

**The Cuckold, His Wife, and Her Lover:
A Study of Infidelity in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, the
Decameron, and the Libro de buen amor**

by

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Centre for Comparative Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation compares representations of women in erotic triangles. I contend that despite the stability implied by the triangular shape, the erotic triangle can be made *unstable* through women's language.

The first chapter examines medieval and contemporary writing on an essential relationship in the triangle: the friendship between the husband and the lover. *Amicitia*, chaste friendships between men, had its roots in Greek and Latin philosophy, and recently these relationships have been investigated according to mimetic desire (Girard) or homosocial desire (Sedgwick). In both medieval and modern configurations, these relationships are usually predicated upon the exchange of women. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray provide anthropological and literary explorations of the economic model where men exchange women to strengthen their homosocial bond.

In the three texts, women use linguistic techniques to destabilize the erotic triangle. One is irony: frequently, one character does not understand an ironic statement and is excluded from the relationship between the other two participants. A second is pragmatic implicature, which is

also used for exclusionary purposes. Other women adopt economic terminology to negotiate with their husbands or lovers for control of their bodies. Through these linguistic devices women speak exclusively to another member of the triangle, thereby undermining male friendships and denying their bodies be used as objects of exchange.

Although their strategies are not always successful and some women remain exchangeable objects, we nevertheless see that erotic triangles can be destabilized. Furthermore, counter to the prevailing anthropological theory, certain women are aware of their position as commodities. From this insight, a new perspective on sexuality is exposed. The formerly strong male relationship, built on classical ideals and predicated on equality, breaks down when one man's virility is pitted against his rival's. Sometimes even, the supposedly chaste male relationship reveals erotic undertones. Women's sexuality is also transformed when certain women prove to be desiring subjects, able to manipulate the system of exchange.

In the end, institutionalized notions of chaste male friendships and women as objects of exchange are disrupted, sometimes even undermined, by capable women who determine who should have access to their bodies.

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Introduction: The Problem of Medieval Feminism

Medieval feminism is a seemingly oxymoronic term. Feminism is a recent concept, generally considered to have begun around the nineteenth century with the suffrage movement and is currently in its third wave. This being the case, how could the Middle Ages be feminist? In short, they were not. Rather, medieval feminism is a recent construction. It is a mode of inquiry that destabilizes male-centered history to focus on questions relating to women, sexuality, masculinity and other narratives that have traditionally been marginalized by history.¹

The field of medieval feminism took root at the end of the 1970s when scholars began to re-examine women's lives, writing, and status in the Middle Ages. In the 1970s and 80s, medieval feminism was primarily identified as the study of women in the Middle Ages, but even this mode of inquiry was not well developed. E. Jane Burns writes that in 1980 there were still very few options for how to discuss women in the Middle Ages, a problem she and Bonnie Krueger encountered when they tried to organize a bibliography in a special edition of Romance Notes on "Courtly Ideology and Woman's Place in Medieval French Literature."² In the decade that followed, scholars developed a vocabulary to talk more deeply about the lives of women and also cultivated a greater interest in female-authored texts ("Medieval Feminist Movement" 32). This work was essential not only for developing the discipline of medieval feminism, but also for medieval studies in general, and throughout the decade the canon grew to include texts by female troubadours, mystics and poets. The work done on 'Women in the Middle Ages' in the 1980s was a necessary step, but by the 1990s, it became clear that studying women was not

¹ Judith Bennett nuances the definition of medieval feminism further, writing that "all studies of women are not informed by feminism (indeed, some scholars working on medieval women would almost certainly eschew the label "feminist"); and second, some feminist scholars focus not on women but instead on topics such as gender, masculinity, and sexuality" ("Medievalism and Feminism"; 32).

² Burns writes that the bibliography was divided into such sections as "Women in Medieval History," "Woman as Character, Image and Sign," and "Women Writers, Feminine Textual Voices, and Female Audience" ("Medieval Feminist Movement"; 32).

enough. As feminist theory has shown, ‘women’ is not a stable category that can be treated with broad strokes and generalizations, an assertion demonstrated by many, including Judith Butler, Monique Wittig, and Gayatri Spivak.³ This theoretical position has proven to be productive for re-thinking sex and gender roles, but Judith Bennett argues that although ‘women’ is a slippery concept in a theoretical context, in practice ‘woman’ still acts as a stable category. She continues that in certain times and places it is more practical to talk about ‘women,’ so long as we do not forget the theoretical aspect of the word (History Matters 9). The position that Bennett advocates is essential to medieval feminism because it simultaneously facilitates a study of women in the Middle Ages without essentializing the category ‘woman’ or the theoretical movement that has broadened the concept.

The balancing act between the theoretical and practical sides of a medieval feminist methodology articulated by Bennett was the *modus operandi* for many medieval feminists in the 1990s. During this decade a more nuanced approach to medieval feminism developed, and by the mid-1990s, a number of highly influential studies radically changed the field, offering new possibilities on how to integrate feminist and critical theory with medieval literature. These inquiries were concentrated in French literature, perhaps due largely to the influential French philosophical tradition which has been widely accepted by scholars in French studies. E. Jane Burns, for instance, proposed the concept of ‘bodytalk’: a manner of reading the double discourse in texts that occurs when a female heroine speaks within and against traditional male discourse. Burns looks for bodytalk in a number of genres including farce, *fabliaux*, *lais* and romance. She contends that in all these genres, there are examples of women who use their

³ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), Gayatri Spivak, “French Feminism in an International Frame.” In Other Worlds (New York: Routledge, 1988), and Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and Other Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

bodies to circumvent misogynist paradigms that have been harmful to female nature.⁴ Simon Gaunt expanded the focus of women's bodies to include representations of both male and female sexualities in his study on gender and genre. Drawing from Marxist, structuralist, post-structuralist, feminist and gay theory, Gaunt re-considers how masculinity and femininity are constructed across genres in medieval French literature. He writes that every genre represents an ideological position into which gender always figures. The ideological systems and genres that Gaunt isolates are not only examined in relation to a complicated sex/gender system, but they are also compared to each other, thereby foregrounding the intertextual element previously denied by medieval genre studies.⁵ In her study on the woman respondent and intellectual mastery between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries in French literature, Helen Solterer also added to the growing discipline of medieval feminism. According to Solterer, scholastic and clerical texts attempted to dominate women through intellectual mastery. Women were considered only literal readers of the word, unable to engage with language on a figurative level. The prevailing logic was that this deficiency prohibited women from joining the ranks of a sophisticated scholastic tradition predicated on symbols, metaphor and other forms of rhetoric. However, by the later Middle Ages, in texts such as the Reponse au Bestiaire d'amour, Livre de leesce and the Querelle du Roman de la rose, the respondents, in the form of the female figure, prove their ability to engage with language's symbolic level to such an extent that they disrupt misogynist rhetoric and contest their sexualized and marginalized representations across a wide spectrum of canonical texts.⁶

⁴ E. Jane Burns, Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1993).

⁵ Simon Gaunt, Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶ Helen Solterer, Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

The work of Burns, Gaunt, Solterer, and others was particularly important because they proposed different ways of integrating critical theory into a medieval framework. In other words, they began to establish a kind of methodology for medieval feminism, a difficult task not only because of the inherent anachronism of the concept, but also because of the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline. Indeed, as with other interdisciplinary fields such as Comparative Literature, it is impossible to establish a strict, and widely accepted methodology, that can be universally applied or taught because these fields borrow from so many other areas. History, anthropology, religion, and women's studies are just some of the acceptable fields that a medievalist can draw from, but each has its own methodology.⁷ Therefore, by complementing rigorous philological, palaeographical, codicological, and historical scholarship (the foundations of medieval studies), with concepts from gender theory and critical theory, medieval feminists in the 1990s provided startling new readings of texts and it proved to be a watershed not only for medieval studies, but for gender studies as well.

More recently, the area of medieval feminism has changed again as narratives about difference have also come to include discussions of masculinity, homosexuality, religious differences and cultural cross-pollination between the East and the West.⁸ These new avenues

⁷ This is indeed a problem in Comparative Literature departments, including at the University of Toronto, where it is difficult to evaluate students from the same department using the same set of criteria. With an entire department of students ostensibly in the same field, they are nonetheless pursuing research in areas as diverse as the history of the book and cognitive psychology. While it is necessary for their research to employ the methodologies of their chosen areas, at the same time, it is impossible to offer a set PhD field examination for all students that will uniformly test their knowledge and expertise. As a result, students have widely varying experiences and graduate with entirely different skill sets from each other.

⁸ The annual Gender and Medieval Studies conference, held in Edinburgh in January 2008 and focusing on 'Gender and Difference' reflects the general trends in the field. Several sessions are devoted to masculinity and masculine sexuality as well as to Jews and Christians in medieval society. See also the work of William Burgwinkle, Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature : France and England, 1050-1230 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Sharon Kinoshita, Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2007), Queering the Middle Ages Ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance Ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1999).

are both exciting and necessary for the advancement of a field that seeks to explore questions that have customarily been taboo. At the same time, scholars such as Judith Bennett say that these changes have meant that woman's history is losing its "feminist edge." She writes that recent scholarship is,

deferring unnecessarily to male authority, dwelling overmuch on biographies of unusual women, taking a sharp cultural turn away from social and material considerations, attending more to diversity than to the power differentials, and allying with a history of masculinity that is developing in surprisingly problematic ways. (History Matters 22-23)

The principal source of "male authority" that Bennett alludes to is part of the very theoretical tradition that encouraged medieval feminism in the first place. However, she writes that this tradition was also developed largely by male philosophers who "either ignored women (for example, Michel Foucault), or problematically considered women (for example, Jacques Lacan)." Bennett contends that treating these philosophical texts with undue reverence only reinforces the belief that abstract thought is the domain of men (23).⁹ Instead, she urges medieval feminists to work more closely with "middle-range theory" that is based on "empirical insight (for example, bell hooks, Alice Walker, Valerie Amos, and Pratibha Parmar)" (23). In short, Bennett encourages scholars to balance postmodern philosophy, a discipline that is important for evaluating the "male-ness" of philosophy, psychoanalysis and epistemology with methodologies that do not obscure women's voices in history (23).

⁹ This is not unlike the problem of male, intellectual dominance that Solterer discusses in the Master and Minerva, thus showing how little the situation has changed since the Middle Ages.

Elizabeth Robertson supports Bennett's evaluation of the current state of medieval feminism, writing that "medieval feminist studies have lost some of their critical edge but not their potential" (20). She continues,

I am also concerned that many of the brightest, most dynamic young critics working in the field of late middle English studies, while fully supporting feminism in their lives, tend to avoid feminism in their work and to declare it unfashionable; while they willingly acknowledge the importance of studying the 'other,' they are distinctly uncomfortable with discussing women, and even gender or sexuality. Feminism, hand-in-hand with theory, seems to be facing marginalization by the academy in my field. (20)

To correct this problem, she urges medieval feminist studies to re-visit the tenets of second-wave feminism through the lens of the third-wave. She proposes re-assembling previously fractured groups of women in order to re-evaluate what women have in common, a suggestion that complements Bennett's own proposal that 'woman' be re-considered a stable category (23).

The comments on the state of medieval feminism made by Burns, Bennett, Robertson and others, underscore the highly self-reflexive nature in the discipline. In the mid-1990s – the time that important scholarship in the discipline was appearing – there was also a flurry of articles which commented on the discipline itself. E. Jane Burns, Sarah Kay, Roberta Krueger, and Helen Solterer jointly wrote an article which asserted that medieval studies need not only borrow from feminist studies, but also contribute to it. They explain that medievalists can create "a historical and material feminism grounded in the differences of the past as well as the uncertainties of the present" (231). Their suggestion in fact responded to Bennett's own assertion three years earlier, when she wrote that feminists have traditionally been consumers of feminist theory, but that they now have the opportunity and the potential to be producers of

theory which can then inform the work of non-medievalists (“Medievalism and Feminism” 330). In addition to suggesting new ways forward for the discipline, these articles also addressed what it meant to be a feminist, a medievalist, and an academic. The authors mention the male-centeredness of journal-boards and universities, writing that despite the developing “medieval feminist network ... each of us has a more or less extensive anecdotal history of isolation, marginalization, or trivialization of our concerns, and in extreme cases, even harassment within the academy” (228).¹⁰ Regarding this issue, Bennett writes that while collegiality is essential to every medievalist, some medieval feminists have suffered on a personal level and have sometimes been subject to jokes or comments made by colleagues. Citing the “Report from Chapel Hill” from the Medieval Feminist Newsletter, she notes that graduate students “reported in 1989 that their professors derisively told them that ‘[f]eminism has no place in medieval studies] and urged them to avoid classes offered by a colleague whom they described as a ‘crazy medieval feminist woman’” (5; qtd in Bennett “Medievalism and Feminism” 316).

Recently a new set of self-reflexive pieces on the state of medievalism and feminism have appeared, including Bennett’s book History Matters and several articles reflecting the history of medieval feminist scholarship in the 2006 winter edition of the Medieval Feminist Forum (formerly the Medieval Feminist Newsletter). These articles are also complemented by annual roundtable discussion by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship at Kalamazoo each year, and as of 2007, also at the Medieval Congress at Leeds.¹¹ I find these self-reflexive

¹⁰ For my own part, I am grateful to Sarah Kay, who, in July 2007, encouraged me to attend her keynote address at the ICLS conference “Courtly Mythologies” with my infant son. She commented that if female academics could not bring their children to conferences then there would be no changes in the academy, and women would have to continue to hide their dual roles as scholars and mothers.

¹¹ The first roundtable discussion at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds in 2007 was on “Feminism and the (Post)Graduate Experience.” The session “aims to interrogate attitudes within academia towards feminist scholarship and the advantages and perceived disadvantages which this type of methodological approach may

pieces and discussions not just inspiring, but also greatly indicative of the nature of the discipline. They demonstrate how political activism can be interwoven with scholarship as they openly work through their struggle against the patriarchal order in their professional and personal lives. Simon Gaunt notes specifically how his engagement with feminism and medieval studies is political, writing that it allows him to analyse power relations, hierarchies and the way that literary texts mediate these political structures (3). His political agenda, he explains, is not to attempt to read “like a woman,” but instead to foreground questions of gender that are pertinent to both men and women. He continues that if male academics are concerned about re-appropriating authority from women and speaking for them then they should turn their critical attention to men and masculinity (3). Since Gaunt wrote this statement thirteen years ago, this is exactly what has happened, as studies in masculinities have begun to complement feminist analyses of literary texts. There has also been a growing body of self-reflexive commentaries in other disciplines including queer theory. This is evidenced by William Burgwinkle’s very recent comments on the state of queer theory in medieval studies in his *Etat Présent*, in the January 2006 edition of French Studies.

This dissertation is influenced and inspired by these perspectives on medieval feminism: what medieval feminism means, how to ‘be’ a medieval feminist, and particularly what we can learn by combining these two seemingly anachronistic categories. But instead of thinking of medieval feminism as anachronistic, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider it as ‘chronistic,’ an approach suggested by Eric Hicks who has addressed the (much discussed) question of Christine

entail. Bringing together a range of academics, both seasoned and postgraduate, from a range of different backgrounds and experiences, it will unpick the problems associated with feminist scholarship in our discursively 'postfeminist' times. It will also facilitate a comparative approach to where we think the future of feminist scholarship lies.” <<http://imc.leeds.ac.uk/imcapp/SessionDetails.jsp?SessionId=1976&year=2007>>

de Pizan and her apparently ‘feminist’ attitude. He writes that, while it is perhaps “dishonest, to speak of Christine in a strictly modern context,” at the same time,

it is a strange sort of nearsightedness that would consider our own times as unique, as if the fundamental problems of human existence had never been faced before this century. There does exist a *long term* in the ideological sphere, as in all other historical domains, and what we might call chronism (or the exclusion of the long term) ... [is] no less a sin against the spirit. (11)

Hicks’ view of history, and the role of feminism in it, is productive: by accepting our own biases *and* viewing history as fluid and changing, then Christine’s work can be placed into a specific historical context and read through the lenses with which we choose to see the world. In short, so long as we are aware of our biases and our readings remain rooted in sound methodology, then we can straddle that delicate balance between history and contemporary preoccupations.¹²

Thinking about Christine’s writing from this perspective, I take her writing as a second source of inspiration for this study. Leaving aside the question of Christine’s political motivations and her ‘feminist’ intentions, and looking instead at her objectives for the Livre de la Cité des Dames and the Livre des Trois Vertus, we see that she carves out a place in a masculine world of letters to fight misogynist principles, and more important for my study, to problematize the category ‘woman’ by showing how different types of women performed virtuous actions in their everyday lives. As Rosalind Brown-Grant writes, in the Cité des Dames, Christine tries to foreground what women have achieved in their own right (128) and in the Trois Vertus, she “addresses women across a wide range of social roles, from princesses to

¹² Laurie Finke calls this approach “dialogic” (347). She writes that medieval literature does not offer an unmediated window into medieval life, but rather, the text’s “reality” is connected to its historical moment of production (352). She continues that literary texts have a dialogic relationship with the social conditions at the time that they were written by both reflecting and shaping them.

prostitutes and from nuns to artisans, she treats *all* her readers as rational beings who, whilst accepting their inferior position in social and political terms, can nonetheless prove their *moral* equality with men” (181-2). In so doing, Christine creates a text that foregrounds *women’s* self-representation. Karma Lochrie writes that this female self-representation simultaneously constructs a defence against masculine representation of women and a community of women that fosters feminine friendships and spiritual and intellectual support (77). The notion of women’s self-representation, in conjunction with the depiction of many different women (instead of the category of ‘woman’ or even the Madonna/Whore binary), lie at the foundation of my investigation on erotic triangles.

The Ubiquitous Erotic Triangle

The erotic triangle, in particular between a husband, his wife and her lover, is a structure that was repeated throughout medieval literature. The Cent nouvelles nouvelles (Cnn) (circa 1462), the Decameron (1349-52), and the Libro de buen amor (Lba) (1343), three texts covering over one hundred years and three countries, abound with different scenarios that repeat this triangle. The preponderance of erotic triangles in these three texts and beyond demonstrates a general preoccupation with this structure and also a drive to determine women’s place in it. As LaGuardia and Ferguson state,

[b]y consistently repeating the same kinds of stories, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *nouvellistes* perhaps revealed something that was fundamental to their identities ... The same could be said for the collective identity of a culture, which requires that stories be told and listened to constantly, producing a version of events that is an abstract accompaniment to the material world on which these stories comment. (6-7)

Although the characters form the triangles in a multitude of ways – through seduction, manipulation and even deal-making – it is generally assumed that they are ‘types,’ stock characters about whom we can generalize. Women especially are considered to be mere dupes, powerless to change their circumstances and subject to the decisions of either husband or lover. Instead, I contend that the erotic triangle is a structure that foregrounds different kinds of women – some of whom are ignorant of being objectified by men and others who are capable of discussing with their male counterparts and even manipulating the triangle for their own purposes. Through an examination of medieval and contemporary theories on male friendship, marriage, and the exchange of women, I will show that we can detect a variety of female characters in the erotic triangle, each of whom has a different idea of her sexual power, and displays different capabilities for dealing with the prevailing patriarchal structure. By concentrating on the female character and the depiction of her sexuality, her use of language, how she is listened to, and most importantly, whether she is able to assert herself as a powerful figure in the erotic triangle, I attempt to destabilize masculine authority by listening to the women’s voices.

Of course, unlike the works of Christine, in my three texts, the women’s words are penned by men, and it would therefore be irresponsible to read their discourses as representations of ‘real’ medieval women. Instead, as Michael Calabrese proposes, examining language, femininity and women’s speech in male-authored texts helps us to “understand medieval *constructions* of female voices and identity” (23). Moreover, when reading these male-authored texts, we must also appreciate the obstacles faced by male authors. Confronted by a tradition of virulent misogyny, the prevalence of characterizing women through a series of established paradigms (usually antifeminist in nature), and a general unease and misunderstanding of female sexual desire, male authors who set out to represent atypical women

were faced with a myriad of obstacles. Indeed, Calabrese asks, was it was even possible for “a Christian author, or, simply, a man, to ever celebrate female sexuality unproblematically?” (37). The issue of the male-authored female-voice ripples throughout my dissertation. Sometimes this problem surfaces, as in the case of the Zima story in Decameron III, 5, and sometimes it remains submerged, giving way to other linguistic and interpretive issues, as in the case of the *chevalier* and the *musnier* in the third *nouvelle*. However, what remains essential is that although women’s voices are determined by the male pen, there is still a surprising diversity of women’s voices that emerges in these three texts, thus providing plenty of fodder for a study of women’s roles and the construction of their sexuality within the erotic triangle.

The foundations of the erotic triangle, namely, the bond of friendship between two men and marriage, are explored in the first chapter. Explaining both medieval and contemporary perspectives on these relationships, I construct a picture of the roles that men and women have traditionally occupied in this ubiquitous structure. From the medieval side, *amicitia*, or the exclusive friendship between men, is essential to understanding the male-male relationship in the triangle. An explanation of how marriages were arranged and the expectations placed on wives completes the medieval section. From a modern perspective, anthropological and feminist philosophies on male friendships and the exchange of women are necessary for understanding recent approaches to the same relationships. This chapter also reviews the existing scholarship on these questions in relation to the Cnn, the Decameron, and the Lba.

While the first chapter examines *amicitia* and marriage, and the critical writing on both, the rest of the dissertation focuses on the nexus between them. In three chapters, each one devoted to a text, I examine what happens when these two relationships are intertwined. This investigation has the potential to become unwieldy, for in the Cnn, Decameron, and Lba, there are almost as many variations of the erotic triangle as there are stories that detail it. To organize

these stories and to control the scope of the analysis, I have created an appendix to each chapter that summarizes all the erotic triangles and categorized them according to trends I have observed across the three texts. These categories do more than organize a vast set of tales; they also lay the groundwork for thinking through how sexuality, especially women's sexuality, is constructed in the triangle. Moreover, they permit us to investigate questions such as, what happens to men's friendship when one man desires his friend's wife? What does a wife do when her lover and her husband become friends? When, and how, can a woman use sex to tear apart two friends? In all these situations there is the potential for conflict, rivalry and even aggression, as men who might be friends compete for wives or try to seduce their friends' spouses. Furthermore, in instances where women are not considered sexual objects, but actual women capable of being wives and friends to men, a husband might find his loyalties split between his wife and his friend. Most important, by classifying these stories and then analyzing examples from the different categories, a variety of women's voices, sometimes barely audible in these loud, male-authored texts, become easier to discern.

The Cent nouvelles nouvelles is the subject of the second chapter, followed by a chapter on the Decameron and then the Libro de buen amor. This counter-chronological order benefits a comparative reading of the three texts because it removes the temptation to classify the most recent text as more 'modern.' And as chapter four makes apparent, the Lba is an incredibly heteroglossic work, where the women's voices are clearer and even more subversive than in the French or Italian texts. Although a reverse-chronological examination of the Cent nouvelles nouvelles and the Decameron might be somewhat unconventional, a comparison between these two texts is not. Indeed, there is no disagreement that the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, written most likely in 1462 in the Burgundian court of Duke Philip le Bon, was influenced by Boccaccio's Decameron. By the 1370s, stories from Boccaccio's work began to be

disseminated in France: in 1373, the Griselda story had been translated into Latin by Petrarch, and then between 1384 and 1389, Philippe de Mazières translated the story again, this time into French (Di Stefano vii). Christine de Pizan also made Boccaccio's stories known in her Livre de la cite des dames (Di Stefano viii). And finally, in 1414 Laurent de Premierfait translated the Decameron into French, entitling it the Cent nouvelles, thereby further popularizing Boccaccio's stories with French readers. Moreover, a copy of De Premierfait's translation has been catalogued in the library of Duke Philippe le Bon's father, Jehan Sans Peur (Di Stefano xiii); therefore making it indisputable that a version of the Decameron was known in the Burgundian court.¹³ And indeed, Boccaccio's influence is felt throughout the Cnn – not surprising, given that they are both works containing one hundred secular and often bawdy stories told by a number of storytellers. But the two works have more in common than simply being collections of salacious stories. As Roger Dubuis points out, in the author's dedication to the Duke of Burgundy, he goes to some pains to use the Decameron as a justification for his text, showing that it was not just a passing source of inspiration. Dubuis writes, "Ce qui frappe, en premier lieu, c'est que l'auteur se réfère au *Decameron* non pas comme à une source, mais comme à un répondant, une justification" (12). At the same time, the author of the Cnn emphasizes the difference between the texts by highlighting the newness of his stories and explaining the addition of the adjective "nouvelles" to qualify the noun "nouvelles," thus distinguishing the French version from Boccaccio's own Cent nouvelles and showing the uniqueness of his text. In the dedication, the author explains that, although his oeuvre cannot "atteindre le subtil et

¹³ De Premierfait's Cent nouvelles is indeed a *version* of the Decameron because some details from the Italian text were eventually changed not only during the process of re-copying the various French manuscripts, but also in the translation process itself. In fact, translating the Decameron was difficult for De Premierfait because he did not completely understand Boccaccian Italian. Therefore he solicited the help of an Italian monk who translated much of the Decameron first into Latin, which De Premierfait then translated into French (Di Stefano x). Despite these changes, De Premierfait's Cent nouvelles allowed many of Boccaccio's stories to become known by the French reading public.

tresorné langage du livre de Cent Nouvelles” (“achieve the subtle and well-wrought language of the Cent nouvelles”; 16-17), the stories in both works are “assez semblables en matere,” (“similar enough in substance”; 15-6) although his are different enough to be considered ‘new’.¹⁴ One example of this simultaneous ‘newness’ and similarity is in the twenty-eighth *nouvelle* where the storyteller, Messire Michault de Chaugy, explains that his story could well have been adapted by Boccaccio himself and would have been “mise ou reng du compte des nobles hommes mal fortunez” (“and put it in the category of stories of unlucky noblemen”; 9).

The author’s reference to the Decameron in the dedication certainly indicates an intimacy with the Italian text, but it also points to a deeper preoccupation: by composing a text so closely resembling the Decameron, the author knew that the two works would inevitably be compared. If we read the author’s remark that the Cent nouvelles nouvelles could never “attaindre le subtil et tresorné langage du livre de Cent Nouvelles” as self-deprecating, then his comment anticipates (by five hundred years) the small body of criticism that has compared the two texts.¹⁵ Eric Auerbach, for one, makes passing reference to the Cnn in relation to the Decameron, writing that the French work is a poor copy of the Italian masterpiece. He writes that in the Cnn,

what constitutes the very essence of Boccaccio is not imitated, indeed is apparently not even recognized ... Nothing is left of Boccaccio’s elegantly humanistic ‘intermediate style,’ of his doctrine of love, his service of women, of the human, critical, and embracing perspective of the *Decameron*, of the multiplicity of its scenes and its reports of life. It goes without saying that the

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the Cent nouvelles nouvelles are my own.

¹⁵ It is also possible that this statement was intended to be ironic – a form of rhetoric that, as I will show in chapter two, permeates the Cent nouvelles nouvelles. In fact, the whole of the dedication might be read ironically, the adjective “tres,” for instance, is used six times in ten lines and excessive flattery is often an indication of irony. But even if the dedication is written in an ironic tone and the author did not believe that his work was inferior to Boccaccio’s, many have still considered the style of the Cnn poorer than that of the Decameron.

language too, though flavourful and expressive, shows no sign of having been penetrated by humanism and is anything but literary. (260)

For Auerbach, the great Renaissance style and spirit that epitomizes the Decameron is lacking in the French text that followed it. Auerbach's judgement of the literary style of the Cnn is harsh, but perhaps not entirely mistaken. In relation to Boccaccio's elaborately planned and detailed world – his social commentary, his attention to language and style – the Cnn cannot compare. This does not mean, however, that the Cnn does not have the potential to illuminate perspectives on women's sexualities in erotic triangles. Rather, it is through reading one text against the other that a true diversity of women's voices begins to emerge. In the end we see that even in texts like the Cnn where less attention has been paid to character development, social commentary and engagement with the anti-feminist tradition, there is still much to be uncovered.

The third text to complete this comparative analysis is Juan Ruiz's Libro de buen amor. While there is a narrative and historical logic for comparing the Cnn and the Decameron, the Lba is a less obvious choice since it does not have the same narrative or framing structure as the other two works. Here there is one storyteller, the Archpriest of Hita, who documents his quest for love. Interspersed in the narrative are fables, and prayers to the Virgin bookend the text. Although there are not one hundred tales as in the other two works, the Lba nonetheless is filled with a variety of stories and *exempla*, and the topic of adultery and questions of sexuality also permeate the text. Erotic triangles are one of the thematic backbones, though here they form and fall apart along different lines than in the French and Italian works. Specifically, in the Lba, the triangle between a husband, his wife and her lover is transformed, and the go-between takes the place of the husband in many of the triangles. Chapters three and four explore the fundamental role of the go-between in the Libro de buen amor, especially how messages of

love, reading, and the text itself are conflated onto the go-between's body. But what further complicates the triangles in this text is that some of them form between two women and one man. This occurs when the go-between is a woman and she woos another woman on behalf of the desiring male. At first glance, these differences in the erotic triangles do not make the Libro de buen amor an obvious choice for comparison with the Cnn and the Decameron. However, all three texts explore the nature of adultery, the problems faced by the cuckold, and the duplicitous nature of language within the frame of the erotic triangle. Furthermore, the intriguing conflation of language, body, and sexuality onto the person of the go-between in the Lba finds remarkable parallels in both the Cnn and the Decameron.

A second apparent difference between the Libro de buen amor and the other two texts is that it was written in culturally heterogeneous environment, and could draw from Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions. This cultural diversity is more or less mirrored in the criticism, although most scholars choose which sources they will concentrate on for their analyses. Barry Taylor, for instance, focuses only on the tales' European provenance. Like the Cent nouvelles nouvelles and the Decameron, stories in the Libro de buen amor borrow from popular Latin and vernacular stories. Taylor, for instance, has counted references to thirty-two *exempla*. He has shown evidence of the presence of the Classical tradition through the guise of moral tales involving animals (following in the tradition of Aesop, for example), knowledge of known proverbs, and re-tellings of familiar *fabliaux*.¹⁶ Felix Lecoy has discussed both the Western and the Eastern influences on the text, writing that the tales "ont été empruntées par notre auteur soit à la tradition orientale ... soit aux 'contes d'animaux' si répandus au Moyen Age" (114) although he devotes one small section in his book to "La tradition orientale." Lida de Malkiel is

¹⁶ See Barry Taylor, "Exempla and Proverbs in the *Libro de buen amor*." A Companion to the Libro de buen amor (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2004. 83-104).

more detailed about both Arabic and Jewish influences on the Lba and writes that the unique autobiographical aspect of the text was most certainly influenced both by the Libro de delicias (second half of the twelfth century) authored by the Jewish doctor Yosef ben Meir ibn Sabarra from Barcelona, and the *maqāmāt* genre created by Arabic author al-Hamadhaní (end of the tenth century). *Maqāmāt* was characterized by “un cuento que encuadra una serie de cuentos – como en las *Mil y una noches*” and by the thirteenth century, Arabic collections of these texts were being translated into Castilian which were then adapted by Castilian authors in the fourteenth century (31-2). The Lba’s mixed cultural connections are also considered by Leila Rouhi through the figure of the go-between, or the *alcahueta*. She finds that “Juan Ruiz shows considerable sensitivity to the curiously contradictory nature of the blend of *mudéjar* currents with Christian ones and thematizes the simultaneous existence of interaction and conflict in the shape of the old go-between” (231).

Islamic and Jewish traditions are integral to the Lba’s textual fabric; however, there is still evidence of cultural hybridity in varying degrees in both the Cent nouvelles nouvelles and the Decameron. Indeed, while some of Boccaccio’s characters venture Eastward, or are from the East, such as Alatiel in II.7, other stories have also been scrutinized for non-western influences. It has been argued, for example, that I, 3, the story about Melchisedech and the three rings is comprised of several non-western influences, including a Persian tale from a collection called History of the Kings of the Persians, written by al-Tha’alibi, sometime between 1030 and 1034 (Shagrir 166). Another Persian influence in the Decameron has been detected by A.C. Lee. He writes that an analogue to X.5, the tale of Dianora, Ansaldo and the garden, is found in the Persian Tutinameh, a collection of fifty-two tales from the beginning of the fourteenth century (322). Scholarship on the Cent nouvelles nouvelles does not indicate as much evidence of cultural hybridity as there is in the other two texts: although the sixty-ninth

nouvelle takes place partially in Turkey, the majority of the characters are Burgundian and occasionally there are Germans and Englishmen.

Although the Libro de buen amor initially appears to be an entirely different kind of text – one which is marked by a variety of cultural sources – the undisputed use of Western influences including *exempla*, fables and *fabliaux* connects it to the Cnn and the Decameron. Furthermore, its similar pool of sources, in conjunction with its cultural differences, opens up the possibilities of reading the ubiquitous erotic triangle in an entirely new light.

History-as-Continuity

In History Matters, Bennett explains two different perspectives for understanding change: transformation versus continuity. Traditionally historians have treated history as transformative, where structural shifts are responsible for altering the course of history. Using this model to explain women's history, it is necessary to examine how these (seemingly) significant moments have affected the status of women. In contrast, history-as-continuity is more difficult to record because it is predicated on examining the evolution of economy, society and the environment.¹⁷ Bennett elucidates this distinction with the example of the changing nature of women's work between the 1300s and the present. In both epochs, she explains, women's work has traditionally been low-status, low-paid and low-skilled. She continues that although much has changed in women's *experiences* as workers between the Middle Ages and the present, there has been "little transformation in their work status in relation to that of men" (62). From this brief example, Bennett demonstrates that a history of women's work is more

¹⁷ Bennett writes that the idea of continuity was explained by Fernand Braudel and others in the *Annales* school in the 1930s.

revealing when we uncover women's experiences than when we examine their changing occupations.¹⁸

The principle of history-as-continuity is also important to my own study because it de-emphasizes the master narrative to focus instead on the voices and experiences of marginalized members of society. History-as-continuity is also integral to the counter-chronological progression of this dissertation because both approaches resist reading erotic triangles through the lens of historical progression. Instead, other tools must be found to examine women's experiences within these constructs. And while there is a difference between a social historian's search for these experiences and literary scholars', the basic agenda of both remains the same.

In this dissertation, I examine one element important to understanding the social consciousness of the late Middle Ages – the erotic triangle. Prevalent in literature, and by extension, representative of societal anxieties, the erotic triangle is a construct that gives us the opportunity to understand how some women in literature spoke and were spoken to, how their bodies were exchanged, and how they tried to control their sexuality. With this study, I contribute another piece to a historical puzzle. This puzzle is not pieced together by charting great changes and events in history, but rather, by carefully examining personal experience and societal preoccupations. By slowly constructing this puzzle, one which includes narratives that heretofore have been mere whispers, we gain insight into where we have come from, and ultimately, where we might be going.

¹⁸ The very idea of 'experience' is also problematic. Joan Scott argues, for instance, that "[e]xperience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political" (797). Therefore, while historical methodologies that privilege narratives of experience over other modes of inquiry have the potential to destabilize a hegemonic discourse, this approach must also acknowledge the biases that cause the historian to choose one set of experiences over another.

Chapter 1: Male Friendships and the Exchange of Women – Medieval and Current Approaches

The erotic triangle is a situation with which the medieval reader was very familiar. In French literature alone, stories such as Bérout's Tristan et Iseut, Chrétien's Le Chevalier de la Charette, the Prose Lancelot and even the *lais* of Marie de France were populated by wives and their husbands and lovers. Stories in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles (Cnn), the Decameron and the Libro de buen amor (Lba) were not exceptions, and these three texts are also comprised of many stories that hinge on the erotic triangle. The most common erotic triangle in these three works is formed between a cuckold, his wife and her lover. In texts that adopted *fabliaux* and *exempla*, including the Cent nouvelles nouvelles and the Decameron, there is a multitude of ways these triangles develop, resulting in situations both comic and tragic. In some stories, a married woman seeks a lover because her husband does not satisfy her. In others, a woman is tricked into having sex with a man who is not her husband. Erotic triangles also happen when two men decide to share one woman. Yet other triangles occur when go-betweens facilitate the union of a woman with her lover. Although these are very general descriptions of how erotic triangles can form, the sheer variety indicates a medieval preoccupation with adulterous affairs. This fascination is mirrored by literary criticism. In fact, almost as quickly as these stories were written did people start commenting on courtly love and the erotic triangle, and from the Middle Ages onward, much ink has been spilled on adultery and fading of love. Even by the twelfth century, the period credited with the flourishing of courtly and romantic love, writers, including Gottfried von Strassburg, Chrétien de Troyes, and Aelred de Rievaulx, all lamented the decline of chaste courtly love (Jaeger, Ennobling Love 185). Since the Middle Ages, the debate on love

triangles has continued, and recent scholarship still turns its attention to how power, politics and friendship work in these relationships.

In this chapter I develop the critical discussion on erotic triangles by exploring the relationships that constitute the triangle – the rapport between the two men and the marital bond between husband and wife – and probe into the economic and sexual ramifications of these triangles. I start in the Middle Ages with a discussion of *amicitia* – the chaste friendship between men or between a man and a woman. The medieval terms of *amicitia* provide essential groundwork for understanding medieval concepts of friendship, love, and how women are exchanged between men. To contextualize the medieval vision of *amicitia*, Cicero's Laelius de Amicitia will be reviewed. In this short discussion between Laelius, Caius Fannius and Quintus Mucius, Laelius explains which men are suited for an ideal friendship and what they should expect from it. In the twelfth century Aelred de Rivaulx adapted Cicero's writing on *amicitia* and also using the dialogic form for his Spiritual Friendship, he expounds upon how men can develop and maintain friendship. However, in contrast to Cicero's ideal male friendship, Aelred de Rivaulx envisions an ideal spiritual friendship between monks where the common goal is devotion to and love for God. Recently, Aelred's sexuality has been questioned, and scholars such as John Boswell have re-read Spiritual Friendship to find evidence of Aelred's homosexuality – a reading that complicates the close male friendships that Aelred advocated. In addition to Aelred's spiritual friendships, *amicitia* was also apparent in a secular context, including courtly literature and art. In the courtly version of *amicitia* women are also added to the equation, and although many men believed that women were incapable of forming close, non-sexual relations with men, some women proved otherwise. To talk of erotic triangles also means a discussion of marriage, and after the section on *amicitia*, I will examine how marriages were commonly brokered in the Middle Ages as well as the expectations placed on women

during and after the formation of these alliances. As Georges Duby has pointed out, a woman was often considered a prize, where she “constitue le prix d’une compétition, d’un concours permanent entre les jeunes hommes de la cour, attisant parmi eux l’émulation, canalisant leur puissance aggressive, les disciplinant, les domestiquant” (Que sait-on de l’amour ? 47). Thus, in privileged circles, once a man is married, an erotic triangle could form between men who are both friends and rivals: two men who have chosen to become friends and who might also have competed for the same wife.

From the medieval, I move to the modern and focus on contemporary anthropological and feminist perspectives of how families or tribes exchange women in order to strengthen political and economic ties. To begin this section, I briefly discuss the most well-known of triangles – Freud’s Oedipus triangle. Then I address Claude Lévi-Strauss’ writing on how women function as objects exchanged between men. Two feminist positions responding to Lévi-Strauss are then considered. In the 1970s, both Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray responded to Lévi-Strauss’ Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté with their own readings of women’s position within the patriarchal system. Rubin and Irigaray were early feminists who articulated clear positions on the exchange of women and because each scholar concentrates on different aspects of the issue, together, they provide important starting points for understanding the feminist approach to this economic phenomenon. Rubin refutes Lévi-Strauss in his own terms – as an anthropologist – and she refocuses the argument to consider how the patriarchal system affects the woman who is exchanged. Although written over thirty years ago, Rubin’s article still proves essential for a discussion on the exchange of women within the patriarchal system. In contrast to Rubin’s position as an anthropologist, Irigaray counters Lévi-Strauss as a French radical feminist and considers the social ramifications of using women as a means of exchange. She ends her piece with a vision of a social system that does not use women as the means of

(re)production and exchange. Shortly after Lévi-Strauss' Anthropologie structurale, the literary scholar René Girard also wrote about erotic triangles and developed his theory of mimetic desire. Unlike his feminist counterparts who focus their discussion on the woman in the triangle, Girard ignores the woman completely and concentrates instead on male, 'mimetic' desire. He maintains that all desire is mediated and that a subject can only want what his rival also wants. Eventually, the competition between subject and rival grows stronger and the object of desire recedes in importance. In Girard's model, the woman who is the object of desire pales in importance to the competitive relationship between the two men, the subject and the mediator respectively. In the mid-1980s, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick recontextualized Girard's model of mimetic desire, calling the relationship between men 'homosocial desire.' In fact, Sedgwick's homosocial desire reintroduces the idea of *amicitia*, though within newly constructed twentieth-century parameters: unlike Girard who pays little attention to how marriage figures within these male-male relationships, Sedgwick revisits the question of how male homosocial friendships coexist with heterosexual marriage.

After considering medieval and contemporary theoretical models of male friendship and the exchange of women, in the second half of this chapter I review and critique the previous studies that have considered these topics in relation to the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, the Decameron and the Libro de buen amor.

Part 1: Building the Erotic Triangle: Homosocial Relationships and The Exchange of Women

Erotic triangles are complicated because they are comprised of four separate relationships. In the erotic triangles most commonly observed in the Cnn, Decameron, and the Lba, these relationships are between: the woman and her husband; the woman and her unmarried lover; the husband and the lover; all three participants. The two most critical

relationships are between the two men, and the husband and wife, and each one must be considered separately. Indeed, both these relationships are formed according to complicated criteria, and understanding them will allow a deeper understanding of the tripartite relationship.

Amicitia Perfecta: Classical and Medieval

Amicitia was a classical ideal of male-male friendship prized by the ancients and adopted in the early Middle Ages, and for the greater part of the Middle Ages this relationship was privileged more than heterosexual union. Despite the Latin word, James McEvoy traces *amicitia* to its Greek roots, explaining that Pythagoras used the noun *philia* – Φιλία – to connote friendship, affection and devotion in a bond of brotherhood (6). Aristotle also famously discussed ideal friendship, commenting that more than affection and devotion, true friendship is achieved when a person considers his friend as an integral part of himself (Cassidy 50). Among the Romans, Cicero was a great adaptor and proponent of the Greek ideal of friendship, and he highlighted qualities such as *similitudo* (resemblance), *election* (choice), and *virtus* (virtue) (McEvoy 32). Cicero also stressed the Latinate connection between the concepts of love (*amor*) and friendship (*amicitia*) through the root verb *amare*. These concepts are explained in Cicero's Laelius de Amicitia where he goes into great detail explaining not only which men are ideally suited for friendship, but also what should be expected from that friendship. To begin, he writes that true friendship can only be developed between certain men: "Those who behave and live in such a way that people praise their honesty, integrity, fairness and generosity, and have in them nothing of greed, intemperance or shamelessness, being also endowed with great strength of character" (V:19). More than these qualities, true friends see their reflections in each other so one man sees his ideal image in his friend: "For he who looks at a true friend, sees as if it were a reflection of himself" (VII:23). Once a true friend is found then the relationship should be

developed so that the men's goods, projects and wishes become a collective desire, even if it means straying from the true path. While one man's willingness to devote himself and his dreams to another is imperative, Cicero stresses that the most highly prized attribute in a friend is virtue. *Virtus* was a concept taken from the Greek *arête* which connoted a cluster of excellent qualities including strength, courage, wisdom, charisma, sanctity, piety, goodness and mercy (Jaeger, Ennobling Love 28). Throughout the De Amicitia Cicero returns several times to this concept, including the conclusion of the treatise, where he explains that friendship is rooted in virtue:

It is goodness, human goodness ... In it is found all harmony, stability and trust. Whenever it rises up and shows forth its light, and sees and recognises the same thing in another, it moves out towards it and in turn receives what the other has to give. Thence love, or friendship (for both have their origin in loving) blazes forth; and loving is nothing other than showing affection for the object of love for his own sake, not because of any lack in oneself, or the prospect of any advantage; though advantage does indeed flower from friendship even if one was not particularly aiming at it. (XXVII:100)

Without virtue, *amicitia perfecta* is impossible: from virtue springs harmony, devotion and above all, love. However, *virtus* also connotes manliness, and because of the attendant masculine implications in this word, Ciceronian and early medieval notions of *amicitia* were inextricably linked to men; while, and at the same time, the concept was ambiguous regarding homoerotic implications.

John Boswell has written about the uncertain homoerotic tendencies in *amicitia*. He comments that in Greek, and to a greater extent in Latin, there is ambiguity in words such as *amicus* (friend) and *amans* (lover), both of which stem from the same word *amor*, and therefore

these words can be used interchangeably. This flexibility often leads to confusion and it sometimes makes it impossible to determine whether one man ‘loved’ or ‘was in love with’ another man. Boswell comments:

This confusion is probably not accidental. It is likely in fact that ancient societies recognized fewer boundaries between ‘friendship’ and ‘romance’ than modern ones, and for the researcher to suggest that a clear dichotomy existed or to place a particular relationship on one side of it is usually anachronistic and inaccurate.

(47)

By the early Middle Ages, the ambiguity between friendship and romance was not entirely eradicated. Boswell writes that although there was some effort made after the sixth century to outlaw homosexuality, there were nonetheless some areas in Europe where homosexuality was practiced, and even flourished. Most notably, Spain, under Islamic rule, permitted homosexual communities to develop. Surprisingly, Spanish Christian communities kept silent about the homosexual love and poetry that developed, even though they chose to legislate in detail about other sexual practices, including bestiality (198). But Spain was not an anomaly in Europe, and Boswell determines that while Rome tried to dispel a perceived Hellenistic hedonism from its past, “this reaction seems never to have affected the majority of Christians and was significantly vitiated even at the theological level during the eighth to the tenth century” (206). By the High Middle Ages, previously tolerant communities ended their acceptance of homosexuality and by 1300, homosexuality was outlawed and people found guilty of a single homosexual act were condemned to death (293). This intolerance continued throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, and, Boswell argues, remained institutionalized until the nineteenth century. Because the Cnn, the Decameron, and the Lba were all written after 1300, and therefore within this intolerant

culture, we can conclude that the prevailing notion of *amicitia* adopted from the ancients underwent significant changes.

In the Middle Ages, notions of *amicitia* and representations of virtue were adopted in both lay and religious arenas. This is not to say that the concept was completely bifurcated, but rather, that *amicitia* was developed according to different requirements in spiritual and secular circles. The Church quickly adopted Ciceronian *amicitia perfecta*, developing into a perceived higher ideal of *amicitia spiritualis*. Within a Christian context, the virtue of humility was a principal quality and associated with the ability to forgive. In the twelfth century, spiritual friendship between monks was encouraged and practiced in strict monastic orders such as the Cistercians under Aelred of Rievaulx. In Spiritual Friendship, Aelred leads a series of dialogues with fellow monks on the nature of friendship. Using the Ciceronian model, Aelred defines which men are best suited to friendship and explains how to develop it.¹⁹ Like Cicero, Aelred believes that two friends must share common goals and beliefs. However, unlike Cicero, he goes to great lengths to categorize friendships, writing that friendships can be divided into three groups: carnal, worldly and spiritual. “[C]arnal friendship,” Aelred writes, “is created by an agreement in vices, while hope of gain spurs on worldly friendship, and similarity of character, goals, and habits in life makes for a bond of friendship among good people” (1:39). In contrast, spiritual friendship,

¹⁹ John Boswell has further complicated Aelred’s writings by claiming that Aelred’s apparent homosexuality has influenced his views on male friendship. Boswell comments that, “There can be little question that Aelred was gay and that his erotic attraction to men was a dominant force in his life. This was true by his own account, from the beginning of his emotional life...” (222). Boswell continues that even once Aelred abandoned his quest for carnal love and dedicated himself entirely to God, it was not out of a sense of shame, but rather, because his worldly loves were not eternal, while his relationship with God was (223). However, Boswell’s argument has not been universally accepted, and some scholars such as Mark F. Williams, have argued that it is impossible to be so categorical about Aelred’s sexuality (see “Introduction.” Spiritual Friendship. Trans. Mark F. Williams. (Scranton: University of Scranton Press; Toronto, London: Associated University Press, 1994).)

which is what we mean by true friendship, should be desired not with a view to any worldly good, nor for any reason extrinsic to itself, but from the worthiness of its own nature, and the feeling of the human heart, so that it offers no advantage or reward other than itself. (1:45)

Although Aelred defines three different forms of friendship, the form most closely modelled on Cicero's ideal is Aelred's 'spiritual friendship.' In fact, the major part of Aelred's writing on the topic draws directly from Cicero, but with one major alteration: Aelred's formulation for friendship depends upon love of Christ and devotion to God. According to Aelred, in order for spiritual friendship to exist, both men must also be united in their love for Christ. In book two Aelred writes,

[a]nd so in friendship are joined honesty and agreeableness, truth and pleasantness, sweetness and will, affection and action. All of these qualities come together in Christ, they are advanced through Christ, and in Christ they are perfected. (20)

Another example of how Aelred Christianizes the De Amicitia is found in his discussion of how to maintain a friendship. Like Cicero, Aelred advocates complete devotion to one's friend, even if it means certain death, though according to him, death resulting from friendship would have been preordained by God: "anything should be undertaken for a friend, even to the point at which we must lay down our life for our friend – a sacrifice ordained by divine authority" (2:69). Aelred also echoes Cicero when he talks about the utility of friendships. Both men believe that true friendships are not born out of necessity, but out of love. Cicero explains that those men who need friendship the least, cultivate it the most, writing:

In fact an individual excels most in the acquisition and preservation of friendships according as he is fortified with good qualities and wisdom in himself

and stands least in need of another, regarding everything that concerns him as within his own control. (IX:30)

Likewise, Aelred comments that, although most friendships develop “with a thought to some practical usefulness, which many people think a proper reason for a friendship to be sought, nourished and preserved,” ideal friendships should nonetheless precede benefit (2:60).

Cicero ends his dialogue by revisiting the idea of virtue, restating that it is a conglomerate of characteristics possessed by one man that he can use to enrich the life of another. Aelred, on the other hand, concludes his text with an examination of love, writing that it is a capability that enriches the man, his friends and his community. In other words, for Cicero, *amicitia* was rooted in virtue, and for Aelred, friendship springs from love of oneself, a neighbour and God:

The first task, therefore, is for each partner in a friendship to make himself morally clean, indulging himself in nothing which is indecent, withholding himself from nothing which is beneficial to this end. By truly loving himself thus, and following this rule, he loves his neighbour also.

(3:128-9)

Aelred’s concentration on love is a final move that distances his text from the classical ideal of friendship and draws it closer instead toward the Christian model that stresses God’s omnipresent and benevolent love.

James McEvoy has noted another intention for Aelred’s spiritual friendship, remarking that this ideal could also be viewed as a way of encouraging monks to tolerate the extreme difficulty of living the Cistercian life. McEvoy comments:

Silence must have done much to inhibit the exchange of merely sentimental trivialities and the formation of gossip-groups (and there can be no doubt that this

was part of its purpose) but it did not make friendship impossible – on the contrary, silence, together with the prescribed spiritual exercises and ascetical practices, enabled a truly spiritual friendship to come into being, based upon the undivided, inner loyalty of the heart to God, first and above all. (21)

Within this Christian context men no longer became friends because they were of equal rank or were similar in virtue, but because of their common spiritual goals where they strove to model themselves after Christ.

While *amicitia perfecta* proliferated in the monasteries and church doctrine, it was also appropriated in poetry, literature and art. Although the secular adoption of *amicitia perfecta* was not considered to carry erotic undertones, most of the imagery associated with it in texts and art might lead us to think otherwise. Stephen Jaeger comments on the highly charged imagery in early medieval writing depicting men sleeping together, kissing each other, sharing clothes and meals. Jaeger even mentions one cleric who wrote about longing to kiss his archbishop-friend, lick his viscera, and fuse their souls, maintaining that these references are in keeping with the chaste ideal of *amicitia* (Ennobling Love 15). He points out that this graphic imagery fits well within the *amicitia* topos where there is undeniably a discourse of desire, but which remains innocent of sexual insinuation, a thesis consistent with Boswell's assertion that homosexual behaviour was considered heretical. Jaeger concludes that this graphic style of writing "posits nonsexual male-male desire, a contradiction neatly formulated in the richly ironic phrase of Paulinus of Nola, 'chaste voluptuousness' (*casta voluptas*)" (Ennobling Love 15). Jaeger's hypothesis is exemplified by Aelred's position on men kissing. He writes that there are three different kinds of kisses between men: "the kiss of the flesh, the kiss of the spirit, and the kiss of discernment." Aelred explains that a "kiss of the flesh is made by a pressing together of lips, while a kiss of the spirit is made by a coming together of two souls, and the kiss

of discernment results from the outpouring of favour through the spirit of God” (2:23). Between friends, the kiss of spirit is acceptable, representing a “mingling of two spirits” imparted and bestowed by God. Aelred concludes, “[i]t would not be inappropriate for me to call this sort of kiss the kiss of Christ...” (2: 26).

In secular circles, Michael Camille also discusses chaste kisses between men and applies the term ‘Feudal Kiss’ to images of men kissing each other (133). Such representations of men kissing, such as a vassal kissing his lord, or Tristram kissing King Mark, should not be read sexually, but rather as one man paying homage to another. To contrast representations of the Feudal Kiss, Camille finds one example of a depiction of homosexual sex in a Bible Moralisée from 1220. In this manuscript, the artist goes to great lengths to show the ‘unnaturalness’ of the desire shared by the men by using signs representing penetration and perversion (139).²⁰ This anomaly aside, Camille provides further evidence to support Boswell’s thesis that, even when couched within the terms of *amicitia*, writing about or representing homoerotic desire was taboo in the High Middle Ages.

While homosexual desire proved a dangerous topic in discussions of *amicitia*, heterosexual love also began to pose its own problems. Women, formerly vilified and excluded from *amicitia* because they were considered unable to display the necessary virtuous qualities, were sometimes included in the medieval art of friendship by the twelfth century (Ennobling Love 90). By this time, in some circles, certain women were credited with possessing a strong

²⁰ The images from Parisian Bible Moralisée Camille discusses is now in Vienna, Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek, MS 2554, in fol. 2r. In one roundel in a series of four, there is a “rare depiction of a lesbian couple” and beside them a male couple, a layman and a cleric, who are intertwined. The amorous women are represented in conventional courtly terms, chin-chucking and kissing, while the men are depicted more unconventionally. Camille writes that “Even in their ‘sin against nature’ men who love their own sex are seen as distinct from women who do the same. The illuminator of this image was unable to imagine female to female sexual intercourse, which explains why he has presented it in the most conventional terms” (138-9). One sign that Camille says represents penetration and perversion in the male couple is a rent in the robe of the layman who is on top of the cleric, “this revealing rent in addition to his effeminate dress indicates that of the two he is the sodomite, the passive partner of anal intercourse” (139).

moral character. This acceptance only developed in parts of Europe by the eleventh century. In particular, Jaeger writes that French and German poetry and prose began to praise women by the twelfth century (Ennobling Love 87).²¹ This change also comes at a time when women were also becoming respected poets: “at the same time woman becomes virtuous she also becomes a poet. The image of the virtuous woman is coupled with learning virtue, but also with learning and practicing poetry” (Ennobling Love 88).²² The correlation between changing misogynist attitudes and women’s writing might be attributable in part to how misogynist beliefs were perpetuated. As Howard Bloch has written, misogyny can be perceived as a kind of speech act. He writes,

Misogyny is the expression of a negative opinion... misogyny is a way of speaking about, as distinct from doing something to, women, though speech can be a form of action and even of social practice, or at least its ideological component... Whether good or bad, laudatory or deprecatory, the reduction of woman to a category implies in our culture – and this because of a historic real imbalance of possessory power – an appropriation that is not present when identical generalizing statements are applied to man or men. I propose, then, a definition of misogyny as a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term. (Medieval Misogyny 4-5)

²¹ It is important to state that I do not believe that misogynous attitudes and writing began to sharply decline at this time. As Howard Bloch has remarked, “the ritual denunciation of women constitutes something on the order of a cultural constant, reaching back to the Old Testament as well as to Ancient Greece and extending through the fifteenth century... The discourse of misogyny runs like a rich vein throughout the breadth of medieval literature” (“Medieval Misogyny” 1). I therefore interpret Jaeger’s comments on the incorporation of women into some masculine circles only to be pertinent to the question of *amicitia* – an already exclusive elitist bond that existed only amongst the elite classes.

²² Norbert Elias writes that it was only wealthy women in wealthy courts who had the time and the facilities to cultivate intellectual activity (81).

If misogyny is a speech act, where women are unable to escape categorization and remain at the mercy of male writers, then once they pick up the pen they have a means of writing themselves out of predetermined categories and negating the speech act that condemned them. Indeed, through writing, women have the opportunity to render misogynous claims invalid, and thus ‘infelicitous,’ and in turn, certain women can communicate with men on their own terms. Through this emancipation, women begin to prove their moral and spiritual worth and might convince some men of their ability to lead exemplary lives.²³ As Jaeger has noted, by the twelfth century, women began to be recognized for their ability to judge goodness, and because they could “love more and ... learn virtue,” women were “solidly in the game of ennobling love, which grants love as recognition of virtue” (*Ennobling Love* 93).

Norbert Elias offers a different perspective on the relationships between the sexes in the twelfth century. He writes that in the great feudal courts men’s military function declined and women’s social importance increased. With this change, in important feudal courts, “a common sphere of life and a common social life for men and women were established” (81). By extension, these new conditions permitted high-class women to learn to read and pursue other interests, and in fact, “it was about women that the first circles of peaceful intellectual activity were established. ‘In aristocratic circles in the twelfth century the education of women was on average more refined than that of men’ (qtd. in Wechsler 173, and Weber 265) (81).” Although some women pursued intellectual activities, Elias maintains that women were still considered lesser and even those who outwardly possessed the same social status, were dependent upon men and therefore “socially inferior” (82).

²³ The starkest example of this negation of misogynist discourse by female authors is probably the “Querelle de la Rose” that took place in France in the 13th-15th centuries. Bloch notes that this “was not only France’s first literary debate but one that turned specifically around the enmeshed issues of woman and interpretation ... Christine de Pisan, for instance, poses the delicate questions of authorial intention, voice, and the relation of poetic representation to social base...” (“Medieval Misogyny” 6-7).

Given the pervasive hierarchy between the sexes, *amicitia perfecta* between men and women was very difficult to nurture. Most significantly, if a friendship between a man and a woman was formed, the previously silent erotic component of friendships was foregrounded, and men who befriended women had to work especially hard to convince their brothers that their relationships with women were chaste. Jaeger comments that,

Taking sexuality into the idealism of ennobling love meant forcing a union of eros and agape, of the earthly and the heavenly Venus. The great challenge that project posed was to maintain love's ability to ennoble even while declaring the sexual act and its fulfillment a quasi-legitimate element. (*Ennobling Love* 159)

By acknowledging the tension between *eros* and *agape*, men and women could forge a new kind of friendship that redefined previous definitions of *amicitia*. But even the most famous friendship between a man and a woman – Abelard and Heloise – was marked by their earlier sexual relationship and there was always a distinctive erotic tone to their communications. However, by the fifteenth century, a new humanistic version of *amicitia* became possible – friendship within marriage – a model written about by the Italian writer, Francesco Filelfo, and a position which will be discussed below. In cases where men were willing to enter into a friendship with women, these women found themselves welcomed into a revered institution previously reserved for men.

Marriage and the Exchange of Women

Once some women were allowed to enter the bond of friendship, the concept of marriage was also transformed. Reginald Hyatte argues that by the fifteenth century in Italy, *amicitia perfecta* and ideal marriage were evaluated according to similar criteria. Hyatte writes that Italian humanists used “the exemplary tradition to demonstrate the comparable moral excellence

of male friendship and marriage and, also, their presentation of either marriage or male friendship as the model for the other to emulate” (“Complementary Humanistic Models of Marriage” 251). Among the documents he examines is a 1439 Latin letter written by Francesco Filelfo who determines that the three most desirable traits for a marriage are *honor*, *utilitas*, and *voluptas*. Hyatte observes that these characteristics are adopted from the Aristotelian-Ciceronian commonplaces of *amicitia* (251-2). He continues that Filelfo equally positions marriage and male friendship by concentrating on both relationships’ “mutual benevolence” to the extent that Filelfo’s concept of marriage becomes “a sort of *amicitia*, a term which, like French *amitié*, may apply to lovers as well as friends” (252). While Filelfo and his contemporaries might only represent a small minority of writers in the fifteenth century who equated *amicitia* with marriage, Hyatte’s evidence for how this classical concept developed into an inclusive and amorous relationship is compelling. Moreover, the humanists’ view that spouses should be both friends *and* lovers should still be familiar to a twenty-first-century reader.

Despite the depiction of an increasingly familiar marital situation for contemporary readers, the reality of marriage throughout the early and high Middle Ages nonetheless reinforced the hierarchy between men and women.²⁴ Furthermore, arranged marriages represented the primary method that women were exchanged between men. Georges Duby observes that *all* marriages were arranged by men who spoke among themselves to agree upon

²⁴ According to Stephen Nichols, the question of women’s equality is a thorny one. He writes that they occupy a paradoxical role: while they were essential to men, they were nonetheless marginalized through competition and exchange. He continues that women’s perceived inferiority could stem from the Latin Fathers’ interpretation of Creation (44). In the version according to Augustine, woman was created weak and was an intended instrument for the Fall, an event that though not preordained, was anticipated. Thus even before the Fall, Eve was created as an inferior being, representing “the imperfect language of the fallen state” (48). In turn, Eve “seduces Adam into speaking the carnal vernacular introduced by Satan rather than the spiritual and hierarchical language authorized by God” (48). This ‘historical’ version of Creation formulated by Augustine, gave credence to the belief that women were inferior and thus their marginalization could be perpetuated.

unions for their daughters, adopted daughters, servants or vassals' widows. "Chose sérieuse," Duby writes, "le mariage est affaire masculine" (38). Thomas Kuehn elaborates on this commonplace to explain the economic benefits of an arranged marriage for both prospective husband and family: for the husband a wife represents both a source of money and labour, and to a family, a married daughter no longer requires to be fed and clothed (198). Once married, a woman was then expected to bear children, which were both economic and genealogical necessities:

Because the prevailing ideology of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries stipulated that a family's property (*substantia*) was preserved and perpetuated through males, social historians have generally concluded that this ideology dictated that women be transferred to their conjugal lineages and excluded from their natal lineages. A woman fulfilled her social role when through marriage she became the means of perpetuation of her husband's lineage, which was an agnatic association. (199)

The hierarchy between husband and wife was further reinforced by the management of the woman's dowry. After marriage, the dowry was controlled by the husband. Martha Howell explains that by law the husband became the sole manager of conjugal finances which included any dowry that the wife might have brought with her. She concludes, "[s]uch an arrangement, it is easy to imagine, would hardly produce [a] harmonious partnership... (29)." The dowry was unquestionably a critical element for arranging marriages and the negotiations surrounding it affected all social classes. For wealthy classes in particular, Joan Cadden comments that marriage was a business transaction that held social and political ramifications for both families. In these cases, dowries were often comprised of significant sums which were not only transferred between families, but also passed down the generations, thus affecting the social and

economic status of present and future families (233). In some cases, more than property was at stake: in certain high-profile marriages, peace was also an issue and women were exchanged as only part of a larger agreement or peace treaty. One such example is the political treaty between Duke Philippe le Bon, the Duke of Bedford and the Duke of Brittany who included wives as part of their peace alliance (Ribordy 10-11).²⁵

The lower classes were also not exempt from the political and economic negotiations of the marriage process. Cadden writes that,

among townsfolk, landed peasants, and even landless labourers, marriages involved transactions undertaken by the families of the bride and groom, at least in the case of first marriages, although when there was less property involved, the arrangements were less complex and less likely to involve long-term arrangements such as ongoing commercial ties. (234)

In addition to agreeing upon the economic details of the marriage, until the twelfth century, unfree persons were also required to ask permission to marry from their abbot or lord (Berkhofer 3). This custom slowly changed, and in 1155, Pope Hadrian IV issued the decretal on marriage Dignum est which stated that lords who had not given their permission for two people to marry could no longer contest the marriage (Berkhofer 8). This decretal had a significant effect on the ruling classes who could no longer directly control how their population married and mated (Berkhofer 16).

Regardless of social class, marriage was a highly regulated and heavily negotiated transaction between families. In France, these negotiations were formalized by a *traicté*, which

²⁵ On April 14th, 1423, the Triple Alliance, or the Treaty of Amiens, was sealed between the three Dukes. Under this treaty, Philip le Bon married Anne, the Duke of Bedford's sister, thus creating an alliance between the Burgundians and the English (Vaughan 9). This was Philip le Bon's third marriage: he had previously been married to Michelle of France who died at Ghent, and then Bonne of Artois, the countess of Nevers, who died after one year of marriage (8).

outlined the general conditions for the marriage and a promise from both sides to fulfill the necessary requirements (Ribordy 10). Although children were legally required to obey their parents (Ribordy 30), by the twelfth century attitudes towards marriage began to change and greater regard was given to a couple's affections. Howell writes that by 1200 the idea of companionate marriage began to spread across Europe. She explains that companionate marriage was usually considered to be a union agreed upon by two consenting adults who chose to marry each other for reasons beyond material support or progeny. Nevertheless, Howell concedes that betrothed couples still considered the financial implications of their union, and property would still remain a primary consideration, even when people married for love (18). In short, the change that companionate marriage introduced is that couples began to expect friendship, support and sexual fulfillment, and moreover, it was expected that the marriage would last until the death of a spouse (18).

Complementing the seemingly egalitarian principles that defined companionate marriage, was new canon law that determined that a woman could refuse a prospective husband (Duby, "Que sait-on de l'amour" 38). Kuehn explains further, writing that,

[t]he church was concerned with marriage as a sacrament, as the initiation into a particular form of Christian life. With all its consequences for the souls of those involved. This concern resulted in numerous canons and decretals, beginning with Pope Alexander III, which asserted that a valid marriage was based on the free consent of husband *and* wife and that parental consent was *not* necessary. (215)

Although it is tempting to view these changes as evidence that women had more control over how they were exchanged between families, Duby reminds us that many women would not dare disobey their families and cause a scandal. Kuehn also qualifies his statement, noting that in

practice, some canon lawyers were willing to grant more power to families than to children, allowing parents to apply pressure to their daughters to choose a suitable husband. Furthermore, canon lawyers also conceded that once married, a woman was subject to her husband (215). Finally, Howell also reiterates the importance of the dowry in the marriage game, and concludes that despite development of companionate marriage, love was “not the principal motivations for marriage, and medieval people did not associate marriage with the deep emotional attachments that would later give the companionate marriage its normative character” (18-9).

Although canon law stipulated that parental consent was not needed for two people to marry, the Church nonetheless retained the right to determine who could. One of the Church’s primary concerns was banning consanguinity. By the High Middle Ages there was so much worry about consanguinity that in 1076 Pope Alexander II prohibited sixth-degree cousins from marrying (Betzig 201). But these measures proved excessive and it was difficult for the laity to arrange for suitable marriage partners or to find someone who could verify whether a couple was distantly related (qtd. in Tanner 257-9). In 1215 this issue was addressed by the Fourth Lateran Council which changed the consanguinity law to forbid only fourth-degree cousins from marrying (“Sex and Canon Law” 38). If a couple ignored the law and entered into a clandestine marriage, the Council decreed that any clergy who allowed such marriages were to be suspended for three years and were to be “punished even more severely if the nature of the fault requires it.” The offending couple’s punishment would be “suitable penance” and if any children resulted from the union, then they were deemed illegitimate (“The Decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council” qtd. in Love, Family and Marriage 203-4). The medieval concern with consanguinity is not unusual: as Claude Lévi-Strauss has observed, and this point will be discussed below, consanguinity has been a primary concern for many societies. Whether driven by church or family, fear of consanguinity plays a direct role in the exchange of women – in order

to ensure that bloodlines remain healthy, families and communities must be sure to exchange their daughters with non-relatives.

Once a marriage took place it was extremely difficult to dissolve it. Surprisingly, even proving a wife's adultery was not enough grounds for divorce (Betzig 199). In fact, one of the only ways to break a union was proving that consummation had not occurred. In the twelfth century, Pope Alexander III decreed that a divorce could be granted on the grounds that consummation was impossible. This decree reflected the idea that marriage was primarily necessary for procreation (Murray, "On the Origin and Role of 'Wise Women'" 235). However, impotent couples petitioning for divorce were often required to wait three years before proving that they had tried and failed at consummation (238). In many cases, impotent men were 'tested' by court-appointed women who tried to arouse the man, since some cases of impotence were considered curable (240). Of course, successfully proving impotence was difficult, but the fixation on this perceived disability is striking. Indeed, this divorce loophole highlights the importance placed on women's role as procreators and mothers. Already given in marriage through the terms outlined by a contract or treaty determined by men, once married, a woman's role shifted from being an object of exchange to procreator. If a woman was unable to fulfill her procreative duty, then she could be exchanged once more so that she could try to have children again. Indeed, the arrangements made for weddings and the grounds surrounding divorce suggest that women's bodies were repeatedly exchanged and sexualized beyond their control.²⁶

²⁶ Counter-examples to the many women who were unable to divorce their husbands include some women in fifteenth-century Valencia, who, under the legal code, the *Furs*, were able to divorce their husbands and reclaim their dowries. This code stipulated that a woman could seek restitution of her dowry if her husband has become insolvent or "[i]f a woman's husband had misused her property in any way, abandoned her, did not provide her with the necessities of life, or became a madman. A wife whose marriage was dissolved through the fault of her husband, for example, because of adultery, was also legally able to initiate a suit of dowry restitution" (Wessell 512). Some women exercised their rights; more often the labouring women, not noble women, won the right to their dowries (518). Wessells concludes that although "this control did not necessarily translate into more power

Reading the Medieval in Light of the Modern

In the Middle Ages, the relationships that men were expected to form with each other differed greatly from the marital bonds they were supposed to have with women. *Amicitia* was predicated on closeness between two men which reinforced each man's greatest qualities and ameliorated men's minds and souls. Marriage, on the other hand, was often an economic transaction that brought families together and improved inter-familial relations by promising daughters to sons. Whereas the first relationship was chosen by the participants, the second was usually determined by families. Each relationship has its own set of expectations, but when the two become intertwined – a man begins to desire his friend's wife, or a woman's lover becomes friends with her husband – then an erotic triangle forms, the rules vanish, and a new order is instituted. In stories from the Cnn, the Decameron and the Lba, it is in the nexus between *amicitia* and marriage where the complicated politics of erotic triangles develops: linguistic tricks and manipulative manoeuvres are the mainstay of these stories as cuckolds, wives and lovers try to outsmart each other and assert their authority. To delve into this new social order it is essential to understand the medieval context for male friendships and marriage, but equally helpful to such an investigation is the contemporary theoretical corpus that examines these same issues. By integrating the work of anthropologists, philosophers, and literary scholars with the medieval outlook on the erotic triangle we construct a new lens with which to view these subjects and build a vocabulary for discussing the intricacies of the erotic triangle.

In the second half of this section, six theories on male friendship and marriage are considered. Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin, Luce Irigaray, René Girard,

for Valencian women, it does demonstrate that not all women in southern European society were simply pawns in the hands of their husbands and families" (518).

and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have not only examined these topics, but have also built on their predecessors' writing to develop their own ideas on these issues. After these six perspectives are considered, a review of the existing literature on male friendships and the exchange of women in the Cnn, the Decameron and the Lba is possible.

Male Friendship and the Exchange of Women in the 20th Century: Six Perspectives

Setting the Stage: Freud

A discussion of twentieth-century perspectives on the erotic triangle must start with Freud's Oedipus complex. Indeed, this triangle between a mother, her husband and her son has coloured all subsequent anthropological, feminist and literary readings of tripartite relationships. According to Freud, the Oedipal drive does not manifest itself as an overt desire. He notes that "many men dream of having sexual relations with their mothers, and speak of the fact with indignation and astonishment" (1900, v.1, 264). Freud continues that in addition to desiring sexual relations with their mothers, men also dream about the death of their fathers. He maintains that the "story of Oedipus is the reaction of the imagination to these two typical dreams. And just as these dreams, when dreamt by adults, one accompanied by feelings of repulsion, so too the legend must include horror and self-punishment" (1900, v.1, 264). In the XX^{ist} lecture, Freud again addresses the subject of incest and the Oedipus complex and comments on the conflict between men's desires and their repulsion of these triangles (334-5).

This Freudian triangle built on incestuous desires, has entered into common parlance, and although it has been contested, it retains its status as the most well-known triangle of the twentieth century. Still, Freud's triangle stands in contrast to Lévi-Strauss' conception of it. As we shall see, Lévi-Strauss observed triangles predicated on economic exchange and the need for

reproduction which necessitated a strict avoidance of incest. Although it may seem at first that the Freudian model is in conflict with Lévi-Strauss', we can instead observe how the two visions work on two separate, but necessary, planes: Levi-Strauss' triangle is a concrete reality that forms between a husband, a wife, and her lover, while Freud's is constructed by the subconscious. Thus, the triangle exists not only as a convenient and necessary economic structure, but also a basic human instinct that Freud would argue, is impossible to suppress.

Kinship and the Exchange of Women: The Anthropology of Lévi-Strauss

Nearly sixty years ago, Claude Lévi-Strauss published his doctoral dissertation, Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté, and then ten years later, Anthropologie structurale. These 1948 and 1958 publications changed the face of anthropological research and set Lévi-Strauss on a path devoted to uncovering how human systems of kinship operate. Since then, Lévi-Strauss' strict structuralist approach has been criticized; however, his writing on the exchange of women was groundbreaking and its influence is still recognized. Although his use of vocabulary and some of his findings are problematic today his work is still necessary for a discussion on contemporary ideas of male friendship and the exchange of women.

In Anthropologie structurale, Lévi-Strauss describes a connection between linguistic and kinship systems. By explaining linguistic systems, he lays out a footprint for other systems including kinship. In short, he uses linguistic theory to understand how humans cultivate connections, both endogamous and exogamous. He maintains that like language, kinship structures are formed by small units which gain meaning when they are considered as part of a system or pattern. In kinship structures, the smallest unit is a pair that might be “une relation de consanguinité, une relation d’alliance, une relation de filiation; autrement dit, une relation de germain à germain, une relation d’époux à épouse, une relation de parent à enfant” (56). Like

individual words which require a context in order to form meaning within a system, kinship pairs also rely on contextualization. For instance, before a woman can become a wife, she must first leave her position in another pair where she might be a man's sister or a daughter. Therefore, we can observe how the kinship system grows out of its smallest unit – brother/sister, or father/daughter – to include a secondary unit of husband/wife. Based on this model, a kinship system grows exponentially, as daughters and sisters are given to men outside the family unit. One essential component of this model of kinship is the economic factor, where women are used as objects to be exchanged between men. Within this economic system, women are only one of many objects that can be exchanged. “L'échange,” writes Lévi-Strauss, is a “phénomène total,” comprising the exchange of “la nourriture, des objets fabriqués, et cette catégorie de biens les plus précieux, les femmes” (Les structures élémentaires 77). However, unlike goods such as food or crafts, the exchange of women is not equal: one tribe or family does not necessarily receive a new woman in exchange for the one they gave away. Lévi-Strauss considered this inequality in Anthropologie structurale, and nuanced his earlier argument to include this observation:

Or, l'hypothèse initiale a été confirmée par la démonstration – obtenue – de façon purement déductif – que tous les mécanismes de réciprocité connus de l'anthropologie classique (c'est-à-dire ceux fondés sur l'organisation dualiste et le mariage par échange entre des partenaires au nombre de 2, ou d'un multiple de 2) constituent des cas particuliers d'une forme de réciprocité plus générale, entre un nombre quelconque de partenaires. Cette forme générale de réciprocité était restée dans l'ombre, parce que les partenaires ne se donnent pas les uns aux autres (et ne reçoivent pas les uns des autres) : **on ne reçoit pas de celui à qui l'on donne ; on ne donne pas à celui de qui l'on reçoit**. Chacun donne à un

partenaire et reçoit d'une autre, au sein d'un cycle de réciprocité qui fonctionne dans un seul sens. (68-9) (emphasis added)

According to Lévi-Strauss, within this binary system that thrives on exchange, the exchange of women works cyclically, not as a simple give-and-take. In other words, Lévi-Strauss notes that a man who 'takes' a woman is not required to 'give' a different woman in return; rather, it is expected that he will 'pass' a kinswoman to another tribe.²⁷ Lévi-Strauss' conclusions mirror the decrees of the medieval church: it is important to avoid endogamous relationships and necessary to instead lay out measures that will encourage the mixing of bloodlines.

By identifying the common preoccupation of consanguinity across cultures and epochs, we can begin to understand how one set of 'tools' for understanding one culture can be applied to another. In fact, Lévi-Strauss began this project himself, for although he primarily discusses the exchange of women in 'primitive' cultures, in Les Structures élémentaires he notes that in 'advanced' cultures, women are still considered the most valuable good to be exchanged. He writes that in both 'primitive' and 'advanced' civilizations:

les mariages par achat est une institution spéciale, seulement par sa forme; en réalité, elle n'est qu'une modalité de ce système fondamental analysé par Mauss²⁸, selon lequel, dans la société primitive, et, partiellement encore, dans la

²⁷ A very good example of this cycle in medieval literature is the story of Athis and Prophilius found in a variety of forms, including as an exemplum in Petrus Alfonsi's Disciplina Clericalis and then later retold by Boccaccio in Decameron X.8. In the Latin version, Athis' family arranges for him to marry Cardiones, but when Athis discovers that his best friend, Prophilius, loves the same woman, he arranges for him to sleep with her on his wedding night. When Prophilius sleeps with Cardiones he considers himself married to her. After much debate and more adventures, Athis is eventually given Prophilius' sister, Gaïte, in marriage. In turn, the king who was supposed to marry Gaïte, declares war on Prophilius' family when he discovers his future wife is married. To appease the king and stop the threat of war, Athis' sister is given to the king instead (Jill Mann 100-103). In this story, the men do not exchange kinswomen in a dual relationship; rather, the women are each passed from one man to another, thus ensuring the continuation of exogamous relationships as well as sealing the friendships between men. This story indicates how valuable women are for safeguarding male friendships and even creating peace between warring men.

²⁸ Lévi-Strauss refers here to his predecessor's Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques (1923-24). In this short text, Mauss examines how gifts function in a variety of cultures including

nôtre, les droits, les biens et les personnes circulent au sein du groupe selon un mécanisme continuuel de prestations et de contre-prestations. (74)

Lévi-Strauss continues by explaining that the omnipresent circulation of women forges necessary alliances between men to the extent that,

une transition continue existe, de la guerre aux échanges, et des échanges aux inter-mariages; et l'échange des fiancées n'est que le terme d'un processus ininterrompu de dons réciproques, qui accomplit le passage de l'hostilité à l'alliance, de l'angoisse à la confiance, de la peur à l'amitié. (79)

The results of the exchange of women that Lévi-Strauss observes should be familiar to a western reader: hostilities and fears have been assuaged through intermarriage repeatedly in history.

From this historical observation, we see that women are exchanged for the same reasons in the cultures called 'primitive' and 'advanced' by Lévi-Strauss.

History aside, Lévi-Strauss is concerned with presenting an impartial explanation of the systems of exchange, and as such, he represents an image of women as silent and pliant who move between clans as easily as do oxen or goats. Despite Lévi-Strauss' attempt at impartiality, as twenty-first-century readers, we are painfully aware of the anthropologist's own white, masculine and authoritarian prose, which simultaneously reinforces the power asymmetry described in these patriarchal systems and silences the female voice. Nonetheless, in a rare moment in his later work, Lévi-Strauss comments on, but unfortunately does not expand upon, the potential for female autonomy within the system of exchange. Language, he writes, elevates

Polynesia, Samoa, the American west coast, and in Celtic, Germanic and Chinese law. The principal question Mauss asks in this study is: "Quelle est la règle de droit et d'intérêt, qui dans les sociétés de type arriérés ou archaïques, fait que le présent reçu est obligatoirement rendu? Quelle force y a-t-il dans la chose qu'on donne qui fait que la donataire la rend?" (7).

women from the mere symbols or tokens exchanged between men (Les Structures élémentaires 60).

Moving from a description of how the kinship unit of husband and wife is formed, Lévi-Strauss briefly addresses what happens when one person is added to that basic unit: in other words, how a triangle forms. Because of women's importance to a tribe's or a family's economic viability, the social group has a vested interest in the terms of her marriage. Thus, when a woman is exchanged, the group always adopts the role of a third party within the marriage bond. Within this triangle, Lévi-Strauss asserts that the group "affirme que la relation qui rend le mariage possible doit être sociale – c'est-à-dire définie dans les termes du groupe – et non pas naturelle – avec toutes les conséquences, incompatibles avec la vie collective..." (Les Structures élémentaires 50). Part of the social considerations in this triangle is that the married couple adhere to the rules of exogamy and endogamy, in particular, the incest taboo. When the group has a stake in the marriage it can prevent incest from taking place and help to ensure its healthy perpetuation. Lévi-Strauss also refers to the potential for another triangle: when another man rivals the husband's position. According to Lévi-Strauss, the husband's rival in this kind of triangle: "affirme qu'il possédait un droit d'accès égal à celui du conjoint, droit dont les conditions dans lesquelles se fait l'union doivent établir qu'il a été respecté..." (Les Structures élémentaires 50). So long as the husband's rival is not committing incest, the threat of a third party is always permitted within a marital relationship. However, Lévi-Strauss does not go into detail about the husband's potential rival. Moreover, although he admits that rivalry between men is a possibility, he does not consider the ramifications of the rivalry. In other words, Lévi-Strauss neither questions the future of the heterosexual union, nor the relationship between men. But I maintain that if such a force intervenes in the husband/wife unit, then the formerly (presumably) strong union would fall apart. This destabilized triangle is essential to my study.

While the work of Lévi-Strauss and others has helped us to conceptualize how (male) power forms unions between men via women, illustrating both potentially disruptive external sources and social preoccupations with incest, few have enquired how male-held power might be subverted, changed or even destroyed.

Questions of male power and unstable unions were not raised at the time that Lévi-Strauss published Les Structure élémentaires. In fact, early feminists, including Simone de Beauvoir applauded Lévi-Strauss' observations about 'primitive' women. In her 1949 review of Lévi-Strauss' book, Beauvoir praises Lévi-Strauss' "rigoureuse objectivité scientifique" and his observations on the exchange of women (949). Beauvoir interprets the reasons for the exchange of women as positive, commenting that women are essential to cementing relationships between men. She does note, however, that this system of exchange is inevitable and eternal, writing that between the sexes, there has always been "une profonde asymétrie et la 'Règne des femmes' est un mythe périmé ... Tous les systèmes matrimoniaux impliquent que les femmes sont données par certains mâles à d'autres mâles" (945). Nevertheless, Beauvoir maintains that the exchange of women is favourable because it is structured in such a way that kinship relations will be exogamous, thus ensuring that the rules regarding incest are upheld, and kinship structures maintain a stable economy of exchange.

Feminist Anthropology and the Exchange of Women: Gayle Rubin

Although Simone de Beauvoir praised Lévi-Strauss' pioneering work in observing how women are exchanged, feminists of later generations have taken issue with his patriarchal perspective. Indeed, while his discussion of how women function within systems of exchange was ground-breaking, his silence on women and agency is striking. Twenty-five years after Lévi-Strauss' Les Structures élémentaires, Gayle Rubin used the debate on the sex/gender

division to re-examine how women are exchanged. In her revolutionary article, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy of Sex,’” Rubin undertook a rereading of Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Marx and Mauss. Building on Lévi-Strauss’ and Freud’s separation and isolation of sex and gender from modes of production, Rubin challenges the sexism that she observes permeating the sex/gender systems. Highlighting the deeply ingrained sexism in European civilizations, Rubin argues that the “ethnographic record is littered with practices whose effect is to keep women ‘in their place’ – men’s cults, secret initiations, arcane male knowledge, etc...” (163). Such comments aside, even Rubin’s title challenges the forefather’s hegemony and control over women: by choosing the word ‘traffic,’ Rubin foregrounds the negative implications of women-as-objects in a way that Lévi-Strauss’ term ‘exchange’ cannot. Starting from Rubin’s title, it becomes apparent that she was attempting to construct a new paradigm in which to discuss how women figure within a patriarchal economy.

Within Rubin’s new model, she concedes that, while Freud and Lévi-Strauss acknowledged the sex/gender system that permeates most cultures, Marx’s concept of modes of production is deeply flawed because it discounts the importance of sex and gender roles (160). She insists that including the sex/gender system in a discussion of the traffic of women is essential because to disregard it would mean ignoring the value of housework. This is an undervalued form of labour that takes purchased commodities such as firewood and food, and works on them again in order to produce a consumable object. This work, done by women, represents a surplus of labour because the women who perform these tasks are not compensated or recognized for their efforts (162).

According to Rubin, the sex/gender system is determined by social intervention and convention. She defines the sex/gender system using similar terms to the kinship structure observed by Lévi-Straus, writing it is:

the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied. (159)

Like Lévi-Strauss, Rubin sees an ‘arrangement’ where women become commodities that move between men. Quoting Lévi-Strauss, she reiterates that women are the most precious gift because they enable the formation of kinship (173). From this observation, Rubin concludes that the relationship of gift-giving casts the woman as “a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it” (174). Although both Rubin and Lévi-Strauss both agree on the basic terms of exchange, they use their common information for different points of departure. While Lévi-Strauss did not postulate on whether women are cognizant of their role within a patriarchal system of exchange, Rubin bleakly concludes that women are both unable to change their status and are unaware of their status as gifts. In fact, she writes that the relationships that form from an exchange create a critical difference between gift and gift-giver:

If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges... (174)

As this quotation demonstrates, Rubin departs drastically from Lévi-Strauss when she names, even accuses, the patriarchal system that permits the exchange of women. Interestingly, Rubin’s comment also foregrounds the exclusive male relationship that results from exchanging women, although in Rubin’s formulation, this is a secondary feature that develops out of the objectification of women.

In reading Rubin's remark we become aware of the vast theoretical changes in anthropology in less than two decades: Lévi-Strauss, writing in the 1950s, believes he is impartially observing cultural phenomena; whereas Rubin, a woman in the 1970s, uses her writing as a means of articulating her struggle against a patriarchal tradition subscribed to by Lévi-Strauss.²⁹ While this theoretical chasm between Lévi-Strauss and Rubin is not surprising, it is critical, because it casts the exchange of women in an entirely new light. Within Rubin's feminist context, Lévi-Strauss' quasi-scientific mould of cold classification of kinship admired by Beauvoir develops into another form of enquiry where women's oppression becomes even more glaring as their "gender identity" and their sexuality are conflated into one category (168). Rubin expands on Lévi-Strauss' hypothesis that women are used as a means of solidifying a relationship between men, families or tribes, to consider also women's gendered and sexual lives. Through this shift, Rubin reconfigures Lévi-Strauss' structuralist and quasi-scientific observations on the exchange of women to make a bold theoretical and political statement. In fact, Rubin's article exemplifies the new anti-structuralist and feminist theoretical paradigms that were spreading across intellectual circles in the 1970s, where scholars began to pay attention to how women were constructed and objectified in the collective conscious. Indeed, a year before Rubin's article, Juliet Mitchell published her seminal Psychoanalysis and Feminism which used Lacan to reread Freud, thus destabilizing Freud at the head of the patriarchal order and positing a feminist approach to psychoanalysis. The same year that Rubin published her article, Laura Mulvey wrote her groundbreaking study "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which problematized how men, and women, look at women in film. Thus, at the time that

²⁹ It is important to note that feminists after Rubin will in turn criticize scholars such as Rubin for presuming to understand the tribulations of women who are not white and western. See, for example, Gayatri Spivak "French Feminism in an International Frame." In Other Worlds (New York: Routledge, 1988).

Rubin wrote her piece she was undeniably at the forefront of a discipline that was producing studies questioning patriarchy and arguing for women's agency.

In spite of the probable sense of empowerment that came with these watershed times, Rubin does not give her own work the credit it deserves. Indeed, by concluding that women “are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation,” Rubin undermines her position, for as a woman writing about the exchange of women she was already effecting change in the system.³⁰ And while I subscribe to Rubin's strong thesis on how women operate in a system of patriarchal exchange, I dispute her conclusion. In fact, in the *Cnn*, the *Decameron*, and the *Lba*, certain women who are part of an erotic triangle, *do* in fact understand the “benefits of their circulation” and even manipulate the situation to their advantage. Of course, although few women, even fictional ones, succeed in controlling how they are exchanged, there are those who prove both Lévi-Strauss and Rubin wrong, and show that some women are aware of their commodification and are capable of entering into a masculine economy. While reading medieval stories through the lens of Lévi-Strauss and Rubin benefits from hindsight, this methodology also gives us new opportunities to understand how some women were able to manipulate the patriarchal system of exchange

Feminist Literature and the Exchange of Women: Luce Irigaray

Rubin's contemporary, Luce Irigaray, does not observe women's agency within the patriarchal system of exchange either. In an essay written in the same year as Rubin's, Irigaray wrote that women can only function “comme possibilité de médiation, de transaction, de

³⁰ As a well-educated and privileged woman writing in the 1970s, Rubin is different from the women she writes about who primarily function as gifts to be exchanged between men. Therefore, there is not a straight line that links Rubin's discussion of the exchange of women to her own emancipation from the system. However, the very act of writing could still change the system: by entering the masculine discourse to address the treatment of women, Rubin asserts her independence in another patriarchal context (the Academy) while at the same time bringing attention to the oppression of women in another institution (marriage).

transition, de transfert entre l'homme et son semblable" (190). However, Irigaray's conclusions did not stop her from decrying the submissiveness of women more forcefully than Rubin, and in an essay written three years later in 1978, Irigaray revisited the issue of the exchange of women and even went as far as to envision a society built on a different economic model than the traditional system of exchange. From the very beginning of "Le Marché des femmes," two feminist agendas are immediately apparent. First, she is intent on alienating Lévi-Strauss from his work as much as possible. She does this by directly responding to Les Structures élémentaires but only naming Lévi-Strauss in a citation and otherwise calling him "l'anthropologue." Second, Irigaray shifts the focus of Lévi-Strauss' work from 'primitive' cultures to include Western European civilization. Through this gesture Irigaray undermines Lévi-Strauss' scientific distance praised by Beauvoir by widening her scope to include anecdotal evidence from Western Europe. In turn, this shift implicates him, his milieu, and his patriarchal community and ancestry, in the business of exchanging women.

In addition to criticizing Lévi-Strauss, Irigaray also peppers her essay with questions and observations that are antithetical to Lévi-Strauss' scientific method.³¹ Among the myriad questions Irigaray poses, is whether women, like men, also tend toward polygamy. "Questions," writes Irigaray, "qui ne se posent pas à l'honnête anthropologue" (167). Irigaray also asks *the* question a feminist is likely to raise when discussing the exchange of women, and provides her own answer:

A fortiori: pourquoi les hommes ne sont-ils pas objets d'échange entre les femmes ? C'est que les corps des femmes assurent – de leur usage, de leur consommation, de leur circulation – la condition de possibilité de la socialité et

³¹ Some of the discrepancy between the two positions is due to the tension between Lévi-Strauss' anthropological methodology and Irigaray's philosophical approach.

de la culture mais qu'ils restent une 'infrastructure' méconnue de leur élaboration. L'exploitation de la matière sexuée, la femme est si constitutive de notre horizon socio-culturel qu'elle ne peut trouver son interprétation à l'intérieur de celui-ci. (167-8)

The endless loop of exchange that Irigaray foresees is not too different from the glum picture painted by Rubin three years earlier. Both women construct women's bodies as the makers (Irigaray calls women the (re)producers) of culture and economy. Where Irigaray differs from Rubin is in her vision of the body. While Rubin only considers it in its physical state – as an object of exchange or an object that produces – Irigaray also sees its symbolic meaning.

Irigaray remarks on the woman's commodified body, writing,

La merchandise – la femme – est divisée en deux 'corps' irréconciliables: son corps 'naturel', et son corps valeureux socialement, échangeable: expression (notamment mimétique) de valeurs masculines. (176)

This argument reconfigures the meaning of the body and conceptualizes it as a tangible object to be touched and eroticized, and as a sign of the anti-phallus. For Irigaray, woman's role as the symbolic 'non-phallus' is offensive not only because of the lack it symbolizes, but also because women do not even realize the symbolic significance of their bodies, thus they are unable to take control of their bodies/means of production. She continues:

Les femmes, animaux doués de parole comme les hommes, vont assurer la possibilité de l'usage et de la circulation du symbolique sans y être pour autant partie prenante. C'est le non-accès, pour elles, au symbolique qui établit l'ordre social. Mettant en rapport, en relations, les hommes entre eux, les femmes ne réalisent cette fonction qu'en y abandonnant leur droit à la parole et, d'ailleurs, à l'animalité. (184)

Most importantly, this statement undermines Lévi-Strauss' argument that language raises women from the status of mere tokens or symbols. At the same time, this comment also reinforces Rubin's concern that women are unable to recognize their value, but reconceptualizes this problem on a symbolic level. Furthermore, like Rubin, Irigaray also fails to see any future female emancipation either from the system of exchange, or from the patriarchal stronghold on the academy that comments on the exchange. Nonetheless, in a conclusion more akin to a call to arms than a scientific commentary, Irigaray ends her piece by envisioning a society not based on the exchange of women, but based instead on a new social order, "à la nature, à la matière, au corps, au langage, au désir" (185).

It is true that the Middle Ages did not in any way epitomize the utopic alternative envisioned by Irigaray; however, by reading literature while being mindful of systems of exchange, we can identify ways that women can alter the balance of power and even control the exchange of their bodies despite the overwhelming presence of male power and friendship.

'Triangular Desire': Girard

René Girard also sees the erotic triangle as an inevitable structure in human relations and examines how it is manifested in literature. Through a comparative analysis of a broad range of writers including Cervantes, Flaubert, Proust, Stendhal, and Dostoyevsky, Girard uncovers the complexities of triangular desire – what he calls 'mimetic desire.' To explain this term, Girard starts with a brief description of 'simple desire' writing that a straight line connects the subject to the object. In contrast, in mimetic desire, a mediator influences how and who the subject will long for. He writes that above that line, there is the mediator "qui rayonne à la fois vers le sujet et vers l'objet." He continues, "la métaphore spatiale qui exprime cette triple relation est évidemment le triangle. L'objet change avec chaque aventure mais le triangle demeure" (12).

To illustrate this, Girard turns to Don Quixote, where the mediator, Amadís, influences how Don Quixote will long for and woo his various objects of desire.³² Girard writes that the chivalric passion that inflames Don Quixote is defined “*selon l’Autre* [Amadis] qui s’oppose au désir *selon Soi* ... Don Quichotte et Sancho empruntent à l’Autre leurs désirs en un mouvement si fondamental, si original, qu’ils le confondent parfaitement avec la volonté d’être *Soi*” (13). Emma Bovary is another figure who appropriates desire from an external source and directs it to an object of desire. According to Girard, triangular desire is apparent in Madame Bovary when the romantic heroines of Emma’s novels influence who and how she desires, thus mediating between her and her lovers. As the examples of Don Quixote and Madame Bovary show, the mediator does not have to be physically present: when the ‘spheres’ of the mediator and the subject do not connect then external mediation takes place. In contrast, there are also triangles that involve internal mediation so that the sphere of the mediator penetrates the sphere of the subject (18).

Rivalry – which might result when a triangle is formed – might occur with either internal or external mediators. So long as the mediator and the subject desire the same object, or a similar-like object, then rivalry can develop (16). In the cases of internal mediations where there is the potential that rivalry might take place between the mediator and the subject, Girard writes that the subject creates obstacles for himself by revealing the object of his desire. Instead, wise subjects should hide their desire,

Si le sujet désirant cède à l’élán qui l’entraîne vers l’objet, s’il offre son désir en spectacle à l’autrui, il se crée, à chaque pas, des obstacles nouveaux et il renforce

³² Responding to the problem that Amadis does not exist, Girard writes, “Amadis, dira-t-on, est un personnage fabuleux. Sans doute, mais la fable n’a pas Don Quichotte pour auteur. Le médiateur est imaginaire, la médiation ne l’est pas. Derrière les désirs du héros, il y a bien la suggestion d’un tiers, l’inventeur Amadis, l’auteur des romans de chevalerie” (13).

les obstacles existants. Le secret de la réussite, en affaires comme en amour est la dissimulation. Il faut dissimuler le désir qu'on éprouve, il faut simuler le désir qu'on n'éprouve pas. Il faut mentir. (112)

The situation that Girard describes above, of the potential for rivalry between an internal mediator and the subject, bears the most resemblance to the triangular situations in the Cnn, Decameron and Libro de buen amor. In the tales involving erotic triangles in all three works, the spheres of subject and mediator interconnect as they both desire the same woman. Furthermore, what often drives the stories and creates the intrigue is when the lover/mediator does not effectively hide his desire for his rival's wife, thus creating the possibility of the husband discovering his marriage has been compromised. Indeed, dissimulation is a significant component in many of the stories.

While the subject actively desires the object, and the mediator exerts an omnipresent influence over the subject, the object of desire occupies a passive role. For Girard, the subject and the mediator desire, but the object of desire reflects back that desire onto its bestowers. Girard writes that the greater the mediator's specification on what should be the object of desire, the greater the subject desires the object: because Amadis does not specifically indicate any particular object of desire, Don Quixote moves blithely forward, switching his objects of desire (90). In contrast, Emma Bovary has a much clearer notion of what her object of desire ought to be, and with that clarity, the "vertu métaphysique" of the object increases, making the object "irremplaçable" (90).

Once the object is attained, even if there is sexual pleasure, Girard writes that there is a metaphysical disappointment,

Le sujet constate que la possession de l'objet n'a pas changé son être; la métamorphose attendue ne s'est pas réalisée. La déception est d'autant plus

terrible que la 'vertue' de l'objet semble plus abondante. La déception s'aggrave, par conséquent, à mesure que le médiateur se rapproche du héros. (94)

After this disappointment, the subject realizes that he was wrong about his object, and rather than being disillusioned with the game of desiring he moves on to another object to desire (94-5). In this scenario of desiring, attaining, and rejecting an object, the object remains a silent component of the triangle. Although in the previous constructions of the triangle, such as the one outlined by Lévi-Strauss, ignoring the object of desire (which was always a woman) indicated an insensitivity to the complexities and politics of the erotic triangle so that the men's roles are highlighted and the women are relegated to a form of chattel, the same is not the case in Girard's formulation. Here, the object of desire might be a man, woman or even an object, but the primary relationship – the one that determines and drives the triangle – is between the subject and mediator. In contrast, in the erotic triangles discussed by Lévi-Strauss, Rubin and Irigaray, the marital bond determines that there is an equally important relationship between the subject and the object as there is between the subject and the mediator. Furthermore, the mediator occupies a less exalted position than the mediator in Girard's examples. In the latter cases, the mediator is usually the subject's equal, exchange partner and/or rival. In the former, he is a third party who determines who, or what, the object of desire should be and then rivals the subject for its attainability. This relationship between subject and mediator is further differentiated in Girard because there is not the same concept of friendship between the two: in Girard's examples, while the subject may esteem or even love the mediator and enter into rivalry with him, there is not the potential for friendship or exchange as there is in the other triangles. In fact, it is the idea of exchange that marks the greatest difference between Girard's and the other triangles. In Girard's conception of the triangle, the object is *not* exchanged between two parties: it is something to be desired but it does not have economic value. All

these differences vastly change the parameters of the triangle, making Girard's triangle more closely resemble Freud's than Lévi-Strauss'. In the Oedipal triangle, the subject desires an object determined by a mediator and the two men then rival each other for the object's attention. In addition, in both triangles the object is not exchanged between the subject and mediator.

Girard's conception of mimetic desire has been harshly criticized by some feminists as overtly masculine because it only focuses on male desire, obliterates the 'mother' role found in Freud's triangle, and therefore whitewashes even the possibility of female desire. Toril Moi argues that,

in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* it would seem that for Girard the desiring subject is always male, and that so is the rival, whereas (tien!) the object is female.

Throughout Girard's work this male-male-female constellation recurs as an absolute, ahistorical structure ... Girard claims that only the truly great novelists (Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, Dostoevski) have discovered and understood the true nature of desire, that is to say, that all desire is mimetic and mediated ... It is evident that for Girard, women have not produced many great texts. ("The Missing Mother" 23)

Girard's dismissal of female desire is directly linked to his relationship with Freud's Oedipus triangle. Moi asserts that Girard eliminates the possibility that women are subjects by denying the important role they play in the Oedipus triangle:

Girard here actually seems to be *proud* of having shown that the mother (the woman) cannot possibly be desired for 'herself.' Her whole value resides in her status as an object for the father. This, of course, is the logical implication of Girard's triangular theory. Both in *Des choses cachées* [cf. p. 375] and in his

chapter on Freud and the Oedipus complex in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard rejects the suggestion that the child should desire the mother. (27)

It is true that Girard uses Freud's Oedipus triangle to forge his own conception of desire, and in so doing he entirely ignores the question of female desire; however Moi's criticism of Girard simultaneously lends impartial support for Freud's Oedipus triangle – a position that although influential and groundbreaking, is still flawed.

Despite the problems in Girard's argument, Sarah Kay has found the concept of mimetic desire useful for her interpretation of masculine desire and femininity in the *chanson de geste* and courtly literature. She compares how women are desired by men in these two genres, writing that there is often a 'dédoublement' in representations of femininity: in courtly literature two women are paired together, the virtuous women against the seductress, and in the *chanson de geste* there is confusion between a woman's behavior and people's perception of her honour (224).³³ To explore how masculine desire works in relation to *dédoublement*, Kay writes,³⁴

Selon Girard, seul est désirable ce qui est déjà désiré; ce que l'on désire, c'est moins l'objet prétendu de ce désir que son modèle; le désir est toujours relayé par un autre désirant, un autre semblable à soi. Au moyen âge, Girard verrait le désir mimétique dans les formules de la rhétorique courtoise comme: 'tout le monde la

³³ Kay explains her examples for courtly literature writing: "je pense par exemple à Guinièvre à côté de la fée dans *Lanval* ; à la duchesse de Bougogne à côté de la dame de Fayel dans *li Romans du castelain de Couci* ; à la reine à côté de Silence dans *Le Roman de Silence*" (224). Examples from *chanson de geste* are taken from the *Cycle de la Gageure* (see Gaston Paris, "Le Cycle de la gageure" *Romania* 32 (1903): 481-551 for a full explanation of these texts) where "deux hommes parient que si le premier arrive à séduire la conjointe du second il aura gagné, non pas la femme, mais le territoire de ce dernier. La séduction échoue, mais le séducteur obtient de fausses preuves de son succès, la femme ou l'amie est répudiée, et ce n'est qu'après de longues péripéties que son innocence est établie, le menteur puni, et la terre restaurée" (226).

³⁴ Kay also reads Girard's *To Double Business Bound. Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology*, for an explanation of doubles. To explain this position, she briefly cites Girard where he writes that "Desire ... has no original or privileged object ... Desire chooses its objects through the mediation of a model" (39) and "Doubles are the final result and truth of mimetic desire" (41).

reconnaît comme la plus belle’; ‘elle est sans conteste la meilleure et la plus sage de toutes’. ... Le désir mimétique peut osciller entre la rivalité et l’identification ; mais dans les romans du cycle de la gageure, la rivalité, versée du côté du traître, s’avère uniquement matérielle, car le méchant n’a jamais ni aimé ni séduit la femme; il n’a fait que désirer le territoire qui faisait le statut social de son compagnon. (228)

Kay recognizes the problems inherent in Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, but nonetheless appropriates aspects of his theory to compare aspects of desire and sexuality between two seemingly diverse genres.³⁵ Although Girard ignores the pertinent question of female desire, his formulation of mimetic desire offers yet another explanation for how triangles might develop. As we have already seen, Lévi-Strauss’ triangles are concrete: either, a real woman is exchanged between two men; or, a married woman is desired by her husband’s rival. For Freud, triangles exist on the subconscious level where a son tries to rival his father for his mother’s love. In this third formulation under Girard, a mediator influences how the subject will desire the object. Yet another variation is proposed by the feminist literary scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: by appropriating and critiquing the triangles discussed by Freud and Girard, Sedgwick inserts her own reading of these relationships through the lens of ‘homosocial desire’.

‘Homosocial Desire’: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Exactly ten years after Rubin’s and Irigaray’s writing on women’s position in the erotic triangle, Sedgwick, like Girard, turned her attention to the men in the triangle. Sedgwick

³⁵ Kay writes, “La réaction féministe à la pensée de René Girard a été diverse ... quelques-unes l’ont trouvée utile pour expliquer le mécanisme de certains textes, et c’est dans cet esprit que je m’en suis servie moi-même à propos du roman courtois. Mais beaucoup ont pourtant refusé d’accepter les prétentions totalisantes de Girard, qui voit dans sa théorie une explication universelle de tout désir” (233).

maintained that men form an exclusive relationship within the confines of this tripartite relationship. Sedgwick's work is notable for myriad reasons, not least because she is interested in how men, not women, are able to disrupt the system of exchange from within. In other words, unlike Rubin and Irigaray who concentrate on women's oppression within the system of exchange, Sedgwick examines how men undermine the systems they perpetuate. Despite her different perspective, the basic terms of the argument on the exchange of women have not changed, and at one point Sedgwick nearly paraphrases Rubin's idea of the role of women in male-dominated erotic triangles:

It has been clear that women had a kind of ultimate importance in the schema of men's gender constitution – representing an absolute of exchange value, of representation itself, and also being the ultimate victims of the painful contradictions in the gender system that regulates men. (134)

Although Sedgwick's appropriations of Lévi-Strauss and Rubin demonstrate that she agrees in essence that women represent an "absolute exchange value," her enquiry, like Irigaray's, is philosophical, and therefore also moves away from classificatory and scientific methodology embraced by the anthropologists. In particular, her study focuses on desire and love, constructs which did not concern Rubin or even entered Lévi-Strauss' discussion. Indeed, while Rubin's project was more concerned with highlighting women's lack of agency, Sedgwick relegates women to the sidelines again, unquestioningly positioning them as objects of exchange, and then focuses on men and the subtleties of their relationships.

To preface her discussion of the erotic triangle, Sedgwick, like Lévi-Strauss, first considers the smallest unit: the relationship between two people. But she focuses on a different aspect of the male-male relationships than Lévi-Strauss. For Sedgwick, these are feeling and desiring men whose considerations for their relationships go beyond the preoccupations of

incest/non-incest affiliations. Sedgwick proposes, but does not refer explicitly to, a same-sex relationship that echoes the classical and early medieval concept of *amicitia*: in both definitions, men form exclusive relationships that verge on, but do not become, sexual relations. Thus, while both definitions acknowledge that the two men love and desire each other they distinguish this form of friendship from homosexuality, while at the same time acknowledging the complicated nature of the friendship. As stated earlier, Boswell has also questioned the motivations in classical *amicitia* and its relationship to homosexuality by pointing out the word play between *amicus*, *amans*, and *amor*. Sedgwick, too, is concerned with the slippery nature of this relationship, and investigates the space that develops between friendship and sexual desire. Her motivations for this study are both literary and political, writing,

[This topic's] importance for the practical politics of the gay movement as a minority rights movement is already obvious from the recent history of strategic and philosophical differences between lesbians and gay men. In addition, it is theoretically interesting partly as a way of approaching a larger question of "sexual politics": what does it mean – what difference does it make – when a social or political relationship is sexualized? (5)

By asking these questions, Sedgwick links anthropological with literary concerns on exclusive male friendships: she believes that by observing how male friendships are formed in literature, we can also better understand issues of politics and power in our own society.

To describe her version of male-male friendships, Sedgwick coins the term *homosocial desire*:

'Homosocial desire,' to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. 'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously

formed by analogy with “homosexual,” and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from “homosexual.” (2)

Within the above terms, Sedgwick makes an important distinction between homosocial desire experienced by men and women. She postulates that homosocial desire between men is more akin to “male bonding” (1), whereas for women, she writes about “female connections” (4-5). To explain these differences, she writes that in female friendships there is an uninterrupted continuum that starts with “bonding” on one end, and ends with homosexuality. She points to mother/daughter relationships, sister/sister bonding, and female friendships as strong points on the spectrum that can lead from “women helping women” to lesbianism (2). She maintains that this spectrum does not exist in male relationships where there is a stronger fear of homosexuality: although there should be a continuum between male homosocial desire and male homosexuality similar to the one experienced by women, for men it is more common for these two states to exist as dichotomies.

Despite the potential for an involved discussion on the differences between male and female homosocial desire, Sedgwick follows the tradition of Girard and Freud and concentrates on relationships between men in erotic triangles.³⁶ Sedgwick agrees with both Freud and Girard that the two men in an erotic triangle are conflicted by love and rivalry, but disagrees with their assertion that these triangles are symmetrical, “in the sense that its structure would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the

³⁶ Although Girard concentrates almost exclusively on the relationships between men in erotic triangles, he barely explores the possibility of homosexual relations between the two men. Indeed, the only mention that Girard makes of homosexuality is the following: “Il faut tenter de *comprendre* certaines formes d’homosexualité à partir du désir triangulaire. L’homosexualité proustienne, par exemple, peut se définir comme un glissement vers le médiateur d’une valeur érotique qui reste encore attaché à l’objet dans le don-juanisme ‘normal’. Ce glissement n’est pas, *a priori*, impossible, il est même vraisemblable dans les stades aigues de la médiation interne que caractérise une prépondérance toujours plus marquée du médiateur et un effacement graduel de l’objet. Certains passages de *L’Eternel mari* révèlent clairement un début déviation érotique vers le rival fascinant” (52-3). This love relationship between the two men is necessarily complicated by the feelings of rivalry that Girard writes often results in such triangular relationships.

gender of one of the participants” (23). She maintains that in fact such relationships are asymmetrical and that:

on the one hand ... there are many and thorough asymmetries between the sexual continuums of women and men, between female and male sexuality and homosociality, and most pointedly between homosocial and heterosocial object choices for males; and on the other hand ... the status of women, and the whole question of arrangements between genders is deeply and inescapably inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women – even in male homosocial/homosexual relationships. (25)

Sedgwick’s reading of Freud and Girard offers an interesting perspective on the previous interpretations of the erotic triangle, even casting them as reductive and their understanding of men’s and women’s choices for their sexual lives even as naïve.³⁷ However, I do not think that Sedgwick pushes her understanding of asymmetrical triangles far enough and the issue of power and how it is used and exchanged in erotic triangles is not fully examined. It is true that Sedgwick concedes that, where a cuckold is concerned, there is necessarily a hierarchy of power between the two men so the lover is ‘active’ and the cuckold is ‘passive.’ She writes that this power discrepancy is usually made manifest through a difference in knowledge where the husband does not know that he has been cuckolded (50). But like others before her, Sedgwick underestimates women’s potential for playing with and appropriating power within the system of exchange and the erotic triangle.

The denial of, or disregard for, women’s potential to disrupt male power and the system of exchange is common to all the theories on erotic triangles discussed above. However, I

³⁷ To further support this interpretation, Sedgwick cites Moi’s 1982 criticism of Girard’s mimetic desire and its noticeable absence of female desire (220n23).

contend that in addition to asymmetries that Sedgwick highlights, in the erotic triangles in the Cnn, the Decameron, and the Lba, there is also often an asymmetry in the balance of power, which can favour both men, one man, or even be manipulated by the lone woman. Furthermore, in erotic triangles between two women and one man, the women can be just as likely to control the situation as the single man. Part of the difficulty in detecting this imbalance of power is the deceptive shape of the triangle: while its balanced shape suggests equilibrium, and even equality between two sides, the *erotic* triangle is a paradox, where shifts in power and desire continually upset the structure's desire for balance.³⁸ I therefore propose that the erotic triangle can be *destabilized*, where through clever uses of language, irony, or tricks, all three members of the erotic triangle have the potential to undermine a universal mathematical truth.

In the second, third and fourth chapters I examine the destabilized triangle, exploring in detail examples from each text where erotic triangles are damaged even when male homosocial friendships are formed and maintained. In the remainder of this chapter I review secondary sources on the Cnn, the Decameron, and the Lba, and comment on what other scholars have written about homosocial desire, *amicitia* and erotic triangles.

Part II: Reading *Amicitia* and Male Homosocial Desire in Medieval Texts

Sedgwick and Medieval Literature

Following Between Men, no other theoretical model has been proposed to either counter, or elaborate upon, how male friendships function within the context of erotic triangles.

However, some scholars have selected certain attributes of the theories of Girard and Sedgwick to apply to their own readings of specific works from the classical period onward. Indeed, while

³⁸ Girard writes that in triangular desire, the mediator is connected to the object of desire with the same intensity that the subject is connected to it. Therefore, the kind of triangle that forms in triangular desire is an isosceles triangle (83) – a triangle that in mathematics, is symmetrical, but in literature, might not be.

Sedgwick's homosocial desire has largely gone unchallenged, some of what she proposed has been nuanced, allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.³⁹ Daniel Juan Gil's reading of the poetry of the sixteenth-century Thomas Wyatt, for instance, has been influenced in part by Sedgwick's writing on homosocial desire. Gil begins by simply summarizing Sedgwick's argument commenting: "Sedgwick points to the way prestigious relationships between men are mediated by women ... The concept of homosocial desire captures how sexuality can inhabit the very heart of relationships between men that are not specifically designated as sexual" (861). He continues that Sedgwick's methodology "has pointed to the unsettled and unsettling ability of sexuality to slip in and out of the central nodes of early modern society." Using this foundation laid out by Sedgwick as his starting point, Gil then proposes his own approach to reading sexuality in the early modern era. He contends that sexuality at this earlier time can be perceived as

as a social node of its own, one which stands at a tangent to the other nodes of social life. Neither social nor antisocial, sexuality will come to seem asocial insofar as it constitutes a place apart where powerful connections spring up between people who have in some important ways dropped out of the functional dimensions of early modern society. (862)

³⁹ I am grateful to Simon Gaunt for his comments on my own approach to Sedgwick: after I presented the paper "Men Who are Friends and the Women who Deceive Them: Cross-Gender Communication in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles," at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference: Seeing Gender, King's College London, January 2002, Gaunt disputed Sedgwick's argument that male homosocial/homosexual tendencies do not exist on an interrupted spectrum. He argued for nuancing Sedgwick's binary and putting male relationships on a similar spectrum to the one enjoyed by female relationships – a perspective that has become increasingly accepted since the publication of Between Men. I agree with Gaunt and think that it is important to consider that all homosocial relationships can be more or less intense or more or less sexualized. Of course, because of this ambiguity, it makes it more difficult to pinpoint where the homosexual side of a relationship begins and where the homosocial side ends. Therefore, even when we use this term within a well-defined context, we must still bear in mind that terms such as 'homosocial' will always be subjective.

According to Gil, one kind of connection that can ‘spring up’ between two men is a homosocial bond that is predicated on relieving the pain caused by a tortuous relationship with a woman. Although he does not state this explicitly, in Gil’s reading of homosocial desire in Wyatt’s poetry, the woman is less an object of desire and more commonly a source of anxiety, pushing men together to commiserate and possibly even begin to desire each other. In this reading of Wyatt’s poetry, Gil successfully nuances the model set by Sedgwick and proposes another variation on the erotic triangle that is sensitive to the social preoccupations and anxieties in the sixteenth century.

Richard King has also availed himself of Sedgwick’s homosocial desire in his reading of Ovid’s Fasti. King writes that he will “adapt Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of male homosocial desire in English literature, which combines René Girard’s theory of ‘mimetic desire’ (or ‘mimetic rivalry’) with Gayle Rubin’s observation that males in various cultures ‘traffic’ in women to define their manhood relative to each other” (198-9). He maintains that when in exile Ovid was compelled to nurture the male homosocial bonds he had previously enjoyed through another medium: his writing. Ovid positioned his writing as the feminine object of desire to mediate between male poet and male reader. According to King, Ovid created a text with apparent flaws so as to incite the elite male reader to correct it, thereby demonstrating his own manliness or *virtus*” (205). By encouraging his reader to become engaged and involved with the writing, King argues that Ovid built homosocial bonds between himself and his male reader. The feminized, passive, and manipulated text becomes both the object of desire and exchange so that its primary purpose is to strengthen male homosocial relationships. King’s use of Sedgwick to read Ovid is innovative and convincing, and unlike Gil, he uses her theory to explore not only a different model of the erotic triangle but also different motivations for homosocial desire. Of course, in King’s discussion there is no room

for discussion of the object of desire's position in the triangle because it takes the form of an inanimate object.

One critic to adopt Sedgwick's homosocial desire is Edward Joe Jonson. In his dissertation on 'idealized male friendships' in French literature, Johnson examines instances of male friendship within erotic triangles in literature from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment. The examples he chooses are vast and include Ami et Amile, the Prose Lancelot, the Heptaméron, La Princesse de Clèves, and Manon Lescaut. Perhaps because he devotes so much space to contextualizing his many sources, Johnson does not take the time to delve into the theory, and instead summarizes Sedgwick's and Girard's positions on homosocial friendships, applying them directly to his texts. Johnson does not contextualize Sedgwick or Girard, tending to read them at face value and maintaining that "Sedgwick's theory is flexible enough, however, to give fruitful insight into the literature of earlier eras when different paradigms organizing male/male or male/female affectivity prevailed" (14-5). He continues that in "medieval literature, the axes of the emotive triangles might well be desirable men who were the objects of context by both men and women" (14-5). Indeed, as we shall see in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles and the Decameron, there are instances where it is not clear whether the woman is an object of desire or an object to transfer desire between men. Despite these claims, Johnson's approach to Sedgwick does little to nuance her ideas on homosocial relationships.

In contrast to Johnson, another medievalist, Jill Mann, has considered more thoroughly how homosocial relationships fit within a medieval context, addressing both medieval *amicitia* and male homosocial friendships. However, Mann only offers a perfunctory nod to both these traditions and does not follow with a deeper criticism of either. This is most striking when she explains her definition of male homosocial relations: she acknowledges that the term 'homosocial' derives from Sedgwick, but she does not delve into a discussion or a criticism of

the concept (94). Unlike the other studies on homosocial relationships, however, Mann considers the role of the woman in the erotic triangle and takes pains to position her argument within the context of Lévi-Strauss and Rubin even though she favours Sedgwick for her literary analysis over the anthropologists (although Sedgwick herself blurred the lines between anthropology and literature). This issue aside, Mann's article remains the only work I have come across that considers Sedgwick's homosocial desire in relation to *amicitia* and the exchange of women. And while her study does not push the boundaries to consider the woman's role in the triangle, it is still an important step to bring together the issues inherent in the erotic triangle.

Review of Criticism in French Literature

Sedgwick's influence on medieval criticism has been more pervasive than just an interest in homosocial relations. Bill Burgwinkle recently acknowledged her contributions to the field, writing that before Sedgwick, John Boswell and Judith Butler, French medieval scholarship completely ignored the potent heteroglossia and play between signifier and signified that permeates many French texts (80). Although this statement is perhaps too general, ignoring the influence of deconstructionism and the work scholars like Eugene Vance, Howard Bloch and Stephen Nichols, Burgwinkle's observation reinforces the tremendous impact that Sedgwick's theory has had. Simon Gaunt, for instance, has exploited heteroglossia, while at the same time effectively combining contemporary ideas on homosocial ties with readings of early French texts. In Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature, Gaunt re-names Sedgwick's 'homosocial desire,' 'monologic masculinity,' and explores how concepts of male friendship, heroism and masculinity figure in an early medieval setting. Gaunt disputes that gender systems are binaries where masculine opposes feminine, and masculinity opposes femininity. Rather, he

maintains that within the system of monologic masculinity, femininity is *always* discounted, while patriarchy is constant; thus, the relationship between these two forces is necessarily asymmetrical (12). He continues:

One consequence of the exclusion of women from the ethical system of the genre and of the foregrounding of male bonding (or its disintegration) is that ideals of the masculine gender are not constructed in relation to the feminine, but in relation to other models of masculinity. Yet because the texts also draw on a strong and pervasive myth of brotherhood, of the unity of the masculine, they attempt to produce what I shall call a ‘monologic’ construction of gender, a model which has difficulty in tolerating difference and which therefore engages in an obsessional, but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to repress and marginalize alterity. (23)

Gaunt’s insistence on monologism and the repression of the other is essential for re-configuring understandings of homosocial and heterosexual relationships in medieval literature. In particular, his inquiry into versions of masculinity and the monologic model is important for a discussion of erotic triangles where cuckold and lover are not always represented consistently. This is exemplified throughout the Cent nouvelles nouvelles the Decameron and the Libro de buen amor, where there are no uniform portrayals of the cuckold: in fact, surprisingly, the cuckold’s presumed ineffective masculinity is not oppositional to the lover’s excessive virility.

Gaunt focuses on women’s roles within monologic masculinity in his chapter on the *chanson de geste*. In his discussion of the Chanson de Roland in particular, he notes that although women can be integral to a text’s plot and sub-plot, they are still “ignored, treated with wanton violence, or sometimes suppressed altogether, as if the male characters, and possibly the poets, did not wish to recognize dissenting voices” (64). In this context, Gaunt also observes that

women are objects of exchange in a variety of genres, not only in the *chanson de geste*, but also in the *romance* (63).

Gaunt's feminist approach has set a strong example of how to re-read French medieval texts within the context of homosocial behaviour and desire. Furthermore, his research has helped prove beyond a doubt that male homosocial behaviour had been a strong and dominant form of friendship long before the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* were written. At the time that Simon Gaunt was writing about masculinity in the *chanson de geste*, Sarah Kay was investigating constructions of femininity in the same genre. Kay found that while each class had its own set of codes of how men should behave, all women were classed together. Women were evaluated according to how they conducted themselves at home, and especially whether they were faithful to their husbands. Men's and women's lives were separate – men dominated public life, and women domestic life – and these worlds rarely collided. Kay writes that women were only necessary in the public, male world, to act as a *colle sexuelle* between men; in short, they were necessary in order to mediate relationships between men ("La représentation de la féminité" 223). In this respect, Kay echoes the anthropological argument that women act as objects of exchange between men. But Kay also discusses the role that femininity plays in constructing masculinity and determining how desire functions between men. She writes that when women are virtuous, they act as a transparent *colle* that binds men together. However, the idea of the *colle* becomes more complicated when the dangerous implications of femininity are also considered. In cases where *dédoublement* occurs, as in the *Cycle de la Gageure* as discussed above, femininity can become an insidious presence, that, "réussit néanmoins à s'insinuer par l'intermédiaire de personnes dont la masculinité est douteuse: marque d'un homme défectueux, la féminité désigne d'abord un manque, qui affaiblit ou corrompt les relations dont la société dépend" (224). In this respect, Kay relies on Sedgwick's formulation of

homosocial desire. But she relies even more strongly on Girard's mimetic desire where two men ostensibly compete for the same object of desire, but more importantly, they develop a complicated relationship that oscillates between rivalry, friendship and desire that is mitigated by the dangerous feminine presence. In short, Kay's concept of *colle sexuelle* is striking because it complicates the anthropological idea of women as objects of exchange to include the more ambiguous terms of femininity, masculinity, lack, and desire. As we will see, Kay's suggestion of women as *colle sexuelle* is also applicable to many of the triangles in the Cnn, the Decameron, and the Lba, especially in the unusual situation where a woman's body and her femininity are treated as two different entities in the economy of exchange.

David LaGuardia is another French medievalist who has applied contemporary ideas of homosocial relationships to readings of medieval texts. Like Gaunt, he has built on Rubin's and Sedgwick's theories of erotic triangles, though LaGuardia concentrates on late French medieval literature, including the Cent nouvelles nouvelles. Overall, LaGuardia declares the Cnn to be a paragon of male homosocial domination. He observes that women are exchanged on two levels, and in each instance, are used as conduits for cementing a male homosocial relationship. The first exchange is on the text's structural level, and LaGuardia reads the exchange of stories in duke Philippe le Bon's court as "homoerotic fantasies that a group of men told one another, among whom the exchange of women's bodies was the basis of power and position in a male-dominated, homosocial society" (12). In the court, stories are analogous to women's bodies: they are exchanged between men and represent the most valuable gift that a courtier can offer his master, the duke. The second level of trade occurs when women are exchanged within the stories: these fictional women are valuable objects of exchange as well and also represent the highest form of gift that one man can give another. Stories containing erotic triangles

accentuate the strength of the homosocial bond and even when one man sleeps with another man's wife the result is not a broken marriage, but rather, a male homosocial tie.

To explain why the male homosocial tie is the privileged relationship in the Cnn, LaGuardia invokes Sedgwick and uses her writing to explain these paradoxically oppositional and complementary male tensions. Describing female seduction and male homosocial desire LaGuardia writes:

this seduction is about something other than the act itself: it figures the paradox of **rivalry** and **desire** that opposes male characters and draws them together, in a standard sequence of developments that constitutes the **male homosocial economy**. (58) (my emphasis)

Here LaGuardia adopts, but does not acknowledge, a long tradition of male rivalry. Within the twentieth-century history of male friendship and the exchange of women, rivalry was identified by Lévi-Strauss as a necessary component in arranged marriages. This concept went on to become a key word in Girard's and then Sedgwick's discussion of the erotic triangle, and is eventually appropriated by LaGuardia. Therefore, by the time LaGuardia's formulates his version of homosocial desire, rivalry has become a recurring theme in the discussion of a male-controlled exchange of women. Of course, rivalry between men or women has always indicated a deep anxiety in social networks and threatened the fragility of friendships. Surprisingly, however, rivalry was not a fundamental aspect of medieval *amicitia*: indeed, one of its characteristics is the *absence* of rivalry. As stated earlier, one tenet of *amicitia* is that both men shared everything and that they were equal in every way. The medieval concept of *amicitia* also stressed equality, thus disabling the development of rivalry. This is not to say that medieval texts were not filled with tales describing rivalry and jealousy, but rather, in stories about true *amicitia*, rivalry between friends was precluded. LaGuardia certainly stresses the dual

development of both rivalry and desire in some of the stories in the Cnn (as per his reading of Sedgwick) but he does not investigate stories where rivalry is not an issue and where men uphold their friendships based on the classical model of *amicitia* so that everything, including women, can be shared between true friends. This oversight is unfortunate because it excludes from his analysis certain homosocial relations and erotic triangles that would benefit from a closer reading.

Male rivalry is not the only concept that LaGuardia appropriates and changes. Throughout his study, he also adopts Sedgwick's term 'homosocial desire,' alternating it with his own notion of a 'homosocial economy.' This new term is significant for, unlike Sedgwick who concentrates on the meaning of desire, LaGuardia's analysis is more akin to Rubin's, where he places his argument within an economic framework. LaGuardia, however, pushes this economic model further than Rubin, arguing that not only are women's bodies traded, but their body parts are also appraised. He comments that women's body parts are frequently mentioned for their value, thereby reinforcing the goods-value of women and minimizing the importance of woman as woman. The third *nouvelle* is used to demonstrate this point. In this story, a *chevalier* sees a *musnière* and desires her. To seduce her, the knight tells her that the *devant* is in danger of falling out. Knowing how much her husband adores her *devant*, the woman allows the *chevalier* to put it back in its place using his special *oustil* (25-76). LaGuardia points to the obsession with the *devant* as an example of how a woman's body might be fragmented and fetishized (63).

Another way women are exploited is that their age and status are considered during an exchange. LaGuardia notes that a lady is more valuable than a young woman; however, if a

lady is more mature than the young woman, then her erotic value is diminished (62).⁴⁰ Married women also carry status: to wit, a majority of the women in erotic triangles are married. Furthermore, a married woman's fetishized parts (her *cul*, her *devant*) are considered more valuable in the homosocial economy – these parts 'belong' to another man and the wooer must work harder if he is to possess them (82).

The first *nouvelle* is used as an example to illustrate how rivalry, desire and the fetishization of women's parts come together in one story. In this tale, a tax collector covets and seduces his neighbour's wife. One night the lover is at his house with his neighbour's wife when the woman's husband knocks on the door. Trapped, the woman hides under the covers. When her husband demands to see who his neighbour is hiding in his bed, the lover removes the sheets to display the woman's backside. The husband remarks that,

j'amaïs n'avoit veu chose si tresbien ressembler le cul de sa femme; et, s'il ne fust bien seur qu'elle fust a son hostel a ceste heure, il diroit que c'est elle! (121-124)

he had never seen anything that so well resembled his wife's behind, and if he were not so sure that she was at home at that time, then he would say that it was her!

After this exclamation, the woman stays hidden under the covers while the two men eat the meal that was intended for the woman and her lover. LaGuardia reads this *nouvelle* as an example of an exchange of goods, where to compensate for sleeping with his neighbour's wife, the lover

⁴⁰ LaGuardia's discussion of the worth of women's 'parts' follows from the feminist theoretical tradition espoused by Rubin and Laura Mulvey. Mulvey wrote that in films women's body parts are fetishized, so that men get pleasure from gazing upon the female body. Susan Haywood writes that this gaze "fixes the woman and in so doing fetishizes her, makes her the object not subject of desire. It fixes her and attributes meanings to her that are derived from another (male) perception or reading of the female bodily text. To this effect, woman has no agency" (306). Although LaGuardia does not credit this tradition *per se*, his application of it is interesting, and I think convincing, particularly in relation to this *nouvelle* where not only are the women objects of desire, but also even if they were aware of their fetishized position, they would have no agency to change their situation.

offers his neighbour a sumptuous meal (albeit under duress). According to LaGuardia, both the woman and the meal are treated in similar terms, not only because one is exchanged equally for the other, but also because both are recipients of the gaze: the men look at the woman with the same admiration as they do their dinner. LaGuardia writes, “The scene figures an economic exchange: the husband enjoys the goods of his neighbour’s table while the *bourgeois* takes possession of the other man’s wife” (61).

It is true that the woman in this *nouvelle* is shared by two men, but LaGuardia’s analysis of it is not convincing. First, he does not take full account of the power dynamic between the two men. Sedgwick’s reading of the power-play between cuckold and lover can help elucidate this relationship. She writes that

[t]he bond of cuckoldry... [is] necessarily hierarchical in structure, with an ‘active’ participant who is clearly in the ascendancy over the ‘passive’ one. Most characteristically, the difference of power occurs in the form of a difference of knowledge: the cuckold is not even supposed to know that he is in such a relationship. (50)

This observation is pertinent to the power dynamics in this *nouvelle* where the cuckold is the passive figure because he is ignorant of his wife’s infidelity. Furthermore, the *nouvelle* is explicit in detailing the power hierarchy in place: the lover clearly controls the adulterous situation having successfully seduced his neighbour’s wife, forcing her to hide, and then manipulating her husband by convincing him that the object in front of him is not what he thinks. LaGuardia’s position is that this *nouvelle* represents a fair exchange between men. But if this exchange were fair, then the husband would have had to recognize that the woman in the bed was his wife and accept the meal in exchange. Instead, the husband believes he is eating with his neighbour out of friendship, not because of an unspoken, implicit transaction. From

LaGuardia's interpretation of the scene in the first *nouvelle*, it appears that he has confused the codes of *amicitia* and homosocial relations, where the first necessitates an equal partnership and exchange, while the second does not.

It is unfortunate that LaGuardia chooses the first *nouvelle* as his example of how women can function as objects of exchange. Indeed, the forty-third tale better illustrates how 'homosocial economies' function. For, while this tale not only exemplifies LaGuardia's reading of male homosocial economies, it also illustrates my contention that some women realize that they are objects of exchange between men, and moreover, that some women have power over how they are exchanged.

In this story, a woman willingly takes a lover because she feels neglected by her husband who works all the time: "tant y alla et tant la laissa seule que un gentil compaignon s'approucha..." ("The man went away and left his wife alone so often that an attractive man approached her"; 17-18). For her part, the wife decides to start a relationship with a new man, "elle abandonna tost l'amour qu'elle luy devoit..." ("she soon gave up the love that she should have had for her husband"; 23-24), establishing at the beginning of the *nouvelle* that the woman willingly enters into an erotic triangle. When the husband finally finds his wife and her lover together, it is first the lover who attempts to enter into an economic exchange with his rival. He cries, "mon amy, je vous cry mercy, pardonnez moy... et par ma foy je vous donray six rasures de blé" ("My friend, I beg your mercy, please excuse me... on my word, I will give your six barrels of wheat"; 45-47). The husband immediately enters in the deal-making, saying that he will kill the man if he does not give him twelve barrels. At this point, the woman enters the exchange and attempts to make a better deal for her lover. The wife tries several times to negotiate for eight barrels, but she is adamant that her husband, "laissez [son amant] achever ce qu'il a commencé..." ("Allow him to finish what he started"; 54).

The woman's active role in this *nouvelle* is striking. Left on her own, she searches for a lover, and then when she is caught cheating, she negotiates with her husband on her lover's behalf. In fact, once the wife enters the negotiations in line 50, the lover leaves the bargaining to the woman and the only time that he speaks in the remainder of the *nouvelle* is to agree to the deal that the woman negotiates for him. Furthermore, the woman would rather devalue herself and be satisfied with her lover than negotiate a higher price for herself and ensure a good deal for her husband, and by extension, herself. David Fein has remarked that this woman

is the only one of the three characters in the drama who stays in control at all times. It is she who summons her lover as soon as her husband leaves the house. It is she who immediately seizes control of the negotiations, persuading her husband not only to abandon any thought of retribution but even to allow the completion of the offending act, and dismisses him once the bargain has been completed. She succeeds in controlling the outcome of this dangerous situation... (Displacements of Power 23)

In short, this woman goes against Rubin's assertion that women are ignorant of, or at least helpless from being exchanged between men. While the relationship between the two men is predicated on economic rivalry, the erotic triangle is completely destabilized when the woman becomes the 'active participant,' and castigates her lover and husband, reducing them to the position of 'passive participants.' In so doing, the woman emasculates both men, first by cuckolding her husband, then by appropriating the active role of negotiator from her lover. In fact, the woman's powerful words, which effectively destabilize the erotic triangle, support Sedgwick's assertion that power relations in erotic triangles are asymmetrical and that gender *does* play an important part in the development of power dynamics. Furthermore, it is the wife's strong will and knowledge of her worth, not her physical presence at the negotiations between

the men, that destabilizes the erotic triangle to the point that both men end up fulfilling the woman's economic and sexual needs. This results in the woman being satisfied on two levels: she is sexually satisfied by her lover (after the husband leaves, "sa femme et son amy recommencerent" (94) "his wife and her lover began again") and she is heeded and accepted in the negotiation process.

The forty-third *nouvelle* might be an extreme example of how a woman can take control of her situation within an erotic triangle and manipulate both her husband and lover into satisfying her erotically and monetarily, but it is ideal for an investigation into the destabilized triangle. In fact, not only is this *nouvelle* important because it clearly demonstrates how erotic triangles can be upset, but it also epitomizes how power can shift between all three participants to the extent that, by the end of the story, the woman is its sole possessor. The *nouvelle* is also significant because the woman's voice is clearly heard amid the men's negotiations. Finally, it illustrates how the potential for homosocial desire or the homosocial economy can be disrupted by a female force in order to privilege the adulterous heterosexual relationship.

This reading of how woman's language has the power to destabilize the male relationships is only one way of understanding the erotic triangle formed in the forty-third *nouvelle*. David Fein reminds us that women's bodies and sexuality were often considered dangerous and uncontrollable, and the Cent nouvelles nouvelles was not an exception ("The Dangerous Sex" 195). In two separate works, Fein constructs a theory of sexuality and power in the Cnn. In Displacements of Power, he writes,

beneath the obvious interest in sexuality, acts of seduction and infidelity, exploitation and manipulation, the endless pursuit of pleasure and gratification in every form, lies a preoccupation with power and a fascination with the various,

and often unpredictable, ways in which power can be undermined and ultimately displaced. (5)

Fein's comment shows how the above reading of the woman's negotiations can be glossed differently, where her voice can be interpreted as exploitative and manipulative. Fein uses the fifty-fifth *nouvelle* to demonstrate this interpretation. In this *nouvelle*, a girl who suffers from the plague has sex with three men, transmits her disease to them and then becomes cured herself. Fein notes that the restoration of the woman's health seems to be connected to the dangerous consequences of her actions, "as if by transferring the source of suffering from her own body to the body of the male subject, the woman somehow undergoes a process of liberation, a restoration of health achieved at the price of male sacrifice" (198). In turn, Fein reads the men's willingness to engage with the woman as an attempt at penetration for the sake of domination, although all three are usurped by female subversion. In the end, Fein concludes that the men in *nouvelles* such as the fifty-fifth always fail in achieving dominance because "they are incapable of reading the discourse of the female body" (201). Unfortunately, Fein does not engage in the "discourse of the female body" himself, and although he reads various *nouvelles* for their unusual power relations, and points out certain aspects of male camaraderie at work, he does not talk about their implications, what it means for the institution of marriage, how it affects the woman or how it redefines her role in this economy of power.

Review of Criticism in Italian Literature

As the literature review above indicates, recent scholarship on French literature has exploited contemporary ideas of homosocial desire in order to produce new readings on relationships in certain texts; however, Italian medieval criticism has tended toward analysing the conjunction of *amicitia* and literature. Reginald Hyatte, for instance, has written at length on

amicitia, and in one article, he focuses on *amicitia perfecta* in Decameron X,8.⁴¹ Using Filomena's story of two friends Gissippus and Titus, Hyatte examines how *amicitia* is constructed and then developed first in the *novella* and then in the frame narrative. In Filomena's story there are two close friends who are identical in every way: they share the same roof and they are of equal social rank and intellectual abilities. When Gissippus becomes engaged to Sofronia, Titus admits to his friend his undying love for the same woman, and Gissippus gives Titus his place in the marriage bed on the night of the nuptials. Gissippus defends his and Titus' actions to Sofronia and her family: "Ma egli sé onesta cosa aver fatta affermava e da dovernegli esser rendute grazie da' parenti di Sofronia, avendola a miglior di sé mariata" (861-2:53) ("But he maintained that he had done an honest deed and that the relatives of Sophronia should thank him, for he had married her to a better man than himself"; Musa and Bondanella 647).⁴² After Gissippus finishes explaining to Sofronia's family why Titus married Sofronia, Titus, with an "animo romano e senno ateniese" (862:55) ("with the heart of a Roman and the wit of an Athenian"; 647), gathered Gissippus' and Sophronia's relatives together so they could resolve the problem. Titus' marriage to Sofronia is finally recognized, the new couple leave Greece and move to Rome. After they are there for a few years, they find Gissippus in an impoverished state and accused of murder. To save his friend's life, Titus defends his friend and claims to have committed the murder himself. When the true murderer hears this story, he is so in awe of this display of friendship that he confesses to the crime, thus clearing the friends' names. Gissippus is then given half of Titus' wealth and his sister in marriage.

⁴¹ See note 8 for an explanation of one of the roots of this tale, found in Petrus Alfonsi's Disciplina Clericalis as the *exemplum* of Athis and Prophilias. Boccaccio also retold this story in book 4 of Il Filocolo. Chaucer also re-told this story in the Franklin's Tale (Mann 108).

⁴² All translations of the Decameron will come from the Musa and Bondanella translation unless otherwise indicated.

On the surface, the friendship between Gissippus and Titus seems to adhere strictly to the tenets of classical *amicitia*. Not only is each man willing to sacrifice himself in order to preserve the other's honour, but their strong similarities also seem to predestine their friendship. As James McEvoy has noted, most ancient ideas about *amicitia perfecta* state that such relationships result when two men bear strong a resemblance to each other. In contrast, medieval ideas of friendships deemphasize the similarity between men, and concentrate instead on virtue as per the model of Christ. McEvoy concludes that, in the Middle Ages,

Friends do not always become friends because of an already-existing similarity in virtue or goodness; the grace received from God can be the origin of friendship between parties who do not at the outset much resemble each other... (35)

Thus, both the second setting for the *novella* – Rome – and these men's supposed adherence to the classical rules of *amicitia* might lead us to believe that Filomena's story described a classical form of friendship. However, Hyatte argues that this story does not accurately mirror Cicero's *De Amicitia*, but rather, reworks it. He maintains that the whole concept of *amicitia perfecta* changes so that friendship and ideal oratory skills both take primary importance. He writes that,

The intimate relationship between perfect friendship and ideal oratory in the *novella* suggests two major modifications of the standard Ciceronian *amicitia vera*. Whereas in *Laelius* [*De Amicitia*] courteous speech and ease in conversation are traits of only secondary importance to be sought in *amicus*, in the *novella* the ideal friendship of Gisippo and Tito could not have been preserved had they been less than excellent speakers. (36)

Here Hyatte argues that these men's oratorical skills are vital to keeping the friendship and the men alive. In the case of Titus, Gissippus must try to convince Sofronia and her family that the trick they played was permissible. Titus adds to the discourse of persuasion and maintains that

it was Sofronia's fault that she was deceived when she was asked in the darkened bedroom whether she loved her husband (who Titus knew was himself, but she assumed was Gissippus) and she answered yes. Titus says:

e appresso, quantunque io ardentemente l'amassi, non come amante ma come marito i suoi congiugnimenti cercai, non appressandomi prima a lei, sì come essa medesima può con verità testimoniare, che io e con le debite parole e con l'anello l'ebbi sposata, domandandola se ella me per marito volea : a che ella rispose di sì. Se esser le pare ingannata, non io ne son da riprendere, ma ella, che me non dimandò chi io fossi. Questo è adunque il gran male, il gran peccato, il gran fallo adoperato da Gisippo amico e da me amante, che Sofronia occulatamente sia divenuta moglie di Tito Quinzio... (79-81)

and then, though I was passionately in love with her, I sought her embraces not as a lover but rather as a husband, for, as she herself can truthfully testify, I never came close to her before I had married her with the proper words and ring and had asked her whether she wanted me as her husband – to which she answered that she did. If she feels she was deceived she should not blame me but rather herself for not asking me who I was. So, then this is the great crime, the great sin, the great wrong committed by Gissippus, my friend, and by me, her lover, that Sophronia secretly became the wife of Titus Quintius... (650-651)

This first rousing speech convinces Sofronia and her family of Titus' merit and he is allowed to remain married to her. Later, when Gissippus is falsely accused of murder, Titus returns the favour to his friend and attempts to convince the judge in Rome that he, not Gissippus, was the murderer.

What Hyatte points to, but never clearly articulates, is that by modifying the Ciceronian principle, a new object of exchange – one that is essential in cementing these men’s relationships – is uncovered. Perfect speech is the object that the two men prize and depend upon. While it is indisputable that in this *novella* women occupy a predominant place in the strict economy of gift-giving – Titus replaces Gissippus’ traded wife with his own sister – each man’s oratorical skills are also commodities to be exchanged. Indeed, the pleasure that a woman might bring to a man is in no way equal to the life-saving capabilities of speech, in particular in this *novella* where each man was in grave danger of being punished or even killed for certain (perceived) crimes. It is also interesting to note that Titus portrays Sofronia’s apparent linguistic sloppiness as the reason she is placed in a compromising situation. As shown in Titus’ speech above, had Sofronia been more discerning when answering Titus’ question (“domandandola se ella me per marito volea: a che ella rispose di sì”), then the men’s trick would not have worked. But because she understood Titus’ words on the literal level – she did not think that the speaking man’s ‘io’ could refer to anyone other than Gissippus – she not only married herself to a different man, but also proved her weaker verbal ability, thus further excluding herself from the relationship between Titus and Gissippus that was founded on oral dexterity.⁴³ Nevertheless, in this story Sofronia’s linguistic ability –Lévi-Strauss’s key that elevates women from the mere symbols or tokens exchanged between men – does not help her to avoid being exchanged between men.

⁴³ Marilyn Migiel addresses “the contrary uses to which language can be put,” writing that this theme was raised in the stories from Day 2 where “the readers get introduced to a more intricate social reality – one that takes account of gender and sexual difference,” but that the readers do not necessarily have “the tools they need to comprehend adequately the workings of the system” (*A Rhetoric of the Decameron* 54). Although by the tenth day, the narrators may have acquired the necessary tools for understanding not only the contrary uses of language, but also the implications of gender and sexual difference, Sofronia does not, thus perhaps reflecting the more naïve state of the storytellers from eight days earlier.

Although Hyatte addresses the topic of exchange in the story (there are so many objects, both women and wealth, which move between two men, it is difficult not to address the question), he does not clearly examine the full extent to which oratorical skill is valued within the economy of this *novella*, and by extension, the whole Decameron. Admittedly, considering oratory as an object of exchange extends beyond the scope of Hyatte's paper, but his argument leads to a comparison of oratorical skill and the exchange of women. In this story oral dexterity is the primary object of exchange. Each friend delivers a speech for the benefit of the other in what becomes an equal exchange that cements, and even saves, the relationship. This connection between the exchange of women and speech was frequent in the Middle Ages, where women were commonly associated with orality and men with literacy (Jaeger, The Tempter's Voice 194). Speech was considered feminine, and by extension, volatile, in contrast to literacy which had a long and stable tradition (237).⁴⁴ In the friendship between Gissippus and Titus, speech and women are synonymous: they are both exchangeable commodities that can strengthen the male bond. This use of speech is demonstrated first by Gissippus who acts according to classical values of proving his love for Titus by 'giving' him his intended wife. The gesture is then reciprocated by Titus who shares his wealth with his friend, which includes both money and his sister. In contrast, the two situations that require public speeches to clear one man's name, demonstrate that each man is willing to sacrifice his life for the other. Through these speeches Filomena shows her listener that oratorical skill can be another kind of 'glue' (perhaps even another manifestation of a *colle sexuelle*) that holds a friendship together. Moreover, the friendship between Titus and Gissippus is reminiscent of the classical model of

⁴⁴ Jill Ross has also explored the connection between rhetorical speech and the feminine, which has its roots in classical literature and philosophy. See Ross, forthcoming. This situation in X, 8 is also mirrored in the court setting for the Cent nouvelles nouvelles as discussed by LaGuardia, where women equal stories and both are exchanged between men in order to strengthen homosocial ties.

amicitia where virtue and intellectual worth are highly prized and women's voices are entirely muted.

In contrast to the scenario in X.8, the social environment nurtured by storytellers themselves offers an alternate version of *amicitia* where women's voices are listened to and valued. Hyatte remarks,

As Filomena shifts the focus of her listeners' attention from her protagonists' exemplary actions and words to the present time and circumstances, she may be seen to describe herself and the noble band in that they share with her protagonists the specific virtues which she underlines in her conclusion. (34)

Here Hyatte echoes remarks made by various members of the *brigata* on the chaste and virtuous nature of their relationship. Panfilò, Hyatte writes, has also praised the members of the *brigata* for their *onestà* and their virtue, and while most people living in their circumstances would be seduced into committing shameful acts, the *brigata* is the model of restraint (34). This example of chaste friendship recalls Jaeger's discussion of later medieval *amicitia* when women were finally allowed to participate in the kind of friendship previously reserved for men. Within this chaste model, although oratorical skill is still used to cement friendships, it is used by both men and women to exhibit their virtue and talent. Indeed, within this egalitarian model of friendship, women cannot be exchanged at all since they are now equally implicated in this economic dynamic. Hyatte's observations on the *brigata*'s reworking of *amicitia* – where oratory is valued as much as friendship – support Jaeger's contention that later medieval *amicitia* in fact helped emancipate women from their position as objects of exchange. While Hyatte does not acknowledge his argument in this proto-feminist vein, he nonetheless helps us construct the *brigata* and their storytelling pastimes in a new light. Moreover, this chaste model of *amicitia* helps nuance contemporary notions of male homosocial behaviour that still focus on women as

object of exchange. In the end, through Hyatte's reworking of this classical idea, our understanding of friendship is deepened so that it can include stories where men become friends by sharing the same woman⁴⁵, and chaste examples such as Filomena's eighth story on the tenth day. Moreover, Hyatte's discussion of *amicitia* as it relates to the *brigata* allows us to hear how women's voices sound in relationships that are not exclusively concerned with sexual relations.

Review of Criticism in Spanish Literature

As we have seen, *amicitia*, homosocial desire or friendship and erotic triangles are topics that have been discussed, at least to a certain extent, by both French and Italian medievalists. These studies have tended to focus either on *amicitia* or on homosocial desire, as is evident in criticism pertaining to the Cent nouvelles nouvelles and the Decameron. The same, however, is not true of the scholarship on the Libro de buen amor. At least as far as I have found, there has been no book or even article that has broached either the topic of homosocial desire or *amicitia*. Although this topic has not been addressed directly, some critics have referred in passing to how erotic triangles form, and how men communicate with each other. Louise Vasvári has discussed the meaning of phallic aggression in the Lba: how dominance and submission figure in the text so that "the male organ becomes a kind of weapon and where the passive position is equated with dishonour, weakness, and feminization" ("The Semiotics of Phallic Aggression" 130). Nonetheless, she does not examine the ties that bind men and those that exclude women. André Michalski has also briefly addressed the relationship between two men: the Archpriest and the

⁴⁵ The most salient examples of two men sharing the same woman are in the thirty-first and thirty-third *nouvelles*. The thirty-first is told by Monseigneur de la Barde. In this tale, a knight tells his servant about the woman he loves. The servant finds the lady and seduces her. The knight discovers his servant's trick, and rather than admonishing him, the two men decide to take turns with the woman. In the thirty-third *nouvelle* by Monseigneur, two men find that they have the same lover and instead of letting her decide whom she prefers, they decide to share her. These tales provide an excellent counter-example to the chaste and selfless friendship formed in Decameron X,8. Considering these tales together, we have the making of a wide spectrum onto which we can place other tales that depict erotic and chaste relationships between men.

go-between Ferrand García. He explains that when García seduces Cruz the baker-girl for himself instead of for the Archpriest, the text says “del mal de la cruzada yo non me rreguarda” (“I had no defence against the evil crusade”; 121d) which can be interpreted as the go-between swindling the Archpriest (438).⁴⁶ Because of his deceit, this male-male relationship does not end amicably, and it is clear that both men value possessing the woman more than forming a strong bond of friendship. The relationship between the Archpriest, García and the baker-girl is a tri-partite relationship, but there has been no discussion of it within the context of the erotic triangle. This critical oversight in *Lba* studies is both unfortunate and fortuitous: unfortunate because this text could benefit from this form of investigation; fortuitous, because the gap leaves ample room for my own research into erotic triangles.

Conclusion: From the Exchange of Women and *Amicitia* to the Destabilized Triangle

In this chapter the two essential relationships in the erotic triangle were explored. One important component of the erotic triangle is found when a woman is exchanged between two men. In both the medieval system of marriage and the anthropological observations of Lévi-Strauss and Gayle Rubin, women occupy a paradoxical position as both an oppressed member and most valued object. Families, tribes and groups develop this contradictory status by treating women as valuable commodities that represent labour, wealth, and the promise of succession, while at the same time largely ignoring their desires and wishes. As Lévi-Strauss has observed, it is necessary to transfer women from the kinship unit of father/daughter or brother/sister to husband/wife to assure exogamy – a preoccupation that is both medieval and modern. Deals are

⁴⁶ All translations of the *Libro de buen amor* are taken from the Drayson Macdonald edition.

commonly brokered between two families or tribes, and as Geneviève Ribordy has observed, in medieval France such contracts between two families were commonly sealed through a treaty.

The ramifications of this system of exchange have been explored by feminists including Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray, who have explained that because women often do not understand the benefit of their circulation in the system of exchange, their ignorance reinforces the hegemony of the patriarchal structure and their own oppression within it. Through their work, these feminists began to redress this imbalance of power by bringing attention to the deep gender imbalance in European economic systems, thus making important inroads for examining new ways of configuring models of exchange.

The anthropological and societal observations made by Lévi-Strauss, Rubin, and Irigaray are also applicable to a literary setting. Although the erotic triangles in this study do not represent the first time a woman is exchanged (when she is given to her husband by a relation), but instead the second moment of exchange (when a woman moves between her husband and her lover), the anthropological framework still provides a means of engaging with the concept of women as objects. Thanks to this model, we have a language with which to discuss women, such as the wife in the first *nouvelle*, and Sofronia in Decameron X.8, who move between men with little control over how their body is used or exposed. At the same time, a re-analysis of Rubin's and Irigaray's work also makes us sensitive to women such as the wife in Cnn forty-three, who defies expectations and displays a form of agency over her body and its exchange. Using a combination of medieval and contemporary modes of understanding erotic triangles, it becomes possible to observe various strategies women use to cope with their situations. Ultimately, we see that not all women can be neatly classified as mere objects of exchange, thus complicating notions of the 'traffic' in women.

With regard to male-male relations, in the classical period and the Middle Ages, *amicitia* was a well-documented form of friendship that was encouraged between men of the same class or religious aspiration. Mostly women were excluded from this highly regarded bond of friendship, but some were eventually allowed to enter into this chaste relationship. Studying the tenets of *amicitia* is helpful for understanding how men thought of and spoke about each other in the Middle Ages. There have also been recent studies on the nature of male-male friendships, and René Girard and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in particular have concentrated on male desire, or ‘mimetic desire’ and ‘homosocial desire’ respectively. Although neither cites classical or medieval perspectives on this subject, some of their views on friendship bear resemblance to *amicitia*. Certainly, all theories on male desire carefully tread the line between chaste and sexual relationships between men, and take pains to separate one from the other. Read together, the medieval and contemporary interpretations on male friendship and desire form a solid context for evaluating these relationships in the Cnn, the Decameron and the Lba.

Now that medieval and modern approaches to these relationships have been considered, it is possible to investigate how the two sets of relationships become intermingled to form an erotic triangle. More important, however, is the effort, the strategies, and the struggles, required to tear apart, or at least, destabilize, these triangles. Women’s strategies for destabilizing the erotic triangle in the Cnn, Decameron, and Lba, are the subject of the next three chapters. In each text, women who are part of erotic triangles develop different ways of coping with their involvement with two men. Although some women are either unaware of, or at least nonplussed by, their particular situation, there are those who seek to cease being objects of exchange, and aim instead to be equal with their male counterparts. This investigation into how women destabilize their triangles, in turn facilitates new comparisons and definitions of sexuality, marriage and friendship in late French, Italian and Spanish literature.

Chapter 2: The Cent nouvelles nouvelles

Introduction

The Cent nouvelles nouvelles contains by far the highest number and widest range of adulterous triangles in comparison to the Libro de buen amor and the Decameron. In the Cnn, there are forty-three *nouvelles* depicting erotic triangles (see appendix A), making the Cent nouvelles nouvelles the standard against which to measure tales of adultery and tripartite relationships in the other two texts. Within the forty-three stories, thirty-eight represent erotic triangles between two men and one woman. Although the erotic triangles in these thirty-eight stories are between two men and one woman, the relationships between the three participants vary greatly. In order to examine the intricacies of these relationships, I have further divided these thirty-eight stories into seven categories. These more specific categories allow us to consider both the development of the male homosocial friendship, the sustainability of the spousal relationship and the construction and possible disintegration of the erotic triangle. The seven sub-categories under consideration are: those in which 1) a male homosocial bond is formed; 2) a pre-existing male homosocial bond is broken; 3) the husband knows he has been cuckolded but the lover gets away with adultery; 4) the husband knows he has been cuckolded and the lover does not get away with adultery; 5) the husband does not know he has been cuckolded, and the lover gets away with the adultery; 6) the husband knows he has been cuckolded and the wife does not get away with the adultery; 7) erotic triangles between single women or widows and two men. The five stories about erotic triangles between two women and one man should be considered separately.

The high proportion of male-dominated erotic triangles in the Cnn should not be surprising given our understanding of medieval *amicitia* and contemporary writing on the

exchange of women where men are the primary figures in friendships and exchange. In the first chapter male friendship was analyzed alongside the phenomenon of the exchange of women. Scholars such as Gaunt and LaGuardia have also considered how this system of exchange functions in medieval French literature, naming these trends ‘monologic masculinity’ and ‘homosocial economy’ respectively. Although the majority of erotic triangles in the Cnn form within the hegemonic masculine culture detailed by Gaunt and LaGuardia, sometimes the woman in the triangle is able to intervene in the male friendship and if not break apart the friends, at least disrupt the male privileged order. In such situations, I contend that the woman disproves the assertions made by Rubin and Sedgwick regarding the woman’s passive role in erotic triangles because she attempts to remove her body from a system of exchange constructed by men. Although such examples are rare, they indicate that it is not possible to make generalizations about the women involved in erotic triangles. By extension, there is a variety of erotic triangles that form throughout the Cnn, Decameron and Lba, which together, provide fertile ground for comparison and for the formulation of a theory on sexualities in these medieval texts. In the following three chapters I will examine some of these triangles and chart how they develop and dissolve in the French, Italian and Spanish texts.

In this chapter I expand upon the short studies of the *nouvelles* from the first chapter to detail specific narrative techniques in the Cnn that allow for the construction and possible dissolution of the erotic triangle. This discussion focuses on two features common to the entire work: the *divertissement* enjoyed by both storyteller and listener, and the use of irony. To illustrate these two features, I use the example of the sixteenth *nouvelle*, a story that effectively displays both tendencies. Following this general summary of narrative elements in the Cnn, I analyse three specific narrative techniques, or themes, that also encourage the development of erotic triangles. These themes are applicable to some *nouvelles*, but are not ubiquitous like

divertissement or irony. To complement my analysis of these features, I look at one *nouvelle* per theme. Each of the three case studies highlights one of the following elements: conversational implicature, the art of seduction, and the willingness to share the same woman by two men. The three *nouvelles* were selected as case studies because they provide the strongest and clearest examples of the thematic device in question; however, many other *nouvelles* are also predicated on similar narrative lines and/or rhetorical devices. Ultimately, the *nouvelles* discussed here provide a cross-section of the forty-three erotic triangles found in the Cnn and represent how erotic triangles function throughout the text.

The sixteenth Nouvelle

The sixteenth *nouvelle* is told by Monseigneur. His story starts when a woman's husband, who is blind in one eye, leaves to fight the Prussians. During his absence, the *chevalier's* wife has an affair with her husband's squire. One day the knight returns unexpectedly and his wife is in bed with the squire. When the husband knocks on his wife's door, the woman pretends not to recognize her husband's voice. After much persuasion, she agrees to open the door only if he can prove that he is truly her husband, saying: "pour la paix de mon cuer, je vous requier que nous l'esprouvons" ("for my own peace of mind, I would like you to prove who you are"; 127-28). Opening the door, the woman covers her husband's good eye with her hand, and holds a candle to his bad eye asking "Monseigneur, ne voiez vous pas bien, pas vostre foy?" He replies, "Par mon serment, nenny, m'amy, ce dit-il" ("Sir, you swear that you cannot see? -- On my word, no, my dear, he says"; 124-36). While the husband is blinded, the squire manages to escape. After the squire leaves, the woman 'recognizes' her husband and expresses joy at his return: "Dieu soit loué et gracié que vous estes cy!" ("May

God be thanked and praised that you have returned!”; 145-6). Monseigneur concludes that although others knew about how the knight had been cuckolded, he never finds out.

Se Divertir: Deceit, Laughter and the Pleasure of Storytelling

In the majority of the *nouvelles* containing erotic triangles, there is often a deceit or a trick that humiliates one participant to the great amusement of the other two. Roger Dubuis has written that many of the *nouvelles* focus on deception and trickery, making this element the foremost ingredient for a successful *nouvelle* (71). But more than trickery, Dubuis also writes that the stories about cuckolds and the awkward positions the lover find himself in when escaping from his rival, also provide diversion, amusement and interest for the reader. He explains that the entertainment value of a *nouvelle* is a secondary effect, “[a]u fond, c’est bien le terme de *divertissement* qui convient le mieux pour désigner ce que représente la nouvelle dans ce recueil: un récit qui soit capable de retenir l’attention, d’amuser, certes, mais avant tout d’intéresser” (96). Given that 43% of the stories in the Cnn focus on erotic triangles, it is safe to assume that this form of relationship effectively captivated and amused the listener. This opinion is shared by Edgar de Blieck, who writes about how comedy is constructed in the Cnn. In his discussion of the sixty-third *nouvelle*, de Blieck reads the protagonist as a comic hero who is able to avenge the social slight committed against him through a ruse that perturbs, but does not offend his companions.⁴⁷ de Blieck concludes that since the hero’s antics amuse audiences centuries later, “might they not also have made Philip the Good laugh?” (258). In fact, according

⁴⁷ In this story, known as *Montbléru*, the eponymous hero encounters some friends at the festival at Antwerp. The three friends ask him to join them, and he agrees, so long as they pay him as much as his current employer, the lord of Étampes. They agree (much to his surprise), and they stay in Antwerp longer than expected. When their shirts become dirty, they leave them for cleaning with the maid at the inn. First thing in the morning, Montbléru sees the shirts, and without anyone seeing, he steals and hides them. When the shirts are discovered stolen, Montbléru remains silent, and eventually sells the shirts for a profit. One year later, on Ash Wednesday, Montbléru is with his friends and asks them if they will forgive a thief his sins. They agree, and he tells them what he did with their shirts. They eventually forgive him and the companions laugh over the joke.

to Dubuis, comedy is one of three other ingredients necessary for a good story. He writes that some *nouvelles* “sont écrites pour illustrer un bon mot” (66), others tell a good story, “c’est pour l’anecdote elle-même” (67), others still, are stories of intrigue. I would argue, however, that a *nouvelle’s divertissement* is often equally dependent upon and possesses all three requirements, where a *bon mot*, intrigue and the anecdote work together to tell a story with an often unforeseeable twist.

Judith Bruskin Diner has also examined the literary style of the Cnn, and although she does not directly address Dubuis’ breakdown of the anecdote, *bon mot* and *divertissement*, her conclusions contribute to a general discussion on how comedy and especially, *le gracieux tour*, add to the *oeuvre’s* sense of *divertissement* and the pleasure inherent in the storytelling experience. According to Bruskin Diner, the Cnn was written in a new style that combined two earlier forms: courtly and comic literature. She writes that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, courtly and comic styles were distinct and each treated the themes of tricks and sex in genres such as *lais* and romances from a different perspective. She posits that in the courtly style, the story’s main trick, or *le gracieux tour*,

deliberately downplayed the immoral aspects of tricks as a means to maintain the audience’s admiration for the tricksters themselves ... [the] comic style emphasized the deception through the use of negatively charged words for tricks and by the presence of abundant and specific narrative details. The tricks are underhanded pranks – lying, stealing, and the substitution of one person for another. (“The Courtly-Comic Style” 50)

On the subject of sex, Bruskin Diner notes that the courtly style treated the subject in a sentimental vein, while the comic style discussed sex in crudely physical and even grotesque terms. However, by the fifteenth century, and in particular with the Cnn, the courtly and comic

styles merge, forming “a synthesis of characters, ethical systems, narrative motifs, and lexical items” (“The Courtly-Comic Style” 57). Once this new style and aesthetic are introduced, formerly courtly sexual relationships are no longer as exalted as they once were and adultery is not as reprehensible as it had been. This new style also changes how the story is received, so that now audiences are not only allowed, but also encouraged, to want the lovers to succeed, despite any obstacles or moral dilemmas (58). To develop Bruskin Diner’s conclusions further, we can hypothesize that the newfound sexual and comedic pleasures are enjoyed by the characters, the storytellers, and the audiences, who now have the freedom to mix genres and morals in order to create a new form of storytelling.

Putting sex and *le gracieux tour* aside, Cristina Azuela concentrates on how pleasure and storytelling work on the rhetorical level in the Cnn. Commenting that many stories use a similar narrative structure in which “le cornu découvre ou pas les amants; il punit la femme ou l’intrus; ou bien il est berné par eux de façon plus ou moins comique,” she continues that what distinguishes stories from each other are “les recours de style, les surprises du langage, les jeux de mots, qui vont permettre au lecteur d’aborder une histoire mille fois racontée comme si elle était le récit le plus original du monde” (35). Azuela believes that this fascination with language indicates a deep pleasure in the storytelling experience. Above all, she writes, the erotic metaphor is the rhetorical device that best illustrates the extent to which the storyteller experienced pleasure and *divertissement*. Azuela supports this claim by examining several *nouvelles* including the eighty-fifth and the twenty-third. For the twenty-third *nouvelle*, Azuela examines the different ways a metaphor can be interpreted, how these different interpretations question what it means to read objectively, and finally how these metaphors contribute to a pleasurable storytelling experience. In this story, a woman’s child witnesses his mother and his father’s clerk having sex. Before the act, as a means of teasing the clerk, the woman challenges

the clerk to a battle and spills his ink over his robe, his desk and his parchment. The clerk then challenges the woman with the following metaphors (which were heard by the child):

vous avez respandu mon cornet a l'encre et avez brouillé et mon escripture et ma robe, je vous pourray bien brouiller vostre parchemin; et affin que faulte d'encre ne m'empesche d'escripre, je pourray bien pescher en vostre escriptoire. (53-9)
since you have spilled my bottle of ink and scribbled on my parchment and got ink on my robe, I'll scribble on your parchment, too. And so I'll not be prevented from writing for lack of ink, I will certainly fish in your inkwell. (The One Hundred New Tales 95-6)

A day after this event, the child says to his father, “Mon père, gardés bien ... car nostre clerc vous abateroit et huppilleroit ainsi qu'il fist nagueres ma mere” (87-9) (“My father, take care ... for our clerk will throw you down and will roughhouse you, just as he did my mother, not long ago”; The One Hundred New Tales 96). Azuela uses the child's innocent and literal use of the clerk's words to comment on how language is played with in the Cnn, where metaphors, understood and enjoyed by some characters, are equally misunderstood by others. When metaphors are treated in such different ways by characters in the same story, then the pleasure that results from linguistic play is made even more apparent. As Azuela notes, the metaphor in the twenty-third *nouvelle* highlights the pleasurable elements of literature which includes especially the delight that comes with clever word play (44).

A more global perspective on pleasure and storytelling is taken by Glending Olson. According to this critic, combining recreation with literature was thought to be beneficial for several reasons, including the following: supplying solace, offering a non-competitive form of diversion, and providing positive hygienic effects. Olson's argument for the correlation

between recreation and hygiene is particularly compelling. He explains that many medieval documents demonstrate that,

[c]heerfulness (*gaudium*) is not only helpful to the body per se but is also a remedy for anxiety and depression. To anticipate later arguments: anything that produces temperate cheerfulness, such as reading a fiction, is thus functioning to preserve health; cheerfulness induced by storytelling, for example, would be particularly useful to people burdened with cares, such as the horrors of the Black Death. (49)

This explanation of *gaudium* is in fact the essence of the concept of therapeutic humour – an idea developed by the Greeks. Quentin Skinner explains that Greek physicians considered laughter essential for the promotion of good health: they thought that anyone who suffered from excess black bile in the spleen would experience feelings of rage and eventual melancholia (438). A cure for this problem was laughter. Democritus, for example, had a terrible temperament and apparently became suicidally depressed. Skinner writes that by constructing himself as an absurd figure and laughing at everything that made him angry, Democritus could overcome his malady (438). This solution increased his blood flow, making him more serene and apparently helped expel the bile that caused the melancholia (439). The case of Democritus is only one example in an entire literature on therapeutic humour. Part of the literature is devoted to an exploration of *euthymie*. As Jackie Pigeaud explains: “Cette littérature de l’euthymie s’intéresse au mal d’être, et au malaise, au mal de vivre ; elle s’intéresse au tout du corps et de l’âme, et au rapport de l’un et de l’autre, à l’influence de l’un sur l’autre ; elle tente de répondre à l’angoisse et aux formes les moins graves du désespoir” (443). The other part of the literature is devoted to responding to this *angoisse*, advocating, in part, maintenance of an equilibrium “entre l’hilarité et la taciturnité” (464).

As Olson reminds us, the curative properties of laughter were still being discussed in the Middle Ages,⁴⁸ and although it was not explicit in the Cnn, the beneficial effects of laughter were espoused by Laurent de Premierfait who translated the Decameron in 1414. In his dedicatory letter to the text, he writes that the Decameron is as beneficial to the mind as a good meal is to the body (Olson 76). De Premierfait's remarks demonstrate that the argument connecting *gaudium* and good health was prevalent just fifty years before the Cnn was written, and was used as a means of detailing the benefits of laughter in a similar collection of stories.

In addition to Laurent de Premierfait's observations on the positive hygienic effect of the Decameron, the health benefits of the Italian text are also made apparent in other ways. Olson comments that Pampinea's suggestion of telling stories as a means of diversion was well-chosen, since in the Middle Ages "games, even chess, often elicited violent reactions in the participants, [which] ... a civilized company would want to avoid" whereas storytelling was a "zero-sum game" where all the participants gain pleasure (180-1). Even more important perhaps than the curative effects and the diversions provided by storytelling, was that the act was also perceived to prevent the plague. Olson comments, "there is a great deal of evidence that educated people in the fourteenth century believed that enjoyment of music and fiction would decrease the likelihood of their being struck by plague" (197).

The Decameron is only one example that Olson uses to illustrate the strong and positive correlation between storytelling, pleasure and a healthy body – he also cites the Canterbury Tales as well as examples from French literature including the *fabliaux* and the work of Guillaume de Machaut. Through these examples, Olson consistently and efficiently proves that until the late Middle Ages there was a indisputable link between the positive effects and

⁴⁸ In fact, discussions of therapeutic humour continued well into the Renaissance. Castiglione, for instance, employed this device in his Book of the Courtier. By using witticism to lighten the tone of his serious text, Castiglione demonstrated a practical application of therapeutic humour (Pugliese 140).

pleasure that storytelling can have on a person's body and mind. With respect to the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, although this link is not foregrounded as it is in the Decameron, it is certainly a subtext.

Starting with Dubuis and finishing with Olson, we see there were many pleasurable effects from telling the *nouvelles*. Not only did these stories act as *divertissement* and provoke laughter for storytellers and audience alike, but also, they provided an outlet for storytellers to assert their linguistic prowess, to play with new genres and even to strengthen their bodies while feeding their minds. With these myriad reasons for telling and listening to stories and the pleasure inherent in the process, it not surprising that the tales are well-formulated, even while the basic plot for many seems repetitive. Because each story is carefully crafted and not entirely based on 'stock characters,' it follows that the character development and use of language in each offers the potential to provide new insight into how characters relate to and manipulate each other, and by extension, the politics behind erotic triangles and the sexual relations within them.

To demonstrate the pleasure that can be derived from a well-told anecdote, we turn to lines 34-42 of the sixteenth *nouvelle*. In this section, the knight's upstanding morality is juxtaposed against the wife's licentious behaviour. Here, Monseigneur simultaneously describes the activities of the knight on the crusade, and his wife who is left at home:

Tantdiz que monseigneur jeune et fait penitence, madame fait goettes avecques l'escuier. Le plus des foiz monseigneur se disne et soupe de bescuit et de la belle fontaine, et madame a de tous les biens de Dieu si largement que trop; monseigneur au mieulx se couche en la paillace, et madame en ung tresbeau lit avec l'escuyer se repose. Pour abreger, tantdiz que monseigneur aux Sarrazins fait guerre, l'escuier a madame combat...

While the knight fasted and paid penitence, the lady feasted with the squire. And while the knight had breakfasts and dinners of soldier's bread and water from the fountain, the lady had so much of God's good things that it was almost too much; at the best of times the knight slept in hay, while the lady rested in a beautiful bed with the squire. In brief, while the knight made war against the Saracens, the squire battled the lady...

In the above lines, *monseigneur's* actions are invariably described first and then followed by the *dame's*. In lines 34-35 for instance, first *monseigneur* fasts and then his wife is said to commit the sin of greed as she feasts and fêtes with her lover. In this sentence, each character is in the process of doing something, but the verbs that qualify each *faire* are antonyms. *Penitence* evokes a state of contrition and meditation, while *gogette* refers to feasting and lovemaking.⁴⁹ Therefore in lines 34-35, in addition to establishing a syntactic pattern for each sentence, the juxtaposition of the words *penitence* and *gogette* further helps to establish the initial set of contrasts between husband and wife. Line 36 adopts *gogette*, the general revelry of line 35, and focuses on the eating habits of husband and wife. The differences between the two are tangible to the reader and are the result of two familiar conditions: to be hungry for the sake of a fast and to be full from overindulgence. Because each character represents a state that the reader can

⁴⁹ The Sweetser edition of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* defines *gogette* as: 'réjouissance, fêtes,' while Verard describes it as '*bonne chière*'. Godefroy says it is a: 'terme de caresse adressé à une femme, cause de joie, de plaisir' (v.4, p.302). There are, however, many cognates of *gogette* which include *gogier*: 'faire bombance; faire la noce, se réjouir'; *gogy*: 'divertissement bruyant, bombance, noce'; *gogue*: 'gai, joyeux, plaisanterie, raillery, gaîté, bonne humeur, fête' (Godefroy, v.4, 302). Outside the *Nouvelles*, the word is used in Straparola's *Les Facétieuses Nuits de Straparole*. In one tale, two men sit together about to start a feast: 'Or maistre Raimond, qui avoit l'une des plus belles femme que nature fist oncques, comença entrer en ses **gogues** en disant...' (iv:iv) (emphasis added). Therefore, this word is inextricably linked to the idea of gaiety and festivity, thereby reinforcing the extent of the woman's pleasure with the *escuier* while her husband is away. Monseigneur uses *gogette* only twice more in the rest of the collection: in the forty-eighth *nouvelle* to describe two unmarried people who arrange to meet secretly, and in the ninety-third when a married woman and a priest share a feast. From these four examples, the word can literally be understood as a feast shared between two people (rather than a party amongst a group of people). This word can also be understood as a euphemism for having sex. However, this must be interpreted in the right context, given that in the *Nuits de Straparole*, for instance, the feast was shared by two men who were not attracted to each other, but rather, to the same woman.

recognize (though perhaps not to that extreme), the differences between the *chevalier* and the *dame* are glaring. First, the *chevalier* is eating dry bread while his wife is indulging in all of God's good foods.⁵⁰ The disparity in their behaviour is also made clear through the composition of the sentences: their syntax is balanced by equally depicting the activities of husband and wife. At the same time, the sentences also function as a balance wherein the actions of one character offset the actions of the other. In addition, no extraneous information is given in any sentence, thereby forcing the reader to concentrate on the denial/indulgence of each character.

The clause beginning "monseigneur au mieulx" juxtaposes the location where each character spends the night: *monseigneur* in the hay and *madame* in a bed. The differences between the *dame* and her husband are further strengthened when the dame's *lit* is reputedly *tresbeau* while the lack of any qualifiers for *paillace* indicates how bare the *chevalier*'s resting place is. Thus far in the section of contrastives, no adjectives have been used to describe the objects or actions of either character. Here, the narrator states that *monseigneur* would be lucky to have hay to sleep in, while *madame* has a beautiful bed in which she has sex with the *escuier*. This final difference is emphasised with the verbs *se couche* and *se repose*, perhaps indicating that *monseigneur*'s days are tiring, causing him to find a place where he can sleep; whereas *madame* has become exhausted from having sex with the *escuier* and she only needs to relax in his arms.⁵¹ Notably it is the most grievous of sins, adultery, which is demarcated from the contrastive section, drawing attention to itself both through chiasmus and through the adjectives used to qualify *lit*. Nonetheless, while the virtue of temperance is pitted against the sin of greed

⁵⁰ Godefroy defines *bescuit* as "pain cuit deux fois" (v.1, p.632).

⁵¹ Later (lns 80-81), when the husband comes home and the *escuier* and the *dame* are in bed, the narrator says that the "lieutenant ... fut ebahy, et madame aussi," implying that their exhausting activities have been conducted in the "tresbeau lit" (40).

and sloth, no direct judgement is placed on the characters, perhaps leaving it to fortune to decide how the scales should be tipped.

In the final endeavour to establish the contrast between husband and wife, the narrator turns the allusion to peace and tranquility from the beginning of the *nouvelle* on its head in lines 41-42 (“tantdiz que monseigneur aux Sarrazins fait guerre, l’escuier a madame combat”). This final contrast is the most compelling because for the first time a similar verb is used to qualify the activities engaged in by each character. While the *chevalier* has literally been fighting the Saracens,⁵² his wife has metaphorically fought the *escuier* by having sex with him.⁵³ he has used his sword to penetrate the *dame*, and according to the text, she has fought back. The choice of the verb *combattre* therefore demands a two-fold reading. First, the literal aspect of the word is that the *chevalier* believes it is his duty to fight the Saracens, while the metaphorical sense may show that the *dame* is making a mockery of her husband’s duty by having her own battle – this time of the erotic kind. This two-fold interpretation of *combattre* not only establishes the differences between the two characters, but also it creates expectation, or intrigue, as to what will happen when the *chevalier* comes home to find his wife in bed with his squire.

⁵² ‘Sarrazins’ is a generic term for non-Christian which in this case refers to the Prussians. In line 22 it is written that the *chevalier* made pilgrimage (or a crusade) to Prussia. It is possible that Prussia is specifically mentioned in order to imply that the *chevalier* is not as brave as he could have been by choosing to go to Prussia, a less dangerous location, than Turkey, which was another destination for crusades at the time. Riley-Smith writes that, although Prussia was a worthy location for a crusade, fighting the Ottomans in Turkey was generally considered more dangerous (120).

⁵³ The verb *combattre* is used many times throughout the *nouvelles* as a metaphor for sex. In *nouvelle* fifty-nine, a man searches for his maid’s bed, “et s’en alla combattre ou lit de sa dame la chambriere tout prest pour sa veu accomplir, ou il fut bien receu et rencontré” (“and he went to battle, ready to accomplish what he desired, in the bed belonging to his mistress, the maid, where he was well-received”; 44-46). In the seventy-sixth *nouvelle*, a priest has such violent sex with a woman that she is “*combattu*” (48). The most extended metaphor that adopts the verb *combattre* to mean sex is in the eighty-sixth *nouvelle*. A newly married couple go to bed for the first time and the husband “monte sur le lit, et se joint au plus près de sa dame, la lance au poing, et luy presente la bataille... Quelque devoir que nostre mary peust faire, il ne peut trouver la maniere d’estre receu a cest escu ne a ceste joute.” (“he climbs into bed and comes as close as possible to his lady, his arms ready to start battle ... But no matter what the husband does, he cannot figure out how to be received by the shield, nor into the joust”; 53-54; 60-62)

From this short passage we can identify two of the three expectations for a *nouvelle* outlined by Dubuis. Intrigue appears when the wife takes a lover and it is not clear how she will escape from being caught with her lover. At the same time, the carefully wrought passage demonstrates the narrator's delight in the anecdote, where through few words he is able to illustrate the wife's deceit and the husband's piety though without clearly judging either. Finally, the cuckold's ignorance and the wife's duplicity manifests as a three-fold *bon mot* at the end of the *nouvelle*. After inviting her husband inside, the wife says to her husband, "Et vrayement, dit madame, encores vous estes vous **bon mary**" ("And certainly, said the lady, you are still my **good husband**"; emphasis added, 151-152). After this statement, the husband:

se bouta ou lit avecques madame, qui le receut du demourant de l'escuier, qui s'en va son chemin, lyé et joieux d'estre ainsi eschappé. Comme vous avez oy fut le chevalier trompé. Et n'ay point sceu, combien que pluseurs gens depuis le sceurent, qu'il en fust jamais adverty.

slid into bed with his wife who received him with what she had prepared for the squire, who, during this time, was thankful and joyful to have so narrowly escaped. And as you have just heard, this is how the knight was deceived. And even though many others know about it, we hope that he will never be told. (155-160)

The first part of the *bon mot* has the wife call her husband a *bon mary*: through this comment, the wife highlights her own infidelity in front of her ignorant husband. The wife's deceit is then reinforced in line 151, where the cuckold replaces his rival in the still-warm adulterous bed. Finally, the cuckold's naïveté is highlighted one last time when *Monseigneur* clearly states that, although many others heard about the woman's trick, the *chevalier* remained ignorant of it

forever. Through these three examples of the *bon mot*, the power difference articulated by Sedgwick is manifested in an altered format.

According to Sedgwick, there is always a power hierarchy in erotic triangles where the lover is active and the cuckold passive. This hierarchy is predicated on knowledge. While knowledge is certainly paramount in this triangle, and the cuckold is undeniably the passive character, it is the wife, not the lover, who assumes the role of the active participant. Indeed, without the wife's trick, the lover would not have escaped and the two would have been caught. There is also another level of active participants that Sedgwick does not address (even though her discussion of erotic triangles is in a literary context): a story's readers and listeners are also active participants and have a place in this hierarchy predicated on knowledge. Therefore, those 'gens' in the Cnn who know the story about the cuckold and his wife are also active participants because they have enough information to delight in the woman's deceit and understand the irony of her words when she tells her husband that he is a *bon mary*.⁵⁴ Understanding irony is not only essential for enjoying this *nouvelle* and the "anecdote elle-même," but it is also a critical component of many of the other *nouvelles* in the collection. In the sixteenth *nouvelle* the irony in the wife's use of *bon mary* is not the only example of this rhetorical strategy; and before the other ironies in this and other stories can be examined, it is first necessary to explore both medieval and contemporary ideas of this device.

Intentional misrepresentation: Irony and its uses

The sixteenth *nouvelle* belongs to the category, 'the husband who does not know he has been cuckolded and the lover gets away with the adultery.' Arguably, this category contains the

⁵⁴ David LaGuardia writes that this tale is a retelling of an *exemplum* which was intended to caution men about women's wiles. In this tale, however, the tale is not told to warn male listeners, but rather, to provide a means of entertainment about a man who is "half avenging warrior, half pathetic dupe; one part devoted crusader, and one part victim of the game of blind man's bluff" ("Exemplarity as Misogyny" 47-8).

most comedic and morally dubious stories of all the categories of erotic triangles because the cleverest ruses are developed to dupe the husband, and the wife and lover escape unscathed. Moreover, with nine stories, this category is also represented by the highest number of tales. In six of these stories (thirteen, sixteen, twenty-three, twenty-seven, forty-one and eighty-eight), either the lover or the wife intentionally deceives the cuckold through a clever trick, making him the target of an amusing joke. In all instances, the intention to deceive the husband drives the narrative and the attendant humour adds pleasure, for both participants and reader, to the deception. But more than the comedic aspects, the irony involved in telling the stories must have also appealed (and continues to appeal) to the listener. Indeed, irony is a common rhetorical device in many of the *nouvelles*, recognizable to medieval and modern reader alike.⁵⁵ While ideas about irony have changed since the Middle Ages, irony's basic tenet – saying one thing, while implying its opposite – has remained constant. Nevertheless, although irony is now a common, though sometimes misunderstood rhetorical device,⁵⁶ it has not always been highly-regarded, and even after centuries of debate, this device is still sometimes considered harmful to the irony's 'victim'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ John Reiss writes that, contrary to early twentieth-century opinion on the uses of irony in medieval literature, this rhetorical device was in fact quite common. He argues that "the Middle Ages, though lacking the modern consciousness of irony, was nevertheless essentially ironic in its world view and in its literary expression" (211). He continues, that "the Middle Ages was an age of irony because, paradoxical as it sounds, of its sense of certainty. The medieval artist and his audience knew that God was in His heaven and that all was right with the world" (212).

⁵⁶ Using and understanding irony still presents problems, and even presidents have difficulty with irony sometimes. During the 2004 United States presidential elections, George Bush was asked by reporter Alexandra Pelosi about his taste for baloney sandwiches. She queries: "It was rumored that you like baloney sandwiches." Bush replied: "I like a good baloney sandwich. (INAUDIBLE) every day, but I like just baloney." Pelosi: "You don't find that ironic?" Bush: "I find you ironic" (Cnn reliable sources).

⁵⁷ In a detailed description of the different effects irony can have on its 'victim' or the uninitiated, Linda Hutcheon proposes a spectrum that considers everything from irony's 'minimal affective charge' (that can be either positive or negative) to its 'maximal affective charge' (which can also be positive or negative) (47). At the minimal end of the spectrum, irony is used for precision or for emphasis, and its negative quality is that it is non-essential and decorative (48). At the maximal affective charge, there are "issues of power and authority" so that it creates elitism or "in-groups" on the negative end and "amiable communities" on the other (55).

In the classical period, philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero defined and debated the meaning and uses of irony and many of their conclusions succeeded them into the Middle Ages (Knox 7). In fact, it was only at end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth that our current conceptions of irony began to develop and to refute irony's often maligned earlier reputation (Rossman 9). In the classical period and the Middle Ages, irony was most commonly associated with the intent to deceive. From the Greek, *eironeia*, the term meant dissimulation or pretense – a connotation preserved for centuries (14). According to Jan Swearingen, in Plato's time, "*eiron* was a term of rebuke, meaning 'you dissembling scoundrel'; *eironeia* denoted deceptiveness through guileful understatement or masking of self. It was not until Aristotle that irony denoted anything other than despicable, mocking pretence" (73). Although irony's negative connotations started in the Classical period and were preserved into the Middle Ages, irony nonetheless developed a slightly better reputation first with Aristotle and then with Cicero. Indeed, after Plato, irony or deception often centered on the use of a word, where a listener was expected to interpret its opposite meaning. For instance, '*bonus*' was commonly used ironically, where the reader was not intended to understand the word in its literal sense, but rather for its opposite meaning (Knox 7). This form of rhetoric, *unis verbi ironia*, is also known as antiphrasis and is common in the Cnn.

In the Nicomachean Ethics and the Rhetoric, Aristotle addressed other aspects of irony and their implications. In the Ethics, Aristotle referred to irony as 'self-deprecation,' or, the opposite of boastfulness, writing that both attitudes ought to be condemned (Rossman 15). In the Rhetoric, he revisits the subject and emphasizes how it functions as a character trait appropriate to a gentleman. This use of irony contrasts with the earlier version of *eiron* which had been a term of abuse (Swearingen 129). Aristotle writes that irony is an acceptable form of jest for a gentleman, commenting that "[i]rony better befits a gentleman than buffoonery; the

ironical man jokes to amuse himself, the buffoon to amuse other people” (Rhetoric III.19).

From this statement, it becomes clear that irony’s poor reputation improved dramatically in the short time between Plato and Aristotle. Cicero for his part, also addressed *unis verbi ironia*, and slightly widening the concept, he wrote that irony did not necessarily only imply the opposite of a given meaning, but could also indicate something other than the intended meaning: “one type of humour that can be found in a speech is saying one thing and meaning another” (292). From Aristotle’s time and into the Middle Ages, the discussion on irony continued, and much of the debate centered on whether irony was a form of lying or a more acceptable form of rhetoric.

A preoccupation with irony as a form of deceit kept the debate on irony alive into the Middle Ages. Some medieval writers took their moral compass from the Bible, and upon finding evidence of irony within this text, concluded that it was acceptable (Knox 51). As Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas also pointed out, irony’s main purpose was not to deceive, but rather to present something as either greater or lesser than it actually was, and therefore, it was an acceptable form of rhetoric (51). At the same time, irony was also perceived as a means of mockery. It was thought that irony was powerful because it could be more scornful than an outright insult, for instance, calling a harlot chaste was more derisive than simply calling her a whore (79). Knox concludes that by the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance,

[t]he notion that *ironia* was a vehicle of mockery and scorn was ... pervasive both in theory and practice. Indeed it was so pervasive that it coloured the definition of the term. Many definitions of *ironia* as pretence ... or, more precisely, as stating the opposite to, or something other than the intended meaning would also describe *ironia* as mockery. (89-90)

Since the Middle Ages, the association between mockery and irony has continued. However, the problem that remains is determining who ‘gets’ the irony and who does not. Indeed, more

problematic than irony's cutting edge, is the difficulty in expressing it effectively and then interpreting it accordingly. Interpreting irony can be so slippery, that there is not even a specific verb to describe the act. Wayne C. Booth comments that we are left with verbs such as 'to interpret,' 'to decipher,' 'to translate,' 'to understand,' or 'to dig,' or we can resort to metaphors such as "seeing behind a mask or a 'persona'" (33). Although none of these terms adequately captures the complicated process of understanding an implied message behind a word or statement that intends to mock, exaggerate, or deceive, it is indisputable that because there are always those who understand irony and those who do not, a hierarchy inevitably forms between the parties. D.C. Muecke writes that those who do not understand irony are its victims and those who believe they understand irony consider themselves superior.⁵⁸ He goes on to explain that such hierarchies form in 'specific irony' – where the irony is temporary and there is a recognizable victim (119).⁵⁹ Once this hierarchy of specific irony is in place the victim can be laughed at. Muecke writes:

The relationship in irony between the observer and the observed can take many different forms. But whether the difference between them is presented as 'cosmological', from Heaven to Earth, or geographical, from Persia to Paris... the laughter that tends to arise at the spectacle of insignificance, wretchedness, vanity, stupidity, or littleness is fundamentally the laughter of freedom at

⁵⁸ Hutcheon takes issue with the generally accepted terminology 'victim,' writing that "those who do not 'get' the irony are not necessarily what most want to call its victims (cf. Clyne 1974:345); they may not care at all; they may simply 'misunderstand' (i.e. interpret differently) because they are operating within a different discursive context. The so-called uninitiated are not always the same as the targets either, for many miss (or get) ironies directed at others as well as at themselves" (94-5). This interpretation of the alazon's role (the traditional 'victim') in the irony forces the interpreter to question the larger context of the utterance as well as the knowledge possessed by both interpreter and ironist.

⁵⁹ Muecke contrasts specific irony to general irony, writing that the latter is "life itself or any general aspect of life seen as fundamentally and inescapably an ironic state of affairs. No longer is it a case of isolated victims; we are all victims of impossible situations, or universal Ironies of Dilemma ... General Irony is not primarily corrective or normative; we are all in the same hole and there is no way of getting out of it. Nonetheless, there is more than one way of responding to such a predicament..." (120).

enslavement. The ironist tends to laugh because by comparison he feels free. In order to be able to laugh he presents his victim as not free (227).

From this description of specific irony, we can turn to tales in the Cnn where the husband is unknowingly cuckolded and is laughed at for his stupidity or littleness. In situations such as these, the storyteller and the audience interpret some events ironically while the characters usually remain ignorant of it. By interpreting irony, the storyteller and the listener feel superior to the cuckold and are free to laugh at him.

Feelings of superiority arising from humour have been discussed at great length by philosophers. According to Quentin Skinner, philosophers generally agree that feelings of superiority arise when you “perceived some contemptible vice or weakness in your own former self or (even better) in someone else” which then produces a “joyful feeling of superiority” (424). Aristotle, for instance, claimed that we laugh at others because they exhibit a fault that, although not painful, is ridiculous, thus making them seem inferior (Skinner 426). Hobbes maintained that laughter arises when we feel we have triumphed over someone. In short, people laugh at others’ “mischances and indecencies” (64). There is also a temporal element necessary for eliciting laughter: the perception of someone’s weakness must also be accompanied by a sudden realisation of a defect, or there must be a quick reversal of expectations. Hobbes writes accordingly, that laughter must be “*new and unexpected*” (65). He continues that it is possible for people to laugh at their own follies, but only after the embarrassing event has passed and they have surmounted the humiliation (65). Finally, Hobbes addresses whether it is possible to laugh without menace, saying that this can only occur when people laugh at “absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons, and when all the company may laugh together” (66). Bergson also discusses this final point, observing that “[n]otre rire est toujours le rire d’un groupe” and continuing that, “[l]e rire doit avoir une signification sociale” (5-6). The social

implications of laughter are felt in the Cnn, particularly in the stories that are based on historical fact where the listener might have been aware of the details and possibly the principal figures in the story.⁶⁰ In these cases, there is great potential for feelings of superiority to arise, especially in stories with erotic triangles. According to Sedgwick, in these situations there is an ingrained hierarchy between the active and passive participants where the cuckold is on the lowest rung of the erotic ladder. In contrast, the reader or listener is vastly superior to the duped husband: not only is he aware of the specific irony, but also, he is twice removed from the events. Therefore, when a story refers to familiar places or people, the storyteller and listeners have a deeper connection to both characters and the comic situation and there is a recognizable social and cultural context, thus making it easier to relate to the characters and also to laugh at their misfortune. Furthermore, in cases of cuckolding humour, David Turner has pointed out that this form of comedy frequently “established points of contact with the wider world by setting its plots of marital discord in recognisable social milieu.” Through this strategy, the story was imbued with a feeling of “authenticity which supported humourists’ claims that comedy mirrored life” (95). Although this sense of authenticity renders the story even more uncomfortable for the audience, the comic misfortunes of the cuckold could be used as a “safety valve,” thus buttressing the groups’ collective feelings of superiority (Sinclair 28).

For the storytellers and listeners, the environment in which the stories are told – a court, surrounded by others who are ready to laugh at one story and then tell another – is an atmosphere where one can feel superior to the characters in the tales. As the *nouvelles* are recounted, the storytellers create a world where they control other people’s fate. In so doing, they ensure that for a little while they will not be the victims of the same cruel pranks suffered

⁶⁰ Dubuis enumerates a few of the *nouvelles* that happened during the time of Duke Philippe le Bon’s court. Included among the most contemporary stories are: *nouvelle* seventy-five which occurred in 1430; number sixty-two in 1439; numbers forty-two and fifty-five took place in 1450 (19).

by their characters. While the listeners and storytellers are distanced by the events in the stories, the characters are nonetheless familiar – often they are ‘types’ recognizable to the listener and thus their personalities or eccentricities are understood immediately, allowing the storyteller to play more freely with character descriptions that often centre on *unis verbi ironia*. Knox cites the recurring character Calandrino in the Decameron as a good example of a character type who was quickly associated with being too dim-witted to understand his friends’ ironic speech (56). More generally, sometimes the narratives themselves are familiar to the listener, and in such cases, the storyteller has the freedom to alter commonly known plots, often for ironic ends. As Reiss notes, the irony that results from this shared context depends on an “intimacy between author and audience. It is a rapport based not only on their common understanding of *doctrina* but also, and more immediately, on their common view of this world and its multiple facets” (222).⁶¹ Reiss states that many stories were retold, often ironically in the Middle Ages, citing the stories of Lancelot and Tristan as excellent examples. Within the Cnn itself, many of the stories should have been familiar to medieval audiences, including the fiftieth *nouvelle* which is an adaptation of one of the Facetiae by Poggio (Lefèvre 169), the ninety-eighth *nouvelle* which is a retelling of Jehan de Saintré by Antoine de la Sale (Lefèvre 168) and the sixteenth and eighteenth *nouvelles* which, according to Dubuis, were well-known stories at the time (20). Starting from these familiar sources, the Cnn’s storytellers had the freedom to play with character and plot, all the while relying on common cultural references. Although contemporary readers might not have the same cultural context as the story’s original intended audience, a practiced reader of such stories quickly learns to identify the different character ‘types’ and also iterations of similar stories. However, the fabrication of an environment where the reader is

⁶¹ The “common understanding” discussed by Reiss has been called “discursive communities” by Hutcheon. See chapter 4, Irony’s Edge.

exempt from mockery is even more compelling for the modern reader. Distanced by time and space, the contemporary reader has greater freedom to read the irony in the stories without being directly affected by the outcome.

Specific irony and the ‘safe’ distance enjoyed by the story’s listeners are observable in the sixteenth *nouvelle*. The delicate frame that separates the listeners from the participants in the story is constructed from the story’s first lines through references to familiar locations and well-known characters while maintaining a safe distance from the goings-on at court. The introduction of the sixteenth *nouvelle* reads as follows, “En la conté d’Artoys nagueres vivoit ung gentil chevalier, riches et puissant, lyé par mariage avecques une tresbelle dame et de hault lieu” (“Recently, in the region of Artois lived a good knight who was rich and powerful, bound by marriage to a beautiful and well-born woman”; 4-6). This innocuous sentence frames the story in three ways. First, it places the couple in a known geographical location inside the Burgundian territory, yet within the northern reaches, thus removed from the court in Dijon. Second, the characters, a *chevalier* and a *dame* are ‘types’ that would be recognisable to the audience, though because they are unnamed, they remain separated from the members of the court. Third, the word *nagueres* is an unspecified time period, placing the story in the recent past, perhaps even within distant memory. These three factors allow the audience to feel they understand the characters, but distance them enough from them so that they are free to laugh and enjoy all ironies and unfortunate events that might take place.

Using similar narrative techniques, the narrator concludes the story, “Comme vous avez oy fut le chevalier trompé. Et n’ay point sceu, combien que pluseurs gens depuis le sceurent, qu’il en fust jamais adverty ” (“And as you have just heard, this is how the knight was deceived. And even though many others know about it, we hope that he will never be told”; 158-160). In these final two sentences, the narrator maintains the anonymity of the protagonists but at the

same time heightens the audience's sense of superiority over the unfortunate *chevalier*. For not only was he cuckolded, but several people including the court have also been privy to this information. Thus, in the last sentence the narrator strengthens the specific irony and reaffirms his, and his audience's, superiority over the characters.

A moment of heightened irony is also found in the scene where the wife completely blinds her husband so that her lover can escape from her room. In this scene the hierarchy between interpreter and ironist/cuckold and wife/passive character and active character is well illustrated. The woman who finds herself in a compromising situation quickly invents a ruse to allow her lover to escape unharmed. Through the closed door, she tells her husband that she had just had a dream that her husband had come home, but that his blinded eye had been healed. Her husband tells her that she is "bien beste" ("completely crazy"; 122-3) and that his eye could not have healed. She replies, by insisting that he must prove that it is he, and that his eye is still blind: "pour la paix de mon cueur, je vous require que nous l'esprouvons" ("for my own peace of heart, I require you to prove your identity to me"; 127-8). Rather than questioning his wife's motives, the *chevalier* allows his wife to administer the test,

Et monseigneur, qui est content de ceste espreuve, souffrit bien que madame luy bouchast son bon oeil d'une main, et de l'autre elle tenoit la chandelle devant l'oeil de monseigneur qui crevé estoit; et puis luy demanda: "Monseigneur, ne voiez vous pas bien, pas vostre foy? – Par mon serment, nenny, m'ameye, ce dit il."... "Or actendez, monseigneur, ce dit elle. Et maintenant vous me voiez bien, faictes pas? – Par Dieu! M'ayme, nenny, dit monseigneur, comment vous verroie je? Vous avez bouché mon dextre oeil, et l'autre est crevé passé a dix ans. – Alors, dist elle, or voy je bien que c'estoit songe voirement qui ce rapport m'a fait. Mais, toutesfoiz, Dieu soit loué et gracié vous estes cy!"

And the gentleman, who accepted this test, allowed madame to cover his good eye with one hand, and with the other hand, she held a candle in front of the gentleman's bad eye. Then she asked him: "Sir, do you swear that you cannot see?" "By my word, no, my love," he answered. "Now wait, sir," she said. "And now you can see me, right?" "By God! No, my love," said the gentleman, "how can I see you? You covered my right eye and the other was blinded ten years ago." "So," she said, "now I see that it really was a dream that made me think this. But, in any case, may God be thanked and praised that you are here!" (130-136;139-146)

In this scene, the *chevalier* is simultaneously the duped husband and the deceived listener who interprets his wife's request to test his eye as a true identity test, rather than an elaborate trick intended to deceive him further. Rather than question whether his wife has duplicitous intentions when she covers his good eye, he innocently falls into the role of the duped man in his wife's game. While the *chevalier* interprets his wife's words and intentions literally, the listener can enjoy the spectacle. According to Knox, this situation can be interpreted as ironic. He writes that if "the speaker does not mean what he is saying literally and intends his audience to realise this, there is an opposition" and, in turn, this opposition creates irony (35). More ironic perhaps than the opposition between meaning and interpretation, is the use of the husband's blinded eye. By exploiting her husband's partial blindness and making him fully blind, the woman literalizes her husband's figurative blindness in this situation: not only does the woman prevent the *chevalier* from seeing what is before him, but her words also make him blind to this compromising situation.

In addition to the comedic aspect of this situation is the subversive function that the lady's words fulfill: the ironic deceit focused upon by classical and medieval scholars is

foregrounded, as the cuckold is duped once again by his wife. In this erotic triangle, the woman uses language, especially irony, to manage her body and to take control of her compromised situation, making her the active participant in this triangle. In fact, by tracing irony's development from the introduction towards the climax in the scene with the covered eye, we observe that language is a powerful tool that can upset the narrative and the relationships between the characters. To begin, the narrator *Monseigneur* uses irony to poke fun at himself and his unstable state, and later, his female character uses irony to deride her husband and her marriage. Through this form of mockery, the stable erotic triangle hypothesized by Lévi-Strauss, Irigaray and Rubin is disrupted. Instead, the lady in the sixteenth *nouvelle* enlightens us with her cunning and her linguistic ability, while her husband remains blinded by her wiles.

Irony is certainly a strong component of the majority of the *nouvelles*, but there are also other elements that contribute to the maintenance or dissolution of the erotic triangle. In terms of the portrayal of women alone, some critics, including Judith Bruskin Diner, have noted that the Cnn contains some stories that are surprising in their portrayal of a clever and wily woman. She attributes this tendency to the fact that the Cnn was written at a time when there was a lot of experimenting with new genres and styles. By the fifteenth century, she explains, stories no longer focused on the theme of courtly love, but were replaced by comedic or parodic tales ("Filling in and Fleshing Out" 20). Furthermore, the kind of woman portrayed in these adulterous stories varies greatly from her counterparts in the courtly love genre. Bruskin Diner comments that the medieval definition of sexuality and sexual attractiveness was beginning to widen at the time that the Cnn was written, and unlike earlier texts, the Cnn casts formerly sexually undesirable women as sexual objects. Indeed in the Cnn, wives, who were historically characterized as "sexually repugnant" were looked upon with lust ("Filling in and Fleshing Out" 29). This is epitomized in the fiftieth *nouvelle* where a father is ready to kill his son for having

mounted his grandmother on several occasions. In terms of comedy, the case of the wife in the sixteenth *nouvelle* effectively illustrates how women were sometimes allowed to be the disseminators of mockery, not just its target. However, experimentation with genre and sexuality, as highlighted by Bruskin Diner, is only a partial explanation for the wide variety of situations and outcomes in the adulterous stories, where both women and men, lovers and cuckolds, form unconventional relationships predicated on lust, desire, or rivalry. Indeed, the relationships that develop between the characters throughout the stories are too complicated to be attributable to one trend or factor. Just as surprising as the tale about a woman who asserts control over her tripartite relationship, are other stories where men forge, or even maintain, homosocial bonds, despite the husband knowing he has been cuckolded. In fact, in some situations, homosocial relationships might develop irrespective of the infidelity – a fact that makes the politics of erotic triangles so fascinating. Because so many situations might lead to erotic triangles, it follows that homosocial relationships form differently across a variety of scenarios. The rest of the discussion on the Cnn examines accordingly three factors in addition to irony that can lead to either a strong or weakened male homosocial bond, which in turn contributes to the potential destabilization of the erotic triangle. Conversational implicature, the art of seduction, and men's willingness to share the same women all create different formulations of the erotic triangle, each with its own outcome. Common to all these examples, and the factor that ties these stories together making them part of a whole oeuvre, is the narrators' shared goal of amusing the listener through a *bon mot* and ironic speech.

Scenario 1: Building Triangles Through Conversational Implicature

The first scenario that illustrates how a homosocial relationship might develop occurs when two men communicate through coded language, or conversational implicature.

Conversational implicature has been defined by Jacob Mey as “the principle according to which an utterance, in a conventional setting, is always understood in accordance with what can be expected” (40). He adds that it is “something which is implied in conversation ... which is left implicit in actual language use” (99). To Mey’s understanding of conversational implicature, I would add that in order for the implicature to function as intended – that is, to be properly understood by the listener – implicature is also dependent upon Austin’s conditions for ‘happy’ utterances. Austin’s requirements are the following:

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conversational effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriated for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently. (14-15)

In many ways, Austin’s regulations for ‘happy’ utterances are not very different from how irony functions. For irony to be effective it has to be executed properly and completely. However, the essential difference between ‘happy’ utterances and irony depends on how the speaker’s words are received. So long as a listener, though not necessarily the person being addressed,

understands the double meaning in the statement, an ironic effect is achieved. This is not the case for a ‘happy’ utterance, where an unstated bond between speaker and listener expects that the listener will understand all the implications of the locutionary force. In most instances in the Cnn this communication bond exists primarily between the male characters. Often men use conversational implicature while relying on the fact that the woman will only understand one meaning of their words and remain ignorant of the implicit message coded into their speech. As is required by Mey and Austin, these men know how to utter and interpret sentences that carry a secondary, implicit, message. One result of this ‘happy’ conversational implicature in the Cnn is that men are able to form an exclusive homosocial bond. In fact, even when the husband is not necessarily cognizant of his cuckolded state, when conversational implicature is used, a bond forms between the men nonetheless.

A clear example of conversational implicature occurs in the third *nouvelle*, an example that has already been touched upon in the first chapter with regard to LaGuardia’s analysis on the exchange of women. As I stated earlier, LaGuardia observes a clear exchange of women in this *nouvelle* where both women’s body parts are fragmented and fetishized (63). While this might be true, there are also other factors that lead to a strong homosocial bond between the two active men in this tale. To summarize the plot again, this story contains two sets of erotic triangles involving the same two men, where first a knight seduces a miller’s wife and then the miller seduces the knight’s wife. In both cases, the men use conversational implicature to seduce the other’s spouse. The knight begins by approaching the *musnière*, telling her that she is in danger of having her *devant* fall out and that he can cure her:

Vrayement, m’amy, j’apperçoy bien que si vous cheminez gueres avant, que
vostre devant est en tresgrand dangier de cheoir ... je suis content, affin de plus

en plus nourrir amour entre nous deux, vous recoigner vostre devant, et le vous rendrai en tel et si tresbon estat que par tout le pourrez seurement porter ...

Really, my friend, it is clear that if you continue to walk then your genitals are in grave danger of falling out ... I am happy, out of the love we share, to put back your genitals in such a good state that you could certainly carry them anywhere...

(26-29;71-74)

After the *chevalier* puts the *musnière*'s genitals back in place, the woman is so happy that she tells her husband about the *chevalier*'s kindness. In retribution, the miller tells the knight's wife that she has a diamond stuck in her body that he can fish out, and in the same manner that the *chevalier* fixed his wife's genitals, the miller used "un tel oustil ... pour querir et pescher le dyamant ... Pour abreger, tant fist le bon musnier qu'il rendit a madame son tresbeau dyamant..." (the kind of tool to search for and fish out the diamond ... in short, the good miller did this so much that he returned the very lovely diamond to the woman; 258-9;263-5). Each woman believes the stories concocted by the men, and when they recount the incident to their husbands, the men are able to understand the seductive purposes behind their rival's words. At the end of the story, the two men meet each other in the street and call a truce to their game. At the same time, they acknowledge each other's conquest. The *chevalier* calls out:

"Dieu gard, Dieu gard ce bon pescheur de dyamant!"

"Dieu gard, Dieu gard ce recoigneur de cons!"

"Par Nostre Dame! Tu dis vray," dist le seigneur; "tays toy de moy et si feray je de toy."

"God bless, God bless this good fisher of diamonds!"

"God bless, Gob bless this fixer of cunts!"

“My word! You speak well,” said the seigneur, “keep quiet about me and I’ll do the same for you.” (284-289)

Although they are in public, the codes they established through their seductions are used again in order to hide the true meaning of their words from those around them. In this scenario, these men fulfill all Austin’s requirements for a ‘happy’ utterance: they state key words in a particular context to achieve the same effect – where one man indicates to the other that he knows about the seduction, their exchange ends the competition, they both correctly and completely execute the conversation using the same form of conversational implicature, and they presumably conduct themselves properly subsequent to the exchange by never mentioning the incident again. However, in addition to understanding the implications of their words and behaving appropriately, there is another level of interpretation that is required in this scene, for it is only possible to decipher the meaning of this dialogue if the hearer is aware of the words’ context. Raymond Gibbs calls this awareness “pragmatic knowledge” (469). In fact, pragmatic knowledge often goes hand in hand with conversational implicature where context is just as important to understanding coded language as the ability to detect the use of such language. Through the men’s use of conversational implicature and their shared access to pragmatic knowledge, they alienate the women from their relationship and strengthen the male homosocial bond.

The bond that forms between the *chevalier* and the *musnier* is not the only one developed in this story. A male complicity also forms between narrator and listener at the end of the story so that the story’s male audience is drawn into the male homosocial aspect of the *nouvelle*, forming a tripartite male homosocial relationship between miller, knight, and male listener. Indeed, when the male storyteller, Monseigneur de la Roche, tells his story to the male populated court, another layer of homosocial bonding is represented: one man tells a group of

men a salacious story where women are exchanged and men control those women's bodies. At the same time, the absence of female storytellers, and presumably female listeners in the Cnn, reinforces the female silence that echoes throughout the third *nouvelle*. Therefore, by the end of this *nouvelle*, not only have women been subjected to unwitting seductions, but also they have been disenfranchised from a language they think they understand. In turn, the message conveyed to the listener/reader is that the preferred relationship in this *nouvelle* is not between spouses, but between men.

Scenario 2: The art of seduction and the formation of homosocial bonds

A second scenario that leads to the development of an erotic triangle and a possible homosocial bond occurs in scenes that include eating or bathing, activities shared either between men or between a wife and her lover.⁶² Both eating and bathing are erotically charged pastimes. Michael Camille has noted the medieval imagery associated with these two activities, writing that there are many,

fifteenth-century manuscript illuminations of men and women bathing together, which often illustrate historical and literary texts, they are often shown eating a banquet at the same time, the table set up in the bath itself. (86)

The first *nouvelle* replicates this imagery through a combination of eroticism, eating and bathing. This story, also discussed by LaGuardia and referred to in the first chapter, perfectly illustrates how these seductive pleasures are used. Earlier, I refuted LaGuardia's argument that the woman and the feast are interchangeable objects of exchange between men, and stressed that the woman refuses to allow her body to be used in an equitable trade for a meal. Here, I develop this argument further, and explain that not only does the woman try to remove herself from the

⁶² This point is discussed by David LaGuardia in chapter 3 of The Iconography of Power.

economy of exchange by lashing out at her husband, but also, the bond between the two men exceeds our definition of homosocial friendship, representing instead the beginning of a homosexual relationship.

To summarize the story again: while a man is away, his friend and neighbour seduces his wife. When the man comes back unexpectedly, the neighbour is at his own home with the man's wife. The neighbour hides the woman under the covers and the two men partake in the meal originally intended for the woman. Eventually the woman is able to escape the room and she arrives home in time to berate her husband who walks in a few minutes later.

Of interest in this story is the seduction scene that the neighbour arranges for the woman. When he is finally able to arrange for the woman to come to his house, he prepares the following:

Il fist tantost tirer les baings, chauffer les estuves, faire pasteiz, tartres et ypocras, et le surplus des biens de Dieu, si largement que l'appareil sembloit ung grand desroy.

He quickly had a bath drawn, the stoves warmed, and pâté,⁶³ and spiced wine⁶⁴ made, and the quantity of all God's delicacies were prepared in such haste that the house came to be in great disarray. (52-55)

⁶³ In the Godefroy dictionary, a definition for a word spelled *tartres* is given as "piece de monnaie", but given the context, it is more likely that *tartres* should be *tartes* which means 'tart' (v.7, p.652). Conversely, in volume 10, Godefroy adds another definition to *tartre*, writing that it is also a, "substance saline qui sous la forme d'une croute s'attache aux parois des tonneaux de vin" (745). This substance, however, does not appear to be edible, and even if it is, it is far from being an aphrodisiac.

⁶⁴ I cannot find a definition in any of the Godefroy volumes for *hypocras*, however Judith Bruskin Diner translates the word as spiced wine (The One Hundred New Tales 17).

Like the imagery described by Camille, in this scene both bath and food are used to create a seduction scene so tempting and abundant that the room is in disarray. When the lady arrives,

Figure 1



the two lovers, “se bouterent ou baing, devant lequel le beau soupper fut en haste couvert et servy” (“The two jumped into the bath before which the dinner was quickly set and served”; 61-64). This description of the bathing and feasting scene fits perfectly with the images described by Camille and is even represented with its own image in the form of a miniature [figure 1].⁶⁵ In this image a table laden with

food is foregrounded. In the middle ground is the husband who is in the midst of pulling away the bedclothes in order to reveal a woman’s long hair and backside. Lying in bed next to the woman, and facing both the woman and intruder is the lover. Behind the husband and next to the bed are barrels that possibly represent the waiting bath. More striking than this image of seduction, however, is the text’s description of how it happened that the husband was able to so easily enter his neighbour’s house and his bedchamber in particular. The narrator says that when the lover began to desire his neighbour’s wife, he:

trouva par plusieurs et subtiles fassons que le bon compaignon, mary de ladicte gouge, fut son amy tresprivé et familier; et tant que pou de disners, de souppers, de bancquetz, de bains d’estuves, et d’aultres telz passetemps, en son hostel et ailleurs, ne feissent jamais sans sa compaignie.

⁶⁵ Picture from Pierre Champson *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles: Les Images*. Image1.

He found several subtle ways to make the good man, the husband of the aforementioned wench, become his very good and familiar friend, so that there were few dinners, suppers, banquets, baths and other pastimes, in his house and elsewhere, without that man's company. (25-31)

If dining and bathing connote erotic intentions, then the effort the lover takes to gain his neighbour's confidence assumes a sexualized meaning. In fact, the amount of space devoted to describing the efforts the neighbour made to befriend him is twice the length of the description of the seduction scene. Further emphasizing the erotic nature of the relationship between these men, is the husband's jealous reaction to the feast scene when he enters his neighbour's room unannounced:

Et, quand il vit la table chargée de vins et grandes viandes, ensemble le beau baing très bien paré, et le bourgeois en tres beau lit encourtiné avec sa secunde personne, Dieu scet s'il parla hault et blasonna bien les armes de son bon voisin. Or l'appelle ribauld, après loudier, après putier, après yvroigne...

And when he saw the table laden with wine and great food, a well-prepared bath, and the *bourgeois* in bed and wrapped up in the sheets with another person, God knows that he shouted and defamed his good neighbour's name. First he called him a vagabond, then a good for nothing, then a rake, then drunkard... (89-95)

Not unlike a jealous wife, the husband surveys the debauched scene from which he was excluded and calls his friend names. Keeping the woman covered, the lover attempts to appease the husband and invites him to dine:

Pour refaire les yeulx abusez de ce pouvre martir, le bourgeois commenda qu'on le feist seoir a la table, ou il reprint nouvelle ymaginacion par boire et menger largement...

In order to heal the poor martyr's spirits, the *bourgeois* ordered that he be seated at the table, where he improved his mood greatly by drinking and eating a lot...

(129-133)

Finally, the husband, the "pouvre martir," is calmed, and has no trouble taking the place of the woman for whom the bath and the meal were intended. This outcome is surprising indeed: with this ending, it appears that the neighbour is content seducing either husband or wife. Moreover, the homosocial relationship between the two men is laden with, if not replaced by, homosexual desire, as the two friends enact mating rituals usually reserved for heterosexual couples.⁶⁶ At the same time, the woman is completely disenfranchised from this homosocial/homosexual relationship and must attempt to insert her own voice and agency through other means. She does this at the end of the *nouvelle* when she lashes out at her husband for coming home drunk and late.⁶⁷ Overall, the insistence on and intentions behind feasting and bathing in both the homosocial/homosexual and heterosexual ties in this *nouvelle* exemplifies the strong erotic connotations of these activities.

⁶⁶ Despite the powerful erotic imagery in this *nouvelle*, I am most reluctant to call the relationship between the two men homosexual. While erotic desire is undoubtedly a component of these men's relationships, the modern concept of homosexuality is inappropriate for this relationship. As David Halperin warns, it is dangerous to apply our ideas of what constitutes sexuality and sexual preferences anachronistically. He continues saying that indeterminately applying labels such as 'gay' or 'lesbian' to past figures shows a "tendency to refashion past sexual cultures in the image of our own," and this in turn, "says a lot about our own historical situation, the functioning of contemporary sexual categories, our standard ways of thinking about the past" (15). In her discussion of female homosexual relations, Judith Bennett has attempted to circumvent the problem of applying labels anachronistically by suggesting the term 'lesbian-like' when discussing issues relating to women and sexuality that do not necessarily only refer to our contemporary notions of lesbianism, but also to other issues in the Middle Ages (9-10). Bennett's formulation is also useful in this context as it applies to men such as the ones in the first *nouvelle*.

⁶⁷ In fact, as Yasmina Foehr-Janssens comments, in this scene, the wife does more than just avenge herself, she contributes to the complete undoing of her husband, who, already cuckolded and humiliated by his (richer) friend and neighbour, is now publicly shamed by his wife (281). The wife's actions lead Foehr-Janssens to conclude that "la nouvelle est un récit plus cruel que le fabliau. Elle pose un mode regard désabusé sur un monde de dupes" (281). She continues that this treatment of dupes contributes to part of the 'newness' of the *nouvelles* where there is "un bon tour dont le principal mérite semble être d'assurer une publicité inaccoutumée à des procédés scabreux ou des pratiques licencieuses" (282).

Scenario 3: When men willingly share the same woman

The third scenario in which a male homosocial bond develops involves two men who willingly share a woman. These agreements usually take place after each man has had sexual relations with the woman, and these relationships are notable because no rivalry develops between the two men when they discover each other's secret. Instead, it is more common for these men to become closer friends than they were before the information was divulged. The relationships between Jehan Stotton and Thomas Brampton in the sixty-second *nouvelle* epitomizes this form of homosocial friendship. The text's opening reads as follows:

lesquels Jehan et Thomas Brampton se entreaymoient autant ou plus que pourroient faire deux freres germains ensemble; car de vestures, harnois et habillemens estoient tousjours d'une façon au plus près qu'ilz pouvoient; et la plupart du temps ne faisoient que ung lict et une chamber, et oncques n'avoit on vu entr'eulx deux que aulcunement y eut quelque courroux, noise ou maltalent. Jehan and Thomas Brampton loved each other as much, or more, than could two brothers, for in terms of clothing and armour they were always as identical as they could be, and most of the time they only needed one bed in the bedroom, and you would never see any anger, quarrel or irritation between the two of them.

(17-25)

This description of the two friends reads as an ideal example of classical *amicitia perfecta*. These two men resemble each other in every way: they share their bed and their meals, they dress the same, and they are also of equal rank and education. Because the *nouvelle* evokes the topos of *amicitia* from the beginning, the lack of rivalry and jealousy at the end of the *nouvelle* should not be surprising.

The two men have sex with the same woman under the following circumstances. Both men are in Calais to attend a conference and share a room at an inn. One day, without knowing about his friend's similar intentions, each man propositions the innkeeper's wife. The woman first tells Jehan to come to her room from evening until midnight, and then Thomas is instructed to come between midnight and dawn. While Jehan is in bed, a diamond ring he is wearing slips off his finger and falls in the bed. Later, Thomas finds the ring in the bed and puts it on his own finger. The next day Jehan sees the ring and claims that it is his, but Thomas refuses to give it to him. The two agree that the only way to resolve the situation is to ask the next man who passes them on the road to decide who should have the ring. This man happens to be Richard, the innkeeper himself, who settles the dispute by keeping the ring. Soon, Jehan and Thomas understand that they had both been in bed with the same woman and agree that losing the ring to the unknowing cuckold is a small price to pay for their misdemeanours. The two then go to the tavern to tell their story. The *nouvelle* ends with all the men in the tavern laughing over the events of the previous evening: "Et de ceste adventure tous ceulx qui presens estoient commencerent a rire et menerent grand joye" ("Everyone who was there began to laugh and took great pleasure in hearing about this adventure"; 321-323).

The strong homosocial relationship between Jehan and Thomas has been commented upon by Sarah Kay.⁶⁸ Kay reads this story in light of the development of Jehan and Thomas's relationship that moves from chaste friendship to homosexual desire. She maintains that, by having sex with the same woman during the same night, and by inadvertently exchanging the ring in the adulterous bed, the two men consummated their relationship. At the end of the *nouvelle* when they go to the tavern to recount their adventure, they surround themselves within

⁶⁸ Sarah Kay developed her ideas in a paper presented at St. Anne's College, University of Oxford, May 15, 2001. As far as I know, she has never published this paper entitled "History in the text – the text in the history: Historicity and historicism in *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* 62."

an even wider homosocial community as they tell their story to other men. After the story is related, the general laughter of the male audience affirms the hegemony of the male homosocial community, thus validating the homosexual undertones of their friendship and firmly establishing the woman as a sign of economic exchange.⁶⁹

Although Kay's discussion primarily centered on issues of universality and historicity as discussed by Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, she did touch on aspects of gender theory especially with regard to an examination of *jouissance*, or, the pleasure that one takes through the act of storytelling. She also addressed some of the economic factors concerning the exchange of women that are evident in this *nouvelle*. In fact, her analysis substantiates Rubin's materialist approach according to which women are the unknowing or unwitting objects of exchange between men. Kay proposes that the woman's bed is a site of a double exchange where the ring passes between the two friends, and the woman's body is exchanged between three men – Richard, Jehan and Thomas. To add to Kay's argument, I maintain that another object of exchange is the *bon mot*. The exchange of this commodity is foregrounded at the end of the tale when both men recount the story of their conquest(s). Kay advances her argument, saying that there is also a question of how names are used in this *nouvelle*. In general, it is uncommon in the collection for characters to be named at all; instead, they are usually called by their title or identified by their occupation. Here, the only character who is not named is the wife, perhaps indicating her role as mere economic object in the *nouvelle*.

Even though the wife is the only character who is not named, positioning her as an object of exchange becomes problematic if we read the text according to Rubin's and Irigaray's

⁶⁹ This last scene in the *nouvelle* could be considered a microcosm for the greater context of the Cent nouvelles nouvelles. Because the tales were told to a male audience in Philip le Bon's court, we can assume that at the end of a particularly funny *nouvelle* the courtly audience would laugh at the story in a similar way to the men in the tavern in the sixty-second *nouvelle*; that is, a group of men sharing a joke at the expense of another man.

discussion of the topic. Read from their perspectives, the wife's actions actually contradict their position that women are unaware of their status as object of exchange. Instead, this woman carefully constructs her status as an object of desire which she then manipulates for her own end. At the beginning of the *nouvelle* we are told that the woman is "belle, gracieuse, et bien luy avenoit a recevoir les gens" ("beautiful, gracious, and it pleased her to host people"; 32-33). This final attribute should be read as ironic: as an innkeeper's wife, this woman is an able host, both in the strict sense of the term, and also as a woman who happily receives male guests into her bed. However, being a good host does not translate to providing easy access to one's bed and body. Instead, the woman plays an excellent game of cat and mouse. Because she is beautiful, both Jehan and Thomas desire her, and when each propositions her, she first *feigns* flattery. She then tells each man that, although she does not dislike him, she is afraid of tarnishing her honour. The narrator says:

A quoy, comme feignant d'estre esbahie de telle requeste, luy respondit tout froidement que lui ne aultre elle ne haioit, ne voudroit hayr, et qu'elle aymoist chascun par bien et par honneur. Mais il pouvoit sembler a la maniere de sa dite requeste qu'elle ne pourroit ycelle accomplir que ce ne fut grandement a son deshonneur et scandale, et mesmement de sa vie, et que pour chose du monde a ce ne voudroit consentir.

To which, feigning surprise at this request, she coldly answers him that she does not hate him or any other, nor does she want to hate anyone, and that she loves everyone through goodness and honour. But it seems to her that she cannot cede to this request and that it would dishonour her and create a scandal, and never in her life would she consent to this request, even for anything in the world. (48-56)

The narrator's insistence on how the woman *seemed* to emote in conjunction with her cold and predictable reply to each man is indicative that the woman is playing a game whereby she first refuses the men's advances before later seeming to give in to her desires. Jehan responds to the woman's initial refusal, and kissing her, insists that he will preserve her honour and promises that he will always be "son serviteur et loyal amy" ("her servant and loyal friend"; 64). Finally, the woman reluctantly concedes, saying:

"Je voys bien que je ne puis de vous eschapper que je ne face ce que vous voulez;
et puis qu'il faut que je face quelque chose pour vous, sauf toutesfois tousjours
mon bon honneur..."

"I see that I cannot avoid you and that I can only do what you want, and also that
I must do something for you, except sacrifice my honour." (74-78)

After reminding Jehan of her fragile honour, the woman immediately explains to him and then to Thomas (who also promised her servitude, friendship and the preservation of her honour), how they can come to her in the night while her husband is doing his duty guarding the city walls.⁷⁰ I believe that these passages describing the woman's *feigned* reluctance and then eventual acceptance illustrate that the wife is clearly in control of her body and how it is used. By asserting her agency, the woman prohibits her body from being exploited as an object of exchange between men, and determines instead how and when she will use it for her own sexual pleasure. Furthermore, through her speeches, the woman forces her suitors to adopt the courtly love convention that dictates that men should protect a woman's honour, thereby ensuring both men's secrecy and devotion. In so doing, the woman guarantees that general discretion will prevail and Richard will not discover her infidelity. Because the woman denies her body to be used as an object of exchange between men, a new object is found to take her place: the

⁷⁰ There is irony in this situation where the husband goes to guard the city walls while leaving his wife unprotected.

diamond ring. Like the woman's body, this object is passed between all three men, though obviously it does not possess the same agency wielded by the woman. The ring holds a prominent place in this story, both on the narrative and symbolic level. While the ring's symbolism will be discussed below, here it is important to stress the ring's role on the narrative level. An essential component to solidifying the relationships between men, the ring's prominence is highlighted in the *nouvelles*'s miniature, where on the left-hand side, a large ring is clearly spotted next to a couple in bed [see figure 2].⁷¹ The right-hand side of the image shows a man standing in between two other men, holding an extremely large ring. Presumably, this man is Richard who, although ignorant of his wife's infidelity, *is* aware of the economic exchange between himself and the other two men as he willingly receives the ring as payment for serving the two squires after settling their dispute. Ultimately, the ring proves to be a symbol of wealth, a sign of Richard's cuckoldry, and also a symbol of the woman's

Figure 2



emancipation from the male homosocial system of the exchange of women.

Kay also briefly addressed the meaning of the ring, suggesting that the ring is symbolic for two reasons. First, it serves as an indicator of material wealth and the affluent milieu inhabited by Jehan and Thomas. This assertion is reinforced given the general context of the *nouvelle*: at the beginning of the tale the narrator says that Jehan and Thomas have come to Calais

as aids to the cardinal of Winchester who has been sent to negotiate the release of Charles

⁷¹ From Pierre Champion *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles: Les Images*. Image 62.

d'Orleans. Therefore not only do these men mingle with the aristocracy where financial negotiations are paramount, but they also are in the city for a specifically economic reason. In this context the ring can represent the two courtiers' own obsession with money and the politics of economic exchange. On a more abstract level, once the ring is introduced into the sexual realm it signifies a sexual lack for the man who wears it. Kay noted that as each man possesses the ring his own lack is highlighted. But by the end of the *nouvelle*, while neither Jehan nor Thomas is able to keep the woman or the ring, they eventually are able to exchange it for the *jouissance* that will come from telling their story in the tavern. Conversely, Richard is left with the ring – the symbol of his cuckoldry. The objectified ring carries even more weight in this context because rings were closely connected to women's bodies. As Michael Camille has pointed out, rings were charged sexual symbols: worn close to the body, rings often carried strongly erotic connotations, particularly when engraved (103). Given this context, the ring's erotic and economic connotations hold even greater weight as the jewelry stands in for the woman's body as it is exchanged between three sets of male hands.

By re-reading the politics of the erotic triangle from the wife's perspective a new power relationship is revealed. Although both Jehan and Thomas initiate contact with the woman at the beginning of the story, she is the one who manipulates them to serve her desires. Furthermore, despite possible underlying homosexual longing that exists between the two men, they do not intentionally use the woman as a means of solidifying their relationship. Instead, through the wife's cunning, the men's homosocial relationship is exploited and their masculinity is called into question. This is clearest at the end of the *nouvelle* when the two men try to decide which one lost more during the night. The narrator explains first Jehan's argument, then Thomas':

et que il tenoit fermement avoir laissé cheoir son dyamant ou le dit Thomas l'avoit trouvé, et qu'il luy devoit faire plus mal de l'avoir perdu qu'il ne faisoit audit Thomas, lequel n'y perdoit rien, car il luy avoit cher cousté. A quoy ledit Thomas respondit qu'il ne le devoit point plaindre ... qu'il avoit eu le pucelage de la nuytée, et le dit Thomas avoit esté son page et de son escuyrie et allant après luy.

And [Jehan] insisted that he had dropped his diamond into the bed where Thomas found it, and he was worse off losing it than Thomas who had lost nothing, because the ring had been expensive. To which Thomas answered that [Jehan] did not have the right to complain ... because he had the woman first and so Thomas was his page and squire by having to go to her after him. (309-318)

Although the men cannot agree who was the biggest loser, it is indisputable that they both suffered a lack that threatened their masculinity. When Jehan's prized object slips through his fingers without his knowledge, his economic prowess is called into question. Furthermore, his inability to hold onto the desired object – be it the woman or the ring – also undermines his virility. Thomas's economic and sexual aptitude is likewise marginalized when he discovers that not only was he manipulated by the woman, but he was also given access to a body that had already been used by his closest friend.

It is true that the woman manipulates the situation to her benefit; however, she still remains a sexual link between Jehan and Thomas. In other words, the strong fraternal relationship between these two men develops into a passive homosexual relationship when they both have sex with the same woman. Kay suggested that, because the subject of homosexuality is strictly taboo in this text, sharing the same woman is the closest that two men can come to consummating their relationship. She also mentioned that Jehan and Thomas represent only

one-half man each. Indeed, these two men are already so identical that they could be the same man to the extent that it takes both men to satisfy the same woman over the course of the night. By considering Jehan and Thomas a single man, then the relationship between them, the wife, and Richard becomes an erotic triangle. Although reconfiguring the four characters into an erotic triangle allows us to compare this situation with other triangles, we are nonetheless presented with a complicated homosocial situation where the lover(s) are both the same and different people. Due to the complexity of this triangle, a number of readings of the power dynamic within it are possible. In one interpretation, even though the woman determined how her body was going to be used and by whom, by the end of the *nouvelle*, the male homosocial bond regains precedence: neither Jehan nor Thomas is caught while Richard ignorantly claims the symbol of his wife's infidelity. A second possibility is that the woman is only able to disrupt the male homosocial bond within the private sphere: within the confines of her inn, the woman can manage the comings and goings of all three men and partake in pleasure with them in the privacy of her chamber. In contrast, she cannot control how the men related to each other outside the inn, nor is she included in the final scene at the tavern when Jehan and Thomas shared the amusing story in the community of other men. In the public sphere, the woman is excluded from another kind of pleasure – the *jouissance* that comes from storytelling – a pleasure that this *nouvelle* reminds us, is public and entirely reserved for men. Indeed, once Jehan and Thomas are at the inn, the innkeeper's wife is disenfranchised from the events she herself had arranged and she is transformed into the subject of an amusing anecdote discussed by men. A final potential reading is that the homosocial bond was ultimately ruptured by the woman: no matter how strong the bond between Jehan and Thomas might be (particularly after they recount their story to the other men at the tavern), their homosocial relationship is still undermined by the inn-keeper's wife. Furthermore, the laughter at the end of the tale may seem

to re-affirm the authority of the homosocial community, but the character who truly wielded the power in the tale is the woman. After all, she orchestrated the complicated events of the evening and invited two men to her room without her husband knowing. She is also the only character who does not lose something: when Richard is cuckolded he loses his honour and each man loses the ring in turn. Finally, the wife is the only one who does not suffer a lack. It has already been said that Jehan and Thomas only make up one man when combined; therefore, each one lacks half his masculinity, whereas Richard's situation is even more desperate – he lacks all his masculinity. In contrast, the wife's manipulations indicate that she is a fully sexual being, able to keep herself satisfied and clever enough to emasculate the men around her.

Conclusion: Developing and Disturbing the Erotic Triangle

After examining the above three examples, a pattern emerges regarding the formation, development and mutation of erotic triangles in the *Cnn*. This pattern is neither straightforward nor uniform. The third *nouvelle* offers an example of the 'traditional' erotic triangle observed by Sedgwick by exemplifying some conventional ways women have been exchanged between men. In this tale, women are incapable of understanding implicature, and consequently, are taken advantage of. In contrast, the men are assertive and linguistically skilled, settling their disputes through an exchange of their wives so that ultimately the power in the triangles is balanced between the two men while the woman in each situation is ignorant of the men's deal. At the same time, it is not clear that the women would have even been able to control their exchange even if they had understood their seducer's ruse because when conversational implicature is involved, there are many factors that need to be considered. Indeed, it is not enough to understand and communicate through implicature – the speaker's words must also be properly received by the listener. In other words, even if the woman had responded to the men

using the same linguistic strategy as her male counterpart it is not certain that the men would have wanted to acknowledge her words, thus rendering her utterance ‘unhappy.’ As things were arranged, the men continued to communicate between themselves, exclude the woman, and control the power dynamic of the triangle.

In the first *nouvelle* we are presented with an erotic triangle that becomes destabilized. Here, the erotic triangle is upset in two ways. First, knowing that she has been excluded from the men’s friendship, the woman tries to recover her dignity by asserting authority over her husband by publicly decrying him a drunkard and miscreant when she is finally given the chance. The traditional power balance in the erotic triangle is also upset when the relationship between the two men is eroticized. In this triangle, the men use the trappings of heterosexual seduction in order to develop their friendship. In turn, the equal division of power between men that is apparent in the third *nouvelle*, where women are exchanged between friends, changes into an erotically charged union. Thus this *nouvelle* – significant given its privileged placement as first in the collection – presents a non-conformist vision of erotic triangles, which in turn informs all readings of subsequent relationships.

Finally, the sixty-second *nouvelle* further complicates a reading of erotic triangles. In this tale, the woman controls her two lovers and her husband by determining who will come to her bed and when. The power balance in this triangle is completely destabilized, as the husband is unknowingly cuckolded and the two lovers are forced to question their own virility. Even though the homosocial friendships dominate at the end of the *nouvelle*, the woman in this story problematizes not only medieval formulations of *amicitia*, but also contemporary ideas on the exchange of women. In fact, the two friends’ relationship is jeopardized when they discuss which one lost more during the evening’s antics, and their relationship only barely recovers by the final line of the *nouvelle* where they, in the company of the men at the tavern,

“commencerent a rire et menerent grand joye” (began to laugh and elicited great amusement”; 322-23). Although this hegemonic masculine laugh reinstates the homosocial aspect of the *nouvelle*, we must not forget that the woman was able to effectively marginalize each man’s masculinity and economic ability. However, she was only able to do this from the sidelines: her absence in the tavern when the story was being recounted, and a (presumed) general female absence in the court when Monseigneur tells the story, demonstrates that even women who are able to take control of their sexuality are still excluded from the storytelling community and its concomitant *jouissance*. Nevertheless, the woman’s actions in this *nouvelle* are both surprising and bold, showing that Sedgwick might have been correct in positing that erotic triangles are not symmetrical, as stated by Freud and Girard, and that power difference *is* in fact dependent upon the gender of each participant (23).

In this discussion of four *nouvelles* it becomes clear that once the rules of *amicitia* and marriage have been established, the erotic triangle may develop through a number of different avenues. Usually these erotic triangles form at the beginning of the *nouvelle*, where, through a brief explanation, a wife finds, or is seduced, by a man. But the crux of the story is the complicated arrangement devised to keep the secret of the affair from someone within the triangle, or even from prying eyes of neighbours and friends – a paradox indeed, since these stories are being recounted in a court.

Almost as soon as the complicated ruses required to construct the triangle are carried out, it becomes clear that the situation is untenable. In scenarios where the husband does not know he has been cuckolded, there is the risk that he will discover his wife’s infidelity, and even if the husband does discover the secret, the novelty of the triangle wears thin. Surprisingly, in many of these situations, the lone woman is more independent than we would initially assume. Armed with knowledge of pragmatic implicature and the drive to control how and when her

body will be used, some women attempt, and occasionally succeed, at undermining the strong male bond at the foundation of the erotic triangle *and* problematizing the nature and requirements of marriage – two core structures of not only the *nouvelles*, but also medieval society in general. In the following chapter on the Decameron, I continue to examine how women behave in erotic triangles, and as examples of these triangles proliferate, it will become increasingly clear how complicated this configuration can be.

Chapter 3: The Decameron

Introduction

It is indisputable that Boccaccio's Decameron influenced the Cent nouvelles nouvelles. However, an essential difference between these two works is the use of a frame narrative – present in the Decameron and noticeably missing from the Cnn. In the few comparisons between the Cnn and the Decameron that have been undertaken, it is the absence of a frame narrative in the Cnn that has provoked the most discussion. This is primarily because the frame structure is generally considered a remarkably innovative, even 'modern' invention, and its absence in the Cnn has caused many critics to deride the Cnn's anonymous author for ignoring it.⁷² This criticism has in turn encouraged the belief that the Cnn represents a more medieval literary style than its Italian predecessor, and that a more dynamic and self-reflexive writing style only emerged in France over 200 years after Boccaccio, with Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron (1559). Lionella Sozzi comments:

Indubbiamente la cornice boccacciana, praticamente assente dalle Cent nouvelles nouvelles, il cui successo continua in pieno Cinquecento con ben dieci edizioni nel primo trentennio del secolo assente anche dall'omonima raccolta di Philippe di Vigneulles, si sfalda, in altri autori, in direzioni assai diverse da quelle

⁷² By Boccaccio's time, however, the concept of the frame was already an established narrative device. A frame narrative appears in the Indian Pañcatantra (circa fourth or fifth century BCE) and in the ninth-century Thousand and One Arabian Nights. European authors also adopted the device including Peter Alfonso's Disciplina Clericalis (early twelfth century) and Juan Manuel's Libro de los exemplos del conde Lucanor e de Patronio (1335) (Cerisola 137). But what sets the Decameron apart from these other works, Cerisola writes, is the many levels on which the frame narrative works: on the largest scale, it is Boccaccio's way of communicating; it allows him to describe the plague; it facilitates a partial autobiography in the Proem; it permits him to recount the lives of ten storytellers as well as the lives of hundreds of characters. Furthermore, the frame narrative allows Boccaccio to play with register, and throughout the text the tone changes from classical to *stil novismo* to the crude tone between Liscia and Tindaro (138).

originarie. In Margherita di Navarra la cornice diventa l'occasione per un invito al dibattito morale ed all' austera meditazione religiosa... (281)

Sozzi notes that Marguerite's adoption of the frame structure allows the *devisants* to discuss the moral implications of their stories. David LaGuardia pushes this observation further, writing that unlike the Cnn, which was written by men and intended for a male audience, the male and female *devisants*' moral engagement with the stories in the Heptameron allows women to carve out a place for themselves and create a situation where the power of the male gaze is diminished and language is dissociated from desire (The Iconography of Power 145). LaGuardia compares the Cnn to both Philippe de Vigneulle's (1471-1528) Cent nouvelles nouvelles (1505) and the Heptameron, and concludes that of the three, Marguerite's work is the most challenging because she creates a feminist response to a genre that had previously been crafted for the pleasure of male readers and listeners (145). LaGuardia's preference for the Heptameron is in part influenced by both Werner Söderhjelm and Eric Auerbach who, he says, both maintain that the stories in the Decameron are more realistic than those in the two versions of the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, thereby making the Decameron more of a Renaissance work than the *nouvelles* which preceded it by over one hundred years (37).⁷³ In the Introduction I outlined Auerbach's perspective on the two works, explaining that he considers the Decameron a more humanistic and elegant text than the Cent nouvelles nouvelles. He writes that the lack of humanism, insensitivity to female readers, and the lackluster depiction of the human condition in the Cnn results in a text where the "very essence of Boccaccio is not imitated" or even recognized (260).

Auerbach's judgment of the literary style of the Cent nouvelles nouvelles has generally been

⁷³ Eric Auerbach writes: "[t]he realism of the Franco-Burgundian culture of the fifteenth century is, then, narrow and medieval. It has no new attitudes which might reshape the world of earthly realities and it is hardly aware that the medieval categories are losing their power. It hardly notices what decisive changes are taking place in the structure of life; and in breadth of vision, refinement of language, and formative power it is far inferior to what the Italian late medieval and early humanist flowering had produced a full century earlier in Dante and Boccaccio" (260-1).

considered authoritative, and while it is true that the prose and structure of the Cnn are less finely-wrought and well-conceived than in the Decameron, still, we should not dismiss the Cnn for what it might teach us. Richard Vaughan, for instance, remarks that the Cnn has value as a historical source, given that over half of the tales are based on true stories and the storytellers are Philip le Bon's own courtiers whose tales reflect aspects of Burgundian town and country (158). With respect to the literary merit of the Cnn, Lance Donaldson-Evans proposes that there are productive approaches that can be taken to this text, and that this work and others are only indebted to the Decameron for collecting one hundred stories of a bawdy nature. He continues that it is perhaps the common source material of these works – the *fabliaux*, for instance – that forces critics to compare the Decameron to other similar works, and for this reason, “it would be an exaggeration to see in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles a rewriting of the Decameron” (546). I agree with Donaldson-Evans that it is unhelpful to read the Cent nouvelles nouvelles as a poor imitation of the Decameron and despite the significant narrative differences between the two works, there are other essential qualities shared by both works which merit a thorough investigation.

The framing structure may not be common to both texts; however, they nonetheless both exhibit comparable narrative strategies that should be mentioned briefly. One important commonality is they are both intended to amuse and distract their listeners. As we have already seen, *divertissement* is an important attribute of the stories in the Cnn – a feature that is also essential in the Decameron. As Giusi Baldissoni has remarked, one of the main functions of the stories in the Decameron, particularly in the First and Ninth days (because they are days without specific themes), is to make people laugh (10). Baldissoni continues by pointing out that laughter, especially in the first half of the Decameron, is generated through speech not action, an observation that is also applicable to the Cnn and exemplified in the sixteenth *nouvelle* (10).

A second similarity between the Italian and French tales is their brevity. In his discussion on the Cnn, Dubuis emphasizes that a *nouvelle* was a brief story that presented realistic characters. He writes that a *nouvelle* must be “fondée sur des faits réels, transcrite le plus brièvement possible, et enfin qu’elle mérite d’être transformée en nouvelle” (17). Dubuis returns to the subject of brevity and in the conclusion to his study on the *nouvelles*, he defines the genre as follows: “Une nouvelle est le récit, le plus souvent bref, d’une aventure, en général récente et présenté comme réelle, qui intéresse par son caractère inattendu” (126). The succinct nature of the stories in the Decameron is commented upon by Michelangelo Picone, who writes that the “*narratio brevis*” finds its artistic epitome in Boccaccio’s text (164). Baldissone also comments on the brevity of the stories in the Decameron, and adds that a *novella* must not only be brief, it must also be able to stand on its own:

la novella mantiene una brevità che consenta di calcolare i tempi della fuga e di escluderne la notte: non nel senso che non si possa novellare di notte, ma nel senso che nessuna novella o gruppo di novelle sarà così lungo da richiedere un ascolto/lettura a puntate, perché la sinteticità della narrazione è studiata apposta per una unità di comunicazione. (14)

In addition to the similar narrative strategies as identified by Dubuis and Baldissone, there is also a thematic comparison to be drawn. In her article on the Cnn and the Decameron, Mary J. Baker writes that both texts deal extensively with adultery (230). Indeed, although the Decameron contains far fewer tales involving erotic triangles than the Cnn – forty-three in the Cnn and only twenty-one in the Decameron – the Decameron still exhibits a wide array of homosocial relationships that develop within the erotic triangle. Furthermore, just as in the Cnn, homosocial relationships in the Decameron form as easily between a lover and a cuckold who is aware of his wife’s infidelity, as between a lover and an unknowing cuckold. Examining the

stories told by Dioneo, Shirley Allen suggests why there are so many adulterous stories in the text. She explains that Dioneo's position is that sexual desire is an integral part of human nature which cannot be suppressed by either marriage or church (5). In turn, it is possible that this perspective was also shared by Boccaccio, as it has often been suggested that Dioneo is Boccaccio's *portavoce* (5). Two other explanations for why over one-fifth of the stories feature erotic triangles have been offered by Alfredo Bonadeo. First, he says that the overarching explanation for adultery is tied to dissatisfaction with the economic aspect of marriage. Comparing comportment in marriage to an adulterous affair, Bonadeo writes that often the freedom associated with adultery is a reaction to the coercion that is associated with marriage. Furthermore, he asserts that Boccaccio understood that humans desire "sentimental freedom," a powerful feeling which often could only manifest itself through adultery (296). Bonadeo's distinction between the confines of an arranged marriage and the freedom of adulterous affairs implies an understanding of the exchange of women. Indeed, the link Bonadeo makes between coerced marriage and the "sentimental freedom" of adultery is compelling, particularly in light of Lévi-Strauss' observations on how men cement ties by giving their female kinsmen in marriage. In his discussion pertaining to the Decameron, Bonadeo continues that, unlike marriage,

Adultery is never the result of coercion, is not a subterfuge or an escapade, nor is it represented as an evil act; on the contrary, it is quite often an eminently successful and fulfilling experience. No lover in the Decameron is punished because of a commission of adultery, but most fornicators enjoy indefinitely their extra-marital bliss, even when their affairs are uncovered. (296)

Therefore, if marriages are arranged for economic ends, then adulterous affairs provide the emotion, lust and "sentimental freedom" that is lacking in the coerced union between husband

and wife. Bonadeo also addresses particular reasons why a woman might engage in an extramarital affair. He writes that, in addition to being coerced into marriage, women in the Decameron are often left unfulfilled by their husbands. Adultery, Bonadeo continues, usually results when a woman's husband is impotent or homosexual, and explains that other reasons for adultery, including situations in which husbands are handicapped and cannot perform, unsatisfactory sex within the marriage, and a big age difference between a husband and his wife (297-298).

While many of the cuckolded husbands in the Decameron are unattractive, the lovers are usually far more appealing. In fact, unlike the Cnn where there seems to be some equality (as per the requirements of *amicitia*) between the husband and the lover – particularly in the *nouvelles* where two men share the same woman – the lovers in the Decameron are often more charming and alluring than the husbands. In her comparison of the Italian and French works, Baker states that lovers play a significant part in the Decameron, whereas in the Cnn they are often made to look foolish while the husband and wife are the central characters (235). One result of casting lovers in a favourable light is that erotic triangles develop on different grounds than they do in the Cnn: in the Decameron the action tends to focus on the lover, whereas in the Cnn, the narrative usually concentrates on the husband and wife and the state of their marriage.

It is surprising that Baker writes about the lover's role in the *novelle*, given that most critical attention has been paid to the role of the woman in adulterous tales. But Baker defends her position, commenting that there is the view of "Boccaccio as an author who unequivocally takes the side of the adulterous woman" (236) and suggests that this perspective should be nuanced so that more credit is given to the lover.⁷⁴ She explains that although the wife often

⁷⁴ Baker contrasts her reading of adulterous wives to the writing of scholars such as Robert Hastings who has postulated that Boccaccio condones a woman's adultery so long as she is discreet and her husband is a fool (48).

seems justified in taking a lover, Boccaccio still controls the woman's power, since it is often impossible for the woman to deceive her husband without the help of her lover (236-7).

Although Baker's subject is not new – thirty years earlier Auerbach had already commented on the complicated deceptions that lovers (both men and women) had to devise in order to meet each other (231) – her approach, and more recently, Marilyn Migiel's, have looked at the interconnection between the lover's actions and the woman's agency. Both Migiel and Baker concur that women in the Decameron possess limited agency and they are still faced with very few options on how to assert their independence and make their voices heard. Indeed, although it initially appears that women have the possibility to express their desires, they still face restrictions on how they are allowed to speak (A Rhetoric of the Decameron 15). This reading of Boccaccio sheds light on the predicament of how to read women in his text and Migiel problematizes Boccaccio's attitudes toward women without disregarding the possibility that he might have also held some proto-feminist views.

While Migiel balances her argument by allowing for feminine desire to oppose masculine domination, some critics have taken a starker approach to the question of Boccaccio's feminist intentions. Teodolinda Barolini, for instance, has argued that many women in the Decameron are strong, and are able and make their designated work – sex – fit “within the broader context of men's work, thus transferring to women some of the symbolic worth accorded to men and appropriating for women the larger frame of reference – the broader playing field – usually reserved for men” (196). Although Barolini does not expressly make a case for a feminist Boccaccio, her assertion nonetheless suggests that women in the Decameron have a voice. However, certain scholars take the opposite approach and argue that Boccaccio

Likewise, Tauno Nurmela has written about Boccaccio's tacit approval of philandering wives in his examination of stories from the seventh day when young women manage to deceive their jealous husbands (190).

gives no autonomy to his female characters. Indeed, some believe that even in the tales told by female storytellers, women are almost universally cast as silent or powerless and at the mercy of the male characters and a male author. Mihoko Suzuki has questioned, for instance, the meaning of Boccaccio's juxtaposition of "female-directed discourse" to narratives such as the Griselda story where female characters are subjugated to the male character's will (232). Joy Potter has also questioned a Boccaccian pro-feminist ethic and sees masculine control in the text on a variety of levels. In terms of who controls the days, the male storytellers preside over more numerically important days than the female ones, including Days Four and Seven.⁷⁵ Within the stories themselves, Potter examines how much agency female characters wield. She counts thirty-one tales where women are major characters, twenty-two that have no women in them and forty-seven where they are only minor characters or objects to be desired (93). While women have little control overall and are often objects of lust, in things sexual, men rarely lose control: Potter counts only eight men who are made a fool of by sexual desire, and five of them are clergy (93). Finally, Potter finds only two women of thirty-one who manage to succeed in the men's world: Zinevra (II.9) and Giletta di Darbona (III.9) (94).⁷⁶ Potter's reading of the tales is vastly different from that of Baker, who, as mentioned above, sees the husband as the dupe of many sexual pranks devised by the wife and the lover, and instead views the woman as the loser in the erotic game.

⁷⁵ Victoria Kirkham discusses the import of Days Three and Seven, writing that there is a significant interruption at the beginning of Day Four which separates the first three days from the last seven days, reflecting the division of the storytellers between three men and seven women ("An Allegorically Tempered *Decameron*" 7). There is also, of course, numerical significance in the number seven, representing among other things the seven virtues and vices.

⁷⁶ The tales of Zinevra and Giletta are unique, however, because they must resort to cross-dressing in order to escape a precarious situation. Maria Donaggio points out that these two women, as well as the princess of England in II.3, cross-dress under duress, not in order to deceive their husbands. Furthermore, their cross-dressing is never comical, unlike cases where men dress like women: "soprattutto per quello che riguarda i travestimenti da uomo, essi hanno indubbiamente un portato ideologico 'serio' che li distanzia notevolmente da altri travestimenti con semplice significato di *ruse* o di beffa" (207). Therefore, Potter's examples of Zinevra and Giletta must also be considered within the context that they were not seeking to deceive their husbands like other women, or playing a trick on others like certain other men; rather, they were forced to succeed in a 'man's world' because their lives or their honour were threatened.

Just from the discrepancy between Barolini's, Baker's and Potter's readings – only three examples of many on this long-held debate – it is apparent that attitudes toward Boccaccio's female characters and erotic stories are incredibly varied. Indeed, scholarly approaches to this question have ranged from declaring Boccaccio a misogynist to a proto-feminist and everything in-between. Many of these attitudes have been articulated over the past thirty years, and what has become clear is that negotiating medieval notions of misogyny with contemporary ideas of feminism is not an easy task. Recently, Migiel has summarized this problem, writing that, although the Decameron initially seems to be proto-feminist because it gives women a voice, it nonetheless does not give predictable answers. She continues,

If the Decameron is feminist, how can it contain what appear to be glaring misogynistic eruptions, most notably in Filomena's anti-woman statements in the Introduction, in Pampinea's first tale (*Dec.* I.10), in the tale of the scholar and the widow (*Dec.* VIII.7), in Emilia's tale about the Giosefo and the advice of Solomon? Finally, how could Boccaccio position the tale of patient Griselda and her husband's "insane cruelty" ("matta bestialità") so conspicuously as the "final word" in the *Decameron*? ("The Untidy Business of Gender Studies" 219)

In her work on the Decameron, Migiel approaches these problems by including contemporary approaches to the text without masking the narrative elements, or compromising the text's polesemy. Although as a feminist scholar she is invested in uncovering new approaches to reading Boccaccio and his relationship to his female characters, she does not deny the complexity of this investigation. In her examination of Day VIII, for instance, she does not mask the misogyny in many of the tales, as witnessed in her discussion of Panfilo's second tale about the cleric who not only convinces a woman to have sex with him but who also has the last word, despite the woman's attempt to the contrary. In this story, the priest leaves his mantle and

his mortar and pestle with his lover as a promise, but he manages to reclaim them through deceit. Migiel concludes that “Panfilo reinforces the message that the system of exchange between men and women is both symmetrical and asymmetrical: that systems works for men and women alike – as long as women don’t meddle in economic matters” (“The Untidy Business 223-4). Although the woman in this tale is duped by her lover, Migiel does not read this tale as purely misogynist, writing that “[w]hat the narrators of Day VIII of the Decameron can show us is how misogyny is born in a coalition of discourses not all of which are blatantly misogynist,” but where women are nonetheless often deceived and oppressed (231-2). In her work, Migiel articulates a delicate tension in the Decameron that hovers between misogyny and a “coalition of discourses” – an attitude that effectively serves the better interests of Boccaccio and the readers of the Decameron.

Migiel’s approach to Boccaccio and feminist theory mirrors the perspective of a larger project centered on the same topic, and compiled in a volume that reflects the various readings by a number of scholars. The editors of Boccaccio and Feminist Criticism, Regina Psaki and Thomas Stillinger, prepared this collection both in order to demonstrate the variety of opinions on the controversial topic of Boccaccio and women, and also to fill the gap in this (surprisingly) neglected field. They comment that because “women appear in so many roles there – as objects, agents, speakers, addressees, writers, readers,” then “feminist readings are bound to take strikingly different directions according to where, in the text, they start” (4). The editors’ cross-sectional approach to the field does in fact fill a gap in Boccaccio criticism that has been sorely felt by feminist scholars. Taking inspiration from this project, I hope that my own writing on feminist approaches to the Decameron will illuminate new dynamics in well-known relationships while at the same time allowing for Boccaccio’s textual ambiguity and creativity to remain apparent.

In order to begin an investigation into how erotic triangles are formed and possibly destabilized in the Decameron, it is first necessary to classify the tales according to the same categories that I used for the Cnn. Appendix B summarizes the stories containing erotic triangles and uses the same set of subdivisions as the appendix for the Cnn. A cursory glance at this appendix shows that in erotic triangle stories the woman appears to have little control over the development of homosocial bonds or the manner in which she is used and exchanged. Furthermore, as noted by Baker, we see that the lover is a more crucial character in the Decameron than in the Cnn. As the appendix demonstrates, the lovers in these stories are not relegated to the role of mere seducers. Instead, they often show ingenuity in seducing a woman or deceiving her husband. In addition, there are several stories where the lover takes the moral high ground and upon meeting the husband or learning information about the marriage, he refuses to engage in sexual relations with the wife, such as the case between Messer Ansaldo and Dianora's husband in X,5. Further still, the lover occasionally becomes so disgusted with the woman he desires that he either rejects her or plays a trick on her, as exemplified in VIII,1. This abundance of stories that privileges the lover does not exist in the Cnn, and offers another perspective on how homosocial relations might be broken or formed within erotic triangles, often to the detriment of the woman involved. In order to develop this new perspective on erotic triangles and homosocial relations, I begin with VIII,1, the story of Ambruogia, her husband Guasparuolo and her lover Gulfardo. Ambruogia, who sells her body to Gulfardo, is a character that has not yet been encountered in the discussion of erotic triangles. Unlike other women, Ambruogia willingly constructs an erotic triangle, not to fulfill sexual desires or to combat loneliness, but for pure economic gain. After discussing the case of Ambruogia, I examine another story that is also included in the sub-category 'The husband does not know he has been cuckolded.' III,4, the story about the unwitting husband Puccio, whose wife, Isabetta, is

seduced by his friend and priest Dom Felice, depicts a man whose religious fervour and inability to understand linguistic implicature render him a cuckold. In contrast to Felice and Guasparuolo, Dianora's husband, Gilberto, in X,5 hears about his wife's intent to deceive him before the act takes place. In an unusual tale about a dedicated wife and a magic garden, X,5 shows an erotic triangle that favours the male homosocial relation more than the marital relationship. To conclude the chapter, I discuss the 'Zima Story,' the tale about Francesco de' Vergellesi who is also deceived through linguistic implicature because he too does not pay attention to his wife, but instead to his own obsession: money. This is a rich tale that has been subject to much criticism, including a study by Olivia Holmes who has addressed how the woman functions as an object of exchange between the husband Francesco, and the lover, Zima. As I show in the discussion on Zima, the four stories examined in this chapter contain a variety of characters and situations that are represented throughout the Decameron. And by analysing the erotic triangles in each story, our understanding of the politics in this complicated set of relationships, and more specifically, how the woman's body is constructed and exchanged between men, is deepened and nuanced.

Day VIII, Story 1⁷⁷

The first story of the eighth day is told by that day's queen, Neifile. Her story is about Gulfardo who desires Ambruogia who is married to Guasparuolo Cagastraccio. Gulfardo swears to serve Ambruogia loyally and promises her anything. She tells him that she will sleep with him only if he does not tell anyone and if he pays her two hundred florins. Disgusted with the woman's greed, Gulfardo decides to play a trick on her. He borrows two hundred florins from Guasparuolo and later, when Guasparuolo leaves and Gulfardo is summoned by Ambruogia, he gives her the same two hundred florins and tells her to give them to her husband, something which she does not do. When Guasparuolo returns a few days later, Gulfardo asks Guasparuolo to cancel his debt since he has returned the money. Guasparuolo is surprised to learn that his money had been returned, and Ambruogia is shocked to learn that she had been duped.

Ambruogia – a greedy and conniving woman – is a type of woman found both in the Cnn and the Decameron. Unlike the other women already discussed who have strong motives for cheating on their husbands, Ambruogia does not, and when she does commit adultery, she shamelessly prostitutes herself to her potential lover. Not only is Ambruogia greedy, but she

⁷⁷ Fernand Desonay remarks that this story and VIII, 2 are the inspiration for the eighteenth tale in the Cnn (see Appendix A for a summary). Desonay comments: "Certes, le thème assez grossier dans la version de Genappe ne va pas sans rappeler les deux premiers contes de la VIII^e journée du *Décameron* : l'aventure, narrée sous le principat de Laurette, de ce Gulfard qui se fit rendre par la femme du marchand Guasparuolo les deux cents florins d'or qu'il lui avait baillés en échange de nuits d'amour aussi chèrement remboursées que payées; et surtout la nouvelle suivante où l'on voit le matois curé de Varlungo se faire restituer par astuce le manteau qu'il avait abandonné en gage à Belcolor, l'appétissante femme du laboureur Bentivegna del Mazzo, après qu'il en avait fait son plaisir. Dans la nouvelle 18 contée à Genappe, comme dans les deux contes qui ouvrent la huitième journée passée à deux milles des murs de Florence en proie à la peste, le seul trait commun est la déconfiture d'une femme bernée; le stratagème du galant par trop avisé diffère du tout au tout" (514-5). A.C. Lee also remarks on the similarity between VIII,1, VIII, 2 and Cnn eighteen. In fact, the first two stories in the eighth day of the Decameron are so similar that Lee glosses them simultaneously (246).

also does not hide her avarice. Instead of subtly manipulating Gulfardo and skilfully asking him for money, she is forthright with her demands. As we will see, Ambruogia is vastly different from another wife in the Decameron, Dianora (X,5), who unwillingly enters into a contract with Ansaldo, naming an impossible price for her body, and only under duress. Unlike Dianora who attempts to avoid Ansaldo, Ambruogia does not wait for Gulfardo to begin negotiations with her, but initiates the exchange of her body for a price:

La donna ... venne a questa conclusione, che ella era presta di far ciò che Gulfardo volesse dove due cose ne dovesser seguire: l'una, che questo non dovesse mai per lui esser manifestato a alcuna persona; l'altra, che con ciò fosse cosa che ella avesse per alcuna sua cosa bisogno di fiorini dugento d'oro, voleva che egli, che ricco uomo era, gliele donasse, e appresso sempre sarebbe al suo servizio. (637:7)

She was ready to do what Gulfardo wanted when two conditions were fulfilled: first, that he must never reveal this affair to anyone; and second, that since he was a rich man and she was in need of two hundred gold florins to purchase something, he give her that sum, and then she would be at his service, always. (476)

In contrast to Ambruogia and her callous calculations, even the woman in Cnn forty-three is painted in a more positive light. Indeed, although this woman is discovered cheating by her husband and then enters the negotiations with the two men, she is forgiven her adultery because her husband is constantly working and does not pay attention to her (“le povere home ... tant y alla et tant la lascia seule que ung gentil compaignon s’aproucha...” (“the poor man ... went away and left his wife alone so often that an attractive man approached her”; 16-18). Likewise, other women in the Decameron are also absolved of their adultery: in III, 4, the wife, Isabetta,

is married to an older man, Frate Puccio, who does not take care of her sexual needs; in III,5, the wife in the story beckons Zima because her husband is more greedy than concerned for her honour. Ambruogia, on the other hand, is married to an apparently good man – he is neither old nor inattentive – and she therefore has no reason to stray outside her marriage. Indeed, Guasparuolo does not fit any of Bonadeo's categories of a potential cuckold: there is no indication that he is impotent, homosexual, very old, handicapped or otherwise unable to perform sexually. Because Guasparuolo is a fit husband, and perhaps as payment for the inexcusable relationship she seeks with Gulfardo, Ambruogia does not escape from her adulterous situation unscathed. Although Guasparuolo does not discover her infidelity, he can still punish her for not telling him about the money Guasparuolo returned. While Neifile does not say whether or how Guasparuolo punished Ambruogia, it is implied that her deceit will not go unmentioned:

Gulfardo partitosi, e la donna rimasa scornata diede al marito il disonesto prezzo della sua cattività: e così il sagace amante senza costo godé della sua avara donna. (639:18)

Gulfardo left, while the woman who had been made a fool of returned to her husband the dishonest price of her wickedness; and thus the clever lover had enjoyed his greedy lady free of charge. (477)

The embarrassment Ambruogia suffers seems small payment for her infidelity to her spouse.⁷⁸

However, these lines serve a double function: not only do they show that Ambruogia was

⁷⁸ The price Ambruogia pays for her deceit is a pittance compared to the torture suffered by the wife of Sir Guilglielmo Rossiglione in IV, 9, as told by Filostrato. When Guilglielmo discovers that his wife has a lover – his friend Guardastagno – Guilglielmo kills Guardastagno in the forest by his house. He then prepares Guardastagno's heart and makes his wife eat it without her knowing. When the lady discovers this, she throws herself from a high window to the ground and dies, and she is buried with her lover. If we evaluate Ambruogia's humiliation against the measures taken against the philandering wife in IV, 9, then we see that Ambruogia barely suffered for her adultery, and more importantly, for her willing prostitution of herself.

humiliated and exposed for her deceit, but they also nuance the power dynamic in the erotic triangle, where the husband is not cast as the ultimate victim in the tripartite relationship. Although Guasparuolo remains a deceived husband, Gulfardo at least grants him some knowledge about his duplicitous wife and leaves Guasparuolo to act on that knowledge accordingly. Therefore, in the end, the person who is truly duped is not the cuckold, but the wife.

Even though Ambruogia is not directly reprimanded by either Guasparuolo or Gulfardo, in the introduction, Neifile does not hesitate to condemn Ambruogia for her callous actions. Agreeing with Gulfardo that she is an unworthy lady, she explains the severity with which women such as Ambruogia ought to be punished:

Avvegna che, chi volesse più propriamente parlare, quel che io dir debbo non si direbbe beffa anzi si **direbbe merito**: per ciò che, con ciò sia cosa debba essere onestissima e la sua castità come la sua vita guardare né per alcuna cagione a contaminarla condursi (e questo non possendosi, così appieno tuttavia come si converrebbe, per la fragilità nostra), **affermo colei esser degna del fuoco la quale a ciò per prezzo si conduce**; dove chi per amor, conoscendo le sue forze grandissime, perviene, da giudice non troppo rigido merita perdono... (636:3-4) (emphasis added)

But strictly speaking, what I am about to tell you should not be called a trick but rather a **just reward**, and the reason is this: a woman should always be extremely virtuous and protect her chastity as she would her life, nor should anything induce her to stain it (though it is not always possible to observe this to the fullest, because of our frailty). **And so I insist that any woman who yields herself for a price deserves to be burned at the stake**, while a woman who

does so for love, recognizing its most powerful forces, deserves to be forgiven by a judge who is not too severe... (475) (emphasis added)

Neifile's scathing remarks reveal the general understanding held by storytellers, characters and readers alike: that humans (particularly women) are frail, and they might stray outside their marriage, but such actions are only acceptable when love (or in many cases lust) exists. Those who seek to profit from other people's love deserve, "merita," the negative consequences that might befall them. Neifile takes an even more severe approach than her character Gulfardo, as she would not stop at a *beffa* when dealing with Ambruogia, but would go as far as killing her. From Neifile's comment, we learn that even in the Decameron there are limits to adultery, and that it functions within a system where certain restrictions apply. Because Ambruogia moved outside the system and into the realm of prostitution, she is punished, her husband is not made the figure of fun, and the homosocial relationship remains relatively intact.

While Ambruogia sees her liaison with Gulfardo as potentially lucrative, Gulfardo attempts to win Ambruogia with his chivalrous words and deeds. First, when he falls in love with her, he admires her secretly, and from afar, as befits a knight: "amandola assai discretamente, senza avvedersene il marito né altri" (637:6) ("he was most discreet about his love for this lady, without her husband or anyone else becoming aware"; 475). Finally, he sends a messenger to profess his love: "le mandò un giorno a parlare, pregandola che le dovesse piacere d'esserli del suo amor cortese e che egli era dalla sua parte presto a dover far ciò che ella gli comandasse" (637:6) ("one day he sent someone to speak with her, begging her please to be willing to treat his love favourably, and that for his part, he was ready to do whatever she ordered him to do"; 476). Both Ambruogia's greed and her haste in answering Gulfardo, force him to conclude that Ambruogia is far from honourable, and "quasi in odio transmute il fervente amore e pensò di doverla beffare" (637:8) ("his burning love turned almost to hatred as he

thought of some way to deceive her"; 476). Ironically, although Gulfardo decides to seduce Ambruogia – a pursuit that is reprehensible given that Ambruogia is a married woman – because he woos her through courtly means he is not chastised. In contrast, Ambruogia, who takes Gulfardo's word literally and asks for something in exchange for her love is condemned. In other words, Ambruogia does not play the courtly game of love according to the rules, and by asking for money instead of a service or other non-quantifiable object, she is considered to be prostituting herself. Therefore, if we read Ambruogia's actions within the courtly love context that Gulfardo initiates, then we are left with four possible interpretations of the woman's actions. First, it is feasible that when she is presented with Gulfardo's proposition, she is as greedy and unchaste as Neifile insists. She is willing to sell her honour and thus deserving to be punished for her unvirtuous actions. Second, Ambruogia might only be guilty of being an ineffective interlocutor who does not know how to play the courtly game of love begun by Gulfardo, and instead of refusing his requests or asking for an impossible gift like Dianora in X,5 who demands her future lover create a garden in winter, Ambruogia interprets Gulfardo's words literally and names what she desires. A third possibility is that Ambruogia is an effective interpreter, but rather than following through the courtly game started by her lover, she counters his courtly language with another discourse – an economic one – and tries to enter into the masculine economy of exchange and negotiation of her own worth; however, the economic interaction was not initiated by Gulfardo, and Ambruogia's attempt to invoke it backfires and she is cast as a disreputable woman. A final possibility is that Ambruogia's request for money is intended to reveal the crass reality of a system that permits the exchange of women, though only within the confines of masculine discourse, and her attempt at exposing the system's hypocrisy results in her punishment. These four possible interpretations of Ambruogia's behaviour exemplify polysemy in the Decameron, a device which encourages both artistic

freedom and interpretative independence. At the same time, although the ambiguous prose gives several possibilities for *why* she makes the deal with Gulfardo – her greed, her inability to interpret the chivalric code, her linguistic failing, or her attempt at resisting and revealing the male chauvinistic system of exchange – she is still chastised and humiliated by Gulfardo, and condemned by Neifile. Therefore, although Ambruogia's actions allow for interpretative flexibility on the part of the reader, there is still a moral connected to her comportment.

Not only is the wife in this story an unprecedented character, but so is the husband. According to Baker and Bonadeo, cuckolds in the Decameron are usually portrayed as dim-witted, even buffoons. However, what differentiates Guasparuolo from other counterparts is that his wife is apparently greedy and a “cattiva femina” (637:9). In contrast to the other deceived husbands, Guasparuolo does not lose his honour because he is cheated on by an unvirtuous woman. Moreover, he does not even lose his money, since Gulfardo makes sure that Guasparuolo is repaid his loan, thus cheating not only the husband, but also the wife. Therefore, the inferior position that the cuckold sometimes occupies in *novelle* does not apply here: he is neither the victim of a *beffa*, nor of specific irony. Instead, the reader pities the man for being married to a woman who is as greedy as Ambruogia.

It is possible that like the storyteller and listeners, Gulfardo also pitied Guasparuolo for being married to a “cattiva femina” and rather than humiliating him, he repays the money without intimating that he has slept with Ambruogia. This decision results in an unusual erotic triangle where the friendship between the men changes, but almost imperceptibly. Before the seduction the men were initially friends: Neifile relates that Gulfardo knows Guasparuolo quite well: “il quale era assai suo conoscente e amico” (637:6). “(of whom [Guasparuolo Cagastraccio] he was quite a good friend”; 475). And in turn, Guasparuolo trusts Gulfardo enough to lend him two hundred florins without question: when Gulfardo requests the money,

Neifile says that Guasparuolo “disse che volentieri e di presente gli annoverò di denari” (638:10) (“Guasparuolo said that he would be delighted to do so, and he counted the money out for him immediately; 476). Despite their friendship, Gulfardo attempts to seduce Ambruogia, as many of his counterparts in the Decameron do. However, Ambruogia’s greedy nature makes Gulfardo pity Guasparuolo, and although he does not go as far as telling his friend that he cuckolded him, Gulfardo does not take any action that might result in his friend’s further emasculation. Therefore, at the end of the story, the homosocial bond has been neither strengthened by the men’s combined decision to privilege their friendship over the marital bond, nor is it completely weakened. At the same time, when Gulfardo reclaims his money from Ambruogia, he severs his ties with her, thus nullifying their agreement and destroying one of the necessary threads binding the erotic triangle together. In this unusual scenario, it is the lover who is responsible for undermining his friend’s marriage, for changing the terms of his friendship and finally, for the dissolution of the erotic triangle. However, the pity generated for the deceived husband in this situation is rare, and the majority of husbands in the Decameron are portrayed as buffoons, and the reader is often convinced that they merited the trick, deceit, or manipulation contrived by their wives and friends, as is especially the case in III,4.

Day III, Story 4

Panfilo’s story in III, 4 focuses on Dom Felice, a monk who is befriended by Puccio. Felice is invited to Puccio’s house and after meeting Puccio’s wife, Isabetta, the two try to arrange to be alone together. Capitalizing on Puccio’s piety and their friendship, Felice tells Puccio how to do penance in order to be forgiven his sins. He instructs the husband to spend the night outside looking at the sky while remaining in the position of the crucifix. In the morning, Puccio is allowed to go to bed before attending three Masses during the day. When Isabetta

hears of Felice's instructions, she understands the monk's motives and she encourages her husband to follow the directions. As a result, during the forty nights that Puccio spends on his roof in penance, Felice sleeps with Puccio's wife, Isabetta.

The love triangle in this story reflects Bonadeo's assertion that the husband in such situations is often old and ridiculous. Indeed, in terms of attractiveness and intelligence, there is a clear hierarchy between the story's three characters: while the two lovers are both young and nubile, the husband is not only a dupe, but also lacking virility. Panfilo accentuates this hierarchy by first describing Puccio's dimwittedness: "E per ciò che uomo idiota era e di grossa pasta, diceva suoi paternostri, andava alle prediche, stava alle messe..." (252:5) ("Since he was a rather thick-witted, simpleminded man, he always said his Our Fathers and went to Mass...";184-5). Panfilo continues to narrate that Puccio leaves his wife sexually unfulfilled due to "la santità del marito, e forse per la vecchiezza" (253:6) ("because of her husband's saintliness and perhaps his old age"; 185), despite Isabetta's desires and advances:

e quando elle si sarebbe voluta dormire o forse scherzar con lui, e egli le raccontava la vita di Cristo e le prediche di frate Nastagio o il lamento della Magdalena o così fatte cose (253:6).

and on those occasions when she might have wanted to sleep with him and fool around in bed, he would lecture her on the life of Christ, the preaching of Brother Nastagio, or the lament of the Magdalen, or other such things. (185)

This introduction leaves little doubt that Puccio will be cuckolded by the beautiful Isabetta who will be forced to take a lover to satisfy her longings. Indeed, in an amusing reversal, Isabetta finds a monk whose own sexual desires are as forceful as Puccio's religious aspirations. Therefore, from the beginning of the story, it is clear that an erotic triangle will form and that it

will most likely be to the detriment of the husband, but it is not clear how exactly the triangle will be constructed or whether it will last.

While it is already clear that Felice and Isabetta are more cunning than Puccio and better suited to each other because of their common age and shared sexual drive, Felice's character possesses a desirable attribute that Isabetta lacks: *ingegno*. Isabetta is said to be "fresca e bella e ritondella che pareva una mela casolana" (253:6) ("she looked as fresh and pretty and plump as an apple from Casole"; 185), but her lover Felice, is "giovane e bello della persona e **d'aguto ingegno** e di profonda scienza" (253:7) (emphasis added) ("a rather young and handsome monk ... **sharp-witted** and very learned..."; 185 (emphasis added)). While Isabetta's attractiveness proves her desirability, Felice's "ingegno" is critical to the story's development when it is explicitly stated that he is the one who devises a plan to deceive Puccio. As the narrative develops, it is clear that the plan Felice creates is complicated and effective, thus proving his ingenuity and making him the most developed character of the three. This description of Felice, and in particular his "ingegno," proves Baker's assertion that the lovers are the driving force in most of the tales in the Decameron. It is undeniable that the erotic triangle here between Felice, Puccio and Isabetta is attributable to Felice's ingenuity: Felice sees Isabetta, desires her, and then conceives a plan of removing Puccio from his wife's bed.

In contrast to the active Felice who devises the plan, Isabetta is far more passive. While Felice is not only young and good looking, he also possesses wit and learning. In contrast, we only read about Isabetta's fresh and round body. Her passivity is emphasized when it becomes clear that Felice devised the *beffa* on his own and that she only hears of the plan when Puccio tells her about the monk's instructions for penance. Nevertheless, Isabetta is more acute than

her husband and realizes that Felice's instructions are a ruse fabricated so that he can see her.⁷⁹ In the end, Isabetta possesses enough cunning of her own to encourage her husband to follow the religious direction. Upon hearing Felice's instructions, Isabetta reacts in the following way:

La donna intese troppo bene, per lo star fermo infino a matutino senza muoversi, ciò che il monaco voleva dire; per che, parendole assai buon modo, disse che di questo e d'ogni altro bene che egli per l'anima sua faceva ella era contenta, e che, acciò che Idio gli facesse la sua penitenzia profittevole, ella voleva con essolui digiunare ma fare altro no. (255-6:22)

The woman understood only too well what the monk meant with the part about his remaining still without moving until matins; since she thought it was a very good idea indeed, she told him that she was pleased about it, as she was about every other thing he did for the good of his soul, and in order that God might make his penance profitable, she would fast along with him, but more than this, no. (187)

It is clear in this passage that Isabetta understands the double meaning behind Felice's advice to Puccio and so encourages her husband to do the penitence. Furthermore, by agreeing to fast with her husband, she does not make people doubt her own piety. It is already ironic that Isabetta should find a lover in a monk and a monk in a husband,⁸⁰ but this irony is further reinforced when the husband's concern over the state of his soul is contrasted to his wife's

⁷⁹ Felice's strategy of conveying a message to Isabetta through the guise of pious talk is employed by other characters in the *Decameron* as well, including Rustico in III,10 and Frate Alberto in IV,2. Millicent Marcus comments on this trend, saying that "Often amorous rewards await the successful manipulators of language," and continues that "Sometimes, linguistic codes are used to communicate secret messages to lovers, while the literal-minded crowd remains convinced that nothing untoward is being said" ("Seduction by Silence" 1).

⁸⁰ Luigi Totaro notes that the titles that both men are given in the novella reinforce how the men have switched roles – while the monk is referred to as *don* Felice, the husband is called *frate* (71).

disregard for her own. While Puccio is preoccupied with how best to cleanse his soul and effectively perform penance, his wife is not troubled by her adultery. Totaro explains,

Certo Isabetta, con i suoi *ventotto trent'anni* non sembra aver grandi legami con il marito e la sua vecchiezza – che con molta probabilità non ha desiderato e non ha scelto --, né particolari motivi di gratitudine per *la dieta* nella quale il marito *lungamente* l'aveva tenuta. (73)

As Totaro states, given Isabetta's long period of enforced abstinence, she is not only unconcerned with the state of her soul, but also eager to enter deeper into sin. Thus, Isabetta's desires construct her as the direct opposite of her husband and the ironic situation is established.

Although the character of the lover in this story might be more developed than the majority of the lovers in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, the irony that develops in these stories is not different from the French text. As in many of the stories in the Cnn, the duped husband is unaware of being deceived, while the lover and wife enjoy their tryst even more because they have successfully tricked the husband. At the same time, in Decameron III,4, the irony is made richer with the monk's exploitation of Puccio's religious fervour. Felice's manipulation of Puccio represents a case of specific irony as defined by Muecke, where there is an inequality between those who understand irony and those who do not. When Puccio earnestly tells his wife about the monk's instructions on how to cleanse his soul, it is clear which characters understand the irony and feel superior to the husband because of their extra knowledge. The specific irony is also expanded outside the tale, where not only do Felice and Isabetta laugh at the duped husband, but so do the storyteller, his audience and the readers.

Puccio's misfortune is further intensified if we consider how he perceives his relationship to Felice. Not only is the relationship between the two men consistent with Sedgwick's assertion that there is an asymmetry in the relationship between an active lover and

a passive cuckold, but also, the homosocial bond between the two is asymmetrical. Their friendship is compromised because Felice willingly exploits his friend's trust in order to sleep with his wife. By extension, because the two men in the erotic triangle are not equal (they are not equal in intellect, knowledge or virility), their homosocial relationship in this erotic triangle is also compromised. Whereas Felice's infidelity to Puccio is the thrust of the narrative, Puccio's devotion to Felice is explained at the beginning of the story. Panfilo explains how this friendship was developed:

col quale frate Puccio prese una stretta dimestichezza. E ... costui ogni suo dubbio molto ben gli solvea e, oltre a ciò, avendo la sua condizion conosciuta gli si mostrava santissimo. (253:7-8)

Friar Puccio struck up a very close friendship with him. And ... the monk was able to resolve many of his friend's religious questions and knowing the kind of person the friar was, he would make himself appear to be a very saintly man. (185)

As this passage shows, the friendship between the two men is not equal from the outset. Indeed, it is Puccio who seeks out Felice and befriends him. In turn, Felice does not respect the supposed bond between them, exploiting it instead by convincing Puccio to leave his bed at night in order to perform a strange form of penance. Because an asymmetrical friendship develops instead of a strong homosocial bond, the kinds of male friendships as discussed with regard to the Cnn are not entirely relevant. The men in III, 4 do not become friends by knowingly sharing the same woman, nor is the woman seduced through a meal or a bath. Instead, although Puccio does not doubt his friendship with the monk, the stronger bond in this erotic triangle is between Felice and Isabetta. In fact, in this relationship conversational

implicature and feasting play an important role in solidifying this illicit heterosexual relationship.

Although Isabetta is a more passive character than Felice, she is nevertheless allowed to form a bond with her lover that is independent of her relationship with her husband. It is significant that the lovers' relationship begins over meals prepared by Isabetta:

se lo incominciò frate Puccio a menare talvolta a casa e a dargli desinare e cena, secondo che fatto gli venia; e la donna altresì per amor di fra Puccio era sua dimestica divenuta e volontier gli faceva onore... E postole l'occhio adosso e una volta e altra bene astutamente, tanto fece che egli l'accese nella mente quello medesimo disidero che aveva egli. (253:9-10)

Friar Puccio began to bring him home from time to time and offer him lunch or dinner, depending on the time of day; and his wife, out of love for Friar Puccio, also became friendly with the monk and was happy to entertain him ... And he cleverly managed to give her the eye on one occasion or another in such a way that he ignited in her mind the same desire he had in his. (185)

Over this series of meals, Felice's desire for Isabetta grows until he is finally given the opportunity to seduce her. The erotic undertones of food and eating do not go unnoticed by either of the lovers or the readers, even though Puccio does not realize the situation that he is creating by inviting his rival into his home.

Once Isabetta and Felice desire each other, their relationship develops through a clever use of irony and implicature. It is because Isabetta understands the implications of Felice's words to Puccio – that by spending the night on the roof, Felice could freely join her in bed – that she encourages Puccio to follow the monk's advice and then enters into a complicit agreement with the monk, giving him licence to enter her room at night. The adulterous

relationship between Felice and Isabetta is predicated upon successful conversational implicature: Isabetta not only proves herself an able listener, but her interlocutor, Felice, also listens to her and accepts her use of language so that the two are able to form a covert bond. Through this ‘happy’ conversation, Isabetta distinguishes herself from many of her female French counterparts who are either unable to understand implicature (such as the women in Cnn three) or silenced by their male interlocutors (as in Cnn one). As Victoria Kirkham has noted, linguistic facility in the Decameron is a prized skill, and those who lack it are often depicted as buffoons who speak foolish words (The Sign of Reason 178). In this story, Puccio is undoubtedly a buffoon. But in contrast, his wife, who proves her linguistic competence is not only clever, but her facility with language also allows her to take control of her body. In other words, by being given the freedom to either accept or reject Felice’s insinuated proposition, Isabetta can decide with whom she wants to share her body.

The effects of pragmatic implicature are also explored in Emilia’s story in X,5, but unlike Isabetta’s tale which centers on a *beffa*, Emilia dwells on ramifications on the system of exchange when women attempt to speak with men and circumvent the authority of their husbands.

Day X, Story 5⁸¹

Emilia tells the story of a knight, Ansaldo Gradense, who is in love with Dianora, the wife of Gilberto. Ansaldo tells Dianora that he will do anything to win her love. She makes a deal, saying that she will sleep with him if he grows her a garden, “pieno di verdi erbe, di fiori e di fronzuti albori...” (833:8) (“full of green grass, flowers, and leafy trees”; 624) in the month of

⁸¹ A. C. Lee notes that this story is also found in the Filocolo; however, in this re-telling of the story, Boccaccio portrays the husband as more “magnanimous as he was prepared to sacrifice his honour, more valuable even than the money or the love of the others” (326).

January. Ansaldo goes to a magician who creates the garden for him, and Dianora is forced to tell her husband about the bargain she made. Gilberto first reacts with anger: “primieramente ciò udendo si turbò forte...” (834:14) (“at first he was very much disturbed...”; 625), but then he forces his wife to honour her word. When Ansaldo discovers Gilberto’s reaction, he releases Dianora from her obligation. In turn, when the magician hears of Ansaldo’s gesture, he refuses to accept payment for the garden.

The relationship between Ansaldo and Gilberto is key because it is reminiscent of classical *amicitia*. And from the beginning of the story, it is clear that these men are prime candidates forming this kind of friendship. Gilberto is “un gran ricco uomo ... assai piacevole e di buona aria” (832:4) (“a very wealthy man ... a very amiable and pleasant person”; 623). Ansaldo is a “uomo d’alto affare e per arme e per cortesia conosciuto per tutto” (832:5) (“[he] was known everywhere for his feats of arms and chivalry”; 623). Unlike Felice and Puccio in III, 4, Ansaldo’s and Gilberto’s similar class, common social means and good tempers make them ideally suited for developing a friendship in the style of classical *amicitia*.

The friendship that the men ultimately forge is predicated upon their exchange of Dianora. In fact, Dianora epitomises Sarah Kay’s concept of *colle sexuelle*: ultimately, she unites the two men, but only after her femininity, which becomes a threatening force when her *dédoublement* is exposed, is brought under control by a mutual understanding between Gilberto and Ansaldo. At the beginning of the story, Dianora’s comportment is beyond reproach and she resides within the private world of the household, refusing contact with her perpetual wooer, Ansaldo. When she finally engages with Ansaldo by requesting he grow her a garden, Dianora removes herself from the interior world of the household to become a threatening force in the

male-dominated world of bartering and exchange.⁸² In short, Dianora's discussion with Ansaldo marks her *dédoublement*: she has been split between the virtuous woman she was initially, and the seductress that Ansaldo has forced her to become. After Ansaldo arranges for the garden, Dianora understands her error and attempts to cleave herself together by telling her husband about the seduction and the deal she brokered with Ansaldo. When she admits to Gilberto that she has made a promise to deceive him, Gilberto realises that his wife's femininity has become a force that could potentially undermine his own masculinity. He therefore imposes his own control on this unstable situation as much as possible, and insists that if necessary, she further divide herself. He tells her,

“Voglio io che tu a lui vada e, se per modo alcun puoi, t'ingegni di far che, servata la tua onestà, tu sii da questa promessa disciolta: dove altramenti non si potesse, per questa volta il corpo ma non l'animo gli concede.” (835:16)

“I want you to go to him, and by any means possible, short of your chastity, seek to be released from this promise, and if that is impossible, then this one time you must give him your body, but not your heart.” (624)

Through this request, Gilberto re-commands control over Dianora. He knowingly allows her body to be used by another man, but at the same time he remains the recipient of her love. By telling his wife that if Ansaldo insists, she must adhere to the terms of her agreement, Gilberto defies religious doctrine and law by sanctioning adultery. However, breaking these laws is less important than compromising his masculinity. As Sarah Kay notes, “la féminité désigne d'abord un manqué,” thereby constructing, “un homme défectueux” (58). Instead, by

⁸² The garden itself also represents a danger. Jonathan Usher explains that in the *Decameron* there are two different kinds of gardens: the ones in which the stories are told, and the ones that are described in the stories. In the former, the gardens are secure, dignified and chaste, while in the latter, the gardens are grotesque, tragic and represent the misuse of the *locus amoenus* (280). The garden in X,5, conjured by a magician, is certainly threatening: it is a product of a dangerous and unknown art, and its existence threatens not only Dianora's virtue, but also the institution of marriage.

controlling Dianora's body and spirit, Gilberto refuses to allow Dianora's femininity to become an indicator of his own lack. While Gilberto protects his image, reputation, and masculinity, he requests that Dianora split herself further – she not only has to attempt to remove feeling from the sexual act, but her body is also to be claimed by two men. To Dianora's relief, she does not have to fulfil the conditions of her contract. But to Dianora's detriment, she becomes a *colle sexuelle*. She is used by the men as both messenger and message, through which Ansaldo and Gilberto forge a relationship that is stronger than any one Dianora has with either man. Dianora is a kind of transformative glue: by constructing her as message and messenger, the two men change the nature of their friendship, while they simultaneously subvert Dianora's relationship with her husband and undermine the control she initially tried to appropriate by negotiating on her own with Gilberto.

There are two key moments where Dianora is used to relay messages. The first is found when Gilberto commands Dianora to ask Ansaldo to forget the contract, as quoted above. In this speech Gilberto indicates to Ansaldo that he is still in control of his masculinity and his wife's actions. Furthermore, through this message Gilberto revokes his wife's right to speak for herself, especially when it involves communicating with other men. When Dianora initially made an agreement with Ansaldo, she was actively involved in the negotiations and determined the value of her body. Although Dianora underestimated Ansaldo's capabilities for fulfilling her seemingly impossible request, the terms of the agreement were nonetheless set by her. Once Gilberto discovers his wife's contract, he usurps her bargaining power and her body, making the latter an object of exchange. Furthermore, Gilberto chastises his wife for trying to enter into a relationship of exchange with a man, saying: "**Dianora, egli non è atto di savia né d'onesta donna** d'ascoltare alcuna ambasciata delle così fatte, né di pattovire sotto alcuna condizione con alcuno la sua castità" (834:14) (emphasis added). ("**Dianora, it is not proper for a wise or**

virtuous woman to pay attention to messages of that sort or to fix a price on her chastity with anyone, under any circumstances”; 625 (emphasis added)). It is notable that here Gilberto specifically says that *women* have no right to determine the value of their chastity, though at the same time, Gilberto is willing to allow Dianora to fulfill the terms of her contract if necessary, so long as it is clear that he is the one who sent her. In fact, it is not obvious whether Gilberto is more outraged that his wife tried to enter into the system of exchange, or whether she was going to cuckold him. In the end, Gilberto shows that he values economic transactions and contracts more than his marital vows since he forces Dianora to go to Ansaldo. Through this action, Gilberto not only jeopardizes his marital contract which stipulates mutual fidelity, but he also objectifies his wife, removes her agency and takes control of the system of exchange.

Gilberto’s demand to his wife and his acceptance of how she is to be exchanged is interpreted in a different vein by Millicent Marcus. Starting with how the garden came into existence, Marcus writes that Ansaldo had correctly understood Dianora’s request for a garden as a rejection, but he chose instead to interpret the literary meaning of her request, thus splitting words from their true meaning. And just as he manipulated the meaning of Dianora’s words, he also manipulates appearances and reality by commissioning the garden. Gilberto also splits meaning from action, and Marcus writes, he exposes how adultery “recapitulates the conditions of original sin” (“An Allegory of Two Gardens” 163). She explains that,

When [Gilberto] temporarily releases Dianora from her marriage vows for the purpose of fulfilling her pact with Ansaldo, he bids her ‘il corpo ma non l’animo gli concede’ (659), dramatizing the dichotomy between spirit and flesh which was the bitter fruit of the Fall. Gilberto’s injunction to Dianora to give her body while withholding her soul suggests by contrast the sacrament of marriage in which bodies and souls merge in solemn affirmation of cosmic unity. (163)

Although this perspective does not deny that Dianora is exchanged between two men, Marcus highlights the different interpretative strategies employed by Gilberto and Ansaldo. Both Ansaldo and Gilberto attempt to separate words from meaning, intention from action. Ansaldo tries to enter into a system of exchange through a literal interpretation of Dianora's words, while Gilberto uses the same strategy to find a way around adultery. Through these strategies, we see how carefully interpreting words allows Dianora and Gilberto to escape from a potentially detrimental situation.

The second moment Dianora is exchanged occurs when Ansaldo displays his *virtù* to Gilberto and sends back Dianora untouched. Impressed by Gilberto's noble gesture to share his wife, Ansaldo cannot bring himself to fulfill the terms of his contract:

“Madonna, unque a Dio non piaccia, poscia che così è come voi dite, che io sia guastatore dello onore di chi ha compassione al mio amore; e per ciò l'esser qui sarà, quanto vi piacerà, non altrimenti che se mia sorella foste, e quando a grado vi sarà liberamente vi potrete partire, sì veramente che voi al vostro marito di tanta cortesia, quanta la sua è stata, quelle grazie renderete che convenevoli crederete.” (836:22)

“My lady, since things are as you say, God forbid that I should soil the honor of a man who has taken pity on my love, and so, as long as you wish to stay here, you will be treated just as if you were my sister, and whenever you like, you are free to leave, provided that you give your husband such thanks as you seem befitting such courtesy as his.” (626)

Moved by Gilberto's gesture, Ansaldo feels compelled to return in kind and show that his sense of morality is as strong as Gilberto's. At the same time, Ansaldo also uses Dianora as a means of relaying a message: by sending Dianora's untouched body back to her husband, and by

instructing Dianora that she should thank her husband for his kind treatment, Ansaldo exhibits to Gilberto that he too, can be noble. Moreover, Ansaldo's actions indicate that even this man, who had been previously willing to negotiate with Dianora, also shows preference for entering into a relationship of exchange with another man rather than with a woman. Through their gestures and by using Dianora as a conduit, these two men construct an exclusive relationship based on honour and virtue.

Interestingly, this relationship, predicated upon sending an untouched woman between two men, is a twist to the category in the Cnn where men form a homosocial bond by agreeing to share the same woman. In a reversal of Cnn thirty-one and thirty-three, where men's friendships are strengthened after discovering that they have been having sex with the same woman, these Italian men form an equally strong friendship by generously offering the woman's body to the other. This story also recalls the sixty-second *nouvelle* where a 'message' is passed between two men. In this *nouvelle*, the object-cum-message is the ring that falls off Jehan's finger and is retrieved by Thomas while each one is in bed with the innkeeper's wife. This object, not the innkeeper's wife, is what binds the men together: after discovering that they had each had sex with the innkeeper's wife the night before, the next morning they are still more interested in who should possess the ring. With regard to Sarah Kay's distinction between woman and femininity, in this story, these components are split between the woman (the innkeeper's wife), and the ring, symbolizing femininity which also functions as the *colle sexuelle*. Indeed, like femininity, the ring has the potential to highlight each man's sexual lack and economic deficiencies. Furthermore, like femininity, the ring is something to be desired, but also controlled. And although the innkeeper's wife is a formidable woman – she attempts to control her sexual life, she effectively deceives her husband, and she initially manipulates both Jehan and Thomas – in the end, the ring is the object that is not only most valued, but which also

unites all three men. After exchanging the ring and the woman in the same bed on the same night, the relationship between Jehan and Thomas also changes and their formerly chaste friendship is consummated. Conversely, in the story of the magic garden, woman and object are conflated: Dianora's body is the site of the message and she is the *colle sexuelle* which brings together two men, also changing the nature of their relationship whereby these men consciously privilege the male bond over a relationship with a woman. Furthermore, by choosing this relationship and nullifying the deal between Dianora and Ansaldo, the men chose to dissolve the erotic triangle.

Although Dianora's body is used as a vehicle to solidify a relationship between two men, she is not merely depicted as a two-dimensional object of exchange. In fact, her actions throughout the story indicate that she has as strong a sense of morality as either her husband or lover. From the outset, Dianora unwillingly enters into the arrangement with Ansaldo:

E essendo alla donna gravi le sollicitazioni del cavaliere, e veggendo che, per negare ella ogni cosa da lui domandatole, esso per ciò né d'amarla né di sollicitarla si rimaneva, con una nuova e al suo giudicio impossibil domanda si pensò di volerlosi torre da dosso. (833:5)

And when the lady, having become weary of the knight's entreaties, realized that no matter how much she denied him everything he requested, he nevertheless continued to love her and to implore her, she decided to rid herself of him by making a strange and, in her judgement, impossible request. (623)

Once Ansaldo fulfills her wishes, Dianora sees that she is obliged, "era obligata," (834:13) to honour her word. But rather than cuckolding her husband, as many of the women in the Decameron do, she feels bound to reveal the truth to him: "La donna per vergogna il tacque molto: ultimamente, constretta, ordinatamente gli aperse ogni cosa" (833:13) ("Out of shame,

the lady kept silent for a long time; then, finally compelled to speak, she revealed everything to him”; 625). Dianora’s guilt at the prospect of cuckolding her husband sets her apart from many of the women in the Decameron and also provides a counterexample to Liscia’s assertion in the Introduction to Day VI that married women know how to deceive their husbands. After stating that she has had no female neighbour who has gone into marriage a virgin, Liscia continues, “e anche delle maritate so io ben quante e quali beffe elle fanno a’ mariti...” (510:10) (“and as for the married women, I know all too well the many different kinds of tricks they play on their husbands”; 381). If we read X,5 in comparison to Liscia’s lesson from four days earlier, then Emilia’s example of a woman who might have successfully cuckolded her husband but chooses instead to be truthful, implicitly contradicts the earlier assertion. Therefore, Dianora is essentially a virtuous woman, who, like her husband, also values the integrity of her word.

A different explanation for Dianora’s honesty to her husband about the proposed infidelity is again offered by Marcus. She proposes that both Dianora and Gilberto are not literal-minded and “know that the enchanted garden of courtly love is false and so it poses no real threat to their marriage. Ansaldo, however, believes in his garden as he believes in the validity of the adulterous happiness it will bring” (“An Allegory of Two Gardens” 172). If this is the case, then Dianora was an effective interlocutor even before going to her husband: although committing adultery was not ideal, Dianora recognized that the enchanted garden could not threaten her marriage so long as she was honest with her husband. Marcus continues that in “Gilberto’s counterexamples of generosity and *caritas*, Ansaldo is finally able to see the shabbiness of his original scheme and the sham quality of the garden which was to mediate his love” (172). I would add to this and say that Ansaldo’s education is also in part attributable to Dianora: by speaking about her situation to her husband, she implicitly tells him that she does

not want to undermine her marriage, and by acting as go-between for Gilberto's message, husband and wife are able to show Ansaldo an alternative to interpreting literally.

Although Dianora shows that she has the capacity to adhere to legal and religious moral codes as much as her male counterparts, and while she might be partially responsible for Ansaldo's re-education, she is still not an active figure. Indeed, Dianora is the paragon of a passive woman when twice she follows the will of men: first, after being continually wooed by Ansaldo, she feels compelled to make a deal with him; second, Gilberto forces her to honour her word. Furthermore, when she does try to assert her independence by telling her husband about her deal, she loses control of her body and it is subsumed into a system of exchange. This situation is unlike the innkeeper's wife in the sixty-second *nouvelle* who negotiates how and when her body will be used without being coerced by the men around her. However, Dianora's passiveness, her position as *colle sexuelle* between two men, and even her *dédoublement* strongly resemble Francesco's wife in Decameron III,5. But the Zima story is exceptional for more than just this similarity between the two women: in fact, this complicated tale about two scheming men who exchange a wife for a palfrey, brings together many threads discussed throughout this chapter.

III,5: The "Zima" Story

Elissa's story centers on Zima, a successful man who desires the wife of Messer Francesco Vergellesi. For his part, Francesco covets one of Zima's horses. Zima therefore arranges an exchange: in return for his horse, Zima requests that he be allowed to speak alone with Francesco's wife. Francesco agrees but stipulates that his wife not be allowed to speak. When the meeting takes place, Zima speaks to the woman, carrying out a conversation on his own and replying on the woman's behalf. Through this 'conversation,' Zima gives the woman

instructions on how to beckon him should she want him to visit to her. When Vergellesi leaves on business with his new horse, his wife considers Zima's proposition and follows the instructions he set out and he comes to her.

The first striking feature of this tale is the great character contrast between Zima and Francesco. Unlike the men in X,5, who are of similar class and demeanour, Zima is “di piccola nazione ma ricco molto, il quale sì ornato e sì pulito della persona andava, che generalmente da tutti era chiamato il Zima” (258-9:5) (“of humble birth but very rich, who went about town so well dressed and so neatly groomed that everyone used to call him Zima”; 190), as opposed to Francesco who is, “uomo molto ricco e savio e avveduto per altra ma avarissimo senza modo” (258:4) (“a very rich, judicious, and clever man in many ways, but he was an unbelievably miserly person”; 190). As Olivia Holmes notes, though Zima is of lower birth than Francesco, he is endowed with the desirable traits set out by the courtly love tradition: he is generous, well dressed (an external feature often associated with the language of courtly poetry), not driven by greed, and chivalrous. The husband, on the other hand, is antichivalric, greedy and miserly (147). These contrasting descriptions foreshadow the men's doomed relationship: because they are not equal in demeanour, class or character, a relationship based on the tenets of *amicitia* is not possible. But more than the difference in class and character between the two men, it is Francesco's most odious trait – greed – that sets him apart from Zima and which also leads to his emasculation. For Ambruogia in VIII,1 and Francesco, greed is the sin that causes both characters' undoing. Ambruogia's greed brings her to prostitution, a sin for which she is punished by Gulfardo when he reclaims his money in front of her husband. For his part, Francesco's desire for a horse leads him to unknowingly lose his faithful wife. But in both these cases, greed does more than just expose each character's central flaw, or highlight what their covetousness leads them to lose; it also causes both characters to forget how to engage

effectively in an economy that deals in the exchange of women. As stated earlier, Ambruogia is punished for her adultery because she attempts to exchange the use of her body for material gain. In certain stories, such as III,4, some women are given reason to find sexual gratification outside the marital bed and as a result, they are not punished. However, Ambruogia's attempt to profit from her body and looks is taboo within the unwritten rules of economy of exchange, and Gulfardo makes this clear when he comes to reclaim his money. Likewise, Francesco also does not understand the implications of the exchange he brokers with Zima. Believing that he has outsmarted his lower-class friends by forbidding his wife to speak with him, Francesco is convinced that he has won the horse without relinquishing his wife. However, his overwhelming desire to possess the horse prevents him from appreciating the potential of language and realising that even a one-sided conversation can lead to adultery. Indeed, Francesco's longing for the palfrey makes him forget that adultery is usually the result of deceit and trickery.

Two other characters who resemble each other are Isabetta from III,4 and Francesco's wife: each woman finds a way to encourage her potential lover to devise a plan where they can meet. Isabetta responds to Felice's message, sent by Puccio, that her husband should perform a strict penitential regime on the roof of the house at night. By encouraging her husband to follow Felice's advice, Isabetta makes herself available to Felice. Francesco's wife is also unable to speak directly to her potential lover, but she manages to communicate with Zima through her gaze and a series of subtle sighs in order to indicate her feelings. After Zima's initial long speech to his beloved, in which he professes his deep love and devotion to her, some sighs escape her lips nonetheless and she silently encourages Zima:

[Zima] riguardando nel viso e veggendo alcun lampeggiar d'occhi di lei verso di lui alcuna volta e oltre a ciò raccogliendo i sospiri li quali essa non con tutta la

forza loro del petto lasciava uscire, alcuna buona speranza prese e da quella aiutato prese nuovo consiglio. E cominciò in forma della donna, udendolo ella, a rispondere a se medesimo in cotal guisa. (261:18)

as he gazed into her face he noticed a certain gleam in her eyes when she would look at him from time to time, and this together with the sighs she allowed to escape from her bosom with less than their complete force filled him with fresh hope and encouraged him to devise a new plan. And so, as if he were the lady herself, he began to answer for her, as she sat there listening. (192)

Perrus explains that the wife's behaviour in this passage does not go against her husbands' orders. By remaining silent, Francesco's wife respects the literal meaning of his command, but Perrus notes that Francesco never specified that she could not express herself through sighs and looks, "*langage parfaitement 'receuilli' (ainsi que l'écrit Boccace) par Zima*" (239). In other words, Francesco's wife chooses to respect only the literal meaning of her husband's command and finds a way of defying him nonetheless.

In both these cases, the women find ways of communicating with men without relying on direct conversation: Isabetta responds to Felice's message through linguistic implicature and Francesco's wife uses more subtle forms of communication for expressing her desires. Therefore, although both these women are initially victim to their husband's lack of virility or greed, they not only prove themselves to be wiler than their husbands, but also more able communicators. Moreover, because they understand implicature and even delight in irony, these two women also disprove the feminist and anthropological theory of the erotic triangle that posits women as exchangeable objects between men. In fact, three years before Gayle Rubin's article, Perrus countered Rubin's and Sedgwick's arguments, observing how the wife emancipates herself from a restrictive situation and a system of exchange:

Cette Dame sans nom, que le récit nous présente comme un objet – objet de désir pour Zima, monnaie d'échange (truquée) pour son mari --, devient sujet à la fin de la nouvelle. Elle revendique son autonomie avec force, comme en témoignage, dans son soliloque, la répétition du pronom sujet 'io', qui n'apparaît pas moins de dix fois en dix lignes. (243)

Given the similarities between the women and despite their different circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the two tales should be placed side by side on the same day: these women complement each other and together they create a strong case for women's linguistic ability and sexual freedom in the Decameron. These stories are further complementary because they both indicate how male homosocial relationships can fail. In both cases, the lover exploits the husband's supposition of exclusivity in order to seduce his 'friend's' wife, and ultimately, the asymmetrical relationships between the lovers and cuckolds in these tales points to a fallibility in the erotic triangle. But despite the impressive linguistic abilities of Francesco's wife, the terms of her exchange, her *dédoublement*, and the question of the palfrey still remain to be contended with.

A second woman that Francesco's wife can be compared to is Dianora because both women have been wooed by admirers for a long time. Ansaldo unsuccessfully wooed Dianora: "Il quale, ferventemente amandola e ogni cosa faccendo che per lui si poteva per essere amato da lei e a ciò spesso per sue ambasciate sollicitandola, invano si faticava" (832:5) ("while Messer Ansaldo loved Madonna Dianora passionately and did everything he could to be loved in return by her, often sending numerous messages with this end in mind, he laboured in vain"; 623); and Zima unsuccessfully wooed Francesco's wife: Zima "avea lungo tempo amata e vagheggiata infelicemente la donna di messer Francesco, la quale era bellissima e onesta molto" (259:5). ("for some time now [Zima] had been in love with, and courted unsuccessfully, Messer

Francesco's wife, who was most beautiful and very virtuous"; 190). Both women are defined by their virtuousness and remain dutiful wives, staying within the confines of the private, domestic sphere. Although these situations are similar at the beginning, the catalysts forcing them into communicating with their suitors are different. Dianora's situation changes when she attempts to rid herself of Ansaldo by entering the male, public world, and making a deal with him. The situation of Francesco's wife is more ironic, because although her husband tries to keep her within the confines of the home, it is he who invites an external, male force to enter her domain – a situation which leads to his being cuckolded. As is the case with Dianora, the moment that Francesco's wife engages with another man, she is split in two. While these women reside within their houses without contact with the men who desire them, they remain unthreatening and controllable forces; but through discussions with their suitors, they are divided into two. Francesco's wife is split between the virtuous woman she was, and the adulteress she could be during her meeting with Zima. As Elissa explains, despite herself, after Zima's speech, Francesco's wife discovers newfound emotions:

La donna, la quale il lungo vagheggiare, l'armeggiare, le mattinate ... muovere non avean potuto, mossero l'affettuose parole dette dal ferventissimo amante : e cominciò a sentire ciò che prima mai non aveva sentito, cioè che amor si fosse.

(261 :17)

The lady, who had previously not been moved by Zima's long courtship, his jousting, the morning serenades ... was now moved by the words of affection spoken by her most ardent lover, and she began to feel what she had never felt before – that is to say, love itself. (192)

This moment represents the moment of Francesco's wife *dédoublement*, and she is split into playing the conflicting roles of wife and seductress. Although both Francesco's wife and

Dianora are coerced into playing these contradictory roles, the essential difference between the two is that Francesco's wife falls in love with her suitor, while Dianora tries to disentangle herself from the situation.

Another difference between the two women is that Francesco's wife does not have a name. Ultimately, Dianora, possessor of both a name and even some independence, is a more forceful character than Francesco's wife, who is admired from afar by a suitor, Zima, and then exchanged by her husband for a palfrey. Olivia Holmes notes that this absence of not only a name, but also of any defining characteristics, forces Zima to love the woman only for her physical beauty. She comments further that the woman's lack makes her comparable to the horse, where both are only admired for their beauty and splendour and by extension, both are objects of exchange (147). But whereas Francesco believes that he is trading time alone with his wife for a horse, Zima changes the terms of the contract and unbeknownst to Francesco, Zima uses his time with the woman to create the possibility for subsequent private meetings. Through this deceit, Zima compromises the homosocial bond.

The tenuous homosocial bond between Zima and Francesco, predicated on an exchange of a horse and a wife, is further complicated by Holmes when she questions Zima's motivations for desiring the exchange. She asks whether Zima truly desires the woman, or whether he uses her as a substitute or a mediator for Francesco, Zima's true object of desire:

Does Zima only desire the woman because she is the knight's wife, and is the knight – or even chivalric existence – a 'mediator' in the Girardian sense that Zima borrows from it his desires? Is Zima motivated, then, not by passion (for the lady), but by envy (of the other man)? (147)

Holmes leaves this question unanswered, but her inquiry mirrors Sarah Kay's investigation into the relationship between Jehan Stotton and Thomas Brampton in Cnn sixty-two. Both woman

and object – either ring or horse – are desired, and eventually possessed, by both men. Furthermore, these objects’ roles as mediators are underscored by their attendant sexual connotations. I have already discussed the sexual associations with the ring, and there is likewise the sexual innuendo of riding a horse. And although Francesco might not be aware of it, or willing to admit it, Zima desires to ride his wife as much as Francesco wants to ride the horse.⁸³ Despite this parallel of the sexual innuendo between both horse and ring, the palfrey does not function in exactly the same way as the ring in Cnn sixty-two. I argued above that the ring is a manifestation of femininity and a representation of a *colle sexuelle* which unites Jehan and Thomas. This division between woman and object does not happen in the Zima story. Indeed, it cannot happen because Zima and Francesco each desire a *different* object. Francesco covets the horse, and Zima, Francesco’s wife, and in the end they exchange one for the other. In contrast, Jehan and Thomas desire both the innkeeper’s wife *and* the ring, and their disagreement lies in who will possess the ring. Furthermore, the ring brings Jehan and Thomas even closer together, as their friendship is only reinforced following the night with the innkeeper’s wife. The ring is a *colle sexuelle* for the two Englishmen, but it also represents truth: when Jehan sees the ring on Thomas’ finger the following morning, he realises what happened during the night. Francesco, however, does not discover that his wife cuckolded him and he therefore never becomes aware of the true terms of the exchange he negotiated with Zima. Ultimately, the palfrey cannot function as a *colle sexuelle* because these men are not brought closer together following the exchange. Conversely, if Holmes is correct in her supposition Zima enacts his desire for Francesco via his wife, then this situation parallels the

⁸³ Louise Vasvári has written about how erotic symbols function in the Decameron, especially in V,4 where a girl uses the double entendre of “catching a bird” to talk about her boyfriend’s penis. Vasvári writes that an advantage of using such erotic symbols is that it increases the tension between the characters. It also protects the listeners who would be offended by the direct terminology and who can therefore ignore, or at least pretend to ignore it. Furthermore, if confronted with the truth of the *double entendre*, the speaker can also feign innocence (“*L’Usignuolo in Gabba*” 227).

scenario in the first *nouvelle* where a husband shares the feast and the bath that his neighbour had prepared for his friend's wife. As I argued in chapter two, during the feast, the men's previously homosocial friendship moves closer toward a homosexual relationship. Furthermore, in both these stories the woman remains nameless, thus reinforcing her position as a commodity on which the men imprint their desire for each other. Of course in neither story are these desires acted upon or even acknowledged, but a Girardian approach to both these situations illustrates new dynamics in these relationships where the women act as mediators in the relationship between two men. Indeed it is through such situations that we can observe how traces of male homosexual relationships, accepted, according to Boswell, in parts of Europe until as late as 1300, found their way into literature through insinuation and implication (293).⁸⁴ Discussing these forms of illicit and even unrecognized desire also deepens our understanding of how female characters function in the erotic triangle: in situations such as these, even the woman who is aware of her situation as a commodity must remain so because her only way of exerting any kind of sexual power is to act as a conduit between men.

In the Zima story, because there are two objects of exchange and four objects of desire, there are in fact many erotic triangles, all of which are unstable. Francesco desires the palfrey; Zima desires Francesco's wife, but also possibly Zima; Francesco's wife desires no one, but then desires Zima – all of which culminates in the reality that it is very difficult to ascertain who is the mediator of desire and who desires what. While the palfrey cannot be the *colle sexuelle*

⁸⁴ The only tale in the *Cnn*, *Decameron* and *Lba* that explicitly mentions some kind of homosexual encounter is in *Decameron* V, 10. In this story, Pietro di Vinciolo takes a wife out of necessity, but continues with his 'dishonest' behaviour. At the end of the story, it is made clear that Pietro's wife's lover was shared one night by the married couple. Therefore, in this story we are presented with examples of heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual love. Gregory Stone uses this story to propose a "third way of reading" the *Decameron* which does not catch the reader in a bind between only negotiating with the Other (as happens with heterosexual love) or with the same (as happens with homosexual love) and instead finding meaning "in that no man's land between subjective, personal opinion and objective, universal truth" (197). Stone's short investigation into this one tale provides a promising lens that could revise perceptions of other tales in the *Decameron* and other texts.

between the two men, it is possible that the wife is. She is also ‘*dédoublée*’ when she is forced to play the dual role of devoted wife and seductress. The woman’s role in this story is indeed complex. Is she merely a commodity to be exchanged, a mediator of desire, a *colle sexuelle*? Or, do her sighs and looks provide a means of escape from the confines of her room? All these questions are further complicated by Holmes when she adds another mediator into the mix: language. She examines Zima’s clever use of language in his speech to Francesco’s wife, the very speech that elicits her sighs and gazes, and claims that it functions as a ‘galeotto’, a go-between, that emancipates the wife from the system of exchange and gives her a modicum of control over how her body is used.

Holmes begins by commenting on Zima’s impressive linguistic skill. She writes that he convinces Francesco that the palfrey is a gift, even though the horse ends up being an object of exchange for Francesco’s wife. When Zima is alone with Francesco’s wife, he speaks in the manner of the *dolce stil nuovo* – a style that mirrors his noble appearance and comportment.⁸⁵ Holmes sees deep significance in the echoes of the *dolce stil nuovo*, claiming that it is used for several reasons. First, because Francesco’s wife is essentially mute, not only can Zima construct her however he pleases, but her silence also mirrors the silent women in the *stil nuovo* poetry. She explains that, although the poetry was written about women for women, the poems themselves were exchanged between men while women remained outside this transaction, mute

⁸⁵ Several scholars have noted the use of the *dolce stil nuovo* in the tale, including Vittore Branca, who writes that Zima’s words “si riflette piuttosto l’aspirazione a comporre intellettualisticamente e letterariamente la passione in termini elevati e cortesi, secondo gli ideali già accolti nel *Filocolo*, nel *Teseida*, nell’*Amorosa Visione*.” Branca continues, that despite the parallel between Zima’s words and these other texts, all of which reflect the “stile ‘tragico,’” the very same words Zima utters can also evoke “il mondo concupiscente e animalesco,” thus also representing a comic style (115). Therefore, the use of the *stil nuovo* poetry in this tale is ambiguous, and possibly parodic. This observation is substantiated by Louise George Clubb, who has talked more generally about the use of the *dolce stil nuovo* in the *Decameron*. She writes that Boccaccio proposes many different kinds of love, but he does not condone *fin’amour*: “he denies the love that denies the flesh, specifically the love expounded by poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*” (188). From this observation, there is further reason to question the intention behind the *stil nuovo* poetry, where the kind of love suggested by Zima’s poetry does not reflect the nature of Zima’s love for Francesco’s wife, nor the love she comes to have for him.

and unable to express their opinions. However, Zima transforms this traditional model of disseminating poetry: instead of sharing his poetry with other men, he uses it to act as a go-between between himself and the woman.⁸⁶ Therefore, in Zima's reworking of the *dolce stil nuovo*, although the woman is still required to be silent, she is nevertheless integral to the poetry's reception. Holmes comments that the "writer's influence on the reader is figured as an illicit heterosexual act. In other words, it becomes a 'Galeotto'" (152).

The assertion that Zima's words become a Galeotto is striking, and should also be examined in relation to the entire Decameron, in particular how the Galeotto, the go-between, affects the female audience. We do not know how the Decameron was received by its intended female audience, but we could use Francesco's wife's reaction to Zima's poetry as an indication of how Boccaccio might have wanted his female readers to react to his prose. Victoria Kirkham postulates along these lines, though restricting her comments to the sedentary women in the Proem, and comments that Boccaccio's Galeotto appeals to and diminishes women's already weak disposition:

Boccaccio invites us to look in his love stories for a message about temptation to love of the flesh. That this go-between should pander to sedentary ladies secretly afire is eminently right. Idleness invites desire; secrecy fans the flames. In woman, what's more, they can be kindled by spontaneous combustion, for she has no weakness greater than lust (The Sign of Reason 125).

This description of sedentary women is less than flattering, but it might also be applied to Francesco's wife who, idle and isolated, is tempted by Zima's poetry and invites Zima to her.

⁸⁶ A different gloss on Zima's poetry has been proposed by Pier Forni. He has suggested that the poetry in this tale recalls Dante's Vita Nuova where, in a poem, he imagines a dialogue with the woman he loves and where he anticipates her answers to his questions. But where Dante's poetry rests in the realm of the imaginary, Zima's dialogue suggests a real future. Forni explains, "Dante stilizza ed inventa il passato, Zima prescrive il futuro" (73).

However, if we use Francesco's wife as our starting point for understanding the effect of the Galeotto, then we might reach a different conclusion. Indeed, as we saw previously, Francesco's wife is an effective listener and knows how to communicate through sighs and gestures, which allows her to decide whether she will pursue a relationship with her suitor. Starting with her example and moving outward toward the Proem, then we are given a different perspective to Kirkham's on the disposition of Boccaccio's female readers. Indeed, Francesco's wife's creative reaction to her Galeotto translates into freedom: although she is forbidden to respond to Zima, she finds a way to respond to the proposition. While Francesco's wife invents a way to respond to the poetry, a problem with Zima's Galeotto is that it appropriates the woman's voice, thus threatening the woman's autonomy and ability to answer independently. It is therefore significant that Francesco's wife's solution to this problem is to reply with silence – here, the very situation that in most cases restricts a woman's independence (as the case of Dianora demonstrates), empowers this woman instead. By extension, Francesco's wife offers another possibility for how women in the Decameron and female readers of the text can express themselves, even in the face of men who take the liberty to speak for them: by embracing her imposed silence and expressing herself through glances and sighs, Francesco's wife demonstrates that utterances are not necessary for effective communication. At the same time, these gestures must be interpreted properly by the interlocutor; otherwise, as with linguistic implicature, this method of communicating will fall on deaf ears.

Zima's poetry-as-go-between is crucial not only because it provides Francesco's wife with an excuse to communicate, but also because it represents another object of exchange. Holmes comments that the poetry allows Francesco's wife to enter into a partnership with a man

who is not her husband (154-5).⁸⁷ On the basis of Holmes' conclusion, we see that Zima's poetry supplants the woman's body as the object of exchange. This is not entirely surprising, for as I explained in chapter one, speech was often associated with the feminine, and as the case of Gissippus and Titus (X, 8) indicates, it can also replace the woman's body as an object to be exchanged.⁸⁸ However, what is striking is that in the Zima story, speech not only takes the place of a woman's body, but a woman is also one of the active participants in the transaction. In fact, Zima's words act a *colle sexuelle* between him and Francesco's wife and they transform the nature of their relationship. But just as words glue these two together, they also sever: when the woman becomes Zima's lover she also compromises her relationship with her husband.

Holmes' conclusions on this unique moment of exchange imply, but do not articulate, a comparison with the other exchanges in the story. In her formulation, words, lover, and wife form a tripartite relationship akin to the configurations of horse, husband, lover, or, wife, husband, and lover. In this new triangle, however, the woman, unlike the horse or a woman caught in a triangle with two men, has the power to accept or decline the proposed terms of the exchange. But Zima's words are only as powerful as the woman allows them to be, and she can decide whether the terms of Zima's agreement are acceptable. By considering this source of female autonomy, we can then re-read the previous relationship between Zima, Francesco and the woman, finding that in hindsight, the woman wields more power in the male-male-female erotic triangle than previously surmised. At the same time, this conclusion must be tempered by the fact that this woman had to be *allowed* to enter into the masculine economy of exchange.

Zima determined the terms of the exchange, but gives the woman the freedom to decide whether

⁸⁷ This assertion directly contradicts Joy Potter who writes that the only two women in the *Decameron* who succeed in a man's world are Zinevra (II, 9) and Giletta di Darbona (III.9) (94). Although the case for Francesco's wife is not as clear-cut as it is for the other two women (who already have an advantage in the economic system because they are named), Holmes' argument for Francesco's wife is nonetheless convincing and should be considered, especially given how ambiguous many of the characters' motivations are in the *Decameron*.

⁸⁸ See pages 87 and 88 in chapter one.

she wants to accept his poetry in exchange for her body. In his speeches, Zima indicates that he will follow her desires, and will come to her only if she beckons him, thus including her in a system of exchange that Francesco tried to keep her from. By negotiating this secret exchange with Francesco's wife, Zima further undermines the homosocial bond that Francesco believes is intact. And although her husband does not know that he has been cuckolded and deceived by both friend and wife, Zima's private exchange with the woman destabilizes the male-male relationship that had been predicated on exchanging the woman for a horse.

To conclude her article, Holmes does not compare the exchanges in the stories and their implications on the woman and her economic freedom and agency. Instead, she focuses on how Zima's ruse for seducing a woman mirrors Boccaccio's project for the Decameron. Using a new erotic triangle – lover, wife, words – where words act as seducers of women, Holmes turns to Boccaccio's Introduction. She maintains that like Zima, Boccaccio places words (and the potential for pleasure) into the mouths of silent women. Through these one-sided but seductive conversations, Holmes believes that Boccaccio is actively transforming women's traditional role as recipients of courtly texts and endowing them with developed voices and personalities. Once the parallel between Francesco's wife and the female readers of the Decameron is established, Holmes then ventures further to claim that just as Zima managed to cuckold Francesco, Boccaccio also succeeds in cuckolding "all the fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands who have restricted the young women, who are his readers, to the closed circuit of a few rooms" (154). Although this assertion might seem radical, it draws a compelling link between reader, writer and text. First, by making the leap between the Zima triangle and the text, Holmes effectively connects Boccaccio both to his perceived female audience and to the even more fictional (and rarely discussed) men who have restrained the envisioned readers. However,

Holmes' reading of this new erotic triangle has even wider implications, especially with regard to the Lba.

Similar to Boccaccio's preoccupation with the effect that his Decameron will have on his female readers, as he discusses in the Introduction, a concern in the meta-discourse of the Lba is the effect that the text will have on its readers. One of these effects is seduction, and like Boccaccio, the Archpriest recognizes how his words have the potential to seduce and deceive. One way the Archpriest draws attention to this power is by paralleling the go-between, Trotaconventos, to the text itself. Jill Ross has noted that this is done in part by linking Trotaconventos to the text-as-garment. She comments that the "text both consists of and covers 'buen amor' whose contours may be visualized under his garment of words" (237). She cites 68ab as proof: "las del buen amor sson Razones encubiertas;/ trabaja do fallares las sus señales ciertas." ("The words of good love are secret words./ Try hard to find the clearest signs"; 68ab) Ross continues that "Juan Ruiz even refers to himself as a tailor who patches or sews together the text" (237). She uses 66bc as evidence of this second assertion: "rre-mendar bien non sabe todo alfayate nuevo./ a trobar con locura non creas que me nuevo." ("Not every tailor knows how to mend properly./ Don't think I am moved to write through mad passion"). Finally, Trotaconventos is connected to imagery of tailoring and garments in 933ab when "Juan Ruiz clearly states that the book is the alcahueta (go-between) and vice versa" (238). "Por amor de la vieja e por desir Rason,/ buen amor dixe al libro e a ella todo saçon." ("Out of love for the old woman and to speak wisely,/ I called both her and the book 'good love' for all time.")

Because garments are imperfect, conceal the truth and are seamed (as opposed to the seamless perfection of God's word), equating them to Trotaconventos and to the text suggests that their language is as duplicitous as this highly deceptive artefact (237).⁸⁹ Ross comments,

[s]ince both Juan Ruiz's text and the go-between have been described as garments that are far from seamless perfection, it is not surprising to find other places in the text which equate the *alcahueta* with a book. She herself functions as a communicative text in that she relays verbal messages (both oral and written) between seducers and their desired victims. (237)

In this equation, where a text is likened to a known seducer, we see a direct connection to Holmes' reading of the *Decameron* where Zima represents a micro-example of how the *Decameron* can also slip into women's rooms and seduce them with poetry or stories.

Trotaconventos and the *Lba* itself also work by similarly deceptive means, especially because many of the women in the *Lba* are as equally susceptible and inaccessible as the women in the Introduction to the *Decameron* (and also Francesco's wife in III,5). Similar to Boccaccio's intended female audience, the women visited by Trotaconventos are isolated and confined and have little contact with men. The first solitary woman wooed by Trotaconventos is the widow Doña Endrina. It is thanks to Trotaconventos' deceitful manners – her persuasive language and her disguise as a jewellery seller – that the go-between is invited into Endrina's house and

⁸⁹ The Archpriest advocates using language as a masking device in other ways as well, including telling poor lovers only to woo a woman when well-dressed. Good clothing, even if it has to be borrowed, will mask the lover's poverty and is the only effective way to win a woman: "de tuyo o de ageno vele byen apostado,/ guarda non lo entyenda que lo lyeuas prestado,/ que non sabe tu vesino lo que tyenes condesado,/ encubre tu poblesa con metyr colorado." ("When you see her, be elegant, well turned-out,/ in your clothes or in others', but don't tell her if they are borrowed./ Don't let your neighbours know what you have got hidden,/ cover your poverty with a well-embroidered fib"; 635). In this stanza, clothing, sewing (and the idea of seamed vs. seamless) and language are one and the same, further highlighting the masking and deceptive properties of words.

speaks to her on the Archpriest's behalf.⁹⁰ Ultimately, Trotaconventos' words are successful, and she lures Endrina out of her house and into a trap set by her and the Archpriest. Another woman targeted by Trotaconventos is a nun: Doña Garoça is perhaps more cloistered than Endrina, and once again Trotaconventos is able to penetrate the walls of the nunnery and attempt to seduce the nun. Although it is not clear whether Trotaconventos successfully woos Garoça, the go-between nevertheless functions like a small, innocuous book: able to slip through women's fortresses and use persuasive language to seduce women.

The book that Trotaconventos represents is not just any book: it is a *Galeotto*. The Archpriest refers to a "galeote" in line 1477b "El mundo es texido de malos arigotes,/ en buena andança el omne tyene muchos galeotes." ("The world is woven with evil rags./ A man with good fortune has many oarsmen"; 1477ab). This passage has been glossed by many critics, especially because literally interpreted, "galeotes" means oarsmen. Ross comments that the "usual sense of *galeote* 'rower' seems to be at odds with the context." Critics, however, have reconciled this problem, writing that the reference is more likely in keeping with "the expression of a fear of false friends" (239). More specifically, it is possible that this word is a reference to Dante's "galeotto" which in turn refers to Gallehault, the intermediary in the Lancelot romance. Ross continues that, "[b]y associating the word *galeote* with the go-between who is herself an erotic intermediary, Juan Ruiz is strongly hinting that his book too is a *galeote*, especially since both the *alcahueta* and the book have already been identified as similarly imperfect garment-texts" (239). It is also notable, that in line a, the imagery of weaving and cloth is evoked in such

⁹⁰ Trotaconventos goes by Endrina's house pretending to be a peddler of jewellery and other accessories: "la buhona con farnero va taniendo cascaueles,/ meneando de sus joyas, sortijas E alfileres;/ desia por fasalejas: '¡conprad aquestos manteles!' vydola doña endrina, dixo: 'entrad, non Reçeledes.'" ("The pedlar goes off with her basket, jingling her bells,/ dangling her jewellery, rings and pins,/ saying: 'Tablecloths for sale, swap them for towels.' Endrina saw her and said: 'Come in, don't be timid.'"; 723a-d). As soon as Trotaconventos is in the house, she immediately begins to try to coax Endrina out of her house and into the public square where she can meet men.

proximity to the word “galeotes,” thus inscribing even more deeply the connection between weaving and words and the deceptive nature of both. But most striking in this formulation, is the conflation of the Galeotto-as-book onto Trotaconventos’ body. In the Zima example, the Galeotto was constructed through words which seduced the object of desire – a traditional manifestation of this intermediary which takes the form of a text. However, in the case of Trotaconventos, a notorious “false friend,” her body and the text become synonymous. In a more extreme example of Dianora, who is constructed as both messenger and message, Trotaconventos also encapsulates both, but her influence as *colle sexuelle* extends far beyond the relationship between two people. And as we will see in the following chapter, her powers to transform someone from subject into object, from desirous into desired, are impressive and sometimes dangerous. But Trotaconventos is also not the only character with a textual body in the Lba, and as I will show in the next chapter, this theme is explored with relish throughout the text.

Another consequence of the seductive powers of the Libro de buen amor/Galeotto, is that seduced women means that there are also cuckolded men.⁹¹ However, unlike the Decameron where the cuckolded men are referred to, the men in the Lba remain hypothetical. Nevertheless, their presence is still felt, both as educated readers of the polysemous text and as husbands or lovers of unnamed and unknown female readers. Reading from this meta-textual perspective, the Archpriest’s many failures in seducing women should be reconsidered: while he might have been unlucky in love throughout the course of the Lba, he did become lucky in the long-run as a seducer of countless women, and perhaps even men.

⁹¹ No one is cuckolded in the case of Doña Endrina, since she is already a widow when Trotaconventos seduces her on the Archpriest’s behalf. In the case of Doña Garoça, should she have an affair with the Archpriest, then she would be cuckolding her spiritual husband, Christ.

Despite the commonality between the Decameron and the Lba, where the texts themselves act as one point in the erotic triangle, the erotic triangles that form within each text are vastly different. Indeed, in the Libro de buen amor, erotic triangles follow yet a different path from those observed in either the Decameron or the Cnn. Although irony and humour also play a distinctive role in the formation and dissolution of erotic triangles, in the Spanish examples, the husband is often deceived without any chance of a male homosocial relationship developing. In fact, the female characters in this work often have the upper hand, manipulating men (in particular the Archpriest), and creating female homosocial bonds akin to the male friendships observed in the Italian and French works. In the next chapter, I continue my analysis of the complexities of erotic triangles by looking at four more examples of this tripartite relationship in the Lba. However, this time a new ingredient will be added to the mix – female homosocial relations – an avenue of inquiry necessitated by the ambiguous and polysemous Libro de buen amor.

Chapter 4: The Libro de buen amor

Introduction

The number of erotic triangles in the Libro de buen amor is far fewer than in either the Cent nouvelles nouvelles or the Decameron: even counting the relationships that develop between two women and one man there are only nine episodes in the entire work that contain erotic triangles (see appendix C). Nevertheless, this small number of erotic triangles should not exclude the Lba from our analysis. Instead, the few triangles that do develop offer insight into other variations on the theme of the ‘traditional’ triangle of husband-lover-wife, especially with regard to how women wield power. In fact, in the Lba, there are some women who manipulate men similarly to how men have controlled women – tendencies we have already observed in the previous two chapters. This new form of feminine control is revealed through an analysis of the Cruz, Pitas Payas, Doña Endrina and Doña Garoça episodes: in the first two an erotic triangle forms between two men and one woman, and in the second two there is a triangle between two women and one man. Furthermore, in three of these episodes, a triangle is formed between a desiring man, a desired woman, and a go-between. In the previous chapter we saw the great importance of the go-between in the Lba: Trotaconventos, one of the two go-betweens in the Lba, is not only a carrier of messages between the Archpriest and his desired women, but she is also a Galeotto with the power to make people desire that which they had not wished for before. The recurring subject of the Galeotto, the use of speech as object of exchange, and the appearance of textual bodies, themes which are explored within the frame of the erotic triangle, connect the Lba to the Cnn and the Decameron. Furthermore, the four erotic triangles taken from the Lba offer new perspectives on how erotic triangles form and how they might fall apart. These episodes will be discussed in the order that they are told in the Lba; by remaining faithful

to the story's chronology, it becomes apparent that women's control over their sexuality and autonomy increases with each story. In fact, by the final episode, the Doña Garoça story, the discussion of women's sexuality has advanced to such a degree that the debate about whether and how a woman can control her body is only held between the two women, while the male participant is muted and his fate rests in the two women's hands.

Surprising as the culmination of the erotic triangles may be, I have not been able to find in the scholarship on the subject either an analysis, or a comparison of women's power and authority in the Lba. Traditionally, the examination of power has been linked exclusively to authorial control, and therefore, the Archpriest as character and writer has remained the focus of critical attention. When women in the text were discussed, it was usually done in the most general terms. Félix Lecoy, for instance, writes about the role of women in the Lba, stating that, "aucune d'elles n'est développée en hors-d'oeuvre ou pour elle-même"; instead, he continues, the women are always inextricably tied to the action at hand (113). In her promisingly titled "Women in the *Book of Good Love*" (1983), Rosalie Gimeno also fails to discuss the unique attributes of many of the women in the Lba, but insists on dividing them into the following three static categories: authority figures, go-betweens and urban and rural young women (89). Over twenty years later, Gimeno's arguments and classifications seem rather simplistic and do not allow for multifaceted and multiple readings that more recent scholarship offers. More recently, Wendy Casillas has addressed women's position in the text on a more comparative level using the folklore tradition to reread the role of the *serranas*. She concludes that these women "son arquetipos femeninos del mundo diabólico," in contrast to the Virgin Mary who appears at the beginning and ending of the text and who represents "el benévolo arquetipo femenino que preside y confirma la acción cíclica" (86). While such analyses provide useful stepping stones for uncovering the portrayal of women in the Lba, there still remains very little cross-episode

analysis that considers how the female characters develop and illuminates how women speak to each other and their relationship to men in the Lba. Through my discussion of four key episodes, I hope to begin to rectify the critical gap on the nature of homosocial and heterosexual relationships. By exploiting the construct of the erotic triangle – examining how it is formed and destabilized, and the modes of communication between the triangle’s participants – I believe we can uncover a new perspective on gender communication and sexuality in this enigmatic text.

The Cruz Episode

The Cruz episode, stanzas 105-122, offers an excellent example of a male homosocial relationship that is broken over the love of a woman. Like many of the tales in the collection, the story is told in two parts, first in prose and then retold in poetry.⁹² In both versions, the Archpriest is in love with Cruz the bakergirl, and hires a male go-between, Ferrand Garçia, to woo her on his behalf. However, Garçia falls in love with the woman and, in an ironic turn, seduces the woman for himself instead. It is not apparent that Garçia ever tells Cruz about the Archpriest, and the Archpriest ends up being thwarted in love. Although the narrative details of the prose and poetic versions of the story are the same, they are distinguishable because the poetic version is told with humour and irony and in a manner similar to that adopted in many of the stories in the Cnn. The irony at the end of the story is manifested through the Archpriest-as-narrator’s willingness to distance himself from his own victimized position as manipulated lover. At the end of the tale, the Archpriest/narrator pens this ironic twist and couples it with humour, commenting that the only option at the end of the tragic tale is to *laugh*: “Ca devrien

⁹² Giuseppe Di Stefano has commented on the practice of re-telling the same story in the Lba in relation to the *Serrano* episodes. He writes that this tendency not only highlights the text’s polysemy, but also marks the Lba as a model of textuality which plays with linguistic formalities, themes, figures and even the body (473).

me dezir neço e mas que bestia burra,/ sy de tan grand escarnio yo non trobase burla” (“I would be a fool and more stupid than a donkey/ if I could not see the funny side of such a trick”; 114c-d) .

As Anthony Zahareas has pointed out, humour plays an essential role in the Lba:

The humorous element is everywhere present in the *Libro*; it produces laughter without malice or cynicism, laughter for the sake of amusement and entertainment ... His stories and comments are, therefore, offered not only for instructive or corrective purposes but also for wholehearted enjoyment. (121)

This observation is not far from Dubuis’ comment that a primary reason for the Cnn is *divertissement* or a *bon mot* (96), or Baldissone’s observation that the stories in the first and ninth days of the Decameron are intended to make people laugh (10). The Archpriest also seems to enjoy a *bon mot* even if it is at his own expense, but at the same time, he uses the *bon mot* to his advantage: as narrator of the ironic and humorous events in the story, he distances himself from the position of ‘victim’ of the ironic situation and laughs at himself through his poetry – behaviour which corroborates Hobbes’ observation three hundred years later, that people can laugh at their own follies only after they surmount their immediate humiliation (65).

The situation in which the Archpriest finds himself is not the only example of irony in this episode. A parodic treatment of the courtly love tradition and the use of sacred imagery in a secular context also add humour and irony to the tale. Through a close reading of the relationships between the go-between, the bakergirl, and the Archpriest, the parodic and problematic imagery in this tale is highlighted and in turn informs a new reading of the power dynamic in this erotic triangle.

The story’s problematic imagery is introduced at the beginning of the Cruz episode, where the primary images are of suffering, Christ, crucifixion and betrayal. To begin, the

Archpriest is portrayed as a suffering Christ, though unlike Christ, he suffers for his fleshly desires. Ferrand García (who has yet to be named), is cast as the Judas figure when he betrays the Archpriest who has trusted him as his friend, “mi conpanero,” to woo Cruz (also yet to be named) on his behalf (112-114). This comparison to Christ and Judas is strengthened in the episode’s first few stanzas:

E yo commo estaua solo, syn compañia,
 codiciava tener lo que otro para sy tenia;
 puse el ojo en otro **non santa, mas sentia**;
 yo **cruyziaua** por ella, otro la avie val-dia.

E por que yo non podia con ella ansi fablar,
 puse por mi menssajero, coydando Recabdar,
 a vn mi conpanero. **Sopome el clauo echar**;
 el comio la vianda e a mi fazie Rumiar.

And as I was alone, with no company,
 I longed to have what others possessed.
 I set my sights upon another, **not saintly, but foolish.**

I suffered archly for her, worse than **crucifixion**, but another won her easily.

Because I could not speak to her directly
 I asked a friend of mine to act as a messenger,
 thinking of success. **But he knew how to drive home**
the nails of deceit. He ate the meat while I chewed the cud. (112-113 a-d; my
 emphasis)

In this passage the Archpriest is a tortured Christ whose own friend “drives in the nails.”⁹³ At this point, we still do not know that the woman’s name is *Cruz*, but when this is revealed in stanza 116, the Archpriest’s suffering changes from a metaphor – he suffers as Jesus did on the Cross – to a literal suffering – his pain is due to the Cross. Of course, this wordplay is impossible for the Archpriest to resist, and the section *De lo que contesçio al arçipreste con Ferrand García su menssajero* (What happened to the Archpriest and his messenger, Ferrand García) exploits the Cross imagery and develops the potential for wordplay with Cruz and her name.

Cruz the bakergirl is probably the most remarkable of the three characters in the love triangle because the imagery associated with her character shifts several times. Starting in stanza 115, she appropriates the Archpriest’s place as the Jesus figure and then from stanza 118 she is portrayed as the archetypal conquered woman. The Jesus imagery begins in stanza 115a-b when the Archpriest connects Cruz to Christ and the cross, lamenting: “Mys ojos non veran luz/ Pues perdido he a cruz” (“My eyes shall see no light/since I have lost my Cross”). These two lines are striking because they form a complete stanza, an anomaly, since all stanzas in the Cruz episode are comprised of four lines. The imagery here is also unique: in these two lines, the Archpriest equates his experience of losing Cruz to losing his sight. Like those who are metaphorically blind because they cannot see Christ, so too is the Archpriest blinded by the loss of his beloved. If non-believers need Christ in order to see the way of God and be blessed by his love, then here the Archpriest needs Cruz in order to love. James Burke has also commented on these lines, writing that they recall the medieval aphorism *Per crucem ad lucem*. In a monastic setting, the reference to light “would imply two things: first, it would suggest the

⁹³ It should be noted that “drives in the nails” is only one of several possible translations of “Sopome el clauo echar.”

illuminated state to which the monk could aspire while still in this life and second, it could stand for the life of the soul after death” (255). In the context of the Lba, Burke comments that this journey towards light should be read in a secular context, where Cruz has the capacity to lead the Archpriest toward an earthly paradise of fulfilled desires.

Another secularized reading of the sacred imagery in this passage is presented by André Michalski. He links the beginning of stanza 115 to the Eucharist:

On a different plane, we may also read into it an irreverent allusion to the Eucharistic communion, which would correspond to the equally irreverent “en la Cruz adorava and mis ojos non verán luz” with the meaning “I shall be damned” in the theological sense. (436n)

If we read the line from Michalski’s perspective then Cruz the bakergirl, who is literally linked to bread, is now metaphorically linked to the Eucharist and therefore Christ. Burke also comments on the relationship between bread and the cross, writing that “on Good Friday the cross and the pure meal, the bread of life, are intimately connected” (257). In this configuration, Mary is also essential – she gave life to Christ who in turn is associated with bread.⁹⁴

Considering this configuration, Burke writes, “the idea of bread as a symbol of passion on the one hand and renewal and fertility on the other is a very old one” (259); however, in the Lba, the connection is secularized. As Burke points out, Cruz represents the anti-Mary and embodies the site of earthly desires. Therefore, in Burke’s, Michalski’s and my own reading, the Cruz episode is replete with secularized Christological imagery. According to Burke, Cruz symbolizes an anti-Mary, instilling desire and lust in the hearts of men instead of reverence and piety. At the same time, in both Michalski’s reading and my own, Cruz is interpreted as a Christ

⁹⁴ This imagery complements Galen’s theory of reproduction where women were the ovens in which foetuses are cooked and their bodies gave babies the matter they needed to grow (Walker Bynum 421).

figure, and at the beginning of the episode at least, she is cast in a sacred position in the erotic triangle. These two readings seemingly contradict each other, but like the case of Ambruogia in Decameron VIII,1, whose actions can be interpreted in a variety of ways, these conflicting glosses of the episode attest to the text's creative ambiguity that simultaneously gives the poet artistic freedom and the reader interpretative independence. And although Ambruogia's problematic bet is unlike the ambiguous depiction of Cruz, in both these cases, the polysemy forces the reader to engage with the text on a moral level, whether it is to question the motivations for Ambruogia's behaviour, or to consider the implications of conflating the sacred with the secular in a tale about a priest's quest for love.

The polysemy in the Cruz episode continues in stanza 116, where a new representation of Cruz is introduced to complement the earlier Christological imagery. In 116a, Cruz is depicted as the helpless victim of the crusader Ferrand García. In the line "Cruz cruzada panadera" ("Cross crusaded, Cross the baker girl"; 116a) the play on words keeps its reference to Jesus while adopting a second reference – the crusades. Elizabeth Drayson Macdonald remarks that this line has been the subject of some controversy, though *cruzada* "seems to be an obvious allusion to the crusades" (433n). Others, though, have noted the sexual implications of the word. Michalski writes that *cruzada* carries a sexual connotation: "Here I suspect that, like the Latin *cruciare* from which it is derived, *cruzar*, as used by Juan Ruiz, may have meant *to impale*, a meaning easily translated into sexual terms." Furthermore, *panadera* "might also be understood sexually" (436). Michalski also notes that bakergirls were often considered promiscuous because they had reason to conduct business outside the house (delivering bread, for example) and, because they came into contact with many people, their virtue was suspect. Furthermore, it is possible that the shapes of the bread carried sexual meaning (435). Particularly taking note of Michalski's reading of *cruzada*, the imagery evoked is of an invaded

body, which in this case has been penetrated by the Archpriest's nemesis (and friend), Ferrand García. By reading the Jesus and crusader imagery together, Cruz has been transformed into a parodied, cross-dressing Jesus, caught between the love of two men, whose impaled body stands in contrast to Christ's own. Moreover, like Christ, whose body was exchanged by Judas for payment, so is Cruz's body considered an object to be exchanged.

Although the Christ imagery is abandoned temporarily, it is reintroduced in stanza 121a-b: "quando la cruz veyá, yo sienpre me omillava, santiguava me a ella do quier que la fallaua" ("When I saw Cross I always knelt in greeting,/ crossed myself whenever I met her"). Once again, the bakergirl adopts Jesus-like properties as the Archpriest admits to worshipping her as he would at an altar – by kneeling and crossing himself. This description becomes more significant if we accept Michalski's earlier interpretation of stanza 115 as a veiled reference to the Eucharist. Indeed, according to Michalski's reading, this line would mean that the Archpriest reveres Cruz the way he would Jesus: he prays to her, crosses himself and takes the Eucharist while thinking of her. These two lines also provide the lasting image of Cruz the bakergirl. The woman has become a cross-dressing Jesus figure who has the power to bestow sight, demand adoration and grant love to her male admirers.⁹⁵ But perhaps more important than the Jesus imagery in this episode, is the fact that Cruz is never considered responsible for betraying the Archpriest. She is either adored (as Jesus) or is conquered (as the bakergirl), but in neither role she knowingly betrays or hurts the man who loves her from afar.

The same cannot be said for Ferrand García whose dual role is messenger and traitor.

He is the Judas character in this scenario and he is ultimately responsible for hurting and

⁹⁵ This startling imagery can also be compared to the equally surprising depictions in some medieval art and writing of Christ as a woman. Bernard of Clairvaux referred to Christ's sweet breasts in his ninth sermon on the Song of Songs, and in the twelfth century, William of St. Thierry addressed Christ as a mother (Walker Bynum 414). These writings help contextualize Cruz-as-Christ; however, in many of the formulations of Christ as a woman, he is also associated with the maternal because of his nurturing role. This imagery is not connected with Cruz: she is an object to be desired and possessed by her male admirers.

betraying the Archpriest. García, already called “conpanero” (113c), is also intended to be the Archpriest’s “pleytes e duz” (“negotiator and guide”; 117d). But by betraying his master, the messenger earns a new moniker: he is called “el traydor falso marfuz” (“false, deceiving traitor”; 119d) who launches a “mal de la cruzada” (“evil crusade”; 121d) against the defenseless Archpriest. In addition to ‘conquering’ the bakergirl, García also openly defies the Archpriest by offering the woman a rabbit as a gift. Elizabeth Drayson Macdonald remarks, “[t]hough a rabbit was a valued foodstuff, Ferrand García’s gift here has undoubtedly erotic undertones, both in the suggestiveness of the word itself and because of the rabbit’s well-known capacity to reproduce freely” (434n). Through his gesture, García proves himself the worst kind of traitor, taking delight in his infidelity toward his friend and openly deceiving him. He is clearly the evil character in the triad, and unlike the depiction of the bakergirl, which fluctuates between the two extremes of saviour and victim, it is possible to chart a progression of García’s character from friend to foe.

The Archpriest also occupies two distinct roles in the episode: he is both lover and cuckold. Just as sacred imagery is parodied in this episode, so too, is the courtly tradition, and it is within this paradigm that the Archpriest casts himself in his two opposite roles. Like a knight in the *fin’amor* tradition, the Archpriest falls in love with his lady from afar. But rather than relaying his message of love himself, he chooses to ask an intermediary for help. To introduce the second telling of the story, the Archpriest says that he wrote a *troba caçura* (“a minstrel’s song”; 114a) to tell his tale of woe. Thus, in a parody of the Courtly tradition where the lover writes poetry in order to woo his beloved, the Archpriest is incited to write only *after* he experiences his tragedy. By the end of his *troba caçura* we see the transformation in the Archpriest from potential lover to fool:

Del escolar goloso conpañero de cucaña,

fize esta otro troba, non vos sea estraña,
 Ca de Ante nin despues non falle en españa
 quien ansy me feziere de escarnio magadaña.
 I wrote this new poem, which I hope will not shock you,
 about the greedy student, an opportunist like the cuckoo,
 for neither before nor after did I find a person in all Spain
 who ever made a bigger scarecrow dummy of me. (122a-d)

While lines c and d make it clear that he admits to being tricked by Ferrand García, the first two lines are less transparent. In particular, it is unclear how *cucaña* is used. Although the modern definition of *cucaña* does not mean cuckold, I believe that either the term *compañero de cucaña* or simply the word *cucaña* refers to cuckoldry in this context. Despite the ambiguity of this line, there has been very little critical work to clarify it. In the Tentative Dictionary of Medieval Spanish, the entry for *cucaña* is followed by a question mark after which are two references to the Lba lines 122a and 341b (155). In 341b, the word is used in a different context in the *Fabla del pleito quell lobo e la rrapossa que ovieron ante don zimio alcalde de bugia* (The tale of the lawsuit between the wolf and the vixen heard before Sir Monkey, judge from Bougie in Algeria). In this tale, Sir Monkey goes to a judge's house with a "conçejo de cucaña" (a council of rogues) which tries desperately to fool the judge. Although the word *cucaña* is not used to describe a cuckold, the intention of this group of rogues is nonetheless to dupe someone, just as it is García's intention to deceive the Archpriest. The Corominas dictionary also concedes that *cucaña* is used ambiguously in the Lba, but nevertheless, it helps pinpoints the meaning of the word, stating that it should be interpreted as "*picaresca*" (263-4). Jacques Joset does not clarify the problem either, noting only the rhyming precedence for the noun and writing that the rhyme *cucaña-estraña* also appeared in the Arabic poem *El Cuco*. Otherwise, he does not address the

elusive meaning of lines a and b (130). However, the Macdonald and Daly/Zahareas edited and translated editions offer two more promising solutions for the meaning of these lines.

Macdonald's translation reads: "I wrote this new poem, which I hope will not shock you,/ about the greedy student, an opportunist like the cuckoo" (39). Daly/Zahareas's translation is: "Of him who overate with her and brought me to cuckoldry, I wrote that song above. Don't think it a strange mockery" (55). Although both translators take poetic licence in their interpretation of this unclear line, their editions nonetheless propose two separate glosses on either the word 'cuckoo' or 'cuckoldry' in order to illustrate the act of deception that is nonetheless clear in the text. What these two translations suggest is that the word *cucaña*, a 'cuckoo' or 'cuckold,' can be attributed either to the active or the passive man in an erotic triangle. Alison Sinclair explains this contradiction, writing that in fifteenth-century French and English, the cuckoo bird

was seen as clever, in that it manages to lay its eggs in the nest of another bird, thus ensuring that its kind is propagated without having to engage in the tedious activity of feeding and caring for its young. But we might also remember that we use the term 'cuckoo' colloquially, and that here it does not primarily refer to someone who is astute or wily, but implies someone rather soft in the head, a little stupid, one who stands out as being not of the common run. These allusions presumably derive not from the ridiculous figure cut by the cuckoo in a nest of smaller birds, but from the parent bird who continues to feed the intruder. (32-3)

According to this contradictory definition, either García is the cuckoo – a wily friend who takes advantage of his friend, or the Archpriest is a cuckold – a naïve man who does not realize he is being exploited. The first part of the definition is applied by Daly and Zahareas who not only read García as the parasitic cuckoo, but also see the Archpriest as the victim of García's ruse, made even more pathetic by the fact that he never consummated his relationship with the

bakergirl. Furthermore, Cruz is presumably not even aware of Ferrand García's infidelity, thus making the Archpriest a victim without a woman. In contrast, according to the second part of Sinclair's definition, the Archpriest can also be considered the cuckold who is 'soft in the head' and who continues to consider García his friend until he discovers his betrayal. In short, although both interpretations implicate Ferrand García as the villain in the scenario, the Archpriest's innocence is debatable. On the one hand, if the Archpriest is a cuckold, then his inaction leads to his demeaned state and so he is to blame for allowing himself to be deceived by his friend. On the other hand, if García is the cuckoo, then his active seduction of Cruz makes him blameworthy, and the Archpriest is the victim and guilty of trusting his friend. Through this word play, Juan Ruiz proves himself a master of ambiguity by keeping his reader on edge and refusing to clearly state his intentions. But whether the Archpriest is a cuckold or Ferrand García a cuckoo, the Archpriest has been unquestionably reduced from the lofty heights of the Courtly Lover to the figure of fun. To extend this parodic reading of the courtly love tradition, the lady involved is not an aristocrat, but instead a lowly bakergirl, and the lover is not a knight, but a messenger. Through these transformations, Juan Ruiz combines two seemingly disparate types into one complicated figure, thus completing his parodic trilogy.

Although the Cruz episode is brief, Juan Ruiz recasts Christianity's ultimate tale of deception in the first telling of the story by removing it from a holy context (*santa* 112c) and replaying it within a silly one (*sentia* 112c). At the same time, the characters also figure in a parody of the courtly love tradition. Through this double shift and play with traditions, the Archpriest manages to once again distance himself from his source of embarrassment and laugh at himself, in this case, by re-casting himself as an ironic figure. This reaction is not only startling, but unique. A survey of Appendices A and B, show that in cases where a husband finds out that he has been deceived, he will most often react in rage by punishing his wife and

sometimes even killing her and her lover. The exception to this rule is the seventy-third *nouvelle* where a woman hides her lover in the pantry when her husband comes home unexpectedly and accuses her of adultery. Demanding a divorce, the husband takes immediate possession of the pantry and leaves. In transit, the lover jumps out of the pantry covered in eggs and butter. The husband allows the man to escape, and returns home, at which point his wife “cria mercy” (“pleads for forgiveness”; 219) and he “luy fut pardonné par telle condicion que si jamais le cas luy advenoit, elle fust mieulx advisée de mettre son home aultre part que ou casier” (“pardons her on the condition that should this ever happen again, she hide her lover somewhere other than the pantry”; 219-21). After which, “ilz demourerent ensemble long temps” (“they lived together for a long time”; 223-4). In this *nouvelle*, not only does the husband does not reprimand, punish or otherwise harm his wife, but he also forgives his wife’s adultery, excusing it with a joke. Both this man and the Archpriest represent extremely unusual cuckolds who treat their situations with levity, while at the same time, breaking the erotic triangle by ridding themselves of the lover.

The Archpriest’s reaction might be unusual for a scorned man, but so is Cruz a unique object of desire: despite the Archpriest’ inscription and reinscription of Cruz’s story she remains a silent woman, and although she is ‘martyred’ and worshipped, she is never given a voice or a choice in love. Indeed, Cruz is mute throughout the story as she is unknowingly traded between two men: García, the manipulator of the situation, and the Archpriest, the manipulator of words. Ultimately, although the homosocial relationship between the two men breaks apart, the dissolution of the relationship cannot be attributed to Cruz’s actions or desires. Indeed, like the women in the third *nouvelle* who are seduced by each other’s husbands, the *musnier* and the *chevalier* thus being made into objects of exchange between two men, Cruz remains similarly ignorant of the competition between two men.

The Pitas Payas Episode

Although Cruz might be an unwitting object of exchange between men, the case of the wife of Pitas Payas is vastly different. In this story, the woman willingly becomes an object of exchange, but at the same time, she manages to a great extent to control the use and transfer of her body. However, despite her best efforts, she remains at the mercy of both men's artistic talents. Payas' wife's eventual submission to her male counterparts is made most apparent through a comparison of the men's behaviour in the Cruz and Payas episodes. In turn, our observations on the relationships in both these situations allow us to consider the differences in the structure and integrity of both triangles.

Pitas Payas is a painter who marries a young woman. Soon after his marriage, Payas leaves his wife alone for two years while he goes away to learn his craft. Before leaving, he paints a picture of a young lamb on her belly. While he is gone, she finds a lover who is also a painter. When the woman learns that her husband is coming home, she asks her lover to repaint the picture of the lamb. Instead of painting a lamb, the lover paints a fully-grown ram with horns. When Payas asks his wife why the picture has changed in his absence, she says that over the two years the lamb grew up and became a ram.

One parallel between the Archpriest and Payas is that they take an active role at the beginning of the story by choosing whom they will love. The Archpriest says: "codiciava tener lo que otro para sy tenia;/ puse el ojo en otra non santa, mas sentia" ("I longed to have what others possessed./ I set my sights upon another, not saintly but foolish"; 112b-c). For his part, Pitas Payas chooses a girl to keep him company: "Era don pitas pajas vn pyntor de bretaña,/ casose con muger moça, pagavase de conpañã" ("Pitas Payas was a painter from Brittany,/ he married a young girl, as he liked to have company" 474c-d). To further underscore the men's

active nature at the beginning of the tales, neither woman is given agency. Instead, these women are chosen by men, and even after their affairs with another man they are rarely mentioned. This female silence is effective in re-focusing the attention on the Archpriest and Payas and highlighting both men's demise. Indeed, the introductions depicting active men are crucial to both episodes, not only because they demonstrate how each man controlled his situation at the beginning of the story, but also because they allow the reader to chart each man's decline from active to passive. That is, while each man determined his fate at the start of the story, by the end he has become the victim of his desired woman/wife and her lover. In the Archpriest's case, by telling Garçia about Cruz and refusing to woo the woman himself, the Archpriest gives his male go-between control over discussions with the desired woman. For Payas, by deciding to leave his new wife alone for two years, he makes himself a target for cuckoldry, and once he returns his now experienced wife can manipulate words and image in order to deceive her ignorant husband. However, Payas is also the victim of another form of degradation, since his (unknown) rival is also a painter. Vasvári remarks on this irony, saying that the lover,

is offered the narrative opportunity to “screw” poor Pitas Pajas through the more effective [brush]strokes he is able to administer to Pitas' willing wife. Lest my interpretation seem fanciful, recall the Latin slang term *penicillus* ‘little penis/paintbrush’; cf. the related ancient sexual connotation of writing as ‘penetrating stone or skin,’ where *pencil* also has the same etymology as paintbrush.” (“Festive Phallic Discourse” 104)

This particular form of irony commented on by Vasvári can also be found in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles. In chapter two, we examined a similar situation in the twenty-third *nouvelle* where a clerk tells his master's wife that he will scribble on her parchment “bien brouiller vostre

parchement” and would like to fish in her inkwell “je pourray bien pescher en vostre escriptoire” (56, 58).⁹⁶ In the two situations the irony is identical, for both Pitas Payas’ rival and the clerk use the inherent metaphor of the tool of their trade – pencil or paintbrush – to seduce a woman. And although the husband in the *nouvelle* discovers his wife’s infidelity, while Payas does not, in both cases, the reader revels in the irony and the rich pragmatic implicature.

To continue the comparison between Pitas Payas and the Archpriest, then we see that by the end of the tales, the descriptions of the formerly self-possessed men are contrasted to the descriptions of grief or ignorance that each man undergoes after the act of deception. The Archpriest says that by using his grief: “ffiz con el grand pessar esta troba caçura” (“In grief, I wrote this satirical minstrel’s song”; 114a). And Don Amor relates:

Cato don pitas pajas el sobredicho lugar,
 E vydo vn grand carnero con armas de prestar:
 “¿como es esto, madona, o como pode estar
 que yo pynte corder E trobo este manjar?”
 Pitas Payas looked in the aforesaid place
 And saw a huge ram with excellent horns.
 ‘What is this, my lady, how can this be?
 I painted a lamb, and now I find this lump of meat?’” (483a-d)

After such admissions of grief or dimwittedness, and keeping in mind Vasvári’s observations above, we are painted a portrait of two thoroughly humiliated men. Furthermore, we see that in

⁹⁶ See pages 98-9 of chapter two.

both instances, these men's cuckoldry depends upon a drastic transformation from an active to passive man.⁹⁷

Another characteristic the two men share is that they are considered poor hunters. In mirroring imagery, the two women are also referred to as prey. In the Cruz episode, the Archpriest deflects the blame and, instead of acknowledging his poor hunting skills, disparages García for his unfair hunting technique. The Archpriest remarks: "non medre dios tal conejero/ que la caça anys aduz" ("God will not favour a rabbit-hunter/ who catches prey like that"; 120c-d). In contrast, Don Amor applauds the successful hunter and encourages the Archpriest to become an able hunter. Amor explains to the Archpriest that a woman who is well-hunted will react to the aggressive man positively, saying:

"otro pedro es aqueste
mas garcon e mas ardit quell primero que ameste;
el primero apost deste non vale mas que vn feste,
con aqueste e por este fare yo, sy dios me preste."

"This Dick is another kettle of fish,
more manly and full of ardour than the other one I loved.

After this one, the first isn't worth a fig,

I'll stick with this one, with God's help." (487a-d)

While the quotation from the Cruz episode exposes yet another way that women are looked upon by men – this time as prey – the excerpt from Don Amor's speech marks one of the few times in the entire book that thought is given to how women look at men. And although the

⁹⁷ It is true that the Archpriest's humiliation propels him into activity and he writes his song lamenting his loss, but this action acts as a surrogate for the sexual satisfaction he has lost and does nothing to rectify the situation with Cruz. While his loss might make him a better or more prolific artist, his inaction during the wooing process shows him to be less virile than García.

words themselves are uttered by Don Amor, they should be heeded by both the reader and the Archpriest because they suggest that women are willing to look beyond the marital bed for sexual fulfillment. Moreover, women desire an aggressive man who is daring or bold, “mas ardit.” According to Don Amor, women search for hunters and in turn, expect to be chased by them. We have already seen in the Cruz episode that women are sometimes called rabbits or hares – “conejo” (119c), “conejero” (120c) – and in the Payas episode, the wife is called “lyebre” who must be chased from her hole, “couil” (486a). As mentioned in the discussion of the Cruz episode, the rabbit is evoked because of its reproductive capabilities. In turn, the rabbit’s fecundity allows for an apt comparison between it and a polyamorous woman. Read in the context of Don Amor’s speech, the sexual overtones of these rabbit names are further highlighted. Within this hunting paradigm, men are expected to be aggressive hunters and be aware that they are competing with other men. Because neither the Archpriest, nor Payas seems aware that he is part of a complicated game of pursuit, both are left behind. Vasvári observes even more dire consequences for such men. She comments as follows:

Any man who doesn’t know how to play the aggression game is judged lacking in masculinity and therefore to be effeminate (or *manso* ‘timid’/ ‘weak’/ ‘henpecked’/ ‘impotent’), regardless of his actual sexual orientation. (“The Semiotics of Phallic Aggression” 147)

Adding to her list of ‘timid and ‘weak’ men, I believe that those men who do not play the game are also in grave danger of becoming cuckolds. Therefore, from the Archpriest’s and Payas’s inaction, the reader also learns that to avoid being a cuckold means being willing to engage in *les règles du jeu*.

Although both men tend toward inaction, in neither scenario is the wife/love accused of adultery. Reasons for Cruz’s innocence have already been stated, one important point being that

the Archpriest hired an unfaithful go-between to do the work he should have assumed himself. In the Payas episode, the wife is exonerated of blame for two reasons. When Payas leaves, Don Amor explains how the wife suffered and how her husband's two-year absence affected her: "fasia sele a la dona vn mes año entero" ("one month seemed a whole year to the girl"; 477d). Added to this temporal issue is the problem of the woman's newly aroused sexuality. Because she was just married, Don Amor comments that she had only just begun to experience the pleasures of sex. To be so quickly robbed of such delight is devastating and her only recourse is to take a lover "tomo vn entendedor E poblo la posada" ("She took a lover, who filled her husband's place"; 478c). Later, when Don Amor explains the moral of the story, he repeats this point: "Por ende te castiga, non dexes lo que pides;/ non seas pitas payas, para otro non errides" ("So I advise you, don't leave what you desire,/ don't be like Pitas Payas, don't arouse her for another"; 485a-b). Therefore, lines 478c and 485ab allow the wife to escape being labeled an adulteress. Zahareas brings attention to this point as well, claiming that:

When her husband is away she shows impatience ... She takes a lover because of the physical laws of feminine necessity ... Given her youth, impatience, and present circumstances whereby a young woman introduced to physical love needs more of it, the wife of Pitas is vulnerable. (85)

Zahareas, like Don Amor, believes that by leaving her alone, Pitas Payas is to blame for his wife's infidelity. In both situations, the men are culpable of not understanding how to appeal to women. The Archpriest writes love poetry only after he loses Cruz, and Payas never understands the danger in leaving a newly aroused woman alone. Thus, these men are in fact responsible for their own cuckoldry.

The final similarity between the two men is that their lack of professional knowledge is transferred into their personal lives. As a writer who delivers sermons, and a poet, the

Archpriest ought to understand the value of words. But rather than writing love poems to Cruz, he relies on the duplicitous words of Ferrand García. By not applying his professional knowledge to his personal life, the Archpriest proves he is master of neither. The same is true of Pitas Payas – he too is the ultimate cuckold because both his masculinity and his professionalism have been compromised. Ironically, although Pitas Payas leaves his wife to go to Flanders to learn his craft, his apprenticeship teaches him nothing about how to retain textual mastery and control.⁹⁸ This ignorance is fore-grounded by the end of the tale, when he loses control of his inner and outer life – his profession and his wife – and the two are conflated onto the same feminine body and he is deceived by both.

By comparing the two deceived men in two of the three male-male-female erotic triangles found in the Lba we see how breaking a homosocial bond, or the ignorance of a husband can lead to the dissolution of the erotic triangle. The Archpriest and Payas begin the episode respectively as wooer or husband, and ultimately they are painted in a negative light, especially as they become passive characters in their triangle. Although both men start as active male figures in the stories, their ignorance of the ‘hunt,’ their own inaction and their poor professionalism ultimately lead to their downfall. In the end, whether cheated by a friend, or dishonoured by a wife, these men are victims of their own weaknesses. Because of their weaknesses, the erotic triangle – a formulation that has proven that it is able to withstand male competition and even strengthen men’s bonds – disintegrates nonetheless, and the adulterous heterosexual tie is privileged over male friendship and the licit heterosexual alliance. Notably, the erotic triangles in these episodes form because of the intervention of a second man, either the go-between or a potential lover, and then fall apart because of the inaction or ignorance of

⁹⁸ Jill Ross discusses the conflation of sexual and textual mastery in the Pitas Payas episode in her chapter on the Libro de buen amor in Figuring the Feminine.

the initial male character. Nowhere in this formulation do women either incite the formation or dissolution of this tri-partite relationship. Nonetheless, although neither woman possesses a strong voice, the portrayals of the two women differ. Cruz is represented as a passive and submissive woman who is unknowingly exchanged between two men. In contrast, Payas' wife appears to be a sexually awakened woman who has some desire to control her own body. Nevertheless, while Payas' wife is aware of her sexuality and controls her body to the extent that she takes a lover, she does not attempt to control or manipulate either her husband or lover, as do the women in the sixteenth and sixty-second *nouvelles* and *Decameron* VIII,1. This is not true of the next woman in the *Lba*, Doña Endrina, who not only recognizes her exchange value, but also tries to control it.

The Doña Endrina Episode

The erotic triangle in the Endrina episode presents yet another variation on the triangles already discussed. The most glaring difference in this example is that it is composed of two women and one man. Because of this difference, the man occupies a different role than in the other two triangles. Here, he is only the wooer and cannot be the cuckold, since there is no other man to cuckold him. However, this does not mean that he cannot be made the figure of fun, or be at the mercy of cunning women to the same degree that he was emasculated by a woman and her lover in previous triangles.

After learning from his mistake with Cruz, the Archpriest tries this time to woo the object of his desire on his own but his attempts are thwarted and he ultimately proves to be an inactive male character who allows others to seduce the object of his desire. When he first falls in love with Endrina, the Archpriest writes that:

atrevy me con locura E con amor afyncado,

muchas vezes gelo dixे que fynque male denostado.

non preçia nada, muerto me trae coytado;

sy non fuese tan mi vesina non seria tan penado.

Deep-rooted love and its madness made me bold,

I spoke many times to her of love, but was reviled.

She cared nothing for me, I am dying of grief,

I would not feel so tormented, if she were not my neighbour. (602a-d)

The Archpriest's torment is not alleviated, and just as he was forced to do earlier on, he hires a go-between to woo Endrina on his behalf. This time the Archpriest chooses a woman, Trotaconventos, to do the job. Once Trotaconventos is introduced, an erotic triangle forms where the Archpriest is relegated to the position of passive male and Trotaconventos actively pursues and seduces Endrina.

The Archpriest's passive position is reinforced further in the episode, when he speaks to Trotaconventos and calls her a "picaça parladera" – a chattering magpie (920a) – a comment he says was made in jest, "commo en juego" (920a). Trotaconventos is greatly offended by this name and lashes back at the Archpriest, humbling him and asserting her forceful character, concluding, "Nunca digas nombre malo nin de fealdat,/ llamat me buen amor, e fare yo lealtat." ("Never call me ugly, cruel names, call me 'good love' and I will be loyal"; 932a-b). Although the Archpriest claims to have called her a "picaça parladera" as a joke, it is more than likely that both he and Trotaconventos understood the negative implications of this name. As Louise Vasvári has written, "picaça parladera" is not a naive insult; rather, in the folklore tradition, magpies and other small birds often carried negative sexual connotations. Magpies could be associated with sex organs due to their contrasting black and white colours, like pubic hair on white skin; or the fluttering of the small bird was thought to resemble a penis in the act of

copulation (“Múltiple transparencia semántica” 458). Surely the Archpriest was aware of these associations and therefore did not choose the insult lightly, despite his objections to the contrary. Instead, I believe that by selecting this name for Trotaconventos, the Archpriest tries to reassert his authority over the go-between and cease being the passive character in the erotic triangle. But this ruse is unsuccessful and the go-between’s harsh retort to the Archpriest’s words relegate him to his former inactive position.

The third member of the erotic triangle, Doña Endrina, displays a mixture of Trotaconventos’ aggressiveness and the Archpriest’s passivity. Unlike her counterpart Cruz, Doña Endrina has the opportunity to engage the go-between as a go-between, and not as a potential lover. Through her interaction with the go-between, she is given a chance to refute the Archpriest’s advances and doubt his true intentions. Furthermore, by communicating with each other, both female characters are allowed to develop as their exchange of words reveals traits unique to each. In turn, Trotaconventos and Endrina expand into more forceful characters while at the same time further alienating the Archpriest and forcing him into a passive role. By examining this female-female relationship we can continue to trace how the female characters in this text slowly assert their independence and authority over the erotic triangle.

When Trotaconventos comes to Endrina’s house, Endrina immediately counters the attempted seduction, exclaiming to the go-between:

“callad ese predicar,
que ya esse parlero me coydo engañar,
muchas otras vedas me vyno a Retentar,
mas de mi el nin vos non vos podredes alabar”

“stop all this talking,

Since he has already tried to deceive me with his words.

He has tempted me many other times,

But neither of you can boast of getting me.” (740a-d)

It is possible that Endrina immediately refuses the go-between’s proposition because she wants to establish a virtuous reputation for herself, and fight against the common perception that widows are debauched and lustful (Vasvári, “Why is Doña Endrina a Widow?” 262). Endrina’s harsh words also portray her as a forceful and independent character, vastly different from Cruz and even Payas’ wife before her. Ramírez Pimienta comments that Endrina is depicted at the beginning of the episode as a dangerous force and is

una mujer independiente y peligrosa. Independiente pues no tiene un hombre a su lado y peligrosa por ser joven, bella y rica ... Pero Endrina es aun más peligrosa porque está consciente de su posición independiente y privilegiada.

(177)

Endrina continues to assert her independence even after Trotaconventos points out the dangers of remaining either alone or in the company of women. After telling a fable that points out the advantages of living with a man, the go-between continues, saying the following:

asi, estades, fiia, biuda e mançebilla,
sola e sin conpanero commo la tortolilla ;
deso creo que estades amariella e magrilla,
que do son tadas mugeres nunca mengua rrensilla”

So, daughter, you are young and widowed,

Alone without a companion like the little turtle-dove.

I think you have grown thin and yellow because of it.

Where there are only women together, there is always strife. (757a-d)

However, even arguments regarding her own health and safety cannot change Endrina's mind, and she uses her virtue to counter the go-between's argument:

Renpondiole la dueña, diz: “non me estaria bien
casar ante del año, que a bivda non conuien,
fasta que pase el año de los lutos que tien,
casarse; ca el luto con esta carga vien.

sy yo ante casase seria enfamada,
perderia la manda que a mi es mandada,
del segundo marido non seria tan onrrada,
ternie que non podria sufrir grand tenporada”

The lady replied : “It would not be seemly
to marry before a year has passed, it's not appropriate
for a widow to marry till the year of mourning is over,
this is the usual obligation.

If I married before then I would be shamed,
And would lose the inheritance owing to me.
My second husband would not respect me so much,
He would think I could not wait such a long time.” (759-60 a-d)

Although the first part of Endrina's response centers on her seeming preoccupation with leading a virtuous life that is respectful to both her deceased and future husbands, the second part of her statement reveals other preoccupations about marrying quickly. First, she says that if she remarried less than a year after her first husband's death, then she would lose the money to

which she is entitled (“sy yo ante casase seria enfamada,/ perderia la manda que a mi es mandada”) (“If I married before then I would be shamed,/ and would lose the inheritance owing to me”; 760ab). As a widow, Endrina is in the enviable position of controlling her finances and independence both of which she would lose if she were to quickly marry again. Second, Endrina comments that if she were to get married now then her new husband would think that she was unable to go very long without a husband (“del segundo marido non seria tan onrrada,/ternie que non podria sufrir grand tenporada”) (“My second husband would not respect me so much,/ he would think I could not wait such a long time”; 760d). This fear echoes Endrina’s earlier sentiments expressed in stanza 740 that she does not want to be considered a lusty widow. In this stanza, Endrina articulates this concern more forcefully, trying to convince the go-between that she is not a “viuda alegre” (Ramírez Pimienta “La aventura de Doña Endrina” 175), but rather a widow devoted to her husband’s memory.

Despite Endrina’s protests, both Trotaconventos and more recent readers have doubted the widow’s true intentions. Trotaconventos comments that Endrina has already been widowed for more than a year and now would be an acceptable time to begin considering new proposals: “‘Fiia,’ dixo la vieja, ‘el año ya es pasado,/ tomad aqueste marido por omne e por velado’.” (“‘My dear,’ said the old woman, ‘the year’s already past./ Take this man as your husband’”; 761a-b) Scholars have read even deeper into Endrina’s protests, claiming that she is enjoying her newfound freedom and enviable status as a young and wealthy woman too much to be willing to sacrifice it for marriage (Vasvári, “Why is Doña Endrina a Widow?”; Ramírez Pimienta). Ramírez Pimienta has noted, however, that so long as Endrina remains unmarried she continues to be an unstable force that has to be ultimately controlled (179). And despite her best intentions, Endrina is eventually brought back into the social order.

After several visits and several lies, Trotaconventos eventually convinces Endrina to come to her house so they can meet and play games: “ortorgole doña endrina de yr con ella fablar,/ a tomar de la su fruta e la pella jugar” (“Endrina agreed to go and chat with her,/ to try her fruit and play ball games.”; 867a-b). After Endrina agrees to go to Trotaconventos’ house, the go-between visits the Archpriest and tells him that she has finally succeeded in luring the snake out of its hole: “el encantador malo saca la culebra del forado” (868 c). When Endrina arrives at the go-between’s house the following day, the Archpriest is waiting for her. There is an approximate thirty-two stanza lacuna in the manuscript at this point, but the following stanzas imply that the Archpriest was waiting for Endrina at the go-between’s house and raped her there. In stanzas 878, where the narrative picks up, Endrina is confronting Trotaconventos about this development and the go-between answers her thus:

“quando yo saly de casa, pues que veyades las rredas,
 ¿por que fyncauades con el sola, entre estas paredes?
 A mi non Retebdes, fija, que vos lo meresçedes;
 El mejor cobro que tenedes, vuestro mal que la calledes.”
 “When I went out, since you knew the traps,
 why did you stay inside alone with him?
 Don’t blame me, young lady, you deserved it.

The best thing you can do is keep quiet about your problem.” (878a-d)

By this stanza, Trotaconvento’s formerly sweet tone has become harsh, and she blames Endrina for her own inability to read the signs of her impending rape. Indeed, Trotaconventos might have seduced Endrina into coming to her house, but she never lied about her profession. As far as Trotaconventos is concerned, Endrina is an unfit reader of signs and the outcome of the visit should not have been surprising (“A mi non Retebdes, fija, que vos lo meresçedes”) (878b). In

fact, from the very start of her encounter with Trotaconventos, Endrina has shown that she was an incompetent reader, for although she refused to meet the Archpriest on the basis of her loss of freedom, she nonetheless invited a known go-between into her house and listened to her duplicitous messages. At the beginning of the episode, she willingly invites Trotaconventos, the seller of jewellery and cloth, into her house: “vydola doña endrina, dixo: ‘entrad, non Reçeledes.’” (“Endrina saw her and said: ‘Come in, don’t be timid.’”; 723d). Because of her inability to read effectively, Endrina proves to be similar to the women in the third *nouvelle* who do not understand pragmatic implicature when they are told that their ‘*devant*’ is in danger of falling out, or a diamond is lost inside their body. What differentiates Endrina from these two women, is that, while the French women do not understand that the repercussions of misreading their suitors’ language leads to cuckolding their husbands, Endrina realizes that her misreading has led to her loss of freedom. As readers of both texts, we consequently learn from these women’s misreadings the importance of understanding pragmatic implicature and the essential role it plays in interpreting these works.

At the conclusion of the episode, once Endrina is raped, it seems that she keeps the go-between’s advice and keeps the violation a secret. The episode ends with Don Melon and Endrina’s marriage: “doña endrina e don melon en vno casados son,/ elegran se las conpañas en las bodas con rrazon.” (“Endrina and Lord Melon were married,/ and the wedding guests were happy.”; 891a-b). Interestingly, the happiness in this passage is not experienced by the couple, but rather by the wedding guests. As a result, the episode ends ambivalently: although the Archpriest finally gets what he desires, he is married through dubious means; and it is not clear that Endrina is happy with her new status as a married woman. On a symbolic level, by the end of the episode, Endrina’s marriage represents the reassertion of the social order, as Endrina, a formerly unstable and threatening symbol to male-controlled society, is brought under control

by the Archpriest who rapes her into submission and marriage (Ramírez Pimienta 179). Alan Deyermond comments that Endrina is the only woman with whom the Archpriest has “indisputable success,” meaning that this is only case where the reader can know for certain that he has connected with his object of desire (110). However, the measures that the Archpriest must take to solidify this relationship problematize the notion of a “successful” relationship. Indeed, Endrina’s futile attempts at maintaining control of her wealth, independence and especially her body, lay bare the cruel foundations of a social order that condones the actions taken by the Archpriest and Trotaconventos.

Unlike Endrina who ultimately loses control of her independence, Trotaconventos constantly remains in control. Like Ferrand García before her, Trotaconventos is the most active figure in the developing triangle, even though this go-between is not actively involved in any sexual liaisons. In fact, because of her strong presence in this erotic triangle, and the one with Doña Garoça, she is arguably one of the most well-developed characters in the *Lba*.

One way that Trotaconventos manages to control the erotic triangle between the Archpriest, herself and Endrina is through secrets. Because both Endrina and the Archpriest tell her their private thoughts, she can use this information to manipulate and deceive. When the Archpriest hires Trotaconventos to woo Endrina, he beseeches her to listen to his tales of misery and to keep his secrets. The Archpriest asks:

“quiero fablar con-vusco bien en como penitencia,
toda cosa que vos diga, oyda en paçiençia;
sinon vos, otro non sepa mi quexa e mi dolencia.”
diz la vieja: “pues desidlo e aved en mi creencia.”
“I want to talk to you as if in penitence,
listen patiently to all I say.

Let no one other than you know my pain and suffering.”

The old woman said: “Speak, then, and trust me.” (703a-d)

By using the word “penitência,” the Archpriest’s request resembles the beginning of a confession; however, this demand is a blatant parody of the sacrament. Here the Archpriest comes to Trotaconvenos as a penitent, asking his matchmaker/confessor to help him. In turn, Trotaconventos adopts the role as confessor in this game, and agrees not to share his secret with anyone. She promises:

“Comigo Segura mente vuestro coraçon fablat.
fare por vos quanto pueda, guardar he vos lealtal;
ofiçio de corredores es de pucha poridat,
mas encubiertas encobrimos que meson de vesindat.”

“You can surely speak your heart to me,
And I will do all I can for you and stay loyal.

The go-between must keep confidences.

We keep more secrets than the local inn.” (704)

By referring to the “meson de vesindat,” a location rife with debauchery, Trotaconventos draws attention to the secular and parodic nature of the Archpriest’s confession. One fundamental difference between the sacred act of confessing and the secular act played out here, is that Trotaconventos accepts responsibility for the Archpriest’s request, unlike the priest who acts as an intermediary between the sinner and God and does not assume responsibility for his penitent’s sins. That is, the go-between, the *alcahueta*, takes on the Archpriest’s sins without divulging them or relieving herself of them to anyone. Just as the penitent feels liberated after the act of confessing and knows that he will be absolved, so is the Archpriest relieved in knowing that his love will be wooed on his behalf. While it is Trotaconventos’ burden to bear

the weight of these secrets, her knowledge nonetheless puts her in the enviable position of having private information about her clients which ensures her authority over them.

Another way Trotaconventos controls the erotic triangle is by distancing herself from the other two members. Although she is hired by the Archpriest, she has no difficulty lying to him when necessary in order to encourage his affections for the widow. In the middle of her negotiations with Endrina, Trotaconventos goes to the Archpriest and tells him that Endrina is beginning to have feelings for him. Lying to the Archpriest, she says:

“Amigo,” diz la vieja, “en dueña lo veo
que vos quiere e vos ama e tyene de vos desseo;
quando de vos le fablo e a ella oteo,
todo se le demuda el color e el desseo.”

“My friend,” says the old crone, “I see that
The lady loves you and desires you.
When I talk of you and look at her,
Her colour and general attitude changes.” (807a-d)

Through such lies, Trotaconventos is able to keep the Archpriest as a client and lure him into believing that she is accomplishing her task. At the same time, these lies distance the go-between from the Archpriest, proving that she is an effective go-between but not a trustworthy friend.

Trotaconventos also does not build a strong relationship with Endrina even though she has the opportunity to form a homosocial friendship with the widow that is similar to relationships developed between men in other erotic triangles. But rather than allying herself with Endrina against the Archpriest, Trotaconventos continually lies to the widow, appearing to give her advice and even saying to her: ““Es maldat E falsia las mugeres engañar,/ grand pecado

e desonrra en las ansy dañar.” (“It is evil and false to deceive women,/ and a great sin and dishonour to harm them so.”; 848a-b) But these are just words, and in the end, Trotaconventos has committed the greatest deceit by delivering Endrina into the Archpriest’s lustful hands. Therefore, instead of forming a strong female homosocial relationship, Trotaconventos remains distant from Endrina and even the Archpriest, thus asserting her independence and remaining free of emotions.

Because Trotaconventos is unwilling to forge strong ties with either the Archpriest or Endrina, the erotic triangle that forms between the three characters is tenuous from the start. Without any strong relationships to bind the characters together, the triangle easily falls apart and violence even ensues. The breakdown of this unstable triangle can be primarily attributed to misreading linguistic implicature – a device that is detrimental to Endrina, but necessary for the readers of the *Lba* who use it to decode both this episode and even the text in general. Because of Endrina’s misreading of Trotaconventos’ words and actions, she falls into the go-between’s trap, and any tie that might have formed between the two women is compromised. Although linguistic implicature is a key component of this episode, this tale does not display the same sense of humour and irony that characterizes the previous two male-male-female erotic triangles. As we saw in chapter two, irony is used as a vehicle for mockery where the victim of the irony is laughed at (Muecke 119), and is successful if it elicits feelings of superiority – feelings which result when people laugh at others’ misfortunes. But at the same time, these misfortune must be “new and unexpected” (Hobbes 65). This is not the case in the case of Doña Endrina, whose misfortune is not unexpected, but rather, entirely planned. First, she is lied to by Trotaconventos, and then lured into her house on false pretences. Once she is at the go-between’s house, Endrina’s rape is also not a surprise, especially in light of the last words Trotaconventos speaks to the Archpriest:

“byen se que diz verdat vuestro prouerbyo chico,
 que el rromero fyto que sienpre saca çatico;
 Sed cras omne, non vos tengan por tenico;
 fablad, mas Recabdat quando y yo no fynco.”

“I know your little proverb is true,
 that the persistent pilgrim always wins his bread.
 But tomorrow, be a man in all things, don’t be a wimp.
 Talk, but achieve your aims when I’m not there.” (869abcd)

The go-between’s injunction to the Archpriest to achieve his aims strongly indicates to the reader what will happen while Trotaconventos is gone. And when the widow visits the go-between several stanzas later to complain about what happened, the reader is not surprised by what she says she experienced. Therefore, in this episode, there is an inevitable progression toward rape, which despite being contrived through deceit and linguistic implicature, is in no way constructed as a humorous event. Indeed, this tale appears to legitimize the rape, using it as a means of reinstating the patriarchal social order.

Despite the female-sanctioned sexual violence in this tale, both Trotaconventos and Doña Endrina still struggle against that same patriarchal order. Although these women fight each other, they still carve out a place for themselves where they are able to assert their agency and freedom to the point that they begin to dominate erotic triangles, even taking rudimentary steps toward building homosocial relationships amongst themselves. Ultimately, both Endrina and Trotaconventos seem to understand the potential value of a woman’s body, and while one tries to control how her body is exchanged, the other tries to manipulate other female bodies, and the system in general.

The Doña Garoça Episode

The erotic triangle that develops between Trotaconventos, Doña Garoça and the Archpriest is a fourth variation on the tripartite relationships that have been developing throughout the Lba. In this episode, Trotaconventos suggests the nun Doña Garoça as a potential mate for the lonely Archpriest. When she goes to woo Garoça, the nun refuses to meet her suitor, and instead the two women engage in a debate. Eventually, the nun concedes although it is never clear whether the Archpriest and the nun consummate their relationship.

One important difference between this erotic triangle and the other three is that it is not obvious that the two members of the triangle become lovers. In the other episodes the active male lovers unquestionably engage in a sexual relationship with the desired woman; however, in this episode, it is ambiguous whether the Archpriest consummates his relationship with Garoça. At the end of the episode, the Archpriest writes that after falling in love with Garoça,

Resçibio me la dueña por su buen Seruidor,
 ssyenprel fuy mandado e leal amador,
 mucho de bien me fiso con dios en lynpio amor,
 en quanto ella fue byua, dios fue mi guiador

Con mucha oraçion a dios por mi Rogaua,
 con la su abstinencia mucho me ayudaua,
 la su vida muy lypia en dios se deleytaua,
 en locura del mundo nunca se trabajaua
 The lady accepted me as her good servant;
 I was always a loyal and obedient lover.

She did me great good in God's pure love;
 As long as she lived, God was my guide.

She interceded for me through prayer to God.
 Her abstinence was a great help to me,
 And her pure life delighted in God.

She never strove for the madness of the world. (1503a-d-1504a-d)

These lines have posed considerable problems for critics, who have tried to decipher the nature of the relationship between the Archpriest and Garoça. According to Nicolás Emilio Álvarez, scholars have interpreted this episode in one of four ways: first, the relationship is consummated; second, although the relationship is consummated, the episode still ends ambiguously; third, it is more pertinent to discuss the narrative's artistic merits than possible sexual encounters; fourth, the relationship remains platonic (111). Álvarez believes that it is essential to decode the end of the episode because it is the only part of the *Lba* where the struggle between carnal and spiritual love is literalized (111). His own conclusion is that *loco amor* is sacrificed for God's eternal love (119). Peter Dunn agrees with Álvarez, writing that the nun represents a Magdalene figure: a formerly promiscuous woman, she is now unwilling to engage in a sexual relationship with any man. He supports this by tracing the origin of her name to Arabic roots, writing that Garoça can be linked to '*arusa*' which means "betroted, hence 'bride of God'" (90). Roger Walker's interpretation adheres to Álvarez's fourth option: he comments that the end of the episode leads to "a frustrating platonic relationship" between the two characters (235). Although these investigations into the relationship between the Archpriest and Garoça seem to shed light on this ambiguous ending, I believe that these critics are overlooking part of the picture. By focusing purely on the sexual aspect of the relationship

between the Archpriest and the nun, Trotaconventos' role in arranging their meeting and the women's debate are obfuscated. Furthermore, by disregarding the debate and the events leading up to the meeting between the Archpriest and the nun, Garoça's reasoning and intellectual ability are also discounted and she is portrayed as a less dynamic character. Moreover, by giving priority to the end of the episode (which represents only a small portion of the sequence overall), the erotic triangle that is built throughout the episode is also ignored. Instead, I believe that the ambiguous end is a logical conclusion to this episode, and it is only by analyzing Garoça's friendship with Trotaconventos that we can interpret Garoça's relationship with the Archpriest.

A second difference that separates this erotic triangle from the previous ones is that the desired woman can finally understand pragmatic implicature and as a result, control how her body is exchanged. Unlike Endrina, Garoça understands the subtext for Trotaconventos' visit and then speaks to the bawd in her own terms. As a result, the two women forge a friendship that in certain ways resembles the male homosocial relationships found in the Cnn and the Decameron. This is especially true if we read the Archpriest as occupying the traditional female role in this erotic triangle, where he is talked about, gazed upon and excluded from the women's developing bond. However, at a certain point, the similarities between these female and male homosocial relationships break down and the women exemplify a new kind of homosocial tie.

When this episode begins, Endrina has died and the Archpriest is looking for a new love. He solicits Trotaconventos to find him a new mate, and she suggests the nun Garoça, a woman for whom she used to work. Trotaconventos goes to Garoça on the Archpriest's behalf, but the nun does not want to talk to the go-between. Eventually, however, the two women engage in an exchange of fables as a means of debating whether the nun should meet with the Archpriest. The tales they tell resemble the fable that Trotaconventos told Endrina, *Enxienplo de la*

abutarda e de la golondrina (The fable of the bustard and the swallow), which she used to persuade Endrina to see the Archpriest. But while Endrina listened to the fable and replied with an excuse, Garoça answers the go-between with her own stories. Through this exchange each woman displays her intellectual prowess and her ability to understand linguistic implicature. Moreover, by telling stories to each other, the women alienate the Archpriest from their growing intellectual bond.

Much of the scholarship conducted on the fables in the Doña Garoça episode has centred on the role and origins of the stories told by the women. But rather than concentrating on how the fables illuminate the depiction of each woman, her sexuality or her intelligence, scholars have focused on how the original tales have been changed or manipulated in their retelling. Ian Michael, for instance, has divided the entire text into various sections and then catalogued the origins for each tale. He writes that in the Doña Garoça section, there are four precursors to the nun's first story, *Enxiemplo del ortolano e de la culuebra* (The fable of the gardener and the snake) (208). Michael tracks the development of this tale, outlining how it has been changed by Juan Ruiz, and what these changes mean for the development of the narrative. Robert Edwards has also written about the Garoça section, dividing it into three parts. According to Edwards, first the go-between convinces the Archpriest to woo the nun, then Trotaconventos (also called Urraca) acts as messenger between the Archpriest and the nun, and finally Garoça and the Archpriest are united in love. Edwards states that in the middle section, the exchange of tales "freezes the progression" of the narrative (270) and the only comment that Edwards makes about the relationships between the characters is his concluding remark that the Garoça episode is a love story about a love story and that there are no exposed emotions (272). In contrast, I believe that this middle section is rife with emotions and the relationship that develops through the exchange of tales leads to the strongest link in the triangular relationship.

When Trotaconventos goes to see Doña Garoça for the first time the reader is led to believe that the affair between the nun and the Archpriest is a *fait accompli*. In stanza 1333, Trotaconventos tells the Archpriest that when she served the nuns a decade earlier, “tienen a sus amigos viçiosos sin sosaños.” (“They kept their men-friends happy and carefree”; 1333b). Sure that this was still the case, she goes to see Doña Garoça and tells her there is a man she wants her to meet, “para que a vos sirua cadal dia lo abuyo./Señora, del convento non lo fagades esquiuro” (“I urge him to serve you, every day I do./ Madam, don’t send him away from the convent”; 1345c-d). But Garoça blatantly refuses the go-between’s proposition. Two stanzas later, Trotaconventos urges Garoça to serve the Archpriest and an intellectual joust begins between the two women. Garoça begins the debate and tells a story in order to convey her distrust of Urraca: in her story’s conclusion, a snake that a farmer had rescued comes back to kill him. This moral incites Trotaconventos, who claims the nun has shunned her because she did not bring the nun a present, and she replies with a second tale. After the second tale is told, the complicated relationship between the women has clearly begun to develop. By this point, Urraca has ignored the Garoça’s entreaty for her to leave, instead staying and countering the first fable with her own story. By telling her tale, Urraca shows that she considers herself to be on equal intellectual ground as her former mistress. In other words, the class difference between the two women, which would usually be upheld through signs of deference exhibited by Urraca is not respected. Rather, Urraca makes herself equal to the nun and treats Garoça’s fable as a challenge. After Urraca tells her tale, it becomes apparent that the two women are intellectual equals – both are able to go beyond the literal word and communicate through example and metaphor.⁹⁹ Even at this early stage in the story telling, the Archpriest is already excluded from

⁹⁹ Because metaphor was frequently associated with the feminine in classical and medieval culture, it is possible that the women’s use of this device would have resounded with a medieval reader. See chapter 1 of Ross *Figuring*

the friendship: rather than going back to relate the news of Garoça's reticence to her master, Trotaconventos stays and confronts the nun on her own. From this developing exclusive female relationship, and each woman's insistence on telling her story, we might conclude that the issue being debated is no longer whether Garoça should become the Archpriest's lover, but instead, which woman will win this debate of wits.

As the debate continues and the women become more entrenched in the game, certain rules begin to form. For instance, both women are extremely polite. And while they are debating serious issues such as honour, respectability and desire, they maintain a veneer of impartiality. Before the *Enxiemplo del gallo que falló el çafir en el muladar* (The fable of the cockerel who found a sapphire in a dung heap), for instance, Trotaconventos says, "dezirvos he la fabla e non vos enojedes" ("I'll tell you the story, and don't get cross"; 1386d). For her part, the nun must pretend that she derives no pleasure from such storytelling. In stanza 1410a-d she says,

la dueña dixo: "vieja, mañana madrugueste
a desir me pastrañas de lo que ayer me fableste;
yo non lo consentria commo tu melo rroqueste,
que consentyr non deuo tan mal juego como este.

The lady replied: 'Old woman, you got up very early
To come and tell me stories. What you spoke of yesterday
I cannot consent to in the way you asked me,
As I must not agree to such a wicked game as this one.

Of course, the connection between telling stories and pleasure is not new; indeed, it is a theme that courses through the three primary texts in this study. Earlier in the *Lba*, this theme

appeared in the Cruz episode, when the Archpriest picks up his pen to tell the story about his lost love Cruz and in so doing, replaces sexual gratification with textual. Sexual and textual gratification is a well-known theme, present in both the Cnn and the Decameron. Indeed, in the Decameron the *brigata* uses storytelling to sublimate sexual desire. But at the same time, there remains an anxiety in the Decameron about the dangers of sharing salacious stories. Dioneo in Day V mentions this danger, when he instructs the women how to interpret his story about Pietro di Vinciolo (story 10): he explains that the evil elements in the story might ensnare an innocent female audience and so, while they listen to the equivocal story, they should separate the rose from the thorns:

quantunque la materia della mia seguente novella, innamorate giovani, sia in parte men che onesta, però che diletto può porgere, ve la pur dirò. E voi, ascoltandola, quello ne fate che usate siete di fare quando ne' giardini entrate, che, distesa la dilicata mano, cogliete le rose e lasciate le spine stare... (495:4-5).
the subject matter of the story I am about to tell you may be somewhat less than virtuous, since it may amuse you, I shall tell it to you. And as you listen to it, you should do with it what you are accustomed to do when you enter a garden and stretch out your delicate hands to pluck the roses but leave the thorns where they are... (369)¹⁰⁰

Here, Dioneo's warning to the women in the *brigata* about the less than virtuous subject matter of his story, "men che onesta," echoes Garoça's fear about the potential negative effect of

¹⁰⁰ Gregory Stone elaborates that Dioneo's instructions put the women in a double-bind: if they are to listen selectively to a story, then they become dishonest readers and tear apart the text, but if they listen to the whole story, then they stand being corrupted by the tale. Another problem with this passage is the image of separating the rose from the thorns. If the women only listen to the rosy passages then they are only paying attention to the female parts of the story and disregard the other half, the masculine part of the story. This kind of selective reading both compromises the hetero-normative sexuality of the Decameron where female complements male, and advocates a homosexual reading of the text (193-4).

narrating. Nevertheless, Dioneo continues to tell his story and the women listen, just as Garoça and Trotaconventos insist on telling their stories. Therefore, although Garoça, and even Dioneo, insist on stating the potential negative effect of storytelling, the inherent pleasure of the act proves a stronger impulse, and the storytelling continues. Indeed, one stanza after Garoça says she should refrain from the “mal juego,” the wicked game, she proceeds to tell another fable which she says will be her final response to Trotaconvento’s persistent nagging. Even this statement is untrue and after Trotaconventos tells another story, Doña Garoça follows it with one more before she is convinced to meet the Archpriest in person.

By telling each other fables, the women not only forge a friendship, but they also replace the female body as the object of exchange with a well-crafted story. In this way they are similar to Gissippus and Titus (Decameron X,8) who use speech to replace the female body. But women are also exchanged between Gissippus and Titus: they are both objects of desire and instruments used to cement male relationships. However, in the case of Trotaconventos and Garoça, speech is their only mediator. And more than just replacing the female body, the stories exchanged between the two women is a *colle sexuelle*. Because spoken language was gendered feminine in the Middle Ages, then the stories the women share represent both the commodity that is exchanged and the representation of femininity. In other words, in this scenario the stories take the place of the woman’s body-as-object and represent the dangerous feminine force that must be controlled. In other stories this force is sometimes figured by the woman, such as in the case of Dianora (Decameron X,5), and sometimes is represented by an object, such as the ring in Cnn sixty-two. One result of speech acting as *colle sexuelle* is that the Archpriest is eliminated from their relationship: unlike Dianora who is required to mediate between her husband and her lover, the Archpriest is made redundant when the women find another mediator. Another implication of this *colle sexuelle* is that an entirely new kind of triangle

forms, one between two women and a feminized object of exchange. In this triangle, the potentially threatening nature of the feminized words (akin to the threatening aspect of femininity) is controlled by both women, a mastery which they demonstrate when they engage in a dispute: a style usually reserved for men.

There are several features in the dispute between Trotaconventos and Garoça that are particularly striking. The first is that they speak to each other without a male intermediary. According to Helen Solterer, when women were allowed to speak during a disputation, they were only expected to respond to men. That is, women who engaged in debate were mimicking the usual university style wherein learned men would pose questions or make statements and their students would answer them in a disputational manner (10). Although by the fifteenth century some women engaged in disputes with men (11), in the case of Doña Garoça and Trotaconventos, the two women are alone and there is no learned man either to encourage them or to guide them. Perhaps if this same situation unfolded in another kind of text then this encounter might be parodic: for instance, instead of two men engaging in a serious debate, we might see two women discussing far less weighty subjects. However, this is not the case in the Libro de buen amor. In this episode, the two women succeed in carrying the serious debate about love and fidelity to its natural conclusion. Furthermore, neither woman relies on male intercession and both are mentally prepared to engage in the disputation that they have mutually agreed to.

The second unusual feature of the dispute between Trotaconventos and Garoça is that they demonstrate a deep understanding of the connection between words and actions – a correlation that preoccupied scholars in the Middle Ages (Solterer 11). But words can only be powerful if they are uttered in the right context. Powerful words, ones that have the ability to affect the reception of a text or a person's attitude, will only be influential when they are uttered

by someone who is respected and when the listener is willing to accept the veracity of the words.¹⁰¹ In the stories told by the women, we might glean two levels in which words are powerful. The first is within the stories themselves. In the fantastic world that the women weave, words come from unlikely places including animals and inanimate objects.

Furthermore, the language used in the stories is often prophetic. Even more surprisingly, sometimes words wield more power than physical strength. An excellent example of this is in the *Enxiemplo del león e del mur* (The fable of the lion and the mouse) (1425-36).

Trotaconventos tells this story about a lion who captures a mouse. The mouse then uses his linguistic skills to convince the lion not to kill him. He says,

“Señor,” diz, “non me mates, que non te podre fartar,
en tu dar me la muerte, non te puedes onrrar.

¿Que onrra es al león, al fuerte, al poderoso,
matar vn pequeno, al pobre, al coyoso?
es desonrra E mengua e non vençer fermoso,
el que al amor vençe es loor vengoncoso...”

El leon destos dichos touose por pagado;
solto al moresillo, el mur quando fue soltado,
diole muy muchas graçias e quel seria mandado,
en quanto el podiese, quel siruirie de grado.

“Sir,” he said, “don’t kill me, I wouldn’t fill you up,

¹⁰¹ This concept is not very different from J. L. Austin’s speech act theory. In both cases, words have the power to alter a situation or a state of being.

You would gain no honour from my death.
 What honour is there in the strong and powerful lion
 Killing a poor, wretched little thing?
 It is dishonourable and demeaning, not a worthy victory.
 Beating someone smaller is shameful praise.”

The lion was pleased at these words.
 He let the little mouse go, and when he was free,
 He thanked the lion very much and said
 That the lion’s word was his command, to serve with gratitude. (1426c-d-
 1427;1429)

In this passage, the mouse appeals to the lion’s pride when he asks him to spare his life. The strength of the mouse’s words is enough to convince the lion and he is set free. However, this is not before the mouse promises to help the lion whenever he might be in trouble. In the next stanza the mouse’s words are converted into action when the lion becomes trapped in a net and the mouse uses his sharp teeth to set the lion free. In this tale the mouse’s words initiated action two times. The first was with his successful plea to the lion to set him free. The second occurs when the mouse’s promise to help the lion is actualized.¹⁰² From this tale, we can make a comparison between the mouse and the women. Like the mouse, women are usually perceived to be weak. But in both cases – the mouse who speaks to the lion, and the women who speak to each other without a male mediator – both show that they are able to use words to their benefit. Furthermore, just as the mouse is able to set the lion free in an unexpected situation, so should

¹⁰² There might also be a greater connection or moral associated with how the mouse uses his mouth to set himself free (language) and his teeth, which he uses to set the lion free (action). Both acts are initiated from the same place.

we not underestimate feminine creativity or intellectual ability. Conversely, a second interpretation of Trotaconventos' tale is that she is establishing a comparison between the lion and the mouse and the nun and herself. Like the lion, Garoça gave Trotaconventos a cool reception when she arrived at the monastery and immediately tried to send her away, not believing that the go-between could be of any assistance to her. But like the mouse, Trotaconventos continues to try to convince the lion/Garoça of her utility and knows that her significant linguistic skill – emanating from her mouth – will ultimately serve, and perhaps even rescue, the nun from some unknown danger.

The second level where words become powerful is in the effect that they have on the women. While the stories primarily demonstrate each woman's position to the other, they also inspire the listener to become the next raconteur. Indeed, before the storyteller can finish her tale, the other woman intercedes with her own example. At the end of the tale of the mouse and the lion, for instance, Doña Garoça says,

Estas buenas palabras, estos dulçes falagos,
non querria que fuesen a mi fiel E amargos,
como fueron al cueruo los dichos, los encargos
de la falsa rraposa con sus malos trasfagos.

These good words, such sweet flattery,
I wouldn't want them to be bitter gall,
like the words and entreaties of the false vixen
were to the crow, with her evil deceits. (1436a-d)

In this stanza, Doña Garoça illustrates that as a manipulator of words herself, she knows the negative effect that even “buenas palabras” can have on a listener. And here, instead of listening to the moral of the tale – “Puede pequeña cossa E de poca valya/faser mucho prouecho

E dar grand meioria” (“A small thing of little value may/ do much good and bring great benefit”; 1434a-b) – she listens to the hidden message in the story which implies that words are powerful and have the capacity to convince people to do things that go against their nature. This is only one example of how each woman seemingly distrusts the other’s words and insists on telling her own story which will accurately reflect her opinion. But these stories are also creative springboards where the act of telling one story inspires the other woman to tell another. And eventually, both women continue to tell more fables until both are exhausted.

Ultimately, words – and their metaphoric and creative powers – emancipate the women from their ordinary lives and allow them to forge a unique friendship. Because both women understand the power of words and know how to read beyond the literal meaning of a story, they create a bond that is stronger than either one’s relationship with the Archpriest. For the first time in the book, two characters use a shared understanding of language to develop what we might define as a homosocial relationship.

But what is the nature of their homosocial relationship? Can it be categorized according to the rules of the disputation where a master struggles to dominate another during an intellectual “give-and-take” (Solterer 24)? Or does their relationship form according to the tenets of classical *amicitia* where two people, of equal birth and education, build a relationship predicated on equality? In the first case, according to a feminist perspective, the term “mastery” carries negative connotations because the domination of others can also include the oppression of women. Furthermore, the model of the dispute was constructed within a patriarchal model – an example that the two women might imitate, but simultaneously free themselves of. While there is a definite give-and-take between Trotaconventos and Doña Garoça, it is not apparent that one desires to dominate the other. And although it is clear that both women want to win the debate, the result of such a victory would not lead to subordination of the other. It is also not the

case that these women build a homosocial relationship according to the rules of *amicitia*. First, it is not possible because they are not equal in the way that Gissippus and Titus, or Jehan and Thomas are. Furthermore, their relationship is not based on a mutual love or virtue, as is required in the Classical model. Indeed, the relationship that the women form through their combined pleasure at telling good stories cannot be categorized according to traditional patriarchal models. And perhaps it is because of this non-patriarchal aim that it is never clear whether the nun became the Archpriest's lover, for this would demonstrate that the women's attempt to free themselves from the patriarchal mode of exchange where women are objects to be traded was not successful. As a result, we see that the ambiguity surrounding the Archpriest and Garoça's relationship is in fact a necessary and logical conclusion to this episode. And by its end, the aim of uniting the nun with the Archpriest merely becomes a by-product of the joust that two intelligent women have embarked upon.

The Archpriest's role in this erotic triangle is further devalued when we consider how few appearances he makes in the episode. Throughout the 176 stanzas, the Archpriest appears only at the beginning and the end, whereas the two women take centre stage throughout. Furthermore, even when he is talked about by the two women, he is not given a chance to defend himself. Consequently, there is no indication that the Archpriest attempts to break the strong homosocial bond that develops between the two women or to intercede in their relationship in any way. In this respect, he can be likened to several female characters we have already observed. Like the women in the third *nouvelle* who do not even know that their husbands have formed a homosocial bond, the Archpriest seems to be unaware of the relationship between the two women.¹⁰³ Likewise, Cruz does not know about the friendship

¹⁰³ The Archpriest's ignorance is paradoxical: as the narrator, he clearly knows about the relationship, while as a character, he seems unaware of the friendship.

between the Archpriest and Garçia, even though she is the reason the two men sever their friendship. Through his passiveness, the Archpriest proves to be more similar to the women who are unknowingly traded between men, than to those who attempt to break or disrupt male homosocial bonds. Unlike the innkeeper's wife in Cnn sixty-two, who prevents her husband from forming a homosocial tie with her lover(s), or Ambruogia in Decameron VIII,1 who tries to prevent her husband and her lover from interacting, the Archpriest remains an invisible presence throughout most of the episode without ever trying to destabilize the erotic triangle built around him.

By looking at the relationship between the two women in terms of linguistic mastery, we uncover another example of the unique way that these two women succeed in forming their homosocial bond. Instead of relying on one to be the teacher and the other the student, they listen to each other equally and respond accordingly. In due course, the democratic nature of this give-and-take proves to be far stronger than the class differences that separate them. As a result, the two women are able to communicate on the same level and form two triangles: one that uses their stories as their intermediary, and one that makes the Archpriest the silent participant, subject to the will of the two women. For both triangles, Trotaconventos and Garoça provide an excellent example of how women can create a homosocial friendship that is far stronger than the relationship that either woman had or will have with the male participant. But more important, in this episode we witness the formation of *two* unprecedented erotic triangles predicated on female authority.

Conclusion

By tracing four examples of erotic triangles in the Lba, we uncover portraits of four vastly different female characters. Starting with the bakergirl Cruz, who is never told about two

men's battle for her love and is portrayed as a crucified, meek and mute woman, we move to Pitas Payas' wife who is aware of her sexual power and willingly deceives her husband. Endrina also knows that her body is desired, but unlike Payas' wife, she tries to guard her virtue in order to reap the benefits of widowhood. Like Payas' wife, however, Endrina is unable able to keep her body entirely out of the system of exchange and ultimately her raped body is made legitimate through marriage. Finally, Garoça controls her body through her intellect, and although there is ambiguity as to whether her body is given to the Archpriest, this is ultimately irrelevant, because instead of a body, she and Trotaconventos use stories as the new currency to be exchanged. Charting this progression from passive to active women is important because it not only shows how some women are able to take control of their bodies and begin to dominate erotic triangles, but the final episode also becomes even more spectacular after we observe the struggles a series of women suffer in order to eventually arrive at that final example. In what can be read as a medieval upset to Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray's contemporary theories on the exchange of women, female characters such as Garoça prove that they are aware of the patriarchal system of exchange and have the authority to usurp it. Although this upheaval takes a long time to develop – over two-thirds of the book passes before the Garoça episode – it eventually occurs and its repercussions are staggering. Indeed, not only does Garoça claim her body, replacing it with a new object of exchange, but she also forges an exclusive relationship with another woman. Although this relationship, like other male homosocial friendships, isolates the third member of the triangle to allow the women to develop a relationship on their own terms, the conditions they set for their friendship does not resemble those of other male relationships. The bond that Garoça and Trotaconventos cultivate is predicated on shared knowledge and intelligence, but moreover, these female characters show that they are primarily interested in developing an egalitarian intellectual joust than determining a hierarchy of

intelligence. Through this common goal, the women succeed in creating an erotic triangle where the strongest bond is between the women and which cannot be destabilized by the third participant: in this case, a man.

In the Lba there are representations of four different types of desired women, but there is also a fifth woman who is equally important to the development of the triangle: Trotaconventos. She is vastly different from the other characters in this text; indeed, her independence, her cleverness and facility with language, are attributes that make her a unique character by any standard. But most startling in the character of Trotaconventos is the representation of her textual body. This image is not new in the Lba, in fact, it is prefigured by Pitas Payas' wife whose body literally carries the message of her husband's cuckolding. But the image on Payas' wife's body does not have a transformative power – it does not incite desire in another person. However, this *is* the case for Trotaconventos: like a Galeotto she has the ability to spark desire in others, and in so doing, create a new kind of erotic triangle. Indeed, in the episodes in which she figures, she is the personification of the seductive nature of textuality: she convinces the Archpriest whom he should desire, and her use of tales incites women to meet the man who desires them (which in the case of Endrina even leads to marriage).

If we recall Girard's suggestion that triangles are usually formed through a mediator – an object that is commonly desired by two men – then the majority of the triangles in the Cnn, the Decameron and two in the Lba fit this description. Furthermore, as Rubin has posited, these women are also objects that are exchanged between men. The women in the third *nouvelle*, for instance, are desired by both their husbands and their lovers and are used to cement the relationship between the two men; Dianora and Payas' wife are likewise the common object of desire between two men, even though in the former case, the husband does not discover that he is in competition with another man, and therefore a friendship between the two men cannot

develop. Sometimes in *lieu* of a woman's body, an object can be exchanged, as the case of the ring in the sixty-second *nouvelle* indicates. However, in this scenario, the ring represents a certain monetary value, in addition, perhaps, to a symbolization of heterosexual and homosexual desire. The ring itself, although it is the indicator to Jehan and Thomas that they have become members of an erotic triangle, does not incite desire. In contrast, in the Zima episode, Zima's words incite desire in Francesco's wife – they are a Galeotto, sparking desire, and by extension, change, in the woman who hears them. Zima's words therefore create two different triangles: one comprised of Zima, his words, and the object of desire; and a second between Zima, Francesco and the object of desire. In the latter situation Zima's words create the third point of a new triangle which brings together two people who come to mutually desire each other. The former situation represents a Girardian triangle where the woman is the mediator of desire between the two men. But the case of Trotaconventos is different. As a conflation of text and character, she brings together the two triangles from the Zima story: like Zima's words, she is the third point of a triangle when she incites desire in the Archpriest and the women she woos *and* she is also a person in that triangle. As a result, the triangle that forms is between the feminized representation of language, a woman and a man, as well as between two female and one male characters. Moreover, Trotaconventos problematizes the role of the mediator. This position had been occupied by the woman who was also the common object of desire between two men. In this case, Trotaconventos brings together a woman and a man, after which they decide whether to develop a relationship of their own. In other words, there is not one object or person that is jointly desired by two people. Furthermore, within this new triangle, desire does not express itself through two men's common love of one woman; rather, in the hands of Trotaconventos and the women she visits, desire is examined and dissected. Because of Trotaconventos, desire is not only something the character feels, but it is also a state to be

pondered. In turn, the detail in which desire is discussed allows the other female characters to speak their minds and to showcase their intelligence. In short, with Trotaconventos as mediator, women in this text are encouraged to talk, but they are also listened to.

Conclusion: Moving Forward with the Erotic Triangle

Doña Garoça, Dianora, and the innkeeper's wife: only three women of many in the Libro de buen amor, the Decameron, and the Cent nouvelles nouvelles who are part of erotic triangles. These three women, and others like them, speak out from the confines of their triangle in the attempt to control, or at least influence, how their bodies are used and by whom. And while, as readers, we are mindful that these voices are created by the male author, the male storyteller, or sometimes the male character, these female voices are still distinctive and merit closer analysis. Occasionally, as in the case of Doña Garoça, their words are accepted by their male interlocutors. More frequently, these women's attempts to be heard are thwarted, as experienced by Dianora and the innkeeper's wife. Nonetheless, their strong voices, their cunning solutions for escaping compromising situations, and their ability to use pragmatic implicature and understand irony, build a picture of erotic triangles that demonstrates that some women are not only able to engage with men on an intellectual level, but also to control how their bodies are used. Female characters such as Garoça and the wife in the first *nouvelle*, for instance, refute both the medieval perspective that women are unable to understand the symbolic level of language, and the recent anthropological observation that when women are treated as commodities they are disenfranchised from their bodies. In turn, these women are able to destabilize, or at least disrupt, the presumably solid configuration of the erotic triangle. In the end, while not every woman is able, or even willing, to control the triangle she is a part of, an analysis of a cross-section of stories from three texts, spanning three countries and over one hundred years, makes it evident that many different types of women find solutions to coping with the omnipresent erotic triangle.

Despite the variety of scenarios that lead to erotic triangles, it is apparent that the triangle is a constant structure in the French, Italian and Spanish texts. In accordance with Judith Bennett's explanation of history-as-continuity, we see that there were no great shifts that dramatically altered women's position in this triangle. Instead, what becomes apparent across the works is that certain women were more powerful than others. Indeed, power is a central factor in all the stories. As we have seen, in each erotic triangle, there is always one character who is better able to manipulate the situation or control the other characters. In many cases, a character's power is manifested through words. Zima, in Decameron III,5, for instance, allows Francesco to hear what he wants to, while through a cunning use of monologue, conveys to Francesco's wife a plan for how they can deceive her husband. Through words, Zima has the ability to inflict a great amount of pain on Francesco by cuckolding him, and as readers, we admire Zima's linguistic prowess while scorning Francesco for his inability to read effectively. Although Francesco does not discover his wife's infidelity, there are other husbands who do, and in these cases it is possible that the power balance in the triangle favours the bonds of *amicitia*. This is evident in the third *nouvelle* about the *musnier* and the *chevalier* who willingly agree never to discuss the double seduction they carried out. In this case, the two husbands maintain control of the triangle by arranging for its conclusion together, thus further alienating their already duped wives from the triangle constructed by their husbands. There are also stories that I have not discussed in detail where violence erupts and power is manifested through brute force instead of humour, irony or deceit. This is the case in Decameron IV, 9, where Sir Guiglielmo Rossiglione discovers that his wife has been cheating on him with his best friend Guardastagno. Rossiglione invites Guardastagno to his house for dinner, ambushes Guardastagno in the forest and then prepares Guardastagno's heart for dinner.¹⁰⁴ When

¹⁰⁴ See footnote 76 in chapter three for more discussion of this story.

Rossiglione's wife finds out that she has eaten her lover's heart, she throws herself from a high window to the ground and dies, and she is buried with her lover. Here the erotic triangle is more than destabilized – it is destroyed: Rossiglione ineffectively ends the erotic triangle by using brute force as a means of power instead of the more subtle tool of language.

Language and violence are only two ways that power can be manifested in erotic triangles. Also worthy of further study is the nexus between the gaze and power in erotic triangles. In 1975 Laura Mulvey problematized how men, both in film and in the audience, gaze at women on the screen. She suggested that the pleasure in looking has typically been split between the active male and the passive female where male fantasies are projected onto the female form. As such, women's appearances are "coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (62). In film, women as erotic figures can be objectified through close-ups of their bodies which in turn fetishize their bodies (63). This fetishization indicates a deeper fear of castration: the female body, a potentially threatening object, is turned into a fetishized object in order to reassure the male spectator (65). Borrowing the Freudian term 'scopophilia,' Mulvey gives a name to the sexual pleasure derived from watching women's bodies on film and in a darkened room (24, 26). Mulvey's writing on the gaze has been criticized, but it has nonetheless marked film and literary scholarship concerned with the depiction of women, bodies, and sexuality. In medieval studies, for instance, E. Jane Burns has written about how women's body parts have become objects of male fetishization, particularly in Courtly Romance, commenting that "female anatomy is first eroticized by the male gaze that constructs it as a collection of seemingly naked body parts" (*Bodytalk* 110). She continues that the body is often re-dressed in sumptuous clothing that is described in as much detail as the body parts themselves (110). With regard to the *fabliaux* tradition, Burns writes that women's body parts are also fetishized, a phenomenon which: "tend[s] to reduce women to

mindless, gaping orifices, bodies whose speech can be dismissed as petty harassment or idle chatter...”(112).

Concepts such as scopophilia and fetishization are also applicable to the Cnn, the Decameron, and the Lba, where we observe not only the traditional male gaze, but more importantly, instances of the female gaze which might even usurp the male one. Because concepts such as scopophilia and fetishization are interconnected with sexuality and sexual prowess, our understanding of the female gaze also influences our understanding of how some women’s sexuality and power are constructed in these texts. The erotic triangle between Trotaconventos, Doña Garoça and the Archpriest in the Lba provides an extreme example of how power and the gaze work together. After Urraca has begun to woo Doña Garoça for the Archpriest, Garoça finally asks the go-between to be serious and to describe the Archpriest for her. In the section called *De las figuras del arçipreste* (What the Archpriest looked like) (1485-1507), Trotaconventos concedes, and begins by describing the man’s overall appearance. Then, in the style of a courtly lover talking about his beloved, Trotaconventos continues her narrative portrait with a detailed picture of the Archpriest’s frame, mouth and limbs: “el cuerpo ha bien largo, mienbros grandes e trifudo,/ la cabeça non chica, velloso, pescoçudo,/ el cuello non muy luengo, cabos prieto, orejudo” (“He has a broad frame and long limbs, he’s robust and muscular./ His head is not small, he is hairy and has a thick neck,/ but not too long, and he has dark hair with large ears”; 1485bcd). Like a courtly lover, she moves her narrative gaze down his body to describe his chest, his arms and his legs: “los ojos ha pequeños, es vn poquillo baço,/ los pechos delanteros, bien trifudo el braco,/ bien conplidas las piernas, del pie chico pedaço” (“His eyes are small, he’s slightly swarthy, his chest is prominent, his arms muscular, his legs are shapely, his feet small”; 1488abc). Finally, the go-between discusses his virtues and

manner, “Es ligero, valiente, byen mançebo de días,/sabe los instrumentos e todas juglarias” (“He is agile, brave, youthful,/ he knows all the instruments and minstrelsy”; 1489ab).

While this section is already striking given its similarities to traditional male descriptions of women’s bodies in the courtly literature tradition, it is even more so when compared to stanzas 431-436. In this section, Don Amor advises the Archpriest on the kind of woman he should seek. Like Trotaconventos who describes the Archpriest’s physical attributes to Doña Garoça one by one, Don Amor tells the Archpriest that he should look for a woman with the following features: “Cata muger fermosa, donosa e loçana,/ que non sea mucho luenga otrosi nin enana; (“Look for a beautiful woman, gay and lively,/ neither too short nor too tall”; 431ab).

Don Amor continues,

busca muger de talla, de cabeça pequena,
cabellos amarillos, non sean de alheña,
las cejas apartadas, luengas, altas en peña,
ancheta de caderas, esta es talla de dueña.

ojos grandes, fermosos, pyntados, Relusientes,
E de luengas pestañas, byen claras e Reyentes,
las orejas pequenas, delgadas; paral mientes
sy ha el cuello alto, atal quieren las gentes.

Look for a woman with a good figure and a small head,
Blonde-haired, but not dyed with henna.
Eyebrows well apart, long and arched;
Her hips should be nice and broad, as a lady should be.

Her eyes should be large, well-set, bright and shining,

With beautiful, long, visible eyelashes.

Her ears should be small, not thick. Notice if her neck is long,

as this is how men like it. (432-33)

This section is akin to the style of the passage discussed by Burns, where a woman's body parts are dismembered and fetishized, evaluated for their size and form, a procedure which thereby undermines the female as a whole. However, when we read this section together with Trotaconventos' own description of the Archpriest, then the two sections have a new meaning. Playing with Don Amor's traditional and sexualized description of women, Trotaconventos uses similar language and a masculine-style gaze to render powerless the man who has become the object of desire. It is ironic that Trotaconventos confuses the terms of the gaze and refocuses it on the Archpriest, because Don Amor had suggested to the Archpriest that he choose a female go-between who will be able to look at a desired woman with a critical eye. In other words, Don Amor advocates finding a woman who can appropriate the male gaze when assessing a woman and give a clear description of the woman's attributes; however, he does not anticipate the games that Trotaconventos plays. Indeed, with Trotaconventos' adoption of traditional male language and gaze, the gender roles in the section *De las figuras del arçipreste* become confused – while she employs the same language as Don Amor did to describe a woman, Trotaconventos uses it to evaluate a man. With her description of the Archpriest, Trotaconventos plays with gender roles and performs the part of the male lover who possesses the oppressive masculine gaze. But how should we read Trotaconventos' performance and her gaze? Can it be gendered either male or female? The solution is not obvious, for suddenly Trotaconventos, who until now has played the part of the asexual old crone, begins to show that she is in fact able to bestow a sexualized gaze on a man. Furthermore, Garoça is intended to

partake in the gaze and to picture the Archpriest according to Trotaconventos' description, thus forcing her to also perform the role of the gazing man. According to Laura Mulvey, the gaze can only be gendered male because it is always men who are actively looking and who encourage other men to look in the same way (63). If this is true, then we might conclude that Trotaconventos and Doña Garoça both perform a masculine role in this section of the episode.¹⁰⁵ At this point they discard their proscribed roles as feminine nun and asexual matchmaker and together perform the part of the courtly lover.

If we accept that Trotaconventos and Doña Garoça are both performing masculine roles then the triangular relationship that has been forming between two women and one man is reversed. In addition, by the conclusion of the episode, the homosocial subtext – this time between two women – that has been building from the beginning of the episode is brought to the forefront. From a formerly intellectual discussion concerned with chastity, reputation, and sexual desire, comes a homosocial relationship whose focal point is the feminized attributes of a man. Now the Archpriest, once cast as the desiring man, has been made into a sexual object. Furthermore, by desiring this man through their oppressive gaze, the two women have been brought closer together, and their relationship moves farther along the homosocial spectrum, away from friendship and toward homosocial desire. In other words, the Archpriest acts as a conduit for the female homosocial relationship. In the erotic triangle, control over the gaze equals power, and by appropriating the trappings of the traditional male gaze, Trotaconventos becomes the key figure in this tri-partite relationship.

¹⁰⁵ I am taking my definition of performativity from Judith Butler. Very succinctly, in her description of the sex/gender differentiation, she writes that performing a certain gender is a choice available to every man and woman. She writes, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being" (43-44). It is particularly striking to see two women who until this point were gendered feminine to suddenly, and without warning, begin to perform the role of the male courtier gazing at an emasculated man as though he were a woman.

The relationship between Trotaconventos, the Archpriest and Garoça is only one example of how the gaze, power and sexuality work together in erotic triangles. There are many other situations in the Lba, the Decameron and the Cnn that also merit an examination of this phenomenon. Nelly Labère explores how the supposed veracity of the gaze is compromised when it is connected to two other ‘uncovered holes’ – the eye and the buttocks –thereby forming a new kind of triangle. She writes that in the first *nouvelle*, although the husband *sees* his wife’s naked buttocks in front of him, his speech (the mouth) makes it clear that he does not believe in the truth being revealed before his eyes (207). The primordial and deceptive nature of sight is also exemplified in the sixteenth *nouvelle* when the wife ‘tests’ her husband’s blindness, thus controlling his gaze and allowing her lover to escape from a compromising situation. The gaze is also central to Decameron VIII, 7, the story about the scholar Rinieri who falls in love with the widow Elena. Gazing at her in a crowded room, the scholar immediately desires this woman who is “piena di tanta bellezza al suo giudizio et di tanta piacevolezza quanto alcuna altra ne gli fosse mai paruta vedere” (675:6) (“so graced with beauty and charm, more so than any other woman he had ever seen”; 505). But Elena is aware of her beauty and charm, and because she desires another man and wants to make him jealous, she encourages the scholar’s attention by artfully casting glances back in his direction: “E cominciato con la coda dell’occhio alcuna volta a guardare, in quanto ella poteva s’ingegnava di dimostrargli che di lui gli calesse” (675-7:9) (“And she began to look at him from time to time from the corner of her eye, doing her best to show him that he mattered to her” (505)).¹⁰⁶ After this scene, the scholar comes to harm due to the power of his desiring and possessive gaze, but in the end, it is the woman, who first

¹⁰⁶ This scene can also be read against the Zima story where Francesco’s wife communicates with Zima through a series of gazes and sighs. However, unlike Zima, who interprets the woman’s looks appropriately, Rinieri proves to be an ineffectual interpreter of these looks and the situation in which they were cast, is consequently humiliated and harmed by the woman, after which he exacts his revenge. Millicent Marcus writes that in fact, Rinieri proves to be a “literal-minded and exacting fool” (“Misogyny as Misreading” 142) who allows his desire to be “transformed into an antifeminist rage” when he punishes the woman he had initially objectified (132).

manipulates how she is looked at and then tries to control the scholar himself by pitting him against another lover, who is truly punished. In this story the desiring gaze acts as a catalyst for a brutal power struggle that occurs in an erotic triangle between Rinieri, Elena and her lover.

These brief examples highlight how power and the gaze can function together in erotic triangles, thus further complicating our understanding of sexual relations and the construction of women's bodies in late medieval texts. While an examination of the gaze is one avenue for further study, the topic of (in)fertility in erotic triangles is another area that requires consideration. It is striking that in many of the adulterous tales in all three works, the sexual unions between the woman and her husband or the woman and her lover rarely involve conception. In fact, only three women conceive in the Cnn (the twenty-second, nineteenth, and eighth *nouvelles*), two in the Decameron (X,4; III, 8), and there are no children mentioned in the Lba.¹⁰⁷ It is not only startling that the number of times the characters engage in sex seems to be inversely proportional to the number of children conceived, but also, because there was so much emphasis given to procreation in debates on sex in the Middle Ages, it is strange that so few children actually result from the number of unions in any of the texts.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, it was generally believed in the Middle Ages that procreation could only happen when the woman experienced sexual pleasure because the female seed also needed to be released (Cadden 142). This supposition began to change by the thirteenth century, around the time that Aristotle's Generation of Animals was being translated, and philosophers disassociated women's sexual satisfaction from the emission of seed – a verdict which “absolved men of a reproductive

¹⁰⁷ That there are only two illegitimate children in the Decameron is interesting, given that Boccaccio was himself an illegitimate child and he sired five illegitimate children of his own.

¹⁰⁸ As Dyan Elliott has pointed out, following Augustine, Thomas of Chobham wrote that couples were only allowed to have sex in order to procreate, if one spouse requires it, or if one spouse wants to have extramarital sex, then she or he should turn to the spouse for relief instead (50). Of course, Augustine and Chobham were only referring to sex between a married couple, and extramarital sex was an unequivocal sin.

interest in women's sexual satisfaction" (143).¹⁰⁹ Therefore, given the prevailing notion that women needed to experience pleasure in order to conceive, it is even more surprising how few women conceive in these tales.

Georges Duby gives one reason for the lack of children in adulterous tales, writing that bastardry was too serious a matter to discuss in literature (The Knight, the Lady and the Priest 222).¹¹⁰ The dearth of children in these stories also highlights how many of these adulterous women neglect their wifely duties in general: therefore perhaps one message is that adultery encourages women to neglect their husbands, their households, and their duty to procreate. Conversely, it is possible that these stories carry an implicit moral message that because of their adultery, these women are punished with barrenness. Still, it is undeniable that the absence of children is essential for the story's logic to persist. Indeed, not only would conceiving a child raise the prickly question of bastardry and inheritance, but a child's existence would also provide living proof of a woman's infidelity or a friend's deception. This, in turn, would undermine the very trick or play on words that provided a *bon mot* and ensured a humorous end to a potentially dangerous situation. Yet another possibility to consider in the issue has been briefly raised by Marilyn Migiel, who asks whether in the Decameron, female fertility actually threatens male fantasies about women (A Rhetoric of the Decameron 68).

Migiel's question also raises another, far more general problem in literature: how to control the threatening female body. The issue of how it was manifested in medieval literature

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle writes in Book II, section 4 of his On Generation of Animals that "It is impossible to conceive without the emission of the male in union and without the secretion of the corresponding female material, whether it be discharged externally or whether there is only enough within the body. Women conceive, however, without experiencing the pleasure usual in such intercourse, if the part chance to be in heat and the uterus have descended" (34).

¹¹⁰ This assertion is nuanced by Peggy McCracken who, in her study of adulterous queens in The Romance of Adultery, shows that while illegitimacy sometimes hidden, it was never absent. In the Livre de Caradoc, for instance, she finds an example of an illegitimate son who is not only acknowledged as such, but is eventually crowned king, thus demonstrating that sometimes even illegitimate children do not threaten succession or courtly politics.

has been discussed by many, including McCracken, who has examined this theme in conjunction with childbearing and adultery in *Cligés*. She explains that even once queen Fenice is married, but before beginning an affair, she wishes to stay a virgin so that she cannot produce offspring whose lineage might be questioned by the court. By remaining a virgin, Fenice ensures that her body remains “intact, complete, and integral; since the state of the body may reflect the state of the soul, the body’s integrity counters spiritual disintegration” (“The Body Politic” 52). However, Fenice’s resolve is eventually swayed, and she opens up her body to her lover. McCracken notes that when Fenice loses her virginity, the integrity of her virginal body is split into two: as a sexualized body, it is now fragmented, caught between plenitude and lack, and split between two men. In other words, Fenice’s body has become the opposite of the “patristic ideal of physical *integritas*” (52). Although we might think that Fenice’s body becomes threatening only once it is divided, McCracken notes that the queen’s body always represents a danger: as a virgin she went against her duty to provide an heir to succeed her husband, and as an adulteress she threatens the integrity of the noble lineage (38). It turns out then, that although Fenice’s adultery proved dangerous, even in a state of physical *integritas*, her body was equally threatening and needed to be controlled.

The women in my three primary texts do not bear the same amount of responsibility as Fenice to produce an heir, but they nonetheless face many of the same contradictions as the French queen: many find they must find fulfillment outside marriage, while at the same time are expected to fulfill their duties as wives and child bearers. The problem, however, faced by Fenice, the women in the stories, and even real women, is that women who found themselves split in two were often left to work out this conflict on their own. Indeed, as women, their lives and desires were often cleaved: they were expected to act decorously as wives, but also found they had personal urges to be filled. Although Fenice does not have sex with her husband or her

own accord, she, like many of the women, still needs to go outside marriage to fill the lack. The case of Madonna Filippa in VI, 7, for instance, provides an excellent example of a clever woman who shares herself with both her husband and her lover by trying to fulfill the lack she experiences in her marriage. When she is caught with her lover by her husband and brought to trial for her adultery, she asks the judge his opinion about her relationship with her husband: “domando io voi, messer podestà, se egli ha sempre di me preso quello che gli è bisognato e piaciuto, io che doveva fare o debbo di quel che gli avanza? debbolo io gittare a’ cani? Non è egli molto meglio servirne un gentile uomo che più che sé m’ama, che lasciarlo perdere o guastare?” (532:17) (“I ask you, Messer *Podestà*, if he has always taken of me whatever he needed and however much pleased him, what was I supposed to do then, and what am I to do now, with what is left over? Should I throw it to the dogs? Is it not much better to give it to a gentleman who loves me more than himself, rather than let it go to waste or spoil?”; 398). In this speech Madonna Filippa simultaneously articulates one of the predicaments some women face in marriage, and rationalizes her dangerous behaviour within the male-controlled court. Although Madonna Filippa’s situation does not include the problem of illegitimate children, her explanation of her motivations for her adultery and the creation of an erotic triangle, read within the framework of sexual ‘lack,’ provides a focus for unravelling the unwieldy problem of the threatening female body. Indeed, this problem, as articulated by McCracken and demonstrated by Madonna Filippa, provides yet another avenue that merits enquiry.

This dissertation has only begun to explore the possibilities for investigating constructions of sexuality, power and linguistic control in the erotic triangle. As we have seen, the erotic triangle is a constant, but unstable formation that continually reappears in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, the Decameron, and the Libro de buen amor, but also in many other works. As I have shown, a comparative reading of these texts not only allows us to examine the politics

of the erotic triangle, but it also facilitates a deeper understanding of the roles that different women played across textual, geographical and temporal boundaries. This analysis has demonstrated that there are women in these three texts who are able to usurp male power, control who touches their bodies, and decide whether they will be exchanged, even as they struggle against their male counterparts, and perhaps also against the men who are authoring their fiction. I hope that now, at the end of this dissertation, the voices of some of these female characters have been heard, their words have been listened to, and their efforts have been added to the historical and literary record slowly being reconstructed by medieval feminists.

Appendix A

Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles:

A Taxonomy of the Erotic Triangles

TOTAL stories with erotic triangles: 44

Erotic Triangles between Two Men and One Woman

A male homosocial bond is formed (8 stories)

1 – *Monseigneur*: A woman bathes and eats with the neighbour who has seduced her and when the husband comes to the door – the woman escapes. The woman then arrives back at the house before her husband, and when he knocks on the door, she does not let him in. She then yells at her husband loudly to make sure that the whole household believes that he came home drunk, and that she had been in her apartment the whole evening.

3 – *Monseigneur de la Roche* – This story involves two erotic triangles. A knight seduces the miller's wife by telling her that her genitals are in danger of falling out. When the miller discovers this trick, he seduces the knight's wife by telling her that her diamond ring is lost in her body. When the two men meet each other in the street after both seductions, they greet each other as 'curer of genitals' and 'fisher of diamonds' and agree never to talk about the incidents again.

31 – *Monseigneur de la Barde*: A knight tells his servant about the woman he loves. The servant finds the lady and seduces her. The knight finds out and they decide to share the lady.

33 – *Monseigneur*: Two men find that they have the same lover and, after catching her out on her trick, decide to share her.

43 – *Monseigneur de Fiennes*: An unsuccessful merchant goes home and finds another man having sex with his wife. While the wife and her lover are in bed, the merchant negotiates with the lover and his wife about the number of barrels of hay the lover should pay so that he can 'finish' with the wife. After a hard bargain, driven by the woman, the men settle on twelve

barrels of hay in two payments, but the wife reminds her husband that the deal is only valid if her lover can finish the job.

62 – *Monseigneur de Quievrain*: Jehan Stotton and his best friend Thomas Brampton are so close they are almost like one man. They are together in Calais as part of a large meeting and they both desire the innkeeper's wife. Jehan Stotton approaches the woman and she tells him to come to her bedroom from six am until midnight. Thomas Brampton also approaches the woman and she tells him to come after midnight. During the night Jehan's diamond ring slips from his finger. Later, Thomas finds the ring in the bed and takes it. When Jehan discovers his ring on Thomas' finger, they fight about who should keep it. Richard, the innkeeper, comes by and they ask him who should have the ring, and Richard decides he should keep it himself. Alone, the two men decide that the ring was a small price to pay for the use of the innkeeper's wife.

65 – *Monseigneur le Prevost de Wastenens*: A man tells his wife and others about an innkeeper who has the largest penis he has ever seen. The wife is interested and pretends to go on pilgrimage to Mont St. Michel to see the man. The husband figures out why she's going and he arrives before her and asks the innkeeper to show her good hospitality, but not to touch her. The innkeeper agrees and when the woman arrives she is disappointed that nothing happens. When she gets home, her husband tells her what he did and she agrees never to try anything like that again.

87 – *Monsieur le Voyer*: A knight has a lovely servant whom he loves. One day, the knight has a problem with his eye and a surgeon comes to look at it. The surgeon desires the servant, and she him, and they devise a plan whereby they allow the knight's eye to worsen and then they will convince him that he has to cover his good eye as well for the healing process. When this is done, they take their pleasure many times. One day they are too loud, the knight overhears them, opens his good eye and sees what's happening. But the two men make up and the eye heals.

A pre-existing male homosocial bond is broken (2 stories)

7 – *Monseigneur* (also classified in *the lover doesn't get away with adultery*): A 'chareton' shares a bed with a couple and tries to take the wife, but the husband catches him on time.

9 – *Monseigneur*: A man falls in love with his servant, but his wife takes his servant's place in bed and both he and his friend end up sleeping with the wife.

No homosocial bond is formed

a) The lover gets away with the adultery, but the husband knows he has been cuckolded (7 stories)

4 – *Monseigneur*: A husband is too cowardly to kill the Scot who sleeps with his wife.

22 – *Caron*: A man leaves his pregnant wife to go to war, and when he is gone she has an affair with the neighbour and she tells the neighbour that the child is his. When her husband comes back at first he demands his child, but then leaves the couple in peace.

37 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A very jealous husband who has studied all forms of womanly deception is impressed when his wife finds a way to deceive him in a way he had never heard of. She arranges things so that her lover dirties her dress and, as her servant fetches her a fresh one, the lovers spend time together.

61 – *Poncelet*: A man knows that his wife is cheating on him and devises a plan to trap her lover in his house. Once the man is trapped, the husband goes to fetch the woman's entire family to prove her infidelity to them. While the husband is away, the wife discovers her trapped lover and finds an old key that opens the door to the room. The lover escapes, and they replace him with a donkey. When the husband comes back to the house with his wife's family, the husband tries to make the woman admit to having a lover but she refuses. When the husband opens the door to expose her lover and everyone sees a donkey instead, the woman's family is extremely upset with the husband for the shame he caused them. Peace is struck between the families and the husband is kind to his wife for the rest of their lives.

71 – *Monseigneur le Duc*: A man who is staying at an inn sleeps with the innkeeper's wife. The couple forget to close the door and the innkeeper sees them and is outraged that they didn't close the door because someone else might have found them.

93 – *Messire Timoleon Vignier, Gentilhomme de la Chambre de Monseigneur*: A woman is in love with a clerk. She tells her husband she's going on a pilgrimage and he asks her to go only for one day. The morning of, she buys some fish and meat and has new shoes made and then she asks her clerk to come to her house while her husband is at the tavern. The husband, having seen the meat and fish, invites his friends to his house, but when they get there, they see the man's wife on her back with her shoes in the air. The husband admires how much the woman respects his money, by saving her shoes and going on pilgrimage on her back. Then he goes back to the tavern and never bothers to rush home again.

b) *The lover doesn't get away with adultery (6 stories + 1 already accounted for)*

7 – *Monseigneur* (also classified under *A pre-existing male homosocial bond is broken*): A 'chareton' shares a bed with a couple and tries to take the wife, but the husband catches him on time.

44 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A simple woman is desired by a priest, but she won't sleep with him out of fear of becoming pregnant. He negotiates with her parents and with a man's parents for her to be married, and he even provides the dowry. The future husband finds out about the priest's intentions just before the marriage. After the wedding, when the woman asks her husband to 'ride her' he rapes her instead. Then he makes love to her and says that this is called 'blowing up the asshole.' When the priest asks to ride the woman, she refuses, but says that he can whistle up her asshole. The priest is disgusted and doesn't have anything else to do with the woman.

56 – *Monseigneur de Villiers* (also classified under *the woman is punished*): A man knows that his wife is sleeping with the priest and that his wife's servant is lying to him. He and his cousin pretend to go on a pilgrimage, but spy on the wife instead. During the night they dig a large

hole in the forest. First a wolf falls in. Then the priest falls in. Then the servant falls in. The woman is afraid that her servant and the priest are having sex, so she goes out and she falls in the hole. The next morning the men set fire to the hole. When they tell the king about the incident, he laments the killing of an innocent wolf.

72 – *Monseigneur de Quievrain*: A woman and her lover (who is also her neighbour) are interrupted in bed when the woman's husband comes home early with some friends. The lover is very sick and cannot escape easily and so he has to find another way of leaving the house. The man takes his sword and the woman paints him black and he leaves through the front door, with everyone believing that he is a devil.

73 – *Maistre Jehan Lauvin*: A priest desires a man's wife, and he decides that the only way he can get to the woman is to become friends with the husband. The man is told by his neighbours the priest's intentions and he refuses to see the priest. Nonetheless, he knows he is being deceived by his wife. When he tries to catch her she hides her priest in the dairy pantry. The man asks for a divorce and they divide their possessions. He husband says that he'll take the pantry immediately. In transit, the priest jumps out of the pantry, covered in eggs and butter and the husband allows the priest to run away. The husband then returns home, the couple reconciles and they have no more problems.

85 – *Monseigneur de Santilly*: A smith works all the time, and his wife starts having an affair with the priest. The husband's valet notices the affair and, because he loves the woman but she will not have him, he tells his master. So the husband and the valet catch the two in the act, and they take the priest to the man's smithy where he is forced into choosing whether he wants to lose his balls or be burned in a fire. The priest chooses to live without his balls.

c) *The husband does not know he's been cuckolded (9 stories)*

13 – *Monseigneur de Castregat*: A clerk tells his master that he does not have testicles. As a result, the clerk is allowed to watch over his master's wife with whom he is having an affair.

16 – *Monseigneur*: The wife of a man blind in one eye has an affair while her husband is at war. When he comes back, she covers his good eye while her lover escapes by the very door the husband is standing in.

23 – *Monseigneur de Quiévrain*: A woman and her husband's clerk have a session where he practices his writing on her parchment.

28 – *Michault de Chaugy*: A man loves the servant of the Queen. This servant always sleeps in the same bed as the Queen when the king is not there. In order to sleep with the servant, the man takes the Queen's dog outside the room and makes the dog bark during the night, thus giving an excuse to the servant to get out of bed and tend to the dog. But when the servant comes to find the dog and him, he cannot get erect. The servant goes back to bed with the Queen and a series of *double entendres* ensue where the Queen believes the servant is talking about the dog, when in fact she is talking about her unsuccessful lover.

27 – *Monseigneur de Beauvoir*: A woman makes a bet with her husband that he can't fit into her chest – he does and he spends the night there while she sleeps with another man. The servants are blamed for the trick and the husband does not discover the true reason why he was locked in the chest.

41 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A stupid woman marries a knight. Each time they have sex the woman must dress up in armour. When the knight leaves for war, the woman invites a clerk to her room, and when he arrives she is in full armour. The clerk shows the woman another way of having sex, which she much prefers. When the knight returns, the woman almost lets her secret slip, but covers herself at the last minute.

48 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A man falls in love with a married woman and although she agrees to sleep with him, she always refuses to kiss him. When asked why, she replies that she had made many promises to her husband through her mouth, but not through her 'surplus,' so as far as she is concerned, she can do what she wants with that region, but not with her mouth.

67 – *Philipe de Loan*: A ‘chaperon’ loves a married woman and tells her that he will marry her when her husband dies. When the woman is widowed the chaperon tires of her and tells her he is devoting himself to the church and he marries her off to a barber. Some time later, the chaperon gets engaged to a wealthy woman and when the first woman hears about it, she goes in front of a judge who proclaims that the chaperon has to marry the first woman.

88 – *Alardin*: A woman has a lover whom she sees whenever her husband leaves the city. One day the lover comes to the house, but the husband arrives home early to find the doors and shutters of the house closed. When the woman opens the door, she tells her husband that the police had been there, because he was accused of murdering someone. The husband tries to escape the city before nightfall, but the gate is already closed, so he returns home and hides in the *colon*. The next morning, the husband leaves the city and stays in the countryside for many days, to the great delight of his wife.

The wife does not get away with the adultery – she is punished (6 stories + 1 already accounted for)

19 – *Philipe Vignier*: A merchant leaves his wife first for five years, then for ten years. During the first five years the woman is faithful, but during the ten-year period, she has another child, which she tells her husband was born when she ate snow. The husband seems to believe his wife, until the time that the snow child is grown up and the husband takes the boy away with him, ostensibly to teach him the trade. While away, the husband abandons the bastard child, and when the husband comes home without the child, he tells his wife that because the boy was made from snow he melted in the exotic heat.

47 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A man knows that he’s being cuckolded. He tells his wife that there is a family wedding the following week and asks her if she’d like to go. In the meantime, he feeds one of his mules salt without allowing him to drink. When the wife leaves the following week, the parched mule she is riding sees the Rhône river and runs toward it, throwing the woman into the river where she drowns. The husband is pleased that he is rid of his wife.

49 – *Pierre David*: A man suspects that his wife is cheating on him and one day he spies her in the bedroom with another man. The woman assures her lover that her mouth, eyes, hands, nipples, stomach, vagina and thighs belong to him, but she says that her ass is for her husband. The husband invites the woman's family to dinner the next week and gives her a strange dress that is scarlet in the area of the buttocks. When asked why, he relates what he witnessed and says that he dressed up her ass in a way that befits a cuckold and that he was returning his wife to her family in that state.

52 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A man's dying father gives him three pieces of advice, the last one being not to marry a foreign woman. The man does just that, but on the night of his marriage he is told that the tradition is to wait a night before consummating the marriage. That night he spies from the room next door his wife sleeping with the priest. He brings his new family all the way back to his house and reveals what happened and everyone, including the wife, goes back to where they came from.

56 – *Monseigneur de Villiers* (also classified under *lover doesn't get away with the adultery*): A man knows that his wife is sleeping with the priest and that his wife's servant is lying to him. He and his cousin pretend to go on a pilgrimage, but spy on the wife instead. During the night they dig a large hole in the forest. First a wolf falls in the hole. Then the priest falls in the hole. Then the servant falls in the hole. The woman is afraid that her servant and the priest are having sex, so she goes out and she falls in the hole. The next morning the men set fire to the hole. When they tell the king about the incident, he laments the killing of an innocent wolf.

68 – *Messire Chrestien de Dyogyne, Chevalier*: A woman cheats on her husband frequently and he is sick of it. One day he asks her to give him all the valuables she has and in exchange he will excuse all her sins. She does so willingly until she's naked. He then says that she must leave his house – she came to him naked, and naked she will leave. He refuses to ever see her again.

Triangle with Widows or Single Women with Two Men (2 stories)

46 – *Monseigneur de Thienges*: A ‘maistre jacobin’ is having sex with a nun and they are forced to meet outside under a pear tree in order to continue their affair. A young man overhears their plans for a rendez-vous and he hides in the tree. Just before they are about to have sex, the man in the tree speaks and shakes the tree so that pears fall on the couple. The Jacobin runs away and the young man catches the nun before she can leave.

She is very happy that the Jacobin finished what the man could not.

69 – *Monseigneur*: A woman is forced to remarry after her husband goes on a crusade and is thought dead. When she finds out that he’s alive and coming home, she dies of grief for having betrayed him.

Erotic Triangles between two Women and one Man (5 stories)

8 – *de la Roche*: A Piccardian makes his boss’ daughter pregnant. He returns to Picardie to his wife. Later he finds out that his wife was also cheating and he returns to the girl he impregnated.

17 – *Monseigneur*: A learned man falls for his maid and when he approaches her one morning, she makes him dress up like a cook and then she fetches his wife. Both women see the man in the kitchen and they laugh at him. The man then goes to the tavern to tell his friends how he was mocked.

40 – *Messire Michault de Chaugy*: A monk deserts one lover for another. The rejected woman decides to climb down the monk’s chimney to see what he’s doing, but she gets stuck.

9 – *Poncelet*: A man pretends to be ill so that he and his wife will go to bed early. Once his wife is asleep he goes to the female servant’s bed and the two sleep together. The wife wakes up in the middle of the night and sees the two together and then calls her children and the other servants to witness the scene. The following day the wife organizes a large dinner and confronts her husband at the table. When he tries to deny what happened, he finds out that everyone at the

table witnessed what happened. After, he asks his son to make sure that the servant is well-provided for and that his wife is happy. He never tries the same trick again.

92 – *L'acteur*: a married woman is in love with a *chanoine* and, because he lives in a busy area, she asks her good friend to accompany her to his house and to wait while they have sex. After the couple has sex, the friend wants to have sex with the man as well. She cannot be persuaded otherwise, so the *chanoine* agrees. After this, the first woman is jealous, so she has sex with the man again. When they're ready to leave, the *chanoine* gives the woman a present to be divided between the women two-thirds and one-third. The second woman does not want her third, but half the gift, but the first woman says she deserves two-thirds because she slept with the man twice. The women start fighting on the road and their husbands come. Neither man discovers the reason for the fight but they start fighting each other and end up in jail. The women never tell the judge what happened and the two men remain in jail.

Other Tales of Adultery of Interest

One married couple and two others – where someone is used as a substitute for someone else
(3 stories – not included as 'erotic triangles')

35 – *Monseigneur de Villiers*: A woman marries a knight, but when the knight she loves comes back, she sends her servant to sleep with her husband while she sleeps with her lover.

38 – *Philippe de Loan*: A man orders a piece of meat to his home but his wife sends it to her lover. She denies having received it, and that night asks her neighbour to sleep in her bed. The husband whips the neighbour without knowing it and the wife convinces him he is crazy.

39 – *Monseigneur de Saint Pol*: A woman sends her maid Jehannette, to keep her lover company. She does so. Then, at night when she is with her lover, Jehannette keeps the woman's husband company.

Miscellaneous (2 stories – not included as 'erotic triangles')

18 – *Monseigneur de la Roche*: A 'gentil homme' from Burgundy goes to Paris and upon seeing the hotel's chamber maid, desires her. When the man's valet propositions her on his

behalf, the woman says that she will sleep with him for 10 *écus*. Although the man does not have that amount of money to spare, he finds it and spends the night with the woman. Early the next morning, the woman wants to leave the bedroom and asks for her money. The man refuses, saying that he wants her to stay the morning. She refuses, and says that she will be fired if her master or mistress finds her with a guest of the hotel. The man then makes a loud sound which brings the hotel owner to the room. The man explains to the owner that his chambermaid had just come by to return something that she had borrowed from him. With these words, the chambermaid knew she had lost her money and the ‘gentil homme’ returned to Burgundy to happily tell his story.

64 – *Messire Michault de Chaugy*: A priest ‘confesses’ all the women in the village. One day a ‘ballcutter’ arrives and the priest decides to play a trick on him: to pretend that he has a bad testicle and wants it cut off. His plan is to moon the man before he is able to do the deed. It does not work out that way, and both his balls are cut off – much to the dismay of the women in the village and to the great pleasure of their husbands.

78 – *Jehan Martin*: A knight goes travelling for a long time and while he is gone, his wife has three lovers who give her many gifts. When the knight returns he is convinced that other men gave his wife those gifts, since he did not leave enough money to buy everything she now owns. The wife denies the allegation, and so the knight decides to dress up like a priest in order to hear her confession. When the wife is asked about her possessions, she replies that it was an *escuier* and a knight who offered them to her. Soon the knight can no longer hear any more and he reveals himself. The woman claims that she always knew it was he, and she was always talking about him: when she married him, he was an *escuier*, and when he came back he was a knight. The chevalier feels guilty for having doubted his wife and apologises.

Appendix B

Decameron: A Taxonomy of the Erotic Triangles

TOTAL stories with erotic triangles: 21

Erotic Triangles between Two Men and One Woman

A male homosocial bond is formed (4 stories)

V.10: These two men become more than friends! Pietro di Vinciolo goes out to eat supper and in the meantime, his wife has a lover come to the house. When Pietro returns home, his wife hides her lover under a chicken coop. Pietro tells his wife that while he was at the home of friend, Ercolano, a young man was discovered hiding who had been put there by Ercolano's wife. Pietro's wife criticizes Ercolano's wife severely; unfortunately at that moment, a donkey steps on the fingers of the young man hidden beneath the coop, and he cries out. Pietro runs to the coop, sees the man and realizes his wife's deception. Finally, the couple reaches an arrangement in accordance with the husband's wishes: in short, the husband is accused of being gay, and the two men and the woman enjoy a night together, so that the next day the young man doesn't know who he spent more time with – the woman or her husband.

X.4: Messer Gentil de' Carisendi, having arrived from Modena, takes from a tomb a lady he has loved who has been buried alive. Once revived, the woman gives birth to a male child. Messer Gentile then restores the woman and her son to Niccoluccio Caccianimino, her husband, during a banquet. Before she is brought out, Gentile uses logic to convince everyone at the banquet that what he had restored to life ought to belong to him. Despite this, he gives back the lady he loves and he is highly respected.

X.5: Messer Ansaldo loves the married Madonna Dianora. She tells him she will only love him if he can give her a garden that would be as beautiful in January as in May. By hiring a magician, Messer Ansaldo manages to grant her wish. When Dianora's husband discovers the arrangement, he agrees that she must fulfill Messer Ansaldo's desires, but when Messer Ansaldo hears of her husband's generosity, he frees her from her promise. When the magician hears what happened, he then refuses to accept payment from Ansaldo.

X.8: Sophronia, believing that she is the wife of Gisippus, is actually married to Titus Quintus Fulvius. The couple goes to Rome after which Gisippus arrives in an impoverished state. Believing that he has been scorned by Titus, Gisippus must face a false accusation that he has murdered a man alone. When Titus recognizes his friend on trial, he declares that he himself committed the murder in order to save Gisippus. When the actual murderer perceives this, he confesses; as a result, they are all freed by Octavianus. Finally, Titus gives Gisippus his sister in marriage and shares all his possessions with him.

A pre-existing homosocial bond is broken (1 story)

IV.9: Sir Guilglielmo Rossiglione finds out that his wife has a lover – his friend Guardastagno. Rossiglione invites Guardastagno to his house for dinner, and ambushes Guardastagno in the forest by his house. He then prepares Guardastagno's heart and makes his wife eat it without her knowing. When the lady discovers this, she throws herself from a high window to the ground and dies, and she is buried with her lover.

No Homosocial Bond is Formed

a) The lover gets away with the adultery, but the husband knows he has been cuckolded (3 stories)

III.3: A groom lies with the wife of King Agilulf, and Agilulf discovers this but says nothing. One night the king follows the man and shears his hair while he is asleep, but the lover discovers this before dawn and so shears all the others in the room, thus avoiding coming to a bad end.

IV.8: Girolamo loves Salvestra but he is persuaded by his mother's entreaties to go to Paris. When he returns he discovers Salvestra married. Nonetheless, he secretly enters her home and dies there by her side. His body is then taken to a church, and when Salvestra realizes she still loves Girolamo, she dies by his side.

VI.7: Madonna Filippa is discovered by her husband with a lover of hers, and when she is called before a judge, with a ready and amusing reply she secures her freedom and causes the statute to be changed. Formerly, the statute read that the husband has the right to request his wife's death

if she is caught cheating on him. But Madonna Filippa tells the judge that she had always satisfied her husband, but she still had needs, and that's why she went elsewhere. So the statute was changed so that if a woman satisfies her husband, but is not satisfied herself, then she should be permitted to seek it elsewhere.

b) *The lover doesn't get away with adultery*

There are no tales of this kind in the Decameron

c) *The husband does not know he's been cuckolded (10 stories)*

III.4: Dom Felice teaches Friar Puccio how to attain sainthood by performing a special penance. Dom Felice tells Puccio to go where he can see the sky, then stretch in the crucified position and wait all night. After matins, Puccio is allowed to sleep after which he must go to church and then start again. While Puccio does this, Felice sleeps with Puccio's wife.

III.5: Zima gives Messer Francesco Vergellesi one of his horses. In return for this gift, Zima is given permission to speak to Vergellesi's wife; however, the wife is ordered not to speak to Zima. So Zima carries out a conversation on his own, replying on the wife's behalf, and in so doing gives her instructions on how to beckon him if she wants him to come to her. When Vergellesi leaves on business with his new horse, his wife considers Zima's proposition and follows the instructions he set out and he comes to her.

III.7: Tedaldo, angry with his lady, leaves Florence. When he returns some time later disguised as a pilgrim, he speaks with the lady and makes her aware of her error. He also frees the lady's husband who had been falsely accused and then condemned to death for murdering Tedaldo. Tedaldo then reconciles the husband with his brothers. Finally he discreetly enjoys himself with his lady.

III.8: After eating a certain powder, Ferondo is buried for dead. In the meantime, the Abbot, who is enjoying Ferondo's wife, takes him out of his tomb, imprisons him, and makes him believe that he is in Purgatory. Once the lady realizes she has become pregnant from the Abbot, the wife and the Abbot decide to take Ferondo out of 'Purgatory.' Before leaving Purgatory

Ferondo is told that he will quickly sire a child. This trip to Purgatory also served to cure Ferondo of his great jealousy so that the wife was happier afterwards. Finally, the Abbot's reputation also grew since he was attributed with bringing Ferondo back to life.

IV.10: The wife of a physician, believing her lover to be dead after he has fallen asleep from taking a drug, puts him inside a chest, which is then carried off with the man inside by two usurers to their home. When the lover comes to his senses, he is arrested as a thief. The wife then tells her servant to tell the physician that she was the one who invited the lover inside the house so that the physician testifies in court that he had made the sleeping potion. In the end, the lover escapes the gallows and the moneylenders are condemned to pay a fine for making off with the chest. After the lover gets off without penalty, the wife and servant and lover all laugh at the event together.

VII.1: A woman has an arrangement for her lover to come to her house, but when the woman's husband, Gianni Litteringhi, comes home early, the wife sends the meal she prepared for her lover into the nearby orchard. That night, the lover knocks on the door to see his lady. Litteringhi hears the knock and wakes up his wife. The lady makes her husband believe that the noise is from a ghost. To get rid of the ghost, the lady says a prayer, which secretly tells the lover that Litteringhi is in the room, and she lets him know where he can go to find the dinner. Litteringhi, meanwhile, is satisfied that his wife has exorcized the ghost.

VII.2: Peronella invites her lover to her house once her husband leaves for work. When the husband comes home unexpectedly, Peronella hides her lover inside a barrel. The husband wants to take that barrel because he sold it to someone else, but she tells him that she has already sold it to someone who is inside of it checking to see if it is sound. Then, her lover jumps out of the barrel and tells the husband that he has to carry it off to his home for him. While the husband is cleaning the inside of the barrel, the wife instructs her husband on the spots he missed while at the same time she encourages her lover to continue making love to her.

VII.9: Lidia, the wife of Nicostrato, is in love with Pirro. In order to test her love, Pirro asks her to perform three tasks, all of which she does for him. One of these tasks is that Lidia has to

have sex with Pirro in Nicostrato's presence. Lidia devises a ruse to trick her husband that he is not seeing what is in front of him, and that way she makes love to Pirro without her husband knowing.

VIII.1: Gulfardo is in love with Guasparuolo's wife, but when he sees that she will only sleep with him for money, he devises a trick to get what he wants and to shame her for attempting to prostitute herself. First, Gulfardo borrows a sum of money from Guasparuolo. He then makes an arrangement with Guasparuolo's wife to sleep with her for the sum of money he has received. Later, in her presence, he tells Guasparuolo he has returned his money to his wife, and she has to admit that it is true.

VIII.2: The priest of Varlungo goes to bed with Monna Belcolore, leaving his cloak with her as a pledge. After borrowing a mortar from her, he sends it back to her and asks that she return the cloak he left as a pledge. Because she received the request in the presence of her husband, the good woman returns it to him with a few well-chosen words.

The wife does not get away with the adultery – she is punished

There are no tales of this kind in the Decameron

Triangle with Widows or Single Women with Two Men (2 stories)

VIII.7: A scholar is in love with a widow, who loves another man and makes the scholar stand one winter night under the snow waiting for her. That summer, the lady is upset that her lover has left her and following the advice of the scholar, she stands outside for an entire day in mid-July on top of a tower, naked and exposed to the flies, horseflies, and the sun.

IX.1: Madonna Francesca is loved by Rinuccio and Allesandro, but loves neither of them in return. In order to get rid of both men at the same time she assigns them an impossible task (without the other knowing). She instructs the first man to play dead in a tomb and tells the other one to go in to carry out what he thinks is a dead body. When they are unable to complete their task, she discreetly manages to rid herself of the both of them.

Erotic Triangles between two Women and one Man (1 story)

IX.5: Calandrino falls in love with a young woman, and Bruno and the woman play a trick on Calandrino. Bruno gives Calandrino a magic formula for him so that as soon as he touches her, the lady goes off with him. At the same time, Bruno calls Calandrino's wife so that she discovers Calandrino with another woman. When Calandrino's wife sees him she beats him up.

Other Tales of Adultery of Interest

Multiple Partners (1 story – not included as 'erotic triangle')

II.7 – The Sultan of Babylon sends his daughter Alatiel to be married to the king of Algarve. She is kidnapped and passes through the hands of nine men in different lands in the space of four years. Eventually she is returned to her father, who believes she is still a virgin, and then she is sent again to the King of Algarve who finally marries her.

Appendix C

Libro de buen amor: A Taxonomy of the Erotic Triangles

TOTAL stories with erotic triangles: 9

Erotic Triangles between Two Men and One Woman

A male homosocial bond is formed

There are no tales of this kind in the Libro de buen amor

A pre-existing male homosocial bond is broken

Cruz the Bakergirl – Ferrand García – The Archpriest:

‘The Cruz Episode’ – stanzas 105-122

The Archpriest loves Cruz the bakergirl from afar. Rather than approaching her himself, he hires a male go-between, Ferrand García, to seduce her in his stead. The Archpriest’s plan backfires, however, and García seduces the girl for himself. The girl never seems to find out about the Archpriest’s affections, but García is considered a traitor.

No homosocial bond is formed

- a) ***The lover gets away with the adultery, but the husband knows he has been cuckolded***

There are no tales of this kind in the Libro de buen amor

- b) ***The lover doesn’t get away with adultery***

There are no tales of this kind in the Libro de buen amor

- c) ***The husband does not know he’s been cuckolded***

Pitas Payas – His Wife – The Artist:

‘The Pitas Payas Episode’ – stanzas 474-489

Pitas Payas is an artist who leaves his new, young wife alone for two years while he goes away to learn his craft. Before he leaves, he paints a picture of a young lamb on her stomach. While he is gone, she finds a lover who is also a painter. When the lady learns that her husband is

coming home, she asks her lover to repaint the picture of the lamb. Instead of painting a lamb, he paints a fully-grown ram with horns. When Payas asks his wife why the picture has changed in his absence, she says that over the two years the lamb grew up and became a ram.

The Archpriest – the mountain woman – Fferuzo:

Serrana 2 – stanzas 972-992

The Archpriest is lost in the mountains and is found by a mountain woman. The woman first attacks him, and then invites him to her house, saying that Fferuzo won't mind (Elizabeth Drayson Macdonald writes that Fferuzo is presumably the woman's companion or husband). The Archpriest goes to her house and has lunch, but refuses to have sex with her. He concludes his story with a song about the incident.

The wife does not get away with the adultery – she is punished

There are no tales of this kind in the Libro de buen amor

Triangle with Widows or Single Women with Two Men

There are no tales of this kind in the Libro de buen amor

Erotic Triangles between two Women and one Man

Endrina – The Go-Between – The Archpriest:

'The Endrina Episode' – stanzas 596-891

The Archpriest, known in this episode as Don Melon, loves the widow Doña Endrina from afar and he hires Trotaconventos to woo her for him. At first Trotaconventos is not successful at wooing the woman and the two women exchange a few fables in order to highlight each one's position on the proposed seduction. Although Endrina does not express interest in the Archpriest, Trotaconventos convinces him otherwise, and tells him that she in fact desires him. Trotaconventos does the same toward Endrina, telling her about the love the Archpriest harbours for her. Endrina begins to change her mind, and agrees to go to Trotaconventos' house to talk things over. It is not entirely clear what happened at the house, but many scholars agree that the Archpriest is waiting for her there and then rapes her. The final stanza indicates that Endrina and Lord Melon were married.

Doña Garoça – The Go-Between – The Archpriest:

‘The Doña Garoça Episode’ – stanzas 1332-1507

Trotaconventos suggests a nun she knows as a possible match for the Archpriest, saying that she used to work for this woman and others in her convent. She goes to the nun Garoça on the Archpriest’s behalf and begins to woo her for him. The nun understands why Garoça is there and the two women exchange a series of fables that function as a means of debating whether Garoça should accept the Archpriest’s advances. In the end, it is not clear what happens exactly between Garoça and the Archpriest, although it is written that they loved each other. At the very end of the episode Garoça dies.

The Woman in Church – Trotaconventos – The Archpriest:

stanzas 1321-1327

The Archpriest is at church during a religious festival and sees a beautiful woman praying. He asks Trotaconventos to approach the woman for him. Pretending to sell jewellery, she approaches the woman; however, the woman understands what Trotaconventos is really selling. Following Trotaconventos’ visit it is unclear what happened exactly between the Archpriest and the woman, though it is implied that they have a relationship. Later, the woman marries another man and the Archpriest and the lady ignore each other and the Archpriest finds himself alone again.

Other Tales of Interest

Serrana 1 – stanzas 950-971

The Archpriest is lost in the mountains and comes across a mountain woman. The woman does not let the Archpriest pass a narrow mountain pass, and he gets by after promising to bring her back some jewellery. The woman is so pleased with the promise that she carries him across the pass. After the tale, the Archpriest retells it in a song form. In this version, the mountain woman takes the Archpriest to her home and feeds him and then they have sex.

Serrana 3 – stanzas 993-1005

The Archpriest is in the mountains and meets a girl who, thinking that he is a shepherd, wants to marry him. After this version of the story, he retells it with a song. At the end of the song, he agrees to marry the girl, even though he does not follow through with his promise.

Serrana 4 – stanzas 1006-1042

The Archpriest is stuck in the mountains and is very cold. He comes across a mountain woman and asks her for shelter. This woman is very large and ugly. In the song that follows the prose version description of her physique, he changes the story and makes her lovely. In this song, the mountain girl propositions the Archpriest, and he says that he already has a wife, but will give her money in exchange for his hospitality. She lists the presents that she wants and assumes that when she receives those presents she will become his wife. In the end the mountain girl realizes that the Archpriest is only full of promises and is disappointed.

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