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《坎特伯里故事集》中婚姻之美學
THE AESTHETICS OF MARRIAGE IN
THE CANTERBURY TALES

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論文提要：

本論文嘗試探討傑弗瑞·喬叟在其《坎特伯里故事集》裡所呈現的婚姻與中古美學之間的關係。聖湯馬斯·阿奎納斯(St. Thomas Aquinas)提出美與技藝(art)的理論，主張美乃由「比例」(proportion)、「清澈」(clarity)與「完整」(integrity)三要素組成，而技藝具有模仿與製造的特性。本文借用聖湯馬斯所提出之美與技藝的理論，對喬叟於其《故事集》裡所描繪的婚姻所蘊含之美與技藝的要素作一詮釋。筆者視美與技藝為兩種關鍵性的美學概念，並以類比(analogy)為方法重新建構美學與婚姻之間隱含、想像的空間。婚姻可視為一種美的表現，透過聖湯馬斯的美學理論，可分析出《故事集》中呈現的婚姻形式與內容以及中古美學感受力之間的呼應與差距，以及婚姻如何體現「比例」、「清澈」與「完整」之美學。本論文第一章從聖湯馬斯的「比例」理論探討《故事集》裡〈牛津學者的故事〉、〈律師的故事〉、〈第二位修女的故事〉、〈紳土地主的故事〉、〈商人的故事〉、〈磨坊主人的故事〉、〈巴斯婦人的序言〉以及〈巴斯婦人的故事〉中所描述的貴族婚姻與平民婚姻之形式，如何呼應此一美學要素。第二章著重分析包含物質之美與靈性之美的「清澈」要素在婚姻中扮演的角色，另一方面，上述多則故事中對於美的此兩層級是否共存於婚姻之辯論也是討論的焦點。第三章探討「完整」要素與婚姻之間的密切關聯，並延伸中古技藝的內涵，使之與婚姻中的「生殖技藝」(procreative art)互相連結，進而分析生殖技藝與婚姻的完整性之間的互動。結論闡明喬叟對於上述故事中貴族與平民的婚姻美學之立場。

關鍵詞：傑弗瑞·喬叟，《坎特伯里故事集》，婚姻，聖湯馬斯·阿奎納斯，美，技藝，「比例」，「清澈」，「完整」，「生殖技藝」

Title: The Aesthetics of Marriage in *The Canterbury Tales*

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Abstract:

This thesis aims to interpret the elements of beauty and art in the marriages portrayed in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* by means of St. Thomas Aquinas's theory of beauty and that of art. St. Thomas asserts that beauty consists of three elements: proportion, clarity and integrity, and that art imitates and denotes production. I take beauty and art as the crucial concepts and use analogy as the inquiring tool to examine the imaginary domain between beauty and art as applied to marriage, meanwhile investigating the implied language of intercommunication between aesthetics and marriage. Marriage is taken as a representation of beauty; its different forms and contents portrayed in Chaucer's various tales will be analyzed so as to see to what extent they reflect and diverge from medieval aesthetic sensitivity and how aesthetic theory can be adopted to interpret medieval marriage. In Chapter One, the theory of "proportion" is applied to the various forms of marriage depicted in the *Tales* to explore how the marriage of the nobility and that of the commoners will correspond to this element of beauty, as portrayed in "The Clerk's Tale," "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Second Nun's Tale," "The Franklin's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale," "The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" and her tale. Chapter Two examines the roles the variants of "clarity," that is, physical and spiritual beauty, play in marriage, and a debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty of a wife among the pilgrim-tellers will be demonstrated. Furthermore, in Chapter Three I shall extend the medieval concept of art to that of the "procreative art" in marriage, and explore the relationship between the procreative art and the "integrity" of marriage in the aforementioned tales. The conclusion discusses Chaucer's positions on the aesthetics of marriage of the nobility and that of the commoners portrayed in the tales.

Key words: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, marriage, St. Thomas Aquinas, beauty, art, "proportion," "clarity," "integrity," "procreative art"

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Introduction

The topic of marriage in *The Canterbury Tales* [henceforth called the *Tales*] is not a new issue in Chaucerian criticism. Among previous critics, George L. Kittredge, who creates the term “Marriage Group,” is one of the most authoritative figures. The term designates a cluster of tales narrated by Chaucer’s pilgrim-tellers, including the Wife of Bath, the Clerk of Oxford, the Merchant and the Franklin (185-211). Many Chaucerian critics have thereafter adopted this frame of reference for their discourses on the subject of marriage. It stands to good reason that the debate on the sovereignty in marriage, which the Wife of Bath initiates, draws most readers’ attention. In looking at the *Tales* from a broader perspective, nevertheless, one shall find that many tales *outside* the “Marriage Group” also portray the theme of marriage. For example, “The Miller’s Tale,” though conventionally categorized under the genre of fabliau because of its comic and coarse actions, deals with the husband and wife relationship as well. “The Man of Law’s Tale” too discusses the subject of marriage in two dramatic and epic episodes concerning Constance’s marriages, first with the Sultan of Syria and later with King Alla of Northumberland. Among other tales, the hagiography in “The Second Nun’s Tale” also dwells on how a marriage can be sublimated from a physical to spiritual relationship when the bridal pair forgo the practice of the conjugal debt to reach a tacit agreement in serving God. To one’s surprise, nearly three fourths of the *Tales* revolve around the notion of marriage in one way or another.¹ The deployment of diverse opinions concerning

¹ Eighteen out of the twenty-four complete tales are set in the framework of marriage: “The Knight’s Tale” (as the tale approaches its end), “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Reeve’s Tale,” “The Man of Law’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and her Prologue, “The Summoner’s Tale,” “The Clerk’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale,” “The Squire’s Tale,” “The Franklin’s Tale,” “The Physician’s Tale,” “The Shipman’s Tale,” “The Prioress’s Tale,” “The Tale of Melibee,” “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” “The Second Nun’s Tale” and “The Manciple’s Tale.” Among these, some tales such as “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Squire’s Tale,” “The Physician’s Tale” and “The Prioress’s Tale” do not explicitly portray a couple’s married life but do mention their legitimate offspring, and therefore are generally included as those that deal with the theme of marriage.

the subject of marriage no doubt shows that Chaucer reveals his great interest in exploring the relationship between husband and wife and the nature of marriage.

When people nod to agree to a marriage or shake their heads in disapproval of a mismatched couple, both judgments depend on their value systems. How a marriage is evaluated can be as diversified as economical, political, ethical, moral, religious, ideological and/or aesthetic. This thesis will only focus on the aesthetic aspect of marriage because it has been a relatively unexplored area in the discussion of the marriages in the *Tales*. By aesthetical judgment of marriage is meant the application of aesthetic concepts to the interpretation of marriage. Something peculiarly aesthetic can be found in one's decision to enter into marriage. When choosing their potential spouses, people pay special attention to their choice from various points of view and considerations. The aspects of the candidates' age, estate and religion along with their physical appearance and spiritual qualities all have vital influence on the shaping of a future household. These criteria lay stress on an aesthetics that involves an appropriate proportion of age, estate and religion between a couple which suggests harmony and hence beauty. The Venetian Franciscan Fra Paolino in 1314 explained that the inhabitants of an ideal household in the medieval period consist of a husband, a wife and their children (de La Roncière 157).² In 1434, the moralist Leon Battista Alberti had a similar notion of a family. A couple, children, maids, menservants—"That is what people refer to as the family" (qtd. in de La Roncière 158). From these two moralists, one can realize that the elementary unit of a household is the married couple. Moreover, children are usually regarded as part of the integrity of marriage. Altogether, factors such as proportional age, estate and religion between a couple, the physical and spiritual beauty of a wife as well as the production of offspring contribute to the aesthetics of marriage. These conditions seem to be social, moral and religious, yet indeed they are also bolstered by medieval aesthetic concepts, such as proportion, appropriateness, harmony, clarity and integrity,

² In addition to a couple and their offspring, Paolino considers a female domestic to wait on the couple as essential in a household, yet de La Roncière comments that such a condition is "a luxury" (qtd. in de La Roncière 157).

which are almost synonyms of beauty in that period. To adopt these aesthetic notions against a reading of medieval marriage will enable us to channel the marriages described in the *Tales* into a history of aesthetic experience.

The history of Western aesthetics since the Antiquity involves many complicated issues. The aesthetic discourse includes academic areas such as “the philosophy of language and the theory of value, and in neighboring disciplines, such as psychology, literary criticism and art history.”³ To handle the complexity of the various subjects of aesthetics is definitely beyond the grasp of a single thesis and my capability. In addition, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, the foremost contemporary Polish humanist and a European historian of aesthetics, has contributed numerous articles and volumes of books on the development of Western aesthetics.⁴ Hence, I shall only give a very brief account of some major aesthetic notions in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages which are narrowed down into the categorization of beauty and art.

Concept of beauty in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages

The concept of beauty has a long history as early as in ancient times. Plato points out three supreme kinds of values or judgments—truth, goodness and beauty, which have persisted in European thought ever since (Tatarkiewicz 1980:1). While we are not interested in Plato’s view of these three values, we may focus on the continuance of the concept of beauty from the Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The concept of beauty in the Antiquity and that in the medieval period share many similarities. A narrower view of beauty includes only physical and sensuous things, such as shapes, colors and sounds, while a wider view extends the concept to abstract and intellectual things, such as thoughts and ideas. Greek philosophers, like

³ Wreen and Callen, “Foreword,” Beardsley 1982:7.

⁴ Among Tatarkiewicz’s works, two important articles on western aesthetics are “Did Aesthetics Progress?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 31.1 (1970a): 47-59 and “The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31.2 (Winter 1972): 165-80. Two important books of his on aesthetics are *History of Aesthetics: Medieval Aesthetics*, ed. Cyril Barrett, and trans. R. M. Montgomery, 3 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1970) and *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, trans. Christopher Kasparek (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980).

Pythagoras and the Sophists of Athens, take sight and hearing as the two important senses that can most fully appreciate beauty (Tatarkiewicz 1980:122). Of these two senses, the faculty of sight particularly invites ancient and medieval thinkers to reflect on aesthetic problems. Through the mechanism of seeing, people are not only sensuously perceptive to the phenomena of beauty but also intellectually cognitive of the implicit harmony derived from them.

Five main propositions about the discussion of beauty in the Middle Ages have been handed down from the Antiquity:

1. Beauty consists in the proportions of parts;
2. Beauty consists in the appropriateness or suitability of things to their end;
3. Beauty is an objective property of things;
4. Beauty is apprehended both by the senses and the mind; and
5. Beauty is found in Nature and in the arts. (Tatarkiewicz 1970a:47-48)

The first proposition indicates that the mathematical relationship between objects or within an object contributes to beauty because a good arrangement of parts results in balance, harmony and order. The second proposition states that the idea of appropriateness denotes the notion of symmetry and harmony. For the third proposition, the objectivity of beauty highlights human beings' ability to judge an object from the reality of its existence, instead of from the total subjectivity of the observer. The question of the objective characteristic of beauty is brought up by St. Augustine, who formulates the problem of beauty with great precision: "Is a thing beautiful because it pleases or does it please because it is beautiful?"⁵ The former condition emphasizes subjectivity, while the latter objectivity in the action of seeing or perceiving. St. Augustine answers the question by saying that a thing pleases because it is beautiful. Such an approach treats beauty as an objective quality of things, although the activity of appreciating beauty needs a subject who practices subjectivity. St. Augustine's privileging the idea of objectivity of beauty influences

⁵ St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, XXXII, 59, qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970a:51; please also cf. Tatarkiewicz 1970:59.

the mentality of the medievals toward aesthetic polemics, and we see this again in St. Thomas Aquinas's aesthetics. St. Thomas says, "A thing is not beautiful because we love it, but is loved by us because it is beautiful and good."⁶ The fourth proposition about the discussion of beauty explains that beauty is perceived via the senses and contemplation. The last proposition that Nature and the arts contain beauty can be widely applied. The arts refer to the products of human skills or the skills themselves, and Nature can include objects like the sky, flowers, trees, animals and mankind.

Among these propositions, the theory of proportion has been the most prominent throughout the history of Western aesthetics. The belief that beauty is based on the concept of proportion started in Greece around 500 B.C. and has persisted in a variety of forms to the present day (Tatarkiewicz 1972). Proportion can be assigned to abstract and concrete qualities. Tatarkiewicz terms the theory of proportion as the "Great Theory" of European aesthetics and discusses its influences in a series of his works on Western aesthetics.⁷ The "Great Theory" finds its supporters such as Boethius, Robert Grosseteste, St. Bonaventure, Albert the Great, St. Thomas and William of Ockham, who all agree that beauty consists in the proportion of parts and numbers.⁸ To be qualified as beautiful, an object needs to be well-proportioned among its components as well as within itself. The notion of proportion is applied not only to physical objects but also to intellectual ideas. A thought is beautiful when it fulfills the requirement of proportion or harmony between it and human intelligence.

⁶ St. Thomas, *Expositio super Dionysium de divinis nominibus* [On the Divine Names], IV, 10 (Mandonnet 398), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:259.

⁷ The term "Great Theory" serves as the title for Tatarkiewicz's article "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline" (1972).

⁸ Tatarkiewicz summarizes the similar points of view shared by early and late medieval philosophers. In Boethius, "Beauty seems to be an adequacy of parts"; the Scholastic Robert Grosseteste explains beauty as the concordance of the proportions; St. Bonaventure observes that all delight "depends on proportionality"; Albert the Great asserts that the concept of beauty "implies the proportion of elements"; St. Thomas says: "Beauty requires consonance and clarity"; and later Scholastics such as William of Ockham are faithful to the opinion that beauty is "the proper proportion of numbers" (Tatarkiewicz 1970a:50).

Concept of art in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages

In addition to the concept of beauty, art is another main concept in the domain of Western aesthetics. Tatarkiewicz explains that the ancient Greeks have no word to denote those artistic activities that we today subsume under the name “art,” and neither do they linguistically or conceptually distinguish between crafts and the “fine arts” as we do today. Other names such as craft, skill or technique suit the ancient idea of art better than our term “art” does (Tatarkiewicz 1980:51). The ancients take every skill and every production as “art” if it is based on rules. Similar to the Greeks, the medieval men lack a theory of the fine arts because their focus is on the distinction between liberal and mechanical arts (Eco 1988:181), not on that between crafts and the fine arts. “Art” without a modifier in that age means the liberal arts, instead of the non-liberal arts (Tatarkiewicz 1980:57). On top of that, the seven liberal arts of the era are coupled with the seven mechanical arts.⁹ In addition to its productive character, art also designates knowledge which is required for crafts. Art as knowledge includes intellectual activities such as poetics, grammar, rhetoric and eloquence, while art as production refers to the productive character of manual or servile activities. From the Antiquity, the Middle Ages and down to the Renaissance, both the “skill” required to command an army and the “skill” required to make a statue are called arts. To put it another way, the medieval notion of art contains two main elements: cognition and production, and cognitive art is regarded superior to productive art (Eco 1988:164). To the ancients, art also designates a collection of objects and the capability to produce them (Tatarkiewicz 1980:3).

Four major propositions in the Middle Ages about the discussion of art are inherited from the Antiquity:

⁹ The seven liberal arts are grammar, rhetoric, logic or dialectic (constituting the *trivium*), and arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music (constituting the *quadrivium*) (*MED*, Part A.4 401). The Scholastics since the twelfth century also tried to classify the “mechanical arts.” For example, Hugh of St. Victor divides the mechanical arts into seven arts: “*lanificium* (supplying men with wearing apparel), *armatura* (supplying men with shelter and tools), *agricultura*, *venatio* (both supplying food), *navigatio*, *medicina* and *theatrica*” (in Tatarkiewicz 1980:57).

1. Art is based on rules;
2. Art is not creative;
3. The function of art is not expression; and
4. Art is either productive or imitative. (Tatarkiewicz 1970a:52)

For the first proposition, art in the medieval period is a kind of knowledge or skills and is subject to universal laws. Rules denote order, reason and proportion in the production of objects. The second and third propositions make explicit that what constitute the medieval concept of art are the human ability to produce things and the product itself, not the psychological condition of the artist. Hence, art has nothing to do with creativity or expression. Lastly, art is either productive or imitative. Mimesis, the Greek name for imitation, is a protean term, but basically this concept and its cognates indicate “a constant relation between something which is and something made like it” (McKeon 122). The notion that art imitates is thus further strengthened by the exclusion of artistic expression and creativity.

Similar to the ancient attitude toward art, the medieval men also believe in a hierarchical order of art: the liberal arts are superior to the mechanical ones. During the process of production, craftsmen must bear in mind that the works to be made are to meet the functional and moral purposes. Art ought to act as a medium of instruction. Works of art such as painting, sculpture and architecture are always among the items taken as exemplars of the beautiful, a liaison that relates art to beauty. Tatarkiewicz asserts that the functions of art in the Middle Ages are mostly religious, moral, practical and/or educational; only incidentally are they aesthetic (1970:291). That is to say, art for art’s sake is a relatively recent invention and hence unheard of among the medieval men. The medieval view of art holds that the practical use or the task of art “is not desired for its own sake, but to decorate life with the splendour which it could bestow” (Huizinga 244).

The above-mentioned propositions of beauty and art inherited from the Greeks also find expression in the Renaissance, while some of the propositions are modified in modern times. Tatarkiewicz in his article “Did Aesthetics Progress?” has done a

succinct yet thorough examination of the development of Western aesthetics. After analyzing important aesthetic propositions in these various eras, Tatarkiewicz declares that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance share many aesthetic propositions, among which the most essential ones are: beauty consists in right proportion and concordance of parts, and beauty is perceived by the mind and the senses; arts are either productive or imitative, and arts rely on rules which are based on knowledge. In modern times, aesthetics refers to a discipline in the domain of philosophy, and it incorporates the two concepts of “beauty” and “art” as its two main categories. David Cooper indicates that aesthetics after 1750 first became an academic subject in German universities, and it had been mainly concerned with the fine arts (48). From the previous basis, Cooper draws out two focal points. First of all, the year 1750 proves to be a watershed in the history of Western aesthetics for in that year the term “aesthetics” was first applied to the studies of beauty and art when Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) coined it (Tatarkiewicz 1980:7). Yet, if one traces its earlier appearance, aesthetics has its etymological origin from Greek and refers to a mental knowledge, which is contraposed against a sensual knowledge (1980:3). The second point in Cooper’s statement reveals that the fine arts have been the core for the studies of beauty and art ever since their turning point in 1750. The name “fine arts” was dubbed in 1747 by Charles Batteux, French abbe and writer on philosophy and aesthetics, and he is the first to equate art with beauty in the history of Western aesthetics (Tatarkiewicz 1980:7, 29).

As the enterprise of art develops, the range of the discoursing domain gradually narrows from the literary arts to the visual arts (Tatarkiewicz 1980:21). Eco remarks that “a great deal of modern aesthetics considers artistic form to possess an ontological value superior to that of natural forms, just because it is a product of the human spirit” (1988:173). Tatarkiewicz also expresses a similar view of the shift of aesthetic discourse: modern aesthetics gives more weight to the beauty of art than the beauty of nature and emphasizes more on the expressive and emotional function of art (1970a:56). Another way of saying this is that people nowadays tend to emphasize more subjectivity than objectivity of the aesthetic experience. As the scope of

aesthetic objects narrows, the reflection on natural beauty in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages is transformed to the focus on art, namely representational arts and fine arts. Cooper also observes that the worries of the ancients and the medievals about the moral impact of art disappeared from the philosophical purview during the eighteenth century when Baumgarten labeled “aesthetics” as a philosophical term of art (viii). As for the question of the development of Western aesthetics, Tatarkiewicz concludes that important changes have occurred in the history of aesthetics around and after 1750. Yet, for about two thousand years (500 B.C.~1500) Western aesthetics has undergone only partial changes (1970a:58-59). He distinguishes the progress of the *arts* from the progress of the *theory* of the arts and contends that the practice of the arts does not progress:

It has been said, and correctly been said that Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, are not above Aeschylus and Homer, that Michelangelo is not more perfect than the Greek sculptors; neither is Rembrandt a greater artist than Van Eyck. Artists are different; arts have different forms and styles. They change and they do so rather often. *They change but they do not progress.*
(58, author’s emphasis)

On the other hand, the theory of arts progresses as its concepts become sharper and its propositions richer. Yet, major propositions have been known since ancient Greece, consequently the theory of art *progresses but it does not change* (58). One interesting and pertinent metaphor has been devised by Tatarkiewicz in comparing and contrasting ancient aesthetic theory and modern aesthetic theory:

one aesthetic theory, the “classical” one, has for at least 2000 years been the leading theory. This is not contradicted by the fact that simultaneously other theories have been set up. Those had fewer adherents and their acceptance was less continuous. The history of aesthetics has been a pluralistic history with several different trends; but the importance of its component theories was not equal. The classical theory has been for centuries the *freeway* of aesthetics. It had, of course, its mergings and exits, as every freeway has. But for centuries other theories were only *side roads* of aesthetics. (57-58, author’s emphasis)

However, after 1500 things change. The classical theory is no more the freeway of

aesthetics; it seems to be a road of less importance. While there are new roads, none of them becomes a new freeway (58).

Medieval aesthetics

In the Middle Ages, the classical theory of beauty is still a commonly known freeway, especially the theory of proportion. Yet, it takes a different hue in the Middle Ages in light of the integration of Christianity. The notion of beauty in the Judeo-Christian philosophical system shows a shift to spiritual and religious features of beauty. Eco observes that Christianity confers upon most of the aesthetic issues a quite distinctive character, hence medieval thinking on aesthetic matters is original (1986:4). Early Christians view that spiritual beauty is the kind of beauty to be held in esteem, keeping in mind that the only true beauty worthy of admiring is God. In fact, the basis of Christianity has “no need of science or philosophy, still less of aesthetics” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:1). What draw many medieval thinkers’ attention are theological issues, like the relationship between man and God as well as an understanding of God. Tatarkiewicz continues, “The Christian view of the world was based first and foremost on the *New Testament*. But the *New Testament* contains even less aesthetic factors than in the *Old Testament*” (1970:11-12). In the *Old Testament*, beauty is mentioned in *The Book of Wisdom* (11:20): God is said to “have set in order all things by measure, number and weight.”¹⁰ While in the *New Testament*, the beauty of mercy and that of fraternity, instead of the beauty of physical forms, are emphasized. Later in the fourth century, St. Augustine followed the same track of aesthetic philosophy, in which he was interested in the objectivity of beauty as well as the elements of harmony and proper proportion of parts that constitute beauty.¹¹ The key concepts in St. Augustine’s theory of beauty are “unity, number,

¹⁰ Qtd. in St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XII, 19. The *Book of Wisdom* speaks of the beauty of creation and of works of art. Its mathematical theory of aesthetics is evidence of Greek influence. The assimilation of Greek and Christian elements is to be very important for medieval aesthetics. Tatarkiewicz states that “the authority of the *Scriptures* allowed it to be propounded and led to the unexpected result that a mathematical theory became one of the main aesthetic theories of a religious period” (1970:7).

¹¹ St. Augustine holds that things are beautiful when “their parts are similar to one another

equality, proportion and order” (Beardsley 1975:93). All these terms share two characteristics: reason and order.

That how the medieval Christians understand God is a theological issue, yet it is usually uttered in aesthetic terms. For example, in *Song of Solomon*, the speaker utters: “Let me see thy countenance, and let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (2:14).¹² The addresser tries to appreciate the beauty of God by arousing the audience’s visual and audio sensations, the involved two senses being the most cognitive ones according to the medieval philosophers. In the prime era of Scholastics, philosophers also utilize the concept of beauty to discourse their understanding of God and the world.¹³ Even though there is then discourse on beauty as such, when the Scholastic movement moves into the late Middle Ages, the most powerful thinkers become enthralled by the theological, ontological and epistemological problems rather than aesthetic problems so much so that most aesthetic remarks tend to be brief and peripheral to the main thought of the Scholastics (Beardsley 1975:89). Yet, aesthetics somehow finds its way into the philosophical systems of the Scholastics. Indeed, the question of beauty could not be “omitted from an all-embracing *Summa*, particularly in those chapters which dealt with God and the world” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:213).

Aesthetic judgment

Aesthetics and its chief concepts, such as beauty, art, creativity, form and so on, are “among the most general and most enduring possessions of human mind”

and their relationship results in harmony” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:49).

¹² This translation comes from Tatarkiewicz 1970:13.

¹³ According to Robert Grosseteste, an Oxford Franciscan, Bishop of Lincoln from 1235, when we say that “God is beautiful, this means that he is the cause of all beauty” (*Commentary in Divina nomina* [Pouillon, 321]), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:232. Ulrich of Strassburg, pupil to Albert the Great and fellow classmate of St. Thomas, also adheres to the tradition of using aesthetic terms to describe God. He writes, “God in Himself is not only perfectly beautiful and the highest degree of beauty, but is also the efficient, exemplary and final cause of all created beauty” (*De pulchro* [Grabmann, 75]), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:244.

(Tatarkiewicz 1980:4). All these concepts are usually accompanied by judgment of values. Immanuel Kant defines aesthetic judgment as a non-conceptual and disinterested judging, which is not grounded in the subject's personal interests, desires, needs or susceptibilities. This is certainly a highly human intellectual capability. Kant, however, also acknowledges that the intervention of the pleasant and the good *always happens*, because of the mechanisms of human nature. For example, the notion of disinterested judgment is often penetrated by sensory pleasures such as those derived from the beauty of mankind (Kant 73). Five centuries earlier, St. Thomas also distinguished pure aesthetic pleasure from biological pleasure.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Summa Theologica*, Part II (Second Part), Q. 141, Art. 4 ad 3. *Summa Theologica* will be henceforth called *ST*. According to the on-line version of *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, which is translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (2000), the summa falls into three parts, of which St. Thomas subdivides the second into the first part of the second part, and the second part of the second part. He never finished the third part, therefore his followers composed an ending from his earlier writings, and their work is "the supplement." We usually see the following in notes and parenthetical references: 1. "First Part" (*Prima Pars*), 2. "First Part of the Second Part" (*Prima Secundae Partis*), 3. "Second Part of the Second Part" (*Secunda Secundae Partis*), 4. "Third Part" (*Tertia Pars*) and 5. "Supplement to the Third Part" (*Supplementum Tertiae Partis*). Each part breaks down into questions, each of which consists of articles. In the deployment of each article, "objections" on one side of an issue are followed by an argument supporting the other side, which is introduced with the formula *sed contra* ("on the other hand"). Next are St. Thomas's solutions in the body (*corpus*) of the article, that is, his replies to the aforementioned objections. Replies open with *ad* ("to") followed by a number.

There have been numerous formats of citing St. Thomas's *Summa Theologica*. For instance, Eco in his *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, employs the following format: "*ST*, I-II, 27, 1c," which reads "*Summa Theologica*, the first part of the second part, question 27, article 1, St. Thomas's solutions in the *corpus*." In other situation when Eco refers to a specific reply of St. Thomas's, the word "*ad*" is put after the number of the article and before that of the reply. For example, "II-II, 180, 2 ad 3" reads as "the second part of the second part, question 180, article 2, St. Thomas's *responsio* to *objectio* 3." Margaret A. Gist, on the other hand, adopts a different method. In her *Love and War in the Middle English Romance*, she uses the following format: "*Summa Theologica*, Part II (First Part), Q. 27, Art. 1," yet she does not employ the marking of "*ad*" or "*c*" to pinpoint a certain passage; instead she refers to an article *per se*. A third example is Tatarkiewicz's method of citation in his *History of Aesthetics: Medieval Aesthetics*. In citing "*ST*, I-II, 27, 1c," he follows the format of "Summa theol., I-a II-ae, q. 27 a. 1 c," and "II-II, 180, 2 ad 3" is written as "Summa theol., II-a II-ae, q. 180 a. 2 ad 3." In this thesis, I will synthesize all these methods of citation, and "*ST*, I-II, 27, 1c" will be written as "*ST*, Part II (First Part), Q. 27, Art. 1c," and "II-II, 180, 2

Sometimes, the desire to possess an object of beauty can also easily intervene one's disinterested aesthetic judgment.¹⁵ Thus, interestedness often infiltrates through the senses and the mind to the extent that a "mixed" experience, judgment and pleasure is brought up.

St. Thomas's aesthetic theory

In the Western history of aesthetics, there are numerous great philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle as well as Kant and Hegel, before and after St. Thomas, and their theories are influential. According to Hegel (1770-1831), Kant speaks "the first rational word on aesthetics," and *The Critique of Judgement* has formed the basis of subsequent writings on the theory of beauty and art.¹⁶ Yet, among these important figures, St. Thomas is more culturally, religiously and aesthetically integrated with the social background of Chaucer's *Tales* than other philosophers. Therefore, it shall be more appropriate to employ St. Thomas's aesthetic theory to shed light on the interpretation of beauty and art in medieval marriage. Furthermore, during the Middle Ages, it is the Scholastics who contribute most to the discourse on aesthetics.

ad 3" as "ST, Part II (Second Part), Q. 180, Art. 2 ad 3." All St. Thomas quotations in this thesis are taken from the on-line version of *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, unless otherwise specified.

¹⁵ To further demonstrate how disinterested judgment can be intervened by circumstances, I would like to propose a situation wherein disinterestedness is inadvertently turned into interestedness. Once in the National Gallery, I was looking at an oil painting titled "Hylas and the Nymphs" by John W. Waterhouse. The artistic ambiance infected me so much so that I had been immersed in its mythological counterpart for some time. The sense of disinterestedness naturally infiltrated my mind because there was no selfish desire on the painting. After having enough of the sight of the masterpiece, I left the exhibition room and was "inevitably" led to the museum gift shop. Exactly then, my desire to possess a replica of the "Hylas and the Nymphs" oil painting welled up. I realized the necessity to purchase at least a poster or a postcard while I was there because I probably would not return to the National Gallery during my whole life. Thus, the interestedness penetrated into the unselfishness of my aesthetic experience. This should be what Kant categorizes as the judgment of the pleasant and of the good, not of taste (44-48). This is to show how easily the sentiment of disinterestedness can be transformed into emotional engagement.

¹⁶ "Kant, Immanuel," *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. Ian Chilvers and Harold Osborne (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997). *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford UP. 25 April 2003. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/>

Among these scholars, St. Thomas with the magnitude and variety of his intellectual achievements, has a distinct view on aesthetics which is “one of the most frequently quoted of all medieval statements on aesthetics and is even regarded as the quintessence of Scholastic aesthetics” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:248).

Though St. Thomas does not compose a systematic treatise on aesthetics, three essential elements are usually regarded to constitute St. Thomas’s theory of beauty. On the other hand, the views of aesthetic pleasure and the apprehension of beauty form his definition of beauty.¹⁷ On top of that, he also has a distinct theory of art. In his theory of beauty, St. Thomas asserts that beauty consists in proportion, clarity and integrity:

beauty includes three conditions, “integrity” or “perfection,” since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due “proportion” or “harmony”; and lastly, “brightness” or “clarity,” whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color. (*ST*, Part I, Q. 39, Art. 8c)

Firstly, “due proportion” can be said to correspond to the first three propositions of beauty in the Antiquity mentioned above. The beauty of a thing consists in the proportions of its parts, and the appropriateness of the arrangement of the parts suits the moral end. Furthermore, the notion of proportion emphasizes the objective property of beautiful things. Secondly, “clarity” in St. Thomas’s philosophical system includes both physical beauty and spiritual beauty: he uses these two characteristics to describe the beauty of human beings. Lastly, “integrity” refers to the completeness of a thing, namely, perfection. These three criteria are in fact “various modalities of proportion,” and we can conclude that they are “criteria of the perfection of a thing—perfection in the sense of goodness, but also, by implication, in the sense of beauty—and that they are conditions and aspects of the substantial form of the thing” (Eco 1988:67). In terms of the definition of beauty, St. Thomas

¹⁷ Feliks Jaroński distinguishes “definition” from “theory” by giving the following example. When air is said as “the gas surrounding the earth,” this is a definition, while when air is explained as “a mixture of nitrogen and oxygen,” this is theory (*O filozofii* [On Philosophy], 1812), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1980:9. Based on this notion, Tatarkiewicz distinguishes St. Thomas’s theory of beauty from his definition of beauty.

attributes a psychological aspect to beauty and defines it as the following: “beautiful things are those which please when seen” (*ST*, Part I, Q. 5, Art. 4 ad 1) and “the ‘beautiful’ is something pleasant to apprehend” (*ST*, Part I [Second Part], Q. 27, Art. 1 ad 3). The first proposition reflects on the faculty of seeing and its relationship to aesthetic pleasure, whereas the second proposition focuses on the faculty of apprehension. These two propositions may seem different at first glance. Yet St. Thomas extends the faculty of “sight” to all the other senses and even to the inner apprehension, hence the two propositions are actually two in one (*ST*, Part I, Q. 67, Art. 1c).

Moreover, St. Thomas also brings up his view of art. He defines art as the “right order of the mind” (*ST*, Part I [Second Part], Q. 57, Art. 5 ad 1), a brief phrase that reminds us of the rules in the process of artistic production. He also attaches reason to the practice of arts—art is the “right reason about things to be made.”¹⁸ This proposition suggests that artists require fixed rules to enable the production of objects, thus reducing individual creativity and expression during the making process. Elsewhere St. Thomas remarks that art imitates nature.¹⁹ All of his observations correspond to the aforementioned four propositions of the theory of art.

Thesis statement

On the basis of the above preliminaries, this thesis attempts to interpret the marriages portrayed in Chaucer’s *Tales* in terms of St. Thomas’s aesthetic theory and to explore how the beauty and art in different types of marriage Chaucer describes reflect the contemporary aesthetics. Chaucer, being a late medieval poet, absorbs the cultural heritage into his final literary creation, the *Tales*, and it is logically assumed that he consciously or unconsciously reveals traces of contemporary aesthetics. This study therefore aims to examine the practices of the concepts of beauty and art in marriage in light of St. Thomas’s aesthetic theory. Firstly, marriage is taken as an object of beauty, and its various forms and contents portrayed in different tales will be

¹⁸ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part II (First Part), Q. 57, Art. 5 ad 1.

¹⁹ St. Thomas, *Physics*, II, 4 (Leonina, vol. II, 65), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:262.

analyzed so as to see to what extent they reflect and diverge from medieval aesthetic sensitivity. Chaucer's tales are grouped under three dialogic bodies. One group includes the nobility as portrayed in "The Clerk's Tale," "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Second Nun's Tale"; the second group the knights as represented in "The Franklin's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Tale"; and the third group the commoners²⁰ as portrayed in "The Miller's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue." Secondly, a wife will also be regarded as an object of beauty. I shall discuss how a husband's "aesthetic experience" drawn from his spouse's physical and spiritual beauty embodies medieval aesthetic attitudes. The objectivity and subjectivity of aesthetics reflected in medieval marriage will serve as the structural framework of this inquiry to analyze the various aesthetics of marriage celebrated among the nobility, knights and the common folks in the various tales. After dealing with the elements that make a medieval marriage beautiful, I shall proceed to inquire the relationship between the concept of art and the procreative and productive nature of marriage. Briefly, what motivates the research of this paper is the intention to

²⁰ The traditional hierarchy of the medieval feudalism consists of three main strata of people: knights, clergy and peasants. At the very beginning of the *Tales*, Chaucer warns his readers not to take him too seriously and excuses himself from being accused of inaccuracy: "Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,/ Al have I nat set folk in hir degree/ Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde./ My wit is short, ye may wel understonde" (I 743-46). The poet explicitly confesses that he does not intend to reflect the social reality of that period for some reasons. The implicit rebellious spirit in modifying the traditional tripartite structure of the feudal society seems to suggest the necessity to incorporate more sub classes, such as people of professional trades, because a person's work determines the estate to which he belongs. In addition, in Jill Mann's list of the order in which the estates are presented in the "General Prologue," the commoners, especially people of professional trades, occupy a large part. Her lists is as follows: "Knight: Squire: Yeoman: Prioress: Second Nun and three Priests: Monk: Friar: Merchant: Clerk: Sergeant of Law: Franklin: Guildsmen—Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyer, Tapicer: Cook: Shipman: Doctor of Physic: Wife of Bath: Parson: Ploughman: Miller: Manciple: Reeve: Summoner: Pardoner" (206). On such an order, Mann comments that the "higher echelons of both clergy and laity are unrepresented, but ... the third estate is represented in the *Prologue* with an unusual richness" (5). That is to say, Chaucer pays lots of attention to the experiences of the commoners, a term that allows a generalized application in designating people's estates. It is necessary to clarify my working definition of the term "commoners" in this thesis: it refers to the sub class of the occupational trades who possess wealth, and thus excludes tenant farmers or peasants.

inquire to what extent the marriages described in the aforementioned tales reflect medieval aesthetic theory, and how aesthetic theory can be adopted to interpret marriage. By juxtaposing medieval aesthetics and marriage, I shall aim to discover meaningful interrelations between these two cultural aspects. Among other things, an aesthetic debate on spiritual beauty versus physical beauty in a wife is launched among the pilgrims. I shall demonstrate that the pilgrim-tellers on their way to Canterbury conduct a dialogue on the form and contents of marriage. The intended goal is to find out whether or not the stereotype of the binary opposition of physical beauty versus spiritual beauty is resolved and to explicate Chaucer's attitude toward different types of aesthetics of marriage in his *Tales*.

The historical range of this thesis will cover the times from St. Thomas to Chaucer, which constitutes the years from late thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth centuries. The reason to start with St. Thomas is self-evident: as a scholar, philosopher and theologian, St. Thomas had been able to conduct academic and profound research on theological and philosophical bases. The effort throughout this thesis is to reflect some fundamental aesthetic concepts of the Middle Ages, yet one major difficulty faces the construction of this thesis. This is basically a methodological problem since St. Thomas does not compose a systematic aesthetic theory, hence I shall rely on his three elements of beauty and treat them as the components of his theory of beauty. Huizinga states that Denis the Carthusian²¹ in the fifteenth century tried to apply St. Thomas's three elements of beauty, yet he hardly succeeded because applied aesthetics is seldom successful: "When the idea of beauty is so highly intellectualized, it is not surprising that the mind passes at once from earthly beauty to that of the angels and of the empyrean or to that of abstract conceptions" (Huizinga 267). We do not actually know how Denis the Carthusian

²¹ One of the distinguished Carthusians, Denis the Carthusian (1402/1043-1471) is a theologian and mystical writer and called the Ecstatic Doctor (*Doctor Ecstatims*) (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03388a.htm>). Carthusian order was a Roman Catholic order founded by St. Bruno in 1084 at Chartreuse, near Grenoble, France. The Carthusians live chiefly in silence and support themselves by their own labors (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 4, 764-65).

applied St. Thomas's aesthetic theory. Yet, even though St. Thomas's idea of beauty is said to be highly intellectualized, it is fundamentally based on concrete objects or imagery. Eco observes that St. Thomas employs the example of the beauty of human body to illustrate abstract conceptions such as proportion and clarity (1988:125). This implies that the foundation of St. Thomas's aesthetic abstraction lies in concreteness. The aesthetic polemics in marriage that I shall bring up is realistic and practical; therefore, they can be analogously interpreted from St. Thomas's aesthetic theory.

Methodology

St. Thomas's theory and definition of beauty as well as theory of art will serve as the framework to examine the practice of aesthetics in medieval marriages portrayed in Chaucer's *Tales*.²² The analysis of the richness of the three elements of beauty, i.e., proportion, clarity and integrity, will respectively appear in the subsequent three chapters. Beardsley observes that each of these three properties is not univocal because there is "not a single beauty common to all beautiful things, but a whole family of qualities, each to be prized wherever it is found" (1975:105). These three elements are analogical and "constitute beauty in each of its endlessly varied forms" (1975:105). I shall hence attempt to analogously interpret the beauty and art of marriage via these three aesthetic elements. Based on the tripartite theoretical structure, each of the three elements is assigned to a chapter. Moreover, the discussion of the *definition* of beauty will be merged with the *theory* of beauty in Chapter Two, while St. Thomas's theory of art will be explored along with the concept of integrity in Chapter Three. To look at the framework from an encompassing perspective, the form of marriage will be approached from the notion of proportion, while the contents of marriage from the notions of clarity and integrity.

In the Middle Ages, the term "aesthetics" is not discovered, and it may not be

²² References to the concept of beauty and of art in the *Summa Theologica* reflect St. Thomas's mature aesthetic views (Tatarkiewicz 1970:247) hence I shall frequently refer to the work.

appropriate to apply the modern conception of the term in the medieval context. Yet, the term “aesthetics” is chosen on purpose to include not only the concept of beauty but also that of art; “aesthetics” is not taken as an academic subject, but as a general concept that permeates through medieval marriage. In other words, aesthetics in the present study means a particular theory of beauty and art in the domain of marriage. The beauty of the fine arts will not be the focus of this thesis, yet the reflection on art and beauty can provide a gateway for interpreting medieval marriage. The division of beauty and art which aesthetics designates is expected to serve as a suitable approach to realize the aesthetic attitude of Chaucer’s pilgrims.

Marriage will be taken as an object of beauty that is specifically regarded from the aesthetic point of view. In a broad historical sense, the concept of marriage under different contexts may mean (1) a momentary ceremony at which the act of marrying is done, (2) an act of marrying someone, (3) a duration wherein husband and wife stay and live together, (4) a life-time commitment and (5) a pledge between husband and wife and between man and God. In addition, the criteria of a potential spouse’s physiological, social and religious backgrounds will also be taken into account. These considerations are not included in the above-mentioned five meanings of marriage, yet they can definitely decide the quality of marriage as a whole. During the time the couple stay together, they are required to accomplish the obligation of procreation, which also contributes to the significance of marriage. On the other hand, a wife’s virtues in the Middle Ages are always examined with a magnifying glass. All of these conditions contribute to the form and contents of marriage, and they assert importance before, during and after the wedding ceremony. For a woman, to center upon marriage and the aesthetic polemics growing out of it is only natural since “the most important relationship women entered into was the marital one,” asserts Margaret A. Gist (11).

The definition of “aesthetic experience” in this thesis will not range over what Beardsley calls “artkind instance,” which covers poetry, painting, sculpture, music or dance (1982:285). Terms such as aesthetic experience, aesthetic judgment and pleasure are used to refer to an intellectual activity in appreciating the beauty of

human beings. Experiences of an aesthetic character need not be universally associated with objects that belong to artistic categories, i.e., artkind categories. This is no intention to challenge an established academic significance that has been acknowledged for a long time. Rather, I think it worthwhile to put the appreciation of the mankind's beauty under the aesthetic category because experiences of beauty as such touch upon a fundamental sensitivity found in the breath and values of life. If man can perceive the beauty of the order in works of art, can they not respond similarly to human beauty if taking human beings as works of art? Based on a "mixed" aesthetic judgment observed both by St. Thomas and Kant, my definitions of "aesthetic judgment" and "aesthetic pleasure" are placed in between purely sensory or sensual pleasure and purely cognitive or intellectual one.

D. W. Robertson in *A Preface to Chaucer* has done an in-depth research on medieval aesthetics, such as the important contributions of St. Augustine to aesthetic theory and the continuing relevance of his thought to the late Middle Ages, figurative expression, the distinction of the use of beauty and abuse of beauty in Chaucer's works. Reading Chaucer's *Tales* exegetically, Robertson contextualizes the work within the frame of medieval aesthetics and the rubric of medieval religious tradition. Francis K. H. So comes up with a succinct summary of the Robertsonian criticism: Robertson holds that in order to understand Chaucer, one has to first understand medieval aesthetics, and in order to apprehend medieval aesthetics, one has to primarily apprehend religious arts and biblical exhortations of that age (1997:3). So continues that Robertson's exegetics employed in his book almost becomes a synonym of historicism (3). Robertson is able to bring out philosophical hypotheses from his research because he puts Chaucer and his work in the historical context even though Robertson's exegetical discourse tends to be circuitous and verbose (So 1997:3). The way I deal with Chaucer's *Tales* and medieval aesthetics will be different from Robertson's exegetical interpretation of the work. One major difference lies in the fact that I shall not aim at providing historical facts as Robertson does; rather, only occasional references with historical background will be made in the process of inquiry since my intended goal is to explore the literary representation

of the aesthetics of marriage in Chaucer's *Tales*, instead of the social reality of marriage in the Middle Ages.

In Chapter One of this thesis, the theory of "proportion" is applied to the various forms of marriage depicted in the *Tales* to explore to what extent the marriage of the nobility portrayed in the tales of the Clerk, the Man of Law and the Second Nun, that of the knights described in the tales of the Franklin, the Merchant and the Wife of Bath as well as that of the commoners portrayed in the Miller's tale and the Wife of Bath's prologue, correspond to this element of beauty. Chapter Two examines the roles the variants of "clarity," that is, physical and spiritual beauty, play in marriage, and a debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty of a wife among the pilgrim-tellers will be demonstrated. Furthermore, in Chapter Three I shall extend the medieval concept of art to that of the "procreative art" in marriage, and explore the relationship between the procreative art and the "integrity" of marriage in the aforementioned tales.

Chapter One

The “Great Theory” as Evidenced in the Marriages in the *Tales*

At first glance the association between medieval marriage and the medieval concept of beauty is not self-evident because while one belongs to an aspect of social reality, the other to a concept of philosophy. Yet, if one takes beauty as a concept, and at the same time uses analogy as the inquiring method to examine and construct the imaginary domain between the values of beauty and marriage, there is an implied language of intercommunication between the two subjects.

This chapter addresses the relation between the form of medieval marriage and the first element of beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas’s aesthetic theory, namely, the notion of proportion. I shall begin with Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* [henceforth called the *Tales*], by exploring the extent to which an aesthetic perspective is embodied in the various marriages portrayed in the work. The intended goal is to examine whether the marriage of the nobility, of the knights and of the commoners in various tales reveal an ideal or misfit marriage based on the theory of proportion.

If we can decide the beauty of an object, by way of analogy we shall be able to do the same with reference to the entity of marriage. By weaving together the notions of medieval marriage and medieval concept of beauty, one will not only see the conceptual correspondence but also the polemics between the theory of what ought to be beautiful and what is contradicted in life. Just as there is commensurability between visual beauty of concrete objects and intellectual beauty in abstract entities, likewise the analogy between a beautiful object and a beautiful marriage is also logically sound. To understand the relationship between medieval aesthetics as well as the marriages portrayed in “The Clerk’s Tale,” “The Man of Law’s Tale,” “The Second Nun’s Tale,” “The Franklin’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and her tale, the representations of marriage will be explicated to fit into St. Thomas’s aesthetic theory and vice versa.

I. Theory of “proportion”: the “Great Theory”

St. Thomas inherits from the Antiquity the concept of proportion and renders it the quintessence of his aesthetic theory. He considers an object to be beautiful when it satisfies three formal criteria: proportion, clarity and integrity.¹ Tatarkiewicz observes that such a definition is St. Thomas’s own (1970:247). Among these three criteria, the notion of proportion is the only one to be accepted and understood universally despite the richness of its variant meanings (Eco 1988:71). Tatarkiewicz dubs the concept of proportion the “Great Theory” of European aesthetics (1972:167). Its aesthetic importance cannot be emphasized enough because it is discovered, learned and practiced since the ancient period. St. Thomas’s three elements of beauty share a common essential feature, which is the perfection or completeness of an object. That is, whenever a harmonious form characterizes an object, it is considered beautiful. Of the three elements, St. Thomas does not seem to impose on them a definite hierarchy—they are arranged in different order under different occasions.² Yet, the inversion of order hardly affects their validity because they have reciprocal connections, and one cannot once and for all decide which is the cause and

¹ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part I, Q. 39, Art. 8c; please cf. page 14 in the introduction of this thesis for the original quote.

² For example, the arrangement of these three elements in *ST*, Part I, Q. 39, Art. 8c and that in Part II (Second Part), Q. 145, Art. 2c shows a different order. In the former, St. Thomas says that “beauty includes three conditions, ‘integrity’ or ‘perfection’...; due ‘proportion’ or ‘harmony’; and lastly, ‘brightness’ or ‘clarity’ ...,” while in the latter, he writes that “beauty or comeliness results from the concurrence of clarity and due proportion.” The omission of “integrity” in Part II (Second Part), Q. 145, Art. 2c should not impede our understanding of St. Thomas’s viewpoint because he never provides a single systematic treatise on beauty. Eco explains that the subject of beauty had long been internalized in St. Thomas, who “never took a specific interest in the problems of beauty for their own sake, [and] he never wrote a treatise, or even an article, about it. He never felt the need to put his ideas on aesthetics into systematic form. He always mentioned the problem of beauty as if by chance, and his remarks about it were always parenthetical. But this was not because he had no interest in aesthetics. The reason was rather the opposite: it came naturally to him to see the world in terms of its beauty; it was something *spontaneous*, *effortless*, and *habitual*.... It was a natural and everyday fact of life that the world was conceived of aesthetically” (1988:115-16, emphasis mine).

which is the effect. Yet, to a fundamental extent, the idea of proportion is the denominator of the three elements—when an object has a harmonious proportion in the arrangement of its parts, the form brings clarity and integrity to the object. For this reason, the “Great Theory” is not only an element of beauty to St. Thomas: it actually operates as head among these three elements of beauty.

The notion of “due proportion” to St. Thomas is equated with “harmony,” both of which bring forth the importance of a good and proper arrangement of parts. The theory of proportion can serve as a measure to judge the aesthetic value not only of a concrete object but of an abstract entity. St. Thomas further explains the nature of beauty as follows:

Beauty or comeliness results from the concurrence of clarity and due proportion. For ... God is said to be beautiful, as being “the cause of the harmony and clarity of the universe.” Hence the beauty of the body consists in a man having his bodily limbs well proportioned, together with a certain clarity of color. (ST, Part II [Second Part], Q. 145, Art. 2c)

In order to explicate an abstract concept such as beauty, St. Thomas uses the well-arranged limbs of mankind as a concrete example to demonstrate the aesthetics of proportion, keeping in mind that God is the exemplary cause of all kinds of beauty in the universe. Eco points out the practicality of St. Thomas’s “highly intellectualized idea of beauty”:³ when St. Thomas decides to give a concrete example of beauty or explain what is meant by proportion and clarity, he “invariably has recourse to the human body” because man is “one of the most perfect and complete of organisms, in which spiritual and material elements combine, grounded in a wide range of proportional relations” (1988:125).

St. Thomas’s concept of proportion, though not a new aesthetic idea, is wider than that of the classical Greeks. For instance, Pythagoras finds proportion only in material things, so that his understanding of proportion is limited to quantitative and mathematical terms (Tatarkiewicz 1970:251). For St. Thomas, proportion includes not only quantitative but also qualitative relations. He says,

³ The quotation is from Huizinga 267.

Proportion is twofold. In one sense it means a certain relation of one *quantity* to another, according as double, treble and equal are species of proportion. In another sense *every relation* of one thing to another is called proportion. And in this sense there can be a proportion of the creature to God, inasmuch as it is related to Him as the effect of its cause, and as potentiality to its act; and in this way the created intellect can be proportioned to know God. (*ST*, Part I, Q. 12, Art. 1 ad 4, emphasis mine)

Hence, proportion is a numerical as well as a relational concept, a concrete as well as an abstract notion. Eco terms the first of these a mathematical and quantitative kind of proportion and the second a qualitative kind of proportion (1988:82). Quantitative proportion is understood as a sensible relation, while qualitative proportion as a purely intellectual relation. Indeed, the idea of proportion in St. Thomas has a very complex connotation. There are various types of proportion, as summarized by Eco. Proportion can be conceived of as a relation of one thing to another, as process, as a relation of fitness between a thing's essence and its act of existence, as logical relation between things and as the fit between an object and its function (Eco 1988:83-98). The above quotation from *ST* about the twofold meanings of proportion has covered the mathematical and relational characteristics of the concept of proportion, and these two aspects shall be our concern. Proportion as a sensible relation is not a difficult idea to understand, yet proportion as a purely intellectual notion needs more explanation. St. Thomas explicates elsewhere what he means by a qualitative kind of proportion:

There is a proportion between a created intelligence and God as an object of understanding, not a proportion implying any commensurateness of being, but a proportion implying a reference of one to the other, as matter is referred to form, or cause to effect. Thus there may well be a proportion between the creature and God, as the understanding is referred to the understood, or the effect to the cause. (*Summa contra Gentiles* 3.54)

This passage helps to clarify the question of beauty as a transcendental. The relation between the creatures and God, the effect and the cause, is not concrete; instead, it is abstract yet perceivable. St. Thomas's way of understanding the relation between man and God clearly places beauty on a metaphysical level. Proportion thus

includes the relations of the natural world as well as “relations in the ontological structure of things, such as the relation of form to matter; and even the relation of a thing to itself: namely, its inward harmony, the fact that it is as it should be” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:251). The harmony of a sequence of thought and the proportion of thought to the laws of thought also explain proportion as a purely intellectual notion. In addition to the relation of a thing to itself, proportion also pertains to a relation between one item and another, or the relation of three, four, “an infinity of things, proportionate among themselves and proportioned also in respect of some unifying whole” (Eco 1988:89). If we take two objects for instance, when they are related in the same space-time, the act of joining involves a proportion and a concordance. One may summarize that when two objects or thoughts are connected, the act of relating necessarily involves a mathematical and/or relational proportion.

II. The relationship between the form of marriage and the theory of proportion

Since the theory of proportion is the most widespread aesthetic concept in the Middle Ages, it is supposed that one may find aesthetic correspondence in everyday experiences. Marriage, in fact, will be such an entity that reflects the medieval aesthetic theory of proportion. Just like an object that has its form and contents, marriage, composed of husband and wife as the elementary unit, also has its form and contents. Marriage analogically possesses physical as well as spiritual beauty by its own right. It is an existence that is both concrete and invisible: it is perceptible because it consists of a couple who in turns construct an imaginary space, and simultaneously it is also imperceptible since it is a conceptualized institution that is manifested through concrete entities, like marriage certificate, household or legitimate children.

What exactly relates beauty to marriage in the Middle Ages? One brief remark about the relationship of beauty to marriage can be found in Master Peter Lombard (c. 1100-1160/64), who was an Italian Scholastic teaching theology in Notre Dame. As Frances and Joseph Gies assert, Lombard attributes *beauty* to marriage as one of the legitimate reasons for matrimony, in addition to procreation and avoidance of

fornication (1978:34). They state that Lombard lists three “decent” motives for matrimony: “the political one of reconciliation of enemies; money; and—the nearest to a mention of love—*beauty*” (34, emphasis mine). Although the Gieses only make a brief mentioning of beauty in marriage and even leave out the bibliographical details concerning Lombard’s writing, one cannot fail to relate the existence of beauty to the concept of marriage. On the other hand, a more secular idea of the relationship between beauty and marriage holds that the desire for the intended’s beauty is also one of the motives for marrying (Kelly 247). L. B. Alberti agrees: “To take a wife is to search for beauty, kindred and riches” (qtd. in de La Roncière 292). Yet, John Gower warns against marrying only for beauty or delight.⁴ What Lombard understands the relationship between beauty and marriage apparently differs from the secular view propounded by Gower. The positive and negative attitudes toward the relationship between beauty and marriage as such, however, make explicit that the idea of beauty is closely related to the realm of marriage.

A. Mathematical aesthetics in the form of marriage

Matrimony in the medieval period carries a theological as well as an aesthetic significance. St. Augustine, in *Concerning the City of God*, remarks that a sacrament is “a sign of a sacred thing” (X, 5). Lombard approves of St. Augustine’s assertion and adds that a sacrament is “the visible form of an invisible grace” and is a great sign of the grace of God.⁵ The sign of sacredness depends on the mind of the Creator which is thought to be rationally ordered. In other words, God is the ruler of numbers.⁶ According to St. Augustine, numbers signify rational order, equality,

⁴ Gower, *Mirour de l’homme*, 17413ff., qtd. in Kelly 275.

⁵ The Fourth Book of *Sentences*, “On The Doctrine of Signs,” Distinction 1, ch. 2 and ch. 4. The book of *Sentences* (*Quatuor libri Sententiarum*) makes Lombard an important name for the later Middle Ages. By the thirteenth century, the *Sentences* had become the principal theological text in the universities and brought some Scholastics’ attentions (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 11, 221-22).

⁶ F. J. Thonnard in the notes to the edition of the *De musica* in the “Bibliothèque Augustinienne” (Paris, 1947) points out that the word “number” is used in four ways. Except the common understanding of the ordinary mathematical sense, number can mean (1)

proportion and harmony.⁷ Since matrimony carries vestiges of God's blessing, it should be likewise arranged in order and harmony. St. Paul explains that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the *two* shall become *one* flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32, emphasis mine). The great mystery or sacredness lies in the fact that a couple act according to God's will, and God is the "eternal and supreme Prince of number, of similitude, of equality and of order" (Robertson 116). The *two* souls and bodies of husband and wife will ultimately unite as *one* in perfection. Such a numerical aesthetics reflects St. Thomas's theory of proportion which is simultaneously a numerical as well as a relational concept. A *good* marriage is consequently based on number, similitude and equality between the two parties that are to be united. The aesthetics of number thus finds a correspondence in the significance of the sacrament of matrimony.

The joining of husband and wife precisely echoes the "Great Theory," which takes a mathematical aesthetics as its foundation. St. Thomas asserts that the joining of a couple is the essence of matrimony (*ST*, Suppl., Q. 44, Art. 2c). Elsewhere, he specifies the numerical relation that marriage ought to be between *one* man and *one* woman (*Summa contra Gentiles* 3.124). Hence, the joining of husband and wife is the kernel of the sacrament of matrimony. Theologians and moralists usually advocate the mathematical law to upkeep the social and moral orders since the major reason for monogamy in most societies was and has been to ensure paternity.⁸ The numerical relationship between husband and wife also symbolizes a harmony that reflects the order God has erected. With serendipity, St. Augustine's and St.

rhythm, (2) harmony among parts or, in man, harmony among sensible, intellectual or moral activities, and (3) ultimately, "the supreme unity of God, which is the source of mathematical law, beauty, rhythm, and the harmonious activities of nature and of man" (513-14, qtd. in Robertson 114).

⁷ St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 2, 16, 41-44, qtd. in Robertson 114.

⁸ St. Thomas offers another perspective. He says that a sincere friendship between husband and wife will not be possible when the marriage takes the models of either polygamy or polyandry, both of which can never bring a friendship of equality on the parts of the couple (*Summa contra Gentiles* 3.124).

Thomas's ideas of a mathematical aesthetics can be applied to the construct of marriage.

B. Mathematical aesthetics suggested in the iconography of marriage

Lombard remarks that a sacrament is “the visible form of an invisible grace,” yet how can one *visualize* the *invisible* grace? The “visible form” of matrimony will be a point of departure. If we look at the iconography of marriage which depicts a wedding ceremony, the act of marrying is consecrated to embody a numerical relationship. Edwin Hall provides a couple of iconographies of marriage in his book.⁹ Plate 5 entitled “The Sacrament of Marriage”¹⁰ depicts a wedding ceremony at which a priest is drawing a husband and a wife together by the joining of their right hands. Behind each of the couple stand his and her kith and kin attending the ceremony. Interestingly, the arrangement of the position of the married couple as well as their kith and kin at church porch reflects the influence of the “Great Theory”: the guests are segregated by gender, and the visual reference to the proportionate relation between female guests and male guests demonstrates an aesthetics of proportion. In Figure 9 “The Marriage of Moses and Sephora,”¹¹ and Figure 20 “The Marriage of Saint Waudru”¹² again, the newlyweds take the central position of the frame, and the guests are segregated by gender, with women accompanying the bride and men the groom. Artists had made the formal joining of a couple be endowed with the beauty of proportion from these iconographies of matrimony. The visual as well as gender balance support an aesthetic interpretation of the matrimonial ceremony. The textual and visual references to a matrimonial joining of right hands

⁹ The iconographies of marriage reduplicated in Hall's *Arnolfini Betrothal*, especially the images following page 26 with plates 1-10, and pages 35-47 with figures 11-22, depict matrimonial ceremonies that clearly reveal an aesthetics of proportion.

¹⁰ *The Sacrament of Marriage*. *L'art de bien vivre*, Paris, 1492, vellum exemplar. San Marino, California, The Huntington Library (Hall, following page 26).

¹¹ *The Marriage of Moses and Sephora*, Nave mosaic, 432-40. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore. Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York (Hall 21).

¹² *The Marriage of Saint Waudru*. *Chroniques de Haniaut*, vol. II, Bruges, 1468. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I^{er}, ms. 9243, following 103r (Hall 43).

and the parallel position of the couple are theologically and aesthetically significant not only because of a one-to-one mathematical correspondence but also because of the “emblematic depictions of the married state, epitomizing the *concordia*, or harmony, between the spouses characteristic of an ideal marriage” (Hall 19-20). Thus the relationship between matrimonial ceremony and the aesthetics of proportion can be concretized through the iconography of marriage.

What has been demonstrated about the correspondence between the theory of proportion and marriage as well as the wedding ceremony can equally be applied to the marriages portrayed in Chaucer’s *Tales* since they all belong to the same religious context. In the *Tales*, the focus is more on the development of the marriage life rather than on the wedding ceremony itself, yet it shall be beneficial to draw from the symbolic meaning in the iconography of marriage to reflect the religious and aesthetic contexts in the *Tales*.

III. Proportions of age, estate and religion between the couples in the *Tales*

When talking about medieval marriage, we tend to think and ask: By what criteria do people judge the quality of marriage? In Chaucer’s *Tales*, how do his pilgrims decide that a marriage demonstrates a certain unity, order and hence beauty? In Alan Macfarlane’s words, marriage “was not something automatic and universal ... occurring like any natural event. It was something to be chosen, a conscious decision which could be made early or put off, and there were costs and benefits in any solution” (11). Hence the importance of choosing a potential spouse against certain criteria for the part of the male in the Middle Ages. I shall argue that the spouses’ respective age, estate and religion are three major conditions that determine the outward beauty of marriage in the *Tales*. These three conditions are general measures for a number of husband characters in the *Tales* to consider before they decide their lifelong partners. When there is a proper and satisfactory proportion for each condition, the marriage denotes a sense of order and harmony, and thus is related to the notion of the beautiful. As a couple lead a happy life, it can be equally called a beautiful life, an adjective which is simultaneously a homology referring to *mei-man*

in the Chinese tradition.¹³ In the Western medieval Christian tradition, a happy marriage suggests a perfect state blessed by God. Hence, a happy marriage is conceptually the same as a beautiful marriage. Donnell Van de Voort argues that arranged marriages work out for the best socially: “Riches have always married riches, and power, power; such matches are no doubt calculated to produce the happiest results” (11-12, qtd. in Kelly 32). Such “happiest results” are built on the formal conditions of marriage. The arrangement is obviously based on the theory of proportion: the relation of one spouse’s riches to those of the other demonstrates a one-to-one proportion between a potential couple. In the *Tales*, we can also observe a similar practicality of the theory of proportion. A good number of pilgrim-tellers have remarked on the criteria of a happy marriage. For instance, Chaucer’s Miller reiterates after the manner of Cato a general principle that “man sholde wedde his simylitude./ Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,/ For youthe and elde is often at debaat” (I 3228-30).¹⁴ In his tale, the Miller focuses more on the similitude between a couple’s age, yet the concept of similitude can be understood in a wider sense.

St. Thomas tells us that proportion is a numerical as well as a relational concept,¹⁵ indicating both the concrete and abstract features of proportion. The above-mentioned factors, including age, estate and religion, can be likewise quantified and qualified to a certain extent. The quantity in age is self-evident because of its numerical nature. When the ages of a couple are compared at the moment of their marital act, it is characterized by a numerical proportion. As for estate and religion, they serve as the means to evaluate a person’s social value in a rigid hierarchically-defined society such as the Middle Ages. The proportion of the estate and religion between a couple is not so much a numerical as a relational concept. The relationship between a low-born and an aristocrat spouses does not constitute a

¹³ *Mei* is translated as beauty or beautiful in English and *man* as consummation and perfection. For the Chinese, saying that a marriage is happy is just like saying that it is beautiful and perfect.

¹⁴ Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). The subsequent citations of Chaucer’s works in this thesis are from this edition.

¹⁵ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part I, Q. 12, Art. 1 ad 4; please cf. the quote on pages 24-5 of this chapter.

good concordance and thus deviates from the aesthetics of proportion. Similarly, the respective belief of the spouses also brings about the issue of proportion. The relation between a Christian and a heathen or an unbeliever is theologically as well as aesthetically unsatisfactory, while the relation between two Christians fulfills the notion of harmonious proportion. When all these conditions—age, estate and religion—comply with the requirement of proportion, there is an aesthetics of marriage in terms of its form.

The proportion proper to the form of marriage is that a couple have a good arrangement of these three prominent criteria—age, estate and religion of husband and wife. The form of marriage in question is restricted to the moment when a couple swear their oath because a conjugal oath should be expressed in words of the present tense (St. Thomas, *ST*, Suppl., Q. 46, Art. 1). Furthermore, Scholastics attempt to “establish the correct attitude to beauty, the attitude necessary for the apprehension and evaluation of beauty, or, in modern terms, the specifically aesthetic attitude” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:109). The same can also be said of marriage: the medieval society attempts to impose the correct attitude on the form of marriage, the aesthetically-correct attitude necessary for the union of a couple. Age, estate and religion are acts of existence, while the aesthetically-correct attitude toward the form of marriage designates the law of these acts of existence. When the nuptial tie is based on the concept of proportional age, status and religion of the couple, harmony is assumed to be the expected result. In other words, what functions behind these three formal criteria of marriage is the concept of the “Great Theory,” or harmony, order, balance.

On these bases, I shall discuss the factors that make the form of marriage blissful, happy and accordingly beautiful in the selected *Tales*. In the medieval period, to discourse a matter aesthetically and to discourse it morally would virtually mean the same. When Chaucer’s pilgrims discuss marriage between people of (un)equal age, estate and religion from an aesthetic point of view, they also touch upon these issues from the perspective of goodness. In the *Tales*, the pilgrim-tellers reveal their sensibility of beauty much the same as they conceptualize the form of marriage in

their narratives. Margaret A. Gist has done a remarkable research on the subject of marriage in romances. She also employs these three marital conditions to discuss the marriage in medieval romances: she has covered marriages between people of age with youth, of unequal estate and of Christians with unbelievers along with the marriage of convenience and other types of marriage relationships. With some modification of Gist's bases, this chapter analyzes the relationship between marriage and the proportion of age, estate and religion between the couples in "The Clerk's Tale," "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Second Nun's Tale," "The Franklin's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale," "The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" and her tale.

A. Proportion of age between a couple

The basic criterion for medieval marriage is to marry one's counterpart, a principle which provides a "correct" aesthetic framework. If beauty consists in the proportions of parts, then part of the beauty of marriage will be derived from the proportion of age between a married couple. *A History of Private Life* (Vol. II) explores everyday experiences of the medieval society, yet it is a bit surprising that there is only one reference to the average age at marriage in the Middle Ages:

Girls were married off quite young. In 1370 the average age at marriage was sixteen in Prato (Tuscany). In 1427, again in Prato and in Florence, the average was seventeenth and a half. Around 1350 in Siena parents began planning a daughter's marriage as early as age twelve. (de La Roncière 290)

Only women's age is mentioned, and the readers are left ignorant of men's mean age at marriage. Frances and Joseph Gies add that in Prato in 1371, the average age of men at marriage is twenty-four (1989:233). In addition, G. Robina Quale explains that in Florence, "by 1427 the mean age of marriage for men was thirty, whereas for women it was seventeen" (23). From these three sources, one can have a general idea that during late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, women were married around sixteen or seventeen, while men around twenty-four to thirty. Although we lack direct evidence about the social situation in medieval England, it can be assumed

that custom in the Continent is also acceptable in the English social context. As a result, the age gap as wide as thirteen years between a couple then seems to be within an admissible or even “appropriate” range. However, when the disparity of age reaches at forty years, as January is some forty years older than May in “The Merchant’s Tale,” the marital union diverts from the aesthetics of proportion. In this section, the gap of thirteen years serves as an “appropriate” proportion of age between a couple. That is to say, a married couple who have similar age or disparity of age within the range of thirteen years act in compliance with the theory of proportion.

With the establishment of this aesthetic rule, the appropriate proportion between the age of a husband and that of a wife will naturally adhere to the moral end. If the legitimate union of the man and the woman goes against the standard of “appropriateness,” being out of harmony and proportion will decrease the aesthetics of marriage. As has been said, Chaucer’s Miller exhorts that “man sholde wedde his simylytude./ Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,/ For youthe and elde is often at debaat” (I 3228-30). Similitude can be regarded as a variant form of equality and order. Gist examines the nature of medieval marriage and concludes: “It is a commonplace that throughout the Middle Ages marriage was an arrangement of convenience, an enforced legal contract, designed to secure certain political, military or economic advantages” (17). These various sorts of advantages indeed reflect the concept of proportion, since an arranged marriage ensures that every condition of the bride and that of the groom fit proportionally to each other so much so that harmony reduces to the least some potential conflicts arising out of discord. Because the convention of allowing freedom to choose one’s spouse is not heard of in those days, matchmakers or marriage brokers try to avoid troubles and complications caused by family background. Hence, marriage of convenience more than other types of marriage¹⁶ requires the observance of the “Great Theory.” Such an arrangement

¹⁶ Gist mentions other types of marriage such as the marriage between people of unequal rank, of age with youth and of Christians with unbelievers (49-74). These types of marriage are not the generally known “marriage of convenience” for Gist. Yet in Chaucer’s tales that we discuss, the marriage of people of unequal rank, of age with youth and of Christians with

highlights the rule of proper proportion and therefore presumes the beauty of harmony.

It is assumed that the marriages in the *Tales* discussed in this thesis are all marriages of convenience. Yet, not all marriages of convenience in the *Tales* take age into consideration. This is true for the marriages in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Franklin’s Tale,” where we do not see specific age references. In “The Franklin’s Tale,” we are fully informed about the hero’s and heroine’s social backgrounds, Arveragus being a knight with “his worthynesse” (V 738) and Dorigen a lady, “oon the faireste under sonne” (V 734). This is so much that the readers know about the married couple. Yet, if taking the idealistic nature of romances into account, we may assume that there is a satisfactory proportion of age between Dorigen and Arveragus because the problem of age in marriage seldom occurs in the medieval romances, says Gist (27).¹⁷ Not only the Breton lay of the Franklin but also the saintly legend of the Man of Law ignores the condition of age. In “The Man of Law’s Tale,” the Roman Emperor’s daughter, Constance, is successively married twice, but we have no idea about the respective age of her two husbands. The Man

pagans are predominantly marriages of convenience.

¹⁷ In the tradition of courtly love, the disparity of age does not constitute an obstacle for elder men to obtain the chance of serving their favoring women. In Andreas Capellanus’s list of the eight dialogues concerning the art of courtly love, the second dialogue occurs between a man and a woman of the middle class. The man obviously is rather old compared to the woman. She says to him, “You may deserve praise for your great excellence, but I am rather young, and I shudder at the thought of receiving solaces from old men” (39). The addressee replies, “Old age is certainly not a thing to disapprove of, since we are all drawing near to it at the same speed, and the same nature that not one of us can resist is bringing us to it. I was not able to oppose the divine Power and make it change its plan and postpone my nativity and bring me later into the world. Therefore I am not in the least to blame for the fact that I am so far advanced in life, and it ought not to be considered to my disadvantage” (39). As the man continues to reveal that in the long period of life, he has done many good and praiseworthy deeds that no one would have been capable to do at a young age. So he thinks that old age is an invaluable and praiseworthy asset for the woman to treasure. We know that at the end of the conversation, his hope is bearing fruit, an ending which indicates the compromise between the disparity of age and love. Hence old age does not trouble the lovers at all.

of Law is supposed to be very sensitive about numbers and laws of whatever kind, yet he does not make age an issue. However, if we are to reconstruct from internal evidence the age of King Alla, Constance's second husband, a passage in the tale might be of avail. Near the end of the story, King Alla undertakes his penitent pilgrimage to Rome, and he is happy to be able to meet Constance and their child there. Afterwards, the family start off for a journey back to Northumberland. The storyteller narrates:

This kyng Alla, whan he his tyme say,
 With his Custance, his hooly wyf so sweete,
 To Engeland been they come the righte way,
 Wher as they lyve in joye and in quiete.
 But litel while it lasteth, I yow heete,
 Joye of this world, for tyme wol nat abyde;

 That litel while in joye or in plesance
 Lasteth the blisse of Alla with Custance.

For *Deeth*, that taketh of heigh and logh his rente,
 Whan passed was a *yeer*, evene as I gesse,
 Out of this world this kyng Alla he hente,
 For whom Custance hath ful greet hevynesse.
 Now lat us prayen God his soule blesse!

(II 1128-33, 1140-46, emphasis mine)

While Constance is still young, her husband passes away. There is no mentioning of the cause of his death. If he does not die of disease, in battle or of other causes, there is implication that he dies a natural death, which suggests his old age. If this is true, then their marriage is that of age with youth. The reasons why both the Man of Law and the Franklin ignore to some extent the ages of their heroes and heroines can be many. Perhaps the thought of the lawyer is occupied by, among other things, Constance's saintly career and her power of converting the pagans, while the Franklin is more interested in Arveragus's generosity of rectifying the reckless wrong of his wife, Dorigen, who because of her lovesickness for him, lifts her security line and allows a lusty young knight, Aurelius, to take advantage of her emotional weakness. These appeals indeed attract more attention than the age issue. Yet, since the matter

of age influences the formal beauty of marriage, it is essential to analyze this issue.

For those tales that spell out the approximate ages of a married couple, there is a definite relation of a husband's age to his wife's. In "The Clerk's Tale" and "The Second Nun's Tale," although we do not know the exact age of the heroes and heroines, these two tales give a full account of the references to age. In "The Clerk's Tale," there are three references to the approximate age of Griselda. When the name of Griselda first appears, the adjective "yonge" (IV 210) is used. Then she is portrayed as "tendre were of age" (IV 218). We also hear Walter's inner voice: he is pondering about Griselda's femininity, her virtues and her "yong age, as wel in chiere as dede" (IV 241). Just within about thirty lines the young age of Griselda has been emphasized over and again. Walter is the "gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye,/ A fair persone, and strong, and yong of age,/ And ful of honour and of curteisye" (IV 72-74). In terms of comparable ages, their marriage is apparently based on the aesthetics of proportion. In "The Second Nun's Tale," the narrator specifies that St. Cecile is a "mayden" (VIII 120, 127) and Valerian a young man (VIII 128). Therefore, the comparable ages between the couples in these two tales contribute to the aesthetics of proportion in terms of the form of marriage.

On the other hand, the divergence in age seems a persistent problem in a number of tales, such as "The Miller's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue." To say that the husbands do not take age into consideration is misleading. They do take age into account, but due to the economic situation, apprenticeship system or other factors of that era, the husbands in these tales marry late. Such a situation in the *Tales* reflects the medieval social context that men tend to marry late. Macfarlane explains that apprenticeship is a very widespread institution in England from at least the fourteenth century (267), and apprentices will not be able to feed the mouths in the household before they can establish themselves. Macfarlane continues: "Not only should a person not marry during apprenticeship, but even after it had ended and the young man had set up a shop, he should wait a few years ... laying up profits until he is in a state to obtain a wife with a good position" (213). Because of this reason, a lot of men would postpone their marriage in their old age. Late

marriage has its advantages: “The longer he delayed his marriage, the greater his chance of a comfortable middle and old age” (Macfarlane 278). There are different opinions as to the threshold of old age. De La Roncière explains that for Dante old age begins at age forty-five, for Matteo Palmieri (1406-75)¹⁸ at fifty-six, while decrepitude begins for Dante at age seventy and Palmieri agrees (228). De La Roncière continues that to define old age as beginning at age forty-five or fifty-six would “classify many fathers of young children as old men” (228). Chaucer also writes tales concerning old men who enter marriage as late as fifty or sixty like January the knight and John the carpenter. In fact, many medieval men were left no choice but to accept the social reality. As a result, a correct way to interpret the disregard of the condition of age in these marriages is that they do not because they *can not*.

In “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Merchant’s Tale,” the problem of age forms the major obstacle to the happiness of the couple. In the two tales, both husbands are just married, and the great difference in their age with that of their wives typifies a “spring and autumn” marriage. According to the Miller, the carpenter John

... hadde wedded newe a wyf,
Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;
Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
For she was wylde and yong, and he was old
And demed hymself been lik a cokewold. (I 3221-26)

The disparity of age apparently causes problems between the couple. Due to the ill proportion of age, the old husband worries very much about his gains and losses: he is afraid of losing his wife and of becoming a cuckold. In “The Merchant’s Tale,” the

¹⁸ Matteo Palmieri, Italian writer and poet, was born into a Florentine mercantile family. He writes several historical works in Latin, including a history of Florence, and in the vernacular a religious poem, *La città di vita*, which is indebted to Dante. His major work, written about 1430, is the dialogue *Della vita civile* (*The Market House Books Encyclopaedia of the Renaissance*, eds. Thomas G. Bergin and Jennifer Speake [Market House, 1987]). That Palmieri’s work *La città di vita* is indebted to Dante is probably the reason why de La Roncière parallels these two poet’s opinions concerning the threshold of old age.

pattern of “spring and autumn” marriage is reduplicated. Despite his old age, January specifies the age and other physical conditions of his future wife: she “shal nat passe twenty yeer, certayn” and he “wol no womman thritty yeer of age” because women over thirty for him “konne so muchel craft on Wades boot,/ So muchel broken harm, whan that hem leste,/ That with hem sholde I [January] nevere lyve in reste” (IV 1417, 1421, 1424-26). January, being a *specialized* knight good at woman-hunting, has been fooling around with countless women all his life and even brings in his frivolous habit when he is faced with the important event in his life. He only cares the age and appearance of his future spouse yet gives no consideration to the inner beauty of her virtues. These old husbands do enjoy the sensual pleasure with their youthful wives, yet the more they search for sensual security from youthfulness, the more they lose spiritual security from it. John jealously guards Alison against all her admirers, and January acts exactly the same. For these two aged husbands, the proportion of their age as a quantity to their wives’ age is double or treble, and hence out of proportion. Both husbands later are cuckolded mainly because of the discord and disharmony caused by the disproportion of age, so much so that the aesthetics of their marriages is unsatisfactory.

Besides these two tales, “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and her tale again portray the problem of age in marriage that obstructs the spiritual and material joining of the couple. All of the Wife of Bath’s four former husbands are very much older than her. She tells us,

... tho housbondes that I hadde,
 As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.
 The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;
 Unnethe myghte they the statut holde
 In which that they were bounden unto me. (III 195-99)

It can just well be imagined that all these marriages are those of convenience. The disproportionate ages between the Wife of Bath and her husbands entail many interesting or sarcastic episodes in every period of her marriage. For example, the disparity of age makes the “spring and autumn” couple lose the opportunity to win

bacon which is awarded to spouses who live a year and a day without quarrelling: “The bacon was nat fet for hem [the Wife’s old husbands], I trowe,/ That som men han in Essex at Dunmowe” (III 217-18). Later when she welcomes her fifth marriage, the paradigm of older husband and younger wife shifts to that of older wife and younger husband. Still, a great deal of discord arise in the household over communication problem. The couple, namely, the Wife of Bath and Janekyn, have their own values and distinct modes of thinking mainly because of their vastly different ages. When Janekyn wants to escape the dominance of his older wife, she binds him up even tighter; when she orders him to forsake the books about subversive and untamed women through tearing his books, he slaps her on the face, so violently that she turns deaf in one ear. The narrator herself is revealing to us that their marital problems are brought about due to the couple’s distinct values, which in turn are predominantly caused by the disproportion of age.

Living under the shadow of aged men since an early age of twelve, the Wife is so obsessed by the “spring and autumn” marriage that even her tale is framed in the marriage of age with youth. In the Arthurian tale she relates, the young knight is forced to marry a homely “old” lady, who is the very savior of his life when he is almost condemned to death on account of his sexual attack on an innocent lady he bumped into in a forest. He is released on probation and asked to find out the answer as to “what women desire most.” This old woman provides him with an answer that is to satisfy every lady in Arthur’s court. The savior then confidently makes an offer of marriage to the young knight in the face of the Queen by saying:

“I taughte this answe unto the knyght;
For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
The firste thyng that I wolde hym requere
He wolde it do, if it lay in his myghte.
Bifore the court thane preye I thee, sir knight,”
Quod she, “that thou me take unto thy wyf,
For wel thou woost that I have kept thy lyf.
If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!” (III 1050-57)

It is too painful for him to keep company with the old “hag,” and he laments his fate.

As he publicly pleads her for mercy in front of the Arthurian court: “Allas and weylawey!/ I woot right wel that swich was my biheste./ For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!/ Taak al my good and lat my body go” (III 1058-61). Probably he would rather be sentenced to death than be forced to pay the debt that he owes her by “betraying” his youthful body and soul. He is finally “forced” to marry her. The old lady afterwards turns the tables because of the respect the knight shows her, consequently she restores herself to beauty. In actual life, the Wife of Bath has not been able to enjoy a happy marriage. The poetic and romantic picture in her tale is thus a projection of her wish that the marriage of age with youth such as that between her and Janekyn, would end up happily. The character of the Wife of Bath is rather unique because on the one hand, her *prologue* represents the view of marriage for the common folks while on the other hand, her *tale* represents that for the nobility. Sarah Disbrow observes that the old lady in the Arthurian tale turns herself into a beautiful young woman when her husband agrees to be ruled under her sovereignty, and this is felt to be true to the Wife’s personality and to her argument in the Prologue about female power (59). Besides sovereignty, the Wife of Bath also desires magic in her marriage, so that she would not suffer the discord of disproportionate age again.

Does a marriage of age with youth in the Middle Ages always bring unhappiness? Probably no one could give a definite answer except for a relative one. At least two medieval “spring and autumn” couples demonstrate that they could make up a happy and beautiful atmosphere by cultivating their spiritual properties. The first couple lived around the fourteenth century. The husband, a “Goodman of Paris,” is an elderly French official of wealth and position, and his child wife is an orphan. He writes her letters to express his love for her. “Throughout the many pages, his *sympathy* and *loving understanding* for her keeps breaking through” (Rowling 77-78, emphasis mine). If a husband expresses sympathy with and understanding of his wife, their marriage can hardly be an unblessed and ugly one. His maturity can help her get through her difficulties in life while she is still unfamiliar with the way of the world. The task of sympathizing with and appreciating his wife requires him to have a great deal of maturity; a young husband or one in comparable age with that of the

wife, though as gallant as he can be, usually needs more exposure to the variety of life experiences. A normal argument has it that it would take a long time for the young husband to gain access to the spiritual world of his wife, if he is spiritually insensitive. This is an example about how an elderly husband's maturity makes his marriage successful and beautiful. There is another example of a good "spring and autumn" marriage. Thomas Betson, a forty-year-old English merchant who traded in Calais, was deeply in love with his fiancée, Katherine Riche, fifteen of age, an affection recorded in his letter to her in 1476. The two are married soon after she grows to marriageable age, and she proves a *loving* and *helpful* wife (Rowling 79, emphasis mine). Despite the disparity between ages—with the gap of twenty-five years—the couple prove a beautiful match due to the fact that the elder husband has the ability to draw forth the wife's spiritual properties that makes her trustworthy in the household. She is ahead of other maidens of her age in experiencing the maturity a woman is to learn later. Altogether, the characteristics of an elderly husband, "sympathy" and "loving understanding," and those of a young wife, "loveliness" and "helpfulness," make the "spring and autumn" match a *perfect* union. Since the husband is older, he is the guidance counselor for his wife who has seen little of the world; at the same time, the young wife brings vivacity into the life of her husband and is willing to learn to be a help mate for her husband and to love him. The relationship between such a couple does not break down because of the divergence in age; instead, the mutual respect toward one another reflects the sermon that Paul admonishes people: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:22-25). The French and English couples, though divergent in age, can in the best situation lead a happy married life. To look back on Chaucer's couples, however, these precious qualities just discussed do not characterize the aged husbands nor the young wives in "The Merchant's Tale," "The Miller's Tale" or "The Wife of Bath's Prologue." Chaucer and his pilgrim-tellers do not hold an optimistic view

toward the marriage of age with youth; rather, Chaucer appears to be more interested in presenting unblessed “spring and autumn” marriages than happy and blessed ones.

B. Proportion of estate between a couple

Except for age, the condition of estate also suggests an underlying principle of proportion that determines the formal beauty of marriage. When a couple enter into marriage under the principle of equal social class, the embedded appropriateness or suitability of the combination fulfills a proportion between their estates. The element of appropriateness finds its counterpart, harmony, in the marital union. Thus, a union of a couple who are comparable in social class is beautiful. Proportional pedigree is one of the primary considerations for marriage, especially for the marriage of convenience. In Chaucer’s deployment, “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and her tale as well as “The Clerk’s Tale” delineate marriages based on disproportionate estate, while “The Man of Law’s Tale,” “The Second Nun’s Tale” and “The Franklin’s Tale” describe marriages based on equal estate.

Among the pilgrims, the Miller and the Merchant relate marriages between people of unequal estate, yet the storytellers do not focus on the problem of such a disparity. “The Miller’s Tale” is about a marriage of the carpenter John and his wife, Alison, who descends from a low-born family (“swich a wenche” [I 3254]). Since artisans in the Middle Ages belong to the middle class, there is social gap between the couple. As we have seen in the discussion of the disparity of age in the “spring and autumn” marriage, what the Miller focuses on and ridicules is not so much the disparity of estate as that of age, and it is the problem of age, not the problem of estate, that imposes the serious moral troubles for the couple. On this account, the Miller seems to lump the social position of the carpenter and that of his wife together so that the differential effect is reduced to the least. One can presume that the social positions John and his wife possess hardly differ from a broad perspective—they are both common folks. Following the similar pattern in John and Alison’s marriage, the couple in “The Merchant’s Tale” have no problem caused by unequal estate

though they are to a strict sense people of unequal social class. Only one casual mention of May's low estate appears: she is said to be "of smal degree" (IV 1625). As for her husband, January is socially superior to her because he is a

... worthy knyght, that born was of Pavye,
 In which he lyved in greet prosperitee;
 And sixty year a wyflee man was hee,
 And folwed ay his bodily delyt
 On wommen, ther as was his appetyt,
 As doon thise fooles that been seculeer. (IV 1246 -51)

The first three lines announce his eminent estate, yet the loftiness is soon deflated by the following description about his incautious private life. This kind of dissolute life has its origin from the early feudal period. In respect of the sexual pleasure knights are to enjoy, Georges Duby, a French historian who has researched into medieval social and cultural history, offers us some sufficient evidence. When knights and nobles are unmarried, they indulge "freely in the erotic rituals appropriate to 'youth'" (1994:37). Moreover, there is little difficulty in finding an outlet for sexual frustration because "the generosity of the lords also extended to ensuring that the castles were peopled with obliging girls" (72). Hence, January is typical of such a knight figure who "folwed ay his bodily delyt/ On wommen, ther as was his appetyt." The narrator Merchant tries to excuse January's licentious habit in the name of "appetyt," while the truth is that January has never cultivated himself spiritually as well as physically, the outcome of which is a depletion of his own moral growth. Sexual greed debases his character, so that when he marries a wife below his estate, this does not really socially distinguish him from her. However, strictly speaking, the difference in estate impairs the beauty of the form of their marriage.

In "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" again, we see the disparity of estate in her five marriages. What we know about the five husbands of the Wife as she claims are their sexual appetite toward her and her tricks on them, while references to their respective social class are relatively scanty, except that the "thre were goode men, and riche, and olde" (III 197). If wealth is an index of one's estate, her three former husbands occupy the middle stratum; yet, in terms of social respect, there is no

sufficient internal evidence to show definite social backgrounds of her former husbands, except her fifth one. Janekyn, once a clerk of Oxford, is her only true love ever since she has the experience of marriage. He is intellectually superior to that of the Wife who used to make her living by weaving clothes. Yet, he is pecuniarily inferior to her. By the time he is married to her, he is poor while she has accumulated a great deal of fortune from her former husbands. The books of classics he reads are obviously beyond the grasp of his wife, so when he uses what he has learned from the books against her domestic sovereignty, she cannot bear it and consequently tears three pages off. Therefore, in terms of the disparity of estate, the “spring and autumn” couples do not answer to an aesthetics of proportion.

On the contrary, the marriages portrayed in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale” reveal more beauty in terms of an ideal proportion of estate between a couple. The dramas that are put on the stage revolve around aristocratic experiences and life, hence the family origins specially attract one’s attention. In “The Man of Law’s Tale,” Constance is described as the following:

A doghter hath that, syn the world bigan,
To rekene as wel hir goodnesse as beautee,
Nas nevere swich another as is shee.
I prey to God in honour hire susteene,
And wolde she were of al Europe the queene. (II 157-61)

She is of such a unique quality that people of the nation would support her to be the future Queen of Europe. The Emperor accepts the request of the Sultan of Syria who desires to take the hand of the princess. The Sultan has a social status that could almost match with Constance’s, except that he is a pagan. In fact, the different beliefs affect the footing of Christians and pagans: “A Saracen is a person of ill repute not because of his social, racial or military standing, but because of his belief” (Gist 56). Despite that she is of a high estate, Constance cannot make her own decision concerning her potential spouse. Frances and Joseph Gies observe that there does not exist a system of courtship based on free choice and personal attraction in the Middle Ages. This nurtures a taken-for-granted tendency for the parents not to

respect their children's, especially women's, choice of the object of courtship. The Gies continue to say that parents might pay some attention to their children's feelings, but love is not an accepted motive for marriage (1978:33). In the case of Constance, however, her parents do not show a slight care about her feelings. Full of frustrated tone, she says to her parents,

“Custance youre child hire recomandeth ofte
Unto youre grace, for I shal to Surrye,
Ne shal I nevere seen yow moore with ye.”

“Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun,
I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille ...” (II 278-82)

It feels like that she campaigns for international relations between her fatherland and an alien kingdom. As the Syrians and the Romans heartily prepare for the wedding, Constance's heart must have been burdened with worries because of the impending marriage. Nevertheless, she is too powerless to prevent the coming of a forced transnational marriage in spite of her honorable and superior social status. For Constance's second marriage, her husband Alla is the king of Northumberland, whose social status is comparable to Constance's. Hence, the theory of proportion finds a truthful correspondence in the marriage of Constance and King Alla. Elsewhere, the marriage pictured in “The Second Nun's Tale” does not give any detailed references to the husband Valerian's social background, mainly because this is the legend of St. Cecile, and the Valerian tale seems merely to be a subordinate one. St. Cecilia is “comen of Romainys and of noble kynde” (VIII 121) whereas Valerian comes from an unknown parentage. However, one should be able to reconstruct his lineage. Just as most medieval marriages, Cecile's may also be a marriage of convenience. Her father, by logic and convention, would arrange a marriage which requires suitable proportions of age and estate from the part of the suitor. Therefore, it should be acceptable to argue that St. Cecile and Valerian are people of comparable estate.

Among the couples in Chaucer's *Tales*, Griselda and Walter's marriage as well as the “old” lady and the young knight's marriage in “The Wife of Bath's Tale” address the problem of the disparity in estate, yet the estate issue is afterwards found to be a

kind of testing instrument or medium through which the virtues of the wives are examined. In “The Clerk’s Tale,” the marquis Walter belongs to the upper class, while his wife who is searched among his subjects comes from a common social background: “For povreliche yfostred up was she,/ No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne” (IV 213-14). Gist observes that the legend of Griselda is “one of the rare instance in medieval literature of marriage between persons of unequal rank” (73). The barrier to marriage between nobility and commoners does not seem at all to affect Walter’s determination to marry Griselda, who does not give a single thought to the intention that she can raise her own status by marriage with one of higher rank. In spite of different social classes, their marriage ends happily, if we are talking about the worldly view on happiness.¹⁹ Gist remarks that the convention of “marrying within one’s own social rank was occasionally violated, and at times the Church even lent approval” (64). Griselda’s marriage is one that violates the convention as such. If “The Man of Law’s Tale” is established on the necessity of a transnational political marriage, “The Clerk’s Tale” is on a domestic political necessity. Walter marries for political reason, hence he must have posterity to succeed to his throne in order to maintain the political order of his nation. Griselda is married to one of upper social class, yet the medieval moralists imply that loving within one’s own class is virtuous. Loving outside one’s class is “a manifestation of bad judgment, arousing both family antagonism and general social disapproval, and at worst, reprehensible lewdness” (Gist 63). In this respect, Walter might have made a seemingly unwise judgment in choosing a spouse below him. Nevertheless, Griselda’s virtues make up for his self-willed yet levelheaded decision. He ought to feel grateful for Griselda’s extreme patience and fortitude so that the family antagonism has not occurred by the time he ceases his psychological tests. The disharmony between Walter’s and Griselda’s

¹⁹ St. Thomas tells us that only God’s love is the ultimate end and true happiness, while no one can attain true and perfect happiness in this life: “For this present life is subject to many unavoidable evils” (*ST*, Part I [Second Part], Q. 5, Art. 3c; also cf. *Treatise on Happiness*, 56-58). Neither wealth, fame, honors, pleasure nor power can bring true happiness to human beings because true happiness can only be obtained and enjoyed in afterlife and only from God (*ST*, Part I [Second Part], Q. 2).

different estates is thus reconciled. In “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” the “old” lady is described by the “lusty bachelor” (III 883) that she “comen of so lough a knyde” (III 1101), and hence there is disparity of estate between the couple. Yet, the disharmony between the couple is also reconciled when the truth of the real age of the “old” lady is finally revealed.

Among the various tales, “The Franklin’s Tale” seems to be the only one that explicitly depicts a marriage between people of equal estate among those tales we have so far discussed. The Franklin’s hero and heroine constitute an ideal married couple: the wife is “oon the faireste under sonne,/ And eek therto comen of so heigh kynrede...” (V 734-35), and the knight whom the lady is married to is admired “for his worthynesse,/ And namely for his meke obeysaunce” (V 738-39). The ideal match is what the audience usually expects from romances. Ideally fitted though it is, Chaucer adds a moral dilemma to the married couple. The admirer Aurelius entreats Dorigen to show mercy on him by agreeing to be his lover. Dorigen has attempted to persuade him out of his inappropriate request but still carelessly gives her word to him that if he could make the rocks ashore disappear, she would be his lover. After everything comes to light and Aurelius does carry out Dorigen’s wish, her husband Arveragus insists that Dorigen keep her promise because this is a matter about her reputation. He actually makes a haste decision, yet reputation sometimes weighs more than one’s life, especially in the social class where the couple are situated. Without a consensus and common values between the couple, they would not reach an agreement as for the moral solution. If Aurelius was not touched by the couple’s sincerity, he would not have withdrawn his demand nor let go Dorigen who is almost in his possession. Sharing common values, the couple of the same social estate are able to work together with one heart, although the solution is unfavorable for any married couple to think of. Another way of saying this is that the proportional social estate enables the couple to squarely face the moral crisis, and their willingness to solve the problem exempts them from possible family antagonism.

C. Proportion of religion between a couple

Along with age and estate, the “Great Theory” can also be applied to interpret the proportion of religion(s) between a couple. Similar to the proportion suggested in the estate between a couple, the proportion embedded in the religion(s) between a couple is a relational concept, instead of a numerical one. The relation between a Christian and a heathen or an unbeliever is theologically as well as aesthetically unproportional and unsatisfactory, while the relation between Christian couples²⁰ theologically and aesthetically fulfills the notion of harmonious proportion. If the proportion of a husband’s religion to that of a wife’s shows a satisfying relation, there reveals an aesthetics of proportion. Beauty consists in the proportions of parts and by analogy, part of the beauty of marriage consists in the proportional match between religions. The Church and canonists suggest that the medieval men should marry women of the same religion based on the principle of appropriateness. The thought that a couple are comparable in religion is beautiful because the arrangement fulfills the requirement of an implicit proportion and hence harmony, though the proportion may not be quantified. In the medieval mentality, Christians have a higher hierarchy than pagans or unbelievers, hence marriage of Christians with pagans or unbelievers is theoretically not encouraged.

As for the polemic of whether Christians can marry pagans or unbelievers, St. Thomas responds,

In the Old Law, it was allowable to marry with certain unbelievers, and forbidden with others [due to the fear of being drawn into idolatry].... But under the New Law which is spread throughout the whole world the prohibition extends with equal reason to all unbelievers. Hence disparity of worship previous to marriage is an impediment to its being contracted and voids the contract. (*ST*, Suppl., Q. 59, Art. 1 ad 1)

In a mixed marriage, the couple do not serve the same creator and often than not

²⁰ The proportion in religion between pagan couples is also a relational one and determines part of the formal beauty of marriage. Yet, since this thesis is based on the perspective of Christian marriage, I only discuss the proportion in religion between Christian couples.

religious conflicts take place. Among many spokesmen of the Church, Tertullian²¹ expresses sharp disapproval of the marriage of Christians with unbelievers and even called such union fornication.²² Yet, other Fathers do not express a totally negative and pessimistic view of mixed marriages. Edward Westermarck states that some of the Fathers encourage the marriage of Christians with heathens for the sake of propagating the faith (57). Hence we see two opposed views concerning the role of faith in medieval marriage. If medieval Christians obey the Fathers' exhortation, they ought to marry Christians, which conceptually correspond to the notion of proportion. Despite the objection to marriage of Christians with unconverted pagans, such unions do occur, and some of Chaucer's tales reflect such a social reality. At least two tales deal with the relationship between a couple's religious belief and their marital life as portrayed in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Second Nun's Tale."

Rather than rendering the issue of the marriage of Christian with unbelievers, Chaucer is more interested in presenting the marriage of Christian couples, with one spouse, particularly the husband, just being Christianized. For instance, in "The Man of Law's Tale," the Sultan of Syria is Christianized because he desires to marry Constance, and King Alla is converted because he witnesses a miracle and is touched by Constance's fortitude. In addition, in "The Second Nun's Tale," Valerian is baptized because he is pure enough to see an angel. The Man of Law relates that Constance is married off and sent away to live with the Sultan. Due to their different beliefs, the Sultan, a pagan, cannot marry Constance, a Christian unless he is Christianized, yet he suffers so much pang of love that he exclaims:

"Rather than I lese
Custance, I wol be *cristned*, doutelees.
I moot been hires, I may noon oother chese.
I prey yow hoold youre argumentz in pees;
Saveth my lyf, and beth noght recchelees

²¹ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian (c. AD155-c. 222) is a Carthaginian theologian, Father of the Church and the first major Christian to write in Latin (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 13, 246-50).

²² Tertullian, "Ad Uxorem," Bk., II, Ch. 3, Migne, I, 1405-6, qtd. in Gist 56.

To geten hire that hath my lyf in cure,
For in this wo I may nat longe endure.” (II 225-31, emphasis mine)

In order to have Constance as his wife, the Sultan makes all his liegemen be “cristned,” at the expense of their own religion. That Nevill Coghill translates *cristned* (II 226) as “baptized” (145) is reasonable since to be converted as a Christian in the Middle Ages, one has to be baptized. For a pagan such as the Sultan, who seems to be converted for the sake of conversion, we have legitimate doubt on his knowledge of Christianity. Even though the Sultan is formally converted, he has probably not yet been familiar with Christian doctrines and spirit. As for Constance’s second marriage, her husband King Alla, ruler of Northumberland, is a pagan before being converted under the influence of her nobleness and fortitude as well as God’s power. When she first lands on the shore of Northumberland, she is pitiful because of her miserable physical condition. The constable of Northumberland and his wife are kind enough to keep her in their house and treat her just as their own daughter. Later on, Constance refuses a knight who fiercely woos her. For revenging himself, he falsely accuses Constance of murdering the constable’s wife, who is actually murdered by this very knight. Brought to the king, the knight swears on the Bible that Constance is the evildoer. While the devilish intention of the knight almost triumphs,

[a] voys was herd in general audience,
And seyde, “Thou hast desclaundred, giltelees,
The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence;
Thus hastou doon, and yet holde I my pees!”

.....
And for this miracle, in conclusioun,
And by Custances mediacioun,
The kyng—and many another in that place—
Converted was, thanked be Cristes grace!

(II 673-76, 683-86, emphasis mine)

After the occurrence of the timely miracle, the king and his liegemen are converted. They are willing to do it out of their own wills and their natural affection for

Constance because she embodies the enduring spirit of Christ. This is very different from the kind of conversion of the Sultan, who does it out of purpose and affectation. Both King Alla and the Sultan are already Christians before their respective marriage, yet the kind of maturity and profoundness of their understanding of Christianity is enormously different.

Similar to Constance's first marriage, St. Cecile's marriage with Valerian initially faces the same religious problem. Just right on the wedding night, Cecilia reveals a mysterious message that panics her groom. She says that an angel guards her virginity against anyone who touches her. He responds with menace:

“If I shal trusten thee,
Lat me that aungel se and hym biholde;
And if that it a verray angel bee,
Thanne wol I doon as thou hast prayed me;
And if thou love another man, for sothe
Right with this swerd thanne wol I sle yow bothe.” (VIII 163-68)

It seems that Valerian has already acknowledged the existence of angels before his marriage, so that he does not ridicule an unexpected request as such. Instead, he would like to have a look at the named angel. In response to Valerian's rage,

Cecile answerde anon-right in this wise:
“If that yow list, the angel shul ye see,
So that ye trowe on Crist and yow *baptize*.” (VIII 169-71, emphasis mine)

By now we know that Valerian has not been baptized by the time he marries Cecile. Having heard Cecile's words, Valerian immediately goes to the place she mentions and is greeted by St. Urban. Afterwards, Valerian indeed sees the angel Cecile referred to and “Pope Urban hym cristned right there” (VIII 217). “Cristned” here means *baptized*, instead of Christianized in a general sense. According to Benson's edition, Chaucer altogether uses three different verbs, to be “cristned,” “converted” and “baptized” with reference to conversion. The distinct usage seems to imply that Chaucer wants to differentiate one from the others in that people are converted but there are differences in the level of how they understand the true Christian doctrines.

Based on St. Thomas's interpretation, if a husband is not baptized, his marriage with a baptized woman is regarded as invalid. For the difference between being *Christianized* and *baptized* and their relation with marriage, St. Thomas offers a satisfactory explanation. He writes:

If a believer marry [sic] a *baptized* heretic, the marriage is valid, although he sins by marrying her if he knows her to be a heretic.... [W]hereas on the other hand, if a catechumen having right faith but not having been baptized were to marry a baptized believer, the marriage would not be valid.

(ST, Suppl., Q. 59, Art. 1 ad 5, emphasis mine)

St. Thomas seems to regard baptism, as a formal ritual, more highly than inner faith. Religion, an internalization of an individual's moral and transcendental cultivation, should belong to the category of *intrinsic* worth. However, religion can also be taken as an *external* label that reveals people's religious belief and explicates their worship. In discussing whether a believer can marry an unbeliever, St. Thomas points out that matrimony as a sacrament has more to do with baptism than with interior faith:

Matrimony is a sacrament: and therefore so far as the sacramental essentials are concerned, it requires purity with regard to the sacrament of faith, namely Baptism, rather than with regard to interior faith. For which reason also this impediment is not called disparity of faith, but disparity of *worship* which concerns *outward service*.

(ST, Suppl., Q. 59, Art. 1 ad 5, emphasis mine)

This is not to decrease the significance of interior faith. Baptism is a sacrament, and sacrament is the *visible* form of an invisible grace. Interior faith needs to be proved first by exterior ritual, that is, baptism. Hence, it is argued that religion connotes a significance of an "outward" feature. The outward service, baptism, thus has an important role in medieval marriage because of its symbolic meaning. When a Christian is baptized, his faith and worship are united as one, hence a true Christian. Strictly speaking, in terms of Christian doctrines, a marriage with disparity of worship, such as Cecile and Valerian's marriage, is invalid. Yet, since some of the Fathers sanction the marriage of Christians with heathens for the sake of propagating the faith,

the union of converted and unconverted Christians is also practiced.

In “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale,” the storytellers relate the plot of converting pagans, but after the conversion takes place, there are religious collisions injuring the two sides of the alliances. The two mother-in-laws of Constance, the sultana and Donegild, in order to protect their respective beliefs, devise various ways to obstruct the conversion of their mother countries. The sultana even kills her own son in order to vent her rage on him, while Donegild forges a letter to set Constance up so that she would fall into disfavor of King Alla. One common strategy the two mother-in-laws employ is to send Constance adrift on sea. All these misfortunes and unhappiness are caused by the disharmony of religion between the husband and the wife. Furthermore, St. Thomas is also concerned with the education of the descendents of mixed marriages. Being a theologian, he does not merely approach this problem from a conventional religious viewpoint but also from the angle of educating the offspring, a farsighted vision that solicits more profound discussion on the topic of marriage of Christians and pagans in the Middle Ages. Gist also notes that for St. Thomas, a mixed marriage goes against “the good of the offspring” (56). Yet, the “good” can be of various kinds, and it is necessary to pinpoint St. Thomas’s thought here. He remarks that

since education is the work of father and mother in common, each of them intends to bring up the child to the worship of God according to their own faith. Consequently if they be of different faith, the intention of the one will be contrary to the intention of the other, and therefore there cannot be a fitting marriage between them. (*ST*, Suppl., Q. 59, Art. 1c)

It is clear that Constance’s and St. Cecile’s marriages are in a general sense not mixed marriages, but these wives’ relatives from their grooms’ sides are presumed to influence the education of their offspring. Unless the heathen lands are completely converted during the time the offspring grow up, the impact on the education of offspring from religious conflicts would not be reduced to the least. Yet, as the two tales end, the storytellers do not bring up the problem of education.

For St. Thomas, his theory of proportion and his assertion of the marriage of

equal faith are in tune with one another. As we have reiterated, beauty has objective characteristics, which altogether constitute the proportion of parts. Religion is one of the outward characteristics of medieval marriage for people to judge whether a marital union is theologically as well as aesthetically harmonious. In “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale,” the aesthetically-correct framework is challenged based on a strict criterion. Yet, what has been foregrounded in these two tales is the power of conversion from paganism to Christianity, instead of the unsatisfactory proportion of religion between the couples.

The above discussion has been aimed to analyze the form of marriage in terms of St. Thomas’s theory of proportion. The concept of marriage of people with equal age, estate and religion suggests a social product and an extension of an aesthetic entity. From the above analysis, the process from the choice of a partner to the accomplishment of matrimonial ceremony is seen to be under the sway of the “Great Theory.” The various forms of marriage of the nobility, the knights and the commoners portrayed in Chaucer’s tales reflect or contradict St. Thomas’s theory of proportion. Moreover, each pilgrim-teller stresses different conflicts entailed by the disparity of age, estate or religion, as shown in the table at the end of this chapter. In “The Merchant’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” the disparity of age and estate as well as related problems take the majority of the storytellers’ concern. Neither the pilgrim-tellers nor Chaucer approves marriage of youthful wives with aged husbands or aged wives with youthful husbands. When Macfarlane argues that January’s decision to wed in his old age to a young woman is “welcomed by Chaucer, who proceeds to write in praise of marriage” (186), Macfarlane has not taken Chaucer’s intended ironic undertone into consideration: Chaucer is satirizing the old knight’s vision of marriage and the discrepancy between his vision and the reality. While these “spring and autumn” couples, such as the carpenter John and Alison, the knight January and May as well as the Wife of Bath and her five husbands, gravely suffer from the problem of age, they seem to display a satisfactory proportion of religion between husband and wife. On the other hand, in “The Man of Law’s Tale,” “The Clerk’s Tale,” “The Second Nun’s Tale” and “The

Wife of Bath's Tale," the marriages respectively encounter the problem of age, estate or religion, yet these couples are able to cope with the difficulties. It is hard to categorize these marriages because there are distinct patterns for each. However, the various disparities and polemics encountered by the couples are not amplified as the disparity and problem of age in the "spring and autumn" couples. In fact, L'Hermite-Leclercq notes that there is also disparity of age among the nobility in the medieval society:

In aristocratic marriages the age difference between husband and wife was often ten or twenty years or more, and the younger partner was always the wife. Among commoners we observe a similar, though less marked, disparity in age. (in Klapisch-Zuber ed., 218)

Compared against the historical records L'Hermite-Leclercq offers, Chaucer's picture of the nobility's marriage apparently is an ideal one partly because via this he can entertain his court audience,²³ and thus the proportion of age between an aristocratic couple is presented as aesthetically satisfied. It can be concluded that nearly every marriage in the selected *Tales* is aesthetically unsatisfactory in one way or another.

Concerning the form of marriage, Chaucer seems to be nostalgic of a more ideal pattern in the early Christian period while expressing little hope in a more unsatisfactorily form such as the commoners' in the contemporary England. Coincidentally, some aristocrats in the various tales come from highly cultivated places. For instance, Constance and Cecile come from Rome, Griselda and Walter from Italy. Or in other cases, the nobility come from historically famous places: the "old" lady in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" comes from certain place under Arthur's reign, and Dorigen, Arveragus and Aurelius from Breton in France. In contrast, most commoners in these tales we discuss are inhabitants of England, being either people of the middle class or of humble birth. To some extent, Chaucer seems to

²³ Concerning the nature of Chaucer's relationship with the royal court, Derek Pearsall holds a different opinion. He rejects the view that Chaucer has intimacy of association with the king and with the highest levels of court patronage because of his increasing isolation in the 1390s from the court (185).

suggest that the ancient nobility possess more marital happiness than the contemporary commoners. Such an ideology is perhaps based on the aesthetic distance between the ancient Rome and the contemporary England. Some things are beautiful when seen from a distance, while some are beautiful when seen in close range. Marriage is usually such an entity that is beautiful when seen from a distance.

If most marriages of the nobility, the knights and the commoners divert from the aesthetic principle of proportion, then why does the marriage of the aristocrats have a better claim in terms of marriage happiness? If these couples do not exactly follow satisfactory proportions of the three criteria, then one perhaps needs to ask why the incongruity between unequal age, estate and religion in the aristocratic marriage *can* be solved, whereas the incongruity between unequal age and status in the commoners' marriage *cannot* be solved. Gist points out the abhorrence of the marriage between people of unequal estate, of age with youth and of Christians with pagans: "Medieval society condemned unreservedly ... marriage with one of another faith ... [and] frowned upon unions of those of unequal rank as shameful, and considered the marriage of age with youth as unwise and conducive to unhappiness" (73). Her observation reinforces the fact that all the tales we have discussed, except "The Franklin's Tale," lack the beauty of proportion in terms of the form of marriage in one way or another. Most of these couples face problems of various sorts, yet there is obvious disparity of evaluation. If the answer cannot be found via the form of marriage, then one should turn to the contents of marriage for it.

Conditions Tales	Age	Estate	Religion
The Clerk's Tale	equal	unequal	equal
The Man of Law's Tale ^a	unknown	equal	equal (?)
	unequal (?)	equal	equal (?)
The Second Nun's Tale	equal	equal	unequal
The Franklin's Tale	equal	equal	equal
The Merchant's Tale	unequal	unequal	equal
The Wife of Bath's Tale	unequal→equal	unequal	equal
The Miller's Tale	unequal	unequal	equal
The Wife of Bath's Prologue ^b	unequal	unequal	equal
	unequal	unequal	equal
	unequal	unequal	equal
	unequal	unequal	equal
	unequal ^c	unequal	equal

^a The two rows refer to Constance's two marriages, one with the Sultan of Syria and the other with King Alla.

^b The five rows on the right hand side refer to the five marriages of the Wife of Bath.

^c The marriage consists of an old wife and a young husband, rather than the common pattern of an old husband and a young wife.

Chapter Two

The Debate on the Coexistence and Non-Coexistence of Physical and Spiritual Beauty in the Marriages Portrayed in the *Tales*

Just as the universe is hierarchically ordered, beauty also admits degrees. The hierarchical order of beauty in the Middle Ages is firstly, God's truest and most perfect beauty, secondly, spiritual beauty and thirdly, physical beauty. The levels of spiritual and physical beauty are not seen as mutually exclusive. A correct aesthetic attitude should not be one that the differentiation pits spiritual beauty and physical beauty against one another. Without requiring drastic modification of the way either kind of beauty perceives itself, physical and spiritual beauty can coexist within a single framework, that is, God's framework. Each level of beauty plays a different role yet is married to another in the quest to understand the phenomena of the universe.

However, when the hierarchy of beauty is applied to everyday life, physical beauty and spiritual beauty are often taken as opposites rather than two contrasting levels of the aesthetic hierarchy. For example, Chaucer's pilgrim-tellers in the *Tales* distinguish physical beauty from spiritual beauty in the marriages of the nobility, the knights and the commoners. Not only so, many storytellers further dichotomize these two levels of beauty. The debate on fidelity-and-infidelity alteration of ugliness and beauty in a wife in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" conveys the notion that an ugly wife tends to be faithful, while a beautiful wife unchaste. "Aesthetic stereotype" as such is also suggested in the marriages portrayed in "The Miller's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue." On the other hand, physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a wife are described to coexist in the marriages portrayed in "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Clerk's Tale," "The Franklin's Tale" and "The Second Nun's Tale."

While some pilgrims upholding an aristocratic view of marriage tend to appraise the value of the spiritual beauty of wives and demonstrate the "aesthetic pleasure"¹

¹ "Aesthetic pleasure" in this chapter is applied to the appreciation of physical and spiritual

derived from the wives' inner qualities, other pilgrims celebrating the popular view of marriage reveal the value of the physical beauty of wives and demonstrate the "aesthetic pleasure" drawn from the wives' physical beauty. Manifesting medieval sensitivity and perception of physical and spiritual beauty, Chaucer in his tales treats the two different types of aesthetic pleasure from daily life experiences rather than adopting a philosophical frame of reference. He seems to present a debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty in a wife during the pilgrimage to Canterbury. Both kinds of beauty arouse pleasure in the observers in the tales and the audience, yet the kind of aesthetic pleasure presented in the marriage of the aristocrats is not pure or "disinterested," because it is often mixed up with moral pleasure derived from a wife's spiritual beauty. Neither is the aesthetic pleasure in the marriage of the commoners a pure one due to its mixing with biological pleasure.

In the previous chapter, the form of marriage has been explicated in terms of the theory of proportion. St. Thomas's other two elements of beauty, "clarity" and "integrity," can also be analogously employed to explore the beauty in the contents of marriage. The contents of marriage in this thesis will refer to two factors, which further contribute to the quality and beauty of a household. They include a wife's beauty and the fulfillment of procreation. These two qualitative criteria can respectively attest "clarity" and "integrity" in St. Thomas's aesthetic theory. I shall deal with the first condition in this chapter and leave the second to the next chapter. As for the wife's beauty, her physical and/or spiritual "clarity" in reference to the aesthetic, biological and moral pleasures will be discussed.

I. St. Thomas's definition of "clarity"

St. Thomas distinguishes physical beauty from spiritual beauty and puts them under the term "clarity" or "brightness," which designates a bright color to things in question (*ST*, Part I, Q. 39, Art. 8c). A bright color or light can be applied to one's

beauty of a wife. These two levels of beauty arouse pleasure via her husband's aesthetic judgment.

comeliness and inner qualities. St. Thomas further explains the definition of clarity by having recourse to the human body:

The *beauty of the body* consists in a man having his bodily limbs well proportioned, together with a certain clarity of color. On like manner *spiritual beauty* consists in a man's conduct of actions being well proportioned in respect of the spiritual clarity of reason.

(ST, Part II [Second Part], Q. 145, Art. 2c, emphasis mine)

St. Thomas applied the notion of clarity to physical and spiritual radiance, in other words, clarity is used in the literal and the figurative senses (Tatarkiewicz 1970:252). The concept of hylomorphism, moreover, buttresses St. Thomas's understanding of clarity. The hylomorphic interpretation of clarity means that the essence of things shines through their outward appearance.² Thus, beauty for St. Thomas is "determined both by the appearance of a thing (when it corresponds to its essence) and by its essence (when it penetrates to the outward appearance)" (Tatarkiewicz 1970:252). As a result, these two levels of beauty are integrated. In the example of mankind, the beauty resides in the essence of one's inner virtues and outward comeliness.

Of the two levels of beauty, St. Thomas does not oppose one against the other, as any learned philosopher should try to avoid. Instead, these two levels of beauty are related to the beauty of God. According to St. Thomas, the perfect beauty of God includes and enfolds the imperfect beauty, that is, physical and spiritual beauty, which people know from experience. A philosophical and theological understanding of the bearing between the two is to treat the mutable physical beauty as the basis for ascending to a higher and durable realm of spiritual beauty and ultimately to the contemplative and eternal realm of the beauty of God.

In terms of the effect of beauty, not all people are capable of appreciating physical and/or spiritual beauty, even though these two levels explain the

² Eco translates hylomorphism as "The Aristotelian and Scholastic doctrine that bodies consist of prime matter and substantial form" (1988:280). *OED* defines it as "the doctrine that primordial matter is the First Cause of the universe."

apprehension of most people's understanding of beauty.³ St. Thomas employs the two levels of beauty to decide the quantitative and qualitative features of man. Tatarkiewicz remarks on the profundity of St. Thomas's aesthetics that is "based on visible beauty, but extended by analogy to spiritual beauty" (1970:247). Some eight hundred years earlier than St. Thomas, St. Augustine while discussing the function of man's bodily composition, interestingly attributes an aesthetic value to some parts of the body. He says: "There are some details in the body which are there simply for *aesthetic* reasons, and for no practical purpose—for example, the nipples on a man's chest and the beard on his face, the latter being clearly for a masculine ornament, not for protection" (*City of God*, XXII, 24, emphasis mine). Such a short mention reveals St. Augustine's distinction between the beautiful and the useful (*Confessions*, IV, 20). The function of the human body shall not be our concern here. Although he is discoursing the utility of the human body, St. Augustine also comments on its aesthetic value. One shall then ask: via what mechanisms can people comprehend physical beauty as well as spiritual beauty?

A. The sense of "seeing"

Aside from the *theory* of beauty, composed of three elements, i.e., proportion, clarity and integrity, St. Thomas also gives a *definition* of beauty in a wider sense.⁴ He says: "beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which *please* when *seen*."⁵ The actions of "pleasing" and "seeing" are the two keynotes in the aesthetic experience. What has been emphasized is the faculty of sight and the capability of being pleased when seeing the beautiful. Elsewhere St. Thomas states that "the 'beautiful' is something pleasant to *apprehend*."⁶ This proposition reveals another important aesthetic element: apprehension, which can also be extended to

³ Comparatively speaking, the beauty of God has been accessible only to a small scale of individuals, while most people indulge in the game of searching and defending the worldly beauty of mutability, such as fame and glory.

⁴ For the difference between "theory" and "definition," please cf. note 17 (page 14) in Introduction.

⁵ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part I, Q. 5, Art. 4 ad 1, emphasis mine.

⁶ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part II (First Part), Q. 27, Art. 1 ad 3, emphasis mine.

“contemplation.”⁷ These “two” propositions draw critics’ attention because they are St. Thomas’s own definition of beauty (Tatarkiewicz 1970:247). On the surface, the two propositions seem to convey *two* different definitions, since one version narrowly denotes beauty in terms of seeing, and the other more widely defines it in terms of perception (247). Yet, the faculty of sight and the denotation of perception are not for St. Thomas incompatible notions. He remarks that the sense of sight is “the most excellent of all the senses, and covers a larger ground ... and so its name is transferred to all the other senses, and even to the *inner* apprehensions”⁸ If the sense of sight also includes an inner comprehension of the beautiful, the “seeing” in the first proposition can be extended to the contemplation of both material and spiritual things. St. Augustine also points out the importance of the role of sight while discussing the fundamental different natures of the heavenly city and the earthly city. He remarks: “Of all visible things the greatest is the world; of all invisible things the greatest is God. But the existence of the world is a matter of *observation*: the existence of God is a matter of *belief*” (*City of God*, XI, 4, emphasis mine). It is apparent that mundane people use the eyes as instrument to acquire knowledge that waits to be discovered. Nevertheless, St. Augustine is explicit that if man only applies the physical eye to observe the world and do not cultivate the faculty of the inner eye, man tend to become blind toward the matter of belief because the inner eye is not opened toward the apprehension of God. St. Thomas agrees with St. Augustine’s distinction of the two levels of the sense of sight, yet he further transfers the sense of sight to all the other senses and even to the inner apprehensions. The “two” propositions mentioned above are actually one which is formulated in two distinct ways. Thus, the extension of seeing to contemplation annuls the seemingly rift

⁷ According to Tatarkiewicz, St. Thomas does not mention the word “contemplation” in his definition of beauty, yet he uses it elsewhere in connection with beauty, such as *contemplatio spiritualis* and *contemplatio intima* (internal) (1970:247). That is to say, “contemplation” is connected with the apprehension of the spiritual.

⁸ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part II (First Part), Q. 77, Art. 5, ad 3 and *ST*, Part I, Q. 67, Art. 1c. In other occasions, St. Thomas maintains that sight and hearing are two primary cognitive senses. He contends that the notion of the beautiful is that “which calms the desire, by being seen or known. Consequently those senses chiefly regard the beautiful, which are the most cognitive, viz. sight and hearing, as ministering to reason; for we speak of beautiful sights and beautiful sounds” (*ST*, Part II [First Part], Q. 27, Art. 1, ad 3).

between them, and the “two” propositions in fact converge as “one” definition of beauty (Tatarkiewicz 1970:247).

In terms of cognitive faculty, physical and spiritual things can serve as the objects of seeing and contemplating. Contemplation is mainly applied to the apprehension of God’s great beauty in the Middle Ages, but it can also be applied to perceive spiritual beauty. Be it concrete objects or abstract entities, the mechanisms of seeing and perceiving require the operation of the eyes and intellectual powers to create an image of the beautiful since the two coexist in aesthetic experience. Since St. Thomas’s definition of beauty is based on visible beauty and extended to spiritual beauty, we may legitimately employ the capacity of the senses and that of the intellect to apprehend these types of beauty, which arouse aesthetic pleasure.

B. Distinguishing the beautiful from the good

By exercising the faculty of “seeing,” observers obtain aesthetic pleasure. Earlier before Kant, St. Thomas had mentioned pure aesthetic pleasure and noticed the differences in aesthetical taste.⁹ He asserts that “whereas the other animals take delight in the objects of the senses only as ordered to food and sex, man alone takes pleasure in the beauty of sensible objects for its own sake” (*ST*, Part I, Q. 91 Art. 3 ad 3). St. Thomas points out man’s aesthetic faculty, which is an invaluable asset because it differentiates the uniqueness of mankind from other animals. What St. Thomas understands is pure aesthetic pleasure, distinguishable from biological pleasure. He writes,

The lion rejoices when he sees or hears a stag, because of the promise of food. And man experiences pleasure with the other senses and not only because of food, but also because of the harmony of sense impressions.... And since sense impressions deriving from the other senses give pleasure because of their harmony—for instance, when a man delights in well harmonized sounds—then this pleasure is not connected with keeping him alive. (*ST*, Part II [Second Part], Q. 141, Art. 4 ad 3)¹⁰

⁹ Even earlier in the ninth century, the Scholastic John Scotus Eriugena suggested that the proper response to beauty is disinterested (*De Divisione Naturae* [On the Division of Nature], IV, 16, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* [Paris, 1844-1890], vol. 122, col. 828B), qtd. in Beardsley 1975:99.

¹⁰ This passage is cited from Tatarkiewicz’s translation (1970:259) since his seems to be a

Based on the factor of subsistence, St. Thomas indicates the difference between a lion's concern and man's concern when seeing a beautiful object. By differentiating biological from aesthetic gratification, St. Thomas considers biological desire for the good as interested pleasure, while aesthetic desire for the beautiful as pure or disinterested one.

On top of the distinction between biological and aesthetic feelings, St. Thomas further separates the good from the beautiful. He says,

Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ *logically*, for goodness properly relates to the *appetite* (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an *end* (the appetite being a kind of movement toward a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen Now since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause. (*ST*, Part I, Q. 5, Art. 4 ad 1, emphasis mine)

In this aspect, the good and the beautiful differ in that the former ends in the satisfaction of appetites and the possession of benefits, while the latter ends in the gratification of cognition and the possession of the beautiful image. The beautiful is thus the object of perception, while the good is the object of desire. Tatarkiewicz has made an explicit comparison in terms of the distinction that

the beautiful is the object of contemplation, and not of desire, while the good is the object of desire, and not of contemplation. We strive for the good, and we do not contemplate it. The beautiful is a form which we contemplate, while the good is an end to which we aspire. (1970:248)

simpler and clearer version than the on-line translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, which reads: "... the lion is pleased to see the stag, or to hear its voice, in relation to his food. On the other hand man derives pleasure from the other senses, not only for this reason, but also on account of the becomingness of the sensible object ... while in so far as the sensible objects of the other senses are pleasant on account of their becomingness, as when a man is pleased at a well-harmonized sound, this pleasure has nothing to do with the preservation of nature. Hence these passions are not of such importance that temperance can be referred to them antonomastically."

Such an explication accurately conveys what St. Thomas writes elsewhere about the distinction between the good and the beautiful:

The beautiful is the same as the good, and they differ in aspect only. For since good is what all seek, the notion of good is that which calms the desire; while the notion of the beautiful is that which calms the desire, by being seen or known ... so that “good” means that which simply *pleases the appetite*; while the “beautiful” is something *pleasant to apprehend*.

(ST, Part II [First Part], Q. 27, Art. 1 ad 3, emphasis mine)

Here, St. Thomas further points out the distinction between the good and the beautiful. Appetites can be various—appetite for moral goodness or appetite for biological gratification. Aesthetic, biological and moral judgments all belong to the values of human beings, but the ways man conceptualize them commonly create a large contrast.

C. Mixed pleasure

The concept of the good in St. Thomas’s understanding refers to biological and moral considerations, and the kinds of pleasure derived from them are called biological pleasure and moral pleasure. Both biological and moral feelings desire for an end, the satisfaction of the natural needs and that of the “cultural” needs. The natural needs in man are easy to understand because they often include preservation of life and sexual instincts, while the cultural needs in man require elaboration. It is commonly believed that our moral feelings are social constructs. Without moral cultivation and training, most people are not aware of moral values. With more and more nurturing as such, they tend to exhibit a higher expectation of morality. As a result, the moral feelings that men have are given a cultural meaning. The sphere of goodness thus refers to a moral concern and end(s) of a social conduct.

Since St. Thomas’s main point is about the theoretical distinction between the spheres of the good and the beautiful, he does not need to focus on the problems of practicality in life, and the element of reason can serve every cognitive faculty. Yet, when the practical problem of preferences comes in, the position of reason might be loosened. George Santayana is very straightforward to negate reason in an aesthetic

judgment: “Preference is ultimately irrational” (15). If the arbitrary ideal of reason is swayed, biological or moral pleasures will be often mixed with aesthetic pleasure. When human beings are regarded as objects of beauty for seeing and contemplating, the aesthetic pleasure aroused by their physical and spiritual beauty often involves mixed judgment and pleasure.

St. Thomas is a forerunner to Kant in the sense that he, who lived some five hundred years earlier, propounds the concept of “disinterestedness” in its primitive form; the two philosophers point out the element of detachment and non-functionality in an aesthetic activity. According to Kant, the delight which “determines the judgment of taste is independent of all interest” (42). Yet, when human beauty is taken as the object of beauty, the whole matter becomes complicated. Kant acknowledges that

the beauty of man (including under this head that of a man, woman or child) ... presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; and is therefore merely *appendant* beauty. Now just as it is a *clog* on the purity of the judgment of taste to have the agreeable (of sensation) joined with beauty to which properly only the form is relevant, so to combine the good with beauty, (the good, namely, of the manifold to the thing itself according to its end,) mars its purity. (73, emphasis mine)

Most people thus do not apply a non-conceptual judgment to the beauty of their kind because they, as insiders and the “interested,” are trapped in a mist of prejudices that would usually intervene their pure aesthetic judgment. Hence, the difficulty of maintaining a non-conceptual and disinterested attitude toward the beauty of human beings. If man’s physical and spiritual beauty are merely *appendant* beauty, these two levels of beauty can be treated as dispensable, but the case proves to be the contrary: most mundane folks regard them as necessary and essential. It is from such an insistent mentality that a debate over physical and spiritual beauty is launched in Chaucer’s *Tales*.

On theoretical as well as practical bases, every beautiful object is able to arouse the sense of beauty, and the sense of beauty should have a fairly large application to

things like inanimate, artistic objects and even human beings. Such a sense of beauty is a kind of order and reason, according to St. Thomas.¹¹ Since God creates man as His creations, there should be no contradiction in treating an individual as an object of beauty. In saying this, I do not intend to reify an individual. Instead, the strategy is to adopt human beings, especially the role of wife, as a medium through which her husband's sensibility and perception of her physical and spiritual beauty can be explored in Chaucer's *Tales*.

When talking about physical beauty of people, a woman's outward beauty is often one of the focal points. It will be easy to find examples concerning the value of female physical beauty. As early as in the Song of Songs,¹² the Church is being praised as a beautiful woman. The bridegroom invokes: "Come from Lebanon, my bride,/ Come from Lebanon, come!" (Song 4:8) and recalls the physical beauty of the bride in the song of the lovers:

Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved,
ah, you are beautiful!
Your eyes are doves
behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down the mountains of Gilead.

Your teeth are like a flock of ewes to be shorn,
which come up from the washing,
All of them big with twins,
none of them thin and barren.

Your lips are like a scarlet strand;
your mouth is lovely.
Your cheek is like a half-pomegranate
behind your veil.

.....

Your breasts are like twin fawns,
the young of a gazelle
that browse among the lilies. (Song 4:1-3, 5)

¹¹ "The forms of artificial bodies result from the conception of the craftsman, [and]... they are nothing else but composition, order and shape" (St. Thomas, *ST*, Part II [Second Part], Q. 96, Art. 2 ad 2).

¹² "The Old Testament," *The New American Bible*, 1991, 1986, 1970, Online, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Here, the intrinsic as well as the extrinsic attributes of the bride are elevated to a transcendental dimension even though the intimate relation between the Lord, or the Lover, and his people, or the beloved, is described in secular terms. The author of the Songs does not compare the beauty of the Church to that of the male, because female beauty extracts a profounder cognition in the realm of human imagination. The beautiful image thus arouses aesthetic pleasure via the operation of sensuous beauty and the contemplation of intellectual beauty.

In Chaucer's *Tales*, the cognition of the physical and spiritual beauty of a wife also proceeds from the sense of beauty to the operation of the intellect, two levels of beauty that elicit aesthetic pleasure. Though it is difficult to quantitatively gauge the impact of the beautiful in real life, beauty has been the deciding factor in the choice of spouses. According to So, the search for the aesthetic value embodies a quest desire (1993:92). This is exactly the behavior pattern of the characters in the *Tales*. A husband searches for the values of physical and spiritual beauty embedded in a wife. While in the various Chaucerian tales we can occasionally find that how a wife aesthetically feels attracted to her husband, we may narrow down the discussion to a husband's sense of beauty toward his wife, leaving out the reverse direction of such feelings.

II. The aesthetic debate on physical and spiritual beauty in the *Tales*

The issue of the hierarchy of beauty is not merely a topic for the learned ecclesiastics in the Middle Ages. Chaucer is also interested in such a topic and formulates it via his personae in the *Tales*. Some pilgrims are more receptive to physical or sensuous beauty, such as the Miller, the Merchant and the Wife of Bath, while others are consciously responsive to spiritual or intellectual beauty, such as the Man of Law, the Clerk, the Franklin and the Second Nun. Eco explains the change in our psychological state when seeing a beautiful object. In clear and unmistakable language he remarks: "When we reflect upon the objective and rule-governed character of perceived phenomena, we discover our own *connatural*ity with their proportions, that there are *proportions* also in ourselves" (1986:77, emphasis mine).

Beauty thus corresponds to the inherent ideas of these pilgrim-tellers.

However, in practicality, the distinction between the two levels of beauty is often polarized into the physical versus spiritual qualities of people. The dichotomy of these two types of beauty is further reinforced by Christian canons and doctrines that instill in the medieval men the superiority of internal beauty over external beauty. The fear of the danger and transience of physical beauty leads to the condemnation of its aesthetic value. In Chaucer's *Tales*, such a stereotypical attitude toward beauty is also dealt with, and he seems to present a debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of these two levels of beauty in the various types of marriage he portrays.

A. Argument: physical vs. spiritual beauty in marriage

Besides the discussion of the sovereignty in marriage, the Wife of Bath also launches an important topic: the debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a wife. Kittredge asserts that "the old hag" story of the Wife has caused "a strange dilemma" (191) for marital couples or for those who plan to marry. It is a dilemma of a choice between doubtful fidelity of a beautiful wife and assured chastity of an ugly wife. The wife in "the old hag" story poses a question to her newly-wed groom. She utters,

"Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise thynges tweye:
To han me *foul* and *old* til that I deye,
And be to yow a *trew*e, humble wyf,
And nevere yow displese in al my lif,
Or elles ye 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 some oother place, may wel be.
Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow liketh."

(III 1219-27, emphasis mine)

This is a lifetime issue between beauty and ugliness, between fidelity and infidelity, and fundamentally, between physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a wife. This is not only a dilemma for the young immature knight, but also for all human beings

because most people are accustomed to a binary mode of thinking. To look at the dilemma aesthetically, this is an issue of the debate between physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a woman: a debate on whether a physically beautiful woman is chaste or unchaste. Therefore, the complication of the Wife lies not only in her enthusiasm about the nature of marriage and how the marital life should be, but also in her role as a precursor in introducing a debate over physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a wife. Such a debate kindles the flame of the heated debate and enlivens the journey to Canterbury. On the other hand, what she has proposed is an ideological stereotype in view of physical and spiritual beauty in the mundane world.

The dichotomy of physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a woman in the medieval culture can best be exemplified in the three articles of Margaret Schlauch, Richard F. Green and Glending Olson.¹³ In Schlauch's paper, she asserts that the tradition behind this marital dilemma is a learned and clerical one, instead of merely a folkloric tradition.¹⁴ In Green's analysis of an analogue concerning the choice between day-and-night alteration of beauty and ugliness, he argues that the action of the French farce, *Les deux maris et leurs deux femmes*, is reminiscent of the Wife's riddle and hence has a popular element. Olson resumes the debate over the origin and analogues of the marital riddle, and he provides a balade addressed to the Seneschal d'Eu by Eustache Deschamps as another analogue and contends that "Deschamps's poem locates itself in a network of courtly social exchange" (unpaginated).

We can easily cite another analogue, "The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure," to prove that the same literary motif of the

¹³ Margaret Schlauch, "The Marital Dilemma in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," *PMLA* 61 (1946): 416-30, Richard F. Green, "An Analogue to the 'Marital Dilemma' in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," *English Language Notes* 28.4 (June 1991): 9-12, and Glending Olson, "The Marital Dilemma in 'The Wife of Bath's Tale': An Unnoticed Analogue and Its Chaucerian Court Context," *English Language Notes* 33.1 (September 1995): 1-7.

¹⁴ Schlauch cites examples of the alternative of chastity versus infidelity from the Roman satirists such as Ovid, French and Italian writers such as Jean de Meun and Petarch. The same subject can be found in a lot of writers throughout the history, hence the conclusion that the dilemma is a learned tradition.

marital dilemma could still find its counterpart in the late fifteenth century.¹⁵ In the romance, due to the witchery imposed on Dame Ragnell by her evil-intentioned stepmother, Ragnell is turned into an ugly woman. Later, she is married to Sir Gawain. In the bridal chamber, in spite of Sir Gawain's unwillingness to embrace her because of her homeliness, he has to fulfill his bride's claim of kissing her. At this, Ragnell is transformed back to her original beauty. Gawain's heart is now filled with rapture. Yet, before he is able to embrace her, she brings up a question:

“Syr,” she sayd, “thus shall ye me have;
Chese of the one—so God me save,
My beawty woll nott hold:
Wheder ye woll have me fayre on nyghtes
And as foull on days, to alle men sightes;

Or els to have me fayre on days
And on nyghtes on the fowlyst wyse.
The one ye must nedes have;
Chese the one or the oder;
Chese on, syr Knyght! Which you is lever,
Your worshypp for to save?”

(“The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell,” ll. 656-66)

The choice between day-and-night alteration of beauty and ugliness almost reproduces the Wife of Bath's version of the marital dilemma, only that from a hindsight, Sir Gawain's dilemma seems a bit relieved compared to the Wife's riddle: once the switch of the nocturnal and diurnal alternative is turned on, the pattern in the romance about Sir Gawain will be operated on a *part-time* basis, whereas the Wife poses a *full-time*, that is, a lifelong riddle. Once a wrong judgment is made, the knight in the Wife's tale would regret throughout the rest of his life. In both cases, the husbands are clever or lucky enough to turn the peril into safety. Schlauch comments that “any well-trained hero who has heard disenchantment tales from nurse

¹⁵ “The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure,” in *Middle English Romances: Authoritative Texts sources and Backgrounds Criticism*, Stephen H. A. Shepherd selected and ed., 243-67. Shepherd states that the manuscript dates around the late fifteenth century or possibly the early sixteenth century; the date of its composition is held to be no earlier than the mid fifteenth century (243).

or mother would surely know how to conduct himself in the face of such a marital dilemma” (417). Gawain is such a figure. Presumably the young knight in the Wife’s tale is one too. Chaucer’s innovation in the Wife’s tale lies in that he is not restricted to the logic that sexual performance can only be enjoyed at night, that is, a day-and-night alteration of beauty and ugliness. Instead, Chaucer seems to be more interested in presenting how a man conducts himself in the face of such an aesthetic predicament, which is a lifelong issue.

Based on these analogues, we can find that they altogether tend to reinforce people’s prejudices and stereotype in terms of appreciation of beauty. Whether or not the dilemma can be traced back to the time as early as the creation of human beings, or be handed down to the timeless future, we see the limitation of most people’s aesthetic cognition. The point worth mentioning is that these traditions, be it learned, popular or courtly, all signify the mentality which dichotomizes these two levels of beauty. That is to say, throughout the evolution of history, many people were trapped in this aesthetic obsession and had not learned how to deconstruct the ideology. In Chaucer’s *Tales*, in addition to the Wife of Bath’s narrative, “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” duplicate the stereotype that a beautiful wife is unfaithful, while “The Man of Law’s Tale,” “The Clerk’s Tale,” “The Franklin’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale” deviate from such a stereotype and convey the belief that a beautiful wife can be faithful when she simultaneously possesses spiritual beauty. Hence, the opposition between the argument and the counterargument is self-evident. Except in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” other marriages in the Miller’s, the Merchant’s tales as well as the Wife of Bath’s prologue do not explicitly present such a specific dilemma for the husbands. However, in these tales, the implied argument that outward beauty is incompatible to spiritual qualities also indirectly attests to the aesthetic stereotype. As if by deliberation, the deployment of the wives’ outward sweetness in these tales is designed to form a sharp contrast to their lack of spiritual beauty.

In the marriages of the common folks that Chaucer portrays, the Miller spells out one of the most remarkable examples and the most systematic rendering of a woman’s

physical beauty. Through Chaucer's highly polished linguistic skills, the Miller is able to describe Alison's visible properties and her outward ornaments which embellish her as a lovely object of beauty as tangibly as if we can feel her presence:

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any wezele hir body gent and smal.

.....

The tapes of hir white voluper
Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;

.....

She was ful moore blisful on to see
Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
And softer than the wolfe is of a wether.

.....

In al this world, to seken up and down,
There nys no man so wys that koude thenche
So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe
Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.

(I 3233-34, 3241-44, 3247-49, 3252-56)

Here, the descriptive language enhances the audience's sensibility of Alison's external beauty. The sense of touch (her soft "weaselly" body, "softer than the wolfe") and that of the sight (yonge, silk, brighter) are aroused, and the use of both the comparative and the superlative degrees of rhetoric are allocated to add more flavor to her physical attractiveness. In other words, she is more glamorous and voluptuous than elegantly beautiful. However, the vivid sensory depiction of her outward beauty is tinged with ridicule, especially when it seems to be uttered from the point of view of John: it is he who has seen most of Alison's beauty. The Miller in his tale has to spend about forty consecutive lines on the physical attributes of Alison, who is almost described from head to toe. All these appeal to the faculty of sight, that of John, the narrator, the audience including us and even Chaucer. The beauty of her body consists in her well-proportioned limbs that radiate sensual connotation. This is the literal meaning of what St. Thomas defines clarity. The way Chaucer portrays Alison reveals John's preference, taste of beauty and immediate sensuous pleasure in

observing femininity. Not only the boarding student, Nicholas, but also the parish clerk, Absolon, is charmed by her physical clarity. The way she dresses herself may neither be elegant nor tasteful, yet her husband and her two suitors all enjoy the aesthetic pleasure she brings them. However, because of her immaturity in character, we are left in ignorance of her inner properties, if there is any. A slight mentioning of some spiritual merits would make her character altogether different. It is apparent that the Miller cares nothing of such kind since he is incapable of appreciating spiritual beauty. Alison's physical beauty and spiritual beauty are thus described as mutually exclusive.

The attempt to stylize the external traits of a wife also extends to the Merchant. In "The Merchant's Tale," the physical beauty of a wife is emphasized, and this is how the Merchant introduces May, the bride-to-be to the aged knight January:

I may yow nat devyse al hir beautee.
But thus mucche of hire beautee telle I may,
That she was lyk the brighte morwe of May,
Fulfilde of alle beautee and plesaunce. (IV 1746-49)

This brief remark presents her external beauty, which "consists in the proper ordering of the body and an abundance of external properties pertaining to the body."¹⁶ She is pretty, bright and vital, just like what her name symbolizes. There is clarity in her young age. Meanwhile, she seems to be a rare woman for January because he has made an arduous "mental" journey throughout the country in order to find the right match:

Many fair shap and many a fair visage
Ther passeth thurgh his herte nyght by nyght,
As whoso tooke a mirour, *polished bright*,
And sette it in a commune market-place,
Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace
By his mirour; (IV 1580-85, emphasis mine)

The device of mirror ingeniously reveals the limitation of January's taste of beauty.

¹⁶ St. Thomas, *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* [An Apology for the Religious Orders], c. 7 ad 9 (Mandonnet, *Opuscula*, vol. IV), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:258.

If the mirror is *polished bright*, it should be able to reflect not only external attractiveness but internal qualities of a female. Yet, January's mirror can at most capture a charming figure, while it cannot reflect the moral values of women. Still, the metaphor of mirror attests to the proposition that beautiful things are those which please when seen. When the object of marriage is finally decided, January begins to contemplate her sensuous traits:

And whan that he was in his bed ybrought,
 He purtreied in his herte and in his thoght
 Hir fresshe beautee and hir age tendre,
 Hir myddel smal, hire armes longe and sklendre,
 Hir wise governaunce, hir gentillesse,
 Hir wommanly berynge, and hire sadnesse. (IV 1599-1604)

Beauty relates to the cognitive faculty, and what January is then exercising is his faculty of contemplation. Although what he ponders is constrained to the outward form of women, the fact that he is under the sway of contemplation cannot be denied. From the image reflected in the mirror to that shown in his mental perception, January has experienced both the sense of sight and the contemplation of the beautiful. In fact, January and May are juxtaposed in terms of their "clarity." E. T. Donaldson says well that there is a "dynamic" juxtaposition of the "seemingly, or potentially, beautiful with the unmistakably ugly, of the 'faire, fresshe' May with the 'olde' January" (34). The seemingly beautiful ultimately reveals herself to be ugly in the moral sense. Besides January, his young squire Damian is likewise arrested by May's physical clarity and falls in love with her at his first glimpse of her. When Damian first meets May, it is on the wedding feast of his master. Unable to resist his admiration of her, Damian immediately gives his heart to her. This is the magic that the sight of a lovely woman can spellbind those who behold her. This also proves the operation that beautiful things are those that please when seen.

In "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," the focal point is not so much the physical beauty of the Wife as her feminist interrogation of the traditional view of marriage of that period. Yet, earlier in the "General Prologue," Chaucer the pilgrim describes her beauty as such:

Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
 She was a worthy womman al hir lyve:
 Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
 Withouten oother compaignye in youthe— (I 458-61)

The audience seems to be oblivious of her physical beauty because her call for the rights of women in marriage attracts most readers' attention. She, in her confession, only makes occasional references to her own external beauty: she is "yong and ful of ragerye/ Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye" (III 455-56) when she marries her fourth husband. Through the description of every period of her marriage life, one gradually realizes that to some extent, her outspokenness shines through her physical beauty, a condition that makes her both physically and intellectually confident. She has seen so much of the world since the age of twelve and cannot have been more familiar with the subject of marriage. Furthermore, it is this very image of the beautiful that attracts those who behold her outward brightness or those who apprehend her inward sophistication. It will thus be natural to assume that among her husbands, four of them must have been drawn by her physical as well as intellectual clarity. Her rich experience further allows her to interrogate the stereotypical view of the medieval men who tend to dichotomize a woman's physical and spiritual beauty. She lays bare the fastidiousness of most medieval men's mentality:

Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief
 To wedde a povre womman, for costage;
 And if that she be riche, of heigh parage,
 Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie
 To soffre hire pride and hire malencolie.
 And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,
 Thou seyst that every holour wol hire have;
 She may no while in chastitee abyde,
 That is assailed upon ech a syde. (III 248-56)

Behind this, there is an entrenched disbelief in a woman's physical beauty. Being a narrator of her own prologue, she might have told her audience more about the beauty of her virtues, yet Chaucer apparently is maneuvering behind her so that the picture

she portrays herself cannot evade from the stereotype of the opposition between physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a wife. A typical and exaggerating negative view about feminine beauty is recorded as follows:

Woman was represented as the door of *hell*, as the mother of all human ills. She should be *ashamed* at the very thought that she is a woman. She should live in continual penance, on account of the curses she has brought upon the world. She should be *ashamed* of her dress, for it is the memorial of her fall. She should be *especially ashamed of her beauty*, for it is the most potent instrument of the daemon. (Lecky ii:357-58, emphasis mine)

Lecky here states a stereotype that manifests a misogynist attitude typical of an Eve/Virgin Mary dichotomy. The outward beauty of whatever form seems to be never harmless except in the case of Virgin Mary. The ascetic attitude toward physical beauty can also be found in the condemnation of artistic beauty. In the twelfth century, there was a noteworthy campaign against superfluous art in church decoration, and St. Bernard expressed his denunciation of art as follows:

We who have turned aside from society, relinquishing for Christ's sake all the precious and beautiful things in the world, its wondrous light and colour, its sweet sounds and odours, the pleasures of taste and touch, for us all bodily delights are nothing but dung....¹⁷

Eco observes that despite the vigorous energy of renouncing aesthetic pleasure, St. Bernard unwittingly has “a lively appreciation of the very things that he denounces” (1986:7). Monks, clergymen and friars preaching the ascetic ideal regard the female as “an instrument of the Devil, the supreme temptress, and as such must necessarily be both evil and inferior to man” (Rowling 72). These people perhaps are temporarily forgetful of the fact that she simultaneously is also an instrument of God—she is the unique medium for giving birth to babies. Russell feels it necessary to retort upon these moralists by saying that since “the moralists were men, woman appeared as the temptress; if they had been women, man would have had this role” (45). Hence, a partial understanding of the female reveals these traditional

¹⁷ *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, chap. 12 (J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* [Paris, 1844-1890], vol. 182, cols. 914-916), qtd. in Eco 1986:6-7.

moralists' double standard and intellectual limitations. The Wife of Bath also points out such a stereotype that the physical beauty and spiritual beauty of a wife cannot coexist.

All the wives in "The Miller's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" share a feature: all of them are portrayed physically attractive yet unfaithful to their aged husbands. Since there is disparity of age, the "spring and autumn" couples often hold different values and modes of thoughts. While the aged husbands want to grasp a sense of security by keeping their young wives to themselves, these wives are at the stage eager to explore the world. The narrators do not analyze psychological factors as such in details. Instead, the way they present the issue of adultery easily misleads the audience to an incorrect impression and corollary that all young beautiful wives are unfaithful.

B. Counterargument: physical *and* spiritual beauty in marriage

On the contrary, "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Clerk's Tale" and "The Franklin's Tale" deal with not only the physical charm and moral loftiness of a wife but also the coexistence of these two levels of beauty. The coexistence refers us to St. Thomas's concept of hylomorphism. The notion of hylomorphism reinforces one's understanding of the nature of clarity in mankind. The hylomorphic interpretation of clarity means that the essence of things shines through their outward appearance. Beauty of mankind is simultaneously determined by the appearance and the essence, that is, by the physical and spiritual beauty. The physical beauty does not exist by itself; instead, it is buttressed by a higher level of beauty, i.e., the beauty of moral qualities. Therefore, when inner virtues penetrate to the outward appearance, an individual is seen as physically and spiritually beautiful. In this context, these two levels of beauty are integrated.

What draws the audience's attention upon listening to these tales is the heroines' physical and spiritual beauty, which are hylomorphically united. These wives' spiritual beauty consists in an abundance of intellectual goods, which are conveyed through the storytellers' idealized and stylized language. Moreover, the narrators'

treatment of these heroines' two kinds of beauty reflects the medieval hierarchical order of beauty, in which the higher, spiritual dimension embraces the lower, physical level. That is, the essence of a wife's virtues shines through her outward appearance. In "The Man of Law's Tale," the narrator introduces the Roman Emperor's daughter, Constance, as follows:

"Oure Emperour of Rome—God hym see!—
A doghter hath that, syn the world bigan,
To rekene as wel hir *goodnesse* as beautee,
Nas nevere swich another as is shee.

.....

"In hire is *heigh beautee*, withoute pride,
Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
To alle hire werkes *vertu* is hir gyde;
Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.
She is mirroure of alle *curteisye*;
Hir herte is verray chamber of *hoolynesse*,
Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse."

(II 156-59, 162-68, emphasis mine)

These are ideal traits for an exemplary wife. No sooner is Constance introduced than her innermost qualities are punctuated. As seen from the above-quoted passage, there are more than five references to her "heigh beautee," such as *goodnesse*, *vertu*, *humblesse*, *curteisye* and *hoolynesse*. All these internal properties put together make a woman an apotheosis of wife. These encomiums are doubtless some of the superlative terms for eulogizing the beauty of a woman. The narrator stresses that Constance's "heigh beautee" is *in* her, not outside of her, and that is why the point of his description is directed to her spiritual beauty, not her physical beauty. The light of these inner qualities radiates through her appearance, so that although the Man of Law does not adopt the kind of rhetorical skill used by the Miller, who describes Alison's physical charm from head to toe, Constance is no doubt deemed angelic. Not only her looks arouse the sense of comeliness but her virtues make whoever knows her contemplates her nobleness. The merchants of the Sultan of Syria who go to Rome to do business notice her noble and graceful demeanor, and after they go back to Syria, they report to the Sultan about the wonders they saw and heard. The

storyteller Man of Law says,

Amonges othere thynges, specially,
 Thise marchantz han hym toold of dame Custance
 So greet noblesse in earnest, ceriously,
 That this Sowdan hath caught so greet pleasance
 To han hir *figure* in his remembrance,
 That al his *lust* and al his bisy cure
 Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure. (II 183 -89)

The Sultan has never seen Constance, yet with what his merchants tell him, he begins to formulate “hir figure in his remembrance.” He starts to contemplate the beauty of her inner virtues, even without her being actually seen. This situation brings out the differentiation between the subjective and the objective understanding of a beautiful object in St. Thomas’s understanding of beauty. As summarized by Tatarkiewicz, on the one hand, the cause of pleasure lies in the act of seeing objects, on the other, in the things seen (1970:247). The latter suggests an objective way of understanding aesthetic pleasure, while the former a subjective one. The Sultan’s appreciation of Constance’s beauty validates the objective cognition of beauty. As a corollary, Constance’s appearance and virtues are beautiful not because the Sultan loves them; they are loved because they are beautiful and good. To regard goodness as the major kind of beauty generates the meaning that inward goodness is the main subject while outward beauty a modifier. All these unique qualities as well as Constance’s ripeness and courage are conditions that later support her through various severe trials.

Similar description of a heroine’s spiritual qualities also prevails in “The Clerk’s Tale.” As the picture of Griselda slowly comes into view, the attention of the audience is redirected from her physical beauty to her spiritual beauty:

Amonges thise povre folk ther dwelte a man
 Which that was holden povrest of hem alle;

 Janicula men of that throop hym calle.
 A doghter hadde he, fair ynogh to sighte,
 And Grisildis this yonge mayden highte.

But for to speke of *vertuous beautee*,
 Thanne was she oon the faireste under sonne;
 For povreliche yfostred up was she,
 No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne.

.....
 She knew wel labour but noon ydel ese.

But thogh this mayde tender were of age,
 Yet in the brest of hire *virginitee*
 Ther was enclosed *rype* and sad *corage*;
 And in greet *reverence* and *charitee*
 Hir olde povre fader fostred shee.
 A fewe sheep, spynnynge, on feeld she kepte;
 She wolde nocht been ydel til she slepte.

(IV 204-205, 208-14, 217-24, emphasis mine)

Though economically deprived, Griselda is spiritually rich and happy. True, she is born of an impoverished family, yet she becomes peerless in her hometown because of her “*vertuous beautee*.” In a similar pattern of how Constance is described, Griselda’s dominant features of inner virtues are eulogized and weighed more than her physical attractiveness. While most men care greatly about dowry,¹⁸ Walter values more Griselda’s refined way of getting along with people. Here, the theme of virtue is by no means doubted by anyone.

Among her spiritual qualities, Griselda’s total submission to Walter most impresses the audience. Her calmness and self-denial might not be sympathetic to a modern reader, yet her behavioral mode is typical of what a medieval ideal wife should be. Jacob of Voragine defines in precise terms the medieval conjugal relationship. He says that husband and wife must love one another and help one another to achieve salvation. The husband, nevertheless,

is required only to reciprocate his wife’s perfect love with moderate love (*discretus*). A wife’s love is perfect ... when she is *blinded* by her feelings and loses all sense of proportion and truth, sincerely believing that “nobody is wiser, stronger, or handsomer than her husband,” when she is pleased by *everything* about him, when she finds *everything* he does or says right and just.¹⁹

¹⁸ Frances and Joseph Gies remark that marriage after the Black Death remains an “economic enterprise, the dowry growing larger and more important than ever” (1989:291).

¹⁹ Jacob of Voragine, *Chronica*, 195-98, qtd. in Vecchio 110-11, emphasis mine.

This exactly describes what Griselda behaves in her marriage with Walter. She is “blinded” by her feelings and loses all sense of proportion and truth when firstly, Walter has their two children sent away and later, when she is told to be substituted by a younger and socially superior lady. As a wife, Griselda’s love cannot be more perfect. Jacob of Voragine’s version of a wife’s perfect love exposes patriarchal coercion in the medieval society. Yet, to look at his version from another perspective, medieval husbands are also burdened with moral responsibilities. As the head of a family, a husband is prohibited from loving his wife with too much affection—he needs to learn how to control his sexual desire. A wife is also responsible for the mutual love between her and her husband: she should make herself lovable, especially in the aspect of her inner qualities. To a large extent, both men and women are conditioned under the moral principles. Jacob’s words, nevertheless, are not likely to elevate women’s spiritual nobility because he emphasizes too much on a woman’s conjugal debt. Laura Kendrick, on the other hand, seems to show a positive opinion of Griselda’s repression. In Kendrick’s analysis, Walter is compared to a figurative Father, who devises various tests to try his wife’s endurance. Kendrick says, “The story of Griselda is an abreactive fiction of total accommodation to the laws and will of the figurative father, who may stand for the progenitor, husband, political ruler, or God” (48). Kendrick further asserts that Griselda’s pose and self-mastery enable her to “identify with her husband, to make his will her own” (47-48). The self-denial of Griselda should not be regarded as a negative attribute of her personality; rather, it should be seen as a wise decision for her to identify with the man who has power over her. In other words, she persuades herself that *everything* her husband does or says is right and just, and this is the way she expresses her wifely perfect love. Although in life, such total submission is generally painful due to the suppression of one’s own desires and will, Griselda’s self-mastery ultimately enables her to win God’s tests.

Griselda’s wisdom is also manifested in public relations. She does more than what an ordinary woman would usually do. For instance, she advances the cause of public good, conciliates personal enmities, rights all wrongs and protects the country with all what she can. The pilgrim-teller says to us:

Nat oonly this Grisildis thurgh hir wit
 Koude al the feet of wyfly hoomlinesse,
 But eek, whan that the cas required it,
 The commune profit koude she redresse.
 Ther nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse
 In al that land that she ne koude apese,
 And wisely brynge hem alle in reste and ese.

Though that hire housbonde absent were anon,
 If gentil men or othere of hire contree
 Were wrothe, she wolde bryngen hem aton;
 So wise and rype wordes hadde she,
 And juggementz of so greet equitee,
 That she from hevene sent was, as men wende,
 Peple to save and every wrong t'amende. (IV 428-41)

From her noble deportment, she proves that she is fit “by birth” to deal with the problems of Walter’s people. She is almost unexceptionable in every way, so much so that no neighbors or relatives of hers can believe that she is the same maid as the one who used to labor in the cornfield. Some even say that she is no child of Janicula! (IV 402-406) Griselda is renowned and revered by the people in Lombardy as well as those in nearby regions (IV 414-17). A humble creature like her can also possess noble characters as such since she has a beautiful soul. Kendrick even remarks that Griselda nearly replaces her husband in his people’s affections (52).

Chaucer’s Franklin also tells a story which celebrates the physical attractiveness and spiritual characters in feminine portrayal. Dorigen is “oon the faireste under sonne” (V 734) and her “so heigh kynrede” (V 735) arrests the knight Arveragus’s admiration and he decides to court her. Before their marriage, Arveragus’s “meke obeysaunce” (V 739) is one of the reasons that makes Dorigen accept his courtship. After they spend one year in their happy and blissful marriage (V 806), Arveragus “[s]hoop hym to goon and dwelle a yeer or tweyne/ In Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne,/ To seke in armes worshipe and honour—/ For al his lust he sette in swich labour—/ And dwelled there two yeer; ...” (V 809-13). The narrator tells us that Dorigen is reluctant to let her husband go yet she is helpless:

For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
 As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh.
 She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneeth;
 Desir of his presence hire so destreyneth
 That al this wyde world she sette at noght.
 Hire freendes, whiche that knewe hir hevy thoght,
 Conforten hire in al that ever they may.
 They prechen hire, they telle hire nyght and day
 That causelees she sleeth herself, allas! (V 817-25)

Even her friends fail to help her get free from melancholy. Her unswerving love for Arveragus is further demonstrated when the “lusty squier” (V 937) Aurelius, who is “[y]long, strong, right vertuous, and riche, and wys/ And wel biloved, and holden in greet prys” (V 933-34), asks her to be his lover when Dorigen and her friends are in a garden. After listening to Aurelius’s request, Dorigen looks at him and responds,

“Is this youre wyl,” quod she, “and sey ye thus?
 Nevere erst,” quod she, “ne wiste I what ye mente.
 But now, Aurelie, I knowe your entente,
 By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
 Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wyf
 In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;
 I wol been his to whom that I am knyht.
 Taak this for fynal answer as of me.” (V 980-87)

Aurelius apparently has no chance at all to win Dorigen’s heart. Yet, perhaps the “odour of floures and the fresshe sighte/ Wolde han makid any herte lighte/ That evere was born...” (V 913-15), Dorigen’s heavy heart is somehow infected by the romantic and festival climate of May and the sweetness of the garden, “the verray paradys” (V 912). Playfully she says:

“Aurelie,” quod she, “by heighe God above,
 Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,
 Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.
 Looke what day that endelong Britayne
 Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
 That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon—
 I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene
 Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,
 Thanne wol I love yow best of any man;
 Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan.” (V 988-98)

Dorigen may be infected by the light atmosphere of the garden, yet she is rational enough to know too well that what she requires of the passionate Aurelius is an impossible mission. If it is so, her confused motive gives Aurelius an illusionary hope, but she then takes it away from him right on the spot. After Dorigen makes the reckless promise to Aurelius and as later things turn out to be against her presumption, her husband insists that she be sent away to the suitor for the sake of her honor and honesty. Dorigen, guilty of her own fault, submissively obeys his instruction. On the other hand, the black rocks ashore disappear because Aurelius has a magician to make them submerge under the water, hence Aurelius does not feel at ease. When Dorigen is sent to him, he conscientiously takes her back to her husband. The result at the end of the tale reveals that Dorigen's spiritual beauty carries a moral flaw, despite the fact that the problem is settled.

In the "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Clerk's Tale" and "The Franklin's Tale," the heroines share the similarity that their physical attractiveness is a medium and window through which their spiritual and moral characters shine. If we configure the hierarchy of beauty represented in these three tales, spiritual beauty is a higher realm than physical beauty. Meanwhile, the former includes the latter, so that there is no opposition between the two. This reflects the same tendency in the contemporary medieval hierarchy of beauty. These tales reveal the sense of beauty in marriage as exemplified in the moral, intellectual beauty of a wife. Constance and Griselda demonstrate the clarity of their virtues that are the best of the deportment and personal cultivation the narrators can depict. The charm of femininity actualizes itself in the individuality of a person. Constance has a unique personality which embodies in her gentleness, humility and perseverance, while Griselda is temperamentally preeminent because of her wisdom, calm, patience and courage. As for Dorigen, she exhibits unswerving love for her husband which is worth mentioning. These women are portrayed as heroines rather than as ordinary women because of their assemblage of pulchritude and virtues. The compatibility between the physical and spiritual beauty in a wife shows a harmony between the two levels of beauty, and when the two levels are united in matrimony, the beauty of marriage is more self-evident.

C. Aesthetic pleasure and moral or biological pleasure

Human beings are capable of apprehending physical beauty and spiritual beauty which arouse aesthetic pleasure, and such perceptive and intellectual faculty can characterize the value of people's existence. St. Thomas observes that every man loves beauty, and "physical men love physical beauty, and spiritual men spiritual beauty."²⁰ The distinction between the preferences for and appreciation of physical and spiritual beauty is also presented in the marriages in the tales we have so far discussed. People like John the carpenter, the four former husbands of the Wife of Bath, the knight in her tale and January the knight belong to physical men who love physical beauty, and King Alla, Walter and Arveragus are those who love both spiritual and physical beauty. An intellectual cognition toward them should be known as pure and disinterested as well as distinguished from biological or moral judgment. However, St. Thomas concedes that the concept of the good, including biological and moral desires, often interferes people's aesthetic judgment. It is quite true that man is superior to other animals in the disinterested cognition of beauty, yet it is also true that *man* alone is confused with mixed aesthetic, moral and biological pleasures. The realm of aesthetic feelings is usually intertwined with interestedness, especially when the objects of beauty are men or women. In Chaucer's tales, we can trace such a mixed judgment via the husbands' perception of spiritual and physical beauty of their wives.

The lovely sound of a stag is dispensable for most people, and it is naturally that they pay less attention to it than a lion, or they harbor a different motive for it. However, in the apprehension or contemplation of an individual, the fine figure and inner beauty may be indispensable for most people because of a moral or cultural, and biological or natural aesthetic desire. Tatarkiewicz states that St. Thomas distinguishes between two kinds of aesthetic feelings, some are purely aesthetic, while others are mixed, i.e., biological and aesthetic pleasures (1970:250). The blending of pleasure implies that there is a gray area where the link between beauty and the desire

²⁰ St. Thomas, *Postilla super Psalmos* [Commentary on the Psalms], 25, 5 (Editio altera Veneta, vol. I, 311), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:260.

to be pleased, and the link between the good and the biological satisfaction can be intimate. For example, feminine beauty or the smell of the perfume worn by a woman would arouse in people mixed pleasure (Tatarkiewicz 1970:250).

When Chaucer's Clerk describes the physical attractiveness and spiritual character of Griselda, the portraiture offers an objective understanding of a fictive character for the narrator himself, the pilgrim-audience, Chaucer and modern audience like us. These partakers then employ their imagination to configure Griselda's looks and virtues. They do not actually see her, yet as they contemplate her beauty, an image of the beautiful takes shape in their mind. Except for Walter, those who perceive the feminine beauty have not so much an "interested" observation as a "disinterested" one because of the aesthetic distance. Walter is most intimately, corporeally and spiritually related to his wife, a condition that facilitates in him a mixed feeling of pure aesthetic judgment and pleasure with moral judgment and pleasure.

Spiritual beauty of a wife is usually made manifest via being "tested," i.e., the going through of bodily and mentally ordeals for her part. As the narrative gradually discloses, the marquis Walter turns out to be a ruthless experimenter and torturer of Griselda's soul and mind. He takes advantage of her humble origin as a mistake so much so that he finds an excuse to hide their children away from their mother for the purpose of trying her virtues. To a certain extent, the unseen beauty which people are after can hardly satisfy the appetite aroused by the seeable beauty that sets them after it. Griselda already possesses praiseworthy traits before contracting the marital bond with Walter. After entering into marriage, she is expected to fare better, or best, in virtuous conducts; hence there are bodily and mental trials to test her perseverance and fortitude. Moreover, Walter makes a false report that he will be marrying a young wife to replace Griselda due to Griselda's "low degree" (IV 425). The young woman later turns out to be Griselda's long-lost daughter. Griselda's torture from knowing the truth is not revealed in the story, yet most mothers would sympathize the deep trauma that Griselda endures. Only a woman with tremendous fortitude like Griselda is able to sustain such a mental torture. It seems like the *maintenance* of

Griselda's spiritual beauty would not satisfy the moral desire of Walter.

In "The Man of Law's Tale," Constance is also tried by being sent to drift again and again so as to prove that she is worth of her name. The hardships during the trip from Syria to Northumberland and that from Northumberland to Rome, are more than enough for a person to suffer. King Alla's aesthetic perception toward noble Constance is embodied in his compassion for her when she is falsely accused by a knight who desires her yet fails. As the grievance-stricken knight publicly indicts her for murdering the wife of the constable of Northumberland, the people show their disbelief of such an accusation. King Alla is especially passionate about the accusation. The narrator tells us,

This Alla kyng hath swich compassioun,
As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee,
That from his eyen ran the water down.
"Now hastily do fecche a book," quod he,
"And if this knyght wol sweren how that she
This womman slow, yet wol we us avyse
Whom that we wole that shal been oure justise." (II 659-65)

King Alla's way of bettering Constance's virtues is to "fecche a book" and let the truth or God's Word speak. A sympathetic gentleman such as King Alla intensely contemplates Constance's moral virtues to the extent that he even weeps for her undeserved lot. Marie Collins observes that the contemplation of adoration is analogous to religious meditation (24). King Alla's adoration of Constance reveals exactly such a religious sentiment.

The spiritual virtues of these wives, Constance and Griselda, are not only examined in the full light of public notice, they are also *overseen* by the patriarchal institution. Whoever participates under patriarchal economy oversees the *development* or *evolution* of womanly virtues. In this context, the spiritual beauty of these virtuous wives is *increased* after being enjoyed because of the intervention of moral pleasure with aesthetic pleasure. If the husbands' aesthetic judgment of their wives' spiritual beauty is disinterested, these wives' spiritual beauty should not be increased after being enjoyed. The husbands' appreciation of the beauty of their

wives is not identical with the desire to change it, but it is closely related and preliminary to that desire.

Besides the blending with moral pleasure, aesthetic pleasure is also often mixed up with biological pleasure. For instance, in the marriage portrayed in “The Merchant’s Tale,” the cause of the husband’s aesthetic pleasure originates from his wife’s appearance, i.e., her being seen. Physical beauty of an object is a neutral existence, yet when it is appended to a human body, those who do not have a detached attitude toward such a phenomenon often tend to emphasize a skin-deep level of beauty. The sense of beauty felt in these aged husbands in the “spring and autumn” marriages also belongs to a “cognitive” faculty. Take January for instance, he “learns” something from the cognition of May’s physical beauty. He thinks that only when he engages his young wife can she provide him with a stable and happy life and she will be chaste to him forever. The sense of security, however, is only temporary and illusory; he is soon to find out that what happens runs counter to his desire. He does not learn the fact that the more he searches for the feeling of security by imposing restriction on his wife, the more he suffers from the anxiety of loss. The way these old husbands, such as January and the Wife of Bath’s first four husbands, indulge in their young and beautiful wives’ outward sexual charms shows that they entrust their lives and values to no other means than the existence of their wives. The aged husbands rejoice when they *see* their wives, because of the promise of sexual gratification, and they become anxious when the wives are out of their sight. This gratification seems to be connected with keeping the aged husbands alive. January treats the companion of May as his daily necessity. It can be even exaggerated that he cannot endure a day without her just as he can hardly live without water or food. It will be extremely difficult to ask these husbands to contemplate unseen spiritual beauty because they are not yet qualified for it.

The senses of sight and of touch are two media through which the aesthetic pleasure in the marriage of John the carpenter and that of January the knight is exhibited. Take January for example, he restricts his wife’s outdoor activities, in order that he can constantly gaze on her. One characteristic about the “spring and

autumn” marriage is that the couple are often portrayed in a narrow space, often in their bedroom, and such a close space makes the intense looking of the husbands even more felt. A typical passage describing such a scene can be found in the bedroom of January and May:

The bryde was broght abedde as stille as stoon;
 And whan the bed was with the preest yblessed,
 Out of the chamber hath every wight hym dressed,
 And Januarie hath faste in armes take
 His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.
 He lulleth hire; he kisseth hire ful ofte;
 With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,
 Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere— (IV 1818-25)

There is no specific words to denote the act of looking. However, when all these gestures and actions are taking place through the tactile sense, one can naturally imagine the kind of keen sexual look, which the impetuous groom casts upon his tender bride. Another example might be more relevant. The couple are again portrayed in their bedroom. January is originally sleeping while May stealthily reads the love letter which the squire Damian gives her. After knowing the sore and pang of love Damian hides in his heart,

Adoun by olde Januarie she lay,
 That sleep til that the coughe hath hym awaked.
 Anon he preyed hire strepen hire al naked;
 He wolde of hire, he seyde, han som pleasaunce;
 He seyde hir clothes dide hym encombraunce,
 And she obeyeth, be hire lief or looth. (IV 1956-61)

Here, May is exposed to January’s gaze.

An interesting instance about the look of the husbands also occurs in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale.” The knight originally shows a dull and even repulsive squint look at his bride-to-be before he realizes that she is indeed a beauty. The knight makes criticism on the physical “ugliness” of the “old” lady because his physical aesthetic pleasure cannot be satisfied. When the lady expresses her will to amend the awkward situation, he exclaims,

“Amended?” quod this knyght, “Allas, nay, nay!”
 It wol nat been amended nevere mo.
 Thou art so loothly, and so old also,
 And therto comen of so lough a kynde,
 That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.
 So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!” (III 1098-1103)

Apparently, he refuses to forsake aesthetic enjoyment generated from feminine physical beauty, even if he might be well acquainted with the aesthetic stereotype that a charming woman tends to be unfaithful. His disparagement of her is a deliberate judgment which must have hurt the internal feelings of the “old” lady. The Wife of Bath seems unable to penetrate the recesses of the heroine’s mind because the Wife makes no mention of the heroine’s slightest emotional ups-and-downs when the knight makes such an offensive remark on her appearance: “Thou art so loothly, and so old also,/ And therto comen of so lough a kynde.” Perhaps the Wife is even unconscious of that because Chaucer would not allow. Later, when the truth is revealed, the knight has such a drastic change in terms of his attitude toward the lady, and his dull glimpse of her turns into a keen gaze on her.

In order to enjoy the kind of aesthetic pleasure they perceive in their wives, husbands such as John the carpenter, January the knight and the four former husbands of the Wife of Bath physically and mentally cage up their wives because of their fear of cuckoldry. Fear of cuckoldry in these aged husbands is often more oppressive than the cuckoldry itself. For instance, January is so afraid that he would be cuckolded and hence restricts his wife’s outdoor activities. Ironically, the cuckoldry occurs right in his household, in the love garden of Eden he constructed for himself and May. When he actually sees the adulterous act between May and Damien, he is *blind* to believe that it is merely his illusion via May’s persuasive rhetoric. Likewise, the carpenter John is also afraid of being made a cuckold and he tries every way to encage his young and beautiful wife, which shows his anxiety and the sense of insecurity. Yet, when the cuckoldry actually happens, we do not see him in pain because he is yet unaware of the whole “Second-Flood” scheme when he falls down from the tub hung under his roof. These men wager their marital happiness on the

outward features of their wives in order to ensure that only they can possess the pleasure derived from their wives' bodily beauty. Yet, such dependence on physical beauty only proves to cause more of their anxieties because they lack confidence in their appearance and age and most of all, because they do not have a correct attitude of the nature of marriage. Wives like Alison, May and the Wife of Bath thus lose their freedom and are caged up. In a sense, the physical beauty of these wives is *decreased* after being enjoyed. If these aged husbands' aesthetic judgment of their wives' physical beauty is disinterested, these wives' physical beauty should not be decreased after being enjoyed.

Such kind of aged jealousy, in essence, differs from what Andreas Capellanus writes in *The Art of Courtly Love*. At the end of Book II, Andreas Capellanus lists "The Rules of Love" for those who practice courtly love. Among the thirty-one rules, Rule Twenty-first stipulates, "Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love," and the next rule states, "Jealousy, and therefore love, are increased when one suspects his beloved" (185). Here, jealousy and love are equal entities, yet there has been a (literary) tradition that love and marriage seem two irreconcilable relatives; they have been under a perennial quarrel so that they will not agree to live in the vicinity. The practices of jealousy in January, John and the Wife of Bath's husbands do not elevate the aesthetic value of their wives after they express jealousy. Jealousy in the domain of love is a given and desirable essence, whereas in the real world of marriage, it appears like a detestable circumstance. January exhibits sexual jealousy and when he projects such a possessive sentiment toward May, the sexual act appears to be disgusting, and the appetite loathsome.

III. Reconciliation in "The Second Nun's Tale"

As has been said, the marriage of the aristocrats presents a harmonious relationship between physical and spiritual beauty of a wife. For a common understanding, the coexistence of these two levels of beauty already suffices for a beautiful marriage. The marriages in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale" indeed present a harmonious relationship between these two levels of beauty.

Yet, the inclusion of physical beauty in spiritual beauty should not be considered as the solution to the debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty. There is a higher view of the beauty of marriage that transcends the dimension of the coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty, that is, God's beauty.

Among Chaucer's tales, "The Second Nun's Tale" presents a relationship between a couple that transcends the aforementioned stereotype. Valerian is originally unbaptized yet converted to become a Christian with the help of his wife, Cecile. Right on their wedding night, she stakes her life on the conversion of her husband. The fact that Valerian's impure heart can be purged as soon as he has faith in God shows his ability to be flexible. His initial obsession with Cecile's physical and spiritual beauty is afterwards elevated to a love of God's perfect beauty. In medieval mentality, the ascent from the lower level of beauty to the top level of beauty represents the highest form of mental development. Therefore, the transcendence of Valerian's sense of beauty from the imperfection of the earthly city to the perfection of heavenly city provides a synthesis for the debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty for the pilgrim-tellers.

In "The Second Nun's Tale," St. Cecile's external features and internal qualities are portrayed as desirable and ideal, yet the focus of the storyteller is on Cecile's resolution to guard her virginity and to serve God. Cecile has long harbored the intention of staying chaste well before the arrangement of her marriage. Yet, she does not disobey her parents' command to enter into marriage and thus injure their feelings. Instead, she makes concessions in order to gain an advantage to induce her would-be-husband to be converted. Such a sentiment not only elevates the value of her established inner beauty but reveals a transcendental understanding of the nature of love. The idea of serving a mundane husband is not her will. She wants to devote herself to the Heavenly Husband and Lord. Young though she is, she deserves one's tribute to her for the maturity and soberness she exhibits.

Unlike the aesthetic pleasure of Walter and King Alla, Valerian after his conversion exhibits "disinterested" aesthetic judgment of Cecile's physical and

spiritual beauty, an action which opens the door to a reconciliation between the two levels of beauty. The Second Nun does not describe an ugly wife because it is human nature to long for beautiful objects. In Cecile, both her physical and spiritual beauty *remain* what they are after being enjoyed because no external factors are imposed on them. Cecile does not constrain her vision to the convention in the secular world whose moral codes demand that a couple must procreate so that the marriage would be happy and beautiful. She is forced to get married, yet after that, she paradoxically has freedom to be her own and to return to her nature. The newly converted and baptized husband is able to give room for Cecile and to transfer his love of Cecile's physical and spiritual beauty to the perfect beauty of God. This sentiment reflects St. Thomas's cognition of the hierarchy of beauty, a macrocosmic vision that dispels the haze of the aesthetic stereotype and brings in a disinterested appreciation of physical beauty and spiritual beauty.

In another work of Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, that God's beauty embraces physical and spiritual beauty is also portrayed. At the moment of Troilus's death, his indignation at Criseyde's betrayal and at the injustice he has received can be strongly felt. It is natural that from a secular view, Troilus inevitably plunges into pain when love is not requited and his passion not echoed. Yet,

... whan that he was slayn in this manere,
His lighte goost ful blisfully is went
Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,
In convers letyng everich element;
And ther he saugh with ful avysement
The erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye
With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This *litel* spot of erthe that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This *wrecched* world, and held al *vanite*
To respect of the pleyne felicitye
That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn, his loking down he caste,

And in hymself he *lough* right at the wo

Of hem that *wepten* for his deth so faste,
 And *dampned* al oure werk that foloweth so
 The *blynde lust*, the which that may nat laste,
 And sholden al oure herte on heven caste;
 And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,
 Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle.

(*Troilus and Criseyde*, 1807-27, emphasis mine)

The dimension of Troilus's sense of beauty undergoes a total change after his soul ascends to the eighth sphere of the Heaven. For the first time in his life and at the beginning of his afterlife, he truly realizes what it means to be true love. What he had been searched after, love and lust for Criseyde, is now seen as insignificant as the earth, a "*litel* spot" compared to the boundless galaxy or heaven. Other than despising Criseyde's vanity, he cannot help laughing at his own shallow vision of the way of the world. To compare the awakening in St. Cecile and Troilus, St. Cecile is more mature than Troilus in terms of their understanding of the transience and mutability of sexual relation. Cecile transcends emotional and sexual entanglements at an early age and metaphorically enters the heavenly city while she exists in the mundane world, whereas Troilus has to "fall" to finally see that the Truth of love is right in front of him, only that he has long been complicated into the sea of lust. That is why the narrator exclaims:

Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
 Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
 Swich fyn hath his estat real above!
 Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!
 Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!
 And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde,
 As I have told, and in this wise he deyde. (*Troilus and Criseyde*, 1828-34)

Medieval men long for a sense of immutability, stability which can only be found in the unfailing love of God. Cecile chooses not to experience the vanity of love or the changeability of love between sexes and diverts her spirit to the love of God, so that her spiritual capacity is higher than Troilus, although both of them comprehend the beauty of God.

Although Chaucer contributes most of the *Tales* to the description of secular

marriage, as the marriage of the nobility portrayed in “The Clerk’s Tale” and “The Man of Law’s Tale,” that of the knights described in “The Franklin’s Tale” and “The Merchant’s Tale” as well as that of the commoners portrayed in “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” “The Second Nun’s Tale” stands out to reveal a transcendental marriage. The debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty in marriage can be said to be solved in “The Second Nun’s Tale” before the pilgrimage to Canterbury ends.

Chapter Three

The Integrity of Marriage and the “Procreative Art” in the *Tales*

In the previous two chapters, proportion and clarity, the two elements of beauty, have been applied to interpret the marriages as depicted in Chaucer’s *Tales*. The third element, integrity, also plays a role in the aesthetics of marriage. Integrity generally denotes completeness and wholeness. In most marriages, it is assumed that children are the normal fruit of a marriage, and the production of offspring contributes to what people understand as the integrity of the conjugal union.¹ Specifically in the Middle Ages, when procreation serves as one of the two reasons to legitimize the sexual union of a couple,² offspring asserts a vital import in marriage. Consequently, one will have to admit that a marriage consisting of a couple *and* their posterity is deemed happy and hence beautiful; only then is a marriage made perfect and an integral whole.

On the other hand, the way that offspring is begotten often entails oppositional arguments in that era. Some regard that sexual union of a married couple as a sin due to the disparaging attitude toward intercourse, while others regard such an act chaste as long as it complies with the ecclesiastical rules and decorum. St. Jerome and St. Augustine in the fourth century obviously maintained opposite opinions

¹ Macfarlane adds that children are seen as “wealth and as an expansion of individual and family power and position” (51).

² The other reason is the avoidance of fornication. The legitimate reasons for a couple’s intercourse, according to St. Paul, are usually two, yet Silvana Vecchio adds the function of “conferring sacramental grace” as the third reason: “Directly instituted by God in the Garden of Eden, preserved thanks to divine intervention after the Universal Flood, the sanctity of marriage was confirmed by the presence of Christ, the Virgin, and the Apostles at the wedding at Cana and by the operation in that context of Christ’s first miracle. Marriage was the condition ordained by God for the mother of Christ; it had the triple function of generating offspring, avoiding fornication, and conferring sacramental grace” (106). In Chaucer’s “The Parson’s Tale,” the narrator also names three reasons for a couple to have sexual union: “The firste is in entente of engendrure of children to the service of god, for certes that is the cause final of matrimoyne./ Another cause is to yelden everich of hem to oother the dette of hire bodies, for neither of hem hath power of his owene body. The thridde is for to eschewe leccherye and vileynye” (X 939-40). If husband and wife perform the act solely for amorous love, that is mortal sin, according to the Parson.

concerning a practice as such. Christopher Brooke observes that St. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* is treated as the basic medieval textbook for antifeminism, while St. Augustine's *De bono conjugali* for "the theology of marriage" (61-62). It does not seem easy to get out of the perplexity of marriage if the focus is restricted to sex. To some extent, the view of the sexually ascetic moralists coincide with that of the artistically ascetic commentators in that each camp plays down the importance of sexual and artistic pleasures, due to the potential dangers of sex and arts.³ The word "intercourse" is a formal usage that refers to the act of having sex, yet the compound word "love-making"⁴ seems to add more pertinence to the "skillful" nature of performing intercourse. The latter part of the compound, "making," is here applied to the sexual act per se, but it is also applicable to the fruit of a couple's intercourse, that is, offspring. Not only love needs to be made, but offspring also need to be made. The skill or art to achieve such a production in the context of marriage will be called "procreative art." On the common ground between art and the procreative art, we shall further elaborate the module of the procreative art as exemplified in the marriages of Chaucer's various couples and the relationship between the procreative art and the integrity of marriage.

I. St. Thomas's definition of "integrity" and "art"

St. Thomas's idea of "integrity" and that of "art" belong to two distinct fields of study since one belongs to the discussion of beauty, while the other to the discussion

³ Sex is usually regarded as an impediment to the understanding of God and of the ascent to transcendental life. As for the danger of the arts, Plato is famous for his disparaging attitude toward the imitation of artificers and poets. Since their works are respectively twice and thrice removed from the truth, what they imitate are at most illusions and deceptions that will easily and immorally confound simple creatures so that they cannot distinguish appearances from truth (*Republic*, Bk. 10).

⁴ According to the etymological information given for the phrase "make love," the approximate date for its first attestation is before 900 (Middle English: *lov(i)en*, Old English: *lufian*), and "lovemaking" around 1400-1450 (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary* [New York: Random House, 1990] 805). *OED* does not provide detailed etymological information as *Webster's College Dictionary* does. What *OED* offers is an example for "make love" from Lyly's *Euphues* in 1580, and another for "love-making" from *Merlin* in about 1450: "Vlfyn is som-what a-qtytte of the synne that he hadde in the love makinge."

of skill and production. Yet, in the context of marriage these two ideas can be analogously adopted to examine the perfection of marriage by dint of procreation.

A. Integrity

Integrity in marriage depends on the joining together of two bodies and two minds (*ST*, Suppl., Q. 44, Art. 1c).⁵ St. Thomas designates the term “integrity” on two levels: aesthetical and ontological. On the aesthetical aspect, “integrity” is one of the three elements of beauty and identical with the notion of perfection, for beauty includes “‘integrity’ or ‘perfection’: those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly” (*ST*, Part I, Q. 39, Art. 8c). Hence, a thing is ugly because something is missing from the integrated whole. St. Augustine also notes that ugliness is “a privation of form.”⁶ On the ontological aspect, integrity is a notion that connotes the state of the substance of a thing. The term admits a dual dimension. Firstly, it designates the essence or “form” of all things, and secondly, the end or “operation” of things. St. Thomas identifies integrity with perfection as follows:

The perfection of a thing is twofold, the first perfection and the second perfection. The “first” perfection is that according to which a thing is *substantially perfect*, and this perfection is the *form* of the whole; which form results from the whole having its parts complete. But the “second” perfection is the *end*, which is either an *operation* ... or something that is attained by an operation, as the *end* of the builder is the house that he makes by building. But the first perfection is the *cause* of the second, because the form is the principle of operation.

(*ST*, Part I, Q. 39, Art. 8c, emphasis mine)

A twofold reading of the nature of all things thus distinguishes their *cause* from their *end* and their *essence* from *operation*.⁷ The primary perfection is internalized, while

⁵ St. Thomas, many medieval saints and Fathers hold that a marriage without sexual union is regarded holier than one that involved intercourse. That is to say, the marital relationship can exist even without carnal intercourse. Yet, since procreation is a must for the productivity of every society, Church Fathers have to concede that the sexual union of a couple for the purpose of procreation is essentially good.

⁶ St. Augustine, *De immortalitate animae*, viii, 13, qtd. in Beardsley 1975:95.

⁷ “Form” in this sense is substantial form (Eco 1988:280), which is essentially distinct from the “form” of marriage I have discussed in Chapter One.

the secondary perfection externalized. The Thomistic method of approaching a question from two ways usually makes a thorough interpretation of the question possible.⁸ In another passage when St. Thomas tries to answer the question that “whether carnal intercourse is an integral part of the sacrament of matrimony,” he sets apart the primary and the secondary integrity. He contends,

“Integrity” is twofold. One regards the primal perfection consisting in the very *essence* of a thing; the other regards the secondary perfection consisting in *operation*. Since then carnal intercourse is an operation or use of marriage which gives the faculty for the intercourse, it follows, that carnal intercourse belongs to the latter, and not to the former integrity of marriage. (*ST*, Suppl., Q. 42, Art. 4c, emphasis mine)

If carnal intercourse is “an operation or use of marriage,” instead of an essence of matrimony, this does not mean that St. Thomas objects or condemns the practice of intercourse in marriage. His intention here is rather obvious: he is examining the nature of matrimony from a pantoscopic point of view, and he concludes that carnal intercourse is *contained in* but does not *contain* the essence of matrimony. As a result, he holds that the “integrity” or “perfection” of wedlock is not impaired if a couple does not carry out its “operation” or “use,” namely, intercourse, when one is thinking of a higher level of integrity. Such a view differs fundamentally from the secular view that most couples feel a biological need to procreate. Elsewhere, he elaborates on what exactly the form and the operation of wedlock are and applies the concept of integrity to marriage:

The form of matrimony consists in a certain *inseparable union of souls*, by which husband and wife are pledged by a bond of mutual affection that cannot be sundered. And the end of matrimony is the *begetting* and *upbringing* of children: the first of which is attained by conjugal intercourse; the second by the other duties of husband and wife, by which they help one

⁸ St. Thomas is fond of doing a twofold speculation on the nature of a problem, by dividing his answers into a primary and a secondary consideration. The corollaries from these two different angles may not necessarily contradict one another; instead, St. Thomas sees them as inherently connected. Thus the twofold resolutions complement one another, clarify logical ambiguities or fallacies, and add intellectual as well as epistemological depth to one’s cognition.

another in rearing their offspring.

(*ST*, Part III, Q. 29, Art. 2c, emphasis mine)

This passage shows St. Thomas's introducing a new consideration. By now, it is clear that for him, the nuptial intercourse and the begetting of children belong to the secondary integrity of marriage, while the bond of souls and mutual affection mark the primary integrity. In theory, the form and the end of marriage can coexist, just like the twofold integrity of Adam and Eve reveals: "Adam expressed the integrity of marriage in regard to both perfections, because a thing is known by its operation."⁹ Spiritually, Adam's soul sticks to Eve's, and materially they give birth to Cain and Abel after the Fall. However, like most ecclesiastics of his time, St. Thomas believes that matrimony without intercourse is more chaste.

Yet, since the purpose for most marriages is the begetting of offspring, it will be inevitable to firstly discuss the secondary integrity, which involves the ability and skill to produce offspring. A general understanding of the medieval concept of art shall be necessary before the ushering in the concept of the "procreative art." We may resort to the *Middle English Dictionary*.

B. The medieval definition of art

According to *MED*, art has seven common usages:

1. one of the seven traditional liberal arts or the whole field of the seven arts;
2. the "principles and practices of such organized fields of knowledge and activity as law, medicine, theology...";
3. the "principles and practices of a craft; a craft or occupation";
4. "a code of morals or of behavior, such as that of chivalry, courtly love or love-making";
5. "knowledge or know-how as applied to a situation or a problem";
6. learning, scholarship and craftsmanship;
7. cunning, craftiness and trickery. (Part A.4, 401-403)¹⁰

⁹ St. Thomas, *ST*, Suppl., Q. 42, Art. 4 ad 1.

¹⁰ What especially deserves one's attention from the explanations *MED* offers is that passages from Chaucer's works, such as *Boece*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Legend of Good Women*, *The*

The concept of art, like the concept of beauty, has a very wide application since the classical times.¹¹ Among the seven uses of art, the first one can be extended to the problem of the division of art.¹² From the Antiquity, the Middle Ages and down to the Renaissance, both the “skill” required to command an army and the “skill” required to make a statue are called arts. These two explanations respectively indicate the second and the third usages of art mentioned above, and Eco respectively terms them as cognitive and productive skills (1988:164). The fourth usage, a code of “lovemaking,” first appeared before the ninth century and thence is connected to sexual intercourse. Occasionally, art as trickery also occurs in marriage when a party of the couple tends to be unfaithful. The fourth usage, together with the fifth, is more relevant in the application of art in this chapter because the “procreative art” requires knowledge and skill during intercourse.

MED has provided a basic conception of medieval art, yet one extremely important idea has been left out from the above usages, that is, art as imitation. As a result, it is best to draw a broader use of art from other sources, such as St. Thomas’s theory of art.

C. St. Thomas’s theory of art

Early on around 400 B.C., Aristotle in his *Poetics* asserts that arts, such as verse, song and dance, imitate human actions (ch. 1).¹³ Alex Preminger terms this

House of Fame and especially the *Tales*, serve as illustrations almost for each of the seven usages. This seems to imply that Chaucer has a good grasp of the many usages of the term and can apply widely in his works.

¹¹ A full coverage of its connotations is an impossibility within the range of this chapter. Here, I content myself with the usages which *MED* provides, along with St. Thomas’s view of art.

¹² The seven liberal arts are coupled with the seven mechanical arts. The seven liberal arts are grammar, rhetoric, logic or dialectic (constituting the *trivium*), and arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music (constituting the *quadrivium*) (*MED* Part A.4, 401). For the “mechanical arts,” the Scholastics since the twelfth century also tried to classify them. For example, Hugh of Saint Victor divided the mechanical arts into seven arts: “*lanificium* (supplying men with wearing apparel), *armatura* (supplying men with shelter and tools), *agricultura*, *venatio* (both supplying food), *navigatio*, *medicina* and *theatrica*” (Tatarkiewicz 1980:57).

¹³ Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, trans., S. H. Butcher (New York: Dover, 1951) 8-9.

fundamental human instinct as “an *intellectual* instinct” (104). Sixteenth centuries lapsed between the greatest of the Greek philosophers and the greatest of the Scholastics. Based on Aristotle’s insight, St. Thomas in the thirteenth century broadens the scope of imitation to state that,

Art imitates nature; and the reason for this is that the principle of artistic activity is cognition. Therefore, natural things can be imitated by art, because, by virtue of a certain intellectual principle, all nature is directed to its aim, so that a work of nature appears to be a work of intelligence, since it moves toward sure goals by definite means—and it is this that art imitates in its activity.¹⁴

Art (*ars*) for St. Thomas denotes the ability to make something. The layout of arts in the hands of St. Thomas apparently transcends that of his predecessor: nature enfoldes everything far larger than human actions do. Art thus can imitate virtually all things. Moreover, art imitates nature in the sense that it duplicates the purposefulness of nature and strives toward definite goals. Art also imitates nature’s manner of operation or, to be exact, imitates “nature’s modes of acting” (Tatarkiewicz 1970:254). The modes of acting in nature refer to the ways she keeps her beings in the process of incessant circulation and vitality. Nature provides abundant materials for free, and “art operates upon the material which nature provides” (St. Thomas, *ST*, Part I, Q. 77, Art. 6c). Tatarkiewicz observes that St. Thomas’s theory of art is “not a theory of the fine arts, but of art in the wider sense, embracing every form of production” (1970:253). Every form of production is not only based on the imitation of Nature but also on “reason.” St. Thomas contends that in matters of art, “reason is directed to a particular end, which is something devised by reason” (*ST*, Part II [First Part], Q. 21, Art. 2 ad 2). This sounds a tautology, yet the keynote here is the emphasis on reason and intellect as well as rational judgment in artistic activities. He further adds that art is the “right reason about things to be made,”¹⁵ which suggests that an artist requires certain fixed rules to enable the attainment of a goal. In short, art as imitation and production based on reason characterizes St. Thomas’s theory of art.

¹⁴ St. Thomas, *Physics*, II, 4 (Leonina, vol. II, 65), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:262.

¹⁵ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part II (First Part), Q. 57, Art. 5 ad 1.

D. The procreative art

In the procreative art, such a twofold finality, i.e., production and imitation, is also found. The procreative art in marriage strives toward a *sure goal* by *definite means*—the goal being the begetting of offspring and the means being the intercourse. In St. Augustine's philosophical system, he enumerates three good things about marriage, and offspring is one of them.¹⁶ The procreative art is a human action, namely, the act of love. In fulfilling the conjugal debt, there must be a kind of knowledge—sexual knowledge—and relevant skill or set of skills involved to consummate a marriage. Procreative art is a specialized and uncommon ability—from it, “sexual ecstasy goes to the very depth of bodily existence; it has in its overwhelming power something extraordinary, to which terrible bodily pains are alone a counterpart.”¹⁷ Moreover, procreative art is tinged with mystery, and in most situations in the Middle Ages only men acquire it. If poetry or tragedy is imitation of actions, then the procreative art is not only an imitation of action but a human action by its own right.

Furthermore, what a couple imitate during paying their conjugal debt is “nature's modes of acting,” the mode of production and the Form/Ideal of human beings. The procreative art enables the succession of human race via the means of intercourse. Offspring can be seen as created semblances and reproductions of their parents, as well as vestiges of God. In many aspects of the medieval metaphysics, Plato's doctrine of Forms and later the Plotinian¹⁸ doctrine of “emanation” are assimilated to enhance the medieval cosmological outlook. The medieval men think that the visible of the earthly world reflect the invisible in the realm up there, and all things have traces of God. Plato thinks that poets, like painters, are incapable of nothing

¹⁶ These three good things about marriage are *proles*, *fides*, and *sacramentum*, that is, offspring, marital fidelity of the spouses to one another and mutual marital obligation (St. Augustine, *De bono conjugali*, 32), qtd. in Hall 14.

¹⁷ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, 147.

¹⁸ Plotinus (204/5-270 A.D.) is the most distinguished and original of the Neoplatonists during the first centuries of the Christian era when the philosophy of Plato went on to be taught by his followers at Alexandria, Rome, and in the Academy at Athens (Beardsley 1975:78).

more than counterfeiting the external appearance of Ideals (*Republic*, Bks. 3 and 10). St. Thomas also propounds a version of emanation in his discussion of art. Among the various works of art in the artistic world, he uses the instance of building to illustrate the beauty of architecture. An architect, he says, produces the form of a house according to an idea: “Thus the likeness of a house *pre-exists* in the mind of the builder. And this may be called the *idea* of the house, since the builder intends to build his house like to the form conceived in his mind. As then the world was not made by chance, but by God acting by His intellect ... [and] there must exist in the divine mind a form to the likeness of which the world was made. And in this the notion of an idea consists” (*ST*, Part I, Q. 15, Art. 1c, emphasis mine). In other words, the idea of a house is given to the architect by God, since God alone creates the first exemplary cause for him to imitate. The realm of the Ideals is made by a divine craftsman, and the materials, equipment or most important of all, ideas for making things, depend on a preexisting reality. Hence, the medieval men deem that they should have humility and acknowledge their limitation in artistic activities—artists can never create new things. In St. Bonaventure’s words, “the soul can make new compositions, but it cannot make new things.”¹⁹ St. Thomas inherits the Platonic notion of Idea and brings up a Christian theory of emanation and of Forms.

We can adopt St. Thomas’s notion of the Platonic Idea here to interpret the relationship between the works of art, namely, offspring, and the Ideal a couple theoretically imitate. A Platonic interpretation of the making of offspring shall be that there is a Form, according to which a couple produce their work(s) of art. This imitated Form is supposed to be one of a manlike nature, not of beastly nature. When a wife is pregnant and later delivers her offspring, the couple can be said to imitate the ideal archetype of the “real” child: the physical child can be said to be a replica of the Ideal child. Although analogously children are imitative works of art, there is no negative connotation in procreative imitation because at a higher level a child has God’s traces. On the issue of artistic imitations, however, Plato does not

¹⁹ St. Bonaventure, *Commentarium in III Sententiarum*, 37, 1, dub. 1, qtd. in Eco 1988:173.

admit the legitimate value of arts because they are twice (for an architecture) or thrice (for a painter) removed from the Reality. He holds a negative view of artistic imitations. Still, his objection does not change the fact that imitations exist in various kinds of production.

II. Bridal chambers/rooms and bridal “workshops”

The above-mentioned descriptions about the procreative art can be converged in a locus: “workshop.” Duby comes up with the name of “workshop” when he elaborates on the situation of a French aristocratic marriage in the twelfth-century France (1994:27). He ingeniously devises the analogy between “workshop” and bridal chamber in the medieval marriage scene as a social convention. Commenting the failure of Philip II of France to consummate his marriage with Ingeburg of Denmark, Duby utters that

we should consider the couple’s *bedroom*, that *workshop* at the heart of the aristocratic residence where the new link in the dynastic chain was *forged*, not as the setting for those banal idylls ... but as a field of a battle, a duel whose fierceness was hardly conducive to the strengthening of intimate bonds between husband and wife based on concern for the partner and forgetfulness of self, that opening of the heart which is what *caritas* or affection, means. (1994:27, emphasis mine)

The term “workshop” points out the productive and artistic nature of marriage. Nevertheless, Duby has merely made general rather than specific association between workshop and bridal chamber. By borrowing his interesting analogy, I shall explore the practicality of “art” in the scene of medieval marriage.

A bridal *chamber/room* is a term that attaches matrimonial significance to the space. Its aestheticism is generated from the love of a deep, unique and mutual self-donation, from the opening of the heart and “concern for the partner and forgetfulness of self.” In addition, the proper use of the procreative art elevates the conjugal act to dignity. On the other hand, a bridal *workshop* is a term that designates its productive function. A workshop means a room in which manual or industrial work is carried on (*OED*), which indicates the productive and mechanical

nature of the space. Although Duby's research is later turned into analyzing other medieval cultural phenomena rather than elucidating the matrimonial metaphor, the term "workshop" is suggestive of the unexplored relationship between art and marriage.

In Chaucer's *Tales*, there are two interesting references to art or its variants: one is spelt out by the Host, and the other by the Wife of Bath. After having listened to the Merchant's regret of the "[w]epying and waylyng, care and oother sorwe" (IV 1213) his marriage has brought him, the Host thinks that the Merchant should be able to relate a story about the "art" of marriage.

"Now," quod oure Hoost, "Marchaunt, so God yow blesse,
Syn ye so muchel knowen of that *art*
Ful hertely I pray yow telle us part." (IV 1240-42, emphasis mine)

The "art" in the Host's mind belongs to the fourth and the fifth usages provided by *MED*: that the art is a code of behavior or morals in marriage and the knowledge applied to the maintenance of the household order. Compared to the Merchant's "art," the Wife of Bath's "art" of marriage is bolder, more palpable as well as relevant to the procreative art in marriage.

A. The "Sely instrument"

The reference to art that the Wife of Bath makes is featured by a comparison between instruments required in an artistic workshop and sexual instruments in the bridal workshop. This is how she justifies the legitimate use of sexual organs for physiological and procreative purposes:

Telle me also, to what conclusion
Were membres maad of *generacion*,
And of so parfit wys a [wright]²⁰ ywroght?
Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.
Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and down
That they were maked for purgacioun
Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale
Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,

²⁰ The word "wright" is Benson's insertion.

And for noon oother cause—say ye no?
 The experience woot wel it is noht so.
 So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,
 I sey this: that they maked ben for bothe;
 That is to seye, for *office* and for *ese*
 Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese.
 Why sholde men elles in hir books sette
 That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette?
 Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,
 If he ne used his *sely instrument*?
 Thane were they maad upon a creature
 To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure. (III 115-34, emphasis mine)

The Wife points out the three mechanisms of the “sely instrument”: to excrete, to procreate and to enjoy pleasure. “Instrument,” according to *MED*, is commonly known as a device operated by hand and a tool. A special usage is that of a “part or organ of the body performing a certain function...” (Part I.2, 230-32). On this basis, the Wife uses the term “instrument” in a correct context. In addition, her understanding of instrument reveals an underlying difference between art and the procreative art. The first type of art requires the artists to use their hands to mold, fashion or carve his raw material in light of the Ideals, while the second type of art employs sexual instruments to create a new being out of ovum and sperm.

The Wife somehow worries about the public censure she would receive because of her bold speech on sexual matters. Actually, her viewpoint that the sexual organs are *sely*, meaning blessed and innocent, is not heretical. When commenting that the Wife is “an heresiarch after her own boisterous fashion,” Kittredge is not censuring her opinion of the “sely instrument”; instead, he is censuring her alleged sovereignty with which she reduced Janekyn to “shameful subjection” (189). From the physiological perspective, the Wife’s understanding of the sely instrument does not contradict St. Thomas’s opinion of the very issue. He points out that the end of any instrument of the body cannot be evil in themselves. Moreover, to use sexual instruments proportionally to their end is by itself good. St. Thomas explains:

The members of the body being the instruments of the soul, the end of every member is the use of it, as in the case of any other instrument. But there are members of the body the use of which is for the intercourse of the sexes:

that therefore is their end. But that which is the end of any natural thing cannot be in itself evil, because the things of nature are ordinances of divine providence. Therefore the intercourse of the sexes cannot be in itself evil.

(*Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.126)

It seems that there is no need to legitimize the function of the sexual organs since they are natural things that perform the natural function. The organs are by themselves neutral and do not carry any ideological prejudices. The main problem should lie in man's intention in carrying out the act. Those clerks whom the Wife of Bath fears would scold her may not be as impartial as St. Thomas in terms of sexual knowledge. Thanks to her boldness and outspokenness, the Wife's opening remarks on the "sely instrument" shall lead us to explore the scene in the bridal chambers/rooms and workshops in "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Clerk's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Miller's Tale."

B. The bridal chambers/rooms²¹ and bridal "workshops" in the *Tales*

Indeed the bridal chamber ought to be a private place for every married couple or the newlyweds. St. Augustine once remarks on the necessity of a couple's privacy. He asks: Does the "conjugal intercourse, whose purpose is, according to the prescriptions of the marriage contract, the procreation of children ... not require a private room and the absence of witnesses? Does not the bridegroom, before he

²¹ Realizing that a room for the commoners in the Middle Ages is usually divided into several compartments, to use the name "bridal chamber" to connote the privacy of the couple would seem inappropriate. For example, in "The Reeve's Tale," when the two Oxford students ask to spend the night in the miller's house, the storyteller narrates how the host makes a bed for the two:

... in his owene chambre hem made a bed,
With sheetes and with chalons faire yspred
Noght from his owene bed ten foot or twelve.
His doghter hadde a bed, al by hirselve,
Right in the same chambre by and by.
It myghte be no bet, and cause why?

Ther was no roumer herberwe in the place. (I 4139-45)

The miller has warned them earlier: "Myn hous is streit" (I 4122), and the room is divided into several parts for the family and the guests. Yet, one still needs a name to designate the room where the couple sleep, hence "bridal room" is used to refer to the bedroom of the commoners for the sake of convenience.

begins even to caress the bride, show the door to all the attendants, and even his groomsmen, and all the others who had been permitted to enter because of some tie of kinship?" (*City of God*, XIV, 18).²² In "The Merchant's Tale" January is impatient with his kith and kin who have been lingering at the wedding feast when it almost comes to an end. He cannot wait to be alone with his bride, and from this we do see that he needs privacy for himself and his bride. Yet, the scene of their bridal room is still made public by the Merchant (and Chaucer!). What is worse is that their intercourse is gazed upon so that everyone knows the scandal of January's repugnant sexual habits. Chaucer has two very distinct ways of presenting the bridal chambers/rooms in terms of the purpose of procreation and sexual pleasure. For example, the bridal workshops in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale" display a sacred interpretation of the procreative art, which demonstrates the kind of aestheticism derived from the production of offspring as well as proper sexual pleasure, whereas the bridal workshops in "The Miller's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" exhibit a profane interpretation of the procreative art, which reveals the kind of aestheticism limited to eroticism without fulfilling the function of producing offspring.

1. Aestheticism of the bridal chambers in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale"

On the whole, the scene of the bridal chamber of the aristocrats in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale" is not described in detail. Their bridal chambers shun the public gaze from the pilgrims, the audience, Chaucer and us. If treated lightly, one may easily miss the implications to them. Chaucer's narrators have been very careful when they come to any mentioning of the bridal chamber. Take "The Man of Law's Tale" for example, after their guests "ete, and drynke, and daunce, and synge, and pleye" (II 707), King Alla and Constance

²² Elsewhere St. Augustine adds that "when this act is being performed, ... not even the children who have already been born as the result of such an act are permitted to witness it. This right action craves for recognition in the light of the mind's understanding, but it is equally concerned to escape the light of the eyes's [sic] vision" (*City of God*, XIV, 18).

... goon to bedde, as it was skile and right;
 For thogh that wyves be ful hooly thynges,
 They moste take in *pacience* at nyght
 Swiche manere necessities as been *plesynges*
 To folk that han ywedded hem with rynges,
 And leye a lite hir *hoolynesse* aside,
 As for the tyme—it may no bet bitide.

On hire he gat a knave child anon,
 And to a bisshop, and his constable eke,
 He took his wyf to kepe, whan he is gon
 To Scotlond-ward, his foomen for to seke.
 Now faire Custance, that is so humble and meke,
 So longe is goon with childe, til that stille
 She halt hire chambre, abidyng Cristes wille.

The tyme is come a knave child she beer;
 Mauricius at the fontstoon they hym calle. (II 708-23, emphasis mine)

Within these several lines, the narrator jumps from the wedding night to the bearing of a young prince. The Man of Law does not describe the scene of the bridal chamber in detail, yet he explicitly tells us that Constance immediately conceives a child upon accepting the love from King Alla. While the couple are still placed in their bridal room, the narrator's discourse shifts our attention to the bride's spiritual qualities, such as "pacience" and "hoolynesse." One can derive symbolic meanings from these two terms and appreciate the aestheticism in the process as well as the receptive consequence of the sexual act. These two notions symbolize the spiritual beauty of Constance: patience implies her bashfulness, delicacy, tenderness and all admirable feminine qualities that can be thought of, while holiness is often an equivalent of beauty itself. Moreover, the words "heigh beautee," "vertu," "humblesse" and "hoolynesse" (II 162, 164, 165, 167) bespeak virginity. All of these are something pleasant to contemplate and they should be something beautiful, not to mention when Constance is described as a "hooly" creature. Infected by the atmosphere in the bridal chamber, the Man of Law exclaims: "it may no bet bitide"—nothing better could happen.

With all these wonderful qualities, timeliness and a favorable locus, the intimate

union of the two in one results in Constance's conception. Russell attributes the reserved emotion of a woman to an education which inculcates indifference: "In women who have been conventionally educated there is often a certain pride in coldness, there is great physical reserve and an unwillingness to allow easy physical intimacy" (85). In Constance, her reserve and indifference should not be treated as negative qualities. She is emotionally reserved because this image suits her poise and nobleness. Thus an imaginative picture of Constance's static beauty creates delicate aestheticism in their chamber. Guy Sircello contends that when qualities as such are enjoyed in sex, "it seems as if they belong, not to one or the other of the partners, but to *both* at once or to the lovemaking itself" (174, emphasis mine). That is to say, Constance and King Alla share a single quality of beauty during their lovemaking, a symbol of mutual love. Thus, this is an ideal imagery of a perfect bridal chamber that simultaneously fulfills the function of procreation and reveals chamber aestheticism. The beauty of the chamber of bliss also infects the readers who are able to obtain vicarious aesthetic delight and tickles sexual imagination. The Man of Law does not exaggerate the most pleasing aspects of lovemaking in Constance's chamber of bliss, a style which corresponds to the reserved nature of the couple. Yet, the narrator's heightened language achieves in other aspects, subtly, delicately and aesthetically.

Again, implicit chamber aestheticism is perceived in "The Clerk's Tale." The narrator does not describe the bridal chamber at all, yet he features Griselda's physical traits and spiritual qualities that can be transformed into a reading of the aestheticism of her and Walter's chamber. The Clerk describes,

This markys hath hire spoused with a ryng
 Broght for the same cause, and thanne hire sette
 Upon an hors, snow-whit and wel amblyng,
 And to his paleys, er he lenger lette,
 With joyful peple that hire ladde and mette,
 Conveyed hire; and thus the day they spende
 In revel, til the sonne gan descende.

And shortly forth this tale for to chace,
 I seye that to this newe markysesse

God hath swich favour sent hire of his grace
 That it ne semed nat by liklynesse
 That she was born and fed in rudenesse,
 As in a cote or in an oxe-stalle,
 But norissed in an emperoures halle.

To every wight she woxen is so deere
 And worshipful that folk ther she was bore,
 And from hire birthe knewe hire yeer by yeere,
 Unnethe trowed they,—but dorste han swore—
 That to Janicle, of which I spak bifore,
 She doghter were, for, as by conjecture,
 Hem thoughte she was another creature. (IV 386-406)

The scene of the bridal chamber is not described from the above passage, yet the extended holiday of a medieval marriage (IV 391-92) is a “fictive time (like the modern honeymoon) that marked and encouraged the accommodation of the new wife to her new identity, that is, her husband’s” (Kendrick 48-49). Griselda has no difficulty accommodating herself to her new identity because she is no ordinary woman. The narrator employs a roundabout way to praise her that she cannot be said of coming from a humble house. The noble disposition, grace, eloquence, benignity, intellectual beauty and sense of justice that shine through her physical beauty, are her greatest charms, and these qualities elevate her social status and cultivation as if she has been brought up in an “emperoures hall.” Moreover, the words “vertuous” (IV 407), “heigh bountee” (IV 409, 418) bespeak virginity. Griselda’s spiritual qualities signify “the intact seal, ... But this metonymy could easily turn to metaphor: the intact seal became the signifier of a woman’s essence” (L’Hermite-Leclercq 213). Griselda’s chastity, honesty, tenderness and warm personality all suggest a strong potential for a pure and perhaps romantic temperament as well as meekness. With all these pleasantness, even Walter, in spite of his rigid character, cannot but yield to her tenderness and gentleness in their bridal chamber. Later we find that she is happy to deliver a baby girl, although she would be happier if she had born a boy. One may imagine that when Walter’s explosive masculine energy is greeted with her static feminine temperament, the couple are painted into a harmonious and beautiful picture in their bridal chamber.

In “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Clerk’s Tale,” the realm of intimacy in the bridal chamber granted to the spouses formulates a symphony in which effusions of tenderness and mutual love culminate in consummation. Sircello has said well about the correlations between sex, love and beauty: in making love with another, we can “enjoy what we *love* about that other”—tenderness, vigor, gentleness, robustness, kindness, concern, joyfulness (174, author’s emphasis). Sircello continues, “Not only are such qualities easily experienceable in sex, but they are experienceable there in unique ways. Sometimes, indeed, there are qualities that a person reveals only in lovemaking” (174). We, of course, can never know what qualities Constance, King Alla, Griselda or Walter actually reveal during their intercourse, yet their serious and noble spirits suggest a potential for moderation. Therefore, their chambers are blessed—they have the power to arouse in the pilgrims, the medieval audience, Chaucer and us the intimate marital relationship that contributes to the sacredness of the procreative art.

2. Sacredness of the bridal workshops in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Clerk’s Tale”

The pattern of “the sacred and the profane” usually refers to religious connotation, yet it can be pertinently related to the attitude toward art: “While the term or pattern of ‘the sacred and the profane’ tells the intimate relationship between godhead and manhood in early periods, it also spells out the cultural environment in which people express their attitude toward art” (So 1993:91). Designations such as the sacred and the profane can also be applied to interpret the procreative art in medieval marriage. In the tales we have discussed, the sacredness of the procreative art has been accentuated in the workshops of the aristocrats, while the profaneness of the procreative art has been highlighted in the workshops of the commoners.

In the workshops of the aristocrats, such as Constance and King Alla as well as Griselda and Walter, the sacredness of the procreative art lies in the couples’ fulfillment of procreation during which they act in accordance with the “right reason

about things to be made.”²³ Each pair of these couples have sex as nature demands, properly use the power of the procreative art and succeed in creating a new life. In the “creative act” or “creative art,” man and woman become one flesh, both in love and from love, and the “creative art” indeed reveals the mystery of the profound link between procreation and love. Thomasset offers an interesting medieval text from Hildegard of Bingen, who proposes a theory of the sex of the embryo in terms of psychic factors (59). Hildegard of Bingen argues that the potency of the male seed determines the sex of the embryo, yet the married couple’s love for each other determines the child’s moral qualities:

A large quantity of sperm together with a virtuous love between parents yielded a male child blessed with every possible virtue. A small quantity of sperm produced a daughter, virtuous if her mother and father felt true affection for each other. A small amount of sperm and loveless parents resulted in the worst possible outcome: a wicked daughter.

(qtd. in Thomasset 59)

One may doubt the credibility of such a categorization as for the gender of the embryo. However, the passage points out that love and procreation are closely related.

For the sacredness that procreation is endowed with, we may go back to the time when our first parents acquire the procreative art from God. In the beginning, God creates the natural universe out of nothing —He does not give birth to it, mold or carve it after the Forms; He simply makes something where before there was nothing (Beardsley 1975:106). While Adam and Eve were still living in the Garden of Eden, God did not assign them the task of procreation. No sooner did they commit their first sin than their felicity in Eden was forever terminated. “Increase and multiply,” said the Logos (St. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 10). The skill and power to increase and multiply is supposed to be God’s grace because He enables the first parents to keep and sustain their lives after they are driven out of Eden. With His mercy and grace,

God created man with the *added power of propagation*, so that he could beget other human beings, *conveying* also to those offspring the possibility,

²³ St. Thomas, *ST*, Part II (First Part), Q. 57, Art. 5 ad 1.

not the necessity, of propagation. True, God did remove this power from certain individuals, at his pleasure, making them infertile; but he did not deprive the whole race of this gift, when once it had been conferred on the first pair by that *blessing* on mankind.

(St. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, 24, emphasis mine)

St. Augustine is explicit that without God's grace, such an *added power of propagation*, the situation of man after the Fall would be even more miserable. Thus, procreation is "a consequence of original sin" (L'Hermite-Leclercq 214). With God's blessing, procreation is sacred in nature and should not find excuses for having intercourse. On the other hand, the shock Adam and Eve might have experienced should not be small: they knew nothing about procreation, not to mention "multiplication and propagation." When they still led an innocent life in Eden, God handled all of these things. However, they now have to increase the quantity of mankind so as to atone sin. In the past, they did not have any offspring to take care; now they are forced to pay extra attention to them.

Since the ability to beget offspring is an *added* power, the propagating ability and skills are not inborn; rather, later generations require a model to imitate—Adam and Eve is that model, and their propagating ability is *conveyed to* next generations. That is to say, later generations imitate the sexual behavior of earlier generations—they have to "learn to perform" it (Russell 17).²⁴ Adam and Eve set up an effective model of propagation for later generations to follow, and the mode of producing offspring had been relatively stable throughout history until recently. Artists in their works of art imitate nature. In a similar vein, the producers of offspring imitate nature's modes of operation, which signify the prolongation of lives. Consequently, both types of production, that of fine arts and its counterpart in marriage, are regulated by the rule of imitating nature.

The sacredness of the procreative art is also demonstrated in the workshops of Constance and King Alla as well as Griselda and Walter. These two couples have conjugal intercourse as nature demands. With God's blessing, they properly use the

²⁴ Russell only regards the act of sucking in infancy as instinctive in the strict psychological sense (17). Perhaps intercourse is instinctive only in the sense that men and women need the comfort of intimacy that is most directly discerned by the sense of touch.

power of the procreative art and succeed in creating new lives—Constance bears one son and Griselda a pair of children. Neither the Man of Law nor the Clerk feels it necessary to mention that the skill King Alla and Walter employ to procreate is an *added* power because few people would particularly make such a reference. Neither do they feel obliged to mention the process of intercourse because what is emphasized is the product, not the process of practicing the procreation art. Just like Constance's heart is a "chamber of hoolynesse" (II 167), the bridal chamber she spends time with King Alla is also holy. Thus, the process of lovemaking still wears a mysterious veil and hence beautiful. The audience does not at all sense a touch of sinfulness or impurity that is commonly *and* mistakenly attributed to the nature of intercourse. Russell from a modern perspective regards the biased attitude as

purely superstitious; the reasons which led to its adoption were presumably those which were considered ... as liable to cause an anti-sexual attitude, that is to say, those who first inculcated such a view must have suffered from a diseased condition of body or mind, or both. The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed, in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widespread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible. (44)

Russell indeed makes a harsh criticism on the weakness and incompetence of human judgment when man face a widespread yet insensible consensus. He is right that not everyone, medieval men or some other civilizations, is capable of possessing an open and correct attitude as such. St. Thomas offers a penetrating view about the problem of "Whether the marriage act is always sinful":

If we suppose the corporeal nature to be created by the good God we *cannot* hold that those things which pertain to the preservation of the corporeal nature and to which nature inclines, are altogether evil; wherefore, since the inclination to beget an offspring whereby the specific nature is preserved is from *nature*, it is *impossible* to maintain that the act of begetting children is altogether unlawful ... unless we suppose ... that corruptible things were created by an evil god ... this is a most wicked *heresy*.

(ST, Suppl., Q. 41, Art. 3c, emphasis mine)

Unlike some Church Fathers who condemn the conjugal intercourse, St. Thomas does

not evade the thorny problem. Instead, he squarely faces it and offers a detached and correct point of view.

The couples in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Clerk’s Tale” have conjugal intercourse “as it was *skile* and *right*” (II 708, emphasis mine). The Man of Law employs adjectives like “skile and right” to characterize the intercourse between the couple. Reason is embedded in the proper and correct sexual pleasure that can not be better in the realm of the beautiful. Such a “skile and right” way of doing things originates from the concept of art. In the development of the concept of art, the element of reason asserts its importance. St. Thomas stresses:

The good of an art is to be found, not in the craftsman, but in the *product* of the art, since art is *right reason about things to be made*: for since the making of a thing passes into external matter, it is a perfection not of the maker, but of the thing made.... Consequently art does not require of the craftsman that his *act* be a good act, but that his *work* be good.

(ST, Part II [First Part], Q. 57, Art. 5 ad 1, emphasis mine)

There are several different ways of translating the “right reason,” such as the “right order of the mind,”²⁵ the “correct concept,”²⁶ or the “right judgment,”²⁷ all of which indicate the significance of rules, reason, order and appropriateness in the process of making a work. Rules of proportions in the artistic activity demand the maker to possess the right order of the mind. Before an artificer proceeds with his raw materials, he has in his mind certain rules that will be imposed on the object. When portraying a figure, an artist pays attention to the bodily proportions corresponding to geometric figures or to the calculations of proportions between the limbs. St. Thomas is also explicit that it is the product, not the maker, which really matters in the enterprise of artistic production. This corresponds with the medieval outlook that creativity only belongs to the capacity of God, while people imitate nature. In other words, St. Thomas’s theory of art is no theory of creativity and invention; it is a theory of reason and order.

²⁵ Cf. Tatarkiewicz’s translation, 1980:56.

²⁶ Cf. Tatarkiewicz’s translation, 1970:261.

²⁷ Cf. Eco’s translation, 1988:164.

His aesthetic moderatism is a theory of reason, order and imitation. While stressing the significant role reason plays in art, St. Thomas does not deny the pleasure derived from works of art. He divides the arts into those which give pleasure and those which are useful. Aesthetically moderate, he avoids an ascetic attitude in his assessment of the value of the arts.²⁸ Responding to the question: “Is there a sin in lack of mirth,” he justifies the human right of pleasure as follows: “Austerity, as a virtue, does not exclude all pleasures, but only such as are excessive and inordinate” (*ST*, Part II [Second Part], Q. 168, Art. 4 ad 3). Something of this spirit can also be seen in Aristotelian accounts of pleasure. Pleasures “differ in kind according to the activity which they ‘complete’; each activity has its ‘proper pleasure.’ ‘Pleasures increase activities, and what increases a thing is proper to it.’”²⁹ Both Aristotle and St. Thomas, in the assessment of the values of art, reassert the importance of reason and appropriateness.

Likewise in the bridal workshops of Constance and King Alla as well as Griselda and Walter, the spirit of aesthetic moderatism can also be translated in the procreative art and sexual pleasure, which are conditioned by the law of reason and appropriateness. The good of the procreative art lies not in the couple, but in the product of such an art, that is, offspring, since the procreative art is the “right reason about things to be made.” What is crucial about the procreative art is not the makers themselves, but the thing made. Procreative art does not require of King Alla or Walter that his sexual technique be good, but that his *work* be good. That is why the Man of Law and the Clerk spend so little time describing the situation in the bridal chambers of their heroes and heroines. That is also the reason why the two narrators only mention their heroes and heroines’ posterity, instead of *how* they produce them.

The right sort of procreative art is indispensable means for consummating a marriage, and the procreative ability is expected to exhibit a calm and rational activity.

²⁸ St. Thomas’s aesthetic moderation enables him to recognize the values of jewellery, ornaments and perfumes, along with theatrical performances, instrumental music and poetry (Tatarkiewicz 1970:255).

²⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, v, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1962), qtd. in Beardsley 1975:60.

The marriage of the aristocrats thus transforms the bridal chamber into an “allegory of art.” Intercourse, if not connected with procreation or described in an indecent way, is easily connected with lasciviousness. Yet, allegorizing is “a way of purifying sacred truth, by transmuting what was barbarous or scandalous into something higher” (Beardsley 1975:107). Hence, moralists want to justify the procreative art, which is seemingly “scandalous,” by allegorizing it. The allegorization of art depends on a rational operation of the procreative art. Based on the idea of the “*right reason* about things to be made,” the love and “plesynges” (II 711) King Alla and Constance or Walter and Griselda enjoy is the best part of their world. Chaucer and his narrators approve proper sexual pleasure implied in these two tales because the purpose of the couples’ physical union is mainly for procreation, and their spiritual union helps celebrate the holiness of matrimony.

Imitation-pleasure

A couple are the happiest creatures when they know they become parents. Not only do they become new human beings but they together bring life to another, which is the new-born infant. In “The Clerk’s Tale,” the storyteller describes the moment when Walter welcomes the coming of his child with Griselda:

Nat longe tyme after that this Grisild
Was wedded, she a doghter hath ybore.
Al had hire levere have born a knave child,
Glad was this markys and the folk therfore;
For though a mayde child coome al bifore,
She may unto a knave child atteyne
By liklihede, syn she nys nat bareyne. (IV 442-48)

The joy at the birth of the little prince was clearly related to a deep affection felt toward her. Pregnancy marks a major change in Griselda’s life. Before she gives birth to her baby girl, we have no idea about her love toward children. All of a sudden, her affections are centered on children; probably due to the demand of social conventions, she even reveals her preference of a baby boy. What the procreative art produces is analogously called a “work of art.” This is not a new idea. St. Thomas

has told us that God creates all things in the universe, and they are metaphorically called His “works of art.” St. Thomas asserts that all “natural things were produced by the Divine art, and so may be called God’s works of art” (*ST*, Part I, Q. 91, Art. 3c). Offspring, by analogy, are also seen as God’s and the parents’ “works of art” since one is the ultimate cause while the other the immediate cause. Macfarlane argues that children born in wedlock fulfill “the desire of all humans to see *mirrors* of themselves” (51, emphasis mine). Parents accordingly take the imitation-pleasure, which is derived from their gratification of seeing their children who look like them.

In the *Tales*, we can at least find one example of such an imitation-pleasure. The Man of Law tells us that Constance gives birth to Maurice soon after she is married to King Alla. The king is on the battlefield while she has her delivery. The king’s mother, Donegild, who tries to get rid of Constance because she has changed the religious belief of the country, sets up her daughter-in-law by sending a forged letter to the king, saying that his new-born baby looks like a monster. The king regrets about what happened. The Man of Law relates,

Wo was this kyng whan he this lettre had sayn,
But to no wight he tolde his sorwes soore,
But of his owene hand he wroot agayn,
“Welcome the sonde of Crist for everemoore
To me that am now lerned in his loore!
Lord, welcome be thy lust and thy pleasaunce;
My lust I putte al in thyn ordinaunce.

“Kepeth this child, al be it foul or feir,
And eek my wyf, unto myn hoom-comynge.
Crist, whan hym list, may sende me an heir
Moore agreable than this to my likynge.” (II 757-67)

Although King Alla feels disappointed about the appearance of the child, he expresses his sympathy toward the child and does not order to put him to death as Donegild has expected. There is another thing deserving our attention. That the king finds out the child does not please him is not merely because of his monstrous appearance, but because the child does not *look like* him. The semblance-making is a mechanism of

imitating the Form. There is a pre-existing image of what the child ought to look like; he cannot be like a monster, nor can he have an appearance of a donkey.

Such an imitation-instinct can be traced back to Aristotle. While defining the features of poetry, Aristotle firstly introduces the notion of imitation as an instinct that is implanted in man from childhood (*Poetics*, chs. 4, 15). From this imitation-instinct, people obtain pleasure. Aristotle explains this nature of enjoying an imitative object: “... the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, ‘Ah, that is he’” (*Poetics*, chs. 4, 15). What is in Aristotle’s mind is the notion of the arts such as poetry, yet the way he explains imitation-pleasure can also find a counterpart in the procreative art. The imitation here is not so much an intellectual instinct, in Preminger’s words, as a biological one. When children look like their parent(s), there is an implicit harmony and rhythm between the two parties: “there is the instinct for ‘harmony’ and rhythm, metres being manifestly sections of rhythm” (*Poetics*, chs. 4, 15). King Alla desires to see a replica of his image in his child, so that he can say, “Ah, this is like me.” If the child really looks like a monster, then it means the couple fail to perform their procreative art in their workshop. The procreative art is beautiful when it well performs its function, that is, to produce offspring that look like their producers. When discussing Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, Beardsley comments on the pleasure the audience derives from recognizing an imitation:

In so far as matters of human behavior are of greater moment to us than other actions, and the significant (“serious”) actions of tragedy are most important of all, the pleasure of seeing an imitation of them—and in this sense learning about them—might be the most intense of all imitation-pleasures. (1975:58)

Beardsley is right in the belief that tragedy brings the most intense imitation-pleasure in the artistic world. While in offspring, the imitation-pleasure derived from recognizing an imitation is as equally intense, if not more profound than that in the art of poetry.

There are at least two important fundamental differences between an artist's work and a marital couple's work. Firstly, the artist can work alone and produces his/her artworks that complete, integrate or prolong nature (Eco 1988:165). Nevertheless, the bridal pair cannot accomplish the task of procreation without one another's help. Secondly, art cannot create living things, yet the procreative art can: it gives a living body that awaits its soul which comes from God. When the soul enters into the crying baby, its spirit is evoked, and the body begins to breathe, move and feel. St. Thomas describes a work of nature as a "work of intelligence," in that it "moves toward sure goals by definite means."³⁰ Such a nice compliment can also be applied to the works of the procreative art. Ideally, offspring are also works of intelligence when the union of the bridal couple is based on a common spiritual basis—the inseparable union of a couple's souls. Thus, offspring are supposed to be the fruit of both physical and spiritual union of a bridal couple. Such a sexual relation has more value than others because it has "a large psychical element than when it is purely physical" (Russell 11).

However, the procreative art of human beings also has its limitation. A couple can make new shapes and faces of the young, just like artists can decide the form, shape, beauty of their objects. But the couple cannot make souls. For example, when a block of stone becomes a statue, its original shape disappears and gives way to a different outline, yet the elements constitutive of the statue do not change. A couple, however, can only give an outward body, or matter, not a soul, or disposition, to their works of art. According to St. Thomas, only God can give each natural being its best disposition (*ST*, Part I, Q. 91, Art. 3c). Elsewhere, St. Thomas remarks that "this [procreative] power cannot create the rational soul" (*ST*, Part II [Second Part], Q. 26, Art. 10, ad 1). Even so, children are still held as part of the integral whole of a marriage, as presented in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale." The bridal aestheticism in the workshops of the aristocrats thus encourages the use of the procreative art which brings "plesynges" (II 711) to the married couple.

³⁰ St. Thomas, *Physics*. II, 4 (Leonina, vol. II, 65), qtd. in Tatarkiewicz 1970:262.

3. Aestheticism of the bridal rooms in “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale”

By contrast, the aestheticism represented in “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale” focuses on sensual aspects of the intimate physical relationships between a couple. It is usually associated with concupiscence without fulfilling the production of offspring. Such a kind of aestheticism is not seen as the binary opposition of that in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Clerk’s Tale.” Instead, it is distinguished because people differently understand beauty. The aristocrats in “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Clerk’s Tale” have leisure to pay more attention to intellectual beauty, while the commoners in “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale” only pay attention to sensual beauty. The couples who are vulnerable to the public gaze of the activities in their bridal rooms include Alison and John, May and January as well as the Wife of Bath and her husbands. Among these tales, the Merchant has offered the most detailed description of lustfulness in the bridal rooms.

On his wedding night, January tries to legitimize his burning desire for his bride by appealing to the “lawe.” He utters to May:

“It is no fors how *longe* that we *pleye*;
 In trewe wedlock coupled be we tweye,
 And blessed be the yok that we been inne,
 For in oure actes we mowe do no synne.
 A man may do no synne with his wyf,
 Ne hurte hymselfen with his owene knyf,
 For we han leve to *pleye* us by the lawe.” (IV 1835-41)

January obviously has a wrong concept about the nature of conjugal intercourse. He believes that the “lawe” allows a married couple to indulge in lasciviousness *as long as* they want. Yet, no sane law would draw up such a lax principle as January imagines. The focus of a sane moral law requires the priority of procreation over sexual pleasure. In other words, January evaluates intercourse merely in terms of quantity, not quality, in terms of the duration of the “pleye” time, not mutual love between him and his wife. After justifying his impure intention, he talks himself into believing the legitimacy of lasciviousness and seems very confident in the way he

practices the procreative art:

Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe;
 And thanne he taketh a sop in fyn clarree,
 And upright in his bed thanne sitteth he,
 And after that he sang ful loude and cleere,
 And kiste his wyf, and made wantown cheere.
 He was al coltish, ful of ragerye,
 And ful of jargon as a flekked pye.
 The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh
 Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh. (IV 1842-50)

January expresses too much of his passion through a series of actions—he “pleye,” “laboureth,” “sitteth,” “sang,” “kiste,” “made wantown cheere” and “coltish wantonness,” “jargon,” “shaketh” his neck, “chaunteth,” “craketh.” It seems that he can only express his feelings by means of “performing” his sexual desires and skills. His restlessness reveals his flippant attitude toward May. Just like art is “not expression, but construction, an operation aiming at a certain result” (Eco 1988:165), the procreative art is analogously not concerned with expression, but the making of offspring. It is the final product, offspring, not the makers, which really matter for the nature of the procreative art. On the contrary, the narrator Merchant draws our attention to the excessive emotions with which the husband “pleye.” Despite the fact that intercourse often lasts but a relatively short duration, the numerous acts it entails in January have been out of proportion to its duration. Soon we find out that what happens in the couple’s bridal room falls into the target of the Church Fathers. A Franciscan preacher Gilbert of Tournai (d. circa 1280) best comments on a bridal room such as January’s, fed by lust. “It was comparable to adultery in that it produced the same disastrous consequences—lasciviousness, jealousy, madness,” while what grows in the aristocrats’ chamber is “true conjugal love, essentially social since it established an equal relationship between husband and wife.”³¹ That January indulges in passions and enjoys his bride’s sexual attractiveness is understandable, since Chaucer’s Reeve reminds the pilgrims of the aged desire: “for thogh oure myght be goon,/ Oure wyl desireth folie evere in oon” (I 3879-80). It is human nature to

³¹ Gilbert of Tournai, *Ad conjugates*. *Sermo II*, fols. 173va-174vb, qtd. in Vecchio 110.

satisfy desires, both for the young and the age, for men and women (the Wife of Bath is not young yet still keeps searching for a “prey”). Yet, the way January treats his wife is as frivolous as a playboy. What is worse is that he has no idea that his frivolous attitude toward his wife is against the “lawe.” St. Thomas explains,

If pleasure be sought in such a way as to exclude the honesty of marriage, so that, to wit, it is not as a wife but as a woman that a man treats his wife, and that he is ready to use her in the same way if she were not his wife, it is a mortal sin; wherefore such a man is said to be *too ardent a lover* of his wife, because his ardor carries him away from the goods of marriage.

(ST, Suppl., Q. 49, Art. 6c, emphasis mine)

According to such a definition, January commits a mortal sin when he overuses the procreative art and treats May as merely a sex object, not as a wife. Perhaps there is no fundamental difference in the way he treats her as that he treated his former lovers. In other words, he is *too ardent a lover* of his wife, and his discordant soul is too susceptible to the curve of emotions. Therefore, the bridal room of January and May “flagrantly satisfies erotic and aggressive desires and flouted authority” (Kendrick 57).

On “Whether it is a mortal sin for a man to have knowledge of his wife, with the intention not of a marriage good but merely of pleasure,” St. Thomas’s answer is as follows:

Some say that whenever pleasure is the chief motive for the marriage act it is a mortal sin; that when it is an indirect motive it is a venial sin; and that when it spurns the pleasure altogether and is displeasing, it is wholly void of venial sin; so that it would be a mortal sin to seek pleasure in this act, a venial sin to take the pleasure when offered, but that perfection requires one to detest it. *But this is impossible ... because pleasure in a good action is good, and in an evil action, evil; wherefore, as the marriage act is not evil in itself, neither will it be always a mortal sin to seek pleasure therein.*

(ST, Suppl., Q. 49, Art. 6c, emphasis mine)

It is one’s intention that leads sexual pleasure to be good or evil. In January’s workshop, what is denounced is ugliness in his way of performing the procreative art. It is teeming with lust, beset by internal discord and torn by the restless soul. The

relationship and love between husband and wife is here reduced to sex and possession. It is erroneous to think that love between a couple “differs from other types of love only through its connection with sex.”³² Gist notes that St. Thomas “declares the marriage act at least venial, perhaps even mortal, sin” (12). We can find from the passage above that Gist is right in that St. Thomas “measures the relative sinfulness of the act by the amount and type of pleasure derived from it” (12), yet perhaps she forgets to mention that “pleasure in a good action is good ... as the marriage act is not evil in itself, neither will it be always a mortal sin to seek pleasure therein.” The tenet St. Thomas sticks to is the principle of moderation and appropriateness. As long as one accomplishes the marital act in compliance with reason and order, there should be no need of questioning its legitimacy. Such an elaboration suffices to defend St. Thomas against Gist’s accusation that he holds a totally negative attitude toward marital sex. Yet, this will not be able to justify the fact that January exaggerates the most pleasing aspect of sexual intercourse to the extent that their conjugal debt is distorted and hence ugly. The result is an excess of sweetness to the point of vulgarity.

Not only the aged husbands misuse the procreative art, restless young wives in the commoners’ marriage also abuse the power of the procreative art which often results in the complicities with extra-marital affair and the appropriation of a couple’s bridal room by an outsider. Two examples can illustrate such an assertion: John’s bridal room is appropriated by Nicholas, while January’s garden of love by Damian. William F. Woods discusses the private and public space in “The Millers’ Tale” and argues that “the most private space in the tale and the richest metaphor for its world is what Alison herself embodies: the promise behind those black eyes, inside the embroidered collar, above the long laced boots” (166). In addition to the most private space that Alison embodies, John’s house is also compared to such a space. These two are “established as analogous, mutually signifying tropes for the forbidden paradise that constitutes private life in a small town like Oxford” (166). This paradise is desired not only by John but Nicholas. Despite the fact that John

³² *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 13, 148.

constructs the private space, Nicholas tries to make that private space exclusively his own. The same pattern of plot can also be found in “The Merchant’s Tale.” January’s garden of Eden is of course a private space, though it is alfresco. The private space in the two locations, John’s and January’s bridal rooms, are also “established as analogous, mutually signifying tropes for the forbidden paradise that constitutes private life in a small town like Oxford” or in a financial city like Lombardy.

Believing the impending Second Flood, the carpenter John (apparently oblivious of God’s promise not to destroy the world by deluge) hides himself in the tub hung under his roof. He is exhausted due to a string of preparatory travail—“The dede sleep, for wery bisynesse,/ Fil on this carpenter right” (I 3643-44). Then, the adulterers seize the chance and take action:

Doun of the laddre stalketh Nicholay,
And Alisoun ful softe adoun she spedde;
Withouten wordes mo they goon to bedde,
Ther as the carpenter is wont to lye.
Ther was the revel and the melodye;
And thus lith Alison and Nicholas,
In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas,
Til that the belle of laudes gan to ryng,
And freres in the chauncel gone synge. (I 3648-56)

These adulterers take John’s marriage bed as their pleasure bed and shamelessly trespass the moral codes. Nicholas even seems to have made that private space exclusively his own. In a similar vein, May and Damian act in collusion to deceive and cuckold January. While January is momentarily blind, the wife betrays him by stealing the key to the garden to Damian.

This fresshe May...
In warm wex hath emprented the clyket
That Januarie bar of the smale wyket,
By which into his gardyn ofte he wente;
And Damyan, that knew al hire entente,
The cliket countrefeted pryvely. (IV 2116-21)

In one occasion January takes May with him to the garden of love, which is metaphorically an extension of their bridal room. Damian enters the garden earlier than the couple do, and at the signal of May, he climbs into “the pyrie” (IV 2217). Later May goes up the tree and right there “sodeynly anon this Damyan/ Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng” (IV 2352-53). Pluto and Proserpine just argued about May’s chastity, and having thus seen the nasty art (craftiness, trickery) concocted by May and Damian, Pluto promptly restores January’s sight. The aged husband sees what happened yet afterwards is naïvely talked into believing the lie May devised: that she was struggling with a man in order to search for the cure to heal January’s blindness. After she goes down from the tree, January

kisseth hire, and clippeth hire ful ofte,
And *on hire wombe* he stroketh hire ful softe,
And to his palays hoom he hath hire lad. (IV 2413-15, emphasis mine)

Kenneth Bleeth makes an interesting observation on the act of stroking. He argues that January’s stroking of May’s womb and his joy at their reconciliation show that Chaucer incorporates into the plot the motifs associated with the Biblical narrative and tradition of “Joseph’s Doubting of Mary” (58). Out of instinct, the old carpenter Joseph suspects Mary’s chastity while being told of her pregnancy. Yet, when he later hears the angel’s prophecy of Christ’s birth, he apologizes to Mary. In “The Merchant’s Tale,” January also apologizes to May, not because of his suspicion of her pregnancy (she is not pregnant by the end of the tale), but because of his “blind” judgment imposed on her. One does not seem to be able to detect procreation as one of January’s motives for intercourse as we have seen in his bridal room. Bleeth, however, contends that “January’s *expectation of fatherhood* is probably a delusion, while his renewed intimacy with May appears to have been achieved at the price of future deception” (64, emphasis mine). True, January has been living in delusion before and after his marriage, yet he has never *thought* of procreation as the reason for having sex with his wife, hence there should be no delusion of such a kind. Just like the carpenter John is not aware of the truth of his being cuckolded, the knight January also has no idea of the truth. Being indulged in sexual play, January is ultimately set

up by his squire and the squire's sexual play. Thus, the bridal room and the garden incur disastrous consequences.

Often, when Chaucer presents the abuse of the procreative art, the plots of the tales take age into consideration. This is what we have in "The Miller's Tale" and "The Merchant's Tale." Each of the elderly husbands often cannot subdue his passion and thus become too ardent a lover of his wife. To some extent, the medievals tend to be biased about age: neither in the courtly tradition nor in marriage are the elder expected or encouraged to express their passion and sexual desires. Both Andreas Capellanus and John Gower propound sexual moderation or even asceticism for the elders. Andreas Capellanus, in explaining "What persons are fit for love," argues,

Age is a bar, because after the sixtieth year in a man and the fiftieth in a woman, although one may have intercourse his passion cannot develop into love; because at that age the natural heat begins to lose its force, and the natural moisture is greatly increased, which leads a man into various difficulties and troubles him with various ailments, and there are no consolations in the world for him except food and drink. (32)

Physiologically, Andreas Capellanus may or may not be right, yet psychologically, he is certainly prejudiced to hold that only food and drink can comfort an elder man or woman. He fails to acknowledge a higher and more profound level of spiritual union between husband and wife when they reach maturity. Gower also wrote two verses devoted to such a problem. In a verse titled as "More about unlawful desire," the poet first preaches to a general readership admonishing them to exercise reason in the choice of love:

Though love is everyone's, the man whose love
Is out of bounds is reckoned not as lover;
Yet Venus lures the heart by random lot
Which does not let him reckon reasonably. (Book Eight)³³

Gower then addresses to the aged lovers in the next verse, called "That lust is not appropriate for old men":

³³ The original Latin title is "Item de voluptate illicita," Gower 89.

He wastes his time who wants what he can't have;
 Where might is missing, wanting wants a cure.
 When warmth departs, then frosty bristled Winter
 Will not be up to Summer's exercise.
 What May has Nature gives not to December,
 Nor to a flower can mud or mire be matched;
 And thus decrepit pleasure, youthful dotage
 Won't flourish in the service Venus seeks.
 Therefore it's meet that whom white age has touched
 Should cultivate chaste bodies after that. (Book Eight)³⁴

In these two passages, Gower is insinuating that age does not always bring wisdom. These elder lovers or husbands, for example January, have no awareness that they only waste their energy and time in pursuing what they do not deserve. The more they long for sexual warmth, the more they experience bristled frostiness. In their cases, only age comes alone. Chaucer's description of the mental condition of old husbands like John is often exaggerated and ironic. Among the pilgrims, no one sympathizes aged desires except the Reeve. He exclaims:

"We olde men, I drede, so fare we:
 Til we be rotten, kan we nat be rype;
 We hoppen alwey whil that the world wol pype.
 For in oure wyl ther stiketh evere a nayl,
 To have an hoor heed and a grene tayl,
 As hath a leek; for thogh oure myght be goon,
 Oure wyl desireth folie evere in oon.
 For whan we may nat doon, than wol we speke;
 Yet in oure ashen olde is fyr yreke." (I 3874-82)

Yet, the topos of "Know thyself" is so recurrent throughout every aphorism in Gower's passage that the Reeve's voice is drowned. The major flaw January has would be lack of wisdom, which leads him to a misjudgment of the values of marriage. Owing to a mixture of lavish concupiscence and extra-marital complicities, the rooms of the commoners reveal the aestheticism of sensuality.

³⁴ The original Latin title is "Voluptatem senibus non convenire," Gower 90.

4. Profaneness of the bridal workshops in “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale”

Such an aestheticism of sensuality portrayed in the bridal rooms in “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale” further leads to the profanation of the procreative art, which consists of the motive to “play” and intemperate concupiscence. It is assumed that “constant biological drives would lead to pregnancies and childbirth” (Macfarlane 51), yet in these two tales and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” the opposite situation is presented: the barrenness of the “spring and autumn” couples is foregrounded. In “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” despite that she intends to “speke of wo that is in mariage” (III 3), the way she describes her bridal-room affairs does not sound that her sexual pleasure is destroyed by that “wo.” She tells the audience,

In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
As frely as my Makere hath it sent.
.....
Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,
Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.
An housbonde I wol have—I wol nat lette—
Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
.....
I have the power durynge al my lyf
Upon his proper body, and noght he. (III 149-50, 152-55, 158-59)

She seems to be quite satisfied with her leading role in her bridal room. Yet, she reproduces January’s motive for intercourse: to freely use her “sely instrument” “eve and morwe,” while the motive of January is to “pleye” as “longe” as he wishes (IV 1835). Such wasteful and unproductive lust often leads to intemperate ardent desire. January’s and the Wife of Bath’s workshops are designed to arouse feelings of lust, instead of the sacredness of procreation, in the reader. Richard Neuse adds that, January’s “language of sacramental idealism [IV 1263-70] is coupled with totally profane notions of marriage as instituted to serve the husband’s crassly practical needs and interests” (119). In marriage, intemperate passion always does not go with the procreative art.

To some extent, barrenness and concupiscent impulse in the workshops in “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale” can be allegorized into a Spenserian “bower of bliss”: both emphasize lasciviousness and sexual play.³⁵ In a bridal bower of bliss, the name “bower” emphasizes the element of intemperate concupiscence, while “bliss” refers to marriage as a sacrament. These two features together make the term a contradictory combination. Spenser’s “bower of bliss” is not one for a married couple; instead, it is a place for lovers. Guyon and the Palmer find that Verdant yields completely to “lewd loues and wastfull luxuree” in Acrasia’s arms:

And all that while, right ouer him she hong,
 With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight,
 As seeking medicine, whence she was stong,
 Or greedily depasturing delight:
 And oft inclining downe with kisses light,
 For feare of waking him, his lips bedewd,
 And through his humid eyes did sucke his spright,
 Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;
 Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rewld.

.....
 Lo see soone after, how more bold and free
 Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
 Loe see soone after, how she fades, and falles away.

So passeth, in the passing of a day,
 Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre,
 Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
 That earst was sought to decke both bed and bowre,
 Of many a Ladie, and many a Paramowre:
 Gather therefore the Rose, whilest yet is prime,
 For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre:
 Gather the Rose of loue, whilest yet is time,
 Whilest louing thou mayst loued be with equall crime.

(*The Faerie Queene*, II.xii.73-75)

In such an “image of consupiscent bliss,” the description about the bower is designed to arouse sensuous feelings in the audience. Spenser indicates the disastrous

³⁵ Although anachronistically analogous, Spenser’s bower of bliss and Chaucer’s bower of bliss offer erotic sensation in the private space.

potential of the concupiscible impulses when people rebel against the temperateness and the rule of reason (Pollock 44). Pollock continues that Acrasia represents the “double role as concupiscence and intemperance” (48). These two factors can also be found in January’s and the Wife’s “bowers of bliss.” These two characters seem to be counterparts of Acrasia in that all express strong sexual impulses. Acrasia’s bower of bliss bears no conjugal responsibility, whereas January’s and the Wife’s do. In these tales when man and woman become one flesh, we cannot feel the mystery of the profound link between procreation and love. Instead, Chaucer’s audience almost gains voyeuristic pleasure from the sensuous gestures. The process is exposed to the extent that it loses all its mysterious beautifulness that an aesthetic bridal room is supposed to reflect. The workshops of the commoners encourage neither sexual moderation nor fertility. The consummation of the couples in “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and “The Merchant’s Tale” combines concupiscence and aimless sexual play in an intemperate way without the guidance of reason. January and the Wife of Bath respectively have sex merely for its sake and hence abuse the power of the procreative art. In marriage, whenever sex is isolated from its legitimate purpose and sought for its own sake, its qualities are distorted, and the depth, mystery, nobleness of sex disappear. Chaucer seems to suggest that improper use of the power of the procreative art would fail to create a new life. The commoners’ bridal workshops thus exhibit a profane reading of the procreative art.

Many canonical rules and ecclesiastic rituals designed for the bridal workshop are used to facilitate the consummation of the marriage and procreation, and the case of January and May’s workshop demonstrates some of these. Russell observes that from the time that the fact of paternity is first discovered, “sex has always been a matter of great interest to religion. This is only what one would expect, since religion concerns itself with everything that is mysterious and important” (28). Just as medieval art is governed by fixed canons and by the rules of the guilds, the art of procreation is also governed by rules from canonists and the Church Fathers. In order to produce a new life out of sperm and ovum, a couple are supposed to observe moral rules especially encoded for them in the bridal room. For instance, Duby

records that for the twelfth-century French courts, “marriage was not the place for what was then defined as love, since the husband and wife were forbidden to rush at each other in fierce ardor” (1994:31-32). The reason that the medieval canonists impose rules on a Christian couple’s intercourse is to maintain a moral system under their sway.

In addition, rituals can also be used to facilitate the consummation of the marriage, that is, to speed up procreation (Westermarck 457).³⁶ Among those various rituals, the blessing of the bridal bed and silence imposed on the bride are rendered in “The Merchant’s Tale.” Although January’s sexual life is portrayed as somehow disgusting, the detailed description of the bridal room provides the audience with a picture of the matrimonial rituals that is related to the procreative power of the newlyweds. As the Merchant tells us, “The bryde was broght abedde as still as stoon;/ And...the bed was with the preest yblessed...” (IV 1818-19). Westermarck explains that in “England, in the Papal times, no marriage could be consummated until the bed had been blessed” (578). Such a ritual carries not only a sacramental but a procreative import, and the art of consummation is the main concern for these rituals. Within the bridal workshop, the platform for producing offspring is further fumigated with incense to keep away evil influences that might affect the production of progeny. “The object of the ceremony was partly to bestow upon the couple a long life and progeny and other good things, but partly also to protect them against evil influences...” (Westermarck 578).

Other than the ritual of blessing the bridal bed, the silence of the bride also has a direct link with a couple’s procreative art. “The greatest possible inactivity is frequently required of a bride, and this rule may have to be observed for a considerable time after the marriage” (Westermarck 545). During the marriage act, the husband is forbidden to arouse his wife, so she must “act” like a stone, motionless and full of the spiritual love for God: “She must act as if she were made of stone,

³⁶ For example, the use of eggs in marriage rites serves different purposes, one of which is the idea of promoting her fertility. The act of breaking an egg which is tied around the bride’s forehead symbolizes that her hymen shall be broken by her husband as easily as was the egg (Westermarck 457).

without the slightest quiver of her soul” (Duby 1994:28). The practice of such a marriage art truly disables a wife’s emotions and has kept her artificially stupid. In other words, the wife’s ego or dignity is deliberately made insignificant. The scene of lovemaking in the bridal room of January and May shows a picture that while the husband busies himself laboring on the bride, she is nothing more than a working platform, at best a living one. Yet, rules as such are practiced in a medieval bridal room and are said to have procreative functions. In “The Merchant’s Tale,” January does not complain the rigidity of May’s response toward his sexual performance. Yet, Duby presumes that many husbands should have complained about such sexual inactivity—how many men “went shouting, referring to their wives who were stubbornly impassive: ‘The priests have planted a cross in this woman’s loins?’” (1994:29). The side-effects of a rigid moral rule imposed on a wife’s sexual reaction obviously entail adverse sentiments, and this is to be expected because a double standard cannot bring satisfactory solution to a moral issue. The magic of silence is even extended to the extent that sometimes the couple are not allowed to speak until they have born a child (Westermarck 546).

In addition, a newly-wedded couple, particularly the wife, are not allowed to leave their house or bridal room for a certain period of time. For instance, May was “[h]eeld hire chambre unto the fourthe day,/ As usage is of wyves for the beste” (IV 1860-61) and “[s]o longe hath Mayus in hir chambre abyden,/ As custume is unto thise nobles alle” (IV 1888-89). According to the narrator’s description of January’s mode of sexual behavior, we can probably imagine the situation May experienced during the time she was kept in her bridal room: January would “laboureth” till the dawn every day (IV 1842). Nevertheless, despite the effort of blessing the bridal workshop, sexual intercourse does not always produce pregnancy, as we see in the marriage of most “spring and autumn” couples in Chaucer’s *Tales*; instead, their marriages often have complicity with extra-marital affairs.

No detailed description of matrimonial rituals is found in the bridal workshop of Griselda and Walter, as well as that of Constance and King Alla, yet their workshops fulfill the function of procreation and reveal aestheticism derived from the use of the

procreative art. On the other hand, the bridal workshop of January and May is elaborated to include marriage rites yet the couple are barren. January and May's bridal room is aesthetically dissatisfying in that it does not reproduce, and it is a lustful "bower of bliss." There seems to be an intended irony via the comparison and contrast under Chaucer's maneuver.

C. Affection between Madonna and her "work of art" in "The Man of Law's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale"

Not every conjugal intercourse results in the production of offspring since God only endows mankind with the possibility, not the necessity, of propagation. Therefore, when a child is delivered and reared, he or she is especially precious. Macfarlane explains:

Children born in wedlock were welcome. Children were a psychological gratification to their parents, fulfilling their needs in various ways: the biological craving of women to reproduce ... the desire for companions, the desire for objects to love and care for. (51)

Russell is exactly right that the feeling of a mother toward her child is one in which "there is a close physical tie, at any rate up to the moment of weaning. But the relation of father to child is indirect, hypothetical and inferential" (18). We have seen that a father's affection in a child, such as King Alla's in his son, lies in the imitation-pleasure, while the mother has a closer physical tie than the father to the posterity. The affection between mother and her "work of art" shall be our concern here.

The pseudo-Dionysius in his *Celestial Hierarchy* explains how humble objects, animals for example, can stand for divine things (qtd. in Beardsley 1975:112). Although the babies are newly-arrived souls, they, according to the pseudo-Dionysius, are divine images of the Ideals. John Scotus Eriugena in *De Vivisione Naturae* also observes that visible things are signs of the invisible. These two views are derivations from the Platonic doctrine of Forms and emanation.³⁷ However, it might

³⁷ *De Vivisione Naturae*, I, iii, col. 443, qtd. in Beardsley 1975:112.

not be easy to trace the maternal affection toward children. Frances and Joseph Gies observe: “Parental feeling toward children are difficult to recover in the scarcity of the kind of sources that normally express sentiment: memoirs, personal letter, and biography” (1978:206).³⁸ Fortunately, we have “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Clerk’s Tale” yielding pictures of maternal attachment to children.

After Donegild seeks by all means to banish her daughter-in-law, a forged letter finally announces the exile of both the son Maurice and the mother Constance. When the time comes that they are to be exiled, she has pity on her child:

“O litel child, allas! What is thy gilt,
That nevere wroghtest synne as yet, pardee?
Why wil thyn harde fader han thee spilt?
O mercy, deere constable,” quod she,
“As lat my litel child dwelle heer with thee;
And if thou darst nat saven hym, for blame,
So kys hym ones in his fadres name!” (II 855-61)

Unable to bear separation with her loved one, Constance asks the constable of Northumberland to keep Maurice with him. Yet, her request is of no avail. She then says goodbye to her “ruthless” husband and takes her innocent son with her to go aboard. Because of the complicities in the world of the adults, the child is forced into a predicament. Now, all that she can have is only her son. She cries yet does not complain her ill-fated destiny. Fortunately, Maurice afterwards succeeds to his grandfather’s throne and becomes the Roman Emperor. The power that the procreative art has caused is good: it contributes to the order of society.

The Clerk also portrays a picture of maternal affection of Griselda. When her daughter was born, Walter and his people are glad. A newborn life such as the baby girl exhibits natural beauty and is the artwork of the Madonna figure Griselda, just like a beautiful melody or painting that will reveal the Form of Beauty. One day, her husband is struck by a fancy and decides to test the patience of his wife. He has a sergeant to take Griselda’s daughter away from her. Griselda, because of her

³⁸ Frances and Joseph Gies, “Children in the High Middle Ages,” *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1978) 196-217.

promise that she would never disobey what Walter says, does not ask the cause why he wants to separate her from her daughter. The sergeant soon comes to her:

“Madame,” he seyde, “ye moote foryeve it me,
though I do thyng to which I am constreyned.
Ye been so wys that ful wel knowe ye
That lordes heestes mowe nat been yfeyned;
They mowe wel been biwailed or compleyned,
But men moote need unto hire lust obeye,
And so wol I; ther is namoore to seye.

“This child I am comanded for to take”—

.....
Grisildis moot al suffre and al consente,
And as a lamb she sitteth meke and stille,
And leet this cruuel sergeant doon his wille. (IV 526-33, 537-39)

The Clerk describes Griselda’s calm and identification with her husband’s will, yet she also makes reasonable suspicion:

Suspecious was the diffame of this man,
Suspect his face, suspect his word also;
Suspect the tyme in which he this bigan.
Allas! Hir doghter that she loved so,
She wende he wolde han slawen it right tho. (IV 540-44)

Instead of suffering from separation between loved one in life, she would rather know a definite fate of her daughter on the spot.

But atte laste to speken she bigan,
And mekely she to the sergeant preyde,
So as he was a worthy gentil man,
That she moste kisse hire child er that it deyde.
And in hir barm this litel child she leyde
With ful sad face, and gan the child to blisse,
And lulled it, and after gan it kisse. (IV 547-53)

In the face of dire and hopeless predicament, what she can do is only to take the baby girl into her arms, lull her for the last time and pray for their unknown fate, or failing that, for her soul. Although the audience is fully aware that far from having their children murdered, Walter is sending them to be fostered and educated in his sister’s

household, yet Griselda is totally kept ignorant. The kind of affection Griselda expresses for her daughter exceeds largely that which she shows for her husband because the daughter is her lineal relative, while the husband her collateral relative. He finds it easy to carry out his will over his wife. Husbands like him never expresses his pity for Griselda's sad sentiments when it is impossible for her to know what would happen to her daughter. Later, when the second round of test befalls her, the same sergeant takes away her son. Loss of her children and extreme anxiety over their safety involves more than emotional considerations, and this is something that her willful and ruthless husband would not feel sympathetic with. She gives up her children to be "murdered" and she suppresses her motherly desire to protect her infants because she would never break her oath to Walter before their marriage. She is actually struggling within her heart because on the one hand, it is her children who need her, while on the other hand, it is her husband who commands—she is indeed trapped between Scylla and Charybdis. Compared with the picture of maternal love for her child, the relationship of husband and wife remains constrained and more or less formal in the marriage of Walter and Griselda. Then, there is the third round when Walter tells her he is going to marry another noble woman. At this time, her ability to absorb tests reaches a climax. In the face of a Lord figure, or Walter, Griselda finally wins God's test (Kendrick 53).

III. Integrity of marriage without procreation in "The Second Nun's Tale"

For most situations, the element of offspring contributes to the integrity of matrimony. Yet, do all marriages whose couple do not procreate are considered aesthetically flawed? According to St. Thomas, the primary integrity of marriage is the inseparable union of the souls of a couple, and the secondary integrity is procreation and the rearing of children. As the primary integrity is abstract and the secondary integrity concrete, "operation" is easier to perceive than "essence." People diversely address the nature of the procreative art, and hence controversies are inevitable. The secular world cannot find an answer for their doubt about the truth of procreation because they only look at the issue from the perspective of human

beings. Diachronically, people lack depth, while synchronically, they lack magnitude. If we consider the procreative art from another viewpoint, the debate on the beauty of this art may appear secondary.

There is one type of marriage that exempts a couple from all anxieties about secular love and from sexual intercourse. It is in the Garden of Eden, where only the primary integrity of marriage is taken into consideration. St. Augustine explores the kind of emotion Adam and Eve had when they were still living in Eden. In answering to the question of the “emotions of the first human beings before their sin,” St. Augustine asks,

What of the first human being? Or rather, what of the first human beings, since there was a married couple? We have every reason to ask whether they experienced these emotions in their animal bodies before they sinned—the kind of emotions which we shall not feel in our spiritual bodies, when all sin has been washed away and ended....

The pair lived in a partnership of unalloyed felicity; their love for God and for each other was undisturbed. This *love* was the source of immense gladness, since the beloved object was *always at hand* for their enjoyment. There was a serene avoidance of sin; and as long as this continued, there was no encroachment of any kind of evil, from any quarter, to bring them sadness....

How fortunate, then, were the first human beings! They were not distressed by any agitations of the mind, nor pained by any disorders of the body.... Moreover, this felicity would have continued until, thanks to the blessing pronounced in the words, “Increase and multiply,” the number of the predestined saints was made up. (*City of God*, XIV, 10)

It is for sure that St. Augustine refers to immense gladness and enjoyment felt by spiritual bodies, not by animal bodies. If the beloved object includes Adam or Eve, St. Augustine does not seem to refer enjoyment to their animal bodies because then desire would disturb them even in that serene place. It seems legitimate to doubt whether or not the couple had sexual life in Eden. According to St. Paul, two legitimate reasons for the sexual union of a couple are procreation and avoidance of fornication. It is implicit that before the Fall of the couple, God took care of the procreation of any species, a task which then had nothing to do with the couple. In other words, they did not need to worry about the role of procreation in matrimony.

Their only task was to love God, the beloved object for each. Therefore, procreation is not their concern because they had not yet committed the first sin and God had not yet commanded them to increase and multiply. As for the second legitimate reason for conjugal intercourse, it is even more impossible that Adam and Eve had sexual life in order to avoid fornication! “The pair lived in a partnership of unalloyed felicity,” St. Augustine says. If the concerns of procreation and avoidance of fornication are excluded, it is extremely difficult to imagine why Adam and Eve should have intercourse, unless it is a kind of “spiritual intercourse,” which is beyond the mode of human understanding. As a corollary, Adam and Eve do not owe the marital debt to one another when they still enjoyed felicity in paradise. That is why their love toward each other is not of a possessive nature; when possessive love overwhelms the reason of mankind, all vicious emotions, such as avarice, anger, silliness, jealousy, hate and so on assail the soul. Instead, mutual respect ennobles their union. Then, for what purpose do they need intercourse in their spiritual bodies? Hence, it seems that the first parents while they are still in the Garden of Eden do not provide a model for later generations to follow in terms of how to behave in the bridal workshop. Instead, they shall learn how Adam and Eve keep their souls inseparable when they enjoy happiness in the “ever-memorable place of bliss called paradise” (*City of God*, XIV, 10).

The marriage of the virgin Cecile and Valerian in “The Second Nun’s Tale” also belongs to a similar type of transcendental format. The form of their matrimony consists in the inseparable union of souls; it is a pledge between husband and wife, and more importantly, it is also one between man and God. The mutual affection between Cecile and Valerian is revealed by the reality that both of them devoted themselves to religious affairs. Their souls cannot be sundered unless severed by death when ultimately Valerian is martyred and St. Cecile later follows his steps. The heroic deaths spiritually elevate them. The end of matrimony, or the fulfillment of procreation, does not function in their marriage, but they maintain the primary perfection of marriage and even transcend to the highest form of integrity between man and God.

The aversion to worldly pleasure can also be found in the biography of St. Simon (d. circa 1080-82). He obstinately refused to marry. Despite his will to remain chaste, he pretended to agree to the arrangement when he was offered a wife. Duby explains: "After he had been conducted to the wedding chamber and everyone thought he was taking his pleasure, he in fact spent the night preaching his wife a sermon" (1983:126). Later, it is found that St. Simon converted his lady and persuaded her to remain chaste and renounce lust. "Before dawn he dispatched her to the convent of La Chaise-Dieu and took himself off as quickly as he could, only just escaping the wrath of her father" (126). From the secular view, people might think that Simon's aversion to worldly pleasures is morbid, yet from the religious view, those who are married to God expediently take the form of marriage as a foil in order to fulfill their wish to love God.

The examples of Adam and Eve as well as St. Simon are employed to shed light on the sacredness and values of St. Cecile's marriage. Chaucer in his *Tales* only provides one marriage of such a kind, and the marriage of saints seems to be out of proportion to marriages that take procreation as priority. Yet, the disproportion only sets off its uniqueness. Chaucer presents the common and secular as well as transcendental and religious views of the integrity of marriage. The former kind of integrity takes the procreative art as the priority of marriage, while the latter does not stick to such a concern. From the secular view, the beauty of marriage lies in the fulfillment of procreation; as for the religious view, the beauty of marriage lies in the spiritual bond between a couple and their love for God. Through the concept of integrity, the concept of the procreative art and that of beauty are thus converged in the realm of marriage.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored St. Thomas's aesthetic theory and its relationships with the various types of marriage portrayed in Chaucer's *Tales*, not only because such an inquiry is an unexplored area, but especially because St. Thomas's aesthetic theory can shed light on the interpretation of the elements of beauty and art embodied in the marriages in the work. From the above analysis, it is believed that part of the great achievement of Chaucer comes from his rendering the aesthetic issues in the various types of marriage. The aesthetics of marriage in Chaucer's literary imagination can be detected from both secular and religious perspectives. In the secular view, he freely moves between bawdy as well as noble characters, between physical and spiritual beauty of wives, between serious and humorous treatment of the marriage scene and between tales of "best sentence and moost solaas" (I 798). In the religious view, the poet elevates man's dignity and faith in God and subjugates the physical and spiritual beauty of mankind under the beauty of God. No unitary style of composition can pin down Chaucer's dramatic strategies in the work. Kendrick remarks on Chaucer's literary diversification as follows: his "career as a poet begins with tragedy and ends with comedy" (154). This is a good way to start and end one's career because he has seen the dark side of the world, and he also has discovered the ways to relieve pain and presented the function of abreaction in his *Tales*. He synthesizes the climax and the low tide in the span of life and is able to emotionally relieve his audience through vicarious aesthetic delight.

Aesthetic polemics such as the proportions of age, estate and religion between a couple, the tension and debate on the coexistence and non-coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty as well as the relationship between the procreative art and the integrity of matrimony are what Chaucer deals with in "The Clerk's Tale," "The Man of Law's Tale," "The Second Nun's Tale," "The Franklin's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale," "The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" and her tale. These topics not only reflect the social values but also the aesthetic values of the poet's era. This

thesis has thus far tried to answer the following question: What properties of a medieval marriage make it beautiful? That is, what elements associate marriage with medieval aesthetics? We can come up with the following patterns: From the secular point of view, proportional age, estate and religion constitute the formal beauty of marriage, while a wife's spiritual and physical clarity as well as the fulfillment of procreation contribute to the internal beauty of marriage. From the religious point of view, in addition to the formal beauty of marriage, the inseparable union of the souls of a couple and their faith in God make their marriage beautiful.

In the tales that we have discussed, the conditions of age, estate and religion dominate in the decision-making when men choose their potential spouses. These factors are deemed to be ideological props capable of determining and governing the harmony of marriage, hence the beauty of the union. When all these conditions comply with the requirement of proportion, there is an aesthetics of marriage. As age, estate and religion are judged against the yardstick of the theory of proportion, most marital alliances of the aristocrats, the knights and the commoners in the *Tales* do not exactly match with a good proportion of each criterion. In terms of the problem of age, Chaucer seems to highlight the disparity of age in the marriage of the common folks. Norman F. Cantor explains that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were

a period of crisis and dissolution. Plagues and wars were more frequent and more severe, and an exhausted and demoralized society did not easily recover from the repeated blows it received. Instability and decline are not merely tags what historians have attached to the late Middle Ages; the men and women living at the time were themselves aware that theirs was a troubled world. Violence and extremism in human affairs accompanied a wide variety of natural disasters and social dislocations. (481)

The disorders and dislocations of the late medieval community are embodied in various social aspects, and the marital sphere is one of them. The moral disproportion is evidently reflected in the ill-matched couples such as those in "The Miller's Tale," "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue." However,

de La Roncière explains that the number of elderly is relatively small: 3.8 percent of the population of Prato in 1371, and 4.8 percent of that of Florence in 1480 (228). Such figures can presumably be used to shed light on the situation in late medieval England, hence the situation of the “spring and autumn” marriage should have been a relatively insignificant phenomenon. Chaucer, however, places great emphasis on the representation of the mismatched union among the commoners, which shows his ideological obsession and the literary amplification of such a phenomenon. “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” portray “spring and autumn” marriages to the extent that it may be subject to misunderstanding and mistreatment that the disparity of age *prevails* among the commoners. As for the condition of estate, Chaucer does not punctuate the negative effects derived from the disproportional estate between couples such as Griselda and Walter and those in the tales of the commoners. Disproportional relation between a couple’s religious belief occurs only in the marriage of the aristocrats, while Chaucer is not interested in bringing up the issue of the marriage of Christians with pagans in the commoners’ life experiences. On the part of the aristocrats, the incongruity between different religions of a couple can be solved through a wife’s inner qualities, whereas in the marriage of the commoners, the incongruity of the difference in age cannot be solved. In a strict sense, most marriages in the tales this thesis covers, except “The Franklin’s Tale,” are aesthetically impaired in one way or another—“The Miller’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” present the issue of disproportionate age and estate between the couples, “The Clerk’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” demonstrate the problem of disproportionate estate between the couples as well as “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale” bring up the issue of disproportionate religion between the couples. The impaired formal beauty of marriage suggests a sense of imperfection of the earthly world, while the most perfect proportion is “equality, which, in its perfect form, resides only with God.”¹

¹ St. Augustine, *De musica*, 6, 11, 29, qtd. in Robertson 114.

Chaucer also remarks on the influences of a wife's beauty, both external and internal, in the marriages depicted in his *Tales*. Through incidents of the aristocrats' marriage, he focuses on the husbands' perception of spiritual beauty of their wives, while through those of the commoners he brings the audience's attention to the husbands' sensibility of the wives' physical beauty. On a limited level, a wife's moral excellence brings brilliance to the household for her husband and glorifies their family; on a comprehensive level, the hylomorphic integration between her physical and spiritual beauty contributes to the happiness of their marriage. Meanwhile, there occurs the debate between the argument that a wife's physical and spiritual beauty cannot coexist in marriage, and the counterargument that these two levels of beauty can coexist in marriage. The debate seems to be synthesized in the aesthetics of marriage of the aristocrats when the wives simultaneously possess outward traits and inner qualities. Startlingly enough, however, Chaucer has his Clerk in the "Envoy" utter that, "Griselda is deed, and eek hire pacience,/ And bothe atones buried in Ytaille" (IV 1177-78). Perhaps the Clerk is merely stating a fact that Griselda is dead, but why does he add and emphasize the *death* of her spiritual beauty? Presumably, the medieval men would seldom acknowledge that spiritual beauty would *die* and be *buried*, especially when patience is one of the Christian virtues. If patience has an especially important place in the moral life of the medievals, what does the Clerk want to hint at?

An envoy is not "necessarily the logical conclusion to the poem but often is rather a means of *connecting the action to actual life*, by establishing a realistic context for the abstract ideas of the poem."² When the Clerk announces the death of Griselda's physical and spiritual beauty, he is addressing directly to his audience while *connecting* himself and the author Chaucer. The Clerk, or rather, Chaucer, believes that physical beauty has its advantages, while spiritual beauty can be beautiful only when appreciated in moderation. Perhaps what goes beyond aesthetic moderation

² D. Poiron, *Le Poète et le Prince Lyrisme Courtois* (Slatkine Reprint, numéro 20) 373, qtd. in Benson 883.

should not be regarded as a model for the later generations because it is not worth emulating. Yet, if spiritual beauty is no more permanent than physical beauty, then there must be a higher, more perfect beauty. Such kind of beauty in its perfect form resides only with God. This is a typical medieval aesthetic attitude as well as a religious outlook, and the various types of marriage portrayed in Chaucer's *Tales* reflect such a tendency.

The common, secular view holds that only when a couple procreate can a marriage be deemed integral and hence beautiful. In the *Tales*, the couples in the marriage of the aristocrats successfully produce their offspring, while the bridal workshops of the commoners do not present such a procreative art. The pleasure that the procreative art offers is seen as good in itself—such an art is given to a married couple; the accompanying pleasure is there for them to accept and enjoy, passively. When the relationship or proportion between the procreative art and the motive for having intercourse is a virtuous, temperate one, the sexual pleasure derived from the art leads the couple to taste the sweetness of mutual love. However, when the proportion between the procreative art and the motive is intemperate, people strive in vain to prolong and intensify the pleasure through over-elaborate and ultimately aimless and meaningless art.

While the groups of aristocrats and the commoners worry about the problem of the procreative art, there is another transcendental aesthetics of marriage portrayed in “The Second Nun’s Tale.” The religious, transcendental view of a beautiful marriage does not take offspring as the priority of matrimony; instead, the mutual spiritual bond and elevation between St. Cecile and Valerian feature their union. Kelly sums up Hugh of St. Victor’s symbolism of the unconsummated marriage as the following: “A virginal marriage is truer and holier because it contains nothing to make chastity blush; it is an even greater sacrament, which signifies the union between God and the soul” (298). Hugh of St. Victor bases the symbolism of a virginal marriage on “the Canticle of Solomon, or Song of Songs, where the bridegroom represents God,

and the bride the rational soul.”³ On this basis, a marriage such as St. Cecile’s is a union between God and the rational soul. The couple’s harboring no self-interestedness and serving God truthfully imprint on the integrity of matrimony. Even though we find only one example of the marriage of the saints in the *Tales*, the aesthetics of marriage as such reveals a profound religious and aesthetic significance while illuminating two highly cultivated souls.

Chaucer tends to present such a picture: it seems that only the couples in the early Christian period in the Continent present a beautiful marriage that celebrates the coexistence of physical and spiritual beauty of a wife, as evidenced in “The Man of Law’s Tale,” “The Clerk’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale,” while the couples in “spring and autumn” marriages in late medieval England seem to be addicted to the dominance of physical beauty. That is to say, Chaucer approves the aestheticism revealed in the aristocrats’ marriages, whereas he caricatures the aestheticism in the commoners’ marriages as portrayed in “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue.” As for “The Franklin’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” which are about the marriage of the knights, Chaucer has two different views concerning the aesthetics of marriage of each couple. He idealizes the marriage in the Breton lay while satirizing that in the fabliaux. The way Chaucer presents the perception of distinct levels of beauty reinforces our understanding the nature of each stratum of the hierarchical order of beauty in his era. During the pilgrimage to Canterbury, which is simultaneously a metaphor of a lifelong pilgrimage for every medieval man, these participants, including the narrator-pilgrims, the contemporary audience, the countless readers in the following centuries and us, all experience the panorama of beauty.

³ Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, 2, 11, 3 (in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* [Paris, 1844-1890], vol. 176, col. 481-82), qtd. in Kelly 298.

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