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THE PURSUIT OF PRIVACY IN MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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To my family.

Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv

Abstract vii

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Privacy as Privilege and Deprivation in the Medieval Literary House 7

Laüstic 8

The Miller's Tale 20

The Wife of Bath's Prologue 38

Assessment 56

Chapter Two: Manipulating Private Space: Towers as the Space of Conflict 59

Yonec 60

Le Chevalier de la Charrete 82

The Knight's Tale 95

Assessment 106

Chapter Three: Privacy as Freedom in the Medieval Literary Garden 108

The Merchant's Tale 110

Erec et Enide 126

Cligès 138

Assessment 148

Chapter Four: Privacy as Sovereignty in Medieval Literary Forests 151

Bisclavret 152

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell 168

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 181

Assessment 196

Conclusion 198

Works Cited 199

Abstract

The Pursuit of Privacy in Medieval Landscapes identifies the ways in which individual pursuits of privacy in the medieval world are shaped by the landscapes in which those pursuits occur. There is a correlation between the space of a particular landscape feature and the gender interactions of the characters that move in or around that feature. Landscapes are places for power relations that are crucial to the product of gendered and private identities. This dissertation focuses on four features of the medieval British and French literary landscape: houses, towers, gardens, and forests. Landscapes in medieval literature may be the palette of political agendas. Used and occasionally abused for the purposes of power and control, landscapes can be produced and programmed. Each of the selected texts in this chapter features characters that must engage closely with their respective environments in order to obtain some form of individual privacy, and in all of the texts, authorities or convention controls the space and landscapes in some way. The struggle for privacy in these texts, whether that struggle is for privilege, for freedom, or for sovereignty, seems like an easily relatable concept for a medieval audience who so frequently endured political conflicts over control of space and social convention.

Introduction

For years, artists and scholars have studied landscapes. Landscapes are places of tranquility, beauty and solace as much as they are places of wild, untamed foreboding. But they are also crucial to the ways in which humanity constructs individual identities. This dissertation, *The Pursuit of Privacy in Medieval Landscapes,* identifies the ways in which individual pursuits of privacy in the medieval world are shaped by the landscapes in which those pursuits occur. Frequently, when scholars of medieval literature use the word "places," they suggest human places and when scholars use the word "landscapes" (as opposed to nature), they suggest generalized nonhuman backdrops. Landscapes are not only spaces that are lived experiences in their own right, but also they are critical to the ways in which gender interactions and the pursuit of individual privacy are shaped. Landscapes are often reflections of literary characters, which is why specific stories need to take place in specific settings. Landscapes are used to reflect and encourage social wildness or social imprisonment; they are used to separate private identities from public convention; they are used to deprive and to privilege, and they are used to establish and reinforce individual freedoms. Much scholarship approaches the medieval literary landscape from an historical perspective, focusing on daily life and routine of medieval people as they move about in or around a specific topographical feature. From A. Bartlett Giamatti's 1960s work on landscapes from the classical through the Renaissance period, from Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter's influential arguments on landscapes in the medieval world to more recent scholarship on the medieval landscape, specifically Laura Howes's treatment of medieval wildernesses and their association with the spaces around those wildernesses, Jocelyn Wogan-Brown's analysis of images

of enclosed women in the Christian literary tradition, and Robert Pogue Harrison's discussion of the impassive features of landscape, many ways in which the medieval landscapes impact the people living within them have been examined. Historical research that addresses a number of different landscapes often interacts with the work of medieval authors, yet the role of landscapes as they relate to the pursuit of individual privacy remains understudied. Some academic conversations acknowledge gender and privacy and other conversations acknowledge landscape, and still there are few conversations that attempt to fill the space between the two. This gap invites the opportunity to address the connection between gender, privacy, and landscapes, and how landscapes contribute to and function in discourses of power. There is a correlation between the space of a particular landscape feature and the gender interactions of the characters that move in or around that feature. Landscapes are places for power relations that are crucial to the product of gendered and private identities.

This dissertation focuses on four features of the medieval literary landscape: houses, towers, gardens, and forests. Comprehensively, the chapters are designed to elicit a visual movement from "inside" space to the "outside" space. They are arranged to begin with the least natural space and move outward to the wildest natural space. Not only will this arrangement break down the different forms of privacy that occur in each space, but it will illustrate a narrative arc of privacy that connects the most intimate human spaces to the wildest spaces. Privacy is more than simply "the state or condition of being alone, undisturbed, or free from public attention, as a matter of choice or right; seclusion; freedom from interference or intrusion" ("privacy" *OED*). Individual pursuits

of privacy in medieval literature tell a story about individual notions of identity, and landscapes are an active part of that plot.

The etymology of privacy is a point of departure for understanding the different forms of this concept. In the article "The Concept of Privacy," Marilyn M. Rawnsley points out that the words *privacy* and *private* "are derived from the Latin *privo* which means 'to deprive.' Its original usage was the military term *private*, which meant literally 'to be deprived of status or rank.' The stem of *privacy* is *priv*, as is the stem of the word *privilege*, which means 'favoring opportunity'" (26). This dissertation will read privacy as an evolving concept that begins with deprivation and ends with individual sovereignty. Privacy is a key term throughout the chapters.

The first chapter of this dissertation is the starting point for navigating the evolution of privacy. "Privacy as Privilege and Deprivation in the Medieval House" explores privacy in the context of privilege and deprivation. The house is the domestic landscape that is a space for reevaluation and mediation of power relationships. It is a space in which individuals challenge dominant cultural values. In Marie de France's twelfth-century *Laüstic* and Geoffrey Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, privacy in the context of privilege and deprivation are explored through a female perspective that engages in some way with power relationships, and the house is an essential place to regain lost perspective or perspective that has been stifled by the dominant discourse of the time. In Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, the house is a place to examine the behaviors of different types of masculine ideals, which are clearly in tension with each other. The masculine behavioral ideal is a highly public concept, and consolidating the ideals into a house, a site of both deprivation and privilege, allows the

Miller (or Chaucer himself) to challenge the sustainability of those behaviors for those who seek to emulate any one of the ideals in a public context.

"Manipulating Private Space: Towers as the Space of Conflict," the second chapter, examines the relationship between the manipulation of private space and negotiations over that space's authority. In Marie de France's twelfth-century *Yonec*, in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century poem *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, and in Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Knight's Tale,* the tower represents the space of conflict and negotiation, but power, secrecy, and authority differs in meaning with each text. Negotiation is most visible in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* when Guinevere and Meleagant negotiate the use of the tower space and also in the *Knight's Tale* as Palamon and Arcite negotiate between the pull of authority and the pull of a shared desire for Emelye. *Yonec* is less about negotiation than it is about the manipulation of private space, though manipulation of private space is a common trope in all of the texts. On a number of occasions in literature, those who are imprisoned in a tower contest the constraints of the tower space, and those people use the tower as the space in which they can manipulate secret spaces and resist the authority that confines them. Analyzing specific examples of conflict in the space of the tower helps define the boundaries of the tower's space, showing how this kind of space can be used to construct, maintain, control, and transform social order, depending on who is enclosed within it.

Chapter three, "Privacy as Freedom in the Medieval Garden," maps privacy in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* and Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romances *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès* as a form of freedom to reveal the ways in which gardens can function in discourses of power and captivity. Privacy as freedom is contextualized in these texts

through the analysis of what is kept out of the gardens and who wants it excluded. Chaucer's Januarie constructs a locked and walled garden designed to exclude conventional sexual expectations. The lady in the Joy of the Court scene in *Erec et Enide* pursues privacy as a form of freedom as a means to isolate her and her lover from the court politics that privilege the duties of the chivalric order over the desires of women. In *Cligès*, Fenice seeks refuge in her hidden garden in an effort to shut out the Emperor's unsympathetic approach to love and female desire. In these two texts, the women pursue privacy as freedom, but their pursuit of privacy is more focused on the sub-points of privacy: autonomy and dignity. Throughout these texts, privacy as freedom imagines people as autonomous and self-defining instead of socially embedded and bound through common socialization into shared norms.

The final chapter, "Privacy as Sovereignty in Medieval Forests," engages with public and private identities. As the wildest of spaces in this dissertation, the forest challenges humanity's sense of temporal boundaries; its primeval space, both real and symbolic, exemplifies the locus of personal transformation and self-realization. In Marie de France's twelfth century lay *Bisclavret*, the anonymously-written late fourteenth century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the anonymously-written fifteenth century poem *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, the forest enables transformation for individuals, whether that transformation is physical or emotional. Bisclavret and Dame Ragnelle grapple with issues of privacy as a form of sovereignty over the individual self. Gawain represents the prevailing attitude that humanity belongs in a controlled environment, and he experiences nature, specifically the forest, as the adversary. His journey is less of a battle against his apparent opponent

Bertilak than it is a struggle for freedom from humanity's prevailing attitude. In all of these texts, the forest complicates individual senses of power, privacy, and sovereignty, but the forest also allows for recognition or reassessment of those concepts.

Landscapes in medieval literature may be the palette of political agendas. Used and occasionally abused for the purposes of power and control, landscapes can be produced and programmed. Each of the selected texts in this chapter features characters that must engage closely with their respective environments in order to obtain some form of individual privacy, and in all of the texts, authorities or convention controls the space and landscapes in some way. The struggle for privacy in these texts, whether that struggle is for privilege, for freedom, or for sovereignty, seems like an easily relatable concept for a medieval audience who so frequently endured political conflicts over control of space and social convention.

Chapter One: Privacy as Privilege and Deprivation in the Medieval Literary House

Medieval authors did not explicitly state that certain spaces including landscapes were gendered, though some medieval texts certainly imply this idea. In "Gender and Landscape: renegotiating morality and space," Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczygiel assert that historically, in scholarship, "the landscape was assumed to be masculine in that it represented the universal rather than the specific" (2). Gendering landscapes can also extend to gendering public and private spaces, and some scholars have addressed the social interaction and power relationships that exist in and across both public and private space. For example, Ted Kilian, in "Public and Private, Power and Space," argues that while spaces cannot or should not be categorized as inherently "public" or "private," scholars should not "collapse or eliminate the concepts of publicity or privacy" (115). For Kilian, the concepts of publicity or privacy are not characteristics of particular space. Rather, they are "expressions of power relationships in space and . . . both exist in every space" (115-116).

Publicity and privacy may seem like opposite concepts, but they are concepts that depend on one another. Kilian notes that privacy can signify both privilege and deprivation (119). In order to signify privilege, it needs to be considered as power over a person's surrounding space, and this kind of privilege is dependent on the notion that public life must be available on one's own terms. If privacy is considered in the context of deprivation, it is the absence of power, because in this sense power only exists in a public space. "Without access to the public, no one has access to power" (Kilian 119). Those who have the greatest power over space have both the greatest power over access

and the greatest power over exclusion, and there are examples of this in different forms in many texts. I have selected Marie de France's twelfth-century *Laüstic*, Geoffrey Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Miller's Tale* and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* because in these texts, the house and its privacy[1] play a role in challenging dominant values of medieval culture. Each text engages in some way with power relationships and the house is an ideal place to regain either a lost perspective or a perspective that has been otherwise stifled by dominant discourse of the time. In these texts, the house is a place where public authority may be escaped or renegotiated.

In these texts, the domestic landscape, specifically the house, is a dynamic site of reevaluation and mediation of power relationships. The house has a more significant role than a simple setting that "reinforc[es] identities as well as the subordination of women or the mobility of men" (Dowler et al 7). In addition to its more traditional role as a place wherein moral messages about female domesticity are communicated, the house is also a place in which protests of dominant values can be challenged.

Laüstic

Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, in the book *Marie de France: A Critical Companion*, group Marie's *Guigemar*, *Yonec*, and *Laüstic* as the three *lais* that feature the trope of the *malmariée* (a lady who is unhappily married). Kinoshita and McCracken assert that the ladies in these *lais* are "imprisoned by jealous husbands and may not leave the rooms in which they are kept," and that they "find happiness only when lovers come to them" (117). This claim may apply to the lady in *Yonec*, whom

[1] Privacy here will be considered in the context of both privilege and deprivation.

Marie describes as an extremely beautiful young woman whose old husband takes such great care to watch over her that he locks her in his tower. This claim may apply to the lady of *Guigemar*, whose beauty, wisdom, and courtliness inspires so much jealousy from her very old husband that he keeps her locked away in a chamber inside a larger enclosure in his castle. This claim, however, does not apply to the lady in *Laüstic*, primarily because the lady cultivates her own kind of happiness through her proximity to the neighbor knight; she does not need to wait for him to come to her or rescue her from the constraints of her home in order to find happiness.

Even though enclosure may be the crisis of Marie's *Guigemar, Yonec,* and *Laüstic*, the plot in *Laüstic* is triggered by proximity and perspective. The house in *Laüstic* is unique among all of the other *lais* in that it is the only *lai* in which the proximity between the lovers determines the trajectory of the plot. In the others it is bodily mobility; that is, protagonists moving between human and animal embodiment, as seen in *Yonec* and *Bisclavret*, or physical travel, as seen in *Milun* and in *Le Deus Amanz. Yonec* and *Guigemar* feature guarded tower enclosures, but the enclosure in *Laüstic* is unique in that the *malmariée* has more opportunity to engage actively with the world outside her house than her *malmariée* counterparts; she does not need to wait for her lover to come to her. In *Laüstic*, the lady's ability to converse with the neighbor knight reveals the kind of proximity that is notably absent for imprisoned wives in the other *lais*.

Even though wives are frequently confined to specific spaces in these *lais*, they are not necessarily limited to these confined spaces. Marie goes to great lengths to establish specific female perspective in *Laüstic*; the lady's gaze from the inside of the

house to the outside of the house determines that perspective. It is designed for an audience to "see" through her eyes, and the perspective allows the lady to transcend her confinement for a time. The *lai* takes place in the region of St Malo, wherein two knights dwell in close proximity, each with a fortified house. One of the knights had taken a wife, whom Marie describes as a "[s]age, curteise e acemee; / A merveille se teneit chiere / Sulunc l'usage e la manere" (*Laüstic* 14-16).[2] Marie's description of the lady seems designed to align audience sympathy with her so that there is no question that the lady's perspective in the *lai* is the dominant one. We are told little about the husband's personal characteristics that would normally be designed to align audience sympathy toward or away from him. In contrast, in *Yonec*, the husband is described as old and jealous, and the pains he takes to lock his beautiful young wife in her tower, guarded by his old, widowed sister inspire audience sympathy with the distressed lady. Similarly, in *Guigemar*, the husband is old and jealous, and locks his lady in a guarded chamber. Marie even points out that "tut li veil seient gelus—/ Mult hiet chascun kë il seit cous—" (*Guigemar* 215-16),[3] which is a critical detail when establishing an unhappy situation for a *malmariée*. The husband knight in *Laüstic* initially appears as more of a background character; he is neither good nor bad, though eventually he is revealed to be very bad. The lack of description regarding the husband in *Laüstic* suggests that the lady's perspective in the *lai* is the primary one, despite medieval cultural customs that historically privilege masculine perspective. In the other *lais,* the jealous husbands have clear motives for imprisoning their wives, and even though their

[2] "wise, courtly and elegant wife who conducted herself, as custom dictated, with admirable propriety" (94). *(All translations come from* The Lais of Marie de France *translated by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby.)*

[3] "all old men are jealous and hate to be cuckolded" (46).

motives and characteristics are designed to sway audience favor toward the ladies, the husbands still have a perspective, which is not the case in *Laüstic.* The husband is nondescript, and unlike the explicit mention of the other jealous husbands' advanced age, there is no indication that the husband in *Laüstic* is old or afraid to be cuckolded. Although he ensures that his wife is closely guarded when he is out, there is no evidence to suggest that he does so for the explicit purpose to avoid becoming a cuckold. Rather, the guards seem to be a display of his authority over the space of the house. Marie's favorable description of the neighbor knight, however, directs the reader's attention and admiration to him only after the lady's introduction, which gives him a perspective, even if it is a secondary one. Not only does the neighbor knight conduct himself nobly and appear to be known for his knightly valor and service to the community, he happens to be in love with his neighbor's wife. Marie describes this reciprocated courtly love in terms of proximity and perspective as the knight and the lady gaze at each other:

> La femme sun veisin ama;
> Tant la request, tant la preia
> E tant par ot en lui grant bien
> Que ele l'ama sur tute rien,
> Tant pur le bien quë ele oï,
> Tant pur ceo qu'il iert pres de li.
> Sagement e bien s'entr'amerent;
> Mut se covrirent e garderent
> Qu'il ne feussent aparceüz
> Ne desturbez ne mescreüz.
> E eus le poeient bien fere,
> Kar pres esteient lur repere,
> Preceines furent lur maisuns
> E lur sales e lur dunguns;
> N'i aveit bare ne devise

Fors un haut mur de piere bise. (*Laüstic* 23-38)[4]

The houses in which the lovers conduct their "affair"[5] is far from the idyllic space of love that other intimate enclosures represent in other *lais*, specifically *Yonec* and *Guigemar*. In *Laüstic* the neighboring houses remove the need for public or mobile adventure and point to the importance of the role of domestic proximity in making love possible without that specific kind of adventure. Even though the lovers do not or cannot touch each other despite their close proximity, Marie establishes a unique bond of love conducted only through the senses of hearing and sight: "Il i entent a sun poeir, / E la dame de l'autre part / E de parler e de regart" (*Laüstic* 66-68).[6]

The lovers in *Laüstic* conduct a relationship of sight and of sound that never actually collapses into any kind of destructive sensuality like other lovers in Marie's *lais*. Suzannah Biernoff, in her book *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages,* notes that courtly love, when enacted as an exchange of gazes, "relies on the receptiveness of the beholder's eye to Love's (or the beloved's) wounding glances. To expose oneself—especially one's eyes—to another's gaze is thus an open invitation to ocular penetration" (53). As the lovers gaze upon each other through their respective windows,

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[4] "He loved his neighbour's wife and so persistently did he request her love, so frequent were his entreaties and so many qualities did he possess that she loved him above all things, both for the good she had heard about him and because he lived close by. They loved each other prudently and well, concealing their love carefully to ensure that they were not seen, disturbed or suspected. This they could do because their dwellings were adjoining. Their houses, halls and keeps were close by each other and there was no barrier or division, apart from a high wall of dark-hued stone" (94).

[5] I place the word "affair" in quotation marks because this is the only love relationship in Marie's *lais* in which the love is never consummated. To label the relationship as a full-blown adulterous affair would be placing it in the same category with the other consummated love relationships in the *lais*; aligning it with the others would not isolate the uniqueness of this relationship.

[6] "Both he and the lady made the greatest possible effort with their words and with their eyes" (95).

there seems to be an "open invitation to ocular penetration" that could signify consummation of their potential love. Biernoff states that sight, which is the sense closest to the "mind's eye," is both "a tool for the acquisition of *knowledge*, and a locus of carnal *desire*" (17). If the human senses, when aligned with the mind, can be radiant, as Biernoff contends, and because the senses operate through organs of the flesh, they have the potential to collapse into an "obscuring, destructive sensuality" (17). Neither the lady's gaze nor the neighbor knight's gaze seems particularly destructive when they gaze at each other. Unlike many other love gazes in medieval literature in which one character, usually the male gazer, feels wounded or believes himself to have been shot in the eye by Love's wounding arrow, the dramatic love-longing of an injured lover is conspicuously absent here. This absence implies that both parties are equally willing participants in this physically chaste love exchange compared with those who require, as a means of winning the object of their love, mobile adventure to prove themselves.

Some scholars, however, are skeptical that their affair was chaste. K. Sarah-Jane Murray, in her article "Marie de France, Ethicist: Questioning Courtly Love in *Laüstic*," argues that the "explicit reference to one of the Ten Commandments ('Thou shalt not desire [or love] thy neighbor's wife' [Exod. 20:17]) . . . creates an important ethical dimension to the story and . . . the text can be understood as a subtle and very interesting critique of the covetous and destructive kind of selfish love, or *cupidas*, portrayed therein" (2). Murray contends that what she considers to be a sinful affair in *Laüstic* contrasts with and complements other tales in Marie's collection, and cites *Eliduc* and *Le Fresne* as examples of texts that focus on a redeeming, selfless form of love, or *caritas* (2). While *Eliduc* and *Le Fresne* are indeed examples of texts wherein

the lovers eventually find happy endings and serve God accordingly, Murray seems to dismiss not only the fact that those *lais* are full of either consummated adulterous liaisons or, as in *Le Fresne*, of concubinage, but she also ignores twelfth-century Europe's cultural rediscovery of what R.W. Hanning describes in his article as "the centrality, and the power, of love and creativity in the functioning of a civilization" (87), which he argues is the background for Marie's literary achievements. The rediscovery, Hanning states, was

> part of a radical reorientation of cultural priorities, away from investing maximum energy and resources in the cultivation (and hence the dominance) of martial prowess and toward the exploration of the potential for personal and social empowerment inherent in the more private sphere of human feelings, emotions, and intellectual capacities. The religious background (and analogue) of this reorientation was the Church's attempt, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to bring under control the aggressive energies of a feudal, warrior aristocracy insufficiently restrained by centralized secular authority. (87-88)

Marie was likely aware of this cultural reorientation, which seems evident in her focus on the lady's private sphere of human feelings in *Laüstic* that directs audience attention away from bodily mobility and martial prowess and toward the lady and the lady's perspective on love and marriage. Marie was, as Logan Whalen notes in his book *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory*, conscious of the power of her words and an "accomplished painter of narratives" (7) and her judicious use of her rhetorical technique urged her courtly audience to use their imaginations as they conceptualized her texts. If one keeps this in mind, the love "affair" in *Laüstic* is not so much a selfish disregard for the Biblical Commandments, but rather a tragic narrative that explores the private sphere of both female emotions and female perspective that is detached from ecclesiastical pursuits or chivalric adventure. The fact that the lovers conduct their relationship through their gazes and their words instead of through physical intimacy

suggests that this *lai* is more concerned with the potential of love and a lady's desire to escape her social confinements. The potential of love is made visible in the body of the nightingale when it appears in the *lai*. The nightingale is the visible embodiment of love, though once the image of the nightingale is introduced, love is never mentioned again.

In the book *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: the Bestiary and its Legacy*, Wendy Pfeffer reports that in Europe, the nightingale represents spring, the poet, the poet's love, or his song. Further, Pfeffer contends, the bird may serve as a strongly sexual metaphor as well (93). Marie explains that the lady leaves her bed so frequently to stand at the window that her husband becomes angry and suspicious, though the lady explains her behavior:

> Tant i estut, tant i leva
> Que ses sires s'en curuça
> E meintefeiz li demanda
> Pur quei levot e u ala.
> 'Sire,' la dame li respunt,
> 'Il nen ad joië en cest mund,
> Ki n'ot le laüstic chanter.
> Pur ceo me vois ici ester.
> Tant ducement l'i oi la nuit
> Que mut me semble grant deduit;
> Tant me delit' e tant le voil
> Que jeo ne puis dormer de l'oil. (*Laüstic* 79-90)[7]

The lady's explanation for why she stands at the window could easily be a veiled allusion to the joys of sex, as it draws attention to an experience of the physical senses. But she is a courtly woman, as described in the early lines of the poem, so it is

[7] "But so frequently did she stand there and so frequently did she leave her bed that her husband became angry and asked her repeatedly why she got up and where she went. 'Lord,' replied the lady, 'anyone who does not hear the song of the nightingale knows none of the joys of this world. This is why I come and stand here. So sweet is the song I hear by night that it brings me great pleasure. I take such delight in it and desire in it so much that I can get no sleep at all'" (95).

unsurprising that she would channel her true feeling through courtly discourse with hope that her husband would not see through her metaphor.[8] In the article "Marie de France's Poetics of Silence: The Implications for a Feminine *Translatio*," Michelle Freeman acknowledges that the lady is "speaking the language of love, that is, of lyric song, wherein a physical background redolent of springtime imagery (and necessarily including the motif of birdsong) introduces the Lover's discourse" (868). The lady does not appear to consider that her discourse would be problematic. Even though the bird might in one sense represent illicit sex, the lady frames her discourse to emphasize a love for nature, springtime, and song.

Even though the lady tries to communicate her nightly visits to the window as a chaste enjoyment of birdsong, she answers to the best of her ability without coming out and confessing her true reason for going to the window. The husband would need to reaffirm his own social position as husband and authority; his wife's "enjoyment of birdsong" without his knowledge shows that she subverts his authority in the house and in his role as husband. Clearly realizing that his authority has been compromised, her husband gives a spiteful, angry laugh when he hears what she says. He does not interpret her words as those of springtime enjoyment or a love for nature; he understands the metaphor, and retaliates in a literal way. He quickly exploits the lady's discourse by acting on the bird's proximity to the window, using glue, nets, and snares

[8] The transparent metaphor approach was not unprecedented in twelfth-century literature. One of the most famous transparent metaphors occurs in the twelfth-century poem *Tristan et Iseut*, in the version by Marie's contemporary Béroul. At the scene of Mal Pas, Tristan, disguised as a leprous mendicant, carries Queen Isolde across a swamp, her legs on either side of him, resulting in her truthful oath that no man had been between her thighs other than the leper who carried her across the mire and her husband, King Mark.

in order to trap the bird. Kinoshita and McCracken point out that the consequences of adultery are often mapped out on men's bodies, and even though men are not subject to confinement or violent punishment in the same way women are, they are susceptible to vengeance (157). We see examples of this in *Yonec*, where Muldumarec is slain by the jealous husband, and again in *Guigemar* when Guigemar is exiled when he is discovered in his lady's enclosure. But in *Laüstic*, the vengeance on the lady and her lover is exacted on the little nightingale. If the bird is the physical embodiment of the love between the lady and the neighbor knight as I suggested earlier, any potential of their "affair" is made visible once the husband captures the bird while it is still alive. Once the husband breaks the bird's neck and flings it at the lady, the potential for her escape in love is exposed and destroyed, and along with it, the lady's delight, desire, and all her pleasure. While the husband may be socially entitled to reaffirm his authority, the lady's perspective is still the dominant perspective in the *lai*, and her witness to the nightingale's death emphasizes the tragedy of the story. The lady wraps the bird in a piece of samite with a message inscribed on it. This is an important detail not only because it emphasizes the role of the wife in cherishing the love the nightingale represents, but also because samite is a precious material at the time and it demonstrates the value of the love. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, in the article "Speaking Through Animals in Marie de France's *Lais* and *Fables*, wonders whether killing the bird "ends or eternalizes the lovers, whether it functions as a sign of fidelity transcending bodily distance or as a substitute that merely embalms but no longer sustains their love" (171). It is certainly possible that killing the bird eternalizes the lovers. It is even possible that the nightingale, as a token of love when given to the neighbor knight, is a highly

fetishized replacement for the lady herself. Monica L. Wright, in the article "Heart Economies: Love Tokens and Objects of Affection in Twelfth-Century French Literature," reminds us that men in romance

> tend to be the recipients of the love token, and although this allows them ultimately to assume the position of possessor, the women take their agency in the situation before the men are allowed theirs. The women, before bestowing their gifts upon their lovers, first fashion representations of themselves, imbuing objects with a meaning that they themselves construct, essentially commodifying themselves. (561)

When the knight receives the dead bird, he commemorates the lost love by having a small casket of pure gold prepared in which he places the bird's body and carries it with him at all times. Even though the bird bears with it the words of the lady and ultimately becomes a preserved symbol of impossible love, it is also a relic that reaffirms the husband's authority over his wife.

Even though what Bruckner wonders has merit and can be supported by Wright's analysis, I contend that it is also possible that killing the bird can be seen as an attack on the potential for personal and social empowerment that the lady attempts to obtain within her private sphere of human emotion. In this context that private sphere is a metaphorical space within her own mind that she controls. Early in the *lai*, the husband, confident in the security of his domestic authority, attempts to block any kind of external influence that might interfere with his social position and control over the space. However strongly he exerts his authority, the lady is still able to subvert it, however briefly, with every visit to the window. The nightly window visits further demonstrate her efforts to shut out the social demand for monogamy, even if the "affair" never culminates with a physically intimate encounter. Her proximity to the neighbor knight allows her an opportunity to customize a private sphere in her mind to

include an elite few on her own terms since she cannot leave her house to construct that space. Houses do not typically have only one exit (or one guarded exit in this case), so there are other possibilities through which to connect with the outside world. Where there is a window, there is an exit, and in this *lai*, the lady's window represents the exit through which she can escape into her own emotional sphere. Her perspective, her gaze from inside the bedroom through the window and into the night, is a way of crafting her own space that extends to the neighbor's house, and that space is temporarily resistant to any power her husband holds over her. For a time, she is able to hold her own kind of power that the guards and her husband cannot touch. The lady's window is the space to which she can return to escape from her wifely bonds and renew herself in the potential for love—a love that she cannot or does not find with her husband, whose true private nature is revealed.

The brutal violence toward the bird reveals a more sinister aspect to the husband: "A sun seignur l'ad demandé, / Et il l'ocist par engresté; / Le col li rumpt a ses deus meins— / De ceo fist il que trop vileins— / Sur la dame le cors geta, / Se que sun chainse ensanglanta / Un poi desur le piz devant" (*Laüstic* 113-19).[9] The fact that the husband orders his valets to trap the bird to seek personal vengeance could be an example of Marie's rhetorical resistance to a society whose ideals do not privilege female emotion or a woman's ability to sustain her personal and social agency long term. Destroying the bird destroys the lady's power over her own private sphere of emotion, and returns her to her proper role in the marriage. Even though the husband

[9] "She asked her husband for the bird, but he killed it out of spite, breaking its neck wickedly with his two hands. He threw the body at the lady, so that the front of her tunic was bespattered with blood, just on her breast" (95).

kills the bird, the neighbor knight preserves it in a beautiful jeweled box as a relic of impossible love and a reminder of lost proximity. This relic implies that although the potential for love, even when explored within the constraints of one's own mind, is not necessarily sustainable in Marie's culture, it is still preserved and decorated.

The Miller's Tale

A humorous criticism of different types of prescribed ideals for heterosexual masculine behavior takes place in the space of the house in Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Miller's Tale*. Chaucer's drunken Miller explicitly states his desire to "quite" the Knight's aristocratic tale of chivalry and love, and the Miller targets the prescriptive ideal of masculine behavior by consolidating the most common representations of the masculine ideal that appear in the *Knight's Tale* into a small narrative space. Using the image of the house as the setting for the critique could be a way of juxtaposing the smaller house image with the vast expanse of space featured in the *Knight's Tale*. The smaller setting calls for more narrative attention to the behaviors of different types of masculine ideals, which are clearly in tension with each other. The irony here is that the masculine behavioral ideal is a highly public concept, and consolidating the ideals into a house, a site of both deprivation and privilege, allows the Miller (or Chaucer himself) to challenge the sustainability of those behaviors for those who seek to behave according to the rules of any one of the ideals in a public context. In the words of Gaston Bachelard, the literary image of the house "constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). If one keeps Bachelard's interpretation of the image of the house in mind, and if each man in the *Miller's Tale* is an absurd,

exaggerated representation of a different masculine type determined by medieval authorities, then the narrative structure of the tale should take place in a house in order to illustrate closely the illusions of stability that accompany each type. Thomas J. Farrell, in the article "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau in the *Miller's Tale*," reminds us of the English fabliau genre's two chief narrative topoi: that of sexual triumph and physical battery (773). In fabliaux, Farrell contends, "sex occurs outside the social institution of marriage, and quite often as an extramarital attack on the institution; violence almost inevitably privileges individual vindictiveness (or whim) over social order" (773). Even though it is one of the most famous English fabliaux, the *Miller's Tale* does not necessarily target the institution of marriage or the privileging of individual vindictiveness over social order exclusively. If different ideals for masculine behavior were codified, as Anne Laskaya reminds us in her book *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales*, in "law, education, religion, the arts, the economy, the court, and in texts generated by, or about, fourteenth-century political and social institutions" (15), then Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* both resists the codification by depicting the realities of human behavior and challenges the illusions of stability set forth by those who determined them. While the men in the Knight's tale behave according to the established ideal of one type of masculinity or another, the Miller reminds us that the realities of human behavior are occasionally offensive, and are unlikely to sustain any particular ideal long term.

Laskaya details the ideals of heterosexual masculine behavior in her book. Because these ideals existed as different literary discourses within powerful institutions, the codified beliefs were tremendously influential to fourteenth-century Europeans (15).

The first type, the "heroic male," was a fighter and a leader. This man should exhibit a great deal of prowess and skill in any form of earthly competition. The culture of the Middle Ages, Laskaya says, "promoted and perpetuated this discourse particularly within the aristocratic class and its political and military institutions. But such an ideal, once established for a powerful group of men, spills over into other classes and social arenas and promotes competition between men of any class or group" (15-16). The most obvious example of the heroic male is Duke Theseus in the *Knight's Tale*, who by martial prowess "conquered al the regne of Femenye" (*KnT* 866) and who, sitting at a window, "[a]rrayed right as he were a god in trone" (*KnT* 2529), presides over the final battle between Palamon and Arcite. The Miller's John, a "riche gnof" (*MilT* 3188), is positioned as the ruling male in that he is the owner of the house and tries to exert authority over those under his roof. Despite his efforts to contain Alisoun and despite his steadfast determination to save her heroically from drowning in the second Flood, his caring, almost feminine nature leaves him vulnerable to the manipulations of other men, and he falls short of the criteria for a true heroic male. However, most important to the criteria for a heroic male for this narrative is that his marriage to Alisoun promotes competition among men, both inside and outside the house.

A second ideal laid out by Laskaya is that of the courtly lover. The Knight's Palamon and Arcite both fit the criteria for this type of ideal, as the lover-knight "suffered psychologically and physically in pursuit of his goal; the courtly male body was to endure hardship and sacrifice itself for glory" (Laskaya 16). Further, the lover-knight often held women as their "source of inspiration, the worthy cause of hardship, and a superior reason for action in the world" (Laskaya 17). Where Palamon and Arcite

effectively elevate Emelye to the level of goddess and thereafter use her as their reason for enduring hardship, the Miller's Absolon is clearly the courtly lover in the *Miller's Tale*, assigning Alisoun the role of courtly lady worthy of courtly pursuit. He performs exaggerated scenes next to Alisoun's window about his love longing, his yearning, fainting and sweating, citing her as the reason for his woe and emotional hardship: "Wel litel thynken ye upon my wo, / That for youre love I swete ther I go. / No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete; / I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete. / Ywis, lemman, I have swich love-longynge / That lik a turtel trewe is my moornynge" (MT 3701-3706). He is, however, clearly deceived by the assumptions he has regarding the behaviors of a courtly lover. He privileges his appearance over true sacrifice, and when Alisoun plays her joke on him, both his crying and his plan for revenge demonstrate that he has little tolerance for enduring actual hardship. The Miller's comic approach to this courtly ideal, however, first becomes visible in Absolon's portrait, which seems to mirror descriptions that commonly introduce a courtly woman. The Miller's portrait of Absolon begins with his head and moves downward: "Crul was his heer, and as the gold it shoon / And strouted as a fanne large and brode; / Ful streight and evene lay his joly shode" (*MilT* 3314-16); in comparison, many courtly women are described in a descending catalogue from head to toe. In the *Knight's Tale* we first see Emelye's "yelow heer . . . broyded in a tresse / Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long" (*KnT* 1049-1050) before we see any other part of her. Describing Absolon in a way that echoes Emelye's portrait suggests that the Miller assigns effeminacy to Absolon.

The last ideal of masculine behavior that is useful for analyzing this tale is that of the intellectual male. This prescription for medieval masculinity, according to

Laskaya, "promoted the virtue of knowledge above all else" (18), and she cites the rapid growth of universities in Europe during the late Middle Ages as support for her assertion. "In 1200, there were 6 universities in Europe (including Oxford). By 1300, the number had more than doubled to 14 (including Cambridge). By 1400, there were 36; by 1500, there were 80" (Laskaya 18). As a clerk studying at Oxford, Nicholas represents this late-medieval humanist ideal. On one hand, his scholarly pursuits focus on astrology, and even though the male intellectual of the Middle Ages is supposed to privilege mind over body and gain "control of the world by knowledge and rational thought" (Laskaya 18), Nicholas is clearly focused on lustful intent instead of rational thought when he is in Alisoun's presence. On the other hand, the events in the tale may reveal another possibility in which Nicholas may privilege mind over body after all. The Miller reconfigures mind over body as a caricature of the intellectual ideal by using Nicholas's knowledge and rational thought as a means of subverting John's control of the house, and as a means of supplanting John's body in Alisoun's bed. Essentially, "hende" Nicholas privileges the cleverness of his own mind over John's body.

In addition to the different roles ascribed to John, Nicholas, and Absolon, scholars assign a range of roles to Alisoun. For example, in the influential book *A Preface to Chaucer*, D.W. Robertson contends that Alisoun is a figure that "urgently appeals to all of the senses" (384), and thus views the men as three types of individuals who exhibit different Biblical sins that privilege material gratification. John's trust in riches aligns him with the Biblical avarice, Nicholas's iconographic actions situate him with the sin of lust, and Absolon is the very essence of vanity (Robertson 384-85). In the book *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry*, Alfred David lauds

Alisoun's enthusiastic response to sex. For David, Alisoun's response to sex is the healthiest and the most natural of any of the forms of sexual indulgence, and Alisoun's uninhibited pursuit of her own sexual desires is the reason she remains unpunished at the end of the tale (97). Alternatively, Laskaya views Alisoun's role in the *Miller's Tale* as the same as the role of Emelye in the *Knight's Tale*: the "female-as-body, the object to be possessed" (90). For Laskaya, only the men in the tale have fantasies, affectations, and hidden motives that need to be exposed, and Alisoun only exists in the tale as a means of revealing something about the male characters (90).

Alisoun's role is much more vast and central to the tale than these other contentions, and even if she exists in one sense as an object of possession for the men who go to great lengths to possess her, she symbolizes the world in a broader context. Without her as world, the Miller's challenge to the ideal masculine behavior types would be less forceful because if the types of masculinities were not concentrated around a small, private world designed for both deprivation and privilege, it would be too easy to dismiss the Miller's story as a bawdy tale about lusty small-town people seeking instant gratification instead of the cleverly structured critique of prescribed behaviors that inform the Knight's courtly behavior and supply the foundation for the Knight's chivalrous tale. Alisoun's highly detailed portrait points to her relation to nature that represents the world.

The Miller describes Alisoun in equal parts flora and fauna. She bears five descriptors of flora: "sloo" (*MT* 3246), "pere-jonette" (*MilT* 3248), "apples" (*MT* 3262), "prymerole" (*MilT* 3268), and "piggesnye" (*MilT* 3268). She also bears five descriptors of fauna: "wezele" (*MilT* 3234), "swalwe" (*MilT* 3258), "kyde" (*MT* 3260), "calf"

(*MilT* 3260), and "colt" (*MilT* 3263). In addition to ascribing Alisoun with characteristics of flora and fauna, the Miller also includes a textile: "wolle" (*MilT* 3249); beverages: "bragot" and "meeth" (*MilT* 3261); and one extra item describing an object created just for fun: "popelote" (*MilT* 3254). Laskaya reminds us that Alisoun's name means "of delight" (90), and the flowers, fruit, animals, textiles, beverages, and toys prominently featured in her portrait remind us of the delights of not only the natural world, but the material world as well. Essentially, Alisoun is the delight of everything natural and everything manmade; one could claim that she represents all the delights of the physical world. The Miller's portrait of Alisoun can also be useful in attempt to rediscover the dimensions of space through Alisoun's body. In his book *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Edward S. Casey believes that "the dimensionality of space follows from the directionality of the body" (205), and if we apply Casey's assertion to the *Miller's Tale*, we get a clearer sense of the house's space when we consider that the movement of Alisoun's portrait parallels the tale's movement when addressing levels of John's house.

There are three levels to John's house. There is Nicholas's upper room with its gable and view of the stars, there is the main floor where Alisoun and John sleep, and there is the street level directly outside, below the shot window. Similarly, there are three levels to Alisoun. Her portrait begins not with the glorification of her face like so many beautiful women in medieval literature, but instead at her center, focusing on the "ceynt she werede, barred al of silk" (*MilT* 3235) and the apron she wears "[u]pon hir lendes" (*MilT* 3237). Narrative focus moves upward from her loins to her collar, then to her headband, then down to her eyes, further down to her girdle, and then finally to her

legs and feet. In the same manner of movement as Alisoun's visual portrait, the story's plot begins at the center of the house, ascending to Nicholas's room, back to the center of the house, and finally to the lower level of the shot window. Alisoun's center, as implied by her portrait, is where these three men want to be. When imagining the house in terms of verticality, Alisoun's center, the house's center, the center of the world is the center of the tale's action, and everything revolves around and moves toward that center.

In order to clarify the concepts of privilege and deprivation in the narrative structure of the *Miller's Tale*, the spaces of the house's interior require analysis. The Miller describes Nicholas's room early in the tale as an individually private space: "A chambre hadde he in that hostelrye / Allone, withouten any compaignye" (*MilT* 3203-04). In one sense, Nicholas's room is a place of privilege; he is the only occupant, and he has power over his immediate surrounding space. Even though he is deprived of the university environment, he personalizes the space with his textbooks and instruments so his access to public life and public knowledge is available on his own terms. He rents the space from John, and there is no question that the space is under John's control, but only in an economic context. Despite John's economic control of the room, the narrative structure of the tale suggests that Nicholas's room is still a space privileging intellectual masculine power. The interior space of the house can be considered in the context of a vertical metaphor, primarily because it is described in terms of vertical levels. The highest position on the vertical axis is the closest to God and thus the most powerful, and the lowest position is the farthest from God and the least powerful. Nicholas's room is the highest on the house's vertical axis, and its proximity to the

heavens implies Nicholas's space is privileged above all other rooms. Further, it is the place where Nicholas stages his second Flood story and the place where he manipulates John into believing it. Absolon's proper space seems to be all the way down in the street, and not only because the street is the outside place where he stages his master performance by singing for Alisoun. The songs that Absolon plays in taverns for the barmaids are in the context of entertainment: "In al the toun nas brewhous ne tavern / That he ne visited with his solas, / Ther any gaylard tappestere was" (*MilT* 3334-3336). The Miller does not specify whether Absolon designs his tavern performances to obtain favors from the barmaids. The performance outside of Alison's window, however, is designed to obtain Alison's favor. It is also the place where he is on the public receiving end of Alisoun's joke.

Privacy in the context of deprivation seems to be a primary function of John's house. After the Miller gets past the portraits of the principal characters, the narrative moves inward to John's limited dwelling. John's trips outside of the home are only viewed in terms of his return to the activity of the house, wherein John keeps Alison "narwe in cage" (*MilT* 3224), an attempt to deprive her of any outside influence. The "cage" in this context is a metaphoric enclosure drawn from the characteristic of the "jalous" husband, but the physical image of the cage suggests John's desire to have full control of everything in it. Together, John and his house contribute to the narrative structure that seeks to isolate Alisoun from other men, but unfortunately for John and despite his efforts, he and his house only encourage interaction with other men. John's marriage to Alisoun promotes competition from men both inside and outside the house, and in this tale, the house is the only place in which any significant activity occurs. The

tale's action centers upon the house, and plot events situated in the house revolve around the most significant object kept within it—the bed. The bed is the site of John and Alisoun's most intimate moments, it is the place in which the only scene featuring John and Alisoun together is interrupted by Absolon's outside singing, and it is also the place where relations between Nicholas and Alisoun transgress the privacy of marriage. In his book *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex and Agency in the Canterbury Tales*, Mark Miller argues that John's desire for intimacy is problematic in this tale: "The problem is so deep because the Miller knows that intimacy cannot be what his picture says it must be, simply a matter of coming close to some desired object by possessing it" (67). Even at the moment when he is in bed with Alisoun, Absolon's singing deprives John of his intimacy with his wife.

It is no surprise that the Miller has John, Nicholas, and Absolon competing for the prime position in the center of this small world. This competition can be read as the ways in which different masculinities privilege each type as superior to the other types, and each type strives to compete with the others for its rightful place at the center. Each man is in some way dismissive of the others. For example, although John is clearly afraid of being cuckolded, he keeps Alisoun caged because "she was wylde and yong, and he was old / And demed hymself been lik a cokewold" (*MilT* 3225-6), and even though he is a jealous man, he never seems to consider that potential threats can occur from inside the house. Instead, Alisoun's "cage" seems designed more to keep her from responding to or exploring potential temptations from outside the house. Because Nicholas, as a university student, is supposed to privilege mind over body, John seems to assume that Nicholas will conform to this kind of masculine ideal and hence be

trustworthy because he is less interested in sensory pursuits than he is in educating himself. This assumption receives support when John blames Nicholas's "illness" on the pursuit of intellectual enlightenment:

> This man is falle, with his astromye,
> In some woodnesse or in som agonye.
> I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!
> Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.
> Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man
> That nought but oonly his bileve kan!
> So ferde another clerk with astromye;
> He walked in the feeldes for to prye
> Upon the sterres, what ther sholde bifalle,
> Til he was in a marle-pit yfalle;
> He saugh nat that. But yet, by Seint Thomas,
> Me reweth soore of hende Nicholas.
> He shal be rated of his studiyng,
> If that I may, by Jhesus, hevene kyng! (*MilT* 3451-3464)

This passage suggests that John feels there should be less emphasis on the pursuit of scholarly knowledge in life because there are secrets to the world that men ought not to know. This passage implies that Nicholas's illness is a punishment for Nicholas prying into the details of "Goddes pryvetee," because when is too busy looking heavenward, one is oblivious to the earthly things in front of him. Here John is clearly scornful of Nicholas's desire for intellectual enlightenment. John's words "blessed be alwey a lewed man" indicate that he privileges his own less educated type of masculinity if it helps avoid succumbing to a madness ("woodnesse") or a fit of some kind ("agonye"). Early on, the Miller details John's lack of education. We know that John "knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude" (*MilT* 3227), and that he is dismissive of education. The fact that John believes that Nicholas should be "rated of his studiyng" shows the dismissive attitude that John takes toward Nicholas's chosen career; essentially, it is better to study less and remain healthy instead of studying too much and suffer illness.

But however disdainful John is of Nicholas's studies, this passage also suggests the caring, tender, almost feminine aspect of John's character. That is, he cares about Nicholas and wants to do what he can to ensure Nicholas's health and comfort. We also see John's tender side when Nicholas informs him of the second Flood, and John believes Alisoun is in danger: "'Allas, my wyf! / And shal she drenche? / Allas, myn Alisoun!' / For sorwe of this he fil almost adoun" (MT 3522-3524). While swooning upon receipt of shocking information is not exclusively a womanly behavior, it is uncommon in most men in medieval literature, and in this case could suggest a behavior more commonly ascribed to women.

The passive role that the Miller assigns to John designates him as a potential victim, open to attacks by other men. In his article "Negotiating Masculinities: Erotic Triangles in the *Miller's Tale*," Martin Blum notes that older men like John are often portrayed as cuckolds (41). In this respect, Blum contends, "the older man's place is equal to that of the socially enforced passivity of medieval women, who by reason of their gender were largely barred from taking on more active roles" (41). We see an example of the socially enforced passivity of women in the *Man of Law's Tale* when Custance herself states that "[w]ommen are born to thraldom and penance, / And to been under mannes governance" (MLT 286-87). The unquestioning ease with which John believes Nicholas's second Flood story suggests not only John's tendency to fall into thralldom, but it also places him, in a sense, under Nicholas's intellectual governance. However dismissive John is of education, he still places a great deal of trust in it.

The tale's harshest criticism of the masculine ideal types targets Absolon, whose candid nature of demonstrating his "love-longynge" (*MilT* 3679) to Alisoun demands an audience, since, as Blum notes, Absolon's "self-definition as a male is entirely based on this notion of performing the part of the courtly lover" (44). That is, he defines himself to himself, and not necessarily to others. Absolon's hobbies include dancing, singing, and playing instruments, all of which he seems to consider important aspects of his performance as a courtly lover. However, he is not so much a passive effeminate lover waiting patiently for his lady to cast her eyes upon him; he entertains merry barmaids and pursues paramours all night, but there is no reason to believe that any of his entreaties are effective. Blum supposes that the reasons for Absolon's eventual failure "are to be found less in his lack of ability to perform any of his individual activities, than in his own misconceptions, both about the nature of Alison's wishes and, more importantly, about his own notion that impersonating a lover is an adequate substitute for actually being one" (45). Absolon's attempt to endear himself to Alisoun by singing at the shot window while she is in bed with her husband, rather than waiting until John leaves the house, suggests that he has little respect for the legitimacy of John's authority in the house or for John's legitimate sexual rights to his wife. Absolon's barrage of love tokens to Alisoun include money, "pyment, meeth . . . spiced ale, / And wafres" (*MilT* 3378-79). The gifts seem to stem from his assumptions that "som folk wol ben wonnen for richesse, / And somme for strokes, and somme for gentillesse" (*MilT* 3381-82), and Absolon's awkward assumptions about how to properly woo a lady bear a resemblance to the myriad answers the knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* receives when seeking the

answer to the question of what "wommen moost desiren" (WBT 905).[10] Absolon's assumptions about the notions of successful courtship are thwarted, however, because he does not recognize that Alisoun, who has the most power over the space of the house, is the only person in the tale who holds the true power of inclusion to or exclusion from the house. Because Absolon is so enamored with himself and the idea of conducting a successful performance, he does not understand that Alison's refusal is in fact a real refusal instead of the obligatory courtly refusal, even when she threatens to throw rocks at him if he does not let her alone.

The literature of courtship does not suggest that Alisoun's refusal of Absolon's proclamation of love would have persuaded him to stop pursuing her. In her book *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, Susan Crane reminds us that a woman's "refusal is itself scripted into courtship as a first stage of feminine responsiveness" (63). We see an example of this initial refusal early in the tale. When left alone in the house where there is privacy and isolation from the community, Nicholas aggressively grabs Alisoun's "queynte" (*MilT* 3276) and holds her "harde by the haunchebones" (*MilT* 3279). She threatens to cry "'out, harrow' and 'allas'" (*MT* 3286) if Nicholas refuses to let her go. But Nicholas argues his case effectively; he is convincing enough, and he "spak so faire, and profred him so faste" (*MilT* 3289) that Alisoun concedes, and "she hir love hym graunted atte laste" (*MilT* 3290). Nicholas convinces Alisoun to return his love; in this way, we see early on how convincing Nicholas can be—he can indeed gain control of the world through his reasoning, but

[10] "Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse, / Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse, / Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde, / And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde. / Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost esed / Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed" (WBT 925-30).

only if she allows the access. Absolon's wooing is so emphatically public that there is little chance of immediate success; a refusal is part of the courting process in a public context, and Absolon's attempted wooing is in fact very public. After all, he stands in the street and sings to Alisoun and begs for her kisses, all within view of anyone who might look. A public wooing necessitates a public refusal, but a private wooing, as Nicholas demonstrates, might be more successful. In the book *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, V.A. Kolve notes that Nicholas "knows the need for secrecy in such matters, if success is what you're after" (187). Nicholas is educated enough to ensure his own success not only because he is aware of the need for secrecy, but because he has also gained John's trust so that John never has a reason to suspect Nicholas's intentions toward Alisoun. For Absolon, the ritual of courtship seems to be its own reward. It is an excuse to dress up, fix his hair, chew on sweet herbs, and sing. He only wants to obtain a kiss from her, and because initially, he is not explicitly looking for a sexual encounter, Alisoun seems to be little more to him than an occasion to exercise his courtly skills.

For Absolon, the shot window is the barrier that deprives him of his access to Alisoun, who remains behind that barrier. She alone holds the power of inclusion. Absolon casts her as the "lady" in his courtly performance, but the Miller has made such a mockery of courtly tropes that by the time Absolon arrives to collect his kiss from his lady, we should not be surprised that Alisoun reminds him that his performance is inadequate, and that he is faulty in casting her as the courtly lady in his self-gratifying show. The role of lady, Kolve contends, "implies high birth and refined sensibility, [and] is so far from Alisoun's secure sense of her own nature that it earns

[Absolon] a crude correction . . . when the love language he affects, and the posture from which he speaks it, become most intolerably elevated and grand" (194). The fact that Alisoun's crude reminder of his inadequacy takes place specifically through the "shot-wyndowe" (*MilT* 3358), while Absolon "doun sette hym on his knees" (*MilT* 3723) in a dramatic demonstration of divine adoration is particularly fitting because this scene is the Miller's punch line to his satire. Peter Brown offers a hypothesis regarding the shot window in the article "'Shot Wyndowe' (Miller's Tale I.3358 and 3695): An Open and Shut Case?" He states that the term "shot wyndowe . . . is a rare and striking term and may designate not [the] conventional arrangement for a domestic window, but a special characteristic, namely that it was a privy window, the window associated with *shot* in the sense of discharge, shit, or chute" (100). Alisoun's crude correction to Absolon's feckless courtship attempts is the culmination of the Miller's "quiting" of the Knight's tale, because when Alisoun "at the wyndow out . . . putte hir hole" (*MilT* 3732) so that Absolon could kiss "hir naked ers" (*MilT* 3734). Absolon, angry beyond measure, cries "as dooth a child that is ybete" (*MilT* 3759). With this exhibition of childlike behavior, the Miller communicates his underlying message: characteristics that are womanly or childlike are weak and unbecoming when they exist in a man, and the performance of courtly behavior that is so typical of lordly knights in much medieval literature (specifically in the *Knight's Tale*) is such an artifice of refinement that it warrants a retaliation commensurate to how the world really perceives this ideal. Essentially, the courtly ideal amounts to discharge from a shot window.

Just because the harshest criticism targets the "courtly" Absolon does not mean that the Miller is satisfied with the other masculine types. Some scholars disagree.

Laskaya, for example, argues that the harsh maligning of Absolon means that the Miller "believes that the working man who creates with his hands and the intellectual who designs with his mind are more masculine than the courtly lover whose goal is to love women and revel in desire" (87). "Hende" Nicholas, for all of his intellectual designs and ingenuity when it comes to manipulating John for his own end, still blindly follows Alisoun's example, thus demonstrating a clear lapse in his calculated, educated reason established so early in the tale. Even though his intellect has for a time granted him access to Alisoun, the central place in this tale's world, the Miller is quick to remind us that such positions are fleeting. By duplicating her joke when Absolon comes around again, this time with the "hoote kultour," Nicholas opens himself up to situational manipulation by sticking his own arse out of the window, and here his masculinity and his body are unknowingly vulnerable to the discretions of the other masculine types. Nicholas's ill-timed joke results in a scorched backside and serves as a reminder that while a keen intellect can for a time maintain for one a prized position at the world's center, it is just as fallible as any other masculine type. Each man tries to defeat the other men in the tale using the particular strengths assigned to him as prescribed by the types he represents, but their own assumptions about other men, about themselves, and about how the world tolerates those assumptions results in punishments for all three.

If Absolon's original target for the "hoote kultour" had been struck, the tale's "quite" would have been remarkably less emphatic than it is. In the book *Chaucer's Queer Nation*, Glenn Burger contends that if Absolon had in fact landed the "hoote kultour" on Alisoun's rear end as he intended, "his action would have scored a violently misogynistic blow against the female body that humiliated him" (27). However, *The*

Miller's Tale is not so much about male/female power struggles than it is a tale of power struggles between masculine types. In order to communicate this kind of competition effectively and "quite" the Knight, the Miller needs to put Nicholas on the receiving end of Absolon's coulter. Burger contends that the end of the *Miller's Tale* has reasserted a communal order by the tale's disciplining of the body (24). For Burger, the laughter of the *Miller's Tale* works to restore proper masculinity [and] the tale 'quites' the *Knight's Tale* only so far as it translates the Knight's message onto another discursive terrain" (24). However, Chaucer's text does not allow for the restoration of masculinity: Nicholas's desire to recreate a joke that has already once played out successfully earns him a burned backside and shows that he underestimates Absolon's ability to learn from experience; Absolon's exaggerated courtly wooing results in an embarrassing misdirected kiss that damages his feelings more than his body and reveals his inability to endure hardship successfully; and John's naiveté nets him a broken arm when he falls from the tubs suspended from the ceiling and public ridicule that is not only unbecoming for one who is supposed to represent the house authority, but publicly discloses his inadequacy in that role. None of them wins Alisoun in the end. All of them are in some way exiled from Alisoun's prized center and by extension, the world. Alisoun remains unpunished at the end of the tale and not because, as Blum claims, she is determined to defy the roles all three men have designed for her: that of John's young and controllable wife, Absolon's courtly lady, and Nicholas's available mistress (51). Alisoun does not need to defy any of the roles the men have assigned to her because she possesses the greatest power over the surrounding space; she alone retains the power of privilege or deprivation and of access or exclusion. As we see in the *Miller's Tale*, any

type of masculine ideal is vulnerable to the influence and sabotage of other types. In John's house, the illusions of masculine stability collapse and the types are exposed for the fiction they are.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

The *Wife of Bath's Prologue* reveals such a lively character that it is no wonder that scholars have constructed and deconstructed nearly every available aspect of her *Prologue*. In fact, she rarely represents the same thing to scholars. In their article "Rough Love: Notes toward an Erotics of the 'Canterbury Tales,'" W. W. Allman and D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. believe that in the Wife, "Chaucer takes over a passive, objectified image of female sexuality, consumption, and remakes it as an image of self-conscious aggression and agency, specifically a self-administered and inverted sacrament, a force-feeding of sexualized grace" (56). Burger contends that the Wife's ruthless attempts at female agency contribute to her representation of one aspect of "female masculinity" (94); yet Robertson labels her as a "typically 'feminine'" (330) character. Robertson believes she does her best to "subvert the traditional hierarchy of husband over wife as it reflects the hierarchy of Christ over the Church and parallels the hierarchy of the spirit over the flesh, or the 'newness of the spirit' over the 'oldness of the letter'" (330) For Robertson, Alisoun of Bath is not a "'character' in the modern sense at all, but an elaborate iconographic figure designed to show the manifold implications of an attitude" (330). However, her *Prologue* does not imply a strong desire to subvert the traditional hierarchy of husband over a wife, nor does her *Prologue* exclusively advocate for a privileging of female "maistrie" (though if female "maistrie"

is a consequence of her speech, she might be pleased). Rather, church authorities are abused unwittingly yet significantly in accordance with her perspective on their discourse and in defense of her right to live her life freely. The intention to mock church authorities lies not within her as a character, but within the design of the text. Because the house is a site for renegotiating public authority, which in this tale includes masculine authority, money, sexual appeal, and social capital, it is important for the Wife, as she attempts to renegotiate public authority by emphasizing her perspective on established cultural discourse, to have access to public spaces and power that is publicly recognized. In this tale, the house is the place where she argues these negotiations with her five husbands.

To communicate her point effectively, she draws from her "[e]xperience, though noon auctoritee" (WBP 1), and uses public speech to frame her criticism. A close look at the way the narrative design of the Wife emphasizes her criticism will reveal more about male/female power relationships than simply dismissing her performance as the rant of an uneducated, misguided woman who is "hopelessly carnal and literal" (Robertson 317). Some scholarly debates focus on her authorial voice, or the legitimacy of her female authority, or whether she confirms sexual stereotypes in what appears to be an uninformed, antifeminist performance.[11] An analysis of her unwitting abuse of medieval authorities in the context of the home in terms of privilege or deprivation will shift critical focus from whether she is deliberately subversive or conforming to stereotypes, or whether she is typically feminine. Rather, a discussion of power

[11] For further reading on this, see works by Mary Carruthers, Sheila Delaney, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Lesley Lawton, Elaine Treharne, and John Pitcher listed in the bibliography for this chapter.

relationships inside the home as she negotiates them will emphasize the concept of privacy in terms of meaning and female perspective.

For the Wife, the house is a site for negotiations. She spends a great deal of time arguing at home with husbands one through three for the right to leave her house, the right to have access to "the keyes of thy cheste" (WBP 309), and the right to visit and gossip with her friends and have her clothes admired. She believes in the right to behave as she wishes: "We love no man that taketh kep or charge / Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large" (WBP 321-22). Where husbands one through three seem to consider the privacy of the house in terms of privilege (that is, the power they hold and demonstrate over their surrounding space—leaving her at home while they philander, locking her out of the chest containing their money, etc.), the text's narrative structure seems to allow the Wife to view privacy in terms of deprivation. Only with occasional access to the public sphere can she show that she too has power, and she exerts that power most obviously by revealing intimate details of her marriages to an audience of pilgrims. An historical analysis of documented medieval behavior infers that the social assumptions underlying gendered divisions of space had implications for where women could be and what would happen to them if they moved outside that space. In the article "Medieval English Women in Rural and Urban Domestic Space," Barbara Hanawalt notes "[a] woman's reputation might hinge on her ability to remain in a particular, acceptable space. The space might be a house, village, or city quarter depending on her economic activity and her social class" (19). If the power of dominant groups lies in the ability to control the ordering of space for subservient groups, and if the Wife argues for her right to move freely at her leisure, then any of her solo public appearances would

communicate a lack of power for her husbands, which would compromise their masculine authority in both the public and private spheres.

The Wife's husbands might have had more at stake than simply public emasculation. Their reluctance to allow her to move about freely could have come from a very real concern regarding her safety in public space. Hanawalt notes:

> One might assume that the urban environment was not as conscious of the space that a woman could occupy. Evidence from advice literature, coroners' inquests, and other legal cases argues against this assumption. Women's space could be confined by means other than simple geography: clothing, the way of walking, and even injunctions of speech could regulate a woman's access to physical space. (22)

Husbands one through three could have been attempting to regulate the Wife's movement outside of the home because movement outside of the designated space leaves her vulnerable to rape or other types of attacks, especially if she arrays herself fancily or speaks authoritatively in public. The Wife claims that the first three husbands loved her, even if she thought little of their love: "They loved me so wel, by God above, / That I ne tolde no dyntee of hir love!" (WBP 207-08). Even though she knows they love her, she seems to view their attempts to limit her space as a means of depriving her of her right to space instead of as loving gestures. She is confident in her ability to care for herself: "Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen? / Thogh thou preye Argus with his hundred yen / To be my warde-cors, as he kan best, / In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest; / Yet koude I make his berd, so moot I thee!" (WBP 357-61) She does not seem to acknowledge or care that her honor might be questioned because she travels alone beyond Bath. Hanawald notes that widows of craftsmen or merchants or married women acting as *femme sole* often "ventured into the marketplace or dealt in substantial production. But even there they were limited to their own cities. They could not

accompany their goods to trade fairs or other towns" (24). The Wife cares little for the customs that limit her space; these customs are clearly arbitrary to her. Her determination to obtain access to public space and travel wherever she likes without consideration for her husbands, however, seems to be more than her henpecked husbands can stand. Her fourth husband, for example, dies when she returns from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. While the Wife does not assume sole responsibility for his death, she does admit that her behavior made him suffer during their marriage: "By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie, / For which I hope his soule be in glorie./ . . . / Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste, / In many wise, how soore I hym twiste" (WBP 489-90; 493-94). Determined as she is to ensure that her perspective on privacy includes power over her surrounding space instead of, as her husbands would have it, deprivation and the absence of power, she will argue against the authorities who seek to set the limits on her movement.

Alisoun of Bath should be understood partly in terms of her house. Her *Prologue* and her *Tale* begin and end in the domestic center of the house. Most of the negotiations with her husbands take place there, and her house is the place in which she communicates to them most of her self-assertion. To be shut in or contained by the house is something to which she will not agree. The Wife has movement, and her physical existence will not be defined by the presence or absence of the men she loves or their perspectives on how she should regulate her movement. The Wife's home is not so much a building as a centralized place where gender politics can be confronted and heard by her husbands. Her fifth husband, Jankyn, is the husband most resistant to her perspective. This may be because he speaks to not only the intellectual medieval mind

by virtue of his clerical profession but also the priesthood. It is important to note that the Middle English Dictionary glosses "Jankin" as not only a man's name, but also a name applied contemptuously to priests ("Jankin" *MED*). In one sense, by virtue of his name, he represents the authorities that determine Alisoun's movement.

The Wife of Bath has established herself as mistress of her house and the head of her domestic enterprise, qualities that constitute the "perfect woman of the Old Testament," according to Philippe Ariès in the article "Love in Married Life" (131). Her successful business and acquired riches makes her relatively powerful. That power seems the motivating force to advocate for her right to pursue uninterrupted access to the public even if the Church seeks to intervene. Even if, as Ariès notes, "[d]uring the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Church was inclined to interfere more and more in marriages, to control them and make them conform with the sacramental pattern that was being worked out and established" (146), the Wife's perspective on domestic privacy in context of privilege does not allow for a belief that the rules of marriage should be framed exclusively in terms of male privilege.

Medieval gender prescriptions were largely preached in terms of religious faith, and the narrative structure of the text suggests that the Wife interprets gender-based behavioral guides as biased prescriptions of individuals who use devotion to conceal ulterior motives that allow them to justify criticism of female behaviors and assert their self-imposed power over women: "Men may devyne and glosen, up and doun, / But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye, / God bad us for to wexe and multiplye; / That gentil text kan I wel understonde" (WBP 26-29). The comment here suggests that ecclesiastics can interpret the Bible however they like, but she is more loyal to the will of God.

Succession was so important to people in the Middle Ages that people were often encouraged to engage in sexual intercourse until their succession was assured (Flandrin 116). In his article "The Indissoluble Marriage," Ariès cites one example of King Philippe Auguste of France, who in 1190 "found himself the widowed father of a three-year-old son," and because the "whole line of succession hung on the slender thread of a child's life" (147), the king was obligated to take a second wife. While the Church's primary marriage doctrine was aimed at the laity, the "aristocratic literate laity [was] the only ones it [could] hope to influence" (Ariès 145). If kings were allowed to remarry to secure their heirs, then as ruler of her own domain and as a powerful woman in her own right, the Wife should be entitled to the same privilege.

The Wife may be the one figure in all of the *Canterbury Tales* who remains faithful to the spirit of the marriage institution. Robertson observes that the Wife seems happy with the fact that she has had five husbands and sees nothing wrong with it. For Robertson, this means that she "has little regard for the sacramental aspect of marriage" and that the "'spirit' of the institution escapes her completely" (319). However, the Wife confidently argues that since there were no specifics in the Bible regarding the number of times that a person could be married, there is no reason for criticism: "But of no nombre mencion made he, / Of bigamy, or of octogamye; / Why sholde men thane speke of it vileynye?" (WBP 32-34). In his article "'Space to Speke': The Wife of Bath and the Discourse of Confession," Jerry Root notes that she "refuses the figurative 'sentence' that Jesus's exchange with the Samaritan means that she should marry only once" (257). She does admit that "What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn" (WBP 21), but her reluctance to follow the authorities' figurative interpretation of that

example aligns her more with the Wycliffite school of thought that encouraged a more literal reading of the Bible. According to William Mallard in his article "John Wyclif and the Tradition of Biblical Authority," in this line of thought, the Bible "is the only source of doctrine that will insure the health of the Church and the salvation of the faithful" (51); Wyclif was known to be "thoroughly scornful of theologians who slight Holy Scripture" (Mallard 51). Crane states that she "celebrates the transgressive potential of women's sovereignty but also expresses a sovereignty as seized power rather than sanctioned authority" (130-31). Her performance makes it very clear that in every tradition from which she draws, be it romance, ecclesiastic, or scholarly, women are denied open access to public space, and thus, deprived of their own unmitigated authority; the design of her performance suggests that seized power is often necessary for women. The Bible makes no explicit rule stating that only one marriage is required, and the Wife cites Solomon, Abraham, and Jacob as examples of holy men who famously had more than one spouse: "As wolde God it leveful were unto me / To be refresshed half so ofte as he!" (WBP 37-38). As the Wife's statement shows, and as Laura Betzig observes in her article "Medieval Monogamy," "[t]hroughout the Old Testament, powerful men are polygynous men" (182). Essentially, where marriage is concerned, the Wife argues in favor of equality, even if people of the Middle Ages did not view due benevolence as equal. Marriage is a preventative medicine prescribed by God to save mankind from immorality. In this sense, the Wife is following the guidance set forth by biblical authority and not by the intellectual authorities of her time; in pursuing marriage, she is saving herself from immorality.

While medieval authorities believed that a marriage was supposed to symbolize a relationship between Christ and the Church that informed a model for the relationship between husband and wife in the Christian tradition, the Wife's contention does not allow for exclusively male privileged interpretations. If one marriage could serve as an ideal model for a Christ/Church relationship, then why not a second marriage, or an eighth marriage? As Carol M. Meale notes in her article "Entrapment or Empowerment? Women and Discourses of Love and Marriage in the Fifteenth Century," "[r]ecent feminist scholarship has been much occupied with exploring, if not privileging, the notion of virginity as a positive choice of being which was available to women, or avoiding, or transcending, the entrapment of both love and marriage" (175).[12] The Wife does not seem to experience entrapment in marriage nor does she feel compelled to commit to the dismal arrangement of widowhood as St Jerome had encouraged. She does speak of the "wo that is in mariage" (WBP 3), but in the context of her performance it seems to be a satirical comment; she certainly does not hate marriage, so the "wo" does not really apply to her.

The power of speech was commonly recognized in the Middle Ages. In the book *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, C.M Woolgar notes that speech, "like other sounds, could effect direct changes in listener and speaker. It was thus extremely powerful, nowhere more so than when dealing with the word of God or his agents, or with evil and the Devil" (85). For example, if one considers that speech effected the process of excommunication, specifically a word or some kind of formal, spoken

[12] For further reading on this idea see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture;* Sarah Salih's *Versions and Virginity in Late Medieval England*; Ruth Evans's chapter on "Virginities" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing.*

condemnation, then one can see that the power of speech was particularly potent for those working on God's behalf in either sermons or in prophecy. In this sense, words are powerful and determine reality. In defending her right to assert her authority and define her perspective, one aspect of the Wife's performance is of particular interest—her allegation that no wife has ever had the opportunity to be the author of her own story and if she ever had that opportunity, stories would be remarkably different:

> For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
> That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
> But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
> Ne of noon oother woman never the mo.
> Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
> By God, if women hadde writen stories,
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
> They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
> Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (WBP 688-96)

This passage reinforces the conventional notion that literacy was reserved for men; that is, those who by virtue of their gender are allowed access to the exclusive group of the elite few considered privileged enough to interpret "accurately" the written word. This passage is therefore crucial to justifying her right to assert her perspective. Whether she wants to elicit changes in her listeners with her performance is not explicitly clear, but she does want them to listen. In her *Prologue*, she will "peynt the leon." The Wife of Bath does not speak for exceptional women; she represents the general or usual experience of women. Her *Prologue* and *Tale* separate the male audience from their place as privileged storytellers, and she creates a safe space for women who must be heard, and who should be rid of deprivation; after all, her audience is "Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde" (WBP 225).

In the spectrum of human senses, the closest relative to speech is hearing, and the Wife's hearing, or lack thereof, defines her perspective. In the second line of her

portrait in the *General Prologue*, Chaucer mentions that she "was somdel deef, and that was scathe" (GP 446), and out of any of her characteristics, her handicap is mentioned most frequently. In the article "Alisoun's Ear," Melvin Storm observes that her deafness "both initiates and concludes the composite portrait that Chaucer gives us of her" (219). For Storm, Chaucer uses Alisoun's deafness "iconographically to reflect her intellectual abilities and her spiritual state, echoing a long patristic tradition of equating the ears and hearing with the apprehension of truth" (220). Storm argues for a reading in which Alisoun of Bath "takes her authorities, classical, scriptural, or patristic, out of context, fails herself to understand and interpret them aright, and distorts them in the recounting" (222). Even if Alisoun abuses the authorities, she does so unwittingly because her perspective on their discourse does not align with her perspective on her right to live freely and without interference; perhaps she cannot or does not want to hear the truth according to medieval authorities. Her interpretations call attention to masculine privilege, and her distrust of masculine privilege justifies her attempt to reclaim an identity for women that has been buried beneath the discourse of devotion. Although she appears flighty, and contends that her "entente nys but for to pleye" (WBP 192), she is a learned woman, a successful businesswoman, and her five husbands have granted her more experience on her subject matter than the rhetoric of those who sought to set the limits on the subject: "Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes, / And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes / Maken the werkman parfyt sekirly; / Of fyve husbondes scoleiyng am I" (WBP 44d-f).

Despite her life experience and the "scoleiyng" she has received from her husbands, however, she insists that she marries Jankyn for love: "My fifth housbonde—

God his soule blesse!— / Which that I took for love, and no richesse" (WBP 525-26). Because she loves him, she gives him her land and property that she has acquired from her previous husbands: "This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende, / Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee, / And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee / That evere was me yeven therbifoore" (WBP 628-31). Her great love inspires her to endow her belongings to her young husband and the giving act results in her deprivation and escalates his privilege in the marriage. Her deprivation here is incongruous in that she willingly gives away the power for which she strives to retain. She relinquishes her own sense of governance to him and deprives herself of the self-"maistrie" she has obtained thus far in marriage. Over time, she has acquired a great deal of experience, which has been the foundation for her domestic governance, so her gift to Jankyn is particularly dramatic for her. In the book *Chaucerian Spaces: Spatial Poetics in Chaucer's Opening Tales*, William Woods points out that Alisoun's authority in this sense is not absolute. It exists, he says, "as relationships, as bonds of identity between herself and household articles, clothing, cash, servants, neighbors, and not least, her husband" (119). For Woods, her relations with her husband create her position in the house. "To the degree that she manages the husband, the house becomes her domain" (Woods 119). Even though ordinarily her yield on her long-term wifely investment has been her "good" (WBP 314), because she has traded her youth and her sexuality for control of the household, with the priest-like Jankyn, she either needs to or wants to tithe her wealth.

Jankyn's contribution to the marriage, however, is both physical and emotional abuse, an unfortunate overstepping of the privilege she has generously granted him in her home: "And yet was he to me the moost shrewe; / That feele I on my ribbes al by

rewe, / And evere shal unto myn endyng day" (WBP 505-07). Despite the physical abuse, his book of "wikked wyves" (WBP 685) inspires her to reaffirm her own privilege by reclaiming power over her surrounding space. In the book *Feminizing Chaucer*, Jill Mann comments that "[m]any a woman must have found herself in the position of Chaucer's Wife of Bath, tormented by the literary representations of 'wikked wyves', yet with no alternative model to turn to other than the role of suffering victim" (2). Medieval literature leaves little question as to the polarized nature of attitudes towards women of the time. Sinful Eve is set against wholesome Mary, the sensual deceiver against maternal purity, and wanton rebelliousness against the ideal meekness. Alisoun of Bath clearly recognizes that such an extreme dichotomy cannot be an accurate representation of real life. This polarity as defined by the clerks and the priests informs the structure of most of her performance, but her perspective on that discourse does not allow for the polarity to define the way she lives her life. When Jankyn, reading to her from his book, brings the outside prescriptions inside her home, she defends her place in the home in terms of her privilege instead of deprivation. The enemy in this case is not only the clerical and priestly prescriptions that inform the book's content, but also the man who embodies these ideas and seeks to deprive her of all power with a regurgitation of rhetoric, the roots of which are grounded in masculine privilege.

But the Wife has a polarity of her own:

> For certes, I am al Venerian
> In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
> Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
> And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
> Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
> Allas, allas! That evere love was synne!

I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
By vertu of my constellacioun;
That made me I koude noght withdrawe
My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.
Yet I have Martes mark upon my face,
And also in another privee place. (WBP 609-20)

While she is driven by love (Venus) in feeling, her heart is marked by war (Mars); she epitomizes love and war. Jankyn has no reason to comply with her personal mores; after all, he is a clerk and has been well integrated into the authoritative discourse that for him justifies his right as a man to "maistrie" and control over the space by virtue of depriving her of power. On the other hand, Alisoun has no reason to comply with his social conventions either; he has defiled her space with misogynistic prose that reinforces the belief in masculine-privileged rhetoric. Even if she aspires to be meek like Mary or wanton like Eve, she will remain problematic, inferior, and bothersome: "'A womman cast hir shame away, / Whan she cast of hir smok'; and forthermo, / 'A fair womman, but she be chaast also, / Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose'" (WBP 782-85). Only when he arrives at the point wherein the prescriptive polarities reaches their climax does she retaliate, but it is important to note that she attacks the book before she attacks the man: "And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne / To reden on this cursed book al nyght, / Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght / Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke / I with my fest so took hym on the cheke / That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun" (WBP 789-93). Throughout her performance, Alisoun is engaged in a struggle less with men themselves than with the "auctoritee" that seeks to limit her power over her surrounding space. After she mangles the text from which that "auctoritee" stems, she punches Jankyn in the face. Jankyn's kind of "education" might have its place in the masculine space of the university, but there is no place for it in

Alisoun's home. In her home, it becomes a betrayal designed to reinforce her deprivation, and for her, this kind of betrayal justifies a violent response. So when Jankyn "with his fest" smote Alisoun "on the heed" (WBP 795), Alisoun feigns death and uses the illusion of death to reclaim her lost privilege. However, the cost to her is substantial and symbolic.

Jankyn deafens Alisoun's ear when he hits her. Once he uses a bodily assault to communicate his anger over the loss of his authority and sees her fall to the floor as though dead, Jankyn seems to recognize, as does the Wife, that her body is crucial to his identity in the relationship. Because of her success in business and her previous inheritances, he has money and land, which might have served as economic evidence of his "maistrie" until their fight, even though (or especially because) there is no evidence to suggest that his university education contributes to their economic state. As Elizabeth M. Biebel notes in the article "A Wife, a Batterer, a Rapist: Representations of 'Masculinity' in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*," "the wife's possession of superior resources can undermine the ability of the husband's resources to validate superior power, thus leading to the substitution of a resource in which wives can rarely be superior to their husbands: physical violence" (70). It would be a blessing for Alisoun if Jankyn were strong enough in mind not to resort to asserting his masculinity through physical violence when he feels emasculated, but as a man living in a male-dominant culture, he is supposed to maintain control over his wife. When the only rhetoric he knows does not serve to control her, he turns to violence. When he perceives that his emotionally-based response might have killed Alisoun, he returns to verbal communication; that is, he is very sorry and he will not repeat the incident: "'Deere

suster Alisoun, / As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!'" (WBP 804) But the damage is done, and Alisoun is deaf in one ear.

Her deafness allows her to devise her own path to eternal life on her own terms. If scholars have argued that she distorts the figurative biblical interpretations it is because they likely assume a traditional Christian perspective on the tale, and this assumption de-emphasizes the importance of Jankyn's role; he is, after all, the priest-like figure who deafens her for emasculating him and subverting any masculine authority she might have granted him in the home and in the marriage. Laskaya asks that if Alisoun "is struggling against the discourse of a patriarchal culture, what better defense than an inability to hear?" (182) If she can no longer hear the discourse of antifeminism so prevalent in her culture, she cannot be persuaded to participate in any of its perceived truth either. Her inability to hear means she can pursue her own kind of truth as she interprets it and not the truths written by those who have less experience than she. Her interpretations are a unique approach to challenging authorities without appearing heretical. For the Wife, religious devotion and blind obedience to prescriptive roles generated by authorities and designed for masculine privilege under the guise of religious interpretations are two different things.

There seems to be a discrepancy regarding Church doctrine and people's actual behaviors. In the book *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, Ariès and Béjin contest the assumption that Church doctrine offers an adequate representation of medieval practice (ch 11-12). The thesis of Jean-Louis Flandrin's article in Ariès's and Béjin's book, "Sex in Married Life in the Early Middle Ages: the Church's Teaching and Behavioural Reality," suggests that one way of reading the

literature of marriage precepts is to see doctrine as a repeated attempt to enforce and consolidate standards that often differentiated from behavior; essentially, the exhortations of theologians and moralists witness the conjugal eroticism that the Church wishes to discourage (Ch 11). But Alisoun's story expresses a double expertise in marriage. She has experienced the trials set forth by four of her husbands and, thanks to Jankyn's book, she has expertise on the ways in which men have represented it. For Alisoun, marriage exists in a private place that is not necessarily secret. Privacy, Ariès notes, "implies an enclosed space, withdrawn from the external world but known and sought out, accessible in certain conditions" (136) Secrecy, on the other hand, "is hidden away, except from a few initiates, as if it did not exist, protected by its cloak of religious silence, which binds the initiates also into silence" (Ariès 136-37). For Jankyn as a husband in the house, privacy in terms of privilege is assumed and probably desired, and yet Jankyn's book draws in ideals from public discourse on behavior. His use of the book's rhetoric does not seem designed to confirm his own privilege; rather, he seems to use it in a deliberate attempt to reinforce Alisoun's absence of power. He is unable or unwilling to interpret the book in his own terms even in private, and he relies on public authority to determine behavior inside and outside the home. The idea of public and ecclesiastical authority setting the standards for personal behavior seems to be to what Alisoun objects the most, and her dismissive perspective on that kind of behavior regulation is why she is willing to draw out the details of her husbands' private lives into the public. By doing so, she says everything that the Man of Law is unwilling to say; where the Man of Law's ever-suffering Custance is traded and silent, Alisoun is adamant that the female body can and should speak for itself. In the book *Chaucer's*

Sexual Poetics, Carolyn Dinshaw notes that Alisoun "articulates, makes visible, exactly what that patriarchal hermeneutic necessarily excludes, necessarily keeps invisible . . . She makes audible precisely what patriarchal discourse would keep silent, reveals the exclusion and devalorization that patriarchal discourse performs" (114-115). Bringing her husbands' private deeds into public allows her listeners to confront the social system that governs them all, and she reveals the system as one that actively seeks to disempower women, and this is something that the pilgrims need to hear.

Because the Wife is so lively and forthcoming, it is tempting to read her as the author of her own tale, but we must remember that Chaucer is the one who confronts the problem of devising a voice for women. In writing the Wife, Chaucer's artistry is so forceful that her character overshadows most of the other pilgrims, which raises the question of how opposed Chaucer himself might have been to the mainstream cultural indoctrination of prescribed gender roles. Mann observes that "what comes out of the Wife's mouth is not a naive attempt at an unprejudiced representation of 'how women feel', but rather the most extensive and unadulterated body of traditional antifeminist commonplace in the whole of the *Canterbury Tales*" (57). In order to highlight the disempowerment of women, writing in the voice of a woman is especially helpful. Robertson's claim that the Wife is carnal in what he believes to be her misunderstandings might suggest that he associates her with danger and an unwillingness to accept truth, and that her enthusiastic encouragement of sex might endanger her spiritual life and the spiritual lives of her audience. But as the narrative makes clear, "truth" is dependent on interpretation, and the Wife questions the theologians' ability to interpret the Bible without slighting Holy Scripture and

customizing it in a self-serving, aggrandizing way. That said, Chaucer is not necessarily inventing a new female language so much as he is challenging existing assumptions woven into the words of masculine authority by readers or listeners of the Wife's *Prologue* and *Tale*. The language of the authorities simply illustrates the confining nature of masculine language. With regards to conventional modes of discourses of love and authority, the Wife's words are impactful enough to make the Friar and the Pardoner uneasy. Her words seem to suggest a simultaneous exasperation with the limits of masculine language, with the constraints of the "holy" discourse itself, and the roles open for women to fill within it. One effect that Chaucer achieves in writing the Wife is an appearance of alterity; the Wife does not conform wholly to any stereotype. Although she occasionally appears absent-minded, she demonstrates a consistent sense of self in the rationality of her argument throughout her *Prologue*. She cannot and will not be dismissed solely as a woman who speaks and nags like the generalizations of women addressed in the Jovinian texts. She has authority of experience, she speaks in her own defense and in support of her own desire for public access and power, and her marriages to *men* taught her that knowledge.

Assessment

Analysis of Marie's *Laüstic* shows that the private space of the lady's house is both a site of privilege and deprivation as seen through a female perspective. Her proximity to the neighbor knight allows her privilege in her private space, and with that privilege, she is able to access her lover and exclude her own husband from that space. Her knight husband, whose power seems dependent on public recognition, goes to great lengths to reassert his power in the home when he discovers that his absolute authority

within the house has been temporarily subverted. Bachelard notes that "[h]ouse and space are not merely two juxtaposed elements of space" (43); in this sense, the house's very structure capitalizes its victories over the outside elements. The husband may have killed the symbol of the lady's love, but the love is not dead.

The house in the *Miller's Tale* is a site of both deprivation and privilege that allows the Miller to challenge the sustainability of certain masculine types for those who seek to behave according to the rules of any one of the types. If in the context of deprivation power only exists in a public space, it is no wonder that all of the men are punished in some way by the end of the tale. The success of Absolon's exaggerated courtly behavior relies on public acknowledgement, and because he focuses his entreaties on a woman who embodies the concepts of privacy and exclusion, he is reminded that there is no place for public preening in a private place. John's attempts to rule the house result in public embarrassment and ridicule when his literal fall results in a broken arm that reveals to the town the extent of his inability to control his own house. Nicholas's punishment tells us that while there may be a place for intellect amongst the public world of learning, it is weak in a private environment. Each man is dismissive of the others, and the all of them are deprived of power, which could be Chaucer's subtle way of communicating that in some cases, constructed ideals of masculinity are collapsible in an environment removed from public view.

The Wife of Bath reminds us that she believes in her right to assume power over her own surroundings, and that she will not be confined to the narrow space of what authorities and the Church have set for her. Mann mentions that "[w]riting the truth of woman's existence . . . means not turning one's back on stereotypes, but accepting that

their existence is the centrally important and interesting fact to be confronted" (67). This means that Chaucer needs to acknowledge the power of the stereotypes even as they are resisted because doing so will define the form of the resistance. "Chaucer could not plumb the unrecorded secrets of woman's existence," Mann says, " but he *could* anatomize the literary stereotypes which set the terms in which male-female relationships were played out, and he could question the male writer's role as the 'auctoritee' that supports them" (67). Chaucer constructs this questioning in the representation of a woman engaging with these stereotypes and how those stereotypes were confronted in individual life.

Chapter Two: Manipulating Private Space: Towers as the Space of Conflict

In medieval literature, the tower is a highly visible representation of controlled space. As a controlled space, it is thus the place for conflict and action in the text. In Marie de France's twelfth-century *Yonec*, in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century poem *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, and in Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Knight's Tale,* the tower represents the space of conflict and negotiation. In these texts, towers are places of power, secrecy, and authority, all of which carry different meanings in different texts. Thus, towers have varied meanings; their function differs depending on the authority of the space. For example, in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, Guinevere and Meleagant negotiate the use of the tower space. Despite Meleagant's authority over the tower space, Guinevere is the one who oversees the conditions of her confinement, which includes having her knights with her in the tower. In *Yonec,* the *Jaloux*'s tower is an expression of authority, but for the woman imprisoned inside, the tower is a place for secrecy and the manipulation of private space. In Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, Theseus's tower is not only a place of control, but also a place for negotiations. The cousins Palamon and Arcite try to negotiate between the pull of authority and the pull of a shared desire for Emelye, and the tower is the space of conflict in the lives of the lovers who face authority as an obstacle. The conflict in the *Knight's Tale* is made stronger by the heroes' struggle with familial loyalty within a shared space. If families were conceptualized as one body with the same blood, as Bettina Bildhauer contends in the article "Blood in Medieval Cultures" (1052), and if blood was thought to bind social groups into one body, then the ways in which cousins Palamon and Arcite manipulate

their respective places in the shared tower prison divide that united body into two individuals who compete for a shared desire and audience. On a number of occasions in literature, those who are imprisoned in a tower can contest the constraints of the tower space, and those people can use the tower as a space of secrecy to manipulate secret spaces and resist the authority that confines them.

Yonec

Yonec features an elderly, very jealous man, the acknowledged lord of the fief of Caerwent, who marries a very young, noble lady for the sole purpose of producing heirs for his large inheritance. The lady is very beautiful, but as attractive as her beauty is to the lord's vanity, it is also problematic: "De ceo kë ele ert bele e gente, / En li garder mist mut s'entente: / Dedenz sa tur l'ad enserree / En une grant chambre pavee" (*Yonec* 25-28).[13] The lord's primary interest lies with the lady's body, specifically her womb, and in order to guard this interest, he confines her to his tower keep. Unlike the image of the pious virgin or pious widow, contained for the purpose of religious contemplation, the *malmariée* is a prisoner; the *Jaloux* denies her the opportunity to run her household, and he even denies her the opportunity to worship.

Managing a household and the freedom to worship are privileges commonly afforded the typical medieval wife, but the denial makes the lady and her imprisonment unique compared to other images of distressed damsels in medieval literature. In an article on chaste bodies, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne notes that "[i]mages of enclosed

[13] "He loved her greatly on account of her beauty, but because she was so fair and noble, he took good care to watch over her and locked her in his tower in a large paved chamber" (86). *(All translations come from* The Lais of Marie de France *translated by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby.)*

women are present throughout Christian tradition, but have particular intensity and meaning in the high Middle Ages against the new marriage patterns of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and an increased concern with the movement and control of women" (31). The *Jaloux* does not perceive his wife as much more than an extension of his castle, and he does not keep her in his tower for spiritual contemplation; in fact, he isolates her from spirituality entirely, limiting her spiritual movement as much as her physical movement. Further, she has no real role within the household, and his ruthless attempts at control seem to urge the reader's desire that he be thwarted by spring, by love, by procreation. The *Jaloux*'s possessive love may be rooted in his desire for children to further his lineage and to inherit his estates, but Marie implies the *Jaloux*'s impotence. The *malmariée* conceives quickly enough with her lover, proof that she is not the procreative problem. The *Jaloux* fails to reproduce with his wife after seven years of wedlock, and his sterility seems apparent even in the spatial poetic descriptions of his dark, lonely, and essentially unholy tower room: "Issi la tient plus de set anz— / Unques entre eus n'eurent enfanz— / Ne fors de cele tur ne eissi / Ne pur parent ne pur ami. / Quant li sires se ala cuchier, / N'i ot chamberlenc ne huisser / Ki en la chambre osast entrer / Ne devant lui cirge alumer" (*Yonec* 37-44).[14]

The space of the tower is designed, rather cruelly, to prevent all love from flourishing. The *malmariée* is guarded by the lord's old, widowed sister, whose own implied sterility seems to reinforce the gloom of the tower: "Il ot une sue serur, / Veillë e vedve, sanz seignur; / Ensemble od la dame l'ad mise / Pur li tenir meuz en justise"

[14] "Thus he held her for seven years—they never had any children—and she did not leave the tower either for family or friend. When the lord went to bed, there was neither chamberlain nor doorkeeper who would have dared enter the chamber to light a candle before him" (86).

(*Yonec* 29-32).[15] In writing about the control of space and secrets in Marie's *lais*, Michael Calabrese states that the *malmariée*'s confining tower, as we recognize it, is a corrupt and unholy place, "watched by the envious eyes of the impotent *Jaloux* and his lordless sister" (91). There is no mention of the sister having offspring, and she literally and figuratively stands outside the sexual ideal (she is old and unattractive and she guards the lady outside the space of the bedroom) as much as the *malmariée* is contained both literally and figuratively within it. The old woman rarely speaks, and seems to personify this space of silence and deprivation as much as she guards it.

As a result of her deprivation, the lady's beauty begins to fade, and she laments her ill fortune in her birth, her marriage, and her alienation from her friends and family. These laments suggest a desire to reject the reality of her situation: "Mut ert la dame en grant tristur; / Od lermes, od suspir e plur / Sa beuté pert en teu mesure / Cume cele que n'en ad cure" (*Yonec* 45-48).[16] She has no reason to remain beautiful if there is no access to beauty. She has no reason to care for herself if the only person who sees her insists on imprisoning her. The desire to remove herself from her situation manifests itself in what Frederick Hodgson calls a "temporal context completely removed from her present state" (24). This desire is explicit in her romantic daydreams. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne remarks that the *malmariée* "first develops resistance to her ferocious elderly duenna and her husband in the spring by remembering romance tales . . . musing over these in her enclosure she articulates her sorrow for her exclusion from romance and desire" (129). Despite Wogan-Browne's contention that the *malmariée* first

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[15] "He had a sister, old and widowed, without a husband, and he placed her with the lady to keep her from going astray" (86).

[16] "The lady was in great distress, and she wept and sighed so much that she lost her beauty, as happens to any woman who fails to take care of herself" (86).

develops resistance to her husband and his sister when she remembers romance tales, the *malmariée* seems to have only a *desire* to resist her husband and her duenna by the time she starts to remember the tales. The affirmation she declares, however, transforms the desire for resistance in to an active resistance: "'Si ceo peot estrë e ceo fu, / Si unc a nul est avenu, / Deu, ki de tut ad poësté, / Il en face ma volenté'" (*Yonec* 101-104).[17] The affirmation is a powerful one; it invites her savior. In an article on women and space, Judith Fryer notes that windows "are designed to make landscape what, as seen from a room, it logically ought to be: part of the wall-decoration" (194). Until this point in the *lai,* the lady's tower view of the landscape is little more than wall decoration; she is only able to interact with it passively, to gaze upon it as though it were a painting, until the moment in which Muldumarec flies through her window immediately after her affirmation. Hodgson contends that the aristocratic hawk-knight's immediate arrival and subsequent metamorphosis "represents the advent of a different reality which could correspond to the lady's needs" (24).

The lady's different reality manifests in a number of ways. The first and perhaps most important example of this is that the hawk-knight arrives at the lady's window and opens himself to her gaze. In fact, he desires her gaze, he encourages her gaze; he lingers in her room to allow her to see him for the beautiful knight he is. She is afraid at first, but then she sees beauty. He becomes "safe" to her only to the extent that his body is constructed by the *malmariée*'s gaze upon it. "Il s'est devant la dame asis. / Quant il i

[17] "'If this can be and ever was, if it ever did happen to anyone, may almighty God grant my wish!'" (87)

ot un poi esté / Et ele l'ot bien esgardé, / Chevaler bel e gent devint" (*Yonec* 112-115).[18] Marie mentions beauty eight times in the verses leading up to Muldumarec's arrival, which reinforces beauty's importance in the *lai*. The hawk-knight, described as "bel e gent," suggests Marie has a choice in the order of the adjectives in this line without interrupting poetic caesura. The hawk-knight is first and foremost "bel," and his beauty draws the lady's focus. A few lines later, in line 143, Muldumarec is again described as "beals chevaler;" the frequent references place his beauty as the most privileged of his character qualities. The *malmariée* needs access to beauty; without it, she languishes. Even though her own beauty has faded, her powers of intelligent observation remain intact; the *Jaloux* cannot stifle them. The *malmariée* is first introduced as "[s]age, curteise e forment bele" (*Yonec* 22).[19] In this line, Marie has a choice in how she arranges the adjectives "sage" and "curteise" without interrupting the rhyme. Placing "sage" as the first descriptor implies the importance of the *malmariée*'s intelligence over all of her other character qualities, even if intelligence is the quality most ignored by her husband. The *Jaloux* dismisses or ignores her "wise" characteristic, the first and most identifying of the descriptors, in favor of fetishizing her body; there is no evidence that he cares anything about her intelligence, as he only loves her greatly on account of her beauty. The hierarchy implicit in the love relation between the *malmariée* and Muldumarec that makes the *malmariée* "sage" while Muldumarec remains "bel" not only contrasts the usual, often prescriptive love hierarchy pervasive within some

[18] "It landed before the lady, and after it had been there a while for her to see, it turned into a fair and noble knight" (87).

[19] ". . . wise, courtly, and extremely beautiful" (86)

medieval literature[20] but it signifies the first in a series of events that eventually result in the lady's subversion of her space's constraints.

Muldumarec's metamorphosis is also important in the series of transformative events. A medieval bestiary aligns the hawk with change because the way the hawk sheds its old feathers signifies how the warm touch of the spirit causes one to cast off an old life (Badke). Because the hawk signifies how the warm touch of the spirit causes one to cast off an old life, Muldumarec's prompt appearance is useful for initiating the inspiration and guidance the *malmariée* needs in order to transmute her passivity into activity, and her distant dreams of romance into a new reality. In fact, her reality changes so much upon Muldumarec's arrival[21] that her beauty begins to reaffirm itself, contributing to her transformation into a new reality. In an article on Marie's *Lais* and the psychology of women, Heather Arden suggests that in the cases of imprisoned wives, "the lover's presence appears to symbolize and embody all the human connections from which the wife has been severed" (218). Muldumarec not only symbolizes all the human conditions from which the *malmariée* has been severed, but his hybrid body actually contains all of these conditions. Muldumarec is at once a lover, a friend, an animal, a man, and all of these touches on aspects of the lady's happiness that she has been denied while married to the *Jaloux*.

As both a bird and a man, Muldumarec's body represents both the natural world and humanity, the boundaries of which are often difficult to define. While Muldumarec is not a hybrid in the same way as, for example, a harpy or a werewolf or the Green

[20] Refer, for example, to Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romance *Erec et Enide*, in which Erec is described as "sage" and Enide is described as "bele."

[21] Muldumarec's reality involves change as well, both physical and spiritual, but he is eventually punished for these changes.

Knight,[22] he is still able to shift between human and animal at will and this kind of ability made medieval authorities uneasy. In an intriguing work on hybridity and monstrosity, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that the monster, in whatever form it assumes, "can . . . offer a body through which can be dreamed the dangerous contours of an identity that refuses assimilation and purity" (6). Muldumarec's metamorphosis is as important for him as it is for the lady; his presence triggers her own metamorphosis, even if hers is more figurative than his. He is neither purely man nor is he purely hawk, and he expresses no preference to remain either one. He is neither entirely domesticated nor entirely wild. He is neither purely human nor purely fairy. In this context, his ability to assume different shapes and to penetrate and resist difficult boundaries stresses the permeability of boundaries, whether those boundaries are human or natural, and his body may suggest the difficulty of maintaining those boundaries. Bruckner comments that in pagan mythologies, "metamorphosis takes place precisely because the boundaries between gods, animals, humans, and even plants are imprecise and permeable, their links inscribed in the double nature of being" (181). Even though Christianity influences this *lai* more than paganism, Muldumarec's dual hawk/human identity embodies transgressed boundaries that are difficult to define. What was outside becomes inside. What was animal becomes human. What was cold and sterile becomes warm and fruitful.

Muldumarec is able to shift at will and does not appear to prefer the purity of one shape to the other. He is a hawk with jesses on his feet, which suggests that his soul

[22] I include the Green Knight in the group of hybrid characters because there are some elements of human form that remain present in his frightening green body. Further, he is "half giant," neither full giant nor human sized, a hybrid of giant and human.

is a gentle, tamed one, and indicates that his potentially wild nature embraces the idea of domestication: "En la chambre volant entra; / Gez ot as piez, ostur sembla, / De cinc mues fu u de sis" (*Yonec* 109-111).[23] Murray points out that "[c]hurch doctrines and medical beliefs held that often a man's body was reflective of his inner self or soul" (27). If a man's body reflected his inner self or his soul, then jesses on Muldumarec's feet, implying domestication, should indicate that the lady has little reason for concern. Hawks have the unique benefit of being both wild creatures and domesticated servants of the medieval aristocracy. The jesses, as Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner observes in an article on Marie's *Lais* and *Fables,* "are the sign of a tamed bird who has subordinated its predatory instincts to his mistress's command" (179). Muldumarec reinforces his subordination to the lady's command by reassuring her of her safety: "'Dame,' fet il, 'n'eiez poür! / Gentil oisel ad en ostur; / Si li segrei [vus] sunt oscur, / Gardez ke seize a seür, / Si fetes de mei vostre ami!" (*Yonec* 121-25).[24] In the usual case of a shapeshifter, as an authority like Augustine[25] would warn, an animal-human metamorphosis is an illusion and probably the devil's work. However, birds are often associated with spiritual things, which might suggest that Muldumarec's metamorphosis is easier to accept as a spiritual relief instead of something to be feared. In her book on memory in the Middle Ages, Mary J. Carruthers notes that the bird in general is a common image for souls, memories, and thoughts throughout the ancient world, and has textual precedence in both classical and Hebrew culture. She cites common phrases such as

[23] "The bird flew into the room: it had straps on its feet and looked like a hawk of five or six moultings" (87).

[24] "'Lady, do not be afraid! The hawk is a noble bird. Even if its secrets remain a mystery to you, be assured that you are safe, and make me your beloved!" (87)

[25] Reference Augustine's *City of God* (18.18).

"feathered thoughts" and "winged memories" that flock throughout Psalms, in Virgil, and in many lesser texts (36). Bruckner aligns the bird image with "thoughts and memories that must be captured before they fly away, the flight of the human soul toward the divine" (180). Even though there is also a common literary use for birds as metaphors that signify male arousal and potency, associating the hawk-knight with spirituality before potency seems better fitted in the context of the *lai*. The hawk-knight arrives after the lady prays to God. He appears after she laments the denial of her spirituality. He shapeshifts into her likeness to receive communion because receiving communion is important to her. Even though he is fertile and conceives a child by her, there is no textual evidence suggesting that she longs for a child; the text is clear that the *Jaloux* is the one determined to conceive a child. She does, however, lament her inability to go to church and hear God's worship: "Jeo ne puis al muster venir / Ne le servise Deu oïr" (*Yonec* 75-76).[26] It is unclear whether this spiritual association exempts Muldumarec from the *malmariée*'s immediate suspicion of devilry, but just in case there is something demonic about Muldumarec, the lady insists that he accept the body of Christ via the ritual of communion, probably to ensure that she is not deceived by potential evil. Accepting communion, as Bruckner contends, allows Muldumarec to escape the "negative views associated with bird-women, sirens, or harpies who appear in the medieval bestiary to charm and kill their . . . victims" (180). It is a necessary, customary step toward ensuring the lady's trust in a way that his courtly verbal reassurance cannot.

[26] "I can neither go to church nor hear God's service" (87).

In order to secure the lady's trust and to reinforce his allegiance to her, Muldumarec takes the Eucharist while assuming *her* bodily appearance, even though there is no real reason to believe that outside the castle environment he actively participates in communion. In fact, he only briefly acknowledges his own spiritual belief, but only to reassure the lady: "Jeo crei mut bien al Creatur, / Que nus geta de la tristur / U Adam nus mist, nostre pere, / Par le mors de la pumme amere; / Il est e ert e fu tuz jurs / Vie e lumere as pecheürs" (*Yonec* 149-54).[27] Muldumarec cites Adam as the one responsible for the fall of humanity, and does not isolate Eve, whose role in the fall of mankind is an all-too familiar blame in medieval literature. He is a fairy lover from a magical, Otherworldly land that seems to privilege material opulence over religious observances, and after he receives the Eucharist and the *malmarieé*'s mind is at ease, there is no further religious discussion. The ritual of the Eucharist in this tale not only demonstrates Muldumarec's desire for the lady, but also allows her a newfound control of her situation. His presence and willingness to engage in the act of communion enables her to reclaim some of the elements of spirituality to which she has been denied for so long.

As much as the *Jaloux* attempts to control the tower space and his wife's chastity and fortify them to signify control over his domains, Muldumarec's arrival penetrates the symbolic barrier of the tower and by extension, the castle itself and the *Jaloux*'s lordship. Gilchrist notes that space "was used to construct and reinforce a gendering of women's bodies which emphasized chastity and purity. It can be no

[27] "I do believe in the Creator who set us free from the sorrow in which our ancestor Adam put us by biting the bitter apple. He is, will be and always has been life and light to sinners" (88).

coincidence that the iconographic representation of chastity was a tower . . . Women's chastity was protected through enclosure" (57). The *Jaloux* intends to guard his wife's chastity and fidelity by enclosing her in his dark tower so that she cannot escape. The *Jaloux*'s castle is not infiltrated by conventional masculine confrontations, but by a shape-shifting hawk-knight who flies in through the tower window. Marie seems to use this unconventional infiltration to illustrate the need for a higher or Otherworldly power to inspire or assist a woman to assert her role in displacing cultural norms when those norms are abused or otherwise undesirable.[28] The lady is enclosed in a tower that contains her bedroom, and the *Jaloux* becomes suspicious when the lady begins to regain her beauty; it is a clear indicator that she feels more fulfilled in her home, and more importantly, in her bed. Where the *Jaloux* assumes his husbandly rights in the darkness, Muldumarec returns the light. If the tower enclosure can represent both the lady's cell and her heart and soul (that is, her body is physically shut away from the world she loves, and therefore her heart is closed off as well), then Muldumarec's arrival, which breaks the physical barrier of the tower and opens her heart to love, seriously compromises the *Jaloux*'s power, considering an outsider has supplanted his role as husband.

In this story, the trope of the lady as container contained in the tower is, more broadly, a struggle for control of the space. On a small scale, the lady's fetishized body, or more specifically her fetishized womb, is the object of exchange in the tale. The *Jaloux* is unable to impregnate her, but Muldumarec can. Even though, as Vern

[28] The lady's domestic situation is clearly undesirable, and it can be argued that when the *Jaloux* visits her, he is asserting rape and property rights in her body in order to assert his patriarchal control.

Bullough suggests in an article on the medieval concept of adultery, early Roman and English law states that "a man who had sexual relations with someone else's wife violated another man's property and therefore committed adultery" (8), the *lai*'s narrative structure encourages the affair so that love can flourish and because love produces a child within an otherwise sterile environment. On a larger scale, the lady's tower is a space in which different masculinities vie for control. Later Roman law permitted a cuckolded husband to avenge himself by slaying the adulterer and his unfaithful wife, and medieval civil law "continued to tolerate private homicide in adultery cases" (Bullough 10-11), so the *Jaloux* is legally justified in his attempt to reclaim his "violated" property and trap and slay Muldumarec when he places a row of large iron spikes on the window: "Broches de fer fist [granz] forgier / E acerer le chief devant: / Suz ciel n'ad rasur plus trenchant. / Quant il les ot apparailliees / E de tutes parz enfurchiees, / Sur la fenestre les ad mises, / Bien serreies e bien asises, / Par unt le chevaler passot, / Quant a la dame repeirot" (*Yonec* 286-94).[29] Somehow the *Jaloux* manages to set the trap in secrecy, and Calabrese observes that with the carefully concealed secrets so prominent in the tower space, Marie is "crafting a battle for control of both space and of secrecy, with love, and life itself, at stake" (92).

The *Jaloux,* instead of reinforcing his masculinity by overcoming his own compromised honor and winning public recognition through chivalric prowess, manipulates secret space to further his control over the *malmariée* and Muldumarec specifically within the space of his tower. The *Jaloux* has a culturally prescribed

[29] "He had large iron spikes forged and the tips more sharply pointed than any razor. When he had prepared and cut barbs in them, he set them on the window, close together and well-positioned, in the place through which the knight passed whenever he came to see the lady" (89).

compulsion to redeem his compromised honor (he is essentially *expected* to act on his wounded honor), but unlike the noble knights of other courtly tales, he does not demonstrate his masculinity publicly. The spiked trap is the catalyst for the important transformative action in the tale. Everything that has happened up until this point has laid the foundation and context for the lady's opportunity for her own individual power. Unlike many other courtly tales that prioritize and glorify female chastity, this tale also grapples prominently with issues of masculine worth. In an article on Chaucer's honorable women, Mary Flannery contends that "one core feature of medieval masculinity . . . is the need to prove oneself in competition with other men and to dominate others" and that a man's ability to demonstrate his manliness "depended particularly upon [his] forcefulness, his 'hardynesse' or his 'manhode'" (339). The *Jaloux* shows little 'hardynesse' when he sets the trap in secret, and even though he is the tower authority, he does not confront Muldumarec to publicly defend or prove his right to space, which speaks little to the quality of his "manhode." Calabrese remarks that "[t]hose who use space to spy and trap and to kill, making space not only a prison but an animal trap, will suffer for their envy and treachery" (92).The secret manipulation of the space tells us that in those who use a spatial trap treacherously in order to destroy or confine, the forces of love and justice will not survive.

Even though the trap is the catalyst for the tale's most important transformative action, Muldumarec's bleeding on the *malmariée*'s bed sheets marks the beginning of the *malmariée*'s solid grasp on individual power, the final step in her own figurative metamorphosis. In a general sense, shedding blood testifies to the strength of character for those who continue to function despite the blood. Blood is, as Cohen contends, "the

most precious of bodily humors, a sacred substance that suggests suffering and redemption, the most visible marker that the boundaries of the body have been penetrated, and a potent condensation of human life itself" (71). Muldumarec's bloodshed represents both his suffering and the *malmariée*'s redemption; that is, he dies but his son lives to free the *malmariée* from the *Jaloux*. On writing about medieval blood specifically, Bettina Bildhauer notes that in medieval culture, blood secured the body in crucial ways: through "functioning as revelatory proof of the body's existence; through being regulated by taboos and thereby marking gender and ethnicity; and through the widening of this conception of the enclosed body to include social bodies, so that collective and individual bodies could reaffirm one another" (1). If Muldumarec's body, having been penetrated by the *Jaloux*'s iron spikes, bleeds all over the *malmarieé*'s bed sheets, there is a clear image of a physical change. As the blood leaves Muldumarec's body, he reveals to the *malmarieé* that she is pregnant with Yonec, and because semen was understood in the Middle Ages to be a processed form of blood that contains the human soul, we can see a transfer of life and soul in the blood from this scene. Even as the blood is leaving Muldumarec, the *malmarieé* is filled with it, and this exchange seems to empower her; she is able to engage in a figurative moulting inspired by the hawk's physical moulting, to cast off her old life.

In order to contextualize the significance of the blood in this tale and emphasize its importance, it might be useful to examine briefly the ways in which masculine bleeding and feminine bleeding were perceived to medieval people. That blood must be gendered is important as well. In the influential book *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*, Peggy McCracken observes the following:

> The fact that women bleed, and bleed regularly, makes blood a readily available vehicle for the representation of sentiments, emotions, or feelings associated with women, and the fact that only women bleed regularly makes women's blood a readily available vehicle for the representation of their difference from men. This is not to say that the association of women's blood and women's suffering is a self-evident or essential equation, but rather, that gendered values are mapped onto blood so that women's blood, or women's bleeding, is seen to mean something different from men's blood or men's bleeding. The gendering of blood defines not only explicit power relationships between individuals . . . but also culturally endorsed values and sexual identities. (1)

Women's blood, especially menstrual blood, is normally hidden from view. The custom of regular medical bleeding does not challenge too forcefully the idea that women's menstrual blood is a readily available vehicle for representing women's difference from men. This is because regular medical bleeding is deliberate and controlled, while women's regular bleeding is not. Menstruation and the blood of parturition have "long been associated with pollution in the Judeo-Christian tradition" (McCracken 3). Neither menstruation nor parturition can signify, like men's blood, a heroic wound or cause for revenge.

Women's bloodshed is associated with hidden blood, specifically the blood of menstruation and childbirth, which is defined in terms of pollution and containment. So what happens when a man's blood, especially a knight's blood, is shed in a private space such as a tower prison? Medieval people, McCracken states, "inherited ideas about blood from popular beliefs about bodies and blood, from religious discourses about blood, and from medical definitions of the functions and nature of blood . . . literary texts also contribute to the definition of what blood means in medieval culture" (110). Stories about chivalric heroism and war—for example, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Laȝamon's *Brut*, the alliterative

Morte Arthure, amongst others—describe the bloodshed of men as a public act that establishes and maintains social order, an "order defined in part by the exchange and sexual possession of women" (McCracken 111).

It is also important to note that men's public bleeding was also crucial in gaining power and winning a lady; for example, the public brawls that Lancelot conducts in order to access and rescue the imprisoned Guinevere in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romance *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*. According to McCracken, blood is "the basic currency of fights and quests, their operative factor as much as their issue, and often unrealistically prominent in fights that end without a death. Men bleed prominently in medieval fiction to prove valor, to avenge unjust wrongs, and to impose justice" (10). In contrast to the standard meanings associated with masculine bleeding, Muldumarec's bloodshed occurs in the *malmariée*'s tower space after she summons him to her side:

> Si tost cum el l'ad demandé,
> N'i ad puis gueres demuré:
> En la fenestre vient volant,
> Mes les broches furent devant;
> L'une le fiert par mi le cors,
> Li sanc vermeil en eissi fors.
> Quant il se sot de mort nafré,
> Desferré tut enz est entré;
> Devant la dame al lit descent,
> Que tut li drap furent sanglent.
> Ele veit le sanc e la plaie,
> Mut anguissusement s'esmaie. (*Yonec* 307-18).[30]

[30] "When she summoned him, he left without delay and flew through the window, but the spikes were in front of it. Once of them pierced his body and the red blood flowed out. When he realized that he was mortally wounded, he freed himself from the prongs and entered. He sat down on the bed beside the lady, covering all the sheets in blood, and when she saw the blood and the wound she was grievously alarmed" (90).

Muldumarec's bleeding is not the result of a battle to win a lady. His bleeding is not even public. Instead, it is the result of the *Jaloux*'s secret manipulation of spaces and it confirms Muldumarec's presence to the suspicious *Jaloux*.

The *malmariée* is an active lover instead of a passive one waiting to be rescued; she sheds her container and the identity with which she has been prescribed, and we see this physically manifest when she sheds her courtly garments when she leaps out the window: "Par une fenestre s'en ist; / C'est merveille k'el ne s'ocist, / Kar bien aveit vint piez de haut / Iloec u ele prist le saut. / Ele esteit nue en sa chemise. / A la trace del sanc s'est mise, / Que del chevaler [de]curot / Sur le chemin u ele alot" (*Yonec* 337-344).[31] In the influential scholarly book *Courtly Love Undressed*, E. Jane Burns remarks that it is a "commonplace of medieval French scholarship that the courtly world depends on material extravagance and opulence, reflecting a culture obsessed with self-display and ostentation as a form of self-definition among members of the ruling elite" (26). With Burns's observation in mind, shedding the sartorial signs of courtly definition makes the *malmariée*'s escape all the more significant. She is "nue en sa chemise." Clad only in her shift, the *malmariée* is socially naked; she is no longer identifiable as an aristocratic consort. Not only has she cast off her physical aristocratic garments but there is a spiritual context to shedding her garments as well. In the article "Violence, the Queen's Body, and the Medieval Body Politic," John Carmi Parsons comments on the common medieval spiritual symbolism of the often unseen shift: "As it was worn nearest the flesh, so contrition and confession are the first means of turning to God. This imagery's

[31] "She escaped through a window, but it was a wonder she did not kill herself, for she had to jump a good twenty feet. Naked but for her shift, she followed the trail of blood which flowed from the knight on to the path she was taking and to which she kept until she came to a hill" (90).

intimate association with the individual soul echoes Augustine's analogy between the relationship of attire to body and that of body to soul" (247). Further, Burns points out that medieval sermons generally extolled "women who divested themselves, often dramatically, of excessive garments" (38); while there is no specific evidence that the *malmariée* casts off her garments specifically for sanctimonious reasons, a medieval audience might have identified a subtext that suggested a spiritual transformation, that of casting off of an old life, perhaps inspired by the hawk's symbolic association.

The reader is introduced to the element of movement when the *malmariée* starts to follow the blood trail. In the book *Space, Place, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative,* Laura Howes contends that the concept of space is "defined by movement and experience" as opposed to the concept of "place," which is much more static; movement within the space of the medieval literary landscape allows for a bypass of the static in favor of moving through space and interacting with it (viii). This kind of physical movement is particularly interesting because the *malmariée*'s movement from her tower and through the landscape, following a bloody trail in search of her wounded lover, evokes images of the knight-errant, who typically moves through the medieval literary landscape in an effort to rescue a lady in distress, or perhaps in search of an ideal, or simply he searches for self-realization or to find his own identity within the masculine domain. One recalls again Chrétien's *Le Chavalier de la Charrete*, in which Lancelot crosses a number of landscapes in order to rescue the imprisoned Guinevere; one can also recall Arthurian quests across kingdoms in search of the Holy Grail; one recalls the anonymously-written *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which Gawain traverses through detailed landscapes in order to confront the elusive Green Knight.

Whereas all of these tales feature errant knights typical of the courtly trope so common in medieval literature, Marie subverts the trope when the *malmariée* breaks free from her own containment and seizes her own power. There are few occasions in which a woman sets out on a particular quest. In a manner similar to Muldumarec penetrating the space of the tower, the *malmariée* penetrates the predominantly masculine space of the adventuring landscape; in doing so, her transformation becomes more visible.

Similar to the adventuring Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, who must pass through the obstacle of the forest in order to reach his goal, the *malmariée* must also pass through the forest to reach hers. Marie mentions that crossing into Muldumarec's realm involves "mareis" and "forez": "Devers le burc sunt li mareis / E les forez e les difeis" (*Yonec* 365-66).[32] Much like the fairy court in *Lanval*, distant from Arthur's court, Muldumarec's domain is set far apart from the established locus of the *Jaloux*'s court. Muldumarec's court is opulent and seems to privilege wealth, and Muldumarec's exotic qualities have never been more emphasized until the *malmariée* arrives at his foreign homeland, which is constructed entirely of silver: "Asez pres ot une cite; / De mur fu close tut entur; / N'i ot mesun, sale ne tur, / Que ne parust tute d'argent" (*Yonec* 360-63).[33] As Burns notes, the "sumptuous wealth of the heroine's husband, who bears the typical courtly epithet of a 'riche hume,' cannot compare with the extravagant luxury of the lover's foreign city, although this knight remains more courtly than any other" (285). Although Muldumarec bears the conventional epithet of "chevalier" throughout the lay, he is never accompanied by a horse and he never wears

[32] "Over towards the town wee the marshes, the forests, and the enclosures" (90).

[33] "There was a city nearby, completely enclosed by a wall, where there was not a house, hall or tower which did not seem to be made of solid silver" (90).

armor; but the fact that the *malmariée* must pass through a hill and a forest to find him indicates that she enters a different world, a parallel universe that a medieval audience would automatically assume to be the fairy world; sartorial knightly conventions might be different there. Cohen argues that clothing "is a strategy of distinction that makes identity visible through combinations of bodily accentuation, concealment, exaggeration, and revelation. It is meant to exhibit an inner character, to surface a corporate identity" (18-19). But Muldumarec is a fairy lover and hails from an Otherworld; his identity is most visible through his shapeshifting ability instead of his clothes, and the qualities that may identify his knightly prowess in the Otherworld seem to make him most vulnerable outside of it; essentially, his body is most permeable when he is outside of his realm or outside his true form.

The *malmariée* dies for love on Muldumarec's tomb inside of the enclosure of the chapter-house, and her death finally unites the lovers and completes the literary circle of events. Where the *malmariée* begins her journey in an enclosure, she ends in another enclosure. She follows the trail of blood to find Muldumarec dying in his room; the discovery reminds us of the tale's beginning, in which Muldumarec finds the *malmariée* languishing in her room. Muldumarec himself died for love: "A Carwent fu entrepris, / Pur l'amur de une dame ocis" (*Yonec* 519-20).[34] The *malmariée* breaks free from the undesirable tower that imprisons her, and she returns to a container that to her is preferable. In this way, she functions as a kind of female hero in addition to her position as the *lai*'s heroine. In "Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition," Maureen Fries clarifies the traditionally recognized

[34] "He had been destroyed at Caerwent and killed for the love of a lady" (92).

heroine in literature: "A heroine is . . . recognizable by her performance of a traditionally identified, female sex-role. But any woman who, by choice, by circumstance, or even by accident, escapes definition exclusively in terms of such a traditional role is capable of heroism, as opposed to heroinism" (6). While the *malmariée* begins the tale as a woman who is shackled to her role as imprisoned wife, Muldumarec's bleeding in the tower is the very occasion needed to enable her transformation from a static, mournful character to that of a female hero, who has the power to change her environment and shape her own identity as literary men do.

The *malmariée* serves as a heroic role model for females in the Middle Ages when there were few heroic literary role models for women of the time, even if there was historical precedence for influential heroic women, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and later, Joan of Arc. Of course, there are some literary female heroes—for example, Antigone from Euripides' classical play and Enide from Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*. Figures like these "assume the usual male role of exploring the unknown beyond their assigned place in society" (Fries 6). The males are required to fill roles subordinate to their female protagonists in those tales, and the *malmariée* fits within the category of those heroic women. Continuing to function normally after bearing witness to her lover's bloodshed and death at the hands of her husband testifies to the strength of the *malmariée*'s character. After Muldumarec dies and she returns to a magically improved marriage[35], she continues to function despite the *Jaloux*'s previous behavior and despite the bloodshed. Before he dies, Muldumarec gives her an enchanted ring and tells her that as long as she keeps it her husband will remember nothing and will not keep her in

[35] Her husband is no longer jealous, she has a child, and they live as a model family.

custody. As long as she keeps the ring she is in control of her destiny; by keeping the ring, she controls her husband's behavior and his memories. She is also aware, according to Muldumarec's reassurance earlier in the *lai*, that her son Yonec will comfort her in her grief and will grow up to avenge Muldumarec and kill the *Jaloux*: "Il la cunforte ducement / E dit que dols n'i vaut nïent; / De lui est enceinte d'enfant, / Un fiz avra pruz e vaillant: / Icil [la] recunforterat; / Yonec numer le f[e]rat, / Il vengerat [e] lui e li, / Il oscirat sun enemi" (*Yonec* 325-32).[36] Maintaining a normal marriage is the only way to ensure the eventual success of Yonec's revenge, even if the marriage only appears normal from an outside perspective. Wogan-Browne has observed that many scholars have read *Yonec* as a courtly love tale "standardly preoccupied with adultery as 'fin amor', focusing on its important issues around the dramatic eruption of the lover-knight into the heroine's imprisonment in her tower" (128). But even though thematically much of the standardized courtly love trope within this *lai* aligns with courtly ideals established by, for example, authorities such as Andreas Capellanus in *De Amore*, the treatise that most prominently proffers the social system of courtly love, one could speculate that a woman writer like Marie might want to appeal to women's need for fantasy. "In this account by a woman writer of how a woman might make the restrictive conditions of her marriage bearable enough to herself to be able to become fecund in them, we get a narrative of female desire which suddenly illuminates by implication how occluded the pain and suffering of women may be" (Wogan-Browne 130). As occluded as women's pain and suffering sometimes are in the literary tradition

[36] "He comforted her tenderly, saying that grief was of no avail, and telling her she was with child by him and would have a worthy and valiant son to comfort her. She was to call him Yonec, and he would avenge both of them and kill his enemy" (90).

(the *malmariée* is no exception), the *malmariée*'s ability to escape her constraints explores the potential for women to subvert their prescriptive roles, seize their own power, and shape their own identities and destinies.

Bloodshed can unmake a body but can also reintegrate or perfect a person's psychology or personality. Muldumarec's blood on the *malmariée's* sheets in *Yonec* transmutes the imprisoned lady's passivity into activity, her obedience into agency. The blood is the catalyst that prompts her to subvert the cultural constraints placed on her as a wife, break free of the constraints of the tower, and embark on her own quest to shape her own identity and to seize her own power. In this *lai*, the masculine bleeding invites the lady to quest as a knight does and to pursue her wounded lover with the intent of rescuing him. The *malmariée* is never assigned a name, but even though the lack of a woman's individual identity might be in other texts an attempt to keep a tale's conflict centered upon male characters, the *malmariée* is the center of action in this tale. Marie's approach to the trope of the adulterous woman privileges female desire and female agency, thereby resisting common medieval literary roles of women that frame the female body as a locus of corruption and masculine dishonor.

Le Chevalier de la Charrete

In Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romance *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, the tower marks a space in which negotiations are crucial to the action that takes place within it. Guinevere's active participation in the conditions that dictate her confinement shapes the ways in which Lancelot, Meleagant, and Bademagu behave. This is most evident in the tower scene in which Lancelot's wounded hand sheds blood all over

Guinevere's bed. Violent confrontation is not the cause of the wound; we can thus associate it with devotion and sexual transgression instead of with the chivalric prowess for which Lancelot is known until this scene in the tale. If the body can be considered a model for boundaries that are threatened, precarious, or difficult to define,[37] then bleeding on Guinevere's bed sheets in the private space of the tower demarcates a boundary that Lancelot has fought to cross. The bloodshed reveals a dual identity of knight and lover. The bloodshed interrupts his public identity of a knight and provides evidence of his identity as a lover. Outside the tower, he bleeds as a heroic knight. Inside the tower, he bleeds for love. While the concepts of chivalry and love are not mutually exclusive in all cases of identity, Lancelot cannot reveal his identity as both a knight and a lover to anyone but Guinevere; doing so would invite potentially destructive consequences. Kenneth Hodges explains the potential ramifications of their love in the article "Guinevere's Politics in Malory's 'Morte Darthur.'" According to Hodges, Guinevere and Lancelot's love poses two threats: "private adultery, treasonous because of the threat of a bastard heir and the emotional injury to the king; and public favoritism, politically dangerous for those not allied with the lucky lover" (Hodges 63). These potential consequences are very real threats, which may be one reason why Lancelot goes to great lengths to ensure his anonymity. This text is not clear whether Lancelot's refusal to reveal his name is designed to avoid inflicting emotional injury on Arthur, but it is possible that Lancelot's concealed identity is rooted simply in a private desire for Guinevere that is intended to be and must remain secret. Lancelot does not even notice his wound until much later when he returns to his lodging after his night

[37] Recall the discussion of the body in the *Yonec* section.

with Guinevere, but spilled blood in the space of this tower suggests a choice for the hero. He chooses for what he will bleed.

The romance begins immediately with a challenge between a mysterious armored knight and King Arthur during the Ascension Day feast with Guinevere's body as the object of exchange between Meleagant and Arthur, and later, between Lancelot and Melegant: "'Rois, s'a ta cort chevalier a / nes un an cui tu te fïasses / que la reïne li osasses / baillier por mener an ce bois / aprés moi, la ou ge m'an vois, / par un covant l'i atandrai / que les prisons toz te randrai, / qui sont an prison an ma terre / se il la puet vers moi conquerre / et tant face qu'il l'an ramaint'" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 70-79).[38]

Guinevere's vulnerability is beyond dispute; she is extremely vulnerable as an object of exchange between men. In the article "And Fall Down at His Feet:' Signifying Guinevere in Chrétien's 'Le Chevalier de la Charrette," Teresa Ann Sears argues that although Guinevere "carries the title of 'queen,' [she] has no power beyond that which she brings to bear as the force of her presence and personality. She cannot refuse to take part on the bargain proposed as an arrangement between men, nor can she choose her own defender" (45). Guinevere's kidnapping is designed more to challenge Arthur's competency as king, but Guinevere's body is immediately and physically at risk. When Meleagant demands Guinevere as hostage, Arthur seems unable or unwilling to do anything to prevent it, which implies a weakness or incompetency, qualities that are

[38] "'Sir, if at your court there is even one knight in whom you have faith enough to dare entrust the queen, to accompany her into the woods after me where I am going, I give my oath that I will await him there and will deliver all the prisoners who are captive in my land—if he is able to win the queen from me and succeed in returning her to you'" (5-6). *(All translations come from* Lancelot or, The Knight of the Cart, *edited and translated by William W. Kibler.)*

undesirable in a king. If the king cannot protect his own wife, his ability to protect the kingdom comes into question. We do not perceive Meleagant's personal interest in Guinevere until much later.

Even though she cannot initially resist being exchanged between these men, once she is exchanged and taken from the Arthurian court and we see her again in Bademagu's court, we realize that Guinevere possesses more power than for which she is initially given credit. Arthur implies this power early on when he asks Guinevere to compel Kay to stay in the court, but even he clearly does not believe that her persuasive powers will be successful, and implores her to throw herself at Kay's feet to emphasize her plea: "'Congié demande et dit qu'il n'iert / a ma cort plus; ne sai por coi. / Ce qu'il ne vialt feire por moi / fera tost por vostre proiere. / Alez a lui, ma dame chiere, / quant por moi remenoir ne daigne, / proiez li que por vos remaigne / et einz l'an cheez vos as piez, / que jamés ne seroie liez / se sa conpaignie perdoie'" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 118-27).[39] Despite Guinevere's desire for Kay to remain with Arthur, Kay does not remain in court. Where Guinevere's power of persuasion fails in Arthur's court, it is successful in Bademagu's court.

Whether Guinevere's power is more successful in the realm of Gorre because Gorre is evocative of a fairy Otherworld is not clear, but the idea should not be dismissed. Fairy Otherworlds in which female power prevails are a common trope in medieval literature; one recalls the fairy mistress in Marie's lay of *Lanval*, or even

[39] "'He has asked for leave and says that he will quit my court. I know not why. What he would not do for me he will do at once at your request. Go to him, my dear lady; though he deign not to stay for my sake, pray him that he stay for yours and fall at his feet if necessary, for I would never again be happy if I were to lose his company'" (7).

Morgan le Fay's influential and powerful roles in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae.* Gorre seems to be accessible only by either a water bridge or a sword bridge, but the fact that the realm is surrounded by water and guarded by enchanted, disappearing lions suggest Otherworldly origins. Because Gorre stands outside the realm of the conventional patriarchy, it might be an appropriate place for Chrétien to allow Guinevere more power and influence than she has in Logres. Women were often allowed a great deal of power and agency in otherworldly lands, to which Lanval's fairy mistress and Morgan le Fay can attest. We see this power begin to take form when from her tower Guinevere looks down upon Lancelot's duel with Meleagant when Lancelot arrives in Gorre.

Even though Laura Mulvey's identification of the "gaze"[40] was not textually constructed until the twentieth century, many cultural historians have commented upon its power and influence throughout the ages. In this romance, Guinevere's gaze defies the common fears and anxieties pervasive within medieval culture. She does not defer to Bademagu or Meleagant, who hold her hostage and thus would be expected to have control over her: "Quant Lanceloz s'oï nomer, / ne mist gaires a lui torner; / trestorne soi et voit amont / la chose de trestot le mont / que plus desirroit a veoir, / as loges de la tor seoir. / Ne puis l'ore qu'il s'aparçut / ne se torna ne ne se mut / de vers li ses ialz ne sa chiere, / einz se desfandoit par derriere" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 3669-78).[41] In the book *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic*

[40] Reference Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.*

[41] "When Lancelot heard his name, he turned about at once and saw above him, sitting in one of the tower loges, that one whom he desired to see more than any other in the whole world. From the moment he beheld her, he did not turn or divert his face and eyes from her, but defended himself from behind" (155).

Ecomomy, Madeline Caviness notes that in treatises on desirable physiognomic traits, the late Roman sophists emphasized the ways an honorable man should or should not use his eyes (Caviness 18). "Yet a long cultural tradition," Caviness states, "has denied women the right to stare, and even denied that women were right to look, precisely because staring is understood as dominating behavior; in other words, the proscription performed the ideological work of gender construction. It was reinforced through the Bible, [and] through medieval writings and images" (19). In the courtly literary tradition, the female spectator's watchful gaze is generally uncensored because it inspires a knight to valor; even so, the female spectator's gaze is still sexualized in the courtly context. The force of the female spectator's gaze "approaches an elaborate mating ritual" (Caviness 21). In this romance, Guinevere's gaze is certainly sexualized, but the fact that Lancelot loves her accounts for her influence over him and gives her gaze power. Guinevere herself acknowledges this power while she laments the news of Lancelot's death: "Quant il vint devant moi riant / et cuida que je li feïsse, / grant joie et que je le veïsse, / et onques veoir ne le vos— / ne li fu ce donc mortex cos?" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4210-14)[42]

However courtly the female gaze has the potential to be, to a medieval audience, a woman's eyes can still be potentially destructive, as Chrétien has implied through his characterization of Guinevere. Caviness notes that "[i]ncreasingly through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the thought is expressed that women's gazes, like their rapacious sexuality, must be controlled" (21). Although this romance predates the textual construction that identifies the fear that medieval authorities expressed regarding

[42] "'When he came before me smiling, expecting me to be happy to have him, and I shunned him and would never look at him—was that not a mortal blow?'" (221).

a woman's gaze, the anxieties about potential female domination and women's uncontrollable sexuality were still present; in this tale those anxieties are marked by Meleagant's accusation of Guinevere's indiscretion with the wounded Kay, who sleeps, practically incapacitated, in Guinevere's tower room.

In the space of the tower prison, Guinevere is confined to a fixed space and bound by a set of rules. However, she negotiates the terms of her conditions with Meleagant, which include allowing her to keep her knights close by and having a say in who enters the room and under what conditions. Kay says as much when speaking to Lancelot about Guinevere's confinement: "Que nëis veoir ne la let / Son fil, qui mout an eft dolanz, / Fors devant le comun des janz / Ou devant le fuen cors demainne. / A fi grant enor la demainne / Et demenee a jufque ci / Li frans rois la foe merci, / Com ele devifer le fot. / Onques devifeor n'i ot / Fors li, qu'einfi le devifa; / Et li rois mout plus l'an prifa / Por la leauté qu'an li vit" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4072-83).[43] Even though Bademagu maintains that the queen is securely confined and safe from the lusts of men, Guinevere is able to determine the conditions of her exposure to men on the outside. She willingly meets Lancelot at the tower window to hold his hand. She must only grant Lancelot permission to try to enter the room after Lancelot assures her that nothing but she will keep him from entering the room. Her tower is difficult to access and requires Lancelot to exercise virtually superhuman strength and a remarkable display of stealth in order to get in:

[43] "Though it upsets his son, he has not let even Melegeant see her except in his own presence or with a company of people. The good king in his kindness has always treated her as properly as she could require. No one but the queen has overseen her confinement; she arranged it so, and the king esteemed her the more because he recognized her loyalty" (257).

As fers se prant et sache et tire,
si que trestoz ploier les fet
et que fors de lor leus les tret.
Mes si estoit tranchanz li fers
que del doi mame jusqu'as ners
la premiere once s'an creva,
et de l'autre doi se trancha
la premerainne jointe tote;
et del sanc qui jus an degote
ne des plaies, nule ne sant
cil qui a autre chose antant.
La fenestre n'est mie basse,
neporquant Lanceloz i passe
molt tost et molt delivremant.
An son lit trueve Kex dormant.
Et puis vint au lit la reïne,
si l'aore et se li ancline,
car an nul cors saint ne croit tant. (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4636-53)[44]

After Guinevere and Lancelot have their night of love, Lancelot sneaks out before dawn. Guinevere is oblivious to the fact that Kay's wounds have opened up, and she is oblivious to the bloodstains Lancelot leaves on her bed sheets. When Meleagant discovers the blood, and notices that Kay is bleeding again, he is quick to accuse her of wrongdoing:

Et dit: "Dame, or ai ge trovees
tex anseignes con je voloie!
Bien est voirs que molt se foloie
qui de fame garder se painne—
son travail i pert et sa painne;
qu'ainz la pert cil qui plus la garde
que cil qui ne s'an done garde.
Molt a or bele garde feite
mes pere qui por moi vos gueite!

[44] "He grasped the bars, strained, and pulled, until he bent them all and was able to free them from their fittings. But the iron was so sharp that he cut the end of his little finger to the quick and severed the whole first joint of the next finger; yet his mind was so intent on other things that he felt neither the wounds nor the blood flowing from them. Although the window was quite high up, Lancelot passes quickly and easily through it. He found Kay asleep in his bed. He came next to that of the queen; Lancelot bowed and worshiped before her, for he did not have this much faith in any saint" (195).

De moi vos a il bien gardee,
mes enuit vos a regardee
Kex li seneschax, malgré suen,
s'a de vos eü tot son buen,
et il sera molt bien prové." (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4756-67)[45]

Meleagant's jealous accusation reveals his self-delusion that he has a say in the use of Guinevere's body, which by law is a right only Arthur should have. In his speech, Meleagant emphasizes the ways in which he feels wronged by Guinevere's alleged transgression, which seems to imply that the accusation stems from a personal sense of rejection. As McCracken notes, this is a romance in which the "disputed exchange of women between men is debated in terms of blood and, implicitly, in terms of the value of women's blood in relation to the value of men's blood" (10). Meleagant's jealous outburst essentially confirms his desire to supplant Arthur as the queen's mate in a way that simply abducting her does not do, and even though Lancelot is the one who *actually* supplants Arthur as the queen's mate, Meleagant's suspicion with the "evidence" of blood as proof of Guinevere's indiscretion suggests a peer-rivalry that can only be resolved within the masculine world of combat, since men's blood, when shed in contests, has a curious way of determining truth in literature. This is why Lancelot is willing to shed his own blood in a contest to prove that none of the blood in Guinevere's bed was Kay's. Whose blood stains Guinevere's sheets is the question that sparks a physical contest that will determine the truth of the queen's actions—that of whether she made love—presumably since women are both unreliable

[45] "'My lady,' said Meleagant, 'now I've found the proof I've been wanting! It is quite true that a man is crazy to take pains to watch over a woman—his efforts are all in vain. And the man who makes the greater effort loses his woman more quickly than he who does not bother. My father did a fine job of guarding when he watched you because of me! He protected you carefully from me, but in spite of his efforts the seneschal Kay looked closely upon you this night and has done all he pleased with you, which will easily be proved'" (199).

at truth telling[46] and possess uncontrollable sexual urges; confirmation through masculine bloodshed is paramount to judging her, for determining the ultimate truth since her femininity makes her unreliable.

Even though masculine blood on Guinevere's sheets marks the transgression that threatens the exchange of her body, Guinevere uses her powers of negotiation to feminize the blood (essentially emasculating the blood) and claim that the blood was hers. In medieval legal discourse, blood could serve as instant incontrovertible proof of a particular action or crime (Bildhauer 41). "Blood functions as proof in a variety of medieval discourses like medical diagnostics, theological and mystical writing and drawing as well as courtly fiction, confirming not only the presence of God's body in the host, but also the incarnation, the superiority of men's knowledge, the authenticity of specific texts, the idea that guilt requires punishment, and . . . the conception of the body as a bounded entity" (Bildhauer 17). Clearly the "proof" in this case is not proof at all, even if Meleagant is confident in his position of authority to make the accusation and take the grievance to the king. Melagant's hasty accusation might imply that the perceived superiority of men's knowledge has room for dispute.

When Guinevere notices the blood on her sheets, she is astonished and she blushes, but her blush seems to be more because the blood on the sheets draws undesired attention to her sexual body, and not because she exhibits regret at her actions. Her private actions are thus made public, and are subject to analysis and

[46] Meleagant rejects the queen's explanation for the blood outright even though Guinevere's explanation is a logical one. He calls her explanation "nonsense,"; "neanz" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4796), which McCracken contends means he believes that Guinevere's claim that the sheets were stained by her own blood is "empty, literally a void" (12).

extensive discussion: “Lors primes la reïne vit / et an l’un et an l’autre lit / les dras sanglanz; si s’an mervoille. / honte en ot, si devint vermoille” (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4775-78).[47] Caviness reminds us of the prescriptive medieval masculine ideals that surrounded the act of seeing and being seen: “sin entered the world through the eyes of Eve, eyes that women still use: When you look at a man, you are in Eve’s situation; you are looking at the apple” (22). Blushing suggests that Guinevere is confronted with evidence of her sin, but she provides a logical account for the physical evidence of her illicit actions, and she is the only one in the room who knows the truth. In an effort to resist her position as a passive object that exists only as a token of masculine exchange and whose fate lies at the mercy of masculine voices and judgment, she tries to renegotiate the situation. In order to ensure success and to guard Lancelot’s identity as lover, her lie is necessary, even if to an audience it reinforces the male suspicion that women are frequently liars. However, it does not seem as though she lies because she is ashamed of her adultery with Lancelot (she never expresses regret about that); rather, it seems to be an opportunity to reclaim control of a situation and a space that is subject to male authority. Her claim of a nosebleed suggests that she wishes to draw attention away from her sexual body and redirect the attention to her head, thus resisting any potential claim to her body that Meleagant believes he might have.

Identifying the source of the blood as her nose is important to establishing that the power Guinevere has extends beyond that of the typical courtly heroine. In “The Place of Women in the *Morte Darthur,*” Elizabeth Edwards identifies Guinevere as a character whose power is “that absolute power of the beloved in the courtly love

[47] “Then, for the first time, the queen saw the bloody sheets on both beds. She was dumbfounded; she was ashamed. Blushing . . . ” (199).

tradition, which is revealed as merely the power to reject" (50). Edwards's assertion does not seem to be an accurate description of Guinevere. We have already seen that Guinevere has the power to reject Lancelot when she dismisses him at their reunion because he hesitates before getting into the dwarf's cart, but her power is more than just the ability to reject. She has the final word on the rhythm of the battle between Lancelot and Meleagant when Bademagu defers to her to keep Lancelot from killing Meleagant. She also has the power to reveal Lancelot's identity to the public. Lying about the nosebleed means she safeguards Lancelot's identity as a lover, succouring him from any legal repercussions of his actions as well as shielding herself from perceived wrongdoing. Further, she has the power to determine how the space of her tower confinement will be used and under what conditions. She can manipulate the space to ensure secrecy and resist the authority that confines her there.

Guinevere's nosebleed changes the dynamic of the scene. When confronted with Guinevere's attempt to renegotiate the accusation, and in response to the adamant defense of her and Kay's honor to the blustering Melegeant, Meleagant seems to lose faith in the legitimacy of his own authority. Convinced of Guinevere's indiscretion, he runs off to find his father; when he finds Bademagu, he falls down at the king's feet: "Lors le quist tant qu'il le trova, / si se lesse a ses piez cheoir" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4796-97).[48] Meleagant pleads with his father to oversee justice because Meleagant believes he has been wronged: "Mes ainçois que vos i ailliez, / vos pri que

[48] "Meleagant sought out his father, the king, then let himself fall at his feet" (201).

vos ne me failliez / de justise ne de droiture" (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* 4803-05).[49] Meleagant's loss of authority over the space ultimately grants Guinevere control of her space and for a time, power over all of the men in the room. That the accusation takes place in the tower prison reinforces the tower as a place of conflict. Further, Guinevere is the only one who knows the truth behind the bloodshed; this knowledge gives her power even if that power is fleeting and she must eventually defer to Bademagu's decision regarding the charges brought against her. If in the Middle Ages, as Bildhauer notes, power spoke through blood (19), and if Guinevere successfully uses the masculine blood in the tower space to renegotiate the situation by redistributing the male focus from her sexuality to her head and her mind, then she is resisting male ideals.

Even though Guinevere's success in renegotiating control of her tower space does not earn her any glory (she still needs Lancelot's public bloodshed to "prove" her innocence, and she still needs to be rescued and returned to Logres), her success in transforming her position of passive object of exchange into that of an active participant suggests that the prescriptive social order is vulnerable in spaces of authority when those spaces can be renegotiated in terms of resistance and secrecy. She is able to reconfigure the tower prison from a site of conflict and authority to a place where secrets are kept and guarded.

[49] "'But before you go there, I beg you not to fail me in justice and righteousness" (201).

The Knight's Tale

In Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, Theseus's tower is not only a place of control and conflict, but also a place for negotiations. The young cousins Palamon and Arcite try to negotiate between the pull of authority and the pull of a shared desire for Emelye's affections, and the tower is the space of conflict in the lives of the lovers who face authority as an obstacle. The tower prison that confines Palamon and Arcite is the site wherein the fragility of the familial bond is revealed, and it is also the site wherein that bond begins to fray. In their mutual attraction to Emelye, both Palamon and Arcite breach a formalized promise of brotherhood and protection; the breach implies the vulnerability of blood-kin when that blood stands to compromise individual notions of romantic love. In her article "Sibling Relations in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," Carolyne Larrington states that brotherly love "is the supreme measure of affection, not only in Arthurian romance, but more widely in medieval thinking about family and loyalty" (59). Whether this kind of brotherly love as the supreme measure of affection is experienced between actual brothers or metaphorically between knightly comrades as seen in any given tale of King Arthur's fellowship does not seem to matter in this tale. The narrative structure of the *Knight's Tale* places great emphasis on the strong bonds of kin that weaken not only when confined to the space of the tower, but also when confronted by a shared desire.

Palamon and Arcite are not brothers in the same way that, for example, Balin and Balan are brothers; they are cousins "of the blood roial / Of Thebes, and of sustren two yborn" (*KnT* 1018-19). Despite their cousinhood, they consider themselves sworn brothers; Palamon confirms this when he proclaims himself to Arcite as "thy cosyn and

thy brother / Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother" (*KnT* 1131-32). They enter the story, both unconscious, pierced through with "many a grevous blody wounde" (*KnT* 110). Susan Crane contends in the book *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* that Palamon and Arcite's Theban blood "carries the destructive rivalry of Polynices and Eteocles from Thebes to Athens" (16). Their Theban blood, spilling out onto the field, offers a visual reminder of their position not only as family, but also as conjoined adversaries of the Athenian victor Theseus. The cousins begin the story "liggynge by and by" (*KnT* 1011), bleeding together, their blood united; in the tale, the cousins' familial link is established early on. Theseus takes them to Athens and sentences them to "dwellen in prisoun / Perpetuelly" (*KnT* 1023-24) without ransom, imprisoned together, held in the tower prison at Theseus's castle.

When he finds the men bleeding on the field, Theseus has just shown a great deal of compassion to the grieving Theban ladies by returning the bones of the widows' slain husbands to them, an act that Crane argues "complicates his masculinity" (16) because compassion is a particularly feminine characteristic. While many medieval literary women are lauded for their compassion, medieval compassion in general does not need to be a trait exclusive to women. Even if Theseus exhibits a compassion that for some critics complicates his masculinity, his masculine authority is of little debate when he takes the cousins to his castle, the space of visible expression and guarantee of conquest. He is still the authority.

The cousins remain united as brothers until Palamon sees Emelye roaming in her garden; in this moment, imprisonment, as overseen by Theseus, becomes a more challenging obstacle instead of a simple problem. Once the cousins set their sights on

Emelye, "the young men measure their desire for Emelye against Theseus's ability to constrain it and . . . their desire becomes both a component of their chivalric relation with one another and a constitutive feature of their sexual identities" (Crane 16). When he sees Emelye, Palamon "bleynte" (*KnT* 1078)[50] and since "turning pale" means the blood drains or retreats from the skin's surface, we see here visually the first indicator that foreshadows the dissolution of the cousins' familial union. The blood draining from Palamon's face offers a visual image of the division between the pair, indicating the beginning of the drain of brotherly union. Because Emelye's arresting beauty is the cause of the blood draining from Palamon's face, she is positioned as the cause for splitting the familial bond, though she is completely oblivious to her role in the split.

The spatial role of the tower in this tale is both to separate and connect what lies outside and within it. At the moment Palamon sees Emelye, Palamon tries and fails to function both as an individual and as a member of a pair. As an individual, he is suddenly incited to love this beautiful, garden-dwelling woman and follow the drive of his own romantic desire. This incitement threatens to jeopardize and supplant his familial relationship with Arcite. As a member of a pair, Palamon lives as half of a united brotherly duo sentenced to suffer in prison. Arcite reminds him: "For Goddes love, taak al in pacience / Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be. / Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee. / Som wikke aspect or disposicioun / Of Saturne, by som constellacioun, / Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn; / So stood the hevene whan that we were born. / We moste endure it; this is the short and playn" (*KnT* 1084-91). Crane observes that courtship in the *Knight's Tale* "begins with Palamon and

[50] "turned pale"

Arcite interpreting their own desire as the onslaught of a life-threatening adventure" (172). Even though they are physically safe in the tower, the idea of and potential for love reveals a new kind of combat, and each man is vulnerable.

The space of the tower unites the cousins in their imprisonment, and at the same time the tower's window offers a view that threatens to divide that unity. In other texts, the tower divides those imprisoned from higher authorities. We see an example of this in *Yonec* when the *malmariée* laments that she cannot conduct her masses while locked in her tower, and we see it again in the cousins' tower prison. Palamon is not certain if Emelye is a woman or a goddess, but he eventually settles for aligning Emelye with the goddess Venus: "'I noot wher she be womman or goddesse, / But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse" (*KnT* 1101-02). The conflict in the tower runs much deeper than Theban/Athenian politics; now Palamon is confronted with the need to negotiate between loyalty to Arcite and his own desire. Labeling Emelye a goddess suggests that Palamon's desire for her runs more strongly than his blood bond with Arcite; in the hierarchy of temporal and spiritual authority, a goddess takes precedence over earthly connections.

The moment he sees Emelye, Palamon begins to experience a painful grappling between his loyalties to Arcite on the inside of the tower and his desires for Emelye on the outside of the tower. This is an example of a moment in which, as Gaston Bachelard might say, intimate space loses its clarity. In the influential book on spatial phenomenology, Bachelard engages with the dynamics of the intimacy between outside and inside spaces. He argues that outside and inside "are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface

between “an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides” (217-18). For Palamon, the inside of the tower is painful because he is not able to be with Emelye, yet the outside of the tower is equally painful because he is a loyal member of a pair. Palamon is no longer simply or clearly locked in a tower prison; he is also a prisoner of romantic love. For those entangled in romantic relationships, other kinds of relationships tend to be complicated, whether the relationships are with family members, with sovereigns, with friends, or all of these.

Emelye provides focus to what had previously been simply an outside void; in this context, the word “void” means that until Palamon sees her, the outside as seen from the tower appears to be a feature that Palamon glosses over with a vague longing. Until he sees her, the outside, when viewed from inside the tower, seems more like a wall decoration, as Judith Fryer would contend. Palamon looks out at the “noble citee” but makes no note of individual constructions, and he looks at the “gardyn, ful of braunches grene” (*KnT* 1067; 1068) without seeing much past the tree branches and taking note of the beautiful flowers. He looks out on the outside as a kind of background until suddenly the sight of Emelye, whom he says hurts him “thurghout myn ye” (*KnT* 1096) provides him with a focus; she becomes the raw material that constructs a sexual identity within him that has been either dormant or absent until this point in the tale. With Emelye’s help, he and Arcite can be freed from the prison, and if earthly freedom is not Palamon’s destiny, then she can assist him in heaven as befitting a man of noble birth: “’Venus, if it be thy wil / Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure / Bifore me, sorweful, wrecched creature, / Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen. / And if so be my destynee be shapen / By eterne word to dyen in prisoun, / Of oure

lynage have som compassioun, / That is so lowe ybroght by tirannye'" (*KnT* 1104-11). The act of seeing Emelye specifically in this case weakens the prospect of eternal imprisonment for Palamon and infuses him with a new range of personal potential.

As Palamon and Arcite watch Emelye and vie for her affections, their perception of her beauty betrays fears of her destructive power. Her potentially destructive power manifests in each man's perception of her beauty, and the way they perceive her intensifies the rivalry between the two. Palamon describes her beauty in a typical courtly fashion, channeling Andreas Capallanus's ideal of courtly love when he states that Emelye's beauty hurts him through his eye and into his heart, her "beautee hurte hym so" (*KnT* 1114). When Arcite sees her, he believes her beauty possesses lethal potential: "'The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly / Of hire that rometh in the yonder place; / And but I have hir mercy and hir grace, / That I may seen hire atte leeste weye, / I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye'" (*KnT* 1118-22).

Once the idea of courtship asserts itself within the tale, the shared desire for participating in romantic love transforms brotherhood into opposition. Palamon expresses to Arcite a sense of wrong in his claim that Arcite's oath of brotherhood should prevail over any competitive love for Emelye:

> "It nere," quod he, "to thee no greet honour
> For to be fals, ne for to be traitour
> To me, that am thy cosyn and thy brother
> Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
> That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,
> Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
> Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
> Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,
> But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
> In every cas, as I shal forthren thee—
> This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn;
> I woot right wel, thou darst it nat withseyn.

> Thus artow of my conseil, out of doute,
> And now thow woldest falsly been aboute
> To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
> And evere shal til that myn herte sterve.
> Nay, certes, false Arcite, thow shalt nat so.
> I loved hire first, and tolde thee my wo
> As to my conseil and my brother sworn
> To forthre me, as I have toold biforn.
> For which thou art ybounden as a knight
> To helpen me, if it lay in thy might,
> Or ells artow fals, I dar wel seyn." (*KnT* 1129-51)

Crane points out that in romance, courtship "clarifies the ambivalently adversarial and desiring relations between men in the genre's version of chivalric culture. Where courtship and chivalry intersect, they may appear to be in competition; but finally courtship extends masculine identity by providing a new arena of interaction for men" (17). The "new arena of interaction for men" is literal in this tale; within Theseus's battle arena, Palamon and Arcite can settle their differences in a clearly masculine space in which they can determine a kind of truth about which man is more deserving of Emelye's affections. After all, a fighter's blood is his currency in proving his prowess, gaining power, and winning his lady. The public nature of Palamon and Arcite's final battle relies on an authority's witness function, specifically Theseus's witness function, and each man's shedding of the other's blood signals the need for a complete unmaking of a formerly united physical brotherly body in order to justify the remaking of a new familial body with Emelye.

The masculine allegiance of sworn brother, made stronger by the bonds of family, precedes a kind of love that both inverts and destroys their friendship and their chivalry toward each other. Palamon is not out of line to invoke the custom of knightly virtue between him and Arcite; clearly he believes he has been wronged when he confides his love for Emelye to Arcite. Instead of helping Palamon obtain his heart's

desire and therefore working as part of the same social body, Arcite immediately expresses his own love for Emelye and refuses to observe the brotherly oath the two had sworn. Bildhauer points out that in the same way that any "organ or area suffused by the same blood was defined as belonging to an individual body, so people sharing the same blood were defined as part of the same social body" (135). Further, if the human body was "supposed to work together as a unit separate from the exterior, the family was expected to stand together against outsiders and to cooperate internally as well, and certainly never shed the blood of their own. But . . . the concept of relatives as united by a common blood is often invoked precisely when the ties that bind are violated, whenever the taboos against violence or disloyalty are broken" (Bildhauer 135). Palamon invokes this concept first in his protest: "'I loved hire first, and tolde thee my wo / As to my conseil and my brother sworn / To forthre me, as I have toold biforn'" (*KnT* 1146-48). Likewise, Arcite feels betrayed by Palamon, whom Arcite argues only loves Emelye as an "affeccioun of hoolynesse" (*KnT* 1158) instead of as an earthly woman, and he too invokes the concept of relatives united by a common blood: "'myn is love as to a creature; / For which I tolde thee myn aventure / As to my cosyn and my brother sworn'" (*KnT* 1159-61). The fact that both cousins invoke the concept of blood-ties to each other illustrates the severity of the dissolving loyalty between the two.

And yet, the cousins' earthly desires are still contained within the tower, even if their brotherly alliance has been divided. Arcite compares his rivalry with Palamon to hounds fighting over a bone and divided by an intervening kite:

> "'We stryve as dide the houndes for the boon;
> They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon.
> Ther cam a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe,
> And baar awey the boon bitwixe hem bothe.

> And therfore, at the kynges court, my brother,
> Ech man for hymself, ther is noon oother.
> Love, if thee list, for I love and ay shal;
> And soothly, leeve brother, this is al.
> Heere in this prisoun moote we endure,
> And everich of us take his aventure'" (*KnT* 1177-86).

According to *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilloy's Aviarium*, the kite is a weak bird in both its powers and its flight: "Est enim milvus mollis viribus: illos autem milvus significat quos mollities voluptatis temptat" (207).[51] Arcite names the "kyte" as the bird that disrupts the fighting between the hounds in his analogy. If the cousins are the fighting hounds in his analogy, then the kite, representing weakness, divides them, and each man must care for himself. By invoking the image of the kite, considered to be weak and signifying those whom the weakness of desire tempts, Arcite implies not only the fragility of blood ties in the face of a shared romantic desire, but he also alludes to the unexpected power of weakness. Brotherly chivalric allegiance, however strong in its foundation, can quickly dissolve in a moment of weakness that takes the form of a romantic temptation.

The purpose of the tower's containment in this scene is to isolate the division of familial relations and keep it private within the space of the tower; only when their rivalry is introduced into the chivalric community, in Theseus's public arena, does the physical bloodshed becomes necessary to determine the truth of which man experiences the greater, truer love. The ability to determine this truth publicly is critical to this tale, because both Palamon and Arcite are essentially failed knights; there is little mention of chivalric prowess that would have won them public recognition. We see them at the tale's beginning bleeding and unconscious on the battlefield, and the only reason we are

[51] "For the kite is weak in its powers: the kite further signifies those whom the weakness of desire tempts" (207).

aware of their highborn status is because of the heralds on their armor and not because they have accomplished chivalric precedence.[52] Further, they do not seek adventure the way, for example, Lancelot or Gawain do. On the occasion in which Arcite is released from his tower prison and has the opportunity to experience the land and its perils to prove chivalric merit, he only seeks to return to the castle. Palamon recognizes the importance of chivalric prowess and its contribution to winning a particular lady:

> "Allas," quod he, "Arcita, cosyn myn,
> Of al oure strif, God woot, the fruyt is thyn.
> Thow walkest now in Thebes at thy large,
> And of my wo thow yevest litel charge.
> Thou mayest, syn thou hast wisdom and manhede,
> Assemblen alle the folk of oure kynrede,
> And make a werre so sharp on this citee
> That by soma venture or some tretee
> Thow mayst have hire to lady and to wyf
> For whom that I moste nedes lese my lyf.
> For, as by wey of possibilitee,
> Sith thou art at thy large, of prisoun free,
> And art a lord, greet is thyn avauntage
> Moore than is myn, that sterve here in a cage." (*KnT* 1281-94)

Now that Arcite is free from prison, he is free to demonstrate his chivalric initiative, assemble an army, and make a "werre so sharp" that Theseus has no choice but to surrender Emelye. Arcite does not seize the opportunity after all; instead, he sneaks back into Theseus's court in disguise and observes Emelye from a distance. He rejects the opportunity to prove chivalric prowess, which makes the final battle between the cousins all the more necessary to prove his worth and win honor, the most important of masculine virtues in tales of romance.

[52] Recall Lancelot in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, whose chivalric feats were so renowned that strangers could easily identify him by his armor, a useful defense for Kay when he switched armor with Lancelot.

Displaying their chivalric prowess in a public arena under Emelye's watch and the Theseus's authority and shedding each other's blood restores, to some degree, the chivalric honor that they have until this point failed to exhibit. Whether the cousins have denied or been denied the opportunity for obtaining chivalric prowess by force or by choice does not seem to matter in the general context of the tale, because more important is their opportunity to win it in the end. Crane notes that "chivalry entailed a form of selfhood insistently, even exclusively public. It stressed a collective or corporate self-definition and so ignored the merely personal or individual" (31). The Knight's formulaic *General Prologue* portrait "reflects a chivalric validation of public over individual identity" (Crane 31). The chivalric validation for Palamon and Arcite is necessary for determining the proper place for Emelye's body, yet it suggests how fragile the familial blood bond can be when familial solidarity is compromised. In many cases, familial solidarity enables great chivalric feats, but the tower prison's confinement in this tale is the site of conflict that destabilizes the familial blood-bonds between the cousins; their tightly-knit relationship unravels to the point of death. Arcite's death may ultimately determine Palamon's worthiness as Emelye's mate, but even though Arcite's horse was ultimately responsible for dealing his death blow and not Palamon himself, the final battle and sudden reversal of fortune reveals the fragility of fraternal love when it is confronted by individual notions of romantic love; the familial bond can quickly dissolve in the face of public honor. Despite the outcome of the final battle, the tower prison is the place in which Palamon and Arcite are kept, and that tower space is integral to the conflict of the tale. As Peter Brown suggests in the article "The Prison of Theseus and the Castle of Jalousie," "the prison undergoes a

series of redefinitions so that it acquires symbolic status" (147). The prison is very much a place that serves many literary symbolic functions throughout the tale, but first and foremost, it is the space of conflict in the lives of the lovers who face authority as an obstacle.

Assessment

In a literary context, the tower's space can and does align with notions of secrecy, conflict, power, and authority. Analyzing specific examples of conflict in the space of the tower helps define the boundaries of the tower's space, whereby showing how this kind of space can be used to construct, maintain, control, and transform social order, depending on who is enclosed within it. As a secondary point, the texts clearly suggest anxieties that surround bloodshed.

Muldumarec's bleeding on the *malmarieé*'s bed sheets reminds us that the boundaries that make up the masculine sphere (in this context, the overly-controlled family unit, the fortification of the castle itself) are more permeable than one might think, and the unmaking of Muldumarec's body results in a more defined identity for the *malmarieé.* Lancelot's blood in Guinevere's bed demonstrates how a compromised female body can undermine male authority. Her success in transforming her position of passive object of exchange into that of an active participant suggests that the prescriptive social order is vulnerable in spaces of authority when those spaces can be renegotiated in terms of resistance and secrecy. Within the context of her confinement within Meleagant's tower, Guinevere's behavior, enabled by Lancelot's blood, challenges local authority, and her refusal to apologize for her adulterous action makes

her dangerous to Meleagant's authority. In some medieval estates theory women were "classified by their virginity, chastity, or biological motherhood; good women might be nuns, wives, or widows" (Caviness 2). Neither the *malmarieé* nor Guinevere could technically be considered "good" women according to estates theory because of their respective adultery, but Marie does not textually condemn the *malmarieé* for her behavior (on the contrary; she condones it), nor does Chrétien textually condemn Guinevere for hers, even if he was thought to disapprove of the subject matter, as some scholars have claimed.

Cousins Palamon and Arcite try to negotiate between the pull of authority and the pull of a shared desire for Emelye's affections, and the tower is the space of conflict in the lives of the lovers who face authority as an obstacle. Palamon and Arcite's familial blood-bond configures a restricted social body that is vulnerable to change within that space of the tower prison when confronted with a shared desire. In many cases, power speaks through blood, whether it is spilled or shared, and blood is a reality with a symbolic function. The tower, however, is the most visible symbol of the control of space, and perhaps because it is also a site for conflict wherein control is attempted through secrecy, negotiations, and the manipulation of private space, it tends to attract blood.

Chapter Three: Privacy as Freedom in the Medieval Literary Garden

Privacy is one motif in medieval literature that surfaces in different forms and contexts, and it is one motif that transgresses both indoor and outdoor spaces. There is little doubt that some of the narrative landscape of medieval romance is structured around an opposition between open spaces and closed spaces. For example, cities, castles, and courts can be the places from which a knight departs and to which he returns at the end of an adventure, and an open wild space like the forest can be the space in which adventures occur. Enclosed settings in many cases symbolize the civilized world and can represent safety as much as it can represent constraint. For example, in Geoffrey Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Knight's Tale*, Theseus's castle contains a wall that encloses both the garden in which Emelye celebrates her courtly springtime rites and the tower that imprisons Palamon and Arcite; the wall is a compressed image of this double function of enclosed space. For those in positions of power or captivity, whether indoors or outdoors, privacy is a sought-after desire that contributes to the formation of the individual self. In the article "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England," Mary Thomas Crane contends that the image of the private cultivated pleasure garden contains characteristics of both indoors and outdoors (5). "Private gardens represent a space that blurs the distinction between concepts of inside and outside . . . gardens share terminology with new private interior spaces such as chambers and closets: 'bowers' and 'cabinets' could be found in both house and garden" (Crane 8).

In order to contextualize the use of privacy for the texts in this chapter, we need to consider what is kept out of the garden space and who wants it excluded. In Chrétien

de Troyes's twelfth-century romances *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*, garden walls keep out systems of courtly politics that are unsympathetic to love and to women. In these two romances, the women want to wall out these systems, but their lovers, who maintain different relations to the court, respond differently to this exclusion. In Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*, the garden walls out a world of conventional sexual expectations. At the beginning of the tale, Januarie fully supports walling out conventional sexual expectations because those expectations involve young men and women coming together and they involve married sexuality in bed for procreation instead of taking place outdoors for pleasure. Januarie's garden protects his deviation from conventional expectations, but his deviations are in tension with May's own desires and deviance. Even though his garden is designed to protect his privacy as a form of individual freedom, it actually enables May's own individual pursuit of privacy as freedom. According to Robert C. Post in the article "Three Concepts of Privacy," privacy as a form of freedom "presupposes difference rather than mutuality. It contemplates a space in which social norms are suspended, rather than enforced" (2095). In other words, privacy as freedom safeguards the spontaneous and uniquely individual aspects of the self. The lady in the Joy of the Court scene in *Erec et Enide* pursues privacy as a form of freedom that isolates her and her lover from the court politics that privilege the duties of the chivalric order over the desires of women. In *Cligès*, Fenice seeks refuge in her hidden garden as a means to shut out the Emperor's unsympathetic approach to love and female desire. In these two texts, the women pursue privacy as a form of freedom, but their pursuit of privacy specifically concerns autonomy and dignity. In this chapter, autonomy will be defined as the ability of a person to create his or her own identity as a

means of defining his or her individuality. Further, dignity will refer to what Post defines as a person's sense of self as "commanding attitudinal respect" (2092). In Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*, and in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romances *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*, privacy as a form of freedom reveals the ways in which gardens can function in discourses of power and captivity.

The Merchant's Tale

The concept of privacy in a broad sense is made visible in the image of the locked and fully walled garden in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale.* The Merchant's description of the garden is as elaborate as other literary representations of gardens, but the presence of the "clyket" (MerT 2046)[53] makes this garden different from most private literary gardens. The key symbolizes Januarie's efforts to exclude conventional sexual expectations of the outside world. As the sole possessor of the key, he protects his own pursuit of privacy and his way of isolating himself from those conventions. When Januarie asks for advice on marriage from his friends, his friend Justinus prudently advises against marrying a much younger woman: "Avyseth yow—ye been a man of age— / How that ye entren into mariage, / And namely with a yong wyf and a fair. / By hym that made water, erthe, and air, / The yongeste man that is in al this route / Is bisy ynough to bryngen it aboute / To han his wyf allone. Trusteth me, / Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres thre— / This is to seyn, to doon hire ful plesaunce" (MerT 1555-63). Justinus's advice communicates some of the social expectations of a conventional marriage, specifically that only a young man can and should handle a young woman.

[53] Latchkey

Januarie disagrees, and dismisses Justinus's words as simply "scole-termes" (MerT 1569). Apparently for Januarie, social convention is less meaningful when it conflicts with his personal ideal for marriage. Instead, Januarie seeks marital pleasure according to his own conventions, but for him, the only way to ensure the privacy of that pleasure is to construct a walled garden that can be locked away and secured from the conventions of a society that does not privilege his desire as he perceives it.

In honor of his very young bride, Januarie

> made a gardyn, walled al with stoon;
> So fair a gardyn woot I nowher noon.
> For, out of doute, I verraily suppose
> That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose
> Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse;
> Ne Priapus ne myghte nat suffise,
> Though he be god of gardyns, for to telle
> The beautee of the gardyn and the welle
> That stood under a laurer alwey grene. (2029-37)

The garden is so elaborate that the Merchant narrator himself does not have the words to describe it. The Merchant comments that even Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, authors of the thirteenth-century French poem *The Romance of the Rose* could not conceive of the beauty that flourishes within this garden, nor the garden god Priapus describe its art. With features evoking those described in the Garden of Eden and in the *Song of Songs,* Januarie's garden contains flowers, fruit trees, and a well, and is clearly overdesigned for pleasure. The Merchant makes no mention of any of the utilitarian plants that would commonly be included, along with the fashionable plants, in these kinds of gardens. This omission suggests that Januarie's concept for the garden might be designed to fulfill his lustful desires (in case his brutish commentary regarding his perception of women earlier in the tale does not establish this idea clearly enough), because utility has no place in this garden. Both the Garden of Eden and the garden in

the *Song of Songs* are described in literature and are often shown in artistic representations to be sealed gardens, watered by wells or fountains, and with extremely limited access in or out, if there is access at all. According to Paul Meyvaert in the article "The Medieval Monastic Garden," the Garden of Eden is a "place, still perhaps in existence somewhere on this earth, which no living man could find or enter" (50). Like Eden, Januarie's garden is designed specifically to limit entrance.

Because all access to the beautiful garden requires Januarie's permission, the garden needs to be considered in terms of captivity rather than nature. The garden is firmly enclosed by stone, and Januarie loves the garden so much that he keeps it literally under lock and key. The key is always with him, and he "wol no wight suffren bere the keye / Save he hymself" (MerT 2044-45). As the guardian of the key, only Januarie has the power of inclusion or exclusion. His intent, the Merchant says, is to visit the garden as a way to "paye his wyf hir dette" so that he and May could do "thynges whiche that were nat doon abedde" (MerT 2048; 2051). Even though early in the tale one of the primary cited reasons for taking a wife is because doing so might engender an heir, Januarie is not content to remain "abedde" simply for procreation. Although he piously intends children as one of the benefits of wedlock, he seems more interested in the pleasure involved in their begetting. He would rather have his wife *al fresco* for pleasure, and the garden walls and limited access protects his deviation from conventional expectation. Because in this tale privacy is largely a function of power, Januarie's control over who is allowed access to the privacy of the garden[54] suggests May is more of a captive in the arrangement than she is an integral part of a domestic

[54] "no wight but they two" (MerT 2050).

household organization. However, his desires are in conflict with the ideal sanctity and purpose of the courtly love garden, and so is his age.

There are many references to Januarie's advanced age, and his age is problematic in the discourse of love even if he goes to great lengths to construct and control an environment in an effort to pursue his own freedom to access love on his own terms. The Merchant describes Januarie as "oold and hoor" (MerT 1269), and Januarie himself claims that he is "hoor and oold, / And almoost, God woot, on my pittes brynke" (MerT 1400-01). He is in his sixties, and as Andreas Capellanus proffers in his twelfth-century treatise *De Amore*, after a man's sixtieth year, even though he can physically have intercourse, his passion cannot develop into love, because when a man reaches that age, the natural heat begins to lose its force (32). The pleasure garden's literary tradition almost always features people who are young enough to emulate the ideal growth and fertility of the garden plants as well as the plants' blossoming beauty. As Venus rules the garden in terms of the ideal love intended to be experienced within, Priapus, the Merchant mentions, is the god of the garden and fertility; essentially, the pleasure garden is no place for the aged. But we cannot forget that even though Priapus is a god of fecundity and generation, he is also associated with more negative characteristics. According to Ann Haskell in the article "Chaucerian Women, Ideal Gardens, and the Wild Woods," he is also "a reminder of age and, by extension, of death" (197). To illustrate further Priapus's inappropriate place in an ideal pleasure garden, Haskell remarks that "Priapus is neither young nor beautiful . . . [He] is mature, bald, and paunchy, and so distorted that his mother, Venus, deserted him at birth. His very presence repels romantic idealizations" (197). Januarie's age places him far outside

the desirable age of those who are most fruitful and blessed within the garden environment, even though he feels young and strong despite his age: "I dar make avaunt / I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt / To do al that a man bilongeth to; / . . . / Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree / That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee; / . . . / I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed" (MerT 1458-64). Though he goes to great lengths to construct an ideal environment for love and compares himself to a flowering laurel tree, Januarie's efforts to place himself within the ideal parameters for procreative love are unconvincing; he is too old and his blindness later in the tale suggests a removal or rejection from love. Januarie might have designed the garden under the pretext of reproducing an environment conducive to biblical love, but as Richard Hoffman states in the book *Ovid and the Canterbury Tales*, his "wanton spring dalliance with young May in that little man-made Eden constitutes a kind of devotion to the obscene god who was the true patron saint of his old age and the proper tutelary deity of his garden" (156). However, for Januarie, the unspoken homage to the obscene Priapus may be effective, because the garden represents a place in which he experiences a kind of sexual revitalization. On his wedding night, inside his home, he "laboureth . . . til the day gan dawe" (MerT 1842), whereas when he performs his sexual duties outside, he "in the gardyn parfourned hem and spedde" (2052). In the book *Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention*, Laura Howes points out that Januarie's success with lovemaking in the garden "links (his) sense of himself as a man of worth to his sexual arousal and satisfaction. When performing sex in the garden he seems to draw not only on the energy of nature but also on the power generated by his own inflated, reflected image" (2). Januarie may have an inflated sense of himself, but the privacy provided by

the garden's walls and locked gate offers him the freedom to explore a potential for change that society may not see or may dismiss when confronted with men of Januarie's advanced age.

There is little doubt that Januarie has an inflated sense of himself. He possesses great wealth, he constructs a garden that would be more appropriate for a higher noble instead of a knight, he has decades of experience taking "bodily delyt / On wommen" (MerT 1249-50), he marries a very young woman who he believes will remain passive and loyal and true to him, and he believes himself to be well-versed in the art of physical love. He even alludes to his sense of superiority over the church: "A man may do no synne with his wif" (MerT 1839). This seems an inflated statement in context of the church's attempts to regulate marital intercourse habits. Because Januarie seems to have more success in lovemaking while in the garden instead of in his home, one can surmise that the garden, which is the result of human efforts required to tame, organize, control, and form nature into a sealed, well-protected, artificial enclosure, represents the human efforts needed to "organize, arrange, and control other forces that may seem natural, such as love or dreams" (Howes 6). Januarie may try to reconstruct the world on his own terms by shutting out social conventions, but his attempt to keep May captive in his personal paradise suggests a desire to free them both from those conventions. In the article "Love in Hell: the Role of Pluto and Proserpine in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*," Elizabeth Simmons-O'Neill remarks that the appearance of Pluto and Proserpina reinforces the idea that Januarie and his mercantile view of humanity "are products of a literary and cultural inheritance which insists that women are owned by men who are interested, like the Merchant himself, only in 'th'encrees of [their]

wynnyng'" (396). While Januarie may be interested, like the Merchant, in "th'encrees of his wynnyng," (GP 275), the presence of the pagan gods speak more to the role of the garden's function in the context of captivity and power.

Some critics consider the Pluto and Proserpina section to be an artistic blunder,[55] but the gods' presence in the tale does more than employ a surprise conclusion to Januarie's betrayal. However Edenic Januarie's garden is designed to be, Chaucer chooses the gods Pluto and Proserpina as the intervening deities, possibly because they are mirror images of Januarie and May in this tale, and they symbolize an intrinsic tension between Januarie and May. Simmons-O'Neill states "Pluto and January are feckless old men whose wives, taken initially against their will and Nature's, have accepted their lot and learned to keep the upper hand in marriage" (392). But the relationship between Pluto and Proserpina in this tale is not necessarily that of rapist and victim, even if those roles inform their characters and their respective relationships to Januarie and May. In this tale, they are primarily husband and wife. The first time they appear in the tale they are not arguing. Proserpina is not lamenting her misfortune in having to spend six months in the underworld away from her mother Ceres. Instead, Proserpina and Pluto are celebrating the beauty of the garden together: "Ful ofte tyme he Pluto and his queene, / Proserpina, and al hire fayerye, / Disporten hem and maken melodye / About that welle, and daunced" (MerT 2038-41). As the daughter of Ceres, Proserpina has explicit ties to nature even as she functions in human spaces and

[55] Reference the article "The Non-Dramatic Disunity of the *Merchant's Tale*," in which Robert M. Jordan contends that even though the Pluto and Proserpina scene fits with the antifeminist theme of the tale, it bears a minimal relevance to the tale as a whole. While engaging, the scene must "dismay the reader intent upon continuity and consistency" (298).

constructs. Proserpina symbolizes the woman who is at once captive and goddess, and who is both powerful and powerless. She is sympathetic to May, who is also captive and crafts her own ties to nature, and who is powerful enough to keep the upper hand in her marriage but powerless to free herself from it. Like Januarie, Pluto is elderly and powerful; Pluto's loneliness and childlessness drives him to ravish a young woman and hold her captive in his domain. The parallels between Januarie and May and Pluto and Proserpina in this case are thinly veiled. May is described as a "mayden in the toun, / Which that of beautee hadde greet renoun, / Al were it so she were of smal degree" (MerT 1623-25). She is not Januarie's social equal, but he is not interested in social approval or social positioning. Rather, he is interested in her "yowthe and hir beautee" (MerT 1626) so that she may bear him children, and May is hastily married to Januarie through "scrit and bond / By which that she was feffed in his lond" (MerT 1697-98). From afar, the arrangement seems mutually beneficial; once married, May improves her social position and Januarie gets to fulfill his desire to honor God through the sacrament of marriage. But the locked garden makes visible Januarie's desire for containment and power, the two concepts that correlate with the figure of Pluto. Like Pluto, Januarie is unable to control all aspects of his wife's captivity. Proserpina is able to leave the underworld for six months out of the year; while May cannot or will not free herself from her garden prison[56], she does have the power to manipulate the environment as a way of controlling the terms of her confinement.

May's affair with Damyan allows her to redefine the terms of her confinement. Like Proserpina, who ate the pomegranate in the garden of Hades, May attempts to

[56] May steals the key and makes a wax imprint of it for her own use, but she does not use it to escape from the garden.

enjoy the "fruyt" (MerT 2336) borne from Januarie's walled garden. Simmons-O'Neill contends that for May and Proserpina, the fruit "emphasizes the extent to which women's actions must be seen as desperate attempts to survive within structures cultivated unnaturally by men" (397). However, May's attention to the fruit seems intended as more of a diversion that enables her illicit encounter with Damyan instead of a desperate attempt to survive; after all, Damyan is hiding in the pear tree waiting for her, and she must literally walk all over Januarie to climb the tree to get to Damyan. This diversion provides May with the opportunity to exploit both the marriage bond and the biblical ideology that characterizes the paradise garden. As Eve is cast out of paradise after she sins, May is brought into paradise from the outside only to sin in paradise without consequence. The scene of the sin for both Eve and May is of course the fruit-bearing tree centered in the garden. While Eve's tree is thought to be an apple, May's tree is a pear, a testament to the idea that although a place might be designed through artifice to *look* like paradise, it does not mean that it *is* paradise. Haskell points out that the shape of the pear "ubiquitously symbolized that of the woman, and, hence, eroticism, the pear tree was thought of as a poor man's apple. As late as the mid-seventeenth century, we can come across a comment such as that by François de la Varenne, saying 'The pear is the grandfather of the apple, its poor relation, a fallen aristocrat'" (197). Pears do not seem to have the same poetic importance as apples because pears do not have the same role in *Genesis* or *Song of Songs* as the fruit of knowledge or of comfort. In literature, Howes remarks, "pears were simply symbols of delight, pears being the next most popular medieval fruit after apples" (230). Essentially, the pear symbolizes that this garden is really a false paradise that privileges

lustful pursuits instead of biblical love. May will not remain captive to Januarie's lust, and she manipulates the garden environment to enact sexuality and deviance on her own terms.

Januarie's emphasis on Christian ideals mandates that his overly elaborate garden construction contain the ideal components of Eden. In the book *Medieval English Gardens*, Teresa McLean argues that after Adam and Eve's exile from Eden, "gardens (became) testing-grounds of man's ability to see through their physical delights to the creative divinity that lay behind them" (135). But this garden is only superficially designed to explore the creative divinity within, as evidenced by the few Christian figures present there. By drawing May into the Christian sacrament of marriage (the institution of which, of course, is presided over by male church authorities), Januarie traps her within the confines of his own authority and literally encloses her within his individual ideal of earthly paradise, tamed and controlled to satisfy his desires with the intent (legal at this point, according to church authority) to tame and control May. The old stone walls of the garden embrace and isolate the flourishing youth of the garden paradise and secures May's exile from her former life; the walls on all sides ensure her isolation. Similarly, while with Pluto in the underworld, Proserpina experiences exile from the life and family and customs with which she is familiar.

Januarie's garden evokes Christian imagery, but as previously mentioned, the prevailing gods in his garden are not Christian; interestingly, they seem to reflect the subjugation and imprisonment of those who move about in the garden. Despite Januarie's claims to the contrary, the presence of Venus suggests sexuality within the

garden is based on pleasure rather than progeny. Instead of pursuing Januarie with her torch of love, she burns the squire Damyan with it: "So soore hath Venus hurt hym with hire brond" (MerT 1777); Damyan is compelled to seek his own pleasure with May in the garden. In addition to Venus's mischief in the tale, the Merchant reminds his audience of Pluto and Proserpina's presence in the garden. In order to further the parallels already established between Pluto and Proserpina and Januarie and May, a reference to Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is useful. Ovid's version features Cyane, the most celebrated Sicilian nymph, voicing her outrage to Pluto about Proserpina's abduction: "non potes invitae Cereris gener esse: roganda, non rapienda fuit"[57] (Ovid V. 415-16). Cyane's protest follows the juxtaposition of Proserpina's lost innocence (her torn garment and her dropped white flowers) with the image of the dark, barren underworld's deep lakes that reek with sulphur and that boil up from a crevice in the earth. The passage heightens the "contrast between the bountiful earth of Proserpine's youth and the barren depths of Pluto's realm, as well as emphasizing the abrupt change Proserpine experiences" (Howes 98).

While May is not ravished from her young life in the same way as Proserpina, she is stolen and exiled from the carefree bounty of her youth when thrown into the bonds of marriage and forced into a locked garden. There is no real evidence that Januarie wooed May; rather, the Merchant glosses over the legal details of the marriage as though May has been sold or traded into the deal. Pluto imprisons Proserpina in the underworld and January imprisons May in his garden. Like any prisoner, May longs for and seeks the opportunity for a sly exit. In the article "Sexuality and the Subversion of

[57] "Thou canst not be the son-in-law of Ceres against her will. The maiden should have been wooed, not ravished" (Ovid V. 415-16).

Order in Jean de Meun's 'Roman de la Rose,'" Sylvia Huot points out: "Like the various animals that are caged, trapped, or otherwise domesticated by human artifice, so too the woman embodies a potent desire for freedom that is expressed as an irrepressible sexuality, and constantly resists the strictures imposed by male authority" (54). Januarie's authority is visible in the image of the garden, and May's devious strategy to pursue her own freedom is powerful even as it is limited.

The walls in Januarie's garden are evocative of the walls of the *Romance of the Rose*, and the walls in both poems are designed to exclude undesirable company. Whereas the walls in the *Romance* strive to exclude corrupting figures including Hate, Felony, Villainy, Covetousness, Old Age, Sorrow, and Poverty, Januarie designs his garden to exclude undesirables that could threaten his paradise and his place within it. In this case, Januarie tries to exclude any younger man that he has reason to fear, lest the younger men attempt to defile his bride and by extension, his authority over his own land and property. On one hand, Januarie fully adopts medieval society's criteria for proof of masculinity. He congratulates himself on his ability to satisfy a young wife and he emphasizes his intention to beget an heir to inherit his estates. On the other hand, creating an environment designed for captivity suggests a rejection of other conventions of medieval society, specifically those cited earlier by Justinus. In order to have an environment to accord with his personal desires, Januarie needs to construct a space wherein he can cultivate his own social rules and isolate himself from the social conventions that do not include him. He must design a private space in which he can pursue his own freedom from cultural expectation.

The garden is the only useful place for imprisonment in this tale. It is useful to recall that Original Sin was "the event that corrupted sexuality in particular and Nature in general . . . because . . . a man listened to his wife and relinquished his authority over her. As a result, man is now condemned to an endless struggle to subjugate woman on the one hand, nature on the other" (Huot 42). If Januarie seeks to secure his property within the walls of his earthly paradise as a means to exclude outside threats, it is important to consider aspects of the sources that inspire the garden. The Lover in the *Romance* seeks to defile the unbudded rose, and the rose's guardians, Jealousy and Chastity specifically, go to great lengths to keep Amant from defiling the rose. In fact, the woman "pursued by the Lover of the *Rose* is so deeply hidden and fortified behind multiple obstacles, so obscured beneath the proliferation of allegorical figures, that it is difficult to be certain that there even is a woman at all there" (Huot 61). Though Amant pursues the rose under the guise of love, there is little evidence that love, courtly or otherwise, was involved at all. Like Januarie, lust and a greed for conquest of virgin territory drive Amant on his quest. Amant, while gazing into the well of Narcissus, falls in love with the *reflection* of the rose and not the rose itself when he is struck by the God of Love's arrow:

> Entre les autres en eslui
> un si tres bel, envers celui
> nul des autres rien ne prisé
> puis que celui bien avisé;
> car une color l'enluminequi est si vermeille et si fine
> con Nature le pot plus faire.
> [. . .]
> Li dex d'Amors, qui, l'arc tendu,
> avoit tout jorz mout entendu
> a moi porsivre et espier,
> s'iere arestez soz un figuier;
> et quant il ot aperceü

que j'avoie ensint esleü
ce bouton, qui plus me seoit
que nul des autres ne fessoit,
il a tantost pris une floiche;
et quant la corde fu en coche,
il entesa jusqu'a l'oreille (Guillame 1653-1689)[58]

Januarie seems to be more in love with May's fair face and youth, and thus the *idea* of love, than he is with the woman herself. However, in order to ensure that his pursuit of individual freedom is not compromised by outside influence, seclusion and privacy is essential.

Artistic depictions of the Garden of Eden emphasize enclosure; as an ideal place of paradise exclusive to those whom God deems worthy to inhabit, there is no clear entrance or exit. But despite its secure walls, even Eden is not impenetrable to the defiling influence that preys on women. The defiling influence of Satan in Eden is not far removed from the role of Amant in the *Romance of the Rose,* who, like Satan, manages to gain entrance to a sealed garden. In the *Romance,* "Oiseuse" allows the dreamer access to the garden. According to Gregory Sadlek in the article "Interpreting Guillaume de Lorris's Oiseuse: Geoffrey Chaucer as Witness," the Old French word "oisose" or "uiseuse" "indicates 'inaction,' 'leisure,' 'laziness,' or 'folly'" (22). Sadlek points out that some critics align Oiseuse with virtues that represent the aristocratic leisure required to contemplate fully the beauty of a paradise garden (22). But it seems

[58] "One of the buds I chose, so beautiful / That in comparison none of its mates / I prized at all; and I was well advised, / For such a color did illumine it- / So fine was its vermilion-that it seemed / That in it Nature had outdone herself / . . . / The God of Love, who, ever with bent bow / Had taken care to watch and follow me, / Beneath a fig tree lastly took his stand; / And when he saw that I had fixed my choice / Upon the bud that pleased me most of all / He quickly chose an arrow; nocking it, / He pulled the cord back to his ear. The bow / Was marvelously strong, and good his aim, / And when he shot at me the arrow pierced / My very heart, though entering by my eye" (Guillame 1653-1689).

to make more sense to align Oiseuse, considering the nature of her name, with personal vices, such as lechery or leisure or most important, idleness. If she can so clearly be associated with personal vices, then it stands to reason that these personal vices are the driving forces of the poem, and they clearly lead Amant on a journey to defile the innocence and beauty of the unbudded rose in the same way that Satan uses his wiles to defile Eve's innocence in Eden. After all, as Derek Pearsall points out in the article "Gardens as Symbol and Setting in Late Medieval Poetry," the garden of humanity's biblical fall is "a perilous place, full of seductive pleasures that bring about destruction" (237). The implicit significance of medieval literary gardens has to do with the notion of inherited biblical imagery, and medieval authors seemed hard-pressed to resist the temptation to allegorize these pleasures. Eve's sin extends to the association of the garden with the place for gratifying pleasure and individual freedom, and May responds to the garden space similarly.

Though she is imprisoned within the walls of Januarie's false paradise, May is essentially able to use the garden as an instrument of rebellion and pursue her own freedom despite Januarie's constant presence and the conventions of the medieval marriage. As Howes points out, "[g]ardens . . . provide a language of convention *and* a language in which protest can be voiced" (2). Like the contained and cultivated plants around her, May bursts forth from the darkness and into the light by using Januarie's blindness (darkness) to propel her up and into the "light" of the tree. Like Proserpina returning from the underworld in the spring, the boughs of nature and fertility embrace May. Even though May might not have any say regarding her potentially unnatural marriage to Januarie, his blindness provides May with the opportunity to pursue her

own freedom that is private only in the context that Januarie cannot see her. Her own pursuit of privacy as freedom is problematic at first when he is stricken blind because his constant presence is the biggest obstacle between May and her desired freedom: "Which jalousye it was so outrageous / That neither in halle, n'yn noon oother hous, / Ne in noon oother place, neverthemo, / He nolde suffre hire for to ryde or go, / But if that he had hond on hire alway; / For which ful ofte wepeth fresshe May" (MerT 2087-92). Because she is Januarie's legal property, May cannot protest Januarie's encroachment. But as Huot asserts, "[e]ven the patriarchal institution of marriage, supposedly established to ensure a husband's absolute possession of his wife, proves maddeningly inadequate, as women devise ever more intricate means of resisting their husband's encroachments, escaping the marriage bond, or exploiting it for their own ends" (60). Although Januarie devises a structure that will wall out a world of "normal" sexual expectations in order to construct and contain his own expectations, he fails to consider that his wife's relation to sexuality would be remarkably different from his.

Because Januarie's garden is intended to protect his own deviance from sexual expectation, his pursuit of privacy as freedom from expectation is clear. At first he seems to welcome this freedom from conventional sexual expectation because it allows him to take part in sexual encounters outdoors for pleasure instead of in bed for procreation. Further, his freedom in the garden allows a man of his advanced age to participate in the joys of flourishing youthful love where convention would normally exclude him. However great his efforts at containing his ideal paradise, he underestimates the power of sexual conventions when they manage to find and have their way inside the garden. May herself represents many of these conventions. With

explicit ties to nature, "fresshe" May seeks access to "highte" Damyan with whom she can celebrate the joys of love according to the will of nature. Her sexual deviance is not so much an example of a subversion of the marriage bond as it is an example of nature's perseverance for its own freedom when nature is contained in an environment constructed through artifice. Her deviance might also suggest that "normal" sexual expectations exist because they represent the will of nature and the will of love, concepts that are more powerful than manmade constructions designed for captivity and that symbolize individual power.

Erec et Enide

Similar to the garden in *The Merchant's Tale,* the garden in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* is used as a place of imprisonment. The conceptual difference between the gardens is mainly a gendered one. The garden in *The Merchant's Tale* is constructed by a man to imprison a woman; in *Erec et Enide*, a woman uses a garden to imprison a man. Unlike Januarie, who constructs the garden to wall out a world of "normal" sexual expectations to pursue his own conventions, the lady in the Joy of the Court uses the garden to keep out systems of courtly politics that are unsympathetic to women's desire. The lady pursues privacy as a form of freedom by isolating her and her lover from the court politics that privilege the duties of the chivalric order over the desires of women. Her privacy needs to be considered in the context of female autonomy and dignity. By imprisoning her lover in the enchanted garden, the lady's autonomy is made visible in her attempt to craft her own identity by defining her individuality and power within the

garden. The lady imprisons her knight, but because he maintains a chivalric relation to the court, he responds differently to the exclusion.

The garden that not only harbors the elusive Joy, but also serves as prison for a knight and his lady in *Erec et Enide* is enchanted both inside and on its perimeters. Chrétien describes its peculiar properties:

> El vergier n'avoit anviron
> Mur ne paliz se de l'er non;
> Mes de l'er est de totes parz
> Par nigromance clos li jarz
> Si que riens antrer n'i pooit,
> Se par dessore n'i voloit,
> Ne que s'il fust toz clos de fer.
> Et tot esté et tot iver
> I avoit flors et fruit meür;
> Et li fruiz avoit tel eür,
> Que leanz se leissoit mangier:
> Au porter fors feisoit dangier;
> Car qui point porter an vossist,
> Ja mes a l'uis ne revenist,
> Ne ja mes del vergier n'issist
> Tant qu'an son leu le fruit meïst;
> Ne soz ciel n'a oisel volant,
> Qui pleise a home, qui n'i chant
> Por lui deduire et resjoïr,
> Que l'an n'an i poïst oïr
> Plusors de chascune nature;
> Et terre, tant come ele dure,
> Ne porte espece ne racine,
> Qui vaille a nule medecine,
> Que l'an n'an i eüst planté,
> S'an i avoit a grant planté. (*Erec et Enide* 5740-64)[59]

[59] "Around the garden the only wall or palisade was one of air, yet by black magic the garden was enclosed on all sides with air as though it were ringed with iron, so that nothing could enter except at one single place. And there were flowers and ripe fruit all summer and all winter, and the fruit had the peculiar property that although it could be eaten therein, it could not be carried out: anyone who tried to take some away could never discover how to get out again, for he could not discover the exit until he put the fruit back in its place. And there is under heaven no bird, however pleasing its song and its ability to gladden and delight a man, that could not be heard therein, and there were several of each sort. And the earth, however great its extent, bears no spice or

It is clear from the description that this *locus amoenus* is unique among the other poetic ideals. It is not a sealed Edenic paradise, nor does it function as an exaggerated status symbol for a powerful nobleman. It is designed for both utility and beauty, and though it contains a number of Edenic elements, it is not exactly a place of repose or pleasure. Superficially, it evokes the courtly topos of the *locus amoenus* as a place of repose, pleasure, and love, but a closer examination reveals that neither Venus nor her ilk is present here. In the book *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*, Gillian Rudd explains that the archetypal garden "is an enclosed space, usually walled against the elements to create not only optimal growing conditions for the plants contained within but also a sense of refuge for those humans who are allowed entrance" (165). The garden in *Erec et Enide* is walled, but the wall is invisible, and the plants living within the garden borders flourish year-round. In this garden, seasons do not matter as they matter in other literary gardens; this garden embodies perpetual spring and there is no indication that plants wither and die—a clear deviation from the natural order of life that would normally cycle at the whim of the gods or of God. Unlike Januarie's garden, there is no Proserpina to symbolize life or Pluto to symbolize death. This deviation suggests that the enchanted garden resembles a kind of Otherworld. In the article "La Joie de la Cort (Erec et Enide), Mabon, and Early Irish 'síd' [peace: Otherworld]," William Sayers points out that "[t]he Otherworld, reached across a lake, over a stretch of sea, or behind a wall of rock, is characterized by opulence, e.g. silver branches with golden apples, elaborate horns, but also by natural

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medicinal plant of use in any remedy that was not planted therein, and there were plenty of them" (*Erec et Enide* 107-08).

marvels: gardens and orchards ever in bloom and/or in fruit, apples that endlessly nourish without depletion, eternal youth" (17-18). Most poetic examples of fairy Otherworlds are understood to be part of the poetic landscape, and the garden in *Erec et Enide* is no exception. These gardens exist without any apparent magical assembly or intervention behind rocks or near hills or deep in forests or on far-off islands. This particular garden has been enchanted by black magic, though Chrétien does not mention who or what is responsible for the black magic.

The knight Maboagrain briefly mentions to Erec that before the garden became a place of imprisonment, it was originally a place of ceremony: "Li rois Evrains, cui niés je sui, / M'adoba veant mainz prodomes / Dedanz cest vergier, ou nos somes" (*Erec et Enide* 6070-72).[60] Having sworn an oath to his lady to grant her a boon without first asking her what it was, Maboagrain explains that once he receives his knighthood and is legally (and publicly) sworn to uphold a chivalric ideal, his lady "[t]antost de ma foi m'apela / Et dist que plevi li avoie, / Que ja mes de ceanz n'istroie / Tant que chevaliers i venist, / Qui par armes me conquëist" (*Erec et Enide* 6074-78).[61] The lady's invocation binds the knight to her desire and becomes the consequence of the knight's sworn duty to uphold his oath to her: "Por ce me cuida a delivre / Toz les jorz que j'eüsse a vivre, / Avuec li tenir an prison" (*Eric et Enide* 6095-97).[62]

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[60] "King Evrain, whose nephew I am, dubbed me in the sight of many gentlemen within the garden where we are" (*Erec et Enide* 111).

[61] "immediately invoked my oath and said that I had sworn to her never to leave this place until some knight came along who defeated me in combat" (*Erec et Enide* 111).

[62] "Thus she thought to keep me all the days of my life with her: completely in her power, in prison" (*Erec et Enide* 112).

The origin of the garden's nigromancy is unclear, given that Chrétien does not explicitly attribute the garden's enchantment to any one individual. Since the garden appears to be an open space, Chrétien's use of this word may be the only way to explain why the knight cannot leave of his own volition. This garden is the only explicit example of the supernatural in the tale, and the medieval conception of nigromancy seems out of place with the way Chrétien uses the word in the story. In the article "Stars, Demons and the Body in Fifteenth-Century England," Robert Ralley comments that in Middle English, the term "nigromancy" was a corrupted form of the word "necromancy," though in this corrupted form it simply meant "magic that was unequivocally 'black'" as a way of illustrating its meaning as illicit devotion and the perversion of religion (110). Further, necromancy was considered a "religious ritual performed in veneration of the wrong thing, often in pursuit of a morally reprehensible end" (Ralley 110). In the article "Some Medieval Conceptions of Magic," Lynn Thorndike remarks that to a medieval audience, magic itself "includes prediction of the future as well as transformation of nature and bewitching of human beings" (109). Chrétien does not acknowledge or imply that anyone "bewitches" Maboagrain; he is there because he swore an oath to the lady, and not because magic influences his decision to do so. Additionally, the garden does not appear to reflect any kind of religious perversion. Perhaps the nigromancy is simply present in order to function as a kind of locking device that ensures captivity.

The story is written entirely within a Christian context, though the *joie de la cort* episode echoes elements of well-known Celtic material. For example, Erec's adventure "bears a general resemblance to an archetypical Celtic storyline in which a human hero

is called to do service in the Otherworld, fighting in battles that supernatural beings cannot win on their own. The mortal hero, his patron, or his opponent may serve a 'fairy mistress,' who may herself be under certain restraints" (Sayers 17). The fact that Celtic storylines surface from the depths of this contextually Christian tale should bear minimal importance to the broader construct of the narrative, but they are important to understanding character developments. The lady is not a fairy mistress, but she is under certain restraints, even though those restraints are self-imposed.

Chrétien definitively articulates the issue of female empowerment in the moment in which the lady extracts of the promise of eternal fidelity from Maboagrain. Using the conventions of chivalric honor to her advantage is an essential component for the kind of individual autonomy that will privilege her own desires without interruption from the chivalric order. It is unlikely that the lady's individual desire would be a priority in Evrain's court. In the court, Maboagrain would be expected and probably willing to participate in chivalric duty that would lead him away from her. Her desire is equally as unlikely to be a priority in the wider world outside the court because the outside, untamed world carries so much potential for uncontrolled and unforseen problems. In the article "Royal Gardens in Medieval England," Howard Colvin cites the pleasure garden as the "especial province of women" (9). If this contention is true,[63] the lady will have power in that space even if it means she must imprison herself as well. By removing herself from environments governed by men, this garden is the only place where the lady can find the kind of environment wherein her desire for seclusion from

[63] Refer to Mary Thomas Crane's article "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England," in which she argues for the outdoor space of the garden to be considered as simply an extension of the house that offers more opportunity or privacy for all residents than the house's interior.

courtly politics is privileged. In this way, she crafts her own identity as a lady whose desires supersede those of the chivalric order. Since the garden features only one entrance, opponents can be monitored and controlled.

The lady seems to use the garden setting not so much as a prison as an enclosure in which to contain her love and to keep Maboagrain free from the conventions of a chivalric ideal, with which she clearly does not agree. In the article "Erec and the Joy of the Court," William Nitze examines the social ideal that Chrétien upholds in this particular tale, arguing the ideals that Chrétien upholds derive from the Arthurian chapter of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (692). "Geoffrey's conception of chivalry . . . rests on the idea that Arthur's court is a society of knights and ladies, lovers and beloved, *militia et amor*, reacting upon one another like alternating currents" (Nitze 693). In order to fit this ideal, every knight must have his lady. There is no evidence to suggest that Maboagrain wishes to withdraw his love from the lady; in fact, he holds her love in the highest regard: "Que nule rien me despleüst; / Que, s'ele s'an aparceüst, / Tost retreissist a li son cuer; / Et je nel vossisse a nul fuer / Por rien qui deüst avenir" (*Erec et Enide* 6085-89).[64] But Maboagrain's lady wishes to control and monitor her lover's chivalric pursuits in an effort to safeguard the love that has persisted between them since childhood. Her retreat from court and subsequent self-imposed exile into the garden could be seen as a subversion of the social ideal that, in its broadest scope, has minimal consideration for women's desires.

[64] "I could not show any sign that anything displeased me, for if she had noticed it she would have withdrawn her love and I did not wish that at any price, no matter what the consequences" (111).

Her self-imposed exile can also be seen as a deviant attempt to establish control of herself as well. The lady waits until Maboagrain is dubbed knight in the presence of many gentlemen before she extracts his oath. Even though the oath had male witnesses, none of the male witnesses seemed to have the power or desire to combat the enchantment placed on the garden. The lovers are not married, but common medieval convention would encourage some control over the lady's sexuality, a convention that even an enchanted garden cannot erase entirely. In the book *Marriage, Property, and Women's Narratives*, Sally Livingston points out that "when women are receivers of 'male' property, either by inheritance or dowry, marriage, as well as courtship and sexuality, tend strongly to be controlled. As carriers of property, women's sexuality needed to be controlled in the patrilineal system of the twelfth century" (19). Despite the lady's attempt to flee the conventions of the society in which she lives and despite her attempt to isolate herself within her own space, there is still opportunity for Maboagrain to exert control over her and her sexuality. This is most visible when Erec seeks to examine the lady more closely when he sees her sitting on the silver bed: "'Vassaus, vassaus! / Fos estes, se je soie saus, / Qui vers ma dameisele alez. / Mien esciant tant ne valez, / Que vers li doiiez aprochier. / Vos conparroiz ancui mout chier / Vostre folie, par ma teste! / Estez arriers!'" (*Erec et Enide* 5907-14).[65] The garden can provide seclusion from most political conventions and at the very least ensure minimal masculine control over the lady's sexuality; even the enchanted garden cannot eliminate this kind of control altogether. There is no indication that Erec wishes to violate the

[65] "'Vassal! Vassal! You are mad, upon my soul, to go towards my damsel. By my word, you are not so worthy that you should approach her. This very day you will pay most dearly for your folly, by my head. Stand back!'" (109).

lady, and she does nothing either to welcome or refuse any potential advances. Her position as "beautiful object" amongst many beautiful objects in the garden is the catalyst for the required opposition between Maboagrain and Erec. Maboagrain tells Erec that the lady "'Einsi me cuida retenir / Ma dameisele a lone sejor; / Ne cuidoit pas, que a nul jor / Deüst an cest vergier antrer / Vassaus qui me poïst outrer'" (*Erec et Enide* 6090-94).[66] Maboagrain's remark suggests that the lady may not mind *some* control over her body because she believes that no one is worthy enough to best her knight. Her intent to keep him to herself for a long duration allows her to maintain control of her environment and of her love.

Upon the lady's extraction of her knight's promise, the garden evolves into a broader construct of artifice; inside the invisible walls, springtime endures even through the harsh winters that persist outside of it. As Michael Calabrese points out, "[s]uccess in love depends on . . . control and manipulation of the physical world, the artificial landscape of love" (82). The lady manipulates the garden environment, but only to free herself and her love from the world outside of it. Maboagrain says he is unhappy with the arrangement and considers it an unwelcome prison, but the lady later reveals to Enide that he was once impatient to be there with her: "Lui demora et moi fu tart, / Que ça m'an venisse avuec lui; / Si nos an venimes andui, / Que nus ne le sot fors que nos" (*Erec et Enide* 6284-87).[67] All gardens, by design, despite their emphasis on utility or pleasure, were thought to help prevent illness and promote mental and spiritual stability; constant exposure to the delightful sights and fragrant smells of the enchanted garden

[66] "'Thus my lady thought to keep me for a long duration, since she did not think that any knight would ever come into this garden who could outdo me'" (111-12).

[67] "'He was impatient to come away here as was I to come with him; we both arrived here in such a way that no one knew of it but us'" (114).

might have once encourage the knight's mental and spiritual stability to flourish, but the knight clearly does not believe he continues to flourish.

Like any earthly garden inspired by the perceived delights of Heaven and Eden, potentially destructive foes are unwelcome, and Maboagrain's unhappy duty to slay and behead all knightly interlopers serves as evidence that the lady perceives *any* intruder as a threat. In the article "'Delectable Sightes and Fragrant Smelles:' Gardens and Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern England," Carole Rawcliffe mentions that the "garden itself constituted a major weapon in the relentless battle against disease" (3). Maboagrain's frequent battles with various wayward, interloping knights might suggest that the lady perceives the chivalric ideal as a disease that constantly threatens her ability to pursue love freely; thus, she must ensure individual autonomy for herself and the ideals she values in order to keep them uncorrupted by chivalric obligation. Chrétien makes no mention of Maboagrain fighting any women who happen to wander into the garden; this omission implies that the only threats to the lady's authority are knights who represent the structured masculine social ideal instead of female competition. The garden's wonders, like the lady's autonomy, cannot be removed from the garden itself if there is any hope for them to be sustained, and the human heads spitted on stakes could be interpreted as warnings to those who seek to challenge that autonomy.

The outcome of the Joy of the Court episode represents a defeat of female autonomy. Because she is able to control their love and privilege her own desire, the lady is much happier in the garden environment than Maboagrain. When Erec defeats Maboagrain with his exemplary chivalric prowess and blows the horn to usher in the Joy, it is unsurprising that the lady grieves while everyone else rejoices: "La joie que ele

veoit, / Ne li venoit mie a pleisir; / Mes mainte jant covient teisir / Et esgarder ce qui lor poise" (*Erec et Enide* 6194-97).[68] Once Erec defeats Maboagrain and chivalry trumps institutionalized love, the garden transforms, for the lady, into what Logan Whalen and Rupert Pickens describe as a *locus horribilis*; that is, a space "where lovers or would-be lovers experience disappointment and frustration" (187). The garden's disenchantment releases Maboagrain from the garden prison but it also returns the lady to a world that does not privilege female desire. Her grief alleviates a bit when she reunites with her kinswoman Enide, but then the lady and Maboagrain simply head back to town and do not return to court. The nameless, anonymous lady disappears into further anonymity, her subverting empowerment itself subverted. Her thwarted autonomy makes her namelessness even more apparent and she and any identity she may have constructed within the boundaries of the garden vanish into the background of the tale. In the article "Chaucerian Gardens and the Spirit of Play," Kenneth Bleeth contends that in the Middle Ages, a "move from city to garden can be understood as part of a well-documented regimen for countering the effects of the plague—both the physical dangers and the accompanying emotional anxieties—with recreation and fresh air" (108). If what Bleeth proffers is true, then the move from garden to city implies, for the lady in this romance, a return to physical danger and emotional anxiety, over which she has no authority or control. When she vanishes from the tale, so vanishes the enchanted garden from the tale. When these vanish, so does the story's largest symbol of a woman's struggle to construct her own environment of harmony and autonomy in in an effort to wall out the opposing forces of masculine conventions.

[68] "The joy she saw did not please her a bit—but many people have to look on in silence at what distresses them" (113).

The enchanted garden in *Erec et Enide* is not so much a matter of geography; people in the tale know where it is. It is not hidden as a fairy Otherworld might be hidden, but its enchanted nature symbolizes the lady's efforts to capture and contain an ideal that is less likely to be corrupted by uncontrollable outside forces that naturally oppose female desire. In the book *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, A. Bartlett Giamatti cites twin themes regarding the investigation of special or blessed literary garden motifs. He argues that the garden is "remote in space or time (or both), and it involves some ideal of love or harmony" (84). The first of the twin themes, he says, is "concerned with the place's 'geography'" (Giamatti 84.) The second of the themes is "'internal' and related to its way of life" (Giamatti 84.) Both themes, he argues, are found in every account. The garden "is a beautiful place because that is the best symbol for man's inner need and desire for peace and harmony; it is lost or far away or fortified or . . . false, because that is the only way to convey man's daily awareness of the impossibility of attaining his ideal" (Giamatti 84). The garden in *Erec et Enide* coincides with Giamatti's second theme, that of the internal. For the lady, the enchanted garden symbolizes her internalized need for a specific way of life. This life needs to cater to her whims and her desires, and it can be externalized through her control over the conditions of the garden's confinement. She successfully isolates and maintains her ideal for a while, but Erec's triumph over Maboagrain reminds us that even ideals cannot last, and that occasionally, there will be rejoicing when society's conventions prevail. As Giamatti says, the false paradise, or the enchanted garden, "embodies the split between what seems and what is; it looks like the true earthly paradise but in the end it is not. It looks like the image of all a man thinks he has sought

in his spiritual wanderings, but in the end it is the scene wherein he learns he was wrong; where he learns that his inner wishes were only the illusions a man creates for himself" (85). For the lady in *Erec et Enide*, the garden is an ideal place in which she can pursue privacy as a form of individual freedom, even if that kind of freedom is fleeting for her. In the garden, she is able to craft her own feminine identity as a means of defining her individuality as a woman who can control and privilege her own desires over those of the masculine.

Cligès

Though the image of the garden paradise might be a fragile, temporary illusion in *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien does not remain loyal to that particular motif in all of his romances. However, he does occasionally remain thematically consistent with his garden imagery outside of *Erec et Enide*. In *Cligès* for example, he employs the trope of a pseudo-paradise designed to wall out systems of courtly politics that are unsympathetic to love and to women. The garden paradise in *Cligès* may seem to represent a place of exile and imprisonment for Fenice and Cligès, but it is primarily a place where Fenice is able to pursue privacy as freedom from her emperor husband. Within the garden walls, Fenice is able to disassociate herself from her role as Empress and craft a newer, more desired identity as lover and beloved. As much as Cligès desires to remain with her in private, peaceful seclusion, the arrival of the interloping knight Bertrand reestablishes Cligès obligation to pursue chivalric duty, which is often very public. The garden may be a small-scale paradise and thus an escape from the prison of political conventions, but it is vulnerable to external violence.

Outside of the garden, in *Cligès*, Fenice subverts the cultural expectations of womanly behavior. Her motivation seems to stem from a strong need to satisfy her individual desires, which, prior to the garden scene, have been ignored or dismissed by systems of politics and conventions. For example, she refuses to be assigned (like Queen Isolde) the often tragic roles offered to women in love, and she refuses to accept her unhappy role as wife to the Emperor long term. Once she is safely inside garden walls with Cligès and away from the court, she has the control and responsibility to craft her own desired identity that is far removed from her public identity and role as Empress. Her voice becomes the paradigm of chivalric authority. However, in the article "The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," D.W. Robertson claims that the events that take place in Fenice's garden are "antics of [Chrétien's] twelfth century Eve and Adam [and] are a mockery not only of their love, but of those in the audience who would take them seriously" (40). There is no way to ascertain the ways in which a medieval audience would have interpreted the antics in Fenice's garden, but a desire for privacy in many forms seems to be a recurring concept in medieval literature. There is no reason to dismiss the importance of an outdoor space that, much like the forest wilderness, assists with an individual's formation of the self. Pearsall contends that not everyone would want to read Cligès the way Robinson claims. "[S]ome," Pearsall states, "will recognize that stories of this kind embody something of the multifacetedness of experience, in which the delight and joy of love, and of gardens, are communicated, as well as their follies and vapors" (241). On one hand, the garden experience is indeed multifaceted as Pearsall proffers; it explores the delight and joy of love through examples of a kind of

anti-Eden. The garden exile and imprisonment in this tale compress Cligès and Fenice's love and parallels characteristics of a wild space tamed by human intervention. Though their love might be natural and has the potential to grow, it bears the mark of human design while walled inside the garden. On the other hand, their love does not grow wild and untended. Instead, it must be secret, cultivated and contained within human boundaries, and far away from public view. In order for love to flourish for Fenice, it is necessary to pursue privacy and free herself from systems of courtly politics.

In the beginning of the tale, Fenice challenges social boundaries and resists constraints that typically bind women's freedom of authority in medieval romances. Uninterested in simply succumbing to her role as wife to the Emperor, Fenice invokes the herbal talents of her duenna Thessala to help simulate Fenice's death in order to escape the conventions that accompany her role as the Emperor's wife. Fenice, in love with Cligès, would rather suffer bodily dismemberment than to share her body with a man she does not love: "'Et se cil a joie de moi, / Done ai gié la moie perdue, / Ne n'i a mes nule atandue. / Miauz voldroie estre desmanbree, / Que de nos deus fust remanbree / L'amors d'Iseut et de Tristan, / Don tantes folies dit l'an, / Que honte m'est a reconter'" (*Cligès* 3142-49).[69]

While in her deathlike coma, Fenice endures a great deal of bodily injury at the hands of the male doctors whom the Emperor commissions to save her. Believing she feigns death, the doctors threaten her, they strike her body with straps, they beat her until she bleeds, and they pour boiling lead straight from the fire onto the palms of her

[69] "'And if the emperor takes his pleasure of me, then I will have lost my own happiness and can expect no other. I'd rather be torn limb from limb than have our love remembered like that of Tristan and Isolde, which has become a source of mockery and makes me ashamed to talk of it'" (*Cligès* 161).

hands. It is only when the doctors prepare their most dehumanizing act—to roast and grill her over a fire as though she were an animal for a feast—that Fenice's ladies break down the door and fling the doctors out the window and into the courtyard, breaking the doctors' necks, ribs, arms, and legs. Fenice's determination to pursue her own freedom and resist the conventions of masculine authority is strong enough that she, through silence, sacrifices her body to extreme abuse; she is aware of what is happening to her.

Such abuse requires a great deal of healing, and to a medieval audience, there is little better place for convalescence than a garden. The use of scent was an important weapon in a physician's armory. Rawcliffe states that like everything in the cosmos, odors, whether good or bad were "deemed to possess an individual complexion, whose levels of heat, cold, aridity or moisture were determined by the substance which created them. They could, therefore, be used to temper the humoral balance of the patient by regulating the levels of warmth or fluidity within his or her body" (10). Cligès commissions his serf John to construct a tower with an adjoining orchard garden; the purpose of both is to ensure secrecy, health, and safety for both Cligès and Fenice: "Bien i sera la dameisele / Toz les jorz quë ele vivra; / Que ja nus hon ne l'I savra" (*Cligès* 5570-72).[70] Most medieval monks believed that the beauties of nature were beneficial to both the soul and the body. Meyvaert points out that "[t]he sick were encouraged to spend time in the orchard, breathing the scent of fruit and flowers, so that their senses could be refreshed" (44). In addition to Thessala's healing hands, Fenice

[70] "his lady would be quite safe here all the days of her life, for no one would know she was there" (*Cligès* 191).

uses the garden for healing repose: "La se va Fenice deduire / Et an sor jor i feit son lit, / La sont a joie et a delit" (*Cligès* 6418-20).[71]

Fenice's garden includes the conventions of Edenic paradise, the most obvious of which is the fact that it is primarily an orchard garden. "Par l'uis est antree el vergier, / Qui mout li plest et atalante. / Anmi le vergier ot une ante / De flors chargiee et bien foillue, / Et par dessus iere estandue. / Einsi estoient li raim duit, / Que vers terre pandoient tuit, / Et pres jusqu'a terre beissoient, / Fors la cime don't il neissoient: / La cime aloit contre mont droite. / Fenice autre leu ne covoite" (*Cligès* 6400-6410).[72] The image of this single central tree consolidates the images of the Edenic Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, symbolizing the lovers' celebration of life and love and their freedom from any interference or intrusion that may threaten that love. In the article "Sacred Landscape and the Early Medieval European Cloister: Unity, Paradise and the Cosmic Mountain," Mary Helms asserts that in the context of landscape, tree images "exemplify the widespread concept of the Cosmic or World Tree . . . [serve] as cosmic theophany, and, as archetype of life giving plants, evidences life, immortality, and the mystery of the periodic rejuvenation and perpetual regeneration of the universe" (443). For Fenice, the central tree may represent a new life and her own regeneration. Like the phoenix from which her name derives, Fenice rises from the dead and begins life anew. Much like the actual medieval gardener who brought the forces of nature under control

[71] "Fenice went there for her repose, and by day they set up her bed beneath the tree where the lovers had their joy and pleasure" (201).

[72] "She stepped through the door into the pleasant and delightful orchard. In the middle of the orchard stood a grafted tree, covered with leaves and flowers, with a wide-spreading top. The branches were trained into a sort of bower, hanging down and nearly touching the ground, except that the upper trunk from which they sprang grew straight and tall. It was all that Fenice could want!" (*Cligès* 201)

with increasing artistic effectiveness, Cligès has John build his garden to meet Cligès's specifications, ensuring that the garden is not only a place of sensual delight, but also a place of fantasy and serenity, entirely walled away from the hostile outside environment.

Because this particular garden is much smaller and more focused in terms of design than some of the previous gardens explored in this chapter, it evokes characteristics exclusive to that of the traditional medieval cloister gardens. The primary purpose of a cloister garden was to offer retreat. In the article "Gardens in Medieval Art," Marilyn Stokstad elaborates that in a cloister garden "it was essential that distractions, external and internal, be excluded so far as was possible" (56). Because of the religious requirements demanded of monks in the medieval cloister garden, the importance of excluding distractions was more important than with most other types of gardens. While Fenice's garden is not necessarily a sacred space in the same way as a monastic cloister garden, it is designed to be exclusive, and the future of the couple's success in love depends on that exclusivity. Cloister gardens were usually double-walled, and though Chrétien does not specifically describe the walls as doubled, the adjoining tower seems to serve as the required extra security to isolate this place of retreat more effectively, for no one can enter the garden without first passing through the labyrinthine tower, which is full of secret rooms and tunnels.

Fenice's jealous husband eventually pursues Cligès and Fenice, and the lovers' exclusivity in this case is crucial if they are to avoid political consequence. Fenice's freedom from the demands of her old life necessitates exile and imprisonment, and in this secret place, love and new life, like the flora, has the potential to grow. In the book

Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World, Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter contend that the lovers' garden in which they have taken refuge from family and society's persecution allows readers to "encounter something of actuality; the gardens [poets] describe had their material counterparts in the seigneurial life so familiar to poets and patrons—walled plots of civilized and private pleasure-ground, contrasting with the wild or roughly practical countryside beyond the castle gates, and offering respite from the noisy communal life of the hall" (76-77). The outside environment in this tale is not just hostile in general. Because she must hide from the Emperor and his men, it is hostile to Fenice in particular; the Emperor would be well within his rights to have her killed for treason if she were caught.

Although the garden allows Fenice to heal from her wounds and provides a space in which her new life can grow and flourish, this particular garden exhibits a dark side in addition to its serene and isolated characteristics; not every enclosed garden guarantees pleasure to those who enter. The good knight Bertrand, whom Chrétien describes as a man renowned for his chivalry, climbs the wall of the garden and sees Cligès and Fenice sleeping naked in their bower: "Soz l'ante vit dormir a masse / Fenice et Cligès nu a nu" (*Cligès* 6450-51).[73] At the very moment at which Bertrand discovers them, "une poire destele, / Si chiet Fenice les l'oroille" (*Cligès* 6466-67).[74] Because the pear is symbolically associated with eroticism and occupies a lower social poetic status than that of the more aristocratic apple of knowledge, it is easy to see why Robertson would consider this episode a mockery of love. Instead of the lovers seeking true knowledge and spiritual repose, the falling pear could imply false love and bodily

[73] " . . . he saw Fenice and Cligès sleeping together naked in their bower" (201).
[74] "a pear dislodged and fell beside Fenice's ear" (201).

delights. The falling pear in this tale, however, does not necessarily have to imply false love or bodily delights, but it can emphasize the body. Because women are often aligned in the Middle Ages with the body and not with the mind (eroticism aligns with the body and knowledge with the mind), the falling pear draws attention to the concept of body, and by extension to woman. The falling pear therefore positions Fenice as the active body of the garden, and her commanding words to Cligès have an authoritative power. "Amis, amis! nos somes mort! / Vez ci Bertran! S'il vos eschape, / Cheü somes an male trape. / Il dira qu'il nos a veüz" (*Cligès* 6470-73).[75] Her voice inspires Cligès to leap to his feet and dispel the intruder.

While Bertrand clambers up the wall in an effort to escape, Cligès strikes him with his sword, severing Bertrand's leg beneath the knee as if it had been a stalk of fennel: "Quant Cligès est venuz aprés / Et maintenant hauce l'espee, /Sel fiert si qu'il li a copee / La janbe dessoz le genoil / Aussi come un raim de fenoil" (*Cligès* 6484-88). The symbolic importance of fennel in this episode is important because it provides some insight into the ways in which the Emperor and his knights are or should be perceived by a medieval audience when readers are meant to sympathize with the lovers. As a principal medicinal plant grown in a garden, fennel was considered by medieval physicians to be a "hot" medicine (McLean 214). Medieval people crushed fennel roots to make a volatile oil designed to "get rid of wind . . . also worms, bowel-ache . . . and matter which fennel expelled in its capacity as a diuretic and laxative" (McLean 214). Despite its use as medicine for digestive problems, fennel was used most prevalently to alleviate hunger. "The method of alleviation was to chew the 'hot'

[75] "'My love! My love! We're doomed! Bertrand is here. If he evades you, all is lost; he'll say he's seen us'" (202).

seeds of the fennel foliage" (McLean 215). Chrétien associates the interloping Bertrand with this common medicinal plant found in gardens; in this context, Bertrand's harvested leg could relate to the concept of unexpected bodily disruption that needs to be expelled. Bertrand's severed leg could also be suggestive of masculine castration, which is also an unpleasant bodily disruption. The castration could be a way of wounding the cuckolded Emperor's strength, since Bertrand is the Emperor's knight, and thus an extension of the Emperor himself. In the article "Feminist Research," Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva point out that for the early fathers of natural science, "nature is by no means an asexual being; it is a woman, an evil, dangerous woman who must be dominated. Men can best maintain dominion over this whore through his mind, his intellect . . . only if he has the material military power behind him, as otherwise his *mind is as impotent as a withered stick*" (45). Bertrand could represent one aspect of the Emperor's military power; though he escaped Cligès's assault, he runs straight to the Emperor to report the affair instead of communicating anything to the men who hunt with him.

Enraged by the discovery that he is a victim of deceit, the Emperor swears vengeance on Cligès: "Et dit que s'il n'an prant vanjance / De la honte et de la viltance, / Que li traïtre li a feite, / Qui sa fame li a fortreite, / Ja mes n'avra joie an sa vie" (*Cligès* 6639-43).[76] His quest for vengeance, however powerful and well manned, is no match for the will of love in this tale. The Emperor is not heartbroken over Fenice's deceit; rather, he perceives Cligès as the aggressor. This suggests he does not hold

[76] "Then he swore that if he did not take vengeance for the shame and humiliation caused him by the traitor who had stolen away his wife, he would never again be happy in his life" (204).

Fenice accountable for her deception, even though both potions she drinks to deceive him are her ideas. Further, the Emperor sends his men out in search of Cligès, but there is no evidence that the Emperor contributes to the search. Much like Mies and Shiva's contention, without the Emperor's military power behind him to help maintain control, his mind becomes as impotent as a withered stick. Once the Emperor loses dominion over his property (Fenice), and once his men scatter through all towns and cities in a futile search for her and her lover, he loses his mind completely and dies insane in Greece. Once Fenice marries Cligès properly, Chrétien leaves his audience with the note that Fenice loses nothing in marrying Cligès, even though her lifelong authority results in generations of empresses sentenced to imprisonment in Constantinople because succeeding emperors are too fearful of Fenice's story to allow them any freedom.

From the beginning of her role in the tale, Fenice's exile and imprisonment is vital to her success in pursuing privacy as freedom from a political system unsympathetic to female desire. She is unique among common poetic portrayals of the medieval woman in her ability to endure brutal physical abuse and arise, regenerated, from a virtual death. Her name, "Fenice," French for "phoenix," suggests a connection with a mystical bird with the power to resurrect itself from death. Within her very name lies her parallel to the natural world and also carries with it Otherworldly implications. The magical phoenix has the ability to control its comings and goings and it famously controls its own life and death. The phoenix does not answer to any known authority and in the Christian context, according to a medieval bestiary, "[t]he phoenix can also signify the resurrection of the righteous who, gathering the aromatic plants of virtue,

prepare for the renewal of their former energy after death" (Badke). Like the mythical bird for which she is named, Fenice turns to the natural world to aid her individual sovereignty and assist in her freedom. Like the phoenix, she "dies" and is "reborn" anew, her energy restored by the healing properties of the flora within the garden and Thessala's herbal talents. Her story is circular; she experiences both life and death, she rejects the conventions of a marriage determined by property and embraces a marriage conceived in love. In this way, she is testament to courage and thus, she stands apart from her *fin amour* counterparts as portrayed in other poems.

Assessment

In *The Merchant's Tale*, *Erec et Enide*, and *Cligès*, privacy as freedom imagines people as autonomous and self-defining instead of socially embedded and bound through common socialization into shared norms. Post states that privacy as dignity "seeks to eliminate differences by bringing all persons within the bounds of a single normalized community" and that privacy as freedom "protects individual autonomy by nullifying the reach of that community" (2095-96). Januarie's privacy as dignity manifests in the visible image of the garden designed to protect his social differences. Januarie customizes the intimate enclosure to reflect an individual micro-community, complete with present and active gods. Januarie's pursuit of privacy as freedom resists social conventions that exclude him from its community of ideals. May's relationship to the natural world and her deviant behavior might suggest the unsustainability of that freedom when it occurs in a forced environment and constructed through artifice. The lady in *Erec et Enide*, like Januarie, also attempts to normalize a community in the

enchanted garden, but her privacy as dignity is less pronounced than her pursuit of privacy as freedom. The lady's privacy as a form of dignity commands an attitudinal respect from her lover and from those who enter the garden because it is she who controls the conditions of the garden confinement, even if those conditions are informed by chivalric obligations at their core. Her autonomy drives her dignity but only because she wants to live in an environment that privileges her own relationship to love over the masculine relationship to chivalric obligation and court politics. The lady is similar to Januarie in the context of the pursuit of privacy as dignity, autonomy, and freedom; these concepts are unsustainable long term. Of all the individuals pursuing privacy as freedom in these texts, Fenice seems to be the most successful. The walls of her garden temporarily protect her autonomy from the nullifying reach of the community, but her garden is not as secure as the other gardens in the chapter. Her garden is still vulnerable to interruption and external violence. However, she is able to overcome the violence and maintain her autonomy and her identity as lover and beloved, even though her ability to overcome these obstacles has consequences for her successors. Post states that before privacy as freedom developed into its modern definition, it "used to be associated with nature" (2096). From that perspective, when the the garden environment is used for the pursuit of freedom and when it is considered in the context of power and captivity, it is a sphere of authentic personal liberty removed from the constraints of social norms and obligations.

While not all literary gardens are meant to be prisons, many of them illustrate the arbitrary boundaries between what is considered valuable and not valuable, especially when women are the garden's focus. In the literature explored in this chapter,

gardens create the possibility of controlling and colonizing that which can be free and/or self-generative. Medieval garden design, as Howes points out, "derives much from aesthetic concerns current in the culture at large" (22). But it is important to remember that oftentimes these literary gardens also reveal the futility of man's efforts to cultivate and contain these potent forces he has enclosed, because with the power to grow comes the power to escape and subvert boundaries.

Chapter Four: Privacy as Sovereignty in Medieval Literary Forests

Sovereignty is a common trope in many literary texts; all of the texts in this chapter engage in some way with public and private identities. In these texts, the forest challenges humanity's sense of temporal boundaries, and its primeval space, both real and symbolic, exemplifies the locus of personal transformation and self-realization. In Marie de France's twelfth century lay *Bisclavret*, the anonymously-written late fourteenth century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the anonymously-written fifteenth century poem *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, the forest is a landscape of didactic importance, carrying within its shadowy mysteries lessons that can only be learned by characters' struggle to rejoin civilization. It is a place that frequently transforms characters, physically or emotionally. This kind of transformation necessitates travel between civilization and wilderness in order to reveal true identities.

For Bisclavret and Dame Ragnelle, privacy becomes a form of sovereignty over the individual self. Bisclavret's wife demands knowledge of his secrets. Relinquishing those secrets results in Bisclavret's banishment to the woods, trapped within his wolf form. Once the king grants Bisclavret privacy, he is able to return to human form. In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, the concept of sovereignty is a powerful one. Ragnelle grapples with sovereignty in the marital and sexual contexts, while Gromer Somer Joure advocates for sovereignty over contested territories. Even though forests are by law reserved for the king's use, in both *Bisclavret* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, control of the forests is contested by the unauthorized lives that find refuge or prey within them.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight explores medieval attitudes toward the non-human world. In the beginning of the text, Gawain represents the prevailing attitude that humanity belongs in a controlled environment, with nature as its adversary. On his journey to find the Green Knight, Gawain battles the environment; the environment is hostile to him in return. Bertilak embodies nature, but manages to coexist with civilization respectfully. By the end of the text, Gawain's adventure results in his transformation into a green knight, but that transformation does not mean that he embodies nature the same way as Bertilak. Gawain's place is not relegated to the woods; for him, the forest is a place of struggle rather than residence. Once he becomes a green knight, however, he discovers that nature is not necessarily the adversary perceived in the tale's beginning. By the time he leaves Hautdesert he has been transformed, and he does not encounter struggles with the natural world en route to Camelot.

Bisclavret

Bisclavret's physical metamorphosis between human and werewolf suggests his ambivalence not just about marriage but also his roles in the civilized world. He is both husband and loyal knight, and the time he spends trapped in wolf form emphasizes the difficulty of embracing the expectations of the civilized man; it signifies, for a time, an inability to return fully to the civilized world. In an article on the landscape of love in Marie de France's *Lais*, Michael Calabrese argues, "[s]uccess in love depends on the deft use of secrets and secret places, a control and manipulation of the physical world" (82). Like Guigemar's carefully-caulked ship in Marie's *lai Guigemar*, or the fairy

mistress's opulent tent in the *lai Lanval*, the hollow rock in *Bisclavret* is an enclosed space designed for secrecy and security. It is a secret space that guards clues to his human identity when he stores his clothes in it. Most importantly, the rock safeguards one aspect of his privacy; privacy itself is crucial for Bisclavret to establish individual sovereignty.

Marie carefully describes Bisclavret in the beginning of the *lai*. She spends the first fourteen lines of the *lai* establishing the known facts about werewolves at the time. Werewolves were understood to be ferocious, man-eating beasts who were possessed by madness, but the affliction was common amongst men: "Jadis le poeit hum oïr / E sovent suleit avenir, / Hume plusur garval devindrent / E es boscages meisun tindrent" (*Bisclavret* 5-8).[77] She spends the second fourteen lines describing Bisclavret's virtues as a knight and husband; he is handsome and conducts himself nobly, his neighbors love him, and he loves his equally worthy and attractive wife, who in turn loves him. But a much more sinister secret underscores Bisclavret's ostensibly perfect life and causes his wife great worry: "la semeine le perdeit / Treis jurs entiers, qu'el ne saveit / U deveneit në u alout, / Ne nuls des soens nïent n'en sout" (*Bisclavret* 25-28).[78] Once Bisclavret reveals to his wife that he is indeed a werewolf, he qualifies his secret by explaining what he does while in that form: "Dame, jeo devienc bisclavret. / En cele grant forest me met, / Al plus espés de la gaudine, / S'i vif de preie e de ravine"

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[77] "In days gone by one could hear tell, and indeed it often used to happen, that many men turned into werewolves and went to live in the woods" (68). *(All translations come from* The Lais of Marie de France *translated by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby.)*

[78] "each week he was absent for three full days without her knowing what became of him or where he went, and no one in the household knew what happened to him" (68).

(*Bisclavret* 63-66).[79] Bisclavret's wife is understandably fearful. In an article on the emotional landscape of the forest, Deirdre Kessel-Brown points out that in medieval literature "the forest shares a close association with hell" (239). Considering the werewolf's physical appearance and known behaviors, the wife's fear is warranted.

Werewolf depictions of this time, even in literature, seemed to reflect medieval culture's tendency to steep all facets of life into such an atmosphere of deep religiosity "that no object or incident, no idea or action could escape religious interpretation" (Husband 1). By the time the Gothic style came into fashion (in the twelfth century, around the same time as Marie's writing), artistic depictions of devils had conformed to a familiar type of iconography that merged human and animal characteristics. In an article on encountering devils in the medieval landscape, Jeremy Harte points out that by the twelfth century, one could "expect a devil to have horns or a beak, shaggy fur and claws" (178). In addition to devils, the werewolf also resembled the mythic wild man in many ways, though the wild man was exclusively a literary and artistic figure dreamed up by the medieval imagination. Werewolf imagery can be traced to antiquity, specifically to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In the book *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism*, Timothy Husband states that "[c]oncepts generated by faith tended to be seized upon and externalized in a naïve and literal fashion, and thus abstractions became rendered as concrete realities" (1). Medieval artists and writers made flesh cultural fears by fusing forms from a wide range of prototypes; with this in mind, a medieval audience might identify with Bisclavret's wife's fear that her husband is demonic in

[79] "'Lady, I become a werewolf: I enter the vast forest and live in the deepest part of the wood where I feed off the prey I can capture'" (69).

some way. However warranted her concerns, her demand to know details of his secret interferes with Bisclavret's individual privacy.

Privacy in *Bisclavret* should be explained in terms of both limited access and concealment. In an article on conceptualizing privacy, Daniel J. Solove defines limited access as a limited access to the self: "This conception recognizes the individual's desire for concealment and for being apart from others" (1102). Concealment of information involves secrecy. According to Solove, privacy as secrecy is an individual's right "to conceal discreditable facts about himself" (1106). In other words, an individual desires the power to conceal personal information that others might use to the detriment of the individual. A husband's mysterious and unexplained disappearance from the home every week for three days at a time will arouse a wife's suspicion. While the wife is well within her wifely right to inquire about his disappearance, her fears are strictly marital at first: "Mun escïent que vus amez, / E si si est, vus meserrez" (*Bisclavret* 51-52).[80] She pressures him to reveal his secret; when he does, her fears are no longer marital. Bisclavret's reluctance to disclose his secret suggests that he is well aware of the possibility that the gravity of the truth will result in catastrophe. His intent to guard his secret is grounded in a desire for self-preservation; for him, individual privacy is crucial to his own well being in this matter: "'Dame,' fet il, 'pur Deu, merci! / Mal m'en vendra, si jol vus di, / Kar de m'amur vus partirai / E mei meïsmes en perdrai'" (*Bisclavret* 53-56).[81]

[80] "'I think you must have a lover and, if this is so, you are doing wrong'" (68).

[81] "'Lady,' he said, 'in God's name, have mercy on me! If I tell you this, great harm will come to me, for as a result I shall lose your love and destroy myself'" (68-69).

The lady's discovery of Bisclavret's secret is the catalyst for the transformative action in this tale, because the moment he discloses the details of his secret he is completely vulnerable to his wife's discretion. Once Bisclavret's wife discovers his real secret, her fears are no longer strictly marital. In other words, Bisclavret's secret is no longer a matter of potential infidelity for her. Instead of running from him screaming in fear, she uses careful rhetoric to draw out the details of his secret, which transfers all control over the fate of his body to her. Revealing the details of the secret to his wife strips Bisclavret of his individual desire for limited access, and when she uses the information against him to trap him in wolf form, we see that his fears of great harm are warranted. However, the wife's abuse of the secret and its details eventually damns her, even if her actions might be justified to some degree. The object of her fears has shifted from the familiar (adultery) to the fantastical (lycanthropy), but there should be no surprise that the lady would fear the unknown and the savage. Even though Bisclavret explicitly states that he feeds off of the prey that he can capture in the woods, he does not clarify what the "prey" is, and Marie is clear in the beginning of the *lai* what werewolves eat. A reader would have little affection for a beast that devours human beings; early in the tale, readers find themselves in the same position as the wife. In the beginning of the *lai*, the narrator is clear about what meaning a reader is to assign to "werewolf."

The wife's control over Bisclavret's secret results in a plan to manipulate private information and secret space in order to banish him so she can pursue a more normal marriage. Once he assumes his wolf form, his wife sends her new lover to violate Bisclavret's privacy by taking advantage of Bisclavret's need for concealment. The

lover steals Bisclavret's clothes out of the hollow rock; the act imprisons him in his lupine form for a year and removes him completely from civilization. Trapped within his wolf form and exiled to the woods, Bisclavret has no individual sovereignty. In the book *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*, Gillian Rudd posits that the forest wilderness is defined by its very unknowability and, significantly, "the wilderness resists the entry of humans to such a degree that those who enter it tend to be dehumanized in one way or another" (91). For Bisclavret, this dehumanization is literal. Bisclavret's yearlong sojourn in the woods aligns him once again with the image of the wild man, who "lives in the forest alone, naked and hirsute, strong and aggressive, for the most part speechless, feeding on herbs or the raw flesh of venison, yet he is essentially human" (Harrison 65). Trapped in wolf form with all evidence of his humanity concealed in his interior self, Bisclavret must struggle to rejoin the civilization from which he has been exiled.

A werewolf's abandonment of clothing should symbolically signal his rejection of all civilization, humanity, and reason, but because Bisclavret retains his human ability to reason, readers would eventually recognize, even if Marie had not mentioned it explicitly, that he is exceptional. His lupine dalliance in the woods for the better part of the week every week might attest to his insecurities about civilization and humanity in the general sense, but the most prominent institution of humanity in this tale is matrimony, which of course involves another person. In the book *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison writes that the very nature of matrimony is hostile to the forest environment (6). Matrimony is unable to institute itself in the forests because forests "encouraged dispersion, independence, lawlessness, polygamy,

and even incest" (Harrison 6). Further, Harrison appropriates forest imagery as a metaphor for other human institutions: "Human beings have by no means exploited the forest only materially; they have also plundered its trees in order to forge their fundamental etymologies, symbols, analogies, structures of thought, emblems of identity, concepts of continuity, and notions of system" (7-8). Bisclavret spends a year in the woods suspended in wolf form. The narrator does not specify what he does during that year, but the lapsed narrative time might indicate that the forest is a place of ambiguity that reflects Bisclavret's inability to return to the human institutions with which he is familiar, whether the institution is marital or chivalric. Bisclavret's enthusiastic response upon seeing the king suggests that he views the king as the one who will enable Bisclavret's return to the chivalric community.

Considering the institution of matrimony is at the forefront of this tale, and if matrimony is theoretically hostile to the forest environment, Bisclavret's abandoned clothing may represent that very institution or convey the insecurities of his role within it, since he is only performing the roles of husband and human part time. For his wife, the forest is also the space wherein she acts upon her own insecurities of the marriage. By sending her lover to hide Bisclavret's clothes and imprison Bisclavret in his wolf form, his wife strips him of personal sovereignty by manipulating and violating his private secret space, exiling him from the marriage and from his human individuality. By arranging to have his clothes stolen, the wife assumes control over the truth of Bisclavret's identity and she also controls access to that truth. In this way, she cloaks her betrayal in secrecy; she now has her own kind privacy in the context of secrecy.

If the forest is a symbolic receptacle for Bisclavret's exile,[82] then the space of the forest reflects his sorrow. He is unhappy with the (semi-permanent) role of wolf that his wife assigns him, and he is unhappy with his exile from the chivalric community. In the forest, Bisclavret finds a landscape in harmony with emotional chaos. The forest is a place filled with thorns and briars; it is a harsh and dangerous environment. It is uncultivated, wild, and unremitting. Stripped of individual human sovereignty, the only control he has relies on the primal instinct of survival. His reaction to seeing the king is a testament to his desire to be returned to civilization. The moment he sees the king, he attaches himself to the king and begs for mercy: "Des quë il ad le rei choisi, / Vers lui curut quere merci. / Il l'aveit pris par sun estrié, / la jambe li baise e le pié" (*Bisclavret* 145-48).[83] Bisclavret is unable to communicate his specific feelings about his imprisonment while he is doomed to endure it, but the tale's narrator, clearly sympathizing with the werewolf, conveys those feelings upon the disappearance of his clothes, "Issi fu Bisclavret trahiz / E par sa femme maubailiz" (*Bisclavret* 125-26).[84] He has not only lost the performative physical human element to his life, but he has also been stripped of the ability to perform his domestic role as husband; his exile signals his inability, however temporary, to return to civilization. The wife, symbolic of the marital institution, exiles him from civilization; in order to return, he requires assistance from the masculine order. But the forest is a place in which, as Rudd contends, "[t]he risk to the human is that of losing themselves, not merely geographically but also in terms of

[82] Some critics argue in favor of the role of the forest in this context; for example, refer to Deirdre Kessel-Brown's article "The Emotional Landscape of the Forest in the Medieval Love-Lament."

[83] "As soon as he saw the king he ran up to him and begged for mercy. He took hold of his stirrup and kissed his foot and his leg" (70).

[84] "Thus was Bisclavret betrayed and wronged by his wife" (69).

their identity, and it is this which makes wilderness a site of trial and transformation" (93). Bisclavret's imprisonment in his wolf body and his imprisonment in the woods implies a relationship between his body and the landscape; this relationship is necessary for Bisclavret's trial away from the domestic sphere and an eventual full-time return to his place within the chivalric order.

As a rational man trapped within an animal body, Bisclavret resembles the wild people of the forest and he also resembles what those wild people represent to medieval audiences. In the article "Wild Folk and Lunatics in Medieval Romance," David Sprunger claims that wild people of the forest "represent at one time both the animal and the human. They can suggest the low, animal side of human potential with its violence, its lust, and its raw struggle for survival. They can also suggest the heights of human potential" (145). The king sees the "merveillë" (*Bisclavret* 152) in the wolf; while the king does not recognize Bisclavret's humanity specifically, the king's choice of words suggests he acknowledges a potential for intelligence that makes the beast unique from other feral forest creatures. As a noble knight on the inside, Bisclavret retains a strange dignity when in wolf form. He is the animal with which the king will form an alliance. Bisclavret's eventual departure from the wild and final metamorphosis into human being is triggered by his acceptance as the king's favorite pet. Once returned to the civilized social order, Bisclavret is offered the opportunity to restore his own humanity and he finds his secure place not within the institution of marriage, but within the confines of the masculine chivalric space. Bisclavret does not necessarily emerge from the forest as a regenerated, converted knight; there is no textual evidence to suggest that once he returns to civilization he will cease his weekly visits to the forest

as a werewolf. Further, there is no evidence to suggest that he *wants* to terminate his wolf cycle. During his regular werewolf cycle, his time in the forest vivifies him; he returns home from his cycle "joius e liez" (*Bisclavret* 30).[85] During his exile, the forest is less enlivening; while he is imprisoned in wolf form, he must act upon the animal side of human potential through violence and the raw struggle for survival. Once Bisclavret's privacy and sovereignty are restored, however, the forest should cease to be the locus for his struggle, and he will no longer resemble a wild man who merely suggests the heights of human potential.

Bisclavret's yearlong exile in the woods characterizes his difficulty in returning to civilization. There is no evidence to suggest that he was not born a man, and the fact that he maintains his human reason and intelligence while in wolf form would have carried a theological implication with a medieval audience. In the book *Metamorphosis of the Werewolf: A Literary Study from Antiquity through the Renaissance,* Leslie Sconduto points out that when St. Augustine of Hippo wrote *The City of God*, he developed his theological interpretation of human beings' metamorphosis into wolves and other animals, and this interpretation remained influential for over a thousand years (17). "Augustine declares that although the men's bodies changed, their minds did not . . . these metamorphoses are 'demonic trickery'; they are not real, but are only illusion" (Sconduto 17). Augustine does not deny that such transformations could in fact exist, because doing so would assign a limit to God's power, but he maintained that instances of metamorphoses were actually nothing more than misperceptions (Sconduto 18, 19). When placed into this context, Bisclavret's metamorphosis falls within the parameters

[85] "In high spirits" (68).

of Christian doctrine: "as people created in the image of God, they have not become animals, but have merely acquired the appearance of animals and have retained that quality which sets them apart, their reasoning or their intelligence" (Sconduto 29). Bisclavret's ability to maintain and control this human reasoning is the key to his successful return to the world of men, even if returning to the world of men depends on an encounter with them in the forest.

A royal hunting expedition is exactly the kind of ritualized penetration of the savage wilderness that allows Bisclavret to reunite with the world of men. In the article "The Werewolf as Möbius Strip, or Becoming Bisclavret," Lucas Wood suggests that the primary content of Bisclavret's performance is its own "capacity to convey content . . . to express an intentionality that it cannot falsify because misrepresenting his motives would mean failing to evince human reason" (13). The moment he sees the king, Bisclavret begs for mercy. The king is receptive to the wolf's plea, but only after the wolf kisses the king's foot and leg: "Il l'aveit pris par sun estrié, / La jambe li baise e le pié" (*Bisclavret* 147-148).[86] The narrator uses vocabulary that humanizes the animal (baise), which implies that the king, despite his initial feelings of dread, will recognize a distinction between kissing and licking. This important distinction inspires the king to draw attention to the marvel, which ends the hunt: "'Seignurs, fet il, avant venez! / Ceste merveillë esgardez, / Cum ceste beste s'humilie! / Ele ad sen d'hume, merci crie. / Chaciez mei tuz ces chiens ariere, / Si gardez que hum ne la fiere! / Ceste beste ad entente e sen. / Espleitiez vus! Alum nus en! / A la beste durrai ma pes, / Kar jeo ne

[86] "He took hold of his stirrup and kissed his foot and his leg" (70).

chacerai hui mes'" (*Bisclavret* 151-160).[87] Consistent with Augustine's belief that rationality, as the characteristic that distinguishes humanity from animals, is a prerequisite for salvation, Bisclavret finds that very salvation in the king's court after the king acknowledges the wolf's rational behavior.

Even though he finds protection and affection as the king's favorite pet, the very preconceptions people held regarding a werewolf's behavior replaces Bisclavret's humanlike rationality, first with the appearance of the knight who married his wife, and again upon seeing his wife when she brings a present to the king's lodging in the region where Bisclavret was discovered. He sees the knight who married his wife and viciously attacks him: "Si tost cum il vint al paleis / E li bisclavret l'aparceut, / De plain esleis vers lui curut: / As denz le prist, vers lui le trait. / Ja li eüst mut grant leid fait, / Ne fust li reis ki l'apela, / D'une verge le manaça. Deus feiz le vout mordre le jur!" (*Bisclavret* 196-203).[88] When he sees his wife, his attack is more devastating than his attack on the knight, and no one tries to thwart him until after the attack is complete: "Quant Bisclavret la veit venir, / Nuls hum nel poeit retenir: / Vers li curut cum enragiez. / Oiez

[87] "'Lords,' he said, 'come forward! See the marvelous way this beast humbles itself before me! It has the intelligence of a human and is pleading for mercy. Drive back all the dogs and see that no one strikes it! The beast possesses understanding and intelligence. Hurry! Let us depart. I shall place the creature under my protection, for I shall hunt no more today'" (70).

[88] "As soon as he arrived at the palace, Bisclavret caught sight of the knight and sped towards him, sinking his teeth into him and dragging him down towards him. He would soon have done the knight serious harm if the king had not called him and threatened him with a stick. On two occasions that day he attempted to bite him" (70-71).

cum il est bien vengiez: / Le neis li esracha del vis! / Que li peüst il faire pis?" (*Bisclavret* 231-36)[89]

Attacking and disfiguring his wife, an act that contradicts the empirical evidence of gentle behavior as perceived by the king and his court, suggests that Bisclavret communicates again as a human, only this time he acts in place of the law. Wood states that mutilating the wife "not only precipates the inquiry that will sanction the werewolf's private vendetta, but also endorses his hand of vengeance as a sentence carried out on behalf of public justice" (15-16). Bisclavret's violent attacks do not support the *lai*'s early description of his gentle manner, but his attacks may be justified. They lead to the discovery of the wife's secret and eventually to the restoration of Bisclavret's privacy as a form of individual sovereignty. In an article on men and beasts in *Bisclavret*, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner contends that these attacks are the moments at which Bisclavret can "safely encounter the real beast hiding in human form. His *rage* is not that of the werewolf; it is the understandably human and feudal desire for vengeance, the appropriate punishment of his wife's betrayal" (262). Bisclavret's encounter with the "real beast" is safe only to the extent that he is under the king's protection, yet it is only when he attacks the lady does Bisclavret's violence become the most significant. The king's wise man interprets its significance: "'Sire, fet il, entent a mei! / Ceste beste ad esté od vus; / N'i ad ore celui de nus / Ki ne l'eit veü lungement / E pres de lui alé sovent: / Unke mes humme ne tucha / Ne felunie ne mustra, / Fors a la

[89] "When Bisclavret saw her approach, no one could restrain him. He dashed towards her like a madman. Just hear how successfully he took his revenge. He tore the nose right off her face. What worse punishment could he have inflicted on her?" (71)

dame qu'ici vei'" (*Bisclavret* 240-47).[90] Sconduto translates "felunie ne mustra" as "committed any act of treachery," and explains that an act of treachery "is not something an animal would do, but it is something that a knight would do who has betrayed his oath to his lord. By the same token, it is something that husbands or wives would do who have betrayed their marriage vows" (50). In the king's court, Bisclavret's wolf body and chivalric mind represent a link between the human world and the animal world as well as a feudal link between a knight and his sovereign. This link is made visible when the king orders the wife's torture and extracts her confession only *after* Bisclavret enacts bestial violence to punish the wife in place of the law, essentially forcing the king to command the sentence.

The wife's confession reveals the human aspect of Bisclavret's identity to the chivalric community much like Bisclavret's confession reveals the beast aspect of his identity in the marital context earlier in the *lai*. For the chivalric community, Bisclavret is a man. For the wife, Bislavret is a wolf. The wife surrenders control of Bisclavret's body and his privacy with her confession. Solove states that "[p]rivacy is an issue of power; it affects how people behave, their choices, and their actions" (1143). The way the wife uses the concept of privacy as secrecy to guard access to Bisclavret's truth may be informed by her own desire for marital empowerment. In other words, she cannot control her husband's cyclic changes and his weekly disappearances, but she can take advantage of his privacy to empower herself and manage her exposure to those changes. Unfortunately for her, her confession not only reveals Bisclavret's hidden human

[90] "'Lord, listen to me. This beast has lived with you and every single one of us has seen him over a long period and has been with him at close quarters. Never before has he touched a soul or committed a hostile act, except against this lady here'" (71).

identity, but reveals a hidden beast identity within herself as well. To the king and his men, she is exposed as the widow who mourned the loss of her husband but she is the one who created that loss. It is up to the king as the hand of justice to extract the truth from the wife and offer Bisclavret a way to return to human form.

For Bisclavret, privacy is crucial to his metamorphosis. He desires privacy in the context of concealment to change into a wolf, and he desires privacy in the context of concealment in order to change into a human. While there is no evidence to suggest that this physical ability to shift is mandated by the *need* for privacy, it is nonetheless necessary on a personal level. For Bisclavret, privacy is an issue of sovereignty over himself and his individual right to limited access. The king offers Bisclavret his clothes but Bisclavret ignores them with people in the room; he will not shift in front of the court. Only when the king grants Bisclavret the privacy he seems to desire does Bisclavret seize the opportunity to return to his human form: "Li reis meïsmes le mena / E tuz les hus sur lui ferma. / Al chief de piece i est alez, / Deus baruns ad od lui menez; / En la chambrë entrent tut trei. / Sur le demeine lit al rei / Truevent dormant le chevaler" (*Bisclavret* 293-99).[91] The shift from forest to palace as the site of Bisclavret's transformation makes visible his reintegration into the chivalric order. Bisclavret's restored privacy also restores his stolen individual sovereignty.

Bisclavret's banishment into the forest may initially appear to be a punishment at the hands of a frightened yet manipulative wife, but the narrative structure of the *lai* suggests a journey rather than a punishment. Bruckner argues that the end of the *lai*

[91] "The king himself led the way and closed all the doors on the wolf. After a while he returned, taking two barons with him. All three entered the room. They found the knight sleeping on the king's own bed" (72).

reflects a kind of failure because it does not end with the reunion of the married couple. She argues on the grounds that love between a vassal and his sovereign complements but cannot form the backbone of a strong feudal society. Only a man and a woman can "found and maintain the base unit of society, the couple and ultimately the family as the tie across generations" (Bruckner 268). However, the *lai* seems more concerned with the struggle for the right to individual privacy and sovereignty as a form of that privacy; in this context, a reunion between the married couple is not necessary and does not constitute a failure, even if marriage was an integral part of the narrative. If, as Harrison contends, matrimony is one of the human institutions that embody the linear openness of time, then nature's closed cycle of generation and decay is what underlies "the enduring hostility between the institutional order and the forests that lie at its boundaries. Precisely because they lie beyond its horizon of linear time forests can easily confuse the psychology of human orientation" (8). In order to find his true place in the world, Bisclavret must wander the forest and endure a loss of temporal boundaries; he must enter a wilderness whose seemingly limitless landscape challenges his understanding of human institutions, in which he must be lost for a time in order to be rediscovered, reintegrated, and rehumanized. Once he is welcomed back into civilization with his privacy restored, his complete identity reveals itself and finds an accepted place in society.

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell

Forests may be legally reserved for the monarchy, but the unauthorized lives that seek refuge in the forest are the lives in control of the concealed and sought-after information found in that space. Like Bisclavret, Dame Ragnell suffers an intimate betrayal. Both characters enter the woods transformed, and they both depend on the perceptive courtesy of others in order to be readmitted to society. Privacy as a form of sovereignty over the individual self is a constant theme in *Bisclavret*, but it is also visible throughout the fifteenth-century poem *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. Ragnell struggles with sovereignty in the marital and sexual contexts, while her brother Gromer Somer Joure advocates for control over contested territories. Similar to its function in *Bisclavret*, privacy in *The Wedding* is a form of sovereignty; it concerns an individual's desire or ability to maintain control over information. In both *Bisclavret* and *The Wedding*, control over information addresses intimacy as a means of locating the value of privacy, but the concept of intimacy is treated differently in each text. Solove explains that "intimacy is the sharing of information about one's actions, beliefs or emotions which one does not share with all, and which one has the right not to share with anyone" (1122). Bisclavret admits his secret to his wife after she bullies him into admission, but despite his reluctance, acceding to her demand demonstrates a kind of trust in the value of intimacy. Unfortunately for him, relinquishing his privacy results in a betrayal of that intimacy and earns him exile. Ragnell, though betrayed by her stepmother, is already exiled from civilization at the start of the tale. Her guarded access to critical information is a strategic attempt to reassert herself into the chivalric order, and she only reveals intimate knowledge on her own terms.

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell begins with an event that epitomizes royal privilege, entitlement, and leisure: the royal hunt. In some respects, particular spaces, especially forests, can serve as sources of power for kings. For example, in the article "Forests, Parks, Palaces, and the Power of Place in Early Medieval Kingship," David Rollason observes that the forest "was outside the common law, and subject rather to the forest law which gave the king extensive powers. These he enforced through an impressive machinery of forest courts and forest officials" (436). Though it was often difficult to enforce forest laws despite the presence of the forest courts and forest officials, the forest was still considered a place of royal privilege, and hunting was a characteristically royal activity. Rollason affirms that "[h]unting was developed by the Persian kings, for whom 'this display of royal prowess before the people's eyes was part of the kingly function, not merely a sport'" (441). Whether the royal hunt in medieval England was historically considered an intrinsic part of a king's rulership is unclear, but it was certainly an opportunity to demonstrate his skill and strength and prowess and also a command over hostile and inhospitable landscapes.

At the same time that forests were considered privileged environments around which the king's law extended, they were still often viewed as places that lay beyond the law—or what Harrison identifies as the "shadow of the law" (63). "The shadow of law—be it social, religious, or otherwise—is not a place of lawlessness; it lies beyond the law like a shadow that dissolves the substance of a body. The shadow of law is not opposed to law but follows it around like its other self, or its guilty conscience" (Harrison 63). The story of Dame Ragnell and Sir Gawain maps out the intriguing ways in which legalities tend to dissolve in the forest environment when those in legal control

are confronted with the need for specific information and the need for travel from the civilized world to the forest and back again.

Greek Goddesses and Irish Sovereignty figures converge in this poem. Like the goddess Diana, the loathly lady seems to be associated with water and with the forests. Diana's domain is remote and inaccessible, and the goddess goes to great lengths to preserve that inaccessibility. In one example, the poet Ovid writes of Actaeon, who falls victim to Diana's wrath and is turned into a stag when he accidentally encounters her while she bathes. In the article "Coupling the Beastly Bride and the Hunter Hunted: What Lies Behind Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale,'" Susan Carter asserts that the earliest appearance of the loathly lady motif "comes in the figure of the Irish Sovranty Hag, an imbroglio of cultural ideas about political power contestation, in which gender roles are loosened, dissolved, and resolved" (330). If Ragnell's origins are Irish,[92] then the notion of sovereignty is all the more relevant in this poem.

Often in Diana's forests the hunter and the hunted unite, and Arthur's leisurely pursuit of the "greatt hartt" (*Wedding* 23) in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* enables Arthur to encounter the disgruntled Gromer Somer Joure. Unlike the rapist knight in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, who is banished from civilization and who must re-enter the natural world in order to find the answer to the question of what women really want, Arthur leaves civilization (represented in this tale as his knights) voluntarily in order to pursue the hart. The hunted hart leads the hunter Arthur into a fern thicket, and once Arthur slays the animal, the mysterious knight Gromer Somer

[92] Some scholars have suggested that in addition to its Irish association, the image of the Loathly Lady has a number of parallels to nonwestern mythological figures that might have contributed to the literary image. For further reading, consult Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's article "On the Loathly Bride."

Joure immediately tracks Arthur to the same fern thicket, transposing Arthur from the hunter to the hunted. Carter contends that the wilderness backdrop "is a reminder that tales of the loathly lady tend to offer a 'hunter hunted' spin to gender destabilization" (330). The wilderness backdrop may be a reminder of gender role destabilization when Ragnell appears, but the confrontation between Gromer Somer Joure and Arthur in the forest can also serve as a reminder that legal rights to a particular space may not be as meaningful for those who seek refuge outside civilization.

In the wilderness, Gromer Somer Joure is able to speak freely; he does not appear to be hindered by the strictures of rank imposed by society. He boldly confronts Arthur about the "greatt wrong" (*Wedding* 59) Arthur has done him by giving his lands away to Sir Gawain, and then threatens Arthur's life: "wofully I shalle quytte thee here; / I hold thy lyfe-days nyghe done" (*Wedding* 56-57). Three lines later, he draws attention to the king's isolated position in the woods: "'Whate sayest thou, kyng alone?'" (*Wedding* 60). Without knights as reinforcements, Gromer Somer Joure has the physical advantage over Arthur, because Gromer Somer Joure is "[a]rmyd welle and sure: / A knyghte fulle strong and of greatt myghte" (*Wedding* 51-52) and Arthur only has a bow and is "clothyd butt in grene" (*Wedding* 83). The rhetorical exchange between Gromer Somer Joure and Arthur strips away the hierarchy of the men's prescribed identities within the civilized order of society, and Gromer Somer Joure's threat and subsequent focus on Arthur's solitary position in the woods seems to assert a freedom from civilized mores that prevail in town. There is little textual evidence from any source to suggest that threatening a king is appropriate or tolerated under most circumstances when the king is not explicitly tyrannical, so this detail in Gromer Somer

Joure's confrontation reveals the life-threatening potential of the wilderness environment. Essentially, feudal customs and feudal rules are suspended in the wilderness, despite the king's legal rights of "ownership" of the woods.

Even though Gromer Somer Joure's threat tests the extent of forest law enforcement, the opportunity for Arthur's redemption implies that chivalric courtesy has not entirely disappeared from the environment, so long as Arthur is able to tell Gromer Somer Joure "whate wemen love best in feld and town" (*Wedding* 91). Areas designated Forests were essentially "game preserves, the animals in which were the property of the king or lord who had the rights over that area of land. Usually these rights extended to cover all that lived there, animal and vegetable, human and non-human" (Rudd 48). If Arthur has a legal claim to the space of the forest, Gromer Somer Joure either ignores or rejects the law. He asserts his rights to the lands as he sees them, but his offer to allow Arthur the chance for redemption suggests that he is not an unreasonable person. Gromer Somer Joure uses what is essentially a political issue (Arthur giving lands to Gawain when the lands are not his to give) and transforms it into a gender issue (what do women want). This curious juxtaposition launches Arthur on a quest for a broader understanding of the needs and wants of his subjects. Whereas Arthur represents the political in this tale, Gawain represents the sexual; Gawain is the focus of the lady's desire, and he is the sexual reward for the lady's ability to save the body politic (Arthur's body) from certain death.

When Arthur and Gawain depart in opposite directions to find the answer to this perplexing conundrum, Arthur returns to Ingleswood and encounters a lady who is "as ungoodly a creature / As evere man sawe, without mesure" (*Wedding* 228-29). In the

book *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature*, Tory Vandeventer Pearman argues that when medical and literary representations of the female body convene with the Aristotelian construction of the female body "as a deformed male body, a web of embodied Otherness begins to surface, demonstrating the intricate bonds between discursive notions of embodied identity categories such as gender, sex, sexuality, ability, and ethnicity" (5). A literal embodiment of a marginalized Other, Ragnell is not simply an ugly woman; she is *deformed*:

> Her face was red, her nose snotyd withalle,
> Her mowithe was nott to lak;
> Her tethe hung over her lyppes;
> Her cheekys syde as wemens hypes;
> A lute she bare upon her bak.
> Her nek long and therto greatt,
> Her here cloteryd on an hepe;
> In the sholders she was a yard brode;
> Hangyng pappys to be an hors lode;
> And lyke a barrelle she was made;
> . . .
> She had two teethe on every syde,
> As borys tuskes, I wolle nott hyde
> Of lengthe a large handfulle;
> The one tusk went up, and the other down;
> A mouthe fulle wyde, and fowlle i-grown
> With grey heryes many on;
> Her lyppes laye lumpryd on her chyn;
> Nek forsoothe on her was none i-seen—
> She was a lothly on!
> (*Wedding* 231-42; 548-57)

Even though her ugliness may embody an exaggeration of Aristotelian notions of the normal state of the female body, it also indicates that she belongs in the forest. Her unnatural flesh is untamed and uncivilized like the forest, and because she possesses an untamed body, she belongs in the margins, far outside of the realm of conventional standards, in an untamed environment that mirrors her body. Like the carvings depicting devils and sinful women bordering the edges of a medieval cathedral's tympanum, or

like the gargoyles projecting from the gutters of a building, deformed and hideous figures are still a part of society even if they are relegated to its margins. In an article on the usurpation of masculine authority in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Mary Leech proffers that "[t]he existence of figures that draw attention to the shadowy places of a culture's values and morals is initially disturbing" (215). However disturbing the shadowy places of a culture's values and morals, more disturbing is confronting what lies within those shadowy places, even if those who dwell within are very much a part of civilization.

Ragnell's grotesque description sets her far outside the conventions for sexual desire and her request for a sexual reward destabilizes the standard for masculine cooperation. Leech asserts that Ragnell's deformed flesh makes her an unviable commodity for marriage, and is therefore unmarketable (215). Because she is repugnant, she is not subject to the same standards as beautiful women:

> The Loathly Lady is therefore accorded a certain amount of freedom not otherwise permitted to a woman. This usurped authority is considered at least as loathsome and obscene as the lady herself. The Loathly Lady seeks reintegration to the very society that she disrupts: her influence, which comes from her transformed state and not her original state, is normally limited once again when she returns to her beautiful form. (Leech 215)

In this case, her repugnance works to her advantage. Because she is accorded a certain amount of freedom that conventional women are typically not allowed, she can barter life-saving knowledge by demanding cooperation from the masculine order. She guards intimate knowledge that will save Arthur's life, but will only reveal that knowledge if Arthur will assist with her return to civilization. Her appearance may disrupt society, but forcing the court to confront a face that represents civilization's untamed aspects of its culture and values will lead to society's acknowledgement of those faces, if not

acceptance. Ragnell knows she is foul, but she also knows she is beautiful. Society may need to interact with the ugly before it earns the right to see the beauty.

Ragnell refuses to be controlled by her exile, and she is not controlled by her environment. In the article "Gender and the Nature of Exile in Old English Elegies," Stacy S. Klein remarks that the conventional literary female exile experiences place as something that is all too permanent (116). For Klein, exile is a "space from which she can never escape and that does not prompt spiritual change but simply embodies her spiritual inertia and psychological torment" (116). Ragnell is unlike her conventional literary exilic counterparts. She may be exiled to the space of the forest, but she retains items that identify her as one who does not truly belong there. She sits on "a palfrey was gay begon, / Withe gold besett and many a precious stone" (*Wedding* 246-47). These details might suggest that her time in the forest is temporary. Like the forest, she might be under the legal authority of the king, but also like the forest, she and her brother are difficult to govern, and they seem to exhibit more freedoms than those governed in town. She does not appear to be psychologically tormented; she treats her environment as a temporary place that just happens to mirror her uncivilized appearance. Even though the forest implies chaos and disorder, it is still very much an ordered place. It will continue to change with the seasons; it will shift from winter to summer, from ugly and fallow to beautiful and fertile, and it will do this every year. Amidst the chaos of the forest there is still order, just as there is order in Ragnell's body, even if she keeps the knowledge of that order private. Even though as a woman she is vulnerable to definition as desired object by the masculine conventions of society, her ugliness essentially removes her female body from sexually desired objectification and provides an

opportunity for her mind and voice to influence and be heard by the homosocial masculine order.

Ragnell is both sexual and vocal, and she demands an exalted knight as payment for information only she possesses—information that cannot be found in town. If towns cannot provide a voice to explain what the king's subjects most desire, it is because the answer to the question concerns privacy, the body, and formation of the self. Solove posits that for quite some time, the body has been viewed as the core of privacy (1135). "The claim that the body is 'private' is really a claim about certain practices regarding the body, such as concealment of certain bodily parts, secrecy about diseases and physical conditions, norms of touching and interpersonal contact, and individual control and dominion over decisions regarding one's body" (Solove 1135). The concept of bodily privacy in an urban area (such as Arthur's court or in town) is different than privacy in a less civilized space. Individual control over decisions regarding one's body is more difficult to maintain in an urban environment when one is in constant company with other people. Buildings, whether they were homes, storefronts, or churches, whether they were royal or common, were often full of people including workers, servants, family members, apprentices, and children. Although privacy in some contexts was not impossible in a more urban setting, the outdoors was often considered the site in which control over one's individual privacy was more feasible. In an article on illicit privacy and outdoor spaces, Mary Thomas Crane contends, "outdoor spaces might provide a more open and liberating environment for the formation of the self" (7). All of Ragnell's characteristics involve formation of the self: her loathly appearance, her secret knowledge regarding her true identity, and her strategy to rejoin civilization.

Arthur complies with Ragnell's request because he does not have a choice to decline. His lack of control over the situation echoes the reality of humanity's lack of control while engaging with the physical threats of a wilderness environment. Carter contends that an ideal good king must please the shape-shifter whose monstrous desire destabilizes gender stereotypes (86). But Arthur does not comply simply because he is a good king and a nice guy. He complies because he wants to live. Further, Ragnell's request for Gawain's hand in marriage makes her an active agent of her own sexual desire, which also challenges traditional gender stereotypes, especially concerning who pursues and seduces whom, and whose pleasure is important. She does not express a voiced interest in Gawain's pleasure (she does not see any problem with Gawain marrying a monstrous looking woman), but she is concerned with her own pleasure. Ragnell's challenge is especially disturbing, especially considering that her loathsome body is iconic of what the medieval masculine culture considered reprehensible in the female body. The poet describes Ragnell's beastliness at length, and because medieval literature frequently aligns land with fertile young women, Ragnell's appearance represents a coarse and potentially animalistic facet of female sexuality and compromised fertility, which invokes the idea of her as a terrifying and formidable sexual partner.

Because the tale positions Ragnell outside of the realm of sexual temptation, Arthur has no need to resist her demands; her demands are an exchange for information that cannot be found anywhere else. Her demands make Gawain a commodity; his body has essentially become a political affair, a business arrangement in addition to a sexual issue, thereby reinforcing Gromer Somer Joure's political-turned-sexual dispute. But

Ragnell has the ethos to participate in this arrangement. In addition to and in contrast with her ugliness, the poet describes her as sitting "on a palfrey was gay begon / Withe gold besett and many a precious stone; / Ther was an unseemely syghte; / So foulle a creature withoute mesure / To ryde so gayly, I you ensure, / Ytt was no reason ne ryghte" (*Wedding* 246-51). In contrast with the loathly ladies in both Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale,* and John Gower's *Tale of Florent,* whose garments are ragged and torn, and who are only viewed nobly once their beauty reveals itself, Ragnell's description suggests that she is not a figure attempting to pollute or infiltrate the noble community from somewhere outside of it. Instead, her attire suggests that she has roots in the nobility. The knowledge she possesses, probably gained from society's margins since no one in town is endowed with the knowledge, is the key to her reintegration into the nobility. It enables her to tie herself to Gawain, who is the exemplar of chivalric society and Arthur's nephew. As Leech reminds us, "Dame Ragnell's ability to enter Arthurian society presents a myriad of contradictions and reveals a social system at odds with itself" (219). Ragnell's vile body in tandem with her beautiful attire and her insistence on marrying publicly (instead of privately, as Guinevere suggests) imply contradictions present within the social system that enable the success of her sloppy dinner performance. No matter how much the courtiers marvel at her foulness, no matter how disgusted they are by the fact that she cuts her meat with her three-inch long nails during the wedding feast, they cannot or will not interfere with her wedding celebration or the customary rituals. Their refusal or inability to interfere implies acceptance, however reluctant the acceptance might be.

On a surface level, the public ritual of marriage is designed to honor and celebrate Ragnell's reintegration into civilization, but the juxtaposed images of Ragnell's loathsome visage and her expensive, splendid bridal array so ornate that it surpasses Guinevere's attire, seems to express anxieties about the symbolic order of the Arthurian noble community. Rituals designed to reinforce the boundaries of the body "are a means of policing community boundaries and social margins" (Finke 361). The wedding at High Mass is the most public of medieval rituals in this tale. "With her body in a state of continual fluctuation and formation, she acts as a regenerative signifier of problems within the social structure that are also in a process of continual flux and reformation" (Leech 222). While Ragnell's presence challenges the existing social structure and tests the boundaries of the noble community's social rituals, she also secures her place within it by using the conventions of the very culture that recoils from her.

Despite the fact that Ragnell's body personifies the challenges and anxieties that hover on the borders of the social order, the social order and its prescribed conventions will not be challenged and subverted for long. Arthur's concern for Gawain's well being after the wedding night suggests a suspicion that Ragnell may hold more power and influence over the chivalric order than he anticipated. Not only does she demonstrate the required knowledge to save his life, as Gawain's wife, she has the potential and the opportunity to corrupt or destroy Gawain, who at this point in the Arthurian timeline still champions the king and defends the chivalric order. But Arthur is not aware of Ragnell's overnight metamorphosis from loathly hag to beautiful woman, and when Gawain fails to emerge from his bedroom by afternoon, Arthur fears the worst: "'Syrs,'

quod the kyng, 'lett us go and asaye / Yf Sir Gawen be on lyve; / I am fulle ferd of Sir Gawen, / Nowe lest the fende have hym slayn; / Nowe wold I fayn preve'" (*Wedding* 722-26). As he soon discovers, Arthur's fears are unfounded; Ragnell's metamorphosis is the first indication that any problems within the social structure are determined to return to their "rightful" order.

Once Ragnell reveals the private information regarding her true identity, privacy as a form of individual sovereignty is made visible for both she and Gawain. She asks Gawain to "'Chese of the one . . . / Wheder ye wolle have me fayre on nyghtes, / And as foulle on days to alle men sightes, / Or els to have me fayre on days, / And on nyghtes on the fowlyst wyfe'" (*Wedding* 657-62). On one hand, Ragnell's request might empower Gawain to gain sexual control of her body; this is important because until this exchange, he does not have a lot of choice in this marital arrangement. On the other hand, revealing the intimate details of her true identity is an important part of her own strategy to control her own formation of the self since she has already rejoined civilization. Unlike the rapist knight / bridegroom in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, Gawain is not the knight whose life depends on finding the answer to the question of what women want, so when Ragnell asks Gawain to choose her form, it is not to test whether he learned a particular lesson. Once Gawain makes the decision to allow her to make the choice and she chooses the fair form that will benefit the both of them the most, her sovereignty over her individual self is reaffirmed. Gawain will not lose public worship during the day, at night he will not have "a symple repayre" (*Wedding* 674), and Ragnell will be wholly accepted into civilization, socially *and* physically.

Ragnell, once marginalized and exiled from the chivalric community, finds herself in a unique position to challenge the social order nearly free from social repercussion, while simultaneously pursuing her own agenda to reinstate herself into that very order. She needs to be constructed as an abject figure in order to challenge the symbolic and social order and allow it to reassert and accept itself. In the book *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation*, Jeffrey S. Theis asserts, "the forest often is a spatially disruptive force that challenges a culture's preconceived notions of itself and nature" (xii). The forest may be a spatially disruptive force that challenges a culture's preconceived notions of itself and nature, but Dame Ragnell is a socially disruptive force that challenges the court's preconceived notions of itself as well. In this sense, Ragnell's exile and reintegration depend on the need for individual privacy and control over access to that privacy. The space of the forest offers her an opportunity to construct her formation of the self.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The concepts of public identity, private identity, and formation of the self extends to the anonymously written fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, even though Gawain's experience with these concepts is more figurative than Ragnell's or Bisclavret's respective experiences. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* contains a narrative circularity structured through the poetic attention to the cycle of seasons, the allusions to death and resurrection, and Gawain's personal transformation. His transformation results from the movement between Camelot (the familiar) to the wilderness (the foreign), and back to the familiar. In this poem, the Wilderness of

Wirral, the other unnamed forest, and the encounter with the Green Knight, both within and outside of the Green Chapel, are the loci of transformation for the young Gawain, who begins the tale as the exemplar of Arthurian chivalry, but who is unable to return to court a faultless knight. In a way, he experiences a destabilization of his exalted knighthood and returns to Camelot as a flawed man by the end of the tale. The forest provides the space where Gawain discovers his private identity as a flawed knight of a flawed court; it is an identity that is far less civilized than the exalted public identity at the poem's beginning. His journey reveals that he has more in common with the fearsome Green Knight than he would like, and by the time he returns to court, he has essentially become a green knight himself. This transformation does not mean that he embodies nature the same way as Bertilak. Gawain's place is not relegated to the woods; for him, the forest is a place of struggle rather than residence. Once he becomes a green knight, however, he discovers that nature is not necessarily the adversary perceived in the tale's beginning.

Gawain's forest experience feeds into his strange experience at Bertilak's castle, and these experiences show that the physical landscape and human anxieties about the landscape and about its own civilization are interrelated. In the book *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature*, John Aberth notes that in the Celtic tradition, trees were venerated, both individually and as a larger forest unit because they were seen as a "link or bridge between the earth and sky, between the under- and upper-worlds, between the chthonic and celestial realms, as symbolized by the roots going into the ground and the trunk and branches reaching up to the heavens. With their cyclical rhythms following the seasons, trees were also symbols of death and resurrection"

(Aberth 80). The growth rings inside of a tree trunk not only map out the tree's age, but the circular pattern is a natural reminder of the changes inherent in the cycle of the seasons in addition to the cycle of all life. In the article "The Wilderness of Wirral in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," Gillian Rudd proffers that Gawain's brief experience across the Wirral "seeks to open up questions of how literature 'thinks' landscape" (52). Even if Gawain's experience in the forest opens up the potential for questions of how literature "thinks" landscape in this poem, the Celtic symbolism of trees' circular rhythms correlates with Gawain's individual circular and transformative experience while in the forest. The Green Knight himself is the anthropomorphic embodiment of the very representation of anxieties that pervade humanity's thoughts about the human and non-human world, and his correlation with these human anxieties also contributes to Gawain's personal metamorphosis through his interaction with Gawain.

The purpose of the Green Knight's visit is more than a simple reminder to the court that the natural world has a way of transgressing constructed physical barriers designed to protect civilization from invading elements. His presence also draws focus to the transformative potential of the human soul. The poem's introductory fitt begins within the warm embrace of closed-off Camelot "vpon Krystmasse" (*SGGK* 36), and although much poetic attention is focused on the very young Arthur's revelry and feasting, there are no details about the natural conditions outside the castle, almost as if the outside is ignored or forgotten. However, the December British weather is cold and hostile[93], a stark contrast to the warmth and welcome of the fifteen-day long cultural festival amidst "alle þe mete and þe mirþe þat men couþe avyse" (*SGGK* 45). When the

[93] Note the poet's vivid description of the winter landscape one year after the scene's opener, specifically in lines 504-505; 726-35.

Green Knight brazenly interrupts this cultural ritual without warning or invitation, one might assume that he, an archetype of the powers of the nonhuman world shaped into a human body, will no longer tolerate being ignored or closed out. Even if the Green Knight's body does not meet the leafy specifications of the iconic image of the Green Man, his clothing, spun from silk, is decorated with images of birds and butterflies. Rudd contends that the timing of the Green Knight's entry into Arthur's court

> also suggests connections with the folkloric Green Man who embodies the principle of new life returning after the dead of winter. His appearance thus answers Arthur's call for 'some marvel' but also and perhaps more disconcertingly, hints at the distance humans have put between themselves and the rest of the natural world, to the extent that the simple processes of nature have become imbued with an air of the supernatural. (111)

The Green Knight's green physical appearance might represent the principle of new life returning after the dead of winter as Rudd contends, but his challenge to the court is the focus of the scene. If the Green Knight has Celtic roots in this poem,[94] then the beheading challenge is symbolically significant. In the article "A Little-Known Celtic Stone Head," Stephen Fliegel points out that to the Celtic people of Europe, the "human head was venerated as the seat of human magical energy" (91). If the human head carried the entirety of human magical energy, then the Green Knight might have introduced the beheading game as a means to demonstrate the transformative potential of the human soul.

The vulnerability of the court becomes clearest when the Green Knight presents his strange challenge. Unannounced, he bursts in to Camelot like a tempest in search of

[94] Some scholars have challenged the Celtic origins of the Green Knight in this poem. Refer to Su Fang Ng and Kenneth Hodges' article "Saint George, Islam, and Regional Audiences in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," in which the authors suggest that there are extensive parallels between the Green Knight and the popular Islamic folk figure al-Khidr (the Green One).

some “Crystemas gomen” (*SGGK* 283) wherein he will present an opulent battle-axe to any man who steps up to play his Yuletide game. In the book *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes that because “Anglo-Saxon England was continuously faced with challenges to its integrity and self-definition, the hybrid body of the monster became a communal form for expressing anxieties about the limits and fragility of identity” (xvii). It is necessary to displace Cohen’s argument forward three hundred years to apply to this poem because society’s anxieties about the limits and fragility of identity are still clearly expressed in the text. Though the Green Knight is only a half-giant and therefore perhaps slightly less of a threatening force than, for example, the cannibalistic giant of Mont St. Michel in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, his green body is not so much an affront to natural proportion (he is, after all still clearly a man), but a clear hybrid of human and nature who appears with the intention of challenging the court’s sense of security and identity at the very moment when the unsuspecting court seems most secure. The court seems confused by the Green Knight’s message: “If he hem stowned vpon fyrst, stiller were þanne / Alle þe heredmen in halle, þe hyȝ and þe loȝe” (*SGGK* 301-2). Uncertain of the proper way to react to this alien being standing before them, the guests remain silent until Arthur rises to honor the challenge. But in a true example of courtly modesty by demeaning his own name to Arthur, Gawain volunteers to spare the king and accept the Green Knight’s beheading challenge himself:

> For me þink hit not semly—as hit is soþ knawen—
> Þer such an askyng is heuened so hyȝe in your sale,
> Þaȝ ȝe ȝourself be talenttyf, to take hit to yourseluen,
> Whil mony so bolde yow aboute vpon bench sytten
> Þat vnder heuen I hope non haȝerer of wylle
> Ne better bodyes on bent þer baret is rered.

> I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
> And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe soþe.
> Bot for as much as ȝe ar myn em I am only to prayse;
> No bounté but your blod I in my bodé knowe. (*SGGK* 348-57)

The Green Knight's boisterous announcement regarding his keen battle prowess starkly contrasts Gawain's humility, and the binaries between the civilized nature of the court and the wilder, less tamed nature of the Green Knight are prominent. In the article "Sir Gawain and the Great Goddess," Ruben Valdes Miyares remarks that the Green Knight's "manners, like his looks, are an uncanny mixture of courtliness and wild rudeness, 'culture' and 'nature', inside-the-court and outside-the-court, 'us' and 'them', 'self' and 'other', human colour and greenness. He throws into disarray the rational minds of Arthur's court, which 'sunder everything into opposites'" (193). However, only when Gawain sets forth from Camelot to find the green chapel do these oppositions harmonize to enable Gawain's metamorphosis.

The poet dedicates three stanzas to Gawain's elaborate arming before Gawain departs on his journey, and these details emphasize the defensive precautions that humanity is compelled to take before leaving the luxuries of the civilized world to explore the unknown perils of the wilderness. That the Green Knight arrives without armor at Camelot to challenge the court to a game with arms suggests that some aspects of nature's unpredictability may be enough of a defense against the Christian assertion that all creation exists for human use. In the book *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape*, Della Hooke clarifies the distinction between pagan and Christian attitudes toward nature:

> Pagan beliefs were characterised by the indivisibility of the natural world, the subsuming of individuality into the stream of life, a low-profile regard for property rights and the existence of meaningful relationships between humans and the trees, beasts, water bodies and

> landforms that constituted the context of their lives . . . Christianity, however, came to be associated with control, hierarchies, and a code of values that elevated humans far above the contents of their context and saw all other creations as being subservient and provided merely for human use. (22)

Essentially, no matter how adept humanity fancies itself against the potential aggression of the natural world, the forces of nature will still prevail in the end, and these natural forces require no forged defense.

Gawain rides his horse Gryngolet through the "rylme of Logres" (*SGGK* 691), rides near North Wales, and rides past the islands of Anglesey before he encounters the "wyldrenesse of Wyrale" (*SGGK* 701). He enters the lawless wilderness from what we can assume is an organized, lawful environment. As Rudd points out, "[a]lthough the word 'wilderness' implies remoteness and lack of human habitation, areas designated 'wildernesses' have a direct association with the spaces around them, which is based upon the assumption of a marked contrast" (55). In the fourteenth century, Wirral was known to be a refuge for outlaws (Howes 203), so it is unsurprising that the poet describes the godless and heartless individuals who dwell there; doing so emphasizes exactly how far removed Gawain is from his familiar surroundings: "Wonde þer bot lyte / Þat auþer God oþer gome wyth goud hert louied" (*SGGK* 701-2).

Gawain does not spend much time in the Wirral itself, but the poet's description of the foreboding wilderness landscape signifies the beginning of Gawain's disconnect with the familiar and his engagement with the foreign. Both Wirral and Wales, Rudd contends, "are inevitably places of lawlessness and danger and, being wildernesses, are inhabited by godless men; the two concepts mutually reinforce each other and thus allow the 'normality' and civilization of the surrounding (and so contrasting) country to be taken for granted" (55-56). Gawain must battle a number of wild animals and

godless men (wodwos) in order to reinforce the prevailing attitude that civilization belongs in a controlled environment. The presence of the godless men also might suggest increased distance from God for Gawain. Theis contends that the "forest resonates as that place which is other, which is tangled and undefined and, hence, threatening to the individual's identity" (23). Even the poet acknowledges Gawain's journey into the unknown, the foreign: "Fer floten fro his frendez, fremedly he rydez" (*SGGK* 714). Gawain's identity seems to be complicated once he enters the space of the forest and encounters the challenges there. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron gloss the adverb "fremedly" "as a stranger" (320); there is little doubt that upon his initial pass through the forest, Gawain is the stranger there. His public identity as a chivalric hero is foreign in the space of the forest, even though the forest is foreign to him. His battles against the wild creatures are successful for him, which might suggest to an audience that civilization is a strong enough force to survive some of the unexpected wild encounters. But Gawain is less concerned with the creatures in the forest than he is with the weather, which is an aspect of the natural world that Gawain cannot fight. He battles the environment, and the environment is hostile to him in return.

Gawain passes through Wirral without much difficulty, but once he enters "a forest ful dep" (*SGGK* 741), the foreignness of his environment suddenly seems more pronounced, as it slowly becomes evident that this particular forest might in fact be a gateway to an Otherworld. The poet is subtle about the clues that suggest this gateway, but the implications are much clearer once Gawain reaches the oak grove: "he rydes / Into a forest ful dep, þat ferly watz wylde, / Hiȝe hillez on vche a halue and holtwodez vnder / Of hore okez ful hoge, a hundredth togeder. / Þe hasel and þe haȝþorne were

harled al samen, / With roȝe raged mosse rayled aywhere" (*SGGK* 740-745). Rudd points out that hawthorn "is a common shrub which springs up almost anywhere but has some pertinent associations for this poem. Its foliage is one of the models for the foliate Green Man faces, and the bush most frequently used as boundary marker in Anglo-Saxon charters" (61). This detail revisits the poetic link between the image of the Green Knight and the iconic Green Man, and its place in this particular wood suggests a boundary between worlds.

There is no textual evidence to suggest that Gawain is aware of the natural signs that indicate a transition between the world of men and the Otherworld, which might imply that his civilized human conditioning has lost or forgotten any spiritual connection with the natural world his Celtic ancestors might have had. He does, however, seem to recognize the potential danger presented in the woodland barriers around him once he passes under the birds in the trees who are peeping their melancholy for all to hear: "Þe gome vpon Gryngolet glydez hem vnder / Þurȝ mony misy and myre, mon al hym one, / Carande for his costes, lest he ne keuer schulde / To se þe seruyse of þat Syre þat on þat self nyȝt / Of a burde watz borne oure baret to quelle" (*SGGK* 748-52).

This foreign environment and its confusing messages test Gawain's spiritual resolve. Gawain beseeches God and Mary to help him find "sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse / And Þy matynez tomorne, mekely I ask" (*SGGK* 755-56), essentially asking for a way to return to civilization—to something familiar if only to honor his chivalric obligation. And like magic, his prayer is granted in the form of a moated castle "loken vnder boȝez / Of mony borelych bole aboute bi þe diches" (*SGGK* 765-66).

Gawain's journey to the castle is apparently a journey to the Otherworld; the forest's subtle messages guide his transition from the world he knows to a world that only hints at familiarity.

This particular Otherworld represents a place situated between the youth of Arthur's court and the age and experience of the natural world; it is here that Gawain's public chivalric identity starts to disappear and a more private identity of the flawed knight begins to emerge. The Green Knight is the catalyst for this emergence. Bertilak is the real figure and when he assumes his form of the Green Knight we discover it is merely a transformation. He may *seem* like a Green Knight but by the end of the poem, we learn that it is just a disguise. Further, because his Green Knight form is merely a disguise, he is not really a symbol of the natural world, but he can still evoke ideas of nature. Similarly, Gawain's public identity as the exemplar for knighthood may initially appear to be the dominant identity, but he discovers that it too is a disguise. The encounter with Bertilak and the Green Knight reveal a private identity in Gawain that Gawain does not like: he is a flawed knight of a flawed court. Thus, Gawain is not really a symbol of exalted knighthood, but he can evoke ideas of chivalry.

In order to begin shaping this private identity, Bertilak must orchestrate Gawain's transition from the familiar to the foreign and again to the familiar. The woods are alien and inhospitable, but the castle itself embraces aspects of familiar civilization, despite its Otherworldly hallmarks. Upon his arrival, the courtiers remove Gawain's familiar emblems of courtesy and valor and he is reclothed in the dress of his foreign host: "Þer he watz dispoyled, wyth spechez of myerþe, / Þe burn of his bruny and of his bryȝt wedez; / Ryche robes ful rad renkkez hem broȝen / For tocharge and to

chaunge and chose of þe best. / Sone as he on hent and happed þerinne, / Þat sete on hym semly, wyth saylande skyrtez" (*SGGK* 860-65). The court's grand feast resembles the one at Camelot, but unlike Camelot, wherein food seems to appear on the table with no acknowledgement of its source, there is a great deal of poetic attention dedicated to the ways the henchmen of this court cut, dismember, and clean the "grattest of gres" (*SGGK* 1326) collected from the day's hunt. Whether he appears as a normal human man or as a green half-giant / vegetative deity, the Green Knight / Bertilak's purpose is, as Cohen suggests, "to interrogate exactly where the difference between these modes of being resides" (145).

The first instance of this interrogative exploration lies within both the landscape and the castle. The wilderness itself causes Gawain struggle, but Bertilak's daily hunts suggest that he has no problem managing the wilderness and extracting what he needs from it. Inside the castle, Lady Bertilak embarks on her own hunting agenda; she stalks Gawain as though he were prey, which demonstrates that Gawain experiences struggle inside the castle as well as outside of it. And yet Bertilak is just as comfortable inside the castle as he is outside of it; he is master of both environments. The hunting parallels provide a challenge designed to determine if humanity will successfully survive nature's well-honed predation. Each of Bertilak's three hunts relates in some way to the hunt going on in Gawain's bedroom.

On the first hunt, Bertilak captures deer, which may be the most prevalent of wild animals recorded in medieval hunting records, and they do not put up much of a fight while they are being hunted. Bertilak's henchmen and hounds catch the deer quickly and easily: "What wylde so atwaped wyȝes þat schotten / Watz al toraced and

rent at þe resayt, / Bi þay were tened at þe hyȝe and taysed to þe wattrez, / Þe ledez were so lerned at þe loȝe trysteres; / And þe grehoundez so grete þat geten hem bylyue / And hem tofylched as fast as frekez myȝt loke / Þer ryȝt" (*SGGK* 1167-73). As a parallel, the first time Lady Bertilak slips into Gawain's room, she remarks on the ease in which she is able to enter the room without his protests or his knowledge: "Ȝe ar a sleeper vnslyȝe, þat mon may slyde hider. / Now ar ȝe tan astyt!" (*SGGK* 1211-12).

Bertilak's second hunt targets a boar, an animal infamous for its ferocity and cruelty. A medieval bestiary cites the thirteenth-century Franciscan monk Bartholomaeus Anglicus's description of the boar's ferocity: "The boar is so fierce a beast, and also so cruel, that for his fierceness and his cruelness, he despiseth and setteth nought by death, and he reseth full piteously against the point of a spear of the hunter" (Badke). Bertilak's boar is a markedly more difficult kill than the deer from the previous day, and true to its reputation, the boar vehemently resists capture: "Ful of the bydez þe baye / And maymez þe mute innmelle. / He hurtez of þe houndez, and þay / Ful ȝomerly ȝaule and ȝelle" (*SGGK* 1450-53). Inside the castle, Gawain seems ready for the lady's arrival, and she is unable to sneak up on him a second time. Her seduction attempt is much more forceful; her rhetoric is no longer introductory and lighthearted. By remarking on his dismissal of her previous day's lesson, she calls into question his chivalric mannerisms. Next, she accuses him of not living up to his rather amorous reputation: "And of alle cheualry to chose, þe chef þyng alosed / Is þe lel layk of luf, þe lettrure of armes; / For to telle of þis teuelyng of þis trwe knyȝtez, / Hit is þe tytelet token and tyxt of hr werkkez . . . And I haf seten by yourself here sere twyes, / Ȝet herde I neuer of your hed helde no wordez / Þat euer longed to luf, lasse ne more" (*SGGK*

1512-15; 1522-24). Gawain must resist the lady's advances with more effort this time, and although he successfully rebuffs her, the length of the exchange suggests the refusal is more difficult than the previous encounter.

The third hunt targets a fox, which according to a medieval bestiary is an animal that "represents the devil, who pretends to be dead to those who retain their worldly ways, and only reveals himself when he has them in his jaws" (Badke). Bertilak's fox evades the dogs for a time, but of course the predatory nature of the hunters prevail. In his room, Gawain is sleeping when the lady returns; she remarks on the clarity of the day and "He watz in drowping depe, / Bot þenne he con hir here" (*SGGK* 1748-49). This third and final visit occurs on the eve of his meeting with the Green Knight, and Gawain's clever if evasive denial of the lady's advances weakens, he finally submits to her request, and he accepts the lady's green girdle. The lady has broken down Gawain's resolve, but her temptation is no longer that of the body's pleasures; instead, she appeals to his instinct for survival. By accepting the girdle and later betraying his oath to his host, Gawain's public identity as the chivalric ideal dies and he is reborn as a green knight; that is, he has to experience the hunting as the Green Knight hunts.

The kissing game is as much of a test of the flesh and soul as is the beheading game at the poem's beginning. Cohen states that once feasted and praised, "wrapped in warm bedcovers and decked in fur robes, Gawain does not realize that the beheading game *is* a kissing game, that the woman of the manor who daily tempts him to carnal indulgence is conducting on her husband's behalf a version of the very test in which the traditional giant of romance assays the flesh and is rebuked" (147). Lady Bertilak might be testing the armor of Gawain's chivalric identity for potential weaknesses but she

discovers that in the end, Gawain is not so far removed from any hunted creature of the natural world. Like the deer, he is easily chased, like the boar he has stubborn and fierce defenses, and like the fox, he cleverly attempts to protect himself by hiding beneath the green.

The neck wound Gawain endures at the Green Chapel could serve as the final event that completes his transformation into a green knight, and it is also a kind of rite of passage that allows for Gawain's private identity to fully emerge. Cohen contends that when "Gawain learns not to flinch as the weapon is lowered—learns, that is, to submit to the proper adoption of the Christian chivalric code that passes for an adult male identity—he is grazed along the neck, a 'symbolic wound' . . . integral to the rite de passage" (149). Now that Gawain has symbolically endured the same game as the Green Knight and now that he too is wearing green, he returns to Camelot, and he endures no struggle or hardship from the natural world during his return. Where Camelot was once so familiar, it is now, upon his return, a much more foreign place. He returns, ashamed, to Camelot, and to the courtiers he relates his tale; "He tened quen he schulde telle; / He groned for gref and grame. / Þe blod in his face con melle, / When he hit schulde schewe, for schame" (*SGGK* 2501-04).

The court continues to celebrate the same pleasures with which the poem opens, but Gawain's melancholic transformation excludes him from the merriment. His private identity has been made public, and he finds no joy in discovering his flaws. The Green Knight, upon his initial arrival to Camelot, was more experienced than the people in Arthur's court. He did not blush when faced with challenges, he did not contribute to the merriment, he did not seem to extract any enjoyment from that merriment, and he

arrived with a message that confused the court. Similarly, Gawain returns to court a green knight himself; he is older, more experienced, much less innocent, and the green girdle he continues to wear represents a message that the court either does not understand or dismisses nonchalantly. His return to civilization has been a difficult one, and he finds a crowd at Camelot that misinterprets his mark of shame for a mark of success, despite Gawain's insistence to the contrary:

> "Lo! lorde," quoþ þe leude, and þe lace hindeled,
> "Þis is þe bende of þis blame I bere in my nek.
> Þis is þe lape and þe losse þat I laȝt haue
> Of couardise and couetyse, þat I haf caȝt þare;
> Þis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne.
> And I mot nedez hit were wyle I may last;
> For mon may hyden his harme bot vnhap ne may hit,
> For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer." (*SGGK* 2505-12)

The natural world in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* provides civilization with the opportunity to test and transform itself, and invites it to live in tandem with nature instead of opposing it or denying its influence on how civilization shapes itself. Even though Bertilak appears to dominate nature, he still coexists harmoniously with it. Even if his actions might be self-serving, they are also respectful. As a green knight, Gawain does not need to embody nature, nor does his place need to be relegated to the woods. For Gawain, the forest is a place of struggle rather than residence. Once the face of his flawed private identity is revealed to him and he can coexist with nature, he can return to civilization as a representative of a flawed system without interference from the natural world.

Assessment

The roles the forest was required to fill stressed the danger and insecurity of worldly life, and the fact that medieval society could not decide whether the forest was to be spiritually revered or physically feared is a testament to this social insecurity. Medieval ideas were often expressed through the antithesis of nature and culture, which frequently invited literary descriptions of a haunted world circumvented by barriers of chaotic wilderness; the wilderness and the things in it could potentially swallow people, but most importantly it could change people. At the same time that it provides spiritual resolve or shelter from a problematic society, the forest mandates transformation; those who enter its domain are not the same people by the time they leave it. It further complicates individual senses of power, privacy, and sovereignty, but the forest also allows for recognition or reassessment of those concepts.

Where forests represent the wild and the threatening aspects of the natural world, semi-wild gardens represent a reconciling of wilderness and town in which the hostile powers of nature are tamed but not entirely extinguished. However different nature may appear to be, or whatever form it needs to assume, "as long as we can in some way give it a physical body it becomes accessible to us and thus it becomes possible for us to deal with it" (Rudd 125). Bisclavret and Dame Ragnell require a physical metamorphosis in order to return to their respective civilizations, and in both texts, control over information addresses intimacy as a means of locating the value of privacy. Sir Gawain's metamorphosis is a little more symbolic and emotional and less physical, but the forest is the place that enables the transformations in all of these tales.

Humanity tends to generate the animal, whether the animal is literally an animal or just some other abject, marginalized figure, and position it outside human limits for objectification and scrutiny. The ultimate test of human worthiness lies within the outsider's ability to adapt and change and develop and refine individual senses of privacy and identity in order to return to civilization imbued with lessons that can only be learned from engaging intimately with the natural world. Even though it can be dark and mysterious and full of risk, and even though it hides nefarious beings within its depths, the forest is essentially a beneficial life force that contributes in so many ways to the success of human development.

Conclusion

If we analyze space and gender together we see new ways of looking at the significance of space. This dissertation sought to make connections between landscape and gender when those in positions of authority use landscapes as spaces of power. If the texts in this dissertation are read in this context, we find that specific interactions depend on specific spaces, and that privacy is in fact a technique of power. Privacy as a technique of power is a repeated theme in Marie de France, Geoffrey Chaucer, Chrétien de Troyes, and anonymous writers wherein close engagement with a particular landscape changes different kinds of social interactions. The texts in this dissertation were selected after the complete works of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Marie's *Lais*, and Chrétien's romances were taken apart in order to examine the use of space in these major works. When Marie uses space in the *Lais*, social dynamics tend to change depending on the space. Chaucer's use of space in the *Canterbury Tales* enables those in positions of captivity to challenge the strength of the authoritative powers designed to ensure isolation. In Chrétien's romances there are certain kinds of social and political relationships in specific spaces. However, in all of these texts, privacy is a concept crucial to the ways in which characters form their individual identities. Privacy in any and all of its forms is sought after, fought over, grappled with, obtained, and occasionally lost. People need to engage with the landscape in order to find, form, and keep individual identities when those in positions of authority use landscapes as spaces of power. Privacy as privilege, as deprivation, as freedom, and as sovereignty is the key to the formation of the self.

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