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ENCLOSED FROM ALL SIDES: READING CONTACT AND AMBIVALENCE IN THE
IMAGINARY AL-ANDALUS OF HROTSVIT'S *THE PASSION OF PELAGIUS* AND *THE*

SONG OF ROLAND

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Carroll College, Helena, Montana, 2009

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in English Literature

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2017

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Abstract Title

Chairperson: Dr. Ashby Kinch

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim's *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* have never been read together in terms of their shared engagement with the Muslim other in the Iberian Peninsula, known during the Middle Ages as Al-Andalus. This project is a comparative reading of the texts' approach to the presentation of an imaginary Al-Andalus as a space of alterity. The texts' emphasis on imaginative as opposed to accurate portrayals of Andalusian history and Islamic culture suggests their engagement with a process of Christian identity-building, where the "Christian," as portrayed in each text, is defined against and in comparison to the "Muslim," as imagined. As such, this thesis examines the way the texts present the imaginary Al-Andalus as a staging area in which to interrogate both difference and an ideal Christian identity. The texts employ the space of alterity as one to define the Christian "self" in opposition to the Muslim "other;" however, in this space of alterity, the Christian must also confront the other's likeness to the self. By employing existing scholarship on cloistered women's communities and hagiography, this project argues that *The Passion of Pelagius* implicitly embraces the position of the female religious other even as it explicitly demonizes the figure of the Muslim other. *The Song of Roland*, meanwhile, reflects traditions of epic literature and chivalry to express ambivalence about the difference between Muslim and Frank, especially in terms of the poem's vivid battle scenes.

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Introduction

Al-Andalus, largely controlled by Muslims and located in the Iberian Peninsula, served for the European imagination in the Middle Ages as a place enclosing the strange, the monstrous, the pagan, the alter. According to María Rosa Menocal, Muslim armies from northern Africa had entered what is now modern-day Spain in 711, drawn by the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Roman Empire and the inability of the Visigoths to retain control of the area (*Ornament* 26). Muslim forces knocked on the door of Europe, perhaps most notably at the Battle of Tours-Poitier in 732, when Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne, defeated a Muslim army attempting to invade southern France (*Ornament* 55). Most of Al-Andalus was under complete Muslim control until the early eleventh century, after which disintegration of centralized power led to a city-state, or *taifa*, system, in which power was held by various Christian and Muslim lords (*Ornament* 39-40). Against this historical backdrop, Christian literature of the period constructs an imagined Muslim other that embodies monstrosity. On the imagined body of the dog-headed monster called the cynocephalus, Christian writers of encyclopedias and polemics and Christian mapmakers laid the body of the Muslim other. The cynocephalus, a member in the cast of characters of the medieval monstrous races, thus takes on a specific role, not only as a reminder of foreign weirdness but also as the personification of Islam, an embodiment that, because it was not human, drew the denigration and degradation of medieval writers. As a monster, the Muslim – or Saracen, the term used by Europeans of the time – serves, in the words of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, as a body that “quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic [here, meaning “not emotionally disturbing”] or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence” (*Monster Culture* 4). The imagined Saracen monsters in Al-Andalus provided medieval writers with a serviceable other, upon which

the writers projects their fears and through whom they may express their ambivalence to spaces and states of alterity. Seen through this lens, two texts – *The Passion of Pelagius* by Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, composed ca. 960, and *The Song of Roland*, whose earliest extant manuscript dates from ca. 1090 – express this ambivalence toward alterity while relying on principles of medieval memory theory with Al-Andalus serving as a memory locus. Memory theory navigates between the strange and the familiar by employing the form of the strange, or unfamiliar, object to act as a mnemonic to remember a piece of information that is familiar, or perhaps banal. This introduction will return to memory theory after first laying out the theoretical terms upon which this thesis relies.

This thesis will argue that, by studying *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*, at the intersection of monster theory through the ethics of ambivalence, we can derive a better understanding of the ways in which pre-Crusade Christian writers understood the Muslim other and Christianity’s relationship to Islam. Further, this thesis argues that we must read the texts using medieval memory theory to understand their rhetorical positions as they relate to the ethical question of ambivalence. Monster theory is a branch of cultural studies that, according to Cohen, is “a method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender” (3). Monsters are those beings that cannot be understood rationally, according to Stephen T. Asma, “and also when we cannot readily relate to the emotional range involved” (10). A culture’s invention of a monster, then, is a way to understand what that culture most fears and reviles, but also what that culture desires and what captivates it. Literally, the word *monster* is a combination of two Latin words, according to Michael Uebel, who argues the word comes from both the word *monere* (meaning “to warn”) and *monstrare* (“to show”). The Greco-Roman cultures that birthed the monstrous races, which will be discussed in more detail below, attached little moral value to the

difference carried in the body of the monster. Christian culture would change that. “From the Greco-Roman tradition, the Middle Ages inherited what may be termed a scientific impulse, and from the Judeo-Christian, an allegorical impulse,” Uebel writes (18).¹ Monsters of medieval literature and art, then, are not only frightening or amazing beings that are unfamiliar and grotesque. They are embodiments of their own morality but also the will of God. They are also, Uebel argues, an epitome of “Western medieval conceptions of otherness. A particular rhythm informs their being – an oscillation between domestication (disavowal of difference) and estrangement (recognition of difference)” (19). As a harbinger of difference, the monster carries with it the anxiety of the imagining culture. But as a manifestation of God’s will, the monster reminds the imagining culture both of God’s unknowability and of God’s ability to intervene in the physical world.

As we shall see, *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* imagines Saracens as monsters, but these texts also demonstrate ambivalence toward the Saracens as the “other.” This ambivalence is, as postcolonialist critic Homi K. Bhabha notes, a hallmark of the stereotype, “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (94-95). The Saracen as a monster is similar to the stereotype Bhabha describes in that the Saracen is both always fixed as a monster, demonic and beyond salvation, who defies God through his refusal to (properly) worship Him. But the texts also delight in “anxiously repeat[ing]” this charge, constructing an imagined other

¹ Here, I must delineate between the “monstrous races” as described in classical and medieval encyclopedias and the mythological monsters so ubiquitous in ancient Greek culture. Uebel’s discussion concerns monstrous races that were supposed to exist, as opposed to a mythological monster that serves an allegorical purpose. According to Friedman, the Greek ethnographers Ctesias (early fifth century BC) and Megasthenes (fourth century BC) traveled to Asia and documented the monstrous races as they existed (Friedman notes here that some modern scholars doubt whether Ctesias left home at all) (5). Friedman notes, “Ctesias and Megasthenes belong less to the class of geographic writers than they do to that of Hellenistic paradoxographers, whose rhetorically heightened descriptions of peoples and marvels in other lands are a distinctive product of the Greek genius” (6).

whose origin in doctrinal difference soon morphs into bodily difference so extreme that the other eventually becomes less than human. But the ambivalence, according to Bhabha, also sees the other as “an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (96). In his study of the giant in medieval England, another geographical space on the periphery of the known world, Cohen notes the capacity of English literature, written in a place of cultural diversity, to imagine the monster in the form of the giant. “Because of its diversity and because of its permeable, perpetually transgressed borders, Anglo-Saxon England was relentlessly pondering what it means to be a warrior, a Christian, a hero, a saint, an outlaw, a king, a sexed and gendered being” (*Of Giants* 4-5). Like Anglo-Saxon England, western Europe of the tenth and eleventh centuries was a place of diversity and of endless movements of people, some benign, some invaders. That the literature produced there, including *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*, also takes up questions of what it means to be a Christian, a saint, and a warrior, is logical. But by displacing the action of these stories away from western Europe, their writers are able both to express ambivalence about the other – by being displaced, the other is physically farther away and therefore less of a threat – and also to construct Al-Andalus as a memory locus in which to place concepts of Christian and Saracen identities.

The setting of Al-Andalus serves as an imagined place of ambivalence toward the other because it also becomes a memory locus for the writers of *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*. During late antiquity and the Middle Ages, scholars developed a system for memorizing large amounts of information. Treatises about mnemonic techniques, including *Institutio Oratorio* by Quintilian, advised students to memorize concepts by picturing a *locus*, or place, a preferably familiar space, and place objects that will jog the memory in the locus,

according to Frances Yates (18-19). Cicero and the author of *Ad Herennium* advise students to choose memorable images to link to concepts they wish to recall later. Yates notes perhaps an obvious aspect of human memory: we tend not to remember things that are “petty, ordinary, and banal” but hold in our minds things that are “exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous” (25). Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski note that memory was considered an “activity involving human will and thought... Re-collection was essentially a task of composition, literally bringing together matters found in various places where they are stored to be reassembled in a new place” (1). According to medieval memory theory, the craft of memory can be used “to *make* new things: prayers, meditations, sermons, pictures, hymns, stories, and poems” (3). Storing these memories depended upon careful study and disciplined composition of a memory locus, an imagined space – preferably a place with which the student is familiar – where concepts can be stored for later retrieval (6-8). Memory work, then, is the tool of the writer creating an original work. As we shall see, evidence that the authors of *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* were familiar with and employed memory theory is clear throughout the texts.

The Passion of Pelagius and *The Song of Roland* are not often read side-by-side, but both recreate Al-Andalus imaginatively in their respective genres. *The Passion of Pelagius* participates in the genre of hagiography, while *The Song of Roland*, often referred to as the best of the *chansons de geste*, hearkens back to the epic tradition, with great heroes fighting for their own and their king’s glory. On the surface, then, these two texts have very little in common. This focus on Al-Andalus as a conceptual staging ground for cultural contact provides, however, an opportunity to read the two texts together. By doing so, we will see similar attitudes toward the Muslim other and toward alterity, but extremely different visions of an ideal Christian identity.

The Passion of Pelagius is loosely based on the true story of the martyrdom in Cordoba of a Christian adolescent by the caliph Abd Al-Rahman III. *The Song of Roland*, relating a highly fictionalized account of the Battle of Roncevaux of 778, tells the story of the annihilation of Charlemagne's rearguard by a Saracen army after the Frankish army is betrayed by an errant knight. Within both texts, we shall see a tension between centrality and alterity, with Christian values corresponding to the "center" and non-Christian values corresponding to the "periphery." Rather than constructing a strict binary, with centrality corresponding to "good" and alterity corresponding to "evil," the texts interrogate the very necessity of such a structure, demonstrating the authors' ambivalence toward both the metaphorical concept of Christian centrality-as-superiority and toward a concept of intractable difference between Christian and Saracen.

The Passion of Pelagius and *The Song of Roland* emerge from a culture disturbed by the increasing pressure of Islam, a religion that, beginning in the seventh century, united Arab society to turn it into a formidable military force in the Middle East, northern Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula. John V. Tolan argues that, among Christians in both eastern and western Europe, Islam was first seen as a military adversary or "divine chastisement for Christian sins." Once Christians began converting to Islam, the attitude changes, and surviving texts take on a polemical stripe (71-72). Many medieval texts, in a variety of languages, "paint Saracen religion in the familiar hues of classical Roman idolatry" (105). They do not stop at idolatry, however. Cohen notes the ways in which race and monstrosity collide in many later medieval texts, but he points to *The Song of Roland's* portrayal of monstrous races, which I will take up in chapter two, as bringing "the darkness of Africa' queerly close to Christianity, a temptation within a threat" (OSE 120). Reacting to this perceived Islamic threat, early medieval polemicists laid the

groundwork for a genre of contact literature that would explode with the beginning of the Crusades in 1096. By the High Middle Ages, Islam will be portrayed in Christian literature in specific, even stereotypical ways. While *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* participate in an emerging mode of Christian representation of the Muslim other, they also rely on early Christian identities and late classical memory and educational treatises in their imagining of place. Thus, while both *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* demonstrate Christian perceptions of Islam, they also rely on similar conceptual engines to plumb the depths of Christian identity, especially in regard to how that identity relates to the world and to non-Christians. The texts present two very different visions of Christianity, but when read together, they present diverging visions of the Christian place in the world and similar constructions of the Saracen other, which will be reinforced and developed over the ensuing centuries. Eventually, the construction of the Saracen other will become a fully fledged stereotype: by the Late Middle Ages, blue- and black-skinned Saracens or monstrous cynocephali skulk through Christian art and literature. By the modern era, the discourse of Orientalism, defined by Edward Said as “the style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (2), would develop, aided by European colonization of the Middle East.² Other medievalists, including Suzanne Conklin Akbari, have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of trying to apply Orientalism to medieval literature, noting that tripartite maps, which separate the world into three continents, Asia, Europe, and Africa, would argue against “conflat[ing] a binary

² An important difference between Said’s modern Orientalism and pre-modern, medieval Orientalism that some medievalists argue for is the position of economic power of Europe or “the West,” which did not yet exist in the Middle Ages. “The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony,” Said writes (5). Thus, any application of Orientalism to the Middle Ages (or other pre-modern period) must take this reality into consideration.

overtly based on religious differences with the binary of Orient and Occident... It does not follow that West is where ‘we’ are,” Akbari writes (“From Due East” 20). Thus, while medieval contact literature does employ geographical concepts to interrogate difference, it is not necessarily along the East-West binary observed by Said and others.

The absence of a binary does not, however, indicate that Christian writers did not think of their world in terms of imaginative geography, with the familiar belonging to “us” and the faraway and strange belonging to “them.” Both *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* construct what Said refers to as “imaginative geography,” in which sometimes arbitrary geographical boundaries become markers of difference between people, so that a physical border morphs into a boundary between civilization and barbarity, between “us” and “them” (53-54). In the case of these two texts, that boundary is the border between Al-Andalus and the rest of Europe, which is explicitly evoked in *The Song of Roland* when Charlemagne and the Frankish vanguard pass through the “Gate of Spain” into France (1703), a boundary that Roland and the doomed rearguard will never reach. Instead, they die at the hand of the Saracens. By building a boundary between Al-Andalus and the rest of (Christian) Europe, the texts invent an Andalusian peripheral space. Medieval T-O maps and *mappaemundi* often place Al-Andalus at the edge of the world, in the same location as the monstrous races the texts conflate with Muslims.

Both texts are influenced by Plinian thought, specifically that monstrous races inhabit the peripheries of the world, the faraway places that are the subject of legend but often not first-hand experience. The first century A.D. Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder did not “invent” the monstrous races, but his *Natural History* and the monsters discussed therein became so influential for medieval and later writers that they have taken on his name.³ Monstrous races

³ In his excellent and oft-cited book *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, John Block Friedman traces the idea of monstrous races at the world’s peripheries at least as far back as the works of the Greek writers Ctesias in

“occur with great frequency in medieval art and literature,” writes John Block Friedman, “lurking in *Mandeville’s Travels*, populating the outermost edges of world maps, and resting uneasily in neat frames on the pages of great illustrated encyclopedias” (1). The ubiquity of the monstrous races suggests they captured the European imagination. Indeed, these bizarre races ran the gamut from one-breasted Amazons, pygmies, giants, and cannibals, to cave-dwelling troglodytes, hermaphrodites, the Blemmyae who lacked heads, black Ethiopians, and the dog-headed cynocephali, among many others (9-21). Some monstrous races were, no doubt, based upon real groups of people, either misidentified or misunderstood by Greco-Roman chroniclers. Other groups may have been purely imaginative, such as the cynocephali, a dog-headed people who, depending upon the source, either “communicate by barking,” and have “huge teeth and breathe flames” (15), or possessed reason, wore clothing, and were prime candidates for conversion to Christianity (61). No less a theologian than St. Augustine weighed in on the potential for conversion of monstrous races, when he argued in *City of God* that if cynocephali are indeed rational creatures, they ought to be converted: “But no faithful Christian should doubt that anyone who is born anywhere as a man – that is, a rational and mortal being – derives from that one first-created human being. And this is true, however extraordinary such a creature may appear to our senses in bodily shape, in colour, or motion, or utterance, or in any natural endowment, or part, or quality” (CG 662).⁴ Friedman and others point out that the cynocephali, the dog-headed race, were often equated with Muslims. “The Moslems [sic] were often described by Christians as a race of dogs, an epithet ultimately deriving from Western biographies of

the fifth century B.C. and Megasthenes in the fourth century B.C. Pliny the Elder drew from Ctesias, Megasthenes, and many other sources for his *Natural History* (5-8).

⁴ “Verum quisquis uspiam nascitur homo, id est animal rationale mortale, quamlibet nostris inusitatam sensibus gerat corporis formam seu colorem siue motum siue sonum siue qualibet ui, qualibet parte, qualibet qualitate naturam: ex illo uno protoplasto originem ducere nullus fidelium dubitaueri” (*De Civitate Dei* XVI.8).

Mahomet [sic], which pictured him as a Christian heretic, a Roman cardinal disgruntled because he was not elected pope” (67). Friedman also notes that artwork depicting Pentecost sometimes included a cynocephalus wearing Arab dress, thus suggesting that Arab dog-heads were part of the potentially convertible non-Christian peoples (66). The association between Muslims and cynocephali was so established that by the time of the composition of a 1430 Niello world map, a “Saracen Ethiopian king with his dog-headed people” is placed in Africa. This inclusion, argues Friedman, “stresses remoteness, monstrosity, and religious heresy in much the same way as did the Pentecost pictures” (67). Monstrous races are not neutral harbingers of difference. On the contrary, their difference suggests evidence about the state of their very souls. While theologians including Augustine argued for their conversion, as we shall see, the urge to force monstrous races further to the periphery was strong among European writers.

The Passion of Pelagius and *The Song of Roland* set their stories in Al-Andalus, a significant point of comparison that allows inquiry into how the writers stage each text within the same conceptual space. Geographically speaking, Al-Andalus is a peninsula, set off somewhat from the rest of Europe (though not, of course, as peripheral as Britain or Ireland, for example). Nonetheless, even the seventh-century Iberian encyclopedist Isidore of Seville, whose work was well-known in the early Middle Ages, perhaps self-consciously described the Iberian Peninsula in terms that accentuates its peripheral nature and alterity. Isidore writes, “Sita est autem inter Africam et Galliam, a septentrione Pyrenaeis montibus clausa, a reliquis partibus undique mare conclusa” (Moreover it [i.e. Hispania] is positioned between Africa and Gaul, from the north closed in by the Pyrenees Mountains, and from the other parts enclosed by the sea; Etymologies Latin XIV.iv.28). By Isidore’s definition, the Iberian Peninsula is closed off, separated on one side by mountains and on the other three sides by the sea. Medieval *mappaemundi*, a tripartite or

T-O map that accents the separation of the world into the three known continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, often place the Iberian Peninsula at the edge of the map, a position with religious as well as moral or metaphorical meaning. *Mappaemundi* highlight the peripheral nature of the Iberian Peninsula as a physically remote place, sometimes even squeezing the land mass onto the edge of the map. The inevitably inaccurate scaling matters less than the moral value such a depiction presents. Evelyn Edson argues medieval maps did not communicate geographical facts alone, and indeed that function was far less important than the communication of moral or religious facts. “Details, such as the orientation to the east, were not random happenings. East was the place of the creation of humanity and the direction of the Earthly Paradise. Jerusalem is central, at least in later medieval maps such as the Psalter map, because here Jesus was crucified and resurrected for the salvation of all,” Edson writes (507). Focusing on the obvious inaccuracies of the *mappaemundi* prevents study of the value system they present. In this system, as Edson points out, centrality is prized. Many scholars have noted that Jerusalem is often at the center of *mappaemundi*, serving as an anchor or focal point for the entire world. Often oriented to the east, the *mappaemundi* that place the Garden of Eden in the east also place earthy paradise physically at the top of the document, suggesting a moral hierarchy.

The world as presented in *mappaemundi* is one of central-peripheral value: to be physically peripheral from the spiritual center, Jerusalem, now became the physical center, meant also to be spiritually peripheral as well. Geraldine Heng notes the impulse to assign value to the mythical monstrous races that inhabit the world’s peripheries in the “project of European identity:”

In its most grotesque and spectacular forms, cartographic race equates with the monstrous races of semi-humans located by the Hereford and other *mappaemundi* in Asia and

Africa, and especially the coastline of southern Africa, which in the Hereford arrestingly teems with human monsters of many kinds. The depiction of pygmies, giants, hermaphrodites, troglodytes, cynocephali, sciapods, and other part-human, part-animal, deformed and disabled peoples inherited from the classical tradition harnesses the inheritance of the past to a medieval survey and anatomization of the world that reflects on the meaning and borders of European self-identity and civilization. (“Invention II” 338-39)

Heng and others, including Akbari, have pointed out the value system inherent in medieval maps, where Jerusalem indicates a holy center and the peripheries representing a falling away from holiness, and ultimately, from God. Medieval maps and encyclopedias placed Jerusalem at the world’s center. Philip S. Alexander argues this tradition goes back to at least the Book of Jubilees, composed in the second century BCE, in which Jerusalem is called “the center of the navel of the world” (147). Isidore of Seville explains in *Etymologies*, “In medio autem Iudaeae civitas Hierosolyma est, quasi umbilicus regionis totius.” (In the middle of Judea is the city of Jerusalem, a sort of navel of the entire region; XIV.3.21). Akbari notes that Isidore is one of many encyclopedists to make this claim, including Hrabanus Maurus in the ninth century, who added that Jerusalem is the navel not only of the region but also of “totius terrae” (the entire earth; qtd. in “From Due East” 21). Jerusalem’s metaphorical centrality carried with it a moral value: that which is at the center is the site of holiness, the source of a spiritual substance. Just as the navel is a reminder of the umbilical cord, which provides nourishment from mother to fetus, Jerusalem is a reminder of the nourishment God provides to the faithful. Moving outward from that center, however, also carries with it a moral value. The farther one is from that center, the less holy substance is available.

This concept has a direct analogy in Neoplatonic philosophy: the farther away one gets from God, the less of God's goodness one experiences. Evil, according to Boethius and Augustine, is not a substance or "being" of its own. Rather, evil is the *absence* of goodness. As Lady Philosophy says in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, heavily influenced by neo-Platonic thought, "Then evil is nothing, because God cannot do it, and there is nothing he cannot do." By this logic, when one thinks one is surrounded by evil, one is actually in the absence of goodness, the absence of God. Because God is unitary, and because God is good, all things that exist are good (102-03). Thus, "whatever falls from goodness ceases to exist," according to Boethius (118). Addressing God in his *Confessions*, Augustine writes, "I saw and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, and there are absolutely no substances which you did not make... For evil does not exist at all" (C VII.xiii.19). Those things that are closer to God represent goodness. In this situation, evil is then the state in which God is absolutely absent. Similarly, a value is assigned to Jerusalem's centrality: it and everything around it abound in holiness. The farther one moves from Jerusalem, the farther one moves from holiness. In the hinterlands of the world, those places at the edges of the map or beyond, Jerusalem's holiness has begun to dissipate, just as spiritually moving away from God means one is surrounded by less and less goodness. *The Song of Roland* imagines Al-Andalus in this way, as a territory outside the Christian fold, while *The Passion of Pelagius* challenges this supposition by placing the saintly Pelagius in the midst of what should be iniquity. As we shall see, however, this difference in the way the texts stage alterity is significant to their rhetorical positions.

Even though central and northern Europe itself was a peripheral zone – far from the cultural and religious centers of Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem – Europeans tended to view other peripheral spaces such as the far north, India, Ethiopia, and Al-Andalus as places

morally inferior to the spiritual center. At a distance from the spiritual center, these peripheral zones lack God and even humanity. Boethius argues that evil men, those who live removed from God, “cease to be what they are.” In other words, “by their wickedness [they have] lost their human nature, although they still survive in the form of the human body.” These evil men are called wolves, deer, jackasses, or pigs. They have become subhuman, bestial: “All those who have put goodness aside have no right to be called men anymore, since there is nothing divine about them, but they have descended to the *level of beasts*” (118 emphasis mine). On a less philosophical and more practical level, Akbari argues, “For medieval Europeans, the unknown margins of the world extended across all four of the cardinal directions, and so wondrous phenomena and monstrous races were described in a variety of places” (Idols 68). Writing about the early fourteenth century Hereford map, Naomi Reed Kline also links peripheral zones with monstrosity and mystery: “Most of the strange and monstrous peoples are relegated to the southernmost and northernmost reaches of the world far from the navel of Jerusalem” (162). Al-Andalus, as one of those margins, is teeming with monstrosity and attracts monstrosity too. The parade of monstrous races in *The Song of Roland* features the subhuman and the strange, those men “upon whose backs, all down the spine in rows, / As on wild boars, enormous bristles grow” (1322-23), who come from the corners of the world to fight the Franks.⁵

⁵ Too much, perhaps, can be made of a unique Christian sense of a center-periphery dichotomy here. After all, centrality and peripherality is more a matter of positionality and perspective than absolute truth. In the introduction to her book *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534*, Kathy Lavezzo explains that English writers at different times in their history have accentuated both the peripherality and centrality of Britain. According to the school of new cultural geography, “space is itself...socially produced” (11), and critics such as Benedict Anderson, Homi K. Bhabha Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and others, have commented on the use of borders – both physical and metaphorical – to delineate the identity of the self and the perception of the other. Butler notes in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, “It is worth noting, however, that identification always relies upon a difference that it seeks to overcome” (145). Also significant to note is the way in which, even as Christians were defining center and periphery, medieval Muslims were doing something similar. According to Ralph W. Brauer, while mapmakers such as Al-Idrisi and Al-Ma'mun did not include clearly delineated political boundaries in their maps, geographers of the ninth- and tenth-century Balkhi school indicated centrality and peripherality in terms of transition and liminality: “The Balkhi school... recognized the existence of political boundaries in the sense that as one progressed in a direction away from the center of a

Monstrous Muslim characters emerge from this marginal space to define the contours of both *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*, which consequently betray a deep ambivalence about cultural difference. Both texts feature Saracens whose behavior is alternately reprehensible and admirable. In *The Passion of Pelagius*, for example, the king Abdrahemen's sexual proclivities cause Hrotsvit to refer to him as "corruptum vitiis ... Sodomitis" (corrupted with the vices of Sodom; PP 205), while in *The Song of Roland* the Saracen warriors display courage in battle, such as Baligant whose "valour proved in battle o'er and o'er; / Were he but Christian, God! what a warrior!" (3163-64). This ambivalence is more deeply developed in *The Song of Roland* than in *The Passion of Pelagius*, but Hrotsvit perhaps hints at a more nuanced view of Saracens than she first demonstrates early in the text. *The Passion of Pelagius* is a rhetorical exercise in which Hrotsvit reflects upon her own status of alterity, both as a woman in a patriarchal culture and as a cloistered monastic removed from the outside world. Hrotsvit works within the hagiographical genre in *The Passion of Pelagius*, but she also participates in and subverts the epic genre through her use of dactylic hexameter, a decidedly masculine poetic genre. By celebrating virginity and martyrdom in the figure of Pelagius, Hrotsvit feminizes the male figure and creates a didactic text that argues for her ethic of "heroic virginity," in the words of Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (84). Her use of dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic poetry, demonstrates her appropriation of a masculine genre, the epic, to achieve decidedly un-masculine

state, one would sooner or later pass from one sovereignty to another... Yet, clearly in the minds of these cartographers such boundaries were constituted not as sharply defined boundary lines but rather as transition zones of uncertain sovereignty between states" (5). Samar Attar argues that medieval Muslim texts do not reflect "a notion of either 'the fear,' or 'the welcoming' of strangers." Further, medieval travel writers such as Ibn Batutah "had not on the whole created a binary construct of East and West, South and North. For many of them, Europeans, as well as all other nations, were like the rest of us, i.e. the children of God. Human diversity is, in particular a manifestation of the greatness of God" (18). In all situations where we speak of large groups of diverse people over long time periods, attitudes differ. My work here is based upon evidence in *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* themselves and my treatment of medieval maps as texts in their own right. The construction of Jerusalem-as-center and the moral values attached to it is one of many such constructions of centrality and peripherality across cultures and epochs.

ends, namely to remind cloistered females that virginity is a superior lifestyle. Simultaneously, she sets up an impassable barrier between Christian and Saracen, repeatedly referring to the Christians and Saracens as separate *gentes* (sing. *gens*), a Latin term that refers to discrete groups of people.

The *Song of Roland*, while explicitly setting up a binary between Christians and Saracens, implicitly questions just how different the two groups are, particularly in the pattern of doubling throughout the text, with the narrator reflecting on the potential of Saracen warriors, saying of one, “Were he but a Christian, right knightly he’d appear” (899). The scene of the Battle of Roncevaux features the Saracen army ambushing the Franks after the Frankish knight Ganelon betrays his own rearguard, led by his stepson Roland. Roland’s friend, Oliver, urges Roland to “sound your horn” to request help from the vanguard, led by Charlemagne (1051). Roland refuses at first, saying it will cause “my fame” to “suffer scorn” (1054). When the rearguard is overwhelmed by Saracens, however, Roland relents, blowing his horn, called an Oliphant, to signal to the vanguard he needs reinforcements. But he has waited too long, and the vanguard “cannot come in time” (1841), leaving the rearguard to be slaughtered by the Saracens. I read this scene as an example of a place where the Christian-Saracen binary begins to break down. As the Saracen army penetrates the Frankish rearguard’s defenses, we see the breaching of a “mental and physical frontier,” a concept Michael Uebel considers in his book *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages*. Uebel argues that frontiers “mark less lines of division than interspaces where identities are formed through negotiation, interaction, and engagement” (36-37). The frontier created in the Oliphant scene is the literal battle line between Franks and Saracens, even as Roland blows the horn and, aurally at least, achieves a connection to the Frankish vanguard, which is by then too far ahead to provide

reinforcements. Meanwhile, the boundary between Frank and Saracen breaks down, as iron penetrates flesh and blood literally flows together. The aural space created by the blare of Roland's Oliphant also creates a memory locus, a place in which the poem "hangs" the various qualities and characteristics of both the Franks and the Saracens, including the monstrosity of the other.

As a vessel of the monstrous, Al-Andalus functions in both *The Passion of Pelagius* and *the Song of Roland* as a memory locus. Hrotsvit certainly would have been aware of memory theory, as it proliferated in monastic settings, where monks and nuns had to memorize large portions of the Bible. Mary Carruthers explains that the Book of Psalms often were memorized "by heart," in monasteries, along with other books. In order to achieve this feat of memorization, monastics employed aspects of memory theory (112-113). Paula Leverage convincingly established that the *chansons de geste* participate in the discourse of medieval memory theory, arguing that they likely came from a monastic tradition. References to the *chansons de geste* within sermons suggest the genre was popular with the Church, and evidence suggests that jongleurs performed the *chansons de geste* at the monastery in Beauvais in the fourteenth century (28, 32). Leverage cites Mary Carruthers to point out the "role of the architectures of the cloisters in meditation," reasoning "it is within this meditative space that the monks of Beauvais heard, and perhaps reflected upon, the *chansons de geste*" (32-33). One senses that aspects of the physical experience of clausturation and its psychological effects on cloistered individuals likely influenced monastic literature. We see in *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* a construction of Al-Andalus as a discrete space, "cloistered" in relation to the rest of the world. As a cloistered space, Al-Andalus also serves as a memory locus, ripe for the development of a

system of mnemonics that highlighted both the Christian/non-Christian binary but also the personal ambivalence of the two texts.

While *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* are similar in many respects, they differ in their portrayal of the ideal Christian. Hrotsvit's *Passion of Pelagius* exists within a rich genre of hagiography that flourished in the late classical and medieval eras. Hagiography, which tells the stories of saints and other venerated persons, often communicates a sense of voyeurism in which the story's audience gazes at the saint, whose body engenders in the voyeur a sense of curiosity, arousal or even disgust. Closely linked and sometimes overlapping with hagiography was the mania around martyrs, those people who die for their faith, among early Christians (Wood 44-45, Schäfer-Althaus 153). The hagiographical characteristics of *The Passion of Pelagius* highlights Pelagius' largely passive resistance to the oppression and sexual advances of the Saracen caliph.

The Song of Roland, meanwhile, is a *chanson de geste*, or song of deeds. The *chansons de geste* comprised a popular genre of literature that flourished between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, according to Catherine M. Jones (1). As the name suggests, the texts originally were likely sung and told the stories of the military deeds of heroes. Jones explains that the *chansons de geste* "reflect the structure and values" of feudal society, whose "feats of arms are accomplished primarily in the context of 'holy war' against Muslim and other non-Christian forces" (2).⁶ Jones argues that the *chansons de geste* were often performed before "popular, courtly, and clerical audiences" (7). Paula Leverage argues that while the genre likely

⁶ Some *chansons de geste* deal not with Muslim or non-Christian foes but with conflict within French aristocratic society. Jones splits the larger genre into five subgenres, two of which rely on the Saracen other for an enemy, namely the Charlemagne Cycle, of which *The Song of Roland* is one, the Crusade Cycle, which depicts "horrific acts of violence perpetrated by both Christians and Muslims." The other three subgenres portray primarily interfamilial conflicts or rebellious barons. Later *chansons de geste* from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries are, according to Jones, "generically 'hybrid,' conjoining motifs from romance, folklore, and/or hagiography to the thematics and formal structure of the *chansons de geste*" (28-53).

appealed to many audiences, “the monastic and ecclesiastic audience has not been sufficiently emphasized in *chanson de geste* scholarship” (28). The original intended audience notwithstanding, the *chansons de geste* that deal with Christian-Muslim conflicts “may well have served a propagandist function,” Jones writes, that “were composed in part to inculcate Christian knights with the crusading spirit” (21). Saracen alterity, with its emphasis on monstrosity and pagan-ness, “serves in part to justify Western hegemony and the notion of ‘holy war’ celebrated in so many epic works” (21). Within the militaristic society of eleventh century Europe, the Catholic Church developed a set of rules governing when and how warfare was to be conducted. H.E.J. Cowdrey explains that the Catholic Church throughout the eleventh century tried to extend protections for certain classes, including the poor and the clergy, to prevent them from being victims of violence (42). These protections, referred to as the Peace of God and the Truce of God, proliferated until the Council of Narbonne in 1054, when it was declared that “no Christian should kill another Christian, for whoever kills a Christian undoubtedly sheds the blood of Christ” (qtd. in Cowdrey 53). In the literary imagination, non-Christians, including Muslims, then become the target of Christian knights, including the Franks in *The Song of Roland*, who, in order to participate in their militant culture, are compelled to exercise their violence on somebody. The Franks do so cloaked in religious imagery and language. For example, Roland’s sword, Durendal holds “relics” in its “hilt of gold” (2345), including “St. Peter’s tooth, St. Basil’s blood, it holds, / Hair of my lord St. Denis, there enclosed, / Likewise a piece of Blessed Mary’s robe” (2346-48). The melding of Christian and martial values crystallize throughout *The Song of Roland*, reflective of the a compromise reached in the debate between a Christian church that worshipped the “Prince of Peace” in the form of Jesus Christ, and a secular society that, by the tenth century, had had to deal with centuries of military threats from Vikings, Hungarians,

Muslims, and others, according to Maurice Keen. Eventually the Church acquiesced in some form to secular pressure: “as time went by, the balance of ecclesiastical thought began to tip in favor of militancy, until in the end the crusading indulgence turned the teachings of the penitentials upside down” (45-46). Instead of enduring a forty-day penance period for killing on the battlefield, knights now become imbued with spirituality.

These two visions of Christianity are extremely different: one emphasizes the passive resistance of believers, even to the point of martyrdom; the other glorifies the military exploits of a knightly class defending not only land and sovereignty but the Christian religion. Both, however, elicit a strong reaction in their readers. Gary Macy argues, “Hrotsvit’s first audience may have been her own canonesses, and her primary intent may have been to encourage them to adopt a life of virginity either as nuns or continent wives” (73). Thus, Hrotsvit’s work, including *The Passion of Pelagius* and other verse legends, may have been, in their own way, propaganda tools to convince women living in Gandersheim to take up virginity as a mantle, a sign of their devotion to God. As we shall see in chapter one, hagiographies functioned to elicit strong reactions from their audience, and *The Passion of Pelagius* participates fully in this practice. *The Song of Roland*, as noted above, may have been an instrument of propaganda for the ensuing Crusading movement of the late eleventh century, and it is often placed within its context. Melissa Furrow, who believes the Oxford version of *The Song of Roland* post-dated the Council of Clermont,⁷ argues, “A song of Roland at Roncesvalles [sic] could readily have been both symptom and agent in the social shift that led to Clermont, just as Clermont is compounded in the social shift that led to the Oxford *Roland*” (60). Indeed, Furrow argues that *The Song of Roland* was so effective in stirring martial furor that it was used in other contexts where, for

⁷ Furrow writes that the Oxford manuscript is “generally dated to the second quarter of the twelfth century,” several decades later than the usual dating of ca. 1090 (57).

example, “the story of Roland at Roncesvalles [sic] was cultivated in England and used to bolster Norman cultural pride” (57). *The Song of Roland* and other *chansons de geste* were effective tools to excite an audience to action or to feel increased cultural pride.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will work with Hrotsvit of Gandersheim’s *The Passion of Pelagius*, arguing that Hrotsvit constructs a memory locus in the imaginative, peripheral space of Al-Andalus. This memory locus is a place for Hrotsvit to “hang” ideas in which she glorifies virginity and martyrdom while vilifying and “monsterizing” non-Christian pagans, here specifically the Saracens. The memory locus of Al-Andalus allows Hrotsvit to use *The Passion of Pelagius* as a didactic text for what was likely its first audience, the women at Gandersheim. Hrotsvit argues for the virtues of virginity and resistance to worldly temptations. Yet in doing so, Hrotsvit exposes a sense of ambivalence about the alter space itself, and in doing so complicates the text’s superficial demonization of Islam and Muslims. Specifically, Hrotsvit suggests an identification with the state of alterity, forcing the audience to reconsider a simple moral binary, in which Christians are good and Saracens are evil. *The Passion of Pelagius*, an early portrayal of Saracens by a western European author, begins both a tradition of animalization and demonization of the monstrous Saracen other, and also a sense of ambivalence about that monstrosity.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will argue that *The Song of Roland* similarly presents Al-Andalus as a space of alterity but also expresses ambivalence about the moral state of alterity. *The Song of Roland*’s gleeful portrayals of violence toward the Saracen other indicates another version of Christian identity: that of the holy warrior, which exists here in the context of the First Crusade. As in *The Passion of Pelagius*, a proposed Christian identity is presented in a space of alterity that also functions as a memory locus where the poem can “hang”

ideas against a memorable backdrop. The battlefield action of the poem portrays physical and graphic penetration, especially in the scene in which Roland blows his Oliphant to request reinforcements from the Frankish vanguard. Yet the well-developed pattern of doubling of Frankish and Saracen warriors indicates the poem develops a more complex attitude toward the implications of the differences between Frank and Saracen. In presenting a far more developed vision of the monstrous Saracen other, *The Song of Roland* advances a trope that will continue through the Middle Ages. Through the use of monster theory, I will interrogate the role the monsters play within the poem, suggesting that monstrosity betrays a desire for conversion of Saracens and questions the difference of Franks and Saracens.

Taken together, *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* accentuate a complex relationship between Christianity and Islam at a time, that is, pre-Crusade Europe, before sustained contact had begun to take place between the two religions. Far from setting up a simple binary between Christianity and Islam, however, the texts demonstrate ambivalence toward difference. Rhetorically, *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* participate in medieval memory theory, and by doing so, they construct Al-Andalus as a memory locus, an imaginative place where ideas about Christianity and Islam can be compared, contrasted, and ultimately brought to metaphorical truce. The ambivalence both texts express toward Islam, shown in the form of the Saracen monster, demonstrates the authors' feelings toward the other both as a threat but also as an object of desire. By studying the ambivalence present in these pre-Crusade texts through the lens of monster theory, this thesis provides a treatment of *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* that, as far as I am aware, has not yet been attempted. Understanding these texts in this way, however, allows modern readers both to trace the origins of later medieval portrayals of Muslims and to understand the complex ways in which Christian writers

imagined the Muslim other. Imaginative portrayals, as opposed to historical portrayals or fact-based studies, are important to understand because they are influential in how one culture views another. As we shall see, both *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* present inaccurate portraits of Islam, but that is not the point. By highlighting these inaccuracies – the texts insist on the persistent myth, of the time, that Islam is a polytheistic religion, for example⁸ – the texts accentuate the anxieties of their authors. We can thus read these anxieties as fear about and ambivalence toward the Muslim other. Said remarked that the Orient was “*essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality” (5 emphasis in original), and the Islam created and reinforced by medieval texts, including *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*, is grounded not in reality but rather is reflective of the cultures out of which the texts originated. In this way, the texts are vehicles through which identity is interrogated and ultimately forged.

⁸ Islam is, of course, a monotheistic religion (Esposito 1). The charge that Islam was polytheistic was one of the inaccurate representations of Islam by Christians in the Middle Ages (Inaccuracies continue to proliferate on the Internet to this day). Among them was the belief that Islam was not its “own” religion but a Christian heresy. See *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* by Suzanne Conklin Akbari, Chapter 5. Friedman notes that European biographies of Muhammad “pictured him as a Christian heretic, a Roman cardinal disgruntled because he was not elected pope” (67).

Chapter One
Delighting in Virginity, Celebrating Clastration:
The Paradox of Alterity in *The Passion of Pelagius*

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim enjoys a unique place in medieval literary studies. At first glance, she appears to be an anomaly: a tenth century⁹ canoness who produced a body of work that includes eight verse legends, six plays that are largely subversions of the work of the Roman playwright Terence, two epics, and one short poem (Wilson “Introduction” 1-9). According to Jo Ann Kay McNamara, Hrotsvit is “as far as we know... the only playwright of her age” (200). Hrotsvit, likely of noble birth, lived and wrote at Gandersheim, an abbey known for its excellent library and that served as “a center of intellectual and religious activity,” in Wilson’s words. Under the Holy Roman Emperor and patron of the arts Otto I (r. 936-973), Gandersheim flourished, even reaching a status of semi-autonomy, free to mint its own coin, raise an army, and have a seat in the imperial diet (“Saxon Canoness” 31). Hrotsvit at one point refers to herself as “Clamor Validus,” the Latin equivalent of her name in Old Saxon, *Hrôthsuith*, which means, roughly, “big noise” or “mighty voice” (Dronke 70). This choice of name is perhaps reflective of Hrotsvit’s position as a resident poet of the powerful abbey. Wilson places Hrotsvit in a larger context of Benedictine hagiographers, whose work “bears testimony to the prominent role that hagiographic *lectiones* played in the Benedictine office and to the gradual rise of the use of hagiographic *exempla* in homiletic texts” (Introduction 1). Her verse legend *The Passion of Pelagius* serves as an example of this type of hagiographic *exempla*.

⁹ Little is known about Hrotsvit other than she was very likely of noble birth, as Gandersheim only admitted the nobility (Wilson “Introduction” 5). Her name, which is often Latinized to Hrotswitha or Hrotsvitha, is from the old Saxon *Hrôthsuith*, whose meaning, according to Peter Dronke, is roughly equivalent to her Latinized moniker, *Clamor Validus* (70). Scholars generally agree that she was born around the year 935, but there seems to be no agreed-upon date of her death. Olson places it ca. 1003 (115). Her “main period” of writing “occurred between 960 and 975” (Wailes and Brown 4).

Scholarship on Hrotsvit's work tends to focus on her use of gender and virginity in her rhetorical repertoire, while other critics focus on the historical context from which her work sprung. Some critics argue that within this female-controlled principality, Hrotsvit developed an ethic of "heroic virginity," in the words of Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (84), in which steadfast Christian women overcome pagan men who want to use them sexually. Most of Hrotsvit's verse legends, including *The Passion of Pelagius*, follow this general plot line. Critics disagree, however, about Hrotsvit's motives for developing her ethic of "heroic virginity." Some, including Gary Macy, argue that Hrotsvit was part of a movement of clerics and theologians who believed in clerical celibacy. Other critics argue that Hrotsvit's vociferous defense and celebration of virginity is a rhetorical exercise. They suggest that Hrotsvit's legends and plays likely were read or performed in Gandersheim, and their virgin heroines served as models for the nuns there. Jo Ann Kay McNamara argues that a celibate life as a canoness in a monastery was an attractive choice for some women, a choice that would have allowed them to keep their money, remain semi-independent, and be free of the marriage culture of the day, in which they did not fare well. McNamara puts it plainly: "Women in these troubled centuries were pitifully vulnerable both to rape and to seduction" (192). Jane Stevenson asserts that Hrotsvit had "a passionate attachment to virginity as a positive, even mystical, state, and a view of wedlock as a poor second-best" (49).

Predictably, then, critics also disagree over whether Hrotsvit's championing of virginity is an act of proto-feminism or a capitulation to a patriarchal church. M.R. Sperberg-McQueen and Marla Carlson argue that Hrotsvit's work participates in cultural misogyny in which sexuality is linked to sin and female sexuality in particular should be abhorred. Others see Hrotsvit's work as subversive and liberating. Referring to two verse legends, *The Passion of*

Agnes and *The Passion of Pelagius*, Petroff identifies three qualities of “heroic virginity,” namely, beauty, heroism, and eloquence: “The active choice of the virgin’s life brings about an inner transformation, resulting in extraordinary strength, perseverance, and eloquence” (85). Hrotsvit’s prologue to the verse legends, for example, is a tour de force in subservice rhetoric. She employs the common modesty topos of medieval literature, claiming she is unqualified to write her story, while simultaneously asserting her very right to do so. Peter Dronke notes Hrotsvit writes in a dactylic meter, the “heroic metre *par excellence*” while excusing herself as a “frail” woman (66). Yet her clear mastery of the form justifies her use of it, as well as the her subversion of the epic genre that she develops. Kate Olson argues, “Hrotsvit makes subversive or self-conscious use of her femininity and that of her female characters in order to hijack the classical epic genre and redefine it” (116).

Hrotsvit employs this epic genre in the work of glorifying Christian piety, another act of subversion of a pre-Christian tradition. Her primary concern in *The Passion of Pelagius* is the construction of Christian identity, and it is useful to remember the gender and historical context when considering this construction. Critics who have focused primarily on *The Passion of Pelagius* often discuss the text’s similarity to another verse legend, *The Passion of Agnes*, and the text’s perception of the Muslim other. Linda McMillin, for example, has documented the ways in which Hrotsvit’s characterization of Muslims mirror her characterization of pagan Romans. For example, Hrotsvit claims the monotheistic Muslims worship “*diis auro fabricatis*” (idols made of gold; PP 57). Indeed, Hrotsvit seems to have little concern about the factual beliefs and practices of Muslims. Rather, McMillin notes that their “religious practices parallel those of pagan Romans in early Christian martyr stories” (42). For Hrotsvit, Muslims serve as a convenient other, but not an other that is distinguishable from other non-Christian pagans. The

Muslim is a stand-in, an object against which to interrogate and define Christianity. Tolan, however, sees a more sinister undercurrent in Hrotsvit's portrayal of Muslims. He claims Hrotsvit is "the first Latin author to describe this paganism in lurid detail and to use it to justify resistance against Saracen rule." While acknowledging Hrotsvit "makes no call to war..., it is easy to see how this view of the pagan other could (and would) subsequently be used to justify war against Saracen 'pagans'" (108).

By accentuating religious difference, Hrotsvit begins a process in which she uses the imagined space of Al-Andalus as a memory locus for which to work out the differences between Christians and Saracens. The active practice of committing information to memory was referred to as *memoria*, and, as Mary Carruthers shows, was a systematic strategy of storing and recollecting information. *Memoria* practitioners often advised the student to construct in her head a certain place – be it a garden, a bee hive, or the complex architecture of a monastery – and imaginatively “place” or “hang” items to be remembered in specific locations in that place. This careful organization was necessary because “memory without conscious design is like an uncatalogued library, a useless contradiction in terms,” Carruthers explains. Instead, “human memory should be most like a library of texts, made accessible and useful through various consciously applied heuristic schemes” (39). Carruthers cites an example given by St. Jerome, who reported that one of his own students had “constructed a library for Christ” in his memory (qtd. in Carruthers 39). Thus, “in order to understand something, we must first have a place to put it, something to attach it to in the inventory of all our previous experience” (39). Given that Hrotsvit likely had access to writers such as Jerome, she may have been influenced by his emphasis on the potential of the human memory to build “libraries” in which to place ideas. She

builds this library in the imagined space of Al-Andalus, and places ideas related to Christian and Saracen identity there.

Thus, throughout *The Passion of Pelagius*, Hrotsvit “hangs” memorable concepts of both groups, providing her audience with a practicable mental picture not only of Al-Andalus as a zone of contact but also of the specific characteristics of the Saracens and Galician Christians, which she places in opposition to each other in a way that highlights the sin of the Saracen caliph, Abdrahemen¹⁰, and the devotion of the Christian martyr, Pelagius. Specifically, Hrotsvit characterizes Abdrahemen similarly to the way she characterizes Roman pagans – as aggressive, sexually licentious, and violent. As many critics have noted, Hrotsvit feminizes Pelagius, thus characterizing him in ways similar to her female Christian martyrs, as beautiful, faithful, eloquent, and eternally virgin. Hrotsvit’s construction of a memory locus in this text accents its rhetorical purpose: to convince women living at Gandersheim that virginity is an act of feminine strength, even resistance, and that claustration is not only a lifestyle option, but an option *superior* to the option of marriage and motherhood, or capitulation to the sexual humiliations implicit in a patriarchal culture.

Thus, the rhetorical effectiveness of *The Passion of Pelagius* depends upon its geographical position, which associates its liminality with the claustration of the monastery. Hrotsvit places the action in Cordoba, “Partibus occiduis fulsit clarum decus orbis, / Urbs augusta” (An august city, a brilliant thing that beautifies, shone on the western part of the world; PP 12-13). Hrotsvit’s use of the word *orbs*, meaning a “round object” (Cassell) indicates she believes the world to be round. She places Cordoba at the edge of this circular world, suggesting

¹⁰ Hrotsvit refers to Abd Al-Rahman III as Abdrahemen, a corruption that likely reflects Arabic pronunciation of the caliph’s name. Thus, when discussing the historical Abd Al-Rahman III, I will use the standardized English spelling. When referring to the character, I will use Hrotsvit’s spelling.

an awareness that an unknown world exists beyond it. The known world is opposed to the land of the antipodes, those “fabled” men, according to Augustine, “who live on the other side of the earth (*contraria parte terrae*), where the sun rises when it sets for us, men who plant their footsteps opposite ours” (CG XVI.10.9, pg. 664). Her placement of Cordoba in the “western part of the (round) world” suggests, perhaps, that she had seen T-O maps or early *mappaemundi*, which often placed the Iberian Peninsula at the very western edge of the map. Hrotsvit likely would have read Isidore of Seville and thus would have absorbed Isidore’s fundamental organizing principle of his *Etymologies*: a geographic mnemonic. Isidore’s repeating of information in several different sections of *Etymologies* suggests, argues Andy Merrills, that “Isidore regarded geography as appropriate for the organization of material” (59). Further, Merrills draws a connection between the memory treatises of late classical writers such as Quintilian and Isidore’s work, leading him to conclude that “the form in which Isidore presented his geographies would seem to suggest that he wished his audience to commit this information to memory” (61). Isidore’s own description of the Iberian Peninsula supports Merrills’ view. In that passage from *Etymologies* XIV, Isidore uses two different verbs to describe the way in which the Iberian Peninsula is hemmed in on all sides. He uses similar words, *clausa* and *conclusa*, to describe the peninsula’s boundedness. According to Isidore, the peninsula is positioned between Africa and Gaul, “a septentrione Pyrenaeis montibus clausa, a reliquis partibus undique mare conclusa” (“from the north closed in by the Pyrenees Mountains, and from the other parts enclosed by the sea”; *Etymologies* Latin XIV.iv.28). *Clausus* is the passive participle of *claudere*, meaning “to shut, close,” with *clausa* then taking the meaning of “an enclosed place,” according to both *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary* of classical Latin and R.E. Latham’s *Revised Medieval Latin World-List*. *Conclusa*, the passive participle of *concludere*, and a cognate of *claudere*, means in

classical Latin “shut up, enclosed” and in medieval Latin “excluded.” Relatedly, *conclusio*, means “prison.” Thus, *clausa* seems to have a more existential, neutral meaning, whereas *conclusa* indicates the object has been shut up deliberately by an agent (here the sea). Isidore’s choice of passive participles indicates that, while he sees the Iberian Peninsula cloistered in relation to its neighbors, he considers the sea an impassable barrier, while the Pyrenees Mountains are a passable obstacle. On an emotional level, Isidore may have considered the neighbors across the Pyrenees closer than the strange races that lived across the sea. That the sea serves as a vestibule to the unknown world may also have influenced Isidore’s thinking – what lies beyond the western horizon, including Plinian monstrous races, is unknown but undoubtedly strange.

Hrotsvit indicates she has absorbed Isidore’s description by her rhetorical placement of Al-Andalus at the edge of the world. Further, as a woman living in claustration, Hrotsvit herself likely felt identified with Isidore, writing from a place he describes as *clausa*. Her characterization of Cordoba as a shining jewel of a city serves as a mnemonic device, emphasizing the city’s beauty and cultural superiority, perhaps ironically, as it is also the capital of a people “spargendo nefandi / Dogmatis errorem” (spreading the error of abominable dogma; PP 22-23). By suggesting that that which is aesthetically attractive may also be spiritually abominable, Hrotsvit reminds her audience that worldly beauty may be a gateway to sin. Yet all of Al-Andalus, not just Cordoba, is a place of alterity, sitting at the edge of the world, at the edge of what is familiar. In this way, Al-Andalus is not unlike the abbey in its position of alterity. Thus, while Al-Andalus is the space ruled by a pagan people, it also is a space that is similar to that in which Hrotsvit and other nuns found social liberation. The opposing natures of a space of alterity allows Hrotsvit to express a deep ambivalence about the state of alterity. As a cloistered

woman, Hrotsvit and the other residents of Gandersheim would have felt this ambivalence in their daily lives. As women, they are perpetually other in their patriarchal, Christian culture.¹¹ Living in claustration, they were physically shut off from the rest of the world, thus doubly existing in a space of alterity. Hrotsvit's life in cloistered Gandersheim mirrors the physical geography of Al-Andalus, segregated from the rest of Christian Europe. This space of alterity, Al-Andalus, which at first may appear to hold a negative moral value to Hrotsvit, actually emerges as a place where she is able to interrogate multiple identities – not only that of pagan Saracens and resistant Christian martyrs but also the identities of women like herself living in claustration.

As a hagiography, *The Passion of Pelagius* participates in a genre that glorifies the saint, in this case the feminized Christian martyr Pelagius. Thus, *The Passion of Pelagius* has much in common with other hagiographies of female saints. Hallmarks of the subgenre include what Sarah Schäfer-Althaus refers to as “saintly torture on the verge of pornography,” a vivid description of the near-rape or dismemberment of attractive young females that elicits a visceral reaction among readers or listeners of the story (151-53). Patricia Cox Miller also argues that this visceral reaction and emotional connection to the martyr is a hallmark of hagiography. Miller refers to this as “visceral seeing,” adapting art historian James Elkins’ term, defined as “a peculiar kind of response to depicted bodies that puts in question the traditional distinction

¹¹ I would be remiss here not to point out that Saxon women enjoyed more freedoms than most other women in Europe at this time. Jo Ann Kay McNamara notes that Saxon women could inherit land and retained their own property rights upon marriage. “In the post-Carolingian age, women had unparalleled access to wealth and status, and their marital relationships were exceptionally unstable,” McNamara remarks, accentuated the dual nature of the status of women in Saxony (182). Jane Stevenson writes that noblewomen in Ottonian Germany, of whom Hrotsvit was very likely one, often played active roles in the administration of estates, perhaps after the influence of their Byzantine allies. Stevenson notes that “the power of Ottonian royal women also has roots in German traditions” (40). Thus, while Saxony would not have been a bad place for a woman to live in the tenth century, women still lacked full autonomy, access to education, and personal stability.

between viewer and viewed” (qtd. in Miller 396). Such a response “implicate[s] the reader in such a way that the boundary between text and reader begins to weaken” (396).

The relationship between voyeur and subject is as significant as the saint’s material body because the emotional connection developed through “visceral seeing” is just as strong as a physical connection. “The saint and the saint’s body also came to represent the ‘body’ of the Church metonymically, serving as the first line of defense, the lightning rod, the decoy, as it were, for the institution behind it,” writes Kathleen Coyne Kelly (41). Miller adds that hagiography of the rape, near-rape, or physical abuse of female virgin martyrs is an exhortation “to see in the strongest possible form, [the] belief system based on the view that spiritual beings are corporeally present in human life, and that the human body is a locus of spirituality” (403). Indeed, Kelly argues that “the *female* virgin body, produced through a series of mystifications as closed, sealed, intact – both as a wall and a door, as the Song of Songs puts it (8:9)¹² – came to function as the most apt homology between the self and the institutionalized Church even when that self was gendered male” (42 emphasis in original). The verse from the Song of Songs that Kelly references is one that celebrates virginity and metaphorical “closing up,” but could also conceivably be read by a cloistered individual as an endorsement of her lifestyle.

The body of the virgin, female saint becomes a vessel of a holy substance, enduring violent abuse that is meant to draw the eye and emotion of the voyeur. Hagiographies are meant to engender a strong response, perhaps a response that will encourage listeners to act in ways consistent with Christian teaching or to redouble their devotion both to God and to the saint in question. Indeed, cults of the saints in the Middle Ages became wildly popular, with relics from the saints, including body parts, playing significant roles in the worship patterns of pilgrims.

¹² “If she is a wall, / we will build upon her a silver turret; / But if she is a door, / we will board her up with cedar planks” (Bible).

Concerns among some clergy about idolatry took hold, but Miller sees this as a progression of hagiographical stories that highlight the physical suffering of saints that was “a mark of divinity working through them” (404). Schäfer-Althaus notes “the crueller [sic] or more fantastic the legend, the more it was spread among the population,” suggesting that in the Middle Ages, as now, people were drawn to and remembered spectacle. Thus, those clerics or writers promoting a saint had an incentive to craft the most lurid account of her sufferings that they could.

Saints’ cults were influential and powerful, too, according to Jamie Wood, writing about the martyr movement in Cordoba in the mid-ninth century. These cults existed in the Iberian Peninsula before Islamic conquest and were politicized by Visigoth conquerors in the late sixth and seventh centuries (45-46). “The cult of saints was as well embedded in late- and post-Roman Iberia as it was elsewhere in the late-antique Mediterranean... Martyr *acta* and hagiographies were read, copied and reused, and cult sites were developed across the peninsula,” Wood writes (45-46). Hoping to discourage these cults, Muhammad I in 852 ordered “the destruction of new churches and the removal of any ornamentation that had been added to old pre-conquest churches” in Cordoba. The Muslim caliph recognized the emotional power of the Cordoban martyrs, who had resisted Islamic rule and sometimes actively courted martyrdom, to the Christian population (52). One notable example was John of Gorze, an emissary from the court of Otto I. According to Wood, John refused to amend his letters of introduction, which contained passages offensive to Islam, “apparently welcoming the chance to receive martyrdom for the faith and berating the local Christians for the laxity of their dealing with the Muslims” (56). Historical evidence suggests Hrotsvit’s and John’s lives intersected in the person of Racemundo, the bishop of Elvira, who served as Abd Al-Rahman’s envoy to Otto’s court in 955/6, according to Menocal (*Ornament* 88). While at Otto’s court, Racemundo obtained the documents from Otto

I that would secure John of Gorze's release (Southern 38). Dronke and others speculate that Hrotsvit may have been at Otto's court at this time and met Racemundo, who told her the story of Pelagius that she would adapt into her own work (57). Thus, Hrotsvit may have heard the story of the martyr Pelagius from a bishop trying to secure the release of another cleric attempting to get himself martyred in the Iberian tradition. Hrotsvit may have heard Pelagius' story while she was aware of John of Gorze's imprisonment, spurring the composition of *The Passion of Pelagius*, which accentuates geographical clausturation and the spiritual glory of martyrdom.

The stories of martyrs, along with their cults and relics, thus had incredible power for Christians. Individual martyrs commanded great devotion among adherents, but they also created an infectious fascination, a deep emotional response that drew adherents closer to both the martyr and the martyr's platform. The adherent thus enters into an intimate relationship with the martyr in the witnessing of her physical abuse. "The reader," remarks Schäfer-Althaus, "intentionally or unintentionally becomes the witness, the secret attendant, the voyeur of these horrifying and sickening spectacles and is fascinated and repulsed at the same time" (158). The adherent also would have found memorable a story that was "exceptionally base," in the words of memory theory expert Frances Yates (19).

Hrotsvit works within the gruesome genre of hagiography to construct a memorable saint, Pelagius, who is feminized and whose story bears similarities to Hrotsvit's account of Agnes. In both legends, the virgin martyr is a juvenile. In Pelagius' case, "attigit aetatis primose flores iuvenilis" (he reached the first flowers of juvenile age; PP 148). Agnes is repeatedly called "virgo," which means both "virgin" and "maiden," indicating young adolescence. Ronald Stottlemyer argues that Hrotsvit emphasizes the beauty of both these martyrs while

simultaneously “expressing her religious desire as fundamentally androgynous, a rapturous identification with an unstained corporeal beauty that is both male and female” (105). In this vein, Pelagius is described as “omni praenitida compostus corpore forma” (composed in all respects with shining form [and] body; PP 144). Agnes, meanwhile “Pulchra fuit facie fideique decora nitore” (was beautiful in appearance and decorous in her faith; PA 31). Thus, Hrotsvit associates physical beauty with spiritual uprightness. Yet her martyrs are not passive. Agnes is said to be “victrix hostis corruptalem suadentis” (conqueror of the corruption of a seductive enemy; PA 39). Just as Pelagius is identified as “Christi...miles” (soldier of Christ; PP 238), Agnes’s victory over the Roman pagans is presented as a military one. *Victrix* comes from the verb *vincere* meaning “to conquer,” “to defeat,” or “to vanquish,” and carries a connotation of military victory and physical fighting. By alluding to battle, Hrotsvit places her hagiographies in the tradition of epic poetry, at once subverting the masculine, martial genre by appropriating it for the hagiography of a virgin, and also implying that the struggles of martyrs are just as heroic as the deeds of heroes in battle.

Hrotsvit provides her martyrs with metaphorical physical protections. Agnes is “tincta sacri pura baptismatis” (imbued purely with sacred baptism; PA 33), while Pelagius identifies himself to Abdrahemen as a “virum Christi baptismate lotum” (a man washed in the baptism of Christ; PP 243). Pelagius identifies himself in this way as Abdrahemen is attempting to seduce him, arguing that it would be inappropriate for him, as a baptized Christian, to cavort with the caliph. Thus, both Agnes and Pelagius are protected spiritually by the waters of baptism. More conspicuous perhaps is the imagery of precious stones and jewelry in both texts. Agnes is covered metaphorically with gems by Christ. She tells the Roman trying to seduce her, “Pignore ceu sponsam clara dotando corona, / Atque meum gemmis collum cinxit pretiosis, / Auribus et

resplendentes suspendit inaures, / Praebens ornatus varii claros mihi cultus” (By a richly endowed guarantee like a shining crown, He [i.e. Christ] encircles my neck with precious gems, he suspends from my ears shining and resplendent things, giving to me bright embellishments of various sorts; PA 90-94). Agnes is metaphorically bedecked in rich jewels, given her by Christ, and her crown, necklace, and earrings provide her a sign of Christ’s protection. She considers these spiritual jewels, which she has by virtue of her virginity, more valuable than a sexual relationship.

By bringing forward imagery of jewels in *The Passion of Pelagius*, Hrotsvit places the memorable images of aesthetically beautiful precious stones and metal in contrast to the superficial beauty of Cordoba with the spiritual beauty of those who follow Christ. The first time Pelagius is adorned, it is because the caliph “iussit Pelagium...collum gemmatis necnon ornare metallis” (ordered that Pelagius adorn his neck with precious gems; PP 219, 222). Pelagius is also bathed and dressed in fine clothes. But just as the bejeweled Cordoba belies its immorality, the jewels of Abrahemen are only a cover for sin. Metaphorical jewels of Christ are more valuable than those of the earth. At the end of the poem, when Pelagius has been beheaded, his severed head “Quod iam splendidius puro radiaverat auro, / Expers ardoris penitus tantique caloris” (by now radiated splendidly like pure gold, as if destitute of the heat of the flame; PP 404-05). Protected by Christ, Pelagius’ beheaded and mutilated body is kept pure, and his head shines like a precious metal. Even after – or perhaps *because of* – being martyred Pelagius’ body shows itself to be as incorruptible as his soul. Hrotsvit shows the physical gems, clothes, and water used to make Pelagius physically appealing are nothing compared to the spiritual riches and baptismal waters of his Christian faith. The worldly objects of wealth are understood now to be worthless next to the beauty of Pelagius’ faith.

In the face of barbaric behavior and monstrosity, Agnes and Pelagius show great courage and eloquence, as Stottlemeyer has demonstrated. Both bring down the anger of their oppressors, and in both cases Hrotsvit uses the same word “latrare” or “to bark,” to express the oppressor’s reaction. In *Agnes*, “furore latravit” (he barked with fury; PA 134), and in *Pelagius* Abdrahemen speaks “talia pestifero latrando” (with such destructive barking; PP 103). In both cases, Hrotsvit uses the language of animality to communicate the lack of humanity of the oppressors. Pelagius even insults Abdrahemen, calling him “daemonis...spurci...famelli” (filthy servant of the devil; PP 246). Hrotsvit’s use of the word “latrare” coupled with Pelagius’ demonic accusation can be read with a deeper meaning than its use in *The Passion of Agnes*, especially when it is considered alongside the other ways Hrotsvit describes the Saracens of Al-Andalus. Wilson notes in her translation of Hrotsvit’s works that animality is often associated with “the infidels” (Florilegium n. 6 32), thus Hrotsvit’s characterization of both Saracens and Roman pagans as animals aligns them with monstrous races. Unlike Augustine, however, who believes God creates monstrosity from his own wisdom, Hrotsvit sees monstrosity as a reflection of one’s inner self. While she does not describe Abdrahemen in the monstrous terms we will see used in *The Song of Roland* in chapter two, her use of animal imagery is highly suggestive that she wants her readers to think of him, at best, as less than human, and, at worst, as a monster.

The association of Muslims with dogs has a long history. While Augustine expresses skepticism about the existence of cynocephali, writing, “Sed omnia genera hominum, quae dicuntur esse, credere non est necesse” (But it is not necessary to believe in all sorts of men who are said to exist; CG XVI.viii), he nevertheless admits that, if cynocephali are rational creatures, they ought to be converted to Christianity. He describes the cynocephali as having “canina capita” (canine heads), and that “ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur (real

barking shows them to be more beasts than men; CG XVI.viii). Here, Augustine uses “latratus,” whose root is “latrare.” As early as the ninth century, the cynocephali diverged from their place as merely one of many of the monstrous races believed to inhabit the edges of the world and became a symbol for Muslims, carrying with it connotations of animality and irrationality. Rhabanus Maurus (780-856) associated “Ishmael’s house” with “Moors” (64). As early as the ninth century, then, we see a link between the descendants of Ishmael, black skin, and perhaps dogs. Thus, Hrotsvit’s use of the verb “latrare,” while not exclusive to *The Passion of Pelagius*, instantiates beliefs that Muslims are less than human. Beyond that, Hrotsvit calls them “barbaricae gentis” (a barbaric race; PP 92) and calls their religion “profanato...sacello” (profane worship; PP 40). The Muslim doctrine is “errorem” (an error; PP 23) and “vulgato” (poorly cultured; PP 51). Yet Hrotsvit uses the term “Saracen” only once in *The Passion of Pelagius*, calling the Muslim rulers of Al-Andalus “Saracenorum gens” (A group of Saracens; PP 24).

Hrotsvit’s use of the word “gens” when describing the Saracens indicates that she sees the Saracens and Galicians differently not only because of their religion but because of their origin. She refers to both groups as a *gens* (pl. *gentes*), which refers to a group of people with a common ancestor. The word itself comes from the verb *gignere*, which means “to beget, bear, or bring forth.” A *gens* is literally, then, a group of people begotten by the same ancestral parents. Hrotsvit calls the Galicians “gentem...fidelem” (faithful people; PP 117) and “fidissima gens” (surest people; PP 126), while the Saracens are “barbaricae gentis” (of a barbarian people; PP 32).¹³ She invests both groups with essential qualities, positive in the case of the Christian Galicians and negative in the case of the Muslims. In this way, she presents the Muslims as the

¹³ Augustine’s use of the word *genera* (acc. pl. of *genus*, meaning “birth, descent, origin, race, stock”) to describe the cynocephali in the quote above indicates that he considers the dog-headed people to be descended from a common ancestor, one that is not shared with other groups.

monstrous other, a group whose beliefs and practices are “sordere” (filthy; PP 41) and whose leader “luxu carnis maculatus” (is stained with luxury of the flesh; PP 73) and who behaves with “daemonis ira” (the anger of a demon; PP 97) and “veterem serpentis...bilem” (the crafty anger of Satan; PP 98). Abdrahemen serves the devil while Pelagius is a “famellus” (servant; PP 387) or “miles” (soldier; PP 238) of Christ. When compared with Pelagius’ earlier charge that Abdrahemen is the “daemonis...spurci...famelli,” we see Hrotsvit drawing a binary between the Christian servants of Christ and the pagan servants of the devil. Moral values are absolute in this equation, with all non-Christians falling into the category “pagani” and “famelli daemonis.”

Hrotsvit ends her story dramatically, with Pelagius’ martyrdom. He is at first “Trans muros proici iactum funda machinali” (thrown over the walls and tossed by a mechanism to the ground; PP 278). Pelagius’ body is dashed on “ingentes obstantes undique rupes” (huge obstructing cliffs; PP 287) but “Attamen illaesus Christi permansit amicus” (the friend of Christ remained unchanged; PP 288-89). Frustrated but not giving up, Abdrahemen orders Pelagius beheaded by “exacto...ferro” (an accurate sword; PP 294). His body is denied at first a respectful burial and thrown on the seashore, but fishermen find it along the rocky coast but do not recognize it because of “purpureo fuerant quia sanguine membra” (his limbs were clad in purple blood) and “caput egregium iacuit procul amne” (the excellent head lay farther downstream; PP 329-30). The graphic description of Pelagius’ mangled, headless body is shocking, considering the earlier description of the youth’s beauty. The desecration of Pelagius’ body does not, however, negate his holiness. Rather, it is a necessary step in the process of “proving” his holiness. The torture Pelagius has endured shows his devotion to Christ and his determination to remain an untouched virgin. In this way, the violation of his physical body demonstrates his devotion. From a rhetorical standpoint, a description of a violent death makes the story more

memorable for the audience, and in the crowded genre of hagiography, saints must be memorable for their cults to be successful. But from a theological perspective, the violence provides evidence of the saint's "pleasure" at being united with God, according to Schäfer-Althaus (158). So desirous of this unity, the saint is willing to undergo torture, and after surmounting this obstacle, he has achieved the unity he desires. Vicariously, the audience achieves that unity as well in the act of listening to or reading the story and experiencing a strong reaction, what Miller called "visceral seeing."

Thus, within the memory locus of Al-Andalus, Hrotsvit hangs several concepts she wants her audience to remember on the framework, constructed within an imagined geography. With its vivid descriptions and melodramatic action, *The Passion of Pelagius* is an exercise in didacticism, but it is not a boring homily. Nor is it only an exercise in *memoria*, in which she advises her audience on the advantages and superiority of a celibate life, the joys of resistance, and the evils of the paganism of the *Saracenorum gens*. With her geographical setting of the story in a place of alterity, Hrotsvit also interrogates the ethical value of living a life as the other. On the one hand, the other is the monstrous, the demonic, the pagan; on the other hand, the other is Hrotsvit herself, a cloistered woman. The position of alterity, then, must take on a more complex meaning than simply that of moral inferiority. In her peripheral position, Hrotsvit may not have been comfortable completely demonizing the other. Her decision to tell Pelagius' story, amid the other legends that, with one other exception, are about women, may have been due to a fascination with the hinterland of Al-Andalus. Her willingness to place her story there, and thus also herself and her audience, is reflective of perhaps an early utopic impulse, which Michael Uebel discusses in *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages*. Although Uebel studies the twelfth century, discussion is relevant to Hrotsvit's work as well. He

argues that border areas of the imagination, which correspond sometimes to geographical borders, “produce spaces ‘in-between,’ gaps or middle places symbolizing exchange and encounter. As such, they are the areas where identity and sovereignty are negotiated, imagination and discursively, in relation to the necessary other” (14). Uebel’s argument is particularly seductive, as it suggests a (perhaps subconscious) desire on Hrotsvit’s part to know that “pagan” religion better, to “exchange and encounter” with its adherents. Even as she dismisses Islam along with the paganism of the pre-Christian Romans, she is drawn to it, drawn by the intellectual curiosity she no doubt possessed – her celebration of education would testify to that.¹⁴ The “in-between” exchange zone doubles in this case as a memory locus. In this way, Al-Andalus is a palimpsest, a space of layered identity mechanisms that allow Hrotsvit to contemplate another religion while arguing for an ideal Christian lifestyle of continence, resistance to temporal (and therefore counterfeit) authority, and devotion to spiritual, rather than worldly, ends.

¹⁴ In the prologue to her legends, Hrotsvit specifically cites the instruction she had received from Gandersheim’s abbess, Gerberga, and another nun, Rikkardis. Hrotsvit declares that she has written her little book in “nostri / Gandeshemensis” (“our Gandersheim”; “Liber Primus” 27-28) under Rikkardis, whose tutelage is “sapientissimae atque benignissimae” (“very wise and very kind”; 28-29). The abbess Gerberga, to whom she dedicates the verses, “Scientia provector / aliquot auctores, quos ipsa prior a sapientissimis didicit, / me admodum pie erudit” (“kindly taught me entirely the advanced knowledge of those authors, who she learned about before from very wise men”; 33-35). With this dedication, Hrotsvit communicates the value she places on education and her appreciation of those who have served as her teachers.

Chapter Two
“Thirty Great Leagues the Sound Went Echoing”:
Reading Ambivalence Toward Alterity in *The Song of Roland*

Chapter one argued that Hrotsvit of Gandersheim constructed a space of alterity in Al-Andalus as a memory locus to interrogate meanings of Christian and Saracen identity, essentializing in many ways those identities. But Hrotsvit also identifies with the other, and for her, alterity carries a double meaning: it is at once other and therefore holds a negative moral value, but when it manifests itself as a vehicle for spiritual and personal autonomy, alterity takes on a much more attractive form. *The Song of Roland* employs similar strategies of emphasizing imaginative space to construct a Christian identity, but the identity this *chanson de geste* constructs argues for a militant version of Christianity that places itself in opposition to non-Christian groups, including the Saracens that serve as the enemy and other in the story.

Like *The Passion of Pelagius*, *The Song of Roland* relies on the creation of an imaginative space of alterity to interrogate Christian identity. This space also serves as a memory locus in which *The Song of Roland* “hangs” significant ideas about Frankish Christians and Saracens. Just as *The Passion of Pelagius* portrays graphic physical violence and threatened sexual violence to create a memorable experience for the reader, *The Song of Roland*’s us-and-them rhetoric and graphic battlefield violence encourages the audience to engage with the text emotionally. While the story’s hero, Roland, is not a saint, his death is staged similarly to the way Hrotsvit stages Pelagius’ death. In particular, the scene in which Roland, surrounded with the Frankish rearguard by a Saracen army, blows his Oliphant to request reinforcements from the Frankish vanguard, renders at once the text’s glorification of Roland, the perceived difference between Franks and Saracens, and, ultimately, the ambivalence the text feels toward that difference.

The scene in which Roland blows the Oliphant is not often considered a pivotal moment in *The Song of Roland*. Some critics, including Andrew Cowell, have discussed the scene as a moment of *démesure*, a literary ethic in which the hero allows his excess or lack of control to bring his downfall (106). In this case, Roland is shown as a proud warrior, whose haughtiness brings his and his comrades' deaths. When his companion Olivier first asks him to blow the Oliphant and call to Charlemagne and the Frankish vanguard that the rearguard needs reinforcement, Roland refuses: "'Now God forbid,' Roland makes answer wroth, / 'That living man should say he saw me go / blowing of horns for any Paynim¹⁵ foe!'" (1073-75). I read this scene, however, as integral in understanding the way in which the poem understands difference. The poem itself pivots on this scene, in which the audience must contend with the fact that the rearguard has been attacked because a Frank, Roland's stepfather, Ganelon, has betrayed the Franks to the Saracens. This moment of Frankish treachery necessarily forces the audience to doubt any ultimate good-evil dichotomy between Franks and Saracens that the poem constructs. The Oliphant scene also stages literally a zone of contact, in which physical penetration in the form of hand-to-hand combat occurs and forces the Franks and Saracens not only to interact directly with each other but also to collapse into sameness in their shared suffering and death.

While the Oliphant scene has not been extensively theorized, scholarship on *The Song of Roland* has been wide-ranging, with critics focusing on its structure, on its place within the *chanson de geste* genre, on its treatment of women and marginal groups including Muslims, and on its historical context. The role of the Saracen other has featured prominently in criticism, particularly feminist and postcolonial criticism. Sharon Kinoshita sees the poem as not just

¹⁵ The French uses the terms "Sarrazins" and "Païen" interchangeably to refer to Muslims, but Sayers often translates both to "paynim," a Middle English word that means "pagan," according to the *MED*. The original French word in this case is "païen."

reflecting “the crusader ethos” but also being “produced during the course of it” (15). Kinoshita, while admitting this difference is a small one, argues that acknowledging it allows us to recognize “a complex nexus of historical ambiguities, literary conventions, and ideological reformulations” (16). Later, Kinoshita puzzles over the roles played by the two female characters in the poem, Roland’s betrothed Aude and the Saracen queen Bramimonda, arguing that “the contrast between the visions they present of Frankish and Saracen femininity is crucial to the *Roland’s* resolution. Reversing the binarism of later colonial discourse, it is the foreign women who display a new feminine agency while the Frankish woman is consigned to passivity and silence” (41). Other critics have examined how the *chansons de geste* as a genre influenced and informed the later development of romance. Sarah Kay, for example, observes presciently the different ways the two genres deal with the possibility of conversion of the other: “Whilst the romance other is to some degree assimilated to the self, in the *chansons de geste* the opposing force remains external and ineradicable” (51). Melissa Furrow reads the *chansons de geste* as an outlet for an increasingly militaristic culture. While Christians were forbidden from killing other Christians, they could still kill non-Christians, including the Saracen enemies of *The Song of Roland*, an enemy that is conveniently morphed from the Basques of northern Spain to the Muslim other. Furrow, like others, contextualizes *The Song of Roland* in terms of the rising furor surrounding the Crusades, mass invasions and occupation of the Holy Land by Europeans. Furrow writes, “Scholarly consensus now places the composition of the written antecedent of the Oxford *Roland* at the very end of the eleventh century, as a response to the events of the First Crusade and the cultural after-effects of the Council of Clermont in 1095” (58-59). In this interpretation, the poem, ostensibly set in 778 in Spain, is actually responding to a growing enthusiasm for fighting Muslims to the east.

Simultaneously, however, the *chansons de geste* often are seen as gesturing back toward a heroic past. As epic narratives, they often ensue from the breakdown of the “reciprocal obligations” between a lord and a vassal, according to Catherine M. Jones (19). Matthew Gabriele contends that *The Song of Roland* was influenced by the legend of the “Last Emperor,” with Charlemagne acting as a eschatological figure who “creates an idealized, unified Christian empire” to lead to battle against the antichrist before the end-times (107, 116). Gabriele notes that other medieval texts associated Charlemagne with the “Last Emperor,” “seeing parallel images of universal, Frankish, Christian empire and tentatively bringing past and future together” (119). In 1960, Ernst Robert Curtius proposed that the author of *The Song of Roland* was highly influenced by the “epic literature of antiquity, especially” Vergil’s *Aeneid*, writes Andreas Kablitz (S149). Indeed, the poem’s vivid description hearkens back to Vergil’s epic about the founding of Rome. *The Song of Roland*’s epic influence combined with its use of the legend of the Last Emperor positions it as an origin myth, one that tells the story of the founding of a civilization, often after a disaster or defeat. The Last Emperor, a figure with its origin in the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, is prophesied to come “at the point when the political and military fortunes of the ‘Romans’ have reached their nadir and when the Arab enemy imperils the very Empire” (7). The story of *The Song of Roland* paints such a nadir with the Battle of Roncevaux and defeat by the Saracens (here a stand-in for the Arabs). The epic, especially the *Aeneid*, is often obsessed with the confluence of endings and beginnings. In the case of the *Aeneid*, that obsession is self-conscious, according to William Franke, who writes that for Vergil “the weight and role of history have become decisive in his epic, and the turbulences of his own contemporary period take on a new kind of significance for all his representations of the historical and legendary past” (11). The writer(s) of *The Song of Roland* thus set the action in a

world where the stakes are high: the inclusion of the Last Emperor indicates the Apocalypse may be close, but the parallels with the *Aeneid* and their mutual obsession with origins – Romans and Franks, respectively – suggests a sense of inevitability. The Battle of Roncevaux as it exists in *The Song of Roland* thus becomes the flashpoint in a larger struggle between Christians and Saracens that signals the beginning of a new era.

Many of the *chansons de geste* feature heroes from the French “noble warrior class,” many of whom perform their feats “in the context of ‘holy war’ against Muslim and other non-Christian forces,” writes Jones (2). Jones places the *chansons de geste* within the “‘epic’ or the ‘heroic’ as a transhistorical and transcultural mode.” They are some of the earliest examples of literature written in the French vernacular, which places them “at the dawn of a national literature.” The *chansons* function as identity or culture making tools, fusing “history and myth in the interest of social cohesiveness.” Further, the *chansons* often begin with a “kernel of truth,” including “the specific struggles of the French medieval warrior aristocracy as it responded to the threat of Muslim dominance abroad and rising power of the monarchy within” (3).

The extreme violence, similar to that portrayed in classical epic poetry, provides a vehicle for the construction of a collective identity among Franks and, as time went on, other European groups. The poems, especially those such as *The Song of Roland*, that include conflict with a conveniently irredeemable other allowed Franks and other European Christian groups to justify “the violence at the heart of Christian chivalry,” notes Melissa Furrow (63). Gabriele, for example, convincingly argues that the poem plays a role in the Frankish identity-building process, particularly in the way in which it reimagines the Battle of Roncevaux as a conflict between Christians and Saracens, not, as history testifies, a humiliating defeat suffered by

Charlemagne at the hands of Christian Basques and their Muslim allies.¹⁶ In this way, Roncevaux is recast in *The Song of Roland* as a moment, not of defeat after a questionable military decision, but as a formative moment in the construction of a brand of Frankish exceptionalism that operated in opposition to the perceived inferiority to othered groups, including and especially Saracens. Many *chansons de geste* conflate chivalry with prowess in battle, according to Richard W. Kaeuper, to the extent that “prowess often stands as a one-word definition of chivalry in these texts” (135). Even in *The Song of Roland*, Kaeuper argues, this conflation is clear (136). That noble knighthood is linked so explicitly with military success makes logical the emphasis on the wholesale killing of Saracens. Roland’s prowess is emphasized: “Roland is fierce and Oliver is wise” (1093), so the audience is encouraged to imagine Roland thirsting for battle with Saracens. Upon observing Saracens lying dead and dying on the battlefield, the bishop Turpin remarks, “Right blessed be our knighthood” (1349), explicitly connecting knighthood with killing on the field of battle.

The killing of Saracens on the battlefield is coded as an honorable, even religious, act, one that *The Song of Roland* revels in, but the poem also encourages its audience to remember a heroic moment in Frankish history and to identify with its protagonists. Gabriele writes that by the beginning of the eleventh century “being a Frank seems to have meant consciously tying into an empire of memory.” That empire was a militant one, and “talking about Charlemagne was a way of remembering a glorious, militant past that saw the Franks extend their dominion across

¹⁶ Reconstruction of Arabic and Carolingian sources has given modern historians a reasonably clear picture of the reality of the Battle of Roncevaux in 778. According to these sources, Charlemagne had laid an unsuccessful siege on Saragossa before abandoning it when Saxons rebelled in his own kingdom. He took the Muslim ruler of Barcelona, Suleiman ibn Al-Arabi, hostage as he returned home. “At this point the sources give diverging accounts,” writes Jones, but it seems that the Franks were ambushed near Roncevaux, probably by Suleiman’s sons and their Basque allies. Suleiman “was freed, and Charlemagne lost high-ranking warriors and important supplies. The earliest Latin account, the Royal Annals in 801, does not mention the Roncevaux disaster, perhaps in an attempt to suppress the humiliating defeat,” Jones writes (63).

the Mediterranean world” (134). But even as the poem seems to have been heavily influenced by the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, a text that claims to prophesy the future, it also encourages the audience to look backward to the identity-forging moment of a glorious Frankish past, just as the *Aeneid* encouraged its audience to look back to a significant moment in the history of Rome. The audience of *The Song of Roland* could participate in this glorious past by remembering and claiming that past for themselves through an emotional connection with the Frankish warriors fighting, for God, against Saracen hordes. Gabriele notes that *The Song of Roland* was popular not only among people who might be considered Franks. Legend has it that William of Normandy’s invading Norman army told the legend of Roland before the Battle of Hastings in 1066, according to Furrow (62). *The Song of Roland*, with its construction of Frankish identity, became something of a universal touchstone throughout Europe, writes Gabriele, as “peoples from numerous regions shared [*The Song of Roland*’s] understanding of what it meant to be a Frank. They claimed these heroic Frankish predecessors as *theirs*, and clung to them tightly... By the end of the eleventh century, the glorious Frankish past was a militant one and was widely remembered as such” (139 emphasis in original). Thus, the poem provides justification for Frankish domination of the Muslim other while participating in the process of reimagining a cultural history, a positive feedback loop that will reinforce beliefs of cultural superiority but that is complicated by the ambivalence *The Song of Roland* expresses about the other.

In addition to this cultural memory formation, *The Song of Roland* participates in medieval memory theory. Paula Leverage has established convincingly that *The Song of Roland* likely came from a monastic tradition in which *memoria* was embedded in story composition. Leverage notes that “most of the known external references to the *chansons de geste* come from sermons, historical treatises, and occasionally property records. The evidence suggests a

reception context for the *chansons de geste* which has strong ties with monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions” (28). Leverage cites Mary Carruthers to point out the “role of the architectures of the cloisters in meditation,” reasoning “it is within this meditative space that the monks of Beauvais heard, and perhaps reflected upon, the *chansons de geste*” (32-33). Further, the Oxford manuscript that contains the earliest extant version of *The Song of Roland* also includes Calcidius’s Latin translation of Plato’s cosmological treatise *Timaeus*, Leverage calls “a decidedly clerical” text, indicating its use in monastic settings (72). If the *chansons de geste* were popular among monastic audiences, Leverage argues that such an audience “is likely to have participated in an interpretive community which may have shared familiarity with the generalities of memory theory” (132).

Thus, *The Song of Roland*’s construction of the physical space of Al-Andalus corresponds to a memory locus. Just as Hrotsvit used Al-Andalus to “hang” concepts of monastic Christianity and monstrous pagan-ness, *The Song of Roland* employs the space of Al-Andalus, and specifically the circular area created by the aural boundaries of the Oliphant, as a place to interrogate what Kinoshita has called an “impending crisis of non-differentiation” (28). Specifically, the construction of this space, which I consider a space that produces “gaps or middle places symbolizing exchange and encounter,” in Uebel’s words (14), allows the poem to question just how different the Franks are from their Saracen adversaries. The poem hints at this “crisis of non-differentiation,” but it is fully instantiated within the aural area of his Oliphant. The treachery of the Frank Ganelon, because of whom Charlemagne says “fair France is ruined quite” (835), forces the audience to consider an ethical world in which Franks, too, commit evil deeds. Likewise, the poem builds an elaborate system of doubling, in which Franks and Saracens are presented as uncomfortably similar.

The uncomfortably close other is ubiquitous in the text in a pattern of character doubling. Charlemagne's double is the emir Baligant, whom he meets in single combat. After an equal fight, Charlemagne kills Baligant: "He carves the helm with jewel-stones ablaze, / He splits the skull, he dashes out the brains, / Down to the beard he cleaves him through the face" (3616-18). Charlemagne ultimately perseveres in the fight, proving his superiority over the Saracen emir, but the audience is reminded that the two are very similar by evoking the image of Baligant's beard, which is perhaps the only characteristic that makes the emir recognizable after Charlemagne splits open his face. Charlemagne has won this fight, but he also has killed a leader who is eerily like him, right down to "his beard" that "flow[s] forth; / It is as white as any flower on thorn" (3520-21). The long white beard on Charlemagne is indicative of his age and wisdom, even perhaps his legitimacy as a ruler. The audience is forced to ask whether Baligant, who shares this physical trait with Charlemagne, also shares his wisdom, legitimacy, and competence as a ruler. Absent worldly possessions and politics, little separates the two rulers. Baligant is described as being the emir of Babylon and "a paynim,"¹⁷ but he is never described in the same way as the monstrous armies he leads. On the contrary, Baligant, as we shall see below, is described just as nobly as Franks.

Roland's double is the king Marsile's nephew, and both Frankish and Muslim nephew are repeatedly identified as such. Both men are champions in their respective uncles' armies. Marsile's nephew, Aelroth, says to his uncle, "I've served you well and long; / Much have I suffered, much labour undergone, / Many fields fought, and many battles won!" (863-65). Aelroth is the one to lead the charge on the Frankish rearguard and tell Roland he has "been betrayed by him that should protect you" (1192). Roland and Aelroth meet in hand-to-hand

¹⁷ The French word used here is "paien" (La Chanson de Roland).

combat, just as Charlemagne and Baligant will do the next day, but this meeting is less evenly matched. Roland “splits the breast and batters in the breast-bone, / Through the man’s back drives out the backbone bended, / And soul and all forth on the spear-point fetches” (1200-02). As he kills Aelroth, Roland shouts, “Right’s on our side, and wrong is with these wretches!” (1212). In this clash of champions, Roland wins a decisive victory. In doing so, he moralizes the battle, declaring that the Franks are right and the Saracens are wrong. Here we see the ambivalence of alterity: Roland and Aelroth are both great soldiers, nephews of their respective kings. But Roland fights on the side of right, which, using a binary logic, means that Aelroth fights on the side of wrong. Absent Roland’s moralizing, however, there is little to differentiate the two champions. They are equally brave, noble, and capable in the battlefield.

Less significant characters highlight this doubling effect as well. Both the Franks and the Saracens have twelve great leaders. Aelroth emphasizes the peers’ mirror relationships when he tells Marsile, “Find me twelve lords, the best that you can pick. / ’Gainst the twelve peers our valor for to pit” (877-88). Individual Saracen knights are also identified as *almost* good enough to be Christian knights. The Emir of Balaguet’s “form is noble” and is “famous far and near” “for his courage.” The narrator concludes, “Were he but a Christian, right knightly he’d appear” (895, 898, 899). King Corsablis declares, “No coward I, no, not for all God’s gold!” (888). Margaris of Seville is so noble that “there’s no Paynim¹⁸ his match for chivalry” (960). Baligant himself is “broad in his breast and beautifully formed” whose “valour proved in battle o’er and o’er; / Were he but Christian, God! what a warrior!” (3159, 3163-64). Kinoshita points out that the Saracens of *The Song of Roland* worship a perverted trinity of Mahumet, Apollin, and Tervagent, just as the Christians worship the doctrinally orthodox trinity of Father, Son, and

¹⁸ The French here is “païen” (La Chanson de Roland).

Holy Spirit. She notes that the two groups do not need interpreters and experience no language barrier during the scenes of diplomacy. She concludes, “Similar in language and custom, the two sides arguably differ in religion *and nothing more*” (26 emphasis in original). This aspect of alterity in *The Song of Roland* is perhaps the most ethically vexed. The poem presents us with a vision of demonic Saracens, but it also questions the degree to which the Saracens differ from Christians.

The extreme collapse of any distance between Frank and Saracen comes when Roland blows his Oliphant. By quickly communicating with the Frankish vanguard that the rearguard is in danger, the sound of the Oliphant collapses the distance between the two contingents and places them in the same aural space. The blare of the Oliphant is loud enough to reach Charlemagne and the vanguard who are “passing through the Gate of Spain” (1703), and it echoes “thirty great leagues” (1756). The sound, then, can be heard as far as approximately ninety miles away, presumably in all directions. This aural construction places Roland at the center of a ninety-mile radius, an orbit that marks a “safe space” for the rearguard in which it can still reliably communicate with the main army. Poignantly, the sound of the Oliphant reaches Charlemagne and the vanguard almost instantly, but the Franks in the vanguard know they are helpless to aid the rearguard. Despite Roland’s finally blowing the Oliphant, the main army “cannot come in time” to save the rearguard (1841). The speed of sound is much faster than the speed of an army on horseback. Only God can aid the Frankish army by “hold[ing] back the sun’s course, / Prolong[ing] the day” (2450-51), and allowing Charlemagne and the vanguard to reach the area in time to slaughter the Saracens, avenging the massacre of the rearguard. The miracle described here further demonstrates God’s favor toward the Franks.

The poet seems to make a deliberate choice to emphasize spatial setting. Eugene Vance notes that “this attentiveness to spatial settings does not characterize earlier narrative poems of the Middle Ages,” indicating the poet’s desire to accentuate details of geography (606). The physical geography that surrounds Roland and the rearguard is formidable and confining: “High are the mountains” upon which the blast of the Oliphant echoes (1755). Critics have long noted that the poem’s geography does not match with the physical geography Charlemagne’s army dealt with at the Battle of Roncevaux, but Vance argues that factual geography is less important than the imagined space of the poem: “One begins to notice that for all his vagueness on a large geographical scale, the author is meticulous about situating episodes within specific settings. The reader always has an immediate sense of *locus* as he followed the action of the heroes” (604-05). Vance reads the echoing of the Oliphant amid the mountain peaks as “resound[ing] with the agony of Roland’s tragic experience” (610). I agree with Vance’s reading at this point, but I think it can be pushed further. Physically, the poem stages the Battle of Roncevaux at a liminal space, referring to the “Gate of Spain” numerous times. As a boundary, the battlefield is a place of porous identity, where what is “Christian” and what is “Saracen” begins to intermix, just as the blood of enemies oozes together in the mud. Further, Roland blows the Oliphant so loudly that the pressure bursts the blood vessels in his head: “Count Roland’s mouth with running blood is red; / he’s burst asunder the temples of his head” (1785-86). Roland’s flesh is penetrated but not by a Saracen sword. In this reverse penetration, Roland’s blood spills out of his body by his own doing. Roland lives for several more stanzas, indicating the injury is perhaps more metaphorical than actual. In this moment of crisis of differentiation, then, the blood that rolls out of Roland’s mouth and temples exposes the hero himself to mixture with the Saracen body.

The very nature of that Saracen body is called into question in the description of Saracens, both at the Battle of Roncevaux and at the battle the next day between Charlemagne and the Frankish vanguard and Saracen reinforcements from the far reaches of the world. The poem strongly associates Saracens and their religion with Satan, while the Franks' religion is, not surprisingly, associated with God. In this more ethical aspect of the poem's doubling structure, Saracens rush down to hell upon their deaths while Franks go to heaven. When the Saracen Malprimis of Brigale dies, "Satan comes and hales his soul away" (1268). Soon thereafter, the Christian Engelier kills the Saracen Escrimiz and "says to him: 'The devil take thy soul!'" (1296). As Roland strikes down a Saracen soldier, "The Adversary [i.e. Satan] bears his soul to Hell" (1553). Upon Roland's death, however, the narrator assures us "The County's soul they [i.e. angels] bear to Paradise" (2396). A rousing speech delivered by the Bishop Turpin accents both the Franks' belief that God favors them and also the poem's endorsement of this notion.

Barons, my lords, Charles picked us for this purpose;
We must be ready to die in our King's service.
Christendom needs you, so help us to preserve it.
Battle you'll have, of that you may be certain,
Here come the Paynims¹⁹ – your own eyes have observed them.
Now beat your breasts and ask God for His mercy;
I will absolve you and set your souls in surety.
If you should die, blest martyrdom's your guerdon;
You'll sit on high in Paradise eternal. (1127-1135)

¹⁹ The original French word here is "Sarrazins" (La Chanson de Roland).

The rhetoric of this sermon is brilliant, as Turpin quickly shifts from reminding the Franks they are fighting for Charlemagne to implying and then explicitly stating their fight is for God. By fighting on God's behalf, the Franks will gain "martyrdom" and are guaranteed to "sit on high in Paradise." Their fight with the Saracens, then, rises above any political conflict. This battle is between God's people against the enemies of God. Like Pelagius in *The Passion of Pelagius*, the martyrs, including Roland, are celebrated. But the way in which *The Song of Roland* stages martyrdom is as death in battle. Martyrdom in this case comes not at the hands of an oppressor but rather at the sword of an opponent that the poem has already established is a worthy adversary. This vision of Christianity, then, is far different from the one Hrotsvit advocated for: it is a Christianity of military prowess, not of passive resistance. These two visions of Christianity, however, would have elicited strong emotional responses from the audience. Emotional response, however, is not enough. Hrotsvit wanted her audience to commit to a life of cloistered celibacy. *The Song of Roland* was composed on the cusp of the First Crusade, in which the emotions western Europeans felt toward Muslims were put into action in the form of military invasion of the Middle East. Even Turpin's sermon bears some resemblance to the version of Urban II's speech at the Council of Clermont recorded by Fulcher of Chartres. There, as he called the First Crusade, Urban claimed, "Deus vult!" (God wills [it]; Fulcher of Chartres, qtd. in Claster 37), adding a layer of legitimacy to the campaign that even the pope himself could not provide. Turpin's speech may have been a powerful moment of propaganda, an argument for holy war embedded in a popular epic poem.

Together, these two visions of Christianity do not seem to be compatible, but they come from a similar source: the dehumanization of the other, the practice of which, while certainly not a Christian doctrine, becomes evident in Christian literature in the Middle Ages. This process,

however it is expressed – through passive resistance in Hrotsvit’s case or militant action in *The Song of Roland*’s – renders the other as nonhuman and strange, and as such, ready for storage in one’s memory locus as a reminder of what monsters lie beyond known horizons.

These monsters are shockingly real and terrifyingly close in *The Song of Roland*. They are much closer in this poem than in *The Passion of Pelagius*, where the monstrosity of Abdrahemen was only alluded to. After the Battle of Roncevaux, the poem pivots to the Franks’ desire to avenge the massacre of the rearguard. The Franks and Saracens regroup and prepare to battle again, but this time, the Saracen reinforcements, a parade of monstrosity, have arrived under the command of the emir Baligant. “Full fifty thousand souls” (3219) from faraway places such as Nubia, Polose, Occian, and other corners of the earth arrive to offer the Saracen army military aid. They are grotesque: “Myconians next, with huge and hairy polls, / Upon whose backs, all down the spine in rows, / As on wild boars, enormous bristles grow” (3221-23). Black men from Africa and “men from strong Balida’s hold, / Who are a race of most malignant rogues” (3230-31). Soldiers from “barren Occian” called “sons of the desert, a wild and godless clan,” with impossibly thick skin: “Harder than iron their hide on head and flanks, / So that they scorn or harness or steel cap; / They are in battle extremely fierce and rash” (3246-47, 3249-51). A column of “giants that to Malprise belong” come next (3252), followed by “Longbeards from the Fronde: / These are people who have no love of God” (3260-61). As the French watch this frightful army, they cry, “You’ll die, this day, you hounds!”²⁰ (3275). Later, the narrator tells us the Saracen soldiers from “Arguille like dogs are yelping all”²¹ (3527). The parade of monstrous

²⁰ This line in *The Song of Roland* is spoken by the Frankish army as a contingent of Muslim reinforcements charge their position (3275). The French word translated to “hounds,” is “glutun,” which has many meanings, including, according to the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, “monster.” Thus, the translation here to “hound” is somewhat loose.

²¹ The word used in *The Song of Roland* is *chen*, meaning “dog.” The word translated here as “yelping” can also be translated as “howling,” specifically related to dogs or other mammals, according to the Anglo-Norman Dictionary (“chen”, “glatir”).

races from the edges of the world juxtaposed with the Franks' and narrator's likening them to dogs gestures toward the Muslims-as-cynocephali trope. By relegating the monstrous races to animal status, the poem questions whether even conversion could change the nature of the Saracens.

Blackness, too, is associated with the Saracens. One Saracen in particular, Abisme, "black he is as melted pitch to see. / Better he loves murder and treachery / Than all the gold that is in Galicie" (1474-76). Archbishop Turpin sees Abisme and remarks, "This Sarsen²² looks right heretic to me. / 'Twere best by far to go and kill the beast" (1484-85). Abisme's blackness is connected to heresy and beastliness by Turpin, an interpretation present in medieval discourse about skin pigmentation. Thomas Hahn argues that "represented color difference is never 'innocent,' or neutral, or without cross-cultural evaluative meaning" (6). Uebel argues that, in the Middle Ages, "difference was always hierarchical – the other was perennially inferior to what passed as normal" (16). Using this logic, if the Franks' whiteness is "normal," Abisme's blackness is not only "abnormal" but also aberrant. The central point – what is normal, white, and Christian – is juxtaposed to the points on the edges – abnormal, black or brown, and pagan. The Saracens in these sections of *The Song of Roland* are so strange, so grotesque, that the audience must ask whether they are even humans. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen remarks in "Monster Theory: Seven Theses" that the monster is "the difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" (7). Cohen argues, "The *chansons de geste* celebrated the crusades by transforming Muslims into demonic caricatures whose menacing lack of humanity was readable from their bestial attributes; by culturally glossing 'Saracens' as 'monstra,' propagandists rendered rhetorically admissible the annexation of the East by the West" (8). Cohen's use of the word "annexation" can be read in

²² The French word here is "Sarraz[in]" (*La Chanson de Roland*).

two ways: it may indicate domination over a colonized people, or, more neutrally, a general overtaking of one culture by another. If the latter is the meaning, “annexation” in this context realistically may mean mass conversion.

Just as Hrotsvit’s *Passion of Pelagius* expresses ambivalence about existing in the center, instead suggesting Hrotsvit’s comfort with alterity in the form of her gender and her clausturation, *The Song of Roland* cannot seem to decide whether Muslims are irredeemably different or carry the potential of conversion. The only Muslim to convert in the poem is Bramimonda, the widow of the slain king Marsile, but her conversion is forced. Even with “Bramimonda brought to the fold of Christ” (3990), however, the story is not over. The angel Gabriel comes to Charlemagne in a dream telling him to “assemble thy whole imperial might” to assist an ally whose city is “besieged by Paynim²³ tribes” (3994, 3997). Thus, Charlemagne’s fight with the Saracens is never-ending; it cannot end until full conversion has occurred. As long as Saracens exist and refuse to convert, conflict will continue. But, as we have seen, the poem itself remains noncommittal on its belief in universal conversion, an interesting position for a text that purports to portray Christian values. Indeed, Augustinian theology, well-known in the eleventh century, would have argued vociferously for that conversion. Charles T. Matthewes writes that Augustine saw God as “theologically the absolute other,” a figure that simultaneously attracts humankind and confounds it. Matthewes’ essay argues that religious pluralism is compatible with Augustinian theology, but I think his points about Augustine’s ideas about conversion are relevant to the discussion of alterity:

For Augustine, the subject’s center of gravity is “outside” the self, or rather, reveals that “outside” to have been *inside* all along. In other words, Augustine presses dialectic to its

²³ The French here is “païen” (*La Chanson de Roland*).

most radical point, suggesting that the self is itself perhaps a dialectic, a dialectic between itself and God. For Augustine, the central fact of all reality is its radical dependence upon God; hence, all fallen creatures are fallen not so much from God (as they could not exist were they so to fall), but rather from themselves. The one basic (perhaps *the* most basic) description of sin is self-division, and conversion is not so much the reunion of two separate entities as it is the reconciliation of the self to itself, its acceptance of its relation to its source. (89 emphasis in original)

In the Augustinian sense, then, the monstrous races of *The Song of Roland*, which physically embody the otherness that all Saracens in the poem represent, have not fallen away from God so much as they have fallen away from their individual selves. By reconciling the “self to itself,” a Saracen other would be able to re-enter communion with God, and conversion always remains an open possibility: “redemption and damnation are always open questions,” as Matthewes puts it (89). Further, if God is the “absolute other,” humankind must seek that other in order to find redemption. The other, in this sense, is not something to be feared but rather something to embrace. As the Saracen army closes in on the Frankish rearguard, penetrating the Franks’ bodies as well as their “safe space” of Christian-ness, they also close in on the Franks’ identity. The Saracens are terrifyingly close to the Franks – even down to the pattern of doubling within the poem – and they have now physically penetrated their citadel. The poem’s final stanza, in which Charlemagne is urged to continue the war with the Saracens, is ominous, as it suggests an epic struggle that will never end, except, perhaps with universal conversion. The consequence, according to the Last Emperor legend, is the End Times, the ushering in of a new type of world that no human can yet envision.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of this thesis, I discussed the ways in which Christian martyrs embraced the role of persecuted other. Pelagius embodies this ethic, as he openly defies Abrahemen and welcomes martyrdom. Christians may actually desire to become the other, and this is a logical desire for *The Passion of Pelagius* to express, considering its author was doubly othered, by her gender and by her status as a cloistered canoness. In the second chapter of this thesis, I argued that *The Song of Roland* expresses similar desires for otherness, even if the text seems to try to suppress that desire. *The Song of Roland* throws a simple Christian-Saracen binary off balance, as it portrays Frankish and Saracen characters who are eerily similar to one another, forcing the reader to question the true difference of the groups. After considering Augustinian theology, I argued that the text may express a deep desire for conversion while questioning exactly how a mass conversion of a monstrous other could take place on a practical level.

Throughout the Crusader era and the rest of the Middle Ages, writers and artists continued to question how conversion might take place, or if it was possible. In the fourteenth century Middle English romance *The King of Tars*, a white Christian princess marries a black Muslim sultan. The two conceive a child, which is born “a misforshapen thing” (972), a monstrous birth that, according to logic of the time, held negative moral value. The lump of “flesche” (773) is a physical manifestation of the Princess’s and Sultan’s fundamental incompatibility. A white Christian and a black Muslim are, by the logic of the poem, two separate species, and their offspring is not viable. The Princess, however, requests the lump be baptized, and when it is, the child “hadde liif and lim and fas [stet] / And crid with great deray, / And hadde hide and flesche and fel” (772-73). Convinced of the veracity of Christianity, the

Sultan now requests to be baptized. When he is, “His hide that blac and lothely was / Al white bicom thurth Godes gras / And clere withouten blame” (922-24). The black Sultan becomes white when he converts from Islam to Christianity, just as his son went from a “misforshapen thing” to a healthy baby boy upon baptism.

The message of *The King of Tars* is also much more pointed than that of *Pelagius* or even *The Song of Roland*. In the centuries between the composition of the earlier texts and *The King of Tars*, distinct processes have occurred that now place the Saracen other in a new category, one that is no longer blurry or arguable. Rather, by the fourteenth century, the Saracen is an animal, a demon, a racialized other that theoretically may benefit from conversion but whose genetics are impure, polluted. In some ways, then, Christian Europe has perhaps softened toward the Saracen – *The King of Tars* admits Saracens can convert, that their blackness can be turned to whiteness (metaphorically, at least), but the text cannot imagine a union between whiteness and blackness that is productive. In other ways, however, the Christian stance toward the Saracen has hardened. As *Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland* seem to question where exactly to place the Saracen – is he a pagan? Is he a monster? – *The King of Tars* has definitively placed him in the subhuman category, subject to human violence.

The King of Tars fantasizes about conversion, but it can only imagine a Christianity of normative whiteness. Several critics, including Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Geraldine Heng, have argued that the baptism of the Sultan, with the accompanying change of skin color, is reflective of a growing concept of race in the Middle Ages, an arbitrary marker of difference that carries with it a moral value. The text also shows us, however, Muslim monstrosity in vivid descriptions of dogs accompanying the Muslims into battle and of demonic dogs chasing the Princess in her horrifying dream. This association of Muslims with monstrosity, specifically the dog-headed

men, or cynocephali commonly described in medieval encyclopedias and placed in the peripheral zones of *mappaemundi*, brings to mind the parade of monstrous races described in *The Song of Roland*. But the monstrous races that penetrate Christian bodies with swords in the earlier *chanson de geste* have now become sexual monsters who penetrate female bodies, injecting malformed semen into Christian wombs. The penetration portrayed in both texts betrays the same ambivalence toward difference. Crusader literature, too, fantasized about taboo penetration. Uebel points to a letter written in the late eleventh or early twelfth century by Alexius I Comnenus that claimed, “Nam pueros et iuvenes Christianorum circumcidunt super baptisteria Christianorum et circumcisionis sanguinem in despectum Christi fundunt” (For [Saracens] circumcise Christian boys and youths over Christian baptismal fonts and they spill the blood of circumcision into the font of Christ; qtd. in Uebel 32). Physical penetration, redoubled with suggestions of sexual depravity, are coupled with the defilement with blood of Christian holy places. This image brings to mind violence and (possibly) rape, but also the descriptions of the Christian siege of Jerusalem in 1099, where Christian knights rode up to their knees in blood at the Temple of Solomon. The blood in that situation – blood of Muslims and Jews – had been cleansing, reclaiming the holy city for the Christians. But the blood here – Christian blood now – defiles Christian churches. One cannot discuss imagery of blood in Christianity without also remembering that Catholics believe in the doctrine of Real Presence, which states that the bread and wine of the Eucharist literally becomes the body and blood of Christ. In the context of the Catholic mass, this blood is holy and redeeming.

But blood is the result of penetration. Christ’s blood flowed from his side at his crucifixion when a soldier stabbed him with a lance (John 19:34). Blood in the Christian imagination is both holy and redemptive but also the source of contamination. This dual role of

penetration, and the resulting blood, suggests once again a deep ambivalence toward difference and the act of penetration. Does Alexius' account, then, actually betray a desire for Christians and Muslims to experience some sort of cultural or sexual union? Two centuries later, does the Middle English *King of Tars* desire the same? If so, can this desire be reconciled with the metaphorical and literal violence present in *The King of Tars*? Portraying Muslims as monstrous cynocephali suggests they are less than human. As such, they are subject to human violence with impunity. The twentieth century philosopher Jacques Derrida argued that "power over the animal is...the essence of the human" (qtd. in Steel 18), thus portraying the other as subhuman suggests power over the other in a way that approves violence and further dehumanization. If the other is not human, after all, why think about his comfort or, as we would say today, his human rights?

Near the end of *The King of Tars*, the now-white Sultan and his father-in-law, the Christian King of Tars, lead an army against Muslim nobles who refuse to convert to Christianity. During the battle, the Sultan meets one of the errant Saracens. Both sit atop horses, and the Sultan "smot him oboven the scheld / That neighe he feld him in the feld / Among the houndes fele" (1168-70). Now lying dead on the ground, the Saracen rebel lies among the "houndes," below the Sultan, who sits high above him on a warhorse. This visual image shows us the Sultan now has moral superiority over the Saracen who has been equated with an animal. Physically, the Sultan is above the dead Saracen, but he is morally above him as well. Seeing this, the King of Tars declares, "Bi Him that tholed wounde / The dogge schal adoun to grounde / That fightes thus in feld" (1174-76). Twice in the space of fewer than ten lines, Muslims are equated with dogs, animals that are below humans and subject to human violence. Yet the miraculous baptism of the baby and the Sultan's conversion complicate a text that we today might call racist, or at the very least, prejudiced.

The underlying message of *The King of Tars* seems to be that monsters exist all around us – “us” being white Christians. Indeed, images of monsters on *mappaemundi* and the moral application of *Timaeus*, with demons and monsters dwelling in the base earth, seem to support the omnipresence of the monster. Yet *The King of Tars*, like *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*, expresses ambivalence about the other, in the text’s fantasy that the black Saracen Sultan can become a white Christian. The child born of the union between the Sultan and the Princess is the product of a mixed union, but only viable when he is claimed for Christ through baptism. The text seems to be suggesting that *people* can convert, but *populations*, which remain anonymous, nameless, and monstrous, are perhaps beyond conversion. The Sultan’s followers who do not convert are given no names or unique characteristics. They are instead “houndes” and “dogges.” It becomes far easier to demonize people from distance than to do so up close. The Sultan and Princess in *The King of Tars* seem to grow fond of each other. Immediately after his baptism, the Sultan calls the Princess, “Leman min” (709), a term of endearment. “Leman” or “lemman,” according to the Middle English Dictionary, is a “term of intimate address.”²⁴ The poem allows for a loving, intimate relationship between the Sultan and the Princess. That the Sultan is white when he calls the Princess “leman mine,” is also likely significant: now that they are of the same species, their relationship is morally and culturally sanctioned. Nevertheless the exchange may hint at the way in which the writer imagines the potential for conversion and (literal) penetration. In the twenty-first century, any practice that resembles eugenics or selective breeding understandably brings shudders, after the horrors of the American eugenics movement and of Nazi Germany, but in the fourteenth century, that particular bias did not exist.

²⁴ The MED cites this usage in *The King of Tars* for this definition.

Indeed, perhaps a genetically and culturally mixed population would have been ideal. Throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, a “Europeanization” took place, according to historian Robert Bartlett, who has traced, among other things, the way in which linguistically or ethnically specific names gave way to “pan-Christian” names (279). In the decades after the Norman Conquest of 1066, for example, baptismal records throughout England show fewer Anglo-Saxon names such as Alfred or Edward and more Norman names such as William and Robert, as “the English population of England chose to adopt the names of their conquerors.” Bartlett points out that names are perhaps “the most malleable elements of linguistic culture” (271), so the changes in names could be the result of Anglo-Norman intermarriage, but perhaps more likely that Anglo-Saxons wanted their children to “fit in” with the Norman elite. Quibbling about the underlying reason for the change in names obscures another fact of the aftermath of the Norman conquest: suddenly, groups of people who had not lived next to each other previously were now forced to be neighbors. Cohen argues that “by the time the twelfth century drew to a close, the vigorous English community disrupted by the Norman Conquest had reconsolidated, in part by dehumanizing people who differed in religion, language, custom, descent, history” (*Hybridity* 3). Cohen’s assertion is comforting – the English found a way to recalibrate identity and “reconsolidate” after the Norman Conquest – and disturbing. Thus, perhaps *The King of Tars* argues for a society in which intermarriage pulls different communities together, but the English turned their ire on other groups, including the Welsh and the Irish. Even as they consolidated in one direction, they held other groups at arm’s length.

This uncomfortable tension, this tug-of-war is the same process occurring in *The Passion of Pelagius* and *The Song of Roland*, and I have tried both to demonstrate that these texts participate in a discourse of ambivalence toward the other and to theorize how the texts

participate in that discourse. It is a discourse that continued through the Middle Ages, jumping languages and genres, for example in *The King of Tars*, and many other texts, including notably the *Constance* group (in which some critics place *The King of Tars*). That discourse mutated in the modern era and, compounded by European economic and military hegemony, became Orientalism, which, Said writes, is a discourse that emphasizes the “ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (2). Part of that distinction is to imbue the “Oriental” with qualities that are “lamentably alien,” including delinquency, insanity, effeminacy, and poverty (207). To this list could be added, in 2017, “irrationality” in the guise of terrorism, and a perceived blind adherence to religion. In an “Occidental” world that has increasingly embraced rationalism and secularism, their opposites may seem monstrous. The modern “Oriental” monster is not a dog-headed man who howls and barks before going into battle, however; rather, he is a young man who straps explosives to his torso and uses his body as a weapon. Yet, the Occident is still drawn to the Orient, in the same ways Said observed in *Orientalism*. This (irrational?) desire for the Orient can also be read as the desire for the monster, through whose body, Cohen reminds us, “fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space” (17). Anxiety about Muslims and Islam is colloquially referred to as “Islamophobia,” a word that perhaps unwittingly betrays the ways in which Muslims are still portrayed as monsters in contemporary popular discourse. A “phobia,” is a fear, and, as Cohen points out, “the monster stands as a warning against exploration of its uncertain demesnes.” Such exploration is “more often punished than rewarded” (“Monster Culture” 12). The monstrous Muslim of 2017 stands as a symbol of difference but also a warning against exploration of the strange, the other, the alter. In this way, the fears felt by non-Muslims in our contemporary

moment are not new. They were written centuries ago, inscribed on the bodies of Saracens, made monstrous by their creators.

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