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Abstract

This dissertation offers a reevaluation of the Old French romance genre on the basis of gender and adventure. I challenge a view of romance adventure that solely privileges the male individual, showing that models for female and coupled adventure not only exist in romance, but are numerous, serving as sites for the interrogation and transformation of the knightly model. While the concept of adventure has long been recognized as a complex and multifaceted aspect of romance fiction, the critical focus on the male protagonist has remained largely unquestioned, and in turn this focus has generated theories of narrative subjectivity based on the concept of the male individual as the subject of adventure. My study examines identity, subjectivity, and narrativity as they relate to *female* adventure in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Old French romance, with extensive analyses of the *Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Guillaume de Palerne*. Importantly, these female-centered romances display an evident interest in gender, demonstrating that writers of romance fiction were conscious of the gender dynamics to which their works respond, as they sought to examine and innovate upon these dynamics in dialogue with current social and political issues.

In my introduction, I set the stage for my analyses by exploring the generic horizons of romance fiction, different models for female protagonism and adventure in romance and saints' lives, critical concepts of adventure and of the knightly protagonist, and questions of subjectivity. My first chapter, on the *Roman de Silence*, argues that the romance recasts adventure as a site of performative prowess in which performance itself becomes the central narrative interest and generator of conflict, resolution, and suspense, reflecting Silence's own gendered circumstances. The forms of physical prowess that accrue to the reputation of the knightly protagonist are shown

to be illusory in the case of Silence, prompting an examination of the relationship between female adventure and identity. I also show how the text emphasizes the way in which adventure is constructed through language, or as a narrative phenomenon. My second chapter presents a new reading of the chantefable *Aucassin et Nicolette* by looking at the work within its Occitan setting, considering this setting in light of the chantefable's northern French audience and place of composition. I look at representations, stereotypes, and historical realities of women and gender in Occitania in order to reframe the relationship between Aucassin and Nicolette, as well as Nicolette's active narrative role. I also consider the influence of Occitania's multicultural market economy on the narrative's presentation of conflict and exchange. My final chapter foregrounds the adventuring couple and takes up the tension between social identity and adventure in *Guillaume de Palerne*. I read Guillaume and Mélior's adventure in relation to desire and social identity, the space of adventure and the space of the court, and desire and consent, particularly as related to marital practices. I argue that *Guillaume de Palerne* stages an unresolved tension between narrative adventure and the socio-political world to which its protagonists belong.

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Please note: All French to English translations of contemporary critical texts and secondary sources are my own. Translations of primary sources are sometimes my own and sometimes cited from published editions, specified in my notes.

Introduction: The Gender of Adventure

If you are slow at chivalry,
Minstrelsy will be of use to you.
And if the king should happen to die,
You will be able to practice your art in a chamber;
You will have your harp and vièle
To make up for the fact that you don't know
How to embroider a fringe or a border.
You will be less bored in your captivity
If you at least have something to fall back on.¹

The above passage is taken from a thirteenth century Old French verse romance, the *Roman de Silence*, in which the female protagonist, named Silence, is raised as a male by her parents to ensure that she will be able to inherit their land and wealth. The intermixing of gender codes (chivalry/embroidery) apparent in this citation point to Silence's unusual situation – unconventional both in social and narrative terms² – as well as to her anxiety that she might ultimately not succeed at being either male or female. Speaking to herself, Silence entertains the possibility that she might be slow (*lens*) at chivalry, but also imagines that if she were ever to live as a woman (which would be occasioned by the death of the king who has outlawed women's inheritance), she would be consigned to a chamber with none of the normative skills, represented by embroidery, that help women pass the time.³ For Silence, to be a woman is to live

¹ “Se lens iés en chevalerie / Si te valra la jonglerie / Et s’il avient que li rois muire / Es cambres t’en poras deduire / Ta harpe et ta vièle avras / En liu de cho que ne savras / Orfrois ne fresials manoier / Si te porra mains anoier / Se tu iés en un bastonage / Ke tu aies vials el en gage” (2863-2872). Citations of the *Roman de Silence* in Old French, and their English translations are from Sarah Roche-Mahdi (2007 [1992]).

² Although, as I will show later in this introduction, versions of this situation appear in multiple saints' lives.

³ Women's textile skills have a long literary tradition, as far back in the western canon as Penelope and Arachne. Within the medieval and Old French context, see E. Jane Burns's *Sea of Silk: A Textile Geography of Women's Work in Old French Literature* for literary representations of “silk work done by female protagonists in Old French literary texts” (2009, 1). Similarly, an entire genre of song in the Middle Ages – the *chanson de toile* – is based upon the representation

a sedentary and largely indoor existence. Compared to her relative freedom as a boy, being a woman would be dull, would require learning particular feminine skills in which she has no apparent interest, and would be the equivalent of living in captivity (*bastonage*). Silence envisions music as a possible solution to the problems of both chivalry and embroidery. The problem with chivalry, as the reader learns just prior to this passage, is that Silence cannot be sure that, having been born a woman, she will turn out to be brave and skilled at combat. Musical skill might enable her to offer something else to her peers (and herself), so that she might be liked in the absence of other markers of masculine prowess:

Et se coze est par aventure
Que si fais u longhes te dure,
Bien sai, tu ieres chevaliers
Puet sc'estre coärs, u laniers,
Car ainc ne vi feme maniere
D'armes porter en tel maniere.
Tolt cho repuet avenir bien.
Se ne ses donc aucune rien
por tes compagnons conforter,
Ne te volront pas deporter (2839-2848)

[And if it should turn out that / you have to keep up this pretense for a long time, / you'll become a knight, as well you know, / and then maybe you'll be a terrible coward, / for I never saw a woman fit / to bear arms in such a manner. / All that may well happen. / If you don't know a single way / to entertain your companions, / they won't want to spend their time with you]

Minstrelsy, however, does not solve Silence's greater dilemma, which is the difficulty she has in acquiescing to the norms of either her male or her female identity. The continued performance of Silence's masculine identity, which may occur *par aventure* [by happenstance], as Silence phrases it, leads instead to other forms of narrative *aventure*. Indeed, Silence's decision to

of women sewing while singing or composing them. See for example E. Jane Burns (2002): "The *chansons de toile* are unique among the varied genres of women's song in the Old French and Occitan traditions because a number of them feature a lovely lady, object of the male lover's desire, who not only sings songs of love but also sews" (90).

maintain a male identity is made partially on the basis of the freedom and outdoor activity it affords. At an earlier moment in the story, having listened to the allegorical figures of Nature and Nurture battle for authority over her, Silence contemplates the situation:

Et poise dont en son corage
Tolt l'us de feme a son usage
Et voit que moils valt li us d'ome
Que l'us de feme, c'est la some" (2635-2638).

[And weighed in his heart of hearts / all female customs against his current way of life / and saw, in short, that a man's life / was much better than that of a woman's.]

This dissertation takes the intermixing of generic and gender norms in fictional worlds as the foundation for an examination of women and adventure in the Old French verse romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At one pole we have chivalry with all of its connotations of knights errant, risk, displays of prowess, singular combat, individual reputation, freedom of movement, *noblesse oblige*, and the marvelous, and at the other pole we have embroidery, with its connotations of enclosure, intimacy, domesticity, patience, and chastity, although also with creativity and shared, communal experience (as with *chansons de toile*).⁴ The romances that are at the center of this dissertation are situated – like Silence – between these two poles, neither adhering firmly to the knightly, chivalric model, nor relegating female characters to their chambers. Instead, in occupying this porous and indeterminate middle space between masculine and feminine norms by foregrounding female protagonism and adventure, they interrogate gendered conventions and in doing so transform our understanding and critical reception of the romance genre.

Popular amongst the aristocracy, verse romances blended aristocratic values and concerns with elements of the extraordinary and the marvelous. Diverse in their range of subjects and

⁴ See footnote #3.

characteristics, these works nonetheless formed a somewhat coherent generic corpus, partially centered on a common meter and rhyme scheme.⁵ Definitions of romance have typically emphasized the centrality of the adventuring or questing knight standing as one of romance's most prominent and recurrent features.⁶ According to this definition, romance is at heart a form that takes shape around the protagonist's movement away from (and back to) court, seeking adventure on the margins of the familiar world and returning to tell the tale. The narrative focus on the outward movement of the knight, which extended the fictional world to the fertile land of the unknown and all its inherent possibilities, also imposed certain constraints on whom or what a story could be about, with gender and genre thus becoming mutually reinforcing. Romance narrative is, in this sense, deeply linked to gender: female characters often lack the freedom of movement, the social impetus, and the conventional narrative role that would allow them to participate in a form of adventure that is predicated on going out into the world.⁷ Instead, it is the *chevalier errant*, or wandering knight, around whom romance adventures are often structured, a character whose gender, activity, and peripatetic existence are encoded in the very phrase by which we refer to him.⁸ One could posit many explanations for this – social, historical, and

⁵ During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, verse romances, in the model of Chrétien de Troyes, often employed rhyming couplets and verses of eight syllables (or, less frequently, twelve syllables on the model of the popular *Roman d'Alexandre*). This stood in contrast to the various forms of lyric poetry and to the form of the epic, which generally involved assonanced verses of ten syllables (and later, twelve syllables), forming stanzas or *laissez* of variable length.

⁶ See for example the opening paragraphs of Kathy Krause (2019).

⁷ As Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986) notes, the *chevalier errant* was always “lancé vers un ailleurs, dans un déplacement fictif qui devait donner un sens à sa vocation, le combat, à ses aptitudes, la force et la liberté, et à d'autres aspirations distinctives” [set out on his way towards somewhere else, in a fictional displacement that was meant to give a meaning to his vocation, combat, aptitudes, force, and liberty, along with other distinctive aspirations] (18).

⁸ See Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986) for a detailed analysis of the terms *chevalier* and *errant*. For example, she notes the importance of movement to the figure of the *chevalier errant*: “Le verbe *errer*, dont est tirée la forme en *-ant* de la dénomination, issu du bas latin *iterare*, aller son chemin, marquait d'abord le mouvement, par opposition à l'immobilité” [The verb *errer*, from

narrative – but the fact remains that verse romance, a dominant form of French literary production of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and one that has become so culturally iconic that it continues to influence storytelling today,⁹ rested heavily on gendered conventions in a way that placed limitations on who could have adventures, and thus on whom, or what, its stories could ostensibly be *about*.

At least that's how it would seem, based on how medieval verse romance has most often been understood by a critical tradition extending back to the nineteenth century. In his work on gender in romance, Simon Gaunt, for example, defines romance primarily in terms of masculinity and the “male individual”:

In some respects the notion of a genre called ‘romance’ may seem like a modern imposition on a group of texts which are heterogeneous. However, a degree of thematic and stylistic unity is supplied by the treatment of love, by a particular model of the male individual which is associated with an ethical vision of chivalry, and by a highly stylized form of rhetoric and love casuistry. (72)

Gaunt is not necessarily incorrect in his assessment, which is typical of definitions of romance: the figure of the knightly protagonist does originate in medieval verse romance and did present a new and very particular model of literary hero that was highly influential within the genre, and who came to symbolize it.

which the denomination's form ending in *-ant* derives, from the Latin *iterare*, to go on way's one, marked first of all a movement, in opposition to immobility] (11).

⁹ In addition to the many modern stories and movies that are clearly *about* knights (and often about King Arthur and his particular knights), we also see continued interest in the adventure story broadly speaking, predicated partially on ancient models such as the *Odyssey* and partially on models of knightly adventure and lady-saving (or self-conscious transgressions of this model), at least in the European and anglophone American traditions. Some of this cultural tradition stems from the literature of the nineteenth century, which took a particular interest in chivalric tales and offered up both reworked models of heroes and heroines (especially within the romantic movement) and stories of adventure such as those of Jules Verne and Robert Louis Stevenson. The idea and structure of adventure has proven culturally resilient as a storytelling form.

This dissertation argues, however, that the conventional gender roles exemplified in romance - the knight and the lady - were less constrictive than they were generative, leaving open a space in which *romanciers* could explore and innovate upon the genre precisely through the manipulation and subversion of gender norms. The fact that gender was a meaningful narrative (and not only social or bodily) category did not escape medieval writers, who left us numerous romances that feature prominent female protagonists who transgress the boundaries of their social and spatial limitations in order to embark on various forms of adventure.¹⁰ As Kathy Krause (2019) rightly observes in an article that looks at the circumstances surrounding women's narrative mobility, "in fact, we have a non-negligible number of both romances and *chansons de geste* in Old French with female protagonists" (65). This dissertation aims to shift the framing of women in romance from a situation of *emplacement* to one of *displacement*, showing how the romance genre constructed models for female adventure, and how such female-centric narratives can transform our understanding of romance, as well as the function and meaning of adventure within a romance context.

While the female protagonists of verse romance have elicited significant critical interest, particularly since the advent of feminist scholarship, this interest has typically been reserved for studies of individual works and has not significantly transformed how romance is viewed as a genre, or how adventure might be redefined. This situation partly has to do with the fact that most major studies of romance as a genre have privileged a corpus centered on a specific subset of Arthurian romances, and in particular those of Chrétien de Troyes and the Grail stories. Kathy Krause (2019) has also made this observation:

The disconnect between the above definition [of romance] (as well as more general assumptions) and literary reality arises from the modern canonization of a relatively small

¹⁰ See the conclusion of this dissertation for a non-exhaustive list of such romances.

subset of the literary production of the French Middle Ages but also from the underlying structure of medieval fictional narratives, many of which built on heroic narrative paradigms, such as those identified by Otto Rank or Vladimir Propp and popularized by Joseph Campbell, among others. (65)

In addition to the scholars mentioned by Krause, an Arthurian focus is evident in Marie-Luce Chênerie's work on knightly protagonists, which specifically limits itself to the Arthurian corpus, *Le Chevalier errant dans les romans arthuriens en vers des XIIIe et XIIIe siècles*, in Erich Köhler's *L'aventure chevaleresque: Idéal et réalité dans le roman courtois*, and even Giorgio Agamben's recent work *The Adventure* (first published in Italian as *L'Avventura*). Likewise, Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, which contains a chapter specifically focused on gender in romance, devotes substantial attention to Chrétien's most iconic hero, Lancelot, and is primarily interested in romance's construction of masculinity. These studies are all excellent on their own terms and have their own reasons for limiting their corpus in light of what they are individually trying to accomplish. When taken together, however, a picture starts to emerge of a somewhat narrow focus in romance studies on a well-known and beloved corpus that certainly represented not only a watershed moment for French literature, but also some of the finest and most original literature in Old French. This focus on a subset of Arthurian romances is in some ways understandable, but it adds up to an incomplete and ultimately distorted picture of the genre that does not take into account the many ways in which romances innovated upon and called into question gendered conventions. In fact, my preliminary research indicates that there are more romances that deviate from this model than conform to it.

If we look, we find female characters and protagonists everywhere in romance. Typically, their presence has been accounted for under the heading of "courtly love."¹¹ The interrelation

¹¹ This focus is evident, for example, in the title of Gaunt's chapter "The knight meets his match: romance." The critical emphasis on courtly love is not misplaced, as courtly love serves as one

between female and male characters is in fact one of the primary interests of Simon Gaunt's (1995) work on gender in romance, in which he argues that, in contrast to the homosocial bonds privileged by *chansons de geste*, romances substitute male-female amorous relations for male-male bonding in a way that nonetheless serves to cement relations between men within a masculine narrative discourse.¹² In other words, women in romance are exchanged between men¹³ - in the sense articulated by Gayle Rubin¹⁴ - and while these women thus help to assure the identity of the knightly male, they are also seen as potentially problematic for his masculinity. Women may guarantee the knight's heteronormative behaviors both in bed and on the battlefield, but, Gaunt argues, they are also inherently unreliable and may detract from a knight's masculinity by upstaging him or suggesting he is not good either in bed or in battle.¹⁵ In other instances, the discovery of a knight's identity through female characters may in itself prove

romance's most defining features. However, the conventions of courtly love do not encapsulate the variety of ways in which women - even as objects of courtly desire - participate in romance narratives. The *romantic* side of romance in fact can obscure the transgressive aspects of both desire and female protagonists.

¹² "One important difference between the two genres lies in their treatment of the differentiation of the male individual and the concomitant problem of otherness. As I have argued, the epic hero's identity is constructed - albeit problematically - in relation to other men [...] Romance, on the other hand, consciously makes the role of the exchange of women in the formation of masculine hierarchies within feudal society a central theme. It thereby offers a new model of the masculine identity, constructed in relation to the feminine, but which proves to be no less problematic than the epic model" (Gaunt 1995, 73-74).

¹³ "But although women are more important in romance than in epic, romance merely replaces one type of male bonding with another, for Enéas's relationship with Lavine is part of a broader web of homosocial ties, between Enéas and her father, and Enéas and his own father. The difference is that male bonds are now mediated by women." (Ibid, 83)

¹⁴ See Gayle Rubin's 1975 essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex."

¹⁵ About Gauvain and the *Chevalier à l'épée*, Gaunt writes that "it is implied that Gauvain's new wife leaves him because he is no good in bed. The image of the hero flouncing off at the end with his two dogs is frankly comic and his dignity is further undermined by the narrator's gleeful epilogue, which tells us that Gauvain's less than flattering *aventure* was told and listened to *mout volontiers* once he returned to court" (119-120). Similarly, "Enide is punished gratuitously for trying to help her husband and in effect blamed by him for his own faults" (114).

problematic, with a tension arising between private desire and the requirements of a social identity.¹⁶

While I find Gaunt's comparison between the "monologic" (23) homosocial bonds of *chanson de geste* and the "dialogic" (85) construction of gender in romance to be compelling and apt, he nevertheless makes some questionable moves to discount female characters in romance as anything other than supporting players in the construction (or problematizing) of the knight's masculinity. Because Gaunt's work represents the most extensive study to date on, as its title states, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, I would like to take a moment here to discuss my differences with Gaunt's approach. Analyzing these differences not only serves to distinguish my work from Gaunt's (this difference should be evident in that Gaunt is focused primarily on masculinity and male characters in romance), but also allows me to set out the theoretical stakes of my project as they involve an argument for both female subjectivity in romance as well as a turn towards how gender can function as a site of innovation for romance conventions.

On the one hand, no one would deny the primordial role that courtly love plays in romance fiction, nor the importance of questions of masculinity in romance, nor the way in which amorous/sexual relations are used to establish the identity and sincerity of the knight, and to reward, complicate, and motivate his adventures within the social world. To some degree, female characters, regardless of how otherworldly their beauty, serve to anchor the wandering knight within a courtly reality just as much as they might tempt him to stray from it. On the other hand, there is something troubling about an account of male-female relations in romance, even

¹⁶ About *Le Bel Inconnu*, Gaunt writes: "Male subjectivity is constructed through a relationship with a woman, but Guinglain's relationship with the Pucele is incompatible with the social role his new-found identity requires of him" (108).

those based entirely in courtly love (which, as we will see, does not begin to account for the variety of ways in which female characters appear in romance), that makes claims for the formation of the masculine subject but does not acknowledge any corresponding formation of the female subject. Gaunt explains this focus on masculinity at the expense of the female subject in two main ways. The first of these is his view that female characters are simply metaphors within a male discourse:

[S]ince all surviving romances from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are as far as we know male-authored, 'women', or more accurately femininity in these texts, is a metaphor men use to construct their own subjectivity. Female characters in romance are not real women, but figures within a male discourse. Huchet acknowledges this, but often fails to see the implications. If in romance men evolve and assume new identities through love and their relationship with women, it follows that what this engagement with femininity articulates is the construction within a male discourse of masculinity through its relationship with femininity constructed as other. (71-72)

His mention here of Huchet renders Gaunt's perspective somewhat understandable, because he is pushing back against a line of critical thought that perceives "une certaine psychologie féminine" in "successful" female characters, specifically Lavinia in the *Roman d'Eneas* (78-79).¹⁷ Gaunt is certainly right to reject the notion that we can locate in romance "a certain feminine psychology," whatever that might mean, particularly in male-authored romance. However, setting aside the fact that it's not possible to assert definitively that all romances from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are male-authored,¹⁸ this line of reasoning begs the question of whether

¹⁷ Gaunt is citing: Jean-Charles Huchet. 1984. *Le Roman médiéval*. Paris: PUF.

¹⁸ For example, if we accept the existence of Marie de France, it is conceivable that at least some of the many anonymous romances, or romances attributed to an author for whom we have no other historical record, including the potentially pseudonymous author of the *Roman de Silence*, Heldris de Cornuailles, were written by a woman. We may recall Virginia Woolf's statement in *A Room of One's Own* that "I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." Such a guess is not historical fact, of course, but nor do we have any reason to deny the possibility of women's authorship, especially given that we do already have works reliably attributed to women in the Middle Ages. In addition to Marie de France, and even if we remain in our twelfth and thirteenth century time period and in the

we can locate any kind of “real” male psychology in romance, either, or at least whether male characters are any more “real” in this sense than female ones. Are not all characters in romance metaphors and fictions? Romances are not written by knights errant, after all, and even if they were, their characters are highly fictionalized, figurative representations. Narrative *is* discourse and it *is* figuration, and medieval romance is a particularly stylized and conventional form of narrative. As Giorgio Agamben puts it, perhaps too starkly, the adventurer in romance “is conventionally called a ‘knight,’ but has nothing to do with the homonymous social figure” (54).

The same argument that seeks to exclude women on the basis of their status as mere figures within a male discourse, then, would also by necessity exclude male figures, unless we want to argue that the “male discourse” imbues knights like Lancelot with a kind of extra-narrative “truth,” or an actual male identity, beyond figuration. Indeed, the only justification for seeing male characters as something more than figures or metaphors – for seeing them as subjects – is the fact that Gaunt claims romance to be a “male discourse,” given its male authorship, and that these characters play a role in constructing masculinity. But what is a “male discourse”? Does a discourse become “male” simply because the author is male, and if so, does

context of France and/or Old French, we accept that Héloïse maintained correspondence with Abelard, that Marguerite Porete really did write the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, that there existed *trobairitz* in addition to *troubadours* (see Bruckner et al. 1995, xxxix-xlvii), and that there existed female *trouvères* as well, as demonstrated by Eglal Doss-Quinby et al. (2001). In this context, and given the quantity of anonymous or ambiguously attributed romances, we have no way of affirming that no romances were authored by women.

From another perspective, Keith Busby (2002) has shown that production of manuscripts moved from a more exclusively clerical to a more varied “lay” setting potentially quite early: “If the origins of the vernacular codex are indisputably monastic and clerical, certain features of some of the witnesses argue for an even earlier movement towards a lay setting than the very end of the twelfth century” (17). If this is true, we have an even greater reason to question the notion that all romance narratives were clerical in origin, or to question what such a statement meant in practice. For example, Busby writes that “Lay scribes may well have had some monastic or cathedral training and this could explain the ‘monastic’ appearance of manuscripts produced outside of an ecclesiastical institution” (18).

this insinuate an unproblematic continuity between different kinds of males, between a male writer and his discourse, between this discourse and male characters? Are the male characters of this discourse representative of the psychology of the male author or of some kind of medieval-universal masculinity that lends them greater truth than the otherwise equally figurative female characters? Do all medieval authors participate in the same male discourse, or the same construction of masculinity? Are all equally masculine? Do we know for sure they are all male? Would all of them identify more with their knightly creations than with their feminine ones? Is the masculinity of the knight the same as the masculinity of the writer, such that knights are more than figures but women are irrevocably *other*, absent in their presence?

Gaunt seems to agree, though, that the male writer and male character are not in fact continuous, even in their constructs of masculinity, particularly as he notes the competition between *clergie* and *chevalerie* in romance, represented by the distinction between learned author and the chivalric knight, often involving some degree of irony toward, and ribbing of, the knightly character. *Clergie*, however, gets at the second reason Gaunt gives for foregrounding masculinity and downplaying the portrayal of women, namely his assertion that “the writers of romance, usually clerks steeped both in the Church Fathers’ misogyny and the intense patriarchy of feudalism, do not like women” (85), an assertion that he later repeats: “*romanciers* do not like women” (114). There is indeed no denying that romance generally involves, at the very least, misogynistic discourses, and that the European Middle Ages were not exactly a model time for women’s liberation. But it also is not at all obvious that all *romanciers* “do not like women.” It is unclear how one would go about gathering the evidence to support this statement, which reads as a very reductive view of medieval writers of romance as the stereotypical clerics who wrote

invective against women.¹⁹ As Christine de Pizan would later point out, this kind of invective is fairly standard fare in learned writing.²⁰ But do all writers who invoke it believe it? Might it just as much be part of narrative convention as personal conviction? If it is personal conviction, do we really have evidence that *no* writers of romance “liked women”? Are liking women and holding misogynistic viewpoints mutually exclusive? And importantly: did the writers of romance always *like* knights, or did they always like their male characters much more than their female ones? I aim to show throughout this dissertation that writers of romance were at the very least interested in female characters, and that female characters were used to construct - and deconstruct - much more than masculinity in romance.

It is not my goal, anyhow, to judge whether or not the texts and female characters that I am studying are misogynistic. Misogyny is never too far away in romance discourse, and the

¹⁹ Though her study focuses on the later medieval and early modern periods, Helen Swift (2008) encounters and overcomes a similar problem in confronting “pro-feminine” texts written by men in the time between Christine de Pizan and “a later generation of women writers and male, Neoplatonist writers” (v). Of the writers she studies, she writes that “Literary defences written by men in the intervening years were found wanting on two counts that we might classify loosely as ethical and aesthetic areas of weakness. First, on ethical grounds, they were entirely eclipsed by Christine; the merit of a male author's perspective - which was prejudged, at bottom, ‘really’ misogynistic anyway - was automatically discounted in the face of a real woman’s viewpoint. The principle criterion for assessing *querelle* works was thus sincerity, with this factor inevitably working to the detriment of all, ‘naturally’ insincere, male writers. A gendered opposition arose between sincerity and rhetoric, what is ‘heartfelt’ and what is ‘literary,’ with male-authored defences dismissed either for their presumed *insincerity* as ‘dubious,’ even facetious, constructions of women, or for being rhetorical flights of fancy that are somehow ‘indifferent’ to their subject matter and simply ‘prescribed exercises on a set subject’” (5). Swift proposes to “redress these presuppositions by re-evaluating the artistic interest of literary defences” (5).

²⁰ “an extraordinary thought came into my mind which made me wonder why on earth it was that so many men, both clerks and others, have said and continue to say and write such awful, damning things about women and their ways. I was at a loss as to how to explain it. It is not just a handful of writers who do this, nor only this Matheolus whose book is neither regarded as authoritative nor intended to be taken seriously. It is all manner of philosophers, poets and orators too numerous to mention, who all seem to speak with one voice and are unanimous in their view that female nature is wholly given up to vice” (Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant 1999, 5-6).

Middle Ages did not share, nor were they able to foresee, our modern sensibilities regarding gender and feminism. But to say that medieval romance is misogynistic is not the same as saying it never has anything interesting, complex, or relevant to say about women or gender. Brooke Heidenreich Findley (2012) has addressed this question in her book on medieval poet heroines, asserting that “it is possible to recuperate anonymous texts, as well as texts signed by men, as the sites of culturally significant portrayals of women making literature” (5). I agree with Findley, and I would extend this statement to encompass literary portrayals of women more broadly. From within the values and conventions of their own time period, some medieval writers were very much invested in interrogating gendered norms and in the narrative possibilities inherent in female protagonists. Gendered models in romance – whether of knights, ladies, or others – merit evaluation on their own terms, even from within a “male discourse.” I do not believe that the supposition of a male discourse absolves us from viewing female characters as potential subjects in romance. By looking at three romance narratives through the lens of their adventuring female protagonists, one of my goals in this study is thus to provide a fuller picture of the romance genre that extends beyond the centrality of the “masculine individual.” My intentions go much farther than a mere identification of and attention to female protagonism, however. I argue that what is at stake in centering a study of romance on female protagonists is the very definition of romance and of adventure, and beyond that, what is at stake is a particular concept, even a philosophy, of the individual and of subjectivity that has largely excluded the feminine or turned women into supporting characters on a knight's journey to *becoming* and to *being*.²¹

²¹ Kathy Krause has taken a similar viewpoint (although with a different approach and corpus), writing that: “The question this essay then addresses is what changes are effected in the narrative paradigm, as laid out by the theorists of heroic narratives, in order to accommodate female protagonists; and vice-versa, how is a female protagonist fashioned in such a way as to ‘fit’ within certain aspects of those paradigms?” (66)

The work of foregrounding female protagonists can thus be seen to challenge modern definitions of romance, but it also challenges the narrative conventions within romance upon which the modern definitions were built. The narratives that I have selected for this study - *The Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Guillaume de Palerne* - each grapple, openly and self-consciously, with questions of adventure, identity, and the subject, particularly as they relate to gender. Rather than substituting women for knightly protagonists as a mere narrative gimmick, each of these stories is deeply involved (even if sometimes in comical or ironic ways) with interrogating the gendered norms in romance, and also the significance of these norms *for* romance. Each recognizes, in its own way, that to transgress gender conventions is in some way to transgress narrative conventions, and thus to use gender as a site of narrative innovation. Out of this focus on female protagonists, however, arises another observation that may transform our view of the romance genre. Namely, I show that in highlighting women's adventure, the notion of the knight or the romance protagonist as an individual in the unitary sense increasingly gives way to a concept of romance focused around the couple in a manner that extends beyond the tropes of courtly love. The adventuring couple does not displace the knight, but expands upon the potential subject(s) of chivalric adventure, a category which proves to be more capacious and heterogenous than has been acknowledged.

I have chosen to focus this study on female adventure, rather than simply female protagonism or female characters, because adventure implies a set of actions, a subjectivity, and a development of the protagonist in a way that mere presence does not. As Caroline Jewers observes in her article on the *Roman de Silence* and Marie de France's *Lais*, "prioritizing the feminine requires the destabilization of romance convention; in particular, it calls for a

reevaluation of the meaning of adventure.”²² Female characters, and even female protagonists, have in some ways been admitted within a standard definition of romance, whether as objects of courtly love or desire, as queens (such as Guinevere), as fairies, and as (embodied) allegorical speech characters.²³ None of these roles are out of step with social or literary norms, as they account for women’s power through sovereignty or magic. Adventure, however, implies a form of spatial displacement that stands in direct contrast to women’s frequent emplacement in romance,²⁴ and female adventure in particular transgresses both social and narrative conventions.

By focusing on adventure, I also open a space for discussing gender and women as formed by and within narrative.²⁵ Much of the early literary scholarship on medieval women

²² Caroline Jewers (1997, 88).

²³ As exemplified by Nature and Nurture in the *Roman de Silence*.

²⁴ For examples, we might look to Guivenere, who is imprisoned by Meleagant, and who is, generally speaking, moved around by others from emplacement to emplacement, as well as multiple *lais* of Marie de France (Guigemar, Yonec, Laüstic, Chaitivel, Eliduc). Fénicé from *Cligès* also fits this model, prior to her fleeing her enclosure with Cligès, (though her time in the tower is voluntary, it is also forced by circumstance), and even Nicolette prior to her escape (and the subsequent reversal that sees *Aucassin* in a tower), in addition to the myriad secondary female characters who are imprisoned or enclosed, such as the tower of concubines in *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur*. What we see in many of these examples, however, is a bid for women’s bodily freedom and autonomy (whether self-engineered or, more often, thanks to the intervention of male protagonists), heightened by its contrast with the confines of imprisonment, often portrayed as unjust. On the other hand, Ayoush Lazikani (2015) and Liz Herbert McAvoy (2015) separately examine, in other textual instances, “how a woman’s voluntary removal from sociality and her exclusion from heterosexual temporality may have impacted upon those works written by and for her” (10), demonstrating the complexity of enclosure for women as a space of both imprisonment and, for others, safety or voluntary seclusion, such as in (but not solely) the space of the convent.

²⁵ Adventure, as I am using it here, is, after all, a strictly narrative phenomenon. Similarly, the knightly exploits of the chivalric romance only become socially meaningful when other people hear about them, that is to say, when they are narrated. Thus, even within the fictional world of the text, narrative is a prerequisite to adventure’s rewards, and as such it is a frequent concern of the chivalric hero. For example, in Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*, Erec defeats a knight who had dishonored him and wins Enide’s hand, after which he is careful to send the defeated knight back to King Arthur’s court ahead of him, instructing him to give the court an accurate account of what had happened. In this way, Erec’s reputation precedes him upon his return, augmenting his triumph. It also occurs that a knight might narrate an adventure in which he did not triumph. This

aimed to legitimize gender as a serious category for academic inquiry, and women as worthy objects of study, while seeking to identify female authorship, voices, and resources for studying women in the Middle Ages.²⁶ A large body of research has subsequently focused attention on female writers or historical women²⁷ while exploring the ways in which modern feminism could be brought to bear on the reading of medieval texts. And rightly so: critical scholarship was long lacking in these areas, and they are far from exhausted as subjects. My study, however, lies outside of the boundaries of this path: it does not take female writers or female voices as its primary focus, and it is concerned with gender as a form of representation in literature, although historical context will of course inform my readings.

is the case with Calogrenant in Chrétien de Troye's *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au lion*, in which the knight tells the court of an adventure, that, as David F. Hult (1994) puts it, "n'a point tourné à sa gloire" [did not at all bring him glory] (706). His narrative sets up the conditions for Yvain's success in motivating him to seek out the knight who had beaten Calogrenant.

²⁶ See for example early issues of the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, now the *Medieval Feminist Forum*. The first newsletter includes a call for sources: "For the next issue of the newsletter, we need your help. Would you please send a briefly annotated list of two or three recent (since 1985) books or articles you have found especially useful in your research," while the remainder of the newsletter contains a list of relevant scholars, their areas of research, and their (institutional or personal) address. See also: Joan Scott. 1986. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis". *The American Historical Review* 91.5: 1053-1075.

²⁷ In addition to works on individual authors such as Marie de France or Christine de Pizan, see for example (a non-exhaustive selection, in reverse chronological order): Delphine Aguilera. 2012. *Femmes poètes du Moyen-Age: les troubairitz*. Paris: Harmattan.; Albrecht Classen. 2007. *The power of a woman's voice in medieval and early modern literatures: New approaches to German and European women writers and to violence against women in premodern times*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.; Anne-Marie Legaré, ed. 2007. *Livres et lectures de femmes en Europe en Moyen Age et Renaissance*. Turnhout: Brepols; Danielle Régnier-Bohler, ed. 2006. *Voix de femmes au Moyen Age: Savoir, mystique, poésie, amour, sourcellerie, XIIe-XVe siècle*. Paris: Robert Laffont.; Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds. 2005. *Voices in Dialogue: Reading women in the Middle Ages*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.; Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot. 2002. *Histoire des femmes en occident, Tome II: Le Moyen Age*, under the direction of Christiane Kapisch-Zuber. Paris: Editions Perrin, collection Tempus.; Eglag Doss-Quinby et al., eds. 2001. *Songs of the Women Trouvères*. New Haven: Yale University Press.; Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Laurie Shepard, and Sarah White, eds. 1995. *Songs of the Women Troubadours*. New York: Garland.

I am not the first person to travel this particular path. As already discussed, Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (1995) looks at gendered representations across a range of literary genres in Old French, namely the *chanson de geste*, romance, troubadour lyric, hagiography, and *fabliaux*. In Roberta Krueger's *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (1993), the author examines how medieval female audiences might have related to their fictional depictions. E. Jane Burns's *Courtly Love Undressed* (2002) takes as its central premise the literary representation of women and clothing, enriching its readings with other non-literary evidence, describing a system of sartorial identity-creation and power that is internal to the courtly fictional world. In her book *Poet Heroines in Medieval French Narrative* (2012), Brooke Heidenreich Findley illuminates a path for exploring gender in medieval literature by focusing on representations of women in the act of performing or composing varieties of literature. Her work "aims to rethink portrayals of literary creation, as performed by gendered bodies, within a cultural context in which individual authorship remains problematic" (1). As already cited, Kathy Krause's article "Gender and Paradigm Shift in Old French Narrative, or What Happens When the Heroine Becomes a Hero" (2019) looks at female-centered *chansons de geste* and romances and identifies some key differences between these works and their male-centered counterparts. The collection of essays *Reconsidering Gender, Time, and Memory in Medieval Culture* (2015), edited by Elizabeth Cox, Liz Herbert McAvoy, and Roberta Magnani, examines gender in the Middle Ages through a temporal lens with a strong focus on literary representations. Susan Crane has read Chaucer from a gendered perspective that looks back to its Old French influence in *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (1994). Looking at the later Middle Ages, Daisy Delogu's *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France* (2015) "examine[s] the sudden

emergence in literary works of the late fourteenth century of the allegorical figures of France,” (3) and reads these representations within the context of the “female exclusion from royal rule” (3) leading to the Salic Law, thus blending an examination of gendered literary representations with historical legal developments. In the collection of essays *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier of Old French Literature* (1998), edited by Karen J. Taylor, gender is viewed from the perspective of transgressive narrative representations, with an eye toward showing how Old French literature destabilizes the normative roles that it simultaneously encodes.

This list of critical works is not exhaustive, but points to the richness of the scholarly tradition that informs and precedes my own approach, and that has been concerned with ways of reading the representation of women and/or gender in medieval literature. Taylor (1998) positions the scope of gender roles and gendered representations in medieval literature in relation to the medieval awareness, and even expectation, that a given discourse will contain multiple layers of meaning.²⁸ I might add to this that across texts we see multiple examples of how what we think of as norms might in fact represent only one literary model among many. We might indeed begin to ask whether certain gendered representations “transgress” these norms or simply expand upon them, and in this we might draw a line between what would have been socially transgressive within the actual medieval world and what constitutes transgression in narrative. Most of what happens in romance, after all, is a much exaggerated and deeply imaginary

²⁸ As Karen J. Taylor writes in the foreword: “There is a common perception, which has perhaps arisen from some literary criticism of the 60s and 70s, that the Middle Ages was a period of conservatism in the area of gender roles and in the expression of cultural and sexual mores. In the analysis of gender roles in medieval literature, a polarized viewpoint is repeatedly imposed on texts that may more accurately be viewed as possessing multiple shades and subtleties of meaning – much more in line with what we know about the ability of the medieval imagination to grasp multiple meanings from a single symbol, word, or act.” (ix)

reflection of the historical world that it supposedly represents.²⁹ Perhaps literature itself is inherently transgressive of the norms it reflects back to us as if through a prism.

In what follows, I would like to more fully articulate the background and stakes of this project by considering what exactly the knightly model of romance adventure is and how it has been understood by scholars.

Adventure and the knightly model of romance

The term “adventure” covers a wide range of potential forms and definitions.³⁰ In Old French literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, its use appears both flexible and somehow precise, referring to a particular, seemingly recognizable kind of (especially) narrative content and form that nonetheless is not always consistent. It was a term that was in actuality in the process of being both codified and transformed through its use in the very narratives it has come to define. In my use of the term, I conserve certain essential elements of what we usually mean when we talk about “adventure” in the context of chivalric romance, such as a movement away from the court, the centrality of the hero/heroine, and the sense that the sequence of events

²⁹ In this, we might be reminded too of romance’s tendency to place itself in a legendary past.

³⁰ See also Ménard’s list of the scholars who have, from one angle or another, treated the question of adventure, particularly in relation to Arthurian romance (89-90). Ménard adds: “Tel critique pense que l’aventure chevaleresque a un caractère strictement individualiste. Tel autre estime que l’aventure a une portée sociale et que le chevalier errant ne se désintéresse nullement de la communauté qui l’entoure. [...] Les différences ou les divergences d’appréciation tiennent évidemment à la complexité du problème, à la diversité et au nombre des textes, à la richesse aussi de la notion d’aventure. Seules les grandes questions suscitent des controverses” [Such-and-such scholar thinks that adventure is of a strictly individualist character. Another scholar esteems that adventure has a social significance and that the knight errant is not at all disinterested in the community that surrounds him [...] The differences and divergences of assessment obviously have to do with the complexity of the problem, with the diversity and number of texts, and also with the richness of the notion of adventure. Only grand questions give rise to controversies] (90-91).

involved in the adventure are in some way out of the ordinary. From here, we might add other elements as well, such as the importance to adventure of identity and reputation, as extraordinary circumstances and feats come to define special persons and meaningful subjects, often in an almost mystical sense that I believe persists today. In many ways, this study is an attempt to reframe what we mean by adventure by not only centering adventure around a female protagonist (rather than, or in addition to, a knightly protagonist), but also by examining how the content and form of adventure shifts in such narratives while still remaining (and often being referred to as) adventure. Because chivalric adventure has so consistently been tied to the figure of the knightly protagonist, it is worth examining how the two are related.

Erich Auerbach (1953), Erich Köhler (1974), Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986), Philippe Ménard (1991) and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben (2015)³¹ are among the scholars who have reflected upon, and done extensive work on, the figure of the *chevalier errant* and on the forms and meanings of *aventure*.³² Their work is focused primarily on one kind of romance – that of

³¹ See also Ménard's list of the scholars who have, from one angle or another, treated the question of adventure, particularly in relation to Arthurian romance (89-90). Ménard adds: "Tel critique pense que l'aventure chevaleresque a un caractère strictement individualiste. Tel autre estime que l'aventure a une portée sociale et que le chevalier errant ne se désintéresse nullement de la communauté qui l'entoure. [...] Les différences ou les divergences d'appréciation tiennent évidemment à la complexité du problème, à la diversité et au nombre des textes, à la richesse aussi de la notion d'aventure. Seules les grandes questions suscitent des controverses" [Such-and-such scholar thinks that adventure is of a strictly individualist character. Another scholar esteems that adventure has a social significance and that the knight errant is not at all disinterested in the community that surrounds him [...] The differences and divergences of assessment obviously have to do with the complexity of the problem, with the diversity and number of texts, and also with the richness of the notion of adventure. Only grand questions give rise to controversies] (90-91).

³² In addition to her own analysis of this term, Leslie Sconduto (1995) provides a wide-ranging summary of various scholarly works on adventure (at least prior to 1995). See in particular pp. 104-108 of her dissertation. I do not offer as extensive of a range of scholarly citations here, but rather seek to sketch out the contours of how I am using and understanding this term, which appears to have a great deal of flexibility in Old French literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

the Arthurian variety, or the *matière de Bretagne*, and even more specifically on the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Although the Arthurian romances represent only one subset of the romance genre, they have in some ways come to serve as a kind of a shorthand for medieval romance when it is defined in a larger sense.³³ The enduring appeal and influence of characters such as Lancelot, and the importance of knightly activities and the courtly milieu to romance fiction generally, have lent to Arthurian romance an outsized influence in defining and understanding the genre as a whole.³⁴ In the introduction to his edition of the works of Chrétien de Troyes, Jean-Marie Fritz (1994) highlights the importance of Chrétien's romances for modern readers and scholars:

Chrétien de Troyes, qui a construit son univers romanesque autour de la figure du roi Arthur, est incontestablement le romancier médiéval le plus lu (des spécialistes comme des non-spécialistes) et le plus étudié - le nombre de travaux critiques qu'il n'a cessé de susciter depuis plus d'un siècle en témoigne. Premier romancier important du Moyen Age, Chrétien de Troyes en est donc aussi le plus grand, comme si le roman médiéval avait d'emblée atteint son apogée, comme si au Moyen Age l'œuvre première était nécessairement la plus réussie. (10)

³³ As Alison Stones (1993) has observed, although the Chrétien manuscripts "that remain are preserved in greater numbers than other vernacular literary texts composed in the twelfth century [...] judging by what survives, Chrétien's texts were not medieval best-sellers. Their numbers are substantially less than those of the Latin *Pseudo-Turpin* epic of Charlemagne's Spanish wars, composed at least a generation earlier and surviving in close to 200 manuscripts; or the later vernacular romances and histories in prose and verse, like Guillaume de Tyr's *Histoire de la Guerre sainte*, and the *Lancelot-Graal*, the most popular vernacular texts of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, or the *Roman de la Rose*, which dominated French literary manuscript making in the fourteenth" (4). Likewise, the number of extant Chrétien manuscripts is less than those of, for example, the various versions of the *Roman d'Alexandre*: "In his basic article on the *Roman d'Alexandre*, Paul Meyer listed twenty-eight complete manuscripts or fragments; if one adds fragments discovered since 1882, as well as manuscripts of the *Paon*-poems and *Le Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, the number rises to somewhere near sixty" (Busby "Codices" 2002, 260). In contrast, Keith Busby and Alison Stones identified "a total of 43 manuscripts and fragments of Chrétien texts" (Stones 1993, 3).

³⁴ To these romances we might also add specific non-Arthurian works, such as the *Roman d'Eneas* (classified as a *roman d'antiquité* due to the Roman origin and setting of its story, based on the *Aeneid*), which has enough thematic similarities with the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, that its characters, plot, and presentation of courtship and marriage are more often held up as typical examples of romance than the otherwise very popular *Roman d'Alexandre*.

[Chrétien de Troyes, who constructed his own *romanesque* universe around the figure of King Arthur, is uncontestedly the most read (by specialists and non-specialists alike) and most studied medieval *romancier* - as evidence by the number of critical studies that he has ceaselessly elicited for more than a century. The first important *romancier* of the Middle Ages, Chrétien de Troyes is also the greatest, as if medieval romance had right away reached its height, as if in the Middle Ages the first work was by necessity the most successful.]

However lopsided this image of romance may be, weighted so heavily toward the early Arthurian works, it is worth exploring in greater depth here for the very reasons outlined by Fritz. The Chrétien, and subsequent Arthurian, model does exert considerable influence on Old French literature, and is somehow present in the background of many romances, as a point of comparison or as an originator of certain values and conventions, even when romances deviate from it significantly. Likewise, the critical interest in these romances tells us something about the modern significance of this particular form of narrative adventure, and thus provides a way into understanding how female adventure can be transformative both within medieval narrative and in modern scholarly discourse. For adventure is, as we will see, not only a set of actions, but also a kind of transformative experience that imbues its subject with meaning, although what this meaning *is* proves somewhat slippery, obscured behind layers of irony and contradiction.

The knightly model that I am referring to, and that derives primarily from Chrétien de Troyes and Arthurian romance, is one that is centered on a male protagonist – a knight – who sets out on a series of adventures through which he demonstrates his prowess, proves his worthiness, and possibly discovers or reveals his identity, gaining some form of reward in the end – a good marriage, recognition, some land of his own. These adventures take place away from the court but are highly invested in the court’s ultimate knowledge and assessment of them. The narrative is at least in part structured around these episodic adventures, which may take the knight to faraway locations and to places where he may encounter the marvelous or the magical.

Marie-Luce Chênerie reminds us that spatial displacement and demonstrations of prowess were, for actual members of the knightly class in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, partially forms of socio-economic obligation: “le verbe *errer* revient souvent à propos des chevaliers qui, au XIIe et XIIIe siècles, étant donné la fréquence des tournois et l’institution de la guerre soldée, recherchent les exercices et les faits d’armes pour assurer leur subsistance ou leur carrière” [the verb *errer* often recurs in relation to knights who, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, given the frequency of tournaments the institution of mercenary war, sought out exercises and feats of arms to assure their subsistence or their career] (12). In this sense, “L’adjectif *errant* exprime alors une aptitude aux déplacements rapides, répétés, longs” [The adjective *errant* thus expresses an aptitude for swift, repeated, and long displacements] (13). For the *literary* figure of the *chevalier errant*, however, this verb *errer* came to designate a knight wandering here and there for the less material purpose of adventure:

On sait que *errer* au sens de ‘voyager, faire route’ disparaît à une date difficile à préciser, au profit d’*aller* ; que ce verbe *errer* ne subsiste qu’avec le sens de ‘voyager à l’aventure’, contaminé par le sens de son homonyme *errer*, issu d’*errare* : aller çà et là, à l’aventure, ou s’égarer ; que les deux sens se combinent dans *chevalier errant*, de sorte que le lexème n’a plus besoin de glose pour renvoyer au type littéraire ; qu’enfin le sens premier subsiste peut-être davantage dans une autre désignation figée, celle du Juif errant, ce personnage de légende condamné à voyager sans fin. (17)

[We know that *errer* in the sense of “to travel, to head out” disappears at a date that is difficult to specify, replaced by *aller*; that this verb *errer* only subsists with the meaning of “to travel à l’aventure,” contaminated by the meaning of its homonym *errer*, from *errare*: to go here and there, aimlessly, or lose one’s way; that these two meanings come together in the *chevalier errant*, so that the lexeme no longer needs a gloss to refer to the literary type; that finally the first meaning perhaps continues to subsist in another fixed designation, that of the wandering Jew (*Juif errant*), this legendary character condemned to endless travel.]

According to Chênerie, the mere fact of movement, then, comes to define the knight through a kind of displacement à l’aventure, referencing both its destination-less quality and, for romance, its literal movement towards adventure. The wandering of the *chevalier errant* may have thus

diverged from the obligatory movements of historical knights, but they are nonetheless linked by the knight's freedom to move through space, only this time ostensibly in search of adventure rather than livelihood (although material reward often awaits the successful knight errant).

The feats of prowess that the knight demonstrates during these adventure sequences may be accompanied in the narrative by depictions of the knight's success in battle, but adventure implies a different sort of challenge and triumph than that of the battlefield: it is often faced alone, its glory goes entirely to the knight, and it may follow a logic that is limited to the event or circumstances at hand, in other words an apolitical logic. Fritz astutely observes, in fact, that Arthurian romances take place during what would be the twelve years of peace documented in Wace's *Brut*, a narrative that served as the basis for the stories of Arthur and his court. As he elaborates:

Le récit du règne arthurien est surtout un récit de guerres, mais Wace prend bien soin de mentionner les douze années de paix, pendant lesquelles ont eu lieu les merveilles et les aventures que l'on ne cesse de raconter sur Arthur au point qu'elles sont devenues fables et mensonges. Chrétien de Troyes empruntera à Wace un cadre géographique et ses personnages les plus importants (Guenièvre, Gauvain ou Keu sont déjà présents dans le *Brut*), mais écartera totalement la perspective lignagère et quasi épique de Wace [...]. Les romans de Chrétien et tous les romans arthuriens ultérieurs se logeront en effet dans les douze années de paix, sans *histoire* et sans exploit, du règne d'Arthur; suspension des événements qui permet l'irruption de la merveille et la substitution de l'aventure à la *geste*. (16)

[The story of King Arthur's reign is above all a story of war, but Wace is careful to mention the twelve years of peace during which took place the adventures marvels and adventures that have continued to be told about Arthur, to the point that they have become fables and lies. Chrétien de Troyes borrowed from Wace his geographic setting and most important characters (Guinevere, Gawain, and Kay are already present in the *Brut*), but he completely set aside Wace's lineage-based and quasi-epic perspective [...]. Chrétien de Troyes's romances and all subsequent Arthurian romances will in fact lodge themselves in these twelve years of peace, lacking in *histoire* and exploit, of Arthur's reign; a suspension of events that allows for the irruption of the marvelous and the substitution of adventure for the *geste*.]

The conflict, politics, and prowess inherent in war narratives – the primary context of the *chansons de geste* in addition to the *Brut* mentioned here – thus give way in romance to a form of battle and proving that are highly centered on the individual and on situations that exist within their own fictional world, separate from the political court and kingdom although highly reliant on the values, approbation, and ultimate recognition of the court. Knights in romance still do battle, but they must seek out adventure of their own accord, and it is this adventure that moves the plot and serves as the heart of the genre. As Philippe Ménard (1991) has shown, the desire to seek adventure is a new development in the time of Chrétien de Troyes, and this desire distinguishes the *romans d'antiquité*, based as they were on classical stories, from medieval romance from Chrétien de Troyes onward:

On doit dire simplement qu'il y a, semble-t-il, une nette différence pour l'emploi du mot entre les prédécesseurs de Chrétien et le grand romancier champenois. L'enquête menée par Gl. Burgess sur les romans antiques montre qu'aventure a tantôt le sens de "hasard", tantôt celui de "danger, risque, péril de mort", voire la valeur de "coup du sort". Autrement dit, le mot est très souvent pris en un sens péjoratif. Il implique mésaventure, désagrément, risque de perdre la vie. [...] On se contente de subir passivement les aventures. On ne les cherche pas avant Chrétien. (98)

[We must simply say that there is, it seems, a clear difference in the way the word is employed by Chrétien's predecessors and by the great *romanier* from Champagne. Glyn Burgess's study on *romans antiques* shows that adventure sometimes means "chance," sometimes "danger, risk, peril of death," and even "a stroke of bad luck." In other words, the word is very often understood in a pejorative sense. [...] One settles for passively enduring adventures. One does not seek them before Chrétien.]

If for the classical stories and their Old French versions *aventure* was a peril that arrived unexpectedly of its own accord, to which the hero then responded, for the romance hero it is something to be sought out and met face on.³⁵ Erich Auerbach (1953) likewise emphasizes this

³⁵ Leslie Sconduto (1995) argues that in what are sometimes classified as *romans d'aventure* (in contradistinction to Arthurian romance, and a category that overlaps with that of the *roman idyllique* that I discuss in this introduction), the hero does not so much seek adventure, but rather the story focuses on a "confrontation with his fate" (10). She writes: "he does not seek adventure,

aspect of chivalric adventure, distinguishing it from a modern concept of the “purely ‘accidental’” (135):

When we moderns speak of adventure, we mean something unstable, peripheral, disordered, or, as Simmel once put it, a something that stands outside the real meaning of existence. All this is precisely what the word does not mean in the courtly romance. On the contrary, trial through adventure is the real meaning of the knight’s ideal existence. (135)

Romance adventure is thus formative, and definitive, for the knightly hero. What makes the *chevalier errant*, then, is not only ability or prowess, or an adherence to a certain courtly code, but a *desire* for adventure and its inherent risks:

D’abord, l’aventure est recherchée. Elle n’arrive pas d’elle-même. Elle implique une participation active de l’intéressé. Autrement dit, la notion de déplacement dans l’espace du chevalier errant dans les romans arthuriens est intimement liée à celle d’aventure. Point d’aventure qui échoit à un héros passif. Le goût du risque et du combat chevaleresque est également permanent. (Ménard, 100)

[First of all, adventure is sought out. It does not arrive of its own accord. It implies the active participation of the concerned party. In other words, the notion of the spatial displacement of the *chevalier errant* in the Arthurian romances is intimately linked to that of adventure. No adventure befalls a passive hero. An appetite for risk and knightly combat is likewise ever-present.]

This active *desire* for adventure is partially what ties adventure so thoroughly to the knight’s character and valor. It also distinguishes the literary knight from other social classes and characters and comes to define him in an essential, fundamental way, sometimes comically dealt with within romance. For example, when the knight Yvain from Chrétien de Troye’s *Yvain ou le*

it happens to him, either accidentally or providentially” (11). This would put this kind of adventure more in the realm of the *romans antiques* discussed by Ménard. However, I do not think that such a clear categorization can be made, either of *romans d’aventure*, or of the kinds of adventure these romances portray. In both, there can be an element of fate or destiny, and in both adventure can be sought out, though the reasons for this may vary. For example, in *Guillaume de Palerne*, which is the subject of Sconduto’s study, this distinction does not hold, as Guillaume chooses to flee with Mélior and their adventure, which takes a highly specific form, is not one that merely befalls them.

chevalier au lion encounters a “vilains,” or a coarse and vulgar person, on one of his journeys, the *vilains* asks him to tell him “Ques hom tu es et que tu quiers” [what kind of person you are and what you are looking for?] (355).³⁶ Yvain responds with what appears to be a kind of incredulity that this lowly individual would not already recognize the “kind of person” he is: “Je sui, çou vois, uns chevaliers / Qui quier che ue trouver ne puis; / Assés ai quis et riens ne truis” [I am, as you can see, a knight / Who is seeking what I cannot find / I have much looked and have found nothing] (356-358). When the *vilains* asks in turn what it is that he would like to find, the knight replies “Aventures, pour esprouver / Ma proeche et mon hardement” [Adventures, to prove my prowess and courage] (360-361). When Yvain then asks the *vilains* where he might find “ou d’aventure ou de merveilles” [either adventure or marvels], the *vilains* responds in turn that “D’aventures ne sai je rien / N’onques mais n’en oï parler” [I know nothing about adventures / and I have never heard of them] (366-367).

This episode could be read as mocking the ignorance of the *vilains*, who is so uncouth and uncultivated he hasn’t even heard of the defining experience and activity of the more noble and handsome class. After all, Yvain, who is recounting this episode in the first person, has just spent 25 lines doing nothing but detailing the hideousness of this *vilains*, comparing him to a series of beasts, and not least to the wild, aggressive bulls that he is caring for. Moreover, this misrecognition is set in direct contrast to the preceding scene, in which a good vassal with a beautiful and perfectly mannered daughter take excellent care of Yvain, feed him, and put him up for the night, the vassal even recognizing that the knight is a *chevalier errant* seeking adventure: “Aprés souper itant me dist / Li vavassours qu’il ne savoit / Le terme puis què il avoit

³⁶ Translation my own, based on the Old French and David F. Hult’s (1994) modern French translation.

/ Herbegié chevalier errant / Qui aventure alast querant / Sin avoit il maint herbegié” [After supper, the vavasseur told me / that he didn't know / how long it had been / since he had last hosted a wandering knight / who had set out in search of adventure / yet he had hosted many of them] (256-261). This comparison suggests that recognizing the literary knight and his quests for adventure is the sign of a fine noble character, equating the literary references of the aristocratic class who patronized writers of romance with the recognition within narrative of the romance hero.

On the other hand, because Yvain himself is narrating this sequence, it can also be read comically *against* the knight, who displays a kind of self-importance and unawareness of the lives of those of lower classes with more difficult jobs. He is, after all, afraid of the bulls that the *vilains* is caring for and is initially afraid of the *vilains* himself, hardly the mark of a courageous hero. Either way, it becomes clear that the ability to recognize the *chevalier errant* and the knowledge of what it means to set out in search of adventure serve as status markers both within and outside the narrative, although this status is subject to a certain irony. It is also clear that the knight's very identity is intimately linked to his action of going forth into the world seeking adventure, and that adventure held a very special valence that a mere *vilains* could not be expected to grasp.

The Female Subject of Adventure

When Ménard gives a possible definition of adventure, it is intentionally large enough to encompass a wide variety of interpretations centered around this notion of risk: “Au fond la meilleure traduction d'*aventure* serait peut-être pour les textes arthuriens ‘entreprise risquée et fascinante’. Selon les héros et les contextes on pourrait nuancer” [All things considered, the best

translation of *adventure* for the Arthurian texts would perhaps be ‘risky and fascinating endeavor.’ One could provide nuance according to the hero and the context] (101). This definition notably opens up considerable space for different kinds of heroes and contexts, though it appears to assume that such heroes will be male individuals. Because there is no parallel literary convention of movement or adventure-seeking for women, the notion of female characters departing *à l’aventure* may immediately strike us as unusual, or as something that must be motivated by reasons external to the character and to the norms of society and narrative. Unlike Yvain, whose identity is innately tied to his search for adventure and who is immediately recognizable as a wandering knight (at least to the initiated), there is no corresponding knightly identity for female characters, no reason or expectation that they might be out seeking adventure, no exalted category into which we might place a woman travelling alone. Even women on pilgrimage did not depart *alone* and were not seeking risky adventure, although pilgrimage does serve as a close and potentially fruitful comparison to displacement in romance, given its emphasis on seeking something and on the transformative nature of the experience.³⁷

And yet, such female adventures did take place within romance literature. Romances featuring female adventure must thus navigate the space between the expectations of a narrative model (adventure defines the knight, after all, not the lady), social norms surrounding female mobility and activity, and the capacity of adventure to nonetheless feature female subjects. The external circumstances that compel female characters to leave home and depart on a kind of adventure constitute one of the main focuses of Kathy Krause’s work on female protagonists. Based on her selected corpus, she discerns that “the female protagonist’s departure is motivated

³⁷ This comparison is worth exploring, particularly as it relates to female protagonists and female pilgrims, although that is outside the scope of this present study.

by a familial crisis, often although not exclusively of a sexual nature” (69). Despite this familial aspect, Krause’s argument ultimately undermines the tempting conclusion that women's motivations in romance are “private” whereas knights’ are “public.” One of her most compelling observations, though, is that “where female protagonists are, for the most part (but again, not absolutely always) departing from their home, male protagonists are moving towards something, whether that is romance adventure or epic battle” (72). Indeed, for the knight, adventure may provide its own ends and justification,³⁸ while for the female protagonist, it is the means to another end. This difference is crucial, because it implies that female protagonists do not seek adventure, but rather that adventure befalls them as a result of their response to an external circumstance. Already, this difference significantly alters the meaning and potential for adventure in romance. In turn, women’s departure, occasioned by crisis, effects a break in the link between narrative and adventure: to whom will women narrate their adventures, if they don’t wish or are unable to return home? *Will* they tell of them? What will it mean to do so? As will be seen throughout this dissertation, the answers to these questions not only vary from text to text but become very significant elements of the female protagonist’s adventure and its narrative treatment.

But why does this matter? Why should we care whether female protagonists could be the subjects of adventure in medieval romance, or what kinds of subjects, and of what kinds of adventure? One major answer to this question is that studies of romance have for a long time argued that romance represents the rise of the individual in literature, in the form of the knight seeking out his own destiny, linking exterior exploits to a kind of inner development. Erich

³⁸ However, as we have seen, the knight may also be motivated by material reward and, as I show in my discussions of *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion*, may also be motivated by social pressures.

Köhler writes, for example, that in the knightly model of romance “L’homme n’est plus lié au destin seulement en tant que membre d’une collectivité, mais en tant qu’individu dont le destin décidera du sort de la communauté” (78) [Man is no longer tied to destiny only as a member of a collectivity, but as an individual whose destiny will decide the fate of the community]. This perspective is echoed in Simon Gaunt's assessment of the difference between epic and romance, when he states that “One important difference between the two genres lies in their treatment of the differentiation of the male individual and the concomitant problem of otherness” (73). Through adventure, romance is thus seen as constructing a particular version of the individual - a male individual - predicated on this individual’s difference from others. This individual attains the level of *subject* through coming to represent something more than a single instantiation of a character in a book. Michel Zink (1985) articulates this perspective clearly and eloquently in the introduction to his book *Subjectivité littéraire*:

Dans le domaine de la littérature profane, cette passion de l’individu est particulièrement éclatante, si l’on songe au type du héros romanesque. On a souvent dit que le roman du Moyen Age est un roman d’éducation. Il suit un jeune chevalier à travers des aventures qui à la fois le révèlent à lui-même et sont en même temps le signe, la matérialisation – une fois de plus –, parfois presque le symbole de cette aventure intérieure, la découverte de lui-même, à laquelle il parvient après avoir été affronté à des conflits moraux mettant en jeux des valeurs comme l’honneur, l’amour, etc. Hegel lui-même a été particulièrement sensible à cet aspect de la littérature médiévale, et les pages qu’il consacre précisément, dans le cadre de son analyse de l’art romantique, au roman de chevalerie et à la notion de l’honneur sont justement célèbres. (14-15)

[When it comes to profane literature, this individual passion is particularly dazzling, if we are thinking of the type represented by the romance hero. It has often been said that the medieval romance is a Bildungsroman. It follows a young knight along adventures that simultaneously reveal him to himself and are at the same time the sign, the materialization - once again -, sometimes almost the symbol of this interior adventure, the discovery of the self, which he arrives at after having been confronted with moral conflicts that put at stake values such as honor, love, etc. Hegel himself was particularly sensitive to this aspect of medieval literature, and the pages that he devotes precisely, in the context of his analysis of romantic art, to the chivalric romance and the notion of honor are rightly famous]

In this account of the individual in romance, it is the young knight who is the subject of an adventure that will also serve as a form of self-discovery through moral conflict and the assertion of certain values. (For Köhler, cited above, this individual then becomes a figure for the destiny of the community, rather than the other way around). Subjectivity, for Zink, is not only wrapped up in the character of the knight, but also in the awareness of the narrative voice as that of a subject, or the awareness that the narrative is the product of a subject. At the same time, the concept of the individual within romance and the subject as an ontological entity are closely linked, with the former serving as a representation of and by a “conscience particulière.”³⁹

Zink reminds us that this perspective on chivalric literature forms a part of Hegel’s theory of subjectivity, particularly in his lectures on aesthetics. For Hegel, the chivalric hero arises within a context of Christian inwardness coupled with the external action of the Crusades. The adventures of the literary chivalric knight differ, however, from the Crusades, and are more aligned with inwardness, particularly in poetry: “Amongst the particular arts it is especially poetry which has been able to master this material in the most appropriate way, because it is the

³⁹ “Mais que faut-il entendre par subjectivité littéraire? Non pas, bien évidemment, l’effusion spontanée ou l’expression véritable dans un texte de la personnalité, des opinions ou des sentiments de son auteur. Mais ce qui marque le texte comme point de vue d’une conscience. En ce sens, la subjectivité littéraire définit la littérature. Celle-ci n’existe vraiment qu’à partir du moment où le texte ne se donne ni pour une information sur le monde prétendant à une vérité générale et objective, ni pour l’expression d’une vérité métaphysique ou sacrée, mais quand il se désigne comme le produit d’une conscience particulière, partagé entre l’arbitraire de la subjectivité individuelle et la nécessité contraignante des formes du langage” [But what do we mean by literary subjectivity? Not, of course, the spontaneous effusion or true expression in a text of the personality, opinions, or sentiments of its author. Rather, it is what marks the texts from the point of view of a conscience. In this sense, literary subjectivity defines literature. This latter only truly exists from the moment when the text no longer presents itself as a piece of information about the world, laying claim to a general or objective truth, nor as an expression of a metaphysical or sacred truth, but when it designates itself as the product of a particular conscience, divided between the arbitration of individual subjectivity and the constraining necessity of forms of language] (Zink, 8).

one most competent to express both the inwardness which is concerned solely with itself, and also its aims and adventures” (554). Even in their physical exploits, there is something internal to the knight that is at play, in contrast to the external, forceful bravery of the classical heroes:

Yet what the champions of the Middle Ages have in common with the heroes of antiquity is bravery, though even this acquires a quite different position here. It is less the natural courage which rests on healthy excellence and the force of the body and will which has not been weakened by civilization and serves to support the execution of objective interests; rather does it proceed from the inwardness of the spirit, from honour and chivalrousness, and is on the whole fantastic since it resigns itself to adventures of inner caprice and the contingencies of external entanglements, or to impulses of mystical piety, but in general to the subjective relation of the subject to himself. (557)

The chivalric hero’s adventures are thus seen as “proceed[ing] from the inwardness of the spirit,” and ultimately from the “subjective relation of the subject to himself,” thus implying subjectivity through the action of *seeking out* adventure, to recall Philippe Ménard’s description, as an expression of the inward self.⁴⁰ Hegel later phrases this, evocatively, as saying that for knights: “the heart just wants out and looks for adventures deliberately” (589).⁴¹ In this formulation, the

⁴⁰ Giovanna Pinna (2019) likewise emphasizes the importance of chivalry to Hegel’s theory of subjectivity, and highlights that part of this concept of chivalry was rooted in adventurous, heroic actions: “In the lectures of 1826, Hegel added to the above virtues, audacity (*Tapferkeit*), which he saw as associated with the adventurous and fantastic dimension of the Romantic epos. We are not talking about the, so to speak, physical, natural courage of Homeric heroes, but of a disposition that is rooted in one’s interiority, in the sense of honor which is, once again, conditioned by the relations of the subjects with themselves. It applies to finalities of a religious-fantastic nature, as in the case of Parsifal, or to any heroic action, even the most gratuitous one, that is aimed at affirming the value of the individual” (15). By “the above virtues,” the author is referencing specifically honor, love, and fidelity. Please note that I am citing Pinna according to paragraph rather than page number, as I have been unable to access a paginated copy.

⁴¹ “Consequently, on mundane ground the other basic causes of actions and events consist of the endlessly varied adventurousness of ideas and of the external and internal contingency of love, honour, and fidelity; here we see men hitting around for the sake of their own fame, there we see them leaping to the aid of persecuted innocence, accomplishing the most astounding exploits for their lady’s honour, or restoring the rights of the oppressed by force of their fists or the skill of their arm, even if the ‘innocence’ thus freed be only a gang of rascals. In most of these things there is no state of affairs, no situation, no conflict which would make the action necessary; the heart just wants out and looks for adventures deliberately.” (589)

medieval chivalric hero, in contrast with the ancient hero, is acting of his own accord in a manner that ties action to self, thus generating a form of subjectivity. Likewise, for Hegel, adventure would become the flash point for a new literary consciousness as represented by *Ariosto* and *Don Quixote*, and that would turn the world of chivalric romance into its own subject of literary creation.⁴² Giovanna Pinna (2019) summarizes his view, saying:

Adventure, which in all its arbitrariness and variety becomes the center of this poetical universe, is nothing but the extension of the abstract subjectivity or the absolutization of individuality. In this fashion, the dissolution of chivalry, the more or less radical ironic re-elaboration of the constellation of values on which the chivalric universe was based, is consciously grasped and becomes itself the object of art. (23)⁴³

In this description we find a strong connection between the action of adventure (which has also been presented as a kind of value in its relationship to audacity) and “the abstract subjectivity or the absolutization of individuality.” Adventure and the subject are clearly mutually constitutive concepts within Hegelian thought, beginning in medieval literature and extending from there through various reworkings over time. Perhaps unsurprisingly (although somewhat maddeningly), Hegel's only mention of female characters in chivalric romance is in relation to courtly love. He hides a dismissal of the female subject behind a veil of exaltation:

It is especially in female characters that love is supremely beautiful, since for them this surrender, this sacrifice, is the acme of their life, because they draw and expand the whole of their actual and spiritual life in this feeling, find a support for their existence in it alone, and, if they are touched by a misfortune in connection with it, dwindle away like a candle put out by the first unkind breeze. (563)

⁴² While I am focused here on providing a sketch of how chivalry, adventure, and the romance hero have been understood within philosophical accounts of subjectivity, I do wish to assert that the “conscious grasping” of the chivalric model, or the way in which it is turned into an object to be played with and under a thick layer of irony and self-awareness, is already present in medieval romance fiction. I would argue that authors such as Cervantes do not invent this self-awareness, but that they grasp it, expand upon it, stretch it, and exaggerate it to create something new. At the same time, this does not negate Hegel’s perspective, as in either case adventure becomes the means according to which notions of the literary subject are transformed.

⁴³ As noted in footnote #40, I am citing Pinna according to paragraph rather than page number.

Instead of building upon this particular image of women to form a distinct female subjectivity in romance (however distorted the image may be), Hegel instead implies a little later that this kind of “spiritual life” and “feeling” do not constitute the wholeness of the individual: “This content of deep feeling, once more itself still formal, does not truly correspond with the totality which an inherently concrete individual must be” (567). The individual, and thus the subject, cannot be female for Hegel, because female characters simply do not fit into a knightly paradigm in which inwardness is expressed through adventure, presumed to be the sole province of knights errant.

Beyond Hegel, a broader understanding of romance as centered on the male individual - and as uniquely constitutive of male subjectivity - has been passed down from scholar to scholar in its abstracted form. More recently, Giorgio Agamben (2018, 2015 for the original Italian) has written in his philosophical essay *The Adventure* an account of subjectivity and adventure that turns Hegel on his head but still maintains an exclusive focus on the knight:

By happening (*avvenendo*), the adventure demands “someone” to whom it happens (*a cui avvenire*). However, this does not mean that the event – the adventure – depends on the subject [...] The “someone” does not preexist as a subject - we could rather say that the adventure subjectivizes itself, because happening (*l'avvenire*) to someone in a given place is a constitutive part of it. (67-68)

Agamben is making a clever move here to evacuate the literary subject of a romantic notion of “inwardness” based on Christian spiritualism, instead suggesting that it is the adventure itself that makes the subject because it has to happen to *someone*. While Agamben thus presents a distinct argument for *how* the knight becomes a literary subject, he does not on the other hand dispute the notion *that* the knight represents the literary subject. He articulates this clearly in his statement that “It is easy to recognize here the traits of the adventure, which always and immediately involves the knight who is living it” (67). And yet, because Agamben’s perspective allows a way out of the trap of inwardness (or an assumed subjectivity), it also opens a space for

other kinds of literary subjects. Do not adventures also *happen* to female protagonists? Might women too be the subject of a “risky and fascinating endeavor,” to recall Ménard? Do they not also constitute literary subjects, then? The possibility for female subjectivity is never alluded to in Agamben, perhaps because within the philosophical context of literary subjectivity, the knight errant and the adventure model of chivalric romance have taken on a life of their own. They have been entirely abstracted from the particularities of individual romances. Whether or not this model exists in any true form within an individual work may not matter within the philosophical or theoretical realm, because it has moved into the realm of ideas; it has become an ideology. Yet, this ideology reveals more about a European self-image or a strand of modern western thought than it does about medieval romance. It tells us very little about a specific romance, but allows us to construct a model of our own individual development and subjectivity on the basis of medieval models. Michel Zink (1985) recognizes this when he writes that:

Montrer le moment et les conditions de cette prise de conscience dans les premiers siècles de la littérature française, c'est-à-dire au Moyen Age, ce n'est pas seulement se livrer à une étude sur la littérature médiévale, c'est éclairer l'ensemble de la littérature française et son développement. (8-9)

[To locate the moment and the conditions of this awareness in the first centuries of French literature, which is to say the Middle Ages, is not only to engage in a study of medieval literature, it is to illuminate the entirety of French literature and its development]

For French literature in particular, this moment of awareness or awakening (*prise de conscience*) embodies a point of origin, or an origin story, for a concept of the self and the entire development of a literature that has influenced and informed a multitude of philosophies, theories, and even revolutions. All of this is at stake, then, in framing romance around male protagonists or the male individual to the exclusion of the female. However, it would be a mistake to frame this argument for female subjectivity as a zero-sum game between the ideal of

the chivalric hero and the complete dismantling of this model of hero. The chivalric hero does exist in romance, although perhaps not always with the seriousness or clarity of purpose he seems to achieve in philosophical accounts of his subjectivity. However, the focus on this individual (as subject) to the exclusion of other individuals, such as female protagonists, performs an erasure of other kinds of subjects and other forms of subjectivity.⁴⁴

The goal of this dissertation is thus to construct new models of the romance subject through the lens of gender, and in doing so to transform the modern critical and even philosophical understanding of romance and of the subject of adventure. I do not wish to rob the knight of his subjectivity, but I wish to give one to the lady. Nor do I claim that male and female protagonism, male and female adventure, and ultimately male and female subjectivity are the *same* in romance. On the contrary, I devote considerable attention to their points of divergence. However, it is a modern, rather than a medieval, perspective that sees these points of divergence as one road ascending to the peak of subjectivity while the other road leads straight off the cliff.

Reassessing Chrétien de Troyes

We do not need to rely solely on less-studied romances to find examples of female adventure and protagonism. Paradoxically, Chrétien de Troye's own romances do not well adhere to the conventional model of the knight-protagonist of courtly romance, either in terms of the ideal of masculine identity or the solitary nature of the wandering knight. While Chrétien's romances ostensibly center on the masculine, knightly characters of Erec, Cligès, Yvain, and Lancelot (as well as Perceval if we include the Grail story), their narrative ecosystems are in fact

⁴⁴ While my focus here is gender, this argument could be extended to other forms of identity (racial, class, religious, etc.) or individuals in the Middle Ages and in medieval literature, which will vary according to the literature, region, language, genre, culture, etc., in question.

much more diverse and populated, and their titular characters much less solitary, than has generally been accounted for in the knightly model of courtly romance. Notably, Chrétien's romances feature a number of prominent women who sometimes share in the knight's adventure.

Most well-known of these stories today, of course, is the Lancelot-Guinevere-Arthur love triangle, echoing that of Tristan-Iseult-Mark. The primary interest of the Lancelot stories, including Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charrette*, is found less in Lancelot's prowess as a knight (though he is presented as possessing exemplary skill and many of his exploits are memorable) than in his adulterous relationship with Guinevere and the complications this creates for his position as Arthur's knight. Within the *Chevalier de la charrette*, Lancelot was never an unproblematic model, initially jeered at and pursuing an adulterous love. The play of the story revolves rather around the complex relationship between individual knightly proving and the importance of social identity and recognition, as well as the ethics - both social and individual - of unsanctioned love. Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charrette* is thus already a story that complicates the ideal nature of the knight-protagonist and ties the knight's adventures and fate to a strong, prominent female character. Simon Gaunt (1995) demonstrates how Chrétien has in fact "chosen a different model of masculinity, marked by reason, learning and writerly skill rather than by an ethical model of chivalric prowess and love service" (103), and he how has thus "shown that the chivalric enterprise and construction of masculine identity exemplified by Lancelot is flawed" (103). The importance of Lancelot to definitions of romance since the nineteenth century, however, complicates our ability to see past the ideological model of the knightly protagonist. As Gaunt astutely remarks, "Scholars are reluctant to deny Lancelot's heroic status altogether because without it romance would appear to be empty at its center" (93). This perceived emptiness, however, is not a product of romance itself, which flourished for

centuries only to be reimagined hundreds of years later and to resurface as a rich source of narrative models and characters. Instead, we might imagine that romance always had at its heart a willingness to play with form and to raise questions (rather than provide answers) about themes such as passion, exemplarity, obedience, identity, and gender.

Chrétien's other romances are likewise notable for the way in which they complicate masculine adventure. Nowhere is this more apparent, perhaps, than in *Erec et Enide*, a story in which Enide upsets the harmonious balance of her recent marriage to Erec when she worries aloud about something she has overheard regarding her husband, namely that he is neglecting his knightly duties by spending too much time at home with her. This rumor disturbs her so much that she can't help but weep in bed and talk aloud to herself while Erec is sleeping. He overhears part of what she says, of course, and compels her to tell him the rest. With his pride deeply wounded, Erec departs abruptly *à l'aventure*, but not alone. He brings Enide with him, so that the two of them adventure together, presumably to test Enide's devotion while simultaneously showing her what a great knight he is. Enide's punishment for her verbal transgression, however, is that she is not allowed to speak. She nonetheless cannot stop herself from doing so at several key moments when she needs to alert Erec of imminent danger. While Erec threatens to punish her each time for these transgressions, she nevertheless succeeds in saving his life. During this bizarre process, Erec comes to recognize Enide's love for him, and he falls back in love with her more fiercely than before, while also building a solid reputation for himself as an unsurpassable knight. This romance provides a stark illustration of the degree to which, for male protagonists, knightly adventure consists of forms of physical prowess and risks that win substantial rewards for the knight, including renown and allegiance. On the other hand, for the female protagonist who accompanies him, dialogue is, in a very true sense, a form of action that likewise carries

serious risks and rewards. Enide's circumstances are brought about by her words, her punishment is silence, her adventure consists of risking the demise of her marriage in order to save her husband through her own verbal warning, and her redemption likewise comes through the force of her own narration. As we will see, this emphasis on dialogue and discourse as a form of female prowess emerges again and again in romances that center on female adventure, while the model of the adventuring couple - as opposed to the solitary male individual - recurs in multiple forms.

Yvain, or Le chevalier au lion, presents yet another version of problematic marital bliss that strongly echoes that of *Erec et Enide*. In this narrative, Yvain sets out to challenge a knight who had previously defeated another of Arthur's knights, Calogrenant. He does so, mortally wounding the knight, while he himself is also wounded and left trapped between two gated doors in the knight's castle. While imprisoned in this small space, a chambermaid, Lunete, comes to see him and to help him escape. In a telling exchange, she warns Yvain of the dangers awaiting him if he remains there, as he will be killed or imprisoned by the knight's men. Yvain responds, with bravado: "Ja, se Dix plaist, ne m'ochirront, / Ne ja par eus pris se serai" [Never, if it pleases God, will they kill me / Nor will be I taken prisoner by them] (992-993), to which Lunete replies "Non, fait ele, car j'en ferai / Avec vous ma poissanche toute" [No, she said, because I will do, with you, all that is in my power].⁴⁵ In saying this, Lunete both places herself at the same level as Yvain (they will work together) and also in the superior position: she knows, after all, that it is her help and "poissanche" that will ultimately get Yvain out of this situation. Lunete then proceeds to recall a time that she went to Arthur's court and Yvain was the only knight who

⁴⁵ Translation my own, on the basis of both the Old French and David F. Hult's (1994) modern French translation.

deigned to speak to her and serve her; she knows his name, and she has decided to help him in return. And her help turns out to be quite remarkable indeed: she gives him a magic ring that makes him invisible.

While invisible, Yvain sees the lady of the castle, Laudine de Landuc,⁴⁶ grieving the dead knight, and listens to her deliver a long monologue in which she accuses him of cowardliness for not showing his face while lamenting the valorous fallen knight, and he falls in love with her. Lunete persuades Laudine to take a new husband, in order to “defend her fountain” (“De vostre fontaine deffendre”) (1624), a reference to the fountain that calls forth the knight who protects the castle, but which also insinuates the danger that might befall her own person – sexually, her own “fontaine” – if enemy knights arrive and she has no knightly husband. It is thus an awareness of the precarious situation in which she finds herself that convinces Laudine to take a husband, and, through some skillful discursive maneuvering by Lunete, she accepts Yvain.

Later, when Arthur and his knights arrive (having followed the same trajectory as Yvain), Gauvain accuses Yvain of no longer being knightly enough, too content in his marriage: “Comment? Seroiz vos or de chix / Che disoit mesire Gavains, / Qui pour lor femmes valent mains?” [What? Are you one of those people / (Sir Gauvain was saying this) / Who are worthless because of their wives?] (2484-2486). The resonance with *Erec et Enide* is clear, although in this case the accusation is made directly to Yvain by one of his fellow knights. Pressured by this negative assessment of his knightliness, Yvain leaves home to fight in tournaments, having promised Laudine that he would be home in one year’s time. Unfortunately, Yvain loses track of

⁴⁶ David F. Hult (1994) notes that the name Laudine does not appear in all manuscript versions: “Elle n’est appelée *Laudine de Landuc* que dans trois manuscrits sur dix au vers 2153 (VFR); dans les sept autres, elle est la dame de Landuc” [She is only called *Laudine of Landuc* at verse 2153 (VFR) in three manuscripts out of ten; in the other seven, she is *the lady of Landuc*] (706, footnote).

time, breaks his promise, and his wife refuses to see him. Yvain despairs and descends into madness, at which point he is helped once more by a lady, this time the lady of Noroison, who recognizes him, startled to find him “povre et nu” [poor and naked] (2912). She heals him with an ointment, and Yvain regains his sanity. He helps a lion fight off a serpent, and this lion follows him around as a form of gratitude (hence *Le chevalier au lion*, a name that Yvain later uses to refer to himself). He encounters a chance to save Lunete from death and confronts a number of other challenges and adventures before reuniting with his wife, again with the help of Lunete.

While this romance is thus clearly centered on the protagonist Yvain, following him along his various peregrinations, it is also a romance that foregrounds the character Lunete, whose cleverness and courtliness (she knows how to correctly repay a favor) save and aid Yvain at various key moments. While Yvain helps her in return, their mutually supportive relationship mimics that of homosocial *pairs*. Like *Erec et Enide*, this romance also suggests that there is something potentially destabilizing about the relationship between a knight and his wife, while putting the blame for this destabilization on the external pressures exerted by other knights rather than on the pleasure and contentment the protagonist finds with his partner. It is, after all, from the female characters that Yvain receives the most help, and the narrative makes clear that he would be entirely lost without them: likely killed if not for Lunete, likely unable to marry Laudine if not for Lunete, likely still in a state of madness, naked and poor, if not for the lady of Noroison, likely unable to reunite with his wife if not, once again, for Lunete. In this sense, Yvain is not so solitary and self-sufficient as the knightly model might suggest. Indeed, we may view the character Lunete as a different version of the female protagonists of later romances, who become more central participants in the errant adventure, often in conjunction with a

knightly character who is also a love interest. The model of male-female adventure becomes increasingly important throughout this dissertation, culminating in the chapter on *Guillaume de Palerne*, and this focus on the couple will ultimately provide a new way of looking at romance from the perspective of shared, rather than individual, adventure.

In *Cligès*, the titular hero's story is first framed by the love story of his parents, whose mutual love, desire, and courtship are presented in highly equal terms. The two are unable to articulate their love for one another, and their mutual desire is only recognized following the kindhearted intervention of Guinevere. Likewise, the love between Cligès and Fénice is presented in equally mutual terms, but instead of being mediated by a helpful queen, it is thwarted by a perfidious king, Alis, whose intentions to marry Fénice (and his eventual marriage to her) break the agreement he had made with this brother, Alexandre, Cligès's father, according to which Alis would not marry so that Cligès would inherit the throne. The realization of the love between Cligès and Fénice, like that between his parents, is again mediated by a woman: this time Fénice's wet nurse, Thessala, who concocts a potion for Alis to drink so that he will imagine he has slept with his new wife when it is nothing but an illusion, and later provides another potion so that Fénice will appear to be dead and Cligès can come fetch her from her tomb (a Romeo and Juliet scenario, only successful this time). While in her semi-dead state, Fénice endures the torture of being abused by doctors to be sure that she is dead. She then escapes to live an idyllic life (or so it is presented as being) in a tower, where she can maintain her relationship with Cligès. Eventually tiring of her tower and wanting to be outside, however, Fénice ventures into the enclosed garden space and the two lovers are spied by a passing knight. They escape together again, along with Thessala, and eventually are able to marry once the king

Alis has died, with their ascent to the throne presented as a righting of wrongs, as the succession was intended for Cligès and the throne never should have been Alis's in the first place.

Cligès is thus a romance that is predicated on women's involvement in negotiating relationships between the characters and a woman's role in solving a marital problem created by men's political maneuvering. It is also a romance in which a certain parity is suggested between women's and men's desires and between the relative nobility and exemplarity of both female and male characters. Likewise, it is a romance that places the issue of women's consent in marriage, as well as the conflict between private desires and social or class obligations as they relate to gender, at the forefront of the romance's plot and tensions. It interrogates women's emplacement and freedom of movement when Fénicé longs to be outside, her protection and desires only realized through a form of imprisonment. And finally, it presents an example of a couple fleeing together, embarking on a form of spatial movement that in future romances will constitute an adventure in and of itself. All of these themes will be resonant and will reappear throughout this dissertation: the ability of women to solve problems, the gendered parity of romantic love or desire, the relationship between marital dilemmas and female protagonism, the issue of women's emplacement and freedom of movement, and the model of the couple fleeing together as a particular form of narrative adventure.

The prominence of women in Chrétien's narratives complicates the notion of the solitary, wandering knight even within the narratives out of which it arose. In this sense, female protagonists in romance do not stand in opposition to the knightly model, but rather they might be thought of as shifting position to occupy a more active or prominent role. Chrétien thus sows

the seeds for the transgression of his own model,⁴⁷ a development which perhaps shouldn't surprise us given Chrétien's sense of irony and humor and his occasionally ambivalent approach to his heroes. We can even find evidence that medieval readers themselves were attentive to the women in Chrétien's romances. In the Occitan narrative *Flamenca*, a long description appears near the beginning of the work, in which the narrator elaborates all of the stories told by jongleurs during a gathering. Within this list, reference is made to a number of works of courtly romance, and it is notable that the focus of each description is not always on the titular knight, but often on the female characters as well. Thus, while the jongleurs tell tales of "Galvain" [Gauvain] (665) and "Persaval"(671) [Perceval], for example, among myriad other masculine heroes, Chrétien's *Yvain* is referred to as the story of the "leo que fon compain / Del cavallier qu'estors Luneta" (666-667) [the lion who was the companion of the knight saved by Lunete], and the story told of Lancelot is, unexpectedly, that of "la piucella breta / Con tenc Lancelot en preiso" (668-669) [The Breton lady who held Lancelot prisoner]. In both cases, the narrative reference emphasizes the activity of female characters over the knightly heroes, whether imprisoning or saving them. In these tellings, the knights are the objects of the female characters' own actions. Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* is also referred to, simply, as the "comtet d'Erec e d'Enide" (673) [the story of Erec and Enide], with both characters receiving equal billing, while *Cligès* is referenced only in regard to two of the female characters: "L'autre comtava de Feniza / Con transir la fes sa noirissa" (677-678) [another told the story of Fénice / whose wet nurse passed off as dead].⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Or put another way, he offers multiple models for the knightly protagonist and chivalric adventure.

⁴⁸ Translations my own, aided by Valérie Fasseur's (2014) modern French translation.

These female-centric descriptions in *Flamenca* are perhaps not unexpected given *Flamenca*'s plot and narrative interest in its female protagonist.⁴⁹ It is the story, essentially, of how a jealous husband's imprisonment of his wife brings about the very conditions that cause her to sleep with someone else, thus provoking his own worst fears by exercising an unjust control over his wife's body. It is, in other words, another narrative that could very well have been the subject of a chapter in this dissertation (although it is in Old Occitan and not Old French). The quantity of narratives that were excluded from this study by the limits of space and time attests to the possibilities, not exhausted here, that are opened up by looking at medieval romance through the lens of the female protagonist, and thus the utility of this lens for a reassessment of romance itself. While not contemporaneous with Chrétien's works, nor many of the others that the jongleurs recite (*Flamenca* most likely dates to the late thirteenth century, although the narrative appears to take place in 1234),⁵⁰ this passage of *Flamenca* nonetheless provides an example of how, in the thirteenth century, Chrétien's romances were read and remembered according to their female characters, including minor, non-titular, or non-love interest characters such as Lunete, the "Breton lady," Fénice, and the wet nurse in *Cligès*.

Other forms of romance: the *roman idyllique*

When we begin to look beyond the Arthurian model of romance, we find a great variety of romance subjects and forms that foreground women's narrative involvement in ways that, I have shown, were not entirely absent within Chrétien de Troyes but are developed in new directions.

If one of my primary goals in analyzing romances featuring female adventure is to argue for the

⁴⁹ *Flamenca* is also, incidentally, the work that gives us the feminine form of the word troubadour, *trobairitz* (Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner et al 1995, xi).

⁵⁰ See François Zufferey's (2014) introduction to *Flamenca* (99-105).

ways in which they transgress (or expand) narrative norms, it is thus worth a detour here to discuss how two of the works that are the focus of my chapters - primarily *Guillaume de Palerne*, but also to some degree *Aucassin et Nicolette* - have in recent years been categorized as belonging to a particular variety of romance grouped somewhat fluidly under the heading of *romans idylliques*, and to consider what this means for an assessment of romance and its portrayal of female adventure. The category of *romans idylliques* generally refers to stories that feature a young couple in love, who often resemble one another, and whose love is in some way problematic within their families or social milieus.⁵¹ These narratives thus commonly foreground marital and familial crises, which are harmoniously resolved at the end. As Bridget Behrmann (2012) notes, experimentations with gender and sexuality were also a defining characteristic of the so-called *romans idylliques*:

Recent studies of idyllic romance have read *Guillaume de Palerne* through an interest in the genre's representation of a young couple's relationship to parental figures. Such an approach firmly anchors the *roman idyllique* in familial, social, and political concerns, and has generated valuable insight into the genre's experimentation with established gender and sexual norms. (332)

Thus, the chivalric model of knightly adventure was constructed largely on the basis of Arthurian romance, while romances that featured "experimentation with established gender and sexual norms" were given their own category of romance, one that could contain them as generically separate from Arthurian romance, though no medieval distinction is made between these kinds of *romanz*. Indeed, the first challenge in discussing the norms of the *romans idylliques* stems from

⁵¹ This category overlaps with another categorization, that of the *roman d'aventure*. For my purposes here, I am not committed to the names modern scholars have given to these categories, nor to specific differences and overlaps in how the categories are constructed. I do not believe that such clear distinctions existed in the minds of medieval writers; it was all romance. However, these categorizations do show the heterogeneity of romance fiction, and the degree to which scholars have been influenced by the knightly model, such that romances that present a different model are thought to be practically a different genre.

the fact that the “genre” regroups a heterogeneous corpus defined largely by its unclear status in relation to what are generally considered to be the three “matières” of Old French vernacular fiction of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: the *matières* of Bretagne (Arthurian romance), of Rome (*romans d’antiquité*), and of France (*chansons de geste*). These three categories were not imposed by modern scholars but were rather outlined in the twelfth century by Jean Bodel in the *Chanson de Saisne*,⁵² thus revealing a medieval awareness of the generic distinctions inherent in still nascent literary forms, categorized largely on the basis of their geographic and historical-temporal features and focused on content rather than form. And yet none of these categories pertain to the kinds of narratives present in what are being called the *romans idylliques*, which have thus been roped off rather than used to interrogate the validity of the romance categories that have been passed down in this concept of three *matières*. As Marion Vuagnoux-Uhlig (2009) puts it in her extensive analysis of the *roman idyllique* as a genre:

Le malaise de la critique actuelle pourrait provenir de cette absence de définition au Moyen Age même. Comment caractériser des romans d’aventure qui se distinguent de la production antérieure tout en lui restant affiliés, et dont les premiers représentants voient le jour peu d’années après la composition des *Saisnes*? (19)

[The unease of modern criticism could arise from this absence of definition in the Middle Ages themselves. How to characterize romances of adventure which distinguish themselves from prior literary production while remaining affiliated with it, and whose first representations saw the light of day not long after the composition of *Saisnes*?]

The *roman idyllique* is thus, in its initial categorization, a genre defined in the negative by its difference from, and yet relationship to, other established and (seemingly) better-defined forms,

⁵² “*Guillaume de Palerne* est un roman en vers dont la critique a surtout retenu qu’il met en scène un loup-garou: c’est aussi un de ces romans difficiles à classer, puisqu’il n’entre pas dans les catégories décrites par Jean Bodel (vers 1165-1210) dans son prologue à la *Chanson de Saisne*” [*Guillaume de Palerne* is a verse romance that critics have mostly remembered for its portrayal of a werewolf: it is also one of those romances that is difficult to classify, because it doesn’t belong to one of the categories described by Jean Bodel (around 1165-1210) in his prologue to the *Chanson de Saisne*] (Ferlampin-Acher 2012, 11).

leaving modern scholars to try to cobble together resemblances between its diverse instantiations, whose shared traits are only unevenly distributed. Moreover, *Guillaume de Palerne* was notably excluded from early groupings of what Behrmann and Vuagnoux-Uhlig are calling the *roman idyllique*. From this heterogeneity, Vuagnoux-Uhlig rightly concludes that each individual work needs to be examined on its own terms, rather than as representative of a stable category: “La disparité du corpus et l’hétérogénéité des critères de sélection soulignent en outre la nécessité d’envisager chacun des neufs romans *per se*, en fonction de ses qualités propres, dans l’espoir de rétablir sa valeur narrative” [The disparity of the corpus and the heterogeneity of the selection criteria furthermore highlights the necessity of envisaging each of the nine romances *per se*, according to its own qualities, in the hopes of reestablishing its narrative worth] (23).

And yet, a number of the traits that have been thought to unify, however ambiguously and unevenly, the *romans idylliques* prove both consistent across a set of difficult-to-classify texts, as well as highly relevant to explorations of gender norms within romance, already identified as a dominant site of the genre’s (so to speak) experimental specificity. While maintaining a critical eye toward categorization, then, we can still productively look back to Rita Lejeune (1978) whose interest in the “realist” aspect, or *vraisemblance*, of her selected corpus of generic misfits led her to enumerate some of the texts’ evidently shared features. The objective “realism” of these features has been challenged,⁵³ but they nonetheless provide a fair sketch of some unique aspects of romance that tempt modern scholars to group together various

⁵³ As does Vuagnoux-Uhlig: “En premier lieu, certains critères présentés comme caractéristiques du ‘roman réaliste’ s’inscrivent dans la continuité de modèles hérités des traditions classique et vernaculaire” [First of all, certain criteria presented as characteristic of the ‘roman réaliste’ are continuous with models inherited from the classical and vernacular traditions] (17).

combinations of these romances into their own genre.⁵⁴ Of particular note in the context of female adventure is her inclusion of two traits, as also cited by Vuagnoux-Uhlig (16):

“l'apparition d'une géographie précise,” [the apparition of a precise geography] and the portrayal of a female character who “prend des initiatives, se lance sur les grands chemins, se mêle à la vie de tous les jours” [takes initiative, sets out on the road, gets mixed up in everyday life] (439-440). Each of these features designates a shift in how journeys through space are conceived and depicted, and how women participate actively and spatially in narrative. Specific and referentially accurate geography and female adventure thus implicate certain gendered structures in a category that is both distinct within romance and constitutive of one of its main categories.

Lejeun's assessment notably came on the heels of her 1977 article “La femme dans les littératures française et occitane du XIe au XIIIe siècle,” demonstrating her attention to questions of gender and female protagonists at the same time that she generated her analysis of the medieval “roman réaliste.” In this article, she lists *Guillaume de Palerne* among the “grands exemples” of female literary patronage (207) and notes that women are represented *in conjunction with men* “dans les scènes romanesques d'objets qui sont du reste typiquement féminins (coffrets de mariage, miroirs, valves de miroirs).” In these images, “la figure féminine a rejoint celle de l'homme [...] La femme n'est plus l'élément mineur humain, c'est un élément du couple amoureux et, visiblement, un élément essentiel” [The feminine figure has joined that of

⁵⁴ Lejeune's (1978) corpus notably did not include *Guillaume de Palerne*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, or *Floire et Blanchefleur*, but included *Guillaume de Palerne*'s manuscript pairing *L'Escoufle*, along with *Guillaume de Dole*, *Galeran de Bretagne*, *le Roman de la violette*, *la Manekine*, *Jehan et Blonde*, *Joufroi de Poitiers*, *le Roman du comte d'Anjou*, *le Roman du chastelain de Couci et de la dame de Fayel*. See also Vuagnoux-Uhlig (2009, 16).

the man [...] The woman is no longer the minor human element, she is an element of the *amorous couple* and, visibly, an essential element] (209).⁵⁵

Representations of the couple likewise form an essential nucleus of *romans idylliques*, evident for example in *Aucassin et Nicolette* and *Floire et Blanchefleur* in addition to *Guillaume de Palerne*. These works, however, were not included in Lejeune's initial list of *romans réalistes*, and only were later incorporated when the focus shifted from the "realism" of these works to, notably, their treatment of the couple, the family, and gender. In a short span, then, Lejeune set out two different critical paths, one consisting of female protagonists and their active role within the couple, and the other an interest in a collection of works that did not fit into the standard categories of romance or Old French literature. These would later be partially combined into a category that has women, the couple, and a certain geographic and historical specificity at its heart.

Lejeune likewise cites in her article on women in Old French literature the figure of Eleanor of Aquitaine as formative in the development of strong, idealized female fictional characters (211). The historical mobility of some women at this time, as exemplified by Eleanor's accompaniment of her husband to the holy lands during the crusades, functions for Lejeune as influential for the literary representations of women:

Ajoutons que le mouvement très marqué qui s'effectue en faveur des femmes après la deuxième croisade ne peut être dissocié du fait que beaucoup de grandes dames sont parties avec les croisés, acquérant ainsi une indépendance de fait qu'elles n'auraient même pu concevoir sans cela. (216)

[We should add that the very marked movement that occurred in favor of women after the second crusade cannot be disassociated from the fact that many of the *grandes dames* departed along with the crusaders, thus acquiring an effective independence that they could not have even conceived of otherwise]

⁵⁵ Emphasis mine.

Here again we see the overlaying of male-female paired movement, or the traveling couple, onto an image of women's independence that is then reflected back into female representation in the literary sphere, particularly in relation to Iseult, who is both a prototype of an adventuring female who travels as part of a couple, and an important intertext for *Guillaume de Palerne*.

While Vuagnoux-Uhlig, for her part, rejects some of the underlying assumptions of Lejeune's category of "romans réalistes," she nonetheless similarly sees women's fictional mobility and male-female coupling as particularly significant in the *romans idylliques* as broadly defined. She stakes out this position strongly in relation to her primary texts of *Galeran de Bretagne* and *L'Escoufle*:

L'aspect principal de cette réussite semble tenir dans l'attention exceptionnelle dont les personnages féminins bénéficient dans les deux romans. [...] Les demoiselles, aventureuses voyageuses ou orphelines itinérantes, disposent dans les deux textes d'une mobilité qui n'a rien à envier à celle des chevaliers errants et accèdent à l'héroïsme en gagnant leur propre subsistance. [...] Or cet aspect largement commenté de nos romans doit être envisagé dans la perspective du thème idyllique. Pour saisir la fonction de la mobilité des dames et ses implications sur le déroulement de l'intrigue, il faut la considérer dans son rapport avec les représentations du couple amoureux et du cadre familial. (30)

[The main aspect of this success seems to stem from the exceptional attention bestowed on female characters in the two romances. [...] The young ladies, traveling adventurers or itinerant orphans, have in the two texts a mobility that is no less than that of the wandering knights, and they accede to heroism while supporting themselves. [...] Yet this well-studied aspect of our romances must be considered from the perspective of the *roman idyllique*. In order to grasp the function of female mobility and its implications for the plot, it must be considered in its relationship to representations of the amorous couple and the familial setting.]

The emphasis that Vuagnoux-Uhlig places on female mobility and the couple as constitutive of a particular corpus of texts, though its groupings and definitions may shift, provides a provocative backdrop for considering how gender operates structurally within romance. That a corpus defined largely by *what it is not* would feature female mobility as one of its most consistent, defining and unique traits suggests the degree to which women's active narrative participation,

and mobile female adventure in particular, transgresses contemporary critical norms for the romance genre and calls for new evaluations of form.

On the other hand, women's active narrative participation is not unique to the *romans idylliques*. As we have seen, even Chrétien de Troye's first romance, *Erec et Enide*, features not only a mobile female protagonist, but one who travels as part of a couple. *Tristan et Iseult*, for all of its moral ambiguity, nonetheless provides a model for the adventuring couple, as did *Cligès*. As Ferlampin-Acher phrases it, preferring the more neutral term *romans de tiers état* to *romans idylliques*:

Si les romans de tiers état sont avant tout des romans qui ne sont ni arthuriens, ni antiques, ils ne cessent de s'écrire contre (ou parallèlement à) ces 'genres,' en soulignant, par des parodies marquées par le décalage, qu'ils ont en commun avec ces récits d'être des romans, mais qu'ils sont autres. (17)

[While the *romans de tiers état* are above all romances that are neither Arthurian, nor antique, they continue to be written against (or parallel to) these 'genres,' highlighting through parodies marked by difference that they have in common with these stories the fact that they are romances, but that they are something else]

From out of this mixing and matching of genres, then, defined by varying degrees of *rapprochement* and *décalage*, it is thus most useful to acknowledge both the shared features that appear to set apart a group of romances as a corpus called *romans idylliques*, as well as their inclusion within the literary economy of the romance genre writ large, from which they were never technically demarcated in the Middle Ages, and are not always demarcated in modern scholarship. It is within this context that works such as *Guillaume de Palerne* must be understood - as responding not only to the models of Arthurian knightly romance but also to a parallel tradition that produced its own alternate models centered around gender.

The saint as heroine

As with the categories that modern scholars and at least some medieval writers constructed within romance, the boundaries that separate romance from other medieval literary genres are not always clear, and they are absolutely porous. In this sense, female protagonists, female mobility, and female adventure in romance should be viewed as responding to not only the models visible within romance, but also within other medieval literary forms and genres. These forms and genres include *chansons de geste*, *lais*, *pastourelles*, *fabliaux*, lyric poetry, and saints' lives. The latter is, in my view, the single most important comparative genre for the female-centered romances analyzed in this dissertation, and perhaps for female protagonism in romance generally. While we might be tempted to compare knights to epic heroes such as Roland, particularly given the extended battle scenes that are common to both epic and romance as well as the vocabulary with which both epic heroes and romance heroes are extolled, it is in saints' lives that we find direct comparisons to many of the female protagonists in romance, as well as their particular circumstances.⁵⁶

We need only to look at saints such as Eugenia/Eugenios to see how gender can function as a site of inquiry, narrative possibility, and literary influence in saints' lives, and how these stories are then overlaid onto female romance protagonists. The life of Saint Eugenia is a clear intertext for the *Roman de Silence* though it is never explicitly mentioned in the romance. In this Life, Saint Eugenia converts to Christianity, changes her clothing and appearance to pass as a man, changes her name from Eugenia to Eugenios, and enters a monastery. After healing a wealthy widow, this widow falls in love with Eugenios and tries to seduce him. When Eugenios

⁵⁶ However, as Kathy Krause (2019) has shown, there also exist a number of *chansons de geste* featuring female protagonists.

does not reciprocate, the widow accuses Eugenios of sexual assault and Eugenios's only recourse at trial is to reveal his/her female body, as well as his/her identity as the daughter of the very magistrate judging the case. Her entire family then converts to Christianity and they all eventually die as martyrs.⁵⁷

We thus find in this narrative many of the same themes as in the *Roman de Silence*, including overlapping plot points. What appears to be a completely original romance, then, turns out to have its roots in a hagiographic tradition passed down over centuries, in this case from Greek to Latin to Old French.⁵⁸ And it is not the only one. The Life of Saint Euphrosina likewise features a cross-dressing female protagonist. Cazelles (1991) describes it as “One of the many medieval tales inspired by the motif of transvestism, the story of Euphrosina (or Euphrosyna), which has an eastern origin, narrates how a young woman is led to dress as a man” (172). It is the story of a young noblewoman who does not want to marry the young man chosen for her through an agreement between her father and potential father-in-law. With the help of a monk, she avoids the marriage by cutting her hair, dressing in the religious attire of a nun, and changing her name to Emerald, which was considered a gender-neutral name. She decides that she risks being discovered in a convent more than she would be in a monastery, where no one would think to look for her. At this point, the narrator makes the significant observation that “She cannot leave alone without risking shame, / Nor does she want to take along a male companion” (472-473),⁵⁹ a circumstance that, as we will see throughout this dissertation, often prompts the dissimulation of female identity, or the choice to flee as a couple rather than alone. To avoid this fate, Euphrosina dresses as a knight and then enters a monastery, pretending to be a eunuch. The

⁵⁷ For a more detailed account, see for example Campbell Bonner's summary (1920, 253-254).

⁵⁸ Bonner (ibid, 254-255).

⁵⁹ Translations from Brigitte Cazelles (1991).

men of the monastery think Emerald is so beautiful that they fear they will be tempted sexually by him: “Son, your beauty is such that it inspires desire / And makes young and old men lustful. / You will remain in your cell, and will not mix with us” (581-583). The female body is thus seen as sexualized and dangerous even when it is thought to be male; Euphrosina cannot in this sense escape her body, as the men of the monastery “are moved by him as by a woman” (591). Euphrosina’s father comes to the monastery to receive comfort in his grief for his missing daughter, and the pious Emerald manages to soothe his spirit. Thirty years pass and Emerald’s body is finally worn out from devotion. Emerald’s father hears about this and comes back to the monastery to grieve the sick and dying monk. He is still lamenting his daughter, and Emerald tells him to return in three days, at which point he reveals that he is the long-lost daughter and implores him not to tell anyone. Emerald then dies, the father faints, sleeps in Emerald’s cell that night, has Euphrosina’s Life written, gives Euphrosina’s inheritance to the monastery, and lives in the monastery for the rest of his life.⁶⁰

Similarly, the Life of Marina features the story of a father who abandons his family to live piously in an abbey, but later regrets having abandoned his daughter. He returns to find her, and quickly dresses her as a boy so that they can go back to the abbey together. Once there, the father gives the daughter’s name as Marin. He raises Marin at the abbey. The father dies and tells Marin on his deathbed to not let anyone know his true gendered identity. Like Silence, Marin laments this situation: “Could there be a harsher torment / And a more difficult test than this one?” (327-328).⁶¹ Marin stays at the abbey and one day the abbot tells him he should accompany the monks who travel by cart back and forth to the sea in order to bring back

⁶⁰ See Emma Campbell (2019) for a comparative reading of the *Vie de Sainte Euphrosine* and the *Roman de Silence*.

⁶¹ Translations are from Brigitte Cazelles (1991).

provisions. As they head for the sea they stop at an inn along the way, whose innkeeper has a beautiful daughter. This daughter becomes impregnated by a knight. Her father is angry and she doesn't want to tell him the name of the knight. She instead accuses Marin of having impregnated her during one of his stops there, and her father travels to the abbey to accuse Marin. Marin does not admit or deny the accusation, but rather acknowledges that he has committed many sins and that God will forgive them. This answer leads the abbot to think Marin guilty, and he is expelled from the abbey, but instead of leaving, he lives the rest of his life by the abbey door, mocked daily and shown no pity. The innkeeper then brings his daughter's baby to be raised by Marin, once it has been weaned, and Marin accepts. The brothers at the monastery begin to think that Marin has been treated too harshly, seeing the piety he exhibits. Marin is brought back in to perform menial labor and one day dies, at which point his female body is discovered and the extent of his/her saintliness revealed. The innkeeper's daughter is subsequently possessed by the devil but helped by Marina, and Marina becomes a famous saint.

Many similarities can be identified between these stories and the *Roman de Silence*, not least, cross-dressing, name changing, false accusations, bodily proof of innocence (eventually), and familial crises. Like Silence, Marina and Euphrosina do not choose to cross-dress out of a desire to do so, but because circumstances compel them to do so (Marina in particular is initially dressed as a boy by her father). As Cazelles writes,

The authors of both *Marina* and *Euphrosina* exalt transvestism as an admirable accomplishment that empowers the heroine to protect her virginity. The goal is to show how the transformation of female into male allows the saint to become more Christ-like. Yet cross-dressing is, in reality, not an option willingly chosen by these two heroines, but the result of external forces inducing loss of freedom. (63)

Despite these similarities, we may also note some significant differences between these saints' lives and the *Roman de Silence*. In the life of Eugenia, for example, the saint's cross-dressing is

motivated by a desire to live a devout Christian life as a monk, while in the *Roman de Silence* the choice to live as a boy is motivated by a profane desire for wealth and inheritance, a difference that points to a significant shifting of values between the two stories, or between the genre of the Life and that of the romance. The movement from saints' life to romance is thus not one of simple imitation, but rather it raises questions about what it means to recast a holy story in the context of the aristocratic and chivalric values of romance narrative. A similar movement can be glimpsed in *Guillaume de Palerne*, which reemploys numerous images, themes, and plot elements from the life of Saint Eustache, while *Aucassin et Nicolette*, in its winking style, portrays with sexual overtones, the idea of Nicolette being endowed with a healing power reminiscent of a relic.⁶²

Neither *Guillaume de Palerne* nor the *Roman de Silence* overtly acknowledge their direct references or debts to specific saints' lives, but we have every reason to presume that in the Catholic culture of northern France such references would have been visible to at least some readers or members of the narratives' audiences. Amy V. Ogden (2005) reminds us that saints' lives and verse romances both had lay audiences and that saints' lives were immensely popular:

The evidence of hagiography's central role in the literature enjoyed by the Francophone nobility still bears reiteration, despite an increasing number of incontrovertible demonstrations to this effect. First, the indications that remain concerning hagiographers' intended audiences show them to have included both noble laypeople and religious. Records of patronage are relatively strong for Anglo-Norman works, and both insular and

⁶² "L'autr'ier vi un pelerin, / nes estoit de Limosin, / malades de l'esvertin, / si gisoit ens en un lit, / mout par estoit entrepris, / de grant mal amaladis; / tu passas devant son lit, / si soulevas ton traïn / et ton peliçon ermin, / la cemisse de blanc lin, / tant que ta ganbete vit: / garis fu li pelerins / et tos sains, ainc ne fu si; / si se leva de son lit, si rala en son païs / sains et saus et tos gari" [The other day I saw a pilgrim / from Limousin; / he was sick with madness, / lying in bed, / doing very poorly / and gravely ill. / You passed before him, / lifting your train / and your tunic lined with ermine fur, / and your shirt of white linen, / so that he saw your little leg. / This pilgrim was straight away cured, / he regained his full health. / He got up out of bed, / and returned to his homeland, / completely well, completely cured] (XI). Translation my own, based on the Old French and Philippe Walter's modern French translation.

continental Lives contain direct and (even more abundantly) indirect references to their audiences' literary tastes. [...] There are approximately as many extant saints' Lives as there are romances, and quite likely more: the most recent tallies list 278 Lives and over 200 romances. (2)

In addition to these instances of direct borrowing, saints' lives provided some of the most widely known and evident models for female protagonism within Old French narrative. In a sense, what Ogden sees as the critical sidelining of a very popular and prominent genre (saints' lives) in favor of romance⁶³ echoes the distortion we find by focusing too much on the knight at the expense of the lady. That many romances featuring female protagonists found models in these saints' lives further highlights the double displacement that occurs when we focus on romance to the exclusion of other genres that prominently featured both female characters and interrogations of gendered norms. Ogden demonstrates that much of what we see as the suffering of the female body in saints' lives is actually true of the male body as well, and she mobilizes a host of critical works that all point to the way in which gender is unstable, fluid, and contextually dependent (13). As she writes, "Such an uncoupling of sex and gender is a hallmark of medieval Francophone hagiography and, it would seem, of medieval religious literature and art more generally," although she is also quick to note that

Literal imitation, such as Peter Waldo's heretical performance of St. Alexis, is not the goal. The hagiographers are not advocating transvestism, effeminacy among men, or even the widespread rejection of marriage, even though all of these characteristics convey the saints' extraordinary natures. (13)

Ogden refers to this difference as representing a "distinction between exemplarity and heroism," which is a distinction worth examining. It's not clear that the romance hero or heroine is meant to be literally imitated either, and it would have in many instances been impossible to do so.

⁶³ Ogden (2005, 2-3).

Female protagonists in particular are often motivated by circumstances that require extraordinary behavior, while male protagonists seek out extraordinary circumstances.

Examples of female saints are numerous and we must assume that the possibility of female exemplarity and protagonism evident in these stories influenced depictions of women in other genres. In her collection of Old French female saints' lives of the thirteenth century, Brigitte Cazelles (1991) includes, for example, the stories of saints Agnes, Barbara, Catherine of Alexandria, Christina, Elizabeth of Hungary, Euphrosina, Faith, Juliana, Margaret of Antioch, Marina, Mary the Egyptian, Paula, and Thais. These stories collectively provide significant examples of female initiative, mobility (and enclosure), suffering, risk, family drama, issues of inheritance, and even what we may consider to be forms of adventure. Notably, Cazelles refers to these saintly narratives as "romances" in her title, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century*. She uses this term because the saints' lives with which she is concerned share the same literary form as romance (and sometimes epic): "A few employ a ten-syllable verse, in imitation of the meter that is the mark of the epic genre; most however, use the octosyllabic verse in vogue in twelfth-century courtly romance" (3). While Cazelles emphasizes the influence of earlier verse narratives (which she refers to as "imaginative literary works" (5) on these verse saints' lives, it should also be noted for our purposes that the influence of these narratives would have flowed the other way as well during the thirteenth century when romances such as the *Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Guillaume de Palerne* were likely composed. Cazelles also aptly refers to the saints at the heart of these stories as "saintly heroes and heroines" (5), further blurring the distinction between the saint and the romance protagonist.

A full account of the connection between female protagonism in romance and in saints' lives (and in saints' romances, as the case may be) is beyond the scope of this present dissertation, but it is important to acknowledge that hagiography represents a significant intertextual tradition and a rich source of literary models for the female protagonist. From this we must ask not simply which models were available and which were used, but also what it meant to transfer a the life of a saint into the profane context of chivalric romance, concerned as romance is with beauty, reputation, wealth, inheritance, marriage, physical combat, material luxury, and sexual/amorous desire. The highly divergent value systems, nonetheless both operative for the same lay audience, point to a tension and overlap in medieval literature between religious beliefs and traditions and the chivalric model that would find itself criticized in the *Quête du Saint Graal*. The sharing of plots, themes, *topoi*, and formal features between romance and saints' lives reveals an avenue for exploring these tensions as they move back and forth between the genres.

Defining a Female Corpus

The works I have chosen to feature in this study – the *Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Guillaume de Palerne* – represent only a small subset of the diverse range of twelfth and thirteenth romance (and romance-adjacent) narratives portraying or centering on female protagonists. As I discuss below, identifying a corpus of romances that feature a female protagonist is neither a simple nor a limiting task - instead, we must carefully select our corpus for the purposes of space, time, and focus, rather than a lack of choices.

The three works that comprise my corpus are all thirteenth century (for some, possibly twelfth century) verse romances – or, in the case of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, a *chante-fable* that shares similarities in content and plot structure with the verse romance genre although it is

entirely unique in its formal features – that foreground a female protagonist’s participation not only in the narrative, but particularly in the narrative’s central adventure sequence. I have selected these particular works because each of them displays a conspicuous interest in gender, with substantial sections of the plot or discourse dedicated to discussing issues such as whether gender is a product of Nature or Nurture (*Roman de Silence*), portraying a scene in which a king is preparing to give birth while the queen is out fighting a battle (*Aucassin et Nicolette*), or in which women’s freedom of movement is treated as an absolute right (*Guillaume de Palerne*) that should not be abrogated even by a strategic marriage. While other works could have been added to this corpus (and, ideally, will be in later iterations of this project), these three works display a breadth of plot elements and interests that make each one a unique case study while also all participate in an interrogation of what it means to be female within the medieval romance genre, and how women’s involvement in the adventure sequence enacts changes in the generic conventions typically associated with the knight-protagonist.

In her article “Gender and Paradigm Shift in Old French Narrative, or What Happens when the Heroine Becomes a Hero,” Kathy Krause elaborates on the difficulty of identifying a clear corpus from which to explore the phenomenon of female protagonism in Old French narrative:

[I]t would seem useful to start with a list of Old French chivalric narratives that feature a female protagonist. However, creating such a list very quickly runs into the issue of how to define the corpus: should it only include texts that are clearly focused on a single female character, such as Philippe de Rémi’s *Roman de la Manekine* or the epic *Chanson de Florence de Rome*? What then about those narratives named for a main female character but which devote significant time to a male character, such as the *Chanson de Parise la Duchesse*, where Parise’s son not only receives at least an equal share of the narrative limelight but also is the “hero” who effectuates his mother’s return to her rightful position in the last episodes of the chanson? Or vice-versa, what about a romance like *Galeran de Bretagne*, where it is the heroine who shares the central role with the eponymous hero? (66)

For her purposes, Krause settles on romance and *chanson de geste* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that feature a single female protagonist (as opposed to a couple), and yet even with this particular categorization in place, the task is not straightforward. By using the phrase “Old French Narrative,” rather than pinpointing a single genre in the title of her article, Krause skirts around some of the generic difficulties that deflect an interest in Old French heroines: which kinds of stories are we talking about? Limiting her corpus to pre-1300 romances and *chansons de geste*, Krause helpfully provides a list of works with a female protagonist within this generic and temporal range in an appendix to her article, listing nine texts.⁶⁴ The fact that two of the major works discussed in my chapters – *Aucassin et Nicolette* and *Guillaume de Palerne*, both of which feature couples – are absent from this list speaks to Krause’s point about the difficulty of constructing a corpus on the basis of the presence of a female protagonist alone.⁶⁵ The problem is not that we can’t find enough examples of female protagonist, but rather that female protagonists, of one sort or another, abound in romance fiction. For my purposes, I have included romances that feature adventuring couples, as the couple provides another version of the adventure model that challenges received notions about chivalric romance and knightly subjectivity.

To add to Krause’s own description of the challenge, what weight should we give to Enide, for example, in Chrétien de Troye’s *Erec et Enide* or to Iseult in *Tristan et Iseult*, both of which are also absent from her list? Both Enide and Iseult motivate and share in the hero’s

⁶⁴ These are: Philippe de Rémi’s *Le Roman de la Manekine*, Heldris de Cornuaille’s *Le Roman de Silence*, *La Fille du comte de Pontieu*, Adenet le Roi’s *La chanson de Berthe as grans piés*, *La chanson de Florence de Rome*, Jean Renart’s *Le Roman de la Rose*, Jean Renart’s *Le roman de Galeran de Bretagne*, *Le conte du Roi Flore et de la Bielle Jehanne*, and *La chanson de Parise la Duchesse*.

⁶⁵ These are likely absent from her list because Krause is specifically focusing on works with a single female protagonist, rather than works that feature a male-female couple sharing the narrative adventure and spotlight.

adventures and their names are given equal billing (if second position) in the works' common titles. Or what to make of the plethora of female “supporting actors,” such as Lunete in *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion* or Alexandrine in *Guillaume de Palerne*? Or what about the many female protagonists in Marie de France’s *Lais*, which read as romance short stories, and which the author moreover claims are written down from oral story forms already in circulation (thus suggesting that female protagonism was not unusual, and not confined to a handful of nonconforming romances)?⁶⁶ The number of lines that must be drawn in order to define such a corpus provides evidence of the rich array of female protagonists within romance fiction. In the conclusion to this dissertation, I have listed a number of works that could have formed the basis of their own chapters in this dissertation. The list is non-exhaustive, but points to the breadth of romances that feature female protagonists, and female adventure in particular.

In terms of periodization, the title of this dissertation refers to romances of the “12th and 13th centuries,” although in all likelihood the narratives that form the basis of my chapters are thirteenth century compositions. I have retained the twelfth century in the title in part because the date of composition of the romances cannot be known for certain, as *Aucassin et Nicolette* has at times been referred to as a twelfth century work, while *Guillaume de Palerne* has been variously dated from the late twelfth century to as late as 1280. The title thus reflects this range of

⁶⁶ “De lais pensai, k’oïz avei. / Ne dutai pas, bien le savei, / Ke pur remembrance les firent / Des aventures k’il oïrent / Cil ki primes les comencierent / E ki avant les enveierent. / Plusurs en ai oï conter, / Ne voil laissier ne oblir. / Rimé en ai e fait ditié, / Soventes fiez en ai veillié” [I thought of *lais* which I had heard. / I did not doubt, I knew well, / That they were told in order to remember / the adventures that were heard / By those who first started them. / I have heard many of them told, / I do not want to let them be forgotten. / I put them into rhymes and into a poetic work, / I worked many sleepless nights on them!] (33-42). Translation my own, based on the Old French and Alexandre Micha’s (1994) modern French translation.

possibilities, although in my own readings I opt for the thirteenth century dating, as I discuss in my chapters.

At the same time, situating this study within the twelfth and thirteenth centuries allows for a broader discussion of female protagonism in romance more generally, as well as a reassessment of the corpus of Chrétien de Troyes along these lines. The knightly model that this dissertation is in part a response to was developed in the twelfth century, and yet I have shown that this model was based on a small corpus of famous early works that were later (beginning in the nineteenth century) read according to a very particular framing centered around the figure of the male individual or knight errant. My work is thus not only interested in the particular romances that I discuss, but in an entire phenomenon of female protagonism that is evident throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in verse romance.

The limits of this periodization – beginning in the twelfth century and ending in the thirteenth – are inspired by my focus on the verse romance form and a particular kind of chivalric narrative. During the thirteenth century, prose narratives began to flourish in Old French alongside the verse forms of the twelfth century, and by the fourteenth century these prose forms had become dominant. Prose did not passively coexist with verse, nor did it neatly replace it. Rather, as Sarah Kay and Adrian Armstrong (2011) have shown, it defined itself in contrast to verse, which was seen by some as distorting: “From the early thirteenth century, when prose is first pioneered as a medium for writing history in the vernacular, prose writers denigrate verse in terms like these as artificial, unreliable, and falsifying” (1).⁶⁷ The verse romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries slowly gave way to prose:

Although some narrative verse continues to be composed into the fifteenth century, the verse narrative genres from the early Middle Ages are increasingly sucked into this

⁶⁷ See also Gabrielle Spiegel’s (1993) chapter on the *Pseudo-Turpin*.

promotional machine, rewritten in prose, or else supplanted by their prose equivalents. Thus verse romances are often recast as prose romances, the *fabliau* cedes to the *nouvelle*, and chansons de geste are “de-rhymed,” often in massive historical compilations. (1-2)

Thus, while it would of course be worthwhile to extend a study of female protagonism and adventure into the fourteenth century (and into the 21st, for that matter), it does not necessarily make sense to do so while maintaining a focus on Old French verse romance. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries represent a particular moment in the development of French and medieval literature, evident in the continuation of formal features such as narrative verse, but also in terms of what kind of truth these narratives are expected to represent. They encapsulate the origin and the transformation of the romance model.

What Do I Mean by Gender?

There is of course no formula for what gender means in medieval romance literature, and the texts that I have selected bear witness to a variety of circumstances, concerns, and even narrative forms (such as the *chante-fable Aucassin et Nicolette*) that each place their gendered choices and representations within a highly particular context. The question of gender thus becomes one that is always intimately tied to an individual text and imbricated with the specific circumstances and sets of power relations that it describes.⁶⁸ Likewise, questions of gender cannot be dissociated from categories such class, status, wealth, race, religion, and genealogy, rendering any discussion of gender *as such* overly simplified.⁶⁹ And yet, because gender is so explicitly problematized in

⁶⁸ See for example Gayle Rubin (1975): “One might paraphrase [Marx]: What is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations” (158).

⁶⁹ For an intersectional view of gender, see for example the foundational work of bell hooks, in particular *Aint I a Woman: Black women and feminism* (1981) and *Feminist Theory: From margin to center* (1984). From a recent medievalist perspective, see the 2019 *postmedieval* issue

the texts with which I am concerned, and because gender roles are so conventional to verse romance and related forms, gender is also plainly a category unto itself, one that inscribes basic social divisions (and I should specify that I am talking about the aristocratic class with which verse romance was largely concerned) and that medieval writers confronted directly and sought to consciously manipulate for various narrative purposes.

Concepts and terminologies surrounding gender and gendered identities have shifted rapidly over the past half century, both within English-speaking culture writ large, and within the realms of scholarship and theory. I have every reason to assume that the terms and concepts that I employ here will become outmoded as well, which perhaps presents an even stronger argument for explaining what I mean by them. My use of terms such as gender, female, woman, masculinity, etc. are not intended to reinforce a gender binary system, to assume a simple equation between biology and the social or personal expression of gender, to elide the breadth of potential gendered identities, or to ignore intersectional identities. I do not, for that matter, intend to wade into larger discussions of what gender *is* in an essential, theoretical, or philosophical sense, particularly as I do not think an adequate answer could be provided to this question across time and place, or even simply for the span of time and place that constitutes the Middle Ages.⁷⁰ Rather, I am using gender according to a wide definition, one that I see operative in medieval texts, as a differentiation of humans on the basis of the categories of male and female, however porous they may sometimes be, and *inclusive* of other non-binary categories that are nonetheless defined by their specific relationship to, deviation from, or blending of the culturally dominant male/female binary (the term intersex, for example, assumes the existence or recognition of

Feminist intersectionality: Centering the margins in 21st-century medieval studies, as well as Dorothy Kim's 2016 blog post "Antifeminism, Whiteness, and Medieval Studies."

⁷⁰ Even here, we might ask, *what* Middle Ages? *Whose* Middle Ages?

sexes to be *inter*).⁷¹ These gendered categories are pervasive throughout medieval (and modern) society, literature, and legal systems, although their particular expression differs according to their intersection with other categories and identities such as sexuality, geography, class, status, sector, age, religion, race, ability/disability, time period, language, or degree of (perceived or actual) humanness.

And yet, as the texts that I examine in my chapters demonstrate, gender was (and is) at the same time a category unto itself, one that provided an implicit (although not simplistic, predetermined, or always binary) division into particular social roles and legal statuses based, essentially, on one's bodily traits and one's performance of gender.⁷² This study thus takes an intersectional approach insofar as I do not pretend that experiences and expressions of gender are universal, nor do I ignore other interceding factors (such as Nicolette's position, in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, as both lower status than Aucassin, a converted Saracen, and a purchased and then freed slave). At the same time, I want to assert that my frame of analysis is indeed that of gender, understood in the sense of opening an inquiry rather than imposing a definition. Gender, in my analysis, will be posed as a question to which narrative responds.

Description of Chapters

The chapters of this dissertation are organized around close readings of individual romances: the *Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Guillaume de Palerne*. Each of these analyses follows a specific set of concerns internal to the work itself yet derived from larger themes that I view as particularly pertinent to the portrayal of female adventure in romance. The importance of

⁷¹ For an excellent perspective on intersex identity in the Middle Ages, see the June 2018 issue of *postmedieval*, including Ruth Evans's introduction "Gender does not equal genitals."

⁷² See, of course, Judith Butler (1990).

narrative and performance as a form of prowess will be discussed in all three chapters, with particular emphasis in the chapter on the *Roman de Silence*. Crisis, particularly as it relates to issues such as inheritance or marriage, also surfaces as a dominant theme, as female-centric romances grapple with the legal, social, and familial issues that, as Kathy Krause showed, motivate women to leave home and depart on a form of adventure. Problems of social identity likewise arises again and again within female adventure, as the protagonists engage in various forms of disguise in order to dissimulate their names, status, gender, and even personhood in order to move freely in the world. This suppression of identity will then have consequences for what adventure accomplishes within narrative, as the knightly model of reputation building cannot function the same way for characters whose exploits accrue to an identity that is not their own or cannot be maintained. Finally, the importance of the couple as an adventuring unit has been overlooked in romance, as male-female pairings are often subsumed under the heading of “courtly love.” Instead, I show how the couple as comes to serve as the subject of adventure, calling into question the purported individualism of romance and also the primacy of the model of the lone adventurer.

In addition to these recurring themes, conditions, and forms of female adventure, romances that foreground female protagonists display a sometimes remarkable (to the modern reader) engagement with gender. Whether in the *Romance de Silence*'s overt battle between Nature and Nurture, in the Torelore episode of *Aucassin et Nicolette* in which the king is waiting to give birth while the queen fights on the battlefield, or the claim in *Guillaume de Palerne* that women should not be forced to marry against their will, narratives featuring female adventure make clear that in centering women, they are also centering discussions *about* women, and that

in placing women in the role of the central adventurer, they are foregrounding questions surrounding gender norms.

In Chapter One, I read the *Roman de Silence* through the dual lenses of performative and discursive prowess, and interpret adventure as a form of discourse or language. Beginning with an often-overlooked sequence that begins the romance, featuring a series of marriages followed by a long episode of the mutual, suffering desire of Silence's parents, I show how from the outset the romance interrogates women's societal position and reframes adventure as a form of language. I then analyze Silence's two adventure sequences in terms of performance, mapping Silence's particular forms of performative prowess back onto her gendered circumstances.

In Chapter Two, I read *Aucassin et Nicolette* in its Occitan setting in order to show how the work restages adventure as a non-combative form of contact and exchange within the context of a Mediterranean market economy. In addition, I consider how this Occitan setting informs the representation of its female protagonist, Nicolette, as well as the relationship between its Spanish Muslim and Occitan Christian protagonists. I argue that rather than presenting a love story between a French youth and a converted Saracen, the northern French narrative positions both protagonists as cultural others whose particular origins, society, religion, and geography inform the way in which the narrative treats gender and the kinds of prowess its female protagonist displays.

In Chapter Three, I read *Guillaume de Palerne* according to the concepts of subjectivity and consent. By looking at changes in marital practices in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, I show how the issue of consent – central to the Church's emphasis on marriage as a sacrament – is thematized throughout *Guillaume de Palerne* in relation to the problematic effects of desire. The tension between personal desire and social obligation extends to the central adventure scene,

in which Guillaume and Mélior attempt to live out their desire in the wild but are ultimately revealed to be products of a nobility and society that they cannot escape.

In each of these narratives, I will likewise be concerned with the question of what adventure *does* for the female protagonists in question. If adventure forms the knightly subject, what kind of subject does female, or coupled, adventure form?

Overview

This chapter will examine the concept of adventure and its relationship to gender in the thirteenth-century Old French verse romance known as the *Roman de Silence*.¹ The *Roman de Silence*, a text in which a woman, dressed and living as a man, becomes an accomplished knight, offers the opportunity not only to examine some of the assumed gendered features of adventure, but also to view the effect that gender subversion has on a text's presentation of adventure. What is the significance of knightly adventure when undertaken by a woman, even or especially if she is disguised as a man? I intend to show that the *Roman de Silence* does not simply place a woman in a position typically occupied by a knight, but rather that this very transgression brings about, or is accompanied by, other transformations in narrative structure and in the content and significance of adventure. As Caroline Jewers (1997) observes in her article on the *Roman de Silence* and Marie de France's *Lais*, "prioritizing the feminine requires the destabilization of romance convention; in particular, it calls for a reevaluation of the meaning of adventure" (88). Indeed, I will show in this chapter that Silence's adventures do not adhere to a conventional image of knightly proving, but rather that they employ the structure of adventure to stage a more discursive, performative content.

In particular, I argue that the *Roman de Silence* repositions performance and discourse as sites of prowess and as the narrative material of adventure. Despite Silence's clear demonstration

¹ I will be using Sarah Roche-Mahdi's edition for my citations, in Old French and English, unless otherwise noted: Sarah Roche-Mahdi, ed. and trans. 2007 (first edition 1992). *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

of prowess in battle and of knightly skill, Silence's adventures² rather reveal a performative prowess rooted in minstrelsy and discursive skill, along with the ability to *perform* as a knight, both in living as a social male and excelling at knightly activities. In addition to Silence's own performative prowess, I show how the text distills adventure into a language that is employed in more intimate contexts, namely the travails of desire. I thus do not entirely agree with Jane Tolmie (2009) when she states that "The Nature of Silence's adventure does disable even the possibility of any model for female adventure and heroism that is not male – effectively, to have adventure, you must be a man socially" (18).³ While it is true that Silence's male identity and resulting freedom of movement enable her to participate in combat and to traverse the geographic space in which her adventures take place, these adventures are not at all typical of the knightly variety. Instead, they propose a new version of adventure rooted in examinations of identity, gender, and narrativity.

First, I will show that there is a significant connection between adventure, marriage and genealogy that situates women within the realm of adventure's motivations, while simultaneously excluding them from its content. Secondly, I will show how the *Roman de Silence* utilizes language as a means of creating or emphasizing a sense of adventure in realms that are not part of the knight's traditional combative proving ground. This is especially apparent in the love and courtship episode involving Silence's parents, Cador and Eufemie. Third, I will

² By Silence's "adventures," I mean the sequences in which she travels from place to place, away from home or court, sometimes with no particular destination, and faces a series of challenges, some of which contain elements of the marvelous.

³ Along these lines, Jane Tolmie makes a number of observations regarding the social aspects of Silence's cross-dressing, noting for example that "This male paradigm for heroism or adventure is not diminished by the inclusion of female participants, because their participation as social men does not threaten the stability of the available models for heroism, adventure, or participation in public affairs" (20).

argue that the *Roman de Silence* presents the reader with scenes of *aventure* and *mésaventure* that, again, do not involve the typical knightly or combative scenario, and that serve to rewrite the conditions of adventure. These can be seen in the jongleur episode and in Silence’s conflict with the queen. Finally, I will look at the Merlin episode to show how, despite initially taking the form of a more conventional adventure, this episode likewise replaces combat with performance and a particular interest in the disjuncture between body, self, and appearance.

The *Roman de Silence* was discovered in 1911 in a box marked “old papers-no value.”⁴ It is a unique manuscript both in the material sense – there is only one known version – and in the sense that its narrative uniquely features a woman cross-dressing as a knight.⁵ The *Roman de Silence* dates from the second half of the thirteenth century⁶ and its manuscript can be found today at the University of Nottingham, MS. Mi.LM.6, folios 188 recto to 223 recto. It was apparently written by a certain Heldris of Cornwall (Heldris de Cornuälle), who names himself twice as the author (lines 1 and 6684). He is unattested outside of this self-attribution.⁷

⁴ Roche-Madhi (ibid., xi). According Roche-Madhi, also included in this box of “old papers - no value” was a letter from Henry VIII.

⁵ However, as I showed in the introduction, it calls upon a fairly established trope of saints’ lives.

⁶ See Lewis Thorpe (1972, 9-10). Following a summary of the evidence for the dating of the manuscript and the opinions of various scholars, Thorpe concludes that “The language is that of the second half of the thirteenth century; and I find it difficult to be more precise. When all the evidence of handwriting, decoration, contents and language is taken into account, such an approximate statement seems the only possible one for the manuscript as a whole: that it was compiled and copied at some time between 1250 and 1300, probably nearer the end of the century than the beginning” (10).

⁷ Sarah Roche-Madhi (2007) writes in the introduction to her edition: “As Heinrich Gelzer has convincingly argued, ‘Master Heldris’ seems to be a name picked from the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth because of its connection with Cornwall [...] Is this *Lokalpatriotismus* (as Gelzer suggests), the desire to please a patron (e.g. Richard of Cornwall)? Is the author, like the heroine, a transvestite she? Or does he just want to make us think so?” (footnote, xi). These questions raise the possibility that the *Roman de Silence* was written by a woman, a possibility that we can, at this point, neither validate nor refute.

The *Roman de Silence* tells the story of a girl born to noble parents shortly after the king has unjustly outlawed female inheritance. In order to preserve their estate, her parents decide to raise their daughter as a son, giving her the significant name Silence. Knowing that living as a male is her parents' wish, and in many ways preferring the freedom that her masculine disguise affords her, the adolescent Silence participates in the ruse as both a dutiful daughter and a successful son. After a period of time during which she runs away and lives as an itinerant and accomplished jongleur, Silence returns home and grows up to be a talented and much-admired knight, at one point saving the kingdom through her prowess in battle. The primary obstacle that she encounters, a perfidious queen, brings Silence's gender trouble to center stage and is eventually overcome through a combination of her noble heart, courage, and some mystical intervention, as she is obligated to capture and bring Merlin back to court. Her eventual unmasking leads to what would conventionally be considered a happy ending, that is to say, female inheritance is restored and she marries the king, but this ending can come across as deeply unsatisfying against the backdrop of the work.⁸ It is also accompanied by a barrage of misogynistic sentiments, notably that a woman's main purpose is to keep silent,⁹ that sit uncomfortably within a story that has featured such an exemplary and sympathetic female protagonist, though she herself is named Silence. Even the narrator is compelled to apologize to his female audience at the end, though this apology is not much better than the statements and portrayals that have prompted it. It is these sorts of unresolved tensions that underpin the entire

⁸ Mary Ellen Ryder and Linda Marie Zaerr (2008) begin their article with the straightforward observation: "The ending of the *Roman de Silence* is almost universally unsatisfying for modern readers." (22).

⁹"Sens de feme gist en taisir. / Si m'aït Dex, si com jo pens, / Uns muials puet conter lor sens. / Car femes n'ont sens que mais un, / C'est taisirs" [A woman's role is to keep silent. / So help me God, I think / a mute can tell what women are good for, / for they're only good for one thing, / and that is to keep silent] (6398-6402).

work, which even stages ongoing quarrels between the allegorical figures of Nature and Nurture, who battle for control of Silence's gender. As Howard Bloch (1986) puts it, "Silence represents the systematic refusal of univocal meaning" (88).

Thus, not only does the *Roman de Silence* place a born-female knight at its center, it also articulates what seems to be a rather modern sex/gender discussion through the figures of Nature and Nurture, calling into question whether a *chevalier* – and by extension, a man – is male by birth or by activity. That Nature ultimately wins the war does not negate the fact that Nurture has quite a few victories of her own along the way. In a sense, up until the very end, Silence's entire narrative is one long success story for Nurture. To further complicate matters, the text frequently equates one's nature with customs (*us*), using the two terms interchangeably, so that it is a woman's nature to be in the sewing chamber, for example.¹⁰ Thus, the text's discourse assumes that social gender roles and one's birth sex or nature are one and the same, while simultaneously providing an extended example of this not being the case. That this argument is even being made in regard to gender is surprising. As Simon Gaunt (1990) has noted, "the very fact that [the author Heldris] should feel the need to refute the idea that gender might be a cultural construct is curious, for the idea has no currency in the Middle Ages" (203). However, given that *the Roman de Silence* dedicates so much narrative space to adjudicating the conflict between Nature and Nurture, it appears that the idea must have had *some* currency, as it evidently does in this romance.

Such complexities and subversions of accepted norms have understandably drawn a considerable amount of critical attention to gender in the *Roman de Silence*. Some scholars, like

¹⁰ For example, Nature scolds Silence, telling her: "Va a la cambre a la costure, / Cho violt de nature li us" [Go to a chamber and learn to sew! / That's what Nature's usage wants of you!] (2527-2428). In the Old French, it's clear that women's *us* are also what Nature commands.

Simon Gaunt (ibid.) and Peter Allen (1989), have argued that the narrative in fact ends up reinforcing misogynistic sentiment and systems, while others have argued that its portrayal of Silence and its staging of the Nature vs. Nurture conflict at the very least make it proto-feminist discourse, raising questions of the sex/gender distinction, regardless of how they are resolved.¹¹ Ultimately, the narrative blends what appear to be almost modern ruminations on whether gender is innate or learned, and an extensive portrayal of a strong woman - the romance's heroine - who performs admirably as a man (and generally in all she/he does), with interludes of misogynistic discourses about women. My primary interest is not to come down on one side or the other of this debate, but to show how Silence's female body – and the disjuncture between this body and Silence's male appearance and activity – is used as a site for reframing adventure around questions of identity, signs, and performance, rather than amorous desire or physical prowess. Likewise, whatever Heldris or the narrative's male characters (primarily King Evan) may say about women,¹² the *Roman de Silence* displays an evident interest in women's roles, both social and literary, and a nuanced treatment of gender, threading these interests through transformations of romance conventions, in a manner that puts these conventions in an uncomfortable or problematic light, though it does so with a laugh and a wink.

In light of the romance's treatment of gender, it is worth taking a moment to consider the narrative's use of pronouns, and my own use of pronouns when referring to Silence. Because the

¹¹ See for example Regina Psaki (1997, 3-8) and Kathleen J. Brahney (1985), the latter of whom posits a female authorship for the romance. Suzanne Conklin Akbari (1994) strikes a middle ground, noting both the misogynistic overtones of much of the work, and also the way in which the author has reworked the allegorical figure of Nature to be “far more ‘feminine’ than that found in the preceding literary tradition” (45), concluding that “The misogyny undoubtedly present in the work is not evidence against female authorship, for misogyny is and was not unique to men. If Heldris was indeed a woman, she may not be an ancestress we can comfortably claim as our own” (46).

¹² In terms of the king, the narrative gives us several opportunities to doubt his wisdom.

English language requires the use of gendered pronouns (or the pronoun “they” which in a sense becomes its own gender through its very refusal of the gender binary), any choice of pronoun to refer to Silence verges simultaneously on the political and the highly personal. Though Silence embodies a masculine social identity throughout most of the romance, Silence’s female body is at the same time a significant aspect of her identity within the romance. Indeed, it is hard to see how this romance would be of much interest if its primary source of tension – Silence’s cross-dressing – were not a major part of the narrative. The difference between Silence’s female body and her male social identity is the largest theme of the romance and is its entire *raison d’être*. In this circumstance, no pronoun seems correct, as each one elides an important aspect of the narrative and of Silence’s own gendered identity and dilemma. The narrative is of no help in this respect, as it uses both masculine and feminine pronouns and is always quick to remind us that Silence is not a boy under her clothes.¹³ Nor is Silence’s own approach to her gender very clarifying. When Silence is old enough to realize that she has a female body, and confronts her parents with this fact, her inner thoughts reveal that she feels that she is doing something wrong in living like a boy – that this is in fact a lie.¹⁴ We have no indication that Silence *feels* like a

¹³ Simon Gaunt (1990) notes, however, that the narrative does usually use masculine pronouns when Silence is living as a boy or man: “with one significant exception, Silence is designated by masculine pronouns and adjectives throughout the period she lives as a man, even by people who know she is really female. What is the effect of the one exception? In the second exchange between Nature and Noretire Silence is addressed as feminine. It is hardly surprising that Nature addresses Silence in the feminine (2510, 2512), but Noretire’s use of feminine forms when talking of Silence to Nature is more striking” (207).

¹⁴ “[S]ilences forment s’enasprist, / Car ses corages li aprist / Ke si fesist par couverture” [Silence was deeply disturbed about this, / for her conscience told her / that she was practicing deception by doing this] (2497-2499). The narrative also describes Silence’s situations as a torment, because Silence must work against her will and heart: “Et por cho di jo de Scilence / Qu’i ert de moult grant abstinence, / Que ses pensers le tormentoit / Et il le sentoit et sofroit. / Et tols jors ert pres a contraire / A cho que ses cuers voloit faire. / Et qui ouevre contre vouloir / Soventes fois l’estuet doloir” [And that is why I say that Silence / showed such great forbearance / for his thoughts tormented him, / and he felt this and suffered from it. / He was always ready to

male, and I would hesitate to equate enjoyment of masculine activities and liberties with some kind of deeper male identity. Although, as Gabriela Tanase (2006) observes, Silence clearly states “Car vallés sui et nient mescine” [for I am a young man, not a girl] (2650), she also views her male identity as a sham, for example in the lines cited by Tanase (5): “Jo sui, fait il, nel mescréés, / Com li malvais dras encrées / Ki samble bons, et ne l’est pas” [“I am,” he said, “believe me, / like an inferior piece of cloth powdered with chalk, / that looks good, but isn’t”] (3641-4643). Indeed, Silence fears and reasons that, as a female, she may not succeed at masculine activities (she turns out to be wrong about that, but it does show that Silence views female identity as something essential to her identity or personhood).

Within the narrative, Silence’s female body is her “nature” while Silence’s male identity is his “nurture.” Based on circumstances (“nurture”), Silence is living as a male and agrees to continue doing so out of obedience to her parents, in order to receive her inheritance, because it’s what she’s been raised to do, and because she estimates men’s lives to be superior to women’s within her society. The narrative suggests repeatedly that living like a male does not make one male, whether in Nature’s eventual triumph over Nurture, in the narrator’s repeated references to Silence’s female body, in Silence’s own awareness that her body is female (and apparent acceptance of this fact, too), and in Silence’s eventual public revelation of her body resulting from her capture of Merlin, who can only be captured by a woman. Likewise, the idea of gender neutrality, or of denying or subverting the gender binary in the way that we mean today, does not seem to occur to the narrator, to Silence, or to either Nature or Nurture. The tension of the romance revolves around whether Silence *is* a man or a woman, what she does as a man (as a

go against / what his heart wanted him to do, / and whoever works against his will / finds himself often in a state of unhappiness. / Silence’s heart was divided against itself] (2673-2681)

woman), why she is a man or a woman, and how she will continue being a man when it is actually her “nature” to be a woman. All of these questions are treated with ambiguity, complexity, contradiction, humor, and irony, but the narrative does not suggest that a gender-neutral existence or social identity is really an option, particularly in a society that places such a high value on lineage.

In this context, I believe that “she” is usually the most logical pronoun for speaking about Silence generally, although I sometimes opt for “he/she” or “he” when it clarifies the circumstances. The gender-neutral pronoun “they” would be another available option, but it too assigns Silence a kind of third gender or a non-gender that I do not believe the narrative supports. The narrative conflict resides precisely in the tension between Silence's highly conventional masculine appearance and activity, and female body.

Ultimately this discussion raises questions of whether a gender is what one *feels* one's gender to be, what one's body or genetics are (whether male, female, or intersex), what gendered conventions one's external appearance and activities most closely adhere to, and/or what gender one presents as socially. All of these questions are at stake in the *Roman de Silence*, and they are still at stake in discussions of gender today. One key difference between Silence's situation and the way gender is talked about today, however, is that Silence's social gender identity cannot very easily be seen as a choice.¹⁵ True, Silence chooses to maintain a male identity when she

¹⁵ Silence in fact puts the entire responsibility for this “choice” on her father: “Mes pere fist de moi son buen... / Et quant jo ving a tel aäge / Que gent comencent estre sage / Mes pere me fist asavoir / Que jo ja ne poroie avoir, / Sire, ireté en vostre terre. / Et por mon iretage quierre / Me rova vivre al fuer de malle, / Fendre me dras, aler al halle, / Et jo nel vol pas contredire” [My father did with me as he saw fit... / and when I reached / the age of understanding, / my father explained to me / that I could never inherit / in your land, Sire. / And in order to claim my inheritance, / he asked me to live as a man, to wear men's dress and not protect my complexion. / I didn't want to go against him] (6592-6601).

could refuse to do so, but the circumstances are such that to choose another option would be extraordinarily difficult if not impossible: to do so would be to go against the wishes of her parents, to lose her inheritance, to learn entirely different skills and a different way of life than the one to which she is accustomed, and to lose many of her freedoms in favor of a kind of indoor imprisonment.¹⁶ At the same time, selecting any particular pronoun for Silence is a problematic choice, and I wish to make clear that throughout this chapter, whenever I refer to Silence as “she,” I am not intending to make a larger statement about the immutability of gender, or to assert that in general someone who identifies as male is still female. But I do believe that in Silence’s specific case, the idea that Silence’s “nature” is female is essential to an understanding of the romance, and in particular to an understanding of how the narrative is rewriting a certain model of knightly adventure based on the body of its protagonist.

Marriage, Lineage, and Displacement

The *Roman de Silence* does not, in fact, begin with Silence’s story, but rather with a series of marriages that each highlight the differing ways in which the exchange of women, to employ the concept that Gayle Rubin analyzes,¹⁷ has the capability to both create and resolve conflict within

¹⁶ See the passage discussed at the beginning of the introduction, verses 2863-2872.

¹⁷ Gayle Rubin’s analysis of the “exchange of women” is vast and nuanced, largely based on a combination of readings of Marx and Lévi-Strauss, in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory and Lacan. She presents a feminist reading of Lévi-Strauss’s observation that women are exchanged between men within kinship groups, later moving from this analysis to a reconsideration of psychoanalysis and possibilities for a dissolution of the sex/gender system, and systems of exchange, that oppress women. She writes: “Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and *people* - men, women, and children - in concrete systems of social relationships. These relationships always include certain rights for men, others for women. ‘Exchange of women’ is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to the male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound

particular political and social arenas. These marriages frame Silence's story within a context that foregrounds questions of lineage and women's rights. At the same time, in terms of narrative adventure, the physical mobility implicated by an exchange of women – particularly between territories – also reveals how this kind of mobility does not typically function as a site for adventure even for narrative. This marital model is the one referred to by Simon Gaunt (1995) when he writes that, in contrast to *chanson de geste*, “Romance, on the other hand, consciously makes the role of the exchange of women in the formation of masculine hierarchies within a feudal society a central theme. It thereby offers a new model of masculine identity, constructed in relation to the feminine, but which proves to be no less problematic than the epic model” (73-74). In the *Roman de Silence*, this model will ultimately prove problematic for women too, resulting in unhappy marital outcomes that impose onerous, unjust circumstances on Silence and are ultimately resolved through an undoing of the first of these marriages. At the same time, following these series of exchanges, the *Roman de Silence* challenges the narrative conventions by which women are constitutive of male identity. In what follows, I discuss these marriages in terms of gender, and how they frame and bring about Silence's own adventures and dilemma.

In the first of these marriages, a war between King Evan of England and King Begon of Norway has lasted so long and proven so devastating that the Norwegian king's counselors advise him to offer his daughter Eufeme's hand to King Evan in exchange for ending the hostilities. Despite Evan's statement that “Et bien mon travail employé / Se jo a feme puis avoir; /

perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves. The exchange of women becomes an obfuscation if it is seen as a cultural necessity, and when it is used as the single tool with which an analysis of a particular kinship system is approached” (177). The “exchange of women” is thus seen to be a means of establishing relationships between power holders (men) within a kinship system that establishes different kinds of rights on the basis of gender.

Il n'a el mont si chier avoir" [it was well worth the hard work / if I can have this woman to wife, / for there is no greater treasure on earth] (180-183), the marriage is unquestionably motivated by political concerns. In fact, the statement that there is nothing "si chier avoir" as Eufeme foregrounds the ambiguity between personal and material value. The story involves no prior courtship, meeting or even reference to desire, to Eufeme, or to marriage. As Sharon Kinoshita (1995) succinctly puts it, "it is clearly political, a homosocial compact in which the exchange of a woman guarantees the resolution of conflict" (398).

Fittingly, the majority of the episode involves a sort of diplomatic to-and-fro that emphasizes the geographical space traversed by the kings' delegations (first to bring the offer to Evan, then to accept the offer and to bring Eufeme to England). This geographical crisscrossing can be viewed as representative of the political space that must also be traversed in order to create peace between two remote sides. The arrival of Eufeme in England marks the end of the war between Evan and Begon. Their mutual destruction is brought to a halt by an act of alliance made material in marriage, and this marriage is enabled by the exchange and displacement of a female body, figured prominently by Eufeme sailing across the sea to her new home:

Cange li vens, si s'en retornent
 C'onques plus longues n'I sojornent.
 En Engletiere prenent port.
 Li rois Ebains n'a nient de tort
 [...]
 Et puis sil fait bien aäsier,
 Car son cue rot un poi amer
 De la lasté et de la mer. (235-238, 244-246)

[As soon as the wind changed, they returned; / they didn't stay there any longer. / They reached the English port. / King Evan omitted none of the niceties / [...] / and then saw to her comfort, / for her heart was a little bitter / from the tiring journey across the sea]

In this sense, it is the concrete representation of both the corporeal and symbolic action of Eufeme's movement from one royal household to another. The allusion to the journey's physical

effect on Eufeme reinforces this sense of displacement. Notably, Eufeme is almost completely silent during this entire episode. She displays no desire for Evan, and if Evan has or does indeed desire his wife there is no indication that this is reciprocal. Her primary emotion is weariness from the sea and from travel. The potential for this journey across the ocean to an entirely new home and life to represent its own form of adventure is foreclosed in the text by recounting nothing that happens along it, although its described effect on Eufeme suggests that it was indeed a wearying experience and that Eufeme has responded to it, perhaps been changed by it, both in body and in mind (or heart).

The second and third marriages immediately follow the description of Eufeme and Evan's wedding ceremonies, creating a direct narrative connection between the two events: "Grans fu la fieste en Engletiere. / Atant vint uns cuens en la tiere / Ki avoit .ii. filles jumieles" [The festivities in England were magnificent. / Then a count with twin daughters / came to the land] (277-279). The two daughters marry two counts, their father dies, and the counts then quarrel over who will inherit their recently deceased father-in-law's estate, since they can't prove which daughter is older than the other. The counts duel, kill one another, and King Evan outlaws female inheritance as a result. It is another form of kinship exchange, this time leading to conflict rather than resolving it. The arrival of the twins creates a destabilization of the narrative and social order that in turn opens a space for narrative action and a change of circumstances.¹⁸

The king's injunction against female inheritance is portrayed as unjust and occasioned by grief and rage, but it also sheds light on women's marital displacements as mirroring the transfers of wealth and prestige that accompany them. These sorts of movements of goods along

¹⁸ Logically, the fact that the twins arrive from a different (and unidentified) land also serves to explain why no one can attest to their respective birth order.

with female bodies, likewise alluded to in the inclusion of valuable animals that sail to England along with Eufeme as a gift for Evan,¹⁹ form a very different model for displacement than that of knightly adventure. Medieval noble women can do little on their own accord to increase their assigned value beyond marriage (though knights can improve their reputations and wealth through feats of prowess and combat), a decision over which characters such as Eufeme are shown to have little control. They may only decrease their potential material worth by giving their bodies away in an unsanctioned manner. The ability to seek wealth, renown, and increased honor, on the other hand, is essential to the motivation of the figure of the adventuring knight, as Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986) has shown.²⁰

Women's displacements through marriage, which we might reasonably imagine could have constituted a form of risk and journey into the unknown, as evidenced by Eufeme's own tiring journey into what was only recently enemy territory, do not apparently contain the elements necessary to make narratives of them in the medieval romance genre as it developed in the twelfth century. As Caroline Jewers (1997) writes, "The story of [Eufeme's] marriage is described in masculine terms as a public merger inscribing a limited, passive space for women," and "Similarly, the second narrative, involving the two counts, also belong the paradigm of the *chanson de geste* and its traditional subject matter of dynastic feuding. Once more, women denote access to power and wealth without possessing either themselves" (99). Within this system of exchange, women's itineraries may be mapped out, but do not themselves constitute the setting of adventure. At the very least, they are not treated as such in narrative.

¹⁹ "Cil prenent la fille al Norois / Et maint cheval avoec morois, / Et ors et ostoirs et lyons" [They took the Norwegian king's daughter / and many black horses as well, / and bears and fowlers and lions, too] (231-233).

²⁰ See my discussion of Chênerie and the model of knightly adventure in the introduction.

At the same time, the enclosed, domestic, amorous and marital spheres of noble women are not exempt from feudal politics. On the contrary, Eufeme's marriage, as well as those of the count's daughters, illustrate how lineage, genealogy, inheritance and family alliances constituted the foundation upon which medieval power and politics were built. These concerns were dependent upon advantageous marriages and arose from within the familial and domestic sphere. The *Roman de Silence*'s overt interest in gender and inheritance foregrounds these concerns to such a degree that they become the primary anxiety and motivation of Silence's noble parents, and ultimately of the romance itself. In a sense, the romance's *aventure* turns entirely around the problem of female inheritance and the transfer of wealth. Its largest (and largely unspoken) dilemma is that the work's gender trouble, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, cannot be resolved by simply engaging in the outward trappings of knighthood, as Silence remains fundamentally unable, as a cross-dressed knight, to produce her own heir if she continues to live as a social male. Julie Orlemanski (2011) addresses this dilemma when she writes that "genealogical society creates circumstances in which Silence's gender cannot be sustained in independence from anatomy. [...] Genealogical discourse insists on the non-arbitrary correspondence of the linguistic with the corporeal, of the gendered with the sexual" (35). In other words, the very genealogical concerns that motivated Silence's parents to raise her as a boy make it impossible to sustain this identity while still participating in genealogical society.

Disguise, identity, and suspense

One important effect of this dilemma is that it establishes for the reader an expectation of Silence's unmasking, and it is this eventuality upon which the work's suspense is largely built. The genealogical impossibility of Silence's circumstances creates a primary form of suspense

that overarches each individual episode, as the reader awaits the moment at which Silence will no longer be able to maintain her male appearance. In this sense, it is significant that Silence's eventual unmasking marks not the mid-point of the story, nor its turning point, but rather its end. It was always the conclusion of the story because it constituted the primary conflict. A comparison can thus be drawn between the *Roman de Silence* and the myth of Iphis and Ianthe, recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Iphis's mother conceals the (female) birth sex of Iphis from her husband, so that they will not have to kill their daughter, being unable to afford a future dowry. The couple thus raise her as a son, with the father being none the wiser. When a woman, Ianthe, is later promised in marriage to Iphis, the two fall in love with one another. Iphis prays to Juno before the wedding, hoping for a divine intercession to resolve her dilemma, as she knows she will have to reveal her body on their wedding night. Juno takes pity upon them and transforms Iphis into a male, avoiding the potential genealogical sterility of their match, as well as the dangerous revelation of Iphis's transgression. This myth points to an alternate possibility – not employed in the *Roman de Silence* – of some kind of magical intervention that could solve Silence's dilemma. However, the narrative, like the saints' lives discussed in the introduction that served as important intertexts for the romance,²¹ instead opts for a drama of disguise in which revelation is the anticipated outcome.

Another useful comparison can be made between the *Roman de Silence* and an influential romance that utilizes a disguise-suspense tactic, namely Chrétien de Troye's *Chevalier de la charrette*, in which Lancelot operates in disguise for a significant portion of the story. In writing about this disguise as both a plot element and a narrative device, Ernst Soudek (1972) outlines several reasons that Chrétien might have employed this form of identity secrecy in the context of

²¹ Specifically, I refer to the Lives of Eugenia/Eugenios, Euphrosina, and Marina.

Lancelot's story. The first of these gets right at the heart of how disguise – or a discrepancy between external/social identity and internal/individual identity – function in narrative:

“Chrétien's primary reason for creating this intricate scheme of secrecy around his hero's identity is at once clear: it is simply to increase the suspense of his audience” (221). In addition, the revelation of this identity proves to be a key moment for Lancelot's ascension to heroism:

[I]t is possible, and even probable, that Chrétien, in an age when literature abounded in symbol and proleptic devices, intended the revelation of the hero's identity at the height of the battle with Meliagant, that is, long before Gauvain's misfortune at the water-bridge becomes known, as a subtle hint that Lancelot was about to become the best of all knights. (221)

The revelation of Lancelot's identity is thus correlated with his self-actualization, the moment at which his abilities, feats, and prowess accrue to a social individual in the form of a name that also represents the individual's true identity. For Lancelot, the name is the knight.

It is clear that for both the *Roman de Silence* and the *Chevalier de la charrette*, the hero/heroine's unknown identity serves the narrative function of suspense. However, for *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, this suspense is generated between the disguised knight and both the audience and other characters; the audience, assuming they have not heard the story before, is no more “in the know” than the characters who encounter the mysterious knight and wonder who he might be. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the revelation of the knight's identity will in any way be deeply problematic for him, because, unlike for *Silence*, there is no established back story to suggest as much. Instead, the name will lead to greater renown because it will provide an identity to which renown might accrue.

When his name is eventually revealed, by Guinevere herself, the importance of it having been hidden in the first place is downplayed:

Lors vint a la reine et dit:
Dame, por Deu et por le vostre

Preu, vos requier, et por le nostre,
 Que le non a ce chevalier
 Por ce que il li doie eidier
 Me dites, se vos le savez.
 --Tel chose requise m'avez
 Demeisele, fet la reïne, / Ou ge n'antant nule haïne
 Ne felenie se bien non.
 Lanceloz del Laz a a non
 Li chevaliers, mien esciant. (3650-3661)

[She then went to the queen and said / My Lady, in God's name and in your own interest,
 / and in ours, I ask you / to tell me, if you know it, / the name of this knight, / so that we
 can come to his aid. / In what you are asking me, / damsel, said the queen, / I see nothing
 hostile / nor mean, quite the contrary. / Lancelot of the Lake is the name / of the knight,
 as far as I know]²²

This revelation occurs near the midpoint of the romance (as opposed to the endpoint in the *Roman de Silence*) further highlighting that while disguise and secrecy are important themes and devices of *Le Chevalier de la charrette* (for example, corresponding to the hidden nature of Lancelot and Guinevere's love), they are not essential to Lancelot's knightly identity, nor to the continuation of the narrative, nor its central and primary conflict. Naming Lancelot is a real and symbolic step along his quasi-mystical path to becoming a savior and a renowned knight. In direct contrast, the *Roman de Silence* is entirely reliant upon the hidden identity of its title character. Importantly, this identity has very little to do with a name. Silence, is, after all, Silence's actual name, with the potential transition from *Silentius* to *Silentia* marking the passage from man to woman and the neutral *Silence* employed in both situations:

Sel faisons apieler Scilense
 El non de Sainte Paciensce,
 Por cho que silensce tolt ance.
 Que Jhesus Cris par sa poissance
 Le nos doinst celer et taisir,
 Ensi com lui est a plaizir!
 Mellor conseil trover n'i puis.

²² Translation my own on the basis of both the Old French and Charles Méla's (1994) modern French translation.

Il iert només Scilenscius;
Et s'il avient par aventure
Al descobrir de sa nature
Nos muerons cest -us en -a,
S'avra a non Silencia.
Se nos li tolons dont cest -us
Nos li donrons natural us,
Car cis -us est contre nature. (2067-2082)

[We shall call her Silence, / after Saint Patience, / for silence relieves anxiety. / May Jesus Christ through his power / keep her hidden and silent for us, / according to his pleasure. / I can't think of a better plan. / He will be called Silentius. / And if by any chance / his real nature is discovered, / we shall change this -us to -a, / and she'll be called Silencia. / If we deprive her of this -us, / we'll be observing natural usage / for this -us is contrary to nature, / but the other would be natural.]

Here, we see that the name is merely a custom, referred to in the Old French by the word *us*, while the *-us* ending of Silence's male name (*Silentius*) goes against both usage (*us*) and against nature.²³ Nature is also shown to operate according to its own customs (*us*) in the *Roman de Silence*, further blurring the distinction between what is natural and what is normal, in the sense of social norms. The name itself – ostensibly a marker of identity, particularly in genealogical society – conceals Silence's nature by going against custom, and it is mutable rather than stable.

Silence's identity, in the form of a name, is thus always out in the open, plain for everyone to see: she really is named Silence, really is noble, really is the child of Cador and Eufemie, really has become an accomplished knight, really has saved the kingdom. What counts as identity for Lancelot – a name, the basis of renown – is not the same form of identity that is significant for Silence. That her name is a word representing the absence of sound, and therefore the absence of the circulated utterances that make up knightly reputation, underscores the level to

²³ About this change in name, Simon Gaunt (1990) makes the claim that “[Heldris] does not play at all on the truly indeterminate French form of Silence's name, only the Latin version, which must be either masculine or feminine. For Heldris, to call Silence *Silencius*, rather than *Silencia*, is not legitimate play, it is simply wrong” (207).

which the naming that stands in for identity in other narratives contains little of substance, resolution or promise for Silence.²⁴ While the revelation of Lancelot's identity (a name) is a moment at which he fully comes into being as a knight, the revelation of Silence's identity (a gendered identity) is his/her undoing as a knight. In this sense, it is more akin to the eventual public revelation of Lancelot and Guinevere's hidden and socially forbidden love (not in the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, but later in the Lancelot cycle) than it is to the revelation of Lancelot's identity. The consequences might not be so grandly devastating for Silence as they are for Lancelot, Guinevere and Arthur in *La Mort du Roi Arthur*, for example, but they ultimately mark the destruction of his/her knightly identity, and of the very possibility of Silence being a knight at all. It coincides with his/her narrative silencing,²⁵ and ultimately silences the narrative as well.

The suspenseful risk of revelation has little to do with one's named identity, and everything to do with the implications of this identity vis-à-vis social customs. Silence must not only live as a male in order to inherit her family estate, in doing so she is also put in the impossible position of being, herself, unable to produce heirs to whom she may in turn transmit this wealth. What this points to is a shift from the disguise-suspense model presented in *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, in which naming and identity are forms of self-actualization, to a model in which naming is emptied of implied identity, and what is hidden is destructive, rather

²⁴ Gabriel Tanase (2006) makes an interesting comparison between the masculine and feminine forms of Silence's name: "Ce n'est donc pas par hasard si en latin classique *silentius* s'associe à l'absence de bruit ou de paroles, tandis que *silentia* désigne le repos, l'inaction, l'oisiveté, ou la patience, telle que l'exprime le texte lui-même" [It is thus not an accident that in classical Latin *silentius* is associated with the absence of sound or spoken words, while *silentia* designates rest, inactivity, idleness, or patience, as the text itself tell us] (3).

²⁵ Silence speaks for the last time – whether as a dialogue or as an inner monologue – during the scene in which she is revealed to be a woman. We do not hear from her again after that, nor are we privy to any emotion or thought she might have.

than constitutive, of one's social self. Lancelot, through the various episodes of Chrétien's romance, enacts a form of proving that make his name increasingly socially meaningful, while Silence performs a series of feats that will be undone by her "unmasking." Her feats and reputation as a knight do not adhere indefinitely to her name as a knight-protagonist, and indeed, it is a name that she will be unable to pass on as a knight.

This difference illustrates one of the ways in which the centering of female inheritance in the *Roman de Silence* enacts a reframing of adventure around lineage and the preservation of a family's estate. While *amour courtois* served as a motivation for knightly adventure, and while the knight may conventionally be rewarded with a (politically, socially, economically) good marriage, Silence's adventure takes this concern many steps further by imagining inheritance issues and genealogical unviability as a primary source of suspense and conflict. It is important to note that while Silence's specific form of gender transgression is a rarity in romance,²⁶ in actuality, romance's concerns for inheritance and lineage were never absent from either the social or the narrative-adventure aspects of knighthood. As Sharon Kinoshita (1995) writes:

[I]n the High Middle Ages, as fiefs became hereditary and monarchical power became centralized, the preservation of lineage came more and more to be the feudal aristocracy's primary function. In this perspective, the recoding of Silence as female reflects a shift in the way aristocratic bodies mattered: less as *bellatores* charged with maintaining order in the land than as link in a genealogical chain charged with maintaining dynastic legitimacy. (406)

This increasing emphasis on the individual as a "link in a genealogical chain" was likewise mirrored, according to Christopher Callahan (2002), in the desired outcome or end goal of the fictional knight's adventures as well:

The key to [chivalric heroes'] success in life is to seek adventure, acquire a reputation for prowess, and in the end marry an heiress, who is ideally of superior rank. As genealogical records have revealed, the primary anxiety, the primary envy, that motivated young men

²⁶ Not, however, in saints' lives, as discussed in the introduction.

of this rank was marriage envy. For although knightly activities were a source of wealth and renown, marriage was the only means to property and security and was perforce acquired outside the family. (17)

However, since Silence can never expect to marry a woman and produce an heir from this marriage, the genealogical concerns of the romance become a source not of motivation, but of instability and absence, or as Orlemanski puts it “a silence in the family tree.”²⁷ Addressing the same issue from another perspective, Craig Berry (2005) writes that “since marrying an heiress was one of the few methods by which a medieval nobleman could add to his patrimonial holding and increase his status, Silence also functions as the desire object of the quest” (195). Indeed, Silence’s inheritance, if she were to receive it, would be substantial - substantial enough that her parents have taken the extraordinary step of raising her as a boy in order to pass it down. But the text cuts off – almost literally castrates – the potential realization of this desire: either Silence is an impotent man, or she is a disinherited woman. The only way in which this desire for lineage and inheritance can be realized is through the undoing of Silence’s knightly persona and the restoration of female inheritance, both of which occur in the narrative’s conclusion. For Silence, the object of the quest must thus be the undoing of her social identity. Her adventures are mere placeholders on the road to this end goal, and they are suspenseful and meaningful only because we know that they must somehow be dissolved in the end.

Marriage and lineage are also problematic for many of the knightly models of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Lancelot and Tristan are well-known examples of knights motivated by an impossible, and ultimately destructive and infertile form of desire. What is key to their success as knights is not key to the success of their narratives. Instead, it is their failure to live up

²⁷ From the title to Orlemanski’s 2011 article: “A Silence in the Family Tree: The Genealogical Subject in Heldris of Cornwall’s *Silence*.”

to an ideal that in many ways constitutes the real suspense and interest of their stories. Likewise, for figures such as Yvain in Chrétien's *Chevalier au lion*, marriage is only the beginning of, and in fact the reason for, a series of obstacles that the knight-protagonist must overcome in order to *win back* his own wife's trust and love.

However, Silence's story is not a love story. This is, in fact, one of the *Roman de Silence*'s most unique and potentially disruptive characteristics, and one of the ways in which it maps onto the saints' lives that served as models for Silence's cross-dressed identity. The only real love in the romance exists between her parents, whose courtship will be the subject of my next discussion, while Silence's experiences with the desires of others – namely the queen, Eufeme – are revealed to be sources of danger, conflict, and false accusations. Unlike the typical knight-protagonist, and unlike the emplaced lady as object of the knight's desire, the impossibility of Silence's position, and/or its motivation, has nothing to do with love. Love does not inspire her to great or greater feats. She does not require the sort of coupling that forms the basis of Lancelot's legend, or, more importantly, that lends narrative substance to female characters such as Guinevere, Enide, or Laudine. She is, most notably, a female character who is portrayed as being without amorous desire.²⁸ Silence is apparently unbound by sexual desire, but she is entirely bound by considerations of inheritance and genealogy, and her ostensible lack of desire proves to be just as problematic as the unsanctioned desires of Tristan and Iseult, or Lancelot and Guinevere.

²⁸ See also Peggy McCracken (1994) and, as cited by Craig Berry (2005): Barbara Newman. 1995. *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 165; Barbara Newman. 2003. *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 122-134.

Desire and the Language of Adventure

While love and amorous desire may be absent from Silence's motivations, they nonetheless play an important role in the narrative, first in the context of the marriage of Silence's parents, and second in Silence's conflict with the queen. Having shown how desire, lineage, and marriage are intimately linked to knightly adventure as sources of motivation, conflict, and reward, in this section I would like to explore how desire – even when sanctioned and resulting in marriage – can itself be cast in romance as a form of adventure. This recasting of adventure as an intimate, corporeal experience of desire does not substitute for or displace adventure as an active engagement with the external world; desire is not equally “adventure” in that sense. However, it does reveal the degree to which adventure is a narrative phenomenon, constructed by and within the text through the employment of certain kinds of language. The emphasis on the narrativity of adventure in turn sets the stage for what I will later show is the *Roman de Silence*'s staging of performance and language as forms of prowess and as the material of adventure.

The interiority of desire may indeed at first seem counter to the notion of adventure, and such a recasting does involve a rupture with at least one of knightly adventure's most prominent and consistent features, namely a spatial displacement outward, away from the familiar and the domestic. This displacement is, according to both Marie-Luce Chênerie and Philippe Ménard as cited in the introduction, one of the first and most essential aspects of the figure of the *chevalier errant*. Certainly, any model for intimate adventure will by necessity need to express a basic distance from, and transformation of, the classic understanding of romance adventure. I do not mean to argue that the intimate adventure fulfills all of the qualifications according to which romance adventure has been broadly defined. I do mean to suggest, however, that it is presented in language that that overtly echoes knightly or risky adventure.

Cador and Eufemie's romance begins after Cador, Silence's future father and one of the best of King Evan's knights, has slain a dragon, saving the king and his men from what is depicted as real risk of demise. The dragon slaying episode calls upon one of verse romance's enduring tropes (the knight vs. the dangerous beast) and serves to position the narrative within the romance conventions of bodily risk, the triumph of a worthy knight, and the motivating force of love (Cador kills the dragon so that he may have Eufemie, whom he loves, as a reward, as the king promises any eligible woman to anyone who can defeat the dragon). Following this episode, it is notable that Cador and Eufemie's courtship will involve many of these same elements and will blur the lines between the harm incurred from fighting the dragon and from love.

As promised, the king rewards Cador's valiancy with a gift of land, and the promise that he may marry anyone he wishes, as long as that person is not already betrothed. While Cador already has Eufemie in mind, it quickly becomes clear that he has not told her this. More immediately pressing for Cador is the fact that upon returning to court, he falls gravely ill, which the text tells us is the result of having inhaled too much of the dragon's smoke. It just so happens that the most skilled healer in the land is Eufemie. In a mirroring of the reward bestowed upon Cador for his knightly prowess, the king promises Eufemie that she may marry whomever she wishes if she succeeds in curing Cador, who is moreover a relative of the king and much beloved by him. Cador and Eufemie's mutual desire, their mutual inability to communicate their desire to one another, and the marital nature of their rewards, constitute the primary objects and obstacles of their courtship. This episode – from Cador falling ill until the two obtain permission to marry – extends over more than a thousand lines, with the majority consisting of descriptions of their emotional state, its bodily manifestations, and their tormented thoughts. What sustains the episode over this length of text during which the primary action is emotional are the tensions

created between a multitude of contrasting elements, including active terms depicting bodily harm and/or reflecting the language of knightly combat and adventure. These contrasting elements can roughly fit into binary categories such as hidden/revealed, speech/silence, pain/pleasure, harm/cure, action/inaction, nearness/separation. The interplay of these concepts forms a model of discursive and intimate adventure that repositions and re-genders the content and form of knightly adventure, while simultaneously maintaining its risks and rewards.

The most immediately evident of these oppositional pairings stages a vicious cycle between illness and cure. While it is the dragon's smoke that has caused Cador's initial malady, it is the woman who is charged with healing him (and who succeeds in doing so) who inflicts another type of harm on his body, this time in the form of the intensely felt pains of desire. As Cador laments: "Ele m'a fait d'un mal délivre, / Mais d'un moult gregnor voir m'enivre, / Car ivres sui et esmaris / Quant jo languis, si sui garis" [She has saved me from one malady, / but now, truly, a much worse one poisons me, / for I must be drunk or mad / if I still languish now that I am cured] (660-663).

Eufemie thus becomes like the dragon in that she metaphorically poisons Cador, but she also embodies his only hope for a cure. Not only does she nurse him back to health from the dragon's harmful smoke, but it is likewise only she who can cure Cador of his second affliction, by reciprocating his desire. This situation is a literary trope in which love is an illness and the desired woman is the infecting body, but also the only possible cure.²⁹ It also conflates the

²⁹ In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, for example, an exaggerated reference to this trope presents Nicolette's body as having healing powers even for those ill of something other than love: "L'autr'ier vi un pelerin, / nes estoit de Limosin, / malades de l'esvertin, / si gisoit ens en un lit, / mout par estoit entrepris, / de grant mal amaladis; / tu passas devant son lit, / si soulevas ton traïn / et ton peliçon ermin, / la cemissee de blanc lin, / tant que ta ganbete vit: / garis fu li pelerins / et tos sains, ainc ne fu si; / si se leva de son lit, si rala en son país / sains et saus et tos gari" [The other day I saw a pilgrim / from Limousin; / he was sick with madness, / lying in bed, / doing

physical effects of bodily harm from the dragon's smoke with those suffered as a result of unrealized desire. This alternation between sickness and cure turns the state of falling in love into an active and bodily exchange and ordeal. Notably, Eufemie has also been infected: "Par Deu, ai mainte gent sane[e], / Al daërrain sui engane[e] / Car or sai tres bien par verté / Que par Cador ai l'enferté. / Trestolt l'ai par cest damoisiel" [My God, I have cured many a man, / but I have been badly repaid by the last one. / For now I know the truth very well: / I caught this disease from Cador. / This young man is highly contagious] (779-783).

Now they are both ill. This situation lends to love a physical, risky and active dimension, while also opening up an abundance of oppositional discursive possibilities that are explored through extended metaphors and the mirroring of Cador and Eufemie's emotional and physical states. Indeed, the physical effects of this love are quite serious:

Vellier la nuit, jaindre, pener,
Qu'Amors le prent a demener,
Fai le fremir, suer, tranbler.
Pis que fievre li puet sambler:
Car fievre est lués de tel nature
C'om le piert sovent par froidure
U par bien durement suer;
Mais Amor ne violt remuer
Ne por grant froit, ne por calor;
Ne n'espargne home por valor,
Ne por fierté, ne por promesse
[...]
A Cador pert bien qu'ele est fierce. (719-732)

[He was awake all night, suffering, groaning, / for Love had seized control of him, / made him shiver, sweat and tremble. / It was worse than the symptoms of a fever, / for fever is such that / a man often loses it through chill / or by sweating copiously. / But Love

very poorly / and gravely ill. / You passed before him, / lifting your train / and your tunic lined with ermine fur, / and your shirt of white linen, / so that he saw your little leg. / This pilgrim was straight away cured, / he regained his full health. / He got up out of bed, / and returned to his homeland, / completely well, completely cured] (XI). Translation my own, based on the Old French and Philippe Walter's modern French translation.

refuses to give way / to extreme heat or cold; / he doesn't spare a man for valor / or yield to threats or promises. / [...] / Love seemed very fierce to Cador.]

Love itself becomes like an opponent, and the ability to endure it is akin to a form of combat, though its effects are those of a malady. This dual language of illness and embattlement saturates Cador and Eufemie's narrative. It is not merely a feeling, but rather a physical battle through which they each suffer and are wounded. When Love strikes Cador, it is violent:

Amors que fait? .i. dart soslieve
Qui plus est trançans d'almiele,
Si l'a feru sos la mamiele.
'H[e]las!' fait il, 'qui si me point?'
Et Amors pries del cuer se joint
Et tant li greieve l'envaie
Qu'il gient, et crie: 'Aïe! aïe! (680-686)

[And what did Love do? He took up a dart / sharper than a lance's point, /and struck Cador just beneath the breast. / 'Alas!' he cried. 'What has pierced me so?' / And then Love pressed him close to the heart, / and this attack hurt him so / that he moaned and cried, 'Ah! Ah!']

Cador is physically wounded by Love's attack, and the attack is described in terms of weaponry and bodily trauma: "dart," "plus est trançans d'alemiele," "grieve et l'envaie." In contrast to Silence's donning of men's clothing and subsequent movement through the space of the exterior world on the model of knightly adventure, Cador and Eufemie's love scenes employ the language of risk, danger, and combat to describe an event that is largely interior, both in terms of the rooms in which it is contained as well as its essential psychological and emotional character. The combat is figurative, but its effects on the body are at the same time real and physical. The risk is not only bodily harm, but in fact a radical alteration of the body's integrity. The effects of this destabilization are like a denaturing of the body:

Si grans cals ne puet vaintre mie
Le froit que j'ai, bele Eufemie.
Li frois ne puet avoir valor
Ki puisse vaintre ma calor.

Anbedoi sunt ivel en force;
 Li uns enviers l'altre s'esforce,
 Ne puet l'uns l'altre sormonter.
 Oïstes vos ainc mais conter
 De calt, de froit, qui sunt contraire,
 Que en un cors peüscent faire?
 S'en moi peüst valoir Nature,
 Ja voir si estrange aventure
 A mon las cors n'en avenist;
 L'une viers l'altre ne se tenist.
 Mais jo sui tols desnaturés
 Et si cuic ester enfaturés. (1017-1033)

[There is no heat hot enough to conquer / the cold I feel, belle Eufemie. / There is no cold that has the strength / to overcome my heat. / Both are equal in strength; / one contends with the other. / Have you ever heard tell / what the opposition of heat and cold / can do inside the body? / If Nature could assert her strength in me, / this strange state of affairs / could not occur in my weary body; / the one would not struggle with the other. / But I am totally dis-natured; / I think I am bewitched.]

The play of contrasting binary elements (hot/cold) is evident here, even more so in the Old French, with the lyrically suggestive and sequential reversals of the terms *uns/altre* (“*Li uns enviers l'altre s'esforce, / Ne puet l'uns l'altre sormonter,*” 1022-1023) and the clear declaration of their opposition (“*De calt, de froit, qui sunt contrarie,*” 1025). This play of opposites whose simultaneous existence should be precluded by the mutual exclusion of their terms, leads to a state of being that is described as “*desnaturés*” (1032).³⁰ This suggests that passionate love or desire enacts a form of destabilization and denaturing, similar to the text's treatment of Silence's gendered identity, that opens up a space for the reformulation of assumed relationships between bodies, and between the self and body.

³⁰ The connection between the desiring body that is “*desnaturés*” and Silence's “unnatural” cross-dressing (in terms of Nature's strong opposition to it) is hard to ignore, although the direct relationship is unclear. At the very least, they each participate in a shared thematic of destabilization and denaturing, each of which engender new narrative and social possibilities.

Significantly, Cadour describes this denaturing as a “si estrange aventure” (1029). This language highlights both the way in which adventure is being rewritten as an interior event (or vice versa), and in which this rewriting alters the notion adventure itself, making it “si estrange.” The language of malady, risk, bodily harm, and combat becomes the narrative material for adventure as an affective experience of desire. The model for intimate adventure is thus one that is simultaneously at odds with other forms of knightly proving, while at the same time often described and understood in terms that were proper to these more externally displaced masculine feats.

The portrayal of love as combat, illness or suffering is not unique to the *Roman de Silence*.³¹ Its extensive treatment in the text echoes, for example, Chrétien de Troyes’s romance *Cligès*, in which Soredamor and Alexandre’s love for one another unfolds over roughly 600 verses. In Chrétien’s text, Soredamor is the first to be wounded:

Or la fera Amors dolente
 Et molt se cuide bien venchier
 Dou grant orgueil et dou dangier
 Qu’ele li a touz jorz mené.
 Bien a Amors droit asené,
 Qu’au cuer l’a de son dart ferue.
 Sovent palist, et si tressue,
 Et maugré suen amer l’estuet. (456-463)

[Now Love is going to make her suffer / and thinks it will avenge itself / for the refusal and great pride / that she always showed him. / Love aimed true / With his arrow, he struck her in the heart. / She often goes pale, sweating, / despite herself, he made her love]³²

³¹ Ovid, for example, speaks of love in terms of war and armies (*Amores*, Book I, poem IX), although he is not referencing the pain of love but rather its obstacles and efforts.

³² For all English translations of *Cligès*, translations are my own, on basis of the Old French and Charles Méla and Olivier Collet’s (1994) modern French translation.

The narrative then enacts a long discourse that plays upon oppositional pairings such as strength and weakness, pain and pleasure, partially in the form of Soredamor's extended inner monologue. For Soredamor and Alexandre, as for Cador and Eufemie, love is a form of battle: "Amors les .II. amanz travaille, / Vers cui il a prise bataille" [Love torments the two lovers, with whom it is engaged in battle] (573-574).

Here too, the physical suffering is prolonged by the fact that neither of the embattled lovers is able to communicate their desire: "Alixandres aime et desirre / Celle qui por s'amor soupire, / Mais il nel set ne ne savra / Jusqu'a tant que il en avra / Maint mal et meint ennui sofert." (575-579) [Alexandre loves and desire / she who sighs for his love / but he does not know it; and he will not know it / until the moment when he will have / suffered much pain and many torments].³³ Again, love and desire are not equivalent to the more outward, and outwardly displaced, activities of the *chevalier errant*, but the language used in these passages positions the experience of love and desire in direct relation to this model.

In medieval romance, both men and women suffer the same bodily affliction in love, and both are equally capable (or incapable) of doing battle with this emotion, and equally capable (or incapable) of resolving this conflict through its communication and consummation. In *Cligès*, it is ultimately the queen who must broker understanding between the two lovers, and in the *Roman de Silence*, this is accomplished nearly inadvertently through a slip of tongue, when Eufemie accidentally exclaims "Ah mi!" instead of "Ami," alerting Cador to her inner state (882-915). Significantly for our comparison between these two works, each of these episodes of love displays a mirroring of the two lovers, and this reflective equality will ultimately result in

³³ And again: "Et ce que li uns l'autre voit / Ne plus n'osent dire ne fere / Lors torne molt a grant contraire" [And that one sees the other / without daring to say or do more / is for them a source of torment] (588-590).

producing a child (Cligès and Silence), the romances' respective titular heroes/heroines, who will each end up in a sort of genealogical bind. For Cligès, this takes the form of a mutual desire between himself and Fénice, who must nonetheless marry Cligès's uncle, Alis, even though the latter had engaged a contract with Alexandre to never marry, as a condition for their sharing of power over Constantinople. Fénice and Cligès thus share a love that is illicit and complicated by familial ties. Like Silence, Fénice must give up her identity as a solution to her dilemma, faking her death and living for years (voluntarily) hidden in a tower that Cligès can regularly visit, before being understandably overcome by a desire to once again be outside, thus leading to her discovery.

Both *Cligès* and the *Roman de Silence* ultimately resolve their genealogical dilemmas through a form of revelation: a passing knight sees Cligès and Fénice, assumed to be dead, in the garden, and tells Alis, whereas Silence reveals her own identity after capturing Merlin. For Cligès and Fénice, their troubles are resolved when Alis dies and they are able to openly marry. Cligès transforms from fugitive to emperor; Fénice moves from literal non-identity, having performed her own death, to reclaiming her identity and becoming queen. Silence, however, moves from being a knight of great renown to a silenced queen who is married to someone she does not apparently love, or at least the text never suggests that she does. The fact that King Evan openly silences his first wife, Eufeme (6398-6407) only reinforces the extent to which silence is a condition for Silence's transition to womanhood, and his directive to the queen to "alés en vostre canbre" [go to your room] (6407) echoes Silence's earlier fears about her own potential imprisonment in a room if she were to live as a woman. Interestingly, this possibility seems to reflect the conclusion of *Cligès* not for Fénice, but rather for the women who follow, as the text tells us that Fénice's example was henceforth used as a reason to keep the empress of

Constantinople in guarded enclosure: “Por ce einsi com an prison / Est gardee an Costantinoble, / Ja n’iert tant riche ne tant noble / L’empererriz, quex qu’ele soit” [It is thus that as if in prison / the empress is kept guarded in Constantinople / no matter who she is, / no matter how powerful and how noble she is] (6690-6693). Thus, despite the two texts’ many similarities, the resolution of Silence’s circumstances is more akin to a loss of identity and bodily autonomy than to the triumphant return-to-being-and-power experienced by Fénice and Cligès.

Cligès and the *Roman de Silence* also portray love and desire as forces that are potentially disruptive to the social order. The same denaturing of the body that made love a *si estrange aventure* is reflected by love’s influence on the body politic as well. Indeed, desire itself engenders the possibility of a rupture with the most important feudal aspect of coupling, namely the aforementioned preservation and transmission of wealth, political power, and lineage. This potential disruption is evident in Fénice and Cligès’s illicit love, although their circumstances ultimately turn out to their advantage and to the advantage of the empire. Similarly, for Cador and Eufemie, the destabilizing effect of love ultimately prompts the possibility of permanent displacement, as Cador contemplates exile with Eufemie if the king doesn’t approve their marriage:

Cador a dit: ‘Que c’est tolt nient!
 Se on droiture ne nos tient,
 Amie, j’en ferai meruelle,
 Car mes corages me conselle
 Que en essil o vos m’en voise,
 Tolt a laron, sans faire noise.’
 Ele respond: ‘Tel n’oï onques!
 Bials amis, mervelliés vus donques
 S’essil sofrés por vostre amie,
 Or voi qu’es homes nen a mie
 Si grans cuers come g’i ai creü.
 Amis, or ai jo bien veü
 Et sai de fi et sui certaine
 Que del mal don’t ne suis pas sainne

Que vos estes en grant fretel.
Mais jo certes ne m'esmervel
S'en bos vois o vus u en lande. (1345-1361)

[Cador said, 'It doesn't matter/ if they don't deal fairly with us, love, / I'll give them a surprise, / for my innermost being counsels me / to seek exile with you, / in all secrecy, without making a noise.' / She replied, 'I've never heard of such a thing! / Dear love, it would certainly be amazing / for you to suffer exile for your beloved! / Now I see that men's hearts / aren't as great as I had thought. / Beloved, now it's clear to me, / I've seen for certain, / that you are profoundly disturbed / by that illness from which I suffer, too. / As for me, I certainly wouldn't think it strange / to wander with you in forest or field]

Cador and Eufemie thus communicate their willingness to forgo the social, financial and political possibilities of their union – or of any other potential unions – in order to preserve their love.

Eufemie's reaction to Cador's proposal is one of both surprise and agreement: she's never heard of such a thing ("Tel n'oi onques!", 1351) and she tells Cador that he is "en grant fretel" (1359).

The *Dictionnaire Godefroy* shows that this word (from "frestel") refers to both a noisy racket or cacophony and, in verbal form, such actions as "faire retentir, parcourir en galopant à grand bruit" [to make ring out, go galloping around with great noise] and "s'agiter, avec diverses nuances de signification" [to grow restless, with diverse nuances of meaning]. The state of being in "grant fretel" is thus essentially destabilized and without harmony and suggests the notion of a spatial displacement that borders on the out of the control. Significantly, this instability is also expressed partially in terms of a disruption in gendered expectations, as it suggests to Eufemie that men's hearts aren't as "grans" (1354-1355) as she once thought. Clearly, Cador's passionate heart does not fit in with her notions of masculinity. Knights may wander to seek certain types of adventure, but not this kind of adventure. Nonetheless, Eufemie accepts the possibility of displacement, and though she recognizes it as unusual and perhaps also unreasonable, it is one that ultimately "ne m'esmervel" (1360); she wouldn't find this strange adventure of wandering indefinitely in the woods and fields to be very astonishing after all.

In fact, as Georges Duby (2002) reminds us, courtly love was always defined by a certain level of risk, which he refers to as a form of adventure: “Aimer de fine amour, c’était courir l’aventure” [To love with fine amour, is to run to the risk of *aventure*] (325). *Aventure* here means something very different from the knightly variety and refers rather to a romantic affair. However, as we have seen in the *Roman de Silence* (and this is the case for medieval romance more generally), the difference between these kinds of adventures becomes blurred through a language that situates desire in direct relation to physical adventure. They are not the same, but *aventure* is clearly a capacious category that can include the romantic as well as the chivalric. The meaning of adventure is in fact formed through its use in these medieval narratives - it may comprise different models and may interrogate the space between them.

Fine amour itself differs from the amorous experiences of Cadour and Eufemie, in that *fine amour* is built on the model of a young man falling in love with a woman who is already married to someone else, or who is otherwise unattainable. The risk run by the lovers is of being caught or found out and the risk run to society is of the destabilizing of the institution of marriage and of lineage. This form of adventure, which is both interior and interpersonal, is largely played out through the fabrication of signs and other means of intimate communication: “Obligé à la prudence, et surtout à la discretion, il lui fallait s’exprimer par signes, édifier au sein de la cohue domestique la clôture d’une sorte de jardin secret, et s’enfermer avec sa dame dans cet espace d’intimité” [Obligated to remain prudent, and above all discrete, it was necessary [for the lover] to express himself through signs, to construct within the midst of the domestic crowd the enclosure of a kind of secret garden, and to shut himself in with his lady in this intimate space] (ibid, 325). The intimacy of the domestic space, paradoxically offset by the controlling gaze of those who share it, necessitates that the conditions for this form of adventure are ever-

greater intimacy, an ever-more-private interiority. In Georges Duby's formulation, the physical space of the room or garden where the lovers meet must be figuratively shrunk to an even smaller space of mutual understanding, a new enclosure in which to meet.

Spatially, this form of adventure is in complete opposition to the model of the outward travelling and adventuring knight, who, as Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986) notes, was always "lancé vers un ailleurs, dans un déplacement fictif qui devait donner un sens à sa vocation, le combat, à ses aptitudes, la force et la liberté, et à d'autres aspirations distinctives" [set out on his way towards somewhere else, in a fictional displacement that was meant to give a meaning to his vocation, combat, aptitudes, force, and liberty, along with other distinctive aspirations] (18). The essential directionality of the knight is an outward one, creating an ever-larger space for adventure. The *estranged adventure* of desire, on the other hand, is deeply interwoven with another body and must be resolved through the sharing of language and signs between these two bodies as a substitute for, and means of attaining, the corporeal communication of realized desire. Georges Duby suggests in fact that for *fine amour*, no resolution of physical desire *within the other* is truly possible:

Ce que chantaient les poètes retardait donc indéfiniment, repoussait toujours dans le futur le moment où tomberait l'aimée, où son servent prendrait en elle son plaisir. Celui-ci, le plaisir de l'homme, se trouvait déplacé. Il ne résidait plus dans l'assouvissement mais dans l'attente. Le plaisir culminait dans le désir lui-même. C'est ici que l'amour courtois révèle sa vraie nature : onirique. L'amour courtois concédait à la femme un pouvoir certain. Mais il maintenait ce pouvoir confiné au sein d'un champ bien défini, celui de l'imaginaire et du jeu. (325)

[What the poets sang thus delayed indefinitely, always put off into the future the moment when the beloved would fall, when her servant would take his pleasure in her. This, the man's pleasure, found itself displaced. It no longer resided in fulfillment but in waiting. Pleasure culminated in desire itself. It is here that courtly love reveals its true nature: oniric. Courtly love concedes to the woman a certain power. But it maintains this power confined within a well-defined field, that of the imaginary and games]

The form of displacement described here is that of a body which one is forever approaching and yet never reaching. The displacement is of desire, but also of the desired. It is a form of adventure in which *adventure itself* is the only reward and outcome. For Duby, this eternal displacement essentially reduces women's power even within the realm of intimate adventure reserved for them: what is viewed as their triumph is to remain unattainable. They must sustain desire but never fulfill it. The risks of this game are considerable.

In contrast to this particular courtly model, however, the desire shared by Cadore and Eufemie is at once intimate and attainable. In it, there is little risk of discovery. They are neither betrothed nor yet married; they are each free to choose one another, and this choice would be wise and socially celebrated. There are no external obstacles to their love. The king has promised both of them that they may marry whomever they please. When they try to hide their desire from the king while waiting for his permission to make good on their rewards, they ultimately fail to completely dissimulate their feelings, and there are no negative consequences for this.³⁴ Nevertheless, the basic structure of their *aventure* resides in the tension of unfulfilled desire and the necessity of language as a means of accessing it. This adventure is not the equivalent of the adventure story, or of the knightly model of adventure, but it reveals how adventure is constructed through a narrative language that is flexible enough to encompass other seemingly vastly different circumstances. In other words, it highlights the narrativity of adventure.

³⁴ “Li cuens de Cestre est moult voiseus: / Ainc nen oïstes mains noiseus. / Voit les cluignier et lor esgart: / Dés or n’a il mais nul regart / Qu’il n’ait trestolt lor vol seü. / Fait quanses qu’il ne l’ait veü” [The count of Chester was very prudent; / you never heard of anyone less rash. / He saw their lowered eyes, their looks, / he didn’t need a second glance, / he saw at once what they wanted, / but he acted as if he hadn’t noticed] (1399-1404).

From *estrange aventure* to *male aventure*

More darkly, the risks of desire can be later glimpsed, once the narrative turns its attention to Cadour and Eufemie's daughter/son Silence, in Queen Eufeme's attempted seduction of Silence, who does not reciprocate the queen's desire.³⁵ Like other forms of intimate adventure, the episodes is built on a language of adventure, but its risks and physicality are heightened, as Silence is placed in a truly perilous situation, both in responding to the queen, and when her response prompts the queen to vindictively accuse her of rape. Caroline Jewers (1997) examines the queen's seduction scene in relation to Cadour's slaying of the dragon:

[T]he vocabulary used of the queen recalls that used of the serpent. The beast of Malroi shares Eufeme's carnal and voracious nature, and her inner and outer blackness. The narrator says of her that 'le cuer el ventre a noir' (3716) [her heart was black in her chest]. Furthermore, the dragon exhales smoke from its venomous mouth, while the queen burns with rage and ardure (3698), and uses dangerous wiles to poisonous effect. Although she protests, 'Jo ne sui mie mordans beste' (3831) [I am not a biting animal], her mordant behavior contradicts that claim. Because Heldris turns the episode into a test of loyalty to Ebain, and uses almost mock-heroic language to convey Silence's staunch resistance, one might forget that the heroine is female were it not for the continual reminders of her predicament in the form of juxtaposed gender terms [...] Silence thinks in masculine, chivalric terms and longs for escape from the predatory Eufeme, who plots a further *male aventure* (3965) with another locus classicus of chivalric romance, the staged rape. (104)

As Jewers points out, this is not an *estrange aventure*, but rather a *male aventure*. It is the wrong sort of adventure, an adventure that has gone wrong, a perversion of adventure. Here, enclosure is not the intimate space of interpersonal communication and shared signs, but rather it is a

³⁵ This is what the text suggests, at least. The specter of homosexuality is however raised in the romance, with the queen accusing Silence of being a homosexual male. Regardless, the text explicitly states that the queen would be disappointed with Silence's anatomy. As Jane Tolmie observes, "The Queen's rage at Silence's rejection of her body is also a rage at homosexuality and Silence's imagined contempt for women ('il despist femes et desdaigne' l. 3940), raising of course the issue of separate constitution(s) of gender identification and sexual orientation, and the apparently problematic instability of such constitution(s) – thus the inapplicability of discourses of stability." (Ibid, 21)

battleground between unfriendly foes. If Love waged war on the bodies of the Cador and Eufemie, here desire wages war between the bodies of Silence and Eufeme. There is good reason to believe that the masculinized, physical combat that serves as metaphor for this scene of seduction would be more easily overcome than the feminized, desiring one the that instead rears its head. Silence's impulse here is to flee – to enact a physical displacement and spatial distance – rather than to fight. The enclosure of the scene and her lack of appropriate weaponry – in contrast to her prowess in physical combat – instead leave her mute and motionless, unable to give the queen what she wants, unable to explain why, unable to act.

What this scene emphasizes is that there is one arena in which Silence can never perform as a man, regardless of her other knightly accomplishments. The ability to carry out men's external, social or political activities has never in fact been the most radical aspect of female cross-dressing, in the Middle Ages or otherwise. Instead, it is sexuality that circumscribes cross-gendered boundaries. Michèle Perret (1985) describes how this phenomenon differs for men and women:

De fait, la cause du travestissement n'est pas la même pour les hommes et pour les femmes : on remarque que les hommes se travestissent pour avoir plus facilement accès à la femme désirée, alors que les femmes le font, parfois pour fuir un homme, et en tous cas pour bénéficier des privilèges masculins: droit d'héritier, de voyager seule... Donc, alors que la période de travestissement est une période d'intense activité sexuelle pour l'homme, elle est le plus souvent, pour la femme, une période de vie asexuée. (329)

[In fact, transvestitism does not have the same cause for men as for women: we may observe that men cross-dress to have greater access to the desired woman, while women do so sometimes to flee a man, and in any case to benefit from masculine privileges: the right to inherit, to travel alone... Thus, while cross-dressing represents a period of intense sexual activity for the man, it is most often, for the woman, an asexual phase of life]

The fact that Eufeme is eventually revealed to have been having an affair with a man disguised as a nun reinforces Perret's distinction between the sexualized cross-dressed male and the desexualized cross-dressed female. Silence's apparent asexuality, and lack of male anatomy,

proves to be not only an absence, but a nearly fatal obstacle made very present in her interaction with the queen. In case there were any doubts, the text forcefully reminds us that Silence lacks both male desire and sexual ability, and it does so in part by presenting this intimate conflict as a physical combat in which she has no weapon, understood both figuratively and anatomically. She also finds herself caught up in another dilemma, which is that the proof of her innocence in the queen's rape accusation lies in the revelation of her female body. She must thus choose between maintaining her male identity and proving her innocence, potentially saving her life. She chooses to maintain her male identity, and although her life is spared, it is the queen's later revenge, in the form of forced exile justified by a search for Merlin, that is the impetus for Silence's eventual unmasking.

Intimate adventure can thus be both *estranged* and *male*, marking its distance from typical forms of knightly wandering and proving. For Silence, however, cross-dressing turns desire into a peril. The possibility that desire and intimacy can themselves be forms of adventure is at once highly transformative of the traditional adventure model, while also firmly based in existing tropes already evident in the romances Chrétien de Troyes. The language used to describe such scenes of desire reveals how it is discourse - or narrative itself - that constructs the content of the knight's adventures and that ultimately constructs our own notion of adventure as well.

The Adventure of Performance

Even for the knight-protagonist that Silence becomes, adventure takes a very different shape from the masculine, chivalric, Arthurian variety. Silence is not, it turns out, motivated by an innate desire for knightly adventure. While Silence enjoys and excels at knightly activities, she does not simply ride off in search of adventure. She goes to court at the insistence of the king and

is sent to France following the queen's false rape accusation. While she is successful and gains great renown in France, we are not privy to any adventures she may have had there, if any. There is no indication that she enacts the sort of displacement that would distance her from the court in the mode of the *chevalier errant*. She returns to do battle at the king's command, and while she proves to be an excellent warrior, this is not in itself an adventure in the narrative sense: it is war.

The overarching feat of prowess in the *Roman de Silence* consists instead of the very fact of Silence's cross-dressing and success as a male, or the performance of gender. Within this context, the work's sequences of what might more properly be called adventures each stem from a particular conflict brought about by Silence's gendered circumstances. The sequences to which I am referring are Silence's two movements away from home or the court, in which she faces unknown circumstances, displays a specific kind of prowess, and overcomes particular challenges, returning to court each time with a newfound identity. Such sequences occur twice in the narrative, first when Silence runs away from home to join a pair of traveling minstrels, and second when Silence is sent away by King Evan to find and capture Merlin.

In the first instance, Silence's departure is occasioned by an inner conflict in which he/she does not know how to choose between the twin poles of "chivalry" or "embroidery," or between his/her male and female identities. Silence reasons that minstrelsy will instead enable an existence between these categories, as music can serve as both a feminine and a masculine activity. In the second instance, Silence is sent away from the court following a false rape accusation by the queen Eufeme, an accusation that she cannot fully dispute without revealing her female body. As an added gendered dimension, Silence's exile involves having to capture Merlin, who can only be captured by a woman. As we will see, each of these adventures involves

a form of performance rather than physical combat, and each highlights different aspects of discourse or discursive prowess as a subject of conflict and a way out of this conflict.

I discuss both of these adventure sequences in the remainder of this chapter, beginning chronologically with the first wandering adventure, which at first glance bears very little resemblance to any form of knightliness. This is the episode in which Silence disguises herself as a jongleur, marking the transitional moment between Silence's childhood and her coming of age. In this episode, though Silence is living as a boy, she is not yet a knight, nor does she know if she will become one. At a certain moment, Silence wonders at her own potential cowardice – since women do not usually perform knightly tasks nor do battle – and also at her lack of feminine skills, and deliberates upon her situation:

S'il avenoit del roi Ebayn
Que il morust hui u demain,
Feme raroit son iretage.
Et tu iés ore si salvage,
Ne sai a us de feme entendre.
Alques t'esteveroit aprendre
Dont te seüsces contenir,
Car tolt cho puet bien avenir.
Et se coze est par aventure
Que si fais us longhes te dure,
Bien sai, tu ieres chevaliers
Puet sc'estre coärs, u laniers,
Car ainc ne vi feme maniere
D'armes porter en tel maniere.
Tolt cho repute avenir bien.
Se ne ses donc aucune rien
Por tes compagnons conforter,
Ne te volront pas deporter.
Car t'en vas vials en altre tierre
Sens et savoir aprendre et quere.
[...]
Se lens iés en chevalerie
Si te valra la joglerie.
Et s'il avient que li rois muire,
Es cambres t'en poras deduire.
Ta harpe et ta vièle avras

En liu de cho que ne savras
Orfrois ne fresials manoier.
Se te porra mains anoier
Se tu iés en un bastonage
Ke tu aies vials el en gage. (2831-2850, 2863-2872)

[If it should happen that King Evan / died today or tomorrow, / women would inherit again, / and you know nothing of women's arts. / You really need to learn something / that would serve you in good stead, / for all that might come to pass! / And if it should turn out that / you have to keep up this pretense for a long time, / you'll become a knight, as you well know, / and then maybe you'll be a terrible coward, / for I never saw a woman fit / to bear arms in such a manner. / All that may well happen. / If you don't know a single way / to entertain your companions, / they won't want to spend their time with you. / Why don't you at least go abroad / to gain some experience and some expertise? / [...] If you are slow at chivalry, / minstrelsy will be of use to you. / And if the king should happen to die, / you will be able to practice your art in a chamber, / you will have your harp and vial / to make up for the fact that you don't know / ho[w] to embroider a fringe or a border. / You will be less bored / in your captivity / if at least you have something to fall back on]

This reasoning serves as motivation for Silence to run away from home and to join up with the jongleurs who have stopped at her caretaker's home for the night. She reasons that if she fails at being a good knight, at least her musical skills will encourage others to want to be around her, and if she must instead live as a woman, she will at least have a skill to keep her occupied, since she doesn't know how to embroider.

This passage illustrates a few important points for an analysis of the jongleur episode as a form of adventure. First, it highlights the difference between what Philippe Ménard describes as a pre-Christien de Troyes notion of adventure visible in the *romans antiques* – namely, that it was something that happened to someone, and was to be endured or overcome from a position of circumstance – and a medieval romance understanding, which is that it is something to be sought out.³⁶ This distinction is highlighted in the *Roman de Silence* through the use of the terms “par aventure” and “quere.” Silence realizes that it could happen *par aventure* that she must remain a

³⁶ As cited in the introduction (p. 26).

knight for a long time, and thus continue to participate in male activities. Silence's cross-dressing is thus *aventure* in the sense of being situational and the result of bad luck. In this way, her knightly activities, and even her unusual circumstances and the great degree of fortitude they require, do not fulfill the conditions for the form of adventure that is specific to the knight-protagonist model. On the other hand, Silence does at this particular moment of the narrative choose to leave home and to embark on a journey into the unknown, into a land that is unfamiliar to her, with strangers, to perform a task that she has never performed, with uncertain results. This is described in the text as a form of pursuit, perhaps even a form of quest: "sens et savoir aprendre et *quere*." This last word describes a form of seeking that is more in line with a model of adventure as errant displacement. Her decision to run away and live as a jongleur is explicitly shown in opposition to a mere state of situational endurance, and also to a state of enclosure (*bastonage*) that defines feminine activity. Its essential characteristic is displacement.

Moreover, Silence's decision represents a pivotal moment of autonomy for a character whose primary motivation has up until this point been obedience. She has also valued her male privileges, illustrated for instance following her exchange with the allegorical figure of Reason, when she realizes that she would lose these privileges if she were to give up her male identity:

Raisons ja od li tant esté,
 Se li a tant admonesté
 Que Silences a bien veü
 Que fol conseil avoit creü
 Quant onques pensa desuser
 Son bon viel us et refuser,
 Por us de feme maintenir.
 Donques li prent a souvenir
 Des jus c'on siolt es cambres faire
 Dont a oï sovent retraire,
 Et poise dont en son corage
 Tolt l'us de feme, c'est la some. (2625-2638)

[Reason stayed with him for so long / and admonished him so severely / that Silence understood very well / he had listened to bad advice / ever to think of doing away / with his good old ways / to take up female habits. / Then he began to consider / the pastimes of a woman's chamber - / which he had often heard about - / and weighed in his heart of hearts / all female customs against his current way of life, / and saw, in short, that a man's life / was much better than that of a woman.]

Nevertheless, her circumstances were also put upon her, not created by her, and she has never disputed them with her parents.³⁷ While Silence is not yet a knight in this episode, and is less sure than ever about becoming one, her decision to leave home as a jongleur does however share some of knightly adventure's defining characteristic – such as autonomy (or freedom of movement) combined with displacement toward the unfamiliar – than any of her subsequent or previous experiences. It is in this episode, then, that the central adventure unfolds, which moreover occurs at the midpoint of the narrative.

It is thus significant that the jongleur episode is the only one that the narrator describes, in knightly adventure fashion, as a marvelous adventure: “Oies mervellose aventure” (2689). This proclamation might seem odd in context, as the episode is not particularly *merveilleux* in the magical or quasi-mystical sense commonly present in other marvelous adventures of medieval romance. Instead, we are likely meant to understand that it is incredible, singular, or unbelievable. This is the translation that Sarah Roche-Mahdi gives, which does seem to capture the verse's expressive tilt (“Now you're going to hear something amazing!”). However, even this connotation might seem like a bit of an exaggeration in the context of a young person who runs away from home as a traveling minstrel, succeeds at this, escapes potential danger without any

³⁷ “Tolte l'oquoison, fils savés. / Si chier come l'onor avés, / Si vos covrés viers tolte gent.’ / Et cil respond moult dolcement, / Briément, al fuer de sage enfant: / ‘Ne vos cremés, ne tant ne quant, / Car, se Deu plaist, bien le ferai, / Viers tolte gent me couvrai” [‘Now, son, you know the whole situation. / As you cherish honor, / you will continue to conceal yourself from everyone.’ / And he replied very sweetly, / briefly, as befits a well-bred child, / ‘Don't worry the least little bit. / So help me God, I will do it. / I will conceal myself from everyone'] (2455-2462).

harm, and returns home. In any case, it is clearly being presented as an *aventure*, and the term *mervellose* contains an entire universe of romance adventures.³⁸

What kind of adventure does the jongleur episode represent, then? First it will be useful to outline what occurs in the episode, which begins when two minstrels, one of whom is apparently the best jongleur in the world, leave Cornwall for the coast and find themselves without a place to stay at nightfall. Seeing the home where Silence lives in the distance, they make their way there, and are welcomed into the household, where they are given supper and play music in exchange. Silence serves them that night, helping them to get ready for bed, after which she lies awake in her own bed pondering her situation and reasoning that minstrelsy would be a good skill to learn (as previously cited). At daybreak she bids farewell to the minstrels, finds out where they are headed, pretends to go out hunting, and instead goes into the forest and uses some herbs to darken her complexion. She makes way for the coast, boards a ship which is soon after boarded by the minstrels, who discuss whether or not she is the same boy from the night before (one thinks yes, another no). She accompanies them upon arrival in Brittany. After serving them well at an inn, the minstrels recognize her with certainty, and are happy to let him/her join up with them. In the meantime, the seneschal who cares for Silence realizes that she is missing and is forced to tell Silence's parents. Everyone grieves profoundly, and scenes of

³⁸ Speaking of what she sees as “the point at which a narrative shaped itself into the pattern we now recognize as medieval romance,” namely Geoffrey on Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (*Historia Regum Britannie*), Geraldine Heng (2003) describes how an admixture of fantasy and history underpins the romance genre: “Geoffrey’s story is remarkable for many exemplary demonstrations: chief of which perhaps is how, in a resourcefully accommodating cultural medium, historical phenomena and fantasy may collide and vanish, each into the other, without explanation or apology” (2). Heng is not referring to the marvelous *per se* (or to the marvelous alone), but romance has always involved phenomena that we see now as something beyond fiction and that enters the realm of fantasy.

their lamentation fill many verses. Because her parents believe that Silence has been abducted by the minstrels, they outlaw minstrelsy in their land, punishable by death.³⁹

As for Silence, she and the jongleurs travel from town to town, from estate to estate. As part of her disguise, she has taken the name Malduit, meaning badly brought up. The jongleurs are welcomed everywhere, and Silence eventually surpasses her masters, becoming an accomplished and renowned minstrel. Very little occurs during this time, and a number of verses are taken up in explaining how accomplished Silence is and describing her performances and her audience's opinion of her. Because of her great skill, these same audiences are no longer interested in hearing the other jongleurs, and although she puts all of her money into their communal funds, they plot to get rid of her. They plan to kill her, and after waking from a dream in which "wild dogs wanted to tear him apart" (3361), Silence overhears the minstrels discussing how they will kill her. Instead of fighting back or running away, she lies awake until morning, at which point she and the minstrels engage in a double-entendre dialogue, a mark of verbal prowess, in which she makes it clear that she knows that continuing to follow them will be dangerous to her, offers to take a small share of the money, and leave them to travel on their own. They accept this offer, and Silence heads back home.

Once back across the sea, an innkeeper informs her that as a jongleur, she will have to be brought to Cador (who is actually her father, although no one knows this) and put to death. This does not appear to upset her, and she plays her *vielle* into the night, with people coming from all around to hear her. The next morning, Silence heads into town playing her *vielle*, and is brought before Cador, who is still heavily grieving the loss of his daughter/son. An old wise man tells

³⁹ A decision reflective of the king's unjust decision to outlaw female inheritance, thus implying a connection between women's circumstances and the act of performance and composition (and thus the very act of storytelling).

him that Silence is really his son, but he doesn't believe him. So, changing tactics, he tells Cador instead that the jongleur is *not* his son,⁴⁰ but that he knows something about his son's whereabouts. Cador speaks with Silence in private, and Silence reveals to him her identity, proving it by means of a birthmark and by allusions to her cross-dressing. Cador is overjoyed, everyone celebrates, minstrelsy is allowed again, and Silence performs for her parents.

Two aspects of this episode that I would like to highlight are that the primary conflicts encountered by Silence are generated by and resolved through language and performance, and that the majority of the episode consists of detailed descriptions of performance and the performers' itinerary. While running away from home does throw her parents and the kingdom into grief and could be detrimental to any minstrels who happen to travel to Cornwall, this aspect of the adventure does not prove particularly challenging for Silence. She is able to maintain her jongleur disguise with little issue, even though the other jongleurs recognize him/her almost immediately. She learns quickly and becomes a highly successful performer. The outlawing of minstrelsy does not affect her until she once again crosses into Great Britain, at which point she summarily ignores the law. Instead, she passes half a year in relative ease, until the moment when her fellow jongleurs plot to kill her. Here, though, this mortal challenge does not involve hand-to-hand combat or any form of physical proving. Instead, Silence engages in a playful discourse, and an act of generosity, that alone liberate her from danger. The dialogue between Silence and the jongleurs turns around mutual points of understanding and hidden meaning, essentially forming a clever combat of words, in which the jongleurs make the opening move, quickly parried by Silence:

⁴⁰ In the logic of the narrative, as will particularly be seen in the Merlin episode, this latter statement is the more accurate as it sees "beneath the surface": Silence is not Cador's son, but rather his daughter.

‘Levés!’ / font il. ‘Petit savés
Com grief jornee a faire avés.’
‘Chi n’a’ fait il, ‘mestier de gloze,
Car grief jornee est male coze,
Et bien doit remanoir el mal
Ki de son gré se met el val.’
Sa parole ont cil trestornee:
Dient que il ont grief jornee
Por cho que lor voie est pesans,
Et lor jornee est longhe est grans.
Si tornent le plus bel defors,
Mais malfés ont dedens les cors. (3417-3428)

[‘Get up!’ they said. ‘Little do you know / what a hard journey you have to make.’ / ‘That needs no interpretation,’ said Silence. ‘A hard journey is dreadful indeed, / and he richly deserves his evil fate / who deliberately puts himself at a disadvantage.’ / The two minstrels turned his words around: / they said that they had a hard journey ahead / because the road was difficult, / and that would make for a long and strenuous day’s travel. / Thus they affected goodness, / while they were evil on the inside.]

Silence’s strength lies in both her knowledge of what the jongleurs are plotting to do, and also in her ability to verbally navigate this situation *without* provoking or engaging in physical combat. Despite later evidence of her knightly prowess, when she will demonstrate great physical skill in battle, at this point Silence is still a girl-raised-as-a-boy confronting two older men, and perhaps it is unclear to her what the outcome of a physical confrontation would be, or whether she would in fact be victorious. Her earlier musings on whether or not, as a woman, she might in fact turn out to be a coward suggest just such a hesitation. Instead, she confronts the jongleurs with hidden meanings, so that she neither has to directly reveal to them that she knows their plot, nor does she have to go along with it. The “grief jornee” is thus both a (false) reference to the difficult journey, and a reference to something that is physically harmful and quite serious. Similarly, Silence mentions the possibility that someone, some unnamed enemies, might do her harm:

‘Segnor, vos me dirés
Ains que jo mueuje, u vos irés,
Car aler poés en tel liu
U l’on me feroit malvais giu,

Se l'en m'i peüst atraper,
Ains que jo peüsce escaper.' (3431-3436)

[‘Gentlemen, before I make a move, / you must tell me where you are going, / because you could be headed for someplace / where someone might do me a bad turn / if they happened to catch me / before I could escape.]

The jongleurs reply to this by implying that they will protect her against any criminals, while also obliquely referencing their own intentions, saying that “S’il i fierent, nos i ferrons” [If they strike, we strike, too] (3446). Silence responds in kind:

‘Dirai vos,’ fait il, une rien:
Je ne cuic pas, ains le sai bien
Que vos i ferrés volentiers.
Et cil se quart endementiers,
Se il violt, qui a garder s’a,
U s’il nel fait que fols fera.
Segnor, jo que vos celeroie?
Mes enemis enconterroie
Se jo aloie o vos en France,
Cho sachiés vos tols a fiñce;
U s’o vos aloie en Espagne,
En Alvergne, u en Alemagne.
Si me vient chi miols remanoir,
Qu’aler allora por pis avoir.
Jo remanrai, cho est la some,
Et vos end irés com prodome
Et bone gent, bien le savés.
Si com vos viers moi fait avés,
Vos rendie Dex le gueredon;
Port el deserte altretel don.
Moult m’avés fait, plus eüsciés
Se moi faire le peüssciés.
En vos servir ai jo perdu.’ (3447-3469)

[I think, or rather, I know very well, / that you will be only too happy to strike. / In the meantime, the one who has to protect himself / had better be on his guard, if he wants to defend himself; / and if he doesn’t do this, he is a fool. / Gentlemen, why should I not speak openly? / You know very well indeed / that I would encounter my enemies / whether I went with you to France / or whether I went with you to Spain / or Auvergne or Germany. / Therefore, it would be much better for me to stay here / than to go somewhere else and be worse off. / In short, I’m staying here. / And you will go off, like upright / and honest men, make no mistake about that. / As you have done to me, / may God do to you in return, / may you receive your just desserts. / You have done much for

me, / and would have done more if you could have. / I haven't been able to do enough for you.]

This sequence of clever double-entendres acts as a discursive weapon against the machinations of the jongleurs, who are defeated by her discourse and . As the text tells us directly following Silence's speech: "Li jogleör sont esperdu" [The minstrels were undone] (3470). This reflects (and forms a rhyming couplet with) Silence's statement in the verse prior, that "En vos servir ai jo perdu" (3469). While Roche-Mahdi has translated this verse for its level of meaning suggesting that Silence has not succeeded in serving the jongleurs as well as she could have, the line also suggests that serving them has become, for Silence, a losing proposition. Though she says that she will speak openly ("jo que vos celeroie?"), her speech continues to be hidden in plain sight, fully transparent to herself, to the jongleurs, and to the reader, and yet still indirect, simultaneously provocative and non-confrontational. Her claim to openness is itself cleverly worded, because in asking "What would I hide from you?" she suggests a possible answer to that question, one that manages at the same time to reference another thing that Silence is hiding - the minstrels do not know that she is "really" a woman - as a bit of a wink from the author.

Similarly, Silence's return to her own land, and her escape from the death that awaits minstrels there, is marked and resolved by shrewd and indirect speech. Initially, the wise old man who recognizes Silence tells her father rather plainly that she is his son: "Al conte dist sa consience: / 'Veés la vostre fil Silence, / Si a pris des estrumens" (3561-3563) [He spoke his mind to the count: 'That is your son Silence; he has learned the minstrel's art']. This open and true statement is met with hostility from the king, who calls the old man a "traistor" (3564) and tells him he's lying and crazy. The old man thus switches his approach, and speaks to Silence, asking for his/her name, to which Silence replies "Malduit." The old man, somehow privy to

family secrets or to what lies beneath appearances,⁴¹ immediately understands that this is in reference to Silence's cross-gendered upbringing and says as much in only slightly veiled language:

Bien sai que vostres nons despont,
Car malduis cho est mal apris,
Si estes vos, qu'il n'i a pris
Ne los a vos n'a vo parage
D'avoir mené si fait usage. (3578-3582)

[I know very well what your name means: / Malduit means 'badly brought up,' / and that suits you well, for neither you / nor your family wins any praise or prizes / for such a counterfeit upbringing.]

He then returns to Silence's father, moving away from open meaning back to the realm of the cunningly veiled, and tells him:

Sire, or sai bien que jo mespris
De vostre fil, que jo vos dis.
Cho n'est il pas, mais j'ai oï,
Se Dex me doinst ester esjoï,
Que cis vos dira tells novieles,
S'il violt, et vos, ki seront bieles.
De vostre enfant set la verlor
Et si vos metra fors d'error. (3601-3608)

[Sire, I know now that I was mistaken / in what I told you regarding your son. / That's not he, but I have heard, / may God grant me the joy of it, / that this boy can tell you some wonderful news – / if you and he are willing. / He knows the truth about your son / and will clear the matter up for you.]

Once again, indirect or veiled speech proves a powerful device, and Silence's father listens to the old man this time. Speaking together in private, Silence reveals to her father her true identity. It is curious that Silence does not do this earlier (she could have conceivably taken the initiative to

⁴¹ Sarah Roche-Mahdi believes that the wise old man is a manifestation of Merlin: "This old man is certainly Merlin in disguise, penetrating Silence's disguise and unmasking her, just as he appears later as a white-haired old man (i.e. in human form, not stag, as in 'Grisandole') to help with his own capture. Thus, Heldris forges a link between the two parts of the narrative." (Roche-Mahdi, *ibid*, 325).

reveal her identity to Cador without the intervention of the old man - she would need only say “I am your son” and not even risk any other kind of public exposure), and that this meeting is only arranged on the basis of an understanding that must be expressed in veiled terms. But such acts of veiled speech are ultimately how the conflicts in the jongleur section are resolved, which make the adventure equally one of language – and the disjuncture between appearance and truth or meaning – as of risk or danger.

This veiled speech is in turn reflective of Silence’s veiled identity, as Silence’s “self” exists under the cover of misleading clothing, and yet is entirely constituted by her experiences wearing this clothing and living as a boy, and now also as a jongleur. Just as veiled language proves to be a useful and successful weapon in the jongleur episode, it is Silence’s male identity that resolves (at least temporarily) the problem of female disinheritance. Though Silence is eventually “unmasked” and women are again able to inherit, this conclusion is only brought about through Silence’s double existence. Merlin’s revelation of not only Silence’s female identity, but also of the queen’s affair with a cross-dressed nun, is what enables the king to simultaneously punish his wife, reward Silence, and reinstate female inheritance. It is thus through her performance as a man that Silence ultimately receives her inheritance, even though she does so as a woman.

The performative aspect of the jongleur episode therefore gains particular significance within the context of the text’s focus on appearances, but also because the episode itself offers up performers and performance as narrative subjects. While Silence take on the disguise of the jongleur as a means of leaving home and gaining musical skills, these pragmatic reasons are not necessities of her situation; it would have been acceptable for noble men to learn to play musical instruments without having to engage in the socially unacceptable act, for a noble, of performing

for money. But the text is somewhat unconcerned with these practicalities, and instead uses the opportunity afforded by the jongleur disguise to richly explore the jongleurs' itinerary and performances. Indeed, throughout the jongleur episode, Silence's gendered dilemma becomes conspicuously unimportant. She is not worried about being exposed, nor about how her female body might affect her musical performance. Throughout this episode, the primary source of the romance's suspense, and its entire *raison d'être*, namely Silence's gender, is temporarily lifted in favor of staging the concerns of a performer.

Paradoxically, though, this unmooring is enabled by Silence's gendered dilemma, because as a protagonist exempt from the requirements of amorous desire or knightly motivations, she is able to disappear into the role of the jongleur without any competing interests. Typically, female characters who disguise themselves as jongleurs in medieval romance and related genres do so for a particular end, almost exclusively related to desire or to their role as one half of a couple. In this context, the jongleur disguise is used as a means of disseminating a particular narrative, giving a public voice to women who were otherwise without one. In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, for example, Nicolette is motivated to disguise herself as a jongleur in order to reunite with Aucassin, and she maintains her jongleur disguise once she has finally made it back home to Aucassin, so that she can narrate her own adventures to him incognito in order to discern his unguarded reaction. In doing so, she takes control of her own narrative, which becomes part of the actual narrative of the text, told through Nicolette's voice.

Similarly, in her work on poet heroines, Brooke Heidenreich Findley (2012) examines the romance *Galeran de Bretagne*, in which the heroine Fresne disguises herself as a female jongleur in order to figuratively conquer her lover Galeran, publicly identifying herself to him by singing a song known only to the two of them. According to Findley, "Fresne suggests that her singing is

an act of aggression and prowess. This is a combat she has won” (32). As for the *Roman de Silence*, the line between action and narrative becomes blurred in each of these texts, as the female protagonists use their disguise and new narrative position to recount past actions, and the narratives themselves become actions to elicit a response. As Findley reminds us, the very act of public performance was, for a noble woman, “a transgressive crossing of class and/or gender lines” (45), highlighting the extent to which discourse was a form of action for medieval women in both historical and fictional settings.⁴²

For Silence, on the other hand, who is not bound by the same considerations that inscribe either feminine or masculine identities in romance, the end that she seeks in this episode is simply to gain the skills of the jongleur; the skills themselves are what she set out to *aprendre et quere*. In this sense, Silence’s gendered situation positions her in a liminal space between narrative gendered expectations, and this position enables a third type of narrative subject to take the stage, namely the performer. As with other female characters disguised as jongleurs, Silence’s conflicts are resolved through a form of language performance rather than direct action. However, the conflict that the disguise is meant to resolve (Silence’s position between the male and female) is achieved not through the telling of a particular narrative, but rather through the simple act of becoming a jongleur. This act places the figure of the jongleur in the narrative spotlight.

Developed depictions of characters other than noble men and women are rare in medieval romance of the twelfth century, although the voice of the narrator plays a prominent role in both framing and commenting upon both the story’s action and the artfulness of its telling. The

⁴² Furthermore, Findley notes that “Fresne’s claim of military prowess through the double act of singing and self-naming constitutes a classic performative utterance, according to the terms established by Benveniste and summarized by Felman” (46).

performer-as-character begins to become more visible in the thirteenth century, not only the *Roman de Silence* but also in works such as *Guillaume de Dole*, which features the elusive and pivotal figure of the jongleur Jouglet. However, the extended depiction of jongleurs' wanderings, performances, and material existence are notably more prominent in the above analyzed episode of the *Roman de Silence* than in its romance contemporaries. Ultimately, the *Roman de Silence* utilizes the text's gendered circumstances as a space for expanding the narrative possibilities of whose story can be told, or of what constitutes narrative interest, positioning the performer outside of the male or female romance typecast.

Silence's "mervellose aventure" is, in the end, an adventure of performance and of language. It is the adventure of a jongleur, a figure whose peripatetic existence, while in some ways parallel to that of the knight, is never meant to produce the same forms of combat or conflict, nor necessarily to seek the strange and *merveilleux*. It is the jongleur, however, who *creates* the marvelous through the very act of storytelling and narration. Knightly adventure itself is only marvelous within narrative, brought to life by storytellers and performers, and it is this aspect of the romance model that comes into focus through Silence's own highly discursive and performative adventures.

In turn, the very act of performance-as-adventure recalls, of course, Silence's gendered circumstances. Aside from Silence's own conflicted thoughts about her gendered body and social identity, the narrative also stages a direct conflict between the allegorical characters of Nature and Nurture who engage in a verbal battle for control of Silence. Their battle brings to mind works such as Prudentius's *Psychomachia* and in this sense they provide more of a scene of single combat than can be found elsewhere in the *Roman de Silence*. Silence's gendered performance thus reveals itself to be its own kind of adventure, one that is playing out inside

Silence but also in all of Silence's subsequent adventures and interactions. In her book *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France*, Daisy Delogu shows how in the later Middle Ages – in the centuries following the *Roman de Silence* – gender operates as a significant feature of allegory as female allegorical bodies were used to represent entities such as the nation of France and the University of Paris. Her larger observations regarding the relationship between gender and allegory are valid for earlier time periods as well, given that most medieval allegorical figures – at least in the Latin and Old French traditions – are in fact women. As she writes: “If allegory is a woman, it is not, as has too often been claimed, simply on the basis of grammar. Rather, it is because the very processes of allegorical writing and reading are imagined by their practitioners in gendered terms” (2015, 19). The use allegory in the *Roman de Silence* is thus even more striking in light of the consistent correspondence between gender and allegorical representation during our time period. Two female allegories – Nature and Nurture – fight over a female body precisely as it relates to the correspondence between the body and the body’s covering, using gender as a means of interrogating the space between the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, or the very space occupied by allegorical writing.⁴³

The particular form that allegory takes in the *Roman de Silence* has been analyzed by Gloria Thomas Gilmore (1997). She writes of the Merlin episode in particular that “The delivery of Merlin into the hands of society implies the delivery of meaning to the understanding of men.

⁴³ See Jon Whitman (1987) who writes that “The basis for the technique [of allegory] is obliquity – the separation between what a text says, the ‘fiction,’ and what it means, the ‘truth.’ This very obliquity, however, relies upon an assumed correspondence between the fiction and the truth. The apparent meaning, after all, only diverges from the actual one insofar as they are compared with each other. In these two conflicting demands – the divergence between the apparent and actual meanings, and yet the correspondence between them – it is possible to see both the birth and the death of allegorical writing. [...] In this way, allegory tends to be at odds with itself, tending to undermine itself by the very process that sustains it” (2).

The use of silence to capture the deliverer of meaning is at the heart of whether allegory can keep its promise” (155). Regardless of what promises allegory makes or can keep, the relationship between how language is used and what language signifies is at play in both of the extended adventure sequences of the *Roman de Silence*, and the protagonist of these sequences embodies this very tension. The fact that Reason intervenes on behalf of Nurture appears to signal in the text both the validity of Silence’s male identity and the potential truth of the covering. However, this reading is complicated by the fact that Reason does not state that Nurture is inherently correct, but rather that it is more practical for Silence to remain a male:

[...] Raisons
 Li monstre, et dist les oquoisons
 Que poi le valt mains de la mort
 Se il s'acostume et amort
 A deguerpir sa noreture
 [...]
 ‘Ja n'ieres mais vallés apriés.
 Tolt perdrés cheval et carete.
 Ne cuidiés pas li rois vos mete
 En l'onor, por estre parjure,
 S'il aperçoit vostre nature.’

[Reason / started her case, citing examples / as to why, if she abandoned her nurture / to take up the habits of nature, / it would be almost as bad / as killing herself. / [...] ‘believe me, / you will never train for knighthood afterwards. / You will lose your horse and chariot. / Do not think the king will go back on his word / and acknowledge you as rightful heir, / when he finds out your true nature’]

Though Roche-Mahdi translates the end of this passage as the king “going back on his word,” in the Old French we see that the king will not put Silence “en l'onor,” for having been “parjure.” Reason thus seems to agree somewhat with Nature that Silence’s male identity is a lie (or at least that it will be seen as such by others) but reasons that the possible consequences of revealing her “nature” will far outweigh the transgression itself. Silence stands to lose not only her honor and inheritance, but also notably her “cheval” and “carete,” things that Silence might be remiss to

part with (who would want to lose their horse?) It is after this passage that Silence decides that being a man is better than being a woman, an opinion that Silence owes to Reason, and not to either Nature or Nurture, who seem to confuse Silence more than convince her. The reader is left to wonder which is the greater truth, given that Silence performs admirably as a male and that the use of veiled speech is shown to be a source of performative prowess.

Deceitful Appearances and Veiled Language

A final example that illustrates another aspect of the reworking of adventure in the *Roman de Silence* is the Merlin episode, which at first glance appears to fulfill at least some of the requirements for knightly wandering. In this episode, Silence is sent by the king and by Eufeme to capture Merlin, a task that they believe will be impossible, as Merlin can only be captured by a woman and they believe that Silence is a man. This task thus amounts to effective banishment, curiously coming right on the heels of Silence's remarkable victory in battle. It is occasioned by the lustful and vengeful queen's second mendacious rape accusation. For unexplained reasons, and in direct contrast to his response to the previous rape accusation, the king decides to believe the queen and to punish Silence. Instead of having the now-hero and savior of the kingdom killed or officially banished, the king and queen agree to send Silence on a search for Merlin, intending to sentence Silence to indefinite wandering beyond the margins of the familiar world. And indeed, Silence sets out and spends six months wandering the woods, far from people and from civilization, a time period which the text covers in just two verses: "Tant ne porquant d'anchoi assés / Que li demi ans fust passés" [And yet, not quite / half a year later] (5873-5874). This textual condensing of time insinuates that nothing of interest has happened during Silence's months of searching, which takes the form of an adventure (wandering past the edges of the

cultivated world, attempting to capture Merlin) but empties it of its content. When Silence does then encounter a mysterious man who tells her where Merlin is and how to capture him, it becomes clear that she succeeds not by her own prowess, but rather by the intervention of a mystical figure who is perhaps Merlin himself. The capture, too, constitutes an odd form of adventure: following the mysterious man's advice, Silence captures Merlin by way of cooked meat, and by making him drunk and bloated as he attempts to quench his thirst with honey, milk and wine. The episode that in many ways employs the most typical narrative conventions surrounding adventure – the marginal and solitary wandering of a knight, the mystical, a difficult challenge – thus also finds its resolution in tactics that prove relatively little about the protagonist other than her ability to follow instructions, and the fact that she is a woman (per Merlin's statement that he could only be captured by a woman). The outcome of her success then is inverse to that of the knight: she does not bolster her reputation and knightly identity, but rather undoes it. The indeterminacy of her wandering, meant to remove her from society with no hope of return, is thus mirrored in the dissolution of her social identity as a knight. In this way, the Silence who departed – the Silence who was a knight – never does return.

Equally problematic for Silence's final adventure is that it breaks with the tradition of the autonomy or freedom of the knight's adventure. This lack of autonomy can be glimpsed in Silence's capture of Merlin only through the actions of another male character, but even more significantly it stems from the fact that this is an adventure that Silence herself has not chosen: her movements lack freedom, an essential quality of the *chevalier errant*. Indeed, as Chênerie reminds us, the mere choice of the term *chevalier* in medieval romance convention contained within it an echo of the knight's freedom:

[L]e terme de chevalier ne comporte pas la connotation de dépendance à l'égard d'un seigneur, comme celui de *ministeriales*, les guerriers montés, non nobles, qui existèrent

en Allemagne plus longtemps qu'en France. Sans lien non plus avec l'idée de service contenue dans *militare*, la dénomination littéraire était tout entière disponible pour l'idée aristocratique de la liberté, conçue comme engagement volontaire envers soi-même. Ailleurs, *Ritter*, *knight* se libèrent aussi de l'étymon du latin classique, *miles*. (9-10)

[The term *chevalier* does not connote dependence on a lord, such as in the case of *ministeriales*, the non-noble, mounted warriors who existed in Germany longer than they did in France. Unconnected as well to the idea of service contained in the word *militare*, the literary denomination was entirely available for an aristocratic idea of liberty, conceived as a voluntary engagement towards oneself. Elsewhere, *Ritter*, *knight*, were also liberated from the classical Latin etymon *miles*.]

The *knight* as such, as has been previously shown, is thus both a historical reality and a literary construct imbued with aristocratic values, of which liberty, and therefore autonomy (“engagement volontaire envers soi-même”) are paramount. Silence's lack of autonomy is clear from the outset of the Merlin adventure. She protests when the king commands her to go on this journey:

‘Coment, sire?’ cil le respont.
‘Coment prendroie jo celui
C’ainc ne se lassça a nului
Baisier, ne prendre, ne tenir,
N’a cui nus hom puist avenir?.’ (5844-5848).

[‘What, Sire?’ Silence replied to him. / ‘How could I capture the one / who has never let anyone / kiss, catch, hold / or come anywhere near him?’]

Again, we must make a small correction to Roche-Mahdi's translation, which is nonetheless a major difference: it's not just that Merlin hasn't let anyone come near him, it's that he hasn't let *nus hom* (any man) do so. This is a key difference, because it insinuates that Silence already knows that this adventure will be a dead end. Either she will prove unsuccessful and spend the rest of her life wandering the margins of the known world (in which case, what is the point of the inheritance?), or she will succeed and in doing so reveal her “nature” as a woman, thus losing her inheritance. The king cannot be moved by her reasoning, however, and Silence departs,

Pensius et tristes, tolt plorant

Et Dameleu sovent orant
Que il son travail li aliege
Qu'il puist prendre Merlin al piege
Et qu'il soit vengiés de la dame
Ki por noient l'alieve blame.
[...]
Il est moult las et moult delis. (5859-5864, 5872)

[pensive and sad, weeping bitterly, / and praying frequently to God / to ease his burden / and help him trap Merlin / and let him be avenged on the lady / who persecuted him for no reason. [...]] He was very miserable and discouraged]

It is interesting, in light of this passage, that Silence goes on the adventure at all, rather than revealing her body right then and there, which would avenge her against the queen's accusations without having to capture Merlin. Perhaps, in a way, it is a test that Silence sets for herself, a kind of final decision about her identity that will be made by external forces.

More broadly, if we take a view of the text as a whole, it becomes clear that Silence's knighthood is entirely predicated on a kind of obedience and obligation that separates her from the chivalric hero, even within a feudal system of loyalty and rigid social expectations. While one could make the argument that all male knights exist as such only out of a form of obedience to norms over which they have no control, these norms are treated in the *Roman de Silence* as inherently natural. Throughout the text, Nature's conflation of customs (*us*) and human nature underscore the level to which gendered roles, and likewise class roles, are perceived as being intrinsic to the individual, just as Nature's use of the finest flour to create Silence is responsible for both her beauty and – more significantly – her nobility.⁴⁴ What Nature suggests is that one's

⁴⁴ "Tolt si com cil qui prent un crible, / U tamis, u un buletiel, / Quant faire violt blanc pain e biel, / Et quant la farine i a mise / Dunt crible, u bulette, u tamise, / Et torne le flor d'une part, / Et le gros terchuel en depart, / Et fait adonc un entreclos / Entre le fleur blanche et le gros, / Si qu'o le fleur n'a nule palle, / Ne busce nule, ne escalle, / Ne entre tolt l'autre monciel / De fleur vallant un botonciel, / Et de la fleur fait ses gastials, / Et del tercuel torte a porciels, / Tolt si com cis fait sans dotance / Que chi ai mis en la sanblance, Si fait Nature, c'est la some, / Quante faire violt un vallant home / Que voelle overer par majestyre." [Just like the one who takes a sieve / or

social standing and social role (whether as a noble or non-noble, man or woman, knight or jongleur) is “baked” into the substance of the individual. The obligation to be a noble, a man and a knight is thus equivalent to the obligation to eat food – or more precisely, as demonstrated in Merlin’s case, to eat cooked food.⁴⁵ In this sense, Silence’s obligations differ from those of the knight-protagonist, because they are not born from the “natural customs” of gender and class norms, but rather from uncustomary circumstances. As a result, the reputation that Silence gains as a knight accrues to an identity that is unstable, because it slips off as easily at the end as does her man’s clothing.

Within this space of difference from the knight-protagonist, the *Roman de Silence* constructs another version of adventure in the Merlin episode that, like the jongleur episode, rests on a play of language, the correspondence (or divergence) between the sign and its meaning, and the correspondence (or divergence) between body and gender, Nature and Nurture, and even identity and the body. The very construct of the adventure, as revolving around the truth revealed in Silence's capturing of Merlin, since Merlin can only be captured by a woman, sets up the

sifter or colander / when he wants to make beautiful white bread, / and sifts the flour through / the sifter, sieve or colander, / and puts the extra-fine flour on one side / and the course bran on the other, / and carefully keeps / the extra-fine flour separate from the course, / so that the fine flour has no straw / or chaff or husks in it, / and the other little heap / doesn't have the little bit of fine flour / and makes find cakes of the flour / and loaves for the pigs out of the bran - / just like this, without a doubt, / like the one we have depicted here, / does Nature, to be brief, / proceed when she wants to make a noble human being / that she wants to be a masterpiece] (1808-1828).⁴⁵ “L'appétit irrésistible de Merlin pour la viande grillée, incontrôlé par la raison, semblerait renvoyer à sa nature animale plutôt qu'à sa nature humaine. Mais cet appétit pour la viande cuite est précisément ce qui rend Merlin humain, selon le vieillard qui conseille Silence. C'est sa dernière caractéristique humaine après qu'il a abandonné l'humanité pour l'état sauvage, cela constitue la limite de définition de la culture humaine.” [Merlin's irresistible appetite for grilled meat, uncontrolled by reason, would seem to stem from his animal, rather than human, nature. But this appetite for cooked meat is precisely what makes Merlin human, according to the old man who advises Silence. It is his last remaining human characteristic after having abandoned humanity for a wild state, it constitutes the outer limit of the definition of human culture] (Robert S. Sturges 2014, 42).

circumstances by which Silence's knightly identity will be undone. This identity proves not to reside in Silence's name (which does not change, although perhaps it becomes *Silentia*), and not in Silence's corporeal reality (Silence's body hasn't actually changed), and not in Silence's actions and feats of prowess (those haven't been erased). Rather, it resides in an assumed correspondence between Silence's external features, name, actions, and some sort of natural or essential self as represented by the gendered body. For a social class highly concerned with issues of lineage and genealogy (and we will recall that just such concerns are what prompt Silence's cross-dressing in the first place), the body represents not only a gender but also what that gender is expected to (re)produce. In this sense, Silence's enduring reputation is not assured by her prowess; rather it is assured by the assumption that she is what she appears to be.

The relationship between gender and Merlin is not specific to only this episode in the Merlin tradition.⁴⁶ As Sarah Roche-Mahdi (2002) shows, it borrows heavily from the *Grisandole* episode of the Arthurian *Vulgate*, in which a lady, Avenable, who is disguised as a seneschal named *Grisandole*, captures Merlin. As Roche-Mahdi points out, "When *Grisandole* asks why Merlin is laughing at her, he bursts into a tirade" (8), calling her an "Unnatural, shape-shifted creature, deceptive and deceitful in every way" and telling her to "be silent" (8). Merlin then reveals at court that he laughed at *Grisandole* "Because the most beautiful and best woman in the kingdom did what no man could do," (9) and as in the *Roman de Silence*, the emperor then marries Avenable. The resemblance of these two episodes is evident. Moreover, Roche-Mahdi

⁴⁶ Lorraine Kochanske Stock (1997) notes that "Heldris's choice of Merlin as arbiter of the clash between the various constructions of male and female power in the denouement is appropriate, most obviously because of the tradition that he is fated to be trapped by the *engien* of a female. In various Arthurian romances, Merlin relinquishes his own male-gendered knowledge to females who, empowered by that appropriated knowledge, use it against their teacher" (25).

analyzes the difference between Merlin as truth-teller in the Grisandole episode and in the

Roman de Silence:

As in 'Grisandole,' Merlin's role at the end is to reveal the truth veiled by unnatural language and dress, to reestablish 'straight' sexuality and feudal laws of inheritance. But in *Silence*, the elements that persuade the reader he is a genuinely 'friendly helper' are absent, and much is added that reinforces the impression that he is playing a malicious game. (17)

Whether or not the truth that Merlin reveals is thus desirable, or preferable to its continued concealment, is thus left ambiguous in the *Roman de Silence*, an ambiguity that becomes even more evident when read in relation to the broader Merlin legend.

As in the Grisandole episode, Merlin's reaction to Silence's situation is to find it almost unbearably comical. He laughs so much at court that he cannot speak and is only silent when threatened with death if he will not explain himself. The fact that no one seems to know what he is laughing *at* is what is so aggravating and discomfiting. The king and the court need to know that there is a correspondence between Merlin's behavior and some rational basis for laughter, and they need to know what that basis is. Merlin then reveals a series of observations he made while traveling with Silence to the court, such as his foresight that a man he saw carrying a new pair of shoes home from the market would die before he got there and would never be able to enjoy them. Merlin's word is not sufficient, however, and the king sends messengers to verify Merlin's story: "Li rois l'a fait enquerre en oire, / Si l'a tolt altres si trové" [The king quickly sent messengers to look into the matter, / and found it was just as Merlin had said] (6324-6325). For the king, the story must thus correspond to a visible, verifiable truth – something someone must go see in person – in order to be believed, perhaps because the king suspects that Merlin, despite his mystical insight and reputation for truth telling, might not exactly be the most literal or reliable of speakers.

Merlin may be a truth teller, but he also takes various forms, thus making him another “Unnatural, shape-shifted creature.” The issue of appearance and shape-shifting arises when Silence first captures Merlin, although not initially in relation to Silence’s own transformed appearance. In an unexpected revelation (nothing prior to this episode has prepared us for a deep dive into Merlin lore), Silence accuses Merlin of having “as good as killed” one of her ancestors, and claims it is for this reason that she is taking her revenge on him:

Merlin, assés le me tuas
Quant Uterpandragon muas
En le forme al duc mon a[n]cestre
Et toi fesis altretel estre
Com fu ses senescals avoec.
Uter en menas droit illeuc
U il o la feme al duc giut,
Quant a Artu le preu conciut. (6147-6154)

[Merlin, you as good as killed him / when you transformed Uther Pendragon / into the likeness of my ancestor, the duke / and you yourself likewise pretended / to be his seneschal and accompanied him. / You led Uther right to the spot / where he lay with the duke’s wife, / and she conceived the noble Arthur]

Merlin’s response to this accusation is not to deny it, but to claim that it was done for the best (“Cho fu graindres prel,” 6155), as the great Arthur, “qui fu si preus” (6156) [who was so worthy]⁴⁷ was born from this deception.⁴⁸ For Merlin, then, the ends justify the means, even when this means taking on a deceptive appearance, a stance at odds with his invective against the lady-as-knight in the Grisandole. In manner similar to Reason, Merlin appears not to argue about whether or not changing one’s appearance is right or wrong, but rather to view it in practical terms for its outcome. Does it ultimately matter what the truth is if the outcome is good?

⁴⁷ Translation my own.

⁴⁸ Sharon Kinoshita (2002) compares this history with Silence’s own subsequent marriage to King Evan: “The illicit conscription of the women of Cornwall to the king’s pleasure has a long history” (73).

In the Merlin adventure, gender is used as a site for exploring the correspondence between signs and their meaning or interpretation, but the outcome of the “truth” is ambiguous at best for Silence. This ambiguity is evident in gendered terms for Silence, but also for how utterances (laughter, for instance, or truth telling) come to signify, and what they in fact signify. Gloria Thomas Gilmore (1997) has argued that the Merlin episode represents an interrogation of the function of allegory. As she writes,

More than a character, Merlin is the embodiment of writing itself, polyvalent and a shape-shifter; the Middle Ages knew him as the personification of reading [...] Merlin reads the signs of the times, uncovers truth veiled by ‘figura,’ and as a translator of allegory delivers meaning. (111)

The Merlin episode thus reveals itself to be another adventure predicated on forms of performance and discourse. Gilmore observes that “Merlin translates the signifiers, but the signifieds remain the same” (118). And yet, these signifieds are viewed in a dramatically different light when the signifiers shift – Silence loses her ability to save the kingdom as a knight, and loses everything she has trained and worked for in becoming a woman, because these activities and feats of prowess will not remain part of her social identity and function as queen. The signifier is not only a manner of speaking, but a way in which this speaking generates subjects and has real consequences for the signified.⁴⁹

In becoming a woman, Silence’s many feats of prowess – we will remember that she unequivocally excels in combat and saves the entire kingdom – are no longer part of her social

⁴⁹ Similarly, Howard Bloch (1985) reminds us that “Silence participates in a long and respected Latin and vernacular tradition according to which nature, writing, and sexual difference are allied” (83). Comparing the *Roman de Silence* to Alain of Lille’s *De Planctus Naturae*, Bloch further notes that “Nature in the *Roman de Silence* considers her work to be have been linguistically perverted by an act of false naming” (86), later comparing the notion of silence and speech to the poet’s art: “The troubadour or trouvère is one who attempts to fill the silences or ‘trous’ in speech (which he also makes by speaking)” (90).

identity or subjectivity. The combat episodes in romance are always distinct from those of adventure. While the knight may prove his valor in battle, facing off against a great many enemies with bravery and panache, it is through adventure that the knight proves something about himself, about who he is, sometimes even literally gaining a name in the process (as with Lancelot or Guinglain). It is this quality of adventure that has led to the theory that subjectivity begins with chivalric romance, in the persona of the knight errant. In the adventure sequences in the *Roman de Silence*, however, what is at stake is always the performance and instability of identity. Like many romance heroines, Silence proves to be discursively adept and to use narrative in her favor, but she is also thwarted by her need to remain silent about her own body, most notably in response to the false accusations of the queen. The identity that is “discovered” at the end is hardly one that Silence seems to relish. She will now have to give up her *cheval* and perhaps even learn to embroider (we can only hope that her minstrelsy will serve her well).

Roche-Mahdi provides an excellent description of the disappointment of this ending:

The wicked queen is punished and the heroine marries the king. Inheritance rights are restored. Yet few readers are comfortable with the dénouement of *Silence*. Can we assume this marriage will be happy? Is this for a greater good? In ‘Grisandole,’ the reader is assured that the heroine lives happily ever after. Heldris’s version of the conclusion differs obviously and drastically. The heroine’s sadly banal, brutally realistic destiny is to be a young heiress married to a much older man. A politically, sexually and morally inadequate ruler ends up with a young, loyal and fertile wife who embodies the most important piece of real estate in the kingdom. No one, least of all Heldris, says she lives happily ever after. (15)

Returning to some of the earlier arguments I made in this chapter about adventure as a form of language, a thematic thread can be drawn from Cadour and Eufemie's courtship all the way to Silence's “unveiling,” in which adventure becomes a highly narrative phenomenon. Reading the *Roman de Silence* in terms of its apparent interest in narrative and language does not in itself

represent a novel critical stance.⁵⁰ However, my reading shows how this interest enacts a transformation in the generic material – the Arthurian adventure – in which *Silence* embeds itself. In particular, while it does not present a resolutely feminine version of adventure (*Silence* maintains a male identity throughout), it mobilizes *Silence*'s gendered dilemma to stage a form of adventure that is not predicated on feats of physical prowess, even though we know from the text that *Silence* is capable of these feats. Instead, the thematic of identity, present in other Arthurian romances in the naming of knights and in the building of a reputation, is explored through the adventure sequences along with language, discursive prowess, and the very act of performance. By changing the body of the knight, the narrative changes not the outward structure of adventure – displacement, the marvelous, conflict, etc. – but rather its content, or what we might call the body of adventure.

⁵⁰ See for example: Campbell (2019), Séguy (2018), Terrell (2008), Johnson (2005), Bibbee (2003), Gilmore (1997), and Bloch (1985).

Chapter 2: Gender and Geography in *Aucassin et Nicolette*

In this chapter I present a reading of the thirteenth century chantefable *Aucassin et Nicolette* that situates the story within the historical, literary, and geographical context of its Occitan setting.

While *Aucassin et Nicolette* is frequently described and studied as a love story between a French nobleman and a Saracen princess-turned-Christian-convert,¹ I argue that its setting of Beaucaire, in Occitania, instead suggests that both characters are foreigners to the manuscript's northern French dialect and society. Seen in this context, northern readers of *Aucassin et Nicolette* could have understood both protagonists to be cultural "others" whose diverse Occitan and al-Andalusian societies were politically and culturally intertwined. Likewise, Beaucaire was also known as a multicultural center of trade, hosting an important annual *foire* that drew merchants from across the Mediterranean, and I read the work's staging of a variety of non-violent encounters and negotiations within this mercantile context. The Occitan setting also informs the presentation of the female protagonist, positioned within a narrative tradition that includes the gendered dynamic of troubadour lyric, and within a cultural milieu in which women exercised forms of active and discursive power that were subject to particular northern stereotypes.

Adventuring women do travel to, from, and through *somewhere*, after all, and their journeys

¹ For example, in her excellent work tracing some of the historical and geographical background of *Aucassin et Nicolette* (in particular the relationship of Provençal, Spanish, and Arabic cultures), María Rosa Menocal still refers to the culture represented by Aucassin as French: "The issue is not, transparently, whether 'Aucassin' is an Arabic word/name but rather why the impeccably – at least in terms of heritage – old-guard Frenchman has a name that sounds Arabic while the blonde Nicolette, whose every external marker no less misleads is in fact an abducted *sarasine*" (1989, 497). While *Aucassin et Nicolette* is written in a northern French dialect, likely for a northern French audience, this chapter challenges the idea that Aucassin represents a "French" culture.

often include specific geographical references. This chapter looks at how these references can inform our understanding of the gendered dynamics of female adventure.

Though some scholars have taken into account aspects of *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s historical backdrop, the narrative is not typically read within its local context, nor as presenting two non-French protagonists. My approach is in part inspired by María Rosa Menocal, who has observed that the historical specificities of a text, and she is referring in particular to *Aucassin et Nicolette*, are often found unarticulated in its background. As she writes: "a history that is either obscured or so thoroughly assimilated as to be unknown must be in some measure recouped before we can ask it to recede into the background – since 'background' means what we all really know and are not obliged, consequently, to articulate" (1989, 509). I argue that by bringing forward *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s particular Occitan setting, and the Occitan identity of one of its protagonists, from the background, many of the narrative's unique and original elements, including its presentation of gender, adventure, and its female protagonist, can be seen as a response to, or reflection of, the culture, values, and political alignments of a specific Occitan geography and time period. Menocal has analyzed Nicolette's Arabic origins in these terms, although she does so by reading this Arabic identity in contrast with a notion of Frenchness as represented by Aucassin.² I will show instead that there are two levels of remove in the narrative, namely a difference between the two protagonists (of Occitan and Spanish/Arabic origins,

² "It is no less relevant to ask why it is that the traditional formula of romance is here encrusted with a palpable layer of historical allusion – and of the especially specific allusion to the Spain of the Arabs – and how the reversals and dialogues between inner and outer selves, between lyric and narrative, between old order and new order (all these themes readily explored by other critics) come to be associated, at the level of the most conspicuous identification, with the apparent dichotomy between French Self and Saracen Other" (Menocal 1989, 497-498).

respectively) and between these two protagonists and the northern French setting and dialect in which the manuscript and narrative were produced.³

Likewise, my analysis is indebted to the scholarship of Sharon Kinoshita, particularly her book *Medieval Boundaries*, which recognizes that “many of the best-known works of medieval French literature take place on or beyond the borders of ‘France’ or even the French-speaking world,” and thus “sets out to rethink Old French literary production (circa 1150-1225) through the thematics of cultural interaction” (1).⁴ This cultural approach is clearly in the background of my own study, with its attention to the details of place and setting. Indeed, though Mario Roques (1982) viewed *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s Occitan setting as a work of imagination on the part of the writer, who perhaps had never been to Occitania,⁵ it is precisely from the viewpoint of the northern French imagination that I am reading the narrative’s specific Occitan culture and geography.⁶

³ Robert Griffin (1965) has likewise read *Aucassin et Nicolette* in connection with the Cathars, troubadour poetry, and the Albigensian Crusade, and his work has likewise been useful in constructing my argument. At the same time, Griffin does not take into account the distance between the Occitan setting and the work’s northern dialect and audience.

⁴ In fact, it was Sharon Kinoshita who first gave me the idea of looking closely at the geography and specific itineraries of the mobile female protagonists featured in my dissertation, during a meeting at the 2017 MMA conference. I thank her for this very productive and generous suggestion.

⁵ “C’est enfin, semble-t-il, le fait d’un écrivain maître de son métier que l’adresse avec laquelle le récit est relevé par quelques touches de couleur locale: celles-ci ont suffi pour faire croire que notre auteur avait voyagé en Provence, encore qu’il ne connaisse manifestement pas la géographie de ce pays” [It is finally, it seems, the mark of a writer who is a master of his craft that the story is so skillfully embellished with touches of local color: these have sufficed to make it seem as if the author had traveled in Provence, even though he is clearly not familiar with the geography of that region] (Roques 1989, xii).

⁶ Geraldine Heng (2003) provides a way of reading romance as both imaginative and historical in her book *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*. As she writes: “though I have been discussing ‘history’ and ‘culture’ as if both were interdependent but distinct forces in a teleological dynamic, it is necessary to add that cultural performances of the kind enacted by and in medieval romance are, of course, also fully historical forces, in and of themselves. Romance projects of the kind I mention – projects of race-making and the culling of

In terms of gender and female adventure, this geographical reading places Nicolette's mobility, agency, and adventures within a setting that foregrounds non-combative forms of exchange against a backdrop of senseless violence, as represented in several episodes of the chantefable and also potentially in reference to the Albigensian Crusade. Likewise, I show through this reading that Nicolette, as the active heroine, can in part be understood through various representations of women in Occitan society – whether in relation to Catharism, troubadour lyric, or historical figures – that would have been familiar to a northern French audience. Within the broader scope of this dissertation, this chapter thus serves to demonstrate the degree to which female adventure can serve as a reflection of conventions beyond romance, and how these diverse conventions and forms are incorporated back into a romance structure through a process that enacts a generic transformation.⁷

Aucassin et Nicolette is, at its core, a love story between two young people of differing social and religious backgrounds.⁸ Aucassin is an Occitan noble whose father has long been

racial hierarchies, distinctions, and priorities; of imagining and projecting a national totality out of fragmentation and division; of resistance and opposition to the encroaching end of feudal time and feudal culture, and the incipience of modernity; and of exercising a will-to-power in geographically conceiving the world as the hinterland of Europe and the playground of Christian faith – all show romance performing as a historical actant. By intervening, persuading, influencing, judging, innovating, and deciding, romance has a hand in the shaping of the past and the making of the future” (7-8).

⁷ Mario Roques (1989) discusses the highly literary quality of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, or the way in which its author displays a command of various forms and tropes in circulation at the time: “l’auteur d’*Aucassin et Nicolette* apparaît moins comme un intermédiaire entre l’imagination orientale et l’art français que comme un connaisseur averti de la littérature et de la tradition française de son temps” [the author of *Aucassin et Nicolette* appears to be less of an intermediary between the oriental imagination and a French art than to be a conversant authority on the literature and French tradition of his time] (x).

⁸ Joseph E. Garreau (1985) in fact posits the possibility that *Aucassin et Nicolette* is little more than a pleasant love story. As he writes: “This essay has a twofold objective: 1) It offers a balanced judgment on the diverging lines of recent criticism and, in particular, it attempts to disprove the parody thesis, 2) It advocates a return to simplicity, stressing what seems to have been the author’s intention as exposed in the exordium: to narrate the story of Nicolette and

defending his castle against attack, with Aucassin refusing to aid in this defense unless he is allowed to be with his love, Nicolette. This young love is forbidden by Aucassin's parents, however, on the grounds that Nicolette is a Saracen captive who has been adopted and baptized as a Christian, and whose status dictates that she will one day wed someone who will be forced to work for a living. This situation places Aucassin and his father at an impasse, and only after making a promise that his son will be allowed to see Nicolette and give her a kiss, does Aucassin engage in battle, quickly capturing his father's enemy after so many years of fighting. The promise made by his father turns out to be a false one, however, and Aucassin retaliates by releasing his father's enemy and making him swear to never stop waging war against his father. This behavior ultimately leads to Aucassin being locked up by his father. Meanwhile, Aucassin's father has already demanded that Nicolette be sent into exile, and she has instead been secretly imprisoned so that her adoptive father won't have to send her away. Nicolette, however, refuses the confines of her situation, and escapes from the tower in which she is imprisoned by, classically, knotting together her sheets and climbing down. She finds where Aucassin has been imprisoned, escapes the guards who are on watch, and after a perilous jump, runs to hide in the forest. She gives a group of shepherds a figurative and humorously received message to pass on to Aucassin, and takes up residence in the forest, in a small shelter she has constructed, waiting to see if Aucassin will find her there and thus prove his love. Aucassin embarks on his own journey, interacting with the shepherds and with a rustic herdsman along the way. He manages to

Aucassin 'des grans paines qu'il souffri / et des proueces qu'il fist / por s'amie o le cler vis,' a story, therefore, first of thwarted and then triumphant love, a story that borrows from the *topoi* of the literature of the time, where love and adventure are often complementary, a story wherein the form results from its unique combination of sung verses and narrative prose, and finally a story in which are combined the two major traits required of a literary masterpiece: humor and celebration, where the celebration is one of love" (184). I disagree with Garreau's assessment of the simplicity of the story, in which the themes of love and adventure are far from simple.

find Nicolette and the two are reunited and begin traveling together. They arrive in the land of Torelore, where they find the king waiting to give birth and the queen out fighting in the battlefield, in what amounts to little more than a food fight. Aucassin resorts to violence in an effort to “make right” both of these situations: he attacks the king, extorting a promise from him to never give birth again, and violently attacks the queen’s enemies on the battlefield, winning the battle but earning condemnation for killing the enemy, which is not the custom in Torelore. Nicolette is prized in Torelore and Aucassin nearly sent away, but Nicolette advocates on his behalf and they stay there for some time, before being captured by some invading Saracens. Aucassin’s boat miraculously makes it back to Beaucaire, while Nicolette is taken to Cartagena, which she suddenly recognizes as her homeland. Upon seeing the city’s walls, she recalls her past there, and remembers that she is in fact the daughter of the king. Her homecoming is met with great joy, and she is told that she will marry one of the kings of Spain. Refusing to give up so easily on Aucassin, Nicolette disguises herself as a jongleur and travels back to Beaucaire, where she finds Aucassin sitting around and lamenting her absence. His father is dead, and there are now no obstacles to their marriage. She recounts Nicolette’s (her own) adventures to Aucassin, who does not recognize her in her jongleur disguise. Upon receiving reassurance that he still loves her, she takes a few days to remove her disguise and beautify herself, before presenting herself as newly arrived back in Beaucaire, and the two marry.

As this summary makes clear, *Aucassin et Nicolette* is a story that is predicated on geographical displacement and the encounters that subsequently arise between seemingly disparate peoples and places. Nicolette’s trajectory takes her from Cartagena to Beaucaire, and from Beaucaire to the edges of the familiar, urban world, into the forest, across the sea, to a fantastical topsy-turvy land, back to her Muslim homeland, and ultimately back to Beaucaire.

While Aucassin accompanies her for part of this journey, it is Nicolette who travels farthest afield, and whose own self-engineered escape serves to initiate the voyage. Further emphasizing this point is the fact that when Nicolette returns to Beaucaire disguised as a jongleur and leads Aucassin to believe that she is still imprisoned in Cartagena, Aucassin does not himself go out to bring her back; instead he relies on paying an itinerant performer to do so, counting on Nicolette to escape and make the trip back home. This is despite the fact that Aucassin, not much earlier in the narrative, had been lamenting that he would go out and seek Nicolette among all of the lands of the earth, if only he knew that he might find her there. In this sense, Nicolette can be seen as the primary subject of the narrative's adventures sequences, and Aucassin's involvement only serves to further highlight her agency.

Manuscript Context

Aucassin et Nicolette survives in only one manuscript, BnF fr. 2168, folios 70r-81v. Musical notation accompanies the narrative's lyric interludes. The manuscript has been variously dated from the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century. Serena Lunardi (2012) dates it to the second half of the thirteenth century, following the tradition of Bourdillon, and based principally on an analysis of the script and the musical notation.⁹ As further evidence of a thirteenth-century date, the manuscript also contains a copy of the Pseudo-Turpin in Old French, which was first translated into the vernacular in the thirteenth century.¹⁰ Its dialect is Picard, and its manuscript

⁹ Lunardi provides an exhaustive list of scholars who have written about the manuscript BnF, fr. 2168, and its dating, in footnote #6, pp. 61-62. See also Francis William Bourdillon (1896).

¹⁰ See Gabrielle Spiegel's (1993) chapter on the Pseudo-Turpin in *Romancing the Past*, particularly pp. 69-72.

is not a luxurious one,¹¹ containing no miniatures or notable illuminations.¹² A material analysis of the manuscript suggests it was originally assembled as a single codex, and was later reorganized and rebound, although without changing its original contents.¹³ The other texts with which *Aucassin et Nicolette* was bound can thus shed light on potential readings of the *chantefable*. Several scholars have established the original ordering of the manuscript and James Simpson (2012) has considered how a comparison of its initial ordering and subsequent reordering allow for different readings of the individual texts and the codex as a whole. Unfortunately, the manuscript offers no clues as to the author of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, although the particular version of the Pseudo-Turpin contained within the same manuscript is dedicated to a Flemish aristocrat.

The dating of *Aucassin et Nicolette* matters when taking into consideration its Occitan setting, given that the Albigensian Crusade began in 1209 and lasted until about 1229, with the

¹¹ “Bien évidemment, on n’a pas affaire à un ouvrage de luxe: la graphie est négligée (voir ci-dessous), la qualité du parchemin et de la mise en page est assez pauvre, tout comme l’ornementation: on n’a pas de miniatures, mais seulement des initiales coloriées à l’encre rouge” [Obviously, we are not dealing with a luxury object: the handwriting is careless (see below), the quality of the parchment and the *mise-en-page* are rather poor, as is the decoration, there are no miniatures, only initials colored in red ink] (Lunardi, *ibid*, 62-63).

¹² Aside from musical notation, *Aucassin et Nicolette* is accompanied by no images.

¹³ “On n’a pas ici affaire à deux unités codicologiques distinctes: la qualité du parchemin, la dimension des feuillets, la justification restent homogènes tout au long du volume. L’ornementation est homogène aussi, exception faite pour ce qui concerne le dernier texte de la première section, comme on l’a déjà remarqué ci-dessus. En outre, les signatures à l’encre rouge qui se trouvent au dernier feuillet de la plupart des cahiers ne sont pas discordantes, comme on pourrait le supposer au premier abord” [We are not dealing here with two distinct codicological items: the quality of the parchment, the dimension of the leaves, and the justification remain homogenous throughout the volume. The decoration is also homogenous, with the exception of the last text of the first section, as already noted. Moreover, the signatures in red ink that are found on the last leaf of most of the quires are not discordant, as it might seem on first glance] (Lunardi, *ibid*, 70).

siege of Beaucaire occurring in 1216. Some scholars have posited a twelfth century dating,¹⁴ and if this earlier dating is accurate, then it is possible to read the story, as Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian (2017) do, as giving “‘a faithful picture’ of the attitudes held in Occitania [pre-crusade] – sensual, anticlerical, and fiercely independent” (215).¹⁵ Commenting on Aucassin’s speech about it being better to go to hell than heaven, the authors add that: “Such rhetorical bravery was still relatively easy in 1200, nine years before the opening of the Albigensian Crusade with the wholesale slaughter of the men, women, and children of the southern town of Béziers,” and that “All seemed well, especially because Occitan culture was successful and growing” (216). The manuscript’s likely later thirteenth century dating, however, calls into question this idyllic image of Occitan culture. While it is possible that *Aucassin et Nicolette* may have existed in a version that pre-dated its thirteenth century manuscript, we simply have no evidence for any earlier circulation of this story, and the later dating also requires us to take into account that it was of interest to a northern French audience during or after the time of the Albigensian Crusade.

What Bryson and Movsesian correctly identify, however, is the lighthearted tone the work takes towards its central characters and its setting. While containing elements of parody,¹⁶

¹⁴ Although the manuscript is thirteenth century, Roques explains that “L’emploi de l’assonance dans les vers a paru à Gaston Paris un signe d’archaïsme, qui permettrait de faire remonter l’oeuvre jusqu’au règne de Louis VII: l’auteur d’*Aucassin* serait ainsi un contemporain de Chrétien de Troyes [...] mais on a fait remarquer que l’assonance se rencontre encore au XIIIe siècle” [the use of assonance in the verses seemed to Gaston Paris to be a sign of archaism, which would allow the work to be pushed back to the reign of Louis VII: the author of *Aucassin* would thus be a contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes [...] but it has been pointed out that assonance can still be found in the thirteenth century] (xv). Roques himself opts for a thirteenth century date, perhaps the first half of the century (xv).

¹⁵ In using the phrase ‘a faithful picture,’ the authors cite: Robert Briffault. 1965. *The Troubadours*, ed. Lawrence F. Koons. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 132.

¹⁶ See for example Sarah Kay (2008), Barbara Nelson Sargent (1970), Tony Hunt (1979).

the story never reveals the full scope of the violence of the Albigensian Crusade nor displays any threatening animus towards its protagonists. It is difficult to square this tone with the manuscript's time period and place of origin. Robert Griffin (1965) has in fact identified a number of elements of the narrative that seem to refer to the Albigensian Crusade, the siege of Beaucaire, and to particular historical individuals of the time.¹⁷ The Albigensian Crusade is thus likely in the background of the narrative or the manuscript, but we do not know when the story was originally composed, nor do we know the stance of its writer, scribe, or patron towards the lengthy and violent conflict. Suffice it to say that, from this perspective, there is a troubling discrepancy between the work's tone and the historical circumstances in which it was written down and bound into a codex, particularly given that this same manuscript contains an account of Charlemagne's crusades in Spain.

Narrative Form

Aucassin et Nicolette is composed in a unique form of alternated prose and lyric verse, and its manuscript refers to the story as a *chantefable*, a designation unattested elsewhere. The lyric interludes are accompanied by musical notation. It is unique in that it is the only known example

¹⁷ Griffin has noted in particular that a parallel exists between the long war waged by Aucassin's father and the siege of Beaucaire during the Albigensian Crusade, while Aucassin's statement that the war had lasted twenty years is suggestive, given that the Albigensian Crusade also lasted twenty years. Griffin writes, for example: "No Count Garin of Beaucaire ever existed, nor any Bougars de Valence, and Torelore has inspired much confusion for critics. Indeed, the only war of any size in which Beaucaire was involved was the siege of May 1216, during the great Albigensian Crusade. Here, in face, the comparisons become interesting. The siege was directed by Simon de Montfort, the most zealous of crusaders, assisted by his ever-loyal aide Bouchard and 10,000 infantrymen – the same number used in the siege of Beaucaire in *Aucassin et Nicolette* – against Raymond VII, who had been left in charge of the town by his father Ramond VI, Count of Toulouse, while he went to Spain to seek help. The siege ended with a truce, as did the siege in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, only to be resumed immediately at Toulouse, where again Montfort was pitted against Raymond in the bloodiest campaign of the twenty murderous years of the Crusade (in Sec. 10 Aucassin adds that 'vint ans ja dure ceste guerre')" (250).

of this particular form in Old French literature, although comparisons have been made between the *chanteuble* and Byzantine and Arabic literary forms.¹⁸ The work thus exists outside of narrative categories established on the basis of form alone, including but not limited to romance. In this sense, *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s generic conventions, or the elements it shares with certain narrative types, cannot be discerned exclusively through its formal features. In terms of content, *Aucassin et Nicolette* shares features with number of twelfth and thirteenth century Old French literary forms. Mario Roques (1982), for example, writes that "les uns en ont fait un roman, un conte, une nouvelle, un fabliau même, et si aucun de ces noms, entendu dans un sens précis, ne paraît convenir exactement, tous expriment du moins cette idée qu'*Aucassin et Nicolette* est avant tout un récit" [Some have made of it a romance, a tale, a novella, even a fabliau, and if none of these names, understood in a strict sense, seem exactly appropriate, they all at least express the idea that *Aucassin et Nicolette* is above all a story] (iv).

I include *Aucassin et Nicolette* here in a study of romance because of the way in which it thematizes particular romance conventions. In terms of romance fiction, its shared characteristics

¹⁸ See Griffin again: "But what catches the attention of anyone interested in a possible influence of Catharism on *Aucassin et Nicolette* are the many suggested similarities of the work to Hellenistic, Byzantine, and Arabian writing. Long ago Hugo Brunner clearly established a parallel between the *chanteuble* and *Floire et Blancheflor*, which Gaston Paris subsequently claimed to be of Greek origin, as is the name *Nicolette*, while Joachim Reinhold proposed a Byzantine origin and Gédéon Huet an Arabian origin. Paris went on to suggest that *Aucassin et Nicolette* is similar in form to Byzantine literature (pp. 88-89), and Wilhelm Hertz strongly hinted that the work resembles the Arabian novel in form and in the character of the poetry" (Griffin 1965, 247). Mario Roques (1982) tells us that "A défaut de traits orientaux certains, on a noté que quelques circonstances de l'histoire d'*Aucassin et de Nicolette* se retrouvaient groupées dans un conte des *Mille et une nuits*, *Uns el Ujud et El Ward fil Akman*" [In the absence of certain oriental traits, it has been noted that the circumstances of the story of *Aucassin* and of *Nicolette* are found in a story of the *Arabian Nights*, *Uns el Ujud and El Ward fil Akman*] (viii). Roques also writes that "le mélange du récit et de morceaux lyriques est familier à la littérature arabe" [the mixing of narrative and lyric is familiar within Arabic literature] (vii), although he also notes that this trait is not specific to Arabic literature alone (viii).

include its courtly setting and concerns, its noble protagonist who is expected to engage in knightly activities, its peripatetic adventure, and a problematic love story resulting in marriage. At the same time, its hybrid structure calls for a consideration of the relationship between innovative narrative forms and other forms of transformation, boundary crossing, and hybridity. Nicolette's agency and mobility, and Aucassin's disinclination towards knightly duties, offer alternatives to the chivalric romance model that remain in conversation with existing forms in a manner parallel to the simultaneous use of verse and prose as a recognizable yet innovative formal feature.

While the narrative's hybrid form thus deserves attention, so too, I would argue, does its particular use of prose. Beginning in the thirteenth century, lyric insertion is attested in a variety of Old French literary texts, typically verse narratives, although these insertions do not contain plot elements nor do they continue the narration of the story, as do those of *Aucassin et Nicolette*.¹⁹ The *chante-fable's* regular alternation of verse and prose is especially unique given that some writers of prose, which was beginning to take hold as a literary form in the thirteenth century, set their compositions apart from verse forms with specific claims to veracity.²⁰ *Aucassin et Nicolette* is thus situated temporally at a moment of innovation for both the inclusion of lyric within narrative, and for the use of prose as a vernacular narrative form distinct from

¹⁹ See Maureen Boulton (1993): "Whatever measures were taken to reconcile the songs to a narrative setting, however, they always remained essentially extraneous and intrusive. Because they could circulate independently, they raised the possibility of other performances, other audiences, other contexts. They continued to direct the reader/listener's attention beyond the narrative itself, forcing an intertextual interpretation of the work. This dual character of lyric insertions – independent compositions, though part of a larger work – is inherent in the device" (4).

²⁰ See Sarah Kay and Adrian Armstrong (2011): "From the early thirteenth century, when prose is first pioneered as a medium for writing history in the vernacular, prose writers denigrate verse in terms like these as artificial, unreliable, and falsifying" (1).

lyric and verse. It stands, uniquely, at the intersection of two forms that, especially in the thirteenth century, were often defined against one another. As Gabrielle Spiegel (1993) has noted, prose was first introduced into Old French narrative in the late twelfth century in a handful of religious contexts, although it quickly proliferated as a literary form following the early thirteenth century prose translations known as the *Pseudo-Turpin*.²¹ These Old French translations of the Turpin chronicles often emphasized the connection between their prose form and their claim to historical truth, particularly by defining themselves *against* verse (Spiegel 55-57). In the first translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin*, for example, Nicolas de Senlis declares in the prologue that “many peoples have heard told and sung [the story of Charlemagne’s expedition to Spain], but what these singers and jongleurs sing and tell is nothing but a lie. No rhymed tale is true.”²²

However, as prose became more prominent throughout the thirteenth century, its ostensibly straightforward, documentary style was increasingly used for literary narratives as well as supposedly historical ones. Within this context of formal innovation, *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s alternation of verse and prose can be read as taking an almost transgressive stance toward the veracity of the narrative, highlighting simultaneously its “truthfulness” (as straightforward prose) and its quality as playful, unreliable, poetic fiction. It could very well be winking at, or implicitly referencing, the kinds of claims made in works like the *Pseudo-Turpin*, a version of which, moreover, is bound in the same manuscript as *Aucassin et Nicolette*. As

²¹ See Spiegel’s (1993) chapter on the *Pseudo-Turpin*.

²² Gabrielle Spiegel’s translation, p. 55. And yet, this truth becomes quickly complicated, as the *Pseudo-Turpin* was largely a work of invention, though it was not considered as such during the Middle Ages. In an article outlining the challenges of cataloguing the *Pseudo-Turpin* for modern librarians, librarian Jo Williams (2013) makes it clear that the fictional work’s claim to historical truth, as well as its status as a translation and its multiple possible origins, have continued to generate issues of generic classification into the modern day.

Sarah Kay and Adrian Armstrong (2011) have observed, the rise of prose and the ensuing displacement of verse did not merely substitute one form for the other; instead, it helped to define verse as a particular formal choice.²³ The choice to alternate prose and verse in the early thirteenth century thus intentionally calls into question the significance and function of these two forms.

In this context, *Aucassin et Nicolette* presents a distinct case where both gender and generic conventions are simultaneously transformed into something at once recognizable and unexpected. In parallel manner, while the *chanteable* captures many of the concerns and themes of chivalric romance, it deviates substantially from romance's structure without clearly aligning itself, in formal terms, with any other Old French genre. The alternation of verse and prose thus mirrors many of the work's other forms of alternation (between Christian and Muslim, father and son, male and female) but it also provides a new structure for a new kind of story – one that is not predicated on knightly prowess, but that nonetheless positions itself in relation to knightliness, adventure, and courtly values. This is also accounts for why the work has often been read as a parody.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and into the present day, what Tony Hunt called the “thèse parodique” has indeed been dominant in critical readings of the *chanteable*, although it has not been without its detractors. Tony Hunt is the most notable of these, who in 1979 summarized the major arguments in support of the parody thesis and articulated what he saw as their problems. His primary criticism concerns a lack of definition, as scholars have failed to

²³ The rise of prose, they write, had the effect of giving “heightened definition to verse. In much the same way that the establishment of color photography did not eliminate black and white but instead defined it as a category and endowed it with a whole new meaning, the widespread use of prose defined the status of verse” (Kay and Armstrong, 2).

define exactly what a parody *is*, particularly in relation to other forms such as pastiche and burlesque. For Hunt, this is a fatal flaw, as he views parody in the classical sense, that is to say, as a work *in the style of* a recognized form but that uses this form to mock other recognizable aspects of the genre and its values. Because of its unique form, however, Hunt sees *Aucassin et Nicolette* as excluded from this category – a parody in the style of *what genre?* he might ask – and notes that most scholars who read the work as a parody do so because of the way that it parodies *matière* rather than form.

However, this is a strict definition of parody, and other scholars have seen the work as taking some variety of parodic stance towards its source materials.²⁴ Part of the problem lies in the fact that it is impossible for a modern reader to know the degree to which a medieval audience would have laughed at the tale, or the degree to which they would have taken its transgressions seriously. The desire to apply these labels – such as parody or pastiche – or to deny them, resides in a desire to bridge the historical gap and to answer questions about how medieval stories were, or should be, read based on modern categories that signal particular, defined relationships between the reader and the text. At the same time, we must ask ourselves what it might mean to assume that the presentation of female adventure occurs within a work that is meant to be read in a manner that we would describe as parodic. How are we thus to read the narrative’s treatment of gender or other forms of identity and transgression? In fact, it should not surprise us that “serious” innovations would occur within the context of a parody. This form of distanced authorial stance is precisely what allows the reader to take stock of the forms being presented and to evaluate them according to the models they mimic and reshape. The character of Nicolette can thus be read in the context of the adventure model that is transformed around

²⁴ See for example Sarah Kay (2008).

her, and such a reading can acknowledge both that Nicolette is treated with a high level of sympathy within the narrative – she is truly the protagonist – and that there is a lot of humor to be found in the manner in which she and Aucassin act out their series of encounters and mobile adventures.

The Female Protagonist

The story that *Aucassin et Nicolette* offers its readers is ultimately one that displaces the knightly protagonist from the central narrative position and transfers a large portion of the knight's mobility and prowess to its female protagonist instead. Nicolette is the one who escapes from her tower by herself, even injuring herself with a perilously high jump; she is the one who leaves a message for Aucassin to find her; she engages in multiple encounters that require some form of prowess and/or risk-taking; she is captured by Saracens, experiences an important revelation of identity, disguises herself as a jongleur, and travels all the way back to her love, whom she can now marry. Nicolette's adventures take her from Beaucaire into the forest, to a land called Torelore, across the ocean to Cartagena, and then back to Beaucaire.

And yet, Nicolette is not only a female subject of adventure, she is moreover a Saracen convert and an adopted former slave (having been taken from her homeland). The stereotype of the “Belle Sarrasine” can thus to some degree account for Nicolette's activity and narrative role, as described by Jane Gilbert (1997): “Belle Sarrasines are sexually forward, clever and crafty, cross-dressers and betrayers of husbands or father” (222). However, Nicolette's particular role is more complicated than this, and not only because she has in fact been converted to Christianity, seems to fit perfectly well into her Occitan society (not even her Saracen captors recognize her as

one of their own) and is described as white and blonde. In fact, she closely resembles Aucassin.²⁵ Gilbert notes in fact that “Although it determines Nicolette in the audience’s eyes, however, the Belle Sarrasine stereotype does not seem to have any currency within *Aucassin et Nicolette* itself” (222).²⁶ Instead, Nicolette retains some degree of passivity: Gilbert observes that despite her distinctive agency she consistently presents *herself* as prey, as feminine, and as a love object.²⁷ Sharon Kinoshita (2006) also argues that the Saracen stereotype “fails” in *Aucassin et Nicolette*: “Paradoxically, the symbolic power of the motif of the Saracen queen may be discerned in two cases where it fails: *Aucassin et Nicolette* and *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople* [...] the generic strangeness of each work derives from a strategic ‘misfire’ in the plot of the Saracen princess. In each case, the ‘solution’ the motif offers in adjudicating scenarios of cultural contact is blocked by the fact that the woman in question, however foreign, is *already* Christian” (64). This ambiguity surrounding the story’s transgressions – particularly the gendered portrayals of its protagonists in relation to other available models – are what have made it notoriously difficult to interpret. As with its alternation of verse and prose, it never explicitly takes a side, but it brings about a transformation in the conventions it implies.

What *Aucassin et Nicolette* does clearly present, however, is a crossing of the borders and boundaries that delineated groups of unequal status from a northern French perspective, whether

²⁵ See also the previously discussed article by Jane Gilbert (1997).

²⁶ Gilbert argues that Nicolette attempts to conform instead to a role she refers to in her article as the Good Christian Girl (223).

²⁷ “one of the most striking things about Nicolette is that, whereas full of activity, she invariably presents herself as passive, as one who has things done to her, as object of and subject to actions” (Gilbert 1997, 222). See also Kevin Brownlee (1986), whom Gilbert cites in setting forth this argument.

as defined by geography, religious difference, social class, or gender. Gabrielle Spiegel (1993) reminds us as well that status and “alternative modes of discursive behavior” go hand in hand:

modern sociolinguistics has demonstrated that social groups most affected by transformations in status tend to be especially conscious of alternative modes of discursive behavior – that they are, in other words, particularly sensitive to the power of language to register social change. Language games, Lévi-Strauss insists, are essentially power games, and it follows that disputes over language domains and usage are contests of power. (77)

Seen in this light, *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s formal hybridity provides a means of expression for its gendered transgressions that may be most meaningful for the “social groups most affected by transformations in status” – in this case, women as well as those whose origin, religion, and class status differ from that of the conventional protagonists of romance fiction and the ruling classes of northern France, categories to which Nicolette multiply belongs as a converted Saracen and adopted former slave. Whatever stance the *chante-fable* takes towards its characters, or whatever stance its readers would have taken (which remains an open question),²⁸ its narrative form signals a tolerance, within the space of the page, for alternative modes of discourse, and for various forms of incongruity, hybridity, and border crossing. Within this space, there opens up a mutually constitutive relationship between transformations in gendered and generic conventions, or in *genre* broadly speaking.

A debate has in fact arisen in scholarship on *Aucassin et Nicolette* as to whether or not the narrative does in fact present an example of gender reversal or transgressive gender roles. This question is not always distinct from questions of the narrative's parodic elements, and most often revolves around how to interpret Aucassin's supposed passivity, Nicolette's activity, and the episode of Torelore. For example, in order to explain that the work does not present any

²⁸ For a study of the resistant female reader of Old French romance, see Krueger (1993).

gendered deviations, Tony Hunt writes that: “L’initiative de Nicolette cadre parfaitement avec les activités des entremetteuses et même des héroïnes de la littérature médiévale, et se comprend en partie comme legs du thème traditionnel de la princesse sarrasine” [Nicolette’s initiative is in perfect keeping with the activities of intermediaries and even heroines in medieval literature, and can be in part understood as legacy of the traditional theme of the Saracen princess] (374).

However, I would argue that Nicolette’s role profoundly expands upon that of the *entremetteuse*, and that in fact that the type of heroine she represents is a very particular one, namely a mobile, adventuring heroine whose role has not yet been fully captured within critical scholarship – which is indeed the aim of this dissertation – and that, as I show, is consistently accompanied by crises in social relations and concomitant discourses on gender. Likewise, as has been discussed, it is oversimplifying matters to categorize Nicolette as an example of the typical Saracen princess.

Instead, Nicolette’s agency is not only in dialogue with existing stereotypes about Saracen women, but also in dialogue with existing stereotypes about emplaced heroines and knightly adventure. Her position at the intersection of different *gendered* – as opposed to only religious/ethnic – conventions is established not merely by her own actions, but also by their relationship to Aucassin’s character. Her active role cannot be disassociated from Aucassin’s lack of knightly initiative. However, the narrative’s deviations from gendered norms should be viewed not only in relation to the generalized categories of Knight and Lady or Saracen and Christian, but also to the specific context of Occitania and the gendered associations it carried with it in the thirteenth century.

In this sense, it is important to recall *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s specific literary context during a time that saw the rise of new forms, as we have already mentioned for prose, but also

tied to the spread of troubadour lyric and the subsequent silencing of troubadour culture in the Albigensian Crusade.²⁹ The beginning of the thirteenth century also saw immense gains in the political territory of France under Philippe Auguste as well as a flourishing of urban life, commerce, and a rising merchant class. In the late twelfth century, Eleanor of Aquitaine accompanied her husband Louis VII on his travels eastward during the Second Crusade, and later, following the dissolution of her marriage, transferred her considerable land holdings to the duke of Normandy, soon to become Henry II, king of England. Beginning in 1209, the Albigensian Crusade sought and enacted a violent suppression of the Cathars, whose society had flourished in Occitania, while also significantly shifting southern French power and land holdings to northern crusaders and nobles. Notably for our purposes, the Cathars were known for their unusual approach to female power, as they allowed women to climb much higher in the church's hierarchy than was possible in the Catholic church.³⁰ The thirteenth century also saw the rise of another religious movement, the Beguines, women who challenged the male, hierarchical domination of religious access and experience.³¹ In the latter half of the thirteenth century, Jean de Meun translated the letters of Héloïse and Abelard – a relationship featuring an intelligent, devout, literate, and ultimately powerful woman – into the vernacular. That Jean de Meun brought attention to their story through its inclusion in the otherwise overtly misogynistic

²⁹ Eliza Zingesser's (2020) very recent book, *Stolen Song*, "charts the ways in which the linguistic and cultural specificity of Occitan lyric was actively effaced in its medieval reception in the northern territories of what is now France, allowing it to pass as part of French literary tradition. It also documents the emergence of a parallel corpus of what might be considered fake troubadour song. These songs, which were composed by francophone poets, deployed linguistic coloring to evoke Occitan in less prestigious genres and with pseudo-primitive elements. They thereby produced a vision for francophone audiences of a foreign culture (Occitan) as rustic, while genuine troubadour songs were silently purloined and reframed as part of French literary history" (from the introduction, pagination not currently available to me).

³⁰ See Susan Taylor Snyder (2006) and Robert Griffin (1965, 225).

³¹ For a fairly recent historical study of the Beguines, see Tanya Stabler Miller (2014).

Roman de la Rose only demonstrates the complexity of representations and discourses surrounding gender at this time.

At the same time, Sharon Kinoshita (2006) notes that the “epistemic rupture” of the thirteenth century was one that also sought to increasingly regulate borders and boundaries: “Most particularly, the attention devoted to identifying and regulating internal others - Jews, heretics, and lepers - gestures toward the increasingly disciplinary taxonomies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (2).³² *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s innovations must thus be understood as arising during a time when the *status quo*, in terms of not only literary convention but also gender relations, French power, and Occitan society, were in a state of profound transformation, expanding in some ways and hardening in others. I would therefore argue that *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s shifting and crossing of conventions and borders is reflective of a broader cultural context in which distinct forms and categories were porous, multiple, and unstable, yet increasingly visible and impactful in terms of religious and cultural identity. The Mediterranean in particular provides a setting in which borders were crossed and interactions - textual, cultural, religious, mercantile - were a fact of life. As Kinoshita (2013) puts it:

Rethinking the medieval Mediterranean as a transitional space – a contact zone of commercial exchange and cross-confessional interaction – puts pressure, in turn, on traditional views of the Middle Ages as a transitional time – those perilous centuries during which the legacy of classical antiquity hung in the balance until being reanimated by the “rebirth” emanating from northern Italy in the mid-fourteenth century. (36)

In other words, the Middle Ages were *also* a time of birth and rebirth, a period that not only preserved the writings of the ancients, but also translated them into new forms. *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s forms of hybridity should be read in the context of the specific Occitan geography and Mediterranean identities that interacted in unstraightforward ways.

³² See also, as cited by Kinoshita, Geraldine Heng (2004) and David Abulafia (2002).

Nicolette's Saracen identity is in this sense highly pertinent to an interpretation of the romance, but perhaps not as such a distinct cultural "other" from Aucassin or the Occitan setting as has often been presumed. Along these lines, Robert Sturges (2015) has recently examined Nicolette within the context of postcolonial scholarship, race theory, and slave narratives by reading *Aucassin et Nicolette* in the light of Frantz Fanon. Sturges makes the case for his choice of Fanon by stating that "the text links its preoccupation with race and slavery to sex and sexuality, a concern also shared by Fanon" (13). Sturges initially provides a nuanced assessment of Nicolette's boundary crossing, stating that she

oscillates among and, I suggest, deconstructs the categories of race, class and gender, if we define medieval race, with several recent historians, not only in terms of genetically inherited biological characteristics or skin color, but also as a constellation of geographical determination and social practices. (14)

However, Sturges ultimately abandons this nuanced reading in a manner that, I would argue, does a disservice to both Fanon and to *Aucassin et Nicolette* by eliding their vastly different historical circumstances (the "constellation of geographical determination and social practices"). His argument assumes that for the Middle Ages, race represented a black/white binary that mapped clearly onto a Muslim/Christian binary: "Race conceived as religious difference, then, cannot be separated from race conceived as difference in color or from race conceived in terms of geographical location" (18).

Given the geographical heterogeneity of the medieval Islamic world, as well as that of medieval Christendom, it would be difficult to argue from a historical perspective that Muslims or Christians were considered racially homogenous. Moreover, the term "blackness" in a post-colonial European and American context is associated in part with a historical slave narrative in which white represents the master (Sturges explicitly puts his argument into dialogue with the

Hegelian master/slave narrative).³³ This dialectic that is out of place within an entire history of medieval Muslim political and intellectual prominence, of Muslim/Christian alliances and exchange, of Muslim conquest, and the fact that Muslims of the thirteenth century were also slaveholders and slave traders.³⁴ Both Aucassin and Nicolette are in fact captured by Muslims while they are in Torelore, and it is her captors who unwittingly bring Nicolette back to her homeland of Cartagena. A similar event occurs in the *Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur*, in which it is the Christian Blanchefleur who is taken captive by Muslims, eventually falling in love with her noble Muslim companion Floire, and subsequently is sold away by Floire's parents due to her inferior status as a captured Christian. Thus, while ostensibly arguing that Nicolette serves as an example of boundary crossing, Sturges in fact reproduces the kinds of boundaries that underlie a view of the European Middle Ages as culturally homogenous or bifurcated, and as

³³ On the other hand, see Cord J. Whitaker's (2019) book *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* for an examination of how we can read forward from medieval depictions of race to modern forms of racism. Specifically, Whitaker writes that "This book's aim is to investigate the relationship between the idea of blackness and the notion of sinfulness in the literature and culture of the English Middle Ages, with influences from continental European texts as well" (9). For Whitaker, however, the progression from medieval race-thinking to modern racism was not inevitable, and the metaphors and differences he identifies in the Middle Ages do not map perfectly onto our own more hardened conceptions of race. He writes, for example: "The dialogizing perspective that Khanmohamadi has demonstrated in Mandeville is a way of figuring late medieval culture's willingness to accept incomplete interpretive loops: that other peoples are different might mean that they are grotesque, but it may also mean that the Latin Christian reader is grotesquely different. The interpretation of difference in the Middle Ages does not necessarily conclude in hierarchies in which some are classed as superior and others inferior. In modernity, such hierarchies are not merely interpretive conclusions; through the processes of enthymematic rhetorical mirage, they crystallize into fact" (151). Pertinent to my analysis of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, he also writes in relation to Zurara's 1457 *Chronicle of the Deeds of Arms Involved in the Conquest of Guinea* that "For Zurara, slave does not yet mean black, and black does not yet mean slave. The newly arrived slaves come in a spectrum of skin tones. Zurara does refer to the enthymematic premise that devils and demons are black but without the conclusion that the slaves with black skin are necessarily demonic" (154).

³⁴ See for example Kecia Ali (2010), Gordon (2017), and de la Puente (2017).

underwriting, as precursor, a modern master/slave dialectic based on racial difference. However, as Cristina de la Puente (2017) has shown

It is thus widely held, and naively so, that slaves had to possess a skin color or be of a geographic origin different from that of their owners. It is perhaps too easily forgotten, however, that slavery, throughout the course of its long history, has not always been rooted in ethnic difference, or that it has sometimes had that connection, but only partially or occasionally. The risk is also that one ignores the fact that membership in a specific ethnic group, did not necessarily have to be a reason for slavery or its opposite. (124)

Thus, while Nicolette's history as a former slave and as a Muslim does contribute to her status as belonging to a lower class, and her identity as a convert does mark her as different and socially inferior, it is not clear that this status maps neatly back onto a racial identity, particularly as the majority of Muslims in al-Andalus were of mixed ethnic origins.

Sturges's argument relies partially on an article by Jacqueline deWeever (1994) that argues that in darkening her skin to travel as a jongleur, Nicolette is disguising herself as a black Saracen and thus recapturing her black identity.³⁵ However, this reading is called into question by similar depictions in works such as the *Roman de Silence*, in which the darkening of the skin does not serve as a religious or racial marker, but rather as a class marker.³⁶ While Nicolette's darkening of her skin may potentially be read as symbolic of her Muslims origins (and may also be used as a means of "fitting in" as she travels out of Cartagena), at the same time, what Nicolette dons is in fact a classic jongleur disguise. This fact only further highlights that darkness

³⁵ Menocal (1989) provides a similar reading of Nicolette's darkening of her skin.

³⁶ Sturges also mentions that the jongleur disguise is a class marker "Nicolette's blackness in the disguising episode is also a class and gender marker: she has learned that she is a Saracen princess by birth, but she blackens her skin also in order to disguise herself as a lowly – and male – jongleur" (16). It is interesting that Sturges writes that Nicolette is a male jongleur, as the narrative never specifies and female jongleurs were less common, but not unheard of. In a narrative that is so interested in gender, and that stages scenes of gender reversal, it does seem unexpected that the narrative would not specify.

of skin was not in fact mapped straightforwardly onto religious or geographical difference in the Middle Ages. Indeed, as Geraldine Heng has noted, “the Caliphs of Córdoba were blond-haired, mostly blue-eyed men (with one exception, who was red-haired) because of their Caucasian slave mothers” (7). Sturges argues that “Nicolette’s blackness thus associates her with servitude” (16), but in fact what we see it associated with in the jongleur episode is a bid for freedom: her escape from Cartagena, her ability to choose whom she marries, her ability to travel freely through both Spain and Occitania.

I do not want to downplay the importance of race to studies of the Middle Ages. Recent books by Geraldine Heng (2018) and Cord J. Whitaker (2019), for example, demonstrate the degree to which race can be a useful category for approaching the Middle Ages, and the degree to which race did indeed have consequences in the Middle Ages.³⁷ On the other hand, approaching Nicolette from a geographic perspective, we might also consider her particular place of origin, Cartagena, and its relationship to her adoptive homeland, Occitania, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In her book *Medieval Boundaries*, Sharon Kinoshita has persuasively cautioned us against generating a monolithic image of the Saracen in modern readings of medieval literature.³⁸ What has been most obscured in some arguments that set out to impose a

³⁷ Heng’s (2018) discussion and definition of race (3) is useful in this sense, as is her statement: “the use of the term *race* continues to bear witness to important strategic, epistemological, and political commitments not adequately served by the invocation of categories of greater generality (such as otherness or difference) or greater benignity in our understanding of human culture and society. Not to use the term race would be to sustain the reproduction of a certain kind of past, while keeping the door shut to tools, analyses and resources that can name the past differently” (4).

³⁸ As Kinoshita writes in the introduction to *Medieval Boundaries*: “medieval treatises furnish vivid and copious material to those interested in tracing the long genealogy of Christian hostility toward Islam. Obscured in the process, however, are medieval Christians’ lived reactions to and interactions with Muslims and the Islamic world – interactions much more complex and multifaceted than implied in the demonizing depictions by Norman Daniel or Edward Said himself” (6). And similarly: “Of course, this does not mean that Christian-Muslim relations were

post-colonial narrative on the Middle Ages is the specificity of medieval political alignments, intellectual cultures, cross-cultural exchange, and geographic heterogeneity. Certainly, Nicolette's Saracen origins should not be ignored nor glossed over as an essential element of her identity within the narrative. Likewise, the narrative's emphasis on the incredible whiteness of Nicolette's skin may strike us as rather suspect and conspicuous. However, the specificities of Nicolette's identity – including her gendered identity – and role within the narrative are, I believe, best illuminated by viewing them in their particular context, not only her homeland of al-Andalus, but also her place of residence, and Aucassin's homeland, in Occitania. For example, Sturges states in his article that "Nicolette crosses boundaries, then, in terms of social and geographical identity: she is both Saracen in origins and French by upbringing, Muslim by birth but Christian by baptism" (14). He is certainly right that Nicolette crosses boundaries, but she is never French, and nor for that matter is Aucassin. This difference is crucial to an understanding of the *chanteefable*.

Occitania

My analysis of *Aucassin et Nicolette* thus rests on a simple yet critically overlooked observation: that the story takes place in Beaucaire, in the south of what is now France, and features two protagonists whose places of origin are Occitania³⁹ (Beaucaire) and al-Andalus (Cartagena),

consistently peaceful; this was a violent age. But it does mean that religion was never the only – and sometimes not even the dominant – criterion in the determination of difference" (7).

³⁹ In using this name, I follow (among others) Cheyette (2001), who writes: "I adopt the term of other recent historians and call the region between the Rhone and the Pyrenees 'Occitania.' It is a coinage with but the smallest grain of historical justification and for that very reason has a paramount claim to favor; it avoids all traces of the political anachronism implied by "southern France" and recognizes that before the thirteenth century, in the days when Ermengard rules Narbonne, this region had not yet been tagged with an alien name" (3-4).

respectively.⁴⁰ This locality is not a subtle or obscure aspect of the narrative – the geographical locations are named and marked in the narrative – yet it has at the same time been largely overlooked as a meaningful setting in which to read the narrative and its particular forms of hybridity, gender portrayals, and border crossings. While the manuscript and dialect of *Aucassin et Nicolette* is northern French, the characters both belong to cultural and language traditions that were, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, very distinct from the manuscript’s northern, Old French audience and socio-political context.⁴¹ The specific city in Occitania in which the story begins and ends – Beaucaire – was also not unknown in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, at

⁴⁰ The text refers to Nicolette's birth city as “Cartage.” Mario Roques (1982) identifies this city as Carthage (xii). However, In his edition of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, Philippe Walter (1999) associates Cartage with Cartagena: “comme le prouve la laisse 40, il s'agit très vraisemblablement de Carthagène en Espagne, province de Murcie (sud-est du pays), fréquemment mentionnée dans des chansons de geste. A l'époque, cette ville est censée être occupée par les Sarrasins. La reconquête menée en Espagne par les chrétiens contre les musulmans ne sera achevée qu'en 1492 grâce à la prise de Grenade” [as laisse 40 shows, [Cartage] very likely refers to Cartagena in Spain, in the province of Murcia (in the southwest), which is frequently mentioned in *chansons de geste*. This city was thought to have been occupied by Saracens at the time. The Spanish Reconquista, led by Christians against Muslims in Spain, would not be fully achieved until 1492, with the fall of Granada] (189). The laisse that Walter refers to contains Nicolette’s (disguised) narration to Aucassin of her own travels, in which she pretends that Nicolette is still in her homeland: “si est fill au roi de Cartage, qui le prist la u Aucassins fu pris, si le mena en le cité de Cartage tant qu’il seut bien que c’estoit se fille, si en fist molt grant feste. Si le veut on doner cascun jor baron un des plus haus rois de tote Espagne” [She is the daughter of the king of Cartage, who captured her when Aucassin was captured, and took her to the city of Cartage, then he learned well that she was his daughter, and he was overjoyed. Now, every day, he wants to give her as a husband one of the most powerful lords of all of Spain] (my translation). I find this evidence compelling, particularly as Carthage was no longer an important urban center by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the descriptions of “Cartage” in the narrative map well onto Cartagena in Spain. I thus adopt the identification of Cartage with Cartagena here, as has moreover become common in scholarship on *Aucassin et Nicolette*.

⁴¹ For example, Kinoshita (2006) writes that “In our period [the twelfth century and early thirteenth century], to take one example, it is impossible to correlate language with nation: by the late twelfth century, Old French was spoken in England, Norman Sicily, Lusignan Cyprus, and the crusader states of Outremer, but not in the area today known as southern France” (3).

which time it hosted an important annual *foire* that I argue is thematized in the narrative's interest in mediating encounter through exchange.

The distinction between Occitania and northern France in the Middle Ages, in keeping with the complexities of medieval boundaries, was both shifting and dependent on the perspective from which one viewed both political and regional identity. Occitania as a region has only been referred to as such since the nineteenth century; in the Middle Ages it had no consistent political status or identity but was rather a region united by a common language, or set of dialects, by shared cultural and social structures, and by some common political interests. As Fredric Cheyette writes (1999), Occitania

was a region where people spoke a Romance language closely related to Catalan, a language usually called Old Provençal or Old Occitan, the language of the troubadours; and throughout the twelfth century – the great age of the troubadours – this region had only the most tenuous connections to the Capetian kings of Paris. (145)

Likewise, Linda Paterson (2005) notes that a more cohesive Occitan identity only began to take shape during and following the Albigensian Crusade, and that it was closely related to the Catalan identity:

At the time of the Albigensian crusade a certain Occitan self-consciousness comes to crystallize itself around French aggression. Negative feelings provoked by opposition to the French invaders give rise among previously competing southern groups to a positive sense of belonging to a cultural community that is clearly distinct from that of the northerners. In a poetic debate between Albertet and Monge comparing the merits and defects of the French and southerners, Albertet presents a geographical idea of the south that includes Gascony, Provence, the Limousin, the Auvergne and the Viennois, by contrast with the French regions subject to the kings of France and England. What is remarkable here is the term by which he designates the people of all these southern regions, namely 'Catalans.' (3)

Occitan identity thus came to be defined precisely in opposition to the French. Though this regional identity may not have fully coalesced until the Albigensian Crusade, it was still until that time a region with a distinct language, politics, and culture, however heterogeneous and

local it may have been in practice. The linguistic closeness of Occitania to Catalonia was in fact mirrored in a particular, longstanding political relationship between these two lands, in contradistinction to Occitania's "tenuous connections to the Capetian kings of Paris."⁴² Occitan or southern identity was especially visible from the perspective of northern France, which tended to view the southerners in unflattering terms:

certain northerners had no hesitation in categorizing the southerners as distinctive and different. From the eighth century onwards non-Occitan writers described them unflatteringly as frivolous, morally corrupt, garrulous, gluttonous, poor Latinists, lacking in warlike spirit, given over to disgusting fashions, and more. (Patterson 2005, 1)

This one-sentence list of attributes already makes apparent some of the potential resonances between *Aucassin et Nicolette* and the stereotypes that northerners would have associated with Occitan culture. Aucassin certainly lacks the warlike spirit, and his speech claiming that he'd rather go to hell with the beautifully dressed than to heaven with the poor and ill-clothed suggests a level of both moral corruption and frivolity. At the very least, it's clear that a nobleman from Beaucaire would not have co-identified with a northern French audience, or vice-versa.⁴³ Rather, Aucassin belonged to a culture that was distinct from that of the northern region

⁴² "In the twelfth century, this region was a battleground over which a handful of great lordly families attempted to assert their dominance. The counts of Barcelona gained the title of count of Carcassonne by purchase in 1067-68; they became counts of Provence by marriage in 1112 and kings of Aragon, again by marriage, in 1150; from the early twelfth century until the Albigensian Crusade in the early thirteenth, they maintained a tight alliance with the most important lordly families of the Occitan coastal plain: the viscounts of Narbonne, the lords of Montpellier, and the family we know as the Trencavels, viscounts of Albi, Béziers, Agde, and Nîmes and effective rulers of Carcassonne and the mountainous region to its south." (Cheyette p. 145)

⁴³ I say "northern French," although this territory is only suggested. There is also evidence of a possible Flemish origin of the manuscript, and the Picard dialect was used in the French-speaking part of what is now Belgium as well (see footnote below). Likewise, due to the proliferation of the production of Old French manuscripts across multiple regions, the Picard dialect may have reflected a previous language of composition, an earlier manuscript, a tradition of literary dialect, or the training of the scribe, rather than a precise location. Regardless, the northern dialect and geography of the manuscript present a distinct difference from its southern characters and setting.

and Picard dialect of *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s manuscript.⁴⁴ Moreover, the proximity of this region to Catalonia geographically, politically, and linguistically, would have meant that Nicolette, while hailing from Cartagena in al-Andalus further south, would have potentially been viewed by a northern French audience as less *other* with respect to Aucassin than might be assumed if we were to assign him a "French" identity. Seen in this light, the close physical resemblance of the two protagonists, common to other examples of so-called *romans idylliques*, could be a reflection of this proximity, as could their seemingly flipped names (Nicolette sounding more French, Aucassin more Arabic).⁴⁵ María Rosa Menocal (1989) reminds us, after all, that "the Christian-Latin and the Spanish-Arabic worlds [were], more often than not, not at all those separate worlds we tend to imagine and project but rather, as *Aucassin et Nicolette* depicts it, often difficult-to-separate components of the same universe" (509). This would have been particularly true for Occitania in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In what follows I will examine several aspects of the narrative's geography that can illuminate our reading of the text by situating it within its particular backdrop. The first of these will be Beaucaire's market economy and a narrative focus on discourse, negotiation, and non-violent encounter. The second will focus on troubadour lyric and the gendered dynamics of

⁴⁴ Similarly, Keith Busby (2002) has shown that the manuscripts of Old French secular narratives were of decidedly northern production, particularly crossing the English channel and into Flemish/Dutch territory, with major centers all in the north of what is now France (and Belgium): "Manuscripts of secular narrative in French were produced in most of northern France and the southern Lowlands; outside of Paris, the main centres of production seem to have been Amiens, Arras, Saint-Omer, Cambrai, Tournai, Lille, Metz, and Reims. In England, French romances and epics were copied into the fourteenth century" (53). While Busby also notes that "The prestige of French literature at the courts of Naples, Milan, Genoa, and Venice led to considerable production in Italy," (53), the southern, Occitan part of France is notably absent from the centers of this considerable literary production of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, though it otherwise spanned a number of linguistic and cultural territories.

⁴⁵ Menocal (1989, 497).

courtly love as a model for the gendered roles of both protagonists, and Aucassin in particular. Finally, I will consider representations of Occitan women in the cultural imagination, as well as their particular political and social situation in the south, in order to place Nicolette's narrative activity within a cultural context that comprised a local and complex matrix of female roles.

Beucaire and the medieval market economy

For a thirteenth century reader of Old French, Beaucaire was neither an abstract nor a culturally and politically neutral territory. Rather, Beaucaire, which is situated along the Rhône river, near where it empties into the sea, was the site of an important multicultural *foire* that drew merchants and buyers from across the Mediterranean. Beaucaire was thus not only “on the map” as a medieval commercial center, but it also provided a backdrop for an array of exchanges between people of differing social classes, religious backgrounds, languages, and places of origin. It is unknown when Beaucaire began hosting this *foire* (a kind of combination market and fair), but it is attested at least as early as 1168:

L'on ignore à quelle époque et sous quel prince s'ouvrit à Beaucaire, une foire qui devait acquérir une célébrité européenne, on sait seulement qu'elle existait au XIIe siècle, mais dans un mois différent de celui que l'on connaît. Ménard, d'après les manuscrits d'Aubaïs, cite une donation que fit un seigneur du pays, en mai 1168, à l'abbaye de Franquevaux. L'acte où étaient présents Bermond d'Uzès avec ses deux fils, Elzéar et Raymond, fut passé à Beaucaire durant la foire.⁴⁶

[We do not know during what period nor under what prince the *foire* in Beaucaire began, which would become renowned in Europe; we only know that it existed in the twelfth century, but that it took place during a different month than the one we know. Ménard, on the basis of the manuscripts of Aubaïs, cites a donation made by the region's lord, in May 1168, to the abbey of Franquevaux. The deed, for which Bermond d'Uzès was present,

⁴⁶ Alexandre Eyssette (1884, 281). A note to my readers: It would be useful to conduct additional research on the *foire de Beaucaire* in future iterations of this or related projects. Most information available is either from quite old sources, of a more general nature, or in reference to the Albigensian Crusade in particular. The Beaucaire archives would be a good place to start.

along with his two sons, Elzéar and Raymond, was written up in Beaucaire during the *foire*.]

Beaucaire's *foire* was renowned, part of a series of markets that arose in southern France during the twelfth century, before the Straits of Gibraltar began to be used for shipping.⁴⁷ Beaucaire's status as a market town would have meant that it served as a site for the regular mixing of people of different social class and origin, and indeed, one aspect of *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s setting that has stood out vividly to modern readers is the degree to which it features a variety of non-noble characters, such as shepherds, the rustic herdsman, and merchants. Along these same lines, scholars such as Virginia Green (1995) and Kevin Brownlee (1986) have, in different ways, analyzed the ways in which *Aucassin et Nicolette* thematizes a market economy. Indeed, to the extent to which modern scholarship has taken into account *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s setting, it has generally been with this socially diverse, market-oriented image in mind. Virginia Green, for example, has effectively situated the narrative's interest in non-nobles and exchange within the growing and heterogeneous markets of the *north* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As she writes:

Aucassin et Nicolette reflects the rising importance of commerce in its period and place of origin. The end of the 12th century was a time of growth and expansion of the fairs of Champagne, under the patronage and authority of Henri le liberal, where merchants from Flanders, France, Italy, etc. came together to sell and exchange their merchandise – merchandise which came from all over Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and even China. Picardie was situated on the commercial axis between Champagne and Flanders. The cloth of Flanders was known renowned for its variety and quality, and found its way to Italy via the fairs of Champagne. From the other direction came luxury goods and spices, for example. (197)

⁴⁷ “The great fair at Beaucaire emerged after 1150, and since the town was under the control of the counts of Toulouse, whose castle still dominates the fair-ground, it provided a source of wealth for the family” (Costen 1997, 36-37).

Green is right to point out that the expansion of markets in Champagne should serve as a contextual backdrop to *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s interest in exchange. At the same time, when Green discusses the work's "place of origin" she is referring specifically to the region in which it was composed. However, we need not look only to Picardy for an example of a flourishing market economy. Both the place of origin of its manuscript and the place of origin (or current residence) of its protagonists shared a market culture that belied any overly simplified notions of Christian v. Muslim or East v. West. As Michael Costen (1997) writes about the market in Beaucaire and surrounding areas, "By the end of the [twelfth] century merchants from the towns on the Mediterranean were to be found trading as far as North Africa, Romania, Egypt, and the Holy Land" (37). In this sense, not only does this context inform the way in which the narrative depicts non-nobles and monetary exchange, but also the very notion of border crossing and cross-cultural relationships. Seen in this light, Nicolette as Saracen does not appear nearly as "foreign" or "strange" as is suggested by stereotypes of the Belle Sarrasine or the exotic Saracen princess.

Beaucaire's Mediterranean market economy can inform a reading of several aspects of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. The first of these, as mentioned, is its interest in, and mixing of, non-noble and noble characters, unusual in courtly literature. It could also help to explain the generational tolerance exhibited by Aucassin and, apparently, his court, toward difference in geographic and religious origin. Aucassin's parents are in fact alone in their opposition to Aucassin's love for Nicolette; even Nicolette's own adoptive father seems to object primarily out of obligation to his lord, and he ultimately fails to obey the command to send her away.

Perhaps more to the point, though, is the narrative's interest in staging forms of encounter that seem to call for no real conflict or perhaps even resolution, or that find resolution in forms of

discourse and monetary exchange rather than violence. Kevin Brownlee (1986) has analyzed precisely this aspect of the work, showing how *Aucassin et Nicolette* works to reframe *prouesse* as a form of discursive skill. He notes, for example, that “The first reunion of the lovers involves a two-tiered effort on the part of Nicolette. In each case what is foregrounded is her extraordinary efficacy in manipulating discourse in ways which are simultaneously communicative and aesthetic” (171). And later: “On the level of the plot, Nicolette’s *prouesse* has already enabled her to effect her second escape and her second reunion with Aucassin, just as she had done the first time around. And this characteristic is now explicitly associated not with chivalric excellence but with the ability artfully to manipulate signifying codes” (180). He ultimately goes on to argue that this *prouesse* is overlaid onto the writer’s own skill, thus valorizing “[the author’s] own signifying activity as the source of *his* power” (182). Nicolette’s discursive prowess thus recalls my discussion in Chapter One of the *Roman de Silence*, in which that narrative’s heroine likewise negotiates risky encounters through forms of discourse, and in which performance is shown to be its own form of adventure and prowess. In this sense, we might begin to identify discursive prowess as a feature not only of *Aucassin et Nicolette*’s portrayal of female protagonism, but perhaps as a feature of female protagonism and adventure in romance narrative more broadly. Brooke Heidenreich-Findley has shown, for example, that

not only female figures in the literal sense, but an entire array of feminized men, masculinized women, and cross-dressing or queer characters, take part in the medieval French literary conversation that hammers out ideas about writing and, eventually, authorship, over a period of about two hundred years. These figures are not at the margins of that conversation, but at its center; indeed, they, and the questions of gender, embodiment, and writing they raise, are what that conversation is all about. (4)

Gender, and female literary portrayals, are thus seen as important sites for medieval conversations about writing and, ultimately, language and performance as well. Women relay messages, send and receive messages, falsify messages, and are told to be quiet; they compose

and sing, deliver monologues, disguise themselves as jongleurs, and they demonstrate forms of prowess – as the central adventuring figure – that involve discourse and performance. Nicolette can be seen as participating in this literary tradition.

In a parallel manner, as both Brownlee and Green have pointed out, verbal and especially monetary exchange are employed as a means of negotiating interactions between Nicolette and Aucassin and the non-nobles they meet along their travels. Brownlee cites the example of the exchange of money with the shepherds, in which Nicolette speaks metaphorically of a beast in the forest of such value that “s’il l’i puet prendre, il n’en donroit mie un membre por cent mars d’or, non por cinc cens, ne por nul avoir” [if he can catch it he would not part with a single one of its limbs for one hundred gold marks, nor for five hundred, nor for any amount of wealth].⁴⁸ While Nicolette is metaphorically referring to herself, Brownlee notes that the shepherds “interpret it literally” and that “They know all the various beasts in the forest, and the maximum value for a single *membre* of even the most prestigious of these is [...] ‘two deniers or at most three’” (172). However, by paying the shepherds to deliver this message, Nicolette engages in a kind of transaction capable of bridging the gap in their levels of speech and interpretation: “simple transmission is an act whose value can be quantified in precisely the register the shepherds understand” (172). In this sense, Nicolette masters both metaphorical speech and straightforward exchange, effected through the signifying value of money. Green likewise shows the degree to which *Aucassin et Nicolette* functions as a series of exchanges and contracts, noting that the only character to not “get what they want” at the end is Aucassin’s father, who also happens to be the only character to have broken a verbal contract or pact when he denied Aucassin the access to Nicolette that he had previously promised (204).

⁴⁸ Brownlee's translation, p. 171.

Green goes on to argue that Nicolette functions in the story as a form of merchandise – a good that is exchanged between characters (199-203). While there is no denying the exchange value of women in the context of medieval marriage, and Green presents a convincing account of the way in which Nicolette's *monetary* value increases throughout the romance, I would argue that Nicolette functions in this context as both merchandise *and* merchant. She describes *herself* to the shepherds as a valuable beast, she brokers her own liberty both from Beaucaire and Cartagena, and she returns to offer herself to Aucassin. This dual role as merchandise/merchant in fact succinctly encapsulates the contrast between Nicolette's active mobility and her self-portrayal (and the narrative's portrayal) of her highly feminized beauty. Mapped back onto the model of the romance hero, Nicolette is thus both the goal of the adventure (a successful marriage) and the one who adventures in pursuit of this goal. Just as the knight must increase his renown in order to increase both his status and his wealth through marriage, Nicolette too begins at a disadvantage in terms of the desirability of her union with Aucassin: her status is simply not high enough. Though Aucassin shows no concern for this difference in status, nor for the fact that his marriage to Nicolette would be far from advantageous from a socio-political or wealth perspective, nor from the perspective of his family's strong disapproval, the problem that this difference in status and origin presents is nonetheless partially solved within the narrative as Nicolette accrues value through her own adventures: she is revealed to be royalty, after all. This new, noble identity stands in direct contrast to Aucassin's father's dismissive description of Nicolette as having been, in fact, thrown out of Cartagena and purchased from a Saracen⁴⁹ – not

⁴⁹ “jetee fu de Cartage, / acatee fu d'un Saisne; / puis qu'a moullié te vix traire, / pren femme de haut parage” [She was thrown out of Cartagena / and purchased from a Saracen; / if you want to get married, / take a high-born wife] (III). My translation. It is worth pointing out that the word “Saisne” literally translates to “Saxon.” Walter, whose (modern French) translation “Saracen” I have kept here, explains his choice: “le texte original dit *Saisne*, ce qui devrait se traduire par

only, in his view, was she of non-Christian origin, but also apparently of little status even in her homeland. This viewpoint is shown to be erroneous as Nicolette instead discovers that she too comes from a noble family, but it is unclear whether or not this knowledge would have swayed Aucassin's father. Instead, it appears that it is the death of Aucassin's father, rather than the revelation of Nicolette's origins, that ultimately enables their marriage. In this sense, while Nicolette embodies the adventuring protagonist who discovers key aspects of his/her identity along the way, this identity does not translate, in the same way as it does for the wandering knight, to a clear elevation in status in the context of her (now chosen) home court at Beaucaire. Aucassin, it seems, would have married her either way.

Encounter and conflict

The repositioning of adventure around discursive and mercantile prowess in *Aucassin et Nicolette* has the effect of enacting a kind of neutralization of the forms of conflict that might otherwise result from the meeting of Christians and Muslims in, for example, Old French epic. Even the romance *Floire et Blanchefleur*, which *Aucassin et Nicolette* clearly resembles and that likewise features a story of Christian-Muslim love, stages a violent scene of encounter and conflict between Christians and Muslims, as Blanchefleur's father is killed before her eyes while the two are on a pilgrimage. *Floire et Blanchefleur* also features a mass conversion to Christianity as a narrative resolution and final triumph. However, conversion is never a possible

Saxon. En réalité le terme ne désigne pas l'habitant de la Saxe, région allemande, mais toutes sortes de peuples païens ou mécréants. Il est synonyme de Sarrasin" [the original text says *Saisne*, which should be translated as Saxon. In reality, the term does not designate an inhabitant of Saxony, a German region, but all sorts of pagans or infidels. It is a synonym for Saracen] (189).

solution to Nicolette's dilemma because she is already a convert. *Aucassin et Nicolette* thus seems largely disinterested in the possibility of either conquest or of mass conversion.

In fact, violent encounter plays little role in the adventures sequences of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and it surfaces at moments that reveal themselves to be absurd and highly incongruous with the expectations of the other characters. The first of these is Aucassin's capture of his father's enemy, which comes only after a long refusal to engage in any kind of battle, much to his father's consternation. Rather than fight for the preservation of what will one day be his own estate and inheritance, Aucassin spends his days pining for Nicolette and refusing to comply with his parents' wishes if they won't comply with his own, which is to be with Nicolette. Aucassin's father views his son's behavior as a refusal to uphold his knightly duties: "qu'il ne veult estre cevaliers, ne faire point de quanque faire doie!" [He doesn't want to become a knight / nor do his duty!] (IV). Here, amorous desire stands in conflict with knightly duty. Likewise, when Aucassin's father promises him, deceitfully, a kiss and time spent with Nicolette in exchange for his participation in the war, Aucassin arrives on the battlefield without much interest in the action. Following an exalting (and in context, seemingly ironic) description of the handsome, strong, elegant, and knightly impression that Aucassin makes once suited up for battle, the text tells then us:

Or ne quidiés vous qu'il pensast n'a bués n'a vaces n'a civres prendre, ne qu'il ferist cevalier ne autres lui. Nenil nient! onques ne l'en sovint; ains pensa tant a Nicolette sa douce amie qu'il oublia ses resnes et quanques il dut faire; et li cevax qui ot senti les esperons l'en porta par mi le presse, se se lance tres entre mi ses anemis; et il getent les mains de toutes pars, si le prenent, si le dessaisient de l'escu et de le lance, si l'en manent tot estrousement pris, et aloient ja porparlant de quel mort il feroient morir. (X)

[But don't believe that he was thinking of capturing steer, or cows, or goats, nor of striking enemies or receiving their blows. Not at all! He didn't even remember that. He was thinking so much of Nicolette, his sweet *amie* that he forgot his reins and all that he needed to do. The horse who had felt the spurs carried him into the skirmish and threw himself right into the middle of the enemy. They immediately threw their hands

everywhere around him and captured him, taking his shield and his lance and taking him prisoner while mistreating him, already discussing the manner in which they would kill him.]

It is the horse who is the greater warrior here, and Aucassin's lack of focus leads to his easy capture at the hands of his enemies. However, when Aucassin reflects upon the fact that, once his head is cut off, he will no longer be able to speak with Nicolette, he mounts a sudden defense described in terms that make it appear unhinged and indiscriminate:

il mist le main a l'espee, si comence a ferir a destre et a senestre et caupe hiaumes et naseus et puins et bras et fait un caple entor lui, autresi con li senglers quant li cien l'asalent en le forest (X)

[he grabs his sword in his hand, and begins to strike right and left; he smashes helmets and nasals, he cuts off hands and arms and creates a massacre around himself, just like a boar attacked by dogs in the forest]

The language used to describe Aucassin's combat recalls that of epic, a genre whose aims and values are at odds with the amorous concerns of a sighing young nobleman who wants nothing more than to see his "douce amie," particularly given that this *douce amie* is a converted Saracen. His battlefield feats are accomplished not by any great inner virtue, nor by a commitment to religious, political, or tribal ideals, but rather by a lovesick desire for Nicolette. He is in fact compared to a wild boar. His motivation mirrors that of the romance hero moved by amorous desire, but it also relies on a juxtaposition between the mopey sentiments of that love and the violence of a massacre, with hands and arms cut off "right and left." Aucassin's prowess is thus meant to recall other generic forms of knightliness, while wryly underscoring its distance from them. Appropriately, the result of Aucassin's prowess is that he captures his father's enemy, Bougars, but then quickly releases him upon discovering that his father will not keep his promise. In further retaliation, Aucassin makes Bougars promise to continue attacking and

damaging his father's estate, thus dramatically undoing his own battlefield accomplishments and working against his own economic and political interests.

In a similar manner, Aucassin engages in a series of violent acts in the land of Torelore that are explicitly incongruent with their circumstances. Upon finding the king of Torelore lying in bed, preparing to give birth, Aucassin attacks him viciously, upending the conventional courtly behavior expected of a young nobleman towards his royal host. Likewise, upon finding the queen engaging in what is essentially a food fight on the battlefield, he rides out and violently assails the enemy in what in other circumstances (or, in other narratives) would be knightly fashion, but that in Torelore is highly inappropriate and uncustomary. In response, the king is concise: "Sire, dist li rois, trop en avés vos fait: il n'est mie costume que nos entrocions li uns l'autre" [Sire, said the king, you have done too much. We do not have the custom of killing one another] (XXXII). Aucassin's violence is clearly out of place, highlighting not only his ongoing inability to perform correctly at the correct moment, but also potentially the grotesque nature of violence more generally, particularly its mystification in literary combat. As Tattersall (1985) puts it:

It is hard to agree with Jodogne and others that Aucassin, whilst inadequate in his own milieu, is favourably transformed in the crazy world of Torelore. He is, at the very least, an incongruous figure acting with totally misapplied vigour. It might still be argued that what is mocked is a purely literary stereotype: that of the epic or romance hero, medieval equivalent of the trigger-happy cowboy, who puts military bravura above all else. Yet was the literary image necessarily so far removed from popular ideal and actual practice in this respect? (563)

Instead, then, of armed conflict and insurmountable difference based on religion, social status, and place of origin, *Aucassin et Nicolette* offers an image of a topsy-turvy world (from the perspective of both romance and epic) where the violence of knightly prowess is unproductive, and encounters with those of differing status are both frequent and peaceably negotiated. Indeed,

the long-standing conflict between Aucassin's father and Bougars de Valence disappears from the narrative once Aucassin returns to Beaucaire and his father dies, suggesting that the armed conflict that so occupied his father and lasted for so long was ultimately insignificant, a narrative device unessential to the plot's resolution. The heavy toll of that conflict, in men and years, seems absurd, or perhaps chilling, in light of its sudden vanishing.⁵⁰

For *Aucassin et Nicolette*, discourse and monetary exchange instead function as the primary means of successfully negotiating encounter. The forms of adventure that thus occur in *Aucassin et Nicolette* thus take place against what I would call a market backdrop: they involve a mixing of social classes, religions, and geographies, and they enact boundary crossings that are either devoid of conflict, or that resolve this conflict through non-violent means through which both parties often benefit. Following Aucassin's violent displays in Torelore, for example, it is Nicolette's verbal defense of Aucassin that prevents him from being exiled and Nicolette from being married to someone from that land. An earlier example of this same phenomenon can be seen when Nicolette and Aucassin are surprised by a night guard. Taking pity upon them, the guard warns them through song, thus enabling Nicolette's escape. If we read this within the context of Beaucaire's traditional multiculturalism and its identity as a site of trade, *Aucassin et Nicolette* can be seen as staging a story that is highly reflective of the kinds of exchanges that would have been associated with its specific location and with a twelfth and thirteenth century proliferation of markets more generally.

⁵⁰ The episodes of war have been compared by Robert Griffin (1965) to the Albigensian Crusade (lasting equally as long and comprising the same number of men who besieged Beaucaire). If indeed the war fought by Aucassin's father is meant to reference the siege of Beaucaire or the crusade generally, then this reading is somewhat chilling – erasing the violence and impact of the crusade – although also potentially pointing to the senselessness of the crusade.

These discursive and monetary exchanges in turn reflect an alternate means of accruing wealth, value, and renown, and one that is in some ways at odds with the warring value system portrayed by Aucassin's father and inherent in genres such as epic and romance, or, more seriously, that was shockingly turned against Occitania in the Albigensian Crusade. Such forms of exchange are far from the knightly model, as evidenced by the fact that they often involve the wholesale mockery of the noble characters and are most successfully negotiated between characters of differing social class or status. From this point of view, is notable that *Aucassin et Nicolette* is a story in which enemies are created by proximity, not distance. The most dominant conflict, after all, is between Aucassin and his father, two characters who are closely related and whose battle is one of will rather than arms. On the other end of the spectrum, potential enemies are instead turned into allies; in addition to Aucassin's release and alliance with his father's enemy, and the fact that this enemy, Bougars de Valence hails from a southern city only about 150km away from Beaucaire, we might also note that Nicolette's capture by Saracens is turned into a homecoming, her captors into her compatriots. This reversal parallels the manner in which Nicolette's "adoptive" family actually purchased her as a captive and baptized her into their own religion. In both cases, Nicolette's captors are also her parents.

However, the unproductivity (and absurdity) of violence in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, as well as its focus on negotiating encounter and exchange, are not held up as clear, unproblematic ideals. It would be tempting to say that *Aucassin et Nicolette* reflects the potential that the market economy offers for non-violent encounter and discursive negotiation, particularly across boundaries of religion and social class, or that it represents non-violent ideals of trans-cultural communication and encounter. And indeed, there is substantial evidence for such a reading. However, such encounters also take shape within a narrative context that calls into question the

gendered roles and circumstances that produce them. From the start, the reader is made aware that despite Aucassin's exemplarity, he is failing to live up to his knightly duties, one of the hallmarks of masculine identity for the knight-protagonist. Aucassin is thus problematic in gendered terms not because he lacks the outward markers of knightly masculinity, but because his behavior falls short of what is expected of a noble of his gender. Rather than defend his father's castle, he pines for Nicolette. Rather than show obedience to his father, he argues with him, goes against his wishes, and frees his enemy. Rather than engineer a solution to his and Nicolette's dilemma, he mopes until Nicolette frees herself from her own tower. While Aucassin's gender trouble never puts his male identity into serious doubt, it nonetheless highlights the ways in which Aucassin fails to live up to the expectations of a masculine protagonist in the knightly, courtly model. By itself, Aucassin's lack of prowess, or its ineffectiveness, does not appear as stark, however, as it does when read alongside Nicolette's simultaneous agency, mobility, and competency. Masculine and feminine are, in effect, mirrored constructs within romance, each defined in contradistinction to the other, as Simon Gaunt has observed.⁵¹ And indeed, Nicolette throws Aucassin's gendered expression into relief with her own contrasting prowess.

Gender trouble

An example of how this contrast between Aucassin and Nicolette functions in the text can be seen in episodes 12 and 13, in which Nicolette escapes from her imprisonment in a tower and finds Aucassin imprisoned in a tower of his own. In episode 12, Nicolette's escape – achieved

⁵¹ “The consequences of romance's privileging of sexuality are enormous: femininity is given enhanced value within romance discourse and gender is constructed dialogically rather than monologically” (Gaunt 1995, 85).

through the time-worn tradition of knotting sheets together to make a rope – is immediately followed by conventional descriptions of female beauty, although these descriptions at times appear exaggerated or are made through unusually specific comparisons, such as when Nicolette’s breasts are described as “two big walnuts” (*deux nois gauges*) or her skin is described as being so white that it makes daisies look black as she crushes them with her toes: “et les flors des margerites qu’ele ronpoit as ortex de ses piés, qui li gissoient sor le menuisse du pié par deseure, estoient droites noires avers ses piés et ses ganbes, tant par estoit blanche la mescinete” [and the daisy flowers that she smashed with her toes and that fell back on her feet appeared truly black in comparison with her feet and her legs, so white was the young lady's skin].

Already something seems slightly *off* about this otherwise conventional description, with its depiction of Nicolette’s blonde and delicately curly hair, her red lips, little white teeth, and slim waist,⁵² all mainstays of female beauty in Old French literature. Following this descriptive, highly feminized interlude, Nicolette jumps right back into action through a series of very plainly narrated movements:

Ele vint au postic, si le deffrema, si s'en isci par mi les rues de Biaucaire par devers l'onbre, car la lune luisoit molt clere, et erra tant qu'ele vint a le tor u ses amis estoit. Li tors estoit faelee de luis en luis; et ele se quatist delés l'un des piliers, si s'estraint en son mantel, si mist sen cief par mi une creveure de la tor qui vielle estoit et ancienne, si oï Aucassin qui la dedens plouroit et fasoit mot grant dol et regretoit se douce amie que tant amoit. (XII)

[She came to the garden’s postern, opened it and went out into the streets of Beaucaire, walking on the shadowy side because the moon was shining very brightly. Nicolette walked until she arrived at the tower where her *ami* was. The tower was cracked in

⁵² “Ele avoit les caviaus blons et menus recercelés, et le ex vairs et rians, et le face traitice, et le nés haut et bien assis, et lé levretes vremelletes plus que n'est cerisse ne rose el tans d'esté, et les dens blans et menus [...] et estoit graille par mi les flans qu'en vos dex mains le peusciés enclore” [She had blonde hair with fine curls, and sparkling and laughing eyes, and a pleasant face, a high and well-placed nose, and lips more ruby-red than cherries or than a summer rose, and small white teeth, [...] and she was slender between her flanks, so that you could enclose her [waist] with your two hands] (XII).

several places. Nicolette huddled against one of the pillars of the wall, enveloped herself in her mantle and stuck her head through a hole in the very old and ancient wall, and heard Aucassin who was crying inside and lamenting and missing his sweet *amie* whom he loved so much]

This very atmospheric sequence of events foregrounds Nicolette's initiative, and contrasts this initiative with Aucassin's inability to escape from *his* tower, which is moreover very old and already starting to fall apart. The optics of Nicolette standing outside the tower while Aucassin is imprisoned within immediately strikes a dissonant chord. It evokes a reversal of such images as those in Marie de France's Guigemar and Yonec, where the knight comes to the lady imprisoned in a tower, a commonplace that was especially dominant in stories of jealous and insecure husbands, but also in stories such as *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, where Lancelot penetrates Guinevere's tower after she has been captured by Meleagant. This optic only becomes more pronounced in the following lyric section, in which Nicolette listens to Aucassin's lament and says to him:

Aucassins, gentix et ber,
frans damoisiaux honorés,
que vos vaut li dementer,
li plaindres ne li plurers,
quant ja de moi ne gorés?
car vostre peres me het
et trestos vos parentés.
Por vous passerai le mer,
S'irai en autre regné. (XIII)

[Aucassin, noble lord / young man rich in nobility and honor, / what good is it to lament,
/ complain and cry / when you no longer have me by your side? / For your father hates
me / as do all of your relatives. / Because of you, I will cross the sea / and I will go to a
foreign land]

Once again, Nicolette's initiative and mobility – she will cross the sea and go into a foreign land while Aucassin cries in his tower – are contrasted with Aucassin's emplacement and impotence. This circumstance makes Aucassin appear ridiculous, but it makes Nicolette, who is not

embodying her conventional gender role either, appear rational, pragmatic, and sympathetic. And yet the narrative is not content to leave us with this simple image. Instead, Nicolette immediately throws Aucassin a lock of her hair, which Aucassin venerates:

De ses caviax a caupés,
la dedens les a rüés.
Aucassins les prist, li ber,
si les a molt honerés
et baisiés et acolés;
en sen sain les a boutés;
si recomence a plorer,
tout por s'amie (XIII)

[She cut some of her hair / and threw it into the tower. / The brave Aucassin took it, / venerated it and embraced it, / and embraced it again. / He pressed it against his chest / and begins to cry again / all for his *amie*]

While this passage seems at first to continue to mock Aucassin's position, as he cries and embraces a few strands of Nicolette's hair, it may also remind us that other so-called model knights have done the same thing. In fact, the passage distinctly recalls Lancelot's fainting at the sight of Guinevere's hair. This comparison will then remind us that Lancelot, too, was imprisoned in a tower, where he too spent a great deal of time lamenting before ultimately being freed by a female character:

The windowless tower in which he is imprisoned by Meleagant deprives him of any contact with the outside world. Even after Guinevere has been allowed to return to King Arthur's court, Lancelot remains an entire year in captivity, subsisting on bread and water hoisted through a small hole in the wall, before any serious attempt is made by King Arthur, Gauvain, or Queen Guinevere to find him (Reichert 2006, 131).

These "gender reversals" can thus be shown to have precedent in Chrétien de Troyes's most famous knight, frequently referenced in scholarship that seeks to build models of the male individual and male subjectivity on the basis of the adventuring knight protagonist. In Lancelot's case, however, the imprisoned knight, or the knight fainting over the sight of hair, was the mobile, adventuring, and active protagonist. For *Aucassin et Nicolette*, however, the situation

appears exaggerated and parodic due not only to the emphasis on Aucassin's perpetual weeping, but also because the female gaze that looks upon him in judgment is that of the more active female protagonist. This judgment is not even implicit – Nicolette admonishes him for his crying, because she is the one who will ultimately have to risk the dangers of overseas travel into a foreign land, hated by all of Aucassin's family. Lancelot is also subject to a female gaze while imprisoned in the tower and is ultimately freed by a woman (the daughter of Bademagu). However, he is not overtly criticized by this female character – quite the contrary, although his situation in the tower is still treated with a degree of irony – nor set in unflattering contrast to her comparative prowess and pragmatism. In this sense, by the time Aucassin and Nicolette arrive in Torelore, the narrative's readers or audience have already come to suspect that a certain gender trouble underlies the portrayals and activities (or non-activities) of its protagonists, but that this gender trouble is in reference to certain models already in circulation.

These models of masculinity are centered on the male knight, but by expanding our literary references to include Occitan literature in addition to that of northern France, we find that Aucassin and Nicolette's male-female dynamic, and in particular the elevation of Nicolette, may likewise be read in part as a response to the courtly love of Occitan troubadour lyric, which spread across France and the Mediterranean in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Troubadour literature brought to the romance vernaculars a new form of lyric as well as a new form of courtly love, or *fin'amor*, in which the lady is presented as (putatively) dominant over the man, who suffers for, and cannot have, her love. As Wendy Pfeffer (2001) explains,

The troubadours are credited with creating many of the commonplaces of the theme of love in medieval lyric. These poets sing of a lady they cannot have; they are willing to serve her and act at her command, using vocabulary that is feudal in origin and reminds the listeners of the homage a feudal vassal swears to his lord. Troubadour songs reflect the social nature of love; they often recount a love triangle involving a pair of lovers and a third party who interferes with the amorous couple's wishes. (36)

In this literary system, the male voice laments his circumstances and articulates his subservience to the woman or *domna*, who is portrayed as holding power over him according to the codes of a male-oriented system of vassalage. Which is not to say that the *domna* escapes prior gendered constraints. In fact, Howard Bloch argued in *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* that idolizing the superior woman enacted an inversion of the classical terms of misogyny, elevating women but also putting them in the bind of needing to remain distant, cold, and inaccessible in a manner that recalls an antifeminist obsession with the pure and virginal. Jill Tattersall (1985) articulates a complementary assessment from a different perspective, writing that placing women on a pedestal is “poor compensation for her dependent and inferior status in real life” (559). At the same time, Bloch (1991) argues that this misogynistic turn, or shift in the form of misogynistic discourse, was also the result of an increase in women’s freedoms and property rights leading up to the twelfth century. The connection between *fin’amor* and gender relations is thus complicated by external realities and their reflection, or distortion, through poetry. At the very least, it is evident that *fin’amor* and troubadour lyric were profoundly imbricated with the notion of gender relations, women’s representation, and power dynamics.

The model of courtly love established in Occitan troubadour lyric spread quickly throughout the Mediterranean and France, but its point of origin was always Occitan. The status of troubadour lyric in fact led to an increase in the status of Occitan or Provençal as a literary language, with poets employing it in other settings to align themselves with the troubadours and the Occitan literary tradition. Fredric Cheyette (1999) writes that “[w]ithin a generation after their songs began to circulate, the poets of Occitania were imitated by French-speaking poets and soon afterward by poets of German-speaking lands; eventually they became the inspiration for Dante and Petrarch. Their themes became the themes of the European lyric” (144). The

troubadour concept of *fin'amor* thus markedly influenced literary production outside of Occitania.⁵³ It presented a new model for courtly love that was quickly adapted into other vernaculars and contexts. According to Howard Bloch (1991), it was in fact the beginning of a notion of romantic love that still has currency today:

The terms that serve to define, or mediate, what we consider to this day to constitute romantic involvement were put into place definitively – at least for the time being – sometime between the beginning and the middle of the twelfth century, first in southern and then in northern France. [...] Romantic love as we know it did not come into being until what is sometimes called the renaissance of the twelfth century. (8-9)

The love story *Aucassin et Nicolette* is thus situated within a cultural landscape out of which arose the very conventions of both medieval and modern romantic love. The text's playful stance towards courtly love, as embodied by Aucassin's glum longing and Nicolette's pragmatic agency, is in fact not in contradiction with the conventions of troubadour lyric, which did not always take itself seriously either. Simon Gaunt (1989) reminds us, for example, that romantic love was not the only focus of the troubadour poets, nor did these poets always accept *fin'amor*'s conventions with a straight face:

The troubadours discussed moral, political, even religious issues in the poetry, often critically or satirically; there is also a sizeable corpus of comic poetry. In these texts they are likely to be as predisposed towards irony as the authors of romances. Furthermore, even in their love poetry the troubadours might have a predisposition towards irony, for the troubadour love lyric often draws on a predefined notion of *fin'amor*, which not all troubadours accept. Questioning the conventions of *fin'amor* within the framework of a courtly love poem is obviously an ideal recipe for irony, for the poet is simultaneously confirming and denying his adherence to tradition. (2)

Gaunt's description of troubadour irony resonates deeply with *Aucassin et Nicolette*'s approach to literary conventions and generic borrowings, "simultaneously confirming and denying" its "adherence to tradition." Reading *Aucassin et Nicolette* in light of troubadour conventions and

⁵³ "Northern poets borrowed much from the troubadours' conceptions of love. Rare is the poet who sings of a happy love situation; rather, a commonplace is that the lover is away, whether voluntarily (as on crusade) or not." (Doss-Quinby 2001, 37-38)

the development of *fin'amor* allows us to not have to choose between the competing gendered systems that are at work within the narrative. On the one hand, there is an evident interest in the tropes of romance fiction, which emphasize the mobility and prowess of the male, along with marriage as an eventual and desired outcome. On the other hand, also present in *Aucassin et Nicolette* are reversals and exaggerations in terms of the dominance of the woman and the emplaced, lamenting male. Though these are not the only two sets of generic conventions at work in the *chantefable*, the work's mocking of its lamenting male, contrasted sharply with a female protagonist who even joins in by scolding him, can be understood as employing tropes of *fin'amor*, or as expressions from within the very culture or geography that produced them. In this sense, the narrative's use of gender can be read as a comment on newly popular forms of literary love, arriving in the north from Occitania and reflected back on the Occitan setting. The ironic tone of the work may in turn be accounted for by a simultaneous affirmation and rejection of these conventions, through their exaggeration and comparison with other models, as well as a reference to the irony that Chrétien de Troyes, for example, displays towards knights such as Lancelot. That this same approach is taken towards all of the genres that constitute *Aucassin et Nicolette* suggests a pervasive sense of playfulness, but each of these intertexts is also placed within an overarching emphasis on *love*, its effects, and its expression – in other words, the very concepts being transformed in the north by poetry from the south.

At the end of the *chantefable*, Aucassin remains in the same sentimental, lamenting position in which he began: he is emplaced in Beaucaire, pining for Nicolette but making no effort to find her. This circularity and lack of fulfillment reflect the position of the lover in troubadour lyric. It is Nicolette, in the role of the romance-inflected, adventuring knight-protagonist, whose journey takes her through remarkable shifts in identity and ends the story in a

fundamentally changed position. This dynamic reflects the very nature of lyric stasis put into conversation with narrative development and activity. The work's alternation of lyric and prose is thus reflected in the contrasted positions of its protagonists, with Nicolette taking the lead as the active heroine and the subject of her own literary development and discovery of identity.

Women and Gender in Occitania

In *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, Joan Tasker Grimbert (2001) writes about Nicolette's status as poet when she returns to Beaucaire dressed as a minstrel and recounts her own story to Aucassin. She states that "Whether [Nicolette] presents herself as a male or female minstrel is unclear; it is also immaterial: the story suggests not only that women were capable of composing, but also – and more important – that for a woman to compose a song was perfectly natural and commonplace" (17). While the historical evidence may not show us precisely how commonplace it was for females to be poets, nonetheless Occitan society was known to have featured a selection of powerful female poets, or *trobairitz*. There are twenty such named women poets in the troubadour tradition, the most well-known being the Comtessa de Dia. Though this only represents a small fraction of the 400 known troubadours, it nonetheless represents "an exceptional and exceptionally large group of literary women within medieval tradition" (Bruckner 1995, xi). For Bruckner, the women troubadours were active participants in Occitan social and literary life: "The *trobairitz* give precious testimony of the ways aristocratic women in Southern France were able to participate fully in the game and life of poetry, not only as patrons and objects of song but as poets singing and reshaping the art of the troubadours" (xi).

While it is not necessary to locate Nicolette within this tradition in order to make sense of her minstrel disguise and performance (other instances of women disguised as *jongleurs* and

performing as poets can be found throughout Old French literature as well, as discussed in my previous chapter),⁵⁴ it is at the same time useful to consider the role of women within Occitan society, as a significant aspect of what Occitania represented to northern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The aristocratic female poet, as well as the literary power of the *domna*, did not come out of nowhere. In fact, these women existed within a society that afforded women power in various ways that run counter to what has conventionally been understood as the dynamic of the knight and lady of romance fiction.

Fredric Cheyette, in particular, has addressed the question of women in Occitania through analyzing a range of administrative and juridical documents. He finds that in Occitania in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, women could hold positions of power enabled by their right to inherit and the expectation that they would fulfill all of the duties commensurate with their position as head of estate. Though it was less common than for men, women could, for example, own castles and swear oaths:

As castellans, women would have exercised all the rights that went with such positions: rights of justice over market disputes, over petty crimes (or even over major ones), over mines or roadways in the ‘district’[...] They would have sworn the oaths of fidelity that castle-holding required – oaths to their lord, whether male or female, and oaths to their fellow castellans. As the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century documents still demonstrate, they would likewise have done the military service implied by those oaths and regularly demanded. (Cheyette 1999, 163)

While Cheyette is careful to point out that male heirs were given priority over women, and thus that female castellans were not the norm, at the same time he notes that when circumstance did favor women and they inherited landholdings or castles, they seem to have occupied this role as fully as men. For some women, this extended even to combat, and there is historical documentation of Occitan women leading their own small armies in defense of their own

⁵⁴ See also Brooke Heidenreich-Findley (2012).

holdings or those of their allies. A particularly striking example is that of Ermengard of Narbonne:

Heiresses were expected to fulfill the demands of their family's position, to honor inherited alliances, in short, to do everything a man would do in their place. Accordingly, we find Ermengard's army before the walls of Tortosa in 1148, she herself at the siege of Les Baux in 1162, at another moment (after a momentary shift in alliances) promising king Louis to lead her army in aid of the count of Toulouse. She was deeply involved in all the military and diplomatic quadrilles of the region for nearly half a century. (Cheyette 1999, 156)

The example of Ermengard as an Occitan woman is illuminating in the context of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. Not only can it inform the cultural context in which Nicolette shows a great degree of agency, competency, and mobility, but it also surprisingly adjusts our view of Torelore as wholly imaginary. Occitan women could and did, it seems, participate in battle, and the fact that Ermengard appears with her troops at Tortosa, which bears a resemblance to the toponym Torelore, is suggestive.⁵⁵ It should also be noted that Ermengard was not an obscure figure in the twelfth century. To the contrary, her rule was long and renowned, she was the subject of contemporaneous troubadour songs, and her reputation spread far beyond Occitania:

Ermengard succeeded her father in 1134 and effectively ruled as viscountess from 1143 until she was forced into exile by her impatient nephew in 1192 or 1193, dying in Perpignan in 1196 or 1197. She appears to figure in the songs of Bernart de Ventadorn, Peire d'Alvernhe, Azalais de Porcairagues, Giraut de Bornelh, and Peire Rogier. Her fame as "she who protects joy and youth," who gives "joy and merit," spread to the far reaches of the Latin world. Even a Norse skald of the Orkney Islands, north of Scotland, knew of the legendary beauty named "Ermingherda" who ruled the sea-town of "Nerbon." (Cheyette 1999, 150).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Robert Griffin (1965) has suggested a connection between the name Torelore and the city of Toulouse, noting in particular that Toulouse was inserted into rhymes that echo the lyric quality of the name Torelore: "But a suggested similarity between the ridiculous Torelore and Toulouse is not altogether fanciful. Toulouse was itself subject to much ridicule and transposition: witness the joyous 'Montfort / Es mort / Es mort / Es mort! / Viva Tolosa / Ciotat gloriosa / Et poderosa! / Tornan lo paratge et l'onor' of the Albigensians, and the caustic rebuttal from the *Chanson de la croisade*: 'Tolosani, dolosani' and 'Tolosa, dolosa'" (250).

⁵⁶ See also Cheyette's (2001) book on Ermengard, in which he notes for example that "in her own time – in the second half of the twelfth century, when Eleanor was marrying her kings and

While Ermengard was thus unique in the degree to which she inhabited her role, she was also not alone amongst Occitan women to hold a position of power, and that combined with her widespread reputation posits her as a potential figure through which to understand how northern regions would have viewed Occitan women and gender roles. Seen in this light, both the Torelore episode and Nicolette's agency and mobility appear consonant with, and reflective of, gendered models within their geographical context.

Occitan women's agency and power were also evident in the culture of the Cathars, who afforded women greater access to status within the church than was possible within the Catholic church (although still less than men), just one of many points of contention between their religious practice and the norms of Catholicism. Despite the Cathars' apparent rejection of the material body and the validity of marriage, which may have disfavored reproductive women, the Cathar religion nonetheless permitted women to engage with religious practice from a position of some authority: "Undoubtedly, women who became perfects had the authority to preach, teach, and perform the *consolamentum*. Female believers, on the other hand, lived much as their Catholic neighbors did; they married and bore children and were subject to the same property rights and inheritance practices as other women."⁵⁷ Cathar women in this sense enjoyed at least as many rights as did Catholic women, while the particularly devout had greater opportunities to ascend the religious ranks and to attain greater spiritual perfection.

Occitan society was thus the site of several highly visible examples of women ascending to positions of power, or partaking in activities, that were, for northern French society, more

seeing to the education of those who would be kings, when Marie was hearing the freshly minted stories of Erec and Cligès and Perceval – Ermengard was at least as well known [as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne]" (1).

⁵⁷ Susan Taylor Snyder (2006, 114)

masculine domains. This was true in the literary context of troubadour lyric, both in the presentation and participation of women, as well as in the context of women's status and duties in a society in which women could inherit and rule over castles and land, and in some instances participate in military campaigns. It was also true for the heretical religion that would, ultimately, be used as a justification for bringing an end to Occitan dominance while it was still at its height, through the violence and destruction of the Albigensian Crusade. At the same time, this crusade would solidify an Occitan cultural identity constructed in opposition to that of northern France.

Gender roles and women's agency were thus essential aspects of the geographic and cultural specificities of Occitania in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It would be overstating our evidence to claim that *Aucassin et Nicolette* is clearly a direct response to the gendered historical and literary developments of Occitania in the twelfth century, but it is safe to say that gender as a literary and social phenomenon was visibly "in the background" for a northern French audience listening to a love story between an Occitan nobleman and a Saracen convert. This context shows that we need not resort to simplistic stereotypes such as the Saracen Princess to explain away Nicolette's agency. Nor need we view Aucassin and Nicolette as representatives of a "French" noble and a Saracen "other." Instead, the ties between Occitania and Spain suggest that both of these characters were "others" to a northern French audience, bound by political and economic realities as much as they were separated by religious origin.

Read this way, *Aucassin et Nicolette* stages its gendered representations, as well as its literary conventions and forms, in a manner that is consonant with its Occitan setting. Yet, it brings this setting to bear on northern narrative forms, and in particular on the gender dynamic of these forms. The model of chivalric adventure is thus transformed through the narrative's

insertion of a Mediterranean dynamic – in gendered, market, and literary terms – into a narrative tradition of knightly prowess and, in its relationship to *chanson de geste*, of violent conflict based on religious difference. This transformation is enacted through the adventuring female protagonist, whose agency is heightened in contrast with the male protagonist's relative inactivity and haplessness (and vice versa). *Aucassin et Nicolette* thus offers an alternative to romance adventure by centering its narrative on a female, Saracen heroine within an Occitan setting. The cultural, literary, and historical associations of this setting have now faded into the story's background, but by bringing these associations forward, we can see how the text innovates upon romance adventure – and the generic models to which it refers – through the geography and agency of its heroine.

The Adventuring Couple in *Guillaume de Palerne*

In this chapter I analyze the thirteenth century romance *Guillaume de Palerne* through the lens of the adventuring male-female couple. Like narratives such as *Erec et Enide*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Tristan et Iseult*, female adventure in *Guillaume de Palerne* occurs on the model of the couple who sets out together away from home, court, or society. For these couples in particular, adventure is inscribed within a system that problematizes the workings of amorous passion in relation to subjectivity, society, and aristocratic marital norms. I will show how in *Guillaume de Palerne*, Guillaume and Mélior's adventure is set against a context in which the effects of amorous passion cast doubt on whether or not passionate love is compatible with consent, and likewise whether or not the space of the adventure – beyond courtly society – is truly separate from the social world and the social identity of the protagonists. Similarly, the issue of consent will arise within the work's treatment of marriage, reflecting the legal and sacramental frameworks upon which marital alliances relied, but that was in tension with aristocratic emphasis on political alliance and lineage. The uneasy relationship between passion and marital alliance also recalls standard tropes of romance, in which desire is either disruptive of the political order (such as with Lancelot and Guinevere or Tristan and Iseult), or in which it justifies or mystifies socially advantageous matches by turning them into love stories (such as with Lavine and Eneas). I argue that *Guillaume de Palerne* suggests that while desire is disruptive of the political order, it must also be reintegrated into it, however problematic this reintegration may be.

Within this context, the adventuring couple of *Guillaume de Palerne* – Guillaume and Mélior – rebels against social expectations and even their human identities, disguising

themselves as animals in the woods and embarking on an extended adventure sequence. The particular shape their adventure takes is one that questions the degree to which this form of escape and denial of one's social identity and position are possible. By analyzing this adventure sequence in the context of the narrative's evident interest in issues of consent, passion, and marriage, I show how *Guillaume de Palerne* reworks romance conventions surrounding the couple to foreground a problematic of desire and social identity. This consideration will in turn allow us to reflect on the use of female or coupled adventure to explore these issues from within the construct of chivalric fiction.

Guillaume de Palerne follows the interwoven storylines of three young nobles of three different royal lineages: the titular character Guillaume, who is the son of Embron and Félice, the king and queen of Palermo; his love interest Mélior, who is the daughter of Nathaniel, the emperor of Rome; and the prince-turned-werewolf Alphonse, who is the son of the Spanish king.¹ Each of these characters undergoes significant transformations of their persons and statuses over the course of the romance, with the werewolf Alphonse embodying the most extreme of these external/internal discordances. The story begins in Palermo, where Embron and Félice are enjoying their lives as sovereigns with their four-year-old son Guillaume, unaware that Embron's brother is plotting to kill both Guillaume and the king, the former through the treacherous help of Guillaume's wet nurses. However, this plan is thwarted when instead a wolf appears in the royal park on a beautiful day and takes young Guillaume, escaping with him despite the pursuit of the king and his men, who see the wolf cross a river and think both wolf

¹ This Spanish king is unnamed, and the particular kingdom or region of Spain is likewise not specified: the king is referred to simply as the "roi d'Espagne" and no other geographical indicators are given. It would be reasonable to posit that the kingdom in question is Castille, given the use of the name "Alphonse," but this lack of specificity is notable and stands in marked contrast to the narrative's geographic specificity when it comes to what is now Italy and Sicily.

and child have drowned. The narrator is quick to comfort the reader by letting them know that the wolf and child made it to safety, and that the wolf did not at all harm the child. In fact, it is no ordinary wolf, but rather the transformed son of the Spanish king. As we are told, the wolf-prince's mother died in childbirth, and the king's new wife, who also bore him a son, used magic to transform the firstborn into a wolf in order that her own son might inherit the throne. This werewolf had become aware of the plot to kill Guillaume and had saved him from death at his uncle's hands.

Placing Guillaume down in a safe spot in the forest, the wolf goes to find food, whereupon a cowherd's dog discovers Guillaume, leading the good peasant to him by following the dog's barks. The *vacher* brings the boy home to his wife, and since they have no children of their own, they are delighted and raise him as their own son. The werewolf returns and is happy that Guillaume has found such a good home. Guillaume thrives in his rustic life, shows generosity and loyalty to his friends and great skill in all of the arts of living in the woods. One day, however, the emperor Nathaniel of Rome is hunting in the woods, and being separated from his men, chases first the werewolf then a stag, and is led to Guillaume. He can see the boy's nobility, and speaking to the cowherd, learns that he was found in noble clothing; he then takes Guillaume back with him to court, much to the despair of his peasant mother.

The emperor entrusts Guillaume to his own daughter of the same age, Mélior, and Guillaume quickly learns the ways of the court, soon becoming the most respected and valorous of the young valets. Mélior, hearing of Guillaume's great renown, develops a romantic passion for him, for which she reproaches herself, knowing that she cannot marry someone of unknown parentage. Soon afterward, Guillaume has a dream in which he is embracing Mélior, and upon waking realizes that he loves her, likewise reproaching himself for the impossibility of this love,

which would also be a form of treachery against the emperor who has treated him so well. The two pine away while Mélior's closest confidante, Alexandrine, who recognizes Mélior's affliction as desire, works to find out how Guillaume feels and promises Mélior that she will cure her with a special herb. Guillaume has fallen into despair over his love. While he languishes one day in the royal park, Mélior and Alexandrine spy on him, and with Alexandrine's help, the two lovers are brought together and admit their love, exercising their (chaste) passion in secret.

Their first idylle is brought to an end when the emperor of Greece asks that Mélior marry his son, Laertenidon. The king accepts and the marriage preparations are made. Guillaume falls ill from his despair and is on his deathbed when Mélior comes to see him. The two plan to run away on the eve of the wedding, and Alexandrine has the idea to sew them into two bear skins so that they can escape without being followed. They do so, and the next day when Mélior is found to be missing, the kingdom is thrown into disarray and they are pursued. Remembering having seen two white bears, the guards figure out that it was Guillaume and Mélior, and so despite their disguises, the word is spread throughout the land to look for the two bears, and a reward is placed on their heads.

Meanwhile, Guillaume and Mélior are in the woods and hungry. Luckily, the werewolf has not abandoned Guillaume, and he brings them food and serves as their protector throughout the young lovers' long trek (walking on all fours during the day, the text tells us) from Rome to Palermo, during which they encounter numerous dangers, each time saved by the wolf. Following one such event, they remove their bear skins and change into the skins of male and female deer. Their discarded bear skins and the skinned deer are found, so it is known that they are now travelling as deer. After crossing the sea, and following the werewolf's lead, they eventually arrive in Palermo, where the queen is defending her lands against the king of Spain,

whose son wants to marry the queen's daughter, Florence, without her consent. The queen has a complex prophetic dream involving bears and deer and is told by an advisor that this dream means that she will soon receive help in her war and extend her power. She soon sees the two disguised lovers, who are resting in the royal park. After a couple of days, and with the help of her resident wise advisor, she realizes who they are, and in order to speak with them, she herself is sewn into a deer skin. She goes into the park and stands near them. A short conversation ensues, and she lets Guillaume and Mélior know that she knows who they are and asks for Guillaume's help in exchange for their safety. They all go back into the castle, and Guillaume prepares to fight for the queen, who he does not yet realize is his mother, although a series of revelations, events, and resemblances leave both of them to secretly entertain the idea (including the king's horse, who has been depressed since the death of the king, recognizing Guillaume and letting him ride him, which he will do for no one else). Guillaume proves to be a marvelous knight, and through extended descriptions of highly explicit and violent battle scenes, he emerges victorious in the war, taking the prince and king captive. Around this same time, the werewolf comes to pay a gestural tribute, and is ultimately protected by Guillaume (who has, incidentally, asks that his shield have an image of a wolf on it). The Spanish king, seeing the werewolf come and pay loving honor to him, remembers the rumors that his wife had changed his son, Alphonse, into a werewolf. Guillaume, who is already convinced that the wolf is not really a wolf, asks that the king's wife be brought right away. When she arrives, the werewolf springs at her, but she is protected, admits and apologizes profusely and publicly for her wrongdoing, and changes Alphonse back. Alphonse then recounts the story of Guillaume's origins, and mother and son are reunited.

A series of marriages wraps up the tale - Guillaume marries Mélior, Florence marries Alphonse, and Alphonse's brother marries Alexandrine, who has come to Palermo with emperor Nathaniel for Mélior's wedding. Even the Greek prince arrives, who turns out to be Guillaume's uncle in a plot detail that recalls both *Tristan and Iseult* and *Cligès*. He is shocked to hear the story and considers that he would fight for Mélior if he could, but ultimately decides against this course of action, since he doesn't have his army with him, and accepts the outcome. Guillaume's adoptive cowherd parents are also invited the wedding and given a castle and enough money and attendants to see to their every need in return for the love and care they showed Guillaume. Mélior's father later dies, and the two become leaders of both Palermo and Rome, with their family also allied, through Florence's marriage to Alphonse, with the Spanish throne once the Spanish king dies. Guillaume and Alphonse remain loyal friends.

The Old French *Guillaume de Palerne*, composed in a Francien dialect with Picard features,² is preserved in only one manuscript, MS. 6565 at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris.³ The text is intriguingly bound with only one other work, Jean Renart's *L'Escoufle*, which provides a rich intertext for *Guillaume de Palerne*,⁴ and is additionally unusual in its binary pairing: "Dans le cas du manuscrit 6565, la juxtaposition de deux romans, en l'absence de tout

² For an extensive treatment of the language of the scribe and of the author, see Alexandre Micha (1990, 10-23). Micha notes that "Les rimes à elles seules dénoncent un auteur non étranger au domaine picard et Nord-Est" [The rhymes alone betray an author who was no stranger to the Picard domain of the Northeast] and that "Si l'on peut avancer que l'auteur vit aux confins de la Picardie et de l'Ile-de-France, il convient de ne pas oublier que les graphies ne sont pas homogènes" [If we can assert that the author lived within the confines of Picardie and the Ile-de-France, we should not forget that the handwriting is not homogenous] (18).

³ In the introduction of her 2012 edition of *Guillaume de Palerne*, Christine Ferlampin-Acher provides a detailed outline of the text's manuscript tradition and issues of its classification (along with a substantive and excellent analysis of the text itself). See also the online BnF catalogue record: <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc91177h>

⁴ See Ferlampin-Acher's discussion of these two texts together (18-32).

autre texte, n'est pas habituelle, et semble répondre à une volonté de mise en recueil" [In the case of manuscript 6565, the juxtaposition of two romances, in the absence of any other text, is not typical, and seems to reflect a desire for a particular assemblage] (Christine Ferlampin-Acher 2012, 19). The manuscript was catalogued among the library holdings of the dukes of Burgundy as well as Charles Quint.⁵ Along with its illustrious ownership, *Guillaume de Palerne*'s existence in only one manuscript belies its posterity: an English version, in alliterative verse, was produced in 1360⁶; a English prose version was printed in 1520-1529 by the excellently named Wynkyn de Worde; an Irish prose version, *Sir William*, was produced in the sixteenth century; and a French prose version appeared in the first half of the sixteenth century, for which we retain four editions dating from 1552 to 1634 (Ferlampin-Acher 2012, 45; Alexandre Micha 1990, 9).⁷ Likewise, there is some evidence of *Guillaume de Palerne*'s influence on *Tristan de Nantueil*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and *Perceforest* (Ferlampin-Acher 2012, 46). Even Christopher Columbus's son Fernando possessed a copy (ibid, 48).

⁵ "Antérieurement, de la bibliothèque du duc de La Vallière, chez lequel l'a vu Barbazan: Cf. manuscrit de l'Arsenal n° 4629, p. 342. — Au XV^e siècle, ce manuscrit faisait partie de la bibliothèque des ducs de Bourgogne; il figure aux inventaires de 1467 et 1487: Cf. Barrois, Bibliothèque protypographique, nos 1362 et 2139, p. 199 et 302; il est ensuite décrit dans l'inventaire des livres de Charles-Quint, fait à Bruxelles au mois de mai 1536: Cf. Bulletin de la commission royale d'histoire de Belgique, t. XII, p. 199. — Malgré les doutes de M. Michelant qui supposait deux manuscrits identiques, c'est bien du présent manuscrit qu'il s'agit dans ces divers inventaires: la reliure a seulement été changée plusieurs fois." (BnF online catalogue record, <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc86503c>).

⁶ For a comparison of this translation with the Old French original, see Randy Schiff (2009).

⁷ For detailed descriptions and comparisons of these different versions, see, in addition to Randy Schiff (2009) cited above, Renée Ward (2015), G.H.V. Bunt (1984), John Manolis (1976), Charles Dunn (1960), H.F. Williams (1952), and Irene Pettit McKeehan (1926), to which Vernam Hull (1927) briefly responds in order to include mention of an Irish version, which McKeehan does not discuss. Alexandre Micha (1990) also lists, for the English version, the following sources: Max Kaluza (1881, 197-287), Friedrich Brie (1907, 318-325), and Edward E. Foster and Gail Gilmon (1973, 480-495).

The dating of the Old French original is uncertain, with a range of 1194-1280 having been variously proposed. Alexandre Micha (1990) opts for a range from the late twelfth century until the 1220s (23). Ferlampin-Acher (2012) argues for a much later date, perhaps even as late as 1280 (38). The earlier dating relies on the identification of a certain Countess Yolande, to whom the work is dedicated:

Il gart la contesse Yolant,
La boine dame, la loial
Et il destort son cors de mal.
Cest livre fist diter et faire
Et de latin en roumans traire (9656-9660)

[And may He protect Countess Yolande / The good and loyal lady / And may He preserve her from evil. She had this book written and made / And translated from Latin into French]⁸

Micha believed that this Yolande was the daughter of Baudouin IV, count of Hainaut (Micha 1990, 23), following the work of Anthime Fourrier (1973), who based his analysis largely on the mention of the count of Hainaut in *L'Escoufle*, the work with which *Guillaume de Palerne* was bound. However, Ferlampin-Acher questions this identification, relying on a more robust set of historical markers internal to *Guillaume de Palerne*, such as place names, current events, and the mention in the text of a pope Clément who held the papacy “entre les .II. Grigoires” [between the two Gregorys] (9356). Likewise, she points out that there are many possible candidates for a Countess Yolande: “Les Yolande sont très nombreuses entre 1180 et 1300!” [Yolandes are very numerous between 1180 and 1300!] (35).⁹ With the later dating, Ferlampin-Acher tentatively

⁸ All Old French citations are from Alexandre Micha’s edition (1990), cited by verse number. All English translations are from Leslie A. Sconduto (2004), unless otherwise noted. The verse numbers are the same in the Micha and Sconduto, so will only be provided once, for the original Old French. All translation of secondary sources are my own.

⁹ This later dating also conforms with a number of references in the text, which it could help explain: “Ces diverses pistes suggèrent de repousser la date de composition du texte vers 1280: les Alphonse d’Espagne font alors partie de l’actualité, Guillaume roi des Romains de l’histoire

associates Yolande with Yolande de Bourgogne, an identification that allows her to read the text in a unique political context with very particular resonance for the story:

Celle-ci est mariée en 1272 à Robert de Dampierre, qui a combattu en Italie contre Manfred Ier de Sicile, qui vaincu meurt à la bataille de Bénévent en 1266. On comprendrait l'intérêt pour l'Italie, la Sicile et Bénévent que manifeste le roman. Plus troublant: la rumeur et la *Chronique de Baudouin d'Avesnes* rapportent qu'en 1280 la comtesse meurt, son mari l'ayant fait étranger en l'accusant d'avoir voulu tuer son fils Charles, né d'un premier mariage avec Blanche d'Anjou [...] L'Accusation portée contre l'épouse de Robert rappelle la faute commise par la marâtre d'Alphonse. (39)

[She was married in 1272 to Robert de Dampierre, who fought in Italy against Manfred I of Sicily, who died defeated at the battle of Benevento in 1266. This would allow us to understand the interest that the work shows in Italy, Sicily, and Benevento. Even more troubling: rumor and the *Chronicle of Baudouin d'Avesnes* tell us that in 1280 the countess died, having been alienated by her husband who accused her of having wanted to kill his son Charles, born from an earlier marriage with Blanche d'Anjou. [...] This accusation against Robert's wife recalls the wrongdoing of Alphonse's mother in law]

As tempting as this train of thought may be, it remains conjecture. Though based in a solid set of historical facts that point to both a later date and the Countess Yolande de Bourgogne, the identification is not definitive. For my purposes here, then, it suffices to conclude that the work is almost certainly thirteenth century, as is generally accepted, and quite possibly late-thirteenth. At the same time, the suggestion that there may be a relationship between a highly specific contemporary marriage and the text's patronage does align thematically and historically with my reading of the work's portrayal of marriage within the context of political power and issues of consent.

A number of possibilities have been proposed for the text's later success, including its interest to the Burgundian dukes, which comes into greater focus in Ferlampin-Acher's thesis.

récente (une trentaine d'années plus tôt), Guillaume roi de Sicile de l'histoire plus ancienne” [These diverse trails of evidence suggest that we should push back the text's date of composition to 1280: at that time the Alphonses of Spain were part of current events, Guillaume King of the Romans was recent history (thirty years prior), and Guillaume King of Sicily was further back in history] (Ferlampin-Acher 2012, 38).

Micha (1990) provides a rather lackluster assessment of its literary quality, however, stating of the author that “En somme s’il n’est pas un grand écrivain, notre romancier se situe dans une honnête moyenne” [In sum, while he is not a great writer, our *romancier* is situated in an honest middle] (38). Beyond its literary value, then, and outside of its potential interest for a particular aristocratic family, the motivation usually cited for later adaptations may in fact echo its primary interest among academics today, namely its werewolf storyline. Ferlampin-Acher notes that the later Middle Ages saw a surge of interest in sorcery and werewolves:

à la fin du Moyen Age, la diabolisation des croyances, la montée de la sorcellerie, ont redonné une vigueur particulière aux histoires de loup-garou: si cette créature était en passe de devenir mythe littéraire, elle a retrouvé au XVe siècle une actualité particulière dans les croyances et dans les procès de la sorcellerie. (47)

[At the end of the Middle Ages, the demonization of beliefs, the rise of sorcery, once again imparted a particular vigor to werewolf stories; if this creature was on the verge of becoming a literary myth, it found in the fifteenth century a particular currency in the beliefs and trials of witchcraft]

Likewise, Sarah Kay and Peggy McCracken (2012) write of its modern critical interest that “literary scholars in animal studies have shown heightened attention to texts featuring metamorphosis, in particular to what C.W. Bynum has identified as the ‘werewolf renaissance of the twelfth century’ [...] It is in this context that the romance *Guillaume de Palerne*, recently re-edited, has gained new scholarly attention” (2). As evidenced by the series of essays on *Guillaume de Palerne* edited by Sarah Kay and Peggy McCracken (2012) and published together in the *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, the animal studies lens has also encompassed examinations of the work’s treatment of skin, the lovers’ escape disguised as

animals, the symbolic function of the beast, subjectivity, recognition, and questions of animality and desire.¹⁰

From another angle, a number of scholars have analyzed and compared the romance's subsequent versions, particularly its English-language iterations, more recent examples being Renée Ward (2015) and Randy Schiff (2009), the latter of whom reads the changes in the fourteenth-century English version as indicative of contemporary anxieties regarding increased socio-economic diversity and the aristocracy's place in the social hierarchy, an issue to which I will return.¹¹ A third line of critical inquiry involves identifying and analyzing *Guillaume de Palerne*'s heterogeneous source texts, such as *Cligès*, *Tristan et Iseult*, and *Bisclavret*, *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, and the Life of Saint Eustace. A fourth dominant line of inquiry, of particular relevance to this present study, concerns the generic classification of *Guillaume de Palerne*, and namely its relation to the *roman idyllique*.¹² Similarly, Leslie Sconduto (1995) reads the work in relation to another category known as the *roman d'aventure*. My analysis and that of Sconduto (in her own dissertation on *Guillaume de Palerne*) have many points of convergence; we are both interested in the concept of adventure, for example, as well as identity, desire, and marriage. However, the conclusions that we draw from our analyses are typically vastly different. Part of

¹⁰ See for example Bridget Behrmann (2012), Peggy McCracken (2012), Miller (2012), Corbellari (2002), and Sconduto (2000).

¹¹ "William's translation is motivated not by patriotism, but by a desire to disseminate elitist class values [...] By intensifying his source's feudal elitism, and by underscoring the link between violence against peasants and aristocratic exceptionalism, William registers his aristocratic patron's anxiety concerning increasing socio-economic diversity" (418). See also, as previously cited: G.H.V. Bunt (1984), John Manolis (1976), Charles Dunn (1960), H.F. Williams (1952), and Irene Pettit McKeehan (1926).

¹² As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, chivalric romance is often divided up into categories, of which the Arthurian romance, or the *matière de Bretagne*, is only one category among others. This categorization has had an outsize influence on how modern scholars view the romance genre. See my introduction, pp. 47-54.

this difference has to do with our generic lenses, as I am less interested in upholding the categorizations of modern scholars, and part has to do with Scoduto's focus on Guillaume in the context of the knightly ideal (although she also focuses on the werewolf). By shifting the frame to include Mélior and the couple as the subjects of adventure, my reading shows how the narrative in fact calls into question many aspects of the knightly model as well as the role of desire in relation to marriage, lineage, and norms within romance. Certainly, it is important to recognize that *Guillaume de Palerne* is responding to models beyond those of the Arthurian, knightly variety, and that these other models are likewise interested in questions of marriage, familial crisis, generational conflict, and the problematics of desire. On the other hand, the justifiable inclination to read *Guillaume de Palerne* in the context of a genre considered to be *idyllique* has also, in practice, obscured what I would argue are the ambiguities and disharmonies of *Guillaume de Palerne*'s treatment of desire, marriage, and coupling. *Guillaume de Palerne* is certainly responding to depictions of amorous couples in other examples of *romans*. However, it is not a work in which love conquers all, at least not on its own.

This chapter will look first at female characters and protagonism in *Guillaume de Palerne*, then it will consider the figure of the amorous couple, and in particular will examine the scenes of desire between Guillaume and Mélior. I will show that these scenes of desire raise questions about consent – as well as the integrity of one's identity – when overtaken by passion, an observation that will be read in relation to the concept of marital consent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The adventure sequence initiated by Guillaume and Mélior will then likewise be read within this context of desire and coupling, as I argue that the romance stages the adventure as one that simultaneously strips the amorous protagonists of their social identity – echoing the de-personing of desire – while suggesting that their social identities are immutable

and that there is no place for the young couple outside of society. The reintegration of their desire with society, which occurs when Guillaume is finally revealed to be a prince and heir to the throne of Palermo, is however left ambiguous as a series of marriages that ostensibly serve to mediate between socio-political obligation and intimate desire in fact raise new questions about consent and personal identity in relation to marriage and an aristocratic emphasis on political alliance and genealogy. Coupled adventure will thus be looked at in relation to these broader socio-political concerns, as a narrative phenomenon in dialogue and tension with aristocratic norms.

Female protagonists in *Guillaume de Palerne*

Guillaume de Palerne displays an evident interest in questions and themes relevant to my broader inquiry on female adventure, mostly notably female mobility, autonomy, and identity. It is also remarkable for its diverse array of substantive, and often named, female characters. In addition to Mélior, the story's female characters include Alexandrine, Félise (the queen of Palermo), Florence, Guillaume's adoptive stepmother (the wife of the *vacher*), Alphonse's stepmother Brande, the treacherous wet nurses, and Queen Félise's attendant. This range covers a number of social statuses, geographies, and levels of protagonism/antagonism. Yet even the perfidy of Brande and the two *nourrices* is resolved at the end, as all repent and are forgiven, with the latter two living out their days at a convent.

The number and complexity of the female characters is roughly equivalent to that of its male characters, which include Guillaume, Alphonse (who spends most of the romance as a werewolf), the Spanish king and his second son, the emperor Nathaniel, Guillaume's father (who dies before the second half of the story), the *vacher*, the Greek prince, Guillaume's murderous

uncle, who is only briefly mentioned but never seen, queen Félice's wise man, and a variety of knights in battle. *Guillaume de Palerne* is thus a story in which women feature prominently.

Despite this parity, the narrative maintains many conventional gender distinctions. Thus, it is men who accept proposals on behalf of their daughters (as with the emperor Nathaniel), it is men who fight in battle, and it is men who comfort their wives when they are distraught by the loss of their sons. It is women whose marital futures are at stake in various proposals, who watch the battle from afar and wait for news, and who mourn the loss of their sons. Scenes of mourning are in fact repeated in the case of both Queen Félice and the *vachère*, suggesting that a gendered, motherly grief, and a fatherly reason, transcend the social class hierarchy:

Ensi la dame demente,
Ensi por son fil se gaimente,
Ensi le ploure, ensi le plaint.
Mais tant le castoie et constraint
Li rois, que tout laissier li fait
La dolor qu'ele maine et fait.
Ensi la dame se rapaie. (159-165)

[In this way the lady torments herself; / In this fashion she weeps for her son, / Thus she weeps for him, and so she regrets his loss. / But the king chastises her and constrains her so much / That soon he makes her set aside / Her grief and her expressions of mourning. / So the lady calms down.] (p. 15)

Molt am audite l'aventure
Que l'emperere ensi l'emporte;
Del tot se fust ocise et morte,
Jamais sa bouche ne mangast,
Se cil ne la reconfortast
Qui li dist de l'empereor
Que a brief terme et sans lonc jor
L'en devoit rendre tel deserte
Jamais nul jor n'aront poverte.
Ensi cele se raseüre. (620-629)

[Very much did she curse this adventure, / That the emperor had taken him away in this way. / Because of everything she might have killed herself and died; / Never would her mouth have eaten another bite, / If her husband had not comforted her; / He told her about the emperor, / Who in a short time without long delay, / Was supposed to give them what

they merited. / Never another day will they experience poverty. / Thus she puts her mind at rest.] (p. 27)

Though the peasant woman is reassured by the promise of money and an end to their poverty, while the queen is calmed by the chastising of the king (an exercise of power), still the two episodes echo one other across class lines, particularly in the structure of the ending verses “Ensi la dame se repaie” and “Ensi cele se raseüre.”

In similar manner, the majority of the characters in *Guillaume de Palerne* form a variety of couple (and sometimes triple) formations, both male-female, male-male, and female-female: the *vacher* and the *vachère*, Guillaume’s mother and father, Félise and Florence, Guillaume and Mélior, Mélior and Alexandrine, Guillaume and Alphonse, Alphonse and Florence, Alexandrine and the Spanish prince, the Spanish prince and the Spanish king, etc. The interplay between the shifting couplings - and their alliances or conflicts - reveals a complex economy of human relations whose stability requires a harmonious management of conflicting or aligning desires, statuses, familial relations, political concerns, and power.¹³ It is these relationships that are at stake in *Guillaume de Palerne*, as the romance intertwines the destinies and crises of three different royal families. The fictional world in which coupling is dramatized in *Guillaume de Palerne* thus moves beyond generational conflict (as in the *roman idyllique*) into a wider social and political arena in which both men and women feature as political actors.

Of the work’s female protagonists, Mélior, Alexandrine, and Félise play outsize roles in the narrative, and are each presented as cultivated, intelligent, and “good” women (although Mélior’s break with her social expectations and her escape on the eve of her wedding also invite

¹³ Likewise, what one character achieves, another often loses: Guillaume’s parents lose a son, while the *vacher* and *vachère* gain one; the emperor gains an excellent knight but the *vacher* and *vachère* lose their son; Guillaume wins a lover but the Greek prince loses a promised marital alliance; Guillaume and Mélior gain each other, but Alexandrine loses both.

comparisons with the more morally ambiguous Iseult and Fénice). It is through the female character Alexandrine's social awareness and cleverness that Guillaume and Mélior are first in a position to admit their love to one another, thus aligning Alexandrine with the matchmaking role played by Queen Guinevere in *Cligès*. With the possible exception of the werewolf Alphonse, Alexandrine displays more intellectual prowess than any other individual character in the narrative. It is also, importantly, Alexandrine's idea for the lovers to disguise themselves in bear skins. In order to do so, Alexandrine disguises herself as a servant, steals the skins from the kitchen, and sews up the lovers in the skins. She even thoughtfully leaves room for their hands to emerge so that they can eat.¹⁴

Alexandrine embodies the roles of the clever romance go-between and confidante as well as the verbally skilled female protagonist. She quickly realizes the danger she would be in on Mélior's wedding day if anyone were to suspect her involvement in, or knowledge of, Mélior's disappearance. To save herself, she invents a believable story *sur-le-champs* that simultaneously absolves her of any responsibility for Mélior's disappearance while still enabling her to reveal the truth about Mélior and Guillaume. She provides the emperor with a plausible excuse for why Mélior did not want to marry the Greek prince, and which conspicuously encapsulates issues of female mobility and bodily autonomy:

Ne vousist pas cest mariage,
Car on li a bien dit l'usage
Des signors de Constantinople.
Je n'aront feme, tant soit noble,
Si vaillant nule ne prisie,
N'estraite de haute lignie
Qu'ele ne sot lues mise en serre.

¹⁴ Peggy McCracken (2012) notes that "the lovers eat like people, not like bears. They bring their hands out of the skins to eat the food the wolf has brought them" (364). McCracken's article provides an excellent analysis of *Guillaume de Palerne* in relation to the use of hands, such as in human forms of eating.

Molt puet, ce dist, haïr la terre,
 La richoise, la region
 De coi on n'a fors que le non.
 N'avra fors non d'emperreïs:
 Il ne li puet avenir pis.
 Ensi vivra, mais comme pors.
 Qui por son avoir pert son cors,
 Ce dist qu'il fait male gaaigne.
 Qui son cors pert petit gaaigne;
 Si amast mix duc u contor
 Ou fil d'un povre vavassor
 Que tel honor ne tel richece
 Dont tos jors mais iert en tristece. (3591-3610)

[She did not want this marriage. / For she has been well informed of the custom / Of the lords of Constantinople. / They will never have a wife, as noble as she might be, / None of such great value or so esteemed / Or from such a high lineage / That she will not be immediately locked up. / She will hate very much, it is said, the land, / The wealth, the region / Of which she has nothing but the name. / Except she will have the name of empress: / Worse cannot happen to her. / Thus she will live, but as a hog. / Whoever loses his body for his possessions, / It is said that he makes a poor profit. / Whoever loses his body gains little; / It is better for her to love a duke or count / Or the son of a poor fiefholder / Than to have such honor or such wealth / From which she will be forever in sadness.] (p. 104)

The evocation of the custom of the emperor of Constantinople of locking women up stages a direct opposition between the fate that would have awaited Mélior had she married the Greek prince and the complete autonomy she displays in fleeing the court into the woods. She may have given up her status and even humanity for a bearskin, but she has not in doing so “pert son cors,” so much as dressed it up in order to use it as she pleases.¹⁵ The choice of a bear, an animal associated with nobility,¹⁶ also stands in direct contrast to the animal she would have been had

¹⁵ “In [*Guillaume de Palerne*’s] representation of animal skins not just as garments, but as skins the characters live in, the romance imagines a bodily surface that can be put on, adopted, inhabited, and abandoned” (Peggy McCracken 2012, 361).

¹⁶ Miller (2012) also writes that the matching bearskins that Guillaume and Mélior will later wear serve in fact to mirror their noble status: “The donning of animal skins in this episode can be seen as an aristocratic *rite de passage*, but can also be viewed as a performance of recognition: similitude in nobility here is symbolized by the identical bearskins into which Mélior’s lady-in-waiting sews the lovers” (354).

she married the prince: a *pors*, or lowly pig.¹⁷ It is through the voice of Alexandrine that the stakes of female mobility and bodily autonomy, and their preferability to power and wealth, are thus most clearly articulated.

This passage also unsubtly echoes the warning at the end of *Cligès* that, due to the untrustworthiness of women such as the female protagonist Fénice (who also ran away with her lover *Cligès* in order to flee a marriage with *Cligès*'s perfidious uncle), the emperors of Constantinople forever locked up their wives following her reign:

Por ce ainsi com an prison
Est gardee an Constantinoble,
Ja n'iert tant riche ne tant noble
L'empererriz, quex qu'ele soit,
Que l'empereres ne la croit
Tant com de cesti li remanbre.
Toz jorz la fait garder en chanbre
Plus por peor que por le hasle,
Ne ja avoec li n'avra masle
Qui ne soit chastrez en anfance,
De ce n'est criemme ne dotance
Qu'Amors les lit an son lien. (6690-6701)¹⁸

[It is thus that as if in prison / in Constantinople is kept / the empress, whoever she may be, / however powerful and noble she may be. / The emperor does not trust her / as long as she reminds him of Fénice. / He always keeps her guarded in her chamber, / more out of fear than protection from the sun. / A male is never allowed near her / unless he has been castrated from childhood. / Thus there is never any fear / that Love will hold him in its bonds]

Amorous coupling, then, has resolved a political problem (*Cligès* was the rightful heir to the throne to begin with), and is shown to be reciprocal even after marriage, but at the same time, the transgressions of desire (*Fénice* tricked her actual husband in order to run away with *Cligès*,

¹⁷ The number and diversity of animal metaphors in *Guillaume de Palerne* is striking and has not, to my knowledge, been systematically explored.

¹⁸ Cited from: Chrétien de Troyes. *Cligès*, ed. and trans. Charles Méla and Olivier Collet. In: *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans*. 1994. Paris: Livre de Poche. English translations are my own, on the basis of the Old French and Méla and Collet's modern French translation.

however justified she may have been) have resulted in empresses losing their bodily autonomy along with the castration of eunuchs, showing an unequal distribution of punishment across social hierarchical lines that centers on the woman's body as guarantor of legitimate succession. Notable, too, is that Fénice and Cligès, after they have run away together, are discovered when Fénice decides she can no longer stay hidden in her tower and comes outside into the garden, emphasizing the human desire for liberty that will subsequently be denied to future empresses.¹⁹

Guillaume de Palerne thus provides a reading of this ending from a female perspective (or at least, a fictional female perspective): enclosure and loss of bodily autonomy are not worth the status and wealth that come with being an empress.²⁰ It is even, perhaps, better to be a free animal (a noble bear, not a pig) than an empress. This same desire for physical liberty, we may recall, was present in the *Roman de Silence*, in which Silence reasons that it would be better to live like a man instead of being trapped in a room as a woman and losing her horse, her outdoor existence, and her freedom. In both instances, women must alter their apparent "nature" (through presenting as male for Silence, and disguised as a bear and then deer for Mélior) in order to attain a level of freedom denied within their social positions – a result of inheritance laws, for Silence, and of compulsory marriage for Mélior. *Guillaume de Palerne* thus thematizes female autonomy and mobility, which it then explores through two primary narrative means: Guillaume and Mélior's adventure disguised in animal skins, and a recurring focus on the issue of marital consent.

²⁰ Randy Schiff (2009) also observes that this sentiment sets up an opposition between eastern and western Christian empires.

Passion and Consent

Like many romances, *Guillaume de Palerne* features a long sequence in which two young nobles become aware of their love for one another and suffer through it until they can manage to reveal their mutual passion, thus “curing” their respective illnesses.²¹ The scenes in which Guillaume and Mélior each individually come to recognize their romantic desire and passion for one another emphasize the isolation that this passion imposes from the perspective of both their social statuses and their own free will, suggesting that passion may be incompatible with consent.

Mélior, who is the first to feel the confusing physiological effects of her heart’s desire, expresses her condition as one of being trapped and bound by her own doing:

Or ai grant tort,
Qui aventure blasme emporte
Ou je sui prise et enlacie,
Et la roi ai sor moi sachie
Que por autrui prendre getoie.
Or i sui prise, et prise i soie.
Et en mon lac soie cheüe. (909-915)

[Now I am very wrong / To blame Adventure / When I am trapped and abandoned, / For I have pulled down on myself the net / That I threw to capture another. / Now I am taken there and there I am caught; / I have fallen into my own trap] (p. 35)

This imagery reverses the trope of the woman as prey, hunted by the man,²² and instead suggests that it is one’s own desire that is the hunter, and one’s own self, which is somehow separate from this desire, that is the hunted.²³ Mélior recognizes right away the unsuitability of Guillaume as an

²¹ See my discussion of Cadour and Eufemie’s desire in the *Roman de Silence* in Chapter One of this dissertation, pp. 96-109. As I show in that chapter, these scenes of desire link back to *Cligès* as well.

²² For example, Nicolette portrays herself this way in *Aucassin et Nicolette*.

²³ At the same time, the unexplained suggestion that Mélior had intended this trap for someone else remains an ambiguous allusion – had she intended to catch someone else’s heart? In what way did she throw the net back on herself? If Mélior is referring to the nobility of Guillaume, which she helped develop through her role in initiating Guillaume into the norms of the court, and whose resulting noble comportment and prowess is responsible for her desire, it suggests

object of her desire, and yet this desire, unsanctioned due to Mélior's superior status, is paradoxically based on a recognition of the superior nobility that Guillaume himself embodies. Indeed, Mélior's desire for Guillaume develops not at the sight of his knightly prowess or handsome figure, but rather due to his reputation and the esteem in which others hold him. He is particularly appreciated among young, unmarried women:

Molt a boin los par la contree,
Par tot en va sa renoumee
[...]
De la chambre est merveilles bien;
Les puceles sor tote rien
Por sa franchise et sa valor
Li portent molt tres grant honor.
Quant Meliors la debonaire
Ot del vallet le los retraire
Et les grans biens qui en lui sont,
Et voit qu'il n'a si bel el mont
Ne damoiseil de sa valor,
Fil de roi ne d'emperor,
Ne de si boine renoumee
Trestot son cuer et sa pensee
Tot maintenant verse lui s'atorne. (805-825)

[He has a very good reputation throughout the country; / His renown spreads everywhere. [...] In the chamber he is wonderfully accomplished; / The maidens above all else / Because of his nobility of character and his valor / Bestow on him great honor. / When the sweet Melior / Hears recounted the praises of the valet / And the great qualities that are in him / And sees that there is none so fair in the world, / Nor is there a youth with his merit, / Whether he be son of king or emperor, / Nor of such great renown, / All her heart and her thoughts / She immediately turns toward him.] (p. 33)

On the one hand, then, Mélior's desire follows a very traditional pattern of noble coupling in romance: she falls in love with someone of equal nobility, based on his noble reputation.²⁴ In this

perhaps that another woman was intended to eventually be caught in the desiring trap of Guillaume's nobility, one more suitable for marriage with a young knight of unknown origin.
²⁴ A similar desire-based-on-renown occurs in another romance featuring a protagonist named Guillaume, namely *Guillaume de Dole*, in which the emperor Conrad falls in love with Guillaume's sister Liénor based on the stories he hears about her great beauty and worth.

sense, Mélior has placed her heart in exactly the right place, particularly from the perspective of the reader, who is aware that Guillaume is in fact the legitimate son of Embrons, the king of Palermo, a lineage that Mélior instinctually recognizes when she sees that there is no other “damoiseil de sa valor / Fil de roi ne d'emperor” [young man of his valor / whether son of a king or of an emperor] (821-822). On the other hand, the seeming intractability of their current social inequality, and thus the impossibility of their socially sanctioned coupling, leads her to initially chastise herself for this desire.

Is Mélior's desire therefore a reasonable passion, based as it is in Guillaume's actual nobility? Her desire prefigures, for example, the later recognition of Guillaume by his deceased father's warhorse, with animal instinct both surpassing human social norms while also reinforcing them: nobility is so inherent that it can be felt by those who see it, human or animal.²⁵ This same phenomenon occurs in Emperor Nathaniel's recognition of Guillaume's nobility when he comes upon him in the forest, and in Guillaume's (and then the queen's and the Spanish king's) recognition of the werewolf's humanity and nobility. The text states plainly, in fact, that Guillaume's nobility is part of his “nature,” for example when describing how well he adapted to courtly life:

Molt s'i acointe belement
Si com li hom qui n'estoit mie
Norris en cort n'entre maisnie;
Mais auques le prueve nature. (728-731)

[He learns to do it very graciously, / Just as the man who was not at all / Raised at court
or in the middle of a great household, / But Nature reveals his qualities.]

²⁵ In an excellent analysis of this scene, Hartley R. Miller (2012) writes: “The way this animal seems to know Guillaume contrasts with the human inability to sense Guillaume's identity with equal certainty: though the human characters in the scene marvel at the horse's behavior, their deductions stop there. Successful animal recognition is raised here as a counterpoint to the possibly flawed phenomenon of human recognition, subject as the latter is to ideology” (358).

The juxtaposition of *norris* at the beginning of verse 730 with *nature* at the end of verse 731 underscores that it's due to *nature* rather than *nurture* that Guillaume responds so quickly and well to the courtly life of a noble. In a similar manner, the text goes on to compare him to a bird of “gentil aire” that is capable (presumably by nature or instinct) of training itself:

Oï avés pieça retraire
Que li oisiax de gentil aire
S'afait meïsme a par lui
Tot sans chastiëment d'autrui.
Comme vos ci oïr poés
S'est si Guillaumes doctrinés. (745-750)

[For a long time you have heard it said / That birds of noble birth / Train themselves all alone / Entirely without the correction of others. / As you will hear now, / Guillaume educated himself in exactly the same way.]

Regardless of Guillaume's evident nobility, Mélior quickly recognizes the conflict between her desire and her place in the social hierarchy, maintaining a competing awareness of the external conditions that render her desire transgressive:

Ainc mais pucele de mon lin,
De mon valoir ne de mon fuer
Ne mist en si fait lieu son cuer
Comme j'ai fait, bien le puis dire.
Bien me devroit li mons despire,
Quant j'ai laissé dus et contors
Et rois et fix d'empereors
Et ceus dont je fuisse honoree
Por .I. vallet d'autre contree,
Que nus ne set, n'il ensement,
De quel terre est ne de quel gent. (1574-1584)

[Never has any maiden of my lineage / Of my merit and worth / Ever put her heart in such a place / As I have done, I can honestly say. / The world is truly correct to hold me in contempt / When I have set aside dukes and counts / And kings and sons of emperors / And those by whom I was honored / For a valet from another country, / No one knows, not even he himself, / What land he is from or from what people] (p. 52)

Guillaume likewise understands the social impossibility, and even the danger, of his love for

Mélior:

Ce n'est pas garce ne vilaine,
Mais la ou nus de cet empire
Por chose que il peüst dire,
Tant par i soit de grant pooir,
Riches de terre ne d'avoir,
N'en porroit ja a nul chief traire
Por nule riens qu'il peüst fair,
Tant ne s'en saroit entremetre:
Dont me doi bien de ce demetre
Et ceste grant error laissier
Qui ains me puet nuire d'aidier;
Enseurquetout que tex hom sui
Que je ne sai cui fix je fui
Ne de quel terre estrais et nés.
Si me doi mix garder assés
Que cil qui en lor terres sont
Et qui lor bons amis i ont. (1212-1228)

[She is no common girl or peasant girl, / But the one whom no one in this empire, / Whatever he might be able to say / However powerful he might be, / Rich in land or in possessions, / Would ever be able to triumph over / Whatever he might be able to do / So much that he would not know how to recover from it: / Therefore I must indeed set aside / And abandon this great desire / Which can harm me rather than help me; / Especially since I am the kind of man / That does not know whose son I am / Nor from what land I was taken and born. / Thus I must be much more careful / Than those who are on their own lands / And whose good friends are there with them.]

Both Guillaume and Mélior emphasize her higher status and Guillaume's unknown origins, although only Guillaume recognizes the danger that this love poses for him as a stranger with no family alliances. His reference to his love as a "grant error" is noted by Hartley R. Miller (2012) who observes that in addition to this instance, "Twice Guillaume uses the word *error* in his self-castigation" (354).

However, like all young heroines and heroes, Mélior and Guillaume's awareness of the social unacceptability of their desire exercises no control over it, or over their response to it. Remarkably, Love itself interjects in the narrative following one of Mélior's laments, in order to

explain that parentage and power have nothing to do with love (it is worth citing the long passage in full:

Amours repret sa consience,
Contre son dit estrive et tence
Et dit Amors: "Tex ne sui mie.
Je ne vois pas par signorie,
Par parage ne par hautece,
Mais la ou mes voloirs s'adrece,
Car desor tous **ai le pooir:**
Si preng a chois a mon voloir,
S'aim mix les larges et les frans,
Les prex, les sages, les vaillans,
Les biens apris et les cortois
Que tos ces princes et ces rois
Ne ces contes avers mauvais.
Et neporquant est ce meffais,
Se je t'ai fait prendre a cestui?
A il el mont plus bel de lui,
Mix entechié en tos endrois
Ne plus vaillant ne plus cortois?
Qu'est que defaut qu'il doie avoir,
Biauté, proece ne savoir?
Por ce se ne sés dont il fu
Ne com de lui est avenu,
Bien pues veoir a sa samblance,
Si com de lui fait demoustrance
Par ses oeuvres et par ses fais,
Qu'il est de haute gent estrais.
Or me di a ton esciënt
Et si me fai droit jugement:
Se tu avoies or trouvé
.I. marc de fin or esmeré
Et ne seüsses cui il fu
Ne qui le marc eüst perdu,
Vaurroit en por ce mains li ors
Ne qu'il fust pris en tes tresors?
Ja n'en perdrait li ors son pris
Ne qu'el tresor le roi fust pris.
Neporquant tuit somes d'un pere,
Tos nos cria uns seus criere,
Tuit somes d'une matere fait
Et tuit d'une lignie estrait." (1587-1626)

[Love takes over her consciousness, / Against her remarks it debates and quarrels / And Love says: “I am not [at] all like that, / I do not judge according to the authority of the lord / Or according to his noble birth or greatness, / But there where my will directs itself, / For I have power over everyone: / Thus I choose according to my own desire, / So I prefer the generous and the noble, / The virtuous, the wise, the worthy, / The well educated and the courteous / Over all these princes and all these kings / And these evil wicked counts. / And nevertheless is it a misdeed / If I caused you to fall in love with that one? / Is there anyone in the world more handsome than he, / Who has more good qualities in all places / Or is more worthy or more courteous? / What is it that he must lack, / Beauty, prowess, or wisdom? / Because if you do not know where he is from / Or how he happened to come into the world, / You can surely see by his appearance, / Just as he demonstrates / Through his works and through his deeds, / That he is of high noble birth. / Now tell me your opinion / And give me an honest judgment: / If you had just now found / A mark of fine pure gold / and did not know whose it was / Nor who had lost the mark, / Because of this would the gold be worth less / Than if it had been taken from your treasury? / Never would the gold lose its value / Nor the fact that it came from the king’s treasury. / Nevertheless we are all from one father, / All of us created by one single Creator, / We are all made from one substance / And all born of one lineage.”] (52-53)

A number of important threads are established in this speech.²⁶ Firstly, Love sets up a contrast between nobility and nobles, stating that it does not care about birth and parentage, and even denigrating kings and counts, before attenuating this position with reference to Guillaume’s actual noble birth (“Qu’il est de haute gent estrais”) and a metaphor about gold that suggests an inherent nobility – practically of matter and composition – that persists regardless of knowledge of one’s parentage. However, this attenuation is again overturned in the declaration, expressive of Christian rather than aristocratic values, that, in fact, all humans are of the same parentage, lineage, and substance: “Tos nos cria uns seus criere / Tuit somes d’une matere fait / Et tuit d’une lignie estrait,” with the repetition of singular articles and the rhyme pair “fait / estrait” accentuating the single substance of humanity as God’s creation. The reference to *une matere* moreover implies a second reading of the gold metaphor according to which the gold of

²⁶ See also Leslie Sconduto’s (1995) commentary on this passage (39-41).

unknown parentage would be gold *regardless* of parentage, circling back to Love's initial claim that "Je ne vois pas par signorie, / Par parage ne par hautece."

Thus, while the narrative recuperates Mélior's desire through Guillaume's nobility, it leaves open the possibility that Mélior would have no control over her desire whether or not Guillaume's parentage ever became known. Likewise, Love's speech suggests the even more transgressive possibility that all humans are created equal (or at the least that they all equally bear the imprint of God), a possibility that has already been delicately hinted at in the storyline of the *vacher* and *vachère*, who by the end of the narrative are in fact granted status as de facto nobles in recompense for their excellent care of young Guillaume. Indeed, when Guillaume leaves their home with the emperor, it is the *vacher* who provides the narrative's most explicit lesson on noble comportment. Though he says he learned this lesson from his own father who served a count, his absorption of the lesson implies that nobility, at least as a behavior, can be taught, setting up a discrepancy between the narrative's portrayal of nobility as inherent, and as a learned phenomenon. The effect of Love's speech is to suggest that while Mélior's desire is seemingly excused through Guillaume's natural (and, as the reader knows, actual) nobility, this particular narrative choice is not a necessity. She could, perhaps, love him just as well with a different parentage, since "we are all of the same lineage."

Moreover, Love attributes to itself a willpower that it takes away from others: "Mais la ou mes voloirs s'adrece / Car desor tous ai le pooir: / Si preng a chois a mon voloir." Again, through the effect of repetition, the doubling of "mes voloir[s]" highlights the concept of will only to suggest its absence: if *vouloir* belongs to love, which has *pouvoir* (*pooir*) over everyone, then desire is both not a choice and also disabling of choice.

As in many medieval romance depictions of amorous passion and desire, Mélior and Guillaume's first experiences with love are therefore troubling. Mélior, in particular, does not fully understand what is happening to her, although she recognizes it is a response to her feelings about Guillaume. She describes her experience as an illness, which is conventional, but also as a disfigurement:

Cis maus qui se me deffigure,
Que si me vait aniëntant,
N'en sai plus dire fors que tant
C'une pensee m'est venue
Qui si me destraint et argue
Que tot me fait perdre et laisser
Et le dormier et le mangier,
Que si me taint et si m'enpire. (1034-1041)

[This malady, which is disfiguring me / And destroying me so, / I cannot say anything more about it except / That a thought has come to me / Which is torturing and bothering me so much / That it is causing me to lose sleep / And to totally stop eating, / Thus changing my color and making me quite sick.]

This disfiguring capacity is likewise pointed out by Christine Ferlampin-Acher (2012), who describes love as “threatening Mélior’s integrity”: “L’amour menace l’intégrité de Mélior, qui *se despersone* (v. 908), *se deffigure* (v. 1034) et *va s’anientant* (v. 1035)” [Love threatens the integrity of Mélior, who is de-personed, disfigured, destroyed] (98). The earlier use of the verb *se despersone*, as noted by Ferlampin-Acher, succinctly captures love’s effect on Mélior, as it transforms her person: “Tout comme le garou chasseur, en enlevant Guillaume, a provoqué une disjonction entre sa samblance, son estre, et sa nature, l’amour menace Mélior, en proie aux souffrances amoureuses: elle n’est plus ce qu’elle paraît et ne paraît plus ce qu’elle est” [Just as the werewolf, in abducting Guillaume, provoked a disjuncture between his *samblance*, his *estre*, and his *nature*, love threatens Mélior, prey to amorous suffering: she is no longer what she seems and no longer seems what she is] (Ferlampin-Acher, 99). Mélior’s entire body and her heart have

turned against her, in fact, so that they are both conjoined to Guillaume and separate from, and destructive of, her own self:

Si est mes cors sor lui esmers
Et il miens cuers au sien aers
Que nes puis en nule maniere
Partir ne faire traire arriere;
Si m'en sui mainte fois penee,
Mais si m'ont au desos tornee
Que por moi rien ne daingnent faire;
Si sont a moi del tot contraire
Que tot ce qui me plaist refusent
Et ce que celer voel acusent:
Ce vont disant que celer voel,
La me blecent ou je me duel;
Ce voellent qu'estre ne porroit
Et ce laissent qui estre doit;
Ce me porchacent qui me nuist.
Vesci le mal qui me destruisit,
Qui ensi me destraint me maine
Et si me fait et pale et vaine.
Si me merveil que ce puet estre. (1053-1071)

[Thus my body is joined so tightly to him / And my heart is so attached to his / That I cannot in any way / Separate them or pull them apart; / I have grievously suffered many times about it, / But my body and heart have turned me so upside down / That they deign to do nothing for me; / They are so contrary to me in all things / That they refuse all that pleases me / And what I want to hide they declare: / They go about saying what I want to conceal, / There they wound me where I suffer; / They want what cannot be / And neglect what must be done; / They seek for me that which is harmful to me. / That is the malady that is destroying me, / That is imprisoning and manipulating me / And making me so pale and weak. / I marvel greatly at what it can be.]

The repetition of “me” as an object to her heart’s and body’s destructive forces displays the level to which Mélior views her own dissolution into separate parts as a manner which she is battling a version of herself as whole and rational. Recalling Love’s effects as disabling of the will, Mélior repeats the word *voel* only to deny it: her heart and body consistently work against what she *voel*, as they are “a moi del tot contraire.”

In what capacity, then, can Mélior be thought to have a will, if she scarcely maintains the integrity of her personhood? In analyzing an earlier passage, Hartley R. Miller (2012) calls attention to Mélior's comparison of her situation with having lost "signorie" (v. 886) over her heart, writing that "Melior interprets her love as an overthrow of order: her heart has overturned the rule of her head, just as an uprising of the masses might threaten the rule of a sovereign. Melior's lament assimilates the danger of loving Guillaume with that of allowing the dominant power structures to be overturned" (353). Indeed, soon after this passage, Mélior accepts her heart as her "sire":

Or sui a lui, il est me sire,
Si m'estuet faire son voloir,
Et si sai bien de fi por voir,
Sel set la gent de la contree
Que j'en serai trop fort blasmee. (894-898)

[Now I belong to my heart; it is my lord. / Thus I must do its will. / And I know well that / If the people of my country find out, / I will certainly be strongly blamed for it.]

Not only has Mélior abdicated her will, or the throne of her reason, but she also knows that this decision has political consequences and references "la gent de la contree" as those who will blame her for it. She knows that she is making a poor decision from the perspective of her social and political status, but she cannot help but make it, as her *voloir* now belongs to her heart.

In some ways, this description is conventional, but when read in the context of a narrative that foregrounds issues of consent and marriage, the repetitious references to *voloir*, *voel*, or *vooir*, and their repeated transfer to the heart and body while denied to the "person" (*me*, *sui*, *moi*) stand out as moments that call into question the subjectivity or personhood of the ostensibly consenting individual. Similarly, the references to *signorie*, *sire*, *gent*, and *contree* recall the very real stakes of decision-making involving coupling, as well as the context in which such decisions are made. In a legal system that, as I will show in the next section, privileges speaking words of

consent over family and political concerns, the narrative raises the question of whether someone with no will can consent, or of what kind of thing is consenting when it speaks words of consent.

Marriage and Consent

The relationship between will and marital consent is discussed by Philip L. Reynolds (2016), who notes in his book on the sacrament of marriage that early twelfth century theologians “considered marriage to be a *coniunctio animorum*: a union of wills or intentions. The mutual consent of the spouses was constitutive of this union, and not only a necessary precondition, for only the spouses’ mutual consent could constitute a union of their wills” (43). In the theological and canonical context, then, the repeated emphasis on will (or lack thereof) in *Guillaume de Palerne*’s depiction of amorous passion creates a disjuncture between this passion and the will required of – indeed, constitutive of – marital consent. Guillaume and Mélior do not *consent* to their coupling in the same way that they might consent to a marriage, namely because they no longer have the integrity of personhood and will to do so. Instead, they have both given up their own authority to their hearts:

Mais en la fin, que qu’il aviengne,
Dit que tenra celi sans faille
Ou li siens cuers tent et travaille,
Que ja n’en veut mais issir fors. (966-969)

[But finally, whatever might come to pass, / She says that without fail she will take the path / Toward which her heart is drawn and expends all its efforts, / And that she never wants to step away from it]

Here, Mélior’s desire or will (*veut*) is invoked, only to be displaced onto the heart, which she never *wants* to stop following. In the Old French as in modern French, the concept of *vouloir* can encapsulate both a kind of desire and a kind of rational will, but through Mélior and Guillaume’s

passionate laments, the transfer of *vouloir* to the heart is clearly contrasted with a personal wholeness or rational capacity, or that which ensures the declaration of will or consent is valid.

The lack of (will)power to stop following the path outlined by Mélior is made even clearer in reference to Guillaume, directly following a passage in which Guillaume “se chastoie” (v. 1241) and attempts turn his heart back on the right path (away from desiring Mélior):

Mais por chose que il puist faire
Ne puet son cuer de la retraire
Ou il a sa voie acueillie,
Ou soit savours ou soit folie,
Soit maus, soit bien, que que l'en veigne,
Qu'a cesti voie ne se tiengne
Que por autre ne veut gerpir,
Qui qu'en doie vivre ou mourir,
Que que nus die ne que non;
Ains fait de soi comparison
Et dist: “je samble le sengler:
Quant voit l'espier vers lui torner,
Droit cele part aqueut sa voie;
Si se fiert dedens et embroie,
Si comme cil qui mort ne doute,
Que l'entraille li perce toute
Et le cuer del ventre li part,
Que mors trebuche d'autre part.
Tot autresi est il de moi:
En l'espier sui et el embroi,
Si m'oci tot a essiënt.” (1245-1265)

[But whatever he might be able to do / He cannot withdraw his heart / From the path that it has begun, / Whether it be wise or foolish, / Whether bad or good, whatever might come from it, / He has to hold himself to this path / That he does not want to abandon for another, / Whoever must live or die because of it, / Whatever anyone might say or not; / Thus he makes a comparison of himself / And he says: “I seem like the wild boar: / When he sees the lance turn toward him, / He heads straight that way; / So he hurries forward and throws himself on the spit, / Just as one who does not fear death, / So that the lance completely pierces his entrails / And separates his heart from his chest, / And he drops dead elsewhere. / It is just the same with me: / I am on the lance and on the spit, / So I have killed myself with certainty.”]

In this passage, Guillaume has no control over his desire, and like Mélior, this desire is self-destructive, doubly undoing his personhood through a lack of self-control and a comparison with

another animal: a wild boar.²⁷ Guillaume will follow this path whether or not it is *folie*, whether or not it ends in his heart coming out of his chest (an image suggestive of the metaphorical separation that has already occurred), and though it makes him more akin to the irrational boar than to the hunter who spears and roasts it. In this sense, both Guillaume and Mélior *se despersonent*, both in the sense of reproaching themselves and, more literally, de-personing themselves.²⁸

Within the courtly context of amorous romance protagonists, the complete submission to desire does not imply the lack of consent that in other literary contexts can lead to rape and sexual assault (in certain fabliaux, *pastourelles*, and hagiographies, or among antagonistic romance characters, this form of consent does come into question in often disturbing ways for a modern reader),²⁹ but rather ensnares the desiring individual in a coupling that may be more or less socially sanctioned, serving various narrative purposes such as justifying obligatory marriages, provoking intergenerational conflict, or generating suspenseful love triangles and infidelities such as with Tristan-Iseult-Mark, Lancelot-Guinevere-Arthur, or Cligès-Fénice-Alis (though in this latter, there is no love lost between Cligès and Alis, despite their familial ties). In each of these stories, as with *Guillaume de Palerne*, the problems of desire come to full fruition when confronted with marital social norms.

²⁷ “A poi entent, mais ne parole / A paines ot, mais ne entent.” [He pays little attention, but does not speak, / He hears with great difficulty, but does not understand] (2716-2717)

²⁸ As with many a young literary couple, they desire death rather than separation (and Guillaume nearly dies from his suffering): “Se il se muert, bien velt sa mort, / Se il s’en part, sa mort desire” [If he dies, she truly wants to die, / If he leaves, she desires death] (2772-2773).

²⁹ The threat of sexual violence, unwanted sex, or bodily violence due to the refusal to wed or engage in sex, is common in female saints’ lives, which intertwine the refusal of sex, and subsequent martyrdom, with a martyrdom on the basis of having adopted the Christian religion, including the devotion of one’s virginity to Christ. In fabliaux, on the other hand, various forms of rape and sexual trickery are treated in characteristic ribald manner. See for example the collection of stories in the edition *Fabliaux Erotiques*, ed. Luciano Rossi (1992).

Is there then consent in love, or to love? Can desire translate to the kind of rational choice required of marital consent? The question is salient because, beginning in the twelfth century, views and rituals surrounding marriage shifted around issues of consent (among other legal and sacramental aspects of marriage), following efforts by the church to exercise control over unions that had, for the ruling elite, typically been handled by, and between, noble families. As Glenn D. Burger (2018) outlines in his book *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages*:

Emphasizing the sacramental nature of marriage – at least in theory – marks a significant change from earlier medieval practice, conceiving of marriage not primarily as a contract between families to transfer land, belongings, and social status, as it had been throughout much of the early Middle Ages, but instead as a contract between men and women whose informed consent – expressed when they pronounced the words of present consent in the wedding ceremony – was the essential marker of a valid sacramental marriage. (17)

Ruth Mazo Karras (2012) likewise emphasizes the centrality of consent to marital unions within the church's larger reform program in the twelfth century:

A turning point in the church's treatment of what made a union legitimate – indeed, what might be taken as the origin of modern ideas of marriage – came in the twelfth century. The elaboration of the church's rules, the treatment of marriage as a sacrament, and the focus on the consent of the parties, none of which was entirely new but all of which received new emphasis, were not due to a fundamental concern with the state of pair bonds. [...] Rather, the development of the church's position on marriage grew out of the reform movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. (45)

The centrality of consent, according to Karras, was evident even a century earlier:

By the eleventh century, the consent of the two parties was being taken as an important criterion for marriage, even the definitional criterion. If marriage was to be a sacrament – and sacramental theology was beginning to argue that it was – it could hardly be defined by something as impure as coitus. Although theologians assumed that women would usually marry according to their fathers' choices, their father could not compel them if they objected. A union could be deemed other than marriage if one party successfully claimed not to have consented to a marriage. (54)

The parties had to consent to entering into marriage, not just to sexual intercourse or to a domestic partnership. And it was the parties themselves, not their families, who had to consent. (54)

While various aspects of marital rites and legitimacy were both solidified and contested during this time, the “consent of the two parties” was generally taken to mean a vow, in the present tense, in which both individuals stated their consent to the marriage.³⁰ Ideally, the marriage would take place and be proclaimed publicly, and would be officiated in the local church parish (and a marriage’s validity could be called into question on the basis of the absence of these markers) but, as Karras notes, we have evidence of a marriage’s validity being upheld even when undertaken by two individuals without the knowledge and consent of the parents, as long as they each verified their consent.³¹

In Karras’s account, we can already begin to see the anticipated conflict between the will of the family (and in particular the parents or father) and that of the individual(s) that is staged in *Guillaume de Palerne*.³² This conflict between wills is evident in many romances that feature

³⁰ See for example R.B. Outhwaite (1995): “the medieval church had taken up the position that wedding vows made in the present tense, freely uttered between two people who were legally at liberty to marry, constituted the very essence of marriage. [...] Such vows could be made, moreover, by boys of the age of fourteen and girls of twelve. Ideally, the church decreed, these verbal exchanges should be made publicly before witnesses, and the union should be solemnised by a priest before cohabitation began. To ensure publicity, as we shall also see, the medieval church began to lay down certain rules, attempting to tie weddings to certain places, certain days and times, and to certain preliminary procedures [...] The church was battling, however, against a society which had its own procedural forms of entry into matrimony. Indeed, the church’s marriage liturgy embodied such folk customs while seeking to clothe them with ritual and with religious significance” (xiii-xiv).

³¹ See for example Karras’s discussion of the marriage of Heloise and Abelard: “Heloise and Abelard did marry. Their marriage would have been considered clandestine, at least at a later date when the canon law of marriage was more thoroughly worked out, not because her family did not consent (they were present, according to Abelard) but because it was not performed publicly in the parish of the parties’ residence with a calling of the banns” (49-50). On the other hand, Karras also writes that “The lack of a proper ritual was rarely in itself a reason for declaring a marriage invalid, according to the rules under which the church operated from the twelfth century on” (53).

³² “ - Voire, dont n’estes vos plevie? / - Se mes peres fist sa folie, / Quidiés vos dont que je le tiegne? / Certes, je non, que qu’il aviengne, / Je n’averai duc ne contor, / Baron ne fil d’empereor / Por riens que nus hom peüst faire, / Ançois me lairoie detraire / Ou escorchier ou enfouïr / Que

female protagonists,³³ although it is conspicuously absent from Arthurian romances thought to conform to the knightly model, such as those of Chrétien de Troyes. Consent is a central element in Mélior's refusal to marry the son of the Greek emperor and in Florence's refusal to marry the son of the King of Spain, a situation made explicit in Felise's (the queen of Palermo's) refusal to hand over her daughter, stating that that king of Spain wants to take her by force: "C'a force velt par son orguel" (5245) [Whom he wants to take by force through his arrogance]. It is also, from an entirely different angle, made explicit in her subjects' desire that Florence marry him anyhow to avoid the destruction: "Sovent le dient a la dame, / Chascuns l'en chose molt et blasme: / Que doit c'au roi ne fait son gré / Ains qu'il destruite la cité, / N'ele soit prise ne il pris?" (4455-4459) [Often they give their advice to their lady, / Each one reprimands her greatly and blames her: / Why does she not act according to the will of the king, / Before he destroys the city, / Before she is taken and they are captured?]. For the queen's subjects, the exchange of women between ruling families may serve as a means of maintaining their own peace and security, which is what *their* will dictates (and understandably so), such that the apparent, personal consent of the individual parties is of comparatively little concern. Within the royal families themselves, however, consent is at issue, as evident in the prince of Spain's declaration, after defeat, that:

Mal ait a prendre
 Ou il convient tel gage rendre!
 De nos lia vons fait douaire,
 Si em puet tot son plaisir faire.
 Moilliers a prendre ait mal dehé
 C'on fait outre sa volonté.
 Quant on par son voloir la prent

de vos me doie partir." [- In truth, are you not betrothed? / - Since my father did his folly, / Do you therefore believe I will keep it? I will never have a duke or count, / A baron or the son of an emperor, / For anything that man might do. / I would allow myself to be torn apart / Or flayed and buried alive / Than to be separated from you.] (2851-2860)

³³ In addition to *Guillaume de Dole*, we find this conflict in works such as *Aucassin et Nicolette*, *Floire et Blanchefleur*, and *La Manekine*.

Et par le los de l'autre gent
Et on li fait au mix c'on puet,
N'en a on pas ce qu'en estuet?
Cesti cuidai par force avoir,
Or em puet fair son vouloir
De nos et de tote no terre;
Il n'i a fors de merci querre. (7171-7184)

[It is ill advised to take something / When one must make such reparation for it! / We have made ourselves a gift to her, / So she can do everything she wants with us. / Cursed be he who takes a wife / Against her will. / When one takes her in accord with her desire / And by the approval of the other people / And he treats her as best as he can, / Then has he not done all that is necessary? / I believed I could have her by force. / Now she can do as she likes / With us and with all our land; / There is nothing to do except ask for mercy.]

This passage is essential to a reading of *Guillaume de Palerne*, centered as it is around issues of consent in marriage, and the conflict between political and personal (desiring) motives. There is no clear reason given for Florence's refusal to marry the prince of Spain – she simply doesn't want to. The fact that this same prince is later married to the excellent and noble character Alexandrine suggests that he's not such a bad match after all, and indeed, from a political standpoint, he is quite desirable. The prince's above declaration appears clear enough: marriage shouldn't happen without consent. But, as we shall see, the narrative's messaging around consent proves far more complicated, and even here the prince's convictions seem grounded in what he has personally lost, and the precarious situation in which he now finds himself, rather than in a transcendent belief in the sacramental virtue of marriage and women's consent.

In this context, it is notable that no marriage occurs between Guillaume and Mélior until the union has already been made socially acceptable by the revelation of Guillaume's royal parentage. Their foray into the forest occurs outside of the legal structure of marriage, based in a mutual desire rather than by mutually pronounced and binding wedding vows. This adventure is more a result of the desire to *evade* marriage (between Mélior and the Greek prince) than to enter

into one. The type of consent it implies – of two lovers consenting to love one another and to leave society behind in order to do so – lies outside of the bounds of what was meant by consent in the context of marriage and canonical law in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in which the pronouncement of the marriage vow signaled consent to a legal union that may or may not have been *personally desired* for reasons beyond political and family obligations. Indeed, the focus of Karras’s work – titled *Unmarriages* – is largely on the kinds of unions that existed outside of the recognized, legitimate bonds of marriage, revealing the variety of unions available to medieval couples who did not wish to, or could not, marry (although none were as socially, and certainly not legally, sanctioned as marriage). Her work reveals the degree to which desire, love, sexual intimacy, cohabitation, or even childbearing were often not sufficient criteria for entering into a legitimate marriage for an aristocracy that continued to perceive marital unions through an economic, social, and political lens. In particular, marriage, or even an unmarried coupling, between a woman of higher status and man of lower status was rare and not socially sanctioned at any level of legality or arrangement (Karras 68-69). This kind of coupling is exactly what Guillaume and Mélior’s relationship represents to those around them, though the reader knows better.

Once *in* a marriage, however, the increased focus on marriage as sacrament opened up, as Glenn D. Burger argues, a way for men and women to accede to forms of spousal piety that had previously been reserved for the chaste.³⁴ Likewise, it was recognized that a certain marital

³⁴ “Beginning in the twelfth century and intensifying through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there is a renewed emphasis throughout western Europe on marriage as a sacrament. As a result, the gendered and sexualized relations within the late medieval married estate can be reimagined in ways that will allow laymen and laywomen to manifest a self-restraint and self-actualization that parallels, or even betters, the chastity of monastics and clerics” (Burger, 16).

affection might ideally arise between the spouses, although this too lay outside the bounds of medieval depictions of desiring romance couples such as Guillaume and Mélior:

As a legal and conceptual category, then, marital affection operates very differently from medieval *fin' amor* or modern romantic love. Marital affection first and foremost describes the care for the spouse that should take place – indeed, should develop and intensify – within the sacramental married state. Thus it is important not to confuse medieval understandings of marital affection with the modern concept of romantic love, just as we should not assume that canon law's emphasis on consent as the essence of marriage as sacrament would automatically signify for medieval audiences that men and women were suddenly free to marry as they pleased. (Burger, 19)³⁵

In this sense, marital affection and passionate desire, particularly of the type represented in romances, are not equivalent. The form of consent implied by Florence's refusal to marry the prince of Spain and Mélior's refusal to marry the son of the Greek emperor, all fall within the category of marital consent as defined by canonical law. Guillaume and Mélior's desire, on the other hand, is separate from the categories of both marital affection and the implication of the word "consent" in a legal context.³⁶

Instead, to return to my earlier analysis of Love's discourse and Mélior's and Guillaume's self-reproach, the passionate desire of Guillaume and Mélior implies an abdication of will that stands at odds with the underlying logic of both marital consent and sanctioned,

³⁵ Burger further elaborates on the kind of marital affection found in conduct texts: "While not inimical to romantic love or sexual expression, the desire for love of the marrying kind expressed in these conduct texts stands apart from both, expressing a sexuality organized not in terms of drives, lack, or jouissance but more ambiguously as a set of self-restrained, socially expressed and sanctioned connections: an affective rather than an erotic or feudal contract. If we think of sexuality not simply as a set of sexual acts (or their absence) but rather as the capacity of such acts to define one's place within the social and thus to define who one truly is, then one might well argue that there is nothing like modern heterosexuality (as we currently understand it) in the Middle Ages. When a medieval nobleman married, what mattered most was marriage's ability to transfer property and produce the heirs needed to maintain family name and landholdings that mattered." (24)

³⁶For more on marriage as a legal and sacramental entity, in addition to the works already cited, see for example: Philip L. Reynolds (2016).

“self-restrained”³⁷ marital affection, placing their relationship rather in the marginal realm of the “unmarriages” discussed by Karras. At the same time, because the text privileges questions of marriage and consent, Guillaume and Mélior’s adventure in the wilderness disguised as animals can be read as responding to concerns surrounding marital consent. Legally, Mélior has a right to her consent, or lack thereof, although the text treats her refusal to marry the Greek prince and ensuing escape with Guillaume as an action punishable by death.³⁸ Any coupling with Guillaume would have fallen far outside of the bounds of a socially acceptable pairing, particularly, as both Guillaume and Mélior express, in light of Mélior’s higher social status. Two related questions thus arise from the narrative. First, is it possible to consent on the basis of desire alone? The narrative seems to suggest that this type of consent is not of the rational sort, nor is it sufficient grounds for a marriage. Second, what does it mean when this kind of desire is employed within narrative as means of justifying what in actuality is a politically advantageous coupling? As we will see, the text presents a complex response to this question. It is in this context that we can read the lovers’ sojourn in the forest disguised in animal skins.³⁹

The Adventuring Couple

On the eve of Mélior’s marriage to prince of the Greek emperor, she and Guillaume decide to flee. They consult Alexandrine, who suggests they disguise themselves in animal skins purloined

³⁷ Burger (2018, 24).

³⁸ “Et sē estes reconneü, / Trestos li ors qui onques fu / Ne vos porroit garir de mort.” [And if you are recognized, / Absolutely all the gold that there ever was / Would not be able to save you from death] (3007-3009).

³⁹ While Christine Ferlampin-Acher (2012) and Penny Simons (2012) are both right to point out the comical, parodying aspect of *Guillaume de Palerne*, and in particular their journey (or, as Behrmann would have it, their idyll) as animals in the woods (even walking on all fours during the day!), the comical or idyllic does not of course exclude the meaningful or serious.

from the kitchen. Alexandrine sews them up in two bearskins and the two lovers depart during the night and head out into the woods, where they are soon overcome by their hunger. Luckily, the werewolf has followed them and provides for them by stealing food from travelers along the road through the forest. They slowly make their way to Palermo (seemingly without consciously choosing that destination), led by the werewolf. They are nearly caught at the marble quarries in Benevento, but manage to escape, again with the help of the werewolf. They eventually change from their dirtied bearskins into the skins of a doe and stag. Upon arrival in Palermo, they are eventually identified by the queen and the remainder of the narrative ensues at court, with Guillaume fighting against the Spanish to protect the lands (and daughter) of the queen.

In terms of female adventure, this escape into the forest reflects several characteristics common to female adventure in other medieval romances and related genres.⁴⁰ First, this adventure is coupled, recalling stories such as *Erec et Enide*, *Tristan et Iseult*, and *Aucassin et Nicolette*. We should not read this episode, therefore, only from the perspective of female adventure, as it also implies a major shift in the depiction of the knightly protagonist as well, who no longer ventures out alone. Likewise, the adventure involves an erasure or disguising of identity, also common, but not exclusive, to romances featuring female adventure, recalling, for example, the *Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *La Manekine*. It is also occasioned by issues of gender roles and marriage. This position recalls the *Roman de Silence*, when Cadour and Eufemie consider running away together if the king would not sanction their marriage (although he happily does, and so that fate is avoided), as well as the role that female inheritance plays in that work, and it recalls too *Aucassin et Nicolette*, in which the two young lovers do indeed

⁴⁰ See also Kathy Krause (2019) for some common characteristics of female adventure in romance.

escape into the forest and beyond. The solution to an unsanctioned love for these couples does not seem to be found in taking marital vows in the absence of family or social support, although that would be legally plausible, but rather in fleeing society.⁴¹ There is no “place” for Guillaume and Mélior’s love within an aristocratic society, and so marriage, in these instances, is treated as separate from, and perhaps superfluous to, an alternative form of coupling that resides outside of legal recognition, and also outside of society altogether.

During this adventure in the woods, in fact, remarkably little happens, particularly in terms of actions taken, obstacles encountered, or feats of prowess achieved by either of the two young protagonists. Instead, the heroic acts are all undertaken by the werewolf. When Mélior and Guillaume are surrounded by townspeople at the Benevento quarry and fearing for their lives, Guillaume laments:

Se j’avoie mes garnemens,
Cheval, escu, espee et lance,
Par tans verroient ma puissance,
Saroient au commencier l’uevre
Que beste ceste piaux acuevre. (4050-4054)

[If I had my armor, / My horse, shield, sword and lance, / Soon they would see my strength, / They would know at the beginning of the action / What beast this skin covers]

As the weaponless *bête-in-disguise*, Guillaume is powerless, and it is ultimately the werewolf – likewise not the beast he seems – who uses his actual beastly body to distract the townspeople by stealing away the provost’s son (who remains unharmed, as per the werewolf’s inner nobility),

⁴¹ Aucassin and Nicolette do finally marry without parental consent, but only after Aucassin’s parents die and Nicolette is revealed to be a princess who renounces, likewise through fleeing, her claims to her Saracen lineage and former religious identity. There are no longer any indicated impediments to their union, though we might imagine it would not have been readily accepted in the world outside of the narrative.

allowing the two young people to escape. They do so after having removed their bearskins, which they carry with them, so as to run faster and escape attention.

It is not only in feats of physical combat that Guillaume proves powerless, however - he also fails to provide for himself and Mélior in the woods, instead relying on the werewolf. While his bearskin and lack of weapons are likely encumbrances to hunting (in contrast to *Tristan et Iseult*, in which Tristan's skilled hunting feeds the couple), his apparent inability to survive in the woods without help seems odd in the context of his upbringing, as Behrmann (2012) has pointed out: "The hero's passivity is all the more confounding when we recall that he spent seven years of his childhood learning to live in the woods." (342) Indeed, the text makes explicit that Guillaume was skilled at the rustic life.⁴²

On the other hand, echoing Behrmann's description of Guillaume, Mélior's role in the adventure in the woods has been described by Marion Vuagnoux-Uhlig as lacking in the kinds of initiative that define female mobility in works such as *Aucassin et Nicolette*. As she writes in regard to Mélior and *Guillaume de Palerne*:

[L]a passivité de la jeune fille efface l'équilibre du couple au profit d'une relation courtoise conventionnelle. (177)

⁴² For Behrmann, Guillaume's passivity during the forest sequence represents a form of regression to an infantile state (cared for by the werewolf) that she reads in conjunction with an understanding of the *roman idyllique* as representing familial, inter-generation succession and conflict: "[Guillaume] exhibits unmistakably strong leadership qualities, on the battlefield and off, and an apparent sexual awareness. Yet once animalized by his bear skin disguise, Guillaume becomes defined by his *incapacity*; he regresses to the state of an infant, a regression that only draws to a close when the lovers' hides are removed at Guillaume's rightful court of Palermo. [...] Until the age of eleven, during the period from birth to his arrival at Rome with the politically effective father Nathaniel, Guillaume is designated an *enfant*. Thereafter *damoisel* appears most frequently, as life at court educates the boy, who is also called a *vallet* before his dubbing there and a *vassal* after. *Chevaliers* and *bers*, then *rois* and finally *empereres* dominate in the text's second half." (339)

L'enjeu de la réécriture [de *Cligès*] est clair. Il s'agit de reconduire la demoiselle sur un modèle plus docile, susceptible de satisfaire l'idéal de la perfection matrimoniale. (179)

[L]'indifférence sexuelle et la précellence du personnage féminin disparaissent au profit d'une relation conforme à la convention courtoise. De fait, l'amour n'est plus le fruit d'une habitude contractée dès les premières années, il naît d'un sentiment stimulé par l'admiration, dans le cas de Melior, par la beauté et la noblesse, dans le cas de Guillaume. L'équilibre idyllique laisse ainsi place à une distribution des rôles fondée sur les présupposés de l'échange courtois. Melior affiche sa supériorité de ton et de rang dans l'échange amoureux, mais elle se distingue par sa passivité et son inertie lors des aventures. (179)

[The passivity of the young girl erases the equilibrium of the couple in favor of a conventional courtly relationship]

[The stakes of the rewriting [of *Cligès*] are clear. It is a matter of reworking the damsel according to a more docile model, likely to satisfy the ideal of matrimonial perfection] [sexual indifference and preeminence of the female character disappear in favor of a relationship that conforms to the courtly convention. In fact, love is no longer the fruit of a habit established from one's earliest years, it is born from a sentiment stimulated by admiration, in the case of Mélior, and by beauty and nobility, in the case of Guillaume. The idyllic equilibrium thus gives way to a division of roles founded on the assumptions of courtly exchange. Mélior displays her superiority of tone and rank in amorous exchange, but she distinguishes herself by her passivity and her inertia during the adventure sequences.]

By comparing Mélior's presumed passivity to other female protagonists within the model of the *roman idyllique* (as opposed to that of Chétien de Troyes) with which her study is concerned, Vuagnoux-Uhlig views Mélior's participation in the narrative's adventure sequences as one of "passivity," "docility," and "inertia." She sees this passivity, in turn, as generating a return to the hierarchies and gender norms of the courtly model, in contrast to narratives in which the female protagonist takes a forceful, active role. However, I view this assessment as incomplete. It leaves several major aspects of the work unaccounted for – first, Mélior's role in initiating the escape, and secondly, the simultaneous passivity of Guillaume which renders *both* protagonists relatively passive figures in a manner that brings equilibrium to the gendered hierarchies that are, instead, present within courtly society prior to and following this adventure. Thus, while Vuagnoux-

Uhlig is correct in stating that prior to the adventure, “Mélior affiche sa supériorité de ton et de rang dans l’échange amoureux,” this superiority functions only as a facet of Mélior’s higher social status (as daughter of the emperor) and only within a context in which her own marriage is left outside of her control.

The narrative makes clear that it is in fact Mélior, and not Guillaume, who decides that she will not marry the Greek prince; it is Mélior who hatches the plan of running away; and it is Mélior who first confronts the reality of living in the woods. As she and Guillaume discuss their circumstances prior to their escape, she also directly contradicts Guillaume’s statement that he has lost her:

Et si dites que vos ai mort:
Certes non ai, vos avés tort,
Et que vos perdue m’avés. (2845-2947)

[And thus you say that I have killed you: / Indeed I have not, you are wrong, / And that you have lost me].

Likewise, as Guillaume laments the impossibility of their situation, Mélior chides him and issues a call to action, saying:

Se li a dit; “Biax amis dous,
Se vos plaist, tot ce n’a mestier
Mais or pensons de l’exploitier,
de l’esgarder et del porquerre
Comment soions fors de la terre,
Que ne soions aperceü
Trouvé ne pris ne retenu.” (2962-2968)

[Thus she said to him: “Fair sweet friend, / Please, all of this is not useful, / But now let us think about exploiting it, / Examining it and researching / How we might get out of the realm / Without being seen, / Found or captured or detained.”]

In questioning their ability to survive in the woods, Alexandrine initially raises some very pragmatic issues: “De vos mengier ne sai que dire” [About your meals, I do not know what to say] (3027). Guillaume’s response to these issues is, however, of a romantic rather than practical

nature: “Bien viverons de nos amors, / D’erbes, de fuelles et de flors” [We will live well off our love, / From grass, from leaves and from flowers] (3031-3032).

Guillaume’s romantic view of living off of leaves and grass soon fades, however, and not long into their adventure he changes his tune, stating that “Car pis ne nos puet avenir / Que nous laissons de fain morir” [nothing worse could happen to us / than that we allow ourselves to die of hunger] (3219-3220). As a solution to this problem, Guillaume recommends ambushing someone in the woods (which, notably, the werewolf will later do), but Mélior senses the danger in that course of action, knowing that they are being searched for and recognizing their relatively powerless circumstances. She suggests instead that they live off of the food provided by the woods. It is Mélior’s idea that wins out, although soon enough the werewolf brings them food more suited for aristocratic human consumption, namely meat, bread, and wine. Mélior thus begins the adventure in the woods as the more pragmatic and action-oriented of the two, never hesitating to contradict Guillaume in a well-reasoned manner.⁴³ While Mélior’s initiative begins to fade over the course of the adventure, it is matched by Guillaume’s equal acquiescence and powerlessness in the circumstances. Rather than viewing Mélior’s relative passivity as reflecting a courtly gendered hierarchy that stands in contrast to the almost mirrored coupling and female initiative of other *romans idyllique*,⁴⁴ she attains a position of equilibrium with Guillaume precisely by abandoning her social identity and meeting Guillaume on the level of the animal.

The problem, however, is that the two are, essentially, unable to fend for themselves as animals, or to truly be wild animals, and are reliant upon the werewolf whose transition into a beast was physically complete. The werewolf’s involvement in the narrative and his

⁴³ This is notably the opposite of the advice she receives upon marrying

⁴⁴ For example, *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur* as well as the texts Vuagnoux-Uhlig analyzes in her study: *L’Escoufle* and *Galeran de Bretagne*.

demonstrated prowess substitute, then, for the activity of Guillaume and Mélior's adventure through the woods. Instead, Guillaume and Mélior occupy themselves primarily with avoiding the kinds of confrontation that, in other romance narratives, serve as occasions to demonstrate prowess or generate narrative conflict, suspense, and interest. Their main concern, and the main source of suspense surrounding them, is maintaining their disguises, escaping detection, and not being caught. The werewolf's prowess and the young lovers' avoidance of conflict is clearly articulated, for example, in the former's strategy of leading any potential hunters or searchers away from Guillaume and Mélior:

Ains lor garist sovent la vie,
Car quant li questor approchoient
La ou li dui amant estoient
A tout lor chiens, li leus sailloit;
En aventure se metoit
Por eus garandir et deffendre.
Tos le faisoit a lui entendre,
Que tos les avoit desvoiés
Des jovinceus et eslongiés;
Puis n'avoient garde el jor,
Sovent on de la mort paour.
Ensi la beste les enmaine
O grant travail et o grant paine
Et garde de lor anemis
Que il nes ont perçus ne pris.
Mainte perilleuse jornee
En a soufferte et enduree. (3766-3782)

[Thus he often protects their lives, / For when the hunters would get close / With their dogs to the place where / The two lovers were, the wolf would leap out; / He would put himself at risk / In order to protect and defend them. / He would keep them all busy with him, / Until he had led them all away / And distanced them from the young people; / Afterward they had no more worries that day, / Often they are afraid of death. / In this manner the beast leas them / With great fatigue and with great difficulty / And protects them from their enemies / So that they are neither seen nor captured. / Many a perilous journey / Did he suffer and endure.]

In this passage, it is the werewolf to whom the idea of *aventure* is attributed, and whose prowess is on display. Despite the Guillaume and Mélior's fear (*Sovent on de la mort paour*), it is the

beast's journey that is perilous (*Mainte perilleuse jornee / En a soufferte et enduree*). This same strategy and narrative construct are later repeated and amplified during the episode at the quarry, when the two lovers seek shelter after their path leads them out of the thick woods and past a city on the edge of Apulia. Sleeping in the quarry, they are recognized by some workers who alert the town provost, and a party consisting of the provost and his son sets out to capture them. The intensity of the moment is heightened, but also completely prefigured – as occurs multiple times throughout the narrative – by a dream that Mélior has and that she recounts upon waking in the quarry. In this dream, “Bears and leopards and fierce boars” are coming to eat them, “led by a lion / That had only one cub.”⁴⁵ This description is of course a scarcely disguised figure for the townspeople, provost, and his son, and the accuracy of the dream continues as Mélior recounts how the beast (the werewolf) comes to save them, carrying off the cub, which is incidentally exactly what happens next. The werewolf does indeed carry off the son to distract from Mélior and Guillaume, and the text is clear about the risk the werewolf puts himself in, his exhaustion, and his ultimate success. Meanwhile, Guillaume and Mélior sneak off unseen.⁴⁶

The werewolf's prowess thus creates a scenario in which he – later revealed as the prince Alphonse – takes on the role of the protagonist, a fact which hardly subverts the social or animal/human hierarchy given his noble birth, already revealed by the narrator and clearly reminiscent of Marie de France's *Bisclavret*. The two young people, then, are equalized but

⁴⁵ “Que ci nos venoient mengier / Ors et lupart et sengler fier / Que uns lyons i amenoit / Qui .I. seul lyoncel avoit.” (4005-4008)

⁴⁶ Later again, the same scenario plays out when the two young people hide on a ship in order to sail to Sicily. They embark at night, but how will they disembark upon arrival without being seen? The werewolf again saves the day by distracting the sailors, as it jumps in the water and suffers the blows of the sailors as it tries to swim away. Meanwhile, again, Guillaume and Mélior sneak off.

powerless, with even their narrative roles as protagonists given over to a beast who is not merely wearing a skin as a disguise.

Although the sojourn in the woods thus echoes what Behrmann calls an “idyll” and ostensibly represents a return to an animal state, removed from the exigencies and hierarchies of the court, the narrative in fact reveals the extent to which Mélior and Guillaume never truly leave the social world behind. In their continual avoidance of confrontation, what is foregrounded is not the wildness of the woods in which they find themselves, but rather the degree to which this wildness is penetrated by human society. The werewolf has no problem finding passersby from whom to steal food, and the primary obstacle faced by the two young people, once the issue of hunger has been resolved, is avoiding the many people who are after them. In an episode directly following the incident at the quarry, for instance, Guillaume and Mélior awake in the morning to hear peasants talking near where they are hidden in the underbrush, gathering bundles of sticks. The peasants are discussing the events at the quarry, and at first they treat the story of the white bears as a “merveille,” of the sort that might arise within the margins or entirely outside of civilization: “Ainc tel merveille ne vit nus / Des .II. blanc ors ou tot s’esmurent” [Never such a marvel has anyone seen / Like that of the two white bears when everyone set off] (4308-4309). However, they immediately undo this sense of marvel by mentioning that everyone already knows that the two bears are Guillaume and Mélior:

On dist pieça ceste novele
Que ce est nostre damoisele,
Fille l’empereor demaine,
Et uns chevaliers qui l’enmaine,
Qui en ces piax ensi s’en vont,
Por cui on banist et semont
Tote la gent de ceste terre
Que tot viegnent ces .II. ors querre. (4311-4318).

[They have been saying for a while this news / That it is our lady, / The daughter of the emperor himself, / And one of the knights, who took her away, / For whom they are proclaiming and summoning / All the people of this land / That everyone come to seek out these two bears]

The peasants then express their own desire to find and capture the young people, imagining that the reward for doing so will make them rich. Realizing that their bearskins now serve little purpose, the two young people then change into the skins of a stag and a doe (thoughtfully brought to them by the werewolf), but the abandoned bearskins and skinned deer are later found, so those disguises too (although unbeknownst to Guillaume and Mélior) no longer function as such. Despite their attempts to erase their social identities, Guillaume and Mélior never succeed in being forgotten, in completely fleeing the pressures of human society, or abandoning the visual markers that serve to identify them within that society. In their adventure through the woods, then, it is actually society that is the danger. As the narrative tells us of their bucolic adventures, “Molt lor pleüst icele vie, / S’il ne fuissent en tel paor” [This life would have pleased them very much, / If they had not been so afraid] (3196-3197).

The fear expressed here is not of the wild woods themselves, but rather of the humans that are pursuing them. Their social identities have, in the end, followed them into the margins of the social world. Nor do the animal disguises represent complete transformations, and in fact serve in some ways to highlight the “hidden” nobility of the characters. For example, when Guillaume and Mélior are later resting in the queen of Palermo’s park and she glimpses them through the window, she can see their noble clothing peeking through the seams of the skins. Similarly, Peggy McCracken (2012) notes:

The humans who wear animal skins experience an exclusion from human society and its hierarchies and privileges, but their humanity remains visible in the gestures they make from within the animal hides. (361)⁴⁷

The animals chosen for the disguises – bears, stags, and deer – are also, as other scholars have pointed out, signs of royalty:

Par ailleurs cette substitution [ours / cerf] reflète peut-être le fait qu’au XIII^e siècle a lieu, dans les imaginaires, une mutation importante: l’ours est remplacé par le cerf dans les représentations royales. (Ferlampin-Acher, 69)

[In addition, this substitution [bear/stag] reflects perhaps the fact that in the thirteenth century there took place, within the imaginary, an important transformation: the bear was replaced by the stag in royal representations.]

As Peggy McCracken and Sarah Kay (2012) remind us, wearing the animal skins also paradoxically signals the youths’ nobility: “Noble men and women reserved the exclusive right to dress in animal furs” (2). Hartley R. Miller further elaborates on this use of the bearskin, noting that the text treats Guillaume’s disguised transformation as a noble one:

While the donning of animal skins is a “privileged crossing into the animal world” that confirms the exceptional status of nobility, the shift in Melior’s language suggests a more productive role for the bearskin in Guillaume’s case. The bearskin produces the “sens” of nobility; Guillaume’s “becoming-animal” in this scene can be understood as a simultaneous becoming-noble. His participation in this aristocratic rite is not simply available to him *because* he already belongs to the nobility; rather, his nobility is both conferred and confirmed *by* his participation. (355)⁴⁸

⁴⁷ “The short scene that follows further emphasizes the distinction between the human and the animal. First, the wolf brings the lovers bread and cooked meat – Guillaume and Melior eat human food, not the raw meat that wolves (or even white bears) would eat. Second, the lovers eat like people, not like bears. They bring their hands out of the skins to eat the food the wolf has brought them” (McCracken, 364).

⁴⁸ “The adolescents’ love expresses a desire for mutual likeness that can be read as the desire of nobility for itself. Desire arises in Melior and Guillaume despite the interference of the rational mind: since they believe Guillaume is an orphan, they reproach themselves for loving where they think they should not. The proof of generic nobility evidenced by the noble clothing in which Guillaume was found as a child is insufficient once Guillaume is put in competition with pedigreed princes for Melior’s hand. Their desire for shared likeness is performatively demonstrated when the lovers are sewn into identical white bearskins in order to escape undetected from the city.” (Miller, 352)

We might in fact compare this bearskin disguise to Guillaume's unknown parentage - his "true self" has been disguised all along, although it too shows from beneath the seams. When the emperor first encounters Guillaume in the woods, he enquires about the clothing that the *vacher* found him in, and learns they were indeed rich and noble.⁴⁹ Guillaume's rustic appearance was thus another kind of disguise that did not conceal his true nature, and the emperor can "see" (or suspect) the clothing he previously wore. As the queen of Palermo states when she speaks with Guillaume and Mélior in the park (while she, too, is disguised as a deer): "je sai bien / Vos erremens tos et vos estres" [I know well / your adventures and your situation] (5208-5209). While Leslie Sconduto translate *erremens* and *estres* as *adventures* and *situation*, respectively, "estres" in fact has a deeper connection to "being" than to mere circumstance. The queen then proceeds to make this connection with "nature" more explicit: "Si sui tex beste comme vos, / D'autel samblant, d'autel nature" [I am a beast just like you, / Of similar appearance, of similar nature] (5224-5225).⁵⁰

In these various ways, the narrative suggests that Guillaume and Mélior have a "true nature" that is noble, rather than "natural" in the sense of wild or animal.⁵¹ Guillaume and Mélior may wish to match their amorous desire with a perfectly paired, equal, and mirrored animal identities, lived out beyond the constraints of social obligations, but not only do their social

⁴⁹ Along these lines, Ferlampin-Acher emphasizes the contrasting ways in which the text treats the bear disguises and courtly clothing, providing a clear distinction between the two in terms, at least, of narrative interest: "le contraste avec le déguisement en ours, qui n'est pas décrit, et les tenues de cour, évoquées hyperboliquement sur le modèle de la prétérition (v. 3472) n'est qu'apparent" (68).

⁵⁰ In this discourse, the queen uses a series of animal metaphors to describe her situation, saying for example that: "Chacie m'ont de ma pasture / Autres bestes par lor effors" [Other beasts have chased me / From my pasture with their armed forces] (5226-5227)

⁵¹ The werewolf himself perfectly encapsulates this dynamic, as he maintains his inner nobility even when fully transformed, outwardly or physically, into a wolf.

identities emerge from within them and find expression in the very skins they wear, but there is no place that is truly so wild and marvelous as to be safely separate from society. This is particularly apparent in the narrative's continual employment of accurate and highly specific toponyms throughout the lovers' travels, mapping their wild exile onto the known political world.⁵²

The ability of passion, then, to *despersoner* – for example, in the abandonment of social identity in order to travel through the woods as bears – and the way in which it strips Guillaume and Mélior of their own rational “vouloir” – is never complete on the level of the narrative. As Ferlampin-Acher observes in a footnote to her edition of *Guillaume de Palerne*:

La conciliation entre passion et nécessité sociale est problématique. Comme Tristan et Iseult dans la forêt de Morois, les deux amants ne sauraient vivre leur amour qu'en dehors du cadre curial: cependant cette exclusion ne peut être que provisoire. (172)

[The conciliation of passion and social necessity is problematic. Like Tristan and Iseult in the forest of Morois, the two lovers would not know how to live out their love if not outside of the courtly context: however, this exclusion can only be provisional]

In fact, the exclusion is less than provisional: it never truly exists, and the lovers are instead engaged in a constant mode of vigilance against the social realm, which pursues them through the forest. Ferlampin-Acher's reference to Tristan and Iseult in the forest of Morois is, however, informative. This episode, in which the two lovers are banished by King Mark to live a life in the wild outside of society, has been analyzed by Molly Robinson Kelly in her book *The Hero's Place: Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging*. Her analysis is relevant to a discussion of Guillaume and Mélior's self-exile, as it too calls into question the relationship

⁵² See for example Penny Simons: “It is also apparent that there are very precise and accurate references to geographical locations – for example, Benevento, Reggio and the Straits of Messina – which are juxtaposed with the more fantastic elements derived from the Breton-type tradition of the *merveilleux*” (412).

between aristocratic social identity, the erasure of this identity in the wild beyond the margins of the court, and, importantly, the role that passion plays in this form of exile. At first, she writes that

whether their banishment is seen as a horrible plight or a welcome respite from the constant interference of others, and whether Mark is seen as courtly or uncourtly, their exile in this episode signifies nonetheless the impossibility of integrating their love into society. The Morois/Cave of Lovers episode reveals that estrangement from society is the true nature of the lover's place. [...] In banishment, the alienated placelessness of their love receives external, spatial expression. (237)

Like Guillaume and Mélior, Tristan and Iseult find that their love is “placeless,” having no sanctioned model for expression within the courtly hierarchy. Guillaume and Mélior likewise find that they can only live out their passion away from the court, in circumstances that, they hope, exercise an erasure of social identity and, ultimately, of humanness, opting for something more like an animal existence that is at odds with the characters' upbringing and identity in every way. However, the narrative of *Guillaume de Palerne* suggests strongly that there is no place that is placeless – no place for placeless love to go.

Though Tristan and Iseult do find harbor in a greater wild beyond society, they too sense its incompatibility with their persons:

If this episode illustrates the nature of the lovers' place once they are excluded from all other forms of belonging, then the outlook for them is dismal indeed. Through the use of concrete details, the narrator denotes the solitude and hardship of the lovers' sojourn in Morois forest (see B, vv. 1271-2764). He describes at length their struggle to find food: they lack milk and salt (v. 1297), although they have plenty of meat because Tristan is an excellent hunter. The narrator insists particularly on their lack of bread [...]. Their deep slumber is repeatedly evoked, suggesting their extreme fatigue. Their clothing is tattered [...]. Béroul emphasizes several times that they sleep in a different place every day. This constant mobility demonstrates that, even in the forest wilderness, there is no place for them. (Kelly, 240-241).

Or, more succinctly: “The Morois forest concretizes the burdensome, uncivilized character of their passion and renders the metaphorical placelessness of their love.” (Kelly, 242). *Guillaume de*

Palerne is clearly indebted to the story of Tristan and Iseult, and in reworking certain elements of the narrative, it maintains the placelessness of the Cornish/Irish lovers, but transfers their exile into a mappable political world from which the Roman/Sicilian lovers cannot truly exclude themselves, even within the so-called wilderness. For both sets of lovers, however, the exile, however complete it may or may not be, eventually leads back to the courtly world. As the effects of Tristan and Iseult's passion wears off (signified in the narrative through reference to a potion), they reconsider their choices: "When the potion, which had drained the significance out of their respective social roles by blinding them to all but their passion, loses its effect, their eyes are opened to the desirability of place. *Free will, when restored, chooses belonging over passion*" (Kelly, 242).⁵³

Kelly's use of the phrase "free will" here recalls Love's discourse in which it is love's will that substitutes for that of the desiring subject. While *Tristan et Iseult* covers for its protagonists by suggesting their actions were based on a reaction to a potion (thus absolving them of some responsibility), the effects of passion are not functionally different from this "potion," leaving one to suspect that it merely stands in for the kind of "de-personing" that desire enacts. For *Guillaume de Palerne*, at least, the scenes of amorous suffering suggest as much. Mostly notable, however, is Kelly's assertion that, for Tristan and Iseult, free will exists outside of this passion and is required for the exercise of choice. When free will is made possible, it "chooses belonging," elevating the social identity and social structure above the individual's desire, which itself only leads them to an incompatible animal-like state,⁵⁴ all too evident in *Guillaume de Palerne* in the adoption of animal personas.

⁵³ Emphasis my own.

⁵⁴ "The deprivation Tristan and Iseult experience during banishment reduces them to an almost bestial state. Bérout makes clear that they continue in this existence only because the potion

Guillaume and Mélior likewise choose to integrate back into society, ostensibly so that Guillaume can help the queen of Palermo defend her lands, although they are able to do so in a way that allows them to continue their coupling. Significantly, however, they make no plans for marriage until after Guillaume's identity as the heir to the throne of Palermo is revealed: to consent to marriage is to consent to a social identity that itself relies on the kinds of hierarchies that prevent Mélior from *choosing* someone of unknown parentage. Within the context of a narrative that foregrounds issues of women's consent in marriage during a historical moment when marital consent was of particular political and social interest, we thus find that the protagonists' adventure represents an amorous exile that de-couples desire from consent or free will. The narrative accomplishes this along the model of *Tristan et Iseult* but pushes this model further by suggesting that there is no true exile from the political map, and that life in the wilderness is more fantasy than geo-political reality.

This interpenetration of the wild/animal and the social is further emphasized in the narrative through the continual alternance between descriptions of Guillaume and Mélior's travels through the woods with descriptions of life at the court. While they are experiencing escape, this same escape is being experienced at the court, with the narrator interrupting Guillaume and Mélior's adventure multiple times to take the reader back to the court where everyone is waiting for her to arrive at the church for the wedding. Their story thus appears more as a story of what they've left behind, and one of where they are headed: we know Guillaume's

gives them no other choice. As soon as the potion's power wears off, each remembers the comforts of their former existence at Mark's court, suddenly aware of all they have lost." (Kelly 2009, 241)

backstory and true identity, and are always waiting for it to be resolved, which is only possible through a reacceptance of social identity.⁵⁵

The ending of the narrative in fact highlights the degree to which the path traversed by Guillaume and Mélior is more well-traveled than remote. As messengers are sent to Rome, Spain, and Greece, and as envoys and convoys travel back and forth between these realms, it becomes clear that merely crossing the territory between major urban and political centers does not a wild adventure make. For example, when queen Brande comes from Spain to Palermo, the narrator turns her journey into a kind of elaborate social event:

La roïne pas ne sojourne,
Son oïrre apareille et atorne,
Bien a porquis son estavoir:
Quanque mestier li puet avoir
A fait porter, lors est montee;
Tote sa gent s'est arroutee.
Ne va pas escariement,
Mais a tot grant plenté de gent,
De puceles, de chevaliers
Et de serjans et d'escuiers.
Congié a pris a cex del raine,
Atant s'em part sa gent demaine;
Chascun jor chevauchent a tire.
Ne vos puis mie tout redire
Com le fisent et exploitierent
Ne les ostex ou herbergierent;
Les jornees que il ont faites
Ne vos ierent par moi retraites.
Tant ont le droit chemin tenu
Que en Palerne sont venu. (7533-7552)

[The queen does not tarry / She prepares for her voyage, / Well has she obtained her necessities: / Whatever she might need / She has brought to her, and then she mounted up; / All her people set off on their way. / They do not go unaccompanied, / But with a great quantity of people, / With maidens, with knights, / And with men-at-arms and with squires. / They took leave of those in the realm, / Thereupon the queen herself left. / Each day they ride without interruption. / I cannot tell you everything / As they did it or

⁵⁵ The same applies to the werewolf/Alphonse.

accomplished it / Nor the inns where they lodged; / The voyages that they made will not be recounted by me. / They kept to the road so much / That in Palermo they arrived.]

Unlike Guillaume and Mélior's voyage, the queen's voyage is a social affair, during which events do occur (*Com le fisent et exploitierent*) but which the narrator has no interest in relating. It's not the space traversed, then, that is important for narrative, but rather the manner (*Tant ont le droit chemin tenu*). While the queen's royal voyage is thus not a subject for romance fiction, it does make clear the degree to which traveling between cities was a social event for the nobility, rather than a perilous journey through unknown wilds. The narrative certainly displays an interest in these in-between spaces, however, as Penny Simons points out:⁵⁶

We thus find key elements of the narrative taking place away from the world of the court: the raising of the hero in the forest and the elopement of the lovers from Rome, to give the two most significant examples. Together these two episodes constitute approximately 2000 lines, equivalent to some twenty percent of the total of the romance. (412)

The young lovers' sojourn in the wild is, however, shown not to have been very wild at all, despite their animal disguises. They did, after all, continue to eat meat, bread and wine along the way, and to have everything brought to them as befits the daughter of the emperor and a fine young knight who is actually the heir to the throne of Palermo.⁵⁷ Passion, here, is no match for the courtly world, which is adept at traversing and penetrating rural spaces.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Penny Simons, among others, notes the similarities between *Guillaume de Palerne*, *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, and the Life of Saint Eustace: "In *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, itself a reworking of the life of St. Eustace, Guillaume, the king of England, is ordered by God to renounce the life of this world and abandons his palace for life in the wild forest." (Simons 416) St. Eustace's son was also taken a wolf, and the resonances between the two works are provocative and merit further consideration.

⁵⁷ "Iluec se gisent teste a teste, / Grant joie mainent et grant feste, / Car nul riens ne lor soffraint / C'on ne lor aport ou amaint" [There they are lying head to head, / Showing great joy and great delight, / For nothing have they lacked / That has not been brought or led to them] (4905-4908).

⁵⁸ For a study of rural spaces in *Guillaume de Palerne*, see Penny Simons (2012).

In the final section, I will show how this deconstruction of the trope of the lovers' wild escape reflects the narrative's simultaneous interest in marital consent and political alliance. In particular, I will analyze the series of marriages that make up the work's denouement, solidifying political power through familial relations and standing in stark contrast to Guillaume and Mélior's earlier episodes of passion. In doing so, I will be arguing against a common thread of scholarship on *Guillaume de Palerne* that views the work as "reconciling" passion with marriage, as exemplified, for example, in Ferlampin-Acher's assessment: "Grâce à ce rapport à double détente avec la matière tristanienne, *Guillaume de Palerne* réussit à concilier la passion et le mariage" [Thanks to this double connection to the Tristan matter, *Guillaume de Palerne* succeeds in reconciling passion and marriage] (106). Instead, the passion of Guillaume and Mélior is shown to exist outside of the political and social realm in which individuals enter into marriage contracts, setting up a conflict between these realms that is only imperfectly resolved in the narrative.

Three Marriages

Once at the court of Palermo, and having abandoned their animal disguises, Guillaume and Mélior are separated into spaces and activities that create a hierarchy between them, this time based on gender rather than status.⁵⁹ Because the queen, Félice, is so desperately in need of a heroic savior, Guillaume's status is immediately elevated at her court, aided by the queen's premonition, through a dream, that he will save and even expand her kingdom,⁶⁰ as well as by

⁵⁹ Hartley R. Miller (2012) astutely points out that this gendered difference in fact begins to arise earlier, as they near Palermo and switch from bearskins to those of the stag and doe: "The stag and doe skins reconfer a gender difference on the lovers, thus re-establishing a significant dissimilarity between them." (355-356)

⁶⁰ As with all of the other dreams that occur in *Guillaume de Palerne*, this dream substitutes animals for the human actors (as in the *Song of Roland*, laisses 185-186). Each of these dreams is

her hidden suspicion that he may in fact be her long-lost son, and finally by the horse Brunsaudebruel's obvious and enthusiastic recognition of its master.⁶¹ And yet, there is still no question of Mélior and Guillaume marrying, due in part to the more pressing matter of the war, but also presumably because such a union would still be socially unsanctioned as Guillaume's parentage is still unknown (or unrevealed).

Instead, the narrative moves into an extended series of chivalric/military episodes in which Guillaume repeatedly proves his worth and (presumably) provides the reader with the satisfaction of seeing an enemy violently and thoroughly defeated. In the meantime, Mélior remains in the castle with the other women, including Félise and Florence, who watch, fret, chat, and wait for news.⁶² Mélior has become a passive and nearly absent protagonist. Unlike the overall passivity of the adventure sequence in which she and Guillaume are both reduced to similar levels of dependency, Mélior's role in the narrative diminishes considerably in relation to Guillaume's once they abandon their animal disguises and enter into traditional roles defined by physical prowess, for Guillaume, and interiority, for Mélior. This diminishment does not

also revealed to be completely accurate in its premonitions, as the thinly disguised "symbols" represent in almost literal terms what is about to happen, if the reader/character only replaces the animals with the humans they clearly represent.

⁶¹ "Quant li chevax voit son signor, / Ainc n'ot beste joie grignor; / Vers lui s'en vait humeliant, / De grant amor li fait samblant, / Del pié marche, le col estent; / Et Guilliaumes son bliaut prent, / Le chief li frote et les oreilles. / Molt par vient cex a grant merveilles / Qui esgarder venu estoient" [When the horse sees his lord, / Never did a beast have greater joy. / He goes toward him bowing down humbly, / Great love he shows him, / Stamps his feet, stretches out his neck, / And Guillaume picks up his tunic, / Rubs his head and ears. / Very greatly amazed are those / Who had come to watch] (5501-5509).

⁶² As Mélior waits, she begins to worry that Félise and her daughter Florence might start to fall in love with Guillaume, too, but the narrator assures us there is no danger of this (vv. 5552-5573). Still, it raises the spectre that society still carries its dangers, and that Mélior has not entirely regained her rationality: "Miex amast encor en son pel / Estre el vergier o le dansel / Qu'estre venue ou ele estoit; / Mais de folie de doutoit" [She would rather still be in her skin / With the young man in the orchard / Than to have arrived where she was. / But her fear arose from foolishness] (5569-5572).

function to return the narrative back to its original equilibrium: prior to the adventure in the woods, Mélior featured prominently in the narrative once Guillaume arrived at her father's court. Now that the two are at the court in Palermo, the suspense, friction, and interest of her narrative role has diminished – she has already gone through the suffering of love, has already escaped her potential marriage, and there is, at least initially, no question of her marrying Guillaume. The extensive battle scenes distract from her and Guillaume's dilemma, and the narrative weight is then transferred to resolving the mystery of Guillaume's parentage and righting the wrongs done to Alphonse, the werewolf. These multiple denouements rely on a revelation of identities that transform two of the protagonists into what they truly are – for Guillaume, a prince of Palermo, and for the werewolf, a human prince of Spain. There is no equivalent transformation to enact in Mélior, however – she is the same person before and after her animal skin adventure, and the stability of her social identity requires no resolution. This consistency stands in contrast to the knight-protagonist of chivalric adventure, whose identity and circumstances will have been in some way altered through adventure.

Nonetheless, the issue of Mélior's marriage does once again arise, and it does so within the very explicit and particular context that ultimately brings order to the narrative's political worlds. Marriage is, after all, at the heart of the final episodes in Palermo. It is due to Florence's refusal to marry the prince of Spain that the queen is at war, and it is for this reason that Guillaume once again demonstrates his prowess on the battlefield. The outcome of the battle leads to the king of Spain's recognition that the werewolf might be his long-lost son, and then to the eventually (re)transformed Alphonse's revelation of Guillaume's parentage. In this sense, Florence's refusal to marry the Spanish king was the narrative event that allowed all other rights to be wronged, despite the damage done to the queen's land.

The ensuing discourses surrounding marital consent recall Mélior's earlier dilemma: she did not want to marry the Greek prince, either. In comparison with Florence's situation, we might wonder why Mélior was never consulted when Florence was. Is it because Palermo is ruled by a queen rather than a king or emperor? The two undesired, unconsented-to marriages clearly reflect one another, and the narrative's alignment with its young female protagonists suggests support for the prince of Spain's declaration that "Moilliers a prendre ait mal dehé / C'on fait outre sa volonté" [Cursed be he who takes a wife / Against her will] (7175-7176). The werewolf Alphonse, who along with Guillaume serves as the narrative's symbol *par excellence* of inner nobility, echoes this sentiment when his father explains the situation to him after he has been finally transformed back into his human form:

-- En non Dieu, pere, dist Amphons,
Molt fu grans la derrisions,
Quand par force voliés avoir
La pucele outr son voloir. (8055-8058)

[In the name of God, father, said Alphonse, / Very great was the offense / When by force
you wanted to have / The maiden against her will]

However, this clear-eyed defense of women's marital consent is somewhat obscured as the narrative progresses toward its conclusion. Alphonse, in fact, takes a liking to the woman, Florence, who spurned his brother, but instead of asking what she thinks, he arranges the marriage through the traditional, masculine, aristocratic channels. Following Guillaume's detailed public recounting of all that Alphonse has done for him, he mentions that he doesn't know how he could ever repay him. Alphonse, though, has an idea: "Or te requier, se il te plaist, / Que tu me doignes ta seror / Avoir a feme et a oissor" [Now I ask this, if it please you, / that you might give me your sister / To have as my wife and spouse] (8290-8292). Guillaume enthusiastically agrees to this proposition:

Plaisoit? Mais buer fust ele nee,
Puis que tant vos plaist et agree
Que le volés a moillier prendre.
Et Diex vos puist merir et rendre
L'onor que me faites de li.
Or par serons entier ami,
Ami entier et frere en loi.
Liés et joians la vos otroi. (8297-8304).

[If it please me? But she was born at an auspicious moment, / Since she pleases you and satisfies you so much / That you want to take her as your wife. / And may God compensate you and return / The honor that you are showing me with her. / Now we will truly be perfect friends, / Perfect friends and brothers-in-law. / Happily and joyfully I grant her to you]

Guillaume does not consult with Florence, but rather the marriage is presented as a form of exchange between the two men. Neither the narrative nor the protagonists take any issue with this arrangement, and it is only briefly mentioned that Florence is also happy with it, with this reference to her happiness quickly eclipsed by the happiness of everyone else: her mother and the king of Spain, along with the “barons and rich and poor from all around”⁶³ A good marriage is a standard reward for the kinds of prowess, and nobility of character, demonstrated by Alphonse, but as an entire war has just been fought so that Florence will not have to marry against her will, the way in which the reward is bestowed appears at odds with the very notion of women’s consent. The exchange is portrayed as a homosocial, brotherly bond between Alphonse and Guillaume, rather than an exchange of consent between Alphonse and Florence. The construction “L’onor que me faites de li” suggests the elision of Florence in favor of the bond between the male protagonists, who are thrilled to be *entier ami* (echoing perhaps the *ami* of

⁶³ "Molt fu lie la meschine, / Si fu sa mere la roïne, / Li rois d'Espaigne et li baron / Et riche et povre d'environ" [Very happy was the young lady, / So was her mother the queen, / The king of Spain and the barons / [and] Both rich and poor from all around] (8321-8324).

Guillaume and Mélior's earlier passion) and *freres en loi*, even underscoring the legal aspect of the bond.

As the final nuptials are arranged (Florence with Alphonse, Guillaume with Mélior), the Roman emperor and Alexandrine travel to Palermo to partake in the rituals and festivities; all is forgiven now that Guillaume turns out to be a prince. The much beloved Alexandrine is then so fully lauded by her friends that a third marriage is arranged, between her and Alphonse's brother, who is finally identified as Brandin:

Puis ont parlé d'Alixandrine.
Tant ont la parole menee
Que de Brandin est afiee,
Le frerè Amphon, le puisné,
Et cil l'a prise de bon gré
Par le commandement son frere
Et par le los le roi son pere. (8772-8778)

[Then they spoke of Alexandrine. / They continued the conversation until / She was promised in marriage to Brandin, / The brother of Alphonse, the younger, / And he took her gladly / Because of the command of his brother / And with the consent of his father the king]

The fact that this brother was so undesired by Florence that Palermo fought a war so she wouldn't have to marry him goes uncommented upon, and he is suddenly a suitable match. Now, even the brother appears to consent out of a sense of obligation (his brother's *commandement*), with his consent likewise transferred to his father (*le los le roi*), while there is no mention of Alexandrine's *vouloir*.

The three marriages nevertheless take place under a general feeling of goodwill, and even the Greek prince, who is in attendance, nobly accepts the outcome. But this sense of balance and well-being is, at the same time, disturbed when the Greek prince reflects to himself that if he were in a position to do so, he would not have accepted the outcome so amiably, and instead

would have fought for Mélior.⁶⁴ The Greek prince's thoughts recall Florence's earlier circumstances and suggest that the dilemma of women's consent – or anyone's consent – has not yet been universally resolved in this one instance. Randy Schiff (2009) astutely applies a political reading to the Greek prince's loss: "Each of the romances participates in Western consolidation by excluding the Eastern other from the closing marriage alliances, revealing that class is the driving force of its animalized allegory" (418). Indeed, in recalling Alexandrine's earlier defense of Mélior as not wanting to be locked up in the style of Constantinople, the refusal of the Greek east can be read as both an example of "western consolidation" and as a reflection on women's specific autonomy within that tradition. At the same time, the tradition of women's autonomy is not only of a geographical-political nature, but also a literary one, as it in fact refers back to the ending of *Cligès*. Along these same literary lines, the Greek prince reprises his role as King Mark to Guillaume and Mélior's Tristan and Iseult, as the narrative explicitly states what the careful reader would have already realized, namely that the Greek prince is Guillaume's uncle:

Mais molt par s'est esmerveilliés
 Li Griex que cil estoit ses niés
 Qui sa feme li ot tolue. (8787-8789)

[But the one who marveled so very greatly was / The Greek, that it was his nephew /
 Who had stolen his wife]

The line that separates Guillaume and Mélior from Tristan and Iseult or from Cligès and Fénice is therefore slim indeed, dependent upon their having fled prior to Mélior's marriage, and upon the incapacity of the Greek prince to take what he wants, given the circumstances. Legally, his

⁶⁴ "Ja n'en joïst, se il peüst, / C'ançois par force ne l'eüst. / Mai c'est ce qui estre ne puet, / Voelle ou non remanoir l'estuet" [He would rejoice no more about it, if it were possible, / But would rather take her by force. / But this cannot be / Like it or not, he must remain] (8791-8794)

claim to Mélior's hand would have some basis in the previous promise that was made to him, and indeed the promise was seen as part of the legal process leading to a marriage; however, its relative power was subordinate to that of consent. He knows that he would have to obtain Mélior "by force," recalling precisely the way in which Florence's circumstances were described.⁶⁵

The most destabilizing aspect of the marriages, then, is the lingering issue of consent and its seemingly contradictory treatment in the text. While Guillaume and Mélior's eventual harmonious and politically sanctioned marriage has been described by Ferlampin-Acher as "reconciling passion and marriage" or as "socializing" love,⁶⁶ I hope to have shown how the narrative instead stages passion as irreconcilable with the kinds of consent required of marriage (or indeed, with consent itself).⁶⁷ In addition to the discourses surrounding the "de-personing" of passion and Love's usurpation of will, Guillaume and Mélior's woodland adventure reveals the degree to which such passion has no place within either the courtly world or the marginal realms into which the courtly in fact penetrates. Thus, when Ferlampin-Acher states that, for *Guillaume de Palerne*, love is an "urge" that must be lived out "cathartically" in a situation in which "one accepts to be a bear or a deer, in order for marriage, lineage, and political power to be firmly

⁶⁵ "Cesti cuidai par force avoir" (7481).

⁶⁶ Ferlampin-Acher (96 & 137-138).

⁶⁷ This conclusion also contrasts directly with that of Sconduto (1995), who writes: "*Guillaume de Palerne* clearly endorses the ecclesiastical paradigm. Guillaume and Melior, in effect, reject the aristocratic model when they flee Rome to avoid the marriage that her father has arranged for her. They choose instead to follow the ecclesiastical pattern, which is represented by the three marriages at the end of the romance. By the time *Guillaume de Palerne* was written, this model was fairly well established, and the authority of the Church regarding marriage was recognized by the nobility. The romance, therefore, does not present a debate over the two paradigms of marriage but instead extends its presentation of the moral vilienie of nobles to include a criticism of those who disregard the principle of mutual consent introduced in the ecclesiastical model of marriage" (78).

established,” (107)⁶⁸ she correctly identifies the narrative’s juxtaposition of the political and the passionate, but perhaps gives too much credit to the cathartic value of the adventure. It does not by itself, after all, result in a good political marriage: only the revelation of Guillaume’s identity does that. Yes, the lovers accept their roles as bears and deer, but only within a highly aristocratic framework in which they remain cared for, continue to eat like nobles, and must constantly dodge a human society that recognizes them for what they are.

Likewise, the three marriages at the end of the narrative leave open the question of consent. Taken in its strictest legal form, consent refers only to the words uttered during a marriage ceremony. The legal validity of this spoken vow, even when spoken in clandestine circumstances, primarily came into question when the couple did not agree on whether they had both indeed consented (Karras 2012, 58). What the words were intended to express was a personal form of consent to marriage in a context in which this consent was held as distinct from the familial arrangements that had traditionally governed marital contracts among the nobility. Given the emphasis placed on consent throughout the text, in the context of two different female protagonists, it is impossible to ignore the similarities between how Florence and Alexandrine’s marriages are ultimately arranged and how Mélior’s initial marriage was arranged as well. Ultimately, then, the issue is not with marriage as arranged on a model of homosocial exchange, but rather with women’s acceptance of this arrangement. At the same time, Alexandrine and Florence’s respective acceptances of their marriages are only briefly gestured at, for the latter,

⁶⁸ “L’amour est au contraire une pulsion, qui engage la nature aussi bien que la samblance et l’estre et qu’il importe de canaliser, après une phase quasiment cathartique où l’on accepte d’être ours ou cerf, pour que le mariage, le lignage et le pouvoir politique soient fermement établis” [Love is on the contrary an urge, which engages *nature* as well as *semblance* and *estres*, and that it is important to channel, after a quasi-Cathartic phase in which one accepts being a bear or a stag, so that marriage, lineage, and political power can be firmly established] (Ferlampin-Acher, 107).

and not at all mentioned, for the former. In the absence of an abiding passionate love, however, their acceptance appears reasonable: marital decisions are made, rationally, within a political rather than personal dynamic. On the other hand, what to make of Florence's initial refusal of Brandin, when no explanation is offered? The narrative appears to side with consent while undermining any straightforward interpretation of what justifies and underlies it, suggesting that it is really geo-politics and social hierarchies that are at stake.

The ability of marriage to cement and socialize political desire and men's bonds, on the other hand, is clear. Mélior's near-disappearance from the end of the narrative is counterbalanced by Alphonse's increased role, and her relationship with Guillaume is ultimately eclipsed by Guillaume's homosocial bond with Alphonse. In speaking with Alphonse, Guillaume's discourse resembles the vows of a marital or amorous union:

Je t'aim et serf a mon pooir;
Molt de vera icil liés estre.
Nostre regne soient tot un,
Nostre voloir soient comun;
De tot voel faire le tien gré,
Trestot met a ta volonté;
Terre et honor, cors et avoir
Pues prendre et faire ton voloir. (8264-8272)

[I love you and will serve you to the best of my ability. / Very happy ought to be the one / Who can be sure of your love. / May our realms be entirely one, / And may our will be common. / I want to do all that you want, / I put absolutely everything at your disposal: / My land and fief, life and possessions, / You can take them and do as you please with them.]⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Hartley R. Miller (2012) has likewise observed how this transfer begins even earlier, while the young couple is still in the woods and beginning to recognize the werewolf's inner worth: "Guillaume begins to transfer recognition of his idyllic resemblance to Melior to recognition of Alfonso as a chivalric peer. By the end of the romance, after Alfonso has regained his proper human form, the bond between the two princes comes to overshadow the relationship each one has with his queen" (355).

Guillaume explicitly references love in his *serment*, promising his friend not only his possessions but also his “cors,” and strongly echoing the marital sentiment and advice found throughout medieval romance that “Nostre voloir soient comun.” Similar language appears, in fact, in the marital advice given by the queen of Palermo at the end of the narrative (9504-9520).

In conjunction with this shift, Mélior’s brief return to the narrative at the end, after a semi-absence, emphasizes solely her contribution to Guillaume’s lineage: “.II. enfans ot de sa moillier / Qui molt furent poissant et fier” [He had two children by his wife / Who were very powerful and fierce] (9645-9646). Here, Mélior is no longer named, now simply referred to as “sa moillier,” overshadowed in the verse by the dominant, initial position of the “.II. enfans” who are also the subject of the following verse (from which the *moillier* has disappeared).

Perhaps the most notable example of Mélior’s gradual erasure from a story whose narrative sequence she inspired, however, is the conspicuous absence of her name from the story’s concluding list of characters, with a double reference to Guillaume’s descendants:

Del roi Guillaume et de sa mere,
De ses enfans et de son genrre,
De son empire et de son regne
Trait li estoires ci a fin. (9650-9653)

[About Guillaume and his mother, / About his children and his offspring, / About his empire and his realm / The story draws to an end here.]

Who has this story really been about? Up until the final Palermo episodes, the narrative was highly balanced between Guillaume and Mélior, with the hierarchically superior Mélior often serving as a voice of reason. By the end, we are told that this has been Guillaume's story, as already suggested by the title, emphasizing the degree to which the kind of adventure the two shared in the woods has no place within a society and a genre that prize lineage and social identity. And yet, we cannot ignore what we have read leading up to this. The female

protagonists have played a primordial role in arranging the circumstances that brought about such a happy political and homosocial ending, while the realm of adventure has been shown to be one where men and women may be brought onto equal terms. This adventure, however, is no match for the larger forces at work within the royal families of Rome, Spain, Palermo, and Greece.

Conclusions

Like other instances of female adventure, such as we saw in the *Roman de Silence*, the erasure of identity of the female protagonist (often traveling in disguise) means that Mélior's adventure will not accrue as social currency. Mélior's social currency remains her high social status and noble upbringing, unchanged throughout the narrative. Even her time in the wilderness does not and cannot mask or alter either her birth status or her learned behaviors, mirroring Guillaume's own nobility despite an upbringing away from the court and, in fact, in the woods. The animal disguises donned by the lovers simultaneously suggest their passion's lack of reason and "placelessness" within the social hierarchy, while also signaling their nobility and scarcely functioning as disguises: even the peasants gathering sticks in the woods know who they are. As the queen of Palermo suggests, their true nature lies hidden, while remaining in evidence, under the animal skins.

As a disguised adventure that does not generate an increase in social status, both Guillaume and Mélior participate in a form of adventure, in the episodes traveling as animals, that follows a female model due to its unsanctioned character, its suppression of identity, and its contravention of the norms of chivalric narratives that prize knightly prowess and renown. True, Lancelot also serves as a model for the unknown knight, but his adventures in this guise involve

intensive forms of knightly proving; for Guillaume and Mélior, the challenge is merely to survive, and this survival is largely ensured by the care of the werewolf rather than their own skill or initiative.

Mélior's gradual erasure once she has returned to the social sphere stands in contrast to her erasure in the woods: in one, she suppresses her identity but gains narrative prominence, while in the other she attains an even higher social status but loses narrative interest as a character in her own right. However, medieval narrative thrives on social connections, too, and what makes the adventure in the woods into a story is the social status of the characters, their conflicted relationship to the political world, and the "marvel" (as narrative trope) of the werewolf: the social interest in their story has also penetrated the wild woods, about which medieval narrative indeed has little to say without some adventure occurring within it.

While such an unknightly adventure may not do much for the status of the protagonists and only serves to reinforce the degree to which social identity and belonging is an inescapable aspect of one's nature, it does, apparently, serve as great material for a story. In fact, the denouement of *Guillaume de Palerne* employs a highly conspicuous repetition of storytelling, with the story of Alphonse and/or Guillaume and Mélior told and retold a half a dozen times by and to different characters: it is told to Mélior's father (twice), who then tells his barons; Mélior tells it to Alexandrine; Mélior tells it to a room full of people including the Greek prince; and the Greeks tell it again when they get home. The story of Alphonse's transformation is treated as the marvel that it is (8779-8785), but Guillaume and Mélior's story is also met with amazement, as listeners wonder how they ever survived (8667-8679), and they are overjoyed to hear this adventure story: "De l'aventure font grant joie" (8679).

In its interaction with a range of source materials and self-conscious employment of multiple endings and retellings, *Guillaume de Palerne* firmly asserts its own belonging to a social literary tradition while playing with and at times subverting this tradition's recognizable forms. Female adventure, and the adventuring couple, function within this tradition as an expansion of, and alternative to, the knightly model, encompassing a male-female dynamic that is shown to be equalizing in love, but hierarchical within political society. And yet the narrative's suggestion that there is no space beyond the social, and that passionate love itself is disabling of choice and destructive of subjectivity, calls into question the premise on which such romance couplings rely, namely that they represent a form of consent that "socializes" or "reconciles" the politics of marriage by embedding it within a love story. The narrative's prominent interest in marital consent raises the question of whether such socialization is possible, only to foreclose any unproblematic answers. True, Guillaume and Mélior end up happily married at the end. But the narrative's conclusion sidelines the couple in favor of homosocial and political bonds between Guillaume and Alphonse, and between Rome, Palermo, and Spain. The narrative suggests that there is absolutely a space for female and coupled adventure in romance, but that its primary function resides in storytelling, not in its ability to create a new kind of consenting, social subject that will somehow transform aristocratic marital models. If there is a social value to be had in this kind of adventure, it is perhaps in its emphasis on female bodily autonomy and mobility. In choosing to escape into the woods disguised as a bear, Mélior evades the fated enclosure that would result from her marrying the Greek prince, a fate that the narrative, through the voice of Alexandrine, makes clear is an unacceptable price to pay for an advantageous marriage. Mobility and consent are truly what is at stake for the female protagonists in *Guillaume de Palerne*, and yet these forms of autonomy and legal subjectivity sit

uneasily in a society in which the exchange of women secures political, male bonds. By foregrounding female and coupled adventure, *Guillaume de Palerne* raises pertinent questions about gender conventions in romance and in aristocratic society, but it does not provide us with any easy answers.

Conclusion: Towards a Model for Female Adventure

A model for female adventure exists in Old French romance, and it is neither obscure nor necessarily transgressive. Although conventional definitions of romance have focused on the knightly protagonist, and accounts of subjectivity in literature have since the nineteenth century privileged the “male individual” represented by the wandering knight, romance has in fact interrogated gender and featured a rich array of female protagonists from *Tristan et Iseult* and Chrétien de Troyes onward. The three romances that have been the focus of this dissertation – the *Roman de Silence*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and *Guillaume de Palerne* – offer three distinct case studies that show not simply that female protagonism and adventure can be found in romance, but also how foregrounding women allows writers of romance to interrogate narrative and social conventions as well as themes such as discourse and performance. Shifting our frame of reference to encompass female protagonists alongside knight-protagonists reveals romance to be a more capacious and flexible genre, particularly in relation to gender and adventure, than has traditionally been acknowledged. Similarly, romance is revealed to have a broad interest and capacity to interrogate both class and gender norms.

As our case studies have demonstrated, one of the major areas of transformation between a female and a male model of adventure in romance involves the treatment of social identity. While for a knight-protagonist, adventure results in greater renown and sometimes even the revelation of identity, for female protagonists adventure signals a suppression of social identity, in the form of a name, a gender, a social class, or even humanness. This suppression leads to a non-correspondence between women’s demonstrations of prowess and the development of a meaningful reputation or social identity – women’s prowess simply does not accrue to their

persona in a way that meaningfully transforms their social value or prospects. These female protagonists may get what they want (or are expected to want) in the end – namely a socially or politically promising marriage – but this comes about due to a change in circumstances rather than through the development or elevation of their social identity. Thus, Silence marries the king and inherits due to the revelation of her female identity and the simultaneous revelation of the current queen’s infidelity, Nicolette, despite the revelation of her nobility, marries Aucassin because his parents have died, and Mélior marries Guillaume because he turns out to be a prince.

The suppression of female identity enables the narrative to raise questions about the significance of such identity markers as a name or a social class, and to explore the space between identity, reputation, and self. In this sense, disguise and performance feature prominently in female-centered romances. Far from stripping women of their subjectivity, these narratives present the reader or audience with an awareness of female prowess that may not be visible to the other characters in the narrative. In this sense, only the reader knows the full extent of Silence’s travails, Nicolette must herself narrate her own adventures to Aucassin (while disguised as someone else), and Mélior and Guillaume’s adventure becomes the source of a series of narratives recounted at the end of the romance. However, what these stories do for the female protagonist is socially limited. Silence’s reputation as one of the kingdom’s best knights is quite simply erased as she becomes queen and her considerable skills (she did save the kingdom) are apparently no longer needed or recognized; Nicolette’s story of her adventures serve only the personal purpose of discerning whether or not Aucassin still loves her; Mélior does not gain or lose anything through the story of her adventure, which seems to function primarily as a form of entertainment at the end of the narrative. Female adventure thus enables the *romancier* to question the value and basis of social identity without necessarily contradicting

its importance, because it is not assumed that this identity will function in the same way for a wandering female as it will for a wandering knight. Yet the questions these narratives pose are salient for both knight and ladies: What does a name or an appearance represent? Is there an inner nobility, and if so, is it something nobles innately have or is it something else entirely? On what basis are class, gender, or religious distinctions made, and to what degree should these infringe on the rights or freedoms of individuals, for example to marry or inherit? What is the relationship between desire and consent? What are the limits of adventure? Who can have adventures, and what kind?

In a related manner, the importance of narrative as a producer of adventure surfaces repeatedly in female-centered romances. In these romances, female characters demonstrate various types of discursive prowess that often substitute for forms of physical proving, even when the character (as with Silence) clearly demonstrates skill in battle. Likewise, the narrativity of adventure is highlighted through a focus on the language of adventure and the way in which *aventure* is applied as a concept in a variety of circumstances and situations, including passionate love and dangerous seductions. In female-centered romances, the narrative revels in its own flexibility and its own prowess, of which the rewriting of chivalric adventure around a female protagonist is one manifestation. The ability of language to signify on multiple levels is also highlighted in both the *Roman de Silence* and *Aucassin et Nicolette*, as is the power of the heroines to manipulate appearances and use language to their advantage. However, for Silence language is also an absence or an inability to say what is true, most remarkable in her refusal to offer the best proof she has in response to the queen's false rape narrative. This reticence is of course made visible in the very name Silence. For all of our heroines, language has its limits and it is partially for this reason that adventure – a form of physical displacement – becomes a

necessity for them. Nicolette cannot argue her way into marrying Aucassin or being freed from her tower imprisonment (Aucassin certainly tries this tactic to no avail) while Mélior cannot talk her way out of her marriage with the Greek prince, as she had no say in it to begin with.

Alexandrine explains all of this to the emperor, but it does not alter Mélior's situation, which can only be changed through a course of action. And yet, for female protagonists, what that action consists of is largely narrative and performative in nature, coupled with the risks and displacements inherent in traversing geographical space and encountering others along the way.

For each these heroines, however, the outcome of their adventures is comparable to that of the knight-protagonist in that each of them makes an advantageous or at least appropriate marriage in the end, although in Silence's case the absence of any apparent love or desire renders the marriage ambiguous. And yet marriage is also the source of Nicolette and Mélior's dilemmas from the outset. Indeed, as Kathy Krause and studies of the *roman idyllique* have shown, familial and marital crises are what motivate female protagonists to leave home or the court and engage in the kinds of mobile behaviors that generate the conditions for adventure. Krause in particular has argued that these familial dramas do not, however, situate female protagonists in a more domestic sphere than the knight, as the domestic and political are always imbricated in romance. As we have seen, female protagonists in fact provide a means of delving into the conflict between social and other forms of identity. Romance narratives that feature female protagonists openly problematize the connection between the personal and the political by focusing on the personal consequences of decisions or customs such as the outlawing of female inheritance, the ability to marry across religious and class lines, or the idea of consent in marriages. In this sense,

female protagonists are not merely metaphors within a male discourse but are rather responding to circumstances that were of concern, and being actively negotiated, for both men and women.¹

In the three romances we have looked at, we have also seen how female protagonism is often featured in a recognizable and precise geographic and political world. Silence is the daughter of the duke and duchess of Cornwall, and her itinerary as a traveling minstrel is traced out with real place names (Nantes, 2941; Gascony, 3215; the court of the Duke of Burgundy, 3216). Nicolette is from Cartagena and lives in the real city of Beaucaire, and as I have shown the narrative revolves around the particular geography and culture of the south of France. Guillaume is from Palermo, Mélior is the daughter of the emperor of Rome, and Alphonse is from Spain, and all along Guillaume and Mélior's travels specific place names (such as Benevento) are given, which have been shown by scholars to be not only accurate, but also accurately described in the text.² The issues that these female protagonists confront are also all salient for their time. Female inheritance was at issue in the thirteenth century, the cultures and societies of southern France reached a crisis with the Albigensian Crusade around the same time that *Aucassin et Nicolette* was written down, and issues of consent were part of the changes occurring in the legal and religious structures surrounding marriage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The challenges that these female protagonists confront, then, were current and unsettled in the time these romances were written. Far from being vague and ambiguous accounts of women's problems within the domestic sphere, romances that feature female protagonists deal with complex and current tensions between individual freedoms and desires, on the one hand, and the constraints of political and social structures on the other.

¹ At least, of the aristocratic class in French medieval society

² See for example Simons (2012, 420-421).

At the same time, and as a final point, these romances display a high degree of self-consciousness relating to gender. It was not lost on medieval *romanciers* that to build a romance around a female character was to make a statement about gender or to reframe romance along gendered lines. Perhaps this reframing was even *the point* for some or all of the romances I have looked at in this study; it certainly seems to be so for the *Roman de Silence*, and both *Aucassin et Nicolette* and *Guillaume de Palerne* include specific and even remarkable discourses about women and gender. Foregrounding women is thus not a simple gimmick, but rather encompasses an extensive reflection on the role of women in narrative and on women's freedoms, including freedom of movement. The *Roman de Silence* even goes so far as to ask whether or not gender is innate (Nature) or learned (Nurture), a question that *Guillaume de Palerne* likewise takes up in relation to class. Though the *Roman de Silence* ultimately hands Nature her triumph, Nurture puts up a good enough fight to make us wonder whether the battle has really been decided so definitively. Even Reason sides with Nurture, on the simple basis that Silence has more freedoms and privileges as a male – why not live as one, then? Silence excels at knightly activities, too, further complicating what is meant by gender in a social context. Similarly, in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, the Torelore episode reverses gender conventions to a comical or parodic effect, but also self-consciously undermines some of its own parody by suggesting that Aucassin's adherence to more traditional gender conventions (such as killing people in battle) is potentially grotesque, and certainly both pointless and out of place. And as we have seen, even these “gender reversals” were more common, historically, particularly in relation to Occitan society, than it might at first appear if we adhere to traditional critical notions about gender dynamics in romance.

The relationship between the interest that these three narratives show in women's freedom of movement, and the fact that they place women in the position of the mobile protagonist, merits further consideration. In the *Roman de Silence*, we saw how Reason intervenes on behalf of Nurture, and how Silence comes to agree with Reason, based on the argument that boys have more freedoms, particularly those represented by having a horse and not being forced to stay in one's room as a form of imprisonment or even enslavement (*bastonage*).³ In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, we saw how Nicolette takes the initiative to make her *own* escape from her tower prison, and how it is Nicolette who first wanders into the woods, thus beginning the adventure that Aucassin will only partly join her on. And in *Guillaume de Palerne*, we saw how Alexandrine defends Mélior to the emperor by telling him that Mélior didn't want to marry the Greek prince because she didn't want to live a life of forced enclosure like the women of Constantinople, echoing the ending of *Cligès* as a reasonable defense against making an otherwise advantageous marriage. The fact that women are frequently emplaced in romance narratives, or find themselves imprisoned in towers, is clearly a circumstance that women would not accept if given the choice. Instead, our narratives suggest that it is the freedoms of knightly protagonists that women desire, perhaps not to embark on an adventure filled with combative prowess, but to have the ability to exercise control over the movement – and exchange – of their bodies.

Nowhere does women's lack of freedom or mobility become more apparent than in narratives where women engage in mobile adventures. These adventures are hard won; they involve being forced into situations of lifelong cross-dressing, dangerous escapes from imprisonment, and taking on the disguise of a bear and living in the woods, surviving only on the

³ Verse number 2871, see first page of the introduction.

generosity of a werewolf (not ideal!). They are also occasioned by political, familial, and marital crises, rather than undertaken on a whim or as part of the normal order of things. While no “actual” woman would be expected to live in *imitatio Silentii* (although Joan of Arc provides an endlessly complex and later comparison), just as saints’ lives were not meant to be *literally* imitated, still the issues of inheritance that Silence’s dilemma points to would be salient for female members of its audience or readership. In its construction against, and in relation to, the knightly model, women’s adventure hinges on the ways in which women’s circumstances differed from men’s. Thus, female adventure enacts transformations in the motivations for leaving the court (with a greater emphasis on crisis), in the kinds of prowess women demonstrate based on the kinds of challenges they encounter (with a greater emphasis on discursive and performative prowess), and in the notion of social identity (with a greater emphasis on the suppression of identity). These transformations result in bringing increased attention to the precarity of women’s circumstances. On a narrative level, they also provide a means of attributing the coveted status of *subjectivity* to women.

Areas for further exploration

Several areas of significant interest have emerged from my work on female protagonism, in addition to those mentioned above, that merit further development. In particular, I see my research as generating new perspectives on the figure of the couple in romance, the interconnection between representations of gender in romance and other medieval genres (however fluid they may be) and an intersectional approach to female protagonism, specifically as related to class but also to race, religion, and geography. Likewise, as discussed in the introduction, female adventure in medieval narratives can challenge theoretical/philosophical

models of subjectivity that take the figure of the wandering knight as a point of origin for the development of the male individual. Similarly, female adventure and protagonism can contribute to modern discussions of gender and representation, particularly as they relate to story forms.

I have highlighted throughout this study the degree to which shifting our frame to encompass women challenges the image of the solitary, wandering knight. While such knights do exist in romance, we also find myriad examples, as far back as Chrétien de Troyes but also notably even farther back in the legend of *Tristan et Iseult*, of male-female adventuring couples. As we saw in my chapter on *Guillaume de Palerne*, and as is also evident to some degree in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, the couple represents an undertheorized aspect of romance adventure, and one that has the potential to transform our understanding of the solitary nature of the hero and of the focus on the *individual* in the unitary sense. True, the amorous couple of romance has been widely accounted for within modern scholarship, but such accounts stop short of attributing to the couple the central figure in adventure, or a particular kind of agency. And yet, making adventure the purview of the couple rather than the solitary knight enacts a serious alteration of notions of subjectivity based on the individual, or of histories of medieval literature that see in it the rise of the individual. What if this individual was not acting alone, but rather as part of a couple?

Secondly, as discussed in the introduction, a major facet of female protagonism and adventure in romance that is still vastly under-explored is that of the connection between the portrayal of women and gender in romance and other medieval genres, and in particular in saints' lives. Each of these genres served as source material for the others, and the lines between them are not always clear, whether in terms of form or content. Brigitte Cazelles (1991) has highlighted female protagonism in saints' lives (which she refers to as "hagiographic romances")

due to their shared formal features). The representation of women as protagonists, including various forms of female adventure, is also evident in *chanson de geste*, *pastourelles*, *lais*, and *fabliaux*, in addition to lyric, each of which explores issues of gender from a unique perspective that taken together form a rich tapestry of women's experiences, circumstances, and subjectivity in fiction.⁴ A full account of female subjectivity in romance would thus include a more broadly intertextual study. Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* was an important first step down this road, but that work's heavy focus on masculinity leaves much room for a fuller account of women and female characters within narrative gender dynamics. A broader study of women in romance, or of women in medieval fiction, could also incorporate a comparative approach beyond Old French and beyond the western canon. Indeed, many medieval stories and narrative forms circulated across the medieval world, and looking for alterations in gendered portrayals and discourses could provide a means of assessing how medieval writers and audiences responded to, and innovated upon, such narratives within different cultural, social, and political, geographic, and religious environments.

A comparative approach would also open up a greater arena in which to consider gender from a more intersectional perspective. For the narratives that have been the focus of my study, class in particular presents a complex and highly significant aspect of gender, including in the concept of one's "nature." I have tried to be attentive to intersecting categories in my readings, most significantly in my reading of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. However, by expanding the relevant corpus to include a broader range of romances both in Old French and across medieval cultures,

⁴ For an excellent discussion of the notion of fiction and fictionality in relation to medieval literature, see Julie Orlemanski (2019), who writes: "if the answer to 'Who has fiction?' is everyone, the relevant question becomes *how* people have it" (147).

female protagonism could be explored in a more diverse manner that could take greater account of difference across a variety of identities and geographies.

Finally, the lens of female adventure and female protagonism in romance enables us to challenge notions of subjectivity built around the chivalric hero and the male individual, while also contributing to current discussions of gender through historical models and examples of female-centric narratives. I have already discussed in the introduction the ways in which I see female adventure as providing an alternative to, and expansion of, subjectivity theory, and these ideas can be further elaborated into a larger philosophical argument that moves beyond individual narratives and instantiations of female protagonism. This alone would form a contribution to gender theory from the perspective of how gender has historically been used as a means of arguing for certain kinds of subjectivity, or how narrow readings of medieval genres are more exclusive of women than the narratives are themselves.

Appendix: Romances featuring female adventure

I provide below a list of Old French romances narratives featuring female protagonists and female adventure. The episodes of female adventure in these romances exist along a spectrum of resemblance to the chivalric model, but are all predicated on a movement away from the home or court and contain elements of risk, challenge, prowess, and/or the marvelous. An argument could be made that they each present an alternative to, or expansion of, the knightly model of adventure, whether in the form of the adventuring couple or in the form of singular female adventure. A non-exhaustive list of such romances, many of which have been variously referenced throughout this study, includes:

Aucassin et Nicolette

Cligès

Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur

Erec et Enide

L'Escoufle

La fille du comte de Pontieu

Galeran de Bretagne

Guillaume de Palerne

La Manekine

Le Roman de Mélusine (fourteenth century)

Le Roman de la rose ou Guillaume de Dole

Le Roman de Silence

Le Roman de la violette

Tristan et Iseult

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