

2019

The Medieval Slut: Sexual Identities of Medieval Women in the Patriarchal Narratives of the Decameron and Canterbury Tales

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The Medieval Slut

Sexual Identities of Medieval Women in the Patriarchal Narratives of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury*

Tales

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Advised by Professor Cord J. Whitaker of the English Department

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the

Prerequisite for Honors in

Medieval & Renaissance Studies

May 2019

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Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking Professor Cord Whitaker, without whom this study would not have been nearly as thorough, well-thought out, and generally *good* as it has become. He has my utmost gratitude. He told me very early on in the thesis process that writing a document of this nature was a therapeutic experience. It certainly has been. I've certainly struggled enough for it to be one. In that struggle, I have also found joy, of an academic nature, of course—there is nothing quite like finding one piece of literary theory in the wee hours just before a chapter is due—but to the therapy aspect, I have found joy of a personal nature. In writing this thesis, I have been able to come to terms with my label and accompanying identity in newfound ways I never would have imagined when I first read the books on sluthood so helpfully cited here. Thanks to Prof. Whitaker for helping me to reign in that joy through invaluable commentary and responses to emails written in a panic.

Thanks as well to H el ene Bilis and Sarah Wall-Randell, the amazing co-chairs of the Med/Ren program, just as invaluable when they stepped in for Prof. Whitaker. Though their feedback was difficult to hear at times—inspiring those previously mentioned panicked emails—it was necessary to help me to create something *good*. Thank you to Larry Rosenwald, Stephen Spiess, and Julie Walsh, whose calming El Table presence and deep discussions over Mind, Body, and Soul helped ease my mind, body, and soul. Thank you to Francesca Southerden for introducing me to Med/Ren at Wellesley and the Med/Ren community for being such a welcoming group of people, genuinely encouraging of a medieval slut.

I would like to thank my family with the caveat that if they read this thesis, their questions pertain to the *academic* nature of sluthood and not my personal narrative. There's no more therapy left in here to unpack that. Thanks to my mom especially, who answered panicked phone calls instead of panicked emails in which I always pleaded that I just wanted my thesis to be *good*. Thank

you for always reminding me that done was all I needed, and *good* was all I wanted. Thank you for listening, telling me to breathe, and offering snacks by mail. The Easter basket coinciding with the final deadline was a moment of true motherly perfection.

I share as much love as possible with the incredible friends who have made up my family here at Wellesley. To my other moms, Hanna Day-Tenerowicz and Cecilia Nowell, your guidance has meant and continues to mean so much to me (and shout out to Cecilia's article cited in Chapter Five!). To Sam English, my thesis neighbor and Counterpal—We Did That! To Naomi Whitney-Hirschmann and Siena Wise, my Dream Team, I love you; thank you for dreaming with me. To Eilis Corcoran and Empress Helwig, thank you for always being there, breakfast, brunch, and dinner (and often well past dinner), to listen, to talk, to entertain, to support; I am so glad we don't live together anymore.

Finally, to all the sluts I've had the pleasure of getting to know, whether a partner or not, learning and growing from and with you all has been a mostly good time. Mostly good is slightly bad, but still mostly *good*. Growth can be hard—harder than writing fifty-seven thousand words—but knowing y'all contributed to how *good* I have become and as a result how *good* this thesis is.

And this thesis is *good*. So this thesis is dedicated to us. Whether I know you or not, if you're a slut, medieval or modern, this thesis is for you—for us. Be proud. Revel in how *good* it is. Revel in how *good* we are.

Chapter One: The Introductory Slut

Hi, I'm Roz. I'm a slut. I like sex. Sex is fun. Thus, I am a slut. There is nothing inherently detrimental or amoral in being a slut. It is just a label—but “just” would inaccurately indicate a shortcoming of the label. “Slut” does not come short. It is a powerful label that allowed me to deeply explore my sexuality beyond orientation and into my identity. The label “slut” in addition to all my other labels enabled me to unpack more of my sexuality: what I like, what I dislike, how I go about having sex and with whom, how I consciously and ethically construct my relationships and boundaries. Whether I mean it in the pejorative or reclaimed sense, I can be proud to be a slut. In fact, we all get to be proud sluts, should we choose to identify as such. The label slut, like all labels of sexuality, is not shameful; it is something in which to take pride and to celebrate, to use as a tool in finding one's community. “Slut,” like all labels of sexuality, is a label because it expresses part of an identity. Identity is only enhanced by use of such a label and therefore the label deserves a certain acceptance, both inward and outward, personally and societally, alongside the rightly earned pride.

A label, such as slut, that functions as both slur and reclaimed identity works extremely well in an application to the women of literature, as they can be interpreted in as many ways as there are readers. For the slut as reader, medieval women especially represent the unique position of being reclaimed sluts in their own actions while simultaneously remaining pejorative sluts, or sluts-as-slur in the sense of their wider patriarchal narratives. In preliminary applications, I settled significantly on the Wife of Bath and women like her, thinking they were quite the sluts, and hoping to one day sit as easily “upon an amblere.” For example the Wife of Bath describes herself in the following way:

I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.
 As help me God, I was a lusty oon,
 And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon,
 And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
 I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.
 For certes, I am al Venerien
 In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,

And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
 Allas, allas! That evere love was synne! (604-614)

She celebrates herself. Veiled through the influences of medieval astrology, she takes pride in her lascivious nature—as well as her bodily appearance with a specific influence on the cunt¹ that allows her to have sex. Such a nature is sexy and fun, dirty and playful, and, most importantly, a self-described inherent aspect of who she is as a woman. She describes herself as a slut without ever using the term. I chose her not only because of her clear slut identity but also because women like her in medieval literature are typically governed by their relationships with men: as mothers, wives and widows, sisters, daughters, and even prostitutes. The Wife of Bath is after all a wife.

When men are taken out of these relationships, women are often left without much characterization, as though they have no identity whatsoever. The Wife of Bath is after all a widow and by definition, her men have left her story. What remains of medieval women's identities after men vanish is relegated to their bodies. Often contemporarily called the “Sexy Lamp Test,” these female characters are irrelevant to the plot and could easily be replaced by a sexy inanimate object, even in the times before lamps existed. There are, however, a few women who, while sexy, are not lamps. The women of medieval texts that are relevant to their plotlines are often relegated to sexual roles—not just sluts, but the “medieval sluts.”

The term “slut” is, of course, multitudinous. As many reclaimed slurs, it functions as both a slur and as a reclamation. In the days of Chaucer and even in his own writing, it functioned as a term commenting on the cleanliness of a person regardless of gender; a slut was a dirty person (M. Jones).

Modern, self-proclaimed slut and sexologist Karley Sciortino writes that “according to the relic

1. A note on vulgarity: “slut,” just like “cunt” and “fuck,” is a shockingly vulgar term and yet vulgarity merits use because Chaucer was just as vulgar with his use of “queyente” and “swyven.” This thesis will use all these terms alike. This thesis aims to be just as vulgar (when the situation calls for it) in descriptions of sexual activity in order to preserve the original medieval intent while simultaneously normalizing such words. Using words like “cunt” and “fuck” only helps in destabilizing the propriety of traditional medieval readings. “Slut” is not a bad word and should not be treated as such. This thesis will not do so.

known as the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘slut’ is a pejorative term for a woman who has many sexual partners. However, in recent years, the word has gone a bit rogue. These days it’s often used maliciously as an umbrella term for any woman who’s openly sexual” (Sciortino, 2). Yet these definitions refer only to the slur and not its reclamation.

As Sciortino says, the word has indeed gone a bit rogue—particularly in its reclamation. For example, the authors of the *Ethical Slut* note that the dominant meaning of the term is “a woman whose sexuality is voracious, indiscriminate and *shameful*,” but reclaim the epithet for “a person of any gender who has the courage to lead life according to *the radical proposition that sex is nice and pleasure is good for you*” (Easton and Hardy, 4. Emphasis mine.). For these writers, to be an ethical slut is to be a force for good: “a slut shares their sexuality the way a philanthropist shares their money—because they have a lot of it to share, because it makes them happy to share it, because sharing makes the world a better place” (ibid.). Though this term is anachronistic, it describes much of the behavior of the women of the *Canterbury Tales* and *Decameron*. The medieval slut, as this study defines her, has a sexual identity focused on the proliferation of sex and sexuality that is meant to be seen as shameful—all as it ever was synnel—within the male driven narrative in which she resides, and yet her sexual identity says something truly powerful about who she is as a *person* in addition to her sexuality.

I emphasize person with the explicit desire to define the medieval slut as a woman and not only a literary character. The authors of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* created their sluts with the explicit desire that they entertain. Literature, due to its purpose of entertainment, becomes “among the most useful sources for the history of sexuality because (in the absence of private letters) imaginative literature gives us the most vivid examples of actual medieval life” (Karras 10). While Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy discuss real-world women, and medieval sluts (as this study defines them) are literary characters, medieval sluts are still useful for talking about real-world dynamics,

both medieval and modern. Where Chaucer and Boccaccio's sluts start out as one character in one tale, the character easily escapes them. Once the story is written they develop a life of their own heavily influenced by the actions written by their creators. Chaucer and Boccaccio write the character to be in search of her autonomy, and that search relates itself so well to personhood rather than characterhood that their characters effectively become people. Ruth Mazo Karras goes on to caveat this paradigm of medieval characters by writing "the behavior of literary characters cannot be taken as typical (although we may perhaps say that it can be taken as plausible)" (ibid). Sluts similarly are not typical. Their behaviors are unique to their circumstances and as each sexual experience is different, each circumstance becomes different resulting in an entirely distinctive identity unique to the slut who holds it.

At risk of sounding essentialist, a slut is a person who has sex. The term functions as both a slur and a reclamation; the reclamation, along with a set of ethics, allows for a more nuanced understanding of medieval sexuality. As Karras writes in her aptly titled book, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*, medieval sexuality is more about the sex and sexual acts done unto one another and less about identity. The ethical slut is a modern construction of sexual identity wherein abundant sex with abundant partners is celebrated not as amoral or immoral but as a way of imposing an ethical framework onto one's already slutty actions, such as those of modern polyamory. The ethical framework of the medieval slut prizes autonomy above all else. The medieval ethical slut requires autonomy—the ability to act as one wishes in accordance with self-governance—in order to make the more lofty ethical decisions of consent and boundary negotiation. For the medieval ethical slut, her ethics derive from her autonomy, presented through agency, consent, and her ability to celebrate her sexuality. I propose to offer a reworking of this framework through the literature of Chaucer and Boccaccio to include the medieval understandings of consent and autonomy and thus create the medieval ethical slut.

The new framework, and thus the medieval ethical slut herself, lies somewhere between strict medieval interpretations—as discussed by Ruth Mazo Karras and Christopher Cannon, working from Thomas Aquinas—and strict modern interpretations—as discussed in Easton and Hardy’s *Ethical Slut*. I will argue that the medieval ethical slut, because of her ethics, remains a slut even when her autonomy is threatened. Her autonomy, her agency, and her celebration of them through her sexual relationships are an integral part of her identity as an ethical slut. Her agency makes her the medieval ethical slut, even when that agency is threatened by outside, patriarchal, unethical influences. While the medieval slut would not identify as a slut the way a modern slut would, with a label and a community, the two different sluts still have much in common. They both strive toward an ethical understanding of sex and its relationship to promiscuity, personal relationships, and, above all, consent and autonomy. They even go about doing so in similar ways, the medieval slut closely tracking with a surprising amount of advice from the *Ethical Slut*. Where the medieval slut diverges from the modern is of utmost importance. The medieval slut is not the modern slut. She is a consciously created character, often acting like a real woman but always remaining a literary figure, who diverges from the sexual mores of her time because of her creators’ concerns about such mores. The literature of Chaucer and Boccaccio, registering unease with the status of sex in the later Middle Ages and even bringing attention to its multiplicitous ironies with irony of their own, construct the medieval slut to enforce a medieval set of sexual ethics more nuanced than that of their contemporaries, similar to that of their modern successors, and yet entirely their own.

As literary figure emblematic of real woman, the medieval slut becomes an addition to Elizabeth Fowler’s concept of the “social person,” meant to represent personhood in addition to characterhood through the slut’s very real issues of sex and sexuality. Sluthood acts as unifier between personhood and characterhood in order to make transformative statements about the way

modern scholars, sluts, and slut-scholars are meant to view these narratives. Much as slut has evolved in reclamation alongside its use as a slur, the slut's sense of self "indicates a paradigmatic representation of personhood that has evolved historically among the institutions of social life" (Fowler, 2). Thus the slut becomes a topos of a character alongside other topoi, such as the priest, victim, criminal, etc., which Fowler utilizes to create a definition of the social person. The medieval slut—as a social person—offers "a new method of analysis for the human figure in words" (ibid. 3) so that the medieval slut, while a literary figure, is based in personhood and therefore challenges previously held convictions about personhood. The medieval slut, as literary figure, acts as woman in order to make a more meaningful statement about the sexual ethics of the medieval sluts, even the modern sluts, of the real world. Much as the medieval slut exists between reclamation and slur in order to provide commentary on both subjects, she exists as a social person between character and person to provide explanation for the apparent contradictions we find in these medieval characters.

By consciously creating the medieval slut as an extension of the social person different from the modern ethical slut yet still in conversation with her, her authors lead us to the significance of the medieval slut. The medieval slut matters not only in the important "self-help" category of slut representation, but in the greater theoretical ramifications of reading traditionally patriarchal narratives through an ethical, sex-positive lens. By applying the anachronistic term of slut to the scenarios of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales*, we are able to strip away certain misguided notions about the propriety of popularized late medieval narratives. These works have long been hyper-sacralized as the pinnacle of medieval thought surrounding love, romance, and therefore sex—even leading to the creation of Chaucer as the magnificent, imposing *figure* of "The Father of English Poetry." The medieval slut desacralizes them in order to note their both their nuances and their limitations as well as their liberations—vulgarity, pornography, sexual ethics, and at times even misogyny—as experts in such subjects. The medieval slut attempts to destabilize the prim and

proper readings of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* in favor of a more accurate display of women's (and occasionally men's) desire. A reading in the style of the medieval slut reinforces the ethical framework with which the sluts of the tales are already working in order to demonstrate the power that comes from the reclaimed term "slut," as well as the power those sluts have to actively change the tales in which they reside.

Chaucer's Wife of Bath thus makes for the perfect prototypical medieval slut. She is a woman who celebrates her promiscuity, having had five husbands at the church door (6), even going so far as to question the patriarchal power over promiscuity in her celebration. She says of marriage

God bad us for to wexe and multiplie;
That gentil text kan I wel understonde.
Eek wel I woot, he seyde myn housbonde
Sholde lete fader and mooder and take to me.
But of no nombre mencion made he,
Of bigamy, or of octogamy;
Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileyny? (28-34)

In so doing, she questions the morality of the church. How can relegation to monogamy be ethical when it goes against what God has bade? How can men question the villainy of polyamory when monogamy clearly presents so many problems? In her prologue, the Wife of Bath addresses pressing questions regarding medieval sexuality and gender—and of their ethics—by speaking of her own slutty experience. Furthermore, she does so through "pleye." Whereas the modern slut does so through guidebooks like the *Ethical Slut* that attempt to dissuade any sluttishness (the medieval shame) in favor of sluttiness (the revelry of reclamation), the medieval slut celebrates both. The medieval slut's "entente nys but for to pleye" (192) just like the Wife of Bath. As Lisa Perfetti writes, the Wife of Bath's pleye

is also linked to her sexuality since she knows the arts of sex ("the olde daunce"), is dressed in scarlet clothing, has a red face, and is "gat-tothed," which in medieval culture signified a large sexual appetite. All of these characteristics combine to create a portrait of the "*bad girl*" whose excessive female sexuality is linked to wide-mouthed laughter and joking (30. Emphasis mine.)

Where Perfetti says “bad girl,” I say slut. As an aside, “bad girl” itself is an incredibly powerful identifier. Perfetti chose it specifically. While it plays successfully into the umbrella term of “slut,” “bad girls” per se should be noted for their individuality. Sciortino writes of the “bad girl” that she marks a symbol of the many problems of slut reclamation: “we don’t want to simply reverse the idea of being a slut from being ‘bad’ to being ‘good,’ or from unacceptable to acceptable. There *is* something bad about being a slut—something naughty, controversial, and unpredictable” (15). Sluts should not lose this aspect of their multifaceted identity. Medieval sluts in particular need this aspect in order to live up to the ploy of their stories. They are meant to be entertaining. Because her status as a slut allows her to live under both paradigms—the reclaimed empowered woman and the slut-as-slur—the Wife of Bath is able to live in both paradigms: as both the jokester and the butt of the joke.

Her duality of slut identity comes not from who she is as a woman, but instead from her consciously constructed nature as a female character in a male-driven, patriarchal story. There is no doubt that Chaucer and Boccaccio were sexy writers; the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* were clearly written with sex on the brain. The first eighteen lines of Chaucer’s *General Prologue* are filled with undeniable sexual imagery that sets a general atmosphere that what is to come will certainly “prick” the reader in their “corage.” The *Decameron*, itself, is a story focused on love; both the frame narrative and the hundred tales tell of the myriad ways in which women go about loving, or fucking, or betraying based off their own autonomous decisions. Boccaccio even intended the book to be a *Galeotto* “as a remedy to women in love who are confined to their homes, have no means of release for their frustrated desires, and may thus be able to find some sort of vicarious satisfaction in reading” (Boccaccio, xxxviii).² Such an intended *Galeotto* is similar to the “practical guide” Easton

2. Rebhorn translation. I intended to use the Rebhorn translation throughout the thesis, however it is abridged and does not include several vital tales. When a tale is missing from the Rebhorn translation, I supplement it with the Payne

and Hardy endeavor to create. With so many different women in the tales, and so many of the tales being told by men, the men seem to construct, alongside society, a set of rules or expectations based on the virtuosity or morality of the women with whom they interact. For example, as Wayne Rebhorn writes in his introduction to the *Decameron*,

Dioneo's topic actually entails at least three separate challenges. First—and most obviously—it contains an affront to conventional morality and social harmony: women's wit will achieve sexual satisfaction for them outside of marriage and at the expense of the men they deceive. Second, his topic is challenging to the group because it both appears to identify women rather than their lovers as the responsible agents in their illicit love affairs and deliberately portrays them as the antagonists of men—of their husbands—rather than as, say, the accomplices of their lovers. Finally, Dioneo's topic implicitly contains a distinctly antihierarchical element, insofar as Boccaccio's society thought of women as being socially, politically, intellectually—indeed, ontologically—inferior to men. (ibid. xxxi)

While it is important to note that they have attributes of real women (indeed, I will often refer to them as such), it is far more important to remember that Boccaccio and Chaucer's women belong to their male creators. While they enact the attributes of the reclaimed medieval ethical slut in their stories, they do so when it best fits the patriarchal narrative. The medieval slut as social person is a woman, and like all medieval women, she is subject to the patriarchal society dictating her sexuality. In the case of the medieval slut, due to her status as social person, her subjection to the patriarchy comes as a result of her male-authored construction. Like sluts of the real world, the literary medieval slut has the opportunity to fight against the patriarchal influences of her life, as she does exist outside her male-authored construction according to the theory of the social person. The Wife of Bath is only as “proto-feminist” as Chaucer allows her to be, and ultimately the sexual politics Chaucer allows are only included to further his own sense of pleye—the sexual pleye imposed as early as April's showers. Chaucer and Boccaccio use sluts, like the prototypical Wife of Bath, to

translation. I recognize that these are two very different translations, however they have similar styles and both were written with the intention of keeping faithful to the original Italian.

embody the duality of slut identity and use that embodiment for their own authorial advancement, present in their ability to successfully portray both sides of sluttiness.

In the romances, the embodiment pushes away from traditional medieval courtly romances in order to further Chaucer and Boccaccio's ethical ideal of an autonomous woman, later upheld by the extremely modern ideals of the *Ethical Slut*. This woman belongs more to the category of reclaimed slut than to that of slut-as-slur so that she might fit into the courtly ideal. In the fabliaux, the opposite is true—the embodiment furthers the idea of a sluttish woman who, while still autonomous, belongs more to the slut-as-slur identifier. By identifying as the slut-as-slur she might exemplify the butt of the joke while attempting to promote the ethical standard behind the joke. These divides in genre result in the different subsets of the medieval slut. Where the Wife of Bath is the prototype, she does not encompass all of medieval sexuality or womanhood.

Therefore, medieval sluthood, like modern sluthood, must be separated into what Easton and Hardy call “slut styles,” from which a slut can begin to create an identity. For the purposes of this thesis, I will define and examine the three main slut styles of the “courtly slut,” the “adulterous slut,” and the “professional slut” or whore. Each following chapter will analyze the slut style in terms of the most relevant tales and the sexual actions of their slutty characters, at times both female and male. Where these “slut styles” diverge from the modern sense is in the sense of identity. Medieval sluthood is not so much a style to be practiced as it is a set of roles to be performed just as other sex acts are performed. This set of roles includes bottoming and topping, payment, and of course Andreas Capellanus's courtly rules set forth in *De Amore*. While these roles each constitute individual acts, each act works with another to create a sense of identity in the same way that one who participates in bottoming activity becomes a bottom. Medieval sexual identity is built upon acts coming together to form a singular slut identity. For example, courtly love as a construct is built from the individual acts and rules of courtly love. The construct then becomes integral to the courtly

lover's sense of self and thus the courtly slut's as well. The adulterous slut is nothing without the construct of adultery. The professional slut's identity is even recognized and enforced as an identity by the patriarchal society in which she lives. As Karras writes, "the denial of the existence of sexual identity before any given historical period shuts off the possibility of a history of sexuality that is comparative over the *longue durée*" (159). What we find in the comparison is that the identities of the slut, in their various forms, are similar to the modern and yet uniquely distinct from everything else. The medieval slut, as the Wife of Bath puts it, "may no while in chastitee abyde, / that is assailed upon ech a syde" (255-256). Her identity as a slut is tied intrinsically to how others view her, the actions she herself performs, and above all, her own relationship with her chastity (i.e., her sexuality). By using the term slut, we are able to analyze the actions and personalities of any man or woman assailed for their chastity, whether through a self-enforced ethical framework or not, whether through a sense of reclamation or not. By dividing the term slut into the aforementioned subsets and corresponding chapters, such analysis explores the nuances of each slut's individual experiences. In this way, the term functions as a group identifier, allowing similar sluts to share a similar name and therefore a communal literary experience, but not going so far as to encompass the essentialist, "a slut is a person who has sex."

The courtly slut is simply a slut in a medieval courtly tale, not necessarily without ethics but responding in the typical fashion of a courtly beloved; she is a slut firm in her place on the courtly pedestal. When the courtly slut, a subset of the medieval slut, imposes her own ethical framework onto her unethical courtly situation in order to redefine her relationships in protection of her own autonomy, sexual and otherwise, she endeavors to become the medieval ethical slut. Within the courtly slut's situation, lust serves as unethical sluthood whereas love and lust working together serves as ethical sluthood. When lust masquerades as love, when lust creates an illusion for love as often occurs in the courtly tradition, the courtly slut must dissipate such an illusion in order to

preserve her ethical framework, her ethical relationships, and her autonomy. The courtly slut is not quite the modern ethical slut—she never could be as her own situations, her own time period, are too far removed from the situations modern sluts face—yet she shares the most important quality of the modern ethical slut: a “celebration of sexuality with an open mind and an open heart” (Easton and Hardy, 276). Within the romantic tales of courtly love, the courtly slut’s struggle to define and redefine her sexual ethics in terms of her sexual relationships is of the utmost importance. These sluts are focused primarily on their growth, beyond the struggle to reclaim slut as a force for good.

The chapter on courtly sluthood aims to prove this definition by analyzing several notable courtly sluts. Each slut approaches their courtly scenario in a different manner. All do so with an ethical framework that, while in one instance overwhelmed by patriarchal sexual drive, allows them to retain their autonomy and grow as women. In multiple cases, doing so causes the label to be extended to their male partners. The men of courtly love like sex. Sex is fun for them. Thus, they too are sluts. Their courtly situation allows them to learn just as much about their likes, their dislikes, their methods of constructing a relationship as their female partners; they even go so far as to learn from their female partners. Occasionally they even do so with the same peculiarly medieval ethical framework. By analyzing the specific actions, such as consent and boundary negotiation, of each slut while focusing intently the actions’ ethical ramifications, we gain insight into the sexual identity of each slut. Courtly love of course becomes an identity for the sluts to latch onto, but courtly sluthood offers a more nuanced understanding of their identities. By applying the anachronistic term of slut to the courtly love scenario, we are able to strip away certain misguided notions about the propriety of courtly love. By calling a slut a slut, we can learn about these constructed characters beyond the limitations of both the traditional medieval topos as well as Chaucer and Boccaccio’s respective illusory and parodic perversions of the topos.

In Chapter Two, commonalities among the would-be courtly lovers present themselves so that they all fit, somewhat haphazardly, into the role of the medieval slut. Regardless of gender or courtly role (lover, beloved, etc.), they do their best to follow an ethical framework. By reading them as medieval sluts with an (occasionally failing) ethical framework, we have a deeper understanding of who they are as social people. This deeper understanding enlightens not only the reading but the reader as well. The reader, watching as courtly sluts become ethical sluts, is empowered on their own journey of medieval-inspired ethical sluthood. This style of reading the courtly love narrative should be utilized because it destabilizes traditional readings of courtly love in order to elevate the reader's understanding of the characters as well as the reader's understanding of the self by allowing the reader self-acceptance of their own slut identity. By seeing sluts in medieval courtly love, the reader sees where their own sluthood comes from in addition to a forewarning about what kind of sluthood would be best to practice.

The adulterous slut, as her name suggests, is a slut with a husband but a slut who has sex with a partner not her husband. While she practices adultery often without her husband's awareness, she remains self-aware. She is aware of the ethical ramifications of her actions. Due to this awareness and her own circumstances as an individual, it is for her to decide whether or not adultery is the mark of a medieval ethical slut. Unsurprisingly, she often decides that it is. Because of the conditions of her marriage—specifically that the wife is rarely having sex with her husband—and what medieval marriage entails—specifically that both the ecclesiastical and secular courts legalized, regulated, and imposed sex within a marriage—the adulterous slut inherently believes that she deserves sex from an outside source. She is a slut focused primarily on good sex with a partner equally interested in good sex; it just so happens that this partner is not her husband. Thus in a straightforward manner, she is an adulterous slut. She is a person who happens to be a wife and yet is capable of her own sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual ethics apart from her relationship with her

husband. She is a medieval slut but with a modern ethical flair. The adulterous slut is not quite the modern ethical slut—she never could be as her own situations, her own time period, are too far removed from the situations modern sluts face—yet she shares the most important quality of the modern ethical slut: a “celebration of sexuality with an open mind and an open heart” (Easton and Hardy, 276). Within the comedic tales of the medieval fabliaux, the adulterous slut’s struggle to define and redefine her sexual ethics in terms of her sexual relationships is of importance, though not of the utmost importance. Of the utmost importance to the adulterous slut is her own drives and boundaries. These sluts are focused primarily on their growth in order that they might be satisfied in addition to their struggle to reclaim sluttiness and sluttishness as a force for good.

The chapter on adulterous sluthood aims to prove this definition by analyzing several notable adulterous sluts. By first looking at the legal (both secular and ecclesiastical) construction of marriage in the late Middle Ages, we are able to arrive at an understanding contrary to what the literature presents. The literature of Chaucer and Boccaccio strives to answer the ethical question of what to do when a marriage fails to meet such a construction as created by the law. They answer with adultery. Their adulterous marriage is just as much a construction of marriage as the legal construction. In fact, the authors’ construction of adulterous marriage is just as much a construction as that of the courtly love topos. The construct presents a type of woman; this woman is the insatiable adulterous slut with a set of ethics who always remains on top—in an ethical sense, a sexual sense, and, most importantly, through her worldly situation. By analyzing how this kind of slut is able to get on top within a patriarchal narrative and medieval worldview that would strive to keep her on the bottom, we come to realize just how slutty these women are. They make their own choices about how to have sex, why to have sex, and with whom to have sex in order to exercise their own sexual autonomy. This chapter is not only about the ethics of practicing adultery, but how

such ethics are utilized in order to present an autonomous character closer to actual woman than to fabliau's caricature.

In Chapter Three, the term “slut” comes to signify more than just a destabilizing of the propriety of courtly love. Here “adulterous slut” becomes a term that encapsulates the power that comes from a sexually promiscuous and autonomous woman. Her power is a different power than that of the courtly slut, and yet it remains so without taking power away from the courtly tradition. No one slut style devalues the sexual ethics of their fellow sluts. By reading comedic tales of adultery in the style of the courtly slut, the reader comes to see that sluthood is varied: it means different things in different contexts while retaining an overarching ethical framework. The adulterous slut shows the reader another kind of slut style, helping the reader to embrace their own sense of sexual identity. This kind of reading allows the reader to be on top with the sluts of the chapter because it empowers sexual voracity without punishment.

At risk of returning to essentialism, while a slut is a person who has sex, a professional slut is a person who has sex for money. The term slut functions as both a slur and a reclamation and it is the reclamation along with a set of ethics that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the exchange economies present in medieval fabliaux. The professional slut³, a subset of the medieval slut, is simply a slut in a medieval fabliau, not necessarily without ethics but responding in the typical fashion of an errant wife. She, in particular falls into two categories depending on the extent of her ethics and the response of the patriarchy—the professional slut is either a prostitute or a whore. The distinction between whore and prostitute is of the utmost importance. A prostitute is devoid of internalized shame; she is only doing her job as mandated by the Church's theory of excessive male

3. This is to say a modern ethical ideal for a sex worker. “Professional Slut” allows the continuations of the epithet as with “Courtly Slut” and “Adulterous Slut.”

desire.⁴ Thus she is able to participate in the transaction (sex for money) as she would in any other transaction. The medieval whore, alternatively, has a certain amount of emotion attached to the monetary transaction due to the societal constraints on women's vocations and emotions. This emotion takes many forms, most notably that of desire, whether the desire be for sex or money or money for sex. Attached to this emotion is also a certain amount of shame, not necessarily originating from self-imposition, but always from the patriarchal society that judges whores to be unethical and amoral. The whore is both slutty and sluttish; using "sluttishness" to refer to the medieval quality of sluttish, meaning dirty or slovenly (M. Jones) and "sluttiness" to refer to the modern quality of promiscuity. The professional slut, both whore and prostitute alike, is not without ethics, but as with all medieval sluts the ethical framework must always be self-determined.

Ultimately, the medieval slut is a woman who enjoys sex and makes her own choices about with whom she has it. When the professional slut, a subset of the medieval slut, imposes her own ethical framework onto her unethical working situation in order to redefine her relationships in protection of her own autonomy, sexual and otherwise, she endeavors to create the identity of the medieval ethical slut. When the professional slut endeavors, the text registers the impulse to treat this woman with newly defined autonomy as a woman. She is more than a character because her author has imbued her with qualities and a story too closely resembling reality to treat her as only a character.

The chapter on professional sluthood aims to prove this definition by analyzing several "notorious" professional sluts. Here notorious has quotations because (as the chapter will demonstrate) these sluts, are unfairly relegated to amorality. Even though they work with an ethical framework comparable to those of the courtly and adulterous sluts who have come before, their patriarchal stories relegate them to amorality. The professional sluts are so relegated because of the

4. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote on the subject of prostitution as necessary to contain excess male desire as an outlet and alternative to violence toward "moral" women (i.e. non-prostitutes) (Hancock 14:30).

unwillingness of the text to accept for a fact that whoredom and morality can work together to create an ethical slut contrary to popular misogyny of the day. The sluts of this chapter show a wildly different conception of themselves. The authors write a code of ethics into their professional sluts only to have such a code completely disregarded by their male characters, their frame narrative storytellers, and thus the reader, whether the reader performs a reading in the style of the medieval ethical slut or not.

In Chapter Four, the construction of the medieval ethical slut is not expanded upon as it has been in the previous two. Instead, it is challenged. The ethical framework suddenly does not work as well because the sluts are suddenly cast as amoral villains as opposed to heroines with whom we can enjoy a journey of sexual and self-exploration. This suddenness comes from the patriarchal notion, still extant, that whores are without ethics. Not so sudden after all, this chapter forces the reader to question the merits of ethical sluthood when applied to the medieval tradition, for the medieval ethical slut is not the modern—she never could be. Ultimately, the chapter comes to the conclusion that the analysis of the medieval slut must be applied to these professional sluts in order to fly in the face of such patriarchal notions inherent in the tale. The tales are complex and in their complexity lies room for our own challenge: that these whores deserve the same respect and ethical framework as any other slut in any other tale. These professional sluts have a job to do. Calling them by what they are only makes their job easier and ours as readers more enriching because it allows us to see past the individual to critically evaluate the sexual ethics of the tale. By critically evaluating, I come to the important conclusion that the tales of professional sluthood do not approach sexual ethics with the same open-mindedness as the other slut styles, indicating that scholars must *reevaluate* the role the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* play in understandings of medieval proto-feminism. The reading through the lens of the professional slut destabilizes the medieval slut enough to be a compelling

argument for the multifaceted nature of medieval sexuality and failings in literature to fully represent such a nature.

These three slut styles—courtly, adulterous, and professional—are obviously not the only styles to be analyzed in the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales*. They are however, the most notable because they share the quality of marriage. Each slut in this thesis is married. For the medieval slut, marriage presents the unique opportunity to step outside of the wifely identity where she is relegated to property and not personhood and step into the slut identity where her personhood may grow. By entertaining a slut identity, these women become more than wives. The wife who is also a medieval slut is a person who happens to be a wife and yet is capable of her own sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual ethics apart from her relationship with her husband. Courtly love, adultery, and especially professional sluthood when the slut is a married whore, all present extremes of sluthood in the marital context. Because they are extremes, they allow for extreme analysis in the creation of the medieval slut. The extremity of these slut identities allows for the destabilization of the propriety associated with medieval literature. They, like the Wife of Bath, are quintessential sluts. In this thesis, I focus on marriage because marriage allows these women a gateway to sluthood. As the Wife of Bath says,

Thow seyst we wyves wol oure vices hide
Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe—
Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewel! (282-284)

These sluts are not sluts because they are married. They did not hide their sluttiness nor their sluttishness before they went to the church door. They have always been sluts, as a part of their sexual identity. Their marriage simply allows for a greater exploration of that identity, often with the very complications of marriage, such as courtly love, such as adultery, and such as professionalism. In this way, slut becomes a label for a certain kind of sexual identity: one focused on the proliferation of sex and sexuality that is meant to be seen as shameful within the male driven

narrative in which she resides, and yet says something truly powerful about who she is as a *person* in addition to her sexuality. She is autonomous in that she enjoys sex and makes her own choices about with whom she has it. In opposition to this term is the woman who attempts to remain irresponsible of such choices. The opposition to the medieval ethical slut is the slut who does not choose either to have sex or to not (as we will see in chapter two, even the celibate slut is still a slut because of the choices she makes). The opposition to the slut is someone who denies their own sexual autonomy especially when threatened by outside, patriarchal, unethical influences. While the term slut feels good in your mouth, as Sciortino writes “it just sounds perfect—so sharp and clear and beautiful. It’s one of those satisfying four-letter words, like ‘cunt’ and ‘fuck’” (1) the counterterm does not. There is no one counterterm because “slut” through its slurred definition, through its reclamation, through its medieval radicalization, has come to mean so much that one term cannot counter an entire identity. Slut has so many synonyms that all basically mean the same thing. Tramp. Whore. Floozy. Harlot. Hussy. Tart. Broad. Trollop. Strumpet. There is no one term that encapsulates what these all mean. But slut comes close in a way that a counterterm does not. “Prude” responds only to promiscuity and not the autonomy of ethical choice, and ultimately functions contradictorily in its approach to morality. Slut does not have a proper counterterm because a counterterm does not come from a place of both misogynistic hatred and prideful self-reclamation. Slut as a label works because it is simultaneously vulgar and multitudinously brilliant—just like the women of the tales the label describes. The Wife of Bath is simultaneously vulgar and brilliant. She is multitudinous in that she represents so much of what a medieval woman could be beyond what she is allowed to be. The medieval slut is not so loose-fitting an identity that it seems almost anyone could be a slut, but is to be celebrated in that everyone has the potential to explore their possible slut identity.

“Slut” is not inherently a “bad word.” “Slut” is, however, a great label; it labels one’s sense of promiscuity and autonomy as an aspect of sexual identity. This label, used extensively in modern

sexual politics, is anachronistic, yet describes much of the behavior of the women of late medieval literature. The medieval slut's sexual identity focuses on the proliferation of sex and sexuality that seems shameful within her patriarchal narrative, and yet it says something truly powerful about *who* she is in addition to her sexuality. This thesis examines the stories of specific medieval sluts in order to destabilize traditional readings of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* in favor of a more accurate display of women's desire. A reading in the style of the medieval slut reinforces the ethical framework with which the sluts are already working in order to demonstrate the power that comes from the reclaimed term "slut." Furthermore, it allows for modern sluts to see their medieval roots while simultaneously encouraging modern sluts to question how they have changed or even evolved from their medieval counterparts.

Chapter Two: The Courtly Slut

Courtly Love as Gateway to Ethical Promiscuity

While Foucauldian philosophy dictates the idea of sexual identity, that is to say a modern understanding of sexual orientation, as a nineteenth century bourgeois creation, there certainly existed an idea of romance as an affective identity long before then. Most notably within the literature of the late Middle Ages, a romantic identity existed in the form of courtly love. Not just an idea, courtly love constitutes an identity in that it creates a set role, similar to a gender role or a sexual role, for the courtly lover to participate in. First developed by troubadours of southern France, courtly love is a “highly conventionalized medieval system of chivalric love and etiquette” (OED) wherein—typically—a young man falls in love with a woman and (often in futility) attempts to win her over through ennobling, heroic deeds. Through these deeds, the man shows not only his love for his lady, but also the superiority of his lady—she deserves to be put onto a pedestal by the courtly lover so that the courtly lover may continue his (often futile) attempts to serve her. This futility comes not from the woman’s unwillingness to love, however, but from her previously married state or in the case that she is not married, from her higher social standing which is only elevated by her place on the aforementioned pedestal. As Mark Taylor categorizes it, “the lady must be unattainable until she is seduced” (74). The love shared between the man and woman, both when it is and is not reciprocated, is characterized by suffering, self-doubt, and—for the man—a peculiarly servile and imprisoning essence. This imprisoning servitude reflects the man’s servile state he (as knight) owes to his lord, and as C.S. Lewis describes, creates “a struggle between personified abstractions” resulting in “a feudalization of love” (Lewis, 1).

These types of lovers fit into the identity⁵ of the “courtly slut.” At risk of sounding essentialist, a slut is a person who has sex.⁶ The term functions as both a slur and a reclamation and it is the reclamation along with a set of ethics that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the courtly love tradition. The courtly slut is simply a slut in a medieval courtly tale, not necessarily without ethics but responding in the typical fashion of a courtly beloved; she is a slut firm in her place on the courtly pedestal. While I use the female pronoun here, that is not to say that men are excluded from the slut role. Men, too as we will later see, can be firm in their courtly positions, either as the outside lover or as the husband. The use of the female pronoun is meant to typify the courtly slut as a woman in order to show the multifaceted nature of sexuality and desire in often overlooked female characters. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the ethical slut is a modern construction of sexual identity wherein abundant sex with abundant partners is celebrated not as an amoral or immoral slur regarding a slut’s promiscuity but as a way of imposing an ethical framework onto one’s already slutty actions, like those of modern polyamory. The medieval ethical slut is a reworking of such a framework through the literature of Chaucer and Boccaccio to include the more medieval understandings of consent and autonomy that lie somewhere between strict medieval interpretations—like Ruth Mazo Karras’s and Christopher Cannon’s, working from Thomas Aquinas’s—and strict modern interpretations—like Easton and Hardy’s *Ethical Slut*—(all discussed further in this chapter and the introductory chapter). The medieval ethical slut, because of her ethics, remains as such even when her autonomy is threatened. Her autonomy, her agency, and her

5. Identity, in this sense refers to the modern Foucauldian ideal of a sexual identity that goes beyond just sex acts, or even beyond just orientation or gender to encompass all aspects of sexuality. Of such an identity, sluthood, like queerness or kinkiness, is just one aspect in a multifaceted identity that makes a person—or a literary character—an individual.

6. As noted in the introduction, this thesis uses a purposefully colloquial, even vulgar, style as such a style is very important when addressing issues of sex and sexuality since a comfortable tone can make it easier to talk about such issues that are traditionally seen as uncomfortable. Especially as “slut” itself is a colloquial term, a thesis on sluthood needs a colloquial style. As this chapter is on the most scholarly subject, its colloquial style is not as exaggerated as other chapters.

celebration of them through her sexual relationships are an integral part of her identity as an ethical slut. Her agency makes her the medieval ethical slut, even when that agency is threatened by outside, patriarchal, unethical influences.

Ultimately, the medieval slut is a woman who enjoys sex and makes her own choices about with whom she has it. When the courtly slut, a subset of the medieval slut, imposes her own ethical framework onto her unethical courtly situation in order to redefine her relationships in protection of her own autonomy, sexual and otherwise, she endeavors to become the medieval ethical slut. Within the courtly slut's situation, lust serves as unethical sluthood whereas love and lust working together serves as ethical sluthood. When lust masquerades as love, when lust creates an illusion for love as often occurs in the courtly tradition, the courtly slut must dissipate such an illusion in order to preserve her ethical framework, her ethical relationships, and her autonomy. The courtly slut is not quite the modern ethical slut—she never could be as her own situations, her own time period, are too far removed from the situations modern sluts face—yet she shares the most important quality of the modern ethical slut: a “celebration of sexuality with an open mind and an open heart” (Easton and Hardy, 276).

The medieval ethical slut is important as a constructed sexual identity not only because such a construct allows modern sluts a unique sense of history but also because it explores and expands upon medieval sexual identity through the redefining of sex, sexual love, and the boundaries necessary to ethically experience both. The medieval ethical slut tells us about the literature of Boccaccio and Chaucer, but more importantly allows us to examine the struggles their female characters undergo in search of their own sluthood and even personhood. By examining these patriarchal narratives with a radical sex-positive lens, the slut as reader is able to destabilize the propriety associated with traditional readings of such literature in order to reclaim the literature for

herself. Not only does the slut as reader reclaim the term slut, but also the stories in which she finds herself present. She is able to give herself a voice where Boccaccio and Chaucer gave a character. Returning to courtly sluts, it would then seem that courtly lovers do not share their love in the way that ethical sluts do. It is this particular slut, not the medieval ethical and certainly not the modern ethical that believes in the starvation economy. Instead of belief in abundance—instead of a sharing and celebration of sex and sexual love as “fundamental forces for good, activities with the potential to strengthen intimate bonds, enhance lives, open spiritual awareness, even change the world” (Easton and Hardy, 4)—courtly sluts, both the beloved and the lover, take the approach of a starvation economy. The feudalization of love which creates a struggle between personified abstractions only emboldens the idea that there is not enough love to go around. Courtly love as a concept results in power structures in which one lover believes that more love or sex for their lover means less love or sex for themselves. According to such a power structure, a courtly beloved with a husband could never provide enough love or sex to her courtly lover while participating in any sexual or amorous relationship with her husband. This belief is entirely contrary to ethical sluthood and fashions a kind of conviction wherein “desperate starvation is just around the corner if we don’t corner some love right now” (Easton and Hardy, 57).

Yet simultaneously, courtly love does advocate for sluthood. Because there is the occasional reciprocation—the parameters being that she even entertains the courtly concept—on the woman’s behalf, she does inadvertently become a slut. Should the beloved woman in her married state return the affections of the man, she would entertain the idea of multiple partners. As polyamory describes those loving many, mostly in self-defined ways, it means different things to each person who does love many. According to Easton and Hardy “some use it to mean multiple committed live-in relationships, forms of group marriage; others use it as an umbrella word to cover all forms of sex and love and domesticity outside conventional monogamy” (8). And while the ideals of sex and love

were certainly different in the late Middle Ages, the reciprocation of an already married woman within the context of courtly love certainly lies outside of conventional monogamy.

The lack of the beloved's action beyond her internal reciprocation, the lack of external action in the form of direct sex acts, comes not from a lack of love, but a social stigma incredibly similar to that which modern poly people continue to face. While Karley Sciortino defines a slut as "someone who has no moral obstacle between themselves and their desire to enjoy sex...a person who has sex with who they want, how they want, and isn't ashamed about it" (2), that is an ideal that does not account for the continued presence of shame, particularly in the Middle Ages. This shame is deeply engrained in female autonomy and promiscuity mainly due to the medieval Church's portrayal of women. Beginning literally at the beginning, the Church demonizes sexually active women from Eve all the way to the modern day. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, believed that promiscuous women were lost to sin, fit only to be sewers for men's own lust (Karras, 162). The sluts of courtly love have no way of battling this sex negativity, particularly when "the myth that long-term monogamous relationships are the only real relationships" (Easton and Hardy, 15) is not so much a myth as the viable reality for women controlled by medieval Church doctrine.

Outside of the literary, non-monogamy was seen only as adultery and adultery only as sin. In secular medieval society, adultery by women was especially heinous in terms of ownership. While the unmarried woman, or *femme seule*, could own herself, (Karras, 64) a wife was less person and more property, and thus female adultery was stigmatized similarly to theft of property. Christopher Cannon goes so far as to weaponize adultery as "a woman's consent has the power to accomplish acts—in particular to threaten her husband's financial interest in the act that is marriage" (75). According to Ruth Mazo Karras "men's fear of women's adultery was part of a more generalized fear and distrust of feminine independence" (89). And yet within the literary, claims Karras, courtly love is a "genre often connected with a positive valuation of at least some women's adultery" (91).

She treats “the courtly love phenomenon as merely a literary game, arguing that given general attitudes toward female adultery in medieval society the kinds of relationships discussed in the poetry *could not have been acceptable*” (92). She even points out the problems of such a game in terms of sluthood by observing

furthermore, although this poetry seems to place women in a position of power—the man is begging the woman for her love—it is putting her on a pedestal and objectifying her rather than according her any real power in the relationship. As the ‘court of love’ cases show, the genre considered it the woman’s obligation to grant her favors if the man was worthy. (93)

In this section, Karras’s reference to an objectification calls on the original meaning of the term slut. Instead of the powerful reclamation of “slut” Easton and Hardy make, Karras argues for a promiscuous woman whose sexual and amorous decisions lie outside her own autonomy. The required passion and reciprocation on the woman’s behalf within the construct of courtly love—the required adultery on the woman’s behalf—makes the woman a slut, but unfortunately not an ethical one. Karras’s construction lies directly within the courtly slut, firm in her place on the courtly pedestal, without challenging sexual ethics as a medieval ethical slut must.

It is these very concerns of sluthood and ethics—the concern that women are forced into a misogynistic shameful trope of sluthood without a sense of celebration of sex and love, that they are only ever sluts-as-slurs and never reclaimed ethical sluts—that prompt Boccaccio and Chaucer to adapt the traditional courtly love trope. Boccaccio adapts through parody and Chaucer through illusion both in an effort to show how lust alone serves as unethical sluthood whereas lust and love (courtly lust and marital love) working together in the same singular relationship is ethical sluthood. Take for example one of Boccaccio’s early stories of adapted courtly love. The *Decameron*, itself, is a story focused on love; both the frame narrative and the hundred tales tell of the myriad ways in which women go about loving, or fucking, or betraying based on their own autonomous decisions. Boccaccio even intended the book to be a *Galeotto* “as a remedy to women in love who are confined to their homes, have no means of release for their frustrated desires, and may thus be able to find

some sort of vicarious satisfaction in reading” (Boccaccio, xxxviii).⁷ Such an intended *Galeotto* is similar to the “practical guide” Easton and Hardy endeavor to create. On the very first day of storytelling, Fiammetta tells such a satisfying story of would-be courtly love thwarted by a woman unwilling to “grant favors.” This is the one where “by means of a banquet consisting entirely of hens, plus a few sprightly little words, the Marchioness of Monferrato curbs the foolish love of the King of France” (Boccaccio, 36).⁸ The meaning of Fiammetta’s sprightly little words, however, is far from little. Her purpose is twofold: the first is the power in the simplicity of a witty remark, and the second is of sexuality. Fiammetta begins her story boldly with the following denunciation “whereas in men it is a sign of great wisdom to court women whose social position is higher than their own, women show how very discerning they are by means of their ability to protect themselves from the love of men stationed above them” (Boccaccio, 36).⁹ She talks of the women’s point of view within a courtly love setting from a place of resistance. She talks of “defense” from “that sort of love” and praises those who are witty enough to avoid it, just as the Queen of the day would have it. Boccaccio adapts courtly love to show exactly how problematic it can be; by thwarting a tale of courtly love intended to take away a slut’s autonomy, Boccaccio and Fiammetta show exactly how powerful an ethical slut’s autonomy is.

Within the story itself, the King of France behaves just as a courtly lover should. Upon hearing an account of a beautiful woman he “immediately began to love her with a passion” (Boccaccio, 37)¹⁰ and puts a plan in place to seduce her despite her love for her husband. Instead of responding to this plan as the beloved of a typical courtly love tale should (i.e., accepting her place on the courtly pedestal), the Marchioness devises her own plan resulting in the quip that shames the

7. Rebhorn translation.

8. Rebhorn translation.

9. Rebhorn translation.

10. Rebhorn translation.

King so much so that he abandons his courtly endeavors. As to why the meal is all hens and no cocks, the Marchioness responds to the King “the females here are made the same way they are everywhere else” and Wayne Rebhorn interprets as “the King should not expect women in Monferrato, and especially her, to be unlike women elsewhere—i.e., they will be faithful to their husbands” (Boccaccio, 38). In other words, while the King might expect courtly sluts, he gets nothing. Instead, the Marchioness chooses to remain faithful to the more worthy man: her husband.

The Marchioness’s concept of faithfulness is, of course, skewed toward monogamy, but as Easton and Hardy write “faithfulness is about honoring your commitments and respecting your friends and lovers, about caring for their well-being as well as your own,” that “it has very little to do with who you have sex with” (66). In this sense then, the Marchioness is not a modern polyamorous slut, and yet she still retains slut-like qualities. The ethical slut need not be polyamorous, especially for the medieval ethical slut. Provided she engage in an ethical framework, exemplified by her fidelity, alongside her joy and pride found in sex, exemplified by the enthusiasm with which she defends her relationship with her husband, she is still an ethical slut. Surprisingly for Boccaccio’s bawdy and randy style, the Marchioness’s sexual relationship is not as explicit as the slut reader would expect. Nevertheless, her joy in sex can be interpreted through her statement that “the females here are made the same way they are everywhere else”—that all women, as the *Gailetto* aims to enable, enjoy sex. The faithful slut is an ethical slut; whereas the modern ethical slut has an easier time making the jump to polyamory, the medieval ethical slut’s sense of fidelity is grounded more in the perfection of a primary relationship, through the application of ethics. As Easton and Hardy also write, “to us a slut is a person of any gender who celebrates sexuality according to the radical proposition that sex is nice and pleasure is good for you” (4). In Boccaccio’s construction of marriage between the Marquis and Marchioness, there exists passion, love, and sex—there exists the radical proposition of sluthood because the Marchioness may be an active participant in passion,

love, and sex. Many *Decameron* scholars choose to believe the married couple's love is only Boccaccio's parody of courtly love. For example, Brittany Asaro suggests Boccaccio included the King's *amor de lohn* "to parody conventional concepts of courtly love" (97); the King is seen as silly for the speed with which he falls in love, especially since he has not seen his beloved. This parody is further strengthened by the strength of the Marchioness's love. Boccaccio writes "that there was no couple beneath the stars like the Marquis and his wife, for just as the Marquis was famed among knights for every virtue, so his wife was considered more beautiful and worth of more respect than any other woman in the world" (37).¹¹ In parodying one slut—the courtly lover—for foolishness and even a lack of ethics, Boccaccio's adaptations to the courtly love trope praise another slut—the Marchioness as ethical, faithful, and medieval—for passion and a surplus of ethics.

Boccaccio's praise of ethical sluts in the non-ethical courtly love environment, is a theme that continues throughout the *Decameron*. Most notably for my purposes, it occurs again on Day 10 "in which, under the rule of Panfilo, they all speak of those who have acted with liberality or magnificence, whether in matters of love or otherwise" (Boccaccio, 297).¹² As N.S. Thompson points out in *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love*, these liberal or magnificent acts "occur because of an emotional reaction which transforms a character from the pursuit of self-centered to selfless action, and thus deliberately recalls the later narratives of Day I" (257), or in the case of I.5, we turn to the selfless action of X.5.

The fifth story of the tenth day recalls thwarted courtly love due to a woman's preexisting slutty relationship where Boccaccio attributes the act of thwarting, in this case an act of liberality and magnificence, not to the woman's ethics but instead to the men of the tale. The selfless action of X.5

11. Rebhorn translation.

12. Rebhorn translation.

adds to the theory of the medieval slut by expanding the roles of gender at play in the ethics of courtly love. The story begins with a typical arrangement of courtly love; this is the one where

Madam Dianora requires of Messer Ansaldo a garden as fair in January as in May, and he binding himself [to pay a great sum of money] to a necromancer, gives it to her. Her husband grants her leave to do Messer Ansaldo's pleasure, but he, hearing of the former's generosity, absolves her of her promise, whereupon the necromancer, in his turn, acquits Messer Ansaldo of his bond, without willing aught of his. (Boccaccio, 724)¹³

What Emilia, this story's teller, leaves out of this short heading, is how courtly Ansaldo's love for Dianora is, and Dianora's reluctance toward reciprocation. To be clear, Dianora's reluctance is not in the sense described earlier in this chapter, that she would fear the ramifications of adultery, but in the sense that she truly is not interested. In fact, Dianora is entirely passive in the construction of Ansaldo's love for her, as Boccaccio writes "the lady's charms caused her to be passionately loved by a noble and great baron...a man of high condition and everywhere renowned for prowess and courtesy. He loved her fervently and did all that lay in his power to be beloved of her...but wearied himself in vain" (724)¹⁴. Dianora does not love this passionate, courtly man, and in an effort to be rid of him, employs a rash boon that in a standard scene of courtly love would be the ennobling act finally causing Dianora to give over her incessant denials in favor of truly loving Ansaldo.

Boccaccio does not do standard scenes of courtly love. Because standard scenes of courtly love disempower the ethical and autonomous decisions of the courtly slut, Boccaccio creates further gender-based parody in X.5 in order to expand the ethical medieval slut to the husband of the tale. As we saw in Asaro's account of I.5, courtly love exists as a parody in the *Decameron*. Here the parody comes not from a quip toward a King but Dianora's hyperbolic reaction upon Ansaldo's completion of the garden—she is "the woefullest woman alive" (Boccaccio, 726).¹⁵ The parody only deepens when Dianora's reaction is compared with that of seeming rationality from her husband,

13. Payne translation.

14. Payne translation.

15. Payne translation.

Gilberto. After a preliminary reprimand for even listening to words of love from another—for as also demonstrated in I.5, words have a distinct power in the realm of love—Gilberto never once questions “the purity of [Dianora’s] intent.” He trusts his wife. He, trusting his wife and his own code of ethics, encourages his wife’s already promised slutty actions so long as such actions follow the same ethical code.

This pivotal moment of trust and consent provides a clear connection to the modern poly idea of opening an existing relationship. Gilberto says unto his wife “I would have you go to him [Ansaldo] and try to have yourself absolved of this your promise, *preserving your chastity*, if you may in any way contrive it; but if it may not be otherwise, you shall, for this once, *yield him your body, but not your soul*” (Boccaccio, 727. Emphasis mine).¹⁶ First in Gilberto’s speech comes the concept of Dianora’s chastity. Obviously, Dianora’s chastity refers not to her virginity but to her fidelity in marriage; much as it was for the Marchioness of Monferrato, Dianora’s fidelity is about honoring her commitments and respecting her lover. Gilberto, in demanding the preservation of his wife’s chastity is really demanding she care for his well-being as well as her own. In other words, Gilberto is demanding his wife be not just a slut, in that she has sex with multiple partners, but an ethical slut, in that she has the consent necessary to have sex with multiple partners. Such a demand is pivotal not only to the story’s plot but because it opens the existing idea of medieval relationships. Instead of the confines of a monogamous or the adulterously amoral relationship courtly love demands, Boccaccio provides a new example—one that is potentially successful for the medieval slut and accepted as a norm by the modern slut.

Boccaccio, by writing an ethical Gilberto, deliberately goes above and beyond the courtly love topos to foreground the construction of an ethical framework. Gilberto does even more than just demand: he sets expectations and boundaries for his partner in opening their relationship.

16. Payne translation.

Easton and Hardy categorize such expectations as “agreements that avoid scary feelings” (169) while Gilberto intends them to be more. His expectations, unlike those of the modern ethical slut, intend to protect his partner’s ethics over his own emotions, engaging in a particularly medieval ethical sluttiness. While one of the most common avoidant strategies when first opening an existing relationship is a form of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ in which “many people find it easier not to hear about the specifics of their partner’s lovemaking with others” (ibid.) no matter how ethical it might be, Gilberto puts the needs of his wife—particularly her need for chastity—above his own. With Gilberto’s demand that his wife not give her soul to another partner, he engages in an emotional agreement so that everyone in the newly opened relationship understands not only the expectations but the ethics involved in such a relationship. Gilberto as an ethical man and a married man encourages Dianora’s own ethical sluttiness, especially given her own intentions toward Ansaldo at the beginning of Emilia’s story.

The maturation of the characters in their ethical slut identities demonstrates the power of love and lust over lust alone thereby parodying true courtly love in favor of entertaining sexual ethics. Dianora, though she matures in her identity as an ethical slut throughout the tale, does not change in respect to Ansaldo’s courtly love. Ansaldo, though he begins with courtly love, also matures throughout the tale. With the beginning in mind we thus turn to the end of Emilia’s story. Beginning with Ansaldo’s courtly love personified as his enslavement to the lady’s charms, Ansaldo now finds “having extinguished from his heart his lustful love for the lady, he [abided] fired with honorable affection for her” (Boccaccio, 728).¹⁷ As Thompson so elegantly summarizes this ending, “Ansaldo’s courtly love is turned into a genuine ‘cortesia’, based on *caritas* (‘onesta carità’) [honest charity], his disordered love is chastised and married love prevails” (261-262) in Boccaccio’s ultimate parody of courtly love. This parody not only shows the faults, as Boccaccio sees them, of such a

17. Payne translation.

trope but goes even further to act as example of the *Decameron*'s opening words "it is a matter of humanity to show compassion for those who suffer" (Boccaccio, 3).¹⁸ The ethical sluts of X.5 follow this tenet of humanity in that they approach their sexual relationships with compassion in an effort to avoid the suffering, self-doubt, and servitude inherent in courtly love.

Boccaccio's opening proverb is often mirrored in Chaucer's writings as well. While we must keep these parallels between sluts of both the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* in mind, we must also note the unadulterated similarities between the ways Boccaccio and Chaucer wrote about courtly love. Though these similarities exist, it is, of course, important to remember what else Thompson writes about the two: "in short, he [Chaucer] was his own man and the way he used his sources was one which might best be described as well-absorbed" (Thompson, 3). This integration presents itself clearly in the case of the *Franklin's Tale*, which also offers an adaptation, or even parody, of a standard scene of courtly love.

Chaucer, like Boccaccio, does not do standard scenes of courtly love. The *Franklin's Tale*, as a nonstandard scene of courtly love is important to the development of a medieval ethical slut because it offers an alternative to the non-ethical construct of standard courtly love. Certain Chaucerian scholars latch on to Chaucer's nonstandard standards ardently, resulting in outlandish conclusions such as "we know enough to discard the old model of 'courtly love' enunciated by Gaston Paris and C. S. Lewis, yet vestiges of that model have continued to obscure certain moral and social imperatives promulgated in a cohesive body of courtly texts within the tradition of *fin' amor*" (Taylor, 65) or even that "there is no courtly love in the *Canterbury Tales*. There are only a few lovers exhibiting oddments of courtly behavior...unable to excite even in their own kind the ennobling passion characteristic of the courtly love to which they aspire" (Mandel, 287). Despite these arguments, the very same scholars cannot help but to acknowledge and comment on the

18. Rebhorn translation.

courtly aspects of the *Franklin's Tale*. These aspects go far beyond just “oddments of courtly behavior” and simply could not be understood by “discarding the old model.”

The *Franklin's Tale*, instead of only a mere parody of courtly love as Boccaccio would write, is an exercise in the role of illusion in all types of love: courtly, erotic, marital, and even ‘ordinary.’ Like queerness or even slut style, the idea of illusion is one aspect of the ethical slut’s identity. This aspect is complex in that the loss of such an illusion allows for a self-actualized ethical slut capable of making ethical sexual decisions. The process the characters of the *Franklin's Tale* go through to dissipate such an illusion adds to their ethical framework, making some of them peculiarly medieval ethical sluts and others just sluts. The tale itself is about the tension between lust and love in the different types of love (e.g., courtly, erotic, marital, ordinary) wherein lust becomes an illusion for or the appearance of love in the characters’ efforts to maintain an absolute truth about their own experiences in love. In the way that courtly sluts interact with each other and without an ethical framework, lust becomes an illusion for love. These interactions take shape when Dorigen, Arveragus, and Aurelius must continually define and redefine their understandings of consent and autonomy within Dorigen’s more explicit “trouthe” and their interpersonal relationships. This tension and resulting illusion appears not only in the characters’ actions, but is a significant element of the tale itself, appearing in the tale’s setting—e.g., the rocks of the tale serve to impede courtly marriage—as well as the Franklin’s own prologue. Chaucer then uses the *Franklin's Tale* not as a parody of courtly love—the tale has too many tragic elements for that—but as an expansion of medieval sexual identity and the role of love within sexual identity. Chaucer expands upon medieval sexual identity through the topos of courtly love in which the straightforward courtly construction of love is an illusion for lust. The expansion is only possible due to Chaucer’s novel reinterpretation of Boccaccio’s use of love and lust as opposed to lust alone.

The first fifty lines of the tale contain, complete within them, an entire courtly romance featuring a couple of courtly sluts, not to mention at least one ethical slut. The tale begins in a manner courtly enough with

a knyght that loved and dide his payne
 To serve a lady in his beste wise;
 And many a labour, many a greet emprise,
 He for his lady wroghte er she were wonne. (Chaucer, 730-733)

As Mark Taylor puts it, this knight, Arveragus, follows the ‘old model.’ Through his ennobling deeds, in this case his chivalric exploits or “many a labour, many a greet emprise,” the knight is able to win a beautiful lady. In the process of winning, Arveragus acts in a particularly feudal manner, as per Lewis’s construction of courtly love, in his “meke obeysaunce” (739) to his lady which resembles the same submission expected of a knight to his lord. With his lady’s return of “pitee caught of his penaunce” Dorigen continues the feudalization of love without creating a struggle between personified abstractions. Instead, she acts contrary to the starvation economy inherent in courtly love and “pryvely she fil of his accord / to take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord” (741-742). Dorigen not only provides the emotional reciprocation necessary to a courtly slut, she acts on said reciprocation to enter into an ethical relationship based on consent and the sharing of power. She chooses to take Arveragus for her husband *and* her lord so that she has both the sexual lust inherent in courtly love and the sexual love inherent in marriage. Once Dorigen accepts the lust of Arveragus, Arveragus is free to do the same, promising to be both

Servant in love and lord in mariage.
 Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage.
 Servage? Nay, but in lordshipe above,
 Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love;
 His lady, certes, and his wyf also,
 The which that lawe of love acordeth to. (793-798)

Within married love, Arveragus chooses to forgo a hierarchy by keeping the lady-relationship of the courtly love topos alive within the new wife-relationship. The lust between Dorigen and Arveragus

turns into love while keeping the original passion so that each person may be both simultaneously lover and spouse without concern for “servage” or hierarchy.

The acts of freedom and of consent they come to agree upon in defining their relationship make Dorigen and Averagus’s consciously chosen, ethically slutty relationship not only possible but tenable. As the Franklin himself notes

Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,
And nat to been constreyned as a thral;
And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal. (767-770)

The search for freedom in love comes because love is itself a free, liberated thing that all people, regardless of gender, desire. The search for freedom in love is really then a search for equality, to be able to be free in sharing a person’s sexuality. Dorigen and Averagus in agreeing to be patient and free in their love are ethically willing to let go of the suffering of courtly love in order to “share their sexuality the way philanthropists share their money: because they have a lot of it to share, because it makes them happy to share it, because sharing makes the world a better place” (Easton and Hardy, 4). In agreeing to share their love between each other, we see an ethical consent—“collaboration for the benefit, well-being, and pleasure of all persons concerned” (Easton and Hardy 21)—between the two, and especially in Dorigen. Because they have the consideration of consent based on a mutual understanding of what kind of love they want to share in their relationship beyond but still inclusive of the love dictated to them by *fin’ amor*, Dorigen and Arveragus are good examples of medieval ethical sluts. Medieval sluts because they take courtly love as a jumping off point, ethical sluts because they turn to consent from that jumping off point, and medieval ethical sluts because the two slut styles coexist in a successful relationship.

Dorigen demonstrates the agency and autonomy necessary to the ethical slut. Her consent is so vitally important because she “freely consented to the marriage agreement with Arveragus, as Barrie Ruth Straus points out, [thereby] she ‘confounds any masculinist construction of ‘woman’ as

simply ‘man’s other’” (Taylor, 70). When she says “Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf—/ Have heer my trouthe—til that myn herte breste” (758-759), Dorigen stresses her truth (only to have it strained later). In this stressing, Chaucer, following Chrétien, is “testing and rejecting an older concept of marriage based upon coercion or upon the external right of a man to claim a woman, and was championing consent as the only valid criterion of marriage” (Taylor, 70). This application of consent in literature read by Chrétien’s aristocracy and Chaucer’s somewhat wider audience “forms the social underpinnings behind Chrétien’s achievement [and Chaucer’s later execution] of uniting the *fin’ amor* of the anti-adultery tradition to a new ideal of love in which marriage is central” (Taylor, 70). While marriage is not necessarily central to an understanding of love, love is central to an understanding of this kind of marriage, creating a new standard. In this new standard, both courtly love and marital love exist in one relationship. The ethical relationship between Dorigen’s husband and lord and Arveragus’s lady and love is simultaneously courtly and marital because of a shared lust and love based on freedom and consent.

Their medieval relationship continues to be ethically slutty because of the promise of constancy. Constancy for the modern ethical slut is of little consequence; it is of importance in that it allows for certain slut styles predicated in openness, honesty, and commitment. Nevertheless, separations happen as part of the way modern relationships happen, and constancy becomes of more consequence for the individual slut in the context of their relationships. However, for the medieval slut, particularly the courtly slut, constancy is of great consequence; the typically courtly beloved is marked by inconstancy as part of the game of infinite deferral the starvation economy encourages. The struggle between lust and love remains a struggle because of the inconsistent love kernels—or even lust kernels—the courtly beloved doles out. The inconstancy inherent in traditional courtly love narratives (i.e., *Roman de la Rose* or Chrétien’s Guinevere) encourages unethical sluthood. That this relationship discards the notion of inconstancy is notable because it

pushes away from the medieval toward the modern in the characters' search for an ethical understanding of one another. Because Dorigen's consent goes against the traditional courtly slut to include medieval constancy, their relationship lies beyond the medieval and edges toward modern.

In her consent, Dorigen promises constancy, again showing how Dorigen is a medieval ethical slut because she breaks from the tradition of the inconstant courtly beloved. Her constancy comes specifically in the line "Have heer my trouthe—til that myn herte breste" (759). Dorigen consents by her "trouthe" and in so doing promises that such a trouthe will last as long as she will—until her heart bursts. As Taylor states, "the question of female constancy in consensual marriage drives part of the narrative progression" (Taylor, 70), in that Dorigen's constancy, a novel concept for the courtly slut though not necessarily the ethical slut, enables the ethical consent to marriage as well as the continuation of such a marriage. Dorigen, in promising constancy, adds to the ethical slut's understanding of medieval marriage. Dorigen, in promising constancy, lies somewhere in between the medieval and modern slut styles, reinforcing Chaucer's adaptation of courtly love so that lust and love work together. While the very idea of consent allows for the existence of both courtly and marital love in one relationship, the promise of constancy as a part of her consent allows for the success of both courtly love and marital love in one relationship. Her promise of constancy allows her to dole out both lust and love kernels on an altogether consistent basis. Dorigen's constancy ensures that her dual sluttiness, just like her trouthe and fidelity, will last throughout her relationship with Arveragus.

Dorigen's promise of consent, though she remains rather vague, fits into the framework of the medieval ethical slut rather than the modern ethical slut because of her vagueness. In his seminal article on Chaucer and rape, Cannon describes the uncertainties of both modern and medieval rape law coming to the conclusion that "our law is simply unwilling to make judgements about the status of an interior faculty" (72). Medieval law defines consent in a great number of ways, from our

modern simplification, to a husband consenting for his wife, even as to consent after the fact. However, this seemingly unnamable “interior faculty” has the same sense modern sluts mean when using the phrase “collaboration.” Medieval consent is less about an interior faculty and more about how such an interior faculty interacts with others. Dorigen’s promise of consent does not fit in with Easton and Hardy because she consents mediievally—by taking into account the interior faculty of her chosen partner. Easton and Hardy follow up the earlier definition of consent with the statement that “consent means that everybody involved must agree to whatever activity is proposed and must also feel safe enough that they could decline if they wished” (242). In the modern view, ethical consent goes beyond the oversimplified “no means no” to the enthusiastic, and ethical “yes means yes and nothing else means yes.” Instead, Dorigen operates on the more medieval, though still ethical, “yes, if” paradigm. As Karras notes, “if” carried an incredible amount of power in medieval consent because “words of present consent—‘I take you as my wife’—created a valid marriage immediately. Words of future or conditional consent—‘I will take you as my wife,’ or ‘I take you as my husband if my father agrees’—did not.” (70). Crucially for Dorigen, if conditional consent was “followed by sexual intercourse, the marriage immediately became valid; the parties were assumed to have dropped the condition” (ibid.) thereby making her “yes, if” paradigm that of the medieval slut. She relies upon her statement “I wol be youre humble trewe wyf” (758) without defining humble trewe or wyf beyond their meanings for herself. Her consent is vague because it relies on the interior faculty the law chooses not to make judgements about. Her consent, though it is vague, is her own and allows for an ethical relationship.

Her consent, because of its medieval vagueness, allows Dorigen to develop the boundaries of an ethical slut and thus her simultaneously ethical and courtly marriage. In telling Arveragus

Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
 Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
 Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne,
 As in my gilt, were outhere werre or stryf.

Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf—
 Have heer my trouthe—til that myn herte breste. (754-759)

she promises only to be a trewe wyf because of the reyne or freedom Arveragus has in turn promised her. Dorigen consents with the limitation that she retain her freedom—that she not be owned as a wife, but be a partner as a wife. In understanding her own limitations and making them clear as a condition of her consent to the marriage agreement Dorigen goes beyond “confounding any masculinist construction of woman as man’s other” to defining herself as a slut and as a person. In order to be an ethical slut “you need to have very good boundaries that are clear, strong, flexible, and, above all, conscious” (Easton and Hardy, 71) and Dorigen does exactly that and more. Dorigen defines her boundaries by her ‘trouthe.’ She consents to be a “trewe wyf” as a true slut. By the truth of her act of consent to a relationship that is built upon both lust (courtly love) and love (marital love) Dorigen sets up her absolute truth about her own experiences in love that she must later strive to maintain under duress from all involved. Ultimately, Dorigen’s boundaries are the boundaries of an ethical slut. The subsequent consent from her partner to these boundaries is based in love—the freedom in love, freedom of love, and freedom to love. Not only do Dorigen and Arveragus set up a relationship based on the ideals of ethical sluthood, the Franklin reiterates them to confirm the importance of freedom, consent, and above all truth. Dorigen, Arveragus, and the Franklin as storyteller are all ethical sluts—at least in these first few lines.

Dorigen’s truth, throughout the tale, must undergo changes, misinterpretations, and extortions, so that ultimately “trouthe” means multiple things in the tale—keeping a promise of fidelity *and* keeping any promise, even of infidelity. Because Dorigen’s ethically slutty relationship is built upon her concept of truth, and because her concept of truth is primarily *her* concept, Dorigen, as ethical slut, has the responsibility to respond to these changes, misinterpretations, and extortions with the same ethical force of her original promise. In these first few lines, her truth is the basis of her ethical framework that allows for her caveated consent, making it the keeping of the promise of

fidelity. On her journey as an ethical slut however, “trouthe” comes to mean keeping any promise, especially when Dorigen’s truth is promised to an intrusively unethical slut in her life. Dorigen, when consenting to be a “trewe wyf” uses an ethical truth different from the “trouthe” she must “kepe and save” (1478) that Arveragus later twists out of her. This kind of “trouthe” is more of a pledged word than an ethical Truth enabling her sluthood. In order to keep her own truth and the ethical boundaries of sluthood it creates, the unethical sluts in her life force her to keep any kind of truth—i.e., the pledged word—whether it matches up with her own concepts or not. In the face of unethical sluthood, does her best to deal with patriarchal misinterpretations of her own ethics so that she might preserve those ethics for herself and her seemingly ethical relationship.

The Franklin continues the tale in a fashion that directly threatens the ethical sluthood of Dorigen and Arveragus in the form of abandonment and intrusion, actually strengthening the constancy of the couple’s ethical sluthood. Instead of the happily-ever-after promise that “been they bothe in quiete and in reste” (760), Arveragus leaves Dorigen almost immediately. The man has only been married “a yeer and moore” (806) when he must leave his wife behind for double that time, thus plunging her into such a rage, such a passionate grief, that her friends become sincerely worried for her. She even complains directly to God about some pretty important black rocks. Sure Arveragus sends her letters and over time her rage lessens, but clearly such sentiment—such passion on Dorigen’s part—shows the passionate lust of courtly love the relationship began with has done nothing to wane when accompanied by the passionate love of marital love. Though she is abandoned, her feelings that provoked such an ethical consent (in the forms of freedom, liberality, cooperation, and constancy described above) remain.

Thus with the wife stranded, the Franklin presents the intrusion that threatens the ethicality of the physically abandoned yet still emotionally present relationship of Dorigen and Arveragus. Separated from her husband and amid all her passion and grief, another courtly lover enters the tale,

this time more of a lusty squire than an ennobled knight. The lusty squire Aurelius, ever the servant to Venus (937), goes through all the courtly motions we have just seen Arveragus perform. He loves the lady from afar “but nevere dorste he teelen hire his grevaunce / withouten coppe he drank all his penaunce” (941-942) just as Arveragus did. He performs ennobling acts just as Arveragus did—although through the manner of writing of songs in which “somwhat wolde he wreye / his wo, as in general compleynyng” (944-945) rather than more knightly honorable deeds. He begs of his lady

Madame, reweth upon my peynes smerte;
 For with a word ye may me sleen or save.
 Heere at youre feet God wolde that I were grave!
 I ne have as no no leyser moore to seye;
 Have mercy, sweete, or ye wol do me deye! (974-9780)

for the same pity Arveragus besought in the form of his own ‘meke obeysaunce.’ Aurelius, while seeming to present the possibility of modern-day polyamory for the previously married Dorigen, actually presents an obstacle. Where Arveragus practiced a form of courtly love palatable to the medieval ethical slut, Aurelius sets the example for the courtly lover without ethics. Aurelius shows what kind of slut Dorigen could have been without the conscious boundaries she created for herself in terms of her relationship with Arveragus.

In order to preserve those consciously created boundaries, Dorigen in response, does not grant Aurelius any pity. This time with Aurelius, she plays into the starvation economy inherent in courtly love. Dorigen, in answer to the lust of Aurelius’s courtly love, falls back upon the boundaries of her ethical sluthood. She has promised to Arveragus and then to Aurelius

Ne shal I nevere been untrewē wyf
 In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;
 I wol been his to whom that I am knyght. (984-986)

Her promise of consent made in her truth reflects the ethical slut’s concept of faithfulness. She places her relationship with Arveragus—a relationship built on both lust *and* love—above the offer of lust from Aurelius. Furthermore, in her words to Aurelius—specifically that “*she been his* to whom

she is knyt”—she broadens her boundaries with Arveragus, entering into a kind of ownership. This ownership is, of course, one to which she consents. Her consent is predicated on her freedom. This ownership is a willing ownership based on a mutual lust and love in which “it is essential and incontrovertible that we each own ourselves” (Easton and Hardy, 71). Her ownership of herself as well as “the kind of consensual power exchange that we call ‘ownership’” (Easton and Hardy, 71) she pledges by her “trouthe.” Thus, Dorigen, when faced with the threat of the unethical courtly love of Aurelius, is able to develop her consciously created *flexible* boundaries to better encompass what it is she wants from an ethical relationship with her husband (ownership) and what it is she does not want from any relationship with Aurelius.

Then in a playful illusion that *appears* to be her ethically slutty Truth, Dorigen promises “by her trouthe”—this time the pledged word, not her ethical Truth—that she will love Aurelius best of any man should he remove all the rocks on the coast of Brittany. She pledges her word not her ethical Truth because the pledge concerns those very same black rocks she complained about to God on her husband’s behalf. Here lies the beginning of lust masquerading as love and the masquerading’s causal tension between lust and love. Aurelius’s courtly love for Dorigen bears none of the characteristics of the love shared between Dorigen and Arveragus. It is not predicated on freedom, consent, or truth. Its only defining feature is the unreciprocated passion Aurelius has for Dorigen. Dorigen, when answering Aurelius’s courtly love, retorts in jest; she does not take him seriously. She cannot take him seriously when the lust of Aurelius for Dorigen is a mockery of the love of Arveragus. The lust of courtly love, on its own, is only a mockery of married love when combined with courtly love. The tension between Aurelius’s type of love and Arveragus’s type of love creates an illusion for lust to be seen as but not to become love. Between Aurelius and Dorigen, lust becomes an illusion for love because Aurelius believes his own lust to be love when his lust is only masquerading as love. Dorigen responds to this masquerade with an illusion of her own.

Aurelius, as an unethical slut, misinterprets Dorigen's illusion. As Laura Howes argues, "that she acknowledges his presence and speaks with him makes her a willing participant in the game of courtesy" (104). Dorigen plays along with the accepted rules of courtly love, but only at first and only "in play." Because her consent was that of conditional consent not followed by sexual intercourse but rather predicated on intercourse, Aurelius has no legal basis for taking Dorigen's word. Furthermore, because her consent to the game was made in jest and as an illusion, it is not even a true "yes, if." Dorigen does not mean yes and therefore does not consent. Where Dorigen was able to entertain a modern understanding of consent with her husband, Aurelius's illusion of lust as love dissuades her from such an idea. Aurelius's ideology of consent, like his insistence on a courtly seduction, is entrenched in the medieval and the unethical.

Dorigen entertains a modern understanding of consent because her medieval consent diverges from the unethics of courtly love. In the modern view, a basic rule of consent states "if someone is being coerced, bullied, blackmailed, manipulated, lied to, or ignored, what is happening is not consensual. And sex that is not consensual is not ethical—period" (Easton and Hardy, 21). Sex that is not consensual is not sex. This basic rule is extremely modern but has its roots in the medieval conditional consent provided by both Dorigen and Karras. Instead of consent happening because of the conditional as for medieval ethical slut, consent cannot be provided because of the conditional. If someone is being coerced, they cannot consent. This basic rule does not quite encapsulate what the medieval slut would have thought of as consent and yet Chaucer's own basic rules push away from the medieval toward Easton and Hardy's.

Returning to Cannon's argument on Chaucerian consent, medieval law was not meant to protect the autonomous slut providing consent but instead whoever owned her, in Cannon's terms those "who have an interest in the marriage" (75). The Westminster Statutes on "raptus"—

ravishment that does not distinguish from “forced coitus”¹⁹ and consensual sex acts (in our modern understanding) as the “victim” could consent to both—were written “to conceive of a woman as still in some measure responsible for her own ravishment” (74) or to “ignore a woman’s will at the moment of an act of ‘ravishment’” (90). For the most part, medieval forms of consent ignored the woman’s will because they were unable to make judgements about such an important interior faculty. Indeed because of this inability, women could even be considered to consent after the fact (Cannon, 74) giving ample time for coercion and further non-consent. Karras in addressing medieval consent comments that “there was a good deal of what today might be considered *quid pro quo* sexual harassment, except that it was not illegal in the Middle Ages” (113) indicating that coercion was a standard of sexual activity. All of this evidence of medieval coercion establishes the importance of consent—that when women did give it, even in pley as Dorigen does, it is taken very seriously as a signal that coercion was not necessary.

That Aurelius would so strictly adhere to a medieval understanding of “consent” in which the actual possibility of Dorigen’s consent is ignored (coerced, bullied, blackmailed, manipulated, lied to, etc.) allows Chaucer to show exactly what is wrong with medieval theories of consent. For Aurelius, medieval consent causes the illusion wherein lust masquerades for love and lust. For Dorigen, medieval consent causes a refusal of her actual consent made by her trouthe. Because her consent lies beyond the medieval, Aurelius intentionally misunderstands Dorigen’s consent to love him. Through the illusion of love and very real feelings of lust, Aurelius becomes the very real villain of the tale. Such villainy comes from the unethical medieval theories of consent. In order to escape the villainy, the medieval ethical slut’s consent *must* push toward our modern understanding. The

19. Rape. Forced coitus is rape. By using the term “forced” Cannon insinuates there is also “unforced coitus.” Unforced coitus is simply sex. Forced coitus is rape. Cannon means rape.

push cannot come from a legal perspective—Cannon and Chaucer show the ineffectiveness of that approach, but as a mutual understanding of what consensual sex should be.

Chaucerian scholars widely accept Aurelius as villain and thus they fall victim to one of the many illusions of the tale. The villain is illusion itself, and Aurelius, as unethical slut, plays directly into the villain's plans. His existence as simultaneously courtly lover and villain leads Jerome Mandel to conclude that there is no proper courtly love in the tale at all. He writes "courtly love, to the extent that it exists in this tale at all, is antagonistic to happiness; it functions only to make the adversary's behavior explicable in terms of a code of behavior which even the lovers, Dorigen and Arveragus, seem to have outgrown through marriage" (281-282). Taylor reaches a similar conclusion based on Aurelius's unethical behavior—even "insistent images of rape" (72)—so that "Aurelius is not a courtly lover at all but conforms to the type of false lover or *tricheor* condemned in courtly lyrics and, like Count Galoain, defeated by the hero in romances" (ibid.). Aurelius is an obstacle and an impediment that must be overcome, but not because of his courtly approach. He must be overcome because his courtly love is unethical in that it "threatens the married love we have been led to applaud" (Mandel, 281). His unethical behavior consists not only of his original coercion of Dorigen's consent, but also in the subsequent extorted and manipulated consent obtained through further illusion and cheating. Aurelius, himself, is not the villain; his unethical methods of wooing that threaten the ethical sluthood we have come to praise are villainous. The illusion where lust masquerades as love is the true villain of the tale and the source of scholarly objection.

The further illusion and inherent cheating refers to those black rocks Dorigen referenced in her initial illusion; Aurelius cheats using magic to create further illusion and therefore further unethical attempts to ensure his lust is seen as love. Aurelius, having misunderstood (perhaps intentionally as he was blinded by his lust) Dorigen's initial illusion, enlists the help of a clerk learned in "artes that been curious" and "of magyk natureel" (1120+) to create further misunderstood

illusions. The clerk, along with some help from the tides, is responsible for the disappearance of the rocks. Aurelius himself does not remove the rocks. As he took Dorigen's promise of love on the basis of her word alone—not its intent—he does not follow her exact wording in earning her love.

Dorigen told Aurelius

whan ye han maad the coost so clene
Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,
Thanne wol I love you best of any man (995-997)

but Aurelius is then not the one to make the coast so clean. Aurelius takes Dorigen's words at face value only when they match his own desires. Aurelius gives no serious thought to Dorigen's words—much like her *trouthe* as a wife. His cheating through the employ of the clerk is complemented by the clerk's own cheating. He also does not make the coast so clean. As the *faerie* enchantment scene shows, the clerk's specific brand of magic is based in illusion. He makes things *appear* not as they are—just like Aurelius did with his lust as love, and just like Dorigen did with her promise made in *pley*. Dorigen herself plays into his illusion and Aurelius's extortion by never going to check if the rocks are actually gone. The clerk's magic—the clerk's illusion—is a well-constructed gap in reality that allows the other to assume whatever they like about their own experiences with reality. The clerk's illusion allows for Aurelius's continued villainous extortion. He says to his lady “avyseth yow er that ye breke youre trouthe” (1320) invoking in his extortion the very *trouthe* as a *trewe wyf* she cannot break. His extortion serves to highlight the illusion he creates by making his lust serve as a construct of love.

His extortion also highlights the tension between reality and illusion caused by such a masquerade, so much so that the tension can also be seen in the appearances of place. Dorigen makes sure to emphasize the black rocks as a stand in, or rather stand between, for the love she shares with Arveragus. Simultaneously, Aurelius makes sure to emphasize the importance of “a gardyn that was ther bisyde, / in which that they hadde maad hir ordinaunce” (902-903), wherein

their ordinance is a representation of Aurelius's one-sided lust. The black rocks present a foreboding imagery that keeps Dorigen's husband away from her. The fact that they stand between the couple's new construction of courtly love contained within marital love, creates an elegant metaphor for the rocks as the same fear of women's adultery—indeed, women's autonomy—that Karras describes when writing of courtly love as existing only in literature. While the rocks represent the constancy of her ethical love, the rocks' position represents the societal opposition to that kind of love in a courtly narrative. Dorigen's desire that the coast be clean of rocks is synonymous with her desire that her relationship with Arveragus be acknowledged for its truth. In desiring an acknowledgement of truth—specifically her ethical Truth—Dorigen is searching for validation of her identity as an ethical slut. She wants the coast clear, so that she can return to the combination of courtly and marital love—the combination of lust *and* love—that enables her ethical sluthood.

Dorigen, in lamenting these rocks from her place in a garden, however, works against her desire for an acknowledged relationship. As the garden is used “by Dorigen's friends to lift her spirits and to indulge in their own pastimes,” (Howes, 103) its purpose is as a pleasure park, or *paradis d'amours*, in direct contrast with the menacing nature of the rocks directly beside it. The garden itself is lusty, providing ample reasoning to Aurelius for his initial approach of Dorigen. Not only is the garden lusty, but it was created consciously to be so, as it is “arrayed 'curiously' by the 'craft of mannes hand,'...not one that appears to grow in such a way naturally” (Howes, 104). The garden, like the construct of courtly love, is constructed to best perform the actions of lust. That the garden overlooks the rocks, meant to symbolize the societal fear of women's autonomy in marital love, deeply represents the tension between courtly love, or lust, and marital love, or lust and love, that Dorigen must face when Aurelius comes to extort her. With the tensions between lust and love mounting and the illusion of lust *as* love causing Dorigen to question her truth about love, Dorigen turns back to her love for Arveragus which she knows to be true.

In response to extortion that questions her fundamental truth, and her boundaries, Dorigen considers Aurelius's coercion and the impending sexual relationship as "agayns the process of nature" (1345). Aurelius's coercion, as part of his approach to courtly love, goes against what Dorigen believes to be the natural process of her love for Arveragus, in other words her ethical sluthood. Dorigen takes this consideration even further to

conclude that it is bet for me
To sleen mself than been defouled thus.
I wol be trewe unto Arveragus. (1422-1424)

This time Dorigen's truth goes beyond her consent to be married in order to define her concept of fidelity and faithfulness. She does not only wish to honor her commitments to herself and her lover, she intends to honor herself and her lover, even if doing so means killing herself. The dishonor she foresees from the consequences of her promise to Aurelius do not come because of the sheer act of sex outside of marriage. The dishonor comes from being befouled which in turn comes from sex not based in the sharing of both love—here meaning freedom, consent, and truth—and lust on which her marriage to Arveragus is predicated.

Arveragus, however, has an entirely different view of what honor and truth should be, thus redefining his own boundaries as an ethical slut. His initial response is that of seeming rationality for he speaks to her "with glad chiere, in friendly wyse" (1467) and counsels that "ye shoulde youre trouthe kepe and save. / Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe" (1478-1479). Arveragus, like Aurelius, values the illusion of Dorigen's truth over her real truth. His own code of ethics places honor above love, either courtly or marital, because ethics enabled the novel type of love he shares with his wife. By the same ethical logic, he must encourage the role of ethics in his wife's already promised slutty actions. Taylor frames Arveragus's choice in his own ethics over his wife's ethics, or rather faith over ethics, in that "his understanding of love lies behind [his own] relationship, then Arveragus's decision is based on his faith in the power of that love centered in his relationship with

his wife and extending outward as an active force able to maintain itself in the face of immorality” (69). Because of Arveragus’s faith in his own combination of lust and love, he has faith in the act of moral courage that allows his wife’s adultery but not infidelity. Though they go about it in different ways, both Arveragus and Dorigen attempt to protect the truth that enabled their relationship to be based on both lust and love. Arveragus attempts to protect the aforementioned pledged word so as not to invalidate Dorigen’s ethical Truth and therefore their entire relationship, while Dorigen, ever the ethical slut, concerns herself with her own ethical Truth so as to keep her own firm boundaries.

Their protection of their truth, in all its varied forms, contradicts the villainy of Aurelius. Aurelius, seeing what Taylor calls Arveragus’s faith and I call Arveragus and Dorigen’s ethical sluthood, finally sees past Dorigen’s initial illusion. Upon seeing the truth in the couple’s relationship, Aurelius finds “in his herte hadde greet compassioun” (1515) and because of that compassion, gives up his coercion of Dorigen. He finally recognizes her “as of the treweste and the beste wyf / that evere yet I knew in al my lyf” (1539-1540). In this recognition, Aurelius finally breaks the illusion of lust *as* love and the tension between courtly love and marital love so that the couple is capable once again of having both

In sovereyn blisse leden forth hir lyf.
 Nevere eft ne was ther angre hem bitwene.
 He cherisseth hire as though she were a queene,
 And she was to hym trewe for everemoore. (1552-1555)

Thus the couple returns to their absolute truth regarding the nature of their love in their relationship and the Franklin finds fit to comment on it.

By way of concluding, the Franklin asks “which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?” (1622). The question is not as clear as the reader would hope. The concept of freedom, like Dorigen’s consent, is an absolute. Free means free and nothing else means free; it would be incorrect to think of one character as “more free” than another. Also like consent, freedom is vague. Freedom as a medieval concept is not as clear cut as the modern ethical slut would hope. “Fre” also

means noble, unbonded to land, unbonded to working for the sustenance of a lord, among many other things (“fre” MED), and so the Franklin’s question becomes even more complicated for the medieval ethical slut. A fre slut is not a reclaimed slut—they do not have the necessary ethical framework to celebrate sexuality in faithful manner if they are not bonded to anyone. Ethical sluthood requires some form of partnership. Yet, the Franklin’s question is reminiscent of his earlier self-inserted line: “Love is a thyng as any spirit free” (767), thus a reminder to us that his question is about a search for freedom and the process of defining and redefining conceptions of sex, sexual love, and ethics. In the context of ethical sluthood, the Franklin should really ask after the most ethical slut: who is most able to work for their own pleasures *and* those of their partners? The Franklin has concerned his tale with asking who kept to their absolute truth in a way that is consistent with the ethical slut’s very good boundaries that are clear, strong, flexible, and, above all, conscious.

The question, however, is as clear as the Franklin intended, speaking now as he did in his prologue, with an element of caution that leaves room for interpretation. He creates for himself a modesty trope that—like the illusions of Dorigen and the clerk—creates a well-constructed gap in reality that allows the reader, or the other members of the frame narrative to assume whatever they like about their own experiences with reality. Howes writes of Chaucer that he “encourages readers to assume that his characters can choose their own destiny,” (86) just as the Franklin has attempted to show his character’s continual redefinitions of sluthood in order to come to a communal understanding about their interpersonal relationship statuses. By encouraging a choice in destiny, the Franklin creates an illusion of freedom for his characters onto which the reader projects certain assumptions about freedom, consent, and truth—all the concepts necessary to combine lust and love (courtly love and marital love) without the tension Aurelius creates for Arveragus and Dorigen. In this way, the slut as reader is able to see themselves in the sluts of medieval literature. The

Franklin is able to encourage freedom because he leaves room for interpretation. By encouraging freedom, especially freedom as interpreted by a sex-positive audience, Dorigen is not a female character emulating the ethical slut—she becomes a social person capable of explaining the apparent contradictions we find in medieval characters. Elizabeth Fowler writes of the social person's construction of marriage that it

entail[s] carefully negotiated and regulated structures of agency that are applied to, and constitutive of, social relationships. The redistribution of “will” in these relationships means that they partake of a degree of coverture and involve a degree of civil death for certain parties and a corresponding dominion for others (109-110)

thus the social person's relationships are more than evocative of the ethical slut—they create Dorigen as a woman with her own slut style.

For the slut, the assumptions the Franklin and Chaucer allow express themselves in the type of love or slut styles expected and actually presented between the three main characters. Numerous times throughout the tale, lust is equated with pity. Both Arveragus and Aurelius complain of their pitiable states—they complain of the exact suffering typically expected from courtly lovers—to Dorigen with the expectation that Dorigen will pity them. In their complaints they equate their lust with pity in hopes of winning over Dorigen. Arveragus, once he has won Dorigen with pity, turns to death; he equates his love with death. He does so when he tells her “I hadde wel levere ystriked for to be / for verray love which that I to yow have” (1476-1477), and she does the same to him in the cataloging of unfair treatment of women that leads to her decision in favor of suicide. Ultimately the slut must conclude that, while the tale is filled with both lust and love, including “the joye, the ese, and the prosperitee / that is bitwixe an housbonde and his wyf” (804-805), the tale itself is not particularly sexy. In fact, instead of sex, the slutty reader is met with romantic tragedy. Chaucer did not pen a parody of courtly love, but a literary exploration of such a parody that expands medieval sexual identity and the role of love to include marriage, in a similar way that the modern slut

explores and expands upon their own sexual identity through the redefining of sex, sexual love, and the boundaries necessary to ethically experience both.

Here we see why exactly the medieval ethical slut is a necessary addition to the concept of medieval sexuality. In terms of the characters themselves, by calling them sluts, we are able to more deeply explore the relationship dynamics without concerning ourselves with the question of sex. Of course these characters are sexual—they are sluts. By taking this identity as a given, there is more space to explore the nuanced aspects of the slut identity, specifically in terms of autonomy and ethics. By reading these characters as sluts, we are able to dismantle traditional patriarchal readings as well as some of the pain attached to the slut-as-slur term.

In terms of the greater results, slut as an identity allows for the modern to understand the medieval even when the medieval does not fully match the modern. Multiple times throughout the *Franklin's Tale*, we see that Dorigen does not always fit the mold of the perfect ethical slut, and yet she still strives for a kind of perfection in her relationship with her husband and in her own personal boundaries. Her medieval redefinition of courtly love to include marriage is parallel to the modern redefinition of sexual promiscuity. Her continual redefinition paves the way for other medieval sluts to make their own redefinitions in a push toward a more ethical understanding of who they are and eventually who we are.

Similar to the role of pity that plays so tragically in the *Franklin's Tale* is the power of pity that forces the slut of the *Knight's Tale* into a situation of conventional courtly love. This new situation is distinctly undesired and unethical, showing that pity while integral to the courtly love topos works against sexual ethics in favor of illusion. The *Knight's Tale*, like the examples above, parodies the courtly love trope but in so doing does not account for the sexual or romantic agency necessary to the woman involved. The tale itself is instead about knightly fraternity wherein courtly love again creates an illusion: this time it disguises power dynamics resulting in male domination,

rather than simply lust misunderstood for love. This constructed male domination in turn constructs a non-autonomous slut who is the direct inverse of the courtly slut the Knight attempts to describe. Not only does the *Knight's Tale* lack a courtly slut, according to Mandel, it lacks courtly love altogether. Much as he approached the *Franklin's Tale*, Mandel points to a lack of centrality of courtly love and its bastardization when it is present, as reasons to discount the tale as courtly altogether. He writes that “this [treatment of Emelye] is the very antithesis of courtly love: the woman's desire is never considered; the lover whom we see suffer most wins least; the lover who loses the tournament wins the lady; and the final coming together of lover and lady satisfies a political expedient determined by Duke and parliament” (286). While conventional courtly love fails with an autonomous ethical courtly slut (as we saw with Dorigen), *without* an autonomous ethical courtly slut the construct of courtly love is still unable to serve its purpose. Thus in this catch-22, ethical sluthood and *conventional* courtly love are unable to coexist with a successful ethically slutty paradigm due to the presence of illusion and consequent misunderstanding.

Emelye lacks autonomy in all decisions throughout the *Knight's Tale*, stripping her of the possibility of an ethical slut identity and relegating her to a would-be ethical slut. She represents perfectly the Knight's misinterpretation of what exactly courtly love is. In Chaucer's construction of her, she is troublesome as she appears not to be a part of the topos at all. As Elizabeth Scala writes “vacant and undeveloped, Chaucer's Emily has been widely disappointing to the Knight's readers, and her absence from the romance a subject of critical vexation” (46). This critical vexation comes from “the structural role her absence plays in the Knight's story [that] can be easily related to the patriarchal assumptions underwriting the heroic conquest and repression of Amazons” (*ibid.*, footnote 9). Chaucer constructs Emelye in the ironic capacity of a captured—Scala's repressed—Amazonian warrior reduced to courtly lady in which she begs “I / desire to ben a mayden al my lyf, / ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf” (2304-2306) only to be answered that “thou shal ben wedded

unto oon of tho / that han for thee so muchel care and wo” (2351-2352) by the very goddess meant to protect her chastity. Emelye herself has almost no desire at all to engage in any form of sluthood. She ends her prayer with the same type of caveated consent Dorigen uses to accept Arveragus. Emelye operates on a “yes, if” paradigm in which she consents to becoming a wife as long as Diana “sende me hym that moost desireth me.” She makes this promise but never makes mention of her own sexual desire. In the context of ethical sluthood, Emelye still qualifies as a slut and even an ethical slut despite her desire to never have sex. The *passion* of her *desire* not to be a wife, as representative of her sexual autonomy, acts as her self-introduction to her own slut style. Just like the freedom to consent comes with the option to say no, “any kind of sexual freedom must include the freedom to *not* have sex, without being pestered or pathologized” (Easton and Hardy, 46). The idea of a celibate slut is not a contradiction. It enables the freedom of choice surrounding the physicality of sexual acts without limiting the “infinite ways of relating to other people—romantically, intimately, domestically, and more” (Easton and Hardy, 47) necessary to the openness of an ethical slut. Emelye’s lack of desire makes her just as much as an ethical slut as Dorigen’s desire does. Emelye’s slut style diverges from Dorigen not in the role of desire but in the role of freedom, making Emelye a would-be ethical slut. In the end she does not have the freedom to remain celibate. Her freedom to define her identity as an ethical slut, albeit a celibate ethical slut, is ultimately stripped from her. However, because her intention, unlike her agency, is not stripped Emelye is not a failed ethical slut but a would-be ethical slut failing to fight against the patriarchal institution, i.e., the knightly fraternity that drives her story.

One of the many problems with the *Knight’s Tale* specifically is its conceptual misunderstanding of the role of desire within courtly love. Chaucer’s Knight, as a dishonorable

mercenary (T. Jones)²⁰ set apart from his more chivalric peers, cannot understand Lewis's "feudalization of love." He puts Emelye on the courtly pedestal only to satisfy his own desire for love and honor—not hers. The Knight's placement of Emelye is a perversion to courtly love because the Knight revels in the patriarchal power dynamics of control. In placing her on the pedestal, the Knight is a slut, but not an ethical one, because he is solely concerned with his own selfish desires. Paradoxically, his selfish desires—that of the patriarchal ideology that "male sexuality is predatory and uncontrollable" (Easton and Hardy, 276)—inversely reflect his desire for control. The Knight as unethical is uncontrollable even in his attempts to control the slut. Emelye, unaware even of her place on the pedestal, does not and cannot consent to the Knight's desires presented in the form of Palamon and Arcite. Without Emelye's consent, the desires of Palamon and Arcite then become about their domination and power; they are not interested in the servile nature of courtly love but instead in the overpowering seduction of the lady through their own jealous aims. On some level, Palamon and Arcite recognize the role Emelye's consent must play in their love for her. On some level they attempt to treat her as an autonomous slut with the agency to consent. When Arcite first sees her, he describes the pain as

The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
 Of hire that rometh in the yonder place
 And but I have hir mercy and hir grace,
 That I may seen hire atte leeste weye,
 I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye. (1118-1122)

Alongside his pain, however, Arcite draws our attention to Emelye's mercy and grace. Arcite recognizes by the standard understanding of courtly love that only Emelye's pity—"hir mercy and hir grace"—will be capable of easing the pain that so suddenly slays him. Later on, Arcite repeats his desire for Emelye's consent saying "and eek it is nat likly al thy lyf / to stonden in hir grace;

20. While Jones notes the novelty of his argument that Chaucer's Knight was in fact a mercenary and not "the quintessence of chivalry," I find the argument compelling and particularly useful in understanding the Knight's misunderstanding of courtly love. Jones's argument is therefore taken as actuality.

namoore shal I;” (1172-1173). In so doing, he places not only Emelye but her consent on the courtly pedestal high above even his own life. Scala points to this very act as “one of the striking differences between Arcite’s worldly and practical point of view and Palamon’s dreamy-eyed one,” (54) wherein, even through the rose-colored glasses of courtly love, Arcite still acknowledges Emelye’s consent in the form of her desire. This could allow for Emelye’s continued existence as an ethical slut, before her encounter with Diana strips it all away.

Therein lies the problem for Arcite: he conflates Emelye’s desire, of which there is very little, with her consent, of which there is even less. After Arcite wins the tournament meant to end the jealousy between Arcite and Palamon, Emelye keeps true to her caveated consent made to Diana. In an attempt to find her own desire for Arcite, “she agayn hym caste a freendlich ye” which Arcite interprets as fully fledged desire and therefore consent. After all, Arcite has suffered great costs to be loved by Emelye and the rules of courtly love demand she acknowledge his own ennobling acts. This acknowledgement is not consent. By the ethical slut’s standard, there would have to be collaboration for the benefit, well-being, and pleasure of all persons concerned. There could never be such a collaboration when one of the concerned person’s pleasure comes from remaining a “mayden.” In this manner, Arcite is complicit in Diana’s stripping of Emelye’s consent. Because Arcite is unwilling to account for Emelye’s desires—that she continue to be a maiden—they fail to reach an ethical relationship, and Emelye is made not a failed ethical slut but a would-be ethical slut. As sex acts are an “opt-in” activity, understood in medieval sexuality as “acts done unto one another” (Karras, 3) and Emelye is unwilling to do unto Arcite she continues to follow her own ethical framework.

Arcite’s interpretation of consent where there is none goes even further than a simple longing look. When Arcite pushes Emelye in Palamon’s direction he does so by stating that he knows no one

so worthy to ben loved as Palamon,
 that serveth yow, and wol doon al his lyf.
 And if that evere ye shul ben a wyf,
 Foryet nat Palamon, the gentil man. (2794-2797)

Arcite compares himself and his service to Emelye to that of Palamon, conflating them just as he did his idea of her desire and her consent. As Arcite has united his actions of service with those of Palamon, Emelye must return to her original dilemma—that there is no difference between the two knights and she has no desire for either. Arcite, however, interpreting some kind of desire on Emelye’s part, wishes to conflate that desire with her agency just as he did with his and Palamon’s service. If ever she becomes a wife, which she must because of Theseus’s tournament, she should choose Palamon at Arcite’s urging even without her own desire. Scala argues that Arcite gives Emelye “decisive power” in choosing Palamon. With the words “if that evere ye shul ben,” “Arcite accords Emily the power to desire, something never considered by anyone in the story other than Emily herself. That these terms should *fail* to decide the matter in Arcite’s favor only points more savagely to the lack of sexual relation” (55). Scala goes further when she classifies Arcite’s according as “a thoughtful resolution, an *ethical* answer to a question that the tale has generated” (55. Emphasis mine). It is not. Arcite cannot give Emelye power. She has already been stripped of it as repressed Amazonian reduced to a badly formed trope of the courtly slut. Arcite cannot give Emelye desire. She has already stated that which she does desire and been stripped of that too. The idea that Arcite could ethically give Emelye away can never be ethical because it lacks Emelye’s autonomy and consent. Arcite—in coercing Emelye’s desire for him, through a “freendlich ye,” and in coercing Emelye’s desire for Palamon through giving her to him—practices the worst kind of coercion. He coerces because he believes he loves her, but he fundamentally misunderstands what his desire—and therefore desire as a whole—is.

Desire, like all things for the ethical slut, must be a collaboration—as Easton and Hardy put it, “sweeping someone off their feet when they don’t want you to only works in movies” (174). A

partner is not a one-sided resource for sex and desire but someone to collaborate with in order to discover the pleasures of everyone involved. Palamon and Arcite—sluts, but clearly not ethical—try to do the ultimate “sweeping” after merely one painful look upon Emelye. This ultimate “sweeping” adheres so strictly to their own ideas of courtly love that Palamon and Arcite completely ignore the autonomy of Emelye. In so doing, they could not feasibly have an ethically slutty relationship with Emelye. Their selfish desires, a reflection of the Knight’s selfish, patriarchal, predatory, and uncontrollable sexuality, are just one of the many factors that strip Emelye of her autonomy. Cyclically, Emelye’s lack of autonomy, in the case of her inability to choose or even distinguish between Palamon and Arcite, drives the larger point of the poem—its competitive nature (Scala 47)—so that desire becomes little more than an illusion masking the knights’ competition. Instead of lust masquerading as lust and love as we saw with the Franklin’s Tale, toxic masculinity in the form of competition masquerades as lust. Due to the Knight’s inability to understand ethical desire, the illusion of the *Knight’s Tale* is so stunted that it does not even begin to approach the nuances of lust and love working together. Thus lust becomes the end goal. Lust remains the end goal because it is unattainable in that the Knight, as narrator, is unable to see past the false lust masking his true misogyny. Because their desire is so misguided, it easily becomes twisted. As Scala points out in her own Lacanian reading of the tale, “desire appears to relate a subject and an object, here a knight and his beloved, yet this situation is *imaginary* in the *Knight’s Tale*, even a bit delusional” (50). The situation is imaginary because of Palamon and Arcite’s adherence to Lacan’s Mirror Stage (ibid.)—they see themselves as lacking and projecting that lack onto the unaware Emelye in the form of perfection; Palamon even goes so far as to compare her to a goddess.

The idea that they lack, whether in the Lacanian sense or in their construction as non-courtly knights by a Knight who is himself a mercenary (T. Jones), underscores the already imbalanced power dynamics and results in the jealousy and violence that eventually withers the knights’ sense of

brotherhood. Instead of sharing power as an ethical slut would, Palamon and Arcite want power over their so-called beloved. Under Taylor's definition of courtly love "the lady must be unattainable until she is seduced" (74) and in this case of not-quite-courtly love, the seduction is only a signifier that Emelye has been overpowered. Much as with her non-autonomy, Palamon and Arcite care only about their own relationship with, and eventual power over, Emelye.

Emelye, as ever the ethical slut, does her best to deal with these power dynamics according to her intact ethical framework. Disregarding her identity as ethical slut, her attempts are only emphasized by the power dynamics playing out between the knights. In her prayer to Diana, she asks that the goddess "as sende love and pees bitwixe hem two, / and fro me turne away hir hertes so" (2317-2318). Emelye, as ethical slut, recognizes the harm that the knights' jealousy is causing not only to their relationship with each other but to herself. She asks for peace between them so that they might be able to give her the very same peace. She recognizes that the jealousy comes as a cause of their own insecurities, as well as their inability to describe what they feel as they are "colonized by this system of words [courtly love], which has taught them [wrongly] what to desire and how to desire it" (Scala 51). Palamon and Arcite have become "disempowered by their jealousy" to the extent that they wish to also disempower their loved one (Easton and Hardy, 115). They themselves need to go through the process of unlearning their jealousy in order to ever have the ethical relationship with Emelye they hope for in acknowledgement of "hir mercy and hir grace."

They, of course, are unable to do this just as Emelye is unable to refuse them. The tale ends with Theseus's autocratic statement

That gentil Palamon youre [Emelye's] owene knyght,
 That serveth yow with wille, herte, and myght,
 And ever hath doon syn ye first hym knewe,
 That ye shul of youre grace upon hym rewe,
 And taken hym for housbonde and for lord.
 Lene me youre hond, for this is oure accord.
 Lat se now of youre wommanly pitee. (3077-3083)

and the resultant marriage between the two. For such a long, drawn out love story featuring the great pain of Emelye and more especially Palamon and Arcite, Theseus—working on Fate’s behalf—wraps up the tale quite nicely in only a couple dozen lines. Nicely, of course, only for himself and Palamon. The duke, like the Thebans, has little to no regard for the wishes or consent of Emelye. The duke, like the Thebans, buys completely into the illusion of courtly love the knights have constructed. He refers to Palamon as belonging to Emelye—“youre owene knyght,”—as though she consented to taking on her perceived role as the courtly slut. Theseus makes reference to the suffering, self-doubt, and in particular servile state Palamon has subjected himself to with the full force of his will, heart, and might but never makes mention of Emelye’s necessary reciprocation. Theseus treats her instead like an object when he *literally hands her over to Palamon* (“lene me youre hond”) who himself has done nothing but objectify her (in the sense that he turned her into a goddess, whereas Theseus means to treat her as property). The duke, like the Thebans, has a fundamental misunderstanding of sexual ethics. Because of his place of power within the court, his misunderstanding has further ramifications and makes him responsible for the unethical slutty actions of his courtly sluts.

Here the *Knight’s Tale* reflects ideas about property and ownership similar to those Dorigen explores through her relationship with Arveragus in the *Franklin’s Tale* with the essential exception that Emelye does not consent as Dorigen does. The *Knight’s Tale* does not offer “the kind of consensual power exchange that we call ‘ownership’” (Easton and Hardy, 71). Emelye does not own herself in any sense and therefore cannot consent to being owned by another, either as husband or as lord. Theseus in his transaction does make some reference to the desires of Emelye when he mentions her “grace” and “wommanly pitee.” Arcite, when faced with questions about the reciprocal desire of his lady, turned to a need for “hir mercy and hir grace;” he found her unable to love him without it. Theseus makes no such accommodation for the role of consent, and he instead

adheres to the idea that Emelye owes Palamon consent. He has done so much work for it that he *must* deserve her. Palamon believes he is owed Emelye and Theseus makes sure Palamon will not be cheated out of what he is owed. Theseus even goes so far as to say “for gentil mercy oghte to passen right” (3089), but not with regard to Emelye’s actual mercy and instead the mercy the illusion of a courtly love scenario demands she possess. In other words, Theseus, like Palamon and Arcite, intends to coerce Emelye’s consent.

Theseus’s ethical misunderstanding has further ramifications beyond the subjugation of Emelye—he, as unethical courtly slut, is responsible for courtliness overpowering ethics. The Knight ends the tale of Palamon and Emelye with their wedding (3098) and all is well with Palamon “lyvyng in blisse, in riches, and in heele,” (3102) and Emelye “hym loveth so tenderly, / and he hire serveth so gentilly” (3103-3104). Emelye is said to love though we never see her consent to do so. Palamon is said to love and serve though we never see a fulfilled love that is not controlling. Though they attempt it, none of the men of the tale have a code of ethics with which they approach their love. Emelye has a more fleshed out code, as we see with her prayer to Diana and resulting caveated consent, but ultimately her role as ethical slut must subject itself to her role as courtly slut for the men of the tale. By subjugating Emelye in favor of Theseus, the *Knight’s Tale* subjugates ethics in favor of courtliness despite a fundamental understanding in which fraternal patriarchal power struggles masquerade as courtliness. Courtliness overpowers ethics because the Knight cannot understand ethics. Paradoxically, he cannot understand courtliness either because he is unable to see the illusion in which his mercenary version of chivalry stands in for courtly love. Thus he creates characters without sexually ethical codes and a tale ultimately disappointing for the slut as reader.

In looking at both Boccaccio and Chaucer’s not-quite-courtly tales of courtly love, commonalities among the would-be courtly lovers present themselves. They all fit, somewhat

haphazardly, into the role of the medieval slut. They do their best to follow an ethical framework but occasionally fall short. The women in each story can all be classified as sluts, in the un-reclaimed sense, when the word “is used maliciously as an umbrella term for any woman who’s openly sexual” (Sciortino, 2). The openness of their sexuality comes not necessarily from their various entanglements with courtly lovers but from the passion—or lack thereof—with which they approach their primary relationships. The Marchioness of Monferrato, Dianora, and Dorigen all love and lust for their husbands in an openly passionate manner, and thus they are sluts in the un-reclaimed sense. Emelye, though she is forced into it, ends up loving her husband in an open manner (3103), and thus is a slut in the un-reclaimed sense for “not wanting it” but submitting anyway. In their choices regarding consent and faithfulness they diverge from the expectations of the typical courtly lover, or rather from the courtly slut expected to take multiple partners (as is the case with the quintessential medieval slut, Chrétien’s Guinevere). These choices represent similar choices modern sluts make in their own attempts to be seen as ethical sluts. These women, though they be medieval, demonstrate modern aspects of their identity, especially in their decisions to place themselves and their ethical relationships with their partners above simplistic sexual drives. Their relationships function because of the conscious choices of the ethical slut.

Of course, they alone are not responsible for their relationships; the men with whom they interact are also sluts. They all fit into the classification of slut in the un-reclaimed sense—they clearly all enjoy sex and will go to great lengths to get it. The terminology of unreclaimed is less effective in their case because “slut” is not a well-accepted slur for most men—calling the men of these tales sluts does little to destabilize the patriarchal influences of the word. It does however add to our understanding of medieval sexuality as each situation for each man is a unique addition to the slut’s framework. Overwhelmingly, these sluts’ frameworks are distinctly unethical due to the aforementioned lengths. Overwhelmingly, the male sluts of courtly love narratives, even when

parodied as Boccaccio does or shrouded in illusion as Chaucer does, are unethical sluts. In the case of Theseus, Palamon, Arcite, Aurelius, Ansaldo, and the King of France, the men are too deeply entrenched in courtly love—or rather what they believe to be courtly love—to approach an ethical understanding of love. The exceptions—Arveragus and Gilberto—stand out as ethical courtly sluts because they are able to combine lust and love, seeing through both parody and illusion, in order to have an ethical relationship based on both the tenets of courtly love and the autonomy, consent, and boundaries of their ethically slutty wives.

That these wives are ethical sluts through the constructed writings of men changes their classification. Rather than these women deserving classification as an ethical slut, or a courtly slut, or even a medieval ethical slut, Chaucer and Boccaccio *characterize* them as ethical sluts. This characterization, like the choices the women make, is a turn away from the typical courtly narrative. Either through parody in Boccaccio's case or illusion in Chaucer's, the courtly love narrative explained by Lewis is adapted to provide the women of the stories more autonomy—or at least a desired and attempted autonomy—and a deeper understanding of who they are within an overall patriarchal narrative. Chaucer and Boccaccio expand upon a medieval sense of sexual identity through their literature and their own adaptations of courtly sluts. Their adaptations allow for an understanding of what medieval sexual identity actually could become when existing somewhere between medieval and modern. Though they have created ethical sluts by asserting a code of ethics onto their courtly sluts' already slutty actions, Chaucer and Boccaccio themselves are not ethical sluts. They retain ethical slut like qualities because their constructions are so effective, but ultimately the texts are self-serving in that they force their patriarchal desires onto female characters who may desire autonomy but are unable to achieve it outside of their purely constructed patriarchal narratives.

Chapter Three: The Adulterous Slut

Free Choice under the Subjugation of Marriage

“But Roz” you say, “in the last chapter no one ever actually had sex with more than one partner. How on earth could they be sluts?” Well, those sluts, like all sluts, have a complicated identity. In fact, they were sluts, and ethical ones at that, in their own right. But if you want more sluts with multiple partners, we can look at other stories. While the previous chapter’s focus was primarily on the courtly marriages, both Boccaccio and Chaucer wrote of marriages with less than perfect matches. The medieval tradition of adultery, while a part of the last chapter, will be more fully explored in this chapter, particularly in the sense that adultery affects sexual autonomy and identity. What did it mean to be married without the weighty *topos* of courtly love backing up the relationship? How did this more realistic, for lack of a better word, approach change the idea of marriage in the contexts of the law and more importantly of sex and sexual identity? Boccaccio and Chaucer answer, in short, with adultery.

The adulterous slut, as her name suggests, is a slut with a husband but a slut who has sex with a partner not her husband. While she practices adultery often without her husband’s awareness, she remains self-aware. She is aware of the ethical ramifications of her actions. Due to this awareness, it is for her to decide whether or not adultery is the mark of a medieval ethical slut. Unsurprisingly, she often decides that it is. Because of the circumstances of her marriage—specifically that the wife is rarely having sex with her husband—and what medieval marriage entails—specifically that both the ecclesiastical and secular courts legalized, regulated, and imposed sex within a marriage—the marriage of the adulterous slut inherently believes that she deserves sex from an outside source. She is a slut focused primarily on quality sex with a partner equally interested in quality sex; it just so happens that this partner is not her husband. Thus in a straightforward manner, she is an adulterous slut. She is a person who happens to be a wife and yet

is capable of her own sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual ethics apart from her relationship with her husband. She is a medieval slut but with a modern ethical flair. The adulterous slut is not quite the modern ethical slut—she never could be as her own situations, her own time period, are too far removed from the situations modern sluts face—yet she shares the most important quality of the modern ethical slut: a “celebration of sexuality with an open mind and an open heart” (Easton and Hardy, 276). Within the comedic tales of the medieval fabliaux, the adulterous slut’s struggle to define and redefine her sexual ethics in terms of her sexual relationships is of importance, but not the utmost. Of utmost importance to the adulterous slut, is her own drives and boundaries. These sluts are focused primarily on their growth in order that they might be satisfied in addition to their struggle to reclaim sluttiness as a force for good. By examining the three sluts—Isabetta, Alisoun, and Filippa—with their conscious choices, analyzing their compartments toward modernity, we as sluts can draw out the implications of medieval sluthood for modern sluthood. We can cast adultery among the aspects of both modern and medieval sluthood as a tool meant to help grow our slut identities and teach us about our relationships with marriage, autonomy, and sluthood.

Marriage in the Middle Ages was, of course, different from marriage in today’s contemporary western view. Marriage in the Middle Ages does still share certain similarities with today’s contemporary western view, particularly in the idea of contractual obligation. Medieval marriage was not only an ecclesiastical sacrament but also a secular contract. As I described in the previous chapter, wife was property and not person according to societal construction. The duality of the wife’s legal contract, however, allowed her to be seen as both. Her contract between her husband and the church made a wife person, while her contract between her husband and the state made a wife property. In terms of her contractual personhood, the ecclesiastical courts “enforced the personal duties of a spouse and decided (in dubious cases) whether marital obligations had in fact been undertaken” (Jacobs, 337). In less legal terms, the church legalized, regulated, and imposed sex

within a marriage. This legalization took the form of a sacrament wherein “if two people participate in a particular ritual prescribed by the jurisdiction in which they live, they are married” (Karras, 60). Yet due to the highly constructed nature of marriage typically through an economic arrangement, “a wife was not considered to be the focus of a husband’s emotional life or even his sexual life” (Karras, 23). Unlike today’s contemporary western view where “we expect the most intense emotional relationships in our lives to be with our sexual partners, especially spouses, they did not” (Karras, 17). Thus a medieval ethical framework of marriage does not insist upon an ethical experience of emotions as we saw in the previous chapter. Instead such a framework insists on the ethics of sex, particularly the difference between sexual love and logical sex so that the medieval ethical slut is most occupied by the role she is meant to play in bed.

With the introduction of the sacrament came a new understanding of what sexual love within a marriage entailed. In fact, the sacrament stressed that even the very idea of sexual *love* was “meant to be spiritual love rather than carnal passion” (Karras, 67). The sacrament of marriage was a way for the church to control the sin of sex inherent in a marriage without actually making marital sex a sin. The late medieval idea that love was a necessary part of the construction of a couple’s marriage changed the way that couple was meant to view sex. The view of sex then became threefold: 1) for the obvious sexual pleasure that marriage made palatable/less sinful, 2) for the obvious procreation that resulted from said sexual pleasure, and 3) for the newly developed ideal that marriage should include some level of mutual love, if not necessarily our modern ideal of respect. Based on these three views, sex within marriage then became obligatory, not only for the married couple but for the societal expectations of the courts both ecclesiastical and temporal that enforced the marriage contract.

Not to be misunderstood, medieval marriage certainly did contain eroticism beyond a contractual obligation; it manifested mostly in the objectification of carnal desire traded through an

exchange economy. Originating in the concept of marriage debt, one partner was, from the beginning of the relationship, legally owed sex, whether the tender ideal of “making love” the Church attempted to impose through the sacrament or a simple “rough fucking” at the expense of the other. This would seem to put the wife in a never-ending subservient position to her husband. After all, as Karras points out, “marital sex was not understood as egalitarian” (78). In the very understanding of sex in the Middle Ages, the female partner would always have to be subservient. Sex, as understood to be an act one did unto another, entailed an always passive and an always active partner. Because of the “tyranny of hydraulics”—an idea explored in *The Ethical Slut* (60) wherein a person with a penis’s desire is mitigated by the “tyrannical” limitations of their biological reuptake period and thus a theory not just limited to the modern ethical slut—the active partner would always be the partner with the penetrating penis. Ideas of activity and passivity in sexual roles relate well to the modern concept of tops and bottoms. Here, bottom and top refer both to the physical space taken up during a sex act as well as the modern concept of identity relating to one’s sexual preferences (bottoms like to be led, tops like to lead) and where their preferences place them in medieval sexual hierarchies (medieval bottoms are passive, medieval tops are active). The roles as they pertain to identity are enacted regardless of gender (despite the medieval insistence that active tops needed penises) and physical position so that a bottom can physically be on top but still participate in the act of bottoming as an identity and vice versa. In this way bottoms and tops participate in an exchange economy, trading the sex acts of a bottom for the sex acts of a top so that everyone involved gets the type of sex that they want—or even that they are owed.

Also perhaps due to the tyranny of hydraulics, married women in the later Middle Ages were conscientiously depicted as not only lustful, but near insatiable. In the egalitarian sense of their marriage contract, both partners in a marriage were owed sex should they want it (Jacobs, 339). Women, though considered by medieval sex regulators (the Church) to be passive bottoms, often

thought of themselves as more or less entitled to marital sex. In the case of chaste marriages, women were typically the cause of such chastity. In the case of lusty marriages, women were typically the cause of such lustiness. As they are technically biologically insatiable, their character's constructed personalities often reflected such biology—especially in the patriarchal genre of the fabliau. Their lusty insatiability must then be satiated by their male partners because of women's passive role in medieval constructions of the nature of sex. Sex, as Easton and Hardy so rightly point out, requires partnership (212). As Jacobs points out, building off said partnership and returning to the contractual obligation, should the woman's lust not be fulfilled by the man's active sexual role, the woman has the right to look outside her marriage in order to fulfill her own contractual obligation to an orgasm (Jacobs, 339).

Thus, women turn to adultery in a search to get off. When a woman's lust is not fulfilled, there is a breach in her obligatory marital contract that results in further breaches of contract specifically in the form of adultery. The woman's resourcefulness in solving one breach of contract results in further breaches of contract that not only break the marital sacrament, but the law as well. In *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, James Brundage argues that “as men and women were equally bound by their conjugal duties, Gratian considered that each bore equal guilt if he or she strayed into adultery” (247). The guilt of breaching such a contract and such a law existed beyond the boundary of gender and therefore was punished equally. Also under Gratian, consideration was the responsibility of Church law (at this time canon law) to punish adultery itself, not necessarily the adulterers or the cheated spouses themselves (Brundage, 248). Adultery is thus a dilemma in that it solves one legal problem only to create more legal problems. The dilemma is not, however, an ethical dilemma as the problems exist only in a legal context not in the relationship sluts construct for themselves. The ethics of a relationship are even reflected in the legal punishment—in that it applies to everyone regardless of gender. Legally, there is a problem; ethically there is not.

The legal definition continues to have problems beyond the ethical slut. The legal definition fails to reflect the societal fear of women's freedom inherent in women's steps outside of marriage. There are no legal constraints on the ethical slut because both partners are equally guilty for adultery carried out by only one of them. The law is also responsible for shaping society's ethics, sexual or otherwise, in that the law reflects societal values. Thus marriage—as societal control of women imposed through law and not loving sacrament—makes it impossible for women to outsmart their husbands. If wives are responsible for their husbands' mistakes and vice versa, they cannot outsmart them by performing an adulterous act. In breaking the “monogamy clause” of their marital contract, women become not only uncontrollable, but also morally and ethically bankrupt—especially in the eyes of the ecclesiastical courts (i.e., the patriarchy) responsible for the maintenance of women's morality. Adultery then evolves past “outsmarting” a husband to become a moral statement about the adulterous woman's identity. She becomes an adulterous slut through societal interpretation of the law, the same societal interpretation that would relegate her to the role of slut-as-slur instead of allowing for a complete woman's sexual identity including a proclivity for—or even revelry in—adulterous sluthood.

In comparison to this medieval construction, Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy provide an updated ideal for what marriage could be, not only for the ethical slut but for any married couple. Completely contrary to the depiction Karras supplies, Easton and Hardy have the ideal that

if we ran the world, we would abolish marriage as a *legal* concept, allowing people to enter into contract relationships as allowed by the perfectly adequate laws that already govern other forms of legal partnerships. Sample contracts could be provided by institutions, attorneys, churches, publishers, and support networks. Those who wished to perform marriage as a sacrament could do so under the auspices of whatever religious or social institution felt like a good fit for them. Under such a system, no agreement would be taken for granted; sexual exclusivity, money sharing, inheritance, and all the other issues currently covered by inflexible marriage laws could be consciously chosen. We really like conscious choices. (196)

Easton and Hardy keep what is important about the contractual obligation of a medieval marriage but open it to the infinite possibilities of conscious choice. Unlike the medieval tradition, women in such a marriage as *The Ethical Slut* provides are not the ironic lusty sex objects Karras would have her readers believe them to be. In such a marriage, women's expectation of sex as a duty performed by the spouse is an understood and consensual expectation. In so being, it can be renegotiated like all other expectations. Under such a renegotiation, women who have been constructed to always want sex and never say no—to be insatiable—can fight against such an unethical construction in order to present themselves and their desires as they actually are. Instead of the insatiability the medieval topos of marriage would have them exhibit, women have the conscious choice to present themselves in whichever way they find pleasing. In presenting a conscious choice, they demonstrate themselves as ethical sluts ready to define their own sexual autonomy and boundaries.

That is, after all, what I (and Karras and Jacobs and Chaucer and Boccaccio) have presented—a topos of marriage. Much like courtly love in the previous chapter, this presentation of marriage and the inherent morally bankrupt adultery is a topos. It is only a traditional formula of literature. The idea that a wife is solely a being filled with lust, who wants nothing from her relationship other than sex whether procreative or not, is just as damaging a *construct* as a woman on a courtly pedestal. Such a wife is stripped of her sexual autonomy because she has no ability to say no. If she is insatiable, is always seen as saying yes, any reversal could not be seriously considered as a refusal. In this way, yet again, medieval literature has created a non-autonomous slut, this time even more so because her lusty construction leads to an apparently immoral plurality of partners.

Yet for some reason, a lusty adulterous wife is a more believable topos than a courtly lady. For some reason, a lusty adulterous wife is more believable *as a presentation of reality* instead of a traditional literary theme. For some reason, we forget that insatiable wives driven by their sex drives are constructed that way because of a patriarchal narrative that celebrates sex without autonomy in

the form of moral bankruptcy as turn on. For some reason, sex without autonomy is celebrated as moral bankruptcy because sex without autonomy is immoral, and medieval sluts without ethics find their turn on in that immorality. Ultimately we forget because of the patriarchy and its built in misogyny. Here, like everywhere else, the patriarchy is a harmful tool used against ethical sluts. As an institution, it allows for the subjugation of women. As an institution, it prevents the growth and autonomy of women, particularly in regard to their sexual identity and choice. The patriarchy, as a weapon against both medieval and modern ethical sluts, determines what is ethical and what is ethically bankrupt in terms of women's sexuality, preventing the women from determining for themselves.

For Boccaccio and Chaucer, the moral bankruptcy is not actually a problem. As shown in Chapter Two, the writers themselves create ethically slutty texts in which they encourage the application of a code of ethics for the already slutty actions of their characters. This is no different when discussing adultery than it is when discussing courtly love. In fact, Boccaccio and Chaucer's praise of non-monogamy works even better in the context of the fabliau. As N.S. Thompson writes in his treatment of the comic tales, "in the ostensibly realistic portrayal of the world in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*, things and people are not always what they seem. In literary terms as well, there is a fracturing of surface expectations and a blurring of the usual adjudication of praise and blame" (176). Responding to the rigidity of the law, contract theory, and role of wife as voracious slut, Chaucer and Boccaccio's texts push against the morality driving the surface expectations and usual adjudication. Instead of blaming the adulterous partner as Brundage would have it, and instead of blaming the wife as Karras writes, Chaucer and Boccaccio look at adultery as a societal practice allowing not only for trickery, violence and scatological humor, but also, and more importantly, ethical sluthood.

A societal practice allowing for so much liberation comes in the form of the medieval fabliau—a genre that acts as a literary vehicle for ethical sluthood, albeit a lemon of a vehicle that often breaks down or comes up short. A fabliau, in the French tradition, is a short humorous poem focusing on trickery, violence, and especially adultery, wherein women often outsmart their husbands in order to satiate their insatiable sexual desires. The fabliau, through its comedic nature, plays off the great societal fear of women’s freedom, especially as a husband can never know exactly what his wife gets up to while he is away. The fabliau, also in its comedic nature, contains a kind of ethics unique to the genre. The victims—or rather dupes—of the trickery, violence, and adultery are always deserving in one sense or another. The dupes are mean, ugly, old, boring, and above all jealous. The dupe is a cuckold; the fabliau is his punishment. Contrary to the law and a legal construction of marriage as a contract, the fabliau, as a genre, does not punish the adulterer but instead their victim.

The fabliau, though it has a code of ethics, lacks the ethics necessary to tell the fully developed story of an ethical slut. Instead of a focus on partnership with clear boundaries meant to embrace fear and jealousy so that everyone involved can share their sexuality with like-minded sluts, fabliaux choose to believe in harmful myths and make damaging judgements about unethical sluts. In their discussion of what a slut is, Easton and Hardy address some of these very judgements and myths that still pervade modern society. Judgements that sluts are “promiscuous,” “amoral,” and “easy,” are answered with the simple question “is there, we wonder, some virtue in being difficult?” (12-14). They address the myths that “sexual desire is a destructive force,” that “loving someone makes it okay to control his or her behavior,” and that “jealousy is inevitable and impossible to overcome” (16-17). Accordingly, the societal and internalized stigma that modern sluts must fight against in order to be ethical sluts are the very building blocks of medieval ethical sluthood in fabliaux. These are not the stories of the modern slut; fabliaux instead contain the building blocks

for medieval ethical sluthood as it is unique to the medieval slut. How then can Chaucer and Boccaccio, writers who have shown themselves to prize female sexual ethics so much in the tales of courtly love, be so flippant in their fabliaux?

For answers, we turn first to Boccaccio's Isabetta and Chaucer's Alisoun. As with Dianora and Dorigen, these women are more than just wives. They are people who happen to be wives and yet are capable of their own sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual ethics apart from their relationships with their husbands. They are medieval sluts but with a modern ethical flair.

One of Boccaccio's many adulteresses is the Mistress Isabetta who appears in the fourth story of the third day. This is the one where "Dom Felice teaches Fra Puccio how he may become beatified by performing a certain penance of his own devising which the other does, and Dom Felice meanwhile leads a merry life of it with the good man's wife" (Boccaccio, 220).²¹ The short heading Boccaccio provides would have his reader believe that the wife is of little importance to the story; she is not even named but rather an object with which Dom Felice amuses himself. Boccaccio, however, writing the *Decameron* for women's pleasure, even insisting on "the naturalness, the inescapability—and hence the goodness—of human beings' appetites, and in particular the one he calls love, which almost always has sexual desire at its core" (Boccaccio, xxix)²² could not possibly leave Isabetta as only an object. Instead he explores her objectification and the role of her autonomy through the fabliau's main stylistic technique—humor and adulterous humor.

Because Isabetta makes changes to her autonomy, especially her sexual autonomy, depending on which relationship, indeed which partner, her autonomous choices will affect, we must examine her autonomy through these partners. Starting with her relationship with her husband, Boccaccio portrays an almost lack of autonomous choice. Isabetta, as the medieval tradition of

21. Payne translation.

22. Rebhorn translation.

marriage demands, is property of her husband and therefore pursuant to his sexual desires. It would seem, however, that no one is pursuant to Fra Puccio's sexual desire, it being the case that he does not have any. The Payne translation refers to the man as "an ignorant, clodpated fellow," so pious that "it was buzzed about that he was of the Flagellants" (220) which Payne glosses as "one of the many organized bands, or brotherhoods, which from the twelfth century on practiced self-castigation as a religious rite" (844). This being the case, Isabetta is denied the very sexual activity a medieval marital contract promised her. She is denied a chance to "frolic with him" and instead served pious lectures. According to medieval sexual ethics, the passivity of her husband breaks the marital contract and allows for Isabetta to look elsewhere for a partner with whom to frolic. Because her husband acts as a bottom, Isabetta is forced into the role of top. The modern ethical slut would approach this problem by redefining the couple's relationship and boundaries to open the relationship, as discussed in the previous chapter. Yet "by reason of the piety and perhaps of the age of her husband" (Boccaccio, 221),²³ Isabetta does not have this avenue of communication. The unilateral sexual denial of her husband shows the relationship to be absent of the very idea of "partnership" that allows for open sexual promiscuity and polyamory. Thus Isabetta cannot have an ethically slutty relationship with her husband and must make changes to her ethical sluthood because of this partner.

This is not to say that Isabetta is not an ethical slut, simply that her ethical sluthood is hampered by the restrictions of her legally binding relationship on her autonomy. When looking outside such a relationship, these restrictions are lifted; she makes a change to her sexual autonomy based on her partner. We see this in the ethics with which she approaches her seduction of Dom Felice. I use the term "her seduction of him" to draw attention to her active role in the seduction. It is not simply that Dom Felice finds a willing body while he is cruising. There is a *reciprocal flirtations*

23. Payne translation.

relationship between the two in which Dom Felice proposes sex with the assumption that Isabetta knows what she wants. According to Easton and Hardy, “with this assumption, it becomes easier for your potential partners to make very direct proposals that might seem outrageous in any other context; that’s because they trust you to say ‘no’ if you’re not interested.” (83) Fortunately for the reader, Isabetta says yes. Their flirtation is not only erotic but filled with the idea of consent. Dom Felice, clearly practiced in the art of flirting begins “craftily casting his eyes on her, at one time and another, he made shift to kindle in her breast that same desire which he had himself, which when he saw, *he bespoke her of his wishes as first occasion betided him*” (Boccaccio, 221. Emphasis mine).²⁴ Dom Felice talks to Isabetta, finds her “well disposed to give effect to the work,” and the two of them enter into a consensual sexual relationship together with such clearly defined boundaries that are lacking in her marriage. The ease of seduction not only demonstrates the power of consent, but also a willingness of sexuality—Isabetta wants to be a slut. She also has the ability to discern between sexual partners. She is not “indiscriminate” as the Promiscuous Judgement would imply since she, like an ethical slut, “can always tell [her] lovers apart” (Easton and Hardy, 12). Her sexual autonomy shines through because of her sexual ethics.

Further evidence of her sexual autonomy comes in the form of her very sexual activity. Not only is she a “frolicsome and spirited dame,” but she states very clearly “I know what I am about” (Boccaccio, 224).²⁵ Like all good ethical sluts, she knows what she likes, is able to find her “turn on” (Easton and Hardy, 176), and most importantly is able to ask for it. Isabetta, “belike astride of San Benedetto’s beast or that of San Giovanni Gualberto” finds her turn on in being on top (Boccaccio, 224).²⁶ Isabetta is literally floor-shaking in her sexual voracity and her enjoyment of it. Part of her turn on comes from the adulterous nature of her sluthood. As Sciortino writes, part of the problem

24. Payne translation.

25. Payne translation.

26. Payne translation.

with the reclamation of the word ‘slut’ is that “there *is* something bad about being a slut—something naughty, controversial, and unpredictable” (15) that is lost when the identity is reclaimed for good and ethical purposes. What is more “to totally flip the meaning of ‘slut’ into something that’s solely positive or empowering denies the darkness that’s inherent in slutdom, which is part of what makes it so sexy” (Sciortino, 16). Isabetta finds joy, orgasm, and laughter in being an adulterous slut. She has the ethical autonomy to choose to be an ethical slut as well as the self-knowledge necessary to enter into an empowering identity—the sluthood—while simultaneously entertaining the inherent darkness—in her case the adultery.

Isabetta, aware of the complexity I discuss here, is still able to find joy, orgasm, and laughter within it. Isabetta’s laughter comes partially from her joy at finally having a sexual partner as well as the sexual pleasure that partner is capable of providing. But for the most part, Isabetta’s laughter comes from her role in the trickery of her husband. Before even reaching the sexual climax of the tale, Boccaccio focuses on the pleasure Isabetta receives from the gambit on which she and Dom Felice are about to embark. Still in their flirtatious stage, Dom Felice suggests that Isabetta’s husband leave his wife each night so that he might become closer to God through prayer. Isabetta, being the quick-witted slut of the fabliau, picks up what Dom Felice is putting down. She replies to the plan “that she was well pleased therewith and with every other good work that he [Fra Puccio] did for the health of his soul and that, so God might make the penance profitable to him, she would fast with him, but do no more” (Boccaccio, 223).²⁷ In so doing, she emphasizes how little she cares for a relationship lacking in partnership, as well as how little she cares for a spiritual relationship with God. She cares little for a relationship lacking in partnership because she cares little for her husband—she will not even spend the night with him. She cares little for a spiritual relationship with God because she does not care to spend the night with her husband in an effort to become closer to

27. Payne translation.

God in the traditional way. Instead, she uses her husband's relationship with God to improve her own sexual relationship with Dom Felice. She will "do no more" than give her husband a reason for the later tossing and turning of the night, saying "who sups not by night must toss till morning light" (Boccaccio, 224).²⁸ She says this with a laugh while riding another man in their marital bed, thus putting herself 'on top' in multiple ways. In the moment, she is both physically on top of Dom Felice and (less obviously) on top of Fra Puccio within the hierarchy of their relationship. As her relationship with Fra Puccio is not a partnership—it lacks the necessary agreement on the role of sex mandated both by medieval sluthood and modern ethical sluthood—Isabetta's topping of Felice functions as a power grab for her own sexual autonomy, independent from her societally expected ownership by her husband.

Such an unethical act requires sexual autonomy, or the conscious choice Easton and Hardy discuss—Isabetta chose to perform these sexual acts. The woman on top, as an excellent sexual position, is representative of a favored characteristic of the voracious woman of the *fabliaux*. The insatiable woman of the *fabliau*, while a harmful stereotype that pervades both the medieval and the modern patriarchy, can also "assert that *fabliaux* show admiration for the woman on top, who impresses us with her ingenuity, making the man, usually her husband, look ridiculous" (Perfetti, 13). In this case then, we praise the unethical sexual actions of Isabetta because of the moral statement these actions make in regard to Fra Puccio's unethical treatment of his wife. This kind of praise, due to its paradoxical nature, is distinct to the medieval ethical slut. Isabetta, looking outside her marriage, finds a certain code of ethics in her own sexual autonomy, her sexual desires (whether voracious or not), and her moral desires that are radically similar to, though obviously not the same as, Easton and Hardy's Ethical Slut.

28. Payne translation.

Boccaccio also argues for the ethics inherent in Isabetta's sexual actions through means of her spiritual relationships. As previously stated, Isabetta cares not for a relationship with God; she leaves that to her husband and will do no more. Because the sacrament of marriage is not observed by either Isabetta or Fra Puccio, Isabetta looks for a different kind of spirituality. Just as she found sexual pleasure with Dom Felice, she also finds spiritual pleasure. As Easton and Hardy write,

every orgasm is a spiritual experience. Think of a moment of perfect wholeness, of yourself in perfect unity, or expanded awareness that transcends the split between mind and body and integrates all the parts of you in ecstatic consciousness....When you bring spiritual awareness to your sexual practice, you can become directly conscious of—connected to—that divinity that always flows through you....For us, sex is already an opportunity to see god. (37-28)

Isabetta picks up on this awareness, for she compares sex to heaven when she says “you have put Fra Puccio to performing a penance, whereby we have gotten Paradise” (Boccaccio, 224).²⁹ Not only does she achieve paradise through orgasm and laughter, but that orgasm comes from a partnership with a monk and that laughter comes from being on top sexually, ethically, and now spiritually. Isabetta as a spiritual top comes from “the conjunction of sex and prayer [that] constitutes the plot of 3.4” (Eisner, 200). The story mixes the secular and the sacred by combining erotic activities with religious activities. Fra Puccio's love for religion stands in the way of his love for his wife, which in turn, leads his wife to make an autonomous choice to experience sexuality and religion through the same exploit. Sex, as it was a necessary, though lacking, part of marriage, becomes a necessary part of religion. As such, the orgasm of paradise becomes literally paradise because it allows for an opportunity to see God. Pamphylo, the storyteller, acknowledges the religion of sex in his conclusion “whereas Fra Puccio, by doing penance, thought to win Paradise for himself, he put therein the monk, who had shown him the speedy way thither, and his wife, who lived with him in great lack of that whereof Dom Felice, like the charitable man that he was, vouchsafed her great

29. Payne translation.

plenty” (Boccaccio, 225).³⁰ Fra Puccio is unable to win Paradise because he lacks a sexual drive for his wife. His wife has no ethical qualms fucking outside their marriage because it allows for an ethical experience of the very Paradise for which Fra Puccio searches. Isabetta’s experience demonstrates sex to be a spiritual experience with spiritual implications; spiritual implications, in turn, play a significant role in Isabetta’s self-determined morality and ethical code. A sex act that brings her closer to Paradise surely must be a sex act performed by a medieval ethical slut.

Boccaccio acknowledges the ethics of Isabetta’s choice. Isabetta is never caught, nor is she punished. Dom Felice remains uncaught and unpunished by virtue of his name, a derivative of the Latin *felix*: the man just got lucky. Lucky in this sense is both colloquial—he got lucky and got to have sex—as well as literal—he got lucky and did not get caught. Isabetta did not get lucky. Isabetta, whose name is a truncated form of Elisabetta, the Italian variant of Elizabeth meaning “my God is my oath” in Hebrew, gets religious. Isabetta shrugs off a relationship in order to find autonomy and partnership that leads her to a sexual Paradise through which she is able to see God. She makes the ethical and autonomous decision to find religion by finding her turn on. She is an ethical, religious, slut and cannot be faulted for it.

We see the same kind of ethics in Isabetta’s Chaucerian mirror, the slut Alisoun of the *Miller’s Tale*. Chaucer’s mirror is that of a funhouse in that Isabetta is reflected bigger and more fully developed in Alisoun. Where Isabetta lacks autonomy in her marriage, Alisoun does not lack autonomy sexual or otherwise. Alisoun is filled to the brim with independent choice in her sexual actions, and because of it, holds all the power in the tale. Like Isabetta, her autonomy takes the form of her consent, both where it exists and where it does not; her discernment between sexual partners, both where it is consummated and where it is not; and her unadulterated joy, where it comes from both her autonomous sexual actions and her autonomous involvement in the trickery of the fabliau.

30. Payne translation.

Unlike Isabetta, Alisoun's autonomy goes beyond to also encompass her unadulterated joy at her role in the cosmic punishments of the men in the tale. And unlike Isabetta, Alisoun is responsible for a certain amount of gender-bending that enables the trickery and resulting punishment. Where Alisoun's autonomy leaves off, the Miller picks it up in a more nuanced discussion of her sexual ethics predicated on her role as punisher which categorizes Alisoun as a *medieval* ethical slut, without perhaps some of the modern ethics upon which Easton and Hardy would insist.

The tale begins with a description of two beautiful lovers. Their descriptions are divided by that of a jealous, old man foolish enough to get cuckolded. The lovers, like their poetic descriptions, are divided by the very same cuckold until, of course, the two beautiful lovers go about actually making the man a cuckold. In looking at who this beautiful woman is, she starts off as a "newe wyf" (3221) and ends lower down the sentient spectrum as both a "joly colt" (3263) and "a prymerole, a piggesnye" (3268). Any way the opening description puts it, Alisoun is an object "for any lord to leggen in his bedde, / or yet for any good yeman to wedde" (3269-3270) with the one small exception of the girl's eyes. Amidst a focus on her changeable physical characteristics and even more changeable black and white clothing, comes the line "and sikerly she hadde a likerous ye" (3244), carrying with it the first mention of Alisoun's desire. *The Riverside Chaucer* glosses "likerous" to mean flirtatious, but the word's entry in *The Middle English Dictionary* includes terms like "lascivious," "amorous," "gluttonous" and in relation to an eye specifically "an eye which tempts to lechery; an eye which looks lasciviously." Within Alisoun's eye lies not only her own desire but a tempting nature that relies on the desire of others. There is no need for Alisoun to find her own turn on—not a big deal considering the misogynistic representations of insatiable women in fabliau, but certainly a big deal for Alisoun's identity as an individual slut—as it can be found in her very eye.

Her lascivious nature appears again just thirty lines later when Nicholas, the clever young clerk of the previous description, "fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye" (3273), rage glossed as

“sport (sexually)” by *The Riverside Chaucer* (69). Again, however, the gloss does not convey all it could in relation to Alisoun’s sexuality; while it could include the possibility of coitus, the word’s combination with play insinuates that they are “just playing,” only experiencing an insignificant flirtation. According to *The Middle English Dictionary*, “rage” is not limited to sport but includes “amorous longing or desire, lovesickness; also, a fit of carnal lust or sexual desire; a feeling of passion or love.” It would seem that where *The Riverside Chaucer* would have flirtation (whether harmless or not) there is evidence for a reading of Nicholas as cruising over flirting. Whereas both activities “involve an exchange of sexual energy in the form of eye contact, body language, smiles and warmth, and little flashes of erotic energy that can be shared long before any physical contact would be appropriate” (Easton and Hardy, 82), Nicholas’s use of cruising over flirting causes an important infringement on Alisoun’s sexual autonomy. In the modern context, “flirting [is seen] as a more introductory maneuver and cruising as what you do when you know for sure that you’re interested” (Easton and Hardy, 82). Working from such a definition and given the likerous quality of Alisoun’s eyes, Nicholas could easily take “rage and pleye” for more than an introductory maneuver as he has reason to believe “for sure” that Alisoun is interested. Furthermore, Nicholas’s “rage and pleye” occurs *with* this young wife, indicating that up to this point, Alisoun has consented to the combination of flirting and cruising inherent in their sexual sport, even partaking in it herself. Alisoun’s autonomy as both ethical slut and human being with bodily rights is under threat because Nicholas believes he knows what she wants and to what she consents.

And then Nicholas moves from those little flashes of erotic energy to extreme physical contact believing it to be desired but without ever determining if such would be consensual. Nicholas, seeking more than “rage” moves to direct sexual play “and prively he caught hire by the queynte” (3276). With his hand upon her cunt, Nicholas proceeds to make a profession of love to Alisoun. He does so not in the manner of an ethical slut because his profession depends entirely on

his successful coercion of Alisoun's consent. We have already seen that Alisoun possesses certain forms of autonomy, in both her spirited and sexual nature as well as her participation in flirtatious or cruising behavior, but Nicholas's action here infringes upon Alisoun's already defined autonomy. In catching her by the cunt, Nicholas invalidates Alisoun's autonomy because he does not give her the opportunity to consent, or not consent should she so choose.

Nicholas sexually assaults Alisoun. Nicholas sexually assaults Alisoun without realizing it because of his prior engagement in actions leading, in his mind, to the very fingering that takes place. Nicholas misrecognizes his action as not assault because of the patriarchal distortion of women's sexuality and the role of "insatiability." Because Nicholas believes that medieval women will always want sex, he sexually assaults Alisoun, without realizing that it is sexual assault. By believing that he has not infringed upon Alisoun's autonomy, he silences Alisoun by taking away her ability to consent. Instead of being able to say "yes means yes and nothing else means yes," or even the diminutive "no means no," Alisoun's options have been bypassed and she is left without a communicative option. Alisoun is deprived of the consent necessary to the ethical slut because of the unethical actions of a man fully consumed by inaccurate patriarchal representations of the medieval slut.

The idea of consent discussed above in conversation with the *Ethical Slut* is obviously that of the modern ethical slut. This type of consent, though occasionally backed up by the law, is more of society's making. Ethical sluts are able to come together to determine what consent is and when it is and is not granted. Of course, given certain aspects of society, the idea of consent must constantly be reinforced by those who believe in its fundamental right. Idealistically, it is not a difficult concept to grasp. It must be freely given because "if someone is being coerced, bullied, blackmailed, manipulated, lied to, or ignored, what is happening is not consensual. And sex that is not consensual

is not ethical—period.” (Easton and Hardy, 21). Sex that is not consensual is not sex. Realistically, society (especially recent modern society) shows that it is a difficult concept to grasp.

The medieval concept of consent is even more difficult to grasp, particularly in the period’s discussion of raptus, for which there is no modern equivalent and thus problematizing the autonomy of consent necessary for an ethical slut, medieval or modern. Christopher Cannon in “Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty’s Certainties” writes “that mention of a raptus in fourteenth-century law was itself an attempt to achieve clarity in the face of a legal tradition that had become hopelessly confused about the naming of sexual violence and its punishment.” The law essentially allowed the female victim to consent to rape after the fact (68)—just as Alisoun will eventually do with Nicholas (Chaucer, 3290). Cannon’s discussion, unlike mine in the context of Easton and Hardy, is based in medieval law. His definition is therefore inadequate. As we can see in extremely recent modern events, the law does not protect the survivors of sexual assault in the way that it should. Neither did the medieval law. Neither law code works the way the ethical slut’s social contract does (i.e., the way that it should to protect everyone involved) because it is based in the patriarchal idea that “as women, we infantilize ourselves when we don’t take responsibility for our own actions in the bedroom. We have to be able to assess the difference between assault and discomfort” (Sciortino, 11). Nicholas, unaware that such an assessment would even take place, and influenced as he is by the trope of insatiability, proceeds to misrecognize his actions as not rape under the medieval law code, the modern law code, or the modern sense of ethics with which sluts arm themselves.

Of course, in his misrecognition, believing that he has not bypassed her consent, Nicholas believes he can still acquire Alisoun’s consent and goes further to coerce it out of her. With his hand still on her cunt, Nicholas says

“ywis, but if ich have my wille,
For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille.”

And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones,
And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones,
Or I wol dyen, also God me save!" (3277-3281)

Nicholas, after already sexually assaulting Alisoun, threatens to die in an attempt to coerce her consent, then proceeds to further his sexual assault by holding her so that she must listen to him. The language is sweetened by the pet name of "lemman" but the action cannot be sweetened. He threatens to "spille and to dyen" under the framework of pity that works so well in Chaucer's tales of courtly love. Pity here does not work as a reason for Alisoun to consent. Pity here only serves to emphasize the ironic position Nicholas holds. He, after silencing Alisoun's autonomy through multiple sexual assaults, asks for pity from a position of power. He threatens that Alisoun would be responsible for Nicholas's "spille," in this case meaning both "to die" and "to break (a law, the marriage vow); also, vitiate (a code of law), invalidate; also, make false (a prophecy)" (MED) should Alisoun not respond favorably. By enforcing this responsibility onto the unwilling Alisoun, Nicholas makes her complicit in her own invalidation as a slut. He effectively says to her that her code of law, or code of marriage, or even code of ethics is meant to be vitiated for his simple sexual pleasures. He blackmails her through threatening to die, as well as threatening to break everything which medieval society tells Alisoun she should hold dear. I have said before and will continue to scream about this basic rule of consent: "if someone is being coerced, bullied, blackmailed, manipulated, lied to, or ignored, what is happening is not consensual. And sex that is not consensual is not ethical—period." (Easton and Hardy, 21). Sex that is not consensual is not sex. Nicholas, through his own patriarchal actions and failure to recognize them, believes he has a right to Alisoun's sexuality—he literally "caughte hire by the queynte" without consent under such a belief—and believes further that she is responsible for his feelings, and his death should she choose not to be responsible for his feelings. Nicholas assaults Alisoun emotionally and mentally, in addition to sexually, by manipulating and

coercing her consent under bodily harm without regard to her own desire. He commands only that she must “love [him] al atones” and with such a commandment silences her autonomy.

While Alisoun might, in effect, be silenced by Nicholas’s assault, she does not remain silent.

In response to Nicholas’s commandment, she physically distances herself from him:

And seyde, “I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!
 Why, lat be!” quod she. “Lat be, Nicholas,
 Or I wol crie ‘out, harrow’ and ‘allas’!
 Do wey youre hands, for youre curteisye!” (3284-3287)

Even while her autonomy is infringed, Alisoun is able to hold fast to it. Alisoun has the amazing capability of the ethical slut to say no. She knows what she wants and she knows for certain that this is not it. She swears that she will not do what she does not want—by her faith. Under *The Ethical Slut’s* ideology, she is faithful in that she cares for her own well-being. She also knows her own boundaries; she knows she is incapable of being responsible for another’s emotional well-being and is able to stand up for those boundaries. Whereas Nicholas responds to the desire expressed in the flirtations and cruisings of “rage and pleye” with unethical, patriarchal, acts of assault, Alisoun defies the medieval expectation of insatiability in favor of ethics. What is even more amazing of her capabilities as an ethical slut is her ability to adapt. Sciortino notes that “often, people who are sexually abused call themselves ‘survivors’ rather than ‘victims,’ in an effort to move away from the idea of the passive female victim who’s there for the taking” (11). This effort to move away is also an effort to move toward—toward how “we can decide to define ourselves...after something bad happens, we can learn from it and move forward. Because realistically, being a fragile victim is just not on-brand for the modern slut” (Sciortino, 12). Once Alisoun makes the effort to move on and Nicholas allows for an ethical discussion and renegotiation of boundaries,

she [Alisoun] hir love hym graunted ate laste,
 and swoor hir ooth, by Seint Thomas of Kent,
 that she wol been at his comandement,
 whan that she may hir leyser wel espie. (3290-3293)

Alisoun and Nicholas reach an agreement so that both their needs and commandments can be met. In their discussion, “spak so faire,” (3289) Alisoun consents to being at Nicholas’s commandment. Alisoun is able to swear by her “ooth” to consent in the same manner that she swore by her “fey” that she would not consent. Part of being an ethical slut is the ability to have *changeable* boundaries, which allow for the growth of a relationship (Easton and Hardy, 71). Most importantly in their renegotiation, Alisoun’s autonomy regains its voice. Nicholas comes to recognize Alisoun’s ability to consent and leaves the final decision regarding the actual sex up to her. It is when she espies an opportunity that they will consummate the original “rage and pleye” that led to their newly defined relationship.

As it would happen, Alisoun takes her time to “espie hir leysset,” giving ample time for the slut as reader to analyze Alisoun’s own ample opportunity to practice ethical sluthood. She has such a plethora of partners but lacks discernment among all her presented options, choosing in each case not to practice ethical sluthood. Alongside the lusty and clever Nicholas, Alisoun has the opportunity to “rage and pleye” with her husband John, as well as another lusty clerk, Absolon. She has the opportunity but she does not take advantage of it. She does not consent to John and Absolon with the same autonomous negotiation of boundaries she forges with Nicholas. In regard to John, from the word go, the dearth of desire between the carpenter and his wife is palpable. Whereas the young lovers’ descriptions focus on their shared beauty, John’s description paints a portrait of a cuckold meant to be punished for his foolishness. His description presents reasons for Alisoun’s eventual adultery; it is an argument as to why John should be punished. Alisoun does not consent to a partnership or even relationship with her husband because the two are entirely ill-matched.

In regard to Absolon, we again see one-sided desire at the cause of an ill-matched couple. Where John is too old for the young Alisoun and therefore not worthy of Alisoun’s consent,

Absolon is too proper for the wild and natural Alisoun and therefore also unworthy of Alisoun's consent. Absolon, in particular does not garner Alisoun's consent because he attempts to garner it in the right way, or rather in a courtly way. Unlike the flirting or cruising of an erotic power exchange turned consensual agreement in which Nicholas engages, Absolon is neither erotic nor exciting. He woos by suffering woe, "he waketh al the nyght and al the day;...and swoor he wolde been hir owene page" (3372-3376). He uses the pity trope common in the courtly love topos as seen in the last chapter which is entirely at odds with Alisoun's overtly sexual and wild nature. John Hines describes Absolon's attempt at seduction as artificial which "can be seen as the root of his failure within the tale" (117). He is too prim and proper to play with Alisoun either in a flirtatious manner or in a sexual manner and is therefore refuted. When his attempts at wooing move into more physical endeavors, it is still with an unnatural cultivation. Instead of catching her cunt and then entering into a conversation about consent, Absolon ponders aloud

to Alison now wol I tellen al
my love-longynge, for yet I shal nat mysse
that at the leeste wey I shal hire kisse (3678-3680)

attempting to enter into a conversation about consent and then chastely kiss her. There is no turn on for Alisoun in Absolon's attempt to woo. She finds no joy at the idea of being a slut—being sexually free like the animals with which she is so often compared—with him because he himself presents no joy in his lust. He has the lust to woo, but his artificiality, to borrow Hines's term, dresses his lust up as love, a concept for which Alisoun has no need as such an illusion is patently unethical.

Throughout the tale, John makes his love for his wife very clear, not by his words but through his actions characterized by constant jealousy as opposing the ethical slut's purpose and therefore a reason for his eventual punishment. Even in Alisoun's description Chaucer notes John's jealousy writing "jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage" (3224). This cage represents the same artificiality characteristic of Absolon in that it traps though the emotion of jealousy based in a

convoluted sense of ownership and owed sex acts. When confronted with the flood, his first thoughts are for Alisoun. He is, as Alisoun continuously points out, continuously jealous (3224, 3294, 3404, 3851). Jealousy for the ethical slut is a complex emotion in that it is a very bad emotion to feel and yet a very important emotion to feel. In fact, jealousy, as a concept is so important that it “is not an emotion....Jealousy is an umbrella word that covers the wide range of emotions we might feel when our partners make sexual connection with somebody else” which we feel because we care not only about our partners but about ourselves (Easton and Hardy, 111). Ethical sluts know that jealousy can be unlearned and disempowered, but John has yet to get there. Instead he allows his jealousy to signify his love for his wife while also disempowering himself in his relationship. His jealousy, though sourced in love drives his wife away because it is not an attractive emotion. His jealousy seeks to trap his wild wife in the same artificiality Absolon uses to woo. Though both Absolon and John love Alisoun, they do so in ways that are harmful to who Alisoun is and what she wants. John loves but does not lust. Absolon lusts but through the performativity of love. They therefore are rebuked, tricked, and punished, leaving Alisoun to experience all the lust she would have, without the complexities of love. Jealousy as antithetical to the sexual identity of the ethical slut goes a long way toward answering the major question of why Alisoun does not suffer when all the men do. Alisoun, as ethical slut, is free from jealousy and emboldened to experience lust as she would want making her ethically unpunishable.

Alisoun and Nicholas’s well-matched lust enables a newly established continual consent specific to their newly established relationship which brings the tale from “rage and pleye” to the “bisynesse of myrthe and of solas.” As we saw with Isabetta, Alisoun can be sexually voracious, insatiable even, when it comes to the fuck and not the flirtation. As we saw with Isabetta, Alisoun not only enjoys sex, she is good at it. In fact, she engages in some rather kinky activities. Eager to get to them,

ful softe adoun she spedde;
 withouten words mo they goon to bedde,
 ther as the carpenter is wont to lye.
 Ther was the revel and the melodye;
 and thus lith Alison and Nicholas,
 in bisynesse of myrthe and of solas,
 til that the belle of laudes gan to ryng,
 and freres in the chauncel gonne synge. (3649-3656)

Unlike with Nicholas's sexual assault where Alisoun was averse to actions without consent, here Alisoun is eager to reach the actions "withouten words." Alisoun, by agreeing to a consensual relationship with Nicholas, can forgo the specificity of consent to each individual act in favor of a more convenient way to "goon to bedde." The speed with which she approaches sex with Nicholas demonstrates her desire, her excitement, and her consent. By racing from the solitude of her hanging tub to the companionship of the bed, Alisoun acts promiscuously. By doing so with the forethought of consent, she acts ethically. By doing so in this particular bed, she furthers her kinks.

Alisoun and Nicholas engage in the kinky activity of replacing one partner with another when they "goon to bedde, / ther as the carpenter is wont to lye." This replacement of one partner for another is a reflection of Alisoun's replacement of ethics with kink to further her own autonomous expression of her sexual desires. With her John sequestered above her and with no knowledge of her actions, Alisoun takes a lover into the bed she shares with her husband. According to Easton and Hardy, this could not be the act of ethical slut. An ethical slut prizes their faithfulness. As we have seen previously, Alisoun does as well in that she swears "by her fey" and ultimately keeps her commandments to Nicholas, but she fails in her relationship with her husband. Though they are ill-matched and without partnership, there is love in the relationship, even if it is one-sided. An ethical slut's faithfulness "is about honoring your commitments and respecting your friends and lovers, about caring for their well-being as well as your own" (Easton and Hardy, 66). I mentioned previously that Alisoun does indeed care for her own well-being in her rejection of multiple possible partners, but she fails in the respect of caring for the well-being of her husband. She undertakes

acts—like fucking another man in their marriage bed while he lies impotently above—that are designed to hurt him. She designs to make him a gnof, a churl, and a cuckold. Here, Alisoun trades some of her ethics for some of her kinks. Her trade, though it does away with certain ethical ideals, is itself an act of the ethical slut because it allows her to prioritize her own desires, desires that in this instance are seen by patriarchal influences as abnormal and therefore amoral, unethical desires. By prioritizing kinks over ethics in effect reshaping her ethical framework to include kinky behavior, Alisoun furthers the patriarchal subversion of the medieval slut.

Alisoun's kinky adultery works hand in hand with her ethical adultery to continue to subvert the patriarchy. In hopes of returning some of Alisoun's lost ethics, Kathryn Jacobs takes a different view of this act. Alisoun is not an adulteress but a lawyer; she rewrites her marital contract. Because of Alisoun's disinterest, sexual or otherwise, in her husband, "the discrepancy in age again prevents reciprocal affection and obligation" (Jacobs, 338). Because of the lack of affection due to age, Alisoun does not owe John her marital debt. John by medieval law is therefore "responsible for [his] partner's misdeeds" (338) and has a hand in his own punishment. Blaming John restores Alisoun's ethical standing in the legal sense. As her replacement of kink for ethics was the act of a societally conscious ethical slut, she never lost her ethical standing. Instead, her husband lost ethical standing because he was unable to do as required by medieval husbands and provide sex. Blaming John does however come with another ethical dilemma: blaming John is victim blaming because John is, after all, a victim of adultery. As the victim of adultery, John is emasculated. His emasculation is further represented by his broken arm. His emasculation is furthered by his unwillingness to act with an ethical framework for sexuality or his marriage thus making him an unnatural bottom in the medieval view of sexuality. Under such a view, John has brought this on himself because he has not been able to act with reciprocity toward his wife's lust. Thus blaming the unethical John returns

Alisoun's autonomy because it ensures the reader's recognition of Alisoun's pain at John's hands and her ethical right to rectify such pain through the only means she has—ethical adultery.

Alisoun's kinks continue beyond the adultery, and the adultery taking place in her marriage bed. She finds joy in sex. She finds joy in sex with her chosen partner. She finds joy in the intimacy of sex with her chosen partner. She finds intimacy in the particulars of her desire. She describes what she envisions as the trick on John being successful; that “she sholde slepen in his [Nicholas's] arm al nyght, / for this was his desir and hire also” (3406-3407). She describes the kind of behavior that is usually associated with modern sleepovers, typically characterized by not only intimacy, but deep connection and privacy. Yet another example of Alisoun's desire as a part of her sexual relationships and identity proves Alisoun to be a self-conscious slut aware of her own desires and willing to go after them.

The way in which she does go after her desires speaks to the tension between public and private sex repeated throughout the tale, and thus the tension between ethics and kinks for the adulterous slut. Alisoun must “espie” an opportunity for adultery. When she does fuck Nicholas, she must do so privately so as not to wake her husband. Regarding this tension, Alisoun's actions and reactions show a distinct preference for private over public sex. When her cunt is first caught, Nicholas does so “prively” (3276), as he himself is “sleigh and ful privee” (3201). Alisoun insists on “privee” (3295) both to hide from her husband's jealousy, but also as a condition of sex with Nicholas. Sex with Nicholas only becomes possible because of John's insistence that “an housbonde shal nat been inquisityf / of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf” (3163-3164). For Alisoun, sex is private, while trickery is public. Similarly, sex is slutty while trickery is sluttish.³¹ While her sex with Nicholas is ethically slutty in that she makes her own decision to have it, her trickery of Absolon is

31. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use “sluttishness” (and its variants i.e., sluttish) to refer to the medieval quality of sluttish, meaning dirty or slovenly (M. Jones) and “sluttiness” (and its variants i.e., slutty) to refer to the modern quality of promiscuity.

ethically sluttish. She is sluttish in her decision to put her hole out the window, joyfully participating in the perceived “slovenliness” of anilingus while simultaneously participating in an act of public trickery rather than explicit sex. In addition to Absolon’s artificiality, his attempt at seduction fails because he attempts in public. His blunders, as well as those of John and Nicholas, cause even more joy in Alisoun. In addition to her joy at sex, sex with her chosen partner, and intimate sex with her chosen partner, part of her “myrthe and solas” comes from her joy of trickery and her joy at everyone else’s punishment.

Alisoun’s role in the trickery displays even more of her kinks while also effectively placing her as the woman on top. Unlike with Isabetta’s tale, the Miller is not explicit in describing Alisoun’s preferred sexual positions. This however, does not not make her a top. Alisoun places herself on top, in the hierarchical sense, through the trickery of her husband. She places herself on top by duping every single man in the tale. She, alongside Nicholas, dupes her husband into believing that Noah’s flood is coming. She, alongside Nicholas, dupes Absolon into eating ass. She, alongside Absolon, dupes Nicholas into being branded. Her response to all of this is that of joy. She is iconic in her exclamation of that joy. With the single utterance of “Teheel!” (3740), she engages in the laughter that is emblematic of the wife in the fabliaux. This laughter is so iconic because it enables the woman to change the gendered hierarchy enacted by the patriarchal marginalization of women as only sexual objects. This laughter shows joy and autonomy, while also “alert[ing] us to the contradictions that inhere in the construction of femininity in medieval discourse by pushing antifeminist clichés to their limits or showing how assumptions about women contradict each other” (Perfetti, 21). Alisoun’s joy and laughter comes not necessarily from her orgasm which enables her sluthood but because she is involved with the trickery that causes the moral punishment of the men who have attempted to engage in her sluthood without regard to her autonomy. Her joy which comes from liberated sexuality equivalent with her joy which comes from moral punishment—really

retribution—“is most striking in its unmasking of the fundamental structure underlying medieval concepts of gender difference: the binary pairs of male/reason/head versus female/passion/body” (Perfetti, 21). Alisoun places herself on top of the tale because her liberated sexuality, which by medieval standards is gender-bent or queer, creates the opportunity for trickery and subsequent moral retribution.

John, in addition to being physically harmed (his arm is broken) due to Alisoun’s retribution, loses the most emotionally and societally mainly because of how Alisoun and Nicholas go about feminizing him, effectively creating a scapegoat for any ethical failings of the adulterous couple. Just as Alisoun deals out three punishments for three lovers, John is punished three times. As Tison Pugh puts it

John has been thrice unmanned, thrice queered: he is a victim of Nicholas’s [and Alisoun’s] cuckoldry, which denies him his heteronormative privilege, his fall casts him as the product of simulated sodomitical intercourse, and he becomes the laughingstock of the town. His masculinity has been stripped from him, leaving only an unmanned joke behind. (53)

Alisoun’s laughter at her punishment of her husband reinforces his feminization by placing John on the bottom. Not only is Alisoun the woman on top by her own autonomous actions, by her own autonomous choice John is on the bottom, below both Nicholas to whom she consents and Absolon with whom she has no sexual debt. The modern ethical slut knows that there is nothing wrong with bottoming; it is simply an assumed sexual role during which “we can truly appreciate the gift we are being given, not to mention feeling free to thrash and shriek and otherwise express our appreciation” (Easton and Hardy, 235). The medieval slut does not approach gender roles so cavalierly. Because their roles are circumscribed by hard boundaries clearly defined by their marriage, Alisoun’s queering of John’s gender role is even more of a punishment than his role as a cuckold or dupe.

Given the severity (now including queering) of John’s punishment, the slut as reader must question the ethics lesson the tale attempts to impart by asking if the man actually deserves his

punishment. Alisoun answers yes, emphatically, of course. Otherwise she would not go to such lengths to do it. Her answer is easily discounted through the lens of the slut-as-slur, discounting her ethics in favor of the ethics determined by the medieval church which make extra-marital sex unethical in any sense. By discounting her answer based solely on her enjoyment of sex, the text registers the impulse to play into the patriarchal interpretations. Reading Alisoun's answer in this way therefore denies all the complexities that exist within the reclaimed slut's identity. Reclaimed sluts have a complicated identity that comes from a drive towards ethics and a fight to be considered a person.

The Miller also answers yes, perhaps less emphatically, but still yes. The drunkenness of the Miller, well-noted in his prologue (3120), registers the similar impulse to deny the Miller's ethics, again in favor of those of the Church. Such an oversimplification of the role of the Miller in the frame narrative ignores the complexities he gives to his characters. He is drunk. His drunkenness does present a problem but the speaker of the frame narrative presents a solution in the form of a forewarning. Just before the tale is to begin, he pleads with the reader

Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.
The Millere is a cherl; ye knowe wel this
So was the Reve eek and othere mo,
and harlotrie they tolden bothe two.
Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame;
and eek men shal nat maken ernest of game. (3181-3186)

This plea alongside the Miller's drunkenness should ensure that the reader not make earnest out of Alisoun's little game that, while she might mean it and the men might deserve it, is nothing other than the harlotry of an inebriated churl. Harlotry itself should not be listened to as it is only "ribaldry, dirty stories" as *The Riverside Chaucer* so unhelpfully glosses (67). Harlotry is more than just the simplicity of a dirty story; it is a form of "popular entertainment, evil conduct, and sexual immorality" (MED) part of the necessity of a fabliau—a *fable*—from which we can extrapolate certain noble truths about the explicit sexual acts of medieval sluts. The Miller even works to impart

a noble truth about medieval sluts in his prologue when he states “an housbonde shal nat been inquisityf / of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf” (3163), which he finds so important that he repeats it again in the tale: “Men shoulde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee” (3454).

The medieval slut in the hands of the Miller becomes an ethics lesson. The ethics lesson continues as Alisoun escapes any form of punishment. Hines cites Chaucerian Janette Richardson, explaining that “Alison escapes any punishment in the tale because she acts purely in accordance with ‘nature’” (115)—just look at her *effictio*, full of natural imagery, animalistic energy, and a certain sense that she is right to be young, wild, and free. Her sexual ethics, like her sexual drive, are entirely natural, in the patriarchal medieval sense that she is insatiable and has a right to sex from someone, anyone, if not her husband.

Moreover, Alisoun’s sexual ethics, like her sexual drive, are entirely natural, due to her belief in sharing her sexuality (with us the reader) to perhaps “make the world a better place” (Easton and Hardy, 4) through actively turning the medieval slut into a natural autonomous woman. More than an ethics lesson, the Miller’s slut is meant to parody the slut who came before her. Where my last chapter discussed the complete disregard, even lack, of autonomy found in Emelye, this chapter discusses Alisoun’s plethora of autonomy which enables so much of the tale. Elizabeth Scala characterizes the parody through the use of genre wherein “deploying genres ostensibly suited to the narrators who tell them, these tales pose alternate means of attaining desirable feminine figures; the Miller’s Alison has thus stood as ‘the accessible and sensuous antitype to the distant and spiritualized Emily...more animal than goddess’” (85). The tale is then a joke with a particular meaning that helps us to understand not just the sluthood of Alisoun, but also the sluthood of Emelye and every other medieval slut ensnared in sticky issues of consent and autonomy. Simultaneously, the Miller’s parody works against Alisoun to portray her as the butt of the joke. While she is on top in her relationship, she is also a warning to readers of the tale of the dangers of a woman on top. According to the

whorearchy, “the hierarchy that shouldn’t—but does—exist in the sex industry, which makes some jobs within it more stigmatized than others, and some more acceptable” (Sciortino, 189) more closely examined in Chapter Four,³² Alisoun is further down the hierarchy than Emelye because of her autonomy. Unlike Emelye, Alisoun enacts unethical sex acts in a power grab for autonomy, thus making her even more unethical in the views of the medieval patriarchy. Alisoun, when read as a parody, works both ways—working for the medieval slut due to her own autonomous actions and against the medieval slut due to patriarchal misinterpretations of those actions.

In continuing the line of ethical parody, Chaucerian ethics come into question regarding Alisoun as a paragon of ethical sluthood. Without entering into the complexities of authorial intent, a biographical reading of Chaucer and adultery—specifically adultery in the form of sexual assault—sheds light on the *Miller’s Tale*. As Cannon so helpfully discusses, Chaucer himself was accused of *raptus* only to be released of “all manner of actions such as they relate to my [Cecily Chaumpaigne’s] rape or any other thing or cause (omnimodas acciones tam de raptu meo tam de aliqua alia re vel causa)” (68). Clearly Chaucer’s ethics as a slut are problematic at best. Chaucer does make certain attempts to discourage the tale the Miller tells, but they, like the very definition of *raptus*, are hazy. For Chaucer, rape was “hopelessly confusing” because legal definitions remained unable to address the question of interior faculty—whether that faculty was consent, desire, or even orgasm—and therefore for the Miller, any attempt to dissuade the sexual assault of the tale is confused. There is the aforementioned plea to “blameth nat him” as well as his characterization of the Miller and his tale as drunken, churlish harlotry. He attempts to dissuade the Miller from even telling his tale—even broaching the subject of *raptus* or sexual ethics—as the Hoost said

Abyd, Robyn, my leeve brother;
som bettre man shal telle us first another.
Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily. (3129-3131)

32. Chapter Four, section on the whorearchy within Fragment I, specifically the *Cook’s Tale*.

Despite his attempts, the Miller is still successful in telling his tale and presenting us with a complex slut with complex ethics. In giving such complexity, Chaucer allows himself to simultaneously praise and demean Alisoun. Chaucer makes Alisoun special. Chaucer makes Alisoun unique in her autonomy as a slut, even an adulterous slut with questionable modern ethics. Unlike *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales* has distinctly few adulterous sluts, indicating Chaucer's own questions regarding the complexity and moral righteousness of such an act. Chaucer makes Alisoun special by making her complicated, leaving us to look elsewhere for purely ethical sluts.

In looking elsewhere, I now return to *The Decameron*, this time with a focus on the seventh story of the sixth day. This is the one where “when Madonna Filippa’s husband discovers her with a lover, she is called before a judge, but secures her freedom by means of a prompt and amusing reply, while also getting the statute changed at the same time” (Boccaccio, 185).³³ As the medieval ideal of insatiability demands, Madonna Filippa is described as “not just beautiful, but exceptionally amorous by nature” (Boccaccio, 185). But Boccaccio, ever the proponent of women’s desire, describes her further as “possessing a lofty spirit” and a sense of ethical pride (186).³⁴ Madonna Filippa, in the face of great danger, is able to keep her ethics about her. She answers the summons sent by her husband in order to kill her, as the law demands. If she had not, she would thus show “herself unworthy of such a lover as the man in whose arms she had been the night before” (ibid.). Here, her ethical pride comes not from her sex drive, which of course is integral to the story, but from her relationship with those whom she loves. She, as the ethical slut that she is, is able to retain faithfulness to herself, her love, her desire, alongside insatiability, contrary to her medieval construct.

She puts her insatiability to good use, and in so doing recognizes her sexual autonomy and her turn on in the form of multiple partners. It is important to note that Madonna Filippa, unlike the

33. Rebhorn translation.

34. Rebhorn translation.

previous sluts of this chapter, does have sex with her husband. In fact, as Rinaldo says to the court, “she had always satisfied his every desire and given herself to him whenever he requested it” (Boccaccio, 187).³⁵ Instead of throwing her leftovers to the dogs (*ibid.*), Madonna Filippa “shares her sexuality the way philanthropists share their money, because they have a lot of it to share, because it makes them happy to share it, because sharing makes the world a better place” (Easton and Hardy, 4), in this case meeting every single stipulation of the ethical slut. Madonna Filippa recognizes both her medieval insatiability and the timeless tyranny of hydraulics when she says to the *podestà* “us poor women...are much better than men at giving satisfaction to a whole host of lovers” (Boccaccio, 186).³⁶ She is good at sex. She is clearly an ethical slut as she shares that goodness with her sexual partners. She uses that sharing to change an unethical law to further protect not only herself but any slut like her.

Madonna Filippa’s amusing comments regarding the excess of her insatiability work to change the law under which her husband originally planned to kill her. Filippa, by entertaining her auditors and making them laugh, helps to “modify their cruel statute, restricting it so that it only applied to those women who betrayed their husbands for money” (Boccaccio, 187).³⁷ Filippa helps her audience to laugh through a comparison of her own animalistic sexuality to the uncleanness of dogs saying “if he’s always obtained what he needed from me and was pleased with it, what was I supposed to do—in fact, what am I to do now—with the leftovers? Should I throw them to the dogs?” (*ibid.*) thereby justifying her desire in both biblical terms “*nolite dare sanctum canibus* (give not that which is holy unto the dogs)” (*ibid.*) as well as common sexual sense. Lisa Perfetti notes that “it is in fact because of Madonna Filippa’s use of a humorous justification for her adultery—the cliché of the ‘surplus’—that she is able to show the deficiencies of the double standard of the law”

35. Rebhorn translation.

36. Rebhorn translation.

37. Rebhorn translation.

(85). Where we have seen the law fail sluts previously in this chapter, as well as in our own modern society, Madonna Filippa uses wit to ensure that the law will no longer fail those it has not even bothered to protect. Regarding *raptus*, the law is meant to protect the owners of the victim's property rather than the victim herself. Here, without regard to what is owed to the men, both of whom are sexually satisfied, "the woman, has achieved a victory against a legal establishment hostile to women through her use of a witty reply" (ibid.). Perfetti goes on to construct an argument similar to that of the Wife of Bath: that woman's wit is inextricable from her wiles "justifying women's deception as a necessary strategy to equalize unfair social conditions" (ibid. 86). The only people that can work to protect adulterous sluts are the ethical sluts who themselves engage in a form of ethical adultery.

In this chapter, I have shown three different medieval adulteresses, all of whom approach their adultery, a distinct ethical dilemma, with a certain kind of ethical prowess. The legal idea and religious sacrament of marriage both require a strict set of ethics predetermined by the ecclesiastical and secular courts which have decided what exactly marriage is. Under such a system, all agreements are taken for granted; sexual exclusivity, money sharing, inheritance, and all the other issues covered by such inflexible marriage laws are not able to be consciously chosen. Sluts, whether ethical or not, whether medieval or not, really like conscious choice. This desire for conscious choice, driven in part by sexual desire, is present in the conscious choice of Isabetta, Alisoun, and Filippa's adultery. Their adultery, as well as Boccaccio and Chaucer's construction of their adultery, is the conscious choice to go against their patriarchal marriages. It is their conscious choice as ethical sluts to go against the involvement with the patriarchy (through church, through the law, or even through their husbands) in their consciously chosen relationships outside marriage. Each presentation of each slut shows how the medieval slut can be the ethical slut, even with certain ethical failings. The culmination of presentations of each slut, shows how the ethical slut exists as a medieval idea, as well as a modern one. Chaucer and Boccaccio, with their medieval readers, have been grappling with

the same allowances for and judgements against sluts with which modern readers and modern sluts still grapple. The medieval adulteress Alisoun takes the same form as the modern polyamorous slut Alison. Adultery, as a form of unethical polyamory serves as a precursor to the ethical polyamory of today, wherein Alison has an avenue of communication to redefine her polyamorous relationships in a way that Alisoun does not. Where Alisoun fails in our modern sense of an ethical code because of certain medieval tropes of the fabliau, the modern recreation of her—Alison who has learned from Alisoun in order not to repeat Alisoun's ethical failings—has the opportunity for growth. As does modern Isabetta. As does modern Filippa. Medieval sexual identity, when extrapolated from these characters, can influence modern sexual identity so that we, the modern sluts, learn and grow enough not to make the same mistakes. Adultery can be an ethical marker of the modern slut in the same way it is for the medieval slut. Adultery does not have to be a part of the modern slut's identity, but as a construct necessary for the medieval slut, adultery is a helpful tool from which to learn. The modern slut, learning from the medieval slut, can make the conscious choice to be more ethical in the way in which they relate to their partners.

Chapter Four: The Professional Slut

Autonomous Sex Work Among Bawdy Tales

As noted in the previous chapter, due to the feared insatiability of women, sluts could be prosecuted. Boccaccio's Madam Filippa takes a different view when she helps to "modify their cruel statute, restricting it so that it only applied to those women who betrayed their husbands for money" (Boccaccio, 187).³⁸ While making great strides for the treatment of adulterous sluts, Boccaccio creates even greater stigma against professional sluts. By modifying the statute so that it only affects women who "snyved for hir sustenance" Boccaccio reflects late medieval anxieties regarding the ethics of capitalist accumulation and prostitution.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will be defining prostitution as the exchange of sexual acts for money specifically. I recognize that this is a very simplistic view compared with that of the actual medieval prostitute as well as that of the modern prostitute, but its simplicity allows for an in depth discussion of both Boccaccio's Ambrugia and Chaucer's unnamed wives in the *Shipman's* and *Cook's Tale*. Their prostitution, or exchange of sex for money, is only one aspect of their slut identity—it comes along with their identities as wives, as women, and as people.

While a slut is a person who has sex, a professional slut (or sex worker) is a person who has sex for money. The term slut functions as both a slur and a reclamation and it is the reclamation along with a set of ethics that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the exchange economies present in medieval fabliaux. The professional slut, a subset of the medieval slut, is simply a slut in a medieval fabliau, not necessarily without ethics but responding in the typical fashion of an errant wife; she, in particular falls into two categories depending on the lengths of her ethics and the response of the patriarchy. The professional slut is either a prostitute or a whore. The distinction between whore and prostitute is of the utmost importance. A prostitute is devoid of shame; she is

38. Rebhorn translation.

only doing her job. Thus she is able to participate in the transaction (sex for money) as she would in any other transaction. A prostitute is just a person with a job. The whore, alternatively, has a certain amount of emotion attached to the monetary transaction. This emotion takes many forms, most notably that of desire, whether the desire be for sex or money or money for sex. Attached to this emotion is also a certain amount of shame, not necessarily originating from self-imposition, but always from the patriarchal society that judges whores to be unethical and amoral. The whore is both slutty and sluttish; using “sluttiness” to refer to the modern quality of promiscuity and “sluttishness” to refer to the medieval quality of sluttish, meaning dirty or slovenly (M. Jones). The professional slut, both whore and prostitute alike, is not without ethics, but as with all medieval sluts the ethical framework must always be self-determined.

A rehearsal of this study’s categories of sluttiness are in order, focalized through professional sluts. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the ethical slut is a modern construction of sexual identity wherein abundant sex with abundant partners is celebrated not as an amoral or immoral slur regarding a slut’s promiscuity but as a way of imposing an ethical framework onto one’s already slutty actions, like those of modern polyamory. The medieval ethical slut is a reworking of such a framework through the literature of Chaucer and Boccaccio to include the more medieval understandings of consent and autonomy that lie somewhere between strict medieval interpretations—like those of Ruth Mazo Karras and Christopher Cannon, working from Thomas Aquinas—and strict modern interpretations—such as Easton and Hardy’s *Ethical Slut*—(both discussed further in this chapter and the introductory chapter). The medieval ethical slut, because of her ethics, remains an ethical slut even when her autonomy is threatened, even when such threats come from her narratorial creators. Her autonomy, her agency, and her celebration of them through her sexual relationships are an integral part of her identity as an ethical slut. Her agency makes her the medieval ethical slut, even when that agency is threatened by outside, patriarchal, unethical

influences. Ultimately, the medieval slut is a woman who enjoys sex and makes her own choices about with whom she has it. When the professional slut, a subset of the medieval slut, imposes her own ethical framework onto her unethical courtly situation in order to redefine her relationships in protection of her own autonomy, sexual and otherwise, she endeavors to create the identity of the medieval ethical slut.

With the elements of the medieval ethical slut established, the more complicated role of the medieval prostitute becomes clearer. Medieval prostitution, as with modern prostitution, was of course a profession but it also constituted a label. As Ruth Mazo Karras writes, “most identities in the past, for those who were not able to textualize or encode their own, came from without rather than from within—from societal systems of classification, from dominant discourses” (“Prostitution,” 162). Thus we see that, contrary to the modern prostitute, medieval prostitutes did not create their own identity as sex workers; instead, they were labeled as such by society. Such a label was tied intrinsically to the prostitute’s sense of sluthood and personhood: “society defined the prostitute as a member of a particular outcast group not because of the acts she committed but because of the kind of person she was, permanently marked with her sin” (ibid). Not only were these women permanently marked with sin, but they were lost to it. Saint Thomas Aquinas goes so far in his labeling to call them “sewers” for men’s lust, taking the approach that prostitution, as a lesser evil, “was seen as a safety valve, preventing the seduction or rape of respectable women, or redirecting men away from sodomy” (ibid). Like the wives of the previous chapter’s discussion, prostitutes made sex palatable for men while relegating all the sin to women. This time, the sin even takes the form of a slut herself, as it plays into the original meaning of the term. Sluttish, as used in Middle English, describes a “slovenly” or “dirty” person regardless of gender (M. Jones), perfectly fitting Aquinas’s idea of the sewer. The medieval sex worker—or professional slut—as a subset of the medieval slut is decidedly sluttish though the decision is not her own. Unlike our previous

understandings of the medieval slut where there is a degree of self-identification within the term, the medieval professional slut is an identity characterized by the patriarchal imposition of the label. In this way, the professional slut has the more difficult job of portraying herself as more than a slut-as-slur.

The professional slut's identity is further complicated by the other roles she must play; specifically should the slut identity coexist with the wife identity both are unfairly treated with patriarchal morality designed to keep her controlled. Karras makes note of the difference, or lack thereof, between a regular prostitute and a wife who prostitutes herself. Much like the modern slut (in this instance, in reference to the slur and not the reclamation), the medieval prostitute was a loose category, wherein any "woman who took many lovers was a prostitute, whether she took money for her favors or not" (Brundage, 248). As James Brundage argues, the law saw no difference between a sex worker and an adulterous wife such as those of Chapter Three. This argument is so successful in its restrictions of the professional slut identity because it returns to the patriarchal anxiety of women working—even existing—outside the patriarchy and male dominance. According to the medieval view prostitution—while it provided economic independence for the professional slut (as we will see with the following tales)—does so at the risk to a woman's ethical code, and in the medieval tradition to her very soul, effectively remanding the professional slut to an identity controlled by patriarchal anxieties. The difference between prostitutes and wives then becomes solely about payment and, particularly, what that payment means for the men involved in the transaction. Due to this anxiety, we see a turn away from ethical sluthood and a return to the idea of a wife as property; as an outgrowth of that idea, we find the additional notion of the prostitute as property.

The concept of the prostitute as both property and subject of mockery fits well into the already constructed nature of ownership and humor within the genre of the fabliau. As a woman lost

to sin and seen as the dumping ground for all of men's sinful acts, the prostitute is well-placed for trickery, violence, adultery, and the sluttishness³⁹ of scatological humor. However, due to patriarchal influences, the prostitute does not fit as well into the fabliau as we would hope. She is only half a top. Yes, the prostitute is physically capable of being on top during specific sex acts, but the tales show her as incapable of being on top in her relationships. Karras writes of prostitutes controlled by pimps, reinforcing not only the notion of women under male ownership but the continual subjugation of women due to the professional slut's loss of autonomy to her pimp. In the same vein of ownership and subjugation, the misogynistic framing of Boccaccio and Chaucer's texts acts as pimp by infringing upon the whores' sexual autonomy, insuring that Boccaccio and Chaucer's whores end up on the bottom. With regard to prostitutes, it would seem that the woman physically on top is an example of why exactly it is women should not be on top: in either the physical or morally hierarchical sense it is the world upside down. These women are not only meant to be a sewer for men's lust, but they are also meant to be laughed at for physically topping while bottoming in society's moral hierarchy. Here, as in the previous chapter, bottom and top refer both to the physical space taken up during a sex act as well as the modern concept of identity relating to one's sexual preferences (bottoms like to be led, tops like to lead) and where their preferences place them in medieval sexual hierarchies (medieval bottoms are passive, medieval tops are active). The roles as they pertain to identity are enacted regardless of gender and physical position so that a bottom can physically be on top but still participate in the act of bottoming as an identity. Lisa Perfetti approaches the medieval conundrum of physically topping while societally bottoming when she writes "some argue that fabliaux are meant to condemn women because they portray them as

39. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use "sluttishness" (and its variants i.e., sluttish) to refer to the medieval quality of sluttish, meaning dirty or slovenly and "sluttiness" (and its variants i.e., slutty) to refer to the modern quality of promiscuity.

deceitful, libidinous, and quarrelsome” (13). Perfetti, along with the Wife of Bath, argues for an approach to women’s sexuality as that of a game to find joy in but also to be laughed at.

Certain gay focalized queer readings of the whore’s act discount the agency and the slutty identity of the whore by approaching whorish cuckoldry as a monetary and consequently sexual transaction between two men. Tison Pugh argues that cuckoldry *is* “a transaction between two men, a lover and a husband, for sexual possession of the wife. The desire which inspires a potential cuckold is the desire to dispossess and to possess at the same time: to dispossess the husband and to possess the wife” (52). It is only due to internalized homophobia that the transaction between men must take place through the sex acts of a women. Metaphorically, the married whore whores herself out for her husband, allowing her husband to have the very same sex acts with her johns without impugning the johns or the husband with homosexual desire. Because of the patriarchal hatred that views men loving men as inherently weak or even “disgusting,” an act of such blatant queerness as paying a *man* for sex with must be read as homosexual desire rather than homosocial desire. By treating the homosexual desire as homosocial desire made possible through heterosexual albeit whorish desire, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s continuum of homosocial desire to homosexual desire remains unbroken (Sedgwick, 1-2). Sedgwick’s continuum is thus made possible by women’s (sex) work. In the same way that Thomas Aquinas saw prostitutes as the necessary evil or safety valve so men’s “unrequited lust would [not] turn into violence” (Janega) meant to protect moral women from men’s lust, Sedgwick’s male homosocial desire allows prostitution to protect moral men from men’s lust. There is clear anxiety, whether queer or not, about the role of women who take money for sex and what exactly their identities mean for an ethical experience of sex.

This anxiety is even somewhat reflected in the ethical sluthood of modernity. *The Ethical Slut*, as guidebook for modern polyamory and “other adventures,” actually takes a rather idealized and

naïve view of prostitution. Easton and Hardy write of sex workers only once, giving them only half a page in the section on “Slut Styles.” They write

Despite what you might have learned from the TV or the tabloids, sex workers really are not all desperate drug addicts, debased women, or predatory gold diggers. Many healthy and happy women and men work in the sex industry, doing essential and positive work healing the wounds inflicted by our sex-negative culture. . . . Practitioners of the world’s oldest profession offer all of us the wisdom of the ages about understanding, accepting, and fulfilling our desires: these are the real sex experts. (38)

To Easton and Hardy, the only prostitute worth discussing is an ethical one, and consequently the *Ethical Slut* does not bother to examine the more problematic aspects of the inescapable misogynistic hierarchy of sex workers competing against one another to all be seen as more ethical than their peers—or the “whorearchy.” In response to early second wave feminism’s demonization of prostitution—startlingly similar to that of Thomas Aquinas’s—Easton and Hardy go too far in the other direction, unable to recognize the remaining problems of prostitution. Instead they proffer guidelines to being the best professional slut an ethical slut can be.

Because the *Ethical Slut* fails, the ethical framework of the professional slut is oversimplified to create an image influenced by the medieval but still entirely modern of professional sluts as monolithic amoral whores. Sexual ethics must be expanded to include a wider variety of slut styles in order to be an applicable ethical framework used to turn sex workers into *people* with jobs as opposed to monolithic amoral whores. Karley Sciortino, filling in Easton and Hardy’s holes, takes a deep dive into the whorearchy in which she writes of her own experiences in addition to those of professionals in the modern sex industry. By concentrating on the unique personal stories of individual sex workers, sex work and professional sluthood becomes a personal industry. Sciortino’s writing focuses primarily on the seeming inability of professional sluts to reclaim the term whore “in part because of the lingering belief that women should be pure, that women who have a lot of sex are somehow worth less than those who don’t” (168). Moreover, the difficulty of whoredom comes from the radical feminist cultural conversation around sex work that deautonomizes individual sex

workers to “perpetuate the cultural misconception that all sex work is inherently degrading, bolstering both the sexual objectification of woman and the patriarchy. Some have gone as far as to say that all sex work is rape” (ibid. 169). This misconception comes from the age old anxiety that presents itself with the combination of sex and money. While there is nothing wrong with sex and there is nothing wrong with getting paid, getting paid for sex is morally questionable. The moral question does not come from the sex workers who have made the autonomous choice to exchange sex for money. The moral question comes from coercion. Professional sluts whose circumstances have forced them into selling sex have not made the autonomous ethical decision to do so. Therefore their profession is neither autonomous nor ethical. This oversimplification disregards the realities of many sex workers, including Sciortino—they do make the autonomous choice to participate in sex work. The oversimplification to the contrary, whether it comes from radical feminists like Andrea Dwrokin and Catharine MacKinnon or from patriarchal institutions like the Church, robs individuals of their personal sexual ethics and the opportunity to learn and grow as a whore or a slut.

Furthermore, such oversimplifications are complicit in the dehumanizing whorearchy. Sciortino describes the whorearchy as “the hierarchy that shouldn’t—but does—exist in the sex industry, which makes some jobs within it more stigmatized than others, and some more acceptable” (ibid. 189). Essentially, the whorearchy ranks women according to their worth by how well they are able to adhere to what an unreclaimed whore should not be while still doing the job of the prostitute. It is an unfair structure not limited to just those who do not understand the work of a professional slut but those inside the industry:

non-sex workers will view certain workers as dirtier/more disposable/less worthy of respect than others, and sex workers themselves will often throw workers under the bus, in order to distance themselves from them and make themselves seem more respectable. It’s driven by assumptions and prejudice. While you will find people of all different races, backgrounds, and genders etc. in all different kinds of jobs within the sex industry, racist and classist assumptions feed into the whorearchy. (ibid. 189)

In this manner, “all sex workers are judged in this system” (ibid. 190). There is no escape, even for the ethical professional slut simply because of others attempting to control women’s sexuality with their rather unenlightened views.

The whorearchy is not limited to modern whores and in application to medieval sex work attempts to create bottoms out of women who are just doing a job. While Sciortino writes of the modern whorearchy as “starting from the bottom (in society’s mind): street-based sex worker, brothel worker, rub-and-tug worker/erotic masseuse, escort, stripper, porn star, BDSM mistress, cam girl, phone sex worker, and finishing with sugar baby on the top” because “it’s the closest to marriage in that it mimics monogamy and usually involves the exchange of material goods” (ibid. 189) the medieval whorearchy would place the mimicry of marriage directly at the bottom. In fact, because medieval whores were women utterly lost to sin according to Aquinas and Augustine any attempt by them to mimic something as holy and sacred as the sacrament of marriage would only further their baseness. Much as Aquinas has a hierarchy of sex based on what kind of sex is the most logical—“sex in which you enjoy it the least amount as possible” (Hancock, 10:54)—the medieval whorearchy is also based in logic in order to protect non-whores not lost to sin. The medieval whorearchy includes all the sluts of this study to ensure that whores, especially whores who are also wives and thus even more amoral than a sewer because their amorality endangers the morality of their husbands, end up on the bottom. Starting from the bottom in medieval society’s mind, the whorearchy would go from professional sluts with husbands, to professional sluts to adulterous sluts, to courtly sluts, to married wives, to celibate women—the reverse order of both the *Canterbury*

Tales' Fragment I and this thesis.⁴⁰ Such a hierarchy is meant to control the sluttish desires of any woman exchanging her own set of sexual ethics for the monolithic morality of misogynistic society.

In order for Sciortino's work on the whorearchy to apply to all professional sluthood instead of the individuals with whom she worked, academia needs to undertake a paradigm shift regarding whorish morality. For a more academic approach, Noah Zatz's article on law, labor, and desire offers competing narratives of prostitution that not only take into account the personal relationship between sex workers and their work but does so in order to make an ethical change to the institution. Zatz examines the ideal of ethical prostitution from the framework of its three main detractors: Marxist critics, radical feminists, and sex radicals. With each class of critic, Zatz discusses the actuality of anecdotal prostitution with the critics' theories regarding the subject. In response to the radical feminists⁴¹ in particular, Zatz discusses the same ideas of want vs. need that Sciortino explores, just through an academic lens. Zatz accurately frames the radical feminists as sex work exclusionary (SWERF). In attempting to argue against a prostitute's presence of bodily autonomy in the actual cases where it does not exist,

the contribution of radical feminists has been to emphasize that prostitution involves sex and as such is linked as much to the organization of gender and sexuality as it is to the organization of wage labor... Instead of identifying how workers' subordination allows their labor to be appropriated, radical feminists focus on how women's subordination allows their sexuality to be appropriated. (Zatz, 288).

By institutionally categorizing prostitution as subordination even for those prostitutes who willingly participate in sex work, these SWERFs discount the lived experiences of many consenting sex workers. SWERF ethics deprive professional sluts of their own opportunities for an ethical framework. While "sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own,

40. Fragment I begins with courtly love, only to devolve into violent fabliaux and eventual whoredom, as does this study, so that the tales effectively fall down the whorearchy, demonstrating the baseness of whores (in Fragment I) and the baseness of a whore's search for autonomy (in *The Medieval Slut*).

41. This refers to the radical theorists of second wave feminism, as Zatz's article is from the mid-1990s.

yet most taken away” (MacKinnon, 3) MacKinnon is complicit in allowing sexuality to be taken away by ignoring professional slut autonomy. By insisting that all sex work is rape instead of sex work as work, MacKinnon “reinforces dominant sexual roles in which men violently use women’s sexuality for their own pleasure and reproduction, and women are constructed as sexual servants for men” (Zatz, 288). These are the same roles that the ethical slut must fight against to create her own self-definitions of boundaries, consent, and—especially for the professional slut—autonomy.

Turning away from SWERF tendencies, Zatz explores the idea of consent within the want vs. need discourse; this exploration is integral to the growth of the professional slut’s understanding of her own autonomy and sexual ethics. The sex worker needs to understand why she is working. This exploration results in the contradicting conclusion that while “many prostitutes emphasize that they engage in sex work not simply out of economic need but out of satisfaction with the control it gives them over their sexual interactions” (291), others still subscribe to the wildly held understanding that “the vast majority of prostitutes enter their profession simply to earn money, not because sex for money turns them on” (293). It would seem then, that “want,” or in the below cases of medieval prostitution *desire*, is subservient to the need for money. Zatz does his level best to examine the modern prostitute, not as a whore, but as a prostitute; his discussion disregards the morality of selling sex for money. Under Marxist theory wherein prostitution is an exchange contract like any other, so long as consent is not coerced, any objection to the contract is “considered to be outdated, ‘moral’ objections that, while individuals may be entitled to have them, ought not to interfere with others’ liberty to contract” (285). Marxist theory when applied to sex work treats the subject as any other work, decidedly demonstrating not only that “sex work is work” but that “sex workers are just people with jobs” wherein the concern for morality is replaced with a concern for the professional slut’s ability to consent.

The professional slut's ability to consent is of the utmost importance to her bodily autonomy in a fight to prove herself a person that goes beyond the ethical framework necessary to her job. Moral objections aside, the importance of consent begs the question that consent does in fact occur—that money and need for money are not coercive acts in the face of a sexual proposition. Scholarship would not concern itself with the sex worker's rights to consent if the sex worker is not consenting, thus the professional slut—like any other slut, medieval or modern, ethical or not—clearly has the right to consent. This is contrary to the idea of the medieval whore as Karras writes “one could see prostitutes as being coerced by the economic circumstances; other women who also performed low-paying tasks were similarly coerced, but prostitution was not only low-paying but socially degrading” (*Sexuality*, 105). Thus, the medieval ethical slut and subsequently the medieval ethical whore lies somewhere between Sciortino and Zatz's ethical whore and Karras's medieval whore. Analyzing exactly how consent in the terms of want vs. need functions within the following tales provides a more holistic understanding of medieval whores and their possible, if not actually existent, ethical framework.

All of these approaches, whether academic or critical, medieval or modern, frame the question of need alongside desire. What is desire, specifically, and how is it influenced by need? How does the tension between desire and need function for an ethical whore (a subset of the ethical slut) and for the more peculiar medieval ethical whore—if such a person should even exist? In order to answer some of these questions, I will now turn to the literature for a more comprehensive understanding of the medieval ethical professional slut.

Despite the controlling influences regarding the question of desire, VIII.2 of the *Decameron* constructs a medieval professional slut who is initially drawn to the unethical but who ultimately becomes ethical when analyzed in a personal rather than societal context. This is the one where “Gulfardo borrows of Guasparuolo a certain sum of money, for which he has agreed with his wife

that he shall lie with her, and accordingly gives her; then, in her presences, he tells Guasparruolo that he gave it to her, and she confesses it to be true” (555).⁴² The tale itself is brief, and in its briefness, we receive a frustratingly small amount of information about the wife, Ambrugia. Her sole defining act seems to be selling her body to Gulfardo, but in that act, we see a surprising amount of autonomy. Ambrugia has the autonomy necessary to choose her johns—an act Sciortino and Zatz insist upon for not only ethical prostitution, but safe prostitution. Furthermore, this choice is unencumbered by the coercion of financial inequality. Her autonomy also takes the form of her stipulations toward Gulfardo: “one that this should never be by him revealed to any; and the other that...he, who was a rich man, should give them [200 gold florins] to her; after which she would always be at his service” (556). Ambrugia asks for secrecy and sets her own price, both of which are her prerogative as a prostitute in the modern sense. That prerogative was nonexistent in Ambrugia’s own time; it was instead the right of pimps and brothel owners as Karras points out in “Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity.” Because she takes it for herself she is an ethical slut and because of her response to the backlash of such autonomy she is a medieval slut.

Ambrugia is a medieval ethical slut because of her adherence to her own set of morals, even though medieval society would judge such morals as amoral. Ambrugia does not necessarily need the money, as she is married to a wealthy merchant, but nevertheless she wants the money. She wants the money more than she wants the sex, again pointing to her own self-defined priorities. Ambrugia ignores the tension between want and need for medieval prostitutes and modern prostitutes alike. For her, there is no need and the want is relegated solely to that with which the need has been replaced. She wants what other whores typically need. Regarding what other prostitutes typically want—sex—she herself shows little want. She does not desire her possible sex partner and is

42. Payne translation.

therefore able to make the ethical autonomous decision to engage in sex work without any form of coercion; instead her decision is founded on her self-imposed moral desire for the money.

Ambrugia's replacement of need with want ends up creating some problems for her, specifically in the way in which Gulfardo and Guasparruolo, who represent the moral judgement of medieval society, respond. These problems, which stem from Gulfardo and Guasparruolo's response, challenge the ethical framework of the medieval professional slut in an attempt to show her not as a sex worker doing a job but an amoral whore full of unnecessary want. Guasparruolo, Ambrugia's husband, is a rich merchant and, as we have seen of husbands in the previous chapter, an unsuspecting dupe ready to be cuckolded. Other than that he is a rich merchant, the reader only knows him by his friendly interactions with Gulfardo and his ridiculous name. A brief digression regarding his name only furthers the man's portrayal as a dupe characterized by scatological humor; as N.S. Thompson notes, the root of his surname, Cagastraccio, is "cagare" [and] derives, of course, from the Latin 'cacare'" meaning shit (222) and "straccio" meaning rag. Guasparruolo is literally a wealthy shit rag—his name, along with his position, sets him up to be the dupe of the tale. Neifile and Boccaccio, having done the necessary work however, do not move the tale in that direction. Because of the societal judgement of the amoral quality of Ambrugia's monetary want, Ambrugia is more deserving of trickery than her husband no matter how foolish he might be. In setting up such an easy dupe, Neifile's final characterization of Ambrugia as dupe instead of her more apt husband reinforces the laughable quality of autonomy in medieval sex work. Casting Ambrugia as the dupe works to effectively undermine her ethical framework as a professional slut, yet again showing the near impossibility of an ethical whore.

When Ambrugia replaces the usual prostitute's need with her want, in addition to making her the bottom of such a moral hierarchy, her use of the word "need"—indeed whether she actually has need—comes into question. She is vague. In her request of Gulfardo, Ambrugia only states that

“she had need of two hundred gold florins for some occasion of hers” (Boccaccio, 556).⁴³ While her statement can be read as masking want with need, such a reading discounts her autonomous choice to use the word when she later does demonstrate need. “Some occasion” lies somewhere between the medieval whore and the modern whore. “Some occasion” does not demonstrate the need (for example for food) that makes modern prostitution more palatable to Zatz’s radicals. At the same time, “some occasion” demonstrates more need than Thomas Aquinas’s woman lost to sin would ever demonstrate. Ambrugia is somewhere in between, but because she remains so vague, her need cannot be seen as either immoral or moral. Without moral categorization, her need remains a mask for want—a mask easily seen through for those wishing to deautonomize the professional slut—and only adds to her construction as an amoral whore. What, if anything does this mean, for Ambrugia’s code of ethics? The amoral vagueness of her need is a return to the autonomy seen in the demands she makes of Gulfardo, specifically that of secrecy. Just as she had demonstrated need that their relationship never be revealed (demonstrated in the sense that her husband could have her legally killed in the event he discovered them) she demonstrates her need for secrecy a second time. “Some occasion of hers” is an occasion *of hers*. She, as an autonomous woman, has the right to keep the occasion secret just as she has the right to keep the relationship a secret. She is a medieval ethical whore in that she is able to retain her own sense of autonomy when dealing with the rather sticky moral questions of what a whore should be allowed to ask for in terms of want and need.

Just as Ambrugia is seen to make her want masked as need perverse, Ambrugia’s want without love is seen by the men in her life as even more perverse. This perverseness works against Ambrugia’s ethical framework, not as the fault of her ethics but because of male response to women whom they view as sewers, thus reminding us of the fallibility of ethical sluthood when everyone involved does not play by the same ethical rules. Ambrugia is able to make the ethical professional

43. Payne translation.

slut's divorce of love from lust and of lust from want. Ambrugia neither loves nor lusts for Gulfardo. Similarly, her want is also not for Gulfardo but for what he can provide. Her own perversions regarding what is acceptable for women of her position to want, lust, or love, result in a further perversion of love itself. In this case, Gulfardo's response to Ambrugia's perversion is to pervert his courtly love indicating that Gulfardo is an unethical courtly slut attempting to play the same game as an ethical professional slut. Because they are playing the same sexual game with different ethical rules, the two frameworks work against each other to ultimately portray both characters as unethical. Ambrugia's so-called perversion perverts the relationship between courtly love and prostitution so that in this tale neither slut style seems to work ethically.

Gulfardo provides the reasoning as to why Ambrugia's want without love is seen as more perverse or amoral by the judgmental medieval society—in that he now must pay for sex when he believed he was owed it for free. Gulfardo believes Ambrugia owes him sex simply because she is a slut. When Gulfardo originally comes to Ambrugia, “he, on his part, was ready to do whatsoever she should command him” (ibid.). Immediately, we can see Ambrugia on the courtly pedestal, indicating why Gulfardo does believe he is owed. She is a beautiful woman with an assumingly unloving husband open to the idea of an extra-marital relationship. How she sees fit to carry out that extra-marital relationship—with the ethics of a professional slut rather than a courtly slut—causes Gulfardo to knock over the pedestal. Such a woman who is sluttish enough to ask for money in exchange for sex, according to the medieval idea of prostitution, would not be the kind of high, moral lady of a swooning courtly romance. Because of Ambrugia's sluttishness, Gulfardo “was moved to exchange his fervent love for hatred and thinks to cheat her” (ibid.). Here is the idea that a medieval whore not only does not want love, as identified by Ambrugia's own actions, but that a medieval whore does not deserve love, as identified by Gulfardo's newfound hatred. Neifile emphasizes this point in how her description of Ambrugia changes; she goes from a “lady of worth”

to a “vile woman” at the drop of 200 florins. In Neifile’s new description is the very idea of sluttishness—Payne repeatedly uses the term “sordid” to emphasize both the amoral actions of Ambrugia as well as the physical dirtiness of such amorality. Unlike with our previous sluts, Ambrugia’s sluttishness is placed upon her, like Karras’s idea of labeling from dominant discourses (162). While certain sluts apply medieval ideas of sluttishness directly to themselves—a slut such as Alisoun who revels in sluttishness by hanging her ass out the window—to internalize value judgements, Ambrugia has chosen to internalize sluttiness over sluttishness. While she chooses to be slutty through her own autonomous actions and her exchange of lust and love for material want, the men of her tale and her storyteller condemn her to be sluttish.

Furthermore regarding the perversion of courtly love, Ambrugia and Gulfardo’s relationship becomes an entire reversal of courtly roles. In her promise of prostitution, Ambrugia states that “she would always be at his service” (Boccaccio, 556).⁴⁴ Instead of love driving the man to serve the woman in whatever way she should command him, want masked as need drives the woman to serve the man so long as money exchanges hands. Thompson points out that while Gulfardo is “shocked by this baseness” (201), he still engages in the proposal. Gulfardo is still willing to play into the illusion of courtly love, no matter how perverted it has become, in order to see his own satisfaction from the impending trickery. Thompson describes the situation in terms of Ambrugia’s body: service should appertain to the man, but the equivocation on the term is here being used by the lady to refer to the availability of her body” (ibid). Not only does Gulfardo knock Ambrugia off the courtly pedestal, Ambrugia makes no effort to climb back up while on her way down. Because she uses her body to “satisfy him of her person not that night only, but many others before her husband returned from Genoa” (Boccaccio, 557)⁴⁵, she allows herself to be seen as amoral by Gulfardo and

44. Payne translation.

45. Payne translation.

the audience, even though she adheres to her own ethical code. Thus through prostitution, Boccaccio is able to combine aspects of both his romances and fabliaux to trick the seemingly amoral yet self-moralizing woman onto the bottom of the medieval sexual and moral hierarchy.

Ambrugia continues to bottom when punishment is doled out in the final lines of the tale. The tale ends with “the lady, finding herself cozened, gave her husband the dishonorable price of her baseness; and in this way the crafty lover enjoyed his sordid mistress without cost” (ibid). The men of the tale, acting through a patriarchal understanding of moral desire, completely steamroll Ambrugia’s autonomy. Her autonomy was present in the form of her two requests. That she is ultimately denied the request of money and returns it to her husband is an ultimate denial of her autonomy and therefore her existence as a medieval ethical whore. Her request for money, and therefore her request that her autonomy be respected as is necessary for all ethical sluthood, is described instead as a request for dishonorable money not because of who she is as an ethical slut but because of the “baseness” of her person. Outside influences instead of the slut herself judges the act of demanding money to be amoral and consequently judges the slut making the demands as base specifically due to the patriarchal understanding of whoredom and sluthood. Ambrugia’s place on the bottom reinforces this tale as a moral tale warning against the evils of replacing love for lust, lust for need, and need for “base” want.

In attempting to be a moral tale, however, the tale disregards any morality Ambrugia might have herself by characterizing her as sordid. When she believes she has gotten off she is “mighty content in herself” (ibid), representing a narratorial shame in that Ambrugia should not actually be content with herself because she has done something amoral and shameful, even as that characterization goes against the standards of the ethical slut. When she finds out she hasn’t actually gotten off, she is coerced against her will and her autonomous choice through the presence of a witness. The very idea that Ambrugia owes sex to her husband or to Gulfardo as a price for their

own desires, regardless of her wishes, tramples on her autonomy. Ultimately, she is left not with the reclaimed identity of the ethical whore for which she has strived in constructing her own autonomy in the form of decisions, but instead the identity of slut-as-slur represented by her continual characterization as sordid. Ambrugia is represented as sordid. Ambrugia is represented as sordid not for the simple act of adultery but for her lack of love and for lust in her self-directed sexual actions. Ultimately, that the tale fails to present a medieval ethical slut is the fault of the tale and its characterizations—not the actions of the slut in question.

Because of Neifile's construction of Ambrugia as a whore in the traditional sense and a non-ethical slut, the reader is meant to hate her. Similarly to the operations of Zatz's second wave radical feminists, Neifile and Boccaccio hate Ambrugia because of her status in the whorearchy. She was meant to be a wife, not a self-selecting sewer of male lust. Self-selection—while integral to the identity of the ethical slut—is also a weapon used against the slut by incorporating values of shame into the slur, as Neifile demonstrates. In the introduction to her tale, Neifile affirms that “she who consents to her own dishonor for a price is worthy of the fire” (ibid. 555). According to this affirmation, Neifile only cares about autonomy and the consent to prostitution when she can voice her own sex-negative opinions about it. She does not care for the strength of will Ambrugia put into her own identity and choices, only the judgement of that will as amoral. For Neifile, the idea of the medieval professional ethical slut is not even an idea because of how impossible it is to achieve. Neifile and Boccaccio specifically construct the medieval professional slut as without ethics in order to accord with medieval society's view of prostitution. As the *Galetto* is “a remedy to women in love” (Boccaccio, xxxviii)⁴⁶ prostitution as the economization of love does not embody a remedy. Nevertheless, Ambrugia persists in making her own sexually autonomous decisions as a medieval professional ethical slut, even while the *Decameron* condemns her for it.

46. Rebhorn translation.

Condemnation of the professional slut is not specific to the *Decameron* or even to Church doctrine. Specifically where Chaucer is concerned, the condemnation of whores is a reoccurring theme, going so far as to attempt to erase their collective group identity altogether. Each bid to present such a slut is immediately shot down in favor of an altered, more palatable version. Where Boccaccio has a sordid woman intent on creating her own autonomous identity as a medieval ethical whore, Chaucer's tales attempt to create medieval ethical whores with a distinct aversion to the very label of whore. This aversion indicates that the attempts are a mockery meant to fail, meant to demonstrate the infeasibility of a medieval whore with an ethical framework. In the clear anxiety shown by the texts' reticence to discuss the sluts of medieval whoredom, the tales create a mockery of the medieval ethical slut, inherently condemning such an identity to an amoral, unethical existence.

Instead of prostitution, Chaucer focuses on whoredom in order to portray a mockery of an ethical professional slut. Where Ambrugia had some kind of morality, even if that morality is focused on desire for money rather than for sex, Chaucer's professional sluts do not. As John Finlayson writes, Chaucer, instead, focuses on a "mercantile [capitalistic] ethos" to elaborate "the merchant by means of his trade, and the multiple puns on words of commerce [to] justify a variety of readings of the tale as some sort of critique of mercantile values" (339). Take for example, the slut of the *Shipman's Tale*: she is portrayed as a slut and a whore, just not an ethical one. The Wife, unnamed as she is, is an autonomous woman. She is autonomous not only in the sheer volume of words she speaks (as the tale is mostly dialogue), but in how she speaks. She speaks of herself: of her desires, her needs, her expectations, and her own sense of sluthood. When she speaks, she exists as a person set apart from her partners, yet still hemmed in by her relationships with them. Her cause for speaking in a sexual manner to the monk comes from a lack of sex with her husband. Her cause for a sexual act with the monk comes from a need of money which in turn comes from a need to honor

her husband. Her autonomy, while it exists, exists only in the vacuum of her male relationships. As such, her autonomy is male-dominated and not the true autonomy of an ethical whore.

This structure of male-dominance, however, is a feature of the tale and its narrator, not the slut. The Wife, though relegated to relationships, takes an activeness in the relegation. Through her sexuality, she is an active woman. She presents her activeness through her expectations of relationships. She says that all women

Desiren thynges sixe as wel as I;
 They wolde that hir housbondes sholde be
 Hardy and wise, and riche, and therto free,
 And buxom unto his wyf and fressh abedde. (173-176)

meaning that all women deserve such an active and providing partner. She has the expectations necessary to an ethical slut to build a relationship, and yet her expectations are not met. Because she knows herself well enough to set such expectations, she has an ease with which she approaches sexual conversation and sexual activity. Upon being approached by a man who is not her husband and is therefore more likely to be “fressh abedde” as she deserves, she immediately launches into a sexual conversation. The Wife flirts with daun John and daun John flirts back. In an illusion of courtly love, the couple “in the gardyn walketh to and fro” (80). As outlined in Chapter Two: Courtly Sluts, the garden is a symbol of lust consciously created to be so. The Shipman’s use of such a setting recalls the romances of the *Knight’s* and *Franklin’s Tales*, and in so doing, also recalls the courtly nature of such tales. Daun John’s flirtation in such a setting also reinforces the garden’s courtly nature when he makes the oath “that nevere in my lyf, for life ne looth, / ne shal I of no conseil yow biwreie” (132-133). The promise is reminiscent of the great claims of courtly lovers made to protect their beloveds. The promise is also made following a great cruising flirtation reminiscent of the *Miller’s Tale*. Daun John says to the Wife “I trowe, certes, that oure goode man / hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan” (107-108), drawing to the Wife’s mind not only sex, but the good and deserved sex she is so undeservedly missing out on. With such a thought in mind the Wife

lamentingly flirts back “that lasse lust hath to that sory pley” (117). Thus she is active in attempting to step out of one relationship and into another. She makes the sluttish and slutty decision to ethically engage in an outside relationship, boasting the ethical slut’s necessary skills of agency and autonomy through activeness.

With the ease of sexual conversation observed, the Wife and the monk flow into an ease of sexual acts. In their flirting that verges on cruising, daun John and the Wife already have a quasi-sexual relationship; they have a preexisting sexually ethical relationship that directs the flow of sexual ethics into the later development of a sexual relationship that includes monetary transaction. The presence of ethics in the quasi-relationship sets up a gateway for an ethically professional slutty relationship. As Elizabeth Scala writes, “their flirtatious play begins with a dirty joke, a provocation that emerges from a situation of friendship and intimacy the tale carefully cultivates” (125). Such cultivation also encourages a sense of ethics onto the Wife’s actions. After an initial provocation, the Wife raises the ethical question of blood relation, saying that she would tell him “what I have suffered sith I was a wyf / with myn housbonde, al be he youre cosyn” (146-147). Daun John immediately responds that they are not, in fact, related but only appear to be so

To have the moore cause of aqueyntaunce
Of yow, which I have loved specially
Aboven alle wommen, sikerly. (152-154)

Thus the relationship continues in an ethical and courtly direction. This direction, however, is waylaid by the continuation of a seemingly amoral sexual practice. As Finlayson writes, “the problem raised is notably one of social ethics and personal loyalties, not of morals, thus alerting the audience almost by indirection to the absence of moral scruples” (342). Scala goes on to engage with John Hermann to read

the wife’s language critically and aggressively, somewhere between a conscious seduction of daun John with her disingenuous question and a more simple baiting of him into licentious thoughts. Already the aggressiveness of the desires of wives and clerks are felt long before they become entangled in the deception over the hundred franks. (125)

This aggressiveness takes place in the following aggressiveness of sexual acts (though not sex acts). The courtly and adulterous flirtation goes on to include more physical acts. The Shipman describes daun John “hire embraceth harde, and kiste hire ofte” before the monetary exchange even begins. Thus they have an ethical sexual quasi-relationship—similar to both the “rage and pleye” (i.e., sex acts) of Alisoun and Nicholas and the courtly ethics of Dorigen and Arveragus—that only becomes amoral with the introduction of payment.

Even with the introduction of money, the relationship continues to be an ethical one. The Wife enforces ethics onto her autonomy. As Kathryn Jacobs writes, that the Wife “speaks emphatically of her husband's inadequacy: ‘at al / In no degree’ and ‘in all the reawme of France.’ ‘That sory pley’ refers, not to sex in general, but to the sorry state of his sexual play,...She is, of course, making the case for adultery” (341). Because of her husband’s unethical treatment of her—namely that they do not have good enough, or even enough, sex—the Wife has the ethical right to seek good enough sex outside her marriage. The interchangeability of her husband for her monk reinforces the “mercantile ethos” of sex as exchange. The wife follows the ideal that sex is simply an act done unto another, in this case following the prostitutional ideal that such an act is done for money. The inclusion of money itself is not unethical, after all it is simply a visible extension of her relationship with her husband. The inclusion of payment, however, is different from the inclusion of money. The concept of payment already exists in medieval sex practices—one act is exchanged for another in active and passive transactions so that while not everyone enjoys themselves (that would be far too sinful) everyone does orgasm and thus increases Aquinas’s “logical chances of conception” that makes sex less sinful (Hancock, 14:37). Payment changes at the inclusion of money—now that the acts exchanged are monetarily compensated, morality comes into question thus making the Wife a medieval whore. Unlike Gulfardo, daun John is not immediately taken aback by such a “sordid” request for money; he instead sees it as a simple case of payment and of

prostitution. Daun John sees it as an exchange of goods and services again reinforcing the mercantile ethos and the sexual ethics of both the tale and the professional slut.

The price of sex is also responsible for reinforcing the professional slut's ethical framework because a sex worker autonomously setting a price for her work emphasizes the ethical autonomy of a woman doing her job and a john respecting that job. After all, sex work is work and work deserves compensation. The price the Wife sets is relatively low. It is half the amount Ambrugia sets and also includes an explicit purpose. The Wife says unto daun John

A Sondag next I mote nedes paye
An hundred frankes, or ellis I am lorn.
Yet were me levere that I were unborn
Than me were doon a sclaudre or vileyne; (180-1830)

in which she demonstrates a desire to be ethical. She would rather never have been born than suffer a disgrace and therefore goes beyond Ambrugia's autonomous yet vague need in a show of ethical promiscuity. Peter Beidler, in attempting to compute the exchange rate of The Wife's 100 franks to modern currency, comes to the conclusion "that, while Chaucer was wise enough to see that the story of deception, falseness, and infidelity works only if the price the wife of St. Denis puts on her sexual services is high, he was also wise enough not to make that figure outlandishly high" (15). An "outlandish figure," suitable to Boccaccio's tale makes the payment sordid and therefore unethical and amoral, whereas the merely high price of the Wife is understandable to daun John and contains within it a personal set of ethics seen in Zatz's, Sciortino's, and even Easton and Hardy's construction of ethical whoredom. Where Gulfardo represents the antiwhore, misogynistic patriarchy in his complete aversion to payment for sex, daun John acts differently so as to support the decisions of the Wife, offering a different perspective on the medieval ethical professional slut. Daun John acts as a john should—holding up his end of the sex work transaction—and in doing so enables the Wife to continue working under a set of professional and slutty ethics.

In recognition of the Wife's ethical complaint against her husband's fucking behavior, daun John cheats the husband. Daun John cheats while the Wife cannot, demonstrating the gendered nature of the ethics involved in payment. Using the same courtly language he did to seduce the Wife, daun John says to the merchant

And if that any thyng by day or nyght,
If it lye in my power and my might,
That ye me wol comande in any wyse,
It shal be doon right as ye wol devyse. (265-268)

Thus, daun John includes the husband in his attempt to bed the Wife. Pugh's aforementioned argument that cuckoldry is a sexual act between two men is seen in daun John's flirtatious language. Daun John essentially places the merchant on the courtly pedestal in order to bed his wife. What Pugh's argument lacks is the devaluation of the woman's actions. Pugh would only refer to the Wife as a "certein beeste," using the same words as daun John to indicate how far removed from the situation the Wife is. The beast is then passively used to complete the male-male transaction, even though the *woman* is still actively responsible for "myrthe al nyght." While the male-male transaction is an important aspect of the triangle, it does not mean that male-female transaction is any less important. The male-male transaction actually serves to heighten the amorality of payment. The amorality comes not from the inclusion of money or of price but of the payment. The payment is amoral in its source: coming from a man not involved in the service for which the payment is necessary. The payment is amoral in its recipient: the very involvement of the Wife with money is amoral by medieval legal and ethical standards. Where it is acceptable for the monk and the merchant to be unethical in their monetary actions, the Wife must be above reproach by the simple fact that she is a wife and a woman. Daun John can cheat the husband but the Wife cannot ethically cheat at all, so long as the Wife serves as the go-between for her husband and her monk. In other words, she cannot ethically dupe the dupe so long as payment is involved. The limitations on the Wife's ethics come from the gendered morality surrounding medieval prostitution, wherein the Wife

must do an amoral job to protect the morality of non-professional sluts. She is the safety valve for men's lust and more so men's ethics, thus showing how gender in the medieval institution works against the individual rights to autonomy of individual professional sluts.

Chaucer makes this point through a fascinating wordplay with "pay" and "play." A form of 'pay' is used 15 times throughout the relatively short tale. A form of 'play' is used only nine. Toward the end of the tale, they become interchangeable. The Wife plays—in the same sexual sense of the Miller's "rage and pleye"—with everyone and yet pays and is paid by no one. According to the tale

That for thise hundred frankes he [daun John] sholde al nyght
Have hire [the Wife] in his armes bolt upright;
And this accord parfourned was in dede.
In myrthe al nyght a bisy lyf they lede. (315-318)

Instead of being paid, the Wife gets played. She is both fucked and fucked over without receiving payment. When later playing with her husband, she is again fucked and fucked over "as she was wont of oold usage algate, / and al that nyght in myrthe they bisette;" (374-375). She is fucked literally by fucking her husband, and fucked over in that she does not fuck who she would rather be fucking. Her final plea to her husband represents the duality of fucking when she tells him

As be nat wrooth, but lat us laughe and pleye.
Ye shal my joly body have to wedde;
By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde! (422-424)

Because she will not pay him except in her bed, she exchanges the money she owes for the sex she could playfully enjoy. She even promises that the sex will be jolly, filled with laughter, and therefore good enough to assuage any wrath her husband might have had. That kind of sex is certainly playful, making the Wife complicit in the interchange between play and pay. The Wife is complicit in her own fucking. At the end of the tale payment literally becomes playing, as the Wife is meant to repay her husband with sex "scored upon her taille" so that sex clearly has a value even if sex work is valued as amoral.

The interchangeability of “paye” and “pleye” are mirrored in the interchangeability of her monk and her husband; Chaucer even uses the same phrase—“myrthe al nyght” vs. “nyght in myrthe”—to reinforce the amorality of the Wife’s nondiscrimination. Finally, when she is inevitably confronted and punished as the fabliau demands, she is *again* fucked and fucked over, this time asking her husband to “score it upon my taille” (416). She literally exchanges money for sex without ever being paid. She plays and pays for it but does not pay monetarily and thus does not engage in ethical whoredom. She hardly classifies as a professional slut as she is duped out of money for sex and ends up owing sex for money, as she cries “by God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde!” (424). Her ethics are subverted and her autonomous sexual decisions thwarted by the men in her life who are uncomfortable with “paye for pleye” and thus with the very idea of professional sluthood.

Ultimately because of the male anxiety, the Wife is punished. The mercantile ethos of the tale is restricted to the men of the tale. A woman participating in such an ethos is seen as dangerous, amoral, and therefore deserving of punishment. Scala makes the point that the Wife’s punishment is importantly nonviolent, for “in the end, no one is humiliated. The circulation of words follows (and explains) the circulation of money, itself a signifier, such that the wife can return symbolic capital to her husband by scoring it “upon [her] taille” (124). The *Shipman’s Tale*, like the *Miller’s Tale*, is thus carefully crafted with punishment in mind; while the punishment of the *Shipman’s Tale* is not physical like that of the *Miller’s*, it is still violent. This violence presents itself in the patriarchal and misogynistic ways the Wife is continually dehumanized. She is not a Wife but a whore, ensnared by the patriarchal institution that insists on shame, dirtiness, and sluttishness attached to such a label. When attempting to enforce her own ethical framework onto the term in order to not only remain honorable in the eyes of her husband and therefore society, but to reclaim the term for herself, she is relegated to sluttishness instead of sluttiness. She is relegated because she is duped out of what she is owed. She is further relegated by the return of a sexual economy to her husband. In “scoring it

upon her taile” she is punished and humiliated because her sexual autonomy is flouted, returning to the very relationship in which she advocated for adultery. Scala does not account for the near-missed humiliation that caused such male-anxiety. The men of the tale are anxious because the Wife could have been easily caught and the men exposed for their part in the deception—daun John in physically fucking another man’s wife and the merchant in initially allowing his wife a way out. Male financial interest is crucially in play because, as Christopher Cannon reminds us, “a woman’s consent has the power to accomplish acts—in particular, to threaten her husband’s financial interest in the act that is marriage” (75). The Wife has the power to lessen her husband’s wealth and very status as a husband, so she is symbolically punished in order to increase his wealth by playing with him without him paying her.

While the tale is filled with overt male anxiety about a professional slut’s right to work, the frame narrative is more subtle. Where Boccaccio’s narrator and Boccaccio himself promoted adultery at the expense of professional sluthood, the Shipman and the Host take a different approach when they attempt to protect the professional slut not through her own ethical framework but through their own patriarchal attitudes. At the conclusion of the tale, the Host brightly responds “God yeve the monk a thousand last quade yeer! / A ha! Felawes, beth ware of swich a jape!” The Host recognizes the unethical practices of daun John and as such believes that he deserves a punishment on par with the rest of the tale—a thousand cartloads of bad years. However, the Host continues

The monk putte in the mannes hood an ape,
And in his wyves eek, by Seint Austyn!
Draweth no monkes moore unto youre in. (440-442)

In admonishing the monk for his unethical behavior, the Host takes part in the dehumanization of the Wife. By commenting that the Monk has put an ape in the Wife’s hood, the Host participates in stripping the Wife of her autonomy because she does not consent to being turned into a joke. While

the phrase simply means that she has become the butt of the joke, as Perfetti's theory of laughter in the fabliau indicated, the metaphor goes further than stripping the Wife of her autonomy to strip her of her humanity. According to the language directly, she is now not even a wife or a whore (either reclaimed or slurred) but an ape. The Wife becomes an animal deservingly laughed at. Yet in the spirit of the whorearchy, the Wife is more pitiable and less villainous than the man who has made her into a whore. Rather than Boccaccio's moral warning about the amorality of professional sluts, the Host takes the tale and turns it into a moral warning about the amorality of monks. Inherent in the Host's statement is Scala's claim that "the aggressiveness of the desires of wives and clerks are felt long before they become entangled in the deception over the hundred franks" and therefore the Wife shares some of the Host's blame on the monk. The Host swears as much by Saint Augustine, father of the Church, whose misogynistic *Confessions* cite women as the cause of all his sinful sexual actions. Thus, in attempting to fault the monk and protect the Wife, the Host unknowingly condemns the Wife and her sluttishness. The Shipman, like the Host, protects the wife on a surface level. He consciously constructs the narrative so as to avoid violence even though "of nyce conscience took he no keep" (398). However, because "hardy he was and wys to undertake" (405), the Shipman's violence comes about in other ways, specifically the punishment meant to continue the subjugation of the Wife to her husband. The Shipman is clever in his construction of the tale so as to create a legally inspired argument to protect the tale's male interests. Instead of an outright hatred as we saw with Ambrugia's sordid nature, the frame narrative of the *Shipman's Tale*, as well as the tale itself, promotes anti-ethical slut rhetoric through delicate perversions of the whore's own ethics.

Where previous tales and previous narrators took a stance on the promotion of ethics in their sexual activity, the Shipman and his tale do not, making the text responsible for the continued promotion of anti-ethical slut rhetoric. The creators of the courtly sluts and adulterous sluts—such

as the Franklin and the Miller—advocated for the medieval ethical slut while the professional sluts are condemned by their creators as actors without ethics, even when the sluts themselves attempt to create their own autonomy and sexual decisions. In this way, the *Canterbury Tales* is a text of sex work exclusionary radical proto-feminism. By comparing the tales of different storytellers in the frame narrative, the *Canterbury Tales* registers professional sluts (sex workers) as undeserving of the same ethical protections as other Chaucerian sluts. Where Alisoun and Dorigen had ethical frameworks respected and occasionally even supported by the men in their tales, and Emelye insisted on an ethical framework only to be thwarted by male dominance, the Wife of the *Shipman's Tale* is not afforded even that courtesy. Her ethical framework is a reach. She goes beyond the sewer of Aquinas and Augustine but remains ensnared by the patriarchal whorearchy so that she may never achieve the status of medieval ethical professional slut. Ultimately, the text plays into self-serving misogynistic ideas about who the professional slut should be instead of who she is by forcing the same misogynistic ideas onto the Wife. The Wife who may desire autonomy is consequently unable to achieve it outside of her purely constructed patriarchal narrative. The *Canterbury Tales*, like the *Decameron*, attempts to exclude the subset of professional sluts from the ethics of the medieval slut because both texts strictly adhere to late medieval misogynistic views regarding the moral value of sex work.

This position is subtle yet direct in the *Shipman's Tale* but becomes even more complex in the *Cook's Tale* due to the role as women that professional sluts are meant to play. The complexity comes not only from the tale's plot but its incomplete nature. The tale just ends. The tale just ends on the subject of the professional slut. The tale begins as any fabliau, with a jolly apprentice headed down an amoral path of dancing, dice, and debauchery. His pley is reminiscent of both hendy Nicholas and rapey John and Aleyn of the two preceding tales. The Cook, as narrator, throws in some moral aphorisms—“revel and trouthe, as in a lowe degree, / they been ful wrothe al day, as

men may see” (4397-4398) and “wel bet is roten appul out of hoord / than that it rotie al the remenaunt” (4406-4407)—so as to show exactly how amoral Perkyn Revelour’s reveling is going to get. With the later introduction of the woman, the reader would think her the match of Perkyn, like the professional slut’s version of Alisoun. This Wife is what the fabliau tradition demands: a wife even more amoral than the man she commits adultery with given the fact that she “swyved for hir substance” (4422). As soon as Perkyn encounters such a woman, the tale just ends. In doing so, the tale makes a complex statement about what the woman is supposed to mean in terms of her own sexual ethics and therefore morality, as well as the role of desire for such a woman.

Scholarly debate surrounding why the tale just ends mistakenly chooses not to focus on the desire and sexual ethics of the professional slut. According to Jim Casey, the three most popular theories of the tale’s incompleteness are “that more of it existed, but has been lost (but the Hengwrt scribe seems to have decided that there was no more); that Chaucer was by some circumstance or other prevented from completing it, or that for some reason he decided not to do so” (185). These theories focus on the problem of the *Cook’s Tale* in that it “does not feel complete” (ibid. 186). Regardless of such a squishy feeling, the tale is complete. According to the Hengwrt manuscript, underneath the line describing the professional slut the scribe annotated “Of this cokes tale maked Chaucer na moore” (ibid. 187). Thus the tale is done. As Larry D. Benson points out, it even ends in one “‘ideal couplet at which to stop’ rather than with an incomplete thought or a mundane sentence. And yet the tale fails to satisfy as a narrative” (ibid. 191). The tale fails to satisfy because the desires of the professional slut and Perkyn Revelour are not satisfied.

The tale is all about desire. The preceding tales are all about desire. As Scala writes in *Desire in the Canterbury Tales*, in Fragment I “each tale witnesses a conflict over a desired feminine object and moves toward a sharper presentation of how desire works, dissipates, or is revealed as something other than it first seemed” (86). According to this reading, professional sluthood—

specifically the dirty shame and revelry of whoredom—would then be the next logical step following the rape of the *Reeve's Tale*, the titillating adultery of the *Miller's Tale*, and the illusory courtly love of the *Knight's Tale*. The “sharper presentation of how desire works” culminates in the cold and unfeeling prostitution of the unnamed Wife. The unnamed Wife who “swyved for hir sustenance” according to patriarchal ideas about unreclaimed professional sluthood is the desired feminine object and, more importantly, the lowest rung of the whorearchy. She falls below Symkyn's (illegitimate) wife and victimized daughter, who fall below likerous Alisoun who falls below saintly Emelye because of the progression of Group A. The Wife falls below Perkyn Revelour because of medieval (and present day) society's acceptance of male lust over a woman's desire. This Wife's desire is the lowest, and therefore the dirtiest. In her dirty desire she is amoral. She is the ultimate bottom. Chaucer, in having the Cook set the tale up to be all about desire, sets the tale up to be all about amorality in the text's misguided misogynistic crusade to adhere to the medieval status quo against the professional slut.

While the tale is all about desire, the tale's set up is all about amorality. The Host calls the Cook out on his amorality by saying

Now telle on, Roger; looke that it be good,
 For many a pastee hastow laten blood,
 And many a Jakke of Dovere hastow soold
 That hath been twies hoot and twies coold.
 Of many a pilgrym hastow Cristes curs,
 For of thy percely yet they fare the wors,
 That they han eten with thy stubbel goos,
 For in thy shoppe is many a flye loos.
 Now telle on, gentil Roger by thy name.
 But yet I pray thee, be nat wroth for game;
 A man may seye ful sooth in game and pley. (4345-4355)

The Cook, in virtue of being a cook, is amoral. He does things for himself, for example drawing off the gravy from unsold pies to make them keep longer and knowingly endangering the humors of his customers simply because it serves himself. By deliberately bringing up the Cook's amorality, the

Host simultaneously admonishes the Cook that his story better be good. The Cook's amorality should make for good entertainment "ful sooth in game and pley." The Cook is the perfect person to tell a tale about amoral desire because he himself is amoral. That Chaucer "maked na moore" of the *Cook's Tale* beyond the introduction of whoredom makes sense as a condemnation of both the Cook and even the briefest mention of whoredom. This way, the whore has no opportunity to enforce her own set of sexual ethics as we saw with the Wife of the *Shipman's Tale* and her *Decameronian* counterpart. The text registers male judgement on the professional slut in that she is so unethical that the tale might as well end with and as the epitome of unethicity and amorality. In briefly mentioning her for the purpose of ending the tale, the text deprives her of the opportunity to *become* a medieval ethical professional slut. By leaving the character underdeveloped, the text denies her the opportunity for ethical and moral growth and instead relegates her and the tale itself to the sewer of male lust.

The texts of Chaucer and Boccaccio do not advocate for professional sluthood. They create professional sluts. They even occasionally allow their creations to in turn create a certain set of ethics. These ethics are of a wobbly set; they are not as fully fleshed out as those of the courtly slut or the adulterous slut. They consist almost entirely of the straightforward drive for autonomy. For Ambrugia, her autonomy presents itself in her personal decision to become a professional slut. For the Wife of the *Shipman's Tale*, her autonomy presents itself in her personal decision as to who to become a professional slut with. For the Wife of the *Cook's Tale*, there is a distinct lack of autonomy in favor of misogynistic assumptions. These ethics, if they are present, are only ever ethical for the professional slut. Everyone else in the professional slut's tale is able to steamroll the slut's ethics, as well as the slut herself, in favor of their own desires, as well as their own sense of moral right. For Gulfardo, the moral right results in cheating Ambrugia out of the money she is ethically owed. For daun John, *the* moral right is of less consequence than *his own* moral right, resulting in the

punishment of the Wife's "taille." For the counterpart to the slut of the *Cook's Tale*, the moral right results in the complete deprivation of any character development for the slut at all. She is oversimplified into only a slut, and a whore at that, in only two lines. In their oversimplification of the professional slut as an amoral sewer of male lust deserving of trickery and punishment they have robbed those very sluts of their personal sexual ethics, their autonomy, and the opportunity to learn and grow as a person in the medieval patriarchal society that insists on treating them as less than.

The robbed professional sluts are problematic to the theory of the medieval slut. The medieval slut attempts to destabilize the prim and proper readings of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* in favor of a more accurate display of women's (and occasionally men's) desire. A reading in the style of the medieval slut reinforces the ethical framework with which the sluts of the tales are already working in order to demonstrate the power that comes from the reclaimed term "slut." The professional medieval slut diverges from this reinforcement because the tales in which they appear are overly concerned with the patriarchal society that does insist on treating sluts as less powerful. Whereas the medieval slut is powerful because she is a slut in her own right, the professional medieval slut is entirely without power because she is labeled a slut by others and therefore faces the consequences not of her own actions but of the moral rectitude and punishment enforced by the greater societal pressures to acquiesce to the standard unethical framework of medieval prostitution.

Chapter Five: The Conclusory Slut or The Modern Medieval Slut

Throughout this study, I have demonstrated the sexual identity of the medieval slut. In all her quirks, contradictions, preferences, and proclivities, she exists as not only a woman and a character—in fact many different women and many different characters—but also as a social person capable of experiencing sex and sexuality as an ethical practice in the form of autonomy, agency, consent, and boundaries. According to Foucauldian philosophy, such an identity as the medieval slut cannot exist before the introspection of the self, first explored in the nineteenth century. Within poetry, however, the characters created by Boccaccio and Chaucer exhibit much introspection as to what their desires are and how they can go about achieving them ethically. Dorigen stands against Foucault by contemplating suicide over sexual unethicity when she wonders aloud what her best course of action is. Isabetta stands against Foucault by making the conscious free choice to place her sexuality above her religion, in effect creating an identity that is sacrilegiously sexy. The Wife of the *Shipman's Tale* stands against Foucault by making the autonomous decision to replace her identity as wife with that of wife and ethical whore. Furthermore, Foucault designates sexual identity as a matter for the public when he writes “a policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses” leading to sex as “not something one simply judged: it was a thing one administered” (1425). With each slut of the previous chapters, I have demonstrated that their ethical dilemmas come as a result of the conflict between personal sexual identity and public sexual ethical policing, in the form of the Church, the sluts' husbands, and even in the case of Filippa, their fellow sluts. In this way, I have effectively established the medieval slut as an identity of a social person that challenges previously held notions about sex through her ethical existence created from her autonomy and introspection of her slutty situation. This challenge successfully works to strip away the power—power that comes from the sacralized approaches to

popular late medieval literature—of the patriarchal narratives within which the slut resides in order to illustrate the slut as more powerful, as both character and person, than her tale.

These three chapters do not encompass all of medieval sexuality, or even the identity of all possible medieval sluts. Each chapter is an in-depth exploration of one of three slut styles specifically for married sluts to experience more of their sexuality and identity outside of their marriages. The medieval slut is not a combination of the styles. Rather than a tripartite identity, medieval sluthood is a multifaceted identity that encompasses as many people who want to be sluts in as many slut styles as they can self-identify. In terms of characters rather than people, these sluts are consciously created to tell a story. This story, told in many tales, is one of female (and occasionally male) sexual exploration, at times even exploitation should the ethics of the character fail to match the ethics of the frame narrative's storyteller. These sluts are medieval in their construction of ethics, as well as their construction of sluthood itself. Their identities are multifaceted because sex is multifaceted. Multifaceted identities such as those the sluts of this study exemplify are meant to encompass all who practice sex as an identity—courtly lovers, adulteresses, whores, bottoms, tops, men, women, wives, monks, social persons—whether or not they use the identifier of 'slut.' Such an identifier, while it is used in general application, derives from a unique person and that person's experiences. Similar experiences among sluts—particularly the fact that they are sluts, no matter their style—work to bring sluts together to form a communal literary experience. Karley Sciortino describes the communal slut experience as “unifying...[Sciortino] immediately feels an affinity with her—like, *one of us*” (2) much like having a shared secret. As previously discussed, the medieval slut is not a secret—she is a public figure within and without her narrative. She was consciously created with public (courtly) audiences in mind, further reinforcing the relatability of the medieval slut as well as the role of the patriarchy (through patriarchal narratives) in enforcing a slut identity. The medieval slut, as individual explored through the

individual characters of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales*, is a multifaceted individual whose identity only grows stronger when read alongside sluts like her, when she inhabits a communal literary identity focused on the proliferation of sex and sexuality at the expense of the perceived propriety of her tale.

Beyond these three chapters, slut continues to be a sex-positive label. In expanding on the medieval slut styles of this thesis I would include such styles as the married slut, the religious slut, the queer slut, and many others. The married slut, the non-adulterous alternative to Alisoun, would expand on the medieval slut theory to explain the complicated relationship between the labels slut and wife, demonstrating an intersectional identity not marred by the ethical complications of adultery, adulterous prostitution, or courtly love. The religious slut, similarly, expands the medieval slut in terms of both celibacy and rejection of patriarchal control. As portrayed through Emelye in Chapter Two, sluthood and celibacy are not mutually exclusive terms, especially as Boccaccio and Chaucer's religious female characters very rarely remain celibate despite their vows. Religious sluts, in the form of nuns, prioresses, and mystics, also offer the unique approach of women directly under the patriarchal influence of the Church. The slutty actions of the religious slut carry even greater weight in stripping the patriarchal narratives of their propriety and power because the actions directly respond to patriarchal institutions physically present in the tales. The queer slut, as subset of the medieval slut, would work to undermine sexual theory that enables the historical restrictions of sexual orientation. Studying the queer sluts would allow for a deeper understanding of the relation between sex acts and identity, as sex acts are still acts no matter the gender of the actor. A deeper understanding in this area would also go on to influence the roles of top and bottom exercised in Chapters Three and Four. Slut styles are as copious as the characters Boccaccio and Chaucer created and each offers the opportunity to learn more about medieval sexuality in order to destabilize its patriarchal roots.

There is still much to learn from medieval sexuality and the constructed relationships characters with other lives create for themselves. Medieval sexuality still has much to teach us about multifaceted intersectionality, as medieval sexuality is “not just one thing, dissident sexualities must be included in any history.... ‘A sexuality’ is a way of being or a form of desire that is more fundamental to the individual than a preference” (Karras, 6). Sexuality conflates the modern ideas of orientation with gender and identity to create one cohesive concept. When sexuality as opposed to sexual identity is read through the lens of the medieval slut, the medieval slut is understood at a fundamental level which allows for more clarity in analysis of characters and people who fit into the label.

While I found it necessary to commence the study of the medieval slut with the popularized and recognizable narratives of the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales* in order to undermine the inherent patriarchal nature of the texts, these also do not reflect all of medieval sexuality. The choice to use these texts began as a way for sluts as readers and critical thinkers to begin to unpack what it meant to be a slut in the Middle Ages in a desperate and fulfilling search for slut, medieval or modern, representations. Further applications of this lens must recognize this not-so-humble beginning by encouraging sluts as readers to identify with the complicated ethics of medieval identity. Further applications must also move beyond this beginning to look at other narratives—not just the patriarchal storytelling driven by Boccaccio and cribbed by Chaucer—in order to understand the medieval slut as a tool for analysis as opposed to a destabilizing force. By including not only female driven but female written narratives, the medieval slut will become a tool for analysis that sheds light on inherent sexuality of all medieval narratives, not just the patriarchal. The female voice is a necessary element to understanding the medieval slut beyond the confines of male characterization. For example, in comparing the medieval sluts of male-written *Le Roman de la Rose*, to those of Christine de Pizan’s *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, the lens of the medieval slut works to show the

contemporaneous differences between social persons as created by men and women. Hopefully, such an application would show that the social person of the medieval slut has less internalized shame and misogyny to unlearn when created by a female author. These further applications should continue to unpack medieval sexuality for a better understanding of its intersectional nature and the ramifications of that nature on traditional readings of all medieval texts, not just the popular representations of Boccaccio and Chaucer.

Further applications of the medieval slut must also look at such voices in a modern context because modern representations have the opportunity to demonstrate where the medieval slut has led in interpretations of Boccaccio and Chaucer. As Chaucerian translator Sheila Fisher remarks, there is “frustratingly little” representation of Chaucer in modern media—she “saw no one rushing to make movies of Chaucer’s stories, and in the process, to make Chaucer accessible and popular, and as loved and revered as Shakespeare and Austen” (xv). What representation of Chaucer and Boccaccio we do have in modern media is sexual in nature and therefore responds well to the medieval slut paradigm, in order to create an amalgamation of medieval and modern sexualities, much like the amalgamation Karras describes. These representations are, however, flawed in that they do not analyze the sexual ethics of their medieval inspired characters. Where modern representations have the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of the medieval slut, they often fail in their construction of slut as social person and slut as ethical. Due to this failure, the creators of modern representations believe they portray the medieval slut when ultimately their modern voice fails to explore the medieval ethics of consent and autonomy that make the medieval slut who she is. Thus we have the ultimate further application—the modern medieval slut.

Therefore, I will now turn to the ultimate further application—the modern medieval slut, who, in the following case of adaptation, represents the failure of modern readers to understand

medieval sexuality due to their own stabilized understanding of patriarchal narratives. The modern medieval slut is a medieval slut with a modern voice. She lies in between the ethical framework of the medieval slut and the modern slut. She is a reclamation not only of the word slut but of medieval sexuality in all its problems (problems according to the modern ethical framework). She is as unabashedly and straightforwardly sexual as the Wife of Bath of the Introductory Slut. She takes what romantic elements she wants while leaving behind the stuffy courtly narrative of the Courtly Slut. She is free to do as she pleases with whom she pleases regardless of a prior relationship to husband or God as is the Adulterous Slut. She fights for her right to fuck regardless of her financial or ethical position just like the Professional Slut. She has the voice of a modern slut with the mentality of an amalgamation. She represents both the best and worst of modern and medieval sexuality by shamelessly being who she is. The modern medieval slut would be everything, should her writers get it right. Luckily enough, she exists and thrives in the very same narratives Boccaccio and Chaucer constructed to contain their own slut.

The modern film *The Little Hours* (2017), starring Aubrey Plaza, Alison Brie, and Kate Micucci, is a comedic masterpiece that follows several tales from day three of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Appearing alongside the title in the opening credits is the phrase "based on 'The Decameron' by Giovanni Boccaccio" (1:18). Writer and director Jeff Baena would have been more apt to display "loosely based." Day three is the one where "they speak of people who have relied on their resourcefulness to acquire something they really desired or recover something they had lost" (Boccaccio 91)⁴⁷ and Baena's own script chooses to focus on that exact desire. Following the first and second stories of the day, Baena and his actors create a character driven narrative made enjoyable through the easy vulgar laughs yet propelled by the deeper drive of the women's sexuality and the empowerment that derives from it. Plaza, Brie, and Micucci, though they be modern,

47. Rebhorn translation.

portray distinctly medieval sluts in order not just to get the easy laugh, but to make the audience consider the critical questions about sluthood originating with the source literature after the laugh has passed. The aim of the *Little Hours* is the same as the *Medieval Slut*: to destabilize the perceived propriety of medieval literature in favor of a more accurate display of women's desire through vulgar and at times comedic portrayal.

The first and second tales of day three are already medieval slut narratives. These are the ones where "Masetto de Lamporecchio pretends he is a deaf-mute and becomes the gardener in a convent where the nuns all race one another to get to sleep with him" (94)⁴⁸ and "a groom sleeps with the wife of King Agilulf. When the King finds out about it, he says nothing, but tracks down the guilty party and shears off some of his hair. The shorn one then shears all the others and thus escapes a terrible fate" (98).⁴⁹ Both tales respond to the Queen's subject of the day by focusing primarily on the sexual aspect of desire. Both tales are comedic in nature and through such a comic lens are able to explore the multifaceted nature of medieval desire of men and of women alike.

As simply as Filostrato states it, the first tale demonstrates effectively the stupidity of believing that a religious woman "is no longer a woman and no longer feels female cravings, as though, when she became a nun, she was turned into a stone" (94).⁵⁰ Filostrato's tale describes voracious women unhesitatingly using "the worst language in the world" (96) while also unhesitatingly sharing their love amongst each other as when one woman "had gotten what she wanted like the loyal friend she was, she made way for her companion" (97). In their voracity and language use, the tale describes the vulgarity of the slut. In the women's passing around of one

48. Rebhorn translation.

49. Rebhorn translation.

50. Rebhorn translation.

partner, or sharing their sexual love the way modern metamours do, (Easton and Hardy, 212)⁵¹ the tale describes the ethical framework of the slut.

Pampinea's tale also focuses on acquiring a desire, though by countering Filostrato's insatiable women with one insatiable man. Pampinea's groom, in contrast to the fabliau-esque nuns of the previous tale, exemplifies the courtly lover. Just as we saw in Chapter Two, Boccaccio rarely presents straightforward tales of courtly love; this tale is just the same, as the groom's love instead centers primarily on sexual desire and means of getting such sexual favors. The placement of the groom's love interest on the courtly pedestal becomes almost perfunctory. The satisfaction of the courtly love, instead of the romantic gesture known to cause grief and chaos, comes as the result of a gender-bent bed trick.⁵² The groom climbs into bed pretending to be his lady's husband, depriving his lady of any emotional reciprocation or connection the groom might want. Instead, "he took the Queen lustfully in his arms, and then, without either one of them ever uttering a single word, he had carnal knowledge of her over and over again" (Boccaccio, 100) so that the story becomes not about partnership or sharing, as we saw in the previous tale, but solely male lust. The theme of male lust is emphasized again when the King enters the picture, saying to his wife "don't you think I'm *man enough* to come back here a second time after having been with you once before?" (ibid. 101. Emphasis mine.). Thus the tale becomes the story of proving male lust so as not to be outdone by another man. Acquiring desire, as in all courtly love tales, functions as a result of the starvation economy, disempowering the ethics of courtly sluthood—literally *tricking* the woman, thereby violating her consent—in favor of toxic masculinity and lustful competition. Thus the tale, unlike the one preceding it, shows the actions of the medieval slut *without* the accompanying ethical

51. A partner to a partner, who, while they have a close friendship or relationship, often do not have a romantic or sexual relationship.

52. The deceptive substitution of one woman in a man's bed for another, a common motif of romance literature.

framework. The medieval slut without the ethical framework cannot work against the undercurrent of subjugation and therefore is complicit in the patriarchal narrative in which she resides.

The tales are simple in their construction of sexual exchange, yet become more complex when the slut as reader attempts to unpack the murky issues of consent—one with ethics, the other without, and both treated the same by the brigitta—thus challenging the beliefs of the modern ethical slut and yet fitting decidedly into the medieval. The ethics of the first tale seemingly violate the autonomy of both Masetto and the nuns. According to a modern framework, the nuns violate Masetto, believing him to be a deaf-mute and thus taking advantage of him, and vice versa Masetto violates the nuns by lying to them about his abilities and experiences. These ethical problems are solved by the end of the tale through exchanging sex for curative prayer (ibid. 98) and thus the medieval concept of raptus’s “consent after the fact” seen in Chapter Three. The ethics of the second tale seemingly violate the autonomy of the Queen. According to a modern framework, the Queen is violated by the groom as he does not obtain consent. However, by nature of the bed trick, the wife believes her sex partner to be her husband, to whom she has consented. As no one involved in the sexual acts of the tale comes forward to confess, claiming to protect the lady’s reputation (ibid. 102), the violation of consent is not prosecutable and for all intents and purposes never happened and will never happen again. Thus the sexual ethics, complicated to the modern slut, fit entirely into the medieval framework outlined in the previous chapters. These tales are the tales of medieval sluts.

In response to these tales, the script of the *Little Hours* emphasizes the power of women’s autonomy by not only embracing gender bending, but going too far in its witchcraft metaphor, essentially demonizing the medieval slut as a force of power regardless of an ethical framework. The *Little Hours* script, instead of glossing over the issues of consent in the second tale as it does in the first, changes the power dynamics along the lines of gender roles. Instead of a man performing a bed

trick (an already gender-bent trope) in order to have nonconsensual sex, the film portrays an ongoing relationship in which the woman is just as voracious as the nuns of the prior tale. Where the wife of the *Decameron* is an unnamed object of the groom's desire, her film counterpart, the aptly named Francesca (Lauren Weedman) acts as an empowered slut. Francesca, as modernized courtly slut, has all the power of the courtly pedestal that the tale describes—the groom of the tale (Dave Franco) “had raised his thoughts to such a lofty height” to ennoble his lady (99)—while simultaneously the power of a modern slut—in that she is the one to seek him out, despite the threats of her husband. In this way, there is a gendered role reversal that empowers the woman, as the ethical code of the medieval slut would suggest, but falls short in that it disempowers the man. The groom even goes so far as to turn down sex with Francesca saying “You’re insane... Stop, stop. Somebody’s gonna catch us! Look, look, you’re gonna get me fuckin’ killed! (19:37), as she forcefully pushes him up against a wall for the very sex he denies her. The groom is further emasculated, not by Francesca but by her husband, King Agilulf in the tale and Lord Bruno in the film (Nick Offerman) in the shearing scene. The script exactly follows the story set forth by Pampinea but in its modern language sets a tone that does not praise “the cleverness of a man whose social position may have been even lower than Masetto’s” (Boccaccio, 99). Instead, of Agilulf’s humbling “whoever did it, ...he’d better not do it ever again,” (ibid. 102) Bruno upon discovering the groom’s cleverness speaks with disdain, saying to all the men “one of you sluts thinks he’s quite the jester” (*Little Hours*, 17:42). In the modernized vulgarity of the script, this is the only instance of the word ‘slut.’ Clearly, Bruno does not mean it in the reclaimed sense, but intends to emasculate the man who has emasculated him by fucking his wife. Here, slut is gender-bent, used by a man on another man, not only for the purposes of emasculation, but also for humor. Offerman’s delivery is coated in imposing masculinity that is meant to terrify the groom and yet amuse the audience. This duality of purpose becomes especially clear at the uproarious audience laughter following Bruno’s next line:

“I’ll fuck you where you breathe” (ibid., 17:54). By gender-bending the power structures of the courtly love narrative to give further power to the woman, the film makes a feminist statement in order to portray medieval women as unable to become victims. Thus the modern medieval slut is a powerful woman in charge of her own autonomy and sexuality without ethical regard as to how her actions impact those around her.

The women’s empowerment causes the groom’s continued disempowerment, costing him his autonomy and showing the modern medieval slut to be adverse to the “power with” mentality of modern feminism. In an ethical power exchange, sexual partners share their power with each other. Like a lamp plugged into the wall, the wall does not become less powerful because it is powering the lamp; in this way sexual partners should have “power with” each other instead of “power over” each other. The *Little Hours* does not portray what should happen in an ethical relationship as it continues the plotline of the groom’s disempowerment. The groom’s disempowerment continues at the convent, where he takes up the role of Masetto (the film conflates the two characters from two different tales). Heralded as “some kinky miracle [meant] to disrupt the stifling sameness” and save the nuns of the convent from the religious life they have been forced into (Dowd), Masetto’s own unethical issues are wiped clean. He does not show up at the convent pretending to be a deaf-mute in order to sleep with the nuns, but rather to protect himself. The film follows the same storyline as the *Decameron*, up to a point—Franco’s Masetto is not interested in fucking all the nuns, whereas some of the nuns, specifically the queer-coded Fernanda (Plaza) and her “friend from home” Marta (Jemima Kirke), are interested in fucking him without his consent. These queer-coded characters are only interested in Masetto for the purposes of their witchcraft practices, furthering their queerness and their growth as fully-developed female characters, but also furthering Masetto’s disempowerment. Ultimately the nuns act as sluts, focusing on liberating their “true desires: drinking, getting laid, and practicing witchcraft” (Nowell), but sluts without ethics, as they are solely

focused on their own experiences rather than the treatment of their partners. This proves Baena's misreading of the *Decameron* as a decidedly unethical text. Because the modern medieval sluts act without ethics where their medieval counterparts did, the new text has failed to grasp the importance of ethical sluthood as destabilizing for patriarchal narratives. Instead, the new text plays directly into the medieval patriarchal narratives by furthering an adaptation focused on a misinterpretation of who the medieval slut is.

The witchcraft subplot is especially troubling for modern ethical sluts. The complexity of the metaphor allows for witchcraft to simultaneously represent queer women and their empowering search for autonomy while also representing the perversion of such a power in order to violate and therefore disempower perceived disabled men. Witchcraft in the Middle Ages relied almost entirely on this second representation—specifically in order to demonize women's freedom in a way that was prosecutable by both secular and religious courts. Thomas Aquinas wrote of witchcraft: "that the works of magicians result not only from the influence of heavenly bodies... those who practice works of this kind [magic], observe the position of the stars: and are assisted by the employment of certain herbs and other corporeal things" (Aquinas, 90). This would imply that magic, while not entirely human, is rooted in humanity's free will. Magicians who are given the ability to perform magic by the stars, yet *choose* not to use magic are considered good, while magicians who can perform magic and do perform magic are evil (Aquinas, 92-93). While Aquinas writes of magic, witchcraft, contrarily, did not have the same caliber as magic, as witchcraft was a female practice and therefore tainted by Eve's original sin. In the modern day, witchcraft has come to mean much more than Aquinas's oversimplified literal demonization to include queer representation. Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is particularly notable for its representation of the woman-loving-woman sexual experience through specific pagan rituals—Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan) and Tara Maclay (Amber Benson)'s telekinetic moving of a vending machine to represent orgasmic foreplay in fan-

favorite episode “Hush” in particular comes to mind. In modern pop-culture the witchy has become synonymous with the queer. Baena plays directly into this modern trope with Fernanda’s “friend from home” yet goes too far by including Masetto’s male presence in their queer rituals. The witchcraft subplot, as a symbol of Masetto’s disempowerment and sexual assault follows the medieval demonization of women, while as a symbol of queer love and much needed queer representation, follows the modern celebration of women. Thus the witchcraft subplot works effectively to categorize the sluts of the *Little Hours* as simultaneously medieval and modern—the modern medieval slut. This categorization reinforces the failure of the modern medieval slut in that she is unable to escape the plot of her tale, as a social person does. By existing between the ethical frameworks of the medieval and modern, the modern medieval slut cannot effectively enact either, making her an unethical slut unlike both the medieval slut and the modern slut.

In accordance with the categorization of sluts in the previous chapter, the sluts of the *Little Hours* can be further categorized due to their own one-dimensional characterization. While reviewers tout these women as multifaceted, autonomous, developed characters, their development does not extend beyond their sexual identity. They are easily understood characters working from the medieval tropes of the source text, so one-dimensional that they come out as cartoonish versions of women’s sexuality. Beginning with Francesca, while she is more developed than her Decameronian counterpart, she has traded the sexual submissiveness of tale 3.2 for the sexual voracity more common in the wives of the fabliaux, as described in Chapter Three. She is simple in that she is driven only by her own voracity. In the Madonna/Whore dichotomy, where Francesca is the clear whore, Masetto’s later consensual partner Alessandra (Alison Brie) is the virginal Madonna. While she is the active agent in her sexual relationship with Masetto, she is still a nun—still religiously virginal practically begging for a male deflowering. These reductive categorizations are created through the women’s relationship with Masetto. However, they pale in comparison to the

Madonna/Whore dichotomy of Fernanda and Ginevra (Kate Micucci). As they have a queer relationship further influenced by the practice of witchcraft, they are meant to be read as less desirable women. Their lack of desirability is further confirmed by Masetto's rejection and subsequent almost rape. In terms of their own relationship, while it escapes the male gaze, it does not aid their character development. Their queer sexual relationship instead others Ginevra casting her as the Madonna no one wants. Unlike Alessandra, Ginevra is othered—as both a queer woman incapable of “playing it cool” and a Jew—in order to turn her particular brand of sexuality—new and unsure of herself—into a joke. Fernanda, in comparison, is a whore no one wants, as Baena complicates her sexuality by including the problematic witchcraft-as-rape metaphor. In this way, we see categorizations of medieval sluthood—categorizations incredibly similar to the later witch-hunting manual, *Malleus Maleficarum*—in a modern voice that, while funny, ultimately disappoint the audience members in search of slut representations. The slut as audience is so disappointed because we are aware of the possibilities of medieval ethical sluthood in modern representations. Such a failing as Baena presents reinforces the very patriarchal narratives that the medieval slut deconstructs, while simultaneously masquerading as a sex-positive slutty romp. Because the film fails and the slut as audience is disappointed in the failure, the medieval slut framework opens up new directions for where adaptations could lead to better portray the nuances of medieval sexuality explored in the previous chapters.

Baena's inclusion of witchcraft is particularly interesting in comparison to the eroticized theology already present in Day 3 of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. As discussed in “Chapter Three: The Adulterous Slut,” the third day, in response to the Queen's subject of desire, mixes the secular and the sacred by combining erotic activities with religious activities. In *The Little Hours*, the erotic and religious activities are kept entirely separate for the women. The nuns replace their religious activities with the actions of a “bad girl”—“this notion that as women [or nuns], we are naturally sweet and

pure and good-hearted, until one fateful day when we eat the forbidden fruit, and then it all goes to shit” (Sciortino, 57). As A.A. Dowd characterizes it,

the movie belongs to its headlining trio, finding humor not just in broad shtick but also the relatable frustrations of these cooped-up young women, many forced into holy responsibility because they had no other options (a detail history and *The Decameron* can corroborate). When Plaza, Micucci, and Brie get smashed on stolen communion wine and perform a drunken sing-along of a wordless choral staple, like college girls sneaking booze past the RA and belting some radio anthem in their dorm, the true resonance of all this anachronism slips into focus: An itchy desire for a better life is something women of every century experience, regardless if their catalog of curses yet includes “fuck.”

Dowd’s characterization is entirely reductive. Clearly there was something already wrong at the convent. Fernanda, Ginevra, and Alessandra are all already participating in sinful acts against their Catholicism before the introduction of witchcraft. The witchcraft, once introduced, becomes an outlet for their already unethical sexual behavior and thus a stand-in for Eisner’s “eroticized theology” (199). Infantilizing these complex female characters down to “drunk college girls” ignores all the effort they go to create themselves as “loud, raucous, sexually-liberated characters trapped in the mold of medieval expectations who entertain with their independence and defiance” (Nowell). Where Nowell says medieval, I would even go so far as to replace with patriarchal. It is not the time period that reduces these women—as we have seen in the previous chapters, medieval sluts are capable of the same independence and defiance as these modern medieval sluts—it is the patriarchal theological framework in which they reside; they use their loud, raucous, sexual liberation to step outside of such a framework. The penultimate scene of Bishop Bartolomeo (Fred Armisen)’s chastisement and punishment of such crimes as

“ingestion of drugs, lying with a woman, not being baptized. Not being baptized? That’s what makes you what you are. You can’t... You shouldn’t even be coming through those doors! Being a busybody, filthy conversation, vain jangling, drinking, eating blood. [long pause] Do you think I’ve ever written down ‘eating blood’ before? Where am I? Envy, fornication, homosexuality, that’s the same as lying with a woman, but we separate those. Lustfulness, reveling, mischief in your heart. That’s the longest list I’ve ever had, for sins” (*Little Hours*, 1:11:18-1:12:04).

shows the anxiety with which the men of the film approach any sort of women's liberation. In the context of the film, women's liberation, and the women themselves (specifically the Jew Ginevra (Kate Micucci)) is made into what is not—according to Bartolomeo, they are not even what they are supposed to be. For the audience of the film, this scene turns women's liberation into a joke, a long list of sins to be laughed at for their ridiculousness. Fortunately for women's liberation, this scene is followed by one of Ginevra and company throwing aside Bartolomeo's punishment in favor of freeing Masetto from Bruno's prison and returning to the convent for more illicit sex. By donning black habits "to hide [themselves] in the night," (ibid., 1:22:04), the characters exchange one religious experience for another, successfully turning their given catholic theology into chosen witchcraft and then a replacement of witchcraft for sex. They act as sluts because they are capable of making autonomous choices that start with sexual experiences but go further to encompass their entire lives.

The witchcraft plotline, while not included in the source text of the *Decameron*, roots itself in one line of the first tale, thus explaining the seeming amorality of the nun's actions. Boccaccio writes of the nuns "they're all young and I think they all had the Devil inside them" (Boccaccio, 94). For Boccaccio's contemporary readers, this statement would have immediately signaled the kind of evil Aquinas wrote on and explored deeper by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in the aforementioned *Malleus Maleficarum*. While Baena writes about that evil by creating one-dimensional witches bent on their own sexual satisfaction, without ethics, without regard for their partners' own autonomy, Baena does not achieve the same success as Boccaccio. Boccaccio's nuns are successful in their sexual conquests and their sexual ethics. Baena's nuns, while just as humorous, create more problems regarding questions of consent than they answer by modernizing the voice of Boccaccio's medieval tales. Ultimately, the modern medieval sluts of the *Little Hours* are unethical sluts that hinder the forward momentum of sexual ethics. These sluts fail as a further application of the

medieval slut because they do not have a reclaimed slut identity due to their modern misconceptions of medieval text.

Ultimately, the film is a humorous farce working off both the comedic prowess of the star-studded cast, as well as the already interesting tales of the *Decameron*. The film attempts to go further than just farce, by exploring necessary female narratives about sexuality and autonomy made palatable through a comedic lens. By attempting to go further, the story itself has power, a power characterized by, as Nowell categorizes it, its relationship to its source text. She writes that the film exceeds the expectations provided by the pithy introduction “a lot like Massachusetts: full of Catholics dropping f-bombs” to “keep our spirits alive, *The Little Hours* certainly does just that. But, where *The Decameron* did so in more religiously appropriate language, *The Little Hours* does so by empowering its female characters.” The film is powerful in that it is funny, but also in that it creates a narrative that is more palatable to the viewer than the murky issues of medieval consent provided by Boccaccio’s original. Neither Nowell nor Dowd make mentions of the problematic issues of consent the film does introduce. The issue of witchcraft, though it be medieval in conception, is a modern addition to what Boccaccio wrote; as such, it lacks the necessary criticism any modern rape narrative requires in order to be palatable for a modern sex-positive audience. Ultimately, the film is a fun romp that offers medieval context the modern voice that is vital for medieval narratives to continue to be present. More importantly, the film adds essential female voices to the patriarchal narratives of the late Middle Ages (as the script was mostly improvised by the three leading actors)—voices necessary for the proliferation of the medieval slut in the modern era. The film does not proliferate the ethics of the medieval slut—the voices are so modern that any medieval ethics grate on those of the modern slut. In this way, the modern medieval slut is both an anachronistic and contradictory term. Much like the strictly medieval sluts of this thesis, the modern medieval slut falls short by modern ethical standards. Unlike the strictly medieval sluts of this thesis, the modern

medieval slut's shortcomings are a failing for the advancement of sex positivity and sexual rights.

While the medieval slut destabilizes the traditional propriety of medieval literature, the modern medieval slut destabilizes the feminism of the modern slut, not by bringing it back down to the medieval level, but by existing in an antagonistic in-between space, helping neither, hindering both.

Of course, *The Little Hours* is just one modern representation of the medieval slut. While the film is the most recent and most popular in Western culture, modernized versions of the Wife of Bath and the *Miller's Tale* have also had recent success. Candace Barrington writes on Wahala-Dey-O, the modern Nigerian retelling of the Miller's Tale, focused on reclaiming western medieval narratives for a modern global Chaucer (Barrington). Marta Cobb writes on the connections between the Wife of Bath and modern kink films in the *Fifty Shades* trilogy in order to show "the real danger...in thinking that any individual, whether it is E L James, one of her critics, Chaucer, the Wife of Bath – or even the mysterious loathly lady – can answer this question [of what women want] for all women" (Cobb). Sara Rees Jones recently published on a case "like a Monty Python sketch" in which a nun faked her death "in order to escape her convent and pursue—in the words of the archbishop of the time—"the way of carnal lust" (Flood). The tales of medieval sexuality are far from over. Not only is new research constantly coming to the forefront, as Emily McLemore writes in "What the Wife of Bath Still Has to Teach Us," this scholarship is coming into much needed conversation about what it means to be sexually ethical in addition to sexy. The medieval slut in the era of #MeToo represents a reclamation of female sexuality in all its variations, whether courtly, adulterous, professional, or 'modern' from the male authors that attempt to tell female stories for them and without them. The medieval slut in a modern context is a way of destabilizing not only the perceived propriety of medieval narratives, but of destabilizing the men who wrote them in order to reclaim not only the label slut, but the tales themselves. As Boccaccio wrote the *Decameron* as a

Galeotto “for women,” the medieval slut analysis allows women, both of the tales and the frame narrative *as well as the reader*, to take back the tales for their own use.

Hi, I'm Roz. I'm a slut. I like sex. Sex is fun. Thus, I am a slut. The first time I was called the epithet was before I had fully embraced it as a label. Without fully disclosing my sexual history in an academic setting, the situation was uncomfortable. Suffice it to say, I was uncomfortable as a slut when called such by a male sexual partner regardless of his complimentary intentions. Like most English majors, my response in order to unpack my discomfort was to read a book. In fact, I read many, the best of which are cited in this very thesis. By unpacking my discomfort at being labeled a slut, I found what it meant to *be* a slut. In finding my being, I also found pride. I am a proud slut. I'm proud to stand among the likes of the Wife of Bath, The Marchioness of Monferrato, Dianora, Dorigen, Emelye, Isabetta, Alisoun, Madonna Filippa, Ambrugia, the Wife of the Shipman's Tale, the Wife of the Cook's Tale, and countless others not included in this thesis. They represent a certain kind of sexual ethics indicative of the medieval tales in which they reside and simultaneously are capable of reaching beyond their tales to influence modern sexuality. Through all of their faults—and of course they have faults, they are three-dimensional characters—they represent the ambition to uphold the standard of the medieval ethical slut. The medieval slut is an unattainable standard. It is a goal to reach toward in the literature of the late Middle Ages. It is a far-surpassed standard in the sexual ethical framework of the modern age from which to learn but not in which to base one's own practice, as the modern medieval sluts of *The Little Hours* so helpfully show. In both ages, the medieval slut is a helpful tool for analysis, for the advancement of women who would be otherwise chastised, criticized, even killed for their sexual decisions—just like prostitutes, just like adulteresses, and just like romantic courtiers.

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