Qualities and definition of a fabliau

**A fabliau is……**

* a brief comic tale in verse, usually scurrilous and often or obscene.
* The style is simple and straightforward; the time is the present, and the settings real, familiar places; the characters are ordinary sorts -- tradesmen, peasants, priests, students, restless wives; the plots are realistically motivated tricks and ruses.
* The fabliaux (plural) thus present a lively image of everyday life among the middle and lower classes. Yet that representation only seems real; life did not run that high in actual fourteenth-century towns and villages -- it never does -- and the plots, convincing though they seem, frequently involve incredible degrees of gullibility in the victims and of ingenuity and sexual appetite in the trickster-heroes and -heroines.
* One common plot for a fabliau is a love triangle.
* It is more obscene than other stories, primarily through sexual situations. It is presented to be comical against marriage.
* The fabliau does not hide any negative human traits; it instead makes them comical.
* Tricks are played and sexual situations are described to give each fabliau its obscenity.
* Contains a bait and switch or some sort
* often contain material that provides an epilogue to the previous tale and other connecting matter

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**Fabliau justice** is where greed, hypocrisy, and pride are invariably punished, but so too are old age, mere slow-wittedness, and, most frequently, the presumption of a husband, especially an old one, who attempts to guard his wife's chastity. The victims of the fabliau are usually those whom society respects --prosperous merchants, hard-working tradesmen, women foolish enough to try to remain chaste. The fabliau, in short, is delightfully unruly -- a light-hearted thumbing of the nose at the religion, the solid virtues of the citizenry, and the upper classes and its courtly literature, which the fabliaux frequently lampoon (parody), though just as frequently they parody lower-class attempts to adopt courtly behavior.