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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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Conflict, Reciprocity and Intimacy in Medieval
Literary Treatments of Married Life

Patricia Helen Boston

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and
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ABSTRACT

Conflict, Reciprocity and Intimacy in Medieval
Literary Treatments of Married Life

Patricia Helen Boston

Medieval literary treatments of marital quarrelling reveal a process of interaction which is constructive and contributory to the co-existence of mutuality and intimacy in married relations. Consistent patterns of quarrelling in literary representation of marriage have been incorrectly perceived. A comparison of the conflict functionalism of Lewis A. Coser and the exchange structuralism of Peter M. Blau with the process and dynamics of marital interaction in literary texts, demonstrates that conflict in medieval marriage rests on reciprocity rather than on unilateral imposition and thus affords resolution to the differences. Thus the opportunity is provided for mutuality and intimate association. Despite the presence of an authoritarian social structure which assumed the subordinate status of women, historical and literary evidence reveals that the medieval social system permitted opposition to this condition by women and thus an environment existed which allowed adjustment to the unequal balance of power in men-women relations.

The study concludes that traditional images on the "role" and "function" of women in medieval marriage have been created predominantly by male historians, therefore more critical reconstruction of women's role in history is needed. Moreover, change and reform of contemporary social structures cannot be instigated without some reconsideration of literary and historical interpretation of women's activities. In this regard both literature and sociology may be seen as distinct but complementary disciplines for both are concerned with adaptation and change to the social world.

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INTRODUCTION

The question is posed as to the degree of existing sentiment within medieval married life during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. What was the nature of commitment of family members? Can one postulate that the unity of marriage in medieval society was based upon the co-existence of mutuality and intimacy? Can it be suggested, for example, that literary treatments of marital quarrelling in the lower stratum of medieval society, reveal a process of interaction which is constructive and in fact contributory to the co-existence of intimacy and mutuality within the context of married life. Despite an implied emotional distance of marital association based on contract with regard to property and wealth, could an intimate association have existed in husband-wife relations?

The thesis will suggest in a re-reading of medieval texts that medieval marriage can be viewed as a unit characterised by intimate association in contrast to the emotional distance of an impersonal relationship, frequently perceived in the literature.

There is indeed some evidence to support the absence of intimate association in the medieval marriage relationship. A preliminary glance at historical and literary records would

seem to support the notion that intimate association was absent in the medieval relationship. Orthodox Christian tradition separated the idea of love both from sexuality and the primary purposes of procreation. There is also evidence in literary treatments of marriage to support the ecclesiastical call for men and women to pursue a life of chastity in an effort to "conquer" man's fallen state. Thus the bawdy drunken wife in medieval fabliaux and marital interaction depicted in medieval drama often reveal a persistent preoccupation with the need to protect a potentially corruptible husband from an aggressive, oppositional spouse. Moreover, there is a notable absence of expression of affection within the marital dialogue. Furthermore, literary treatment of marriage reveals an anti-feminist attitude which had the support of the ecclesiastical and political order which in turn supported the operation of the economic conditions of feudalism.

According to historical evidence, it is apparent that the nature of contracted marriage was that of an institution which primarily aided the economic structure of feudalism. In general, the church seems to have contributed to economic relations by supporting male dominance over women who were an important child-bearing appendage for economic alliances. It is apparent that the political, economic and ecclesiastical institutions recognised marriage as an economic bond to serve purely political ends. Theoretically, medieval marriage law gave women no power or recognised autonomy.

Whether the daughter of a bonded peasant, freeman or merchant, the prospective bride was viewed as a commodity with relative economic value. She appears to have been only marginally involved with respect to the "bargaining" process of marriage.

Thus the foundation for marriage in the lower and middle classes was based on a significant degree of inequality or injustice with respect to husband-wife relations.

The question to be investigated is in what way the co-existence of mutuality and intimacy could enter into a relationship based purely on economic assumptions and the dominant-subordinate status of men-women relations. How could intimacy enter into a relationship based on a significant differential of power and privilege between men and women? It is here argued that, despite evidence to the contrary, one can offer serious challenge to the idea that intimacy and marriage could not co-exist. A comparison of some contemporary social theory with the process and dynamics of marital interaction in narrative texts will show that mutuality and intimacy between spouses was a necessary and viable aspect of married life.

If one regards the literature depicting lower and middle class marriage, for example, it can be demonstrated that consistent patterns of quarrelling have been incorrectly perceived. For if such patterns are viewed in the light of a contemporary social theory of conflict functionalism and a theory of exchange structuralism, it then becomes possible

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to argue that conflict or "quarrelling" is not always destructive but rather a condition which can be viewed as functional and positive allowing intimacy and marriage to co-exist. We shall be most concerned with the question of mutuality and intimacy in marriages in the lower and middle strata of medieval society, or as they will here be called the lower and middle classes. The notion of "class" will be used in a broad sense in reference to one of the two main stratum in medieval life. These two basic groups were the "lords" on the one hand and "the common people" on the other. For the purposes of the present discussion, interest will be focused mainly on the stratum composed of the "common people": the merchants and peasants.

The condition of intimacy is defined here as a social bond characterised by the expansion and growth of mutual trust. That is to say, intimacy is a condition which is arrived at by the "gradual expansion of an exchange relationship which permits the partners to prove their trustworthiness to each other."¹ This broad definition takes into consideration all forms of mutuality encompassing mutual service (or giving) and the growth of trust.

In a study of the present nature, the question arises as to whether literary representations of marriage can be

¹Peter M. Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), p. 315.

considered a "biography or a social chronicle" with respect to the daily lived experience of men-women relations. Lucien Goldman's treatment of this question appears particularly appropriate in light of the present argument. Thus of the form of the novel Goldman observed that it "is obviously a particularly complex structure and it would be difficult to imagine that it could one day emerge simply from individual invention without any basis in the social life of the group."² Goldman's argument can be equally applied to the present discussion on literary representation of marital interaction. Since historical evidence reveals that the medieval wife entered marriage with an innate sense of her subordinate role and inferior status, it would follow that there had to evolve some mechanism of coping or defence in the existential daily interactive experience. It must be argued that literature is indeed a reflection of the social conditions in society and "that a character does not act independently of the social forces in his or her milieu."³

It is significant that the literature discussed here reveals a pattern which appears to support this condition. The socialisation of the spouse reveals traditional attitudes.

² Lucien Goldman, Towards A Sociology of the Novel, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1975), p. 6.

³ Elizabeth Langland, Society in the Novel (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 7.

Thus marriage is initially based on self-interest and economic gain. This provokes behavioural conditions of mistrust. The resultant opposition or struggle permits re-evaluation and a new set of rules for behaviour emerge which permits a relationship based on both extrinsic and intrinsic conditions of association. To be sure, literature is not simply a mechanical reproduction of the reality of lived experience. Our knowledge with respect to marriage, in lower and middle class marriage, must depend on those human relationships as they are illustrated in literature on marriage through the characters' patterned interactions and through their expectations of each other. In the context of the present study, this becomes evident through the historical support of literary evidence of medieval marriage.

Method, Scope and Sources

The major method of investigation will be the utilisation of the contemporary social theories of Peter Blau and the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser to analyse literary representation of marriage in the context of intimate association. Briefly stated, the contemporary social theories of conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser and the exchange structuralism of Peter Blau have been utilised for their comprehensive treatment of the conditions of reciprocity and conflict. Discussion on economic contract and the dominant-subordinate relationship in medieval marriage relations must inevitably involve some detailed treatment of the conditions of injustice

and inequality with regard to the balance of power. Coser and Blau argue that underlying all human association lies a differential power. A subsequent failure to develop a reciprocal set of rules for mutual behaviour results in conflict, which, if permitted to exist and manifest, permits a re-evaluation of rules for behaviour and therefore permits the expansion of mutual trust. The possibility is thus created for intimate association. The utilisation of social theory in conjunction with literary treatments of medieval marriage will demonstrate that conflict in marriage rests on reciprocity rather than unilateral imposition and thus affords resolution to the differences. Therefore, the opportunity is provided for mutuality and intimate association.

A further method employed in this study will be the utilisation of historical evidence of marriage in the lower and middle classes. We will examine the relevant concepts with regard to structural opportunities for opposition to the existing medieval marriage institution. This will be done through a study of representative sources which deal with conditions for medieval marriage with respect to the lower and middle classes.

There is very little written on the subject of female opposition to contracted marriage but there is a great deal of evidence which relates to the autonomous position of women relative to their position with the opposite sex. The most recent available source is the study of Margaret Wade

Labarge, Women in Medieval Life, who makes extensive reference to women as agitators, speakers and writers relative to their subordinate position in men-women relations. Other important sources with respect to women's roles in law and property dispute which have been used are Women of the Medieval World, edited by Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple, and Women in Medieval Society, edited by Susan Mosher Stuard. Eileen Power's study on Medieval Women, edited by M.M. Postan, has been a useful source of evidence with respect to women's economic autonomy in marriage relationships in the lower and middle classes. Similarly, Judith Bennett's discussion of "Medieval Marriage" in Pathways to Medieval Peasants, offers valuable research findings with respect to the independent payment of marriage fines by women.

An extremely useful primary source with respect to the condition of reciprocity and conflict in men-women relationships is the work by J. Toulmin Smith, titled English Guilds. This collection of fourteenth-century original documents published by the Early English Text Society provides evidence of the major degree of fellowship which women enjoyed with men in English guild relationships. Another extremely useful primary source which gives evidence of the co-existence of reciprocity and intimacy in marriage, is the Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, edited by Norman Davis. The interactive process in the husband-wife relationship has been fully represented in the correspondence between Margaret and John Paston.

In consideration of literary representation of marital dialogue, our study will be confined to the content analysis of literary evidence. The conditions of conflict, reciprocity and intimate association will be analysed in the content of the literature by utilising the fundamental tenets of the exchange structuralism of Peter Blau and the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser. We will consider representation of middle-class marriage in three of the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer: the contracted economic marriage of January and May in The Merchant's Tale, the dominant-subordinate relationship of Walter and Griselda in The Clerk's Tale, and a marriage characterised by 'generosity' between Arveragus-Dorigen in The Franklin's Tale. In the same vein the content of marital dialogue in medieval drama will be examined. We will consider the exchange of power in the relationship between Mak and Gill in The Second Shepherd's Pageant by the Wakefield author, the interchange of power and compliance in the Noah marriage in The Deluge (Chester), and the contracted marriage of Mary and Joseph in The Annunciation (Coventry).

Utilising theories of social exchange and conflict functionalism, analysis will show that depicted conflict is consistently followed by accommodation and conciliation. It will be shown that reciprocity rests largely on the premise of existential expansion of trust relations, which, when interwoven with periods of imbalance and opposition, provides an opportunity for development and increased stability in marital relations.

CHAPTER I

A SYNTHESIS OF THE EXCHANGE STRUCTURALISM OF PETER BLAU AND THE CONFLICT FUNCTIONALISM OF LEWIS COSER

From a sociological perspective, the question is frequently posed as to how and why patterns of social organizations are created, maintained and changed. What are the crucial phenomena which serve to effect constructive change, and what is it that promotes integration, unity and social equilibrium? In the context of the present discussion on medieval marriage, one may ask what particular conditions functioned to permit a unified relationship in medieval marriage. What is it that served to perpetuate stability, promote increased integration and thus permit the opportunity for intimate association?

A theoretical resolution may be provided to some of the questions by examining some of the theoretical propositions of the exchange structuralism of Peter Blau and the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser. It will be argued that the juxtaposition of these two theoretical perspectives will ultimately provide support for the notion that the institution of medieval marriage existed as a unified, integrated social system which was characterised by the existential expansion of trust relations.

First the general theoretical statements of Peter Blau and Lewis Coser should be briefly examined. Blau's exchange perspective assumes the fundamental task of conceptualizing simple direct exchange processes and the expansion of these processes to large social systems (macro-structures).⁴ The basic social process is viewed as a series of stages in human interaction which follow the sequence of attraction, interpersonal exchange, competition for power, opposition and integration. This basic process is regulated by values and norms which at all levels of organization influence that which is rewarding and attractive. The degree to which values and norms are internalised also influences the forms the struggle for power will assume, and these basic theoretical assumptions are applicable to all levels of social organization. Blau's exchange theory maintains the basic dynamics of utilitarian economics. People pursue activities to receive benefits. When these activities are characterised by unequal distribution, power becomes a resource which creates pressure for conflict and constructive change.

The theoretical assumptions inherent in the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser are significantly similar to

⁴Peter M. Blau's major work on exchange theory is Exchange and Power in Social Life. See also Blau's, "A Theory of Social Integration," in the American Journal of Sociology 65 (May 1960), and "Parameters of Social Structure," in Approaches to the Study of Social Structure, edited by him. (London/New York: The Free Press, Collier Macmillan, 1975).

Blau's formulation of exchange theory. Coser's notion of instrumental association encompasses power imbalances, conflict, the competition for power and system integration.⁵ In the same vein, the particular orientation of a given society, its values and norms regulate the process in social interactions and determine the "rewards" of instrumental association and the form of opposition. However, a major emphasis is placed on the functional component of conflict or opposition. For Coser, all forms of conflict including violence and deviance can be identified as strengthening the stability of the social system.

However, Blau makes the assumption that society is built specifically on compounded self-interest and he assumes a rationality where common values and a collective ideology, relative to the maximization of profit makes the existence of structure an unproblematic issue. Blau presents a conflict perspective emphasizing the positive forces of opposition relative to relations of power and authority, but there is limited explanation concerning the emotional processes of

⁵ Lewis A. Coser's major work on conflict is, The Functions of Social Conflict (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1956), and Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977). See also "Some Functions of Deviant Behaviour and Normative Flexibility," in American Journal of Sociology 68 (September 1962) For a critical review of Lewis Coser's Conflict Functionalism, see Douglas L. Eckberg and Lester Hill, Jr., "The Paradigm Concept and Sociology: A Critical Review," in American Sociological Review, 44 (December 6, 1979), 925-937. A useful introduction to conflict theory can be found in Alan

these "forces": Moreover, while power is considered "fair and unfair" according to the norms of fairness, an explanation is lacking as to how this may be evaluated. Blau claims to offer merely a theoretical "prolegomenon" and a somewhat limited set of abstract propositions in order to describe fundamental processes at various levels of social organization. Therefore there is an omission of an explanation of the process of the interaction, and the absence of explanation as to why, for example, a higher "morality of fairness" should not displace the economics of self-interest.

The conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser on the other hand emphasises the need to attribute conflict a primary role in the maintenance of social equilibrium. Conflict in all of its forms is an integrative, functional social process which is a vital contribution to social stability. Coser also argues that exchange of instrumental association can be a stable situation which encompasses its own norms and values. It is an association which must be permitted to exist in a flexible rather than a rigid social system in order to avoid disintegration. Important to Coser are the methods and process of opposition, such as the emotional escalation which accompanies the inequality of power relations. For Coser, available grievance channels, and methods of evaluation

Wells, "Conflict Theory and Functionalism," Teaching Sociology, 6 (4, July), 1979, 429-437. See also Lewis A. Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977).

must exist before people can achieve their objective interests. Moreover, he asserts that deviance, violent conflict and punishment are fundamentally contributive to the increasing overall adaptability of the system. It can be conceded that both the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser and the exchange structuralism of Peter Blau focus on the process by which social institutions expand, form and unify. However, it is argued that juxtaposition of the major theoretical assumptions of the two theories will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions for social integration and stability and in particular the institution of medieval marriage.

For the purposes of our argument, discussion will be largely confined to three components of exchange structuralism and conflict functionalism. The notion of simple exchange association will be discussed with attention to the relationship between social exchange theory and former utilitarian models of exchange behaviour. The process of conflict and the emphasis on its positive functions as strengthening the stability of the social system will be discussed and some attention will be given to the notion that deviance also functions to promote system integration. The third theoretical component undertaken for discussion is the notion of power and authority relative to the condition of imbalance in exchange association.

The first discussion on the relationship between social

exchange theory and former utilitarian models of exchange behaviour is relevant to the argument that medieval marriage could not have developed as an association based on purely rational economic considerations. The notion of social exchange as a re-formulation of utilitarian association will offer explanation as to why a different model of "reciprocity" was necessary for a viable functional marital union.

In discussing the positive integrative functions of conflict, it is felt that a more comprehensive understanding will be given by the juxtaposition of the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser and the condition of opposition in Peter Blau's exchange perspective. This will offer a theoretical foundation to the argument that conflict resulting from unequal men-women relations witnessed in representative literature about medieval marriage, functioned to effect positive change and stability. Thus, it provided the possibility for intimate association. In this section on conflict, we will also consider the notion of open flexible societies as opposed to the problematic nature of rigid social systems. This will provide an explanation to the chapter titled Marriage Contract, Conflict and Reciprocity, where we will discuss the relative elasticity of the larger medieval social system and whether it afforded opportunity for opposition to the subordinate status of women.

The remainder of the discussion in the present chapter, will be devoted to the notions of power and authority relative

to the condition of inequality. This is intended to provide an understanding of the justification for conflict or opposition with respect to the subordinate role of women in medieval contracted marriage. We will consider the theoretical argument by Peter Blau and Lewis Coser, that the notion of authority rests on a consensus of common norms by a group of subordinates which in turn commits its members to comply to the demands of the dominant power. In later discussions, it will be seen that "power" relative to the medieval marriage institution is only recognised as legitimised authority when a "common" set of values have determined the "rightfulness" of exchange in power.

While the tenets of utilitarianism have been universally rejected as a realistic model for human exchange, underlying all contemporary exchange theories are reformulations of utilitarian assumptions.⁶ This reformulation has involved the recognition that people do not always attempt to maximize profits, and at times non-rational behaviour characterises human exchange. Moreover, associations are controlled by socialisation practices and external regulation, and people are never free from limiting social commitments.⁷

⁶ See George Homans, Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms (New York: Brace and World, 1961), also J. Thibaut and H.H. Kelley, The Social Psychology of Groups (New York: Wiley 1959); Ralph Emerson, "Power Dependence Relations," in American Sociological Review, vol. 27 (Feb. 1, 1962); and Jonathan R. Turner, The Structure of Sociological Theory (Georgetown, Ontario: The Dorsey Press, 1978).

⁷ Turner, The Structure of Sociological Theory, p. 248.

Contemporary exchange theorists recognize these facts and thus utilitarian principles have been reformulated into theoretical systems of social exchange. This modification of the principles of economic theory involves recognition that social transactions are characterised by some awareness of profit, rational and non rational considerations, and an awareness of some alternatives which permits evaluation of cost and benefits. While there are normative limits on human behaviour, there is a relative degree of competition underlying all human association. There is also the recognition that while material exchange typifies marketplace transaction, people do in fact reciprocate other needed benefits, such as affection, loyalty and needed services.

Much like his predecessors of social exchange, Blau recognizes that purely rationalistic models of human behaviour are in need of re-formulation.⁸ Extremes of utilitarianism must be discarded in favour of a reciprocity which involves "actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others and that cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming."⁹ Utilising the basic idea

⁸ Homans, Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms, p. 79. Earlier Homans had argued: "Indeed we are out to rehabilitate the economic man. The trouble with him was that he was not economic, he used resources to some advantage, but he was anti-social and materialistic interested only in money and material goods and ready to sacrifice even his old mother to get them." See also Homans, "Social Behaviour as Exchange," American Journal of Sociology, 63 (1958), pp. 597-606.

⁹ Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 6.

of all exchange theories (reward, cost and profit), Blau argues that it is a person's overall desire for personal gain which draws him to others and provides the basis upon which he judges others to be attractive associates.¹⁰

However, social exchange typically encompasses feelings of personal obligation, gratitude and trust, there is the absence of coercive formal obligations, and the relationship engenders both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits.¹¹ Unlike purely rational utilitarianism, social exchange involves reciprocal benefits which have variable or fluctuating values. These values cannot be quantified or measured and therefore obligations are diffused and often unspecified: "Specific benefits exchanged are sometimes valued as symbols of the supportiveness and friendliness they express and it is the exchange of the underlying mutual support that is the main concern of the participants."¹² The primary concern in social exchange is to prove oneself trustworthy and, inter-personal evaluation occurs through the process of increasing

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 37. The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards sometimes presents analytical difficulty. Blau also notes that "many social relations cannot be readily classified as being extrinsically and intrinsically rewarding. Thus workers participate in unions not only to improve their employment conditions but because they intrinsically enjoy the fellowship in the union."

¹² Ibid., p. 95.

trust and moral obligation. Gradual expansion of exchange relations promote the necessary trust and "as individuals regularly discharge their obligations, they prove themselves trustworthy of further credit."¹³ Hence processes of interaction which may originate in pure self-interest or the absence of trust, in fact generate trust through their recurrent and gradually expanding nature. "Social exchange relations evolve in a slow process starting with minor transactions in which little trust is required because little risk is involved in which both partners can prove their trustworthiness enabling them to expand their relationship and engage in major transactions."¹⁴ Thus the process of social exchange leads to the trust required for it in a self-generating fashion. Here, Blau is interested in the notion of emergent properties which in social interaction are "the forces that induce human beings to establish social associations on their own initiative and to expand the scope of their associations once they have been formed."¹⁵ It is the idea, in exchange terms, of perpetuating the act of reciprocity. Performing a service warrants gratitude, and if gratitude is expressed it will then serve as an inducement for further services. Moreover, the reciprocal exchange of

¹³Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 20.

intrinsic and extrinsic benefits ultimately creates a bond between the participants.

Blau does not specifically qualify the process or the conditions which are required to ensure reciprocity, but postulates that when exchanges have occurred "a fundamental and ubiquitous norm of reciprocity emerges which serves to regulate subsequent exchanges."¹⁶ As reciprocal acts are reinforced over the passage of time, this principle becomes established as a social norm of reciprocity which encompasses the norm of fairness. In turn, violation of the norm brings about disapproval and negative sanctions. Here Blau would challenge Alvin Gouldner's claim that the "norm of reciprocity" exists before the onset of social transaction.¹⁷ Social relations are started by the existential conditions of exchange and norms and values emerge during the process of interaction rather than as a measurable starting point. It has been argued, however, that the fact that the normative quality of social exchange is derived ad hoc and is not already given, rather weakens the claim that there is a distinction between

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁷ Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity," in American Sociological Review, 25, 1960, pp. 161-179. Gouldner asserts that the "norm of reciprocity is developed phylogenetically as an attribute of society whereby individual actors are socialized and which is taken as given in everyday activities. Reciprocity connotes that each party has rights and duties and there can be stable patterns of reciprocity qua exchange only insofar as each party has both rights and duties."

social and economic exchange.¹⁸ However, if one compares the notion of self-interested behaviour in the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser, an explanation may be offered with regard to the ad hoc normative quality of exchange. For Coser, the question arises as to whether self-interest is pursued with a moral conscience, and whether its pursuit is considered legitimate by the individual participant himself or the group of which he is a part and from which he seeks approval. In this way, "existential conditions of social exchange" may be realised but must take place, in a social system wherein self-interest and success are highly approved. Moreover, self-interest is not without moral significance. "Far from being defined as opposed to the goals of collectivity, self-interested behaviour, at least that according with social definitions of certain roles, is regarded as morally desirable and, in accord with the expectations and value assumptions of the group."¹⁹ Therefore, where self-interest and maximization of profit are recognised and encompassed in the socialisation process, 'trust' in Blau's conception of social exchange is permitted to generate and expand.

¹⁸ Jack N. Mitchell, Social Exchange, Dramaturgy and Ethnomethodology (New York/Oxford: Elsevier, 1978), p. 65.

¹⁹ Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p. 112. See also Talcott Parsons, "The Motivation of Economic Activities," in Essays in Sociological Theory Pure and Applied (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949); and David McClelland's discussion on the achievement motive relative to normative structure in the The Achieving Society (New York: The Free Press, 1961).

There are other difficulties and limitations to Blau's theory of social exchange. Despite Blau's assertion that "psychological processes of underlying feelings of attraction" direct relationships of exchange, it is sometimes argued that the primary basis of association is the singular calculated gain that the individual expects from the association.²⁰ There is an absence of altruistic motivation and a primary focus on self-interested profits.

But it must be argued that Blau is explicit in his argument that while rational action is a major consideration in his exchange perspective, forms of irrational action such as Max Weber's notion of wertrational action enter into behavioural transactions. Wertrational action is "the action of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to be required by duty, honour, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call, personal loyalty or the importance of some cause no matter in what it consists."²¹ In other words, some intrinsic considerations may not be calculated to obtain a specific benefit or reward, and they may have more of an expressive significance. However, Blau argues that this does not necessarily mean that their conduct is (purely) non-

²⁰ Peter P. Ekeh, Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 169.

²¹ Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 116.

rational, but rather wertrational, that is to say, that "it is oriented to the pursuit of ultimate values, rather than to the pursuit of immediate rewards."²²

However, while some non-rational considerations and moral values are seen to influence exchange association, it is sometimes argued that it is with difficulty that Blau separates social exchange with its encompassing gratitude and trust from the impersonal notion of economic exchange.²³ The problem with moral obligations in social exchange is that they are dependant upon varying degrees of trustworthiness which has the potential for reduction to purely instrumental concerns. Social exchange, in its crude form of explanation by Blau, becomes problematic in that it is based on caution and a basic underlying element of mistrust. Blau asserts, "typically, social exchange relations evolve in a slow process, starting with minor transactions in which a little trust is required because little risk is involved, and in which both parties can prove their trustworthiness . . ."²⁴ Gouldner's argument that the "norm of reciprocity is part of the socialization process and therefore governs

²² Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 5.

²³ Ekeh, Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions, p. 176.

²⁴ Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 94.

social action" is explicitly rejected.²⁵ Blau sees "reciprocity" through adherence to common norms as slowly emerging rather than existing as a given condition; only present on-going transactional processes have any validity.

While there may be skepticism as to the plausibility of an attempted fusion of instrumental and moral concerns, Coser observes that such a fusion may exist if a particular social orientation permits it. In a society which places emphasis on self-interest and individualistic concern, moral considerations will also be incorporated: "A culture with a strong emphasis on instrumentalism . . . is likely to produce a profusion of voluntary associations for instrumental goals."²⁶ Self-interest and morality can then be reconciled within a social system which places emphasis on individualism. For example, the individualistic loose association of craft guilds originally had the common goal of controlling the labour market. They then had to form alliances with other crafts and thus "a loose alliance of individuals and groups (grew) into an entirety with common loyalties, ideologies and objectives transcending instrumental ends."²⁷

Coser seems to imply that all types of instrumental

²⁵ Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity," pp. 161-179.

²⁶ Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p. 142.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

relations vary with a particular culture or process of socialisation. His analysis also suggests that the stability of various forms of instrumental relations is often dependant upon varying levels of endurance and intensity. The duration of instrumental relations is also noted by Coser. For example, reciprocity "based on unification against a common foe tends to remain on the level of temporary association when it is limited to instrumental ends and temporary purposes."²⁸ Therefore if the "norm of reciprocity" developed in this context, it would remain within the restriction of short-term goals. Coser also raises the issue of the need for "adjustment of reciprocity". "Coalition involves compromise and may promote further compromises, leading to adjustments of interests and values between partners."²⁹ Where Blau has omitted explanation of the process of long-term reciprocal association, Coser explains it: "The likelihood of transformation into more enduring forms of sociation is increased in associations where the members of the alliance are individuals rather than groups."³⁰ Blau's theory of simple direct exchange (dyadic relationships) would then be viewed as a more enduring form of relationship. Coser argues that when the opportunity for frequency of inter-

²⁸ Ibid., p. 146.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

action between two or more persons increases, the degree of attraction will increase and therefore the association will become strengthened. Conversely, larger coalesced group associations are potentially less enduring. "In coalitions, each of the coalesced groups is anxious to maintain its own boundaries and the exclusive loyalty of its members."³¹

The stability of instrumental association is also significant for Coser. For example, association or alliance for a singularly exclusive purpose such as conflict with a third party, is for Coser inherently unstable; there is always the potential for termination of the relationship after accomplishing the common goal.

So far discussion has been limited to an explanation of the basic assumptions of social exchange theory. Inherent in all relationships of exchange, however, is the potential condition of imbalance or opposition. Therefore, the remainder of this discussion will focus on a comparison between the conflict and functionalism of Lewis Coser and the condition of opposition in Peter Blau's exchange perspective. It should be initially emphasized that the theory of conflict functionalism is singularly concerned with the argument that conflict functions positively to re-establish system integration and social stability. Underlying Coser's theory is the idea that all social systems reveal imbalance,

³¹Ibid.

opposition and conflict. The interactive processes of conflict operate amongst the component parts of a social system under varying conditions and serve to effect change, integration and adaptability. Coser views processes such as deviance, dissent and conflict as a positive means to strengthen the social system, which in turn effects increased integration. For example, imbalance in a social system leads to the expression of conflict. This in turn causes reintegration of the social system which increases flexibility in the social structure. The system then becomes capable of resolving future imbalances. For the purposes of this discussion, however, we will be concerned with Coser's emphasis on the conditions for conflict, the causes of conflict, the duration and functions of conflict. Particular emphasis will be given to those propositions which serve to complement the assumption of opposition in Blau's exchange perspective.

While his treatment of opposition is sometimes vague and limited, Blau is aware that "all social organization is characterised by conflict which creates an inevitable dialectic between integration and opposition in all social structures."³² Moreover, the conditions of imbalance and opposi-

³²Turner, The Structure of Sociological Theory, p. 257. There are somewhat conflicting arguments as to whether Blau's discussion of conflict continues at this point, to assume a functionalist or dialectical perspective. Turner argues that Blau adopts "both dialectical assumptions and also the useful tenets of functionalism," but see also Michael A. Weinstein and Deena Weinstein, "Blau's Dialectical Sociology," in Sociological Inquiry 42 (Spring 1972), pp. 173-182.

tion arise in exchange relations from "questions about the reciprocity in the underlying orientations of support and congeniality."³³ Underlying all associations of exchange is the differential of power. "A person who commands services others need attains power over others by making the satisfaction of their need contingent on their compliance."³⁴ This principle is held to apply to the most intimate, as well as the most distant social relations. The failure to develop through the association of exchange a common set of values and regulative norms can also create opposition and conflict.³⁵ Failure to receive expected rewards and violation of the norms of fair exchange results in negative sanctions or negative consequences at all levels of social organization. That is to say, inherent in all relationships of exchange are sources of imbalance of power. When there is a

³³ Blau,

³⁴ Blau's definition of power is sometimes vague. For example, the power in intimate relations is attributed the same value as power between the employer and his employees. For a more comprehensive understanding of Blau's notion of power, see Talcott Parsons, "On the Concept of Influence," in Public Opinion Quarterly, 27, 1963, pp. 37-60. See also Patrick Spread, "Blau's Exchange theory, Support and the Macro-structure," The British Journal of Sociology, vol. XXXV (June 2, 1984). Spread argues, that power for Blau is associated with "support bargaining" processes. Power in a bargaining system is seen here to be inextricably interwoven with what is termed group support bargaining processes.

³⁵ Blau seems generally less concerned with the development of a formal system of propositions with regard to oppositional processes. He does stress the development of a series of general concepts with which to provide insight equally to both primary group behaviour and large scale organization.

violation of the norm of reciprocity, there is open conflict amongst individuals in all forms of human interaction.

The more the reciprocity in exchange becomes imbalanced and reciprocal obligations are violated, the more negative sanctions are imposed by the deprived party. In the same vein, when the norms of fairness are not realized, the deprived party will impose negative consequences on those who violate the norms. Discrepancy in the balance of power, then, creates the potential for conflict. Blau postulates that exchange relations always function according to the norm of reciprocity. Those who receive valued services are placed in a position where they must provide reciprocal rewards. If a relationship is characterised by dominant-subordinate relations, in order to function, the services of the dominant group must be considered legitimate and in accordance with the social norm of fairness or the norm of reciprocity.

It has been argued that there is somewhat limited discussion by Blau of the conditions leading to conflict or intense opposition.³⁶ In order to gain a more accurate understanding of the notion of imbalance and opposition, this argument should be explored. Blau, for example, notes that "more imbalance" increases the "probability of opposition", that a certain degree of violation of the norm of reciprocity and the norm of fair exchange leads to "greater imbalance".

³⁶Turner, The Structure of Sociological Theory, p. 258.

However, he fails to explain the process by which these conditions are measured. While he argues the existence of "collective experience" of relations of imbalance relative to the degree of deprivation and "more communication" as leading relations of imbalance by the collective, the actual process leading to the "imbalance" is loosely defined and somewhat obscure. Similarly, Blau speaks of "more" experience of collective deprivation relative to ideological solidarity and opposition to power. The degree of solidarity is viewed relative to the degree of ideological belief, which in turn leads to a greater possibility of opposition. Opposition for Blau, then becomes an end in itself in terms of the degree of ideological solidarity. While Blau in effect is describing the instrumental processes which lead to social conditions which cause conflict, there is an absence of analysis of the problematic nature of social interaction or exactly how "imbalance" might be determined. For example, what are the levels of conscious awareness by subordinates relative to their experience of collective observation? And how is a sense of solidarity linked to the definition of opposition by Blau, as a "noble and worthy cause"?

There are similarities in Coser's discussion of the conditions leading to conflict or "opposition" but it is noteworthy that there is more of a concern with the subjective consciousness arising in relations characterised by imbalance. Coser argues that deprived members of a system (or subordinates) actively or consciously question the distribution of

scarce resources. Moreover, the forum or opportunity for interpersonal expression is a fundamental element in the collective experience of relations of imbalance. The less there is an available resource for the ventilation of grievance over the "distribution of scarce resources" by the deprived, the more they will question legitimacy (or the norms of fair exchange).³⁷ "If certain groups within a social system compare their share in power, wealth and status honour with that of other groups and question the legitimacy of this distribution, discontent is likely to ensue. If there exists no institutionalized provisions for the expression of such discontents, departures from what is required by the norms of the social system may occur."³⁸ Therefore, while Coser would concur that imbalance is the result of a violation of the norm of fair exchange or the norm of reciprocity, a crucial variable is the presence or absence of internal organization which serves to "segment emotional energy". The degree of imbalance must be relative to the degree of opportunity for expressing grievance. Duration is also important for Coser, for the presence of a forum for expression of conflict may prolong opposition.

Blau seems to imply that the instant norms are violated,

³⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

³⁸ Coser, "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change," British Journal of Sociology 8 (September 1957), p. 203.

the system becomes imbalanced. However, Coser sees the actual process of interactional conflict as important since there is always the potential for the re-establishment of new norms and values. He observes that "conflict within and between groups in a society can prevent accommodations and habitual relations from progressively impoverishing creativity. The clash of values and interests, the tension between what is and what some groups feel ought to be, the conflict between vested interests and new strata and groups demanding their share of power, wealth and status, have been productive of vitality."³⁹

Blau concedes that "collective deprivation" is directly related to the interplay of power in exchange relations, but Coser is also concerned with the relative degree of ego deprivation. If there are experienced ego deprivations, then there is a greater possibility for imbalanced relations. Internal ego restraint is also an important variable with respect to experienced deprivation. For example, it is argued that aggression in lower class categories is more predictable since these groups are less influenced by internal constraint. Coser notes, that "a people who have supported without complaint (without internal constraint) as if they were not felt the most oppressive laws, violently throws

³⁹ Coser, Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict, p. 20.

them off as soon as their weight is lightened."⁴⁰ For Coser, there is always the notion that certain groups of the population are socially sanctioned for aggressive outlets by socialised conditioning to external constraint. Guiding norms and values are often inadequately internalised by the poorer classes who therefore question more actively and readily the existing legitimation of the social system.

Another crucial variable in Coser's analysis of conflict is the relative degree of experienced deprivation. Blau acknowledges the need for a sense of deprivation for the healthy pursuit of conflict, but Coser expands on this by distinguishing between deprivation which is "relative" and that which is 'absolute'. Here there is an interest in the differential rates of participation in aggressive or retaliatory activity. For example, apathy and resignation are not conducive to emotional arousal leading to opposition, but if some channel of mobility or opportunity for grievance is perceived, then the deprived group will conduct their behaviour with a sense of hope and expectation: "Any revolution is a revolution of rising expectations; it transforms absolute deprivations into relative deprivations. Moreover, since the lower class tends to be bound more exclusively by external restraints . . . (this) furnishes a socially

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

sanctioned outlet for aggression."⁴¹ Therefore, emotional arousal in aggressive behaviour depends on the degree to which people are committed to the social system, the degree of internal and external constraint and the degree of social control within the system. Coser does not argue that the deprived always instigate conflict with an awareness of their true interests, but seems to suggest that conflict episodes take place over specific tangible issues.

However, there is an explicit concern with the breakdown of legitimacy and the subsequent mobilisation of energy with which to pursue conflict. Blau's notion of imbalance in exchange relations tends to be generally applicable to all social systems. He makes the assumption that the differential of power and conditions of opposition occur at all levels of organization. Thus the broad notion of opposition would be equally applicable to both primary and secondary groups.

But the specific nature of the group or collectivity is important for Coser. In primary groups or the family, for instance, the presence of conflict indicates a greater

⁴¹Ibid., p. 67.

The question of course arises as to exactly when an oppressed group is able to openly express deprivation. It may be helpful to recall that much conflict research in the 1960s was generated by the need for resolution of domestic and international disturbances which often culminated in violence. See Thomas V. Bonoma and Thomas W. Milburn, "Social Conflict: Another Look," Journal of Social Issues, vol. 33, I, 1977.

intensity of emotional involvement. It then follows that the more closely associated the group where the conflict occurs, the more likely there will be emotional involvement.⁴² In the same vein, secondary relations or more impersonal relations demonstrate more frequent conflict but less emotional involvement. Turner elaborates on these propositions: "the more primary the relations, the more involvement and the more intense - that is the more commitment to pursue - the conflict In less involving social relations, conflict is likely to break out more frequently, but it will be less intense and thus less disruptive to people's lives and to the more inclusive system. For example, a feud between families is likely to be far more intense than the competition between two corporations."⁴³

Having discussed basic exchange processes and the imbalances of power inherent in those processes, we now look at the structural conditions under which conflict is seen to promote change. The conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser and the exchange perspective of Peter Blau both focus on the structural conditions under which conflict leads to the discontinuity of existing dysfunctional social systems. Here it is emphasized that certain structural conditions permit the presence of conflict (or opposition). This in turn leads

⁴²Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p. 98.

⁴³Turner, p. 167.

to the discontinuity of existing macro-social systems, which then provokes a new set of social relations within a new social structure.

Blau postulates that the existence of heterogeneity within the larger social structure permits opportunity for conflict and the subsequent re-establishment of a new equilibrium. That is to say, if conflict is to function as a positive force, the political and social structure must have existing mechanisms which provide legitimised opportunities for overthrowing an existing dominant power. However, if the political and social structure is unable to relieve collective grievance, there is consequent alienation which then gives rise to collective retaliation. The irrational nature of radical opposition is such that it is not necessarily a calculated means to gain rewards but rather an expressive action of retaliation for deprivation and powerlessness.⁴⁴

Here Blau supports Simmel who argues that "radicalism is necessitated by the unreserved devotion of individuals to the rationale of the group and by the impossibility of taking care of widely varying tendencies within a narrow social

⁴⁴Turner, p. 167.

"What Coser has in mind is that commitment to pursue conflict is not simply the result of sudden emotional arousal, nor rational and dispassionate calculations of interest. Where parties to the conflict are involved in and dependant upon groups engaged in conflict, then their commitments to pursue conflict, as opposed to withdrawal or opting out, or apathy will be greater."

framework."⁴⁵ Yet Blau's main emphasis is the rational calculation of advantage. He advocates that political systems incorporate structural opportunities for expressive action and thus permit opportunity for radical expression and opposition.

Coser also outlines the structural conditions whereby conflict may serve to effect change. However, this discussion is not specifically limited to the political structure. Rather Coser is concerned with the broader notion of open flexible societies as opposed to what he considers the problematic nature of an overly rigid social system. He explains:

The rigidity of the system and the intensity of conflict within it are not independent of each other. Rigid systems which suppress the incidence of conflict exert pressure towards... violent forms of conflict. More elastic systems which allow the open and direct expression of conflict and which adjust to the shifting balance of power ...are less likely to be menaced by basic and explosive alignments within their midst.⁴⁶

That is to say, in open societies where conflict exists as an accepted condition within the social system, the opportunity for stabilisation and integration within the social structure is inevitably greater. "In open societies conflict, which

⁴⁵ Georg Simmel, The Sociology of Georg Simmel (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), p. 94.

⁴⁶ Coser, Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict, p. 26.

aims at the resolution of tension between antagonists, is likely to have stabilising and integrative functions These systems avail themselves, through the toleration and institutionalization of conflict, of an important stabilising mechanism."⁴⁷ Conversely, Coser aligns an overly rigid system with the absence of conflict, which in turn results in apathetic accommodation, habitual relations and "progressive impoverishment". It is also argued that in these social systems there is an absence of pressure towards creativity and innovation.⁴⁸ Both Blau and Coser concur in advocating the need for ideological opposition within a social structure. For Blau, active radicalism transforms revenge into noble ideals and effects change from social deprivation to increased intra-group relations, cohesion and solidarity.

Inherent in Blau's theoretical propositions is frequently an assumed unproblematic rationality. That which actually exists within the political structure clearly functions, otherwise it is deleted. Coser, in contrast, outlines more specifically both the rational and non-rational processes

⁴⁷ Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p. 154.

⁴⁸ An empirical attempt to unify the results of low degree conflict toleration in a particular social structure can be found in Vladimir Arzenek, "Social Structure and the Character of Conflict," Sociologija, 1975, 17, 2, 249-60 (Ser). The study concluded that tension and the number of unreal conflicts increase in a rigid social system and therefore function within the system decreases.

which cause the legitimised social order to undergo direct challenge. Discussion of "opposition" is not limited to specific forms of political structure. Rather the emphasis is on the variation of conflict and strain in varying sub-systems:

Yet not all social systems contain the same degree of conflict and strain. The sources and incidence of conflict-
ing behaviour in each particular system vary according to the type of structure, the patterns of social mobility, of ascribing and achieving status and of allocating scarce power and wealth, as well as to the degree to which a specific form of distribution of power, resources and status is accepted by the component actors within the different sub-systems.⁴⁹

While it is evident that Coser concedes the necessity of legitimised opportunity for opposition within the political structure, he omits the suggestion that Blau appears to make that there is only one direction of causation. Coser argues that the problematic nature of the social structure leads to intermittent^o conflict and overt questioning of the legitimised social order.

However, both Blau and Coser concede that interdependence by multi-group affiliation in an open flexible democratic system prevents disintegration, preserves fundamental values and effects social stability. Blau emphasises that

⁴⁹ Coser, Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict, p. 26.

multi-form differentiation also lies at the root of the dynamics of social change. It functions to intensify inter-group relations, which in turn is conducive to openness and flexibility; moreover, it aids social interaction in diverse groups as well as the processes of social mobility. The absence of multi-form differentiation impedes inter-group mobility and fortifies rigidity. "Once deep attachments and narrow circles have begun to dissolve, mobility and change gather momentum. But this trend may be reversed if the consolidation of various lines of differentiation creates new structural rigidities."⁵⁰ Moreover, social change is prevented by entrenched rigid positions and increasing hostilities. For Cosér, analysis of the social structure is important for the dynamics of social change, but the analysis of the process of social interaction must also be seriously considered. Structural factors and interpersonal interaction are inextricably interwoven; moreover, structural factors are mediated through the interpersonal interaction which in turn encompasses the condition of opposition.

While the imbalance in power relations is conducive to conflict, Blau postulates that the potential for conflict can be changed by the acceptance of power as legitimised authority. This should be discussed in further detail. According to Blau's exchange perspective the notion of

⁵⁰ Blau, "Parameters of Social Structure," p. 249.

authority rests on a consensus of common norms by a group of subordinates, which in turn commits its members to comply to the demands of the dominant power. Exchange associates always function on the premise of reciprocity, but participants must be socialised into a common set of values which determines fair exchange and also how fair exchange can be institutionalised into norms for both leaders and subordinates. It appears that Blau is arguing that in order for a destructive competition for power or dysfunctional conflict to be avoided, there must exist a consensus of common norms which have either previously existed or which have emerged in the course of social interaction. This normative regulation of power also effects a decline in interpersonal competition, and group members come primarily to value group loyalty and group approval. The advantage of this, Blau argues, is that leaders may then avoid coercive methods and subordinates may avoid potentially high costs of interaction with their leaders since norms then define the degree of compliance and conformity. Therefore the potential for conflict is averted by the change of power to legitimised authority; moreover, the social norm of reciprocity determines the nature of exchange relations and established relations are regulated by the norm of fair exchange. Therefore, power is viewed as rightful and beneficial when determined by the social norm of fairness.

However, the question arises as to the conditions under which a person sees his own subordination as rightful and by

what particular process can this be evaluated? There is also the suggestion that subjective evaluation must be made by subordinates (although Blau does not explicitly deal with this). Also, one may ask, how is power differentiation beneficial and when is this decided? While Coser's theoretical framework would acknowledge the concept of legitimation of power and a recognised "social norm of fairness", he also argues that "power can often be appraised only in its actual exercise."⁵¹ It would appear that Coser advocates a process of measurement or evaluation within the interactive process in order to explain the emergence of the social norm of fairness. While it is acknowledged that the latter can pre-exist or emerge within a collectivity, Coser argues that evaluation as to whether power is oppressive or exploitive, can only be undertaken through a non-rational process of conflict. He notes the difficulty and limitation with regard to actual assessment of differential power and argues that mediation of exploitive interests may only materialise after relative power is established through interactive struggle. Because of the difficulties which lie in accurate estimation of power, Coser argues that contending parties must frequently resort to trial by ordeal in order to effect evaluation. For example, even though there is a pre-existing norm of fairness, by what process does the subordinate participant

⁵¹Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p. 136.

come to accept the dominant authority as given? Incompatible goals and interests must lead to some form of inevitable struggle in order for comparative strength to be defined or measured. Coser argues that the outcome of a rebellion is determined by the relative resources of the contestants:

Each estimates the limits of his own resources in comparison to those of his opponent and gauges his own losses against possible gains. The ensuing settlement is based not on an application of recognised principles, but on force whereby each side compels the best conditions he can within the limits imposed by codes and established assumptions of society.⁵²

Therefore, the 'rightfulness' of exchange in power becomes possible only after the respective power of the contenders has been achieved through the process of struggle. This in turn establishes equilibrium and a newly developed set of common values. On-going active struggle is necessary, Coser asserts, to avoid disequilibrium and modify the basis for power relations. Therefore, while Coser concedes that there may exist a positive imbalance of benefits in exchange which may result in the legitimation of power as authority, this cannot be taken as given.

While Blau omits the question as to the basis of the "rightfulness" in the legitimation of power, Coser advocates that the process of struggle or conflict will determine this

⁵²Ibid.

The argument that some exchange contributions are so valuable that compliance is effected, is conceded by Coser, but there must be always a process of measurement. Coser also concedes that the nature of power in exchange creates a difference of status and power, but he advocates consideration of the subjective consciousness of those complying participants.

Blau tends to avoid explanation of exploitation and opposition. If it is present it is negative and represents a failure in the system. Coser contends that these conditions are positive and effect a struggle which is ultimately functional for the re-establishment of social equilibrium. Moreover, where Blau advocates the concept of "rightfulness" of the inequality of exchange, Coser questions the basis of "rightfulness". Finally, where Blau would claim that norms automatically aid the extension of properties of power into institutional properties, Coser sees this as only emerging in a collectivity in the course of social interaction and struggle.

Summary

Utilitarian models for human exchange are unrealistic for they are based on the exchange of quantifiable external commodities. While social exchange is also characterised by the exchange of reciprocal benefits, there are variable and fluctuating values which cannot be quantified nor measured. Reciprocal obligations are therefore "diffused and unspecified". The primary concern in social exchange is to prove oneself trustworthy and inter-personal evaluation occurs

through the process of increasing trust and moral obligation, thus allowing an opportunity for intimacy. As reciprocal acts are reinforced over the passage of time, a norm of reciprocity emerges which encompasses the social norm of fairness. Violation of the norm of reciprocity brings about a condition of inequality and consequently negative sanctions are imposed by the deprived participant. Underlying all reciprocal association is the differential in power. The perceived discrepancy in the balance of power violates reciprocal obligations and thus the potential for conflict or opposition is ever present. Conflict, however, is seen as a positive condition which serves as a means to strengthen the social system and is therefore conducive to increased social integration and intimate association. Systems which are open and flexible endure, for they permit the presence of conflict and opposition and therefore afford the opportunity for increased social stability.

The juxtaposition of the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser and the exchange structuralism of Peter Blau has been intended to provide a theoretical foundation for the historical and literary analysis of conflict and reciprocity in the chapters which follow. In these discussions, we will consider in detail positive functions of conflict with respect to unequal men-women relations, the relative degree of flexibility in the medieval social system and the coexistence of mutuality and intimacy.

CHAPTER II

MARRIAGE CONTRACT, CONFLICT AND RECIPROCITY

It is often contended that the existing social order in the later middle ages repressed and prevented the possibility of mutuality and an appropriate balance of husband-wife relations in married life. The dominant-subordinate status of men and women in marriage was based on contract and served to accommodate economic consideration in the feudal social order. "Marriage was primarily a transaction organized by males, to serve economic and political ends, with woman as a useful child-bearing appendage to the land or goods which were exchanged."¹

While the latter arguments are plausible, one must ask whether or not structural opportunities existed for the expression of grievance or protest on the part of women. Did the social system suppress resistance and opposition to the dominant-subordinate status of men and women in marriage? Or can it be argued that the system was flexible and therefore afforded in its structure some opportunity for

¹David Aers, Chaucer Langland and the Creative Imagination (London: Routledge and Paul, 1980), p. 143.

opposition?

If one assumes that structural opportunities did exist for the expression of grievance, one must then ask whether women were actually aware of their subordinate status with regard to the institution of medieval marriage.² Did medieval women in the lower and middle classes consciously experience deprivation as a collective body or as isolated individuals, and to what degree was this conscious experience transferred into marriage? If the apparent unequal distribution of status and power was opposed by women, then it must also be argued that opposition provided an opportunity in marriage for a reciprocal, unified, intimate partnership. With respect to the latter argument, it may be useful to digress briefly and review an earlier discussion on the exchange perspective of Peter Blau and the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser.

It will be recalled that according to these two social theorists, there is the notion that underlying all associations of social exchange exists a differential of power. The failure to develop a common set of reciprocal values with respect to status and power can therefore create opposition

² Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p.

37.

Coser argues that before a social conflict can take place and before hostile attitudes are turned into social action, the negatively privileged group must first develop the awareness that it is indeed, negatively privileged. It must come to believe that it is being denied rights to which it is entitled.

and conflict. Yet conflict, rather than being a negative factor, functions positively to re-establish system integration and social stability. There is a basic consensus between Blau and Coser that imbalance in the social system leads to the expression of conflict. This in turn effects re-integration of the system which increases flexibility in the social structure, and the social system then becomes capable of resolving future imbalances. With the latter argument in mind, we may then undertake discussion of the condition of opposition with regard to the discrepancy between the status of women and that of the dominant male culture.

We will consider existing structural opportunities for the expression of opposition or protest by women with respect to their subordinate status and there will be an attempt to show that even though an inequality of power relations existed between men and women, the social system was flexible enough to permit healthy opposition of it by women. It will then be argued that the expression of conflict acted as a positive condition and ultimately functioned to permit the co-existence of reciprocity and intimacy in married relations.

In the following chapter, three conditions will be examined: the existing social order with its incumbent marriage laws, the existing opportunities for expression of grievance or opposition by women, and the co-existence of

reciprocity and conflict in the marital lifestyle of the lower and middle classes.

In a discussion of medieval social structure, with respect to inequality in marriage, it is important to consider in some detail the degree of rigidity and resistance to change.³ There is a frequently held impression that the system was inflexible and that there were few existing mechanisms for adjustment and change. This would also suggest that there was no institutionalized provision for the expression of discontent. This is particularly pertinent with respect to the institution of marriage with its encompassing inequality of status and power, and should be closely examined. Did the system permit expression of female discontent? Was there an opportunity for open expression of conflict which would permit a balance of power in marital relations?

In many respects the unequal distribution of rights and privileges is obvious. In village and community life, while peasant women as tenants, labourers and entrepreneurs had some recognised rights within their own locality, there was always an incompatibility of such positions relative to the

³ Lewis A. Coser, "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change," British Journal of Sociology, 8 (September 1957), p. 202.

Coser explains, "whether given forms of conflict will lead to changes in the social system or to breakdown and to formation of a new system will depend on the rigidity and resistance to change, or inversely on the elasticity of the control mechanisms of the system."

socio-political dominance of males. "Women were not head of tithings; they did not sit on local juries; nor did they fill the office of constable or reeve."⁴ There were severe limitations to the peasant women's rights to form a decision with respect to marriage. "In particular, the pressures of the lord and the leading elements of the village community were still powerful in a vital area of a woman's life, whether she was a woman or a widow. It is evident that the woman fortunate or unfortunate enough to have a legal title to a holding could still be obliged to marry."⁵ Marriage was seen as an economic commodity to serve both economic and political ends. The bonded peasant in a legal sense was in possession of the lord and it then followed that all he possessed was also his lord's. Hence the peasant and his family were all of some value to the lord and any decisions which threatened to remove ownership were most likely to be opposed.

The merchet, a fine payable by the bondsman to the feudal lord for permission to arrange his daughter's marriage afforded little opportunity for freedom of choice for the bride. Even when the fine had been paid by the bride to the satisfaction of the lord, it is apparent that the

⁴R.H. Hilton, The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 106.

⁵H.S. Bennett, Life on the English Manor, A Study of Peasant Conditions 1100-1400 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 106.

marriage was then arranged for singularly economic purposes with little concern for the feelings of the bride. George Homans, H.S. Bennett, and R.H. Hilton all support the notion that women traditionally had no personal autonomy with regard to the feudal marriage transaction.⁶ The idea that they must "buy their own blood" had to indicate some strong measure of inferiority. Women had no public power or recognised autonomy within the manor or village. Peasants bought the right to marriage when they took over their father's land or bargained with the lord for the privilege of marrying. "Women who wished to leave the manor were forced to pay for it. There were also fines for incontinency known as leywrite."⁷ For if a bondswoman was unchaste then undoubtedly the sale of her in marriage terms was less profitable and she therefore depreciated in value. "If she gave birth to a child outside of marriage she was also bound to pay a fine known as childwite."⁸ Even when a peasant was a freeman and not totally at the disposal of the feudal lord,

⁶G. Homans, The English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century (New York: Russell & Russell, 1941), pp. 144-156.

H.S. Bennett, Life on the English Manor, pp. 240-241. Bennett also observes the difficulty when marriage was contemplated outside of the manor: "The marriage meant loss of property to one of the lords and he therefore expected some compensation called redemptio."

Hilton, The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages, p. 107.

⁷H.S. Bennett, Life on the English Manor, p. 243.

⁸Ibid.

he could not marry without his father's consent. The prospective bride appears to have been only marginally involved with respect to the actual decision to marry. Homans refers to the bargaining process of marriage. "Once he had decided to give up his land the father would look for a suitable match. When he hit on his son's liking and his own, he opened negotiations with the family of the girl Bargaining went before marriage in all the peasant communities of Europe."⁹

Marriage was thus associated with the idea of purely rational behaviour which was carefully calculated to gain material advantage. It was a formal contract which specified a quantifiable exchange of commodities. Even when the terms of the covenant were agreed upon, marriage was frequently delayed until the birth of the first child, which seems to imply attachment of quantifiable values to the biological ability to give birth. In general, widows seem to have had a greater autonomy than women who had never married. Yet a degree of control was still exercised by the feudal lord with respect to a widow's re-marriage. In theory when the head of a peasant family died his land was returned to the feudal lord although often the widow was permitted to retain the holding. However, her re-marriage was of considerable

⁹Homans, The English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century, pp. 160-162.

interest as a profitable transaction and therefore, her life-style and sexual behaviour were also of concern. Any action on the part of the widow which threatened marriage as a profitable transaction was condemned by the feudal lord.

The idea of marriage as a contribution to male economic interests was also of prime importance in the merchant classes. Sylvia Thrupp notes the socialization process of merchant women: "The girls' training would make them grow up useful with a sense of economic responsibility, of which they were a part, and at the same time keep them gentle so that they would be amenable to male authority."¹⁰ Marriage settlements were also common between merchant families.

There was a great deal of bargaining: "The young merchant looked about carefully, made business-like enquiries and was ready to pay a commission on the dowry to a broker."¹¹

Obviously if he could delay marriage until later on in life, he had greater bargaining power with a greater chance of maximum profit.

One can safely assume that marriage was associated

¹⁰ Sylvia L. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 170.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 105. Thrupp notes examples of marriage bargaining: "John Lyonhill, goldsmith agreed to pay a clerk 10 out of a dowry of 80 for arranging his marriage with the daughter of his company. William Nightingale, draper, married on the promise of 100, a gold ring, a gray fur, and a horse described as 'an Irish hevy'."

with rational calculation and overriding preoccupation with exchange of marketplace commodities. That economic and patriarchal determinations were contained by a rigid social structure quite alien to self-criticism and flexibility, is evident at least in part. Must one then assume that the marriage system lay firmly embedded in a larger social system with purely economic and patriarchal determinations? There is the implied assumption that the institution of marriage was so rigid that it lacked mechanisms for any form of re-adjustment. Moreover, this rigidity would seem to imply an inhibition of realistic conflict and a strict ideological adherence to the dominant political and economic structure.¹²

One is presented with a picture of a static inflexible society with the absence of any antagonistic forces. If women were subjected to male dominance, there is, by extension also the assumption that the lack of adequate representation by women existed without protest or challenge. It is apparent that women could not have all they wanted, in

¹²Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, p. 79.

Coser makes the distinction between rigid and flexible social systems. "Rigid systems such as contemporary totalitarian societies demonstrate absence of mechanisms for re-adjustment to changed conditions which permits the accumulation of conflict which serves to threaten consensual agreement. Flexible systems, on the contrary, by allowing occurrences of conflict, make the danger of breakdowns of consensual agreement remote."

the way of a desirable state of affairs, in what was clearly an unequal distribution of status. Did women want to be held back, assuming they were aware of the relative imbalance of power, if it was also apparent that status and power were considered necessary, important and a means to attain goals? Let us look further at evidence from later in the Middle Ages.

The *Ménagier de Paris* wrote near the end of the fourteenth century for the rising class of the bourgeoisie in the larger towns. Concerned with practical affairs, his treatise included a meek, submissive wife who would at all times obey her husband. A fifteenth-century work in English verse How the Good Wijf Taughte Hir Doughtir, designed for both peasants and townswomen, insists on wifely obedience.¹³ Similarly the Knight of La Tour Landry, a minor noble of Anjou, assumes that the best attitude is absolute subservience and warns against "evil or headstrong women". He argues that women should respect estate and degree but emphasizes masculine ideals for their behaviour. Aers observes that, "texts such as St. Paul's, 'Husbands love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it' (Eph.5:25) are never recalled by the Knight. All talk about 'love' in the Knight's text actually turns out to be the

¹³ F.J. Furnivall, ed., "How the Good Wijf Taughte Hir Doughtir," Babees Book, EETS, (1868, 1969), p. 48.

male's demand for a totally unquestioning obedience from the female he owns. In return, the man would abstain from violence towards the woman."¹⁴

Assuming that those meant to benefit from these instructions received the message, one is still left with the question as to whether there were areas that had not been determined with regard to the institution of marriage. Can it be claimed that the larger social structure was quite alien to self-criticism and flexibility? If indeed this was the case, were women complacent and accepting with regard to their "under-represented" status? If one makes the assumption that status and power were a logical necessity to attain goals, can it be postulated that women consciously reacted to their condition relative to the unequal distribution of wealth, power and status? If one looks at this question in the context of twentieth century feminism, where the basic issues are concerned with equal pay for equal work, legal abortions and the equality of employment opportunity, then it is conceded that the issue becomes somewhat misleading. One must accept the argument that "utterances of the past should never be taken at face value, (there are) modes of thought that are no longer with us, such as a tendency to think in hierarchical terms . . . a tendency to explain things by supernatural causes . . . and a tendency

¹⁴Aers, p. 145.

to think allegorically."¹⁵

What is important to consider however, is whether or not there was a conscious awareness of the lower and middle class medieval woman's position. We have spoken so far only of the dominant-subordinate men-women relations as prescribed by law. But discussion should now turn to the abundant evidence which suggests that women in the lower stratum of medieval society were both articulate and effective in opposing numerous instances of unequal distribution of power and status. There are extensive scattered references to women as agitators, speakers and writers defending their position. Women were independently engaged in matters of law and property dispute and any matter which hindered their role as equal participants in men-women relations.

The book of instruction for women by Christine de Pizan can certainly be viewed as a defense against the attacks and abuse coming from misogynistic books and men's behaviour. She refers to the Romance of the Rose and the Book of the City of the Ladies, claiming strongly that women were unjustly treated and much undervalued by their male contemporaries. Her reaction to the misogynist view that women were untrustworthy, vicious and worthless is explicit: "A great

¹⁵ Beatrice Gottlieb, "Feminism in the Fifteenth Century," in Women of the Medieval World, ed. Julius Kurshner and Suzanne F. Wemple (London: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 339-340.

unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature."¹⁶ Christine attempts an articulate defense in The Book of the Three Virtues, arguing that women were loyal and had the privilege of motherhood. She argues further that an educated mind is useful and an aid to the efficient running of a household. Widows should also receive an education in order to guard against fraudulent treatment. Christine's consciousness certainly indicates an awareness that women needed to learn how to manage cruelty and oppression in marriage. She believed that "God had intended men and women to work together in equal partnership. They were ordained to serve Him in different offices and also to aid and comfort one another, each in their ordained task, and to each sex [God] has given a fitting and appropriate nature and inclination to fill their offices."¹⁷ Christine de Pizan does seem to address specific problems relative to male dominance and its relationship to imbalanced relations within married life. Although the latter evidence with respect to opposition of existing norms and values relative to existing marriage laws is limited, it is also possible to argue the existence of a great deal of factual evidence with respect to female independence and outspokenness.

¹⁶ Christine de Pizan, The Book of the City of Ladies, trans. Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), p. 5.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

There is much to suggest that women quite often functioned independently of their husband and family. They were involved in important decisions with respect to property, wealth and position, and might function as equal partners in a stable and functioning marriage.

While little is known about the economic organization of peasant families, it has been assumed that there was exclusive parental responsibility in all economic transactions with regard to marriage. As previously discussed, some have held that there was apparently no recognised economic or personal independence on the part of the couple in the marriage transaction, and even less on the part of the female spouse. But according to the Liber Gersumarum of Ramsey Abbey which records the payments for the marriages of peasant women in twenty-nine of the abbey manors between 1398 and 1458, the prospective female spouse paid her own merchet in 33% of the cases. Judith Bennett notes that in "only 37 instances of merchet payment in the Liber Gersumarum was it thought necessary to require that the purchaser secure a personal pledge and 27 of these instances involved payment by the woman."¹⁸ What is important to note is that while fines constituted only 33 per cent of the purchases of marriage licenses, they account for 73 per cent of those required

¹⁸Judith Bennett, "Medieval Marriage," in Pathways to Medieval Peasants (Toronto: Institute of Pontifical Studies, 1981), p. 204.

to produce pledges. Despite the peasant women's economic limitations, "women tended to buy a larger proportion of the general licenses to marry outside the village." ¹⁹ which is interesting since a general license could be more expensive than a typical license, (a typical license kept a woman's services, goods and child-bearing capacities within the manorial jurisdiction). Therefore, it would appear that women made some independent economic choices. Bennett's findings also reflect a later marrying age for women purchasing their own merchets (a median age of twenty-four to twenty-seven) which indicates they had probably reached a stage of relative economic independence. ²⁰ The study also reveals that many women demonstrated economic and personal independence even when resources in the family were limited. This indicates some departure from what was required by the norms of the social system. While it cannot be claimed that the economic autonomy of women purchasing merchets involved the formation of a new value system, it would also be inaccurate to suggest that it was mere frustration or deviation. It is apparent that such women were subject neither to subordination nor patriarchal control.

There is other evidence of women having genuine economic autonomy before marriage. A study of the manor of Brigstock

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

revealed that "three young women held lands of their own and one, Isabella Huet, received income from both brewing and baking for a three year period prior to her marriage."²¹ Another independent woman was Juliana, the gardener on the Bishop of Ely's manor at Little Downham. She commanded village workers and, "while there is no record of how much she must have earned, she must have done reasonably well for she was involved in a number of illicit land deals for herself and leased a fishery and several meadows from the episcopal bailiffs."²²

Another independent economic activity for women was money lending. Hilton comments on a manorial court litigation: "Juliana Wheeler of Hagley, Worcestershire, was suing Philip Brough and his sureties for a loan of three marks in 1387 in the Halesowen manor court Agnes Hendy was suing another for 6s. 8d."²³

There was also a significant number of women labourers who paid tax in 1381 and "around 1400 women were doing the same manual jobs as men such as haymaking, weeding, mowing,

²¹J.G. Dickinson, "The Congress of Arras 1435" (Thesis, Oxford, 1955), p. 146.

²²M. McLean, Medieval English Gardens (New York: Viking Press, 1981), p. 219.

²³Hilton, The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 103-104.

carrying corn and driving plough oxen."²⁴ Female reapers and binders at Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire in 1380 received equal rates. "At nearby Avering female thatchers were paid the same daily rate as men doing the same job."²⁵

Aside from various independent economic activities, women often demonstrated conscious protests at the manorial courts. In a study of English dower in the year 1200, Leongard argues this with respect to the issue of dowry rights. Women were frequently, actively and personally involved in dower litigation. Leongard's analysis of dower litigation reveals frequent actions between mother and son both for dowry withheld and for admeasurement.²⁶ There are examples of a daughter acting as her mother's warrantor and litigation between a mother and son-in-law. Moreover, there is a significant number of second or third wives litigating with sons of first wives.

The issue of dower was therefore a family affair, and one would have to refute the notion that the economic transaction belonged exclusively to the father or son.

²⁴ R.H. Hilton, Economic Development of Some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 145-147.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁶ Janet Senderowitz Leongard, "English Dower in the Year 1200," in Women of the Medieval World, ed. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple (London: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 232.

"Dower was not even an arm's length transaction. It was a family affair and it was as much subject to mistake, anger, dislike and affection as any other intra-family arrangement."²⁷

A substantial number of pleadings in manorial courts with regard to such issues as debt and trespass were conducted by women, and "only rarely through attorneys. Payments for relaxation of suit were made by women which made them also liable as suitors."²⁸ Margaret Paston supervised the operation of much property in Norfolk which comprised most of the Paston estate. When there was a serious opposition to the ownership of the manor, she convened a court and competently handled disputes over the family's legal affairs. Margaret's concerns in letters to her husband and other family members, included such things as "hearing complaints, arbitrating disputes, supervising rents and an overall concern with her personal defense of the Paston territory."²⁹

Labarge cites numerous cases of women's assertiveness and engagement in active dispute (though the justification

²⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

²⁸ Hilton, The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages, p. 105.

²⁹ Ann S. Haskell, "The Paston Women on Marriage in Fifteenth Century England," Viator, 4 (1973), pp. 459-471. See also H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

is sometimes dubious). Women were indicted for selling stinking fish, stealing dough from male bakers and selling poultry above its true price. There is evidence of lively competition between men and women brewers and sometimes women would sell ale in uneven measure? Women were actively engaged in disputes over tax assessments and often women won the petition and ended up paying less. Cases are cited whereby women have contested unjust inheritance and examples can be found of cases cited by women against the Mayor of London.³⁰

While deviance is not the strongest evidence to support realistic female protest, studies in female crime in the fourteenth century show that female motives for violence were similar to those of men. While only a quarter of the female offenders were involved in violent attacks on the person, the bulk were concentrated in property crimes in the counties of Norfolk, Yorkshire and Northamptonshire. In a study of gaol delivery rolls for 1300-48, Barbara Hanawalt observes that "female motives for violence were those of material gain, personal grudges and familial arguments. There were 27.8 per cent of females accused of burglary.

³⁰ M. Wade Labarge, Women in Medieval Life (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), p.p. 155-156. Labarge cites the "case of Joanna Hext, jeweller, who admitted that 'for hatred and wantonness...she had accused Whittington of owing her large sums of money'."

compared to 23.4 per cent of males."³¹ While a variety of motives are cited and the psychopathological aspect of crime is complex, the fact that women were equally engaged in active opposition (albeit deviance) offers a challenge to the idea of subjugation or submissiveness in a dominant-subordinate relationship.

Some evidence exists with regard to the existence of organized conscious protest in the areas of religion and the church. That women were capable of opposing certain restrictive norms and values inherent in the existing social order, is evident by the emancipatory activities of women witnessed in the religious orders. Paul Johnson comments, that "women who entered nunneries in fourteenth century England were often considered radical and rebellious. Johann Busch, the Augustinian reformer, held a commission from the Council of Basle to tackle recalcitrant nuns and monks. However, when he attempted to read out a disciplinary charge he was besieged by rebellious nuns who lay on the pavement chanting: 'In the Midst of Life We are in Death'."³² Johnson observes that "Busch had to use physical violence to control the nuns and came across similar opposition to reform in

³¹ Barbara A. Hanawalt, "The Female Felon in the Fourteenth Century England," in Women in Medieval Society, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), pp. 125-140.

³² Paul Johnson, A History of Christianity (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976, 1982), p. 239.

seven out of twenty-four nunneries."³³ Similarly, the response of women in millenium movements, supports the notion that women as a group were capable of intelligent and articulate protest. There was a large representation of women in the movement of the Free Spirit which spread rapidly through Europe in the later middle ages and, the movement seems to have appealed particularly to unmarried women in the lower and middle classes. Cohn notes, "these self-appointed beggars were contemptuous of easy-going monks and friars, were fond of interrupting church services and impatient of ecclesiastical discipline."³⁴

From the latter evidence, it must be concluded that women as a group were frequently aware of their "under-represented status" with respect to relationships with the opposite sex and they were conscious of the effect they could have with respect to change. Women in these socio-religious movements seem to have been forceful and articulate in expressing opposition to ecclesiastical authority. Cohn observes, "again and again, we find the clergy who had to combat these people, dismayed by the subtlety and eloquence of their teaching and by the skill with which they handled abstruse arguments."³⁵

³³ Ibid., p. 239.

³⁴ Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1957, 1972), p. 159.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

Whether or not there existed a progressive conflict in the relationship between women and the male dominated political, social and economic order cannot be empirically determined. But one sees that women were neither invisible, inaudible nor unheard. Evidence reveals an articulated consciousness, an ability to handle abstract and consecutive argument and willingness to engage in open dispute relative to rights and status. In any argument about the presence of dominant-subordinate relations between men and women of the lower and middle classes, a comprehensive analysis would be necessary to determine the exact nature of female response to male subjugation. What is apparent from the preceding historical evidence is that any restraint which may have been imposed on reciprocal men-women relations was subject to challenge. This is evident from women's oppositional behaviour at the local courts, in deviant acts, in socio-religious protests, in the desire for economic independence and in the daily living and working experience.

Structural opportunities did exist for the expression of protest and opposition relative to the subordinate status of women. The social system was flexible and provided mechanisms to allow for adjustment to imbalanced conditions. The various forms of oppositional behaviour by women served to adjust existing inequalities of status and power. Moreover, if conflict existed as a positive and unifying condition, then something is indicated with regard to the existence of an equal and intimate partnership in married

relations. There is the possibility that marriage in the lower and middle classes, despite established assumptions and practices of a male-governed society, existed as a partnership based on the co-existence of mutuality and intimate relations. Given these latter considerations, the remainder of this discussion will consider further historical evidence with respect to the conditions of reciprocity, conflict and intimacy in lower and middle class married life.

In the daily life of the peasant, it is apparent that marital role relationships were characterised by interdependence and cooperation. In the village, ploughing was a partnership between husband and wife. "The wife had a place in reaping, binding, haymaking as well as milking cows and the making of butter and cheese."³⁶ In Eileen Power's account of Bodo the peasant, we find an interesting view of role congruence. We learn how "Bodo rises with his son before dawn to work on the feudal estate."³⁷ He joins friends, ploughs all day and eats with fellow ploughmen. Meantime Bodo's wife is busy managing the house and dairy yard in a joint effort to earn the rent to pay to the feudal steward. Women in the lower and middle classes were full-time workers,

³⁶E. Lamond, ed., "Walter of Henley's Husbandry" (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1890), pp. 82-83.

³⁷Eileen Power, Medieval People (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 46.

and it is evident that their tasks were essential to the overall functioning of the family unit. They shared in the agricultural labour of haymaking, weeding, reaping and mowing, and were also engaged in the domestic tasks of weaving, brewing, spinning, baking and cooking.

Most villages contained a few craftsmen, a miller, carpenter, tinker and a butcher. One notes the necessity for wives of village craftsmen also to share in the daily labour. The wife of a craftsman had to know his job as well as he and often worked as his assistant. Power observes, "in daily life the man relied on the woman for the comfort of his home and the management of affairs in his absence. The wife had to understand her husband's job so as to take his place. As we descend the social scale, we do not find the role of women declining. On the contrary, her activity and her importance in the family is all the greater for the modesty of her possessions."³⁸ Wives were frequently sworn into the craft-guilds and shared in the duties of trade as well as those which were domestic. Widows often continued with their dead husband's trade. Many married women also were engaged in separate occupations and indeed were held responsible, quite independently of their husbands, when there was a trade dispute. The wife would not be covered by

³⁸ Eileen Power, Medieval Women, ed. M.M. Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 53.

her husband and was not responsible for his debts. "The world of the tradeswoman, whether she was a wife working with her husband in the family business or a widow in charge of it, a wife with a separate trade of her own, or a single working woman, was very different from that of her rich neighbour. She was much busier, since she herself worked hard at the trade, often supervised the workshop, but was still responsible for the children and the household."³⁹

The tradeswoman was responsible for the same hours and conditions of work, she was expected to produce equal quality of craftwork, produce reliable goods and service, and was responsible for the same fines to the guild or corporation as those of her husband.

One observes that there are obvious conditions of interdependence and mutuality in the preceding evidence of marital relationships. This indicates some degree of change and adjustment from purely contracted marital expectations. We have seen that women were quite capable of opposition with respect to the unequal balance of power, and it can be postulated that this ability to express opposition positively functioned to allow reciprocal relations between husband and wife.

Undoubtedly the tradeswomen worked in close physical proximity to their husbands. Often they shared the same

³⁹ Labarge, Women in Medieval Life, p. 148.

work, the same hours, mutual goals and values with respect to work performance, and the subsequent reward and failure which accompany any life task. The interdependence of roles and congruent values implies a degree of sharing and a certain level of required trust. The wife's ability to make decisions, share in work production and manage the business in her husband's absence, must be viewed in the context of her husband's recognition and approval. It would appear that the couple had achieved some acceptable compromise with regard to the balance of dominance, acceptance of mutual responsibility and role reciprocity. For there was no place for avoidance or escape from daily domestic work issues and one cannot assume a complacent routine unhampered by struggle. "The merchant woman shared time with her husband, their journeymen, apprentices and the buying public."⁴⁰

Our knowledge of the interactive process by which the discrepancy of power in contracted marriage was re-adjusted is restricted to literary representation of marital dialogue, and will be discussed in a later chapter. However, there is still much to be gained from a close examination of the nature and practice of guild relationships. There is much evidence to support the notion that marriage did not thrive as an association based on purely economic contract and the

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 148.)

dominant-subordinate status of men and women. Instead it functioned with an overriding concern for intrinsic rewards such as approval, compassion, respect and intimacy. The guild system rather than having a purely economic focus was in every way social. It has not been established when the word 'gild' became applicable to brotherhoods and societies but it is understood to have two meanings, "geld" a payment (with a secondary use, money), and "gild" a brotherhood. The principles associated with the formation of guilds were "principally those of mutual self-help and a manly independence which could think of the rights of others."⁴¹

Guilds were essentially sworn brotherhoods which rested upon oath and pledge, and, according to Kemble, "offered a noble resistance to episcopal and baronial tyranny which formed the nursing cradles of popular liberty."⁴² What is important to this discussion is that the guild functioned by bringing its members together in common sympathy, social charity and simple Christian principles of brotherly love. With respect to the latter, the main objective appears to have been social rather than religious. Mutual assistance and justice were the principal objects of the guild and it seems to have functioned much like a family system with

⁴¹Toulmin Smith, ed., English Gilds, The Early English Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1895, 1963), XX.

⁴²Ibid., XXX.

'togetherness' as the principal focus for its operation. All members of the individual member's family belonged to the guild. In fact membership seems to have consisted of families almost exclusively. Membership of women in most guilds was restricted to wives, widows and daughters, so one has to visualize a corporation of multi-family networks. Family members were cared for and protected, neighbourly conduct was demanded, and all family crises were acknowledged and assisted.

"Each new member took an oath of obedience and was received lovingly with a kiss of peace."⁴³ One observes that both men and women were required to follow the same rules and the emphasis rested on mutuality rather than any apparent separation of the sexes. The Guild of Garlekeith of London was begun in 1375 to nourish good fellowship of both men and women: "to noriche more loue bytwene þe bretheren and sustren of þe bretherhede."⁴⁴ However, there is also an implied assumption of male and female conflict: "ne broper ne s(uster of þe sai)d bretherhede ne schal nocht debat with oper."⁴⁵

One observes that one in five guilds refer to resolution or the need for resolution in male-female disputes.

⁴³Ibid., XXXI.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 4.

Often the ordinance demanded reconciliation by the offenders themselves or mediation was undertaken by an alderman or another guild official. The Gild of St. Katherine refers to discord between "bretheren and sisteren" and judges it a "matter to be set before the gild."⁴⁶ The Stratford Gild imposes fines for any brother or sister who quarrel or "stir up" a quarrel.⁴⁷ The Gild of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, stipulates that an "alderman shall appease quarrels and forward bretheren and theren shall be punished,"⁴⁸ and the Gild of the Annunciation states that "quarrels shall be put into arbitration and whoever is found wrong, shall make amends."⁴⁹

One notes that in all sixteen cases reviewed here reference is made equally to both bretheren and sisteren. In no instance are "sisteren" singled out as instigators of dispute. The offending parties are merely identified as "whosoever", and one must always take this in the context that mutual assistance and justice were the principal objects of guild ordinance.

In a similar way there is an equally persistent pre-occupation with the issue of fairness and fair exchange. The

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 217.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 268.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 270.

nature of reciprocity appears to be based on mutual obligations of trust, and purely utilitarian assumptions are notably absent. While it can be seen that some rational consideration is evident with respect to calculation of costs and maximization of material benefit, often the transactions involve an exchange association which goes beyond materialistic gain. For example, the Guild of Berwick of Tweed imposed sanctions on "underhand dealings", and "forestalling" the market was prohibited. Also, buyers of herrings were to share them at cost price with the neighbours present at buying. The guild demanded that amends be made for goods that were misrepresented by false samples, and insisted that profit and loss be equally shared. Fair sales were a priority and "if one buys goods misled by false top samples, amends must be made."⁵⁰

Sometimes there was a curious blend of reference to rational considerations and non rational concerns. For example, the guild of St. Peter was equally concerned with "help to poor bretheren, rendering of accounts, quarrelling between men and women and the Dean's salary."⁵¹ While clearly there were "dayes of spekyngges tokedere for here commune profyte,"⁵² the principal ideas of the guild

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 342.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵² Ibid., p. 67.

involved proof of trustworthiness, just dealings, charitable works, reciprocity of roles and family harmony.

The Gild of Exeter demanded that no craftsman entice away any man's apprentice, and the Gild of Worcester demanded that bakers were not to take advantage of the common folk in buying corn nor were work people to be employed to the hurt of the poor community in the town. It also stipulated that "payment in kind to labourers in cloth making, is greatly to their hurt."⁵³

It would seem that economic gain is inextricably interwoven with definite moral values and rules for behaviour. This obviously separates purely utilitarian interests from the Guild code. There is an overriding concern with intrinsic rewards such as approval, respect, compassion and loyalty.

Indeed the importance of relationships based on mutual trust appears to have been an important consideration with respect to the overall functioning of the guild. The nature of social brotherhood and the qualifications for belonging to it rested on the qualities of personal commitment, affection, and aspirations of trustworthiness.

Clearly, the idea of payment in money or kind was an important item. Stewards, aldermen and others were required annually to render their true accounts of profit, but it is

⁵³ Ibid., p. 383.

noted that in most cases the brotherhood oath (a kiss of love, charity and peace) was of greater concern. It may be concluded from the preceding discussion that while guild ordinances functioned for tradespeople who had some utilitarian interest, guilds functioned predominantly on the principle of social exchange. Mindful that in all social exchange relationships the opportunity for opposition must exist with respect to the differential of power, it is observed that the balance of power in guild relationships was distributed equally between men and women. Moreover, "in at least seventy-two guilds women were members on an equal basis with men."⁵⁴ This has to suggest something with regard to the frequency and intensity of daily interaction.

If conflict or quarrelling existed, it functioned to strengthen and unify exchange association, and this seems to have applied particularly to men-women relations. All disputes between men and women were expected to terminate in peace and harmony following mediation between the couple or in the presence of a third party. If the 'norm of reciprocity' was violated the expression of conflict functioned to re-adjust that violation. If assumptions of female subordination and male-governed norms existed at the macro-level of medieval social organization, the nature and practice of

⁵⁴ Mary R. Beard, Women as a Force in History (New York: Octagon Books, 1946, 1976), p. 234.

the guild brotherhood would still be a marked deviation from the legal ideal.

While the subordinate status of life for lower and middle class wives may have been predetermined by feudal law, it is evident that the opportunity existed for restoring the inequality in dominant-subordinate male-female relations. Discrepancy between the legal assumption and actual marital behaviour, between the legal norm and mutually defined norms, was a practical reality. It then becomes possible to suggest that marriage existed as a unified, intimate and reciprocal partnership based on diffused unspecified obligations of trust. With the latter argument in mind, let us look at the marriage of John and Margaret Paston. If we examine the relationship in some detail, it is apparent that married life for the Pastons was characterised by a complementary reciprocity in role-sharing, shared values and a kind of intimacy which can only be achieved by the gradual expansion of trust. The unexpected dilemmas of domestic life, physical hardship, fear of safety and unfaltering struggle seem to have contributed to a relationship which, while initially founded upon economic contract, grew and expanded to arrive at love and intimate concern.

The initial marriage contract of John and Margaret

Paston indicates little reference to individual concern.⁵⁵

The family had only recently ascended the social scale to the gentry classes and therefore the betrothal of Margaret to John was undoubtedly a useful economic transaction.⁵⁶

Justice William Paston sought every opportunity to acquire more wealth and elevate his position and his own marriage to Agnes, heiress of Sir Edmund Berry, had resulted in the acquisition of the manors of East Tuddenham, Marlinford, Stanstede and Harlingbury. Similarly, the arrangement for William's son, John, to marry Margaret Mauteby was the result of a candid business transaction for it meant the acquisition of more property such as the manors of Fritton, Mauteby, Sparham. Furthermore, Margaret's mother Margery was related to Sir John Falstaff which must have been a careful consideration with regard to the Paston family's desire to elevate their social status. In any case, there appears to have been little concern for Margaret's opinion about her marriage to John and, it must be conceded that (Margaret's) charm was that she was the sole heiress of John Mauteby of

⁵⁵H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 234. Bennett observes that from 1449-1459 there are continuous references to negotiations for the hand of John Paston's sister with material interests as the primary concern.

⁵⁶John Paston I was the grandson of Clement Paston, "a good pleyn husband". For a genealogical description of the Paston family, see The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

Norfolk."⁵⁷

According to law, the foundation of the marriage of John Paston rested upon economic contract and an assumed subordinate status for his wife. Yet if inequality or an imbalance of power existed at the time of the marriage settlement, Margaret Paston appears to have been quite capable of opposing it. For despite the assumptions of law, the Paston marriage appears to have functioned singularly on principles of reciprocity and an equalitarian partnership. We learn that, "in addition to the management of her own large family, Margaret oversaw the operation of the several landholdings in Norfolk which comprised the bulk of the Paston estate. When ownership of the land was challenged, she convened a court to establish the family's right to the land and entered knowledgeably and confidently into whatever legal affairs arose at the local level."⁵⁸ Moreover, references to family dispute by Margaret's children lead us to believe that she was quite able to oppose anything which could be perceived as injustice. A letter from John Paston II to John Paston III indicates that the atmosphere was not always peaceful and harmonious in the Paston household with respect to Margaret's behaviour:

⁵⁷Frances and Joseph Gies, Women in the Middle Ages (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), p. 212.

⁵⁸Haskell, "The Paston Women on Marriage in Fifteenth Century England," p. 460.

She (Margaret) purposeyth to go in-to
 the contre and ther to soiorn onys-a-yen.
 Many gwarrellys (ar) pyekyd to get my
 brodyr E. and me ought of hyr howse.
 We go not to bed vnchedyn lyghtly.⁵⁹

If injustice did exist with regard to the contracted marriage settlement, it can be argued that Margaret's demonstrated independance and outspokenness served as a positive function with regard to existing imbalances. For we learn that the marriage partnership thrived on mutual support, shared responsibilities and unquestioning mutual trust.

During one of his frequent absences from the manorial estate, John writes to Margaret. He compliments her, showing great respect for her successful defense of the family territory following a violent siege:

I thank of yowr labour and besynes with
 the unruly felechep that cam befor yow
 on Monday last past, whereof I herd
 report....And in God feyth ye aquyt yow
 rygth wel and discretly and herttyly to
 your wurchep and myn and to the sháme
 of your adversarijs.⁶⁰

Correspondence between the couple indicates that Margaret was independant and proud of her role as an equal marital participant. She writes to John narrating her part in events such

⁵⁹ Norman Davis, ed., The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, no. 353, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). Hereafter P.L.

⁶⁰ P.L. no. 168.

as territorial disputes, fights for cattle ownership, and rent litigation with the full confidence that John will approve of her difficulties and accomplishments. On one occasion rent collection is a concern. She writes:

And as for gadryng of mony (I sey) nevyr
 (a) werse seson, for Rychard Calle seyth
 he can get but lytyll in substans of that
 is owyng, nowthyr of yowyr lyuelod nor of
 Fastolfys.⁶⁰

Aside from the practical considerations of instrumental family functioning, Margaret frequently writes to ask John to buy personal family items in a manner not unfamiliar to the modern day wife. There are letters requesting the purchase of a "needed hat, a pesse of blac lacys, and some largere cappys for be chylderen."⁶¹ A further request is made for a "govne cloth from London mystyrdevyllers" for "I haue no govne, to werre bis wyntyr but my blake and my grene."⁶² Yet on another occasion, Margaret can just as easily request the purchase of arms to defend the family territory and asks John to bring "crosse bowis, wyndacis to bynd (them with) and quarell."⁶³ (arrows).

Intrinsic concerns in the Paston union are also evident.

⁶⁰P.L. no. 168.

⁶¹P.L. no. 127.

⁶²P.L. no. 125.

⁶³P.L. no. 130.

Margaret's letters to John make frequent compassionate reference to his welfare. On hearing that her husband is ill while staying in London, Margaret writes with the familiar anxiety of a caring spouse: "Yf I mythe have hade my wylle xulde a seyne yow er dys tyme. I wolde ze wern at hom"⁶⁴ And this tone of compassion is reciprocated on a separate occasion when John, on hearing that his wife is ill, writes:

Jon (hobbys) tellith me pat ye be seekly,
 wech me lekith (not) to here, prayi(n)g
 yow hartyly bat ye take what may do yow
 eese and spare not....

John's concern is so strong that he continues to comfort and reassure his sick wife:

And jn cas I come not home within thre
 wekis, I pray yow to come to me; and Wykes
 hath promisid to kepe the plase in yowr
 absens.⁶⁵

Indeed there were obligations of both an intrinsic and instrumental nature, but never is there any hint of coercive behaviour. Rather there is more of a gentle, willing reciprocity of roles and mutual expectations. The authority given to the respective spouse is viewed as legitimate and acceptable. Margaret on numerous occasions vows to do all she can for John while he is away. On an occasion following a

⁶⁴P.L. no. 126.

⁶⁵P.L. no. 74.

siege by Lord Molynes men, Margaret writes requesting further instructions. Although exhausted and weary, she vows to do "all I can or may in all your matters."⁶⁶

Sometimes, the only consideration for Margaret is the emotional desire to see her husband again. Despite the practical, instrumental reason for his practice of law in London, Margaret can write chidingly:

I may non leyser have to do wrytyn half
a quarter so meche as I xulde seyn to
yow yf I myth speke wyth yow

and she comfortably adds:

I thanke yow pat ze wolde wochesaffe to
remember my gyrdyl, and pat ze wolde
wryte to me at bis tyme....⁶⁷

The initial marriage contract between John and Margaret Paston encompassed strictly utilitarian concerns and an assumption of the dominant-subordinate status of husband and wife. If inequality existed at the time of marriage, Margaret's demonstrated independence, her ability to oppose injustice and the recognition of her as an equal partner by John, permitted a reciprocal relationship based on unspecified obligations of trust. This created the possibility for the expansion and generation of trust which in turn permitted a

⁶⁶H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England, p. 65.

⁶⁷P.L. no. 126

unified and intimate partnership.

We have spoken so far only of the impact on married life as it relates to contracted settlements with direct reference to land ownership and economic concerns. In general, the medieval church supported marriage as an economic settlement through its policies which placed men in a dominant position over women and emphasized the importance of chaste sexuality. The lay economic model of marriage regulated sexual impulses in the interest of patrimony and subjugated women to protect property. It also treated adultery as sinful. However, there lay some measure of agreement between the church and the laity since both recognized the dangers of adultery and the merit of female virtue.⁶⁸

However, Gratian questioned the idea that a daughter be given in marriage against her will and taught that even if one married only to satisfy lust, one was married.⁶⁹ Noonan

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Parrinder, Sex in the World's Religions (London: Sheldon Press, 1980), p. 214. St. Paul gave important approval to sexual relations within marriage (Cor.1:7). He denounced male and female homosexuality: 'women changed the natural use into that which is against nature'. (Rom:1:26). The subjugation of women was also taught. They were the weaker vessels and were told to learn in silence and were reminded that Eve was the first to be deceived into transgression though women could be 'saved through child-bearing'. (1 Pet.3.1; Tim.2:9). St. Augustine believed that marriage was exclusively for the purposes of procreation.

⁶⁹ Discussion on Gratian's capitulum proper is taken largely from John T. Noonan, 'Power to Choose' in Viator, vol. 4, 1973. Noonan gives an excellent account of Gratian's attempt to interpret St. Paul, Ambrose and St. Augustine with respect to free will as it related to marital choice.

observes that "underlying this deference to the individual was the conviction that consent makes marriage."⁷⁰ Gratian's notion of consent denominated marital affection, an emotionally influenced assent to the other as husband or wife. For Gratian, where this was wanting there was no marriage. Although this was largely unsupported by St. Paul, and Gratian had no clear warrant in the New Testament, he argued strongly that the consent implied individual freedom. He used as evidence two judgements by Urban II on forced marriage. Urban II had declared that marriage could only be authorized if the girl in question was willing, and declared that "those whose body is one ought to be one of free spirit."⁷¹ That these arguments were held offers some support to the notion that freedom of choice was valued. If this value existed, it had to exist in marriage, even when the marriage had been formally contracted with minimal consent of the participants. The slightest notion that freedom of choice could be associated with the marital union must have had some effect on the day to day interaction in married life.

Even with the existence of formalized contracted marriage, there is also evidence to suggest a high incidence of clandestine marriages. While the formal ceremony of marriage

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 425.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 421.

may have been considered necessary for the lay economic model of marriage, "if both spouses admitted clandestine marriage, the church was bound to ratify it as if contracted in the sight of the church in the beginning."⁷² In a study of a fourteenth century Ely marriage register, Michael Sheehan notes that 89 out of 101 clandestine unions were conducted with no real punishment by the church and no real concern for uncovering them.⁷³

In the same vein evidence which supports medieval knowledge of contraceptive techniques also suggests that individual freedom of choice was seen as a quality necessary for a unified marriage. One observes that Aristotle's History of the Animals contains a section on contraception, and was translated in 1220 by Michael Scot's Canon of Medicine. Michael Scot's text reveals a significant list of contraceptive properties of plants. Noonan observes that while condemning the use of contraception, St. Augustine refers to the 'poisons of sterility' and St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the 'vice against nature as being one of several species of lust.'⁷⁴ John of Gaddesdan and Magnino of Milan also list

⁷²Ibid., p. 437.

⁷³Michael Sheehan, C.S.B., "The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register," Medieval Studies 33 (1971), p. 263.

⁷⁴John T. Noonan, Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 226.

contraceptives to avoid sterility, yet Noonan notes that "the kinds of extrinsic causes mentioned by these authors are so clearly the result of deliberate human choice, that the recital of them cannot be for diagnostic purposes only."⁷⁵

Summary and Conclusion

There is some evidence to suggest that women in the lower and middle classes were articulate, capable of protest and aware of their unequal position with respect to status and power. While there is no direct evidence of a radical conscious movement (in the sense of twentieth century radical protest), the assertive position witnessed in women's behaviour contradicts an historical image of stagnant complacency. This would also contradict the notion that the medieval social structure was a rigid system which entirely suppressed the incidence of conflict and opposition.

It can be argued that if women were relatively deprived of status and power because of feudal economic and political marriage laws, there was also a positive effort to restore unequal relations. "It is not possible to judge accurately the relative strength of a given contention or conflict issue."⁷⁶ Whether specific issues can be related to unequal-

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

⁷⁶ John Jackson, Community and Conflict (Toronto, Montreal: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p. 2. Jackson observes, "one seldom finds conflict situations initially

ity of power in marriage relations is not always apparent. However, it is apparent that alleged static relations of male dominance and female subordination were subject to conflict within the system, which in turn served as a positive mechanism for re-adjustment. Moreover, guild ordinances functioned not on sheer utilitarian principles but largely on the principle of social brotherhood or what has been termed in an earlier chapter "social exchange". Women took part in all of the proceedings and were subject to the same rules and penalties. Evidently they were neither inaudible nor unheard in asserting their opinions or in opposing perceived injustices, for frequently there is reference to quarrelling and the need for mediation between "bretheren" and "sisteren". These conditions of "opposition" appear to have been an integral part of the guild family network. We have seen that amidst rules for chastity, brotherly love, loyalty and trust, there is importance also given to conflict and its mediation. It is therefore argued that conflict between men and women with respect to perceived injustice or inequalities was a positive condition, which made equalitarian relationships possible, and which in turn promoted conditions for intimacy.

In a similar manner, we have seen that Margaret Paston

or overtly about status differentials. Conflict episodes, as we observe them take place over specific tangible issues. These issues as we observe them draw underlying values and status into play."

was independent, outspoken, tenacious and capable of opposing any form of injustice. Yet we see also that the marriage of John and Margaret Paston was a relationship characterised by the co-existence of reciprocity and sentiment. It has to be conceded that freedom of individual choice within marriage existed as a significant intrinsic value, despite existing incumbent marriage laws. There also seems to be some desire for freedom in sexual behaviour, as evidenced by clandestine marriage and adultery. In a married relationship recognition of sexual desire would create a more harmonious intimacy. (See also below on "The Merchant's Tale").

It is then concluded that relationships encompassing intrinsic considerations took precedent over those based purely on instrumental gain. Relationships of trust were fostered and gratification came from the exchange of approval, affection and respect. The co-existence of harmony and conflict (assuming the implied regularity of this occurrence is correct), suggests the opportunity for growth and expansion of male-female relationships. These conditions made possible a marriage relationship in which mutual sentiment could thrive, expand and flourish. To find expression of such mutual sentiment in the late Middle Ages, we shall now turn to the literary treatment of marriage.

CHAPTER III

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF LITERARY EVIDENCE

) The Deluge (Chester)
The Second Shepherd's Pageant (Wakefield)
The Annunciation (Coventry)

So far we have discussed conflict and reciprocity in medieval marriage from an historical perspective and we have concentrated on the deprivation of women with particular reference to feudal socio-economic marriage laws. For the remainder of the present study, these conditions will be examined by an analysis of the interactive process in literary representation of marital dialogue.

Literary treatments of marriage were undoubtedly influenced by the medieval socio-economic and political structure. The influence of the Church was also instrumental in shaping medieval literary ideas and, in general, it appears to have contributed to the socio-economic structure by supporting male dominance over women. In consequence, literary treatment of marriage in the later Middle Ages frequently reveals an anti-feminist attitude. Rarely does one encounter any significant contribution to marriage by women. It appears that medieval narratives were written favouring views like those of Juvenal who refers to the marital noose, Theophrastus, Lucretius and St. Jerome who viewed marriage as

merely a way to avoid fornication.¹

In consequence, literature of the later Middle Ages reflects patterns of marital discord which is frequently perceived as "providing rich opportunity for the deployment of a caricature, sometimes mischievous, sometimes sour."² This must be closely examined. While antifeminism was largely responsible for a tradition of social and personal satire that presented the woman as a cantankerous bully or an 'avaricious whore', one may still question the effect this had on the lower class medieval woman in the day to day

¹A useful selection of primary source materials, including two selections, "Marriage and The Good Women" and "The Anti-Feminist Tradition", is printed in Robert P. Miller, Chaucer's Sources and Backgrounds (New York, 1977, pp. 363-473. See also Rolfe Humphries trans., The Satires of Juvenal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958). In his sixth satire, "Against Women," Juvenal refers to the "drunkenness" of women, those who "bicker and quarrel," women's "vanity" and "labour pains on a golden bed." See W.H. Fremantle, trans., The Principal Works of St. Jerome (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1983: Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. St. Jerome refers to wives as "weaker vessels" and the bondage of wedlock which prevents men's prayers to God. St. Jerome's catalogue of "wicked wives" focuses on the distractions of marriage from a preferred life of chastity. See also Theophastus, The Golden Book on Marriage in the above source.

²H.P. Weisman, "Antifeminism and Chaucer's Characterization of Women," in Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. George D.E. Cononore (New York: New York, 1975), pp. 93-94. Weisman also provides evidence that the tradition of antifeminism may include any presentation of a woman's nature intended to conform her to male expectations. Weisman also gives an excellent account of the Old Eve and New Mary images of women in religious tradition and their counterparts in the two principal secular literature, the courtly and the bourgeois.

existence of domestic life.

How much did the conventional male sentiment (if this was a reflection of the dominant ideology) affect the self-image of the female spouse? If the submission of the female was essential in a dominant-subordinate male-female relationship, can the degree of ego deprivation be said to be relative or absolute?³ Certainly it may be acknowledged that the image of the perverse, sour "Old Eve" existed as an ever-present reality for medieval women; moreover, the imposed stigma of the Church undoubtedly affected the daily relationships of women who were branded incapable of loyalty, judgement, trust, physical attraction and positive emotion.

Given these realities, it follows that lower and middle class family life had to encompass some degree of marital struggle and imbalance in order to effect restoration and repair of ego damage to women. In this respect literary representation of marital opposition may well have been in keeping with a tradition of social satire, but at the same time offered a realistic presentation of the result of a struggle for status and identification emerging from their particular role in that particular social system. Therefore

³Lewis A. Coser, Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1977). The notion of relative deprivation permits some opportunity for grievance whereas "absolute denotes termination or absence of conflict." See Coser's discussion on "Violence and the Social Structure," pp. 53-71.

the depicted struggle of lower and middle class wives in a world allegedly dominated by males is viewed here not as the work of "disgruntled malcontents" or "nagging bullies" but a reaction to incompatible values and a realistic "acting out" in response to their poorly represented position. To be sure the authors were undoubtedly familiar with Judeo-Christian theological teaching, but it is also unlikely that they were isolated or uncomprehending participants of local community and family life. In any realistic attempt to describe marriage, one surely had to consider the actual functioning of women, in the day to day domestic experience.

From a close observation of interaction between the fabliaux husband and wife, it is noted that patterns of opposition and conflict exist. There is also evidence of harmony and integration. The dialogue rarely terminates at a totally dysfunctional level of imbalance; conflict existed as a direct result of an ever present need for restoration of the balance of power. It therefore existed as an inherent and necessary process of domestic life. The material selected for study has been chosen to demonstrate by representative examples that lower class medieval marriage was governed by a reciprocity of common norms, values and roles. Where conflict existed in either its overt or covert manifestation, it served to effect a re-evaluation of existing behaviours and thus contributed towards marital stability.

A lesson of previous chapters is that social conflict

is inevitably interwoven with the necessity of a continuous re-evaluation of mutual roles, values and norms. Blau's theory of social exchange rests largely on the premise of existential expansion of trust relations, which when interwoven with periods of imbalance and opposition provides opportunity for integration and increased stability in primary relations. Here it will be argued that this condition can be witnessed in literary representations of marital interaction.

In the following discussion two particular conditions in lower and middle class medieval marriage have been selected for analysis. The first is the subordinate status of women. The second relates to the principle that marriage was an institution based primarily on economic transaction. While the traditional attitudes of male dominance and female subservience were complacently entrenched in the medieval social structure, it posed problems with regard to the reality of lived existence, since it can be argued that conditions of inferiority and dominance are rarely fused or static for any duration of time. Since the medieval wife therefore entered marriage with an innate sense of her subordinate role and inferior status, there had to evolve some mechanism of coping or defence either by pre-existing socialization or existential daily interactive experience. It will be seen in the literature that there is a consistent preoccupation with restoration of the female status which generally takes the pattern of the arousal of hostility, the need to control and a sub-

sequent restoration of equilibrium.

While the historical reality of the economic determinant related to marriage cannot be questioned, it cannot be assumed that simply rational principles of economic exchange were observed. The question then arises as to how rational principles of behaviour become linked with the non-rational components of sexual intimacy, indecision, compromise and the complexity of hostile behaviour with its accompanying components of trust. Such considerations therefore demand analysis of the link or connection between rational relations of economic exchange and mutual, non-coercive intimate relations.

It will be seen in the following discussion of literary passages that there evolves a sequential pattern. The socialization of the spouse reveals traditional attitudes. Thus marriage is initially based on self-interest, and economic gain and transactions are principally based on rational considerations. These provoke behavioural conditions of mistrust, for as the relationship expands and progresses, a strain is imposed by the failure to receive intrinsic rewards which results in conflict and opposition. The resultant opposition or struggle permits re-evaluation and a new set of norms and values emerge which permits a relationship, based on both rational and irrational components of human exchange. This in turn permits a relationship of increased stability and the subsequent development of mutual trust. Thus the

condition of intimacy in married relations then becomes possible.

Let us now turn to a consideration of some guild pageants. In an earlier discussion, it has been seen that guild relationships functioned on the principle of what has been termed "social exchange". Moreover, conflict, conciliation and reciprocity were an inherent part of guild life with respect to men-women relations. In the context of the present discussion it must be emphasised that guild pageants were financed, produced and performed by members of the trade guilds. Guild pageants were short biblical plays which were acted in the form of a procession by using a mobile wagon which would move to appropriate vantage points to accommodate local audiences. While little is known about the authors of the pageants, they were apparently in a position to describe the process and interaction of marital dialogue.

David Bevington notes the "realistic" nature of family relations in the Noah pageant: "Husband and wife flail at one another in slapstick scenes of comic physical abuse and indulge in domestic quarrels that must have seemed vividly relevant to the play's fifteenth century audience."⁴ Let us now turn to The Deluge by the Chester author where we are

⁴David Bevington, ed., Medieval Drama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975), p. 290.

reminded early in the dialogue of conventional male values, attitudes to the medieval social system and the place of wives within it.

Representative illustrations of conventional anti-feminist sentiment appear early enough so one must assume that some internalisation by the author of anti-feminist sentiment existed. Noah is the hen-pecked victim of an oppositional cantankerous wife,⁵ with his own style of pulpit rhetoric:

Lord that women be crabbed aye
And never are meke that dare I saye
This well sene by me to daye
In witness of yow each one.⁶

The Deluge
105-108

Earlier in the dialogue the character of Mrs. Noah sarcastically mimics what we have read and understood to be the dominant cultural attitude towards married women. The strain and discrepancy encountered between theory and fact appears evident. Speaking for the other three wives as well as herself, she claims:

⁵A.C. Cawley, ed., "Noah's Flood," in Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays (New York: Everyman's Library, Dutton, 1965), p.35. Cawley notes, "Noah's wife is utterly unlike the orthodox theological idea of her as a meek and virtuous prototype of Mary."

⁶Hermann Deimling, ed., The Chester Plays (London, New York, Toronto: The Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, 1893, 1959), p. 52. All subsequent quotations referring to "The Deluge" will be taken from the same text.

And we shall bring tumber to,
 For we mon nothing els doe;
 Women be weake to vnderfoe
 Any great travayle.

(65-88)

Aers comments that the "attitudes of subservience on the part—the part of women and unquestioning domination on the part of men supported male aggression" existed "in a culture of discourse quite alien to self-criticism or reflexivity."⁷ But it is evident that Mrs. Noah is at least made aware of the relative lack of value attributed to her mode of productivity and her undesirable position within the social structure. The conventional rhetoric of the established dominant patriarchal culture should not prevent the realistic functioning of her daily work.⁸

The alleged subordinate group, the Noah family wives, also reveal that they have internalized assumptions and values with regard to the theoretical model for marriage practice, but their very method of assertiveness in the form of competitive rivalry with their respective husbands shows theory and domestic practice to reveal discrepancy. As if

⁷Aers, p. 152.

⁸Labarge, pp. 149-152.

Labarge notes the significant number of women engaged in the rural and urban working force. Women were active in spinning, weaving, brewing, and candlemaking. "They were generally considered such an essential part of the family economic unit, that they paid half of any tax imposed."

to attempt to restore the inequality in their marriages, the Noah family wives engage in activities that are indispensable to the family corporation.

We note the wives concerted attempt to equate their instrumental tasks as equal in importance to those of their respective husbands. Shem's wife responds to Mrs. Noah's ridicule of the male perception of 'weakness':

Here is a good hackstock;
On this yow may hew and knock;
Shall non be Idle in this flock.

(70-72)

Ham's wife responds:

And I will go to gather sliche,
The ship for to cleane and piche;
Anoynted yt must be in every stich,
Board, tree and pyn.

(73-75)

To which Japheth's wife responds:

And I will gather chippes here
To make a fire for yow in feere
And for to dight your dynner.

(77-79)

Thus attainment of family goals will be established through the function of cooperative tasks by the wives. It is apparent, moreover, that competition and a related degree of collaboration between husbands and wives is also an integral part of the family functioning. Husband Shem claims:

Anne axe I haue, by my crowne,
As sharpe as any in all this towne.

(53-55)

Ham has a hatchet wondrous keen and husband Japheth is skilled enough to use a hammer noiselessly (60). Thus there exists the implicit suggestion that the female participants are aware and act upon an unequal power and status distribution by achieving task competence equal to their husbands.

The actual Noah and Mrs. Noah marital dyad reveals something of the hierarchical structure of the husband-wife relationship. Noah's tone implies that wife and children owe unquestioning obedience and that husbands retain a God-given right to dominate:

Wife, in this castle we shall be kept;
My childer and thou, I wold, in'leaped.
(97-105)

But Noah's tone of authority becomes a focus for conflict for it carries with it the expectation that Mrs. Noah will submissively comply. Yet Noah's wife responds:

In faith, noe, I had as lief thou sleppit,
For all they frankish fare,
I will not doe after thy red.
(99-101)

On another occasion Noah attempts a somewhat confused blend of verbal coercion and deference in an effort to gain cooperation and to regain control:

Good wife, doe now as I the bydd
(102)

But Mrs. Noah perceives his confusion and redirects it so that it becomes a verbal counter-attack:

By Christ, not or I see more neede,
 Though thou stand all the day and stare.
 (104-105)

In fact those values which Noah considers important (meekness, compliance, a submissive response to his authority, unquestioning acceptance and recognition of his decision-making capabilities), in reality provoke and perpetuate marital conflict. For the strain to opposition throughout the dialogue repeatedly indicates constant and profound disagreement with regard to mutually accepted rules for fair and just behaviour. This is manifested further by the increasing intensity and duration of the conflict struggle as we witness an escalation of successive attempts by Mrs. Noah to rectify her unequal position of status and power.

Again Noah attempts to solicit compliance in the recognised form of address for husbands, and this time combines directives with his knowledge of theological and anti-feminist rhetoric:

Wife, come in! Why standes thou here?
 Thou art ever froward, that dare I sweare,
 Come in, on god's half!..

(193-195)

But Mrs. Noah increases the intensity of her opposition and rejects Noah's position even further. Her previous rejection, "go to sleep, I will not do as they rede," (100-101) is intensified with a more damaging attempt to reverse the dominant role:

Yea, sir, set up your sayle,
 And rowe forth with evill heale!

(197-198)

In the light of consistent absence of merit for Mrs. Noah's point of view (on no occasion is there evidence that her interests are understood or explored by Noah), she places her husband in a compromising position of assured failure by refusing to leave town. There are after all greater benefits than marriage to Noah:

But I have my gossips everichon,
 One footē further I will not gone;
 they shall not drowne, by' St. John,
 And I may save their lyfe.
 they loved me full well, by Christ;
 but thou wilt let them in they chist,
 els rowe forth, Noe, whether thou list,
 and get thee a new wife.

(200-208)

The lack of consideration towards her value of fairness ultimately provokes total rejection of the relationship; moreover, Mrs. Noah sees higher rewards by comparison, for her friends can give more: "They loved me full well, by Christ" (205).

The distancing between the couple increases physically and psychologically as the couple's children become a vehicle for communication. Noah's wife:

Sonne, goe again to him and say:
 I will not come therein to daye.

(217-218)

Values which her husband may consider important are now of little consequence. She continues talking to her 'gossips':

here is a potell of malmesy, good and stronge,
 it will rejoye both hart and tong;
 though noy think us neuer so long
 Yet wee will drinke alyke.

(233-236)

The interactive struggle between the Noah couple culminates ultimately in physical violence. Mrs. Noah is physically coerced into the boat by her son Shem and the struggle terminates with her final retaliatory gesture of "boxing Noah on the ear" (246).

The sequence of struggle should be reviewed. The marital system has revealed inequality through failure to receive expected rewards of position, self-esteem and social status by the female spouse. There evolves a condition of conflict which effects interactive catharsis, which in turn permits a subsequent reorganization of roles and values. Thus change occurs promoting equilibrium and stability.

The sacrifice of time and self to the unified attainment of family goals and maintenance of a stable, secure household is mutually valued. The family value, physical methods of communication (albeit that the evidence rests with the act of Noah's wife boxing her husband on the ears), but his complacent: "Ah! marry this is hot!" (246), indicates familiarity with her method of communicating anger. The family can demonstrate competence in the management of extreme tension (they do build a boat despite opposition and marital discord).

It is noteworthy that despite the author's illustration of struggle in the Noah family, there is no indication of further imbalance following the demonstration of successive stages of opposition. Noah is bestowed with "grace", "safety",

in apparent harmonious unity with his wife and children. While it may be conceded that the concluding stanzas focus essentially on Noah's relationship with God, the closure also emphasizes marital peace and harmony. It should be emphasized however, that while harmony is offered as a final resolution, there is the implicit understanding that the Noah family's world will encompass both of the conditions of harmony and conflict. Noah:

Lord, God in majesty
 that such grace has granted me,
 Where all was lorne, save to be,
 therefore now I am bowne,
 My wife, my Childer, my meanye
 with sacrifice to honoure thee.
 (305-310)

Given the limitations of representative marital dialogue in late medieval literature, one is aware that a somewhat static picture is presented of family life. However, it is clear that the interactive marital struggle terminates with some reassessment of values and roles in the ultimate illustration of marital equilibrium. One is mindful that aside from the depicted conflict, there are also numerous incidences of Noah family cooperation. Some values, resources and roles are clearly reciprocated. One notes the interdependent sharing of valued tasks and its accompanied value of sharing labour, and the family does succeed in building a boat through demonstrated cooperative effort.

Rarely does one encounter the suggestion that medieval dramatic representation of marriage could encompass intimacy

with equal husband-wife relations. We learn instead of the misery of the "sely wedmen" in The Second Shepherd's Pageant. In addition there is a notable tone of sympathy for those husbands without will as there is for Joseph the "beguiled fool" and the "ever froward" Noah's wife in The Deluge.

That the assumptions of the dominant ideology were most probably internalised into realistic conformity at least as a focus for comradeship is evident as one encounters in Scene I of The Second Shepherd's Play a group of shepherds lamenting the error of "bondage" in marriage.

Bot as far as I ken, or yit as I go,
 We sely wedmen dre mekill wo: (wretched/suffer)
 We have sorrow then and then, it fallys oft so.
 Sely Copyle, oure heñ, both to and fro (silly)
 She kakyls;
 Bot begin she to crok,
 To groyne or to klok, (groan/cluck)
 Wo is him is oure cok,
 For he is in the shakyls.⁹

(64-72)

The visual image evoked is that of a lazy, irresponsible female spouse. Husbands are expected to behave like "sely wedmen" or are shackled, and those who fail to do so may encounter social disapproval by neighbour and kin. There is apparent consensus on the role of husbands. They are expected to talk about the trials of controlling unruly wives, have

⁹ Wakefield, "The Second Shepherd's Pageant," in Medieval Drama, ed. David Bevington, the University of Chicago (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975). All subsequent quotations from "The Second Shepherd's Pageant" will be taken from the same source.

minimal decision-making power and fulfill their sexual role by participation in the production of unwanted children:

These men that ar wed have not all
 thare will.
 When they are full hard sted, they
 sigh full still.
 God wayte, they ar led full hard
 and full ill;
 In bower nor in bed they say nocht
 thertill.
 This tide
 My parte have I fun,
 I know my lesson:
 Woe is him that is bun,
 For he must abide.

(I.73-81)

Sometimes there appears to be an overly zealous pre-occupation with the "errors" of their "wicked wives", which paradoxically reveals that an entirely different sentiment may be felt in the actual practice of marriage. There is an apparent discrepancy between what the husbands have learned socially and the actual practice of marriage in the following lines:

Bot now late inoure lifys - a
 mervell to me,
 That I think my hart rifys, sich
 wonders to see;
 What that destany drifys, it
 shuld so be -
 Som men will have two wifys,
 and som men thre
 In store.

(I.82-86)

The lines suggest that in reality the cost incurred for marriage and re-marriage is not by comparison higher than the profit of married life. But at this point the relative cost of group acceptance and approval seems to be higher than

individual admission of respective marital harmony. There is, moreover, a sense of competition and pride as to who can "win" the game of having the worst wife. When Mak the shepherd is asked about the welfare of his wife, he responds:

(She) Lys waltering - by the roode -
 by the fyere, lo! (sprawling)
 And a howse full of brude. She
 drinkys well, to(o);
 Ill spede othere good that she
 will do!
 Bot s(h)o
 Etys as fast as she can,
 And ilk yere that commys to man
 She bringys furth a lakan - (baby)
 And, some yeres, two.

(I.236-243)

Undoubtedly sharing conventional sentiment for the benefit of group approval takes precedent over the sharing of intimate family realities amongst the shepherds, but the actual marital dialogue depicted between Mak and his wife in the play has a different reality than the images of married life created by the shepherds amongst themselves.

Here the pattern of conflict assumes a different nature and reflects a higher degree of interaction and mediation of value consensus and a sharing of common goals. The scenes depicting actual marital dialogue show evidence of a variation in pattern and there is evidence of conciliation and conflict resolution. Early in the dialogue there is some evidence of a blocking of goals by Mak's wife. Mak's call for support from Gill after the implied risk of his sheep stealing venture gets only a rebuttal. When he attempts to justify his actions:

For in a strate can I gett
 More then thay that swinke and swette
 All the long day.

(II.311-313)

Gill's response is by changing the existing positive direction of interaction into conflict which she initiates by issuing a direct attack on his plan. She attacks his self-image and self-esteem by stripping any possible merit from his behaviour: "It were a fowll blott to be hanged for the case." (II.315).

It is apparent that Gill acts as if the husband and wife identities are linked together negatively. But the lines following indicate that Mak does not accept her assumption as a basis for his response. Rather, somewhat good-naturedly he chooses not to block positive interaction, and defers to her the role of victor, which, it can be suggested, permits her to obtain the resource of increased status and thus retain the balance of power. It is after all, Mak who has thought of the idea. He responds: "Well, knowe I the token/Bot com and help fast." (II.320-22). Thus the "task relationship" is permitted to take precedence over the "identity relationship" and assumes a more positive goal-oriented direction.

What is interesting in the Mak and Gill dialogue is that Mak playfully tolerates disparaging gestures from Gill. There is a continuous fragile line in the couple's inter-

action in the distinction between bantering rivalry and full conflict which Mak never really permits to be crossed. He does respond to Gill's efforts to injure and damage but redirects the tone to that of game-playing despite the gravity of her previous accusation:

Will ye here fare she makys to gett
 hir a glose?
 And dos' nocht bot lakys, and clowse
 hir toose. (play)/(toes)
 (IV.413-414)

The preceding passages seem to suggest a demand for both personal recognition and an insistence on the recognition of the importance of Gill's role as it relates to the everyday lived existence of domestic life. It is as if she speaks for all women when she says:

Full wofull is the householde
 That wantys a woman. (lacks)
 (IV.420-21)

However, in general, conflict between Mak and Gill does not involve irrevocable loss and injury to the other. There is evidence of recognition of Gill's status by Mak. The power and status between the couple is equally distributed, and the intensity and duration of the conflict tends to be short-lived. There is collaborative effort to maintain deliberate collusion between the couple. Their simultaneous thinking suggests shared values (albeit immoral ones) and a shared perception of humour.

One notes the hilarious effort by Mak and Gill to main-

tain the fraud, even after the sheep has been recognised. They pretend that the 'child was bewitched', taken with an elfe and at midnight thus 'forshapyn' (IV.607-19), which can only suggest the presence of marital unity.

It is ultimately Gill who suggests the idea of concealing the sheep as her unborn child in a unified effort with Mak to deceive the others. In response to his request for help, she adds:

I accorde me thertill.
 I shall swedyll him right in my
 credill.
 If it were gretter slight, yit
 couthe I help till.
 (IV.431-433)

There evolves a significant progression towards a form of cooperation and marital harmony as Gill relinquishes the strategy of trying to out-bargain Mak. It is clear that the couple have shared values on task performance and are able to expedite family decisions and goals. There is mutual agreement in the decision to share in the task of sheep concealment. They share the possible consequences of exposure, ridicule and death.

In the face of conflict, there are no serious negative sanctions imposed on the other by husband or wife. Since decision-making is mutually inclusive, there is an existing balance of power which is clearly governed by mutually agreed upon rules of fair exchange. There is evidence of role compatibility. The provider role and economic function is

shared equally by both partners. Gill spins and cooks, while Mak works as a shepherd. Physical activity between the couple appears enthusiastic and energetic, and there is evidence that close physical distance can comfortably be maintained:

...yit couthe I help till.
I will lig downe stright.
Come hap me.

(IV.433-34)

There is shared humour and obvious enjoyment in teamwork and interdependence in sharing the plot. Wife:

A good bowrde have I spied,
syn thou can none: (trick)
Here shall we him hide, to
thay be gone,
In my credyll. Abide, lett me (cradle)
alone,
And I shall lig beside in
childbed, and grone.

(IV.332-35)

Clearly values and roles are mutually compatible in a reciprocal effort which involves mutual risk and a necessary collaborative adaptability to tension. Wife:

I swelt!
Outt, thefys, frō my wonys! (house)
Ye com to rob us for the nonys. (on purpose)

Mak:

Here ye not how she gronys?
Yours hartys shuld melt.

(V.525-29)

Risk inevitably involves trust, but that common values of trust

also exist is evident. Wife:

When thou heris at the last; (when you finally
And bot I play a fals cast, hear them)
Trust me no more.

(IV.446-48)

One has the distinct notion that despite evidence of cooperation amongst the shepherds, the marital relationship holds a higher value and importance to Mak and Gill relative to the external world: "I hope they will nott be well paide" (IV.425); "Thay will nip us full naroo" (IV.437); "Harken ay when thay call" (IV.440).

There is a distinct sense of "us and them" as the couple enact their roles, not in individual isolation but with anticipation and sensitivity to the needs of each other. The marital struggle functions as a catharsis to permit the re-evaluation of positions, values and norms in order to allow unity and integration. While societal attitudes may have reflected conventional sentiment in the play, it is suggested that the authors were also engaged with illustrating their own view of local community and family life.

In the play The Annunciation, Joseph's assumption of Mary's infidelity is plausible since she is indeed pregnant. Joseph's preoccupation with Mary's "shame", however, provides an adequate illustration of conventional anti-feminist sentiment. David Bevington observes that, "the anti-feminist humour and bawdry allow the audience to laugh at typical human failings and yet perceive that Mary is wholly above

feminine weakness."¹⁰ Indeed, the play reveals an explicit attempt to rectify the injustice imposed upon Mary for it reveals a process of marital conflict which ultimately terminates in resolution and mutuality.

From the onset of the play, the audience is made instantly aware of Joseph's belief in Mary's infidelity:

Alas, what has she wrought.
A, hir body is grete and she with
childe!
For me was she never filyd,
Therfor myin is it nocht.¹¹

The Annunciation
(157-60)

The obvious allusion to the Immaculate Conception suggests there is little justification for Joseph's mistrust of Mary. There is no reason for the audience to assume Mary's infidelity. She recalls her Christian teachings with regard to fidelity in marriage as she pleads:

At Godys will, Joseph, must it be.
For, certanly, bot God and ye,
I know none othere man.
For fleshly was I never filyd.
(203-206)

Joseph, however, finds no credibility in her argument and

¹⁰ Bevington, ed. Medieval Drama, p. 356.

¹¹ Wakefield, "The Annunciation," in Medieval Drama, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975). All subsequent quotations from "The Annunciation" will be taken from the same source.

feels outraged by the perceived infidelity, not so much because of love but more because of economic loss. His wife has been cheapened by this act. She is no longer a bargain. There is perhaps a sense of betrayal in the recollection that Mary was well educated and well prepared by the ecclesiastics and should therefore know better. He recalls the process of training young girls to respect the laws of marriage bartering, a process of which Mary was a part:

And how we met, ye shall wit sone.
Men use yong children for to done
In temple for to lere
Soo did thay hir, to she wex more
Then othere madyns wise of lore.

(227-231)

Hence Joseph supports the traditional economic practice of choosing a wife from the marriage market and relates the story of his own unexpected bargain. He elaborates on the bargaining process saying:

They gaf ich man a white wand,
And bad(e) us bere them in oure hande,
To offre with good intent.
They offered thare yerdys up in that
tide;

(245-248)

Since Mary was young and "of age" he recalls feeling that he had a poor chance at the bargaining table:

I was full sory in my thought
I saide, for old I might nocht
Hir have, never the wheder, (no matter what)
I was unlikely to hir so ying. (young)

(264-267)

However, despite the high cost of "old age", Joseph remembers that the marriage was arranged by necessity. As a result, he felt he had received a good bargain, that Mary was a definite economic gain. It was however, crucial to preserve her high priced chastity:

Whan I all thus had med hir thare
 We and four madyns home can fare.¹³
 (269-271)

Influenced by the anti-feminist teaching, it is Joseph's task to keep Mary "clene". When other women attempt to defend her behaviour, he responds:

Shuld an angel this dede have wrought?
 Sich excusing helpys noght
 For no craft that thay can.
 (293-295)

Furthermore, Mary's chastity is preserved more by the law than by any choice of her own:

She is as clene as cristal clyfe
 For me, and shal be whils I lyf;
 The law will it be so.
 (308-310)

Joseph demonstrates neither compassion nor trust for his wife and it is clear that the relationship is founded on mistrust and an unequal balance of power.

¹³The idea that the four maidens acted as guarantors of Mary's chastity may also be linked to the idea that incontinency was considered unprofitable in a contracted marriage. There were fines known as leywrite.

We note the complete absence of shared roles, values or norms in the early phase of the relationship. Negotiations between the couple are notably absent. Mary fails to provide any concrete arguments for her defense and reiterates what she has learned from the Church:

I can never by mans side,
 Bot has avowed my madynhede
 From fleshly gelt. (progeny)
 (113-115)

Joseph also socialized by the system, is unable to sympathize with Mary's position. He respects the law which guarantees husbands a good contract, a chaste and submissive wife. The ultimate decision with respect to the conflict lies in Joseph's resolution. He decides to terminate the relationship since an untarnished reputation is more important than marital negotiation:

To excuse hir velany by me,
 With hir I think no longer be.
 (224-225)

After reviewing the inequality in the couple's relationship, one finds Mary allegedly unchaste, disloyal, dishonest and unworthy of honour. She is merely an appendage in a marriage contract which has proved unprofitable for Joseph. The reappearance of Gabriel, however, completely eradicates any previous concern with Mary's behaviour. The Wakefield author emphasizes the need for restitution and conciliation which is inevitable, following the intervention by Gabriel:

Do wa(y), Joseph, and mend thy
thoght

I warne the(e) well; and weynd
thou noght

To wildernes so wilde,
Turne home to thy spouse agane.
Look thou deme in hir no trane,
For she was never filde.

(326-332)

Gabriel's advice: "Wite thou no^r wirking of Werkys wast"

(332), encourages an instant reassessment of the imbalanced relationship. Everything that Joseph has been socialized to believe in is destroyed. Because of Gabriel's powerful appearance, Joseph is compelled to re-evaluate his goals, his values and his role expectations vis-à-vis women and marriage. Change and reconciliation are inevitable. Moreover, the goal of repair has not only superceded the marital conflict but provides a dramatic climax to the play. At this point, the issue of justice will be reconsidered, Joseph openly admits he has acted perversely:

I that thus have ungrathly gone
And untruly taken apon
Mary, that dere darling

(341-343)

In the preceding process of interaction, conflict has functioned towards providing an equal transaction between husband and wife. A new equilibrium permits greater opportunity for open communication, trust and intimacy. Joseph concludes:

I rewe full sore that I have sayde,
And of hir binding hir upbrade,
And she not gilty is.
Forthly to hir now will I weynde
And pray hir for to be my freynde.

(344-348)

CHAPTER IV

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF LITERARY EVIDENCE IN FOUR OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S CANTERBURY TALES

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, The Merchant's Tale, The Clerk's Tale, and The Franklin's Tale

In Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, we come to know something of the complexity of Chaucer's society, for it is frequently revealed that convention and reality are in opposition to one another with respect to feudal marriage. We learn that the hierarchy of medieval marriage existed as did prevailing political and ecclesiastical theory, but we also learn that justice and equality were values associated with men-women relations. It is therefore not surprising, that the tales about marriage often challenge established traditions and question conventional values. Chaucer reveals that in actual practice there is always the need for some modification of the existing marriage institution which is frequently revealed through a process of interactive struggle. Marriage founded on economic considerations and dominant-subordinate relations is never denied by Chaucer, but he does show that in order to arrive at a partnership characterised by intrinsic considerations and intimate association, there must be some realistic modification of that which has been prescribed by law.

In the following chapter, we will discuss four of the Canterbury Tales about marriage. The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale considers the question of balance of marital power. The Wife in her Prologue attempts to elevate the status of women in marriage and advocates that the state of marriage be considered at least equal to that of a "life of chastity". We learn about the struggle for the balance of power in the Wife's five marriages and her Tale becomes an illustration of the Prologue which reveals a process of conflict, conciliation and marital harmony. A similar pattern occurs in The Merchant's Tale. January is deceived by his young wife May, but only after a clear illustration of abuse which stems from the conventional practice of wife "bargaining". The Clerk's Tale is about the subjugation of Griselda by Walter and again reveals a process of marital struggle. In the final discussion of The Franklin's Tale, it will be seen that institutional expectations for marriage may be fused with intrinsic expectations which encompass kindness, compassion and trust.

Let us first consider The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Anne Kernan analyses The Wife of Bath in terms of "cupiditas" arguing plausibly that Alisoun views love and marriage as an economic transaction.¹ Similarly Alfred David

¹Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," ELH, vol. 41,1 (Spring 1974), p. 11.

asserts that the Wife's attitudes to marriage "are the sound economic ones of her time," and that "having penetrated the connection between male domination and economic power, she sets about gaining property in approved male fashion."²

The Wife states that in her culture "all is for to selle,"³ (CT III.414) accepting, therefore, the social realities of an economic contractual marriage. She regards "love" like any other commodity to be bought and sold in the world's marketplace. In these terms she accepts the conventional "business of marriage."

What is evident for many literary supporters of the traditional order of the dominant culture and male ideology with regard to marriage is that the Wife succeeds by reducing her self and body to the status of a commodity to be bought by males. It can be conceded that this provides insight into the established theoretical view of the dominant culture and male ideology. When she discusses God's purposes in making sexual organs (CT III.11-34), she merely labels them as members of "generacion" (CT III.116), and there is clearly an economic purposeful calculation as to the business of sex in her view that economic marriage is according to

²Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

³F.N. Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961).
All subsequent quotations will be taken from the same source.

what "men . . . in hir bookes sette" to make payment of the 'dette' (CT III.129-132). But the Wife, aggressively opposes her role of "sexual commodity" by "feyning" sexual desire for the advantage of a rich old husband. We observe the evidence of utilitarian competition and rational calculation in the lines:

Wynne whoso may, for al is for to
 selle.
 With empty hand men may nonne
 haukes lure.
 For wynnyng wolde I al his lust (winning)
 endure,
 And make me a feyned appetit.
 (CT III.414-417)

This fragmentation and depersonalization of sex presents plausibly a commercial transaction based on self-interest. "Of clooth-makying she hadde swich a haunt/she passed hem of Yres and of Gaunt" (The General Prologue (CT I.447-448)).

For the Wife, her orientation to life demands the prototype of an economic transaction which rests on formal contract that stipulates the exact quantities to be exchanged. The impersonal market for the Wife is "designed to strip specific commodities of the entangling alliance of social association, and thus make possible rational choices between distinct alternatives with a final price."⁴

Clearly the Wife has sound knowledge of the political

⁴Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 96.

and economic sphere as it related to contractual marriage, in addition to knowledge of the anti-feminist tradition sponsored by the medieval church. It is difficult to support the unequivocal notion that "the affirmation of her culture in the Wife's negation of it creates an aesthetic representation of the way a subordinate or individuals may so internalize the assumptions and practices . . . that their very acts perpetuate the outlook against which they rebel."⁵

To be sure social and cultural practice must be internalized, but equally adequate counter-arguments may be found in the idea that social positions are rarely created by theoretical notions; they owe more to the realities of facts and daily lived experience. It is also known that early attitudes towards women in the New Testament reflected both theological-ly and socially a means for building a new religious and social basis for women-men relationships in the future, although in the later epistles this notion became obscured. "As a consequence of this obscurity, two seemingly widely divergent messages were inherited, the theology of equivalence in Christ; the practice of women's subordination. Throughout the history of the church this has led to complex and confused theological arguments with their consequent social .

⁵David Aers, Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 147. In chapter 6, "Chaucer, Love, Sex and Marriage," Aers also argues that the anti-feminist conventional sentiment "influenced orthodox Christian tradition and consistently separated love both from sexuality and the primary purposes of marriage."

distortions."⁶

In consideration of these clerical arguments, it is hardly surprising that the Wife's first four marriages reveal knowledge of male dominance and the subsequent reward of totally unquestioning obedience from the female "dette" or commodity. It is true that Old Wife or "Old Eve" has a clear accurate awareness of clerical accounts of anti-feminism, such as St. Jerome's Adversus Jovinian used in her Prologue; moreover, her early accounts of marriage show the effects of orthodox theological ideology with an apparent separation of love, companionship and sexuality.

It is apparent that there is a discrepancy between the church, socio-economic mores and the realities of everyday living. This is surely reflected in the apparent change from the Wife's marriages for rational economic advantage, to a final marriage which reflects equitable exchange, and which in turn encompasses contentment and harmony.

Ultimately Jankyn is partner to an equal marriage, in which neither partner exercises, "By maistrie, al the soveraynetee" (CT III.818), and there is a mutually satisfying marital liaison:

⁶Constance Parvey, "The Théology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in Religion and Sexism, ed. Rose-Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 145-146.

But atte laste, with muchel care and
 wo
 We fille acorded by us selven two
 (CT III.811-812)

Of course the question arises as to what particular form of evolution has enacted movement from a rational profitable relationship based on exchange of the commodity "richesse to a marriage "for love and no richesse" (CT III.526). Alisoun has been rationally prudent in her calculation of the cost of providing physical gratification for the reward of her previous husbands' wealth. Yet there is notable stability in her last husband's declaration:

'Myn owene trewe wyf,
 Do as thee lust the terme of al
 thy lyf;
 Keep thyn honour, and keep eek,
 myn estaat'

(CT III.819-821)

While it can be plausibly accepted that Alisoun does perpetuate the normal practice of exchange of commodities, (she does hand over "al the lond and fee.") the important significance of Chaucer's illustration of the marital quarrel must be considered at this point. There evolves a sequence of actions depicting marital conflict which serves to alter the emphasis on marriage for pure self-interested economic gain. Marital struggle between Jankyn and Alisoun, moreover, appears to precipitate change and transforms to a different kind of reciprocal exchange whereby the "value" of trust is considered an integral and-intrinsic part of the union.

As the Wife herself has reminded her audience, she is

well schooled in the doctrines of anti-feminism (which undoubtedly had a place in the lived realities of daily marital struggle). It follows then, that in representation of marital imbalance she is viewed as "Old Eve" and must therefore play the role of the oppositional partner.

As is evident in much presentation of fabliaux, a progressive sequence of conflict evolves between Jankyn and Alisoun. There is an initial ridicule and mockery of the wife which is aptly illustrated by the traditional reaction of Jankyn the domineering husband (CT III.632-685), in the form of repetitive appeals and support for the Anti-feminist tradition. In characteristic form Alisoun attempts to correct her depraved image, and the psychological violation results in physical sanction:

And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne
 To reden on this cursed book al nyght, (read), (night)
 Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
 Out of his book, right as he radde,
 and eke
 I with my fest so took hym on the (cheek)
 cheke
 That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun. (fire)
 (CT III.788-793)

Pain, in effect becomes release for further violent exchange in the ensuing attempt to regain balance or marital stability. Jankyn offers reciprocal retaliation: "With his fest he smoot me on the heed" (CT III.795). But his wife ultimately gains control by feigning, "as I were deed" (CT III.796), and thus ensures Jankyn's subjugation by manipulating his reaction of guilt: "He was agast, and wolde han fled his way" (CT III.798).

Physical confrontation however, forces Jankyn to the admission that his expression of strength is wrong and that a re-evaluation of the cost of exercising it must inevitably preclude continuation of an equally balanced harmonious relationship. He declares: "Do as thee lust the terme of althy lyf" (CT III.820). In this regard, Richmond is correct in her assertion that "Alisoun (ultimately) does not assert control; the "soverayntee" is equal not to dominance but to a recognition of woman's rights, and integrity."⁷ That is to say that the ultimate "recognition" of Alisoun for her intrinsic worth rather than as an external commodity, ultimately results in an egalitarian partnership based on the co-existence of trust and mutuality.

A brief review of the interaction reveals a recurrent pattern of the husband's ridicule and mockery of his wife who in turn takes the role of the abusive oppositional and retaliatory partner. The sequence is then revealed. There is the status of inequality followed by opposition. Consequently there evolves a need for the reorganization of roles and values which results in catharsis, and ultimately

⁷Velma Bourgeois Richmond, "Pacience in Adversitee: Chaucer's Presentation of Marriage," Viator, 1979, p. 329. Richmond cautions acceptance of clerical assertions of anti-feminism as 'the medieval view'. She argues that "there may be more justification in a counter argument that such statements, like St. Jerome's Adversus Jovinian used in the Wife's Prologue, stem not so much from antipathy to women but from anxieties about women."

results in a new emergent set of mutually accepted norms and values.

What is apparent, is that the new set of mediated values and expectations for behaviour are explicitly contrasted to the values and expectations expressed prior to the marital quarrel. There is at once a difference between those values and roles which result in a "trewe wyf", "honor", "mercy" and "gentillesse" and the contrast of previous marriages for 'dette' and lustful husbands to whom she must give "al the lond and fee" (CT III.D630).

However, the present marriage to Jankyn still resembles a form of interpersonal business transaction where the right to Alisoun's land, to "keep eek myn estaat" (CT III.D821), remains an integral part of the social and political norms of medieval society. But there are also intrinsic gains and a distinct understanding that transactions are based on reciprocity and common "values". Richmond notes: "only when Jankyn's detachment is modified by commitment and Alisoun's self-abnegation enforced by her own sense of self worth is their marriage true and kind."⁸

In a similar rather complementary way, The Wife's Tale further illustrates the sequence and development from conventional formal contractual economic exchange to a form of

⁸Ibid., p. 335.

reciprocity which encompasses personal obligation, a gratitude and trust. The latter, however, follows only after the image of the "old wyf" is restored and she has regained her status, and after the condition of marital conflict has effected a re-evaluation of perceived marital rewards.

There is the initial presentation of familiarity with the male-governed norms of the culture where "al is for to selle" and where the Knight agrees to the Hag's terms which are to "Plight me thy trouthe heere in my hand" (CT III. 1009), but he then bargains for an exchange of commodities later in "taak al my good, and lat my body go" (CT III.1061). Still on the "economic bargaining table", the Hag responds in the language of calculated profit and loss:

"Nay, thanne," quod she, "I shrewe us
bothe two!
For thogh that I be foul, and oold,
and poore,
I nolde for al the metal, ne for oore,
That under erthe is grave, or lith
above,
But if wyf I were, and eek thy love."
(CT III.1062-1066)

And assessing his costs, the Knight responds: "My love?" . . .
"Nay, my dampnacioun!" (CT III.1067).

The catharsis of conflict is the psychological violation of the Knight's rejection of the "olde wyf" on their marriage bed. Like Jankyn, the Knight has similarly inflicted damage on his partner while protecting or enhancing his own self

image and effectively forcing his wife to admit self-disparagement. The effort to regain control or balance is confronted by the "Old Eve" or victim herself with the weapon of persuasive rhetoric. The old wife's speech on "gentillesse" at the bedside argues essentially for a relationship of interdependence based on self-generating trust rather than the engagement in human relationships which are characteristic of marketplace external commodities.

The Knight is invited to remain with the myth of the "old style" conventional economic contractual exchange or alternatively become the participant in a relationship based not only on external commodities, but also on diffused unguaranteed obligations of trust:

"Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise
 thynges tweye:
 To han me foul and old til that I
 deye,
 And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,
 And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
 Or elles wol han me yong and fair,
 And take youre aventure of the repair
 That shal be to youre hous by cause
 of me,
 Or in som oother place, may wel be.
 Now chese yourselven,...."

(CT III.1219-1227)

The Knight's gesture of submissiveness and deference to the Hag encompasses the principle of a new type of reciprocity which encompasses "the principle that when one person does another a favour, the nature of the return cannot be bargained about but is left to the discretion of the

other."⁹

That is to say that sentiment and evaluation of the Hag's affection of intrinsic qualities such as to be "good and trewe" are worth a price. But they cannot be bartered in case their value as genuine feelings or judgements be compromised. What is important is that the Knight and the Hag have demonstrated their trustworthiness and re-established a new equilibrium for the development of growth of trust. The wife offers beauty, youth and loyalty in return for freedom and value of her personal worth.

Therefore "conciliation" in the two cases of marriage presented by the Wife of Bath can be said to offer complementary examples of a development of the economic contractual theory of exchange in medieval marriage, with an inevitable link to a distinct pattern of conflict. There are two primary reasons for the conflict presented in Chaucer's Wife of Bath. Conflict arises as a struggle for status and identification emerging from the 'Eve-type' role which much of the lower class female medieval population were subjected

⁹Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 93. Blau explains, "deep intrinsic attachments fundamentally alter the social transactions in interpersonal relations. The basic difference is between associations that are considered ends in themselves and those they consider means for further ends. The salesman's association with customers are not intrinsically rewarding for him but means for making profitable sales, while his association with the woman he loves is intrinsically rewarding and an end in itself for him."

to in accordance with theological teaching on marriage. Thus female representation in marriage inevitably affected compatibility in values, roles and expectations. The second reason can be simply summarized. The price of a purchasable object is fixed in the same way as the quantity purchased. The transaction does not take into account the behaviour of the participants. "In contrast to economic commodities, the benefits involved in social exchange do not have an exact price in terms of a single quantitative medium of exchange The obligations individuals incur in social exchange, therefore, are defined only in general, somewhat diffuse terms."¹⁰

In summary, both representations of marriage in The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale make reference to a social system based on economic calculation of exchange. That human irrationality and opposition are realistically incompatible with relationships based purely on marketplace commodity behaviour, is evident from the depiction of emotionally violent marital interaction in both the Wife of Bath's Prologue and her Tale.

It has been seen that the incompatible differential of power causes opposition and marital imbalance. There is a subsequent need for the restoration of balance which functions

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

as a catharsis towards reassessment of mutual values and norms. Marital integration and stability are evidenced as the marital relationship develops to exchange based upon trust. The balance of marital control then becomes contingent on mutual need.

For January in The Merchant's Tale there is no "oother lyf" which involves a marriage which is not manifestly built upon instrumental gain. "Justinus, who has received a good press from scholars, actually shares many commonplace assumptions with the old Knight. The counsel he offers is obsessed with material possession He perceives individuals in terms of land, cattle and goods, viewing personal commitment purely as a transference of property rights."¹¹ (CT II.1523-29).

The Merchant's Tale plausibly might appear to be designed "to evoke the economic nexus which both moulded medieval marriage and was supported by it."¹² However, it may also be argued that the Merchant may have been stressing the realistic difficulty of reconciling principles of marriage by economic contract and the living reality of social behaviour as he might have known it.

¹¹ Aers, Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination, p. 152.

¹² Ibid.

To be sure, powerful social forces constrained and limited choices, and while one may concede that marriage and sex were sold as marketplace commodities, both non-rational and rational social behaviour, still had to be reconciled. It therefore seems befitting for the Merchant, whose own marriage reflects domestic strain, to tell a tale which links marital deception and marketplace transaction in order to provide emphasis to the difficulties of reconciliation.

The character of January reflects the fragmentation and problems associated with purely rational economic exchange in marriage. We learn of his naivety as he learns about marriage from living in "greet prosperitee" and by reading marriage manuals, to conclude:

"Noon oother lyf," seyde he, "is worth
 a bene;
 For wedlok is so esy and so clene,
 That in this world it is a paradys."
 (CT IV.1263-65)

January cannot be considered unusual or idiosyncratic nor can it be assumed that his conduct reflects deviance from socially sanctioned normative behaviour. His social and cultural orientation to marriage makes it acceptable to rely on Justinus, who offers advice obsessed with exchange of commodities and the quantification of human behaviour. For January, like Justinus, spouses are purchasable commodities and rationally he would choose a wife for a nurse, house-keeper, servant, sex and heirs, though the cost is evaluated.

For a "trewe Knave" he reads, will be more cost effective.
A wife after all will claim:

Alle othere manere yiftes hardily,
As londes, rentes, pasture or
 commune,
Or moebles, alle been yiftes of
 Fortune,....

(CT IV.1312-14)

The unreal process of looking for a wife in a fantasy world continues. At the same time January's orientation is based purely on marketplace philosophy and the didacticism of St. Jerome, St. Augustine and Theophastus. This only serves to emphasize the strain between rational instrumental consideration and the non-rational and non-quantifiable component of behaviour:

Heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse
Fro day to day gan in the soule
 impresse
Of Januarie about his mariage.
Many fair shap and many a fair visage
Ther passeth thurgh his herte nyght
 by nyght.

(CT IV.1577-81)

The balance of unequal distribution of power in the January-May relationship also remains a serious issue. January wants a young wife since her lack of experience will ensure rewards of power, heritage and subordination. Effectively a marital system with rigid boundaries has been created with little opportunity for grievance or change. January has purchased commodity of marriage, "For wedlock is so esy and so clene" (CT IV.1263-65). It is based on what he has

read with regard to the purpose and practice of marriage.

Thus there is no opportunity for the development of trust. Coercion appears to ensure May's deprived status, and there is the inevitable progression of conflict resulting from unrealistic expectations and absence of reciprocity based on voluntary actions. One may note May's evaluation of reciprocal rewards, "she preyseth nat his pleyng worth a bene" (CT IV.1854). It is predictable that January's love-making becomes an act of violence where the sexual act is depicted as both an "offence and an assault" (CT IV. 1821-30). The balance of power becomes the ultimate issue in the sexual act. Since there is the absence of opportunity for grievance or mutual adjustment of the norms of fairness between the couple, May applies negative retaliatory sanctions by her relationship with Damien.

One must bear in mind however, that the complacent, unselfconscious attitude of the "Old Knight" January was wholly defined by institutional realities, as can be witnessed in his assertion:

A man may do no synne with his wyf,

 For we han leve to pleye us by the lawe.
 (CT IV.1839-41)

The need for restoration of the balance of power by May is overtly designed to challenge the status quo of the marital power relations and the existing theoretical affiliation to marriage. Given the conditions for marriage this is predict-

able; the cost of compliance is for May an excessive demand which is impossible to reciprocate, and moreover, she has placed no value on what January has to offer:¹³

Whan she hym saugh sittynge in his
sherte,
In his nyght-cappe, and with his
nekke lene;
She preyseth nat his pleyng worth
a bene.

(CT IV.1852-56)

The question as to whether May's infidelity "were it by destynee or aventure" (CT IV.1967) or by "influence" or "by nature" (CT IV.1968), can only be answered in terms of the imbalance of marital power and the ensuing lack of reciprocal relations. May deviates from the existing arrangements of norms and values and imposes sanctions on her marriage in rebellion against it. May in turn seeks a level of reward which permits restitution of her subordinate role. Defiantly she justifies the reason for her relationship with Damien:

Whom that this thyng displese,
I rekke nocht, for heere I hym assure
To love hym best of any creature
Though he namoore hadde than his sherte.

(CT III.1982-85)

May's partial resistance to the social mores and values is deeply compromised by the situation in which she has learnt to exist. It can also be conceded that May's version of love

¹³Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 89.
"the possibility of a social exchange of "commodities" can (only) exist if both individuals value what they receive from the other."

lacks any very articulate demand for close mutual affection and commitment. This is reasonable for she is surely un- schooled and her depicted clumsiness in "love", indicates a facile readiness to evaluate her emotion for Damien. More crucial to the question is the absence in the tale of "legitimised authority" in marriage. Neither January nor May recognizes or gives authority to the other on any marital issue. The dysfunctional marital union of May and January shows the predictable sequence of domination, subordination and rebellion.

The Merchant's "soory herte" (CT IV.1244) and his illus- trated difficulty with economic marital exchange, "We wedded men lyven in sorwe and care" (CT IV.1228) reflects what may have been a typical and realistic struggle in daily marital and domestic life. For marriage, unlike the teaching in medieval marriage manuals, could not exist as an exchange of impersonal relations based totally on rational thought of objective commodity, neither could it have been manifested in the lived daily existence as "earthly paradise", "bliss- ful and ordinat" or be "so esy and clene" (CT IV.1263-65). Only in the lived, existential relations of day to day ex- change could the idea of mutuality and role interchange achieve any realistic mediation or agreed consensus. The author seems to point to such discrepancies which were surely a reality of the time with respect to the stability and function of married relations. Again, the catharsis for conflict manifested in May's infidelity is apparent as the

shift in the balance of control becomes directly related to discrepancy in marital theory and practice. Thus a social relationship based on a reciprocity of mutually established norms and values becomes possible for the January-May relationship despite age or other objective consideration. As Prosperina has said:

Lat us namoore wordes heerof make;
For sothe, I wol no lenger yow
contrarie.

(CT IV.2318-19)

and it is observed that January speaks to May more generously and with a realistic consideration of her intrinsic value:

That art the creature I that best
love,
For by that lord that sit in hevене
above,
Levere ich hadde to dyen on a knyf
Than thee offende, trewe deere wyf!

(CT IV.2161-64)

The Clerk's Tale offers further demonstration of apparent discrepancy between the conventional sentiments of the established social and political order and the everyday reality of lived experience.

There is a similarity to the Merchant's view of reciprocal exchange in Walter's attitude prior to marriage. Marriage in its conventional form represents economic contract. His comparison of cost and profit is quite evident:

that seele tyme is founde in mariage,
Ther I was free.

(CT IV.143-147)

There is demonstrated naivety in the absence of any expectant behaviour from his future wife other than as the provision of a vehicle for procreation. We note Walter's lack of knowledge of intimate mutuality, interdependence, or any sense of marriage as a progressive relationship. It is simply evaluated in a comparison between where "I was free, I moot been in servage." (CT IV.147) and the present call for procreative duty. Marriage entails only the calculated bargain of contractual economic exchange. When Walter tells Griselda to be ready with "herte/To al my lust" (CT IV.351-3), and considers "ful right/Hir bountee" (CT IV.243-44), this rests wholly on such considerations as his objective evaluation of Griselda as a marketable commodity. One may note the actual measurement of her qualities:

And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight
Of so yong age

(CT IV.236-41)

While it is clear that Griselda offers intrinsic qualities, Walter evaluates these in terms of economic gain responding to this "povre creature" (CT IV.232), as if she were a commodity, rather than a participant in a mutual partnership. This is not problematic in terms of social, economic, political structure and theological doctrine; as Griselda's peasant circumstances are evaluated, she is considered to offer only the gain of fidelity and child-bearing. The economic calculation is apparent again when Griselda is asked to bring "no thyng of hir olde geere" (CT IV.372). Any consideration for

individual worth is absent as she herself observes later in the tale:

Lefte I my wul and al my libertee
 And took youre clothyng
 (CT IV.656-7)

Then there evolves a testing of Walter's perception of Griselda's "vertu" and her particular nature of "womanhede". His preoccupation with the maximization of profit literally has to prove that whatever has been forfeited on the loss of liberty in marriage (CT IV.143-47) will now maximize on the highest profit of exchange. His wish to receive profitable rewards from Griselda reduces the existing intrinsic values to external commodities. Her qualities of integrity, loyalty and fidelity are reduced to purely economic considerations which must also be rationally tested for quality and profitable sale.¹⁴

In this respect no degree of interaction based on mutually rewarding benefits can exist. There can evolve no development or expansion of intrinsic qualities based on values of trust. One witnesses only the imposition of Walter's own value structure, which has confused the external with the intrinsic. Thus an imbalance and strain towards opposition

¹⁴George C. Homans, Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms (New York/Chicago: Harcourt Brace & World Inc., 1961), p.68. Homans observes that "economics has in money price, a measure of commodity's value in exchange that is independent of the particular other goods it is exchanged for, whereas (human behaviour) has no such thing."

exists in the Walter-Griselda marriage. While Griselda treats Walter with "reverence", "humble cheere" and addresses him as "lord", he assumes a dominant coercive role and the inequality of marital power is eminently clear.

Griselda's patience is frequently observed. When she is asked to forfeit the life of her child, she is "nought ameved" (E498):

Neither in word, or chiere or coun-
tenaunce
For, as it semed, she was nat
agreed.
She seyde, "Lord, al lyth in youre
plesaunce."

(CT IV.499-501)

and tells Walter, "Werketh after youre wille." (CT IV.504).

Walter must gradually come to re-evaluate his dominant role not so much through the implicit need for restoration of equilibrium from Griselda as by her patience and ability to "be constant in adversitee" (CT IV.1146). It can be argued that (Griselda) "is self-contained for neither material nor emotional loss can destroy her, in that no essential difference results from her subjugation,"¹⁵ but this overlooks the extreme nature of imbalance and the implicit need for restoration of equilibrium, in the light of progressive deterioration of even those values and norms which minimally existed.

¹⁵ Richmond, p. 337.

While it is stated that Walter:

Wedded with fortunat honestetee
 In Goddes pees lyveth ful esily
 (CT IV.421-22)

the tale indicates an ever present need to reassess and reject the existing marital order. Since there is no indication that Griselda is ever rewarded for her contribution (loyalty, trustworthiness, "vertu" and being "yong") we are forced to question the illustration of reciprocation which seems rather overdone. For we are reminded that Griselda, in fact, becomes more "trewe", "if that were possible."

In fact it becomes clear that Griselda's "wyfly pacience" ultimately permits a total disruption of the marriage which appears to indicate that the violation of expected rewards (social approval, respect, compassion, esteem) is severe enough to permit her sanction by passive acceptance of Walter's termination of the marriage.

While there is no demonstrated outward manifestation of Griselda's hostility, her need to restore self-esteem is apparent. She gains control over her marriage by an implicit lack of effort or participation in its reconstruction. Thus the illustration of Griselda's covert need to control and thus compensate for deprivation and loss of status must be equated with the existence of extreme violation of existing marital norms and values. A catharsis occurs with the change in Walter's behaviour:

"The smok, quod he, "that thou has
 on thy bak,
 Lat it be stille, and bere it forth
 with thee."
 But wel unnethes thilke word he spak,
 But went his way, for routhe and for
 pitee.

(CT IV.889-96)

At this stage, Walter begins to feel discomfort and guilt by the act of sending Griselda away. Griselda continues to enact the role of subjugated wife to its utmost extreme. She is later called back to cater the wedding reception for Walter's new bride and there is almost a sense of pride and satisfaction in the ability to manipulate Walter's guilt:

With glad chiere his
 gestes, she receyveth,
 And konnyngly, everich in his
 degree,
 That no defaute no man aper-
 ceyveth

(CT IV.1016-18)

Finally, Walter is forced to cease his abuse of Griselda for there has been nothing in her behaviour to encourage it further. Whether or not one approves of Griselda's covert methods of control, her power has been restored by the very act of encouraging Walter's subjugation of her. Thus marital equilibrium is established and an equal balance of marital control, for we learn that:

Ful many a yeer in heigh prosperitee
 lyven these two in concord and in reste.

(CT IV.1128-29)

Thus a reorganization of the marital system is effected. There is a reorganization of norms and values through the

rational and non rational process of conflict and reciprocity. This promotes a re-evaluation of the norm of fair exchange which in turn allows the stability of the marital system and therefore permits a forum for the expansion of trust.

In summary, it would seem that the initial evaluation of comparative resources with respect to the Walter-Griselda marriage effects inequality before trust and obligation can be satisfactorily mediated. Because of the purely rational economic exchange consideration by Walter with its accompaniment of coercive power, there is a subsequent violation of reciprocal relations. In turn negative conditions are imposed by the deprived spouse which effects catharsis and struggle which results in a re-evaluation of profit and loss with respect to existing norms and values.

The Franklin provides the most explicit statement that marriage based on singularly economic interests is incompatible with mutuality. Although a tale which is more about the nobility, The Franklin's Tale describes a marital relationship based on friendship, trust and integrity. The tale, by comparison to the others, begins at a level in the Arveragus-Doreigen relationship which has already affirmed the difficulties of intimacy in a purely contractual marriage. From the Franklin's point of view, unity in marriage is based not so much on the anticipation of specific benefits but from diffused, unspecified obligations of trust:

That freendes everych oother moot
 obeye
 If they wol longe holden compaignye
 Love wol nat been constreyned by
 maistrye.

(CT V.762-64)

The difficulties and unrealistic expectations with regard to the problem of dominant-subordinate marital relations is explicit:

Whan maistrie comth, the God of love
 anon
 Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he
 is gon!
 Love is a thyng as any spirit free.

(CT V.764-86)

The idea that men and women should not feel "constreyned" (CT V.769) is emphasized and yet the notion that "freendes . . . moot obeye" (CT V.762) is also suggestive of obligation. Obligation is then based on the legitimized recognition of the other's authority.

The fundamental base for reciprocity then, is explicit. Mutual obligations are to be based on unspecified intrinsic qualities. There is an implied understanding that obligation and trust will fuse together in a relationship which promises the mutual growth and expansion of its participants.

"Arveragus and Dorigen are, first of all, friends, which means parity rather than the usual imbalance based upon sex."¹⁶ Chaucer moves from consideration of commodities to those

¹⁶Richmond, p. 350.

qualities more appropriately linked to human worth. There is, however, some consideration of the traditional hierarchy of marriage and some suggestion of the presence of a contracted marriage which should not be overlooked. The Knight is initially interested in Dorigen:

For she was oon of the faireste
 under sonne
 And eek thereto comen of so
 heigh kynrede

(CT V.734-35)

One must recall that all marriage relationships, regardless of stratification, were based on some form of mutual contract. To ignore this would impose a subjective view based on knowledge of twentieth century marital relationships. The pattern of communication in a developed relationship is inextricably interwoven with the socialization process or orientation of a given culture.¹⁷ Power, property and Christian teaching were therefore crucial considerations in the contemplation of medieval marriage at all levels of stratification. Feudal marriage laws undoubtedly incorporated some notions of authority and obedience, but at some point mutuality and intimacy had to enter in and be permitted to co-exist.

¹⁷William J. Goode, "The Theoretical Importance of Love," in American Sociological Review 24, February 1959, p. 39. Goode observes that a "predisposition to love is created by the socialization experience. The child learns that he or she will eventually fall in love and attempts are made to pair the child with the opposite sex." The point is also made with respect to learned 'patterns of love': these must fit into the social structure, especially into systems of mate choice and stratification.

Some modification of the objective, impersonal relationship stipulated by law had to involve a consideration of intrinsic values.

This fusion of traditional conventional contractual marriage and mutuality is illustrated in the Franklin's explanation:

Thus she hath tak hir servant and
 hir lord
 Servant in love, and lord in marriage
 Thanne was he bothe in lordship and
 servage
 Servage? nay, but in lordship above,
 Sith he hath bothe his lady and his
 love;
 His lady, certes, and his wyf also,
 The which that lawe of love accordeth
 to.

(CT V.792-8)

One notes the fusion of "servant", "hir lord" and then "love", "lord" and marriage". Reference to the "lawe" is then fused with "lady", "wyf" and "love".

At the beginning of the tale, we are immediately aware that the relationship between Arveragus and Dorigen is initiated by the Knight's risk in revealing his "wo", "peyne" and his "distresse" (CT V.737). If one views this in light of an expanding trust relationship, it is a crucial beginning towards the development of intimate relations. The Knight's willingness to reveal his weakness with its encompassing risk of rejection forces Dorigen to make a choice as to whether or not to reciprocate. Her response emphasizes choice without obligation:

But atte laste she, for his
 worthynesse,
 And namely for his meke obey-
 saunce
 Hath swich a pitee caught of
 his penaunce

(CT V.738-40)

Hence the nature of the return has not been an economic bargain, but has been left to the discretion of the other person, (though Arveragus preserves the "name" of sovereignty for his worldly estate). Dorigen's next line shows the juxtaposition of both rational and intrinsic considerations:

That pryvely she fil of his
 accord
 To take hym for hir housbande
 and hir lord.

(CT V.741-42)

Thus there is the affirmation that the medieval convention is wholly intact, "Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves" (CT V.743). Male dominated relations cannot survive in the reality of intimate relations. In order for more "blisse hir lyves" (CT V.742), it is necessary to modify what is stipulated by law:

That nevere in al his lyf he, day
 ne nyght,
 Ne shadde upon hym take no maistrie
 Agayn hir wyl, he kith hire jalousie

.....
 As any love to his lady shal.

(CT V.746-49)

While plausibly there remains some instrumental consideration:

Save that the name of Soveraynetee
 That wolde he have for shame of his
 degree.

(CT V.750-51)

the nature of the exchange also considers intrinsic immeasurable rewards which are without a guaranteed return. What is important is that a process evolves which begins and expands by a sequence of transactions based on risk-taking.¹⁸ There are a series of minor interactions which eventually culminate in a mutual reciprocity of norms and common values.

The interpersonal mediation of norms and social values continues and maintains an equilibrium until the established norm of reciprocity between the couple runs the risk of violation. Dorigen's intrinsic values of loyalty and commitment are about to be compromised along with the promise of respect and freedom offered to Dorigen by Arveragus. Yet the relationship survives on account of the mutual perception of the other's values and the opportunity to deal openly with mutual opposition.

Arveragus' statement to Dorigen provides a solution for her internal ambivalence with regard to conflicting loyalties. In his response however, we can note explicit fusion of intrinsic and rational considerations:

Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay...

¹⁸ Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life, p. 94. "Typically relations evolve in a slow process, starting with minor transactions in which a little trust is required because little risk is involved. It is necessary for both partners to prove their trustworthiness and enable expansion of relations."

Trouthe is the hyste thyng that men
may keep.

(CT V.1474-79)

There is however, still a rational tone which even in times of stress indicates that he has internalised the law and cultural expectations of marriage:

That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne (life)
breeth (breath)
To no wight tell thou of this aventure. (one)
(CT V.1481-83)

Given the plausible fusion of instrumental and intrinsic considerations in the nature of exchange between Arveragus and Dorigen, the relationship of Aurelius and Dorigen stands out by sharp contrast to the attempt by Aurelius to base a "love" relationship on singularly instrumental considerations. Aurelius thinks only in terms of commodities. His dealings with the Orleans clerk hardly differs from those with Dorigen. He will pay anything for the commodity he wishes to purchase, no matter how unreasonably it is priced. When he is told that the rocks can be made to disappear for a thousand pounds, Aurelius replies:

Answerde thus: Fy on a thousand pound!
This wyde world, which that men seye
is round,
I wolde it yeve, if I were lord of it
This bargain is ful dryve, for we
been kynt
Ye shal be payed trewely, by my trouthe!
(CT V.1427-31)

Richmond notes that "Aurelius is saved because of a series of generous merciful acts that deliberately refuse to insist

upon payment of just bonds."¹⁹ While plausibly the sequence of merciful acts saves Aurelius, the essential point is that his method of interaction is shown to fail. His way of negotiating both with Dorigen and the Orleans clerk is reduced to sheer utilitarianism. His exclusive pursuit of calculated gain belongs in the marketplace, both in bartering with the clerk and his demand for payment for service from Dorigen. All transactions are built singularly upon the fundamental principles of the marketplace. It is therefore inevitable that Chaucer permits no expansion of Aurelius' transactions but rather emphasizes their failure.

What is clearly successful is the relationship of Arveragus and Dorigen. While the marriage is shown to conform to the expectations of medieval law, emphasis is placed upon the mutual recognition of intrinsic worth. We are witness to a gentle, willing partnership founded on values of justice and equality. These conditions create an environment which allows the expansion and generation of mutual trust.

¹⁹ Richmond, p. 351.

CONCLUSION

Literary treatments of marital quarrelling in the lower and middle strata of medieval society reveal a process of interaction which is constructive and contributory to the co-existence of mutuality and intimacy in married relations. Despite existing restrictive marriage laws which encompassed assumptions of dominant-subordinate relations of men and women in married life, it is clear that the medieval social structure permitted opposition to this condition by women and thus created an environment which allowed adjustment to inequalities of power in men-women relations.

While medieval marriage was recognized as an economic contract by the socio-economic and ecclesiastical institutions, there was a marked discrepancy between the legal ideal and actual marital practice in the lower and middle classes. It has been seen that consistent patterns of quarrelling in literary representation of marriage have been incorrectly perceived. For when "quarrelling" is viewed in the light of contemporary social theory it can be seen that conflict is not destructive but rather a condition which may be viewed as positive and functional, allowing intimacy and mutuality to co-exist.

A comparison of the conflict functionalism of Lewis

Coser and the exchange structuralism of Peter Blau with the process and dynamics of marital interaction in narrative literary texts has revealed that intimacy and mutuality existed as an inherent part of married life. Moreover, historical evidence has revealed that relationships encompassing intrinsic considerations took precedent over those based singularly on instrumental gain. Relationships of trust were fostered and gratification came from the exchange of approval, affection and respect.

A major focus in the present study has been on the role of lower and middle class women in historical and literary representations of married life, and there has been a concentration on the response and the ability of women to oppose their subordinate status with regard to the institutional restrictions of medieval marriage. This is not to assume that all contracted marriages existed without exception as a foundation for conflict and the need for restoration of unequal men-women relations. It is possible that in some isolated instances the co-existence of freedom of choice and contracted marriage existed. What is important is that freedom of choice existed as a significant intrinsic value, despite existing restrictive marriage laws. Evidence of clandestine marriage and desired freedom in sexual behaviour demonstrates that freedom of equality existed as a value possible for married intimacy. If inequality existed, then some change was required between what was required by law and actual marital practice. In this respect the condition

of conflict between men and women with respect to perceived injustice or inequalities was a positive condition, which made egalitarian relationships possible and which in turn promoted conditions for intimacy.

Further study could be undertaken with regard to a number of yet untreated areas with respect to the medieval women's role in literary and historical representations of marriage. One might utilise sociological theory as a methodological tool to analyse the voluminous data on female activity in medieval guilds, which requires extensive and elaborate exploration. The major participation of women in guild proceedings and the large proportion of guild membership by women has been largely overlooked. The present study has made only brief references to the relationships between "bretheren" and "sistren" in English guilds. There also remains a great deal of unexplored information on medieval men-women relations in European guilds, and the influence on them of structures and attitudes developed in a growing market economy. The use of social theory as a tool for analysis in addition to literary evidence could provide fruitful evidence with respect to the function of medieval married relations.

In this latter regard, both literature and sociology may be seen as distinct but complementary disciplines for both are concerned with adaptation and change to the social world. "Literature as a reflection of values and feelings

points both to the degree of change occurring in different societies, as well as the manner in which individuals become socialized into the social structure and their response to this experience. Literature, because it delineates man's anxieties, hopes and aspirations is perhaps one of the most effective sociological barometers of the human response to social forces."¹

Traditional historical images of women have been created predominantly by male historians, therefore more critical reconstruction of women's role in history is needed. The present study reveals that sexually defined roles were defied in the daily lived existence of married relations whatever the legal expectation may have been for marriage. Thus an analysis of men-women relations cannot be reduced to any single historical statement on the "role" or "function" of the medieval wife. Change is therefore necessary in our interpretations of literary and historical representation of marriage. Moreover, change and reform of contemporary social structures cannot be instigated without some re-consideration of literary and historical interpretation of women's activities.

We have seen the flexibility of social practice in an age sometimes thought to be the very embodiment of traditional

¹Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingwood, The Sociology of Literature (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1971), pp. 16-17.

authoritarian attitudes. This could also suggest the need for some reconsideration of conventional interpretations of social practice in contemporary structures.

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