

*“I Was Never Bard Ere”*: Creation and  
*Charity in the Wakefield*  
*PLAY OF NOAH*

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“Therfor, wife, have done. / Com into ship fast” (352). Thus the title character in the Wakefield *Play of Noah*, who has been deemed worthy by God to father a new race of humans in light of the cataclysmic flood that will wipe the current population from the earth, entreats his spouse to join him on the ark. Her reply, however, is hardly what one would expect from the wife of the only virtuous man in the world (or, for that matter, in a dramatization of the Lord’s wrath and vengeance): “Yei, Noe, go cloute thi shone. / The better will thai last” (353). Just as mankind rebels against God, the being whom humans were made to adore (“[I] made the and ich man to be, / To luf me well thou awe” [170-1]), so Noah’s wife—hereafter Uxor—stubbornly defies her husband and so upsets what medieval audiences would have understood as the biblical marital hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> Yet while sinning before the Almighty is not a laughing matter, Uxor’s dismissive retorts are undeniably comic. V.A. Kolve observes that “in the Middle Ages, sacraments existed which could bring man to heaven [...] but their efficacy for any man depended upon his understanding something of their meaning” (3). While drama was of course not numbered among the sacraments, its potential for doctrinal instruction made it nothing less than a portal to understanding, enlightenment, and salvation. Why, then, is a typical fabliau situation<sup>2</sup>—an amusing, quarrelling old couple—imposed on this biblical tale? Should one be disturbed that David Bevington, describing the *Play of Noah* in one word, chooses “humorous” (28)? In other words, is the profane comedy there simply to lend pleasure and to make the play more accessible, to teach a valuable lesson, or for some other purpose? True, it may seem obvious that Uxor must return to the fold by the play’s end, but the path she takes to get there is of great importance. By looking more closely into the parallels between the God/Noah and Noah/Uxor dyads, I shall investigate the ways in which the “fabliau” imbedded in this play affects its status as a didactic instrument.

The first line in Noah’s opening prayer identifies God in His most important role, as the Creator: “Myghtfull God veray / Maker of all that is” (1). The word “maide” is also repeated in lines 3, 7, 9, 10, 19, and 28, while “wroght” appears in line 4. Noah, in giving the Creation account, declares that “that gracyous lord / to his liknes maide man” (28). Man does indeed assume God’s image, as the Lord endows his servant with the power and

prerogative to create a microcosmic world and thus allows him to aspire to a deity-like role: “*Make* in thi ship also / Parloures onne or two...a wyndo shal thou *make*...when al this thyng is *wroght*” (132-3, 136, 154, my emphasis). Creation, for Noah, is an act of obedience to a higher authority that also allows him to adopt an earthly share—though, of course, not an identical version—of that authority’s power.

In much the same way, the introductory speeches of Noah and of God are analogous; both start with generalized description or explanation (only becoming specific or personal when Noah says “I” in line 55 and when God turns to address Noah directly in line 118), and both move from expressions of fear or anger to hope or assurance of salvation (“I widder away. / Bot yit will I cry / for mercy” [63-4], “[I shall] make end / Of all that beris life. / Sayf Noë and his wife” [104-6]). Moreover, both speeches continue the theme of creation, as they are highly conscious of themselves as crafted utterances. Unlike the scenes of familial bickering that come later, these monologues make use of complex sentences that stretch over four or five lines rather than being limited to a quicker, more conversational two or three lines; they also contain more Latinate than colloquial diction (see Helterman 49). In this opening section, before the appearance of Uxor, the two makers balance each other in a neat, reciprocal equilibrium. The text itself seems to be fighting against the wife’s boisterous entrance; women, even when their appearance would be most appropriate, go unmentioned.<sup>3</sup> So as Noah describes how the devil “[e]ntysyd man to glotony” (37) in Eden, the default masculine noun is used despite the fact that Eve was, in fact, enticed first (see Gen. 3.6). Noah calls for mercy for “me, and my fry” (66)—no mention of his wife. And although Noah cannot “wax and multiply” (179) without a spouse, God grants a formal blessing only to the father and his sons. As Liam O. Purdon asserts, the success of the relationship between God and Noah depends on reciprocity, friendship (God calls Noah “freend” in line 118), and a “collaborative spirit” (48). Such collaboration is closely linked to the conspicuous absence of the play’s other major character.

This careful linguistic balance is upset when Uxor does appear. The very mention of her temper is apparently enough to change the scene and cause God to vanish;<sup>4</sup> the Noah/Uxor dyad has now replaced God/Noah, and the two do not overlap. There is a comic fall as Noah courteously greets his wife and is rudely rebuffed for his trouble: “God spede, dere wife. / How fayre ye?” is met with “Now as ever myght I thryfe / the wars I the see” (190-1). The rhyme now propels this drama into Uxor’s linguistic territory, as evidenced by the fact that only three words that exceed one syllable (“ever,” “belife,” and “veray”) appear in the initial nine-line exchange between Noah and his wife (Helterman 49).

Now Noah—who, as a creator, has been established as an echo of the Lord—faces rebellion just as God does. But the parallel deteriorates into parody as Uxor insists on claiming a creative prerogative of her own, deconstructing the typological role prepared for her husband. Kolve rightly points out that “God’s great world is turned upside down just as is man’s little world” (147) in the Noah drama. However, to see Noah only as a divine similitude would be to ignore the incongruity of the conjugal dialogue—is Noah a God-like builder or a laughably all-too-human creature?

Uxor’s sharp tongue serves to divide Noah’s identity. On one hand, he echoes God’s creative role; on the other, he is a comically henpecked husband who is cheekily

challenged by his insubordinate "subject." "Now my gowne will I cast / and wyrk in my cote" (262), says Noah as he begins to build the ark, in effect casting off the Godlike aspect of his creative role and becoming an ordinary human laborer. Just as God identifies himself as "god most myghty, / Oone god in trynty" (168-9), so Noah is two beings packed into one. The version of this play found in the York cycle, in fact, has two distinct Noahs portrayed by two different actors, one who receives a commission from on high and one who must deal with the scolding wife at home (Helterman 47-8, 55).

How is this duality developed? As Uxor insists on grounding her disobedience in the realm of the physical and the literal, she demonstrates the essential impossibility of importing the same kind of didacticism found in the God-Noah speeches—in which abstract lessons are formally stated, along the lines of "Every man to my bydyng / shuld be bowand" (76)—into the familiar, colloquial context that she creates. She fears for her well-being, but not (like Noah) because she is aware of mankind's sinful state; rather, she vents the materially-based complaint that "of mete and of drynk / Have we veray skant" (197-8). God will ultimately provide for the human family, but Noah is accused of failing to provide for his own family. Furthermore, as John Gardner skillfully shows, Uxor boldly re-crafts the imagery and associations that surround Noah's quasi-divine identification (45):

WIFE: Bot thou were worthi be cled / in Stafford blew,  
For thou art alway adred / be it fals or trew.  
Bot God knowes I am led / and that may I rew,  
Full ill.  
For I dar be thi borow,  
From even unto morrow,  
Thou spekys ever of sorrow.  
God send the onys thi fill. (199-207)

Royal purple becomes the "Stafford blew" of bruises, the awesome and omniscient Almighty is transformed into a weak, paranoid man who is "alway adred," and the one who can deliver from every distress is now one who "[leads] full ill." Uxor has asserted the fabliau context, re-identifying Noah not as a virtuous leader but as a sort of "sely carpenter," like the simple husband from Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* who is cuckolded when he is fooled into thinking that Noah's flood will come again (3614-3651).

The pattern of movement toward the material continues as Uxor—unmoved by Noah's and her sons' orders and entreaties and warnings of God's approaching wrath—is moved to enter the ark only by "the actual physical experience of the rising waters" (Purdon 59): "therfor will I hy / For drede that I drone here" (371-2). And with the transformation of fear of God into fear of drowning, other abstract concepts are re-interpreted literally by Uxor. For example, she changes Noah's figure of speech—"Ther is garn on the reyll / other" (298)—into a resolve to work with actual textiles: "yit will I spyn" (359).<sup>5</sup> Uxor's eventual choice of a raven to scout for land is also telling. By selecting an animal whose carnal inclinations and irrationality ("without any reson" [501]) reflect her own personality (Helterman 66), she reformulates the significance of the raven and so invades a well-established symbolic system—especially since the biblical account records the bird as Noah's, not Uxor's, choice (see Gen. 8.6-7). Finally, the mirroring effect and balanced mutuality that characterized the relationship between God and Noah

(“my freend”) is literalized and transformed by Uxor into stubborn non-partnership as she sets her husband’s “felowship[...]not at a pyn” (363-4) and allows reciprocity to exist only in the form of exchanging blow for blow (“I shal not in thi det / Flyt of this flett” [222-3]). God may smite His disobedient people, but Noah finds his wife inclined to smite back. When God addresses Noah, He praises Ham, Shem, and Japheth as “sonnes of good fame” (141), but denies the wife any individual merit: her sole qualification for being saved is her status as Noah’s “make” (139). In the same way, Uxor does her best to write God out of her story completely. Her husband explains to her that God has doomed the world to destruction (“All this world aboute...[s]hall be overlaide” [303, 306]), but she ignores this fearful ultimatum and mentions only the “drede of a knok” (342) as she disobeys Noah. God, in the fabliau-world, is reduced to an oath uttered even in the name of *undoing* heavenly work: Uxor can exclaim “Lord I were at ese” (388) and in the same breath wish to thwart the Lord by killing the one man whom He has chosen to spare (in line 389, “Might I onys have a measse / of wedows coyll”). While refusing to credit Noah’s warnings and enter the ark, she uses the ironic phrase “in fayth” (359). For Uxor, creation is not an obedient but a defiant act: she rewrites the unfolding drama into a fabliau, endowing Noah with a new role and surrounding him with a new set of images and associations.

And yet, for all her self-centered, abrasive near-blasphemy, Uxor is a strangely attractive character. She forces the play into the fallen, imperfect, human realm; in contrast to the flawlessly interchangeable sons (who tend to speak on a thrice-repeated rhyme in turn, as in “both / woth / coth” [415-7] or “behold / bold / stold” [523-5]), she asserts her idiosyncratic selfhood and demonstrates that any individual can begin a spiritual journey in a state of defiance. It is Uxor who makes this drama “catholic and comprehensive” (Kolve 7), letting each audience member find a niche for himself or herself in the story enacted onstage. Spinning in the face of impending disaster may indeed be fraught with postlapsarian significance, but it is also a familiar, everyday activity. For Helterman, Uxor thus “allows us to see the sympathy in the playwright’s view of her. He has humanized her typological role as initiator of discord by making her do the ‘reasonable’ thing in the face of an incomprehensible Judgment” (69). It is near-impossible to view Uxor simply as a negative exemplum, precisely because one can very easily imagine reacting to a threatened flood in her dubious and dilatory manner. Even her oaths, which treat the Deity so reductively, make her role more universal and inclusive: a woman who can swear “bi mary” (209) and “by Godys pyne” (227) before the Annunciation or the Crucifixion invites viewers to align her speech patterns with their own and thus to identify with her. And Uxor can introduce appeals that are still more direct: for instance, “we women may wary / all ill husbandys” (208) lets her take on the role of Everywife. Thus, the freedom she holds so dear—“I was never bard ere / as ever myght I the” (328)—is in a sense freedom from the text itself. It is tempting, given Uxor’s capacity for playful rewriting, to read “bard” as both “barred” and “poet.” This woman cannot be confined to the role of an irritating shrew; she breaks free of the script and begins to revise the function of her character, while simultaneously ushering the audience into the world of the play. Even as Noah tries to wrench the dialogue back into the tone of prayer and away from bickering (“*In nomine patris, et filii*” in line 251), his anachronistic mention of Christ in the devotional formula connects the onstage fabliau

realm to the reader's or the viewer's world.

Meanwhile, the work of deconstructing Noah's Godlike side and thus emphasizing his duality continues. Uxor challenges his authority on a purely linguistic level: when he issues a unilateral command ("have done," repeated in lines 316 and 352), she parodies his order with a comically physical directive of her own to "go cloute thi shone" (353). Furthermore, Uxor exposes Noah's shortcomings as a God-in-miniature as she points out his inability to make word and deed equivalent. "Thise grete wordys shall not flay me" (380), she mocks, emphasizing her still-human husband's failure to perform the type of speech act done by God as He says, "My blyssyng graunt I" (178) or announces that "As I say shal I do" (103). The wife's ridicule troubles Noah's role as a Maker; while building the ark is indeed a sign of pious obedience, it is also a purely mimetic act. Not accidentally does Noah repeat *verbatim* the Lord's evaluation of the project ("This is a noble gyn" [128 and 276]); he has not crafted anything original or individual, but has heeded God's instructions to the letter and obeyed Him to the last cubit. But Noah the faithful servant also becomes Noah the buffoon through this act of creation. "The audience enjoys the speed with which the ark is actually readied as a kind of merry joke" (Kolve 24); witness the comically literalizing effect that comes about when divine orders are grafted onto human time and space. Uxor's stubbornness is opposed to the wishes of her marital "God," but in performance "the similarity of Uxor's hill and the ark would have made the building of the ark and her spinning parallel actions [...]. She insists, after the ark is finished, that her work is as important as his" (Helterman 60-1). The wife is elevating her own power as a Maker. She simultaneously writes Noah into a fabliau and satirically asserts the merit of her humbler act of creation.

Clearly, Noah's nature is divided. He himself often slips into the wife's casual speech register: though he is still capable of raising his eyes to heaven and saying "blissid be he / that this can amend" (256), he descends to obscenity and threats with "hold thi tong ram-skyt / or I shall the still" (217). The literal/figurative tension is strong. God may be like a jealous husband without comic effect (Helterman 63)—"Man must luf me paramoure" (80)—but a husband cannot be equated with a jealous God without his wife's defiance coming across as amusing, not cosmically tragic. If God is mocked in this way (Kolve's word), imitation-mockery turns into parody-mockery. When the three sons step in to reprimand their father for quarreling (415) in a "comic reversal of the family chain of authority" (Gardner 47), Noah's loss of control seems complete. Yet soon after this scene, chaos suddenly turns to order again.

What allows this drama to resolve the seeming conflict between piety and comically insistent humanity? Can on-stage action invite its viewers both to laugh and to learn sobering lessons? Michael Bristol argues that the farcical elements are there only to test—and ultimately to consolidate—the world of hierarchy and order (359-60). However, others hold that "the purpose of the inclusion [of farce] is also instruction" (Purdon 53) in and of itself. Disorder is made didactic because one cannot move to grace without once having been in *disgrace*; the divine qualities of charity and forgiveness elevate and dignify all varieties of human spiritual states.

Rational causality is of supreme importance in the opening speeches of God and Noah. When the word "therfor" appears in lines 20, 39, 55, 66, 93, and 100, it justifies God's punishments or man's fear of them (e.g. "Therfor shall I fordo / all this medill-

erd" [100]); as Helterman says, "the arguments of justice precede those of mercy" (58). However, as mentioned earlier, both Noah and the Lord move from despair or anger to recognition of mercy as God's promised free gift to humankind. "Mercy" is mentioned in lines 44, 46 ("Oyle of mercy he hus hight"), and 64; Noah also prays for what he knows is undeserved, saying "Blis us, Lord, here / for charite I hit crafe" (174).

Charity, thus far, is what the Lord can grant to unworthy man.<sup>6</sup> Yet Noah, who as a powerful creator and as a furious Deity has come woefully short, can at last aspire to Godliness when he declares that, despite his wife's orneriness, "I will kepe charyté / for I have at do" (235). Of course, the parallel is human and thus of necessity is still not perfect; despite his resolve, Noah beats Uxor—and it is hard to equate the petty back-and-forth fisticuffs involved in "I shall qwyte the tho" (228) with God's terrifying and unstoppable "[I shall] of veniance draw my swerd" (103)—but "the parody comes closer to its ideal when Noah turns his back on his wife's storming rage in an imitation of divine love and mercy" (Helterman 62). Charity is a savingly permanent abstraction. Uxor cannot claim it for herself, rewrite it, or make it literal and material.

The unique and climactic power of Man's most successful imitation of God is to make dualities into unities; the linguistic realms of pious prayer and fabliau, the contrasting halves of divided Noah, and the pairings of God/Noah and Noah/Uxor are all reconciled. Just as Noah's two roles as real-life family man and Godlike spiritual leader come together in a scene of cooperation and "warm domesticity" (Helterman 53), so the voices of the formerly embattled husband and wife come together in prayer:

NOE: This a grete flood, / wife, take hede.  
 WIFE: So me thought as I stode. / We are in grete drede.  
 These wawghes ar so wode.  
 NOE: Help, God, in this nede.  
 As thou art stere-man good / and best, as I rede,  
 Of all.  
 Thou rewle us in this rase  
 As thou me behete hase.  
 WIFE: This is a perlous case.  
 Help, God, when we call.  
 NOE: Wife tent the stere-tre / and I shall asay  
 The depnes of the see / that we bere if I may.  
 WIFE: That shall I do ful wysely. (424-435)

The rhymes no longer contain a comic "go cloute thi shone" register switch; instead they are harmonized. And Uxor, though she does continue to focus on physical experience as was her wont before ("these wawghes ar so wode"), now knows where credit is truly due for all such experience ("Help, God, when we call"). Uxor and the Almighty, who before had forcefully attempted to exclude each other,<sup>7</sup> are now allowed to co-exist peacefully; a sacred quality has entered Noah, and the Lord has entered the profane fabliau world. A woman who before could only "pray" perversely for her husband to do his worst ("Spare me not, I pray the" [379]) can now sincerely appeal to Heaven. Purdon observes that Noah and his wife have achieved "the same cooperative relationship with God that Noah, first, enjoyed as a means of renewing life and the cosmos" (66). Prepared to be fruitful as Adam and Eve should have been in Eden ("multiplie without discord" [31])—and as

the arc's carefully-paired male and female animals will soon be as well—the reconciled couple sails toward the "hyllys of Armony" (466).<sup>8</sup> More evidence of the transcending of the two dyads comes when Noah orders Uxor to "tent the stere-tre"; through her husband, Uxor is now subordinate to God, the true "stere-man good" (see Helterman 70). Proper hierarchy is at last established. The couple works together without bickering or violence, each giving the other directions, though Noah is clearly the leader.<sup>9</sup>

In her new role not as typological sinner or shrewish clown but as mother of the new mankind and ultimately of Christ Himself, Uxor can recognize the special quality displayed by both her husband and God: "Thise ar of mercy / tokyns full right" (471). The play ends as it began, with a prayer from Noah couched in formal diction and replete with images of light; "accord is re-established" (Gardner 48) as Noah can finally present a cohesive identity. The audience, which has witnessed the motion from strife and division to peace and unity, has been allowed to see the play as a unified whole and to interpret the comic scenes as devotional instruction in their own right.

Indeed, Bristol affirms the ultimately didactic function of such humor; he denies that clowning is simply a negative inversion of order (361). The proverbial battle between Carnival and Lent is not a death-struggle in this particular dramatic setting, for there would be little uncertainty in the mind of a medieval audience as to whether the *Play of Noah* would conclude on a blasphemous or a pious note. The farcical element is present not to challenge the message of God's power and goodness but to provide an example of these harmonizing qualities in action. Uxor has trouble accepting the will of God (in the form of Noah); she enacts, in comically exaggerated form, the same recalcitrance and confusion that any given audience member—male or female—might feel when experiencing doubt or conflict in his or her own life. Yet her subsequent acceptance of charity and her calm absorption into the didactic dramatic structure then allow sacred material and coarse fabliau humor to co-exist. The Wakefield *Play of Noah* celebrates human imperfection even as the concept of the *felix culpa* (or "happy fault") does: as a lyric from the *Adam Lay Ybounden* (also known as *Deo Gratias*)<sup>10</sup> puts it, "Ne hadde the apple taken been / ne hadde nevere Oure Lady ybeen hevene Queen. / Blessed be the time that apple taken was / Therefore we mown singen Deo Gratias!" (354). If the apple had not been eaten, Mary never would have given birth to Christ; if Uxor had not defied Noah, her movement to harmony and grace would not have been so satisfying and instructive. We are flawed, and our faults are part of God's wise plan. Chaucer's Wife of Bath, another admirably imperfect woman, exclaims "Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed, / And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed; / And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan, / Oure Lord Jhesu refreshed many a man" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 143-146).

Perhaps it is impossible to know for sure whether the medieval audience, as Kolve claims, suspended their disbelief for the sake of drama (27) in the same sense that modern theatregoers speak of "losing themselves" in a very realistic production. But if the *Play of Noah*—and for that matter, the entire *Corpus Christi* cycle—is viewed as a ritual and not strictly as a mimetic exercise, then it is possible to posit a new kind of belief. Ronald L. Grimes, who in *Ritual Criticism* defines "ceremony" as "the symbolic means by which a group maintains cohesion and establishes its own mystique" (101-2), also theorizes that "religion is sometimes—perhaps often—played [...]. Faith is more akin to make-believe than to what we conventionally consider belief" (107). So this

drama is a way of acting out the difficult realization of each human's sinfulness and total reliance on God, just as listening to a sermon or working through a Bible passage forces the readers or the congregation to enter a ritualistic territory where they themselves are not only idiosyncratic individuals but also representatives of all humanity. In the same way, "the actor becomes a symbol of man, created in the image of his maker, who in this fallen world remains at an infinite distance from him" (Helterman 167). Watching the *Play of Noah*, audiences may not suspend their disbelief enough to confuse (even temporarily) what they see onstage with the "real" world; however, they *can* suspend their belief in real-world laws and temporarily bring the play-world into their imaginations instead.<sup>11</sup> Jack the Miller's Son (appearing onstage as Noah) is significant because those watching the play know he is both Jack and Noah; Noah is significant because he is both God-in-miniature and "henpecked Adam"; the play is significant because (through Uxor) it shows the often-comical but ultimately didactic collision of the literal, physical human world and the abstract, divine world. The audience's harmonizing act of "charity" is to let those two realms open into each other. Laughter itself aids in accomplishing this task; comedy simultaneously celebrates the universal nature of the flawed human (as Uxor's antics and anachronistic oaths bring pleasure) and teaches by contrast that such humanity is insufficient for salvation (as Uxor eventually ceases her jesting, subordinating her own will to Noah's and God's).

Even as we invite his drama's ritualistic world into our minds, the playwright invites us into that world in his turn. The wife's parodies of creation—writing a fabliau, spinning, re-crafting language and imagery—call Noah's status as a Maker into question. But the Maker whose manipulation of charity brings the threads of the story together is neither Noah nor God but the Wakefield Master himself. It is he who unites the sacred and profane elements of the drama, resolving doubts and confusions just as he harmonizes the hanging "b" rhyme by the end of each stanza. And it is he who has the last word on the characterizations of Noah and Uxor; by the final lines, they are neither a biblical hero and heroine nor a fabliau Punch and Judy but have instead become instruments of the playwright's didactic project.

Kolve takes great pains to describe the ways in which drama was considered "profitable game" (20) and "significant play" (32). Artists "help[ed] men to imagine" (5) and thus allowed them to understand the ways in which they could win salvation. The unseen poetic creator absorbs Noah and Uxor back into his dramatic structure as the play concludes; the couple's fallen, individual identities are temporarily eroded along with the landscape's carts and ploughs, trees and boughs (see 534-5). Uxor asks (concerning those who are in eternal pain after the Flood) "From thens again / May thai never wyn?" (548-9), and Noah replies "Wyn? No, iwis, / bot he that myght hase / Wold myn of thare mys / and admytte thaym to grace" (550-1). Her question is a rhetorical device, a line given to her not because it is particularly in keeping with her character but because the playwright wants his audience to hear Noah's answer (which serves as a reminder that humans have no hope of redemption but through God's great mercy and eventual sacrifice of Christ). When Noah concludes with the wish "That we[...may] con to his light" (554, 557), "we" includes not only the family on the ark also but the entire community of believers. Mercy gets the last word—"Amen for charité" (558)—as it performs a final

act of reconciliation: the playwright's version of unifying "charity" is to reconcile (not equate) the real world with the onstage world and so, through creation, bring his audience to heaven. The eventually-resolved conflict between humor and solemnity can "increase the emotional richness and depth of man's existence as a creature under God" (Kolve 4). It dramatically unites two faces of humankind—human as stubborn sinner, human as Godly image—and enables us to recognize both likenesses in ourselves.

### Notes

1. Jeffrey Helterman (62) points to Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Noah's wife, who does not have a given name of her own, is often simply called by the Latin word for "wife."
2. Consult Joseph Bédier (*Les fabliaux: études de littérature populaire et d'histoire littéraire du moyen-âge*) and Per Nykrog (*Les fabliaux: étude d'histoire littéraire et de stylistique médiévale*) for important studies on the fabliau.
3. This omission is in a sense appropriate, given Uxor's minimal role in the biblical narrative itself. In the passages on Noah and the ark (Gen. 6-9), Uxor is completely silent and is restricted to the space of the repeated formula "Noah[...]and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him." And by chapter nine, Uxor is effectively removed as the formula shrinks to "Noah, and[...]his sons with him."
4. Uxor's power recalls the authority displayed by Mary in such texts as the *Miracles of the Virgin*.
5. Incidentally, spinning is a reminder of the fallen and therefore very human state of Noah and his family (Helterman 65). "Eve span" while "Adam delved," even as Noah breaks his back over the ark-building.
6. See 1 John 4:8 "[F]or God is love." "Love" is also translatable as "charity."
7. Recall the reduction of fearing God to the "drede of a knok," along with the avoidance of mentioning Uxor whenever possible in God's monologue.
8. Helterman takes due note of the pun on "Armenia/harmony."
9. Although the wife's impatient fabliau-self does occasionally threaten to bubble to the surface ("Here have we beyn / Noy, long enogh" or "How long shall thou hufe" [532, 461]), for the most part all is smoothly united.
10. *Adam Lay Ybounden* is preserved in the British Library MS Sloane 2593, fol. 11r.
11. Katie Normington confirms that women did not to our knowledge perform in mystery plays (41); Uxor, then, was almost certainly portrayed by a man. It is impossible be certain

whether the sight of a man in drag “henpecking” another man would have drawn laughs from the crowd and grounded the play more firmly in the realm of farce. However, since every female character in the Wakefield cycle—including Mary herself—was played by a male, one can conjecture that suspension of disbelief was in effect for gender roles and that the mere presence of onstage cross-dressing was not in itself a cause for hilarity. This does not exclude the possibility that actors capitalized on the potential humor of the situation by (for example) casting a particularly burly man as the intransigent Uxor.

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