

MAPPING HUMAN VIRTUE AND THE ETHICS OF DESIRE:

THE LUDIC(ROUS) AS UMPIRE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Building on the assumption that society constructs ideology through, according to Louis Althusser, “apparatuses,” this dissertation explores how medieval romances written from the twelfth through fourteenth century exploit alterity by repurposing the *Chanson de Roland*’s portrayals of Eastern others and women to negotiate the exigencies contemporary to them. The proof texts, in addition to the Oxford *Roland*, include martial romances, deemed martial because the hero serves a liege lord rather than a lady: *Guy of Warwick* and *The Sowdone of Babylone*. In these texts, knights prove themselves men by vanquishing a sensationalized Eastern foe. This project also examines amorous romances, in which affections for a lady initiate the hero’s achievements. These texts likewise employ depictions latent in the *Roland*; they distinguish women as separate from men and as objects partly constitutive of male identity. The Middle English *Floris and Blancheflour* and Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* both exhibit such ideological representations.

By selecting ludic elements from each poem, including depictions of and references to games, laughter, play, and humor, this project draws on the theories of Johan Huizinga, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Henri Bergson to explore hermeneutics of the ludic(rous). These textual elements reveal how the medieval texts in question sought to produce new and revised definitions of masculinity that defined man against what he is

not, in these instances, non-Christians and females. The masculinities espoused in each text relate to the historical moment that produced them, which is evident in reviewing historical sources and by comparing insular texts to the continental sources from which they were translated and adapted.

In this project, ludic(rous) elements, which, from alternative perspectives are at once ludic and ludicrous, hence, “ludic(rous),” are ambiguously gameful, ridiculous, as well as earnest and consequential. They expose mechanisms by which medieval romance produces ideologies constitutive of male identity. As much as the ludic(rous) elements’ ambiguity burdens characters in each text with interpreting their meaning, they invite medieval audiences to make calls as would today’s umpires as to how one might behave as a Christian in the Latin West.

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CHAPTER I

SKETCHING THE TERRITORY: METHODS, BACKGROUND, RATIONALE AND SUMMARY

What qualities and behaviors circumscribe and delimit a virtuous human, a man, or a Christian? The answers are contingent on cultural and historical context because they are ideological, and ideology arises from techniques of power in a particular time and place.¹ In his *Ideology and the State*, Louis Althusser establishes how dominant culture maintains its status through the influence of ideology on the working class. It reproduces “submission to the rules of the established order” (133), thereby maintaining that order. Though the era of capitalism, and the subject of Althusser’s work, fully emerged well after the Middle Ages, the role of ideology nonetheless applies. What he calls state apparatuses, including schools, families, and cultural productions (143), which help designate and distribute power, had their medieval counterparts (154). The medieval church structured and regulated daily life; feudal alliance bonded men and their households; and imaginative literature, though later reproduced in popular, “unofficial” iterations removed from “state control,” each corresponds to the cultural productions cited within Althusser’s theory. In particular, medieval, chivalric romances staging encounters with the Muslim world and with women likely provided an individual “with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society” (155). Regardless of whether the texts were designed to influence or control social practices, these cultural productions affected public perceptions and inflected the ways in which cultures defined roles in society, which is, necessarily, related to identity.

¹ Ideology resembles a fiction: it presents an imaginary construct of reality, one that endorses, or critiques, a particular worldview, and it shapes how people engage their realities (Althusser 265). Throughout this project, I discuss “ideologies” broadly as belief systems formed by political, religious, and cultural exigencies that either “justify or alter their generating conditions” (Crane, *Insular* 11).

This project examines how twelfth to fourteenth-century medieval romances, developed from the early *Chanson de Roland*, an epic song of deeds, engage their contemporary social values, attitudes, and mores by means of ludic(rous) structures and representations. For these texts, imbued at times with various ideologies, are constitutive of identities, the examining of which is valuable in its own right, but also because doing so helps reveal how twenty-first century issues of alterity have, over time, developed, and continue, like the romances examined, to perpetuate and mask the mechanisms of their reproduction with humor, game, and laughter.

To understand how Middle English romances negotiate alterity, I choose to examine ludic elements,² delimiting the scope of my analysis with definitions and principles outlined by Henri Bergson, Johan Huizinga, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Bergson explores the polyvalent nature of laughter; Huizinga presents the serious, culturally formative function of play, which occurs in isolated spaces and appears non-serious, but can actually be quite fraught,³ and Bakhtin's understanding of carnivalesque inversions provides, as a whole, a framework for analyzing laughter, games, jokes, and reversals in medieval texts that seem at once playful, but under close scrutiny, are not only grave, but also consequential.⁴

² Scholars outside the disciplines of history and anthropology have, for the most part, been slow to examine medieval games (S. Patterson 3), despite their pervasiveness and “their ability to reflect cultural processes, values, and impulses” (3).

³ Johan Huizinga promotes a wide scope to which the ludic and play apply encompassing “consecrated spot[s] of ritual”(29) that are isolated and hallowed “within which special rules obtain” (29), including: “the arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc.” (29). Like enjoyment of present day theater, which allows audiences to safely engage real problems in a remote, fictive realm (McDonald 14-15), Huizinga's concept of the “magic circle” offers players a space governed by its limited temporality and contingencies in which new insights are revealed with meaningful applications to the real world (28-29), which is serious work, indeed (Huizinga 19).

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrates how folk humor and carnivalesque laughter, connected to recurrent medieval feasts, maintain balance within social structures by simultaneously destabilizing and affirming

My study investigates ludic—which the *OED* defines as “pertaining to undirected and spontaneously playful behavior”—elements in medieval romance, and to some readers’ likely consternation, I broaden the scope of my inquiry by investigating textual elements categorizable as “game.” The choice allows me to include chess, backgammon, “dicing games...hermeneutic games, debate games...hunting games, fencing, tournaments, and interactive poetry” as not only gameful pastimes in the Middle Ages,⁵ but also as ludic elements alongside humor and laughter, which irony often occasions (S. Patterson 11).

Humor often functions through incongruous juxtaposition, when expectations are met “with an unexpected conclusion” (Halsall 89), which recalls irony. Though not always comic, irony can be quite funny; when it is not, it can reveal the underbelly of humor wherein someone or something is exploitively derided—with variously serious outcomes. Though a problematic analytical category, irony reveals the earnest/jest dichotomy inherent in the mechanism of humor, which, like play, maintains a “neither conclusive nor fixed” relationship between the serious and the non-serious (Huizinga 24). I also examine what might be called representational inaccuracies: understatement, overstatement, and stereotypes; all represent something, but not as it truly is. Such portrayals subvert expectations—yielding “an unexpected conclusion” or merely “bringing together anomalous components” that can be used to comic effect when

social hierarchies and institutions (9-11). An example is the Feast of Fools tradition (5) that, for a limited time each year, irreverently turns authority upside down. Such inverted authority, or “misrule,” surely occasioned much laughter in the Middle Ages, while undoubtedly ruffling a few feathers. This duality reveals how humor can from one perspective, be joyful and amusing, and from another, be problematic and degrading.

⁵ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), “game” refers to amusing pastimes, including hunting sports, athletic contests like jousts and tourneys; intellectual contests from chess to backgammon to dice and debate; love-play, and finally, jokes.

associated with incongruous elements, or when placed in extraordinary situations (Halsall 89).

We may laugh today for different reasons than in the past, but as the fabliaux tradition shows, people have always found, at some point in time, something to laugh at, even if, as we say today, it might be “off-color.” Few actions are as arresting, however, as laughter, a physiological characteristic unique unto humans (Bergson 3). By virtue of its—at times—involuntary nature, laughter is well-positioned as revealer of Truth. Yet laughter is ambiguous, in part because it can be forced, rather than occurring spontaneously. Laughter is not always playful, either; indeed, it can be used “to intimidate by humiliating” (Bergson 198).⁶ Laughter is as multivalent as irony. Though ambivalent and thereby problematic, its infrequency in medieval romance and its potential for signification both warrant laughter’s inclusion in this project.

I do not mean to suggest this project is all fun and games, for as much as I point to ludic aspects within each text, a necessary function of my inquiry shows how ludic turns may also be deemed “ludicrous.” “Ludicrous,” in its obsolete form, describes “play or sport” that is “intended in jest, jocular,” and even “derisive” (*OED*). Today’s lexicon defines “ludicrous” as something that occasions derisive laughter; it is ridiculous, or laughably absurd. “Derision” and “ridicule” may occur in jest and incite laughter, but as modern bullying attests, these actions can yield serious outcomes. The shifting definition of “ludicrous” shows how easily play and game may degenerate to painful earnest and acquire sinister implications contradictory to the root word’s playful connotation.

Likewise, the seemingly lighthearted ludic elements in medieval romance, upon closer

⁶ Laughter and play are typically seen as related because they are “non-serious” and because the comic “provokes laughter” (Huizinga 24).

investigation, better align with modern conceptions of “ludicrous,” for ridiculous portrayals of marginalized characters mark them as “Other,” that from which readers in the dominant social group would seek disassociation.⁷ In the ludic(rous), the lighthearted playfulness of dominant, “mainstream” humor is predicated on conditions of abjection and exploitation. This “othering,” wrought in jest, has ideological implications for identity formation. Such representations, seen from a modern perspective, are even less humorous when we acknowledge the likeness of systematic othering to the reproduction of Karl Marx’s superstructure, where those in power exclude, disempower, and exploit “others” to reproduce systems that maintain hierarchies benefitting the dominant group (20-21). The etymological slippage between “ludic” and “ludicrous,” as well as human experience testifying to the latter’s transformation into ridicule, suggests that, as in Marx’s superstructure, a study of one side of the dialectic without the other would foreclose complete understanding of the mechanism and production of, in this instance, the ludic: play, laughter, ironies, inversions, and games, as well as their ideological effects on identity formation.

Though not all cultural productions today, or in the past, are cogs in the machination of ideology, the effects of ideology on human development in the Middle Ages nonetheless warrants investigation. I have chosen to limit my study not only to ludic elements, but also to medieval romance. Romance is a name for many things: language, fictions, ballads, affairs, and a genre (Fuchs 3). Clara Reeve defines the genre as “an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things” (qtd. in Scholes et al. 7). It is “lofty and elevated” linguistically, and it “describes what never happened nor is

⁷ My proof texts exhibit both ludic and ludicrous elements, so when appropriate, I use “ludic(rous)” to signal the words’ similarity and to unite them in description of my material while accounting for the play/earnest dichotomy between the two words.

likely to happen” (7). Within the context of this study, I draw on Northrup Frye’s understanding of romance as a story within which a marvelous, yet human personage moves “in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended” (qtd. in Fuchs 5). As these tenuous and incomplete, yet also expansive definitions suggest, romance overflows its bounds and “transcends the specificities of genre” (Fuchs 5). This has led some scholars to see romance not only as a genre, but also as a mode or strategy of narration (9), which Patricia Parker notes, “simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective or object” (qtd. in Fuchs 8).

It would seem impossible to limit a study to such an amorphous subject as romance, yet I make an attempt here, and I do so for three reasons. Firstly, As Nicola McDonald points out, popular romance offers “a space, narrative as well as imaginary, in which cultural norms and divergences from those norms are negotiated and articulated” (12). Romance “reflects ideological conflicts” bound to each text’s moment of composition (Fuchs 40). While romance may not “engage in the overt polemicism of ideological arguments,” it may, nonetheless, comment on dominant ideologies (Crane, *Insular* 11). Therefore, at times, and to varying degrees, romance may act as container for ideology and cultural norms; in doing so, it becomes didactic, but not as medieval conduct manuals or encyclopedias are, which is why these have, in the main, been excluded from my overall project.

Romance’s educative quality is the second reason why I have chosen romance for my analysis. The pleasure associated with reading it, the very characteristic for which academics have often dismissed it,⁸ resembles the educative experience found in game.

⁸ Nicola McDonald points out that romance was once defined as “everything that epic – distinguished by its ‘due proportion’, ‘force’, ‘precision’, ‘taste’, and ‘genius’ as ‘art’—is not” (8). Romance has been derided

Romance's didactic nature is inherently ludic. As Barbara Fuchs points out, drawing on Christopher Baswell, romance provides a safe space to probe contemporary problems (51), much the way sports offer today's participants an environment outside everyday life to engage lessons in discipline, interpersonal communication, forbearance, and perseverance (Huizinga 27, 29). The games may be ludic, but their lessons can be serious, and the same can be said of reading romance.⁹

My last justification for focusing primarily on romance is that, if we concede romance is a popular art form that adapts to the fashions, concerns, and technologies of its context while relying on formulas that are not only satisfying, but also repeatable (Fuchs 124), then what may be true of medieval romance may also apply to its afterlives, of which there are many. Today's blockbuster films in which a superhero strives to win a lady's affection while discovering his true nature and surmounting all odds to save the world, or a beloved, comprise but one generic example.¹⁰ I have chosen romance, again,

as "degraded and degenerate" literature produced by "hacks" for the lower-classes (9), but as McDonald reminds us, romance has entertained and afforded medieval and modern audiences alike "enormous pleasure" (10), in part because, despite romance's strategies of delay and deferral, the "kind of desire that propels popular romance *always* finds satisfaction" (13). Indeed, Geraldine Heng defines romance as "the name of a desiring narrational modality that coalesces from the extant cultural matrix at hand, poaching and cannibalizing from a hybridity of all and any available resources, to transact a magical relationship with history, of which it is in fact a consuming part" (*Empire* 9).

⁹ As Northrup Frye observes, the highly conventionalized patterns in romance "resemble games;" just as we "expect each game of chess to be different, but...do not want the conventions of the game itself to alter" (44), the pleasure of romance is in part derived from its conventionality, the rules to which it adheres. It appears "as though romance were simply replacing the world of ordinary experience by a dream world, in which the narrative movement keeps rising into wish fulfillment or sinking into anxiety and nightmare" (Frye 53). The tension to which Frye alludes and the limited time and space in which the experience of romance occurs both testify to the genre's ludic qualities (Huizinga 27, 29). Like play, reading romance "interpolates itself as a temporary activity satisfying in itself and ending there" (Huizinga 27), which can, nonetheless, utterly absorb a player with great intensity (32). I should point out that even if the activity ends, that does not mean its effects are no longer present, nor that lessons learned during the activity cease to exist.

¹⁰ Frederic Jameson points out, "the fate of romance as a form is dependent on the availability of elements more acceptable to the reader than those older magical categories for which some adequate substitute must be invented" (qtd. in Fuchs 8). It's for this reason that Geraldine Heng accuses romance of "cannibalizing"

for the very reason past scholars have rejected it: its popular currency, the likes of which make it and the Middle Ages immediately accessible and relevant to today's audiences who would otherwise disregard the past.

This project is predicated on the belief that one best appreciates a text not only by recognizing its historical context, but also by understanding its place in the literary history of which it is part, despite geographic, linguistic, and temporal boundaries. Consequently, the present study accounts for how Middle English texts *translate*, or adapt and elaborate upon, continental sources. Where medieval English poets and scribes adapt their sources, the preoccupations of their unique time and place emerge, for as Andre Lefevere attests, a translator's foremost task "is to make the original [text] accessible to the audience for whom they are translating" (19); the "domestication" of the foreign text tames it, making it relevant, appropriate, and understandable for its target audience. Traces of this process reveal concerns unique unto the translated text's historical context, for the target audience determines its adequacy (Vermeer 193), and its acceptability hinges on the extent to which it ascribes to the target culture's norms (Toury 171), which are both context-sensitive and unstable (174).¹¹ An implicit concern of this project assesses the ethics of historicizing, representing and speaking for others, as well as translating, for all require mediation; to overlook the means of my proof texts' production would be to disavow the labors that constitute them and thereby participate in

all "available resources" (*Empire* 9), for in doing so, it finds those substitutes for old patterns and material that, as Jameson says, allow it to endure. For my part, I see echoes of medieval romance in today's most popular films, including superhero franchises.

¹¹ A translator mediates between audience and text (Lefevere 19), but approaches to the task differ. The "paraphrast" treats the process as though linguistic elements "were mathematical signs that can be reduced to the same value by means of addition and subtraction" (Schleiermacher 48); whereas the imitator "strives...to give the reader an impression similar to the one received by readers who shared a language and an age with the writer" (48).

a process that silences and disenfranchises voices deemed unworthy of mention in the history of Western literature.¹²

To acknowledge the historical moments in which my texts were produced and to see them as much as a modern can within the context of his/her own time and place, this project not only attends to ludic(rous) elements in each proof text, but also to each text's historical context. Only by doing so can we approximate an understanding of *why* scribes and translators changed elements of their sources to respond to exigencies of their time. History is not often gameful, yet its inclusion in this project is substantial, for only by attending to it can we begin to comprehend the meanings and relevance of a medieval text's ludic(rous) elements for its contemporary audiences.

In order to approach the stories discussed herein with greater understanding of the representational norms that inform them, I will provide an overview, though not an exhaustive one, of traditional methods by which medieval texts portrayed cultural "others" and women. I include more specific discussions of both strands of criticism within the chapters to which they apply. My intent is to establish a preliminary understanding of how medieval Christian authors in the Latin West, drawing on earlier sources, conceived of Jews, Muslims, and women for readers who are unfamiliar with these representations. Of course, scholarship on both postcolonial and ethnic studies as well as feminist theory and criticism is immense. My attempts to encapsulate them here

¹² I allude here to Maria Rosa Menocal's position that scholars of Western Literature have seldom acknowledged their subject matter's debt to Arabic literature (*The Arabic* 9); even in Spain, Lisa Lampert-Weissig points out, scholars have at times sought to diminish Iberian literature's Arabic connections, for acknowledging its Southern and Eastern, non-Christian influences, for some, undermines the extent to which Spain conforms to a "European" subjectivity (36). Menocal argues "the selective process of history and literary history has, in the natural course of telling the story of the victors, deprived us of an appreciation of many critical subtexts, and has in great measure eliminated or simplified and distorted beyond recognition many of the cultural forces that were catalytic in the medieval period" (*The Arabic* 15), a statement that informs the present project and its discussion of early analogues to Middle English texts.

are, we might aptly deem, ludicrous. Nevertheless, I hope to sketch patterns among the literary representations of marginalized groups in the medieval Latin West, non-Christian and female, to lay the groundwork for my literary analyses. What follows will necessarily be incomplete, but where I fall short, I hope each subsequent chapter will, in some measure, account for my shortcomings here.

Attitudes authorizing beliefs and actions against cultural and ethnic others were prevalent during a period of European identity formation between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. As Geraldine Heng explains, this “identity” was “vested in a description of the world that anatomizes alien nations, populations and races in ways that would secure and stabilize the moorings of what it means to be Christian and European” (“Jews” 262). Of course, “race” as we understand it today did not exist in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, as Thomas Hahn argues, “race does operate distinctively in various medieval contexts” (7), and it functions as a “trope of difference” (7). Hahn would agree with Naomi Zack when she claims: “There is no anachronism in identifying the notion of a human division into hierarchical groups, together with the importance of genealogy, as the *historical* foundation of that modern system of biological race, which is now known not to have a scientific foundation” (3); indeed, “structures of identity and difference in the Middle Ages directly correspond to some historical and contemporary practices of race” (Hahn 9). Geraldine Heng posits race as “the strategic, epistemological, and political commitments” that attach “to a repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences...that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups” (*The Invention* 3). Race, she says, constructs “a hierarchy of peoples for

differential treatment;” it “is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content” (*The Invention* 3). The systematic essentializing of groups of people played constitutive roles in emerging, collective identities, like England’s (5), and we can see these essentializing representations in medieval romance, though in this project, I will speak of “cultural others” rather than use the term “race.”

Romance depictions of Eastern others drew on early conceptions, held by cartographers, who saw the world as “banded,” divided latitudinally in relationship to the sun. They believed proximity to solar heat affected human biological makeup (Halsall 92). Constantinus Africanus put the theory thus: “the northern regions near the pole are cold and dry, and therefore the water and air are especially clear, and the bodies of the inhabitants are healthy, of a pleasing color” (Akbari 143); whereas “[t]he southern regions are precisely the opposite: being hot and humid, the bodies of the inhabitants are black in color and tend to be phlegmatic” (143). Such beliefs pervaded literature in the Latin West. Unlike northern peoples, Arabs for instance, “lived too close to the sun; the blood was drawn to their heads making them cowardly by cunning” (Halsall 92).¹³ These geo-biological theories guided early Western assumptions about human difference, as the first half of this project will show.

Groups of non-Christians that resisted medieval geographical theories of biology, however, existed, such as Jewish communities; they were essentialized and

¹³ Throughout the patristic and encyclopedic traditions, Noah’s son Ham is associated with both Africa and heat (Akbari 40). He was believed to embody “the primordial passions of the Jews and heretics” (49), and medieval Christian authors grafted Ham’s attributes onto Muslims, many of whom originated in Africa. Belief in Ham’s “primordial passions,” appetite for the flesh, abetted construction of a lusty Muslim stereotype that found a corollary in the Islamic vision of heaven.

persecuted at the expense of England's emerging identity nonetheless.¹⁴ Seen as “unassimilated internal aliens” in England (Heng, “Jews” 249), negative portrayals of Jews not only emphasized their alterity, but substantiated fictions that justified actions taken against them.¹⁵ In 1179 and subsequently, “synagogues began to be confiscated, and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) introduced the ignominious law that Jews had to wear badges to distinguish themselves” (Schildgen 101, Heng, “Jews” 250). Jews were

¹⁴ One of the most striking assaults on medieval Jews occurred early in the crusades. Jews were massacred in the Rhineland by undisciplined crusaders (Houseley 45-46). Comprised in part from lower classes, they were “inflamed by irresponsible preachers” (Mayer 40), like Peter the Hermit, who may have projected anti-Jewish themes “more overtly or implicitly than the preaching that was conducted or organized by the Pope” (Houseley 46). Regardless, the crusaders, who were likely “attracted by the wealth of the important Jewish communities of the Rhineland[,]...indulged themselves in pogroms on a scale hitherto unprecedented in the Middle Ages” (Mayer 40). Though these actions were later condemned, no formal apology can effectively blot this atrocity from the pages of history. The perpetrators felt authorized to carry out such violence, and these perspectives contributed to and participated within a discourse that legitimized anti-Semitic practices and laws in the Latin West.

¹⁵ Climate alone could not explain the physiognomy of Jewish communities. Because Jews had frequently relocated, their physical similarities were attributed to diet rather than geography. This belief produced stereotypes derived from and connected to Jewish alimentation. Their food was held responsible for their perceived pallor, timidity, and “eagerness to keep themselves apart from the society of others” (Akbari 149), which was understood as melancholy. In the thirteenth-century *Judensau*, Jews were associated with pigs in an abominable rendering that aligns them, ironically, with what they are proscribed from eating (Heng, *Empire* 80). Once established, this association aligned Jews with consumption of fatty, salted foods (Akbari 149). Assumptions about Jewish diets led to inaccurate stereotypes about their bodies, including one that aligned Jewish men with women. In the 1300's, Peter Biller, Bernard of Gordon, and Albertus Magnus debated the veracity of claims that Jewish men experienced a bloody, hemorrhoidal flux symptomatic of their “inherent” melancholy (Akbari 148-149). This monthly discharge was believed to purge their blood “of an excess of melancholy (black humor)” (149). In this instance, Jews are feminized, for in particular, the “bloody flux” was rumored to occur monthly (149), like menstruation. It “reflected, on a microcosmic level, the uncleanness of Synagoga herself, for the entire community of the Jews was believed to have become unclean (that is, ‘out of place,’ cast out, excluded) at the time of the Crucifixion” (Akbari 152). To the medieval mind, the otherness of Jews was, therefore, conceived as a corporeal uncleanness that was coded female. Misunderstandings of Jews and Judaism also led to perceptions of Jews as heretics: they believed in the Christian God, but did not accept Jesus as their savior. They were “variously represented as the antithesis of Christians” (Heng, *Empire* 80), and they were shown as subhuman and animalistic (80). These depictions “reflect mental images of group members and symbolically represent beliefs about the nature of peoples” (Weeda 589). Such ethnic stereotyping increased in the twelfth-century, correlating with the crusades, pilgrimages, and the rise of the universities (592). From “example handbooks of rhetoric and poetry” (592), clerics learned the art of ethnic stereotyping “in order to create convincing characterizations” (592), or, we might say, inflammatory ones. Their models “reflected the predominate stereotypes of their day, which subsequently slipped into new representations of the ethnic other” (592). Like the game of telephone, part of each original message would persist, but it would be augmented, if not twisted, by new interpretations. Each stereotype's permutation becomes a form of “sociocultural capital” indicative of a dominant culture's values (Weeda 590). Stereotypes of Jews helped preserve the integrity of Christian identity by emphasizing the two groups' alterity; Jewish distinctions were then used to authorize violence against them.

accused of ritual child murders, including that of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255, which resulted in nineteen executions (Heng, “Jews” 250-254). These internal “outsiders” were expelled from England in 1290, in large part because of the anti-Semitic fictions English authorities allowed to circulate (251).

Anti-Semitic practices in the Latin West, like Christians’ assumptions of and attitudes towards Jews, were grafted onto medieval portrayals of Muslims. Christian authors systematically demonized, disempowered, and attacked followers of Islam using and extending strategies developed in their invectives against Jews. In both England and on the continent, the Christian majority believed Jews were different “from Christian folk” and that Jews and Muslims “were proximately alike: two alien communities linked by points of resemblance and historical ventures...against the West” (Heng, “Jews” 255). Evidence of Muslim assaults against the West included the “Arab-Berber invasion of Visigothic Spain in 711, Abd-al Rahman’s encounter with Charles Martel at Poitiers in 732, the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim’s destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009, and Saladin’s resettlement of Jerusalem after its Islamic reconquest in 1187” (255). Like Judaism before it, Islam was seen as a threat to Christianity, and both were made scapegoats for Christian social failings (Tolan 16).¹⁶

¹⁶ Problematic portrayals of Muslims surface at least as early as the late seventh century, spurred by fear of Islam’s rapid expansion. In the writings of Anastasius, a monk of Saint Catherine’s monastery on Mount Sinai, he strives to “erect a wall of difference between Islam and Christianity” (Tolan 44) by depicting Muslims as demonic allies of the devil (43). Though aware of Islamic monotheism, Anastasius presents this as a “vener” masking “true idolatry” (44) to dissuade uneducated Christians from converting. He therefore, “is not ignorant of the similarities between the two faiths; he is painfully aware of them. This is why he stresses the differences” (44). The specific fear of Arab expansion resulted in recapitulations of anti-Islamic representations in writings from the seventh to the fifteenth century, yielding stock depictions of Muslims. These, Dorothee Metlitzki says of portrayals in *The Sowdowne of Babylone*, had become “petrified in a literary convention which served as a vehicle for propaganda and psychological warfare” (188).

As in medieval portrayals of Jews, unflattering, inaccurate, and even pejorative stereotypes align Muslims with what their religious injunctions disavow. Muslims are proscribed from eating pork, yet like Jews, they are aligned with pigs. They are also aligned with dogs, which can be explained by the narrative that Mohammed's corpse was consumed by both pigs and dogs after being thrown in a ditch (Kritzeck 18). Islam maintains injunctions against crafting and worshiping icons (Akbari 216, 240), effects of which are visible in the architecture and adornments of the mosque-cathedral Mahdinat-al Ziyarat of Córdoba and Granada's Alhambra. Yet, Muslims are often portrayed in medieval literature as idolaters, a form of worship they are stringently to eschew. "Shirk," the Arabic term for associating other beings with God, is, in Islam, the gravest and only unforgivable sin (Kritzeck 118). Nevertheless, in the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Sowdone of Babylone*, Muslims are portrayed polytheistic idolaters.¹⁷

Lacking a complete picture of Islam, Christians drew on their limited and distorted knowledge of Ishmaelites, and later, knowledge of Mohammed, to understand Muslims. This contributed to distinctive Muslim stereotypes used in literature, such as the irrational hot-head, magician, trickster, heretic, and antichrist. Christians saw Ishmael as the wild, "bastard son of Abraham" who was "a magician" (Tolan 20). The *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* bolsters connections between Ishmael's sorcery and Muslims, as do fragmental legends of Mohammed's life. Because he did not prophesize or perform

¹⁷ Depictions of Mohammed were also instrumental in reinforcing Muslim stereotypes. In the twelfth century *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, "Mauhomet made an idol of himself in Spain, used his necromancy to fill it with demons, and set it up to protect the Saracens from Christian attack" (Tolan 133). This well-known text reinforces the view of Mohammed, and by extension, Muslims, as heretical idolaters. Mohammed's magic and tricks won him supporters, but Christians believed he had "dupe[d] his ignorant followers into following him" (Tolan 168). This view inspired the stereotype of the deceptive Muslim, visible in *Guy of Warwick's* duplicitous Amoraunt. In him, we also see vestiges of Ishmael the wild man; he is quick-tempered, wrathful, and madly irrational. As we will see in Chapter Three, Laban in the *Sowdone of Babylone* also recalls this hot-headed irrationality.

miracles, essential works of a prophet by Christian standards (Tolan 163, 165), Mohammed was believed to have used “trickery and magic” to acquire followers (Tolan 141). His association with magic was transferred onto Muslims in general, as represented in the *Chanson de Roland*’s King Corsablis, who knows the magic arts; in Floripas and her magic girdle in the *Sowdone of Babylone*; and in the Emir of *Floris and Blancheflour*, who possesses an enchanted tree. Mohammed also acquired the label of heresiarch, for which Christians classified him as an apocalyptic heretic (Kritzeck 17-18). His followers, consequently, were also deemed heretical, for they rejected the Trinity (Tolan 9). Christian views on heresy led to the association of Muslims with the “Antichrist” (8), and conflation of Mohammad with Allah did little to discourage this view. In particular, Mohammad was often identified as part of a perverse trinity including Tervagant and Apollo (Tolan 136-137, Akbari 202). Lastly, Mohammed’s polygamy fanned the flames of the Muslim stereotype as lusty and hot-headed (Tolan 152).¹⁸

From a more informed, twenty-first century perspective, we see that none of these labels—idolater, antichrist, magician, hot-headed trickster—fit. Viewing Islamic religious tenets against medieval Muslim stereotypes suggests that legends of Mohammad, like the fictitious narratives constructed about Jews, were “consciously contrived and circulated as propaganda to incite Christians to warfare against Moslems” (Kritzeck 19).¹⁹ Human ignorance, fear of outsiders, and cultural biases, which were believed to be true, were of course, contributing factors as well.

¹⁸ Understood by medieval Christians through problematic Koranic translations and glosses (Akbari 249), the Muslim afterlife was imagined as a sensual paradise that promised a man seventy-two attendant virgins (Akbari 248). The Islamic heaven offered “earthly, fleshly” (249) pleasures because Muslim disavowal of salvation history deprived it of the “fullness of apocalyptic time” (Akbari 249).

¹⁹ Though some Christians may have been ignorant as to what Muslims truly believe, others, like Anastasius, were aware of Islamic fundamentals. Importantly, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny,

Medieval romances depicted women, like cultural and religious others, in disempowering ways, even if, at times, they appeared to elevate, rather than diminish, a woman's status.²⁰ Women were categorically marginalized and lacked the privileges and freedoms of their male counterparts.²¹ Where women are instrumental to male identity construction in romance, they are typically excluded in favor of male subjects from roles in which they could speak and act in uncircumscribed ways to meaningfully affect change in their personal and socio-political situations. The outcome of such representations, like those of non-Christians, is ideological: it defines "maleness" not only in terms of the male protagonist's commendable traits, but also as that quality which enables a man to rightfully subordinate others, in this case, women, to his authority.

As in the inaccurate portrayals of medieval Christendom's cultural "others," the discourse of misogyny, as both a genre and a *topos*, proceeded not from truthful, first-hand accounts of evil, threatening women, but through a tradition of writings built on other "authorities'" opinions of them, as Howard Bloch has shown (*Medieval* 3-4, 7). As one example, "St. Jerome...[set] forth all the wickedness of women and so provided the

journeyed to Spain in 1142 (Kritzeck 10), where he "conceived, planned, and sponsored his project to study, comprehensively and from original sources, the religion of Islam (Kritzeck 14). He commissioned translations known today as the Toledan Collection (Kritzeck 108), including the Koran; the *Fabulae Sacernorum*, which contains legends of Mohammed; the *Liber generationis Mahumet*; and the *Doctrina Mahumet* (109). Though the last two were neither the most useful of selections, nor the best translated, they did communicate "Islam's essential connection with the main stream of Semitic religion" (109), a concept not always recognized before. Peter the Venerable's commission revealed Islam as wholly monotheistic, to the extent that Muslims rejected the idea of the Trinity. According to Peter, Muslims "do not believe that there exists in the single essence of the deity the number of three Persons" (Kritzeck 117). Despite Peter's new-found knowledge, medieval Christian text continued to represent Muslims as polytheistic pagans worshipping Mohammed rather than Allah within a pantheon of deities.

²⁰ The courtly love tradition depicts men as acting in service of women, yet the power dynamic was more fictional than real. Moreover, the frequent, gratuitous depictions of women's abduction and non-consensual sex with men in medieval romance (and elsewhere) greatly undermines the fantasy that women in *fin' amor*, and in historical reality, truly wielded power over men.

²¹ Of course, men in the Latin West were ascribed different agencies contingent on their lineage, wealth, status, and occupation, but in the main, they suffered fewer categorical injunctions against their speech and abilities than did women within their cultural group, as I will show in this introductory chapter.

Middle Ages with a convenient compendium of anti-feminist literature” (Parry 18).

Jerome’s attitudes were often founded on *representations* of women rather than real women.

Representations of women in the Bible contradicted and supported views of women as less than men. Genesis 1:27 claims God created man and woman simultaneously, making neither primary, secondary, nor in any sense derivative: both were formed in God’s image (Bloch, *Medieval* 22).²² However, Genesis 2:21-22 describes God’s creation of woman from man, which makes the former a derivation of the latter: “Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. / And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam.” Eve is not only created after Adam, but from him, as 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 maintains: “...the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. / For the man was not created for the woman: but the woman for the man.” The interpretation of such scriptures justified views of women as derivative from and, therefore, inferior to men (Bloch 24).²³ Assumptions of female inferiority in the Middle Ages led to the association of men with “with spirit or soul formed directly by God, partaking of his divinity;” by contrast, women were “assumed to partake of the body, fleshly incarnation being by definition the sign of humanity’s fallen condition” (Bloch 27). Though exemplary Biblical women, such as the Virgin Mary, contradicted the association of women with original sin, others reinforced

²² All Bible verses are from the Douay-Rheims version. Genesis 1:27 states: “And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.”

²³ Bloch highlights Gratian’s logic that because woman was created from man, it “is natural that women serve men, as sons their parents, because it is just that the inferior being serve the superior one” (24).

the belief that women, created second and derived from Adam, were, therefore, less rational and more susceptible to earthly sin than men.²⁴

Eve's "misunderstanding" in Genesis provided evidence of male superiority: woman lacks reason, while "man is associated with intelligence" (Bloch, *Medieval* 29). Consequently, early Christians aligned women "with *sensus*, the body...animal faculties, [and] appetite" (Bloch 29). This view persisted, and in the twelfth-century, being female corresponded to "the animal functions of sex and reproduction" (McNamara 20). Animals cannot speak, so speech as a sign of female intellection was denied legitimacy. Two *topoi* emerged from these beliefs, the "topos of the talkative female" (22), whose words are trifles, and "the woman as liar" (22), whose words are twisted. Both devalued female speech; woman came to embody the inadequacies of language and represented "the deception of which language is capable" (Bloch, *Medieval* 21). Assumptions about female speech and interpretations of other sexually-based differences between women and men were read as markers of female inferiority. This limited women's power in society and provided a model for "the domination of woman by man" (Markale 21). I foreground these perspectives here because such assumptions about female speech and intellection underlie the portrayals of women in the latter half of this project.²⁵

²⁴ Eve answers God in Genesis 3:13 that: "The serpent deceived me, and I did eat" of the forbidden fruit.

²⁵ Misogynistic perspectives and changing social conditions led to a proliferation of anti-feminist texts in the Middle Ages, especially during twelfth-century monastic reforms that advocated celibacy (McNamara 8). Women's presence within clerical orders threatened monks' status and identity. The shared "sedentary, intellectual tasks" between the two genders made the monks appear "womanish" (McNamara 6). To relegate women to their "proper place, their ability to... approximate levels of spirituality accessible by men were questioned (20), and they were "suspected of perverting the divine mission embodied by masculine activity" (Markale 21). Women with "a tendency to act for themselves urgently required a new, or at least reinforced, definition of woman and her proper relationship to man" (McNamara 20), and this attitude authorized women's systematic disempowerment. Male authorities excluded women from what would become the universities. Denying women an education resulted in a social order that affirmed "the natural law of male superiority" (McNamara 19). Women were precluded from governance. According to medieval authorities, women were too fickle to rule, and they were incapable of resisting outside

During the mid-eleventh to mid-twelfth centuries, the evaluation of sexual relations placed both the clergy and the laity within double bind: the clergy, to maintain their status as “pure” men, required misogynist rhetoric to denounce women and sex. This was problematic, for among the laity, primogeniture was on the rise; they had to exalt women and marriage because younger sons, disinherited, needed to find favor among women to secure their futures (McNamara 8). The crisis required men “[i]n life as in literature...to put women’s tastes ahead of their own masculine image” (9), fashioning themselves in effeminate ways. They “shaved their beards, curled their hair, and cultivated other courtly vanities” (9).²⁶ Men had become women’s “unnatural” subordinates (9), at least in the game of courtship.

The concept of unnatural, female authority, reflected in conventions of courtly love, recalls Carnival’s trope of the woman on top, for both turned “official” notions of superiority on their head. Disseminated by Provençal troubadours, *fin’ amor* “was a revolutionary world view in that it placed human love at the center of the universe and raised the woman (or, rather, the lady) from the status of drudge and brood mare to that of a high ideal” (Russell 31).²⁷ The lady “was exalted from her position as Devil’s puppet

temptations (20). Their household authority was also limited. The invalidation of priestly marriage by the First Lateran Council in 1123, which was predicated upon theological conceptions of original sin (Lansing 40), made women, and marriage, appear unsavory. Indeed, marriage was officially condoned only inasmuch as it lessened sinners’ guilt for copulation, reproduced society, and prevented graver sins of fornication (Pagels 12). Reforms within the church, therefore, helped keep women subordinate to men.

²⁶ It is to these courtly vanities that Bernard of Clairvaux, in part, responds in his 1128 *In Praise of the New Chivalry*, which celebrates an emerging sense of knighthood founded on service to God and in contrast to worldly conceptions of knighthood (Keen 78).

²⁷ The term “courtly love” has proved problematic among scholars; many prefer to use *fin’ amor*, *amour troubadouresque*, or *amour chevaleresque* (Smith and Snow 3-4). One issue, William Calin explains, is the “Robertsonian” view that *fin’ amor* is anachronistic, a modern concept invented by Gaston Paris in 1881 with the coining of *amour courtois* (33). The phrase “courtly love” does not appear in medieval literature, but as Calin points out, both *fin’ amor* and *bon’ amor* do (33). Most scholars agree that, difficulties of terminology aside, as “an intellectual system with a formalized code” (Smith and Snow 6), “courtly love”

and breeding animal to a place little below that of High God. She it was who inspired her lover to courtesy, to gentleness, to hardihood and great emprise. He placed himself wholly in her service, and adored her with a religious worship” (Loomis xvii-xviii). Though falling short of heresy, *fin’ amor* offered a perspective “so incompatible with Christian orthodoxy as to merit classification as a variety of medieval dissent” (Russell 32),²⁸ one that, perhaps, reflected contemporary shifts in medieval life.²⁹

But as much as literature presented the lady as a knight’s feudal suzerain to whom he owes allegiance (Parry 7), “rendering homage to the woman by adorning her with all possible riches while confining her within the narrow space of a harem where she has no rights but to be pretty and keep her mouth shut” (Markale 158) is, nonetheless, limiting and problematic. Worse still are the numerous instances of rape medieval romance depicts. Portrayals of raped and confined women were a mechanism for conditioning them to fear their male counterparts (McNamara 19). In the second half of this project,

was, in the Middle Ages, real. Indeed, Smith and Snow, citing Roger Boase’s argument, call it “a comprehensive cultural phenomenon, a literary movement, an ideology, an ethical system, a style of life, and an expression of the play element in culture which arose in an aristocratic Christian environment exposed to Hispano-Arabic influences” (6). Russell’s view that women prior to circulation of *fin’ amor* discourse were little more than “drudge and brood mares” needs qualification. As John Carmi Parsons points out, even in the mid to late thirteenth-century, the state of aristocratic women’s affairs was thus: “The society that regarded women as commodities to be exchanged in the interests of the system prescribed their compliant acceptance of diplomatic marriages; but if such unions transcended individual hopes (or less politely, ignored them), they also afforded their female partners dignity, wealth, and opportunities for power that could encourage a diplomatic bride’s personal ambitions” (6).

²⁸ Indeed, the Robertsonian view of *fin’ amor* argues that it impedes understanding of medieval texts because “no medieval Christian author could possibly have encouraged his public to indulge in idolatrous passion, in irrational concupiscence” (Calin 33), for doing so would contradict Christian values.

²⁹ Joan Ferrante et al. explain that in the eleventh century, *fin’ amor*’s “courtly code of conduct” counterbalanced “the violence, crudity and instability” of young knights’ lives. Some, “without lands of their own...wandered in search of combat and booty” or found powerful men to serve (4). A greater balance between the extremes of knighthood (battlefield prowess and courtliness) emerged in the twelfth century (5), but when fighting decreased in importance during the thirteenth century, aristocratic class conventions “became stylized and were retained less as an ideal to aspire to, than an artificial means of preserving differences between [the nobility] and the wealthy bourgeois, who copied what they could of noble conventions in order to appear noble themselves” (Ferrante 4).

males in *Floris and Blancheflour* and in *Troilus and Criseyde* predicate masculinity upon the subordination of, if not cultural others, women. Not all romances do this, of course, nor do all portrayals of female subordination function in precisely the same way, yet they are worth exploring because they contribute to ideological constructions of gender, and those constructs maintain currency even today.

Feminist theory from the twentieth century to the present has applied structuralist analyses to cultural productions of gender, often arguing gender as non-identical to sex, and that the former is created; normative cultural practices and individual performances are often the means by which a gendered identity constructs itself. Simone de Beauvoir's seminal, cultural critique, *The Second Sex*, elucidates the interplay whereby woman becomes the other against which man may define himself. Woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (xxii).³⁰ For both genders, as Judith Butler explains, their identity is predicated on performance, not biology. Identity, she says, "is performatively constituted" (34). In *Floris and Blancheflour* and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, de Beauvoir's and Butler's observations apply, for the women they depict operate within "phallogocentric" economies dependent on the exchange of women to create and maintain bonds between men (Butler 55).

³⁰ De Beauvoir points out that "[t]he category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself" (xxii); "[i]f, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—her sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential object" (de Beauvoir xxiii).

The masculinities portrayed in medieval romance were not only problematic for women, but for men as well, because they were exclusionary.³¹ Collections of scholarship in the last thirty years have explored competing definitions of masculinity, why they arose, whom they excluded, and how such constructions affected social structures, relationships, and identity. In keeping with D.M. Hadley's 1999 collection *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, my intention in examining masculinity is not to be anti-feminist (2), but rather, to view "the other side of this binary, asymmetric coin" (Lees xv) of gender. My intent is to consider:

the ways in which masculine identities were constructed within all-male environments; the relationship between masculinity and power; the inadequacy of the blunt bi-polarities of male/female and masculine feminine; the performative nature of gender and the repeated rehearsal of gendered identities; the role of material culture in the construction of masculinities...the relationship between text and social 'reality', and the role of text as a medium for gender construction. (Hadley 3-4)

Throughout, this project examines definitions of masculinity engaged, in the main, by the medieval nobility, for its members are those most likely to have access to the romances I examine. They too, are those who likely confronted cultural difference in the most visceral of manners: as *miles Christi* warring abroad, or as their descendants. The nobility's arranged marriages also brought gender dynamics into sharp relief. Viewing

³¹ For non-clerical men, and even for *miles Christi*, their personhood became fused with "manhood" (McNamara 22), requiring repeated performance of "manly" behaviors to maintain and assert that identity. In effect, this meant subjugating others to one's will, with women and "others"—"heretics, homosexuals, Jews, any rebels who didn't fit the mold" (22)—as casualties. The process constitutes a vicious cycle, "a tragedy for women and for the not-men, half-men, effeminate men who were the objects of this relentless persecution (McNamara 22), and it continues to today, as does the "subtler" tragedy whereby the system continues to produce "psychologically maimed creatures" (22).

fictional medieval genres alongside the nobility's historical reality allows us see how such narratives sought to compartmentalize cultural others, condition women, and circumscribe mainstream conceptions of masculinity.

The first half of this inquiry explores how, with foreign settings and interactions between people of different faiths, martial Middle English romances build on content, patterns, and ludic(rous) strategies in the *Chanson de Roland* to negotiate contemporary social tensions and present ideological responses to their historical realities. As I will show, the *Roland* charts new coordinates for a form of militant, crusading masculinity. It revises earlier French conceptions of manhood by subordinating men to God. *Guy of Warwick* and *The Sowdone of Babylone* tailor the *Roland*'s warrior for Christ ideal and the chanson's ludic(rous) depictions of Eastern others to their historical moments. This limited sample of fourteenth-century martial romances cannot account for the ample variety of rhetorical strategies and social critiques exhibited by other contemporary texts, but it does provide insight as to how martial romances present and negotiate both alterity and identity using ludic(rous) elements.

The second half of this project investigates how ludic(rous) elements in amorous Middle English romances construct and revise masculine identities against women, a strategy latent in the *Roland*'s portrayal of Aude and Bramimond, two oppositional females who, nonetheless, suggest masculinity is that which subordinates women to men. In the Egerton manuscript's *Floris and Blancheflour*, the hero assumes his sovereign masculinity not by fighting against others, but by sharpening his ingenuity while questing to recover his beloved, over whose female intellect he must prove his own superior. In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the poet problematizes a notion of masculinity as that

which achieves its aim by any means possible. As I will show, Chaucer not only portrays ludic(rous) elements to engage his readers, but he also weaves them into the fabric of his work, much as Juan Ruiz does in his *Libro de Buen Amor*. Both works' playful, yet serious subject matter question the legitimacy of mediation, both in love, and in authorship. At the end, they suggest the only means of transcending the pitfalls of love and life, which are necessarily mediated, in part by our own interpretations of them, is to turn one's affections to God. To do so is to be not just the ideal man, but the best *human* one might aspire to be.

The concluding chapter binds together parts one and two by summing up the extent to which time and place affect how marginalized others are depicted in medieval texts. I show how ludic(rous) elements in medieval romance engage social mores of their time by raising ethical questions about the way Christian men perform their identities in contradistinction to marginalized others. The two foci of the project are bound by the belief that the literary violence done to others in medieval texts, whether in terms of culture or gender, as well as actual violence perpetrated on others have the same ideological purpose: to define each group and to assign it a value, often so that those in power can consolidate and justify their dominion, especially when they feel their hegemony is threatened. I approach these texts bearing ethical questions: to what extent are these narratives complicit in the disempowerment of marginal groups, and how did ludic ambiguity allow medieval audiences to adopt a role not unlike today's umpires when texts called upon them to evaluate the ideologies they contained? Both questions, I think, likewise implicate modern readers in adopting the role of umpire.

If we think of literary texts as guides that influence our thinking—how we evaluate, how we approach tasks—then in some ways, they are like maps, directing and redirecting our thoughts. The cartography they chart in readers’ minds draws landscapes not like the maps in elementary students’ geography books—with color-coded countries and bold boundary lines. They are more like detailed road maps with various routes traversing the area displayed. These diverse “roads” navigate our forward movement, and in the romances under discussion, they navigate questions of difference that present mental roadblocks. But several of these texts go one step further in cartographic complexity: they not only provide a variety of routes for thinking about difference, but they are also topographic—they provide contour lines. Maps with this level of detail are particularly helpful for hiking unknown terrain—without roads. They indicate elevation, allowing one to see what is above and below a given point and to what extent, whether extreme, or otherwise. In many of the texts under consideration, the character traits of Christian men, non-Christians, and women are plotted along such contour lines, forcing readers to negotiate the variety of elevations where texts plot the virtues of each group. Sometimes, they are on the same plane. Other times, one group is positioned higher up on the scale of virtue than another. Ludic(rous) elements within the texts constitute seismograph read-outs that signal pressure beneath the surface of both the narratives and their sociocultural contexts.

CHAPTER II

MAPPING INCONSISTENCIES IN THE *CHANSON DE ROLAND*, *GUY OF WARWICK*, AND *THE SOWDONE OF BABYLONE*: SUBTERFUGE AND LUDIC(ROUS) PERVERSIONS

The Crusades and the Reconquista set precedents for European Christians to assert their dominion over others, especially over non-Christians, and the rhetoric authorizing these exploits became ensconced in medieval literature. Works at the onset of the Holy Wars (and after) recall times when the Latin West strove to minimize the threat of Muslim encroachment on lands deemed part of Christian heritage. These conflicts were the bane of many, both in the Middle Ages, and in later atrocities that, following medieval texts, identified non-Christians as enemies. This crusade rhetoric facilitated construction of European empires during the Early Modern period. Europe re-deployed it in World War I's nationalism (Holsinger 470). Denigration of non-Christian "Others" yielded atrocities against Jews in Nazi Germany. In 1989 playing "to an emergent Serbian nationalism," Slobodan Milošević invoked the Christian Serbs' defeat by the Islamic Turks six hundred years before (470). More recently, the 9/11 attacks in the United States generated new "dualisms rooted in self-consciously medieval rhetorics of crusade, religious fundamentalism, and divine right" (Holsinger 470). Throughout history, aggression against "Others" —predicated on the amplification of difference—has had a long, potent afterlife, as twenty-first century Islamophobia and continued anti-Semitism attest.

Unpacking the impulses behind crusade rhetoric remains a timely undertaking: analyzing its content, mechanisms, and production implicates today's antipathy and

violence towards marginalized figures and groups, particularly those of various minority populations, faiths, and cultures. But how did this rhetoric materialize, and were its origins as sinister as its heritage has proved to be?

Arguably the first well-known text to form, embrace, and project a proto-Orientalist, crusade ethos (Kinoshita 15), the *Chanson de Roland* is a cultural touchstone. A rousing tale of heroism sprinkled with the drama of betrayal and revenge, the poem seizes upon Christian and Muslim difference as it glorifies Charlemagne's victory against the "Pagans" in Spain. It is to "France what the *Iliad* is to Greece - at once a glorious military legend, an exposition of core ethical values and a great literary production from its finest political and cultural moment" (Gilbert 21). This "French national epic" so "epitomizes 'une certaine idée de la France' [a certain idea of France] (21), that for medievalists, taking a stance on the canonical work has become requisite (Kinoshita 15).

Eight versions of the *Roland* exist, written in various dialects: Venetian, Picard / Ardennais, western French (Gilbert 22), and in the case of the oldest manuscript, Anglo-Norman. Held in the Bodleian Library, the Oxford Manuscript recounts the epic story for an insular audience. Early scholars date its production circa 1170 (Bédier II),³² and recent scholars date it within 1125-50 (Gilbert 22). Elusive as its date of composition may be, the Oxford *Roland* was produced when French families and culture comingled with those of England in the twelfth-century. The *Roland* also circulated orally, which the manuscript's narrative formulae, repetition, and parataxis" (22) evidence. A feast of

³² "...est l'ouvrage d'un scribe anglo-normand, et le texte que ce scribe nous propose est un spécimen très pur de français qui se parlait et s'écrivait en Angleterre cent ans après la conquête, vers l'an 1170. Mais c'est bien avant l'an 1170, c'est un demi-siècle plus tôt pour le moins, que le poète a écrit la *Chanson de Roland*, et rien n'invite à croire qu'il ait jamais vécu, comme son copiste, en Angleterre" (Bédier II). Throughout the text, I will provide the original language of non-English citations from secondary criticism in footnotes. For primary texts, however, I will privilege the language of the originals, placing such quotations in the body of the text with my own translations in brackets immediately following.

battle exploits infused with Christian ideology, the *Roland* captivated a wide audience. Later poets could repackage its form, content, and rhetorical strategies into new works composed for new purposes. These attributes make the Oxford *Roland* a worthy point of entry for seeking to understand medieval England's negotiation of cultural difference.

The *Chanson de Roland* is based on historical events from the eighth-century. It recounts the attack in 778 of Charlemagne's rear guard as it returned to France from sacking Córdoba (Fletcher 29).³³ Presenting itself as history, the poem is, nonetheless, a form of imaginative literature that uses the leitmotif of a chess game not only as a correlative for its structure, theme, and cross-cultural content, but also to project its crusade-legitimizing ideology.³⁴ We enter the ideological realm with Charlemagne's conquest of Córdoba; here, the first "Pagan" castle on the poem's thematic game board falls. The King of Zaragoza, Muslim Marsile, sues for peace, and the French must dispatch an envoy to negotiate terms. In positioning his pieces, Charlemagne reserves his noblest knights—the twelve peers—in favor of old-fashioned Ganelon, who resents his role as pawn for the mission. Ganelon plots revenge against his stepson, Roland, who nominated him. True to his word, Ganelon betrays the French to the Muslims in exchange for their promise to kill Roland; the traitor argues the hero's elimination would cripple French forces and diminish future assaults. The coalition's stratagem works. Neither Ganelon nor his Muslim co-plotters realize, however, the extent to which Roland himself is only a Knight serving his King. Charlemagne counters and checkmates both Ganelon

³³ For locations in modern-day Spain, I have elected to use Spanish orthography. Alternate spellings are used only in direct quotes from the primary and secondary literature.

³⁴ "Invented in India in the 6th century, chess reached the Islamic countries of the Middle East by the 7th century...it began to infiltrate Europe but did not gain wide acceptance until after the First Crusade...and returning Frankish crusaders brought the game back to their courts" (Newman 170).

and Marsile because he, like all men, moves on the chessboard of earthly existence according to God's plan.

Ganelon's trap springs as an ambush at Roncesvalles, a pass on the Iberian side of the Pyrenees. Roland, metaphorically characterized as Charlemagne's right hand, falls after severing King Marsile's right hand with a mortal stroke. Charlemagne and the Babylonian Emir Baligant, Marsile's overlord, seek vengeance and meet in battle. The clash resolves when, inspired by Providence, Charlemagne defeats Baligant. Yet this "game" has consequences beyond the spilt blood of fallen pawns, knights, and rooks, as new social standards compete with older customs in Aix. Ganelon, the "other" within the French force, is tried for treason. He is nearly exonerated when old belief systems, despite social changes afoot, hold; the French sympathize with his choice to seek revenge. Nevertheless, Thierry, an unassuming nobleman, challenges and defeats Ganelon's champion in a trial by combat, which is, ironically, the old form of justice by which Ganelon anticipated certain victory. Ganelon is hanged and quartered; his supporters are executed. The outcome validates the new social order while burying the old. The story constructs in its telling a new masculine ideal to combat fraught masculine identities in France of the twelfth-century.

The earnest tale of war, a man's game, mints a new ideological currency in the absence of women, but as on a chess board, there are two. They play significant roles in exchanging the old norms and values for the new. Aude, Roland's betrothed, is the epitome of faithfulness. Her life as her word, by pledge, she deems it coextensive with Roland's; when he dies, she dies as well. Like Ganelon and those executed in Aix, Aude represents a waning social order predicated on kinship bonds. In contrast, Bramimond,

Marsile's queen, is a woman of deeds. Where Aude stands for fixity, Bramimond embodies change; like chess pieces that once bore Arabic names,³⁵ she becomes Juliana when she converts to Christianity. Though she has "lost," in her conversion, two orders are upheld: the poem's game of conquest sanctions aggression against Muslims at the same time that it supports the yielding of familial to feudal ties by endorsing new social norms.

Examining *Roland's* historicity, Kinoshita notes that Charlemagne's rearguard was actually attacked by a contingent of Basques, not "Saracens" (17). This substitution of a more distinct "other," for attackers who were Christian elides the complex relationships existing among Christians, Muslims, and Jews on the Iberian Peninsula while assigning a distinctively non-Christian scapegoat for the French's defeat.³⁶ The poem's misattribution perpetuates growing fervor among Christian French men to follow Charles the Great's expansionist example as champions of the faith (Fletcher 115), leading them to impose Christian norms, values, and beliefs upon Iberian inhabitants. But why? Where does the need to construct a "politics of intransigence" come from, and why might it help to replace a real enemy with one two steps removed from the truth?

³⁵ Mark Taylor explains that the queen developed from the *fers*, or advisor, which was a piece in the Persian game *shatranj*, chess's predecessor. Likewise, the bishop developed from the *alfin*, or elephant. Both piece's assigned movements became more fluid and dynamic over time (169-173).

³⁶ Northern parts of the Peninsula, including the Basque country, were never conquered by Muslims; the latter were famously driven back by Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers in 732 (Mayer 3). Brian Catlos points out that "the Kingdom of Navarre...straddled what would be the modern border of Spain, and its offspring, the Kingdom of Aragon, would join with the Catalan counties to form a dynastic aggregate that...claimed seigniorial authority over the Midi and Provence" ("Christian" 7). The relative independence of these lands, especially the Basque country, from Arab authority is evident linguistically: "The Arabisms that are the hallmark of the Castilian and Portuguese lexicon are far fewer in Catalan, whereas the Arabisms in Euskara [Basque] are virtually all Castilian loanwords" (Catlos, "Christian" 5).

Christianity's fate in the Latin West quavered within the long shadow of Islam's pillars, support for which reached from the Levant into the Iberia.³⁷ From the time of Islam's arrival in Iberia to the year 1000, Christian conversions were widespread.³⁸ Converting "either out of conviction or convenience" (Carr 19), Iberian converts became known as *muwallads*" (19). Christians who retained their faith within Islamic territory were, nonetheless, "dazzled" by Arab civilization and culture; "many crusaders, both in Europe itself and in Palestine, were culturally converted" (Menocal, *The Arabic* 40, 47). To them, "the Arabs' lives were incomparably richer, easier, more luxurious, and superior" (40).

Skilled traders,³⁹ the well-connected Iberian Arabs made the Peninsula a locus of technological advances and material riches, both of which appealed to Latin Christians "deprived" of such wealth (Menocal, *The Arabic* 39). Arab advances, including the abacus, which Gerbert of Aurillac studied on the Peninsula in the 960s (Fletcher 148), revolutionized Europe. So did the astrolabe, which Adelard of Bath described in the twelfth-century. More influential still were the theories of Galen and Aristotle, which Averroes's commentaries, translated into Latin and Hebrew, made accessible to medieval, western Christians (Fletcher 133). Demand for Peninsular knowledge was

³⁷ Rather than "Spain," or "Spanish," I use "Iberian" here—and elsewhere—because the Iberian Peninsula was not unified as a single nation in the Middle Ages as it is today. As Brian Catlos put it, "'Spain' is little different from 'France,' 'Germany,' 'Italy,' or 'Europe'—national categories that are also applied anachronistically and inappropriately to the Middle Ages" ("Christian" 10).

³⁸ Fletcher explains: "by about 800 only some 8% of the indigenous population of al-Andalus had become Muslims. This had risen to about 12.5% by the middle of the ninth century. Thereafter the figure increased by leaps and bounds. It had doubled, to 25%, by about 900 and by 950 this figure had doubled again. By about the year 1000 the proportion stood at something like 75%, after which the curve flattened out" (37-38).

³⁹ By the tenth century, Andalusians had regular contact with Baghdad (Menocal, *The Arabic* 34), and in the tenth-century, books were acquired "from as far afield as Persia" (Fletcher 71). Agricultural production and trade lay "the economic foundations for a cosmopolitan urban culture that attracted scholars, musicians, and intellectuals" (Carr 3).

matched by that for its material luxuries, including “sugar and rice, oranges, lemons, silk, and coffee” (Carr 3). These “temptations” constituted a “seductive” force for cultural (Menocal, *The Arabic* 40, 41, 65), if not religious, conversion, and within the Peninsula, minority Christians under Muslim rule became known as “*mozarabes* or ‘Arabized’ Catholics” (Carr 19).⁴⁰ Their cultural assimilation, albeit partial, evidences Christian susceptibility to Muslim culture (19).

Cultural conversion was linguistic, too. Arabic was a language of prestige (Menocal, *Ornament* 29). More versatile than either French or Latin alone (68), it fulfilled religious, artistic, juridical, educational, economic, and interpersonal needs. Arabic wielded such cultural capital that Christians living under Muslim rule, like Jews, adopted it as their main tongue (Carr 19), and the “Mozarabic Church even incorporated [it] into the liturgy” (19). Arabic literature flourished in al-Andalus. The tenth-century *muwashshaha* song form even influenced William of Aquitaine, who was later called the first troubadour (Menocal, *The Arabic* 30).⁴¹ Preceding the subjective “I” of the Provençal *canso* (104), which was popularized by the troubadours, the form and content of the *muwashshaha* not only enamored Christian and Muslim audiences alike, but also revolutionized literature in the Latin West.

The threat of Islam’s influence amounted to more than just material or intellectual “seduction.” Much transpired between Roland’s death in 778 and production of the

⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, “mozarab” was understood as “wannabe” Arab, as many Christians strove to outwardly acculturate, even if they retained their spirituality (Menocal, *Ornament* 69).

⁴¹ He “could hardly have avoided knowing the songs” (Menocal, *The Arabic Role* 30), which deviated from classical Arabic forms. The *muwashshaha* “embodied the symbiotic culture of al-Andalus” (30). Its “formal and musical alternations between strophes and refrain . . . were reiterated and enhanced by the oscillation between classical and vernacular, between the language and poetry of the courts and that of the streets” (30). A romance in a nutshell, the song’s final verse, the *kharja* (99) was expressed in Mozarabic (Menocal, *The Arabic* 30), bringing together the song’s two linguistic voices at the end.

Oxford *Roland* in the mid-twelfth-century that weakened relations between frontier Christians and Muslims. Though many “Normans and other northerners had directly experienced Iberian modes of coexistence” (Kinoshita 22), interrelated factors, from martial aggression and territorial confiscation to religious fervor and economic constraints, inflamed hostility between the increasingly polarized groups.

In the tenth century, Al-Mansur, known in the West as Almanzor, rose to power and funded his regime with violent raids against the northern Iberian Christian kings. He sacked monasteries, including Santiago de Compostela in 997 (Fletcher 75).⁴² The aggression went both ways, as the Christian kings in the north acquired goods and property by offering security to Muslim *taifa* kings who paid them tributes, or *parias*. These payments included “lavish handouts not just in gold but also in slaves, horses, booty and land” (Fletcher 110). Gifts of land from *taifa* kings to Christians furthered “territorially acquisitive” policies that were favored by some, but not all, and in some cases, they could, conveniently, “merge insensibly into conquest” (110). Such acquisitive encroachment, and the taking of Toledo by the Christians in 1085 (Fletcher 110), precipitated an influx of Islamic fundamentalists that further strained relations between Christians and Muslims.

Beleaguered Muslim *taifa* kings welcomed Almoravid reinforcements from the North African Maghrib to repel Christian incursions (Fletcher 105, 110), and this policy drove social and economic wedges between neighboring Christians and Muslims. The Almoravids were outsiders to Al-Andalus’s sophisticated culture. They “dressed in skins, reeked of camels and spoke Arabic only with difficulty” (Fletcher 108), yet they

⁴² Al-Mansūr “launched over fifty campaigns and raids into Christian territory. Because of this, the dreaded figure of ‘Almanzor’ appears prominently in Medieval Christian sources” (Constable 93).

maintained control over the Iberian Peninsula from approximately 1090 to 1145 (Carr 5). Described as puritanical and ascetic (Fletcher 108), the Almoravid beliefs corresponded to intensifying religious zeal among Christians. Cluny Abbey in southern France sponsored the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. The Camino de Santiago was a “conduit” for Christian hostility toward Islam (Carr 27). The destination in the north-western tip of the Iberian Peninsula venerated St James “Matamoros,” [killer of Moors] (27). Cluny’s powerful abbot, Peter the Venerable, verbally assailed “the Saracen heresy” (Carr 27), and he championed the crusades. The ideological clash between Christians and Muslims intensified as the Almoravids strove to “purify” Islamic practices by imposing “the strictest canons of...orthodoxy” (Fletcher 108). In doing so, they eradicated the *paria* tributes. For Christian rulers, these funds had become “an essential part of the[ir] regular income” (Kinoshita 18), and tightened purse strings did little to ease intercultural tensions.

These circumstances polarized relations between Christianity and Islam and account for the propagandist nature of the *Chanson de Roland*, which re-writes the history of Roland’s last stand as a battle between Christians and Pagans, not Basques. To galvanize a Frankish identity, Roland’s enemies had to be categorically distinct from him. To construct a “politics of intransigence” (Kinoshita 24), the poem not only distinguishes between the two groups beyond historical accuracy, but also counters “the temptation” of cultural “coexistence and accommodation” that many Christians and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula experienced, though not without complications (24). The poem enacts, according to Kinoshita, “epic revisions,” the second of which identifies Pyrenean

Basques not at Muslims, but as “Pagans.”⁴³ In propagandist fashion, the poem also employs stereotypes. It dresses Roland’s foes, at times, in the garb reserved for Christianity’s enemies, Satan and the Antichrist.

The *Roland*’s skewed portrayals of Muslims imagines them as demonic, morally perverse, and irrational—not unlike barbarians. The poem’s rhetoric draws upon late-antique strategies to serve an emerging crusade ideology. Guy Halsall points out that for Romans, “the image of the barbarian was...rhetorical. It was a floating category, which could be deployed for a number of purposes in...dialogue *between Romans*, not between Romans and barbarians” (93). Similarly, the *Roland*’s scribe designs Muslim representations for Christian, not Muslim, audiences. Working from incomplete and biased sources, Latin Christians readily assumed that Muslims were either Pagans, or Christian heretics (Menocal, *The Arabic* 44). Spiritual depravity equates cultural inferiority, according to the logic of the *Roland*, where the poem typecasts Christianity’s foes as Rome’s disparaged Barbarians: culturally deficient outsiders. The influx of Berber tribesmen into the Iberian Peninsula may have abetted this view, as their roughness contrasted with the sophisticated Arab culture that threatened Christian norms and values. “Berber,” like “Pagan,” is an imposed term, one not coined by those it labels. It “derives from the Latin term *barbari*, meaning ‘barbarians’ or ‘outsiders’” (Fletcher 19).⁴⁴ The *Chanson de Roland*’s category of the cultural other is a palimpsest of this earlier type; it,

⁴³ Throughout, I place “Pagans” in quotation marks because it is how Muslims in the *Roland* are cast, even if Muslims are not, according to modern understandings, Pagans. It is important to note, however, that medieval Christians frequently classified all non-Christians as Pagans, and that Pagans were often conflated with Saracens.

⁴⁴ “Berber” was “a label invented by condescending Arab geographers for the diverse indigenous peoples of the Maghrib...derived from the Arabic *barbara*, ‘to babble nonsensically’” (Catlos, *Infidel* 25-26).

too, creates an idealized collective identity both religious and, interestingly, inchoately national, by contrasting itself against its enemies.

The *Chanson de Roland* attributes derogatory, “barbaric” stereotypes to its non-Christian opposition, positing Christianity’s foes as barbaric fiends. Marsile’s vassal, King Corsablis, is: “de l’altre part. / Barbarins est el mult de males arz” [He is of the other part. A barbarian he is and of the wicked arts] (ll.885-6). Though “this passage condemns Corsablis’s evil ways even as it praises him as a worthy vassal” (Kinoshita 26), he is notably “altre,” *other*, and a barbarian. He is associated with the wicked arts like Mohammed, whose miracles were purportedly “produced by trickery and magic” (Tolan 141). As noted in the introduction, Mohammed and Christian heretics were associated with the Antichrist. In the Bible, the figure most against God is Satan; accordingly, several of the *Roland*’s Muslim characterizations align with the devil. The name of Abisme, a warrior who rides at the Muslim retinue’s vanguard (l. 1470), links etymologically with “the abyss,” or hell. He is:

Plus fel de lui n’out en sa cumpagnie.

Teches ad males e mult granz felonies;

Ne creit en Deu, le filz seinte Marie;

Issis est neirs cume peiz ki est demise;

Plus aimet il traïson e murdrrie. (ll.1470-1475)

[More venomous than he is not had in hitherward company. He possesses sins and very significant crimes; neither believes he in God, the son of saint Mary; in this way he is equally black as the peace that is death. More, he aims at treason and murder].⁴⁵ Like an

⁴⁵ The Old French, here and following, is taken from Josphe Bédier’s 1930 edition of the *Chanson de Roland*; the translations provided here, as elsewhere, are my own.

envenomed snake, Abisme is “fel” and commits mortal sins; he doesn’t believe in God or the Son. A sinner as black as death, Abisme’s description encapsulates the non-Christian “altre.” It conflates Pagans with “Saracens” and equates both with fiendish heretics. The French Archbishop Turpin aligns Abisme’s blackness with the warrior’s beliefs, commenting: “Cel Sarrazin me semblet mult herite” [This Saracen to me resembles very much a heretic] (l.1484).

The Other as heretic amounts to a popular and enduring stereotype whereby Christians’ repugnance for unorthodox practitioners is transferred to monotheistic non-Christians, as noted in the introduction. In addition to Abisme as heretic, the *Roland* employs this stereotype when Marsile swears his oath to Ganelon upon the volume of Termagant and Mohomet’s law (ll.609-612); the impulse is right, but to the poem’s contemporary audience, the book is wrong. The heretical depiction recurs in the *Roland*’s description of an entire Muslim faction: “Quan Rollant veit la contredite gent / Ki plus sunt neirs que ne nest arrement / Ne n’unt de blanc nerais que sul les denz...” [When Roland sees the counter-spoken race, who are born more black than ink, there is no white except alone that on their teeth] (ll.1932-1934). In naming Roland’s opposition the “contredite gente” the poem underscores disjunctions between Christians’ and Others’ sacred texts. The followers of one are “counter-spoken,” or false, compared to the other. As seen in the introduction, traditional depictions of non-Christians equated “poor” faith with poor virtue. In its most extreme form, this interpretation becomes Muslims are wrong, Christians right, and in the *Roland*, “the poem casts the Saracens as a fierce and intractable Other, as epitomized in Roland’s unforgettable rallying cry, ‘Pagans are wrong and Christians are right’” (Kinoshita 15). Roland’s adversaries are heretics: their

doctrine is wrong, and from a medieval Christian perspective, the Others' bodies outwardly reflect the "error" within. As in the description of Abisme (l.1474), the poem fixates on the blackness of the Christian opponents' skin. Relying on the adjectives "neirs" [black] and "males" [bad], the *Roland* invites readers to side with Roland's bold assertion by lumping all opposition to Christianity into one category: the dark, wicked Other.

The stark colors of the game pieces begin to fade as the *Roland* exposes ungodly, sinful Christian traits, particularly in the eponymous character. Roland is as proud, as single-minded, and as intractable as any of his foes. His own allies cite Roland's pride, recklessness, and foolhardiness as destroying the French force (ll.1723-1734). However flawed he may be, however much he authors his own defeat, Roland, nonetheless, dies an exemplary, heroic death and afterwards is avenged (ll.3807-3976). Both acts seem to excuse, indeed, to exalt him as a hero. Yet Roland's faults and excesses overlap with those attributed to Muslims. Members of both groups are also loyal and powerful; as knights they are often indistinguishable.

In several instances, Muslim characters even appear superior in chivalric virtue to Christians. If, for instance, Marsile and his court intrigue, they hatch plots to save their lives and maintain their devotion to Islam, a more noble cause than Ganelon's selfish treachery. Malprimis of Brigant is "Plus curt a piet que ne fait un cheval" [More fleet of foot than ever could accomplish a steed] (ll.889-890). The Emir of Balaguez is described as: "Cors ad mult gent e le vis fier e cler" [Whose body is very noble and face trusty and clear] (ll.894-895). The Anglo-Norman dictionary glosses "fier" as trustworthy—to trust

in or believe in—a surprising description for an enemy. Yet the text impresses Balaguez’s trustiness upon us, emphasizing:

Puis que il est sur sun cheval muntet,
Mult se fait fiers de ses armes porter
De vassalage est il ben alosez;
Fust chrestiens, asez oust barnet. (ll.896-7)

[When he is on his horse mounted, greatly he trusts in the deeds of the weapons he carries, of courage is he well praised; if he were Christian, sufficiently he would hold a barony]. In terms of chivalric virtue, the Emir armed astride his mount rivals any French nobleman, and he is not alone.

Christian and Pagan leadership within the *Roland* also correspond. The white-bearded leaders, Charlemagne and Baligant, each has his “right-hand” man, Roland and Marsile; both fall, and both must be avenged. The dueling feudal hierarchies of which Roland and Marsile are part are “each a mirror image of the other” (Kinoshita 25), so much so that Suzanne Conklin Akbari contends: “In almost all respects, the Christian force led by Charlemagne resembles the pagan force led by Marsile: each has an elite corps of twelve knights, each king is depicted surrounded by retainers and seated on a sumptuous throne, each side includes warriors distinguished by their bravery” (208). This mirroring of cultural groups is strikingly evident near the poem’s end, when Baligant and Charlemagne’s forces meet in a final battle; pitched on an open field, their shared humanity and chivalric values are gleamingly displayed:

Granz sunt les oz e les escheles beles.
Entr’els nen at ne pui ne val ne tertre,

Selve ne bois; asconse n'i poet estre;

Ben s'entreveient en mi la pleine tere... (ll.3291-3294)

[Large are the beautiful hosts and the arrayed forces. Between them is neither hill nor valley, forest nor tree; a hiding place neither (object) is able to be; well met are the forces in the open field]. The equal footing shared by each host reflects the comparable valor of the foes who meet “face to face.” Fully exposed, they stand in stark relief against the flat, barren battle field.

Despite the clearly demarcated confrontation of forces, the opposing companies merge into a single, glittering rock of citrine ensconced in a shared setting upon the field:

Grant est la plaigne e large la cuntree.

Luisent cil elme as perres d'or girunees

E cez escuz e cez bronies safrees

E cez espiez, cez enseignes fermees

Sunent cez greisles, les voiz en sun mult cleres... (ll. 3305-3309)

[Broad is the plain and large the country. Lucent are the fringed helms of gold, and those shields and those byrniees are saffron-hued, and those you all spy, those resolute insignias sound those trumpets, their own voices very clear]. There is no distinction between the two armies; they are all shining metal, saffron, and gold. Like the individually-raised trumpets blasting a single battle chorus, the two become one. This unified image of faceted gold throws the *Roland's* assurance about who is good or evil, who is right or wrong, into question; it literalizes the overlap of each group's positive and negative traits.

The poem surprises a modern reader by plotting the virtues of Christians and Pagans on equal elevations. Even more surprising are coordinates marking Christian

virtue inferior to its foes, especially with regard to unity. In Roland's arguments with Ganelon and Oliver, and in Ganelon's trial, the Christians are riven by internal strife; by contrast, the Muslims are unified, even if the historical record shows otherwise. For example, in 1009 the deposition and execution of 'Abd al-Raman, known as Sanjul, was quickly followed by a Córdoba uprising against Berber clans that resulted in the "*fitna*, or 'disorder'" (Catlos, *Infidel* 25), which was a time of continued uncertainty and strife within the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁶ Historically, both Christian and Muslim camps experienced internal dissent. Yet the *Roland* casts the Muslims as a unified force. Though hailing from distant corners of the Muslim realm, occupying various ranks, and exhibiting distinctive characteristics that are either admirable or condemnable (ll.885-983), Baligant's host is unified; it responds swiftly, without internal dissent, to a shared threat.⁴⁷ This solidarity contradicts historical facts, and it positions the Others' collective virtue as superior to the dissenting Franks,' a move that controverts Roland's assertion that Christians are right, Pagan are wrong.

Christians' yearning to correct their own cleaving values is amplified by the impulse to acquire Muslim unity for themselves. The Muslim collective stands together despite its positive and negative constituent parts. For example, much of Baligant's host exhibits attractive qualities, from a worldly perspective. They are fleet of foot (ll.-889-

⁴⁶ Catlos points out that for political and ideological reasons, "holy war was waged among members of the two religions as often as between them: Latin (Catholic) Christians crusaded against Greek (Orthodox) Christians, while Sunni Muslim rulers proclaimed jihad against Shi'a Muslim rulers" (*Infidel*, 8). Some *taifa* disputes even arose when Muslim party kings were accused of "double-dealing," at times, with Christians. A case in point is 'Abd Allāh ibn Buluggīn, Granada's party king circa 1095. Al-Mu'tamid, Seville's *taifa* ruler, accused him of disloyalty to the Almoravids. Though 'Abd Allāh had welcomed the regime's 1086 arrival and fought alongside its members against Alfonso VI of Castile-León, his suspected dealings with Christians led, ultimately, to his exile (Constable 142).

⁴⁷ Notably, the poem's construction of the "enemy" force elides the heterogeneity of beliefs historically characteristic of it, as evident in changes from the Almohad to the Almoravid regime.

890), brave, courageous (ll.897-889), loved by ladies, and exemplars of chivalry (ll.957-960), but the quality of men within the force is mixed; it includes undesirable members who would seem to undermine its integrity. Almanzor is a superlative villain; in memory of the havoc wreaked by the historical figure on Christian Spain, he appears in *Roland* as: “Uns almaçurs i ad de Moriane; / N’ad plus felun en la tere d’Espaigne” [One of them, Almanzor, is one belonging to the Moriane; No greater felon belongs in the land of Spain] (ll.909-910). Like Almanzor and the “felon” Abisme, the Eastern ranks include Esturganz and Estramariz. The root of their names, “Est” reiterates the direction from which they came—the East. They are described as “felun, traïtur suduiant” [felon, traitor, scoundrel] (ll.940-942). Despite these moral degenerates and the potential they raise for internal conflict within Baligant’s host, no squabbles compromise the Arab force. The Muslims’ unity presents an attractive ideal for the *Roland*’s Christian audience.

The poem’s shifting mix of desirable and less desirable traits among Muslims and Christians highlights the simultaneous presence and absence of human virtue; we can appraise this earthly merit as we do coordinates on a topographic map: their elevations may be high or low. Yet the *Roland* positions these points as if upon the horizontal plane of a gyroscope’s spinning wheel. The vertical axis about which it turns offers a spiritual vantage on the poem’s map of human virtue. Only two positions exist on this axis: relative to the spinning disk, one is superior, the other inferior. On the horizontal axis, both groups maintain equal footing as they strive for honor, prowess, and support of their liege. But upon the vertical axis, the two faiths are diametrically opposed. Each group says the other subscribes to false beliefs and therefore must be subordinate.

Written from a Christian perspective, the *Roland's* cultural logic posits that if both groups are equally virtuous as knights, then Muslims ought to be the equals of Christians in faith. Since Islam—from a Christian point of view—is wrong, then conversion corrects the error; it replaces spiritual difference with sameness. Contrary to the Christian practice, the Muslims in the fiction make no demand of conversion. When Marsile welcomes Ganelon into his confidence, religious difference is theorized as a calculus of equality. Ganelon becomes Marsile's warrior, but he does not become his vassal; he utterly refuses to renounce his tie to Charlemagne. It becomes clear that the equality he and the Arabs establish is based entirely on earthly concerns.

From the perspective of the *Roland's* horizontal map of earthly virtue, shortcomings among Christians and Muslims amount to a “lack” that generates two kinds of desire: corrective and possessive. As universalists, the Christians desire to correct the Muslims' “misguided” beliefs, as all humans can be saved through belief in Jesus. They also yearn to correct their own failings: their pride, disunity, and betrayal—all of which manifest in the Ganelon conflict. These corrections would help Christians live lives of good deeds. Towards this end, Muslim solidarity and exhibition of knightly prowess generates an acquisitive impulse for Christians to possess, or to equally embody, the virtues of their foes. One way to acquire such virtue is to emulate it; another is to persuade meritorious Muslims to convert. The final alternative, as the *Chanson* suggests, is to destroy the competition.

Christian imperfections in the poem not only incite desire, but also suggest the *Roland's* primary concern is not an external threat to Christendom alone; rather, it is also internal: domestic instability. Successful resolution of both concerns requires establishing

a homogenous, or at least unified, whole. Any sportsperson knows the most expedient means to this end is ideological: position a distinctive “us” against a clear “them.”

The *Roland*'s rhetorical use of stereotypes helps approximate this goal, which from a modern perspective, is condemnable, especially given the strategy's consequential afterlives. Historical examinations of medieval French interactions with Iberian Muslims—as explored here through the work of Kinoshita, Fletcher, Menocal, and Carr—help account for the deployment of negative stereotypes in the *Roland*, but they insufficiently explain the work's notable portrayals of Christian enemies as equal to or better than their opponents in terms of worldly merit. The tokens on the game board are not black and white; rather, they resemble Carrara marble, characterized by fluid intensities of dark and light gray.

To address the discrepancy between the work and its apparent aim—constructing a binary between Christians and Others to legitimize the former's violence against the latter—I have turned to ludic(rous) instances within the text for insight; in a serious text, they are equally as counterintuitive as are the *Roland*'s contradictory representations. As mentioned in the introduction, what I deem “ludic(rous)” derives from Johan Huizinga's seminal work on play and game structures, Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of carnivalesque inversions and laughter, and Henri Bergson's work on laughter. The examples highlighted in the remainder of this section and later in the chapter are not ones I personally identify as “funny,” neither are they innocuous. Many are disturbing. The passages, nonetheless, explicitly reference laughter or games—including chess—and exhibit game-like structures—including competitions. They also feature inversions, or reversals. This ludic(rous) lens acts as a seismometer; it pinpoints the location and

measures the intensity of tensions that simmer beneath a text's narrative topography. In the *Chanson de Roland*, sociocultural concerns rooted in domestic uncertainty rate as high on the Richter scale, if not higher, than tremors initiated by foreign threats.

Tectonic shifts rarely occur in isolation; as in board games, one move corresponds to another. By this token, we can recognize the scapegoating of non-Christian Others in the *Roland* as a move to counter and displace contemporary, gendered domestic issues.

The first ludic(rous) instance in the *Roland* occurs after the French's violent seizure of Córdoba; the poem jumps from the grave, earnest setting to a playful, leisurely one. Games are explicitly referenced in the latter, trivializing the seriousness of the former. In the first place, the violent conquest of Córdoba is anything but inconsequential:

Cordres ad prise e les murs peceiez,

Od ses cadables les turs en abatied;

Mult grant eschech en unt si chevalier

D'or e d'argent e de guarnemenz chers. (ll.97-98)

[To the seizure of Córdoba and breaking her ways of life, in company of the catapults, the towers within are battered down; very great booty in one for a knight of gold and of silver and of precious armor]. Córdoba is seized and broken. From the verb *perçoier*, “peceiez” is to breach, break open, and shatter. The language is of rupture, penetration, and destruction recalling descriptions of sexual assault: the greedy knights are eager to seize precious booty held within. Since the action is “played out” within spatial and temporal bounds, isolated from the ordinary (Huizinga 28), it shares characteristics with what Johan Huizinga identifies as “sacred” game spaces: “hallowed” sites “within which

special rules obtain” (29). Evidencing the ludic’s hermeneutic fluidity from play to seriousness (27), Huizinga identifies “the arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice” (28) as places in which one experiences an interlude from the ordinary. Through their nature, and through recurring experience of them, these spaces become integral parts of life, what Huizinga calls a “culture function” (27). Extrapolating from Huizinga’s examples, the battle field, like a soccer pitch, qualifies as a remote, temporal environment with its own set of rules that are distinct from ordinary life. Indeed, though “War Crimes” are often punished in the twenty-first century, combat has always had its own “rules of engagement,” many of which would not obtain in ordinary situations.

The poem turns the tables from earnest to game and contrasts the violent sporting ground of conquest with a playful environ of leisure. Expressed by the Anglo-Norman verb “leger,” to lighten or relieve (*AND*), the juxtaposed scenes produce a jarring irony, leastwise, for a modern reader. Much like the unsteady lurch and spin of a Tilt-a-Whirl, the shift from one scene to the next offers a glimpse of the motor that propels the narrative. Gendered domestic tensions, the interplay of gears below the ride, drive the poem as much or more than external cultural threats, the wheels riders turn from their seats. As play offsets seriousness (Huizinga 27), the discovery is simultaneously amusing, uncomfortable, and unmooring, as the *Roland* transforms significant actions into trivial ones. For the reposing conquerors, “leger” connotes leisure; it lightens the mood. The same Christian soldiers who despoil Córdoba play in Charlemagne’s camp; they gamble at backgammon tables and play chess: “As tables juent pur els esbanier / E as eschecs li plus saive li veill, /E escremissent cil bacheler leger” [Gambling boards they play for

their enjoyment and gambling with chess the more wise watch, and to fence, this is to relieve the bachelor] (ll.111-113).⁴⁸ “Eschecs” identifies loot, or booty (*AND*), as in the pillaging of Córdoba; it also denotes chess, one of the French soldiers’ pastimes. Despite the pun on “eschecs,” the *Roland*’s shift from earnest to game is disconcertingly sudden. Real battles, death-dealing sword-thrusts, the fall of the city, all become feints and parries of ivory pawns, bishops, and rooks.⁴⁹

If the games parallel Charlemagne’s victory, they also trivialize Córdoba’s subjugation. The dissonance is a signal that we’ve left the actual world and have entered an ideological one. Are the games the Christians play a virtue or a vice, a calm break from warfare, or a sublimation of its carnage? Reconciling the contrasting episodes creates an interpretive puzzle. In play, as the participant strives to reach the solution, “[t]ension and uncertainty are integral parts” (Huizinga 28). Is the conquest of Córdoba but a game?

Significantly, “leger” appears not only in the French camp, but also in what amounts to the second eruption of the ludic(rous) in the *Chanson de Roland*: when Roland laughs in the face of Ganelon, his step-father (l.301). Set within the French court at Aix, a “hallowed” space “within which special rules obtain” (Huizinga 29), Ganelon confronts the proposition that he act as envoy to Marsile. He is uneasy, “mult

⁴⁸ “Juer” is to play, as in a game. It also means to perform. “Esbanier” is to divert or amuse oneself (*AND*). “Tables,” according to Paul Milliman, was the predecessor of modern-day backgammon; it “combined skill with luck as it employed dice, and was, therefore, not considered as strategic as chess” (79). Even in Middle Persian and Iranian sources from the Sāsānian period, dated in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* from 224-651 AD, backgammon and chess are clearly tied to male, courtly culture (Daryaei ix). Both appear in the material culture of the late sixth to seventh centuries CE (xxviii), which underscores the games’ Eastern provenance, age and connection to male identity. As early as the eleventh century, chess had become for European poets “a symbol of courtly society” (Classen 20).

⁴⁹ Games could be as serious, Milliman argues, as royal administration; the frequent links between chess and violence show it, in particular, “was not always regarded as just a pleasant pastime;” it could “be a serious pursuit in which emotions ran high and tempers flared. Within a certain context—with honor, money, or even one’s life on the line—it was not a game that people took lightly” (70).

anguisables” [very anguished, tormented] (l. 1.280). In contrast, and in accord with courtly expectations, he improvises to save face, acting out the role of strong, powerful patriarch as he contests the nomination. Ganelon’s eyes gleam from his stalwart gaze as his robust figure withstands the court’s scrutiny: “Vairs out les oilz e mult fier lu visage; / Gent out le cors e les costez out larges” [He has gleaming eyes and very resolute (is) his expression; / He has a noble body and the flanks he has (are) broad] (ll.283-284).

Ganelon tosses back his marten cloak to reveal his rich attire; the ploy deflects attention from his uneasiness: “E li quens Guenes en fut mult anguisables. / De sun col getet ses grandes pels de martre / E est remés en sun blialt de palie” [And the count Ganelon is made very anguished. Around his neck he tosses the great marten skins and he remains in his tunic of silk] (ll.280-282). Ganelon’s gestures produce a strategic diversion. They gamefully deflect attention from his “unmanly” concern. His improvisation makes the court scene a game. Before Roland’s laughter is heard, Ganelon’s dramatic sport trivializes the consequential.

The poet emphasizes the spectacle of the scene just before Roland laughs: “Tant par fut bels tuit si per l’en esguardent” [So much in order to make good, so much as if an equal peer in display] (ll.283-284). The words “tant” and “tuit” emphasize fullness and excess. The root of “esguardent” “agard,” indicates sight or vision (*AND*). Together, they point to the constructedness of Ganelon’s dramatization as he draws the court’s attention and displays himself as the strong, well-groomed noble. But Ganelon’s luxurious attire recalls the “effeminate tresses’ and silk clothing decorated with silver, gold, and precious stones,” which, being “impractical for combat” (Holt 185), disgusted Bernard of Clairvaux. Seeing through Ganelon’s “manly” façade, Roland laughs in his face. The

laughter shatters Ganelon's illusions of grandeur, undercutting his status and authority, both of which correspond to estimations of his masculinity. It's an irrevocable slight compounded by Ganelon's appointment as envoy.⁵⁰

Ganelon parries Roland's jab by promising revenge: "Einz i frai un poi de legerie / Que jo n'esclair ceste meie grant ire" [Soon I will make a little trick, I will not bring to light that this is my great ire] (ll.300-301). Notably, Ganelon plots "un poi de legerie" a little something to make light of the situation, a joke or a trick. But Ganelon's quip backfires. "Quant l'ot Rollant, si cumençar rire" [When this heard Roland, he commenced to laugh] (l.302). Roland's response to Ganelon's threat illustrates Henri Bergson's point that laughter is not particularly benevolent (194), "absolutely just" (198), nor kind-hearted. Instead, "[i]ts function [can be] to intimidate by humiliating" (198). The impulse to publicly outdo one's rival is akin to the strutting of male birds in season,⁵¹ and Roland "has the last laugh" in Charlemagne's court. Ganelon's vengeance, however, makes his victory over Roland as ambiguous as Roland's laugh.

Behind Roland's laugh are troubling questions: is Roland "better" than Ganelon at this moment? Is he more honorable? According to what criteria is one man more

⁵⁰ Roland's election of Ganelon places his kinsman at risk and obliges the latter to recognize their equal standing as Charlemagne's vassals; the affront contradicts the aristocratic familial model to which Ganelon clings. He should be doubly protected. First, as Roland's step-father, Ganelon is the head of his household. Second, jeopardizing a family member is tantamount to betrayal; therefore, it is subject to vengeance. By this logic, Roland should never have risked Ganelon's life, and Ganelon never wavers from these convictions. He rejects the view that his allegiance and vassalage to Charlemagne could override entrenched social values and norms. Secure in his beliefs, Ganelon registers his dishonor as Charlemagne accedes to Roland's nomination, yet Ganelon believes that by faithfully delivering Charlemagne's conditions to Marsile, his actions in no way undermine his loyalty to the crown.

⁵¹ Huizinga points out that while "play, or rather sexual display, is predominant in animal life precisely at the mating-season...it would be too absurd to assign a place *outside* the purely physiological, to the singing, cooing, and strutting of birds just as we do human play" (27-28) because "[i]n all its higher forms the latter at any rate always belongs to the sphere of festival and ritual – the sacred sphere" (28). Here, Roland and Ganelon's behavior devolves from cultural play to animalistic competition. It's particularly absurd because their actions are not to attract a mate.

expendable than another? If we agree with Bergson that Roland's laughter is meant to intimidate through humiliation, to what extent might Roland's laughter *emasculate* Ganelon? Is Ganelon's open declaration to take vengeance a legitimate way to restore his manliness? Or do Roland and Ganelon cut each other in jest—are they simply *playing*, the way the French play at chess at the opening of the poem? If so, how earnest is their play? Whether Roland laughs at or with Ganelon, this moment points to fissures within the feudal and familial orders in Charlemagne's ranks. Roland and Ganelon's verbal sparring match is a game in which they vie for status as the more valued, more masculine man at Charlemagne's court. But what they try to present as light and playful is more earnest than mere game.

Charlemagne's ranks, from a theological perspective, are parts of a socio-political body that functions as a single whole. It reflects the ideal harmony of the city of God: "we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity" (Ephesians 5:15-16). The metaphor of a congregation joining together, supporting and becoming the shared body headed by Christ, is analogous to the feudal order in which Charlemagne is head and his vassals the various parts of the body politic.⁵² Within the Frankish court, as in the Bible, members of these unions are charged with eschewing "covetousness...obscenity or foolish talking or

⁵² Augustine was the first to elaborate a Christian "theory of the state" in the *City of God*, where he conceives of "the Christian commonwealth as the great community" (Artz 275), in which Christians are citizens of both a heavenly and earthly state that "remain mingled until the Last Judgement" (275). Within this community, the legitimacy of the earthly government depends upon its furthering "the purposes of God" (275). In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, drawing on both Augustine and Aristotle, believed governors on earth "must act according to both human and divine laws" (Artz 289).

scurrility, which is to no purpose” (Ephesians 5:3-4). The divisiveness of Roland’s laugh and Ganelon’s response to it, which sunders the Franks, casts the contenders, from this perspective, as ungodly—an implication that the unity of the “Pagan” foe ironically underscores.⁵³

The ambivalence of the entire court scene is captured by the following verse: “the heart of fools [exists] where there is mirth” (Ecclesiastes 7:5). Both Christians are fools for taking pleasure in actions that ultimately harm the whole. Roland’s taunting laughter is divisive and precipitates Ganelon’s fatal vengeance, yet the hero’s partial responsibility does not absolve Ganelon from taking the bait. His treachery severs the body politic; his crime, therefore, is far graver than perpetuating a feud or overreacting to a personal slight. Both men’s ends fail to justify their actions. They put up their lives and gamble their souls, ultimately losing both in a duel to increase their earthly status as men.

The third instance of laughter in the *Chanson de Roland* mirrors Ganelon’s drama at Charlemagne’s court. Set within Marsile’s court in Zaragoza, Ganelon reaches an agreement to destroy Roland (ll.611-616). Two Muslim warriors laugh and bequeath him arms, first a sword and then a helm:

...uns paiens, Valdabruns

Cler en riant l’ád dit a Guenelun:

“Tenez m’espee, meillur n’en at nuls hom;

Entre les helz ad plus de mil manguns.

Par amistiez, bel sire, la vos duins.” (ll.617-622)

⁵³ A clerical audience might well recall Ecclesiastes 7:6: “For as the crackling of thorns burning under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool: now this also is vanity.” They might recall as well the warning to: “Be not quickly angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool” (7:10).

[a pagan, Valdabrun, clear in laughter he says to Ganelon: ‘You have my sword, better is no man’s. Within the hilt are more than a million gold pieces. For friendship, good sir, I give it you]. Valdabrun’s laugh precipitates a friendly exchange, as does that of a second warrior: “...un paien, Climorins. / Cler en riant a Guenelun l’ad dit: / ‘Tenez mun helme...” [a pagan, Climorin. pure in laughter at Ganelon, he to him (Ganelon) says, “You have my helm”] (ll.627-629). Unlike Roland’s laugh, which extends the rift between him and Ganelon, Climorin’s laughter seals both friendship and confederation. The nobility of gift-giving registers at the same time as the treason that underwrites Ganelon’s alliance.⁵⁴ The ambiguous admixture of mirth and treachery that characterized Roland’s naming Ganelon envoy also characterizes this scene. Laughter is again tied to masculinity. But whereas Roland’s laugh diminishes Ganelon’s manly worth, here, the laughter of both Valdabrun and Climorin augments it.

In Marsile’s court, as elsewhere in the *Chanson de Roland*, highly consequential acts transform into “games” that reveal masculine anxieties; these insecurities correspond to historical realities in late eleventh, early twelfth century France. Agricultural prosperity aided population growth and the rise of a merchant class. As the Carolingian empire weakened, power began to decentralize, which elevated the nobility. At the same time, however, the rapidly increasing importance and status of merchants threatened the aristocracy,⁵⁵ as did the increasing sizes of their own families. For noblemen hoping to maintain their wealth, the addition of possible heirs threatened the integrity of their estate since freely owned land “was almost always held in common by the members of the

⁵⁴ It also suggests material goods are the basis of the Ganelon’s new alliance.

⁵⁵ One of the greatest rewards a lord could offer a knight was protection of his “privilege and fortunes” (Keen 29).

family. This was the legal form known as *frêrêche* (*fraternitia*)” (Mayer 22). The institution required individual submission “to a tight discipline—the control exercised by the head of the family” (22). According to historian Georges Duby, reserving power within a small, elite group became “the most reliable means of safeguarding the patrimony, the very foundation of chivalric preeminence” (10). The aristocracy therefore emulated monarchical practices by designating a head of household, or clan, based on primogeniture: “All power was in the hands of the elders (*seniores*), the eldest sons, married men, and heads of their own houses” (12); everyone else were *juvenes* (11-12). A key exercise of *seniorial* authority was to restrict marriage. Limiting the number of legitimate heirs maintained a consolidated estate (10). Therefore, the *seniores* sought “legitimate union for only the eldest of [their] sons” (11) and ensured “other sons did not take a legitimate wife, unless she was an heiress,” since the latter would augment rather than diminish family coffers (Duby 11).

The *frêrêche* system became a source of anxiety and frustration for the *juvenes*. As Mayer points out, “men of an independent outlook may well have been frustrated by such strict family authority” (22). Maurice Keen notes that among the rewards for knights, some of the most valuable included “land; or a hand towards a good marriage; or a measure of security in the enjoyment of their estates; above all, perhaps, the protection of their privilege and fortunes against the competition for economic advantage of rich townsmen and prospering peasants” (29). Keen’s observation underscores the importance of securing both status and an estate at a time of flux. The desirable rewards for service evidence how *frêrêche* marriage restrictions strained French bachelors; as men who could never marry, they were systematically excluded from power. *Juvenes*’ futures were

uncertain. Their hold on earlier masculine roles, like overseeing a family and administering affairs of an estate, slackened. Ganelon's insecurity within Charlemagne's ranks refracts this tenuous existence; as stepfather to Roland, he has not been long among the *seniores*—leastwise, not long enough to sire Charlemagne's nephew. Ganelon's flamboyant attire also reflects contemporary *juvenes*' efforts to curry favor with wealthy women. His appearance in Charlemagne's court invites Bernard of Clairvaux's pointed question: "Are these the trappings of a warrior or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman?" (Holt 185).

Prohibited from marriage and *seniorial* authority, two roles remained for *juvenes*: clergyman and crusader. Some were placed in monasteries,⁵⁶ and others were expected to earn their keep as vassals. Neither option, however, provided refuge from the "gender crisis" afoot. Mendicant reforms from 1050-1150 and calls for clerical celibacy challenged traditional conceptions of gender (Holt 187). Foregoing sex wreaked psychological havoc because "deprived of sexuality, [men] came dangerously close to traditional visions of femininity" (McNamara 8). Celibacy, for instance, eliminated the necessary "other" upon which clerics could "construct a gender persona" (8), and it was requisite for them and *miles Christi* alike. As Christ's soldiers, the Templar knights epitomized Christian masculinity. A new kind of militia, they stood as a "manly brotherhood [that spurned] the effeminate trappings of worldly knights and, of course, [swore] to forgo the company of women" (17). In the Middle Ages, these "competing and contradictory messages about what it meant to be a man" created (Murray x-xi), on the

⁵⁶ "[I]f despite [the control of marriages], there were still too many potential heirs, some of them would have to be provided for in monasteries or in cathedral chapters" (Mayer 22).

one hand, “individual crises and social confusion,” and on the other, “security and complacency” (xi).

One means of resolving this “gender crisis” was fusing male “personhood with manhood,” so the extent to which a man could prove himself so through deeds garnered direct correspondence to his human worth (McNamara 22). This required a man to continually defend his masculinity, partly by persecuting “with ever-increasing severity anyone who threatened the uncertain inner core of that image (McNamara 22). Those who failed to do so became non-men (22). The alternative solution, for *juvenes*, became taking the cross. Fighting in the Levant for God, young men could earn “present and future praise” for their deeds and gather enough spoils to assure a living for themselves that their culture would consider noble, despite their low familial stations (Holt 189).

Responding to these historical exigencies, instead of defining a man by self-serving, martial prowess, or by marital status, offspring, and material wealth that were denied many *juvenes*, the *Chanson de Roland* constructs a new iteration of masculine identity: the courageous crusader humbly serving God.⁵⁷ This new, ideal “man,” surfaces throughout the *Roland*, particularly in the title character and in Charlemagne, and it corresponds to monastic and clerical reforms as well as to domestic tension in France. Its effectiveness lay in its ability to seduce displaced *juvenes* with an identity that was both fulfilling and attainable.

This crusade ethos adds to the *Roland*'s tension as the *frérêche* values it seeks to displace surface in the very character who embodies the new ideal of Christian masculinity: Roland. Defying familial hierarchy, his endangering Ganelon contradicts the

⁵⁷ The depiction, Andrew Holt argues, is an appropriation by eleventh-and twelfth-century ecclesiastical leaders “of warfare for purposes they deemed worthy or even holy” (188); they were eager to provide a framework for the new type of warrior required by the crusades (189).

frêrêche model of *juvenes*' deferral to the *seniores*. Roland valiantly fights within a close "brotherhood" of warriors for a single liege—a leader who for many, was not a kinsman. By serving Charlemagne, Roland fights for God. His military exploits construct a noble alternative for disinherited French *juvenes*: the life of the *miles Christi*. Nevertheless, Roland's character flaws, as well as the French people's acceptance of Ganelon's defense, confirm that *frêrêche* values retained social currency.

Roland may portray, at times, a new ideal of Christian masculinity, but he is as concerned with honor and status as any nobleman in pre-feudal times, and his pride and stubbornness are not Christian virtues. Unwilling to admit weakness, Roland refuses to blow his horn for aid. He tells Oliver, his brother-in-arms: "...Ne placet Damnedue / Qui mi parent pur mei seient blasmet / Ne France dulce ja cheet en viltet!" [...Never please God that my family for me would be condemned, neither sweet France fall into disrepute] (ll.1062-1064). Roland's concerns are worldly. He values the honor and reputation of both his family and his homeland. He also values his own standing. Roland contends: "Ne placet Deu... / Que ço seit dit de nul hume vivant, / Ne pur païen, que ja seie cornant!" [Never please God...that it be said of any living man, nor of (any) pagan, that I had trumpeted] (ll.1073-75). From a worldly perspective concerned with rank, family, and liege, soliciting and accepting aid is humiliating. From a spiritual point of view, admitting defeat against a religious foe is shameful. For Roland, then, death is preferable to dishonor.

Despite his "model" Christian heroism, Roland dies midway through the narrative, which suggests the poet is more interested in what Roland represents than in what he does. Symbolically, Roland's demise disassociates the emergent definition of

crusade masculinity from “the persona of brash or arrogant knights, who affirmed their masculinity in part by reveling in their status as warriors and boasting of their many achievements” (Holt 189). The hero’s death, predicated upon his pride, affirms the emergent warrior values of humility and submission to God’s will. Together, Roland’s deeds and death present a new conception of a Christian, masculine identity. Forged on the battlefield, not in a monastery or on a traditional estate, the new model hybridizes elements from earlier conceptions of manhood. The crusader fights valiantly against Christendom’s material and spiritual foes: “Franceis sunt bon, si ferrunt vassalment” [France would be good, if (her knights) would attack courageously] (l.1080); he does not aspire to governing an estate, or to forging bonds with marriage.

Indeed, Roland disdains self-preservation, even for the sake of his betrothed, Aude; he rejects dynastic, *frêrêche* values, even as he embodies them by striving to demonstrate martial prowess.⁵⁸ The struggle hinges on what is more manly: achieving temporal goods, or serving eternal ones. The problem is that Roland equates the humble blowing of his horn with defeat. Humbly soliciting aid, like penitence, brings salvation, whereas proudly wielding arms yields death. As Howard Bloch points out, the poem turns from Roland’s horn to his sword; in place of children, the weapon becomes Roland’s legacy (*Etymologies* 103). The concern of familial issue is clear in Oliver’s rebuff for Roland’s silent horn: “Par cest meie barbe, / Se puis veer ma gente sorur Alde, / Ne jerreiez ja mais entre sa brace!” [By that which is my beard, when you see my noble

⁵⁸ “Humility had never been associated with the persona of brash or arrogant knights, who affirmed their masculinity in part by reveling in their status as warriors and boasting of their many achievements” (Holt 189). Roland is still brash and arrogant, and as such, McClure argues that in the Frankish Trinity comprised of Charlemagne the Father, Roland the Son, and Archbishop Turpin the Holy Spirit, Roland is associated “with the paradoxical realm of Christian wisdom, *sapientia* (336), but not because he is wise; rather, because he represents “youthful wisdom in folly” (447).

sister Aude, never enjoy you more within her embrace!] (ll.1719-1721). Citing the mark of his own manhood—his beard—Oliver’s charge voices outmoded issues of self-preservation and marriage, both of which are central to social replication. What Oliver thinks befits a knight, as in the past, are kinship bonds. Roland notes the “ire” in Oliver’s barbed comment (l.1722),⁵⁹ but he remains taciturn about Aude. The implication is that Roland is more concerned with honor than with a heterosexual relationship and all it offers—including security, authority over a *domus* (Duby 10), and a fraternal bond with Oliver. Roland’s internal struggle to choose between the horn or the sword manifests France’s ideological tug-of-war between the *frérêche* system and feudalism.

Yet Roland’s disdain for earlier cultural norms reflects the poem’s preference for emergent feudalism as opposed to the aristocratic *frérêche* system—but just barely, as all but Thierry are willing to let Ganelon go unpunished for the hero’s death. Though Roland dies, his crusading values live on with Charlemagne’s triumphs at the end of the poem. Conversely, Oliver’s values for aristocratic kinship bonds, brokered through marriage, die with him. This is further underscored by Aude’s death; her fleeting role in the poem is ostensibly to await Roland’s hand. The poem’s emerging, feudal worldview and revision of male identity creates new possibilities for men whose livelihood and future were uncertain because of their inability to inherit land and marry. While attaining control of a household or having a legitimate spouse may be nigh impossible for a young Frankish nobleman in the twelfth-century, the *Chanson de Roland* shows fighting against “Pagans” to be a viable enterprise. Like Roland, insecure *juvenes* could reject earlier social tenets and choose, instead, to serve a lord and win eternal glory abroad.

⁵⁹ “Por quei me portez ire?” [Why do you bring me anger?]

The crusades provided an opportunity for Christian men in the Latin West to assert and maintain a new version of masculine power by conquering contested territory and subjugating the inhabitants there—variously portrayed as “lacking,” both spiritually and morally—to their will. The nexus of crisscrossing desires in the *Roland* legitimates aggressive violence—and some very non-Christian values driving it, including the lust for advancement, status, and economic gain. The Muslims become the foil Roland needs to assert his masculine prowess, for Ganelon to save his dignity, and for Christians to cover over their fractiousness and less than noble motives.

In the context of the poem, the near exoneration of Ganelon’s betrayal most threatens the new system of feudal values; the outcome of his trial, however, renounces past definitions of manhood, those predicated on boastful exhibitions of prowess, in favor of one in which knightly success springs from subjection to and support by God. An ironic twist makes this clear. Ganelon defends himself by arguing that his actions were not treason, but justified retribution for Roland’s wrongs (ll.3757-3760, 3768-3778). As the barons deliberate, Ganelon secures a brave champion who is skilled in defense by arms: Pinabel (l.3785). Cowardly caitiffs (l.3817), no noble will fight him in trial by combat; each hangs his head: “Mult l’enbrunchit e la chere e le vis” [Many hang their heads, and their cheer, and their face] (l.3816). Only Thierry, a humble nobleman who is “Heingre out les cors” [has a slim body] (l.3820) and “gueses granz ne trop nen est petiz” [is not very great nor very small] (l.3822) will uphold the old, aristocratic form of justice against Ganelon. He is average in build, but noble in spirit. He fights to honor his ancestors, to correct Ganelon’s ignominious forfeiture of Roland, and to fulfill the service he owes to the body politic, which includes both Charlemagne and his deceased vassal.

Thierry believes it incumbent upon him to offer this service because Ganelon is false, a perjuring malefactor:

Ja savez vos que mult vos ait servit.

Par anceisurs dei jo tel plait tenir:

Que que Rollant a Guenelun forsfesist,

Vostre servise l'en doüst bien guarir.

Guenes est fels d'ïço qu'il le trait;

Vers vos s'en est parjurez e malmis..." (ll.3825-3830)

[I know that you are very self-serving. For my ancestors I deem, with and without agreement, this play to have: that which Roland to Ganelon forfeited, within your service I owe to well defend. Ganelon is false, I say, that he is the traitor; with regard to you (Ganelon), you are forsworn and sick]. In an ironic twist, brawny Pinabel falls to faithful Thierry, and Ganelon is defeated by the very justice he espoused. Like David against Goliath, Thierry would have perished without God's aid: "Deus le guarit, que mort ne l'acraventet" [God guaranteed Thierry against death; it would not knock him down] (l.3923). The humble noble's victory suggests Ganelon's fall is the will of God; it affirms the belief that God sees Charlemagne and his vassals as constituting a single body of which the sovereign is head. Violence against one member constitutes treachery against the whole, and, as the episode shows, the social codes that once permitted such violence as necessary exhibitions of manhood now bow to men's authority that is sanctioned by God.

If the *Roland* registers the disturbances that accompanied the shift from the *frêrêche* system to feudalism, it nonetheless makes the conquest of Muslims—motivated,

as we have seen, by economic opportunity, political expediency, fear of Muslim invasion, and the recovery of Jerusalem from Muslims—a reason to unify Franks to perform God’s work. In the process, however, the poem revises untenable definitions of what it meant to be a Christian man in medieval France. War, which St. Augustine justified only when it was defensive,⁶⁰ became a matter of spreading Christ’s dominion. As Fletcher reflects, for a time, fighting “the infidel in Spain” meant following “in the footsteps of Charles the great, the emperor to whom all looked admiringly, even reverently back: for the knight of that age, this was the path of glory” (115). Crusade ethos became tainted by slaughters of Jews and crusader greed,⁶¹ but for a time, “the idea that war against the infidel might be work of positive spiritual merit for the Christian knight” took hold (Fletcher 115).

The conflict between cultures and the control of commodities, as we have seen, was a factor in in *Roland’s*, at times, negative portrayals of “Pagans,” but it cannot be the primary issues subtending it; if they were, then it seems the poem would strive for greater consistency in depicting Christians as right, Pagans as wrong. But it doesn’t. Christians, at times, are equally as flawed as their Muslim opponents, if not more so, and the Muslims demonstrate Christian virtues.⁶² The inconsistent portrayals, therefore, reflect the poem’s interest in human virtue, not just in constructing rigid cultural binaries.

⁶⁰ Responding to the question: “Whether it is always sinful to wage war?” in the fortieth question of his *Summa Theologica’s* second part, Thomas Aquinas quotes Augustine’s notion of a “just war” as: “one that avenges wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized unjustly.”

⁶¹ During the People’s Crusade, Peter the Hermit’s followers looted in Hungary and plundered the suburbs of Constantinople; a French raiding party carried off rich booty from the neighbourhood of Nicaea” (Mayer 41). Crusaders also slaughtered Hungarians and Jews throughout the Rhine (41).

⁶² For instance, like Abraham, they are willing to sacrifice their sons. But they also agree with what Caiaphas said about Jesus: Roland’s death would serve a greater good (John 11:47-53).

As the only named, speaking females in the text, Aude and Bramimond bring male virtue into the foreground. Roland's betrothed and Marsile's wife are opposites: one is Christian, the other "Pagan;" one is steadfast to the point of death, the other converts in the face of death. Yet each represents the imagined reward for "good" crusaders returning home: a faithful wife.

A maiden embodying the old values of absolute loyalty, Aude appears four times, and each time she is associated with death. She is on her brother's Oliver's lips when he dies (ll.1719-1721); her name is mentioned when Charlemagne learns of Roland's demise; she herself dies when she hears that Roland has been killed (ll.3717-3721). Aude speaks and is spoken to, but though she is not a woman of action, she is a woman of decision. She finds Charlemagne's offer to "exchange" (l.3714) his own son for Roland as her husband "estranged" (l.3717); as Sharon Kinoshita points out, "her love is nontransferable" (42). For Aude, her life was one with Roland's; his death is likewise her death. The poem literalizes commitments we otherwise assume are metaphorical. As she says: "Ne place Deu ne ses seinz ne ses angles / Après Rollant que jo vive remaine!" [May it not please God, nor his saints, nor his angels / After Roland that I remain alive!] (ll.3718-3719). Her will is unbending, yet in her devotion, Aude forgoes all earthly agency; her death happens to her. By passé standards, she becomes the male ideal of womanliness even as she models the faith in God the poem promotes.

Yet Aude's death also "exemplifies the fixity of a feudal-Christian order heretofore threatened by instability and fragmentation" (Kinoshita 43), one that stubbornly persists, but is doomed to extinction. Because Aude, like Oliver, lives within the crumbling aristocratic social structure and in accord its values, her death prefigures

that of Ganelon and his kin, who cling to the same, outdated beliefs. The deaths of these kin-focused characters suggest the aristocratic model will not survive into the next generation. The *Roland*'s presentation of the *frèreche* system as moribund makes an argument for the emerging alternative: feudalism. In the process, the poem promotes a new definition of masculinity that is neither circumscribed by monastic celibacy nor contingent upon filial hierarchies complicated by the presence—and potential “contagion”—of women.⁶³

This ideological shift is further communicated by Bramimond's character arc; her self-preservation is predicated upon her adaptability. In contrast to Aude, Bramimond changes (Kinoshita 43). Named twelve times in the poem, she is a woman of action: she bestows gifts (l.637), bewails faulty deities (l.2714-19), and weeps over her spouse's injury (l.2595). She surrenders to Charlemagne (l.3655), travels to France (ll.3673-4), accepts Christianity, and converts (l.3990). Like a modern chess queen, Bramimond is powerful in her maneuverability. Amidst the Muslims' changing circumstances, her “authority” never slacks. As a consequence, her presence marks the Muslim force, especially after both Marsile and Baligant fall, as feminine. This recalls the feminized capitulation of Córdoba at the poem's outset; the city's pierced walls become Bramimond's surrendered towers (l.3655). Though she has lost knights, her king, her castles, and her faith, for the audience of the *Roland*, Bramimond wins the chess game she has played with fate, because she converts at Aix and is reborn as Juliana (ll.3985-3986).

⁶³ As noted in the introduction, during the mid-eleventh and mid-twelfth centuries, views of sexual relations required the clergy's misogynist rhetoric to denounce women and sex to maintain their status as “pure” men, yet the laity, among whom primogeniture was on the rise, had to exalt women and marriage because younger sons, disinherited, needed to find favor among women to secure their futures (McNamara 8).

Bramimond's journey to France and conversion "par amur" (l.3674)—at Charlemagne's behest—extends the poem's construction of crusade masculinity by bringing not just any woman, but a foreign queen, to the Frankish court. As Kinoshita points out, Bramimond's *amur* "is not for a man but for an entire religious and social order" (43).⁶⁴ Bramimond's adoption and assimilation is especially significant in a context where competition for wealthy heiresses made women prized commodities. As a symbol of her entire community's subjugation, Bramimond, the last "Pagan" on the board, exemplifies the transformation of Others into non-men.⁶⁵

One of the *Roland*'s clearest arguments for emerging crusade masculinity materializes not in the women against which it is defined, but in Charlemagne and the mark of his manhood, his beard. Throughout, the poem emphasizes its snowy hue. The color registers Charlemagne's age and makes his sustained strength all the more miraculous, especially after Roland dies. At this juncture, anguished Charlemagne cannot continue. He cries and tears his beard. "Sa barbe blanche cumencet a detraire, / Ad ambes mains les chevels de sa teste" [His white beard he commenced to tear, / With both his hands the hairs of his head] (ll.2930-2931).⁶⁶ Because men and women were, in the

⁶⁴ Bramimond exemplifies the Muslim stereotype of the Saracen queen/princess (Akbari 174), which is later evident in the portrayal of Floripas in *The Sowdone of Babylone*. Both exemplify the objectification of female Saracen bodies: imagined sites of conversion and assimilation. The Saracen queen, for instance, converts *par amur*—for the love of God. Both women exhibit varying degrees of agency, but they are overcome by Christian men and thereby fulfil the fantasy of desired Muslim conversion.

⁶⁵ Men persecuted those "who threatened the uncertain inner core of that image [of manhood]. Women were victimized by their exclusion, and male victims—heretics, homosexuals, Jews, any rebels who didn't fit the mold—were turned into women" (McNamara 22).

⁶⁶ Archibald reveals that many texts alluded, from the ninth century on, to an unspecified sin that Charlemagne refused to confess (200). In some versions, the unspeakable sin is "deliberate incest with his sister Gillen, resulting in the birth of Roland" (200). Scholars argue "that there must have been some historical basis for the legend," and indeed, evidence suggests "that Charlemagne's sister Gisla was in fact committed to a convent rather young because of a sexual scandal" (200)—possibly one involving her brother. "An incestuous birth story might have been considered an appropriate beginning for the tragic

Middle Ages, often understood in binary opposition to one another, with men on one hand associated with intellection, rationality, reason, self-control, judgement and order, and women on the other hand associated with bodies, passivity, irrationality, emotionality, lust, mercy, and disorder on the other (Bloch, *Medieval* 30), Charlemagne's actions feminize him. This is rectified, however, when Charlemagne prays. Prayer frees Charlemagne of his emotions and prepares him to be girded with arms; thus, he emerges where Roland fails as a new masculine ideal: the warrior made manly through subservience to God (Holt 189).

At once disconsolate, Charlemagne's prayer inspires manly resolve:

Li emperere de sun cheval descent,

Sur l'erbe verte s'e est culchet adenz,

Turnet sun vis vers le soleill levant,

Recleimet Deu mult escordusement. (ll. 3096-3099)

[The emperor descends from his horse. On the green grass (he) is face-down. He turns his face to the sun above; he invokes God heartily]. After humbly prostrating himself, Charlemagne turns to the light, entreating God's aid. His faith invigorates him as sunlight coaxes spring shoots. Like a sunbeam piercing thunderclouds, "se drecet en estant" [he raises himself in standing] (ll.3110). "Muntet li reis en sun cheval curant" [The king mounts on his moving horse] (ll.3112). He is ready for battle and "mult gentement" [greatly emboldened] (l.3121). Charlemagne's penitence garners providential succor. He stands, mounts, and is revitalized. The vertical movements are powerful and virile, suggesting that to serve God is to be a man. Charlemagne's "re-manning" is complete

story of Roland's death. Charlemagne's grief at the loss of his favourite champion is obviously even more poignant if Roland is his own son, and if the death of this splendid son is the price that the King has to pay for redemption for his long-ago sin" (Archibald 202).

when squires “Prent sun escut e sun espier trenchant” [bring his shield and his sharp spear] (l.3114). Inspired by God: “Gent ad le cors, gaillart e ben seant, / Cler le visage e de bon cuntenant / Puis si chevalchet mult aficheement” [His noble figure is robust, vigorous, and well-knowing. His face is clear and of good countenance. Well, he is one noble of manner very firmly set] (ll.3115-3117). Charlemagne’s faith augments his physical prowess, and this change is readily perceived in the transformation of his beard.

As Charlemagne rides into battle, “[d]esur sa bronie fors ad mise sa barbe” [over his byrnie freely positions his beard] (ll.3122). The beard is no longer subject to womanish torments, nor likened to snow. Instead, it resembles a “funt” [rivulet or fountain] (l.3123), streaming over Charlemagne’s armor. He rides forth with the power of swollen rivers and the freshness of snowdrops denying winter’s frost. However white Charlemagne’s beard is, whatever age Marsile muses the monarch to be (ll.520-524), he is resilient. His reign is sustainable and self-rehabilitating, for Charlemagne’s governance is endorsed by God, whose reign is eternal.⁶⁷

For all the poet commends Charlemagne, he also signals the cost of his actions; the portrayal subordinates warriors’ boasts of old to a new, masculine ideal whose hallmark is humble service to God.⁶⁸ Scripture commands: “Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath, for it is written: Revenge is mine, I will repay,

⁶⁷ Indeed, McClure argues that “Charlemagne, up until the concluding section of the poem...exudes *potentia*,” which is “especially associated with God the Father in order to counteract our natural human tendency to associate enfeeblement and senility with advanced years” (446). In this scene, Charlemagne’s beard may first exhibit an old, womanly feebleness, but it later reaffirms Charlemagne’s regenerating virility.

⁶⁸ In serving God, one serves humanity, whose fate, the book of Romans emphasizes, is shared: “Therefore, as by the offence of one, unto all men to condemnation: so also by the justice of one, unto all men to justification of life” (5:18). Romans 12 implores Christians to surrender to God’s will, to play the role assigned them as a member of the church. “For as in one body we have many members...So we, being many, are one body in Christ; and every one members one of another” (12:4-5). Feudal loyalty to Charlemagne offers an earthly correlative for serving the spiritual community of Christianity.

saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). Even though Charlemagne’s revenge is sanctioned by God, he remains a man and subject to all the shocks mortal flesh is heir to. In his battle with Baligant, he is wounded and sorely tried. Moreover, at the end of the poem, when the angel appears in his dream and tells him where he must battle next, Charlemagne breaks into tears. He will remain God’s faithful soldier-vassal, but to him continuing on earth is a tragedy compared to the glory and peace he will have in heaven after he dies. Charlemagne’s humility, and his ability to triumph with God’s aid, reinforces an emerging view of crusading masculinity, which strives to eradicate outdated models of noble manhood predicated on and performed via boastful acts (Holt 189).

As in contemporary children’s games, the pith is in the play, not just the final outcome. Moves and countermoves produce meaning by forging relationships, breaking them, and in the process, revealing identity. Such is the *Roland’s* game of conquest. New alliances replace old, winners innovate to advance, and unadaptable players fold. Yet the ability to transpose victor and vanquished, identifying either as winner or loser, shatters the illusion of conquest as a game. Charlemagne wins out, but at the cost of his salvation. Bramimond loses her faith, homeland, and people, yet she gains a new life. Both players’ sacrifices within confines of the poem are as consequential as its final outcomes. So, too, are the gains and losses of Ganelon and Roland. Ganelon achieves revenge, Roland the status of hero, but both die. As in any competition: the winner “loses” if s/he has not played well, or if his/her integrity is sacrificed to achieve victory. Such “winners” are similar to “cheats,” but more akin to Huizinga’s “spoilsport” (11), the player “who shatters the play-world itself... reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world” and “robs play of its *illusion*” (11). They don’t ruin the game, nor fully violate its boundaries,

but Ganelon and Roland, in Charlemagne's court, threaten to reveal the poem's gendered issues from the outset. Left unchecked, their competition would have rent the scene's gameful façade.⁶⁹ Instead, the dizzying plays upon audience expectations—from what is right or wrong to who is winner or loser—allows an ideology of difference to escape: “Païen unt tort e crestiens unt dret” [Pagans are wrong and Christians right] (l.1015). The poem propagandizes crusade efforts, even as its inconsistencies and ludic(rous) turns reveal its underlying concerns: gendered threats within rather than cultural threats without.

The deteriorating relationships among Christians and Muslims in the Iberian frontier made Muslims a convenient scapegoat for the *Roland* to direct its aggression towards, but by examining ludic(rous) passages in the poem, we can see that its rhetoric of difference is merely a smoke-screen to veil the very real domestic issues at play in twelfth-century France. As variations of medieval masculine identity became untenable, cultural productions like the *Roland* became apt vehicles for ideology that could modify passé norms and values.

An interactive, choose-your-own adventure map, the *Roland* charts new routes toward a revised conception of manhood, modeling how to negotiate gender identity amidst domestic instability. Cartographers today revise borders and place-names to reflect geopolitical developments and shifting attitudes. Because later texts drew on the *Roland*'s content and form, the poem provides a baseline by which to appraise the efforts

⁶⁹ Maintaining the scene's playfulness I argue, enables the poem's subtle didacticism to fall not on deaf ears, for as Foucault argues: “[p]ower is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (*HS* 86). The gamefulness subtending this scene in the *Chanson de Roland* has serious implications, yet the competition's appearance as a “non-serious” masks the mechanism by which *Roland* displaces economic and gendered social issues in the Latin West onto cultural others.

of fourteenth-century English romances, including *Guy of Warwick* and *The Sowdowne of Babylone*, as they negotiate and create new, male, Christian identities against cultural and female Others.

Like the *Chanson de Roland*, the Middle English, stanzaic *Guy of Warwick* seems to be, at first glance, most concerned with religious integrity and cultural difference, especially since we find it in the 1330 Auchinleck MS, many of whose tales are tethered to the East. It is a more streamlined narrative than its predecessor, the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic*; surprisingly, it is noticeably less invested in the problem of cultural difference. The original story recounts the hero's chivalric deeds in the East, which ultimately earn him the affection of his beloved, Princess Felice. After earning status and renown, in part by defeating a dragon, Guy weds. Soon thereafter, he takes up the cross to atone for his martial sins. The Auchinleck version omits Guy's early adventures in Eastern lands and Spain, which featured a number Muslim and "Saracen" encounters; it begins with his rejection of his past.

An omission from the Auchinleck MS that warrants mention in this regard is an episode of cunning where the Anglo-Norman Gui uses deceit, a trait often linked to Muslims,⁷⁰ to free his friend. Gui disguises "himself as a squire; he stained his whole face with an ointment, and dyed his hair, which was in fact blond, completely black" (ll.6145-6197).⁷¹ Claiming to be a "man from a foreign land" (l.6203), Gui gains his friend's captor's trust by offering him a war-horse: "A Saracen raised [the horse] and then a cousin of mine gave him to me" (l. 6206). Although the Middle English version cuts this

⁷⁰ Muslims are described as deceptive and treacherous in alignment with early portrayals of Muhammed, who was believed to use "crude tricks to dupe his ignorant followers into following him" (Tolan 168).

⁷¹ Here, I draw on Judith Weiss's translation from the Anglo-Norman.

scene, it does feature conflicts with and among Muslims, who are characterized from the same stereotypes that the *Chanson de Roland* drew on.

It would seem that such a spiritual text would have little use, or space, for ludic elements. But there are at least two linked, ludic(rous) incidents in the Auchinleck MS's stanzaic *Guy of Warwick*. From a modern perspective, these passages are not "gameful," nor do they present innocent, playful pastimes of small consequence; one scene pivots around a chess game, and another resembles the game-like structure of a tournament duel. Both incidents are grim and far from laughable. Games prove deadly; a Muslim prince is vanquished playing chess. His death precipitates a trial by combat in which one opponent gains a refreshing advantage by tricking the other. These moments of ludic perversion yield somber outcomes, but they are cathartic; they reveal gendered and religious tensions that correspond to those circulating in the fourteenth century. In releasing them, these ludicrous scenes provide opportunities for the text's contemporary audience to (re)consider both their social anxieties and causes of them; such reappraisal invites revision of masculine ideals.

The inciting incident precipitating the hero's battle with the Muslim giant Amoraunt is a chess dispute between Sadok, the sultan's son, and Fabour, King Triamor's son, which ends in Fabour's murder of Sadok. The issue for the young men seems, as in the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic*, to be a matter of both rank and honor.⁷²

⁷² In Judith Weiss's translation of the Anglo-Norman, after dining on the third day of a sumptuous feast, Sadoine the emperor's son, invites Fabur, King Triamor's son, to play chess with him. In the course of the game, "Sadoine of Persia took offence at Fabur telling him 'checkmate'; then he said it again, at which Sadoine was angry. He called Fabur son of a whore, and with a castle struck him on the head so that he broke it open; blood streamed down his face" (ll.7959-7992). Sadoine, losing, hurls a sexually charged slur at his opponent and strikes him. Fabur, his subordinate, retaliates and kills him: "My lord Sadoine," said Fabur, "you have done me much dishonour, by breaking my head and insulting me in your father's court. Were you not my lord's son, you would certainly die in great pain." "Wretch," said Sadoine, "what did you say? Did you threaten me? By my head, it was unlucky for you that you said it; never did you do anything

Thus sultan's son, "That was yhold a douhti gome, / Sadok was his name" (ll.662-663), calls Fabour, "into his chaumber... / Tho knightes bothe ysame (ll.665-666). Sadok asks Fabour "Yif he wald ate ches playn" (l.668), to which the king's son replies "...in gode maner / He wald play with him yfere / Withouten ani blame" (ll.670-672). The "hendy knightes" (l.674) begin to play. Halfway through the game, their anger piques, and "Thurth a chek Fabour seyde for soth / Sadok in hert wex wroth / And missayd him anonright" (ll.679-681). Though "hendy" means polite and well-behaved (*MED*), wrathful Sadok proves himself otherwise when Fabour checkmates him. He "...cleped [Fabour] *fiz a putayn* / And smot him with might and main / Wherthurth ros michel fight" (ll.682-684). The insult, later known in common translation as "whoreson," invites Fabour's retaliation. "With a roke he brac his heved than / That the blod biforn out span" (ll.685-686). Fabour antagonizes Sadok, and Sadok calls Fabour "Vile traitour!" (l.695). He then "smote him in the face" (l.696). Sorely aggrieved, Fabour "The cheker he hent up fot-hot / And Sadok in the heved he smot / That he fel ded to ground" (ll.700-702).

The violent chess game is strikingly ironic. Chess was often intended to teach strategy, restraint, and proper governance.⁷³ Here, it occasions intemperance and brutality. As Fabour and Sadok play at governance on the chessboard, their recklessness undermines dynastic authority; the game's outcome sanctions reason and discipline, for

so stupid." He was going to strike him with his fist when Fabur could stand it no longer; he jumped quickly to his feet, seized the chessboard with two hands, and struck Sadoine on top of his head, so that he knocked him dead to the ground. (ll.7993-8015)

⁷³ Jenny Adams argues that in medieval literature, chess is a pedagogical tool resembling how young men at the time were educated (111), in this case, through games of strategy. Allegorically, chess represented "courtly love, cultural transgression, military strategies, meditation and wisdom" (Classen 42). Such infinite applications, Albrecht Classen argues, demonstrate the extent to which the chessboard and its pieces served poets and writers as a reflective tool through which to contemplate "fundamental ideals, values, principles, and concepts determining courtly society and its relationship both to the lower classes and also to God" (42).

its players, those who should demonstrate such qualities by virtue of their nobility, lack both. The portrayal educates the romance's readers: legitimate male rulers are not baited to action by personal slights. This, too, could be seen as ironic, for within the context of the on again, off again Hundred Years' War, personal slights formed the basis of much animosity between the French and English crowns.⁷⁴

The untranslated expletive that appears in Sadok's and Fabour's chess game points to dissent between English and French leaders. Expletives are uncommon in medieval romances, but *fiz a putayn* is particularly noteworthy because it appears in French in an English text. The lack of translation calls attention to the mutual intelligibility of French and English in the fourteenth century, which the Hundred Years War accentuated.⁷⁵ The expression also jabs at maternal integrity; it implies the illegitimacy of one whose mother gains by sharing her bed with other than her husband.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Charles IV died in February, 1328 (Sumption, I 103). King Edward III of England was Charles's "closest surviving male relative" and "the only surviving male descendant of Philip the Fair," but this lineage was maternal, through Edward's mother, Isabella (106). After Edward III, Philip, Count of Valois, Philip the Fair's nephew, was Charles's next of kin. Unlike Edward, he "descended from Philip the III in unbroken male line" (Sumption, I 106), and he lived in France. Thus, when Charles IV's 7-month pregnant wife, Joan (103), gave birth to a girl on 1 April 1328, Philip of Valois ascended from regent to king of France (Sumption, I 106). Edward III didn't press his claim further until 1337, when Philip VI moved to seize Aquitaine. In 1340, he proclaimed himself king of France (Ormrod, "England" 278); it was "[o]n 26 January 1340, in the marketplace of the city of Ghent," and his assertion ultimately provoked "a public debate on the legality and viability of the Valois monarchy" (Ormrod, *Edward* 212).

⁷⁵ Ardis Butterfield points out England's trilingual nature in the Middle Ages (11), and he sees linguistic exchanges between England and France in the early fourteenth century as hardening in tone: "linguistic frictions of earlier centuries are very much part of the thickening texture of war" that preceded Edward and Philip's dispute over Gascony (103). Butterfield points out France and England's "rich and subtle linguistic awareness of the complexity of defining differences between people who share so much—in genealogy, goods, and language" (104), and he argues that mid-fourteenth century cross-channel texts "do not simply illustrate processes of nation-building...they actually participate—in every interlinguistic encounter—in fabricating identity" (104). He suggests this identity is either English or French, but in the untranslated slur in *Guy of Warwick*, that identity might also regard a man's filial legitimacy.

⁷⁶ Adultery had become a sensitive issue within both France and England in the early fourteenth-century. Isabella had rejected her marriage to Edward II and entered into "an openly adulterous relationship" with Roger Mortimer (Ormrod, *Edward* 35), though, it seems, not until Mortimer escaped from England to France (Haines 169). Isabella's conspicuous adultery in France was ironic, for her brother Charles IV "had

Sadok's insult may also correspond to fourteenth-century anxieties about the legitimacy of women's claims to French governance. Isabella, Charles IV's sister, was the king's closest relation, but neither she, nor even her son, Edward the III (C. Taylor 391), was readily accepted as Charles's heir, in part, because French inheritance customs were gendered. In French custom, based "upon natural and divine law" (365),⁷⁷ women were only permitted inheritance of personal property, while "men should receive the heritage of the ancestors (the landed property, the 'terra salica' or 'hereditas aviatica'" (C. Taylor 359). As Jonathan Sumption puts it, "the question at issue in 1328" asked, "if a woman could not inherit the crown, could she nevertheless transmit the right of inheritance to her descendants?" (I 106). Thus, the expletive Sadok hurls at Fabour seems to invite the question: do these sons of kings represent the noble tensions between England and France over French land and sovereignty? The Auchinleck MS in which *Guy of Warwick* appears was likely produced in London between 1331 and 1340 (Wiggins, "The Auchinleck"). The date and place suggest that the youths' quarrel may, indeed, offer a parallel to the political struggles between England and France.

imprisoned his wife Blanche for the same offence" (170); the affair was famously scandalous (Sumption I 103).

⁷⁷ Craig Taylor suggests that when Jean Montreuil first recorded the law in 1413 (360), its circumscription of women's inheritance, as a reflection of their social status, offered a "toned down" version of "the misogyny of [Montreuil's] fourteenth-century sources" (360). While the law may not have been *written* at the time of Charles IV's death, the *custom* of restricting women's power, in part by exclusionary inheritance practices—which misogynistic attitudes abetted—likely was. Such customs were "regarded with great respect in the Middle Ages," for they were seen as "the expression of the will of the people, the ultimate source of authority for all positive law" (Taylor, C. 365). Later events, for instance, evidence this logic: in 1369, both Charles V and Edward III sought their subjects' approval after continued engagement in cross-channel conflicts; the subjects' responses to each sovereign's questions validated actions that might otherwise have been unjustifiable (Sumption, II 585). Consequently, when France selected Charles IV's successor, though little material evidence exists from the assemblies where the issue was debated, Taylor suggests "it is reasonable to suppose that the learned doctors of civil and canon law affected the outcome" (C. 361), and, given the misogynistic context, it seems the custom later codified in writing as the Salic Law may, indeed, have been a factor in their deliberations and in Charles IV's succession.

Though Edward and Charles were amicable at first, each undermined the other's status. Sadok's unwillingness to accede peaceably, and accept the feminine position of the vanquished, causes retaliation, but the move costs him his life. Casting him as a Muslim emperor's son offers an acceptable guise for any political warning the poem might offer Christian heirs, each of whom claims superiority as a worthier future king, yet it is clear that in the Auchinleck *Guy*, the poet sees chess, which marries war and love, as a way to probe questions of masculinity, not religious difference.

The fatal game played between Fabour and Sadok escalates into a contest between their fathers, both of whom are non-Christians. This amplification of the initial dissent speaks again to the patrimony of both England and France; as before, the poem completely displaces domestic tension, this time with a foreign setting. The resulting trial by combat, as in Fabour and Sadok's quarrel, seems more concerned with protecting or reclaiming position, power, and identity than in staging the triumph of Christianity over Islam.

The eponymous hero of the Middle English *Guy* faces a stereotypically-portrayed Muslim foe, but the trial by combat proves less a victory over the infidel, and more a formal renunciation of the hero's sins, underscoring the salvific power of humble masculinity. The Muslim champion for Sadok's father is described in stereotypical terms as fearsome, barbaric, and cursed:

[T]han dede he com forth a Sarrayine -

Have he Cristes curs and mine

With boke and eke with belle -

Out of Egypt he was ycome,

Michel and griselich was that gome
With ani god man to duelle.
He is so Michel and unread
Of his sight a man may drede
With tong as Y thee telle;
As blac he is as brodes brend,
He semes as it were a fende
that comen were out of helle. (ll.733-744)

Following traditional, pejorative portrayals of Muslims, Amoraunt is big, black, and aligned with the devil. Guy, King Triamor's champion, looks on his adversary and comments: "It is...no mannes sone, / It is a devel from helle is come, / What wonder doth he here?" (ll.1138-1140). He is a son, but one not human; Amoraunt is, as Robert Rouse says, presented primarily as an "avatar of bodily excess, the conquering of which is so important to the process of the physical and spiritual maturation of the Romance hero" (125).

Indeed, evaluating the combatants' motivations for dueling reveals their antithetical natures. Guy fights for King Triamor's release of Christian captives and for future security of Christians (ll.1027-9, 1045-1053). He also fights in atonement for his worldly-motivated deeds. Guy drearily recalls that, "For Jhesu love, our Saveour, / Never no dede he gode," (ll.248-249). In contrition he laments: "Bot wer and wo ichave don wrought / And mani a man to grounde ybrought, / That rewes me ful sare" (ll.259-261), and he argues that:

...yif ich hadde don half the dede

For Him that on Rode gan blede

With grimly woundes sare,

In Hevene He wald have quit mi mede. (ll. 289-292)

For this, he resolves “To bot min sinnes ichil wende / Barfot to mi lives ende / To bid mi mete with care” (ll.262-263). Unlike contemporary heroes who lose and regain their worldly goods,⁷⁸ Guy penitently surrenders his earnings, including land, lady, and honor, to serve as Jesus’s humble knight. Conversely, Amoraunt fights to acquire what Guy has renounced:

The Soudan treweli hath me hight

His lond gif me he shold

Ever more to have and hold fre

And give me his douhter bright o ble...

When ichave thee sleyn this day

He schal give me that fair may

With alle his lond to hold. (ll.1457-1464)

Ironically, Amoraunt mirrors Guy’s past desires; he too is a big, strong, man;⁷⁹ he fights for worldly gain, and his acquisitive motives reflect criticism often directed at crusaders in the East.⁸⁰ Guy realizes a true knight battles for the sake of higher, more ethical principles. Christianity is central to him less for its religious preeminence over Islam than for the power and guidance it provides to help him become a more worthy man.

⁷⁸ The eponymous hero of *Sir Isumbras* participates in a narrative of loss and recovery (Manion 67).

⁷⁹ Guy “thought with dreri mede, / Hou he hadde ever ben stron werroure” (ll.246-247).

⁸⁰ “A general obsession with plunder was characteristic of crusaders” (Housely 91).

We see Guy's providential aid most clearly in the way he defeats Amoraunt. As the combat begins, the poem narrates that "Ther worth Sir Gii to deth ybrought / But yif God have of him thought, / His est help at nede" (ll.1183-1195). Guy's need of divine aid is proved by his instability on foot (ll.1207), and his inability to strike Amoraunt successfully until he offers a prayer to God (ll.1211-1233). Even after that, Guy struggles. Amoraunt strikes Guy "And hit him on the helme so bright / That al the floures fel down right...Almost to grounde him brought" (ll.1252-1260). Guy falls to his knees in prayer (ll.1264-1272); then he rebounds, striking Amoraunt a stumbling blow.⁸¹

Guy's reliance on God is further evidenced by his need for water, which constitutes, symbolically, his need to be reborn as God's knight. Both men are fatigued when Amoraunt asks Guy if he might drink from a nearby river. Guy allows him. When parched himself, he asks Amoraunt for the same courtesy. Amoraunt replies:

Knight...yeld thee bilive

For thou are giled, so mot Y thrive.

Now ichave a drink

Icham as fresche as ich was amorwe.

Thou schalt dye with michel sorwe. (ll.1381-1385)

Amoraunt's play gives him the upper hand.

Distraught by this treachery, Guy's heart "breketh ato" (ll.1515), but he is made whole again in an episode that recalls the sacrament of baptism:

Anon he bethought him thenne

Right to the river he most renne...

⁸¹ Here, Guy's rehabilitation by prayer recalls the effects of of Charlemagne's prayer after Roland's death in the *Chanson de Roland*.

Gii ran to the water right,
Bot on him thenk God Almighty...
In the water he dept his heved anon
Over the schulders he ded it gon
That keled wele his blod.
And when Gii hadde dronken enough
Hetelich his heved up he drough
Out of that ich flod. (ll.1516-1533)

His head and shoulders submerged in the river, Guy is revitalized physically; he returns to the battle anew, his blood cool, rather than hot, like Amoraunt's.

Even after Guy's submersion, however, he still requires God's grace, for Amoraunt smites him back into the water (l.1534-1540). Submerged again, Guy heaves his head out of the water and proclaims:

In this water icham ful cold
Wombe rigge, and side
And no leve, sir ich hadde of thee
And therefore have thou miche maugré
And ivel thee mot betide. (ll.1544-1548)

Cooled in the water, Guy recognizes fully Amoraunt's evil. His emerges from the watery "womb" reborn. The manner in which Guy regains his strength recalls the salvific power of baptism in 1 Peter 3:21: baptism saves "not [in] the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but, [through] the examination of a good conscience towards God." By presenting himself "to God, as those that are alive from the dead" (Romans 6:13) and by presenting

himself not as an “instrument[] of iniquity unto sin,” but as an “instrument[] of justice unto God,” Guy shows himself one who has examined his conscience and been saved by baptism. Sin, and its physical manifestation in Amoraunt, no longer claims dominion over Guy, for he is “not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Cooled and cleansed by the river, Guy charges Amoraunt: “No more wil Y trust to thee / For no behest thou hotest me. / Thou are a fals glotoun” (ll.1558-1560). He now sees the truth. No longer will worldly cunning deceive him; he is “reborn” to conduct God’s will. When the two clash together again, Guy wounds Amoraunt in the neck (l.1592) and strikes off his head (l.1596).⁸²

It is significant that the water primarily affects Guy’s body, because it shows the extent to which bodies became loci on and through which cultural and religious difference, to Christians in the Latin West, became visible,⁸³ though we know this logic,

⁸² When Guy identifies Amoraunt as a devil, the poem not only enters the ludic realm of a duel, which is fundamentally, a contest, but it also enters the realm of ideology. The battle symbolizes Guy’s victory over his former self, an *exomologēsis*. As Michel Foucault explains, drawing on Christian supplications from Tertullian, Jerome, and Ambrose, *exomologēsis* is what a “penitent does to obtain his reconciliation during the time in which he retains the status of penitent. The acts by which he punishes himself must be indissociable from the acts by which he reveals himself” (*About* 59), for *exomologēsis* “is the theatrical representation of the sinner as willing his own death as a sinner. It is the dramatic manifestation of the renunciation to oneself” (60). In overcoming Amoraunt, Guy renounces his former self as sinner.

⁸³ *The King of Tars*, a hagiographic, quasi-romance related to the story of Constance (as in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*) is found among other places, in the Auchinleck MS. As editor John Chandler points out, in the Auchinleck text, a child emerges lifeless and deformed from Sultan Damas, a Muslim, and his Christian bride’s loins (ll.576-579); after Damas allows its baptism, it breathes life and becomes beautifully reformed (ll.769-777). Damas converts to Christianity, and after his baptism, his skin changes from black to white (ll.916-926). Here, the body outwardly presents the state of the inner soul. In a twelfth-century letter to Heloise, Abelard, like the *King of Tars* poet, links outward bodily features to the state of the soul within. He remarks that in the Canticles, the Ethiopian bride’s dark, sun-scorched skin reflects the “blackness of bodily tribulation” (75), for “prosperity is marked by white, so adversity may properly be indicated by black” (74); through her struggles, Abelard argues, the bride: “may truly become through her humility a lily of the valley, and not a lily of the heights” like women who strive for outward, worldly displays of righteousness (74). She is “whiter and lovelier, in her bones, for instance, or in her teeth” than are other women, but, Abelard implies, she is truly more lovely because her tribulations, evidenced by her skin’s blackness, have turned her mind, as those of “the faithful away from love of earthly things and attache[d] [it] to the desire for eternal life” (75). Though Abelard suggests the soul may be white and the body black, his discussion nonetheless reveals a belief that outward appearances in some way correlate to one’s spirituality.

from a modern perspective, is faulty. Guy is “cooled” by the river, in contrast to Amoraunt, whose body is consistently associated with heat. Late antique and medieval texts created biological and geographical reasons to explain “the faults of foreigners,” which were caused by “their living too far to the east, west, north or south” (Halsall 91-92) in relation to the sun (92). Arabs’ proximity to the sun was assumed as the source of their hot-headedness and cunning (92). This heat made them slaves to their passions—“subject to the tyranny of their emotions” (92)—and vulnerable to gluttony (94)—Guy, we remember, calls Amoraunt a “false glutton.” Akbari shows that as far back as Jerome’s *Liber de nominibus hebraicis*, “Ham, id est callidus” (40); Noah’s son Ham, linked to the southern regions of the world, is associated throughout the patristic and encyclopedic traditions with heat (40). The river water that refreshes Guy does not refresh Amoraunt; beyond his exertion, it cools the Christian knight’s previous, passionate, irrational self that misguidedly inclined toward worldly goods. Because Guy is already a Christian, the baptism he undergoes here is moral rather than religious. Yet, it maintains a spiritual nature, for it resembles exomologēsis: “the discipline of prostrating and humbling” oneself in formal repentance for one’s sins (*OED*).

Guy’s battle sequence against Amoraunt argues that God’s grace allows a sinner to reorient himself so that he may pursue salvation. By omitting many of Guy’s early adventures in the East and focusing instead on the hero’s battle against a character who manifests his own depravity, the poem generates desire to surmount cravings for worldly goods like love, land, and honor—earned through chivalrous deeds of arms—and devote oneself instead to spiritual reconciliation. Guy’s triumph parallels, to an extent, the contemporary story of *Sir Isumbras*, where the eponymous hero’s “political recovery of

dominion in the East illustrates how an individual's religious recovery from a sinful state could accomplish what the large military campaigns of the period failed to do with arms" (Manion 79). Like Guy, Isumbras gains status and stature by becoming a crusading pilgrim.

Wealth, family, and reputation comprised central concerns for fourteenth-century English knights, and the Anglo-Norman *Gui* and Middle English *Guy* offered inspirational "Cinderella narratives" that proved any capable knight of average standing could acquire them while fulfilling the noble role of crusading pilgrim (Field 46). In both poems, Guy is "a comparatively humble man" (46), but he wins high rank through meritorious deeds. "As a meritocratic figure he exemplifies the dream of chivalry, of a system which creates heroes through nurture" (Field 46). The narrative of a humble, worthy knight's ascendant star surely resonated among Anglo-Norman elites as an ancestral romance.⁸⁴ It survives in eight, single-text manuscripts and fragments (Ailes 12-15) and in seven compilations (15-21).

The iconic figure continued to resonate among later generations and lower classes; in 1309 and 1320, the humble men fighting in "the 'Peasants' Crusades,' the 'Crusades of the Poor,' and the 'Shepherds' Crusades'" surely looked to the Anglo-Norman hero for inspiration (Manion 79).⁸⁵ Although Guy's humble origins garner less attention in the Middle English version than in its predecessor, the meritocratic figure remains intact, and the construct of the no-frills Cinderella warrior serving God in the East maintained a hold on the fourteenth-century English imagination. As Alison

⁸⁴ *Gui*, "written in the socially superior vernacular of the thirteenth century, is associated with baronial patrons and audiences, seen as distinct from the 'popular' or populist audiences posited for *Guy*" (Field 44).

⁸⁵ Many of these expeditions were unsanctioned, "locally organized movements containing participants from the lower social classes" (Manion 79).

Wiggins points out, “[t]here survive three manuscripts and two sets of fragments of the Middle English *Guy of Warwick*, copied between c. 1300 and c. 1500” (“The Manuscripts” 62). Housley notes that during this time, especially after 1337, the Holy Land influenced the imagination of western Christians “in the realm of ideas, emotions and images” (126); by 1365, crusade efforts relied not on political, military, and financial support, but rather, “on a good deal of optimism coupled with a belief in the workings of providence” (127), a principle embodied by the ME hero. As in Charlemagne’s renewing prayer in the *Chanson de Roland*, Guy recognizes that it is God for whom he fights, and God ultimately allows him to succeed. The depiction reinforces the notion of crusade masculinity that was nascent in the French epic: Guy’s faith is the first step along the road to his salvation, one open to the Auchinleck MS’s audience, even if the personal crusade—for financial reasons—was not.

Guy’s redemptive narrative participates in the same discourse as grail quest literature, where knightly sinners are ennobled by arduous quests in service of a higher power. Historian Simon Lloyd explains that romances “such as *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste del Saint Graal* served equally to instil the notion that the knight should wield his sword in a sacred cause” (96). Works of this nature would have comforted men who “lived by the sword” and feared damnation despite the church’s promise to forgive their sins after taking up the cause of the cross. A knight’s anxiety for his soul is best represented by Chaucer’s late-fourteenth century knight. He travels to Canterbury “Al besmotered with his habergeon, / For he was late ycome from his viage. / And wente for to doon his pilgrimage” (ll.76-78). Though he “loved chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, freedom, and curtesie” (ll.45-46) and had “foughten for oure faith” (l.62), behaviors that

had been endorsed and encouraged for many years,⁸⁶ the knight penitently makes “his port as meeke as is a mayde” (l.69). He humbly seeks redemption, as “Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land” (Matthew 5:4). Guy likewise begins his pilgrimage toward salvation by recognizing his worldly sins and overcoming his desires through submission to God’s will.

Guy’s first steps surely resonated with men returning from “failed” expeditions to the Holy Land where, despite considerable efforts, “Western powers were unable to launch a crusading army to recover the Holy Land” (Manion 63). According to Christopher Tyerman:

The years between 1272 and 1337 demonstrate that the major weakness in the West’s response to the challenge of rescuing the Holy Land was not emotional or financial but administrative. The whole process of agreeing papal grants, launching preaching campaigns, collecting taxes and objections, raising troops, and establishing political security at home was infinitely cumbersome and liable to prolonged delay. (257)

Criticism of the crusaders for failing to recover the Holy Land circulated widely in England after the fall of Acre. The *Excidium*, a chronicle account, and the “Ystoria de desolation et conculcatione civitatis Acconensis et Terre Sancte” both use the forfeiture of Jerusalem to “demonstrate a loss of direction and identity in crusade leaders” (Manion 88). By invoking this sense of loss—this lack—a work like *Guy* would incite the desire to do better, not as part of a large campaign but as a man on a personal crusade in the East.

To be sure, *Guy*, like *Sir Isumbras* and the *Excidium*, recognizes knightly sins—including

⁸⁶ Pope Urban II’s speech at Clermont in 1095 “laid down, in precise and unambiguous words, that whoever took the cross for reasons of religion alone, would be freed from all penances imposed by the Church” (Mayer 30).

pride—as turpitudes leading to crusade failures (Manion 91). But Guy’s example also offers hope to those who deemed their vow to recover the Holy Land unfulfilled and to those souls burdened by atrocities committed abroad;⁸⁷ later, Guy would appeal to Englishmen raising arms against other Christians in France.

The poem’s concern not only with knightly actions but also with religious righteousness corresponds to discord within the church—on either side of the channel—in the early fourteenth century. During the pontificate of Clement V, the Roman papacy was exiled to Avignon (Swanson 5). This created factions within the church and undermined its authority, as did a number of other factors, including increased preoccupation with the church’s finances. The conversion of religious offices and actions into cash commodities called their spiritual value into question, as did the church’s contradictory practice of deploring usury while both borrowing heavily and paying interest (Hoyt and Chodorow 544). The clergy, “monks, friars and secular priests... were holy in that they participated, as no layman could, in the mysteries of the sacrament” (Hay 49), but their commerce with worldly concerns tarnished their virtue.⁸⁸ Guy’s victory over Amourant through submission to God’s will signifies the hero’s renunciation of past actions that were motivated by worldly gain.⁸⁹ The narrative endorses humble masculinity, one that serves a greater good. The conditions of Guy’s service to King

⁸⁷ “The ‘breakthrough’ of crusading lay in the fact that arms-bearers could achieve salvation not by renouncing their military skills, which was almost as unendurable as the condition of sinfulness itself, but by using those skills to recover Jerusalem” (Housley 86).

⁸⁸ In the early fourteenth century, Dante, in *Inferno* Canto 7, reviles the “cherci... e papi e cardinali” [the churchmen, popes and cardinals] guilty, by his standards, of “avarizia” [greed] (l.46).

⁸⁹ Even as he prepares for the battle against Armouraunt, Guy rejects the fine “silk” in which King Triamor “wald him schrede” (l. 1059). “Swiche clothes” he says, “non kepe Y” (l.1061). All he accepts is food; he rejects worldly goods, telling Triamor again: “And riche clothes lat thou be, / Y kepe non swiche prede” (ll.1067-1068).

Triamor require the release of “Cristen men” from his prisons and their ability to “comen and gon / To her owen will in wold” (ll.1052-1053). Considering the papacy was removed to Avignon, might the release of Christians held against their will in *Guy* present, for fourteenth-century English readers, a kind of wish fulfillment?⁹⁰

In the Middle English *Guy of Warwick*, two young men instigate a dispute between their fathers after a chess game leaves one dead; in *The Sowdone of Babylone*, a game involving fire and beards amongst Christian prisoners and their captors allows the captives to assert their manhood despite imprisonment. Both texts re-deploy the *Chanson de Roland*'s tactics of subterfuge and displacement, and over time, each amplifies its traditional stereotypes, making later portrayals of non-Christians increasingly “ludicrous” as each text negotiates revised notions of masculinity.⁹¹ In the Middle English romances—as in the *Roland*—ludic(rous) episodes, ranging from overt game references and game structures à la Huizinga to Bakhtinian laughter and inversions, reveal gendered tensions that correlate the texts' sociocultural context.

Written in the late fourteenth, early fifteenth century, *The Sowdone of Babylone*'s plot is tethered, like the *Roland*'s, to the Iberian Peninsula. Its setting attests to England's fascination with the East, and its narrative showcases a variety of ludic(rous) passages that both derive from and contradict the literary tradition demonizing Muslims. The *Sowdone* maintains, plays upon, and amplifies many of the ludic(rous) rhetorical

⁹⁰ R.N. Swanson shows that during the schism between 1378 and 1419, England obeyed Rome (xiii, 1). The schism, of course, transpired four decades after the the Auchinleck *Guy* was produced. However, England's Roman obeisance during that later crisis suggests the insular population may earlier have judged Rome the papacy's rightful see.

⁹¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an action that is ludicrous still involves “play or sport.” Such actions are “intended in jest,” or are “jocular,” but they are also “derisive” (*OED*) or “ridiculous, laughably absurd” (*OED*). At a linguistic level, the sense of something “ludicrous” may have originated in playful jest, but it becomes more sinister and negative than that deemed simply “ludic.” As in discussing the *Chanson de Roland*, I use the term ludic(rous)” to signal this relationship.

strategies we examined in *Roland* and in *Guy*; the romance maps out an even more distinctive topography of Christian and Muslim virtue than its predecessors.

The *Sowdone* begins by recounting the pillage of Rome by Muslim forces, but Muslim aggression is secondary; it responds to Romans' assault on a Muslim cargo vessel after its traders were blown off course. Rather than charitably aid the merchants, the Christians despoil them.⁹² The behavior resembles Christians' ungodly comportment in the *Roland*, and it creates ambiguity for readers: how can Christians be superior to Muslims if they behave sinfully? As in the *Roland*, the poem urges us to see characters from a spiritual perspective rather than an earthly one. All can be saved, but those who believe as Christians are superior. All others are inferior. If one's spiritual status is properly aligned, then, as in the case of the characters Ferumbras, Floripas, and Neymes, it doesn't matter how wicked the betrayal, they are still "in the right," whereas other "pagans" including Laban and Lucafer, are, "wrong."⁹³ To reinforce the poem's introductory imposition of a spiritual perspective over a worldly one, the Muslim "pagans" retaliate by confiscating the Christians' holy relics. The Sultan's forces wrest the relics from Rome, and Charlemagne rallies his armies to support the beleaguered city. A number of Franks are captured in the campaign, including Roland and Oliver, the French heroes of the *Roland*, but Floripas, the Sultan's daughter, aids the Christian captives by betraying her father, Laban, which leads to his defeat. Despite the conversions of Laban's children, one for love, and one for self-preservation, Laban

⁹² "A drift of wedir' vs droffe to Rome, / The Romaynes robbed vs anone; / Of vs thai slowgh ful many one" (ll.76-78). Here and following, citations are from Emil Hausknecht's edition of *The Sowdowne of Babylone and of Ferumbras his Sone who Conquered Rome*.

⁹³ I use "right" and "wrong" here to invoke the language of the *Chanson de Roland*.

refuses. Charlemagne executes Laban after he rejects Charlemagne's offer to stand godfather at his Christian baptism.

Laban exemplifies the more extreme aspects of the anti-Islamic tradition. His name recalls the trickery of the biblical father of Leah and Rachel, a man who extracted unfair toil from his daughters' intended spouse, Jacob. The sultan's name aligns him with an Old Testament bilker, a choice that enfolds Muslim charlatanism within medieval Christians' view of Jews as untrustworthy. Laban is also an idolater, similar to Marsile in the *Chanson de Roland*. But he is markedly irrational, or "wood," which adds another layer of assumptions to the stereotypical "pagan" Muslim modeled in the earlier text. Despite these stereotypes, however, *The Sowdone of Babylone*, like its predecessor, draws uncanny similarities between Muslims and Christians, which undermines its invective against religious difference. This slippage challenges readers to evaluate how "wrong" "Paynims" are if Christians perform, at times, the same acts for the same reasons.

In a few instances, *The Sowdone of Babylone* challenges a straightforward reading of Muslims as wholly irredeemable. The poet characterizes the sultan as "heþen" (ll.979-979), which foregrounds the issue of cultural—and thereby religious—difference.⁹⁴ Heathens were deemed "unenlightened" (*OED*), which is not an admirable trait. Yet Laban is also "worthy," which seems a paradox, as he is condemnable on multiple accounts.⁹⁵ Though the *MED* defines "worth" with regard to status and merit, worth is

⁹⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that between 971 and 1870, the term's first definition was: "Of an individual or people: holding religious beliefs of a sort that are considered unenlightened, now esp. ones of a primitive or polytheistic nature; spec. not of the Christian, Jewish, or Muslim faiths." From 826-1879, it has related "to such an individual or people, or to their religion and customs."

⁹⁵ He is not a Christian, yet he is not a "good" Pagan, either; he is a childish, irrational ruler.

understood monetarily, too. Laban is wealthy, but perhaps his worthiness is meant, literarily, to increase the prestige of he who might vanquish him. In the “worthy enemy” topos, the greater the foe, the more miraculous is his defeat. Such is David’s victory over Goliath. But the Sultan’s worthiness does not align with this topos, as a “worthy enemy” possesses any of the following chivalric virtues: integrity, loyalty, largesse, and martial prowess. Laban exhibits none of these traits. He is worthy by virtue of his status and wealth alone (*MED*), which hardly makes him a “worthy” enemy whose defeat would increase the victor’s status.

The Laban’s character may fail within the “worthy enemy” *topos*, but in the centuries-long “battle” between Andalusí culture and that of Latin Christians, the former presented a worthy adversary, indeed. The Arab-ruled peoples of al-Andalus were educated and cultured, often beyond their Christian counterparts. In the tenth century, “cultivation of the arts of peace owed much to caliphal patronage. In medieval Islam, as in Christendom, it was part of a ruler’s duty, and a great part of his glory, to be a patron of artists and wise men” (Fletcher 70). The study of astronomy and mathematics flourished; treatises on math for commerce, as well as on the astrolabe, were written in Iberia at this time (71). Moreover, ‘Adb al-Raman III’s son al-Haken II helped establish “one of the greatest libraries of the Muslim world” (70), housing enough works to fill forty-four volumes of fifty folios (70), or 400,000 books—some from as far away as Persia (71).

The arts and sciences blossomed in the eleventh-century Iberian Peninsula despite political unrest after the fall of the Córdoba caliphate. Power and wealth were redistributed from Córdoba (Catlos, *Infidel* 35) to small “statelets” ruled by “amirs

known to historians as ‘the taifa kings’” (Fletcher 81); *taifa* means “‘rulers of the parties’, or ‘factions,’” (81). Like the Christian kingdoms of France and Normandy, as well as England and Wales, these agonistic statelets vied for governance and supremacy over one another. The epic *Cantar de Mio Cid*, written in the late twelfth, early thirteenth-century, attests to the social upheaval characterizing the period—and soon thereafter—as it recounts the complicated fate of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar. A Christian warrior of the late eleventh-century, the famed Castilian alternately allied against competing statelets with both Christian and Muslim lords, some of which formed multi-cultural coalitions. Superiority could be won through cultural aggression as well. *Taifa* kings strove to fund education and the arts more than their rivals (Catlos, *Infidel* 35). Several became “patrons of religious or scientific learning” (Fletcher 89).⁹⁶ Although later powers, namely the Almoravids, appeared less interested in the arts and learning than *taifa* kings (Fletcher 107-108), from our modern perspective, it is clear the characterization of Iberian peoples in *The Sowdone of Babylone* as barbaric heathens is more sensationalist than historically accurate. From our twenty-first century vantage, the incongruous juxtaposition of “heathen” with “worthy,” signals the constructedness of Laban’s character, one that replaces a true, “worthy enemy” with a caricature of one, one who is worthy only monetarily. Whether or not medieval audiences recognized the character as such is another matter.

Despite Laban’s shortcomings, he and Charlemagne mirror each other in the narrative, and this mirroring extends beyond the ruling characters. As in the *Chanson de*

⁹⁶ For instance, “al-Muqtadir of Zaragoza (1046-82) was said to have been a ‘real prodigy of nature in astrology geometry and natural philosophy’” (89), and “‘his son al-Mu’tamin (1082-85) composed a treatise on mathematics. Al-Muzaffar of Badajoz (1045-68) is said to have compiled a fifty-volume encyclopaedia which was ‘a repository of art, science, history, poetry, literature in general, proverbs, [and] biographical information’” (Fletcher 89).

Roland, the poem constructs Muslims and Christians as equal in their earthly attainments. Akbari argues “the depiction of Muslims in western European literature holds up a mirror to medieval Christian practice, showing the readers of those texts what they are *not* so that they may understand what they *are*” (216). As in the *Roland* and in *Guy, The Sowdone of Babylone* seems to suggest that what Christians are and what they are not both reside exclusively in their faith. This distinction makes all the difference; Laban’s refusal to convert generates a desire for Christian righteousness.

In describing Laban and Charlemagne, the *Sowdone* poet emphasizes the breadth of the rulers’ dominions. “This worthy Sowdan...was a worthy conquerour”; / Many a contrey with shelde and spere / He conquered wyth grete honoure” (ll.979-982). Later, Charlemagne is identified as “an Emperour / And kinge he is of many a londe, / Of Citeis, Castels, and many a Toure, / Dukes, Erles, Barons bowynge to his honde” (ll.1983-1986). The two leaders are similar in status, a status contingent upon the lands over which the rulers hold sway.

The Sultan is further linked to his Christian opponents through the reasoning and the language that each deploys to justify their martial efforts. Laban, for instance, calls the Christians: “these Frenche dogges” (l.1013). Earlier, however, the Pope himself had called the Sultan a “cursed hethen hounne” (l.164), or “hound,” who “[b]rennyth and stryeth oure pepul nowe” (l.159). Later, the Sultan insults the French forces because “Thai have done [him] vilanye, / Mikille of my people have they slayn” (ll.1015-1016). In both cases, the leaders’ responses to the attacks are virtually the same. They insult the perpetrators as “dogs” and use the offense to authorize retaliation.

The Sultan, of course, isn't always Charlemagne's doppelganger. He throws childish tantrums upon suffering poor outcomes in battle; he even attempts to destroy his idols on three different occasions. His counselors, however, intervene, and he repents. "The repeated deferral of the act of iconoclasm," Akbari says, creates and "heightens the comic effect, as the same reaction of fury followed by repentance appears again and again after each defeat in battle" (Akbari 215). As an example:

Tho the Sowdon wexe nere wode,
Seinge this tresoure thus dispoyled,
That was to him so dere and goode...
He wente home tille his tente than
With grete sorowe and mourning mode.
To-fore his goddis whan he came,
He cryed, as he were wode:
"Oh fals goddis, that y^e beth,
I have trustid to longe youre mode...
Ye fals goddis, the devel youe spede!
Ye make me nowe for to rave;
Ye do fayle me at my nede."
In Ire he smote Mahounde,
That was of goolde fulle rede,
That he fille down to the grounde,
As he hade bene dede.
Alle here bisshopes cryden oute

Andes aide “Mahounde, thyn ore!”
And down to the erthe wele lowe thay loute,
Howlynge and wepynge sore...
Thay counsailed Laban to knele a down
And aske forgevenes in that place.
And so he didde and hade pardon
Through prayere and speciale grace. (ll.2487-2527)

Laban’s actions subvert any sense of him as a wise and powerful leader. Most notably, he “lacks” religious integrity: to Christians, he worships the “wrong” faith, and he does so badly. He frequently blasphemes his idols and threatens to destroy them. At the end, he nearly trades in his faith for Christianity. To the spiritually devout, Laban’s fluctuations are deplorable. The poem suggests that Laban predicates his belief on worldly success; he is concerned with temporal, material goods. The poem thus positions its Christian audience to separate the man, who is bad, from his iconoclasm, which is good, since idols should be destroyed. Dorothy Metlitzki comments that this comic portrayal would have been quite entertaining to medieval audiences (190). But if a reader laughs at the Sultan here, how is s/he to reconcile this pleasure with the final view of the Sultan who would rather die than convert? The poem subverts the very propositions it most zealously promotes.

Laban’s interrupted iconoclasm, of course, demonstrates the text’s construction of “Islam” as a perversion of Christianity, which serves the argument that Christian men hold invariably to their faith. As Akbari notes, “The anti-Trinity of Mahum, Apolin, and Tervagan worshiped by the Muslims of the *Roland* is expanded in the *Sowdone of*

Babylone, into a wider pantheon, including not just Mahoude, Apollyne, and Termagaunte but ‘Jubiter, Ascarot and Alcaron also’ (2752)” (214). From a modern perspective, the charge that Islam is polytheistic is ironic, not only because Muslims are monotheists, but also because Christians’ worship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could be, and was interpreted by Muslims, as polytheistic.⁹⁷ The representation of the Muslim pantheon parodies the “right” trinity, as do references to Laban’s spiritual guides as “bisshopes,” and “prestes” (1.2767). These labels suggest holy Muslim offices perversely imitate a religion they condemn. Indeed, the Muslim holy men are described as more than twisted Christians; they are bestialized, howling like dogs. After an enraged Laban strikes his metal idols, falling down “as he hade bene dede” (1.2510), his bishops drop “down to the erthe” (1.2513) as well. The scene approaches slapstick, and its comedy pivots on the issue of improper worship. The effect postulates stoic adherence to Christian precepts, regardless of worldly events, as a hallmark of manhood.

As in the *Chanson de Roland* and in *Guy of Warwick*, the tensions in *The Sowdone of Babylone* are announced by ludic(rous) elements in the text and correspond to contemporary social concerns. Whereas *Roland*’s games and laughter provide cover for masculine insecurities in twelfth-century France, *Guy*’s contests allegorize competing rights to rule (over country and the soul) in chess and in a duel; *The Sowdone*’s ludicrous inversions and games, however, paper over issues of Christian orthodoxy in late-fourteenth-century England. Debates about the mystery of the Eucharist and who could interact with the Host ranged widely; Lollardy, a faction believing women, not just men,

⁹⁷ As Adrian McClure points out, zealously “monotheistic Islamic cultures...decried the triune God as a polytheistic abomination” (421). The Almohad Creed explicitly sees God, not as Trinitarian, but as a singular, independent power: “And it is known by this that He is One God and there is not a second with Him in His power, in the words of the Highest, ‘Do not take two Gods Because He is One God So fear Me’ (Qur’ān 16:53)” (250).

could preach, was vehemently condemned.⁹⁸ The church sought to maintain control over access to the Bible as well—John Wycliff, who argued that a vernacular translation would democratize access to Scriptures and who wished to decentralize power from the ranks of the clergy, was vigorously opposed. Religious fidelity and correctness of worship provide the context, I argue, for the way in which *The Sowdone of Babylone* presents Laban’s iconoclasm.

Even when Laban acts in a way that more befits a leader, it is a challenge to plot the elevation of his virtue on our map. When assaulting Rome, Laban rallies his force to:

Destroye vp bothe man and place.
Spare no thinge that is alyve,
Hows, Toure, ner Walle,
Beest, ner man, Childe nere Wife,
Brenne, slo and distroye alle. (ll.414-418)

He later orders his vassals “To sle alle [Charlemagne’s]...mayne,” (l.1046), except Roland and Oliver because they are of “grete renowne” (l.1048). He will spare them “If thai wole reneye her’ goddis ther’/ An leven on mighty Mahounde” (ll.1049-9). On one hand, the Sultan is merciless; on the other, merciful, provided Roland and Oliver convert. His actions seem motivated by faith rather than finance, as the mention of ransom, a common practice at the time, is not brought to bear; yet one wonders whether their

⁹⁸ A number of other characteristics, of course, comprised the heresy of “Lollardy,” not just its evaluation of women’s status and women’s preaching potential. Founded by John Wycliffe’s followers during the 1380s and 1390s (Orme 218), Lollardy was associated with growing literacy; it fostered lay reading. This, Lollardy’s opponents feared, would “distort Scripture” because laypersons’ “horizons are confined to the literal sense” (Copeland 100). Literal readings of Scripture, argued Thomas Aquinas, offered “what the divine author intended,” which leant such readings “powerful prestige,” for they represented a “crucial and foundational hermeneutical activity” (100). For such reasons, Rita Copeland posits, orthodox academics resisted, indeed scorned, lay reading at the literal level, as in the case of the Lollards (100).

renown by itself is a sufficient motive for not killing them on the spot, as he orders done to the others. His compassion and his religious fidelity both seem fatally compromised.

As in the *Chanson de Roland*, consistently mapping the human merits of Christians as superior to their non-Christian counterparts is impossible in the *Sowdone*. Christians commit terrible offenses, but so do non-Christians. Within both factions, the coordinates that measure an individual character's goodness—or ignominy—can also vary, as in the case of Laban. Moreover, both groups are comprised of noble and ignoble characters as in Baligant's force in the *Roland*. When Christians share traits with their opponents, the members of each group map onto the same contour line—they share the same elevation of human “goodness.” From this worldly perspective, it is impossible to determine which group is “better” than the other. The deciding factor is spiritual, as in the *Roland* and in *Guy*, where a group's position on the gyroscope's vertical axis of spirituality designates one group superior, the other inferior. This model resolves the ambiguity inherent in Charlemagne's repetition of Laban's conversion-dependent mercy. Each leader and his warriors cut down their opponents, except when they pledge conversion. Their policy on mercy marks them upon the same contour line: they are equal. But spiritually, as in the *Roland* and in *Guy*, members of either group are not equal; they are diametrically opposed, however similar their earthly behavior may be.

Conversion, however, shifts the perspective from an earthly vantage to a spiritual one. Oliver spares Ferumbras, for instance, not because the latter is a worthy opponent, but because the Ferumbras exclaims:

My goddis ben false by water and londe,
I reneye hem alle here in this place,

Baptised nowe wol I be.

To Ihesu Crist I wole me take. (ll.1356-1360)

Repositioning Ferumbras on the spiritual axis replaces difference with sameness. Once he is absorbed by the Christian party and relocated to Oliver's end of the religious spectrum, Ferumbras's earthly (de)merits, marked out on the horizontal plane, diminish in value. What matters is that he is Christian; it matters less that he is a doughty warrior, or that later, he turns his axe against his kin. The emphasis on conversion as the condition for mercy within both camps accentuates religious difference at the same time that it foregrounds the groups' similarity: the universalist view that any man can be saved, which manifests in their willingness to preserve the lives of those they defeat. This dynamic, as in the *Roland*, generates a desire to correct non-Christians' errant beliefs.

Because difference between the groups collapses at the threshold of conversion, we need to consider the characterization of Muslims, both of Laban and his warriors, as "wood," or lacking in rationality, which is the trait that chiefly distinguishes them from the Christians. Throughout, the poet puns on the Middle English "wōde." In the nominative, wōd, as derived from the Old English wudu, refers to a tree or forest, but it also means madness (*MED*). Adjectivally, "wood" describes a condition of being "out of one's mind, insane" (*OED*), a "lunatic;" it also expresses "fury or violence" (*OED*), especially in rabid animals, like "a dog or other beast" (*OED*).⁹⁹

Though the introduction of Laban seems innocuous enough, we meet him under the sign of Aries (l.41) hunting with his "alauntes, lymmeris, and racches," (l.56) through

⁹⁹ The *OED* draws on *William of Palerne* c.1375 as an indicator of "wood" denoting crazed. The work states: "Ȝif i told him treuli my tene, He wold wene i were wod" (l. 554). *Bestiary* 338 c.1220 includes the passage: "We brennen in mod, And wurðen so we weren wod," which links the word to the materiality of trees (*OED*). In the Tollem MS of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* c.1398, dogs are deemed wild, almost rabid: "heleþ þe bitynge of a wood hounde" (*OED*).

a “grene woode” (l.50). The *MED* points out that an “alaunte” is a “highly prized ferocious dog...used in hunting [and] bull-baiting.” The setting, one sees in retrospect, forecasts Laban’s “wodeness” (“Who was woode but the Sowdon?” (l.276)); his hunting, without losing its association with a nobleman’s pursuits, also begins to point to his future irrationality by aligning him with his dogs,¹⁰⁰ which, as we have seen, was a typical way of characterizing Muslims.

Laban’s subjects are also bound to the polyvalent term “wood.” They collect branches in the forest to fill Rome’s surrounding dikes:

Every man to woode shal goon
Fagotis to hewe and faste bynde,
And fille the Dikes faste anoon
With alle that we may ther fynde. (ll.284-287)

They senselessly continue to follow a recognizably unhinged leader; as a sign of greater lunacy, they worship the “wrong” trinity. For them, wood is wood, not a sign of the cross, a lack of enlightenment the poem mocks by showing Muslims perversely mimicking Christian rites. As a counterpoint to reinforce identification of the “Saracens” with wood the Sultan’s converted son Ferumbras rescues Charlemagne by wielding an axe against them:

Ferumbras with axe in honed,
Myghtyly brake up the gate...
Ferumbras came with gode spede,
He made the Sarasyns to fle.
He reskewed the kinge at his need,

¹⁰⁰ The sultan “waxe both blake, pale and wan, / He was nyge woode þat same tyde” (ll.310-311).

XL Sarasyns sone killed he.

Thai ronnen a-weye by every side...

In shorte tyme was falled her pride. (ll.2995-3009)

A medieval lumberjack, Ferumbras hews away at the “wood” Saracens with his battle axe.

Not only are the Muslim forces felled by an axe, but so “was falled her pride,” a pride that connects them to the devil,¹⁰¹ and a pride that waxed as they besieged Rome: “Tho wox prowde the Sarasyns” (l.401). From Biblical tales, pride was the vice initiating Lucifer’s fall; pride turned him, once so bright and fair, from the light of God. Aside from identifying the woody giant Astogot as “a develes sone, / Of Belsabubbis lyne” (ll.356-357), and likening him to “a develle of Helle” (l.436), the poem aligns the Muslims with the devil, as in the *Chanson de Roland*, by attributing the name “Lucafer” to one of the Muslim warriors. In recounting this character’s death, the text erupts into the ludic(rous), revealing, as in the *Roland*, not only religious concerns, but sexual tensions beneath the surface of the text’s anti-Muslim invective.

Lucafer, Laban’s vassal and the king of Baldas, meets his end when a presumably gameful pastime goes awry, as in *Guy*. One of the French captives, Duke Neymes, uses the instrument of a game for more serious “sport” and drives Lucafer into a fireplace:

To the Chymneye forth he goth

And caught a bronde him with to smyte.

With a goode will [Neymes] him smote,

That both [Lucafer’s] eyen bresten oute.

¹⁰¹ “Thy pride is brought down to hell, thy carcass is fallen down...How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? How art thou fallen to the earth” (Isaiah 14:11-12).

He caste him in the fire al hote...

And with a fyre forke he helde him doune,

Tille he wree rosted to colis ilkadele. (ll.2009-2016)

Pinned by Neymes's poker in the fire, Lucafer is burnt down to coals in a scene that turns from ludic to grand guinol. Unlike Chaucer's contemporary *Miller's Tale*, in which one man is branded in the toot, this episode has, ultimately, nothing gameful or humorous about it. Lucafer is punished like the fiend damned by God to hell's eternal flames. Lucafer, of course, is not Satan, and Neymes is not God. The exaggeration, though, is telling; it points to the poem's underlying anxiety about masculine sexuality.

Truly, Lucafer's death scene is not an amusing one; we can classify it as ludic(rous), however, because his demise results from the sinister turn of a *game*, and it transpires within a remotely confined space: Princess Floripas's tower, where Laban has allowed his daughter to oversee the Christian prisoners. The setting recalls Huizinga's "magic circle," as Floripas's tower is a space isolated from the real and ordinary where games play out (28) and "within which special rules obtain" (29).

Floripas has turned the meaning of prison downside up, reversing conventions as in Bakhtin's theory of carnival misrule. "[C]arnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10). The captives have been transferred from dungeon cells overseen by a man to a towering space managed by a woman. The role of prisoner is transformed. Roland and Oliver bathe (l.1656), no longer chilled by murky tidewater (ll.1539-1544), and Floripas's governance subverts Laban's

rules, including his denial of the captives' "[m]ete and drinke" (l.1536). They feast rather than starve (ll.1651-1655). As Bakhtin observes in medieval parodies, the feast:

was a temporary suspension of the entire system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom. The very brevity of this freedom increased its fantastic nature and utopian radicalism. (89)

As Floripas's space attests, a carnivalesque order may reign within "the intimate feast in the home" (89) as much as in the public square. For in Floripas's bower, her prisoners:

wessh and wente to mete,
And were served welle and fyne
Of suche goode, as she myght gete,
Of Venyson, brede and wel at ease;
The Soudon ne wist it nocht. (ll.1872-1876)

Floripas's "feast" is private rather than public; it subverts her father's sovereignty and undermines male authority.

The reversals in Floripas's tower are akin to the idea of "misrule" in Bakhtin's theory of Carnival. Misrule involves the reversal of power that participates in the "folk culture of laughter...seen in the ritual festivals of inversion during the carnival celebrations of Mardi Gras or the feast of fools associated with the Church" (Perfetti 13). Misrule, like many fabliaux, admires "the woman on top, who impresses us with her ingenuity, making the man, usually her husband, look ridiculous" (13). In this episode, Floripas is not the agent of Lucafer's fall, nor is she his spouse, but importantly, Floripas has agreed to marry Lucafer, provided he captures Charlemagne and his twelve peers

(ll.238-251). Despite this agreement, Floripas is more interested marrying the Christian knight Gye of Borgoyne, who is imprisoned in her tower. Her desire and her carnivalesque reversal of authority does worse than make Lucafer appear ridiculous: it precipitates his doom. Though fourteenth-century readers might commend Floripas's defiance (of her father and fiancée, both Saracens), the outcome of her rule begs for a man to control her, thereby reifying the "proper" place of a Christian man as the head of woman.

Lucafer is clearly, for the audience, a loser in the "game of love." He is an also-ran to Guy, and he has been out-maneuvered by a woman.¹⁰² Floripas, like female tricksters in *fabliaux* and *Les xv Joies de Mariage* appropriates, in Alison Williams's words:

the disorderly characteristics attributed to womankind and exploit[s] them to establish a norm of married life. [These women] use physical and verbal dissimulation to execute their tricks[;] they destabilize the domestic space and violate its exclusivity by opening it up to selected members of the wider community...thus subverting not solely male authority within the home, but the

¹⁰² The proximity of Christian men to Lucafer's betrothed may have ignited jealousy and occasioned his investigation of the tower, for "[t]o asspie the maner was his entent, / Hem to accuse agayne honour" (ll.1961-1962). Before Lucafer arrives at the tower, Floripas cajoles Gye of Burgoyne to wed her. With a kiss, to him she declares: "my loue and my lorde, / Myn herte, my body, my goode is thyn" (ll.1928-1929). Lucafer arrives at the tower, but "[w]han he come, he founed the dore fast I-stoke, / He smote there-on with his fist, / That the barr began to broke. / To make debate, wel him list" (ll.1963-1966). The aggressive scene recalls the climax of *The Romance of the Rose*, where the lover struggles to penetrate the enclosure within which Fair-Welcome is imprisoned. In Chaucer's translation, Fair Welcome "ofte hath played with [the lover]... / The fairest games that he coude" (ll.7528-9, emphasis mine); in Frances Horgan's translation, an unseen barrier bars the lover's entry (ll.21553-21689). Chaucer's translation says, "And thou her watchest at the gate, / With spere in thyn arest alway; / There muse, musard, al the day. / Thou wakes night and day for thought; / Iwis, thy traveyle is for nought; / And Jelousye, withouten fayle, / Shal never quyte the thy traveyle" (ll.7558-7564). The lover must rupture the blockade to free Fair-Welcome and access the rose he desires. Lucafer, like the lover, assails the door until the bar breaks. As in the *Romaunt of the Rose*, which is greatly concerned with coming and going (l.7533, l.7605), the scene in the *Sowdone* parodies John 10:9, where Jesus is the gateway through which "if any man enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pastures." Lucafer is so crazed by the inaccessible "flor," Floripas, and the "pastures" of her body, that he hyperbolically performs Matthew 7:7's command to Christians: "knock and the door shall be opened." The scene perverts what is otherwise holy. Most ironically, Floripas and the space she inhabits are shut to Lucafer, since she already has given herself to Guy.

male-authored rules of community life which decreed that wives should be subject to their husbands. (47)

Floripas subverts male authority five different times. Alarming, when the jailor forbids her to visit Laban's prisoners, "[s]uch a stroke she hym ther' raught, / The brayne sterte oute of his hede pan" (ll.1605-1606). She assumes supervision of the captives, and she undermines her betrothal to Lucafer. Floripas plays the aggressor in her courtship with Guy, and she not only disobeys, but also betrays her father—inverting the "obedient daughter trope" in romance.¹⁰³ These inversions and reversals range from the grotesque to the ludic(rous), and they underscore concerns of subverted male authority, particularly when engineered by a woman.

Though ostensibly a martial romance, where the central action revolves around adventure undertaken for the sake of feudal bonds, *The Sowdone of Babylone* plays with *fin' amor* conventions by grafting the expected subjection of men to women onto Muslim and Christian crusade values. Engaging in *fin' amor*, one might say, is like "playing with fire," a risky endeavor that materializes in Floripas's tower. After gaining entrance to Floripas's bower, Lucafer asks her prisoners to explain their post-meal customs, their *games* (ll.1987-1990). Duke Neymes explains:

Sir, somme men iouste with a sper' and shelde,

And somme men Carol and singe gode songes,

Some shote with dartis in the feelde,

And somme play at Chesse amonge. (ll.1991-1995)

¹⁰³ Akbari calls Floripas "paradoxical," for she is "beautiful and delicate, but also aggressive and violent" (Akbari 175). She offers "insight not only into the medieval characterization of Saracens, but also into the complex ways that categories of gender alterity intersect with categories of religious and ethnic alterity" (175), which I see as true of Bramimond as well. Floripas's choice to convert for love of Charlemagne's vassal, Guy, erases cultural alterity, but it simultaneously subordinates women to Christian patriarchy.

After Neymes outlines Frankish sport, some of which appears early on in the *Chanson de Roland*, Lucafer responds: “Ye bene but foulis of gode dissporte” (l.1995). He invites Neymes to sit and learn a game that will rival all the Frank has heretofore played (ll. 1996-1998). Lucafer:

Teyde a tredde on a pole
With an nedil ther-on Ifest,
And ther vppon a qwik cole.
He bade every man blow his blast.
Duke Neymes hade a long berde,
Kinge Lucafer’ blewe even to hym,
That game hade he never before lered.

He brent the her’of Neymes berde to the skyne. (ll.1999-2006)¹⁰⁴

Though play often acts as seriousness’s opposite, this “game” shows their contrast is “neither conclusive [n]or fixed” (Huizinga 24). The scene proves that “some play can be very serious indeed” (24), and it evidences how games can be reflective and constitutive of masculine ideals.

In this game, victim and aggressor switch places. Though ostensibly a captor, Lucafer is ensnared by the woman he hopes to attain. Moreover, he is struck with a fire fork, and like his Biblical namesake, he meets his doom in the flames. For a fourteenth century English audience, the episode resonates not only on a biblical level, but would have brought to mind the murder of Edward II, which, rumor had it, was done in with a

¹⁰⁴ This passage echoes *The Romaunt of the Rose*’s phallic imagery at the end of Fragment C: “And thou her watchest at the gate / With spere in thyn arest alway” (ll.7558-7559). The lover, in Chaucer’s version, “...kyst the Rose pryvyly!” (l.7596), and False-Seeming promises “...with my bemes I wole blowe / To alle neighboris a-rowe, / How he hath bothe comen and gon” (ll.7603-7605). The phallic imagery is clearest in the line: “Though me hym thrilled with a spere” (l.7634).

fire brand. At the time, “masculinity was in fact a deeply contested issue” (Federico 29). There were public debates about “the scandalous reputation of the ‘unmanly’ Edward II” as well as about “the properly masculine reputation of...Edward III” (29). Concerns with royal sexuality circulated during the reign of Edward II.¹⁰⁵ Allegedly, two sermons contended that Edward II was a sodomite, which spawned a narrative about his death in Berkeley Castle the night of September 21st in 1327. Of it, the Lanercost chronicler writes: “it was either a natural death or one inflicted by the violence of others” (Haines 226). Geoffrey le Baker of Swinbrook’s “embellished account” is dubious, but provocative. It suggests “the king’s murder...left no visible mark on the corpse” to “divert suspicion of foul play” (Haines 227). According to sensationized versions of the story, Edward was killed when “a ‘red-hot copper rod’...or ‘red-hot iron’” was inserted “into his anus” (Federico 31-32).¹⁰⁶ For those who remembered this story, with its anxiety about “anal rape” (32) and the woman who may have been behind it, the red-hot fire poker in our text may have been particularly evocative. *The Sowdone of Babylone* is remarkable for the way in which it transmits its concern for male sexuality by endangering it in a feminine, Eastern space.

¹⁰⁵ When Edward the II was crowned in 1308, the ceremony privileged his “closest associate,” Piers Gaveston, over his new wife, Isabella of France (Ormrod, “England” 274). Isabella wed Edward II when she was twelve; he was twenty-four. He treated her callously, either because he opposed the marriage in principle, or because he preferred the company of his favorite, Gaveston (Haines 61). Disliked at court, Gaveston monopolized the king’s attention and styled himself as a king; he called the barons names, and his behavior was “aided and abetted by the ineptitude of the king, who was either oblivious to the harm which Gaveston was wreaking or more likely – blinded by his emotions – indifferent to it” (65). Gaveston was eventually executed, “run through by one Welsh footsoldier and beheaded by another” (86). He was interred on 2 January 1315 (Haines 94), but the king did not give up behavior that some deemed questionable. He acquired new favorites, in particular, Hugh Despenser the Younger (Sumption, I 93). Sumption reports Hugh as among those homosexual friends of Edward the II that Isabella most loathed (I 93).

¹⁰⁶ The official cause of death later given, however, is that Roger Mortimer suffocated Edward II (227).

Lucafer's death calls into question the extent to which Duke Neymes's actions are justified. Like Charlemagne in the *Chanson de Roland*, Neymes has a "berde so white" (l.2008), which perhaps suggests a lack in virility on account of his age. Unlike a weary Charlemagne, however, Neymes is anything but weak, nor is he humble. He fights fire with fire, striking Lucafer down and reasserting dominance over his Muslim captors. In his quick-tempered retaliation, one with mortal consequences, Neymes's action resembles Ganelon's "poi de legere" [little bit of play] from the *Roland*; both lash out at one who symbolically impugns their manhood. Once again we see that the ludic elements in *The Sowdone of Babylone* signal the text's latent discomfort—which it masks by emphasizing religious difference—even as it constructs a masculine, Christian identity.

As a final example of this concern, I call attention to Floripas's laughter at the end of the romance. When her betrothed knight Gye sees King Marsedage of Barbary approach him in battle, the Frenchman:

A dart to hime throwe herte & liver in fer'.

Dame Floripe lough with loude steven

And saide, 'Sir Gye, my loue so free,

Thou kanste welle hit the prikke. (ll.2256-2260)

Here, a woman laughs, loudly and unabashedly, at the death of a former co-religionist. Unrestrained laughter was considered uncouth in penitential manuals. Here it is significant because women were often "associated with the sinful implications of laughter" (Perfetti 6); the mouth and the vagina were often conflated in popular texts (Trokhimenko 256). A sexual valence undoubtedly subtends Floripas's loud laugh as

Gye's dart "prikkes" or penetrates Marsedage. Middle English, "prikke" is also associated with the prikke of love, from the *Stimulus Amoris* and with the prik of the flesh, or sensual temptation (*MED*). Consequently, Floripas's laughter acknowledges through Gye's manly superiority in arms and in love the superiority of Christianity over Islam. Her laugh is a necessary element in the performance of Christian, masculine identity.

All three texts I have discussed in this chapter reflect contextual strife. The poems' stereotypical depictions of non-Christians mask the conflicts that unsettled Christian notions of chivalric identity, virtue, and spirituality, yet inconsistencies in the portrayals, as well as similarities between foes and heroes, also allows us to map new formations of masculinity. These texts are "provocative," which as McDonald says, means that they interrogate "norms that order and regulate our lives" (17). In fact, she continues, "the more flagrantly a text promotes itself as fiction, the greater are its opportunities to test [the] limits" (15) of "what is (for audience and author) possible" (15). In the slippages from verisimilitude, and especially in ludic(rous) moments in the *Chanson de Roland*, *Guy of Warwick* and *The Sowdone of Babylone*, which increase in absurdity and frequency over time, we can discern the limits of contemporary French, English, and Christian ideologies that strove to define and regulate an individual's relation to reality.

CHAPTER III

FASHIONING NARRATIVE, REFASHIONING MASCULINITY: PLAYING WITH ARTS OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN *FLORIS AND BLANCHEFLOUR*

Romance narratives delighted medieval audiences, who derived “evident, and enormous pleasure” (McDonald 10) from them. Middle English romance “flourishes because of its capacity to ‘delight’ or ‘entertain’ – in other words to provide enjoyment for – its audience” (11). Medieval performances, replete with suggestive mime, gesture, and vocal expression,¹⁰⁷ offered an intermezzo, a space outside of time, distinct from the mundanity of daily life. These romances were preserved by noblemen and by monks (Hellenga and Trapp xvii). Aristocrats either had family copies read aloud, often in groups, or they watched them performed by traveling minstrels and jongleurs; both experiences signaled their privilege, as the books’ ornate covers and records of payments to traveling musicians attest.¹⁰⁸ Monasteries often safeguarded romances within their libraries; the *Le Roman du Mont Saint-Michel*, for instance, entertained pilgrims who had journeyed to eponymous saint’s shrine. Romances engaged lower classes as well as the nobility; they

¹⁰⁷ The unencumbered nature of romance performance—no *viele*, which requires two hands to play (Vitz 188)—left a performer “substantially freer than the performer of *chansons de geste*: that is, he was free – indeed he was invited – to exploit and to develop the dramatic potential of the material he was presenting to his audience” (189).

¹⁰⁸ For instance, “medieval books consisted of hand-written rolls or bound pages known as manuscripts” (Bell 746). Books bought by women of the laity “were relatively expensive...in the eleventh century the Countess of Anjou paid two hundred sheep; one bushel each of rye, wheat, and millet; and a quantity of marten pelts for one volume of the sermons of Haimo of Halberstadt” (747). In the fourteenth-century, “the accounts of Mahaut, Countess of Artois, show that in 1308 she paid seven livres and ten sous for copies of the *Histoire de Troyes* and *Perceval*; in 1313 she paid eight livres for a copy of the *Consolation of Boethius*” (747). As Susan Bell makes clear, these costs made books well “out of reach for anyone except the nobility or upper bourgeoisie” (747). Yet Bell demonstrates considerable book ownership by upper class laywomen from the ninth to the fifteenth century (744). As regards male readership, by the late fifteenth-century, King “Richard’s conqueror, Henry VII seems, like Edward IV, to have been an accumulator, a converter of books-as-objects to his own use” (Trapp 41). Male readers of the clergy, such as John Colet, Dean of St Paul’s, left marginalia suggesting they read “not for pleasure, but for edification, which could be transmitted to others” (Trapp 41).

were passed by word-of-mouth, as Marie de France alludes in the prologue to her twelfth-century *Lais*. She recalls:

that those who first began them
and sent them forth
composed them in order to preserve
adventures they had heard.
I have heard many told;
and I don't want to neglect or forget them.
To put them into word and rhyme
I've often stayed awake. (ll.35-42)

Though the manner in which they experienced these stories differed, romance afforded all classes an imaginative interlude distinct from the travail of daily life.¹⁰⁹ As a result, time in romance exists outside “real” temporal boundaries, but however much it defies physics, it still follows specific “rules” and conventions (Huizinga 28).¹¹⁰

The escapist quality of romance in general applies to medieval romance in particular. “Popular romance is the pulp fiction of medieval England,” McDonald says, “the ‘principal secular literature of entertainment’ for an enormously diverse audience that endure[d] for over two hundred and fifty years” (1). One of the ways it entertained, however, was by reproducing “the easy certainties of sexist, racist[,] and other bigoted ideologies” (1). The actual conditions romance would bracket underwrite its appeals to

¹⁰⁹ Romance, in short, was a form of play, in which, as Plato said, the necessities and seriousness of everyday life were suspended (qtd. in Huizinga 26).

¹¹⁰ According to Huizinga “play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary’ life” (28).

fantasy. As Robert Hanning says, “in the hands of a master, chivalric romance, far from distracting attention from evil customs, offers exemplary encouragement to break the coercive, exploitative hold of *usage* on the ‘artist’ in all of us...so that we can be free to ‘weave’ our own lives, into a form that will bring the personal enrichment of self-fulfillment” (137-138). My argument is that it is the ludic in romance that allowed its creators to negotiate this tension between the alternate realities they present and the cultural critique they perform.

In the *Floris and Blancheflour* tradition, the romance’s “charms,” as well as its ironic presentations of women and men, are ludic in themselves and in the way they call attention to their constructedness. The story’s flights of fancy are present in the oldest version of the poem in Old French, in which, as Norris Lacy says, “character tends toward artifice at the same time objects and images become lifelike, and this method tells us a good deal about the poet’s concept of romance as artifact” (24). Lacy suggests the poet recognizes himself as “playing the same role as the craftsmen he creates, and the mechanisms he uses to animate his characters are no less visible and contrived than the pipes that make artificial figures move” (24). “[T]he poet,” he continues, “clearly privileges the status of a literary text as an artifact, a created object that does not masquerade as life” (Lacy 24). The Middle English *Floris and Blancheflour* presents an alternative reality that differs from its Old French source by tailoring its events so that they reflect the values of fourteenth-century English merchants as well as nobles. The ME *Floris and Blancheflour* caters to its audience’s predilections; it entertains, however, even as it dialogues with fourteenth-century England’s reality.

Guy of Warwick and the *Sowdone of Babylone* perform similar ideological work; although they are martial romances, unlike *Floris and Blancheflour*, each employs ludic elements that counterbalance the serious business of establishing male identity. Strategy applies to games as well as to battle, and each romance, like the epic *Chanson de Roland* before them, challenges readers to evaluate the extent to which entertaining pastimes precipitate matters of great consequence. Overall, these texts reflect, and sometimes critique, despite their generic differences, the ideologies circulating amidst their production. In doing so, all exhibit a pattern of subterfuge whereby ostensible cultural clash and each text's domestic gender tensions displace one another; this mechanism is unveiled by what could be deemed ludic(rous): laughter, inversions, game structures—and actual games—many of which subvert their playful nature.

In *Floris and Blancheflour*, which was widely disseminated, translated, and adapted,¹¹¹ ludic(rous) elements within a narrative of cultural negotiation simultaneously conceal and reveal male appropriation of others' ingenuity, a process the text posits as not only the hero's right, but also a necessity. Floris's contest against the irrational "Other" pits his reason against the intellection of both female (Blancheflour) and cultural (the Emir) others. His victory over both establishes his masculinity in a way that is distinct from that set forth in the *Chanson de Roland* and in "martial" romances

¹¹¹ Hereafter, I refer to the poem as "FB" for brevity, adding "tradition" when my intent is to invoke continental and insular versions of the story. I use "OF" to distinguish my references to the aristocratic Old French version and "ME" to speak to my primary proof text, the Egerton MS. In some instances, however, I clarify further and use "Egerton MS" and "Auchinleck MS" to distinguish between two ME texts that, in slight but important ways, differ. As regards the narrative's "tradition," editor Donald Sands points out the Old French story spread "to Germany, Iceland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and England" (279). Four Middle English versions are extant, MS Egerton 2862, c.1350-1400; the Cambridge manuscript, Gg. 4.27.2 from c.1250-1300; the burnt Cotton Vitellius Diii, c. 1250-1300; and the Auchinleck version from c. 1325-1350 (279-280). I examine MS Egerton 2862 because it is the most complete of the ME versions (Sands 279). It is also, according to Erik Kooper's 2006 edition of *Floris and Blancheflour*, the most recent.

heretofore studied. These texts construct noble, Christian masculinity in opposition to cultural others; manhood is defined as a knight's ability to successfully wage war on God's behalf. In the *FB* tradition, however, particularly in the Egerton MS, the issue of cultural difference is less important. Floris becomes a man not by overcoming non-Christians with force, but by proving his intellect more rational, and thereby superior, to others', including his mother's, Blancheflour's, and the Emir's. The Egerton *FB* constructs noble masculinity as the ability to outwit others; throughout the poem, Floris must sharpen his acumen to, in the end, rescue Blancheflour and secure his position as the man fit to rule his homeland.

The main focus of my inquiry is the ME *Floris and Blancheflour* found in the Egerton manuscript 2862, hereafter, "ME *FB*." Its source is the romance of *Floire et Blancheflor* in Old French, hereafter, "OF."¹¹² The OF text fused together elements from preceding analogues, including Chariton's Byzantine romance *Chareas and Callirhoe*, a tale from the *101 Nights*, as well as other Arabic and Persian tales. It shaped these diverse narratives in accordance with twelfth-century ideological imperatives in France to appeal to an audience bounded by neighboring al-Andalus. The ME text, likewise, makes use of earlier material to dialogue with its own distinct milieu. Because the texts have different social and historical contexts, I will argue that the Egerton *FB* collapses divergent cultural norms that its predecessor highlighted;¹¹³ rather than emphasize the incompatibility of Christian and non-Christian union via ludic(rous) depictions of the

¹¹² There are, however, two OF versions of the tale. My study relies upon the earlier "aristocratic," rather than the later, "popular" version. The former dates c. 1150 and the latter to c. 1200. I have elected to use Margarent Pelan's 1975 edition of the OF; I am indebted to Merton Jerome Hubert's English translation of the same for leading me to key passages which I could then translate and interpret independently.

¹¹³ *FB* may be too imprecise for some, but because the ME texts derive from and closely adhere to the OF narrative, at times it is useful to refer to the entire story and its development over time, even if there are key differences from one iteration to the next.

latter, as in the *OF* text, the ME poem explores, emphasizing the educative function of comedy and game, where gender and intelligence were thought to intersect.

The hero's quest leads him to the actualization of his potential authority, proving the Aristotelian belief "that everything belongs to a hierarchy of values[;]...the lower exists for and is governed by the higher" (Artz 287). The higher being in Christian thought, of course, is man, but as we saw in the previous chapter, he who governs as God's elected servant truly supersedes the authority of other men.¹¹⁴ The hero assumes gubernatorial authority not when he begins his reign in the last lines of the poem, but rather when he applies the lessons he has learned from those "beneath" him to author his own happy ending; this move overwrites the narratives of those who coach and enable his development along the way. Less important are the peaks and valleys of cultural difference that appear so striking in the *OF FB* and in the martial romances of the previous chapter, for in the Egerton's *FB*, cultural distinctions level out. The measure in the story's topography is less one of Christian and non-Christian virtues than a map along whose contours the elevations of intelligence and the ethics of ingenuity appear. Floris proves himself a man less because he outwits and emasculates the Emir who possesses Blancheflour and more because he subjects his emotions to reason and proves his intellect superior to others', in particular, to Blancheflour's.

To explain the Egerton *FB*'s change in cultural perspective from its predecessor, and to comprehend its implications, we'll traverse the Franco-Iberian frontier across the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. In the process, we will see that trafficked Muslim

¹¹⁴ In the case of Charlemagne, the sovereign embodied an earthly proof of the Augustinian conception of humanity as "a single universal society with Christ as its head" (Artz 227). Charlemagne was positioned, in the *Chanson de Roland*, as the head of the political body, just as Jesus was the head of the whole body of humanity.

women often became the conduits through which story material and art from the East reached the Latin West. First, I will offer a summary of *Floris and Blancheflour* as it appears in the Egerton MS and highlight major overlaps between the ME text and the OF. When such overlaps occur in the course of the chapter, I will refer to the OF and ME texts collectively as *FB*. The summary will be followed by a discussion of the surviving *FB* manuscripts. After reviewing scholarship on the French tale and its ME redactions, I will relate my approach to these texts, which converses, in particular, with scholarly inquiries on gender and the nature of ingenuity, the latter of which is equally important in reality and in game. I will discuss *FB*'s inherent humor and then show how ludic moments in the Egerton MS's story of *Floris and Blancheflour* teach its hero to marshal his intellect over his emotions and prove himself worthy of kingship.

To provide a context for my readings, I will also explore the *FB* tradition in relation to possible analogues in Eastern story material. Little is known about the *FB* tradition's early transmission. Therefore, I do not intend to argue that the OF *FB* was derived from, nor directly influenced by, these analogues.¹¹⁵ By virtue of their Eastern provenance, however, these stories bear the imprint of cultural difference, which an OF poet may have exploited, for the aristocratic *Floire* is highly exoticized. The eastern tales also exhibit distinct gender roles that the OF poet could have adapted to better reflect the values of his cultural milieu, which saw women as subordinate to men. Indeed, the cultural Other, and the superiority of one gender over the other become dual focal points of attention in French versions; the ME poet, however, focuses primarily on the latter. I

¹¹⁵ Those I will present, however, circulated orally, especially along Muslim trade routes, so it is possible, though only conjectural, that they may have been known on the Iberian Peninsula prior to and during the unstable period known as the *fitna*, when "party kings," or *taifa* rulers, among whom caliphal governance was distributed after the fall of Córdoba, traded land, goods, and culture with Christians in the borderlands between France and Spain.

will explain why, for historical reasons, the ME *FB* elides its predecessor's emphasis on cultural difference; I will also argue that the change underscores the means by which western medieval texts, and society, came to privilege male authority, often at the expense of women: the traditional, Western value of a man's word over a woman's crystallizes in *FB*'s ending.

Looking eastward to the Mediterranean, the ME *Floris and Blancheflour* relates the nascent affections of a Christian girl, Blancheflour, and a Spanish prince, Floris. In the Egerton MS, he is not explicitly Pagan or Muslim, though he is in earlier versions. The Spanish King would rather put Blancheflour to death than see his son marry the "wrong" girl. He objects to Blancheflour on grounds of social status and faith alike.¹¹⁶ But Floris cannot live without her; instead of depriving himself an heir, the King follows his wife's plan to send Floris away; by separating the two, he hopes to extinguish their affection for each other. When this strategy fails, the Queen must again persuade the King not to kill Blancheflour; he should sell the maiden to merchants and tell Floris that she is dead. But Floris's desire for Blancheflour increases when he hears what supposedly has happened to her; he nearly takes his own life in grief. When he learns she, in fact, is not dead, he pursues Blancheflour over the sea, "protected" by his mother's magic ring. He collects snippets of information about Blancheflour's whereabouts, each time rewarding his informants. Finally, Floris discovers that Blancheflour is in Babylon; using a ruse devised by his newest ally, Daris, Floris contrives a way to enter the tower where she lives among other captive maidens. Blancheflour, though, is ready to die because she

¹¹⁶ The objection to Blancheflour because of her religion is more pronounced in continental versions of the poem than in ME versions. The rationale, Catlos explains, derives from religious authorities' perspective that "social interaction with minority groups was viewed as a danger, a stepping stone to sexual intercourse, the ultimate danger to orthodoxy and a violation of the divinely ordained order" (*The Victors* 305).

must marry the Emir. Once Floris reveals himself, Blancheflour reasserts her love for him. Inevitably, they are caught *in flagrante delicto*. The Emir, though enraged, does not immediately have them executed; they are taken to court, where the ring, flung aside, reappears. A lesser king discovers it and recognizes by its value Floris and Blancheflour's nobility. With it, pity for the lovers' selflessness and beauty, as well as respect for lawful court proceedings, results in a chance for Floris to convince the Emir to free them. The latter is so eager to learn how Floris infiltrated his tower that he swears "To foryeve that trespass / Yif Floris told how it was" (ll.1042-1043). Charmed by Floris's story, both the Emir and his court release the lovers. They marry and return to Spain where Floris rules in his late father's stead.

Four English redactions of *Floris and Blancheflour* survive, derived from two OF versions, the "aristocratic" version (c.1150), and the "popular" reworking (c. 1200). Much of the content and several themes remained when the story crossed the channel. The predominant difference, though, is that in the OF *FB*, Floire converts to Christianity before marrying Blauncheffleur; he then forces his subject to either convert, or die.¹¹⁷ In the ME version, the conversion is "conspicuous by [its] absence" (Jennifer Fellows qtd. in Ingham 83). Indeed, Floris converts in most versions of the story, including the early fourteenth-century *Il Filocolo* by Giovanni Boccaccio and two extant Iberian redactions.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ When referring to the OF poem, I transcribe names as found in OF and in related scholarship; hence, "Floire" rather than "Floris," "Blancheffleur" rather than "Blancheflour." Italics are used to denote poem titles rather than character names. Lastly, some scholarship exhibits diverse orthography. I have chosen to keep each scholar's spelling as is found in their work(s).

¹¹⁸ Boccaccio scholars have parsed the nuances of the Italian work, fitting it into the Boccaccian canon. They read it through the lenses of the author's life, his affinities for the lover by whom he was snubbed, in the context of his other works, and in dialogue with the author's scholarly background. This scholarship is illuminating, yet, I regretfully admit that it does not readily pertain to the present study. Because the ME

For most critics, the aristocratic version of the OF *Floire et Blanchefleur* is more light-hearted, humorous, and accommodating of cultural difference than its popular descendant (Hubert 17). Norris Lacy points out its unconventionality: in the OF version, Floire's "quest" hardly qualifies as such; it "does not include randomness, uncertainty, or danger" (21). The narrative subverts its genre and corresponding expectations: "Not only is Floire hardly a typical hero of romance, but the poet's curious notion of adventure and danger—both of them simply absent—also departs from what modern readers expect" (20); in particular, the hero's "ostensible enemies and adversaries prove themselves to be honorable persons who not only keep their word (even when tricked into giving it, as in the *portier*'s case, (2261 ff.) but are moreover willing and able to devise strategies to further Floire's cause" (Lacy 20-21).

Floris's journey raises diverse questions about how experience forms one's spiritual and gendered identity. Many consider *Floire* a love-pilgrimage; Patricia Grieve, for instance, shows how a "more traditional view of pilgrimage as a religious journey" augments the secular story in various redactions (36).¹¹⁹ Philip McCaffrey's study calls attention to another key issue in the OF text, which is also true of the ME: the "narrative blurs the sexual difference between the two main characters...on the one hand [they] resemble each other in almost every way except their sexual difference; on the other hand, their sexual difference itself is severely compromised by the narrative" (132).¹²⁰

versions descend from French ancestors and share so many of the same concerns, I will discuss scholarship on the OF versions, but not on those from Italy (*Il Filocolo*) or Spain (*La Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor*); unfortunately, those tales fall outside the scope of this inquiry.

¹¹⁹ Indeed, as the "versions change and adapt earlier material," they seem to become "converts themselves" (5-6).

¹²⁰ Traditional gender roles, Megan Moore points out, "are eschewed to the point that the young lovers are indistinguishable from each other in several passages" (66). W.W. Kibler argues that Floire and

For McCaffrey, the protagonists are mirror images, male and female halves of a single, archetypal psyche. How else to explain why Floire weeps, acts irrationally, and refuses to fight? Indeed, the Emir himself cannot distinguish the beardless youth from a maid. The protagonists' "character doubling," and "gender play is predicated from the [poem's] outset, where the children do everything, and become everything, together" (Moore 66). As I will show, in the ME version, Floris becomes a man by subordinating Blancheflour, and the feminine qualities he shares with her, his emotions, to his intellect.

Some scholars focus on the implications of identity, at once spiritual and gendered, in the OF *FB*, but others raise questions about the poem's historical, and mercantile, context, for Blancheflour herself becomes something like merchandise in the medieval Mediterranean (Kinoshita 89).¹²¹ For Megan Moore, the exchange of exotic commodities and their possession is an economy of "conspicuous consumption through which the nobility – and in particular, noble masculinity – is fashioned in relation to the other" (52).¹²² All the ME texts cater to exotic tastes as well. But in her critique of the ME version, Kathleen Kelly unsettles the narrative's "charm" by arguing that its mercantile imagery not only highlights "the theme of social and cultural interchange" (104) but also underscores a "sex/gender system," which, following Gayle Rubin's reading of Lévi-Strauss, is "a systematic apparatus which takes up females as raw

Blancheflor offer a "clear example of the development of the psyche [theorized as bisexual] from initial oneness (the androgynous state), through duality and conflict, to wholeness and integration" (12).

¹²¹ Sharon Kinoshita points out that when Floire disguises himself as a merchant on his quest to retrieve Blancheflor, his "journey transforms the standard romance plot of abduction and rescue into 'a quest based on trade'" (90). Within the context of "one of the premier trade routes of the medieval Mediterranean" (90), the OF poem suggests that the exchange of goods and conversion are convertible processes.

¹²² Given the two OF versions' differing audience, one noble and one popular, it is clear how the text produced for the former revels in exoticism, whereas the latter dwells more upon insurmountable difference.

materials and fashions domesticated women as products” (104). Blancheflour occupies the sub-altern position of captured or kidnapped slave (K. Kelly 103), and I will argue that her liberation from the Emir is, nonetheless, a subordination, for Floris’s defense of the lovers in the Emir’s court silences Blancheflour at the same time as it announces him not boy, but “man,” and one worthy of governance.

Scholarship on *engin*, or ingenuity, in the ME *FB* reveals it to be the characteristic requisite, *par excellence*, for constructing Floris’s masculinity. Examining uses of cleverness and wit in the poem exposes another means by which patriarchal hegemony in the medieval Latin West often commodified women like Blancheflour and subordinated them to men. In *FB*, Blancheflour is allowed space for just one chance to lament her grievous sale into slavery. She had been educated alongside Floris and shows herself his equal when she challenges his sense of responsibility; despite this evidence of a formidable mind, her voice and opinions are muffled. Indeed, these texts complicate the ways their audiences must value ingenuity. On one hand, as Geraldine Barnes says, the lovers’ reunion depends upon the exercise “of *engin* and judicious *counsel*” (12).¹²³ On the other, Patricia Clare Ingham argues that “the story tradition of *FB* details the myriad ways that the adulterations of human creativity can serve deceitful purposes” (81). Especially in the ME version, the “tricks and traps” of *ingenium* when wielded by children in service of love, are “counterfeit machinations [that] gleam untarnished, their makers apparently above reproach” (81). Robert Hanning’s point about the social function of *engine* in *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* is foundational to Ingham’s study. Hanning observes:

¹²³ She also argues the ME poet trimmed the OF to craft “an entertaining account of an extended exercise in wit and ingenuity” (13).

In a literary universe not presided over by an active, all-controlling God, *engin* is humanity's substitute for providence—the gift which makes things turn out better than it seems they will, given the 'facts.' This ability to create an advantage by calculation, manipulation, and the use of illusion is particularly admired and cultivated in a courtly society, where it is the only power available to most. (11)

Praiseworthy, but potentially sinister, *engin* is, for “those on whom [it] has been practiced... salutary—or the reverse” (Hanning 111); this proves especially true in the ME *Floris and Blancheflour*.

Ten variants of *engin*, or *engyn* in ME, appear in Kooper's edition of the Auchinleck version of the ME *Floris and Blancheflour*. By acknowledging its appearance at each key turn in Floris's journey, we come to realize its thematic value. Hanning cites Godefroi's *Dictionnaire de l'ancien langue française* to note *engin*'s close relation to “ruse,” “fraude,” [fraud] “artifice,” and “expédient” (106). The verb “[e]ngigner can mean ‘fabriquer avec art,’ ‘trouver a force d’ habileté, le moyen de faire quelque chose,’ and ‘tromper’” (106), all of which align the word with fabrication, subterfuge, and forceful appropriation. These senses extend to the person who exercises such “ingenuity”: *engigneor* means “a maker of machines, the planner of a project, and the devil” (Hanning 106). As in the *Chanson de Roland*'s use of *leger/legerie*, the connotations of *engin* slide from positive to negative; they do so as well in Middle English. Citing the word's derivation as Old French, the *MED* defines *engin* as “a) innate ability or intelligence, talent; skill, ingenuity, cleverness; also a skill or craft; b) deceitfulness, trickery; evil intention or design; a trick, a snare; false *engin*.” Importantly, *engyn* is used to describe

the many deceptions and tricks that riddle the ME narrative of *Floris and Blancheflour*. It is, I argue, the means by which Floris grows to assert his masculine identity.

Throughout the ME poem, *gin* is a skill taught, learned, executed, and possessed, and the stages of Floris's journey progress as he acquires and hones control over his own *engin* and that of others. To win Blancheflour, Floris must master his emotions, which pull him one way while his reason pulls him another; this tug of war is what ironically differentiates him from his beloved, since in the Middle Ages, women were thought to be feeling creatures, and men reasoning beings. In this respect, Floris's quest for Blancheflour is also a quest for his own identity as a man. In the final scene, each lover tries to outdo the other in claiming responsibility for their deception of the Emir. Floris contends that as a man, he should die first. Blancheflour rejects this argument, but the court in which they are tried ignores her claims by asking *him* for an explanation, not her. As we shall see, only then does Floris actualize his "manhood" by incorporating all he has learned from others in his quest to craft his narrative of all that transpired.

I want to extend this discussion of developing and contested *engin* by examining the connection between the ludic(rous) and instances of deception and trickery that are constitutive of Floris's masculine identity in the Egerton MS's *Floris and Blancheflour*. Several scholars have noted the humorous nature of various events in *FB*, particularly the "ridiculous...stratagem by which Floire enters the palace to find Blancheflor" (Lacy 22): he bests the porter at chess and requires him, by virtue of his loss, to help him infiltrate the tower; the porter hides Floris in a basket of flowers and has him hoisted up to the harem's quarters. Here, the basket of flowers is formulaically delivered to the wrong

recipient (22). Amusement, in fact, is a common reaction to the poem. In Hubert's opinion, its poet:

undoubtedly had a sense of humor. The bumbling king, ferocious in a raiding expedition, but a figure of comedy in his domestic affairs, is not quite ridiculous but very nearly so. The porter of the emir's tower, whose greed almost seals his doom and who is quite aware of his weakness, will provoke a smile though not a burst of laughter. And the emir himself, who goes through an elaborate ritual of leaving to chance the choice of a wife for each new year, but carefully arranges—'by necromancy'—to have the magic leaf [flower in the Middle English text] fall upon a girl whom he has singled out beforehand! Is he not a comic figure? Then there is the scene in which Floire, transported into his sweetheart's room concealed in a huge basket of roses, emerges to find he is in the wrong room and is looking at a girl he has never seen before. This could have been written for a late nineteenth century farce. (18)

The porter, Emir, and protagonist in *FB* each becomes the butt of someone's joke.¹²⁴

These jests, as we will see, are both "innocuous" and serious.

As I did in the last chapter, I will examine games and game structures, many of which depend on the use of *engine*; I will pay attention as well to laughter and to settings that exhibit characteristics of Huizinga's "magic circle." Once again I will foreground issues of gender identity. In *Floris and Blancheflour*, difference, whether socio-economical, cultural, or sexual, is overwritten by love. When *engin* is employed reasonably, it intervenes, as Patricia Clare Ingham says, "in a world where

¹²⁴ Floris is subjected to his mother's tricks, the porter to Floris', which contradicts the porter's allegiance, and the Emir suffers the consequences of both Floris and the porter's deceptions, which permits the hero's entry into the tower.

commodification and enslavement do not have the last word... The determined brand of youthful *ingenium* legible in *FB*... defuses potentially worrying effects of idiosyncratic cleverness, by mitigating, through the earnestness of youth, the alarming possibilities of new texts and technologies, or the dangers of invention's deceitful potential (81-82).

Without denying Ingham's point, however, I argue that the ludicrous elements that result as Floris reaches intellectual maturity—a quest achieved not when he finds Blancheflour, but when he assumes the authority of his bloodline and gender, legitimized by his intellect—also emphasize the “potentially worrying effects of idiosyncratic cleverness” (82). Floris's courtroom defense subsumes Blancheflour's identity and reifies the expectation of female submission to male authority.

As I have said, Floris realizes his quest for selfhood by appropriating the wit and ingenuity of marginalized figures—those limited by social status or gender—and by refashioning their wisdom to bolster his own. He learns from inkeeps to protect his identity by marshaling his emotions. From Daris, he learns strategy, and from the porter, Floris learns to only share his story when doing so proves advantageous. He learns timely improvisation and self-control from Claris. Each lesson, at the end of the poem, aids Floris in subjugating his emotional soul, his *anima*,¹²⁵ to his rational mind. In the Emir's court, he “masters” the situation. Floris, however, is only able to defend himself in the first place because his mother's protective ring comes to light as he and Blancheflour argue which of them the Emir should kill. He takes advantage of this happenstance by

¹²⁵ Citing Edward C. Whitmont, Kibler explains the *anima*, “represents those drive elements which are related to life as life, as an unpremeditated, spontaneous, natural phenomenon, to the life of the instincts, the life of the flesh, the life of concreteness, of earth, of emotionality, directed toward people and things” (14).

securing the Emir's promise to forgive their transgression.¹²⁶ Only then does Floris reveal his *gin*, his explanation of the means by which he infiltrated the Emir's tower. In demonstrating his newly-acquired control over his heart and mind, Floris holds truth in reserve until prudence demands it. But it is Blancheflour who pays for Floris's kingly performance by being silenced.¹²⁷

Like many Byzantine romances, including *Chareas and Callirhoe*, the characters in *FB* return to their points of origin. After an arduous journey, they sail back to their home, wiser from their experiences. Floris in particular learns from the ploys of many others. The Queen's ruses, we remember, were intended to end his infatuation with least harm to Blancheflour. While clearly better than the alternatives her husband proposes, the Queen's plans, nevertheless, do not produce the result she hoped for. They cause Floris to leave; when he learns that Blancheflour is not in fact dead, his mother in effect teaches him that he can engineer outcomes instead of submitting to them.

The Spanish Queen is intelligent, and her advice is well meant: she gives the King *reede*, and she is a better *engeignor* than he is. In order to achieve her goal, however, she must first convince her husband not to kill Blancheflour but to trick her unwitting son into believing she is dead. Both acts establish her authority, though we realize that authority remains conditioned on the King's assent. Her *engin* aligns with Hanning's view that "characters and situations exemplifying *engin* have their own special charm—sometimes exhilarating, sometimes cynical, always profoundly human—as they

¹²⁶ "Now they bidden all y-wis / That the Admiral graunted this, / To foryeve that trespass / Yif Floris told how it was" (ll.1040-1043).

¹²⁷ In Kibler's reading, Floire's separation from his *anima* is what causes his near demise (12); this is the female half of his soul embodied by Blancheflour. I also see Blancheflour as symbolic of Floris's emotional, rather than rational, mind. To "win" at the end of the narrative, Floris not only "acquires" control over Blancheflour as her mate, but he also dominates his emotions with effective intellection.

embellish the world to make it better (or at least other) than it is and surmount life's obstacles by manipulation and circumnavigation rather than by brute force or irresistible goodness" (106). But her plans go awry.

To save Blancheflour, the Queen decides to send Floris to her sister at Mountargis and to keep Blancheflour by her mother's side (ll.65-79).¹²⁸ Her stratagem is to tell both lovers that Blancheflour's mother is ill. But Floris cannot stay separated from Blancheflour; he returns to the court, and the King's ire rekindles. The Queen then has to concoct a new plan to extinguish his love for her (ll.104-141); she tells the King:

For Goddes love, sir, mercy!
At the next haven that here is,
There been chapmen riche, y-wis,
Marchaundes of Babyloin full riche,
That woll hur bye bletheliche.
Than may ye for that lovely foode
Have much catell and goode;¹²⁹
And so she may fro us be brought
Do that we slee hur nought. (ll.144-152)

She then commands that a tomb be constructed to convince Floris that Blancheflour is dead. Once again, the Queen wants to save Floris and Blancheflour, but the very elements

¹²⁸ Raúl Ariza-Barile notes the ME text alludes to Montargis in the Loire Valley rather than the Andalusian Montoro, whose fortress was a pivotal defense for Muslims against Christians (156); in doing so, the poem further associates Floris and his family with Christians, whereas earlier versions of the poem portray the family as clearly non-Christian.

¹²⁹ Floris's father will gain "catell," the Queen argues, "in exchange for Blauncheflur" (K. Kelly 108); the word is apt because "Blauncheflur is indeed considered 'property'" (108). "Catelle" is what Floris later ruminates on when he thinks of his lost "marchaundise" Blancheflour (ll.460, 464).

she draws on to enact her intentions show how intertwined with death they are. As soon as Floris believes Blancheflour is dead, he reaches to stab himself

And to her he had it smeten,
Ne had his moder it underyeten;
Then the Queene fell him upon
And the knife from him noom. (ll.291-294)

After she disarms Floris, the Queen explains that:

...through engine
Of thy faders reed and mine,
This grave let me make,
Leve sone, for thy sake,
Yif thou that maide forget woldest,
Afteroure reed wif thou sholdest. (ll.313-318)

The Queen then craftily convinces her spouse to sponsor Floris's quest for Blancheflour by saying that he is the last of twelve heirs: "On live now but this oon / And better it were she were his make / Than he were deed for hur sake" (ll.302-305). When she lies, the queen's plans fall through; when she yokes her ingenuity to love and truth, she succeeds. In this she anticipates Floris's performance in the Emir's court.

As Floris leaves the side of this shrewd, yet "kinde and curtais" (l.372) woman, she gives him a ring that she says will shield him from harm (ll.375-378). Kibler points out that in the OF text, the Queen's "ring is an archetypal symbol of wholeness, unity, and the Self" (14). He argues its bestowal by Floire's "mother, his primal female identity figure, [is] as a warrant and promise that he will eventually achieve the wholeness and

harmony that will make him a complete man” (14). What the hero lacks is masculine maturity, of which independent wit and authority over others are signs. If we take Marcel Mauss’s view that every gift retains a piece of the giver, then part of the Queen’s essence, in the OF and ME texts alike, “follow[s] after the first recipient” (12) of her ring: Floris. He takes on his mother’s protectiveness, but the poet also makes it clear that he takes on her feminine, and therefore suspect, ingenuity as well. Mauss also shows that every gift expects a return. In Malinese gift exchanges, failure to reciprocate is tantamount to “losing that *mana*, that authority – the talisman and source of wealth that is authority itself” (8). Floris also must make return or die; this is what makes the ring, as Kibler points out, a warrant of Floris’s impending self-actualization. His quest teaches Floris to subordinate the faultiness of emotional *engin*, which he shares with his mother and Blancheflour, with reasoning, and thereby establish his male identity.

Floris produces the ring at the poem’s end; he gives it to Blancheflour when the Emir summons them to court. Blancheflour, however, refuses it. Neither will Floris keep it; it falls to the floor as the lovers are bound. A king retrieves the discarded talisman, which retains its protective qualities; he counsels the Emir to have pity on the lovers and permit them to speak. The ring’s appearance at the crucial moment in the narrative gives Floris the opportunity to test his wits; he protects himself and Blancheflour by promising to tell the Emir all he wishes to know if the Emir promises in turn to forgive him his deceits. Floris’s gambit is as ingenious as any of the others, but it is the gambit of a mature man who has rationally calculated risks and rewards without compromising the love he feels.

Floris's "education" becomes a major element of the poem's plot. Even as a child he is able to persuade his father with tears to permit Blancheflour's education alongside his own (ll.15-24). His emotional appeal links him to Blancheflour, whom the medieval audience would have seen as emotional by nature; they both will learn how reason should direct desire. They prove equally apt students: "To scole they were put; / Both they were good of witte" (ll.25-26). They train in Latin for five years and learn to write on parchment (ll.31-34). Whenever he is separated from Blancheflour, however, Floris struggles to control his feelings; he soon realizes that his will has a mind of its own. Hanning argues that reconciling the hero's private desires with his public expectations often constitutes a primary tension in chivalric poems; "[t]he great adventure of chivalric romance is the adventure of becoming what and who you think you can be, of transforming the *awareness* of an inner self into an *actuality* which impresses upon the external world...a personal, self-chosen destiny" (qtd. in Crane, "Knights" 64). Though *FB* is not a story about knightly derring-do, the Queen's ring beckons toward such texts. But no wizard instructs Floris; his teachers are ordinary people: the lady of the inn, the burgess, Daris, the porter, and Claris.¹³⁰

Throughout his journey, Floris's inability to conceal who he is or the joy he feels when he hears news of Blancheflour puts his winning her back at risk. Floris, we increasingly feel, cannot win her back until he understands who he is, which is to say, a

¹³⁰ Susan Bell explains that though medieval laywomen were untutored in Latin, mothers were, nonetheless, "the primary teachers of the next generation and acquired books as teaching texts" (744). Outside the home, "[t]he oldest type of intellectual center was the monastery" (Artz 229). While the "monasteries educated very few secular priests and almost no laymen" (229), they were "the meeting place of the monk, the trader, the pilgrim, the jongleur, the musician, and the skilled craftsman and artist" (229). Cathedral schools developed later, administered by local bishops, and from the eleventh century, they became educational centers filled with knowledge from the East (229). Out of this milieu developed the university, institutions at which "masters" tutored others. In England, even "many lesser towns had a school by the thirteenth century" (Orme 193).

man and a king. What is unusual in *FB*, however, is the poet's recognition of the role that "play constitutes [in the] training of the young creature for the serious work that life will demand later on," how it, as Huizinga says, "serves as an exercise in restraint needful to the individual" (2).

One of the forms this play takes is play-acting. Floris disguises himself as a merchant in order to trick those he encounters into believing he is not the king's son; his charade demonstrates his native ingenuity, ironically, by presenting an untrue version of himself. In chivalric romance, though, knights use disguises as a "kind of self-presentation, a self-dramatization that invites rather than resists public scrutiny" (Crane, "Knights" 63). Floris's disguise functions the same way. He is scrutinized by those he encounters; his true identity is exposed less, though, by their perspicacity than by his inability to restrain himself from revealing who he actually is. His emotions too quickly overwhelm him.

His failure to maintain his pretense prompts us to think his guile is truthful in the sense that it shows how far Floris is from who he will become, from who he "really" is. In any event, his being discovered turns out not to hinder but to advance his progress, though he doesn't realize it. He now will learn not only how to keep up appearances but to align himself with the truth as he does it. I will therefore now discuss the ways in which Floris's "tutors" correct the flawed strategic thinking he inherited from his mother—flawed because, though clever, it depends on falsehoods and secrecy.

A symptom of Floris's juvenile intellect presents itself when the prince attempts to avoid being identified at the inn he reaches the first night of his quest for Blancheflour. He fails because he "breaks character"—to borrow a term from theater—and because his

“timing is off;” he struggles to check his emotions when Blancheflour is mentioned. The lady of the first inn sees right through Floris without realizing it; his sadness reminds her of Blancheflour’s: “All full of mourning I thee see. / There sate ther this sender day / Blauncheflour, that swete may” (ll.404-407). From these words Floris learns of Blancheflour’s sale and destination. His response is revelatory. When he hears of Blancheflour, “Was he never so glad a man / And in his hert bigan to light; / The coupe he let fulle anon right” (l.415-417); he at once tells the lady “thou of my leman speke. / On hur I thought; for hur I sight; / I ne wist where I hur finde might” (ll.420-422). Floris’s joy overwhelms his caution: he divulges all.

This scene has its counterpart later in Babylon. Floris’s host, a burgess, notes his abstention from meat and drink. Curious, he questions Floris. Floris maintains his merchant charade, hiding his identity until Blancheflour crosses his host’s lips:

This sender day, ther sate herein
that faire maide Blauncheflour...
Ever she made morning chere,
And Bement Floris, her lif fere. (ll.468-471)

This time Floris says nothing to betray himself. He does, however, negate an earlier claim to “thinke on all wise / For to finde my marchaundise” (ll.463-464), and he offers the host rich gifts in exchange for knowledge that Blancheflour has been sold to the Emir. He then proves that he is something of a merchant by offering to pay the burgess a hundred schillings (l.492). The payment requires the host to “...him help, yif he might ought— / Yif he might, with any ginne / That faire may to him winne” (496-498). Floris clearly is more master of his circumstances than he was before. He no longer is simply not a

merchant; rather he has made “merchantness” a part of himself. No longer a lie or a disguise, it becomes an element of his identity, even if it doesn’t define him fully.

From Daris, the porter, and then Claris, Floris understands that he must both rein in his emotions and think before he acts. He learns as well that strategies founded on truthfulness work better than those built on lies. These lessons in mastering *ginne* enable him to infiltrate the Emir’s tower.

The tower is a material symbol of the Emir’s own masculine power and ingenuity: it is “[a] hundred fathom...hye” (l.569). Built “[o]f lime and of marbul stone...the mortar is made so wele, / Ne may it breke iren ne steele” (ll572-572). The tower finial, the “pomel” (l.581), radiates light from its forty-two chambers (l.584). The poet implies that the remainder of the structure resembles a knight’s hilt and the blade. Indeed, neither iron nor steel may harm it. The trope is conventional, but here the marking of the castle’s impermeability signals entry into the ideological realm. In essence, the Emir’s tower represents the limits of knightly prowess; he becomes the worldly, pagan exemplar of masculine identity. Thus we hear that the topmost “boure” (l.584) is reserved for “maidons of highe parage” (l.590); it is a harem no intact man may enter:

...no serjeaunt may serve therinne
That bereth in his breche that ginne
To serve [the maidens] day and night,
But he be as a capoun dight. (ll.591-594)

Denying access to all but eunuchs implicitly links power, ingenuity, and continuation of a royal line to the phallus. For Floris, then, to breach the tower signifies more than the attainment of Blancheflour; it is a deed that declares him a man.

Before Floris can contend face-to-face with the Emir, he must overcome the tower's defenses. To do so, he requires Daris to serve as guide. When Floris reveals his intent to hone his "gin" (l.542) and his desire to "winne" (l. 544) Blancheflour, Daris offers him "som reede" (l. 646),¹³¹ despite his opinion that Floris's attempt is foolish.¹³² To "win" suggests a contest or a game; it also echoes the encouragement of Floris's father at the outset of the quest (l. 361); in Daris, Floris finds an apt coach. He tells Floris: "Leve soon, will ye see / That thy trust is much on me. / Then is the best reed that I can- / Other reed ne can I noon-" (ll.647-651). Daris's *reede*, here, beyond wise counsel, is essentially a *strategy*, and it shares many troubling qualities with the Queen's ploys, which it is meant to recall. How then does Floris take a step forward by following his advice?

Daris advises Floris to play two tricks, equivalent to what in the *Roland* is called "*un poi de legerie* [a little bit of lightness, a joke]," which will help him "win." The first is a disguise to bait the trap; the second is a gamble to clinch it. Floris should approach the tower "[a]s [he] wer a good ginoure" (l.654), carrying with him a "squier and scantlon / As though [he] were a freemason" (ll.655-656). The façade will allow him to inspect the tower, so that Floris might "make another in [his] londe" (ll. 668). The gamble involves consecutive games of "checkere" (l.670) against the tower's porter. Floris will offer to play two games, increasing the wager each time, and lose both (ll.687-690). He'll raise

¹³¹ Daris is moved by Floris's tearful plea: "'Dares, I worth now dede, / But that I hope of thee som reede'" (ll.645-646)

¹³² Floris explains: "For grete love theder y-come / To fonde, with quaintyse and with gin, / Blancheflour for to winne" (ll.542-544), to which Daris responds, "thou art a folt— / And for a foole the childe he halt— / 'Now I woot how it goth; / Though desirest thin own deeth" (ll. 545-548).

the stakes again for a final, third game; this one he will win (ll.691-699).¹³³ By Daris's design, Floris will "with ginne, / The porters love forsoth winne" (ll.679-680). This plan hones Floris's ingenuity; moreover, unlike his mother's ruses, which failed because she did not truly understand the persons on whom they were perpetrated, this gambit succeeds, because Daris knows the porter's character.

One reason why Daris's ploy works is that he disguises Floris not as a merchant, as Floris himself had at quest's outset, but as a *ginoure*. According to the Middle English Dictionary, a *ginoure* is a stone-mason or builder, or operator of a siege engine, all of which Floris is not.¹³⁴ Figuratively, however, Floris is mounting a siege; he aims to compromise the tower's integrity. He is also a designer who must pit his wits against the architect who designed the tower. *Ginoure* begins to give Floris's disguise an air of truthfulness. His disguise is less a lie than a move in a game that, like chess, sanctions covert maneuvers.

As for Floris's subjugation of the porter, who is "had" without full knowledge from the outset of his challenger's identity, a technicality again corrects what could

¹³³ Patricia Grieve highlights two opposing views on the significance of Floris's game of chess: "more than an example of *engin*: it prefigures the contest between Floris and the Emir" (68). According to Grieve, "[b]y playing chess in Babylon... Floris is, in effect, ritualistically enacting a descent into hell, that is, his entry into the tower where Blauncheflour is held captive; and his descent is actually an ascent to the top of the tower" (68). This reading, Grieve explains, "regards Floris's success after three days of play as symbolic of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not specifically the result of Divine Intervention" (68). Other critics, "[i]nstead of religious allegory, however... find[] in the chess game 'an extended allegory for a lover's formal courtship of his fair mistress' (82), such as can be found in the fourteenth-century *Les Eschechs amoureux* and in Chaucer" (Grieve 68).

¹³⁴ *Ginoure* loosely resembles several romance terms for the verb "to deceive" as well as for the noun "engineer": in Spanish *engañar* [to deceive, mislead], *ingeniero* [engineer]; in Portuguese, *se enganar* [to trick] and *engenheiro* [engineer]; and in Italian *ingannare* [to deceive] and *ingegnere* [engineer]. The similarities among romance words for "engineer" and "deception" also seem to resemble the Latin *ingenium* [genius, wit, acumen, character] and *ingenii* [trick, clever device]. As Ingham has suggested, there is a tension between ingenuity and the ethics of its use; wit and cleverness provide insight and means to achieving ends, but use of this power is also questionable. As in the Queen's strategies and deceptions, they may result in poor outcomes for others.

otherwise be seen as a reemergence of the Queen's strategic error. Playing by the rules, being "a good sport," is significant: it is how we assess a player's integrity and the ethics of his actions. This is why we frown on the Queen's deceptions, even if her intentions were good. Because Floris's triumph over the porter is "fair and square," like the architect's tool he carries, instead of resentment, the men share a sense of comradery. Floris and the porter, as Huizinga describes, have chosen to become "play-fellows," and have chosen to participate in a "play-sphere" (49). Their choice subjects both players to the game's outcome. Inherently a gamble and a game of strategy, they both play by the rules unique to their game (Huizinga 28-29). When Floris wins—he "shows [him]self superior in the outcome of a game" (Huizinga 50), and the porter must concede.¹³⁵

The snare Daris helps Floris set is itself a gamble, which makes the victory all the more ludic. "To dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty, to endure tension—these are the essence of the play spirit" (Huizinga 51), and the consequences of loss hang in the balance. As Daris tells Floris, the tower's porter "[w]ell yerne[;] he will thee bidde and pray / Com another day to playe" (ll.683-684); he yearns because of the possibility of success and its juxtaposition with potential failure. Floris's gamble heightens the contest's tension. Semantically, "gamble," links to both "gains" and "winnings." As Huizinga notes, the two latter terms "pertain[] to both play and economics: the player receives his winnings, the merchant makes them" (51). The gambler, like the player, *wins* them, but often because he *makes* a strategic choice. What is at stake—a prize's immaterial value, is what truly matters, however, much more so than the "gains"

¹³⁵ Medieval readers might have justified the porter's loss on account of the sinfulness of his gamble: Kristin Juel claims that losing a chess game symbolizes sin. She contends that the cup wagered in Floire's final chess game against the porter allows the hero to win because it manifests the porter's greed; his sin precipitates his downfall. The game, she argues, demonstrates the porter's distraction by wealth and greed (101).

themselves. As Huizinga argues, the phrase: “There is something at stake” contains the essence of play (49); significant “is not the material result of the play, not the mere fact that the ball is in the hole, but the ideal fact that the game is a success or has been successfully concluded” (49). The symbolic value of winning supersedes the materiality of what is moved, lost, and won. For Floris, the “something” is in the success of his plays: duping the porter with his disguise, outwitting him at checkers, and cleverly subjecting him to his own will—all while playing by the rules—moves him towards Blanche flour and his examination by the Emir.

The poem’s audience participates in this ludic atmosphere as much as the hero. They are spectators. As Huizinga points out, “[t]he outcome of a game or contest...is only interesting to those who enter into it as players or spectators, either personally and locally, or else as listeners...and accept its rules” (Huizinga 49). By experiencing the romance as listeners and readers, the audience has entered Floris’s ludic “play-sphere;” because it is ideological, they are subject to the gamble’s outcome as much as the hero, the porter, the Emir, or Blanche flour.

With Daris’s tutelage, Floris learns to reveal his identity not with emotion, but with guile, and to do so when the outcome is in his favor. As in gin, Floris learns to guard his cards and group them strategically, ever at the ready for an effective play. As Daris advises him against the porter, he suppresses his royal flush until the man is mastered. Once he “is Floris man bicom...Floris said...‘Now my consel I will thee shewe; / Rede me right, yif thou be trew.’ / Now every word he hath him told” (ll.707-712). Floris reveals his identity, “how he was of Spain a kings soon” (l.715) and the reason for his journey: “For grete love theder y-coom / To fonden, with some ginne, / That faire maide

for to winne” (ll.716-718). Floris trains his mind to mend the faultiness of his mother’s stratagems. As Hanning explains, “[e]ngin...can deceive, improve, or educate, depending on the intent of the *engigneor*...personal motive, consciously decided upon and expressing personal values or needs, determines our response to any particular use of this basic human capability” (111).¹³⁶ We see Floris learn through Daris’s *engin*. Though the latter manipulates the former, he does so to help him “win.” Likewise, as Floris deceives the porter in leveraging his aid, his intent is good; we excuse what for some, are questionable actions.

Floris’s victory over the porter may prove his increased guile, but he soon realizes that outwitting someone who is “cruel” and “feloun” (l.658) is one thing; stealing Blanche flour from the Emir is another. Yet he does learn something valuable from the uncouth porter he has bested. He asks him to “[r]ede [him] right, yif [he] be trew” (l.712), and the man he has beaten, now his “vassal,” promises to “bethenke [him] of sum ginne; / Betwene this and the thridde day” (ll.730-732). The porter may need more time than the previous *ginoures* Floris has encountered, but the “ginne” he does devise was one Floris could not have come up with by himself:

The porter thought the best reed
And let geder floures in a meede;
He wist it was the maidons will;
To lepes he lete of floures fille:
That was the best reed, as him thought thoo,
Floures in that on lep to do. (ll.735-740)

¹³⁶ Daris’s plan mitigates perceived diminution of Floris’s integrity—even if gambling was a particularly objectionable pastime in the Middle Ages (Buczyk 34).

He intends to disguise Floris within a basket of flowers and deliver it to the maidens within the Emir's tower. The ploy works: Floris enters the stronghold undetected.¹³⁷

Floris still has much to learn, however, when he prematurely reveals himself to Claris, Blancheflour's confidante within the Emir's tower. The tower's porter has hidden Floris in a basket of flowers and delivered it to the Emir's harem. But the plan immediately goes awry. The basket is delivered to the wrong maiden: Claris. Floris mistakenly thinks it is Blancheflour whom he hears standing outside the basket. "Floris wende it hadde be his swete wight; / O the lepe he stert upright," but when Claris sees him, "the maide, all for drede, / Bigan to shrelle and to grede." Floris can do no more than "Into the lepe ayen stert" (ll.754-758). The comedy of this jack-in-the-box scene of revelation at once distracts from and underscores the fact that Floris can't control his own excitement or recognize that Blancheflour is not there. By contrast, once she regains her composure, Claris speaks to both of Floris's shortcomings. She recognizes Floris is Blancheflour's beloved, and she devises a way for him to escape. As we see, he learns the lessons of self-control and timeliness from her.

Claris, by example, teaches Floris how to master one's emotions and improvise shrewdly. She discovers Floris within the basket left outside her door, not Blancheflour's. She screams when she sees him. But she intuits that Floris must be Blancheflour's beloved; she quickly masters her fear and improvises an excuse for her shout. When maidens rush to her, she explains that a butterfly startled her. Like other Christian women in the poem, for example, Blancheflour and her mother, Claris is imprisoned. In contrast to these characters, who are downcast and listless, she is energetic and jocular.

¹³⁷ Whether he is cognizant of it or not, however, a key element in Floris's arsenal is the manipulation of servile characters' ingenuity to his advantage, and this plays out again once he infiltrates the tower.

Incarceration has failed to dim her spirit, as have the servile tasks she must perform, like washing the Emir's hands.¹³⁸ Even in this state, and despite the medieval stereotyping of women as emotional rather than reasonable creatures, Claris emerges as more rational than Floris and teaches him shrewd, timely improvisation.

Indeed, the ironies of the scene abound; Claris is composed, Floris is not. We laugh at Floris, who acts foolishly; we laugh with Claris for her wit.¹³⁹ When Claris receives the porter's basket of flowers, Floris (humorously) mistakes a friend for his *ami*, his lover (the French word means both). As Claris reaches into the basket:

[t]he flores to hondel and to beholde;
Floris wende it hadde be his swete wight;
O the lepe he stert upright
and the maide, all for drede,
Bigan toshrelle and to grede. (ll.752-756)

Floris's mistake reveals his inadequate control over his emotions; in his excitement to see Blancheflour, he acts incautiously. He pops out of the basket, realizes he shouldn't have, and then retreats under cover of the flowers. By contrast, Claris intuitively identifies the prince's identity and deflects the attention of the maidens who hear her squeal. That a butterfly could cause her to "shrell and grede" invites laughter; "[t]he maidens therof hadden gle" (l.775). Though Claris's explanation is comic because it's a non-serious (Huizinga 24), self-deprecating admission, the fear she felt was real. Yet she mastered her surprise and

¹³⁸ In the OF version, her duties bear a sexual connotation, for she washes feet not hands. In discussing David's suggestion in 2 Samuel 11:8 that Uriah wash his feet upon returning home from the front, David Firth explains that, given feet's usage as "a euphemism for male genitals (Is. 6:2, Ezek 16:25)" it is possible the suggestion is that Uriah have sex with his wife (317).

¹³⁹ The French text makes this explicit when Claris offers an excuse for her surprise to the other maidens: "Dont dist l'engin qu'ele ot trové: / 'Des fleurs sailli un papeillon'" [She says the deception that came to her / of the flowers came a butterfly] (l.2143-2144).

her fright. From her, Floris sees that it is wiser to temper feelings with reason than to react instinctively.

Claris displays her wit again when she tells Blancheflour: “Fellow, come and see a faire flour!” (l.780). She means, of course, Floris; her statement is a tease and a pun rolled into one. Blancheflour chides her playmate: “To scorne me, it is non honoure” (l.784), but the French emphasizes Claris’s jest: “‘Avoi,’ fet Blancheflor, ‘Claris, / Compaigne, pourquoi m’escharnis?’” [“Away,” motioned Blancheflor, “Claris, friend, why do you mock me?”] (ll.2176-2177).¹⁴⁰ When Blancheflour catches on to Claris’s meaning—after she vents her frustrations and hopes to die,¹⁴¹ she sees her beloved. From this point on, Claris remains a faithful ally as important to Floris for what he learns from her as to Blancheflour.

The experiential knowledge Floris gains from lower born characters in the text increases his *engin* and his ability to “win.” But to “win,” Floris must not only surmount his emotions, but also learn how to speak his truth authoritatively. To convince the Emir’s court, he must speak in place of Blancheflour. The poet presents her subordination to him as his final mastering of his own emotional feminine make-up.

Despite Blancheflour’s apparent meekness, she is a willful character. We have already twice seen signs of Blancheflour’s despair. The lady of the inn sees the sadness in Floris’s countenance (ll.404-406); when he arrives in Babylon, the inn-keeper recalls Blancheflour’s moans:

Ever she made mourning chere,

¹⁴⁰ The root of “Escharnis,” “escharn” means “mockery, scorn, derision” (*AND*).

¹⁴¹ “Pour seue amor engin querré / Que a par main je m’ocirré” [For their love a plan I sought that by my hand I might kill myself] (ll.2190-2191).

And bement Floris, her lif fere;
Joy ne bliss made she noon,
But for Floris she made her moon. (ll.471-474)

We first directly hear Blancheflour speak when she sees the basket of flowers in which Floris is hiding. After Blancheflour belittles Claris's request to come see a flower, she laments her impending marriage to the Emir (ll.785-786) by echoing Floris's early wish for death:

[T]hat day shall never be
That the Amiral will me to wif habbe;
But that day shall never be
That he shall ever have me—
That I shall be of love so untrewé,
Ne change my love for no newé;
For no love ne for noon aye,
Forsake Floris in his contraye.
Now I shall swete Floris misse,
Ne shall noon other of me have blisse. (ll.787-796)

Blancheflour here is as resolute and steadfast as Aude in the *Roland*. She will die rather than *change* her love for Floris.¹⁴² She is so despondent that she fails to fly to Claris's

¹⁴² The Old French makes the suicidal implication explicit: “Ne durra més gaires ma vie” [Not much longer will my life endure] (ll.2183), “...a par main je m’ocirré” [...by my hand I will slay myself] (l.2191).

side when she cries aloud in surprise.¹⁴³ In her words and deeds, Blanchefflower owes her resolution to her *feelings* for Floris.

Hearing Blanchefflower's heartfelt, unwavering grief, Floris registers the depths of emotion, but he learns, too, to distinguish feelings from rational thought and to subject the former to reason, which is essential to his becoming a man. Before his journey, Floris had wished for death; now he learns that Blanchefflower does. The wish is irrational, for death does not bring joy, only greater separation; reason and ingenuity, however, have better outcomes, for in Floris's experience, they have reunited him with Blanchefflower. By understanding the difference, Floris will know when he stands before the Emir that a case for damaged property might be stronger than pointing out he is a king's son, or even ethically entitled to Blanchefflower.

In the final section of the romance, the court scene proceeds according to rules of medieval disputation in which the stages of an argument, the methods for coping with each stage, and the implications of propositions, all received great attention (Luscombe 162). In particular, medieval scholars focused on the concept of obligation, which, according to Roger Swyneshed, required one "to reply affirmatively or negatively to the *obligatum*" (Luscombe 163), which was subject to a proposition's withdrawal (*deposition*) and to the advancement of "further propositions on the basis of the first" (163). Some premises might even be deemed irrelevant (*impertinens*), making a firm grip on reason fundamental to a debater's success (163). In the anonymous Oxford treatise *On the Art of Obligation*, circa 1330-1340, the:

¹⁴³ At Claris's screech, "Ther com maidons, and to Claris lepe / By ten, by twelf, on an heepe, / And asked what hur were / And why she made suche a bere" (ll.761-764), Blanchefflower is not among them, for Claris must, after the other maidens depart (l.776), go to her: "To Blaunchefflower she yede anon" (l.778).

art of obligation trains the respondent so that he pays attention to what is granted and denied, in order not to grant two incompatible things within the same time. For in *Sophistical Refutations*... Aristotle teaches the arguer to put forward many things so that the respondent who does not remember because of the large number may be refuted as regards his response to the things put forward. It is partly from this that the art has derived its structure, so that as long as we pay attention we may keep ourselves from being tricked. (Luscombe 163)

Floris adopts a version of this strategy; he sets forth so many premises that recalling each presents an intellectual challenge.¹⁴⁴ The court scene dialogues with medieval use of logic in order to dispute or determine the “truth.”¹⁴⁵ Floris both manipulates the circumstances and proves his case; his ability to do each at the right time demonstrates intellectual mastery over his emotions and over Blancheflour, who is their source.

Floris’s “victory” arrives not without struggle. Before he mounts his defense, he must assume authority over Blancheflour who, hoping to die in Floris’s stead, initially claims responsibility for their predicament: “The gilt is min of oure wo” (1.965). The lovers quarrel over this opinion’s implications. When Floris bestows his mother’s magic ring on Blancheflour, she rejects it:

Floris drough forth that ring

That his moder him gaf at her parting:

¹⁴⁴ If considered in terms of “valid/invalid consequences on the one hand and true/false consequences on the other” (Luscombe 164), then Floris’s arguments might seem to belong on William Ockham’s list of false rules, in which premises believed to be “false/known/believed/doubtful/proved” yield a conclusion that is also “false/known/believed/doubtful/proved” (164).

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Orme explains that in William FitzStephen’s description of London, written between 1170 and 1183, “scholars dispute, some in demonstrative rhetoric, others in dialectic. Some ‘hurtle enthymemes’, others with great skill employ perfect syllogisms” (149). That this was characteristic of London’s feast days in the late twelfth century suggests that the tradition of disputation continued into the thirteenth century. Indeed, as Orme notes, it continued at least into the 1530’s (149).

“Have this ring, lemman min;
Though shalt not die while it is thin.”
Blanchefloure saide tho,
“So ne shall it never go
That this ring shall help me,
And the deed on thee see.”
Floris that ring her raught
And she it him again betaught;
Nouther ne will other deed seene;
They let it fall hem bitwene. (ll.966-977)

This debate, which foreshadows the trial in the Emir’s court, is a draw: neither lets the other claim responsibility; each retains agency by refusing an object that would save his or her life but not the life of the other. The force behind their refusal is both rational and unreasonable; for each the other’s death would be their own. In this, the lovers begin to merge as equals. The equality, however, will become complicated, for the assertion of Floris’s masculine identity hinges upon Blancheflour’s submission.

Blancheflour defends her convictions with spirit; she offers her life to save his again when the Emir tries them in court because he knows “Hit were nought right judgement / Without answeere make acouplement” (ll.948-949). Blancheflour claims all the blame is hers: “The gilt of oure dedes is min” (l.1011). When the Emir “[h]is swerd he breide out of his sheeth / The children to have don to deeth[,] / Blanchefloure put forth hur swire.” Immediately, though, “Floris dide her again to tire” (ll.1014-1017). This is the moment when Floris begins to take control of Blancheflour: ME “dide” carries the force

“made.” She does not give up, however; when Floris openly asserts he more rightfully should bear the penalty for their deception: “I am man; I shal bifore; / With wrong hast thou thy lif loore!’ / Floris forth his swere putte,” and Blanchefflour “again him tittle” (ll.1018-1021).¹⁴⁶ Her will clearly is as constant as his. Floris, though, now adds reason to support his position: he is a man. The irony, of course, is that Floris’s argument is only half-rational; all Blanchefflour’s other arguments are as well-grounded as his, yet women’s minds, according to the theologians, are ruled by their emotions.¹⁴⁷

Although Floris has said nothing that justifies his right to argue the case instead of Blanchefflour, when the Emir orders Floris to speak in their defense, Blanchefflour falls silent. Floris now has the opportunity to prove his ingenuity; he does so by admitting he is a “ginoure,” which we know, in part, is true.¹⁴⁸ He first convinces the Emir to promise to “foryeve that trespass / Yif Floris told how it was” (ll.1042-1043). Once he has artfully engineered the situation in his own favor, Floris:

[E]very word he hath him tolde:
How that maide was for him solde
And how he ws of Spain a kings sone,
For grete love theder y-com
For to fonde, with sum ginne,
That faire maide for the winne,

¹⁴⁶ In the Auchinleck MS: “...Blanchefflour pult forth hire swire / And Florice gan hire agein tite” (ll.1139-1131); then “Florice forth his swire pulte / And Blanchefflour agein hit brute” (ll.1134-1135).

¹⁴⁷ Accordingly, women in the Middle Ages were expected to be submissive, to be modest in demeanor in accordance with “Scriptural directives that women should exert influence only from postures of humility and weakness (Mark 9:34; 1 Corinthians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 8:9)” (Parsons 153).

¹⁴⁸ The *MED* indicates *ginour* as a stone-mason, a builder, a siege-engine operator, and a surname. As discussed earlier, Floris engineers situations as an architect might construct a building; he is a human siege engine that besets the Emir’s tower.

And how the porter was his man bicom
For his gold and for his warison,
And how he was in to Floris borne;
Alle the lordinges lough therforne. (ll.1044-1053)

Floris's timely, insightful confession incorporates and improves all he has learned from his tutors:¹⁴⁹ If the lady of the inn saw through his disguise, he now perceptively drops pretense and gives an open account of all that has brought him to this moment; if the burgess pried information and riches from the lovesick prince, Floris offers his story for no other price than the Emir's forgiveness of Blancheflour. Like Claris, who mastered her fear, Floris shares his story, but without falsifying it.

In the narrative he does relate, Floris emphasizes his ingenuity; had Blancheflour told it, the poet leads us to suspect that she might have stressed how she again and again became Fortune's pawn. As Moore points out, "Floire ...purposefully obscure[es] Blancheflor's narrative of her harrowing near-rape and sale into captivity with his own account of glorious, mercantile questing" (78).¹⁵⁰ Floris absorbs Blancheflour the way he has all the other figures from whom he learned. By doing so, he establishes his authority as a rational man and shows he is ready to be "crowned within a short day" (l.1083).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ The inn-keep's wife notes Floris's woe: "Mete and drinke he foryetes; / Litel he eteth and lasse he drinketh. / He is no marchaund, as me thinketh" (ll.400-402); and she sees in Floris's countenance a reflection of Blancheflour's "semblant and...morning" (l.412). She identifies Floris as a heart-sick lover, sees through his disguise, and rightly associates him with his beloved. She also holds the key to finding Blancheflour: "Blancheflour, that swete may [,] / Heder they brought that maide swete; / They wold have sold hur for biyete; / To Babyloin they wille hur bring" (ll.406-411).

¹⁵⁰ Moore's assessment of the Old French version is true of the ME Egerton text as well.

¹⁵¹ Floris's testimony recalls the frame-tale narrative, a genre in which a story is presented within a larger story. The best known example is the Arabic *Thousand and One Nights*, but it also appears in Ramón Llull's *Libro de la Orden de Caballería*, Isaac ibn Sahūla's *Mešal haqadmonī*, Don Juan Manuel's *El Conde Lucanor*, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (Wacks 5). The frame tale genre is inclusive of the *maqāmat*, a genre at times entertaining as well as didactic that is

The silencing of Blancheflour, of course, is a social, political, and ideological act;¹⁵² her lament is important because it, more than any other part of the poem, illustrates Blancheflour's character in her own words;¹⁵³ elsewhere, third-person narrators describe her. Throughout the poem, we hear obliquely of the pain Blancheflour feels for her absent Floris; she gives voice to her lament, however, only after Floris, hidden in his basket of flowers, has infiltrated the Emir's tower. As Kathleen Kelly notes, "Blancheflour rarely speaks for herself; for the most part, she is condemned to be 'spoken' by others...the very flatness of her character encourages readers to foreground her as a passive object of exchange" (110). Even though the OF and ME *FB* both include her monologue,¹⁵⁴ a clear declaration of her views,¹⁵⁵ her speech appears contingent upon Floris's presence.

characterized by an "anecdotal mode of tale-telling" (Wacks 49). *FB*'s court scene diverges from these genres in that the poem does not record Floris's story as dialogue, the way a *frametales* or *maqāma* likely would. Floris's explanation, like Blancheflour's lament, is narrated in third person. Nevertheless, it accomplishes the same feat as Scheherazade's tapestry of tales. In both the *Thousand and One* and the *Hundred and One Nights*, Scheherazade preserves her own life, and that of her beloved sister, by *narrating* stories that shield them from harm.

¹⁵² Drawing on María Rosa Menocal, it also characterizes the poem's production, which employs the same processes of co-optation and assimilation as its hero. Menocal points out that "[g]eneral anthologies of European medieval literature do not...include examples of literature written in Arabic or Hebrew, nor do they even, in many cases, acknowledge or discuss its existence as part of the general historical background" (*The Arabic* 21), even though the past century is replete with "suggestions within the scholarly community that one of the critical components in the making of the Middle Ages was Arabic and/or Semitic" (9). By 1064, for instance, Andalusian scholarship had been exported to the West, and "the material, intellectual, and artistic riches that escaped al-Andalus in bits and pieces graced that home of the man who was to be known as the first troubadour" (30), William of Aquitaine (31). His poetry, Menocal postulates, was influenced by the form and content of Iberian songs, which were disseminated by women captured at the siege of Barbastro and taken to Provence (31). Courtly love conventions, seen as hallmarks of Western medieval literature, Menocal reveals as principles shared with early Arabic-Sicilian poetry (117); her observation maintains that *fin' amor* is as indebted as troubadour poetics to Eastern influences.

¹⁵³ These are, of course, still the poet's words, but Blancheflour speaks them; written in first-person, the statements reveal Blancheflour's feelings and values. They are neither narrated second-hand by other characters, nor by the poem's narrator in third-person.

¹⁵⁴ "'Avoi,' fet Blancheflor, 'Clarís, / Compaigne, pourquoi m'escharnis?'" ["'Away,'" motioned Blancheflor, "Clarís, friend, why do you mock me?"] (ll.2176-2177). She bewails her circumstances in sixteen lines.

¹⁵⁵ Moore notes that "women are purposefully excluded from narrating in many Old French texts" (78).

Blancheflour never speaks when Floris is not present.¹⁵⁶ Her other significant speech, for example, occurs when the lovers argue over who should die for the other. Blancheflour does seem, in Kelly's words, "a blank page, waiting for her future to be inscribed by others" (K. 110). I contend, however, that by characters in the text and by poets who portray her, Blancheflour is both less passive and more put upon. The emotive power of her words to the Emir, the ferocity with which she claims responsibility of the lovers' actions, shows that if Floris had not arrived, Blancheflour would have written her own end.¹⁵⁷ Instead we see her story has been intentionally erased.

Blancheflour plays both lovelorn maiden and strong woman with deep convictions. Even if both the OF and ME *FB* narratives strive to suppress her direct speech, Blancheflour's lament and her struggle against Floris in court testify to her strength of character. She is, nevertheless, subordinated to a role that fosters Christian male identity, which appears to be a distinctly Western mechanism when we compare versions of *FB* to its potential analogues in Eastern literature. Here, we find women's feelings, opinions, and words more often represented than in *FB*, and in Eastern texts, women function as more than mere foils for male identity formation.¹⁵⁸

Scholars have agreed that the *FB*'s roots lie in Byzantium since 1855 (Huet 348). Its narrative resembles Chariton's Byzantine romance *Chareas and Callirhoe*, which

¹⁵⁶ By this I mean the poet does not record Blancheflour's speech as first-person dialogue, for we know characters such as the innkeeper have heard her complain of being separated from Floris. As a counterpoint, some might observe that part of Floris's speech receives similar treatment; his experience, in part, is narrated for him. However, it is not the case that his direct speech occurs only in the presence of Blancheflour. His dialogue is not contingent upon her presence, which suggests hers is subordinate to his, not vice-versa.

¹⁵⁷ Her suicidal intentions are made clearly in the OF text: For the beautiful love of Floire and Blancheflor, "engin querré / Wue a par main je m'ocirré" (ll.2190-2191).

¹⁵⁸ They serve this purpose to an extent, but what I wish to point out is that the roles females play in *FB*'s potential analogues are less circumscribed than they are in the western versions of the poem examined here.

recalls the familial tension poignantly recounted in Ovid's *Pyramus and Thisbe*. The *FB* also bears resemblance to the Persian tale *Varquah et Golshâ* and the Arab tale *Noam et Neema*, and it has affinities with the *Thousand and One Nights*.¹⁵⁹ The *OF FB* more particularly signals its provenance when Floris acquires a cup depicting Paris's seizure of Helen, which Aeneas carried from Greece to Rome. The scene clearly reenacts the *translatio studii e imperii* (Kinoshita 78). By examining these texts, we can see how the *OF FB* offers its audiences a landscape filled with all the prejudices of medieval Orientalism. Ultimately, the poem traffics in its own foreignness.

Chariton's romance has been called the first novel (Fusillo 22); it features a full-circle expedition in which Chareas recovers his maligned, beloved Callirhoe, whom he believes is dead. Her journey is as prominent as his. As in *FB*, social impediments divide the Greek protagonists' initial union. Callirhoe's father is a general whose rank is far above that of Chareas's father; both families, similar to Pyramus's and Thisbe's, harbor great enmity for the other. Aphrodite joins the lovers in marriage, but Callirhoe's many suitors plot to separate the newlyweds. They deceive Chareas into believing Callirhoe is unfaithful. He goes to her to confirm his suspicions. Callirhoe hears her husband in the corridor, and goes to meet him, but he believes he has just witnessed the visit of her lover, so he deliberately trips her. She falls and lies "unconscious, not breathing; she looked to everyone as if she were dead" (27). Chareas is tried for murder. He is acquitted; Callirhoe is buried in a vault by the sea. Grave-robbers appear and free her (28-30); recognizing her worth, they sell her (32-37). The beauty of the unfortunate heroine unwittingly captures the attention of a powerful foreign ruler, Dionysius. Callirhoe then gives voice to her tribulations. She accedes to Dionysius's overtures; he, as Fusillo says,

¹⁵⁹ Recent discoveries bolster Huet's argument that *FB* is, indeed, related to the tales of Scheherazade.

is unusually sympathetic, “a cultivated and noble rival” who “arouses quite an intense empathy, especially because of his self-control and education (22, 26). Callirhoe also is with child.¹⁶⁰

Before Dionysius can wed Callirhoe, Chareas arrives; a debate ensues as to which man has the greater right to her. Dionysius’s overlord, Artaxerxes, is chosen to arbitrate the case (86), but he, too, becomes infatuated with Callirhoe (90-95). Before the case is decided, the Egyptians rebel and threaten Artaxerxes’s rule. Artaxerxes’s forces speed towards the rebels in Phoenicia, Tyre, and Syria with an entourage of women and valuables, as was customary. Artaxerxes coyly asked Callirhoe to accompany them, not letting on his attraction to her (98-100). Dionysius also rides with the King’s forces; Chareas, however, is left behind. He learns from Dionysius’s servant that the King had decided Callirhoe should go to Dionysus; Chareas, therefore, thinks all is lost. He contemplates suicide, but he resolves to stay alive when his friend suggests they join the opposition forces (100-102). The Egyptians permit Chareas to select a special unit to capture Tyre; when he does, he is promoted to admiral. Artaxerxes learns of Tyre’s fate; he leaves his entourage on the isle of Aradus. Chareas then defeats Artaxerxes’s fleet and surrounds the island (103-108). A soldier reports that among the captured is a beautiful woman, but she says she would rather die than see the Egyptians’ commander. It is Callirhoe, and she, of course, doesn’t know the Egyptian commander is Chareas (109). But, when Chareas begins to arrange his departure (110-111):

¹⁶⁰ “After Chareas and Callirhoe were married, their first contact was passionate; they had an equal impulse to enjoy each other, and matching desire had made their union fruitful. So just before her fall Callirhoe became pregnant; but thanks to the subsequent dangers and hardships she did not realize her condition straightaway” (46).

he saw her stretched out on the ground with her head covered, he felt his heart stirred at once by the way she breathed and the look of her, and felt a thrill of excitement; he would certainly have recognized her had he not been thoroughly convinced that Dionysius had taken Callirhoe for himself... ‘Don’t be frightened lady,’ he said, ‘whoever you are. We are not going to use force on you. You shall have the husband you want.’ Before he had finished speaking, Callirhoe recognized his voice and threw the covering from her face. (111)

When “Chareas had made honorable amends to Love,” by wandering “west to east and [experiencing] untold suffering, Aphrodite took pity on him; having harassed by land and sea the handsome couple she had originally brought together, she decided...to reunite them” (110). The reunification of the lovers, as well as the heroine’s ill-fated beauty, reappears in the medieval *FB* texts, even if the later, Western texts do not present the female version of the story alongside that of the male.¹⁶¹

FB also bears similarities to *Varquah et Golshâ*, a Persian tale about loss and recovery (Legros 23). In the tale, Huguette Legros explains, a King offers a fortune for Golshâh’s hand, but she loves Varquah. To profit by their daughter’s union, Golshâh’s

¹⁶¹ What I mean here is that Chariton’s narrative quite equally presents the perspectives of his protagonists. Both Chareas and Callirhoe speak and act independently of one another, and neither character’s story is told, almost exclusively, in third person, as is the case of Blanche-flour’s in the *FB* tradition. Because Chariton’s plot is so similar to *FB*, one sees why the latter was also thought to have a Byzantine origin. This is also true of Ovid’s *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which Huguette Legros proposes is another potential source for the OF *FB*. She deems it a likely candidate because Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which it is found, was retold orally. The prevalence of translation hubs in the Mediterranean, where Ovid’s Latin could be rendered into vernacular, made the tale accessible to a wide audience: “Certes la transmission aurait été orale à moins qu’on ne songe aux ateliers de traduction si nombreux autour de la Méditerranée. Des titres ont été avancés: Daphnis et Chloé...Chérus et Callirhoe...[p]our ce qui est des sources latines, nous songeons à Pyramus et Thisbe écrit vers 1160 et racontant d’après les *Métamorphoses* d’Ovide les amours funestes des héros éponymes” [Certainly the transmission is oral unless one considers the translation workshops named around the Mediterranean. These titles that have been advanced include Daphnis and Chloe, Chareas and Callirhoe...for the Latin sources, we have Pyramus and Thisbe, written around 1160 as retold according to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* of the eponymous heroes’ disastrous love] (Legros 21). *Pyramus and Thisbe*, like Chariton’s romance, is as much concerned with its heroine as with its hero.

parents accept the King's offer. They tell Golshâh her beloved is dead, so she will forget her love for him (26). To cover their deceit, they tell Varquah their daughter Golshâh is dead.¹⁶² As "proof" they hold a funerary celebration in which they kill and bury a sheep (26),¹⁶³ but Varquah discovers the truth, and after a long speech in which he vents his fury, he departs for Syria to recover Golshâh (27).¹⁶⁴ Varquah laments his circumstances, but he finds Golshâh. In the King of Syria's presence, the lovers recount their story. Moved, he decides to test their chastity by leaving them together. Convinced of the purity of their love, he then refuses to separate them and prepares to repudiate Golshâh, so Varquah can marry her.¹⁶⁵ The lovers embark homeward, but before reaching their destination, Varquah and Golshâh die.¹⁶⁶ A prophet revives them. The miracle becomes known throughout the world; as a result, the text says, Jews comport themselves like good Muslims, and the lovers wed full of joy, weighed down in riches by the Syrian King.¹⁶⁷ The motifs *Varquah et Golshâ* shares with *FB*—false deaths and tombs, parental resistance, the lovers recounting their experience to an authority—confirms its status as an analogue.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² "[L]es parents de Golshâh lui conferment la mort de la jeune fille" (Legros 26).

¹⁶³ "Les parents des Golshâh font tuer un mouton et l'enterrent pour célébrer de fausses funérailles" (Legros 26).

¹⁶⁴ "Après un discours furieux, Varquah part pour la Syrie à la recherche de Golshâh" (27).

¹⁶⁵ "Le roi de Syrie arrive et les deux amis lui racontent leur histoire. Il éprouve leur chastete en les laissant ensemble, puis se refuse à le séparer et se preàpare à répudier Golshâh pour que Varquah puisse l'épouser, mais il part" (Legros 27).

¹⁶⁶ "En chemin, Varquah meurt. Golshâh meurt" (27).

¹⁶⁷ "[L]es jeunes gens revivent. Le miracle est connu du monde entire; les juifs se comportent comme de bons musulmans, quant aux amants, ils s'épousent et vivent dans la joie, comblés de richesses par le roi de Syrie" (Legros 28).

Yet we shouldn't lose sight of the differences between the texts because they show that Persian culture constructed masculinity differently than later French and English cultures did. When the lovers die in Legros's account of *Varquah et Golshâ*, a prophet revives them; as Rubanovich points out, in *Varqa va Gulshâh*, that prophet is none other than Muḥammad, and the lovers' resurrection is contingent upon Jews's *conversion* to Islam (71). This detail offers ironic insight into the OF *FB*, which eliminates the deaths of both lovers but keeps the necessity of conversion. In the OF *FB*, of course, the conversion is from Islam to Christianity. What I find most interesting is that the ME *FB* texts, especially the Egerton MS, elide the stark, religious contrast by omitting the conversion of Floris and his subjects. Late fourteenth-century English audiences, it would seem, were not as threatened by cultural difference as French audiences were in the thirteenth century, and this partly explains, I suggest, why masculinity in the ME versions is not predicated on conversion by the sword.

A number of critics have also noted *FB*'s resemblance to *Noam et Neema*, an Arabic tale. Legros cites J.L. Leclanche's comparison in which both texts feature a young, female slave, in this case, Noam, who receives the same instruction as her male counterpart, Neema, a merchant. The plot further resembles *FB* in that Neema sets sail to recover Noam, and upon locating her, he uses a ruse to penetrate the Emir's harem where she is captive. His success hinges upon a porter's error, and like Floris, during the rescue, Neema is taken to be a woman. The reunited lovers are pardoned by the Emir and marry.¹⁶⁹ Key differences between *FB* and *Noam et Neema*, according to Leclanche,

¹⁶⁹ ...“la condition d’esclave de la jeune fille, le fait qu’ils reçoivent une même instruction, le voyage pour retrouver Noam (Neema n’a pas à se déguiser en marchand, il l’est), la ruse pour pénétrer dans le harem, l’erreur de porte, le rôle de l’amie et le fait [not fair] que Neema est pris pour une femme, le pardon de l’Emir, le mariage des enfants” (Legros 23)

include the absence of faked deaths in *Noam et Neema*, the lack of paternal opposition, and the lack of a game of checkers. Additionally, the children's separation differs in the Arabic tale, as does the type of helper the hero befits from. Instead of Daris the bridge-keeper, the Arabic hero obtains a doctor's aid (Legros 23).

Another key difference between the Arabic *Noam* and the OF *FB* is the elision of an integral female voice. In the former, Neema retells his story to the Emir's sister, Sette Zahia, who tells the story to her brother and gives it a bad ending: the emir of her tale kills the lovers. Sette Zahia then cunningly asks her brother what he thinks of the tale: the Emir says his counterpart acted unjustly. His sister then reveals the truth. Her brother is bound by his judgement; he pardons the two youths, and they marry. Here, words play a fundamental role: it is the made-up ending in the fiction within the fiction that permits the happy ending in the framing story (Legros 29).¹⁷⁰ The effect is similar to the counsel offered to the Caliph in a tale from the *101 Nights*. Yet such instances of ingenious female intervention, played out through speech, diminish in the medieval versions of *FB*: Floris speaks for Blanche-flour; he subordinates her ingenuity to his.

Like Leclanche, Gédéon Huet argues that we should recognize *FB*'s Arab roots; he particularly stresses its resemblance to the *Thousand and One Nights*. He notes that in *FB*, there are "Moorish" traits and themes that one finds in Arabic tales; nonetheless, a number of stories in the *Thousand and One Nights* and other stories in its cycle share

¹⁷⁰ "...qui la raconte à son frère en lui donnant un dénouement malheureux: l'Emir, dans son récit, tue les amants; après avoir terminé son histoire, la conteuse, habile, demande à son frère ce qu'il pense de cette fin: l'Emir la trouve injuste; alors Sette Zahia révèle la vérité et son frère qui ne peut revenir sur son jugement, gracie les deux jeunes gens et les marie. La parole joue donc ici un rôle fondamental: c'est le dénouement fictive du récit en abyme que permet le dénouement heureux du récit premier" (Legros 29).

essential elements with *Floire et Blanchefloire* (349).¹⁷¹ Huet argues that the Emir's harem housed within the magnificent tower in the OF poem is simply a description of either a caliph's or an Arabian sultan's harem as one finds in the *Thousand and One Nights* (350).¹⁷² Huet points out how in Richard Francis Burton's translation, each concubine has her own room (350-351), just as within the Emir of *FB*'s tower.¹⁷³

Indeed, for Huet, the OF *FB* echoes, badly, the *Thousand and One Nights* (353).¹⁷⁴ Legros expands Huet's list of resemblances to include the merchant disguise and the corrupting of the porter to enter the harem. But these are very specific "Oriental" elements; they aren't enough to support more than the claim that the author of *Floire et Blancheflor* knew the topoi of Arabic literature (23),¹⁷⁵ which, Legros argues, were well known to the OF poet.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ "...il y a dans *Fl. Et Bl.* des traits de moers et des themes qu'on retrouve dans des contes arabes; et d'autre part qu'il y a dans les *Mille et une Nuits* et dans les récits que se rapportent à ce cycle, des contes dont le fond essentiel se rapproche de notre roman" (349).

¹⁷² "[c]es détails, dégagés du fantastique auquel ils sont mêlés, sont simplement la description d'un harem de khalife ou de sultan arabe; on les retrouve dans le *Mille et une Nuits*" (350).

¹⁷³ Huet likens the Emir in *FB*, upon discovering the lovers, to Scheherazade's Sultan: "En lisant ces vers, on songe malgré soi au fameux récit qui sert de cadre aux Mille et une Nuits. L'Amirant est moins féroce que le sultan Schahriar; mais, dans les deux cas, c'est la jalousie qui est le mobile de l'inhumanité, le souverain voulant être sûr que sa femme ne sera possédée que par lui" [In these verses, in spite of ourselves, the song of the famous story serves as the frame of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The Emir is less ferocious than the Sultan of Scheherazade; moreover, within these two cases, it is the jealousy that mobilizes the inhumanity. The sovereign wants to be sure that his woman would not be possessed by any but him] (353).

¹⁷⁴ "Le récit de Floire semble un écho affaibli de celui des Mille et une Nuits, en tout cas, les deux contes sont apparentés" (353).

¹⁷⁵ "le d'guisement en marchand ou la corruption du portier pour entrer dans le harem. Or ce sont là des éléments qui bien que spécifiquement orientaux pour la plupart, sont isolés et dont par conséquent on ne peut tirer de conclusions, sinon que l'auteur de *Floire et Blancheflor* connaissait les *topoi* de la littérature arabe" (Legros 23).

¹⁷⁶ "Ainsi, nous sommes en présence d'éléments narratifs bien connus" [Thus, we are in the presence of well-known narrative elements] (Legros 21). She argues that the East offered the medieval West a number of tales and narrative forms. The manuscripts in which these survive are quite late, which complicates our assessment of the OF *FB*'s relation to Arabic material like the *Thousand and One Nights*: "L'autre source

Recent findings strengthen the argument for the influence of Scheherazade's stories on *FB*. In 2010, German Arabist Claudia Ott discovered an Andalusian manuscript of the *101 Nights* from 1234-1235 (Mudhoon and Ott 2).¹⁷⁷ It contains a tale about a young Egyptian and the maiden Gharibat al-Ḥusn, "the good stranger," that resembles *FB*. Even though the recently discovered manuscript post-dates the OF poem's composition, it may have been known prior due to oral transmission.

Beyond sharing a similar plotline, the tale of the young Egyptian underlines the capacity of words to captivate and liberate. The male protagonist, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh l'egiziano,¹⁷⁸ lives in Cairo. "[F]iglio di mercanti, di aspetto gradevole e figura aggraziata...il suo passatempo preferito era la lettura" [Son of merchants, with a pleasant and graceful figure, his preferred pastime was reading] (114). He sounds like Floris, but he is a merchant. Unlike his French counterpart, he does not need to disguise himself as one. Like Floris, Muhammad falls in love with a beautiful woman from the lower-classes. She is named Gharibat al-Ḥusn. Muhammad: "sedeva davanti alla porta di casa intento a leggere un libro, quando, d'un tratto, una fanciulla gli passò davanti a passeggio...Al vedere la fanciulla il giovane cadde a terra privo di sensi ed ella si allontanò mentre egli ancora giaceva" [He was sitting in front of the door of his house, intently reading a book,

d'inspiration, plus difficile à cerner, est l'Orient que offre à l'Occident médiéval de nombreux récits et des images qui le font rêver. Malheureusement les traductions écrites de récits orientaux sont attestées beaucoup plus tardivement" (Legros 18-19).

¹⁷⁷ Similar manuscripts existed dating at least as far back as 1150; a notebook discovered in a Cairo synagogue contains a lending note recording the title (Mudhoon and Ott 2).

¹⁷⁸ Citations are taken from Isabella Amico di Meane's Italian translation of the recently discovered Iberian manuscript of the *101 Nights*, which was found and first translated from Arabic by Claudia Ott into German. The Italian edition was produced with reference to the original Arabic text. The bracketed translations provided here are my own.

when, suddenly, a maiden walked past him... On seeing the maiden, the youth fell to the earth senseless and she walked on while he was still lying there] (115).

From the outset, the tale foregrounds literary art; Muhammad seems almost to fall into a book of romance when the maiden passes by, just as the lovers in *FB* fell into study of Latin (l.33). In the OF:

En aprendre avoient bon sens
Au retenir meillor porpens;
Livres lisoient et autours
Et quant parler oient d'amours
Ovide, ou moult se delitoient
Es euvres d'amours qu'il ooient,
Li livres les fist plus haster,
Ce sachiez bien, d'euls entramer. (ll.223-230)

[In learning they had good sense / To retain the best ideas/ Books they read and authors / And when talk they heard of love / Ovid, in whose company they greatly delighted / His works of love of they listened to / The books made them very hasty / This they knew well, of loving one another]. Lyric poems are performed several times in the Arabic tale as well. Mohammed recites poetry to his father to explain his illness.¹⁷⁹ The Caliph's sister, Rīm al-Qaṣr, sings verses,¹⁸⁰ as does the maiden Gharibat al-Ḥusn; Mohammed

¹⁷⁹ “O voi, che a causa dell’amour avete a biasimare: / Se nulla trovate che m’aiuti, lasciatemi stare! / Lasciatemi stare e la ragion vedrete delle mie cure, / E se ancora poi avrete da biasimar – che facciate pure!” [Oh you, who cause love, you are to blame / If nothing you can find that can help me, let me stay! / And if you still have to be blamed, what do you do?] (117).

¹⁸⁰ She “intonare questi versi: ‘Per ciò ch’è nel cuore, la lacrima è testimone. / Qual pioggia impetuosa scorre come un rivo il mio pianto. / Colui che ieri mi deliziava oggi mi tien desta. / La passione è mia única alleata contro il destino funesto’” [intoned these verses: ‘For what is in the heart, the tear is witness. / What

even responds to her in verse.¹⁸¹ Story, in fact, is a touchstone throughout the narrative: the Caliph's sister asks Mohammed: "E qual è la tua storia?" [And what is your story (or history)?] (122). Later, to the Caliph, Mohammed "gli riferì la sua storia" [he reported his story] (124). As the tale in the Iberian MS of the *101 Nights* closes, Shahrazād's sister entreats her to finish the tale: "O sorella mia! O Shahrazād, racconta al re, nostro signore, le tue belle storie!" [Oh, my sister, O Shahrazād, tell the king, our lord, your beautiful stories!] (124). Shahrazād agrees, replying "Così, mio padrone, prosegue la storia..." [And so, my master, the story continues...] (124). In the *FB* tradition, the protagonists may not sing, but Floris's repeated explanations to the lady of the inn, the burgess, Daris, the porter, and the Emir—in which he tells his tale—allows him, like Shahrazād and the young Egyptian in her story, to survive (ll.539-544,713-718);¹⁸² for without Blancheflour, Floris makes us believe, he would die.

Like *FB*, the tale from the Iberian *101 Nights* also features conventional lovers who are separated and reunited; they experience misfortunes and learn to practice mild deceptions, yet their piteous journey comes to a happy conclusion when the tale they tell

impetuous rain flows like a river, my crying. / The one who yesterday delighted me, today awakens me. The passion is my only ally against baleful destiny] (121).

¹⁸¹ "a fanciulla prese un liuto, lo accordò e intonò i seguenti versi: 'Ecco la primavera, questi i suoi fiori. / Germogliano gli alberi, splendore del creato e festa! / Soseggia il tuo vino, in memoria dell'amato, e canta, / Egli è via, via per sempre, e traccia non ne resta'" [the maiden took a lute, which she tuned and intoned the following verses: 'Here is spring, these are our flowers. / The trees sprout, splendor of creation and celebration! / Sip your wine, in memory of the beloved, and sing. / He is away, away for always, and traces do not remain] (122). To this, Mohammed responds: 'Mirar il semblante dell'amato è puro godiemento, / Il distacco dall'amato è doloroso tormento. / I tormenti paiti non so esprimere a parole, / Dio solo il mio supplizio e la mia umiliazione che duole. / Ho sempre provato pietà per chi dall'amore è tormentato, / Finché io stesso la vittima e il condannato'" [To look upon the semblance of the beloved is pure enjoyment. The distance from the lover is painful torment. / The torments I cannot express in words, / God alone tortures me and mine is the humiliation of a condemned man. / I have always tried pity for those in love and tormented. / As long as I am the victim and the condemned] (122).

¹⁸² In each example cited here, the final words are "for to winne," which underscores the extent to which recovering Blancheflour is a game won by "gin," or ingenuity, which also appears in both speeches.

frees them from prison. When Muhammad returns home after seeing Gharibat al-Husn, his health rapidly declines, so much so that his father becomes intensely worried. A physician reveals that the malady Muhammad suffers from is love: “il medico si rivolse al padre... tuo figlio soffre della malattia dell’amore” [the doctor reported to the father – your son suffers from the malady of love] (117). The father heeds the doctor’s advice and employs all means necessary to heal his son, lest he die. He contracts a marriage between his son and Gharibat al-Husn, “l’Insolitamente bella” [the unusually beautiful] (118).¹⁸³ As she is *en route* to her groom’s abode, she is mistaken for one of the camel-mounted maidens being taken to Caliph al-Mu’tasim, ruler of Alexandria and Cairo:

...uscí subito di casa e montò sulla cavalcatura. In quel momento alla domestica sovvenne di essersi scordata di fare una cosa: lasciò la ragazza in groppa alla giumenta davati alla porta di casa e rientrò... cento schiave su altrettanti animali da sella e che la carovana con le schiave sfilasse davanti alla faciulla in quel preciso istante. Gharibat al-Husn si ritrovò in mezzo alle schiave. (118)

[She exited the house right away and mounted her ride. In that moment the maid accompanying her remembered she had left something undone: she left the girl on the back of the mare in front of the door of the house and re-entered... a hundred slaves saddled on the same number of animals and that caravan with the slaves lined up in front of the maiden in that precise moment. Gharibat al-Husn found herself among the slaves]. Caught up in the caravan, Gharibat al-Husn arrives in Baghdad where she is given to the

¹⁸³ “Pagò al padre della fanciulla il prezzo per la sposa e il sui corredo...” [He paid the maiden’s father the price for the bride and her kit] (118).

Caliph's sister, Rīm al-Qaṣr, "white gazelle of the palace," as an attendant.¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Muhammad's father, like Floris's in *FB*, outfits his son for travel.¹⁸⁵ Muhammad, like Floris, locates his beloved abroad by acquiring knowledge from strangers, in this case, customers who buy his perfumes: "Aprí una bottega nel mercato dei commercianti di profumi...conquistandosi le simpatie della gente con la sua cortesia e generosità" [He opened a perfume shop in the commercial market...winning the people with his courtesy and generosity] (120). Muhammad is courteous and generous like Floris, and he trades the narrative of his love in exchange for information about his lost betrothed. He entreats a page for a favor: "il giovane gli spiegò tutto ciò che gli era capitato e gli raccontò la sua storia per intero, dall'inizio alla fine" [the youth explained all that had befallen him and recounted his entire story, from the beginning to the end] (120), and the page promises to arrange for him to contact Gharibat al-Husn (120).

When the page returns, moved by Muhammad's story, he plays the role of Floris's porter. His ruse disguises the young Egyptian as a woman, and he leads him secretly to the palace: "gli diede abiti femminili e gioielli, prese un vassoio di bambú e glielo mise sul capo e lo condusse a palazzo" [he gave him women's clothes and jewelry, took a bamboo tray and placed it on his head and led him to the palace] (120). As in the *FB* tradition, the protagonist enlists an insider to disguise himself and gain entrance to the ladies' quarters: "E gli descrisse come giungere nella stanza dove si trovava la ragazza" [He described how to get into the room where he would find the girl] (120). Like Floris, Muhammad's masculinity is called into question; where the former hides himself in

¹⁸⁴ "Il califfo, mosso a compassione, dispose allora che la portassero nel palazzo della sorella" [the Caliph, moved to compassion, decided then that she would be taken to the palace of his sister] (119).

¹⁸⁵ "subito predispose quanto gli abbisognava per il viaggio e gli diede un po' di denaro da portare con sé" [right away he arranged all he needed for the voyage and gave him some money to take with him] (120).

flowers, the latter dresses as a woman. Like Floris again, Muhammad doesn't reach his intended destination. He, too, is spotted by an unintended maiden, the confidante of his beloved: “[i]l figlio del mercante se avviò ma, dimenticatasi la descrizione del paggio, di punto in bianco non seppe piú da che parte dirigersi. Mentre girovagava d'un tratto udí una voce...andò nella direzione dalla quale proveniva la voce ed entrò in una stanza che, però, non era quella che gli aveva indicato il paggio...era la sorella del califfo” [The son of the merchant set out but, having forgotten the page's description, he suddenly didn't know which way to go. As he turned about he suddenly heard a voice...he walked in the direction from which the voice came and entered a room that, however, was not the one that the page had indicated...it was the sister of the Caliph's] (121).

The maiden who hears Muhammad's story, Rīm al-Qaṣr, sister to the Caliph, is, much like Claris, moved to help him (122). She calls Gharibat al-Husn to join them, and they spend the night together eating and drinking. When by chance, the Caliph pays his sister a visit, “con una mano impugnò la spada, con l'altra prese una candela [with one hand he grasped a sword, and held a candle in the other] (123), he discovers the three inebriated youths together: “In mezzo alle due fanciulle assopite giaceva il giovane egiziano” [In between the two maidens lay dozing the young Egyptian] (123). Like *FB*'s Emir, the Caliph's first instinct is to run them through, but he reconsiders: “Il califfo afferrò la spada e già si apprestava a fare una carneficina, quando desistette dal suo proposito e andò invece nella stanza della madre” [the Caliph seized the sword and was indeed prepared to slaughter them, when he desisted from his intent and went instead to his mother's room] (123). The matriarch arrives on the scene and orders Muhammad to share his story. When she had heard it, she advises the Caliph “Non prendere decisioni

affrettate, figlio mio. Dio è clemente e non precipita le cose” [Don’t make hasty decisions, my son. God is merciful and doesn’t rush things] (124). She suggests he give them money, and exile them (124), which he does, and as soon as the young Egyptian arrives home, “sposò quindi la sorella di al-Mu‘tašim, organizzò sontuoso pranzo di nozze e da allora in poi visse lieto insieme alle due donne” [he married the sister of al-Mu‘tašim, organized a sumptuous nuptial feast, and from then on lived happily with the two women] (125).

As in *FB*, what saves the lovers is the protagonist’s narrative of what has happened to them. But although the final scenes in the tale from the *101 Nights* and in *FB* are similar, the latter circumscribes the power and agency of female speech far more than the former. Indeed, the fact that Scheherazade tells the tale of the young Egyptian to save her own life, as well as to teach the Sultan how to govern justly, in itself validates the authority of women, even if that authority remains contingent and always in peril. Moreover, in the Arabic text, two women, the Caliph’s clever sister and his mother, save the couple. In the *FB* texts, it is a man.¹⁸⁶ Women’s counsel is much more suspect in *FB* than in its Eastern analogues.¹⁸⁷

By highlighting its Arabic analogues, the ideological biases of the Old French *Floire et Blanchefleur* come clearly into view. As Huet points out, the poet at times

¹⁸⁶The man, however, the king who implores the Emir to hear the lovers’ case, bears the ring of protection given Floris by his mother. This detail, I think, bears with it the residue of women’s authority so evident in the tale from the *101 Nights* and in the Arabic tale *Noam et Neema*. Resemblances between the *101 Nights*’s “Story of the Young Egyptian” and the OF *FB* suggest an even closer relationship between them than originally suggested by Huet.

¹⁸⁷We see this in the Queen’s flawed plans, the lie told by Blanchefleur’s mother, and the trick Claris plays on her fellows. To the contrary, of course, the Emir weds Claris as Blanchefleur advises, and the lady at the first inn helps Floris find Blanchefleur. Nonetheless, female advice appears less trustworthy in the *FB* stories than it does in its Eastern analogues, where sisters and female advisors play key roles. The Caliph’s sister and mother are integral to resolution of the plot in the tale from the *101 Nights*. This is also true of the Persian *Noam et Neema*, but it is much less the case in *FB*.

didn't well understand his sources (352);¹⁸⁸ he knew, though, that he had to efface those traits and qualities a Western audience would have found disturbing (349).¹⁸⁹ Authority, as we have seen, had to be invested in men, as it still is throughout the world today.

The subordination of women extends to the way song was performed in the Middle Ages, and a foray into the history of musical performance suggests that, in history as in fictions like *FB*, circumscribing women's speech within bounds of male authority reinforced notions of masculine superiority. As Judith Cohen points out, "[w]omen were instrumentalists as well as singers. In all three cultures [Muslim, Judaic, and Christian], they were – and throughout the Mediterranean still are – associated with percussion instruments" (67). The association reaches back to "Myriam playing the tambourine at the parting of the Red Sea" (67). Juvenal also describes "Spanish singing-girls with castanets," and "Isidore of Seville [says] that women invented percussion" (Cohen 67).¹⁹⁰ Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria* depict "several miniatures of women musicians of the three cultures" (67).¹⁹¹ Maria Coldwell says, "[d]ocumentary and iconographic evidence suggests that women in Spain played a wide variety of musical instruments, Moorish women routinely learned to play the lute, the *rabel* (rebec), the *manucordio*

¹⁸⁸ "...le trouver ne comprenait pas bien de quoi il s'agissait" (352). For example, Huet shows the relationship between Blanche flour and Claris was modified.

¹⁸⁹ "parce que, dans ces récits, pour donner à la narration une couleur occidentale et chevaleresque, on a précisément effacé les traits exotiques, qu'une comparaison avec les versions du premier cycle fait d'autant mieux ressortir" (349).

¹⁹⁰ Anne Klinck notes: "the dancing girls of Cadiz mentioned by classical Roman authors like Pliny and Juvenal may represent a tradition going back to Phoenician settlers of around 1000 B.C. Both the Greeks and the Romans regarded the eastern and the western Mediterranean as sources of imported luxury and licentiousness, a view which is reflected in the references to those 'girls from Cadiz' who provided erotic entertainment at banquets" (24).

¹⁹¹ "Christian women were also sent as captives to Muslim Andalusia, to be trained as musicians, sometimes becoming part of courtly musical ensembles" (Cohen 69).

(monochord), and the organ so as to be a ‘solace for their husbands’” (44). Musical servants and courtesans were “a fixture in Moorish Spain,” and the “tradition of singing and dancing slave girls and harem members extends back into Near Eastern Islamic history. As early as the eighth century, Arabian conquests had brought captive women of various races and classes into slavery” (Coldwell 43). Such women “were trained as singers and instrumentalists at the music schools of the Hijāz and Irāq to supply harems of the nobility, not only with beauty, but also with musical talent” (43).¹⁹² Despite the broad association of women with musical production, little evidence testifies to female authorship, as their subservient roles and their trafficking might suggest.

Indeed, some trained performers were “sold to Arabian nobility in Spain” (Coldwell 43), where, greatly influenced by Arab customs, wealthy Christian Spaniards “began to keep ‘singing-girls’ as entertainers” (44). Many women, some trained performers, were taken to France after the siege of Barbastro in 1064. “Guillem VIII, for example, brought a large number of female slaves to Poitier” (Zaerr 44), many of whom bore the stories and art forms of their training. As Linda Marie Zaerr points out, there is evidence “that Muslim women performers...were active in France in the thirteenth century” undoubtedly because “female Muslim entertainers were widely dispersed as slaves” (44). These trafficked women could have disseminated Eastern literary forms and content, even if they were never formally credited for doing so.

¹⁹² An early eleventh-century account describes the performance of a trained female performer in Malaga. A visitor unable to sleep was soothed by the beautiful music and voice of a female entertainer who, as “some twenty people sitting with desserts and drinks...[kept] her audience spellbound” (Coldwell 43). The next day, the onlooker learned “that the slave girl was from Baghdad, and one of the best singers of Al-Mansur bin Abi Amir” (Coldwell 43).

It is also quite possible that these various songs, over time, inflected, if not inspired, troubairitz lyrics,¹⁹³ which are often octosyllabic. If, as Evelyn Birge Vitz argues, “the octosyllabic rhymed couplet was not a clerical invention, or simply the translation of a learned Latin form, [but rather] was rooted in French oral culture” (24), then the form itself may bear witness to a cross-cultural conversation with Iberian poetry, which made use of the same metrical pattern.

The connection between women and musical performance extended to troubairitz lyrics and other genres as well, as is visible in traces of their performativity. Though usually read “from a written text with no melody enriching and sustaining the words” (Bruckner, Shepard, and White xvii), the lyrics nevertheless had an “intended life in performance and song” (xvii). Vitz enlarges the argument: “we should understand both epic and romance as being – at least in the twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries – performed genres, in a dramatic and a musical sense of the word” (188).¹⁹⁴ Given women’s formal training in the East and their movement through the Iberian Peninsula northward,¹⁹⁵ Scheherazade may not only have been a familiar figure among medieval audiences, she may have been a fictional counterpart to actual female performers.

¹⁹³ “The troubairitz give precious testimony of the ways aristocratic women in Southern France were able to participate in the game and life of poetry, not only as patrons and objects of song but as poets singing and reshaping the art of the troubadours” (Bruckner, Shepard, and White xv).

¹⁹⁴ Romance was performed by *jongleurs* and minstrels (Vitz 188); their presentations were likely “surrounded by music in the festive performance situations that our literary and historical texts describe” (188). A “romance is almost never referred to as a ‘song[.]’” or *chanson*, although some may have been listed, on occasion, “among the works that are sung by performers...the performer who recites romance is not required by any convention to actually sing...he has his hands free: no vielle, no bow” (189). Given the performer’s free digits, romance content is “full of small-scale gestures – of wooing, of welcoming and bidding adieux” (Vitz 189). Romances contain “many gestures of piety: people cross themselves and fold their hands in prayer. These are all highly conventional actions that it would have been very easy for a performer to carry out or imitate. But precisely for this reason, it would have been hard – culturally difficult – to *avoid* enacting them” (Vitz 189).

¹⁹⁵ Dwight Reynolds corroborates accounts that female singers were often trained in Medina (184).

Of course, as Judith Cohen shows, female performative art was ultimately controlled by men. The latter determined the appropriateness and conditions of female musical productions. (68). If professional female performers from the lower social strata were freer in their art than upper-class women (69), they were also deemed women of ill-repute. Known as *soldadeiras*, these women were “paid for their services, musical or otherwise” (Cohen 69).¹⁹⁶ Ashurst underscores “the function and purpose of the *soldadeiras* as objects of male regard: they were there for men” (31). Klinck, too, in reference to the singing girls of Cádiz and the erotically charged *kharjas* of Al-Andalus, attests to the function of female-voiced lyric as “entertainment for the benefit of men” (25). Precisely for this reason, there is a dearth of evidence that describes the quality of the *soldadeiras*’ performances.

If we look beyond material analogous to *FB* and focus on social changes, such as those concerning the traffic of artistically skilled women cotemporaneous with *FB* manuscript production, the elision of cultural markers in the Egerton *FB* becomes quite striking. Whether or not the result of scribal error, this *Floris and Blancheflour* diminishes the literary, cultural, and religious alterity of the Eastern other and elevates a version of masculinity predicated on male ingenuity that supersedes women’s.

The Egerton *FB* contains fewer non-Christian stereotypes than its immediate predecessor preserved in the Auchinleck MS. For example, in the Egerton version, Floris and his family are not explicitly labelled pagans, or Saracens, or infidels, or Muslims, or Moors. Indeed, they are surprisingly Christian-like: the hero’s parents address prayers to a monotheistic God; at one point, his father hopes that “Jhesu thee of care unbinde”

¹⁹⁶ Prostitution was assumed as her other vocation (Cohen 68). *Soldadeira* derives from *soldado/soldada*, which means salaried (69); other female performers were known as *juglaresas*.

(1.338).¹⁹⁷ In his edition of the Auchinleck MS (supplemented by the Egerton MS), Kooper suggests that this surprising wish is a “small slip of the [Egerton] scribe: Floris and his family are pagans, though Blancheflour’s mother is Christian.” Yet the Queen makes the same “slip” after foiling Floris’s suicide attempt. She runs to the King and protests his hard sentence of the young lovers by crying “For Goddes love, sir, mercy!” (1.300). ME grammar obfuscates whether or not “Goddes” is singular or plural. As a result, the God prayed to cannot be said with assurance to be Islamic, Christian, or multiple and pagan. We see the same blending when Floris reunites with Blancheflour:

Floris then to speke bigan
 And saide. “Lorde, that madest man,
 I it thonke Goddes Sone
 that all my care I have overcome
 Now my leve I have y-founde;
 Of all my care I am unbounde.” (ll.827-832)¹⁹⁸

Christians define themselves as such by accepting Christ, God’s son, as their savior. Consequently, Floris’s statement positions him as Christian. In the OF versions of *FB* he

¹⁹⁷ From 711-1031, maps of the Iberian Peninsula show its northern kingdoms, whose southern borders the Duero River demarcates, including Asturias-Leon, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia, as decidedly Christian (Constable 32). By 1095, the western kingdoms of Castile, Leon, and then, Galicia, stretched their southern border between Coimbra and Toledo, halfway following the Tagus River before swooping southeast of Guadalajara and up to the Duero’s headwaters (156). The extension of Christian governance southward—centrally towards the Guadalquivir River and eastward to encompass Zaragoza—circa 1212—suggests nobles in the Latin West would have increasingly begun to see “Spain” not as Muslim (or Pagan), but as Christian (226). It’s important to note that the areas where different religious groups lived did not always map out according to tidy boundaries, either, as Catlos shows of Zaragoza circa 1200 (*The Victors* 117).

¹⁹⁸ In the Auchinleck, Floris makes a similar apostrophe that seems to be a faithful reference to Jesus: “Florice ferst speke bigan, / And saide: “Louerd that madest man, / Thee I thanke, Godes sone, / Nou al mi care ich have overcome. / And nou ich have mi lef ifounde, / Of al mi kare ich am unbounde” (ll.898-903). He makes no such speech of thanks in the OF text.

is unequivocally pagan. The Egerton version invites us to wonder whether the English may have assumed Spaniards might as likely be Christians as not.

Likewise, although the Emir shares some of the vices we have seen attributed Muslims in the *Sowdowne of Babylone*, he also tempers his anger,¹⁹⁹ and he listens to reason.²⁰⁰ The wrath the Emir expresses in his opening remarks at court is the wrath of a man whose property has been damaged (K. Kelly 109);²⁰¹ it is conditional rather than a fixture of his character. Furthermore, he knights Floris according to the chivalric principles the ME *Floris*'s audience would share. His final blessing of the lovers' marriage would also have endeared him to an audience that disapproved of clandestine unions. He demonstrates a kindness one could easily call Christian when, as Blancheflour advises, he releases Claris from the tower and marries her (ll.1064-1070).

The Emir and his court are more "othered" than Floris's parents, the King and Queen; their differences from Christians are nonetheless minimalized. They lack the conspicuous markers of difference used in other versions of the story and in the martial texts examined in Chapter Two. In the final court scene, for instance, the Auchinleck MS indicates that two Saracens bring forth the lovers, whereas in the Egerton version the

¹⁹⁹ "He quaked for tene there he stood; / Hem to sloon was in his moode; / Yit he thought, or he hem quelde, / What they were, they shuld him tell / And seth he will with dome hem done" (ll.902-906).

²⁰⁰ "I thought to have slain hem booth, / I was so wroth and so woode; / Yit I withdrough min hoot bloode / Till I have sende after you, by assent, / To wreke me with jugement" (ll.935-939).

²⁰¹ "...Lordings, with much honour, / Ye herde speke of Blauncheflour-- / That I bought hur dere aflight / For seven sithes of golde hur wight. / For I wende without wene, / That faire maide to have had to queen" (ll.924-929).

chaperones are simply sergeants.²⁰² The descriptions of the Emir's minions are more culturally neutral in the Egerton MS than in the earlier Auchinleck MS.

Because the Egerton FB does not insist on religious and cultural distinctions, it allows us to explore the ways in which its representation of gender identity differs from that in the OF *Floire*. The Egerton *FB* trades in conceptions of masculinity instead of cultural clash. Floris, unlike the heroes examined in the previous chapter, does not fight. Rather, he engages his wit. His masculine identity contrasts with the ideals presented in the *Chanson de Roland* and in romances like *Guy of Warwick*. Instead of a warrior for Christ who wields a sword, Floris is a man who engineers outcomes with his intellect. A *ginour*, he is master of both wit and will. Floris' weaponry calls to mind the marks on history struck not with swords, but rather with styluses, such as those made by Averroës and Maimonides. Like these scholars, the Egerton *Floris* embodies the hybridized culture of Al-Andalus.

Floris's ingenuity proves valuable, but he offers no proof of physical prowess, which makes his masculinity suspect. Indeed, both the OF and ME versions of *FB* call attention to the protagonists' resemblance to one another. Floris appears so feminine that the Emir must uncover his chest to assess his gender; the OF revels in describing his beauty.²⁰³ Yet for his outward femininity, Floris makes the claim "I am man; I shal

²⁰² Compare the Auchinleck MS's depiction from Erik Kooper's edition: "After the children nou men sendeth / Hem to brenne fur men tendeth. / Twaie Sarazins forth hem bringe / Toward here deth, sore wepinge" (ll.1058-1061) to the Egerton's portrayal: "After the children have they sent—To brenne hem was his entent. / Two serjeauntes hem gan bring / Toward hur deth all weeping. (ll. 952-955). In OF, two slaves escort the lovers: "Dui serf les amaint devant" (l.2564).

²⁰³ "Floires li enfes est moult biaus / De son aage damoisiaus. / Aage avoit de quatorze anz / Et nepouree assez est granz, / Si sourcil sont brun et petit, / Nus hom de chafr plus biau ne vit. / Si oil sont gros por le plorer; / Nus ne s'en poist saoler / D'els esgarder, s'il fussent lié, / Més de plorer sont emirié. / Sa face resemble soleil / Que veons par matin verveil, / N én sa face n'en son menton/ N ávoit ne barbe ne grenon" (ll.2620-2633).

bifore,” which, because of his gender, he wins an opportunity to prove. In succeeding, he not only achieves unity with his female counterpart, but he also subjects her, and his emotions, which are womanly, to their rightful sovereign: his intellect. The portrayal disrupts conceptions of masculinity examined in the previous chapter, and it does so at the expense of female authority.²⁰⁴

The Egerton MS’s *Floris* shifts focus from cultural clash to gender negotiation, in part, I argue, because intellectual developments from the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, both in law and in scholastic disputation, diminished the desire to crusade against the infidel. In the OF *FB*’s eastern analogues, sovereign decisions determine the lovers’ fates; this may be true in *FB* as well, but the lovers’ sentencing follows a formal trial. Because Floris’s performance in the Emir’s courtroom is the final test through which he proves himself a man, and occurs, according to Huizinga’s definition, in a ludic space, I will now show how proceedings in *FB*’s court scene evidence the poet’s and his audience’s knowledge of legal practices, which were an increasingly codified branch of intellectualism in the Middle Ages; doing so helps explain, in part, the Egerton MS’s interest in negotiating gender more than cultural difference.

Johan Huizinga identifies courts of law as ludic, for what transpires in them follows specific rules thereunto (29); in the Emir’s court, a scene with grave implications for Floris’s masculine identity,²⁰⁵ proceedings adhere to precepts of law and disputation that a fourteenth-century audience would have recognized. The study of Roman and

²⁰⁴ The tale reifies the privilege of male narrative over women’s speech, a norm explained in the introduction, in which the Fall indicted women’s speech and intellect. Women became associated with the body and with animal functions of reproduction; therefore it seemed only reasonable and natural that they would be subject to male authority.

²⁰⁵ Floris must articulate his case effectively, proving himself a man and worthy sovereign, if he and Blanche flour are to survive.

canon law, *ius commune*, developed consistent legal practices and standardized interpretations of the law (Eichbauer 73). In the twelfth century, *inquisitions*, or legal inquiries, were first used “to investigate clerical crimes” but Pope Innocent III sanctioned their wider use at the IV Lateran Council in 1215 (74). That the Emir chooses to lower his sword and launch a formal investigation into Floris and Blancheflour’s affair reflects the expansion of inquisitorial practices in the thirteenth century;²⁰⁶ it also increases the poem’s “tension and uncertainty,” which “are integral parts of play” (Huizinga 29). Within the ludic setting of the Emir’s court, we see that some play can be very serious indeed (24).

The Emir levels his charges after he finds Floris in Blancheflour’s bed. He registers Floris a “groom” (l.901), and recognizes that Blancheflour has been despoiled, for which

He quaked for tene there he stood;

Hem to sloon was in his moode;

Yit he thought, or he hem quelde,

What they were, they shuld him telle. (ll.902-905)

Rather than slay the offenders without trial, the Emir binds Floris and Blancheflour and imprisons them (ll. 916-917); then “he after his barons sent / To wreke him after jugement” (ll.918-919). He stands before an assembly of his barons “With semblaunt wroth withalle” and pleads his case (l.923); he argues Blancheflour is his property, that

²⁰⁶ In fourteenth-century England, legal practice expanded under Edward III. In 1349 and 1351, his government empowered country tribunals with enforcing post-plague, wage-related legislation. When this proved successful, “in 1361-2 the commissioners of the peace were given power not only to judge cases brought under the labour laws but also to determine all manner of trespasses and felonies committed within their...jurisdiction” (Ormrod, “England” 295). This expansion of judicial practice in the mid to late-fourteenth century suggests that the dispute decided in the Emir’s court likely proceeded in accordance with increasingly familiar legal practices.

he honored her, and that he has shown restraint: “Yit I withdrough min hoot bloode” (1.937).²⁰⁷ His premises require the barons to assess his case economically, as a case of damaged goods; civilly, with regard to domestic relations; and personally, in terms of his character. In all, he believes his actions are justified and says, “Wreke me soon of my foon” (1.941). His request, however, reveals him no sovereign, for he must abide by his barons’ judgement: the law.²⁰⁸ An Emir’s begging his barons’ for permission, let alone to redress his cuckolding—in public—seems absurd; yet this ludic(rous) context is the crucible within which Floris forges his masculine identity.

In a move that affirms the preeminence of the court and occasions Floris’s performance, a king replies to the Emir’s request:

We have herd all this shame and shonde;
But or we hem to deth deme,
Lat us hem see, yif it thee queeme,
What they wolde spekeor sigge,
Yif they will aught again us legge;
Hit were nought right jugement
Without answeere make acouplement. (ll.943-949)

²⁰⁷ The Emir’s performance recalls Ganelon’s address to Charlemagne’s court; both he and Ganelon strive to regain their honor as men before a gathering of their peers. They form arguments based on traditional models of male authority and their own character. Like Ganelon, the Emir will lose, bested by a man who embodies a new masculine ideal.

²⁰⁸ Such limits on sovereign power were true in late-fourteenth century England as well. “[I]ncreasing complexities of government were reflected in the development of a more refined judicial system,” including “the emergence of parliament as a taxative and legislative assembly” (Ormrod, “England” 273), which had power to check the King’s agenda. For example, the Good Parliament of 1376 offered a “comprehensive indictment of the crown’s military and domestic policies” when it “refused to grant the king a direct tax” (Ormrod, “England” 295). That the Emir must yield to due process and the will of his barons seems to reflect, to an extent, realities in the fourteenth-century.

His statement reveals the court scene's indebtedness to established legal practices. The king affirms the "rules" of the court, that one is assumed innocent until proven otherwise, that he should be summoned to trial, and that the accused should have an opportunity to speak in his or her own defense (Eichbauer 74). Without Floris and Blancheflour's testimony, the king argues, "What mister is to bere witness?" (l.951), which would ensure the Emir, like the barons, is subject to the law (74). The protection of these "procedural rights," while serious, is also ludic, for it ensures what transpires within the "hallowed" space of the courtroom adheres to the rules established unto it.

The *FB* texts reflect expectations for a fair trial; what ensures it, when the Emir resists the first king's request, is a warrant of the lovers' nobility; the king bearing Floris's discarded ring contends that "it is well more worship / Floris counsel that ye weete" (ll.1030-1031). The ring testifies to the lovers' *publica fama*, their reputation,²⁰⁹ which was so valuable that it could "change the lives and fortunes of men and women" (Brundage 29), for it granted one right to fair trial, as it does Floris and Blancheflour.²¹⁰ If the Emir failed to uphold the law he would invalidate the belief that all are bound by it and subject to the same rights.²¹¹ That an emir should yield to a discarded trifle such as

²⁰⁹ A person's *fama* affected the charges a man could suffer in court as well as the amount of evidence required to substantiate those charges (Kuehn 35). As Thomas Kuehn explains, *fama* functioned as a kind of legal status.

²¹⁰ In thirteenth-century France, for instance, the court system excluded "infamous" persons, those of *mala fama*, from participating in legal proceedings (Akehurst 76). In fourteenth-century Tuscany, Paolo da Certaldo, a merchant, advised: "It is better for a man to have good *fama* in this world than to have great wealth" (Kuehn 32). From the twelfth through fourteenth centuries in the Latin West, if one had *bona fama*, then an accusation proceeded to a "trial proper (*inquisition specialis*)" (Eichbauer 73), in which a judge "would call witnesses, hear testimony, and determine whether what had taken place was a crime and whether to proceed with the case" (73).

²¹¹ The Statue of Winchester in England testifies to insular law practices. It was intended to empower local courts run by seigneurial officials who in turn reported on criminal activity to the King in Parliament (Summerson 232-233, 236). "In 1300 the *Articuli super cartas* lamented that there were more criminals...and that robberies...had increased" (238), suggesting the Statute's failure, which necessitated,

Floris's ring is comic, yet doing so also maintains the court's ludic nature by refusing to violate its rules. In the process, the romance underscores proper male sovereignty as that which bends, without cheating, to the law.

In addition to the legal developments displayed in *FB*'s court scene, developing literacy, such as the dialogic reasoning employed in the universities to uncover truths about phenomenological issues—like God's omnipotence—contributed, as I will show, to an erosion of faith in the church.²¹² This, in turn, discouraged would-be crusaders from taking the cross and thereby diminished fears about non-Christian "others."

The thirteenth-century romance of *Floris and Blancheflour* is uniquely situated, Patricia Clare Ingham points out, within a "context of intercultural collaborations associated with scholasticism" (81). The children "To scole they were put; / Both they were good of witte" (ll.25-26), and

When they had five yere to scole gon,

So well they had learned tho,

Inough they couth of Latine

And well write on parchemine. (ll.31-34)

in turn, its recirculation and public reading four times a year (Summerson 238). In 1306, Edward I ordered sheriffs to "read out in the Statute in their County Courts and throughout their shires" (239), a process which would have contributed to fourteenth-century English familiarity with law proceedings.

²¹² The study of philosophy and theology reached their apex between 1220 and 1350 (Knowles 79-80), and ripple effects of scholastic developments from this time are visible in the later *FB* narratives' court scene. Although philosophy and theology seemed to drift "more and more apart," occasioning a thirteenth-century decline in scholasticism, earlier, eleventh-century minds had seized upon literature and humanism; twelfth century intellectuals reveled in humanism and had gravitated towards dialectic and speculative theology (Knowles 82). Dialectical masters like Peter Abelard drew eager minds to his own (84), giving rise to the cathedral schools, and later, universities. According to David Luscombe, Peter Abelard, who lived from 1079-1142, became famous for his arguments "over the nature of the universals" (47).

The lovers' proficiency in Latin, Ingham posits, "gesture[s] towards the history of competition between Latinate scholasticism and vernacular poetics, and it resonates as well with English schooling at the time" (99).²¹³

By the fourteenth-century and the approximate era of the Auchinleck and Egerton versions of *FB*, increased exposure to philosophy, logic, and science had returned thinkers to theological questions that in turn, beset the church.²¹⁴ Philosophic study had introduced "a taste of science and a spirit of rational analysis that the church ultimately could not control" (Artz 263). Although both the church and the papacy waxed during the thirteenth century "in power and prestige" (Artz 287), a century later, the union of "Christendom into one community" (287), fragmented, epitomized by the papal schism (Bell 743). This fragmentation, I argue, correlates to the rise of literacy and logic.

Although educational training and materials had been restricted, in the main, to clerical contexts at the beginning of scholasticism, after the thirteenth-century, "vernacular literature... learning, art, and music" had become less and "less the monopoly of the clergy" (Artz 452), thereby increasing literacy among women and the laity.²¹⁵ Indeed, by the fourteenth-century, Aristotelian logic had become such a linchpin of

²¹³ The High Middle English *FB* was composed pre-1250. As Ingham points out, cross-cultural scholastic collaboration "quite literally both required and produced Europe's desire for the sophisticated learning of the Arabic world" (110).

²¹⁴ From the end of eleventh century to the beginning of the twelfth, scholars puzzled not only upon interpretations of the law, but over the question of universals, which David Knowles explains as "the degree of reality and significance attributable to the mental perception of a similarity between groups of individual beings that can only be expressed by a term common to all, such as man, horse or rose, with its abstract equivalent such as 'humanity' or 'human nature'" (107). The same question of universals would continue to inspire and confound scholars well into the fourteenth-century, including Duns Scotus and William Ockham (Luscombe 147).

²¹⁵ Cathedral schools were initial storehouses of knowledge. The bishops administering them "collected libraries, patronized scholars, poets, artists, and musicians" (Artz 229), which made knowledge available to some men, while blocking access to most women.

education that it infiltrated even commoners' quotidian experiences. Sermons of the time employed the structure of academic texts (Luscombe 136), and outside the scholastic sphere, "[r]igorous logical argument, the marshalling of philosophical texts, citations from the works of recent or contemporary masters, explicit-problem-solving, and *quaestiones*" appeared (136).²¹⁶ such learning, I have argued, is what distinguishes Floris in the courtroom as a man.

By sparking, rather than quelling doctrinal disputes, Aristotelian logic, over time, weakened the church's hold on medieval society's ideological assumptions. When widespread famines and plagues pushed faithful and unfaithful alike further into the embrace of the fourteenth-century church, the thirst for emotional and religious support inflamed demand for "spiritual certainties," which coincided with "a dramatic increase in recognized heresies" (Bell 743). Past assurances no longer slaked believers' spiritual thirst. For, if the institution itself were fallible and untrustworthy, as the papal schism and repeated natural disasters seemed to suggest, then how was one to adjudicate the propriety of church causes, like the crusades? Such logic starved campaigns "against the

²¹⁶ As literacy spread, the problem of universals returned amidst "a vigorous re-examination of the...ideas of Aristotle and others" in the fourteenth-century (Artz 247). The problem inspired and confounded Duns Scotus and William Ockham in succession, doing little in the process to rectify problems of the church (Luscombe 147). As Josef Pieper argues, Ockham's thinking signals the "break down" of Christianity as it had developed out of antiquity (150). Indeed, much contemporary "[d]ebate focused on the kind of power exercised by God" (Luscombe 153), on God's foreknowledge of future events, and on the question of free will. Debaters reasoned, for instance, that God's power cannot be limited if God is omnipotent, so there is an absolute power (*potential absoluta*) which can, for example, even order men to hate God. On the other hand, it is a limited power (*potential ordinata*) since it is subject to the principle of contradiction" (Luscombe 153). As regards free will, scholars reasoned that, following natural law, the premise whereby "a human action is the result either of necessity or of free will" indicates that "will and necessity cannot coexist or coincide" (Luscombe 153). This raised the question: "But can they coincide in God? Can God's will be supremely free and yet supremely reasonable and good?" (153). Scholars also debated the extent of God's power over past and future events (154-155) and the extent of his "foreknowledge of future contingencies: if God knows with certainty what people will do in the future, what role is there for human free choice, and given that people have free will, how can God know with certainty what they will choose to do?" (Luscombe 156).

infidel” for supporters and contributes to why I argue the Egerton *FB*, compared to OF versions, appears disinterested in the matter of cultural clash.

The Old French poems, steeped not in judiciary logic and diffused Aristotelianism, but rather, in the context of twelfth-century France’s deep engagement in the second and third crusades, are most certainly dramas of cultural negotiation. Though many crusade kingdoms in the Levant were ruled by Franks and in conflict with Muslims, these interactions nonetheless provided cultural links between the West and East (Legros 19). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, “men from Lorraine and north France stayed within the kingdom of Jerusalem; the Provençals went to Tripoli; the Normans to Antioch” in what was known as Outremer (Mayer 152).²¹⁷ Poitier was linked to the Mozarabic courts from the beginning of the twelfth century, and ties were strengthened by the establishment of Frankish rule over Jerusalem after the first crusade (Legros 19). In addition, pilgrimage and trade beyond Mediterranean shores further linked France to the East (Legros 19).²¹⁸ For all their othering of Muslims, the *FB* reflects these cross-cultural connections.²¹⁹

Political developments in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries made the situation in fourteenth-century England different. In 1177, Henry II’s daughter, Eleanor

²¹⁷ Guy of Lusignan governed Cyprus after losing Jerusalem beginning in 1192 (Mayer 240).

²¹⁸ “Or les rois de Jérusalem sont tous liés aux milieu culturels occidentaux et les sont les routes de pèlerinage mais aussi les routes commerciales qui ells, s’tendent bien au-delà des rives méditerranéennes” (Legros 19).

²¹⁹ “la cour de Champagne rénit tous les éléments propices à la composition d’une oeuvre telle que Floire et Blancheflor: connaissance des romans antiques...liens permanents avec l’Orient, goût pour les lettres profanes et relations amicales et personnelles avec la cour de France” [the court of Champagne retains all the elements conducive to composing a tale such as *FB*: familiarity with romances of antiquity...permanent links with the East, taste for secular letters and amiable personal relations with the court of France] (Legros 17). Production of the poem in Champagne seems plausible; this setting might account for the differences between the aristocratic and the popular version, as the latter sensationalizes cultural difference more than the former. This likely owes to aristocratic interest in and connections with the East.

of England, was betrothed to Alfonso VIII, King of Castile (Parsons 7).²²⁰ Their daughters became queens not only of Castile, but also of Portugal, Aragon, and even France. The institution of regnal females, granddaughters of Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose homeland, as we've seen, was a cultural melting pot in its own right, likely moderated suspicions about once-Muslim Iberia, which was becoming increasingly Christian. In 1254, Eleanor of Castile married Edward I of England (7).²²¹ Such joining of families also had literary implications. Alfonso, for instance, traced his genealogy back to Guillem VIII, who purportedly carried many Muslim women over the Pyrenees to Poitier; Guillaume IX, often called the first troubadour, was also a descendant.²²²

Moreover, even as Richard I, Eleanor of England's brother, battled Saladin, he helped forge cross-cultural ties to the Ayyūbids of Egypt through his close friendship with Saladin's brother, al-ʿĀdil.²²³ English sources echo the sincere amity between the two men, which was noted by Muslim authors as well (Shoval 656), and these "relations

²²⁰ Alphonso VIII routed the Caliph of Morocco at las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 (Parsons 7).

²²¹ Parsons explains the complicated terms of the marriage as a simultaneously "offensive and defensive" alliance: "[t]he kings of Castile and England became allies against all enemies, saving their allegiance to the Christian faith. Edward was to be knighted by Alphonso... marry Eleanor, and help to impose Castilian supremacy over Navarre," while Henry III would help Alphonso invade North Africa (15). This alliance may have contributed to changing perspectives in England about Iberians, though revised views of "alien queens" (154) like Eleanor was likely slow, especially since she had a penchant for acquiring and consolidating lands through problematic means (148-53). After Eleanor's death, however, Edward I erected twelve monumental crosses in her honor (Parsons 205), commissioned three tombs for her (209), and enacted elaborate commemorations on each anniversary of her death (214). The effect produced extravagant praise of the queen by a St. Albans chronicler, who, in the *Opus chronicorum*, lauded her "prudence and beauty" calling her "a Sybil in wisdom" upon recounting her accompaniment of Edward I on crusade in 1290 (Parsons 216). When the chronicler reported Eleanor's death, he pointed out that "[i]n her days, foreigners troubled England but little" (217), as if to suggest she, in part, was responsible for England's political accord at the time.

²²² "The earliest known troubadour... is probably none other than Guillaume, known both as Guillaume VII, Count of Poitou, and as Guillaume IX, Duke of Aquitaine... he was the ruler of a large and culturally advanced area of France" (Van der Werf 17).

²²³ Indeed, King Richard and al-ʿĀdil had established "English-Ayyūbid relations" (Shoval 657); they maintained, according to Shoval, "an extraordinary personal relationship. Doubtless, shared dining, musical interludes, and exchanges of gifts and ideas, as well as a shared culture of chivalry, would have built up a mutual sense of familiarity and confidence" (656).

between the English king and the Ayyūbid sultan's brother and eventual heir...may have had significant repercussions" (656), including later diplomatic efforts between al-‘Ādil and his friend's younger brother, John (657). English relations with the Ayyūbids greatly contrasted with the latter's rancor with the French: in 1202, Egyptian forces sent additional "troops to protect Damietta from the Franks" (Shoval 657), and in the year of August 1206 - July of 1207, "al-Malik al-‘Ādil devastated the Frankish territories in Syria" (Shoval 658). Growing political ties between England and what had been seen as the "Orient" likely diminished appraisals of it as a threat.

The Middle English versions of *FB* are much more than derivative versions of their French antecedents. Compared to its international cousins, the Egerton MS offers, in terms of content and form, the most tightly-woven narrative; it synthesizes into one a polyphony of Greek, Persian, and Arabic texts that, I think, influenced its French source. It "domesticates"—to borrow from the language of translation—its forebears by highlighting cultural accommodation rather than cultural difference.

CHAPTER IV
PLAYING BY THE RULES? ETHICAL AMBIGUITY IN THE GAMES OF
CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE* AND JUAN RUIZ'S
LIBRO DE BUEN AMOR

Even today, legitimate courtship remains a questionable and ambiguous game in the United States. Indictments of sexual misconduct, once relegated to the shadows by traumatized victims' reluctance to report the crime, are increasingly being tried in court. These developments offer a lens through which we can focus on the conduct of powerful men in the Middle Ages whose rank or wealth protected them at the expense of women in compromised social positions.²²⁴ Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is a case in point, though it never reaches a courtroom. The poem dances around issues of mediation, both textual, as regards the author, his sources, and his narrator, as well as social, for family members, rather than bride or groom, typically arranged medieval aristocratic unions. Chaucer presents the game of love as both contest and hunt, which men negotiate to assert their masculinity.²²⁵ But his narrator's insecurities, as translator and as reader of the tale, twist notions of *auctoritas* [authority]. Ironically, he cannot follow his source, though he purports throughout to do so; his limitations feminize him, because he can neither control the narrative, nor his response to it. His text becomes suspect, rather than authoritative. In particular, his references to classical rape garner a sinister pall when the narrator decries Pagan love at the close of the poem. His proclamation, juxtaposed with

²²⁴ I wish to acknowledge that men, especially young boys, can experience victimhood of sexual assault. Their recourses to redress are often as circumscribed as those for women. However, this chapter does not focus on rape of men, or on men who are compromised by and in thrall to women. Nor does it address medieval pederasty, sodomitical rape, or other forms of sexual violence done to men; these lay outside the scope my discussion.

²²⁵ Johan Huizinga posits play's function as "a contest for something," which makes the "sport" in *Troilus and Criseyde* inherently ludic.

the heights of bliss he elsewhere describes, sits uncomfortably. The ironies and games in Chaucer's composition, I argue, show how closely amorous pursuits may tread to modern conceptions of rape. Actions that from one point of view seem game-like, ironic, or humorous, from another, raise serious questions about gendered abuse of power. Courtship, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, is a zero sum game in which each winning move is a loss.

To a large degree, this sad assessment of human passion stems from the belief that all carnal desire is flawed; by revealing the lack that haunts especially those moments that seem most joyful and playful, Chaucer underscores their inability to attain the fulfillment and satisfaction of spiritual love. I will advance this argument by comparing moments in Juan Ruiz's *Libro de Buen Amor* to Chaucer's poem, for the former, like *Troilus and Criseyde*, explores the nature of masculine identity and forays into the ethics of sexual conquest granted by third-person mediation; the works' formal means likewise resemble one another as they repudiate carnal love and embrace spirituality. In my reading, the primary issue, contrary to what early scholars maintained, is not Criseyde's reprehensible cruelty; neither is it, as recent scholarship suggests, the extent to which Criseyde is a victim of rape. I will argue that the poem is a profound meditation on the inherent inequities and unfairness of the game of medieval courtship itself.

Against the backdrop of the Trojan War, *Troilus and Criseyde* is drama of romance and betrayal with a twist on the conventional love-triangle. An adaptation and reconceptualization of Giovanni Boccaccio's early fourteenth-century romance *Il Filostrato*, Chaucer's poem is mediated by a narrator who is as much a participant in the love story as a commentator on it. His simultaneous love for the characters and distance

from their affairs is integral to establishing at the poem's outset what Allen Frantzen has called an unsettling "sense of the unfitness of things" (30). Chaucer in fact formalizes this feeling of discomfiture by beginning four of the five books with the narrator's proem. Beyond announcing the theme and setting the mood for each book (Howard, *Chaucer* 358), however, these invocations call upon furies for aid as much as they appeal to the muses; many tales of violence against women from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are mentioned.²²⁶ Indeed, as Frantzen says, as we read Chaucer's "litel book," we see that it is a pastiche of genres: "letters, songs, and dreams, each set off as a separate creation" (36). This formal trait also characterizes Ruiz's *LBA*,²²⁷ in both texts, the rough suturing of these forms adds to their fundamental unease.

The *Troilus* recounts how Troilus, prince of Troy, is transformed from passion-scoffing warrior to ill-starred lover when he sees at a temple black-gowned Criseyde, widowed daughter of Calkas, who turned traitor to Troy when he foresaw the Greeks' victory in their war. Wounded by the sight of her, Troilus reveals the source of his anguish to Pandarus, who is her uncle; he assuages his friend's heartache by bringing Troilus and Criseyde together. Pandarus capitalizes on his wit and his status as familiar, older, male relative to manhandle Criseyde, first by threatening her if she rejects Troilus's attentions, then by urging her to pledge to him the chaste love of a sister. Pandarus, however, goes further: he uses deceit, subterfuge, and coercion to maneuver her into satisfying Troilus's desires. The voyeuristic "consummation scene," in which Pandarus remains in the lovers' room, becomes even more deeply unsettling when

²²⁶ Addressed at first to the Muses, the last proem invokes Thesiphone, of the Furies (Frantzen 47).

²²⁷ The *Libro* features, for example, beast fables and Marian hymns in addition to an overarching narrative about the Archpriest of Hita. Lucía Céspedes Benítez characterizes it as a kaleidoscope that at each turn, creates a new image of how fallen man, redeemed in Christ, might find the life he should (55).

Criseyde tells her uncle the following morning of her shame and displeasure. Her relationship with Troilus continues, undiscovered, three years. But the Trojans then decide to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, who had been captured by the Greeks. Troilus entreats Criseyde to elope; she wants to avoid the scandal by promising that she would find a way to return to Troy. Instead she stays in the Greek camp, where she is wooed and won by Diomedes. At the end of the poem, Criseyde reflects on her actions; she realizes her name will be synonymous with betrayal, for she knows that Troilus's love for her was true and her giving herself to Diomedes has falsified the love she promised she bore him. Once Troilus is certain Criseyde has abandoned him, he seeks only to fight the Greeks. After Achilles kills him, he rises "to the holghnesse of the eighthe spere" (V.1809).

Looking down on earth, Troilus

...lough right at the wo

Of hem that wpten for his deth so faste,

And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so

The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,

And sholden al oure herte on heven caste. (V. 1821-1825)

Where Chaucer adapts his primary source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, we can begin to guess at his authorial priorities. For instance, where he changes *Troilus and Criseyde*'s tenor, which is playful but serious, from that of the *Filostrato*, which is more gameful, Chaucer's programmatic towards spiritual love becomes clear, especially in the ending.²²⁸ Because Chaucer extensively re-writes, even amplifies, the concerns of specific scenes, we can infer their centrality to his project. For example, the scenes in

²²⁸ Helen Storm Corsa suggests that Chaucer's interest in Boethius's *Consolation* is what inspires him to re-create Boccaccio's romance, *Il Filostrato*, as tragedy (40). Chaucer's adaptation she argues, "is not only an exemplum of the moving Wheel of Fortune, it is the Wheel itself" (42).

which Pandarus “argues” first with Troilus, then with Criseyde, have been doubled in length (Frank 162). The “first part of the consummation scene is completely recast” (Frank 162); it occupies 812 lines, whereas Boccaccio’s original is a mere 108.²²⁹ Chaucer’s attention to these scenes suggests they, more than others, might reveal his authorial concerns. Consequently, these are the primary sections of the poem I will examine. As I will show, each is also ludic: Pandarus’s arguments between the title characters are rhetorical contests; like chess, they are games, but serious. So too, is the consummation scene, which resembles the noble pastime of the hunt.

Not all of *Troilus and Criseyde*’s deviations from the *Filostrato* are inventions, however; Thomas J. Garbaty contends that Chaucer may have introduced some episodes under the influence of Juan Ruiz, the Archpriest of Hita. As Garbaty says, the complex literary history of the *Libro de Buen Amor* parallels that of the *Troilus*.²³⁰ Without claiming Chaucer’s direct knowledge of Ruiz’s *Libro de Buen Amor* (“The Pamphilus” 468), I will cite parallels between these two texts, which include problematic narrators,

²²⁹ Criseyde’s thoughts after Pandarus’s visit are four times the length of those described in Boccaccio (Frank 162), and the dinner party at Diomedes’s is fabricated from a brief reference at the end of *Il Filostrato* to 630 lines in Chaucer’s poem (162).

²³⁰ It also resembles the earlier Latin text, *Pamphilus de Amore*, which Michelle Hamilton classifies within the popular pseudo-Ovidian tradition that flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (100). In fourteenth century England, it was banned along with Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* from use in schools, for it failed to “teach morals or metaphors or honest poetry” (Orme 100). *Pamphilus* recounts how the eponymous young man, enamored of his neighbor Galatea, pays an older woman in the maiden’s confidence, Anus, to help him win the girl. Anus invites Galatea to her home to eat, leaves on pretense, and in her absence, Pamphilus arrives. In spite of Galatea’s protestations, Pamphilus forces himself on her. Anus returns to Galatea’s reproach and advises the girl to make the best of the situation by marrying her assailant. Only 780 lines long, the content “was recognized and quoted by almost every man of learning from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance” (Garbaty, “The Pamphilus” 457). Ruiz’s *Book of Good Love* adapts elements from the *Pamphilus* to its own rhetorical ends, like Boccaccio, and so, some argue, does the *Roman de la Rose*. “As Juan Ruiz himself declared, the *Pamphilus* was his main source for the Endrina story, and the plots followed along the same lines” (Garbaty, “The Pamphilus” 464). Boccaccio wrote of “Pamphilio” in a letter to Iacobo Pizzinghe (Garbaty, “The Pamphilus,” 458). The same seducer appears in the Latin comedy *Pamphilus et Glisceria*, which Garbaty dates before the one in question (“The Pamphilus” (458). Garbaty lists approximately 55 similarities shared between the *Pamphilus* and Chaucer’s *Troilus* in terms of plot, theme, and character construction in “The Pamphilus Tradition.”

generic variety, jokes, games, and “humor” to explore how each work raises questions about courtship in fiction and reality.

One of the most important and enigmatic texts of fourteenth-century Iberia, the *Libro de Buen Amor*, hereafter *LBA*, stitches together parables, fables, and Marian hymns as bookends to episodes in the story of Don Melón [Mr. Melon].²³¹ Thwarted in courtship, he employs an *alcahueta*, or go-between, to fulfill his desires. *Trotaconventos*, or “convent-trotter,” cajoles Doña Endrina [Lady Sloe] to accept Don Melón’s affection and arranges a tryst between them.²³² Doña Endrina, much like Criseyde, arrives at the go-between’s home unaware of the snare that has been set for her. The story breaks off midway, lost amidst the “two folios that are now missing from the most complete manuscript. The conclusion of the scene is thought to consist of Endrina’s rape, as in the medieval Latin *Pamphilus de amore*” (Hamilton 100),²³³ and the rest of the book, like the second half of *TC*, follows the protagonist’s downturn on Fortune’s wheel. He retreats into the mountains at the onset of Lent. There, he is subjected to females whose appetites

²³¹ The triangulated game of courtship that occupies *Troilus and Criseyde*’s principle narrative is, like the tale of don Melón in the *LBA*, buttressed by proverbs and poems that look at once comic, but harbor sinister implications.

²³² María Lida de Malkiel explains the sloe is an apt name, for it is “the wild downy plum symbolic of the delicacy of feminine honor” (29). André Michalski points out that the characterizations of Doña Endrina and Don Melón can be interpreted as personas that are at once “human, animal, and vegetal.” As representations of humans, “sloe” and “melon” are vegetal. The animal representations arise when “melón” is taken for “badger” (271), and “endrina” is seen as a bird; “endrina” resembles the Portuguese word “andorinha,” which means swallow (272).

²³³ Lida de Malkiel agrees that Ruíz has appropriated the characters from the *Pamphilus* (29). As regards the Endrina episode, Michelle Hamilton believes it is not intended, however, as “an imitation of a classical Ovidian work but an adaptation of contemporary (twelfth- and thirteenth-century) erotic works produced in the style of Ovid” (Hamilton 101). Hamilton conjectures the scene of don Melón’s consummation reflects medieval European mores more than those of Ovid’s Rome.

overpower him. When he leaves, violated, he no longer finds success in sexual conquest and surrenders his soul to monastic life.²³⁴

By calling attention to the similarities between these texts, we acknowledge the extent to which courtship raised central questions in different cultures. Chaucer of course, did travel to Spain as an envoy in 1366; his safe conduct for passage between February 22 to May 24 was discovered in the royal archives of Navarre at Pamplona in 1955 (Pearsall 51). Eugenio Olivares Merino suggests a number of reasons for the mission (147-148), and the record indicates the likelihood that Chaucer also spent some time in Aquitaine (Pearsall 53), a hub of intercultural art. Olivares Merino thinks that Chaucer may have learned about Juan Ruiz's *LBA* then. He notes as well that Chaucer's wife Philippa was in the service of Constanza of Castile, John of Gaunt's Spanish wife (149), who remained in Castile between October 1388 and November 1390; Guadalajara, where Juan Ruiz was from, had become one of her new estates and was among those she visited at length (153). The women's travel may have brought a copy of the *LBA* into Chaucer's circle (152); even if it did not, Olivares Merino points out that "John of Gaunt's court was literally swarming with Spaniards" (153), some of whom may have "had some intimacy with Chaucer" and perhaps spoke to him about the *LBA* (153).

I think Olivares Merino's case for the possibility that Chaucer knew the *LBA* is convincing; indeed, Garbaty notes twenty-one points the *Troilus* shares with the *LBA* and *Pamphilus* that are not in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*.²³⁵ At the least, by acknowledging the

²³⁴ James T. Monroe sees an underlying, chiasmic structure in the work that resembles a ring, much like a rise and fall of Fortune's wheel (323-4). The work's circularity recalls *Troilus and Criseyde*; moreover, like Chaucer's multi-genre poem, the *LBA* is "a hybrid" as Monroe argues, "of the maqāma, the frame tale, and the zajal genres" (330).

²³⁵ As Robert Frank points out, rather than abbreviate or follow his source closely, Chaucer's adaptation primarily employs *amplificatio*. This, according to Frank, increases the poem's thematic significance and

Latin and Spanish texts' parallels to *TC*, we can see, especially with regard to the question of rape, which all explicitly depict, what Chaucer and his narrator mutes or omits. And by reading the gaps between laughs, jokes, and sport that pepper the works, we can better understand the trajectory from sexual transgression to ethical melioration that they trace.

Chaucer and Ruiz both highlight situational and dramatic ironies by playing with the narrator's relationship to the audience. Their comments implicate us in the action; willy-nilly we judge characters and what they do and thereby reveal our social and cultural values by responding to their judgments and values.²³⁶ In this, I see Chaucer's "games," Pandarus's "laughing" manipulations, jokes, innuendos, and references to hunting as operating in a way that is akin to the way comparable events in the *LBA* promote the celebration of divine love and disavowal of carnal desire.²³⁷ Recognizing the serious implications behind ludic elements in Chaucer's poem also allows us to focus attention on Criseyde's woes, which tend to be overlooked if we focus exclusively on the double sorrows of Troilus's "unsely adventure" (I.35).

range (156-8). Among its themes is one *TC* shares with *LBA* and *Pamphilus*, but not *Il Filostrato*: the "moral that women be warned against men" (Garbaty, "The Pamphilus" 467).

²³⁶ Patterson agrees the reader's experience of the poem is ultimately one of complicity (L. 107). Implicating the reader within the narrative makes "the act of critical reading a major preoccupation of the entire poem" (Dinshaw 39).

²³⁷ As Maria Rosa Lide de Malkiel explains: "Today's reader, unfamiliar with medieval mentality, finds it difficult to take seriously a moral teaching which, in order to preach divine love, assiduously inserts case histories of worldly love. But this procedure was dogma to medieval pedagogy... The writer felt authorized to compose stories totally devoid of austerity, and to point out later, that aside from the literal, purely entertaining meaning, the reader could detect other more valuable meaning, in harmony with his moral and intellectual capacity. Such a concept of the book, and its various layers of meaning, dependent upon the merit of the reader, befits the medieval vision of the world. This philosophy regards all creation as valuable, but hierarchized with respect to the Creator, on a scale which goes from worldly pleasure to ascetic renunciation, from carnal lovemaking to divine love" (qtd. in Garbaty, "The Pamphilus," 465). Both the *LBA* and Chaucer's *TC* use secular love stories "to point out the superiority of spiritual bliss" ("The Pamphilus" 466), which is concomitant upon disavowing the means by which carnal bliss is achieved.

The narrators who recount both Chaucer's and Ruiz's works are problematic; their posturing calls attention to the tensions of courtship that each tries rather desperately to diffuse.²³⁸ Chaucer's narrator is constantly torn between affection for his characters and knowledge of the betrayals that not only compromise their love but play a crucial love in engendering it.²³⁹ His internal struggle to reconcile the gap between his feelings and his judgment is analogous to the "narrator" in *LBA*, about whom scholars continue to argue: is the "yo" [I] who recounts the text Ruiz, don Melón, the central figure in the narrative, or someone else?²⁴⁰ To Monroe, Michelle Hamilton, and David Wacks, Ruiz's narrator is a descendant of maqāmat storytellers. In this tradition, authors create framed

²³⁸ Both texts respond, I think, to the ethics of sexual conquest as presented in the *Roman de la Rose* and in the pseudo-Ovidian *Pamphilus*. Winthrop Wetherbee argues *TC* presents Chaucer's confrontation with classical poetic conventions. "Through Troilus, the narrator of Chaucer's poem explores and rejects medieval, courtly love" as depicted in the *Roman de la Rose* (181). We know of Chaucer's familiarity with the *Roman* from his translation of it. The *Roman*, as Garbaty points out, never indicates *Pamphilus* as a potential source (in either author's part), but the allegorization in the *Roman* of Jealousy, Wicked-tongue, friend, and others seems to derive from Galatea's concerns in *Pamphilus*, as explored by Ernest Langois (Garbaty, "The Pamphilus" 462).

²³⁹ *TC*'s narrator, Wetherbee opines, possesses a "desperate need to affirm the attainment of erotic 'gladness,'" but that he "breaks away from this obsessive attachment to the love story at the end of the poem and comes to terms with it in a new way" (181). "The aftermath of the consummation scene," Wetherbee continues, leaves the narrator "disoriented and alone, cut off from Troilus's spiritual idealization of his love and from the vision of a heaven of erotic delight which he himself had imagined;" he is, however, "unable to focus on the lovers' actual situation," and is "willfully blind to his own" (181). An additional tension for readers in particular is that of public versus private, as characters must balance exterior forces in both their words and deeds (Frantzen 33-34). The poem is "social" in that "it operates within a nexus of institutional loyalties involving individuals, the family, the king, and the parliament within Troy, and, indirectly, involving the individuals and institutions of Chaucer's London" (Frantzen 31).

²⁴⁰ Scholars have refuted the historicity of the *LBA*'s events: the "yo" is a fictional identity, not a real person. Others have argued the opposite: that the "yo" is, indeed, autobiographical (Wacks 170). The name "Don Melón" suggests, by nature of its colloquial meaning, that the character and his name make little difference; "melon" is a stand-in for any old thing. Thomas Jay Garbaty explains: "the melon represented persons and things for whom chance, not choice, meant success or failure" (464); therefore, Don Melón could be a kind of "anyman." Citing Joan Corominas's edition of the *LBA* (280), Michelle Hamilton points out that "Melón may also be a euphemism for 'tejón' (badger), an animal whose diet includes wild berries (*endrinās*)" (99). *Endrina* is Don Melón's romantic quarry. "The name 'Endrina' (sloe) was apt because the downy plum of the sloe stood for the delicacy of feminine honor" (Garbaty, "The Pamphilus" 464).

stories in which, as Wacks explains, “characters narrate stories to one another” (131).²⁴¹ The tellers, and the way they tell their tales, inflect what is told. The frame thus is not merely “an occasion for narrative;” rather, as Wacks shows, it presents “opportunit[ies] for reflection on the social function of the narrative” (45). Ruiz manipulates maqāmat conventions in the *LBA*. Monroe explains: “In the Classical maqāma a victim narrates how he was successfully deceived by a trickster, whereas in the *LBA*, a would-be trickster narrates how he was unsuccessful in his attempts at deceiving a potential victim” (330).

In both *TC* and *LBA*, ludic elements—whether lewd topoi, laughter, narratological games that implicate readers, or recourse to noble pastimes like chess and hunting—puncture holes in the veil that otherwise occludes questionable conventions of medieval courtship and marriage. Both *LBA* and *TC* raise a question left unexplored in Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*: what is a good, true love, and what are legitimate means of attaining it?²⁴² The question is fraught; the comic sleights of hand in both works act to minimize their subversiveness. My thesis is that the feints and deceptions one might deploy in chess or the hunt are condemnable when used metaphorically in love either as snares for quarry “out-of-season,” or against those untutored in love’s all too pliable rules and objectives. Maneuverings of this sort rig the game in men’s favor and doom affairs to eventual failure.

²⁴¹ The frametale genre “is didactically ambiguous” because its message is contingent upon characters’ didactic arguments and on the way these are illustrated by exemplary tales in the text (Wacks 130-131). From my personal engagement with them, Ramón Llull’s *Libro de la Orden de Caballeria*, Petrus Alfonsi’s *Disciplina Clericalis*, and Don Juan Manuel’s *Conde Lucanor*, which Wacks has also studied, exhibit these Hebrew-Arabic framing techniques.

²⁴² *Il Filostrato* explores the “nature of agencies that mediate between contraries” (Ginsberg 148), and it shows, in contrast to Dante’s *Comedy*, where “mediation of the word” becomes “an act of faith” that “language always takes on the rhetorical opaqueness of personal motives” (149-150).

Before I evidence how *TC* can be read as a game, one in which men, by adapting understandings of courtship as chess, not only hunt, but also poach, sexual partners—for in Pandarus’s hands, the game of love resembles what Johan Huizinga would call “cheating,” not fair play—I will first outline some scholarly approaches to *Troilus and Criseyde*’s ambiguities.

In her comparison of its structure to that of Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, Helen Storm Corsa shows that Chaucer made considerably more use of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. To Corsa, the five books of the poem align with the rise and descent of Fortune’s Wheel, an idea with which Donald Howard and Lee Patterson agree.²⁴³ Sanford B. Meech argues that Chaucer systematically elaborates and refines Boccaccio’s ironic oppositions to convey humanistic values. Chaucer’s work, he contends, “encompasses diverse manifestations of human nature, finds all of interest, discriminates smilingly or gravely but never with severity, and can therefore communicate to us a view of the whole in which tolerance and critical perception are harmoniously blended” (427). *TC*’s formal structure is important, I think, because it foregrounds ironic juxtapositions between pleasure and violence; while this appears, in the hands of an anxious narrator, game-like or comic, it also reveals the seriousness of Chaucer’s subject matter and has ideological implications for identity formation.

Chaucer’s problematic narrator forms a key part of the poem’s frame. Frames, as interpretive devices for the poem as a whole, “produce[] a familiar opposition between text and context,” Allen J. Frantzen explains, “that operates both in the text and in the history of its reception” (12). He analyzes this opposition by viewing the “narrative,

²⁴³ Lee Patterson sees the first three books of the poem as Troilus’s ascent on Fortune’s when, the rest his downturn (128).

social, sexual, and historical frames” (12) that operate in the *Troilus*. I follow Frantzen in that I agree the narrator frames the tale he tells; unlike him, however, I will argue that the tension between the two produces just as much instability and comedy as Frantzen thinks emerges only in *The Canterbury Tales*.²⁴⁴

On the subject of *Troilus and Criseyde* and ethics, Alcuin Blamires suggests that “[i]n the sexual domain...the courtly ethics that Chaucer adopted modelled for women a cautious, slow-release responsiveness to male entreaty. Only momentarily does Chaucer ever project a woman able to abstract herself from the usual constraints, neutrally, as a kind of free-roaming sexual being” (86). A key issue among scholars is Criseyde herself, not only her sexuality, but also her loyalty. As E. Talbot Donaldson underscores: “every one is aware of the basic fact on which the poem rests—that Criseide did come to love Troilus and that she forsook him before she died, and this awareness will inevitably encourage some readers to examine every action she performs for signs of instability, or light-mindedness, or insincerity” (66). Angela Jane Weisl contends that “Criseyde is condemned...because of her acts of self-protection and...the condemnation results not from her rejection of her position as the masculinized lady created by the romance genre, but rather in her at least partially successful attempt to preserve it” (8).

Criseyde is not the only character whose integrity critics interrogate. Richard F. Green, John Fyler, and Christopher Stampone all examine the roles Troilus and Pandarus play in courting and winning her. In particular, Gretchen Mieszkowski situates Pandarus within the archetype of medieval procurers of love, many of whom were female; in the

²⁴⁴ *TC*'s narrator resembles that of the *LBA*'s, who, “instead of earning the audience’s confidence...introduces [it] to one contradiction after another...he leads the reader into murky ambiguity and abandons him there” (Wacks 178).

process, her work reveals similarities Chaucer's Pandarus shares with Juan Ruiz's Trotaconventos from the *Libro de Buen Amor*.

Questions of gender, particularly, what it means to be a "man," comprises yet another thread of *TC* scholarship. In 2008's *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, Richard Zeikowitz, Kate Koppleman, and Marcia Smith Marzec explore homoeroticism, unstable masculinities, and masculinity as a dynamic between martial and romantic prowess.²⁴⁵ By comparing Pandarus's wooing of Criseyde to Troilus's, I will show that in *TC*, to be a man means not merely playing at the discourse of love, by which I mean chastely following precepts of *fin' amor*, but rather engineering and enacting through deeds the attainment of the object desired.²⁴⁶

Other critics, such as Robert S. Sturges, Gretchen Mieszkowski, and R. Allen Shoaf, see the construction of gender in terms of power. Sturges draws on political theory to illuminate sexual bio-politics in *TC*; he argues that the poem resists and reinforces male claims to sovereignty and privilege. Mieszkowski argues that Troilus's seemingly-effeminate swoon prior to the consummation of his affair with Criseyde is rooted in the traditional depiction of romance heroes as emotionally sensitive and spiritually inclined. Jill Mann argues that Troilus's swoon ensures "that when the consummation does take

²⁴⁵This volume was preceded by Peter G. Beidler's collection: *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*. Zeikowitz examines the scene between Pandarus and Troilus using the cinematographic concept of the "suture," a "shot/reverse shot whereby a character is 'stitched into' the frame, giving the impression that the character is the viewing point in the initial shot – as a hermeneutic of desire" (8). In Troilus and Pandarus's exchange in Book I, the positioning of characters "reveals the unstable power relations between the two" in that it "problematiz[es] the concept of the gazer as active/masculine and the object of the gaze as passive/feminine" (8). Koppleman investigates the ways in which Criseyde contributes to masculine identity formation and maintenance (8). Marzec argues Hector is a masculine foil for Troilus; together, they show an "inverse relationship between martial and sexual prowess...sexual involvement outside marriage weakens and feminizes a knight (7).

²⁴⁶ Troilus proves his masculinity when he catches Criseyde in bed and makes love to her. Pandarus retains his masculinity by manipulating both Troilus and Criseyde's affections and then voyeuristically enjoying their consummation.

place it does not represent the [maneuvering] of one partner into an admission of ‘thralldom’ but the mutual surrender of each partner to the other” (326). According to Mann, Troilus’s swoon invites a consensual consummation by rejecting the social and gendered hierarchy that would make Criseyde Troilus’s thrall. These readings suggest the line: “ech of hem gan others lust obeye” (III.1690) communicates mutuality and consent, not manipulation or manhandling to the point of rape. Yet, opines Elizabeth Robertson, “whether or not Troilus rapes Criseyde remains a matter for debate” (301). R. Allen Shoaf explores how Chaucer and Shakespeare’s versions of the story demonstrate “the failure of the heroic ethos to code predictable gender in men and women” (8).

Carolyn Dinshaw highlights Chaucer’s concern with sexuality throughout his poetics, and argues that *Troilus and Criseyde* differentiates between gendered forms of reading, which in part determines the extent to which a text remains “open” or “closed;” the containment of textual instability, deemed feminine, has implications not only for how one interprets the work but also for recognizing how patriarchal systems reconstitute themselves through the ways in which the letter and the spirit are interpreted therein.

Dinshaw points out that more scandalous than any of Chaucer’s writings, for modern readers, is Cecilia Champaigne’s accusation that in 1380, Chaucer raped her (10).²⁴⁷ Critics debate whether rape means an act of forced sexual assault or abduction (see Cannon), but as Regula Evitt points out, sexual rapes appear in Chaucer’s narratives frequently between 1380 and 1400 (144-5); these scholars’ works all greatly inform my

²⁴⁷ Evitt doesn’t attempt to prove Chaucer’s innocence or guilt; rather, she opines that exploring the poet’s “familiarity with the legal rhetoric surrounding rape in late-fourteenth-century England” affects how he “might have translated into his literary representations...the difficulties women meet in establishing autonomy in a culture that recognizes male subjectivity foremost” (145). Seven years after the Champaigne release, Chaucer investigated a similar case (Evitt 145).

reading of Criseyde's comportment, particularly after the consummation scene in Book III.

In its representation of mediated courtship, *Troilus and Criseyde* represents in English the first of romance's Gordian knots. The problem I address in this chapter regards how, in light of scholarship on gender and power dynamics in *TC*, we read oft-maligned Criseyde. Under the rubric of heroines who fail to meet the romantic expectations of medieval men, whether heroes or readers, are those who cease to be women at all and become, instead, elusive symbols, like Criseyde, whom Donaldson refers to as "the disappointing heroine of *Troilus*" (48).²⁴⁸ She is, no doubt, disappointing, as the poem's narrator makes clear. Yet, I argue the assessment of Criseyde's faults, the extent to which she is "disappointing," hinges on a reader's perspective of the game Pandarus manipulates her, and Troilus, into playing.

On one hand, Criseyde is condemnable because "she jilts Troilus" (Howard, "Experience" 173). Pandarus speaks for many when he says he hates her; the alternative, according to Howard, "is to understand her motives, to forgive and pity her" (173), as the narrator desperately tries to do. Howard argues that Chaucer also urges us to forgive her, despite her "sliding courage," because his poem "makes us know what it feels like to *be* Criseyde" ("Experience" 173). I incline towards Howard's reading of the heroine, not only because we are privy to Criseyde's inner thoughts, but also because her falling in love in the first place has not been something she has freely consented to. The ethical

²⁴⁸ Donaldson points out that Emelye of the Knight's Tale represents spring: "of all pretty young girls in the Spring, but [also] a proof that the Spring of pretty young girls is a permanent thing, and that May in their persons will always warm the masculine heart as May warms their heart and sends them out among the flowers" (49). He argues that Emelye, like May of the Merchant's Tale, proves her beauty at odds with men's assumptions about her character. May, for instance, appears passive and meek, but this is a fiction revealed by her trysts with Damien in the tale (53).

implications of Pandarus's stage-managing her responses are clear when we set his actions against those chronicled in Ruiz's *Libro de Buen Amor*. Moreover, Chaucer shows that Criseyde does all a person could do to preserve her honor; like Emelye in "The Knight's Tale," she too tries to "maken vertu of necessitee" (l.3042).

Baited by the hope of security and the belief that Pandarus's game is less a hunt than a game of *eschecs de amor*,²⁴⁹ Criseyde, a widow, is poached "out of season," partly by her warden. Chaucer's consummation scene is almost a synecdoche for the poem: each player plays what he or she thinks is one version of the game of love, but the rules each plays by are not clearly defined, nor are they equally enforced; moreover, they change. To Pandarus lovemaking is a hunt, to Criseyde it is chess; to Troilus, it is behavior consonant with the courtly rules of *fin' amor*. The multiple perspectives, all of which are in play, make each character and none of them responsible for what transpires. Yet, as I will show, whatever the perspective, the rules tilt towards men. They do not risk what Criseyde risks, which invites the question: to what extent does Troilus, and to what extent does Criseyde, consent to the game Pandarus devises for them? The morning after the consummation scene, Criseyde covers her blushing shame with her sheet; she calls Pandarus a fox and implies that all that happened the night before was the result of his conniving. We do not doubt that she felt the height of pleasure with Troilus, but Pandarus's participation contaminates whatever purity of feeling she experienced. Pandarus prevents even her surrender to Troilus, itself problematic, from being fully hers.

²⁴⁹ Composed circa 1370-1380, *Les Eschéz d'Amours* allegorizes courtship as playing chess, one in which the woman, not the man, wins. Though it seems an apt subject of study for the current project, I have chosen to touch on it in passing, rather than explore it fully, because generically, it is more an encyclopedic dream allegory than a romance (Heyworth et al. 11, 44).

To argue Criseyde does not fully deserve the slurs leveled at her—because of the game she and Troilus have been made to play—I will examine the three scenes Green says are the most expanded from their counterparts in Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*. The first is when Pandarus pries the name of Troilus’s beloved from him; the second is Pandarus’s banter with Criseyde when he discloses Troilus’s love and urges Criseyde not to reject him; the last is the consummation scene itself, which comes about only after Pandarus forces Criseyde to come and stay the night at his home, then leads the already hidden Troilus through a trap door into the room where she sleeps. Each episode’s framing and narrative action exhibits ludic characteristics that have sinister implications, as in the *LBA*; these episodes link sexual conquest, by whatever means necessary, to manhood and force Chaucer’s readers to toggle from earnest to game. Because these scenes affect how we read Criseyde’s later betrayal of Troilus, I underscore the extent to which her actions are circumscribed by a set of unfair rules and show that the events, and the framing Chaucer provides for them, resemble strategies in Juan Ruiz’s *Libro de Buen Amor*.

Book I begins with the narrator’s invocation to Thesiphone, glossed as she who punishes “the perpetrators of unavenged crimes” (Barney 9). A fury, she metes out justice for those wronged by their kin.²⁵⁰ The narrator asks this “goddesse of torment, / Thow cruwel Furie” (I.8-9) to help him tel his “sorrowful tale” (I. 13), which begins at the feast of the Palladion in Troy (I.160), where Troilus falls in love with Criseyde at first sight. The narrator describes Criseyde as through Troilus’s “astoned” (I.274) gaze, but also as if he, too, were transfixed by her womanliness:

²⁵⁰ Jane Chance glosses the invocation of Thesiphone as representing the wicked thoughts that precede action. Book I reveals Troilus’s wicked thoughts, which manifest in his speech with Pandarus. Drawing on Nicholas Trevet’s glosses of Boethius, Chance connects the *TC* narrator’s invocation of Thesiphone to the “fear of wicked tongues” that assails Criseyde (113-114).

She nas nat with the lest of hire stature
But alle hire lymes so wel answeyng
Weren to wommanhod, that creature
Was nevere lasse mannysshe in semynge;
And ek te pure wise of hire mevyng
Shewed wel that men might in hire gesse
Honour, estat, and womanly noblesse. (I.281-287)

The narrator describes Criseyde as womanly and noble; he explains her demeanor as “somdel deignous” (I.290), disdainful, but he seems most interested in her “womanly nobility.”²⁵¹ Unfortunately, the virtues he lists aren’t virtues he says Criseyde actually possessed but virtues one guesses she has by the way she bears herself. In any event, her aloofness especially is what catches Troilus’s eye, who has proudly kept himself aloof from any interest in love. We are perhaps not too far off base to think that what Troilus “Gan for to like” (I.289) in Criseyde is what he thinks she has in common with him. His love for her, that is to say, is at least in part a matter of self-regard; as in all medieval romances, Narcissus lurks somewhere behind the scenes.

Wounded by his affection, Troilus suffers, chiefly because he cannot reveal his love to Criseyde. His hesitation in part reflects the ideals of courtly love: as Sir Gawain puts it, were the lady to say no, he would have been wrong to disclose his affection to her in the first place. But the story takes place in Troy; how could Troilus claim his love for

²⁵¹ The attraction recalls Chaucer’s ballad “Womanly Noblesse” in which the speaker’s desire is for the woman’s “beaute hole and stidefast governaunce, / [her] vertues al and [her] hie noblesse” (ll.2-3). He promises her, “So wel me liketh your womanly countenaunce, / Your fresshe fetures and your comlynesse, / That whiles I live myn hert to his maystresse / You hath ful chose in trewe perséveraunce / Never to change” (ll.5-9).

Criseyde is pure in a city that refuses to return Helen, raped by Troilus's brother Paris, to her husband?

These are the circumstances when Pandarus discovers Troilus pining away. He immediately sees Troilus's words about love as a competition, one that will consolidate Pandarus and Troilus's homosocial bond. Pandarus presents himself as Troilus's friend; according to Aristotle and Cicero, his duty is to share Troilus's suffering and to try to alleviate it: "it is frendes right, soth for to syne, / To enreparten wo as glad desport" (I. 591-592). But Pandarus's motives are hardly selfless, as any true friend's must be. He clearly casts his efforts to persuade Troilus to reveal first why he moans, and then who it is he moans for, as a contest: "I have and shal, for trewe or fals report, / In wrong and right iloved the al my lyve: / Hid nat thi wo fro me, but telle it blyve" (I.593-595).²⁵² The tension we already sense arises not simply from the fact that as Huizinga points out, "the more play bears the character of competition, the more fervent it will be" (29); as Pandarus knows (I.715-16), Ovid, in his *Ars Amatoria*, had raised the possibility that too many confidences to a friend might turn him into a rival.

To Pandarus's argument, Troilus "longe ley as style as he ded were" (I.723); Pandarus "in feere" (I.726) thinks he may "falle, or elles soone dye" (I.728). Why, we must then ask, does Troilus hesitate? Troilus knows Pandarus's own frustrated experience in love argues against his probable success in helping him. But the real reason why

²⁵² Here, perhaps Pandarus seems to express the deepest, most genuine friendship. He might, however, be disclosing a different kind of love, which he can only share with Troilus via a female proxy. My point is that Pandarus's motives are difficult to discern: do his actions satisfy personal desires, or do they truly aim to help a dear friend in need? Is it a telling detail that Troilus points out Pandarus's failed record as a lover? Troilus quips Pandarus's aid would be a thing of wonder, since, as he tells Pandarus, "thow koudest nevere in love thiselven wisse. / How devel maistow brynge me to blisse?" (I.622-623). Pandarus's rebuttal: "Men seyn, 'to wrecche is consolacioun / To have another felawe in hys peyne.' / That owghte wel benoure opynyoun, / For bothe thw and I of love we pleyne" (I.708-711).

Troilus should not enlist Pandarus's aid, despite the demands of friendship, is that he cannot ethically accept his help. Pandarus is Criseyde's uncle (changed from cousin in the *Filostrato*). His relation gives him an influence over her no other go-between could have; it immediately skews the courtship Pandarus will undertake for Troilus in his name.

When Troilus does yield, then, friendship becomes an excuse that covers the moral lapse his submitting his well-being to Pandarus's authority entails.²⁵³ Pandarus himself seems to point to this burying of fair dealing. After Troilus reveals he has fallen in love with Criseyde, Pandarus teases him for his prior disdain of love: "thow were wont to chace / At Love in scorn, and for despit him calle / 'Seynt Idiot, lord of these foles all'" (I.908-910). "How often," he continues, "hastow maad thi nyce japes, / And seyde that Loves servantz everichone / Of nycete ben verray Goddes apes" (I.911-913)? Troilus's "japes" at others Pandarus now directs at him: "Thus seydestow, and japedst ful fast. / Yet seydestow that for the moore part... Now I jape of the, if that I shal" (I.925-929). The jesting here is unsettling; one can't help but think both know the partnership they've entered in is suspect and that their laughter in part covers the discomfort they know they should feel. Troilus, though, at least tries to reinstall some sense of idealism: he says to his friend, "A lord! I me consente, / And preye to the my japes thow foryive, / And I shal nevere more whyle I live" (I.936-938).²⁵⁴ The scene becomes serious, perhaps not with

²⁵³The conversation where Pandarus tries to convince Troilus to reveal his secret recalls Don Melón's debate with Don Amor in the *LBA*. How we interpret Pandarus's later statement, in full knowledge of Troilus's love, that "Wherefor I am, and wol ben, ay redy / To peyne me to do yow this servyse; / For bothe yow to plesse thus hope I / Herafterward; for ye ben bothe wyse, / And konne it counseil kepe in swych a wyse / That no man shal the wiser of it be; / And so we may be gladed alle thre" is fraught (I.988-994, emphasis mine). Pandarus is ready and willing to take pains for Troilus and Criseyde; he hopes to please them and to keep the matter secret. All told, this will make him, like the others—so he believes—glad. His own pleasure seems to be a partial motive.

²⁵⁴ We can see in Troilus's response to Pandarus's pledged aid, however, that each has a different idea of love. While Pandarus delights in the opportunity to participate in, indeed, to direct, the successful

the “oppressed, frightened, bound, lied,” sense Bakhtin said accompanies medieval seriousness, but certainly with something of “the mask of hypocrisy” he includes in his description (94), because Troilus’s hypocritical approach to love subjects him to Pandarus’s slights.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, in enlisting Pandarus, once-proud Troilus limits his own agency, by which I mean his ability to effect meaningful change either in word or deed. At times, one’s agency might be circumscribed by others or by situational constraints.²⁵⁶ Troilus, however, chooses to cede to Pandarus his ability to choose.²⁵⁷ This passivity becomes him; it enables Troilus, and the reader, to put some distance between himself and what Pandarus will do for him, which is to capture Criseyde, so they might consummate their affair and, in the process, make Troilus fully a man.²⁵⁸ Troilus’s choice also seems to create a bond between him and Criseyde even before she knows he loves her, since her

consummation of Troilus’s love affair, Troilus entertains a more idealized idea of his goal: “But herke, Pandare, o word, for I nolde / That thow in me wendest so gret folie, / That to my lady I desiren sholde / That toucheth harm or any vilenye; / for dredeles me were levere dye / Than she of me aught ells understode / But that that myghte sownen into goode” (I.1030-1036).

²⁵⁵ Huzinga maintains the fluidity between the contrast of play and seriousness (27).

²⁵⁶ For example, by reading *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer’s audience consents to experience the events of the poem within their mind’s eye. In part, readers cede agency for what enters their thoughts, yet they retain the authority to close Chaucer’s book whenever they so choose, even if they cannot help that the poet’s narrator immediately spoils the story’s ending. Readers ultimately retain the agency that characters in the text are bereft. This interplay of power is a dialectical game Chaucer plays with his readers here as much as in the *Canterbury Tales*. His gamefulness not only suffuses the character of his narrator, but the structure of *Troilus and Criseyde* as well.

²⁵⁷ The extent to which Troilus cedes agency to Pandarus is more pronounced than in Boccaccio’s version of the story.

²⁵⁸ Troilus’s passivity contrasts with the agency of Boccaccio’s Troiolo, who, as Warren Ginsberg points out, recruits Pandaro to uncover his secret distress. He appeals to Pandaro by employing the latter’s definition of friend as one “who amends his companions’ woe if he can, or shares it with him if he cannot (2.4-5)” (170). In doing so, it is Troiolo who transforms Pandaro into an intermediary, whereas Chaucer endows Pandarus with intermediary impulses of his own.

agency will also be limited by Pandarus's maneuverings. The difference, of course, is that what Pandarus does, he does *for* Troilus but *to* Criseyde.²⁵⁹

By contrast, drawing on E. Talbot Donaldson, Richard Green contends Troilus is, unlike Pandarus, a perfect courtly lover, perhaps too much so. Indeed, he appears, much like Oedipus, a blind, tragic hero, to whom Troilus in fact compares himself in book IV.²⁶⁰ According to Frantzen, after Troilus has been wounded by Criseyde's beauty, his actions "show that he understands and subscribes to the symbolic order as a code of conduct for lovers...he understands the rules of the private world he wants to create within the public world he cannot leave" (Frantzen 57). Although Troilus's "uncompromising purity of...emotion" may seem to set "him apart from the game-world of the poem," though he may seem to represent "the 'thing itself,' of which courtly play is but a pale reflection" (Green 212), Troilus cannot stand apart from Pandarus any more than an end can stand apart from the means that gain it. Pandarus's position as Criseyde's uncle gives him the power to play on her vulnerability as a widow and daughter of a traitor. Nor can we think Troilus is entirely unaware of the advantage Pandarus's relationship to Criseyde gives him. In Boccaccio, Troilo is entirely aware of the impropriety of employing Pandaro; just before he reveals Criseida's name to him, he lists a series of incestuous lovers. Troilo in effect admits that by employing Pandaro he has invited him to be a co-partner in his affair. Chaucer omits this passage; his Troilus is far more naïve. But the consequences Boccaccio makes explicit are present nonetheless.

²⁵⁹ In *Il Filostrato*, Pandaro's choice to abdicate "his responsibilities to kith and kin," according to Warren Ginsberg, "smacks of rank opportunism" (175). Even in Chaucer's text, Pandarus's willingness to forsake his kinswoman's honor aligns with the theme of betrayal ascribed to Troy, for "if we remember how Troy was brought low, we remember a series of betrayers and acts of deception" (Ginsberg 161).

²⁶⁰"Ne nevere wol I seen it shyne or reyne, / But ende I wol, as Edippe, in derknesse / My sorrowful lif" (IV.299-301).

One indication that Troilus and Pandarus are playing a game of love according to two separate sets of rules appears in the language with which Pandarus describes his approach to winning a woman; to him, it is a hunt. Pandarus's language implicitly links gameful ploys in courtship with the use of snares in venery.²⁶¹ The grounds for Pandarus's play, it seems, know no bounds; the rules, except that of secrecy, which Pandarus has learned from personal experience, exist to be broken, for he would readily transgress propriety to aid Troilus in attaining his desire. In his attempt to wrest the name of Troilus's secret love from him, for instance, Pandarus refers to the story of Tityus.

I graunte wel that thow endures wo
 As sharp as doth he Ticius in helle,
 Whos stomak foughles tiren evere moo
 Than hightyn volturis, as bokes telle. (I.785-788)

The titan Ticius tried to assault Latona, mother of Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt. As described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter's punishment was to chain him "on his back to the pit of Tartarus, where a vulture tore eternally at his liver" (de Weever). The reference inevitably associates Troilus and Pandarus's courtship with rape. Chaucer will deepen and complicate the implications of this allusion in Book III; when Pandarus rips Troilus's shirt from his back and shoves him into bed with Criseyde, he in effect assaults

²⁶¹ Pandarus engineers several "traps" to ensnare Criseyde. Fyler suggests that Pandarus's "pretense is not ignoble: a public weal that requires fighting on Helen's behalf or treating Criseyde like chattel, as the Trojan council does when it hands her over to the Greeks, demands no high allegiance" (117). The Trojan court, as Fyler points out, is ready to step up to bolster Criseyde's position, but when the time comes, these characters "are willing enough to safeguard Helen, [but] will sell Criseyde to the Greeks" (118). An added irony here is that Antenor, for whom Criseyde is exchanged, is "the man whose treachery will destroy the city" of Troy (Fyler 118). The poem's setting, coupled with Pandarus's fictions and manipulations, suggest that outside the fallen world, in Chaucer's age of Christian salvation, men would do better. The irony, of course, is that, as Chaucer knew personally from charges of *raptus* and handling others brought into English courts, women were, in the fourteenth-century, treated much like those in his poem, which, by virtue of its distant setting and fictional veneer, holds up a mirror to Chaucer's society in which the hazy reflection diffuses indictments that would be leveled against any one person or group.

Troilus. Unlike the player Huizinga describes, who, “despite his ardent desire to win... must stick to the rules of the game” (29), Pandarus in pursuit of his prey is ready to violate the rules of the hunt, and all others, if need be.

Men and women of noble households participated alongside one another in the medieval hunt.²⁶² Hunting adhered to protocol and occurred within discrete, private spaces. The hunt was not an everyday occurrence; its proceedings and outcomes affected participants by increasing or decreasing their honor. Implicit dangers of pursuing one’s quarry raised both “the stakes” of the enterprise and appraisals of a hunter’s prize. As we can see from the Devonshire tapestries, produced in the International gothic style circa 1380-1420 (Woolley 16), the hunt was an integral part of “court etiquette, and skill in hunting was regarded as the peacetime equivalent of prowess in chivalric wars” (25).²⁶³ Noblewomen participated in the sport as well as men.²⁶⁴ Private forests required landowners “to enforce the law at his own expense by hiring a woodward, although in a few instances... ‘free chases,’ were granted in which the landowner could legally hunt

²⁶² William Stearns Davis examines life in the thirteenth-century on the barony of St. Aliquis, circa 1220 (1), when governed by Sir Conon (10). As in chess, Davis indicates that women of Conon’s household could participate in the hunt alongside men (64). Davis makes it clear that hawking and hunting are sports (67), suggesting we may classify them as ludic enterprises alongside chess play.

²⁶³ The tapestries were produced between 1426 and 1450 (Woolley 9).

²⁶⁴ Hunting was reserved for was the aristocracy (Aberth 180), and it was carried out in England within preserves established by the nobility as early as the Anglo-Saxon period (Aberth 180). William of Normandy expanded protections for game by limiting hunting to himself “and those receiving his special warrant” (Aberth 181). Women might carry “small falcons such as merlin onto the hunting field, which were used particularly against larks” (Woolley 39). John Aberth indicates that on one hand, women in the forest eyre rolls are instigators and recipients of poaching efforts; on the other, records indicate throughout the Middle Ages that women obtained licenses and rights to hunt. For instance, “[t]he abbess of Barking in Essex was granted license in 1221 to hunt foxes and hares in Havering Park, while Matilda de Bruys was said to be accustomed to hunting hares (and catching them) in Pickering Forest” (Aberth 199). Amice de Clare, countess of Wight took “two beasts in the New Forest on January 20, 1253, on her return from the court of the queen, Eleanor of Provence,” and Lady Blanche, Baroness Wake of Liddell was permitted by her father, the earl of Lancaster, to hunt deer in late September of 1332 (Aberth 199).

game on his own land” (Aberth 181).²⁶⁵ A medieval sport, hunting served a cultural function; in Huizinga’s terms, then, it was a ludic pastime with its own rules of governance (28-29), and it is a pastime to which Pandarus’s diction frequently alludes. Later, in Book V, when Criseyde is turned over to the Greeks, we will see Troilus riding, his eagle on his arm; the hunt he and Pandarus initiated in Book I Diomedes will soon undertake, with similar success.

As we see in the *LBA*, hunting may be a game for men, but for the hunted (which can easily turn out to be the hunter, as in *TC*’s Troilus), the feathers of the arrow are dire. Ruiz’s work provides an alternative example by which we can better understand how Troilus meets his end and why, which emerges as an admonishment to men not only for pursuing carnal love, but in doing so, committing the sin of pride.²⁶⁶ In the first third of the *LBA*, beast fables pair with lyric pronouncements against specific sins, including pride, avarice, lechery, envy, and gluttony.²⁶⁷ The *Libro* offers a meditation on the “pecado de la loxuria” [sin of lust] (st.257-269) followed by the “ensiempro del aguila e del caçador” [example of the eagle and the hunter] (st.270-275). After citing men’s downfall by means of adultery and fornication, the pronouncement against loxuria establishes:

De muchos ha que matas, non sé uno que sanes;
quantos en tu loxuria son grandes varraganes,

²⁶⁵ The law also protected boar and hares, although scant remains of these suggest that in England, they were rarely hunted at all (Aberth 183).

²⁶⁶ Foucault reasons that “[f]ornication, the most disgraceful of all the vices... is the consequence of pride—a chastisement but also a temptation, the proof God sends to the presumptuous mortal to remind him that he is always threatened by the weakness of the flesh if the grace of God does not come to his help” (“Ethics” 187).

²⁶⁷ This occurs amidst the fables Ruiz presents in between don Melón’s complaint to don Amor (st.181-188) and don Amor’s response to him (st.423-456).

mátanse a sí mesmos los locos alvardanes;

contésceles como al águila con los nesçios truhanes. (st.269)

[of the many that have been killed, I know of no one that healed; when in your lust they are great vagrants, the crazy ones kill themselves; count those like the eagle among these silly rogues]. In the parable of the eagle, the noble bird, whose feather spurs the hunter's arrow, dies—like the lusty fools—from that which came within him:

Cató contra sus pechos el águila ferida

e vido que sus pendolas la avian escarnida;

dixo contra sí mesma una razón temida:

‘De mí salió quien me mató e me tiró la vida. (st.272)

[The eagle caught a wound against its breast, and I see that they hang the flayed bird; He said against himself a timid reason: ‘of me came that which killed me and tore life from me]. Ruiz's beast fable may seem tendentious, but it posits a serious proposition; one's bane derives from one's own nature.

Like the eagle in the *LBA* fable, and don Melón, for whom the bird is a surrogate, what will harm Chaucer's Troilus comes from within him.²⁶⁸ All who fall into carnal love feel a pain of their own making. At the height of his misery, the ambiguous “yo” [I] in *LBA*, which we may read either as don Melón or as Juan Ruiz, complains that “morría de todo en todo; nunca vi cuita mayor” [I would die of all in everything; never I saw greater grief] (593.d). To assuage his suffering, someone offers this advice to don Melón:

Mijor es mostrar el omne su dolencia e su quexura

²⁶⁸ That the root of one's end derives from his own essence is evident in the *Roman de Thèbes* as well; Oedipus murders his father, Laius, after Laius had intended to kill his son. Oedipus's incestuous error derives from the blood in his veins. The same blood, shared by Polyneices and Etioeles, is the wellspring of vice that leads each to his own demise.

al munge e al buen amigo, que-l darán por Aventura
melezina e consejo por do pueda aver fulgura,
que non el morir sin dubda e bevir en grant rencura. (st.594)

[It is better for the man to show his pain to the mender and to the good friend that he will give him, by chance, medicine and advice, so he might have relief, that he won't die without doubt in drinking in great rancor]. The *LBA* also warns against desire: “Por la cobdiçia pierde el omne el bien que tiene, / coyda aver mas mucho de quanto le conviene, / non han lo que cobdiçian, lo suyo non mantienten” [for covetousness, man loses the good he has, he desires to have much more than what is convenient; he doesn't have what he covets, that which is his doesn't sustain him] (st.225).

As we have seen, Pandarus convinces Troilus that shared misery is halved by confiding in a friend; Troilus will also become a stand-in for the eagle that exemplifies the connection between covetousness and the death that comes from within. When Troilus first sees Criseyde at the feast of the Palladium—a statue of Athena that itself will leave Troy when Ulysses steals it—the ominous implications stand in contrast to the ludic atmosphere of the occasion. Troilus enters the temple “pleying” (I.267); he casts jests at “lovers, and [their] lewed observances” (I.198), whom he calls “veray fooles, nyce and blynde” (I.202) for suffering “whan [their] prey is lost” (I.201). But Troilus soon becomes the object of his own scoffing when he spies Criseyde: “His eye percede, and so depe it went, / Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stent” (I.272-3).²⁶⁹ Troilus's

²⁶⁹ Paris's selection of Venus as most beautiful among the goddesses Pallas and Juno sets in motion the Trojan War.

sight is compared to a bowshot, which evokes Cupid.²⁷⁰ But he is the prey as much as the hunter. As he looks, “in his herte botme gan to stiken / Of her his fixe and depe impression” (I.297-298). Criseyde’s “look thorough-shoten and thorough-darted” (I.325) him such that even in Book IV, “Criseydes darte” (IV.472), Troilus declares, shall never leave his heart. Moreover, the specific form Chaucer gives Troilus as prey is avian: “love bigan his fetheres so to lyme” (I. 353).²⁷¹ Reading this scene alongside Ruiz’s parable, flights of fancy become grave,²⁷² yet, Chaucer leaves his readers to draw their own conclusions, both about courtship and men’s behavior in it, leastways, until the very end of the poem.

But more significant than Troilus’s submission to love, at a celebration in honor of Pallas, the goddess of wisdom, no less, is his choice to employ an intermediary. Doing so suggests Troilus could not otherwise capture the object of his affection, nor with it consummate a union. For a staunch warrior, and a prince, such a lack seems absurd. It undermines Troilus’s masculinity even as he desires to express it. The go-between Troilus employs is also a humorous choice, for Pandarus is not only ill-starred in love, but he is also made to play a role typically reserved for women, such as *Trotaconventos* [convent trotter] in the *LBA*, the old woman in the *Pamphilus de Amore*, *Anus*, and *la Vielle* [Old Woman] in the *Roman de la Rose*.

²⁷⁰ The Latin *cupiditas* is associated with actively lustful, carnal behavior; the passage alludes to the concept, which Chaucer’s readers would have recognized.

²⁷¹ The avian comparison continues when Criseyde dreams of a white eagle, who tears out her heart and “forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte” (II.931).

²⁷² But, no outside assailant wounds Troilus; like Ruiz’s eagle, his injury is less a consequence of external factors than it is of his inborn pride. Indeed, Troilus casts his gaze “eft on hire, whil that servyse laste” (I.315); he looks on Criseyde’s figure throughout the Palladian service, scorning Pallas, as Paris did before. This inborn error will be his fall; he will succumb to Venusian sensuality, but until then, he will merely manifest the pallor and pangs Ovid describes as symptomatic of lovers in his *Ars Amatoria* (I.540-546).

Each go-between problematizes the issue of mediation in love;²⁷³ what makes Pandarus's employment especially serious, however, is that it calls into question the ethics of male activities in Chaucer's day: the maintenance of advantageous kinship bonds via arranged marriage and the use of logic. *Trotaconventos*, *la Vielle*, and *Anus* might scheme and betray, but they never violate kinship bonds as Pandarus, Criseyde's uncle and only male relative in Troy, does. His transgression reveals how easily a patriarch might overstep his authority. Moreover, whereas the female *alcahuetas* [go-betweens] typically peddle love-charms and dispense maxims as advice, Pandarus, who also never wants for a proverb, sets more disconcerting snares than they,²⁷⁴ for he uses strategies as commonplace as word games, grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric to manipulate both Criseyde and Troilus (Garbaty, "The Pamphilus" 469).²⁷⁵ When Boccaccio introduced the figure in *Il Filostrato*, he became so interested in the question of the relation of means to ends that, in Warren Ginsberg's words, "he inscribed them in his poem, lent them flesh and gave them a name: Pandaro" (167). In Chaucer's text,

²⁷³ The titular character in Fernando Rojas's early-modern *La Celestina* carries on the tradition of *Trotaconventos*.

²⁷⁴ "A kind of duenna in the confidence of Galatea, [*Anus*] praises Pamphilus at great length and finally invites the young woman to her home to eat apples. As planned, Pamphilus suddenly enters the home of the *Anus*, and, on a pretense, the old woman exits, leaving the lovers alone. The affair is consummated, but when *Anus*, on her return, innocently asks what has happened, Galatea reproaches her for trickery. To make a happy end of the situation, the old one advises the couple to marry, and all is well" (Garbaty "The Pamphilus" 458).

²⁷⁵ Sandwiched between Trojan examples, John Gower explores rhetoric's power in the *Confessio Amantis*. His confessor explains God "The word to man hath gove alone, / So that the speche of his persone, / Or for to lese or for to winne, / The hertes thoght which is withinne... So scholde he be the more honeste, / To whom God gaf so gret a gifte, / And loke wel that he ne schifte / His words to no wicked us" (VII.159-1519). In particular: "Between the trouthe and the falshode / The pleine words for to shode, / So that nothing schal go beside" (VII.1533-1535) because the "word above alle erthli thinges / Is vertuou in his doings, / Wher so it be to euele or goode. / For if the words semen goode / And ben wel spoke at mannes ere, / Whan that ther is no trouthe there, / Thei don fulofte gret deceipte (VII.1547-1553). Words cannot only beguile, but also enchant: "Of word among the men of armes / Ben woundes heeled with the charmes, / Wher lacketh other medicine; / Word hath under his discipline / Of sorcerie the karectes / the words ben of sondri sects, / Of euele and eke of goode also; The words maken frend of fo, / And fo of frend" (VII.1567-1575).

Pandarus's own means implicate both the poet, who mediates the story by writing it, and the audience that hears the words he has written.

Chaucer in fact formalizes the problem of mediation by insisting that he is translating his story from a source that, as far as we can tell, is made-up. The narrator's professions of fidelity to his author "Lollius" comport oddly with the blame he assigns him when he has to describe events even he thinks are dodgy. As the narrator Englishes his source, the vicarious joy and pain he feels by identifying with his characters forces his readers to assess the pleasure they feel by taking into account the way his poem has pandered our desire.²⁷⁶

Another factor that mediates readers' response to the poem is its setting. Even as Troilus and Pandarus become co-woosers of Criseyde, the very fact that they are in Troy colors their pursuit of her. Troy is the city that validates the rapes of its princes. When Hector objects in Book IV to exchanging Criseyde for Antenor by proclaiming: "Syres, she nys no prisonere...I not on yow who that this charge leyde, / But, on my part, ye may eftsome hem tell, / We usen here no women for to selle" (l.179-182), his moral indignation is undercut by Helen's presence in the city. Troy does use and sell its women; it has fought a ten-year war because it does.

This fact lends added weight to the emphasis Pandarus and Troilus place on keeping the wooing of Criseyde secret. Secrecy, of course, is a prerequisite of *fin' amor*; less noted is its link to play (Huizinga 31). Keeping something secret raises the stakes for all involved; not every player, however, stands the same risk. For Troilus and Pandarus,

²⁷⁶ By this I mean that both Troilus's and the narrator's experience of joy and pleasance, as well as the essence of those experiences themselves, are questionable.

the threat of exposure carries no more penalty than embarrassment; for Criseyde, exposure forever tramples her honor underfoot.

The historical record in fact suggests that women in the Middle Ages fully understood the radical difference in the standard by which they and men were judged; for them, as for Criseyde, avoiding ill-repute was no game.²⁷⁷ As one wife has opined, “men *may* kiss women merely to make them good cheer,” but daughters should avoid “kyssyng and alle suche maners of disoportes” (Green 202).²⁷⁸ Distinguishing “between genuine and playful love-talking, between earnest and game...even for those involved” was not always easy (207), and it was prone to misunderstanding. Green suggests that “to maintain the precarious balance between courtesy and propriety” (202), a medieval noblewoman had to develop sharp sense of social sensibilities. The same asymmetries certainly apply to Criseyde, since the men and women in Troy, as many critics note, behave as if they were members of a noble court in fourteenth century England. In any event, the irony, of course, about keeping the affair secret is ever-present and entirely inescapable: since we’re reading Chaucer’s poem about Troilus and Criseyde their affair did not remain hidden.

In Chaucer’s day, in fact, an uncouth or forward woman was assumed to be immoral. Men’s preoccupation with curbing female sexuality by equating abstinence with virtue made a single woman’s “voluntary, noncommercial heterosexual activity” suspect;

²⁷⁷ In categories derived “from the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-23, [in which] virgins merit a hundredfold reward, widows a sixtyfold reward, and the married a thirtyfold reward” for the extent of their chastity, women were labeled, and valued, with regard to their sexual activity (Beattie 15). With prostitutes at the bottom and virgins at the top, widows and wives fell in between.

²⁷⁸ Green draws on a statement by the wife of the Knight to the Tower Landry (202).

when exposed, the woman's act was "classified as prostitution" (Karras 128).²⁷⁹ Pandarus most of all insists on preserving Criseyde's reputation by keeping his and Troilus's doings secret; the prince, he says, will succeed with Criseyde if he "require[s] naught that is ayeyns hyre name; / For vertu stretcheth naught himself to shame" (I.902-903). As long as Criseyde's reputation is safe, Pandarus opines, she can be plied to Troilus's desire.²⁸⁰ But shame isn't the only thing that Criseyde dreads. As the daughter of a traitor, her life depends on keeping her honor. This is why she cannot refuse Pandarus's forays on Troilus's behalf. She knows her station makes an affair with him impossible. Nevertheless were she "...outreliche his sighte flee, / Peraunter he myghte have me in dispit, / Thorough which I myghte stoned in worse plit" (II.710-12). Criseyde cannot win. Some of Chaucer's medieval readers would have thought her a prostitute not only when she exchanges Troilus for Diomede, but also when she gives in to Troilus in the first place.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Karras indicates that independent women's heterosexual activity threatened men's control and, therefore, required explanation; the easiest means was labeling women's sex outside of marriage as prostitution.

²⁸⁰ In Chaucer's source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, the author expends great energy to impress upon Troilo Pandaro's understanding of *fama*, the medieval principle affecting one's legal status amidst court proceedings, particularly in Italy. Pandaro considers the consequences of he and Troilo's exploits; he knows that it would not bode well "...se cotal cosa / Alla bocca del volgo mai perviene, / Che, per follia di noi, vituperosa / È divenuta, dove esser soleva / Onor, dappoi per amor si facea" [If this deed were ever to arrive on the mouths of the general public, that for our folly, made for Love, where there was honor were to become ignominious] (II.25.4-8). In Book III, Pandarus tells Troilus: "Wherefore, er I wol ferther gon a pas, / The preie ich eft, although thow shuldest deye, / That privete go with us in this cas" (381-283). Pandarus invokes the proverb: "That 'firste virtue is to kepe tonge'" (III.294), as it is the "tongue, allas, so often here-byforn / Hath mad ful many a lady bright of hewe / Seyd 'Weilaway, the day that I was born'" (III.302-4), resulting in the end of romance. Pandarus reveals that "a woman grante me / Hire love, and seith that other wol she non, / and I am sworn to holden it secree, / And after I go telle it two or thre...And lyere, for I breke my biheste" (III.310-15). Pandarus's folly in love emphasizes the import of secrecy, both for Criseyde to entertain the relationship, and for it to endure.

²⁸¹ Chaucer's historical reality contrasts with the fantasy of medieval romance, which posits female desire, reciprocated by the hero, as propelling the latter to achieve great deeds. A woman's love is ennobling in romance, whereas in real life, it was suspect. Chaucer's poem portrays clashing value systems on the nature of love; he juxtaposes sympathetic, antipathetic, ironic and condemnatory perspectives, thereby widening

As we've seen, the banter between Troilus and Pandarus proceeds by playing with the conventions of courtly love; engaging Criseyde in their game, however, poses serious consequences. Pandarus begins his campaign to win his niece for Troilus when he arrives unannounced at Criseyde's home (I.1069-1071). He disturbs her while she reads the *Roman de Thèbes*, the epic tale of betrayal and siege.²⁸² Little does Criseyde realize Pandarus will precipitate both when he arrives to persuade her into accepting Troilus as a lover. Acting as her gossip, which the *MED* defines as both a godparent and close friend, Pandarus jokes, laughs, and plays throughout his visit as he attempts to predispose Criseyde be open to Troilus's professions of love. Pandarus's good humor is strategic, which makes whatever is comic in it serious.

Before he describes Pandarus's doings, the narrator introduces Book II by refashioning an image Chaucer took from Dante's *Purgatorio*: "Owt of this blak waves for to saylle, / O wynd, o wynd, the weder gynnth clere" (II.1-2).²⁸³ In citing two of nature's most fickle forces—wind and sea—the narrator emphasizes the idea of change. Even though he's promising that things will improve for Troilus in this book, his trope inevitably carries premonitions of instability. The narrator participates in his own way in this dynamic. In describing Troilus's rising fortunes, he says "Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne" (II.48) as he brings his tale "out of Latyn" and writes it "in my tongue"

the "spectrum of values" the poem portrays (Frank 158). The double standard makes it difficult to conclude whether, in representing Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer takes "for his model the idealized love of imaginative fiction or the social expression of this ideal in romantic play" (Green 207). He exploits the ambiguity, pitting comedy against earnest as the poem explores "the inevitable and pathetic inability of the human to contain the ideal" (Green 207).

²⁸² The content Criseyde reads and where she leaves off warrant more discussion than is possible here, so I will delay addressing these factors until later in this section.

²⁸³ In the invocation of *Purgatorio* I, Dante's imagery is of a boat emerging from a squall: "Per correr miglior acque alza le vele / omai la navicella del mio ingegno, / che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele" [To run better through the water the sails raise, from then on, the little boat of my devising leaves behind the sea so cruel. (I.1-3).

(II.14). For his labor, he says, “I nyl have neither thank ne blame / Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely, / Disblameth me if any word be lame, / For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I” (II.15-18). Why would he go to such lengths to exculpate himself from blame if the matter he will relate is happier? Implications of something untoward suddenly spring up where we would not have expected them. The narrator then expands his premature defense of himself by noting the mutability of language itself:

Ye know eek that in forme of speche is change
Withinne a thousand yeer, and words tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so. (II.22-25)

The fault, if there is one, he seems to say, lies in the nature of things: all things change, in nature and in the words we use to describe it. By the time the narrator ends his invocation, the reader will find it difficult not to remember that he has already alerted us to the fact that Criseyde will also change. She seems to leave Troilus before she ever meets him. At the same time, the narrator’s recourse to the general state of the world raises the suspicion that he somehow may wish to mask the specific use of words by particular characters in the events he’s about to relate.

Importantly, the narrator invokes Cleo, the muse of history at the beginning of Book II. She is also aligned with Apollo and knowledge (Chance 119). These figures force readers to read the events about to be described from the viewpoint of their already having happened. As we watch Pandarus maneuver Criseyde into acknowledging and accepting Troilus’s attentions, we have been reminded that the love she will feel for him

will not last. We wonder, then, whether the fact that her feeling is not as deep-seated as we might have wished has something to do with the way it has been induced.

After the proem, the narrator reports that Pandarus dreamed of “the swalowe Proigne, with a sorrowful lay” (II.64) before he comes to Criseyde’s palace. The allusion is foreboding; the swallow’s chattering of “How Tereus gan forth hire suster take” (II.69) casts an anticipatory pall of violent rape and terrible revenge, which includes the slaughter of Itys, Philomela’s child, over everything Pandarus and Criseyde will say and do. It also directs our attention to Pandarus’s own role as go-between, since Procne, who enables Philomela to wreak her vengeance, is her sister: this is a family affair (Frantzen 67).²⁸⁴ Moreover, the narrator prays as Pandarus sets off for Criseyde’s home that “Janus, god of entree” (II.77) will guide him.²⁸⁵ Janus, of course, is the god with two faces; as well as being “god of beginnings” (Chance 121), he oversees leaving. Whatever success two-faced Pandarus will have will already have been contextualized by Criseyde’s departure from Troy, and her abandonment of Troilus.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Frantzen opines that Pandarus never arranges for Criseyde’s rape, but he concedes that the swallow’s song recalls Pandarus’s promise “to help Troilus obtain his loved one, even if she [were]...Pandarus’s sister” (67).

²⁸⁵ The Roman god of entryways, Janus is he of two-faces. For Pandarus, both associations seem pertinent: the ability to appear as other than one is: i.e. friend or foe, and the ability to enter a space otherwise closed. Pandarus is two-faced; as Chance says, he is gatekeeper to Criseyde’s heart and to the spaces she occupies. He shows Troilus a “secretive, pandering” visage but reserves for Criseyde a “public wise” countenance (Chance 122). Aside from the reference to Janus, Lee Patterson glosses the poem’s classical allusions, such as the reference to Tantalus and Antigone, as invoking Theban victims (133). Both weep for familial losses, unable to escape Boethius’s invocation of Fortune’s wheel. I argue these references underscore the poem’s tragic undertone. They call upon readers to recognize classical women victims, often of sexual violence, and by extension, they invite readers to identify Criseyde among their ranks. Dietrich maintains that the references to Janus emphasize the questionable portent of Pandarus’s actions, as does the allusion to “the myth of Procne in which Tereus betrays his wife by raping her sister” (214).

²⁸⁶ Bakhtin points out “the medieval feast had...the two faces of Janus: “Its official, ecclesiastical face was turned to the past and sanctioned the existing order, but the face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present” (81) amidst the feast.

At Criseyde's home, Pandarus masks his tactics with a sense of jovial playfulness. When he discovers Criseyde is reading, he asks "Is it of love? O, som good ye me leere!" (II.97). More than "divert[ing] Criseyde's attention" (Fyler 117), Pandarus immediately positions Criseyde into being a version of himself. In playing the inept lover, he casts Criseyde as an adept who can use the *savoir-faire* she has gained from literature to help her uncle: Pandarus, of course, is doing the same thing for Troilus. Pandarus's conscription of Criseyde as his surrogate is profoundly troubling: he will seduce her by establishing that they are entirely compatible. From the start, he intends to seize Criseyde's agency from her.

What Criseyde is reading, the *Le Roman de Thèbes*, is equally significant.²⁸⁷ Were she not interrupted, Dinshaw and Patterson argue, Criseyde could have gained foreknowledge of her own fate.²⁸⁸ She tells Pandarus she has "herd how that kyng Layus deyde / Thorough Edippus his sone" (II.101-102); she stopped reading at the rubrication for Amphiorax's death, well before the romance's midpoint. As Jacqueline de Weever explains, Amphiorax was a seer; he knew the siege of Thebes would prove his end, so he avoided Polyneices, whom he was to accompany there, until Eriphyle, his wife, betrayed him. In exchange for a golden necklace, she revealed to Polyneices Amphiorax's hiding place. Amphiorax went with Polyneices and "was swallowed up by an earthquake." When Criseyde ceases to read, Amphiorax dies, betrayed by the one closest him for naught but a piece of jewelry. Had she gone on, Criseyde would have read of yet another

²⁸⁷ The tale emblemizes tragedy throughout Chaucer's poem, and Cassandra's account of it, according to Winthrop Wetherbee, "reduces the individuals she names to pawns, less important than the sequence of events in which they appear" (130).

²⁸⁸ Criseyde might, Laurel Amtower argues, have identified with the mourning wives in the epic (130).

warning: Etiocles and Polyneices, sons of Oedipus and Jocasta, betray one another.²⁸⁹

She would also have read how swiftly widowed Jocasta was made to remarry.²⁹⁰

But even in what Criseyde has read there are warnings that, had she the narrator's knowledge of how things would turn out, she may have wanted to remember. The reference to "Edippus" (II.102) raises the specter of incest and of a woman who unwittingly sleeps with a man she would never choose. And Criseyde already knows that *Le Roman de Thèbes* recounts the eponymous city's destruction brought about by family betrayal. Etiocles and Polyneices desecrate Thebes by breaking faith with one another. Their grandfather, Laius, had violated the bond of blood by causing Oedipus to be exposed at birth. Pandarus's appearance at Criseyde's house could be less propitious. But even to ask that Criseyde have been put more on guard by her reading than we are is unfair. The idea that we can map our lives onto the lives of characters described in books has its own dangers. For Chaucer's audience, unless that book is the Bible, to do so was to invite calamity.

Criseyde, though, is perceptive; she sees through Pandarus's japery right away.

She quips: "Uncle, youre maistress is nat here. / With that thei gonnen laughe" (II.98-99).

²⁸⁹ Chance identifies Jocasta's sons as allegorizations of greed and lust (126). War breaks out when Etiocles refuses to yield governance of Thebes to Polyneices after his year-long term elapses. Messenger Tydeas adjudges Etiocles to "have betrayed [the brothers'] covenant" (l.1407). Quotations from the *Roman de Thèbes* are taken from John Smartt Coley's translation. I have chosen not to translate from the original text in this instance because the events within the *Roman* do not present themselves as direct parallels to Chaucer's text, though it is clear the poem served as a source of inspiration.

²⁹⁰ Jocasta learns that young Oedipus slew Laius, yet they reach an accord, "For woman is soon led so / That one does with her all his desire" (II.399-400). The next day, Theban counselors desire Oedipus "...for king; / All wish that he have the kingdom / And also that he have you [Jocasta] for wife; / Have together, the kingdom, both of you, / So that he has you, we have him. / We can not find a better one, / Or one who may hold the country so securely" (II.412-418). Oedipus, his mother later revealed to him, tears out his eyes (l.497); his sons crush them underfoot, and Oedipus invokes Jupiter and "Tisiphone fury of hell," imploring she: "Destroy for me the proud ones / Who put my eyes under their feet" (II.510-512). Though Criseyde may have read of these events, she may, nonetheless, have missed the moral to: "Take care in this— / Conduct yourself according to right and moderation; / Do not do anything against nature, / That you may not come to so harsh an end" as do Oedipus and his sons (II.10, 227-10, 230).

Laughter cuts both ways, as Pandarus ““play[s] the lover’ with [Criseyde]” (Green 209). She knows Pandarus play-acts as woe-begone lover whose mistress has denied him. Their laughter seems good-natured, but is it the kind behind which, Bakhtin argues, no fear can lurk (95)? Criseyde already, I would argue, has understood that Pandarus’s joking is part of his playing a role.²⁹¹

Bereft of her husband, Criseyde, according to medieval thinking, has been “unheaded” (Amtower 120); as such some readers would have seen her as “deprived of will, subjectivity, [and of] an audible voice that might assert itself against wrongdoing” (123).²⁹² Chaucer, however, shows us a Criseyde whose widowhood has given her a certain freedom: she governs her own estate. Against this, though, her father’s treachery has compromised her autonomy; nothing she does can cast any questionable light on her conduct. Her condition, therefore, both gives Criseyde a room of her own and hems her in; she is “a woman for whom traditional avenues of behavior are closed” (Amtower 127).

Criseyde’s limitations, Amtower suggests, are why she appears “no longer knowing ‘how to read,’ or how to behave or judge her circumstances” (127). She is yet to acquire new “reading” strategies, to exchange her naïve decision-making process for one that allows her to “effect the kinds of changes in her situation that will ensure her

²⁹¹ Olga Trokhimenko points out how, to “satisfy society’s need for eroticism and seductiveness[] and assure smooth interaction between the sexes” (250), thirteenth-century noblewomen were permitted “a little laugh, sweet and brief, with the mouth semi-open between two charming dimples” (251), provided it did not detract from “a woman’s ornamental function” or “affect her beauty” (252). Perhaps fourteenth-century ladies would have recognized Criseyde’s smiles and laughter as exhibitions they themselves felt required to make. They might have registered, too, the dichotomy between this expectation and the church’s condemnation of unrestrained laughter, which was linked to “worldliness and short-sightedness” (253) and construed “as evidence of moral and physical corruption” (254).

²⁹² The repeated instances whereby Criseyde’s reading, writing, and speaking are interrupted, by men, signal “both her attempt to engage language acts and her inability to complete them” (Amtower 129).

survival” (Amtower 128). Until then, Pandarus’s joking interruptions continue to distract Criseyde’s “reading” of the situation: are they earnest or game?²⁹³

Pandarus’s next move piques Criseyde’s interest: he says he has a secret, one that she will be happy to know: “Yet koude I telle a thyng to doon yow pleye” (II.121). Criseyde immediately asks whether the siege is over; Pandarus says “nay, as evere mote I thryve, / It is a thing wel bet than swyche five” (II.125-126). Pandarus has substituted himself for the romance Criseyde had been reading. Now she must “read” him.

In the process, Pandarus becomes Troilus: he is the man with a secret, just as his friend is secretly in love.²⁹⁴ Criseyde in turn assumes the role Pandarus had played before; she now must probe to learn her uncle’s secret. Not surprisingly, Criseyde lacks Pandarus’s relish in playing. She becomes frustrated and exclaims “Ye, holy God... what thing is that?” (II.127) and continues:

For al this world ne kan I reden what
It shoulde ben; some jape I trowe is this;
And but yourselven telle us what it is,
My wit is for t’arede it al to leene.
As help me God, I not nat what ye meene. (II.129-133)

²⁹³ Fyler assesses the jokes passed between the characters as signs of their closeness. Christopher Stampone agrees; he contends that Criseyde’s laughter “helps reaffirm the light-hearted nature of uncle and niece’s initial exchange” (399). Both, he says, “participate in a rhetorical dance in which both are aware of the rules” (399); it is a *pas de deux* “that is both fun and, at this point in the poem, innocent” (401). I dispute the gameful quality of their exchanges here; I also would argue, however, that their joviality dissipates real concerns about the imbalance of power that Pandarus’s wooing Criseyde for Troilus inevitably entails. Those concerns, as Stampone himself concedes, begin to emerge more clearly when Pandarus begins a new “dance;” instead of a *pas de deux* “in which both partners knowingly participate,” he “dupliciously leads his ignorant niece in preplotted steps” (401).

²⁹⁴ Warren Ginsberg suggests, in discussing *Il Filostrato*, that as much as Troilo, Pandaro becomes Criseida’s lover (169).

Criseyde is frightened and she is burning to learn what Pandarus is concealing from her. She suspects it's all a ruse, a "jape," but knows as well how vulnerable she is. No wonder she says: "I jape nought, as evere have I joye!" (II.140). But Criseyde is an adept game player herself. She then pretends to be indifferent: "Now, uncle myn, I nyl yow nought displese, / Nor axen more that may do yow diseze" (II.146-147).

The two continue to share pleasantries (II.148-149), and "pleide" (II.150). Pandarus entreats Criseyde "ariseth, lat us daunce, / And cast youre widewes habit to mischaunce!" (II.221-222), as he had on first encountering her: "Do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare; / Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce" (II.110-111). To put Criseyde in the right frame of mind to love, he must have her forget the grief she presumably feels as a widow. When we first see Criseyde, she wears her widow's weeds to protect her; they declare her allegiance to Troy in the face of Calkas's betrayal of it and remind the Trojans that she has shared their suffering. Even before Pandarus reveals Troilus is in love with her, Criseyde's careful attention to show herself always in widow's garb already inclines her toward her consent, for it appears no man possesses her. Her weeds, at least to Troilus when he first sees her, make her "not only more attractive, but also more available" (Amtower 129). For Pandarus, Criseyde's widowhood is no more than the garments she wears; she can put it off as easily as she can take off her veil. In his request that she remove them, we see Pandarus following the advice of *The Roman de la Rose*: to fall in love with someone in particular, we must be ready to fall in love generally.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Pandarus's subsequent wooings are simply a more intense version of the "mannes game" Criseyde is forced to play, one in which she is only trying to survive (Amtower 127).

In the end, Pandarus reveals the matter he's kept hidden only when he extracts from Criseyde her pledge to trust him:

'Twis, myn uncle,' quod she, 'grant mercy!
Youre frendshipe have I founded evere yit.
I am to no man holden, trewely,
So much as yow, and have so litel quyt;
And with the grace of God, emforth my wit,
As in my gylt I shal yow nevere offende;
And if I have er this I wol amende.' (II.239-245)

In plighting her troth to Pandarus, Criseyde's actions, wrought by her uncle, inevitably contaminate the possibility of her faithfully loving Troilus, who, Pandarus then tells her, not only loves Criseyde, but if repudiated, will also surely die (II.319-320).

Criseyde's response is telling: she
...caste adown the heed,
And she began to breste a-wepe anoon,
And seyde: 'Allas, for wo! Why nere I deed?
For of this world the feyth is al agoon.
Allas, what sholden straunge to me doon,
Whan he that for my beste frend I wende
Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?' (II.407-413)

Pandarus, whom Criseyde thought was her "best friend" advises "her to love, when he should do the opposite (Howard, *Chaucer* 359).²⁹⁶ Criseyde's terms show the dimensions

²⁹⁶ Pandarus's advice to Criseyde, that she see Troilus's love as a splendid opportunity, manifests the allegation don Melón makes against Love prior to acquiring Trotaconventos's aid. Love "«Fazes como

of Pandarus's betrayal of her, his kinswoman; friendship is exactly the argument Pandarus used to induce Troilus to tell him he loves Criseyde. Again, Pandarus has maneuvered Criseyde into becoming a version of himself.²⁹⁷

Like Emelye in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," Criseyde must "maken vertu of necessitee" (*KT*.3042); in this case, Pandarus and Troilus play the roles of Arcite and Palamon, since each is fighting to gain her love.²⁹⁸ Criseyde becomes the object against which the poem defines Troilus and Pandarus as male subjects. She is "the fearfullest wight" (*II*.450). "With a sorrowful sik she sayde thrie, / 'A Lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce!" (*II*.463-464). She is afraid, she says: "For myn estat lith in jupartie, / And ek myn emes life is in balaunce" (*II*.465-466). She decides at last "Of harmes two, the lesse is for to chese" (*II*.470); she will save his life, and Troilus's, even at the cost of her personal freedom. Her choice reflects the patriarchal norms Chaucer's audience would subscribe to: she obeys her uncle and she serves her prince.²⁹⁹

folguín en tu falsa manera: / atalayas de lexos e caças la primera, / a la que matar quieres sácasla de carrera, de lograr encobierto sacas çelada fierá" [You make like a highwayman in your false ways: You spy from afar and hunt the first, that which you want to kill you take from the roadway, to achieve covertly you take the beast in ambush] (*st*.393). Here, Pandarus leads Criseyde astray from what we intuit is the scrupulous path. Like Love in *LBA*, Pandarus "Tu le ruyes a la oreja e dasle mal consejo / que faga tu mandado e siga tu trebejo" [you laugh in (a daughter's, 394a) ear and give her bad advice that she would follow your command and follow your chessman] into the game he so desires (*st*.396a-b).

²⁹⁷ Though this would seem to suggest Criseyde takes on male traits, she never captures Troilus nor Pandarus in her power, an act the poem posits as central to proving one's manhood.

²⁹⁸ Emelye never gets to choose; she is the object over which two brothers, Palemon and Arcite, fight to the death. Their competition for her recalls the struggle between Theban Etiocles and Polyneices. The outcome of these Theban brothers' dispute sets Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" in motion. It is for husbands lost in the brothers' civil war that the Theban widows weep and entreat Theseus's aid.

²⁹⁹ In the Middle Ages, widows were threats to patriarchal systems; in surviving their husbands, they no longer were subject to male regulation and control of their sexuality (Amtower 122); Criseyde's submission to Troilus via Pandarus relinquishes the small measure of agency she, as a widow, maintained. As Frantzen says, Criseyde's is a "world... controlled by men in powerful positions: Calkas, Hector, Pandarus, and Troilus all influence her fate and help manage her life" (51). "Help" is a term I can't help but bristle at, as each man, particularly Pandarus, constrains Criseyde's movement.

For all their joking and laughter, Pandarus disregards Criseyde's concerns to advance Troilus's, which he has made his own. Without Criseyde's assent, he says, three times, Troilus will die (II.322, 362, 439), and so will he (II.323, 440-2, 446). Pandarus is well aware that what he is doing could be considered pimping for Troilus:

[T]hink wel that this is no gaude;
For me were levere thow and I and he
Were hanged than I shoulde ben his baude,
As heigh as men myghte on us alle ysee!
I am thyn em; the shame were to me,
As wel as the, if that I sholde assente
Thorough myn abet that he thyn honour shente. (II.351-7)³⁰⁰

But he raises the concern only to dismiss it.

As Criseyde herself has made clear, the very fact that Pandarus is present at her home contradicts the notion that he is protecting her honor.³⁰¹ He admits as much with a crude joke when he accepts Criseyde's terms that the relationship between her and Troilus be chaste (II. 477-480, 489). He says that as long as Criseyde is as wise as she is fair:

Wel in the ryng than is the ruby set.
Ther were nevere two so wel ymet,
Whan ye ben his al hool, as he is youre:
Ther mighty God yet graunte us see that houre!" (II.584-88)

³⁰⁰ Pandarus "accuses himself of being a pimp to give himself an opportunity to refute the accusation. This is complex and insistent self-awareness; it may be deferred or disguised, but never eradicated" (Carton 51).

³⁰¹ Pandarus's sway is particularly noticeable in light of the fact that Criseyde is a widow.

Pandarus's sexual innuendo is hard to miss. As Thomas W. Ross has suggested, the ruby in the ring is an "iconography of coition," reinforced by the "play on 'hool'" (qtd. in Carton 52). Criseyde can only laugh in response to indicate that is not what she meant.³⁰²

The moves and countermoves in Pandarus and Criseyde's conversation bring to mind a text with which Chaucer's readers were likely familiar, *Les Eschéz d'Amours*, which allegorizes courtship as a game of chess. Invoking the imagery of the *Roman de la Rose*, its protagonist enters a garden with Idleness's help. He plays chess with a young lady and loses; he is overcome by her beauty. As Gregory Heyworth et al. explain, *Les Eschéz d'Amours* is a "fanciful, allegorically detailed invective against the life of Venus" (15).³⁰³ As a whole, it argues against leisure, chess, and love in favor of reason and chastity: virtues championed by the goddess Pallas, who, at the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde* Trojans venerate. Chaucer's readers, likely familiar with *Les Eschéz d'Amours*, might have understood Criseyde's loss to Pandarus as an inversion of the allegory, where the lover loses, not the lady.

Because Chaucer's readers were likely familiar with *Les Eschéz d'Amours*, it is useful to examine how Pandarus's game with Troilus and Criseyde adapts rules and

³⁰² Pointing out Pandarus's fondness for sexual innuendo and puns, Carton suggests that for Pandarus, verbal intercourse, a means by which to achieve "love," can be "easily and appropriately" taken as a euphemism for sex (55). Here, as in Olga Trokhimenko's analysis of the medieval proclivity to conflate women's mouths with their sexual organs, open mouths and laughter are quickly taken to signify sexual rather than merely communicative meanings.

³⁰³ "[T]he second half is an increasingly practical, allegorically spare Mirror for Princes, a narrative that replaces the 'game' of chess with real-life tactical advice on politics, government, and public service, of which chess was but an otiose microcosm" (Heyworth et al. 15). In *Les Eschéz*, Pallas describes to "Acteur," the protagonist, three lives from which men must choose: "the sensual life (vie voluptueuse), the active life (vie active), and the contemplative life (vie contemplative). The first is the life of Venus; the second, the life of Juno; and the third and best life (la plus suppellative)...induces men to contemplate and understand divine mysteries and, at the same time, flee the ephemeral pleasures of the flesh and the unpredictable turns of fortune" (Heyworth 113-114).

conventions like those known unto players of medieval chess.³⁰⁴ In Chaucer's day, the rules of the game were contingent upon the players.³⁰⁵ What constituted "winning" was often negotiated beforehand; clarifying rules at a game's outset increased the likelihood of fair play. The unclear object of Pandarus's game automatically tips the odds of winning in his favor. For me, however, the most important aspect of medieval chess play concerned the requirement that players agree to the moves the pieces could make before they played.³⁰⁶ In *Troilus and Criseyde*, there is no negotiation; there is only Pandarus. He determines the moves; he defines what winning means.

In Chaucer's immediate source, *Il Filostrato*, Criseida is far more the mistress of her own decisions. As many scholars note, in Boccaccio, Pandaro is Criseyde's cousin. In Chaucer, Pandarus is Criseyde's uncle; he is older and has more power to influence her,

³⁰⁴ Chess played before the turn of the sixteenth century can be deemed "medieval;" it was adopted from the Persian form of chess, *shatranj* (M. Taylor 170).

³⁰⁵ Players agreed upon rules and objectives at the game's outset, which underscores "the application of chess as a social process in which rules were established, but objectives could be negotiated" (77). For instance, the object of the game could be posed as mating the opponent "in a certain number of moves or in a certain position on the board" (Milliman 77). The rules, then, like the pieces, were not necessarily fixed, and they "could be more or less strictly enforced. You could allow an opponent to take back a move or point out that a piece is threatened depending on the social context in which the game is played" (Milliman 77-78).

³⁰⁶ In particular, the queen's role on the board was, until the sixteenth-century, variously defined. For some, it was the weakest piece on the board (Milliman 77), limited to a single-space move, for others, it was the most powerful, permitted to move many spaces in any direction. The *fers* [advisor/vizier], the piece that later became the queen, was at first allowed to move only one diagonal space (M. Taylor 170-71). But as players adapted rules to shorten the game, the *fers* acquired more power; by the thirteenth-century in Spain, it could overleap a single space and move another single space per move thereafter (170-171). In the "Verses," attributed to 12th-century Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (c.1099-1167), the queen "can go to all four corners; there is no one who can say a word against her. / As swift as a gazelle and a strong as a lion, / she can fight courageously, effortlessly" (qtd. in M. Taylor 177). Gaultier de Coinci's early 13th-century *Miracles de la Sainte Vierge* imagines the *fers* as a powerful piece superior the king (M. Taylor 176). In the *Miracles*, the *fers* in fact can enact a tactic known as "the king hunt" (176); she "can chase and corner a king...she can protect all other pieces" (177). These developments, Taylor suggests, happened "as a series of innovations throughout the later Middle Ages—local, tentative, but always in the direction of greater power and speed" (M. 180), all "nearly 250 years before the first recorded modern game" (177). Likewise, the *alfin* [elephant] preceded the modern "bishop [and] was also a much weaker piece, as it moved only two spaces at a time" (Milliman 77). *Alfin* movements began to change alongside those of the *fers*. Initially, it leaped like the *fers*, but it was then allowed to glide along the oblique (M. Taylor 172-173).

especially when he assumes the role traditionally played by the female confidant, or *duenna*, as in the *LBA*'s *alcahueta* [go-between] *Trotaconventos* [convent-trotter]. Far more than in Boccaccio, Chaucer's Pandarus brings the inequality between men and women center stage; in doing so, Chaucer critiques masculinity as conquest at the same time as Pandarus equates manhood with capture of and carnal fulfillment from one's desire.

Courtly love inverts the power dynamic Chaucer draws attention to,³⁰⁷ by elevating the beloved, it is a sort of abreaction "for the fundamental inequality of relations in the social order of the sexes" (Frantzen 52). Pandarus's gaming functions in a similar way, for it reinforces his male superiority while granting Criseyde a power he knows she doesn't have: the ability to determine whether Troilus lives or dies. The truth, as we see, is that Criseyde has little choice other than to do what Pandarus wants her to do. In light of this, Christopher Cannon underscores Criseyde's vulnerability, her fear that spiting Troilus might imperil her. The terms of her consent, he argues, are circumscribed by a situation in which "a 'no' would be a meaningless gesture toward an act whose accomplishment is already settled" (85). This situation makes Troilus's need of a go-between all the more ironic, for it seems social norms, both in Troy and in Chaucer's fourteenth-century England, would inherently expedite his efforts to woo Criseyde.

In a world where women were good to the extent that they obeyed men, Pandarus has won the game he plays with Criseyde before he initiates it. As Dinshaw says, she must yield to her uncle's behest (58). Patterson notes that even when Criseyde finally

³⁰⁷ Drawing on David Aers, Frantzen points out that women were "virtually powerless" in the actual social order; the pedestals they are placed on in fiction position them as "dominae" in a purely "symbolic order" (53). Green agrees; female sovereignty in romance "was a polite fiction of aristocratic courtship" from "an age whose theories of male superiority were stronger than our own" (216).

accepts Troilus, “she is unable to represent [the desire for him] to herself as her own” (L. 145). Her “desire” is less “a function of moral failure” than it is a “cultural necessity” (146). Pandarus is Chaucer’s clearest demonstration of the extent to which courtship in the Middle Ages was a man’s game.

One finds a less clearly-gendered version of the subordination of women in the *LBA* when Trotaconventos cajoles doña Endrina to consider don Melón’s advances. I say “less clearly-gendered” only because the intermediary is female; male interests in the *LBA* are nonetheless privileged over female ones. As for Criseyde, estate and honor are, like doña Endrina’s, her foremost concerns (st.742-744). Whereas Criseyde can in the end do no more than call Pandarus a sly fox, doña Endrina fully deplures

Trotaconventos’s trickery:

¡Ay, viejas pitofleras, malapresas seades!

El mundo revolviendo, a todos engañades:

mintiendo, aponiendo, deziendo vanidades,

a los nesçios fazedes las mentiras verdades. (st.784)

[Ah! old baude, may bad things come to pass for you! The world turning, you deceive everyone: lying, accusing, in speaking vanities to fools, lies are made truth]. Expanding her lament to include the fickleness of language and *fama*, doña Endrina cries out: “Ay, lengua sin ventura! ¿Por qué quieres dezir, / por qué quieres fablar, por qué quieres departir / con dueña que te non quiere nin escuchar nin oír?” [Ah, luckless tongue! Why do you want to speak, why you want to talk, why do you want to leave with a lady that doesn’t want you, neither to listen nor to hear you?] (st.789a-c). Doña Endrina recognizes the futility of trying to speak on her own behalf when her desires are pitted against a

man's. As she enumerates the consequences she foresees of the proposed venture, she, like Criseyde, trembles:

Ay, que todos mis mienbros comiençan a tremer;
mi fuerça e mi seso e todo mi saber
mi salud e mi vida e todo mi entender,
por esperança vana se va a perder. (st.785)

[Oh, all of my limbs begin to tremble / my strength, reason, and all my knowledge, my health and my life and all that I understand, for vain hope, I will lose]. The repeated possessive pronoun “mi” drives home that what is at stake for doña Endrina is her autonomy, her very self. The final clause, “se va a perder,” resonates ominously, then culminates in an anguished sob: “¡Ay, cuerpo tan penado, cómo te vas a morir!” [Oh, body so pained, how you are going to die!] (st.789d).³⁰⁸ Doña Endrina's expression may be more vehement, but the risks Criseyde faces are no less.

³⁰⁸ Michalski points out that reading “endrina” as indicative of “swallow” and “melón” as meaning “badger” underscores the consummation scene's association with hunting, which was often “used to symbolize an amorous pursuit” that “involves stalking the prey, setting, and then springing a trap (271-272). Endrina's response to her circumstances suggests, perhaps, objects of affection should not be pursued with the same means as animals, either for consumption or for sport. In the earlier *Pamphilus*, Galathea's monologues are no less vehement. She fends off Pamphilus's advances, pointing out that “many men by much effort hope to deceive many maidens / And many are cheated by a tricksome love! / You had thought to fool me with your discourse and craft, / But I am not one to be so cleverly trapped! (Garbaty, “Pamphilus,” ll.187-193). Because her argument is successful, Pamphilus employs a go-between, Anus, to mediate on his behalf. After he has occasion to rape Galathea (ll.680-696), she condemns Anus's “devious tricks” (l.761). Hooked like a fish, Galathea then relates to a bird; she saw “the snare of the fowler too late” (l.764). She has not only been struck by “[t]he fierce arrows of Cupid [that] inflict no slight wounds” (l.415), but is also subject to “his evil seductions” and the “gossip [that] often accuses an innocent maiden” (ll.416-7), which she expressed to Anus before the consummation as what “[e]very young girl fears” (l.416). Notably, the *LBA* maintains the equation of forced courtship with a hunt as well as the fear of gossip. Endrina lashes out at Trotaconventos saying: “a las mugeres trahedes engañadas e vendidas...si las aves lo podiesen bien saber e entender / quantos laços le paran, non las podrían prender / ya quando el laço ven, ya las lievan a vender; / mueren por el poco çevo, non se pueden defender” [you deceive and sell tragic women; if birds could well know and understand when snares stop before them, they could not take them, but already when the snare they see, already they are taken to be sold. They die for the meager bait and cannot defend themselves] (st.882a. 883). Likewise, “Si los peçes de las aguas, quando veen el anzuelo, / ya el pescador los tiene e los trahe por el suelo; / la muger vee su daño, quando ya finca con duelo: / non la quieren los parientes, padre, madre, nin avuelo” [the fish of the water, when they see the

Although Chaucer and Juan Ruiz's texts seem to reify male dominance, both poets at the same time resist its power by portraying their heroines' reasoning and emotions. The proem to Book III of *TC*, Criseyde's dream immediately following it, and especially the consummation scene all underscore the extent to which dire circumstances transform the women who are subject to them.

Though we have already begun to see how each character in *Troilus and Criseyde* is a player in an unfair game, what motivates their movements is best examined within the context of the consummation scene. Though the narrator contends the lovers reach the apex of bliss, Criseyde's subsequent responses invite speculation as to the authenticity of her joy.³⁰⁹ The very fact that Chaucer positions her and Troilus as if they were pieces on a chess board that Pandarus plays both sides of compromises the authenticity of their emotions, as do the laughter and playful innuendos of Book III. The sense of manipulation becomes much darker and alarming when we realize how close Pandarus's machinations are to rape.

Before relating what transpires in the consummation scene, we must examine the events that lead to it. In Book II, Pandarus has engineered the first face-to-face meeting of Troilus and Criseyde at the home of Deiphebus, brother of Troilus and Hector. He manufactures a false lawsuit against Criseyde and compounds his lie by gathering together Trojans to support her. Among these, of course, is Troilus. In his case, Pandarus adds deceit on deceit by instructing Troilus to pretend he becomes ill while at his

hook, already the fisherman has them and carries them to the ground. A woman sees her wound when it has already caused her pain, her family, her father mother, grandparents, don't want her] (st.884), for she has been dishonored.

³⁰⁹ Stampone suggests that Criseyde signals her sexual desire for Troilus when she says in III.1306: "but lat us falle away fro this metere" (410). I think it may be dangerous to so readily equate falling away from one matter as desiring copulation; might it also mean, "let's leave this love business behind"?

brother's house. That way, he will be left alone in a room, and Criseyde will be able to see him privately. Throughout Pandarus jokes crudely: when Criseyde arrives at Deiphebus's home, Pandarus whispers to Troilus,³¹⁰ "God have thi soule, ibrought have I thi beere!" (II.1638), which equates Criseyde's body to the bier on which Troilus's corpse will lie "whan ye ben oon" (II.1740). Pandarus's implication may be sexual; in the event, his words prove prophetic.

Book III's proem follows immediately. It consists of a hymn glorifying Venus and the wonderful effects of love. But amid the praise of the goddess's power, the narrator includes unsettling references to Jove's rapes:

Ye Joves first to thilke effectes glade,
Thorough which that thynges lyven alle and be,
Comeveden, and amorous him made,
On mortal thing, and as you list, ay ye
Yeve hym in love ese or adversitee,
And in a thousand forms down hym sent
For love in erthe, and whom you liste he hente. (III.15-21).³¹¹

"Hente" means seize. As Maude McInerney notes, following C. David Benson, Chaucer's Jove "is essentially predatory;" in Boccaccio, by contrast, he is "rendered merciful by love" (231). The fact that Jupiter rapes Ganymede as well as many women

³¹⁰ Later, to deceive Helen and Deiphebus, "thane gan gronen Troilus, / His brother and his suster for to blende" (III.206-207). He is complicit in Pandarus's deception.

³¹¹ "Hente" is, because "of its implicit violence...the only appropriate verb for the active male lover" (231), and McInerney argues that Chaucer understood "the violence under the surface of the metamorphic narrative" (232), and this is why he chooses "hente."

ominously forecasts Pandarus's violent ripping of Troilus's shirt and throwing him into Criseyde's bed.

If Book II ends in Deiphebus's home, Book III narrates what happens in Pandarus's. In the earlier scene, Pandarus convinces Criseyde, despite her protestations, to see Troilus, who he tells her is ill and confined to bed by himself. At the beginning of Book III, Pandarus "ledde hire by the lappe" (III.59), and prods the lovers to plight their troth (III.100-182). At his own home, later in Book III, the order of events is reversed: Pandarus brings Troilus "in by the lappe" (III.742). The reversal points to another. Although the narrator had earlier said that Troilus's prospects were like weather clearing after a tempest, Criseyde must stay at Pandarus's house because a thunderstorm prevents her return to her own. Indeed, Pandarus has bullied his niece into dining at his home on a night when all could see a downpour was imminent. Criseyde is right to suspect her uncle's insistence; she asks whether Troilus will be there. Pandarus, of course, lies that Troilus is out of town. In fact he has smuggled Troilus into a small room connected by a trapdoor to the room in which he places Criseyde and her retinue when the storm forces them to stay.³¹²

To get Criseyde into this closet, Pandarus then invents another lie. He tells her that Troilus has heard she is in love with one Horaste. She proffers Pandarus her ring as surety of her affection for Troilus; he jokes it will serve the need only if its blue stone "might dede men alyve maken" (III.891-892). He presses Criseyde to meet Troilus that

³¹² To avoid the "noyse of reynes" and "thunder" Pandarus has Criseyde sleep "right in [his] litel closet yonder" while he promises to sleep "in that outer hous allone / [and] Be wardein of [her] women everichone" (III.662-665). He shows her that just opposite a door her "women ligger all, / That whom yow list of hem ye may here calle" (III.685-686). Of course, when she would cry out for them: "Quod tho Criseyde, 'Lat me som wight calle!' / 'I! God forbede that it sholde falle,' / Quod Pandarus, 'that ye swich folye wrought! / They might demen thyng they nevere er thought // It is nought good a slepyng hound to wake" (III.760-764). Pandarus, Criseyde's "warden" prevents her from calling for help.

night; she says she would, “er he com...up first arise” (III.940). Pandarus protests: she should “liggeth stille and taketh hym right here” (III.948). Troilus, he explains, has come “thorough a goter, by a pryve wente” (III.787); he then appears kneeling at Criseyde’s bedside. Pandarus begins to “pleye” and extols the prince’s gentility (III.961). He entreats Criseyde to welcome him.

Troilus, however, knows nothing of Horaste or any of Pandarus’s other inventions. When Criseyde charges him with jealousy and too little trust of her, he has no idea what she’s talking about. He can make no honorable defense; the most he can say is “God woot that of this game / Whan al is wist, than am I nought to blame” (III.1084-1085).³¹³ He is so overwrought, though, he faints. Pandarus then tosses Troilus into bed and rips off his shirt. Uncle and niece strive to revive him. Prodded by Pandarus, Criseyde says she forgives Troilus. Finally, Troilus comes to; only now does Pandarus retreat to a corner by the chimney where he pretends to read an “olde romance.”

Finally together, if not alone—Pandarus’s jarring presence only strengthens the unease readers may feel since he makes us realize that we are as close to the pairs’ imminent touching, kissing, and love-making as he is—Criseyde again chastises Troilus for jealousy. He nearly faints again. He tells her “I am al in youre grace” (III.1176), to which she answers, “Of gilt misericorde! / That is to seyn, that I foryeve al this” (III.1177-8). Troilus then transforms from mouse to lion; he grasps Criseyde in his arms

³¹³ Though Troilus may be ignorant of the lie Pandarus told in his favor, his meek defense recalls Pamphilus’s when he tells Galathea, “But if I did sin, the fault was not mine!” (I.704). Troilus might blame Pandarus, but his affliction recalls Pamphilus’s, for which the latter faults Galathea: “Your passionate eyes, white flesh, and noble features, / Your words, embraces, your sweet kisses, this spot, / These stimulated my crime, and gave it start. / Encouraged by these, my love overwhelmed me! / They increased my passion, inflamed by fury of lust” (Garbaty, “Pamphilus” ll.707-711). Both men seek to displace responsibility for their actions elsewhere.

and they consummate their affair. The next morning, after Troilus's departure, Criseyde waxes red for shame and reproaches her uncle as a fox.

Green takes this scene, and its contradictions, to be light-hearted. To him it is a “sustained comic invention; in the solidity of its physical setting and in the string of misadventures which threaten to rob the action of its natural consummation, it reminds one more of a fabliau than an ‘old romaunce’” (215). I think, however, that Green and Stampone ignore the serious implications of the ludic elements, just as Christopher Cannon tends to focus so intently on those implications that he minimizes all sense of play. In the consummation scene, as Cannon argues, Chaucer is so acutely aware of the line between rape and not-rape, despite the gray area that the question of consent seems to raise, that he, “with infinite care” places “Troilus and Criseyde on neither side of but just *on* that line” (86). In Howard's reading, Criseyde's dream, in which an eagle exchanges hearts with hers, is a sign that she already yielded herself to Troilus (361-2); even he, however, notes that the birds cannot help but recall Pandarus's dream of Philomel's rape, a recall that becomes unavoidable when the narrator reports that Troilus and Criseyde think they hear a nightingale sing outside their love-nest.³¹⁴ As I see it, the violent bird imagery connects both the consummation scene and Criseyde's dream with hunting, for in falconry, raptors—not unlike the eagle—prey on smaller birds for sport.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ As will be discussed later, I read her reference to “yielding” differently. I also interpret Criseyde's dream differently than Howard. I agree with him that the lines are beautiful as Criseyde dreams of the nightingale singing from the cedar, but what Howard doesn't attend to is the song's juxtaposition with sudden, invasive violence in the last four lines of the dream. Though it causes Criseyde no pain (nothyng smerte): the white eagle “Undir hire brest his longe clawes sette, / And out hire herte he rente, and that anon, / And dide his herte into hire brest to gone – / Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte; / And forth he fleigh with herte left for herte” (II.927-931).

³¹⁵ Like Troilus, birds of prey are blind until they are loosed to capture their prey. Special hoods, or leather blindfolds, “fit easily over the bird's head with the beak and nares (nostrils) protruding through an opening

The association is simultaneously ludic and serious. Although falconry was, indeed, a noble pastime enjoyed by men and women alike, one cannot disregard that a successful hunt requires not only capture, but death.

Though hunting in the Middle Ages was a legitimate practice, transferring its implications to courtship—and to the construction of masculine identity—raises ethical concerns, for engineering means by which to capture and consume the object of one's affection treads closely to definitions of rape. Rape, in fourteenth-century England, was a slippery term. It meant both forced coition and abduction; both senses are yoked together “so thoroughly that modern rubrics will never distinguish them (Cannon 82). As a verb, rape also meant to hasten as well as the predatory seizing of something as if it were prey. The word was closely aligned with its Latin root *rapere*, which meant the taking away of a person through some kind of force to another place (*OED*). It could refer to abduction of a woman or to the rapture of St. Paul to the third heaven. As Chaucer “knew from his familiarity with fourteenth-century legal practice,” in cases of rape, “the specific, individual violence done to victims” was increasingly unacknowledged (Evitt 151). Dinshaw argues that Middle English fluctuations and variant uses, including idiomatic expressions like “rapen and rennen,” “to seize and abscond with,” sexualized its violence (8). In late Middle English, ‘rape,’ Dinshaw concludes, denotes haste, abduction, sexual violation, or a combination of these meanings (9).

For all its ambiguity, rape emerges as the fundamental question in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*, for it would seem Troilus's masculinity hinges on his ability to claim Criseyde, physically, as his own. Criseyde is not literally seized, yet she dreams the

in the front” (Oswald 72). Such trappings, which were often well-decorated, played specific roles in “the ritual of hawking” (Woolley 39).

eagle violently exchanges its heart for hers. Pandarus does not literally force her to stay the night at his home—the weather does that—but he leaves her no choice at all about coming there. Beyond the story, the narrator begins the book, as we have seen, by extolling the beneficial effects of love, yet when he lists Jupiter’s “hentings,” sexual union is a one-way affair of force and seizure in which the woman’s consent has no say. From all this, I think it fair to say that Troilus and Criseyde’s consummation is a rape and is not a rape; for Troilus and Pandarus, it is a game played to a happy outcome (in the short term); for Criseyde, the union is one forced upon her to which she gives her consent.

As Book III begins, Troilus promises to serve Criseyde (III.134-147), and she accepts his devotion on two conditions: that her honor be preserved (III.159), and that he, though a prince (III.170):

...shal namore han sovereignete
Of me in love, than right in that cas is.
N’y nyl forbere, if that ye don amys,
To wratthe yow; and whil that ye me serve,
Chericen yow right after ye disserve. (III.171-175)

These terms repeat what she had said to Pandarus in Book II:

[C]erteynly for no salvacioun
Of yow, though that ye sterven bothe two,
Though al the world on o day be my fo,
Ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe. (II.486-9)

The “bothe two” is devastating; in declaring that she will maintain her honor, she equates Pandarus with Troilus. They are both her suitors; she would let both die rather than

compromise her chastity. Already a reader has to wonder with whom Criseyde will consummate her passion when she sleeps with her wooer. Regardless, Pandarus disregards Criseyde's terms: he makes the rules.

Early in Book III, after Criseyde sets the terms of Troilus's service to her, she kisses him as he kneels before her; Pandarus, watching, then says: "lat se which of yow shal bere the belle / To speke of love aright?—therewith he lough—" (III.198-199). "To bear the bell" means to win the prize. It is hard to see Pandarus's laugh as something less than cynical; after Criseyde's kiss, words now need to take a back seat in his mind to words made flesh. Pandarus knows that the game he's playing is no laughing matter. He tells Troilus: "For shame it is to seye: / For the *have I bigonne a gamen pleye*" (III.249-250, emphasis mine). He elaborates that "for the am I bicomen, / *Bitwixen game and ernest*, swich a meene / As maken women unto men to comen" (III.253-255, emphasis mine). He has, he says, his "nece, of vices cleene, / So fully maad [his] gentiles triste, / That al shal be right as [Troilus's] liste" (III.257-259). In response to the ethical question about the "traffic of women" as objects Pandarus has just raised, Troilus responds by saying that what Pandarus is doing isn't pimping but an act of friendship, compassion, and trust (III.400-403). To seal this conviction, Troilus then offers to intervene in Pandarus's favor with one his own sisters, let it be Polixene:

Cassandre, Eleyne, or any of the frape—

Be she nevere so fair or wel yshape,

Tel me which thow wilt of everychone,

To han for thyn, and lat me than allone. (III.408-413)³¹⁶

³¹⁶ As Frantzen points out, Troilus, in general, "appears to be a powerful agent" (53).

Part of what makes Troilus's words so awful is our realization that, for all his love of Criseyde, Troilus now sees women as Pandarus does: a commodity whose affections men broker to one another. Pandarus has made Troilus a version of himself. In so doing, Troilus gives voice to the inherent flaw of love in the pagan world that does not know the God who is love.

Whatever Pandarus's qualms, he presses on. He goes to Criseyde's home to invite her to dinner:

Whan he was com, he gan anon to *pleye*
As he was wont, and of himself to *jape*;
And finally he swor and gan hire seye,
By this and that, *she sholde hym not escape*,
Ne lenger don hym *after hire to cape*;
But certeynly she moste, by hire leve,
Come soupen in his hous with hym at eve.

At wiche she *lough*, and gan hire fast excuse,
And seyde, 'It reyneth; lo, how sholde I gon?'
'Lat be,' quod he, 'ne stant nought thus to muse.

This moot be don! Ye shal be there anon.' (III.554-564, emphasis mine)

As much as Pandarus "pleyes" and humorously deprecates himself, he is still a hunter who will not let Criseyde escape; he commands that she come to his house for dinner that night. Criseyde laughs; anyone can see it will rain and that the invitation is ill-timed. Of course, the bad weather is integral to the trap Pandarus is laying for Criseyde; his joking

is meant to distract her so that she might not become too suspicious that he's plotting something.

As Book III progresses, Pandarus lies to maneuver Criseyde into doing his will. After Criseyde accepts his "invitation," since "as his nece, obeyed as hire oughte" (3.581), she puts the matter clearly: "Em, syn I moste on yow triste, / Loke al be wel" (3.587). She then "axed him if Troilus were there." Pandarus "swore hire nay, for he was out of towne" (III.569-70).

Criseyde all but guesses Pandarus's intentions, but her response to his manipulations, as well as to medieval ideas about women and their social standing, is complicated. As Patterson notes, Chaucer takes pains to quarantine his heroine from "anti-feminist reductions" (L. 142). Dietrich concurs: "Chaucer's omissions of the overt anti-feminist digressions common to two of his closest sources, Benoît and Boccaccio – softens the patriarchal / misogynist perspective in the poem" (218). Because Criseyde can see through her uncle's jokes and diversions, she is more than the emotional vessel medieval men said women were by nature. As Howard says, Criseyde's "inner speech," lets us "*feel* her feeling just as we are able to think her thoughts" ("Experience" 163-4).³¹⁷ At the same time, however, many readers, even some who think Criseyde horribly manhandled, cannot help but condemn Criseyde because she understands, not only how Pandarus has stage-managed her affair with Troilus, but how her betrayal of Troilus will

³¹⁷ Criseyde's interest in Troilus, Dietrich points out, regards not his masculinity, but rather his character, his integrity (218). Criseyde is fully aware of his princely "power to hurt or assist her (II, 708-14), but even more prominent in her mind is the fear of masculine dominance and possessiveness" (Mann 320). Dietrich contends, "[i]f Troilus is not the 'typical' male, then Criseyde can expect, or at least hope, that he will not do to her the 'tresoun' (II, 793) that men 'typically' do to women and that he will assist rather than harm her" (218).

sully her name for all time. Criseyde is a woman who cannot win the game she is at once forced and chooses to play.

When Pandarus lies to Criseyde by telling him Troilus thinks she's in love with Horaste, she ponders the worth of worldly joy. Her monologue recalls the theme of mutability the narrator emphasized in the proem to Book III. If a man, she philosophizes, dreads losing his joy, though he knows it to be transitory, then he "May in no perfit selynesse [happiness] be; / And if to lese his joie he sette a myte [coin], / Than semeth it that joie is worth ful lite" (III.830-833). Of a man who knows not "that thow, joie, art muable" (III.822), Criseyde asks, "how may he seye / That he hath verray joie and selyness, / That is of ignoraunce ay in derknesse?" (III.824-826). Criseyde's Boethian meditation, beyond critiquing the insufficiency of worldly goods, also, I think, offers her consolation. Criseyde realizes that the nature of the world is to change; the best one can do is incline to the immutable good. Only by making the best of any given situation can one eventually emerge from the storm. The imperfect virtues Criseyde makes of necessity will be the source of both our condemnation and our exculpation of her and the pre-Christian world she inhabits.

The confined space in which Criseyde sings her mutability canto sees to concentrate the sincerity of Criseyde's self-defense. Criseyde is never more noble and moral than she is here; but her morality and trouthe, however, have been occasioned by Pandarus's lie. The "absolute and peculiar order [that] reigns" (29) in spaces of play, as Huizinga notes, in which tension and uncertainty play integral parts, certainly is present here. When Troilus then defends himself, the scene, as we have seen, turns positively

ludic, if again intensely sad. He doesn't know about Horaste; his reaction, the only honorable one in the circumstances, is to faint.

Before he does, of course, Pandarus has checked Criseyde's plan to speak the next day to Troilus and assure him of her love. He jokes:

Nece, alle theyng hath tyme, I dar avow,
For whan a chaumbre afire is or an halle,
Wel more need is, it sodeynly rescowe
Than to dispute and axe amonges alle
How this candel in the straw is falle. (III.855-859)

To mention fire in Troy, which will be burned to the ground, is ominous. Nevertheless, Criseyde responds: "whether that ye dwelle or for hym go, / I am, til God me better mynde sende, / At dulcarnoun, right at my wittes end" (III.929-31). According to the *Riverside Chaucer*, "dulcarnoun" is a state of perplexity comparable to puzzling through a difficult geometric theorem. Criseyde is at her wit's end; she doesn't know whether it's better for Pandarus to go get Troilus now or to wait until the next day. Criseyde no longer is her "owene womman, wel at ese... Withouten jalousie or swich debat," to whom "Shal noon housbonde seyn... 'Check mat!'" (II.750-754). She now is hemmed in and about to lose the chess match, not to Troilus, as we would have expected, or hoped, but to Pandarus. He tells her: "Dulcarnoun called is 'flemyng of wrecches'" (III.933); only dull wretches who can't decide what to do are put to flight when they face a difficult situation. "Ye ben wis" (III.937), he tells her, by which he means "do as I have advised." As before, Criseyde makes up her mind by letting Pandarus make her choice for her: "Than, em...doth herof as yow list" (III.939). She reminds him "al my trist / Is on yow two" (III.

941-942), and she begs him to “werketh now in so discret a wise / That I honour may have, and he pleasance: / For I am here al in youre governaunce.” (III.943-45). The way she merges Troilus and Pandarus shows how much she is at both men’s mercy. She’s already been mated before Troilus mates with her.

The lovers’ first interaction in the consummation scene reinforces the extent to which women are at a disadvantage in courtship. When Troilus enters with Pandarus, Criseyde’s surprise is so great that “Ne though men sholde smyten of hire hed, / She kouthe nought a word aright out brynge / So sodeynly, for his sodeyn comynge” (III.956-59). Criseyde here becomes not the Procne Pandarus dreamed of but Philomela; she is unable to utter a word, in part because Pandarus has supplied all of them.³¹⁸ Nevertheless, Criseyde quickly recovers her composure, though the narrator’s intrusion at this moment is disconcerting. He’s uncertain whether Criseyde’s sorrow “putte out of hire remembraunce” her asking Troilus to rise:

Or elles that she took it in the wise
Of dewete, as for his observaunce;
But wel fynde I she ded hym this plesaunce,
That she hym kiste, although she siked sore,
And bad him sitte adown withouten more. (III.968-973)

The narrator furiously invents explanations for Criseyde’s actions, as though she were in need of them. Of course, it’s Troilus who needs to explain his presence, and the truth is there is absolutely no good account he can give for his being there.

³¹⁸ McInerney points out that in the cited tales of rape from Ovid, the women are often silenced, as is the case of both Io and Philomela. Both reveal their situation to others through texts, “and horrible vengeance eventually follows” (232).

Pandarus, though, is ready to fill the gap in Troilus's defense. He presses, bullies, and mocks Criseyde, "almost ordering her to say she has pity of Troilus" (Howard, *Chaucer* 362). He "to pleye anon bigan, / And seyde, 'Nece, se how this lord kan knele! / Now for youre trouthe, se this gentil man!'" (III.960-962). He speaks not only for Troilus, but now for Criseyde as well. He has made them both characters of his own devising. His japery has turned him into the author of their tryst; as Pandarus says to Criseyde, "And whan my tale brought is to an ende, / Unwist, right as I com, so wol I wende" (III.769-770). No wonder, then, that he will soon retire to the chimney and pretend to read an "olde romance."

Of course, in order for there to be a romance, Pandarus has to get Troilus into bed in the first place. In the face of Criseyde's reproof of his lack of trust in her, Troilus, as we have seen, faints. Pandarus rips off his shirt and tosses him into bed. For Green, all this casts the scene as a *fabliau* (Green 215); Troilus's swoon is comic, if for no other reason than the fact that women, not men, are subject to swooning in medieval romances. But Troilus's swoon has its ethical burden as well. As Troilus says to himself before fainting: "God woot that of this game / Whan al is wist, than am I nought to blame" (III.1084-5). He's right; Pandarus is to blame, for it was he who invented the "game." But Troilus's lack of knowledge of Pandarus's invention does not exculpate him. Pandarus is his agent; Troilus bears responsibility, whether or not he knows what Pandarus does, for everything he does in Troilus's name.

When Troilus faints, Criseyde ambiguously cries out: "Allas, that I was born!" (III.1100-3). How do we read this "alas"? Is she overwrought with concern for Troilus, or is she exasperated? When Troilus wakes, she says to him "Is this a mannes game?"

(III.1126). It is equally possible that her sigh reveals how much she cares for Troilus; she can't bear the thought that he might in fact die. In any event, the ambiguity serves as an invitation for the narrator to oversee the proceedings.

Once Troilus revives and finally clasps Criseyde fast in his arms, the narrator's commentary becomes no less problematic. He says:

What myghte or may the sely larke seye,
Whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?
I kan namore; but of this ilke tweye—
To whom this tale sucre be or soot—
Though that I tarie a yer, sometime I moot,
After myn auctour, tellen hire gladnesse,
As wel as I have told hire hevyness. (III.1191-1197)

The indirect discourse, beyond its hunting imagery, not only draws “attention to what is not said,” as Evitt notes (150); it forces us to notice who is not speaking. This is precisely the moment we expect Troilus and Criseyde to speak for themselves; instead, we have been made aware that we are as much voyeurs watching them make love as the narrator and Pandarus are. This seems to me far more troubling than our sense, in Donaldson's words, that the narrator's intrusion “may well weaken one's confidence that what is said to be real is real” (71).³¹⁹ It coincides with the implication that if Criseyde is a lark, no matter whether she thinks it sweet *or* bitter, and Troilus a sparrowhawk, both are in the cage Pandarus has made for them out of the privy bedroom.

³¹⁹ Fyler agrees: the details of the *TC* narrative and the frame Chaucer creates for it obfuscates what is real and what is illusory (115).

As for Criseyde herself, once in Troilus's arms, she trembles: "Right as an aspen leaf she gan to quake, / Whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde" (III.1200-1). Troilus says, "Now be ye kaught; now is ther but we tweyne! / Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non!" (III.1207-8). Troilus's language unavoidably reminds us that it has been Pandarus, not he, who has done the tracking of Criseyde and has brought her to bay. Only now does Troilus have Criseyde in his arms. His newfound agency, of course, is undercut by the fact that they are not the only two in the room: Pandarus is there, and so are the narrator and the reader.³²⁰

Criseyde's response is remarkable, again for its opacity. She tells Troilus: "Ne had I er now, my swete herte deere; / Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought here!" (III.1210-1).³²¹ This line has been construed as Criseyde's acknowledgment that she has decided to sleep with Troilus. Had she not chosen to yield, she wouldn't be there. But that is not what the ME says. "Ben yolde" is "been yielded." In the passive construction all Pandarus's running and poking and sweating is expressed. She had decided; Pandarus has decided for her. Criseyde is mistress of her own agency, and she is the victim on whom others have exerted their influence.

³²⁰ When Troilus first spies Criseyde, he acts unlike his men, who "actively hunt the women in the temple by letting their eyes 'baiten' (I,192) on them" (Dietrich 205). In Book III, however, Troilus assumes his men's predatory posturing.

³²¹ Chaucer's characterization of Pandarus suggests a critique of the way in which women are controlled by their older, male relatives. Elizabeth Robertson draws attention to competing perspectives on marriage between the church and the feudal system. Christian doctrine granted women choice in marriage; a union's validity was contingent upon parties' mutual consent. Marriages arranged within the feudal system, however, seldom afforded such choice, if at all, for dynastic authorities saw women primarily as commodities (283). A woman was a means of securing political alliances, land, and wealth by virtue of her family's status. By exploring "the ambiguities that reside in cultural assumptions of female identity that both deny and affirm the right of the female subject to choose" (283), Chaucer's text resists the socially accepted circulation of women. By blurring the lines of culpability in how Criseyde is possessed and by whom, Chaucer raises ethical questions about women's circulation in fourteenth-century society. His plot indicts established marriage practices, including the marriage of "raptured" women to their abductors after, according to fourteenth-century logic, they not only became "damaged goods" (Robertson 284), but also their captors' property.

Contemporary cases of sexual assault “can be variously defined even by those who have identical ‘facts’ in hand” (Carton 69); “what happened” is contingent on one’s perspective.³²² Twenty-first-century definitions of rape hinge on questions of consent and the will of the victim (70-1), something further complicated today by assessments of a victim’s cognitive and situational impairment. These considerations were not taken into account in fourteenth-century law. The value in acknowledging them here, however, is twofold: twenty-first century audiences can’t help but experience Chaucer’s poem through the lens of their time; moreover, recognizing fictions that have contributed to modern assumptions about sexual misconduct may facilitate dialogue and revision of the presuppositions that govern contemporary prosecutions. I recognize the impossibility of subjecting a medieval poem to modern values and legal principles. Nonetheless, I contend Chaucer invites us to deliberate upon Criseyde’s “yielding” to Troilus. Does she consent, or is she forced? Chaucer provides evidence that supports both conclusions.

Chaucer himself exhibits ludic tendencies in *Troilus and Criseyde*, for Chaucerian ambiguity operates much like carnival laughter. Though most fear the official culture that oppresses them (Bakhtin 94), Bakhtin argues that “the culture of laughter,” which is unofficial, and perhaps subversive, breaks “through the narrow walls of festivities and [enters] into all sphere of ideological life” (97). The words Chaucer chooses for Criseyde

³²² Citing California’s law code, Cannon sees rape as contingent upon the extent to which an “‘act of sexual intercourse’ can be judged to have been accomplished without consent, against the victim’s will;” the investigation then turns to “‘*circumstances* that would indicate consent at the moment of an act” (71). How consent is given remains challenging to discern even today, but “[w]here an act of sexual intercourse occurs and there is mental disorder, developmental or physical disability, force or violence, fear of bodily injury either immediately or as threatened for the future, unconsciousness of the nature of the act, intoxication or anesthetization, or an artificially induced belief that the person committing the act is the person’s spouse, then consent is deemed not to have been given and the act is judged to be ‘rape’” (Cannon 71). Up “until relatively recently, the modern law required nonconsent to be manifest in some corroborating physical evidence of ‘resistance’ (that is, by the visible harm of bruises and torn clothing)” (72). Consequently, “those acts of sex that had themselves been forced but that were not accompanied by evidence of violence of some *other* kind” were not seen as “nonconsensual” (Cannon 72). Cannon’s legal observations illustrate just how problematic the issue of “rape” and consent has continued to be.

are similarly playful and subversive; they condone and rebel against fourteenth-century rituals of courtship they are part of. Bakhtin thought that at this time, the “consciousness of freedom” from medieval seriousness “could only be limited and utopian.” (95). Chaucer and other writers—Boccaccio in particular comes to mind—would seem to contradict him. They both embrace “the expression of an antifeudal, popular truth;” the carnivalesque in them “help[s] to uncover this truth and to give it an internal form” (94) by showing “the world anew in its gayest and most sober aspects” (94). But they balance these impulses by clearing space within the irrepressible and the ludic for ethical, moral, and spiritual concerns. The stress such authors would feel who find both impulses in the same events must have been considerable.³²³

We need look no further than Chaucer’s narrator in *TC* for evidence of the author’s ludic tendencies, for the teller’s flaws are at once ridiculous and commendable. The narrator sadly admits the short life of such gladness throughout the poem. After the consummation scene, when Troilus must leave, Criseyde “with a sik she seyde, ‘O herte deere, / The game ywys, so ferforth now is gon” (III.1493-1494). The game to which she refers could either be the lovers’ play, or her attempts at resistance. She feels “al swich hevynesse,” even though it later, the narrator promises, will turn happy again: “— / I thank it God — was torned to gladnesse” (III.1399-1400). But by associating Criseyde and Troilus’s highs and lows with Fortune’s wheel, the narrator underlines the instability of their emotions.

The narrator reprises these emotions in his own register. He is so attached to the love story that he struggles to reconcile it with the vision of perfect love he had imagined; according to Wetherbee, he cannot identify with Troilus’s “spiritual idealization of his

³²³ It accounts, I think, for the repeated apologies both poets wrote for themselves and their fiction.

love,” which is not erotic enough, nor can he “focus on the lovers’ actual situation,” which he finds disturbingly unpropitious (181). The narrator’s commitment to his story leads him to identify with both Troilus and Pandarus. He celebrates Troilus’s romance as the courtliest courtly love, and he manipulates his material, like Pandarus, so he might “hath fully his entente” (III.1582).

In closing Book III, the narrator’s address to Venus and her “blynde and winged sone...Cupide” (II.1807-1808) reveals the extent to which his fascination and doubt about his sources cause him to manipulate it.³²⁴ Grateful “That [Venus] thus fer han deyned [him] to gyde” (III. 1811), the narrator admits, “I kan namore” (I.1812). He admits that in his telling “ther was som disese among, / As to myn auctour listeth to devise” (III.1816-17); this recall to Troilus’s travails before he gained Criseyde’s love sits oddly with his assurances of his joy after it. But his concluding paean to Venus also seems to announce that from this point on, love has little to do with what he will transcribe. The narrator’s hymn casts our eyes forward; once we see, as he has seen, what will happen, we will inevitably wonder what love had to do with everything that happened before the Trojans exchange Criseyde and she exchanges Troilus for Diomedes.

The narrator’s anxieties, that is to say, prepare readers for the poem’s nostalgic final condemnation “of the quick passage of earthly joys” (Wetherbee 181). After Criseyde has decided she will stay with Diomedes, she sends a letter to Troilus in which she lies by saying she will return as soon as she can. Troilus continues to believe in her until he spies on Diomedes a brooch that he had given Criseyde. Then all he seeks is to die in battle.

³²⁴ He has succumbed to Horace’s view against the *fides interpretes* [faithful translator] whereby a writer should “not seek to render word for word as a slavish translator” (D. Kelly 47), for *interpretatio* encompasses exposition, interpretation, and signification, which a good translator should employ (48).

After he is slain by Achilles, Mercury transports Troilus to the eighth sphere, where he looks down at the smallness of earth:

And down from thennes faste he gav avyse
This litel spot of erthe that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste,

And in himself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on heven caste;
And forth he wente, shortly for to tell,

Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle. (V.1814-1827)

Troilus laughs at those who cry for him. He damns those who blindly follow lust and strive after temporary goods. Though his position in the eighth sphere enables him to transcend earthly passions, he is soon sorted to dwell elsewhere as Mercury sees fit. Where he ends is left unsaid; for a Christian, however, he necessarily would be among the unsaved.

The narrator implicitly renders his judgment in the prayer that concludes the poem:

O Yonge fresshe folks, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with youre age,
Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,
This world that passeth soone as floure faire.

And loveth hym the which that right for love
Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevne above;
For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?

Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!

Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle!

Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites! (V.1835-1851)

Shifting rapidly from anger to compassion, from cursed old rites to the wilting of “floures faire,” the narrator nearly suffers a schizophrenic breakdown. He knows that love in

Pagan times was doomed, alas. As consolation, he points to Christ's perfect love that does not fail.³²⁵

Chaucer's pivoting narrator revises *Troilus and Criseyde's* definition of masculinity as the ability to attain one's desire by any means necessary; he re-maps it with an ethical, indeed spiritual, imperative. The same is true of the conclusion in Juan Ruiz's *LBA*, and it is instructive to read both endings together, for doing so allows us to draw more accurate conclusions about how men in the fourteenth-century conceived of their roles and privileges as men. In the final narrative of Don Melón's exploits, we find he is unable to procure a "nueva funda" [new woman, literally, a "new sheath"] (st.1623a). Like Troilus who lost Criseyde, don Melón is bereft of earthly pleasure. Ruiz then addresses his readers, much the way Chaucer does:

Fizvos pequeño libro de testo, ma la glosa
non creo que es chica ante es bien grand prosa
que sobre cada fabla se entiende otra cosa
sin la que se alega en la razón fermosa.

De la santidat mucha es bien grand liçonario,

³²⁵ The narrator's moralized ending evades, according to Wetherbee, "responsibility for the implications of his story. Other books have told of Criseyde's infidelity...and for his part the narrator finds the falseness of men a more serious issue" (225). The open ending, as Dinshaw contends, "forecloses consolation." She argues that containing instability, interpreted as feminine and inclusive of cupidity, preoccupies masculine readings of *Troilus and Criseyde*, especially those posited by E. Talbot Donaldson and D. W. Robinson, Jr. "The narrator, Pandarus, and Troilus, too, *all* characterized as readers of feminine texts, turn away at last from the disruptive feminine toward orderly, hierarchical versions of divine love in which desire is finally put to rest. Such efforts at containment, Chaucer shows in the poem, are urgent emotional responses to the rough disillusionments of carnal involvement, of involvement with the feminine" (39). At the end, the narrator relinquishes his ties to history in addition to his love of romance. The poem's conclusion, and the narrator's telling of it, offers not only an obscure message, but more so "an interpretive impasse" (L. Patterson 113). The coinciding destruction of Troy with Troilus and Criseyde's romance suggests one is caused by the other, but Chaucer denies such causality; in the process, he undermines the value of history and offers readers small consolation: at the metaphorical level, Troy and Troilus fall, and both by blind folly (113). The effect invites readers to re-examine their own blindness and to participate in what Lee Patterson deems Chaucer's "explorations of the dialectic between the self and history" (155).

mas de juego e de burla es chico breviario;
por ende fago punto e çierro mi almario:
séavos chica fabla, solas e letüario.

Señores, hevos servido con poca sabidoría,
por vos dar solaz a todos fablévos en juglería;
yo un gualardón vos pido: que por Dios, en romería
digades vn paternóster por mí e avemaria. (st.1631-1633)³²⁶

[I made for you this little book of text, the gloss is larger—I believe it no small thing before grand, holy verse—that over which each tale can be understood another thing, besides the one read in the beautiful prose. // Of sanity, much is well and good advice, of games and jokes, the matter is small and brief; for the end I put a stop and close my work, may it be a brief tale, offer solace, and be electuary. // Sirs, I have served you with little wisdom, in order to give you and all solace in minstrelsy. I ask you one request, that for God on pilgrimage you would say a Pater Noster for me and an Ave Maria]. Ruiz then concludes with five Marian verses.

Chaucer draws a similar conclusion when he dedicates *Troilus* to John Gower and venerates Jesus, the Trinity, and Mary. The narrator says:

O moral Gower, this book I directe

To the and to the, philosophical Strode,

³²⁶ Céspedes Benítez agrees that the poet strove to teach a path towards salvation within the Christian tradition (55). Editor Alberto Blecuá dates two of the *LBA* manuscripts to 1330 and 1343 (XXIII), which I point out because a later copy, parts of which appear in modern editions of the work, makes the author's moral imperative explicitly clear: "Era de mill e trezientos e ochenta e un años / fue conpuesto el romance, por muchos males e daños / que fazen muchos e muchas a otras con sus engaños, / e por mostrar a los simples fablas e versos estraños" [It was in the year of 1381 that the romance was composed, for the many ills and slights men and women made against others with their deceptions, and to show simple folk these tales and extraordinary verses] (st.1634). The stanza reveals moral impulses as motivating the work.

To vouchen sauf, ther nede is, to correcte,
Of youre benignites and zeles goode.
And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,
With al myn herte of mercy evere I preye (V.1856-18561)

Unlike Ruiz's narrator, Chaucer's does not entreat prayers for himself alone. Addressing himself to "the Lord," he says:

Thow oon and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,
That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,
Uncircumscrip, and al maist circumscribe,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende, and to thy mercy, everichon,
So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy, digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.
Amen. (V.1856-1869).

Despite the narrator's emphasis on worshiping the Trinity, he, like Ruiz's narrator, also appeals to Mary. Chaucer's narrator presents Mary as double-natured, as virgin and mother. In this she stands as the model that Criseyde, who from the start has been both noble lover and traitress, unfortunately fails to live up to. In the same way, the narrator presents Mary interceding on humankind's behalf to God, now not Christ as the Son, but Christ as the Trinity.

The relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, which is the love breathed between them, is the model that exposes the shortcomings of Troilus's and Criseyde's love mediated by the ever-shuttling Pandarus. Patterson thinks the concluding

prayer enacts an “abandonment of authorial control” (L. 154), but I rather see it as Chaucer’s surrender to God as the author of life and history; it is a necessary limit for all who might call oneself not only “man,” but also *human*.

Troilus and Criseyde stages a drama of the unequal power of men and women in love. Chaucer’s poem suggests that the rules of courtship, taken as a hunt, are gendered; these differences buttress asymmetrical power structures. Honor hangs in the balance for all, but in Chaucer’s fictional Greece, and in his own historical moment, the constitutive parts of male and female honor diametrically oppose one another. In the poem, Criseyde believes she plays one game—one that would safeguard her honor, but Troilus and Pandarus play another—one that benefits their desires. That Troilus and Pandarus maintain differing and sometimes competing views of their aim highlights the centrality of female subordination to male identity, however a man might choose to construct and perform it.

Ultimately, then, Chaucer’s poem, I argue, serves a moral function, one more readily perceived when viewed alongside other fourteenth-century texts. Chaucer’s adaptation of Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* and other Troy texts explores what it means to be a good woman when one’s survival is constrained by impossible social mores and expectations. The distribution of human vice among all players devalues earthly games and gestures toward the primacy of spirituality, as the former yield no clear winners.³²⁷

Chaucer’s poem implicates each character, as well as his narrator and readers, in what transpires. As Carton opines:

³²⁷ Lee Patterson contends that moralizing Chaucer’s work is not necessarily wrong, but doing so is reductive (106-107). I still find value in seeking out the moral, or “truth” called another name, that Chaucer would have us know. That kernel of meaning, I think, is what connects 21st-century readers to those of the past.

To write, read, or act in *Troilus and Criseyde* is to be a partner in the polygamy of speaking and hearing that at once makes up the poem and constitutes its main subject. Each partner performs both as speaker and as hearer, as author and as reader. Each, except for perhaps Troilus, seeks to construe or manipulate language and linguistic relationships to attain maximum control over events and over others, with minimum responsibility for the consequences; and each discovers that personal control is always incomplete and that responsibility is always shared. This is what it means to be a partner, a reader, a lover, a member of a community. (49)

Rectifying asymmetrical power imbalances requires identifying their existence.

Chaucer's poem, by virtue of its disturbing form, matter, and conclusion—however gameful these aspects may be—forced the poet's fourteenth century readers to confront the ways in which their own words and deeds might be as much mired in historical tragedy as are those of Chaucer's characters.³²⁸

Written circa 1382-1386, *TC* "pointedly draws attention to the continuum between private and public commodification of women" (Evitt 145); it also identifies rape as an option in courtly love (145). In light of these inequities, we cannot unequivocally commend or condemn the actions of any character in the poem. The text offers us a moving target. Whether each character is moral, or immoral, guilty, or innocent, is difficult to determine. Criseyde, especially, is far more complicated than her infamous reputation would suggest.

³²⁸ By "historical tragedy" I mean to invoke the turbulent historical context within which Chaucer wrote and to point towards smaller historical events like Cecily de Chaumpaigne's revoked accusation of rape against the poet (L. Patterson 158-162, Evitt 143). Whether an event is large or small, in either scope or significance, I think Chaucer's poem suggests that what precipitates one is always a matter of shared responsibility.

Medieval romances often functioned as patriarchal propaganda; they schooled “aristocratic women to accept their lot as wives, mothers, and [their] means of acquiring wealth” (Potkay 67).³²⁹ They not only taught audiences “the social roles they must play but also the psychological attitudes these roles require” (69). The humor such works often incorporated could soften the lessons they would impart; as Bakhtin and Potkay suggest, however, the ludic can also mount an underground critique of the chivalric ideology they at the same time promote (Potkay 70).³³⁰ The comic moments, game structures, and laughter in Chaucer’s poem, for all their seriousness, certainly act to subvert the values it upholds.

The ambiguous assignment of guilt and complicity among characters in the *Troilus* and among members of its audience who are interpolated by it meet at a vortex where the fruit of Chaucer’s moral chaff lies.³³¹ Chaucer forces his readers to assess each player’s strategy; in the process he exposes the difficulty of disentangling human motives

³²⁹ *TC* implores readers to join in *Troilus*’s laughter: the lesson emerges from the poem’s parody of both tragedy and romance. Romance featured marriage as a social institution and as an opportunity for courtly, sometimes adulterous love (Potkay 65), yet Pandarus’s presence in the bedroom scene defies convention. Moreover, what closed doors would otherwise obscure stands naked; the curtain of modesty thus drawn aside reveals a romance in all its confusion, clumsiness, and misunderstanding. On the one hand, it provides rich comedy; on the other, it can bristle hairs on one’s neck. As many aristocratic marriages were contracts typically brokered by older males for younger female relatives, Pandarus’s actions may have struck a chord among medieval readers, especially since “romances often imagine their readers as female” (Potkay 67). As Bakhtin has argued, medieval parody toyed “with all that is most sacred and important from the point of view of official ideology” (84). *Troilus and Criseyde* parodies courtship; in the process, it pokes holes in ideological constructions of both male and female identity. It discovers “the Achilles’ heel” of medieval marriage practices, the likes of which Bakhtin sees as “open to derision,” particularly when possibly conjoined “to the bodily lower stratum” (Bakhtin 87), which of course, sex is.

³³⁰ In *Yvain*, for instance, Potkay explains that Chrétien’s depiction of enslaved maidens producing textiles to augment the household’s wealth “suggests that the idyllic world of romance exists only for readers who ignore the real world around them—a world in which maidens are sacrificed to the financial gain of great families” (70).

³³¹ At the close of “The Nun’s Priest Tale,” Chaucer’s narrator implores those who would take the fable as “a folye” (ll.3438) to: “Taketh the moralite, goode men. / For Seint Paul seith that al that writen is, / To oure doctrine it is ywrite, ywis; / Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be still” (ll.3440-3443); in other words, take the moral and leave what remains.

from one another (Fyler 125). In the end, separating the fruit from the chaff, Chaucer indicates, relies on knowing the truth, and truth is a matter of faith in the God Chaucer believed is the truth.

My purpose has been to explore how reading Chaucer's *TC* through the lens of its ludic aspects—its structure, references to medieval sport, and its laughter and jokes—elicits ethical questions about the nature of medieval courtship and marriage. In some ways like Boccaccio in *Il Filostrato* and Juan Ruiz in the *Libro de Buen Amor*, but in other ways quite unlike them, Chaucer concludes that only belief can stabilize the passions we experience in love. By tracking the games people play in the human comedy, Chaucer elicits its joys and deepens its tragedy.

CHAPTER V

ROLLING UP THE MAP

Children play games at parties, adults laugh at innuendos; we mock what is strange, and we tease one another for our faults. Play can provide escape from reality, yet all of these ludic, seemingly inconsequential aspects of life play a role in constructing identity, and this has implications for quotidian norms and values.

Depictions of marginalized groups, including women and cultural “others,” raise ethical questions about humanity and how its members should treat another. Though medieval mores, and more, differed from today, a familiarity with Aristotle’s ideas of virtue, honor, and the golden mean within the great chain of being suggests an interest in finding the good and middle ways. Naomi Zack explains that for Aristotle, ethics was a critical, deliberative activity, an “inner dialogue” (16) preceding “later senses of obligation and conscience” (16). Though ethics is affected by norms, like social mores (xii), the latter arise “from religion, tradition, and family” (xii), whereas ethics, as a discourse, is interior. It is an “inner conversation” engaging “practical wisdom” (16) that helps one employ “the virtue called for in a given situation” (16). The texts I have studied invite ethical consideration of how marginalized others were portrayed—and treated—in the Middle Ages as poets in the Latin West encoded and revised beliefs about what it meant to be a Christian man.

Indeed, in the *Chanson de Roland*, competition between men is serious; idle jousts and board games interchange with sieging foreign cities. This French epic sows seeds that will blossom into a notion of crusade masculinity that will be asserted as much in contradistinction to foreign, religious, and cultural others as to women. The poems’

stereotypical depictions of “others” appear to work two ways: they create smoke-screens to displace domestic tensions, and they function as foils against which the dominant culture can be defined. The stereotyping and construction of foils, as rhetorical mechanisms, suggest binary oppositions are at play, yet as I have shown, similarities between foes and heroes allows us to map within medieval romances new formulations of masculine identity.

All three texts discussed in the first half of the project reflect contemporary sociocultural strife while constructing ideological alternatives to mask and or displace them. The texts portray non-Christians negatively but are inconsistent in their efforts to do so. They highlight, perhaps inadvertently, human qualities culturally opposed groups share. This slippage undermines ideological binaries among Christians and “Others.” The textual ambiguities, I argue, provided discursive opportunities for the poems’ audiences within which personal and collective identities could be refined.

To understand the mechanism by which contemporary audiences were interpolated into romance narratives and made to assess and evaluate themselves against others, I looked to what I saw as the most surprising and ambiguous parts of the texts: ludic moments of play, laughter, jest, games, and ironic reversals that not only turned game to earnest, but also twisted innocent play into something sinister, sometimes dire. These ludic(rous) eruptions go beyond complicating how readers assess the shifting portrayals of Christians and Muslims; they consistently raise questions about male identity. The texts’ underlying preoccupations, it would seem, are less about staging the clash of cultures and more about redefining masculinity.

The use of absurdity, humor, and game structures kindled in *Roland*; the rhetoric caught on as the crusades continued, and its plumes grew denser and spread as socio-cultural and historical instabilities stoked the fire of discord in late-medieval England. The redemptive promise of taking the cross stayed a touchstone for potential and former crusaders alike. In *Guy of Warwick*, we see that to be a man is to submit to God and fight in his name, even if the ridiculous foe one must ultimately face is a manifestation of one's personal sins recast as an abominable, Eastern Other. The later *Sowdowne of Babylone* flickers with humor and absurdity as it revels in exploiting stereotypes, reversing roles, and literally roasting characters. As crusade efforts burned out, smothered under decreased faith in the church, the East, for England, grew less and less foreign. These effects, I have argued, are evident in the Egerton MS's *Floris and Blancheflour*, where mastery of *engin* becomes the trait requisite for noble male governance.

The fourteenth-century Egerton *FB* gives little indication that the eponymous prince and his family are other than Christian; the concern with foreigners has begun to diminish, matched instead by concerns about women's speech. This poem and the texts from which it descend define male identity, formulated as rational, in opposition to a female "other," who must be deemed predominantly irrational; in the process, the poem, especially its later version, participates in a long-standing process of co-optation. It exploits elements of exotic, Eastern cultures and subordinates East to West as it circumscribes female speech within the purview of male authority. Although *Floris and Blancheflour* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* play at very different aims, both narratives construct masculine identity against a female other, and they use rhetoric, contests, jokes, and games to do so.

The portrayals in both *FB* and *TC* reify latent ideologies about the roles men and women can and should play; Chaucer, at the same time, though, calls them into question. By pointing to mediation in romance—and in authorship—Chaucer suggests all identity is not only constructed by the games we play and how we play them, but also by how those very games are contrived—and mediated—by socio-cultural and historical contexts. The only way to escape the trap in *Troilus and Criseyde*, its narrator suggests, is to give up on blind lust and fix one's heart, not on earthly love, but on the Trinity, a spiritual solace Juan Ruíz likewise turns to in his similarly gameful *Libro de Buen Amour*. Both texts, in presenting issues of textual, historical, and personal mediation, ask whether a man may use any means necessary to achieve his desire; the answer of course is that men, and humans in general, should relinquish their hold on earthly desire.

The texts I've examined in this project all demonstrate the tendency to reveal tremors in their socio-cultural milieu via the disruptive, multivalent ludic elements they include, many of which are games, laughter, or ironic, carnivalesque reversals. Reading for humor, laughter, games, and the latter's structure has revealed a covert mechanism by which certain kinds of male identity were constructed.

Whether in gatherings small or large, noble or popular, romances in the Middle Ages were often experienced in group settings, suggesting their audiences participated in conversations and discourses that constructed, revised, and consolidated approaches to reality.³³² Indeed, English romances from the twelfth through fourteenth centuries wrestle with issues contemporary to their composition and reflect, in non-identical ways, an awareness of “interconnecting and conflicting claims to value and power” (Crane, *Insular*

³³² Discourses are “neither uniform nor stable” (Foucault, *HS* 100), yet they can delimit and define “legitimate” perspectives on a subject and establish “norms for elaborating concepts and theories” (“Ethics” 11); in this, they contribute to the construction of ideology.

11). An underlying preoccupation of this project has been locating “forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to... [understand] the ‘polymorphous techniques of power’” (Foucault, *HS 11*) that have guided Western assumptions about identity. This inquiry, I hope, helps those dismissive of the past to reassess its relevance.

As is the case today, of course, not all perspectives represented in literature were readily accepted; moreover, they fluctuate and compete with other views. Yet, the representations of male identity in the romances I have examined could not have been wholly ignored by medieval audiences, for it seems these old models still clutch at many of our beliefs and values; they inform our choices, behaviors, and norms, even today.

If from a twenty-first century perspective we can recognize ludic representations as actually ludicrous, if we can see how the gamefulness of tricking, mocking, or playing upon non-dominant groups of people contributes, systemically, to their devaluation, disempowerment and dehumanization, then we can also use those ludic instantiations to, like an umpire, make a better, more ethical call for how we map out our relationships to others. The outcomes of jokes and games, in the poems I’ve examined, are neither silly, nor inconsequential; they are often demeaning and carry profound, long-standing consequences. Reading them, nonetheless, offers us an intermezzo, a break out of time, and it is in such moments, I would hope, that we would see the ludic(rous) as an opportunity to exercise our inner umpire.

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