

Labouring to Make the Good Wife Good in the *journées chrétiennes* and *Le Menagier de Paris*

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Recently, Judith Butler has written about the experience of gender *becoming undone* as a process of remaking the human: “Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim.”¹ This second experience of undoing gender, she notes, provokes questions such as: “If I am a certain gender, will I still be regarded as part of the human? Will the ‘human’ expand to include me in its reach? If I desire in certain ways, will I be able to live? Will there be a place for my life, and will it be recognizable to the others upon whom I depend for social existence?”² In reflecting upon how agency is “riven with paradox” because “opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose,” Butler notes the following:

As a result, the “I” that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the “I” becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this “I” fully recognizable. There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process

1 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1.

2 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2-3.

of remaking the human. I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable.³

For Butler, contemporary transgender and intersex experiences provide a crucial location in which to think through how undoing gender and remaking the human might powerfully reshape how we think the social and our relations to it.

But as a medievalist reader of Butler, I would also want to emphasize the historicity of the processes she is theorizing, to ask about premodern locations in which gender becomes undone and the human remade in equivalently challenging and transformative ways, and to consider the complex imbrication of medieval re-imaginings within the present moment which Butler describes. In thinking about locating such an undoing of gender within a medieval context, we might “naturally” turn to the margins; the ambiguities of racial or religious conversion recently noted by Steven F. Kruger, for example, would provide a promising location for such an investigation.⁴ But we might also look to the complexity and contradiction of the supposedly orthodox centre of the medieval social imaginary. One obvious arena of investigation here would be the queer torsions produced by the advocacy of virginity by the medieval Church, necessitating a thoroughgoing revision of classical and pagan sex/gender systems and continuing to provide occasions for gender instability throughout the Christian Middle Ages. Jo Ann McNamara, for example, has argued that one consequence of the Gregorian Reform’s imposition of a monastic model of celibacy for the secular clergy was a reevaluation of celibacy more generally among the laity as well as the clergy. In turn, this reevaluation of celibacy allowed a blurring of traditional gender assignments as both women and men gained authority and personal agency by living an apostolic life of chastity: “The renunciation of sex without separating women from men narrowed the definitional grounds between the genders.”⁵ I am interested, however, in a related development within the sex/gender systems of the later Middle Ages, one that moves “beyond” celibacy in order to provoke the kind of profound undoing of gender and remaking of the human necessary to alter the ground of the social and to provide the foundations for modern heterosexuality. I am speaking, of course, about the blurring of traditional gender assignments and social hierarchies taking place at the very centre of late medieval/early modern

3 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 3-4.

4 See Kruger, *The Spectral Jew*, esp. 39-109.

5 McNamara, “The *Herrenfrage*,” 13. Another, similarly queer “undoing of gender” at the heart of the medieval imaginary is the new hybrid “machinic assemblage” of man and horse discussed by Cohen in *Medieval Identity Machines*, 35-77.

daily life as a result of the revaluation of the married estate and the households built upon it. We need, therefore, in attending to the particularities of late medieval representations of marriage, to attend to the newness of the gendered and sexualized identifications made possible by the developments in medieval conjugality that I am describing here, to the queer torsions put into play by such a hybrid state, and especially to the important differences between it and modern heterosexuality.⁶

From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, marriage in Catholic Europe underwent a profound transformation at every level. As a result, the married estate came to signify far more than simple renewal of the species or a poor substitute for celibacy. Instead, the newly gendered and sexualized identities of self-controlled husband and good wife, conjoined in one flesh through sacrament and marital affection, not only founded a new household unit but also — to the extent that they showed how such marital relations could act as a systematic guide to a virtuous life — provided a model for civic society dramatically different from previous aristocratic or clerical ones. In short, marriage became something good to think with for a wide variety of emergent groups within late medieval society. As Michael Sheehan notes,

between the beginning of the twelfth-century revival and the end of the thirteenth century, in an intellectual effort that has probably had no equal in western tradition except possibly today, marriage was examined at all levels of thought ranging from theology, through moral guidance and law, to confessional practice.⁷

Throughout these discussions, “the point of view was one focused on the couple: by and large, lordship was ignored; the wider family circle and even the children born to the couple received little attention.”⁸ And the new ecclesiastical definition of the sacrament of marriage that developed stipulated that the consent of the couple — constituted by the simple uttering of the words of present consent (*verba de presenti*) in front of

6 For a fuller exploration of these issues, see my discussion of medieval conjugality in the *Canterbury Tales* in *Chaucer’s Queer Nation*, 37–118.

7 Sheehan, *Marriage, Family, and Law*, 84.

8 Sheehan, *Marriage, Family, and Law*, 92. For an important recent enlargement of Sheehan’s discussion of the importance of the Church’s articulation of marriage as sacrament in the central and late Middle Ages, see d’Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons* and *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society*. See also Kooper, “Loving the Unequal Equal”; Schnell, “The Discourse on Marriage”; Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*; Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes*; and Davis et al., eds., *Love, Marriage and Family Ties*. For a provocative recent discussion of medieval marriage and literary culture, see Lipton, *Affections of the Mind*. See also Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*; Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*; and McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England*.

witnesses — and not consummation, was the basic requirement for a valid marriage. Here the example of Mary and Joseph’s chaste marriage was instrumental in providing a normative limit case. With this new emphasis on the importance of the couple’s informed consent and marriage as sacrament came a desire to internalize the marriage relationship. As Sheehan notes, “Theologians emphasized the bond of charity between the spouses and the possibility of its growth as a reason for their choice of each other.”⁹ Not only did canon law articulate the right of access of each spouse to marital sexual satisfaction — the so-called “conjugal debt,” which could only be abrogated by the mutual consent of both spouses — but canon law, theological writing, and sermons directed to the married estate also began to emphasize the desirability of growth in marital or conjugal affection (*maritalis affectio*).

Thomas of Aquinas, for example, notes that “there seems to be the greatest friendship between husband and wife, for they are united not only in the act of fleshly union, which produces a certain gentle association even among beasts, but also in the partnership of the whole range of domestic activity.”¹⁰ And Hugh of St. Victor develops even further the possibility for near equality that the friendly association within domestic conjugality should bring to husband and wife:

For since [woman] was given as a companion [*socia*], not a servant or a mistress, she was to be produced not from the highest or from the lowest part but from the middle.[. . .] She was made from the middle, that she might be proved to have been made for equality of association. Yet in a certain way she was inferior to him, in that she was made from him, so that she might always look to him as to her beginning and cleaving to him indivisibly might not separate herself from that association which ought to have been established reciprocally.¹¹

Such an emphasis on marital affection allowed for the transfer of much of the signifying power previously reserved for friendship between two men to the married estate. The consequent reevaluation of the position of the wife in relation to the husband, and with it the common flesh of the married estate, also had the effect of elevating the mixed estate of the laity more generally. Rather than the debased inferior position below that of a celibate clergy, such a re-imagined powerful role for conjugality put lay married

⁹ Sheehan, *Marriage, Family, and Law*, 92.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, 3 123.6, trans. Bourke, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, 148.

¹¹ Hugh of Saint Victor, *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*, II.11; trans. Deferrari, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, 329.

men on a par with, or even above, celibate clerics, and gave married women a chaste status previously available only to nuns.

Moreover, the Church's reconfiguration of the married estate, especially its revaluation of the sexual and affective connections linking self-controlled husband and good wife conjoined in one flesh through the sacrament, provided the metaphorical ground for a complex theological marriage symbolism figuring Christ's Incarnation (his marriage to humanity) and Passion (his marriage to the Church) and, more generally, Christian salvation (Christ's marriage to the soul of the believer). As David d'Avray has argued, not only does this theological symbolism depend upon a new value being given to real-life marriage, but such theologizing in turn helps to make literal marriage and its lay partners more worthwhile; the symbolic and the social are thus mutually constitutive in complex and creative ways.¹²

At the same time, the increasing importance and centrality of the lay bourgeois household as the model for urban social and economic organization across much of Europe provided another important arena in which the married estate could play a prominent signifying role.¹³ Such households were economic engines of the late medieval market economy but had neither the traditional extended family or lineage as its model nor an equivalent of the modern nuclear family. Instead the bourgeois household functioned with a husband/wife team managing apprentices, other artisanal workers, children, and servants in a business enterprise that mixed public and private in complex ways within the figural and material confines of the domestic. Equally important, the ideology of the domestic sphere that developed out of such households depended upon a crucial mixing of the aristocratic and the bourgeois, the clerical and the lay, the traditional and the emergent in order to develop an appropriate discursive economy for such a new space. And, at the upper levels of such bourgeois households at least, there emerged the time and space for acculturation previously possessed only by the aristocracy and certain elements of the clergy. Imagining the bourgeois scene of reading produced by and producing such new forms of acculturation, Felicity Riddy writes,

We might think of a house like that owned by John Collan, a York goldsmith, who died in 1490: it had a hall, a parlour, a boulting-house (where flour was stored and sifted),

12 See especially d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 58-73.

13 See Herlihy, *Medieval Households*; Beattie et al., eds., *The Medieval Household*; Carlier and Soens, eds., *The Household in Late Medieval Cities*; Dyer, *Standards of Living*; and Smith, *Arts of Possession*.

a kitchen, a store-room, a great chamber, a second chamber and a workshop. It no doubt had at least one privy and was served by the network of public ditches that carried away waste and water. The bourgeois scene of reading was in a house like this: the goldsmith's, the tailor's, the grocer's; perhaps in the hall, or in the parlour, or in one of the chambers. There must have been a mixed readership of men and women, old and young, sons and daughters, as well as the para-family members who were servants and apprentices.

[. . .] The bourgeois home was where trade, manufacture, business, cooking, eating, sleeping — and reading — were all understood as interrelated but separate aspects of domestic life and ordered as such. Managing this kind of domesticity entailed a particular conceptualisation of everyday space and time, locating the regimes of the body, which were its primary concern, inside the house and not, like the urban poor, outside it.¹⁴

Because the conduct of the good wife was crucial in exciting masculine desire for such a married estate as well as in providing the daily management of the everyday bodies inhabiting this conjugal space, the good wife's redefinition of femininity — the very naturalness of its stability and worthiness — assumes a foundational role in articulating the representative potential of this household economy, and quickly becomes the focus of a burgeoning conduct literature aimed at members of the married estate. Addressing his young wife in highly charged language that calls to mind the powerful positions of subordinates such as a queen-consort and other representatives of a sovereign, the merchant narrator of *Le Menagier de Paris* notes that in dealing with household servants, male and female,

apres vostre mary, vous devez ester maistresse de l'ostel, commandeur, visiteur, et gouverneur et souverain administreur; et a vous appartient de les tenir en vostre subjection et obeissance, les endoctriner, corriger et chastier.

[next to your husband, you should be mistress of the household, commander, inspector, and governor and sovereign administrator; and it is up to you to keep them in subjection and obedience to you, teaching, correcting, and punishing them.]¹⁵

His use of such regential language underscores the crucial role which the good wife plays in this new household economy, and highlights the importance of making the right choice of mate and exercising the self-restraint necessary to cultivate the proper

14 Ridy, "Temporary Virginitly and the Everyday Body," 201.

15 *Le Menagier de Paris*, 128; my translation (see also *The Goodman of Paris*, 137). All subsequent translations are taken from *The Goodman of Paris*, trans. Eileen Power.

social relations to work together to power this economy. Merchants' and noblemen's wives in northern Europe, for example, commonly managed their husbands' business affairs when they were away repeatedly or for protracted periods of time. And Christine de Pizan notes in *Le Livre des trois vertus* that this is a task that the wife of a baron or man of high rank should be trained to perform, although a wife could normally take on such a responsibility only if given express, legal authorization by her husband, in an act of procuration or mandate.¹⁶ Thus, late medieval conduct literature, by focusing on the signifying power, yet lesser status, of the good wife, captures the productive, if troubling, hybridity of the gentry and urban elites she is associated with, straddling as these elites do the various divides of late medieval life — public/private, fleshly/spiritual, subordinate/empowered, clerical/lay, aristocratic/bourgeois — in such profoundly ambiguous and contradictory ways.

In this paper I focus on two such related moments of hybridity in this late medieval textual continuum concerned with, even obsessed with, validating and re-forming the nature of the good wife by managing the conduct of her daily life.¹⁷ I want, first, to examine the fusion of clerical and lay authority found in the so-called *jours chrétiennes*, a group of texts written by clerics for married women to help them lead a contemplative life from within the married estate; and second, to consider the epistemological confusion evident in a similar attempt to navigate the interpenetration of lay and clerical experience in the opening sections of *Le Menagier de Paris*. In both cases what interests me is the extent to which these texts, which might easily appear simply coercive and conservative to modern eyes, in representing “the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone” (whether restrictions on what a layperson or a woman or a bourgeois subject might become) also undo “a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim.”¹⁸ The “I” brought into being by these texts thus “finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them.”¹⁹

16 Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies (Le Livre des trois vertus)*, 128-30. See also Reyerson, “Women in Business,” 117-44; Howell, “Women, the Family Economy, and the Structures of Market Production,” 207-208, 214; and Carroll, “In the Name of God and Profit.”

17 For recent discussions of other points on this continuum, see the essays in *Medieval Conduct*, a very useful collection edited by Ashley and Clark.

18 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1.

19 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1.

Labouring to Make the Good Wife Good: The *journées chrétiennes*

La journée chrétienne (or “The Christian Day”) is the name given by Geneviève Hasenohr to a kind of text composed in French and Italian from the mid-thirteenth to the early sixteenth century which tries to map a quasi-monastic order of devotion and prayer onto the time and space of a lay wife’s daily life.²⁰ Hasenohr’s critical treatment of these texts implicitly characterizes them as a distinct genre — alongside sermons, Books of Hours, and penitential manuals — in the repertoire of religious instruction aimed at the laity. But it might be more useful to view the texts more loosely as part of a continuum made up both of devotional treatises addressing the proper conduct of the mixed life (for both lay men and women) and of more secular ethical works (such as *Le Menagier de Paris* or *Le Livre du chevalier de la Tour Landry*) addressed specifically to actual or would-be wives. Some of these *journées chrétiennes* are explicitly organized in terms of the liturgical hours, providing appropriate prayers and devotions to be said at each point of the day. Others limit such private devotion to the times of the day most suited to a married woman’s crowded timetable, notably the hours of waking and sleeping, the leisure time after dinner, and the time for reflection within morning mass. In their most extreme form, these guides advocate, as Robert Clark puts it, “a constant mental effort to override non-devotional activities by projecting spiritual significance onto them in a systematic way.”²¹ Rather than the better known sermons *ad status* or the confessional manuals of the period — which continue to treat women in purely ideological terms, that is, in a hierarchized relationship to chastity (as virgins, chaste widows, and married women) — the new, hybrid form of the *journée chrétienne*, as Hasenohr argues, provides the strongest evidence of clerical concern with the changing social reality of “middle-” and upper-class women in the later Middle Ages.²²

While these texts are marked by a notable pragmatism on the part of their clerical authors in taking into account the conjugal nature of the good wife’s situation, their method of grappling with a changing social reality often seems distinctly negative. Or put another way, it does not seem as if conjugality is something good to think with in

20 Hasenohr, “La vie quotidienne.” In an extensive appendix, Hasenohr provides detailed descriptions of the contents of the manuscript and early printed versions of the nine French and five Italian *journées* which she discusses; Hasenohr, “La vie quotidienne,” 77-101. I am indebted as well to Clark’s richly suggestive discussion of the *journées* in “Constructing the Female Subject,” to date the only other critical engagement with these texts.

21 Clark, “Constructing the Female Subject,” 170.

22 Hasenohr, “La vie quotidienne,” esp. 19-40.

the *journées* for anyone other than their clerical authors. This can be seen most clearly in the way in which the wife's real-life husband is figured as a "problem" to be surmounted. On the one hand, the clerical authors pragmatically acknowledge the necessity for the total submission on the part of a wife to her husband, and hence the husband's (not the cleric's) total control over the wife's spiritual as well as physical life. On the other hand, to the extent to which such writers outline an intense devotional life for their lay female readers as ideal, they simultaneously tend to marginalize the husband in order to substitute themselves and Christ as the "higher" masters of the female body. Thus, the husband is a largely absent figure in these texts, even in the bedchamber, where a perfect privacy is often imagined for the wife so that she can encounter her spiritual bridegroom, Christ. If the husband is acknowledged, it is as a menacing figure keeping the wife from achieving her goal of perfection.²³ As Hasenohr wryly notes, in these texts "On est vraiment loin de la doctrine de la sanctification mutuelle des époux" (we are indeed a long way away from the doctrine of the mutual sanctification of the spouses).²⁴

Household duties, great and small, pose a similar dilemma for the wives' clerical guides, but one not so neatly occluded. While pragmatically acknowledging the good wife's need to continue to address the many day-to-day demands of the household, these clerics at the same time try to superimpose on the daily activities of the lay wife the structures of religious time, monastic "labour," and a spiritual union with her divine spouse. Thus, in a way that parallels the occlusion of real-life peasant labour supporting monastic existence by the emphasis on the superiority of monastic intellectual labour, these manuals attempt an occlusion of the real-life labour of bourgeois production in order to promulgate a superior quasi-monastic spiritual labour as the proper duty of the good wife. To varying degrees, the writers urge their readers to let the sacred colonize household time and space so that, as Hasenohr puts it, "Le temps profane est donc rythmé par le temps religieux" (secular time is punctuated by religious time).²⁵

23 For example, in *L'Opera a ben vivere* of St. Antoninus of Florence, since the wife is married and cannot get up in the night to say the office, she should arise early; since the wife cannot, as a nun could, listen to a worthy reading during her meals, she should never put any food to mouth until she has silently said an *Ave*, and because she has had various household duties during the day, she should retire to her chamber as early as possible at night saying various prayers and sprinkling her bed and chamber with holy water; Hasenohr, "La vie quotidienne," 91-92.

24 Hasenohr, "La vie quotidienne," 49.

25 Hasenohr, "La vie quotidienne," 56.

For example, in the *Decor puellarum*, a fifteenth-century spiritual guide for young women, the Venetian John the Carthusian advocates the following engagement with the day:

Rise early and, upon waking, bless God and meditate on the mystery of the Trinity. When you get up, cross yourself three times in saying “Benedicamus Patrem et Filium . . .”; while dressing, raise your eyes and mind to Heaven in saying “Agimus tibi gratias . . .”; say your usual prayers and meditate on the attributes of the three divine persons; having dressed, coarsely but decently, and put on your shoes, wash your hands and face and comb your hair while praying, with your heart remaining in Heaven, meditating on the creation of the angels, the fall of the bad and the confirmation of the good angels. Immediately thereafter, turn your attention to the housework: wake up the servants, light the fire, sweep, start breakfast, dress the children, make the beds, do the laundry, take care of the chickens, etc., while meditating on the celestial hierarchies, the reasons for the damnation of Lucifer, the creation of the world in six days, etc. [. . .] When you sit down at table, meditate on the Nativity; say the *Benedicite* and make the sign of the cross on the table; while eating the first course, think of the Circumcision; while eating the second, of the Adoration of the Magi; and when you have had enough to eat, meditate on the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt.²⁶

Only by such a renunciatory systematization of her day-to-day experience, it seems, will the good wife truly be able to “translate” fully the low “vernacularity” of her lay estate into a truer “Latinity” of a quasi-monastic *ordo*.

Similarly, instructions for the end of the day often suggest how a space for wifely interiority can be first hollowed out from the temporal structure of her day and also from the actual space of household life itself and the female body’s place within it, and then filled up with a personally experienced spirituality. Thus, the bedchamber is imagined as a private, intimate space where the wife can truly encounter Christ, her “real,” spiritual spouse. In this space, time can be experienced in a spiritual sense that turns “normal” time upside down. The apparent “end” of the day, the time when the wife is freed from household duties such as supervision of servants and children, preparation of meals, etc., even from the marriage debt to her husband, who is safely sleeping in bed, becomes in a way the real *beginning* of the wife’s spiritual day. Her dressing table becomes her devotional altar, her prayer-filled body becomes her highest labour, and devotion to her carnal husband is replaced by devotion to her spiritual spouse.

26 Clark, “Constructing the Female Subject,” 170-71, translating Hasenohr’s French version (96) of the original Italian text. Although the addressees here are technically not yet married, their social situation and John’s treatment of them cast them as proto-wives.

For example, in Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal MS 2176, the anonymous clerical author suggests not only spending several hours after dinner in contemplation but also offers the following advice:

Je croy, ma tres chere fille, que l' eure la plus prouffitabile a vous et a nous [pour s' adonner à la contemplation] seroit de my nuyt après dormir, après la digestion de la viande, quant les labours du monde sont separez et delaissez et quant aussi les voisins ne nous verront point et que nulz ne nous regardera fors Dieu et qu' i n' y aura personne qui puisse veoir noz gemissemens ne les lermes et souspirs venans du perfond du cuer, ne aussi les ameres clameurs, plainctes et complainctes entrerompuez par fors souspirs, les prostracions et agenoillemens d' umilité, les yeux moulliez, la face muante ou suante, maintenant rouge, maintenant pale; quant on ne voit aussi battre la coulpe souvant et par grant contricion, baisier la terre par grant et humble devocion, lever les yeulx au ciel et les mains par grant desir, souvent plaier et entrelasser les bras comme se l' en acoloit son amy par grant amour, estandre le corps sur terre ou tout sur piez comme en une croix par grant compassion: telle chose est bonne a faire ou temps et en lieu que nul fors Dieu ne voie ces choses et autres semblablez signes de douce devocion, lesquelles choses sont moult requises a ceste gracieuse oroison et euvre. Non obstant que en toute heure et en tout temps on doit, comme dit est devant, estre prest et diligent de drecier tousjours et lever continuellement sa pensee a Dieu, toutesvoies l' especiale heure si est l' eure de my nuyt.

[I think, my very dear daughter, that the most profitable hour for you and us [to devote yourself to contemplation] would be midnight, after sleeping, after the digestion of food, when the labors of the world have been separated and left behind and when also the neighbors will not see us, nor will anyone see us but God, nor will there be anyone who can see our moaning nor the tears and sighs coming from the depths of our heart, nor either our bitter cries, complaints, and laments interrupted by many humble sighs, prostrations, and kneelings, eyes moist, face changing and damp, now red, now pale; nor then can one see us often beat our breast in great contrition, kiss the ground in great and humble devotion, raise our eyes and hands to heaven in great desire, often bend and intertwine our arms as if embracing a lover with great love, stretch our body out on the ground or standing, as on a cross, in great compassion; such things are good to do at a time and place when no one but God may see these things and other similar signs of sweet devotion, which things are greatly required by this prayer and work of grace.]²⁷

27 Hasenohr, "La vie quotidienne," 44-45; English translation in Clark, "Constructing the Female Subject," 175-76.

In this moment of apparent clerical triumph over the husband, the text fantasmatically stages the fulfilment of the wife's spiritual destiny as the achievement of a state of pure privacy that makes possible a conjugal relation with Christ, a relationship whose radically different set of symbolic exchanges both echo the marriage debt between real-life husband and wife and claim its supersession. The text thus also stages as real here what is at the heart of the ideological program of the *journées chrétiennes* more generally, that is, the possibility of a fundamental symmetry between the lay household domesticity (both as material and ideological phenomenon) and the monastery. For in choosing the *journée chrétienne* as their basic structure, these texts reproduce a dominant monastic model for subjectivity whose universalizing potential depends both upon a performative iterability *and* a levelling *ascesis*. In a monastic context, performance of the canonical hours levels the differences of time and space in order to transcend them, thereby installing such a monastic subject as the fullest manifestation of the universal Christian subject.

But is that the totality of the performativity at work here? To the extent to which these texts come to have as their subject the hybrid spiritual embodiment of the good wife, they cannot, even at their most fantasmatic moments, leave behind the material facts of temporality and spatiality that instantiate the *differences* of lay possibilities for individual and communal agency and identity. Midnight may *begin* the good wife's spiritual day, but we know also that there is another beginning after dawn when the household awakes. The bedchamber may be imagined as a location to encounter her spiritual bridegroom, but a real-life husband (whether alive or as a memorialized presence after death) also inhabits this space and the materially productive household for which the bedchamber is core. That clerical ideological control emerges most forcefully at precisely the moments where the hybridity of the good wife's embodied subjectivity is acknowledged most directly and materially — as in the examples quoted from the *Decor puellarum* and Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal MS 2176 — also underscores the performative nature of what is being imagined, and with that, the possibility for alteration by individual actors and different material situations. The repetitions that these lay *journées* imagine, then, cannot be simply limited to the teleological movement of the clerical narrative, that is, culminating in the superiority of the spiritual over the material, of the clerical guide over the husband, of interiorized private subjectivity over socially mandated wifely duty.

For the texts' interweaving of Latin and the vernacular, of religious and secular time, their carving out of a new, unstable intersection of public and private as the identity of the good wife (where the presence of the earthly husband must be occluded, even displaced, in order to uncover that of Christ, the spiritual spouse), also enacts the

partiality of such attempts at translation and a labour disturbingly and ambivalently neither monastic nor mercantile. Their simultaneity of reference, whether the clerical guides like it or not, performs the good wife's hybrid embodiment within the world. And their performance of materiality reminds us of a different, hybrid identity possible within this married "rule," an imagined community in excess of the monastic model that might be created through the patterns of devotion performed within this lay bed-chamber and household. This less assured understanding of the texts' performativity might also suggest a multiple, reception-oriented sense of "authorship" for these texts and the cultural capital they transmit, a proliferative and less knowable sense of agency that they might make possible.

For all the "controlling" will of the texts' clerical authors, it is these noble and haut bourgeois wives as desiring subjects who "author" the production of these lay-oriented *journées* as texts, and these good wives who choose such texts from among, or along with, the various other textual possibilities available. The clerics may depict these women as if they were potentially nuns or anchoresses and invoke a levelling process of annihilating material difference in order to produce an ideal Christian subject. But it is these women's individual contexts, their combination of material and spiritual, lay and clerical, public and private, as mistresses of their own households which also emerge as crucial factors in the ability of these good wives to desire in ways which elicit the interest of the clerics. This desiring textual community could be as simple as a specific patroness who commissions a work or, more generally, a group of socially and materially influential women who are creating a market for the dissemination of certain religious practices and the cultural capital they embody to new groups of people. While the husband may not figure prominently in these narratives, the household created and reproduced by such marriages does. And it is precisely these narratives' difficult and contradictory staging of desire and devotion precisely at the divides characterizing these new households that makes the *journées* "marketable" and interesting to a wide audience (and constitutes them as narratives in excess of the authorial intentions of their clerical narrators). For these reasons, we need to pay close attention to the reception of the clerical advice that is represented in them.

Even more apparently formulaic and restrained *journée* texts — read in the performative way I am describing — can be seen as manifesting the complex simultaneity of signification I am arguing for. MS BNF lat. 1391, for example, at first glance looks relatively perfunctory and generic in its devotional agenda. Outlining prayer and devotion during the meditative moments in daily mass, as well as the leisure moments available after dinner and supper, the text explicitly tailors its rule to allow its noble reader, Anne de

Rohan, to attend to her extensive secular duties. But the manuscript also reveals several features that foreground in complex ways the specificities of Anne's situation and the influence of *her* subjectivity in articulating this apparently rote devotional practice. Fol. 2v contains an anagram of Anne de Rohan and Pierre de Rohan, her (presumably dead) husband, and fol. 30r contains their arms. Fols. 10v and 11r form a connected two-leaf illumination. Fol. 10v shows Anne in her bedroom wearing a white coverchief and black dress and kneeling at a low table with a book in front of her (with a red four-poster bed and black chest in the background). The whole scene is set within a gold columned niche, and the arms of Anne and Pierre de Rohan are featured at the bottom of the page. The facing page, fol. 11v, presumably depicts the object of Anne's devotional reading, showing Christ as a bleeding man of sorrows holding a palm branch in his crossed arms; this scene is also set within its own gold columned niche. The illumination shows Anne's bedchamber not as a simple private space (nor indeed the devotions of Anne as simply private). Christ exists in the kind of public spatiality that one would expect in a church setting. Anne, while engaging in the kind of very individual piety espoused by these texts, does so as the representative of a public/private household and as part of conjoined, hybrid married body.

But rather than reading this manuscript's representation of Anne de Rohan as crucially *different* from more affective accounts of the good wife, such as that in Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal MS 2176 (where she is pictured alone, tingling with desire for her bridegroom Christ, a quasi-nun by virtue of escaping the wifely and household duties), I think we should instead see these two modes of representation as mutually constitutive of each other, together demonstrating a range of possibility within the good wife's hybridity and its ability to experiment with the real and to undo gender. Anne de Rohan is, of course, a member of the high nobility, and thus belongs to a far more entitled class of "good wives" than the bourgeois and gentry examples I have focused on, and her early sixteenth-century manuscript comes very near the end of the moment of hybridity I have been describing. Nonetheless, it is interesting in this light precisely for the continuities one can distinguish between noble and bourgeois, late medieval and early modern, and representational strategies and assumptions. One cannot rule out the possibility that similar affective devotional practices might be imagined as taking place beneath the calm exterior of the noble widow represented here. And in this manuscript's chosen inscription of the lay patron — not in the margins or in a physically smaller representation compared to Christ or a depicted saint (as one so frequently finds in illuminations in Books of Hours or in religious painting of the day) but rather full size and central to the visual and devotional project of the book compilation — one can see

continued the engaged performative reading practice I have been arguing for in these *journées chrétiennes*. Indeed, this process may be imagined as continuing across generations of female readers, for on fol. 1v a later hand notes the manuscript's ownership by Françoise de Rohan, and thus by at least one female descendant of Anne.

The constant mental effort advocated by some of the extreme examples already quoted should thus be seen as one end of a continuum of choices these texts make available to their various female subjects rather than as the required ideal one must choose but can never achieve. Perhaps from the reader's point of view it is the value of this choosing that is important, inciting and manifesting a labour that, rather than being occluded as spiritual transcendence, is celebrated as the achievement possible by the careful management of the everyday body and the household community that it subtends. Who is colonizing whom?

Improvisation within a Set of Constraints: Experimenting with the Real in *Le Menagier de Paris*

The contradictions and incoherences that characterize the new space of bourgeois and gentry conjugal relations emerge with particular clarity and urgency in *Le Menagier de Paris*, a conduct book written around the time of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* by a much older, haut-bourgeois Parisian husband for his new fifteen-year old wife. Unlike the *journées chrétiennes*, the *Menagier* assembles a wide variety of oral and textual material (both Latin and vernacular) drawn from sources as diverse as clerical moral treatises, popular stories and jokes, literary narratives such as the Griselda story, and recipes, as well as personal experience and family history. And again, unlike the *journées*, the *Menagier* makes little effort to articulate a coherent narrative voice explicitly mastering such a narrative hodgepodge, and instead manifests a more experimental, personally experienced approach to the relationships between narrative and ethics.

At the same time, in ways that echo the complex performative nature of the *journées*' textuality, the *Menagier* underscores the importance of lay interiority and conjugal partnerships as the privileged assembly points for the new ideal self. Thus, the bedchamber, conjugal conversation, the merchant's apparently extensive private library, and his own social and familial experiences provide points of origin for the text. Similarly, the actions of the good wife in her devotions and household management, as imagined by the husband narrator, work to make visible and "real" the boundaries of household identity and the married estate itself. It is noteworthy that this marshalling of experiential and textual material is not something the narrator reserves to himself. Thus, at the end of

the third chapter, Article 3 of the First Distinction (or Section), which itself reproduces in detail the kind of clerical penitential manual one finds in the “Parson’s Tale” at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, the narrator concludes that this is sufficient

Car le sens naturel que Dieu vous a donné, la voulenté que vous avez d’estre devote et bonne vers Dieu et l’Eglise, les predicacions et sermons que vous orrez en vostre parroisse et ailleurs, la Bible, la Legende Doree, l’Apocalice, la Vie des Peres et autres plusieurs bons livres en François que j’ay, dont vous estes maistresse pour en prendre a vostre plaisir, vous donra et atraira parfondement le remenant.

[For the mother wit that God has given you and your good will to be devout and virtuous towards God and the Church, and the preachings and sermon you shall hear in our parish and elsewhere, together with the Bible, the *Golden Legend*, the Apocalypse, the *Life of the Fathers*, and divers other good books in French which I have and whereof you are mistress and free to take them at your pleasure, these will teach you all the rest at God’s good pleasure.]²⁸

The husband narrator thus imagines the wife, as a result of his and his book’s influence, engaging in authorial work similar to his own when compiling the present book. At the beginning of the next chapter, Article 4 of the First Distinction, the husband imagines this textual/performative attention to personal conduct — on the part of himself, his wife, and his book — establishing an ever expanding textual community. Thus, he notes that Article 4 will address the wife’s continence and chastity, not because he doubts her possession of such virtues,

mais pour ce que je scay que aprez vous et moy ce livre cherra es mains de noz enfans ou autres nos amis, je y mectz volentiers tout ce que je scay, et dy que aussi devez vous endoctriner voz amies, et par especial voz filles.

[but because I know that after you and me this book will fall into the hands of our children or other our friends, I readily set down all that I know, and I say that you ought also to lesson your friends and especially your daughters.]²⁹

The agential roles that the husband/narrator outlines for himself and his wife here makes explicit the kind of performative and transformative labour that I have described as taking place in the *journées chrétiennes*. But much more directly than the clerically authored *journées*, the merchant husband compiling the *Menagier* explicitly acknowledges the hybridity of the textual, cultural, and social spaces where such work takes place, and

28 *Le Menagier de Paris*, 45–46; *The Goodman of Paris*, 63.

29 *Le Menagier de Paris*, 47; *The Goodman of Paris*, 64.

ways in which such spaces bring the private and public together in productive new dialogue and vocalization. The text's opening is a case in point. One could easily read the first few religiously oriented chapters as the rote comments of a lay narrator channelling the hegemonic clerical voice and the formal structure of the *journées chrétiennes*. Articles 1 and 2 of the First Distinction, for example, start with the appropriate prayers to say upon waking, followed by the admonition to attend Mass daily and to confess frequently. Article 3 (fully a quarter of the First Distinction, or Section, of the text) provides a lengthy and detailed exposition of the parts of the Mass and the sacrament of confession, including descriptions of the Seven Deadly Sins and their remedies. And Article 4 delineates in a series of brief stories how the wife can live chastely. Moreover, spiritual discipline is framed within the context of a disciplined body. Thus, when walking to church or whenever outside the household, the wife is to keep her head straight, eyelids lowered, and eyes looking straight ahead about twenty-four feet in front of her.

But even while attempting to form the good wife's nature in this way, by clerical adaptation of monastic discipline, the *Menagier* also works to establish a transformative relationship with clerical hegemony by exploring how an understanding of the natural may be contingent, something socially and linguistically constructed, an effect of institutional control and personal experience rather than something transcendent or absolute. As simple a statement as "Le commencement et premier article de la premiere distinction parle de adourer et du lever" (the beginning and first article of the first section speaks of worship and of rising) exposes a potential epistemological faultline for the observant lay subject. For as the narrator goes on to note, "Lequel vostre lever" (by which rising) should be understood as "matin" (morning). But such a word signifies differently according to its audience and usage: simple "matin" (morning) to lay men and women and the liturgical hour of "matines" (matins) to clerics. For while the usage of "nous gens ruraux" (us country folk) calls "day" that which lasts from dawn to dusk, the usage of clerks, "qui preignent plus soubtilement" (clerks in subtler wise say), calls the same time period "le jour artificial" (artificial day). In their usage, "le jour naturel" (natural day) always begins at midnight and ends the following midnight and is always twenty-four hours long. So, the husband narrator adds, he has said that morning is called matins because the Matins bells ring at that hour to waken the monks to sing Matins, not because he intends by this that his wife should get up at that time. Instead, the wife should, when she hears the bells for Matins, say a prayer before going back to sleep again, and he also provides prayers to be said at midnight and at dawn.³⁰

30 *Le Menagier de Paris*, 6; *The Goodman of Paris*, 35.

The *Menagier's* setting of such spiritual and epistemological questions within the scene of the conjugal and the domestic dramatically exposes the social effects of a larger late medieval *realpolitik*, that is, the absolute pervasiveness of inequality at every level and yet the equally pervasive desire to negotiate personal agency and self-determination within such unequal spaces. For the husband, there are pragmatic limits to the incorporation of the sacred into mercantile time and space. One has to balance conflicting agendas and priorities, negotiate a variety of social and linguistic terrains, if one is to determine a set of practices appropriate to this mixed estate. Thus, while the narrative in the opening five articles of the First Distinction reiterates the kind of stylization of the body and truth technology advocated by clerical writers, the husband as narrator does not simply reproduce their ideological intent. As much as such a clerical voice cannot be ignored, and as much as such a voice may at times work to the advantage of the husband as similarly authoritative control for a subordinated wife, nonetheless, the husbandly voice emerges in a necessarily dialogic way, intent as well on the proper (and materially useful) embourgeoisement of the wife. While the foreground of the narrative in these first five articles inscribes the gender inequality that characterizes such an elaboration of the ideal wife, the narrative also voices the husband narrator's pragmatic recognition of his own place within a social landscape that naturalizes inequality at every level. As he implies, neither he nor any other respectable layman would ignore the primacy of entrenched clerical wisdom, nor ascribe to bourgeois material wisdom a public persona other than the modesty topos of "we country folk." Yet neither would he expect *his* wife, herself better born than he, to ignore the kind of attention to the material world and the marketplace of ideas necessary for any merchant household to survive.³¹

While the set of practices advocated here is clearly tilted in favour of the pleasure and comfort of husbands, the husband imagines no absolute difference between himself and his wife. From the very beginning of the narrative, the husband treats his wife in certain ways as a partner in the family business, a position, as noted earlier, that is made explicit at the opening of the Second Section dealing with household management and recipes, when it notes that "next to your husband, you should be mistress of the household, commander, inspector, and governor and sovereign administrator." Moreover, the narrator imagines a good wife whose moral perfectability and improvement have no theoretical limits. Such a wifely identity then can draw on the reserves of cultural capital created by clerical conduct literature in ways equivalent to the literal capital fuelling

31 The husband alludes to this point twice — in his Prologue and in his response to the Griselda story in Article 6 of the First Distinction; *Le Menagier*, 2 and 73, and *The Goodman of Paris*, 32-33 and 92.

the husband's mercantilist identity. The extent to which the nature of the good wife is thus both bourgeois and chaste provides the wife with a degree of sovereignty and agency that, while not equal, is provocatively equivalent to that of the husband.

In certain crucial, disturbing, but also creative ways, then, the textual strategies of the *Menagier* — in contrast to those of the *journées chrétiennes* — engage directly and experimentally with both the anxieties and possibilities inherent in the hybrid position of the wife as an extension of the husband's own body. As noted above, the conjoining of husband and wife as one in the sacrament of marriage became in medieval theology the basis for figuring the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine nature. So, too, the joining of the unequal — in the language of royal delegation of authority that the *Menagier* uses when he charges his wife to be “governor and sovereign administrator,” for example — is at the heart of so much language describing the married couple. The way in which such conjunctures are imagined in theological, social, and economic discourses thus inscribes a certain *transgender* dynamic within the gendered structure of the married estate and the bourgeois married household. Its gender dynamics are inherently and provocatively unstable, even as such instability and hybridity offer tangible and valuable bonuses to such marital relations and to the household built on them.

I would not deny that when the narrator speaks about the wife, the text makes important and potentially harmful points that have real effects in the world for women. But at the same time, when the narrator speaks about the wife, he speaks about a side of *his* nature as well — as a layman in relation to a traditionally dominant and powerful clergy, as a bourgeois subject in relation to a traditionally dominant and powerful aristocracy, as an emergent identity position occupying a hybrid space alongside the good wife (who could always be imagined as potentially on the way to being bad). Thus, any masculine authority imagined is in certain crucial ways constituted by the femininity of the good wife manifested in partnership with the good husband.³²

32 See Collette's recent argument, in *Performing Polity*, concerning female androgyny and female agency in Christine de Pizan's *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (*Le Livre des Trois Vertus*). Collette maps the routes to agency which a culturally authorized social androgyny made possible for late medieval women. Even while the default template of action and being is male and even though a woman must prove herself as an ideal woman, women “particularly of the aristocracy and merchant classes, regularly perform successfully as socially androgynous members of society who are fully able to step into male positions and roles, fully able to function as men”; Collette, *Performing Polity*, 24. The discourse of marital relations offered a similar androgyny to both men and women, although still in terms of asymmetrical power relations.

The narrator must take a mode of authorizing and revaluing lay bourgeois activity derived from clerically driven agendas for the married estate — articulated in genres such as sermons, confessional manuals, and guides for daily living — and position such discourses alongside the actual labour of the bourgeois household, in order to make knowable and reproduceable a new bourgeois ideology of the married household. Viewed from this perspective, anxiety about the potentially destabilizing activity of bad wives speaks as much to the male householder, reflects how he might easily be read through traditional clerical or aristocratic lenses, just as speaking woman “good” might allow opportunities to “perform” like a cleric or like an allegorical authority figure.

In complementary but crucially different ways, then, within both the *journées chrétiennes* and the *Menagier* the simultaneous undoing of gender and narrative that marks their interactive process of reading and self-authoring, of improvisation with a set of constraints, suggests that the incitement to repetition and remaking that is engendered by such texts might be best understood as a process of textual enrichment achieved by means of a new kind of performative labour, through which the everyday body of the good wife and the desire of her “husbanding” readers (both male and female) engages with the social and by which the “human” can expand to include them in its reach.

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