts out many sections of the text that verged towards the dry or the technical. The instructions about how the laity should behave during mass and what they should do and say during the service, particularly during the consecration and elevation of the host, are all included. However, the sections in the full version which outline more basic catechetical materials, such as the Paternoster, Ave Maria, Creed, Articles of Faith, and sacraments do not appear in CUL Ff.5.48. This implies that the text was tailored for a reader who might be expected to know these basic elements of spiritual practice, but was in search of more specific instruction regarding the form of the mass. The text also includes a guide to penitential procedure, including instructions on what circumstances make it permissible for a penitent to confess to a priest other than the incumbent of their parish. The form confession should take is outlined, including a warning that the priest should take care not to see the face of female penitents, and the text lists some questions that the priest might ask to 'grope' the sin of the penitent. Although this material does appear in CUL Ff.5.48, it is much more compressed than the equivalent section in the full text. The full version provides detailed lists of questions

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[59] K.L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001), pp.20-22.
[60] *Ibid.*, p.31.

priests might ask regarding the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins, venial sins, suggestions for penances, guidance on which sinners to refer to the bishop for absolution of more serious sins, and the formula the priest should recite to grant absolution. The excerpts in CUL Ff.5.48 stick to information that might be of practical use to a parishioner – information regarding midwifery, christening, how to conduct oneself during the mass, and a brief guide to confessional practice – excluding the more encyclopaedic knowledge that might be expected of a priest whose job was to ferret out sins and which is included in the full version of the *Instructions.*

The excerpts in CUL Ff.5.48 modify the text so that it occupies a middle ground, excluding both very basic devotional materials and more specialised materials for pastoral care. The sort of material that is included could have been useful to the lay reader. There is no reason to assume, based on the form the *Instructions* takes in CUL Ff.5.48, and the way in which it is excerpted, that it was intended specifically for a clerical reader or that its presence definitively marks CUL Ff.5.48 as a clerical manuscript. The first folio is missing, so it is impossible to know whether the *Instructions* was titled or not, but the majority of the poems in the manuscript are not. Without the label of *Instructions for Parish Priests*, and excerpted in the way that it is, the text could have been useful to lay readers as well.

The version of the *Instructions* that appears in CUL Ff.5.48 is heavily excerpted in ways that focus it on topics of interest to a lay readership, but even if the full text of the *Instructions* had appeared in CUL Ff.5.48, there is no reason to assume that because it was originally designed as a guide for priests that it would be of no interest to a lay readership. Much of its content is similar in nature to Chaucer's 'Parson's Tale', which is a handbook on penance that is much more technical than the version of the *Instructions* that appears in

CUL Ff.5.48. A layman such as Chaucer could write the wide variety of genres that appear

in *The Canterbury Tales*, and he obviously had the expectation that the same lay audiences

who enjoyed 'The Miller's Tale' or the Wife of Bath would also be capable of reading and

appreciating 'The Parson's Tale'. As Helen Cooper reminds us, the discomfort with

accommodating diverse genres is ours, rather than the medieval reader's. The idea that

moralizing material would appeal more to a member of the clergy than a layperson is a

consequence of modern rather than medieval literary taste.[61] The many miscellanies that

survive from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries demonstrate that medieval readers were

capable of appreciating a mixture of genres, and that their taste in reading was eclectic. To

argue that the inclusion of a text such as the *Instructions*, which came from a clerical milieu

and contains catechetical and penitential material, means that a manuscript such as CUL

Ff.5.48 must therefore be a clerical miscellany involves making a conceptual leap that is

not supported by what we know about miscellaneity in late medieval England. It is akin to

arguing that the author of *The Canterbury Tales* must have been a cleric because he chose

'The Parson's Tale' to occupy the important final position in his work, although the

collection contains many other genres, as does CUL Ff.5.48.

Texts such as 'The Parson's Tale' and the *Instructions* fit into a genre of pastoral

and catechetical literature that was familiar to late medieval readers. The requirement that

all parishioners confess at least once a year, instituted after the fourth Lateran Council in

1215, necessitated the education of both the clergy and the laity. The penitent needed to

know what was necessary to confess and how to do this, and the priest needed to be able to

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[61] H. Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, 2006), p.407.

assess the confession and assign appropriate penances.[62] In order to fulfil these needs,

Archbishop Pecham's provincial Council of Lambeth drew up an instructional programme

for the English laity in 1281. This established a 'required syllabus of parochial instruction

and a structural norm for manuals catering for it'.[63] Gillespie suggests that this system

encouraged the development of clerical miscellanies, into which clerics copied material that

could be useful for this task of instruction.[64] These were mainly in Latin at first, and largely

initially the work of clergy for the benefit of other clergy, to aid in their pastoral duties.

However, they were written in response to lay demand for instruction and began

increasingly to be written in the vernacular and aimed at the laity as well as the clergy.

Caxton showed awareness of this dual audience when he published a translation of a French

pastoral manual, the *Doctrinal of Sapyence*, in 1489. He produced two editions, one with

the contents tailored to lay needs, one to clerical needs.[65] John Mirk's *Festial*, intended to

provide sermon material for clergy, ran through numerous printed editions between 1486

and 1532.[66] Manuals such as the *Festial* later came to be read directly by laypeople as well

as clergy, which suggests that the didactic material contained in them was amenable to lay

tastes and demands.

The spread of literacy was important in the increasing crossover between lay and

clerical textual culture. Texts that were originally designed for priests to use when

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[62] E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, 2nd edition (London, 2005), p.54.
[63] V. Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', in J. Griffiths and D. Pearsall (eds.) *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475* (Cambridge, 1989) pp.317-344 (p.317). The same process was undertaken by Archbishop Thoresby for the Northern Province in 1357, which produced the *Lay Folk's Catechism* (Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp.53-54).
[64] Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', p.317.
[65] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars,* p.56.
[66] *English Short Title Catalogue,* http://estc.bl.uk

instructing their parishioners could now be read by the parishioners themselves.[67]

Miscellaneous compilations that contained material for contemplation and instruction were actively demanded by the laity, a demand that only increased with rising literacy in the later part of the late medieval period. Gillespie argues that 'the fifteenth century witnessed an extensive and consistent process of assimilation by the laity of techniques and materials of spiritual advancement, which had historically been the preserve of the clerical and monastic orders.'[68] As Felicity Riddy notes, the immense number of texts devoted to pastoral purposes was an effect of the decrees of the fourth Lateran council, but for this activity to sustain itself over centuries, it could not have been 'entirely generated from the centre' – that is, this textual production must have been responding to a lay demand to learn, and adapting to the form that these audiences required.[69]

This rapprochement between clerical and lay cultures was not just a matter of clerical practices permeating into lay reading material. Increasing lay literacy was having an effect on how people practised their religion, with devotional texts such as books of hours or primers becoming the most widely owned reading material by lay people.[70] These books became part of the everyday household furnishings and could serve as status symbols as much as devotional objects.[71] Mary Erler argues that there was no rigid divide between clerical and lay readers by the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries: 'devotional reading was everyone's reading'.[72] Owning devotional texts did not indicate extraordinary piety. Books could and did move back and forth between lay and clerical hands, for example as

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[67] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* p.68.

[68] Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', p.317.

[69] F. Riddy, 'Women Talking about the Things of God: A Late Medieval Subculture', in C.M. Meale (ed.),*Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.104-127 (p.107).

[70] Rees Jones and Riddy, 'The Bolton Hours', p.220.

[71] *Ibid.*, p.233.

[72] M.C. Erler, 'Devotional Literature', in Hellinga and Trapp (eds.) *History of the Book in Britain,* Vol. III, pp. 495-525 (p.495).

part of a bequest. In her discussion of late medieval Norwich, Erler identifies a 'subculture shared by clerical and lay persons', in which books were 'not only instruments of spiritual progress, but tokens of social connection as well.'[73] Erler presents the example of the London vowess, Margery de Nerford. She shared a close connection with the priest, William de Bergh, and in 1407 they jointly paid to found a chantry for themselves.[74] When de Bergh died in 1414, he left to Margery 'all my books and the contents of my chamber'.[75] On Margery's own death in 1417, her legatees included Lady Cobham (the wife of Sir John Oldcastle), the anchoress of Bishopsgate, David Fyvyan, rector of Pilkington (Margery's chaplain), and the mercer and MP John Whatley.[76] All of these people received books from Margery de Nerford on her death and it is likely that these were some of the same books that had been willed to her by de Bergh three years earlier. This is a striking example of a professed laywoman receiving books from a member of the clergy and passing them on to a network of connections that encompass an aristocratic woman, an anchoress, a priest, and a prominent layman. In the case of fifteenth-century York, Nicola McDonald argues that the elite comprised a 'tightly knit social world' of prosperous merchants, local gentry, senior clergy, and some members of the aristocracy, among whom ownership and circulation of books was common.[77] The chaplain William Revetour was part of this group, and on his death he made several bequests to female members of the Bolton and Blackburn families, prominent members of York's merchant elite.[78] He left two books to Alice Bolton,

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[73] *Ibid.*, p.523.
[74] M.C. Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2002), p.53.
[75] *Ibid.*, p.59.
[76] *Ibid.*, pp.58-60.
[77] N. McDonald, 'A York Primer and its Alphabet: Reading Women in a Lay Household', in E.M. Treharne and G. Walker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English* (Oxford, 2010), pp.181-199 (pp.188-189).
[78] *Ibid.*, pp.189 & 183.

including the *Pricke of Conscience*, one to her husband John, and one to her daughter Isabella.[79]

As well as connections between male clerics and laypeople, there were also links between lay and religious women. Felicity Riddy goes so far as to state that 'the literary culture of nuns in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that of devout gentlewomen not only overlapped but were more or less indistinguishable.'[80] Carol Meale and Julia Boffey argue that gentlewomen had access to 'multiple and fluid networks' of connection, which could shape their reading practices. These networks included both religious and lay female readers. Professed religious women often came from gentry or mercantile families.[81] The example of the three Fettyplace sisters, which Erler discusses, demonstrates the proximity between lay and religious life and interests for women who came from gentry families. Two of the sisters were married and then widowed. On the death of their husbands, one of these, Susan, became a vowess and the other, Dorothy, became a nun. The third sister, Eleanor, did not marry and became a nun. When making her will on entrance to Syon, Dorothy left the purchase of books for her to her sister, Susan, which Erler suggests demonstrates shared intellectual interests between the nun and vowess.[82]

By recognising that lay and clerical reading cultures overlapped by the late medieval period, the certainty with which CUL Ff.5.48 has been identified by some as a clerical manuscript seems untenable. It is not my intention to argue that CUL Ff.5.48 was beyond all doubt a lay and not a clerical manuscript. On the basis of the evidence I have

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[79] *Ibid.*, p.189.
[80] Riddy, 'Women Talking about the Things of God', p.110.
[81] Meale and Boffey, 'Gentlewomen's Reading', pp.531-2.
[82] Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp.97 & 99.

discussed in this chapter however, I think it very likely to have been written for a lay reader. The *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ironically the very text that others have cited to label the manuscript as clerical, is abbreviated and adapted to an extent that would have been unnecessary and counterproductive if the intended reader was a priest. However, attempting clearly to define some material as only of interest either to clerical or to lay readers is asking the wrong question. Medieval readers had eclectic tastes. There is no reason why this manuscript could not have been read and enjoyed by either a cleric or a layperson, or by both groups over the course of its history. Rather than focusing on who the manuscript was originally intended for, the more productive question to ask seems to be how readers of CUL Ff.5.48 might have read and responded to these texts. The second part of this chapter will discuss a single text from the manuscript, *The Tale of the Basin*, and explore how the ways in which it may have been read were influenced both by literary tradition and by cultural anxieties about household governance and sexual misconduct.

2.5 Household Governance and the Incontinent Priest in The Tale of the Basin

In *The Tale of the Basin* the threat to the family unit is central to the narrative, as is the sexually transgressive behaviour of the main female character. The priest plays a central role in introducing disorder into the household. The text appears towards the end of section one of CUL Ff.5.48. This is the section that is headed by the abbreviated *Instructions for Parish Priests.* Although it is difficult to be certain how long the five sections were associated with each other, it is clear that the contents of section one were copied together. *The Tale of the Basin* occupies folios 58r-61v, between the *Dialogue between a Nightingale*

and a Clerk (fols.57r-57v) and the last item in the section, *The Turnament of Totenham* (fols.62r-66r).

   The Tale of the Basin narrates the reduced circumstances of a married layman, who, despite being his father's heir, is perennially short of means, and his more prosperous brother, who is a parson. The parson agrees to help his brother solve the root cause of his financial and domestic problems: his wife's adultery and her wasting of his household goods entertaining a priest named Sir John. The parson enchants a basin so that anyone who touches it becomes affixed to it, and his brother places it under the bed. Rising during the night to use the basin as a chamberpot, Sir John becomes stuck to the basin, followed by the adulterous wife, then her maid, then Sir John's clerk, then the maid's lover. The unfortunate fellowship, three of whom are naked, must dance around the enchanted pot all night until they are discovered the next morning. Sir John is threatened with the loss of his 'harnesse' [genitals], and agrees instead to pay the wronged husband one hundred pounds. The priest subsequently quits the area in shame and the husband and wife 'leuyd togeder withowt stryfe' (ll.210 & 221).[83]

  CUL Ff.5.48 is the only extant copy of this poem, but it shares motifs with other more widely disseminated texts, such as the section on sacrilege in *Handlyng Synne*, which also features a group of dancers who are stuck together at the instigation of a disgruntled priest.[84] The sin of the dancers in *Handlyng Synne* is defying the will of the priest and committing sacrilege by dancing in the churchyard during mass, rather than the adultery which is the focus of *The Tale of the Basin.* The carolling in *Handlyng Synne* is treated tragically, ending in mutilation and death, whereas the dancing in *The Tale of the Basin,*

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[83] *The Tale of the Basin*, in Furrow (ed.), *Comic Poems*, pp.45-64 (p.64).
[84] I. Sullens (ed.), *Robert Mannyng of Brunne, Handlyng Synne* (Binghamton, 1983), ll.9015-9257.

with its ever increasing number of dancers, becomes steadily more ridiculous as not only the adulterous pair but also the servant, the clerk, and the carter (i.e. the servant's lover) get caught by the enchanted basin. The author of *The Tale of the Basin* may have been attempting ironically to recall the exemplum from *Handlyng Synne* in his tale. The section on sacrilege in *Handlyng Synne* is deeply concerned with disputes between the clergy and the laity over space in the church, with reinforcing clerical authority, and with the potential for women to distract clergy from their duties. Using a similar plot device for *The Tale of the Basin*, in which the priest is behaving incontinently, abusing his position to gain access to the household, and fully giving in to the temptations of the wife gives the tale an added layer of irony. In *The Tale of the Basin* the parson knowingly orchestrates the enchantment, using the magical basin as a solution to his brother's problems with Sir John.

2.5.1 The Concept of 'Husbandry' and the Responsibilities of the Household Head

The concept of 'husbandry' is central to *The Tale of the Basin*. An awareness of late medieval ideas about how the bourgeois household should function is essential to an understanding of the poem. Of course, these ideas were not set in stone, but rather make up a discourse that was constantly shifting, and might be applied in an idiosyncratic way to different circumstances and for different purposes. It is still worth attempting to sketch out the constellation of these ideas in order to better understand the anxieties at work in this text and the assumptions about order and disorder that medieval readers might have brought to it. The household has been the focus of much recent work, as scholars seek to explore

how late medieval people conceived of their domestic space and their family relationships, and the place of the household in their ideas about order, government, and gender roles.[85]

As discussed in the introduction, the order of the household depended on the vigilance and good management of the head of the household. The responsible and godly household head should also take responsibility for the religious instruction and moral guidance of his charges. A list of Latin instructions for the regulation of the devotional life of a household, discovered among the Throckmorton muniments at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, suggests that at least some laymen were anxious to discharge these duties. The editor of the list, which is written in an early fifteenth-century hand, suggests that the author was the confessor or spiritual director of the recipient.[86] The recipient is encouraged to make spiritual instruction a regular part of the rhythms of the household, to bring religious books to the table and have his children read aloud from them while meals are consumed, and to explain the readings in the vernacular to his wife and others.[87] Similar instructions can be found in the vernacular, in *A Werke for Householders*, written by Richard Whitford of Syon, which went through multiple printings by de Worde in the early 1530s.[88] The householder is instructed to gather his household members and neighbours around to read Whitford's instructions. He should make sure his children are taught the Pater Noster, Ave, and Creed as soon as they can speak, read these texts aloud at meals and

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[85] For examples of this scholarship, cf.: F. Riddy, 'Authority and Intimacy' and S. Rees Jones, 'Women's Influence on the Design of Urban Homes', both in Erler and Kowaleski (eds.), *Gendering the Master Narrative*, pp.212-228, pp.190-211; I.Davis, M, Müller and S. Rees Jones (eds.), *Love, Marriage and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003); A.B. Mulder-Bakker and J. Wogan-Browne (eds.), *Household, Women and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2005); Kowaleski and Goldberg (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity*; C. Beattie; A. Masklovic and S. Rees Jones (eds.), *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c.850-c.1550: Managing Power, Wealth and the Body* (Turnhout, 2003).

[86] W.A. Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', in J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson (eds.), *Medieval Learning and Literature* (Oxford, 1976), pp.398-422 (p.401).

[87] '*Ecque cito deferatur liber ad mensam sicut panis...legatur nunc ab eo, nunc ab alio, et a filiis statim cum sciant legere...aliquando exponantic in vulgari quod edificet uxorem et alios.*' (Pantin, 'Instructions', p.421).

[88] These editions are *STC* 25422, 25423, 25425 and 25425.5 in the *ESTC:* http://estc.bl.uk. Accessed 4 March 2010.

make sure everyone in the household can recite them. At church, he should make sure his

dependents are engaged properly, in prayer not chatter, and he should regulate their leisure

time, forbidding gambling and discouraging trips to the alehouse. The end of this

watchfulness is more than simply moral reward. By keeping a close watch on the servants,

the master can avoid unnecessary wastage of his goods; 'the presence of the master in every

corner is much profitable'.[89]

This is the ideal of the omniscient, omnipresent household governor, able to

regulate the behaviour of his household members, curtail misconduct, and ensure the godly

education of his children and servants. How might he respond if his servants or apprentices

stepped out of line? In York in 1417, John Bown, a cordwainer, discovered his servant,

John Waryngton had had sex with one of Bown's servants under his roof. Bown attempted

to curtail Waryngton's behaviour.[90] He made Waryngton swear on a book that he would not

repeat the offence, but he later found Waryngton in his hayloft with another servant,

Margaret Barker. Bown threatened Waryngton with punishment under the common law,

and persuaded him to contract marriage with Margaret, 'You will take her by the hand and

you will say as I say to you'.[91] By acting in this way, Bown was preventing sexual

misconduct in his home by making the couple regularize their relationship and acting in the

place of Margaret's parents to negotiate her marriage. The case came to the Church court

when Waryngton later claimed the marriage had been made under duress and was therefore

invalid. Waryngton had committed two transgressions in this case, firstly by fornicating

with someone to whom he was not married and secondly by doing it under his master's

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[89] R. Whitford, *A werke for housholders or for them ye haue the gydynge or gouernaunce of any company* (London 1530). *Via Early English Books Online* (*EEBO*)

[90] York, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, C.P. F.127. A translation of this case can be found in Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England*, pp.110-114.

[91] Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England*, p.111.

roof and with women whose behaviour his master had a duty to regulate. Although

Waryngton is not specifically identified as an apprentice, Jeremy Goldberg, in his detailed

analysis of this case, argues that Bown's threat to have him committed to prison implies

that Waryngton was an apprentice in breach of his contract.[92] Apprenticeship indentures

generally bound the apprentice not to commit fornication either inside or outside the house

and not to marry.[93] Caroline Barron argues that the apprentice was not considered an adult,

and was expected to remain celibate and chaste for the duration of his or her indenture.[94]

Breach of the terms of the contract by either the master or the apprentice could lead the

other party to sue.[95] Goldberg also argues that it was the location and persons involved

rather than the simple fact of extramarital sex that necessitated Bown's involvement to

regularize the situation. The concern in the case is more with presenting Bown as a master

who acted appropriately to restore his authority over his servant and household, rather than

someone who was interested in curtailing sin *per se*.[96] He had to be seen to be in control of

the sexual activity of his dependents, and only he and his wife, as the heads of the

household, were permitted a licit sexual relationship within its walls.[97]

The Waryngton case took place in York in the first half of the fifteenth century, but

its concern with household governance was not unique to this time and place. Shannon

McSheffrey's 2006 monograph is based mainly on her reading of evidence of Church court

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[92] *Ibid.*, p.58.
[93] C.M. Barron, 'The Child in Medieval London: The Legal Evidence', in J.T. Rosenthal (ed.), *Essays on Medieval Childhood: Responses to Recent Debates* (Donington, 2007), pp.40-53 (p.50).
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.*, p.49.
[96] Goldberg, 'Masters and Men', p.60.
[97] *Ibid.*, p.63.

records from London in the second half of the fifteenth century.[98] McSheffrey provides an excellent summary of the idea of governance and the responsibilities this enjoined on householders.[99] It required both governance of the self and one's own appetites, but also 'involvement in civic politics, governance of social relationships in the neighborhood (especially marriage and illicit sexual unions), and responsibility for the conduct of those living in the patriarch's household'.[100] Those who failed to exercise control over their household dependents could be prosecuted for keeping a disorderly house, or for harbouring those guilty of sexual misconduct.[101] According to late medieval ideas of governance, these problems festered because of the lack of control exercised by the household head. The household of the York goldsmith William Snawschill seems to have been one of these disordered households. The act book for the capitular court of York in 1442 reveals that Snawschill's servant John Smyth was indicted for fornication with two women, one of whom was his fellow servant, Isabella.[102] In 1443, another servant of the household, Alice, was presented for fornication with a vicar choral. In 1445, Snawschill's wife Joan was presented for adultery with John Kendale.[103] Here is a single household where three servants and the mistress who was supposed to be in charge of their conduct were all charged with illicit relationships. This would have reflected unfavourably on William Snawschill, who was apparently unable to govern his dependents. The fact that the

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[98] McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*, pp.4 & 9. McSheffrey relies heavily on marriage and defamation cases in two books of depositions (1467-76 and 1487-96) from the Consistory Court, as well as records of *ex officio* actions from the Commissary Court (1470s onward) (pp.195-197).
[99] *Ibid.*, pp.137-138.
[100] *Ibid.*, p.137.
[101] Cf. R. Helmholz, 'Harboring Sexual Offenders: Ecclesiastical Courts and Controlling Misbehavior', *Journal of British Studies* 37 (1998): 258-68. Cf. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture,* pp.145-146 for examples of presentments.
[102] Goldberg, 'Masters and Men', p.64.
[103] *Ibid.*

household's disorder reached the courts indicates that to his neighbours at least his failings were cause for concern.

An even more serious neglect of duty was when the householder became a bawd for his or her dependents, as was the case with Elizabeth Moring. Moring was presented before the Mayor and Aldermen of London in 1385, charged with procuring. The charges alleged that she had taken young women into her household under the guise of training them as apprentices to her craft of embroidery, but had actually acted as a pimp for them, enticing them into a life of prostitution, or as the case puts it: 'she incited the said Johanna and the other women who were with her, and in her service, to live a lewd life, and to consort with friars, chaplains, and all other such men as desired to have their company'.[104] She accepted payment from these men for procuring the girls and encouraged her charges to steal from their customers. In fact, when Johanna returned empty-handed from a night with a certain chaplain, Moring scolded her and sent her back, telling her to make sure she stole something this time, 'whatever she should be able to lay hold of'.[105] Although the court accused Moring of being 'herself a common harlot and a procuress', this was not what she was primarily charged with. It was the perversion of her role as mistress and instructor that led to her presentment. She had to be punished to contain the threat that she posed to other women who might be corrupted by her example ('in order that other women might beware of doing the like').[106] Moring was married, but her husband is completely absent from the case – evidently he was not doing a very good job of governing his wife or his household.

Returning now to *The Tale of the Basin*, equipped with some of the same ideas that the late medieval reader might have had regarding households and their proper functioning,

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[104] Riley, *Memorials of London*, p.484.
[105] *Ibid.*, p.485.
[106] *Ibid.*, pp.485-486

it is evident that *The Tale of the Basin* is a poem in which household governance is a major concern. The words 'husbande' and 'husbandry' occur frequently in the first few stanzas of the text where the concerns of the tale are established: the parson is described as 'a gode husbande' because of his increasing wealth, whereas his brother is censured for his failings, 'off husbandry cowth he noȝt, / But alle his wyves will he wroȝt'; 'a febull husbande was he as many ar on lyve'; 'litull of husbondry þe godeman con thynke' (ll. 12, 16, 19, 36).[107] The way in which the word is used emphasises its dual meaning in the period. 'Housbonde' could be used to refer to either a married man or a household manager. In practice, both might be the same thing, as men often first established their own household, separate from that of their father or master, upon marriage. For example, the gloss of the word 'hosebonde' in the fifteenth-century *Promptorium Parvulorum* reads, 'of gouernaunce of an howsholde' and equates it with the Latin 'Paterfamilias'.[108] However, the word could also be used to refer to a man who had stewardship or governance of a household, whether he was married or not. 'Husband' could be used to refer to the head of a household and family, without specifically referencing his relationship with a wife. In *The Tale of the Basin,* this creates a play on words in which the man who is not married, the parson, is by far the better 'husband' in the sense of managing a household.[109]

The tale shifts between the two senses of the word for ironic effect, and establishes a relationship between being a good husband -- in the sense of controlling one's wife -- and being good at husbandry -- in the sense of household management. The householder's failure to perform the role of husband and curtail his wife's adultery leads to financial

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[107] Furrow (ed.), *Comic Poems*, pp.53-55.
[108] *MED*: **hous-bond(e)** (n.) 1 & 2. For the *Promptorium Parvulorum* see 2a).
[109] *MED*: **hous-bond(e)**, (n.) 2b. Cf. Chaucer's 'Nun's Priest's Tale', ll.2828-9, for an example of how the word 'husbandry' could be used separate from the sense of masculinity – 'By housbondrye of swich as god hire sente, / She foond hire self and eek hire doghtren two.'(*RC*, p. 253).

difficulty in his household. According to the tale, one cannot be good at husbandry while the personal relationship between husband and wife is profoundly disordered. The link between the two possible interpretations of being a bad husband is established right from the beginning of the poem. In the second stanza, the parson's good husbandry is juxtaposed with his brother's bad husbandry by placing the descriptions directly alongside each other, and the assertion of the brother's bad husbandry -- 'Off husbandry cowth he noȝt' -- is followed immediately by 'But alle his wyves will he wroȝt'. His position under his wife's thumb is presented as a clear explanation for his failure in husbandry, and the next stanza expands on this assertion: 'a febull husbande was he on as many ar on lyve: / Alle his wyves biddying he did it full ryve' (ll.16-17, 19-20).[110] The husband is beaten by the wife and dare not speak a word if she does not allow it. His weakness in his own household, his wife's adultery and his inability to manage his patrimony are linked by presenting the adultery and loss of goods as a consequence of his failings as a husband: 'After a ȝere or two his wyfe he myȝt not pleese; / Mycull of his lande lay to þe preestys ese' (ll.28-29).[111] The priest, Sir John, has the freedom to enjoy not only his wife, but also the income from his lands.

The opening section of the poem sets the scene – the house is under the control of a wife who refuses to work, concerned only with filling her belly, and the proper 'lorde ... at bedde and borde' has been supplanted (ll.32-33).[112] The wife has perverted her role as a giver of hospitality; instead she spends the goods of the household in entertaining her priestly lover. When the husband is sent to his brother, the parson, to borrow money to

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[110] Furrow (ed.), *Comic Poems*, pp.53-54.
[111] *Ibid.*, p.54.
[112] *Ibid.*

repair the household finances, it becomes clear that he has his suspicions about the reason

for his continual poverty:

> I ne wot how it faris, but euer I am behynde.
> For to liffe manly hit come me be kynde.
> I shall truly say what I thynke I my mynde.
> …
> Hit is a preest men callis Sir John
> (ll.72-74, 77).[113]

The parson and his brother espouse different models of masculine household management.

For the parson, his status comes from being considered wise and thrifty. His brother the

layman seems to imply that for him, living 'manly' includes an element of generosity and

hospitality.[114] Although he falls behind in his household finances, entertaining guests and

extending his hospitality to them is an important way to demonstrate his status, establish his

reputation and build trust with others.[115] His wife's diversion of the household's goods has

converted this laudable tendency into one that has a ruinous effect on the household.

2.5.2 'Hit is a preest men callis Sir John': Sir John and the Fabliaux Tradition

The poem does not specifically state initially that Sir John is engaged in a sexual

relationship with the wife. It does not need to. This is one instance where it is apparent that

the tale uses tropes that would be instantly recognisable to a late medieval audience. When

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[113] *Ibid.*, p.56.

[114] For two examples of the word being used with these connotations, cf. Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, p.75: 'Artow manlyche amonge þi neiȝbores of þi mete and drynke?' (*Passus* 5, l.256); Chaucer, 'The Shipman's Tale', l.43 (*RC*, p.203): 'Free was daun Iohn and manly of dispence.', *MED*: **manli**, adj, 4b). The second example is disputed as although *RC* reads 'manli' here, the textual notes acknowledge that the majority of manuscripts in fact have 'namely' instead. The editors of *RC* adjudged that 'namely' was probably intended as a scribal clarification, and 'manli' was the more appropriate reading (*RC*, p.1130). The *MED* reflects this confusion by citing this line under the definitions for both **manli**, adj. 4b and **nām(e)lī**, adv. 'The Shipman's Tale' shares important affinities in plot and character with *The Tale of the Basin*, as it also features the tropes of the adulterous wife and her clerical lover.

[115] For example in *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage*, the husband is the object of scorn from his male peers after he fails to provide suitable hospitality for them. They impute this to his lack of authority over his wife and servants ('The Sixth Joy', G.6).

the husband tells his tale, the parson is told nothing except 'hit is a preest men callis Sir

John', and this is enough for him to comprehend the root of his brother's difficulty. The

brother's further description of Sir John as 'curtesse', a talented musician and singer, a man

who engages in lay pastimes of wrestling and casting the stone despite his clerical status,

serves only to cement the identification of him as the 'seductive cleric' common to many

late medieval English poems.

The generic roots of *The Tale of the Basin* are in the Old French fabliaux tradition.

The tale has a quotidian setting and characters who are little defined beyond the role they

serve in the plot (e.g. husband, wife, lover), and the action focuses on adultery. [116] Daron

Burrows argues that in the fabliaux the priest's lust is usually directed towards a married

woman and he is frequently initially successful when he competes against laymen for

possession of women.[117] The priest's transgression of the physical boundaries of the house

in pursuit of the wife mirrors 'both the act of penetration and the violation of the spiritual

bond of marriage'.[118] For example, in *Le Prestre Qui Abevete* (*The Priest Who Peeked*),

the gullible husband is locked out of his house and cuckolded in front of his eyes by the

priest, who convinces him that he only sees the priest and the wife talking at the table over

a meal.[119] Sharing hospitality is used as a metaphor for sex. The husband in *The Tale of the*

Basin is also displaced from his home and the role he should occupy as household

governor, and spends most of the tale outside it.

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[116] *The Riverside Chaucer* provides a valuable summary of the generic features of fabliaux – *RC*, pp.7-8. Cf.
J. Hines, *The Fabliau in English* (London, 1993), pp.276, 34, 10.
[117] Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest*, pp.100 & 115.
[118] *Ibid.*, p.123.
[119] English translations of fabliaux titles are those used in J. Duval and R. Eichmann, *Fabliaux Fair and Foul*
(Binghamton, 1992).

The priest is the agent of anxieties about the violation of space, property, and sexual mores. However, fabliau morality is often conventional, and the lecherous priest eventually gets his comeuppance and the husband is restored to dominance in the household.[120] When the priest is caught in his adultery, he is often punished by the layman through castration, loss of money or symbolic degradation.[121]. For example, *Aloul* involves the priest being beaten and twice threatened with castration, a fate that actually meets the unfortunate adulterous priest in *Le Pescheor de Pont-Sur-Seine* (*The Fisherman from Pont-Sur-Seine*). *The Tale of the Basin* ends with the priest being threatened with castration, made to pay money for his liberty, and being chased out of town. The formerly adulterous wife lives a virtuous life from henceforward and stops mastering her husband. The husband is placed back in control of his home and his goods are no longer being spent in entertaining his wife's lover.

From this brief summary, it is easy to see how *The Tale of the Basin* fits into this generic heritage. The main characters -- adulterous wife, cuckolded husband, and lecherous priest -- are familiar from many fabliaux. Six Anglo-Norman fabliaux survive in English manuscripts as evidence that the genre was active in England.[122] However, the genre does not seem to have crossed over much into Middle English when this language became the dominant mode of literary composition in the vernacular. *Dame Sirith,* which is also found

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[120] Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest.,* p.189.

[121] *Ibid.,* p.163.

[122] Hines, *The Fabliau in English*, p.39. The manuscripts and titles are: London, British Library, MS Harley 2253: *Le Chevalier qui fist parler les cons* (*The Knight Who Made Cunts Talk*), *Les trois dames qui troverent un vit* (*The Three Women Who Found a Prick*), *Le Chevalier a la Corbeille* (*The Knight of the Basket*), and *La Gageure* (*The Wager*); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86: *Les quatre souhais Saint Martin* (*The Four Wishes of Saint Martin*); Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 50: *Un chevalier, sa dame et un clerc* (*A Knight, his Wife and a Clerk*).

in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86, is the only example in English that survives before Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, of which 'The Miller's Tale', 'The Reeve's Tale', 'The Shipman's Tale', and 'The Summoner's Tale' are usually classed as fabliaux. 'The Merchant's Tale' exhibits many fabliau characteristics, particularly in the climax of the tale, but it is more generically complex than the other tales, boasting diversions into the philosophical merits of marriage on top of the straightforward comic plot of the fabliaux.

Melissa Furrow's recent book, *The Expectations of Romance*, suggests that the Anglo-Norman fabliau had thrived because of its role as an anti-genre to contemporary romance, parodying and questioning its courtly excesses. The role was not initially needed in relation to Middle English romance because it was less focused on the courtly than its French predecessors. However, by the fifteenth century, Middle English romance began to focus on the ceremonial and the marvellous, and to present itself as an instructional guide to the noble lifestyle for upwardly mobile bourgeois readers. This gave comic tales like *The Tale of the Basin*, which burlesqued these elements of romance, space to re-emerge.[123] Furrow's thesis is a convincing argument concerning the absence of the fabliaux from England for much of the fourteenth century, but does not seem specifically applicable to *The Tale of the Basin*, which rather than parodying the aristocratic conventions of romance, seems firmly focused on questioning ideas of bourgeois domesticity and how they might be disrupted and restored.

The Tale of the Basin explores some of the same anxieties regarding sex, money, and hospitality as Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale'. Both tales begin by focusing on the problems that can be caused when too much of the household's resources are spent on

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[123] M. Furrow, *The Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp.96, 136-141.

entertaining guests: 'But wo is him that payen moot for al! / The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye' (ll.10-11)[124]. In the opening lines of 'The Shipman's Tale', the wife's potential for adultery and excessive hospitality are only hinted at. Visitors come to their house because of the merchant's largesse, but also because of his wife's beauty, and because she is 'compaignable and revelous' (l.4). Whereas Chaucer is setting us up for the merchant's cuckolding, at the beginning of *The Tale of the Basin* it is already a reality, and the husband has been repeatedly turning to his brother in desperation to borrow money. In both tales, the wife's lover is a man of the Church: in *The Tale of the Basin* it is the priest Sir John, and in 'The Shipman's Tale' it is Daun John the monk. The common name of these two men points to the popularity of 'John' as a generic name for this type of clerical seducer in the tales, a practice which Chaucer alludes to. When the Host does not know the Monk's name, he tries to take a guess: 'But, by my trouthe, I knowe nat your name. / Wher shal I calle yow my lord daun John' ('Prologue to the Monk's Tale', ll.1928-9), and when mocking the Parson for his supposed Lollardy he calls him 'Jankin' ('Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale', l.1172).[125] 'Sir John' or 'Jankin' is also the common name used for clerical seducers in Middle English lyrics, including in *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament* which also appears in CUL Ff.5.48.

Both tales emphasise the danger of entertaining men such as Sir John too often and express anxiety over allowing them free access to the home, and thus to the householder's wife and goods. The moral which Chaucer presents his Host drawing from 'The Shipman's Tale' is specifically this, 'draweth no monkes moore unto your in' (l.442).[126] Daun John's

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[124] Chaucer, 'The Shipman's Tale', *RC*, p.203.
[125] Chaucer, 'Prologue to the Monk's Tale', *RC*, P.240; Chaucer, 'Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale', *RC*, p.104.
[126] Chaucer, 'The Shipman's Tale', *RC*, p.208.

familiarity with the household is repeatedly emphasised – he is 'famulier' in the house, that is, he is accepted and regarded almost as part of the *familia* or 'meynee' (l.48)[127]. This is a consequence of his generous gifts to all its members. By exercising largesse even towards the least of the servants, he insinuates himself into the fabric of the household. Daun John's free spending is associated with masculinity -- 'free was daun John, and manly of dispence' (l.44) -- and in many ways he is already usurping the role of the *paterfamilias* as gift-giver, as he will later supplant the merchant by cuckolding him.[128] Although it presents a slightly different narrative in which it is the wife who invites the priest into the home much to the frustration of the husband, *The Tale of the Basin* demonstrates the same fundamental concern with the enemy within the home, an enemy who is in both cases a member of the clergy. Both are also concerned with ideas of hospitality and household management and how this is linked to masculinity. 'The Shipman's Tale' uses Daun John's largesse as an index of his masculinity and *The Tale of the Basin* uses good 'husbandry' as evidence of the healthiness of a household's moral state. Sex and money are linked in both tales. The husband of *The Tale of the Basin* is being cuckolded as well as being financially ruined; when he restores domestic order by casting out the priest, this solves his monetary problems as well.

This overview should demonstrate that in many ways *The Tale of the Basin* contains classic fabliau elements, and some of its concerns are very similar to those that had been prevalent in French fabliaux written two hundred years previously. It also shares the concern of Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale' with household governance. Anxiety about the clerical seducer is central to both tales. However, these similarities are not sufficient to

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[127] *Ibid.*, *RC*, p.203.
[128] *Ibid.*

simply dismiss such tales as tired recycling of old tropes. Although many of the elements of *The Tale of the Basin* were part of a long fabliau heritage, they must have still struck a chord with fifteenth-century audiences in order to remain popular. The trope of the clerical seducer, which I have mentioned appearing in the fabliaux, in *The Canterbury Tales*, in lyrics, and in tales like *The Tale of the Basin* had a wider cultural currency.

2.5.3 Responses to Clerical Incontinence in Fifteenth-Century England

The idea of the clergy as sexually active and a threat to the wives and daughters of laymen was not confined to fiction. In her work on prostitution, Ruth Karras has identified clergy as one of the most important sources of business for those in the sex trade.[129] Sir John Scarle, the parson of St Leonard in Fasterlane, London, was indicted before the wardmote court in 1421 for a host of offences, which included sexual harassment, blackmail, and scolding. He had been making public the confessions of any women who would 'not asent to his lecherie' and acting as a pander between his parishioners, as well as falsely presenting himself as a surgeon.[130] The community had obviously had enough. Scarle's actions endangered the bodies of the people he falsely operated on and the souls of the women whose confessions he revealed and those he pandered for. The indictment emphasises this link between spiritual and bodily sickness, and how the failings of the priest could infect those around him by presenting his behaviour as 'a gret dissese to all the parisshe'.[131]

Clerical incontinence seems to have been of particular concern in early-fifteenth-century London. Between 1401 and 1439, the governors of the city compiled a list of those

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[129] R.M. Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1996), p.77.
[130] Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p.127.
[131] *Ibid.*

caught in adultery, which Frank Rexroth in his recent work has referred to as the '*In Flagrante Register*'. Members of the clergy featured heavily in this list, and it seems to point to a concern by the authorities that such men's names be made public. The procedure concerning such cases was first instituted in 1382 and repeated throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Priests caught with laywomen were to be imprisoned overnight, then brought before the Mayor in the Guildhall. After the third punishment of this kind the priest would be banished from the city forever.[132] In 1389, the beadle of Tower ward found a chantry priest, Sir William Stofford, *in flagrante* with Alice Hoo. After being imprisoned separately overnight in the Tun, the pair were questioned by the mayor and aldermen in the Guildhall, before being turned over to the Consistory of the Bishop of London. Their deed was proclaimed in the city and the priest's name noted on a board hanging in the Guildhall, so that his offence might be publicly known and the citizens forewarned.[133] The letter book asserts that this was the common practice in such cases and that any layman who subsequently employed one of these priests would be fined twice the priest's salary by the City. This seems to represent a concerted attempt by the City authorities to contain libidinous priests by tying their behaviour to their future career prospects. This '*tabula*' formed the basis of the '*In Flagrante Register*', which appears in Letter Book I and records sixty-two such cases between 1401 and 1439.[134] There are a few laymen on the list, but they are greatly outnumbered by the chaplains that appear on it.

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[132] Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp.173-174, 346: Letter Book H, fol.146v, 'Item, if any priest is found with any woman, they should be taken to the Tun on Cornhill, accompanied by musicians. And if he is found three times, he will abjure the city forever' ('*Item si auscun prestre soit trove ove auscune femme, soit amesnez al tonelle sur Cornhull ove minstrials. Et sil soit trois foit ency trovez, forsjure la cite pur touz jours*').
[133] Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p.292
[134] *Ibid.*, p.292 (Letter Book I, fols.286r-290v, summarised in R.R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London: I, 1400-1422* (London, 1909), pp.273-287).

This is not to say that this attention to punishing clerical incontinence was inspired by or was a cause of anticlericalism as such, or that anxiety about sex between priests and laywomen was universal. The particular circumstances of each case and each jurisdiction would have affected how these anxieties manifested themselves in each case. Although there were tensions between priests and laypeople in this period, as explored by Robert Swanson and Peter Heath, these usually consisted of complaints against a particular individual rather than agitation against the clergy as a class.[135] What these examples suggest is that these literary tropes were part of the same cultural milieu as actions against libidinous clergy in the courts, and that the fictional and historical ideas of the clerical seducer fed off of each other. Indictments of clergy caught in adultery made the fictional character of 'Sir John' more believable, and the repetition of this trope in tales and lyrics made authorities consider apprehending such offenders as an important part of their action against civic disorder. The clergy could not avoid contact with women if they were to fulfil their pastoral duties, and the idea of the clerical seducer and their unmarried status laid them open to accusations of incontinence.[136]

An example of this is the borough court case from Nottingham that I discussed in the introduction, in which a layman accused a chaplain of housebreaking. Although the charges brought against the chaplain relate only to the housebreaking and destruction of property, it is clear from the narrative of the case that John Bilby also suspected adultery between his wife and the chaplain Roger Mampton. The threat to the dwelling of a layperson posed by the intruder is part of a larger threat to the conjugal household, that is,

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[135] Cf. R.N. Swanson, 'Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England', *English Historical Review* 105 (1990): 845-869; Heath, *English Parish Clergy*, pp.109-111, for examples of clerical negligence including frequenting the tavern at the time of divine service, neglect of church buildings, refusing to administer the sacraments without a fee, defaming their neighbours, and in one case murder of a parishioner.
[136] Heath, *English Parish Clergy,* p.106.

the threat to the marriage posed by adultery that is never mentioned directly but which forms an undercurrent to the case. The wife and the house are both the property of the husband, and although only one is mentioned here, a threat to both is implied. The spatial and the sexual are linked in this case in the same way that they are in the fabliaux. The chaplain's attempts to defend himself with references to his duty of distributing holy water seem to play on the anxiety that clerical access to houses could be used to seduce women. As my discussion of the betrayed maidens' laments in Chapter One demonstrated, the protagonists of the lyrics are often holy water clerks. This chapter concerns itself with the slightly different but connected figure of the interloping priest.

CUL Ff.5.48 contains two misbehaving priests called Sir John. The Sir John of *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament* rapes and impregnates a girl who has wandered away from a well-wake and another Sir John is featured in *The Tale of the Basin*, who commits adultery and impoverishes the household because the wife insists on entertaining him lavishly. However, *The Tale of the Basin* also includes a second member of the clergy, the virtuous and financially successful parson. It is clear that Sir John's behaviour falls outside that mandated for priests in the *Instructions to Parish Priests.* The *Instructions* counsels priests that 'woman's servyce þou must forsake' and 'fro nyse japys and ribadry, / Awey þou must turne þi nye' (*Instructions*, ll.1, 5-6).[137] CUL Ff.5.48 is now missing its first folio, but it seems likely that it originally contained the first fifty-six lines of the *Instructions* as it appears in the other extant manuscripts of the text. The *Instructions* begin on the current first folio of the manuscript at line fifty-seven. Many of the activities Sir John engages in are specifically forbidden to priests in the missing section:

Wrastlynge & schotynge & suche maner game,

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[137] Downing, 'Critical Edition'.

> Thow myȝte not vse wythowte blame.
> Hawkynge, huntynge and dawnsynge,
> Thow moste forgo for any thynge (*Instructions*, ll.39-42).[138]

Of course a man who fits the above description will be engaged in adultery with one's wife

– it is his narrative function in this genre. What is unusual about *The Tale of the Basin* is

that as well as presenting a trope that is instantly recognisable to the late medieval reader, it

makes it clear that the characters in the narrative are well versed in these tropes as well. The

parson recognises Sir John immediately, without having to have the situation explained in

any great detail. The medieval reader who encountered the *Instructions* in the same section

of the manuscript as *The Tale of the Basin* would likely have done the same and have been

fully aware of the ways in which Sir John's behaviour deviated from the ideal for priests.

Eating, drinking, and offering hospitality are shown in the poem as a prelude to

adultery, as the wife uses her domestic resources to entertain the priest while her husband is

out. As soon as he leaves she begins hurriedly preparing a feast and sends for Sir John. This

is presented as a habitual action, and Sir John's familiarity with the domestic furniture

demonstrates the regularity with which he has been taking advantage of this hospitality:

> Within a litull while Sir John con wake,
> And nedis water he most make.
> He wist wher he shulde þe basyn take
> Riȝt at his owne wille (ll.130-33).[139]

Sir John is presented here as mastering the space of the home – he knows exactly where

everything is, and is about to be caught by the enchantment of a perfectly everyday

domestic object, the basin. His ease in the domestic space contrasts with the discomfort of

the husband, who earlier in the poem is presented as the victim of domestic abuse as his

wife beats him and forbids him to speak. It is left unclear whether Sir John has used the

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[138] Kristensson (ed.), *Instructions for Parish Priests*.
[139] *The Tale of the Basin*, in Furrow (ed.), *Comic Poems*, p.59.

basin or not before his hands stick to it, possibly introducing a scatological element to the subsequent 'dance' around the basin.

The *MED* only cites the appearance of 'bacin' in a handful of quotations, mostly dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One of the earliest appearances it records dates from 1325, in the *South English Legendary* ('The Southern Passion') where it is used in the description of Christ washing his disciples feet: 'In a bacyn water he gan to caste / And his disciples ffet gan to wasshe ffaste'.[140] In probate inventories, basins are frequently mentioned alongside ewers. One of the uses of these basins and ewers was for washing before and after meals. In *King Edward and the Shepherd,* another text which appears in CUL Ff.5.48, the king is provided with water to wash before dining, 'Goo wesshe, sir, for it is tyme ... / When he had wasshen and fayre i-sett, / The qwen anon to hym was fett' (ll.882, 887-888).[141] This may suggests that they were associated with hygiene and etiquette. They are usually listed among the contents of the hall (*aula*) which was a room used for eating and other activities, which could include work in some bourgeois houses.[142]

In light of the abuses of hospitality that take place in *The Tale of the Basin*, it is fitting that it is such a quotidian domestic object to which the transgressors become affixed. Some of the dancers –the priest, the wife, and her serving maid -- are naked. From a practical standpoint, this is because they have been roused from sleep in the middle of the night, but it also adds to the contrast between their earlier position of comfortable superiority, in which they confidently tricked the husband, and their confusion and

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[140] *MED*: **bacin** (n.), 1a).
[141] Downing, 'Critical Edition', p.151.
[142] Riddy, ''Burgeis' domesticity', in Goldberg and Kowaleski (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity,* pp.14-36 (pp.23-24).

vulnerability as they dance around the enchanted basin.[143] This time, although they have

'daunsyd al þe nyʒt till þe son con ryse', which under other circumstances might appear to a

euphemism for sexual activity, this is a dance they have engaged in unwillingly (l.170). The

fact that the female servant is quickly drawn into the dance may be an allusion to the fact

that as a personal servant of the wife she is by implication aware of, and has abetted, the

relationship between her mistress and the priest.

The action of the text becomes ever more slapstick, as the clerk joins the dance and

then the servant's lover, a carter, becomes stuck to the company when he hits her 'a *blowe*

on þe towte' with a shovel (l.199). The concept of disorder in the household, which was

introduced first as the domination of a husband by his wife, then expanded into a narrative

of adultery and illicit offering of hospitality, has here manifested itself physically and gone

to the limits of ridiculousness in the figure of the five people dancing around the enchanted

basin. It is at this point that the husband and the parson enter to restore order. Not only do

they separate the dancers by undoing the enchantment on the basin, but they also get rid of

Sir John: 'þe godeman seid to Sir John, "Be cockys swete wounde / þou shalle lese þine

harnesse or a hundred pounde"' (ll.208-9).[144] This scene reveals several important things

about Sir John and his function in the text. First, although adulterous priests crop up

everywhere in late medieval English poems of this type, this is not to suggest that sex

between priests and their parishioners' wives was considered acceptable. It is clear that

being discovered naked in a man's house is enough for Sir John to be threatened with

castration and to force him to leave the country in shame. Being caught with a parishioner's

wife makes it impossible for him to continue to do his job in the area. This might be a way

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[143] For references to nakedness, cf. *The Tale of the Basin,*, ll.162, 181-3, 194 (Furrow (ed.) *Comic Poems*, pp.61-63).
[144] *Ibid.,*p.64.

for readers to enjoy seeing an incontinent priest getting his comeuppance, but it might also serve as a warning to clerical readers of the consequences of such actions. The removal of Sir John is presented as the solution to all the problems of the text. Without his presence, the unequal relationship between husband and wife fixes itself: they become 'wyse and ware' and 'leuyd togeder withowt stryfe' (ll.219 & 221).[145]

2.6 Conclusion

It is clear that the number of extant narratives of 'seductive clerics' from late medieval England indicates a certain anxiety regarding the access these men had to women in the course of their duties. Sir John has supplanted the husband in *The Tale of the Basin*, and it is only when he is removed that order can be restored. The tale also presents a conflict between two clerical figures, the diligent and thrifty parson and the lecherous and incontinent Sir John. As such, it cannot be accurately described as anticlerical in nature, but is a cautionary tale about the consequences of incontinence rather than a diatribe against the clerical estate as such. The inclusion of such a poem in CUL Ff.5.48, along with the abridged *Instructions* and *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament*, seems to indicate an interest on the part of the compiler in the place of the priest in his parish and the disorder that could be produced when he behaved contrary to his proper function. Although *A Betrayed Maiden's Lament* and *The Tale of the Basin* share some elements with the betrayed maidens' laments discussed in Chapter One, such as transgression of the boundaries of the household, extramarital sex, and a clerical seducer, there are ways in which they are fundamentally different. In these poems there is the possibility, or at least the desire, for the priest to be

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[145] *Ibid.*

punished for his transgression and made to make restitution, and in the case of *The Tale of the Basin* this punishment is achieved and order restored.

Chapters One and Two have explored the trope of the clerical seducer, through the linked figures of the young clerk and the more established priest, and have discussed how these figures are used to give voice to anxieties about household governance and control of women's sexuality. The most striking difference between *The Tale of the Basin* and the other texts I have discussed is the extent to which the misbehaviour of the priest and wife is enabled by the weakness of the husband. It is his failure at household governance and, it is implied, his failure at responsible masculinity in the form of 'husbandry' that allows disorder to run rampant in his household. Order may be restored at the end of the tale, but this is only achieved through the intervention of the parson and a magical basin, not through the agency of the nominal head of the household. In Chapters Three and Four I turn to the trope of the weak and emasculated husband, who is used to form a counterpoint to the sexually voracious cleric. The threat posed by the cleric in this trope comes from his ability to penetrate the boundaries of the household using his facility with language and the real or imagined powers conferred by his office (e.g. the sacerdotal powers of the bell and book as an instrument of intimidation, the access allowed to the house for the distribution of holy water, and the 'magical' abilities implied by the enchantment of the basin). The cleric speaks and acts to secure what he desires, and exercises his power through sexual congress with women. In turn, the husband's weakness stems from his vulnerability to the words and actions of others, and his anxiety regarding the perception of him as a deficient husband and householder.

Communities of Women in Two Early-Sixteenth-Century Printed Texts

In the preceding chapters I explored the trope of the sexually confident and smooth-talking cleric. The counterpart of the cleric in the fabliaux-like narrative is the weak or duped layman, who is presented as unable to control the transgressive woman. This chapter explores how a subgenre of late medieval texts use representations of women talking together to express anxiety about the control of women and the maintenance of an orderly household. My analysis focuses on two printed texts published by Wynkyn de Worde - *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* (1507, 1509) and *The Gospelles of Dystaues* (c.1510) (hereafter the *Fyftene Joyes* and the *Gospelles*).[1] I begin by outlining the generic roots of these two poems in the 'gossip' poems that depicted groups of women talking together. I then discuss the origins of the word 'gossip' in the practices of godparenting and lying-in, and how this evolved and became connected to a concept of idle talk that was largely gendered female. When I have laid this groundwork, I then proceed to close readings of the *Fyftene Joyes* and the *Gospelles* that explore how they depict men and women. In the *Fyftene Joyes*, this focuses on movement across the bounds of the house and connections to the wider community. In the *Gospelles*, the role of the male narrator and his interaction with a group of women is central to my discussion. The texts appear on first reading to be anti-feminist. My reading of them will test how far this assessment is truly justified.

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[1] *The Gospelles of Dystaues* (London. c.1510), *STC* 12091 – a complete copy survives in the collection of the Henry E. Huntingdon Library and Art Gallery in San Marino, California. There are fragmentary copies in the British Library, London (leaf D2 only) and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The Huntingdon copy and the British Library fragment are available on *EEBO*, and all quotations in this chapter are from this source. The date of publication is conjectured by *STC*.
The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage (London, 1507, 1509), *STC* 15258 – also available on *EEBO*. This copy of the text (from the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC) is missing Joys 14 and 15. The copy in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, is the only complete copy to survive. Quotations from Joys 1-13 are taken from the Folger copy (*via. EEBO*) and quotations from Joys 14-15 are taken from my own transcription from the Pierpont Morgan copy. A fragment of two leaves comprising part of Joy 2 and the beginning of Joy 3 also survives in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The dating of 1509 is from the colophon to the copy in the Pierpont Morgan Library. *STC* indicates that the Bodleian Library fragment is from an earlier edition, which it dates to 1507 (*STC* 15257.5).

3.1 Groups of Women Talking in Late Medieval Texts.

In publishing the *Gospelles of Dystaues* and the *Fyftene Joyes*, de Worde was tapping into a group of fifteenth- and early-sixteenth poems that was already circulating in manuscript form. These texts, sometimes known as 'gossip' or 'alewife' poems, focus on groups of women who gather outside the surveillance of their husbands to discuss their marriages and share advice on how to conduct themselves, particularly in regard to their sexual behaviour.[2] *The Talk of Ten Wives on their Husbands' Ware*, the carol *Hoow, gossip myne, gossip myn*, and Dunbar's *The Tretis of the Twa Marrit Wemen and the Wedo* are all examples of this subgenre of late medieval literature.

As well as their choice of gatherings of women as their subject matter, several of these poems feature an eavesdropping male narrator who overhears the women's talk and writes it down. Reporting the women's speech via the conduit of the narrator introduces a voyeuristic element to the texts, in which the narrator (and by implication, the reader) observes the women's supposedly secret verbal communication without their knowledge, overhearing a discussion that is frequently about sexual matters and derogatory to men. A favourite topic of women in such poems is comparing their husbands' sexual performance. Since the women are depicted as sexually voracious, the husbands are inevitably unsatisfactory in this area.

In *The Tretis of the Twa Marrit Wemen and the Wedo*, the narrator is explicitly dramatised in the text. He is able to see the women as well as hear them, as he thrusts through the hedge that shields them from view ('in haist to the hege so hard I inthrang', l.13), a

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[2] S.E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park, 2007), p.148 - Phillips lists the members of this genre as *John Crophill's Ale-Pots*, *The Talk of Ten Wives on Their Husbands' Ware*, *The Good Gossips' Carol* (all late fifteenth-century), *Tway Cumeris* (Dunbar, c.1503-1507), *The Ballad of Kynd Kyttok* (c.1508), *Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* (Dunbar, c.1508), *The Tunnyng of Elinor Rummyng* (Skelton, c.1521), *Cryste Crosse Me Spede* (c.1534). Cf. also F.L. Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the end of the year 1568* (Columbus, 1944), nos. 79 (p.139), 107 (p.152), 172 (p.183), 193 (p.197), 195 (p.198), 251 (pp.226-227), 277 (pp.241-243), 336 (pp.282-283).

description that has overtones of sexual penetration.[3] The text emphasises the narrator's voyeurism by lingering over how the women look. He describes them as beautiful and alluring ('So glitterit as the gold wer thair glorius gilt tressis', 'Of ferliful fyne favour war thair faceis meik, / All full of flurist fairheid as flouris in June - / Quhyt, seimlie, and soft as the sweit lillies', ll.19, 26-28).[4] This presents a striking contrast with the content of their talk, which is largely about their distaste for their husbands and desire for other lovers. Although the women's voices occupy most of the text, the poem is focalised through the narrator, placing the reader in the position of the voyeuristic male.

In *The Talk of Ten Wives*, the text specifically states that the women are gathered without a man. The narrator is implicitly not one of the women's group, but is still able to record their talk and include the reader by repeating it.

> Leve, lystynes to me
> Two wordys or thre,
> And herkenes to my songe;
> And I schall tell yow a tale,
> Howe ten wyffys satt at the nale,
> And no man hem amonge (ll.1-6).[5]

The text constructs an all-female group who complain about their husband's small penises and disappointing sexual performance, but immediately breaks the boundaries of this group by introducing the narrator and the reader as invisible spectators. The talk of the wives is being recorded and rehearsed without their knowledge. There is no indication of the gender of the narrator, but the inclusion of this poem in a household miscellany (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Brogyntyn II.1, otherwise known as MS Porkington 10) that contains such diverse contents as treatises on horses and hunting, the crafting of books, saints' lives and

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[3] W. Dunbar, *The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.135-151 (p.135).
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *The Talk of Ten Wives About Their Husbands' Ware*, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.95-102 (p.95).

carols, suggests that the audience was equally diverse. An early-sixteenth century male signature on f.26 suggests that the manuscript's readership was at least partly male.[6]

How gossip myne, gossip myn (*The Good Gossips' Carol*) also features a narratorial voice in the beginning of the poem who addresses the audience and promises to tell them about what women talk about when they get together to drink and spend their husbands' money, although he apologises that half of what he heard must remain untold for fear of incurring the women's wrath (sts.1-2).[7] He narrates the visit of a group of women to the tavern to share stories and spend their husbands' money on food and drink. Again the women are being presented and edited through a narratorial voice that exists outside their group. One of the mansucripts in which this carol appears is the early-sixteenth century commonplace book of the London grocer Richard Hill. David Parker argues that Hill included several poems of a 'distinct misogynistic character' in his compilation, mostly grouped together near the end, but that these poems made fun of hen-pecked men as well as their shrewish wives.[8]

Eve Salisbury argues that the gossip poems offer a 'glimpse into feminine discourses on marital sex … [that] reverses the norm and directs the feminine gaze to the male body'.[9] This is true to the extent that the women disparage their husbands' sexual performance and ridicule their bodies, constructing them as a objects of disgust. Salisbury suggests that disgruntled wives could identify with this mocking. However, there is also a potential reading that is less favourable to the women's position. Opening these female communities to the gaze of the reader creates an opportunity for their talk to be ridiculed and trivialised as an embodiment of anti-feminist stereotypes. Ridicule can be a powerful strategy to counteract

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[6] National Library of Wales, 'A Middle English Miscellany (Brogyntyn MS II.1): http://www.llgc.org.uk/index.php?id=amiddleenglishmiscellanybro. *Ten Wives* appears on fols.56v-59v. Cf. also D. Huws, 'Porkington 10 and its Scribes', in J. Fellows *et al* (eds.), *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays Presented to Maldwyn Mills* (Cardiff, 1996), pp.188-207.
[7] Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols*, pp.249-253.
[8] D.R. Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London: An Examination of BL MSS Egerton 1995, Harley 2252, Landsdowne 762, and Oxford Balliol College MS354* (Oxford, 1998), pp.70 & 80.
[9] Salisbury, *Trials and Joys of Marriage* – 'General Introduction', p.13.

anxiety about the 'secret' talk of women, since it is revealed to be petty, shrewish and mostly lecherous. A.C. Spearing argues that these poems represent male fantasy concerning how women may ridicule their husbands amongst themselves, rather than revealing any 'truth' about women themselves.[10] In these poems, women are reduced to barnyard cacklers who are obsessed with sex and with duping their husbands, but by making that talk *known*, the authors of these texts are presenting a way to defuse it. These texts are responding to a desire to know what women talk about by presenting a women's talk that is *always already known*, the familiar outlines of antifeminist stereotype.[11] This is less frightening than the possibility that women's talk might actually remain concealed and unknown.

The potential for complex readings of texts and images that include voyeuristic elements has been recognised by Robert Mills in his discussion of depictions of the tortures of the virgin marytrs in saints' lives and visual art. Mills argues that the semi-naked bodies of the martyrs, exposed to the male gaze and threatened with a variety of phallic torture implements, could be read almost pornographically as a locus of violent sexual desire if the viewer identified with the torturer.[12] He argues, however, that the viewer, particularly the female viewer, might choose to identify with the martyr instead, and read the image as a celebration of the saint's resistance and impregnability.[13] The complexity of the gossip poems lies in the

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[10] A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love Narratives* (Cambridge, 1993), p.262, p.265.

[11] In misogynistic texts, women were commonly charged with being excessively lustful, unable to be satisfied by their husbands, and incapable of holding their tongues (A. Blamires, K. Pratt and C.W. Marx (eds.), *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992), pp.43 & 118, pp.122-123, pp.125, 157, 164, 184). These are stereotypes that define how groups of women are depicted talking together in late medieval texts.

[12] R. Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London, 2005), p.106, p.109, p.128.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp.122-123. For other examples of arguments about medieval quasi-pornographic discourse and the power of the written word to arouse sexual desire, cf. P.J.G. Goldberg, 'John Skathlok's Dick', in N. McDonald (ed.) *Medieval Obscenities* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp.105-123; J.M. Ziolkowski, 'Introduction' in J.M. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity*, pp.3-18; Vasvári, 'Fowl Play', in Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity*, pp.108-138; M.H. Caviness, 'Obscenity and Alterity: Images that Shock and Offend Us / Them, Now / Then?', in Ziolkowski (ed.) *Obscenity*, pp.155-175; R.M. Karras, '*Lecherous Songys*: Medieval Sexuality in Word and Deed', in Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity*, pp.233-245.

fact that multiple readings are possible and the reader's sympathies could potentially lie either with the women or with the voyeur (or both).

The threat posed by the women's talk in the 'gossip' poems lies in the sharing of information that they can then use to gain mastery over their husbands. In other words, the source of anxiety is the supposed power that the women's talk gives them to alter covertly their subordinate position in the dominant framework, which was largely patriarchal.[14] Talking amongst themselves gives them an opportunity to control and interpret events and experiences by talking about them, by making them into narrative.[15] The dominant group is both desperate to know and terrified to imagine what subordinate groups talk about among themselves. By producing texts in which women's talk is reduced to anti-feminist stereotypes, this talk can be defused of power by presenting it as trivial, and enabling the reader to ridicule it. My concern in examining the texts discussed in this chapter is not whether women were engaged in active resistance to patriarchal control, but with the anxiety expressed on the part of dominant groups concerning the possibility that this might happen. The manipulative and shrewish wives of these texts who educate each other on how best to dupe and exploit their husbands, are obviously a caricature of male fears about women rather than an accurate portrait of the usual behaviour of medieval women.

There is, however, a problem when attempting to discuss groups of medieval women talking, because the word we would most readily use to describe this talk ('gossip') is empty of some of the resonances it had in the Middle Ages. Before I proceed any further, it will be useful to outline the history of the word 'gossip' and the process through which this word first became associated with talking, and specifically with women's talk.

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[14] For 'gossip' as the natural weapon of the subordinated, cf. J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, 1990), pp.5 & 45; J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistanc*e, (New Haven, 1987), pp.33 & 255.
[15] P.M. Spacks, *Gossip*, (New York, 1985), p.11.

3.2 Gossips and Gossiping: The Development of a Word.

The primary meaning of the word 'gossip' today is connected with speech, but the practice of engaging in idle talk that modern critics refer to as 'gossiping', did not acquire this name until after the Middle Ages. Part of the reason gossip and groups of women engaging in it were so threatening is because of the original genesis of the word as a description of practices that were an important part of late medieval society.[16] The word emerged in connection with the practice of godparenthood, as 'god-sib'.[17] The godparent was the sponsor of a child at baptism who agreed to guide the child in the teachings of the church. It was therefore a position of responsibility, with the godparent given influence over the moral formation of his or her charge. It was common for there to be three godparents, two of the same sex as the child and one of the opposite sex, and for the child to be named after one of these godparents. The ceremony of baptism created a complex web of connections that linked not only the godparent and the child, but also almost everyone present at the ceremony.[18]

This idea that the ceremony of baptism created connections between people may have been responsible for the way in which the word 'god-sib' evolved. It developed to refer more generally to a friend or companion.[19] In the 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', Chaucer provides one of the earliest examples of the word being used in this way. The Wife meets her fifth husband because he 'hadde left scole and wente at hom to bord / With my gossib' (ll.528-529).[20] She says of this woman:

> She knew myn herte, and eek my privetee,
> Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!
> To hire biwreyed I my conseil al (ll.531-533).[21]

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[16] Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, pp.149-150. Phillips argues that literary representations of gossip were the means of expressing anxieties about the consequences of orthodox practice and controlling women's networks and talk.
[17] *MED*: **god-sib(be**, (n.), 1.
[18] Cf. J. Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ll.129-134, in Downing, 'Critical Edition'.
[19] *MED:* **god-sib(be**, (n.), 2.
[20] Chaucer, 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', *RC*, p.112.
[21] *Ibid.*

This 'gossib' may have been connected to the Wife through baptismal ties, but what the text

emphasises is the role of shared secrets (i.e. 'privetee') and talk to create intimacy. In the case

of the Wife of Bath, these secrets included those more properly shared with the confessor.

The use of the word 'privetee', which could refer to secrets but also to the sexual organs,

suggests that the subject of the wife's 'conseil' is her sexual sins.[22] Susan Phillips argues that

confession and gossip had a symbiotic relationship. The practice of confession encouraged

tale-telling about one's own and one's neighbours' transgressions.[23] Chaucer's comparison

between the gossip and the parish priest emphasises the importance the Wife places on these

communications and the advice of her gossip, as she prefers to confess her 'privetee' through

channels other than the institutionalized discourse of confession by directing it at her female

friend rather than the sanctioned recipient of such talk, the priest. However, when the Wife

berates her husband for restricting her movements, it becomes clear that the gossip is not

imagined as exclusively female at this date:

> And if I have a gossib or a freend [i.e.kin],
> Withouten gilt, thou chidest as a feend,
> If that I walke or pleye unto his hous! (ll.243-5)[24]

By the time of the Chester mystery plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth century the

relationships between gossips were imagined as strong bonds, as demonstrated by the outraged

reaction of Noah's wife to the suggestion that she board the Ark without her female

companions.[25] *Uxor* Noah declares that:

> But I haue my gossips everychone,
> One foote further I will not gone.
> They shall not drowne, by Sayncte John,

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[22] *MED:* **privētē** (n.), 1.g, 2.
[23] Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, pp.5-6, p.207, p.208: when women gossip in late medieval texts 'they frame their talk as confession' … 'and employ it to forge social and familial bonds.'
[24] Chaucer, 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', *RC,* p.108.
[25] The surviving manuscripts of the plays date from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, but David Mills argues that the cycle was well established by the 1420s and continued until its suppression in 1575 (R.M. Lumiansky and D. Mills (eds.), *The Chester Mystery Cycle* (London, 1974), p.ix; D. Mills, *Staging the Chester Cycle* (Leeds, 1985), p.vii).

And I may saue there life ('The Deluge', ll.201-204).[26]

She is willing to defy her husband and God's command to save her friends. This is partly an

attempt to underline the perversity and disobedience of women, but it also speaks to the

attachment she feels for these friends. The gossips' response gives us some indication of how

these groups of women were depicted. Their response to impending death is to suggest a last

drink:

> Good gossippe, lett us drawe nere.
> And lett us drinke or wee departe,
> For oftetymes wee haue done soe (The Deluge, ll.228-230).[27]

This portrait of conviviality reflects the antifeminist stereotype of the gossips as a group of

women who flocked together to indulge their boundless appetites for food and drink at the

expense of their husbands, instead of engaging in honest work.[28] This stereotype appears in

both the *Gospelles* and the *Fyftene Joyes*. In the *Fyftene Joyes* the women, whom the husband

has fetched to attend his pregnant wife, eat and drink excessively at his expense.[29] In the

Gospelles, the women arrange a 'lytel Ioyous banquet' by bringing food to the gathering

without their husbands' knowledge. Their discussion the following day recounts the excessive

drunkenness of some of the group during the feast. The carol *Hoow, gossip myne, gossip myn*

relates a trip by a group of women to the tavern to drink the best wine and eat 'gose or pigge

or capons wynge' (st.6, l.2).[30] 'Gossip' became associated with gatherings in which women

talked, ate, and drank, and their talk was often feared to centre around ways to dupe their

husbands and gain mastery of their households.

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[26] H. Deimling (ed.), *The Chester Plays, Part I* (Oxford, 1892), p.56.

[27] *Ibid.*, p.57.

[28] For women's insatiable appetites, cf. Blamires *et al* (eds.), *Women Defamed and Women Defended*, p.101, p.119, pp.122-123, p.212. For old women as particularly prone to drunkenness, cf. J.M. Ziolkowski, 'Old Wives Tales: Classicism and Anti-Classicism from Apuleius to Chaucer', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 12 (2002): 90-113 (p.102, p.107).

[29] *Fyftene Joyes.*, Third Joy, C6v., C7r., D1r.

[30] *The Gospelles of Dystaues*, D1r-D3v; Greene (ed.), *Early English Carols,* pp.249-253 (p.251).

The association of the word 'gossip' with groups of women also developed in part because of several different social practices that encouraged groups of women to meet and talk together.[31] Both male and female godparents were present at the baptism of a child, but the female gossip had an additional important function in childbirth and the subsequent ceremony of churching in which the new mother was purified and re-incorporated into the community. The *MED* does not attest to this use of 'gossip' to refer to the attendants at childbirth and the *OED* first records its use in 1600, by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but it does occur earlier.[32] In the *Fyftene Joyes*, first published in 1507, the husband goes out 'the nourysses and gossyppes for to gete / Whiche must her kepe of chylde whyle she lyeth in'.[33] Before the birth, women were attended solely by other women. John Paston II wrote a letter in 1472, asking that his mother might attend the lying in of the Duchess of Norfolk:

> I feere thatt he shall nott speke wyth my lady, for þat she hathe takyn hyre chambre …
> my moodre, iff she weer at Norwyche, she myght speke wyth hyre, for þat she is a
> woman and off worshyppe. I thynke þat my moodre sholde meve my lady moche.[34]

Anti-feminist texts trivialized women's talk when alone as meaningless, but Susan Phillips argues that John Paston's use of his mother as a representative in his negotiations with the Duchess demonstrates that occasions such as the lying-in could be viewed as an important opportunity to further business relationships that were important to socioeconomic life.[35] It is evident that there was an expectation that women would talk at these events and that it might be an opportune way for John Paston to present his case through the agency of his mother.

This is an example of women's talk that might be advantageous for their male relatives, but the *Fyftene Joyes* imagines it otherwise. Once the women that the husband

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[31] For the reputation of groups of women for disorder and excess, cf. Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, p.156. For lyings-in and purification processions, cf. *ibid.*, pp.156-159.
[32] *OED:* **gossip**, (n.), 2b.
[33] *Fyftene Joyes*, Third Joy, C6v.
[34] Davis (ed.), *Paston Letters and Papers*, pp.453-454.
[35] Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, p.160.

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fetched to attend the birth have arrived, they promptly set about teaching the young pregnant wife to disdain her husband, and sharing their own experiences on how to manipulate men.[36]

OED does not attest '**gossip**, v.' as the act of taking part in a feast or of engaging in idle talk about the affairs of others until the seventeenth century, but it is clear from texts such as the *Gospelles*, the *Fyftene Joyes*, and *How gossip myn, gossip myn*, that these activities were associated with gatherings of women much earlier.[37]

One of the meanings of the modern word 'gossip' is that of idle chatter. The word most often used to convey this sense in late medieval England was 'jangling'. This word does not, however, cover identical semantic ground to the modern 'gossip'.[38] It could be used to refer to idle talk or chatter, but it could also refer to spiteful tale-telling or to words that were quarrelsome or aggressive. Jangling, and the connected concept of scolding, were not activities that were imagined as being exclusive to women.[39] However, Sandy Bardsley has argued that while the aggressive, confrontational, or slanderous type of jangling could be associated with men (since it conceived of speech as an act), the sense of idle, trivial chatter was particularly associated with women, and men who engaged in this risked being labelled 'womanly'.[40] Chris Wickham argues that although the *fact* of gossiping was not gendered -- both men and women gossipped -- there can be no doubt that the medieval *imagery* of gossip was gendered female.[41]

One popular example of gossip being connected with women was the sermon exemplum of Tutivillus. In the exemplum a cleric is asked why he laughed during mass. He

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[36] *Fyftene Joyes of Maryage*, Third Joy, C6-8, D1-2
[37] *OED*: **gossip**, v., 2.
[38] *MED:* **jangling(e** (ger.); **janglen**, v.
[39] *MED:* **scōld(e** (n.). Scolds could be male – for instance, John Scarle, the London priest who revealed the confessions of women who would not 'asent to his lecherie' was charged with being 'a scolde, and a perlious Rebaude of his tunge' (Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda* Rolls, p.127; cf. the discussion of Scarle in Chapter 2 of this thesis).
[40] S. Bardsley, 'Men's Voices in Late Medieval England', in E.D. Craun (ed.), *The Hands of the Tongue: Essays in Deviant Speech* (Kalamazoo, 2007), pp.163-183 (pp.163-164, pp.169-170).
[41] C. Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry', *Past and Present* 160 (1998): 3-24 (pp.11 & 15).

replies that he saw the devil Tutivillus, who was recording the words of two women who were chattering. In order to record the excessive talk of the women Tutivillus needs to stretch the scroll he was writing on, causing it to rip and him to strike his head against the wall. This made the cleric laugh.[42] Kathy Cawsey argues that the strategy of the tale is to reinforce control through ridicule. The tale presents idle talk as a feminine vice which is an object of humour for the male clerical observer: 'By gesturing towards these anti-feminist stereotypes which gender gossip and chattering as female, all listeners, even the men, are dissuaded from talking in church.'[43] Christa Grössinger provides several examples of English misericords in which Tutivillus appears between two women listening to their conversation, or else with his scroll, recording their words.[44] The story also appears in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, a conduct text published by Caxton in 1484 and intended to guide the behaviour of young women, but this version does not name the devil as Tutivillus and does not specify those talking during church as women.[45]

The *OED* dates its first example of 'gossip' being used to mean 'to talk idly, mostly about other people's affairs' to 1627.[46] At this point it was also still being used to mean 'to be a gossip or sponsor' or 'to act as a gossip or familiar acquaintance to'.[47] Engaging in idle talk only seems to take over as the primary sense of the word in the late seventeenth or eighteenth century. Modern scholars have tended to use the word gossip as a verb to describe idle talk, and gossip as a noun to refer to the person who engages in such talk, despite the fact that

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[42] K. Cawsey, 'Tutivillus and the "Kyrkchaterars": Strategies of Control in the Middle Ages', *Studies in Philology* 102 (2005): 434-51 (p.435).
[43] *Ibid.*, p.437.
[44] C. Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Manchester, 1997), pp.96 & p.98, pp.100-101.
[45] M.Y. Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* (London, 1971), pp.49-50: the devil 'put in wrytynge all that the men and wymmen talked to geder as longe as he sayd the masse.' Margaret Jennings provides a full account of the literary genesis and versions of Tutivillus: M. Jennings, 'Tutivillus: The Literary Career of the Recording Demon', *Studies in Philology* 74 (1977): 1-95.
[46] *OED:* **gossip,** v., 3a.
[47] *OED*: **gossip,** v., 1& 2.

neither of these senses was current in the Middle Ages.[48] Much of this scholarship has

characterised gossip as an activity that was considered a feminine vice, although medieval

texts also feature male gossips. In what follows I intend to proceed with caution. When I use

'gossip', it is a choice based on the weight of scholarly precedent, rather than an assumption

that this word would have been used by a medieval audience to describe idle talk. In studying

texts such as the *Gospelles* and the *Fyftene Joyes*, it becomes evident that 'gossip' was a word

in transition whose meaning was beginning to shift. It had meant a 'god-sib', and also a friend

or companion, but it began to acquire the meaning of idle talk and the association with women

that is familiar to us today. It took several hundred years for this process to be complete:

'gossip' as a way of describing spiritual affinity was still being used as late as the 1890s,

although this may have been consciously archaic. In the early-sixteenth century, we are

stepping in when this shift had begun to happen but was far from complete.

3.3 Masculine Isolation and Feminine Community in The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage.

Now that I have established some of the terminology that was used to describe groups of

women and their talk in late medieval England, and the social practices from which this

terminology grew, I will explore how the household is depicted in the *Fyftene Joyes*,

particularly in relation to movement across the boundaries of the household and the

interactions of groups of women. In the *Fyftene Joyes* the concept of the household, the duties

of husband and wife, and the connections between the household and the wider community are

central. The women in this text are skilled at manipulating the image of 'the good wife', and

the powers and responsibilities this position confers, to gain mastery over their husbands.

While the husbands are depicted as isolated, vulnerable and unable to assert their authority, the

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[48] For example: P.R. Schofield, 'Peasants and the Manor Court: gossip and litigation in a Suffolk village at the close of the thirteenth century', *Past and Present* 159 (1998): 3-42; Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance'; Phillips, *Transforming Talk*.

wives deftly abuse their connections to the community, particularly familial ties and the bonds

they share with their 'gossips', to bend events to their will. In the following discussion I

support this argument with reference to selected episodes in the text and attempt to draw some

conclusions regarding the extent of the text's misogyny.

The *Fyftene Joyes* was published by Wynkyn de Worde around 1507. The decision of

de Worde to publish a second edition in 1509 suggests that it found favour with readers. A

fragment of the 1507 edition, consisting of several leaves, survives and is now in the Bodleian

Library, Oxford. The only complete copy of the text, which is in the Pierpont Morgan Library

in New York, can be identified as the 1509 edition from its colophon. The final extant copy is

in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC and contains only Joys 1-13.[49] The

Fyftene Joyes is a translation of the *Quinze Joies de Mariage*, which is in turn a parody of

Marian texts about the Fifteen Joys of the Virgin that present the Virgin as the pinnacle of

ideal womanhood. The *Fyftene Joyes* parodies this by substituting the canonical Joys with

fifteen tales of the 'joys' caused by manipulative, adulterous, and spendthrift wives. It

undermines the image of the ideal woman, presenting it as a delusion of men such as the

husbands of the tales. Marriage is simply a snare whose torments must be suffered because

there is no escape once caught.

The structure of the *Fyftene Joyes* is repetitive, with transitions between the joys

heavily signalled. Each of the joys begins with 'here begynneth the … Ioye of maryage'. The

number is then repeated in the first line of the joy, e.g. 'The first Ioy of maryage is this'. Each

joy closes with a reflection on the wretchedness of the husband: 'And there this poore man

shall vse his lyfe / Endynge his dayes in wretchedness and stryfe'.[50] This example is from the

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[49] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce Fragments, e.10; Washington DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, *STC* 15258; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, PML 21589. The 1509 edition can be dated from the colophon attached to the copy now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The c.1507 dating for the earlier edition is provided by the *STC*, but there is no indication of how the compilers arrived at this date (perhaps a guess based on slightly better conditions of the woodcuts used in '1507' compared to 1509?).
[50] *Fyftene Joyes* (London, 1509), The First Joy, C2r.

first joy, but the formula varies little in the other fourteen. For example, the main text of the fourth joy closes with 'and wretchedly his dayes in payne and wo / He shall endure / and make an ende right so'.[51] A colophon is attached to each joy which repeats the title, 'thus endeth the … Ioye of maryage'. The highly formulaic structure enables readers to find their way around the text easily, with the transitions between joys being clearly signalled. The repetition of similar phrases throughout heightens the presentation of the husband's fate as inevitable. No matter how successful the marriage may appear to be, the ending is always misery and imprisonment.

Although the English translation cuts the reference to the Fifteen Joys of The Virgin that appears in the French text, its readers would have easily picked up on the parody. Poems about the Fifteen Joys were extremely popular in England; Lydgate alone wrote two of them. The text may also be playing on similarities to the *Fifteen Oes*, a text that encouraged meditation on Christ's Passion. This was a well-known text in fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century England. Several versions circulated in manuscript and in print and it became a regular element in printed books of hours.[52] In this context, the suffering of the hapless husband in the *Fyftene Joyes* at the hands of his manipulative wife, which almost always ends up ruining both of them, is satirized through the underlying comparison with the suffering of Christ for mankind upon which the reader would be encouraged to meditate in poems such as the *Fifteen Oes*. The suffering of the husbands and wives in the *Fyftene Joyes* benefits no-one. It is presented in a fatalistic way as inevitable and pointless.

I will focus on certain of the Joys which are of relevance to my argument, but as the content of the text is not widely known, it is worth summarizing it here. The first joy concerns a couple who bankrupt themselves when the husband gives in to his wife's demands for a new

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[51] *Ibid.*, The Fourth Joy, E2v.
[52] R. Krug, '*The Fifteen Oes*', in A.C. Bartlett and T.H. Bestul (eds.), *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca, 1999), pp.107-117 (pp.107-108); Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp.219 &.254.

gown. In the second joy, the wife longs to go on pilgrimage, and this wandering leads eventually into adultery. The third joy deals with the wife's (possibly illegitimate) pregnancy and subsequent lying-in, complete with a gaggle of gossips who drain the household's resources dry. In the fourth joy, the husband worries about how to get his daughters married, settle his legal disputes, and order his household. The fifth joy is one of the longest in the text. It relates how the wife and her female servant collaborate to arrange an assignation between the wife and her lover. The sixth joy relates the wife's failure of hospitality towards her husband's guests and her efforts to thwart him by making their stay as uncomfortable as possible. In the seventh joy the wife slanders her husband's closest friend and turns them against each other to conceal her own adultery. The eighth joy returns to pilgrimage, this time narrating how the husband accompanies the wife and must cater to her every whim. The wife of the ninth joy joins forces with her impatient son to take over the household, convincing everyone that her husband has become senile. In the tenth joy, the unhappy husband and wife attempt to separate, to their great expense and loss of reputation. The eleventh joy concerns a young woman who, pregnant and unmarried, is instructed on how to entrap a suitor by her mother. The twelfth joy is a generalised treatment of a henpecked and cuckolded husband. The husband of the thirteenth joy goes off to war and returns years later to find his wife has married another man. In the fourteenth joy, the man's first marriage is happy, but his wife dies and he remarries an old shrew. In the final joy, the husband catches the wife with her lover, but with the help of her mother and the mother's gossips, she persuades him he was mistaken and they reconcile.

Each joy is about how the wife tricks, manipulates, and browbeats her husband, usually resulting in his ruin and often hers as well. The wife is the main transgressive figure in the text, constantly working to overmaster her husband. She accomplishes this by using the resources open to her, by transforming her prescribed duties as a wife into ways through which

she can wield power in the household. Her payment of the marriage debt can be used as a way to manipulate her husband by withholding sex, as the wife does in the first joy. Her responsibilities as household manager can be used as a way to ensure her husband's discomfort by withholding food, drink, and comfort from him, and bestowing them liberally on her lover. The wife may act alone, but more often she has assistance from others both inside and outside the household. These facilitators include the servants, her mother, her gossips, her lover, and the general force of 'public fame'. This is in striking contrast to the presentation of the husband who is usually isolated, vulnerable, and powerless. When he does appear with a male friend or business associate, the wife's immediate efforts go into separating him from this source of support. The household is presented as a porous space. It is the centre of a community for the wife. Goods leak out of the household and the wife goes abroad to engage in flirtation and display. For the husband the porousness of the household space is threatening, a means of access for the wife's lovers and the gossips who abuse his hospitality.

In the fifth joy, the wife uses her household duties as a way to avoid sex with her husband and thus force his hand:

> My husbande shall not yet touche my persone
> Tomorrow / and therfore erly she arose
> And lefte her husbande / routynge in the nose
> And makyth suche a countenaunce as she
> A houswyfe good / and houssholder sholde be.[53]

The description of the husband unattractively snoring in bed engages the reader's sympathy on the side of the wife, which is then reinforced by her manipulation of the image of the industrious housewife, rising early to put the affairs of the household in order while her

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[53] *Ibid.,* The Fifth Joy, E7v.

husband lies in bed.[54] This is hammered home by the repeated description of her as 'this good wyfe' and 'the good wyfe'. It soon becomes clear, however, that the wife is using this script for transgressive purposes, even managing to fit in an assignation with her lover before her husband rises from bed. She is ordering the house for her lover, not her husband, a task on which she is so joyfully intent that she eschews the help of servants:

> In euery place / so ordreth she the house
> And skyppeth aboute / as quyckely as a mouse
> She clappeth to the doores and the wykket
> And is as mery as it were a crykket.[55]

The imagery here recalls Chaucer's fabliaux, particularly the 'The Miller's Tale', with its description of Alison who is compared to young restive animals, 'thereto she koude skippe and make game, / As any kyde or calf folowygne his dame' (ll.3259-3260).[56] The wife is full of youthful sexual energy, a point emphasised by reference to the 'wykket'. The translator appears to be using it here as a form of sexual innuendo for the vulva as Chaucer does in 'The Merchant's Tale'. January carries the key to the 'smale wyket' in his pocket, jealously protecting it as he does his wife's body, but she is able to make a counterfeit copy for her lover, thus giving him access to the garden and sexual access to her body. Like May, the wife in the fifth joy keeps the 'wyket' closed to her husband, but grants access to her lover (ll.2044-2052).[57] The household is presented as open and permeable, a macrocosm of the wife's body. The wife fulfils her duty of hospitality, but to an inappropriate recipient. She leaves other household chores undone and gets her husband to perform them by convincing him that she is ill. Goods flow out of the household, in this case to an inappropriate recipient, the wife's lover.

Access to the wife is facilitated by her control over the servants. When these servants are singled out, rather than simply being referred to *en masse*, the servant focused on is usually

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[54] Cf. *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter* in Salisbury (ed), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.219-232 for the attributes of the good wife - ll.77-80 (stays at home), ll.111-114 (industrious), ll.125-136 (skilled household manager), ll.165-166 (early riser).
[55] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Fifth Joy, E7v.
[56] Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', *RC*, p.69.
[57] Chaucer, 'The Merchant's Tale', *RC*, pp.163-164.

female. In the fifth joy, the wife's 'chamberere' serves as a go-between for the wife and her lover, accepting money and gifts, negotiating with the lover, and setting up assignations. This confederacy allows both parties to play their respective roles in order to extort as much money as possible out of the lover. The servant presents herself as a reluctant accomplice, risking her job and reputation for the lover, and thus presents herself as entitled to maximum compensation. The wife displays herself at church 'as sweetly as an ymage in a wall' for the lover's gaze, while protesting reluctance up to the last moment.[58] The game culminates in a highly staged scene with overtones of rape, in which the maid smuggles the lover naked into bed with her mistress, allowing the wife to protest and appear to be forced into sex, when she has really orchestrated the entire charade. In this way, the wife uses her servant to circumvent her husband, who has refused to buy her a new gown. Instead, the lover buys it for her.

In the sixth joy, the servants are used in a more direct way to damage the public standing of the husband. He brings two friends home to dine and stay the night and sends his page ahead to warn his wife to prepare a meal. Her response is to send all the servants out of doors and to make sure her daughters are instructed on what to say to their father when he returns to find no food prepared. This dereliction of her duty speaks eloquently to the two guests:

> [who] Perceyue ryght wele enpryntynge in theyr thought
> That where he sente his seruaunt or his page
> Afore vnto his wife on his massage
> They might wele thynke that his commaundement
> Was not so sure as acte of parlayment.[59]

The reference to an 'acte of parlayment' emphasises the impotence of the husband. His wife ought to obey his commands without question, but instead she sets out to make him appear ridiculous to his travelling companions, who perceive him as weak because he cannot successfully command his own household. The husband's argument that he is 'bounde vnto'

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[58] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Fifth Joy, F3r.
[59] *Ibid.*, The Sixth Joy, G.6v.

these men implies that their disapproval may cause real damage to his material prospects and thus those of the household as well. The husband demands the finest tablecloths for the guests, but they are either missing or steeping in the washing tubs. The wife also claims to have lost the keys to the linen chests and the chambermaid is busy turning the straw of the bed to and fro searching for them. When the husband begins to threaten to break the chests to pieces in order to get the sheets, the ridiculousness of the threat completes the image of a chaotic disordered household. Veronica Sekules has written about the importance of household linen and how the provision and care of linen was considered part of the proper role of a wife.[60] Sekules argues that:

> The appreciation of linen is a mark of breeding and refinement; its possession denotes wealth. Absence of linen denotes poverty … Its plentiful supply, clean and fresh on demand, is an accomplishment of the sensitive and efficient housewife. Above all, it is associated with order, with faithfulness, and with comfort and cleanliness.[61]

The wife's refusal to provide clean linen speaks of her contempt for her husband's guests, her lack of respect for her husband, and her failure to fulfil the role expected of her as household manager. Rather, she actively perverts this role by using her authority to make sure the house is as unwelcoming as possible to her husband's guests.[62]

The loss of the keys may also contain an element of sexual innuendo, as it does in the carol 'Kytt hathe lost her key', which survives in an early-sixteenth-century manuscript. Here the lost key represents the woman's lost sexual reputation or virginity:

> Kyt she wept and cryed alas
> Hur key she cowed not fynde
> In faith I trow yn bouerr she was
> With sum that were not kende (st.4, ll.1-4).[63]

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[60] Sekules, 'Spinning Yarns', p.79.
[61] *Ibid.*, p.84.
[62] In the case from Nottingham that I discussed in the introduction, the importance and worth of linen is also stressed. Among the goods for which John of Bilby claims damages are two pairs of sheets and a tablecloth ('bortklothus') (Stevenson (ed.), *Records*, pp.242-243).
[63] Greene, *Early English Carols,* p.279.

The image of the key would have been particularly potent in late medieval England because of the popularity of the cult of St. Sitha. Sebastian Sutcliffe has discussed the origins of St. Sitha and the type of people who venerated her. Sutcliffe states that Sitha originated as St. Zita, a domestic servant in Italy who died in 1272.[64] She began to attract pilgrims in the fifteenth century after a shrine to her was built in England, probably at Eagle in Lincolnshire. She was also venerated at Lynn and in London. Sutcliffe argues that her cult was well established by 1400.[65] The later depictions of St. Sitha almost always show her with the keys which symbolised her household work; she was particularly popular among female servants and housekeepers.[66] Sutcliffe argues that although St. Zita was a life-long domestic servant, her role 'may have been reinterpreted in England as similar to that of the housekeeper or the married woman'.[67] In the Bolton Hours, probably produced in York in the early-fifteenth century, a full-page illumination shows the mother of a bourgeois family praying to St. Sitha.[68] The potency of the keys as a symbol of responsible household management is demonstrated by the reluctance of Margery Kempe's household to have the keys of the buttery returned to her, after her bout of post-partum madness, for fear she will give away the household goods. Her husband returns the keys to her and she 'toke hyr mete and drynke as hir bodily strength wold servyn hir, and knew hir frendys and hir meny'.[69] The return of the keys is symbolic of her return to her position of household manager from a period of disorder in which she was incapable of performing these duties.

An awareness of the importance of the key and clean linen as symbols of responsible household management gives us some idea of the cultural context within which contemporary readers may have evaluated the behaviour of the husband and wife in the sixth joy. She

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[64] S. Sutcliffe, 'The Cult of St Sitha in England: an Introduction', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 37 (1993), pp.83-89 (p.83).
[65] *Ibid.*, pp.84-85.
[66] *Ibid.,* pp.86-87.
[67] *Ibid.,* p.88.
[68] McDonald, 'A York Primer and its Alphabet', p.183.
[69] Windeatt (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.56.

deliberately abuses her position and the power that comes with it to shame her husband, and he is powerless to see his wishes carried out in regard to entertaining guests. The guests are left with the cheapest wine and the roughest sheets, and it is made clear that the wife has done this intentionally because she considers the guests beneath her. The guests leave the next day, ridiculing their host. The text concludes that it would have been better for him to have lost much of his goods than to shame himself by providing such poor hospitality.

The wife's control over the household, both servants and household goods, allows her to thwart her husband's endeavours. When her husband accuses her, she counters him with the image of herself as an industrious household manager and him as a spendthrift:

> Aue maria / with me is moche to do
> She sayth. I nourysshe chekyns duckes pygges also
> And euermore I laboure and y spynne
> And do all that I may some thynge to wynne
> Yet can I not one houre haue on the day
> Ofrest ne ease / and ye trauayle always
> Aboute nothynge / but euer wast and spende
> And of oure goodes destroye and make an ende.[70]

This diatribe recalls texts such as *The Ballad of the Tyrannical Husband*, in which wife and husband debate the onerousness of their household tasks, and in which the wife's work is characterised by being heterogeneous (ll.41-60). She juggles many tasks while her husband only occupies himself with one.[71] In *The Fyftene Joyes* the wife uses this discourse of wifely industriousness and husbandly idleness to complain to her husband, but she spends her goods willingly on the visiting 'galaunt', upon whom 'no good thynge' shall be spared. The husband's discovery of his wife's infidelity further disorders their household arrangement, as after their subsequent argument husband and wife refuse to sleep together. The fourth joy is even more explicit about the wife's control over the household and household goods. The husband returns home after a long journey to find his wife and household in bed and can get

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[70] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Sixth Joy, G7r.
[71] *The Ballad of the Tyrannical Husband*, in Salisbury (ed.) *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.85-93 (pp.86-87).

nothing more than rebuke from his wife and disobedience from the servants, who have all

been instructed beforehand by the wife:

> There is not in his hous so lewde a knaue
> That maketh accompte therby ne wyll obey
> So by theyr dame afore taught ben all they.[72]

When the husband attempts to plead his case, he is drowned out by a chorus of female voices,

as the nurse and chambermaid join his wife in upbraiding him, so the husband is 'chekmate …

on euery syde'.[73]

In this case, the voices belong to females of the house, the wife and servants, but the

text also uses the practices of marriage formation, childbed attendance and gossips' feasts to

demonstrate the isolation of the husband in comparison to the wife. By presenting the ways in

which these fundamental social practices can be perverted to upset household order, the text

plays on fears that although these community ties were formed for orthodox purposes they

gave wives a source of power that could be used to thwart their husbands' authority. It was

precisely because these ties to the community, and especially to other women, were so

ubiquitous that they could be so threatening. These outside forces intrude into the domestic

space, converting it from a place of rest and order to one of upheaval and disorder.

The formation of the conjugal relationship that is the foundation of the household is a

contract concerning more than the husband and wife. After the marriage the wife's family are

still involved in commentating on and judging the marriage in the first joy; the wife uses the

threat of her parents' disapproval to castigate her husband. Her claim is that her ignorance led

her to accept an unsuitable match, one which has incurred the disapproval of her family:

> So that all other I refused clene
> And had no wyll / ony to haue but yow
> For whiche grete blame & maulgre haue I now
> Bothe of my lorde / my fader be ye sure
> And of my moder / out of all measures.[74]

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[72] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Fourth Joy, E1v.
[73] *Ibid.*, E3v.

By presenting herself as having lost the support of her family she intensifies her claim upon her husband's generosity. She claims to have risked social ostracism for him and expects something in return. This section of the text also reveals something of the wilfulness and recklessness of the wife. Shannon McSheffrey has argued that although canon law ruled that the consent of both parties was essential in making a marriage, this did not mean that people chose their marriage partners with no regard for the opinions of their family. Medieval men and women often consulted their parents, and in the absence of parents, their employers, to help them make a choice about whether to consent to a marriage or not. Drawing on evidence from London in the 1470s, forty years before the *Fyftene Joyes* was published, McSheffrey notes some women who went as far as to declare that they would not accept a man unless their father consented to the marriage.[75] Goldberg notes a similar development of increasing compliance with parental wishes in the York cause papers for the later-fifteenth century, as compared to the fourteenth century and earlier-fifteenth century when there seems to have been a relative lack of parental involvement in marriage formation in an urban context.[76] By the mid-sixteenth century, this tendency had evolved further, and it was expected that families should be involved in making marriages, even that they should take the initiative.[77] The context in which the *Fyftene Joyes* appeared was located in the middle of this process of growing familial involvement in marriage-making. The wife's complaint about her loss of standing with her family following her marriage to a man they disapproved of indicates her rejection of the normal practice of taking their approval into account in choosing a husband.

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[74] *Ibid.,* The First Joy, B3v.

[75] S. McSheffrey, '"I will never have none ayenst my faders will": Consent and the Making of Marriage in the Late Medieval Diocese of London', in C.M. Rousseau and J.T. Rosenthal (eds.), *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M Sheehan, C.S.B* (Kalamazoo, 1998), pp.153-174 (pp.154-156).

[76] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life-Cycle*, pp. 262 & 274, pp.275-276.

[77] D. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), pp.31-32, 41-42.

In other sections of the text the wife relies on her continuing connection to her family and friends to exert pressure on her husband. The wife and husband argue over the relative superiority of each other's lineage, leading to her claim that his economic and social position within the community is dependent on his connections to powerful people through his marriage: 'I tell you well your dedes were but small / without my frendes helpe'.[78] In *The Book of Margery Kempe,* a similar argument occurs between husband and wife, where it is presented as an example of Margery's pride and concern for public opinion:

> And whan hir husband wold speke to hir for to levyn hir pryde, sche answered schrewedly and schortly and seyd that sche was comyn of worthy kenred – hym semyd nevyr for to a weddyd hir – for hir fadyr was sumtyne meyr of the town.[79]

The wife bolsters her resistance to her husband's authority by referring to her family and her husband's reliance on their assistance. The household is not presented here as an isolated institution, but as part of a community and needing the support of that community in order to function effectively, an underlying condition that the wife is canny enough to use to her advantage. The wife goes on to threaten the physical intrusion of her family into the household to settle the disputes between husband and wife:

> Certes she sayth / yf that my frendes [family] were here
> And you such wordes had / they wolde answere
> You well ynough / then he the mater feres [he is afraid]
> Leest it by her / sholde come vnto theyr eres.[80]

The threat of this intrusion is enough to cow the husband into silence and obedience. He truly seems to fear the power of her family to damage him in the community.

In this case the wife only threatens, but there are occasions when her family, particularly her mother, intrude physically into the household. The mother is the wife's main ally in her attempts to dupe her husband. For example, she facilitates the pilgrimages which draw the wife out of the house and expose her to other potential sexual partners. The mother

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[78] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Fourth Joy, E1r.
[79] Windeatt (ed.) *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.57.
[80] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Fourth Joy, E1r.

persuades the husband of the good character of all the travelling party and the true concern of his wife for the success of the household:

> She is a woman leest that loueth waast
> Of ony lyuynge / for euer she dooth haast
> Home warde whan she at ony place is oute.[81]

By emphasising the devotion of the wife to her household and its continued prosperity the mother secures permission for the wife to venture outside its bounds. In poems such as *How the Goode Wife Taught Hir Doughter*, a mother is depicted dispensing advice to her daughter on how to maintain a good reputation, how to be a good mistress of a household and how to guard her chastity (ll.24-34, 61-65).[82] The mothers and daughters of the *Fyftene Joyes* are almost a nightmarish parody of the ways in which the power of the mother to shape her daughter's behaviour can be used instead to educate her in the ways of manipulation and adultery. The husband places his trust in his mother-in-law, casting her in the role of chaperone, when in fact she enacts the other role common for older women in medieval texts, that of bawd or go-between: 'Ne were it for the trust I haue in yow / She sholde not go'.[83]

The mother appears again as facilitator in the eleventh joy, in which she educates her young and pregnant daughter on how to entrap a suitor.[84] The older woman's practices are here presented as a refinement of years of experience in the types of manipulation practiced by the young wives in the earlier joys, and thus highly dangerous. She perceives that her daughter is pregnant by observing her and takes it upon herself to educate the younger woman, calling her into a 'secrete place' to impart her wisdom, 'the olde testament and the newe'.[85] Her

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[81] *Ibid.*

[82] *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doghter,* in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.219-220. Felicity Riddy suggests that the miscellaneous manuscripts in which this poem circulated in the fifteenth century were of the kind that appealed to urban merchant families (Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best'), pp.81, 83.

[83] *Fyftene Joyes.*, C4r.

[84] This again provides a sinister development of the advice offered by the mother in poems such as *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doghter.* In *How the Goode Wife,* the mother's advice is directed towards 'showing' potential marriage relationships to family in order to circumscribe the young woman's choice to suitors who met parental approval (*How the Goode Wife,* ll.27-32, in Salisbury, *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, p.219).

[85] *Fyftene Joyes.,* The Eleventh Joy, K3v.

knowledge of sexuality and marriage is referred to variously as 'the game', 'that arte', and 'that crafte', but always in terms that emphasise her expert knowledge, based on experience, 'for so it fortune may / that she hath alse / Sometyme ben / in lyke condycyon'.[86] The mother is more knowledgeable about the workings of the young girl's body than she herself is, for when her daughter professes ignorance of her condition, her mother breaks in scornfully and instructs her accordingly: 'Ha sayth her moder holde thy pease for shame / Thou arte with chylde / tell it not all aboute'.[87] Here we can see a similar scene to that presented in the betrayed maidens' laments, a young pregnant woman being berated by her 'dame', who has discovered her condition. However, unlike the young woman of the lyrics, the protagonist here is not abandoned and isolated; instead, she has access, through her mother, to a script that enables her to salvage her reputation and secure support for her and her child. The mother carefully instructs her daughter on how to entrap a 'simple and … innocent' but rich young man. The daughter protests to her suitor that:

> I knowe not what maner thynge loue is
> Ne yet I wyll not lerne it furthermore
> For it is not doctrine ne the lore
> The whiche my moder hathe me taught alwaye.[88]

This has a certain ironic truth to it, not that the young girl is virginal as she would have the suitor believe, but that the doctrine her 'olde wyle dame' has taught her is based on self-preservation (and how to rescue her threatened reputation) rather than love. The mother plays on both sides of the ruse, teaching her daughter 'som what of the game' and instructing her how to convince her husband she is a virgin, but also serving as an authority figure against which the daughter can frame her performance of being seduced by the young man. In a context in which it was expected that young people would seek parental approval for marriage, the young woman can draw the young man in by presenting the two of them as complicit

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[86] *Ibid.*
[87] *Ibid.*, K3r.
[88] *Ibid.*, L1v.

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against the authority of her parents, 'yf that / my / moder it perceyue or wytte / I shall destroyed be I knowe wele it', while actually using her family to facilitate her ruse.[89] The ceremony of asking consent and the trothplight are presented as what they were supposed to be, a submission to the authority of parents or masters for their approval:

> This must be spoken in especyall
> Unto my fader sadly and my moder
> And to my kynne / and frendes dyuers oder.[90]

In reality, when the trothplight occurs, the family conspire to get the couple into bed as soon as possible, and certainly before the young woman's pregnancy becomes apparent, in order to encourage the consummation of the marriage and convince the young man that he is the father of the child. The family then fall back to their expected role, displaying indignation towards the man who has 'wronged' their daughter. Everyone in the narrative except the young man is in on the ruse and they are skilful in using the normative practices of marriage formation in order to preserve the young woman's reputation and entrap the young man.

Elsewhere in the joys, once the daughter is married, her mother's house becomes a refuge when her husband discovers her adultery. The mother or cousin of the wife is privy to the husband's physical and sexual shortcomings, which are confided by the wife: 'By our lorde Ihesus / Whan I with hym in bedde am layde adoune / His flesshe it stynketh lyke a caryoune'.[91] The fiction that she is visiting her mother's house is used as a cover for her assignations with her lover. When her husband finally suspects her, it is to her mother's house that she flees for help. Again the mother attempts to serve as guarantor of her daughter's virtue to an angry husband:

> If she of evyll gouernaunce had be
> She had be lost / but ye may se here
> Frome shame and misrule for to kepe her clere

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[89] *Ibid.* Cf. McSheffrey and O'Hara above for the probability that the poem was published in such a context (notes 75 & 77).
[90] *Fyftene Joyes.,* L2r.
[91] *Ibid.,* The Tenth Joy, I8r

> Streyght vnto me she came / for she ne had
> None other helpe.[92]

In this case her persuasions are unsuccessful, but in the fifteenth joy, in which the husband has

actually observed the wife and her lover alone together, the mother tries a more advanced

tactic. Convincing the husband to disbelieve the evidence of his own eyes and accept his wife

back into the house will require more skill than the mother possesses on her own. To this end,

she calls in her gossips to help.

Apart from the mother, the gossips are the other main group who intrude into the

household of the *Fyftene Joys* and act to disrupt the normative functioning of the marital

relationship. The main danger in this narrative is presented not as the anger of the husband, but

as the threat to the wife's reputation from 'the noyse of people and the crye'; that is, the public

knowledge of her indiscretion which has surely spread after her husband chased her and her

lover from her house.[93] The network of gossips must be pre-empted by engaging them on the

side of the wife.[94] Like all fictional gossips in the texts of this period, they must first be plied

with household goods, partaking of the 'purest wyne' and eating their fill. The gossips'

colloquy in which they discuss how to remedy the wife's problem is described in language

reminiscent of the law courts. They debate amongst themselves and consider the particulars of

the case:

> It is an usage and a president
> A custome of the countre and a lawe
> Whiche can not hurte the value of a strawe
> Among them was grete dyspycyon
> And to accompte was no dyvysyon
> One dooth allege / an other dothe replye
> The thryde sayth thenne all is not worth a flye
> But at the last all they in one conclude
> …
> And thus they speke and answer on a rowe

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[92] *Ibid.,* K1v.
[93] *Ibid.,* The Fifteenth Joy, M4v.
[94] This section of the *Fyftene Joyes* is also discussed by Phillips (*Transforming Talk*, p.172), who argues that the gossips have two aims – to protect the wife's physical safety and her public reputation.

The maner of the sclaundre for to knowe.[95]

This group of women have come together to pool their knowledge and use it to master men. Phillips argues that this section is an anti-feminist joke that plays on the incongruity between the women's words and the discourse of legal scholarship, underlined by the fact that the women's talk accomplishes little and gives way to unproductive chatter, diffusing its subversive potential.[96] They weigh precedents, custom, and their own opinions to come up with a way to proceed against the husband. I would argue that although there is initial dissent, they do eventually agree on a way to proceed, and the outlook does not seem hopeful for the husband against the combined experience of such a group. Not only does he come out the loser in their confrontation, he ends up paying for the cost of their feast. These women share their experience with unmitigated success, and the wife's ability to engage other women on her side proves too much for the husband, although he is clearly in the right.

The gossips also intrude in the third joy. Their presence at the delivery and lying-in of the wife is sanctioned by custom, as I discussed earlier, but it is a custom that they exploit to the fullest to eat and drink at the husband's expense and simultaneously turn his wife against him. The lying-in is presented as a time of profound household disorder with the wife unable to perform her normal duties of household management. Instead, the domestic chores fall to her husband, who is in charge of contacting the household cook to arrange his wife's meals and then bringing the food to her bedside himself. The gossips use their time with the wife to teach her the secrets of women ('*de secretes mulierum*'). Monica Green argues that this label became popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to describe treatises that dealt with gynaecology and matters relating to reproduction.[97] Although the women may share their expertise on the young wife's imminent childbirth, they also scorn her husband ('an euyll man

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[95] *Ibid.,* M5r.
[96] Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, p.173.
[97] M. Green, 'From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynaecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 5-39 (pp.5 & 13).

he is') and use examples from their own experience to teach her to master him.[98] While the wife is welcomed and educated by the community of women the husband is left alone to dine on the scraps from their earlier feast. In the closing lines of the joy he is first silenced, and then finally and physically separated from his wife by the drawing of a bed-curtain:

> Than cometh a matrone with a wryngled face
> An olde kepster with whome is lytell grace
> And to the good man out her mynde doth breke
> Peace syr she sayth / no mo suche wordes speke
> …
> And ther withal she draweth the courtayne.[99]

'Kepster' does not appear in *MED*, but appears to be derived from '**kēper(e)**, n.', meaning someone entrusted with the responsibility of looking after another person, both in the more general sense of attending them (e.g. a nurse), but also of guarding and protecting them from harm.[100] The old woman is here performing the role of guard; by drawing the bed-curtain she encloses the wife in the space of the bed and separates her visually from the husband. He is out of place in the female-dominated space of the lying-in chamber, despite the fact that he pays for their indulgences in food and drink. While fulfilling the same role of facilitator of the wife that the mother performed in the other joys I have discussed, the gossips also serve to defame the husband and isolate him.

The only time in the entire text when an intrusion into the household seems beneficial to the husband, it is thwarted quickly by the wife. This is in the seventh joy, when a friend attempts to persuade the husband of his wife's adultery. The wife responds by accusing this friend of being the one to harass her sexually, thus performing the double function of hiding her own transgression while isolating her husband further from the one ally who has tried to help him. Guy Mermier has suggested that the object of the text's criticism is not the

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[98] *Fyftene Joyes,* The Third Joy, C8v.
[99] *Ibid.,* D2r. It is clear that a bed-curtain is what is intended here – nearly all the citations for **curtīn(e)**, n. in the *MED* refer to bed-curtains and the woodcut that precedes the 3rd Joy depicts a woman lying in a bed partially enclosed by curtains as another woman holds a swaddled child nearby.
[100] *MED*: **kēper(e)**, n. – 2a) guard, jailer, 3) watchman, gatekeeper, 5a) attendant, guardian, nurse, 6b) manager, household head.

institution of marriage itself, but rather the intrusions of the external world into the marriage, which may itself initially be presented as unified and functional. Groups such as the gossips interfere in the conjugal relationship to disrupt its harmony.[101] I would argue that Mermier's image of the happily functioning household that is disrupted by outside influences is perhaps too rosy. In the *Fyftene Joyes* these influences work in concert with the disorder to normative roles and behaviour caused by members within the household itself. What is clear is that the wife is presented as a skilled manipulator of the scripts available to her, and she has connections to the members of her household and the wider community that she exploits fully to achieve her goals. The husband, by contrast, is always isolated. When other men appear in the text they are driven to scorn him because of his disordered household and disobedient wife. He ends each joy miserable and is repeatedly compared to a helpless animal, caught in a snare from which he cannot escape.

3.4 'Our secretary and frende': The Precarious Position of the Narrator in The Gospelles of Dystaues.

In the *Fyftene Joyes*, the husband is powerless while the wife is ensconced in the midst of the community provided by her family and her gossips, secure in her ability to use her community ties to her advantage. The *Gospelles* presents a different situation, with the lone man, the male narrator, being presented initially as a member of the women's group. In most of the 'gossip' texts, the women are constructed as a group and the narrator as an outsider, someone who operates alone, spying on the group in order to describe its workings to the audience.[102] The *Gospelles* differs from this model in several important ways, for example, the narrator is

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[101] G.Mermier, 'La ruse feminine et la function morale des "Quinze Joies de Mariage"', *Romance Notes* 15 (1974): 495-503. 'C'est surtout par intrusion du monde extérieur à l'interieur de l'unité initiale du couple que celui-ci sombre dans la mésentente' (p.497).
[102] The role of gossip in defining group identity is discussed by M. Glückman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology* 4 (1963):307-316 (pp.308, 313-314); and also Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance', p.11.

invited by the women to record their talk.[103] The gospels are an enterprise conceived and directed by the women themselves, rather than being presented as an opportunistic glimpse into a community of women furnished by a voyeur. I argue that this places the narrator in a precarious position, invited to record the talk of the group but also constantly anxious that he not be considered truly part of it.

The *Gospelles* was printed by Wynkyn de Worde around 1510 as a sixty page quarto. The subject of the text is a series of evening gatherings between the women of a community in which they spin with their distaffs and discuss such topics as marriage, children, health, and superstitions. The text has a male narrator, who is engaged by the women on the first evening as a scribe. His purpose is to record their talk and he is thus present during all six evenings on which the gatherings take place, although he does not usually participate in the discussion itself. The women describe their purpose in the gospels as specifically retaliatory. They are composing a text to counteract the 'balades dyffamous and bokes contagyous' that men have written against them, and they make their 'secretary & frende' part of this enterprise.[104] They seek him out specifically because of his track record in writing defenses of women, 'them semed that … I sholde do theyr werke well seynge that other tymes I had wryten of ladyes vnto theyr laude & praysynge'.[105] This is quite unlike the 'gossip' texts in which the voyeur plays a prominent role. The impetus for this text comes from the women themselves, and the man who records it is *invited* into their midst.

The women's stated aim in recording their gospels is to counter misogynist texts which criticise women and, by using the agency of the scribe, the women are able to strike back at anti-feminist rhetoric using its own tools. They refer to a female textual history quite separate

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[103] Phillips notes that it is also in prose, unlike most of the gossip texts which are in verse. Another difference is that the women in the *Gospelles* are depicted drinking and feasting but this occupies a very small portion of the text (Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, p.150, note 10).
[104] *Gospelles*, A5v. All quotations from the *Gospelles* are from the facsimile of the edition in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California (available via *EEBO*).
[105] *Ibid.*, A4v.

from the scholastic heritage of men, a history in which female knowledge has been passed down by word of mouth, 'from aege to aege / and from sede to sede they have ben multeplyed and correcte of the prudent women echone in theyr tyme'.[106] The community of these gospelles is not just the women who gather together while the scribe is writing but also all those who have come before and those who will follow them. Through this image of a transhistorical community of women, together with the earlier reference to holy mysteries, the author presents the network through which women's knowledge is disseminated as a religious cult or a guild.[107] Their aim is to transform this accumulated knowledge into a written text, through the conduit of the male scribe, to serve as a textual weapon against the tradition of misogynistic texts. To these women, the way to lend authority to their text is to put it in writing, to enter it in this tradition of debate about women, what Phillips refers to as the 'legitimizing discourse of scholasticism'.[108]

The frame establishes the text as not only a satire of female talk but also as a parody of religious texts and scholastic practice. The discussions of the women are compared to scholastic debate through the narrator's description of them as 'wyse doctouresses', and their endeavour is equated to that of the four evangelists, 'four ryghtwysemen elect among them … for to make the holy mysteryes the whiche ben named … the gospelles'.[109] This parody is also apparent in the title of the work. It is further seen in the formal division of the text into six days (parodying the six days of creation) and into 'texts', where one woman makes public her wisdom, and 'glosses', where spokeswomen from the rest of the group respond to either support or refute her arguments. Robert Hanning argues that 'glossing' first developed as a scholarly practice to comment on and explain a text while demonstrating mastery of its content, but that it acquired additional meaning as a metaphor for language manipulation and

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[106] *Ibid.*, A3r.
[107] Susan Phillips goes so far as to argue that part of the *Gospelles* functions as a heretical manual of penance regarding sexual sins: Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, pp.184-189.
[108] *Ibid.*, p.182.
[109] *Gospelles*, A3v.

flattering, deceitful speech.[110] Hanning also cites Chaucer's Wife of Bath as an example of a woman who is 'obsessed with authoritative texts and traditions'. For all that she claims to privilege experience over authority, Hanning argues, she spends more time responding to texts and glosses than recounting her own experiences.[111]

The wryly misogynist tone of the *Gospelles* quickly becomes apparent with the narrator's explanation that, because of the lesser worth of women's word as testimony, the task requires six women doctors to match the four evangelists and by his exaggerated assertion that all women are 'naturally noble / honest / swete / fayre / & curteyse and full of sapience / light and gentyll'.[112] It appears that the style of the gospels themselves is intended ironically to undercut the loftiness of women's transgressive purpose and thereby trivialize women's talk by producing a collection of peasant wisdom and old wives' tales. Much of the text is taken up with signs and superstitions, such as how to predict the sex and ensure the health of children and how to know the name of one's future husband. Despite this there are some elements of the women's conversation that are potentially subversive, for example they devise punishments for neglectful or abusive husbands. A man who spends his wife's goods will be 'put after his deth in a caudron in purgatory full of brimstone' and shall 'gyue accountes before god as of thynges stolen'.[113] A man who beats his wife 'shall neuer haue grace of our lady tyl he haue pardon of his wyfe'. Adultery by the husband is likewise seen as a very serious crime in the women's system, casting the guilty man out from the community entirely: 'He that breketh his maryage by aduoutrye is lesse to be praysed than a Iewe or a sarasyn / for he is forsworne.' The wife is positioned as at least the equal partner to the husband, who will

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[110] R. Hanning, ''I shal finde it in a maner *glose*': Textual Harassment in Medieval Literature', in L. Finke and M.B. Schictman (eds.) *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* (Ithaca, 1987), pp.27-50 (pp.27-29, 31-32). Cf. *MED*: **glōsen**, (v.)
[111] *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.
[112] *Gospelles*, A2r.
[113] *Ibid.*, A6v.

be 'false & dysloyall forsworne' if he does anything contrary to her advice or contradicts anything she says.[114]

The content of the gospels can be divided into several broad categories: signs and superstitions, medical advice, and curses meted out to various people, usually those who commit sexual sins. The substance of what the women say reinforces conventional ideas about acceptable gender roles and sexual behaviour; for example, they condemn adulterers and incontinent priests. This fits with the theory, suggested in particular by Phillip Schofield, that public fame and talk were essentially conservative, serving a regulatory function within the late medieval community, and that by stigmatising illicit behaviour this talk had the potential to affect the outcome of legal proceedings.[115]

When the narrator begins to relate how he became part of the evening gatherings, he prefaces this section with language that implies that his work putting the gospels into writing was ill-advised: 'I am come*n* to this obtuous & presumptuous hardynesse & wanhope to wyll wryte & put in ordre this werke'.[116] However, the next sentence makes it clear that his presence at the gathering is welcome and voluntary:

> To take my disporte & passe the tyme Ioyously in the longe winter nyghtes bytwene Crystmas and Candelmas laste past I transported me in to the hous of a wel aeged damoysell my neighbour nere / whereas I was accustomed for to resorte & deuyse with her / for dyuers of her neighbours came theder for to spynne and deuyse of dyuers small and Ioyous purposes / wherat I toke grete pleasure and solace.[117]

I have quoted this at some length because the narrator's description of how he came to be among the women sets up the main concerns that will occupy the narrative frame -- that is, as opposed to the gospels themselves -- for the rest of the text. The narrator is a man who by

[114] *Ibid.*, A7v.
[115] Schofield, 'Peasants and the Manor Court', pp.29, 34, 36-37.
[116] *Gospelles*, A3r.
[117] *Ibid.*, A3r-A4v. Phillips notes that this although this gathering has nothing to do with baptism or childbirth *per se*, the timeframe may be significant, falling as it does between the birth of Christ and the Purification of the Virgin (i.e. the period of the holy lying-in) – Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, p.181.

choice spends his time not with men, but as the only man in a group of women. Part of the attraction of the 'gossip text' genre to a contemporary audience was the titillating thrill of gaining access, via the unseen male voyeur, to 'secret' talk, to discussions that women had amongst themselves, supposedly outside male surveillance. In this way anxieties about groups of women talking together could be explored by making these groups visible and imagining of what their conversation might consist. The *Gospelles*, despite sharing similarities to this type of text, has some quite different elements. This talk is laid open by the women, who invite a male scribe into their presence for the express purpose of recording what they say. The women are fully aware of how men speak of them. As well as the anti-feminist texts against which they are composing their gospels, they refer to verbal communication between men on the subject of women: 'I knowe well ynoughe that they set but lytell by vs / for they holde theyr parlayment and Ianglynge of vs in the reproche of oure sexe'.[118] Here, the men are presented as the ones who are talking amongst themselves to the detriment of women. In her discussion of gossip, Karma Lochrie argues that texts such as the *Gospelles* 'create an intimate masculine exchange through the pretense of exchanging and discovering women's secrets … the unintended and ironic effect is, of course, masculine gossip'.[119] The circulation of anti-feminist tales among men is, in the *Gospelles*, characterised as uncontrolled, with overtones of frivolity, through the use of the word 'janglynge', helpfully defined by Chaucer's Parson as 'whan a man speketh to muche biforn folk, and clappeth as a mille, and taketh no keep what he seith' (1.406).[120] The women gathered together imagine themselves becoming the subjects of men's gossip, through texts designed to display *women's* propensity to gossip. The men 'jangle' while the 'doctoresses' adopt elements of scholastic discourse, which is usually characterised as learned and masculine. Larry Scanlon argues that late medieval vernacular

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[118] *Ibid.*, E4r-E5v.
[119] K.Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia, 1999), p.79.
[120] Chaucer, 'The Parson's Tale', *RC*, p.300.

authors, such as Chaucer, appropriated narrative forms developed in theological and scholastic discourse, such as the exemplum, as a means of establishing their own authority.[121] The *Gospelles* is part of this larger trend, with protagonists who attempt to establish their authority to rebut clerical misogyny by adopting its tools. The complex layering of the text is reminiscent of Chaucer's strategy in 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue'; the female protgonists use the tools of clerical discourse to discuss the anti-feminist talk of men. In the case of the Wife of Bath, this ventriloquism of clerical discourse has produced a profusion of criticism debating whether the character of the Wife is an anti-feminist cariciature or a skilled 'auctrice' who defends women.[122] The *Gospelles* has the same ambiguity about it, but complicates the matter further by adding a male narrator.

The language used is indicative of the trust the women place in the narrator: he is not just a scribe, he is their 'secretary and frende'.[123] Secretary meant more than someone who performed writing tasks. The narrator serves as the women's scribe, but the use of the word 'secretary' also implies that he is privy to their secret knowledge. The secretary was someone trusted to have access to private information. It could also mean an advisor and counsellor, or one entrusted with the secrets of God.[124] The Paston Letters demonstrate the access a secretary could have to important information by saying of John Gylys, secretary of the Earl of Oxford: 'if ony wrytyng wer mad by the seid Erle the seyd Gylys knew ther-of in thes gret materys'.[125] In the case of the *Gospelles* the women trust the scribe with the task of turning their oral discourse into a text that can be circulated to spread their knowledge. They see him as a vital

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[121] L. Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1994), p.5, p.7, p.137.

[122] S.H. Rigby provides a useful summary of the two main positions on the Wife in 'The Wife of Bath, Christine de Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women', *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000): 133-165 (pp.133-135). A.J. Minnis discusses the Wife as an 'auctrice', in 'The Wisdom of Old Women: Alisoun of Bath as *Auctrice*', in H. Cooney (ed.), *Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.99-114.

[123] *Gospelles*, A5v.

[124] Cf. *MED*: **secretari(e** (n.(1)).

[125] Davis (ed.), *Paston Letters and Papers*, Vol I, p.107.

and trusted part of their enterprise when he is in fact presenting them to a reading audience in a manner that invites ridicule and the devaluing of their 'gospels'.

Even at the beginning of the text, when the women are introduced, it is clear that far from being a sympathetic friend, the narrator's portraits of them rely on anti-feminist commonplaces. The first woman to speak is Dame Isengryne of Glaye. Her portrait, like those of the other doctoresses, seems designed to provoke repulsion in the reader:

> Dame Isengryne was of the aege of lxv yere / she had ben a fayre wife in her tyme / but she was becomen gretely wydred / her eyen were holowe / & her eye lyddes somewhat reuersed & reed alwaye watrynge she has had fyue husbandes beside her acquayntaunce aparte.[126]

The structure of the portrait closely mirrors the beginning of a church court deposition. These were highly formulaic, and the actual words the witness spoke were filtered through the clerical perspective of the scribe and the form required by the court. This function is here performed by the narrator, who is presented as recording the women's appearance for the reader. Depositions typically began by stating information that included the name of the witness, his or her age and status (e.g. married, free, servant, etc) and place of residence.[127] The purpose of this information was to establish the good reputation and therfore reliability of the witness, with some depositions explicitly identifying the witness as 'of good standing'.[128] In the case of Dame Isengryne, the information the narrator provides has a different effect. He presents his impressions of her withered and grotesque appearance in order to alert the reader that here we have a standard description of a voracious old woman in the tradition of the Wife of Bath and La Vieille. The detail that she has had five husbands, as well as other men outside of marriage, is one she shares with the Wife of Bath, and in both cases it is an allusion to the

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[126] *Gospelles*, A6v. Ziolkowski argues that old women were reputed to be lascivious and drunken, held in low repute but at the same time feared for their influence over the young (Ziolkowski, 'Old Wives' Tales', p.90, p.108).
[127] Cf. Examples of depositions that use this formula in Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England*, pp.137-140, pp.152-155, pp.219-222.
[128] *Ibid.*, p.219.

Biblical story of the woman with five husbands, related in John 4.18.[129] Her current husband is

young and she is 'right ialous'.[130] Isengryne takes as the subject of her teaching those subjects

with which she is most familiar, marriage and sex. The portraits of the other women proceed

in a similar manner. The narrator is in control of the women's text, inserting his own

impressions before their words, 'before that I procede to the chapytres of the same I wyll

wryte of her estate and maner'.[131] The women are old, ugly, lecherous, argumentative, and

gluttonous.[132] The narrator's disgust at their withered and grotesque appearance is palpable,

despite his admission that his own age is 'sore ronne on'.[133] The gospels frequently make

allusion to the women's appetite for sex despite their advanced age, and their husbands'

inability to satisfy their desires.

Despite his attempts to dissociate himself, the parallels between the scribe and the

women are emphasised by their actions at the conclusion of Wednesday's gospels. As the

women rise up and gather their distaves and 'al theyr instruments that apperteyned to theyr

arte of spynnynge', the scribe does the same with his 'gobbettes'.[134] The meaning of 'gobet'

given by the *MED* is a piece or a lump, but it is clear that here it has a meaning close to 'bits

and pieces' and is used to refer to the tools of his trade. These tools are mentioned more

specifically on Friday, 'I rolled vp my paper / & stopped myn ynkehorne and put vp my

penne'.[135] This focus on the instruments with which the scribe and the women work supports

Laura Doyle Gates' argument that the text 'dramatizes gendered modes of textual

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[129] Vulgate, John 4:18: '*quinque enim viros habuisti et nunc quem habes non est tuus vir hoc vere dixisti*' ('you have had five husbands and the man who you now have is not your husband. This, you have said truly'.) (http://www.latinvulgate.com).
[130] *Gospelles*, A6v.
[131] *Ibid.*, C2r.
[132] For discussion of antifeminist stereotypes about old women, particularly in connection with sexuality, cf. J.M. Ziolkowski, 'The Obscenities of Old Women: Vetularity and Vernacularity', in J.M. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity*, pp.73-89. Cf. G. Angelo, 'Author and Authority in the *Evangiles des Quenouilles*', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 26 (2001): 21-41. Angelo argues that this is part of how the scribe establishes his own authority – 'a certain element of learned misogyny … signalled that a text was authoritative.' (p.24).
[133] *Gospelles,* E6v.
[134] *Ibid.*, C6v.
[135] *Ibid.*, E2v.

production'.[136] The women's texts and glosses, produced as they work using their distaves, are opposed to the scribe's framing text, written with pen and ink. The women produce the texts, which the narrator/scribe records, but which he also tries to control and defuse within his satirical narrative frame, using his pen to counteract the texts produced through the women's oral discourse, represented by their work on the distaff. This imagery is highly symbolic. Spinning was considered an 'exclusively feminine task', and the distaff and spindle was commonly used as a symbol of women's work.[137] This link was so strong that when a man was depicted spinning or with a distaff it was always intended as a point of ridicule, demonstrating his weakness.[138] Frances Biscoglio argues that the woman with her distaff was a symbol of domestic virtue, depicting the industrious and obedient woman properly situated in the hierarchical order, but that this made the image of the woman wielding her distaff to beat her husband a particularly potent reversal of that order.[139]

The scribe makes it clear that his position is not that of the unseen voyeur who has unfiltered access to everything the women discuss. He leaves at the end of each night, at which point the women's talk continues in his absence. Occasionally they will spend the beginning of the next morning discussing what happened the night before, as they do on Friday morning, exclaiming over the outrageous drunkenness of one of their number at Thursday evening's feast, but this is not usual. The scribe admits these gaps in his knowledge and his response is to dismiss their talk as inconsequential:

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[136] L.D.Gates, 'Distaff and Pen: Producing the *Evangiles Des Quenouilles*', *Neophilologus* 81 (1997): 13-20 (p.13).
[137] F.M. Biscoglio, 'Unspun Heroes: The Iconography of the Spinning Woman in the Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1995): 163-176 (p.163).
[138] *Ibid.*, 164. For spinning men or men doing otherwise 'female' chores, see Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, p.147, 234; 'The Wright's Chaste Wife', ll.348-354, ll.503-510, in Salisbury, *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, pp.70 & 74; Chaucer, 'Prologue to the Monk's Tale', ll.1905-1907, *RC*, p.240 ('False cowerd, wrek thy wyf! / By corpus bones, I wol haue thy knyf, / And thou shalt haue my distaf and go spynne!').
[139] Biscoglio, 'Unspun Heroes', pp.165, 170, 174. For examples of women beating their husbands (including with the distaff) in misericords and manuscript illuminations, see Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, p.230; C. Grössinger, *The World Upside Down: English Misericords* (London, 1997), pp.89-90.

Of the good chere y^t they made for to tell you trouthe w^tout ony lesynge I can not tel you / saue that whiche was told me / but there is no thynge worthy to be put in memorye / for in that banquet was soo many reasons without effecte that it is not possible to wryte them.[140]

The text is doubly filtered here – first by the women, who decide what to reveal to their secretary, then by the scribe, who judges whether the women's talk is worthy of recording. These layers of filtering diminish the ability of the text to present itself as anything resembling a portrait of the conversation of a group of women in the same way as texts such as *The Talk of Ten Wives on Their Husband's Ware* or *The Tretis of the Twa Marrit Wemen and the Wedo* purport to be. The aim of the narrator is not voyeuristically to gaze upon the women's bodies - - in fact, he mentions repeatedly that the majority of the women are 'wel aeged' and unattractive -- nor to eavesdrop on their conversation.[141] He attends the initial gathering of his own free will and as an accustomed visitor to such gatherings. The references to 'disporte' and 'pleasure and solace', and that he is 'accustomed to resorte and deuyse' with his neighbour, could be read as sexual innuendo and the women do offer to perform the role of procuresses on his behalf when he has completed his task.[142]

These possible sexual overtones are not what is presented as truly threatening to the narrator. When he enters the room where the women are gathered and talking vociferously he becomes suddenly aware of his difference from the women and of the lack of any other man in the room. What had been only a visit to which he was accustomed, now makes him anxious: 'I which was a lytell shame fast of that I had entred in among them so sodeynly wolde haue w^tdrawen me abacke in takynge my leue of them'.[143] At this point one of the women holds him fast by his gown and together they convince him to remain and to undertake the transcription of their gospels. In this initial passage, the ambiguity which will plague the

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[140] *Gospelles,* E2v
[141] *Ibid.,* A4v.
[142] *Ibid.,* A4v, E6v.
[143] *Ibid.,* A4v.

narrator's reactions to the women throughout the text has been established. He is driven by the conflicting impulses of his curiosity regarding the women's knowledge and his willingness to be part of their community, versus his awareness of his masculinity and separateness, which drives him to reinforce his links with an authoritative community existing outside the text. Sometimes the composition of this community of readers is unspecified, but there are occasions in the text when it is specifically characterised as male.

The narrator undertakes the women's commission, but claims his acceptance is because he was overwhelmed by their words and asks the reader's pardon. Of course, the apology for, and retraction of, the text are familiar authorial topoi, but in this case they form part of a wider pattern in which the narrator attempts to dissociate himself from the female community, of which he has become a part, and to bolster his masculine identity. The narrator appears uncomfortably torn between his desire to know what the women talk about and his consciousness of his place within a masculine textual community. He attempts to play on both sides of the 'querelle des femmes', as both apparent champion of women and mouthpiece for traditional antifeminist discourse.[144] Rather than simply recording the women's speech, he consistently comments, evaluates, and filters what they tell him.

During the course of the text there are several points at which the narrator attempts to dissociate himself from the women and re-associate himself with other men. He displays eagerness to leave their company at the end of the second day but his desire to see who will be elected chairwoman for the next day induces him to stay a little longer. By the fourth day, his dissatisfaction with the group is more pronounced. He frames this dissatisfaction specifically in terms of his isolation. He is physically separated from the community of men, but by virtue of his gender he is set apart from the women as well, unable to understand them: 'it dypleased

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[144] M. Jeay, *Les Evangiles des quenouilles: edition critique, introduction et notes* (Paris, 1985), p.28. Cf. Gates, 'Pen and Distaff', p.18 : 'our cleric wanted to have it both ways, to be the familiar and faithful companion of these women … *and* to identify himself with masculine discourse.'

me moche that I myght not haue the company of ony man for to laughe & passe the tyme / for certainly the countenau*n*ce and manere of them was right sauage and straunge'.[145] This time he leaves the gathering secretly and 'w^tout ony leue I wente vnto my reste'.[146] He presents himself as rebelling against the authority of the women who have engaged him to record the gospels on their behalf; however, this rebellion is still furtive.

By Friday, the narrator appears to have reached a point at which he has dissociated himself totally from the women, condemning their talk as 'but a market where as is but he ha without ony ordenaunce'.[147] This time his attempt to leave silently is prevented by the women, who make him 'abyde by force'. He presents his true reasons for agreeing to return the following night as financial: 'I consyderynge the common prouerbe that sayth / Who serueth and maketh not an ende leseth his mede / dyde vttre vnto them theyr request liberally'.[148] The narrator is caught between his derision of the women's behaviour and 'wisdom', his financial dependence on them, and his curiosity about them. This complex relationship between them is quite unlike that of the more detached and voyeuristic narrator of some of the other 'gossip' texts. The reader is placed in the privileged position of being privy to what the narrator presents as his true reactions to the situation, whereas the women are not. Despite all his protestations of boredom and confusion with the women's talk, and his claim to be involved only for financial reward, the reason he presents for returning for the final day of the gatherings reveals his continuing overriding curiosity regarding what the women will talk about. He returns 'for the affeccyon that I had to se and here to what ende they wolde take conclusion'. It is almost as if the author, taking into account the intense desire of readers to

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[145] *Gospelles*, D1r.
[146] *Ibid.*, D2v.
[147] This disparaging implication that a women's market would be disorderly and unproductive may reflect the rise of an ideology of gender that increasingly designated the market as male space and attempted to exclude higher-status women from this space by connecting it with 'public' (i.e. sexually loose) and lower-status women (cf. M.C. Howell, 'The Gender of Europe's Commerical Economy, 1200-1700', *Gender and History* 20 (2008): 519-538 (p.521, 523-524, 527).
[148] *Gospelles*, E2r.

know what is being said among groups of women, holds out the possibility that the narrator will not attend for the final day, in order to frustrate this desire temporarily.[149]

On the final day, the narrator makes his most decisive effort yet to disengage himself from the women. He dismisses their talk as 'without reason' and attempts retrospectively to impose his disparaging judgement of the value of their gospels ('with out ony good sentence as I thought well it sholde be at the fyrste begynnynge'), despite the fact that he accepted the women's commission and merely appeared curious about them at the beginning of the text.[150] The text presents an unusal twist on the topos of the woman whose appearance does not match her inner thoughts; that is, she appears virtuous but is in fact calculating, lecherous, and disdainful of her husband.[151] Here it is the scribe who conceals his true thoughts about the women with a placid appearance while confiding his true distaste for them to the audience:

> But for to shewe myself not percyall nor also a dyspreyser of theyr wylles I with halfe a ioyous chere abode among them to se what ende they wolde make of theyr gospelles and actorytees / & how that I myghte take my leue honestly of them for to saue myn honour.[152]

For the first time he attempts to impose his authority on the women. Prior to this, the narrator's response to their refusal to be quiet had been to leave the room, usually slipping out silently, but here he deliberately places himself before their sight in the belief that the reminder that a man can see and hear their talk will curb their unruliness ('I put me in theyr sight to the ende that by my beholdynge of them they might haue some shame of theyr affayre the whiche was withouten rule or ordenaunce').[153] This tactic appears to work, as the women come forward and thank him for his endeavours, promising to offer their services as procuresses to reward him. Thus the closing image of the text is one of the sole male figure,

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[149] *Ibid.*

[150] *Ibid.*, E6v.

[151] The women in Dunbar's *Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* are an example of this type (ll.251-69, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, p.143).

[152] *Gospelles*, E6v.

[153] *Ibid.*

who up till now has remained outwardly silent in the face of the women's unruly talk --
although he has confided his misgivings to the reader -- coming forward to attempt to impose
his authority on them, to contain the text, to close it. However, the author's concluding words
allow the text to remain open, as he anticipates that 'another may come the whiche may
augmente them'.[154]

By the end of the text, the women's debate descends into backbiting and conflict. The
gossips have had a feast the previous night, for which the narrator did not stay, and are now
discussing the drunken behaviour of some of their number during the feast. A young member
of the group is incredulous that dame Mehaulte might still feel sexual desire for her husband
and Mehaulte retorts angrily that 'she was not soo old but that she myghte lye upon her
backe'.[155] The speaker for that night, Gonberde, is unable to begin her gospel because of the
bickering between Mehaulte and the other women, until after extended pressure from the rest
of the group, Mehaulte finally falls silent. This is only one of many occasions where the
narrator presents the women descending into a senseless cacophony of voices which runs
completely counter to his idea of orderly scholastic debate:

> For this last glose sounded grete tumulte amonge the wyues that were there assembled
> / also well of laughynge as of spekygne all togyder and it semed none other thynge but
> a market where as is but he ha without ony ordenaunce / and without ony herkenynge
> the one of the other / nor abydynge the end of theyr reasons.[156]

The end of the text appears to present a cacophony that defuses their ambitions to establish a
'noble doctrine' for future women to follow, which 'shall be perpetually praysed and honoured
/ and parauenture we shal come to haue domynacyon ouer the men'.[157] However, while their
style of debate may not be to the taste of the narrator, the community seems to be gaining a
dangerous popularity, drawing more and more women in each night as word spreads. Phillips

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[154] *Ibid.*, E6r.
[155] *Ibid.*, D3v.
[156] *Ibid.*, E2v.
[157] *Ibid.*, D2v.

compares the women to a heretical textual community and reads the concern about their talk as indicative of anti-Lollard sentiment.[158] Although I agree that the text presents the women's talk as dangerous, especially as the community grows, I would hesitate to tie this to a fear of heresy. The entire text is a balancing act between feeding cultural anxieties about women's talk by presenting their gatherings as subversive, while simultaneously attempting to contain the threat these groups posed by presenting the subjects of their discussion as trivial. Groups of women talking together are, in the *Gospelles* and other texts like it, a fundamental and inescapable part of cultural and social life. It is this combination of necessity and potency which made them so threatening to contemporary authors. While the narrator of texts such as the *Gospelles* could disparage the talk of these women, he could not eradicate such gatherings. The narrator is present as part of the group in the *Gospelles* to tame and control it to some extent, although his complicit position as the women's scribe and recipient of their payment means he cannot impose his authority on them as much as he might wish. He is also weakened by his position as the sole man in a community of women, detached from the male textual community of misogynous discourse.

3.5 Readership and Early Print Culture.

Texts such as *The Gospelles of Dystaues* and *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* demonstrate concern with groups of women and particularly groups of women talking together. Both texts are heavily influenced by the tradition of anti-feminist rhetoric, but I would argue that reading them as straightforward misogyny, designed to ridicule women and directed at an imagined male audience, ignores their complexity. The wives of the *Fyftene Joyes* are transgressive, but their transgression is enabled by the weakness of their husbands, who are compared to animals caught in a snare. The narrator of the *Gospelles* is undermined by his complicity as a member

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[158] Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, pp.183 & 198.

of the women's group and his inability to impose his authority on them. The address to the audience at the end of the *Gospelles* suggests that the reality was more nuanced. The text has appeared to suppose a male reading audience who can judge the foolishness of the women who speak within it, but the address indicates that the author envisaged a mixed gender audience, 'my lordes and also my ladyes' who might read the text or hear it read aloud.[159] This presents a diverse range of possible reception contexts. The *Gospelles* is about a group of women whose talking is framed as a response to how men talk about women and these women are in turn talked about by a male narrator to an audience that is envisaged as being composed of both men and women. The layering of perspective in the text is complex and opens up the possibility for multiple readings. However, this depends on whether we accept this address to men and women as an accurate reflection of the likely audience of a text such as the *Gospelles*, and not just a rhetorical device. There is no doubt that the text does contain misogynous elements, but how we intrepret these is highly dependent on the readership that might be expected for a text such as the *Gospelles.*

In the case of texts which form part of a manuscript miscellany, scholars often gauge the potential audience of a particular text by looking at the type of manuscript in which it has been preserved. They also use the kinds of texts it circulated with as some indication of who may have been reading it. This was one area in which there was a noticeable change from scribal to printing practices. The early printers preferred to publish short individual texts in small formats such as the quarto, thus removing one of the major tools that we might use to gauge the type of audience reading them.[160] The difficulties in speculating about the readership of short printed literary texts such as the *Gospelles* and the *Fyftene Joyes* can be addressed in several ways. First, by outlining their origins in French literature we can begin to

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[159] *Ibid.,* E6r

[160] The Folger library copy of the *Fyftene Joyes* does provide one indication of an early reader, Radulphus Kinge. The inscription '*Radulphus Kinge me comparavit*' appears on the title page in what Phillips identifies as an early to mid-sixteenth-century hand, but nothing more is known about Kinge (Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, p.151).

understand why de Worde might have been drawn to publishing them. Then a movement

outwards is required to consider the general conditions of print culture in the early-sixteenth

century. By analysing the conditions under which de Worde worked and the type of texts he

was accustomed to publishing we can come to some suggestions regarding the potential

readership of texts such as the *Gospelles* and the *Fyftene Joyes*. Finally, although de Worde

published these texts on their own, they are similar to several texts that were circulating in

fifteenth-century manuscript miscellanies. By looking at who may have been reading these

texts in manuscript, we can make a reasonable assessment of the market that de Worde hoped

to appeal to when publishing his printed editions.

The *Gospelles* was a translation of the fifteenth-century French text, *Les Evangiles des*

Quenouilles. The *Evangiles* looked like a safe bet for de Worde because it had been extremely

popular in France. Relatively soon after it first appeared in manuscript in the 1470s the

Evangiles was transferred to print.[161] In her critical edition of the text, Madeleine Jeay argues

that the extant manuscripts and the early incunables were circulating almost

contemporaneously but to different audiences. The luxury manuscripts in which the *Evangiles*

originated were intended for an aristocratic audience, but the printed versions were a recasting

of the text to appeal to an audience further down the social scale who wanted cheap

pamphlets. The printed editions were much more widely diffused.[162] The first publication in

print was in Bruges between 1479 and 1484, after which the text went through six incunabula,

five sixteenth-century editions, a translation into English (*Gospelles*), and multiple translations

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[161] The first extant manuscript of the *Evangiles* is Chantilly, Musée Condée, MS 654. Madeleine Jeay argues that although the text of the *Evangiles* is in part a collection of peasant beliefs, it was originally intended for an aristocratic audience. The argument that it is a luxury object is supported by its large size, the fact that it is written on parchment, and its decoration with miniatures (Jeay, *Edition critique*, p.60). Jeay also co-edited an English translation in 2006 (M. Jeay and K. Garay (eds.), *The Distaff Gospels: A First Modern English Edition of Les Evangiles Des Quenouilles* (Peterborough, 2006)). The later manuscript, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS fr. 2151, from which the *Gospelles* and all other printed editions are descended, is substantially different although it also seems to have circulated among the aristocracy (Jeay, *Edition Critique*, p.32).
[162] Jeay, *Edition Critique*, p.32. The Chantilly MS was produced c.1470, the Paris MS sometime between 1466 and 1474, and the first printed edition of the text c.1479-84 (p.35).

into Dutch (four), and German (two), and an adaptation in Occitan.[163] It certainly appears from its popularity as if the text responded to the literary taste of the period and satisfied existing demand.

By printing the *Gospelles*, de Worde was exploiting a publishing phenomenon that was still popular in France decades after its first appearance. This was a venture that was almost guaranteed to be profitable for him. His confidence is demonstrated by the fact that the text has almost no alteration to adapt it for an English audience. The prologue which states the purpose and genesis of the treatise purports to be written by the translator Henry Watson, when in fact it is a very close translation of the French prologue, into which Watson has simply inserted his initials. The content of the gospels themselves, as well as the place names mentioned and the names of the 'doctouresses' are French, yet Watson makes very little attempt to change them in any way.

De Worde's catalogue suggests that he often turned to French literature for material on marriage and women.[164] The *Fyftene Joyes* was also a close translation of a text that had enjoyed widespread popularity and circulation in France. The translation is anonymous, but the *STC* suggests Robert Copland as a possible candidate.[165] Brent Pitts, in his translation of the French original, *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage*, suggests that it was written circa 1400, but it remained popular in France through the late-fifteenth century, surviving in four manuscripts and going through at least seven printed editions between 1480 and 1520.[166] The importation

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[163] Jeay and Garay (eds.), *The Distaff Gospels,* p.27.

[164] As well as the *Gospelles* and *Fyftene Joyes*, de Worde published *The complaynte of them that ben to late maryed* (c.1518) and *The complaynte of them that be to soone maryed* (1535). Both are translations from French texts.

[165] *STC* 15258.

[166] B.A. Pitts (ed. and trans.), *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage [Les. XV Joies de Mariage]* (New York, 1985), p.vii. The French manuscripts are: Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 152 (1464); Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 686 (15th century); St Petersburg, National Library of Russia (formerly Saltikov-Shchedrin State Library), MS fr. F.p.XV.4.1485 (aka Coislin MS, April 1485); London, Robinson Trust, MS Phillips 8338 (c.1470). The fifteenth-century printed editions are: Lyons, Guillaume le Roy, c.1479-80, folio, copies now in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris and the Bibliotheque Municipale, Poitiers; Paris, Jean Treperel, before 25 October 1499, quarto, copies now in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Chantilly Musée Condé and Germany, Jena ULB. Manuscript and incunabula information from J. Rychner (ed.), *Les XV Joies de Mariage* (Paris, 1963), *passim*; J. Crow, 'A Little

and translation of French texts would have provided a convenient source of new material for de Worde. Elizabeth Armstrong, in her examination of the trade in printed books imported from the Continent in this period, argues that from 1479-1480 onwards there was a brisk trade in printed books being imported through London, and that 'by the early-sixteenth century at least it was evidently possible to obtain quite soon after publication books printed in the main continental centres'.[167] Based on a comparison of which gospels are included and excluded from different versions of the text Jeay concludes that the *Gospelles* is a translation of an edition published in Rouen by Raulin Gaultier in the first decade of the sixteenth century.[168] This evidence supports Armstrong's argument that English printers were able to obtain copies of French printed texts relatively quickly after their publication. Since the *Gospelles* itself is dated by the *STC* c.1510, de Worde must have had a Rouen copy of the *Evangiles* to translate from not more than a few years after its French publication.

By translating texts that had already had a proven track record of success in France de Worde lowered the risk involved in producing an edition. This was an important part of his publishing strategy. De Worde has often been touted as the 'popular' printer. He preferred to publish short texts in quarto or octavo, relying on markets that were a guaranteed source of revenue so the income derived from sales could fund the cost of printing. De Worde was operating in a different commercial environment from Caxton. He had to cope with competition from the increasing number of printers in England as well as from imported books from the continent. His decision to move his press from Westminster to Fleet Street around 1500 may suggest that it was more useful to him to operate from the heart of the commercial capital than from a position with easy access to the court and an aristocratic market. This

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Known MS of the XV Joies de Mariage', in E.A. Frances (ed.), *Studies in Medieval French presented to Albert Ewert in honour of his 70th birthday* (Oxford, 1961), pp.121-149; British Library, *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue* (http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/istc/index.html).
[167] E. Armstrong, 'English Purchases of Printed Books from the Continent, 1465-1526', *English Historical Review* 94 (1979): 268-90 (p.285).
[168] Jeay, *Edition Critique,* p.47.

could indicate that aristocratic readers were of diminishing importance for de Worde's business model.

De Worde's reputation as a 'popular' printer appears to be founded on his prolific output and his preferences in terms of format, funding, and genre. He contributed 15 per cent of the 5000 works in the *STC* pre-1557.[169] These assumptions are problematic. First of all, the fact that something is inexpensive does not necessarily mean it is read by an audience further down the social scale than a more expensive volume.[170] It may indicate only that the audience who was already buying manuscripts was now able to buy many more texts because of the cheapness of print. A larger audience does not necessarily mean a broader audience. That the press was profitable enough to allow de Worde often to publish without a patron means nothing beyond the fact that his texts were 'popular' in the sense that he was able to sell them easily. It tells us nothing about the composition of his audience, and it is simplistic to conclude that the printing press represents the literary tastes of 'the people'. The texts that he published were often circulating widely in manuscript form. He put more texts in the hands of more readers than before, but it is difficult to go much beyond this when trying to gauge whether his audience was of a different social class to that of the manuscript audience. His output is dominated by devotional literature, romances, and grammatical texts.[171] He gave the reading public what they wanted, exploiting markets that had already been created in the fifteenth century, rather than attempting to mould public taste. There is a difference between reading more texts and reading varied texts.

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[169] J. Moran, *Wynkyn de Worde: Father of Fleet Street* (London, 1960), p.43.

[170] For an example of this attitude, cf. H.R. Plomer, *Wynkyn de Worde and his Contemporaries from the Death of Caxton to 1535* (London, 1925), p.66 – 'The man in the street preferred to buy trifles…and those of the cheapest kind, to more solid literature'.

[171] For de Worde's publication of devotional literature, cf. N.F. Blake, 'Wynkyn de Worde: The Early Years', *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* (1971): 62-69 (pp.64, 68-69). For grammatical and scholarly works, cf. *ibid.*, p.66. For romance, cf. J. Sánchez-Márti, 'The Printed History of the Middle English Romances', *Modern Philology* 107 (2009): 1-31 (pp.9-10).

Julia Boffey argues that de Worde did venture into one area of publishing that had not much interested Caxton: anti-feminist, particularly misogamist, literature. Boffey argues that 'de Worde seems to have put some energy into developing a line of short 'merry jests' in which the subcategory of humourous misogynist material played an important role'.[172] He printed *The Complaynt of them that ben to late maryed* (c.1505, c.1518), *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* (c.1507, 1509), *The Gospelles of Dystaues* (c.1510), Skelton's *The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng* (c.1521), *The payne and sorowe of euyll maryage* (c.1530), *Cryste Cross Me Spede … How yt good gosyps made a royal feest* (c.1534), and *The Complaynt of them that be to soone maryed* (1535).[173] With these texts again we can see de Worde building on markets established in the fifteenth century through manuscript. Many of these texts were either already circulating in manuscript miscellanies with London provenances or readily available in continental printed editions.[174] Their apparent popularity meant that they were a low risk venture for de Worde and that copies were readily available for him to print from. By printing the *Gospelles* and the *Fyftene Joyes* he was publishing texts that had already gone through many editions in French and that fitted in with the sorts of anti-feminist texts that had been readily consumed and circulated by fifteenth-century English audiences in manuscript miscellanies.

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[172] J. Boffey, 'Wynkyn de Worde and misogyny in print', in G. Lester (ed.) *Chaucer in Perspective* (Sheffield, 1999), pp.236-251 (p.248).

[173] Dates from colophons or as conjectured by *STC*: *The Complaynt of them that ben to late maryed* (*STC* 5728, 5728.5), The *Fyftene Joyes* (*STC* 15257.5, 15258), *The Gospelles of Dystaues* (*STC* 12091), *The Tunnyng of Elinour Rummyng* (*STC* 22611.5), *The Payne and Sorowe of Euyll Maryage* (*STC* 19119), *Cryste Crosse me Spede* (*STC* 14546.5), *The Complaynt of them that be to soone maryed* (*STC* 5729).

[174] Boffey, 'Wynkyn de Worde and Misogyny', p.246. Boffey provides a list of continental printed editions of *Quinze Joies*, *Evangiles de quenouilles, La complainte de trop tard marié* and *La complainte de trop tost marié* (p.244). *The payne and sorowe of euyll maryage* appears in: Oxford, MS Digby 181, a primarily Chaucerian manuscript, as part of a sequence of texts about women; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.1.6 (the Findern manuscript), surrounded by love lyrics and short moral and topical poems; London, British Library, MS Harley 2251, a Lydgate collection that contains other anti-feminist poems; Rome, English College, MS A.347, which is a Lydgate anthology containing topical, moral and antifeminist poems (Boffey, 'Wynkyn de Worde and misogyny', p.239). Another prominent manuscript with anti-feminist material is the commonplace book of the London grocer, Richard Hill (Oxford, Balliol College, MS 354).

Misogynous and misogamous texts had found readers when they appeared in manuscript miscellanies. The question of whether the print audience was similar to the manuscript audience is a more fraught one. The shift from manuscript to print culture has sometimes been presented as the pivotal force in the transition from the medieval to the early modern period.[175] Does the shift from manuscript to print represent a watershed moment that completely changed the conditions of textual production? The state of print culture in this period is a subject of some debate, which falls into two major camps. The first group, comprised primarily of scholars whose interests lie in the early modern or later periods, argues that the shift from manuscript to print was revolutionary. It transformed how people read, provided more people with greater access to the written word, and, in the case of England, fuelled the drive towards the Reformation by familiarising readers with the Scriptures in the vernacular. This school of criticism tends to minimise the influence of fifteenth-century scribal culture on early print and to argue that the medium of print transformed medieval ways of reading into something distinct and more 'modern'. The most influential study of this type is Elizabeth Eisenstein's 1979 monograph, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*.[176]

Despite the title of Eisenstein's book, and its general premise regarding the transformative power of print and the irreversible effect this had on reading practices, there are points in the book where this simple forward trajectory is undercut by conflicting evidence. For example, Eisenstein concedes that an increased output of books does not necessarily mean a broader reading of reading material. Devotional material continued to be very popular, as it had been in manuscript, and 'would fill some book shelves to the exclusion of other reading

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[175] Cf. particularly the influential monograph by Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) (discussed below).

[176] The book was reissued in an updated second edition in 2005, entitled *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, and it is this edition I used here. This edition was abridged and included new material by Eisenstein addressing criticisms of the first edition. Both titles emphasise a break with the medieval past, and the role of the printing press as a revolutionary agent.

matter'.[177] The increased accessibility of texts in print resulting from lower prices allowed

readers to buy more books, but many of them were purchasing primers rather than the latest

Renaissance learning. Mary Erler argues that the popularity of primers was important to the

development of the English book trade, providing publishers low-risk ventures with

guaranteed returns.[178] This income could be used to fund the publication of other work.

Eisenstein concedes that the press was embraced by those with a conservative religious agenda

as well as reformers.[179] Eisenstein admits that 'although printing transformed the conditions

under which texts were produced, distributed, and consumed, it did so not by discarding the

products of scribal culture, but by reproducing them in ever greater quantities than before'.[180]

She recognises both change and continuity at work in early-sixteenth-century print culture but

chooses to place the emphasis of her argument on 'the transforming powers of print' rather

than their antecedents in the scribal culture of the fifteenth century.[181]

Medievalists tend to be wary of crediting the printing press with revolutionary

capabilities and instead emphasise the reliance of early print culture on techniques, markets,

and genres developed in the fifteenth century.[182] Alexandra Gillespie argues that print

'accelerated an existing traffic in texts' that had been developed via the manuscript

miscellanies and increased literacy of the late middle ages, but it did not create it.[183]

According to Gillespie, there were changes in the market, from bespoke to speculative

business, from 'loose networks of amateur and professional, metropolitan and household

scribes and booksellers' to 'an important for-profit industry increasingly linked to the

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[177] E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 2005), p.53.
[178] Erler, 'Devotional Literature', p.501.
[179] Eisenstein, *Printing Revolution*, p.54, p.178.
[180] *Ibid.*, p.128.
[181] *Ibid.*, p.308.
[182] For this argument in J. Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution,* Oxford English Literary History, Vol. 2: 1350-1547 (Oxford, 2002), see pp.295-6. Scholarly work that straddles and questions the boundaries between 'medieval' and 'early modern' has been increasingly popular in recent years, a trend surveyed by David Matthews: D. Matthews, 'The Medieval Invasion of Early-Modern England', *New Medieval Literatures* 10 (2008): 223-244.
[183] A.Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate and Their Books, 1473-1557* (Oxford, 2006), p.16.

powerful London Company of Stationers'.[184] However, Gillespie emphasises the importance of an already-existing culture of vernacular piety in determining what printers produced and criticizes the 'technological determinism' of approaches that focus too much on the printing press as 'an agent of change'.[185]

The fact that de Worde was able to sell so much tells us little about the composition of his audience other than that he was skilled in responding to their demands and tastes. Based on the evidence of his publishing output, what were these tastes? In 1510, the year in which the *STC* suggests the *Gospelles* was produced, de Worde's publications were a mixture of devotional texts (e.g. *St. Augustine's Rule*, a sermon collection, the *Verse History of Jacob and his Twelve Sons,* the *Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, How the Plowman Learned his Paternoster*), romances (e.g. *Torrent of Portyngale, Valentine and Orson*), grammatical texts, law books, and other literature (e.g. by Lydgate, Mandeville, Skelton).[186] Only the Latin and grammatical texts perhaps begin to show the influence of Renaissance learning on the reading public, but they are far outnumbered by the volume of devotional texts that de Worde was publishing. His output for 1510 looks not unlike the contents of a late medieval miscellany, with devotional works mixed with instructional texts and romances. This seems to suggest that, at least in the initial decades of printing, reading tastes were essentially similar to those that had shaped the demand for fifteenth-century manuscripts. Printers such as de Worde were responding to markets which developed as a consequence of fifteenth-century rises in literacy and increased demand for books. Print allowed readers to own and read more copies of the types of literature they had already been reading in manuscript -- and the majority of this was devotional literature -- rather than directing their reading tastes, at least in the early decades of printing. Any influence that printing had in this area would have taken time to make itself felt.

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[184] *Ibid.*, p.66.
[185] *Ibid.*, p.89. 'An agent of change' is from Eisenstein's title.
[186] The information on de Worde's output for 1510 has been taken from *STC*.

Devotional texts were the most broadly popular. This did not change with the advent of print; however, the technological advance allowed these texts to be disseminated more widely. A text that had been read by one family in manuscript, and perhaps copied and circulated among their kin and friendship networks, could now be duplicated and reach a wider audience than ever before.

The above discussion suggests that there was considerable continuity between late medieval scribal culture and early print culture both in terms of the tastes of readers, which influenced the types of texts being published, and in terms of the type of people who were reading texts. It is a reasonable assumption, given the conditions of the early-sixteenth-century market for print, that the types of people who read miscellaneous manuscripts containing anti-feminist texts, texts about women's talk, and texts about household disorder, were the same types of people who read printed texts of this nature. There is plenty of evidence that the audience for late medieval manuscript miscellanies included women, suggesting that the author's address to the 'ladyes' at the end of the *Gospelles* is not simply a rhetorical device but that he had reason to anticipate women would read it or hear it read.

Much of de Worde's output was devotional literature. This may suggest that female readers were a significant section of de Worde's clientele, as it has been argued by scholars such as Carole Meale and Julia Boffey that women were an important part of the audience for devotional literature, particularly in the vernacular.[187] Erler argues that the printed texts that women read were often those which had already been popular in manuscript. These texts appealed to a female audience that had developed in the fifteenth century. Women's relationship with print was one of 'unchanged involvement' with the same types of devotional

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[187]Meale and Boffey, 'Gentlewomen's Reading', p.534.

writing they had read before.[188] Print merely accelerated existing interest in these texts. We

know that de Worde styled himself as printer to Princess Margaret, Henry VII's mother, in

several books published in 1509 and that he had dealings with Syon Abbey, which housed

Bridgittine nuns as well as monks.[189] In 1515, he was summoned before the diocesan court

charged with printing an allegedly heretical book, *The Image of Love*. De Worde confessed at

the hearing that he had sent sixty copies to the nuns of Syon, which he was then ordered to

retrieve.[190] Blake suggests that de Worde's decision to supply so many copies to a single

house implies that the nuns were among his better customers and could be assumed to have an

interest in the vernacular devotional material that formed the majority of his output.[191]

3.6 Conclusion

If it can be reasonably assumed that women were among the readership of texts such as the

Gospelles and the *Fyftene Joyes*, based on our knowledge of de Worde's output, the types of

people who read print, addresses to women in the texts themselves, and knowledge that similar

misogynous texts circulated in household miscellanies, then what does this do to the

perception that these texts are 'anti-feminist'? What would a woman get out of reading a text

such as the *Gospelles* or the *Fyftene Joyes* if their purpose is to ridicule women's lustfulness,

manipulativeness, the triviality of their talk, and their desire for mastery? The answer is that

these texts are not so straightforwardly misogynist as they first appear.

     In both the *Gospelles* and the *Fyftene Joyes*, the male character is presented as isolated,

anxious, and vulnerable against much more powerful female characters. The threat posed by

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[188] Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety,* p.133. A.S.G. Edwards and C.M. Meale, 'The Marketing of Books in Late Medieval England', *The Library, Series 6,* 15 (1993): 95-124 also agrees that de Worde cultivated the market in religious literature and that this market included many women, p.117.

[189] N.F.Blake, 'Wynkyn de Worde: The Later Years', *Gutenberg Jarbuch* (1972): 128-138 (pp.131-132). Blake does not list the books in full, but mentions that the style of printer to Princess Margaret 'appears regularly in all books connected with Margaret and in most of those of a general religious nature' (p.132).

[190] *Ibid.*, pp.128 & 133.

[191] *Ibid.*, p.133.

the women is rooted in their ability to use their connections to each other in order to alter the balance of power between themselves and men. In the *Fyftene Joyes* the women's attempts to overmaster the man are more obviously successful than in the *Gospelles*, in which the women's grand designs appear to falter because the ultimate control of the text falls to the narrator, who uses his pen to disparage the women's inability to co-operate successfully and criticises the triviality of their discussion. However, a closer look reveals that although the narrator of the *Gospelles* attempts to control and ridicule the women's voices, he does not fully succeed. His voice is confined to introducing the text, concluding it, and the transitions between days. The rest of the text is given over to the women, who share advice, recipes and supersitions, and pour scorn on undeserving husbands. The entire text is conceived as a riposte to the tradition of misogynous literature. It is a matter of opinion whether the narrator's interjections manage to satirize this project enough to defuse it of its power, but the women are still allowed to have their say for pages in between his attempts to close down their boisterous community. Likewise, in the *Fyftene Joyes* it is true that the women are often far from being models of virtue, and that they fulfil many stereotypes of the anti-feminist tradition. Despite this, it is usually the women who come out on top. Some of the joys end with both husband and wife miserable, but in the majority of cases, it is the husband who suffers the most. The husbands themselves are far from blameless, and it is often the husband's weakness and inability to govern his wife and household that is presented as the root of the problem. For example, in the Second Joy, the text declares: 'So he is causer of his proper shame / None other wyght therof is for to blame'.[192] The public talk of his wife's indiscretions is a direct result of his allowing her to go on pilgrimage without his supervision. The husband ends the joys isolated, ridiculed, and compared to a beast of burden or a fish caught in a net. These texts might be considered 'misogynous', but they do not praise men

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[192] *Fyftene Joyes*, The Second Joy, C.v.

either; one might imagine that any women who read them might gain some amusement from the spectacle of a fool being humiliated by a woman or a group of women who is invariably possessed of sharper wits and more loyal friends than her masculine counterpart.[193]

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[193] As Pamela Brown argues in relation to the early modern jest, even if the text was intended to be misogynous, 'no one can force the performer to deliver – or listener to credit – exactly those lines in the way in which the writer intended' (P.A. Brown, *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (London, 2003), p.60).

Speech, Gender and Governance in *The Romans of Partenay*

In the previous chapter, my discussion of *The Gospelles of Dystaues* and *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* demonstrated that texts that appear to rely on simple misogynous commonplaces and stock characters may actually be subject to a complex layering of sentiment. By leaving room to ridicule both the male and female protagonists of these texts, it becomes unclear who is really the object of the text's satire. The women of these texts initially appear to verify the accusations of other anti-feminist texts that women are naturally adulterous and avaricious, and that their talk together is composed of mindless chatter. However, despite attempting to minimise the threat these women pose to patriarchal structures, the male characters are often presented no more positively. The men of these texts are weak, easily duped, unable to control their households and mastered by their wives and female neighbours. Male figures in these texts, whether this means the narrator of the *Gospelles* or the feckless husbands of the *Fyftene Joyes*, are deeply compromised. They are also largely isolated in contrast to the women,who use their links to the community, and particularly to other women, to their advantage in the battle for mastery. This chapter develops this argument while continuing to pay attention to ideas about the household and the importance of public talk in constructing reputation and identity. Women are usually presented in anti-feminist literature as unable to control their tongues and unable to keep secrets. This chapter explores the representation of judicious and ill-advised speech in *The Romans of Partenay* while also continuing to consider marriage and the expectations governing the behaviour of men and women within marriage. I argue that this romance is particularly relevant in the light of gendered ideas regarding speech and self-control and the ideology of household governance that was prevalent in

late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century England. In *The Romans of Partenay* stereotypes about speech are turned on their head, as it is the male character who is prone to verbal transgression and who is surrounded by the questioning voices of 'public talk', which assess his worth and reputation.

The most obvious place to find transgression in *The Romans of Partenay* is in the figure of its central female character, Melusine. Her body itself is monstrous, in the sense that it transgresses order by straddling established categories. At different points of the narrative she appears fully human, fully serpentine, or a hybrid of the two, containing the potential for both forms. Apart from her obvious physical strangeness, her narrative is rooted in transgression. She imprisoned her father in a mountain until he died and as punishment her fairy mother cursed Melusine with a serpent's tail. All this suggests that this hybrid character, both human and monstrous, who, along with her two sisters, is responsible for the death of her father, should be the focus of anything the text has to say about transgressive behaviour. The majority of critical responses to the Melusine narrative have centred around the 'transgressive spectacle' of her body and the deformity of her children.[1] This is contrary to the efforts of the text itself, which does everything possible to minimise Melusine's 'otherness' and to present her as a Christian wife and mother figure, rendering the transgressive behaviour of Melusine's husband, Raymond, and other male characters such as Raymond's brother, the Earl of Forest, more visible.[2] Some

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[1] K. Brownlee, 'Melusine's Hybrid Body and the Politics of Metamorphosis', *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 18-38 (p.24). Ana Pairet reads the transgressiveness of Melusine's body as 'an emblem of political instability' and the disruption of genealogical continuity (A. Pairet, 'Melusine's Double Binds: Foundation, Transgression and the Genealogical Romance', in K.M. Krause (ed.), *Reassessing the Heroine in Medieval French Literature* (Gainesville, 2001), pp.71-86 (pp.71-72).

[2] Matthew Morris comments on the attempts of *Le Roman de Parthenay* (of which *The Romans of Partenay* is a translation) to Christianise Melusine as far as possible and depict Raymond as the true sinner: M.W. Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Couldrette's Mélusine or Le Roman de Partenay* (Lampeter, 2003), pp.9-10.

commentators on the Melusine romances have recognised that Raymond's transgression is also important to the narrative and that it is largely depicted as a verbal transgression, but there have been no sustained attempts to consider the text in the light of contemporary ideas about proper speech and gender roles.[3] In this chapter I will analyse some of the major events of the narrative in order to explore how the concepts of transgression and appropriate gender roles intersect in the romance. I will also pay attention to how *The Romans of Partenay* fits into the genre of the Middle English romance and how it fits into the reading context of late-fifteenth- or early-sixteenth-century England as a translation of a French text written a hundred years earlier. The romance displays some striking differences from its French antecedent, and I will explore how these alterations affect the possible readings of the text.

4.1 The Romans of Partenay and the Versions of the Melusine Narrative

The Romans of Partenay is a version of the Melusine romance. It has a complex plot which occupies over 6500 lines of verse. Before I proceed further, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the main events of the narrative. The romance begins with Amery, Earl of Poitiers, who fosters his nephew Raymond. Raymond is implicated in a hunting accident that causes Amery's death, although, as we will see, his degree of responsibility is quite different in this version than in all others. He meets a mysterious woman in the forest, named Melusine, who instructs him on how to conceal his transgression as long as he

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[3] Spiegel recognises that Raymond's public declaration, not the transgressive deed is what produces punishment, but still concludes by pinning the narrative's transgressiveness on Melusine: 'the fundamental transgression occurs not in the betrayal of the vow and the breaking of the taboo but in the hybridization of categories that Melusine stages': G.M. Spiegel, 'Maternity and Monstrosity: Reproductive Biology in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in D. Maddox and S. Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France* (London, 1996), pp.100-124 (p.113).

agrees to marry her. The further conditions of their marriage are that he will never endeavour to see her on a Saturday or enquire where she goes. Raymond agrees and they marry, becoming extremely prosperous and producing ten sons.[4]

Years later, Raymond's brother, the Earl of Forest, admonishes him for allowing Melusine to remain out of sight on a Saturday and accuses her of adultery. Enraged, Raymond takes his sword and pierces the door of Melusine's chamber to reveal her bathing in the form of a serpent from the waist downwards. Raymond is chastened by the realisation that because he believed his brother's slander he has broken his oath. He does not reveal his knowledge of Melusine's secret until one of their sons kills another son, who is a monk, by razing the abbey in which he is professed. At this point Raymond repudiates his wife, calling her 'false serpent' in view of the whole household and accusing her of demonic associations. Melusine berates him as a false oathbreaker and leaps through the window, transforming into fully serpentine form and exiling herself from his company forever.

Scholarship on Melusine and her monstrosity has been abundant, but the majority of it has focused on the two French versions: Jean d'Arras's prose *Mélusine* and Couldrette's verse text, *Le Roman de Parthenay.* This chapter places the English *Romans of Partenay* firmly in the foreground, focusing on it not as a derivative of a French original, but as a text in its own right, which was obviously of enough interest to an English audience to produce the manuscript that contains it (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.17 – hereafter Trinity

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[4] Whether this condition and the marriage would be canonically valid in real life would depend on whether it was considered an honest condition that Raymond had the potential to fulfil (in which case the marriage would be valid but conditional), or whether by asking him to give up oversight of his wife's behaviour it went against the substance of marriage (in which case the marriage would be invalid). Helmholz emphasises that the rules around conditional marriages were highly open to interpretation and depended on the exact form of words used. He also cites several cases where a woman's good conduct was a condition of the marriage (R.H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1974), pp.50-51, 56-57.

R.3.17).[5] *The Romans of Partenay* has a somewhat complex textual history as it is one of several similar versions of the text. It will be helpful at this stage briefly to outline the other versions in order to avoid confusion and to introduce the manuscript in which *The Romans of Partenay* appears. Figure 1 (overleaf) outlines the different versions and their relationship to each other.[6]

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[5] There are also two early-sixteenth century English translations of the Jean d'Arras version. The print edition is STC 14648, published by Wynkyn de Worde, London c.1510. A facsimile of the surviving pages can be accessed via *EEBO*: http://eebo.chadwyck.com. The manuscript is London, British Library, MS Royal 18 B II.

[6] All information regarding manuscripts and dates has been taken from the following editions and catalogues: A.K. Donald (ed.) *Melusine* (London, 1895); M.R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: A Descriptive Catalogue.* Entry for Trinity MS R 3. 17: http://rabbit.trin.cam.ac.uk/James/R.3.17.html, accessed 19 February 2009; *British Library Manuscripts Catalogue* – London, British Library, MS, Royal 18 B II - http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts/INDEX.ASP.Accessed 01 May 2009; M.W. Morris (ed), *A Bilingual Edition of Couldrette's* Melusine *or Le Roman de Parthenay* (Lewiston,NY, 2003); *id.*, *A Critical Edition of Couldrette's Melusine or Le Roman de Parthenay* (Lewiston, NY, 2003); W.W. Skeat (ed.), *The Romans of Partenay or of Lusignen: otherwise known as the Tale of Melusine* (London, 1899).

Le Roman de Parthenay   **The Romans of Partenay**

Language: French – verse   **Language: English – verse**

Author: Couldrette, patronised by   **Author: Anonymous**
William of Parthenay (d.1401) and then
John of Parthenay   **Manuscript: Cambridge, Trinity**
                                                      College MS R 3.17
Manuscripts: 20 MSS

Approx. date: Early fifteenth century.   **Approx. date: Late fifteenth century**
The earliest surviving MS (B.N.   **/ early sixteenth century.**
Fr.12575) dates from 1430.

Figure 1 – The Versions of the Melusine Narrative in French and in English.

Mélusine   *Melusine*

Language: French – prose   Language: English – prose

Author: Jean d'Arras, patronised by the   Author: Anonymous
Duke of Berri.

Manuscripts: 12 extant, 1 attested (+   Manuscript: London, British Library,
multiple printed editions).   Royal 18 B.II.

                                                  Approx. date: 1500.
Approx. date: 1393.

The Romans of Partenay survives, as we can see in Figure 1, in a single manuscript,
Trinity R 3.17. It is a verse romance, written in a single hand of the late-fifteenth- or early-
sixteenth century, and is a largely faithful translation from French to the extent that its
syntax and vocabulary are often obtuse and unidiomatic to English. Its source was a French
romance, known as *Le Roman de Parthenay*, by the poet Couldrette, which was begun at
the request of William, Lord of Parthenay (ll.120-126).[7] There are many ways such a
manuscript could have come to be in England. Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards argue that
texts from France were available in England throughout the late medieval period and that

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[7] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.12.

French material provided a steady stream of new texts for English printers to translate and publish.[8]

The copy of *The Romans of Partenay* in Trinity R.3.17 is the sole extant copy, but there were no doubt other copies of the romance in circulation that have not survived. When the French versions of the narrative were circulating in manuscript in France, *Le Roman de Parthenay* had been the more popular version, and the English elements it contains might make it more likely to appeal to an English audience. I have chosen to focus on the *The Romans of Partenay*, rather than *Melusine*, because this version puts much more emphasis on the character of Raymond and on elements that make it particularly interesting in a discussion of transgressive speech. These will be explored in my analysis of the romance later in this chapter.

The manuscript originally contained 124 paper folios, but folios 1 and 88 are missing. The romance is the only text that appears in the main body of the codex. It is a large manuscript with plenty of blank space around the romance itself. This suggests that whoever was buying the manuscript was concerned that it look good and was not overly constrained by cost. The translation is largely correct, if over-literal, and the translator's epilogue urges the reader to compare the French and English book side by side to demonstrate the fidelity of the translation.

4.2 The Readership of Late Middle English Romance

In a recent article, Jordi Sánchez-Márti discusses the difficulty in identifying the audience of Middle English popular romance. He argues that it appealed to a wide segment of the

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[8] J. Boffey and A.S.G Edwards, 'Literary Texts', in Hellinga and Trapp (eds.), *History of the Book in Britain,* vol. III, pp.555-575 (p.573).

population and that it would be a mistake to assume that stylistic sophistication equated to an elite audience and that less accomplished texts were destined for a 'popular' audience.[9] Basing an argument on codicological observations has its problems as well. Most romance *texts* were composed a hundred years or more before the manuscripts in which they survive and, since few manuscripts survive, we run the risk of reading the idiosyncrasies of one or two manuscripts as typical of all potential manuscripts containing the romance under discussion.[10] With these caveats, Sánchez-Márti suggests that the reader combine an approach that considers the cues given in the text concerning the intended audience (i.e. 'the audience for which a text has expressly been composed'), the implied audience (i.e. the 'imaginary construct of the traits the author anticipates for his primary or immediate public'), and the actual audience (i.e. marks of ownership and other evidence of the manuscript itself).[11] The translator of *The Romans of Partenay* makes little alteration from the French original. In fact, his translation is almost slavish, which suggests that he anticipated an audience who had an appetite for romance and would easily grasp the conventions of the generic world in which *The Romans of Partenay* operated. He also repeatedly mentions that it is a translation from a French text, which suggests that the 'Frenchness' had a positive value for the potential audience. The intended audience of the French *Le Roman de Parthenay* was clear; it was written for the 'lord of Partenay' for a specific purpose, which was to glorify his lineage by linking it to Melusine. The decision to write the romance in verse rather than prose was guided by the aim of maximum dissemination ('I will that it be rimed hole entire, / The sonner peple wyll it say or hire',

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[9] J. Sánchez-Márti, 'Reconstructing the Audiences of the Middle English Versions of 'Ipomedon'', *Studies in Philology* 103 (2006): 153-177 (pp.153-154, 156).
[10] *Ibid.,* p.157.
[11] *Ibid.,* pp.158, 166-7. Sánchez-Márti's terminology is based on P. Strohm, 'Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual', *Chaucer Review* 18 (1983): 137-164.

'Prologue', ll.122,153-154).[12] We can then say that the romance had two intended

audiences: an aristocratic patron, and others whom he wished to encounter the romance

either in manuscript or aurally and spread it by word of mouth. However, Trinity R.3.17

was written a century after this declaration, and for an English audience who would read it

in English. There is no reason to suppose that this audience bore any resemblance to the

original aristocratic recipient of *Le Roman de Parthenay*. The only lines in English that are

not a translation of *Le Roman de Parthenay* are the translator's prologue and epilogue. The

initial leaf that probably contained the translator's address to his audience is missing, but he

reveals that he is not a native French speaker ('Prologue', ll.8-9).[13] The translator's

epilogue suggests that the translation had a patron, 'Sin at your request and

commaundement / This warke on me touke, it to fourge and make' (ll.6602-6603), but not

the patron's identity.[14] The allusions to the intended audience contained within the text are

largely unhelpful, but there is some evidence for a female owner (i.e. the 'actual' audience)

- a poem on the final leaf of the manuscript:

> And ho so on me doth loke I am [*erasure*] boke
> She prays yow for hyr sake not me to w^t drow nor take
> When ye haue rede your fyll delyu*er* me agane w^t good wyll (f.124v.).

This indicates that the book was available for reading by others than the woman who

owned it, but it was not to be taken far from the possession of that owner.

Both English translations of the Melusine narrative date from the early-sixteenth

century.[15] Wynkyn de Worde's printed translation of Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* was

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[12] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, pp.5-6.
[13] *Ibid.*, p.1.
[14] *Ibid.*, p.225.
[15] The surviving French manuscripts date from the mid-to-late fifteenth century, but the romance was composed much earlier. Jean d'Arras' prose version dates from the last decade of the fourteenth century, and Couldrette's verse version was written not long after, c.1401.

published in 1510. The British library catalogue dates the manuscript copy in Royal 18 B II

to c.1500. Trinity R 3.17 can be dated to the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth-century. Those

readers of the French manuscripts who can be identified are aristocratic women and the

texts were composed at the behest of aristocratic men. However, the gap in time between

the French versions of the romance and its English translations means the audience of the

English text cannot be assumed to be the same as its French antecedent. A consideration of

the readership of romances in late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century England is

necessary to begin to form a picture of who might have read *The Romans of Partenay*.

Romances often occur in miscellanies alongside other genres, such as the saint's

life or chronicle, and they often appear in groups. It is uncommon for a romance to be the

only item in a manuscript, as is the case with *The Romans of Partenay*. Joyce Boro has

pointed out that of the eighty-six manuscripts listed by Gisela Guddat-Figge in her survey

of English romance manuscripts, only eleven contain a single romance and nothing else.[16]

This makes Trinity R.3.17 an unusual manuscript. Scholars have come to a broad

consensus concerning the likely readership of romance in England. French and Anglo-

Norman romances had been read by the English aristocracy for centuries, but Carol Meale

notes that the few references available for elite ownership of English romances date from

the end of the fifteenth century and the early-sixteenth century.[17] Considering the late date

of Trinity R.3.17, this does introduce the possibility that the aristocracy could have been

among its readers, but the explosion in English romance manuscripts in the fifteenth

century has generally been attributed to another audience, a combination of urban

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[16] J. Boro, 'Miscellaneity and History: Reading Sixteenth-Century Romance Manuscripts', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, vol.15 (2009): 123-151 (pp.123, 125).

[17] C.M. Meale, ''gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men': Romance and its Audiences', in C.M. Meale (ed.) *Readings in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.209-225 (p.216); G. Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Middle English Romances* (Munich, 1976), p.48.

mercantile and gentry readers. These were the groups who experienced a surge in literacy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and demanded reading material.[18] There was a significant overlap between these two groups in terms of their taste and interests.[19] Although the Middle English romances were probably intended for comparatively less wealthy audiences than continental or Latin romances, Boro cautions against overstating the case regarding their lower status. They were valued as much as, and alongside, other vernacular texts such as devotional literature.[20] Guddat-Figge suggests men of the professional classes, for example administrators or those involved in the law, as likely amateur scribes.[21]

4.3 Speech, Gender and Governance: Transgression of Gender Norms in The Romans of Partenay

What ideological preconceptions about gendered behaviour might readers have brought to their reading of *The Romans of Partenay*? Despite the focus in existing criticism on the character of Melusine, *The Romans of Partenay* is just as concerned with appropriate male behaviour. Much of this concern is focused on the issue of speech. Characters are forever talking when they should be silent and keeping secrets they ought to reveal. I will focus on three of the romance's major incidents to illustrate its concern with gendered behaviour and appropriate speech. I will discuss these issues in relation to late medieval ideas concerning how men and women were supposed to behave and the importance of talk and public fame

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[18] Meale, 'gode men', p.217; Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue*, pp.47-48.
[19] R. Radulescu, 'Literature', in R. Radulescu and A. Truelove (eds.) *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), pp.100-118 (p.100).
[20] Boro 'Miscellaneity and History', p.126.
[21] Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue*, p.21.

to a person's reputation. The sections I will focus on are the beginning of the text, in which Raymond is responsible for the death of his uncle and Melusine helps him to conceal that death; the scene in which Raymond hears gossip about Melusine's supposed adultery and surprises her in the bath; and the scene in which Raymond confronts Melusine, breaking his oath and ensuring the family's destruction.

The first few stanzas of the romance are devoted to introducing Amery, Earl of Poitiers, who is Raymond's uncle:

> In peyters a erle had of grete renoun,
> Off whom gret talkyng men held hie and bas;
> Lovid of all, cherished in eche place (ll.3-5).[22]

Right from the beginning of the romance, public talk and how that talk constructs reputation is emphasised. The following lines set up Amery as a paragon of virtue – learned, of good fame, an expert hunter, and well-liked, but only *after* we are told how he is regarded and discussed by others. How people speak of him is vital in establishing him as a worthy man; this is what creates his reputation. Both those of equal status to Amery and his inferiors bolster his good name by engaging in 'gret talkyng' about him. He is 'of grete renoun', and 'lovid of all'. The fact that there is much talk about Amery is presented here as very positive as it is through this talk that his good character is established and knowledge of this character spread. The approving talk about Amery is a contrast to the later gossip and slander that will destroy his nephew, Raymond. The time spent elaborating upon Amery's good character establishes him as a representative of good character and stable reputation. The narrative then takes a sharp turn, introducing Raymond, Amery's nephew, whom Amery fosters and who will cause his death. The first few stanzas set up a seemingly perfect family, all for the purpose of providing the circumstances in which

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[22] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.8

Raymond's transgression, which will power the rest of the narrative, can occur. Transgression is not a temporary aberration in this text; it is utterly foundational to the narrative.

This beginning is quite different to the version found in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* and its English translation, which instead begins with a long discussion of the nature and origins of fairies and a narrative of Melusine's parentage and how she was responsible for the death of her father.[23] In *The Romans of Partenay*, the section on fairies is entirely absent, fitting with the text's practice of minimising Melusine's difference as much as possible. The revelation about her father's death is not made until near the end of the text, when her son Geoffrey discovers the tomb of his grandfather, King Helmas. Melusine's story is taken out of its chronological sequence and postponed. This acts to render Melusine, when she appears to Raymond in the forest, as mysterious to us as she is to him. Placing Raymond's story first in the narrative places emphasis on him, rather than Melusine, as the central character of the romance – it is his role in his uncle's death that is the catalyst for the plot in this version.

Raymond is the son of the Earl of Forest, who is less affluent than Amery. Seeing that his kinsman has many children and little money, Amery offers to foster one of these children to teach him courtesy and endow him with money. Of the three sons offered, he selects Raymond, 'the fair, the swet, the gentill, the curtoys, / Off all thre best thaught' (ll.97-98).[24] So far this seems unremarkable in terms of what we would expect from a romance hero; Raymond displays qualities that mark him out from those around him and excels as a faithful servant to his uncle, who cherishes him in return. However, within a few

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[23] Cf. Donald (ed.), *Melusine*, pp.4-17.
[24] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.11.

stanzas, this image is shattered by the knowledge that Raymond will slay his benefactor.

Amery and Raymond are alone together in the forest after becoming separated from the

main hunting party. Amery reads a portent in the stars and relates its meaning to Raymond:

> If a man gan sle hys lord souerayn,
> As in thys hour, he shuld gretter lorde be;
> More pusaunt, ful myghtly, and right gret
> Then any of hys kynred in contre (ll.210-213).[25]

Amery is unaware that he is predicting his own imminent death, which will be the

foundation for Raymond's future prosperity. Amery is not just Raymond's kinsman and

benefactor, but also his 'lord souerayn'. Raymond owes him allegiance and loyalty on

several levels: because of their blood ties; because of his uncle's kindness to him; and

because of his feudal obligation to his lord. Raymond will rise to great wealth and power,

but build his good fortune on an act of treachery and concealment. It is this moral conflict,

set up in the opening pages of the romance, that powers the rest of the narrative. In the case

of Amery, his good reputation and elevated social position are simple and uncomplicated.

For Raymond, they are something unfairly earned through treachery and concealment and,

as such, always under threat of destruction.

The foreshadowing of Amery's death is typical of how the romance treats

transgression. It is aberrant behaviour in the sense of being against the rules. It is not

behaviour that goes against what *should* be happening, but instead is constantly

foreshadowed and alluded to before actually being narrated. Although Raymond kills his

lord, the one person who should have his utmost fidelity, it is presented as the necessary

precondition for his rise to prosperity. The prophecy is literally written in the stars from

which Amery, a keen astrologer, decodes it, ignorant that he is predicting his own death.

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[25] *Ibid.*, p.15.

The same treatment is given to Raymond's betrayal of Melusine, Geoffrey's murder of Fromont, and Geoffrey's role in the death of his uncle, the Earl of Forest. All these events are incessantly flagged long before they happen, creating an impression of transgression as destructive to the family, but ultimately unavoidable and a consequence of divine providence. In this romance, transgression is not shocking. In some cases, it is presented as almost beneficial. For example, Geoffrey's destruction of the abbey and murder of the monks is repackaged by Melusine as a punishment for the monks' lechery and misgovernance and an opportunity for the family to strengthen their influence through ecclesiastical patronage.

The partnership between Raymond and Melusine begins with the death of Amery. The way in which the protagonists interact here sets the foundation for the transgressiveness of their future relationship. It is also one of the instances in which the English translation in Trinity R.3.17 varies significantly from *Le Roman de Parthenay*. While Raymond and Amery are out hunting, they become separated from the rest of the party and are attacked by a wild boar. In *Le Roman de Parthenay*, Raymond attempts to persuade Amery to flee by climbing into a tree. Raymond's pleas, with their implication of Amery's cowardice and inability to defend himself, incense Amery, who makes a stand alone against the animal. He tries to strike the boar, but loses his balance and falls to the ground. Then Raymond runs up to slay the beast, and accidentally stabs his uncle:

> … Son espee glissa,
> Car dessus le dos l'assena.
> Le conte fiert parmy le ventre;
> Tout le fer de l'espee y entre.
> Le fer fut bon et bien trancha;
> Tous les boyaulz luy detrancha.

> …His sword slipped, missing its mark.
> He had aimed directly at the boar's back,
> But struck the count in the stomach, instead;
> The whole blade of the sword went in.
> The iron was well-tempered and sharp;
> It cut straight through all his entrails (ll.413-418).[26]

It is quite clear here that Raymond stabs his uncle, albeit accidentally. The English

translation is quite different, giving a sequence of events found in no other version. In the

English text, Raymond's sword smites not Amery, but the *boar* through the entrails

('Raymounde smote, thorught the bely gan go/… Hys good swerd withdrew, the bore ther

fil dōn', l.255, l.259).[27] He turns to help his uncle ('thens vnto hys lord went he forth anon',

l.261) but Amery has already fallen from his horse onto the boar's tusks ('There he moste

of horse fal to hys tuskes bold', l.250).[28] Whether this is a mistranslation or an intentional

choice on the part of the translator, it has the effect of removing any physical violence from

Raymond towards Amery. In this version, Raymond's initial transgression is primarily

verbal, which fits with the romance's concern about appropriate speech. It was Raymond's

words, encouraging him to flee, that convinced Amery to face the boar and therefore caused

his death ('My lord, saue your lyf and ward yow quiklye, / Here vppon a tre wyghtly

[quickly] be clemmyng', ll.234-235), because Amery felt compelled to demonstrate his

courage ('I neuer was repreued at no stound, / Ne here shal not be neuer shuch wise founde.

/ Were it pleasaunce to god I shold hens fle?', ll.237-239).[29] Raymond is completely

excused from any physical role in Amery's death. The effect this produces is a text where

the inability to protect one's lord, under whatever circumstances, is presented as a grievous

sin. It also presents Raymond's verbal role in Amery's death as equivalent to murder.

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[26] Morris (ed.), *Bilingual Edition*, pp.78-81.
[27] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.16.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.

Inappropriate speech, in this romance, is always presented as seriously transgressive, and Raymond is introduced almost from his first appearance as a character whose talk gets him into trouble.

Inappropriate or transgressive speech in *The Romans of Partenay* can mean speaking when one should not with disastrous consequences, but also includes keeping silent when one should confess. Raymond has either slain or believes himself to be responsible for the death of his kinsman. This is bad enough, particularly when Amery was also his benefactor and lord, but Raymond's actions after Amery's death, and the degree to which he submits to Melusine's guidance and direction, can also be interpreted as transgressive in light of the late medieval ideas about the responsibility of men to remain in control of their own household.

I have suggested above that the most likely audience for *The Romans of Partenay* was one made up of gentry and mercantile readers. This is precisely the group that has been most strongly associated with certain ideas about gender and the household, such as the concept of 'governance'. According to this concept, women and young people were considered unable properly to govern themselves without guidance. They needed supervision or else they would be led astray by their own appetites and by unscrupulous others.[30] It was the responsibility of heads of households, primarily mature men, to govern those who were part of their 'meinie'.[31] This also extended into civic responsibility for

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[30] S. McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity in Late Medieval London Civic Culture: Governance, Patriarchy and Reputation', in J. Murray (ed.), *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (London, 1999), pp.243-278 (pp.259-260). Cf. the fifteenth century conduct poem, *How the Goode Man Taght Hys Sone* which warns that men who cannot rule their wives properly leave women open to doing wrong, as women without the proper male governance are quickly enticed to sin (*How the Goode Man Taght Hys Sone*, ll.133-137, in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage* (Kalamazoo, 2002), pp.236-237.

[31] *MED:* **meinē** (n.), 1 (a) - A household, household servants and officers; Riddy, 'Authority and Intimacy' p.212; D. Neal, 'Husbands and Priests: Masculinity, Sexuality and Defamation in Late Medieval England', in Craun (ed.), *The Hands of the Tongue*, pp.185-208 (p.185).

reporting misgovernance in the community, but the ability to govern started at home.[32]

Husbands were expected to head the household and govern their wives. The reality of late medieval marriage at this social level was more complex than this simple prescription would suggest. Although women of the gentry and mercantile classes were expected to submit to their husbands, they also had to be capable of acting as their husband's proxy. It is evident from sources such as the Paston Letters that husbands of the gentry class might spend long periods away from home during which time their wives were responsible for managing the household. Rowena Archer argues that 'virtually all women of property could expect to exercise a measure of administrative responsibility wherever and whenever the need arose'.[33] However, the key part of this argument is that they did it when the need arose, when their husbands were absent; they did not rule in their husband's stead while he was present. Although these women might have authority over large households they still had to appear subordinate to their husband and other men of their own class. For example, Margaret Paston was capable of organising the defence of the family's property in her husband's absence, but she was careful to present her actions as dependent on her husband's approval: 'I haue left John Paston the oldere at Castere to kype the place there, as Richard can tell you, for I had levere, and it pleasyd you, to be captenesse here then at Castere.'[34]

Male householders also had a third responsibility. As well as governing their dependents, including their wives, and the community, they were expected to govern

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[32] McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity', pp.250-251, 256.
[33] R.E. Archer, ''How ladies…who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates': Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages', in P.J.P. Goldberg (ed.) *Women in Medieval English Society* (Stroud, 1997), pp.147-181. Cf. *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter*, in which the wife is pictured as an industrious household manager in the absence of her husband (*How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter* , ll.133-136 in Salisbury (ed.), *Trials and Joys of Marriage*, p.222).
[34] Davis (ed.), *Paston Letters and Papers,* p.298.

themselves. This involved controlling their behaviour and speech.[35] Derek Neal argues that

differing models of masculinity existed in late medieval England, and that there were

always tensions between these models. The first was a youthful masculinity associated with

riotous, disorderly behaviour and satisfaction of one's appetites, including the sexual. The

second was associated with mature men, including those who were heads of households,

and emphasised soberness, self-control, good public fame and honesty.[36] Being an 'honest'

man meant more than simple truthfulness. Neal argues that it meant 'openness, manifest

veracity, a surface meaning that is the only meaning'.[37] In order to be considered 'honest'

and 'worthy' the community had to be convinced that a man's inside matched his outside.

Neal places his concept of 'honesty' at the centre of his ideas about mature masculinity,

arguing that for these men, control of their own sexual behaviour or that of their female

dependents was not as crucial as it has been portrayed by many critics, particularly those

studying the early modern period, who place a heavy emphasis on fears of cuckoldry in

shaping men's 'anxious masculinity'.[38]

My own position is that these concepts cannot really be separated.[39] Just as honesty

and self-control were figured as masculine, falseness and an inability to control oneself,

particularly one's tongue, were figured as feminine. A man who is feminised by being

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[35] McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity', pp.258-259.

[36] D. Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Chicago; London, 2008), pp.22, 78, 243.

[37] *Ibid.*, p.43.

[38] *Ibid,*, pp.31, 53, 74; Neal, 'Husbands and Priests', pp.188 & 190. Neal does not argue that men were not damaged by accusations of their own sexual misbehaviour or their wives' adultery, but that these accusations were less serious than claims that a man was 'false' or dishonest'. For concern about control of women's sexuality in the early modern period, cf. M. Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1996).

[39] Alexandra Shepard makes the same point for a slightly later period, arguing that 'economic honesty' and 'sexual honour' 'did not exist in discrete separation, and are not easily picked apart' – both were important to identity. For men, economic honesty was more important than for women, and for women, sexual honour was more important than for men, but *both* discourses operated to some degree for both genders (A. Shepard, 'Honesty, Worth and Gender in Early Modern England, 1560-1640', in H. French and J. Barry (eds.), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp.87-105 (pp.88-89).

depicted as false and lacking self-control is usually also depicted as a man who cannot be expected to govern his wife and household correctly. As my previous chapters have demonstrated, I would argue that concern with controlling movement into and out of the house, particularly when this is connected to women's sexual behaviour and speech, has roots that extend well into the medieval period. It is not an invention of the early modern period, and it was certainly an issue of concern by the fifteenth century.

Let us compare the ideas about proper marital order outlined above to the beginning of the marriage contract between Raymond and Melusine. When he realises Amery is dead, Raymond, after lamenting the vicissitudes of Fortune, leaps into the saddle and rides headlong through the forest, but neglects to take the reins, letting his horse wander as it wishes. This perfectly represents his lack of control and direction at this point in the narrative. It is the female character, Melusine, who seizes the reins of his horse and rebukes him, 'For goddis sake, man, shew the noght soo' (l.351).[40] This founding moment prefigures their subsequent relationship; it is Melusine who later builds castles and extends the influence of the family, not Raymond. She is the one who dictates the terms of their relationship, that he will never attempt to see her on a Saturday, and in return she promises to make him rich and influential. Even at the moment in which the contract between them is made, the narrative repeatedly emphasises that Raymond will be unable to keep his oath:

> Raymond wolde swere and ther hys othe gan do,
> But att end forsworn was he, is no nay;
> To ful gret myschef it cam hym always,
> For that hire couenant brake and noght gan hold (ll.500-503).[41]

Even at the beginning of the romance, Raymond is presented in terms of his future falseness, which is juxtaposed with his wife's ability to keep to their agreement. His oath-

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[40] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.19.
[41] *Ibid.*, p.24.

breaking runs counter to the ideas I described above concerning the link between manliness and honesty. The way in which Raymond manages to salvage his position and reputation is always precarious because it rests on his contract with a mysterious woman who helps him to conceal his role in the death of his uncle. However, despite the unusual nature of their marriage, and the conditions imposed by Melusine, it is implied that as long as Raymond adheres to these conditions their partnership will be successful and fruitful. They manage to produce ten sons, who through their marriages and crusading, come to control much of Europe. It is Raymond's oath-breaking that ultimately precipitates the destruction of their marriage, as Melusine is willing to hold to their contract even after one of their sons has murdered the other. Rather than the female half of the partnership being presented as faithless, Melusine keeps to their covenant even through the most trying circumstances. It is Raymond who is unable to keep to his oath. He is consistently presented as cowardly, faithless, dishonest, and lacking self-control.

It is typical of the style of the romance that there are no surprises in the narrative. Right from their first encounter, the tragic end of their relationship and its consequences for the entire Partenay line are made clear and Raymond is labelled an oath-breaker. This creates a long period of anticipation between this prediction and its fulfilment, which occurs over two thousand lines later. There is a parallel created between the oath Raymond will fail to keep to Melusine and the bonds of loyalty towards his kinsman and lord which he has broken. He follows Melusine's instructions to conceal his role in his uncle's death and even his presence when it took place. Her price for aiding him is that he will marry her, and she promises him that he will be more powerful than any man of his lineage. By accepting her help, Raymond is transformed from an outcast, responsible for the death of a

man who was both his uncle and his lord, to the scion of a new dynasty. But even at the moment at which the family is being formed, and dynastic success promised, the backdrop is one of murder within the family. The hero of the romance is a man who is reliant on his wife to conceal his responsibility for the death of a family member who is also his lord. It seems a shaky beginning for any partnership, and Raymond's dependent position in the arrangement curtails his ability to have any authority over his wife in the marriage.

Raymond follows Melusine's instructions. When he returns to Poitiers, he pretends he became separated from Amery in the forest and has no idea of his whereabouts, and when the body is recovered he joins in the mourning. He appears so grief-stricken at the funeral that many remark on the extent of his grief, 'his morning, his wailing, his loking bas' (l.665):

> Raymounde Ful wel aqueinted hym that hour,
> Ther many A persone of hym said, "a! he
> Felith sore in hert anguish and dolour!
> Of hys souerain lord had he such pite" (ll.659-662).[42]

'Acqueinted' is a scribal error for 'acquitted', as Morris's edition of the French version of the romance, *Le Roman de Parthenay*, reads 'Raymond si bien s'en acquitta' (l.839).[43] What is important is that the text focuses once more on people's talk and how important it is in constructing one's reputation and public character. The reader knows that Raymond is responsible for Amery's death and is desperate to conceal this fact, but the talk of the mourners constructs an image of Raymond as the grieving nephew and retainer. I do not mean to suggest that Raymond does not feel grief at his uncle's death, but rather that his personal feelings are not the point. The text focuses instead on how his behaviour is read by those around him, who endorse it as an appropriate response to events that demonstrates his

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[42] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.29.
[43] Morris (ed.), *Bilingual Edition*, p.108.

close connection to his dead kinsman and lord. In my discussion of the *Gospelles* in Chapter 3, I drew attention to the way in which that text exploits the misogynous commonplace of the woman who is capable of putting on a convincing performance of innocence and virtue, but is in fact scheming and lecherous, by having a male narrator who conceals his true intentions instead. The behaviour of Raymond in this section of the romance is another example of this trope being applied to a male rather than a female character. He conceals the truth that he is the one responsible for Amery's death. In this sense, he is not an 'honest' man.

At this point in the narrative, the public talk is on Raymond's side. There is a definite incongruity between his outer self and the reader's knowledge that he is fully cognizant of the circumstances of Amery's death and his role in it. Here Raymond holds his tongue, but in a way that demonstrates his willingness to conceal his own transgressions. He follows the directions of his wife, who is presented as the commanding head of the household, while Raymond, stricken with grief and guilt, willingly follows her guidance. When compared to the type of ideal marital relationship I have outlined above, in which the husband governs his wife and dependents, the marriage between Raymond and Melusine is profoundly disordered, with a wife who is presented as the dominant partner and a husband who is willing meekly to follow her direction. The continual reiteration that Raymond is the morally weaker of the two, that he will break his oath and destroy the family, only adds to the contrast between him and his wife. She is presented as the stronger and more 'masculine' of the two – she directs their bargain, she keeps to their contract, she controls her anger – Raymond is the one who is feminised by being depicted as needing guidance and control.

The marriage between Raymond and Melusine is strange in ways that go beyond her dominance and his pliability. The text indicates that the manner in which the marriage is formed appears unusual even to those who do not know the circumstances of Amery's death. The reaction of Raymond's family to the news of the planned marriage demonstrates the importance of family connections as a guarantor of a person's character and behaviour when contemplating marriage. Aristocratic marriages such as the one between Raymond and Melusine were bargains negotiated between families, largely by the men in those families.[44] The idea that a woman such as Melusine should seek out a husband by herself and negotiate the terms of her marriage with him -- in particular, the condition about not seeing her on a Saturday -- was highly unorthodox. By the early-sixteenth century, even gentry and mercantile families of the sort that were likely readers of *The Romans of Partenay* expected to play a significant role in the marriages of their children and dependents. Shannon McSheffrey, in her work on late-fifteenth-century London, has argued that young people were expected to involve their families when they considered marriage, rather than rushing into it hastily. In the absence of relatives, an employer might act in the stead of their parents.[45] By the period in which Trinity R.3.17 was written, marriage without family involvement was probably not the norm, whether at the aristocratic level of the romance's characters, or at the gentry / mercantile level of its probable readers.[46]

Raymond's family clearly expect to have been involved in his choice of a wife and are intensely curious when he announces his betrothal to a woman about whose background

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[44] B. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford, 2002), p.43. For examples from *The Romans of Partenay,* see the marriages of Melusine and Raymond's sons, in which eligible heiresses are offered to the men by a king or council of barons as a reward for successes in war.
[45] McSheffrey, 'Consent and the Making of Marriage', pp.154-156.
[46] Cf. my discussion in Chapter 3, pp.181-182.

he knows nothing. A wife would be expected to bring not only a dowry but also connections to another family, but Raymond is happy to marry Melusine with no knowledge of her heritage. In fact his enthusiasm is presented as reckless and driven by desire for her person: 'off hir linage enquered I no-thing/ Wher she be of duk or of markois hy, / Forsoth I wyll hyr haue, she is me pleasyng' (ll.849-851).[47] *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* cautions against such behaviour:

> weddeth yow not ageyne for playsaunce ne for loue / but only by the counceylle and good wylle of alle youre parentes and Frendes / And thus ye shalle kepe your worship and honour sure and clene withoute repreef.[48]

The author warns that those who wed without consulting their friends shall be scorned behind their back. Peter Idley, in his *Instructions to his Son*, a fifteenth-century conduct manual, specifically counsels against undertaking rash or inconsiderate promises. He advises his son not to make oaths 'ffor ony haste, wrathe, or soden aventure' and counsels him that he would do better to 'keepe thy breith cloos w*ith*yn thy breeste …/ Therefore be neu*er* hasti in a vowe making, / Lest thow sone repent af*ter* thy hete *slakyng*' (Book2, ll.2815, 2818-9).[49] Raymond's haste to agree to Melusine's conditions is, by Idley's reckoning, decidedly foolish, because it is a hasty oath driven by lust and fear of his transgression being discovered. The haste of the marriage is itself unusual.

Although they know nothing of the oath, Raymond's relatives are uneasy. His cousin and lord, the new Earl of Poitiers, expresses his incredulity at Raymond's recklessness:

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[47] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.36.
[48] Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p.151.
[49] Peter Idley, *Peter Idley's Instructions to his Son*, ed.C. d'Evelyn (London, 1935), p.153

> ...thys is gret meruell
> That ye take A wif vnknow what is sche,
> Neither haue knewlich of hir gouernail,
> Ne of hir kinrede; straunge is without fail! (ll.842-845).[50]

The *MED* defines 'gouernail' in several different ways. It can mean mastery or the power of authority, but can also refer one's own conduct, or self-control.[51] Raymond is ignorant in every sense of Melusine's 'gouernail'. Her family background is presented as synonymous with her personal behaviour and self-governance – one determines the other. By agreeing to remain ignorant of her background he has no way to gauge her behaviour or the extent to which she will govern herself appropriately. As I discussed in the case of Amery, public fame provides a guarantee of someone's character and standing. Raymond takes Melusine as an unknown, with no public character to go on, despite his family's anxiety. There may be an element of this passage that plays on the other meaning of 'gouernail' as authority. Part of Raymond's contract with Melusine involves giving up some of his mastery to her and for most of the text she is the one who governs the marriage.

Although we hear of the Earl's misgivings again, three hundred lines later, when he considers asking Melusine herself to speak about her family, he chooses to hold his tongue. The text tells us that 'ful moch he thought, but yut hys pes gan hold' (l.1104).[52] This is a situation in which, as the head of Raymond's family, he should speak out to prevent his cousin making a rash marriage, but he chooses not to speak. There is a stark contrast between these actions and those of Raymond's own brother, who later meddles in the marriage to disastrous effect. The absence of Melusine's birth family later leaves her

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[50] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.35.
[51] *MED*: **governail** (n.)
[52] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.44.

isolated when she is accused of adultery and repudiated by Raymond.[53] A heroine with no parents is not so unusual in romance, but the reasons for Melusine's solitude are unique in being self-inflicted through her parricide and being cursed by her mother.

All that would be required by canon law to make a binding marriage between Melusine and Raymond would have been words of present consent, which they could have exchanged easily when they made their contract alone together in the forest, but the Church discouraged such 'clandestine' contracts and urged formal solemnization.[54] It was expected that aristocratic marriages would follow the pattern of Raymond and Melusine's union. It is witnessed, endorsed -- albeit with some misgivings -- by Raymond's family and the Church and celebrated lavishly in public, all elements which despite not being canonically required helped to secure the union as a properly performed aristocratic marriage. It is Melusine who demands this very public marriage. It has the advantage that Raymond cannot later recant when he discovers her secret, but also serves to further emphasise her measured response to events compared to his hastiness. Everything looks well on the surface, but the underlying transgressiveness of the contract is concealed by these outward forms of social display. We already know that Raymond's promise that he will never see Melusine on Saturday is an oath that he will not keep. The marriage is formed in an attempt to hide Raymond's transgression in the matter of his uncle's death and it is based on a power dynamic between the husband and wife that is profoundly skewed according to fifteenth-century ideas of gendered behaviour.

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[53] Cf. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, p.175 for details of how aristocratic wives depended on their connections to their natal kin and how fathers remained involved in their daughters' affairs long after their wedding.

[54] C. Donahue, Jr., 'The Canon Law on the Formation of Marriage and Social Practice in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983): 144-158 (pp.145-146).

It is clearly Melusine who is at the head of the Lusignan dynasty, not Raymond. She directs him on how to avoid detection for his role in Amery's death, she instructs him on how to obtain land from his cousin, and she sends him out to reclaim his father's lands while she remains at home building castles and bearing the ten sons who will found the family line. Reproduction is linked to building, and the castles associated with the family are presented as integral to familial identity as much as the individuals who form part of the family unit.[55] Her dominance of the family is also demonstrated by the way her sons refer to their parentage. Geoffrey, when asked his name, often identifies himself by his physical appearance as 'Gaffray with long toth' (l.3013), but when he does use a parent's name to identify his lineage it is that of his mother, not his father, 'For I am Gaffray, sone to Melusine, / Off lusignen borne of þat good lady' (ll.4247-8), thus positioning his mother as the most significant of his two parents.[56]

This depiction of a female founder would have resonated with English audiences because of its similarity to myths about the foundation of Britain, such as the story of Albina. This tale appeared in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century both on its own (as *Des Grant Geanz*) and attached to the prose *Brut*, where it was used to explain the lawlessness of Britain before the coming of Brutus.[57] There are several versions, but the story tells of a group of sisters whose father is the king of either Greece or Syria. After their marriages, the sisters, led by the oldest of them, who is named Albina, plot to kill their husbands. In one version of the tale they are successful, in the other, the youngest sister confesses their intention and the murders are prevented. The sisters are exiled and cast

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[55] The descriptions of the birth of Raymond and Melusine's first eight sons alternate with descriptions of the castle building that takes place under Melusine's direction (ll.1111-1274).
[56] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.107, p.147.
[57] A. Bernau, 'Beginning with Albina: Remembering the Nation', *Exemplaria* 21 (2009): 247-273 (p.248).

adrift in a boat for their crime. They land on the shores of Britain, which Albina names

after herself as Albion. As there are no men to satisfy their sexual desires, the sisters mate

with incubi, producing a race of giants who then incestuously reproduce with their mothers.

When Brutus later arrives on the island it is overrun with giants and he must conquer it. The

Albina narrative was very popular in late medieval England. It appears in all three literary

languages, in Anglo-Norman as *Des Grant Geanz,* in Latin as *De origine gigantum*, and as

part of the Middle English *Brut*.[58] The 'Imagining History' project, headed by John

Thompson of Queens University, Belfast, has explored the dissemination of the *Brut* in late

medieval England.[59] The Middle English *Brut* survives in approximately 183 manuscripts

and fragments and it was copied throughout the fifteenth century, which gives some idea of

the dissemination of the narrative.[60] In 1480 it was printed by Caxton as *The Cronicles of*

Englond, widening knowledge of it further. It was reprinted more frequently in the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries than any other text, and the texts of the *Brut* tradition survive in

more manuscripts and early printed editions than any other English work except the

Wycliffite Bible.[61] The narrative deals with women who attempt to overturn masculine

authority by murdering their husbands. Jeffrey Cohen emphasises the role of mastery in

provoking the women's rebellion; Albina feels that her husband is keeping her under too

close surveillance and circumscribing her speech. This prompts her to stray from her proper

role as a submissive wife.[62] The Albina legend also deals with women's perverse sexuality

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[58] R. Evans, 'The Devil in Disguise: Perverse Female Origins of the Nation', *Consuming Narratives: Gender and Monstrous Appetite in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,* ed. L.H. McAvoy and T. Walters (Cardiff, 2002), pp.182-195 (pp.183-184).
[59] http://www.qub.ac.uk/imagining-history/about/
[60] *Ibid.;* Bernau claims 170+ manuscripts, Drukker claims 200 manuscripts (Bernau, 'Beginning with Albina', p.249, T. Drukker, 'Thirty-Three Murderous Sisters: A Pre-Trojan Foundation Myth in the Middle English Prose *Brut* Chronicle', *The Review of English Studies* 54 (2003): 449-463 (p.449).
[61] Drukker, 'Murderous Sisters', pp.449-450; http://www.qub.ac.uk/imagining-history/about/
[62] J.J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1999), pp.48 & 54.

and the production of human-demon hybrids, an issue that resonates with the Melusine

narrative's concern with the deformity of Raymond and Melusine's offspring and the

mixing of humans and fairies. The actions of Albina and her sisters produce a lawless

island that must be subdued by Brutus with proper masculine authority restored.[63] As a

romance that is concerned with feminine assumption of authority and suspicions of

demonic associations, Melusine may have been of interest to a reader already familiar with

Albina. Thompson argues that the marginal inscriptions on manuscripts of the *Brut* suggest

that it was read by 'middling' people – merchants, grocers, rural and urban gentry,

professional and amateur scholars – that is, precisely the sort of people who were a major

audiences for romances such as *The Romans of Partenay.*[64]

I have explored the ways in which the partnership of Melusine and Raymond is

founded on transgression. Raymond's prosperity is dependent on his willingness to conceal

his misdeeds and allow his wife the mastery in their relationship. The central section of the

romance presents a family in the ascendant, as the elder sons of Raymond and Melusine

venture abroad on crusades, conquering Saracens and gaining their own kingdoms by

marrying the grateful daughters of the Christian kings they have rescued. More and more

European lands come under Lusignan control, but this period of family stability can only be

tenuous, given that the partnership that produced it is founded on an oath that we have been

repeatedly warned will be broken. I will explore how this rupture comes about and what

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[63] Lesley Johnson disagrees with this interpretation of masculine re-foundation providing a corrective to earlier, perverse female foundation, arguing that it is too simplistic and the women mimic the system of patriarchal power. Their rebellion against their husbands is in part inspired by the women's awareness of their superior birth and social status compared to their husbands. Johnson argues their act is one of 'aberrant nobility' (L. Johnson, 'Return to Albion', *Arthurian Literature* XIII, ed. J.P. Carley and F. Riddy (Woodbridge, 1995), pp.19-40, especially pp.26, 32-33). This argument seems to me to ignore the sheer transgressive force of husband-murder, both as a moral crime and as an act of petty treason.
[64] http://www.qub.ac.uk/imagining-history/about/

this part of the romance can tell us about the role of speech, public fame, and gendered

behaviour in the demise of the House of Lusignan.

Raymond's oath-breaking and the subsequent destruction of the family comes about

at the instigation of another family member, Raymond's elder brother, the Earl of Forest. I

have already drawn attention to the misgivings of Raymond's cousin and lord, the Earl of

Poitiers, on Raymond's marriage to Melusine and how he eventually decided to suppress

his curiosity. The Earl of Forest is not so self-controlled. He pushes Raymond to confront

Melusine by insinuating that she is unfaithful and by questioning the unorthodox nature of

Raymond and Melusine's marriage, in which she is clearly the dominant partner:

> I can noght say how ye may bere the shame.
> Men sayn ouerall, brother, I you say,
> Ye not so hardy (in wreth ne in game)
> Of your wif enquire, certes at no day,
> (Which vnto you is gret diffame Alway),
> To what place she torn ne hoder wyll go,
> Or in what maner hir gouerneth, lo!
>
> And what knowen ye what she doth þat day?
> Men sain ouerall, so god my soule saue,
> That all disording is she All-way;
> That day hir body Anothir man shall haue (ll.2759-2769).[65]

The Earl here constructs an image of a community of observers who judge Raymond's

behaviour towards his wife. Rather than the 'gret talkyng' that helped to establish his uncle

Amery as a worthy man, the talk that circulates about Raymond is detrimental to his

reputation. 'Men sayn overall' is probably gender-neutral, meaning 'the people say', as it is

a rendering of the French 'on dit partout' and 'checun le dit publiquement' (ll.3009, 3013,

3020).[66] This interpretation is supported by the choice in the English prose *Melusine* to

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[65] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.99.
[66] Morris (ed.), *Bilingual Edition*, pp.252-3; *MED:* **men** (pron. indef.), (b).

refer to 'the commyn talking of the peple'.[67] There are multiple speech acts occurring here: the community is speaking in judgment of Raymond, the Earl of Forest is then acting as a representative to relay this concern to Raymond ('men sayn … I you say'). Raymond is not speaking when he should, since he is not brave enough to enquire of his wife where she goes, so the community has taken it upon itself to construct an explanation for her behaviour in the form of adultery. This is based on the assumption that a woman requires proper male governance because she is unable to control her own urges. In their eyes, Raymond's abdication of his responsibility to govern makes adultery on the part of Melusine a strong possibility.

It is clear from the way that the character of Amery was established at the beginning of the romance, and the construction of Raymond as the grieving nephew, that 'what men say' is extremely important. It is the means through which a person's character and standing are established. In the eyes of this community, Raymond's behaviour falls short of what is required of a husband and the head of a household. The Earl and the community expect that Raymond should be able to control his household. Part of that is governing his wife and being aware of her actions at all times. Instead, he freely allows her to go somewhere without his knowledge on Saturdays. This is emblematic of his lack of control in their relationship as a whole. The case of Thomas and Margery Nesfeld, which appears in the records of the church court of York for 1396, clearly articulates this expectation that a husband should be aware of his wife's activities.[68] Thomas struck Margery when she went out of doors without his consent: 'the aforesaid Margery went from her aforesaid shared home against the will and precept of the said Thomas'. She stayed at another house

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[67] Donald (ed.), *Melusine,* p.296.
[68] Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England*, pp.141-142.

until after dark, and the case frames her response as disobedient: 'she wished to go where she would against the will of the same Thomas her husband'. Thomas's blow with a fist is presented as reasonable chastisement for her disobedience and refusal to be ruled by him, and part of his duty to be aware of and regulate her movements. Margery's witnesses claimed that Thomas beat her excessively and she feared for her life, but the court found in favour of Thomas and rejected her petition for divorce *a mensa et a thoro*.[69]

The emphasis on 'governance' in *The Romans of Partenay* is specific to the English text. Couldrette's French says that Raymond does not have the courage to ask where Melusine goes and what she does ('N'ou elle va, n'ou elle tourne, / N'en quelle maniere s'atourne. Et que savez vous qu'elle fait?', ll.3017-3019).[70] 'En quelle maniere s'atourne' has the meaning of 'in what manner she fashions / adorns herself', but it focuses mainly on outward appearance and behaviour. The emphasis placed on Melusine's moral state and ability to control her behaviour by the use of the word 'governance' is specific to the English text.

The accusations made in this section of the text repeat some of the elements of the Earl of Poitiers' concern, at the time of the marriage, with Melusine's mysterious background. Again, Raymond's ignorance of his wife's 'governance' is presented as strange, even reckless on his part. His inability to control his wife lowers his standing in the eyes of his peers. The question here is: who is right? The Earl of Poitiers did not voice his concerns about Raymond's lack of knowledge about Melusine at the time of the marriage. It appears lax on his part when considered alongside late medieval ideas regarding marriage, the expected involvement of families, and warnings against rash vows. In this

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[69] *Ibid.*
[70] Morris, *Bilingual Edition*, pp.252-3.

case, the Earl of Forest *does* inquire about Melusine's behaviour, but his inquiry precipitates the destruction of the family unit. It is worth returning to conduct literature to examine what it has to say about a situation like the one in which the Earl of Forest finds himself.

Peter Idley has a lot to say on this subject. His position is that men should stay out of each other's business:

> Lete thy tonge not clakke [rattle] as a mille;
> Medle not of eche mannes mat*e*re;
> Kepe w*ith*in thi breste that may be stille…
> Therefore be not talewyse [i.e. garrulous] in no manere (Book 1, ll.50-52, 57).[71]

He specifically cautions against gossip that can damage a man's reputation: 'hyndre no man of his good name/…ffor by croked tongis many a man is slayn.' (Book 2, ll.1533, 1537).[72] These types of behaviour are particularly damaging for men because they are those usually associated negatively with women. For example, Idley criticises women who 'ga*n*gle as a gosse and Iangyll as a Iey' (Book 2, On Sacrilege, l.416).[73] The author of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* manages to characterise the Fall as a consequence of women's idle talk by invoking the medieval practice of representing the serpent as having 'a face right fare lyke the face of a woman'. Eve was led astray because she 'held parlement' with one who appeared to be another woman.[74] Sandy Bardsley has discussed the feminising effect for men of being associated with jangling because of the association between women and disorderly speech. She quotes from the 1529 poem by John Skelton, 'Against Venemous Tongues':

> Sometime women were put in great blame,

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[71] Idley, *Peter Idley's Instructions*, p.82.
[72] *Ibid.*, p.133.
[73] *Ibid.*, p.210.
[74] Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, pp.62-63.

> Men said they could not their tongues atame;
> But men take upon them now all the shame,
> With scolding and slandering make their tongues lame.[75]

The order of the world is turned on its head as men become like the worst aspects of women. Not only are men feminised by scolding and slandering, they are also emasculated. The lame tongue serves as a parallel to the limp penis, Bardsley argues, as the tongue is presented as 'the limp appendage of which scolding men should feel ashamed'.[76]

There is room for two possible arguments in the case of the Earl of Forest. First, that the Earl was correct to alert his brother to the ill fame that was spreading about his wife, and by consequence the doubts the rest of the community were having about his mettle as a husband. Or second, that the Earl would have been better to avoid repeating tales and meddling in his brother's affairs. This argument would hold that through his interference the Earl was responsible for destroying his brother's marriage and setting in motion the decline of his family. The later shameful death of the Earl, who falls to his death as he flees for his life, would seem to suggest that the romance favours the second explanation, however the possibility of multiple interpretations means that the value of speech or silence is never a forgone conclusion.

To return now to the accusations made by the Earl of Forest, he defames his brother's wife by accusing her of adultery and at the same time questions his brother's masculinity and ability to control his household. He is drawing attention to the fact that the marriage of Raymond and Melusine, with the wife as the dominant partner, is unusual. His repetition of the phrase 'men sayn' indicates that he is not the only person in the community to have noticed this. Throughout the text Melusine has displayed an

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[75] Bardsley, 'Men's Voices in Late Medieval England', p.164.
[76] *Ibid.*, p.164.

assertiveness that is almost masculine. The only way she can redeem her transgression against her father is to marry a mortal man who will keep the terms of the oath she has set. Her assertive behaviour towards Raymond has been directed towards this goal.[77] The imputations of adultery and fairy heritage in the Earl of Forest's accusation are presented as less important than the charge that she is an unruly woman. She spends time outside her husband's control and this unsupervised time may be spent in disorderly misgovernance that is presented as shaming to Raymond. The romance uses the word 'disording' to describe Melusine's alleged behaviour. 'Disording' seems like a version of the Middle English word 'disordeinē', which derives from the French 'désordonné' and the Anglo-Norman 'desordené'.[78] The *MED* defines 'disordeinē' as an adjective used to describe something that is not in accord with the rules of conduct, something which is disorderly and improper.[79] This implies that that it was considered important that a husband have the ability to control his wife if she acted in a disorderly fashion and outside the behavioural norms for a married woman of her status.[80] Up to this point in the text, the union between Raymond and Melusine has appeared successful and fruitful. Here we are presented with a different perspective on their marriage, one that views Raymond as a weak man mastered by a wife who is revealed to have supernatural -- and potentially demonic -- origins. The fact that this revelation is brought about by the slanders of a brother intensifies the sense of family dislocation in this section of the text.

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[77] The section in which Presine lays out the terms of Melusine's curse is on the missing folio 88 of Trinity MS R.3.17, but Melusine refers to the curse earlier in the narrative and says that if Raymond kept his word she would have been allowed a natural death as a mortal woman (ll.3618-3626) rather than remaining a serpent until the Last Judgement (Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.127)

[78] E. Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue francaise*, http://francois.gannaz.free.fr/Littre/accueil.php; L. Stone, W. Rothwell *et.al.* (eds.), *Anglo-Norman Dictionary,* http://www.anglo-norman.net/.

[79] *MED*: **disordeinē** (adj.), (a).

[80] Nesfeld c. Nesfeld presents this as a duty – see the discussion of this case on pp.254-255.

Raymond's reaction to his brother's accusation is one of precipitous rage. He immediately goes to Melusine's chamber, bores a hole in the door with his sword and observes her bathing in the form of a serpent from the waist downward. We later learn that this monstrous hybrid form is a curse imposed by Melusine's mother as punishment for Melusine's parricide. The sexual elements of this scene are obvious, as Raymond bores with his weapon to gain voyeuristic access to the naked woman in the bath. Since they have had ten children together, presumably Raymond has enjoyed full sexual access to Melusine throughout their marriage and he has been able to perform sexually, but the narrative very specifically frames him as an observer here. After the revelations of the public scorn regarding their marriage and his worth as a man, rather than the full access to Melusine's body that he should enjoy as her husband, Raymond has to bore through a door and even then he can only look. The author describes the beauty and femininity of Melusine's upper body, 'white / Like as is the snow' which are contrasted with the monstrosity of the 'gret and orrible' tail which strongly beats the water, seemingly beyond the control of its owner (ll.2801-2, 2808).[81] Raymond's actions are hasty and inspired by rage and the insult to his masculinity implied by the idea that he cannot control his wife. Idley makes a particular point of cautioning against such rash behaviour. A hasty man, 'many mat*er*s he doith spille; ffull ofte he vttreth þ*at* should be stille' (Book 1, ll.312-313).[82] Wrathful men are not concerned with the truth but with satisfying their anger, so Idley advises his reader to beware of them (Book 1, ll.269-280).[83] He reminds readers of the patience of Job and counsels them to suffer misfortune without wrath, 'Seyeng to thysilffe þou were worthy to

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[81] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.100.
[82] Idley, *Instructions*, p.86.
[83] *Ibid.*, p.85.

haue doble, / And kepe it withynne thy brest cloos and couert' (Book 1, ll.640-641).[84] Ire is

a sin that is hideous to God and destructive to oneself and one's fellow man (Book 2,

ll.386-399).[85] Jealousy regarding the virtue of one's wife, argues Idley, is

counterproductive and a man's lack of trust and unreasonable behaviour may provoke the

adultery he wishes to avoid:

> Thow shalt to aferde of eu*er*y man,
> And make hir to thynke and werke also
> That neu*er* before in hir mynde rann;
> Therefore I counceill the to leeve it than (Book 2, ll.2072-2075).[86]

Precipitous ire is consistently destructive in *The Romans of Partenay*, the most striking

example being the uncontrollable rage of Geoffrey, who slays his brother and an abbey full

of monks by burning because he feels the abbey has insulted the status of his family by

accepting his brother as a monk. I will discuss this episode in more detail shortly.

According to fifteenth-century standards of conduct, Raymond is a weak man who

allows his wife to master him, thus bringing upon himself the gossip and speculation of his

community. He has neglected to cultivate his good fame by demonstrating his good

governance of his household, instead allowing Melusine to operate as the *de facto* head of

the family. This, combined with Melusine's suspicious absences on Saturdays, has brought

their relationship under scrutiny. Raymond's reaction when challenged further

demonstrates the weaknesses in his character. In the heat of his anger he attempts to

confront Melusine immediately, breaking the vow he made on their marriage and ensuring

his future misfortune.

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[84] *Ibid.*, p.91.
[85] *Ibid.*, p.165.
[86] *Ibid.*, p.141.

The narrative now enters a period of stasis, because although Raymond has broken his oath by observing Melusine in the bath, he does not immediately reveal what he saw. Realizing his mistake, Raymond attempts to plug up the hole in the door with cloth and wax, but the damage is done. At this point he has broken his oath and all his good fortune should evaporate as Melusine threatened; instead what happens is nothing, as Melusine pretends not to have noticed him watching. Once again, Raymond's transgression is tied not to the deed of spying on Melusine in her bath, but rather to the verbal action that follows it. Nothing happens until he confronts Melusine publicly later in the narrative. A chastened Raymond, realising that he has broken his oath to Melusine because he believed his brother's accusations, throws the Earl out of his house. Raymond expels his brother from the family circle, publicly breaking the bond between them and diminishing the Earl's public reputation by calling him false in front of Raymond's household.

The stasis does not last long. The situation is brought to a head by the conflict between another set of brothers, this time Geoffrey and Fromont, sons of Raymond and Melusine. Fromont has refused to become a knight like his brothers and has made his profession as a monk at the provincial abbey of Maillers. Geoffrey's reaction to his brother's profession is violent and hostile. In a burst of virulently anti-monastic rage Geoffrey blames the monks for enchanting his brother. He rushes to the abbey, confronts his brother, and shuts him and all the monks together in the chapterhouse before burning the building to the ground. The reactions of Melusine and of Raymond to the news that one of their sons has killed the other are quite different and the news triggers the final rupture of their marriage. When Raymond hears of Fromont's death and Geoffrey's responsibility, he confronts his wife calling her 'serpent' and accusing her of demonic associations. He

exclaims, 'ha! Serpent! Thy line in lif no good shall do!', thus confronting Melusine

verbally with the fact that he has broken the oath he made to her as repayment for her help

in concealing Amery's death (l.3548).[87] The text emphasises the loudness of his voice and

the public nature of his declaration, 'and afore all he said with uois hautain' (l.3547).[88] This

has parallels to his verbal assault on his brother's accusations regarding Melusine earlier in

the text, which establishes the impression that Raymond is filled with uncontrolled rage, a

quality that is singularly unmasculine. The description of his behaviour here only augments

that impression. In contrast, when Melusine learns of Geoffrey's actions her response is

measured, controlled, carefully weighing divine providence against the apparent violence of

what Geoffrey has done. It is the male half of their partnership, Raymond, who is rash and

uncontrolled. It is Raymond's inability to hold his tongue that eventually destroys the

covenant between him and Melusine and consequently his own good fortune.

A husband was permitted to chastise his wife, even to the point of striking her if she

was persistently disobedient. This convention is attested to by a section of *The Book of the*

Knight of the Tower. This text, which was printed by Caxton in 1484, was intended to

provide rules to govern female behaviour, but it is revealing about what was expected of

men as well. The text relates the story of a woman who talks back to her husband in public,

and ignores his commands to be silent. In response he strikes her with his fist and then

kicks her in the face, breaking her nose and leaving her permanently disfigured, a

consequence that is presented as just reward for her behaviour.[89] However, despite the

shocking appearance of this behaviour to our sensibilities, this was not a licence for

indiscriminate violence towards wives. The text clearly sets up particular circumstances in

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[87] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.124.
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p.35.

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which physical chastisement is justified. Firstly, there is a heavy emphasis placed on the public nature of the wife's actions, and the consequent shame on the husband through the force of public opinion, '[she] answerd to her husbond so noiously and shamefully to fore the peple / that he bicam angry and felle to see hym self so rewlyd to fore the peple / that he had therfor shame'.[90] Secondly, it is made clear that the wife repeatedly ignores her husband's entreaties to be silent. What is depicted here is not an ideal situation in marital relations but a last resort to restore the husband's rule. Ideally, a good wife should 'suffer and hold her in pees / and leue the haultayn [loud, violent] langage to her husbond and lord'.[91]

This would appear to justify outbursts such as Raymond's in principle, as it is the wife's place to be silent and the husband's to speak. However, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* does provide us with another model of harmonious marriage in which the wife may comment on her husband's behaviour, within limits:

> When she shall fynd hym alone and tyme / … she may wel reprehende hym and aduyse hym in shewyng curtoysly that he had wrong and vnright with hym / And yf he be a man resonable / he shal conne her thanke.[92]

The text also provides the example of Queen Esther, who does not respond to her husband's rage but answers him calmly. The nature of Melusine's advice to Raymond, although it is public, is depicted in a way that fits closely with this model. She speaks 'wisely and sagely', and her speech is intended to slake Raymond's ire and emphasise the possibility of restitution for Geoffrey's misdeeds through confession and penance (l.3536, ll.3522-3535).[93] Although she may have been unwise to broach this discussion in public, the

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[90] *Ibid.*
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] *Ibid.*
[93] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.124.

narrative clearly presents Raymond as being in the wrong here 'malice and full angry…/ reson deperted tho from hym' (ll.3537, 3539).[94] Husbands may have had a right to 'haultayn langage' in certain circumstances, but Raymond's response is presented here as wildly disproportionate to the provcation offered.[95]

Melusine's lament after Raymond's outburst focuses heavily on his habit of uncontrolled or false speech. She berates his 'fals vntrew spech' and his 'fals tonges unmesurabelnesse'. He is 'fals for-sworn in ded', 'full of mermerhed', and a 'lesingmonger [liar] knyght' (ll.3593-3594, 3602-3604).[96] She predicts the decline of his family line and reminds him that it is his inability to control his tongue that has destroyed everything:

> Ys only by your **dedes**, sir Raymounde,
> Als by your **labbyng tonges iongling**,
> Ye shall lesse your loue for your **large speking** (ll.3750-3752).[97]

Le Roman de Parthenay asserts that Raymond loses Melusine because of his 'grant genglerie', which the translator correctly renders as the English 'jangling' (*Le Romn de Parthenay*, l.4077; *Romans of Partenay*, l.3751).[98] Jangling referred to idle talk. It could be used more narrowly to refer to malicious gossiping or slander, boasting or grumbling.[99] The English translator adds the word 'labbyng', meaning babbling or big-mouthed, as an intensifier.[100] Both adjectives were used in association with negative descriptions of women. For example, Chaucer's Merchant says of his wife, 'of hir tonge a labbyng shrewe is she' (l.2428). Langland imagines gossiping taking place in a nunnery: 'I was þe

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[94] *Ibid.*
[95] Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p.35.
[96] *Ibid.*, p.126. This line is the only quotation for 'murmerhed' in the *MED*, which defines it as discontent, rebelliousness or complaint but 'murmur' is defined as a continuous noise, e.g. murmuring, grumbling, muttering.
[97] *Ibid.*, p.131.
[98] Morris, *Bilingual Edition*, pp.324-5, Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.131.
[99] *MED*: **jangling(e)**, ger.
[100] *MED*: **labben**, v.

priouresses potagere … And made hem ioutes of iangelynge þat dame Iohanne was a

bastard' (*Passus* V, ll.155-6) [101] It is not Raymond's breaking of the oath not to see

Melusine on a Saturday that causes problems, but rather his decision to confront Melusine

verbally about what he has seen. Throughout the romance Melusine is self-controlled and

measured, Raymond is precipitous, rash, and loose-tongued, but strangely passive in the

romance. His 'dedes', the conduct by which the worth of the male romance protagonist

would ordinarily be measured, are nothing more than 'iongling'.[102]

The romance displays an interest in the power of speech and its proper use,

particularly the speech of its male characters. Sometimes this involves men not speaking

when they should. The Earl of Poitiers fails to speak out to prevent his cousin marrying the

unknown Melusine. Raymond never discloses publicly that he was responsible for his

uncle's death. At other times, characters speak when they should hold their tongue, for

example Raymond's outburst to Melusine. The loose talking of the Earl of Forest triggered

Raymond's precipitous oath-breaking; the importance of holding one's tongue and

preserving a good public reputation are underlined by the ignominious nature of the Earl's

death. First Raymond throws him out of his house, publicly breaking the bond between

himself and his brother and diminishing the Earl's public reputation by calling him false in

front of Raymond's household. The narrative mentions at this point that the Earl's death

was 'huge shame to vew' (l.2861).[103] Later in the text, it is made clear exactly how the Earl

dies. Geoffrey, the son of Raymond and Melusine, enters his uncle's hall in a murderous

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[101]Chaucer, 'Epilogue to the Merchant's Tale', *RC*, p.168; A.V.C. Schmidt, (ed.) *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 2nd edition (London, 1995), p.69

[102] This is particularly striking in light of the argument made by Sandy Bardsley that argumentative jangling could be seen as masculine because it presented speaking as a deed, but that idle babbling chatter was gendered feminine. Raymond's speaking seems to fall into the first category, but Melusine's description of it as 'labbying' imbues it with overtones of the second (Bardsley, 'Men's Voices in Late Medieval England' pp.163-164, 169-170.).

[103] Skeat (ed.), *Romans of Partenay*, p.102.

rage. Although he finds the Earl in the midst of his household, none step forward to protect

him. The Earl flees to a tower, hotly pursued by Geoffrey. The Earl's cowardice is implied

by his flight in pure terror – we are told that he sweats and trembles in dread. It is clear that

this Earl is quite different from Amery, with whom we began the narrative and 'off whom

gret talking men held hie and bas / Lovid of all, cherished in eche place' (ll.4-5).[104] His

insufficiency as a lord is implied by the unwillingness or inability of his 'mayne' to defend

him (ll.4887-4939).[105] In the end he is killed not by Geoffrey, but by slipping and falling

from a window of the tower. This is a grotesque mirror of the moment of Melusine's

transformation. We are told that Melusine 'lepte the fenestre vppon' (l.3823) and then leapt

through it, changing into a serpent.[106] Compare the Earl who,

> At a fenestre lepte in that affray
> Vppon the hedde, failing foote that day;
> Fro that place glint þat full hy tho was,
> Don vppon the Roch A fall gan purchas. (ll.4932-4935).[107]

The text tells us that the Earl dies 'mischeuously… / With dolourous wo And full heuy

shame', purchasing his own death 'by hys owne gret folay' (ll.4937, 4939).[108] The Earl's

inability to control his tongue and his willingness to sow discord are presented as a direct

cause of his shameful and public death. This incident also highlights the way in which the

narrative is more focused on male than on female transgression. A nephew is once again

partially responsible for the death of his uncle, echoing Raymond's involvement in his

uncle's death, the transgression that began the narrative. The son cannot escape the

transgressions of his parents, but it is his *father's* transgression that Geoffrey is destined to

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[104] *Ibid.*, p.8.
[105] *Ibid.*, pp.169-170.
[106] *Ibid.*, p.133.
[107] *Ibid.*, p.170.
[108] *Ibid.*

repeat, not his mother's, despite the fact that Raymond's role in the death of his uncle is never publicly revealed during the narrative. Melusine's serpent's tail is visually arresting, but it is Raymond's transgression, not hers, which destroys the family. She emphasises the fact that, if Raymond had kept his oath, she would have died a natural death as a Christian woman, her ultimate goal (ll.3620-3628).[109]

The romance does everything possible to play down Melusine's otherness and to present her as a Christian wife and mother. For the majority of the text, Melusine is not attributed any monstrous qualities at all. Even after her transformation she is able to return to Lusignan and temporarily regain her human form to nurse her two youngest children. At the end of the romance, her sister Melior makes it clear that Melusine's serpent's tail is a consequence of her mother's curse and not an indicator of her hybrid fairy / human heritage. The tail was a 'gift', given to Melusine by her mother, before which she was 'a maydyn ful fare' (ll.5595-6).[110] When she meets Raymond in the forest, she emphasises her Christianity by listing the articles of faith. This assertion by a fairy of allegiance to Christian doctrine is not unique to this romance, as it occurs also in *Partonope of Blois*:

> Demythe me not to be an euell þynge
> That shulde be crafte yowre sowle In synne brynge …
> My lefe ys fully in Crystes lore,
> And euer haþe ben seethe I was bore (ll.1883-4, 1889-90).[111]

These assertions seem to be an attempt to counter the association of supernatural female characters with demonic influences, such as is found in *Richard Coeur de Lion,* where Richard's mother, unable to bear the presence of the host at mass, flies out through the roof

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[109] *Ibid.*, p.127.
[110] *Ibid.*, p.192.
[111] A. Trampe Bodtker, *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois* (London, 1912), pp.53-54.

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of the church at the moment of the transubstantiation (ll.210-235).[112] A hybrid between

woman and serpent might have demonic associations based on the narrative of the fall.

Claude Lecouteux notes that in the art of the period the serpent in the Garden of Eden was

often represented as having a human head, or being half-human and half-serpent.[113] The

hybrid satanic figure also appears in Lydgate's *Troy Book,* where Satan takes on the 'chere

… loke, and countenaunce / Like a mayde … / In his deceytis raþer for to spede' (ll.5889-

5892).[114] Dyan Elliot argues that by the thirteenth century, 'the conviction that supernatural

creatures (now designated as demons) sexually consorted with humans was generally

maintained in learned circles'.[115] Given her supernatural origins and hybrid human-serpent

appearance in the bath, it would have been very possible for the author of the romance to

have presented the character of Melusine as some sort of succubus, but in fact there are no

suggestions that she may be diabolical in nature until halfway through the six thousand line

narrative. Although it is clear that she has supernatural origins when she marries Raymond,

her actions on his behalf are presented as benign. Even when Melusine is on the verge of

her transformation she is presented as the bearer of privileged information, when she

reveals that Geoffrey's burning of the monastery was divinely ordained to punish the

misgovernance and lechery of the monks, and that their family can rebuild the abbey larger

and fairer than it was before (ll.3519-3522, 3669-3673).[116]

     Although Melusine's transgression is physically written on her body, in a way that

Raymond's is not, it is Raymond's transgressions that set in motion the chain of events that

leads to the destruction of this family. First, his involvement in his uncle's death and

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[112] K. Brunner, *Der Mittelenglische versroman uber Richard Lowenherz* (Leipzig, 1913), p.91.

[113] C. Lecouteux, *Mélusine et le Chevalier au Cygne* (Paris, 1982), p.55.

[114] H. Bergen, (ed.) *Lydgate's Troy Book, Part I,* (London, 1906), p.313.

[115] D. Elliott, *Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999), p.30.

[116] Skeat, *Romans of Partenay,* pp.122-23, 128-9.

subsequent concealment of it, then his unreasoning rage and willingness to believe his

brother's slanders that lead him to break his oath to Melusine, and finally his inability to

hold his tongue when in front of his household he accuses Melusine of being a serpent. He

is presented as a faithless, volatile character in a way that directly conflicts with the

presentation of Melusine as the sage, forward-thinking head of the family. She speaks

'wisely and sagely', whereas Raymond is described as being full of 'malice / And full

angry' (ll.3536-37).[117] Melusine's lament to Raymond after he accuses her uses the word

'fals' or variations of it nine times in two stanzas to describe Raymond's behaviour

(ll.3592-3605).[118] The truly transgressive character in *The Romans of Partenay* is not

Melusine but her husband, who has destroyed all his good fortune through his 'labbyng

tonges jongling' (l.3751).[119]

Conclusion

 In the texts I discussed in Chapter 3, women were shown to be able to manipulate public

opinion successfully and use their connections to the community to improve their position,

often at the expense of their husbands who were left isolated and powerless. Women were

consistently associated with jangling and an inability to keep the secrets of the household.

A text such as *The Romans of Partenay* turns these stereotypes on their head. In this

romance, the male character is the centre of public speculation and talk, but he cannot bend

public fame to his advantage in the way that the female characters in the *Gospelles* and the

Fyftene Joyes did. Instead, he becomes a victim of attacks on his masculinity for his

inability to govern his wife and household. He is presented as faithless, false, impulsive,

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[117] *Ibid.*, p.124.
[118] *Ibid.*, p.126.
[119] *Ibid.*, p.131.

and lacking self-control, all characteristics more often attributed to women in medieval anti-feminist literature. This is particularly striking because his wife is presented with the 'masculine' virtues of self-control, moderation and is presented as the prime mover in their family's dynastic ambitions. *The Romans of Partenay* plays with gender stereotypes in order to feminise its central male character, presenting a world in which anxiety regarding the ability properly to govern the household and police female sexual behaviour is an important factor in the gender identity of late medieval men.

Conclusion: Gender and Transgression in the Late Medieval English Household

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the household for late medieval culture. Vance Smith has written that 'its ubiquity and centrality … make it an important and rich conceptual topic: the household is equivalent to the self, the memory, the family, the entire realm, the impetuses of life itself.[1] I share this conviction that the household was central to how late medieval people thought about themselves and their relationship to the world around them. It was the fundamental unit of organisation in economic, political and administrative life. As such, the ideology governing the late medieval English household was an extremely important element of contemporary culture. David Starkey has gone so far as to brand the period from 1350 to 1550 'the age of the household'.[2]

The house existed as a physical place where people lived and worked, but the household was also a group of people (the *familia* or 'meinie').[3] However, the household was significant for more than its material realities. There was an ideological concept of 'the household' that existed outside the physical reality of the house in its many diverse manifestations in medieval England. My research has shown how the ideology of the household was used to articulate ideas of acceptable gendered behaviour in fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century England. Studying how the household is used in medieval texts can provide valuable cultural insights.

My work is part of a growing critical field, as the household has been an important focus of attention in recent years. A number of essay collections have been published in the

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[1] Smith, *Arts of Possession*, xiv.
[2] D. Starkey, 'The Age of the Household: Politicis, Society and the Arts, ca. 1350-ca.1550', in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. S. Medcalf, pp.225-290 (p.225).
[3] *MED*: **hŏus-hōld**, (n.); **meinē**, (n.); **familiēr**, (adj).

last decade that take the household as a major object of interest.[4] These collections have

been remarkable for their interdisciplinarity and have paid attention to both the physical

environment of the house and its ideological weight. Topics of interest include the legal and

socio-economic construction of the household, marriage and affective relationships

between household members, the influence of 'domesticity' on devotional practices, and

the struggle to impose order on the household. Scholars have also begun to address the

question of the gendered ideology of the household, in particular as it relates to larger

issues of civic governance.[5]

As well as the growth of publications directly about the late medieval household,

several shifts in scholarship have contributed to a growth in interest in related topics. It is

now understood that ideas about the household had influence far outside the walls of the

house. The household was used to conceptualise space we previously thought of as

institutional or communal, such as the parish church. The home was also important as the

place of initial religious instruction.[6] Research on medieval reading practices, such as the

seminal work of Joyce Coleman, has positioned communal reading as the norm, rather than

silent, private reading, meaning that the household needs to be considered as an important

space in which people experienced texts being read aloud. This has been supported by the

surge in work on what Julia Boffey and John Thompson have dubbed 'the household

miscellany'.[7] Many household miscellanies contain texts that were previously little

regarded or studied. The conceptual space of the household in which they were read has

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[4] These include: Carlier and Soens (eds.), *The Household in Late Medieval Cities*; Beattie, Maslakovic and Rees Jones (eds.), *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe c.850-c.1550*; Davis, Müller, and Rees Jones (eds.) *Love, Marriage and Family Ties in the Late Middle Ages;* Mulder-Bakker and Wogan-Browne (eds.), *Household, Women, and Christianities*; and Kowaleski and Goldberg (eds.), *Medieval Domesticity.*
[5] Cf. Goldberg, 'Masters and Men'; *id.* 'Pigs and Prostitutes'; *id.*'Coventry's 'Lollard' Programme'; McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity', *ead. Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*; Neal, *The Masculine Self*; Riddy,'Authority and Intimacy'; Salih 'At Home; Out of the House'.
[6] Cf. Sutcliffe, 'The cult of St. Sitha'; French, Gibbs and Kümin (eds.), *The Parish in English Life*; French, *The People of the Parish*; Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars.*
[7] Boffey and Thompson, 'Anthologies and Miscellanies'.

provided a focus for a growing body of manuscript-based work that re-evaluates the household miscellany as an important production and reception context for medieval texts.[8] The rise in interest in household miscellanies has powered a corresponding rise in interest in the household itself, what households consisted of, and what it was like to read books in them.[9]

The various strands of scholarship that I have outlined above have in common an interest in the house, both the domestic space and the household as a sub-unit of wider political, economic, and institutional structures. The household has been repositioned as an important ideological framework for the construction of the self and the articulation of relations between self and community, and one of the major environments in which texts were being read. I have pushed this further, both by exploring the concept of the household across a range of generically diverse texts and by using the theoretical concept of transgression as a means to elucidate the late medieval obsession with the crossing of household boundaries. Now that I have established the centrality of the household both to late medieval culture and to recent academic investigation of that culture, the following section outlines the reasons why trangression is the ideal concept to use in order to throw light on the cultural preoccupations of late medieval texts about the household.

In my introduction I referenced the recent work of Ashley Tauchert, who argues that transgression was an 'historically and culturally specific mode of theory, the anguished expression of an unresolved post-Christianity'.[10] If Tauchert's argument were correct, this would raise questions about the validity of using transgression as a way to read late medieval texts, which were produced over five centuries ago in a culture in which

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[8] Cf. Meale and Boffey, 'Selecting the Text'; Fletcher and Harris, 'A Northampton Poetic Miscellany'; Meale, 'Romance and Its Anti-Type?; Shuffleton (ed.), *Codex Ashmole 61*.
[9] Cf. Rees Jones and Riddy, 'The Bolton Hours'; McDonald, 'A York Primer and its Alphabet'.
[10] Tauchert, *Against Transgression*, p.105.

Christianity was integral to social, political, and institutional life. Although our idea of 'transgression' may be heavily dependent on various modern theories of transgression that were unknown to the medieval audience, this should not prevent transgression from being a useful tool with which to read medieval texts. Paul Strohm acknowledges that the use of modern theory has the effect of disclosing the gap that always exists between the cultural background of the critic and the medieval context of a text's production.[11] Judicious use of concepts like transgression, developed through modern theoretical writing, can unsettle the status quo and suggest new ways of reading medieval texts by focusing attention on things that might have escaped notice in more traditional interpretations.[12]

Transgression is about the crossing of boundaries. The anthropologist Mary Douglas argued that boundaries are of vital interest because they indicate the taboos that govern a society – they tell us what is important to a particular culture.[13] Rather than being peripheral, boundaries and margins are central to an understanding of the ideological underpinnings of a society. If boundaries and margins are understood as important sites of cultural meaning, attention to transgression, i.e. the crossing of boundaries, can provide a valuable lens through which to examine texts in order to make arguments about cultural issues. This argument underlines the value of studying what kinds of behaviour a culture labels as transgressive, since it is these examples of stigmatised behaviour that will indicate what rules govern that culture.

As a consequence of my caveats regarding the importance of context for any understanding of transgression, the fundamentals of my approach focus heavily on the specific context of production and reception for each of the texts I studied. I approach each text on a case-by-case basis. I determined on an approach that combined the concept of the

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[11] P. Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis, 2000), p.111.
[12] *Ibid.*, p.111, p.201.
[13] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp.49, 117-118 and 150-152.

household with issues around boundaries and transgression. Since the household was, as we have seen, one of the fundamental structures for late medieval social and cultural organisation, and boundaries are, following Douglas, a site where pressing cultural concerns and taboos become more visible, this approach was likely to highlight those issues that were of particular concern to medieval audiences,

The decision to focus on the contexts of textual production led me to develop a specific methodology to address these needs. In the introduction, I outlined the debate among historians regarding whether the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries were a period particularly concerned with ideas of order and governance, in which gender roles hardened and the social and economic role of women became more restricted. The majority of this work relied on highly focused case studies of particular regions or towns, which were then used to argue a case for continuity or change.[14] This thesis does something profoundly different. Rather than proposing a diachronic narrative regarding how ideas about gender changed over time, I have taken a synchronic approach that explores the circulation of tropes between different types of texts and genres. Modern disciplinary and generic boundaries are sometimes unhelpful because they may separate texts that circulated in the same cultural milieu and even in the same manuscript. The interdisciplinary and manuscript-based approach I have adopted here has allowed me to draw productive connections between texts that are not usually considered in relation to each other. This thesis has shown that tropes do not stay within the neat disciplinary boxes in which we tend to study them. My methodology allows me to follow these tropes as they migrate promiscuously across textual boundaries. Thus we can see anxiety about the hypersexualised clerical interloper surfacing in lyrics and fabliaux-like tales, but also

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[14] Cf. Roper, *The Holy Household*; Goldberg, *Women. Work, and life cycle*; Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide'; Jones and Zell, 'Bad Conversation?: Gender and Social Control'.

influencing the presentation of malefactors in court cases such as the Nottingham borough court case I discussed in my introduction or the records of clerical incontinence in fifteenth-century London, discussed in Chapter 2. What is even more arresting is that texts seem to be written in anticipation of an audience who was *aware* of these tropes. For example, in the Nottingham case, John Bilby presents himself as the wronged husband and Robert Mampton as the cleric who abuses his position to commit adultery, characters more familiar from the fabliaux. This awareness even exists within the fiction, as the characters in *The Tale of the Basin* are presented as being well aware of the generic function played by a man who is called 'Sir John'.[15]

These are particular examples, but they serve to illustrate my methodology as a whole. To use a modern concept such as transgression and simply to impose this indiscriminately on medieval texts runs the risk of misunderstanding or distorting those texts. However, using forms of cultural analysis on medieval texts also has huge advantages. It can help us form arguments about attitudes, ideology, cultural resonances, and anxieties that cannot be reached using more quantifiable methods and sources. A poem such as *The Tale of the Basin* is a cultural artefact that was produced in a particular time and place. It is connected to generic antecedents such as the fabliaux, but it is also connected to the records of the agitation of fifteenth-century civic authorities concerning incontinent priests. It needs to be read with reference to both. The anxieties that inform depictions of the household in fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century texts are contingent on the time and place in which they were produced. These texts need to be situated in relation

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[15] Cf. N.J. Menuge, 'A Few Home Truths: The Medieval Mother as Guardian in Romance and Law', in N.J. Menuge (ed.), *Medieval Women and the Law* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.105-124. Menuge argues that a reflexive relationship exists between the legal narratives found in church court records on wardship, and the narratives on wardship found in romances.

to the society and culture of the period, but they also need to be read as growing out of a long tradition of comic misogynous literature.

I set out to investigate how the concept of the household was deployed in late medieval texts as a vehicle for articulating ideas about gender and gender roles. I used the concept of transgression as a tool to highlight anxieties about these issues that were focused around household boundaries. I found that the texts that I have discussed were obsessed with talking about the household and that this talk often focused on how the house should be organised and kept orderly. The preoccupation with well-ordered households stems in one sense from the position of the household as the foundation of local government. If the household was disordered, it was feared that this could spread to other households and so upset the government of the entire community. The household was presented as much more permeable than was desirable. However, the fact that these anxieties appear to have been particularly acute in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries lends weight to the arguments that historians have made that this period demonstrated a surge of concern with maintaining order.

In the ideal household each person had a proper place. The head, usually depicted as male, and his wife governed the house responsibly, overseeing both the productivity and the moral well-being of their dependents, who included children and servants. This arrangement functioned as a partnership, but for proper order to be satisfied it must always be an unequal one, with the husband governing his wife. The household head should be aware of the movements of his dependants at all times and curtail any behaviour that threatened the peace and good order of the household. Of course, this ideal of the orderly household was an unattainable fantasy; medieval writers knew it. In order to function, late medieval households depended on connections to the wider community. The fear represented in the texts I have discussed was that these necessary interactions could be an

avenue to introduce disorder into the house. Agents such as the sexualised cleric discussed in chapters 1 and 2, or the intrusive gossips and relatives of chapter 3, or the force of public fame articulated by family and neighbours in chapter 4, could all throw the house into uproar by draining its goods, troubling the relationship between husband and wife, and encouraging sexual misbehaviour among its servants.

When the household was troubled, it was often because its boundaries were being violated or to put it another way, transgressed. Movement across boundaries was, of course, necessary for the household to maintain its economic productivity and social standing, but it also laid bare the reality that the hermetically-sealed, perfectly ordered, ideal household did not really exist. The image of this perfect household was juxtaposed with nightmare visions of households out of control, which served as a breeding ground for transgressive behaviour that could then infect the surrounding community.

The household is used in the texts I have discussed as the locus of a set of concerns regarding gender. Transgression has two main senses in modern parlance – boundary-crossing (physical transgression) and rule-breaking (behavioural transgression). What is striking about late medieval texts is that these two senses are intertwined. Behaviour that breaks the rules governing appropriate gendered behaviour is often figured as transgression of the boundaries of the house. The opposite is also true -- movement across the boundaries of the house is depicted as implying transgression in a behavioural sense. There is an obsession with controlling movement in and out of the house (particularly as it relates to illicit sexual behaviour) and with the control of speech. The household serves as a prism through which anxieties concerning social control, appropriate gendered behaviour, and the relationship of the individual to a wider community can be articulated. For the medieval audience, physical transgression and behavioural transgression go together.

My main conclusions, then, are as follows. The household is central to understanding medieval ideas about gender and the relationship between the individual and the wider community. Movement across the boundaries of the household is used to articulate anxieties about gender, with physical movement often being connected with transgressive behaviour that flouts normative gender roles. The two primary poles around which this anxiety is focused are those of transgressive sexuality and speech. The domestic setting is presented as the most appropriate for the bourgeois woman, particularly the wife. When she roams outside this setting, this often comes with a suspicion of sexual transgression. Proper governance by the household head is vital, otherwise disorder can spread and the household can be subject to criticism and loss of standing in the community. The married man is the appropriate household governor, but in order to be effective, he must first master himself. In order to secure an orderly house, he must be temperate and self-controlled, but firm in curtailing the misbehaviour of others. He must police the boundaries of the house, making sure that visitors such as the priest or the gossips do not upset its smooth functioning, and that excursions outwards by his dependents, such as visits to friends and neighbours, attendance at local gatherings such as ales and fairs, and pilgrimages, do not have the effect of introducing disorder into the house.[16]

The focus on the responsibility of the male household governor does have a misogynous element to it; situations where male authority is lacking are always depicted as problematic. None of the betrayed maidens' laments mention a father or master to the young woman. The only figure of authority is the 'dame' whose intervention comes too late to prevent the young woman's pregnancy. The husband of *The Tale of the Basin* is mastered by his wife who squanders his goods and cuckolds him with the priest who enjoys

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[16] In *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter'* the young woman is even cautioned to beware of going out of the house for valid economic purposes such as trading at market ('Ne go thou not to no merket / To sell thy thryft, bewer of itte', ll.64-65, in Salisbury, *Trials and Joys of Marriage*).

the hospitality of the home. He is reduced to using magical means to restore the proper

balance of authority. In the *Gospelles*, the narrator repeatedly tries to impose his authority

on the women by mocking their talk, but the effort is undermined by his isolation from

other men and his implication in their project of rebutting anti-feminist works. In the

Fyftene Joyes the feckless husband is constantly downtrodden by his demanding wife, her

family, and her friends, who combine to ruin and humiliate him, often dragging the whole

household to ruin in the process. *The Romans of Partenay* presents the most successful

female-dominated household of them all. Raymond's partnership with Melusine allows him

to become successful and prosperous. However, in the end, this household also falls into

ruin when those around it question the unorthodox arrangement between husband and wife.

Their marriage is built on a foundation of deceit and transgression. The message of these

texts seems to be that in order to be successful, each person in the household must know his

or her place and perform within the boundaries of sanctioned gender roles. A weak husband

or a disobedient wife has the potential to upset the household's proper functioning. Anxiety

about household disorder and gender transgression clusters around examples of boundary

crossing, with the clerical interloper a focus of particular concern. The fabliau tropes of

wily clerk or predatory priest, weak or gullible husband, and disobedient, adulterous wife

have a currency across many different types of texts from this period. They are not limited

to fabliaux-derived tales such as those of Chaucer.

My exploration of the ideology of the household has also demonstrated that the

motif of boundary-crossing was, for medieval people, a convenient way to articulate

anxieties about the (im)proper workings of normative paradigms of gender. They had clear

ideas about who should be in the house and the household, who should be kept outside, and

the correct behaviour required of each household member in order to ensure a properly

functioning, orderly whole. The methodology I use to explore how transgression is used to

interrogate institutional structures such as the household has wider applications beyond the specific medieval texts that I discuss. Throughout this thesis I have emphasised the importance of context when considering transgression. In order to gauge the 'trangressiveness' of a text it is necessary to locate it within the conventions of a particular genre and to consider who might have read and in what ways it might have been read. We need to be historically aware when using the idea of transgression to read past cultures and to remain sensitive to the particular contexts of a text's production – historical, physical, generic, cultural, and social.

My approach produced results that were often different from what I had initially expected and which opened up fresh insights into texts. For example, I approached *The Romans of Partenay* expecting to find a transgressive woman, and instead became fascintated by how the depiction of the central male character engaged with normative ideas of masculinity and reputation. This attention to context has often been lacking in scholarship on 'transgression', which can treat it as a monolithic concept to be used to read texts of any period or locale with little attention to their particular circumstances of production. For example, it is apparent from Tauchert's denunciation of transgression that her idea of the concept is rooted in a very particular manifestation of it, based on the 'free love' ethos of the 1960s that, Tauchert argues, equated sexual promiscuity with freedom from authority.[17] It should be apparent that when talking about transgression in relation to medieval texts, we are not talking about anything of the sort. Transgression is not valued positively by the medieval audience, as evidence of individual rebellion against authority, but negatively, as a dangerous threat to the good order of the community. Larry Scanlon has argued that medieval studies is especially suited to the 'attention to the material conditions of production, reception and use of cultural artefacts' that has been an integral

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[17] Tauchert, *Against Transgression*, p.62.

part of cultural studies, since medievalists have always had to be concerned with the specifics of manuscript production and circulation Medievalists still have much to add to the discussion of transgression and the discipline of cultural studies, both of which have been largely focused on post-medieval texts. Transgression is far from being an exhausted topic when it comes to the Middle Ages. In fact medieval texts have the potential to revitalise a field that has been heavily focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature.

The household ideology that I have outlined in this thesis is one that has often been described as distinctly 'early modern'. Early modernists have claimed anxiety about order, concerns about gender and particularly the control of women, and an emphasis on the importance of household governance for their own period.[18] It is significant that work of this type rarely ventures before the mid-sixteenth century in order to confirm the claims that this ideology is not medieval. A growing body of scholarship, particularly the work of Jeremy Goldberg, Marjorie McIntosh, Shannon McSheffrey and Felicity Riddy, and the essay collections on the household I mentioned earlier, have presented ample evidence that concern with order was flourishing in the fifteenth century and that a distinctive bourgeois ideology of the household was developing decades prior to when Lyndal Roper noted it in 1530s and '40s Augsburg.[19] The texts I discuss range, in broad terms, from the early decades of the fifteenth century to c.1530.[20] The exploration of the literary period c.1500-c.1530 is valuable in itself, as scholarship produced by medievalists has tended to focus most analysis on the period prior to 1500, while that by early modernists remains focused

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[18] Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold'; A. Shepard, 'Honesty, Worth and Gender in Early Modern England, 1560-1640' in H. French and J. Barry (eds.), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp.87-105.
[19] Roper, *The Holy Household*, p.31.
[20] The earliest manuscript I discuss (Sloane 2593) is early fifteenth century. The texts at the later end of my chronological spectrum are Whitford's *Werke for Householders* (printed in c.1530 and again in 1537) and *A complaynte of them that be to soone maryed* (1535).

post-1550. There have been some notable exceptions in recent years, and scholars are

beginning to attempt the difficult task of straddling the medieval / early-modern boundary,

emphasising the continuity between the two periods.[21]

I see this type of research as one of the fruitful avenues for future work on the

ideology of the household and gender. I have argued for a particular ideology of the

household flourishing in fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century England, but is it the same

as the ideology that early modernists have identified for later decades? This is of particular

interest since scholars have argued that the crossover between devotion and domesticity

was a disinctive feature of late medieval spirituality, but the areas of religious practice that

showed the influence of domesticity were precisely those that came under most attack from

reformers – saints' cults, images, and relics, etc. Did these changes affect how people

conceived of the household? Were there attempts to redraw the boundaries between

domestic and institutional space that had been transgressed?

The second possibility for future research is an expansion of the field of interest. I

have largely focused on the ideology that governs the lay household of a conjugal couple

plus children and servants, and particularly at the bourgeois and gentry levels of society. I

have paid little attention to other types of households, where communal living rather than

organisation around a conjugal unit is the norm, such as religious houses and noble

households, although I did touch on the university environment in chapter 1. Did elements

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[21] This trend is surveyed in Matthews, 'The Medieval Invasion of Early Modern England'. James Simpson argues that the first half of the sixteenth century saw significant changes in cultural practice, but that aspects of the medieval lingered until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (J. Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution: The Oxford English Literary History, vol.2. 1350-1547* (Oxford, 2002), pp.558 & 560).Gordon McMullan and David Mathews have edited a collection of essays that explore the ways in which the 'early modern' was constructed by the legacy of 'the medieval' (G. McMullan and D. Matthews (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007)). The collection of essays entitled *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* claims that it 'fights hard against the stereotypes that might encourage … division between medieval and Renaissance modes of thinking', and presents itself as 'an exercise in redrawing historical categories' (B. Cummings and J. Simpson (eds.), *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (Oxford, 2010), p.2)

of the household ideology I have outlined in this thesis operate in these environments, or did they subscribe to something different or merely a modified version of the same?

One of the distinctive elements of this thesis has been my attention to a body of texts, including lyrics, romance, and anti-feminist texts, that were extremely popular in their own time but have attracted little sustained critical attention. My thesis has been developed based on my analysis of mostly non-canonical material from the fifteenth- and early-sixteenth centuries, but I have connected these texts to more familiar material where necessary: the Harley lyrics, the fabliaux, the mystery plays, and the work of Chaucer. There is no reason that my approach could not be extended to useful effect to open up readings of more canonical texts, a process that I have begun outside this thesis with some work on how the ideology of the household is deployed in *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

As well as turning some much needed attention to hitherto largely neglected texts, I have developed a discursive framework for thinking about how the crossing of boundaries reflects concerns about gender and threats to the well-ordered household. This framework is interdisciplinary and focuses on narrative sources, both conventionally literary and conventionally historical. By focusing on how tropes circulate between different kinds of sources, and how narratives are constructed, I have been able to provide valuable insight into the cultural underpinnings of late medieval society, and the ideological preoccupations of that society with order, boundaries, and anxieties about gendered behaviour. Smith argues that 'the romance … permits its audience the luxury of staging the deep ambiguities, the failures of demarcation, the anxiety over limits, that underlie the household'.[22] This thesis has demonstrated that this ideological potential extends far beyond the romance and can be found across a wide variety of texts. The late medieval English household was a

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[22] Smith, *Arts of Possession*, xvii.

potent imaginative space, through which medieval people could articulate their anxiety

about gendered behaviour and the dangerous potential for boundaries to be crossed.

Appendix A - The Betrayed Maidens' Laments

Table 1: Middle English Lyrics, in female voice, ending with pregnancy and abandonment.					
IMEV Number	First Line of burden	First Line of Stanza 1	Robbins Title	Greene Number	Manuscript (Short title)
225	Rybbe ne rele ne spynne yc ne may	Al this day ic han sou[ght]	The Serving Maid's Holiday	452	Caius MS 383 / 603, p.41.
377	Kyrie, so kyrie	As I went on Yol Day in owre processyon	Jolly Jankin	457	Sloane MS 2593, f.34r.
1849	Ales, ales, the wyle!	Ladd Y the daunce a Myssomur Day	The Midsummer's Day Dance	453	Caius MS 383 / 603, p.41
3409	I haue forsworne hit whil I life	The last tyme I the wel woke	A Betrayed Maiden's Lament	456	CUL MS F.f 5.48, f.114v.
3594	A, dere God, qwat I am fayn	This enther day I mete a clerke	The Wily Clerk	454	St John's MS S.54, f.2v.
1589.5 (*Suppl. IMEV*)	n/a –no burden	In wyldernes / Ther founde I Besse	n/a	n/a – not carol.	B.L. MS Addit. 5665, f.14r.(Ritson's MS), BL MS Egerton 3002, f.2v.

Table 2: **Examples of macaronic or Latin lyrics, in female voice, which end with pregnancy and abandonment.**					
IMEV **number**	**First line of burden**	**First line of Stanza 1**	**Robbins Title**	**Greene Number**	**Manuscript (Short title)**
3832.5 (*Suppl. IMEV*)	n/a	Up Y arose *in verno tempore* (macaronic English / Latin)	n/a	n/a	BL Addit. 5665 (Ritson MS), f.145v. Oxf. Bodl. MS Ashmole 176, f.98v.
n/a	n\a	Huc usque me miseram (Latin)	n/a	n/a	*Carmina Burana* (Benediktbeueren MS)

Table 3: **Middle English lyrics, in female voice, which end with abandonment but no pregnancy.**					
IMEV **number**	**First line of burden**	**First line of stanza 1**	**Robbins Title**	**Greene Number**	**Manuscript (Short Title)**
1330	Were it vndo that is ydo	Y louede a child of this cuntre	A Forsaken Maiden's Lament	455	Caius MS 383 / 603, p.210
3418	Wolde God that hyt were so	The man that I loued altherbest	Careless Love	451	CUL MS Addit. 5943, f.178v.

Table 4: **Middle English lyrics, in female voice, featuring clerical lovers, but not ending in abandonment/pregnancy.**					
IMEV **number**	**First line of burden**	**First line of stanza 1**	**Robbins Title**	**Greene Number**	**Manuscript (Short Title)**
2494	Hey, noyney!	O Lord, so swett Ser John dothe kys	Our Sir John	456.1	Huntington Lib. MS. EL. 1160, f.11r.

Table 5: Middle English lyrics ending in pregnancy but in male voice.					
IMEV number	First line of burden	First line of stanza 1	Robbins Title	Greene Number	Manuscript (Short Title)
1302	n/a – no burden	I haue a newe gardyn	Love in the Garden	n/a – not carol.	Sloane MS 2593, f.11v.

Appendix B

CUL MS Ff.5.48 – List of contents.[1]

Folio 1 is missing.

Section 1

1. Instructions for Parish Priests (fols.2r-8r). *IMEV* 961.5. Untitled in MS.
2. The ABC of Aristotle (fols.8v-9r). *IMEV* 4155.2. Untitled in MS.
3. Prognostications from the amount of thunder in the months of the year (fols.9v-10v). *IMEV* 4053. MS title – 'Here sueth a tabull of diu[er]se moneth in the yere if thonder', etc.
4. Contra Fures et Latrones (fol.10v). In Latin. For similar texts - see *IMEV* 939, 993, 3771. Titled in MS.
5. The Northern Passion (fol.11r-43r) *IMEV* 1907.5 Titled from explicit.
6. Signs of Death (fol.43v). Macaronic verse. *IMEV* 4035.10 MS title – 'Memento Ho'.
7. The Wounds of Christ as Remedies against the Deadly Sins (fols.43v-44r). *IMEV* 4185. Untitled in MS.
8. A Tale of An Incestuous Daughter (fols.44r-48r). *IMEV* 1107. Untitled in MS.
9. A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd (fols.48v-56v). *IMEV* 988. Untitled in MS.
10. Dialogue between a Nightingale and a Clerk (fols.57r-57v). *IMEV* 1452. Untitled in MS.
11. The Tale of the Basin (fols.58r-61v) *IMEV* 2658. Untitled in MS.
12. The Turnament of Totenham (fols.62r-66r) *IMEV* 2615.1. Titled from explicit.
13. Prognostications from the day of the week on which Christmas falls (fol.66v). In Latin.

Section 2

14. The Story of the Adulterous Falmouth Squire (fols.67r-70r). *IMEV* 2052.5. Untitled in MS. Folio 70v is blank.
15. A Lament of the Blessed Virgin (fols.71r-72v). *IMEV* 1899.2. Untitled in MS.
16. The Lamentation of the Blessed Virgin (fols.73r-74v). *IMEV* 2619.2. Untitled in MS.
17. An Orison to the Blessed Virgin (fols.74v-75v). *IMEV* 2119.36. Untitled in MS.
18. Prognostics for the year, according to the day on which New Year falls (fols.75v-78v). *IMEV* 73. MS title – 'P[ro]phacy'.

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[1] Titles are as found in the 'Critical Edition' edited by Downing (1969), (ii-iii). The folio numbers and manuscript titles are from my own examination of the manuscript. The reference numbers for each text in C. Brown and R.H. Robbins (eds.), *The Index of Middle English Verse* (*IMEV*) (New York, 1943) have been provided where available.

Section 3

19. The Legend of Saint Michael (fols.79r-84r). *IMEV* 3029.4. MS title – 'Hic incip[i]t de s[anc]to mich[a]e[l]'.
20. The Feast of the Annunciation (fols.84r-84v). *IMEV* 2989. 8. MS title – 'De anu[n]tiat[i]o d[omi]na'.
21. Septuagesima (f.84v). *IMEV* 791 (version of), *IMEV* 483.7. Untitled in MS.
22. Quadragesima (fols.84v-87v). *IMEV* 1859 (version of), *IMEV* 483.7. Untitled in MS.
23. The Southern Passion (fols.87v-92v). *IMEV* 483.7. Untitled in MS. Most of folio 92v is blank. According to a note on folio 92v, folios 93 and 94 are missing.

Section 4

24. The Anonymous Short Metrical Chronicle of England (fols.95r-112r. *IMEV* 1105. MS title – 'Principium Anglie'.
25. The Mourning of the Hunted Hare (fols.112v-113v). *IMEV* 559.1. Untitled in MS.
26. Prognostications about the Seasons of the Year (fols.114r-114v). Untitled in MS.
27. The Betrayed Maiden's Lament (fol.114v) *IMEV* 3409. Untitled in MS.

Section 5

28. The Feest of Tottenham (fols.115r-116r). *IMEV* 2354. Untitled in MS.
29. The Lady Who Buried the Host (fols.116v-118v). *IMEV* 622.3. Untitled in MS.
30. Thomas of Erceldoune's Prophecy (fols.119r-128v). *IMEV* 365.2. Untitled in MS.
31. A Little Jest of Robin Hood and the Monk (fols.128v-135v). *IMEV* 1534.1. Untitled in MS

List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library
c.	*circa*
C.P.	Cause Paper
CUL	Cambridge University Library
ead.	*eadem*
EEBO	*Early English Books Online*
(E)STC	*English Short Title Catalogue*
f. / fol.	folio
ffs. / fols.	folios
ibid	*ibidem*
id	*idem*
IMEV	*Index of Middle English Verse*
l.	line
lls.	lines
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
MS	manuscript
MSS	manuscripts
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
p.	page
pp.	pages
r.	recto

st	stanza
sts	stanzas
v.	verso

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Cambridge, St John's College

   MS S.54

Cambridge, Trinity College

   MS R.3.17

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   MS Egerton 3002

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