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FRAGMENTS I-II AND III-V IN THE CANTERBURY TALES: A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE IDEA OF THE "MARRIAGE GROUP"

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The title of George Lyman Kittredge's pioneering article "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage" (1912) is a misnomer: the article examines the pilgrims' dramatic debate on the issue of "auctoritee" in marriage in Fragments III-V rather than Chaucer's own comprehensive discussion of marriage in the *Canterbury Tales*. This misnomer results from Kittredge's reading of Fragments III-V as a dramatic act with Chaucer the narrator being reduced to the role of a self-effacing playwright.¹ Over the decades, critics have continually challenged the idea of "Marriage Group" as an exclusive label for the pilgrim's debate in Fragments III-V, although Kittredge's interpretation of the debate as dramatically integrating these fragments has generally been endorsed or even acclaimed.² However, still influenced by Kittredge's dramatic interpretation, these "Marriage Group" revisionists are invariably compelled to relate Fragment VII to the "Marriage Group" because of the "wonderful dramatic suitability of the VII-III sequence" in the arbitrarily established "Chaucerian Orders."³ Consequently, we have yet to explore the relationship between the Fragments I-II and "Marriage Group," a sequence founded on the hard evidence of the authoritative Ellesmere and other related manuscripts.⁴

In this article I propose to change interpretive strategy and read the tales in Fragments I-II and III-V, not as a dramatic act, but as an ongoing discourse between Chaucer the ultimate narrator and the reader. In these fragments, Chaucer discusses marriage not in discursive terms but through an artistic handling of narrative materials. Therefore, we will examine how Chaucer treats the themes, characterization, plots, motifs, and images, and thereby get to know his ideas about different aspects of marriage and his attitudes toward different types of marriage. As we find out how Chaucer deliberately reworks and interweaves the recurrent themes, characterization, plots, motifs, and images in Fragments I-II and III-V, we will per-

ceive the internal coherence of these fragments as Chaucer's sustained discussion of marriage with regard to its major aspects and types.

In Fragments I-II, Chaucer begins his discussion of marriage by demonstrating the "wo and stryf" of marriages at opposite extremes—being dictated by abstract ideals and by sex and money respectively. As it is the "wo and stryf" of these faulty marriages that have generated all the moral didacticism and dramatic ribaldry—often thought the major concerns in Fragments I-II, marriage should be rightly regarded as an important theme inherent in all the tales of the first two fragments. First of all, Chaucer brings forth a vision of spiritual marriage or union of man and woman in the form of courtly love in *The Knight's Tale*. As Chaucer "removes from them almost every trace of the mundane and familiar,"⁵ Emelye, Arcite, and Palamon, the three main characters in *The Knight's Tale* appear dramatically altered from their prototypes in Boccaccio's *Teseida* and impress us as symbols of abstract ideals. Emelye has forsaken her identity as a compassionate, sensitive woman in the *Teseida* and no longer delights in the two lovers' attention nor courteously responds to their courtship. She has changed into a symbol of pure beauty aptly hallowed by Edenic images: "fairer . . . / than is the lylie / . . . fressher than the May with floures new— / For with rose colour stroof hir hewe / . . . a subtiler gerland for hire hede" (I.1035-55).⁶ By the same token, Arcite and Palamon have lost much of their human appeal shown in the *Teseida* because of alterations in the plot: their harmonious coexistence after their sighting of Emelye, their joyful reunion in the grove, and Arcite's reluctance to fight with Palamon and his impassioned speech of love for Emelye. Their identity as symbols of chivalry becomes quite apparent as they go through successive ordeals: the pain of the murderous sighting of a beauty (I.1078-1100, 1116-1122), the ceaseless bewailing (I.1366-68, 1281-1333, etc.), the loss of sleep and appetite (I.1361), and physical emaciation (I.1362-65, 1455-56). Moreover, these three characters strike us as puppets acting out the mysterious cosmic forces implicated in courtly love, as they repeatedly transcend their mundane experience of courtship in order to contemplate the cosmic order beyond the chaotic conditions of life, to explore through sacrificial ceremonies the celestial influences from the realms of classical mythology and medieval astrology (the whole of part 3), and, above all, to testify, with the preordained outcome of their courtship, to the benevolent Boethian Providence governing the seemingly orderless world (as expounded by Theseus's speech, I, 2987-3074). By divesting his characters of human qualities, Chaucer shows that they are not human beings truly in love but caricatured figures obsessed with the affected rituals of

courtly love. By elaborating on their philosophizing speeches and mystical invocations, Chaucer shows their love to be an allegorical beautification of man's philosophical inquiry rather than a feasible, constructive union of man and woman.

To counterpoise the artificiality of the spiritual marriage of ideals in *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer calls up a beastly naturalistic world of matrimony totally governed by sex and devoid of any spiritual values in *The Miller's Tale*.⁷ In contrast to the sexless, goddess-like Emelye, Alison the heroine demonstrates vibrant sensuality—her slim and small body being compared to a “wezele”; her brows to “sloo”; her posture to “the new pere-jonette tree”; her gait to “any kyde or calf”; her mouth to “hoord of apples”; and in short her whole being to “a prymerole, a piggesnye, / For any lord to leggen in his bedde” (I.3233–70). Her husband John lacks the luster of sexual appeal and is not described with any animate or animalistic images, despite the “desperate lechery of approaching impotence.”⁸ His sexual inferiority to his young wife occasions his deep-rooted fear of cuckoldry and makes him all the more jealous and possessive as he “heeld hire [Alison] narwe in cage” (I.3224). The sexual incompatibility between John and his wife is bound to cause “wo and stryf” for “youth and elde is often at debaat” (I.3230) in prurient matrimony. Indeed, Alison's unquenched lust accounts, to a great extent, for her acquiescence in an extramarital affair. She prefers the rakish Nicholas to the knightly Absolon perhaps only because his rough caress gives her immediate physical gratification: “Alwey the nye slye / Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth.” For the sexually hungry Alison, the distance here is, of course, more of sexual contact than of actual space. The “wo and stryf” exacted by this sexual rivalry culminates in dramatic ribaldry: the sexually superior wife plays the harlot without any punishment while the sexually impotent husband gets cuckolded and humiliated in public; the virile, sexually aggressive Nicholas consummates, though not without cost, the “bisynesse of myrthe and solas” while the effeminate,⁹ sexually inactive Absolon only kisses his lady's “nether ye.” This revealing denouement sounds very fitting for a marriage ruled by sex, because all involved are awarded or punished on the basis of sexual performance. *The Reeve's Tale* conjures up a similar vision of marriage. Like John's marriage, Symkyn's marriage is bedeviled by what has brought it about—sex plus money in this case. To satisfy his lust for young flesh (indicated by bestial images like “peacock,” “age,” “fly,” and “hors”) and for money, this bald-headed man chose to marry a parson's daughter because of her youthful vivacity (indicated by “buttoks brode, and brestes rounde and hye” [I.3975] and images like “pye” and “jay”) and her “noble kyn” and “ful many a panne of bras”

(I.3944).¹⁰ Consequently, like John, he was doomed to cuckoldry due to the sexual incompatibility between the "youth and elde." Indeed, while the sexually hungry Alison was driven to amour with Nicholas, the sexually unsatisfied wife of Symkyn got so enthralled with the rapist as not to discover him on that night only because "so myrie a fit ne hadde she not ful yooer" (I.4230). Furthermore, Symkyn's additional vice of avarice also contributes to his cuckoldry. If he had not wished for the two clerks' silver, he would not have let them stay overnight in "his owne chambre," thus creating an opportunity for them to defile his wife and daughter. To thicken the plots of dramatic ribaldry largely at the expense of John and Symkyn, Chaucer employs the motifs of sexual maneuverings as many as six times (*MilT*: I.3275-3306, 3648-3656, 3727-3742, 3798-3815; *RvT*: I.4193-4204, 4228-4233), and makes abundant and explicit references to sexual organs like "queynte" (I.3276), "hole" (I.3732), and "ers" (I.3734, 3755, 3800, 3802, 3810) in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale*.

Again, to counterbalance the extreme vulgarity of the marriages depicted in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer moves to the opposite extreme in *The Man of Law's Tale* and sets before our eyes another type of spiritual marriage—this time one conceived through Christian theology. In contrast to the sensual Alison, Custance the heroine is presented as an embodiment of Christian virtues: "heigh beautee, withoute pride, / Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye; / . . . vertu is hir gyde; / Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye" (II.162-65). Constance's physical image is, of course, stripped of any sensuous implications. Her heart is compared not to an "apple" or "primrose," but to "verray chambre of hoolynesse"; her hand is likened not to a "wezele," but to "minstre of fredam for almesse," and her whole being is portrayed not as a "prymerole," but as "mirour of alle curteisye" (II.166-68). At one point she is even identified as the "doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence" (II.675). Similarly, in contrast to the jealous John and Symkyn, Sowdan the husband is portrayed as a gracious man given to elevated thoughts rather than lust and avarice (II.179-82).

Both Custance and Sowdan approach marriage as a means of moral edification. Upon her departure for "the Barbre nacioun," Custance braces herself for the fulfillment of her father's will and her service as a Christian wife, affirming that "women are born to thraldom and penance, / And to been under mannes governance" (II.286-87). Instead of looking forward to nuptial bliss, she implores Christ to give her "grace his heestes to fulfille!" When told of Custance's virtues and nobility, Sowdan experiences "so greet pleasance / To han hir figure in his remembrance" (II.186-187). He is enchanted not so much by her physical beauty

as her inner virtues which confirm the moral perfection envisioned "in his remembrance." Looking up to the faultless, morally uplifting Custance, he makes a solemn vow of conversion: "Rather than I lese / Custance, I wol be critned, doubteles" (II.225-226). Given this marriage's purely theological nature, its outcome is fully justified. Through his marriage Sowdan is christened, purged of his pagan sins, and virtually delivered up into heaven. For her part, through her first marriage Custance has not only fulfilled the intended mission of Christianizing the Syrian people, but through her second marriage she has also summoned, on the return journey, King Alla and his people to the worship and service of God. In the course of accomplishing her missionary duties, Custance has undergone numerous ordeals and proven herself worthy of her name—constant faith in Christ the Lord. In tune with such Christian significance, invocations to God and moral contemplations constitute the tale's leitmotifs, sharply contrasting the lewd descriptions and references in the foregoing *fabliaux*. Indeed, these didactic passages make up about twenty percent of the entire tale—199 lines out of the total number of 1029.¹¹

For a more dramatic exposure of the unfleshly union and carnal wedlock illustrated in Fragments I-II, Chaucer now lets the Wife of Bath and the Clerk spell out the rationale of these opposing types of matrimony and make them refute each other's rationalizations in the dramatic debate of Fragments III-IV. In her Prologue, the Wife of Bath goes to great lengths to rationalize the concept of marriage for sex and money envisioned in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale* and to ridicule Christian morality on marriage. In the course of her heretical argument, this Wife repeatedly parodies biblical authorities and boasts of her sexual gratification and material gains in the same breath. First, immediately after quoting the biblical sources, she exalts the sexual indulgence and monetary profits of her five marriages:

Yblessed by God that I have wedded fyve!
Of whiche I have pyked out the beste,
Bothe of here nether purs and of here cheste. (III.44, 44a-44b)

Then, the Wife reiterates the importance of sex and money in marriage by explicitly describing how she made her first three husbands "swynk" and robbed them of their riches (III.193-223); and by mocking their accusations of her lust for sex (III.253-255, 265-277, 371-378) and for material gains (III.297-302, 337-347). Lastly she once again brings sex and money into prominence by recounting sexual and monetary dealings with the other two husbands (III.452-633), and by mimicking Jankin's moralistic

readings on lecherous and avaricious women (III.640-787). Obviously, through satirical juxtapositions of Christian morality and her sexual experiences, she not only ridicules what has been eulogized in *The Man of Law's Tales*—marriage for moral edification—but has thrice rationalized what has been described in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale*—marriage for sex and money.¹² In the course of her heretical theorization, the Wife suggests that women should assume conjugal mastery, because they, like her, are sexually superior and shrewder in money matters. With her final triumph for "al the soveraynetee," she unequivocally sets forth the idea of female dominance (III.813-28), which is to be developed in the tale proper.

While the Wife's argument conceptualizes the marriages found in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale*, the diverse descriptive details used in her argument capture and often dramatize the motifs and images pervasive in those two *fabliaux*. The motif of the sex-money bond occurs frequently in the Wife's heretical argument (III.214, 314, 411-12) and in her dream of blood and gold (III.577-84). Explicit references to sexual organs are repeated here either verbatim ("queynte," III.332, 444, 516) or by euphemisms ("*belle chose*," III.447, 510). The Wife's lengthy, shameless discussion of genitals (III.115-62) brings to culmination the sexual aspects developed in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale*. Finally, one may note that the Wife herself evokes the images of the two salacious tale-tellers. She drinks wine and dreams of Venus (III.459-66) as do the Miller (I.3120) and the Reeve (as suggested by his self-comparison to an emptying cask, I.3891-95); she repeats verbatim the Reeve's boast of having "alwey a colts tooth" (III.602, I.3888); and she bears voluptuous birthmarks on her face and "privee place" (III.604, 619-20) while the Miller wears a lecherous "werte" on his face (I.555).

To counter the Wife's rationalization of marriage for sex and money and of female dominance, the Clerk sets himself to vindicate the concept of marriage for moral edification and of female obedience as exemplified in *The Man of Law's Tale*. A prudent scholar, the Clerk neither engages in a tit-for-tat argument with the Wife, nor states his theory in glamorous terms, but chooses to justify the Man of Law's vision of marriage by telling a folktale with a very similar moral significance. Grisilde the heroine is portrayed as an embodiment of moral virtue, lauded with tributes quite similar to those paid to Custance: "enressed in swich excellence / . . . yset in heigh bountee, / And so discreet and fair of eloquence, / So benigne and so digne of reverence" (IV.408-11). Because of her angelic virtues, she could, like Custance, "so the peples herte embrace, / That ech

hire lovede that looked in hir face" (IV.412-13). By the same token, Walter demonstrates noble qualities similar to Sowdan's: high lineage, honor, and courtesy (IV.71-77). Like Custance and Sowdan in *The Man of Law's Tale*, Walter and Grisilde display natural abstinence: for one celibate liberty was of the greatest delight (IV.145-47); for the other "no likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne" (IV.214). Like Custance and Sowdan, they accept marriage as necessary to fulfill their social and moral obligations—for the husband to beget an heir to maintain stability in his country (IV.148-61); and for the wife to obey her father and serve her lord (IV.345-57). Furthermore, through their marriage Walter and Grisilde have undergone moral edification in a manner reminiscent of Sowdan and Custance. Walter has found in his wife his preconceived vision of absolute virtue, and thus has purged himself of morbid scepticism. For her part, Grisilde has fully demonstrated her innate virtues through her endurance of successive trials. Through all these thematic correspondences, the Clerk seeks to restore the Man of Law's vision of pure Christian marriage which the Wife has seriously undermined.¹³ In answer to the Wife's newly developed doctrine of female dominance, the Clerk extols Grisilde as the model of female obedience, a concept merely touched upon in *The Man of Law's Tale* (II.287). Before her wedding, Grisilde pledges an absolute obedience to her bridegroom:

Lord, undigne and unworthy
 Am I to thilke honour that ye me beede,
 But as ye wole youreself, right so wol I.
 And heere I swere that nevere willyngly,
 In werk ne thought, I nyl yow disobeye
 For to be deed, though me were looth to deye. (IV.359-64)

Grisilde repeats this oath of loyalty and obedience with slight variations each time Walter puts her to a new agonizing trial (IV.501-511, 645-667, 752-56, 814-847, 967-973). With these refrain-like repetitions of Grisilde's betrothal vow, the Clerk forcefully emphasizes female obedience in a Christian marriage and thus undermines the Wife's philosophy of female dominance. His refutation of the Wife's heresy becomes explicit when he concludes his tale with an ironic compliment "for the Wyves love of Bathe— / Whose lyf and al hire secte God mayntene / In heigh maistrie" (IV.1170-72).

With the carnal matrimony and unleshly union dramatically exposed in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer proceeds to deepen his criticism of these faulty matrimones with his own masterly

double parodies in *The Merchant's Tale*. Deliberately or not, Chaucer prepares us for his intrusion into the tale with a subtle textual clue. *The Merchant's Prologue* begins with the Merchant's words "wepying and waylying, care and other sorwe / I knowe ynogh . . . (my italics)" (IV.1213-14), echoing the last sentence in the "Lenvoy de Chaucer" ("And lat hym *care*, and *wepe*, and wrynge, and *waille!* [my italics]" (IV.1212). This uncanny merger of words by Chaucer the narrator and the Merchant the tale-teller compel us to realize that now we can hear Chaucer's own voice through this tale-teller more clearly than ever. Indeed, this becomes clear, as it is increasingly difficult to suit sophisticated double parodies to their nominal narrator, the practical-minded merchant (I.270-84).

The Merchant's Tale structurally embodies a double parody of the themes and plots of the moralistic folktales and *fabliaux* illustrated in Fragments I-II and freshly justified by Clerk and the Wife. The first part of the Tale (IV.1245-1688) is a long didactic passage modelled on the moralistic folktales.¹⁴ Here, the Merchant exhorts marriage as "a ful greet sacrament" (IV.1319), "hooly bond" (IV.1261), "right of hooly chirche" (IV.1662), vividly recalling the holy marriages glorified in *The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale*; he mimics Grisilde's wifely obedience with a witty "sentence" echoing her betrothal: "She seith nat ones 'nay' when he seith 'ye' " (IV.1345); he imitates the Clerk's praise of woman's supreme virtues (IV.918-38) by lauding woman as "so trewe, and therewithal so wyse" (IV.1346-60); he emulates Sowdan's "greet pleasance . . . in remembrance" and Walter's "virtue-sickness" with Januarie's fantasy about his choice bride (IV.1580-1610) and his aphrodisiacs on the wedding night (IV.1795-1820); and he evokes, through Januarie's discussion with Placebo and Justinus (IV.1399-1688), the early consultations about marriage in *The Man of Law's Tale* (II.204-231) and in *The Clerk's Tale* (IV.85-189).¹⁵ Through all these deliberately wrought reverberations, the Merchant ingeniously ties up, in a single passage, the important scenes and themes developed in the moralistic folktales.

The second part of the Tale (IV.1689-2418) is a bawdy narrative modelled on the early *fabliaux*.¹⁶ While re-enacting the "youth-elde" debate recurrent in *The Miller's Tale*, *The Reeve's Tale* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, in Januarie and May the Merchant inflates the character traits of the *fabliau* figures in these three tales—lust, pride and dotage in a cuckolded husband, and the lechery and guile of a deceptive wife. Januarie is more debauched and concupiscent than John or Symkyn, because he has lived "as a bryd or as a beest / In libertee" (IV.1281-2) and

openly brags about his lust for "yong flesh": "'Bet is,' quod he, 'a pyk than a pykerel, / And bet than old boef is the tendre veel / I wol no womman thrityr yeer of age'" (IV.1419-21). Januarie is more severely mocked for pride in his intelligence and learning. Whereas through their anti-intellectual insolence John and Symkin have been made laughing stocks for their adversaries only, Januarie's intellectual arrogance (IV.1426-30) is held up to ridicule by none other than his own uneducated wife whom he believed he could mold at will like wax. Compared with other cuckolded husbands, Januarie proves much more jealous and doting. He goes so far as to build an enclosure to keep his wife from intruders, and virtually "hadde an hand upon hire evermo" (IV.2103). While John and Symkyn only indirectly facilitate their own cuckoldry, he actually helps, with his stooping back, May into a pear tree to satisfy her lust. When his meticulous protection and wholehearted doting prove counterproductive, his cuckoldry becomes all the more deplorable and ironic. This deepened sense of satire is also indicated by his blindness—the uniform symptom of the cuckolded in all these tales. While John and Symkyn only temporarily lose sight of reality largely owing to external darkness and their ill-timed sleep, Januarie actually loses his eyesight. Worse still, when his eyesight is restored, Januarie lapses into a voluntary blindness—the denial of what he actually sees—which will no doubt destine him to endless cuckoldry. Likewise, May proves a more lecherous and crafty wife than her counterparts in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. She takes more initiative than Alison in an adulterous romance, and manages to cover up more sinister schemes with her manipulative henpecking (IV.2368-2410) than does the Wife of Bath.

Strikingly juxtaposed, these two incongruous parts assume the significance of a double-edged parody of the moralistic tales and *fabliaux*. This double parody becomes all the more obvious when one observes how the moralistic and the lewd infiltrate each other. The high-sounding didacticism is punctuated with numerous overt sexual references borrowed directly from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. While moralizing on the tribulations of marriage, Justinus employs glaring erotic metaphors like pinching "sho" (IV.1553) and "purgatory" which have been invented by the Wife to denote vampirish lust (III.489). When condemning Damyan's betrayal, the tale-teller utters the swear-word "perilous fire," which evokes the Wife's exultation in her own lustful "wylde fyr" (IV.2252). Taking his marriage as "a ful greet sacrament," Januarie eats "a sop in fyn clarree" (IV.1843)—a sacramental ceremony which practically commends the enjoyment of "barley bread" and "sweete wyn" as preached by the Wife (III.459-68). Pluto condemns the corrupting women by quoting the mis-

ogynist remarks by King Solomon whose polygamy the Wife has used to justify her sexual indulgence (III.35-45). Conversely, the *fabliau* narrative is interspersed with high-pitched moralizing (IV.1757-67, 1828-41, 2160-84, 2237-63, 2264-2310) and invocations (IV.1783-94, 2057-68, 2107-15, 2125-31) comparable to those in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale*—mostly occurring amidst the most lurid scenes: Januarie's nuptial ravishment, Damyan's flirtation with May and the subsequent quasi-cuckoldry. In the thick of the ribaldry, May appears as a modest, chaste maiden as she is "broughte abedde as still as stoon" (IV.1818), and this pretentious indifference to nuptial bliss besmeares the image of Custance and Grisilde standing aloof of worldly pleasures, "constant as a wal" (IV.1047).

In addition to the plots and themes of the moralistic and lewd tales, the Merchant parodies the voices and tones of their tale-tellers. In the opening passage, he obviously mimics the Wife's ironic invocation to the Biblical authorities. Whereas the Wife advocates matrimony by parroting the authorities' disparagement of it and their praise of those who were opposed to it (III.87-114), the Merchant censures matrimony by parroting the authorities' praise of it (IV.1362-92) and their condemnation of those who were opposed to it (IV.1293-1310). Furthermore, while the Wife feigns to denounce woman's vices through the mouths of her husbands, the Merchant pretends to eulogize woman's virtues through his narrative persona (IV.1267-92, 1311-61). In the *fabliau* narrative, the Merchant mimics the serious tones of the moralistic tales through the mouth of Januarie. To justify his sexual indulgence Januarie speaks of the sanctity of his marriage (IV.1826-41) and of his "verray love" (IV.2160-84) in a solemn tone identical with those of the Man of Law and the Clerk. Notably, by deliberate incongruity of the licentious tone with the didactic passages, and the moralistic tone with the *fabliau* narrative, the Merchant greatly sharpens the bite of his double parody.

The Merchant also double-parodies the motifs of moralistic folktales and *fabliaux* by violently linking together their conflicting connotations. The aging-death motif in *The Merchant's Tale*, for instance, calls forth the conflicting attitudes toward marriage in the two sets of tales. It bespeaks the Christian fear of death and the consequent negation of worldly pleasure, when Januarie sighs:

Freendes, I am hoor and oold,
 And almoost, God woot, on my pittes brynke;
 Upon my soule somewhat moste I thynke.
 I have my body folily despended;
 Blessed be God that it shal been amended! (IV.1400-4)

This conception of death immediately recalls the Clerk's disparagement of King Alla and Custance's bridal bliss by stressing the imminence of death (II.1128-45); and how Walter's inferiors persuade their master to fear death and fulfill his obligation to beget an heir (IV.121-26). However, the same motif foretells philistine defiance of death soon afterwards when Januarie declares:

Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
 That blometh er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
 I feele me mowhere hoor but on myn heed;
 Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
 As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.
 And syn that ye han herd all myn entente,
 I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente. (IV.1461-68)

This blatant defiance of aging and death for the sake of carnal pleasure calls to mind the Reeve's resolve to burn his lust to the very last in face of approaching death (I.3867-98), and the Wife's determination to sell her "bren" until death claims her (III.469-79).

The purgatory motif, too, plays with the conflicting concepts of marriage in those tales. Januarie must have the Christian concept of purgatory in mind when he voices his sincere fear that a marriage without "wo and stryf" would lead to the forfeiture of his opportunity to enjoy celestial bliss (IV.1637-54). This contemplation of marriage as a purgatory reminds us how Sowdan and Walter have passed through "wo and stryf" in their marriages as a purgatory—one delivered into the heavenly paradise, and the other cleansed of his moral weakness. Justinus exploits the very opposite meaning of purgatory when he ridicules Januarie's frivolous desire for marriage. He intends "purgatory" to mean vampirism when he ironically reassures Januarie that "paraunter she may be youre purgatorie" (IV.1669).¹⁷ Notably, the Merchant picks up this sacrilegious word-play from none other than the Wife, who has brazenly declared that "in erthe I was his [her husband's] purgatorie" (III.489).

In his scathing parodies, the Merchant does not leave *The Knight's Tale* untouched. He calls the lecherous dotard Januarie "old knight," a title belonging to Arcite and Palamon, names the adulteress "May" to which Emelye has been compared (I.1037), and obliges Damyan to repeat the rituals of love performed by Arcite and Palamon—humble address to his lady (IV.1942), moping and love-sickness (IV.1774-82, 1866-84). By giving these characters inflated names and appearances of courtly paramours but depicting them "not as devoted lovers, but as morally bankrupt and some-

what ridiculous adulterers,"¹⁸ he relentlessly parodies scenes of courtly love described in *The Knight's Tale*.

With *The Franklin's Tale* Chaucer winds up his extended discussion of marriage. Like the opening *The Knight's Tale*, *The Franklin's Tale* is structurally symmetrical in its origin and treatment of courtly love, but thematically contrastable in its handling of the Italian sources. Whereas in *The Knight's Tale* he depersonalizes the three main characters from the *Teseida* and mystifies their courtship, in *The Franklin's Tale* Chaucer humanizes his three main characters from the *Decameron* or the *Filocolo* by giving them "a full and at times quite moving emotional response to the predicament" and dispels the astrological mysteries with the "'good magic' of human love, fortitude and fidelity."¹⁹ Interestingly, with this structural symmetry, Chaucer seems to indicate that the discussion of marriage has come a full circle back to love, an essential issue ignored in the moralistic folktales and the *fabliaux*. Then, with the thematic contrast, he reminds us that love in marriage is not a union of abstract ideals, but the deepest bond of human affection, understanding and tolerance.

Indeed, in response to the Merchant's parodies of the ill-motivated and ill-governed matrimony, the Franklin proceeds to present a vision of marriage motivated by love and governed by mutual forbearance. After telling a story of harmonious marriage unmarred by "wo and stryf," he argues that such a happy marriage can only be founded on true love which excludes any marital mastery, the cause of all "wo and stryf":

Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye
Whan maistrie comth, the God of love anon
Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon! (V.764-66)

He holds that love as "spirit free" would compel the couple to respect each other's freedom, develop an aversion to mastery, and gradually cultivate mutual forbearance (V.767-790). Once the husband and wife achieve such "an humble, wys accord," they would, the Franklin believes, attain the perfect conjugal relationship in which the husband is "servant in love, and lord in marriage" (V.793).

When the Franklin has undermined the concepts of marriage for sexual, monetary, or moral purposes in his opening argument, he goes on to displace or subvert, in the tale proper, various motifs particular to the faulty marriages. For example, the jealousy-related motifs in the *fabliaux* are displaced here. Although caught in a similar plight, Averagus demonstrates none of the jealous behavior common to the husbands in the *fabliaux*. He did not contain his wife "in cage" like John, nor try to ward off

suitors "with panade, or with knyf" like Symkyn, nor "hadded an hand upon hire evermo" like Januarie. Rather, not long after their marriage, he leaves his wife in quest of knightly adventures. Even when faced with the possibility of being cuckolded, he would rather "well levere ystiked for to be" than make his wife break her promise. The blindness-motif is drastically subverted. Here, blindness is caused largely by magic and hence does not bring about much harm, whereas the blindness in the *fabliaux* results from characters' inner weakness (John's dotage, Symkyn's covetousness, Januarie's dotage and lasciviousness) and therefore leads to humiliating cuckoldry in all these cases. Also absent is the motif of purgatory in connection with the moralistic folktales. Dorigen does not display any sign of being an embodiment of moral virtue, nor does she perform a purgatorial function for her husband as do Custance and Griselda for theirs. As a sensitive human being, she reacts to her marital crisis in a perfectly normal way. In the face of great adversity, she does not invoke sacrificial ceremonies as does Emelye, nor implore God continuously as does Custance, nor endure her suffering with supernatural fortitude as does Grisilde, but expresses her complex feelings of love, shame, and despair in a touching manner. By displacing or subverting the early motifs, the Franklin skillfully pits a code of "gentillesse" marriage against the rules of sexual rivalry or moral purgatory in the previous ill-founded marriages.

So far we have pursued a prolonged imaginary discourse with Chaucer, the ultimate narrator on marriage. I believe that this nondramatic interpretive strategy agrees with the fundamental mode of discourse of *The Canterbury Tales*. No matter how dramatic its framing device may be, *The Canterbury Tales* remains a narrative work and upon reading it we always find ourselves communicating through the fictitious tale-tellers with Chaucer himself. Once lodged in this undistorted mode of discourse, we discover that Chaucer illustrates to us the opposing types of faulty matrimony in Fragments I-II.²⁰ In the tales of moral purport, he depersonalizes his characters, inflates their rhetoric, and thus indicates the artificiality of courtly love as an unreal union of abstract ideals within a cosmic framework, demonstrating Christian marriage as a theological instrument for moral purgation. In the *fabliaux* he exploits the bawdy themes, plots, motifs, and images to reveal the bestial nature of purient matrimony.

In *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer gives us a dramatic exposure of the rationales behind the faulty marriages illustrated in Fragments I-II. When we see these two tales as a continuation of Chaucer's initial illustration, we are no longer perplexed by the otherwise inexplicable fact that the Wife and the Clerk abruptly launch into a

theoretical debate notwithstanding their agreement to tell tales for "game" (I.852). Here Chaucer makes the two tale-tellers recapture, in the course of their debate, the themes, characterization, plots, motifs, and images recurrent in the earlier tales and thus achieves the maximum effect of a dramatic exposure of both the unfleshy and prurient marriages illustrated in Fragments I-II. We also find that the Wife's and the Clerk's theories of marital "auctoritee," long taken as the sole subject of the marriage discussion, only grow out of their rationalizations of the faulty marriages. Indeed, the Wife does not bring up the subject of "auctoritee" until the very end of her Prologue, as she has been preoccupied with the issue of sex and money.

In *The Merchant's Tale* Chaucer half dismantles his narrative mask and openly censures the faulty marriages with his ingenious parodies. By means of incongruous juxtapositions, he parodies the disparate sets of themes, plots, motifs and images and thereby relentlessly denounces their degenerate nature: both are ill-motivated—one by sex and money, the other by willful desires for moral purgation; both are ill-governed—by the sexually superior woman in one case, by the morally higher man in the other.²¹

In *The Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer rounds out his prolonged discussion of marriage with a meaningful moderation and integration of the recurrent themes, characterization, plots, motifs, and images. The Franklin's final solution represents a compromise among all the matrimonyes examined—achieved by removing their extremes (adultery in courtly love and marriage, absolute husbandly "maistrye" in Christian marriage, and unchecked carnality in worldly marriage) and retaining their reasonable elements (the womanly "soverayntee" of love in the first, the nominal male governance in the next, and conjugal bliss in the last matrimony).²²

In view of the logical cohesiveness and abundant internal links between Fragments I-II and III-V, we may challenge the definitions of "Marriage Group" by Kittredge and his revisionists and argue that Chaucer's discussion of marriage is not so much the pilgrims' debate on "auctoritee" in Fragments III-V, as an extended discussion starting from Fragments I-II: illustration, exposure and parody of faulty marriages, and an advocacy of a happy marriage founded on love and mutual forbearance.

We also may question the acceptability of the "Chaucerian Orders," which thrives on the idea of "Marriage Group" and in turn inspires various revisions of the "Marriage Group."²³ All "Chaucerian Orders" are conceived on the presupposition that *The Canterbury Tales* is an accurate, realistic record of a pilgrimage and are supported by "actual joining by links, clear allusions to earlier incidents of the pilgrimage, notes of place, notes of time."²⁴ Curiously enough, this geographical realism in the

nineteenth-century tradition of positivistic criticism still dominates the studies of the order of the Tales, despite the drastic changes in the critical canon over the decades. When we read *The Canterbury Tales* as a work of Chaucer's creative imagination rather than a realistic record of a pilgrimage, we find that the logical cohesiveness and abundant internal links in themes, characterization, plots, motifs and images outweigh the "factual evidence" of time, place and textual coordination; and we see the Ellesmere-Order as the truly Chaucerian one.

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NOTES

1. G. L. Kittredge, *Modern Philology*, IX (1911-12): 435-67, concludes his argument: "The Marriage Group of Tales begins with the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and ends with the *Franklin's Tale*. There is no connection between the *Wife's Prologue* and the group of stories that precedes; there is no connection between the *Franklin's Tale* and the group that follows. Within the Marriage Group, on the contrary, there is close connection throughout. That act is a finished act. It begins and ends an elaborate debate."

2. While critics who seek to extend the "Marriage Group" seldom take issue with Kittredge on this point, recent critics openly voice their approval of Kittredge's interpretation, as do R. E. Kaske, "Chaucer's Marriage Group," *Chaucer the Love Poet*, ed. Jerome Mitchell and W. Provost (Athens, Georgia, 1973), 45-65; and Jiro Takimoto, "Re-examination of the Marriage Group in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Baika Review*, 12 (1979): 1-24. However, this interpretation of Kittredge was met with strong objections early in this century. Henry B. Hinckley, "The Debate on

Marriage in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XXXII (1917): 292-305, emphasizes the lack of the tale-tellers' allusions to one another, close coordinations among the tales and, above all, exclusive concentration on the issue of marriage. C. P. Lyons, "The Marriage Debate in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Journal of English Literary History*, II (1935): 252-62, acknowledges the different viewpoints on marriage in these tales, but sees them not so much as a dramatic discussion as a schematic formulation.

3. William W. Lawrence interprets *The Tale of Melibee* and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* as the prelude to the "Marriage Group" in "The Marriage Group in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Modern Philology*, XI (1912-13): 247-58. John S. Kenyon, "Further Notes on the Marriage Group in *Canterbury Tales*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XV (1916): 282-88, supports Lawrence's argument by pointing out more connections between *Mel*, *NPT* and the "Marriage Group." Albert N. Silverman makes a comparative analysis of the sex-money bonds in *WBT* and *The Shipman's Tale* in "Sex and Money in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*," *Philological Quarterly*, XXXII (1953): 329-36. Germaine Dempster examines Chaucer's reworking of the link-sections between *Mel* and *NPT* as evidence of a conscious effort to use these two previously written tales as "preparatory steps to the debate" in the "Marriage Group"; see "A Period in the Development of the *Canterbury Tales* Marriage Group and of Blocks B2 and C," *PMLA*, LXVIII (1953): 1142-59. Following Robert A. Pratt's reconstructed order of *The Canterbury Tales*, Donald R. Howard relates *The Second Nun's Tale* and *The Physician's Tale* to the "Marriage Group"; see "The Conclusion of the Marriage Group," *MP*, (1960): 223-31.

The term "Chaucerian Orders" is used here to denote the orders which critics have assumed to be Chaucer's own arrangement before scribal misplacements. The "Marriage Group" revisionists' analyses serve to confirm the "Chaucerian Orders" which have inspired their studies. In this regard, Robert A. Pratt observes, "Shortly after the appearance of Kittredge's paper on the 'Marriage Group' (1912), the wonderful dramatic suitability of the VII-III sequence was independently noted by Lawrence (1913), Tupper (1913), Kenyon (1916), and Hemingway (1916); their interpretative comments are impressive and seem to take us close to Chaucer and his dramatic intention. The fact that the close of Fragment VII leads up to Fragment III serves as a confirmation of the 'Bradshaw shift'" ("The Order of the *Canterbury Tales*," *PLMA*, LXVI [1951]: 1158-59).

4. Despite the long-standing recognition of the Ellesmere MS, the E1. order has inspired none of the "Marriage group" revisionists to consider relating Fragments I-II to the "Marriage Group." Only a few critics have explored the thematic coherence among individual tales in Fragments I-II and III-V. Lee S. Cox, "A Question of Order in the *Canterbury Tales*," *The Chaucer Review*, 1 (1966-67): 228-52, interprets the thematic juxtapositions between *MLT* and *WBP* as indicative of the original linkage between Fragments II and III. John Gardner, "The Case Against the 'Bradshaw Shift'; or, the Mystery of the Manuscript in the Trunk," *Papers on Language and Literature*, III (1967, supplement): 80-106, perceives an encompassing thematic coherence among Fragments I-II, and III-V and succeeding tales

from the perspective of religious allegory. Donald Howard, *The Idea of The Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1976), 210–27, does not see Fragments I–II and III–V directly knitted, but rather thematically interrelated as parallel groups in the overall plan of the *Canterbury Tales*.

5. Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985), 131. See his concise comment on Boccaccio's treatments of these three characters, 131–34.

6. All citations of *The Canterbury Tales* are from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd edition, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1957), with fragments indicated by Roman numerals and lines by Arabic numerals according to the E1. order.

7. Charles Muscatine holds that the courtly love convention is ridiculed in *MLT* as “an idiosyncrasy” by being “juxtaposed to a naturalism of exceptional force and vitality” (*Chaucer and the French Tradition* [Berkeley, 1957], 223).

8. Janette Richardson, *Blameth Nat Me: A Study of Imagery in Chaucer's Fables* (Hague, 1970), 162.

9. Janette Richardson argues that Nicholas' masculinity and Absolons' effeminacy are sharply contrasted by “the formal images in the initial sketches of Nicholas and Absolon” (*Blameth Nat Me*, 164–166). Paul E. Beichner, “Absolon's Hair,” *Medieval Studies*, XII (1950): 222–233, interprets the naming of Absolon as revelatory of his effeminacy.

10. Janette Richardson examines in detail the sexual connotations of the images in the portraits of Smykyn and his wife; see *Blameth Nat Me*, 90–97.

11. Invocations to God: II.446–48, 639–44, 813–19, 826–33. Moral contemplations: II.190–203, 232–45, 267–73, 295–315, 358–71, 421–27, 470–82, 485–504, 582–95, 631–37, 652–58, 771–83, 803–53, 841–54, 906–10, 918–45, 1135–46.

12. Lee S. Cox provides a detailed analysis of the thematic juxtapositions of *MLT* and *WBP* in his essay mentioned in note 4 above.

13. Apart from parallels in plot and theme, *MLT* and *CIT* share similar sectional divisions, rhyme royal stanzas, minimized characterization, and a simple plot scheme marked by frequent parallels and repetitions. See Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 192–93.

14. For source studies of the first part, see John Livingston Lowes, “Chaucer and the *Miroir de Marriage*,” *MP*, VIII (1910): 165–86, and John C. McGalliard, “Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* and Deschamps's *Miroir de Marriage*,” *PQ*, 25 (1946): 193–220.

15. Lines 211–14: “Diverse men diverse thynges . . . and abusyon” are neatly echoed in *MerT*, IV.1469–75.

16. The *fabliau* narrative of the second part is compared with many analogues in the popular “fruit tree” tales about a deceptive wife and a gullible husband in the late Middle Ages. See Germaine Dempster, “The *Merchant's Tale*,” *MP*, 34 (1936): 133–54.

17. The Merchant pursues this word-play further in his comments on Januarie's love-making: “How that he wroughte I dar nat to yow telle; / Or wheither hire thought it *paradys* or *helle*” (IV.1963–34). Since sexual intercourse is compared to a “purgatorie,” the ensuing sensations must be “*paradys*” or “*helle*.”

18. James L. Hodge, "The Marriage Group: Precarious Equilibrium," *English Studies*, XLVI, 4 (1965): 291. In his article Hodge also traces parodic echoes of *KnT* in *MerT* with respect to plot, speech and naming of characters. Muscatine finds the Merchant's parody of courtly love to be more mordant than the Miller's because of its extreme sensuality, and its ironic juxtapositions of the high and lewd styles, the flamboyant and the ugly; see *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 230-37.

19. Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, 144-45.

20. In the light of this illustrative function, it would be inappropriate to over-emphasize some scattered humorous touches and attribute too much ironic significance to *KnT*. Concerning the study of ironies in *KnT*, see Richard Neuse, "The Knight: The First Mover in Chaucer's Human Comedy," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXI (1962): 299-315; F. Elaine Penninger, "Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and the Theme of Appearance and Reality in *The Canterbury Tales*," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 63 (1964): 398-405.

21. The choice of female dominance in a marriage ruled by sex and money is predetermined by both the *fabliau* convention and the Christian bias about woman's lust and covetousness. The designation of male dominance in the theological marriage reflects, of course, the Christian concept of male superiority. Despite their ostensible moral virtues, Custance and Grisilde are but "purgatory"-like instruments for their husbands' moral improvements, and hardly impress us as real human beings.

22. Donald R. Howard offers an insightful analysis on the summative feature of *FranT* in "The Conclusion of the Marriage Group: Chaucer and the Human Condition," *MP*, LVII (1960): 223-232.

23. Robert A. Pratt, "The Order of the *Canterbury Tales*" *PMLA*, LXVI (1951): 1141-1167, spells out the hypothetical grounds on which early "Chaucerian Orders" were founded. The following is a summary of the highlights of his article. Henry Bradshaw (1868) first suggested improving the Ellesmere MS by moving Fragment VII to join the *Man of Law Endlink*, which consequently becomes a prologue to *The Shipman's Tale* (see F. J. Furnivall, *Temporary Preface*, Chaucer Society Publications, 2nd Series, No. 3 [London, 1868], 9, 20-22). As this first alternation of the E1. order smoothes out inconsistencies in geographical allusions, Furnivall endorsed it with vehemence: "A happy hit! and it sets us free to alter the arrangement of any or all of the MSS, to move up or down any *Groups of Tales*, whenever internal evidence, probability, or presumption, requires it" (*Temporary Preface*, 22). Hence, Furnivall took the liberty of inserting Fragment VI between Fragments VII and III, in order to fit in with his preconceived time scheme of a four-day pilgrimage. This second alternation of the E1. order later became known as the "Chaucer Society" order. As Fragment VI contains no definite place or time references, many critics found Furnivall's second alternation untrustworthy. J. S. P. Tatlock suggested a third alternation by restoring, with the exclusion of the controversial Fragment VI, the order advocated by Bradshaw ("The *Canterbury Tales* in 1400," *PMLA*, L [1935]: 122-26). With the major point of dispute set aside, this order had previously "enjoyed universal acceptance from those who have

chosen to make use of internal evidence . . . : Skeat (1894), Shipley (1895), Root (1906), Lawrence (1913), Tupper (1913), Lowes (1915), Root (1906), Moore (1915)" (Pratt, 1145). Nonetheless, critics still vied with one another in juggling Fragment VI with other Tales. Fleary (1879), Kock (1890), Shipley (1895, 1896) came up with a fourth alternation, arguing for an I-VI-II sequence; while Moore (1915) and Manly (1940) brought forth a fifth alternation, contending for an II-VI-VII sequence. In his essay, Pratt took issue with both proposed sequences, finding one in lack of "possible or artistic connections" and the other destructive of the major premise on which the Bradshaw shift is based. He held that, a sixth alternation, which assigns Fragment VI to a position between Fragments IV-V and Fragment VIII as found in the E1. MS, would be most ideal because that would be the only one order which "the internal evidence nowhere conflicts" and which preserves the best feature of the Ellesmere and the "Chaucer Society" order by "correcting the accidental disarrangement of the one and the arbitrary artificiality of the other" (1167).

After Pratt brought to culmination the Chaucerians' efforts to amend the E1. order for nearly a century, the E1. order revisionists sought not so much to formulate new alternations as to defend the existent ones against mounting challenges. For instance, Edward S. Cohen reaffirmed the "Chaucer Society" order by reconstructing a three-day (rather than Furnivall's four-day) pilgrimage on the basis of time and place allusions; "The Sequence of the *Canterbury Tales*," *ChauR*, 9 (1974-5): 190-95. George R. Kaiser, "In Defence of the Bradshaw Shift," *ChauR*, 12 (1977-78): 191-201, took the *Man of Law Endlink* as an important evidence of the allegedly Chaucerian linkage of Fragment VII to II, exposed the E1. order's failure to cancel that linkage, and strongly reasserted Chaucer's geographical realism and artistic coherence between Fragments VII and III.

Since the 1960s, the "Chaucerian Orders" have been continually challenged, for instance, by D. C. Baker, "The Bradshaw Order of the *Canterbury Tales*: A Dissent," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 63 (1962): 245-61; J. H. Fisher, "Chaucer's Last Revision of the *Canterbury Tales*," *Modern Language Review*, 67 (1972): 241-51; Larry D. Benson, "The Order of *The Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, III (1981), 77-117; and by Lee S. Cox, John Gardner, and Donald Howard in their works mentioned in note 4.

24. Pratt, "The Order of the *Canterbury Tales*," 1142.