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CHAUCER'S LAUGHTER

TOSHINORI HIRA

In respect to the affairs of courtly love sometimes Chaucer represents himself as a love-servant who, true to the conventions, serves the god of Love; sometimes he reveals himself as a love-renegade who holds it folly to trust on Love. In the *House of Fame* Chaucer's service to courtly love brings to him the praise from the eagle: “thou so longe trewely / Hast served so ententyfly (diligently) / ...Cupido... / Withoute guerdon (reward) ever yit... / To make bookys, songes, dytees (discourse), / In ryme, or elles in cadence (rhythm), / As thou best canst, in reverence / Of Love and of hys servantes eke, / That have hys servyse soght, and seke.”¹ The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* affords both examples of the contradictory portraits of Chaucer. The god of Love condemns the fictional Chaucer for having translated the *Roman de la Rose* and composed *Troilus and Criseyde*: “And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest, / And hynderest hem with thy translacioun, / And lettest folk from hire devocioun / To serve me, and holdest it folye / To serve Love.... / Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose, / ...And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste, / That maketh men to wommen lasse triste, / That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.”² Alceste, Queen of the god of Love, intercedes with her husband for the fictional Chaucer sinned against the god’s law: “Al be hit that he kan nat wel endite, / Yet hath he maked lewed folk delyte / To serve yow, in preysi‰¤ige of your name.”³ And yet Chaucer the narrator shows the attitude of a spectator in love; Alceste recommends “to speke wel of love thogh the lyke (you list) nat a lovere bee.”⁴ In the *Parliament of Fowls* the fictional Chaucer poses as an outsider: “I knowe nat Love in deed, / Ne wot how that he quiteth

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¹ *HF*, 615-617, 619, 622-626.
² *LGW*, 323-327, 329, 332-334.
³ *LGW*, 414-416.
⁴ Cf. *LGW*, 490-491.
What attitude did the actual Chaucer preserve to courtly love? Perhaps each portrait of Chaucer should be taken with seriousness. From the beginning he was a love-poet. He treated of courtly love. Love is the subject of which the court poet treats. Chaucer's contemporary Gower writes: "thing which is noght so strange, / And wherupon the world mot stonde, / ...that is love, of which I mene (intend) / To trete ...I am miselven (myself) on (one) of tho, / Which to this Scole am underfonge (accepted). / For it is siththe (since) go noght longe, / As forto speke of this matiere, / I may you telle, if ye woll hiere, / A wonder hap which me befell, / That was to me bothe hard and fell (cruel), / Touchende (concerning) of love and his fortune, / The which me liketh to comune (join) / And pleinly forto telle it outhe."6 The lady as represented with perfect attributes and characteristics of courtly love can be seen in the Book of the Duchess. Blanche is an idealized conception; she is conceived as a goddess to whom the lover protests absolute devotion. The lover gives himself to the goddess' service. Service is the primary requirement for the lover worthy to be loved. The Knight relates his reminiscences: "I besette (beseeched) hyt / To love hir in my beste wyse, / To do hir worship (honour) and the servise / That I koude thoo (then), be my trouthe, / Withoute feynynge outher (or) slouthe."7 As Chaucer grew older, however, he gradually freed from the courtly conventions of love which he learnt from France, though confined in the range of courtly love. Alceste of the Legend of Good Women refers slightly to Chaucer's apostasy from the love religion, which is similar to such apostasy as seen in Merciles Beaute: "Sin I fro Love escaped am so fat, / I never thenk to ben in his prison lene; / Sin I am free, I counte him not a bene (bean)."8

The recorded facts about Chaucer and his actual world, alien to the immediate information regarding his writings, can throw light upon the subtleties in his poetry. These facts have an influence on his writings. Fiction is closely interwoven with the living conditions under which the poet lived. A reflection of the social conditions of his age can be discov-

5 PF, 8-9.
7 BD, 1096-1100.
8 27-29.
ered in his writings although every type of medieval fiction was composed in a style of its own. The romance was written primarily for polite society and the religious writings for the Church. The fabliau or fabliau-like tale stood for the realistic values the middle-class men had in life. Chaucer was sent on an official mission to Italy in 1372 and in 1378. His journeys to Italy would have afforded him an opportunity to learn from Italian writers the human attitude which Arcite took up to love and which could be distinguished from the romantic attitude of romances. Arcite differentiates his attitude to love from Palamon’s: “For paramour I loved hire (i.e. Emily) firster thow. / ...Thou woost nat yet now / wheither she be a womman or goddesse! / Thyn is affeccioun of hoolynesse, / And myn is love, as to a creature.”9 While in comptrollership he must have come into contact with merchants. “That men shulde loven alwey causeles, / Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?”10 It may be that such a selfish attitude toward love, no different from trading for profit, was easily perceived during the time when he was in the Customs House. The similar attitude toward marriage that the beloved are regarded as an object of sensual love, or as one of possessions is found in the Merchant’s Tale, written when he was much older. Behind the bourgeois view on marriage is the doctrine of sordidness. It may be mentioned in connection with the Merchant’s treatise on wives. “A wyf! a, Seinte Marie, benedicite! / How myghte a man han any adversitee / That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye. / The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweye / Ther may no tonge telle, or herte thynke. / If he be povre, she helpeth hym to swynke / She kepeth his good, and wasteth never a deel; / Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel; / She seith nat ones “nay,” whan he seith “ye.” / “Do this,” seith he; “Al redy, sire,” seith she: / O blisful ordre of wedlok precious, / Thou art so murye, and eek so vertuous, / And so commended and approved eek / That every man that halt hym worth a leek, / Upon his bare knees oughte al his lyf / Thanken his God that hym hath sent a wyf, / Or elles preye to God hym for to sende / A wyf, to laste unto his lyves ende.”11 This kind of abuses against women is the characteristics borrowed from the anti-

9 I(A), 1155-1159.
10 PF, 590-591.
11 IV(E), 1337-1354.
feminist tradition from St. Jerome to Walter Map.\textsuperscript{12} Women are usually represented as shrewd or beloved of yeomen. These views on women are found in the fabliaux. Alison of the \textit{Miller's Tale} is "a prymerole, a piggesnye, / For any lord to leggen in his bedde, / Or yet for any good yeoman to wedde."\textsuperscript{13} Such a woman in the fabliau tale is made a laughing-stock of her audience. Chaucer voices the views of the anti-feminist tale. The Host says in the Epilogue to the \textit{Merchant's Tale}: "Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees / In wommen been! for ay as bisy as bees / Been they, us sely men for to deceyve, / And from the soothe evere wol they weyve; / By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel."\textsuperscript{14} After 1385 when Chaucer was made justice of the peace in Kent, or 1386 when he was elected Knight of the Shire for Kent he would have been in Kent and the wealthier country gentlemen and reeves may have associated with him. He would have been informed of villagers. His career as a man of business considerably altered the attitude of a love-poet. Experience in the actual world offered the fabliau approach to women which was against the courtly code of love. The fabliau tales have views on women, different from those of women the French courtly love taught him. Courtly love has a love-system of its own. Courtly love is the system under which the lady whom the lover serves appears regularly as an object of homage and the lovers in respect to her occupy the position of her vassals. "My word, my werk ys knyt so in youre bond / That, as an harpe obeieth to the hond / And maketh it soune after his fyngerynge, / Ryght so mowe ye oute of myn herte bringe / Swich vois, ryght as yow lyst, to laughe or pleyne. / Be ye my gide and lady sovereyne! / As to myn erthly god to yow I calle, / Bothe in this werk and in my sorwes alle."\textsuperscript{15} Service or homage is of absolute value in the courtly scales of women. The god of Love demands: "alle wymmen serve and preise, / And to thy (the poet's) power her honour reise; / And if that ony myssaiere / Dispise wymmen, that thou maist here, / Blame hym, and bidde hym holde hym stille. / And set thy myght and all thy wille / Wymmen and ladies for to plese, / And to do thyng that may hem ese, / That they ever speke good of

\textsuperscript{13} I(A), 3268-3270.
\textsuperscript{14} IV(E), 2421-2425.
\textsuperscript{15} LGW, 89-96.
thee, / For so thou maist best preised be.” The traditional accomplishments which pages and young squires ought to have are among the requisites for the courtly love. The curriculum for lovers consists of courtesy, humility, gaiety, generosity and constancy. The god of Love demands these virtues of courtly lover; the lover obeys his commands. He instructs the lover as to constancy: “And for thou trewe to love shalt be, / I wole, and comaunde thee, / That in oo place thou sette, all hool, / Thyn herte, withoute halfen dool / Of trecherie and sikernesse.” The god of Love takes the absolute power over his servant as his lord, and the servant as his vassal submits his will. The Romaut of the Rose furnishes us the feudal conception of the absolute submission of the vassal to the lord underlying the love-system. The Lover answers for the god’s service: “Gladly, sir, at youre biddyng, / I wole me yelde in alle thyng. / To youre servyse I wol me take.” However, there are–će lines in the Knight’s Tale, referring to the service which the lovers render to the god for money, not in behalf of the relationship between a lord and his vassal. Palamon and Arcite receive wages for their service: “hath hir lord, the god of Love, ypayed / Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!” History shows that the feudal levy came into disuse. Historians see a chief factor in paying for military service in the inadequacy of feudalism. The relations of land tenure with knight service to the king were so weakened as to cause the employment of indenture system in rendering military service, the confinement of wealthier freeholders to knightly duties and King Edward III’s use of archery for national game. Almost from the beginning of Norman feudalism the kings, taking scutages from their vassals, had exempted them from military service. But many knights were reluctant to serve even as civil servants. Thus, the freeholders holding twenty pounds’ worth of land were ranked among knights and used for

16 *RR*, 2229-2238.
17 See *RR*, 2203-2215, 2255-2274, 2305-2324, 2361-2365, 2695-2716.
18 *RR*, 2361-2365.
20 I(A), 1802-1803.
public offices. Chaucer says of his Franklin that "At sessiones ther was he lord and sire; / Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.... A shirreve hadde he been, and a contour. / Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour." When Edward III waged war against France in 1337, these freeholders, along with enfeoffed knights, were used as commanders of indentured troops. At the same time, the King encouraged yeomen to archery. The yeomen archers were known for the great deeds on the battlefields of Crécy and Poitiers.

The tendency to emphasize the deeds of arms of knights, such as Edward III and the Black Prince, is marked; Edward III is praised by a fifteenth-century anonymous poetess for his chivalrous deeds. "...there be knights...of the Garter, / That...did right worthily; / And the honour they did to the laurer / Is for [there-] by they have their laud (honour) wholly, / Their triumph eke and marshall glory; / Which unto them is more parfit riches / Then any wight imagine can or gesse." Edward III, taking an oath that he would creat a Round Table for his knights and found the Order of the Garter in 1344, fulfilled the latter in 1349. It can not be said, however, that the knights not always performed the military or civil duties proper to knighthood. "And alle manere of men • that thorw mete and drynke lybbeth, / Helpith hym to worche (work) wightliche (vigorously) • that wynneth yowre fode." Pier's recommendation to a knight is of course from the point of view of the class duties ordained by God. Knights were expected to protect peasants from their enemies that they could provide food for all classes of men. Pier's recommendation gives suggestion as to a failure in knightly duties to peasants. The yeomen helped to victories gained by the English army in campaigns in Crécy and Poitiers. It can be said, likewise, that knights did not defend the Church. History mentions the massacre of Limoges; the Black Prince made a raid into Limoges and massacred the whole townsfolk.

23 I(A), 355-356, 359-360.
Squire who "hadde been somtyme in chyvachie / In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie" is thought to correspond to the actual Chaucer, but it is not known that Chaucer "born hym weel, as of so litel space, / In hope to stonden in his lady grace." Chaucer keeps almost every matter of national concern to himself. No explicit reference to the matter is found in Chaucer's lines. His references to the employment of indenture system, the confinement of franklins to knighthly duties and King Edward III's use of archery are meagre. It seems likely that Chaucer's reference to his Thopas's skill in archery means by implication that the archery tactics the English employed were of much avail in falling on the advanced corps of French cavalry.

The war with France enabled many men of rising middle classes to promote their economic and social developments. The Commons who were knights and burgesses gave reluctant consent to supplies for the unsuccessful war with France in 1371 when William of Wykeham, the chancellor, asked Parliament for money supplies for the war. Toward the end of the fourteenth century the Commons came to have the right to frame petitions. The fruitless expeditions were costly; the English army retained the coastal lands between Calais and Bordeaux after the renewal of the French war in 1369. But the traffic safety of the sea between Middleburg and Orwell was causing Chaucer's Merchant's concern. The Staple had settled down at Calais by 1375 but it was at Orwell between 1384 and 1388. The wool trade brought the staplers in large profits. Wool, which was the most important of English trading commodities, was compared to a jewel at that time. Some merchant princes helped the king who was much in financial needs to pay his army and were rewarded with governmental offices and trading privileges. Chaucer's Merchant is anxious for the traffic safety of the sea but no reference is made to his name and his commodities. Likewise, the livery company, consisting of wealthier traders who were engaged in distributing wares rather than in manufacturing took a

29 I(A), 85-88.
30 VII(B2), 739.
considerable high place in large towns. Some fraternities (yeomen guilds) whose members were the trained yeomen employed by the livery men were gradually established and became important; their prominent members were known. The leaders of prominent companies and fraternities had an important influence upon the municipal affairs. Chaucer’s five Burgesses, engaged in different trades, who wear o livree seem to belong to the London livery company. They are all of them fit to be the municipal magistrates. Chaucer never refers to the important companies of London, both victualling and nonvictualling, which linked up with the wool trade or the cloth industry, such as the mercers’ company and the drapers’ and which were drawn into a feud between the mercers’ company and the grocers’ company in the earlier 1380’s.

Despite Chaucer’s meagre reference to the historical facts about the rising middle classes, on the other hand, he shows an interest in the bourgeois attitude toward women and warfare. We can guess the interest from his fabliau tales which are assigned to the Canterbury pilgrims of the middle or lower classes. The men of the middle classes, who sought gain, were preoccupied with the value of money. Their view of life is realistic; their attitude toward women is practical. The economic change which the rise of the middle classes brought about acted on the traditional values of aristocratic circles. The ideal values of Chaucer’s age were gradually replaced by the materialistic values of the middle classes. It seems likely that the social change of his age is concealed in the Former Age: “What sholde it han avayled to werreye? / Ther lay no profit, ther was no richesse, / But cursed was the tyme, I dare wel seye, / That men first dide hir swety bysinesse / To grobbe up metal, lurkinge in derknesse, / And in the riveres first gemmes soghte. / Allas! than sprong up al the cursednesse / Of coveytyse, that first our sorwe broghte!” This is of traditional value in Boethius’ scale of the Golden Age. Money was in fact preeminent in Chaucer’s day. Money, Money! says: “wythe squyer and knyght and euery wyghte / money maketh men fayne; / and causeth many in sume compeney / theyr felowes to dysdayne. / In marchandys who can deuyse / so good a ware, I say? / at al tymys the best ware

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36 25-32.
The men of the middle classes, whether urban or rustic, who appear in Chaucer's fabliau tales, are represented as sordid or unpolished though some aspire the things associated with the aristocratic values and some behave in a lover-like manner. Unlike the Reeve who was once a carpenter, the carpenter of the Miller's Tale, simple as he is, is sedulous and lays by a sizeable sum of money. Likewise, the dishonest miller of the Reeve's Tale is a person of competent fortune; he is strong in love of honour. "Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde, / But she were wel ynorissed and a mayde, / To saven his estaat of yomanrye." The Wife of Bath, engaged in an industrial occupation, gains economic strength and is of an independent spirit. Arrogant, self-centered, this economically independent woman exploits the beauty of her womanhood for a pecuniary gain: "sith I hadde hem (husbands) hoolly in myn hond, / And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond, / What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese, / But it were for my profit and myn ese?" Three of her husbands, presumably wealthy merchants of old age, hold, as she says, a drab notion of women, characteristic of bourgeois marriage: "Thou (i.e. Husband) seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes, / They been assayed at diverse stoundes; / Bacyns, lavours, er that men hem bye, / Spooones and stooles, and al swich housbondrye, / And so been pottes, clothes, and array; / But folk of wyves maken noon assay, / Til they be wedded; olde dotard shrew." Women are regarded as among their husbands' possessions. The merchant of the Shipman's Tale concentrates upon his pecuniary interest. Affection is weighed in the scale of commercial values. "Ye (i.e. husband) han mo slakkere dettours than am I! / For I wol paye yow wel and redily / Fro day to day, and if so be I faille, / I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille, / And I shal paye as soone as ever I may." The merchant's wife thus serves her husband with the same sauce. By application to his business dealings the knight of the Merchant's Tale presumably got a high social status as is seen in the description of the merchant of the Shipman's Tale: "gooth this marchant faste and bisily /
In his view marriage has a commercial value. He examines a bride from a commercial viewpoint. "A wyf is Goddes yifte verraily; / Alle othere manere yifte hardily, / As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune, / Or moebles (movable possessions), alle been yiftes of Fortune, / That passen as a shadwe upon a wal. / But drede nat, if pleynly speke I shal, / A wyf wol laste, and in thyn hous endure, / Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure." By paradox Chaucer's Thopas is depicted to be ready to fight a good battle for knighthood. He is brave in defense; he is heavily armed with extraordinary amount of armour. "His sheeld was al of gold so reed, / And therninne was a bores heed, / A charbocle bisyde; / And there he swoor on ale and breed / How that the geaunt shal be deed, / Bityde what bityde! / His jambeux (leggings) were of quyrboilly (boiled skin), / His swerdes shethe of yvory, / His helm of latoun bright; / His sadel was of rewel boon, / His brydel as the sonne shoon, / Or as the moone light." Sir Thopas has an idea of love or fight, different from that of chivalrous circles. If he is said to parody the degenerated Flemish knights, it may be conceivable that his characteristics offer some analogy with those of the English knights. The English middle classes had a commercial influence. The ideal values of aristocratic circles were reduced into the materialistic values of the middle classes. Satire turns upon his lady of whom he is in pursuit: "O seinte Marie, benedicite / What eyleth this love at me / To bynde me so soore? / Me dremed al this nyght, pardee, / An elf-queene shal my lemman be / And slepe under my goore. / An elf-queene wol I love, ywis, / For in this world no womman is / Worthy to be my make / In towne; / Alle othere wommen I forsake, / And to an elf-queene I me take / By dale and eek by downe!"

As he seems to have enjoyed the favour of the Kings and Queen, the magnates and the great ladies, such as Edward III and Richard II, Queen Anne and the Princess of Kent, John of Gaunt and Henry Bolingbroke. Chaucer need not have written the fabliau tales. Chaucer’s aristocratic audience expected romances or noble tales from him. He was a page in the

42 VII(B2), 302-303.
43 IV(E), 1311-1318.
44 VII(B2), 869-880.
45 VII(B2), 784-796.
household of Elisabeth, Countess of Ulster, wife of Lionel. Next, he went into service with Blanche, first wife of John of Gaunt. John of Gaunt is thought to have been interwoven with the appointment to the office as Comptroller of the Customs (1374) or as Clerk of the King's Works (1389). Again, he may have used his influence for Chaucer's missions to Italy (1372, 1378). After having removed to Kent Chaucer seems to have less associated with the court. From about 1395 onward, however, he gradually became intimated with John of Gaunt's son Henry, Earl of Derby. Chaucer's writings were written for court audience, not for bourgeois audience. But some important men of bourgeois origin gradually counted among courtiers. Chaucer's audience comprised presumably distinguished merchants like his Merchant, such country gentlemen as his Franklin, poets and lawyers, such as Strode and Gower. Despite the heterogeneous men comprised in his audience his audience expected of him the traditional, established stories of the romance or moral type. It seems likely therefore that he invented the device to introduce into the Canterbury pilgrims the bourgeois pilgrims proper to tell the fabliau tales. The coarse, realistic tale of the fabliau about the befooled husband who is a merchant, a carpenter or a miller by occupation is appropriate for the bourgeois pilgrim. The common people, whether bourgeois or not, are seldom noticed without arousing ridicule or scorn in the literature of court circles. Court audience could enjoy their own social superiority. In apology, thus, Chaucer pleads that: "therfore every gentil wight I preye, / For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye / Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce / Hir tales alle, be they bettre or worse, / Or elles falsen som of my mateere. / And therfore, whoso list it nat yheere, / Turne over the leef and chese another tale; / For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale, / Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse, / And eek moralitee and hoolynesse. / Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys. / The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this; / So was the Reve eek and othere mo, / And harlotrie they tolden bothe two. / Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame; / And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game." In the habits of thought and sentiments and the modes of living, different from those of courtiers bourgeois
people are the favorite butts of court audience. After having been created a laughter by the drab attitude of the bourgeois love the noble falcon in the Parliament of Fowls says: "Now fy, cherl! ... / Out of the donghil cam that word ful right! / Thow canst nat seen which thyng is wel beset! / ...Thy kynde is of so low a wretchednesse / That what love is, thow canst nat seen ne gesse."50 As for the Reeve's Tale satire is directed at Simkin's flour theft and his foolish pride in a family relationship between the miller and the priest. His wife of gentle birth and his heirless daughter were both dishonoured by Cambridge clerks. "Ye, false harlot," quod the millere, "hast? / A, false traitour! false clerk!" quod he, / "Thow shalt be deed, by Goddes dignitee! / Who dorste be so boold to disparage / My doghter, that is come of swich lynage?"51 The carpenter of the Miller's Tale is a victim of his own ignorance. He was tricked with the prophecy of the flood into offering a chance for his wife's illicit love for Nicholas. "This carpenter to blessen hym bigan, / And seyde, "Help us, seinte Frydeswyde! / A man woot litel what hym shal bityde. / This man is falle, with his astromye, / In some woodnesse or in som agonye. / I thoughte ay wel how that it sholde be! / Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee. / Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man / That noght but oonly his bileve kan!"52 Laughter is raised by the wiles of the wife of the Shipman's Tale; she says to her husband, she pays back her debt to her husband in "bedde," when she is asked by him about the money "daun" Monk, his and her friend, borrowed of her husband: "Ye han mo slakkere dettours than am I! / For I wol paye yow wel and redily / Fro day to day, and if so be I faile, / I am youre wyf; score it upon my taille (account), / And I shal paye as soone as ever I may. / For by my trouthe, I have on myn array, / And nat on wast, bistowed every deel; / And for I have bistowed it so weel / For youre honour, for Goddes sake, I seye, / As be nat wrooth, but lat us laughe and pleye. / Ye shal my joly body have to wedde; / By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde!"53 A love, sensual and indiscreet, comes from Venus. The Wife of Bath asserts the goddess gave her a love for pleasure. She never loved discreetly but always followed her

50 596-598, 601-602.
51 I(A), 4268-4272.
52 I(A), 3448-3456.
53 VII(B2), 413-424.
appetite: “Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousness, / ...I folwed ay myn
inclinacioun / By vertu of my constellacioun / ...I ne loved nevere by no
discrecioun, / But evere folwede myn appetit.” 54 At the same time, Ve-
nus is regarded as a goddess as is seen in the Knight's Tale, though the
courty love never disregards illicit relations between the lover and his lady.
Arcite discerns the difference between his own love for Emily and his
cousin Palamon's: “Thou woost nat yet now / Whei–çer she be a woman
or goddesse! / Thyn is affeccioun of hoolynesse, / And myn is
love, as to a creature.” 55 Yet the love of courtly romances differs prima-
arily from that of bourgeois fabliaux. Courtly love is an idealized concep-
tion; bourgeois one is an amorous relationship between the sexes; the ab-
solute submission and devotion of the courtly lover to the lady are never
of the utmost importance. The woman of the fabliau is a human creature
who is governed by her passions, and has a shrewdness of her tongue and
other faults, not the object of the homage or service of the courtly lover.
As the Wife says such women are blabbing shrews and have an heap of
faults: “Thow (i. e. husband) seyst that droppyng houses, and eek smoke,
/ And chidyng wyves maken men to flee / Out of hir owene hous; a!
benedicitee! / What eyleth swich an old man for to chide? / Thow
seyst we wyves wol oure vices hide / Til we be fast, and thanne we wol
hem shewe,— / Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!” 56 The
bourgeois women of the fabliaux turn their love to profit. As ridiculous
are appreciated the Wife of Bath’s wiles through which she assumes her
sovereignty over her husbands. “Deceite, wepyng, spynnnyng God hath
yive / To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve. / And thus of
o thyng I avaunte me, / Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree, / By
sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng, / As by continueel mur-
mur or grucchyng. / Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce: / Ther
wolde I chide, and do hem no plesaunce; / I wolde no lenger in the bed
abyde, / If that I felte his arm over my syde, / Til he had maad his
raunson unto me; / Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.” 57 Ridic-
ulous is also the pecuniary knight of the Merchant's Tale mocked at by
his unfaithful wife. She by dupe had illicit connections with his young

54 III(D), 611, 615-616, 622-623.
55 I(A), 1156-1159.
56 III(D), 278-284.
57 III(D), 401-412.
squire. When the liaison with the squire was made known she talked herself out of the difficulty. The caustic comment of the Host on the wife's wiles probably excited the laughter of Chaucer's audience by saying that: "Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees / In wommen been! for ay as bisy as bees / Been they, us sely men for to deceyve, / And from the soothe evere wol they weyve; / By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel. / But dutllees, as trewe as any steel / I have a wyf, though that she povre be, / But of hir tonge, a labbyng (blabbing) shrew is she, / And yet she hath an heep of vices mo; / Therof no fors! lat alle swiche thynges go."58 Similarly, the degenerated knight of Flanders, as represented with unchivalric attributes, is when judged according to the idealism of medieval knighthood an object of ridicule. Sir Thopas is contemptible for his protective armour and his unchivalric accomplishments. Chaucer's audience make fun of Thopas' cowardice and bourgeois behaviour. "Listeth, lordes, in good entent, / And I wol telle verrayment / Of myrthe and of solas; / Al of a knyght was fair and gent / In bataille and in tourneyment, / His name was sire Thopas."59

This bourgeois attitude based on realities is viewed from the aristocratic standpoint. Chaucer apparently adapts himself to the habits of thought and sentiments of his court audience. There can however be another approach to the bourgeois attitude of the fabliau. At the bourgeois level the reverse is the case. In the bourgeois view it is those who make fun of the bourgeois attitude that are made fun of by those who are laughed at for their attitude different from that of aristocrats. There is no difference between the lady of high degree and the wench suited for a yeoman's wife from the point of view of human creature. The Manciple makes us known the unity underlying the difference "Bitwixe a wyf that is of heigh degree, / ...And a povre wenche": "If it so be they werke bothe amys — / But that the gentile, in estaat above, / She shal be cleped his lady, as in love; / And for that oother is a povre womman, / She shal be cleped his wenche or his lemmman."60 Satire lies in the pretention which Simkin of the Reeve's Tale makes to social superiority. The misconduct the Cambridge clerks committed with Simkins' wife of gentle birth and his heiress daughter abased the pride of the miller who

58 VI(E), 2421-2430.
59 VII(B2), 712-717.
60 IX(H), 213-220.
prided himself on having had an intimate association with the church. Simkin exclaims: “Ye, false harlot...hast? / A, false traitour! false clerk! ... / Thow shalt be deed, by Goddes dignitee! / Who dorste be so boold to disparage / My doghter, that is come of swich lynage?”

Flesh and blood qualities being equal, the lady who is pedestaled for a goddess is ridiculous. The kind of comic idealization is seen in the jokes about the love-making of Absolon of the Miller’s Tale: “What do ye, honeycomb, sweete Alisoun, / My faire bryd, my sweete cynamome? / Awaketh, lemmman myn, and speketh to me! / Wel litel thinken 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 (teat). / Ywie, lemmman, I have swich love-longynge, / That lik a turtel trewe is my moornynge. / I may nat ete na moore than a mayde.”

Alison whom Absolon makes love with in the best courtly manner is never a perfect lady of romance with ideal attributes; she is a wench suitable to be loved by a lord or to be married to a yeoman. To Absolon Alison is a mere woman with feminine charms: “She was a prymerole, a piggesnye, / For any lord to leggen in his bedde, / Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.” The wife of the Shipman’s Tale is contrast with the lady of romances. The wife turns her physical charms to profit. Her sordid husband was persuaded into accepting a suggestion as to the debt in which she was to him on condition of every night’s getting back it by means of her physical charms. The Wife of Bath also prides herself on her wiles. The old dotards the Wife tricked by women’s wiles are the objects of deserved ridicule for her. Her discourse on the dexterous management of her husbands for her profits is based on her own experience. She declares: “Experience, though noon auctontee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me / To speke of wo that is in mariage.”

The dotards cheated in the marriage bargain are comic judged by the bourgeois standards of a tricky wife. Like the Wife the young wife of the Merchant’s Tale, married to old knight January, is not talkative; she belongs to the wilful, tricky bourgeois women of the fabliau. She can never deserve to be praised and loved by January and by Damian. The cheated husband is funny all

61 I(A), 4268-4272.
62 I(A), 3698-3707.
63 I(A), 3268-3270.
64 III(D), 1-3.
the more because he is a knight. *Sir Thopas* is a parody of a noble romance. Satire is directed at Thopas' outrageous protective armour and his love-longing for an elf-queen. The comic idealization of the lady toward whom he feels a love-longing inevitably leads to the satire on courtly love. She is nothing but a remote lady of a fairyland, not one of many maids "bright in bour" who "moorne for hym paramour / Whan hem were bet to slepe."

Chaucer's attitude may find expressions in a joke on his apostasy from the religion of Love. Every good quality is required of the idolized lady; then, an elf-queen deserves the love-longing toward which the lover feels. Chaucer's sympathies may have been with bourgeois people, such as the Merchant and the five Burgesses. We may assume that the humorous or malicious cynicism about the courtly attitude of romances can be found in a ridiculous treatment of the practical attitude of fabliaux.

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