NOTE: Readers should use this key to help identify items throughout the paper:

- SIGNAL PHRASES
- IN-TEXT CITATIONS
- FULL QUOTES
- BLOCK QUOTES
- PARTIAL QUOTES
- BLENDED QUOTES
- SINGLE-WORD QUOTES
- SECTION INTRODUCTIONS
- TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCES
So Funny I Forgot to Laugh:

An Analysis of Geoffrey Chaucer’s Fabliaux

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No one argues the beauty, complexity, or brilliance of *The Canterbury Tales*. Geoffrey Chaucer’s masterpiece is widely acclaimed as one of the greatest achievements in literature and is continuously studied in thousands of high schools and on thousands of college campuses around the globe. The stories, characters, style of writing, multiple layers of meaning, and general literary quality, all make this collection something that will be read, cherished, and scrutinized for centuries to come. However, the most impressive quality of *The Canterbury Tales* is that all its beauty, all its complexity, and all its brilliance can, amazingly, be matched by its crudeness, its vulgarity, and its obscenity. There are twenty-four Canterbury tales and six of them can be classified as *fabliaux*. Incredibly, Geoffrey Chaucer chose to use a genre of literature that had not been seen for nearly one hundred years and is defined by its irreverence, its insolence, its very lack of morality, to write a full one-fourth of his magnum opus.

While many scholars may question *why* Chaucer chose the fabliau genre, no one can claim he did not. “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Reeve’s Tale,” “The Summoner’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale,” and “The Shipman’s Tale,” have all been classified as fabliaux, and “The Cook’s Tale,” while left unfinished, was well on its way to becoming one, too. Not only did Chaucer revive an essentially “dead” genre, but he also took it further than it had ever been taken.
wrote what many would call the best example of fabliau ever, and provided the genre with a credibility it had lacked throughout its history. But why? Why would such an esteemed author choose to write in a genre that was, in a sense, beneath him? What about the genre attracted Chaucer to it and convinced him that it would be worth his attention, time, and effort? Perhaps the history and makeup of the fabliau genre can provide answers to these rather perplexing questions.

Prior to Chaucer’s revival, the fabliau was a genre of French literature popular primarily in the thirteenth century. As Charles Muscatine, author of *The Old French Fabliaux* and professor of English at Yale University, explains: “Most of the fabliaux were professional compositions produced by jongleurs [. . .] who were professional reciters of the poetry of others, and we must assume that they did much of the recitation which was the principal mode of fabliau performance” (Muscatine 5). Because “very few of the fabliaux can be traced back directly to a known literary source” (12), it can be assumed that these compositions were originals and that the jongleurs performing them were most likely the authors as well. Stylistically simple, exceedingly humorous, and fundamentally entertaining to listen to, the fabliau quickly garnered popularity throughout France with both bourgeois and courtly audiences. The fabliau was predominantly characterized by its humor which, according to leading Chaucerian scholar Thomas Cooke, it achieved through the use of obscenities, abundant sexual metaphors, “shock and awe” comic climaxes, ironic or parodic characters, and “excremental jokes” (Cooke 159).

Comedy is something that is universally enjoyed, and it is no wonder that fabliaux, which are comedic in their very nature, became so prominent in the writings of the time. Between the years 1200 and 1340 there were approximately 150 poems written that have been classified as fabliaux;
However, due to the natural deterioration of written manuscripts and the prominence of the oral tradition, the actual number of fabliaux created is almost assuredly higher than the number discovered (Muscatine 16-18).

Aside from lost documentation, another difficulty in classifying texts as fabliaux is that a definitive definition of what a fabliau actually is has never been entirely agreed upon. There are numerous components that make up a fabliau, but, as with all genre-typecasting, not every piece found has every component, and some have additional components that do not readily fit the genre. “[T]here are very long fabliaux, of over a thousand verses, and short ones, of a few dozen; there are polite ones and unpleasantly crude ones; there are skillful works of art and amateurish scribblings” (22). The original French definition of the genre reads: “Les fabliaux sont des contes a rire en vers” (23), translated as “The fabliaux are funny stories in verse.” While this definition is certainly a welcome jumping-off point and does include humor, the most essential aspect of fabliaux, most would agree that it is too vague, and that it leaves out some of the other fundamental elements that comprise the genre.

The basic structure of a fabliau is analogous to the structure of a joke. There is a set-up, which introduces characters, setting, and plot, and there is a punch line, which ties everything together and generates the desired effect whether it be raucous laughter, repulsion, or angry jeering. The punch line is everything and can “be a word, a phrase, or a sentence, but in whatever form it takes, it does not merely bring the joke to a conclusion, it also explains, reveals, and solves everything else within the joke. Everything leads up to the punch line, and everything exists for it” (Cooke 159). It is the part of the fabliau that the audience members would remember long after the telling, and it would have been the deciding factor when they considered
the success or failure of the story.

The fabliau-joke analogy works well because, as the original definition suggests, when looking at the fabliau genre the first thing that should be considered is the use of humor. As Thomas Cooke explains, “The fabliaux are not told for the sake of any theme they might embody, no matter how meaningful and profound, but rather for their humor, which is not a factor added to them, but of their essence” (138). Like any good joke, fabliaux aspired mainly to make audiences laugh – a goal they expertly achieved. “There is a tone of condescension in some critics’ acknowledgment that the fabliaux are funny, as if that quality automatically drums them out of the ranks of worthwhile literature” (137). As Cooke points out, to criticize fabliaux for being funny would be missing the point entirely. Until Chaucer entered the equation, fabliaux were not exceptionally well written, nor were they deep, profound, or especially thought-provoking, but that is because they were not meant to be. To read fabliaux as “high literature” would be reading them as something they never aspired to be. Through the use of many types of humor, fabliau authors simply set out to make people laugh. “Short, bawdy, and rough, [fabliaux] cannot be counted among the literary masterpieces. Yet there is something in them that is analogous to great works of art” (167). Expertise in any form should be appreciated. Fabliaux are essentially expert examples of humor – an accomplishment not easily achieved.

Unfortunately, attempting to classify the types of humor used in fabliaux to create these expert examples would be a useless endeavor that would only serve to frustrate the researcher and would produce no real results. The types of humor used are as varied as the tales themselves and there is no pattern or consistency among the fabliau authors. As Norris Lacy, author of eighteen scholarly articles on Chaucer, put it: “Thus at best, we can generalize about the humor
of a certain group of fabliaux, or we can analyze and describe the methods exploited by a particular author to elicit laughter from the audience of a particular tale. But it is clearly impossible to talk about the principle or principles underlying fabliau humor in general; and our discussion must respect that impossibility.” [Lacy 118]. While an all-encompassing examination of the types of humor used may be impossible, what can be done is a comprehensive look at the techniques used by fabliau authors to achieve laughter. Whether the humor these techniques were implemented to create was crude, sophisticated, lowbrow, childish, dry, or slapstick, is of no real concern; it is only how fabliau authors (and eventually Chaucer himself) created their laughs that is relevant.

There were numerous methods employed in fabliaux that made them as humorous as they were. These characteristic traits all lead to the “comic climax,” or punch line, and were easily recognizable to the typical audience of the time. Again, while no two fabliaux are exactly alike, the announcement of a forthcoming fabliau recitation would arouse a certain set of expectations in an audience and it would be prepared for what followed. One of the most frequently used humor devices in fabliaux was repetition. The comedic actions done by the characters would be repeated over and over throughout the story in an attempt to heighten the humor each time. When done poorly, this device only served to bog down the storyline and became redundant rather than hilarious, but when done with skill, this repetition would have audiences rolling.

In conjunction with repetition, action was also a method used to create humor. “There are many different actions in the fabliaux. There is a great deal of sexual activity, quite a bit of excremental action, and much violence” [Cooke 45]. The actions taken by characters were often acted out by the jongleur as he performed his reading which added to the entertainment
value of the fabliaux and made the stories more memorable.

**Another comedic device used often was inconsistency or incongruity.** Any audience would have preconceived notions of how certain characters were supposed to act; fabliaux often had these characters act the complete opposite of what was expected, creating humor in the inconsistency. “It is a disparity between expectation and event or, more precisely, between our logic and that of the text” [Lacy 121]. Examples of this device in practice would be a knight acting weak and impotent, or a woman acting masculine and overbearing. Fabliaux were grounded in reality, so these inconsistencies never became too extreme, but the simple break from everyday logic created an atmosphere of hilarity.

**Metaphors were also used regularly in fabliaux to allude to certain unmentionables.** Sexual innuendo was oftentimes used to generate laughs so frequently that certain fabliaux bordered on pornography. Occasionally the innuendo would be even more graphic than the actual organ, action, or fluid it was referring to. “The implication [. . .] is that the linguistic taboo invests the word with far greater erotic force than it would have if the word were considered entirely neutral” [79]. Using innuendo always provides a convenient scapegoat for the author or performer. If confronted regarding the vulgarity in a fabliau, the author could simply claim, “I never wrote that, you assumed it.” The pervasiveness of sexuality is undoubtedly what gave fabliaux both their popularity and their reputation for crudeness, and is an indispensable component of any good fabliau.

**Lastly, satire, parody, and irony were all commonly used for comedic effect.** If the members of the audience were not prepared to laugh at themselves, they should not have attended a fabliau. Satirizing the bourgeois was ordinary, but even the members of court were fair game in
fabliaux. While many scholars believe, based solely on the poor literary quality and crude subject matter of most fabliaux, that this genre was exclusively bourgeois, there is significant evidence to show that the aristocracy enjoyed it just as much.

These comedic devices were the primary methods fabliaux used to be humorous. As with anything attempting to be funny, when overused any of these devices could backfire and cause the fabliau to flop. There is evidence that the majority of the fabliaux went through extensive rewrites and alterations over the time they were being used. What constitutes humor was, and is, constantly changing, but thankfully for the jongleurs, these methods were proven to deliver.

**Obviously humor is a necessary ingredient in the making of a fabliau, but there are other features that are equally important and helpful in signifying the genre.** Because fabliaux were structured similarly to, and essentially function as, jokes, there was little time or effort spent on character development or setting descriptions. When writing a fabliau, the general goal was to get to the punch line as quickly as possible; the authors wanted to avoid excessive descriptions because they increased the length of the story, allowed audiences to drift away, and only served to delay the key feature. Because of this need for immediate humor, fabliaux are characterized by the “narrowness of their characters, who invariably are no more than two dimensional and stereotyped” (Cooke 24). Several of the original fabliau authors did not feel naming their characters was necessary and subsequently used titles like “knight,” “merchant,” or “clerk” to discern between people; “the overwhelming tendency in the fabliaux is to establish characters as simply and directly as possible” (27). Fabliaux were usually short (no more than 300 lines), and because the genre provides no space for unnecessary information, the authors stereotyped their characters to save time and allowed the audience’s prejudice to fill in any gaps.
In addition to shallow, uncomplicated characters, fabliaux also had simple, bare settings that rarely described a time or place outside the immediate realm of the characters. Setting in fabliaux is neglected for the same reasons characters are. In fabliaux there is no need for elaborate settings or descriptions and “where a setting is not needed, the authors do not force one on the tale” (40). Occasionally, to increase satire or irony, the name of a town is mentioned, but usually “the world of the fabliau is very small” (40). However, because furniture and other households props (i.e., bed, bath, cane) are frequently used to heighten comedic effect, the immediate physical locale is often described in minor detail. “Although they are almost never described at any length, the approximate surroundings [of the characters] are specifically mentioned” (41); this helps to further the plot, increase audience awareness of what is happening around the characters, and gives the authors items to work with while they attempt to be funny.

Characterization and descriptive settings are not the only literary staples ignored in fabliaux: the plot itself seems to be only a minor concern in these tales. “Plot interest is so often muted, or suspended, or abandoned as to suggest that while it is admittedly a major source of interest in the genre, it is not an exclusive one nor, ultimately, an essential one” (Lacy 49). Fabliaux took the phrase “willing suspension of disbelief” and ran with it. It seemed as though authors, provided they had something humorous for their ending, were unconcerned with how their plots developed. Huge plot-gaps or unrealistic occurrences were frequent, but the audiences were willing to overlook any issues provided they got a good laugh out of it. This is another example of the importance of humor in fabliaux; it is not only the driving force behind everything the author does, but it is also the justification for anything that goes wrong.

Odds are if there is a short, versed piece of writing and, upon hearing it, an audience is
taken aback by the obscenity, indecency, and vulgarity, they just heard a fabliau. The language, specifically the dialogue, used in fabliaux is uninhibited and can be uncomfortably jolting if the reader is unprepared for it. “One of the more characteristic features of the speech in the fabliaux and one that makes it quite different from the more refined medieval genres is its obscenity. Many printed editions of the fabliaux omit obscene words with an ellipsis, and some obscenities have been erased from manuscripts” [Cooke 55]. As was previously mentioned, aside from obscenities, the language in fabliaux is also extremely sexual. “By in large the fabliaux are uninhibited and direct regarding sex” [Muscatine 110].

Howard Bloch, author of The Scandal of the Fabliaux, explains, it can be assumed “that unvarnished terms in the fabliaux always create a shock, get a laugh, and thereby justify themselves aesthetically as a direct source of humor” [Bloch 106].

As has been the case with the majority of the issues surrounding fabliaux, every plot gap, every poorly developed character, every obscene word, and every lascivious act can all be justified in the quest for humor.

But what is a jongleur to do when “I was just trying to be funny” is not a good enough excuse for someone? What if he really wants to cross the line and take his fabliau to unknown depths of vulgarity and obscenity? What if the only reason he writes a piece is to exasperate the “religious right” and there are no redeeming qualities to his work? How can he achieve all this without getting into trouble? Tack on a moral! Another distinguishing feature of the fabliau genre is the “add-on moral” that often serves to soften the blow delivered by the gratuitous sex, violence, or other lecherous acts throughout the tale. These add-ons are usually only one
or two lines and are often “overtly sententious [. . .] didactic passages [and] are often only loosely related to their plots” (101). The fabliau morals serve no purpose in the actual tale and oftentimes have no obvious connection to the tale they succeed.

Many of the proverbs or wise sayings with which fabliaux begin and end either have no necessary connection with the ethical import of the main action or relate to the action so generally that the structure of the tale could never have been predicted from its overt moral. Sometimes different manuscript versions of the same tale offer different morals. If fabliaux carry a moral, they only infrequently embody it. (101-102)

Occasionally a moral may appear at the beginning of a tale, but “whatever commentary there is at the beginning of these tales can often be attributed to the jongleur’s attempt to win the attention of the audience” (Cooke 87). It is at the end that most morals appear and, ironically, they can actually serve to heighten the comedic value of the tale while still diluting any indignation felt by certain members of the audience. Oftentimes the ridiculousness of the moral’s connection, or lack thereof, to the tale serves an ironic purpose and causes the tale to be even funnier than it previously was. “Several moral endings are inappropriate but receive a comic meaning from an ironic relation to the tale; [. . .] some endings are comic in their own right, but their relationship to their respective tales varies; [. . . and] occasionally the moralization at the end of a tale assumes another form, but even then it retains its comic purpose” (93-95). The deviousness of adding a moral ending that has no connection to the tale, serves no purpose other than additional humor, and teaches no moral, but still quiets any complaints, is quite ingenious.

This method of poking fun at the church without the church realizing it, was another reason
fabliaux were so popular in their time.

When in the hands of amateurish jongleurs, the literary devices and stylistic components that make up the fabliau genre were often botched and the created work was lowbrow and childish. They served their purpose – they gave the audience a quick laugh – but nothing about this genre was particularly notable or extraordinary. That is until Geoffrey Chaucer took an interest in it. In the hands of a literary master, these devices were used to create some of the most memorable and most hilarious stories in history. Pitted against romances, pious tales, allegories, and mini-epics, fabliaux were still able to steal the story-telling contest and have remained some of the most renowned sections of The Canterbury Tales. In all, Chaucer’s six fabliaux must be appreciated for reviving the genre and stretching its boundaries while still remaining true to the fabliau form.

Chaucer may have continued the tradition of fabliaux, but he also put his own spin on the genre. “The Miller’s Tale” has been deemed the greatest fabliau ever written for its rich characterization, realistic moral tones, and hilarious plot line. “The Merchant’s Tale” takes the “genre beyond its self-imposed limits” \[171\] and does things not yet seen within the framework of fabliau. These two tales alone show the amazing work Chaucer was able to create within the fabliau genre. Each tale provides an excellent model of fabliau techniques and components, but they also show how Chaucer developed his own style. Distinctly fabliau, but also distinctly Chaucerian, “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Merchant’s Tale” are exceptional examples of fabliau writing.

One of the biggest liberties Chaucer took with the fabliau structure was to increase the length. Chaucerian fabliaux are significantly longer (two to three times the average length)
which provided Chaucer with more space to expand his characters, setting, plot, and moral
development. While Chaucer’s stories are incredibly funny, it is obvious that he was in no hurry
to get to the punch line as was so typical of early French fabliaux. Chaucer described his
characters, included plenty of action, and connected two or three different plot lines into one
story. With the increased length of the story comes increased complexity and this may have
turned some audience members off, but Chaucerian fabliaux were not just long and complex,
they were quality works that stood up under literary scrutiny while maintaining their
entertainment value.

Chaucer wrote exceptional fabliaux and did so in his own style, but the fabliau
features that readers would expect are all present in his works as well. Like most fabliaux,“The Miller’s Tale” and “The Merchant’s Tale” both begin with a quick word on where the story
is taking place, “Whilom ther was dwellynge at Oxenford” [line 3187] and “Whilom ther was
dwellynge in Lumbardye” [1245]. These two lines serve only to briefly orient the audience by
letting them know what country the story is taking place. This information allows the audience to
begin making generalizations about the story – generalizations Chaucer wants them to make –
which will make the plot flow more smoothly and avoid any unnecessary explanations about
customs, traditions, or culture in general; it gives the audience a common starting point.

There is no further discussion of the setting of the town, but again, like most fabliaux,
there is further description of the immediate surroundings of the characters when they are
introduced. Chaucer uses these descriptions to impart information about the character without
having to go into too much detail. When introducing the character Nicholas in “The Miller’s
Tale,” Chaucer writes: “A chambre hadde hein that hostelrye / Allone, withouten any
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Campaignye, / Ful fetisly ydight with herbes swoote,” (3203-3205). He continues with the room’s description by saying: “His Almageste and bookes grete and smale, / His astrelabie longynge for his art, / His augrym stones layen faire apart, / On shelves couched at his beddes heed; / His presse ycovered with faldying reed;” (3208-3212). The objects Chaucer describes allow the audience to pick up on some of the personality traits of this new character. Astrology books, abacus stones, and sweet smelling herbs all play a role in this character’s part of the story. Chaucer could have simply stated that Nicolas was interested in astrology, but he allows the readers to pick up on these things themselves, creating a deeper engagement with the text and a better experience for the reader.

Chaucer’s in-depth characterization in his fabliaux is another way in which he deviates from the traditional fabliau structure, but he does so in a way that enriches the story and provides the genre with some literary components it was lacking. Not only does he have strong main characters (something few French fabliaux had), but he also has well-developed, important, subsidiary characters. The physical appearance of each character is vividly described (especially female beauty) and these traits are often representative of the character’s personality as well. When Alison is introduced in “The Miller’s Tale,” she is described as: “Fair was this younge wyf, and therwithal / As any wezele hir body gent and smal. / A ceynt she werede, ybarred al of silk, / A barmcloth eek as whit as morne milk / upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore” (3233-3237). Naturally, the reader will later learn that the metaphorical description of Alison as a “wezele” is very appropriate. Also, the use of the word “lendes” is later repeated in her sexual escapade with Nicolas, so covering these with a “whit” apron (white representing purity) is ironic. Alison’s description continues with: “And sikerly she hadde a likerous eye. / Ful
smale ypulled were hire browes two, / And tho were bent and black as any sloo” (3244-3246). A mischievous eye with pointed brows and pupils the color of sloe, paints a vivid picture of not only what Alison looks like, but who she will be in the story. This theme was continued throughout The Canterbury Tales and displays the skill with which Chaucer writes.

_Morality is another aspect of the fabliau genre that Chaucer plays with and improves upon._ Unlike the trite, contrived morals in many of the old French fabliaux, Chaucer was able to create worthwhile messages and incorporate them throughout his tales. Chaucer’s morals were not simple add-ons designed to appease people; Chaucer’s morals fit the nature of his stories, came across clearly, but subtly, and served his audience well. An example of this occurs in “The Miller’s Tale” which warns of the folly of marrying outside your age group: “That bad man sholde wedde his simylitude. / Men sholde wedden after hire estaat, / For youthe and elde is often at debaat” (3228-3230). Chaucer then takes this moral and uses it throughout the story, letting the audience know that he is not just saying it, he is proving it. Chaucer also has his characters pass on bits of wisdom, as happens when Alison is warned of her nearsightedness: “Men seyn right thus, ‘Alwey the nye slye / Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth’” (3392-3393). Or when the carpenter believes Nicolas is having a fit: “I thoghte ay wel how that it should be – / Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee. / Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man / That noght bu oonly his bileve kan!” (3453-3456). These statements help to add some humor to the situation, like fabliau morals should, but they can also be taken literally and, if desired, be applied to life. Chaucer even uses an entire character to represent a moral. In “The Merchant’s Tale,” the character of Placebo only serves as an attempt to guide his brother down the wiser path. He preaches patience, “Now, brother myn, be pacient I preye” (1521): he warns of the pitfalls of a
hasty marriage, “I warne yow wel, it is no childe pley / To take a wyf withouten avysement” (1530-1531); and he advises that physical beauty is not everything, “Al be it so that no many fynden shal / Noon in this world that trotteth hool in al” (1537-1538). Placebo is constantly begging, pleading, warning, and praying for his brother to take his advice. When January goes against Placebo’s advice, disaster ensues. Having the characters give the morals, or represent morals, is a much better way of passing on a message. With his way, Chaucer was able to incorporate morality into his stories without coming off as preachy or insincere.

Rich characterization, strong description, and subtle morality all set Chaucer’s fabliaux apart from others, but was he able to capture the most important ingredient? Without humor these stories could never be considered fabliaux. Luckily, Chaucer not only infuses his fabliaux with humor, but he does so in numerous different ways that continue to show his skill as a writer and his expertise in the fabliau genre.

Irony is an important element in Chaucerian humor and his fabliaux are teeming with it. The speech about marriage given by January in “The Merchant’s Tale” is a perfect example: “Mariage is a ful greet sacrament. / He which that hath no wyf, I holde hym shent. / He lyveth helpless and al desolat – / I speke of folk in secular estaat” (1319-1322). Aside from the hilarity of having to excuse God in the last line, this line is funny because of the horrible disaster January’s marriage turns out to be. A listening audience would not immediately know this, but the manner in which January goes on-and-on about how wonderful marriage will be would lead any audience to foreshadow the seemingly inevitable marriage problems. January continues his unknowing irony when he discusses the reasoning for marrying a young woman: “And eek thise olde wydwes, God it woot, / They konne so muchel craft on Wades boot” (1423-1424). Upon
reading the story, the irony of January refusing to marry older women because they are tricky is readily apparent.

Chaucer may have taken the fabliau genre to new heights, but that does not mean he did not get down and dirty as well. **Obscenity is the foundation on which fabliaux were built, and Chaucer, while he may not have been as crude as some, included his fair share.** “The Miller’s Tale” is full of crotch grabbing, loin rubbing, ass kissing, farting, pissing, and plenty of sex. “The Merchant’s Tale” has references to loose skin, bad sex, good sex, sex in a tree, and a lot of other thrusting. All of these obscenities are hilarious and fit well in the plots of the story, but the fact that they are done well does not hide what they are. In “The Miller’s Tale” when May tricks January into helping her up the pear tree, there is no foreplay when she meets Damien:

“And sodeynly anon this Damyan / Gan pullen up the smok and in he throng” (2352-2353).

While not a particularly long sentence, it leaves no doubt as to what is happening and does not describe the action with much civility. There is no “love making” occurring in that tree. The most memorable scenes in “The Miller’s Tale” involve ass kissing and farting (perhaps that is why it has been deemed the best). “And at the wyndow out she putte hir hole, / And Absolon, hym fil no bet ne wers, / But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers” (3732-3734). “This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart / As greet as it had been a thonder-dent” (3806-3807). Funny? Sure. High society? Probably not. In a way, Chaucer was able to add a little class to the genre because, though the topics were crude and the language coarse, it was, like all his work, beautifully written and exceptionally well done.

When Geoffrey Chaucer made the decision to write in fabliau, he did not do it halfway. He embraced the genre and used it as a vehicle to tell some hilarious stories. He was able to take
each of the traditional stylistic components, use them in new ways, and broaden the perceived scope of what a fabliau could be. Chaucer resurrected a genre that had not been seen for nearly one hundred years, changed it enough to give it credibility, but stayed true to its form and spirit. Through strong characterization, vivid descriptions, subtle morality, ironic humor, and must-have obscenities, Chaucer created some of the greatest fabliaux ever written, and his tales have become the tales by which all others will be judged.
Works Cited/Consulted


<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/%7Echaucer/>.