4

Some Literature for Solace

The ideas that moderate joy promotes well-being and that time out for entertainment is a necessary part of human life are independent of literature. They become a part of medieval literary thought only insofar as theory relies on them to explain the function of certain works or fictions appeal to them for purposes of justification. Though we have already seen a few such instances, such as the understanding of *theatrica* as ministering to bodily weakness and the assignment of *De nugis curialium* to the category of recreation, we have yet to survey the more substantial evidence of literary material invoking the ideas. This chapter supplies that evidence by considering some later medieval works and genres that allude, for one purpose or another, to hygienic or recreational principles.

I begin with some literary theorizing by Boccaccio and Petrarch, both of whom in their Latin writings make substantial claims for literature's capacity to profit, usually relying on allegorical approaches. But they impute other powers to literature as well. In 1338 Petrarch wrote a letter to a good friend describing his solitary life at Vaucluse. Acquaintances, he says, avoid the place because of its austerity; he has only his dog and his servants, and some of the latter are leaving. But he can also take joy in his "secret friends":

They come to me from every century And every land, illustrious in speech, In mind, and in the arts of war and peace.... Now these, now those I question, and they answer Abundantly. Sometimes they sing for me; Some tell me of the mysteries of nature; Some give me counsel for my life and death; Some tell of high emprise, bringing to mind Ages long past; some with their jesting words Dispel my sadness, and I smile again; Some teach me to endure, to have no longing, To know myself. Masters are they of peace, Of war, of tillage, and of eloquence, And travel o'er the sea. When I am bowed With sorrow, they restore me; when I meet With Fortune's favor, they restrain my pride, Reminding me that the days of life are fleeting.

This passage of tranquil bibliophilia is much less well known than most of Petrarch's more polemical remarks on the value of literature, but it is more revealing than many of them about the variety of benefits that come from reading: one learns about the natural world, about oneself, about history, about the transitoriness of life. And mixed in with these intellectual and spiritual rewards is the power of "jesting words" to relieve sadness. Some reading, it appears, is playful rather than serious, but it too has a useful function to perform, one that seems to be a sort of therapy, helping to deal with emotional letdown. This role is, of course, that assigned to pleasurable reading and conversation by the physicians studied in Chapter 2.

Since Petrarch tends to be aggressively serious in almost all his writing (we will later see his somewhat snobbish treatment of the *Decameron*), it is rare to find him so receptive to the merely amusing. What kinds of jests would a man who craved the laurel crown deign to praise? Certainly not frivolous and vulgar *favole*. Perhaps he is thinking of urbane *joca* he might have encountered in various classical works; perhaps, as another letter suggests, Roman comedy:

Recently I was reading some charming stories by Plautus for the sake of fleeing boredom and relaxing my mind (fugiendi fastidii et relaxandi animi gratia), and thereby for a short moment with the help of the ancient poet avoided the heavy

^{&#}x27;Epistolae metricae I, 6, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins, Petrarch at Vaucluse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 9-10.

cares of life. It is certainly astonishing how many pleasant stories and elegant pieces (nugas) I have found therein, and what trickery of servants, what old wives' tales, what flattery of harlots, what greed of panders, what voraciousness of parasites, what anxieties of old men, and what youthful loves. I am now less astonished at Terence for having achieved such great elegance following such a leader.²

Note how pleasure and profit mingle here. Petrarch's own *intentio* in reading is thoroughly recreational; something entertaining will both bring him relaxation, the necessary *quies* that will allow him to return to his "heavy cares" later, and keep him from boredom, that is, keep his mind occupied and thus not prey to the ennui that comes from idleness. But Plautus, he finds, has other virtues as well; he writes elegantly, and he portrays different types of characters and hence leads one to an understanding of life, a consequence implicit from the rest of the letter, where Petrarch cites a remark from Plautus's *Casina* that he finds applicable to his own problems with servants.

Petrarch's reading of Plautus seems to be a perfect illustration of what Boccaccio, in the great defense of poetry in the Genealogy of the Gods, suggests about the value of one kind of fiction. Boccaccio specifies four types of fabula: the first two correspond roughly to Macrobius's categories II.A and II.B (see Chap. 1, n. 18), where truth is veiled by either a totally or a partially fictitious surface; the third "is more like history than fiction"; the fourth "contains no truth at all, either superficial or hidden." The terminology here generally follows the allegorical tradition in separating a narrative from the truth it embodies. But Boccaccio's third kind of fiction, which includes Virgil and Homer, who have a "hidden meaning" beneath their historylike surfaces, also encompasses Plautus and Terence: "they intend naught other than the literal meaning of their lines. Yet by their art they portray varieties of human nature and conversation, incidentally (interim) teaching the reader

²Familiari V, 14, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, Rerum familiarium libri I-VIII (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 267. Text in Le familiari, ed. V. Rossi and U. Bosco, 4 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1933–42), II: 34–35.

and putting him on his guard."3 This is a deservedly wellknown passage in medieval literary criticism, and to explore all of its implications is beyond my purposes here. If we remember from Chapter 1 the easy relegation of Plautus and Terence to that category of fiction made causa delectandi, Boccaccio's assertion of their profitableness marks a major rise in their literary stock.4 Still, that "interim" is intriguing. Boccaccio does not seem to think that the moral intentions of even the best comedy are as great as those of the works that allegorically veil truth, and elsewhere he is quick to dismiss much comic poetry as unworthy of defense. Petrarch's comments on Plautus may verbalize some of what the Genealogy leaves unsaid: that although Roman comedy shrewdly examines human nature and is thus relevant ad mores, its principal usefulness is as a source of relaxation and enjoyment. At the end of this book we will see another early humanist, Laurent de Premierfait, take the same view of Roman comedy and use it to explain the nature of the Decameron.

Although the *Genealogy* does not mention *delectatio* here, it is not at all disdainful toward the recreative powers of literature. After defining the four types of fiction and showing that the three worthwhile types all appear in the Bible, Boccaccio goes on to defend literature's efficacy. It has been used in "quelling minds aroused to a mad rage."

By fiction, too, the strengths and spirits of great men worn out in the strain of serious crises, have been restored. This appears, not by ancient instance alone, but constantly. One knows of princes who have been deeply engaged in important matters, but after the noble and happy disposal of their affairs of state, obey, as it were, the warning of nature, and

³Genealogia XIV, 9, trans. Charles G. Osgood, Boccaccio on Poetry (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), pp. 48–49; for more on the third kind, see p. 63. Text in Genealogie deorum gentilium libri, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Bari: G. Laterza, 1951), II: 707.

⁴Terence, however, had been valued throughout the Middle Ages for his observations on human nature, though they were often abstracted from the plays. See Curtius, p. 437; Paul Theiner, "The Medieval Terence," in *The Learned and the Lewed*, ed. Larry D. Benson, Harvard English Studies 5 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 231–47; and, for earlier opinions similar to Boccaccio's, Suchomski, pp. 85–89. Plautus was respected in some twelfth-century circles; see Woolf, pp. 26, 28.

revive their spent forces by calling about them such men as will renew their weary minds with diverting stories and conversation (qui iocosis confabulationibus recreent animos fatigatos). Fiction has, in some cases, sufficed to lift the oppressive weight of adversity and furnish consolation, as appears in Lucius Apuleius; he tells how the highborn maiden Charis, while bewailing her unhappy condition as captive among thieves, was in some degree restored through hearing from an old woman the charming story of Psyche. [Osgood, pp. 50–51]

Fiction also makes the mind "slipping into inactivity" become "more vigorous," and to prove it Boccaccio tells the story of the learned King Robert of Sicily, a reluctant student until Aesop's fables "lured" him into diligent study.

This last example is clearly based on the didactic theory of the fictional surface as sugarcoating. The other arguments are based on principles explained in chapters 2 and 3. Boccaccio fully proclaims literature's restorative power: it improves both physical and mental condition. And these effects, it would seem, are not restricted to any one kind of fiction; certainly the "diverting stories and conversation," like the conversations discussed in the Tacuinum sanitatis, involve a variety of forms of discourse. Boccaccio earlier in the chapter had associated fabula with confabulatio in an effort to give fiction making the same naturalness and usefulness as ordinary human speech, and here he associates them again. Whatever sort it may be, whether it veils truth or not, fiction, like conversation, brings recreation and health to its audience. In the Genealogy as a whole Boccaccio spends much more time on its didactic import, but in this passage at least he reminds us that there is more to its usefulness than instruction alone. Francesco Tateo has argued that Boccaccio's emphasis on the natural need for refreshment gives a value to fiction it does not have in scholastic explanations that stress recreation as mere time out from seriousness.⁵ I do not think he aggrandizes the recreative value of fiction beyond what we have seen in some philosophical and medical testimony and what we will see in other literary justifications; but it is true that in choos-

⁵"Poesia e favola nella poetica del Boccaccio," *Filologia romanza*, 5 (1958), 330-32.

ing to assert the hygienic and psychological functions of *delectatio* in the midst of a discussion of the major values of literature, Boccaccio gives a greater dignity to these benefits than they usually had in earlier humanistic literary thinking.

Turning from theory to practice, we can find similar claims in various works of literature. Kyng Alisaunder, a Middle English romance of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, translated from the French, begins with a number of lines about the "Bysynesse, care and sorou3" that beset people every day, whether through sickness, poverty, or other adversity. Nobody can avoid "ennoy3e/ Jn many cas" while alive.

Ac is bere non, fole ne wys, Kyng, ne duk, ne kni3th of prys, Pat ne desireb sum solas Forto here of selcoube cas; For Caton seib, the gode techer, Obere mannes lijf is oure shewer.

Some people, though, prefer "ribaudye" to a story of God or Mary, or would rather drink ale than hear a "gode tale." The "noble geste" of Alexander is not for those whose "wille" lies "in be gut and in be barel." It is the story of a conqueror who triumphed throughout the Orient, and its presentation of the "wondres of worme and beest" will be "deliciouse" to hear.6 One can see the concepts of pleasure and profit behind these arguments: the presentation of unusual material serves an educational function, one commended by the Disticha Catonis, while at the same time providing the pleasure of wondering at exotic animals. Both effects produce "solas," and what is most striking about this introduction is not its statement of literary intentions nor its rejection of cruder entertainments but the recreational context in which it locates itself. The daily grind of life wears one down; everybody needs refreshment, and that is what Kyng Alisaunder will provide.

More famous, and more distinctively therapeutic in its claims, is the thirteenth-century Aucassin et Nicolette. Calling itself a

⁶Ed. G. V. Smithers, 2 vols., EETS 6.s. 227, 237 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952, 1957), I: 3–5; see Smithers's notes, II: 65, for parallels to the contrast between bad and worthwhile stories.

chantefable, for it is told in a combination of prose narrative and verse meant to be sung (the music survives in the sole manuscript), it is a charming story of young love finally winning out over a variety of obstacles. At the same time, as most recent criticism has stressed, it is a sophisticated parody of a great many conventions of courtly romance. Its introduction asserts no profound treatment of love or fortune but does argue that this entertaining composition ("bons vers... del deport"), which recounts Aucassin's pains and prowess in the course of his love for Nicolette, has merit.

Nus hom n'est si esbahis, tant dolans ni entrepris, de grant mal amaladis, se il l'oit, ne soit garis et de joie resbaudis, tant par est douce.⁷

There is no one so perplexed, so grief-stricken, miserable, or beset with illness, who upon hearing it will not be improved in health and cheered up through joy—it is that pleasant.

An altogether remarkable assertion. Doubtless it, like much else in the fiction, is not to be taken with full seriousness. Yet in light of the medical backgrounds we have explored, the claims are certainly not nonsensical; the pleasures of literary enjoyment produce *gaudium*, which helps restore physical and psychological well-being, both of which are explicitly mentioned in the passage. *Aucassin et Nicolette*, a blend of song and story, laced with adventure and comedy, begins with the hero grieving (VII, 2) and ends with both hero and heroine happy as they had never been before (XLI, 4, 10); the comic movement from unhappiness to delight and joy (XLI, 21–22) embodies in narrative form the change from grief to "joie" promised to the audience.

There is, in fact, a minor medical theme throughout the work. Aucassin's frustrated love is a malady, Nicolette the medicine which can make him cured, "garis" (XVIII, 30-31;

 $^{^7\}mathrm{I},\ 10{-}15,\ \mathrm{ed}.$ Mario Roques, 2d ed., CFMA (rpt. Paris: Champion, 1965), p. 1.

XX, 16-17; XXII, 36-37). At one point the author humorously turns the metaphor into reality by having Nicolette put Aucassin's shoulder back in socket (XXVI).8 The beloved as physician is a familiar image in medieval love literature, parallel to, but not necessarily meant as a moral parody of, biblical and patristic imagery of Christ as physician; one might not make so much of it were it not for the comic twist, the claims at the beginning that the work will make its audience "garis," and its attention elsewhere to relationships between psyche and soma. In one episode, Nicolette, needing to escape after secretly visiting Aucassin in prison, has to slide down the rocky wall of a moat, bruising and bloodying her hands and feet; yet because of her "great fear" she feels neither "pain nor grief" (XVI, 18-19). Later, as Aucassin rides through heavy woods to find his beloved, the sharp underbrush bloodies him, "but he thought so much about Nicolette, his sweet love, that he felt neither pain nor grief" (XXIV, 7-8). And when he finds her, though his shoulder is injured, he feels neither "pain nor grief" because they are now together (XXVI, 8). The extreme emotions of fear and love make the protagonists forget their physical injuries and suffering. This perfectly valid psychosomatic observation, though its formulaic repetition is probably humorous considering the work's other parodic exaggerations, invites us to reflect on Aucassin et Nicolette's first assertion of the power of emotion, the therapeutic value of the "joie" brought to an audience by this delightful chantefable. It too, apparently, can abolish physical and mental distress. One suspects that the author's prefatory claims are deliberately overstated, part of the urbane playfulness and parody that permeate the whole work; but even if they are, such wit would have had point only if the audience of Aucassin et Nicolette was familiar with therapeutic claims on behalf of literary entertainment.

Fabliau and Court Lyric

Let us turn from individual works to genres, and first to that most notorious of medieval types, the fabliau. To what

⁸Eugene Vance, "The Word at Heart: Aucassin et Nicolette as a Medieval Comedy of Language," Yale French Studies, 45 (1970), 49, notes this detail as an example of the author's "downgrading" of courtly conventions.

end were the fabliaux created? "Let us examine the prologues of the fabliaux. They speak with a single voice: a fabliau is nothing but an amusing trifle." Thus Joseph Bédier summarized fabliau purposes, in line with his still standard definition of the genre as versified tales for amusement ("contes à rire en vers"). The fabliaux in fact do not respond with the unanimity he suggests, for some claim moral purposes and most have little or nothing to say about their intentions. But a number do, in one way or another, point up their power to entertain, and in so doing ally themselves with the theories of delight we have examined.

The simple introduction to one fabliau makes a typical case:

Raconter vueil une aventure Par joie et par envoiseure; Ele n'est pas vilaine à dire, Mais moz por la gent faire rire.10

I want to tell a story for the sake of joy and pleasure. It is not shameful to tell but meant to make people laugh.

The tale produces laughter, which promotes joy, and we know the values of gaudium. The third line is coy, since the story involves an extended metaphor for sex; the introduction fends off questions of propriety by stressing the work's intentio of amusement. In addition to others claiming to delight or to make people laugh (e.g. II: 24; V: 157), some fabliaux imply this purpose in their conclusions by bringing on personages of high social rank who function as judges of the tales' actions; their responses are usually laughter and appreciation of the wit of the trick that has been recounted (e.g. III: 174, 206-7; V: 64; cf. the conclusion of Chaucer's Summoner's Tale). It is fair to

⁹Les fabliaux, 6th ed. (Paris: Champion, 1964), pp. 309, 30. Similarly, a much more recent work argues that the nature of fabliau humor is essentially that of the joke; see Thomas D. Cooke, The Old French and Chaucerian Fabliaux: A Study of their Comic Climax (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), pp. 137-69. Many of the quotations in the next few paragraphs appear in Bédier's discussion of fabliau intentions, but he does not consider their theoretical implications.

¹⁰Recueil général et complet des fabliaux, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, 6 vols. (Paris: Librarie des Bibliophiles, 1872-90), IV: 199. Subsequent references to this collection in the text will cite volume and page numbers.

infer that such delight and laughter would contribute to one's cheerfulness, and also to infer from another fabliau's concern not to bore (III: 46) that its end is the opposite of ennui, the passing of time in an entertaining way.

A few tales claim not only to delight but also to refresh. The author of Des trois avugles de compiegne states the case briefly: "Fablel sont bon à escouter: / Maint duel, maint mal font mesconter / Et maint anui et maint meffet" (I: 70), (Fabliaux are worth hearing: they make one overlook much grief, sickness, anxiety, and injury.) Another tale associates its capacity to cause laughter with a lessening of anger, anxiety, and irritability, concluding that "quant aucuns dit les risées, / Les forts tançons sont obliées."11 In other words, a good humorous story functions to regulate destructive emotions. These claims to beguile troubles may seem superficial and escapist, but that is probably because we have institutionalized forms of verbal therapy that deal much more directly and thoroughly with personal feelings. For the Middle Ages, I suspect, claims to lead people away from emotional problems are assertions of therapy rather than detours around it, as the evidence of the consilia in chapter 2 suggests.

One of the longest proclamations of fabliau virtues occurs at the beginning of *Du chevalier qui fit les cons parler:*

Now fabliaux have grown so many, they've pocketed a pretty penny, those by whom they're told and done, because they bring a lot of fun where carefree, idle people gather, as long as folks aren't there to blather; even grouches never fail, on hearing read a clever tale, to feel immediate relief and put aside the care and grief and woes from which they agonize.¹²

¹²Trans. Robert Harrison, *Gallic Salt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 219; text p. 218. Cf. *Recueil*, VI: 68.

¹¹II: 114, but see the better reading of line 2 in R. C. Johnston and D. D. R. Owen, eds., *Fabliaux* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 44 and n. p. 97. Trans. Cooke, p. 106.

This argument combines elements of the hygienic and recreational justifications. Its latter lines echo the fabliau assertions just discussed of providing emotional therapy. The earlier portion seems to rely more on recreational ideas: storytelling brings "confortement" to the "oiseus," solace to the idle, but only as long as the audience does not become "noiseus," troublesome. Fabliaux meet the need for recreational activity or engagement in opposition to sloth, and the warning against excessive unruliness puts the entertainment, at least ostensibly, in the category of honest as opposed to dishonest play. The preface to a shorter version of *Du chevalier* which appears in MS Harley 2253 invokes the recreational justification more directly: stories produce "solas," and solace produces "releggement," mental relaxation and repose (VI: 198).

Nowhere, perhaps, is the relationship between theory and practice more open to questions of motive than in the case of the fabliaux. Clearly these fictions invoke recreational and therapeutic ideas to justify themselves. In light of the traditions we have discussed, their claims to alleviate mental or physical discomforts cannot be automatically shrugged off as desperate, far-fetched efforts at respectability. On the other hand, a great many fabliaux are just dirty stories, and Du chevalier is among the most outrageously vulgar of the group. Are not its claims to provide "confortement" or "solas" more than a little disingenuous, like the appeals of pornographers to First Amendment rights? At what point does an argument become an excuse? We have seen this problem implicitly acknowledged by theorists, in such places as Aquinas's careful delimitation of acceptable, decent recreation; one can probably assume that he did not have telling Du chevalier in mind as an example of eutrapelia. Yet it seems to me fruitless to try to draw hard-and-fast distinctions between types of literature which make valid claims to recreate and types which use recreational ideas more or less cynically. "Acceptability" in any given case must have been dependent on a variety of factors, few of which we can locate with precision in regard to any given text. If certain quarters would have regarded Du chevalier as obscene and offensive, scurrilitas of the worst sort, others must have found it good entertainment, for it is one of the most popular fabliaux in terms of manuscript survival, and its appearance in Harley 2253 suggests an audience for it that can hardly be called churlish in all its tastes. Ever since Per Nykrog challenged Bédier's thesis about the bourgeois basis of the fabliaux, and responses to Nykrog challenged his exclusively aristocratic thesis, careful consideration of fabliau texts has pointed to a wide social spectrum of audiences. A similar variety of taste in regard to fabliau comedy must have existed as well, certainly not determined by social status alone. There is substantial evidence that some medieval people, at least, enjoyed frivolous and even obscene stories as well as more serious fiction, and given this range of toleration (and the purposes of this book) it is probably wisest simply to note where the recreational arguments appear rather than to attempt to sort out the motives that might lie behind them.

The status of the fabliau in relation to more earnest composition emerges as an aspect of some later prefaces. Although the genre is principally a thirteenth-century one, Bédier discusses a trio of early fourteenth-century trouvères, writers primarily of allegorical and didactic poems, who on occasion return to it. ¹⁴ It is instructive to see how they talk about their fabliaux in light of their other, less purely entertaining, work. The evidence in Jacques de Baisieux is minimal. Of his five surviving poems, one, *Li dis de le vescie a prestre*, is a fabliau, best known as the only full-scale analogue to Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*. At the end the author says that he translated it from Flemish into French "because of the trick, which he liked (Por la trufe, qu'il a amee)" (Thomas, p. 112). "Trufe" may refer specifically to the trick performed in the tale, but as the term is used by the two other trouvères it tends to acquire generic force, to denote

¹³Fundamental here is Jean Rychner, Contribution à l'étude des fabliaux, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1960). See also his "Les fabliaux: Genre, styles, publics," in La littérature narrative d'imagination, Colloque de Strasbourg, 23–25 avril 1959 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), pp. 41–52, in which Rychner suggests, among other things, that the fabliau genre might be defined more properly on the basis of its social role than on the basis of purely formal criteria. Such an approach is consistent with medieval habits we have seen elsewhere of classifying works by pragmatic function rather than by structural or generic principles.

¹⁴Pp. 418-26. The work of Watriquet de Couvin and Jean de Condé can be dated with certainty between 1310-40. Making Jacques de Baisieux their contemporary is highly conjectural, as Bédier admits and as Jacques's most recent editor stresses; see Patrick A. Thomas, ed., L'oeuvre de Jacques de Baisieux (The

Hague: Mouton, 1973), pp. 24, 45-47.

the narrative which relates the trick. To the extent that one can work from such a brief reference, the word suggests that Jacques perceives his tale as a trifling but entertaining narrative, not the more substantial subject matter he seeks elsewhere for his elegant compositions ("biaz dis") (pp. 72, 94).

Watriquet de Couvin is more expansive in discussing his fabliau, Des trois chanoinesses de Couloigne. At the beginning he notes that people who tell "aucunes truffes" find their work as well received as do those who write "uns sarmons." So he will tell "a little madcap tale, provided that everyone will laugh at it if they find it well told (.i. poi du reverie / Par covent que chascuns en rie / S'il i a mot qui bien le vaille)." His conclusion confirms this purpose: "These are jests (risées) to entertain (esbatre) kings, princes, and counts." There are as well "risées" within the story, first when Watriquet recites some to amuse the three canonesses, who have explained to him that "we don't want anything noble, just something that can make us laugh," and later when the women themselves, urged by one to tell jokes and jests ("gogues et risées"), produce a series of wishes so offensive that someone censored them out of the sole surviving manuscript.15 The narrative gives us layers of levity. The stories within the frame amuse the women, and Watriquet recites the entire "aventure" to amuse the court. Much of his poem's humor depends on the canonesses' shameless ribaldry, but whatever one may think of their taste in entertainment, the logic of the fabliau as a whole, presented to a secular audience, is unexceptionable: jests produce laughter, and laughter produces a state of amusement—"esbatre" appears in a French translation of the Disticha and probably carries with it here implications of the full recreational argument.¹⁶ Watriquet's other fabliau, Des trois dames de Paris, lacks such extensive selfanalysis but suggests its status obliquely at the start by claiming to be a true but unusual "aventure" and clearly at the end by

¹⁵Dits de Watriquet de Couvin, ed. Auguste Scheler (Brussels: Victor Devaux, 1868), pp. 373-74, 379, 377-78. References to Watriquet will be to page numbers of this edition. For more on Des trois chanoinesses and structurally similar tales, see Roy J. Pearcy, "The Genre of William Dunbar's Tretis of the Tua Marit Wemen and the Wedo," Speculum, 55 (1980), 58-74.

Wemen and the Wedo," Speculum, 55 (1980), 58-74.

16"Entremet toy de jouer et d'esbatre / Aucunes foiz pour tes cures abatre, / Si que puisses mieulx porter en courage / De cest monde le labour et l'orage."

Ed. J. Ulrich, Romanische Forschungen, 15 (1904), 91-92.

referring to its action, like that of *Des trois chanoinesses*, as "reverie" (pp. 381, 390).

But the simple division between "truffes" and "sarmons" is not the whole story. Watriquet's tone at the end of Des trois chanoinesses is somewhat defensive, I think, and his poetics in general not very tolerant of the merely amusing. In prefatory remarks to the Dis de la cygoigne he notes that many people are entertained ("esbaudiz") and take pleasure in hearing good compositions, but they do not profit from them if they do not assimilate deeper meanings. Such people, who gather more pleasure "from a fatras or a trifle" than from worthwhile stories, come to disregard virtue and turn to vice.¹⁷ As Bédier and others have shown, Watriquet and his contemporaries draw a firm distinction between the edifying material proffered by good minstrels and the disreputable amusements produced by bad ones; the minstrel who has become a dignified court maker looks down on vagrant entertainers. Watriquet sincerely wants to edify, though that desire need not exclude elements of professional rivalry and aggrandizement in his posture as well. Throughout his work he prefers "sarmons" to "truffes"; yet he wrote two fabliaux, and in spite of the disparaging allusion to "fastras" he is the only fourteenth-century author whose verses in the genre of the fatras have survived. According to the manuscript rubric, he recited them (obscenities and all, apparently) before King Philip of France. 18 It is not difficult to construct a critical theory for Watriquet which accommodates his professions as well as his practice: although it is wrong to be merely "esbaudiz" by material meant to instruct, and to prefer "risées" to more substantial literature, amusement is proper on those limited occasions when a work's only intent is to entertain its audience. But he was probably never quite so categorical about it, and the evidence suggests a kind of "situation poetics," the court maker pulled in varying directions by his own convictions and interests and by audience demands, trying to accommodate them all.

¹⁷Pp. 283–84. The passage is partially quoted and discussed in *Preface to Chaucer*, p. 61. Cf. Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 108–10.

¹⁸Lambert C. Porter, La fatrasie et le fatras: Essai sur la péssie irrationnelle en France au Moyen Age (Geneva: Droz, 1960), pp. 72-73, 97; text pp. 145-59 and in Scheler, pp. 295-309. Although the fatras form was later used for pious subjects, both it and the fatrasie seem to have originated as virtuoso amusements.

Jean de Condé, a minstrel at the court of Count William II of Hainault, whose daughter Philippa became Queen of England when she married Edward III, offers additional evidence of the tendency to separate trivial from serious writing, even though, like the others, he never uses the term "fabliau" to characterize his tales in that tradition. At the beginning of one story he distinguishes between jesting and serious literature, "truffe" and "auctorité," offering the former this time since some people prefer it. 19 The introduction to Li dis dou plicon also rings with terminology like Watriquet's: "There are many people who take more pleasure in hearing jests (risées) and clever japes than they do in sermons (siermons), so I have often been urged to put jests into rhyme; and therefore I want to set about rhyming a true incident" (II: 127). A third fabliau, Des braies le priestre, mentions its literary status only in passing: Jean offers a new story about a lecherous priest to add to the "maint lait reviel" (II: 121), the many off-color pleasantries, already told on the subject. In all these fabliaux, neither Jean nor Watriquet makes explicit reference to theories of refreshment, and their remarks about furnishing what their court audiences demand are usually taken to indicate disdain for the merely entertaining. But it is possible that the allusions to people's preferences for entertainment over edification constitute a somewhat more objective recognition of simple psychological and social facts. A nobleman might legitimately seek "risées" in order to recreate himself, and a court maker functioning as *confabulator* would appropriately supply such material.

There is, if we look further, certainly no disapproval of entertainment per se in another of Jean's poems, *Le sentier batu*. Though always classified as one of his fabliaux, it is not so much a story as a recounting of an exchange of witticisms. The context is a game known as "The King Who Does Not Lie," a social pastime related to the tradition of the *demandes amoureuses*. In this instance a woman has been chosen Queen. She

¹⁹Dits et contes de Baudouin de Condé et de son fils Jean de Condé, ed. Auguste Scheler, 3 vols. (Brussels: Victor Devaux, 1866–67), III: 197. All references to Jean's works are to volume and page numbers of this edition, though his fabliaux, like Watriquet's and Jacques's, also appear in the Recueil général. There is a thorough study of Jean's work by Jacques Ribard, Un Ménestrel du XIVe siècle: Jean de Condé (Geneva: Droz, 1969).

asks a question of each of her companions, they answer, and she responds to their answers. Then all the other players have a chance to put a question to her and comment on what she has said. In the episode told by Jean, the Queen's question and response to one participant, a knight she had once refused to marry, cast aspersions on his sexual prowess; in the second round, he takes revenge with a question and remark implying her promiscuity. Jean tells the story, he says, to show that "it is not wise to make fun of others or to say things that grieve people or make them ashamed.... Nor is it good to make earnest of game." At the end he repeats his warning against "voir gas," earnest game, play that is too close to a painful truth. The tale is interesting principally for its close connection with a society pastime that can be documented elsewhere; it suggests how easily conversational play can turn into literary narrative.20 And as well, it reveals the special status of gab: jesting, a legitimate facet of secular life, becomes dangerous when it is misused in the attempt to cause "anui" rather than to relieve it. Game ought not be earnest. Le sentier batu is in one sense an exemplum based on the distinction in Nicomachean Ethics IV, 8, between proper amusement and improper jest, which turns play into insult. It is also, implicitly, an illustration of the social circumstances that justify Jean's own forms of gab, the "truffe," "risées," and "reviel" that are his fabliaux.

These social circumstances emerge through argument rather than dramatization in *Li dis des Jacobins et des Fremeneurs*, a defense of some kinds of minstrelsy against the attacks of friars and, by way of reciprocation, an assault on the corrupt state of

²⁰III: 299–303. Trans. Robert Hellman and Richard O'Gorman, Fabliaux: Ribald Tales from the Old French (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965), pp. 23–26. Text and verse translation in Harrison, pp. 138–47. For background on the game, see Elizabeth Daverman, "New Finds on the Courtly Game, Le jeu du Roi qui ne ment," a paper presented at the Fourteenth International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, May 4, 1979. Another court pastime with literary manifestations, the cult of the flower and the leaf, seems also to have been intended essentially as recreative entertainment, at least in the eyes of Charles d'Orléans. His two ballades on the subject note that while with a "compaignie" on the first of May he participated in the game; he remains detached from it, preoccupied with the death of his lady, but he recognizes that it exists "to alleviate melancholy" and "for entertainment (pour esbat)." George L. Marsh, "The Sources and Analogues of 'The Flower and the Leaf,' "Modern Philology, 4 (1906–7), 131–33.

the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Jean begins by adducing examples to show that, contrary to the clerical charge, minstrelsy is not in league with the devil. His first instance is David's harping before Saul, which is able to "conforter" the king (1 Kings 16: 14-23). After other religious evidence he turns to the demands of secular court life. It is right for "cheavaliers" to have abundant pleasure ("envoisement") because their role demands upholding the ecclesiastical and the secular order, which involves fighting against any opponents of either church or state. Hence they must be physically and mentally at their peak; think what would happen, says Jean, if they became depressed. Accordingly, they should frequent the court, mix with other people, "bring themselves great joy and solace (Mener grant joie et grant soulas)"—of course, it must be "joie houneste." Listening to minstrels is a means of attaining this necessary gaudium temperatum: "It is appropriate that refreshment take the form of joy through minstrelsy (Or couvient il que resbaudie / Soit joie par menestraudie)." Jean goes on to discuss the psychological changes, from worry to cheerfulness ("D'anui à joie"), that minstrelsy prompts (III: 249-53; cf. Ribard, p. 149). Later in the poem, after attacking the friars, he returns to the defense, noting that he himself is a minstrel and that his work reproves vice and inculcates virtue. The work of good minstrels ought not be confused with that of "enchanteurs" and other less worthy entertainers (III: 257-59). Although Jean maintains, as he usually does elsewhere, that his goals are both pleasure and profit, the explanation of the nobility's need for recreational joie may be applied to anything that provides legitimate play, including the fabliaux and court games that bring enjoyment to knights and ladies. Jean's commendation of good minstrelsy for its restorative powers offers a thorough theoretical justification for his and his fellow trouvères' fabliau entertainments.

Later in the fourteenth century another, much greater, writer turned also to the tradition. Chaucer's fabliaux are so much richer than what survives in Old French that many critics see them as transcending rather than extending the genre.²¹ But

²¹For a recent overview, see Beryl Rowland, "What Chaucer Did to the Fabliau," *Studia Neophilologica*, 51 (1979), 205–13.

for all their artistic sophistication, they represent a literary intention which he identifies as different from that of his more serious work. Chaucer's thinking is based more or less on the broad Horatian formula, which appears in varied terminology throughout his work. In the Parlement of Foules the narrator reads books for "lust" and "lore" (15); at the beginning of the Canterbury Tales Harry Bailly proposes to reward the pilgrim who tells "tales of best sentence and moost solaas" (A 798); later he asks Chaucer for a story that will offer either "som murthe or som doctryne" and warns the Monk that "sentence" without "desport ne game" will not appeal to an audience (B2 2125, 3979-92). The end of the Nun's Priest's Tale, whatever Chaucer's purpose in raising the theoretical issue, offers a standard allegorical version of delectare and prodesse, in which the literal level of the fable becomes "chaf" and the "moralite" the profitable "fruyt" (B² 4628-33). It is with this conceptual habit in mind that we must read the last line of the apology before the Miller's Tale, where, after a series of witty gambits that call attention to the forthcoming "harlotrie" without really offering a satisfactory defense of it, Chaucer advises that "men shal nat maken ernest of game" (A 3186). This line needs to be taken in light of the tradition of literature seeking to please rather than to profit; "ernest" and "game" are another Middle English equivalent of the Horatian polarity, translating the two different goals of fiction into the distinction between frivolous and serious matter, a tendency we have seen throughout the Middle Ages.22 Chaucer here affirms that the tales of the Miller and the Reeve, and by implication other similar "harlotrie," are more playful than the rest of the Canterbury Tales, meant essentially to delight rather than to give moral instruction.

Of course, things are seldom simple in the Canterbury Tales. Although in one sense Chaucer belongs to a tradition of court makers, his learning and genius are such that we are reluctant to accept at face value the easy dichotomy of pleasure and profit which he establishes to explain his fabliaux just as Watriquet de Couvin and Jean de Condé did to explain theirs. The apology occurs in a dramatic context. Might not this be the

²²Cf. Gower, *Confessio amantis*, VII, 3109; elsewhere, of course, Chaucer uses the terms "ernest" and "game" without literary implication.

pilgrim rather than the poet speaking? Might not A 3186 be just another ploy, one designed to alert us to precisely the opposite kind of reading? Can we really accept the Miller's Tale, brilliant work of art that it is, as a mere "game"? To deal with the first two questions is beyond the scope of this book, since they involve detailed consideration of some of the most complex aspects of Chaucer's art. We can say, however, from the standpoint of medieval literary thought, that a straightforward reading of A 3186 is certainly possible, for the line makes perfect sense as an expression of a substantial tradition acknowledging and valuing literature for pleasure rather than profit. If court makers with as much pretension to seriousness as Watriquet and Jean could write more trivial verse, there is no reason to assume Chaucer could not as well. To the third question I would say only that an exceptionally general theoretical distinction about literary purpose is not the same thing as a sympathetic understanding of the intricacies of a literary work. There is much in the Miller's Tale of great artistry in plotting and characterization, much of religious resonance. In that sense it is certainly not a trifle. Yet I believe that Chaucer ultimately would have thought of it and his other fabliaux as less serious, less worthy of being held in the mind, than the Knight's Tale or the Clerk's Tale. It is much like the distinction Graham Greene made at one time between his "entertainments" and his "novels," a distinction based on intent at a very basic level. There is no reason why we might not find an author's "game" or "entertainment" more satisfying artistically, perhaps even wiser morally, than some of his more explicitly serious work. The Horatian polarity has nothing to do with aesthetic quality, nor with human insight. For these matters we need different criteria, and although one can find them in other medieval and modern literary thought, they are simply not the criteria Chaucer chooses to invoke in regard to his fabliaux. He remains medievally pragmatic in explaining only their most apparent utilitas, their provision of the "game," the delectatio, that brings solace and joy to an audience. And it is not difficult to imagine why: presenting the "cherles termes" (A 3017) and vulgar action of the fabliaux to an audience that knew him as the author of the Book of the Duchess and the Troilus, Chaucer would naturally seek to locate such tales in a

context that his listeners or readers could readily accept and appreciate.

Turning from the coarseness of the fabliau to the grace and decorousness of the late medieval court lyric involves major changes in form and sensibility but not, as it turns out, in the perception of the genre's usefulness. Since I have written about the poetics of the fixed form lyrics at some length elsewhere, I present here only a very brief look at the most pertinent evidence and refer the reader to three related articles for fuller documentation and discussion.²³

From the perspective of literary theory the key text in understanding the myriad of late medieval ballades, roundels, and virelays is Deschamps's *Art de dictier*, dated 1392, a manual for would-be versifiers describing the formal properties of the lyric types in vogue. All such compositions, according to Deschamps, belong to the category of music, even if they are recited rather than sung. And music occupies a special place within the liberal arts:

[It is] like the medicine of the seven arts. For when the energy and spirit of men intent on the other arts named above become wearied and tired of their labors, music—through the sweetness of its art and the melody of its voice—sings to them . . . so that through its delightful melody the hearts and spiritus of those who have become overworked, sluggish, and tired through thinking, imagination, and bodily labor directed toward the other arts are medicined and refreshed and better able subsequently to study and work at the other six arts previously mentioned.²⁴

²³"Deschamps' Art de dictier and Chaucer's Literary Environment," Speculum, 48 (1973), 714–23; "Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer," Comparative Literature, 31 (1979), 272–90; and "Toward a Poetics of the Late Medieval Court Lyric," in Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages, ed. Lois Ebin (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984).

²⁴"Musique est la derreniere science ainsis comme la medicine des .VII. ars; car quant le couraige et l'esperit des creatures ententives aux autres ars dessus declairez sont lassez at ennuyez de leurs labours, musique, par la douçour de sa science et la melodie de sa voix, leur chante . . . tant que par sa melodie delectable les cuers et esperis de ceuls qui auxdiz ars, par pensée, ymaginaison et labours de bras estoient traveilliez, pesans et ennuiez, sont medicinez et recreez, et plus habiles après a estudier et labourer aux autres .VI. ars dessus nommez." Oeuvres complètes, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and Gaston Raynaud, 11 vols., SATF (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1878–1903), VII: 269.

I do not know of any precisely similar categorization of music. Instead of treating it as part of the quadrivium, Deschamps gives it separate status among the liberal arts, in a way reminiscent of St. Bonaventure's separation of mechanical arts into six which aim at *commodum* and one, theatrics, at *solatium*. Whatever prompted this approach, it is clearly based on recreational principles. Serious mental or physical labor leaves people weakened; delight produces rest and refreshment; and with refreshment comes renewed diligence. It is reasonable to give "esperis" a precise scientific meaning, since the passage as a whole relies on a medical analogy and hence invites recollection of the exact hygienic benefits of being delighted. Twenty years earlier Nicole Oresme had given instrumental music the same recreational value, and the relationship between music and medicine was a familiar idea throughout the Middle Ages.²⁵

Similar views of music, as an element of lyric poetry, occur in Machaut, in the fourteenth-century Provençal treatise, the Leys d'amors, and in other French testimony from the period. ²⁶ It is possible, as Douglas Kelly argues, to separate music and words as independent aspects of the fixed form lyrics and to find different functions for each, music affording emotional pleasure, language artistic and moral satisfactions. But in the Art de dictier, at least, Deschamps stresses the musical values of pleasure and solace as the fundamental result of lyric composition, whether sung or spoken. Pleasure is therapeutic, and it is no accident that Deschamps later cites, as an example of instances where recited verses are preferable to ones sung, the case of a person reading "a book of these pleasing compositions to someone who is ill" (VII: 272). Music would be too loud; the spoken lyric can by itself, apparently, help ease a sick person's misery.

Deschamps's view of lyric as natural music involves the logical fusion of hygienic and recreational ideas. The power of music (taken broadly to include the aural and rhythmic pleasures of spoken verse) to repair mind and body is the medical fact that justifies the ethical inclusion of refreshment as a legitimate ac-

²⁵See Chapter 3, n. 16; Chap. 2, n. 28. For Renaissance texts on music as therapy, see Gretchen Ludke Finney, "Music, Mirth, and Galenic Tradition in England," in *Reason and the Imagination*, ed. J. A. Mazzeo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 143–54, a reference I owe to Glenda Pritchett. ²⁶"Deschamps' *Art de dictier*," 718–21; Kelly, pp. 239–56.

tivity within the framework of liberal pursuits. Hence lyric performance becomes, in theory as well as practice, a type of social entertainment; and abundant evidence, some of which appears elsewhere in this book, testifies to the late medieval perception of fixed form verse in this way. Occasionally, as in a chapter of the biography of Marshal Boucicaut, the full recreational argument appears in order to justify such literary pleasures. The author, describing Boucicaut's hatred of idleness and his constant labor at good works, notes that a life without any recreation through entertainment ("aucune recreation de quelque esbatement") is dangerous to one's health. He explains the mental and physical problems that result "when the imagination becomes strained by many things piling up one after the other." Today we call it stress. Because of his concern for Boucicaut's well-being, the biographer devotes the rest of the chapter to an explanation of the value of recreation, retelling the bent bow story to show that it is not at all displeasing to God to "recreate and refresh" the body. Moreover, he mentions some examples of entertainment which reinvigorate one's spirit: listening to songs, playing musical instruments, hearing "merry talk that is neither offensive nor indecent, or something that is humorous (paroles joyeuses sans peché, ne vice, ou quelque chose qui face rire)."27 He is enumerating typical courtly entertainments, doubtless thinking of the fixed form lyrics among them. He invokes the re-creative pleasures of lyric as Deschamps defines them for a very practical hygienic end, the continued health of a man he admires.

Hostile Witnesses

All the literary claims discussed thus far view the recreational and therapeutic values of pleasure positively. But there are some instances in which these values, without others, are made to appear as rather trivial ones. The late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman life of St. Edmund by Denis Piramus opens with a fascinating prologue that suggests the competition for court attention between secular entertainment and more

²⁷Le livre des faicts du bon messire Jean le Maingre, dit Boucicaut, ed. C. B. Petitot, 2 vols., Collection complète des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France, 6-7 (Paris, 1819), II: 214-18.

overtly pious narrative. The author begins with ostensible autobiography, though his pose is part of a literary tradition. He has lived much of his life foolishly, serving the court with songs and rhymes; as old age approaches he will jest no more and will turn to a better kind of work. But before we discover what that work is, he discusses audience response to some literature different from his, the romance Partonopeus de Blois and the lays of Marie de France. These compositions are patently untrue in content, though artfully composed, and court audiences love them. Women hear the lays "de joie." The nobility enjoy delightful stories "because they remove and discard sadness, tedium, and weariness of heart, and they make people forget their anger and banish troublesome thoughts." Denis knows that his audience likes such pleasure ("deduit"), so he offers a "deduit" that is more worthwhile than exotic romance, for it is not only "delightful to hear" but leads to the salvation of one's soul. It is the true story of the life and miracles of St. Edmund, offering a good example to noblemen, and decent people ought to want to hear such stories and hold them in their memories.28

A similar prologue, but without the autobiographical opening, occurs in the early fourteenth-century Roman du Comte d'Anjou, the story of a woman who endures a variety of misfortunes with steadfast faith, intended as an "examplaire" to lead people to persevere in good behavior. The poem begins with a catalogue of various literary efforts to which people devote themselves: "fables" and "aventures," stories of heroes like Tristan and Roland, "pastourelles," songs with instruments including lays and ballades "to entertain people who are ill (Pour esbatre ces gens malades)." All such works are "trufles," yet their makers seem to do rather well for themselves, even though they provide nothing for the soul but merely "drive away tedium of spirit (l'anui des cuers enchacent)." This story will not only offer "plesance" through the beauty of its rhyme

²⁸La vie seint Edmund le Rei, ed. Hilding Kjellman (Göteborg: Elanders, 1935), pp. 3–6. Denis is probably referring to the court of Henry II. For the tradition of rejecting vain youthful writing, see Olive Sayce, "Chaucer's 'Retractions': The Conclusion of the Canterbury Tales and Its Place in Literary Tradition," Medium Aevum, 40 (1971), 230–48, esp. 238–43.

and through its being true rather than fictitious, but it has a profitable "fruit" as well.²⁹

Both these prologues deprecate species of secular literature on the grounds that they lack moral relevance. It is not just that they are lies, fabrications, but that they have no spiritual value whatsoever. (The degree to which this accusation is true or not is, for our purposes here, beside the point.) But neither author is blind to the real attractions of romance and lyric, and they define those attractions in recreational terms. Fictions bring delight, alleviate tedium and anxiety, and induce joy. Maillart's reference to the use of songs as entertainment for people who are ill reveals a therapeutic view of music and lyrics that Deschamps articulates at greater length later in the century. Such benefits are freely acknowledged: pleasure does have this kind of utility. What disturbs the authors is that the public seems so content with these limited values, that audiences freely reward writers of the merely pleasurable and need to be urged to listen to narratives of more spiritual import. Somewhat like Watriquet de Couvin and Jean de Condé, they do not condemn amusement per se but imply that audiences are excessive in their desire for the merely entertaining. The prologues are most interesting, perhaps, because they do not simply dismiss secular entertainment as seduction of the ears; even as they condemn its moral triviality they acknowledge its recreational benefits.

We learn of the recreational justification also from testimony even more antipathetic toward the activities it defends than are Denis Piramus and Jehan Maillart toward romance and lyric. The well-known condemnation of the Feast of Fools by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris in 1445 censures the event for its depravity and impiety. Its proponents claim that the actions are all done in play, not in earnest ("joco, et non serio"), that without some time for levity they would mentally burst, like casks in which the pressure of fermenting wine is not occasionally released, and that time out for entertainment enables them to return to their studies with more diligence. The Faculty perceives this argument merely as an ex-

²⁹Jehan Maillart, *Le roman du Comte d'Anjou*, ed. Mario Roques, CFMA (Paris: Champion, 1931), pp. 1-3.

cuse for their sins; the principle of recreation cannot justify activity against God and the Church. Jean Gerson's condemnation of the Feast argues similarly: to those who say the activities are only "games and entertainments," he responds with the proverbial wisdom that faith is one of the things that ought not be denigrated through play.³⁰ But the evidence supplied by Chambers reveals that the Church's attitude could not always have been so unrelievedly hostile, that the celebration of the Feast of Fools, if not its excesses, was tolerated in many quarters; and in any rationale for it the recreational argument must have been the most natural and convincing one.

The argument was advanced also to explain the religious drama, as we learn from the Wycliffite *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. This tract condemns the drama principally because it represents *invisibilia* by means that appeal to the senses; but it does deal with other justifications advanced by proponents of miracle plays, including this one: "Also summe recreacioun men moten han and bettere it is, or lesse yuele, bat bei han beyre recreacioun by pleyinge of miraclis ban by pleyinge of ober iapis." To this defense the treatise responds:

... verry recreacion is leeueful, ocupiynge in lasse werkis, to more ardently worschen grettere werkis. And þerfore siche myraclis pleyinge ne þe si3te of hem is no verrey recreasion but fals and worldly, as prouyn þe dedis of þe fautours [supporters] of siche pleyis þat 3it neuere tastiden verely swetnesse in God, traueylynge so myche þerinne þat þeir body wolde not sofisen to beren siche a traueyle of þe spirite, but as man goiþ fro vertue into vertue, so þei gon fro lust into lust þat þei more stedefastly dwellen in hem. And þerfore as þis feynyd recreacioun of pleyinge of myraclis is fals equite [righteousness], so it is double shrewidnesse, worse þan þouy þei pleyiden pure vaniteis. For now þe puple 3yueþ credence to many mengid [confused] lessyngis for oþere mengid trewþis and maken wenen to been gode þat is ful yuel. And so ofte siþis lasse yuele it were to pleyin rebaudye þan to pleyin siche myriclis.³¹

³⁰Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis, ed. H. Denifle, IV (Paris, 1897), p. 653. English trans. in Thorndike, University Records, p. 345. Gerson, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Glorieux, VII (Paris: Desclée, 1966), p. 411. The standard treatment of the Feast of Fools remains Chambers, I: 274–335.

³¹Selections from English Wycliffite Writings, ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 100, 103. Hudson does not print the

It meets the recreational argument head-on, with the uncompromising spirituality typical of Lollard thought. Recreation is valid only insofar as its lesser activities lead to more significant work. But what spiritual improvement does one see in the supporters of the drama? They are so caught up in works of the body (the appeal of the plays to the senses, provoking bodily rather than spiritual delight, is a frequent theme of the tract, and it reminds us of the physiological view of theatrica discussed in Chapter 2) that they are unable to rise to the true delights of God. Hence any claims to recreate must be false, since there is no evidence of the lesser activity, the playing, leading to any genuinely contemplative life. In fact, because of the hypocrisy of the recreational argument and the misrepresentation of spiritual truths by sensuous means, it might even be better to indulge oneself in "vaniteis" and "rebaudye"—at least in that case one would not be pretending to acquire righteousness nor misleading people about abstract realities. Genuinely valid "recreacioun" lies elsewhere: after "holy contemplacioun" in church, one's "recreacioun shulde ben in be werkis of mercy to his nevebore" and in other necessary deeds that "reson and kynde" demand (p. 103). As a treatise against dice playing from the same manuscript puts it, there is "fer more myrbe" and "more recreacioun" in "deuoute werkis" that please God than in any which offend Him.³² There was medieval criticism of the religious drama for its secular, impious tendencies, but that is not the point made here by the Tretise. It focuses instead on the relationship between game and earnest, recreation and inner life, demanding that the former be consistent with a spiritually pure form of the latter, and rejecting the notion that the lesser delights of recreation have to entail any bodily indulgence at all.

We have seen the medieval explanation of why they do, and the views of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* are those of an uninfluential minority. By listing all the arguments it does not accept, the tract tells us that recreational ideas were part of the justification of a major form of medieval artistic enterprise,

full treatise, recently edited by Clifford Davidson (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), but what she omits is not directly relevant to our purposes. Important discussions of what we can learn from the treatise about medieval attitudes toward drama are in Woolf, pp. 84–101, and Kolve, passim.

32British Library MS Add. 24202, f. 22. On the MS see Hudson, p. 179.

that the religious drama was seen not only as a means of promoting devotion but also as a means of refreshment. Insofar as the proponents of the plays thought of them as providing recreation, apparently in competition with "iapis" that had no religious motives, we can perhaps perceive, in addition to a general defense, one means of explaining the comic elements that form such a large and interesting part of the genre.

Further evidence of recreational or hygienic defenses of literary pleasure is not hard to find, nor is it difficult to think of other works or genres that must have implicitly or explicitly appealed to the ideas. Robert of Basevorn, in his manual on preaching, notes that a sermon, in order to sharpen the attention of an audience drifting off, may include—judiciously—jests that provoke laughter; other testimony, perhaps the most famous of which is in canto XXIX of the *Paradiso*, shows that preachers' employment of entertaining stories was not always as restricted as Robert urges.³³ Parodic forms like the *sotte chanson* are clearly meant for entertainment rather than edification, and, although the written evidence is Renaissance rather than

33Much has been written, notably by G.R. Owst and J.-Th. Welter, about exempla and entertaining stories in sermons and about the corresponding problems of disentangling motives of profit or pleasure. See most recently on the subject Siegfried Wenzel, "The Joyous Art of Preaching; or, The Preacher and the Fabliau," Anglia, 97 (1979), 304-25, who cites Robert and much other pertinent evidence. Particularly interesting is Jacques de Vitry's defense of using stories "not only for edification, but for recreation." Though he does not approve of tales without some moral usefulness, he seems to recognize as the principal value their psychological effect on the audience. In order to avoid excessive "sadness" or "fatigue," audiences may sometimes be recreated by pleasant stories, "so that afterward they are more alert to hear serious and useful words." Jacques then quotes line 343 of the Ars poetica, thinking not of the combination of pleasure and profit within exempla, even though such may exist, but of the role of principally entertaining stories within the more "utilia verba" of the sermon as a whole. The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry, ed. T. F. Crane (London, 1890), p. xlii. The Dialogus creaturarum, a collection of moralized dialogues between all sorts of natural phenomena, from the human to the inanimate, asserts its usefulness to preachers because it teaches morality in a way that avoids tediousness. In this case we can be sure that the claim to relieve weariness through "the delight of pleasing material" stems from medical thinking, for the author of the Dialogus is the physician Maino de' Maineri, whose Regimen sanitatis, cited in Chap. 2, recognizes that gaudium temperatum restores energy. Quoted in Welter, L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du moyen âge (1927; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1973), p. 359.

medieval, so is the genre of the flyting: as the 1629 edition of Alexander Montgomerie's poems says, his flyting serves to "delight the itching eare," intends "Anger to asswage, make melancholy lesse."34 Some Latin works defining themselves as ridicula point to a tradition of principally entertaining literature in the earlier Middle Ages.³⁵ I do not think we need to pursue these or other references further. As it is, we have a substantial body of evidence to demonstrate the pervasiveness of literary claims to recreate and refresh, ranging through a variety of secular forms-fabliau, romance, lyric-and representing literary endeavors of diverse intent, from the merest joke to serious attempts, like Kyng Alisaunder and the cycle drama, at providing both pleasure and profit. Though we have seen some writers who are uneasy with, and some who violently disapprove of, literature that can assert no other function, in general the values of entertainment and psychological restoration are stated with confidence. Some literature does more than recreate, and that is all to the good; but even to give pleasure by itself is a perfectly valid function, and much medieval literature does not hesitate to announce that as its goal and to affirm the resulting benefits.

Recreation in the Canterbury Tales

The single most important work to depend substantially on recreational and hygienic ideas is Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the principal subject of the next two chapters. This one closes with a short discussion of another literary enterprise of great complexity, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which, because of the way it uses ideas of entertainment, demands acknowledgment here yet

³⁴Cited in part by Pritchett, pp. 267–68, who also notes that Bannatyne found the Dunbar-Kennedy flyting "Iocund and mirrie," and by David Lampe, "'Flyting no Reason Hath,' the Inverted Rhetoric of Abuse," *The Early Renaissance, Acta*, 4 (1978), 113–14, who discusses the genre as a rhetorical game.

35Peter Dronke, "The Rise of the Medieval Fabliau: Latin and Vernacular Evidence," Romanische Forschungen, 85 (1973), 275-97; Jürgen Beyer, Schwank und Moral. Untersuchungen zum altfranzösischen Fabliau und verwandten Formen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1969), pp. 64-93. Beyer's views on the evolution of Schwank material are available in an English summary, "The Morality of the Amoral," in Cooke and Honeycutt, pp. 15-42. In the preface to his commentary on the Anticlaudianus, Radulphus de Longo Campo, enumerating his other compositions, claims to have written, along with grammatical and philosophical works, a "ridiculum" (p. 4). See above, Chap. 2, n. 47.

leads into criticism beyond the scope of this book. If the *Decameron* is the culmination of medieval recreational literature, the *Canterbury Tales* is the richest exploration of how all literary forms, those for profit as well as pleasure, may be used and abused. To pursue fully its view of storytelling would necessitate thorough consideration of all the dimensions of Chaucer's "poetics," a subject of much current critical interest.³⁶ I want only to look briefly at the recreational principle as the *Tales* articulates it and to suggest something of its importance to the work as a whole.

Although the fact is not often presented in such schematic terms, there are two framing devices in the *Canterbury Tales*, an outer frame which is the pilgrimage, and an inner frame which is the storytelling contest. Long ago, in a short but astute essay, H. S. V. Jones suggested that the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* was in effect an amalgam of *Piers Plowman* and Sercambi's *Novelle*,³⁷ and it is the function of the double frame to secure such a complex combination. Concerning the outer frame we have heard much: the pilgrimage to Canterbury was important to critics earlier in this century for its "realism," to many critics since the 1950s for its allegorical implications as the image of man traveling through this world to his heavenly destination. As Edmund Reiss has put it, "we cannot escape from the fact that he chose a pilgrimage. And that choice resulted in a certain tone and atmosphere. . . . "38 But relatively few critics have

³⁶See e.g. Robert W. Hanning, "The Theme of Art and Life in Chaucer's Poetry," in *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Collection of Original Articles*, ed. George D. Economou (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), pp. 15–36; Alfred David, *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Anne Middleton, "Chaucer's 'New Men' and the Good of Literature in the *Canterbury Tales*," in *Literature and Society* (English Institute Essays, 1978), ed. Edward Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 15–56, and her other exhilarating essays cited below.

³⁷ The Plan of the 'Canterbury Tales,' "Modern Philology, 13 (1915–16), 45–48. Jones also noted the role of estates literature in shaping the General Prologue.

³⁸ The Pilgrimage Narrative and the Canterbury Tales, SP, 67 (1970), 295. For a corrective to Reiss's attempt to ally the Tales with allegorical pilgrimage narratives, see Siegfried Wenzel, The Pilgrimage of Life as a Late Medieval Genre, Mediaeval Studies, 35 (1973), 370–88. For affinities between the Tales and literal pilgrimage narratives, see Donald R. Howard, Writers and Pilgrims (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). My distinction between inner and outer frames should not be confused with Howard's more comprehensive approach to the work in terms of inner and outer form; see The Idea of the Canterbury Tales (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 134–209.

devoted attention to the inner frame, which is equally an artistic choice on Chaucer's part and which accordingly deserves the same sympathetic attention and consideration for the particular atmosphere it creates.

The inner frame is the game that the pilgrims agree to play on their way to Canterbury. Two articles have delineated the presence of the game structure throughout the *Tales*, making detailed citation of the evidence unnecessary here, but neither approaches the structure in terms of medieval ideas of play and recreation.³⁹ If we do, we find that the rationale of the Canterbury storytelling—at least as far as Harry Bailly and the pilgrims are concerned—depends on them:

And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye, Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye; For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon; And therfore wol I maken yow disport, As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort. [A 771-76]

The Host's construction of the game is the organization into rules of the impulse of the pilgrims to "pleye" along the way, to take what "confort," what solatium, and "myrthe" they can find. The storytelling contest he proposes has as its goal "to shorte with oure weye" (A 701), to make the time pass agreeably and thus more quickly, and the chief means to that end is "tales of best sentence and moost solaas" (A 798), with a prize for the pilgrim who can most effectively meet those demands. Although elsewhere Harry Bailly shows marked inclinations toward "solaas" rather than "sentence," here, as the rules of the game are explained, the Horatian ideal dominates. The best kind of entertainment is not trivial joca but substantial stories; the full literary enterprise, pleasure and profit, serves the end of "confort." The pilgrims assent to Harry's proposal "with ful glad herte" (A 811), agree to play by the announced rules, and the next morning it falls to the Knight to "bigynne the game" (A 853).

³⁹G. D. Josipovici, "Fiction and Game in the Canterbury Tales," Critical Quarterly, 7 (1965), 185–97; Richard A. Lanham, "Game, Play, and High Seriousness in Chaucer's Poetry," English Studies, 48 (1967), 1–24. See also Stephen Manning, "Rhetoric, Game, Morality, and Geoffrey Chaucer," Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 1 (1979), 105–18. I am indebted as well to V. A. Kolve for ideas concerning play and game in the Tales.

It is important to see the relationship between this game, entered into for the perfectly valid pleasure of entertainment and the corresponding psychological solace that it promotes, and the pilgrimage. The agreement to engage in the recreation of storytelling occurs after we have read the portraits of the pilgrims and discovered the nature of their journey. Their human reality is part of the outer frame; the inner frame begins only when they agree to a set of arbitrary rules designed to create certain benefits within the limited time of their traveling. Hence there is, at least as far as the theory of recreation is concerned, no inherent conflict between the two. The game of telling tales is not indication per se of lack of seriousness; it is a social disport, serving specifically delimited goals. Toward the end of the game there are signs of the pilgrimage reasserting its claims, then an explicit rejection of fiction by the Parson, whose prologue and tale return the travelers to their most earnest concerns. For the company as a whole this transition, however abrupt the Parson's response to the Host may seem, is natural and evolutionary rather than disjunctive:

Upon this word we han assented soone, For, as it seemed, it was for to doone, To enden in som vertuous sentence, And for to yeve hym space and audience; And bade oure Hoost he sholde to hym seye That alle we to telle his tale hym preye. [I 61–66]

The collective wisdom of the pilgrims recognizes that it is time to cease their social recreation, however satisfying it has been at its best, and to think of personal salvation, to move from the public delights of a "fable" to the private spiritual refreshment of a "meditacioun."

What Chaucer does in the course of the Canterbury Tales is to subject the theory of recreation, so comfortably announced and endorsed in the appropriately merry circumstances of after-dinner confabulatio, to the strains of human tension, to dramatize the difference between idea and motive. For all his apparently disinterested appreciation of proper play, the Host turns out to be perhaps excessively preoccupied with mirth and japes, and with the possibility of saying things in game

that he could not otherwise. The Reeve, the Friar, and the Summoner are only the most obvious examples of people who turn the goal of communal pleasure to personal vindictive uses, who expose the problematic relationship between play and insult that Jean de Condé dealt with briefly in Le sentier batu. With the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner the line between private needs and public entertainment becomes deliberately difficult to draw. Yet the game remains an ideal, almost as much of one as the spiritual pilgrimage itself. Significantly, among its most vigorous defenders is the noble Knight. He not only begins it enthusiastically but interrupts the Monk when he perceives that the tragedies are creating a "hevynesse" (B² 3959) inconsistent with the goals of recreation and, as R. E. Kaske has shown, unfaithful to a truly Boethian view of fortune. 40 Also, he keeps the game from disintegrating at the comic but terrible moment when the Host's vulgar insult silences the Pardoner, asserting that the company should again "laughe and pleye" (C 967). The Knight, who is often depicted as rather solemn, turns out to be not only a steadfast fighter for the faith but also a perfect example of Aristotelian eutrapelia. He is so pious that he will not take time to change his war garb before going on pilgrimage, but while on it he recognizes the value of "game" and attempts to ensure the success of such valid "pleye." For him, as for the Lollard knight Sir John Montagu, apparently, religious conviction and military pursuits do not entail rejection of the pleasures of moderate social amusement.41

The Clerk, too, accepts the principles of recreation, though with an edge in his response that alerts us to the reality that lies beyond the entertainment. In a masterly exchange, the Host asks him for a tale and, suspicious of what this threadbare, sober scholar might do to the game, reminds him of his obligations:

⁴¹I am thinking of the fact that the soldier Montagu also wrote fixed form lyrics, probably perceived in the context of gracious court entertainment. See Derek Brewer, *Chaucer in His Time* (London: Longman, 1973), pp. 63–66, and my article "Toward a Poetics of the Late Medieval Court Lyric."

⁴⁰"The Knight's Interruption of the *Monk's Tale*," *ELH*, 24 (1957), 249–68. Kaske also discusses a number of details that directly contrast Knight with Monk, to which may be added the Knight's proper *gaudium temperatum* as opposed to the Monk's cheerless tragedies and his subsequent lack of "lust to pleye" (B² 3996).

I trowe ye studie aboute som sophyme;
But Salomon seith 'every thyng hath tyme.'
For Goddes sake, as beth of bettre cheere!
It is no tyme for to studien heere.
Telle us som myrie tale, by youre fey!
For what man that is entred in a pley,
He nedes moot unto the pley assent. [E 5-11]

These lines not only specify what the Clerk has agreed to but give a rationale for it from Ecclesiastes: *Omnia tempus habent*. This is not the time for the clerk to "studie" nor to preach (E 12–14), two activities most natural to a man who gladly learns and gladly teaches; rather, as manuals for students allow, it is time for the recreation that revivifies the capacity for study. The Host seems to feel the need to cite biblical wisdom in order to persuade one so committed to earnest intellectual endeavor. But the Clerk does not need to be prodded into participation:

"Hooste," quod he, "I am under youre yerde; Ye han of us as now the governance, And therfore wol I do yow obeisance, As fer as resoun axeth, hardily." [E 22–25]

He admits, in language strong with terms of rulership, his part in the agreement made at the Tabard Inn. But the authority of the Host is merely "as now," during the special recreational time which the pilgrims have committed themselves to, and the Clerk need obey only as far as "resoun" demands. This line has a double resonance. First, it draws the distinction between the game itself and Harry Bailly's own inclinations. The Clerk complies fully with what is valid in the Host's request, but the choice of tale is his own, and the story of Griselda probably not what Harry was thinking of when he urged a "murie thyng of aventures" (E 15).⁴² The appeal to "resoun" reminds us too of the larger ethical context of the storytelling game: the Clerk

⁴²On the story as a source of humanist delight and recreation, and for more on this exchange between Host and Clerk, see Anne Middleton, "The Clerk and His Tale: Some Literary Contexts," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 2 (1980), 121–50. On the varying uses of "myrie" in reference to literature, see Lois Ebin, "Chaucer, Lydgate, and the 'Myrie Tale,'" *Chaucer Review*, 13 (1979), 316–36.

need obey only as far as one of those books of Aristotle he so loves, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, reasons out the proper limits and nature of entertainment.

The Clerk sees, in a way that Harry Bailly does not, how restricted those limits really are. Against Harry's assertion of play instead of preaching he opposes a tale of profit by a "lauriat poete." To the easy "every thyng hath tyme," acceptable in itself but readily stretched to accommodate too much recreational indulgence, he opposes the reality that "alle shul we dye" (E 38), the final limit of man's allotted time on earth, the central fact that shocks us into remembrance that we are living in borrowed time, God-lent time, not in the free, self-determined time of games. Appropriately, he tells a tale of a marquis whose interest in his "lust present" must be sacrificed to the needs of preserving his realm from the disaster of the "deeth" of his "lynage," and of a woman whose chief attribute is patience, transcendence of the times for laughing and the times for crying that Fortune brings her. The prologue to the Clerk's Tale manages both to validate the Canterbury game and to remind us of the larger context in which it takes place; the tale itself, likewise, fulfills the agreement to provide a narrative that is "myrie" (at least in the Clerk's sense, if not the Host's) and as well leads us to reflect on matters that lie beyond the "lust present" of the storytelling game.

Most of the pilgrims, though, involve themselves more unequivocally in the entertainment, if not always for the proper motives. In general they participate willingly and respond congenially to the stories of others. Even some disruptions, like the Miller's butting in with a story of "harlotrie," can be absorbed into the recreation. The dominant mood is festive, and the entire inner frame can be seen as a manifestation of the special spirit of carnival, with Harry Bailly as a kind of Lord of Misrule.⁴³ This approach to certain types of literary comedy, best known through C. L. Barber's work on Shakespeare and Mikhail Bakhtin's on Rabelais, is complementary to the ideas of recreation I have been discussing. The analogy between literary celebration and the carnival world of the Feast of Fools and

⁴³James R. Andreas, "Festive Liminality in Chaucerian Comedy," *The Chaucer Newsletter*, 1, no. 1 (Winter 1979), pp. 3–6; David, pp. 90–107.

other popular revels is valid in many respects; but in the case of the *Canterbury Tales* and other medieval works it tends to ignore their more self-conscious ethical justifications. Anthropological and psychological approaches to festive behavior tend to stress the oppositions themselves: everyday-holiday, repression-release, rule-misrule. The idea of recreation is in effect an effort to reach some kind of accommodation between these opposed tendencies, and as we have seen in this chapter, much comic and "festive" literature, rather than appearing purely as revelry, deliberately gives itself a recreational or hygienic context that works to legitimize the festivity by appealing to certain accepted workaday values.

Chaucer did not need to create a formal game in order to have his pilgrims tell tales or reveal their characters. In the Roman de la rose he had a model for the self-exposure of character; in a variety of earlier works, and in the contemporary Confessio amantis, he had collections where narratives arise more or less "naturally" within conversation to illustrate ideas or arguments. But he chose instead a structure like the Decameron's, in which the tale-telling is made self-conscious. His establishment of the double frame, recreational time within pilgrimage time, indicates that his interest lay not solely in the presentation of fictions nor in the exposure of character but, also, in the relationship between the two. Anne Middleton has argued that this interest follows logically upon the Legend of Good Women and its prologue; the Canterbury Tales takes Chaucer's concerns with problems of interpretation and misinterpretation, the relationship between fiction and moral instruction, and gives them center stage.44 Audience response becomes a part of the work itself; the twin frames of pilgrimage and game enable him to explore the complex relationships between life and literature.

Chaucer makes the recreational ideal a major element within his work—but not a justification for it. Unlike Boccaccio, who speaks of his intentions in the *Decameron* in his own voice, Chaucer invokes recreational ideas only within the context of a

⁴⁴"The *Physician's Tale* and Love's Martyrs: 'Ensamples Mo Than Ten' as a Method in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review*, 8 (1973), 27–31. The relevance of the *Prologue* to *LGW* to Chaucer's poetics was first and most influentially argued by Robert O. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 91–111.

more inclusive framing structure. What happens to the principle of recreation in the hands of the Reeve, the Pardoner, the Canon's Yeoman, and the rest of the pilgrims is in one sense Chaucer's elaborate commentary on the difference between literary theory and reality. And since this book is about theory, it is time to return to literature that relies on ideas of entertainment in less complicated and ironic ways.