TOUCHING THE HERO

Bodies, Boundaries and Blood in the Old French *Cycle des Narbonnais*

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Abstract

The poems of the Old French *Cycle des Narbonnais* are highly concerned with touch, paying close attention to who touches whom first in greetings, who is authorised to perform certain symbolic touches and, reading violence as a radical version of touch, whose touch is victorious in battle. Modern sociologists suggest that touching follows lines of social prestige; however, by employing a performative approach to identity, overlaid with a psychoanalytic interpretation of the subject's relationship with the Other, I argue that regulated patterns of touch in the poems iterate and maintain heroic identity. Of course, an identity forged in this way is problematic, for touch both creates and erases the difference upon which performative identity depends, and I argue that violence erupts as a result of this paradox. By thus linking touch, violence and identity, I ask questions about the nature of violence itself, making this a relevant study in a world that is getting out of touch, yet is riven by violent conflict.

I demonstrate that within the community of knights with which the poems concern themselves, there is a shared language of touch that creates bonds between those men, excluding those who are ineligible: women, peasants, children and Saracens. The ritualised public touch of the dubbing ceremony marks the knight's entry into this community, and announces his willingness to kill its enemies. Now his prowess, honour and self-worth – his heroic identity – will be figured through his ability to destroy outsiders whilst remaining inviolate. His violent touching of the Other is a means to safeguard his own body against the Other's traumatic touch, yet it also necessitates proximity with an enemy that troublingly mirrors his own values and achievements. As anxiety provoked by disintegrating subjective boundaries worsens, violence escalates and knights battle mercilessly, until as one poem describes, 'de lor sanc cort li ruz contre val' ('the river of their blood ran down the valley', *Les Narbonnais*, l. 3952).

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Abbreviations

Primary sources will be abbreviated as follows in line references:

Narbonne Cycle

Aymeri de Narbonne	*ADN*
Girart de Vienne	*GDV*
Guibert d'Andrenas	*GDA*
La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne	*LMA*
La Prise de Cordres	*PDC*
Le Siège de Barbastre	*SDB*
Les Narbonnais	*LN*

Other Frequently Cited Sources

Aiol	*AL*
Aliscans	*AC*
Ami et Amile	*AA*
La Chanson de Guillaume	*CDG*
La Chanson de Roland	*CDR*
Le Chevalier au Lion	*CL*
Les Enfances Guillaume	*EG*
Li Biaus Descouneüs	*BD*

Introduction

> How is one to touch, without touching, the *sense* of touch? Shouldn't the sense of touch touch us?[1]

> Epic is nothing if not violent, for whatever characterises the genre, killing or the susceptibility to being killed must be there.[2]

People are often heard to lament that today's society is out of touch. Personal interaction is being steadily replaced by communication via mobile phones, email, Skype, blogs, chatrooms and Facebook, as a 'plethora of technology offers a distortion of genuine closeness'.[3] We are invited by advertisers to 'stay in touch' by sending e-cards, or to think of ourselves as networks of relationships held together by cellular communication.[4] Entertainment is largely individualistic, with games consoles, DVD players, plasma-screen televisions and iPods dominating the market, and even in sport, the increasing popularity

[1] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. by Christine Irizarry, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 135 (original emphasis).

[2] William I. Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honour, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 87.

[3] Libby Brooks, 'The Rewards of the Hermit', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2008.

[4] <http://cards.123greetings.com/cgi-bin/newcards/main.pl?cat=Stay_In_Touch> [accessed 12.11.2008]. This website offers e-cards to 'touch that special person' and make him/her 'feel close, wanted and a part of your life'. Another, <http://www.i-am-everyone.co.uk/index.php> [accessed 12.11.2008], launched by Orange, maps lives of individuals according to their personal relationships, the implication being that those relationships hinge on communication by mobile phone.

of endurance sports such as running, triathlon, snowboarding and surfing shows that the individualising trend is affecting the domain most noted for its team-building and camaraderie. When we do meet and interact, critics have noted our increasing reluctance to touch each other; we prefer instead to remain at a distance, and the extent of this tactile withdrawal is such that Slavoj Žižek suggests that the 'alienation of social life' now characterises European society.[5] As he has it, 'distance is woven into the very social texture of everyday life. Even if I live side by side with others, in my normal state I ignore them. I am not allowed to get too close to others'.[6] Far from a benign expression of life-style choice, Constance Classen finds in this spatial and physical retreat a fundamental cultural fear.[7] She suggests that anxieties about social touching, leading to discourses

[5] *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile, 2008), pp. 50-51.

[6] *Violence*, p. 51.

[7] *The Book of Touch* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005). This edited collection of work focussing specifically on touch – but encompassing a broad range of theoretical approaches – provides a welcome contribution to this remarkably untouched area of social interaction. Another broad-ranging study is Ashley Montagu's *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, rev. edn (New York: Harper and Row, 1986). Beyond that, sociological studies largely fall into two groups: those which are deeply empirical and evaluate touch as demonstrative of an existing relationship (Nancy M. Henley, 'Status and Sex: Some Touching Observations', *Bulletin of The Psychonomic Society*, 2 (1973), 91-93; Tiffany Field, *Touch* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001); and William Schiff and Emerson Foulkes, (eds), *Tactual Perception: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)); and those dealing with touch as expressive of a specifically affective – or even sexual – bond (James Hardison, *Let's Touch: How and Why We Do It* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980); and Linda Holler, *Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002)). In philosophy, Derrida's *On Touching* charts approaches to touch and the body from Aristotle through to Jean-Luc Nancy. Historically-applied investigations of touch are scarce, but include Terry Smith, (ed.), *In Visible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997); Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Laura Gowling, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003). In medieval studies we must be content with studies of gesture, of which there are few: J.A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 48 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'The Rationale of Gestures in the West: Third to Thirteenth Centuries' in *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Jan Bremner and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 59-70; Jacques Le Goff, 'Le Rituel symbolique de la vassalité' in *Pour un Autre Moyen Âge: temps, travail et culture en Occident: 18 essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), pp. 349-420; Philippe Ménard, 'Les Gestes et les expressions corporelles dans la *Chanson de Roland*: les attitudes de commandement et de défi' in *Guillaume d'Orange and the Chanson de geste: Essays Presented to Duncan McMillan in Celebration of his Seventieth Birthday by his Friends and Colleagues of the Société Rencesvals*, ed. by Wolfgang Van Emden and Philip E. Bennett (Reading: Société Rencesvals, 1984), pp. 85-92; Centre universitaire d'études et de recherches médiévales d'Aix (CUER MA), *Le Geste et les gestes au Moyen Âge: communications présentées au vingt-et-deuxième colloque du CUER*

seeking to control and regulate touch, arise from 'anxieties about the vulnerability of the social body – and ultimately of the individual body – to invasion and violation'.[8] She emphasises the increasing imperative to police bodies and boundaries:

> Streets must be patrolled, schools guarded, and communities gated to keep out muggers, deviants, delinquents and gunmen. Borders must be strengthened, travellers searched, and foreigners fingerprinted, to fend off the deadly touch of the terrorist.[9]

Classen's study thus makes clear the connection between touch and *identity*: communities, borders and bodies are all protected through a politics of touch. The outsider, or Other, is – must be – excluded and held at bay through an elaborate process of regulated tactile behaviour. Only then will our social body, and our individual bodies, be safe. Classen's words highlight a fundamental paradox, however, for if communities are protected from the unwanted touch of outsiders, it is only by stopping and searching them at the gates. In other words, to defend ourselves against the Other's touch, we must head to the margins of society and touch him/her first.[10] This fearful urge to manhandle and control the Other inevitably brings us back to Žižek, for in his understanding fear is the basic constituent of modern subjectivity: 'fear of immigrants, fear of crime, fear of godless sexual depravity, fear of the excessive state itself […], fear of harrassment' – all are promoted, he suggests, to mobilise people-as-subjects in the name of ideology.[11] The final fear in the list – the fear of harassment – is particularly pertinent here, for Žižek goes on to describe its role in the subject's relationship with the Other. He argues that for all today's atmosphere of liberal tolerance dictates an attitude of respect and openness towards Otherness, it is counteracted by an 'obsessive' fear of harassment, meaning that the Other can be tolerated so long as he remains at a safe distance, so long as he remains uncontacted and out of touch.[12] The critical gap between these two modes of thinking about touch and identity – the need to touch and control the Other, and the need to keep him at a safe distance – provides the first fundamental paradox that will underpin my exploration of touch and identity here.

MA, Aix-en-Provence, Senefiance, 41 (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, 1997); and Moshe Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

[8] 'Control' in *The Book of Touch* (see Classen, above), pp. 259-65 (p. 262).

[9] 'Control', p. 262.

[10] In the majority of cases in which I refer to the 'subject' or the 'Other' in this thesis as a whole, I refer to masculine characters and thus, to avoid awkward constructions, I will use the masculine pronoun in cases such as this.

[11] *Violence*, pp. 34-35.

[12] *Violence*, p. 35.

The second paradoxical aspect of touch stems from its relationship to the body. Touch is by definition rooted in the physical body, and so touching feels organic, natural, spontaneous and 'real'. The skin is the largest organ in the body, densely covered with pleasure and pain receptors, making touch acutely stimulating: 'it is the sense by which our contact with the world is made most intimate'; or 'the only sense of *immediate* external perception'.[13] And yet, the form that this physical contact and perception takes – the way that subjects touch themselves and each other – is wholly social: it is shaped, conditioned and constrained by cultural discourses. In *Touch*, Gabriel Josipovici resumes quite simply, 'it would be wrong to imagine that my encounter with my friend is a totally natural occurrence. For it to work as it does we both have had […] to learn the rules that underlie such events'.[14] Touch thus dislocates 'cultural' identity from the 'natural' body. In psychoanalytic terms, Sigmund Freud emphasises the importance of the body's *surface*, as the place where a subject makes contact with his environment and others in it, but also where he receives the touches of others: it is a place 'from which both internal and external perceptions may spring'.[15] As such, this surface has a privileged and reciprocal relationship with the ego: the touches received there are formative of the ego, informing and modifying it in correspondence to the social environment.[16] Yet at the same time, the outline of the body (and the sense of its coherent wholeness) is in turn a projection of the ego, with touches being part of the process whereby a subject arrives at the idea of his body. In short, through this splitting of the physical and the social – the natural and the cultural – touch can either define and locate bodies and selves, or else reveal the body's strangeness to itself.

Over and above this intriguing problematising of embodied subjectivity, touch holds a special attraction for the medievalist, for it draws us towards a specific kind of historiography, one that opens up possibilities for re-thinking the medieval past. Carolyn Dinshaw sets out the parameters of such an approach in her book, *Getting Medieval*.[17] Her

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[13] Holler, *Erotic Morality*, p. 2; Derrida, *On Touching*, p. 41 (original emphasis).

[14] *Touch* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 19.

[15] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. by Joan Rivière, ed. by James Strachey, rev. edn (London and New York: Norton, 1960), p. 19. To situate this essay within the context of Freud's work, see Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XIX, pp. 12-66.

[16] *Ego and the Id*, pp. 18-19.

[17] *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999). See also Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998). Biddick's essays explore the history of medieval studies, noting its exclusions,

introduction, entitled ‘Touching the Past’, describes what she calls a ‘queer historical impulse’, a process of ‘making connections across time’ between lives, texts and cultural phenomena both pre- and post-modern.[18] She draws on the work of Donna Haraway to explain this approach to historical subjectivity: ‘the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another’.[19] Dinshaw suggests that by focussing on such fleeting moments of contact (touching?) between subjects – each one capable of briefly iterating an identity and/or community of some kind – we can not only make contact with the medieval past, but we can also restore its indeterminacies and disjunctions, and move away from thinking about the Middle Ages as a static precursor to the modern world. As such, Dinshaw’s work is specifically situated against ‘mainstream historicising’ that insists on the flow of time as a progression, on ‘straight chronologies that privilege a value-based movement of supersession’.[20] Introducing *Queering the Middle Ages*, Glenn Burger and Steven Kruger write that such a rigidly temporal understanding of history is founded in a flawed insistence on cause and effect: in the case of sexuality, for example, the story of Adam and Eve is positioned historically as the ‘origin’ of current forms of sexual interaction, whereas seen through a queer lens, it can be reconceived as a mythic construction created from within culture – an effect of ideology – that has been inserted into a time ‘before’ to fix and legitimise current (hetero)sexual norms.[21] In the same way, the ‘medieval’ is too easily understood as a stable, knowable entity positioned before modernity, rather than as the ‘effect of a certain self-construction of the modern which gives itself identity by delimiting a “before” that is everything that the modern is not’.[22] It is precisely this latter construction to which Dinshaw refers when she calls the medieval a space of ‘abjection’ from the modern, and the queer approach that she advocates seeks to recognise this tendency and to undo its dichotomising effect.[23]

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and the consequences of those exclusions, in order to ‘refigure politically the borders of the discipline’ (p. 16).

[18] *Getting Medieval*, pp. 1-54 (p. 1).

[19] *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991), p. 187: cited by Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, p. 14.

[20] Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, ‘Introduction’ in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. by Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, Medieval Cultures, 27 (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. xi-xxiii (p. xii).

[21] *Queering*, p. xii.

[22] *Queering*, p. xiii.

[23] *Getting Medieval*, p. 189.

Johan Huizinga is one early-twentieth-century historian whose work provides an example of the reductive strain of medievalism against which Dinshaw argues. Huizinga confidently describes the life and thought of medieval society, noting that 'when the world was half a thousand years younger […] every experience had that degree of directness and absoluteness that joy and sadness still have in the mind of a child'.[24] He later states:

> In his daily life medieval man thought in the same forms as in his theology […] Everything that won for itself a secure place in life, that was melded into the forms of life, was taken to be ordained by God's plan for the world.[25]

Throughout *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga reduces the complexity and 'indeterminacy' of individual and community life to similar pithy observations about 'medieval man'. But he also situates those modes of living and thinking as a naïve forerunner of a more mature and sophisticated modernity. For instance, he elsewhere refers to the characteristic 'vacillating moods of *unrefined* exuberance, sudden cruelty, and tender emotions' between which medieval society swung, implying a subsequent progression towards refinement and sensible restraint.[26] He even calls on us as readers to 'transpose ourselves into this impressionability of mind, into this sensitivity to tears and spiritual repentance, into this susceptibility, before we can judge how colourful and intensive life was then'.[27] In other words, to understand medieval man fully we must first cast off our enlightened, modern cynicism and regress to a state of innocent childlike wonder.

Echoing Huizinga to a certain degree, Norbert Elias's slightly later work on the 'civilising process' that began in Europe in the Early Modern period also casts the Middle Ages as a period of uncomplicated barbarity.[28] Elias recognises that the secular upper class of medieval society had a standard of good behaviour through which they 'gave expression to their self-image'.[29] He even goes on to describe how this standard of *courtoisie* referred in the first instance not to the behaviour of knights in general, but to the courtly circles forming around great feudal barons.[30] However, he then explicitly advises that we 'disregard' the process of differentiation performed through this gradation of medieval manners, to see instead a 'great uniformity' of behaviour when measured against the subtle

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[24] *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 1.

[25] *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, p. 268.

[26] *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, p. 2 (emphasis added).

[27] *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, p. 7.

[28] *The Civilising Process*, trans by Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

[29] *Civilising Process*, I, p. 62.

[30] *Civilising Process*, I, pp. 62-63.

codification of later periods.[31] Uniform medieval behaviour can now be conclusively described as simple and naïve: 'there are, as in all societies where the emotions are expressed more violently and directly, few psychological nuances and complexities in the general stock of ideas'; in this unenlightened Middle Age, 'everything is simpler, impulses and inclinations are less restrained'.[32] By thus positioning the medieval as an early stage out of which civilisation slowly develops, Elias gives shape to (and legitimises) his understanding of modernity by, to cite Burgess and Kruger again, 'delimiting a "before" that is everything that the modern is not'.

Crucially, the linear civilising process that Elias charts involves the increasingly insistent regulation of touch and behaviour, the 'internalisation of restraints', and a subjective distancing from the physical body.[33] He notes with disgust the bad habits outlined by Erasmus in his *De civilitate morum puerilium* – habits involving bodily functions – and concludes that his disgust attests to his own civilisation: 'that it is embarrassing for us to speak or even hear of much that Erasmus discusses is one of the symptoms of this civilising process'.[34] In other words, Elias historicises the birth of modern subjectivity as a conscious distancing from the physical body and an emphatic investment into highly nuanced social, tactile procedure. By contrast, medieval subjectivity is straightforwardly physical and chaotically (disgustingly) impulsive. He thus implicitly makes the distinction, noted above, between touch as a bodily practice – calling it medieval and barbaric – and touch as a social practice – calling it modern and civilised.

The strict historical dichotomy set up by scholars such as Huizinga and Elias has had a lasting effect on thinking about the medieval period. As Dinshaw makes clear, even in some postmodern theoretical and critical work, the Middle Ages continue to be made 'the dense, unvarying, and eminently obvious monolith against which modernity and postmodernity groovily emerge'.[35] Consequently, her own work offers a 'contingent history' – which takes contingent in the literal sense of the Latin *com-* + *tangere*, 'to touch'

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[31] *Civilising Process*, I, p. 63.

[32] *Civilising Process*, I, p. 63.

[33] Richard W. Kaeuper, 'Chivalry and the Civilising Process' in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. by Richard W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 21-35 (p. 21). Kaeuper's essay has special resonance for the present study, for it departs from Elias's implication that the Middle Ages were characterised by unmitigated violence and uses chivalric literature to suggest that, rather, those texts work through the complexities of social violence and at times offer a 'powerful critique of the touchy recourse to violence to solve any issue' (p. 29).

[34] *Civilising Process*, I, pp. 53-58 (p. 58).

[35] *Getting Medieval*, p. 16.

– and thus presents a way to subvert this binary thinking in order to restore to the medieval period its complications, anxieties and affections without sacrificing critical rigour.[36] The key point is that we cannot definitively pin down the meaning or significance of any cultural phenomena – sex, gender, violence, religion, touch – without 'exclusivity or reductiveness', not because the medieval past has lost its 'immediacy', but because such phenomena are always contingent, they are 'fissured and contradictory'.[37] To take account of this, we must make contact with medieval texts and lives by and through their contradictions, reconceiving medieval cultural phenomena as difficult and ambivalent.[38] With this in mind, my approach here engages with a small group of medieval poems, seeking to foreground their problematising of social identity, interaction and touching. It is thus positioned against previous thinking about the chaotically unregulated – but eminently understandable – nature of medieval behaviour because it engages with practices of touching as they are presented in the poems: that is, both as an enjoyable and traumatic bodily function, and as a highly regulated, but slippery and contingent, social phenomenon.

The Touchy Subject

Aymeri de Narbonne, the central text of the Narbonne Cycle, opens with a summary of the events of the Oxford *Roland*, describing Charlemagne's victories in Spanish lands, Ganelon's treachery and Roland's death at Rencesvals.[39] It then tells of Charlemagne's subsequent revenge against the emir, Baligant, and now finds him returning home 'iriez et trites' ('angry and sad', (*ADN*, l. 125)) and lamenting the death of his nephew (*ADN*, ll. 133-154).[40] Yet no sooner has the narrative turned to this present scenario, than Charlemagne catches sight of the city of Narbonne shimmering in the distance, and his attention is re-focussed:

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[36] *Getting Medieval*, p. 3.

[37] *Getting Medieval*, p. 12.

[38] *Getting Medieval*, p. 11. Cf. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and James A. Schultz, 'Introduction' in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and James A. Schultz, Medieval Cultures, 11 (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. ix-xviii. Here the editors emphasise the need to see beyond 'presentist assumptions' that straightjacket thinking about medieval expressions of gender and sexuality (p. ix).

[39] 'The Oxford *Roland*', ed. by Ian Short in *La Chanson de Roland – The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, 3 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), I, pp. 111-270. Details of the Narbonne Cycle, including composition, content, chronology and editions are given below.

[40] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Throughout, I have tried to strike a balance between giving a close, literal rendering of the Old French and providing a translation that is as coherent and clear as possible. Where the original syntax is particularly difficult to translate without losing richness and complexity, I err to the former, admittedly at the expense of elegant phrasing in some cases.

> Par devers destre se prist a regarder:
> Entre .II. tertres, pres d'un regort de mer,
> Desus un pui vit une tor ester,
> Que Sarrazin i orent fet fermer. (*ADN*, ll. 157-60)

> He began to look over towards the right; between two hills, near an estuary, on top of a peak he saw there was a tower – that Saracens had had built there.

Seen through the eyes of Charlemagne, the city is then described in great detail, from its solid fortifications to its white walls that reflect the sun (*ADN*, ll. 161-88). Charlemagne is gripped by desire and decides immediately that the city will be conquered. The dramatic shift of focus in this opening passage, from past to present, from Rencesvals to Narbonne, heralds a new beginning in both narrative and thematic terms.[41] The poem is thus positioned as a sequel of sorts to the material of the *Roland*, whilst also turning decisively away from the location and the hero of that earlier text. On the one hand, we might assume that the evocation of Roland's demise clears the ground for the introduction of Aymeri who is effectively forced into Roland's shoes. When no one steps up to take on the challenge of winning Narbonne in Charlemagne's name, the emperor 'forment regrete Rollant son chier ami' ('deeply laments Roland his dear friend', *ADN*, l. 579), saying that since the death of this great warrior, 'Crestïenté n'a mes nul bon ami', ('Christianity no longer has any good friends', *ADN*, l. 588). Aymeri subsequently steps forward promising Charlemagne that 'tant com vodroiz, je serai vostre amis' ('as long as you wish, I will be your friend', *ADN*, l. 729). The semantic chain that links a fallen friend, a 'friendless' Christianity and a new, loyal friend creates a powerful flow of succession from Roland to Aymeri, with the defence of Christianity acting as ideological lynchpin between the two.

Working against the seemingly irresistible force of chronological and historical inheritance from Roland to Aymeri, the noisy shift in focus from Rencesvals to Narbonne, and from that version/vision of society to this, nevertheless makes clear that an antithesis is also being established. In *The Subject of Violence*, Peter Haidu suggests that the overall thrust of the *Roland* calls for a new version of knightly subjectivity whereby 'feudal' heroes are

[41] As I will describe below, *Girart de Vienne* precedes this narrative in terms of composition and content, and is placed before *Aymeri de Narbonne* in the manuscripts. By building a narrative around a young Aymeri, and introducing Roland and Oliver, it creates a bridge between the Narbonne *geste*, the *Cycle de Guillaume* and the pre-history of the *Roland*. It thus seems to anticipate this moment when Aymeri will become the focus of a new clutch of poems telling of a life and society *after* Roland/*Roland*. In fact, when Aymeri is introduced here, Charlemagne makes reference to his boisterous and juvenile behaviour (recounted in *Girart de Vienne*) and thus sets up his past behaviour as a foil to this new incarnation.

replaced by 'Mr Average Frenchman', the docile servant of the monarchy.[42] Roland's death, he argues, is presented as a vision of heroic excess that is superseded by the rise of the little-known Thierry in the trial scene and thus, in his words, 'the new knighthood is cut (down) to size, created *ex nihilo* to represent the norm, the average, the unheroic necessities of its performances in the service of the borning State'.[43] For all that the hero of *Aymeri de Narbonne* is far from diminutive or average, the care taken to describe his humility in front of the emperor, and the detailed outlining of the contractual agreement between this vassal and his lord, coupled with Aymeri's repeated assertions of loyalty, work to establish him as a potentially docile servant of the monarchy. His very appearance in the text – his narrative life – is in fact contingent upon his submission to Charlemagne's authority (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two). The cycle is in this way positioned as a possible answer to social problems posed by that earlier text, with Aymeri acting as a new model of heroism situated in response to Roland (who is 'the subject to be discarded').[44]

Moreover, the fact that Charlemagne bestows Narbonne as a fief upon his newly appointed vassal allows the poem to rehearse material from earlier narratives such as *Le Charroi de Nîmes* and *Raoul de Cambrai* wherein the division of lands among baronial subjects plays a key narrative role.[45] In the opening stages of *Le Charroi de Nimes*, Guillaume is overlooked in the division of lands due to a shortage of suitable fiefs, despite his tenacious loyalty to the emperor, Louis. Feudal wrangling over inheritance is explored in more detail in *Raoul de Cambrai*, however, where the devastating consequences of the resulting internecine conflict are dramatically envisaged in a tale of violence, pride and revenge. The questions posed – concerning the nature of vassalic duty, the legalities of material inheritance, and feudal identity more generally – find no resolution. Rather, 'cohesion is

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[42] *The Subject of Violence: The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 181-92 (p. 186). I follow Haidu in my use of the term 'feudal' here. For a useful summary of the debates surrounding its use in historical context see William Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 2002). Also, James R. Simpson, 'Feudalism and Kingship' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 197-209.

[43] *Subject of Violence*, p. 186. Haidu makes clear, however, that the new subject is called for by the socio-historical situation in and through which the text operates, rather than being directly imagined, or constructed, by the text.

[44] *Subject of Violence*, p. 188.

[45] *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, ed. by Claude Lachet, Folio Classique (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); *Raoul de Cambrai*: *Chanson de geste du XIIe siècle*, ed. by Sarah Kay, trans. by William Kibler, LG (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1996).

lost along with any legitimate focus for […] conflict', so that 'ambiguity and rupture' finally characterise the *chanson*.[46] Coming slightly later, *Aymeri de Narbonne* again acts as a kind of response that takes seriously the problems of such earlier narratives and offers a vision of harmonious, heroic society: Narbonne is inhabited by pagans so there are no qualms about ousting and disinheriting its lord, and in this way the possibility of internal tension is side-stepped by displacing the conflict to the margins of Christian community.[47] In fact, Aymeri wins the city without fuss and Charlemagne helps him to convert it to Christianity before installing him as lord and leaving him with a large retinue of retainers (*ADN*, ll. 1219-27). Soon after, Aymeri's father dies and he inherits further territory, wealth and power. Thus established, he sends a diplomatic envoy to King Boniface of Pavia, with whom he seals a strategic alliance and whose beautiful sister he marries. Finally, he fends off a Saracen invasion with the help of his uncle, Girart, before settling down to engender seven sons and five daughters. Taking their cue from this account of seemingly ideal heroism, the other poems of the cycle relate the history of his *geste*, which goes from strength to strength, expanding in territory, numbers, alliances and power.[48]

If the poems celebrate the history of a powerful feudal *geste* – describing dubbings, marriages, alliances, transactions, diplomatic envoys, court appearances, sieges, conquests and battles – they are also concerned with the mechanics of all these social operations. If they present a vision of harmonious heroic society that acts as a resolution to previous tensions, then they ask how exactly that new society works: what rituals need to be in place for encounters between knights to run smoothly? What meaning does the ritual of dubbing have? And what role do weapons play in this ritual? How can a diplomatic mission be conducted peacefully? How must a knight behave in order to be seen as *cortois* or *fier* or *apris*? How should a knight touch his wife? How should a lord treat his vassals? Indeed, the poems present their society through an endless series of encounters in which touches, actions, contacts and connections are woven together to present a nuanced account of social interaction. However, this attention to detail casts unflattering light on the community that is established around Narbonne. Rather than underpinning a poetic vision of Narbonne as a harmonious, ordered universe inhabited by effortlessly heroic – yet

[46] Finn E. Sinclair, 'Loss, Re-figuration and Death in *Raoul de Cambrai*', *French Studies*, 52:3 (2003), 297-310.

[47] In fact, this solution is suggested by Guillaume himself in *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, and the bulk of the narrative details his conquest into Saracen lands. My contention here will be that the Narbonne Cycle thinks through the problematic consequences of this 'solution' even as it agrees that it is the best way to avoid the internal crisis.

[48] Synopses of the poems of the Cycle are given below.

submissive and docile – subjects, the concern with the mechanics of social interaction ultimately serves to present us with a vision of the failure of (heroic) subjectivity itself. For if Aymeri is meant to exemplify a new subjectivity, acting as a model of submissive vassaldom, the emphasis on social behaviour and performance derails the sense of 'natural' hierarchy that should keep him humbly in his place; if he is meant to embody an innately heroic superiority that justifies his place among the dominant classes, the emphasis on performance and behaviour undermines that desire for ontological privilege.

The exploration of these contradictory impulses, laid bare by the Cycle's meticulous accounting for human touches of all kinds, will provide the thread that links the material across individual chapters in this study. These chapters are roughly organised around investigations of four conceptual boundaries that are negotiated in touching rituals (though some overlapping will inevitably occur). In the first, I use the poems' representation of arms and armour to highlight the contingency of the boundaries of the hero's body; in the second, I turn to the gestures and touches of social interaction and suggest that these are used to articulate the notion of heroic community. Chapter Three focusses on gender boundaries and examines the way in which touching procedure performs the exclusion of women from that community; and Chapter Four explores religious boundaries, as I analyse the bloody violence that erupts between Christian and Saracen knights. Throughout, I demonstrate that the chivalric ideological system in place within the Cycle is one that constrains, coerces, regulates and controls its subjects, and in which Others are touched invasively, forcibly excluded, held at bay, handed over as pawns in social transactions or mercilessly hacked to death in pitched battle. Violence is another thread that will run through all four chapters, therefore, and I ultimately conclude that the gory battlefield action of the final chapter is simply a version of the touching found in the negotiation of all subjective boundaries – albeit a radical one.

The Narbonne Cycle

The group of poems studied here belongs to what Madeleine Tyssens calls the *Cycle d'Aimeri*, Joël Grisward calls the *Cycle des Narbonnais*, and Hermann Suchier and Duncan MacMillan call the *Petit Cycle*.[49] The Cycle as it survives comprises: *Girart de Vienne*

[49] Madeleine Tyssens, *La Geste de Guillaume d'Orange dans les manuscrits cycliques* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967), p. 36; Joël H. Grisward, *Archéologie de l'épopée médiévale: structures trifonctionnelles et mythes indo-européens dans le cycle des Narbonnais* (Paris: Payot, 1981), p. 18; Hermann Suchier's edition of *Les Narbonnais* (see below, p. iii); and Duncan McMillan, '*Les Enfances Guillaume* et *Les Narbonnais* dans les manuscrits du Grand Cycle: observations sur la fusion du Cycle de Narbonne avec le Cycle de Guillaume', *Romania*, 64 (1938), 313-27 (p. 313).

(c. 1180), *Aymeri de Narbonne* (c. 1180-1225), *Les Narbonnais* (c. 1205-1210), *Le Siège de Barbastre* (c. 1220-1225), *Guibert d'Andrenas* (c. 1220-1225) and *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* (c. 1190-1210).[50] This grouping is found in three manuscripts: (*A*) British Library, Harley 1321; (*B*) Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. Acquis. 6298; and (*C*) British Library, Royal 20 BXIX. The three manuscripts share an almost identical text (although only fragments of *B* remain).[51] The poems are found in two further manuscripts: (*D*) British Library, Royal 20 DXI; and (*E*) Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 24369-70. In these collections they are joined by poems from the *Cycle de Guillaume*, and together form the so-called *Grand Cycle*.[52] I also include *La Prise de Cordres* (c. 1190-95) in my study, despite the fact that it survives only in one manuscript – in which it stands alone (Bibliothèque Nationale, fond français 1448).[53] I do so because it is believed to provide a continuation of *Guibert d'Andrenas*, and tells of the extension of the Aymerides' power into new lands.[54]

Although obviously not composed in this order, the poems are organised in the manuscripts into a chronological account of Aymeri's rise and fall, so that linearity is

[50] Editions used are as follows: Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, *Girart de Vienne*, ed. by Wolfgang Van Emden (Paris: SATF, 1977); *Aymeri de Narbonne*, ed. by Hélène Gallé, CFMA (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007); *Les Narbonnais*, ed. by Hermann Suchier, SATF, 2 vols (Paris: Didot, 1894); *Le Siège de Barbastre*, ed. by Bernard Guidot, CFMA (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000); *Guibert d'Andrenas*, ed. by Muriel Ott, CFMA (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004); and *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, ed. by J Couraye du Parc, SATF (Paris: Didot, 1884).

[51] Suchier, *Les Narbonnais*, p. iii.

[52] In the order they appear in E, the poems of the *Cycle de Guillaume* (including editions used here) are: *Les Enfances Guillaume*, (c. 1200-1225), ed. by Patrice Henry (Paris: SATF, 1935); *Le Couronnement de Louis*, (c. 1130), ed. by André Lanly, LG (Paris: Champion, 2000); *Le Charroi de Nîmes* (c. 1130-1140); *La Prise d'Orange* (c. 1140-1150), ed. by Claude Régnier (Paris: Klinsieck, 1972); *Les Enfances Vivien*, (c. 1200-1225), ed. by Magali Rouquier (Geneva: Droz, 1997); *La Chevalerie Vivien*, (c. 1200), ed. by Duncan McMillan, 2 vols (Paris: Centre Universitaire d'Etudes et de Recherches Médiévales d'Aix, 1997); *Aliscans*, (c. 1185-90), ed. by Claude Régnier, CFMA, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 1990); *La Bataille Loquifer*, (c. 1200-1210), ed. by Monica Barnett, Medium Aevum Monographs (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975); *Le Moniage Rainouart*, (c. 1190-1200), ed. by Gérald Bertin (Paris: SATF, 1973); and *Le Moniage Guillaume*, (c. 1170), ed. by Nelly Andrieux-Reix, CFMA (Paris: Champion, 2002).

[53] *La Prise de Cordres et de Sebille*, ed. by Ovide Densusianu (Paris: SATF, 1896).

[54] See Densusianu's edition (p. cxxxix); and Muriel Ott's study, '*La Prise de Cordres et de Sebille* ou du titre de roi à la fonction royale', *Prépublication des Actes: XVIe Congrès International de la Société Rencesvals, Granada 21-25 juillet 2003* <http://www.bookmark.demon.nl/rencesvals/congresXVI.html> [accessed 03.12.2008].

teased out of a pool of clustered poems.[55] Because the nature of my argument relies on references to individual episodes and passages within the poems, a brief summary of the main events of each poem, mapping the overall thrust of the Cycle's narrative, will be useful here. In *Girart de Vienne*, Girart and Renier (sons of Garin de Monglane) are sent to the court of Charlemagne. When the widowed Duchess of Burgundy arrives there, the emperor promises her to Girart, but then takes her for himself and gives Girart the fief of Vienne instead. When Girart goes to kiss the emperor's toe in acceptance of the fief, the newly-crowned empress substitutes her own toe, and this tactile transgression causes feuding between Girart and Charlemagne. The feud climaxes in a scene in which Girart discovers the emperor in a wood and is on the verge of killing him, urged on by his impetuous young nephew, Aymeri. Girart's hand is stayed by mercy, however, and this charitable act is enough to break the stalemate and allow for military aggression to be re-invested into the fight against the Saracen enemy.

In *Aymeri de Narbonne*, we are introduced to Aymeri more thoroughly. Charlemagne is returning home from Rencesvals where his rear-guard was famously defeated by the Saracens, and as he passes through the south of France, he catches sight of Narbonne and calls on his men to win it in his name. Only Aymeri is willing to undertake the task and, although his fighting with the king in *Girart de Vienne* is mentioned, he is nevertheless embraced by Charlemagne as a worthy baron. Once established at Narbonne, Aymeri decides to find a wife and sets his sights quickly on Hermengart, sister of King Boniface of Pavia. The bulk of the narrative details the diplomatic mission to win her hand. Their trip is ultimately successful (though not without its casualties), and after a battle with invading Saracens at Narbonne, Aymeri and Hermengart are married. The poem ends with a list of the couple's impressively prolific progeny.

Les Narbonnais begins with Aymeri well established at Narbonne and with his sons reaching the age at which they must make their own way in life. The first half of the

[55] Madeleine Tyssens and Jeanne Wathelet-Willem describe how stories in the corpus cluster into mini-cycles around particular heroes in *Grundriss der Romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. 3 (*Les Épopées romanes: La Geste des Narbonnais*) (Heidelberg: Winter, 2001), pp. 16-17. For a brief overview of the discussion surrounding the composition of the poems, see Tyssens, *La Geste de Guillaume*, pp. 19-24. For more detailed analysis see Jean Rychner, *La Chanson de geste: essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs* (Lille and Geneva: Giard, 1955); Joseph Bédier, *Les Légendes épiques: recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*, 4 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1908-13); and Jean Frappier, *Les Chansons de geste du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, 2 vols (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1965) – see especially, II, pp. 17-42.

narrative charts the fortunes of the sons: Bueves is sent to Gascony to marry the daughter of King Yon, and Garin is sent to Pavia to marry the daughter of King Boniface. Bertrand, Guillaume, Hernaut and Aÿmer are sent to the court of Charlemagne at Saint Denis to serve and be knighted. The youngest son, Guibert, remains at Narbonne. The second half deals with the siege of Narbonne that occurs in the absence of the sons. Eventually Guillaume and his brothers arrive back from Paris, bringing with them the full force of the imperial troops (now mustered under Louis since the death of Charlemagne that happens 'off-stage'). The siege is lifted and the pagans routed.

Le Siège de Barbastre also begins at Narbonne where Aymeri is holding court. Out of the blue, the city is attacked by pagan troops and Aymeri's son, Bueves, and grandsons Gui and Girart are captured and taken to the pagan stronghold of Barbastre. However, they quickly escape their cell and win the city aided by a sympathetic pagan, Clarion. Unfortunately, the pagan troops have Barbastre surrounded, and with few men they cannot fight their way out. They do manage to send messengers, however, who go to Aymeri to request help. Aymeri in turn asks Louis and, after some persuasion, Louis agrees. The assembled Christian armies march on Barbastre and lift the siege.

Guibert d'Andrenas tells of Aymeri's attempt to win land for his youngest son, Guibert, whom he has decided to overlook in the inheritance of Narbonne. He leads his men (including his sons) into battle at Andrenas, ruled by King Judas. Eventually they win the city and Guibert is married to its queen, Agaiete.

La Prise de Cordres picks up the plot at Guibert and Agaiete's wedding (although this poem locates the nuptials at Salerie). With festivities in full swing, the pagans seize the chance to perform a lightning raid in which Guibert, Guillaume, Bertrand and Hernaut are taken prisoner. Nubie, daughter of the *almassor* of Cordoba who holds them prisoner, helps them to escape, having fallen in love with Bertrand. On their way back to Salerie they encounter Galerien, an ally of Judas, and battle breaks out. Eventually the Franks win the skirmish, take Cordoba and send word to Judas demanding he hand over Seville and Guibert. It is decided that Guibert will fight Butor in single combat, with the winner taking the city and the woman. The unfinished poem ends abruptly here.

To round off the life and times of Aymeri, *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* narrates the decline of his later years and eventually his death. As the poem opens, Louis is under attack from a rebel baron Hugues. He sends a request for aid to Aymeri, but the messenger arrives to find Aymeri seriously ill. The pagans see their chance and attack Narbonne, and

although Aymeri recovers enough strength to fight he is soon captured and tortured outside the city walls in order to precipitate the surrender of the city. Aymeri is taken to Babylon to be killed but the party is intercepted by Guibert (who is on his way home from a conquest in Spain) and Aymeri is rescued. Meanwhile, Louis and the other Narbonne brothers have arrived at the besieged city and once everyone is reunited an attack is launched to oust the pagans. The reconquest is successful, but the Franks then become embroiled in a battle with Sagittarians in which Aymeri is wounded by a poisoned arrow. He subsequently dies (as do Garin and Bernart) and Hermengart dies of a broken heart a year later.

Chapter One – Touching Skin: The Man of Steel and Flesh

Introduction

> I have never felt more vulnerable to total strangers, never more socially defenceless than in my clanking suit of borrowed armour. But then, I guess that's one of the secrets of manhood. Every man's armour is borrowed and ten sizes too big, and beneath it he's naked and insecure and hoping you won't see. It's hard being a guy.[1]

In the twenty-first century, with the phenomenon of 'clanking' armour long gone, it is striking that it is still used as a metaphor to describe the anxiety of masculine identity.[2] In the twelfth century, it was common. For example, *Aiol*, a late-twelfth-century *chanson de geste*, tells the story of the young son of a noble lord, Elie, who has fallen on hard times since a traitor persuaded King Louis to disinherit him.[3] The family now live in a hermitage

[1] Norah Vincent, 'It's Hard Being a Guy' in *The Week*, April 2006, pp. 44-45 (p. 45).

[2] Further notable instances include the 2008 film *Iron Man* (dir. by Jon Kavreau) and Stanley Kubrick's 1987 classic *Full Metal Jacket* – both of which explore modern (military) masculinity through the metaphor of armour.

[3] Other examples include, *inter alia,* Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier au Lion* in which Yvain, unable to reconcile his desire for personal glory with the settled political and social role of husband and king, is torn apart by these competing notions of knighthood. He casts off his armour and sword (see ll. 2804ff) and moves into a wild, liminal phase of savagery and obscurity, living in the forest, eating raw meat and talking to himself (*Yvain, ou Le Chevalier au Lion*, ed. by Mario Roques, CFMA (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1982)). Cf. Ludovico Ariosto's sixteenth-century *Orlando Furioso*, ed. by Marcello Turchi, 2 vols (Rome: Garzanti, 1982). Correspondingly, in the *Perceval* narratives, Perceval's coming of age – as a man, a knight, and a hero – is explored through the quest to mend his sword.

in a forest, condemned to life away from court, and away from the world of aristocratic, warrior prestige. Elie's loss of status and the disintegration of his knightly identity are figured metaphorically by the removal and spatial scattering of his armour: the various parts of it are spread between the rooms of the hermitage: 'ses aubers en la quinte, en la siste la targe' ('his hauberk in the fifth [room], his shield in the sixth', *AL*, l. 90).[4] His lance remains outside because of its size, so that it rusts and decays (*AL*, ll. 91-94). When his son, Aiol, reaches a certain age and manifests signs of 'natural' military talent, he sets out to redeem the family's name and swears he will not remove the armour until he has succeeded. Back at court, he is met with derision and scorn on account of this old, tarnished weaponry, and in a sense, the whole narrative details his quest to return meaning to it, to make it symbolise prowess, honour and nobility once more. At the end of the poem, after many adventures and brilliant displays of martial skill, Aiol is reunited with his father and again the arms and armour provide the focal point of the scene. Elie asks for them back, along with his old horse, Marchegai (*AL*, ll. 8257-58). At first Aiol pretends that Marchegai has been killed and that he has lost the armour, and Elie flies into a rage calling Aiol a 'fol glous desmesurés' ('unreasonable, arrogant scoundrel', *AL*, ll. 8267-72) and threatening to kill him. Aiol quickly admits his 'joke' and has Marchegai brought in along with the arms, which he has had adorned with jewels and gold presumably to announce the family's return to wealth and fortune (*AL*, ll. 8283-84). This elicits much joy from his father and the assembled crowd, and the armour is duly worn in a procession to mark Elie's reunion with his warrior son and to celebrate the family's new-found glory. Finally, Elie himself puts it on and demands a tournament in which to test his former skills: he feels he must know 'se mès poroie mes garnimens porter' ('if I still would be able to bear arms and armour', *AL*, l. 8641). In other words, he needs this ultimate reassurance that his knightly identity has been restored.

If a knight's armour can be used to map the disaggregation of his social being and its subsequent reconstitution, then the correlation between his identity, the armour he wears, and the sword he carries must run deeper than a simple relationship of utility between man and inanimate tool. In the context of my thesis, concerned with touch and contact, the presentation of armour and sword is the touch by which a knight is established in a contractual relationship with his lord, and by which he will, in turn, bind subordinates to him. The armour will encase his body and his sword will be strapped to his side or wielded in his fist, and combined, they will become the medium through which he makes contact with his environment – both physical and social. The armour and weapons mark him out

[4] *Aiol*, ed. by Jacques Normand and Gaston Raynaud (Paris: SATF, 1877).

visually as belonging to the warrior aristocracy, and are potent indicators of masculinity, power, prestige and honour.[5] Yet they are also a source of anxiety, because they speak of the conflicted boundaries of the gendered space, of the tensions between exteriority and interiority, between self and other, between natural and cultural bodies.

In this first chapter I explore the symbolism of arms and armour in the Narbonne Cycle, finding that it destabilises and decentres the gendered identity of its heroes, for martial apparel speaks of a very physical masculine presence whilst placing identity outside the male body in removable pieces of metal that distort and efface the man within. In this way, I will argue that identity is not reducible to a knight's body, but is rather located in action and interaction, in the 'touches' that arms and armour prepare a man to make, in his violent performance. Only rarely do we see a knight unarmed in the poems of this group, and when we are witness to such a spectacle, something is amiss. For, as in Aiol's story above, the shedding and scattering of armour figures a fate worse than death in battle: it announces a knight's inability to act, his loss of honour, diminished manhood, and social death.

Chivalry, Violence and Desire

The key to understanding the relationship between arms, armour and heroic identity lies in warrior ideology – characterised by 'chivalry'. The relationship between chivalry and identity-formation has been critically analysed from a queer perspective by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who writes:

> The word denotes both a powerful cultural fantasy and a catalyst to the formation of a specific kind of European Christian aristocratic male subject. Chivalry aroused and then shaped the desires of an elite fighting class, delineating the contours of socially acceptable expressions of force and passion […]. Chivalry aimed to create a body at once deadly in its sanctioned violence and docile in its comportment at home.[6]

Cohen here picks up on several points: first, the idea that chivalry is responsible for *producing* the subjects who adhere to its values. Second, that chivalry is a cultural fantasy, not a biological quality. Third, that chivalry as cultural fantasy has a normalising force, and

[5] 'Warrior aristocracy' is a term used by Andrew Cowell. He acknowledges the 'legal complexity' of issues of nobility and feudalism, and this term is meant to include '"lords", as well as those mounted warriors supported by the lords or linked to them in relationships of a fundamentally military nature' (*The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance and the Sacred* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2007), footnote to p. 3).

[6] *Medieval Identity Machines*, Medieval Cultures, 35 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 46-47.

finally, that its very aims are fundamentally ambivalent – seeking to create both violent and docile subjects. These issues characterised and troubled medieval thinking about its fighting classes, and they find their way into the Narbonne Cycle through the representation of arms, armour and the armoured body.

Chivalric training for an aristocratic youngster started early and was highly rigorous. According to custom, young boys were sent to a lord's household where they lived and were educated among the knights of the court, listening to their tales of glorious martial deeds, learning to appreciate the values by which they lived their lives, and desiring to take their place among them.[7] They received physical, military training to develop strength, skill with weapons, endurance, and ferocious aggression.[8] To regulate natural responses to fear and danger they also learned 'self-control and self-suppression'.[9] In other words, the youngsters underwent a total physical and psychic transformation: their bodies were moulded to achieve solid muscular contours able to support the weight of armour and weapons, and their desires were realigned in response to the expectations of their cultural

[7] W.M. Aird, 'Frustrated Masculinity: The Relationship Between William the Conqueror and his Eldest Son' in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. by D.M. Hadley, Women and Men in History (London and New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 39-55 (p. 43). For historical accounts of medieval weaponry, see Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (Ipswich: Boydell, 1974); Maurice Keen, (ed.), *Medieval Warfare: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Malcolm Vale, *War and Chivalry* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Kelly de Vries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1992); John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades 1000-1300* (London: UCL Press, 1999); and Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe 300-1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004). For an account specific to Old French literature see Catharine Hanley, *The Portrayal of Warfare in Old French Literature c. 1150-1270* (Ph.D. Thesis: Sheffield University, 2001). Finally, for an account of medieval technological advances, including the development of weapons, see Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

[8] For studies on knightly training see, *inter alia*, Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy from 1066-1530* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 181-210; M. Bennett, 'Military Masculinity in England and Northern France c. 1050-c. 1225' in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (see Hadley, above), pp. 71-88. Medieval sources include Geoffroi de Charny, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context and Translation*, ed. by Richard W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); and Ramon Lull, *Book of Knighthood and Chivalry*, ed. by David R. Price (California: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2003). For a study of twentieth-century military training that provides an interesting counterpoint – stressing the radical physical and psychic transformation of boys into men – see David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially pp. 61-67.

[9] Andrew Taylor, 'Chivalric Conversation and the Denial of Male Fear in Death' in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. by Jacqueline Murray, Garland Medieval Casebooks, 25 (New York and London: Garland, 1999), pp. 169-88 (p. 174).

environment.[10] As such, Jacques Lacan's work on the Mirror Stage provides a useful tool for understanding chivalric training as a means of producing the 'violent and docile' subjects required by the fighting classes.[11] Lacan proposes that a child, looking in a mirror, sees himself reflected as a whole being and this total *gestalt* image is at odds with the reality of his young body with its 'dynamisme libidinal'.[12] The unified, specular form is termed by Lacan the 'je-idéal', the source of secondary identifications in the subsequent subject (such as libidinal normalisation). The form also situates the *agency* of the child's ego in a fictional direction – before it can be determined socially in the subject. Thus, the young noble looks into the social mirror and sees (in the knights that surround him at court) the reified ideal image to which he aspires, and around which he organises his desires. Thus chivalry, a 'cultural fantasy' that is presented as a powerful, unified force in the specular image of the knight, teaches him how to desire, and shapes his body and ego accordingly.[13] When we learn that Charlemagne desires the city of Narbonne, that the Frankish knights greatly desire war, or that Aymeri desires to kill pagans, we must understand that these desires only make sense within – and are indeed the product of – a chivalric system based on competitive honour.[14]

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[10] Medieval scholars conceived of the new-born baby as a 'tabula rasa' and believed it was possible to educate and develop in it 'those character traits and patterns of behaviour considered desirable'. In other words, they believed that the 'contents of culture' could and should be inculcated in line with a social superego (Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 162). On the regulation of the physical body see Georges Vigarello, 'The Upward Training of the Body' in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by Michael Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, 4 vols (New York: Zone, 1989), II, pp. 148-99.

[11] 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la function du Je: telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique' (1949) in *Écrits*, 2 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1966), I, pp. 89-97. For translation, see *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink, rev. edn (New York and London: Norton, 2006), pp. 75-81.

[12] Lacan, 'Le Stade du miroir', p. 90. This is the '*corps morcelé*' or 'violently nontotalised body image' that characterises the pre-Symbolic state. For a discussion of the anxiety that accompanies this image see Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 78-81.

[13] For an interpretation of Lacan's work on desire and fantasy see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York and London: Verso, 1997). Žižek here notes that fantasy mediates between 'the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality' (p. 7).

[14] As Clare A. Lees concisely resumes, 'the warrior desires blood, and the ethos of the heroic world demands that desire' ('Men and Beowulf' in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle* Ages, ed. by Clare A. Lees, Medieval Cultures, 7 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 129-48 (p. 143)).

When a young knight comes of age and is dubbed by his lord, this symbolic touch brings him into the community of knights in order to assume a particular social function. The sword and armour given to him at this public ceremony, the use of which has constituted his entire history, are the outward markers of this identification. Here, for example, Charlemagne dubs the eldest of the Narbonne brothers:

> [Charles] prist une espee, qui mout fist a loër,
> Bernart l'ainzné la ceint sanz demorer.
> 'Amis,' dist Charles, 'cest branc te veill doner
> Par tel covant con m'orras deviser:
> Que Dex te doint lui servir et amer,
> Et lealté a ton segnor porter,
> Et Sarrazins si confondre et mater
> Q'anor en terre an puisses conquester
> Et an la fin l'amor Dieu acheter. (*LN*, ll. 3154-62)

> [Charles] took a sword, which greatly was to be praised [and] straps it to Bernard, the eldest, without hesitating. 'Friend', said Charles, 'I would like to give you this sword, by such an oath as you will hear me recite. May God grant you to serve and love him, and show loyalty to your lord, and kill and destroy Saracens to such an extent, that on earth you may achieve honour and, in the end, gain the love of God'.[15]

The strapping on of the sword physically manifests Bernart's transformation into a knight. He is awarded it by the emperor Charlemagne in return for an oath – pledging to serve, love, fight and kill in the name of the Frankish-Christian community. (The contractual oath as foundation of community will be explored in detail in Chapter Two.) Across the poems, when the knights arm themselves for battle, they re-enact this social transaction, showing their belonging to the elite, male fighting community, and their readiness to fight (and die) in its name: 'maint bon hauberc i ont le jor vestu, / ceingnent espees, lacent maint hiame agu' ('they put on many good hauberks that day, they strap on swords and lace up many pointed helmets', *LN*, ll. 6668-69).[16] Yet, just as moments like this use armour and swords to mark (and celebrate) the knights' belonging to the order of *chevalerie*, they also deny the possibility of seeing that belonging as fixed or natural, for they must be constantly repeated. In effect, the handing down of the sword and armour are really a public transmission of rights, privileges, and judicial and punitive authority in a way that allows them to circulate between men in the warrior community, excluding those not deemed worthy of receiving them. Gayle Rubin calls the power that is transmitted in this way in

[15] 'Anor' can describe honour, a fief, or the honour (and power) that is derived from holding a fief (A.J. Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français*, rev. edn (Paris: Larousse, 2008), p. 30).

[16] Cf. *Aymeri de Narbonne* (ll. 1009-10 and 4248-50); *La Prise de Cordres* (ll. 165-71); *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* (ll. 748-56) where Aymeri arms for combat; and *Le Siège de Barbastre* (ll. 167-68) where he orders his men to arm themselves 'en non de Damedieu' ('in God's name').

kinship systems the phallus.[17] If we think of arms and armour as phallic objects, we begin to understand the very tactile basis of the transmission of symbolic power in the poems, and also its precariousness.

It is a relative commonplace that in psychoanalytic thinking the phallus does not refer to the male reproductive organ but to the meanings associated with it. It is the 'privileged signifier' of sexual difference.[18] In the Lacanian Imaginary, there is a flow of desire around the triangle formed by mother, child and phallus. The child sees that its mother desires the phallus and tries to identify with or 'be' the phallus in order to satisfy her.[19] When the father interrupts as the fourth term the circuit is disrupted, and the father is identified as having the phallus, thereby castrating the child. This renunciation of identification with the Imaginary phallus is the pre-condition for entry into the Symbolic order, meaning that access to the Symbolic phallus is predicated on the admission of a previous castration, a fundamental loss.[20] Moreover, no one can 'have' the Symbolic phallus in absolute terms: rather, as the mark of desire itself, it is always compounded by 'la menace ou nostalgie du manqué à avoir'.[21] The power associated with having the phallus can be wielded in the Symbolic, and passed from father to son, but it is never secure or absolute, and is always external to the subject. As Judith Butler remarks, 'castration could not be feared if the phallus were not already detachable, already elsewhere'.[22] By associating military apparel and the phallus, we can understand why these chivalric objects are such a privileged symbol of masculine identity, and also such a source of anxiety. Passing from father to son, lord to vassal, weapons and suits of armour are invested with the meaning of the paternal function itself – Lacan's *nom du père* – which is the 'symbol of an authority at once legislative and punitive'.[23] This military paraphernalia binds individual men together as members of a patriarchal fighting community, licensing them to act aggressively in 'the

[17] 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210 (p. 190).

[18] 'Le phallus est le signifiant privilégié de cette marque où la part du logos se conjoint à l'avènement du désir' (Lacan, 'La Signification du phallus' (1958) in *Écrits*, II, pp. 103-15 (p. 111)). In other words, it signifies the ordering of desire in the Symbolic order.

[19] 'La Signification du phallus', p. 112.

[20] To distinguish between 'symbolic' in the strictly psychoanalytic sense, and in the softer, sociological sense, I use an upper-case S for the former throughout: hence 'Symbolic order' here.

[21] 'La Signification du phallus', p. 113.

[22] *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 101.

[23] Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 108.

name of the father' and in defence of their family's honour.[24] For example, in *Guibert d'Andrenas*, when Aymeri sends out a call to arms – to gather his sons to help him conquer Andrenas – we learn that Hernaut states his agreement by referring to his weapon: 'tant i ferra de son branc aceré […] que jusqu'au poing l'avra ensanglenté' ('so much will he strike with his steely sword, that he will have bloodied it up to his fist', *GDA*, ll. 366-68). His loyalty to his father, and to his family's reputation, is expressed through his willingness to use his sword in his father's name and to soak it in the blood of his enemies. Sarah Kay comments that the patriarchal family is the place where the subject is introduced to the violent rules of the wider, warrior society; this is what is expected of Guibert, for the laws of chivalry demand his aggressive solidarity.[25]

If the handing-over of arms can be seen as the transmission of Symbolic authority and the licence to act aggressively, then the moment at which Guillaume is dubbed – as recounted in *Les Enfances Guillaume* – provides food for thought.[26] Guillaume is sent by Aymeri to Charlemagne's court to be knighted, but as he strides into the hall one of the seven kings assembled there reaches for his sword, since no one recognises the youth. They do, however, recognise the threatening potential of a fully armed warrior. This suggests an overlap in the functional and symbolic roles of weaponry – for how can Guillaume be fully armed, if he has not yet received arms? Guillaume orders the king not to touch his sword, and when he stands firm, Guillaume attacks him, whirling him around three times before sending him crashing into a pillar. The king's eyes bulge out of his head and he eventually collapses in front of the emperor with blood pouring from his mouth (*EG*, ll. 2297-99). Still not satisfied, Guillaume tells his defeated foe that were Charlemagne not present, he would put out his eyes, slice off his hands and cut away his ears (*EG*, ll. 2302-6). It is a brutal attack linked to Guillaume's sense of public honour and it foreshadows a future Guillaume whose role as supporter of Louis and key defender of Christianity ensures that his orders are carried out without question. Yet it also questions the grounding of that future authority – by transferring it back to an unknown youngster who savages a king.

[24] R. Howard Bloch charts the changing dynamics of power across the medieval period, finding that the introduction of laws of primogeniture led to the investment of authority in diachronicity. The status and power of lineage and family history was thus projected into sons and the future (*Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 85).

[25] 'It is the family which first initiates the subject to violence, whether of his own imperious demands, or of their denial of others' (*The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 80).

[26] Although *Les Enfances* is not strictly part of the Narbonne Cycle, the nature of this passage pre-figures Guillaume's character in its narratives (see Introduction).

Guillaume's 'illegitimacy' in the fight is figured through his bare-fisted approach: he does not use a sword, for he is here to receive one as marker of his entry into the symbolic domain of knighthood. Without this legitimisation, Guillaume's actions seem frightening and diabolical so that even the emperor is dismayed:

> 'De kel diable est cist hons eschapeiz?
> Je ne croiroie por rien c'on seust nommer
> Qui il fust mies de la crestianté.' (*EG*, ll. 2311-13)

> 'From what devil is this man sent? I would not believe for anything that one would [know how / be able] to say that he were [a messenger of / ever of] Christianity'.

Charlemagne's belief that Guillaume cannot be thought of as Christian (and indeed, has sprung from a devil) construes him as an outsider, an invader from the realm of darkness, chaos and Otherness.[27] Given that pagans are often presented with diabolical qualities, the fearful suggestion is that perhaps he is an infidel (see Chapter Four). It is only when Guillaume has been given a sword (and thus the licence of authority) that his actions become unambiguously 'good' – and Christian. Thus, arms and armour are indicative of a permissive aspect of the Symbolic Law that requires its knights to act aggressively, and be the 'violent subjects' to which Cohen referred. Yet they are also indicative of the prohibitive aspect of the Law – Lacan's *non-du-père* – or 'all those agencies that placed enduring restrictions on the infant's desire and threatened to punish, by castration, infringements of their law'.[28] They represent the libidinal reorganisation of the mirror stage and the strict regulations of chivalric life.

The prohibitive function of the Law is made explicit in *Ami et Amile*, a *chanson* from outside the Cycle that nevertheless offers a lot to the present study in comparative terms. In this *chanson,* Amile places his sword between himself and Lubias (Ami's wife) when he takes Ami's place in bed in order to allow Ami to fight on his behalf in a judicial battle (*AA*, ll. 1159-66).[29] The sword prevents illicit sexual touching and forbidden desire. Earlier in the text, Charlemagne's daughter, Belissant, seduces Amile, and Kay observes that she 'obscures social realities' by entering the bedroom in the dark and thus 'evades the consequences of her father's name' (*AA*, ll. 664-91).[30] In other words, she sidesteps the prohibition of the paternal function, and disrupts the social ordering of desire according to

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[27] Chapter Two will pick up on the idea of a social order founded on 'friendships' – including those between men and institutions.

[28] Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 108.

[29] *Ami et Amile*, ed. by Peter F. Dembowski, CFMA (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1969).

[30] 'Seduction and Suppression in *Ami et Amile*', *French Studies*, 44 (1990), 129-42 (p. 134).

which only Charlemagne has the power to give Belissant to Amile: Belissant herself cannot be permitted to make such a gift.[31] The sexual economy is thus strictly regulated by the prohibition of the father, the *non du père*, and it is this prohibition that Amile enacts when he places the sword between himself and Lubias later in the poem.[32] It physically fends off Lubias's attentions by providing a cold, metal barrier between the two bodies, and symbolically it (violently) proscribes the sexual touch between Amile and the wife of his brother-in-arms. It disavows the dangerous, disruptive female desire embodied by Lubias and affirms the priority of a masculine economy of desire that privileges chivalric ideology and male companionship.[33]

However, what is disavowed by this insistence on the importance of arms and armour here and in the Narbonne Cycle, is the fact that the phallus is invested less in objects than in the rituals surrounding them.[34] Knights might want their sword and armour to be more than mere tokens – to be essentially and innately important – but they refuse: ultimately objects are 'stupid' and it is the relationships between people, and the rituals and superstitions they develop around objects, that are important.[35] As noted above, the Symbolic phallus can never be 'possessed' and is always external to the subject: its power can be wielded as it passes from father to son, but its power lies in that acting. Likewise, a sword may symbolise the phallus, but it is the use to which it is put and the investment of meaning into rituals surrounding it that is socially powerful, not the object itself. Such denial of the essential 'lack' of objects effects castration in the Symbolic. Žižek has spoken of Symbolic castration as the gap between psychic and social identity – between the organic

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[31] The anxiety surrounding female desire in the Narbonne cycle is tackled in Chapter Three.

[32] For a discussion of Lacanian desire, prohibition and castration see Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 93-119 – especially pp. 97-98.

[33] There is also the famous episode in Béroul's *Tristan* in which King Mark finds the exiled lovers, Tristan and Yseut, sleeping in the forest, partly dressed and separated by Tristan's sword. Again, the sword represents Tristan's place in the community of warriors assembled around Mark (he is his nephew and vassal) and thus the very structure that forbids the affair. Mark reads the situation as innocent because it contradicts his expectation of finding them naked, touching, locked in a lovers' embrace (ll. 1975-2012) (*Tristan et Yseut*, ed. by J.C. Payen (Paris: Garnier, 1974)).

[34] As Slavoj Žižek notes, the 'phallus is the signifier of castration' for, rather than acting as 'organ-symbol of sexuality' and 'universal creative power', it figures the 'impossible passage of "body" into symbolic "thought"'. In other words, it denies the power of the object to signify, and denies the embodiment of Symbolic practices (*The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (New York and London: Verso, 1994), p. 128).

[35] Warfaring in particular is marked by its extravagant rituals and (superstitious?) practices. Hazing in the modern military is an extreme version of this phenomenon.

('imbecile') body and its Symbolic function.[36] He gives the example of investiture, in which the objects associated with the king's function – the crown and sceptre – symbolise the power of that function: power that is then wielded by the person who holds them. Ernst Kantorowicz, although not employing a psychoanalytic approach, talks about the medieval crown in the same way, as both a physical and metaphorical emblem of power, and as a type of functional space – the means by which the king's power is exercised and then transferred to his heir.[37] He sees the source of a monarch's power as external to him, rooted in the socially functional (immortal) body of the king, rather than the organic (mortal) body of the man. This is precisely what Žižek means when he comments that a monarch's insignia are 'necessarily external' to him and not natural, innate, or fixed. They belong to the social, the universal, the immortal and they therefore castrate the holder by creating a rift between what he *is* (his psychic identity) and his *function* (his social identity).[38] In this way, Symbolic castration is 'the castration that occurs by the very fact of me being caught in the symbolic order, assuming a symbolic mandate'.[39] It is synonymous with power even as it undermines the naturalness of any right to power. Kay notes that in the *chansons* the power of individual fathers is 'subsumed to a symbolic system which commits authority to the paternal function'.[40] In other words, rather than being autonomous, fully-individuated subjects, fathers/knights are radically subordinate to the ideological authority of the chivalric order. In turn, by understanding arms and armour as the phallic insignia of that order we see that, whilst being concomitant with the assumption of a privileged Symbolic mandate, they are also the focal point of this Symbolic castration.[41] Ultimately, they are inanimate objects, pieces of tempered steel, and meaningless outwith social discourse and

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[36] *Metastases*, p. 47. Cf. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 51-52. Here Žižek formulates Symbolic castration as 'the loss of something that one never possessed'.

[37] *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). See also Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. by R. Burr Litchfield (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001).

[38] In simple terms: 'subjects think they treat a certain person as a king because he is already in himself a king, while in reality this person is a king only insofar as the subjects treat him as one' (*Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 33).

[39] Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 87.

[40] *Political Fictions*, p. 81.

[41] Indeed, Žižek describes the phallus as 'an "organ without a body" that I put on, which gets attached to my body, without ever becoming its "organic part", namely, forever sticking out as its incoherent, excessive supplement' (*Organs*, p. 85).

interaction. By endlessly seeking to invest power, authority and symbolic significance into objects that can be 'rightfully' owned, the poems attempt to disavow the structural impossibility of possessing such power and shift attention away from the relentless acting – the rituals and touches that occur in the present – upon which the social edifice relies. It is to this tension between the investment of symbolic meaning into military objects, and the admission of their fundamental lack, that we now turn.

Violent Performance

Knighthood is a radically gendered subjective role, and for the heroes of these poems masculinity hinges on wearing armour and acting in accordance with normative, regulated configurations of gender and desire imposed on them as a consequence of assuming a socio-symbolic mandate at the moment of dubbing.[42] This is what Dinshaw means when she asserts that 'knighthood is a performance'.[43] Dinshaw suggests that the chivalric world is one in which identity is radically contingent upon the performance of acts that are socially coded to produce meaning, and she draws on the work of Judith Butler to show that when a knight is not 'doing', he has no proper masculine identity and his body 'perceptually disaggregates'.[44] In other words, the unity anticipated in the specular image at the Mirror Stage fractures back into the turbulent, pre-Symbolic *corps morcelé.* Butler's study of discursive and performative (gendered) identity draws on two main caveats derived from Foucault's work on bodies, power and discourse. First, that 'regulatory power not only acts upon a pre-existing subject but also shapes and forms the subject' – a caveat that supports the idea of chivalry as a Symbolic domain that influences and guides knights, but that is also productive of those very subjects who uphold and perpetuate its ideals. Second, 'to become subject to a regulation is also to become subjectivated by it, that is, to be brought into being as a subject precisely through being regulated'.[45] Thus, subjection to the behavioural regulations – the prohibitive *non* – of the chivalric order produces knightly identity, denying the possibility of a natural 'chivalric' body prior to that regulation. The body is always social, and cannot 'be' outwith the Symbolic order.

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[42] D.M. Hadley notes that 'martial skills […] were explicitly gendered as heterosexual, elite, secular, masculine traits' ('Introduction: Medieval Masculinities' in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (see Hadley, above), pp. 1-18 (p. 11)).

[43] 'A Kiss is Just A Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Diacritics*, 24:2-3 (1994), 205-26 (p. 213).

[44] Dinshaw, 'A Kiss', p. 214. Similarly, Sarah Kay suggests that Roland's strict and insistent favouring of 'direct physical action' is what characterises him as a hero in the Oxford *Roland* ('Ethics and Heroics in the *Song of Roland*', *Neophilologus*, 62 (1978), 480-91 (p. 481)).

[45] *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 41.

The extent to which performance in arms is synonymous with knighthood is captured in scenes such as this from *Le Siège de Barbastre*. Here, Bueves has been captured and taunted by the Saracen emir and defiantly boasts:

> Tant com [Aymeri] puist porter armes ne monter sus destrier
> N'avrés .I. jor de pes, ce vos os tesmoignier,
> Car moult sont no parent fort orgueillous et fier,
> S'enforce nos linages. (*SDB*, ll. 445-48)

> As long as [Aymeri] can bear arms or mount a horse you will not have one day of peace – this I dare to reveal to you. For our family are marvellously proud and brave, thus does our lineage grow stronger. [46]

On one level, Bueves can be thought to refer to Aymeri's arms and horse simply in order to remind the emir that he is from a family that is 'orgueillous et fier'. He uses the objects to symbolise his father's power, we might say. Indeed, elsewhere, the mere sight of Christian armour can be enough to make a pagan flee: in *Guibert d'Andrenas*, for example, Judas only has to see 'des armes l'or qui luist et reflambie' ('the gold of arms and armour which gleams and shines', *GDA*, ll. 1307-11) before he bolts back to the safety of his city walls. Yet Bueves's statement hinges on the concept of Aymeri's ability to *wear* his armour, buckle his sword and mount a horse. The suggestion is that it is not the objects, but what his father might do with them, that matters. (Equally, Judas's real fear does not stem from the glinting armour but from the use to which Aymeri and his men might put it.) Aymeri's ability actually to put on the heavy armour, support its weight in the saddle and wield the weighty sword would be enough to prove he were still up to the rigorous demands of the chivalric way of life, and so long as he can still manage it, Bueves can count on his waging war to rescue him. However, the 'tant com' of l. 445 gives Aymeri's ability a nervously finite nature and hints at the possibility that a time will come when perhaps Aymeri will not be able to use the objects to act in this way. Indeed, when Corsolt wishes to question Aymeri's prowess in *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, he explicitly evokes this possibility: 'puet il or mès ses garnemenz sofrir / porter ses armes et son escu tenir?' ('can he still suffer his arms and armour? [Can he] carry his weapons and hold his shield?', *LMA*, ll. 582-83).[47] Again, there is a tension between evoking the 'garnemenz' to

[46] To avoid ambiguity, I understand 'porter armes' and 'porter garnemans' in this context as referring to armour and weapons. The English 'arms' I understand as weapons alone: hence 'arms and armour' in the preceding section.

[47] Norman Daniel describes 'prowess' as inclusive of 'skill at arms and physical strength as well as hardened sensitivity. It is the capacity to endure, not passively, but with soldierly initiative' (*Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p. 31). He thus

symbolise the honour and power of the knightly function, and the admission that their importance lies in the rituals and usages surrounding them.[48] It is especially acute here, in fact, because Thiebaut's slur relies on, or at least evokes, Aymeri's past greatness. The 'or…mès' construction, coupled with our knowledge of Aymeri's current illness, speaks of the demise of a once-great knight, and roots that demise in his faltering ability to fight in armour. It thus implies that he is less than a man – or rather that by failing to act, his masculine body is failing, losing its meaning, or 'disaggregating'. In *Guibert d'Andrenas*, Guibert also insults Aymeri on account of his age, but going beyond the inability to bear arms, Guibert suggests that his father is no longer able even to leave the castle and must rest indoors supported by 'tant de coussins' ('so many cushions', *GDA*, l. 184). The soft cushions mockingly imply that Aymeri has lapsed into lazy luxury, unable to endure the rigours of war.[49] They also place him in the castle chambers and away from the public sphere of honour.[50] Crucially, the insult makes explicit the link between armour and gendered *agency*: to be a knight is to wear arms and go out into the world and fight. Not wearing armour is associated with stasis, weakness, old age, and failing health. Again, without arms and armoured performance to make the knight's body meaningful, it decays. In order to refute Guibert's rather uncharitable statements, Aymeri insists he will 'l'espee ceindre et lacier l'elme cler, / et sus Ferrant, le mien destrier, monter' ('strap on a sword

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captures the ideas of heroic suffering and of heroic agency and potential, both of which are evoked (and questioned) by Corsolt's words.

[48] Cf. *Les Enfances Guillaume* (ll. 2956-58) where Thiebaut insults Aymeri by claiming he is too old and frail to bear arms. Crucially, 'garnemens' can already imply agency in itself – sometimes deadly agency. In *Les Narbonnais* Roman baits Gadifer saying: 'por toi ocirre ai mes garnemenz pris' ('I have [taken / put on] arms and armour in order to kill you', *LN*, l. 4704). The idiom 'prendre son garnement' can even translate as 'to engage in combat' (see Jean-Baptiste de la Curne de Sainte-Palaye, (ed.), *Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage françois: glossaire de la langue françoise depuis son origine jusqu'au siècle de Louis XIV*, 10 vols (Paris: Champion, 1875-82)).

[49] Geoffroi de Charny talks at length of the hardships of war, stressing that those who pamper themselves with good food and a soft bed will not be able to endure them (*The Book of Chivalry*, pp. 110-12). The image of cushions also goes against the enduring association of knightly masculinity with the hard contours of armour, and the sharp, metal blade of the sword. Klaus Theweleit's study of masculinity in the Freikorps identifies the imagery of hardened masculinity that is pitted against the soft, flowing insidious threats of (feminine) desire (*Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. by Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner, 2 vols (Cambridge: Polity, 1987)).

[50] The gendering of public space will be tackled in Chapter Two. The key issue here is that heroism is predicated on public display. David D. Gilmore notes that 'performance […] on the battlefield […] must be visibly displayed, recorded and confirmed by the group; otherwise he is no man' (*Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 14). See also Miller, *Humiliation*, p. 116; and Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', *Screen*, 24:6 (1983), 2-16.

and lace up a bright helmet, and mount my warhorse, Ferrante', *GDA*, ll. 201-2), and that he will ride to Andrenas and storm the city in his son's name. There simply is no existence outside of performance on the field of battle and so to prove himself still a knight – and still a man – Aymeri must prove himself with arms and sword.

If being unable to wear armour suggests faltering strength and virility, then the act of removing one's armour is also deeply unsettling. An example from romance is useful here, since the increased reflexivity of the genre allows for more explicit self-analysis from its heroes. Here, Calogrenant recounts his defeat at the hands of the Knight of the Fountain in the opening stages of *Le Chevalier au Lion*. He admits that having been unhorsed by the better man, he returned to his lodgings and 'jus totes mes armes mis / pour plus aler legieremant, / si m'an reving honteusemant' ('I put all my arms and armour down, to go along more [easily/lightly]; so I came back shamefully', *CL*, ll. 558-60). His words neatly highlight the physical strength required to bear arms for great lengths of time, and his inability to support them now speaks of the physical weakness of his defeated body. On a figurative level, the shame of defeat and his loss of honour are given expression by the removal of the symbolic trappings that indicated his social status. His failed performance leads to bodily decay in terms of the injuries he sustains, and to social decay as he slips down the scale of honour.

Similar anxieties about the removal of weaponry and armour are discernible in epic. In the early *Chanson de Guillaume*, an antecedent to much of the material in the Narbonne Cycle, the Christian warriors find themselves in dire straits when the biggest pagan army ever seen moves in to attack the Frankish lands.[51] Girard leaves the battlefield to seek help from Guillaume, leaving Vivien to fend off hordes of Saracens single-handedly, and trudges across the land, worn out by the battle, the heat and his hunger (*CDG*, l. 709-11). Eventually, his armour begins to weigh him down: 'dunc li comencerent ses armes a peser, / e Girard les prist durement a blamer' ('then his arms and armour began to weigh heavily on him, and Girard began to reproach them gravely', *CDG*, ll. 714-15). Piece by piece he drops his armour to the earth until all he has left is the sword, which he uses as an improvised cane (*CDG*, ll. 712-41). We see again that the sword cannot signify Girard's power and authority regardless of the circumstances: if Girard cannot wield it in battle – in the theatre of performative honour – it lapses into a signifier of weakness, lameness and

[51] Tyssens and Wathelet-Willem stress that poems in the corpus cluster into mini-cycles around particular heroes, allowing interplay and overlapping between poems, and between cycles (*Les Épopées Romanes*, p. 18).

shame, indicating a power he has failed to harness and exacerbating the shame of removing his armour. The objects stubbornly refuse to symbolise naturalised heroism and pride, and instead, Girard's inability to use them speaks of his impotence and the futility of the situation in general.

In the Narbonne Cycle proper, the early stages of *Le Siège de Barbastre* tell of Aymeri's efforts to head off incoming Saracen attacks. Overwhelmed, he realises he must return to the city, and the sally's failure and his loss of face are registered in the weary removal of his armour: Aymeri 'est montés el palés si s'est deshaubregiez / le hauberc qu'ot vestu laist cheoir a ses piez' ('Aymeri went into the palace and there he took off his hauberk. He let the hauberk he had worn fall to his feet', *SDB*, ll. 380-2). The unusual verb 'se deshaubregier' – meaning literally 'to dishauberk oneself' – draws attention to this public act of disarming, and the shame and impotence of the previous examples all find their place here. The reflexive construction highlights the fact that Aymeri is doing this to himself; he is removing the symbols of his own power and, we might say, publicly enacting his own (Symbolic) castration. According to Mario Perniola, nakedness can be seen as a 'negative state, a privation' because 'being unclothed [means] finding oneself in a degraded and shamed position, typical of prisoners, slaves, or prostitutes, of those who are demented, cursed or profaned'.[52] Although Aymeri presumably retains some clothing, Perniola's observation about the symbolism of the undressed body helps us understand the extent to which this scene undoes Aymeri's status and honour.[53] And yet, the poem insists on his continued heroism: as he was returning, defeated, we were told that 'Aymeris va derriere con homs de moult grant pris' ('Aymeri goes behind, like a man of great worth', *SDB*, l. 337). As in *Guibert d'Andrenas* (and indeed most of the poems of the group) there is a tension between the admission of Aymeri's increasing age, and the impossibility of thinking about what that actually means. So at moments such as this, in which Aymeri's age does seem to be getting the better of him and his prowess is no longer absolute (if indeed it ever was), there is a dogged attempt to overwrite his failings with continued assertions of his heroism and masculine agency. For what lies beyond the relentless performance of knighthood is too horrible to confront squarely.

It must be borne in mind that performativity is not 'chosen' with free will: '[it] is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation […]. Constraint is, rather, that which impels and

[52] 'Between Clothing and Nudity' in *Fragments* (see Feher et al., above), II, pp. 236-65 (p. 237).

[53] 'Undoes' is a play on Butler's title *Undoing Gender*.

sustains performativity'.[54] Masculinity is not the free and easy assertion of power over others, but a regulated and wholly compelled process of iteration and repetition of norms. Likewise, the transmission of the phallus from father to son may privilege men, but it also oppresses them for it is contingent on compulsory heterosexuality and a violent performance based on an absent model.[55] If we look at the commands given by Charlemagne to Guillaume as he dubs him, they are firmly grounded in Guillaume's future performance:

> Soies prodom et oies fier corage,
> A ton segnor porte foi et omaje,
> Soies hardiz sor cele gent salvaje
> Si retreras a Aymeri le saje. (*LN*, ll. 3181-84)

> Be a [nobleman / man of honour] and have a [proud / fierce] heart. Show faith and homage to your lord. Be tough on the savage race, and so you will resemble Aymeri the wise.

The list of imperatives demands continued action from Guillaume, for these are not tasks that can ever be completed. According to Butler, such repetitive, coerced agency is what '*enables* a subject'.[56] Such acting is not a benign expression of self; it is a traumatic process enforced by the threat of 'prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of production'.[57] Thus, to stop wearing armour, to stop acting 'like a knight', has unthinkable consequences. One critic notes that chivalry is a form of 'emotional blackmail, enforcing itself by an implicit threat of ostracism'.[58] But chivalry-as-fantasy is so much more: it is the support of being *per se*, and so its implicit threat is worse than ostracism, it is the demise of Symbolic identity itself. Žižek describes fantasy as the 'passionate attachment' that teaches a subject how to desire, and also how to relate to the desires of the Other and to the authority of the Symbolic (the Big Other), and we have already seen this process at work in the constitution of the heroic subject. He goes on to explain that without this primordial identification the subject does

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[54] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 95.

[55] Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge Studies in French, 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 12. For Michel Camille, the male body is 'just as tyrannised' by medieval discourses, 'despite its constructed primacy and authority' ('Manuscript Illumination and the Art of Copulation' in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (see Lochrie et al., above), pp. 58-90 (p. 73)). For a general account of the 'naturalisation' of gendered difference, and universalisation of the heterosexual paradigm, see Diane Richardson, 'Heterosexuality and Social Theory' in *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*, ed. by Diane Richardson (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 1-20.

[56] *Bodies That Matter*, p. 95 (emphasis added).

[57] *Bodies That Matter*, p. 95.

[58] Taylor, 'Chivalric Conversion', p. 178.

not exist, and that this nonexistence 'is not directly the absence of existence', but rather it is 'a certain gap or void in the order of being which "is" the subject itself'.[59] In this way, 'fantasy is a defence-formation against […] the loss of (the support in) being'.[60] Chivalric agency, driven by the normative desires and regulated behaviours of Symbolic identification, iterates heroic identity, and beyond it lurks the abyss of non-being. The poems allude to this terrifying beyond when they suggest the impossibility of 'being' outside the battlefield, and Aymeri disavows it time and again by an insistent imperative to take to the field even as his years increase. Only once do we catch a glimpse of the acute horror of the failed heroic performance and it comes in *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, thus aptly prefiguring the death of the hero.

The episode tells of a battle between Aymeri and the pagan warrior-king, Corsolt. After gaining the upper hand (with the assistance of a demon) Corsolt removes Aymeri's sword (*LMA*, l. 1237). It is emphasised that the Franks fighting with Aymeri see it happen (*LMA*, l. 1238-39 and l. 1252-53) and that this provokes great sadness and pain in them (*LMA*, l. 1240 and l. 1254): the public aspect of the defeat thus emphatically exaggerates Aymeri's humiliation. It 'undoes' his knighthood and his masculinity, and crucially, it removes the marker of his identification with the power of the paternal function himself. For Aymeri was not just a common knight, he was lord and ruler of Narbonne, and cornerstone in the defence of the Frankish realm. All of this power hinges on his ability to fulfil a specific Symbolic mandate – and the sword is the marker of that ability. To make matters worse, he is taken to the pagan camp where, understanding the coercive force of public shaming, the emir decides to use Aymeri as a pawn to precipitate the surrender of Narbonne. A fire will be lit outside the city walls (i.e. in full views of its inhabitants, and Hermengart in particular) and Aymeri will be dragged naked to the flames: 'Quens Aymeris i soit toz nuz menez; / par les .II. braz sera dedenz jetez' ('may Count Aymeri may be led there totally naked; by his two arms he will be thrown in', *LMA*, ll. 1382-83). The plan is put into action: Aymeri is stripped and brought before the crowds dripping with blood from thirty wounds (*LMA*, ll. 1398-99). Again, the removal of armour figures loss of prestige, loss of agency, and the inability to fight (back). Rather than being able to lead patterns of touch in order to display power and perform a properly knightly identity (something that will be explored in more detail over the chapters to follow), Aymeri is left vulnerable to the touches of others and diminished in stature; he teeters on the brink of

[59] *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York and London: Verso, 1999), pp. 288-89.

[60] *Ticklish Subject*, p. 289.

social, not to say physical, death.[61] Without his armour and sword, and unable to fight, his is an abject body lacking intelligibility and coherence; it is displayed, like a piece of meat, with blood oozing from his pale flesh. This is, I suggest, a Real body, a body in pieces, a body turned inside out so that the visceral mess of interiority is seeping out, denying the illusory self-identity of the (Imaginary) body.[62] This is the state disavowed by the smooth contours of the armour-clad, sword-wielding knight who strides out purposefully to carve his name in the blood of others.

'Out There Where Metal Meets Meat'[63]

Thus far, I have considered arms and armour as distinct from the body, as items that are attached to it in order to render it ready to fight and so to signify if not masculinity and heroism itself, then the readiness for a gendered performance. Yet, the tension between the 'natural' body and cultural paradigms of bodily intelligibility troubles easy notions of the armoured heroic body by uncoupling heroism from ontology and blurring the boundaries of heroic selfhood: between flesh and metal, nature and culture, and self and other. We turn, then, to the troubled margins of the knight's body – where metal meets meat.

E. Jane Burns has written extensively on the role that clothes play in the construction of bodies and identities in Old French romance, and her work seeks to displace the concept of the natural body that precedes the cultural identity bestowed by clothing.[64] Burns maintains that the ostentatious display of fine garments had three main functions in a court context: to (re)define political and personal identity, to iterate gender, and to attempt to enforce social order between status groups (i.e. to iterate 'class').[65] The same can be said of a suit

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[61] As Dean A. Miller succinctly resumes, removing an opponent's armour enacts his social death (*The Epic Hero* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 217).

[62] One of the definitions of the Lacanian Real is that it is 'the flayed body, the palpitation of the raw, skinless red flesh' (Žižek, *Metastases*, p. 118).

[63] An expression used to describe engagement with the enemy in *We Were Soldiers*, dir. by Randall Wallace (2002).

[64] *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); and 'Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot as Ladies' Man or Lady/Man?' in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (see Lochrie et al., above), pp. 111-34. See also Joanne Entwhistle, 'The Dressed Body' in *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, ed. by Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 133-50.

[65] *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 2. 'Class' in the *chansons* is to be understood as based on different forms of justice and access to it. Although the poems are not concerned to explain the details of this system of division, we can see its functioning in the broad social divisions between those who fight, those who pray,

of armour for, as noted above, it was caught up in a visual semiology related to gender and status. In her article 'Refashioning Courtly Love', Burns also notes that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries civilian dress for knights was a long, unisex robe.[66] Thus, when disarmed, there was little to distinguish a hero from ladies of the court. When he donned his armour, the process retroactively constructed his (masculine) body within the armour as a result of the armour's semiotic value.[67] In this light, Aymeri's 'dishauberking' takes on a more emphatically gendered meaning: his disarmed body is positioned as effeminate, where femininity is associated with failed masculinity.[68]

Picking up on previous discussions of performance, we can argue that cultural symbols and acts play out and in effect produce the very body that displays them. It was noted above that the subject emerges as the body acts in accordance with gendered norms that render it intelligible, and developing this idea Elizabeth Grosz explains: 'it is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type'.[69] In other words, we cannot separate historical and cultural representations from their material basis, for these representations quite literally constitute those material bodies and produce them as such. Far more than just a product of nature, the human body is always *already* inscribed and shaped by the society into which it appears.[70] The body physical is the focal point of acts, interactions and touches that position it within social, cultural and political discourses and render it intelligible, but as Burns phrases it, 'there is no body in any foundational sense prior to the garments placed upon it'.[71] Armour

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and those who work (P. Noble, 'Attitudes to Social Class as Revealed by Some of the Older *Chansons de Geste*', *Romania*, 94 (1973), 359-85).

[66] 'Refashioning', p. 112.

[67] 'Refashioning', p. 115.

[68] Thomas Laqueur notes that from Galen onwards, the female body was thought of as the inverse (and thus imperfect copy of) the male anatomy. Females lacked the necessary heat to achieve the perfection attained by males (*Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990) – particularly 'Destiny is Anatomy', pp. 24-62).

[69] *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. x.

[70] Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin suggest that all bodies are distanced from nature 'by a multiplicity of psychic, sexual, social and political codes' ('Introduction' in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 1-9 (p. 1)).

[71] Burns, 'Refashioning', p. 113. For a broad discussion of the social and conceptual effects of material culture, see Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

is not mimetic; it does not replicate the contours of the heroic body beneath. Rather, it interacts with and constitutes that body.

Armour represents, in psychic terms, the 'armour of an alienating identity', performing a key role in the misrecognition that facilitates the transition from 'polymorphous, disharmonious body into [specular] singularity'.[72] Cohen sums up the tension between this performative identity and the illusory wholeness of the specular body thus:

> Because the trajectory of chivalric identification tended to scatter knightly identity across a proliferating array of objects, events, and fleshly forms, knighthood never precisely resided within the stable and timeless social body that chivalric myth obsessively envisioned.[73]

Cohen stresses the interactive, agential basis of identity and gives importance to 'relations of movement' between bodies – both organic and inanimate.[74] This cuts against the chivalric prerogative – fundamental to the Narbonne poems and *chansons de geste* in general – to root heroism and knightly qualities in biology and genealogical inheritance. This prerogative would naturalise the heroic body, finding in it the innate qualities of beauty, strength, nobility and morality that justify the social domination of the baronial fighting class.[75] Accordingly, arms and armour should be symbols of a family's natural right to power and be freely borne by its members. Yet, in order for the poems to represent the 'easy' relationship between knight and apparel, the gruelling training of his youth must be dissimulated, and the bitter hardships and agonies of war sublimated into noble suffering or even martyrdom (see Chapter Four). Although such dissimulation and sublimation undoubtedly occurs, we also occasionally glimpse the much darker reality that lurks behind it, in which the knight's body is mutilated by the objects he must use, and at times effaced completely.

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[72] 'Armour of an alienating identity' is a phrase used by Lacan to describe the effect of the Mirror Stage, and upon which Cohen et al. build a cogent theory of constructed masculine identity in the medieval period (Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and the members of *Interscripta*, 'The Armour of an Alienating Identity', *Arthuriana*, 6:4 (1996), 1-24 (p. 1)).

[73] *Machines*, p. 47.

[74] *Machines*, p. 50.

[75] It is a prerogative that subtends passages detailing a young knight's 'natural' and precocious talents that emerge sometimes even without due training and education. For example, Guibert sneaks on to the battlefield before he is old enough to fight in *Les Narbonnais*, and Vivien famously manifests knightly desires despite having grown up with merchants in *Les Enfances Vivien*.

Guillaume is the proud bearer of Joyeuse, which came to his hands via Charlemagne.[76] The fact that he carries this prestigious weapon is a defining feature of his identity:

> Li quens Guillames a la chiere menbree
> Tenoit Joiexse, qui tant fu redotee
> Que Charles Maignes li rois li ot donee. (*LN*, ll. 6337-38)

> Count Guillaume of the noble face held Joyeuse, which was so feared, [and] that Charlemagne the king had given him.

Even in this short excerpt, the boundary dividing man and metal is blurred, for if Guillaume is feared it is because he wields Joyeuse, and it is the 'tactile syntax' that exists between man and weapon that renders him deadly.[77] When Guillaume received the weapon earlier in the same narrative, the poet made clear that it would be responsible for his subsequent prowess: 'ce fu l'espee dont tant fist puis domaje / desor paiens, la pute gent salvaje' ('this was the sword with which he then did so much damage on pagans, the dirty savage people', *LN*, ll. 3172-73). In a certain sense, and according to the grammar of the first quotation, it is the sword itself that is feared. Yet surely it is impossible for a sword to be feared, or to have any life independently of its employment by a human agent? Not necessarily. In *Aliscans*, Guillaume talks to his sword directly, attributing to it some of the credit for his victory: '[il] dist a Joieuse: "Benoite soies tu! / Mien esciantre, onques mieudre ne fu" ('he said to Joyeuse, "May you be blessed! To my knowledge, never was there better"', *AC*, ll. 1616-17). Despite the tendency in the poems to imagine knight and sword as an irresistible unity, Guillaume here acknowledges that his sword is not, in fact, part of him. How can we think through this paradox? By again imagining the sword as phallus, as the Symbolic power and authority that is handed down from father to son, we understand that the sword has a power to act that extends beyond its association with Guillaume. Indeed, it is only *because* of Guillaume's prowess that the sword has come to him at all. In a sense, this sword chooses who can wield it: its reputation, history and signifying power mean that it can only go to a superlatively formidable knight.[78] And yet,

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[76] The dubbing ceremony is narrated in both *Les Narbonnais* (ll. 3167-75) and *Les Enfances Guillaume* (ll. 2530-660).

[77] 'Tactile syntax' is a term used by Cohen (*Machines*, p. 49).

[78] We might also think of myths such as that surrounding Excalibur, which could only be removed from the rock by the worthiest knight, or the swords of Perceval and Siegfried, which could only be reforged by the best knights in the land. For details surrounding the myth of Excalibur, see Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300*, Medieval Cultures, 22 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Guillaume is only thus capable *because* of the sword. He is both empowered and castrated by it.

Roland's relationship with Durendal runs along a similar trajectory. In the Oxford *Roland*, the hero uses his dying breath to pay tribute to his sword and to tell of its history and might: he describes how angels descended from heaven to give it to Charlemagne, who honoured his nephew by handing it down to him. He then lists the conquests that he has made with this precious item:

> Jo l'en cunquis e Anjou e Bretaigne,
> Si l'en cunquis e Peitou e le Maine;
> Jo l'en cunquis Normendie la franche. (*CDR*, ll. 2322-24)

> With it I conquered Anjou and Brittany, and with it, I conquered Poitiers and Maine; with it I conquered the freeborn Normandy.

The list continues for a further ten lines, highlighting the efficacy of the union between *this* man and *this* sword. Consequently, as Roland's life is coming to an end, he is anxious that his beloved weapon should not fall into enemy hands and be wielded against Christianity (*CDR*, ll. 2349-51). He tries repeatedly to break the sword so that the two of them can 'die' together and the sword will remain synonymous with *his* (Christian) power – but to no avail. The sword is imbued with the life of saints thanks to the relics embedded in the shaft, and has a symbolic and spiritual essence written into the very history that Roland recounts. Yes, the sword's fame is bound up in the feats performed by Roland, but the sword has a residual power of its own and it refuses to disappear along with its present bearer. That residual power is not innate, of course, but is the result of rituals and narratives attached to it over its history, and its subsequent association with Symbolic authority.

Aymeri, although not endowed with a named sword, also has a problematic relationship with his weapon. This scene is taken from *Aymeri de Narbonne*:

> Tant ot [Aymeri] feru de son branc aceré,
> Que tuit li braz l'en estoient enflé.
> Et si l'avoient paien el cors navré:
> Li sans li ist par le hauberc safré. (*ADN*, ll. 4302-05)

> So [much / many] had [Aymeri] struck with his steely sword that his arms were all swollen because of it. And pagans had so damaged his body that blood seeped out from his ornate hauberk.

Again, Aymeri's arm and sword are shown to have worked symbiotically in order to kill and maim many enemies. And yet the effort has left Aymeri in pain, and his arms are swollen from use of the sword.[79] If the sword is a phallic symbol of chivalric identification, then the pain inflicted on Aymeri by his 'prosthetic' attachment suggests the violence enacted by entry into the Symbolic order. In psychoanalysis, entry into language is necessarily violent for it enforces a cut with the primordial desires of the pre-Symbolic state. It is also a transition predicated on the acquisition of a social tool – language.[80] In *Organs Without Bodies*, Žižek suggests that it is impossible to imagine man without the tools he uses (and he cites language alongside other more physical examples): learning to manipulate these tools is part of the subject's 'symbolic capital' and constitutes his identity in the form of 'externalised intelligence'.[81] These tools are, in a sense, appendages that are attached to his body; they are never fully incorporated and yet the body cannot be meaningful without them. In the case of chivalric identification, the violence of the Symbolic is rendered explicit by the pain and suffering demanded of the aspiring knight. Indeed, his ability to withstand the rigours of war, to suffer its privations and pains without murmur, and to push himself to the limits of endurance are what makes him a knight. Thus Aymeri's sword, as manifestation of Symbolic authority (in its tyrannical aspect), attaches to him and hurts him even as he is rendered intelligible through the painful acts he performs with it.

Just as a sword can blur the boundaries between body and metal, so the armour that a knight wears can become drastically entangled with the body beneath; it is a painful appendage reminding him of his social function and without which he is literally useless. In a common battlefield motif, metal and flesh blur to the extent that the penetration of the one flows seamlessly into the penetration of the other. In this example, Gui fights Gracien:

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[79] Savaris refers to the same phenomenon in *Le Siège de Barbastre* when he says: 'se tenisse en mon poing mon branc qui est letrez, / ains y ferroie tant mes bras seroit enflez' ('if I were holding in my fist my lettered sword I would strike until my arm were swollen', *SDB*, ll. 774-75).

[80] The relationship between language and violence is explored by Žižek, who observes that entry into language is often understood as the renunciation of animal / primordial / savage violence. Yet he goes on to ask whether humans *exceed* animals in their capacity for violence 'precisely because they *speak*' – citing the violence inherent in symbolisation to justify the question. For Žižek, language 'dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity, treating its parts and properties as autonomous. It inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it' (*Violence*, p. 52 – original emphasis).

[81] *Organs*, p. 19.

> Desoz la bocle li peçoie et porfant,
> Et le hauberc li desmaille et desment,
> Par mi le cors li mist le fer tranchant. (*ADN*, ll. 1908-10)

> Under his shield he smashes and breaks his shield for him, and he ruptures and tears apart his hauberk. Through his body he put the sharp steel.

Similarly, when Girard attacks Aquilant in *Le Siège de Barbastre*, 'li haubers de son dos [est] desrous et desserrez / si que par mi le cors li est li brans passez' ('the hauberk on his back [is] broken and ripped, so that the sword passes through into the middle of his body', *SDB*, ll. 276-77). In both cases, the moment the armour is breached so too is the body beneath. The metal skin has, in a sense, become part of the body so that the destruction of one is equal to the destruction of the other. In *La Prise de Cordres*, the violence done to the body of Baufumé is figured through overlapping bodily and armorial imagery:

> Paien lou prenent par flans et par costés
> Et par les las do vert hiaume gemé
> Et par les pens do blanc hauberc safré. (*PDC*, ll. 1712-14)

> Pagans take him by his flanks and by his sides, and by the laces of his green jewelled helmet, and by the panels of his white ornate hauberk.

So much a part of the knight is his armour, that manhandling it is synonymous with doing violence to the body within. The anaphoric 'et' provides a seamless shifting between touches to the body and to the armour as if there were no real distinction between the two. As was the case with the sword, armour also inflicts pain on its wearer. A hauberk alone could weigh twenty or thirty pounds, and in the opening section of *Aymeri de Narbonne*, the barons speak of the intense physical experience of protracted armour-wearing.[82] The metal has bitten into their flesh over the campaign, leaving them physically exhausted and their skin damaged: 'tant ai porté mon hauberc doblentin, / le cors ai taint par desoz mon hermin', says Hoel de Constentin ('so [much / long] have I worn my double-mailed hauberk, that my body is discoloured underneath my ermine cloak', *ADN*, ll. 388-89). The fact that they complain about this and yearn for the luxuries of home (one knight even dreams of a bath! *ADN*, l. 342) is precisely the means by which the poet devalues these characters and paves the way for the meteoric rise of Aymeri. They are no longer identified absolutely with their arms and armour, just as they fail to answer Charlemagne's call to arms. Conversely, Aymeri is so tightly identified with his armour that it is barely distinguishable from his body beneath and, in the passage cited above, the injuries he sustains are figured by the blood seeping not from his skin, or his body, but from the

[82] See Richard L.C. Jones, 'Arms, Armour and Horse' in *Medieval Warfare* (see Keen, above), pp. 186-208; and Hanley, *The Portrayal of Warfare*.

depths of the metal itself. He suffers its pain, embodies its values, answers his lord's call to arms, and bleeds chivalric blood.

If the boundary between heroic body and its paraphernalia is thus contested and shifting, then Donna Haraway's work on the interaction between humans and machines may help tease out the implications of this slippage. Haraway suggests that the body's boundaries, rather than being fixed or finite, 'materialise in social interaction among humans and non-humans, including machines and other instruments that mediate exchanges at crucial interfaces'.[83] Her work revolves around the image of the cyborg: 'a hybrid of machine and organism' that displaces boundaries dividing human and animal, organism and machine, and physical and non-physical.[84] The interaction between a knight and his sword and armour, in this reading, negotiates the body's boundaries, displacing notions of the natural 'body' as we have seen. By breaking down these boundaries, undermining the body's ability to signify absolutely, and undermining even the 'naturalness' of its contours, the social edifices built on boundaries and divisions (subsequently justified with recourse to 'nature') are shown to be fictive. And this is precisely the effect that arms and armour threaten to produce. Because they cause tension along the body's boundaries and sometimes efface completely the body within them, they create slippage across other boundaries that rely on the materiality of bodies: notably those that materialise gender, class and religious difference. In other words, if a knight is completely covered by the armour that he puts on, what prevents a woman heading onto the battlefield – or a child or a peasant for that matter?[85] And what is to stop a Christian knight from masquerading as a Saracen or vice versa?

In fact, many episodes tell of Christian fighters disguising themselves in order to sneak unnoticed through the enemy camps on various missions. Towards the end of *Les Narbonnais*, Guillaume comes to the aid of his father who is besieged inside Narbonne,

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[83] 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 314-66 (p. 318).

[84] *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 149.

[85] Although no female warriors appear in this cycle as such, Hermengart does threaten to lead her family into battle in order to shame the men into action in *Aliscans* (ll. 3105-9). We only have to look at Italian romance epic for a full account of the gender subversion that armour facilitates: Ariosto's Bramimonde in *Orlando Furioso* is a classic example. The porter whom Guillaume dubs in *Le Couronnement de Louis* is an example of a lower-class man crossing into the echelons of knighthood.

and in order to transport much-needed supplies into the city through the enemy encampment he dresses his men in the armour of dead pagans:

> De bones armes les fait apareillier,
> Que il tolirent a la gent l'aversier;
> Paien resanblent li nobile guerrier. (*LN*, ll. 5978-80)

> He made them dress themselves with good arms and armour, which they took from the enemy people. The noble warriors look like pagans.

As they wind their way through the Saracen tents, Guillaume and his men are repeatedly stopped and questioned but always pass these security checks. Differences in bodies, language, skin colour and mannerisms are negated beneath the powerful identification imposed by the Saracen armour: the bodies beneath do not seem to matter. But this is not the only manner in which Christian knights can disguise themselves. In *Le Siège de Barbastre*, a group of Christian knights are sent out from the besieged city to seek aid from Bueves's brothers. In order to pass unnoticed through the surrounding encampment they paint their faces with ink: 'as contes oint les vis qui estoient moult cler: / plus noirs les fist que meure' ('he coated the counts' faces which were so [bright / clear]; he made them more black than blackberry', *SDB*, ll. 3555-56). This disguise is entirely based on the ability to discriminate between the opposing armies by the colour of the skin, and different armour is not deemed necessary to pass as Saracens.[86] So can Christian armour be distinguished from Saracen or not? If not, how can it play a part in personal, political or religious (Symbolic) identification? As is so frequently the case, one answer to the question is simply that the functioning of the armour and the nature of the body beneath are dependent on the exigencies of the plot. Yet, the shifting meanings of armour, sword and body also speak of the anxieties that haunt heroic selfhood: armour and body can merge into a marker of (violent) identity, or the body can be totally effaced by the signifying force of the armour. The sword can become radically attached to the hero acting as an extension of his body, or it can stand alone, bestowed with a mystical agency that outlives the hero, mockingly inflicting pain on him. Either way, when his armour is removed, torn off or scattered, or his sword taken, the hero falls apart, for his masculinity, honour, power – even his very body – are founded in and shaped by his violent performance. Since violence 'always needs *implements'*, the knight without arms is unable to act and thus decays, becoming unintelligible, incoherent.[87] He faces the abyss of non-being as the

[86] The susceptibility of skin to distortions of meaning is discussed by Gargi Bhattacharyya in his essay 'Flesh and Skin: Materiality is Doomed to Fail' in *Contested Bodies*, ed. by Ruth Holliday and John Hassard (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 36-47.

[87] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 4 (original emphasis).

fragmented, traumatic force of the pre-Symbolic Real threatens to engulf him, and with him the social fabric itself.

Knights, Narratives and Fetish

I have already touched on the anxieties clustering around chivalry and the order of knighthood in medieval society, finding that the shifting semiology of arms and armour within the Cycle is a means by which the poems express and engage with these problematic cultural issues. In this final section I will make explicit the fundamental lack of fit between 'real-life' knighthood and the mythologising narratives of the Cycle because, for all the poems manifest considerable unease about the subjective logistics of the chivalric vocation, they also glorify knightly endeavour as a natural noble calling and glamorise the very pursuit of war. This tension maps onto the broader narrative conflict, outlined in the Introduction, between ways of representing heroic society – both as organic entity and performed spectacle – and as such it is worth pausing here to consider it in detail.

In the Cycle, the military action demanded by Charlemagne is largely a matter of honourable battling in defence of Christianity, the Frankish realm, women and children.[88] Symbolic power is predicated on the (selfless) willingness to die in the name of community, and the heroes who wield it are all powerful, aristocratic barons, implying a unity of status within the order of *chevalerie*. Yet, critics such as Haidu pick holes in both of these narrative 'fictions'. First, the order of *chevalerie* was disparate and fractured, encompassing men of many ranks (see Chapter Two). Second, its 'real' function was more properly economic.[89] Within the feudal social structure that characterises the *chansons*, small-scale producers were attached to the land, and the surplus value of their labour was extracted by the dominant noble class (numbering around one per cent of the population, but featuring almost exclusively in the *chansons*). As money came to be integrated into the agricultural basis of society, lords no longer accepted payment in goods but expropriated money via the 'ban'. As Haidu explains, the ban meant 'the right to command, to constrain, and to punish; more broadly, the right to promulgate rules; to constrain their observation, and then punish whatever contravention might occur'.[90] This extraction of

[88] See Charlemagne's enumeration of the monarch's duties to his young son, Louis, at his coronation: a monarch should ensure that young knights are never disinherited, that widows are never deprived of money, and that pagans are beaten back into their own lands (*Le Couronnement de Louis*, ll. 72-86).

[89] *Subject of Violence*, pp. 44-65.

[90] *Subject of Violence*, p. 50.

money could only be performed through the consistent threat of a 'thoroughly institutionalised form of violence'.[91] Armed retainers would thus ride out through the lands to make their presence felt and to manifest physically the crushing power of the lord until 'the very bodies of knight-and-horse became the mobile signs of power and of potential force, destruction, and devastation, instilling fear and submission in the peasantry even when not unleashing military violence against them'.[92] This frightening monopoly of violence and 'measured terrorism' in the name of socio-economic dominance is transposed in the poems, according to Haidu, into the heroic defence of community and religion.[93] Violence is mythologised as a noble and prestigious endeavour because it is at the root of a cult of honour, and in this 'cult', swords and armour are transformed from symbols of tyrannical power into symbols of prestige that fix attention on the beauty of the male form and on the rigid, martial elegance of the warrior.[94]

Beautifully-crafted swords, shields and helmets are a source of covetousness in the epic genre because they are associated with wealth and nobility.[95] In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, Girard wins armour from the cowardly Thiebaut. The shield is expensively and lavishly decorated: 'd'or fu urlé envirun a desmesure / de l'or de Arabe out en mi le bocle' ('it was trimmed around to excess with gold, and the middle of the boss was of Arabian gold', *CDG*, ll. 372-73). Vivien had taken it from a Hungarian king and given it to Guillaume who had, in turn, given it to Count Thiebaut as a gift. Since Thiebaut has been proven unworthy of such prestigious armour, it is fitting that it should be forcibly taken and worn by someone more honourable: 'uncore hui l'averad mult prozdome a la gule!' ('now today, it is a brave man who will have it at his neck', l. 381). Cowards do not deserve to wear

[91] *Subject of Violence*, p. 51.

[92] *Subject of Violence*, p. 52. Cf. Harald Kleinschmidt, *Understanding the Middle Ages: The Transformation of Ideas and Attitudes in the Medieval World* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 48-49. Kleinschmidt remarks that the ability to ride on horseback and bear arms became the 'distinctive criteria' of the empowered knights over the powerless and impoverished peasants (p. 48).

[93] Haidu refers to the *Roland*, but in fact his remarks are equally pertinent to the Narbonne cycle (*The Subject of Violence*, pp. 53-54). He borrows the term 'measured terrorism' from Pierre Bonnassie, *La Catalogne du milieu du Xe à la fin du XIe siècle: croissance et mutations d'une société* (Toulouse: Association des Publications de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1975), p. 598.

[94] For a thought-provoking, though contextually different, exploration of the aesthetic beauty of military uniforms and their promotion of a cult of narcissism, see Joanna Bourke's chapter on male bonding in *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996), pp. 124-70 – notably at p. 128.

[95] Constance Brittain Bouchard notes that armour was costly and difficult to come by in the Middle Ages, and so only a privileged few could afford it (*'Strong of Body, Brave and Noble': Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 118).

fine armour, and as such, the beauty of these items becomes embroiled in the very idea of the hero's bravery, prestige and reputation. Likewise, the sword at a knight's side is an object of cultish attraction. In Ewart Oakeshott's words, 'swords are beautiful, with an austere perfection of line and proportion – surely the very essence of beauty'.[96] Acts carried out with a sword are saturated in this mystifying, essentialising idealism and rendered heroic. This example is taken from in the opening sally of *Le Siège de Barbastre* and describes Aymeri and his men encountering the enemy:

> Ce jour y veïssiés tante lance brisier
> Et nos gentis François sor Sarrasins aidier,
> A destre et a senestre as brans les chans cerchier,
> Amont par mi ces elmes ferir et chaploier,
> Ces chiés et ces viaires laidir et detranchier! (*SDB*, ll. 218-22)

> This day you could see there so many lances being broken and our noble Franks battling against Saracens: searching the fields to the right and to the left with their swords, striking and battling among these helms, making ugly and cutting up heads and faces!

The effect of the sword strokes is painted in stark colours: heads are cleaved open and faces are brutally disfigured. However, the strokes are clinical, clean and deadly.[97] The heads and faces thus sliced are nameless, belonging to worthy enemies (not defenceless peasants) and according to the ideology of the poems they are destroyed in defence of Christianity and the Frankish realm. The actions are deemed heroic and praiseworthy and because of the effortless grace of the Christian heroes they take on a powerful, aesthetic

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[96] *The Sword in the Age of Chivalry*, rev. edn (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994), p. 12. See also *Records of the Medieval Sword* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991). In *Aliscans*, the heroic beauty of the sword is emphasised by contrast to the ungainly 'tinel' employed by Rainouart, the details of which can be found in André Moisan's essay 'Du Tinel à l'épée ou le lent apprentissage du métier des armes chez Rainouart au tinel' in *Le Geste et les gestes* (see CUER MA, above), pp. 429-41; and Jean-Claude Vallecalle, *Mourir aux Aliscans: Aliscans et la légende de Guillaume d'Orange* (Paris: Champion, 1993).

[97] Evidence on the medieval sword's ability to hold an edge is varied. In the period in which the Cycle was composed, plate armour had not been developed, and swords were used primarily to cut and slash, rather than to thrust. Sometimes a cut would have been achieved; sometimes the warrior would have to settle for 'massively bruising' his opponent or smashing his skull. Either way, it seems that scenes like this in which effort is minimised and the results are clean and precise contain an element of poetic licence. See Graeme Rimer, 'Weapons' in *Blood Red Roses: The Archaeology of a Mass Grave from the Battle of Towton AD 1461*, ed. by Veronica Fiorato, Anthea Boylston and Christopher Knüsel (Oxford: Oxbow, 2000), pp. 119-29; Shannon A. Novak 'Battle-related Trauma', pp. 90-102 of the same edition; and Bengt Thordeman, *Armour From the Battle of Wisby 1361* (California: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001).

appeal.[98] The audience must surely experience awe and admiration, not horror.[99] These spectators are drawn into a relationship of complicity with the heroes and are expected to share in the thrill of action.[100]

Elsewhere, the joys of war are admitted directly: Aymeri, for instance, 'plus aime guerre que boivre ne mengier' ('loves war more than drinking or eating', *ADN*, l. 3431) and Garin gushingly declares that:

> Qant j'oi brere ces destriers auferranz,
> Ces chevaliers en fort estor pesant
> Ferir de lances et d'espees tranchanz,
> Ce ain ge plus que nule riens vivant. (*GDV*, ll. 2108-9)

> When I hear these swift warhorses braying and these knights in almighty, grievous battle, striking with lances and cutting blades, this I love more than any living thing.

This dreamy idealisation hinges on the cultish iconography of sword-wielding, armour-clad knights sitting atop feisty chargers – the very embodiment of military 'manly glamour'.[101] It seems that fighting and violence, for all they are part of the knightly profession, are not in themselves constitutive of a heroic, Christian-Frankish identity. They need to be refracted through the narrative lens of chivalric fantasy – a fantasy that aestheticises and glamorises action, spinning a web of desire that draws the audience in

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[98] On the gruesome beauty of violence in a twenty-first-century narrative – Quentin Tarantino's 2003 film *Kill Bill* – see Xavier Morales, 'Kill Bill: Beauty and Violence', *The Record: The Independent Newspaper of the Harvard Law School*, 16th October 2003.

[99] The debate surrounding the composition of audiences has not been conclusive. Some critics believe the poems were produced exclusively for the dominant class of baron-knights since they 'expriment l'idéal féodal' (Gaston Paris, *La Littérature française au Moyen Âge (XIe-XIVe siècle)* (Paris: Hachette, 1914); and Bédier, *Les Legendes épiques*, vol. 1 (*Le Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*)). Others believe that the songs were performed at castles to celebrate dubbings, marriages, and other feasts, but were also sung in the market place and in the streets (see Rychner, *Essai sur l'art épique*). Martín de Riquer bridges these opposing views, asserting that 'le jongleur […] s'adresse à son public *comme s'il était* exclusivement composé de chevaliers ou de puissant barons'. The performer was thus certain to address the barons appropriately, and to flatter the rest by analogy (*Les Chansons de geste françaises*, trans. by Irene Cluzel, rev. edn (Paris: Nizet, 1952), p. 306 – emphasis added).

[100] Rychner argues for such collusion in the *chansons* by reference to phrases like 'Oez, seignor, Dex vos croisse bonté! / Comfaitement Guillelmes a ovré' ('Listen, lords, that God give you his favour, how Guillaume acted', *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, ll. 1352-53), saying 'n'y a-t-il pas là, indissolublement liés, les seigneurs qui écoutaient, Guillaume qui agit, et le jongleur qui leur parle de lui?' (*Essai sur l'art épique*, p. 66).

[101] David Crouch, *The Image of the Aristocracy in Britain 1000-1300* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 124.

and disavows the raw brutality of that violence. In this fantasy context, we might think of sword and armour as 'fetish' items, understanding fetish as 'the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth'.[102] According to Žižek, fetish items are those to which we cling – and in which we invest meaning – in order to disavow harsh realities. Those buying into the fetish are not 'dreamers' *per se* because they are able to accept things the way they are only by clinging to the item and the meanings it embodies.[103] The audience, swept up in the iconography of the steely sword and gleaming armour, is allowed to see beyond the harsh realities of knightly violence and the social problems to which it gives rise.[104] In an earlier formulation, Žižek had called the fetish item that which 'believes' in our place.[105] It is still something that we cling to – this time in order to buy into the ideology that surrounds us. In this sense, the sword and armour are a point of identification between the audience and the ideology sustained in the narratives, just as they are the point of identification between knights and ideology within them. By believing in the material reality of objects and their mythical capacity to enact justice, the audience can suspend knowledge of the terrifying power of its fighting classes. Equally, the knights can suspend the anxiety attendant on an identity founded in relentless, violent and oppressive agency.

Conclusions

Heroic subjectivity is based on a performance, a violent performance steeped in blood. It is a performance that requires, but is also the result of, identification with a sword and a suit of armour. These symbolic tools are given to a hero to mark his entry into the community of fighting men and exist at the interface where knight meets world: they police the margins of his body and the contact he makes with others. This chapter has explored the margins of the knight's body and found that they are the site of anxiety and contestation. It appears at first view that armour clearly demarcates the boundaries of a knight's body and that a sword marks out his position within the contractual feudal system. Yet this is not the end of the story here, for skin can be encased by metal, metal can bite into skin, blood can seep from metal, and swords can be bathed in blood, until it is difficult to see where human flesh ends and arms begin. The effect of this merging and the abstraction of meaning away

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[102] Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 13.

[103] *On Belief*, p. 14.

[104] For a detailed study of ambivalent attitudes to chivalry and chivalric violence in the medieval setting see Richard W. Kaeuper's *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[105] *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 34. Cf. Sarah Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 104.

from an organic 'natural' body into the actions and interactions that it performs, is the breaking down of the boundaries and social categorisations upon which social order is predicated. If bodies cannot be relied upon to display innate difference (masculinity not femininity, nobility not baseness, Christianity not paganism) and if, rather, difference is shown to be produced through action, then the ontological basis of the privilege and domination of the aristocratic warrior community is undermined. Rachel Dressler has cogently argued that this dislocation of heroism from the knightly body led to its subsequent and retroactive fixing in the post-mortem effigies commissioned by knights.[106] Yet it also had consequences in life: Chapter Two will argue that it led to the strict and insistent *regulation* of actions within the knightly community, in order to (re)define and stabilise its boundaries.

[106] *Of Armour and Men in Medieval England: The Chivalric Rhetoric of Three English Knights' Effigies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); and 'Steel Corpse: Imaging the Knight in Death' in *Conflicted Identities* (see Murray, above), pp. 135-68.

Chapter Two – Community, Contact and Conflict

Introduction

> Controlling touch is an essential means of establishing and maintaining an orderly world.[1]

> Gestures transmitted political and religious power [and] bound together human wills and human bodies.[2]

The poems of the Narbonne Cycle were born of a period marked by profound political and social upheaval.[3] Local lords governed lands from hilltop castles, ruling with fists of iron, and seeking ways to consolidate power across ever-greater territory.[4] There were increases in population, urbanisation and trade, and with the clearing of forestland and wilderness that facilitated these developments, came a general improvement in communication.[5] Increased contact and communication in such circumstances are not, however, unproblematic: indeed, Peter Sloterdijk has suggested that, 'more communication means at

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[1] Classen, 'Control', p. 259.

[2] Schmitt, 'Rationale of Gestures', p. 60.

[3] John H. Mundy calls it 'a period of social crisis and internal warfare', noting that 'during this gradual revolution, a new structure of social and governmental power […] came into being' (*Europe in the High Middle Ages 1150-1309* (London: Longman, 1973), p. 25).

[4] Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, pp. 49-58.

[5] Richard W. Kaeuper, 'Introduction' in *Violence in Medieval Society* (see Kaueper, above), pp. ix-xiii (p. ix). The changes in commerce and economy are charted by Mundy in his *Europe in the High Middle Ages*, pp. 111-131. For a mapping of changing patterns of literacy and communication in the period leading up to the Middle Ages, Julia M.H. Smith's work on 'Speaking and Writing' is useful (*Europe After Rome: A New Cultural History 500-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 13-50).

first above all more conflict'.[6] In the Middle Ages, communication meant coming face-to-face with others, encountering them physically and acting appropriately. But even without this physical element, coming into contact with others causes tension as identities, ways of life, and cultural forms are open to renegotiation: boundaries, distinctions and knowledge are at stake. When uncomfortable proximity is added to the equation, the result is an 'essentially hostile' medieval world – in which the very basis of social bonding is self-protection.[7] Forming bonds of friendship and vassalage with the greatest possible number of men gives individuals in this world the best form of personal security. This chapter will show that these bonds are created and sustained through the performance of various ritual touches, actions and gestures, the meanings of which are shared and collectively iterate communal identity in the Narbonne Cycle. Indeed, these performative bonds create the network of negotiated alliances that constitutes the (male) social order of the poems itself and facilitates the transmission of goods and privilege (the phallus of Chapter One) within that closed circuit. I argue that this investment in the erection and protection of community boundaries works to re-establish the boundaries of heroic identity rendered unstable by the uncoupling of heroism from 'natural' ontology.

The community being here established is an elite community of fighting men, for whom violent performance is the *sine qua non* of existence itself. The code of courtly (chivalric) exchange that produces their collective identity is thus profoundly military, and so firmly grounded in a cultural framework of competitive and violent honour that it feeds back into the 'essential hostility' of the medieval world. In this way, we can understand chivalric violence as systemic, part of the very ideology that shapes and moulds the knightly subject. This means that regulation in the name of peace and order is ultimately bound to fail since it merely displaces violence to the margins of the community or sublimates it into a form of social or 'diplomatic' exchange that is nevertheless forceful and aggressive in nature. Classen's assertion that 'controlling touch' is necessary for social order to flourish is thus accurate only to a point; yes, those in power in medieval Europe made moves to create laws to limit certain forms of violence, to organise human relationships more strictly and coherently, and to 'provide alternatives to open fighting'.[8] But such regulatory control of touch is also, in a sense, productive of the very violence that threatens to usurp order. For

[6] 'Warten auf den Islam', *Focus*, October 2006, 84-154 (p. 84): cited in Žižek, *Violence*, p. 50.

[7] Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe*, trans. by Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2. Haidu goes beyond Althoff's rather tentative description, saying that the Middle Ages was a period 'that not only lived violence; [it] knew it as a norm' (*Subject of Violence*, p. 193).

[8] Kaeuper, *Violence*, p. x.

one thing, as Richard Kaeuper observes, those in power who were trying to control violence were also sponsoring the atrocities of war and crusading, and inflicting 'horrific judicial punishments' on the condemned, meaning that violence was part and parcel of social authority at the highest level.[9] But more crucially, by turning once again to psychoanalysis, we can understand the socially coercive regulation of behaviour as the manifestation of the violence of the Symbolic itself – the permissive and prohibitive *non/nom du père* that we have already encountered. In other words, violence is written into the Symbolic order and is productive of subjectivity itself. And when those subjects are knights, that violence is doubly productive, for physical acts of aggression are part of their identity – their being. Thus, although chivalry ought to act as an 'uncomplicated factor in securing public order', such order would actually rely on the 'internalisation of necessary restraints in a vigorous group of men'.[10] It would depend on the violent control of violent men. Perhaps the biggest paradox of all is therefore that the better the knight, the less likely he is to submit to the regulatory mechanisms of community-building diplomacy in the first place. Heroes will more likely than not lash out violently over even the most trivial slights to their honour – for such is the nature of chivalric heroism in its purest form.[11] In this way, chivalry guarantees its own shortcomings, and guarantees the failure of heroic subjectivity. In effect, the space of the epic is that in which the violent over-extension of the chivalric system is envisaged, and for all this particular epic cycle positions itself as a possible answer to the problems posed by previous invocations of chivalric subjectivity (as expressed most notably in the *Roland* and *Raoul de Cambrai*), it is nevertheless unable ultimately to resolve them.[12]

In brief, this chapter will explore the way in which strictly regulated patterns of touch and tactile behaviour perform individual warrior aristocratic identity on a microcosmic level, and iterate community identity on a macrocosmic level. It will then move on to consider the (violent) consequences of a meeting between this group and a group of outsiders, or Others, using current theories of the neighbour to understand the traumatic nature of such an encounter. In order to map the nuances of individual and community identity closely, these first two sections will be grounded in an extended reading of one poem – *Aymeri de Narbonne* – in which tactile exchange is explicitly prioritised. Yet, as the phenomena

[9] *Violence*, p. x.

[10] Kaeuper, *Chivalry*, p. 2.

[11] 'A mark of privileged status was the capacity to respond to any challenge to honour, status, or wealth by means of violence' (Kaeuper, *Violence*, p. x).

[12] As Cowell notes, 'the world depicted is a world pushed to its limits, and not a world to which the listener can – or would wish to – attain' (*Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 114).

charted here are found across the Cycle, I will also draw attention to parallels in other texts. In the final section, the chapter will begin to tackle the problematics of a social order founded in the assertion of community 'unity' set against foreign difference. For the unity proposed and idealised in the *chansons* is ultimately impossible, given that these poems take shape around a warrior ideology that is predicated on violent performance, and that valorises individuality and personal honour. Just as the boundaries of the heroic body were found to be shifting and contingent in Chapter One, so the boundaries of heroic community are here found to be equally mutable and unstable for they rely on the relentless assertion of a 'fictive' difference.[13]

Contacts and Contracts

In *Aymeri de Narbonne*, where Aymeri is established as a key ally of the emperor, the brokering of political relationships takes centre stage. The importance of friends and community is emphasised throughout, and the role that rituals of touch and gesture play in the formation of friendship bonds and community networks should not be underestimated. Chapter One discussed how entry into the Symbolic order of knighthood shapes and moulds the body and desires of the young *chevalier* to produce an intelligible subject who acts in the Symbolic and is recognisable by that acting. The Symbolic is the realm of language, made up of discourses that produce their effects on and in the bodies of subjects. Stephen Whitehead describes the relationship between discourse and power thus:

> Discourses are more than the means by which individuals are reified and confirmed as individuals, for discourses carry knowledge and truth effects through their capacity to signal what it is possible to speak of and do at a particular moment *and in particular cultural settings*.[14]

Whitehead here begins to hint at the way in which discourses produce social difference. By constraining action- and speech-patterns differentially, and by privileging certain epistemologies, they produce subjects marked by a value-bearing difference.[15] He goes on to explain that because discourse shapes patterns of understanding, it provides the fabric of the social web, creating rules as to how a subject exercises power, how he knows himself,

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[13] Žižek refers to the legal and religious values that shape community as 'fictions', having no 'substantial ontological consistency' outside that community. They nevertheless violently mould the bodies and desires of subjects, and render them willing to die in their name (*Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 52).

[14] *Men and Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 103.

[15] Difference entails privileging the masculine: 'dominant discourses are powerful in their persuasion of what counts as normal or natural and, thus, what is or is not valued in terms of male embodiment' (*Men and Masculinities*, p. 184).

and how he communicates. In other words, to take up discourse is a performative act that locates an embodied subject within an identity, and in reference to specific regimes of power and knowledge.[16]

From a sociological perspective, Classen argues that touch is a symbolic language that we learn alongside speech. It has its own vocabulary and grammar dictating what touching is possible, in what circumstances, and what it means.[17] Nick Crossley echoes her, emphasising that if gestures, like language, are to be learned, they must function in accordance with 'public and intersubjectively verifiable criteria'.[18] In other words, they must have a common social meaning attached to them and be able to carry out a certain function. As Classen goes on to suggest, the language of touch and gesture supports and confirms oral discourse, rooting socially symbolic language in the physical presence of the body. To explore the relationship between social phenomena and embodied subjectivity in more detail, we might turn to Freud's work on *The Ego and the Id*, in which he claims that the ego acts as the 'representative in the mind of the real external world', whilst also contending that the ego is 'first and foremost a bodily ego'.[19] We can understand the ego as a mediator between the social and the physical, then, for perceptions drawn from the external social world are experienced along the body's surface and recorded and assessed by the ego. Thus, the 'outline of the body sustains the ego's sense of the outline of the person – the structured wholeness of itself'; the ego is a product of the physical body and its perception of the world.[20] Yet at the same time, the ego maintains and polices the subject's idea of his body: it is 'not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface'.[21] Lacan's work on the Mirror Stage nuances these earlier insights, describing the ego as forming around the totalized and mastered (specular) body, so that it is embodied and situated spatially (even if that 'bodily coherence' is a 'spectacle' produced and governed by the ego).[22] In this way, physical behaviour and patterns of touch can be understood as manifestations of embodied subjectivity for they are the point at which the

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[16] *Men and Masculinities* – see especially 'Power and Resistance', pp. 84-113.

[17] 'Contact' in *Book of Touch* (see Classen, above), pp. 11-14 (p. 13).

[18] *The Social Body: Habit, Identity and Desire* (London and New Delhi: Sage, 2001), p. 43.

[19] *Ego and the Id*, p. 22; p. 20.

[20] Kay and Rubin, *Framing*, p. 2. Kay and Rubin suggest psychoanalysis as one 'frame' within which to explore medieval attitudes to the body. For further evaluation of the relationship between ego and body, this time in a modern setting, see Elizabeth Grosz, 'Space, Time and Bodies' in *Cybersexualities* (see Wolmark, above), pp. 119-136, (p. 120).

[21] *Ego and the Id*, p. 20.

[22] See Lacan, 'Le Stade du Miroir', pp. 89-97; and Kay and Rubin, *Framing*, p. 2.

Imaginary identification of the Mirror Stage is reproduced in the corporeal self. We have already seen this process at work in Chapter One, in the way that the violent bodily agency of the knight manifests his assumption of a Symbolic mandate. What will concern us here is the way that patterns of speech, gesture and touch interact to produce and perform *communal* identity in the Narbonne Cycle.

Aymeri de Narbonne opens as Charlemagne returns home after his defeat at Rencesvals. His heart is heavy, so when he catches sight of the beautiful city of Narbonne, he is determined to defeat the pagan inhabitants in revenge for his losses. He invites his men to go forth and conquer it in his name, but they are war-weary and each, in turn, refuses – citing fatigue, pain, lack of food, and longing for home (*ADN*, ll. 307-621). Charlemagne takes their resistance personally and laments the death of his best knights, among them Roland, saying that: 'puis que mort sont li mien verai ami, / Crestïenté n'a mès nul bon ami' ('because my true friends are dead, Christianity no longer has any good friends', *ADN*, ll. 587-89). Presumably because they refuse his wishes, these men are no longer 'friends' in Charlemagne's eyes, and have failed him despite being his 'home plus puisant' ('most powerful men', *ADN*, l. 468). If they are not friends of the defender of Christianity, they are no longer friends of Christianity itself and Christianity is left 'friendless'. His words are no doubt prompted by anger and humiliation, ('plains fu li rois de mout fier mautalent'; 'the king was full of most fierce anger', *ADN*, l. 467) but the essential message they contain is that these men are bound to him, and to Christianity itself, through ties of friendship and obedience. The idea that an institution such as Christianity could be friendless may seem bizarre to a twenty-first-century reader, but historical commentators such as Gerd Althoff make clear that we cannot conceive of medieval social and institutional networks in the way we think of them today, and he describes them as entirely rooted in *personal* ties.[23] A child was born into a number of communities and groups, and into his father's network of connections and alliances. Throughout his life he would seek to enter new groups himself, to forge new friendships and alliances and build up his (social) network:

[23] 'Friendship and Political Order' in *Friendships in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 91-105 (p. 92). Cf. Cowell, *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*. Cowell's work discusses personal bonds in terms of the symbolic exchange of gifts, and highlights the tensions and aggression involved in such a system.

> In a society that was essentially hostile, these bonds guaranteed security and support in every area of life. Group members were not only obliged to support one another; they were entitled to expect support from one another too.[24]

Bonds between men were personal and intimate, grounded in face-to-face meetings, contact and social touch.[25] Kay refers to such bonds as 'cet énorme réseau de relations entre les hommes qui constitue la société'.[26] In other words, such a matrix of bonds iterates community, constituting the social order itself. Our heroes occupy points on this social matrix, and personal ties of fealty, loyalty and obedience provide the structural mesh holding the points in place and grouping them strategically according to divisions along lines of religion, geographical origin, social order and so on. Christianity can, in this way, be understood as a community of individuals, bound to each other and to God. Because Charlemagne is, in ideological terms, defender of the Christian faith, to disobey him is here figured as disobedience to Christianity itself – despite the rather secular origins of the request. It increases the drama of Charlemagne's anger and paves the way for the introduction of Aymeri – who will take up the challenge and in doing so become the 'friend' that Charlemagne and Christianity are now lacking.

The fact that Charlemagne uses the term 'ami' as a sort of political leverage is also indicative of the nature of medieval friendships. Unlike modern friendships which are arguably founded on love and abstract emotion, medieval friendships are more commonly socio-political alliances: 'the bond of friendship, as one meets it in the medieval political arena, was not a bond of feeling, but rather a contract involving rights and obligations'.[27]

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[24] Althoff, *Family*, p. 2. See also Ronald G. Koss's work on kinship in the *chansons* (*Family, Kinship and Lineage in the Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, Studies in Medieval Literature, 5 (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1990)). Smith provides a detailed account of the development of the concept and meaning of kinship, distinguishing cultural and biological assumptions, in *Europe After Rome* (pp. 83-114).

[25] Classen shows that the use of touch as a bonding mechanism between men is not limited to the medieval arena: 'one of the key features of masculine touch in many cultures seems to be how it is used among men to express ideals of manliness, establish social hierarchies, and ensure group solidarity' ('Male Bonding' in *Book of Touch* (see Classen, above), pp. 155-59 (p. 155)).

[26] 'La Représentation de la feminité dans les chansons de geste' in *Charlemagne in the North: Proceedings of the Twelfth International Conference of the Société Rencesvals*, ed. by Philip E. Bennett, Anne E. Cobby and Graham A. Runnalls (Société Rencesvals British Branch: Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 223-40 (p. 225). Finn E. Sinclair develops this model in *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the Chansons de geste* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003) – see p. 62 in particular.

[27] Althoff, 'Friendship', p. 92. Although, with further probing we can uncover the politics and exchanges upon which modern friendship might, more cynically, be said to depend. As Haidu suggests, we tend to idealise and romanticise personal relationships, masking the 'fundamental role played by inter-personal contracts, often presupposed and unverbalised' (*Subject of Violence*, p. 87). Furthermore, with regard to the

By ‘contract’, Althoff means a public, oral agreement and not a written document, and just what ‘rights and obligations’ entailed was a matter of vague, general consensus.[28] For us, understanding is further clouded by the fact that such contracts in medieval texts are so self-evident that they are not examined or described in detail.[29] However, we can surmise that they were based on the right to expect support in military endeavour and counsel in difficult matters, and that they bound men into a public relationship of privilege and exchange. In this light, we can see why Charlemagne is affronted by his friends’ refusal to support his campaign, and the stage is set for Aymeri to be elevated to Charlemagne’s powerful friendship network. Before Aymeri can come face-to-face with the emperor, however, there are certain protocols to be followed. In an environment in which all interaction must take place face-to-face, and in which such contact necessarily entails a relationship of some kind, spatial proximity to the emperor is a privilege. The importance of spatial dynamics in relation to issues of identity and embodiment has been thoughtfully outlined by Grosz, most notably in her essay ‘Space, Time and Bodies’. She draws on Lacan’s work on the Mirror stage to talk about the way in which corporeality and spatiality are linked to personal identity, noting that ‘the specular or virtual space of mirror-doubles is constitutive of whatever imaginary hold the ego has on identity and corporeal identity’.[30] In other words, it is the child’s conception of occupying space that figures his ideal (alienated) identity. Who can move in certain spaces, in what fashion, and in what order, are crucial elements in the production and performance of identity. If this is the case, then it follows that the occupation of space is itself gendered and allows bodies to be read, produced, and reproduced in a certain way.[31] In the arena of Charlemagne’s itinerant court,

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medieval setting, we might also assume that the rituals of friendship were supposed to produce an affective content when enacted through time. For the present study, however, it is the rituals themselves that must take centre stage.

[28] ‘Friendship’, p. 92; *Family*, p. 9.

[29] Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, p. 87.

[30] ‘Space, Time and Bodies’, p. 121.

[31] According to Ruth Holliday and John Hassard, ‘location and context are key to how bodies are experienced, read, constructed, produced and reproduced […]. Distinctions between respectable and non-respectable bodies have long been at the heart of the boundary-drawing process etched in space’ (‘Contested Bodies: An Introduction’ in *Contested Bodies* (see Holliday and Hassard, above), pp. 1-18 (p. 12)). Indeed, Kleinschmidt shows that in the Middle Ages, space was conceived in terms of relationships between people: groups constituted space, just as space constituted groups (*Understanding the Middle Ages*, p. 36). Cf. Roberta Gilchrist, ‘Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body’ in *Framing* (see Kay and Rubin, above), pp. 43-61. Gilchrist writes that ‘space forms the arena in which social relationships are negotiated and expressed in the landscape, architecture and boundaries of the kingdom’ (p. 45). For a collection of varied approaches to space in the Middle Ages see Barbara A. Hanawalt and

space is significantly occupied by men: men of high social status. At the beginning of the Oxford *Roland*, for example, we first encounter Charlemagne in his court-camp:

> Li empereres est en un grant verger,
> Ensembl'od lui Rollant e Oliver,
> Sansun li dux e Anseïs li fiers,
> Gefreid d'Anjou, le rei gunfanuner,
> Et si i furent e Gerin e Gerers;
> La u cist furent, des altres i out bien. (*CDR*, ll. 103-8)

> The emperor is in a spacious orchard and with him [are] Roland and Oliver, Samson the Duke and Anseïs the fierce, Geoffrey of Anjou standard-bearer of the king. And there also were Garin and Gerier and where they were, there were many others.[32]

Surrounded by his best warriors – the heroic elite of the Frankish realm – Charlemagne relaxes and enjoys his victory. This is a powerful statement of community, framed by the spatial limitations of the garden.[33] Presence and interaction in this space – or in the court more generally – marks actors out as masculine and aristocratic, and this behaviour can be understood as the 'reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names'.[34] As Butler explains, 'gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regime' according to which individuals take shape within distinct spaces or domains that are rigidly associated with a gender.[35] Their very being-in-space depends on and reproduces social intelligibility and, in the case of these warrior aristocrats, privilege. [36] Aymeri is an unfiefed knight and so he is unable to approach the

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Michal Kobialka, (eds), *Medieval Practices of Space*, Medieval Cultures, 23 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[32] Based on Glyn Burgess's translation (*The Song of Roland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990)).

[33] Of course, the narrative of the *Roland* charts the disintegration of this community, as the unity presented here is destroyed by Ganelon's treachery. But this precisely foreshadows the trajectory of my argument; community is presented as natural and powerful on the one hand, and yet liable to fracture if someone behaves in the 'wrong' way. For discussion of the garden as locus amoenus – a literary topos describing an idyllic place – in the *Roland*, see Gerard J. Brault, *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, 2 vols (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), I, pp. 67-70. Brault draws on Ernst Curtius's earlier observations (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 226-47).

[34] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 2.

[35] *Undoing Gender*, p. 41. For a discussion of the gendering of behaviour in terms of social 'domaining' and privilege see Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998) – especially 'Domains: Male and Female Models', pp. 66-97.

[36] We might envisage Louis XIV's highly nuanced structure of differential privilege based on spatial proximity as a radically systematised version of this phenomenon (David J. Sturdy, *Louis XIV* (Basingstoke:

emperor unannounced: his father, Hernaut, who is already a baron in the emperor's close circle, must speak on his behalf.[37] Privilege (the phallic power of Chapter One) is thus literally handed down from father to son: the son will inherit the father's place at court, subject to his reproduction of the correct behaviour. Aymeri has been born into a particular 'culture-specific model' of social interaction, inheriting from his father certain privileges. Yet there is no sense in which an individual simply 'is' aristocratic: rather, 'the individual's actions, behaviours and "performance" work to establish, maintain and alter the individual's specific identitie(s)'.[38] Aymeri, as shown in Chapter One, is subject to the 'subtle and blatant coercions' that reproduce in him a certain symbolic role.[39]

Hernaut asks Charlemagne's permission to present Aymeri, claiming that if Charlemagne makes him his vassal, he will win and defend the city for him:

> Se fetes tant que il soit vostre druz! […]
> Par lui ert bien li païs meintenuz,
> Et vers paiens tensez et defanduz. (*ADN*, ll. 655-58)

> Do so much that he becomes your [friend/man]! By him will the region be well maintained and held and defended against pagans. [40]

He bolsters his request by making claims for his son's military capacity. Aymeri is naturally eager to take the challenge, for he has everything to gain by it:

> Se Dex done que j'en soie fievez,
> Mout chier vendré as paiens deffaez
> La mort Rollant qui tant fu redotez! (*ADN*, ll. 683-85)

Palgrave, 1998), pp. 19-21; and Peter Robert Campbell, *Louis XIV*, Seminar Studies in History (London and New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 16-31).

[37] On access to the king see Althoff, 'Friendship', pp. 96-99.

[38] Cowell, *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 2.

[39] 'Subtle and blatant coercions' is a term used by Dino Felluga to describe the means by which (Butlerian) identity is reproduced in the subject in his online *Guide to Critical Theory* (Module on Butler and Performativity) <http//.www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/> [accessed 01.10.2008].

[40] Note that the word 'druz' is used here, not 'ami'. Friendships imply equality (although the extent to which absolute equality is impossible will be touched on below), whereas a vassal is strictly subordinate to his lord. The bond being established here is clearly the latter, although Charlemagne will later call Aymeri 'ami'. Althoff points out that the two types of bond could overlap, and that kings and lords often referred to their vassals as friends in order to 'stabilise or to control lordship' in times of uncertainty or unrest ('Friendship', p. 92). I do not wish to read meaning into the passage, but we may guess that Hernaut uses the less presumptuous term in order to better the chances of Charlemagne's acceptance.

> If God grants that I be fiefed of [Narbonne], very dearly will I make the faithless pagans pay for the death of Roland who was so feared!

Land is the source of a knight's wealth, status and power, and Aymeri recognises the benefits of this chance to be granted the prestigious fief of Narbonne. He simply has to conquer it, swear allegiance to Charlemagne, and help to crush the pagans. To enter into Charlemagne's group of warrior aristocrats, then, he must enter into a personal contract of exchange with the emperor and pledge to fight on his behalf.[41] In other words, belonging to a social group is predicated on the obligation to help defend the group against outsiders. We begin to understand that community is based on exclusion, creating a sense of 'us' to be defended against 'them', and we come back to issues of identity and (contested) margins: groups create an illusory sense of internal unity, co-operation and sameness, set against what is outside, different and menacing. Entry into the group's space is reserved, in this case, for men of a certain social rank, but this group belonging must paper over individual differences between them (of which, more later). The gestural and tactile behaviour used in exchanges between men performs their relationships with each other, constructing the bonds that constitute community. However, as Miri Rubin rightly suggests, 'community is neither obvious, nor natural, its boundaries are loose, and people in the present, as in the past, will use the term to describe and to construct worlds, to persuade, to include, and to exclude'.[42] Just as the body, in Chapter One, was shown to be neither obvious nor natural, despite the poems' attempts to locate identity in its contours, so community boundaries are not based on essential difference, but produced through normative actions that assert a difference that is then posited as pre-existing and provoking those actions. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler claims that a 'norm' governs the way an action is interpreted within the social domain, and 'allows for certain kinds of practice and action to become recognisable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social'.[43] Boundaries are

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[41] See Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, p. 55. Haidu characterises vassalage as a relationship of exchange, and does not distinguish between land and material wealth given that land is the basic source of economic surplus.

[42] 'Small Groups: Identity and Solidarity in the Late Middle Ages' in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Jennifer Kermode (Stroud: Sutton, 1991), pp. 132-50 (p. 134). Jean-Claude Schmitt discusses the 'unnaturalness' of gesture in his essay 'The Ethics of Gesture' in *Fragments* (see Feher et al., above), II, pp. 129-47. For a sociological perspective on the role of language behaviour in the expression of group solidarity and community, and as a tool in the assertion of power and influence, see Sik Hung Ng and James J. Bradac, *Power in Language: Verbal Communication and Social Influence*, Language and Language Behaviours, 3 (London and New Delhi: Sage, 1993).

[43] *Undoing Gender*, p. 42. This 'grid of legibility' performs the same task as Žižek's 'symbolic fictions' which are the values that regulate life and render it meaningful, but which lack 'substantial ontological consistency' (*Enjoy Your Symptom*, p. 52).

thus erected that exclude certain behavioural patterns from the privileged 'norm', creating difference between those who are licensed to transact in this way, and those who are not: women, clerics, peasants, foreigners, pagans. Yet, the question of what is outside the norm (what is Other/different) creates a paradox, because if the norm 'renders the social field intelligible and normalises that field for us', then being 'outside' is still defined in relation to the norm. In effect, community (self) is predicated on *contact* with the outsider (Other), for all that contact performs their exclusion. The Other will be discussed at length in the following section, and over the course of the remaining chapters. Here, I wish to stress the identity-building effect of tactile norms *within* the group. These men, bound by the values that regulate their lives, share understandings of behaviour and know how to reproduce them.

As our passage continues, we begin to understand how the actions of its characters iterate such an exclusive community identity. Aymeri is brought before the emperor and it is stressed that he behaves in a fitting manner:

> Li vallez fu sage et bien apris:
> Qant vit le roi, ne fu pas esbahiz.
> Einz que li rois l'eüst a reson mis,
> Le salua gentement Aimeris. (*ADN*, ll. 697-700)

> The youth was wise and well-schooled: when he saw the king, he was not dumbstruck.
> Before the king addressed him, Aymeri greeted him [graciously / nobly].

Aymeri is praised as wise and educated because he behaves correctly: he has waited to be invited to approach Charlemagne and when he appears, he presents himself in a proud and dignified manner. He greets the emperor appropriately and then awaits his cue. The word 'gentement' lets us know that this type of greeting and interaction is appropriate to the aristocratic, courtly milieu on this occasion.[44] Elsewhere, more extravagant rituals are performed: when Guillaume approaches Louis in *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, for example, 'si li chaï au pié' and 'l'esperon bese' ('he fell at his feet' and 'kisses his spur', *LMA*, l. 2255). In this context, Guillaume is already the sworn man of Louis and he demonstrates that subordination as a prelude to a request for military aid. Aymeri's more tentative greeting here is followed up with an oath of ferocity against Saracens, and a pledge to be Charlemagne's friend 'tant com vodroiz' ('as long as you wish', *ADN*, l. 729).

[44] That this maps onto 'real-life' concerns is evidenced by Kaeuper's evaluation of knights at court: 'showing elegant manners became increasingly important; knowing how to talk and act in a refined way […] was added to the knowledge of how best to drive a sword-edge through a mail coif into a man's brain' (*Chivalry*, p. 7).

The emperor is impressed, and as agreed bestows Narbonne on Aymeri along with gifts such as gold, silver, food, wine, horses and armour (*ADN*, ll. 750-54).[45] He also pledges to support Aymeri in battle personally, and to furnish him with a battalion of one thousand mounted warriors.[46] Accepting the gifts, Aymeri kneels at the emperor's feet before the assembled court, arising only at the emperor's bidding.[47] This ritual publicly manifests Aymeri's deference to his new lord, depicting physically and spatially the subordination of one individual to another. [48] Because of the shared meaning attached to the action, it produces the symbolic 'effect' of Aymeri's vassalage and Charlemagne's lordship over him. And the formulaic nature of the action means that it will be 'imprinted' onto the minds of those assembled and remembered.[49]

Once Aymeri has conquered the city, Charlemagne tells him: 's'avez besong, prez sui que vos secor' ('if you are in need, I am [ready / near] to help you', *ADN*, l. 1257), splicing the homonyms 'pres' and 'pret' and expressing his readiness to aid his man in terms of physical, spatial proximity. Read in this light, Aymeri's introduction to Charlemagne above reveals that physical closeness to him is synonymous with political privilege and communal belonging. In return for this favour, Aymeri affirms that 'tant com vivrai, vos tendré a seignor' ('as long as I live, I will hold you as lord', *ADN*, l. 1261). The intense physicality of the oath, dependent on the materiality of Aymeri's body, is given further emphasis by the tactility of the verb 'tenir': symbolic discourses are given meaning by their expression in and through the body. The contact and contract between Aymeri and Charlemagne is conducted entirely in this physical language of exchange, a language that

[45] Cowell reminds us that gifts are not benign, however, making explicit the link between 'gift and socially destructive violence'. The underlying aggression of exchange will become more apparent when the exchange operates outwith the community (*Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 10).

[46] A similar exchange occurs in *Les Narbonnais* when Aÿmer is dubbed by Charlemagne. Aÿmer pledges to conquer lands in Spain and to govern them in Charlemagne's name, saying, 'por tant serai vostre home' ('for [so much / so long] will I be your man', *LN*, l. 3016).

[47] Aÿmer similarly pays homage to his new lord in *Les Narbonnais* in return for the military aid that he is promised (*LN*, ll. 3019-20), as do his brothers, Bueves and Garin (*LN*, l. 3085 and l. 3100).

[48] For a discussion of vertical 'spatial hierarchies' see Harald Kleinschmidt, *Perception and Action in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), p.2. For a detailed account of the symbolism of the knee and kneeling see Marjorie Garber 'Out of Joint' in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* ed. by David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 23-52.

[49] M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, rev. edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 172. See also Marc Bloch: 'dans les contrats, les volontés se nouaient essentiellement au moyen de gestes et parfois de mots consacrés, de tout un formalisme, en un mot, très propre à frapper des imaginations peu sensibles à l'abstrait' (*La Société féodale: La formation des liens de dépendance* (Paris: Halbin Michel, 1939), p. 171).

performs their belonging to a certain social order and gives political meaning to their alliance within it. Their ability to transact in this way stems from the power that the gendering and classification of behaviour gives them (and not others).

It is convenient that as soon as Aymeri wins his fief and is welcomed into the ranks of warrior barons, his father dies 'sanz longue demoree' ('without long delay', *ADN*, l. 1313). This catapults Aymeri into a pre-eminent position within his kin group and further increases his power-base since he inherits his father's lands (*ADN*, ll. 1322-27). It comes as no surprise that this is also precisely the time at which his men begin to urge him to take a wife. It is part and parcel of the expectations – the heteronormative coercions – placed on him that he will marry: after all, he needs an heir to continue his family name and to ensure his land does not fall into enemy hands after his death. Moreover, a propitious marriage transaction will vastly increase his network of 'amis'.[50] From the outset, Aymeri is adamant that his wife must be 'avenant / […] sage et de parage grant' ('comely […] wise and of good [family / rank]', *ADN*, ll. 1341-42), so when Hugues tells Aymeri about Hermengart, the beautiful and much sought-after sister of King Boniface of Pavia, he is determined to have her; if he cannot, he says, a thousand armed men will die in her name. The violent tenor of the diplomatic match is immediately evident, then, and will become much more so over the course of the mission to Pavia. Boniface's Pavia represents a potentially hostile element, a neighbouring Other to be confronted; the envoy must travel outwith the protected boundaries of Frankish warrior community into the dangerous realm of the unknown. I suggest that just as shared rituals of behaviour were crucial to the creation of the community bonds illustrated above, so the potentially traumatic – and violent – encounter with the Lombards of Pavia is policed by behavioural protocols that facilitate a 'peaceful' meeting. Yet, because those behavioural regulations merely transpose the exchange into the Symbolic, I argue that the violence is not properly eliminated, merely repressed, so that the diplomatic exchange is marked by aggressive and coercive behaviour and threatens at all times to collapse into chaotic killing. Not only that, but bloody violence erupts on both the out- and home-bound journeys, framing the Pavia episode in mortal struggle. When violence is systemic and plays such a crucial role in individual and community identity formation it cannot be entirely prevented, merely displaced.

[50] Althoff, *Family*, p. 3.

Traumatic Encounters

Communities established through shared behaviours and interpersonal bonds are crucial to an understanding of the Narbonne Cycle. They provide protection and support for their members, as well as playing a fundamental role in individual identity and, in the case of the knights of these poems, the preservation of privilege and status. The boundaries of the group are critical, for margins give shape and form to what is within, whilst pushing back or abjecting what is without.[51] They are therefore the site of contestation, transgression, discipline and violence, a point made clear by David Nirenberg's work on *Communities of Violence*.[52] Nirenberg also highlights the fact that gender is often critically questioned at boundaries, even when the division is more obviously political or religious.[53] The aim of this section is to explore the issues raised when Aymeri's men cross the boundaries of the Frankish group and enter into the liminal space between communities, eventually meeting with Boniface. I will draw mainly on theoretical discussion of the neighbour in order to unravel the traumatic nature of the resulting encounter and to understand how rituals of touch and gesture are used to alleviate (or rather, displace) the violence that is a predictable corollary of the trauma.[54]

Having decided to take Hermengart as a wife, Aymeri plans to win her by marching on Pavia and demanding that she be 'voluntarily' handed over (or the city will be sacked, in short). One of the ways of dealing with a troubling outsider is, as Žižek so memorably puts it, to 'smash his face', thus asserting your superiority and bringing him under your influence and control.[55] In Chapter Four I will discuss 'face-smashing' in more detail, for this is the strategy largely used against the Saracens. The Lombards, however, occupy an uneasy middle-ground in terms of identity in the Cycle. They are Other, for they are not Frankish, but they are not pagans, Saracens or Infidels either, and so the possibility of

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[51] Mary Douglas describes the ambivalent power of boundaries – both bodily and social – in her work on ritual and pollution. She notes that all (social) order is born of disorder and chaos, and thus social margins are dangerous, because not only are they liable to shift, but that shifting can alter the whole dynamic of what they contain (*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)).

[52] *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[53] *Communities* – particularly 'Sex and Violence Between Majority and Minority' (pp. 127-65).

[54] See Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbour: Three Enquiries in Political Ontology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[55] 'The Neighbour and Other Monsters' in *The Neighbour* (see Žižek et al., above), pp. 134-90 (from section title 'Smashing the Neighbour's Face', p. 142).

politically expedient alliance is there – especially given the geographically strategic location of Pavia. In this case, Aymeri wants something from Boniface: he wants his sister's hand and thus also the co-operation and political friendship that accompanies such a marriage. This is not going to be a story of 'raptus', nor is it a 'Saracen princess' narrative: Aymeri wants to transact with Boniface.[56] Thus, one of his advisers, Hugues, puts forward the idea of sending an envoy of sixty barons to negotiate the deal on more 'amicable' terms. Bowing to his wisdom, Aymeri sends word to amass the 'plus hauz homes, qui plus font a prisier' ('most elevated men who are most to be esteemed', *ADN*, l. 1442): they must all be well-armed, well-mounted, brave, hardy and high-ranking. Sending such messengers will reflect Aymeri's own status and display his extensive network of support and power: indeed, 'an impressive following was like a wonderful "adornment"' that 'enhanced [a lord's] reputation'.[57] Simply put, if Aymeri can gather an envoy of sixty noblemen, Boniface will be sure to see the benefits of an alliance with such a well-supported baron, or else be cowed unwillingly into an agreement. Of course, the meeting is not really going to be 'amicable', for with the envoy composed entirely of fully-armed warriors it is difficult to draw the line between negotiation and violent coercion. Aymeri's instructions in the event of refusal make his intentions crystal clear:

> 'Pavie fetes craventer et brisier,
> Et le païs gaster et essillier!
> Roi Boniface feroiz vilment tretier!' (*ADN*, ll. 1479-81)

'Have Pavia crushed and destroyed, and the lands pillaged and devastated! Treat King Boniface shamefully!'

Equally, however, Aymeri's messengers are aware of the risks facing *them*, and mention the importance of being able to defend themselves (*ADN*, l. 1476). They are travelling outside the protection of the community space, through liminal hinterlands, and into the territory of another group. Boniface is a knight with enormous influence and power – a monarch, no less – and so he presents a considerable threat to the messengers. Although the barons are backed by Aymeri's vast power and authority, once they leave Narbonne

[56] On Saracen princess narratives and gift exchange see Kay, *Political Fictions*, pp. 25-48. On 'raptus' see Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 4-10. Gravdal makes clear, however, that within the Christian community, the softening of laws meant that marriages could be negotiated following a 'raptus' – which blurs distinction between 'abduction' and negotiated marriage somewhat (p. 7). That the poet seems aware of this nuance shows an awareness of the structural possibilities available within and across community boundaries/spaces. Cf. Gravdal 'Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle', *Romanic Review*, 76 (1985), 361-73.

[57] Althoff, *Friends*, p. 104.

they are far from the direct support and protection of their lord. Indeed, the intensely risky nature of leaving the community to do business with 'foreigners' is proven by the fact that fifty of these sixty barons will not make it home alive.[58] In *Les Narbonnais* the dangers of leaving home are made evident in the sadness provoked as Aymeri sends his sons into the world. Not only their mother, but all the barons of the realm weep (*LN*, l. 604).

Why is leaving home and encountering a neighbouring community such a traumatic and violent experience? Thus far, the discussion has focussed on groups based on the production of shared meaning through (coerced) behaviours and performances. But the by-product of the creation of community is the creation of the outsider, the foreigner, the not-us: and this Other is dangerous and troubling precisely because of the general hostility and unpredictability of medieval life: 'l'exclu par excellence de la société médiévale, c'est l'étranger. Société primitive, société fermée, la Chrétienté médiévale refuse cet intrus […] ce porteur d'inconnu et d'inquiétude'.[59] Any who do not conform to the community model are potential enemies because they are the harbingers of the unknown, and of possible change and flux: 'la peur de l'Autre rapproche tous ceux qui, avec leur personnalité, apportent un risque de turbulence ou de modification'.[60] The space of the Other is here filled by the Lombards – another essentially warrior culture, whose identity is, however, besmirched by a reputation for cowardice, so that 'pour le guerrier chrétien, français, narbonnais, le Lombard vilipendé (l'Autre que l'on abhorre) représente, incarnées, des tendances peu avouables, que l'on méprise'.[61] The violence that threatens to erupt as a result of a meeting with this Other is primarily the assertion of the Frankish warrior community's boundary for the sake of defending its way of life, its habits, concerns, values and bravery: in short, its identity. It will also be the struggle for supremacy in a society in which honour, power and authority go hand-in-hand.

Žižek sheds crucial light on issues of identity-struggle, tapping into the nature of neighbourly encounters in a way that allows us to go beyond ideas of general social competitiveness. The first, and crucial, point is that the self/subject cannot exist without the Other (it is the 'bodily-desiring' Other – as opposed to the 'regulative-symbolic' Other of

[58] Althoff, in fact, makes clear that in medieval society, moves were made to make envoys untouchable, acknowledging precisely the concerns of this text (*Family*, p. 139)

[59] Jacques Le Goff, *La Civilisation de l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Arthaud, 1964), p. 362.

[60] Bernard Guidot, 'Verbe et révolte: la dérision et l'Autre dans le *Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* et ailleurs' in *Charlemagne in the North* (see Bennett et al., above), pp. 423-35 (p. 427).

[61] Guidot, 'Verbe et révolte', p. 428.

the social order – to which Žižek refers in this context).[62] In his words, we cannot exist without this fleshly outsider because: 'in the core of my being, I am irreducibly vulnerable, exposed to the Other(s)'.[63] This 'primordial vulnerability', Žižek continues, has its roots in the link between the Other's impenetrability and the subject's own impenetrability to himself.[64] The recognition of this mutual, constitutive vulnerability is also the recognition of self in the alienated form of the Other. As I note above, the Other/outside remains forever 'inside' the subject as its founding repudiation, reflecting an 'internal problematic of the subject'.[65] This disturbing sameness (that threatens to erode the boundary of self) is something I will come back to below. Žižek makes clear that the Other can provide a case of the Lacanian notion of the 'Borromean knot' – the point at which the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real touch. The Imaginary Other refers to other people like the subject, with whom mutual recognition is possible: the Other as *miroir*. The Symbolic (Big) Other is the 'impersonal set of rules that coordinate our existence'.[66] The Real Other is the impossible Thing – the inhuman partner with whom no reciprocal exchange is possible.[67] All three aspects are present in any one encounter with the Other, but it is this final dimension of the Other as Real Thing, lurking beneath the neighbour as mirror image, which makes encounters properly traumatic. This is the abyss of monstrousness and unknowability, the 'alien traumatic kernel' of the Other that while reflecting the subject's own decentredness, is nevertheless intolerable.[68]

How does this feed back into the idea of behaviour and exchange? Lacan explains that when a man says, for example, '*tu es mon maître*', the founding value of these words lies in the fact that 'ce qui est visé dans le message, aussi bien que ce qui est manifeste dans la feinte, c'est que l'autre est là en tant qu'Autre absolu'.[69] Žižek confirms that Lacan aims at something more here than a simple theory of performative speech acts:

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[62] 'The Neighbour', p. 138.

[63] 'The Neighbour', p. 138.

[64] 'The Neighbour', p. 138.

[65] Compare Haidu: 'since the Other is merely a minimally differentiated version of the Self, it therefore becomes a screen for the projection of an internal problematic of the subject' (*Subject of Violence*, p. 38).

[66] 'The Neighbour', p. 143.

[67] 'The Neighbour', p. 143.

[68] 'The Neighbour', p. 140. This kernel is the structuring enigma of the Other's desire, the answer to the Lacanian 'che vuoi'.

[69] *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan (Livre III): Les psychoses (1955–56)*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 48.

> We need the recourse to performativity, to the symbolic engagement, precisely and only insofar as the other whom we encounter is not only the imaginary *semblant*, but also the elusive absolute Other of the Real Thing with whom no reciprocal exchange is possible. In order to render our coexistence with the Thing minimally bearable, the symbolic order qua Third, the pacifying mediator, has to intervene.[70]

This is where standardised norms of diplomatic exchange come into play. These (Symbolic) norms governing courtly interaction allow for Aymeri's men to meet and negotiate with their neighbour, Boniface, and his men. These foreigners are Other on two of the levels outlined above: they are, as Guidot makes clear, the Imaginary *semblant* of the Narbonnais knights – troublingly necessary in a political landscape founded on reciprocity and exchange.[71] Yet they also represent the Other as Thing, whose desires and whims are ultimately unknowable and dangerous and with whom no true reciprocity is possible. The Symbolic domain of chivalric diplomacy must thus mediate the meeting in order to make coexistence between the two groups 'minimally bearable'.[72]

The diplomatic exchange is clearly of great interest to the poet for he takes pains to describe the chosen barons, listing them by name and highlighting their impressive physical presence (*ADN*, ll. 1543-89). As befits their aristocratic identity, each wears lavish and expensive armour and rides a magnificent steed, so that: 'mès ne vont pas com vilain esgaré' ('certainly they do not go like impoverished peasants', *ADN*, l. 1567). It seems important to him to stress this outward display of community belonging for soon, we surmise, it will be put to the test. Crucially, he also underlines the fact that these men know how to conduct themselves: they 'savront le mesage noncier' ('will know how to deliver the message', *ADN*, l. 1475). In other words, it is not just the message that is crucial, but also the behaviour that will surround the delivery of the message and facilitate cooperation

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[70] 'The Neighbour', p. 144.

[71] Speaking of the Narbonnais and the Lombards, Guidot remarks that 'l'étranger […] n'est alors qu'un miroir' ('Verbe et révolte', p. 432).

[72] It may be noted that the Symbolic is contingent, lacking the universal applicability needed for mediation in such a context. Yet, the Symbolic order of these poems is, as I have suggested, co-extensive with the aristocratic, knightly value system, and it is a Symbolic order of which Boniface is also a product. It seems possible therefore, to apply this theoretical framework directly to the episode in *Aymeri*. It may seem surprising to acknowledge that Lombards and Franks share an ideology – until we understand that, in these poems, even the pagan knights are sometimes represented as sharing an essentially chivalric world-view (despite failing to live up to its ideals). See Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens* – especially p. 46; and Chapter Four of this study.

and exchange.[73] If they behave unwisely, the situation will rapidly degenerate into chaos, trauma and killing. The poet later reiterates:

> Tuit sont sage et bien enlatimé,
> N'a cort el monde n'en la crestïenté
> Ou il ne fussent par reson escouté. (*ADN*, ll. 1596-98)

> All are wise and [highly literate / good at understanding languages]. There is not a court in the world nor in Christendom where they would not be reasonably given an audience.

The fact that they would be well received at any court in the Christian world attests to the universality of cultural codes within courtly domains. For, whilst belonging to separate territorial communities, members of the fighting elite are united by an over-arching, chivalric ethos. Because these knights are particularly adept in terms of that courtly speech and comportment – that is, in symbolic languages and behaviours – they are most likely to be able to negotiate with others. We might say that they are most willing to submit to a law beyond themselves, and to allow violence to be displaced into symbolic phenomena. The problem is that the 'greater' the knight, the less likely he is to submit absolutely to that prohibitive aspect of the law. I will return to this below, but an example will provide illustration here. In a similar episode found in *Les Narbonnais*, when Garin approaches Pavia in order to marry Boniface's daughter, he ends up in a fight with Boniface's seneschal over a fish. Feeling that the seneschal has slighted his honour, Garin's anger flares up and he strikes out, killing the seneschal. Such is the seriousness of this transgression that it causes diplomacy to break down: when he meets Boniface, the king refuses to enter into exchange with him: 'de rien ne vos salu. / Mon senechal demainne avez bastu' ('I do not salute you at all, you have struck my household seneschal', *LN*, ll. 1569-70). Diplomacy is replaced by spiralling violence as Boniface threatens to hang Garin, and Garin prepares to fight every assembled baron to save himself (*LN*, l. 1572ff.).

Staying in Pavia, but returning to *Aymeri de Narbonne*, the barons soon draw close to the city, and discerning their weapons, banners and armour, Boniface leaps to the obvious conclusion: 'bien senblent gent de mal fere enpensé' ('well do they resemble people intent on doing harm', *ADN*, l. 2013). He orders his men to retreat to the safety of the city and to

[73] The importance of wisely-chosen words is also emphasised in *Les Narbonnais*, when the brothers are called before Charlemagne's court. The abbot tells them: 'gardez vos bien de dire nul oltrage / laissiez parler l'ainzné et le plus sage' ('take care that you do not say anything out of order; let the oldest and wisest speak', *LN*, ll. 2685-86).

bar the gates (*ADN*, ll.2017-21). The problem with impressive displays of status, then, is that they are by nature competitive and aggressive because they are so tightly bound to honour and the potential for violent performance. As Kaeuper makes clear, 'knighthood […] existed to use its shining armour and sharp-edged weaponry in acts of showy and bloody violence'.[74] Indeed, was not the high status of the group expressed through the military glamour that expresses this very potential? Boniface, like the barons, sees the violent possibilities of the encounter and takes measures to protect himself. If Aymeri had had his way, Boniface's retreat to the city walls would have been entirely appropriate (and indeed Aymeri's son's ferocious lack of diplomacy in *Les Narbonnais* shows that Boniface's caution is not misplaced). However, the barons are affronted for this is not the welcome they had expected to receive given their 'diplomatic' intentions. The mission seems to hang in the balance and we wonder whether the barons will seek revenge for the slight. The problem at this point is the misinterpretation of behaviour caused by a too great distance between the parties. They are close, but not close enough to be able to read the nuances of action, to communicate effectively, and so both parties jump to the wrong conclusion about the other's intentions. Both anticipate violence because both are born of the warrior mentality, and the symbolic currency of honour that will ultimately allow them to transact is the source of potential conflict.[75] To foreshadow the sameness-difference dialectic that will provide the focus of the next section, chivalry both unites the two parties ideologically, and separates them with its emphasis on individuality and heroic integrity.

Girart de Roussillon soon offers a different reading of the events, however, suggesting that the retreat is a good sign because it proves that Boniface 'n'a de guerre nul talent' ('has no desire for war', *ADN*, l. 2048). He confirms the need for wise words to negotiate the situation and to protect them from the danger posed by Boniface:

> Se poïons parler tant gentement […]
> Ne crienbrïons puis son dengier grenment,
> Einz porrïons parler seürement. (*ADN*, ll. 2054-58).

> If we could speak nobly enough, we would no longer fear his danger much. Rather we could speak safely.

Girart thus directly admits the danger that faces them during this contact and suggests the means to avoid it. Note that he does not claim to be able to dismantle Boniface's violent

[74] *Chivalry*, p. 2.

[75] Stuart Carrol calls honour the 'currency of social exchange' in *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1-2; Kaeuper calls it 'the glittering reward' of the knightly vocation, 'worth more than life itself' (*Chivalry*, p. 129).

potential altogether: he merely claims that they will have no reason to fear it if they have recourse to wise words and correct behaviour. This behaviour, he assumes, will be recognised by Boniface, and by submitting themselves to the 'symbolic order qua Third, the pacifying mediator', they will be able to come to terms.[76] The men agree, admitting that this is 'conseil molt gent' ('very noble advice', *ADN*, l. 2056). They draw closer and see Boniface out on the walls. Girart makes a move to speak and his social know-how is praised: 'mout sot bien cortoisement parler. / Ou voit le roi, s'enprist a saluer' ('he really knows well how to speak in a courtly fashion; where he sees the king, he salutes him', *ADN*, ll. 2063-64). Boniface recognises Girart's ability, admitting that 'cortoisement sès ta reson conter' ('you know how to speak your mind in a courtly way', *ADN*, l. 2072). 'Cortoisement' again indicates that this mode of interaction is part of a symbolic practice shared by courts: a code that allows negotiation and politics to take place, coloured by the ideals specific to that class.[77] Girart asserts that they bring only 'pès et amor' ('peace and love', *ADN*, l. 2075) and they are admitted to the city. Nevertheless, Boniface understands the difficulty of negotiating with men like these, and he warns his people:

> 'Gardez vos bien que ne dioiz folie,
> Car François sont une gent mout hardie
> Et si sont plain de grant chevalerie.
> Qui lor diroit orgueil ne estoutie,
> Tost le fandroient del branc jusqu'en l'oïe!' (*ADN*, ll. 2300-04)

> Take great care that you do not speak unwisely, for the Franks are a very bold people, and are full of great chivalry. Whoever says to them an outrageous or rash word, soon would they cleave him with a sword right down to the eye!

This really is the crux of the problem hinted at above: the code of courtly exchange iterates a group identity that is primarily military – and individuals take pride in their ability to defend their honour and effectively carve out their name in the blood of enemies. The more a knight is full of 'grant chevalerie', the more volatile and 'irascibly touchy' he is likely to be – as Boniface well knows.[78] He knows because he is a product of the same system. This fundamental problematic of chivalry can perhaps be thought through with reference to Žižek's explanation of Symbolic Law. For Žižek, it is structural excess that guarantees the

[76] Žižek, 'The Neighbour', p. 144 (see above).

[77] The 'homogeneity' of courtly values within the *chansons*, even across the Christian-Saracen divide has been noted by Daniel: 'Saracen society as imagined is no different from European society as romanticised' (*Heroes and Saracens*, p. 46). This idea will be considered further in Chapter Four.

[78] The term 'irascibly touchy' is borrowed from Haidu, who aptly refers to the lethally volatile pride of Roland and Ganelon as 'irascible touchiness' (*Subject of Violence*, p. 84).

correct functioning of the Law.[79] This structural excess – or '*illegal* enjoyment' – emerges at the point at which the Law breaks down: it is the transgression, or 'beyond', of the Law.[80] And yet it also supports and reinforces it, 'exerting the strongest pressure on the individual to comply with its mandate of group identification', thus binding the community together and ensuring its stability even as it 'violates the explicit rules of community life'.[81] In this way, the violent excesses of the most worthy knights are, in a sense, the guarantee of the chivalric Law. The irascible touchiness of our protagonists – their obscene violence, or enjoyment – may break the rules of diplomatic negotiation, but it is also an expression of pure chivalry and thus a powerful tool of group identification and conformity.[82] That Boniface recognises the barons' superlative 'chevalerie' makes of him a mouthpiece for Frankish self-aggrandisement, as the poem sets him up as a mirror that reflects the Franks in this 'ideal' manner. Yet the reflection crucially also highlights the dangerous ambivalence of that version of Frankish heroism, creating a tension that finds no resolution here. All Boniface can do is move to confront the barons, flanked by his entourage of friends and vassals.

When they are face-to-face, Hugues explains that Aymeri's assembled messengers are all barons in their own right, sent by Aymeri to request Hermengart as his bride. If Hermengart is handed over she will become the wife of a powerful lord, and lady over many lands. If the proposal is refused, 'a toz jorz mes sera vostre ennemis / Aimeris de Nerbone!' ('Aymeri of Narbonne will henceforth always be your enemy!', *ADN*, ll. 2359-60) and his men will march on the city. Note the term 'ennemi' – the antithesis of 'ami'. There is no middle ground to encounters in this Cycle, no way to negotiate a neutral ambivalence, and this exacerbates the tension: 'confrontation between two groups ultimately offers the choice of either gift-giving, friendship, and solidarity, or confrontation, violence and warfare'.[83] In other words, once the Other has been encountered, a bond of some sort is formed – whether it be of amity or enmity (and the former can so easily collapse into the latter, or vice versa, if the unspoken contract is

[79] *Metastases*, pp. 54-86.

[80] *Metastases*, p. 54 (original emphasis).

[81] *Metastases*, p. 54.

[82] Further exploration of this 'excessive' phenomenon can be found in *Les Enfances Guillaume*. There, Guillaume's violent outburst at court, during which he kills a Christian king over an insult, has him labelled a 'diable' (l. 2311) – until his loyalty to Charlemagne is ascertained. Then he is dubbed and honoured, and goes on to become the superlative Christian knight celebrated in the *Cycle de Guillaume*. Yet even as he is knighted in this passage, an abbot expresses fearful misgivings – for a knight so powerful and unpredictable has the potential to inflict great harm on others in a quest for land, goods and riches (ll. 2644-46)

[83] Cowell, *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 7.

broken).[84] There is no such thing as 'neutral tolerance' or indifference: either violence will break out or a symbolic exchange will negotiate the terms of 'minimally bearable co-existence'.[85] Yet, as Cowell's recent book on violence and the gift makes clear, symbolic exchange itself is marked by violence: 'the gift ceremony represented not just the preferred alternative to socially destructive violence, but was itself the sublimated version of the repressive violence necessary for social control'.[86] He subsequently refers to the critical role played by gift-giving and gift-receiving in the brokering of relationships between medieval warrior aristocrats. To be given a gift one cannot return is detrimental to a man's 'integrity' and honour, forcing him into a position of dependency. Likewise, to place someone in a situation where he cannot refuse to give a gift of great symbolic value is also demeaning to that person because it precludes reciprocity and asserts pure power.[87] Although this system of regulated behaviour and privileged transaction underpins the Symbolic order, and although it is the means by which these men can meet and interact without drawing swords, the exchange system is stained by the violence it represses. Far from being a peaceful alternative, this type of exchange, mediated through submission to the Law, is the very real form of violence that Žižek calls 'systemic': 'the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence'.[88] At all times, the violence repressed by the system strains at the bonds of tactile and gestural regulation. For example, Gui of Montpancier, dissatisfied with the hospitality offered by Boniface, makes the following suggestion:

> 'Ocirrons le voiant tot son barné,
> Puis enmenrons sa suer au cors mollé,
> Voiant sa gent, et s'en aient mal gré!' (*ADN*, ll. 2209-11)

> 'Let's kill him, where all his retinue see it. Then we'll carry off his sister with the gentle body where all his men see it, and may they have great pain because of it!'

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[84] Althoff, *Family*, p. 70. The poet, earlier in the narrative, takes pains to point out that Aymeri is 'simples et douz' towards his friends, and 'fel et fiers' against his enemies (ll. 698-99). His behaviour is strictly polarised.

[85] Žižek, 'The Neighbour', p. 144.

[86] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 9. For full discussion of social meanings of the gift, see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic* Societies, trans. by W.D. Halls, rev. edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); and Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. by Nora Scott (Cambridge: Polity, 1999). Godelier notes that 'the giving of gifts may ward off direct violence or physical, material, and social subordination, but it may also stand in their stead' (p. 14).

[87] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 110.

[88] *Violence*, p. 8.

The public shaming of Boniface, his sister and all the men of the court is a very real possibility, and reminds us of Aymeri's own initial suggestion. It would amount to 'smashing the neighbour's face' in order to destroy him so completely that no retaliation would be possible. We see now the true extent of the pressure placed on Boniface: to accept is to enter into symbolic exchange with Aymeri and to have his honour diminished by the violence of the forced choice.[89] To refuse is to bring war to Pavia – a choice that would be disastrous given Aymeri's political and military might. In other words, Gui's scenario above is replaced by one that is noticeably similar, albeit less openly bloody: Boniface will still be humiliated and his sister will still be 'taken' in full view of the court. It is the overwhelming pressure exercised by the possibility of the former scenario that guarantees the success of the latter.

Boniface is quick to recognise his predicament and the full extent of the violence being wrought on him (*ADN*, ll. 2382-87). Remarkably, he manages to find a loophole, a third way that allows him to make the exchange without losing face.[90] He displaces the forced choice onto his sister:

> 'Molt est li hom fox et musarz provez,
> Qui fame prant estre ses volentez. […]
> Se ele ostroie ice que dit avez,
> Donrai la vos volentiers et de grez!' (*ADN*, ll. 2389-400)

> 'Much is the man proven foolish and idiotic who takes a wife against her wishes. If she consents to what you have said, I will give her to you voluntarily and with good grace!'

The decision is thus transferred to Hermengart, but far from exemplifying any real concern for her wishes, it is a move that deflects humiliation away from Boniface. Obviously, Hermengart can no more refuse than Boniface could – the violent terms of the offer leave her no option but to accept (not to mention the constraints of the narrative, which simply has to end with Aymeri marrying the woman of his choice). Yet, because this transaction really only involves the interests of the two men, it is her duty to accept, and her doing so will not undermine Boniface's integrity. Indeed, she hyperbolically states: 'ai ge vers lui si tornee m'amor. / Se ge ne l'ai, n'avrai mari nul jor' ('I have turned my love towards him; if I do not have him, I will never have a husband', *ADN*, ll. 2441-42). Her choice is pre-determined for she has been essentially commodified by a system of exchange that

[89] Žižek discusses the 'forced choice' as the condition of subjectivity in *Plague of Fantasies*, pp. 14-15.

[90] On social identity, 'face' and honour see Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

expresses the 'index' of relationships between men.[91] More will be said on the subject of male-female relationships in the following chapter; here the focus must remain on inter-male community bonds for a little longer.

To conclude this section on neighbourly encounters and prepare some ground for the third and final section of the chapter, let us take a look at the moment at which Aymeri and Boniface come face-to-face. Remember that the terms of their 'friendship' have already been negotiated, the marriage has been agreed, and they meet on allied terms:

> Et Boniface, li fort rois posteïs,
> Lor vint encontre conme frans et gentis.
> Contre lui est descenduz Aimeris,
> Com cil qui fu sages et bien apris.
> Molt se conjoient li prince et li marchis!
> Par les degrez, qui sont de marbre bis,
> En sont montez el palés seignoriz. (*ADN*, ll. 3253-59)

> And Boniface, the strong, powerful king came to meet them like a sincere and noble man; before him Aymeri dismounted, as one who was wise and well-schooled. Much do they [make joy / bask in mutual regard], the prince and the count. Up the steps, which are of grey marble, they went into the stately palace.

The meeting expresses a circumscribed parity between the men through the balancing of the actions each performs. Boniface approaches and Aymeri dismounts to put himself on the same level (again, Aymeri's social know-how is complimented). They make joy together, bound in this stylised ritual by the grammar of the Old French, before entering the palace together. However, the words 'encontre' and 'contre' (above, l. 3254 and l. 3255) are also used when men meet in conflict.[92] This is not an episode without its inherent tensions: that these men work on terms of equality now is not indicative of a fixed relationship, but rather announces that they have allowed themselves to be bound by community exchange, submitting to the mediation of the Law. But, as Kay notes, the participants in such an exchange 'deal simultaneously in intimacy and rivalry, alliance and oppression'.[93] The 'friendship' is thus inherently unstable and a shift in the behaviour of either party could cause it to collapse back into conflict, struggle and the desire for

[91] Kay, *Political Fictions*, p. 39 – see in particular 'The Problem of Women', pp. 25-48. The exchange of women in kinship structures is also treated by Gayle Rubin in 'The Traffic in Women'.

[92] See, for example, the scene from *Le Siège de Barbastre* in which Girart and Libanor approach each other for a duel: 'contre Gyrart le conte s'en est venus es prez' ('in front of Girart the count came near', *SDB*, l. 2094). Libanor then asks 'qui estes vous, vassal, qui contre moi venez?' ('who are you, vassal, that comes before me?', *SDB*, l. 2096).

[93] *Political Fictions*, p. 42.

supremacy.[94] Aymeri and Boniface are united at the end of the poem in a big set-piece battle against the pagans, in which the importance of friendship is stated explicitly by the poet: 'mal fu baillis qui a terre cheï, / car n'en leva, se mout n'ot bon ami' ('he was in a sorry state, he who fell to the ground, for he did not get up from there if he did not have many good friends', *ADN*, ll. 4113-14); and 'n'est mie povres qui .I. bon ami a!' ('he who has a good friend, is not at all poor!' *ADN*, l. 3873).[95] Both on a micro- and macrocosmic level, then, friendships and alliances are crucial to the defence of self, territory, community and Christianity, and yet ultimately, heroism is based on individual prowess and a prickly, fiercely-defended sense of personal honour. This paradox will be the focus of the final section.

Contesting Hierarchies

The 'sameness' and coherence of the community forged through political exchange is, as I have already mentioned, inherently idealistic – and masks the reality of individualism and individual power struggle.[96] For is not the very idea of the knight ultimately rooted in pre-eminence? How can a powerful aristocratic warrior accept the status of equals with a whole range of differently ranked 'knights'?[97] Gaunt, in his *Gender and Genre*, talks of ideal unity as 'monologic masculinity' – based on a construction of gender within the *chansons de geste* that foregrounds male bonding and solidarity.[98] And yet, he notes, it is an ideal that is flawed and untenable even in its first expression in the Oxford *Roland*: Oliver is presented as a *different type* of hero to Roland for all he should – must be –

[94] Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, p. 77.

[95] On a similar note, in *Les Narbonnais* we come across phrases like 'Aymeri et si ami charnal, / a la bataille reperent comunal', 'Aymeri and his [close friends / kin] go together into battle' (*LN*, ll. 6314-15). Also, Yon helps Bueves because he is friends with Aymeri (*LN*, l. 1240) and Gui helps the Narbonne brothers because he was dubbed by their father, Aymeri (*LN*, l. 1006).

[96] Diane Watt baldly states that although community may *imply* social unity, in fact 'competition and conflict are inevitable characteristics of any community, modern or medieval' ('Introduction' in *Medieval Women in Their Community*, ed. by Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 1-19 (p. 2)).

[97] For detailed discussion of the concept of knighthood, and the internal difference of the 'class' see, *inter alia*, Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984); Joachim Bumke, *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages*, trans. by W.H.T. Jackson and Erika Jackson (New York: AMS, 1982); Jean Flori, *Richard the Lionheart: King and Knight*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bouchard, '*Strong of Body*'; and Haidu, *Subject of Violence.*

[98] See Chapter 1, 'Monologic Masculinity', pp. 22-70.

identical.[99] The difference between their positions during the battle of Rencesvals – Roland favouring impetuosity and bravery; Oliver favouring caution and bravery – forces the audience to question which is the 'right' approach, setting up the possibility of one of them being 'wrong'. Such moral ambiguity is dangerous: 'if the Oxford *Roland* creates an ideal masculine hero in a community of fighting men, the strength of which depends on similarity and solidarity, then difference is a threat: when it emerges it has to be repressed'.[100] Repressed, or rather forcibly displaced to the margins of community – where lines of difference are rigidly drawn out. Gaunt here talks of a type of ethical difference, yet there exists another type of difference that is so much a part of the fabric of society that it can remain relatively obscure: differences in rank. Kay suggests that hierarchy is a 'prop of monologism' because a text committed to hierarchy could be expected to 'repudiate' the suggestion that the society it represents was anything 'other than legitimate, coherent, and immune to doubt'.[101] But is not hierarchy ultimately founded in establishing and legitimising difference: between men and women, lords and vassals, knights and clerics, and then ordering the links between them?[102] Thus hierarchy both represses and displaces difference between men (as the principle of patriarchal social organisation it preserves their domination only as a collectivity) and legitimises it (by forcing men to jostle for position within it).[103]

Building on the notion of a society predicated on personal ties, Marc Bloch characterises these bonds as the expression of 'dépendance personnelle' sustained by the idea of homage, whereby one man became the sworn 'homme d'un autre homme'.[104] He further suggests that this model of mutual, yet unequal, obligation was the blueprint for the construction of human ties of all kinds, denying the possibility of 'equality' even within the community of fighting men. [105] Cowell also focuses on the issue, albeit through the slightly different term 'integrity'. He contributes to the debate on medieval individuality by

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[99] *Gender and Genre*, p. 26.

[100] *Gender and Genre*, p. 37.

[101] *Political Fictions*, p. 118.

[102] Kay reminds us not to confuse hierarchy with a chain of command sustained by force. Hierarchy is, rather, 'the rationale justifying the integration of all the links in such a chain to the overall structure' (*Political Fictions*, p. 117). But behind that rationale must exist a forceful authority – for a structuring order cannot develop entirely organically, it must be upheld and enforced at some level.

[103] Emmanuel Reynaud provides a thoughtful analysis of hierarchy and masculinity in his book *Holy Virility: The Social Construction of Masculinity*, trans. by Ros Schwartz (Paris: Pluto, 1981), pp. 98-104.

[104] *Société féodale*, p. 209.

[105] *Société féodale*, p. 327. Althoff agrees, noting that the vassal's bond to his lord 'was increasingly being accepted […] as the most important bond' (*Family*, p. 87).

claiming that gift-giving and violent-taking are the symbolic activities whereby an individual identity can be formed, suggesting that they preserve 'social authority' for the warrior aristocracy (as discussed above).[106] Ambitious members of that 'class' can use these symbolic tools to conceive of themselves as 'fully-fledged individuals' capable of acting outwith the networks of reciprocity and exchange that bind society together.[107] He calls this social autonomy 'integrity' and it is fundamentally linked to the idea of honour. He later uses John Peristiany's well-known essay to talk about the correlation between honour and power – via the ability to act successfully in the community and to attract the respect and support of others.[108] In the context of medieval epic (and indeed society): 'honour is relatively unbounded, and by giving more and more, one can accrue more and more honour'.[109] This, in turn, means that medieval warrior-aristocrat society 'allowed for a [wide] range of individual distinction from one's peers', and that 'the idealised social identity for the medieval warrior aristocracy was integrity, not solidarity'.[110] Cowell draws parallels between this social idea of integrity and Kay's literary notion of 'singularity' which she uses in her reading of *Girart de Roussillon*, glossing it as the desire 'to possess an irreducible uniqueness'.[111] Clearly, such a desire among warrior-aristocrats seriously undermines the ideal of unity needed for peace and stability to flourish (a paradox we have already encountered in the form of heroic 'touchiness'). One of the main features of integrity is the ability to transcend or stand apart from exchange – and especially exchange in which one assumes a position of dependency. And yet, the very structure of society in the poems is hierarchical, meaning that every man (for all he may have dependants) is bound to a superior in a relationship of dependency all the way up to the emperor who is in a similar relationship with God.[112] Thus, the individualistic pursuit of supremacy and power is socially disruptive and damaging, and when it breaks out it must be channelled outwards

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[106] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 3. On the debate over medieval individualism see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Richard Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (New York: Blackwell, 1970) and *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Hutchinson, 1953); and Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 82-109.

[107] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 3.

[108] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 22; see Peristiany's 'Introduction' in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. by John George Peristiany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp. 9-18.

[109] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 23.

[110] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, pp. 23-24.

[111] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 24; Sarah Kay, 'Singularity and Specularity: Desire and Death in *Girart de Roussillon*', *Olifant*, 22 (1998), 11-38 (p. 12).

[112] Marc Bloch, *Société féodale*, p. 209; Reynaud, *Holy Virility*, pp. 100-101.

to the margins of community or else repressed by submission to a higher (Symbolic) authority.

Read in this light, the interaction between Aymeri and Charlemagne in *Aymeri de Narbonne* expresses physically and ritually the submission of Aymeri as vassal to Charlemagne as lord. In fact, the very way that touch and tactile behaviour work is productive of an asymmetrical power dynamic, for one party will always perform a higher-status role in the interaction: touching first, leading the encounter, occupying a privileged (often elevated) position and so on.[113] Thus, although the episode bought into a shared economy of ritual action sustaining knightly privilege, it also denied the very unity and equality it promoted. In *Aymeri de Narbonne*, this paradox is left largely unexplored, however, and the hierarchy of the Frankish realm signifies order (under Charlemagne), pitted against the threat of a chaotic outside. Aymeri remains submissive to his lord, despite personal successes. However, in *Le Siège de Barbastre* the internal tension is made apparent because the imperial throne is now occupied by Charlemagne's sickly son, Louis.[114] In one scene, Aymeri approaches and greets the emperor after receiving a promise of military aid from him. He expresses his subordination by adopting behaviours denoting inferiority: 'Aymeri envers [Louis] s'umelie. / A pié se pouroffri et forment l'en mercie' ('Aymeri humbles himself before Louis. At his feet he prostrates himself and greatly thanks him', *SDB*, ll. 4321-22). The spatial ordering of the scene echoes that of Aymeri's first encounter with Charlemagne and so reiterates Aymeri's role as vassal, and Louis's role as lord. Elsewhere in the same poem, though, Aymeri makes a clear statement of his own power. Some messengers arrive at Narbonne and this is how they are greeted:

> Tuit .IV. main a main sont el palés entré,
> Et truevent Aymeri el faudestuef doré,
> Jouste lui Ermengart qui tant ot de biauté.
> Au pié li siet Bernars de Brebant la cité,
> Et Guillaume d'Orenge au corage aduré,
> Et Garin d'Ansseüne c'on tenoit a sené;
> Jusques a Aymeri en sont li més alé. (*SDB*, ll. 3770-76)

> All four entered the palace hand-in-hand and found Aymeri on a throne of gold. Next to him was Hermengart who was very beautiful. At his feet sat Bernard of the city of Brebant, Guillaume of Orange of the steely courage, and Garin of Ansseun who was held to be wise. The messengers went up to Aymeri.

The scene is a tableau designed to present Aymeri as a man of authority, integrity and honour. Sitting in his hall on a splendid throne, accompanied by his beautiful and loyal

[113] This will be explored in detail in Chapter Three.

[114] See Tyssens and Wathelet-Willem, *Les Épopées romanes*, p. 32.

queen, Aymeri waits for the messengers to be brought to him and state their will. Three of his sons (each of whom is a mighty warrior and land-holder in his own right) are arrayed at his feet, indicating their subordination to his lordship. The message could not be clearer in terms of power dynamics: Aymeri is lord and master, and is in perfect control of his household, his realm, and everyone in it.[115] Tyssens and Wathelet-Willem describe the task of the Narbonne *geste* as supporting a contested, weak suzerain and fighting against the internal disruption and antagonism caused by the indecision and fickleness of 'celui qui devait être le principe de l'unité'.[116] Yet, just as they act as prop to the diminished monarch, scenes like this seem to demonstrate their potential to overthrow him if they so wished.

Bearing this in mind, new light is cast on the relationship between Aymeri and his lord, Louis. Let us turn back to the moment when Aymeri first asks Louis for help with the siege of Barbastre. In fact, Louis initially refuses to help, breaking the terms of his mutually supportive contract with his vassal. Guibert, Aymeri's representative at the exchange, is furious and approaches the emperor in a way that indicates his displeasure: 'devant l'enpereour se tint Guibers en piez, / si a parlé li quens aussi comme hons iriez' ('in front of the emperor Guibert remains on his feet: the count spoke like an angry man', *SDB*, ll. 4101-2). By remaining standing, Guibert fails to express his inferiority to the figure of imperial power and hints at his insubordination. He harangues Louis with a list of all that Aymeri has done for him and for Charlemagne before him (*SDB*, ll. 4103-11). He even reminds Louis of the episode in *Aymeri de Narbonne* in which Aymeri was the only man prepared to take on Narbonne, and of the terms of the ensuing friendship between Aymeri and Charlemagne (*SDB*, ll. 4112-17). Soon, dismayed by Louis's refusal to act, he urges all the barons assembled at court to join him in protest against the 'worst king in forty lands' (*SDB*, l. 4159). They retreat to an encampment along the banks of the river where they wait, amassing an army of fifteen thousand men, menacing in their presence and proximity to the imperial court (*SDB*, ll. 4168-69).[117] Louis backs down eventually, on the advice of his counsellors, and agrees to the aid. The episode underlines the immense power of the Narbonne clan and their influence over other barons and the emperor himself. Their potential for rebellion is immeasurable and although the hierarchical system manages

[115] We might compare this scene to Guillaume's arrival at Louis's court in *Aliscans*. Here, Louis refuses to admit the 'stranger' and peers out of the window to see who it is before sending barons out to mock and tease him (*AC*, ll. 2718-22).

[116] *Les Épopées romanes*, p. 32

[117] In *Aliscans*, Guillaume threatens to depose Louis having been woefully insulted by him: 'le roi de France cuit je tost desposer / et de son chief fors la corone oster' ('the King of France I believe I will depose, and remove from his head the crown', *AC*, ll. 2952-54).

to control it, it does so only on the Aymerides' terms. Guibert takes pains to repair the damage done by his insubordination by grovelling at the emperor's feet and swearing an oath:

> Porterai je ma sele, nus piez et sans soller,
> Par itel couvenant que m'orrés deviser
> Que secours ait dus Bueves et Aymeris le ber. (*SDB*, ll. 4260-61)

> I will carry my saddle, barefoot and without protection on my feet, by such an oath as you will hear me say, so long as Bueves and Aymeri the noble will have aid.

Louis, prompted by an adviser, has Guibert stand up and peace is achieved. Hierarchical order is restored and Louis and Aymeri unite to fight the pagans at Barbastre. And yet, Guibert only makes these amends once his demands have been met; even in his oath there is the proviso that his brother and father will get the assistance they need. The implication is that they will only support the emperor and the hierarchy he embodies inasmuch as they remain powerful and privileged within it.[118]

We may well wonder what would happen were Aymeri and his sons to rise up against the emperor, for their insubordination is not unknown in the Cycle. *Girart de Vienne*, for example, is a tale of internecine wrangling and political tension between Charlemagne and Girart (Aymeri's uncle). The fighting in this poem reaches fever pitch when Girart comes close to killing the emperor, urged on by a young headstrong Aymeri, and Roland and Oliver are fighting to the death in a duel. At this point, God intervenes, sending an angel to separate Roland and Oliver, and Girart's hand is stayed by a sense of mercy that is not directly attributed to God, but is nevertheless a moment of pious charity that belongs to a Christian, not a chivalric, context. It allows the merciful decision to come from Girart without affecting his honour, for transposed into a Christian act, it loses the negative implications it would have in an honour culture. The crucial point is that God reminds the feuding Christians that their real mission lies overseas, again allowing the knights to set aside their differences or rather displace those differences to the boundaries of community as the knights unite under the Christian banner. The poem seems to acknowledge the tensions of chivalric ideology here: political harmony must be maintained in order to defend the Frankish realm and her faith. Yet, the Frankish realm and her faith depend upon knights like the Narbonnais, precisely because their determined, aggressive pride makes

[118] Kay suggests that he supports an idea of sovereignty that in turn supports his own aristocracy (*Political Fictions*, p. 122). For an application of Kay's theory to *Le Couronnement de Louis*, and the Guillaume Cycle more broadly, see Luke Sunderland, *Heroism without Sacrifice: Ethics in Old French Narrative Cycles* (Ph.D. Thesis: King's College London, 2008), pp. 45-53.

them the best fighters, and that makes them unpredictable and touchy when it comes to trivial points of honour. Notably, it is only by recourse to a rhetoric outside of chivalry – the intervention of the Divinity – that differences can be overcome, repressed, or transferred to the margins of community.

Returning to the episode from *Le Siège de Barbastre*, Louis as a monarch relies on the Narbonne clan. In the wider context of the *Grand Cycle* they defend Louis from usurpers and traitors and in the Narbonne Cycle they fend off pagan attacks and defend Christianity. Yet their personal power and influence expands rapidly: in *Guibert d'Andrenas* they extend their domain and place Guibert on the throne of Andrenas, and in *La Prise de Cordres* Guibert's territory will be extended to encompass Cordres and Seville too. In many of these poems, Aymeri's is the ultimate voice of authority, with that of the emperor totally absent (or else present but over-ridden). As the power of the *geste* increases, the relationship between Aymeri (and later Guillaume) and Charlemagne (and later Louis) is problematised and as we have seen, Aymeri's individual heroism – not absolute, nor without its tensions and anxieties – threatens to disrupt the social hierarchy that should keep him docile and subordinate to the imperial power (even as it confirms that hierarchy by embodying its values to the letter). The power of the Aymerides allows them to occupy a privileged position in the social hierarchy, yet it also threatens to disrupt it. Ultimately, if identity is forged 'at the margins' of the self – through behaviour, interaction and communication – then what happens when a warrior aristocrat behaves more and more like a king or emperor? If so much of 'self' is invested into rituals of (violent) performance and touch, what happens when they are appropriated inappropriately and become detrimental to the very social order they elaborate? Indeed, is not the imposition of order itself a form of violence – a controlling touch – that perpetuates the very outbreaks of violence that it seeks to dispel?[119] We have come full circle, arriving back at the problematics of chivalry with which we began Chapter One: chivalry must create both violent and docile subjects – at once aggressive and obedient – and the Narbonne Cycle gives anxious expression to this double prerogative. For if 'heroic' behaviour contributes to the monologic masculinity that valorises and privileges warriors in the poems, it also destabilises the very unity required by monologism. The violent performance that characterises a hero, as the structural excess of the chivalric order, both guarantees and jeopardises the stability of the community within which his actions are meaningful. Echoing Kay, 'political hierarchy is threatened

[119] We return here to Žižek's distinction between the violence that is enacted directly, physically and spontaneously by 'social agents, evil individuals' and the more transparent violence inherent in any politico-ideological system (*Violence*, p. 9).

with collapse, both by its own founding, internal contradictions, and by the pressure of rising individualism'.[120]

Conclusions

The fabric of medieval society was woven with threads of touch, contact, communication and interaction. The way that a knight acted was regulated by his belonging to the chivalric order, and was an expression of that belonging. Within the community, interactions between knights supported and iterated community identity – implying unity – and excluded those not able (not licensed) to act in this way – implying difference. As I have shown, both of these premises are problematic in the poems of the Narbonne Cycle. 'Unity' is a fiction because as Miri Rubin astutely remarks, 'identity can never be constituted through a single or over-arching affinity'.[121] It is a myth perpetuated by the aggressive regulation of community inter/action in order to naturalise the domination of those who 'belong' to this privileged elite. And yet that regulated action, demanded by the laws of chivalry, is supported and enforced by the over-zealous, transgressive and unpredictable violence of its most fervent adherents. In this context, community can quickly descend into internecine strife and vicious feuding. 'Difference' is a fiction because it is produced in the 'dynamic negotiation' of community boundaries: boundaries that forcibly exclude others in order to define the contours of community identity.[122] It expresses 'self' as radically opposed to 'other', disavowing the structural dependency of the two terms and the consequent contestation, slippage and anxiety that arises along its lines. It is those boundaries of difference that will provide the focus of the following two chapters as I seek to derail binaristic categorisations founded on gender and race. In her essay 'Seduction and Suppression', Kay mentions the tendency of early critics (such as Jean Frappier, Hans Jauss, and Paul Zumthor) to talk about epic as the expression of community and collectivity.[123] Reading beyond that, Kay notes that the collective action to which they refer is in fact the (collective) action of a group of men: that is, free, lay, western men like the critics themselves. However, the community-building action to which such critics refer has here been shown to contribute to the fracturing of society as much as its foundation. What is more, by talking about epic community in this way, Kay argues that

[120] *Political Fictions*, p. 188.

[121] 'Identity and Solidarity', p. 141.

[122] 'Identity and Solidarity', p. 141.

[123] 'Seduction and Suppression', p. 1. Kay cites Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: L'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris, Hatier-Boivin, 1957); Hans R. Jauss, *Chanson de geste und höfischer Roman*. *Heidelberger Kolloquium* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1963); and Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique mediévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

such critics ‘operate on the text the same exclusions as the epic poets before them’ – primarily the exclusion of women, and the privileging of (white) men.[124] It is the gendered aspect of this exclusion to which I turn my attention next.

[124] ‘Seduction and Suppression’, p. 129.

Chapter Three – Violent Exclusions

Introduction

> Gender is the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time […]. It is a costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance.[1]

> Touch is not just a private act. It is a fundamental medium for the expression, experience and contestation of social values and hierarchies.[2]

In the Narbonne Cycle, great care is taken to describe moments of touching and its social effects; tactile exchange is highly stylised and structured according to patterns that seem, at first, to mirror social relationships. Modern theorists of tactility agree that touch maintains a social hierarchy: rather than a personal communication or behaviour, Classen calls it a 'fundamental medium for the expression, experience and contestation of social values and hierarchies'.[3] Who touches whom, who does not, who initiates touching, and the depth of tactile penetration are all highly significant factors in the power dynamics of society. Nancy Henley, in her study of tactile interaction, notes that touch is dependent upon status (as figured through sex, race, socioeconomic status and age) and that as a rule those of

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[1] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 238.

[2] Constance Classen, 'Fingerprints' in *The Book of Touch* (see Classen, above), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

[3] Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 168; and Classen, 'Fingerprints', p. 1.

higher status initiate touch with those of lower status, touching them more than vice versa.[4] In her reading, women are touched more than men and are thus 'subjected to reminders of their inferior status in our society'.[5] She implies, therefore, that status comes 'before' touching, that patterns of touch are based upon some pre-existing structure of social dynamics. Conversely, in the introduction to *Common Bodies*, Laura Gowling describes a scene from an early-seventeenth-century document in which two men are fighting in a tavern. One calls the other a whore and takes hold of him as if he were such a woman. The assumptions involved in the attack, she observes, are that a woman's body is vulnerable and open to (male) possession: the attack thus effeminises the victim and humiliates him.[6] The passage also makes clear that to the seventeenth-century mind, the way that a person touched another could literally make that person into something or someone else, and that the resulting relationship between them would be based on a pre-existing power structure. In Gowling's words, 'the power of a man over his whore was so familiar that it could be reproduced even between men'.[7] In this example, there is little sense of a natural, gendered body that comes before touching. Rather, the violent touching of the attacker performs his dominant masculinity by identifying with, and appropriating the physical language of, that social role. He forces his victim into the structurally opposite position that is passive, inferior and feminine. These two 'performances' then give meaning to the bodies that are their medium, allowing those bodies to be read back as displaying gendered difference. In this way, ('cultural') identity is divorced from the ('natural') body. With this in mind, an episode of *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* in which Aymeri dresses as Clarissant (a Saracen Princess) so convincingly that her lover does not notice and moves to kiss her/him has drastic ramifications for Aymeri's status as hero and man. This chapter will map the problematics of the performative, tactile operations of gendered identity in the Cycle in order to arrive back at this scene and comprehend the enormity of its implications.

Kay's essay on the representation of femininity in the *chansons* provides a useful platform from which to begin a mapping of gender in these poems: beginning with the assertion that the *chansons* 'traitent du domaine social' and that 'la société médievale est composée d'hommes', Kay explains that medieval treatises dealing with the orders of medieval

[4] 'Status and Sex', pp. 91-93. Field notes that 'women are often considered and treated as inferior to men, so they are touched more than men' – thereby placing status, again, before touching (*Touch*, p. 25).

[5] 'Status and Sex', p. 91.

[6] *Common Bodies*, p. 1.

[7] *Common Bodies*, p. 2.

society view the social domain as inherently masculine.[8] Indeed, community-building within the Narbonne Cycle relies on the development and maintenance of individual bonds between men, as I have suggested already in Chapter Two. Kay continues:

> La société, la chose publique, est constituée tout entière par les relations que les hommes entretiennent entre eux; les femmes n'y sont qu'une sorte de colle sexuelle, necessaires pour médiatiser ces relations, mais imperceptibles tant qu'elles sont 'vertueuses'.[9]

Pushed out of the privileged, masculine social arena, women occupy the gaps or blank spaces between men.[10] Yet paradoxically, Kay's metaphor of 'glue' already points to the importance of women to the very system from which they are excluded: they silently hold it together, binding men, mediating negotiations between men, and producing more men to populate 'society'. Finn Sinclair, glossing Kay's theory of the social matrix, also notes that 'blank spaces' give form to the structures around them, and we understand that without such negative support the whole social edifice would collapse in on itself.[11] Both critics, although focussing on the feminine, thus implicitly place masculine identity outside the organic body, locating it instead along the margins of the epic knight's subjective existence. They evoke the boundary between masculinity and femininity, privileged and marginalised, social actor and social glue. By following their lead and disrupting these boundaries here, I will show that a gendered identity founded in the performative exclusion of women is inherently unstable. Women cannot be definitively excluded from the narrative space for their presence is structurally critical, just as subjectivity itself is troublingly conditional on the presence of the Other. They cannot be ignored or avoided for it is only through *contact* with the Other, through a sustained physical, dominating performance over the feminine that masculinity as a site of privilege is articulated.

If Chapter One talked about the self and Chapter Two charted the grouping of knightly selves into community, then this chapter will begin to tackle the structural oppositions to,

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[8] 'Représentation', p. 223. Kay refers primarily to the *Livre de Manières* by Etienne de Fougères and John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus*. In accordance with Kay, Smith notes that 'as kings, magnates, and bishops, it was men who legislated, revised social norms, passed sentence. It was mostly they, or their subordinates, who copied charters, wrote histories and chronicles, composed moral treatises, delineated ideal social relationships' (*Europe After Rome*, p. 147).

[9] 'Représentation', p. 223.

[10] Sinclair, *Milk and Blood*, p. 160. The notional space 'between men' brings Eve Sedgwick's seminal work on homosocial relationships to mind, foreshadowing the discussion of triangular, mimetic desire that will develop in Chapter Four (*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York and Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[11] *Milk and Blood*, p. 160.

and excesses of, those identities. I will begin by exploring the power dynamics presented in moments of tactile interaction in the poems, arguing that touch is used here to confine a woman to her female body, and to punish and control that body, denying her the possibility of symbolic transcendence needed to claim an active stake in society. I will also touch on the reasons for that exclusion, finding that her sexuality is a threatening force that must be renounced as a condition of masculine identity. From there I move on to consider contestations of this asymmetrical distribution of social agency and authority, and I suggest that eruptions of domestic violence are the means by which such contestation is anxiously rebuked. Finally, I will turn to the most explicit contestation of the gender boundary committed, surprisingly, by Aymeri himself.

A Touch of Power

Over the course of the preceding chapters, I have discussed the way in which the texts of the Narbonne Cycle imply a performance-based attitude to subjectivity: heroic male identity is constituted in violent display and the performance of ritual behaviours that establish community. It is thus also contingent on the rejection of alterity. To better understand the role of exclusion in the iteration of identity, we turn once more to Butler:

> The subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation.[12]

For Butler, the delineation of subjective boundaries is entirely arbitrary – 'there is an "outside" to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute "outside", an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters boundaries of discourse'.[13] The binary of gender is, rather, an 'ideal construct forcibly materialised through time'.[14] The difference upon which the binary hinges is not innate or bodily then, but rather produced through the social repetition of divisive discourses and the (tactile) actions that sustain them. The term 'forcibly materialised' helps us to understand the aggressive nature of this process of exclusion: in the poems, it is simply another aspect of a knight's coerced, violent performance.

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[12] *Bodies That Matter*, p. 3. See also *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); and for further exploration of performativity, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 270-82.

[13] *Bodies That Matter*, p. 8.

[14] *Bodies That Matter*, p. 1.

Greetings and salutations are an ideal focal point for an evaluation of tactile interaction. Sociologists concur that such encounters and the norms that govern them are a crucial part of the complex behavioural code by which intelligible subjects emerge.[15] In the Middle Ages, with communication taking place almost exclusively in person, minimal differences in greeting conveyed a very explicit message about the relationship being established. Althoff observes that 'communication in medieval public life was decisively determined by demonstrative acts and behaviours', and that people used 'signs and firm rules of behaviour to express their relationship to one another'.[16] He confirms that rituals of greeting belong in this context, allowing us to read such initial encounters in terms of power dynamics in order to gauge the relationships being established.

When Aymeri first meets his new bride in *Aymeri de Narbonne*, the scene is described thus: 'a la pucele a ses braz au col mis, / car mout fu bien enseigniez et apris' ('he put his arms about the girl's neck, for he was really well schooled and [trained / learned]', *ADN*, ll. 3280-81). Even in such a brief exchange, Aymeri clearly assumes a higher status by taking the active role: he approaches Hermengart and places his hands on her body. By doing so, he publicly displays his power over her, and his social know-how is praised by the poet. Hermengart, we infer, would have no right to approach Aymeri in this way, or to touch his body without invitation or reason. Indeed, when she must approach Girart to enlist his help in the siege of Narbonne, she sends a messenger on ahead (*ADN*, ll. 3823-40). It is only after mediation through this male body that she meets Girart, and then it is Girart who takes the lead:

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[15] For discussion see, for example, R. Firth, 'Verbal and Bodily Rituals of Greeting and Parting' in *The Interpretation of Ritual: Essays in Honour of A.I. Richards*, ed. by J. S. La Fontaine (London: Tavistock, 1972), pp. 1-38; Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication* (London: Methuen, 1975); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); John M. Wiemann and Randall P. Harrison, (eds), *Nonverbal Interaction* (London and New Delhi: Sage, 1983); and Albert E. Scheflen, 'On Communicational Processes' in *Nonverbal Behaviour: Applications and Cultural Implications*, ed. by Aaron Wolfgang (New York and London: Academic, 1979), pp. 1-16. As with touch more generally, critics tend to understand greetings as reinforcing, rather than producing the relationship between parties. Ruth Finnegan writes 'the presence, amount or form of physical contact during salutations publicly declares and reinforces the participants' relationship' ('Tactile Communication' in *The Book of Touch* (see Classen, above), pp. 18-25 (p. 20)).

[16] 'Ira Regis: Prolegomena to a History of Royal Anger' in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barbara Rosenwein (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 59-74 (p. 74).

> Dame Hermenjart jus au perron trova.
> Li dus l'enbrace et aprés la besa,
> Sus el palais avec lui l'enmena. (*ADN*, ll. 3861-63)

> He found Dame Hermengart down on the steps. The duke embraces her and then kissed her; and led her up into the palace with him.

Here, Girart enters Hermengart's personal space, touches her intimately, then steers her into the palace. If we compare this scene to that in which Aymeri and Boniface approach each other (analysed in Chapter Two) the differences are tangible. In that encounter, the balancing of the actions of the two men expresses their fragile alliance: Boniface approaches Aymeri on foot, so Aymeri dismounts. They do not touch each other but rather make joy together – 'se conjoient' (*ADN*, l. 3257) – and walk up into the palace together ('par les degrez qui sont de marbre bis / en sont monté el palès seignoris', *ADN*, ll. 3258-59). Neither leads the other. Later in the same poem, when Aymeri meets Girart, the two men 's'entrebesent' ('kiss each other', *ADN*, l. 4351), the mutuality of which is again decisively opposed to the interaction between Hermengart and Girart. Although I argue that expressions of 'equality' deny the fundamental antagonism that existed between men locked in a competitive system of honour, the knights in these encounters nevertheless display a different attitude to each other from that which they show to women. Invasive and one-sided touching simply does not happen when both parties are knights; it is replaced with respectful, circumscribed touching behaviour that expresses their investment in shared, chivalric values.[17] Of course, there are greetings between knights that express the radical subordination of the one to the other. We recall how Guillaume greeted Louis in *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*: 'si li chaï au pié' and 'l'esperon bese' ('he fell at his feet' and 'kisses his spur', *LMA*, l. 2255); and how Aymeri greeted him in *Le Siège*: 'Aymeri envers [Louis] s'umelie. / A pié se pouroffri et forment l'en mercie' ('Aymeri humbles himself before Louis. At his feet he prostrates himself and greatly thanks him', *SDB*, ll. 4321-22). And yet, in these encounters, the subordinate party *actively* expresses that subordination. Guillaume and Aymeri both touch their emperor in a way that performs their inferiority; they are not subjected to invasive touching.

In a third example of inter-sex touching, we see the same pattern even in the Saracen camp. Here, Malatrie arrives at the emir's tent outside the besieged Barbastre:

[17] Unless, of course, the knights are meeting in battle – then the interaction definitively *is* invasive and unilateral, as Chapter Four will show. Montagu provides a sociological interpretation of the relationship between touch and class in *Touching*, pp. 340-45.

> Encontre la pucele vint cele gent haÿe,
> L'amirans a sa fille hautement enbrachie,
> Et puis li roys d'Espaigne l'a par les bras saisie.
> Belement la descent du mulet de Surie. (*SDB*, ll. 1799-802)

> In front of the girl came those hateful people. The amirant openly [embraced / kissed] his daughter. And then the king of Spain took her by the arms, and gracefully helps her dismount from the Syrian mule.

Again, the male controls the space and interaction, approaching the female and initiating physical contact. Malatrie is accessible and vulnerable, allowing her body to be touched and manipulated whilst her father remains active and untouched. Her subordination is expressed through this passivity and openness to male touching, unlike that of Guillaume and Aymeri, which was expressed through active rituals of touching. Why the disparity? In the medieval worldview, according to Joyce Salisbury, women were deemed to be open and receptive in their physical sexuality, providing a metaphor for a social role of passivity.[18] Moreover, their sexual openness was seen as justification for their subordination to male control: as Isidore of Seville wrote 'women are more libidinous than men' and 'are under the power of men because they are frequently spiritually fickle'.[19] Although I will return to the issue of female sexuality below, it is crucial here to note the inherent paradox: women are ideologically construed – by men – as open, passive and sexual, and then effectively punished by men for it. Therefore, the touching of individual women by men in the poems is not just a 'reminder' of their inferior status – as Henley would have it – rather it is this very touching that performs their exclusion from the privileged masculine domain: it *produces* their 'inferiority' by buying into or reproducing the pre-existing ideological relationship in which rational, controlled men must govern irrational, fickle women.

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[18] 'Gendered Sexuality' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York and London: Garland, 1996), pp. 81-102 (p. 85).

[19] Isidore of Seville, *Etimologias*, ed. by J. Oroz Reta and M. Marcos Casquero, vol. 1 (Biblioteca de Atores Cristianos: Madrid, 1982), XI, 7, 30, 801: cited in Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality', p. 85. Karen Jo Torjesen makes clear that in medieval discourses the female body is constructed as 'a spectacle signifying weakness and shame' ('Martyrs, Ascetics, and Gnostics' in *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures*, ed. by Sabrina Petra Ramet, Anthropological and Historical Perspectives (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 79-91 (p. 10)). Dorothy Yamamoto notes that a woman's body is inferior in medieval discourse because of its instability; it thus 'needs' male control (*The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 205). For a twenty-first-century parallel, Sally Sheldon notes that the body is the site of female subordination because reproduction denies the masculine ideal of an essential, bounded body ('The Masculine Body' in *Real Bodies* (see Evans and Lee, above), pp. 14-28 (p. 14)). The significance of body boundaries will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The unilateral dynamic of inter-sex touching is even more striking during marriage negotiations with slightly different, though related, implications.[20] At the end of *Les Narbonnais*, Boniface says to Guillaume, 'ceste pucele m'avez promis pieç'a. /[…]/ Donez la moi; no refuseré ja' ('you promised this maid to me a long time ago. […] Give her to me, I will certainly not refuse her', *LN*, ll. 7786-88). Guillaume had earlier promised his sister to Boniface to secure his friendship, and now Boniface demands fulfilment of that contractual promise. The daughter, who is neither named nor asked for consent, is simply handed over to cement the alliance between Guillaume and Boniface in the eyes of the assembled public. We are told that 'li rois la prant, devant toz la bessa' ('the king takes her, and kissed her in front of everyone', *LN*, l. 7793). Jean-Paul Sartre's remark that 'the caress is an appropriation of the Other's body' seems apposite here.[21] Note also the tactile nature of the word 'prant': Boniface is taking a wife in the most literal way possible. He dominates her body and touches it publicly, intimately and without permission. In *Girart de Vienne*, Charlemagne asks Girart for Aude in order to give her to Roland: 'donez la moi. […] Je la donrai a mon neveu Rollant' ('give her to me; I will give her to my nephew, Roland', *GDV*, ll. 6636). Girart answers 'tot a vostre comant; / fere en poez tot a vostre talent' ('as you wish, you may do with her all that you [wish / desire]', *GDV*, ll. 6641-42), offering the girl's body to Charlemagne to use as he sees fit. The word 'talent' denotes, on one level, that Charlemagne is free to do what he likes with this gift item in political terms. But it also evokes an element of desire – presumably sexual – implying a tactile licence offered to her new guardian: indeed, when she is given to Roland, he wastes little time in using that licence and immediately kisses her publicly (*GDV*, ll. 6907-08). A third example concerns the Saracen Princess, Malatrie, who is handed over to Girart by Louis in return for services rendered in the closing stages of *Le Siège de Barbastre*: 'Gyrars, ce dist li roys, tenez ceste moullier! / Et Gyrars la reçut, puis la prist a besier' ('"Girart", said the king, "Take this woman!"' And Girart received her, then began to kiss her', *SDB*, ll. 7544-45).[22] Here, the tactility of the exchange is captured by the verbs 'tenir' and 'recevoir'. Like Boniface and Roland, Girart takes hold of his new possession and touches her publicly and intimately. In all three passages, the woman's body is construed as passive and open to

[20] Crucially, as Dorothea Kullman notes, marriages are ubiquitous in the genre ('Le Rôle de l'église dans les mariages épiques' in *Charlemagne in the North* (see Bennett et al., above), pp. 177-87).

[21] *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. by H.E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1966), p. 506. Sartre makes clear the correlation between touching a body and producing the body through that touch: 'the caress is not a simple stroking; it is a *shaping*' (p. 507 – original emphasis).

[22] Also, Blancandrine is given to Clarion at the end of *Le Siège de Barbastre* despite her earlier tryst with Gui (*SDB*, l. 7809); and Auquaires requests Clarissant as a reward for his conversion and aid in *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*: 'Clarissant, se vos ples me donez' ('Clarissant, give her to me please', *LMA*, ll. 3038).

male touch; it is commodified within the exchange economy that exists between men and used as a gift to be passed from one man to another.[23] It is the handing over – literally the transmission of touching rights – from one knight to another that effects the political bond between the men. As Joël H. Grisward remarks, Aymeri's daughters (and by extension, other women in the Cycle) are thus denied autonomy: '[elles] n'interviennent que comme instrument, comme moyen d'agrandissement et de propagation du lignage, jamais comme personnage, et encore moins comme personne'.[24]

Women are a tightly controlled 'means' to masculine ends in the Cycle, the medium through which men negotiate and interact. Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* helps us understand this attitude to women by locating the roots of male social domination in the transition of society from a hunter-gatherer model to an agricultural one.[25] Labour is paramount in an agricultural economy, so when this shift occurred, it became increasingly important to control reproduction as a means to improve production, and women were subjected to increasing control by men anxious to secure their source of future labour.[26] According to Gaunt, the kinship structure that evolved under these circumstances, founded on the exchange of women (as reproducers of men) and the incest taboo that kept them circulating, permeates all societies through medieval France to our own.[27] In medieval France, especially with the advent of primogeniture and the concomitant emphasis on lineage, woman's 'primary function' was therefore to guarantee the continuity of her husband's patrimony by producing an heir.[28] She was valued for her reproductive capacity and yet feared for the power that that granted her. She was valued as a commodity, an object of exchange to facilitate kinship bonds, and yet closely guarded by the men who

[23] Chapter Two explored the nature of such political gift-giving and exchange between men.

[24] *Archéologie de l'épopée médiévale*, p. 232. Similarly, referring to feudal society more generally, Lacan notes that woman is 'rien d'autre qu'un corrélatif des fonctions d'échange social, le support d'un certain nombre de biens et de signes de puissance' (*Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan (Livre VII): l'éthique de la psychanalyse (1959–1960)*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, Le Champ Freudien (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p. 176).

[25] *Creation of Patriarchy*, pp. 36-53.

[26] *Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 49. Brian Turner reaches the same conclusion in his analysis of patriarchal structures in relation to the (female) body in *The Body and Society*, rev. edn (London and New Delhi: Sage, 1984) – see pp. 2-3 and 126-38.

[27] *Gender and Genre*, pp. 13-14. For a detailed analysis of kinship structures see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949) and Gayle Rubin's interpretation of it in 'The Traffic in Women'.

[28] Laurie A. Finke, 'Sexuality in Medieval French Literature: 'Séparées, on est ensemble' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (see Bullough and Brundage, above), pp. 345-68. For details of the transition to a system of primogeniture see Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Jane Dunnett (Cambridge: Polity, 1994); and R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*.

would possess her.[29] The marriage negotiations above, with their insistence on the tactile domination and control of the bride, voice anxieties attendant on women in the Middle Ages. In fact, the need to reduce women to their bodies in order to control them is given expression throughout the poems of the Cycle.

In *Les Narbonnais*, Louis inadvertently sums up the reduction of women to corporeality in an outburst against the pagan marauders: 'mau des glotons qui les ont angendrez / et mau des lises qui les ont chaelez!' ('damn the traitors who engendered them and damn the bitches who dropped them', *LN*, ll. 6639-40). In other words, men engender children, connoting the transmission of values and characteristics, while women merely carry them in their bodies and 'drop them'. A similar remark is made in *Aymeri de Narbonne*: 'mau soit des meres qui tant en ont porté, / puis des glotons, qui les ont engendrez!' ('damned be the mothers who carried so many of them, and then the scoundrels who engendered them', *ADN*, ll. 3908-09). Again the female is equal to her physical capacity whereas the male fulfils a symbolic function, transcending his corporeal presence. In *Le Siège de Barbastre*, in a different formulation that nevertheless expresses the same ideological structure, the poet describes the risk posed to Narbonne by the Saracen hordes, speculating that: 'Aymeri la teste avra copee, / Dame Ermengart sera as faux cuivers livree' ('Aymeri will have his head cut off, Lady Hermengart will be given up to the honourless wretches', *SDB*, ll. 37-38). The two fates reflect different attitudes to the husband and wife. Aymeri's head will be cut off, attesting to his symbolic importance given that the head, in medieval metaphor, was associated with leadership and control.[30] In this context, decapitation was motivated by the desire to 'destroy and often to appropriate for oneself the *personality* and the *power* of an outsider, a victim or an enemy'.[31] In effect, Aymeri's importance – as a man and hero – transcends his physical body. Conversely, Hermengart will be taken by the invaders as the spoils of war, with the implication that she will be violated. She is reduced to a body that can be man-handled, stolen, and/or physically and sexually abused: she is a pawn in the games of competitive exchange and violent taking being played out between men. For, just as the gifting of a woman can cement a bond of alliance between knights, the stealing and abuse of a woman can seal – or initiate – a bond of enmity because it dishonours and

[29] As Joan M. Ferrante notes, 'purity of lineage' was fiercely protected through the guarding of the female and her body (*To The Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 5).

[30] Jacques Le Goff, 'Head or Heart: The Political Use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages' in *Fragments* (see Feher et al., above), III, pp. 12-28 (p. 13).

[31] Paul-Henri Stahl, *Histoire de la décapitation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986): cited in Le Goff, 'Head or Heart', p. 13 (emphasis added).

shames the man supposed to protect her. If Hermengart were to be given up to the pagans – if they were allowed to touch her – it would be severely detrimental to Aymeri's honour and he admits that: 'se je ma moullier perc, j'en avrai reprovier' ('if ever I lose my wife, I will have blame for it', *SDB*, l. 210). John Parsons makes clear that women had no *autonomous* social honour in the Middle Ages, that being the currency of the social transactions from which she was excluded.[32] Yet, possession of a good woman was crucial to an aristocratic knight's honour, and her body was bound up in the negotiation of that honour. Foreshadowing Kay's 'colle sexuelle', Julian Pitt-Rivers called honour the 'social glue' binding society together.[33] The correlation between the two uses is striking, and foregrounds the relationship between a woman's body and a man's status and honour. Both exist in the spaces between men; both must be protected. To assert his manhood, Aymeri must make sure that other men cannot and do not touch his wife.

In order for Hermengart to be a valuable (honourable) 'prize', however, men must desire her. Accordingly, descriptions of Hermengart's physical beauty are lengthy and detailed when she is introduced as Aymeri's potential match in *Aymeri de Narbonne*. To whet his lord's appetite, Hugues tells him that: 'einz de mes euz ausin bele ne vi, / le vis a gent et le cors eschevi' ('never before did I see anyone so beautiful with my own eyes, she has a noble face and well-proportioned body', *ADN*, ll. 1351-52). She is presented to him through her body, as a vision of beauty to be obtained and cherished. Her desirability is reinforced later in the poem, when she is brought before the barons sent to Pavia to demand her on Aymeri's behalf:

> Vestue fu d'une porpre roee,
> Sa crine fu d'un fil d'or galonnee.
> Les euz ot vers, la face coloree.
> De tel biauté l'ot Dex enluminee
> Que puis ne fu plus bele dame nee. (*ADN*, ll. 2530-34)

> She was dressed in ring-patterned purple; her hair was adorned with a thread of gold. She had shining eyes [and] a radiant face. God had illuminated her with such beauty that never since was a more beautiful woman born.

Here, she is again presented through her physical attributes, or rather she is constructed as an object of the penetrating male gaze. She is subjected to a form of touching that focuses intently on her fleshly body, denying her the possibility of transcending it: moving from her hair, to her eyes and face, the description offers her up to male scrutiny and suggests

[32] '"Loved Him-Hated Her": Honour and Shame at the Medieval Court' in *Conflicted Identities* (see West, above), pp. 279-301 (p. 285).

[33] 'Honour and Social Status' in *Honour and Shame* (see Peristiany, above), pp. 21-77 (p. 38).

that she is the type of woman a man might like to touch, to caress, to own. This descriptive pattern is not uncommon in the Cycle and is sometimes even more intrusive – especially when the woman in question is Saracen (for reasons to which I will return below). In *Le Siège de Barbastre*, Malatrie is described to Girart in similar terms:

> Se veoies ma dame, son cors et sa façon,
> Ses iex et sa boucete et son petit menton,
> Ses mameletes dures aussi comme bouton,
> .I. petit li souslievent son hermin peliçon! (*SDB*, ll. 2657-60)

> If you could [only] see my lady, her body and her face, her eyes, her tiny mouth and her small chin. Her breasts, firm like buds, raise up her ermine cloak a little![34]

The format of the description, taking us again from one physical attribute to the next, represents what Ernst Curtius would call a 'topos' or '[storehouse] of trains of thought'.[35] It is a formulaic way of talking about female beauty that speaks of the relationship between the female body as desired object and the male subject as consumer of that object. James Schultz, in his essay 'Bodies That Don't Matter', talks about the way in which culture produces the bodies it finds desirable, and notes that the construction and expression of desire itself is culture-specific and not necessarily the same for masculine and feminine models.[36] For Schultz, the male/masculine body elicits 'masculinist cultural desire: distant and admiring'.[37] The female/feminine body, on the other hand, attracts 'masculinist cultural desire for the woman: insinuating and possessive'.[38] 'Insinuating and possessive' certainly sums up these lingering accounts, which present the female body as something to be coveted as a prize and a possession. Moreover, the term 'masculinist' points us inevitably to the work of Arthur Brittan, who notes that 'masculinism' is the 'masculine ideology that justifies and naturalises male domination'.[39] In other words, these forms of desire, and the female body produced to elicit them, are part of a structure of gendered relationships in which male power is played out yet taken for granted.[40] Furthermore, the *topos* that evokes female beauty through the enumeration of her body parts, and reduces woman to these

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[34] There are similar descriptions of the Saracen, Nubie (*PDC*, ll. 709-13).

[35] *European Literature*, p. 70. For a broad treatment of descriptive techniques – albeit with special reference to the romance genre – see Faith Lyons, *Les Eléments descriptifs dans le roman d'aventure au XIIIe siècle*, Publications Romanes et Françaises, 124 (Droz: Geneva, 1965).

[36] 'Bodies That Don't Matter: Heterosexuality before Heterosexuality in Gottfried's *Tristan*' in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (see Lochrie et al., above), pp. 91-110.

[37] 'Bodies That Don't Matter', p. 104.

[38] 'Bodies That Don't Matter', p. 104.

[39] *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 4.

[40] *Masculinity and Power*, pp. 1-9.

sexualised fragments in order to invite the reader to enjoy them/her, perpetuates the masculinist agenda beyond the confines of the narrative space. In *Girart de Vienne*, this meta-narrative collusion is rendered explicit when the poet, referring to Aude, asks his audience 'plest vos oïr com est grant sa biauté?' ('would it please you to hear how great her beauty is?', *GDV*, l. 3386). Susan Bordo's work on the female body in the twenty-first century hinges on what she terms a 'gender ideology' whereby the female body is (violently) controlled – even manipulated physically – through representation, in order to appeal to a masculine audience's tastes and desires.[41] In my reading, Hermengart and Aude are victims of a similarly invasive ideology that violently controls their (Other) bodies – on both representational and 'real' levels.[42]

Hermengart's beauty, or rather her beautiful body, will become a marker of Aymeri's pre-eminence among men of rank across the land. The assembled barons make clear that winning her constitutes quite a coup:

> Tuit li baron l'ont forment esgardee!
> Dit l'un a l'autre, coiement a celee:
> 'Se ceste avoit Aimeri espousee,
> Bien porroit dire, c'est verité provee,
> N'avroit si bele juqu'a la mer Betee
> Rois, dus ne conte, tant ait grant renonmee.' (*ADN*, ll. 2535-40)

> All the barons regarded her intently! Said one to another, quietly in secret, 'if Aymeri had married this [one], well could you say, it is proven truth, that no king, duke nor count would have such a beautiful [one] between here and the icy sea, however great his renown.

The implication is, of course, that Aymeri's possession of this prestigious prize will elicit desire in other men – the mimetic desire that will be discussed in Chapter Four – and so his honour and status will become embroiled in the protection of it.[43] When the poet of *Le Siège* suggested the possibility of Hermengart being given up to pagan perfidy, he thus tapped into the anxiety surrounding the female body due to its importance in the

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[41] 'Hunger as Ideology' in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 99-114 (p. 108); and *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, rev. edn (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003). See also Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1991).

[42] The violent control of the Other's body will become more evident in Chapter Four, where I argue that a similar process is at work in the relationship between a knight and his enemy on the battlefield. Where a woman's body is broken down to render it beautiful, the pagan's body is broken down to render it bloody and ugly. In both cases, the resulting fragments are a spectacle that underlines the hero's status.

[43] Mimetic desire is a theory of male rivalry put forward by René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory, rev. edn (London and New York: Continuum, 2005).

competitive paradigms of honour-based identity. And yet, her desirability is also a source of anxiety on a more fundamental, psychic level. Psychoanalysis specifically links constructions of desire to subjectivity, and in an early explanation of fantasy, Žižek notes that it is through fantasy that we learn to desire, and that the subject is constructed through that desire.[44] Indeed, we saw in Chapter One that chivalric fantasy teaches young noble boys how to desire – and that, in fact, they become intelligible as knightly subjects only through that coerced formation of desire. Here, as a fantasy object sculpted by the chivalric discourse of the narrative space, Hermengart elicits the culturally appropriate, heternormative desire that is just one aspect of this gendered identification. However, as desired/desiring Other, Hermengart necessarily creates anxiety in Aymeri-as-subject, for the structural reliance on the desire of the Other undermines any notion of subjective essentiality and highlights instead the inherent lack that characterises Symbolic identity. In this reading, the true source of anxiety lies not in potential loss of the desired object, but in the danger of getting too close to it – and therefore losing the prop of desire itself.[45]

Lacan's most well-known exposition of his theories on desire and female alterity is arguably his work on the courtly lady in his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis.[46] Here, the lady is not a sublime object of veneration, but rather a representation of radical otherness, the properly traumatic Thing which resists symbolisation – and which is menacing inasmuch as it represents the 'deadly impulses of the drives'.[47] Her attractive appearance is merely a 'narcissistic projection whose function is to render her traumatic dimension invisible'.[48] In other words, the woman-as-Thing is fronted by a blank canvas on which the (male) subject can construct a fantasy, so that his gaze towards the screen sees 'the fascinating contours of the object of desire'.[49] This is exactly the process we have seen at work in *Aymeri de Narbonne*: Hermengart appears 'not as she is, but as she fills [the chivalric] dream'.[50] The poet, the audience, and the barons enjoy Hermengart from a safe

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[44] *Looking Awry*, p. 6.

[45] Lacan calls anxiety 'the knife-edge that separates desire from *jouissance*' – it occurs when a desired object is revealed in its truly traumatic reality (Roberto Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on Anxiety: An Introduction*, trans. by Jane C. Lamb-Ruiz (New York: Other, 2001), p. xiv).

[46] *L' Éthique de la psychanalyse*, pp. 167-84. Cf. Žižek, *Metastases*, pp. 89-112.

[47] With the Thing understood as 'a pressure point that lies just outside the symbolic and imaginary orders, where the weight of the real is sensed' (Kay, *Žižek*, p. 53).

[48] Žižek, *Metastases*, p. 90.

[49] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 9. The blank canvas can also be imagined as a mirror, reflecting the desires of the beholder, but acting as an obstacle, a limit between desiring subject and his Lady-object that renders her inaccessible (Lacan, *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, p. 181).

[50] Žižek, *Metastases*, p. 90.

distance, protected from the reality of her Otherness by the fantastic *topos* of her masculinist desirability. And so long as she conforms to the gendered stereotypes that circumscribe her behaviour and control her body, Aymeri too can access her through this fantasy screen – interacting with a projected, or constructed, version of woman (as fantasy/body). But as Aymeri draws closer to her, the danger is that he will lose the protection of the fantasy. As Žižek notes:

> Any contact with a 'real' flesh-and-blood other, any sexual pleasure that we find in touching another human being, is not something evident, but something inherently traumatic and can be sustained only in so far as this other enters the subject's fantasy-frame.[51]

The constructed fantasy version of woman disavows her radical, traumatic Otherness by forcibly repressing her subjectivity, sexuality and desire. And that can only be problematic when that very desire is a necessary prop to masculine expression, and when her sexuality is the 'glue' that binds and perpetuates the male social arena.

Sexuality and the Female Body

Feminine sexuality, as we have seen, is both a necessary support and a troubling problematic of masculine identity. It belongs to the realm of illegal enjoyment, constituting part of the prohibited excess of the Symbolic order that is nevertheless the structural condition of that order. A passage from *Les Narbonnais* articulates this ambivalence. Here, Aymeri sends his sons away to seek fortune and honour in the world and Hermengart, now his wife and superlative progenitrix, is distraught as she watches their departure and suggests sending them mules laden with gold. Aymeri refuses, believing that noble sons should not need such material assistance, but he changes his mind when he sees an opportunity to test his sons, and crucially, his wife. He declares that if the boys accept the goods they 'sont filz d'aucun losanjeor / que avec vos cochastes par folor' ('are sons of some flatterer that you took to bed recklessly', *LN*, ll. 778-79). However, if they send the money back, it will be proven that they are his offspring:

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[51] *Plague of Fantasies*, p. 184. The properly traumatic nature of sexual touching is captured by the medieval concept of the *penis captivus*. As Jacqueline Murray observes, this phenomenon, in which a woman's vagina was thought to constrict so much that her partner remained painfully stuck, shows 'the depth to which men's fear of sexual intercourse with women was psychologically embedded'. Although a product of the medieval imagination, it shows the 'psycho-sexual fears' surrounding a woman's desiring touch ('Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (see Bullough and Brundage, above), pp. 123-52 (p. 140)).

> Ques angendra Aymeri le contor,
> Cil de Nerbone a la fiere vigor,
> Si sanbleront de cuer et de valor
> A nostre fier linage. (*LN*, ll. 784-87)

> [That] Aymeri the count engendered them; he of Narbonne with the proud strength.
> Thus they will resemble, in heart and in valour, our proud lineage.

The testing draws directly on the ideological paradigm in which men engender their sons and women merely carry them in their bodies. If Hermengart's body serves as a reliable vessel, Aymeri's qualities will be reproduced through it, thus ensuring the (legitimate) continuation of his lineage. However, by mentioning the possibility of her adultery, the passage also flags up the anxiety inherent in a system that disavows female subjectivity even as it relies on the female body. Women like Hermengart cannot be properly excluded from society for the very reason of their maternal potential: the female body – as 'colle sexuelle' – is necessary for the reproduction of the social structure in its current form. Not only that, evidence suggests that medieval women played a crucial role in the early socialisation and training of young knights. In addition to nurturing her son, a mother would have taught him to speak, introducing him to adult codes of belief and behaviour (religious faith, morality, manners) and thus paving the way for his subsequent Symbolic identification.[52] As we saw in Chapter One, her son would soon be sent to the house of a lord to begin serious military and chivalric training, and this was the moment at which he entered the world of the fathers and his libidinal reorganisation was completed. Knighthood thus involved a radical break with the feminine at an early age, exacerbating the cut necessary for entry into the Symbolic order. Describing the early experience of a knight, Georges Duby says that 'on l'avait expulsé très jeune de la maison natale […] Son père, pour lui, devenait vite un étranger, et plus tard, un rival'. Accordingly, the knight 's'accrochait au souvenir de sa mère dont il avait été arraché et dont il gardait l'impérissable nostalgie'.[53] In my reading, Aymeri's testing highlights this anxiety surrounding a woman's influence on her children: he wants to make sure that his sons make the necessary break with the feminine, and the material gifts sent after them can be seen to represent the comforts and luxuries of home, perhaps even the nostalgic pleasure of union with the mother. If they accept these goods, they are not worthy to bear his name in the world of men. If they refuse, thereby rejecting maternal desires and indeed femininity itself, then they are ready to assume their Symbolic mandate and receive from him the patriarchal authority of the phallus.

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[52] Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 119; and Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 113. According to Shahar, 'it was [mothers] who created the child's first world-picture', p. 114.

[53] *Les Dames au XIIe siècle: le souvenir des aïeules*, Folio Histoire (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 56.

Other medieval texts also pick up on the anxiety surrounding this moment of separation from the mother, associating feminine maternal influence more specifically with subversive, primordial desire and longing. Moving outside the Narbonne Cycle momentarily, the twelfth-century romance, *Li Biaus Descouneüs* tells of an unknown youth who, having arrived at Arthur's court, sets out on adventures to prove himself a worthy knight.[54] Because of the different generic conventions, this romance is able to dramatise the maternal threat in a way that epic cannot: it uses magic to denote the subversive, feminine alternative to masculine Law. The climax of the journey comes when the 'Fair Unknown' fights two demons in the Desolate City and hears a voice that reveals to him his name, along with that of his father and mother. His 'natural' prowess is explained away by the fact that he is the son of Gawain, despite having had no contact with his father, or indeed the world of men as figured through the metaphor of the court; his father, as in Duby's explanation, has become a stranger. Following the victory, instead of returning to Arthur's court, he returns to the castle of the Lady of the White Hands (visited earlier in his adventures) where, having won his way back into the affections of the Lady, he is told that he was raised and armed by his mother, 'Blancemal le fee' (*BD*, l. 3237; see l. 4974), and that it was the Lady herself, an accomplished necromancer, who sent him to Arthur's court (*BD*, l. 4974ff).[55] She organised the whole adventure in which he would prove his skills and discover his family tree. We thus find a radically subversive counter-narrative wherein the identity-formation of the young man is entirely in the (White) hands of a woman who is narratively conflated with his mother. The (incestuous?) desire that leads Guinglain – as we now know him – back to the Lady is shown by the narrative to be anti-social and emasculating. When he tries to win her back she humiliates him: attempting to enter her room, he is made to believe he is falling into a pit and when the illusion shatters, he is left clutching the hawk-stand and screaming (*BD*, ll. 4549-89) before he finally returns to bed 'tos vergondés et esbahis' ('all shamed and horrified', *BD*, l. 4590). After further degrading trials, their love is consummated illegitimately (*BD*, l. 4817) and the next day the Lady makes a public announcement making clear that her desire has defeated Guinglain: 'cil chevaliers que vos veés, / c'est cil cui tant ai desiré' ('this knight that you see, it is he whom I have desired so much', *BD*, ll. 5042-43). Moreover, the poet notes that

[54] Renaut de Bâgé, *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, ed. by Karen Fresco, trans. by Colleen P. Donagher, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 77 (New York and London: Garland, 1992).

[55] A maternal-incestuous version of identity-formation is more explicitly rendered in Antoine de la Sale's *Jehan de Saintré*. In this thirteenth-century narrative, the young Jehan is chosen and groomed by the 'Madame' to be the best knight at court. She manipulates his confused, nascent desires and directs them towards herself as love object (*Jehan de Saintré*, ed. by Joël Blanchard (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1995)).

'or fu Guinglains de joie sire' ('now was Guinglain the master of pleasure', *BD*, l. 5053).[56] Yet it is an illegitimate, lustful and feminised desire, and it erodes the possibility of Guinglain's heroic identity: no longer associated with the world of men, with exchange, fighting and dominating behaviour, Guinglain is less than a man. The sensuous and nostalgic desires of primordial, maternal union are thus pitted against the social, repressive demands that are the pre-requisite of Symbolic identity (and embodied in the trope of Arthur's court) in a way that must reflect a broader cultural anxiety surrounding issues of masculine identity-formation.[57] The maternal-feminine touch and 'such fantasies of pre-Symbolic bliss as the mother's body' must be disavowed as the price of 'linguistic subjectivisation'.[58]

Returning to *Les Narbonnais*, Aymeri stresses that if the Narbonne boys fail the test and succumb to the wiles of feminine-maternal influence, it will be Hermengart's fault – and proof of her sexual promiscuity. If they fail to embody Aymeri's characteristics and live up to his standards, then it can be through no fault of his. If they cannot break from their mother, then their father must have been weak – some flattering courtier and not a hardy warrior. This sideways glance at Hermengart's sexual subjectivity is made more traumatic by the word 'folor' (*LN*, l. 778), a significant lexical choice that has connotations of madness, recklessness and potentially sexual impulse. We are reminded, perhaps of the libidinous, spiritual fickleness with which Isidore of Seville damningly charged medieval women. The possibility of Hermengart's reckless sexual touching represents that which the patriarchal society of the epic, obsessively preoccupied with genealogy, cannot allow, and that which is disavowed by the construction of woman as a carefully controlled fantasy-body. Yet this illegal enjoyment – women's exorbitant sexuality – is also, in a sense, a product of patriarchal ideology, for it is evoked by men in order to necessitate or naturalise their domination over women. As noted earlier in reference to female sexual openness, it is a charge levelled against women for which they are subsequently punished.

These literary constructions draw on a complex anxiety that troubled medieval society. According to Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong, it was during this period that the meaning of the Fall acquired a sexual content, having hithertofore had to do with excessive

[56] Crucially, in the context of a Lacanian study, the dictionary gives 'jouissance' for 'joie' (Greimas, p. 324).

[57] Shahar comments, 'there is no doubt that in the twelfth century people in general, and noblemen in particular, were highly concerned, if not obsessed, with the problem of incest' (*Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 255).

[58] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures, 17 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 15.

pride.[59] Moreover, that sexuality was linked to a tactile transgression ascribed to Eve (she touched the apple) and was gendered feminine.[60] Cindy Carlson and Angela Weisl write that 'because woman had tempted man, and temptation is the responsibility of the tempter, not the innocent who gives into seduction, women were considered bodily, carnal, dangerous'.[61] Theological, political and medical discourses converged to try to eliminate the troubling potential of the 'femme diabolisée', offering endless lists of sexual proscriptions and prohibitions, advice and hard 'facts'.[62] A severe line was taken on extramarital sex on the part of married aristocratic women and, because of their importance to their husband's honour, they risked punishment (even death) if they were thought to have permitted another man's touch.[63] Within marriage, sexual touching was highly regulated and was to be engaged in only with the specific goal of procreation, and even then there were rules and regulations governing this touch.[64] For example, medical discourses attested to the physical damage risked by a man who allowed himself to assume a passive position during coitus, in addition to the dangers of sexual over-indulgence.[65] As in any inter-sex interaction, the man had to assume an active, higher-status role in bed in order to perform in a masculine fashion. Moreover, he had to exercise self-control and self-

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[59] *Une Histoire du corps au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Liana Levi, 2003), p. 40.

[60] Classen, 'Control', p. 259

[61] 'Introduction' in *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Cindy Carlson and Angela Weisl (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 1-21 (p. 3). For more on woman's body as site of temptation see Nora Cottille-Foley, 'The Structuring of Feminine Empowerment: Gender and Triangular Relationships in Marie de France' in *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in Old French Literature*, ed. by Karen J. Taylor (New York and London: Garland, 1998), pp. 153-80.

[62] Le Goff and Truong, *Une Histoire du corps*, p. 41.

[63] Kleinschmidt, *Understanding the Middle Ages*, p. 134.

[64] 'If sex was, unfortunately, necessary to the reproduction of the human species, the Church declared it was nonetheless very wicked to derive any enjoyment from this animal function' (Andrew McCall, *The Medieval Underworld*, Sutton History Classics (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), p. 179). Jeffrey Richards discusses marriage as a means to regulate sexual desire in *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 22-41.

[65] Camille, 'Manuscript Illumination', pp. 58-90. Camille draws on the thirteenth-century *Régime du Corps* by Aldobrandino of Siena. The association of excessive sexuality with femininity is not an exclusively medieval phenomenon, however: Peter Brown uncovers the same chain of meaning in late Antiquity, where the lover and the uxorious were thought liable to sink into womanly dependence on women (*The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 6-34). A detailed account of the ideological prerogatives that underpin medical discourses is given by Joan Cadden in *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and an overview of legal and religious approaches to medieval sexuality can be found in James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

discipline, for excessive sexual touching and sexual desire (gendered female) were not only detrimental to his health, but channelled his energies away from his public duties. In this way, the troubling excesses of sexuality and desire are evoked, ascribed to women, and disavowed in order to prioritise men and to justify their domination over the weaker (and dangerous) sex. In fact, we have already seen evidence of this operation in action: in the discussion of *Ami and Amile* in Chapter One it was concluded that the *nom du père* regulates desire in the Symbolic, prioritising an economy of male, chivalric desire that is invested into homosocial bonding and warrior camaraderie. And yet, as Kay opines, the women of this poem, marked by disruptive desire, actually contribute to the cohesion of the masculine world: they are introduced *in order that* they can be expelled.[66] In this way, we can understand feminine sexuality as produced, or suggested, by and within patriarchal ideology so that it can be rejected – pushed back and hidden by the fantasy screen of the woman's controlled body. It is the obscene, illegal enjoyment of the primordial Real, the structural condition of the Symbolic, and it thus both troubles and confirms knightly identity.

In *Les Narbonnais*, as soon as the disruptive possibility of Hermengart's sexual touching is outlined, it is denied, with the emphasis falling instead on the brothers' success in the test. This in turn proves that they are Aymeri's sons, and that Hermengart's touch is strictly functional and chaste. Aymeri gloats: 'or sai de veritez / qu'i sont mi fil et ques ai angendrez' ('now I know for sure that they are my sons and I engendered them', *LN*, ll. 923-24). Feminine desire has been evoked and disavowed on two levels: first, the sons were offered, and refused, their mother's helpful advances. Second, Hermengart's sexual transgression, suggested by the possibility of the sons' failure in the test, was denied by their success. On two levels Aymeri's sons have proven their correct socialisation, and so Aymeri can now bask in the (masculine, military) glory of his lineage. Later in the same poem he reiterates his pride in his sons by saying: 'mout mielz aiment ferir de branc d'acier / que il ne font an chambres donoier' ('much better do they love to strike with the steely sword, than to court women in the [castle] chambers', *LN*, ll. 5010-11). By stating their preference for warrior-behaviour over lover-behaviour, Aymeri asserts his sons' belonging to a strictly epic, patriarchal ideology that valorises homosocial companionship. Hermengart is 'rewarded' for not stepping over the boundaries of the role allotted to her in this ideological structure with a public display of 'affective' touching from her husband: 'trois foiz la bese par mout granz amistez' ('he kissed her three times out of great friendship', *LN*, ll. 922). Yet, the word 'amistez' takes us back to Chapter Two, where the

[66] 'Seduction and Suppression', pp. 140-41.

contractual nature of medieval friendships was outlined, and reminds us that at this level of society a friendship even between man and wife was deeply political and served to reinforce the structures of social order. Thus Aymeri's touching once again repudiates Hermengart's troubling subjectivity by publicly reframing her body as a fantasy object. Touching displays possession, possession denies social agency, and these kisses are not benign tokens of affection. Rather, they belong to the framework of 'naturalised' violence by which Aymeri can enact and sustain his socio-symbolic dominance over his wife.[67]

This section on feminine desire would not be complete without a word on Saracen women. In an episode mentioned above, Louis awarded Girart a bride – the Saracen Princess Malatrie. What appears remarkable, on closer inspection of this passage, is that Louis has no paternal right over Malatrie at all: she is not of his kin, nor has he 'won' her from her Saracen father. In fact, Louis has only just met her and he has done so because she has defected voluntarily to the Christian cause having fallen in love with Girart. Clearly Louis's political operation papers over some problematic issues. From the outset, the match between Malatrie and Girart is instigated entirely by Malatrie.[68] Upon hearing of Girart's feats in battle she falls in love with him from afar and sends her handmaiden to invite him to her tent. Although she does not approach him in person, this still disrupts normal interactive procedure because she is taking control, setting the terms and moving into a man's sphere. Girart accepts the invitation and sneaks out of Barbastre at night – setting the tone for an illicit and dangerous meeting. When he first meets her, he seems to regain a little of the control that has so far eluded him: 'Gyrars descendi jus del destrier auferrant / et saisi la pucele au gent cors avenant' ('Girart dismounted from the swift warhorse and took hold of the girl with the noble, comely body', *SDB*, ll. 2784-85). In line with social expectation, he moves towards her and takes hold of her body. However, they then retire to a spot under a tree and 'forment se vont baisant' ('they begin kissing each other a lot', *SDB*, l. 2792). As noted above, the mutual construction of kissing is normally reserved for interactions between men, precisely because it implies a negotiated alliance and the recognition of each other's status.[69] To find it occurring between a Christian warrior and a Saracen princess is thus striking, and points us in the direction of fantasy.

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[67] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 141. Gravdal cites courtly discourse, along with other contemporary discourses, as 'naturalising what seems to have been the common practice of violence against women'.

[68] Cf. *La Prise de Cordres*, wherein the Saracen princess, Nubie, desires Bertrand and instigates a match with him, eventually poisoning her own father in order to help him escape imprisonment.

[69] The only examples of mutual kissing in the Cycle occur in *Guibert d'Andrenas* where Aymeri has Guibert and Aÿmeriet kiss each other to make peace between them ('Aymeris les fet entrebaisier' (*GDA*, l. 1143);

In an essay on Guillaume's love for the Saracen, Orable, in the *Prise d'Orange*, Sharon Kinoshita observes that a Saracen princess can be distinguished from Christian women by dint of her agency. When Guillaume becomes coy during the siege of Orange, Orable initiates the love between them and abandons her city and husband without hesitation.[70] Kinoshita reads this ascription of subjectivity and desire to a female character as based, again, on fantasy. In this version of Christian male fantasy, the woman represents her native city and religion so that seducing her is linked inevitably to military victory (and this conflation of woman and city as objects of mimetic desire foreshadows material to be covered in Chapter Four).[71] What is more, the Saracen woman's desire for – and choice of – a Christian hero confirms the superiority of Christianity over paganism, of Frankish warriors over Saracen warriors, of West over East.[72] It also confirms the prowess of the individual hero, who has attracted this desire and secured the victory/conversion. On a meta-narrative level, Kay suggests that this process makes the Saracen princess into a gift, this time given by the poet to his hero.[73]

Returning to the psychoanalytic framework of the courtly lady, Malatrie, like Hermengart, acts as a screen for the projection of a male fantasy: her body and her desire are a narcissistic reflection of Christian, male ideology. Her agency and desire, on this level, are not 'real', merely figments of a masculine imagination within and beyond the narrative boundaries. Yet, the construction relies on distance, and when Girart draws too close to Malatrie the traumatic aspect – or Real – of her desire becomes only too apparent. The scene of their first encounter proceeds with a demand made by Malatrie: 'car desarmés vo chief, s'il vous vient a talent / si verrai vo façon que je desirre tant ('disarm your head, if you take a notion to, so I will see your face that I desire so much', *SDB*, ll. 2804-5). Like the Lady of the White Hands above, she explicitly articulates her desires and demands, and as in *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, a troubling realm of feminine-maternal desire is suggested by

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and in *Aymeri de Narbonne*, where Aymeri and Girart kiss each other in greeting (*ADN*, l. 4363). Even in the romance narrative, *Erec et Enide*, it is reserved for the greeting between Erec and the king (Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. by Jean-Marie Fritz, LG (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992, l. 2346).

[70] 'The Politics of Courtly Love: *La Prise d'Orange* and the Conversion of the Saracen Queen', *Romanic Review*, 86 (1995), 265–87 (p. 273). This essay forms the basis of a chapter by the same name in her subsequent book, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

[71] 'Politics', p. 267. Cf. Kay, *Political Fictions*, p. 45.

[72] 'Politics', p. 287.

[73] *Political Fictions*, p. 45. Daniel adds a further layer of meaning, suggesting that such a gift to the hero – since he is chosen as 'recipient' for his chivalric effectiveness – would also flatter an 'audience committed to chivalry' (*Heroes and Saracens*, p. 78).

the narrative, with Girart teetering perilously on its brink. The fact that he is asked to remove his helmet underlines his movement away from the world of men. Not only does his headgear represent his knightly identification (see Chapter One), but because it is associated with his head it figures his symbolic transcendence of the feminine carnal world of sexuality and bodily impulse. As he removes it, then, he crosses a boundary and enters a dangerous world in which the relationships that give expression to male domination and privilege are inverted and man is subordinate to woman: Girart says 'conmander me poez comme a vostre serjant' ('you can command me, like your man at arms', *SDB*, l. 2807). The danger of such a disruption to masculine order is painted in stark colours given that, because of Girart's illicit encounter, his brother Gui is ambushed. Battle breaks out and Gui, finding himself outnumbered, blows his horn. Girart hears it, understands what he has done and laments: 'se mon frere y perc, n'i a nul recouvrier, / ja mes au duc Buevon n'oserai repairier' ('if I lose my brother there, there is no [remedy / reparation]; never more will I dare return home to Duke Bueves', *SDB*, ll. 2859-60). He realises he has broken the Symbolic Law embodied by his father and yet, even as he dons his armour and prepares to fight, traces of his over-indulgent love remain and he tries to kiss his lady whilst strapping on his sword (*SDB*, ll. 2868-69). He eventually tears himself away and joins battle, but it is not enough to prevent Gui being taken prisoner by the emir's troops (*SDB*, ll. 3232-37). To compound the damage done to the family's reputation by Girart's sexual antics, Gui is stripped naked by the pagans and brought to a burning pyre set up before the city walls. As discussed in Chapter One, such stripping has a castrating effect – rendering Gui unable to act and publicly divesting him of his social status and honour. For Girart to begin his reintegration into the world of men and repair the damage done to his family name, he must make amends with his father and help in the rescue operation mounted to save Gui from the pyre; he admits that he will be shamed if he does not (*SDB*, l. 3320). The mission is a success: first the men fight their way over to Gui and give him armour and a sword – thus re-doing his Symbolic identification and rendering him able to act – and then, united, they fight their way back to the city. The chivalric continuum of strictly military desire is thus reinstated, bringing the brothers together in warrior camaraderie alongside their father.

Girart's love for Malatrie is recuperated into the Symbolic realm at the end of the poem in the wedding scene discussed above. Here, the traumatic, castrating aspect of Malatrie's desire is disavowed and her former agency in initiating the match in private is subsumed as Girard takes control of the interaction and kisses her in public. She is handed over by Louis as a prize, confining her within a commodified body and denying her the agency and desire that were part of her original fantasy existence. If her Saracen body was allowed to desire in order to affirm Christian superiority, then once it becomes wholly Christian that desire

has no place and is repressed by the same operation by which it was evoked. And yet, this act does not (indeed, cannot) provide the ultimate assertion of Girart's masculine, chivalric identity, just as the stain of Malatrie's subjectivity and desire cannot be so easily removed. As she is handed over, the poet notes that 'par le palais l'esgardent tiex .v.c. chevalier / qui pour .I. seul baisier donnaissent .i. destrier!' ('across the palace five hundred knights look at her, such as would give a horse for a single kiss!', *SDB*, ll. 7546-47). In other words, as was the case with Aymeri and Hermengart, Girart's identity is contingent on Malatrie's desirability as an object and his status predicated on the mimetic desire inspired by possession of her. So feminine sexual agency and desire continue to haunt the margins of chivalric identity, at once constitutive of that identity and threatening at all times to destroy the illusion built on its repression.

Domestic Violence

Having argued that the discursive binary of gender is the materialisation of a sustained, invasive, tactile performance by men, it is now necessary to consider the possible contestation of the gender boundary so produced. Taking an episode of *Les Narbonnais*, in which Aymeri strikes his wife to the floor for questioning his opinion, I argue that this moment of savage, public violence is not exceptional, but is rather the logical extreme of a continuum of tactile domination. As Suzanne Hatty points out with reference to the twenty-first century, actual domestic violence differs from the normal treatment of women by men only in its severity.[74] In *Les Narbonnais*, it occurs when the asymmetry of power and privilege is questioned; when a woman contests her exclusion from the social arena. Yet, simply by being 'necessary', this violent outburst – deemed excessive by some who witness it – confirms the contingency of the social structure. If gendered difference cannot be displayed by natural bodies, it must be forcibly materialised through violent acts.

In the early stages of *Les Narbonnais*, in a scene already discussed for its treatment of feminine sexuality, Aymeri announces that he must send his sons away to seek their own fortunes in the world and establish their own reputations: with seven sons he cannot afford to split his land and inheritance between them. Hermengart objects, arguing that it would leave Narbonne open to attack from Saracens (justifiably, given that it eventually happens). To add insult to injury, she suggests that Aymeri is not up to the task of defending Narbonne without the support of his sons, saying 'trop ies vielz, ne ceindras mes espee' ('you're too old, you will never more strap on [a / your] sword', *LN*, l. 428). As detailed in

[74] *Masculinities, Violence and Culture*, Sage Series on Violence Against Women (London and New Delhi: Sage, 2000), p. 69.

Chapter One, Aymeri's very existence is indissociable from his ability to wield a sword, and Hermengart here taps into the anxiety surrounding this martial performance, transposing it into a scorning insult meant to shame Aymeri into taking her advice. Her words are particularly damaging to Aymeri's honour: uttered in public, they directly undermine his authority over her, jeopardising his status and power in the eyes of society. Aymeri's position as lord of Narbonne relies on his ability to command respect from members of his household, to control his vassals, his lands, and his wife. Failure to prevent his wife from speaking out of turn seriously undermines that position. Here, Hermengart's body has slipped out from the bounds of his control and her physically damaging speech is a vocal gesture issuing forth from it. According to Žižek, the voice plays an interesting role in psychic identity; in his words, 'a mysterious sound magically resonating from within an inanimate object is the best metaphor for the birth of subjectivity'.[75] In effect, we might conceive of this scene in precisely these terms: denied autonomous agency and moulded into a fantasy object, Hermengart is all but inanimate. When she speaks, her 'spectral' voice echoes out from her body – from that 'void of absence' – and indicates a subjectivity that cannot be denied. Furthermore, the voice is what Žižek calls a 'partial object', a unique object attached to a bodily (here oral) drive, with a privileged relationship to the Real: '[partial objects] manifest the real of the drives; they impress their singularity on us; and, albeit traumatically, they communicate enjoyment'.[76]

Envisaging a psychic link between voice and enjoyment is especially pertinent in relation to medieval thought, in which linguistic and sexual promiscuity were conceptually linked. Laurie Finke, in an analysis based on the *fabliaux* but nevertheless pertinent here, suggests that the permeability of the female body, and the accessibility and openness of female sexuality, cannot be separated from a preoccupation with female speech, for both linguistic and sexual transgression are 'powerful symbols of social chaos'.[77] Hermengart's objection – her linguistic transgression – thus reminds us of the possibility of her sexual transgression, described earlier in this chapter. Indeed, that scene follows hot on the heels of this one in the narrative so that the linguistic foreshadows the sexual. Another passage, evoking a similar eliding of the linguistic and the sexual, occurs in *Girart de Vienne*. When the Duke of Burgundy dies, his widow travels to court to ask Charlemagne for a new husband and, to Girart's horror, she expresses a preference for him: to Charlemagne she says 'Girart me done' ('give me Girart', *GDV*, l. 1300) and to Girart 'prenez me a fame'

[75] *On Belief*, p. 57.

[76] Kay, *Žižek*, p. 52.

[77] 'Sexuality in Medieval French Literature', p. 361.

('take me as your wife', *GDV*, l. 1350). Girart spurns her, put off by her outspokenness, and bows to Charlemagne's decision to take her for himself. In revenge for this rejection, the newly-crowned empress extends her own foot when Girart bends to kiss the emperor's foot in a ritual acceptance of the fief of Vienne:

> Devant lou roi vait Girart le guerrier,
> si s'agenoille por sa genbe enbracier.
> Mes la duchoisse, par son outrecuidier,
> tandi son pié, si li a fet bessier […]
> tout nu a nu, ce fu grant enconbrier. (*GDV*, ll. 1465-70)

> In front of the king goes Girart the warrior, and kneels down to embrace his leg. But the duchess, by her arrogance, extended her foot and made him kiss it [directly / skin to skin], it was a great shame.

The idiomatic expression 'nu a nu' is normally reserved for encounters in the bedroom so it gives this moment of touch a sexual content.[78] The empress's linguistic transgression committed when she asked for a particular husband, melds into a tactile transgression and from there into a sexual one. The disruption caused by this 'putage' ('whoredom', *GDV*, l. 1866) ripples across the whole narrative as Charlemagne and Girart become locked in a feud.[79] Finke makes clear that representations of woman-as-chaos act as a powerful social control to silence and contain the threat of femininity, rather than acting as a force capable of subverting that control.[80] In effect, their linguistic and sexual excess is evoked in order to be refuted. It is Aymeri who eventually punishes the empress in *Girart de Vienne*; he strikes her publicly and he has to be prevented from killing her (*GDV*, ll. 1875-77). It is also Aymeri who punishes Hermengart for her oral transgression in *Les Narbonnais*:

> Aymeris l'ot, s'a la color muë,
> Hauce la palme, tele li a donee
> Desus la face qu'ele avoit coloree,
> En mi le mabre l'abasti enversee. (*LN*, ll. 433-36)

> Aymeri heard it, his colour changed. He raises his palm, and gives her such [a blow] on her face that was radiant. Onto the marble he knocked her over.

[78] In *Erec and Enide*, for example, Enide lures a treacherous count into bed (and into a trap) by saying, 'je vos voudroie ja sentir / en un lit nu a nu' ('I would like to feel you already, in a bed together naked', ll. 3394-95); and in *Ami and Amile*, when Lubias slips into bed with Ami, the poet notes that 'Lubias a les siens dras tolus / delez le conte s'a couchié nu a nu' ('Lubias took off her clothes, next to the count she lay down naked body to naked body', *AA*, ll. 1162-63).

[79] Renier swears that 'sa puterie sera chier achetee, / que France en ert essilliee et gastee' ('her whoring will be dearly paid for; France will be destroyed and laid waste because of it' (*GDV*, ll. 1967-68).

[80] 'Sexuality in Medieval French Literature', p. 362.

By striking her so hard across the face that he knocks her to the ground, he reasserts his power over her body and her voice in the most radical way possible.[81] In a cruel public transposition of the intimate touch that might occur between man and his wife, he reinstates his dominant position in the male-female hierarchy. He will brook no dissent from his wife, just as he will decide the fate of Narbonne as its lord and leader.

Having been punished so openly and violently, Hermengart readily admits to her transgression:

> Or ai ge bien vostre force esprovee.
> N'est pas oncor vostre vertu alee.
> Con j'en parlai, trop fui desmesuree. (*LN*, ll. 445-47)

> Now have I really experienced your might. Your [strength / virtue] has not yet left you. When I spoke of it, [I was too arrogant / I overstepped the mark].

She was 'desmesuree' in objecting and has now been violently persuaded to testify to the excessive nature of her resistance, thus reaffirming the power of the Law as embodied by Aymeri. In fact, by returning to Žižek's explanation of the voice, we understand that her voice was not, in fact, opposed to the Law in the first place. Žižek differentiates between a silent and a vocalised scream by reference to enjoyment and the Other.[82] The silent scream suggests a subject 'clinging to enjoyment' and refusing to exchange enjoyment for the Law (the condition of subjectivity). The vocalised scream, on the other hand 'corroborates that the choice is already made and that the subject finds himself/herself within the community'.[83] Hermengart's vocalised 'scream' confirms her structural role in, and forced collusion with, the patriarchal Law that condemns her, for her resistance actually provides the means for a public reaffirmation of that Law. In the same way, for all Aymeri's punishment of the empress leads to further feuding (she is not his wife, so he has no 'right' to touch/punish her), that feuding ultimately leads to the unification of the Christian troops and the channelling of their energies into the quashing of Saracens. The empress's sexual

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[81] For a study of a scene of domestic violence from another cycle, see Valérie Naudet's 'Quand le roi frappe la reine: a partir d'une scene de la geste des *Lorrains*' in *Le Geste et les gestes* (see CUER MA, above), pp. 443-59. Here, the king strikes the queen because she questions his judgement (this time it is on the nose and she bleeds). The queen submits immediately to the king's power, although Naudet notes that it is not without some irony that she does so – for she eventually regains the upper hand. For a general study of violence against women in medieval narratives, see Anna Roberts, (ed.), *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts* (Orlando and Miami: Florida University Press, 1998).

[82] *Enjoy Your Symptom*, p. 118.

[83] *Enjoy Your Symptom*, p. 118.

agency and resistance leads by a circuitous route to the affirmation of the very ideology by which she is disenfranchised.

Aymeri's behaviour in *Les Narbonnais* seems excessive, however, and his son, Hernaut, reacts angrily to the treatment of his mother:

> Hernaut le voit, a pou d'ire n'enraje,
> Pasa avant com hom de fier coraje.
> 'Vellart,' fet il, 'o cors avez la rage
> Qant nostre mere ferites par oltraje'. (*LN*, ll. 470-73)

> Hernaut sees it, he nearly goes mad with anger; he stepped out like a man of proud courage. 'Old man' said he, 'in your body you have rage when you struck our mother in insult'.

Hernaut accuses his father of having 'la rage', a word that implies anger to the point of madness, wildness, or loss of control. He bolsters the accusation by claiming that his father acted 'par oltraje'. 'Oltraje' means infringement, arrogance or excess in word or deed, and so conveys perfectly the exorbitance of the act itself.[84] It allows violence to seep in at a level usually marked only by the threat of it. Why? Perhaps Aymeri sees the truth in Hermengart's advice about sending the boys away, suggesting his fallibility (she is, after all, right – as he later admits (*LN*, l. 4548)). To deny Hermengart the political agency of making an informed judgement denies the fact that women were, in fact, more than capable of such decisions and responsibility in reality.[85] Or perhaps he sees the truth in her insult about his age and is afraid of that truth: after all, he *is* getting older, and *is* losing his power. He even admits later in the poem that his reputation and ability are not what they were:

> Tant con fui jone, […]
> Tant me doterent trestuit mi anemy.

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[84] Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, 12 vols (Berlin: Weidmann; Stuttgart: Steiner; Weisbaden: Steiner, 1925-2008), VI, p. 1414.

[85] Ferrante notes that women were often entrusted with the running of households while their husbands were campaigning, and that 'they did inherit land and sometimes position, and they frequently served as regents, exercising significant authority' (*To the Glory of Her Sex*, p. 4). Kimberlee Anne Campbell agrees, arguing that the dominant feudal discourse of the epic is misogynous, and at odds with reality of every-day life ('Fighting Back: a Survey of Patterns of Female Aggressiveness in the Old French *chanson de geste*' in *Charlemagne in the North* (see Bennett et al., above), pp. 241-52). See also, Sarah S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman, (eds), *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre and the Limits of Epic Masculinity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500* (London: Longman, 2002); Margaret Wade Labarge, *Women in Medieval Life: A Small Sound of the Trumpet* (London: Hamilton, 1986); and Diane Watt, *Medieval Women in their Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

> Mes or sui vielz et auques afeibly,
> Si ne me dotent vaillissant un espi. (*LN*, ll. 5161-64)

> So long as I was young, all my enemies feared me. But now that I am old, and somewhat weakened, they do not fear me worth an ear of corn.

By forcing Aymeri to reflect on his ability like this, Hermengart draws attention to the disparity between what Žižek would call his 'imbecile body' and his Symbolic role – that is, she suggests his Symbolic castration.[86] By playing upon this nameless fear, she reveals for a second the truth behind the illusion of social relationships and evokes the possible demise of Symbolic identity itself. Thus, for all the poems perpetuate and then naturalise social dichotomisations between masculine and feminine, active and passive, authoritative and marginalised, and social actor and social 'glue', they nevertheless give anxious expression to the slippery foundations of this social process. Aymeri's slap, for all it vociferously restates his masculinity, his agency and his authority, suggests, simply by being necessary, that his privileged position is not innate or natural. Rather, it depends on a sustained violence performance that keeps his woman in her place. Ordinarily, that violent performance is 'invisible', taking the form of seemingly benevolent touching that nevertheless expresses his power over his wife. It is only when that dynamic is contested that touch manifests itself as (excessive?) violence in order to reassert a domination and a social exclusion that have been temporarily contested. Ultimately, as Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries remark, 'violence is not just learnt as male activity. It is part of what actually shapes the contours of masculinity'.[87]

A Transvestite Touch

If masculine identity is a performance that is dislocated from the male body, and if femininity and the female body are similarly produced in accordance with an over-arching ideological structure, then similarly femininity can be detached from the female body. In fact, femininity does have the potential for slippage in the poems, and can seep into the world of men to mark defective knights, or those who fail to embody the ideals of chivalric manhood.[88] When Charlemagne tells Naimes of his desire to attack Narbonne in *Aymeri de*

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[86] *Metastases*, p. 47.

[87] *The Sexuality of Men* (London: Pluto, 1985), p. 97. Whitehead concurs, noting that masculinities are not benign, but are implicated in practices that are oppressive, destructive and violent – even when those practices are so commonplace as to be invisible (*Men and Masculinities*, p. 35). See also Suzanne Kappeler's *The Will to Violence: The Politics of Personal Behaviour* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995). In this study of violence Kappeler pays close attention to sexual politics and states that 'violence is no exception to the rules […] in a society in which exploitation and oppression are the norm, the ordinary and the rule' (p. 8).

[88] Kay, 'Réprésentation', p. 223.

Narbonne, Naimes advises against it by saying: ‘tuit vostre home sont si las, par ma foi, / que une fame ne valent pas li troi’ (‘all your men are so tired, by my faith, that three of them are not worth one woman’, *ADN*, ll. 218-19). Similarly, the discussion has already foregrounded the way in which too-great desire can effeminise our heroes and lead them into a world of pleasure and sensuous enjoyment that the poems categorically mark feminine.

Joan Cadden’s detailed study of medical approaches to sex and gender in the Middle Ages can give us some background colouring here. Cadden turns the very idea of the ‘facts of life’ on its head, arguing that we have arrived at those facts via progressive understandings and interpretations of the body, and normative behavioural prescriptions.[89] The medieval discourses that converged to discuss matters of the body and sex – medical, philosophical, theological – had their own prerogatives and agendas so that ‘the facts’ intersected, in the end, with social constructions relating to the roles of men and women, the purpose of marriage, the road to salvation and so on.[90] In terms of ‘gender’, Cadden points to the Aristotelian and Galenic models of sexual interaction which are founded in binary oppositions, suggesting that the theories and understandings that developed from the work of these Classical writers bi-sected with the construction of medieval gender models via the creation of ‘types’ and ‘typical characteristics’ which fed into dualistic misogynistic assumptions. However, this binary approach did not involve a radical split between men and women; rather, there was a whole spectrum of possibility between the two extremes, and medieval evidence shows that ‘manly women’ and ‘womanly men’ were a common social phenomenon.[91] In Cadden’s words: ‘“manly” stands for a set of qualities derived from the notion of an ideal natural man, but applicable to women as well’.[92] Indeed, the word ‘virtue’ is etymologically rooted in the Latin ‘vir’ meaning man – so that a woman who is virtuous is behaving, on one level, like a man.[93] If we turn back to Hermengart’s admission to Aymeri after her beating – ‘n’est pas oncor vostre *vertu* alee’ (*LN*, l. 446: emphasis added) – we realise that she refers not only to his strength but also his manhood, for she had insulted both in her suggestion that he could not strap on a sword. Cadden also notes the moral investment into these categories: that is, there is a lot of extant praise for manly women – because they were deemed to have elevated themselves by such an

[89] *Meanings of Sex Difference*. Cf. Laqueur, *Making Sex*.

[90] *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 2.

[91] Although Salisbury points out that they were exceptional and, in their most radical expression (hermaphrodites), seen as ‘monstrous’ (‘Gendered Sexuality’, pp. 81-82).

[92] *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 205.

[93] See P.G.W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

appropriation.[94] On the other hand, there is scant praise for womanly men as this was seen as a debasement of some kind.[95] Referring to chivalric literature, Ad Putter observes that 'with men-become-women, the change was for the worse'. [96] What are we to make of Aymeri's transvestite performance as a Saracen princess, then?

La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne narrates the demise of our troubled hero, as the name would suggest. All the anxieties of this and previous chapters are given ample expression here, as Aymeri becomes ill, falls prey to pagan troops, and is robbed of his lands and his woman. In the passage in question, Aymeri asks Louis for help with the reconquest of Narbonne but is met with indecision and hesitation because the Saracen troops are plentiful and fierce. Luckily, Aymeri has a plan! He and his men had previously intercepted and 'liberated' a group of women who had been shipped over from Femenie for the pleasure of the Saracens at Narbonne, so Aymeri suggests dressing up in the clothes of these women, thereby gaining access to the stronghold (*LMA*, ll. 2384-402). In Aymeri's words:

> Totes ces dames ferons desconreer,
> Lor garnemenz nos convient enprunter,
> Bliauz et pailes et chainses gironez
> Que vestirons sor les aubers safrez […]
> Monterons es mulez afeutrez
> Comme puceles chanjerons nostre aler. (*LMA*, ll. 2384-93)

> We will make all these women undress, we must borrow their clothes; tunics and robes and ornate cloaks that we will don over our ornamented hauberks. We will mount harnessed mules, and like damsels we will change our [going / gait].

The men will put the female attire on top of their armour and will ride mules in order to 'go' like women. In other words, they will re-write the meaning of their bodies in line with gendered expectations for female performance – but they will remain men underneath. Or will they? At this point, Aymeri seems to understand gender strictly as a performance, one

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[94] *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 206. Also, Ferrante, *To the Glory*, pp. 3-12; Vern L. Bullough 'Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Middle Ages' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (see Bullough and Brundage, above), pp. 223-42; and Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 45-51. In the *Roman de Silence*, a narrative that charts the permeability of gendered categories in the Middle Ages, the eponymous cross-dressed knight asks herself why she would return to being a woman having elevated herself to masculine status. She also prays to God to give her strength, or rather, to strengthen that which nature has made weak (*Silence: A Thirteenth-Century Romance*, ed. by Sarah Roche-Mahdi (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), l. 5607).

[95] Although as Cadden points out, Caroline Bynum's understanding of 'Jesus as Mother' provides a notable exception (*Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 205).

[96] 'Transvestite Knights' in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York and London: Garland, 1997), pp. 279-302.

that will not affect his warrior-status because it is ultimately tied to the higher goal of reconquering his city and reclaiming his wife. Yet, the very fact that these 'possessions' have been taken from him means that he is already in a position of deficit vis-à-vis his honour and integrity; doubts about his manhood have already been raised. As Aymeri sets off for Narbonne, the poet describes him as 'la melz conbatant / qui onques fu en cest siecle' ('the best "fighteress" there ever was in this world', *LMA*, ll. 2597-98). The use of the feminine article already mocks Aymeri's masculine performance, and when narrative attention is immediately refocused on his and his men's appearance – 'comme puceles muerent lor semblant' ('like maidens they change their appearance', *LMA*, l. 2602) – an emphatically antithetical arrangement is set up between Aymeri's supposed military heroism, and the fact that he looks like a girl (a girl from 'Femenie' no less).

To make matters worse, Aymeri is dressed up specifically as Clarissant, a Saracen princess and beloved of the pagan king, Corsolt. As Aymeri approaches, Corsolt asks: 'ou est m'amie o lo cors avenant? / C'est Clarissant dont je sui desirant' ('where is my friend with the comely body? It's Clarissant of whom I'm desirous', *LMA*, ll. 2614-15), casting Aymeri in the position of desired object. As a Saracen princess, he becomes trapped in a fantasy construction of which he is more commonly the consumer, and although the disguise was only meant to be a performance, the fact that Corsolt anticipates the 'cors avenant' of his lover begins to suggest that the performance has in fact reconstructed Aymeri's body beneath.[97] Some critics have suggested that cross-dressing represents a now familiar process of evocation and denial: Michelle Szkilnik argues that the *topos* at first suggests the fluidity of gender boundaries but 'later serves to reinforce their rigidity, implying that there is an essential, a natural difference between men and women'.[98] In other words, the transvestite performance always ultimately 'fails' and highlights the naturally sexed body beneath. Ad Putter makes a similar point, noting that 'the drama of veiling and unveiling, recognition and non-recognition, permits a climactic staging of "manhood"'.[99] Thus, when Aymeri dons the female garb, rather than altering him physically, it proves that his 'real' body is implacably male beneath. Yet such arguments do not hold water here for Aymeri's body beneath *is* affected by the performance.

[97] See section 'Out There Where Metal Meets Meat' in Chapter One where I discuss the role that clothes play in the retroactive constitution of the body.

[98] 'The Grammar of the Sexes in Medieval French Romance' in *Gender Transgressions* (see Taylor, above), pp. 61-88 (p. 62). Gender boundaries are also discussed in Vern L. Bullough's 'Transvestitism in the Middle Ages' in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (New York: Prometheus, 1982), pp. 43-54.

[99] 'Transvestite Knights', p. 286.

Remembering Burns's arguments from Chapter One, the clothes that adorn a body effectively re-write its meaning, and Aymeri's body here becomes female as it is subject to the tactile attentions of a Saracen king. Corsolt approaches his woman and takes hold of her body to help her down from her horse: 'entre ses braz le descent en riant' ('in his arms he helps him dismount, laughing', *LMA*, l. 2623). The meeting is thus conducted through the ritualised (and flirtatious!) behaviour seen throughout this chapter to shape and enforce embodied subjectivity – only Aymeri is occupying the position of the female (Other). His is the open body, receptive and vulnerable to the touch of the male. Corsolt dominates the interaction, remaining active, untouched and powerfully masculine.

The encounter is further troubled by a sexual content, for Corsolt moves in to kiss his lover and is only prevented by his/her wimple (*LMA*, l. 2625). As Dinshaw maintains, unlike kisses indicating greeting and homage which are 'sexually unproblematic', those that take place in the context of an 'erotic plot' cannot be so easily fitted into a normative, heterosexual framework.[100] In this case, the interrupted kiss is highly suggestive of a touch more intimate still, and this oblique reference to an absent 'homosexual' encounter is what Dinshaw terms an 'excess' of the heterosexual paradigm. Throughout the chapter, we have seen sexual intimacy as a possibility existing only between men and women, and it is carefully circumscribed to disavow (feminine) enjoyment and desire, and to perform the domination of reckless, dangerous women by controlled and disciplined men. In this way, masculine identity is 'constituted by the performance of acts precisely coded according to normative configurations of gender and desire'.[101] Within the medieval ideological worldview, with its emphasis on marriage and procreation, normative equals heterosexual. Now, the point is not that there is an alternative sexuality framed as homosexual – indeed the term did not exist in the Middle Ages – but that moments like this in which potential (excessive) acts are suggested by narrative logic nevertheless attest to the exclusion that is the defining feature of heteronormativity itself: again, excess is the structural condition of the norm.[102] In Dinshaw's words, 'the narrative […] produces the possibility of

[100] 'A Kiss', p. 211. Cf. William Frijhoff, 'The Kiss Sacred and Profane: Reflections on a Cross-Cultural Confrontation' in *A Cultural History of Gesture* (see Bremner and Roodenburg, above), pp. 210-36. Frijhoff emphasises the shifting social meanings attached to kisses, and their occupation of a troubling, liminal space between private and public domains.

[101] 'A Kiss', p. 212.

[102] According to some critics, homoeroticism is latent in all masculine identity – indeed masculine identity is structured by its denial. See, for example, Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford's 'Introduction' in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. by Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), pp. 9-20.

homosexual relations only to – in order to – preclude it, in order to establish heterosexuality as not just the only sexual legitimacy but a principle of intelligibility itself'.[103] In this case, the possibility of a (homo)sexual touch is negated and replaced by a violent one: without warning, Aymeri 'tret l'espée qui li pendoit au flanc; / par mi chief en feri l'amirant' ('took the sword that hung at his side; into the head he struck the emir with it', *LMA*, ll. 2626-27). He thus reframes the encounter as exaggeratedly masculine and confirms his man-/knight-hood.

The suggestion of hypermasculinity brings us to another of Dinshaw's works, *Getting Medieval*, where her reading of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* shows that within heteronormative paradigms, homosexual possibility is foreclosed by hypermasculine posturing.[104] In her words, resorting to hypermasculinity uncovers the narrative's 'attempt to construct straight white maleness and armour its body'.[105] By triumphantly displaying ultra-violence, Aymeri forecloses subversive paradigms of homosexual/excessive desire and fiercely states his masculine/straight identity. And yet, as Dinshaw says, such a reliance on showy masculinity uncovers the constructedness of the gendered body despite the relentless attempts of the narrative to 'armour its body' and define its contours. Aymeri's hypermasculine performance, simply by being necessary denies the essentiality of his masculine body. What is more, sexual and violent touches are not so easily distinguished in the Narbonne poems, and indeed the intimate touches between a man and his wife have been shown to be violent, whilst sexual desire is often expressed in military terms.[106] Both forms of penetration involve the assertion of power over the passive body of the Other; both contribute to the performance of a gendered identity; both work actively to construct a heroic male body. In this way, Aymeri's aggressive penetration of Corsolt cannot be sanitised of its sexual counterpart in which he would be subject to similar ministrations from the pagan king.

Aymeri's cross-dressing and fleeting tryst with Corsolt is clearly meant to be funny because it plays on social expectations and inverts social roles.[107] Yet, on closer inspection

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[103] 'A Kiss', p. 206.

[104] *Getting Medieval*, pp. 186-89.

[105] *Getting Medieval*, pp. 188.

[106] Indeed, Murray notes that in the early Middle Ages, male sexuality was 'unbounded and uncontrolled, violent and even vicious. Sex was an act of power and aggression'. As Church influence spread, these impulses were repressed, but not eliminated ('Hiding Behind the Universal Man', p. 130).

[107] On the humour of cross-dressing see Philippe Ménard, *Le Rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p. 351; and Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 242-56. On the relationship between cross-

there is a dark side to this comedy for it taps into the insecurity that runs latent throughout the Cycle. According to Butler, the transvestite 'reveals the arbitrariness of the relations between our bodies, our dress, and our behaviour'.[108] To Marjorie Garber he/she represents a 'category crisis', or a 'failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white, Jew/Christian, noble/bourgeois, master/servant'.[109] By putting one apparent 'ground of distinction' into question, the oppositional hierarchy based upon that initial distinction is undermined and boundaries are disrupted. In the medieval context, Gaunt confirms that medieval stories involving cross-dressing 'raise the possibility that gender and the perceptions of gender are susceptible to manipulation and distortion'.[110] Putter roots this disruption of perceived categories and boundaries firmly in the body, indicating that medieval literary transvestism shows an 'awareness of the body's constant vulnerability to effeminisation'.[111] We are thus brought back to Gowling's hypothesis with which I began this chapter, and see that touching or taking hold of a man as if he were a woman actually effects that transformation. Aymeri may well wear female garb for a military purpose, but when he is manhandled by a pagan king/lover, he slips into the passive position in a pre-existing power structure. He becomes a woman, a Saracen princess, an object of Christian, male fantasy. Bodies are not as fixed as the poems would like them to be, nor can gender be fixed to those bodies in a way that negates the need for continued action. Rather, being a man involves constantly disavowing the feminine, proscribing feminine desire and performing *at all times* like a man.

Conclusions

Heroic, masculine identity in the Narbonne Cycle is structurally dependent on the tactile disavowal of the feminine in all its guises: maternal, sexual, desiring, traumatically Other. And yet, if women are excluded from the social arena, they nevertheless remain stubbornly present in the narratives. If they are 'naturally' inferior to their male counterparts by dint of their fickle sexuality and irrationality, they also need to be reminded of this inferiority through relentless dominant acting. If they are passive and open, it is because their bodies are forced to accept the touches of the men (the knights and the poets) that police their

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dressing, the inversion of roles, and comic subversion see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[108] *Gender Trouble*, p. 128-29.

[109] *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 16.

[110] *Gender and Genre*, p. 283. Gaunt also makes the point that once this distinction collapsed, other cultural divisions legitimised by it were likely to follow (p. 281).

[111] 'Transvestite Knights', p. 287.

existence. If they are 'naturally' different, their natural femininity refuses to remain attached to their womanly bodies and can seep into the male domain, staining those who fail to perform. Given this room for contestation and slippage in the social dichotomisation of gender and gendered roles, epic women can provide a perspective from which a 'critique of the dysfunctional dominant masculine ideology and its construction of masculinity is offered'.[112] Certainly, by short-circuiting the epic process of gender dichotomisation and naturalisation, women blur the boundaries of the warrior community and ask questions of a masculine ideology that simultaneously disgustedly rejects, relies on and enjoys her body, her desire and her sexuality. Occupying the space of the Other, women represent one of the founding exclusions of warrior aristocratic identity – but, given that the feminine can mark defective knights, that alterity is really a reflection of the very things that knights abhor in themselves.

Another founding exclusion of warrior aristocratic identity in the Narbonne Cycle is, of course, the rejection of paganism in favour of Christianity. The Saracen, like the woman, exists in a fraught relationship with the Christian knight: both feared and desired, both rejected and embraced, both constitutive and destructive of heroic identity. Did not Aymeri's cross-dressing foreground the Saracen Corsolt's key role in Aymeri's emasculation and social destruction? By dressing as a Saracen princess, Aymeri's transgression was two-fold, crossing boundaries of religious, as well as gendered, identification. Indeed, the two were elided for, as Cohen proposes, one kind of alterity can be written as another: racial, sexual, religious and moral difference all cluster together as the constitutive outside of the epic community: all threaten to destroy it.[113] On that note, let us turn to a consideration of the perfidious invaders from the pagan lands.

[112] Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 63. See also Sinclair, who notes that 'the emphasis on "monologic masculinity" in the context of a genre that does, nonetheless, admit and acknowledge the importance of the maternal input makes evident the epic's dissimulation and problematising of its own genealogical structure' (*Milk and Blood*, p. 61).

[113] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-23 (p. 19).

Chapter Four – Bodies, Boundaries and Blood

Introduction

> Violence is a corporeal experience, involving the collision of bodies, the extension of touch (painful or injurious) into spaces and places where it is not welcome. Violence, then, involves […] the transgression of bodily boundaries – of skin, of muscle, of visceral tissue – by hands, fists, feet, or weapons.[1]

> As long as the other exists, war will be necessary.[2]

Blood oozes from between the lines of the *chansons de geste* since the poems, concerned with the military glamour of their heroes, glorify war and violence.[3] Battles are described admiringly as 'granz' or 'fier' and bellicosity is valued as a noble, praise-worthy characteristic.[4] Violence is a source of pride and admiration, and the more fiercely a hero

[1] Hatty, *Masculinities*, p. 47.

[2] A.J. Coates, *The Ethics of War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 45.

[3] Indeed, Coates suggests that epic, as a genre, expresses an ideology in which 'individuals are thought to achieve a fulfilment in war that is denied them in peace'. In this context, war is ultimately valued for its own sake, 'for the excitement that is unique to war and in comparison with which pacific pursuits seem insipid' (*Ethics of War*, pp. 50-51).

[4] 'Grant fu et fiere la bataille' ('The battle was great and [proud / fierce]', *ADN*, l. 1769). This is a common formula, variations of which are found across the Cycle. Its formulaic nature should not be seen as detracting from its persuasiveness as a glorification of war, but rather the very fact that such a sentiment is normalised as a formula speaks of an ideology in which war is expected and desirable. An encomiastic passage points

attacks his enemies, the more eulogising is the poet.[5] Indeed, Charlemagne, Emperor of the Frankish realm and defender of the Christian faith, is distinguished in *Aymeri de Narbonne* by his effectiveness at killing: 'meint Sarrazin et meint paien felon / fist il livrer a grant destrucïon' ('many Saracens and many traitorous pagans did he have delivered into great [ruin / suffering]', *ADN*, ll. 80-81).[6] Moreover, the violence that our heroes engage in is particularly visceral and raw: as opponents draw together there is a palpable sense of bodies clashing as they hack, slash, thrust, slice, cut and cleave through their foes. Limbs and even heads are severed, eyes are gouged out, blood and brains spill from gaping wounds, and broken bodies pile up in the dirt. With our 'modern' sensibility, we may recoil at the goriness and bloody grotesqueness of such descriptions, at the poetic delight taken in them, and at the fact that dismembering pagans is cited as a way to win praise. Guidot suggests that long, gruesome battle-scenes 'ennuient sensiblement le lecteur moderne' and Kay also suggests that such scenes (and presumably the glee taken in depicting them) perhaps put off some potential readers of the *chansons de geste*; such violence is too excessive, too intimate, too bloody, too unpredictable, too 'medieval'.[7] Given modern discomfort over (medieval) violence, the Narbonne Cycle seems to speak of touch gone mad: how can we fail to be horrified by such a perversion of tactility? How can physical contact have ever been so distorted, so chaotic, so radical?

In line with my broad approach to the relationship between tactility and identity, I want to suggest that perhaps the warmongering of the poems is neither as chaotic nor as perverse as it might appear. For a start, what is dissimulated by our own political and moral discourses, and by our skewed media perspective, is the universal truth that 'the characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing'.[8] We cannot simply take the

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out that Aymeri 'ne fu sanz guerre .I. seul an aconpli' ('he did not complete a single year without war', *ADN*, l. 38).

[5] 'Qui la veïst cuens Aimeri le fier, / paiens ocirre au brans forbiz d'acier, / testes et braz, et poinz, et piez tranchier, / mout le deüst aloser et proisier!' ('whosoever saw Count Aymeri the proud there killing pagans with his sword of burnished steel, slicing off heads and arms, and hands, and feet, much should he praise and esteem him!', *ADN*, ll. 1168-71).

[6] Charlemagne is praised again soon after for the fact that he has never met a pagan king in battle and not killed him (ll. 91-99).

[7] Bernard Guidot, *Recherches sur les chansons de geste au XIIIe siècle: d'après certaines ouvres du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, 2 vols (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence: 1986), I, p. 123. Conversely, he notes that a medieval audience could be expected to enjoy such scenes: 'un auditoire médiéval devait s'y délecter sans réserve' (p. 123); Kay, *Political Fictions*, p. 49.

[8] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta 1999), p. xiii. Cf. Dave Grossman's section title: 'Killing is what war is all about' (*On*

savagery of war *per se* and assign it to a 'dark' past from which we have evolved as enlightened citizens. Indeed, George Kassimeris suggests that 'the [twentieth] century will go down in history as one of the most gruesome and murderous centuries'.[9] To begin to understand our revulsion towards 'barbaric', medieval violence, Miller's description of violence in terms of 'efficiency' is useful; he notes that modern technology has allowed weapons to become more efficient and to kill without damaging the 'external integrity' of the body to the extent found in the poems.[10] In his account, 'broken bodies, partial bodies, are the stuff of horror and require great force' meaning that the effect is of greater violence, rather than simply a different 'type' of violence. However, because in the Middle Ages more 'humane' possibilities for the taking of life were simply not available, we cannot use modern expectations regarding levels of 'acceptable violence' to judge actions in these poems.[11] Moreover, the distancing effect of guns, artillery and bombing has reduced the need for, and likelihood of, hand-to-hand combat.[12] Instinctive to us is the idea that killing at close range is more violent and more appalling than a long-range strike:

> We believe that if you can see your victim die before you then your own mental state is more intensely focused, more willing to visit pain, and hence more violent than the disposition of the person who is able to harm those he cannot see.[13]

In other words, spatial distance allows us moral distance from the action engaged in. Conversely, in the *chansons*, there is a pride taken in meeting the enemy face-to-face, in making contact with him and entering into an intimate struggle to the death. By re-thinking these encounters in terms of touch and identity – figuring violence as a radical version of

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Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (Boston and London: Back Bay, 1996), p. 93).

[9] 'The Warrior's Dishonour' in *Warrior's Dishonour: Barbarity, Morality and Torture in Modern Warfare*, ed. by George Kassimeris (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1-18 (p. 2). Cf. Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, p. 195.

[10] Miller, *Humiliation*, p. 68. A brief glance at Ernst Friederich's 1924 anti-war polemic *Krieg dem Kriege* – a collection of photographs from WWI – dramatically proves that efficiency does not always follow inevitably from 'technology'. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, war seems to be characterised by the use of shells, landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) – all notable for the damage they do to the body's external integrity. Žižek makes reference to the modern disavowal of messy carnage as 'the suspension of "raw" physical violence', or the 'fundamental fantasy of contemporary technological warfare' (*Metastases*, p. 73). Bluntly, in Susan Sontag's words, 'war tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*' (*Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 7 – original emphasis).

[11] Whether any life-taking can be considered 'humane' is of course a moot point – but I use the term here to refer to those methods deemed to inflict the least suffering on their victims: the lethal injection, for example.

[12] For an account of twentieth-century aerial warfare, see Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. by Linda Haverty Rugg, rev. edn (London: Granta, 2002).

[13] Miller, *Humiliation*, p. 69. See also Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 36-39.

touch, not an exception to tactile norms – we can begin to understand the fundamental and constitutive role that violence plays in the negotiation of bodies, boundaries and identity (something we, in the twenty-first century, would perhaps rather ignore).[14] From this perspective, the blood and guts of the epic battlefield begin to appear, if not less brutal, then perhaps less unpredictable and 'barbaric'.[15]

The violence of this chapter arises from the clashing of our heroes with the Saracen, or pagan, enemy; it is the violence that has elsewhere been repressed or displaced. Channelled outside of the (Christian) community, it is the 'justified', moral violence of defence of the faith. And yet, because it is embroiled in the expression and subsequent defence of community and identity, and because community and identity are unstable concepts in terms of boundaries, it is not unambiguous or socially unproblematic. The poems give expression to this broad, cultural anxiety: on the one hand they try desperately to ground Franco-Christian identity in the violent touching, rending and destruction of the Saracen enemy; whilst on the other, they anxiously admit to the instability of the very boundary that divides the two camps and the two cultural bodies. To explore this tension, I first outline the power dynamics at stake in violent clashing and think about the place of the body in such encounters. Finding that the body is used as a metaphor for *social* bodies in the Cycle, it becomes clear that violent touching (as in previous chapters) establishes difference, this time between Christian and Saracen bodies – both personal and cultural. And yet, I conclude that the violent touch of war can also erase difference, so that knights locked in battle become indistinguishable the one from the other. In the final section of the chapter, in a discussion informed by the Girardian concept of mimesis, I suggest that cross-cultural difference is erased by the rhetoric of feudal values – to which knights Christian and Saracen alike subscribe. Finally, I return to A.J. Coates's assertion that the Other makes war 'necessary', arguing that this logic relies on the assumption of a fully differentiated, naturalised Other who pre-exists a dialectical relationship with the self. Instead, I suggest that war and violence break out as communities and individuals attempt to manage their relationship with the Other – that is, with the Other as culturally constructed fantasy-image.

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[14] Whitehead also makes the connection between violence and identity, saying that violence can never be a mere psychological aberration, because dominant forms and codes of masculinity legitimise it. My argument goes a step further, however, by suggesting that masculinity is (violently) produced through forms and codes that demand violent action. Indeed, masculinity is legitimised by violence (*Men and Masculinities*, p. 38).

[15] For an exploration of the moral implications of 'barbarism' – both as exceptional excess and measured strategy of domination – see Graham Long, 'Barbarity and Strategy' in *Warrior's Dishonour* (see Kassimeris, above), pp. 113-26.

Violent Touching

It may appear somewhat far-fetched to envisage violence as 'touch', and yet previous chapters have already uncovered the violence that subtends interactions performing social domination – even if the touch appears benign, affective or companionable. In fact, the language that we speak today acknowledges the place of violence on the tactile spectrum through idiomatic phrases such as 'she didn't lay a finger on him', or 'he didn't touch her'. In these instances, the nature of the 'touching' is abusive, and remarkably the very same idiom is used in *Les Narbonnais*. During the siege of Narbonne a Saracen, Clargis, agrees to escort two Christian warriors out through the enemy camps in order to seek help from Charlemagne in Paris. As they pass through the besieging armies, Clargis warns his men to refrain from harming them: 'Franc Sarrazin, gardez, n'en tochiez mie! / Je sui Clargis' ('[Noble / freeborn] Saracens, beware, do not touch [us / them] at all! I am Clargis', *LN*, ll. 5434-35). Similarly, in *Girart de Vienne*, Roland and Oliver approach each other to fight, and as Oliver taunts him, Roland can barely restrain himself: 'Rollant l'antant […] ferir le vost, mes ne l'ose touchier' ('Roland hears him; he wants to strike him, but does not dare touch him', *LN*, ll. 4182-83). In both cases touch is deliberately invoked as a type of contact that might occur between enemies. In the first example it is assuaged with a few careful words of self-identification; in the second, it is regulated by the rules of combat. Touch and violence are inter-implicated, then; they are enmeshed in – and regulated by – the framework of structured, performative interactions that are expressive of social relationships in the poems, and thus of the Symbolic order itself. We can therefore employ the same paradigms of analysis used in Chapter Three's 'Touch of Power' to read encounters that take place on the battlefield. There, the encounters were between men and women, here they are between Christian men and Saracen men; yet in both cases, they are expressive of masculine, heroic identity in opposition to a structural Other.

The violent touch of war is one that dominates, invades, controls and ultimately penetrates the enemy.[16] Simply, the Franco-Christian warriors will approach their enemies, striking and slashing them in order to win victory and thus assert their superiority over them. As they enter battle we are told in *Les Narbonnais* that the Franks 'antre paiens se vont ademetant, / chaplent et fierent sor la gent mescreant' ('go hurling themselves among the pagans: they wage war and strike on the faithless people', *LN*, ll. 7265-66). The pagans on the receiving end of this onslaught suffer shame at being touched in this way for it renders

[16] For a discussion of tactile communication in war, see Finnegan who notes that 'warfare, rape, or outright physical coercion communicate through forcibly applied touch, exerting tangible pressures to control others' bodies in ways only too well understood by participants on both sides' ('Tactile Communication', p. 21).

them subordinate to their attackers. The fact that social interaction in the medieval setting resulted in either amity or enmity – but never indifference or neutrality – was discussed in Chapter Two, and it was also made clear that social interactions and relationships were calibrated along the lines of the lord-vassal bond with one party always assuming a higher-status position. In this brief encounter, it goes without saying that the relationship is of enmity, and within this structural dynamic the Franks assume the high-status position of lords over the pagan 'vassals'.[17] The pagan subordination, moreover, is not expressed actively (as was shown to be the case between Frankish knights) since they are forced into it by a touch that renders their bodies passive and submissive. If they do not take measures to reverse the situation, they will suffer pain, injury and possibly death – in addition to the social shaming of their forced inferiority. Elsewhere their physical suffering is described in detail; this scene tells of an attack led by Guibert:

> Tante hanste fraindre et tant escu croissir,
> Tant bon auberc desmailler et faillir,
> Tant poing, tant pié, tant teste tolir,
> Sanc et cervele contre terre jalir,
> L'un mort sor autre trebuchier et chaïr. (*LMA*, ll. 1903-7)

> So many lances broken and so many shields [clashed / crossed], so many good hauberks taken apart and failing. So many fists, so many feet, so many heads taken off: blood and brains fall to the earth; one corpse is falling and collapsing on top of the other.

Scenes such as this, using the anaphoric 'tant' construction, are common throughout the poems, and the formula always invokes the irresistible heroism of the Frankish heroes over their enemies.[18] As above, they are the active party: they destroy their opponents' armour, rendering their bodies vulnerable; then they move in and touch the exposed flesh, cleaving and hacking until pagan blood and matter spills. Probing further into the power dynamics of the interaction, we find that this disruption of the pagans' body boundaries is doubly significant. Chapter Three discussed the medieval construction of the female body as open, passive and weak, needing to be governed by a controlled, self-regulated male. Female

[17] Miller notes that there are always three roles in violence: victimiser, victim, and observer. This trinity fits epic violence, given its correlation with honour and display. He further notes that the dichotomy victimiser-victim maps onto the social dichotomy male-female, so that those occupying the role of victim find themselves feminised (*Humiliation*, pp. 53-56).

[18] Another example can be found in *Aymeri de Narbonne*: 'tant hante frete, tant escu estroé, / et tant hauberc derout et desafré, / tant braz trenchié, tant pong, tant pié copé, / tant Sarrazin trebuchié et versé!' ('so many lances broken and so many shields pierced, and so many hauberks destroyed and broken; so many arms severed, so many fists, so many feet cut off; so many Saracens knocked from their horses and felled!', *ADN*, ll. 4213-16). Cf. *LMA* (ll. 1936-38); *AC* (ll. 58-64); and *EG* (ll. 358-59).

weakness within and beyond the Middle Ages is conceptually linked to the porousness of her body:

> Women's bodies threaten to erupt blood, water, milk and [other] secretions […] and this threatens to undermine Western philosophy's conception of the body as individual, self-contained, and infinitely controllable, and thus male.[19]

Conversely, as Holliday and Hassard here conclude, the male body is characterised by intense bodily regulation, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the policing of its boundaries. Butler makes the connection between embodied subjectivity and the body's boundary clear when she contends that 'the body is not a "being" but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated'.[20] Clad in armour, the masculine, knightly body is constructed as – or regulated to appear to be – hard, taut and self-reliant, and impermeable so long as the knight's performance is sustained: chivalry 'holds the body in tension', to use Cohen's terminology.[21] In the wider medieval context, 'la maîtrise du corps' was promoted as an ideological ideal, and members of the *clergie* were forbidden, for example, from spilling blood or semen in order to retain a strictly impermeable body.[22] Thus self-control took on a moral, as well as a gendered, meaning and to 'leak' was to be feeble, effeminate, unregulated, degenerate.[23] In this way, the bleeding,

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[19] Holliday and Hassard, 'Contested Bodies', p. 5.

[20] *Gender Trouble*, p. 139.

[21] *Machines*, p. 75. This tension disavows the material reality of the flesh which was 'animated by movements of hot and cold, dark and light fluids in changing distributions; blood, semen, tears, sweat, breast milk, bile, and urine were all version of this same living materiality' (Gail Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993): cited by Cohen in *Machines*, p. 75). For full discussion of the body's boundaries in relation to armour see Chapter One.

[22] Le Goff and Truong, *Histoire du corps*, p. 47. In anthropology, blood is often found to denote impurity and in this way bleeding becomes problematic. Menstrual blood is especially 'impure' and this adds to the moral investment into non-leaking bodies – see Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 35-37; and Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 121 and 147-51. For a discussion of the sacrificial aspect of blood (and its association with both life and death; regeneration and decay) with reference to Antiquity, see Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

[23] Mark Breitenberg provides a thoughtful account of this phenomenon, locating masculinity in the strict regulation of boundaries – both the man's own, and those of the women over whom he has authority (*Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 35-62 and 97-126). In terms of the soldier, Theweleit describes the 'sustained erection of his whole body' which closes it off against the insipient chaos of femininity (*Male Fantasies*, I, p. 244); and James William Gibson suggests that the hero's body remains intact, pure and whole while his enemy 'confesses its evil by exposing all its rotten spilled fluids' (*Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), p. 111).

seeping bodies of the pagans display immorality, femininity and weakness, and the passage at once attests to their emasculation and social death, and confirms their Otherness.

Moreover, we might compare the enumeration of the pagans' body parts to the description of Hermengart's body as discussed in Chapter Three. There, I argued that the violent fragmentation of Hermengart's (Other) body allowed it to be presented as an object of desire to a male audience/subject: she was dissected in order to render her amenable to a Christian male fantasy. In the same way, the dismembered pagan body is a fantasy-body that represents the victory and glory of Christian masculinity. In *Les Narbonnais*, Guillaume fights himself out of a tight corner by disfiguring all in his path: 'au paiens coupe et piez et mains et vis. / Cui il consiut, bien est de la mort fis' ('from the pagans he cuts feet and hands and faces: whoever he chases is certain of death', *LN*, ll. 6995-96).[24] The description, moving from fists, to hands, to face, offers up the bleeding pagan body as a spectacle attesting to the power of its destroyer: its ugly incoherence confirms Guillaume's noble, beautiful heroism.[25] In *Le Siège de Barbastre*, the dichotomy between heroic beauty and pagan ugliness is rendered more explicit. This is from the opening sally when Aymeri leads his men out from Narbonne to fend off the pagan attack:

> Ce jour y veïssiés tante lance brisier
> Et nos gentis François sor Sarrasins aidier,
> A destre et a senestre as brans les chans cerchier,
> Amont par mi ces elmes ferir et chaploier,
> Ces chiés et ces viaires laidir et detranchier! (*SDB*, ll. 218-22)

> This day one could see so many lances being broken and our noble Franks battling against Saracens: searching the fields to the right and to the left with their swords, striking and battling among these helms, making ugly and cutting up heads and faces!

Again, the Christian warriors are active; they move towards the enemy and strike first. They search the battlefield, extending their swords, the phallic symbols of their status, power, and authority, using them to assert that power and authority over the enemy. They first strike at the helmets of the invaders, eventually cutting up their faces, rendering them

[24] Cf. Gautier's destruction of pagans in *La Chevalerie Vivien*. Here the progressive wounding focuses on the enemy's internal organs: 'del hauberc li a ronpu la maille; / perce le foie, le ceur et la coraille', ('he tore the mail of his hauberk, pierces the liver, the heart and the innards', ll. 560-61)

[25] And good knights *are* beautiful: Aymeri is described thus in *Aymeri de Narbonne*: 'n'ot plus bel home en .XIIII. païs; […] Le regart fier, cler et riant le vis ('there was not a more beautiful man in fourteen countries: [he had] a noble look, and a clear and smiling face', *ADN*, ll. 691-93). Notice the difference compared to descriptions of female beauty: Aymeri's beauty is abstract, and linked inevitably to the characteristics of nobility and honour. Immediately after this brief physical description, the poet shifts his focus to Aymeri's personality.

incoherent, unintelligible and ugly: to return to the language of a previous chapter, they 'smash their neighbours' faces'.[26] Although fantasy here performs the same operation as with women – rendering the Other into a disjunctive assemblage of parts – the results are antithetical: women are made beautiful whilst Saracens are made ugly. Yet each process asserts and confirms the masculine subjectivity of the Christian hero over and against a diminished, weakened and violently controlled (Other) body.[27] By rendering their Saracen enemies into bloody fragments, Aymeri and his men aggressively perform upon them the 'bodily disaggregation' that is the undoing of their knightly (albeit pagan) identity.[28]

Žižek's work on the body and its insides can help nuance this idea: for him, the subject's normal relationship with the living body relies on the 'radical separation between the surface of the skin and what lies beneath it', noting the disgust he may experience imagining 'what goes on just under the surface of a beautiful naked body'.[29] His point of view corresponds to the Freudian understanding of the ego, outlined in Chapter Two, whereby the ego is identified with the surface of the body, at once shaped by perceptions sensed on the body's outline (the skin), and in a sense projecting the very idea of that surface. Relating to bodies – both self and other – thus involves suspending what goes on inside them, using the surface as a 'place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring'.[30] Žižek calls this suspension an 'effect of the symbolic order' because it is a process that allows the body to appear coherent and intelligible, disavowing the primordial chaos of its bloody messiness, and allowing it to be transcended in the assumption of a Symbolic role: 'this suspension excludes the Real of the life-substance, its palpitations: one of the definitions of the Lacanian Real is that it is the flayed body, the palpitation of raw, skinless red flesh'.[31] Thus, by reducing the pagans to a (Real) vision of bleeding flesh and broken bone, the Christian warriors can revel in the success of their strictly disciplined, whole (Symbolic) bodies. By invoking the pre-Symbolic messy chaos of the Real body and ascribing it to an abjected Other, they enact this primary disavowal-suspension, thereby reiterating their Symbolic identification and illusory bodily

[26] 'Smashing the Neighbour's Face' is a section title of Žižek's essay 'Neighbours'. In Chapter Two it was noted that it is one way of dealing with Otherness ('Neighbours', p. 142).

[27] Thinking of the pagan as an abjected figure of Otherness, or a monster, 'the defeat and beheading of the monster is […] a violent moment of gender assertion, a triumph of desubstantiating ascesis (gendered masculine) over fleshly excess (gendered feminine)' (Cohen, *Of Giants*, pp. 68-69).

[28] See Chapter One.

[29] *Metastases*, p. 116.

[30] *Ego and the Id*, p. 19.

[31] *Metastases*, p. 116.

coherence.[32] The ambiguous, troubling desire of the Real, now embodied by the disfigured, defeated pagans, is then shifted to the heroes or 'made to stick on [those] who [present] this […] object for visual consumption'.[33] In this way, the heroes harness the power of the monstrous bodies they have created and destroyed.

The victorious moment passes quickly, however, and in this example the pagans soon overwhelm the Aymerides: Bueves is taken prisoner and Aymeri returns home defeated. Cohen suggests that a moment of 'becoming male' such as the defeating or dismembering of the enemy already contains within it a 'potential point of future collapse' – because no victory is definitive.[34] Rather, the hero must fight again (and again) in order relentlessly to perform a gendered identity and to root it in a body marked as male. To take another example, when Aymeri agrees to enter into single combat with the Saracen emir during the siege of Narbonne, the young Roman offers to fight in his stead, saying: 'chevalier sui de novel adobé; / mon hardement vodroie avoir prové' ('I am a newly dubbed knight, I would like to have proven my [bravery / prowess]', *LN*, ll. 4558-59). Remarkable here is the use of tense, for the conditional perfect implies that Roman wants to have *already* proved himself.[35] He wants to bypass the fact of performance and repetition, and be the hero about whom no more questions need to be asked; he wants to have secured some kind of ontological security in his heroism with one moment of fleeting contact, one act of (perfect?) violence. Yet ironically, Roman's desire is indicative of its own failure and bears witness to the anxiety at the heart of heroic subjectivity: his identity cannot be swiftly and definitively asserted with an initial, bloody victory, needing rather to be continually proven, continually reiterated in a never-ending series of encounters wherein he asserts his

[32] Similarly, Barbara Ehrenreich calls blood-letting an 'initiation rite'. In her terms, re-birth into the world of men is 'marked by the shedding of blood' (*Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (London: Virago, 1997), p. 155). Her study, however, seems to understand belonging to the world of men as being accomplished through this one act. In my terms, shedding the Other's blood is just one part of a sustained performance that iterates masculine identity.

[33] As Cohen explains, 'the stupefying pleasure of the monstrous arises from its frightening ambiguity, which invites a fascinated *jouis-sense*, an obscene enjoyment in the contemplation of its dreadful signification' (*Of Giants*, p. 67).

[34] *Of Giants*, p. 69.

[35] The interplay between tenses and chronology in the construction of the epic hero is explored by Luke Sunderland in his essay on 'The (Future) Perfect Knight'. Sunderland concludes that the present is erased by narrative insistence on past and future acts, on a heroism that is always still to come and always already past. Again, ontological heroism is impossible ('The (Future) Perfect Knight: Repetition in the *Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*' in *Rhythms: Essays in French Literature, Thought and Culture*, ed. by Peter Collier, Modern French Identities, 68 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 87-99).

superiority over abjected others. As Dinshaw makes clear, subjectivity is a battle whereby '[divides] must be erected and anxiously maintained'.[36] With this in mind, do we not sense in the formulaic 'tant' constructions discussed above a frantic, frustrated insistence in the repetitive face-smashing that belies a fundamental insecurity regarding its ultimate efficacy?

Moving from collective to individual fighting, one-on-one encounters often include details that seem to acknowledge direct engagement with an economy of tactile meaning used to display power dynamics. Here, for example, Gui takes on the pagan Gracien:

> Desoz la bocle li peçoie et porfant,
> Et le hauberc li desmaille et dement,
> Par mi le cors li mist le fer tranchant:
> Encontre terre l'abati mort sanglant!
> Puis trest l'espee par mout fier mautalant. (*ADN*, ll. 1911-15)

> He splits and shatters [his shield] below the boss, and ruptures and destroys his hauberk. Through into his body he thrusts his sharp steel; onto the ground he struck him down, bloody and dead! Then he pulls out his sword in very proud anger.

Gui's active touching prevails over his stricken opponent: passive, vulnerable and receptive, Gracien is at his mercy. Special emphasis is placed on the insertion of Gui's sword 'par mi le cors' of his adversary, and then on its retraction, showing that he has absolute control and can enter and leave the pagan's body as he chooses. An analogous passage from *Le Siège de Barbastre* has Girart striking the pagan Aquilant:

> [Il va ferir Aquilant] en l'escu de son col, que frais est et troez,
> Li haubers de son dos desrous et desserrez
> Si que par mi le cors li est li brans passez.
> Tant com hanste li dure l'a abatu es prez. (*SDB*, ll. 275-78)

> [He goes to strike Aquilant] on the shield at his neck, that is broken and has holes in it. The hauberk on his back is ripped and falling apart, so that through his body did the sword-blade pass. [With] the whole length of the lance, he struck him in the field.[37]

Here, the devastating effect of Girart's blows on the pagan's armour acts as preamble to the penetration of the body with the lance: neither metal nor flesh can resist the advances of Girart's weapon. Again, attention is paid to the way that the sword enters the enemy's body – 'par mi le cors' – and then it shifts to the lance, which Girart plunges deep into his

[36] *Getting Medieval*, p. 194.

[37] The syntax is ambiguous here and l. 278 could equally translate as 'so long as the lance held, he kept striking him in the field'. In this case the emphasis falls on the frequency of penetration, rather than the depth or power, and yet the overall effect – of an emphatic breaching of the other's boundaries – remains the same.

opponent's body. In a third case, from later in the same poem, he takes on an unnamed pagan:

> Girars fiert .I. paien sans point de delaier
> Que les armes qu'il ot ne valent .I. denier,
> Fer et fust li a fet parmi le cors baignier:
> Mort le trebusche a terre de l'aufferant destrier. (*SDB*, ll. 3329-32)

> Girart strikes a pagan without any delaying, so that the arms and armour that he has are not worth a penny to him. He made metal and wood bathe in his body, dead he fells him to the ground from his swift warhorse.

In all three encounters, it is emphasised that the Christian hero's touch breaches the boundaries of his opponent's body: with sword, lance, metal and wood he penetrates his victim, passing 'par mi le cors'.[38] As Klaus Theweleit declares, the hero is always 'poised to penetrate other bodies and mangle them in [his] embrace'.[39] He thereby hints at the sexual connotations of violence and he is not the first to do so: Girard states plainly that 'the shift from violence to sexuality and from sexuality to violence is easily effected', and in terms of the warrior, James Gibson claims that: 'sexuality is placed in the service of destruction as the hard metallic bodies of heroic warriors "open up" the enemy'.[40] Pre-empting material from section three of this chapter, Gibson explains that the 'duel is also a sexual climax'.[41] This slippage between violent and sexual penetration recalls Aymeri's encounter with Corsolt that was discussed in the closing stages of Chapter Three and in which Aymeri's violent attack was the climax of an encounter that attested to a 'narratively logical' homosexual content. Sexual touch was transposed into violent touch, and at the same time Aymeri's passive position in the suggested sexual encounter was disavowed in favour of an active role in the violent one. Leo Bersani makes clear that no subject wishes to be thought of as passive, and that the inactive, penetrated position is typically feared and shunned.[42] He refers to the passive position in homosexual contact, and his essay outlines

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[38] Another instance where the sword is 'bathed in blood' is to be found in *Les Narbonnais* where Roman fights an unnamed pagan: 'par mi le cors li a le fer bangnié' ('in the midst of [his] body he bathed the [iron / blade', *LN*, ll. 4082-84). See also *Guibert d'Andrenas*, wherein Aymeri encounters a foe and 'son espié li fet el cors baignier' ('he made his sword bathe in his body', *GDA*, l. 717).

[39] *Male Fantasies*, II, p. 191.

[40] *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 37; *Warrior Dreams*, p. 111.

[41] *Warrior Dreams*, p. 111.

[42] 'Is The Rectum a Grave?', *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism*, 43 (1987), 197-222. Ellen Mortensen draws on Bersani's work to prove that inactivity and passivity are 'taboo-laden concepts' in current feminist thought, since they are 'exclusively interpreted and associated with woman's position as victim' (*Touching Thought: Ontology and Sexual Difference* (Oxford and New York: Lexington, 2002), p. 17).

the cultural association of that role with weakness, disease and death.[43] However, the relevance of his remark to this study only highlights the slippage between Other bodies within a heteronormative framework: such bodies are subordinate, abject, queer, feminine, porous, weak. Both sexual and violent touches are implicated in the process of Othering and abjection: both are placed on a continuum of desire of/for the Other; both are constitutive of a straight, male heroic identity. In the end, the one becomes conceptually indistinguishable from the other.[44]

When Cohen discusses the killing of the monstrous Other in *Of Giants*, he charts the admiring gaze of the assembled crowd which 'quickly moves from the fragment of the giant whole to the warrior who fragmented the giant and remained whole'.[45] Following the same progression, our gaze must now fall on the hero who remained inviolate in all these passages. Distant, aloof and closed, he touches but is not touched: he strikes, but is not struck. Theweleit tells us why this is so crucial for the hero:

> The most urgent task of the man of steel is to pursue, to dam in, and to subdue any force that threatens to transform him back into the horribly disorganised jumble of flesh, hair, skin, bones, intestines and feelings that calls itself human.[46]

In other words, the knight-hero must quickly subdue the forces that threaten his tense integrity – transforming the enemy into a messy corporeality before he can do the same to him. Fittingly, when Aymeri boasts of his lifetime of heroism in *Guibert d'Andrenas*, he narrates the devastation he has wreaked on other bodies, whilst passing silently over his own physicality:

> N'a encor pas .XXV. anz passez
> Qu'a .XX. paiens fui je seul ajoustez.
> Les .X. occis, ce est la veritez,
> Et .X. en furent et plaié et navré! (*GDA*, ll. 1678-81)

> It is not yet twenty-five years that have passed, since I fought alone against twenty pagans. Ten [of them] I killed, that is the truth, and ten were wounded and injured because of it.

By ignoring his own body, Aymeri leads us to assume that he emerged unscathed from the encounter and that his 'urgent task' was successfully completed. He made contact with the

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[43] Bersani's work focuses on the cultural interpretation of the AIDS virus.

[44] The correlation between violent touching and desire will become more pronounced as this chapter proceeds.

[45] *Of Giants*, p. 66.

[46] *Male Fantasies*, II, p. 160.

Other but was not touched by him. If we are left with any doubt as to the importance of the hero's invulnerability and physical integrity in the poems, then two motifs can assuage them. The first is the recurring use of the word 'entiers' to refer to the hero's safety (and correspondingly, his victory): after Guibert's duel with Butor in *La Prise de Cordres*, Aymeri asks him 'es tu sains et entiers?' ('are you healthy and in one piece?', *PDC*, l. 2918) and Guillaume, when faced with extreme danger in *Aliscans*, laments: 'Dame Guiborc, ne me verrez entier' ('Lady Guibourc, you will not see me in one piece', *AC*, l. 134). The second is the fact that God sometimes intervenes to guarantee the integrity of His champions' bodies.[47] In *Les Narbonnais*, Guibert is attacked by Danebrun but 'Dex le gari, q'an char no pot tochier' ('God protected him, that on the flesh he could not touch [him]', *LN*, ll. 5774).[48] He is attacked again in *La Prise de Cordres*, this time by Butor, and again 'Deu[s] lou guari, c'an char ne l'a tochié' ('God protected him, so that he did not touch him on his flesh', *PDC*, l. 2883).[49] However, this emphasis on God's protection, and on the possibilities that face those who are not protected and are subjected to the enemy's touch, presents an obvious anxiety nagging at the body's boundaries. If the hero's bodily integrity has to be performed and asserted through the relentless fragmentation of the enemy, then it is not guaranteed; if it is the *sine qua non* of his symbolic existence, then so much is invested in it that it becomes a source of dread, for the hero's body must – by definition – be constantly under attack. Cohen may well describe heroism as the organisation of the *corps morcelé* into cultural coherence but he goes on to posit the impossibility of the hero's ontological security: just as the hero is represented as

[47] We can see in this the medieval religious belief that wholeness (and reassemblage) is necessary for salvation and is, indeed, God's ultimate promise to humankind. Caroline Walker Bynum observes that the horrific tortures undergone by saints and martyrs – and recounted by medieval authors like Guibert of Nogent with 'prurient horror' – end with a vision of wholeness, so that the overcoming of 'partition and putrifaction' is invested with moral, spiritual meaning (*Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992) – material cited from p. 13). James R. Simpson also discusses the medieval association of bodily incoherence and sin in his study of the *Renart* narratives (*Animal Body, Literary Corpus: The Old French Roman de Renart*, Faux Titre, 110 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 5-32.

[48] *Garir* can translate as 'to protect', 'to save', 'to guarantee', 'to defend' or 'to heal'. For clarity, I will use 'protect', but these additional connotations should be borne in mind. For discussion of the concept see Wolfgang G. Van Emden, '"E cil de France le cleiment a guarant": Roland, Vivien et le theme du guarant', *Olifant*, 1:4 (1974), 21-47.

[49] Before they engage in battle, the warriors elsewhere pray to God to grant them this protection from the enemy's touch. Roman begs: 'garis mon cors par la teue vertu, / que ne l'ociënt cil paien mescreü' ('protect my body by your [strength / virtue], that the faithless pagans do not kill it', *LN*, ll. 4826-27) and later 'garis mon cors, que il ne soit ocis / ne de paiens afolé ne malmis' ('protect my body so that it may not be killed, nor wounded or [mistreated / manhandled] by pagans', *LN*, ll. 4832-33).

'invulnerable' (untouchable?), he is also 'always in danger of decapitation, dismemberment, and fragmentation'.[50] If chivalry holds the body in tension, then it also places it in situations in which it is likely to fall apart.

Crucially, just as God protects a hero's body from unwanted touches, so demons and devils often intervene to safeguard their favourite Saracens. In *Les Narbonnais*, Gadifer implores Mahomet to 'garis mon cors' ('protect my body', *LN*, l. 4605), and when an unnamed pagan comes under attack from Guillaume, such protection is offered him: Guillaume 'fiert le paien sor l'iame de Pavie, […] mes li deables li a fet garantie' ('strikes the pagan on his helmet from Pavia, but the devil offered him protection', *LN*, ll. 7190-93).[51] In *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, Corsolt receives such help in a battle with Aymeri, and when our hero strikes him, 'bien le garissent deable de la mort, / car en char ne le toche' ('well do demons protect him from death, for on the flesh it does not touch him', *LMA*, ll. 1185-86). When the pagans receive help, it is difficult for our heroes to regain the upper hand, and in the last example Aymeri is ultimately defeated by Corsolt. The pagan seizes the chance to touch Aymeri's body in a way that will bring him dishonour, striking him in front of the crowd and thus displaying publicly his power over the Frankish warrior. Significantly, Aymeri is 'molt afebloie del sanc qu'il ot perdu' ('greatly enfeebled by the blood that he had lost', *LMA*, l. 1165). Now that the boundaries of his body have been breached, his strength literally dribbles out with his blood and he is left diminished, weak and vulnerable. Later, in a passage discussed already in Chapter One, the pagans bring him to the walls and torture him in order to force Hermengart into capitulation: 'en .XXX. lex li trenchent la char vive, / li sans en saut en .X. lex o en .XV.' ('in thirty places they cut his living flesh: the blood springs up in ten or fifteen places', *LMA*, ll. 1398-99). The cutting is clearly not meant to kill him (and he does not die during the ordeal), but the theatrical effect of the repeated stabbing, and of his red blood seeping from gashes in his white flesh, clearly advertises his defeat at the hands of the pagan.[52] The cruel, repeated entering of Aymeri's flesh utilises the meanings invested into tactile encounters because the fact that

[50] 'Armour', p. 2. Cf. Holliday and Hassard: 'because bodies are never fixed, or stable, but rather organised and regulated by discourse, they are always contested' ('Contested Bodies', p. 7).

[51] Cf. *LN* (ll. 7193-94).

[52] A comparable episode occurs in *Les Narbonnais*: here Aymeri's son Guibert is captured, stabbed and put on a cross to force Aymeri into giving up the city. Again, the penetration of Christian body is stressed: 'de la char blanche en est li sans volez' ('blood flowed from the white flesh', *LN*, l. 5029). In this case, as Guibert piteously calls out to his father, blaming him for allowing this to happen: 'a vos linages sera il reprovez, / Quant mon torment a vos eulx esgardez' ('the blame will fall on your lineage since you watch my torment with your [own] eyes', *LN*, ll. 5033-34). The implication is that Aymeri, as Guibert's lord, father and protector, should guarantee and defend the body of his vassal: if Guibert is shamed, so too is Aymeri.

Corsolt can inflict so much damage implies time, consideration and total control. Aymeri's nakedness exacerbates the sexual content of the scene, of course: vulnerable, passive and leaking, Aymeri is at the absolute mercy of his masterful, male captor whose body remains closed, distant and untouched. The stage is set for Aymeri's transformation into Corsolt's woman later in the poem (see Chapter Three).

In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, a poem in which Christian identity is quite obviously threatened by the encircling hordes of pagans, there is a recurring play on issues of boundaries, bodies and heroism. As Vivien looks out across the battlefield, he sees three hundred of his men in dire straits:

> N'i ad icil n'ait sanglante sa resne,
> E d'entre ses quisses n'ait vermeille sele;
> Devant as braz sustenent lur bouele,
> Que lur chevals nes desrunpent par tere. (*CDG*, ll. 496-99)

> There is not one who does not have bloody reins and who between his thighs does not have a crimson saddle. In front, in their arms, they hold their bowels, so that their horses do not trample them on the ground.

These knights are frankly falling apart; their bodies are visibly decomposing, breaking down into messy, unsightly parts. The blood and viscera of some of the knights are spilling forth and risk being trampled by their horses; the brains of others dribble out from their mouths (*CDG*, l. 531). Rather pitifully, they tie bandages around their wounds, trying to reorganise their jumbled bodies into a clean order, to reconstruct their boundaries (*CDG*, ll. 520-21). Injured knights in *Aymeri de Narbonne* attempt the same thing, and bind their gaping wounds before enclosing them once more in armour (*ADN*, ll. 4270-72). These acts, of course, anticipate Vivien's spectacular demise in *Aliscans*, where the wounded hero stuffs his bowels back into his body and ties them in with his pennon (*AC*, ll. 68-73). He thereby attempts to re-police the borderlines of his body, to undo the damage done to them, and to re-write their meaning in line with Symbolic, paternal authority (captured, rather neatly, in the image of the pennon). Paradoxically, however, it is Symbolic authority that has led Vivien, and the Christian soldiers, into battle in the first place. Even though this horrifying disintegration is the sort of risk faced by heroes when they go to war, they cannot choose not to fight: they *must* put their bodies on the line.[53] As we have already seen in Chapter One, the chivalric vocation was not a role that noble

[53] Jane Gilbert, writing of Roland, makes clear that his heroism *commits* him to remaining on the battlefield, come what may (*Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* – forthcoming). Obviously there is a narrative dimension in operation too: as Daniel remarks 'physical danger is the mainstay of the excitement' (*Heroes and Saracens*, p. 18).

youngsters elected, but rather it was 'their very mode of being, an ideological conditioning'.[54] They were subject to the coercions and regulations of the chivalric order, and they were produced as subjects as a result of that regulation. Consequently, failure to perform in battle is a failure of heroism, masculinity, subjectivity and self. Cowardice leads to a fate worse than death, as evidenced by Guillaume's reasoning when he comes face-to-face with two pagan kings:

> Quant .XV. rois ne m'ont de riens mesfait,
> Se por ces .II. m'en fui, ce sera lait;
> A torjorz mes iert a mes hoirs retrait. […]
> Mielz voil morir mon cors ne s'i esset. (*AC*, ll. 1306-10)

> When fifteen kings have not done me any harm, if I run away for these two it would be cowardly. Forever more it will be [recounted to / imputed to] my heirs. I would rather die than that my body is not tested there.

The body must be tested in battle or its transcendent meaning – here figured in terms of genealogical inheritance and family prestige – is lost. In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, as the Saracen invaders approach, Esturmi and Thiebaut refuse to fight, and Esturmi even encourages his men to flee: 'qui ore ne s'en fuit, tost i puet mort gisir; / alum nus ent pur noz vies garir' ('who now does not run away, soon he can lie there dead. Let us run away to save our lives', *CDG*, ll. 256-57), and later 'li couart s'en vont od Tedbald fuiant' ('the cowards go running away with Thiebaut', *CDG*, l. 330).[55] Conversely, Vivien promises his men that he will never flee:

> Jo me rendrai al dolerus peril,
> N'en turnerai, car a Deu l'ai pramis
> Que ja ne fuierai pur poür de morir. (*CDG*, ll. 291-93)

> I will deliver myself to the grievous danger, I will not turn away from it, because I have promised to God that never will I flee for fear of dying.

Vivien's defiant attitude wins him the approval of the men, who adopt him as their commander. He leads them out into battle where they 'fierent cunmunalment' ('strike communally', *CDG*, l. 332), and even though they will all die in the encounter, they will die heroically. Vivien captures the mood when he suggests that it is better to die in battle than in bed (*CDG*, ll. 590-91). In other words, heroic masculinity hinges on leaving the

[54] Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 176.

[55] Thiebaut's lack of self-discipline and self-regulation is underlined by the fact that he is drunk when he receives warning of the attack (*CDG*, ll. 89-116).

safety of city and castle, and riding out beyond the margins of community to meet the enemy head on.[56]

As discussed in previous chapters, the exclusions that give form to communal identity paradoxically rely on contact with the excluded Other, and so it is up to the hero to make that contact. Although he may face death, this is the only way to guarantee his socio-symbolic life, his honour. Richard Holmes describes honour specifically as a means to keep men on the battlefield:

> Military codes of honour […] are designed to make the social consequences of flight more unpleasant than the physical consequences of battle. The one […] might lead to pain, mutilation and death, but the other produces, with much greater certainty, personal guilt and public shame.[57]

Holmes's account is accurate, of course, and it is the fear of public opprobrium that spurs our heroes on into the fray. Yet crucially, the risk of pain, mutilation and death that Holmes cites as inevitable in war are presented as honourable, glorious and even desirable in these poems.[58] In *Les Narbonnais*, Aymeri tells his men that those who die in battle will be remembered without blame:

> En bataille et en estor forni,
> Qui la morra, par Dieu qui ne menti,
> Vilain reproche ne sera dit de lui. (*LN*, ll. 4392-94)

> In war and in fierce battle, he who will die there, by God who does not lie, no unworthy reproach shall be spoken of him.

And in *Le Siège de Barbastre*, Girart tells his that those who die will die a martyr's death:

> Recevés le martyre, de vrai cuer et de bon,
> Car s'ame s'en ira en la Dieu region
> Qui ci endroit morra en bone entencion. (*SDB*, ll. 3004-6)

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[56] We make fleeting contact here with Classen's suggestion – cited in the Introduction – that in the twenty-first century we protect our social and individual by policing national and cultural boundaries ('Control', p. 262). The heroes of modern society are, in this evaluation, those who travel to these marginal spaces and touch Others on our behalf.

[57] *Acts of War* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2003), p. 301.

[58] In fact, Bourke observes that in the aftermath of the Great War, 'male hierarchies' were worked out in British towns based on the severity of battle-scars: to be '"decorated" or "well-painted" with blood was a manly accomplishment' (*Dismembering the Male*, p. 37).

> Receive martyrdom, with good and true heart, for whoever dies in this place in good faith, his soul will enter into God's realm.[59]

From these examples, we sense that Holmes has not taken his conclusions far enough: indeed, he fails to make the connection between honour, identity and *being*. Honour, as the abstract notion underpinning chivalric identification, can be understood as the ideological imperative that drives knights onto the battlefield irrespective of the possible consequences. It urges them into the action without which they would cease to exist as knightly subjects (the social death that Holmes mentions can thus be understood as the terrifying void of Symbolic non-being to which I referred in Chapter One). If honour is thus aligned with the authority of the Big Other, then when it demands certain death it manifests the 'vengeful, sadistic, punishing aspect' of the Big Other: the superego.[60] As Žižek makes clear, the superego exists as the obscene counterpoint to the Law: its excessive, disavowed underpinning. We have seen in previous chapters how excess guarantees – but also troubles – a structure. Here, chivalric ideology's insistence on bravery ensures that knights will not fall short when it comes to their 'duty', but it also means that they will often die in the name of the cause. Dying thus has to be recuperated as something good, as desirable or 'enjoyable' in the properly traumatic sense of the word.[61] Notably, Lacan equates enjoyment with the superego, writing that 'nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of *jouissance* – enjoy!'[62] In this sense, of course, enjoyment is strictly not a matter of pleasure; rather it is 'something we do as a kind of weird and twisted ethical duty'.[63] In other words, we might see dying in battle as the 'enjoyable' heroic beyond of chivalric duty – and the ideological demand to place the body in danger of horrific injury and mutilation (with all the Symbolic ramifications that that entails) as the most extreme manifestation of the chivalric superego. As discussed in Chapter Two, the purest form of chivalry threatens to destabilise heroic and social bodies alike with its persistent drive towards superlativity and excess.

Given this ideological imperative to meet the pagan Other and test the body, the much-beleaguered Aymeri sees his heroism (and masculinity) drastically undermined by a

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[59] Cf. *LN* (ll. 5949-50) and *SDB* (ll. 1318-20).

[60] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), p. 80. The Big Other is here 'the ideal I try to follow and actualise' (p. 80).

[61] 'We are not dealing with simple pleasures', notes Žižek, 'but with a violent intrusion that brings more pain than pleasure' (*How to Read Lacan*, p. 79).

[62] *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 3.

[63] Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 79.

passage of *Les Narbonnais*. First, Aymeri is taunted by the monstrous pagan Gadifer with whom he has undertaken to fight in order to secure his son's release from captivity. Gadifer, waiting outside Narbonne for Aymeri to appear, shouts: 'Aymeri, sire, trop faiz grant demoree! / Mout longuement est ta porte fermee!' ('Aymeri, sire, too much do you delay! A very long time is your gate closed!', *LN*, ll. 4631-32). Foreshadowing material covered in sections below, there is interplay here between Aymeri and the city of Narbonne. If Aymeri loses in combat, he will lose the city; if his body boundaries are penetrated in the fight, those of the city will be penetrated too. And yet, both body and city must be risked in order to 'win'. It is thus significant that when the doors eventually open, it is not he who appears, but the young Roman, who has volunteered to fight in his stead. Gadifer remarks on this turn of events, commending Roman for his bravery when 'contre moi isis de la cité' ('against me you come out from the city', *LN*, l. 4721). The remark also provides a backhanded insult to Aymeri – who did not have that courage perhaps? His failing heroism (charted throughout my argument) leaves his city at risk from the pagan forces of evil and chaos, embodied here by Gadifer. Or, is it that Gadifer and the pagan throng represent something more abstract: the forces of disintegration and antagonism that are disavowed as the pre-condition of a (Christian) community identification?

Communities and Bodies

Throughout the Narbonne Cycle, there is metaphoric interplay between the ideas of hero and of city. In *Aymeri de Narbonne*, Aymeri's prowess as a warrior is proclaimed in terms of his ability to defend Narbonne: 'si desfandi bien vers eus la contree, / qu'i n'en perdi demie ne denree' ('defended the land so well against them that he did not lose a penny or ha'porth of it', *ADN*, ll. 1312-13).[64] Moreover, Aymeri's willingness to conquer and hold Narbonne in Charlemagne's name was the condition of his entry into the privileged space of the warrior aristocratic community, as I described in Chapter Two. Narbonne then became a possession that symbolised his prowess (and provided the material wealth associated with his social status) so long as it was not 'touched' by invaders.[65] In effect,

[64] Cf. *Les Narbonnais* (l. 48) in which Aymeri boasts of his defence of Narbonne: 'bien l'ai tenue contre gent paienor' ('well have I held it against pagan people').

[65] In this vein, Philip E. Bennett notices the correlation between city and female body: both are prestigious possessions to be guarded. The tower, Gloriete, by remaining impenetrable in *La Prise d'Orange* is 'le symbole de l'intégrité de Guibourc' (*Carnaval héroïque et écriture cyclique dans la geste de Guillaume d'Orange* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), p. 54). I do not wish to refute the validity of this argument and, indeed, Chapter Three hinted at such a conflation in regard to Saracen princesses and their fathers' cities. And yet, meanings attached to physical bodies, social bodies and the boundaries of each are wont to shift in

Narbonne provides the focal point for the community gathered under the leadership of Aymeri. Crouch asserts that a medieval castle helped a magnate to impress and overawe his people because it was associated with hospitality, money, gifts, ceremony, feasting, justice and prestige.[66] It was a nexus of power, a meeting point of institutional trajectories where politics, religion, education and trade all found their base.[67] More than just a prized possession, it was the focal point of the alliances and exchanges that underpinned medieval society, perpetuated life in its current format, and gave expression to its lord's status within that society.

Because lord and castle are symbiotically bound, when Aymeri's body comes under attack in the Cycle, so too does the community gathered in the city.[68] Douglas notes that 'the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system and its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious', thus identifying the correlation between bodies human and social, and attesting to the contingent nature of the boundaries of each.[69] In a passage of *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne*, mentioned already, Aymeri is captured by Corsolt and tortured to precipitate the fall of Narbonne. He begs Hermengart to stand firm and not relinquish the city. However, unable to stand her husband's suffering, she surrenders, and Saracen troops sweep in through the city sparing no mercy for those within:

> Les borjois tuent a glaive et a dolor,
> Et les mameles copent a lor oissors,
> Et as puceles les ronpent a tortor; […]
> Et .v. cent moines i ocistrent lo jor. (*ADN*, ll. 1574-79)

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this Cycle, being produced and contested within a processual iteration of identity. Here I suggest that the over-riding correlation is between city – as bounded entity – and the heroic body as untouched.

[66] Crouch, *Image of the Aristocracy*, p. 254. Crouch also captures the ambivalence of that power and prestige, noting that aristocratic power held a 'degree of menace' enforced in part by the 'brooding power' of the city (p. 254).

[67] Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, p. 104. Althoff also notes the link between family identity and castles. For him, 'the process of "relocation" to castles in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the naming of aristocratic lineages after these castles, was very much part of the process of creating centres of lordship' (*Family*, p. 50).

[68] Cohen makes the correlation between the male body and community clear in the analysis of 'slasher films' with which he begins his chapter on 'The Body in Pieces': 'community order is restored at the same time as the *male* body's symbolic order is re-established' (*Of Giants*, p. 63 – original emphasis).

[69] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 115. The relevance of Douglas's remarks in the medieval context is confirmed by the fact that the metaphor of the body is often used in medieval discourse 'to illustrate the subordination of the various "limbs" to the overall "body politic" and their co-operation in its functioning' (Kay, *Political Fictions*, pp. 116-17). Kay refers to an extended use of the metaphor in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*. See also Le Goff, 'Head or Heart'.

> They kill the townspeople cruelly and painfully, and cut the breasts off their wives, and they rip those of the maidens off by way of torture. And five hundred monks they killed there that day.

The sacking of the city is portrayed though the cruel manhandling of its inhabitants. These people are not warriors and should, at least in theory, be spared the violent touch of war.[70] Yet this physical devastation seems to be a direct corollary of that inflicted upon Aymeri; the cruel abuse of his body is writ large in the cruel abuses that take place within the city, and the violent entering of his flesh glides seamlessly into the violent entering of Narbonne. Once inside, the pagans run amok and the community gathered within the walls breaks down as terror, panic and chaos set in.

The representation of community as literally and conceptually 'inside' already points to an 'outside' and if, as Nicholas Orme suggests, the castle and feasting hall provide the 'warm centre of […] social and political life' then outside and beyond them lie darkness, wilderness and the unknown.[71] The closed, exclusive space of the community is thus pitted against an unknowable outside space: the space, perhaps, of the monstrous.[72] This dichotomy finds expression in *Le Siège de Barbastre* where an opening tableau depicts communal conviviality in Narbonne:

> Dont tint li quens sa court en la sale pavee
> A .III.C. chevaliers a mesnie privee.
> La sale fu moult bien entour encortinee. […]
> De mes d'oisiaus farsis n'i ont fet demoree,
> De paons ne de cines n'i ont pas fet nombree.
> Tant en donnent chascun ja la court n'iert blasmee. (*SDB*, ll. 11-22)

> The count held court in the paved hall, for three hundred knights of his private retinue. The hall was well curtained all around. For the dishes of stuffed birds there was not a great delay, and there was no counting the peacocks and swans. Everyone was given so much that the court could never be [blamed / scorned].

Everyone is happy at this gathering, and the poet specifically outlines the social harmony that flourishes: Aymeri's sons help others to the plentiful food, no one's honour is slighted,

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[70] See Christopher Allmand, 'War and the Non-Combatant' in *Medieval Warfare* (see Keen, above), pp. 253-72; and Frederick Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[71] Crouch, *Image of the Aristocracy*, p. 255. Cf. Haidu: 'outside that surcharged and overdetermined world [of the fortress-castle], there is nothing but Others who are, by definition, enemies' (*Subject of Violence*, p. 104).

[72] If, indeed, monstrosity 'demarcates segments of space' (Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, 'Introduction: Conceptualising the Monstrous' in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 1-27 (p. 2)). I return to monsters and monstrosity below.

and no arguments break out even in the jousting that follows the meal.[73] The enclosed, warm, safe aspect of the court is suggested by the curtaining that covers the walls all around, keeping coldness, darkness and savagery outside of, and away from, the civilised community within. Cohen's argument that 'architecture articulates identity' – with the walls of the hall symbolising a fictive unity 'in the time before loss and lack' – is confirmed by this image.[74] Again, we find that community is organised spatially, but here the walls surrounding the space become invested with meaning. In Chapter Two I argued that community space was expressed through the interactions of those that occupy the space, regardless of its physical geography. Why is it that the city walls are significant here, then? In my reading, emphasis on the walls seeks to render physical the difference between 'us' and 'them'; to impose a clear spatial ordering that will then order the bodies so divided. It attempts to fix the boundaries of an identity that is under threat – or rather that is only expressed through the production of boundaries that are then seen as pre-given (or set in stone, perhaps?). In narrative terms, the walls offer a solid metaphor for Christian unity pitted against the 'demonic' invaders from the foreign lands.

Just as cultural boundaries are contested and permeable, so walls can come under attack, however, and Saracens predictably arrive at Narbonne to disrupt the enjoyment of the ordered community within: 'l'amirans d'Espaigne a sa gent assemblee […] bien sont .LX.M. de pute gent desvee' ('the emir of Spain has gathered his men; there are a full sixty thousand of the vile, unreasonable people', *SDB*, l. 30-32). The emir, in a bid to spread his faith across Christendom, plans to topple the emperor at Saint-Denis and take the crown for himself (*SDB*, ll. 34-35). He will march on Narbonne, taking Aymeri's head, and with it the city (*SDB*, ll. 36-37). A clear chain of signification links Aymeri's body with that of Christianity itself – with the city of Narbonne acting as a pivot between the two.[75] Implicit here is the understanding that the Saracen troops are determined to make use of this association and to destroy Christianity through the destruction of its key proponent. Cohen

[73] For elaboration of the social significance of feasting see Althoff, who writes that 'all societies appreciate the value of the meal, banquet or feast in helping to shape and strengthen communities' (*Family*, p. 152). Yet he goes on to outline the fragility of the unity expressed through medieval feasting, because such occasions provided 'an opportunity to murder unsuspecting and unarmed people' (p. 156).

[74] *Of Giants*, p. 7.

[75] William Calin outlines the importance of Narbonne as a bastion of Christianity, highlighting the 'strongly religious' tone of *Aymeri de Narbonne* and asserting that the capture of Narbonne is a tangible sign of the victory of Christ over Antichrist (*The Epic Quest: Studies in Four Old French Chansons de geste* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), p. 6. The first chapter, dealing with *Aymeri de Narbonne*, builds on his earlier essay 'The Woman and the City: Observations on the Structure of *Aymeri de Narbonne*', *Neophilologus*, 50 (1966), 33-43.

has made clear, however, that it is unwise to view the Saracen invaders as a 'force united by its single-mindedness'.[76] He notes that medieval Christians often represented their enemy in a way that glossed over differences in ethnicity, religious belief and political agenda. 'Saracen', as a label, 'contained within reductive flesh the diversity of the Eastern world', being applied to a whole range of foreigners including Arabs, Turks, Armenians and Kurds who were not necessarily unified in their belief and certainly not immune from fighting among themselves.[77] He notes that these heterogeneous (Other) cultures were, in fact, 'as ethnically various and politically mutable over time as the inhabitants of those lands that the Latin Christians had left behind'.[78] The emir and his men may well represent an invading army, then, but to see the invasion as that of a unified Islamic force intent on destroying Christianity and the imperial crown is to rely on fixed religious, political and community boundaries that are in fact fluid and mutable. Indeed, the inhabitants of Narbonne are no more unified than those against whom they fight. Over and above the 'fictive' and violent nature of community identity discussed throughout this thesis, surely the very logistics of conquest would suggest that the inhabitants of the city would be largely the same as those who lived there under pagan rule. However, such diversity is lost by a dichotomising approach to identity in which the enemy is produced and excluded in order to articulate the coherent outline of the Christian community.

How, then, should we understand the Saracen-pagans? It has been argued that they represent an 'impersonal mass' or 'menacing danger', the anxiety that limes the margins of an identity violently forged through abjection.[79] If there can be no ontological or innate 'outsider' who exists independently of social discourses and their performative reproduction, there can be no secure 'them' that can define the parameters of 'our' identity.[80] In this way, the hall can be understood as a metaphor for collective identity, a macrocosmic reproduction of the physical body and of the psychic identification that takes

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[76] *Machines*, p. 90. Cf. Kinoshita's introduction to *Medieval Boundaries*, where she tackles not only medieval attitudes to alterity, but also (modern) critical interpretations of that cultural dichotomisation (pp. 1-12). David Levering-Lewis, calling the events of the *Roland* a 'Carolingian Jihad' (p. 251) presents a nuanced evaluation of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Spain in *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570-1215* (New York and London: Norton, 2008). In his study of *Anseïs de Carthage*, James R. Simpson reflects on the complexities of the reconquest of Spain, and on the 'gap between literature and reality' (*Fantasy, Identity and Misrecognition in Medieval French Narrative* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 96-102 (p. 97)).

[77] *Machines*, pp. 190-91. Cf. Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, pp. 36-37.

[78] *Machines*, pp. 190-91.

[79] Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, p. 266.

[80] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 1-8.

root there. Lacan refers to the way that the ego is symbolised in dreams, that is, as 'un camp retranché, voire un stade […] l'altier et lointain château intérieur, dont la forme […] symbolise le *ça* de façon saisissante'.[81] The formation of the ego during the Mirror Stage, with the concomitant (mis)understanding of the body as a coherent unity, is founded in a spatial relationship, a staging – or stadium – in front of the mirror ('le stade du miroir'). Picking up on this metaphoric interplay between architecture and identity, Jonathan Rutherford calls white masculinity a fortress 'protecting what it deems is its own from an alien threat'.[82] Such alien threat is ever-present, for as Cohen makes clear, outside the fortress, the city or the hall, 'an inimical geography sprawls: […] the habitation of monsters'.[83] That the pagan forces are made into monsters in the *chanson de geste* genre is now a relative commonplace.[84] In this Cycle they can be griffin-like hybrids (*SDB*, l. 97) or demons spewed forth from hell (*LN*, l. 7226). They sometimes have black faces (*LN*, l. 7229), horns (*LN*, l. 7218) or red eyes (*LN*, l. 4592). A first analysis might conclude that the 'monsterisation' of foreigners serves as a means of legitimising violence against them: if enemies are glossed as demonic, devious and treacherous, their annihilation is justified.[85] Yet there is more to it than that. As a conceptual category, monsters are useful

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[81] *Écrits*, I, p. 94.

[82] 'Who's That Man?' in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. by Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), pp. 21-67 (p. 64).

[83] *Of Giants*, p. 7. Elsewhere he writes that 'the threat posed to the national/religious body is that of the monster, whose existence is defined by the disruption of boundaries, by the mutation and opening up of the Christian corpus, and by the blurring of the crucial division between interiority and exteriority' ('Armour', p. 8).

[84] See studies such as Debra Higgs Strickland's *Saracens, Demons and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003) – Chapter Four, 'Saracens, Tartars and Other Crusader Fantasies', is particularly useful (pp. 157-210). Also, Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du Cycle du roi* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982); John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Geraldine Heng, 'The Romance of England: *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Saracens, Jews and the Politics of Race and Nation' in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 135-71; and Cohen, *Machines* – 'On Saracen Enjoyment', pp. 188-222.

[85] This is not an exclusively medieval phenomenon: the same discursive technique is still employed in the rhetoric of the American-led war on terror in order to garner support for the wars in the Middle East. This 'war' has been unflinchingly cast as a 'conflict between good and evil', and the enemy has been constructed as 'inherently dangerous, demonic, and undeserving of even the most minimal levels of human respect'. They are 'subhuman savages and animals that needed to be hunted down and smoked out of caves' (Richard Jackson, 'The Discursive Construction of Torture in the War on Terror: Narratives of Danger and Evil' in *Warrior's Dishonour* (see Kassimeris, above), pp. 141-68 (p. 150; p. 165)); and his book, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

for thinking about identity for they exist at margins of 'civilised' identity and are everything that 'we' are not. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills explain:

> The monstrous is constitutive, producing the contours of both bodies that matter (humans, Christians, saints, historical figures, gendered subjects, and Christ) and, ostensibly, bodies that do not (animals, non-Christians, demons, fantastical creatures and portentous freaks).[86]

In other words, the monster is 'difference made flesh' and his embodied difference is the exclusive condition of the heroic Christian body. As Jean-Claude Payen remarks, 'la violence épique est au service d'une idéologie sommaire qui procède par xénophobie. L'adversaire est l'autre, l'étranger […] dont on accuse les différences jusqu'à la monstruosité'.[87] To relate this to my broad theory of performative identity, Butler makes clear that one effect of the 'coercions' by which intelligible subjectivity is produced is the creation of that which cannot be articulated, 'a domain of unthinkable, abject, unliveable bodies'.[88] The normative (heroic, masculine Christian) body is thus pitted against the abject (monstrous, feminised, pagan) body. At the end of Chapter Three I suggested that one kind of alterity can be written as another so that, for example, racial difference can be recast as, or collapse into, sexual difference. I have already shown evidence of this slippage earlier in the chapter, when violence against the Saracen Other took the same format as violence against the female Other. The very fact of such slippage indicates the fluidity and ambiguity of the Other-monster and attests to its special role in the negotiation of cultural boundaries.[89] Existing at the margins of society, the monster embodies the 'abjected fragment' that enables the formation of warrior aristocratic identity.[90] Yet because of its lurking presence, it also threatens the very categories it helps to create: 'the monster is important because he cannot be fully banished from, or integrated into, those

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[86] Bildhauer and Mills, 'Conceptualising the Monstrous', p. 2.

[87] Jean-Charles Payen, 'Une Poétique du génocide joyeux, devoir de violence et plaisir de tuer dans la *Chanson de Roland*', *Olifant*, 6 (1978-79), 226-36 (p. 227).

[88] *Bodies That Matter*, p. xi. 'This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life' (p. 3). For explorations of embodied 'deviance' in the modern context, see Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[89] See Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, pp. 63-70. Dinshaw notes the eliding of heresy, sodomy and leprosy, seeing in this clustering evidence of how communities work to group together and merge deviant elements in order to protect the unity and purity of the group.

[90] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 19.

identity categories that his body constructs'.[91] The monstrous Other body, then, represents structural excess in another guise – the exorbitant desires and fears that cannot be contained by the Symbolic order.[92] To transpose this theory into an epic context, Miller asserts that 'the battle raging in the [heroic] mind's dark, volatile and resistant interior is released, displaced, projected outward against an antagonist who is, in psychic fact, [himself]'.[93] When Aymeri tells his son that the pagan king is 'molt desmesurés' ('very [excessive / arrogant]', *PDC*, l. 2285) on account of the fact that he is 'de la bataille forment entalentés' ('strongly desirous of battle', *PDC*, l. 2286), we understand that it is his own excesses that he sees troublingly reflected in the tenaciously bellicose Saracen. The enemy embodies his deepest fears, wishes, vulnerabilities and longing, and is thus simultaneously desired and repudiated, embraced and abjected.

Sara Ahmed's discussion of the Other helps understand the fantasy that underpins constructions of the Other. She argues:

> In seeing the bodies of others, we are always engaged in practices of both recognition and reading that fail to grasp the other. The perception of others as 'the black other' involves wrapping the bodies of others in fantasy. Indeed the monstrous black body is represented here precisely as a white fantasy, or as a fantasy that works to constitute whiteness in the first place.[94]

Although in the context of the poems it is more appropriate to consider issues of religion than skin colour when considering 'racial' identity, the white-black dichotomy is already evident and expresses the same value judgements that Ahmed alludes to here. In *Les Narbonnais*, pagans are described as having huge bodies and skin as black as ink ('granz ont les cors et noirs com arrement', *LN*, l. 3803), and later they are 'hideux et noir' ('hideous and black', *LN*, l. 4591). Such descriptions indeed 'wrap the bodies of others in fantasy', not simply in terms of bodily differences, but in terms of the meaning attached to those differences. The term 'noir com arrement' is more than just a racist cliché, for through such formulae, the poet uses a painter's touch to draw on evidence of the pagans' inky Otherness, and thus roots the arbitrary Christian-pagan distinction in ontological

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[91] Cohen, *Of Giants*, p. xiv.

[92] 'Othered bodies often incite disgust and dread, but alongside fascination and desire' (Holliday and Hassard, 'Contested Bodies', p. 8).

[93] *The Epic Hero*, p. 62. Gibson also notes this subjective mirroring in heroic identity, writing that 'the function of the enemy is to represent uncontrolled / uncontrollable human desire: without this 'mirror image' of one who is out of control, the hero cannot exist as embodiment of self-control and purity' (*Warrior Dreams*, p. 114).

[94] 'Racialised Bodies' in *Real Bodies* (see Evans and Lee, above), pp. 46-63 (p. 57).

fact.[95] This image-making is in itself an act of ideological violence committed by the poet on behalf of the Christian cause because it determines and defines the 'pagans' in a way that they cannot control; to use Žižek's words, the power of discourse and language 'dismembers the thing' and 'inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it'.[96] Naming and image-making imply a knowledge drawn from perception – but it is a perception conditioned by ideological imperative and the need to create a unified sense of self. In other words, by falsifying the body of the Other, the poems draw a veil over his impenetrability – an impenetrability that would otherwise troublingly reflect the heroic subject's impenetrability to himself – and seek to mask his subjective decentredness.[97] However, the unreliability of even these 'biological' differences is evident throughout the poems. In *Le Siège de Barbastre*, in a passage already mentioned in Chapter One, four messengers are sent from the besieged city to enlist help from Aymeri. The messengers paint their faces black in order to pass incognito through the Saracen camp. The disguise is successful, and despite some close encounters with the Saracens in which they act and appear convincingly 'Saracen-like', they make it to Aymeri's court. There, the disguise is so good that the plan is nearly jeopardised, for Aymeri does not believe that they are actually Christians (*SDB*, ll. 3848-49). However, he soon realises his mistake and has them wash their faces in vinegar to remove the blackness, and embraces his friends in apology for his outburst. So, for all 'blackness' seems to present a bodily difference upon which social evaluations can be made, and according to which appropriate behaviour can be determined, it is ultimately only skin-deep and implies social discrimination rather than 'racial' difference.[98] Indeed, attempts to draw a biological line between the opposing sides in the endless battling of the poems inevitably fail, and rather, highlight the impossibility of such a division. The pagan monster's true destructiveness is finally, to cite Cohen once

[95] For detailed discussion of the problematic relationship between the 'natural' body and its 'cultural' meaning, see Chapter One.

[96] *Violence*, p. 52. Kappeler also discusses the image-making of the Other, making clear that 'pictorial discourse about the "other" is no less an act of violence against them than is a verbal discourse of naming and defining. […] It is the expression of my subjectivity, my fantasy and my thinking, which says nothing about the so-called object of my representation' (*Will to Violence*, pp. 44-45).

[97] See Žižek, 'The Neighbour', p. 138.

[98] Žižek's discussion of racial 'inferiority' leads to a similar conclusion. For him, because all *being* is 'socio-symbolic', the different meanings attached to skin colour lead to social difference. In this way, dominant racist ideology exerts a 'performative efficiency' that forces the Other into a position of (real, lived) inferiority that is nevertheless an effect of language (*Violence*, p. 62).

more, 'deconstructiveness' – for it threatens to reveal that difference is a process and not a fact, and that 'fact' is 'subject to constant reconstruction and change'.[99]

If the 'monsterisation' of the pagan Other produces the illusory effect of community unity in the Narbonne Cycle, then the pagan can be called a scapegoat in the Girardian sense of the word. In Girard's work on the sacrificial crisis, the scapegoat is made to embody the chaos and violence that threatens to destroy society, and which is then cast out to secure order. The scapegoat appears when there is a 'crisis of distinctions', just as the transvestite of Chapter Three represented a 'failure of definitional distinctions' and as, in the present chapter, the monster can be described as the 'harbinger of category crisis'.[100] The alignment of epic constructions of the Other to this Girardian model must necessarily point us to a wider consideration of Girard's work. In fact, his concept of 'mimesis' and its role in paradigms of violence and desire provides a way of thinking around the slippage between constructions of Saracen Otherness in the poems. For mimesis allows us to map a continuum of chivalric desire that exists over and above the Christian-Saracen boundary, and that constructs a universalised, knightly body – in opposition to the radically differentiated bodies of hero and monster – even as it undermines notions of bodily integrity. Thus, rather than solving the crisis of distinctions, this mimetic desire serves only to trouble further the boundaries of heroic identity.

Mimetic Desire and Violent Intercorporeality

Aristocratic warrior community has been shown over the course of my argument to be based on fictions: it is a social ideal that the poems of the Cycle present as ultimately impossible.[101] The overlapping of Frankish, Christian, military, territorial and gendered communities is problematic, and although this chapter has shown how structural Others excluded by each of these communities can be conflated (Saracen becomes feminised, becomes cowardly, becomes traitorous, becomes foreigner), this is not always the case. When Saracen knights are not demonic or gigantic, they often display a strong identification with aristocratic, chivalric values, and I will here suggest that a putative 'class-based' affinity between knights Christian and Saracen can at times overcome racial

[99] 'Monster Culture', p. 14-15.

[100] Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 16; Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 6 (from section title 'The Monster as the Harbinger of Category Crisis').

[101] Kay notes this phenomenon throughout the genre, stating that 'the *chansons de geste* appeal to the idea of community even as they reveal its failure' (*Political Fictions*, p. 166).

or religious difference.[102] Put differently, the ideological rhetoric of Christian community exists alongside the ideological rhetoric of the warrior community, and the slippage between the absolute Other of pagan monstrosity and the mirror-like Other of a fellow knight can best be understood in these terms. For all Christian rhetoric largely triumphs in this Cycle (most poems end with full-scale Holy War) there are moments when it is displaced by an economy of competitive honour existing between all knights, and which causes cross-cultural desire, admiration, and personal conflict (as well as intra-specific desire, admiration and conflict). As Miller has it, violence is rarely unleashed against a 'distinct power of evil' in the theological sense, because the root of evil lies in antagonism, and competitive antagonism lies at the heart of the warrior.[103] Miller here sets up the antithesis between different paradigms of epic violence and yet he then opts strongly in favour of the latter, saying that 'the hero's opponent may wear or declare some *differentia* identified with the Other, or even of evil, but usually he is simply the hero's mirror image'.[104] Although it is true that this second version of alterity is present in the Narbonne Cycle, we cannot discount the first either. Rather, I argue that the collapsing of the one into the other is reflective of the competing discourses governing heroic agency.

Miller's use of specular imagery in relation to the Other recalls the discussion of alterity in Chapter Two, where I referred to Žižek's distinction between three levels of Otherness. To re-capitulate, the Imaginary Other refers to other people 'like me' with whom I am 'engaged in mirrorlike relationships of competition, mutual recognition and so on'.[105] The Symbolic 'Big Other' manifests the social authority governing existence within the Symbolic order. Finally, the Other as Real is the impossible Thing – or inhuman partner – with whom no 'symmetrical dialogue' is possible.[106] Mapping this onto previous discussion, I suggest that the pagan in his monstrous aspect, who attacks Christian lands and with whom no 'reciprocal exchange' is possible, represents primarily the Other *qua* Real – the traumatic, demonic neighbour that must be defeated at all costs (whose face must be smashed, as it were).[107] In other situations, however, the Saracen knight can be said

[102] In the same way, 'a knight would almost certainly feel he had more in common with an enemy knight than with a foot soldier on his own side' (Hanley, *Portrayal of Warfare*, p. 29).

[103] *The Epic Hero*, p. 322.

[104] *The Epic Hero*, p. 322.

[105] 'The Neighbour', p. 143.

[106] 'The Neighbour', p. 143.

[107] This enemy appears radically different, and yet as Žižek makes clear, the very unknowability of the Other reflects the subject's inability fully to know himself. In a sense, the Other is always inextricably linked to Self even on this fundamental – and fundamentally troubling – level (see 'The Neighbour, p. 138). The key

to occupy the role of Imaginary Other – for he is 'like' the Christian knight to all intents and purposes; as a member of the chivalric order he has the same values and is governed by the same rules.[108] However, rather than acting as a catalyst for peace, this cross-cultural identification is in itself a source of conflict for, as Žižek and Miller both note, it implies a relationship of competition.

Medieval military identity is characterised by rivalry, and following Cowell's assertion that 'idealised social identity for the medieval warrior aristocrat was integrity, not solidarity', we understand that competition is the *sine qua non* of heroic identity.[109] Integrity, for Cowell, is a 'potential, but never fully realised state' combining both socio-economic and psychological states: it is a quest for self-sufficient *being* that combines material and symbolic power, and towards which the warrior will constantly strive. The quest for such (elusive) being will inevitably bring him into competition with others attempting to achieve the same thing. In Girardian terms, individuals look to other men in order to learn how to achieve autonomous, fully-differentiated being, and seeing what other men desire, they become locked in relationships of rivalry as they compete for that object of desire.[110] Kay talks about 'singularity' (a concept mentioned already in Chapter Two) in similar terms, writing that desire for heroic uniqueness is grounded in the 'desire for exclusive possession of particular goods: a particular estate or woman, for example'.[111] There is another aspect to the drive towards this version of integrity, though, and that is the imperative to kill as many people as possible – or rather, to enter into violent competition with them.[112]

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point is that all three dimensions of Otherness are present in any one encounter, but I suggest that different encounters play on the different dimensions, and slip between them.

[108] Daniel resumes: 'what is clear […] is not just the great importance given to noble birth, but the assumption that there was no difference in that between Saracens and Christians' (*Heroes and Saracens*, p. 38). Indeed, he continues, the 'feudal virtues' of Saracens seem more important than their 'false religion' (p. 38). Noble agrees: for him, warriors could accept that those from an equivalent class in other lands could share their qualities, but never those from a lower class ('Attitudes to Social Class', p. 367).

[109] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 24. Crucially, Cowell states that 'integrity is extremely closely linked to the concept of the hero', and uses Kay's discussion of heroic 'singularity' to argue his case – see Chapter Two of this thesis.

[110] *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 152-58.

[111] 'Singularity and Spectrality', p. 12. As Girard makes clear, 'mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict' (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 155).

[112] 'Singularity and Spectrality', p. 12. However, according to Kay, the caveat is that one effect of killing is increased awareness that one's own death is the ultimate expression of singularity – and thus 'singularity' is not possible in life.

In the Cycle, Narbonne itself is a key example of such a desired and desirable object. When it appears on the horizon in the early stages of *Aymeri de Narbonne*, the poet lavishes many lines of awe-struck description on it (*ADN*, ll. 165-80), beginning with the assertion that: 'plus biau deduit ne pot nus regarder' ('a more beautiful [pleasure / item of value] no man could look upon', *ADN*, l. 165). Charlemagne is struck by desire. He asks Naimes who rules there, adding that 'cil qui la tient se puet tres bien venter / q'an tot le mont, ce cuit, n'en a sa per' ('he who holds it may very well boast, that in all the world, I believe, it has no equal', *ADN*, ll. 195-96). His mind is made up, and without waiting for a reply from Naimes, he announces 'la cité vodré ge conquester' ('I want to conquer the city', *ADN*, l. 202). His desire for the city is thus linked to admiration for its present occupant in a way that confirms Girard's opinion that 'chivalric passion defines a desire *according to Another*'.[113] Similarly, winning the city is linked to winning a fight against that occupant and his men; desire for the 'goods' is tied to the desire to kill, and both are bound up in the abstract notion of heroic superlativity.

It is ultimately Aymeri who takes up the challenge on Charlemagne's behalf, of course, and much is made of his prowess in the ensuing battle:

> Aimeris tint le branc aceré:
> Cui il consut, tot a son tans ussé.
> Bien a sor aus son hardement prové.
> Sor paiens a tant feru et chaplé,
> De .C. n'en sont pas .XL. torné. (*ADN*, ll. 913-17)

> Aymeri brandishes his steely sword: whoever he pursues has reached the end of his [time / life]. Well did he prove his prowess over them: he so struck and slashed at the pagans, that out of a hundred, not even forty returned.

Having thus performed on the battlefield, Aymeri hammers on the gates of the city demanding they be opened, for 'la citez est moie!' ('the city is mine!', *ADN*, l. 934). If they are not opened, he will dismember every one of the pagan warriors who retreated to the safety of the city and then set fire to its walls (*ADN*, ll. 928-34). In this scene, violent killing, mimetic desire, and the city of Narbonne are more obviously correlated: defeating the Saracen knights is as crucial to Aymeri's (and Charlemagne's) honour as winning the city. In Cowell's terms, the former contributes to 'psychological' integrity (the accrual of honour) whilst the second contributes to 'socio-economic' integrity (the accrual of material assets). The one cannot be distinguished from the other for both involve engagement with – and victory over – another knight. Aymeri's victory locks him into a lifetime of rivalry

[113] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), p. 4.

with the evicted ruling family of Narbonne. When, in *Les Narbonnais*, we learn that the emir wants it back, his oath is iterated in terms relating specifically to Aymeri: 'a Aymeri a la barbe florie / ne remandra Nerbone la garnie' ('rich Narbonne will not remain with Aymeri of the white beard', *LN*, ll. 3696-97). This Saracen lord understands that there is more at stake than stone and mortar, and for all that the desire of each knight is ostensibly focussed on the city itself, there is an intensity to the rivalry between them, and an intimacy of shared values and mutual admiration, that speaks of a mutual desire. Significantly, this personal wrangling provides a counter-narrative to that in which Narbonne is fought over as a bastion of Christian defence.[114]

The other 'goods' over which warriors fight are women, and Hermengart is invested with desirability in *Aymeri de Narbonne* not least by the murmured approvals of the assembled court (described in Chapter Three), but also by the fact that Aymeri has many rivals in his affections.[115] When Boniface asks her consent in the match, she cites a long list of suitors each of whom she has refused in favour of Aymeri (*ADN*, ll. 2427-89); Aymeri is not just winning a bride, then, he is depriving many men of their chance to possess *this* bride. Savaris, one of the suitors, is encountered by the envoy on both outward and return journeys (see *ADN*, ll. 1736-44), and in a sense, the fighting that breaks out manifests the violent stakes of the rivalry. Ultimately, Savaris and his men are defeated and forced into the ignominious position of trying to run away from Aymeri. While his men are all killed on the run, a fate worse than death awaits Savaris himself. First, he is forced to give up his sword (*ADN*, l. 3208), undoing his identity as man, knight, and warrior. With all his power and honour being transferred to Aymeri and his men, this is effectively a social execution. Furthermore if, as I argued in Chapter One, the sword is intrinsically attached to the body of the knight, then Aymeri's men in a sense remove a piece of him (of which, more later). Finally, he is given to a *vavasseur* who had aided Aymeri's men, in order that he can hold him prisoner and sell him back to his people for a ransom. This 'mercy' manifests

[114] Nevertheless, because the rivalry is between a Christian hero and a pagan villain, it provides a resolution of sorts to the internal conflicts such as they are rehearsed in poems such as *Raoul de Cambrai*. There, the friction caused by personal rivalry – initiated when Louis disinherits Herbert of Vermandois – is so intense that it cannot be recuperated into a Christian framework at all.

[115] On the privileging of inter-male relationships in rivalries over women see Sedgwick, *Between Men*. Sedgwick refers to the male bond as marked by 'homosocial desire' (p. 23).

Aymeri's absolute power over him (*ADN*, ll. 3225-32); in the rivalry for Hermengart's affections, he is the clear winner.[116]

This victory does not bring Aymeri subjective autonomy or absolute integrity, however, for the mimetic double bind is that desire always leads to (more) violence and never to being. In other words, the desire for heroic singularity is forestalled by the performative dimension of knightly identity. Not only that, but if social integrity is impossible, so too is the absolute integrity of the knightly body, for once social categorisations and cultural boundaries are undermined, so too are the bodies shaped by them. We have already seen how Christian bodies can pass as Saracen and vice versa, but here I suggest that an even more radical erasing of subjective boundaries is evident in the poems. As they fight, knights can become indistinguishable the one from the other as they merge into an assemblage of striking arms and arcing swords: boundaries blur, bodies mingle, and the victor is he who comes out of it alive. Girard notes that men who are locked in battle try to win from each other 'their very souls, their vital force, their being'.[117] To repeat material cited in Chapter Three, Stahl locates the triumph of decapitation in the desire to 'destroy and often to appropriate for oneself the *personality* and the *power* of an outsider, a victim or an enemy'.[118] In this way, victory involves the incorporation of the Other's being (taking in*corpo*ration in its most literal sense).[119] The episode with Savaris thus takes on a new dimension and we understand that his social death bolsters Aymeri's heroic life. Yet, because that heroic life relies on the assimilation of aspects of the Other, it disrupts the fixed integrity of his physical body.

In set-piece duels, the progression from symmetry to assimilation is highly pronounced. Let us begin with an example from *Aliscans*, wherein Guillaume comes face-to-face with the Saracen kings, Danebrun and Aerofle. Although *Aliscans* falls outwith the parameters

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[116] Žižek outlines the way that mercy demonstrates superordinate power and authority in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, arguing that it manifests an ability to go beyond the normal application of law and regulation in a way that proves absolute mastery (pp. 110-11).

[117] *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 164. For, as Miller concludes, 'the shortest road to honour was to take someone else's' (*Humiliation*, p. 116).

[118] *Histoire de la decapitation* (p. 13 – emphasis added): cited in Le Goff 'Head or Heart'.

[119] I suggest, for example, that Nick Crossley's essay on the body and intercorporeality presents a 'softer' use of the term. For Crossley, human 'being-in-the-world' implies shared existence, meanings, values, behaviours and body techniques, and this inter-dependency unpicks subjective and bodily autonomy. Although this idea informs my reading of interaction in the poems, it does not quite cover the violent pleasures of subjective mingling that will be evidenced in this section ('Body Techniques, Agency and Intercorporeality: On Goffman's Relations in Public', *Sociology*, 29:1 (1995), 133-49 (pp. 144-49)).

of the Cycle's main body, it is useful for its articulation of anxieties found there. Not only that, but it seems to provide a narrative precedent for the passage in *Les Narbonnais* in which Guillaume and his men don the armour of dead and defeated pagan troops.[120] In *Aliscans*, Guillaume quickly dispatches Danebrun in what can be viewed as a prelude to the main show-down with Aerofle, and immediately afterwards, Aerofle begins to taunt him, telling him that 'vos convient mon roide espié sentir, / dont je ai fet meint crestïen fenir' ('you will feel my hard lance / with which I have finished off many Christians', *AC*, ll. 1382-83). The words buy into the sexualised economy of touch and violence already noted here, and Aerofle's boasting of previous conquests only adds to the effect. He proceeds immediately to list his personal stakes in the duel, and for all they should already be enemies by dint of their respective cultural affiliations, this secondary (feudal) reasoning seems to be required. Aerofle is Thiebaut's uncle and thus seeks to restore Orange and Orable to his nephew by defeating Guillaume (*AC*, ll. 1384-89).[121] In other words, the fight is transposed into the language of competitive honour and mimetic desire, with Aerofle wishing to win back the 'objects' that Guillaume stole (actions by which he shamed and dishonoured Thiebaut – *AC*, l. 1386). Aerofle, then, desires what Guillaume has. In return, Guillaume admires Aerofle, and the poet, looking through Guillaume's eyes, describes him in meticulous detail:

> Guillelmes a le paien regardé;
> Mout le voit grant, parcreü et quarré […]
> De chieres armes ot son cors adoubé
> Et en son dos un blanc hauberc safré. […]
> En son col ot un fort escu bouclé,
> D'or et d'azur richement peinturé. […]
> Desoz lui ot tel destrier amené
> Qui porteroit .II. chevaliers armé. […]
> Li quens Guillelmes l'a forment golosé. (*AC*, ll. 1407-60)

> Guillaume looked at the pagan, seeing him to be big, strong and [solid / square]. With rich arms and armour was his body apparelled and on his back he had a white, ornate hauberk. At his neck he had a strong, embossed shield, richly painted with gold and blue. Beneath him he had brought such a horse that would be able to carry two armed knights. Count Guillaume greatly desired it.

On a narrative level, Aerofle has to appear ferocious and valiant in order for Guillaume's victory over him to be even more admirable.[122] We might also find parallels here with the

[120] *Les Narbonnais*, ll. 5978-80; for previous discussion see Chapter One ('Out There Where Metal Meets Meat').

[121] Guillaume's conquest of Orange, ruled by Thiebaut, and his marriage to the city's queen, Orable, is recounted in *La Prise d'Orange*.

[122] The importance of the opponent's nobility in single combat is noted by Daniel, who adds that fighting someone of low birth does not provide the possibility of attracting praise and honour (*Heroes and Saracens*,

fantasy outline of Hermengart, detailed in Chapter Three, where she was made desirable in order to increase the prestige attached to the one who won her. Here, Aerofle is made desirable in order to increase the prestige attached to the one who wins in battle with him. However, the sheer extent of the description and its painstaking attention to detail – zeroing in first on the armour, then weapons, then horse – speaks of a deeper level of meaning again.[123] In Chapter One, I outlined the process of knightly identification, charting the libidinal re-organisation of young nobles along chivalric trajectories. I looked at the way that the 'chivalric fantasy' teaches the young subject to desire, investing meaning into knightly paraphernalia that comes to symbolise this vocation. The lingering attention to Aerofle's beautiful, ornate arms shows not only their desirability as objects, but also signals the pagan's belonging to the same social order as Guillaume himself.[124] He wears armour, he is prepared to act like a knight, and what is more, he is 'quarré', part of a formulaic descriptor usually associated with Guillaume ('a la brache quarree', 'of the strong arm', *SDB*, l. 17 – and *AC*, l. 3127). A mirror is thus held up to Guillaume and he cannot help but admire the weapons, the horse, and the man beneath.[125] Žižek remarks that fantasy is 'radically intersubjective' because it structures the subject's identity in relation to the Other's desire: 'the desire "realised" (staged) in fantasy is not the subject's own, but the *other's* desire'.[126] Guillaume-as-subject and Aerofle-as-Other thus become locked in a

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pp. 36-37. On another level, Haidu argues that the high-status opponents found in the poems offer a dissimulating transposition of the real violence that medieval knights practised on the peasants over whom they held power (*Subject of Violence*, pp. 53-54) – see Chapter One of this thesis.

[123] For a full discussion of arms and armour see Chapter One. For details on warhorses in this continuum of epic desire, see Daniel who writes: 'like master, like horse; the animal seems to share the chivalry to which it gave its name' (*Heroes and Saracens*, p. 55). He adds that the love of horses is a trait that links Christian and Saracen camps. Cohen gives an extended reading of the affective relationship between knight and steed in *Machines* (pp. 45-71). His account offers a Deleuzo-Guattarian reading of identity based on the idea of 'desiring-machines', and he argues that there is 'tactile syntax' between human and equestrian bodies and asks 'isn't there an erotic charge between man and horse?' (p. 49; p. 71).

[124] Haidu makes clear that Christians and Saracens alike appreciated the beauty of finely-crafted weaponry and he locates this shared appreciation precisely in the 'class identity' of warrior-knights (*Subject of Violence*, p. 47).

[125] Ehrenreich comments that 'at the level of the individual, the symmetry of war may even be expressed as a kind of love. Enemies by definition "hate" each other, but between habitual and well-matched enemies, an entirely different feeling may arise' (*Blood Rites*, p. 140). Ehrenreich refers to Zoé Oldenbourg who writes that in the Crusades, 'the Saracen, strong, brave and fierce and always vanquished in the end, was the ideal adversary in the medieval warrior's imagination' (*Les Croisades* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 39): cited in *Blood Rites*, p. 142.

[126] *Plague of Fantasies*, pp. 8-9.

continuum of desire, as Guillaume finds his desire manifested in a knight with whom he should have nothing in common.

After this lavish armorial description, the taunting and flyting recommences, and goes on for sixty lines, delaying the climactic moment when finally, the knights fight. The symmetry of the violent clashing is remarkable: the knights 's'entrevienent andui' ('both approach each other', *AC*, l. 1522) and 'andui se fierent' ('both strike each other', *AC*, l. 1525). More radically, as the battle gathers momentum the sense of individual bodies is lost:

> Ainz des hauberz n'orent deffendement,
> Lez les costez sont li fer en present;
> Poi se blecierent, navré sont nequedant.
> Endui se hurtent einsi tres durement
> Que a la terre li uns d'els l'autre estant;
> N'i a celui qui n'ait le cors sanglant. […]
> Et li uns l'autre dedenz le cors navra,
> Si que li sans contreval en cola. (*AC*, ll. 1526-35)

> They had no defence from their hauberks; against their ribs are the blades at the moment. They did not wound each other much; they are injured nevertheless. Both strike each other very ferociously so that each one of them stretches the other on the ground. There is not one who does not have a bloody body, and each wounded the other in the body so that the blood flowed down from it.

In contrast to the wounding discussed above, where the hero carved open his opponent in order to revel in his own integrity, the mutual wounding here distorts both bodies. Perniola reflects that 'to wound, expose, open or flay […] means to lose oneself in an abyss that ruptures the body's deceptive continuum'.[127] As the bodies touch and bleed, they mingle and become virtually indistinguishable. Stephen Thayer notes that touch has an ambivalent power and can both construct and erase difference: 'touch represents a confirmation of our boundaries and separateness while permitting a union or connection with others that transcends physical limits'.[128] Theweleit also pays attention to the way that violent touch can dissolve the subject's boundaries as well as the object's, so that the combatants 'enter a union'.[129] Moreover, Gibson notes the pleasure felt by a hero at this point of subjective

[127] Perniola, 'Between Clothing and Nudity', p. 245.

[128] Stephen Thayer 'Social Touching' in *Tactual Perception: A Sourcebook*, ed. by William Schiff and Emerson Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 263-304 (p. 298). Richard Heslin and Tari Alper write that 'touching implies interpersonal involvement'; it binds subjects together, even as it produces difference between them ('Touch: A Bonding Gesture' in *Nonverbal Interaction* (see Wiemann and Harrison, above), pp. 47-75 (p. 47)).

[129] *Male Fantasies*, I, pp. 203-4.

mingling, writing that the hero 'experiences the pleasure – never otherwise permitted him – of merging with another as he begins to absorb the villain's life force'.[130] Crucially, Gibson's comment follows directly on from his discussion of the hero's body, which is constructed as rigid, erect, hardened, disciplined and subject to the stringent regulation of chivalric life. In the heat of battle, however, he can give himself over to the obscene pleasure of intense, intimate touching; to a 'joyous commingling' that confirms his heroic identity, even as his body comes undone.[131] Desire, like blood, is a fluid stream that undermines both boundaries and binaries; the illicit desire of touching is disavowed by chivalric discourse, just as the shedding of blood is disavowed by the rigid, invulnerable construction of the heroic body.[132]

As we reach the troubling climax of intersubjective mingling, however, the bodies begin to pull apart again and we realise that Guillaume has gained the upper hand. He holds his sword, strikes the pagan and 'toute la cuisse del cors li dessevra' (*AC*, l. 1595). Emphasising Guillaume's victory, Aerofle begs to be allowed to die among his own men, and the pitiful pleading of this once powerful man provides a visual picture of Guillaume's domination over him – for Aerofle is prostrate in the mud and Guillaume has remounted his horse. In the same way that Boniface was used as a mouthpiece for Frankish self-aggrandisement in Chapter Two when he expressed fears over the Franks' irascible 'chevalerie', Aerofle's pleading here might be said to offer a flattering fantasy-reflection of Guillaume's heroism (and with it, Frankish heroism more generally). In response, and to transpose Aerofle's body into another fantasy construction of the Other, Guillaume leans from his horse and cuts off his head (*AC*, ll. 1710-12). The symbolism of such an execution has been described above, but given our new emphasis on incorporation, this ritual beheading specifically targets the focal point of Aerofle's status and power. By removing it, Guillaume absorbs that power, that masculinity, that *being*. Still not content, he then begins to undress the dead pagan and to put on the armour that has been so lovingly described (*AC*, l. 1716-21) so that 'le Turc resemble plus c'ome qui soit nez' ('he resembles the Turk more than any man born', *AC*, l. 1722). From the grammar, it is unclear whether Guillaume, more than anyone, resembles the Turk; or whether Guillaume resembles the Turk more than he resembles anyone else. Either way, the effect is striking. In Chapter One I argued that weapons and arms interact with the body to such an extent that they can become indistinguishable from it. That being the case, this violent

[130] *Warrior Dreams*, p. 112. Daniel also remarks on the intimacy of mortal combat (*Heroes and Saracen*, p. 37).

[131] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, I, p. xviii.

[132] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, I, p. 256.

appropriation of the pagan's apparel effects a quite literal incorporation of the defeated man's being, allowing Guillaume the ephemeral victory of a becoming-man. However, given the symbolic power of the armour and its ability to construct the body beneath it, Guillaume effectively *becomes* Aerofle when he steps into the Saracen armour; the assumption of Other armour re-configures his Christian body and renders him a becoming-Other. Thus, the very victory that was supposed to assert his bodily integrity and subjective independence in fact relies on the diffusion of his subjectivity over another, pagan body. This battle highlights the continuum of chivalric desire and rivalry that exists over and above social borders, disrupting the cultural and bodily differences asserted by those boundaries. However, just as mimetic desire problematises in this way the macrocosmic construction of community identity against a Saracen Other, so it problematises relationships of companionship *within* the Franco-Christian community. Let us turn to a second set-piece battle, that between Roland and Oliver in *Girart de Vienne*.

When fighting breaks out between Roland and Oliver, two supposed paragons of Christian knighthood who are famed for their companionship, the idea of harmonious community unity, stitched together through the abjection of the monstrous pagan, is fractured. For, even though the pair lapse into symmetry because of their shared chivalric values, the structure of social relationships, coupled with the heroic imperative to earn honour by defeating others, ultimately demands a winner. The chivalric values that unite these men must also radically divide them. Focussing first on the symmetrical arrangement of the fight, the pair 's'entrélongnent' ('move away from each other', *GDV*, l. 5209) and then race towards each other 'li uns encontre l'autre', ('the one against the other', l. 5213). When they clash, the mirroring of their moves is equally pronounced:

> Granz cous se donent es escuz de cartier,
> desus les bocles les font freindre et percier,
> les groses lances font froer et brisier. […]
> Si s'entrehurtent li noble chevalier
> que desoz aus ploierent li destrier,
> et tout par force les font ajenoillier. (*GDV*, ll. 5219-25)

> Great blows they give each other on the quartered shields, above the bosses they make them smash and rupture; they make the great lances shatter and break. The noble knights strike each other so that beneath them, the horses [buckle / fold] and by force make them kneel down.

The fight is then interrupted to take in the spectators, and even here there is symmetry. Aude prays for both of the men 'que il n'i soient honni ne vergongnié!' ('that they are not dishonoured or shamed there', *GDV*, l. 5294), whilst Oliver's father prays for his son's victory, and Charlemagne prays for that of his nephew (*GDV*, ll. 5328-35). Returning to

the fight, the merging of the two bodies is becoming more pronounced, and now ‘des brans toz nuz se fierent a bandon’ (‘with naked swords they strike each other without restraint’, *GDV*, l. 5345) until ‘tuit sont fandu li escu a lion’ (‘the shields decorated with lions are broken’, *GDV*, l. 5355). As was the case with Guillaume and Aerofle, bodies and the meanings attached to those bodies are being contested in the fight, and so they become disengaged and distorted as the knights battle it out. Yet, just as Roland and Oliver reach the intimate climax of violent assimilation, they pull apart again because assimilation inevitably leads to the incorporation of the one by the other, and in this battle, neither can be allowed such a victory. Instead, as described in Chapter Two, God steps in to break up the fight, and to allow the participants to emerge from it as ‘equals’ and with their chivalric honour intact. Kay argues that companionship is presented in the second half of *Girart de Vienne* as the solution to the problems of hierarchy and lineage that are developed in the first half. She further contends that social harmony is allowed to flourish so long as men and their relationships are a priority.[133] Whilst agreeing that men and their relationships are privileged in the Cycle (the nature of mimetic desire ensures this), I see their companionship as arbitrary – for the rivalry between them is not neutralised, but displaced by the imposition of Christian duty. Rather than offering a solution to the problem of hierarchy, their fragile companionship seems to suggest the arbitrary nature of community unity, for it is imposed on them from outside, and disavows the competitiveness demanded by their chivalric identities. This imposition of friendship allows a transition back to the other version of epic violence – that in which Christian masculinity is won through the violent sundering of pagan monsters – for no sooner are Roland and Oliver united (and the feuding brought to an end) than Saracens invade and Franco-Christian energies can be channelled into smashing and destroying these alien peoples.

Conclusions

I began this chapter with a quote from Coates’s *Ethics of War*, in which he proclaims that ‘as long as the other exists, war will be necessary’. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that the Other exists as a cultural category before violence breaks out, and before war is ‘necessary’. In an account of the role of the Saracen in the *chansons de geste* that evidences a similar understanding of Otherness, William W. Comfort writes that ‘the Saracens we meet, when they are not disfigured beyond recognition for literary purposes of contrast, are the Saracens of the Crusades’.[134] Again the assumption is that intrinsic

[133] *Political Fictions*, pp. 148-50.

[134] William W. Comfort, ‘The Literary Rôle of the Saracens in the French Epic’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 55 (1940), 628-59 (p. 628).

difference between monolithic bodies – Christian and Saracen – pre-exists the discourses used to describe those cultural bodies. This sits uneasily alongside passages in the poems in which differentially cultured bodies suddenly appear the same, or else share values and desires, or fight over the same prizes. Accordingly, this chapter has worked through this paradox by making explicit the link between identity and violence, showing that war and violence are processes through which the warrior subject manages his relationship with an Other who is fantasmatically constructed as a demonic pagan (in the rhetoric of Christian ideology), but who can reveal a mirror-like surface once this fantastic dimension has been broken down.

Throughout, I have shown that violence is focussed along the contours of the heroic body, both literally and taking that body as a metaphor for other boundaries. The knight's body must remain intact in order for symbolic transcendence to occur, and to assert and defend that physical integrity he must destroy the integrity of Others, reducing them to fragments and blood. That this happens largely over and across a Christian-Saracen divide gives anxious expression to Christian-Frankish community, forcibly materialising that unified identity through time and space. However, as with other exclusions performed by tactile interaction, this religious/racial one is not secure. On an individual level, for all bodily integrity seems to be established by fighting, the violent touch is also a point of intimacy that breaks through the boundaries of the Other and effects a kind of subjective mingling. When this individual insecurity is set in a wider context, we find that it is not always clear whether an opponent is even Saracen or not, and there is ambiguity over whether – and how – Christians can pass as Saracens. The enemy is a shifting and ill-defined force: now monster, now demon, now eminently praiseworthy convert.

This epic ambiguity maps onto medieval cultural anxiety about the Islamic world, anxiety that Comfort fails to apprehend. In *Medieval Boundaries,* Kinoshita discusses critical interpretations of the medieval conflict between East and West, and sees in them the kind of abstracting process discussed by Said in *Orientalism.*[135] By casting the 'conflict' in grand terms of enmity and prejudice – based on the 'reality' of the Crusades and *chansons* depicting Holy War – critics fail to see the everyday variety of relationships between Christians and Muslims. Of course there could be violence caused by cultural difference, but there could also be tolerance, co-operation and friendship.[136] In this light, Kinoshita reads the Oxford *Roland* not only as a tacit admission of the reality of tolerance and

[135] *Medieval Boundaries,* pp. 5-8.

[136] *Medieval Boundaries,* p. 7.

cooperation, but also as a narrative effort to end this 'reprehensible slide towards lax accommodationism' by asserting Christian-Frankish community over and against a Saracen-pagan Other marked by radical difference.[137] Positioning itself after the *Roland*, the Narbonne Cycle seems to take on board this ideological desire for a sense of absolute religious difference, yet in its detailed vision of the mechanics of heroic society and identity, it also attests to the impossibility – the failure – of such subjective certainty.

[137] *Medieval Boundaries*, pp. 16-32 (p. 32).

Conclusion

> Repeatedly, especially in their fictional literature, almost all of which turned on exploits of the brave and well-born, [medieval aristocrats] tried to create an idealised image of nobility and knighthood – and yet kept discovering that every ideal was shot through with contradiction.[1]

> *Getting Medieval*: not undertaking brutal private vengeance in a triumphal and unregulated bloodbath [...]; and not turning from an impure identity to some solidity guaranteed by God […]; but using ideas of the past, creating relations with the past, touching in this way the past in our efforts to build selves and communities now and into the future.[2]

By touching on bodies and behaviours in the Narbonne Cycle, I have outlined the beginnings of a way of reading social violence in that context; one that upsets easy moralising dichotomies between medieval savagery and modern civilisation. Touch, I have suggested, is not something that individuals 'do'; it is something they 'are', and if identity is constituted by and through acting that is conditioned by social discourses and practices, then the individual cannot be imagined outwith the complex codified system of intersubjective relationships into which he is born. Nor can 'our' ideological superiority over 'them' be conceived of as natural or innate, but is similarly constructed through the repeated and sometimes bloody assertion of superiority over the Other: 'the subject "is" only (exists exclusively as) the activity of its own self-positing'.[3] Knightly identity in the Narbonne Cycle is predicated on strictly regulated acting, on adherence to a code of

[1] Bouchard, *Strong of Body*, p. ix.

[2] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, p. 206.

[3] Žižek, *Organs*, p. 69.

touching that performs this social function: but true *heroism* is predicated on going beyond such social regulation. The hero's 'touchy recourse' to (excessive) violence is characteristic of a pure form of chivalry – the illegal beyond of the regulatory system.[4] As Kaeuper makes clear, for all the medieval world was deeply concerned to regulate behaviour and actions, this did not lead to 'peace' in the abstract sense, for those who saw themselves as highly refined knew that when honour was at stake, the proper thing to do was draw a sword.[5] In this way, chivalric heroism destabilises the very tactile and behavioural regimes by which its subjects are rendered intelligible.

It has been suggested that epic narratives envisage and explore the possible over-extension of the chivalric system.[6] The quest for social integrity – through dominating acting and the violent control of Other bodies – is simultaneously 'perfected' and yet taken into a realm beyond the law in these tales of conquests, sieges and violent taking.[7] Cowell suggests that while 'real-life' medieval warrior aristocrats must have seen in epic heroes a 'model for identity formation and social action', they must also have used the poems as a point of reflection, and recognised the need to stop short of the absolutism displayed therein. The 'social holocausts' that constitute the grand finales of so many poems in the genre must have acted as a brake, serving to remind the audience that this is a world pushed to (and beyond) its 'speculative limits'.[8] My argument is aligned to this position, for it suggests that the violent, tactile excesses of the poems, whilst being entirely produced by the chivalric ideology of the day, work to upset the very foundations of that ideology – grounded as it is in fixed bodies and naturalised difference. The poems express in this way the anxieties of a class that is defined by its socio-economic domination of Other bodies, and that defines itself by the glorious battlefield pursuits that nevertheless engage them only for a few months of the year. Moreover, once 'natural' difference has been uncoupled from 'cultural' identity and meaning, then other uncouplings must naturally follow: heroism breaks loose from ontology, privilege from male 'bloodright', femininity from the female body, monstrosity from Otherness. In this way, the poems 'put in question both social violence and the symbolic fabric on which a masculine social order might claim to rest'.[9]

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[4] Kaeuper, 'Chivalry and the Civilising Process', p. 29.

[5] 'Chivalry and the Civilising Process', p. 34.

[6] Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, pp. 178-210; and Cowell, *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, pp. 102-14.

[7] Cowell, *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, p. 108.

[8] *Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, pp. 114-15.

[9] Kay, *Political Fictions*, p. 21.

Returning to Dinshaw's tactile historiography, outlined in the Introduction, her concept of 'getting medieval' calls on us to erect channels of communication with the past in order to undo the binaries between medieval and modern; binaries that place a straight-jacket on thinking about the past. By accessing the texts of the Cycle through their indeterminacy, by attempting to sketch a contingent history through the complexities of touching behaviour therein, I have sought to touch the past in a way that truly 'gets medieval'. And in so doing I have found that subjects both medieval and modern manipulate Others and negotiate identity in patterns of touch, gesture and exchange; communities both medieval and modern are forged through arbitrary exclusion (enforced, if need be, with violence); and given this touching across time, violences both medieval and modern need to be more thoroughly re-historicised, and re-imagined in their complex and problematic relationship to touch and identity.

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Abbreviations

CFMA: Classiques Français du Moyen Âge

LG: Lettres Gothiques

SATF: Société des Anciens Textes Français

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