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Genre Trouble: Embodied Cognition in *Fabliaux*, Chivalric Romance, and Latin Chronicle

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Genre Trouble: Embodied Cognition in *Fabliaux*, Chivalric

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Dedication

To Danielle Mendes, for her sacrifices and love.

To Terry and Susan Widner, for their encouragement and support.

To my children, for giving me perspective and joy.

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Genre Trouble: Embodied Cognition in *Fabliaux*, Chivalric Romance, and Latin Chronicle

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This dissertation examines the intersection between theories of body and of genre through the lens of cognitive science. It focuses, in particular, on representations of bodies in exemplars of *fabliaux* in Old French and Middle English, chivalric romance that feature the figure of Sir Gawain, and the Latin *Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds*. This dissertation establishes genre theory on cognitive-scientific ground by considering how embodied cognition influences both theories of genre and the representations of bodies. It argues that, rather than a container into which works fit, genre is a network of associations created in the minds of authors and audiences. This network finds expression in the bodies of characters, which differ across genres. It argues, moreover, that genre and bodies influence, in fundamental ways, interpretations of literary works. Finally, this work discusses the possibilities for future research using methods for quantitative textual analysis and data visualization common in the digital humanities.

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Introduction: A Cognitive Theory of Embodied Genre

There is a recent trend to incorporate scientific methodology and discoveries in literary criticism. One such intervention comes from work in cognitive science as literary scholars employ theories of mind and brain to provide new interpretations of their texts. This dissertation joins these works by examining the intersection between body and genre through the lens of cognitive science. It focuses, in particular, on representations of bodies in examplars of fabliaux, chivalric romance, and Latin chronicle. Though there is already a large amount of scholarship focused on the body and a steady, if quiet, interest in genre,[1] the two realms rarely intersect; when they do, it is typically through the etymological connection between gender and genre and mostly in the service of gender. If we look to cognitive science, however, we discover deep interconnections between genres and bodies. This dissertation probes these intersections in order to establish genre theory on cognitive-scientific ground and to examine how embodied cognition influences both theories of genre and the representations of bodies.

The deeply embodied nature of human cognition also suggests that literary works bear traces of embodiment, particularly in the construction of identities for characters, authors, and audiences. One of my persistent concerns[2] is the benefits

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1   Exemplified by the October 2007 *PMLA* special topic "Remapping Genre" and a host of classificatory work in the field of digital humanities.
2   Another recurrent thread will be the place of quantitative textual analysis in genre studies. Although I proceed entirely along qualitative lines, in the conclusion I address future directions for quantitative text analysis and my research's place in the digital humanities.

that can accrue to contemporary critical theories of genre when we take into account the insights available from cognitive science. Representations of bodies and conceptions of genre are, I argue, crucial to the understanding of how texts construct and deploy identities. Indeed, bodies and genres function in remarkably similar ways. This relationship bears investigation to discover how readers understand texts and the characters portrayed within them. Moreover, even when unstated, preconceptions about the nature of both genre and bodies heavily influence literary criticism, a fact that necessitates a more sophisticated model of their processes. As George Lakoff, on whose work I rely heavily, writes: "Categorization is not a matter to be taken lightly. There is nothing more basic than categorization to our thought, perception, action, and speech. Every time we see something as a *kind* of thing... we are categorizing" (*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* 5). Genre, one of the primary concepts we use when comparing texts, is categorization. The recognition of genre is also often unconscious, a result of the automatic processes of our minds rather than a deliberate application of theory, to the detriment of our scholarly endeavours.

Genres construct identities; to neglect how genre works risks blindness to key definitional moments and interpretive moves. Simon Gaunt writes:

The distinct ideologies of medieval genres are predicated in part at least upon distinct constructions of gender... Every genre is an ideological formation... [and] a crucial component of every ideology is its engagement with the sex/gender

system of the society in which it is produced. (1)

Genre determines how identities of characters in a text arise, how they are

represented as embodied, and how we interpret them. Because critical

interpretation of literary characters, their identities, and their bodies underlies

much social criticism and its understanding, we must remain alert to genre lest we

distort or ignore aspects of texts that, because they do not fit within our horizon of

expectations, could shed a light on cultural issues.

A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO GENRE

Cognitive psychologists have in the last few decades examined how our minds

construct categories because of categorization's crucial role in thought. An overview

of some of the key concepts in this field is now necessary as they inform my later

discussion of contemporary genre theory and its application in scholarship. Lakoff

writes: "Without the ability to categorize, we could not function at all, either in the

physical world or in our social and intellectual lives" (6). There is a traditional,

unproblematized model for genre that many scholars have employed, which is

artificial and taxonomic, even though literary production evolves according to the

processes that characterize the so-called "natural"[3] categories. Eleanor Rosch

observed that these natural categories function according to the processes of what

is now called "prototype theory." Before discussing prototype theory, however, we

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3   Lakoff, in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, makes a binary distinction between "natural" and "artificial" categories. The former are categories as they arise organically, in everyday cognition; the latter are like scientific taxonomies and other logical constructs and are not applicable to genre, which attempts to describe the organic growth of literary works.

must first examine further what is commonly called the "classical view" of categorization—a view that yet dominates much of genre theory. Lakoff writes:

> From the time of Aristotle to the later work of Wittgenstein, categories were thought [to] be well understood and unproblematic. They were assumed to be abstract containers, with things either inside or outside the category. Things were assumed to be in the same category if and only if they had certain properties in common. And the properties they had in common were taken as defining the category. (6)

Simply put, the classical view defines membership in a category as the possession of a particular set of shared characteristics. With the seemingly simple example of what constitutes a "game," Ludwig Wittengenstein demonstrates the untenability of the classical view. "Game" is a category that we regularly use to comprehend a number of widely divergent activities that includes chess, tennis, solitaire, and even hopscotch. Though we cannot discover a single characteristic that these activities share, we still classify them all as games. To resolve this difficulty, Wittgenstein proposed the idea of "family resemblence." Even if none of the myriad activities we call games possess a set of unifying characteristics, they are all related by a number of possible features, none of which are strictly necessary for inclusion in the group.

For our model of genre we begin, then, with familial resemblance and a continuum of variation from a norm that in category theory is called a "prototype." When we posit some texts to be exemplary (i.e., prototypical) and others to be

aberrant—that is, central or peripheral—no list of characteristics can ever be exhaustive or inclusive of all works in a genre. Instead, we must rely upon critical tradition discover a nexus of exemplary texts. Or, we can analyze variation to sketch a chronology of development. Franco Moretti argues for the value of creating just such trees:

> The very small, and the very large; these are the forces that shape literary history. Devices and genres; not texts…. Take the concept of genre: usually, literary criticism approaches it in terms of what Ernst Mayr calls 'typological thinking': we choose a 'representative individual', and through it define the genre as a whole…. But once a genre is visualized *as a tree*, the continuity between the two disappears: the genre becomes an abstract 'diversity spectrum'… whose internal multiplicity no individual text will ever be able to represent." (76)

Moretti highlights, too, the disjunction between the ideal prototype and the inability for any one text to encompass that prototype. Even though readers will possess a prototype against which they evaluate a text, the prototype remains a hermeneutic construction. The shift in our thinking demanded when we view of genre as a diverse tree means that we must think not in broad generalities about genres, but about a genre's structure, its relationships to other genres, and the relationships among a text and its genres. Moretti's call for a diachronic study of the interrelationships among genres and their evolution corresponds to what prototype

theory has to tell us about genres and, moreover, what quantitative textual analysis

has shown about their developments.

The two models that underlie any theory of genre—taxonomic or organic—

whether deployed consciously by the critic or whether silently forming the context

for an interpretation, both derive from the ways in which the human mind

categorizes. One way, which has been the dominant model for genre theory, is the

proposal of a strict boundary between those works that make up a genre and those

that do not quite make the cut. Moretti, quoting Mayr, terms this "typological

thinking." This model for genre derives from our embodiment. Mark Johnson and

Lakoff argue that all human reason is inextricably embodied; metaphors, which are

a type of cognitive model, arise as abstractions of concrete sensory and corporeal

experience. Lakoff writes: "Cognitive models are directly *embodied*… Cognitive

models structure thought and are used in forming categories and in reasoning.

Concepts characterized by cognitive models are understood via the embodiment of

the models" (13). The taxonomic model of genre is a metaphor derived from our

experience with physical containers. We have a natural understanding that

containers have boundaries, that things inside those boundaries are contained, and

that things outside them are not contained. This schema is one Lakoff identifies as

the "container schema," which "defines the most basic distinction between IN and

OUT. We understand our own bodies as containers" (271). We then deploy this

conception of a container to explain literary genres. Though an understandable

metaphor, it is inaccurate and leads to distortions, which I demonstrate in detail throughout this dissertation.

Among literary scholars, Julien Simon has gone the farthest so far to synthesize theories of cognitive psychology with theories of genre. He likewise turns to prototype theory for explanations. Simon's work is, in his own words, "a real investigation into the brain processes underlying the categorization of books" (*A Neurocognitive Study of Literary Genres* 78). By not assuming that genres arise from groups of texts, but are instead formed in the minds of readers, Simon shifts the focus from the characteristics of specific texts to the cognitive apparatus that determines how literary genre works. Another scholar who has considered in depth the applicability of category theory to genre is Michael Sinding who, like Simon and others, turns to Lakoff's "monumental work" for insights into genre that, rather than destroying the old models, allow us to update them and contextualize them within contemporary scholarship:

> A cognitive approach allows us to locate genre in all of its usual haunts. The way to link writer's and reader's genres accurately and without contradiction is to see the text as really embodying writer's and reader's cognitive models, and to see those models as sometimes 'the same' in that, diverse and variable though they may be, they can also be significantly isomorphic." (378)

We need then, to understand how previous scholars' work intersects with (or diverges from) the model put forth in this and other works that argue for the

necessity and usefulness of category theory as a basis for genre studies. Later in this introduction, therefore, I review how scholars have theorized and used genre and how their work relates to prototype theory.

In his effort to provide new models for genre, Simon turns to the field of schemata theory, a well-established topic in psychological research. Schema theory argues that, rather than discrete and unconnected details, the mind stores information as organized networks. In fact, schemata order all our knowledge, provide context for its understanding, and inescapably shape our interpretation of it. Simon writes: "A schema is a cognitive structure that serves to represent our knowledge of the world" (3). All knowledge is contextual and interdependent. There are five salient aspects of schema theory Simon examines. Schema are: 1) cognitive knowledge structures; 2) embedded in embodied experience and other schema; 3) active, dynamic, and ever-changing; 4) working at different levels of abstraction; and 5) possessed of what we might call variables that are set when a schema is instantiated. Each of these points is at work in our understanding and use of literary genre. I will address them throughout this introduction in greater detail.

When we read, we do so with certain expectations about structure, subject matter, and purpose. We base these expectations on our prior knowledge of the genre, if we have it. Invariably, we bring expectations to a text that help us make sense of it and to determine what is significant and, crucially, what is not. Sinding notes:

Genre theories frequently err by shortchanging the full range of genre

processes. Focusing on only one stage or context — tradition, author, text or

reception — can hide a whole world of genre-relevant facts. A more adequate

analysis should consider at least the following factors in the prototypical

sequence leading to a new genre member: There is a collection of past works

constituting a genre; a writer reads some of those works, and then models a

new work after them; a work with some of the genre's defining features

results from this creation; and some readers of the work recognize its

relation to its models and its generic intention. (377)

We will see, in particular, the need for a recognition of the diachronic, interpretive

nature of genre that Sinding describes above. Similarly, and in terms more clearly

connected to cognitive science, Simon writes: "Genres are the literary correlates of

schemata (or categories). In that sense, they are cognitive entities that we, the

readers, create and constantly modify, and not mere textual artifacts imposed upon

us" (vii). All our various schemata provide context that enables interpretation. Not

only is the schema for a genre thus embedded in other schemata operating at

different levels of abstraction, but genres are embedded within a hierarchical

system of difference.

The schemata and categories at work in genre are, further, not all created

equal. The perceived importance of different textual features, possible plots, and

other characteristics define a genre. Further, our schema will change with continued

reading. If, for instance, we have read only one hagiography, that text will comprise our entire understanding of the genre. With more reading, however, both of hagiographies themselves and secondary literature discussing them, our views will change; what we deem important will change. This dynamic process of changing values stands as one of the key features of schemata theory. When applied to genre, we see that, rather than static, immutable categories, genres too must change not only as authors create new texts, but as a result of the process of reading itself. It is, in essence, a hermeneutic circle. Scholars have not been able to settle upon a comprehensive definition of what constitutes a *fabliaux* not because of difficulties arising from the texts, but because each critic has a slightly different set of schemata relevant to framing and understanding the *fabliaux*. Indeed, this issue is one that bedevils practically all attempts at genre-level scholarship.

Just as we cannot settle upon a definitional set of characteristics shared by all games, so too we cannot discover an exhaustive list of features that define a literary genre. As Lakoff points out, if the classical view were correct, then we could not consider one type of thing more characteristic of a given category than any other. That is, if the boundaries of a category were strictly defined by a set of characteristics, then all members would share them and none would be more prototypical than any other. This finding and other prototype effects led Rosch, one of the first cognitive psychologists to examine categorization in depth, to construct a different model for categorization from the classical view.

One might object, however, that prototype effects only demonstrate that membership in a category is gradated; in the case of texts, some are simply "more fully" members of a genre than another, less prototypical text. We can look at the example of the category of "bird"—one of the classic cases in the cognitive psychology of categories—to show the problem with this objection. The "bird" category (unlike literary genre) is a category with rigid boundaries. If we ask for a typical example of a bird, however, we are more likely to point to a sparrow or a robin than a chicken or a penguin. The first two are more prototypical birds than the others. Nevertheless, chickens and penguins are still birds, even if they are not as "good" examples as the more prototypical sparrow. Lakoff argues that, rather than gradation of membership, this effect shows that categories possess an internal structure that contributes to their definition. For genre, the metaphor of a network captures this structure; some texts may be central to their primary genre, yet connected to other genre networks. Others may straddle the space between two genres (or even more).

Another important feature of categorization Lakoff examines is "cue validity," which "is the conditional probability that an object is in a particular category given its possession of some feature (or 'cue')" (52). Cues that correlate more strongly with members in a category are perceived as more valid; indeed, much of genre criticism has been an attempt to find the cues that correlate with all the texts in a

genre.[4] If we take the classical view of categories as applicable to genre—which

many critics implicitly assume—then an exhaustive search for valid cues to a genre

is logical. The classical view, however, is fundamentally incompatible with genre.

Further, Lakoff notes that "categorization depends to a large extent on the nature of

the system in which a category is embedded" (52). This "system," when we speak of

literary genre, is shaped by the goals of the critic. The desired findings may

prejudice the critic's definition of what serves as valid cues for a genre. An

assemblage of schemata thus confronts us. Because the prototype for a genre

functions like a "center of gravity in the reader's psychological space" (Simon 80),

part of the critical desire that determines which cues seem valid and which do not

comes from a desire to judge how closely to that center any given text falls.

By assuming that genres are determined in the minds of readers rather than

implicit in texts and that genres are a form of categorization, we are able to deploy

the discoveries of cognitive science about categorization to retheorize genre. It is

characterized by prototype effects, is a radial category, and functions according to

the principles of schemata theory. Rather than a comprehensive list of shared

characteristics that define stable boundaries for a genre, texts of any given genre

share a familial resemblance and may take characteristics more common to other

genres. Further, because genres evolve,[5] they are constantly under revision by

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4   Such an effort is ultimately futile because genres change and develop over time. They are not static, synchronic categories.

5   Colin Martindale argues that genres evolve based "the pressure for novelty, a pressure as inexorable and as unidirectional as gravity" (12). Moretti likewise writes: "'temporary structures' is… a good

artists, audiences, and critics; they are diachronic rather than synchronic systems.

Existing in the mind of the reader, genre affords useful and necessary means to

contextualize a work of art according to the desires, knowledge, and experience of

the reader. We must, therefore, in order to do justice to the process of artistic

creation and the processes of our own minds, remain aware not only of the

constructed nature of genres, but the assumptions underlying that construction,

both about genre itself and about the goals of the critical argument. A failure to do

so unnecessarily restricts our appreciation of a text and a genre; we miss potentially

salient features, focus attention overmuch on others, and impoverish our

understanding.

Genre is like a window into the texts that participate in it; what we can see

will be limited by the shape of the window. When we understand the cognitive

processes behind categories, then we have a more accurate and useful model with

which to discuss literary genre than critical discourse has provided so far.

Humanities scholars, however, tend to have a healthy skepticism towards claims of

definitive answers in literary studies; as a result, the modern debate surrounding

the appropriate model for genre has revolved without resolution for well over fifty

years, the cognitive case is of a qualitatively different order than previous attempts,

as Lakoff, Simon, Sinding, and this dissertation show. It offers real, foundational

definition for—genres: morphological arrangements that *last* in time, but always only for *some* time"
(14). Both Moretti and Martindale found periodicity in the life cycles of genres that suggest
discoverable rules to explain these changes. Martindale's proposal that a constant need for novelty is
general enough to encompass these recurring structural changes without reference to sociohistorical
specifics.

progress in our knowledge about this important aspect of literature. This is a strong

claim, to be sure, but one with persuasive evidence. The necessity for such a theory

is evident when we consider the chaotic state of scholarship about genre.

GENRE IN THEORY

We can now classify previous metaphors for genre as closer to either the classical

view or prototype theory. When literary scholars consider genre, it is usually to note

in passing that it is an artificial construct, a "law" in Derridean terminology, that

once established must inevitably be transgressed. Nevertheless, the arbitrary nature

of genre acknowledged, scholars proceed to use it in rather traditional ways to

categorize and explain texts. Derrida, who provides one of the primary points of

departure for theories of genre, dismantles the traditional conception of genre as a

rigid taxonomy by showing this model to be inherently flawed and unsustainable.

He begins "The Law of Genre" with the pronouncements: "Genres are not to be

mixed. I will not mix them" (55). He then demonstrates how these statements

themselves cannot confidently be slotted into a particular genre, but instead depend

upon contextualizing interpretation by the audience. He notes that genre is often

treated as a rigid classificatory system: "As soon as the word 'genre' is sounded... a

limit is drawn" (56). To "cross a line of demarcation" like genre is thus to "risk

impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (57). Once he establishes this definition of genre,

he proposes that there is a corollary to the law of genre, "a law of impurity or a

principle of contamination" that makes it impossible not to mix genres (57). He also

remarks that "a text cannot belong to no genre... Every text participates in one or several genres, yet such *participation* never amounts to *belonging*" (65; emphasis added). The distinction between "belonging to" and "participation in" is particularly noteworthy because many scholars treat genre as something to which a text can belong. Derrida, in this formulation, highlights the necessity of context to the meaning of a work. Our sense of genre, the conventions thereof, and the ways in which any given text, body, or other feature deviates from or hews to the tropes and forms of a genre influence and, at times, create much of the meaning. A text performs different genres. For example, *fabliaux* regularly parody other genres to humorous effect; a reader without knowledge of the conventions of courtly love literature, chivalric romance, and other genres will fail to see the parody and, therefore, much of the humor of the genre.

The temptation after reading Derrida's explanation of the inherent instability and arbitrariness of genre may be, unfortunately, to discard the concept of genre itself as flawed, artificial, and relatively useless. Although Derrida provides the useful distinction between "belonging to" and "participation in" a genre, it is only a starting point; there is no discussion of generic structure or the degree of a text's participation in a genre. We cannot, however, do without the idea of genre; its existence is fundamental to meaning. Without some preconceptions about a literary genre, we are left at a loss to make sense of it. These tropes, characteristics, and other markers of genre are, as Thomas Beebee notes, essential to interpretation as

they provide instructions for decoding a text (13): "I began to see genre as a set of 'handles' on texts, and to realize that a text's genre is its *use-value*. Genre gives us not understanding in the abstract and passive sense but use in the pragmatic and active sense" (14; emphasis in original). Although Beebee's formulation "a text's genre" is one that category theory urges we avoid, his identification of genre as a "handle" on a text that has use-value is, itself, useful. The idea of a "handle" is, further, another example of an schema derived from our embodiment.

Moreover, though texts are categorized into genres by critics and authors according to perceived similarities, these categories function through difference; rather than a definition of what constitutes a given genre, the definition sets apart as "noise" the non-salient characteristics of a genre. Beebee writes, "categories and entities can only be developed against a background of non-entities and non-categories" (17). Similarly, genres, though often construed as stable, evince at their core an instability. He writes, "the truly vital meanings of a text are often contained not in any specific generic category into which the text may be placed, but rather in the play of differences between its genres" (249–50). Beebee thus suggests Saussurean difference as another effective way to frame our understanding of a text's contextual and generic meanings.[6] The play of differences and need for context and predictions is essential to the creation of meaning. We begin with

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6 In a consideration of the contextual, hierarchical nature of categories, we can see Saussure's concept of difference as another precursor (like Wittgenstein) to a contemporary model for genre. Not only does the meaning of an individual word arise through difference, but also the meaning of a genre. In my chapter on romance, I review scholarship that discusses the changes to romance that appeared when the genre lost its relationship with fabliaux.

assumptions about a work's genre based on the title, the illustrations (or lack

thereof), the age of the text, our knowledge of related works, and many other

features. Hans Robert Jauss terms these assumptions the "horizon of expectations"

and notes that they are integral to our interpretation of a work. These expectations

are based on how we categorize a text, which in turn arises from pre-existing,

dynamic schemata.

Genres have structure: there are texts in a genre that stand at the center and

others on the periphery.[7] There is a gradation of coherence, of membership in the

population that appears according to the desires of the critic. It can be useful, for

example, to define a text like Chrétien de Troyes's medieval chivalric romance *Le

chevalier de la Charrette* as something other than a centrally-located Arthurian

romance. To put it on the periphery, to make it shade into other genres, permits

certain readings that would be unavailable if it were thought to reside in the center

of the romance genre. Cohen makes this move when he defines romance as a

marriage drama that leads to a valorization of the relationship as one that grants

identity to the chevalier. *Le Chevalier au lion* (often abbreviated as simply *Yvain*), on

the other hand, becomes in his reading a central, generic text. But, by positioning *La

charrette* on the edge, as both a romance and a what he calls a "crisis text," his

reading of it becomes more complex and nuanced. He writes: "inventing its own

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7   Lakoff defines this schema as the "Center-Periphery Schema," which derives from our embodied
     experience: "We experience our bodies as having centers… and peripheries…. The center defines the
     identity of the individual in a way that the peripheral parts do not" (274). This schema is one that
     structures our perception of how texts participate in their genres, too. Lakoff continues: "Theories have
     central and peripheral principles. What is important is understood as being central" (275).

genre as it unfolds, [*La charrette*] intervenes in a world that was preoccupied with rethinking the allowable parameters of gender" (82). He reads *Yvain*, on the other hand, as a coherent story of return to one's wife after wandering. Yvain learns "that his very selfhood is contingent upon circumscribing his energy within a heterosexual, socially approved coupling governed by mutual responsibility" (87). Cohen's argument thus demonstrates the influence of generic structure on interpretation.

We must like Lord Bertilak ask, "what does the critic want?" When we assume the constructedness of genre, we are more alert to moments in the text that do not fit the traditional generic assemblage. An awareness of the generic context of a text can, in turn, lead to new interpretations. The two are intertwined irrevocably. As we question how the goals of a critic influence his or her genre schema, we must also evaluate the different metaphors for genre available and determine both what use-value each possesses and what support each finds in cognitive science. As Lakoff and Johnson argue, nearly all thought is metaphoric. The challenge, in this case, is to find a more appropriate and useful metaphor. Although I have outlined a different model for genre, a more detailed consideration of how scholars have theorized genre to date is now in order.

Recognizing the need for a more nuanced model of genre than what traditional scholarship has provided, multiple theorists have provided different metaphors for genre. Contemporary debate about genre theory has circled around

two different and incompatible models of genre, but has rarely stated the conflict clearly. Instead, it often manifests as a search for a more appropriate or more useful metaphor for genre.[8] A failure to establish clearly the terms of the debate has led to less helpful metaphors. Contemporary theories of genre recognize the pragmatic and contingent nature of genres. They are useful inasmuch as critics find explanatory power in them. Adena Rosmarin writes that the tension between specific texts and their genres is an instance of "the general-particular debate," which is "literary criticism's most precise staging of its most profound conflict: between the individual reading and its generalization, between practice and theory" (7). Ideological and constructed, chosen for rhetorical and hermenuetic purposes, rather than natural and intrinsic to texts, genres nevertheless continue to function for critics as relatively stable bodies. Rather than accepting, a priori, a schema that contextualizes a text, the scholar should begin, "by asking a question—What do I want to do and how may I best do it?" (Rosmarin 19). The answer to this question is by "inventing a schema" (Rosmarin 19). One may include or exclude texts in surprising and novel ways or even invent new, seemingly hybrid genres, but the assumption remains that genre is a taxonomy rather than a network of relationships. Given that genre is an arbitrary and inherently unstable construct that readers impose on texts, why then does it persist? One simple answer is that it is

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8   This dissertation is not exempt from this trend. I argue only that our metaphors can and should be better and more reliably chosen. Prototype theory is an update to the theories of familial resemblance that rely upon Wittgenstein, who Lakoff identifies as an important precursor.

necessary if we want to look at more than one text at a time.[9] As Rosmarin puts it, "classification enables criticism to begin" (22).

Theorists of genre have focused on finding new metaphors and applications for the theory of genre, examples of which include Wittgenstein's idea of familial resemblance and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics. David Fishelov has catalogued four of the primary, useful metaphors in genre theory in an attempt to address this proliferation. He names them "the biological analogy," "the family analogy," "the institutional analogy," and "the speech-act analogy" (1-2). Fishelov describes the "biological analogy" as one that draws on Darwinian evolution for its concepts; the "family analogy" relies on Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance. Both of these concepts fit well with what we have discovered about the evolution of artistic genres and with how the mind categorizes. Fishelov also advocates for "a pluralistic approach to genre theory" (2) that directs us to apply one model to some genres and a different model to others, as deemed appropriate. He also turns to philosophy of science to demonstrate the necessity of metaphor and analogies, but does not employ other scientific findings to evaluate which metaphors most closely approximate the workings of the mind. While he mentions a "cognitive approach" in his work as several points, the time at which he wrote (1993) had not yet seen the explosive popularity of cognitive science we see today. As a result, Fishelov's

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9   Most of the work in quantitative text analysis that typifies one branch of digital humanities research
     relies heavily upon classification and the mapping of relationships among texts, a point discussed in
     detail in my concluding chapter.

oversight of this realm leaves him to argue for a plurality of metaphors, rather than ones that accurately reflect contemporary knowledge about classification.

Without grouping and sorting, reducing the specifics of one into the generalities of the many, we are left with a bewildering multiplicity of unique things. To compare is to assert a commonality among things, to group them together by shared traits. Moreover, "most categorization is automatic and unconscious" (Lakoff 6). If we cannot avoid genres, but we recognize that to employ them is, on some level, dishonest to the particularities of the text, where is a middle ground? And what usefulness can genre retain for the critic? To begin, the most useful and pliable metaphors for genre must prevail.

Wai Chee Dimock, like Fishelov, proposes numerous metaphors for genre that avoid the prescriptive problems criticized by Derrida. She alternately calls genre a genealogy, a fractal, and a fluid system. Genre as a kinship system, which muddies "temporal, spatial, and generic lines, invites us to rethink our division of knowledge. There is much rethinking to do" (Dimock 1386). Dimock writes further: "Genres have solid names, ontologized names. What these names designate, though, is not taxonomic classes of equal solidity but fields at once emerging and ephemeral, defined over and over again by new entries that are still being produced" (1379). Dimock turns to Ed Folsom's work on the Walt Whitman Archive and the idea of databases as a way to resolve some of the problems apparent in the ontologized model of genre:

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Stackability, switchability, and scalability are the key attributes of genres when they are seen as virtual. These terms, inspired by the spatial fluidity of the digital medium, bring to mind a comparable fluidity in genres…. The concept of genre has meaning only in the plural, only when that pool is seen as occupied by more than one swimmer. (1379-80)

As I have discussed earlier, genres exist in conversation with one another and with the texts that participate in them. We categorize via difference (and sameness) and for our particular purposes. In Dimock's terms, critical desire allows genres to scale and switch, to become virtual.

With the concept of genre as a database, Dimock also foregrounds the person "using" the genre. In this metaphor, a collection of texts (presumably it includes *all* texts) exists that the critic can query according to any imaginable criteria. The query returns whatever one seeks and thus provides a more dynamic engagement with texts. She calls it a more "fluid" or "liquid" technique of retrieval.[10] The benefit of this metaphor is that it both includes the critic's desires and goals in the construction of a genre and that it assumes that any text can link with any other. One problem with the database metaphor, however, is not with how it is used, but with its implications. It distorts because it is too permissive. There is something to

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10 Lev Manovich writes, "if after the death of God (Nietzche), the end of grand Narratives of Enlightenment (Lyotard) and the arrival of the Web (Tim Berners-Lee) the world appears to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records, it is only appropriate that we will be moved to model it as a database" (194–95). We can frame much scholarship around genre as attempts to develop plausible narratives; Folsom's and Dimock's turn to the database as another model, then, is one that Manovich would argue is opposed to such narratives.

be said for the existing classifications, however "artificial." The classifications used by generations of critics and readers have value precisely because many people found the commonalities between texts persuasive and useful. Literature as a database suggests that any query, however farcical, is acceptable.[11] It neglects the rhetorical nature of genre and the received categories that, even if we recognize them as imposed upon rather than inherent in texts, still function as Jauss's "horizons of expectations." Further, it is not that the database metaphor cannot permit critical history and rhetorical considerations, but that it occludes them to focus instead on the opening of possibility.

Like Dimock, Rosmarin argues for the importance and power of genre as an explanatory tool in explicitly rhetorical terms. She writes, "Once genre is defined as pragmatic rather than natural, as defined rather than found, and as used rather than described, then there are precisely as many genres as we need, genres whose conceptual shape is precisely determined by that need. They are designed to serve the explanatory purpose of critical thought, not the other way around" (25). Her emphasis on critical need and the multiplicity of possible genres coincides with Folsom's suggestion that we consider genre as akin to a database that one can query with nearly infinite search terms. Both critics posit genre as malleable and reflective of critical usefulness (Beebee's "use-value"). While genres, according to such

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11 Automated, machine-learning approaches to the classification of works, which I discuss further in the conclusion, show that there are discoverable patterns of structures and commonalities within corpora that are independent of our existing scholarly expectations. That is to say, structures do exist that computers—with no prior human intervention—also can find.

theories, might multiply beyond recognition and, therefore, usefulness, Rosmarin's insistence on the "explanatory purpose" and persuasiveness of any genre places limits on what one can propose. To neglect the historical reception of any given texts or the critical work preceding one's own would lead to less persuasive power unless the critic were to provide an explicit and detailed case for the necessity of the new genre. Rosmarin also notes that reading a text generically is essentially the same as reading metaphorically: "The primary act of the generic critic is suppositional and metaphoric: let us explain this literary text by reading it in terms of that genre" (40). Thus the intertextual nature of any given text comes to the fore in a generic reading and grants much of the text's possible meaning not just from the single text, but also from its relationship to other, similar texts and genres.

Theorists of genre clearly recognize the difficulties and importance of genre as a categorizing system, as a way of knowing. They have, further, proposed multiple models and potential approaches to genre that allow for sophisticated understandings of groups of texts. Nevertheless, the models proposed by scholars other than those working also with cognitive science, have tended to be speculative and experimental, calls for new ways of reading that do not provide the particulars for how we should answer those calls in practice. It is perhaps unsurprising then that scholars who use genre, but whose primary object of study is not the nature of genre itself, but the texts participating in a given genre, have, by and large, not adopted these new models in service of their research.

GENRE IN PRACTICE

We turn now from genre in theory to genre as practiced in literary scholarship.

Because it is common for critics of fabliaux[12] to begin their work with inquiries into

the nature of the genre itself, this corpus presents a wealth of examples of critics

grappling with issues of categorization. Fabliaux encourage theoretical concerns

about the nature of genre more so than many other kinds of medieval literature,

perhaps because of the relative lack of clearly attested shared features. While they

are invariably in verse and often funny or bawdy, these features hardly seem a

defensible basis for generic classification. The wide variety of subject matter further

complicates the picture, as does the genre's often parodic nature. Parody requires a

familiarity with the conventions of the genres lampooned; as a result, any parodic

genre may seem almost parasitic rather than an independent, stable entity. We can,

thus, turn to fabliaux scholarship to discover what effects the reliance on schemas,

prototype effects, and exempla has on conceptions of genre as applied to a relatively

stable corpus.

The usual starting point for definitions of fabliaux is Bédier's famous line:

"conte à rire en vers." Indeed, a frequent procedure is to begin here, demonstrate

how unsatisfactory it is, offer possible alternatives all of which fall short, then return

to Bédier's definition for lack of a better one. Perhaps because so many have felt

uncomfortable with presuming to capture the complexities of the fabliaux in a motto

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12 It is common in romance, too, but the fabliaux are a more manageable because it is a smaller corpus. In terms of prototype theory, we might consider fabliaux a bounded category that presents prototype effects, whereas romance is one with fuzzy boundaries that allow for gradations of membership.

so short that it serves as a book title, each critic proposes a new set of salient criteria

and structures or simply throws up her or his hands in despair. One recent scholar

who best exemplifies the impulse to delineate the boundaries of fabliaux is Roy J.

Pearcy. He turns to narratology and quantitative analysis to find the most prevalent

structure of fabliaux. While his findings are, themselves, useful for the evidence they

provide of the embodied nature of humor and other thematics in the genre, an issue

to which I will return later, his conclusions are highly prescriptive. But by virtue of

the clarity and strictness of his argument, Pearcy also provides a testable hypothesis

about the structures of fabliaux.[13] Rather than accept the arbitrariness of generic

boundaries, Pearcy insists upon sharp edges. He works "with the single objective of

devising a structural definition of fabliaux sufficiently general to embrace all extant

examples of the genre, and sufficiently *precise* to permit a reasoned discrimination

between narratives with a legitimate claim to *inclusion* in the canon and *others that*

ought by definition to be excluded" (210; emphasis added). The desire to exclude

certain works shows his investment in the model of genre that Derrida holds to be

logically untenable. Rather than participating in a genre, these texts, in Pearcy's

formulation, either belong or they do not.

In a unique divergence from the majority of fabliaux criticism, which

emphasizes the corporeality and materialism that so pervade the genre, Pearcy

argues that the defining characteristic of fabliaux is a logical structure that gives rise

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13   Although I will not attempt to test his hypothesis in this work, I address this possibility for methods of
     quantitative text analysis in the conclusion.

to humor. He develops formulas derived from a narratological analysis to generate his criteria for inclusion or exclusion.[14] He argues, "Logical exchanges which involve some shift in truth-values... constitute a definitive feature of *all fabliaux*" (34; emphasis added). By constructing formulas that capture this "shift in truth-values," he seeks to establish clear generic boundaries. Pearcy ascribes to medieval compilation practices the scholarly acceptance of fabliaux that do not fit his model:

> Some perception of fabliaux as a distinct genre with its own characteristic features clearly influenced this process of selection and assemblage [of manuscripts], but the theoretical principles underlying this procedure are not articulated . . . . [I]t led to the tentative establishment of a corpus which has *a group of identifiably related texts at its nexus*, but extends through *a cortex of hetergeneous materials* with diminishingly recognisable association to the *core group*. (123; emphasis added)

Although Pearcy views such a "group of identifiably related texts" that "extends through a cortex of hetergeneous materials" as a failure on the part of medieval compilers to recognize the salient characteristics of the genre, his description is remarkably close to the model of genre that cognitive science suggests we should adopt.

A "nexus" or "core group" of texts corresponds to exemplars that demonstrate prototypical characteristics. The "diminishingly recognisable

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14   In this respect, Pearcy aligns his work with the methods used by digital humanists interested in quantitative textual analysis.

association" of the other materials likewise match what we should expect to see in any genre model based on familial resemblance and a network of associations. As we move along the network of texts that participate in a genre, some will more closely match our expectations of the prototype while others, because of their variations on these characteristics, match less precisely with the defaults we would otherwise expect. In Lakoff's terms, these are radial categories, where there are "subcategories… all understood as deviations from the central case" (83). These differences do not demand that we exclude the texts for not matching closely enough, but instead that we investigate the significance of the variations. Do they signal an evolution of the genre? Are they reactions against the prototypical texts? What ideological differences, if any, do the changes suggest? These and numerous other questions confront us when we recognize that genres are tools for thought, not essential elements of texts.

Genres, as I have noted earlier, are dynamic across time as well as texts. Pearcy, in fact, begins with a discussion of how fabliaux developed from beast fables. If we can speak of a genre as a thing, it is a thing spread across time and texts, perpetually changing its shape, but slowly. More precisely, the network of associations that we deploy to define a genre are not now the same as they would have been for the "first" author of a fabliaux, which would in turn differ from that of the genre's "last" author.[15] If fabliaux evolved from fables (Pearcy posits a "proto-

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15 "First" and "last" being, of course, arbitrary and ultimately untenable given a diachronic network
     model of genre that exists in the minds of readers and audience rather than in the texts themselves.

fabliaux"), then any justification for excluding some of the texts scholars have identified as fabliaux must be very strong indeed.[16] Pearcy relies on a stable structure for his definition of the genre, but the logic of his choice is problematic. He writes, "Fabliau humor… has some special qualities…. the basis of fabliau humour being logic" (125). He takes an observation about one signifier of genre, albeit a widely attested one, and then uses it as the basis for a definition of the genre itself. He thus makes a circular argument. If we were to read all the "definite" fabliaux and the outliers, then find something that most of them have in common, we could then use that common trait as the foundational criterion and reject all the texts that do not share it. What then happens when we find other texts that are not in the genre that also share these features? Since they were not part of the original sample, we run up against a clear example of selection bias.[17] The very choice of texts limits the possible findings. If, for instance, we want to find what defines a chair, we might

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16 Pearcy proposes some revisions to the canon: "The canon thus predicated does not require any fundamental revision of the fabliau corpus suggested by the editors of *MR* or *NRCF* or by the fabliau inventories proposed in the critical studies of Bédier and Nykrog" (126). If, however, we look at the list of fabliaux that would not make his cut, we find that he proposes to exclude twenty-eight texts, twenty-one of which have been included in either all four or at least three of the authoritative compilations. Since the entire corpus of fabliaux as defined by the *NRCF* contains only 127 works, Pearcy's criteria would thus exclude approximately 22% of the currently accepted texts. We can hardly call cutting the corpus down by more than a fifth not a "fundamental revision." Pearcy would, further, find it "pleasing to exclude *Jouglet*" because of its "scatalogical comedy," but it conforms to the structural criteria he demands and so must remain (131). To exclude *Jouglet* would also "mandate the exclusion of the structurally similar *Le Bouchier d'Abeville*" (131). "While *Jouglet* is sufficiently undistinguished that its loss from the fabliau inventory would be regretted by few, *Le Bouchier d'Abeville* is by *common consent* an outstanding example of fabliau artistry" (132; my emphasis). The common consent Pearcy notes is, as he implicitly acknowledges, perhaps more persuasive than his logical criteria and aesthetic judgment. Critical reception tells us much about what expert readers have found to be the salient characteristics, which can in turn help us discover the (mostly) shared schema at play.

17 It is for this reason that expert practitioners of quantitative text analysis typically suggest increasing the size of one's corpus to include contextualizing works that may relate to, but would not normally be included with the main objects of study.

collect as many examples as possible (putting aside, for the moment, how we would recognize a chair in the first place). We might then find that 80% of all chairs have backs. To then decide that chairs without backs cannot, based on this analysis, any longer be called chairs is illogical. Lacy, in response to scholars who seek exhaustive criteria for a genre, writes: "If this circularity may sometimes be ignored or circumvented in practice, no one has, to my knowledge, managed to resolve it in theory" (25). We find yet another point where a model for genre based on cognitive theory repairs a serious theoretical flaw. While the process of schema creation and revision is necessarily circular and ongoing, it does not lead to the same theoretical shortcomings because it refuses to metaphorize genres as territories or containers. By recognizing the multiplicity of genre models and their distribution in the minds of individual readers, each with a different degree of expertise and varying motivations and investments, we thus avoid logical fallacy.

Despite the zeal for hard boundaries evinced by his work, Pearcy is neither alone in his assumptions about genre nor is his work invalidated as a result. Indeed, the model of genre for which I argue can include Pearcy's findings while recognizing implications unavailable to such work invested in a bounded, essentializing model of genre. He has usefully detailed a clear and strong characteristic of most of the accepted fabliaux. He writes, "What is definitive [about fabliaux] is a plot organized to create at least one comic peripety (reversal of fortune) and anagnorisis (discovery), an effect achieved in fabliau narrative by a logical structure based on

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accidental or carefully engineered false inferences" (9). The peripeties that Pearcy examines almost invariably derive from a failure by the characters to trust the physical evidence and their own senses. That is, the fabliaux that evince Pearcy's logical structure typically present as part of their humor a character who allows language to contradict the senses. By providing a testable hypothesis, Pearcy makes possible further quantitative work on this corpus.

In comparison with Pearcy's research, Lacy works with a suppler model of genre, but one that could also benefit from a more formal statement of genre. He begins with the example of "La Veuve," a text that, for a variety of reasons (not least of which is its remarkably sparse plot), is "on the fringes of the fabliau genre, if it belongs to it at all" (22). It is, in other words, a peripheral text, another indication of the center-periphery schema that characterizes one type of prototype effect. Through the many problems this poem represents to a comprehensive definition of the fabliau genre, Lacy shows how fraught such efforts at classification remain. He prefers an approach that reads texts individually for their unique pleasures and artistry, yet also recognizes that even were we to abandon efforts to slot texts into genres, people will inevitably turn to some other method of classification. As we have seen already, this impulse is a universal trait of human cognition.

From the dilemma posed by a single "fringe" text, Lacy moves to an analysis of the problems with and necessity of genre itself. He acknowledges the dynamic nature of the concept: "Whenever we deal with a text that does not coincide with

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our understanding of a particular genre, we inevitably react in one of two ways: we either *exclude the text from the genre or we broaden the boundaries of the genre*" (23; emphasis added). This description is based on the standard model that imagines genre as a container of texts, a fact signalled by Lacy's use of the metaphor of "boundaries." While the schemata informing genre models are dynamic and under constant revision, they are not containers whose boundaries need contraction or expansion. Instead, the connections between the many disputed criteria are themselves the basis by which we evaluate a text's relationship to a genre. A genre is nothing other than the weighting of those criteria and the connection strengths among them, features that characterize a network.

Through his insistence upon the importance of individual texts, Lacy exposes many of the problems in traditional genre criticism. For example, he writes, "Despite frequent critical assertions to the contrary, we continue in practice to conceive of *chansons de geste*, *romans*, and *fabliaux* as discrete generic entities, and where they appear to overlap or merge... we are likely to leave our generic conceptions intact and consider the particular work an anomaly" (23–24). There are two related issues at play here. Lacy describes the evaluation of a text based on existing schemata for different genres. The failure, then, is a failure to revise our "generic conceptions" based on a seemingly anomalous text. The second issue explains why the reader refuses the dynamic aspect of genre.[18] To avoid the collapse of entire "generic

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18 Lacy's mention of genres that "overlap or merge" hints at the reason for this refusal. Again arises the spectre of the bounded, reified genre. It is a territory containing within its borders all the relevant

conceptions," the unruly works are cast out as anomalies. The specific ideologies and critical investments thus upheld vary, but they undoubtedly make the expulsion yet more attractive.

Lacy also decries the "tyranny of Bédier's definition," which is "so thoroughly ingrained that it may by now shape the thinking even of many critics who consciously reject it" (24). It does indeed seem that many fabliau critics recognize the unsatisfactoriness of Bédier's classic definition yet, since they cannot find a better one, grudgingly return to it in the end. Lacy remarks that Pierre Ménard, in rejecting Bédier's definition, seems instead to argue implicitly that fabliaux are "stories that most people agree are fabliaux" (24, n.9). Although on its surface, this assumption seems even less theoretically tenable (and far less sophisticated) than the many criteria proposed by critics like Pearcy, Bloch, Muscatine, and many other fabliau critics, it is remarkably close to the definition with which we are left when we follow the implications of a cognitive model of genre to their conclusions. Short of mapping the networks describing each critics' understanding of a genre and then comparing them to discover what commonalities present themselves, we have little recourse other than general consensus joined to the close reading of individual texts and quantitative analysis of the entire corpus.[19]

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literary works. Each genre becomes, in Deleuzean terms, a stratum, static and jealously guarded. These texts that suggest merger, then, are agents of deterritorialization that threaten to explode the entire edifice if examined too closely.

19 Such a project would be a fascinating one, the possibilities for which I outline in my concluding chapter.

This reliance on consensus seems, though, more like an exasperated surrender rather than a theoretically informed position. It seems akin to the repeated return to Bédier's tyrannical definition that so often closes (and forecloses) the critical discussions of fabliaux as genre. How, then, do we defend this return to consensus? What new interpretative purchase does this model permit us when we approach the texts, armed with a more sophisticated conception of genre, one that does not seek to tame each text? For one, it demands that we approach each text, as Lacy desires, as a unique witness. Rather than rush past the rough texture of its details to figure out "where it fits," we must slow down and consider to what degree, how, and why each work invokes different generic schemata. This model also makes it possible to see clearly that a work might prime its readers through the invocation of multiple, potentially misleading, schemata for a wide range of genres while still participating primarily in the concerns of its "base" genre. We return, thus, to Derrida's distinction between "belonging to" versus "participating in" a genre. Able to see how a text causes different genre schemata to interact without being then forced to declare the text a "hybrid" (i.e., a monster) or an example of the "overlap or merge" that Lacy mentions, we can sidestep the knot of difficulties traditionally encountered.

We can also more profitably speculate about medieval audiences' conception of genres. While Lacy does consider the critics who "have attempted to define the genre in terms of self-nominated fabliaux, those that are designated as fabliaux by

their own authors, or by scribes," he concludes that this approach is just as fraught

as a circular definition (25). Here the Middle Ages seems staunchly to defend its

alterity. Lacy writes, "The first problem attending such an approach is thus our

inability to know just how concrete and definite might have been the generic

consciousness of the medieval author" (26). It becomes quickly apparent that a

medieval author lacked a systematic, well-bounded understanding of genre and

labelled works almost indiscriminately. For contemporary conceptions of genre, this

seemingly random application of labels is not just disheartening, but unviable as a

grounds for analysis, as Lacy notes. Discussing Willem Noomen's and Janice Hewlett

Koelb's works on self-designated fabliaux, Lacy declares that there is "considerable

doubt [about] the reliability of self-nomination: if nearly twenty percent of the

authors are acknowledged to be, at best, only partially right about their own works,

we cannot be entirely confident about the others" (27).[20]

Lacy nevertheless makes the useful distinction between lexicographic studies

that seek to know "what a term may have meant at a certain time or to a certain

author" and "the critical question concerning what texts we are going to designate

as fabliaux" (26, 27). Indeed, the confusion induced by the lexicographic study

strongly implies that our medieval author lacked the sort of systematic conception

of genre we now desire. Yet, one might argue that his lack of system frees him from

the constraints of an untenable theoretical edifice and places his work closer to the

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20 A similar situation obtains when we attempt to define "romance." In my chapter on chivalric romance, I
    discuss this point at greater length by turning to the work of Melissa Furrow and Lin Yiu on medieval
    lists of romances that provide evidence for a medieval conception of that genre's prototype.

processes of categorization that are actually at work in the mind. Just as the cognitive model allows us to see the multiple schemata at work in texts and the dynamic, evolving nature of genres, perhaps the seeming confusion in the Middle Ages about genre is, rather, a reflection not only of this dynamism, but also of the recognition (even if unconscious) that texts do not belong behind the walls of genre.

This speculation, though, seems to leave us with little, if any, ground on which to stand if we want to study genre. As Lacy puts it, "I may appear to be destroying a useful and accepted generic label without replacing it by anything concrete" (29). But by weakening the bond between text and genre and thus shifting genres from a container to a hermenuetic classification, we enable entirely new sets of questions at textual, generic, and metacritical levels. Further, we can ask not only how a given text invokes reactions in the audience, but also how the author interrogates, subverts, revises, or otherwise works with the conventions.[21] "We can," Lacy writes, "isolate other characteristics of the form, provided we *recognize* them as characteristics, and not as criteria on which we can construct a rigid definition" (30, italics in original). "We should recognize that our terminology is no more than a convention, capable sometimes of facilitation, but just as often impeding, our understanding of texts" (34). Lacy's approach thus recuperates the artistry of individual texts and puts them in dialogue with the generic conventions

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21 We do, here, run into difficulties of chronology, manuscript dating and transmission, unknown or poorly defined audiences, and the other host of other problems that attest to the alterity of the Middle Ages, but at least we can assume that rather than strict adherence to a static, bounded genre or unartistic failures, each text might invoke the relevant schemata for strategic and ideological purposes that we can investigate and interpret.

rather than judging them based on deviations from the proscribed norms. We thus return to the necessity for a model of genre that provides an account of how genres are structured and how they work to shape meaning.

Theorists of genre have approached or fully adopted recent work on categorization, but practitioners of genre have tended to use older, less interrogated models in their scholarship. Nevertheless, we find examples of prototype effects and unconscious center-periphery and container schemata in this scholarship, which prototype theory predicts. But, to develop a more sophisticated theory of genre is not, in itself, sufficient. We must also apply it, which is a larger challenge, especially if we wish (as I do) to compare multiple genres to one another. We need, then, a feature that we can assume will be present in nearly all our texts, but which will vary according to the demands of the text's participation in different genres. To find such a feature, I return now to another fundamental aspect of human cognition: its embodiment.

BODY THEORIES
Genres and bodies are closely intertwined through the fundamental embodiment of human cognition and the necessity of categorization. Both in the secondary critical literature and in the primary literary works we find traces of embodied cognition, representations of different genres of bodies, and assumptions about how genre works that determine which bodies stand out, if any. Much of the current state of cognitive science demonstrates that the idea of the body, although already a broadly

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investigated topic in humanistic studies, still offers new realms for discovery and interpretation. The body and genre are linked at a deep level in human cognition in ways that grant insights into literature and the discussions surrounding it.

Before examining these ideas, however, a clarification of the term "body" is in order. By "body" I do not mean only the physical, biological human body, but a nexus of multiple overlapping types. Johnson provides a useful taxonomy of bodies that includes physical, ecological, phenomenological, social, and cultural bodies. He writes: "This complex view of multiple aspects of our embodiment thus requires us to always entertain multiple methods of inquiry and levels of explanation for anything pertaining to our body-mind" (278). We must, in other words, when we discuss "the body," keep in mind its dynamism, its situatedness, its apparent concreteness, and its multiple levels of possible meaning. The "body" is usually understood as the individual, personal, human (or monstrous, animal, etc.) body as lived by the individual, as represented in the world and literature, and as understood by society. The relationships of bodies to one another, however, are missing in this definition. The circuits among bodies give meaning, effect experience, and set parameters for individual identities. Thinkers as diverse as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Haraway, and Butler (to name a few) have persuasively argued that the body serves as both a site on which identity is inscribed and a site from which identity arises. Scholars like Grosz and Johnson have fruitfully synthesized

the work of contemporary cognitive neuroscientists to confirm and extend these insights.

Butler argues that, just as gender is a social construction formed in and sustained by discourse, so too is the sexed body. Though commonly positioned as an essential, physical ground for gender, sex is likewise discursive. Yet, sex is defined as extra-discursive and unruly in order to provide a foundation for concepts like gender. Butler states that sex "is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (1-2). Sex thus requires continual reiteration in order to maintain the fiction that it is essential rather than constructed. The necessary reiteration of this norm shows that bodies never quite comply with the norm "by which their materialization is impelled" (2). Through a construction of the body and sex as material and therefore stable, discourse thus provides an apparently certain foundation for gender and sex differences. Butler thus argues that the idea of a stable, self-sufficient body is a fiction used to create a particular set of possible identities. Just as one's body image can and does change, resulting in a modified sense of self, so too can the sexual body—often understood as fundamentally unchanging—shift.

Grosz likewise argues that the body is generative of identity and subjectivity rather than a parchment upon which identity, already somehow present in the mind, is written. Though even those most invested in examining the mind as the seat

of identity do not fail to note that the body has an influence on one's sense of self, the strength of that influence is often understated and made to seem as if it works only on the margins rather than at the center. Grosz corrects this mistake by uncovering how the body asserts its presence. In her synthesis of phenomenology and cognitive science, she finds that not only is body image hard-wired into our consciousness, but also that skin does not restrict the borders of body image.[22] Instead, it can and does expand to encompass tools and other objects. The body is far more fluid, dynamic, and fundamental than previously understood. It can function as an assemblage of the body and tools, bodies and other objects, or as a dynamic series of flows. The contextual, dynamic nature of the body thus parallels the nature of genre.

Further, her careful consideration of sexual difference is of particular importance when discussing medieval representations of bodies as the vast majority of the extant texts were, as is well known, written by men. Often, these men seemed to feel no qualms about repeating and extending some of the more vicious misogynistic tropes of the Middle Ages. Therefore, much of what we can discover about medieval bodies is limited to heteronormative identities constructed via an opposition between masculine and feminine. While many scholars have written

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22 Grosz's review of the work on body-image demonstrates its centrality to our self-conception. She turns to work on phantom limbs to provide "perhaps the most convincing evidence regarding the existence of the body image" (70). The persisting sensory experience of a missing limb after amputation demonstrates that a model of the body exists in the mind that does not exactly correspond with our physical body, but that attempts instead to provide a representative map of the physical body. This body image, though, is "in a continuous process of production and transformation" (Grosz 75). Body image is universal, persistent, and fundamental to self-conception. Johnson also considers neurocognitive work on body image in his development of an embodied aesthetics.

extensively about women, feminism, and gender in the Middle Ages, it has often, as a

perhaps unavoidable result of the nature of the available texts, been through a

deconstructive or queering approach that has sought the feminine within male-

dominated discourse. In any examination of generic bodies—that is, the different

representation of bodies available to different genres—we must keep this fact in

mind. For example, E. Jane Burns, in her examination of Old French literary texts,

attempts to recuperate the "other voices that speak against and dissent from the

dominant tradition" through what she calls "bodytalk," the act of listening to how

the female body can "be heard to rewrite the tales in which they appear" (7). Burns

urges an examination of the body as a site of ineradicable dissent.[23] Throughout the

chapters that follow, I thus endeavor to remain alert to the different sexed and

gendered bodies and how they relate to generic meaning production.

Supporting the work of these scholars, who insist upon the centrality of the

body, the field of embodied cognition also shows that we cannot neglect the role of

the body. Among other representatives of this "third wave" of cognitive science,

Lakoff and Johnson establish the body not only as indispensible, but as the basis for

meaning and cognition itself; Johnson, in particular, shares Grosz's desire to undo

the dualism inherent in the idea of a mind-body split. In his work on the "bodily

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23 Burns's emphasis on the medieval female body derives from the position of the female subject in the
Middle Ages. Butler points out that matter in the Middle Ages was often conceived of as generative,
hence associated with the feminine. In numerous medieval genres the body-as-feminine appears as a
strong basis for identity. Indeed, many medievalists have used Butler's insights because of their
applicability to the Middle Ages. One striking parallel, which Caroline Walker Bynum has examined,
is the medieval theory that posited a binary of spirit and flesh, gendered as male and female. Society
associated women with flesh in order to construct a stable, masculine identity that could then be
distanced from the necessity of considering the male body.

sources of meaning, imagination, and reasoning," Johnson argues that all metaphors and other seemingly abstract thought derive from our bodily experience (ix). Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson convincingly explore the metaphoric nature of human thought and its grounding in our embodiment. Even our most abstract concepts find their first source in phenomenological experience. Like Grosz, Johnson argues that "what we call 'mind' and what we call 'body' are not two things, but rather aspects of one organic process, so that all our meaning, thought, and language emerge from the aesthetic dimensions of this embodied activity" (1). Like Butler, Johnson notes that the body tends toward self-concealment; many aspects of the body go largely unnoticed by the self to make our experience of the world seem immediate and automatic rather than mediated. The body's self-concealment, in turn, leads to the body-mind dualism he and Grosz, among others, seek to abolish.

Because he sees the body as the basis for all human meaning, Johnson calls for an aesthetics of the body: "Aesthetics is properly an investigation of everything that goes into human meaning-making… [that] must… explore how meaning is possible for creatures with our types of bodies, environments, and cultural institutions and practices" (xi). We can then apply this call to literature, too often viewed as the disembodied production of great minds, to argue for the necessity of the body to artistic production. Given that literary production derives from particular aspects of human cognition and that cognition is inherently embodied, it is not surprising that examinations of the body in literature find fertile ground. We can, in fact, argue that

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practically all literary works will offer some representation of or influence from the many bodies—physical, social, phenomenological, etc.—that comprise human existence. We must listen, then, for the "bodytalk" in these works. We can take this point further, however, to discover how literary bodies differ among genres and how they serve as cues for our perception of genres. Different constructions of bodies in a literary text will serve as valid cues towards generic categorization.

GENERIC BODIES/EMBODIED GENRES

Because genre is a category governed by familial resemblence, not by strict sets of definitional characteristics and because embodied experience is central to meaning and metaphor, then we should include in our list of important features representations of the body when examining a genre. Further, because the body is central to identity and cognition and the circuits of identities differ among genres, the types of bodies should likewise vary based on the demands of the genre and the desires of the author. Genres in which little or no representation of bodies appears should be rare or signify an unusual purpose. The connection between genres and bodies, however, does not stop at representation and identity.

Desire defines both bodies and genres. In literature, what the author emphasizes, how the personal bodies of characters appear, how the characters interact, descriptions of the physical—all signal identity and textual or authorial desire. We not only inscribe identity on bodies, but identity arises from it. The two are inseparable. What would Chaucer's Prioress be if she were not so fastidious

when she eats, if she did not carefully wipe her lips clean? What Miller would we have if he did not have the large wart on his nose and a shock of red hair? It is not, as the critical locution commonly implies, that some essential character or identity exists that the author or reader writes onto a body. Such a formula is backwards. Instead, the author leads our eyes to the parts of the body necessary for the character and for the plot; the author's desires combined with our own preconceptions often guide what we observe.

A critic's definition of genre sets parameters for the available configurations of bodies. Types of bodies that do not fit the generic definition will become invisible while those that sustain the genre become a central focus. Karma Lochrie's work provides an example of this operation. Lochrie separates the genre of mystical discourse from hagiography and autobiography, two genres which, she claims, critics often conflate with mystical writing. She writes, "our readings of mystical texts become filtered through our *expectations* of... other kinds of texts. Such readings *often reinforce the categories* we use.... The categories themselves foreclose investigation of mystical texts" (61; emphasis added). Although Lochrie calls them "categories," she is implicitly discussing genre and our horizon of expectations. She offers a definition for the genre of "mystical texts" that centers on how the mystic relates to and represents his or her own body and the body of Christ and his sufferings: "From the mystic's marvelous body the marvelous text is produced. From the mystic's covetous longing and fleshly abundance, two bodies become inscribed"

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(68). Lochrie makes visible a mystical body that founds the genre she defines, thus inexorably linking the possible representations of body with the genre. In her formulation, a mystic who does not empty herself of ego and body so that she might fill the void left behind with a naming of another, divine body is no mystic at all; her text would, therefore, not be a mystical one and must reside outside the genre. Ironically, Lochrie locates the fissured body—a site of abjection open to redemption through its porousness—in the tightly-defined genre of the mystical text. The fissured body comes to define a genre, a metaphoric body of another kind.

Another critic to note a link between the body and genre is Tison Pugh, who proposes an explicit link between sexuality and genre: "Human sexuality is an ideological genre" (1). He argues that just as literature is classified according to various tropes, so too is human sexuality classified according to discursive and somatic signs of sexuality. In making the direct link between genre and sexuality, Pugh also draws a link between genre and body. For instance, he argues that there are no queer genres, only queered or queering genres. This crucial distinction implies that, for the queer to appear in a genre, the author (or critic) must play against the horizon of expectations to destabilize the normative ideology and permit the presence of taboo, a tension that we will see at play, in particular, among the chivalric romances I examine. He writes, "As a strategy of resistance to ideological heteronormativity, the act of queering genres allows the taboo to be present within the familiar structures of recognizable genres" (2). As the Gaunt quotation I

provided at the beginning of this introduction argues, genre is ideological and engaged with the ideologies of sex and gender. The manner in which genres can be queered is strikingly similar to how bodies can be queer(ed). The queer body unsettles the heteronormative horizon of expectations about bodies to permit taboo identities and actions. For example, transsexual bodies, transhuman and posthuman bodies, and cyborg bodies all queer expectations and gain their meaning through the interplay among genres of human bodies. Just as a literary text gains much of its meaning through its relation to genres and their relationships to one another, a human body's meaning arises largely out of its distance from the normative, heterosexual body-genre.

Pugh also points out, as Alastair Fowler and other genre critics do, that "genres are inextricably connected to the social world in which they are created" (7). Therefore, a responsible examination of medieval genres must take into account both the historical status and understanding of any posited genre and the historical social conditions within which the genres lived.[24] It is not enough simply to compare, for instance, two Arthurian romances from different centuries on the basis of their generic status. We must also investigate the ways those texts modify generic conventions in response to historical conditions. Heng makes this argument when she argues that one of romance's primary function is to mediate between social and cultural tensions in order to permit a safe vocabulary with which to discuss such

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24 Though Martindale argues that genres evolve based on the pressure for novelty, the sociocultural
  context of an artistic work nevertheless often determines the specifics of the work.

potentially disruptive issues and anxieties: "Among the genre's objects of attention are crises of collective and communal identity... as well as pressing economic, military, religious, and social conundrums of different kinds" (3). Romance, like other genres, requires that we interrogate the "*structure of desire* which powers its narrative" (Heng 4). This definition allows her to argue that monstrous bodies are such because they partake of themes monstrous to the genre such as, in the case of romance, monetary economies. In her reading, the monstrous body is a generic signifier of the intrusion of typically non-romantic concerns like economics. This type of generic body, then, can mark places where the traditional themes of the romance genre falter.

The role of the body and the role of genre are intertwined. Both arise from the peculiarities of embodied human cognition. We can understand better how their entanglement works and why by looking to the processes that make up that cognition. Although literary theorists and philosophers have approached (quite closely, at times) the interpretive purchase a theory of embodied genre provides, the affordances of their theories have remained obscured by the lack of a scientific grounding. Far from calling for a scientific revolution in literary studies, however, in this dissertation I pursue the goal of joining the practice of close reading to a theoretical edifice informed by gender studies, cognitive science, and genre studies to find where such a synthesis can take traditional methods of literary analysis. In the chapters that follow, I focus on a few exemplary texts, chosen in part for their

common discussion in the critical literature and for the interesting ways in which they join questions of the generic with embodiment to convey meaning. My readings are by necessity impressions of the genre systems in which these texts engage, not definitive statements about entire corpora.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Fabliaux: Bodies, Things, and Desire

In this chapter, I consider in detail three fabliaux, two in Old French and one in Middle English: "Constant du Hamel," "Aloul," and Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale." One theme that connects each of these texts (and indeed, many other fabliaux) is the joint interest in sexual violence and participation in multiple genres to convey meaning. Concerns about the ability of language to signify, about the role of euphemism and its relationship to our senses, and about our embodiment more broadly, all animate the genre. Given these topics, my readings engage with feminist theory and medieval beliefs about love, the body, and sex. I show, in particular, how poets deploy phenomenological and generic bodies to prime audience expectations via the invocation of other genres like romance, epic, and courtly love poems so that those expectations may be thwarted to shock, titillate, and produce meaning.

Gawain in Chivalric Romance

This chapter, like the previous, provides detailed readings of three texts. Each of these is a late medieval, verse romance that features Gawain in a prominent role. Because of the diversity of the romance field of texts (I hestitate even to call it a genre), I focus more narrowly on the representations of a single, exemplary knight

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who often stands for the concerns of chivalry as a whole, or, as Cohen phrases it,

"the knightly definitional system for which Gawain stands" (94). Any treatment of

Gawain, however, must also encompass the characters with whom he commonly

appears: giants and Loathly Ladies. The comparison among these differently

configured bodies and the spaces in which they interact allows me to argue that the

seemingly stable world of chivalric romance in fact shows a deep engagement with

sociohistoric circumstances and, like the fabliaux, examinations of what it means to

be a woman or a man in medieval society.

Bury St Edmunds
Unlike the two chapters that precede it, this chapter focuses entirely on a single text:

Jocelin of Brakelond's *Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds*. Rather than attempt a generic

reading, which would need to encompass not only Latin chronicles but also

hagiography, I focus here primarily upon the ways categories of bodies intersect

with physical space to serve the political, religious, and economic ends of the Abbot

Samson. We thus find that the physical body of St Edmund becomes the basis for

constructions of corporate identities in ways that have chilling historical

consequence through the massacre and expulsion of medieval Jewish populations.

The basis for these circuits of identity, however, arise through the bodytalk in key

hagiographic passages that are mixed within the pages of Jocelin's chronicle. Genre

thus enables Jocelin's work in the chronicle. We also see, in this chapter, the crucial

importance of categories and embodiment more broadly.

Conclusion: Towards a Quantitative Study of Genre

Throughout this dissertation, I treat only a handful of texts in detail, largely by necessity. A truly comparative study at the level of genre would require the quantitative analysis of several large corpora and related texts using a variety of methods now common in digital humanities research. In this conclusion, then, I review the current state of this field and describe a path for future research that could deepen our understanding not only of these different corpora, but also of the nature of embodied genre. Such a project would include methods for quantitative textual analysis, the creation of research and exploration platforms, and the challenges faced when approaching the particularly intractable materials of medieval studies by digital ways.

Fabliaux: Bodies, Desires, and Things

The fabliaux is a key genre for my interests in genre and embodiment. As discussed in the introduction, critics who treat the genre almost invariably begin with an attempt to fix its borders. Even when the problem receives little attention, rare is the scholar who does not at least acknowledge the contested, blurry boundaries of the genre and the difficulties encountered when one tries to define the corpus of poems that comprise the fabliaux. Unfortunately, many of the critics worry because they intuit the poor fit of the model of genre as a container or a territory, but cannot see another way out. The criticism on fabliaux offers, therefore, an opportunity to demonstrate both the unnecessary limitations imposed by the prevailing model of genre—the knots into which it can tie us are on full display— and the possibility a model for genre informed by cognitive science permits for more effective interpretations.

Because it is standard practice for critics of fabliaux to begin their work with inquiries into the nature of the genre itself, we have in the corpus of this literary criticism a wealth of examples of critics grappling with issues of categorization. The fabliaux itself seem to engage theoretical concerns about the nature of literary genre more so than many other medieval texts. This may be because of the relative lack of clearly attested features across all texts. While they are invariably in verse and often funny or bawdy, these features hardly seem a defensible basis for generic classification. The wide variety of subject matter further complicates the picture, as

does the genre's often parodic nature. For if parody requires a familiarity with the conventions of the genres lampooned, then any parodic genre also comes to seem almost parasitic rather than an independent, stable entity. Furthermore, as cognitive science now provides ample evidence of the mental apparatus that undergirds acts of categorization, we can turn to the fabliaux critics to discover what effects the reliance on schemas, prototype effects, and exemplum has on conceptions of genre as applied to a concrete set of fairly stable texts.

The usual starting point for definitions of the genre is Bédier's famous line: "conte à rire en vers" (12). Indeed, a frequent manuever is to begin here, demonstrate how unsatisfactory it is, offer possible alternatives all of which fall short, then return to Bédier's definition for lack of a better one. Perhaps because so many have felt uncomfortable with presuming to capture the complexities of the fabliaux in a motto so short it serves as a book title, each critic (it often seems) proposes a new set of salient criteria and structure or simply throws up her or his hands in despair. Behind these impulses, however, stand the same cognitive structures of schemas, prototypes, and favorite exempla. Literary theories are, themselves, often different manifestations of focii for instantiating these methods of understanding.

As well as being a *locus classicus* for critical anxiety over genre boundaries, the fabliaux themselves are persistently material and corporeal, in their themes, composition, and performance. They bear the traces of a deep embodiment that

reaches down even to the level of the linguistic. In their pervasive materialism, which Charles Muscatine has detailed, and the prevalence of sex and violence, the fabliaux insist upon the importance of bodies to our appreciation of their artistry and troubling humor. Holly Crocker writes, "fabliaux pressure different fabrications of the body, examining the ways that certain bodies are animated, covered, or codified…. Fabliaux exhibit a canny awareness about the instability of discrete bodily formations" (2). Fabliaux provide a stunning panoply of sex (pursued, enjoyed, taken), violence, bodies (castrated, violated, injured), and materiality. Muscatine furthers this observation by examining the importance of physical items beyond the human body: tables, chairs, drinks, and similar items that ground the poems in the concrete. The fabliau concern with the material world intimates the genre's regular intersections with embodied cognition and phenomenology. In this chapter, I examine how generic expectations, sexuality, and violence intersect in three fabliaux, "Constant du Hamel," "Aloul," and Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale." Each poem constructs meaning, in part, through the invocation of tropes from courtly love literature and other genres and, in another part, through engagement with sexual violence and rape culture. I trace these core generic concerns through these texts, the related scholarship that discusses these issues, and examine what these three texts can tell us about some of the moves common to the genre.

Muscatine's analysis of the "fabliau ethos" is particularly amenable to a cognitive

inflection. Muscatine argues that the genre is "preoccupied with *things*, with parts of

the body, articles of clothing, farm animals, baskets, turds, tubs" (59; emphasis in

original). Whether central to the plot or not, the fabliau emphasis on things provides

the reader a sense of "the texture of the world that is being depicted" (60). Despite

the common lack of detailed plots or characterization, the fabliaux often induce a

sense of "dense physical reality" (62). While this sense may well be a literary

artifact, more a poetic choice than a transparent view of medieval life (a potential

trap Howard Bloch warns against), the raw materials and their combinations must,

of course, derive from actual lived experience in the Middle Ages for their use to

have been comprehensible to a medieval audience. They are, in effect, props that

ground the worlds manufactured by fabliaux. By thus keeping the contemporary

audiences in mind, we can begin to consider not only the significance of the

fabliaux's persistent materialism, but also how we can recuperate it in cognitive

terms. Although much of our discussions of medieval audience mentality must

remain speculative, a cognitively-informed reflection on the ontological aspects of

existence as represented in literature lessens the degree of speculation necessary.

This perception, however, Bloch denounces as a naive acceptance of the

poetic illusion for realistic representation. Before we can continue to a buttressing

of Muscatine's description with theories about embodied cognition, therefore, we

must treat with Bloch's objections:

Because these tales seem to contain a more rounded spectrum of social types

than the epic, the lyric, or the romance.... and because the vision of human

nature they portray appears on the surface closer to a kind of grasping

materialism than to the idealism of courtly forms, scholars traditionally have

concluded that the fabliaux offer a privileged view of the way things really

were in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. (4)

Muscatine, in fact, makes the type of claim against which Bloch rails when he writes,

"Perhaps just because of their unpretentiousness and candor, the fabliaux can be

trusted to reveal genuine features of medieval sensibility that other genres tend to

conceal" (2). We have, then, in the opening pages of books published in the same

year by two major scholars (albeit from different generations) directly competing

claims about what kinds of conclusions we can plausibly draw from the fabliaux.

Bloch's cautions and his subsequent deconstruction of the fabliaux that

demonstrates their inherently poetic, literary nature might lead us to dismiss out of

hand the sort of approach championed by Muscatine. Bloch also remarks that "the

assumed transparency of the fabliaux has been summoned to prove just about

anything and everything concerning the social reality of the High Middle Ages" (5);

this is a rather damning indictment of scholarship that takes at face value the

materialism of the genre, which includes the work of Jospeh Bédier and Per Nykrog,

among others. Much of the criticism along this contested line emphasizes the

consistent appearance of the human body in its many forms. Bloch, however, points

out that this often results in a critical "conflation of the body of representation and the body" (9). That is, critics fail to distinguish between the "real" body (or medieval perceptions thereof) and the literary purposes behind representations of the body.

Bloch persuasively argues that the fabliaux "cast doubt upon the adequacy of language ever to render even the simplicity of the body" (18). Further, "if the fabliaux have any coherence as a generic grouping... this unity lies... in the sustained reflection upon literary language writ so large across these rhymed comic tales whose subject, mimetic realism notwithstanding, is the nature of poetry itself" (19). Here Bloch questions not only the criteria by which critics argue for the generic coherence of the fabliaux, but also the meaning of their "mimetic realism." Even so, in his suggestion that we question the coherence of the texts, he postulates, much as Pearcy does (though without the call to exclude texts that fail to fit his model), a single, overriding element by which we can understand the genre. His phrase "the simplicity of the body," moreover, suggests a view of the body at odds with the complex, multifaceted body contemporary theorists accept. The cognitive models that explain how we construct genres requires skepticism about any claims for a single unifying characteristic. We can incorporate such strongly attested features into our networked model of a genre as particularly salient, but we must consistently avoid assuming that whatever feature one critic finds most important would be relevant to any given fableor, his audience, or other literary critics and modern readers.

Bloch traces the metaphor of the "ill-fitting cloak" as representative of fabliaux's claims about the insufficiency of language accurately to represent reality and the medieval view of poetry as inherently deceptive. "The metaphoric equation of language and clothing, the insufficiency of both to cover what is conceived... to be the naked body of Nature, and the inherent scandal associated with the cover-up of such a failure," while not exclusive to the fabliaux, are nevertheless especially present in the genre (Bloch 34). Rather than an idiosyncrasy of the fabliaux, Bloch argues that the equation of language with clothing is "evident across a wide range of generic types" and indicates a wide-spread medieval conception of language that is "particularly well developed in the fabliaux" (60). He thus continues his argument against those who would interpret fabliaux as somehow transparent by pointing out its continuities with a broad swath of other literary forms. Bloch also questions the body beneath the clothes. If language is always ill-fitting, then what of the body it attempts to cover? Bloch claims "the body itself is also never whole" (60). Dismemberment in the form of detached sexual organs, castration, and the "general fetishization of body parts within the fabliaux" all point back, in Bloch's reading, to the problem of signification (63). Rather than a stable sign of reality, the body "derives its significance from the subject with which it comes in contact" (67). On this point, Bloch's argument intersects with Butler's about the creation through discourse of sex.

It is clear that in the work of Bloch, Muscatine, and Cohen (among many others), the place of the body in constructing medieval identity is central. From a cognitive standpoint, this fact is unsurprising. Indeed, it would be more shocking were this not true. As human thought is inherently and persistently embodied, it is only natural that poets and critics both find representing and analyzing the body and its relationships to its material surroundings a consistently fertile field. If we assume that authors wish to be comprehensible to their audience, then it is only logical that they would conjure with one of the most universal aspects of human experience: our embodiment. Because, however, the meaning of bodies arises from context, purpose, ideology, generic expectations, and interaction with other material objects (whether represented or actual), there is a wide latitude for experimentation and interpretation. The body is an unstable, ideologically-informed construct.

Whereas Bloch provides an allegorical reading to determine the significance of the body in the fabliaux, Muscatine insists that "the hedonism and materialism" of the genre corroborate "the historical picture provided by socioeconomic facts" and are, in fact, "more precise, more accurate, and more complex evidence" (169). This declaration claims precisely the translucency for the genre that Bloch decries. Yet both authors recognize the importance of the physical for these texts. How, then, can they be reconciled? These two contemporaneous critics engage the genre at radically different registers. Bloch's allegorical reading of the body and subsequent

examination of how the fabliaux deconstruct the possibility of stable signification is a reading divorced from how we might plausibly have expected the general medieval audience to have interpreted these works. While clerks and other scholars of the time might, indeed, have allegorized the fabliaux in such a way, had they turned their analytical powers to the genre, Bloch's approach loses sight of the physical reality of fableor and audience. His caution that the fabliaux do not lack artistry and are not to be swallowed uncritically as transparent windows onto medieval conditions is indespensible. Still, he denies the fabliau body its flesh.

Muscatine, on the other hand, responds to the texts in a fashion more aligned with the historical conditions of creation and performance. Though Bloch's caution must inform our readings of the fabliaux,[25] Muscatine's emphasis on the materialism and hedonism of the poems, when considered in cognitive terms, allows us further insights into how a medieval audience might have responded. As cognitive genre theory suggests, the audience need not relate to the poems monolithically. There can be both appreciation of the artistic effects such as parody or invocation of other genres and the seeming reality of the settings and corporeality of the characters. The fabliaux activate multiple associative networks in parallel, leading to novel combinations of realms not normally associated with one another, combinations that, in turn, cause pleasure and extend meaning precisely by crossing the lines between abstract, artistic, and realistic. Rather than insist upon the purely artificial

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25 Indeed, my analysis of the parodic elements of many fabliaux and the ways in which they conjure with
    multiple genre schemata implicitly acknowledges the literariness of the genre while also expecting that
    the audience would have recognized these elements.

nature of the poems or their historical embeddedness and reflectionist nature (to use Martindale's term), we can instead steer a middle way that recognizes the complex yet comprehensible responses of a medieval audience.

RAPE, COMPETITION, AND EMBODIMENT IN "CONSTANT DU HAMEL"
Although at over nine hundred lines, "Constant du Hamel" is significantly longer than many fabliaux, the poem presents many of the characteristic concerns and themes of the genre. Sexualized violence against both men and women, use of chivalric romance schemata, a persistent materialism, and a seeming inversion of the social hierarchy and power relations pervade the poem. In it, three different men, a priest, a provost, and a forester, attempt to woo the title character's wife, Dame Ysabeau. She is, in fact, rather than her husband Constant du Hamel, the central figure of the increasingly complicated plot. In brief, the plot follows the attempted seduction of Ysabeau by three men in the village, each of whom she rebuffs. The three conspire to destroy Constant's finances, thereby forcing Ysabeau to submit to them. She, however, tricks each man into thinking she has accepted and has them strip and get in a bath tub, whereupon she tells them her husband is coming home, leading each to hide in a barrel of feathers. From the barrel, each man then watches as Constant, at Ysabeau's direction, rapes their wives in punishment. After these scenes, the men are chased through the town by Constant's dogs and left horribly, and perhaps fatally, injured. The use of three men rather than one allows the poet to repeat and vary the action. Each plot point is thus trebled throughout the

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poem for a variety of effects. The multiplication of punishments is, likewise, another feature common to the genre seen in other works like "Les trois Boçus" and which serves to drive home the poem's message and emphasize important themes.

Immediately after the poet tells us that the poem will be about sir Constanz du Hamel, he shifts to a description of "Dame Ysabeau," "qui mout estoit cortoise dame / Et bele et gente en avenant: / El païs n'avoit si plaisant, / Tant covoitie a decevoir" ["who is a very courtly woman / And beautiful and gentle and agreable: / The country had none so pleasing, / Many desired to deceive/seduce (her)"] (6-9). Although the poet calls his work both "une aventure" and a "flabel" (2, 4) in the first few lines, thus self-nominating the genre of his work, the description of Ysabeau engages with courtly love conventions, which will persist through much of the poem in various forms. The first man to assail Ysabeau is the priest, who like her other would-be paramours, offers her jewels and money for her favors. The tone and imagery parody the conventions of courtly love. Ysabeau is, here, well-defended and "difficult to attack" so that he can "make no conquest there." The imagery of an assault against a fortified, well-guarded castle connects the first three approaches to Ysabeau; each man offers her wealth for sex, but is firmly rebuffed by her courtly refusals. Each suitor then departs anguished by love. The priest, for example, leaves wounded by the dart of love ("Malement l'a blecié li dart / Qui l'a parmi les elz navré, / Et si fort el cuer hurté / Que d'amors se tressue et gient" [34–7]). She leaves the second man to make an attempt, the town's provost, rejected in the street and

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recalling "Qu'el a gent cors et dolz senblant, / Le vis traitiz et avenant, / Les elz vers et bouche petite: / Ne porroit pas estre descrite / Par le prevost sa grant beauté!" ["That she has an elegant and lovable body, / A well-rounded and beautiful face, / Shining eyes, a small mouth; / It could not be described / By the provost her great beauty"] (81-85). The combination of the inexpressibility topos with the review of her features typical to courtly love continues the pseudo-elevated tone of the poem. Because the poet labels it a "flabel," however, we vacillate in our categorization, continually revising our predictions and experiencing a tension between the courtly formulae and our expectations of fabliaux.

The poet consistently deploys markers of more "elevated" literary genres to make the revenge that Ysabeau and Constant take upon her trio of suitors all the more shocking. For instance, Ysabeau remains so upset by the second man's unwelcome advances that the next day she is moved to tears and visits the "holy church" to hear the service and, we presume, receive some solace in her faith. On the way home, though, the forester accosts her with the offer of his ring to have "congié / De baisier cele bele bouche, / Qui tant par est vermeille et douce" ["permission / To kiss this beautiful mouth / Which is so red and sweet"] (107–109). But "cele respont comme cortoise" ["she responds with courtliness"] (110) and rebuffs him as well. She further invokes not only her own marriage vows and the faith she owes her husband, as she does with the other men, but here reminds the forester of his own wife: "Vostre feme me di l'autrier / Qu'el n'avoit par vos se mal non. / Vos en

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avrez mal gerredon, / Quant que ce soit, ou tost ou tart!" ["Your wife lamented to me

the other day / That she had with you such unhappiness; / You will have of it evil

recompense, / Whenever it be, either early or late"] (125–28). While given the tone

of the poem to this point and Ysabeau's consistently gentle behavior, we read the

promise of "evil recompense" here as formulaic, Ysabeau's later revenge makes us,

upon returning to these earlier lines, wonder if she is not already plotting against

the men despite her elevated speech and professions of piety. If so, then we see in

retrospect that her construction as a courtly lady generates a productive tension

with her role as primary actor in the fabliau plot. She represents, in fact, a recurring

character in fabliaux: one who straddles multiple genre schemata and, through the

tension thus created, enables much of the action.

 After establishing the lady's character through both actions and speech, the

poet next cements the villainous nature of the three men. In their cups one day, the

three discuss their desire for her and consider how best to obtain her. They then

hatch a plan to ruin Constant and thus force her to seek their aid after they have

brought the couple low by poverty and hunger. The priest asks his companions, "Ne

somes nos assez puissanz / Por anienter dant Coutanz?" ["Are we not powerful

enough / To bring low Don Constant?"] (176–77). The opposition between Constant,

himself a mere peasant with a beautiful yet chaste wife, and the trio of powerful

men is now fully prepared. The social hierarchy is clear and the scene set for an

eventual inversion, a peripety common to the genre, and one that Pearcy argues is

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definitional.[26] There remains, though, the attempt at ruination, which like the failed

wooing of Constant's wife, will repeat itself three times with only slight variations.

Each man proceeds to abuse his power by falsely accusing Constant of sins or

crimes. The priest begins by publicly accusing Constant, during services, of statutory

incest, claiming that the archbishop has discovered that Constant married his

godmother. The priest futher declares that they must separate because "the law

cannot suffer" their relationship and excommunicates him: "Sire Coutanz, issiez vos

ent / Hors du mostier d'antre la gent! / Congié vos doig de Seinte Yglise: / Il n'i avra

chanté servise / Tant com çaienz sejornerez!" ["Sir Constant, get out / From the

church in front of the faithful! / I chase you from the holy church: / There will be no

services chanted / While you are here"] (200–204). Constant is unsettled and

enraged; he is "pales, descolorez, plains d'ire" ["pale, discoloured, full of anger"]

(209). The physical description (he is also regularly described as "an ugly peasant")

prepares us for his later actions. The poet takes care throughout to portray the

characters through their embodiment. Constant, here and later, expresses his

emotions through his body. After his expulsion, he waits at the priest's house until

after the services, then offers to pay the archbishop to stop making these fictitious

proclamations. The priest, whose motive is to bring Constant to financial ruin,

accepts the promise of seven livres and bids him depart.

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26 An examination of the competition between different social classes drives some of the classic works of
     fabliau criticism, including Bédier, Nykrog, and Muscatine's studies.

A similar situation arises with both of the other men: false accusations followed by a promise of a bribe from Constant. The weight of repetition calls to mind the daily frustrations and humiliations suffered by the powerless at the hands of corrupt officials, clergy, and other figures of power. The texture of peasant economic life grounds the world in the material and, in its recognition of this world, enables not only sympathy with the titular character but also further recognition of the poem's fabliau ethos. Ysabeau assures Constant after the first outrage (the priest's accusation), that she has a plan and that Constant will never have to pay a dime. The inversion of the social hierarchy, the central role of financial concerns, and the wife's role are thus all already prepared. With the forester's final accusation of theft and subsequent threats of violence toward Constant, the initial activation of the courtly love schema has almost entirely faded. The forester berates Constant, threatens physical violence, and curses profusely. Unlike the priest or the provost, the forester exhibits decidedly less genteel behavior. At the end of the extortions, Constant is left exhausted, depressed, and anxious about the future. He contemplates selling his animals and even the wheat he needs for food in order to raise the money he promised. The brief portrait is a heart-wrenching one of the emotional drain of poverty and powerlessness, one with which the fabliaux's audience (provided it is not a noble one) might well have been expected to sympathize. It will not be the last opportunity for the audience to perform such mind-reading.

What follows, then, becomes all the more shocking not only for the graphic depictions of sexualized violence and rape, but for the sudden change in Constant himself. It implies that, rather than a psychologically consistent profile of the titular character, the poet was more concerned with plot twists and social commentary than constructing a realistic character. This conclusion, however, imputes anachronistic goals and understandings to medieval literature. The poem does demonstrate remarkable moments of psychological realism despite its frenetic, almost slapstick plot elements. But it also recognizes that the emotions and capabilities of the individual are in large part determined by environment and context. As recent cognitive science, psychological theories, and studies of subjectivity all show, the subject is not a stable, isolated whole but a narrative of disparate experiences influenced by and partially or wholly determined by sociocultural and spatial-temporal context. Thus we can understand the characters—and Constant in particular—as subject not only to the necessities of plot, but as variable individuals presenting a range of emotions appropriate to their settings. Ysabeau's consistency throughout the poem corroborates our sense not only of the poet's skill in individuation of his characters, but ability to construct a more stable character that meets our demands for a narratively coherent subject. She is, after all, the central figure of the fabliau and the driving force behind most of the action. It will serve, then, to discuss further not only the literary markers surrounding the poet's treatment of her, but also the ways she differs from the

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others in the fabliau for both discussions exemplify many of the features common to the fabliaux.

As noted, the poem begins with a description of Ysabeau as a courtly lady. Her speech is gentle, her beauty unsurpassed, her faithfulness proven repeatedly. While the final feature of her makeup may not, in fact, correspond exactly with the courtly love model, which elevates adulterous love, it nevertheless works with her other good qualities to establish the excellence of her character. It futher lulls the reader without a context (if we read this fabliau in a collection such as the *NRCF* we cannot be thus fooled) into expecting a "higher" genre than the disreputable fabliaux. While the audience quickly replaces this schema with that for the fabliaux, the intimations of courtliness remain attached to Ysabeau. For instance, she employs a prostitute named Galestrot as her go-between to summon each man in the nefarious trio to his punishment. When introduced, however, Galestrot appears in the role of "chanberiere" or chamberlady, reminding us of the now obviously strategic and ironic invocation of courtly literature. For all their precarious poverty, Ysabeau and Constant seem relatively wealthy. She has a servant; they own a bath tub that others in the parish come to use regularly. Indeed, even the language with which Galestrot entices each man to Ysabeau's home toys with the conventions of the panderer common in courtly love narratives. But through a rapid cycling of tone, the parody works by maintaining multiple schemata active in the audience's mind.

Even with the intricate patternings of genre schemata, "Constant du Hamel," like most other fabliaux, maintains a foot in the material realms. For example, the bath tub and the barrel of feathers function not merely as props to drive forward the plot but also as touchstones for the audience. From the meanest peasant to the most courtly lady, all would have recognized immediately these two objects as mundane and real. They are simply part of the background of life. Whether or not, as "Constant du Hamel" suggests, a bathtub was a luxury not possessed by all in a town, any audience would have responded to its appearance by calling to mind the appropriate set of action scripts and lexical associations. They might, first, remember the usual conditions of their own baths (however rare those might have been), picture the water, their disrobing, and then the sense of bodily cleanliness that ensued. They would, without thinking, prime such associations and know instinctually a bathtub's purpose. These primings would locate the poem in precisely "the real" that Muscatine examines.

Further, the scripts and other networks associated with a bath tub spread through related networks, priming such lexical entries as "water," "cleaning," "cleanliness," and further related concepts. It is not, from there, a far step from the idea of physical cleanliness to spiritual. Indeed, as medieval conceptions of the body were not so divorced from those of the soul as later thought would usher in, as demonstrated by the emphasis in saint's lives on physical purity and a variety of devotional practices, the move from corporeal to spiritual considerations might

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have seemed even less metaphorical than it does for a modern reader. This priming would thus make Constant's bestial rape of the three wives all the more horrific. Combined with the glimpses of subjectivity granted the three victims of Ysabeau's plan for revenge, some in the audience might have heard the suppressed "bodytalk" these scenes make possible. Regardless, the intrusion of the terrifying specter of Constant during a moment of immersion, nakedness, and vulnerability serves to make the rapes, through the audience's priming of scripts that would briefly lead them to identify with the victims, all the more sudden and shocking, albeit likely for humorous effect given the mores of the time.

The barrel of feathers functions similarly to the bathtub. Both, for instance, serve as containers for the bodies of the victims. The trio of men in the barrel, however, are far less innocent than their wives. They set the plot in action with their inappropriate advances on Ysabeau, their attempted assaults on her chastity (again, presented in terms of chivalric romance and courtly love), and through their vile campaign of lies and confinement intended to ruin Constant financially. Yet, somehow, during the course of the fabliau we tend to lose sight of their own culpability and begin to wonder who indeed are the villains of the plot. Much of this effect is the result of the men's confinement in the barrel and subsequent brush (or possible final meeting) with death in the jaws of Constant's hounds. The barrel of feathers is, of course, another aspect of the "texture of life" Muscatine describes.

Yet when we keep in mind that genres exist only the minds of the audience and author, not in the texts themselves, and the cognitive processes that go into interpretation, then we cannot escape considering how a medieval audience might have responded to the appearance of so humble an object. For one, the barrel is merely an everyday object, like the bath tub, an item in the background of daily life. Yet through experience, the audience would have a more intimate and ready knowledge of a barrel's dimensions and its overall materiality than we, as modern readers, can readily access. Many in the audience might indeed have built, filled, lifted, or unpacked barrels, providing them a phenomenological sense of the object, its affordances, that would prime the action scripts related to barrels. All this cognitive work would happen unconsciously as the barrel receives sharper focus in the fabliau's plot, but it would nevertheless influence the audience's reaction. The first reaction, both because of the dominant genre schema and the absurdity of the situation, would likely be laughter at the thought of three men in such cramped confines. Indeed, their complaints about back aches, broken ribs, and eyes nearly popping out are strikingly similar to modern slapstick comedy.

The specificity with which their injuries are localized upon each man's body, however, serve another function beyond simple sadistic humor. They also focus, however briefly, the audience's minds upon the frailty of the human body, the exact spots of injury, and again prime associative networks related to their own experiences of injuries and pain. Whether conciously or not, we automatically relate

to the represented embodiment of the three men in order to make sense of the scene. Indeed, were we unable to imagine ourselves in similarly pained and cramped circumstances, we would be likewise unable to perceive the humor the text undoubtedly intends. We thus discover another entry into the subsequent enforced voyeurism of the men as Constant rapes their wives. By being, so to speak, in the barrel with the injured men primarily through automatic cognitive processes of embodied identification, the poem invites us next to consider the affect they present as they watch Constant's violations.

After drawing a bath for Ysabeau, Galestrot hikes up her skirts and speeds to the priest's house (the priest always come first throughout the narrative). When she arrives, she dupes him thus:

"Sire, fait el, se Dieu me gart,

Ge criem ma peine avoir perdue!

Tant me sui por vos combatue

Que j'ai ma dame convertie;

Tant ai fait que c'est vostre amie.

Si ne fussiez large et cortois,

Vos n'i avenissiez de mois

Se ge ne m'en fusse entremise.

Ci n'afiert pas longue devise,

Aportez li tost sa promesse,

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Et ge n'ai point de guimple espoisse."

...

Sire, j'ai ma dame traïe

Se vos n'estes mout debonaire." (437–445; 451–52)

["Sire, she said, may God save me,

I fear my troubles to be lost!

I have so fought for you

That I converted my lady;

So I made it that she is your friend.

Even though you were generous and courtly,

You would not succeed in this in a month

If I had not intervened there.

Here long discourse is not suitable,

Take to her all your promise,

And I don't have at all a thick guimple."

...

Sir, I betrayed my lady

If you are not very noble."]

Galestrot begins by assuming the role of champion or intermediary in matters of

love. Like Pandarus in *Troilus and Criseyde*, she has won for the priest Ysabeau's

"friendship," an obviously euphemistic term for sexual favors common to courtly

love literature. She maintains the fiction by declaring him courtly and generous

before a sudden comic shift when she turns to matters of financial restitution for

services rendered (we must remember that she is, after all, a prostitute). Payment

secured, she shifts again to concerns about nobility and betrayal. The effect is to

enhance the humor of the events that follow by keeping active, however weakly,

certain expectations of gentility and euphemism.[27] The crass demand for payment

keeps the primary generic mode at the forefront while also emphasizing, as the

fabliau does throughout, the economic stakes. Not only do we gain a portrait of

peasant financial insecurity, but the parodic markers suggest, further, a criticism of

the structures of courtly romance.

By placing the prostitute Galestrot in role of intermediary, the earlier

promises of wealth for "friendship" can no longer maintain the fiction of courtliness

enabled by euphemism. Because this work remains fabliau rather than courtly love

narrative, the stark reality of sex, commerce, and violent coercion that revolves

around the bodies of medieval women in other genres never hide behind polite

fictions. This overlaying of schemata for parodic and comedic effect points toward

not only the material world of fabliaux, but indicts the "higher" genres as well. The

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27 This use of courtly language for ironic humor appears in numerous other fabliaux, perhaps most
famously in "Cele qui se fist foutre sur la fosse de son mari."

fableor implies that courtly love is little more than veiled prostitution. But when the mechanics of revenge begin, "Constant du Hamel" shocks us with its now unambiguous embrace of the most graphic and disturbing elements available to the fabliaux precisely because of its earlier play with generic ambiguity.

The poet provides a brief moment of foreshadowing from the beak of chicken, no less, as the priest directs his way to Ysabeau's house. Akin to our modern superstition about black cats, the priest encounters a black and white chicken across his path and contemplates turning back. His lust drives him too powerfully, though, so he throws a stick at the chicken who, in one of the most linguistically hilarious moments of the poem, "En son gelinois le maudist" (476), that is, "In her chickenspeak curses him." While this moment deserves mention for the humorous neologism "gelinois" alone, it serves a further purpose that is of a piece with the rest of the narrative. Other than the continued use of Galestrot as go-between and her pseudo-courtly speeches to the provost and the forester, the poem abandons any pretenses here of parody. The appearance of the humble (yet sentient) chicken emphasizes the details of mundane material existence. Maintaining the now dominant fabliau texture of materiality while inflecting it with humor through exaggeration indicates the poet's ability to inhabit multiple genres and subject positions, both techniques that are central to the poem. It also makes clear to the audience that the priest, in even his smallest actions, is deserving of

punishment, that he will definitely receive his come-uppance, and subtly prepares

his and his co-conspirators' final humiliations.

Once the priest arrives, Ysabeau greets him warmly, calls to her

"chambermaid" to get him ready for a bath, and promises to enter thereafter the tub

with him at which time they will provide solace to one another ("nos solaceron,"

487). Sure first to secure the satchel of coins and jewels he has brought as

payment—though not so low as actually to count the money ("La dame ne fu pas

vilaine," 495)—she takes his money and clothes, including even his shoes, and

leaves him in the tub to wonder when he will receive his promised pleasure.

Ysabeau next directs Galestrot to fetch the provost, whom she dupes with similar,

albeit slightly less courtly language to hasten with his promised "gifts" to Ysabeau;

she has assailed Ysabeau in his favor, words recalling the initial forays against her

defenses also figured in martial terms. When the provost arrives, Ysabeau feigns

distress that her husband has returned home, at which the priest becomes greatly

afraid, as he declares, "quar il est mout vers moi irié" ["because he is very angry at

me"] (547). Ysabeau directs the priest to hide in a barrel of feathers. She repeats the

ruse twice more, with her husband Constant being the actual trigger for the last man

to jump in the barrel.

As the last man, the forester[28] leaps into the barrel of feathers already occupied by his co-conspirators, the poet emphasizes the specificity of the violence done to them:

> Le prestre ataint en la poitrine,
>
> Au prevost fet ploier l'eschine,
>
> Mais nul d'aus n'en osa grocier.
>
> "Ha, Dieus! ce dit le forestier,
>
> Ge sui folement enbatuz!
>
> —Qu'est ce? Mal soies tu venuz!
>
> Fait li prevoz, traiez vos la!
>
> Ge cuit que ge creverai ja
>
> Se nos somes ci longuement.
>
> —Ha! dit le prestre, las! dolent!
>
> Com ci a dolente poitrine!
>
> —Mais ge ai brisiee l'eschine,
>
> Fait li prevoz, au mien cuidier!
>
> —Par foi, ce dit le forestier,
>
> A poi que li oeil ne me saillent! (626–40)

The priest took it in the chest,

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28   The characters are ordered by position in the social hierarchy; by speech and position the forester proves himself the lowest of the three. We thus see an implicit recognition of social status and its inversion.

For the provost his back got bent,

But none of them dared to protest.

"Ah, Lord! said the forester,

I fell in a crazy way!

—What's this? Badly did you come!

Said the provost, get over there!

I know that I will die soon

If we are here long.

—Ach! said the priest, alas! misery!

How my chest hurts!

—But I broke my back,

Said the provost, or so it seems to me!

—By faith, said the forester,

I think my eye popped out a little!

As the men compare injuries, the passage prefigures and locates in their corporeal wounds the coming scenes of yet more disturbing acts of revenge and violence. Each man complains that his injury is worse than that of the others, yet none of them dare to protest. Since it is clear that they are, indeed, in pain and speaking, by "protest" we can only assume that they are too frightened of Constant, who is a brute, to cry out the anguish they feel. Such quiet trembling will soon descend upon their wives

in brief moments that allow us to read the supressed "bodytalk" of the women who appear so briefly in this poem. The humorous dislodging of the forester's eye foreshadows the voyeuristic mix of shame and delight in another's misery, as they (and the audience) must watch from their barrel the rape of their wives. Competition, masculinity, vulnerability, and humor, all key themes, converge in the barrel.

By embedding the characters in a humble physical world peopled by chickens, cows, baths, barrels, localized injuries, and graphic descriptions of genitalia, the poet primes the audience for the so-called "low" humor commonly involved in fabliaux. Similarly, the hints of romantic descriptions of female beauty, siege metaphors, and other markers of romance embodiment, "Constant du Hamel" invokes a competing and constrasting configuration of embodied experience, which enhances not only the humor (such as it is before devolving into sadism) but the jarring vulgarity of the rape scenes. Had we not been subtly primed for something other than "pure" fabliaux (that is, prototypical adherence to the genre schema), the graphically sexual embodiment of the revenge would lose some of its shocking impact. Because, however, the schemata of romance carry with them certain forms of embodiment, where violence is typically more centered on the masculine body and female chastity is defended at all costs, the fabliau's more mundane and "base" embodiment is, albeit still active in the audience's expectations, nevertheless

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lessened. As a result, the sudden and graphic rapes (and Constant's apparent

sadistic delight in them) is not a script for which the poem primes us.

With the three men safely trapped in a barrel and complaining of their

injuries, Ysabeau finally lets Constant in on her plan; she explains her actions so far,

the wealth she has taken from the men, and what she wants him to do next. Here, we

are liable to be shocked by Ysabeau's cold-hearted willingness not only to have her

husband assault the chastity of the trio's wives (since this threat to her own person

was, in part, the motivation for her revenge), but also to see her husband have sex

with other women. The plot at this point reads much like a typical masculine

fantasy. Not only does Constant possess a faithful, intelligent, beautiful, and

resourceful wife, but she now encourages him to have sex outside of their marriage

vows while she is nearby (perhaps in role of voyeur). The apparent hypocrisy of

defending her own chastity while effectuating the rape of other women never arises

in the poem. Only if we take the anthropological model that posits for many societies

that wives hold status primarily as the possession of their husbands can we begin to

understand the logic behind Ysabeau's plans. Whereas she is clearly throughout the

poem the major agent driving the plot and therefore the most fully individualized in

the poem, the rape of other women is to her simply another way of injuring the

husbands as they would have injured her own. Heidi Breuer, who examines the

rapes in *The Canterbury Tales*, also notes "rape was very likely used… as a form of

revenge or protest against wealthy men in the community" (7-8). Indeed, as the

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fabliaux is explicitly a tale of revenge, the rapes of the men's wives unremarkably function in this role.

We must, of course, also consider the cultural context of the fabliaux. In a time where numerous saint's lives apotheosized women often for their dogged adherence to strictures of female inviolability, men's chastity, while discussed, did not receive the same emphasis. Her situation in a male-dominated society allows Ysabeau to defend, on the one hand, her own chastity and good name while, on the other, scheming for her husband to violate the wives of the couple's enemies. That she is either unwilling or unable to transfer her own righteous outrage over the trio's advances to the minds of the women Ysabeau proposes her husband rape suggests that, despite her own cleverness, she has internalized the unequal valuations of genders prevalent in her society. Indeed, Ysabeau presents the same sort of mind-blindess toward women that enables their objectification as the men who wanted her so badly they would ruin her husband to possess her.

Each woman comes, at Galestrot's prompting, to bathe in Ysabeau's tub. Once they are undressed, Constant storms in to continue the revenge against the men by attacking their wives. Each of these graphic and disturbing passages follows roughly the same pattern. First, the woman is shocked to find Constant there. Then, he tells her what will happen. As he rapes her, the men in the barrel cracks jokes at the offended husband's misery and shame. The poet describes the husband's emotions in same way each time, with minor variations: "Qu'il ne set que il doie dire / Du duel

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qu'il ot et de la honte" ["And he did not know what he should say / About the suffering he had and the shame"] (733-34). But the shame inheres in the husband; there is an attack by proxy both against Ysabeau's walls of chastity in the attacks on Constant and, in reverse, against the three would-be suitors through the rapes of their wives. Then Constant roughly kicks her out of the house, again in formulaic fashion: "Quant dant Constan l'ot bien corbee, / Hors de sa maison l'a boutee, / Et el s'en va mout correcie" ["When Constant had well bent her, / Out of the house he shoved her, / And she left greatly distressed"] (736-38).

There are several important aspects to these scenes that distinguish "Constant du Hamel" from many other fabliaux in which rapes appear. First, the poet makes it absolutely clear that the women are unhappy. Not only do they leave distressed, but one actually tries to fight him off:

Et ceste s'est mout irascue,

Si se poroffri a desfendre.

Et il la vait as janbes prandre;

Por ce qu'ele se desfendoit

[And she was very angry,

And tried to defend herself.

And he went to grab her legs;

Because she was defending herself] (717-20)

Whereas most fabliaux either pass over rape and then convert it into seduction by having the woman become the her rapist's ally afterwards, here the violence is unmistakable. Although the reactions from the men and rape's role in the revenge plot implicate the economic system of exchange that views women as property of men and attacks on them as affronts to masculine honor, the poet's portrayal of female distress and emotion nevertheless permits us to hear easily the usually supressed bodytalk of the victimized women. Because most fabliaux entirely ignore the subjectivity of the raped woman or construe her as willing, this fabliau's insistence upon the violence of the assault threatens to undermine the values driving the revenge. In "punishing" the three trapped men through their wives, Constant and Ysabeau become less clearly the heroes of the tale; the ideology that declares women to be little more than property becomes less persuasive when we can easily hear the bodytalk of the victims and more readily sympathize with them in the moment of performance rather than in cool analysis after the fact.

Through first priming the audience to see the husbands as victims and to inhabit the cramped barrel with them, the poet invites the audience to join in their sadistic voyeurism as each man becomes the butt of the others's jokes. As the husband of the last raped wife reflects, "ce le fait reconforter / Que l'un ne pot l'auter gaber" ["This gave him comfort / That they couldn't mock each other"] (766-67). The series of jokes in the face of sexual violence indicts not only practically all the fabliau's characters, but also the cultural constructions that make possible this

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poet's work. The lack of empathy for the plight of the other men and the cold

comfort that the forester takes in the fact that none of them will be able to make fun

of each other for this humiliation both mark the cultural attitudes toward women

active in the story and common to the genre. Each man exposes his inability to

empathize with the suffering of the wives. As argued in many interpretations of

courtly love lyrics, the conflict animating their reactions is strictly between men.

The women become, rather than subjects in their own rights with minds the others

could imaginatively inhabit, little more than another means of giving offense and

causing humiliation and shame. The men remain, in essence, "mind-blind" to the

desires of women, even their own wives. Lisa Zunshine describes this concept of

Theory of Mind, also called "mind-reading" as "our ability to explain people's

behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (6). This effortless

ability is integral not only to our navigation of social situations, but also to our

ability to appreciate literature. In "Constant du Hamel," we experience the

disjunction between a poet clearly able to imagine minds for the wives, the

husband's inability to do so, and the assumption that the audience will find the

whole situation funny. This conflict implies, therefore, that the husbands (and

perhaps the audience as well) view the women in the poem as little more than

objects on roughly the same level as a bathtub. This objectification of women is, of

course, not a new concept in the least for critical studies of medieval literature or

culture. The poem, however, complicates this view through the details of the rape scenes.

What is different about the situation portrayed in this fabliau is that there are instances of what Burns terms "bodytalk," places where we can through attention to the bodies of the women read against the patriarchal hegemony of medieval gender relations. The poet takes pains to make clear that each woman is also a subject however briefly glimpsed. The provost's wife, as noted, goes so far as to fight back. Each woman has a slightly different reaction, but the poet never fails to describe her distress about the violation. Further, just as the violence against the men is highly specific, thereby not only increasing its realism and subsequent humor, but also priming the audience to think in concrete corporeal terms, so too is Constant's violence against the women given in explicit detail. He does not simply rape them. He grabs their legs, throws them down, bends them over, leaves them graphically open, and pushes them in the mud. A comparison with other fabliaux descriptions of sex and rape serves to show how specific these actions are, yet how of a piece. We find here the graphic dramatization of how female bodies are constructed in the fabliaux and in medieval society more generally.

A tension arises between the glimpses of distressed female subjectivity and the ideological basis of both the revenge plot and, more broadly, the genre itself which often relies upon the idea of an inherently receptive and lustful female. The poet attempts to resolve this implicit critique of how fabliaux perpetuate misogynist

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constructions of women through graphic physical description that, at least in one manuscript, becomes almost pornographic. The aforementioned descriptions of the wives' bodies focuses upon their post-coital openness. Rather than portray women as eager to have sex and therefore open to male advances, the poem explicitly embodies the openness of the women. In this respect, this poem and the others I discuss in this chapter engage with, complicate, and possibly perpetuate the ideology of rape culture.

Before deciding what type of work this and other poems perform, however, we must consider the historical circumstances. Gravdal writes, "The frequency of sexual violence in medieval literature intended for mixed audiences may suggest that medieval listeners took the text as an imaginary locus in which they could stage their anxieties about living in a world in which rape was a daily reality and perhaps achieve a sense of mastery, however fleeting, over their own fears" (18). The tension we as modern readers discern between Ysabeau's revenge plotting, her own chastity, and the violation of women who are her neighbors if not (we hope) her friends, demonstrates another entry into the cognitive work the fabliau performs for the audience. Following Gravdal, we can read the poem as an imaginary locus in which the female audience members could reduce the anxiety that the possibility of rape presented by placing the control of plot in the hands of a "good woman." Ysabeau maintains her own chastity, is able to refuse the men, and effects her own revenge upon them in the process. The text thus argues that, a "good" woman

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married to a man who does her bidding need not fear rape. Further, rape itself becomes, though still a means of competition between men subordinate to a woman's clever revenge against men who would assail her and her husband. She becomes her husband's protector as well as her own, dispensing justice as she deems fit.

The ideological interrogations of the poem's genre also suggest a cultural criticism. Because the genre is often considered parodic or subversive, we understand from the outset that it will, through its persistent materialism, likely criticize some aspect of other genres. By priming us to consider the values that animate courtly love and which medieval society as a whole often valued as exemplary of courtly life (leaving aside the conflict between the values of church and of court), we realize that "Constant du Hamel" invites us to see behind the polite fictions of courtly love into the subaltern status of women, the sexual violence and powerlessness to which they were often subject, and the inextricable role economic status plays in this power hierarchy. Further, while providing Ysabeau as an examplar of female chastity, the very values both church and courtly romance promote, the fabliaux suggests that her complicity and indeed direction of the rape of three women is irresolvably ambiguous. She is, certainly, the most intelligent, far-sighted, and ultimately powerful figure in the fabliau, yet that status results from consistent refusal of extramarital sex for financial gain. The introduction of Galestrot as go-between confirms that the poem states, in essence, that courtly love and the

promotion of female faithfulness are both poorly veiled prostitution. The literary genre parodied thus upholds these values while working to obscure the financial and corporeal aspects of this system. By demonstrating the correspondance between procedural schema (i.e., embodied experience of scripts) for courtly love wooing and literary descriptions thereof with fabliaux rape and theft, the poem leads to a revision of the courtly schemas governing literary production and lived experience, a revision that insists upon the experience of women.

DESIRE, GENITALIA, AND GENRE IN "ALOUL" AND "THE MILLER'S TALE"
"Aloul," like "Constant du Hamel" and "The Miller's Tale," invokes courtly formulas and the genres more commonly associated with them. "Aloul," however, offers a more extended and explicit invocation of the conventions of courtly love literature in combination with the sexual bodies of its characters, a feature foreign to the genres from which such conventions come. While the poem is unmistakably a fabliau in its humor, sexuality, violence, and other characteristics common to the genre, it nevertheless opens with the figure of a courtly lady strolling barefoot through a *hortus* during an April dawn:

>Entree en est en son vergié,
>
>Nus piez en va par la rousee,
>
>. . .
>
>Mout ert la matinee bele,
>
>Douz et souez estoit li tens.

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Et li prestres entra leenz

Et voit la dame au cors bien fet.

Et bien sachiez que mout li plest,

Quar volentiers fiert de la crupe

     (50-51, 58-61)

She entered into her orchard

With naked feet she goes in the dew,

. . .

Very beautiful was the morning time,

Gentle and sweet was the weather.

And the priest entered there

And saw the lady had a well-made body.

And know well that it greatly pleased him,

Because he gladly would hit that ass

"Aloul" creates the image of a walled pleasure garden reminiscent of the *Roman de la Rose*. We are told at the beginning of the poem that the lady is "assez bele et gente," adjectives common to descriptions of courtly ladies (10). Her bare feet covered in the dew of the dawn exemplify the sensual pleasure of the setting. The audience calls to mind memories (or imaginations) of walking barefoot through soft

grass and the attendant sensations. It is a brief detail, but one that crystallizes an embodied experience.

Then, much as in "Cele qui se fist foutre sur la fosse de son mari," "Constant du Hamel," and other fabliaux that invoke courtliness, the poet introduces a dissonant note for comic effect. Lacy, describing the juxtaposition of "cortoise et sage" with "en fotant" in "Cele qui se fist foutre su la fosse de son mari," writes, "the contrast of stylistic levels or the contrast between animal lust and courtly diction provides the essential comedy of the scene" (58). In "Aloul," the setting causes the audience to recall similar locales they have encountered in literature, which in turn primes networks that respond to courtly love literature and the lyrical mode. Just when we expect a detailed inventory of the lady's beauty in accordance with the active schema, the poet shifts modes abruptly with the declaration that the priest "would like to tup her!," as John DuVal translates the passage. My differing translation above, however, conveys the sudden vulgarity more emphatically by providing a contemporary idiom that matches more closely the sense of the original language. A common element of fabliau humor derives from the priming of the audience for one set of expectations and then systematically frustrating those expectations through the substitution of direct, non-euphemistic or paraphrastic description.

Although in these cases, the humor results from linguistic effects, as critics like Lacy and Bloch note, representations of the characters' bodies ground the

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language. Every genre configures different permissible bodies; the violation of those norms in fabliau leads to a shock that permits humor. A courtly lady's body, for example, is not open to explicit sexual advances or direct declarations of sexual desire. It is, instead, encoded as desirable in its chasteness, in the lady's refusal to grant favors, as we saw with the character of Ysabeau in "Constant du Hamel." Even when favors are granted, they most often take the form of a single kiss. While we may consider these locutions as euphemisms for more intimate sexual acts, courtly literature like troubadour lyrics and chivalric romances do not construct the lady's body as explicitly, graphically available for sex as do the fabliaux.

It is almost invariably the case, in fact, that when there are misapprehensions caused by linguistic trickery, they are misapprehensions of the body. While this situation results in part from the prominence of the fabliau body, the humor suggests that the correlation between linguistic effect and body is no coincidence. While many critics have argued that the fabliaux, in this respect, interrogate the ability of language to signify or comment upon their own linguistic construction, this line of reasoning overlooks the conditions that enable such situations. Without some object that can be misconstrued, the linguistic effects will fail. When we see, then, that the objects thus employed are so often the bodies of the characters or their failure to recognize the (usually sexual) bodies of others, then we must consider why this is so. Bloch interprets this fact as further evidence of the fabliau concern for the instability of language: "Within the fabliaux detached sexual organs circulate

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as the detachable meanings contained in the disparate plagiarized repertoire of the jongleur" (61). The poems, in his reading, deploy the body as a sign for any stable referent. By fragmenting the body through either an obsession with a single organ or through violence, the poems he examines thus enact metaphorical castration to signal, in turn, language's inability to signify. In Bloch's view, the poet is a trickster who plays with how language covers up truth (itself inscribed in corporeal terms) in order to examine the autochthonous nature of literary production in the fabliaux. The unstable system of difference that animates language's meaning is reflected, in an inverted relationship, on the bodies depicted. Focusing on sexual organs, their fetishization and fragmentation, the poet emphasizes the impropriety and transgressive nature of his linguistic project, his uncovering of that which should remain covered for the smooth functioning of "decent" society. Bloch writes: "detached sexual organs are an integral part of the representation of the body in the fabliaux and are more the rule than the exception" (63).

For an analysis of this feature, "Aloul" offers ample material. The plot, briefly summarized, centers around an irrationally jealous husband, an unhappy wife, and a lustful priest. The poem opens with a criticism of the eponymous character's greedy and jealous nature. We learn his jealousy makes him and his new wife, who is "bele et gente," miserable. He constantly suspects her of cuckolding him, even though this is not the case. One night, she cannot sleep because his constant surveillance has made her so unhappy; when dawn arrives, she strolls through their walled orchard.

A neighboring priest sees her, informs her that he knows of a beneficial herb, and then joins her in the garden. After toying with the conventions of courtly love lyrics, the poem then presents the first of several scenes of corporeal misapprehension effected through language. The "root" the priest promises her turns out to be his sexual member, which he quickly forces upon the lady. She struggles out from under him, then berates him for his trickery. She seems to have a change of heart, however, as she realizes that this priest offers her a way to get back at her husband for his paranoia.[29] She invites the priest to her room that night, where Aloul, with whom she shares a bed, awakes to find himself a cuckold. He cries out to his cowherds to seize the priest, who finds a dark place in the barn to hide. After a series of battles told in mock epic form, near captures, night time confusion, and the priest's intercourse with Aloul's servant Hortense, the fabliau ends with the priest captured, held down by Aloul's men, and about to be castrated. Just at it seems he will lose his parts to the razor, the wife and Hortense storm in and enable the priest's ultimate escape from the grounds.

"Aloul" also provides multiple examples of how the fabliaux can invoke other genres for comic effect, mistaken bodily identities centered on sexual organs, and scenes of stark violence. Throughout, the aspects of the bodies thus constructed rely heavily upon generic expectations and their purposeful violation, demonstrating how genres make available some corporeal configurations while precluding others.

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29   As noted earlier, this change of heart is common to literature implicated in rape culture.

The description of a *hortus* invokes scenes of love and adultery, thereby construing

the wife's body as potentially available to others beyond her husband. The extended

concern with Aloul's jealousy, which opens the poem, converges with the sensual

expectations of her setting to figure the wife as imminently desirable, yet chaste. We

have been told that Aloul's jealousy is unjustified and the wife chafes under his

misrule. Further, though the invocation of a common setting for courtly love primes

the audience for the possibility of adultery, the courtly lady's body is not one that is

described in explicit, vulgar, or too openly sexual terms. Instead, the emphasis is

often on her overwhelming beauty as proven by a catalog of her finely-formed,

conventional features. She is an object thus made for love, but not sex except in the

most euphemistic terms. Thus, as noted earlier, the interjection of the priest's desire

comes as a mild, humorous shock precisely because both in linguistic and corporeal

terms, this comment is inappropriate in its immediate context.

　　Once the priest enters the orchard, the interrogation of language examined

by Lacy and Bloch, among others, comes to the fore and revolves around

(mis)definitions of the sexual body. The priest advises the wife:

　　　　desjeüner

D'une herbe que je bien connois

…

Corte est et grosse la racine,

Mes mout est bone medecine:

N'estuet meillor a cors de fame. (76–77, 79–80)

[To dine

On an herb that I know well

…

The root is short and thick,

But it is very good medicine:

Nothing is better for a woman's body]

As the audience, we are both aware of the priest's intentions (of which the wife, at

this point, is unaware) and of the schema for the pleasure garden, which leads us

quickly to suspect the priest of engaging in the sort of sexual misnaming common to

the genre. The poem's investigation of the power of language's ability to deceive in

order to achieve one's ends converges upon the male member through an already

phallic image. Further, the priest's suggestion that she "desjeüner" or breakfast

upon the root thereby links sexual and gustatory activities. The scene assembles a

corporeal network that links food, sex, and language. The priest's indication that the

root he suggests should be taken into a woman's body makes clear the logic behind

the substitution of food for genitalia and eating for sex. His explicit mention of the

"cors de fame" also suggests, however briefly, the specter of the medical female

body. As the passage has been concerned with the wife's insomnia and anxiety and

her search for a cure, the priest enters into conversation by extending the wife's

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own topic and, unbeknownst to her, metaphorizing her language so as to shift the terms to ones in line with his own desires. That the wife remains unaware of the priest's transformation of meaning becomes apparent when she sits down to receive the "medicine" he offers. (2835)

In typical fabliau fashion, the priest quickly drops his pants, a task at which he is expert ("qui de ce fere estoit toz mestres" [96]), and gives the wife his "medicine": "Bien li aprent la medicine" (98). Here the poet, by using the same term for the priest's genitalia, continues the linguistic game to allow the conflation of medical and sexual bodies through metaphor to extend beyond the borders of character dialogue and into the the fabliau world itself. We will find similar leakage between character perception and narratorial description later as the misapprehension (and apprehension) of the priest's genitalia becomes a central motif. The multiplying indentifications of the priest's sexual organs irritate issues of naming, touch, and identity. Apart from the first instance in the garden, when we find a simple substitution of "medicine" for a more direct name such as "vit," the later instances usually configure the organs as synechdocal identifiers.

That night, the priest attempts to gain quiet entrance into the woman's bed by first urinating on the door hinges. Then, once he has climbed into bed with her (and her husband), the two begin to have sex next to the husband, who is dreaming that a priest had entered their chamber. Once the bed begins to "crisne et tramble" ["creak and shake"] (261) Aloul feels around in the dark:

Sa main gete desus ses dras,

Le prestre sent entre ses braz.

A tant se va atapissant

Et par tout le va portastant,

Quar a grant paine se puet tere.

Le prestre prent par son afere,

 Et sache et tire et huche et crie. (265-271)

[His hand he stuck under the covers,

And felt the priest between her arms.

And so he went in secret

And all over there felt out,

Because only with great pain could he stay silent.

The priest he grabbed by his character

And yanked and grabbed and called out and yelled.]

Not until Aloul has hold of the priest's "afere," itself a euphemism rather than a direct name, does he break his silence and cry out for his cowherds. While here the priest's genitals serve, in part, as a conveniently painful place by which to restrain the interloper, they also confirm Aloul's suspicions in a way simply feeling the man in his wife's arms apparently does not. He could just as, or more, easily have grabbed hold of the priest by his arm or hair, but waits until he finds his "afere."

While Aloul's choice might, in part, result from a desire to have a good hold on the man before calling out, the many times the priest is grabbed or otherwise touched there mitigates against this reading. When considered in context, it becomes clear that grabbing of the priest's genitalia is more than just a plot detail.

The priest, despite Aloul's hold on him, escapes and hides from the search party. After Aloul promises a reward of food to whoever finds the priest, the threat of castration arises along with the next instance of genital identification: "S'or n'est li prestres bien repus, / Tost i puet perdre du chatel" ["And now if the priest isn't well hidden, / Soon he might lose his goods"] (332-3). The foreshadowed threat of castration is here put in terms of the loss of property and financial damage. By refusing to call a "vit" a "vit," the poet maintains the figurative status of the priest's parts. Immediately after these lines, the next misrecognition of his sex organs extends the comparison to "chatel" while beginning the thematization of the priest as animal. Aloul's servant Hortense, also searching for the priest, comes into the stables where he is hiding without any light:

Les brebis eschace et esveille,

Et va querant et assentant

Ou li prestres ert estupant.

S'avoit ses braies avalees

Et les coilles granz et enflees,

Qui pendoient contre val jus

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O est li cus entor velus:

Si sembloit ne sai quel figure.

Hersens i vint par aventure,

Ses mains geta sor ses coillons,

Si cuide que ce soit moutons

Qu'ele tenoit iluec endroit

Par la coille, qui grosse estoit.

Et un poi met ses mains amont:

Velu le trueve et bien reont,

Et un vaucel en le moiere.

Hersent se trest un poi arriere,

Si se merveille que puet estre. (340–357)

[The sheep she woke and chased off

And went looking and feeling about

Where the priest was crouched.

And his pants were down

And his testicles were large and swollen,

Which were hanging down low against

Where his ass is completely hairy:

And they seemed like I don't know what expression.

Hortense went exploring there,

Her hands went under his testicles,

And she thought they were a sheep's

That she held there

By the balls, they were so big.

And she put her hands a little higher:

Hairy she found it and very round,

And a small valley in the middle.

Hortense drew back a little,

And wondered to herself what this could be.]

The initial driving off of the sheep combined with size and hairiness lead Hortense

to speculation that the priest's testicles might, in fact, be those of a sheep. He is here

mistaken for an animal. Her curious explorations extend the moment of confusion

and emphasize the significance of his organs. By devoting so many words to

Hortense's tactile experience, the poet invites us to invision the area anew, through

the imagined mind of one who is literally groping in the dark. The poem leads us to

inhabit the confusion provoked by Hortense's inability to connect her tactile

sensations to an appropriate schema for comprehension. It is not that she does not

comprehend what she has in her hands; she recognizes them as testicles. Instead,

she fails to find a match in her own experience for her sensory experience. The poet

thus deploys the common experience of a disjunction between sensory input and

active networks for comprehension to enable us to appreciate Hortense's confusion. Were the scene described more economically, as is more common to the genre, our ability to translate her experience into our own would be diminished, likewise diminishing the humor.

The humor of the situation, however, is not the only effect of the extended description. We encounter here the second instance of the priest being groped in the dark, the second misidentification of his genitalia, and the most extended description thus far. The passage thereby affirms the centrality of his sex organs not only to the plot, but to the thematic concerns of the poet as well. We have already seen how unrecognized metaphorization led to the wife's initial rape, which sets the plot in motion. Here, rather than discovery and capture, which we expect from Hortense's investigations, the examination of his anatomy finds the priest another conspirator who will, ultimately, help him escape. The scene further exemplifies one key aspect of the fabliau body the sexual body. Hortense's tactile exploration (itself remarkably like Aloul's earlier one) is strikingly realistic. Making a related point, Lacy argues that the reason so many fabliaux feature priests as lovers is not owing to anti-clericism, but the fabliau ethos that promotes natural desires and behaviors above the unnatural (like priestly abstinence). In this graphic description of genitalia, the "natural" is on display.

We find, further, along with realistic depictions of sexual organs, another element of the fabliau body attested to in this passage from "Aloul" and which

appears across a broad range of texts commonly cited as members of the genre. After Hortense examines the priest's testicles, he has his way with her just as he did Aloul's wife in the garden. In neither case is the woman able to prevent him. Her only choice is whether or not to cry out. If we take, for instance, the wife's reproach after the priest provides the promised medicine as a straight-forward protest rather than a disingenious, obligatory protest against something she really wanted all along, then we must assume likewise that she was unable to stop him, even though no mention of force is made. Likewise, when the priest has sex with Hortense, she

> Ne set que fere: s'ele crie,
>
> Toute i vendra ja la mesnie,
>
> Si savroient tout cest afere;
>
> Dont li vient il mieus assez tere
>
> Qu'ele criast ne feïst ton. (363–67)

> [Didn't know what to do: if she cried out,
>
> Every in the household would come there
>
> And know the whole affair;
>
> Therefore she decided it was better to stay quiet
>
> That she neither cry out nor make a sound.]

This uncontrollable openness to sexual intercourse is, in fact, one of the most common configurations of the female body in fabliaux. It serves not only to identify

many of the texts as working within the schema for the genre, but also to mark how the genre constructs specific bodies according to its own logic. Indeed, were we to try and understand how, precisely, the women in "Aloul" and in other texts are so easily penetrated, we would be left assuming either willingness on their part because of the simple logistics of at least partial undress or serial, yet regularly unlabeled rape.

The logic of female corporeal receptivity suggests that, even if the woman does not desire sex at first, after having had it, she will then find it pleasurable and, if necessary to assuage her morals, rationalize the actions. Aloul's wife, for example, seems to have a change of heart about her experience after reviewing the offenses her husband has inflicted upon her, thereby giving her a reason to justify her unsolicited and undesired infidelity. While both the wife and Hortense are rape victims, we have as a contrast the examples in "Constant du Hamel," which makes explicit that rape has certainly taken place. Each wife in that tale is, first, already undressed. Second, their fear and humiliation is clearly described by the poet and commented upon by the trapped husband-voyeurs. Although few fabliau so clearly indicate the woman's reaction, it is common to find the woman resistant at first, then (unlike in "Constant du Hamel") accepting of sex. Regardless of whether acceptance comes before or after the act, the fabliau woman is rarely able to prevent anyone from simply taking her.

One such exception is Ysabeau in "Constant du Hamel." She rebuffs the advances of three different men in succession, putting in motion the revenge plot. Furthermore, her ability to deny them access to her body hinges upon language. In essence, she simply says "no." In light of the fabliau configuration of the female, how then does Ysabeau manage to refuse? The key lies in the different genre schema active at the beginning of the poem. Rather than straight-forward fabliaux, the poem begins, as earlier noted, with the activation of models of courtly love and chivalric romance through its metaphorization of the attempts at seduction as a castle siege. The effort to woo (rather than simply to take what is desired) expands Ysabeau's possible responses to her suitors' advances. Because courtly love idolizes the female[30] and grants her the power to deny or grant favors—themselves possible euphemisms or synecdoches for sexual pleasure more generally—Ysabeau's placement in such a context, however briefly and albeit embedded in a distinctly fabliau world, embues her with far greater agency and ability to control her own body's sexuality than that of other fabliau women. The scenes coming, as they do, at the beginning of the poem rather than later further permit this extra latitude as the audience's generic expectations are not firmly in place; the categorization of the tale at this point remains uncertain, which in turn makes available actions more commonly associated with other genres. The recognition of how a work deploys

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30 This description represents, of coure, a gross oversimplification of the ideological underpinnings of
    courtly love. Simplification, however, is expected when a schema is not the dominant one active.

different genre schemata combined with a focus on how bodies are configured thus demonstrates the insights permitted by this dual consideration.

By following the mediation of identity through the sexual body and its misapprehensions, we uncover several characteristics attested in many other fabliaux. As it does the female body, "Aloul" also presents a common corporeal representation of fabliau men. While critics regularly note how the misogyny of the genre construes women as perpetually libidinous, the men are only slightly less interested in erotic endeavors. The priest in "Aloul" is identified both by the characters and the poet via his genitalia. After the epic-inflected battles, the text presents a lull in the action as the cowherds regroup for food and drink and a recounting of the night's adventures so far. Berengiers (a cowherd) goes into the barn where the slabs of bacon are hung, searching out with hands the best cut. The priest is hiding in the barn by hanging from the ceiling among the bacon. Berengiers comes upon the priest's body, feeling first his "nache" [buttocks] and, finding it uneven, decides that it must be rennets. He then continues to explore in the dark until he reaches the priest's knees and determines they must be "escors" [breasts] hanging to dry. He continues feeling about:

> Sa main a mis de haut en bas,
>
> S'a encontré le vit au prestre.
>
> Or ne set il que ce puet estre
>
> Por ce que il le trueve doille,

Se c'est chauduns ou c'est andoille

C'on i ait mis por essuer.

Celi voudra, ce dist, coper,

Por ce que c'est uns bons morsiaus. (812–19)

[His hand went from high to low,

And encountered the priest's cock.

Now he didn't know what it could be

Because he found it soft,

And it is either tripe or sausage

That someone put there to dry.

This here I want, he said, to cut,

Because it would be a good morsel.]

As in the scene with Hortense, here the poet gives the standard fabliau terms for the

priest's sexual parts, but again the character trusting to the single sense of touch

fails to comprehend what is at hand.

The fabliau intimates that not only is the priest's "vit" the primary site of his

identity, but that the senses of the characters are inherently fallible and subject to

context. This insight is one confirmed both by cognitive science generally and our

model for genre specifically. The correspondence between these realms results both

from the relative stability of human cognition and from the fabliaux's persistent

interrogation of material existence and the role of human embodiment. As we saw in

the scene with Hortense, she mistakes the priest's "coilles" for those of a sheep

because she operates in the dark, through touch alone, after having shooed away the

"brebis." Her tactile inputs would thus not only fail to be extended by sight, but her

interaction with the sheep has likewise primed her to comprehend what she finds

by trying to connect it with the other creatures around her. Here, Berengiers

similarly assumes that the priest must be some sort of meat because he has been

examining other slabs of bacon. Again, the reliance on a single sense impoverishes

interpretation and demonstrates how the mind provides context for interpretation.

Not only, then, do these two passages question the reliability of an individual

sense bereft of confirmation from others, they are made possible by the

embodiment of fabliau characters and the phenomenological reality of their settings.

The materiality insisted upon by Muscatine comes to the fore to confirm

contemporary cognitive knowledge. This reliance on context for interpretation has

profound implications for our perception of genre, as well. As noted when laying out

a cognitive basis for genre theory, one of the primary functions of features in a text

that signal one genre or another is to activate in the audience's mind the relevant

schema for interpretation. This schema includes not only context of other literary

works associated with the genre, but also the relevant embodiments and scripts.

The combination of these elements composes our horizon of expectations. As the

characters in "Aloul" who rely only on touch and context mistakenly identify the

priest's sex organs as aspects of different animals, so too the audience might mistake

the text's generic context through limited information. This possibility appears both

in the introductory sections of the poem during the *hortus* scene, but also in the

battle between the priest and the cowherds figured in epic terms. While neither are

likely to trap readers in misidentifications of the poem's genre, especially later in the

poem once the literary context has been clearly established, they nevertheless

demonstrate a concern with meaning and identity that equates the knowledge of the

body with the knowledge of a literary work. The fabliau's interest in embodied

existence leads, then, to a cognitively astute recognition of the crucial importance of

context to comprehension.

We see, therefore, that category errors beat at the heart of fabliau humor. By

representing a material world, the poet creates a sense of embodiment for the

audience to which they can relate through their own lived experiences. Simple

objects like door hinges, sheep, and bathtubs ground the poetry in a realistic world.

The audience then understands, through the physical context, why a character like

Berengiers or Hortense would mistake the information provided by a sense for

something else entirely. This mistaken identification or failure to identify is a

category error. Indeed, Pearcy argues convincingly for a recurring logical structure

of peripeties, which almost invariably derive from a character's failure to trust

physical evidence and his or her own senses. That this mistake is humorous to us

and to a medieval audience results from the assumption that our sense data are,

unless other persuasive evidence is presented to contrary, true and trustworthy representations of reality. Trust in one's senses underlies the laughter.

Yet the humor of the fabliaux arises not only from category errors effected through representations of a material world and a recognition of the characters' fictional embodiment, but also from category errors brought about through generic expectations. For example, the humor in "Cele qui se fist foutre sur la fosse de son mari" comes from the juxtaposition in the line "En fotant, doce amie chiere" (88) of "two registers—low and high, or the common and the courtly" (Lacy 7); is demonstrates further how category errors function through generic expectations. In this fabliau, the squire begins his address to the widow in courtly language, a genre of speech that does not permit the intrusion of vulgar words like "foutre," preferring instead euphemism and elaborate formulae. The sudden introduction of the word thus creates momentary, pleasurable dissonance for the audience because of the schema activated by courtly language. The *hortus* scene in "Aloul" provides a similar example. The description of the beautiful May morning and the polite language about medicine exchanged between the priest and the wife leads the audience to gloss over the possibility of rape to focus, instead, on projecting a state of mind for the wife that appropriately registers shock at the unexpected turn of events. She who was strolling through a courtly, private landscape finds herself suddenly thrust into a fabliau.

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For its humor "The Miller's Tale" relies upon our knowledge of these

prototypes and our ability to inhabit the minds of the characters while

simultaneously maintaining the distance made possible by our own generic

expectations. Numerous scholars note that the Miller's depiction of Absolon mocks

the courtly conventions underlying the "Knight's Tale" and courtly romance more

generally.[31] Having explicitly labeled the tale as "harlotrye" in the prologue (3184)

and having described the Miller himself as a figure appropriate to *fabliaux*, Chaucer

prepares us for that genre. The figures of the aged and jealous husband, the lusty

young wife, and the poor scholar settle our expectations. While speaking in a courtly

manner of his "derne love" for his "lemman," Nicholas vulgarly grabs the young wife

"by the queynte" (3276).[32] Nicholas's use of the conventions of courtly love

language, which prototypically demands delicate euphemism and female consent,

joins with his more direct actions to demonstrate how *fabliau* often mediates the

play between differing genre schemata through the genitals of its characters. To

overcome Alisoun's protests, Nicholas "spak so faire, and profred him so fast, / That

she hir love hym graunted atte laste" (3289–90). Nicholas's linguistic game of

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31 See, for instance, Christopher Dean, "Imagery in the Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale," *Mediaeval Studies* 31 (1969): 149-163; Robert P. Miller, "The Miller's Tale as Complaint," *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 5 (1970): 147–160; Edward C. Schweitzer, "The Misdirected Kiss and the Lover's Malady in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*," in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, 223–233. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986; and Scott Vasczily, "*fabliau* Plotting against Romance in Chaucer's Knight's Tale." *Style* 31.3 (1997): 523–542.

32 The disjunction between Nicholas's words and his actions when he approaches Alisoun is like that of the squire's in the Old French *fabliau* "Cele qui se fist foutre." In it, a squire bets that he will be able to seduce a widow grieving by her husband's grave. The squire approaches her with courtly language interspersed with more direct speech; the mixture prompts knowing laughs from an audience attuned to the violation of expectations.

seduction conflicts with his actions to focus our attention on the *fabliau* sexual body

that is a central schema of the tale's dominant genre. Chaucer emphasizes the

linguistic game by using a substantive adjective as a barely euphemistic pun.

"Queynte" connotes the deceitfulness and secrecy often ascribed to *fabliau* women

even while it approaches a more direct and vulgar name. The line between courtly

love conventions and *fabliau* vulgarity blurs on the word "queynte" to place in

tension both categories.

Courtly love language grants Alisoun control *fabliaux* does not, while it

simultaneously shows that control to be illusion. Alisoun's acquiescence is a forgone

conclusion. Nicholas, although using courtly language in his seduction, escapes the

limits placed upon his behavior (action scripts) by that genre when he forces

himself upon Alisoun and thus denies her the option of refusal.[33] Because the *fabliau*

female body is always open to sexual advances, whether the woman herself wills it

or no, Alisoun cannot ultimately resist. Nicholas's entrapment of Alisoun in the

fabliau ethos helps explain the rapidity with which she consents. The text, however,

maintains the expectations of both genres at length. Rather than collapsing the

moment into a single schema, it switches back and forth between the two far more

frequently than in most *fabliaux*. In a deft expansion of existing formal possibilities,

the narrative maintains the inter-generic tension from the first moments between

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33 For instance, in "Constant du Hamel," another Old French *fabliau*, courtly language works to protect
    Ysabeau, the main female character, until she can prepare her revenge against her verbal assailants.
    Whereas Ysabeau is able to refuse her suitors as their wooing follows the same constraints as
    Absolon's (linguistic, offering of gifts, etc.), Nicholas's blunt actions demonstrate that he uses the
    language ironically.

Alisoun and Nicholas, through the descriptions of Absolon, until the notorious confrontation with her "nether yë" at the window. Without a suitably responsive model of genre, this instability remains hard to recognize.

Absolon's failure to ironize the schemata of courtly love leads to his humiliation. Whereas Nicholas uses the schemata for ends other than they would allow in their "home" genre, Absolon has internalized the identity of courtly lover. As Shannon Forbes notes, "his sense of self and identity is entirely based upon his need to succeed at defining himself within the confines of what the courtly love discourse dictates."[34] Absolon serenades Alisoun at night beneath her closed window, sends gifts and go-betweens, and begs for a kiss from her in nearly the same words earlier used by Nicholas. Because Absolon's desires are constrained by the schemata of courtliness, however, his speech is both longer and more metaphoric than Nicholas's:

> Awaketh, lemman myn, and speketh to me!
>
> Wel litel thenken ye upon my wo,
>
> That for youre love I swete ther I go.
>
> No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete;
>
> I moorne as doth a lamb after the tete.
>
> Ywis, lemman, I have swich love-longinge,
>
> I may nat ete na more than a mayde.   (3700–3707)

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34 Forbes, Shannon. "To Alisoun Now Wol I Tellen Al My Love-Longing": Chaucer's Treatment of the Courtly Love Discource in *The Miller's Tale*." *Women's Studies* 36 (2007): 1–14 (13).

Absolon sweats and grows faint, prototypically embodying desire in a courtly context. The repetition of "lemman" links Absolon's speech with Nicholas's while exemplifying the differences between their approaches. Whereas Nicholas embodies desire with his actions (grabbing, kissing, and stroking), Absolon turns to metaphors of eating to communicate his "love-longinge." In his attempt to play the proper courtly lover, Absolon strikes upon a highly suggestive metaphor that implies a certain lack of control over his chosen mode of expression. He imagines himself as a lamb longing after the teat, which connotes either his own sexual desires or, in its close approach to a blunt statement of erotic longing more fitting to *fabliaux*, a failure to couch his words in more euphemistic language. This image and his inability to eat also link desire to eating, another common *fabliau* trope. Rather than making him a perfect, gentle lover, Absolon's naive adherence to misplaced schemata and action scripts makes him an object of mockery both by the teller of the tale and the characters within it. Absolon thus unwittingly remains entangled in the schema of the text's dominant genre while he believes he inhabits a different world. He has made a basic category error by failing to recognize that what he thinks is a courtly love situation is, in fact, one of ribald *fabliaux*, straight-forward expressions of desire, and female receptivity embodied by orifices.

Louise M. Bishop notes the central role played by orifices in defining identity in "The Miller's Tale."[35] In his role as the foolish courtly lover mooning for Alisoun

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35 "The Miller's Tale" recalls the humorous masculine confusion over female genitalia found in the Old French text "Berengiers au lonc cul."

outside her window, Absolon bears the brunt of the *fabliau*'s first gag. Expecting a

kiss, the traditional mercy granted a courtly lover by his "lemman," Absolon instead

receives a shock to his senses. The darkness compromises Absolon's ability to

interpret sensory inputs.[36] The materiality of the genre again turns upon basic

cognitive processes for its humor; reality is not straight-forward, but relies crucially

on embodied experience.

But without a robust theory of mind, we would have no way of appreciating

Absolon's shock. The context in Absolon's mind includes courtly formula and the

expectation of a kiss. Touch joins with taste, however, to give Absolon a surprise

from beyond his horizon of expectations. Here Alisoun embodies *fabliau* female

openness when "at the wyndow out she putte hir hole," (546) a doubling of

openings, both of which will soon be shut in mockery of the generically out-of-place

Absolon. The full force of his senses confront his mistaken expectations. Rather than

an embodied context, Absolon's is one formed from a literary genre that proscribes

graphic depictions of sexuality. The scene at the open window thus stages an

encounter between two genre schemata, the instability of which is mediated

through the sexual *fabliau* body.

The window frames a conceptual blend of *fabliau* embodiment and courtly

love schema embodied by Alisoun, Nicholas, and Absolon. When Alisoun tricks

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36 "Aloul" again provides a parallel scene, this time of impoverished sensory data and the attendant
consequences for interpretation. In it, Aloul is cuckolded in his own bed as he sleeps, but because of
the dark, cannot be sure of the situation until he has thoroughly explored the other man's body with his
hands. Only once he has hold of the other man's genitals does he cry out to his hired help for
assistance.

Absolon into kissing her "nether yë," she disrupts the sensibilities of his self-chosen

genre through a confrontation with a key physical site of the *fabliaux*. The window

scene is thus a space of misreading based on mistaken generic assumptions. Further,

the embodiment of reading and misreading is grounded in a material space. Only

after Absolon discovers his mistaken expectations does he engage with schemata

available to *fabliau* characters: he seeks physical revenge with a hot poker. As

Absolon abandons his identity as a courtly lover, the plot accelerates towards its

denouement. No longer keeping in tension conflicting schemata, the tales achieves

its resolution quickly.

Throughout this examination of how "The Miller's Tale" engages with genre

and embodiment, two themes enabled by a cognitively-inflected approach continue

to arise. The first is the possibility of reading multiple generic schemata in a single

text, despite its classification as a *fabliau*. We are able to separate out different,

related schemata from one another. The possible elements, scripts, and structures

need not cohere into a monolithic, all-encompassing definition of genre, but instead

interact with one another to identify different concerns or aspects of a system.

Although the primary genre in which this and the other works discussed in this

chapter participate is, of course, *fabliaux*, they also participate in courtly love lyric,

epic, and other medieval genres. While this classification indicates the predominant

genre, our understanding of how the mind categorizes allows us to discover what

Dimock terms the "rough textures" of a work, to find where a text deploys markers

of multiple genres for strategic purposes. The second benefit of a cognitively-informed genre model is that it enables us to see more clearly how multiple schemata prime the audience for possible configurations of bodies, power relations, and a host of other concepts associated with each different genre. This schema-switching common to *fabliaux* has led many critics to label it an essentially parodic genre, but *fabliaux* activate multiple generic schemata for reasons other than just parody. As we see in "The Miller's Tale," the conventions of courtly love can serve to limit a character's behavior while preparing the audience for a joke by way of purposefully violated expectations.

We find, further, satisfactory answers to the questions I posed at the outset. Alisoun's actions, rather than betraying a troubling lack of consistency, result from the conflict between Nicholas's two methods of approach. He speaks the language of courtly love, but in his forward actions embodies the frank *fabliau* sexuality. Nicholas resides inside the house; he is an insider of the dominant genre. The specter of rape arises when Alisoun commands him to "Do wey youre handes, for youre curteisye" (101) and threatens to cry out for help, but is quickly submerged by the language of courtly love through Nicholas's speech "so faire." By first grabbing hold of Alisoun, Nicholas activates the scripts common to *fabliaux* in which the woman may threaten to cry out, even though her protestations will fail. Alisoun's invocation of "curteisye" then shifts the script temporarily to one from courtly love in which Nicholas must beg for mercy, leading Alisoun to grant him her

love "atte laste" (104). Nevertheless, the predominant schema of *fabliau* has already predetermined her acceptance and thus transforms the moment into a comment on the "true" desires of the courtly lover and the hypocrisy of courtly euphemism. There is, then, no contradiction between Alisoun's first refusal and her quick change of heart. Genre determines her behavior; it is only the method by which Chaucer brings about her acceptance of Nicholas that changes. Whereas *fabliaux* often unmask the ideologies behind other genres, here Chaucer invokes courtly love precisely to mask the specter of sexual violence common to the *fabliaux*, thus reversing the usual operation.

Many of the cruxes in this poem result from an effort to understand the characters as individuals with clear motivations. That is, they result from our desire to ascribe knowable minds to Alisoun, Absolon, Nicholas, and John. This analysis, however, shows that the characters are, instead, deeply entwined with questions of generic prototypes and represent a literary engagement with questions of generic blending and their structures. That we desire so fervently to read the characters as autonomous individuals attests to Chaucer's skill in characterization combined with our cognitive predisposition. Indeed, as Zunshine points out, applying Theory of Mind to literary creations is perhaps why we read fiction in the first place.

In Absolon's case, on the other hand, we see a figure wholly invested in courtly love. He would never begin by holding Alisoun "harde by the haunchebones" (93), but instead woos strictly through language, gifts, and song. Whereas Nicholas

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shifts to courtly language for purely tactical purposes in line with the dominant

genre, Absolon fails to recognize the context. Chaucer thus demands of his audience

that they create a conceptual blend in which a courtly lover finds himself

unwittingly trapped in a *fabliau*. Only after the misdirected kiss does Absolon

recognize his mistake, at which point he shifts into the scripts available to

characters of *fabliaux*: sexualized physical violence. The tension of the conceptual

blending of two genres Chaucer maintains for so long resolves quickly as Absolon

burns Nicholas. His cry for water awakens John, Alisoun's wife, who brings the

slapstick conclusion, held so long in abeyance by the blend, crashing down. It is, in

fact, this resolution of tension, itself embodied as the potential energy inherent in a

bathtub hanging from the ceiling, that provides the sense of closure we experience

at the end. We no longer need the conceptual blend of two conflicting genres to

make sense of the action; the poem resolves into a "pure" *fabliau* that the Miller can

sum up neatly. Throughout, we have laughed at the out-of-place Absolon. But

juggling all the conflicts and the possible interactions of different schemata demands

sustained cognitive work. When "this tale is doon," we, like the

townspeople,"laughen at this stryf" from relief. It is only upon reflecting upon what

we have read that come to recognize the horrific possibilities that drive the laughter.

RAPE CULTURE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN FABLIAUX
Lacy argues that the fabliaux is a generally conservative genre that upholds

patriarchal values: "fabliaux as a group are profoundly conservative, even

reactionary, compositions, using humor to preserve and enforce a status quo considered to be natural or even divinely instituted" (37–8). Although we can hear the bodytalk in "Constant du Hamel," the poem is not exempt from Lacy's critique, nor are Chaucer's works. In discussing how Chaucer handles the genre in "The Reeve's Tale," Brueur argues that the erasure of rape by attempting to transform it into seduction after the fact participates in "the insidious ubiquity of rape culture" (10). Although Brueur's view of fabliaux is perhaps more critical than Lacy's, both note that rather than subversive (as many critics have claimed), fabliaux support the period's patriarchal ideology. By examining how many of these texts construct female bodies as inherently open to sexual advances, we see further one important aspect by which the conservativism of the genre functions. "Constant du Hamel" demonstrates that some of the most graphic depictions of female openness sustains the misogynist logic that women are another circuit for male competition. Kathryn Gravdal notes "the early medieval laws on *raptus*... share one overriding concern: that of maintaining peace among men" (8). This is how the rapes of other mens' wives in "Constant du Hamel" works; it is how the rape-turned-seduction in "Aloul" works; it is how the rapes of a mother and daughter in "The Reeve's Tale" work. It is, even, how the ambiguous seduction of Alison in "The Miller's Tale" works. We find fabliaux repeatedly maintaining the idea of women as objects for competition between men and who, after being raped, often enjoy it according to the texts.

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That the wives in "Constant du Hamel" do not, after their violation, become allies to Constant therefore stands out as potentially anomalous. Whereas in most cases the literary woman's receptive body leads her to enjoy the violation, as Hortense and Aloul's wife do, as the women in "The Reeve's Tale" do, the bodytalk we can hear from Constant and Ysabeau's victims speaks decidely of humiliation and resistance. Because, however, such a line of thought threatens to run counter not only to the ideological investments of the genre but also the logic of the text itself that constructs women as routes for competition between men, this fabliau finds other tactics for defusing the potential unraveling of its project. The first tactic is the graphic depiction of female post-coital openness and the narrator's vulgar jokes thereof. The image of dice primes the audience to think of games rather than violence, but games that are competitions where wages may be lost or won. The suggestion of gambling gives the scene not only a ludic tone, but again connects women to wealth.[37] Further, the competition in "Constant du Hamel" exists not only between Constant and his wife's unwelcome suitors, but between the three men in the barrel as well. After each rape, the other two men joke about what has just happened and poke fun at the victim's husband. As the narrator also notes, after the three violations, none of the men will be able to shame the other with it since they have all been punished equally. The logic of this argument indicates how the woman's body is, in effect, a extension of the man's and intimately related to his own

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37 Gravdal notes that much of the concern in early medieval rape law was over the value a virgin
    possessed to her family as property.

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honor. Despite our ability to read the suffering and humiliation of the three women, the textual emphasis remains on the competition between men, here figured as games, gambling, and jokes.

Even though the fabliau validate the ideology that enables rape culture, many of the fabliaux construct the male body in a similar fashion. It is not only the fabliau women who can be victims of sexual violence. The heteronormativity of the genre prevents homosexual rape from appearing in the fabliaux, but the male body nevertheless is another site of violence, sexualized or not, and similarly vulnerable. Just as fabliau women demonstrate an almost insatiable lust, so too do fabliau men. Scholars often note the misogyny in depictions of female sexual appetite, but to the neglect of male appetite, a fact that suggests a blindness born of our modern biases about masculine and feminine identity.[38]

Numerous examples attest to sexualized violence against men, either threatened or enacted, which drives many fabliaux. The threatened castration of the priest in "Aloul" and the actual castration in "Le Prestre crucefié" demonstrate this fact, which Bloch argues is a generalizable feature of the genre. The near escape

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38 In contemporary culture, it is the man who supposedly always wants sex. Numerous evolutionary psychologists argue that these roles result naturally from adaption. Stephen Pinker, for one, gives the example of male celebrities like Wilt Chamberlain who appear to have no limit to their sexual appetite. Pinker also notes "male competition and female choice are ubiquitous in the animal kingdom" (464). Critics of the evolutionary psychological approach have noted that many of these sorts of arguments tend simply to confirm our own prejudices with seemingly scientific explanations. In this case, there is little evidence that sexual appetite is a genetic trait passed down solely from father to son, excluding daughters and inevitably increasing. The problem of confirmation bias that appears in evolutionary psychology might replicate itself in literary criticism. What if, instead of a gendered view of desire that, in contemporary culture, construes the male as voracious and the female as reticent (which is opposite the view we receive from many medieval texts), we posit instead a human desire in which both men and women participate?

from castration by the priest in "Aloul" exemplifies the emotional charge and relief such a scene could invoke in the audience. After the many turns of plot and mock epic battles, the priest is finally caught, forcibly restrained by Aloul's cowherds, and the razor brought right up to his genitals. The detailed preparation of the scene in "Aloul" serves to heighten the tension and sense of physical vulnerability that would thus be created in the audience because of their own embodied experience (a sense that would doubtless be more acute in the men of the audience). Because of the fabliau's insistent focus upon the priest's genitalia throughout, the threat of its removal makes it seem for the audience yet more real.

While the two women he has raped rescue the priest, itself an indication of the fabliau's investment in a masculine fantasy wherein rape victims become allies and willing lovers (a method Chaucer makes yet more pernicious in "The Miller's Tale"), his escape nevertheless creates in the audience a sense of relief precisely because of the physical reaction that attends it. Because throughout the poem the priest's genitalia have been metaphorically ingested, and literally grabbed, probed, stroked, and approached with a razor, they become in a sense the affective center of the plot and the audience's attention. When he escapes, then, before we have time to reflect critically upon the troubling conversion of rape victims into willing defenders, we react with visceral relief. At the end of "Constant du Hamel," violence against the three husbands follows rapidly upon the heels of rape. After Constant assaults the third wife, he sets on fire the barrel in which the men are hiding, the

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looses his dogs on them. The poet notes the men are so horribly mutilated by the attack that they are unrecognizable and probably will not survive. Like the rapid shift in "Aloul," the extreme violence against the men in "Constant du Hamel" not only completes the revenge plot, but shifts the scene away from the room where the three women were raped, thereby distracting the audience with yet more violence.

Through a similar technique in *The Miller's Tale*, Chaucer deflects the corporeal punishment intended by Absolon for Alisoun toward Nicholas. While here, too, horrific physical violence is threatened, Chaucer, unlike the "Aloul" poet, does not create the stress and tension associated with anticipation of violence. Instead, he subdues the potential horror and revulsion through a rapid comic denouement, thereby distracting us from possible violence against a woman with a literary technique that yokes together two seemingly disparate plots into a satisfying, definitive conclusion. It is only in retrospect that our recognition of how narrow is Alisoun's escape can arise. But again, the violence against Nicholas and Jon is usually not connected to a larger fabliaux interest in the vulnerability of the male body. Because we recognize the social vulnerability of women and therefore tend to root for them because of both our tendency to support the "underdog" and our own feminist investments, we accept as practically justified what Alcuin Blamires calls the "quasi-sodomitic retaliatory attack" upon Nicholas (623). As Blamires notes, the attack is sexualized, further imbricating male fabliau bodies in the genre's systematic deployment of sexual violence. Likewise, John's fall from the rafters, in its

fulfillment of our generic expectations about naive, trusting husbands, creates primarily a comic effect. While much criticism considers issues of revenge and the female body, the parameters of the fabliau male body pass unnoticed.

At the moment of violence, Chaucer deflects our attention. Through the humor surrounding the moment of Nicholas's burning and the brevity with which it is reported, the horrifying nature of the violence is diminished, a stark contrast to, for example, the detailed violence of "Constant du Hamel" and "Aloul." The hyperbolic humor of a fart "as greet as it had been a thonder-dent" (3807) and the calls for water that cause the "carpenter out of slomber [to] sterte" (3816) frame the attack. Still, the "iren hoot" burns off "the skin an hand-brede aboute" (3811), a terrible wound. Unlike the tension created by the kinetic force of a tub hanging precariously from the rafters and ready to come down with the stroke of an axe, Absolon's revenge is quick. From the time the weapon is introduced without any explanation of Absolon's intentions (though we can suspect them) to the attack a mere twenty-five lines pass. In contrast, since Jon has been hanging from the ceiling Nicholas and Alisoun have sullied the marriage bed, Absolon has kissed her "nether yë," made his plans for revenge, and returned to receive a fart in the face.

The substitution at the shot-window of Nicholas's ass for Alisoun's exemplifies the roughly equivalent place of male and female bodies in fabliaux. The first encounter at the window irritates questions of incomplete male knowledge of female bodies and, by extension, female identity while participating in the fabliau

delight in and fetishization of the explicit description of sexual organs. By replacing

Alisoun with Nicholas to "amenden al the jape" (3799), Chaucer suggests not the

feminization of Nicholas, but a continuum that crosses gender boundaries. Absolon's

second encounter at the window further sexualizes Nicholas's body in a manner

similar to Alisoun's, portrayed by the Miller as innately sexual (and perhaps little

more). Nicholas takes Alisoun's place; Chaucer describes how he hangs his buttocks

out the window in the same terms and with the same corporeal details as he does

when Alisoun proffers her "nether yë." Indeed, the similarity in the descriptions

further enables intepretations regarding the Miller's own confusion about female

anatomy while continuing the tendency in fabliaux to assume a fundamental, human

embodiment that only distinguishes between men and women by their genitalia.[39]

    If as Burns demonstrates, we can hear the bodytalk of women in the fabliaux

to recuperate some limited female agency by reading against the grain of these

patriarchal texts, I propose that we can also hear the bodytalk of victimized men. By

doing so we discover that, despite their engagement in and perpetuation of some of

the worst prejudices of the Middle Ages, fabliaux often insist upon human frailty via

the sexual body. I do not in any way wish to lessen the importance of examining

misogyny and female subjugation in the Middle Ages, but instead only to make

visible the connection between the sexes made in fabliaux. The frequency of rapes in

the genre caution the stakes here, but we cannot as a result ignore the similar ways

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39 Other *fabliaux* that focus on genitalia include "Berengier au lonc cul," "Quatre sohais St. Martin," and
   "L'esquirrel" to name only a few.

the genre constructs bodies both male and female. By keeping in mind the persistent

embodiment of audience and how that affects cognition and therefore reactions to a

text, however, we discover aspects overlooked by critics using other lenses.

We should not be surprised when we discover that fabliaux tend to confirm

medieval attitudes toward sex and rape. As Gravdal notes, "medieval French law

was interpreted to support a long-standing tradition of indifference to male

violation of a woman's sexuality and legal personality" (131). While not excusable in

the least, we find a similar attitude across literary genres rather than specific to the

fabliaux. If, then, we wish to generalize about the texts as the concept of genre

enables and requires us to do, then we must examine what stands as unique or

different. It is with this consideration in mind that I compare the vulnerability of the

bodies of both sexes. While not excusing the genre for its complicity in rape culture,

among other moral failings we might attribute to it, I wish partially to recuperate its

reputation; by so regularly making the implicit connection between the bodies of

the sexes, the texts discussed here suggest an interest in corporeal existence that

undoes some gender differences while upholding others (particularly the enabling

effects of masculine fantasy). In the legal and cultural context, the depictions of rape

in "Constant du Hamel" become far more shocking. Guide Ruggerio notes of the

language in Venetian legal records of the time that it "curiously distant and

antiseptic" and that "a close physical description of what individual rapes entailed

might well have added considerable weight to the... penalties" (quoted in Gravdal,

132). Gravdal continues by pointing out that in the Cerisy court records, violence is often depicted with great attention to detail, but not so in cases of rape, which were presented in "a cursory tone." She goes so far as to suggest that "vagueness [is] so consistent that it eventually raises the suspicion that the resulting ambiguity is deliberate" (132). Even worse, many of the court records were themselves accused rapists. "Constant du Hamel" provides just such "a close physical description." In this aspect, however, it is not unique. Like "Aloul," it engages in the broader fabliau interest in detailed physical description centered, typically, around the sex organs. In this context, then, we can more clearly see that these poems have a perhaps more complicated relationship with sexual violence and human sexuality than we might assume.

CONCLUSION
Throughout this examination of how fabliaux works as genre, two themes enabled by a cognitively-inflected approach continue to arise. The first is the possibility of reading multiple generic schemata in a single text, despite its classification by most editors and scholars as a fabliaux. While this classification indicates certainly the predominant genre, our understanding of how the mind reacts to and in turn creates genre categories for a text allows us to discover the rough textures of a work, to find where the poet deploys the markers of genres other than the text's primary one for strategic purposes. In the case of "Constant du Hamel," for example, we find that the use of the courtly love schema allows the poet to distinguish

Ysabeau from the other wives in the tale both in the representations of their bodies

and in their actions and roles in the plot. Nevertheless, we are able through our

focus on genre as happening in the minds of the audience rather than a container for

a text to hear more easily the bodytalk of the raped women and to ask what work

those instances do for the poem's audience. We also find that, despite the

perpetuation of rape culture indicated by the depiction of fabliau woman's body, the

genre does not discriminate as much as we might have otherwise thought. A focus

on the embodiment of the characters and audience reactions through sympathetic

experience and imagining allows us to see that, rather than strictly misogynist in its

construal of sexuality, the common interpretations of fabliaux indicate instead some

of the prejudices in our own attitudes toward gender and sexuality.

Another benefit of a cognitively-informed genre model is that it enables us to

see more clearly how poets prime the audience for multiple schemata for comic

effect, possible configurations of bodies, power relations, and a host of other

concepts associated with each different genre. This code-switching has led many

critics to label the fabliaux an essentially parodic genre, but the fabliaux activate

multiple genres for reasons other than just parody. As we have seen, the use of

courtly love conventions often serves instead to proscribe limits to a character's

behavior, indicate differing powers, or simply prepare the audience for a joke

through generic interweaving. We can, further, through this more useful genre

model discover more easily the rough texture of poems and separate the different

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modes of literary discourse that inform each work. Rather than assume that every

element of a fabliau must indicate some fundamental characteristic of the genre as a

whole, we are now free to consider each element in its potentially strategic use, to

ask what work it does rather than force it into an ill-fitting box.

We see, too, how the fabliaux regularly achieve their effects by appealing to

the audience's recognition of everyday reality through a phenomenologically

recognizable material world. By insisting upon the necessity of an audience with

minds consistent with contemporary cognitive scientific findings, we can discuss the

ways in which texts prime the audience's various schemata, action scripts, and

related memories. This speculative recuperation of the medieval audience's

experience of a text permits us, further, to see continuities and divergences between

medieval mentalities and modern sensibilities. This distinction in turn isolates

features of a literary genre from cross-generic cultural ideologies that we might

otherwise mistakenly attribute to one or another genre. Or, we might struggle to

show how the cultural context informs the fabliaux because of an inability to see

how a text escapes the boundaries of its genre. Instead of attributing the misogyny

evinced by numerous fabliaux to the genre itself, we can see through a combination

of historical work on rape and a genre model that readily allows the mixture of

ideologies and schemata to inform a text that the misogyny so often attributed to the

fabliaux itself is, instead, more likely an indication of prevailing medieval attitudes,

not a feature strictly of the genre. This insight leads to the recognition that the

fabliaux, despite commonly placing the audience in role of sadistic voyeurs,

sometimes insist upon a greater degree of equality between the sexes centered upon

the vulnerable, sexual human body.

Gawain in Chivalric Romance: Silence and Noise, Knights and Monsters, Men and Women

In this chapter I turn from fabliaux to chivalric romance. I focus particularly on three romances that feature Sir Gawain and the non-normative bodies of characters with which he comes in contact: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur,* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle.* I demonstrate that the connections among these texts run far deeper than the presence of Gawain as protagonist and provide insights into the ideological tensions that animate the genre. The close reading of key passages from these works in the context of theories about chivalric romance as a genre reveals several surprising commonalities that cluster around the binaries of normal and abnormal bodies; noise and silence; vision and sight; male and female; and Christianity and courtliness.

Numerous scholars have attempted to define not only medieval genres, but what sense of genre, if any, medievals possessed. One of the predictions of category theory is that most categories will default to a mid-range[40]. That is, rather than seeing a dog first as either a Labrador or a mammal, we usually think of it as the basic-level category "dog." In the case of literary genres, we see this effect at work when we discuss "romance," or "*fabliau*" as genres. Romance, however,

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40   For an overview of basic level categories and their application to genre, see Crane, "Surface, Depth, and the Spatial Imaginary."

encompasses so many texts that the designation quickly devolves into incoherence. Narratives of Arthurian knights, crusaders, and merchant travelers can all fit under the term. Indeed, Geraldine Heng usefully broadens the realm of romance to include all of these and more; she also "suggests that one reason why romance flourishes but has been difficult to define with precision, or secure with demarcated borders, is that romance must be identified by the *structure of desire*, which powers its narrative" (*Empire* 3). Modern scholars, then, must elucidate the texts' structures of desire while also stating which specific romances they elucidate. In this chapter, I consider chivalric verse romances that feature Gawain to be exemplars of the concerns and methods evident in the broader corpus of chivalric romance in particular and, to a lesser extent, to romance in general.

Romance is a troubling genre for its seeming lack of coherence. Even though many other genres receive critical attention and present definitional problems, romance is almost another beast entirely. But clearly medieval audiences had a sense of the term's meaning. Melissa Furrow and Lin Yiu, for example, independently study lists of romances in medieval texts to uncover what a medieval audience considered a prototypical romance. We know that, for contemporary scholars, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Malory's *Morte D'arthur* are a few of the most popular and therefore most seemingly exemplary romances. But a medieval audience would not have recognized them as romances as such. There is a wide divergence between what texts we tend to read and discuss

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most and what medievals understood as prototypes of the genre. This view of how the term romance variously signifies suggests that, perhaps, "romance" does not name a basic-level category, but instead a more abstract one. Rather than a dog, romance is an animal, so to speak, a degree of abstraction that places it above the level of categories we turn to when we first try to classify. That is, the genre of romance is, for contemporary scholars, an intellectual construction derived from our urge to create taxonomies rather than an intuitive recognition of similarities among texts. While we do, no doubt, see enough similarities to group such a diverse array of works together under "romance," the vastness of the genre is unwieldy. We should not expect a genre to inhabit a clear territory; the metaphor of mapping a genre implies travel across borders, proximity, and movement. Still, Middle English verse romance demonstrates a coherence that demands we consider it as an entity in its own right and to recognize, further, that authors and audiences of the period must have had a sophisticated understanding of the variations and multiple territories inhabiting the continent of romance. Rather than restrict the label "romance" to a narrower field, it is useful to see the multitude of shifting, overlapping, and evolving territories inhabiting it, some of which solidify into islands unto themselves. But without the sea of texts surrounding them, these inward-looking, purposefully consistent and stable pockets lose their meaning, a meaning predicated upon insularity and difference. I argue here that Arthurian romance is one such island.

Furrow notes that, while we must have "a shared idea of romance [that] can be developed out of a recognition of what was *central* to the genre," there need not be any single defining characteristics (55; emphasis in original). She turns, instead, to Lakoff's work on categorization to posit a list of experiential domains that are common to, but not required by romance. Further, the fact that an audience possesses a "horizon of expectations" (Jauss) when approaching romances makes clear that the genre exists as a radial category bound by the rules of cognition.[41] On this basis, Furrow is able to examine medieval lists of romances to argue for what "fourteenth-century English readers thought of when they thought of the genre of romance" (62). As evidence for her claims, Furrow cites catalogues of romances in literary texts and contemporaneous attacks on romances for their moral shortcomings that might lead readers into sin. She confirms that "Jean Bodel's three great Matters—of Britain, France, and Rome the Great—are important domains of experience... that belong to romance" (69). Further, "the key figures Arthur (*with Gawain*) and Charlemagne appear most" (70; emphasis added). Her findings, which Liu's work independently confirms, indicate that the somewhat neglected romances *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* were far more central to medieval romance than contemporary critical attention grants them. More germane to my purposes here, though, is the central role played by Arthurian romance and Gawain's regular appearance as an immediately recognizable stand-in for the genre as a whole.

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41 For a more detailed discussion of this concept, see preceding chapters.

Furrow also examines the shifting domains of experience and themes at play in Middle English romance before the late fourteenth century, when comic poems like Chaucer's *fabliaux* arise to restrict once again the possibilities for romance. Her argument is, briefly, that continental romances were in dialog with the *chansons de geste* and the *fabliau*, a relationship that narrowed the range of topics available to authors of romance. With the arrival of the romance in England, however, the lack of a genre like *fabliau* led romance to occupy "a larger and more capacious territory for awhile before a new reconfiguration at the end of the fourteenth century" (141). By the time of the Gawain-romances under consideration here, the expectations of the genre had narrowed considerably, which should, we can predict, lead to stronger generic markers and more clearly defined boundaries generally. For the category of Arthurian verse romance, the territory shrinks dramatically, providing us with a genre that is often regular and internally consistent. That is, many of the Gawain romances remain in the "center" by following the prototype closely, which is marked by certain formulaic turns of phrase, characters, and events. When we find variation, then, it becomes even more meaningful in contrast to a well-defined corpus.

One of the ways in which the genre maintains its consistency is through style. Carol Fewster, in a detailed analysis of the "formalised and distinctive style" (ix) of Middle English romance considers, in particular, *Guy of Warwick*, which both Furrow and Liu show to be one of the most central manifestations of the genre.

Fewster explores how "medieval verse romances economically evoke a larger literary context" (1). Fewster thus engages precisely with the medieval expectations of romance that Furrow analyzes, but through style rather than themes or structures. Romances deploy a "clear set of generic signals" and "display strong formal similarities to each other" (4), a further indication that, even though this formalization does not carry over to structure and themes,[42] a recognizable style often determines audience expectations of a work. That Fewster bases her work upon such central works as *Bevis*, *Guy*, and *King Horn* strengthens her argument. By the time of the fourteenth and fifteenth century romances that are my primary focus here, Middle English romances, according to Fewster, rely heavily upon "stock incident, expressed in formulaic language" (29). The result is that "Middle English romance emphasizes its own typicality, as demonstrated by reference to generic allegiance" (29). The traditionalism of the genre, further, is one that relies upon a sense of its own literary past: "romance," notes Fewster, "creates a generic language in which the style itself indicates the importance of tradition" (30).

We can draw two important conclusions from Fewster's work. First, the genre of Middle English romance is one already deeply invested in creating the sense of a coherent body of texts and of declaring allegiance to an idea of genre. Indeed, the texts I consider in this chapter share a desire for coherence: of bodies, courts, and values. These texts interrogate potential ruptures so that they may be

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42   Furrow's examination of themes is both of a broader corpus than Fewster's and explicitly notes that genres need to share characteristics to be members of the same category.

contained.[43] While contemporary scholars have rightly expanded the meaning of "romance" to encompass a wide array of texts, when we speak specifically of late medieval English verse romance, the term edges near the hidebound sense of "genre" against which category theory fights. This seeming contradiction, however, is not a theoretical problem, but an example of how multiple models for categories (binary versus networked) can inform literary works. When a large number of texts make repeated efforts to hew close to a prototype, to huddle in the center of a tradition, then the resulting effect is that we might see clear boundaries. But these boundaries are purposeful. The desire for centrality among these texts is itself a key structural element, part of the dominant schema and thus has the result of looking like a clearly defined genre. The appearance of a self-contained genre, then, is not a contradiction of genre theory based on cognitive science, but a result of it. Moreover, a closed genre remains a network, albeit a purposefully self-referential one that, rather than connecting outward, forecloses that possibility.

The second conclusion we can draw from Fewster's work is that Middle English romance is nostalgic. Jeffrey Cohen concurs: "medieval chivalry was always embattled, compromised, dispersed, and as a result was also forever nostalgic for an immutability it never in fact possessed" (69). In its invocation of a past that leads to a stasis of style and thus a strong clustering around generic prototypes, we find a clue to some of the ideological and cultural investments of a genre that so insistently

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43 Carolyn Dinshaw makes this point about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which I discuss later in this chapter.

looks to the past and so loudly proclaims its allegiance to by-gone models of behavior and beliefs. Indeed, it is in the structure of the genre itself and the ways in which it sets expectations that we find the clearest connection between the genre's literariness and its embeddedness in larger cultural concerns. Rather than precluding historicist analysis, the formal features of the genre open the door for it.

The tightly constrained genre of Middle English chivalric romance offers evidence, because of its relative structural uniqueness among medieval genres, for the rarity of such structures. Indeed, the genre is itself guided so strongly by prototypes that it seems a distillation of them without elaboration, a structure that because of its aberrant nature must have meaning in itself. Further, by placing this tightly controlled genre in conversation with more fluid genres discussed in other chapters, I show how different generic structures respond to demands of meaning, audience, tradition, and context. The central tension animating the genre, I argue, arises from the joining of Christian and courtly values; the conflict between the two results from latent ideological inconsistencies that threaten to undermine the system. The texts I consider probe this conflict, which seeks through the bodies of the characters a resolution that can reaffirm the ideological viability of chivalric romance. This conflict plays out in the relative disembodiment of chivalric characters, what I am here calling the "erased knight."

Chivalric romance may construe itself as a literary island, but it is—like all genres—embedded in a broad context of motile genres that interact and refer

promiscuously to one another. Though romance is itself a genre as amorphous and variable as any other, the smaller subset of Arthurian verse romance is well-defined and stable across centuries. Such stability would not be possible without crystallized prototypes of characters, actions, and settings; these prototypes do, as we might expect, show variation through their different textual manifestations, but these variations are themselves largely predictable based on the rules of how elements of a schema may be negated or neglected. This statement, however, does not imply that Arthurian romance is monolithic or unresponsive to the historical or cultural structures and the moment of production, only that this responsiveness hews more closely to a pre-determined pattern. As analogy, we might consider the relationship between free and metered verse; Arthurian romance is more akin to a sonnet or a vilanelle—a form with rules. To trace these variations in full, however, would require a book-length study. I will therefore restrict my investigation to a yet narrower set of prototypes, but ones that are central to Arthurian verse romance: the figures of Gawain and the monsters he encounters.

GAWAIN, LOATHLY LADIES, AND MONSTROUS KNIGHTS

Gawain is, as the old books repeatedly tell us, the paragon of courtly chivalry, an exemplar of knightly values. Arthur, in "The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle," declares, "Of alle the knyghtes thou berest the flowre / That evere yett I fond" (373–74). In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Bertilak's retinue recognizes

Gawain's reputation: "alle þe men in þat mote maden much joye / To apere in his presense prestly þat tyme, / Þat alle prys, and prowes, and pured þewes / Apendes to hys persoun, and praysed is euer; / Byfore alle men vpon molde his mensk is þe most" (910–14). He is, in other words, a prototype of the most courteous, moral, and brave knight, the flower of chivalry. At times, one might object, and especially in the prose romances, Gawain appears as the opposite of this prototype. This seeming contradiction, however, relies first upon the audience's awareness of Gawain's status as knight par excellence. Without the availability of that schema, its negation becomes nonsensical. [44] As I consider only a limited number of English verse romances here, I will not delve into the issues surrounding the inversion of his characteristic traits except to say that the maneuver is one we can reliably predict about any relatively stable prototype. Gawain's enduring popularity results, in part, from his prototypical nature, but that does not require his characterization to be static. The network of associations surrounding his name immediately invoke specific expectations in an audience from which an author can then diverge with full assurance that the audience will recognize and appreciate the meaning of such changes. Hanh writes, "Gawain's courtesy… makes him the chief mediator of the father's law, the young man who offers the ultimate reassurance about the status quo" (24). Gawain provides a clear example of how generic prototypes negotiate meaning through context and expectations. Further, as an exemplary knight, Gawain

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44 William Vantuono reviews the scholarship on portrayals of Gawain, which have varied from exemplary to the "most cruel and treacherous of all knights in the thirteenth-century prose romances" (Broughton qtd. in Vantuono, 157).

metonymically represents the genre as a whole and thus makes the romances that feature him excellent entry points into the ideology and purposes behind the genre.

The absent body of the knight demands that we supply him one (we cannot easily conceive of a disembodied character; to do so is certainly not our default imaginative effort), while confirming his exemplarity. For, lacking guidance, we sketch in the prototype of the least aberrant, most perfect knightly body we can imagine, thus securing for Gawain his embodiment and his role.[45] No deviation from exemplarity is even possible without conscious effort on the audience's or reader's part. In his default prototypicality, Gawain represents chivalry in *toto*, the ideology it demands, and the genre that supports it. His quandries are chivalric romance's. Just as Gawain the character represents the genre, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*) serves as modern critical prototype. For this reason, I will draw regular connections between the other Gawain romances and *SGGK*. Among medievalists, *SGGK* centers the genre of verse romance because of its fame, aesthetic excellence, and the critical mass of scholarly discussion surrounding it. In this sense, then, we begin to see how different the modern generic network of chivalric romance is from a medieval one; whereas "romance" for a medieval centered upon *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and a handful of other texts, our idea of "romance" gravitates toward Arthurian texts, which are in turn centered around exemplars that include *SGGK*.

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45 Knightly embodiment is more complex and less stable than the brief discussion here suggests, as issue I examine in more detail later in this chapter.

Around Gawain revolves a constellation of characters like Sir Kay, the Loathly

Lady, the Green Knight, and, of course, King Arthur and Lady Guenevere. While it

may seem perverse to declare that Arthur revolves around Gawain, the latter is

regularly the more central figure. Arthur often exists in the background, even as his

court valorizes Gawain's values and adventures. Indeed, as the recurrent structure

of adventures away from and return to the court show, Gawain's (and other

knights') actions reflect back upon the king. Hanh writes: "Arthur establishes

Gawain's heroic stature and authorizes what might otherwise seem capricious

escapades as knightly quests. Yet in playing this background role to reckless

adventure, Arthur seems sometimes less than dynamic and often ambiguous" (25).

A genre obsessed with visibility, the Arthurian verse romances elevate the acts of

individual knights while enshrining the court's role as a witness to those acts.

In a study such as this one, which argues for the primacy of bodies as keys to

a genre, chivalric romance presents a seeming challenge: Gawain and his cohorts

rarely have clearly described bodies. When bodily description does take place, it is

typically only in exceedingly short passages that grant us a glimpse of the knight

hunting or fighting. Wounds—the dismembering of a body—are by far the most

common manifestation of a knight's embodiment. Otherwise, he is armor, horse,

weapons, and action, not body. Cohen writes: "steed and warrior and accoutrements

become... receptive points within a transformative assemblage" (50). The knight's

body, hardened and trained, but hidden beneath armor, becomes only a small aspect

of the knightly assemblage that establishes identity. He argues, further, that "the promulgation of a code of chivalry that valorized control and subordination... became an increasingly important way of altering embodied masculinity, of producing a male body as docile at court as it was useful on the battlefield" (53). We can see the absence of descriptions of the knight's body itself as both another indication of its docility and of the importance of the assemblage within which it participates. The knight's armor and clothing also signify and conceal. Heng writes of Arthur in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*: "his garments and armor... produce an elite masculine, military body whose ceremonial formality insists on its significance" (*Empire* 120). Parallel to my argument for Gawain's importance as a synecdoche for knighthood and chivalric romance, Heng continues: "Arthur's armor... is corporate armor, a part incorporating the institution of the whole" (*Empire* 121). The masculine, romantic body appears as an integrated whole visible not on its own, but through the assemblage it inhabits. The body itself, the vulnerable human body, disappears.

This notable absence of the knightly body would seem to contradict my claims in earlier chapters that embodied cognition demands an attention to the range of bodies represented in different genres. Rather than a contradiction, however, this (mostly) absent body serves a critical purpose in the genre's ideological and cultural work. When we read or hear about Gawain, we cannot help but imagine him. The texts not only invite us to construct a body for him and his

peers, but also provide shorthand signals as to how we should understand them. The formulaic descriptions of a knight's "countenance" as "bright" and other related adjectives invoke a body image. Gawain, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is called "semly," "fere," "hende," and "a comloker knyȝt nueer Kryst made" (672, 676, 827, 869), but the description of Gawain before he leaves Arthur's court focuses entirely upon his clothing, armor, and horse. A medieval audience would have had even less difficulty imagining a default chivalric body than we do, which even now remains an automatic, unconscious process. The genre's reliance upon an audience-constructed default body thus invests moments of explicit corporeal description with more meaning. Moreover, by requiring the audience to conjure the body without explicit direction, the genre implicates the audience in its ideological work. That is, if the absent chivalric body signifies and upholds structures of meaning, ideology, and culture, then the audience participates in an unavoidable way in making it thus signify. This cognitive work points out the necessity of generic expectations derived from schema and prototypes while permitting us to contextualize the literary within the socio-cultural.

The erasure of the knightly body becomes even more apparent when we compare descriptions of Gawain and other Arthurian knights to those of the Loathly Lady, the Green Knight, and other monstrously embodied characters. These characters show that Arthurian verse romances have no aversion to providing extended details about monstrous bodies, only that a character's described

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embodiment almost invariably carries a stigma about it; such bodies are abnormal. These bodies are the first, and sometimes only, thing the audience is expected to see. The figure of the Loathly Lady is a particularly prominent example owing to her appearance in multiple Gawain romances and, most famously, in the "Wife of Bath's Tale." In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* the poet delights in describing every nuance of Dame Ragnelle's grotesque appearance. Similarly, in *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, the Loathly Lady appears horribly disfigured, with a face that violates even the most basic anatomical expectations. While still nominally "ladies," and more or less treated as such by Arthur and his court, the texts force us to see the Loathly Lady as a body so ugly as to verge on monstrosity.

These romances are late and draw on a long tradition of the Loathly Lady, a transgressive figure who threatens to destabilize societal norms through gender identity, introduces economic exchanges, usurps masculine power, and generally questions the ideological underpinnings of chivalric romance. Her body is anomalous not only in its grotesqueness, but also in its visibility. Just as she is an agent of destabilization, so too is her body unstable, threatening boundaries. In her contact with Gawain, the Loathly Lady might crack the bedrock of the system itself. Yet though the Loathly Lady thus represents a vector of deterritorialization, her noticeable, unstable embodiment always resolves itself into a valorization of courtly society. She regularly presents a seemingly impossible choice, which Chaucer formulates thus:

> To han me foul and old til that I deye,
>
> And be to yow a trewe humble wyf,
>
> And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
>
> Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
>
> And take youre aventure of the repair
>
> That shal be to youre hous, by cause of me (364–369)

The choice presented to Gawain in *Dame Ragnelle* is between a wife who is beautiful at night, but ugly during the day, or the reverse. Male desire thus figures prominently in the choices the Loathly Lady presents her husband; in his refusal to choose, he masters sexual desire and overcomes both revulsion and lust to erase his body and its promptings. Thus, at the heart of the quandary are the genre's structures of desire. As Ellen M. Caldwell notes, "because these Loathly Ladies are transformed, they may be returned to conventional social roles, and the male bonds of the romance genre, of medieval society, and particularly of Arthur's court, may be reasserted" (250). As with other figures in chivalric romance, the threat is ultimately contained and re-assimilated into the generic economy.

The Loathly Lady is not, of course, the only monstrous being that inhabits the forests and courts of chivalric romance. Gawain's titular foe in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the most famous figure whose embodiment stands as a prominent

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feature, but the Green Knight fits a broader romance prototype: the giant enemy.[46]

This enemy appears in the figure of Sir Gromer Somer Joure, too, in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle.* In a context that values physical strength as highly as courtly behavior, the impressive size and strength of many of a knight's enemies immediately indicates their necessity to the chivalric economy of violence. Without physically worthy, even overwhelming opponents, the knight cannot prove his valor at arms nor can he demonstrate the triumph of courtliness over sheer brawn. Such enemies often appear in the forest or as an intruder into a court's banquet, both sites of great import to the genre. Many scenes in the genre occur in these two locales. While it is, therefore, unsurprising that the knight might meet his monstrous enemies in either place, the meaning of such encounters nevertheless differs depending on the location. Moreover, giants and other monsters all signify in varying ways. Indeed, their ability to mark rupture allows them and their cohorts of embodied difference to permit the vectors of culture and history to appear in the closed world of the genre.

To focus entirely on the absent knightly body and the monsters that they come up against neglects, however, one more important, though often marginalized, body schema: the courtly lady. Although characters like Queen Guenevere rarely receive much narrative attention, when they appear they receive a formulaic description akin to that of the knight. Texts emphasize the lady's clothing, her

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46 For discussions of giants in romance, see Cohen, *Of Giants* and Heng, *Empire of Magic*.

conventional beauty (often only gestured at, left to be assumed and therefore all the more idealized by the audience), and her character. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poet describes Lady Bertilak thus: "Ho watʒ þe fayrest in felle, of flesche, and of lyre, / And of compas, and colour, and costes, of alle oþer, / And wener þen Wenore, as þe wyʒe þoʒt" (943–45). She is described as the fairest, more beautiful even than Guenevere, but without other detail. It is left to the audience to imagine how the fairest woman look. Although the courtly ladies are—on the surface— typically either victims or simply spectators,[47] the patterns by which they are described derive from the same system as the descriptions of the knights. Again, such consistency bears meaning in its relative invariability, yet often garners little scholarly consideration precisely because it is so "conventional" (implying the same negative judgment as "generic"). There is, however, a direct connection between the method of physical description used for knights as that used for prototypical ladies like Arthur's queen. The courtly lady's embodiment also exemplifies the ideological and cultural concerns that pervade nearly all aspects of this tightly constrained genre.

Indeed, Arthurian romances are remarkably consistent in their adherence to generic prototypes of body, characterization, and motivation. This consistency suggests a genre deeply invested in constructing and perpetuating notions of a stable, valorized past in which identity and motivations were clear. But to construct

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47 For a reading that argues for women's centrality in a way that inverts and mirrors the standard reading of the genre as male-dominated, see Geraldine Heng's "Feminine Knots and the Other: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," which I discuss at length later in this chapter.

such a stable world requires a negating of the body's inherent resistance to conformity. The body signifies instability, rupture, and wild depths. The hardened, gleaming surface of the knight is all phallus, all authority, all shining and unequivocal. When Gawain sets out from Arthur's court, it is his armor and horse that the poet describes the most: "he watʒ hasped in armes, his harnays watʒ ryche; / Þe lest lachet ouer loupe lemed of golde / … al glytered and glent as glem of þe sunne" (590–91, 604). Only at moments of vulnerability and imperfection does the masculine body appear, but to fear for one's well-being is itself a weakness in a knight.

OPENING THE KNIGHT'S BODY

Although the Loathly Lady is one of the more obvious potential threats to the investments of the genre, the knight's identity is another site of potential rupture, one which in its embodied transformations and flows symbolizes the work of chivalric romance. As Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, and others have noted, bodies are often disruptive and diffuse.[48] Attempts to constrain the body rely upon sparse and formulaic description of chivalric and courtly bodies. Yet even such bodies remain unstable, a threat to a well-ordered system. Cohen provides one of the most detailed examinations of how the knightly body, in its discipline, betrays the instability of corporeal bounds, of the failure of the human body and the limits of skin to cohere as a conceptual category. Cohen writes, "the chivalric code was...

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48 See, in particular, Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity and Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism.

enmeshed within essentialist and socially normative ambitions for the body.... Yet, like any overarching ideology, chivalry promised a perfection that it could never in fact bestow" (*Medieval Identity Machines* 47). Because identity and bodies are always becoming, never complete, never "perfect," the search for stability in face of instability becomes generative. Hence, we find in romance a regular threat to the chivalric order and worldview, itself often embodied in monsters, only to be absorbed and controlled again by the text. The deleuzian becoming-knight Cohen analyzes is a "transformative assemblage" that consists of "the horse, its rider, the bridle and saddle and armor" (*Medieval Identity Machines* 76). This assemblage makes clear the porousness of the human body and the affective flows among the constituent parts of chivalric identity. Without horse or without armor, a knight cannot inhabit fully his role; he is fatally impaired.[49] Armor thus serves as an ideal body—hardened, polished, and mechanical—that conveys strength and impenetrability. Indeed, as Heng argues, even the battle scenes that so vividly display the insides of the knight only further the ideology of chivalry: "Even when it is disassembled by knightly weapons, the anatomization of that noble subject of war, and of history, reinforces the identity, purpose, and centrality of the knight" (*Empire* 171). That is, even the moments of greatest corporeal vulnerability perpetuate the ideology symbolized by the armored body-horse-weapon circuit that

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49 We see this impairment, for example, in the King Arthur of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, which I discuss later in this chapter.

expands the physical manifestation of knighthood while circulating almost entirely at the level of the surface.

Further, such assemblages disperse identity and embodiment. Human skin cannot contain the knight. In continual motion among its parts, the chivalric body enlarges to encompass equine, human, and metal bodies that displace the male, singular, human body, which is dispersed and interpellated until it becomes almost invisible. Instead, the structures of desire animating the assemblage become more important than the concealed and disciplined human frame. Cohen notes, further, the cultural components of this machine. Because knights often had no landed inheritance and no stable position in court, they represented a threat to ordered society. They were thus taught a regime of self-discipline that sought to eliminate their propensity for destabilizing aggression. As a result, "a horse under the complete control of its rider was," Cohen writes, "the public signifier of a knight's internalized discipline, of his self-mastery" (*Medieval Identity Machines* 59). Like chivalric behavior, the horse provides another public, visible marker of identity and the quality of a knight's character. But, in this visibility, the body is again occluded, a strategic vanishing.

"Nowhere does the inhuman circuit of the Deleuzoguattarian horse have more immediate medieval relevance than for the rigorous training of subjectivity and body that is chivalry, the code of idealized masculinity at the heart of knighthood" (Cohen 46). In his focus on the horse, Cohen mentions only in passing

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the instruments of chivalry, nor does he notice that, while the chivalric body is indeed a circuit that decenters the human body, the descriptions of knights are noticeably lacking in an interest in anything other than surfaces-as-depths: rather than skin and muscle, we see armor, shields, swords, horses, and moral qualities. We can, thus, peer both inside and outside the knight, but rarely do we glimpse the human body. The decentering assemblage is even more radical than what Cohen describes. Paradoxically motivating this narrative and descriptive lack is an essentializing code of the body that takes its presence and its contours not just for granted, but as object to be controlled. The knight's subjectivity rests in surfaces and behaviors (themselves the "face" of character); rather than an identity based on a human body; the body is what must be suppressed and erased for the chivalric subjectivity to arise in the first place. The literary manifestation of this absence is made visible through surfaces, especially, the hardened, metal surfaces of armor.

The knight's "self-mastery" encompasses desire, aggression, public behavior, and visage. He must deny the body and ignore even the desire for self-preservation. To die honorably and leave a good tale to tell is, indeed, better than to live to fight another day. Worries about self-preservation are unchivalrous cowardice. As we see in Gawain's repeated refusals to give in to temptation while Bertilak hunts or in his mastering of revulsion when he accepts the Loathly Lady as bride, the exemplary knight must overcome sexual desire and the instincts of the body to maintain

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perfect courtesy.[50] Despite the Loathly Lady's horrific appearance, in *Dame Ragnelle*, Gawain responds stoically: "Syr, I am redy of that I you hyghte, / Alle forwardes to fulfylle" (534–35). We might see Gawain's failure, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to return to Bertilak the three kisses he received as a failure not only because of his dishonesty, but also because he has allowed physical desire to determine his actions. We have multiple ways of understanding his reluctance to kiss Bertilak. Carolyn Dinshaw has noted the significance of the kisses as a potentially queer moment, a potential simultaneously precluded. But, since we instinctively assume knowable motivations for this fully fleshed character, assume that he has a mind we can know similar to our own (or even, hold up as a model of behavior), we can posit multiple possible motivations. What if Gawain, in his suppressed desire for the forbidden wife, wants to keep the secret of their kisses, thus transgressing a code that demands public scrutiny of all acts? Maybe he enjoyed the moments, gave in however briefly to sexual desire, and so holds the memory to himself. Or, perhaps the sexuality of the moments makes recreating it with Bertilak uncomfortable, a seeming betrayal of not only normative heterosexuality, but also the laws of homosociality so fundamental to chivalry. By permitting his discomfort—whatever its source—to drive his actions, Gawain fails in self-mastery, the constitutive mode of the chevalier.

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50   This topic is discussed at length later in this chapter.

While, as Cohen remarks, the knight's body required hardening itself to support the weight of armor and weapons he must bear, we rarely find such training represented in the literary texts. Indeed, in his insistence upon the historical realities of knighthood, Cohen inserts into the picture the image of a muscled, disciplined male body that rarely appears in the texts. Our cognitive need to conjure a concrete embodiment appears at every turn, even when we purposefully emphasize the expanded circuit of bodies as a process that *does* rather than a limit that *is*. Gawain, for instance, is already always the flower of chivalry, its full expression. His body remains concealed in the circuit of identity that crucially relies upon armor, a visible, lovingly detailed shell that represents the knight far more than his human body. In his emphasis on the equine component of knightly identity, Cohen mentions only in passing the knight's armor. Yet the brilliance of this metal covering repeatedly appears in narrative.

But there exists also a deeper connection between the courtly genders. In the critical focus on the figure and identity of the knight as representative of the genre, the courtly lady is sometimes neglected. The bases of identity remain consistent across genders in chivalric romance, a fact that points up the broader generic conception of identity running not through the body bounded by skin, but the body in contact with scopic technologies. Heng writes, "a person *is* his body, and... the body is continuous with identity in some intrinsic, quintessential fashion" (*Empire* 168). This body-identity relationship extends also to women. The courtly lady's

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dress is analogous to the knight's armor. Both are visible markers of class, and hence value in the public, courtly sphere. Both clothes and armor find regular place in narrative for the sort of extended examination so notably absent when we look for the human body. The distinct obsession with surfaces as guarantors of depths, a pattern not restricted to one gender over another, implies fundamental beliefs about the nature of the human that transcends gender identities.

THE THREATS OF DAME RAGNELLE'S MONSTROUS MOUTH
In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, armor and clothing both mark identity in ways that demonstrate not only the cross-gender signification of surfaces, but also the anxiety over slippage between what is visible and what is true, between the surface and the spirit. The romance shows, in short, a genre probing its ideology for weaknesses in search of solutions that will resolve them; these explorations center around the fundamental role the body plays in medieval conceptions of identity, generic expectations, and audience response to those bodies as correspondent with their own classed, gendered, and lived bodies. The poem exemplifies many of the recurrent themes, characters, and concerns of the genre of chivalric romance. The plot of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* will seem familiar to any who have read Chaucer's later "Wife of Bath's Tale." Indeed, many scholars cite *Ragnelle* as a source for Chaucer's work. Surviving in a 16th-century manuscript, *Ragnelle* tells of an encounter in the woods between King

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Arthur and Sir Gromer Somer Joure who, like the Green Knight of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, "represents the forces of wildness and incivility" (Hahn 41). Threatening to kill the unarmored Arthur, who has separated from his hunting party, Gromer sets the king on a quest to discover what women most desire. After Gawain and Arthur search in vain for the answer, only to fill books with a multiplicity of possible responses, Dame Ragnelle—a loathly lady—offers Arthur the right answer if he will arrange for Gawain to marry her. Gawain, loyal knight and friend that he is, agrees to accept Ragnelle and does so without complaint despite her violations of every norm of courtly society and social class: beauty, manners, and dress. On their wedding night, faced with the unpleasant prospect of consummating their marriage, Gawain refuses to choose between the options Ragnelle presents him: to have her beautiful at night and foul during the day or vice versa. In granting Ragnelle the mastery—the answer to what a woman most desires—Gawain "unwittingly fulfills the terms for setting [Ragnelle] free from her enchantment" (Hahn 43). Gawain then finds her beautiful and devoted at all times, thereby restoring the order of the courtly society and allowing the poem to end "with everyone established in his or her proper place, and with courtesy restoring the Round Table's customary mutuality and hierarchy" (Hahn 43). The poem thus poses a challenge to the structures of the genre's investment in courtly order only magically to reestablish that order by the end.

The poem manifests a tension between courtly desire and masculine sexual desire through the bodies of the characters. The Loathly Lady's grotesque appearance receives repeated treatment that emphasizes her horrific mouth. When King Arthur first meets her, the poet inverts the conventional depictions of a courtly lady's beauty with a precision that makes clear the parodic nature of the lady's body:

> Her face was red, her nose snotyd whitalle,
>
> Her mowithe wyde, her tethe yalowe overe alle,
>
> With bleryd eyen gretter then a balle.
>
> Her mowithe was nott to lak:
>
> Her tethe hyng overe her lyppes,
>
> Her chekys wyde as wemens hippes.
>
> A lute she bare upon her bak;
>
> Her nek long and therto greatt;
>
> Her here cloteryd on an hepe;
>
> In the sholders she was a yard brode.
>
> Hangyng pappys to be an hors lode,
>
> And lyke a barelle she was made. (231–42)

Prior to this description, the first of any woman in the poem, the men's bodies received scant attention from the poet. Instead, they are metonymically characterized by what type of gear they wear (hunting or battle) and by swords or

bows. In this passage, then, the loathesomeness of the lady's body infects the text's female bodies generally. The insistent attention to her ugliness bears with it the charge of sexual revulsion. Her mouth receives by far the most detail; a later passage reviews, again, her foulness and creates an image suggestive of medieval fears of *vagina dentata*, as both Russell A. Peck (115) and Mary Leech note (217).[51] Her appearance, centered on its monstrous mouth, undoes the courtly deflection of intercourse to a chaste kiss as it interrogates the buried sexual desire of knights without which Sir Gawain's fateful decision fails to signify.

Multiple anxieties about the status of romance women appear through the Loathly Lady's mouth; the mouth also conveys secret knowledge about women from outside the bounds of chivalric romance's purview. First, as displaced totem of a woman's sexual desirability, the grotesque mouth argues against sexual desire generally. In the Christian erotic economy at the heart of chivalric romance, sexual desire is denied to win greater glory for the knight, his king, and God. Second, from the woman's mouth, symbol of the sinfulness and corruption of the flesh, comes the secret knowledge about women previously unavailable to Arthur and Gawain. The scene in which Dame Ragnelle imparts this wisdom centers the poem both figuratively and literally. It appears after a long, failed quest for knowledge by both Arthur and Gawain, a quest that leaves them with a book full of potential answers to

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51 Compare these scenes with those in the *fabliau* "Le Jugement des cons," in which three sisters must describe their genitalia in a competition for a husband; one of the sisters invokes the vagina dentata when she claims that her "con" lacks teeth. Other *fabliau* also play with this idea; see the preceding chapter for more details.

the question "What do women want?" The Loathly Lady's answer appears almost

precisely in the middle of the poem and serves as the fulcrum upon which the plot

turns. Whereas the first vision of her ugliness plays against the typical review of the

courtly lady's beauty, the second description fixates upon her unreasonable mouth:

> She was so fowlle and horyble.
>
> She had two tethe on every syde
>
> As borys tuskes, I wolle nott hyde,
>
> Of lengthe a large handfulle.
>
>
> The one tusk went up and the other doun.
>
> A mowthe fulle wyde and fowlle igrown,
>
> With grey herys many on.
>
> Her lyppes laye lumpryd on her chyn;
>
> Nek forsothe on her was none iseen--
>
> She was a lothly on! (547–56)

Enclosed within the two declarations of her loathesomeness is an apparent

obsession with the foulness of her mouth, a hole that is an embodied reminder of

her lack of a place in the chivalric world. Rather than fitting neatly into the schema

of the genre, she represents a monstrous negation.

Chivalric romance reserves a special role for monsters. They are the external,

embodied threat to the entire edifice that must be domesticated and rendered a safe

reaffirmation of courtly values. The dinner in reluctant celebration of the marriage between Ragnelle and Gawain layers another meaning upon her mouth while confirming its monstrous import. Whereas the poet skips over the wedding ceremony proper, the banquet afterward, which Ragnelle insists be public and lavish, marks not merely her appearance as loathesome, but her manners as well. She violates etiquette as she ravenously devours the entirety of every plate set before her, much to the horror of the knights, squires, and ladies in attendance. She does not wait for anyone else, eats six times as much as any others, breaks her bread "ungoodly" (608), and causes the men to curse her: "Alle men then that evere her saw / Bad the deville her bonys gnawe, / Bothe knyght and squyre" (616–18). Her appetite, the curse implies, is akin to the devil's, who they pray will gnaw her bones in retribution for her own devouring; the curse shades her acts with the specter of sinfulness. Her ravenous appetite and her wise speech establish a contrast between Christian conceptions of the body as corrupt and the courtly reliance upon beauty as a marker of virtue. In her eating, Ragnelle is foul; in the speech and knowledge that issue from her mouth, she is virtuous. Her mouth thus serves as a nexus of embodied ambiguity for the conflict animating the poem.

Ragnelle's foul appearance and behavior shame all who come into contact with her, exemplifying the link between physical and spiritual goodness. There is always a suspicion cast upon the ugly and the monstrous, as though outer appearance reflects one's inner state. The equivalence holds equally true for beauty.

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The best knights and ladies are flawless in both behavior and looks. The genre calls

for a stable, legible world in which bodies unproblematically mirror the inner self.

The uncourtly, dangerous, possibly sinful ingestion Ragnelle displays, then, becomes

a threat to Gawain and, by extension, the entire Arthurian court. Gawain's

immediate acceptance of her as his bride is thus in keeping with chivalric disregard

of physical desires for security and pleasure. As bravery in the battlefield demands

recklessness from knights, especially ones as exemplary as Gawain, so too does his

behavior in court and in the bedroom require a neglect of physical considerations in

light of his honor, secured by his words and bonds. He remarks to Arthur, in fact,

that to refuse his king's request that Gawain marry her would make him "false and a

great coward" (352). "By being forced to agree to a union with the Loathly Lady,"

Caldwell writes, "the male learns to forgo his libidinal desire in order to achieve a

higher purpose" (250). Yet, by the time of the wedding, it is clear that Ragnelle

threatens both figuratively and literally to devour Gawain. Her appetite seemingly

knows no bounds; when they retire to their bedchambers, the entire court fears for

his safety.

Ragnelle violates courtly expectations in other ways, as well. When Arthur

first encounters her, he sees not only her shocking hideousness, but also her well-

appointed palfrey. Immediately after the first stanza that describes her visage, we

discover "she satt on a palfray was gay begon, / With gold besett and many a

precious stone" (246–7), but it remains "an unsemely syghte" and "was no reason ne

ryghte" (248, 251). The juxtaposition of luxurious trappings with her ugliness, both here and before her wedding ceremony, when her dress is finer and more expensive than Gaynour's (Guenevere's), perpetuates not only the courtly expectation of consilience among parts, of a smooth, legible image, but also the genre's fascination with assembling identities through peripherals and equipment. Just as the armor makes the knight, the dress makes the lady. Ragnelle, though called by other figures "lady" and "dame" throughout the poem, upsets the neat equivalence between dress and character. It is a situation that leaves the characters at a loss; they wish not to include her, to secret her away (Gaynour begs Ragnelle to have the wedding in private), yet her dress and palfrey combine with Gawain's and Arthur's pledges to elevate her to status of lady. The unease of the knights and ladies who treat with her, then, results not simply from physical revulsion, but from the threat she poses to the codes of behavior that shape their world. As Leech notes, Dame Ragnelle's nobility places her inside the system so that she becomes a pollution that "reveals a social system at odds with itself" (reference? 219).

But Ragnelle is not the only threat. We might, in fact, read her appearance, ambiguously salvific though it becomes, as a manifestation of Arthur's initial violations. Arthur's abandonment of his hunting party in the first few stanzas of the poem breaks not only the conventions of the hunt, but also the homosocial unity the hunt establishes. In breaking through the woods in pursuit of the hart, Arthur flees

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his fellows as much as the deer flees the hunter.[52] Though "in his contrey was

nothyng butt chyvalry" and "cowardes were everemore shent" (10, 12), when Sir

Gromer Somer Joure ambushes Arthur, the monarch behaves in a decidedly

cowardly manner by promising Gromer Somer whatever he desires in exchange for

sparing Arthur's life:

> Save my lyfe, and whate thou most crave,
>
> I shalle now graunt itt the;
>
> Shame thou shalt have to sle me in veneré,
>
> Thou armyd and I clothyd butt in grene (80–83)

Gromer Somer, wearing his armor and carrying his sword, overmatches the bow-

wielding, unarmored Arthur. The lack of the full knightly assemblage carries with it

a concordant lack of courage. Rather than recklessly accepting Gromer Somer's

challenge, which would be a laudable, brave death, Arthur bargains for his life,

introducing the element of financial exchange that will also underlie Ragnelle's

bargaining with Arthur. This financial bargain, in turn, links Arthur yet closer to

Ragnelle. Heng notes that the specter of finance when present in romance often

signals corruption and monstrosity.[53] Gromer Somer, moreover, enjoins Arthur not

to tell anyone of his plight, yet upon his return to the court, Gawain easily persuades

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52 Once alone, he demonstrates his skill as a butcher and hunter; that is, the poet displays Arthur's skilled body in one of the rare moments in which we glimpse a knight's embodiment in this poem.

53 Heng writes of the monster in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*: "He is at once a figure of economic monstrosity—of disproportionate wealth, wrongfully acquired—and a figure of superordinate independence: conditions that define him, in the feudal system, as a monster" (*Empire* 119). In this case, GSJ's monstrosity indicates violations of romance ideology and the socioeconomic systems out of which it grows.

the king to confess the cause of his sorrows. Despite a weak protestation that

Gromer Somer "chargyd me I shold hym nott bewrayne" (146), in the next stanza

Arthur spills all to Sir Gawain. Indeed, Arthur's escape from the immediate threat of

death and his later actions all revolve around speech, making Ragnelle's dangerous

mouth all the more noteworthy.

The narrative thus brings to the fore questions about the correspondence

between inner and outer, surfaces and depths, words and deeds, and the

embodiment of desire. But Ragnelle always was already a true courtly lady; she

merely seemed not to be. When she transforms, however, she fails to shed her flesh

in favor of dress, manner, and conventional (therefore tame and understood)

beauty. She becomes, instead, a fiery, sensual woman who saps Gawain's manhood.

Gawain, himself emptied of all personality, a shell, a prototype of chivalry filled in by

audience imagination and expectations, suffers a cowardice of the body at the end.

He who was insistently disembodied, a speaking automaton carrying out the

program of chivalry, too, becomes tainted by Ragnelle's embodiment. This effect on

Gawain is why, as Leech puts it, Ragnelle must die. She never fully assimilates into

the demands of the genre; her body is always a dangerous source of knowledge,

solace, and pleasure. The mind-body dualism of Christian chivalry has no place for

her. While she is in process, a becoming-lady and a wise monster, her narrative role

is secure; the genre makes room for such perceived threats so they can be ultimately

contained. In being a lady, when her body and manners correspond with her

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clothing, when surfaces and depths align, the ripples of embodiment do not quiet; it is then that she becomes the true threat. She continues to put pressure on a major fault line of chivalric romance.

Just as Ragnelle never becomes a "proper" lady, the poem also suggests Arthur may not be a proper knight. Arthur opens the poem as a figure chasing his own hart—a common medieval pun upon heart—that is, chasing his individual desires into the wilderness of the woods. Lacking his sword and unarmored, parted from his companions, Arthur also lacks many of the components that constitute his knightly identity. His failure is in pursuing his individual desire without heeding the rituals of masculine community upon which so much of chivalry depends. His butchering and tasting of the fat, while indicative of his skills and technical knowledge, also invoke bodiliness and desire through the act of eating. When confronted by Gromer Somer, Arthur has nothing other than his wit and words upon which to rely. Lacking the important trappings of chivalric identity, he also lacks the resources for proper behavior, thus setting in motion the entire plot. Moreover, Gromer Somer's demand is an impossible one for the knight: women's desires, if acknowledged at all, are fickle, unknowable by definition, and suppressed by the chivalric economy. Gawain's later satisfaction with the multitude of answers shows, indeed, a blithe disregard for any stable truth concerning this matter: "Doute you nott, Lord, ye shalle welle spede; / Sume of your sawes shalle help att nede" (222–23). One of the many answers, he argues, will undoubtedly serve.

From the hag's mouth, then, the true answer that unifies female desire around mastery of men not only upsets the hierarchy of gender relations enforced by the genre, but also destabilizes the knowledge upon which it rests. If women share a single desire that is essentially identical to the courtly knight's, then the figure of woman ceases to function as a bonding agent among men or an object of masculine desire. Arthur interprets Ragnelle's knowledge as a desire "to have the rewlle of the manlyest men" (470), a reading that even as it conveys the wish for sovereignty maintains the masculine hierarchy: women do not want sovereignty generally, but only over the men who are highest placed, men who most exemplify the values by which masculine identities are judged. But Ragnelle's actual words are more ambiguous:

> We desyren of men above alle maner thyng
>
> To have the sovereynté, withoute lesyng,
>
> Of alle, bothe hyghe and lowe.
>
> For where we have sovereynté, alle is ourys,
>
> Thoughe a knyght be nevere so ferys,
>
> And evere the mastry wynne.
>
> Of the moste manlyest is oure desyre:
>
> To have the sovereynté of suche a syre,
>
> Suche is oure crafte and gynne. (422–430)

Ragnelle opens by claiming a general desire for "sovereynté" of all men, both high

and low (which can be read as describing at once both the station of the women

desiring and of the men over whom they desire dominion), not of a specific subset of

men. The masterful knight then serves as an example, not a general rule. Even the

fiercest, most successful knights cede everything to the sovereign woman. The

ambiguity distills into the last quoted couplet. "Of" marks both possession and

quality. Woman's desire is for the manliest knights, but the desire is itself the

manliest: just as knights (and men both high and low) battle for dominance, for a

place in the hierarchy, so too do women desire a place and power. Not only is their

wit and cleverness directed toward having sovereignty *over* such a sire, but it is

directed toward gaining the very sovereignty he possesses.[54]

It is, thus, a desire particularly dangerous toward chivalry and the ideology of

romance. When Gawain falls under the sensual spell of Ragnelle's transformed body,

he again stands in for chivalry as a whole:

Gawen lovyd that Lady, Dame Ragnelle;

In alle his lyfe he lovyd none so welle,

I tell you withoute lesying.

As a coward he lay by her bothe day and nyghte.

Nevere wold he haunt justyng aryghte (805–809)

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54 For more on the topic, of the inexhaustibility of feminine desire see Heng, "A Woman Wants." "What
    does a woman want?" Heng asks; the answer: "She wants."

Recalling the opening lines of the poem, which invoke a country in which "cowardes were everemore shent," Gawain becomes himself "as a coward," indulging his physical desires for pleasure and thus avoiding the battlefield and tournaments in which he should don his armor, bear his sword, and disregard his body. In his acquiescence to sexual desire, Gawain interrupts the circuit of identity that makes invisible the chivalric body.

We see Gawain's concupiscence and the attendant approbation of his uxurious cowardice after the wedding night. Gawain's courtesy, Ragnelle informs Arthur, leads to her salvation: "God thank hym of his curtesye; / He savid me from chaunce and vilony" (777–78). Indeed, during the bedroom scene between Gawain and Ragnelle, she repeatedly calls him a courteous knight, implying that his courtesy leads to his granting of sovereingty to his wife (or, at least, Ragnelle reads his actions that way). Gawain, however, describes his dilemma as a choice between reputation and physical pleasure. In the genre's terms, then, his decision is a simple one: he should neglect his body's desires in preference for honor and "worshypp" (672). If the chivalric romance is a genre intent upon establishing and perpetuating male homosocial bonds via women, then to have Ragnelle fair during the day, thus maintaining his honor and place in the chivalric community, while disregarding the physical in private, should be an easy choice. That Gawain cannot choose, then, represents the first, often overlooked, flaw in Gawain in this tale. It is, further, a flaw that mirrors Arthur's opening cowardice in bargaining for his life. In both cases, the

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desires of the fallen flesh prevent the knights from meeting the high demands of perfect chivalry.

Moreover, just as Arthur attempts a deal with Sir Gromer Somer Joure based on financial exchange (and, indeed, Gromer's complaint is one of property distribution), Gawain couches his surrender to Ragnelle's wishes in the language of the market: "I putt the choyse in you. / Bothe body and goodes, hartt, and every dele, / Ys alle your oun, for to by and selle" (681–83). Gawain is body, heart, and goods, which in his perplexity he gives to Ragnelle to buy and sell as she sees fit. In thus entering into an exchange economy with Ragnelle, one which she and her brother both invoke at other points in the poem, he not only sidesteps the conflict between public and private desires, but also steps into the territory of the the monstrous. The intrusion of economic concerns, however briefly alluded to, threatens the dissolution of the values driving the genre. Heng notes, for instance, that "cannibalism"—another form of monstrosity that Ragnelle suggests with her devouring mouth—"allows chivalric communities to address the unutterable through body, acts, and power... so that the obscene power of new capital, and a market economy's cash nexus... can be anatomized, and shown to be complicit with the slow dissolution of masculine feudal identity under the new socioeconomic realities" (9). In its repeated testing of the values it seeks to uphold, chivalric romance thus engages with cultural and historical forces in an attempt to tame the changes they were bringing about.

Ragnelle serves, then, in her roles as monster and seductress, as a lure into the realms of female knowledge, physical desire, and economic exchange that threaten the edifice of chivalric romance. If Gawain, the flower of chivalry, can be corrupted, then what hope is there for the others? In a poem that invokes an ideal world of chivalry in which no cowards exist, it is particularly noteworthy that it both opens and closes with acts of cowardice. Indeed, Arthur takes offense at Gawain's refusal (now that Gawain has found a wife beautiful and obedient) to joust, to participate in the rituals of battle and masculine bonding, or to don the armor and arms that constitute chivalric identity. As Leech notes, this unseemly, unknightly devotion to Ragnelle is, ultimately, why the narrative must kill her off. Rather than a true domestication and integration of the threats posed by concerns from outside the hermetic world of chivalric romance, a transformation that would verify and uphold its values, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* instead presents a tainted, flawed world that even its greatest knights cannot escape except through the death of a woman, symbol of the body and its desires.

THE NOISY CORPSE AND CHRISTIAN CHARITY IN *THE AWNTYRS OFF ARTHUR*
Turning now to another Gawain romance, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, we find similar systems of corporeal signification as in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. *Awntyrs* contains a monstrous woman who carries salvific knowledge to one of the leaders of the court. The poem survives in four manuscripts, "none of which," as Hahn notes, "is based upon any of the other extant copies" (169). It dates

from the late fifteenth century and divides into two parts of nearly equal length; this division has long been considered an aesthetic flaw, but my analysis will show (following Hahn's suggestion of the poem's unity) that the poem performs through its structure the same self-reflexive questioning of genre and ideology that we saw in *Dame Ragnelle*. Rather than a monstrous female providing information to Arthur that will save his life, in this poem, Guenevere learns something that will save her soul. The unruly body of Ragnelle finds a parallel in the rotting, reanimated corpse (construed in the poem as a ghost with corporeal presence) of Guenevere's mother. The mother's lifetime of lechery saddles her with a corpse that displays her corruption. The poem thus shares in the genre's fascination with transparently legible bodies that allegorizes the soul.

In the poem's first half, Arthur, Gawain, and the rest of his court go off into the woods on a hunt, just as in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* and many other Arthurian romances. After separating from the group, Gawain and Guenevere are trapped in a violent storm. Then, the ghost of Guenevere's mother confronts them to indict the court for its lack of charity and its obsession with material wealth and pleasure. "The ghost laments the split within her own life," writes Hahn, "between a brilliant, splendid appearance and a fetid inner corruption, and then goes on to commend her own condition as a general warning to the entire court" (169). She thus pries apart the contradictory views of the body in (a particular) Christian belief system and a courtly system that the genre so often

attempts to reconcile. Hahn continues: "this narrow vision of chivalry from hell applies to knighthood not the general community standards of late medieval cristendom, but the austere strictures typical of Christianity's most other-worldly strain" (171). The ghost calls for Guenevere to say Masses for her soul and to give to the poor and hungry outside the castle gates, but goes further yet. Beyond recommending actions for her daughter, she also answers Gawain's concern about "chivalry as a sponsor of violence, rather than a protection against it" with a "prophesy of the downfall of the Round Table" (Hahn 171). The genre's interest in surfaces appears not only in the ghost's explicit condemnation of sensual pleasures, but also in the poem's style as well, which Hahn characterizes as possessing a "lapidary brilliance" that "gives preeminence to pattern, to exteriority as meaning" (173). The poem, moreover, fetishizes "objects like tapestries, dress, swords, helmets, shields, or coats of arms" (Hahn 173) and thus continues the genre's interrogation of surfaces.

But the ghost's criticisms and invocation of the end of Arthur's court invites the audience to interpret the second half of the poem through both the ghost's strict Christian ethos and the structural flaws of courtly chivalry. The second half of the poem finds Arthur and his court seated for dinner. As in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a challenger intrudes upon the scene, though he receives a proper welcome from the king rather than stunned silence.[55] The poet fixes upon Sir Galeron's

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55 Doubtless in part because the intruder, Sir Galeron, is not a monster.

armor, horse, and the rich dress of his lady. The knight "accuses Arthur and Gawain of being in false possession of his lands, and demands an honorable combat" (Hahn 170). Similar to the challenge in *Dame Ragnelle*, a concern for property and material wealth arises to threaten to court. After Gawain defeats Galeron in combat,[56] however, Arthur bestows the disputed lands upon Galeron, thereby healing the rift and extending the sway of his court. But the audience must intepret this outcome with the foreknowledge of the court's doom fresh in mind. This reframing of the complaint and battle undercuts the more typical valorization and unquestioning acceptance of the worth of such acts. It is an epistemic shift again brought about by a monstrous female, this time in the shape of a ghost.

The *Awntyrs off Arthur* demonstrates visions of women, the body, knowledge, and speech that forms part of an associative network that connects to and extends the meaning of the Loathly Lady in chivalric romance. The poem further emphasizes glittering surfaces as a medium for courtly identity and locus of narrative unease. Just as *Dame Ragnelle* persistently examines the values of its motivating ideology, so too does *Awntyrs* through the figures of women, their knowledge, and embodiments. We cannot assume, simply because the monstrous women in these two poems derive from different traditions, that by the time they appear in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the historical significances and varied background of the poems remained dominant in the minds of the audience. Instead, it is more likely that for

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56 Arthur stops the fight after Galeron's lady and Guenevere intervene upon Galeron's behalf to prevent Gawain from killing Galeron.

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both the authors and the audience, the functional, descriptive, and thematic similarities far outweigh the differences of tradition upon which literary criticism has focused. While we cannot neglect to follow the literary threads back to their origins, we must also see how they weave together into a pattern active at the time of the poems' authorship, a pattern that determines a part of the work done by the genre. What does it mean, then, that the questions of chivalric value, the limits of courtliness, and the place of women in that system all appear in terms so decidedly similar yet in contexts so varied? The consistency of referents is, itself, astonishing and unlike the multiplicity of meanings embodied in other genres such as *fabliaux*.

Awntyrs opens as Gawain and Guenevere go off on their own into a barren, frozen landscape. After Gawain and Guenevere ignore Arthur's horn, a call to regroup, the sky turns dark as midnight while hail and rain begin to pelt the hunting party. Taking shelter from the storm under some trees, the two companions encounter the supernatural; a howling, wailing corpse rises up from a fiery lake and glides toward the couple to erupt into deafening, haunted sounds:

Yauland and yomerand, with many loud yelle.

Hit yaules, hit yameres, with waymynges wete,

And seid, with siking sare,

"I ban the body me bare!

Alas! Now kindeles my care;

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I gloppen and I grete!"

Then gloppenet and grete Gaynour the gay (86–92)

The string of "y"s, "g"s, and "t"s clatter in the audience's ears to mimic the howling

corpse. The first recognizably human sounds from the spirit are a curse on the body

that bore it, a fitting act: the corpse is defined by grisly appearance as much as by

unearthly noise. Indeed, when Gawain comforts Guenevere in the face of the ghost,

he declares that he will speak with it to discover "what may the bales bete / Of the

bodi bare" (103–104). It is a bare body in torment. The apparition's

incomprehensible noises suggest the impossibility of a language to convey meaning;

it invokes the rupture at the genre's heart.

Lacking clothing and even skin, the body "blak to the bone" (105) multiplies

its incomprehensible noises of anguish: "hit waried, hit wayment... hit stemered, hit

stonayde, hit stode as a stone, / Hit marred, memered, hit mused for madde." (107,

109–110). Alternatively wailing, stammering, lapsing into stunned silence, and then

groaning like one gone mad, the apparition's noises complement its appearance. It

provokes trembling silence and warning screeches even from the animals that see it.

The hounds, after one "grym bere" (frightening outcry), hide their heads; the birds

begin to screech (125). The poem spends nearly five full stanzas describing the

terrible noises that erupt from the ghost. Whereas the body of the Loathly Lady

primarily defines her, the ghost's body, though present and notable, recedes into the

background in deference to the many groans and wails the specter emits. In both

cases, however, the role of the mouth is central; the women impart knowledge

through speech and offend through their mouths: the ghost by sound, Ragnelle

through sight. Their mouths offend equally, albeit via different sensory paths. Again,

both are sites of rupture that embody the tensions of the genre.

The knowledge these mouths utter is, moreover, from beyond the

conventional domain of chivalric romance. I have already discussed how Ragnelle's

knowledge of women's desires intrudes upon the homosocial masculine world; here

the ghost's knowledge is of a similarly transgressive nature. Notably, this knowledge

is communicated between women, thereby raising the profile of Guenevere in the

poem from mere figurehead and background character (as she is in so many Middle

English Arthurian romances) to prime actor. The ghost's message is simple: wealth

and lust are sinful excess; instead, give food to the poor and have masses said. The

repeated concern for the mouths of the poor and hungry perpetuates a romantic

interest in this particular orifice and its multiple significations. Although these

injunctions do not, on the surface, seem to contradict the Christian ethos of chivalric

romance, which regularly invoke God and the Cross, the implications within the

context of the lavish setting—mirrored by the verse form of the poem—makes the

critique clear: "hertly take hede while thou art here. / Whan thou art richest arraied

and ridest in thi route, / Have pité on the poer" (171–73). The contrast between

Guenevere's and the rest of the court's bejeweled outfits and the poor at the gates

who lack enough food forcefully argues the Christian objection to greed and physical

luxury. The courtly emphasis on display and legible beauty falters when compared to the Christian emphasis on charity. Yet the wealth of the Arthurian court is only one failing the ghost condemns.

Guenevere's questions for the ghost, moreover, draw upon the entire schema of Arthurian history and Guenevere's ever-present status of adulteress. Guenevere remarks upon the "bones... so blake" (212) she sees before her, to which the ghost replies: "That is luf paramour, listes and delites / That has me light and laf logh in a lake" (213–14). That is, sexual love and pleasure have brought her to this low state; her bones allegorize her sins. Guenevere's own sins-to-come (we have no mention of Lancelot in this narrative) are inextricably bound to her character in the audience's mind. There can be no doubt that, just like the apparition's later prophecy of the fate of the Arthurian demesne, here the poet plays upon shared knowledge and the network of associations surrounding Guenevere to make a connection between the mother's sins and the daughter's. The ghost's next lines note the transience of worldly wealth: "al the welth of the world, that awey witis" (215). In this line, sexual love and greed join in the single sin of *cupiditas*. Though this sin is never mentioned, it is a connection we can easily imagine the audience making.[57]

Along with the flaws in the romance's heroine, the conversation between Gawain and the ghost draws out the fundamental problems in Christian chivalry. Gawain asks how he and his knightly fellows will fare who attack diverse countries,

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57   Her mother also repeatedly enjoins Guenever to care for the hungry, i.e., take concern for the mouths of the poor.

enter "reymes withouten eny right," and win "worshipp in were thorgh wightnesse of hondes?" (261–64). Because it addresses a fundamental conflict between the role of the knight as warrior and his identity as a Christian, Hahn sees a "remarkable degree of self-consciousness and self-criticism" in this question, had it come from "an actual medieval knight" (210). The response indicts Arthur as too covetous, further emphasizing the nexus of physical pleasure, greed, and lust that animates the court. Gawain's question, more than just granting space for a criticism of the current realm, also prompts a prophecy of how Fortuna's wheel will come low for Arthur and his court. Just as Guenevere is always, in some recess of the reader's mind, unfaithful, so too is the demise of the Round Table also present. The ghost's voicing of this fate in the middle of the poem thereby casts a pall over the rest of the action, furthers her sermon against the flesh and its appetites, and establishes a new interpretative context for the rest of the poem. The result is a competition between conflicting schemata that accounts for many of the seeming "faults" critics have found in the poem's structure. We are unable to construct a successful conceptual blend to join the two schemata and, instead, must continually switch back and forth, an exhausting mental operation. This rupture is one most chivalric romances attempt to smooth over.

The poem's prolific display of courtly accoutrements thus shifts from an apparently unabashed celebration to an uneasy one in conflict with dual futures: one secular and the other religious, both prophesied by the same ghastly mouth. The

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poem, moreover, prominently features two women who through their dialogue and

through the parallels of their narrative histories (both existing outside the bounds of

the poem itself) speak to the tensions inherent in the genre's blending of ideologies.

By separating Guenevere and Gawain from the hunting party, the poet creates a

space where these contradictions can be explored in the context of an explicit

Christian world view. It is only proper that Gawain be present to witness and

question the ghost. The poem reduces the elements of the genre to its essential

elements: a knight and a lady speaking about their actions (or lack thereof). As Hahn

notes, the poem's "doubled structure" exemplifies the unresolved issues of the

genre: "In both its halves, *Awntyrs* presents a view of social and spiritual

interdependency that reflects common medieval notions of society as a unified

political and sacred body" (171). The common thread connecting the Christian ethos

and chivalric ethos is this idea of unified, corporate identities, which the poem

simultaneously celebrates and questions.

SILENCE AND NOISE IN SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT
Because *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is both richer and longer than the other

works I discuss in this chapter, I will limit my examination to a handful of exemplary

scenes, in particular those that serve as fulcrums for the narrative. The poem

appears in a unique manuscript (Cotton MS. Nero A.x.) that also contains the

celebrated poems *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*; the manuscript dates most likely

from the late fourteenth century. The poem was probably composed for an

artistocratic audience, as were many other chivalric romances.[58] The plot follows a challenge and quest structure prompted by the strange appearance of the monstrous Green Knight during a Christmas feast for Arthur's court. The Green Knight challenges the knights to a game. Upon Gawain's acceptance (after the court's lengthy silence, which I discuss in detail later), the Green Knight demands that Gawain chop off his head and then submit to the same treatment within a year. After Gawain beheads the challenger, the Green Knight picks up his head and rides off, leaving Gawain honor-bound to seek out the strange figure. On his quest, Gawain finds the castle of Sir Bertilak, where he is welcomed and becomes embroiled in another game of honor. At the end of the poem he reports his experiences at the castle to King Arthur's court, where they judge his worth as a knight.

The scholarship on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* revolves primarily around generically-determined questions: what do we make of Gawain's actions within an economy of chivalric identity? Why does the romance raise the specter of homosexual actions in the Bertilak-Gawain exchange game, then foreclose that possibility? And does the seduction game impinge upon Gawain's knightly exemplarity? These questions assume a backdrop of chivalric romance that blends (sometimes uneasily) courtly and Christian values and that crucially centers upon defining masculine identity through the acts and speech of the knight. As with the

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58 There has been, of course, considerable debate on this point. Many scholars have suggested a northern provenance for the poem, both because of its dialect and form (alliterative poetry being a form more common to the Northwest and West) and because of its content.

other Gawain-centered romances discussed in this chapter, *SGGK* also puts to the test the ideological investments of courtly chivalry and its problematic relationship with Christianity. By recognizing that Gawain represents the best chivalry can offer, audiences and scholars contextualize his actions within an idealized schema that makes all the more noticeable his swerves away, what Heng identifies as textual "knots" that demand analysis and, in the process, threaten to surface and disrupt chivalric romance's ideology.

Heng, and later Dinshaw, are in fact two prime examples of scholars who have articulated some of the ways that the poem interrogates the genre's structures of identity and meaning. Heng traces the network of feminine characters and desire that shadows and inverts the structures of masculine identity and desire usually considered to motivate romance. Genre works by arranging networks of characters, tropes, and texts that we internalize as hermeneutic tools for reading and analysing other texts. Heng begins by highlighting the traditional position that, quoting Derek Brewer, the poem "is self-evidently the story of Gawain... [and] all must be interpreted in relation to his interests" (quoted in Heng, "Feminine Knots" 500). She provides this example of the masculine orientation of the genre to demonstrate an alternative reading that transforms the tale into one where feminine desire animates the action and Gawain, rather than any woman, becomes the object of exchange, the signifier traversing the network. In doing so, Heng not only excavates the submerged but crucial roles women play from a critical tradition all too focused

on how masculine identity drives the genre, but also demonstrates one of the manifestations of self-referential awareness of the multiple crises and contradictions implicit in the genre's dominant structures.

In Heng's reading, Gawain becomes less the protagonist, and more a pawn in a shadowy plot, directed by and for the female characters. Feminine dynamics and narrative cross the dominant masculine-centered narrative as traces of questions about the genre's structuring ideology. But, as Dinshaw notes in her later article, the dominant narrative desires to suppress and contain these shadow plots, these inversions of economies that materialize as hermeneutic knots. Dinshaw likewise investigates tensions that arise in the text when we attend to the ways *SGGK* navigates its generic identities. Rather than focus on female agency and desire in the poem, Dinshaw considers the foreclosed possibilities of homoerotic relations between Gawain and Bertilak that the exchange game prompts. Dinshaw looks at the poem's investment in "heterosexual identity" but "proceeds by showing that identity's illusory unity breaking down." Instead, she "trace[s] the disturbances of and threats to that straight identity and the principle of coherent meaning that underwrites it, to analyze the means by which heterosexuality is then naturalized in even greater force" (208). In other words, the poem's dominant genre demands a normative and naturalized heterosexual identity, which the specter of homosexual acts raised by the Bertilak-Gawain-Lady circuit of desire threatens to upset. But, as we have seen in the other romances considered in this chapter, these potential

unmakings—what Heng calls an unlacing and Dinshaw a disaggregation—of the genre's foundational identities are, in fact, the crucial work of the genre. Whereas *fabliaux* more often interrogate other genres, chivalric romance prefers to consider its own underpinnings in order that it may, as Dinshaw notes, suppress and contain the subversive by making it unintelligible and impossible.

By synthesizing Heng and Dinshaw's arguments with an explicit appreciation of the role genre plays in both their analyses, I find that the ideological impossibility of sexual relations between Gawain and Bertilak (despite its suggested possibility when Gawain takes the Lady's place in the exchange game) serves as the key rupture in our expectations of the romance. Gawain's impossible position in the bedroom scenes—where he finds both action and inaction untenable according to the dictates of chivalric identity—arises from the problem of reconciling courtly and Christian values. Gawain cannot simply toss the Lady out of his bed chamber; to do so would be decidedly unchivalrous and uncourtly. Yet he also cannot take her to bed. Such an act would violate his chastity and his courtesy as Bertilak's guest while also demanding that he then either engage in the same with Bertilak (an unintelligible outcome in the logic of the genre, as Dinshaw notes) or that he conceal the act from Bertilak, again, a failure of honesty, a rupture between speech and act unbecoming a knight. Indeed, the scene of debate at the end of the poem in which the court attempts to analyze Gawain's actions and the significance of the girdle and his new scar mirror the critical conversations that likewise revolve around this

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central surfacing of the genre's inherent conflicts. In this context, then, Gawain's concealment of the girdle corresponds not only with Heng's reading of it as a sign of achieved feminine desire, but as a materialization of the contradictions that animate and trouble many of the works in the genre.

Dinshaw argues that *SGGK* attempts to elide these problems through an insistent focus upon surfaces that labors to limit the meanings of the poem's signs (205). But the surfaces of the poem do not simply serve as insecure masks over the poem's potential incoherencies. They also draw the audience in to the sensory world of the poem to make Gawain's erasure more prominent, to complete the compelling illusion of a world, and to ground the interpretive cruxes in materiality. *SGGK*'s focus on surfaces is not, moreover, unique, but appears as a recurrent feature of romance, a feature especially notable in *Awntyrs*, where the poem both celebrates and interrogates the glittering surfaces. Similar work goes on in *SGGK*. For example, the opening site of the poem resounds with carols, mirth, din, "loude crye," laughter "ful loude," and glee that is "glorious to here" (64, 69, 46). Aurality thus appears as a central characteristic of the court's world and a fundamental method of description for the poet. During one of the court's sumptious feasts "anoþer noyse" (132) interrupts the noise of joyful feasting and celebration as the Green Knight appears in the door. In the sudden silence, the poet shifts the aural mode into a purely visual description that lingers over every aspect of the knight's outfit and body; the description covers three full stanzas during which time we, like the stunned court,

are caught in an extended moment of silent vision. The Green Knight's aggressive questions are met with further silence: "al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten / In a swoghe sylence þurȝ þe sale riche / As al were sylpped vpon slepe, so slaked hor loteȝ in hyȝe" (242–245). The pattern of loud noise followed by sudden silence and a shift to the visual realm is one that will repeat at other notable times.

Like *Awntyrs*, the poet's gaze in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* lingers upon surfaces through numerous eruptions of sensory details. The narrative flows through these sensory landscapes to craft a seeming realism, offering the audience an inhabitable material world for the bodies of the characters, thereby inserting the audience's own proprioceptive capabilities as embodied subjects into the glittering pageantry of the genre. In this respect, *SGGK* shows its artistic excellence through an exploration of the possibilities of the genre; it engages multiple senses, and shows, for example, a sustained emphasis on sound to complement the genre's scopic regime. Indeed, the poem presents multiple, rich soundscapes, which influence our interpretation of the laconic Gawain's relatively rare moments of speech by establishing a conflict between embodied experience and linguistic utterance. The poem thus navigates the tension between the illusion of reality and the linguistic aspect of genre. To engage our senses, the poet repeatedly situates the characters in a recognizable "real" to direct our reactions. The narrative has experiential heft—by virtue of its deft combination of sight and sound—that grants it the illusion of realism. The poet makes the chivalric romance present, to exist in the embodied,

imaginative now. In doing so, he fulfills a desire for vicarious enjoyment of the romantic opulence and courtly dilemmas, an affirmation of the genre's relevance to its contemporary moment (a relevance perhaps in doubt among the audience[59]), and represents chivalric romance as decidedly not a fossil or a dying system losing import as feudalism fades. *SGGK* is an efflorescence of realism carried entirely by multi-sensory description in service of the fantastic, an investigation of the worth and contradictions of courtly romance in romance'svalues.

Among the most famous scenes from *SGGK* are the three encounters in which the lady enters Gawain's bedchamber in an attempt to seduce him. Their first bedroom encounter—coming immediately in the text after the noisy hunt—is marked by a remarkable silence. Many scholars have noted the interlacement of the bedroom and hunt scenes, yet they have not noted the meaningfulness of the radically contrasting soundscapes; the alternations, however, make the sonic differences especially vivid. The poet's care to construct soundscapes to elaborate the phenomenological setting leads up to this moment of prolonged hush akin to the reaction to the Green Knight's initial challenge. The silence links the two challenges—one martial, the other erotic—through a common theme of sensory absence by embedding both within a context of noise: horns, revelry, and the like. In

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59 Heng writes: "When late-medieval English society undergoes internal transformation of a kind that confounds seigneurial elites, then, two brillant chivalric romances, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight...* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, mount responses in defense of the elite culture and social class with which this subset of medieval romance has been associated for more than two centuries" (*Empire* 128). Although not all the texts I discuss in this chapter reach the literary excellence of the two Heng mentions, they all, I argue, are engaged in a nervous probing of the tensions inherent in the genre as reflective of the social order's potential and/or emerging ruptures.

the silence we perceive more clearly how sound consistently joins and supports sight to control audience response to the poem's physicality. Within the first stanza of the bedroom encounter, a string of adjectives and adverbs establish and extend the crepuscular and stealthy silence: "sleȝly he herde / A little dyn at his dor, and derfly vpon," "dernly and stylle," "stilly and stol," "creped," "set hir ful sotly," "selly longe to loke," "and unlokked his yȝelyddeȝ" (1182–83, 1189, 1191, 1192, 1193, 1194, 1201). The sonic qualities of these words—replete with sibilants and liquids—mirror the lady's and Gawain's quiet actions. A further effect of the silence and Gawain's feigning of sleep is a concomitant emphasis on the act of looking. The lady is silent so she can gaze upon him freely. His pretense leads to the unlocking of his eyelids, an opening to the visual sense that initiates conversation (itself a sonic transmission).

During this moment, Gawain's difficulties reflect the fault lines inherent in the competing value systems of Christianity and courtliness that the ideal knight must embody. Gawain can neither refuse nor accept the Lady's seduction. To refuse would mark him as uncourtly, an ungracious guest, and (the worst sin) as one unskilled in the games that so engage the courtly audience. If he cannot skillfully extract himself from the situation through language, then he lacks mastery of one half of the means by which the knight establishes, confirms, and continually renews his identity. Moreover, were he bluntly to refuse the Lady and call her out for her euphemistic games, he would violate the very rules of courtly speech that, as the

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previous chapter on *fabliaux* makes clear, works on a pretense that euphemism is not euphemism and that the delicate surfaces should not be disrupted. A polite veil must remain over matters of sex. On the other hand, to accept the Lady's advances, while in keeping with the adulterous triangle present in many romances, would as Dinshaw points out, make Gawain illegible. The requirement that he share his winnings with Bertilak makes sexual intercourse with the Lady an a priori impossibility in the heterosexual norms of the genre. Moreover, to accept sex and then to lie about it would violate the assumed direct correspondence between words and deeds that animate knightly identity. Yet, as Heng remarks: "the girdle is a sign that is also a fully material object, one that carries, in its function and appearance, the impress and memory of the body itself. It is a detail of encirclement bearing the mark of the body and becomes metonymically, in the course of the Lady's theater of seduction, a sexualized, desiring, feminine term" ("Feminine Knots" 505). Gawain's acceptance of the Lady's girdle is but a disguised achievement of the Lady's desire for Gawain—just as if he were to sleep with the Lady—and so he hides this winning from Bertilak, to Gawain's ever-lasting shame, despite the judgment of Arthur's court after Gawain returns.

When he returns to Arthur's court, Gawain displays the scar on his neck—incurred, the Green Knight tells him, because of his acceptance of the lady's girdle—with shame: "Þis is þe bende of þis blame I bere my nek; / Þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I laȝt haue / Of couardise and couetyse þat I am tan inne" (2506–09). Gawain

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judges himself to have acted out of cowardice and covetousness, both of which stem from an unchivalrous love of the body, including bodily survival. Both of these transgressions of the Christian chivalric ideology, moreover, are present from the beginning of this poem and many others: Arthur loves feasts and luxury; in *Dame Ragnelle*, Arthur's cowardice sets the plot in motion much as it does in *SGGK*. The interpretive crux animating the genre again comes to the fore as the rest of the court, however, laughs off Gawain's harsh self-judgment and adopts "a bende abelef hym aboute of a bryȝt grene" (2517) as a sign of honor and camaraderie. The strict Christian values espoused by Gawain, figured forth in his shield and attested by his words—the last words spoken by any character in the poem—give way to a more forgiving system of courtly values that indulge sensual failings, accept without question one's desire to remain safe, and suggest, in the end, that the reckless disregard for the body, and the Christian denial of the flesh as corrupt that forever troubles the genre, may be no more than a ludic stance.

Thus the logic of Gawain's dilemma makes clear the potential rupture between speech and deed, whose unbroken consilience stands as one of the pillars of the genre's normative identity models. If the knight lacks a visible body (except when it is in the process of being undone in battle) better to preserve the fantasy of a unified identity, then his words and actions must figure forth unambiguously his public self—since a knight has no private self. He is, simply put, all surface: an empty suit of armor, a speaking and fighting automaton driven by the demands of his

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context. Gawain's dilemma, then, is not a personal one, but a generic one in which the knight is a cipher for chivalric ideology as the *SGGK* poet explores chivalry's potential fractures while seeking, if possible, a resolution that will heal them, even if only provisionally.

As the final meal scene—where Arthur, Gawain, and the court all proffer differing and potentially contradictory readings of the adventure—shows, one's frame of reference and expectations determine the light by which one sees Gawain's actions. Arthur, the callow king more concerned with feasts, play, competition, and tales of wonder, has, we presume, continued in his hall, indulging his lusts for sensory pleasure and his gustatory urges, while Gawain has quested. The physical setting of the poem's opening remains intact, despite our protagonist's challenges and changes of scenery. In this sense, the return to the hall—a place insistently filled by sound, sights, and tastes—becomes through Gawain and the aura of interpretive demands he trails behind him, itself another object of investigation. Gawain's shame in the face of Arthur's easy acceptance of Gawain's actions constitutes a generic judgment on chivalric romance, upon the logical progression from embodied courtly life to the perceived necessity of denying the physical to achieve salvation, a progression underlying Gawain's encounters with Bertilak and his wife.[60]

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60   In this respect, the poet deploys genre as an evaluative tool much as early twentieth-century critics deployed it, though they substituted aesthetic for moral values.

CONCLUSION

Chivalric romance's (incomplete) erasure of the body propagates the dominant

medieval subject: the masculine, Christian, martial, and courtly body. These

attributes constitute the prototype for a medieval audience—a construction that

persists in contemporary imaginings of knighthood—and serve the hierarchal and

male-dominated order of the period. The absent knightly body is a marker of the

genre's ideological allegiances that include the bifurcation of rational

mind/immortal spirit and corrupt, dying flesh. Moreover, by comparing how the

mouth, in particular, differs in function and meaning between the *fabliau* and

chivalric romance, I have shown more clearly how each genre inflects meaning

differently or situates similar meanings in different loci. Romance also requires that

we attend to the larger network in which corporeal assemblages exist. Soundscapes

and glittering surfaces appear with regularity. Specific parts of the human body

receive repeated description. As a site that joins the corporeal (most often figured as

a visual element) and erotic realms with the aural world of speech and noise, the

mouth of different characters does more than produce speech that moves plots.

Mouths consume, kiss, and deceive; they screech, impart wisdom, present

challenges, and suggest sexual intimacy. A site of potential vulnerability, an opening

amid the closed surfaces of armor and bejeweled gowns, the mouths of the genre's

characters voice the tensions that inhabit the genre. Sound and sight, purity and

corruption, speech and action: the many animating dichotomies of chivalric

romance are spoken (or kept mute) by these mouths.

Unlike *fabliaux*, which productively explore and make visible the tensions among different generic schemata, the chivalric romance often seeks instead to seal the potential ruptures between its competing schemata. In both cases, however, the combination of disparate categories is generative. Indeed, the stark differences of method and purpose that contrast the two genres I have discussed so far suggest a broader conclusion about the role genre and categories play in literature. As I have earlier noted, no genre is or can be "pure," defined by clearly delineated boundaries. A corollary to this claim, which comes clear only as we investigate the productive roles of multiple genres and their inclusion of other categories, genres, and sub-genres, is that genres are all already mixed; it is this mixture that animates many works, the need to resolve, explore, or even explode an inherent tension that arises from the collision of categories that cannot and will not remain "pure" or unmixed. Moreover, we see, again, the ways the different concerns of genres affect the phenomenological world the characters inhabit and which the audience is invited to share. Even as *fabliau* and chivalric romance both evince a clear interest in bodies, material objects, and even specific features like mouths, the assemblages differ radically in response to the radically different ideologies behind these two categories of literature.

We encounter, then, poems in which knights confront monsters that arise out of the fault lines inherent in the literary world that makes knighthood conceivable. Already anachronistic (or quickly becoming so) in the periods when these chivalric

romances were composed, Gawain and his world serve both as comforting islands of nostalgia for elite, aristocratic audiences and as interrogations of the possible reasons for that world's dissolution. The monsters—green knights, ghosts, and loathly ladies—arrive on this seeming literary island to remind us that the world presented is both fantastic and, in many ways, impossible to maintain. Abnormal bodies, the specter of forbidden sexual relationships, and even the wealth of the court all invade the seeming idyllic world with eruptions of noise, sudden silences, misshapen faces, and evasive beauties. Their invasions are generative because of their potential destructiveness. They show how genre can be configured to explore and explain such threats and the resultant literary structures such motivations create. They let us hear the noise behind the silence.

Samson's Touch and a Thin Red Line: Reading the Bodies of Saints and Jews in Bury St Edmunds[61]

On March 16, 1190, Palm Sunday weekend, a mob massed outside Clifford's Tower, to which the Jewish community of York had fled. Rather than face the mob, most of the Jews committed mass suicide, "the fathers of each Jewish household" cutting the throats of their wives and children (Dobson 27–28).[62] Those who tried to escape were massacred once outside. Between 150 and 500 Jews died. While this tragedy "has become... the single most famous incident in the history of the medieval English Jewry" (Dobson 17–18) other, less well-known massacres occurred contemporaneously. On March 18, two days after the York deaths, townspeople of Bury St Edmunds massacred fifty-seven Jews (Hillaby 31).[63] Later that year, Abbot Samson expelled the remaining Jews from Bury on a nearly inexplicable pretext. Jocelin of Brackland,[64] in his *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, neglects to mention the massacre, yet declares the expulsion to be a sign of Samson's *magne probitatis* [great goodness] (*Chronica* 33). Eight years later, after a fire burns the

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61 This chapter has previously been published in modified form as "Samson's Touch and a Thin Red Line: Reading the Bodies of Saints and Jews in Bury St Edmunds" in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111.3 (July 2012): 339–59. Throughout this chapter, I include in footnotes the original Latin for phrases that have been translated.

62 See also, Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Einbinder notes that this mass suicide followed a "model of active martyrdom" that is a "French Jewish cultural model" espoused by Yom Tov, a French rabbi and poet present at the scene (p. 51).

63 See also Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

64 I follow here Antonia Gransden's spelling "Jocelin of Brackland" rather than "Jocelin of Brakeland."

shrine of St Edmund, the monks of Bury translate the saint's body under Samson's

direction. In contrast to the scant description of the historically significant

expulsion, Jocelin, in what Anthony Bale calls "an arresting passage of mysterious

ceremony," lavishes narrative attention upon the translation of and Samson's

interactions with the incorrupt corpse of St Edmund, king and martyr (Bale,

"Introduction" 12). Although the expulsion and the translation seem at first

unconnected, I will show that a close examination of the two events reveals

medieval ideas about bodily and spiritual purity that entwine the identities of saints,

Christians, and Jews. The key passages in Jocelin's chronicle are, moreover, striking

examples of hagiographic language embedded within chronicle to delineate

corporate identities.

SAMSON'S FISCAL AND POLITICAL CALCULATIONS: ABBEY, BURY, AND JEWS
Worries about St Edmund's rights, both secular and religious, provide some

plausible motivations for Samson to expel the Jews. Before Samson's election as

abbot, the monastery had fallen into heavy debt to the local Jewish lenders. The debt

resulted in part from the lax government of Abbot Hugh, Samson's predecessor, who

permitted others in the abbey like William the Sacristan to borrow on their own

authority, and in part from the monks who, in "their ambition to build and adorn

their abbey in the grandest style...had to borrow from God's murderers," as Colin

Richmond puts it (219).[65] To house St Edmund's remains properly demanded a

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65 Richmond argues that the vilification of Jews has long played an integral, though largely

magnificent building, which, in turn, demanded money not available from the revenues of the monastery. Indeed, Diana Greenway and Jane Sayers, translators of Jocelin's chronicle, call the church "one of the most splendid in Europe" (xii). A glance at *The Kalendar of Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmunds* also demonstrates Samson's keen, unrelenting interest in the finances of the monastery; Jocelin's chronicle, too, in its regular listing of revenues and holdings, often touches on financial matters. In fact, Jocelin begins his chronicle by criticizing Abbot Hugh's lack of "ability in business matters": "The abbot sought refuge and consolation in a single remedy: that of borrowing money, to maintain at least the dignity of his household" (3).[66] When Samson took over, he improved the monastery's financial position by paying off debts, stamping out independent borrowing by his monks, and increasing revenues from the abbey's holdings.

Indeed, by the time of Samson's election as abbot, the abbey was "one of the wealthiest and most highly privileged Benedictine abbeys in medieval England" (Gransden xii). Earlier, under Edward the Confessor, who "greatly enlarged" its lands, the abbey also received "jurisdictional and administrative powers over the 'eight and a half hundreds' that came to form West Suffolk and be known as the 'Liberty of St Edmund'" (Greenway and Sayers xv). The Liberty, unlike most other regions nearby, was not subject to the sheriff of Suffolk. "Every aspect of royal

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unacknowledged, role in the creation of English identity.

66 "sed nec bonus nec providus in secularibus exercitiis….Unicam erat refugium et consolacionis remedium abbati, denarios appruntare; ut saltem sic honorem domus sue posset sustentare." *Cronica* 1.

government had to go through the abbot and his agents." In 945, Edward I granted a large amount of land to Bury, which was called the "banleuca." Bale writes, "This area was the abbot's jurisdiction in which he enjoyed all but regal powers; the abbot appointed his own justices in the 'banleuca' and royal justices did not have authority here" (7). The abbey also possessed lands that encompassed broad swaths of West Suffolk, and had long had numerous holdings outside its own eight and a half hundreds that extended throughout East Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex.[67] By the thirteenth century, the convent possessed around 250 "manors or vills" as well as numerous food farms and other properties (Gransden 252). Further, "during the course of the late twelfth century, when Jocelin was writing, Bury achieved exemption (and other privileges that only a pope could grant).... from the jurisdiction of the diocesan, the bishop of Norwich, and... the archbishop of Canterbury" (Greenway and Sayers xiv–xv). Combined with Bury's high profile (St Edmund's shrine was, prior to Thomas of Becket's shrine at Canterbury, probably the most popular pilgrimage site in England), the financial, spiritual, and legal independence enjoyed by Bury made it uniquely powerful (Bale 4). The area was thus "a kind of statelet endorsed by St Edmund's protection and... would, for several hundred years, provide a powerful image of belonging and exclusion based on reverence to St Edmund" (Bale 7–8). Further, as Lisa Colton remarks, "The Liberty,

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67 The Liberty of Bury was not unique, but a particularly wealthy and large example of a common practice in medieval England. For a detailed treatment of the development of liberties, see Helen M. Cam, *Liberties & Communities in Medieval England: Collected Studies in Local Administration and Topography* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963).

and the 'banleuca' within it, created geographical and psychological boundaries that encouraged the mistrust of 'outsiders' of any kind by the ruling elite on its interior, and vice versa" (102). The drive to exclude others to define who belongs is one that was integral to identity in Bury, as we shall see.

The Jews of Bury served an important, yet tragic role in forming this identity. The unique legal and cultural status of Jews in medieval England also made them strategically useful in fiscal and political realms. It is only in this context that we can begin to decipher the motivations behind the expulsion in 1190. Henry I, during his reign (1100–35), "issued a charter of protection to the Jews... [that] may be regarded as the fundamental charter of medieval English Jewry" (Roth 6). This charter established the Jewry "as a separate entity—existing for the king's advantage, protected by him in all legitimate transactions and answerable to him alone" (Roth 6). Henry II continued this policy, as did his successor Richard I. As an example, in 1190, the same year as the Palm Sunday massacres, Richard issued a charter that stated, "It is permissable for them [the Jews] to go wherever they wish with all their possessions, *as our property*" (Chazan 68; emphasis added). The Jews were financially valuable to the king, who could squeeze them whenever he needed money. Moreover, Robin Mundill notes: "One of the major results of taxing the Jews was the fact that it put pressure on them to call in their debts. There can be no doubt that the 1190 massacres were partially caused by the financial pressures of the preaching of a crusade" (Mundill 42). Of especial importance to the Palm Sunday

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massacres is the repeated charge in the charters of successive kings, beginning we

presume with Henry I, that all the king's agents "guard and defend and protect" the

Jews (Chazan 68). This injunction to protect the Jews is, for instance, why those

seeking protection from the York mob had holed up in Clifford's Tower under the

protection of the royal constable.

For a monastery as powerful and large as St Edmund's, fiscal troubles are not

surprising, but Samson's "solution," expulsion of the town's Jews, is surprising at

least in terms of chronology. For one, it anticipates the general expulsion of Jews

from Britain in 1290 by one hundred years. While there were local expulsions in

Sussex and Wales, in East Anglia the expulsion in Bury stands out as unique.[68] For

another, the rationale was strange. Once Samson had righted the monastery's

finances, in 1190 he petitioned the recently crowned King Richard I "for written

permission to expel the Jews from St Edmund's town, on the grounds that

everything in the town...belonged by right to St Edmund: therefore, either the Jews

should be St Edmund's men or they should be banished from the town" (Jocelin 41–

2).[69] Clearly, Samson's stated motivation for the desired expulsion was a pretense,

since the Jews were by law the king's men and therefore could not be St Edmund's.

Even so, Samson formulates the petition in terms of property, much as the legal

charters defined medieval Jews. The given rationale underscores the fact that

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68   See, in particular, Martin Gilbert, *Jewish History Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p.38.
69   "Dominus abbas peciit a rege literas ut judei eicerentur a villa Sancti Ædmundi, allegans quod quicquid
     est in villa Sancti Ædmundi... de jure Sancti Ædmundi est: ergo, vel judei debent esse homines Sancti
     Ædmundi, vel de villa sunt eiciendi" (*Chronica* 33).

Samson most likely felt it unwise to declare openly his fiscal motivations to the king. A purely fiscal motivation, however, remains inadequate to explain the complexity of Samson's reasons.

To be "St Edmund's men" would mean to be Christians of Bury. The Jews of Bury, then, serve as a medium in which Samson may stage a struggle between the political state and the abbey's own spiritual and mundane powers. Rather than a direct challenge to royal authority, Samson combines the legal and religious statuses of medieval Jews in England so that they may stand as proxies to maintain the independence Bury enjoyed from Church and Crown. But with Bury's independence and power came the threat of its erosion. Greenway and Sayers note, "At several points... Abbot Samson [insists] on the importance of his responsibility to administer royal justice. Failure to do so might have the disastrous consequence of provoking the king to step in, thus depriving the glorious martyr St Edmund of his rights" (xvi). Samson often justifies his actions by pointing out his role as protector not of the convent or Bury, but of St Edmund's royal body and dignity. While we might suspect Samson of employing rhetoric to counter secular authority, later events in Bury suggest that the recourse to a plea on St Edmund's authority touched very real and powerful ideas about bodies and group identities common to the time. Samson's invocations of St Edmund's rights, further, signalled the special status of the saint as guarantor for and source of the abbey's powers.

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The Jews, the "king's men," represented a threat to Samson's authority on both financial and political levels. For instance, the Palm Sunday massacres of 1190 in which Bury St Edmunds participated led to the King's direct involvement in York.[70] William of Newbury writes, the King "is indignant and in a rage both for the insult to his royal majesty and for the great loss to the treasury" (Jacobs 131–2). Indeed, the King dispatched "a large and expensive force of royal *milites*" to York, only to find that the mob had long dispersed and no individuals could be punished (Dobson 28–29). Samson was perpetually alert to threats to his power and St Edmund's rights. The monastery could, at any point, slip back under the sway of Jewish lenders or be subject to the king's ire. So long as the "king's men" remained in the town, the Crown could more easily intervene in local affairs. The massacre conflicted with Samson's "need to keep order in the town; failure to do so," Gransden writes, "could result in the forfeiture of the Liberty of the *banleuca* to the king" (29). The expulsion, by protecting Bury's granted liberties, thus improved Samson's hold on the abbey and Bury St Edmunds by reducing the possibility of royal intervention.

Another power struggle, localized to the monastery, presents itself as a possible secondary motivation. Prior to Samson's election as abbot, one of his

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70   Mundill declares the massacres, in fact, to have been "one of the most decisive turning points in the history of England's first Jewish settlers" (11). The massacres resulted, in part, from elevated levels of anti-Jewish sentiment aroused by the cascade of financial pressure originating with the king's increased taxes on Jews, who in turn called in more debts. Richard, in order to protect the Jews, began the official registration of Jewish transactions in the *archa* system, which "amounted to a 'protection racket'" (11). This surveillance would eventually lead to attempts to sequester Jews only in towns possessing these record chests.

primary rivals for the position was William the Sacristan, who served under

Samson's predecessor, Abbot Hugh. Jocelin remarks that William "was referred to as

the father and patron of the Jews, for they enjoyed his protection. They had free

entrance and exit, and went everywhere throughout the monastery, wandering by

the altars and round the shrine while Mass was being celebrated. Their money was

deposited in our treasury, in the sacrist's custody" (10).[71] Jocelin describes this

freedom as *absurdus* [absurd] (*Chronica* 8). The close relationship the Jews enjoyed

with William the Sacristan suggests that Samson may have also wished to destroy

any remaining influence enjoyed by the sacristan. William stood, before Samson's

election as abbot, as one of his principal enemies in the convent's political debates

and held a position of considerable power. Jocelin also states that William did not

fulfill his duties diligently and let things fall into disrepair.[72] Not only, then, was

there a connection between the economic and political troubles Bury's Jews might

cause Samson, but they were also in the habit of "wandering" around the monastery

during services, a practice Jocelin implies he and other monks saw as a clear breach

of propriety and an invasion of their communal Christian space by outsiders. We can

see, then, that while Samson no doubt had other, more pressing reasons for the

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71 "Judei, inquam, quibus sacrista pater et patronus dicebatur; de cuius protectione gaudebant, et liberum ingressum et egressum habebant, et passim ibant per monasterium, vagantes per altaria et circa feretrum, dum missarum celebrarentur sollemnia: et denarii eorum in thesauro nostro sub custodia sacriste reponebantur, et, quod absurdius es, uxores eorum cum parvis suis in pitanceria nostra tempore werre hospitabantur" (*Chronica* 8).

72 The sacristan's responsibilities primarily concerned maintenance of church buildings and its graveyard. He would also be responsible for keeping in good repair items such as vestments, liturgical vessels, and other such equipment.

expulsion, an added benefit might be the definitive crushing of William and the more tolerant attitude towards the Jews he represented.

Given these proffered reasons for Samson's expulsion of the Jews, it might seem that the act of expulsion was a simple, rational decision. The story, however, is more complicated than it appears. The forces at work in the expulsion were not wholly rational and transparent, though no less reprehensible for it. Conceptions of body, space, and purity figure prominently in the construction of identities in Bury. Indeed, without an exploration of the irrational, metaphoric logics underlying these two events—the expulsion and the translation—we lose sight of the complex, overdetermined nature of the expulsion and, more generally, the ways in which rational explanations can mask irrational, perhaps unconscious, beliefs and desires. Indeed, as my discussion of the connection between ritual murder myths, saints' lives, and the expulsion of Bury's Jews will show, there is a unavoidable connection between identity, saintly bodies, and the abjection of the Jewish "other."

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY, JEWISH ABJECTION, AND THE BODIES OF BOY MARTYRS
To understand the expulsion of the Jews of Bury, we must understand the pervasive anti-Jewish sentiment in medieval England, one manifestation of which was the recurrence of ritual murder accusations. Along with one of the earliest expulsion of Jews, Bury St Edmunds is also the site of one of the earliest accusations of ritual murder by Jews. These accusations typically involved stories about Jews murdering a Christian boy through ritualized means such as crucifixion and slitting of their

throats. One of, if not the, earliest ritual murder accusations appears in nearby

Norwich, publicized by Thomas of Monmouth, who describes the brutal murder and

crucifixion of a young boy named William and promotes his cult over the next

decades.[73] Gavin I. Langmuir tells us that "Thomas... became obsessed with William's

sanctity. He collected all the information he could about William, was highly

influential in the development of his cult, became sacristan of his shrine, and wrote

his *Life*" (828). Bury St Edmunds' own boy martyr St Robert appears in 1181, only a

few decades after William of Norwich and shortly before the expulsion of Bury's

Jews.[74] In his chronicle, Jocelin gives only the barest outline of the event: "It was at

this time also that the saintly boy Robert was martyred and was buried in our

church: many signs and wonders were performed among the people" (15).[75] Jocelin

also composed a *vita*, now lost, which likely listed the miracles ascribed to St Robert.

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73 There is a debate over whether, as Gavin I. Langmuir argues, the story of William of Norwich represents the originary moment of ritual murder accusations or, as John M. McCulloh argues, only the earliest written example from a preexisting cultural myth. See Gavin I. Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder," *Speculum* 59 (1984), 820–46; and John M. McCulloh, "Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth," *Speculum* 72 (1997), 698–740.

74 Scholars have suggested that the myth of St Robert may have stoked anti-Jewish sentiment in Bury to make possible the expulsion. See, for example, Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006); Lisa Lampert, "The Once and Future Jew: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Little Robert of Bury, and Historical Memory," *Jewish History* 15 (2001), 235–55; and Ruth Nisse, "'Was it not Routhe to Se?' Lydgate and the Styles of Martyrdom," in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2006). Cautious on this point, Bale asks, "did the development of Robert's cult in the 1180s pave the way for the expulsion, demonising the Jews for the practical purpose of their removal, or did the cult develop later as a form of justification and maintenance of the Jews' absence?" (*The Jew in the Medieval Book* 110). Lisa Lampert, however, argues that "tales of ritual murder and host desecration" like Robert of Bury's created "a conception of the Jew as perpetual murderer" ("The Once and Future Jew," 249, 235). Nisse, in discussing St. Robert's *vita*, argues: "the purity of the virgin male body violently cleanses the English realm of nonbelievers, whether pagans or Jews" ("'Was it not Route to Se?,'" 283).

75 "Eodem tempore fuit sanctus puer Robertus martirizatus, et in ecclesia nostra sepultus, et fiebant

Despite the brief mention in Jocelin's chronicle and the loss of the *vita,* we can nevertheless speculate about St Robert's story, thanks to the work of another monk of Bury St Edmunds: John Lydgate. His later "Praier to Seynt Robert" shares many characteristics of the narratives of other ritual murder cases; sacred bodies, sacred spaces, and vilified Jews also appear in Lydgate's poem. Indeed, Lydgate "ventriloquizes... Jocelin of Brakelond" (Nisse 280). Robert, "ageyns [whom] the Iewys were so wood," is "scourged, and naylled to a tre" while "with-oute langage makyng a pitous soun" (ll. 5, 12, 14). Robert's inability to speak leaves only his scourged and crucified body as testament to the crime. The "Iewys" silence a young Christian voice. Ruth Nisse notes, "the pathos-laden prayer focuses on [Robert's] helpless preverbal, presymbolic age" (280). Lydgate emphasizes the pitiable contrast between Robert's wounds and his youth that is symbolized by the "mylk and tendre pap" upon which he was fostered (l. 17), and links Robert to the body of Christ both through the imagery of crucifixion and the equation of saintly blood with nourishment.[76] The boy becomes a stand-in for Christ. In the final stanza, Lydgate implores St Robert to

> Haue vpon Bury þi gracious remembraunce
>
> That hast among hem a chapel & a shryne,
>
> With helpe of Edmund, preserve hem fro grevaunce,

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prodigia et signa multa in plebe" (*Chronica* 12).

76 See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991). Bynum discusses at length the imagery of Christ's body and blood as nourishment.

Kyng of Estynglond, martir and virgyne. (ll. 33–36)

Lydgate here reminds the boy martyr of the sacred spaces in Bury dedicated to him and of Robert's connection with the powerful patron saint of Bury.

What the legends of St Robert and William of Norwich demonstrate is that in the twelfth century the ritual murder accusation functioned as one way to construct a Christian group identity through the abjection of the Jewish "other." Attention to the bodily desecration of a young Christian boy, a symbol of the promise of future generations, suggests Christ's Passion, the Eucharist, and Christian identity via the perceived threat of Jewish violence. Bale argues that "the ritual murder victim's body might be thought of as a symbol or icon, a version of the sacramental, edible Christ-child, so common in medieval devotion" ("Fictions" 132). Just as William of Norwich's reputed martyrdom permits the reaffirmation of a Christian identity through his young body, so too does St Robert's. Bale points out that in Lydgate's poem "the murderous Jew…functions as the agent which enables the coalescence of various forms of worship" whereas St Robert's body is "a body in pain whose subjectivity has been erased as the body becomes social and communal" (*Medieval Book* 113). The martyred boy's body thus serves as a communal signifier for Christian purity and identity and for the vilification of the Jewish "other." Indeed, "the allegation of ritual murder, and the ensuing devotion to the martyr's body, was primarily a *way of crafting a devotional Christian polity* rather than a way of persecuting England's Jews" ("Fictions" 132–33; emphasis added). Narratives of

physical suffering and dismemberment figure a "Christian polity" or communal identity in terms that equate it with a saintly body that is both threatened by and made possible through the strategic deployment of fictions surrounding the Jewish community.

Bale also argues that each cult of a boy martyr "was fuelled by steadfast 'marketing'…. Further still, none of these cults arose out of anti-Jewish policy, popular antisemitism or child-murders (although these elements possibly preceded and accompanied the cults) but out of competing claims and rivalries between several of the wealthiest and most prestigious Benedictine houses in medieval England" ("Fictions" 131). Bale's argument seems to discount the importance of popular anti-Jewish sentiment, but his point remains compatible with my argument. First, such cults could not have become important in the popular Christian imagination without pervasive vilification of Jews, which sometimes erupted in tragedies like the Palm Sunday massacres. Second, there is no logical conflict between this hatred and religious leaders manufacturing a saint for their own competitive purposes. Instead, Bale's argument points up the strategic usefulness of popular emotions to those in power. The cults thus served not only as potentially lucrative pilgrimage sites by manipulating such emotions, but also as a means to raise the profile of individual Benedictine houses such as those at Bury St Edmunds and Norwich. Jocelin, in composing St Robert's *vita,* thus records his own active engagement in this monastic competition via saintly bodies, a competition in which

St Edmund was central. Jocelin plays upon a general medieval conception of pure Christian bodies where the individual is a metaphor for the group. This correspondence between communal identity and abjection of the other extends from the body of St Robert, a myth created to generate revenue, status, and identity, to the body of the foundational saint of the abbey at Bury.[77] How, then, do the attitudes that informed the legend of St Robert and the translation of St Edmund's incorrupt corpse help explain the expulsion?

Although we might suspect that the Bury expulsion was entirely controlled by Samson, Trevor-Roper counsels, "No ruler has ever carried out a policy of wholesale expulsion or destruction without the cooperation of society" (qtd. in Menache 351). Jocelin mentions the expulsion, for instance, as one proof of Samson's "great goodness," suggesting that approbation of Jewish vilification was a sign of moral uprightness (41).[78] Indeed, the massacre and ritual murder accusations in Bury St Edmunds make it clear that anti-Jewish sentiment ran through the town, from Samson down to the meanest peasant. Without an already existing current of fear and hatred running through the population, it is exceedingly unlikely that a mob would have massacred fifty-seven people nor would the cult of St Robert have taken hold in the populace's imagination as it did. While Samson's actions may represent a "deliberate exploitation of mass hysteria" (Dobson 18)[79] for

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77 While we cannot know for sure the veracity of St Robert's legend, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that ritual murder accusations were almost invariably slander.

78 "ejectio judeorum de villa Sancti Ædmundi... magne probitatis sunt indicia" (*Chronica* 33).

79 Dobson is discussing a general use by elites of popular anti-Jewish sentiment.

his own ends, these ends do not necessarily imply fully rational motivations or an escape from common feelings of bigotry, fear, and hatred.

We can consider as further evidence of popular sentiment common depictions of medieval Jews, including some in Bury. Not only is the body present as a constitutive term of Christian identity in ritual murder imagery, but the body also marks the Jewish populace as decidedly other and impure. Sophia Menache emphasizes that

> The close association between the diabolic image and the blood libel on the
>
> one hand and the expulsion decree on the other, gives rise to the question of
>
> the relation between the stereotype of the Jews and their expulsion, between
>
> the folk imagination which adapts the stereotype to its own needs and the
>
> politics of the elite which is supposed to serve the broader needs of society.
>
> (354)

Although Menache is discussing the later Expulsion of 1290, her insight also applies to the precursor expulsion in Bury St Edmunds. The myths of Jews as diabolic murderers foregrounds a logic that is strikingly similar to that which is at work in Bury. Indeed, elites too often achieve their goals through the strategic activation of popular beliefs.

BODIES OF IDENTITY: SAMSON, ST EDMUND, AND ABBEY
Part of Samson's identity issued from St Edmund himself, or, more precisely, from the physical presence of St Edmund's incorrupt corpse. Samson repeatedly declares

himself the protector of St Edmund's rights and body, and thus confirms his abbatial power as independent of external secular control. To preserve St Edmund's rights is to preserve the monastery and abbatial power. Further, the reviled Jewish bodies expelled from Bury exist alongside the body of St Edmund as two sides of the coin of medieval Christian identity, as I will show. But before we can appreciate the actions during the saint's translation, a brief description of St Edmund's history is necessary.

In life, Edmund was a king of the East Angles who was killed in 869 by Vikings at the end of a long battle. Scholars suspect Edmund's death in battle led to his sanctification, the earliest evidence for which "is a memorial coinage inscribed 'Scē Eadmund Rex' widely current in the Danelaw within a generation of his death, until c.930" (Gransden, "Edmund"). The root of the hagiographical tradition for Edmund comes from Abbo of Fleury's *Passio sancti Eadmundi*, written between 985–87, which attributes a number of standard topoi of hagiography to Edmund, including his being mocked, scourged, and finally beheaded. Though no reliable source exists to describe the fate of Edmund's body, Abbo claims that the Danes, after beheading the king, left the body where it fell, then tossed the head into some brambles. (Remarkably, in his translation and adaptation of Abbo's work, Ælfric compares Edmund's Viking enemies to Jews, thus constructing "a clear parallel between the king and his model, strengthening the identification of Edmund with Christ by identifying his enemies with the supposed enemies of Christ" [Phelpstead

38]). Some Christians who found the body then went searching for the head, making noises and calling out to it. They heard the head reply "here, here, here," and "the head was found guarded between the paws of a wolf 'of terrible appearance'" (Gransden, "Edmund"). The wolf followed the Christians, who returned it to the body, then built a small chapel over the grave. As is often the case with saints, the body was incorrupt; when translated to the church that would become the abbey, observers discovered that the head had reattached to the body with only a thin red line to mark where it had been severed.

St Edmund's status as Anglo-Saxon martyr, king, and virgin played special importance in political relations between the abbey and other powers, including the Crown. By the time Jocelin writes, St Edmund was commonly accepted as the source of Bury's remarkable wealth, power, and independence. Gransden notes: "Relations between the king and abbot were strengthened by the cult of St Edmund, king and martyr. The Angevin kings had a reverence for St Edmund only exceeded by their reverence for St Thomas of Canterbury" (*History* 63). Richard I, for instance, the monarch Samson petitioned when he expelled the Jews from Bury, even bore St Edmund's banners when crossing the sea and into battle. As an Anglo-Saxon king, St Edmund represented continuity with the past, a "genuine" pre-Conquest England, and royal power, both of which made him an ideal saint for royal devotion. Even so, Samson "was constantly on his guard against encroachment by the Angevin kings on St Edmunds' liberties and possessions" (Gransden, *History* 60). Emphasizing St

Edmund's royal status served as another way to maintain the privileges of the abbey; as a king himself, St Edmund should not, Samson would repeatedly argue, be deprived of his rights.

St Edmund's body was most likely the foundational relic of the abbey at Bury. Alongside vilified Jews and boy martyrs, the body of St Edmund served in a critical way in the identity of Bury's Christian inhabitants, which a fire lays bare. Jocelin writes:

> In 1198 the glorious martyr Edmund wanted to strike terror into our convent and instruct us that his body be looked after more reverently and carefully.... Part of a repaired candle burnt out on the ... dais, which was covered with hangings, and began to ignite all about it, above and below, so that the iron walls glowed all over with fire. (94, 96)[80]

The body of St Edmund and a number of his relics, however, escape destruction. Jocelin writes, "When we saw this miracle, we all wept for joy."[81] The passage draws attention to the corporeality of St Edmund's spiritual authority. The body's survival of the fire is, as Jocelin remarks, a miracle verifying Edmund's status as a saint, but is not unusual for the time. Because fire represented the purgatorial flames that would

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80 "Anno gracie M.C. nonagesimo viii. voluit gloriosus martir Ædmundus terrere conventum nostrum et docere, ut corpus ejus reverentius et diligentius custodiretur.... cecidit... pars cerei reclutati jam conbusti super predictum tabulatum pannis opertum... ita quod parietes ferrei omnino igne candescerent" (*Chronica* 78).
81 "Viso itaque miraculo, omnes lacrimati sumus pre gaudio" (*Chronica* 79).

burn away one's sins, a saint's holy nature would, practically by definition, prevent flames from consuming the saint's relics.

Testing relics by fire to determine their validity was in fact a common medieval practice, as Thomas Head demonstrates. The first known testing of relics by fire was in 978 by Archbishop Egbert of Trier who, in order to confirm whether certain relics were authentically those of Celsus, "cobbled together a ritual which both authenticated and proclaimed Celsus's sanctity." Egbert "wrapped a piece of a joint from the saint's finger in [a thin piece of cloth]. He placed it in the live coals of the thurible in which incense was burned for the space of an hour….The relic remained intact in the fire" (Head 223, 222). After the trial of Celsus, the practice became increasingly widespread so that, by the time of Jocelin's chronicle, the authentication of relics by fire would have been familiar.

Gransden notes that, after the fire, there was a rumor that the "sacred body had been scorched in the fire, so that St Edmund no longer lay perfect in his incorruption" (*History* 99). The episode and Samson's subsequent detailed investigation of the corpse thus reaffirm Edmund's saintliness. Indeed, Jocelin's pains to prove repeatedly this fact in his chronicle suggest not only Jocelin's persistent interest in St Edmund's spiritual authority, but an anxiety over the status of the abbey's foundational saint. Though the most basic reason for his narration of this event is that the fire was particularly noteworthy, Jocelin does not simply relate

the event and move on. Instead, he uses the narrative of the fire further to solidify

Samson's and the community's identity.

After describing how the monks quench the fire and start to repair the

damage, Jocelin declares:

> All this happened, by the will of God, so that the area round the shrine might
>
> be more carefully supervised and the abbot's plan carried out more speedily
>
> and without delay: this was to place the shrine, with the body of the holy
>
> martyr, more safely and more spectacularly in a higher position. (96)[82]

The fire warns not only that the monks have been negligent in their care of St

Edmund's body, but that Samson is its true custodian and knows best how the body

should be placed and displayed. Samson is of course from the start of his career as

abbot the guardian of St Edmund's body, a role which, in Samson's plans for its

display, becomes affirmed and reinforced to Jocelin and the other monks. Indeed,

the hastening by the fire of Samson's plans for the body leads to the culminating

moment in the interaction between Samson and Edmund. Jocelin presents the

relationship between Samson and St Edmund as a special one made apparent

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82 "Hec omnia facta sunt, providente Domino, ut loca circa feretrum sancti sui honestius custodirentur, et
ut propositum domini abbatis citius et sine dilacione debitum finem sortiretur; scilicet, ut ipsum
feretrum cum corpore sancti martiris securius et gloriosius in loco eminentiore poneretur" (*Chronica*
80).

through the physical intimacy of the translation and in prophetic dreams Samson and several other monks experience.[83]

Even as a child Samson had a connection to the saint. When he was only nine years old, Samson dreamed "he was standing in front of the cemetery gate of St Edmund's, when the devil, with outstretched arms, tried to sieze him, but St Edmund was near and rescued him, taking him in his arms" (34).[84] The relationship between St Edmund and Samson is from the beginning (according to Samson's telling) marked by physical intimacy and issues of threat and protection. Another dream further exemplifies this relationship. Shortly prior to Samson's election, one brother dreamt that he "saw St Edmund rise up from the shrine and display his naked feet and legs like a sick man, and when somone approached as if to cover his feet the Saint said, 'Don't come any closer: look, there is the man who will clothe my feet', and pointed towards Samson" (19).[85] Physical vulnerability in the form of nakedness and sickness, uncovered feet, and an outstretched finger (*pretendens digitum*) all emphasize the corporeality of the saint and the special protective bond between St Edmund and Samson. These are also points around which the description of the translation of St Edmund's body revolves.

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83 Dreams reported by a few monks prior to his election compared Samson to a wolf ("he will rage among you like a wolf"), an animal particularly linked to the legend of St Edmund, as noted earlier.

84 "cum esset puer ix annorum, somniavit se stare pre foribus cimiterii ecclesie Sancti Eadmundi, et diabolum expansis ulnis velle eum capere; sed sanctus Eadmundus, prope astans, recepit eum in brachiis suis" (*Chronica* 27).

85 "Et surrexit sanctus Eadmundus de feretro, sicut ei sompnianti visum fuerat, et quasi languidus pedes et tibias nudas exposuit, et accedente quodam et volente operire pedes sancti, dixit sanctus: 'Noli accedere. Ecce! ille velabit mihi pedes,' pretendens digitum versus Samsonen" (*Chronica* 15).

One of the most arresting scenes in Jocelin's chronicle appears when the

monks of Bury translate the body to its new location. The monks translate St

Edmund's body to a raised position in the abbey church. After a lavishly detailed

unwrapping of the body, Samson, in a theatrical display, begins to touch the saint's

body, a dangerous act. About one hundred years earlier, for example, St Edmund

"paralysed the hands of Abbot Leofstan, who had pulled the Saint's head to see

whether it had been miraculously united with the body" (Greenway and Sayers xi).

Yet Samson's touch of St Edmund is strikingly intimate:

> So taking the head in his hands, [Samson] groaned….And he proceeded to
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> touch the eyes and the very large and prominent nose, and then he felt the
>
> breast and the arms, and raising the left hand, he took hold of the Saint's
>
> fingers and put his fingers between them. Continuing, he found that the feet
>
> were stiffly upright, as of a man who had died that very day, and he felt the
>
> toes, counting them as he went. (100–101)[86]

The prominence of touch in this passage appears more clearly in the Latin, as Jocelin

repeats the words *tetigit* and *digitos* numerous times in a short space. It is a scene

that privileges touching and digits and emphasizes the intimate physicality of the

abbot's interaction with the saint, almost like a lover. Samson, by intertwining his

fingers with those of the corpse, seeks to make porous the boundary of skin

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86 "Accipiens ergo caput inter manus suas gemendo….Et procedens tetigit oculos et nasum valde
    grossum, et valde eminentem, et postea tetigit pectus et brachia, et sublevans manum sinistram digitos
    tetigit at digitos suas posuit inter digitos sanctos. Et procedens invenit pedes rigide erectos tanquam
    hominis hodie mortui, et digitos pedum tetigit, et tangendo numeravit" (*Chronica* 84).

between himself and the saint. It is a touch that discloses to us, as readers, the relationships of power and identity in Bury even while it affirms those relationships for a medieval audience.

Samson, head of the monastery's physical body, touches the physical remains of the monastery's spiritual head, and confirms his own identity. There is also an intimate connection between Edmund's historic role as king and Samson's current position as wolfish protector of the head. Although the concept of the king as the head of the body politic was likely not yet an explicit political philosophy, we see in Bury how a corporate identity formed, in part, by deploying St Edmund as just such a symbolic head. Events in Bury thus attest to an emerging nexus of political and religious symbols that precedes its codification. Ernst Kantorowicz, examining precursors to the eventual codification of this idea, describes the idea that "the *corpus mysticum Christi* [was] the Church, whose head was Christ" (194). The precocious appearance of this idea in Bury, however, suggests we reconsider Kantorowicz's chronology. The monks saw Samson as the visible head of Christ for this abbey. The saint's body, as foundation for the abbey, is in a sense identical to the abbey. Jocelin's focus on how Samson touches St Edmund's head links Christ as head and Christ as king to the abbot and the saint. St Edmund is the head of the mystical body of his abbey as Samson is the head of its corporate, communal, and political body.

The order of Samson's touches also recalls medieval depictions of Christ's ascension, which first appear "around A.D. 1000," that emblematized the expression *pedes in terra, caput in coelo* [the feet on earth, the head in heaven] (Kantorowicz 73). The feet of Christ represent his Incarnation; the head represents his ascension into Heaven. Often a veil or other dividing line in the image separates the two locations of Christ's body, much like the thin red line around St Edmund's neck. Samson's performance is resonant with such imagery. The head of the abbey and predicted in dreams to "rage like a wolf," Samson begins by touching the head that the wolf protected after Edmund's beheading. He ends with the feet, the emblem of Christ's Incarnation. The order in which Samson examines and touches St Edmund's body transforms it into a text he reads, a reading which Jocelin reports for us in great detail, thereby emphasizing its importance and inviting us to interpret the moment ourselves.

But St Edmund was beheaded. A thin red line separated the body from the head, a metaphor for the break between Samson and the other monks, a symbol of the mutually constitutive roles of exclusion and inclusion in constructing power relations and identities.[87] Further increasing the intimacy, the walls surrounding the scene function as an enclosing body, a space in which the events play out unseen by most. Although the monks "thought the abbot intended to show the coffin to the

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87 Similarly hierarchized bodies appear elsewhere at the time. Debra Higgs Strickland writes that, in 1159, John of Salisbury develops a similar hierarchy of the body in *Policraticus*: "John indicates that the head signifies the prince; the heart, the senate; the ears, eyes, and mouth signify judges and governors of provinces; the hands are the soldiers and officials; the stomach and intestines, treasurers and record keepers; and the feet, the peasants" (47–8).

people during the week after the Feast and to reinstate the Saint's body in the shrine in front of them all," they were, as Jocelin notes, "quite wrong" (99).[88] Instead, Samson chose twelve brothers to move the coffin "while the convent slept" (100).[89] Still, the translation needs witnesses who can attest to Samson's act. Jocelin writes: "And so that there should be plenty of witnesses, by the will of the Almighty, one of our brothers, John of Diss, who was perching in the vault with the vestry servants, saw everything plainly" (101).[90] Though Jocelin reports the scene, it is unlikely he himself was there. Confusion has arisen over his listing of "Jocellus the cellarer" among the privileged viewers, but Gransden convincingly argues that Jocelin and Jocellus were most likely different people.[91] Jocelin's knowledge of the event, then, would have come at second hand, mostly like from the voyeurs in the vault, to whom he shifts attention. The rhetorical move emphasizes both the spatially demarcated exclusivity of the group permitted to witness St Edmund's body and the irresistible power it exerts over the monks. Jocelin also indicates his own sense of being an outsider. The exchange between Samson and St Edmund makes interlopers of all others.

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88 "Putabamus omnes, quod abbas vellet loculum ostendere populo in octavis festi et reportare sanctum corpus coram omnibus; sed male seducti sumus, sicut sequentia docebunt" (*Chronica* 83).
89 "Dormiente ergo conventu" (*Chronica* 83).
90 "Et, ut esset copia testium, disponente Altissimo, unus ex nostris fratribus Johannes de Dice sedens supra testitudinem ecclesie, cum servientibus de vestiario, omnia ista evidenter videbat" (*Chronica* 84).
91 See Gransden, *A History of the Abbey*, 101. R.H.C. Davis, the editor of *The Kalender of Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmunds and Related Documents*, argues that "Jocellus the Cellarer," is, in fact, the Jocelin writing the chronicle. Jocelin, however, reports the scene in such a way as to make not only the narrator's own presence uncertain, but also to shift the point of view away from the central participants.

Before reclosing the tomb, the abbot has the event written out and placed with the corpse, memorializing the occasion much like Jocelin's chronicle does:

> On the abbot's orders another document was now written and stowed away in the box. This is what it said: "In 1198 on the night after the Feast of St Katherine, Abbot Samson, out of devotion, saw and touched the body of St Edmund." (101)[92]

Samson records the moment for posterity and writes part of his own life for any who later open the tomb. But the record is available only to a select few, namely, Samson's successors. The route by which most people will discover this text is through Jocelin's chronicle. Samson desires to mark the moment, yet the moment also functions as another performance of inclusion and exclusion for the monks around him. Samson includes himself with the saint and the line of abbots while excluding all others. Further, by placing the document with the body, Samson links body and text; he writes his own identity on the saint and encloses it in the privacy of the tomb.

In a study of medieval memory systems, Mary Carruthers describes how monks, in particular Benedictines (and Cistercians), viewed the mind as a type of parchment that they must inscribe to form memories. She writes about "the human body as itself a sort of book" (1). Carruthers points out that memory, which helps to

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92 "Et jubente abbate, statim scriptum fuit et aliud breve, et in eodem furulo reconditum, sub hac forma verborum: 'Anno ab incarnation domini MC nonagesimo octavo, abbas Samson, tractus devotione, corpus sancti Ædmundi vidit et tetigit, nocte proxima post festum sancte Katerine'" (*Chronica* 84).

create the self, was seen largely in corporeal terms and often came with floggings and self-flagellation as ways to inscribe the body with memory. The idea that memory is constitutive of identity is familiar even today, though we do not normally imagine memory in physical terms. But in Bury, the physicality of identity stands in the foreground. The thin red line across St Edmund's neck inscribes the history of Edmund's martyrdom, just as the cut throats of boy martyrs remind the faithful of Jewish threat to the Christian voice. The bodies of murdered boys record the mythic memory of Jewish evil. The abbey's fire also uncovers instances of body-as-memory. Head reminds us of the use of trials by fire to discover and recover the innocence or guilt of the accused: "The judicial ordeal by fire simply used fire to read... bodies" (235). Trial by fire could thus confirm or deny Christian purity and identity through the flesh. Through fire and touch, Samson reads St Edmund's body, verifying its spiritual authority and confirming his own. Commemorating the textuality of the saint's body and his own privilege to read it, Samson places a text of his own with it, to rest forever as unfaded and incorruptible as the body itself. If a saint's holiness preserves his body, then surely, through the transference of power effected by holy touch, Samson's text will remain safe from time. In adding his words to St Edmund's tomb, Samson inscribes this moment upon the body of the saint to seal his reading.

Yet another body grounds the identity of the monks—not St Edmund's, but the convent walls that enclose him. Just as Samson is the head of the abbey, the monks also view their relationship to the abbey in bodily terms. Samson relates a

vision seen by "an important visitor" in which "the holy martyr Edmund appeared to be lying outside the shrine, groaning, and seemed to say that he had been robbed of his clothes, and that he was emaciated from hunger and thirst" (97).[93] The monks interpret this dream: "We…are the naked limbs of St Edmund, and the convent is his naked body" (97).[94] Notably, even in the vision as Samson relates it, the saint's body appears inseparable from the body of the church. As Dawn Marie Hayes shows, it was common at the time Jocelin wrote his chronicle to describe the church in corporeal terms. Quoting "Rudolph the eleventh-century abbot of St Trond," Hayes writes that "the chancel and sanctuary [symbolize] the head and neck, the choir stalls [symbolize] the breasts" and the "temple=body," an idea particularly relevant to the events at Bury St Edmunds (13). Had the church burned down, (which would, Jocelin implies, "have been the outcome if the whole church had been decorated with hangings" [95]) it would have been like a bodily death. Similarly, as their interpretation of the dream shows, the monks constitute their identity as members of the abbey in somatic terms. Like Samson's reading of St Edmund's corpse, these terms, by being mapped onto the physical building itself, ground the convent's group identity in the corporeal.

CONCLUSION: MULTIPLYING BODIES AND BOUNDARIES

The church is a hierarchized body: the head is Samson; the body, the monks; and the

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93 "vir magnus per visionem vidit, scilicet quod sanctus martir Æmundus videbatur extra feretrum suum jacere, et gemendo dicere se pannis suis expoliatum et macilentum esse fame et siti" (*Chronica* 81).
94 "'Nos,' inquiunt, 'sumus nuda menbra sancti Ædmundi, et conventus est nudum corpus ejus'" (*Chronica* 81).

feet, the townspeople. Where, then, do the Jews figure in this metaphorical body, in this space figured as body? As seen in the imagery of ritual murder accusations, the Jews represented a threat to the ordered and "pure" body of Christian identity constituted and confirmed by St Edmund's presence and the enclosing walls of the church and town. In supposedly murdering St Robert, Bury's Jews confirmed this system of corporeal signification. Jews, as commonly understood in the Middle Ages, were rejectors and betrayers of Christ. For an identity formed around the sufferings of the savior's body and saints' bodies, such a rejection engendered serious anxiety. Rather than permit a contamination or even destruction of the terms of Christian identity, Samson, no doubt with the support of the town and church, expelled the Jews beyond the walls. Like the space of the convent itself, the town functions as another communal body. The expulsion thus purifies the corporate body of Bury. Samson polices the borders of this corporate body and threatens excommunication to any who attempt to undermine his expulsion of the Jews. Deriving his identity from the authority of the saint's body, Samson banishes those who, because of their religion, cannot participate in the identity-giving powers of St Edmund. As the construction of identities, particularly when seen in racial terms, is nearly always played against an excluded other, the Jews here function, in Gloria Cigman's terms, as an "absent presence" of difference. Just as the boy martyr's body in the ritual murder accusations constructs a hierarchy of Jew and Christian, St Edmund's body constructs one of abbot, monks, and the excluded. Those unable to participate in the

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rituals taking place in and on bodies cannot enter the space of a pure, corporate identity.

Though these two events—the expulsion and the translation—occur eight years apart and arise from seemingly unrelated events, when read together they illuminate the logic underlying both. They offer a window into intertwined ideas about bodies and spaces that manufacture individual and group identities. Moreover, financial, political, and religious currents coalesced in Bury at a turning point in the history of Jews in medieval England. Samson strategically deploys St Edmund's body, the expulsion of Jews, and Bury's own boy martyr in order to craft a coherent group. Whereas the Jewish body was figured as corrupt, the saint's body was incorrupt, not subject to the grotesqueries of decay. St Edmund's body, around which the abbey and Bury centered, served as a metaphorical spiritual head for the metaphorical Christian body of the town's inhabitants. By expelling the Jews, Samson, the earthly head of this communal body, made the status of Jews clear: unclean, abject, and with no place in the pure Christian body of Bury. In this corporeal and spatial system, bodies become like buildings and walls become like skin; these metaphors delineate boundaries between different communities and, in the process, simultaneously establish and confirm hierarchical power relationships. Noting the correspondence between a building and a body, Mary Douglas writes, "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (142).

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We find a multiplication of bodies: the bodies of St Edmund and St Robert, the dangerous bodies of Jews, the body of Christ, the bodies of the convent and the town. The monks and townspeople of Bury, through Samson's acts, construct a purified identity both through interaction with saintly bodies and through the exclusion of a demonized other. The regal powers within the *banleuca* granted to the abbot, the exemption from diocesan control, and the other liberties enjoyed by the abbey and its leader made Bury like an island. A sense of self-containment and independence pervaded Bury that required the exclusion of others. Jocelin's narrative mirrors this attitude as he nearly erases Jews from his chronicle as if to expel them from his text. In contrast, he pays extended textual attention to Samson's touching of St Edmund. Jocelin thus constructs his chronicle as yet another sacred, pure space like the monastery or the town, infused with the power of St Edmund's holy body and emptied of the Jewish "other."

In the Christian imagination, the Jew was linked to the Eucharist, Christian identity, bodily purity, and the myth of ritual murder by representing a perceived threat to a pure and stable Christian identity. Thus, through saintly bodies the chain between ritual murder and inscribed bodies becomes clear; the Word-made-flesh of the Eucharist appears inverted as the flesh-made-word. The thin red line across St Edmund's throat, the fictional slit throats of boy martyrs, the real slit throats of Jews committing mass suicide—all are powerful narratives that sing of bodies resisting,

bodies protesting, bodies creating and securing power.[95] Samson, even as a child, participated in this imagining a world in which violence against the individual, saintly body records violence against entire populations. Through Jocelin's chronicle, we see the connection between the political and the spiritual, the present and the past when Samson's fingers entwine with St Edmund's. Weighty political, financial, and legal matters; devotion, hatred, and fear; myth, belonging, and abjection; medieval bodies sang the confluence of these issues and emotions not despite their cut throats, but through them.

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95 Even centuries after these events in Bury St Edmunds and elsewhere, the imagery's resonance
    continues to perform similar narrative work in Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale."

Conclusion: The Digital Humanities and Genre

Mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes
-Geoffrey Chaucer, "Retraction"

My hope is that the preceding chapters have demonstrated the usefulness and necessity of a more critical approach to genre as well as some of the salient features of *fabliaux*, chivalric romance, and Jocelin's hagiographic chronicle. The ways in which bodies construct and delimit identities within generic contexts has been one of my central concerns. In *fabliaux*, these bodies intimate that the nexus of violence and sex is not merely for the purposes of bawdy humor, but instead is a sophisticated means of interrogating other genres, cultural concerns, and the nature of language itself. *Fabliaux* almost assuredly were directed at multiple audiences, some of whom may have delighted only in the titillating and obscene elements, some of whom may have perceived the often ironic distance at which fableors seem to have held the topics of their works, and some both. The genre was, moreover, one of surprising sophistication and variety. Even though critics have attempted to varying degrees of success to taxonomize these works, lacking a quantitative study that remains sensitive to the central importance of embodiment and generic play, these efforts fall invariably short.

Similarly, with the far wider ranging genre known loosely as "romance," it should be clear that there may be great gulfs between an Arthurian prose romance from one century and a travel narrative from another. To speak of "romance" as a

coherent genre may be so imprecise as to become meaningless. Instead, we must specify which romances we mean to trace the threads that weave them together. By defining more clearly what we mean by genre(s), we are able to clarify in turn our arguments and our understandings of these diverse and rich works. Moreover, to remain, as some scholars of genres do, wholly within the hermetic worlds of the genres themselves (however delimited) neglects the porousness not only of genre as a categorizing manuever, but of the genres as they engage with cultural concerns. As both chivalric romance and Jocelin's chronicle prove, we must despair of perceiving much of the work being done in those texts if we do not first appreciate the conversations into which genres enter, both with one another and with the ideas of their times. In Jocelin's chronicle, for instance, we find that bodies (again, I argue, a nigh inescapable primitive in literature), guided by principles of chronicle joined with hagiography, trace the effects of real world fiscal, religious, and political concerns. The corporate Christian identities Samson and Jocelin forged within Bury St Edmunds relied, in large part, upon conceptions of the body inexorably intertwined with identity. That Jocelin felt it proper to relay these events in forms that were themselves influenced by genre suggest his awareness of the rhetorical and hermeneutic purposes available in these categories. We can, in turn, investigate each genre for a similar awareness. To do so, however, in an impressionistic and non-comprehensive manner is, as I argue in this conclusion, to distort the record. The digital humanities promise, then, a way forward upon which we can extend the

existing scholarship, refine our understandings of the complicated aggregations we call "genres," and begin to ask new questions, to discover new insights. A great deal of work, much of it unglamorous, remains.

The goal of this dissertation has been to uncover the structures of genre and to demonstrate how they drive our interpretations of different texts. In the preceding chapters I have followed the traditional method of engaging with existing scholarship, then closely reading several exemplary texts from the genres I chose to discuss, a method that relies upon a synthesis of the critical conversation with details from the primary texts. Because I compare and contrast the structures of different medieval literary genres, however, the reliance on a handful of texts to stand in for each genre is problematic. I chose texts based upon how closely they track key concerns in their respective genres and upon my intuition—grounded in extensive reading of the scholarship and the literary texts—about how exemplary or noteworthy these texts are. Throughout these chapters, however, I have repeatedly stressed the importance of audience expectations and the individual reader's schemata for understanding a genre. Although intuition informed by wide reading, joined with close analysis, and based on the prior work of experts is a respected and traditional method, it meshes uneasily with the claims I put forth in this work. To make an argument about a genre based on a handful of selected texts falls into the same trap that I have noted bedevils other scholarship. The selection itself presupposes generic knowledge and thus may fall prey to circular logic. Rather than

an objective map of each genre driven by the relationships among the many texts, this method instead relies upon a subjective intuition about which texts are peripheral and which central to the generic networks, then generalizes about the network from the details of those few works. If the exemplary texts are not, in fact, prototypical of the themes and ideologies of their respective genres, then the analysis that follows will falter. Moreover, intuition is a powerful hermeneutic tool, particularly when it is informed by experience and buttressed by the expert knowledge of prior scholars, but intuition's inputs and logic are opaque and can perpetuate confirmation bias or fall prey to incomplete evidence, to name only two potential problems. In other words, the cognitive processes under investigation have themselves driven many of the choices throughout the preceding chapters.

While it may seem unwise, in a conclusion, to reveal the shifting sands upon which one's project rests, I do so for three important reasons. The first is to demonstrate the work we *are* able to accomplish through our internalized generic networks, the prototypes we identify, and their congruence with networks formed by other minds in different times. Indeed, if the preceding chapters hold any persuasive power, they do so because of the mind's innate capability to categorize, which is harnessed for the purpose of contextualizing individual literary works within genres. Yet disagreements about how the texts in a genre relate to one another and to other genres will persist among scholars and audiences. One's mental map for a genre is a network based on individual experience, reading, and—

crucially for my purposes—one's purpose for reading. That is, the topics, themes, and styles to which one pays attention will influence what one "sees" in a text and its commonalities with other texts. Attention thus alters the perception of a genre network in subtle, albeit powerful ways. It is quite possible, for example, that my focus throughout these chapters on configurations of bodies has led me to construe the different genres in ways that others may find unconvincing or that a quantitative analysis would disprove.

Quantitative text analysis is, of course, one of the primary methods of the digital humanities. Thus, the second reason for laying bare the methodological flaws in this study is to show how quantitative methods—what Franco Moretti calls "distant reading" and Matt Jockers calls "macroanalysis"—could enrich this type of study. Drawing from corpus linguistics, natural language processing, statistics, and numerous other disciplines traditionally not associated with the humanities or literary criticism, quantitative textual analysis comprises a field of practices, theories, and tools that make it possible to analyze large corpora in ways previously unavailable to literary scholars. Rather than being limited to a choice between the close reading a few exemplary texts or touching briefly upon a larger (though still relatively small) set of texts, macroanalysis permits the scholar to perform algorithmic analyses of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of texts. There is great promise for the application of these methods to a study of genre. In the case of *fabliaux*, one could prepare a corpus that comprises all of the works in the *Nouveau*

receuil complet des fabliaux (*NRCF*) and then "read" all of the *fabliaux* at once. Such a

project would not, however, provide the researcher with an "objective" reading of

the texts or be somehow more "true" than a more impressionistic and intuitive

interpretation, but it would offer new ways of viewing the texts and their

relationships to one another that could, in turn, suggest new (and testable)

hypotheses. Distant reading, in other words, allows scholars to ask questions that

would previously have been inconceivable. As the number of computationally-

assisted literary analyses have grown, we have also seen methods such as topic

modeling or cluster analysis achieve wider adoption among practitioners, thereby

providing a body of scholarship upon which new studies can build.[96]

The third reason for this turn to methodology is to show how quantitative,

computer-assisted textual analysis often suffers from the same blindspots toward

genre as traditional scholarship and to show some of the theoretical underpinnings

of quantitative literary analysis. For an emerging field that so regularly analyzes

large corpora and frequently divides those corpora along generic lines, there is a

troubling lack of theorization about the nature of genre. Many digital humanities

projects continue to approach genre as an uncomplicated container for texts.

Because quantitative methods are not neutral or objective, but entail assumptions

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96 Topic models are a form of statistical analysis of texts that group words according to their co-
occurrence in a document and are meant as a way of exploring large corpora. Cluster analysis is the act
of grouping together sets of objects in ways such that objects in the same cluster are more similar
(according to the clustering criteria) to one another than objects in other clusters. A detailed
explanation of these methods is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Scott Weingart provides a useful
starting point in his blog post, "Topic Modeling for Humanists: A Guided Tour." This topic, cluster
analysis, and many others are also covered in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*.

and interpretive choices along every step (even at the level of the algorithm), any analysis that uses genre without an explicit theory of how it behaves relies upon an implicit, possibly unexamined, notion of genre. Worse, with quantitative methods, one's unexamined assumptions will inform the results in potentially less transparent ways than in scholarship that proceeds through close reading and rhetorical persuasion alone. Because researchers in the so-called "hard" sciences developed many of the algorithms popular among digital humanists, these tools often seem like black boxes: texts go in; evidence comes out. Without the training necessary to understand the methods used, most humanities scholars are unable to evaluate or even recognize the assumptions underlying computer-assisted analyses. In the rest of this chapter, then, I will review some examples of such work, discuss the assumptions made, and show how understandings of genre inform such scholarship, even when it remains unacknowledged. I will then sketch future directions for quantitative analysis of medieval texts informed by a cognitive theory of genre.

CATEGORIES AND GENRE IN THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

A recurring question among scholars is how to define the field of digital humanities. Is it a discipline? Is it a community of practice? How does it relate to new media studies, humanities computing, and computer science? These conversations appear at conferences, in many blog posts, and in the pages of journals like *PMLA*, the

Journal of Digital Humanities, and others.[97] They result, in part, from anxiety over

the boundaries of this relatively new and increasingly visible field. The desire to be

inclusive of a wide range of practices, methods, projects, and scholars pulls

definitions toward the idea of a "big tent" under which nearly all can fit. At the same

time, faculty, grant organizations, and institutions all have an interest in defining the

field in a way that delineates what "counts" and what does not for the purposes of

funding, hiring, promotion, and prestige. As with many other attempts at

categorization, however, this one often begins with an unacknowledged and flawed

concept of categories. One posits a definition by which a research project either is or

is not in the realm of the digital humanities, but the definition assumes that there

are clear boundaries that can be known if only one views the problem from the

"right" angle. One effort that acknowledges the amorphous nature of the field is the

annual "Day of DH," which is "an open community publication project that will bring

together scholars interested in the digital humanities from around the world to

document what they do on one day" (Day of DH, "About"). As part of this exercise,

participants provide their own definition of digital humanities, which is then

archived along with all the other definitions. Browsing the site reveals the

multiplicity of definitions proffered. One recent, high profile, collaboratively-

authored book, *Digital_Humanities*, also seeks to answer "what is digital

humanities?" through a collaboration among five of the field's leading scholars:

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97   See, for example, the many sessions at the MLA 2014 Conference, the increasing prominence of the
     Digital Humanities Conference, Alan Liu, "The Meaning of the Digital Humanities," and others too
     numerous to list here.

"Digital Humanities implies a reinterpretation of the humanities as a generative enterprise: one in which students and faculty alike are making things as they study and perform research, generating not just texts (in the form of analysis, commentary, narration, critique) but also images, interactions, cross-media corpora, software, and platforms" (10). Stephen Ramsay, in a similar vein, has written that the commonality among digital humanists "involves moving from reading and critiquing to building and making." The examples could be multiplied many times over. As the editors of *Defining Digital Humanities* note in their introduction, "Answering the question 'what is digital humanities?' continues to be a rich source of intellectual debate for scholars" (6).

The unsettled debate about how we define "digital humanities" is important both for how it demonstrates once again the inability of categories to provide stable boundaries and for the professional consequences of these definitions, which determine who gets funding, published, or promoted. These such decisions will, in turn, profoundly affect the types of research and tools upon which other scholars will choose to spend their limited time and energies. There is, for example, a bias in the field towards innovations in methodology and tools rather than the ever more nuanced application of existing practices or the important, yet unglamorous creation of digital scholarly editions, for which I will argue later in this chapter. In part, this situation can be seen as a result of the emphasis of granting organizations like the NEH's Office of Digital Humanities and others, which invariably require that

proposals include a statement of innovation.[98] We also see it in publications, where discussions of new or revised methods often outweigh the scholarship that "simply" applies processes like topic modeling, word frequency analysis, and visualizations to scholarly questions. We begin, too, to organize the digital humanities field around different practices: here are the topic modelers, here the stylometricians, here the network analysts, and here the geospatial mappers. There is a sense, of course, of interconnections among different practices, but also a great deal of specialization. But we do not typically organize the field of digital humanities along lines of genre, cultures, languages, or time periods as is more traditional in the humanities. The research methods take precedence when constructing a definition of the field far more than disciplinary boundaries, time period, or theoretical approaches.

This way of categorizing the field, leading as it does towards a greater inclusiveness than traditional discplinary boundaries, may be a positive development. Through research practices rather than subjects, it unites scholars of different time periods and languages who might otherwise never come in contact. It seems, many times, that the method (preferably a novel one) takes precedence over the research questions; the coding can become itself the research focus, rather than the sophisticated and critical application and interrogation of existing methods. In the networked definition of the "big tent" of digital humanities, moreover, text

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98 This comment should not be taken as a criticism of the NEH ODH, which is one of the primary sources of funding for digital humanities in the USA and which has done more good for the field than nearly any other organization.

analysis still occupies a central place for many. Many practitioners may emphasize the novelty of their approaches (we do not usually see scholars focused on what is new about the **way** they close read, for example) over the novelty of their research findings.[99] In other words, as with genre, the socioeconomic pressures upon digital humanities scholars directs not only how they go about their research, but also how the field defines itself around process rather than around disciplines.

The role of literary genre is another crucial area in the digital humanities that demands further investigation. Because the field deals more often with corpora rather than individual texts, the results and their interpretations require some schema for categorization to make sense of the results. Ted Underwood, for example, writes of categorization and genre:

> Distant reading is hard, fundamentally, because *human beings* don't agree on a shared set of categories.... How can we ever know anything if we can't even agree on the definitions of basic concepts like genre and point of view? But here's the crucial twist — and the real center of what I want to say. **The blurriness of literary categories is exactly why it's helpful to use computers for distant reading.** With an algorithm, we can classify 500,000

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99 To be fair, nearly all digital humanists are driven, too, by research questions and will consistently present their findings on a specific text, author, or corpus. Nevertheless, the details of the method—especially any innovations in that realm—typically receive far more description than the results, which are sometimes easy to anticipate from the chosen method. At the MLA 2014 Conference, Brian Crozall, the organizer of Session #402 "Beyond the Digital: Pattern Recognition and Interpretation," banned discussions of methods and required presenters to speak only about their results, with refreshing results. The session was a reaction against the method-heavy presentations that typify digital humanities.

volumes *provisionally.* Try defining point of view one way, and see what you

get. If someone else disagrees, change the definition; you can run the

algorithm again overnight. You can't re-run a crowdsourced cataloguing

project on 500,000 volumes overnight.

Second, algorithms make it easier to treat categories as plural and

continuous…. Instead of sorting texts into category A or category B, we can

assign degrees of membership to multiple categories. As many as we want….

The point is that an algorithm can give us a starting point for discussion, by

rapidly mapping a large collection in a consistent but flexibly continuous

way. (Underwood, "We Don't Already Know")

Underwood's remarks about the "blurriness" of genre and the provisional nature of

the quantative analysis of large textual corpora recognize both the importance and

the difficulties of genre and other forms of categorization for interpretation. Implicit

in this quotation is the idea that texts participate in rather than belong to a category.

Underwood's research tracks the development of literary style through the 18th and

19th centuries of English language genres to uncover significant vocabulary

differences among prose fiction, prose nonfiction, verse, and drama. His work also

reveals the messy and provisional nature of quantitative, machine-enabled

classification of corpora. The recognition that categorization functions as a

debatable spectrum and that it fundamentally affects interpretion is accurate, but

still limited by a lack of a theory of categorization, a gap that Underwood notes:

The more I look at research on genre (including traditional as well as digital approaches), the more I think the elephant in the room is that the word may not actually hold together. *Genre* may be a box we've inherited for a whole lot of basically different things. A bibliography is a genre; so is the novel; so is science fiction; so is the Kailyard school; so is acid house. But formally, socially, and chronologically, those are entities of very different kinds.

(Underwood, "One Way Numbers")

At times, it may indeed be enough to state that members of a category exist within a continuum, but that information is not enough to discuss the structure of the category or the relationships among its members in a more sophisticated fashion. Without a theory of categories/genres to direct such large-scale analysis, one's view of the structure of such results will remain blurred.

Increasingly troubled by how he categorized the texts in his corpus, Underwood captures one of the essential, if too often unacknowledged, tensions for those who work with genre. The concept has value as a rhetorical stance, as a way of dividing works from one another and grouping others together, and as a hermeneutic device. But genre does not cohere as a concept if we demand of it stable boundaries or that it behave similarly for eighteenth-century lyric poetry as it does for medieval romance. Moreover, at what level we establish genre—that is, at the level of form, content, time period, style, or something else entirely—can be arbitrary, logically inconsistent, or wrong altogether. "Poetry" is not a genre any

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more than is "prose," yet Underwood, for example, calls "poetry" a genre when it is, more properly, a mode of writing or a form.

These challenges demands, then, a theory that can provide guidance. How then should we quantify genre? Rather than a category that inheres in texts, waiting merely to be discovered and described, genre arises in the minds of authors and audiences and is expressed through or found in texts, where it performs rhetorical, ideological, and aesthetic work. Texts participate in genres that exist outside of them, a shared mental apparatus for meaning. Unlike style—which stylometrics convincingly demonstrates appears in the most unconscious lingustic choices— genre is, if not always a conscious concern, a way of being in conversation with existing literatures, of thinking through the semantic fields, thematic concerns, and plot structures that have come before. Genre is a negotiation with influence that is available to normal literary perception precisely because it exists in the interpreting mind. Although its effects appear at the level of word usage and punctuation and can, to some degree, be distinguished from authorial style, the mortar is not the natural level at which genre exists.[100] Genre exists, I argue, more in semantics than punctuation and more in plot than prepositions because genre is a shared vocabulary, a frame for the communication of meaning. Even though our perception of genre is too often instinctive rather than critical, we cannot escape categorization

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[100] Although it can be dangerous to posit authorial intention, the nature of genre suggests if not a greater degree of authorial control than for many other facets of a work, then at least a greater likelihood for its appearance in semantics and structures, which are currently much more difficult to discover algorithmically.

or the networks of meaning among works to which we respond and in which we

locate our texts. A modification of existing quantitative methods could, however,

allow us to refocus the lenses of our microscopes to pinpoint the levels at which

genre more usually resides. A combination of proven methods informed by a critical

genre theory can demonstrate not only the flexibility of quantitative methods, but

also the fundamentally interpretive and theoretical nature of those methods. Indeed,

our impulse is often to critique the numbers and methods themselves, thereby

blinding ourselves to the theoretical underpinnings of both. Or, as Underwood

writes, "we're so strongly motivated to criticize numbers that we forget to be

skeptical about everything else" (Underwood, "One Way Numbers").

Another unaddressed issue in most examples of distant reading is the

absence of the audience.[101] Genre (and categorization in general) is not inherent in

the text, but a interpretive act that contextualizes and connects texts, yet

classificatory algorithms derive their results entirely from the corpus with no

consideration of historical context or of diachronic changes in classificatory

schemes. Moreover, categorization relies upon not just features in a text, but in the

contextualization of those features within a neural map of a genre that is specific to

each reader. How, then, can we approach quantitative analysis while preserving a

parallax view of a text's multiple contexts? It is the job of the researchers to

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101 David Blei, one of the creators of the most commonly applied algorithm for topic models, has recently
    begun investigating what he calls "collaborative topic models" that incorporate user information along
    with purely textual analysis, but this work is focused on providing better suggestions for related
    content, not reader reception. See Wang for more information.

interpret the computer-generated results not only in the light of their research questions, but also in light of the historical moments. An awareness of how categories change over time, of how the audiences of one period might receive a text differently from those in our time (or the algorithms of our time) is all too often missing.

As an example, we can turn to the sophisticated and innovative research done in the Stanford Literary Lab, the methods of which serve as as model for many other digital humanists. In the Lit Lab's first pamphlet, "Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment," Jockers, Moretti, and their co-authors try "to establish whether computer-generated algorithms [can] 'recognize' literary genres" (1). They classified texts using two different methods. They first employed a text-tagging software package known as DocuScope; the second relied on a method Jockers had developed for authorship attribution called "Most Frequent Words" (3, 5). The initial experiment studied "a corpus of 250 19th century British novels from the Chadwyck-Healey collection" to see if these methods could distinguish novelistic genres like "gothic," "*Bildungsromane*," and the like (3). Both the DocuScope and MWF analyses succeeded in classifying the texts in ways that "corroborated what literary scholars already knew," but in doing so showed that "unsupervised statistical analysis" could, indeed, classify by genre (5). The research uncovered a surprising principle of genre and its effect on literary texts. Neither of the methods tested considered semantic content at all, but instead looked at word frequencies

and grammatical structures; this level of analysis meant that the computer programs were not classifying texts based upon the types of features humans typically consider.[102] Even though the units of analysis differed among DocuScope, MWF, and human categorization, the results were nevertheless the same. This finding "suggested that the logic of genre reached a depth that no one had imagined" (6) and that "genres, like buildings, possess distinctive features at every possible scale of analysis" (8). When visualizing the results in a scatterplot that tracked the principal components, the researchers discovered, too, that it might be possible to place "each genre... in relation to all the others" (9). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, genres are always in conversation with other texts both "within" and "without" their genres. The Lit Lab's argument for the relational nature of genre thus further supports this claim.

Nevertheless, their results also make clear some of the problems and ambiguities that arise from classificatory algorithms. One of the Lit Lab's hopes was that "the system of genres might turn from a hodge-podge of unrelated categories to a single matrix of interconnected formal variables" (10). Turning, then, to a larger corpus of 106 rather than 36 texts, the next iteration of the study found that the genres "gothic," "Jacobin," "national," "anti-Jacobin," and "evangelical" did not separate as neatly as the researchers would have liked. Instead, they realized "how strong the 'author' signal was"; rather than clusters of texts organized by genre, they

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102 This research derived from the field of stylometrics, which looks only at linguistic style, not semantic or structural content.

found strong correlations among texts written by the same author. Whereas genres are often organized by semantic content and plots, authorship attribution studies typically look at style at the level of function words to discern linguistic patterns that constitute an author's "signature" (14). In examining the corpus at this level of detail, the quantitative methods the Lit Lab scholars used re-discovered the style of the different authors. They found that "language and style are just not enough to delimit a genre from another" (15). This result further confirms that genre is a negotiation between an author's sense of literary context and the audience's.

Because humans are typically incapable of recognizing the linguistic style of a work—such details may influence our perceptions, but at a less-than-conscious level—but excel at recognizing the characteristics of plot, characterization, and phenomenological description, it should not be surprising that genre tends to show its influence more on these more "macro"-level features of a text than at the level of syntax. This finding, however, undermines the authors' earlier claim that genres possess distinctive features at every scale. While this fact may be true to some extent, it also quickly becomes impossible to distinguish small-scale features attributable to genre from those attributable to author. If the machines find evidence for the author more than genre, then we must keep always in mind that the Lit Lab's "yes" to their initial question is a heavily qualified one. With this discovery about the strength of the "author signal," the experimenters returned to their analysis:

As we studied our charts, it became clear that they rested on two premises that were quite different from those of current genre theory: they never looked at a genre *per se*, in isolation, but *always and only in relation to another genre*; and they were not interested in those features that could add up to a synthetic ideal-type, but only in those that could *differentiate* one genre from another. (18; emphasis added)

One of the threads of argument throughout this dissertation has been that genres exist in relation to other genres and that authors and audiences make meaning through the differences among genres. A passage of courtly love lyric in a *fabliau* has a radically different meaning from what it would have in a chivalric romance or a Latin chronicle, even if the words themselves were identical. Moreover, the desire for a "synthetic ideal-type" is akin to the desire of genre scholars to define a prototypical text or to find the most central node in a network of texts.

If, as I have argued, genres have meaning largely in relation to one another just as the texts that participate in a genre have meaning in relation to their peers and their "distance" from the central prototype, then the finding by Jockers, Moretti, et al. is what we should expect to find. The Lit Lab's quantitative analysis of genres thus shows the necessity of a more sophisticated theory of genre to make sense of their findings while at the same time suggesting that the scholars involved uncovered some of the basic principles of such a theory through deductive means. Although the Lit Lab was able to differentiate genres with varying degrees of

success, they "just didn't know how to make sense" of their results (24). One possible reason was that "these features which are so effective at differentiating genres, and so entwined with their overall texture—these features cannot offer new insights into structure, *because they aren't independent traits, but mere consequences of higher-order choices*" (24; emphasis in original). They discovered that genres have a relational structure and are akin to "icebergs: with a visible portion floating above the water, and a much larger part hidden below, and extending to unknown depths" (25). Lacking a strong theory of genre informed by how the human mind goes about constructing and using it, the Lit Lab's work on quantitative formalism reached a dead end. The researchers discovered the existence of a structure they could not fathom or fully explain, even though they could see its effects. The need for an explicit theory of genre to sort through these difficulties is clear.

In his monograph, Jockers returns to some of the questions raised by the Lit Lab's first pamphlet about algorithmic text classification. In doing so, he uncovers evidence for a "genre signal" that can categorize texts based on style alone, yet also discovers that there are several other major signals that affect how texts are classified by the machine learning processes he used. Focusing on novels from the late-eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, Jockers reveals that at least some genres exhibit generational fluctuations, coming into favor for a decade or two before fading into the background. He calls this phenomenon "generational waves of

genre" (85).[103] But genre is not the only factor influencing the style of a given text; difficulty arises when determining which factors affect style and to what degree. To answer this questions, Jockers "constructed a... test using linear regression to model and measure the extent to which each of the 'external' variables (text, author, genre, decade, and gender) accurately predicts the dependent variables (that is, the usage of frequent words and marks of punctuation" (96).[104] In other words, Jockers acknowledges that these features/variables are deeply intertwined and so performed further analysis to isolate, to whatever extent is possible, the effects of each variable upon the results.

What Jockers demonstrates is that some of the most sophisticated analysis in the digital humanities[105] uses genre as another category with partial influence on a text and is, thus, more interested in what such categorization can do for making sense of thousand of texts rather than in investigating genre as a concept. Instead, the analysis looks in from the outside and sees, as so many others, a category that may wax and wane in popularity, but the internal structure of which is either uninteresting or irrelevant to the scholar's concerns. Jockers writes: "Genres are a

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103 See the discussion in my introduction about generational changes in genre that cites Moretti, Martindale, and others.
104 It should be noted here that, in Jockers's analysis, style consists only of word frequency and punctuation usage, not sentence structure, poetic figures, or any other higher-order structures that literary scholars typically investigate. Jockers thus works within the same frame as the Lit Lab pamphlet discussed above that argues that the effects of genre (or, in the case, any other signal) appear at any level of detail in a text and are thus amenable to algorithmic analysis of even the most basic building blocks of language.
105 About Jockers' book, Underwood writes: "Jockers has raised the bar for this whole area of discussion. In fact, 'raised the bar' might be an understatement, because five years ago I don't recall this particular bar existing" ("Comment on Debating").

subjectively derived and human-defined classification system in which boundaries

are primarily drawn in terms of subject matter. Genre boundaries are notoriously

porous, and genres bleed into each other" (95-96). Extending Claudi Guillén's

remark that "genre is an invitation to form," Jockers writes "we must certainly now

add 'style', or if style is too broad a term for some tastes, then at the very least we

must add 'language usage'" (99). Jockers thus acknowledges, in passing, the deeper

structures of genre, but does not pursue the issue further. While this neglect is not a

failure in his wide-ranging book, it demonstrates yet again how little attention

scholars—who classify texts as the basis of their arguments—often give to the

structure of those classifications.

In order to distinguish the effects of the multiple signals on style, Jockers digs

into the works of three authors who wrote in multiple genres: Charles Dickens,

Edward Lytton, and Benjamin Disraeli. The works of each author cluster together in

his PCA[106] graph. In other words, each of Dickens's works is more like his other

works than any by Lytton or Disraeli. Once Jockers controlled for the effects through

such clustering, he revealed "the full force of genre," which shows that "the linguistic

choices that authors make are, in some notable ways, dependent upon, or entailed

by, their genre choices" (104). By accounting for, as much as possible, the effects of

an author's personal style on that author's works, Jockers demonstrates that genre

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106 "PCA" stands for "principal component analysis," which is a method that seeks to transform multi-
dimensional data of possibly correlated variables into a two-dimensional graph that makes visible
previously hidden factors of variation. A full explanation of this method is beyond the scope of this
chapter; see Binongo.

itself—the conventions and literary history with which an author enters into conversation—affect even unconscious stylistic choices. Even more interesting, "not all genres exert equal force; some genres pull at style harder than others" (104). Among the genres he studied, the *Bildungsroman*, perhaps the most well-established genre of the group, exerts the strongest pull "precisely because it is more formulaic, its conventions more clearly delineated" (104). In other words, a genre with a long tradition and many exemplars to guide an author seems to affect style more strongly than genres without such formula.[107]

The most common methods used for quantitative text analysis in the humanities invoke genre as a simple category, a way of classifying large corpora into different bins. The research questions are not concerned with the internal structure of genres and how those structures connect or complicate relationships to other genres and to the scholarship surrounding them. Although this lacuna results in part from the research questions posed, it derives, too, from the methods deployed. Stylometrics are more concerned with the unconscious choices of word usage, punctuation, and—in more complex studies—sentence structure. The semantic content, plot structure, and characterization, features of texts and genres to which we response most readily, are touched only tangentially and through proxies that exist at different levels of analyses. To use the Lit Lab's metaphor once again, digital humanists pursuing quantitative analysis study the mortar and the bricks to discern

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107 See my chapter on romances featuring Gawain for a discussion of a similar effect in a different genre.

the floor plan and height of the cathedrals. Clearly, a focus at this level is a poor

substitute, at best, for those who wish to analyze more abstract or conceptual

features.

The work, then, by Moretti, Jockers, and Underwood, among others, which

represents some of the most sophisticated quantitative text analysis extant in digital

humanities, presents a clear engagement with questions of genre and categorization

without, however, an attendant theory of genre that is sophisticated enough to

account for how and why their results arise. It is clear, further, that computational

algorithms can distinguish different categories of texts from one another through

purely stylistic features, which is itself another avenue worth pursuit: why might

genre appear at these levels? What does it say about the depth of our horizons of

expectations that they seem to influence even word choice? These questions and

others offer clear avenues for the application of a cognitive approach to genre that I

have outlined in this dissertation as well as further explorations into the effects of

prototypes and category structures upon reception and interpretation.

TOWARDS QUANTITATIVE GENRE STUDIES
Just as genre theory might fruitfully inform digital humanities research, so too might

methods for text analysis and data visualization inform, test, and strengthen

theories of genre. One challenge, which I noted at the outset of this chapter, is the

potential distortion that may arise when a handful of texts stand in for a genre as a

whole. The *fabliaux*, for example, comprise a corpus of approximately 130–150

texts, depending upon the collection. Conclusions drawn about the whole corpus from three or four texts are thus on shaky ground. We have, however, the capability to analyze all of the extant *fabliaux* in a systematic way that could shed new light on the genre's structure. Although, regrettably, such a project is beyond the scope of this work, in what follows I will discuss the possibilities for discovery and analysis through the application of quantitative text analysis to the problem of generic structure, generally, and the *fabliaux*, specifically. In this section, I review some of the relevant technologies and methods for text analysis, discuss the challenges faced when applying them to medieval works, and outline directions for a larger digital humanities project based appropriate to medieval studies.

What, then, are the options? Why are so many scholars focused on the different methods for counting words? Part of the answer rests, assuredly, in the types of research pursued. Few scholars concern themselves with generic structure and embodiment, though Jockers, Moretti, et al. have expressed a desire to uncover plot structures and other elements of texts. The other part of the answer rests in the affordances of the tools combined with the remarkable difficulties encountered when one tries to teach a computer program to expose the structure of a genre, the machinations of a plot, or the methods of characterization. Throughout this dissertation I have argued that embodiment is an especially clear and well-focused lens through which to discern genre. I have based these claims upon recent findings in cognitive science about how both our embodiment and our classificatory

schemata are fundamental to interpretation. How, then, can quantitative methods address these concerns?

The answer is: "only with difficulty and great labor." We can again consider the *fabliaux* corpus. Although it is relatively well-defined, comprising approximately one hundred and fifty texts, all of which are available in canonical, critical editions, the texts nevertheless present multiple challenges to a quantitive, computer-assisted map of the genre's structure. Contemplation of this test case reveals one challenge almost immediately; nearly all of the contemporary tools for text analysis were developed with modern, Western European languages in mind. Orthography is assumed to be stable, which is decidedly not the case for *fabliaux*, even when we consider the critical editions of these works. Even simple methods like word frequencies assume that a word has only one spelling. Although this can pose a problem for the study of modern languages, too, because "body," "bodies," and "body's" would be counted separately, it is possible, through Natural Language Processing (NLP) and wordnet[108] tools to derive the "stem" of these words so that all such variations may be collapsed into a single number. NLP libraries, however, require training for specific languages. English is primary, followed by the common languages like Spanish, French, etc. To my knowledge, there are no extant NLP tools or Wordnets for the study of medieval languages. Named Entity Recognition (NER)

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108 A wordnet is a list of synonyms and related words formatted so that they may be used in computer-assisted text analysis. "WordNet® is a large lexical database of English. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are grouped into sets of cognitive synonyms (synsets), each expressing a distinct concept" (WordNet).

software, which is used to identify and label proper nouns in a text, also suffer the same limitations: they expect regularized spellings and only "know" modern languages. Thus, even if counting words in *fabliaux* could reveal generic structure (and I would argue that it cannot owing to the multiple other factors influencing word usage), the lack of regularized spelling and automated tools to find stems or proper nouns would still make such a method untenable.

One might object further that stylometrics is not only interested in the function words and that word frequency analysis can, in fact, discern clusters of words that carry semantic weight. It is quite possible that after removing orthographical variation from the *fabliaux* corpus that we might begin to discern structures in the corpus. Indeed, such a method must be explored, first, before moving on to other methods. I suspect that word frequencies will serve best as a starting point for further quantitative and qualitative investigations of genre for a few reasons. First, it can be hard to discern low-frequency, but high-importance words. Perhaps, for example, representations of genitalia are particularly important to the genre of *fabliaux* (and this would not be a surprising result or a controversial claim). Yet *fabliaux* often play with euphemism. How, then, can we distinguish, in a traditional word-frequency analysis, words that are used "straight" from those used euphemistically? What if a short poem (and many of the *fabliaux* are exceedingly short) uses a wide variety of euphemisms for genitalia that do not appear much in other texts of the corpus while at the same time never naming any organs with their

"proper" names? If we were determining position in the network of the genre based merely on a count of words in the "genitalia" cluster, then this text would appear to be an outlier that does not treat this theme in any way, even though nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, such a playfully euphemistic text invested simultaneously in the linguistic and sexual should count as one that is especially characteristic of the genre.

Word counts, further, are proxies for other aspects. Jockers notes, in a discussion of word clusters that distinguish British from Irish novels during the 19th century, that "we must agree that this somewhat arbitrary cluster of words... is a reasonable proxy for some latent sense of confidence in British prose" (115). When we work at the scale of genre or centuries, we can no longer investigate each text as closely as in more traditional scholarship; instead, we must use the quantitative tools to reveal features that we can then interpret in light of our expert knowledge. A computer has no conception of what "confidence" might look like in literature, but we can, as Jockers does, interpret stylistic findings as evidence for a national literature that evinces confidence. This need for interpretation is, in fact, one of the virtues of quantitative analysis. There is never a point at which we can definitively state the truth about a corpus; the evidence always demands interpretation and is exploratory not definitive. For example, if we examine multiple genres for word clusters, what if one genre uses words as euphemisms whereas the other uses those same words frequently, but for their literal meaning? These questions are one

reason why scholars must not only interrogate their results carefully, but also think

through the initial parameters of their literary experiments (bearing in mind the

warning: Garbage In, Garbage Out). In the next sections, therefore, I provide a

review of these methods and how they might (or might not) apply to medieval

literary studies.[109]

TEI and Digital Editions

Despite the challenges detailed above, there are ways past them, though they are not

ones amenable to the navigation of large corpora many "distant readers" prefer to

explore. Instead, a rigorous method for engaging with the deep structures of genre

through computationally-assisted tools requires a concomitant deep engagement

not only with the individual texts, but also with the labor-intensive technologies that

can make larger studies possible. Here, I refer to the Text Encoding Initiative, more

commonly known as "TEI," which comprises a set of structures and formats for

encoding texts into eXtensible Markup Language (XML).[110] Much like HTML, a

subset of XML that is used to encode web pages, XML/TEI allows users to wrap

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109 N-grams represent another, slightly more advanced method of word frequency analysis. Rather than
counting individual words, n-grams count groups of words that co-occur. A bigram, for example,
counts pairs of words that occur together. Google provides an n-gram viewer for the exploration of
books it has scanned and processed via optical character recognition. This method is one that serves as
a useful exploratory tool that is easy to comprehend, yet still fraught with the potential pitfalls detailed
above. Nevertheless, it is an increasingly widely adopted mode of text analysis. The ARTFL Project,
for example, provides tools for the investigation of multiple corpora of French texts, "ranging from
classic works of French literature to various kinds of non-fiction prose and technical writing" (ARTFL
project). N-grams, keyword in context, concordances, and collocations are some of the primary tools
ARTFL provides, all of which are roughly similar in their procedures.

110 XML has become one of the de facto standards for encoding data for the web and other technologies.
Moreover, XML evolved in part from the TEI project itself, which stands as major (if largely
unheralded) success for digital humanities.

arbitrary sections of text in "tags" that contain metadata easily understood by computers. The basic structure of a TEI document requires a header that lists such things as author, title, provenance, preparer, format, and other metadata. The body of a TEI file contains the human-oriented text along with the relevant tags, which the encoder determines based upon the needs of the scholarship. One particularly high profile example of TEI's use is by the Walt Whitman Archive,[111] edited by Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price and published online by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Digital Research in the Humanities. The Walt Whitman Archive uses TEI to create "an electronic research and teaching tool that sets out to make Whitman's vast work, for the first time, easily and conveniently accessible to scholars, students, and general readers" (Walt Whitman Archive). For the Walt Whitman Archive's purposes, a fairly basic level of encoding serves well. The editors stay true to the mise-en-page of the original publications by marking line breaks and page breaks, but little more:

```
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<head type="main-authorial">LEAVES OF GRASS. </head>
<lg1 id="ppp.00236" type="poem">
<relations><work entity="xxx.00048"/></relations>
<head type="main-authorial">1&#8212;Poem of Walt Whitman, an
American. </head>
<lg2 type="linegroup">
<l n="first">I CELEBRATE myself, </l>
<l>And what I assume you shall assume,</l>
<l>
<seg>For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs</seg>
```

---

111 See http://www.whitmanarchive.org/

```
<seg>to you.</seg>
</l>[112] (Whitman)
```

Above we see a sample of TEI-encoded text, what the *Archive*'s editors refer to

elsewhere in the document as "a machine readable transcription" (l. 442). Within

the brackets are the tags. The first tag denotes the beginning of the "body" of the

text, which appears after the required header containing metadata. The tag "pb"

denotes "page break" and, in this case, links the encoded text to the physical

publication in a way that should be familiar to anyone who has worked with

manuscripts or studied book history. Farther down, we find the "lg" and "l" tags,

which mark "line groups" and "lines" respectively. Given Whitman's famously long

lines, which often go past the margins, the *Archive*'s editors have chosen to organize

each line within an "l" tag while also showing the breaks on the page via the "seg"

(segment) tag. In this decision, we see that the editors have decided upon a

diplomatic transcription as the approach best-suited to the *Archive*'s mission. It is,

indeed, at this level of encoding that most TEI projects are content to remain. Yet

TEI can do much more than encode diplomatic (or even critical) transcriptions.

The TEI Consortium defines five levels of encoding, from level one—the most

basic, mostly automated encoding of texts for search and preservation purposes—

up to level five, which is indicated for "scholarly encoding projects":

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112 Tags are colored for improved readability by the oXygen XML Editor.

Level 5 texts are those that require substantial human intervention by

encoders with subject knowledge. These texts might include encodings of

semantic, linguistic, prosodic, or other features well beyond the basic

structural elements.... They might also include elements for editorial, critical,

or analytical additions; manuscript descriptions; translations; or other

textual apparatus. (TEI Special Interest Group on Libraries)

It is this level that would most appropriate for an investigation into the structure of

genres that is based upon the semantic, prosodic, and other features of a text that

are discernible currently only by human readers. Moreover, these features can be

linked together in such a way that orthographic variations refer back to a central

concept, figure, or other element of the text. Even for a small corpus like *fabliaux*,

however, the time required to encode each text with such care would constitute, in

itself, a major scholarly endeavor that would return provide a valuable service to the

community studying these digital editions. Just as any critical edition of a text in

print entails numerous interpretive choices about what lines from manuscript

variants are authoritative, about which sections demand explanatory notes, and the

many other decisions required to prepare such editions, even more so would a Level

5 encoding of the texts of a genre be itself interpretive. If, for example, one were to

encode every *fabliau* so that a search engine could easily extract each mention of

genitalia, violence, and material culture, not only would such an encoding be

remarkably labor-intensive, but also would it be replete with assumptions regarding

the salient features of each text. It is for this reason that TEI is both a potentially ideal solution to the computer-aided investigation of medieval genre structures and yet a vastly underutilized technology. It provides an iterative, extensible, and shareable format to record and analyze textual research.

Some might argue that advances in natural language processing and other automated methods of text analysis obviate the need for such detailed, scholarly encoding. We have, indeed, an example that relies largely on advanced computational methods for the search of medieval texts. The Manuscripts Online Project, led by Michael Pidd of the University of Sheffield and Orietta Da Rold of the University of Leicester, provides a portal for the federated search[113] of over twenty major databases of medieval English texts between 1000-1500. This undertaking required "a partnership between the Universities of Sheffield, Leicester, Birmingham, York, Glasgow and Queen's University Belfast" (Manuscripts Online). Beyond the large institutional support, the technical methods deployed were also labor-intensive and sophisticated.[114] Setting aside the difficulties of merely obtaining access to such a wide array of databases, the inherent problems posed by

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113 "Federated search" refers to the simultaneous search of multiple resources in such a way that the user need only make a single query to receive results from all the resources.

114 The project's website describes some of the many challenges posed by aggregating search across these resources: "The hand-crafted, specialised nature of many online medieval resources presented us with a number of challenges when it came to developing a clustering methodology for *Manuscripts Online*: How do we pull together such a diverse range of resources when some of them are freely available, some are only available through subscription and some are poorly maintained? How do we enable users to search consistently across a body of data when non-Latin characters have been represented in different ways, spelling is not standardised and different languages are used? How do we encourage a culture of collaboration and sharing within the manuscript studies research community?" (Manuscripts Online).

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resources in multiple languages with little to no orthographic regularity were considerable and required a combination of advanced language processing techniques that included entity recognition, gazetteers, content tagging, and statistical methods, among others. This work, moreover, demanded scholars engage deeply with the details of the texts before they could begin to create schemata that would disambiguate and aggregate variants. To deploy similar techniques for a study of generic structures in medieval literature would require a similar degree of effort, institutional support, and collaboration. Although this approach is both exciting and promising, it is not within the power of even a small handful of scholars to complete. TEI, however, could be used by a solitary scholar. Moreover, Manuscripts Online required these labors to enable a search platform. It represents a portal into the texts, not a method of recording and quantifying research questions.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges for research presented by medieval texts and the most common methods of textual analysis in the digital humanities, there are salient examples of projects similar to the one I propose here. Recent work on quantitative studies of bodily representation in European fairy tales shows the value of what can be accomplished through these methods and how researchers can remain sensitive to the values of critical, humanistic inquiry even while engaging with computational analysis. Scott Weingart and Jeana Jorgensen explore "the possibilities of using computational analysis to understand the representations and

constructions of gender and the body in European fairy tales" (404). Weingart

focuses on "historical scientific research through the lens of large-scale data

analysis, while… Jorgensen's background is in folklore, gender studies, and

narrative" (404). The researchers created "an expertly *hand-coded database* that

included every noun or adjective used in reference to bodies within all the tales, in

all about 11,000 entries" (405, emphasis added). Rather than employing research

assistants, which is a common practice for large-scale text-encoding research

projects, Jorgensen herself performed all the encoding with advice from Weingart.

Another way of understanding the role of TEI for textual research is to view it as a

hand-coded database that can then inform quantitative analysis. The authors felt

this process to be "an important step toward clarifying the humanistic importance

and subjectivity of the observer" in a way responsive to Drucker's advice that

scholars cannot render observation "as if it were the same as the phenomena

observed" because such a move "collapses the critical distance between the

phenomenal world and its interpretation, undoing the basis of interpretation on

which humanistic knowledge production is based" (quoted in Weingart, Jorgensen

405). This critical distance requires a reflexive awareness on the part of the

encoder; rather than preparing texts for objective, scientific analysis,[115] the scholars

in this project remained fully aware of the interpretive nature of encoding, thereby

bringing this practice more closely into the domain of familiar humanistic

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115 The perceived threat of creeping scientism often arises in projects that use data visualization, even if
such fears are largely unwarranted.

scholarship while preserving the benefits of computational assistance. This work,

moreover, highlights the interpretive, research-oriented role text encoding can play.

Indeed, without attention to the interplay between constructions of gender

and bodily representation in the context of generic and cultural expectations, such

research can tell us little that will not be reductionist.[116] Weingart and Jorgensen's

research models what sophisticated and critical encoding and analysis project can

look like. Their argument, moreover, fall well within the ambit of the arguments I

have laid out in previous chapters about the role of surfaces, gendered bodies,

beauty, and age. They write:

> Most references to body parts are to ones that are external and visible. The
>
> most-used adjectives tend to describe age, appearance, or state of being. A
>
> relatively small number of nouns and adjectives make up more than half of
>
> the total words used in describing body parts. It is far more likely for an old
>
> person to be described as *old* than for a young person to be described as
>
> *young*. Old people and females were both described more than expected,
>
> given the distribution of nouns and adjectives. The most descriptors were
>
> attached to old females, and the least to young males. (411)

Weingart and Jorgensen elaborate, but we need only think back to the descriptions

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116 As a cautionary example for researchers using quantitative methods, Weingart and Jorgensen criticize Jonathan Gottschall's work on folktales for its lack of attention to existing research on folktales. Gottschall, they write, naively treats folktales "as universal and direct lines of access to what the 'folk' really think and believe," with the predictable result that his interpretation becomes "biologically reductionist, and does not take into account either the constructed nature of gender or the fact that the tales, like any form of expressive culture, are filtered through multiple perspectives" (406).

of Gawain and the Loathly Lady to see parallels. Turning to feminist theory, they argue that, not only is "the female body marked within masculinist discourse" (quoting Judith's Butler's summary of Simone de Beauvoir's work, 412), but also that "the same principle applies to young and old bodies" so that "youthful bodies are assumed to be the unmarked universal category in fairy tales" (412). The authors' findings thus also cover some of the same ground I have examined in the previous chapters, namely how embodiment and genre interact. Although their focus is on a single corpus rather than a comparative, cross-genre study of these themes, their methods could be adapted for future research along these lines, the details of which I have outlined above.

A Potential Research Platform for Medieval Texts
The preceding discussion has detailed some of the most promising technologies with which to pursue further the research questions animating this dissertation, as well as the practical and theoretical challenges. In this section, I briefly outline what the next steps might be towards a virtual research environment for this and other research projects on medieval texts. Folsom writes:

> We are coming to recognize, then, gradually but inevitably, that database is a new genre, the genre of the twenty-first century. Its development may turn out to be the most significant effect computer culture will have on the literary world, because literary genres have always been tools, families of technologies for exploring the realms of verbal representation as it moves

from the lyrical to the narrative to the referential, from vision to action, from

romance to comedy to satire to tragedy, from story to play to poem to essay,

with all the subgroups and various meldings that genre theory has spawned

over the centuries. (1576)

The development of hand-coded textual databases (in TEI format) dovetails with

theories of genre. As I noted in my introduction, Dimock has also called us to

approach genres as virtual and scalable so that they are responsive to scholarly

questions. In the model of the database, then, we find both a technology that can

enable further research, a platform for these studies, and another metaphor by

which to frame these questions. To enable such a platform, richly-tagged TEI

versions of the texts will be necessary as a record of research. After acquiring (or

creating) digital transcriptions of the *fabliaux*, I would mark all instances in which a

character's physical appearance is described and link those descriptions to a

glossary of concepts and body parts so that euphemisms, orthographic variations,

and puns may all be available for programmatic discovery and analysis.[117]

The effort, moveover, would be proportional to the rewards. Not only would

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117 Throughout this dissertation I have considered genre, critical reception, phenomenology, and bodily
depictions in an effort to synthesize these different levels of the texts. Although I have assumed that
these are, in fact, some of the most salient features for analysis of because of their interpretability for
humans and the findings in the cognitive science literature that points strongly to these areas as
fundamentally sound levels to investigate, it is possible, again, that such explorations might uncover
less coherence and structure than one might expect. We should recall, too, Moretti et al.'s concept of
the architecture of a text and the varying levels of focus available. The thrust of my argument,
however, has wagered against that outcome and I remain confident that not only will these theories be
upheld, but that they will be greatly enriched and revised. The fact that we have the ability to test them
is an exciting prospect.

digital, scholarly editions of medieval texts, with deep encoding, be a boon to

scholars, students, teachers, and many others, but it would also open up the

possibilities of new research questions. For the next phase of my research, then, I

will collect as many digital copies of *fabliaux* as I can (many of which are already

encoded in a basic level of TEI), and begin performing experiments on this corpus

using a wide range of quantitative methods[118] to explore which methods come

closest to addressing my research questions about the structures of genre and the

representations of embodiment within and across genres. The approach must be

iterative. Initial explorations will uncover unexpected complications and messiness.

The goal must be a parallax view of the texts, a stance Drucker advocates for its

surfacing of of ambiguity and multitudinous meanings that serve as bulwarks

against scientism and the implication that numbers and data visualizations

represent some objective truth. After exploration, refinement, re-calibration, and

further explorations, this project will begin to produce, at the very least, tentative

answers about genre. I suspect that many of my arguments about the radial nature

of categorization and the importance of different modes of described embodiment

will be borne out, albeit with greater sophistication, depth, and nuance. If, however,

these theories are not sustained by the quantitative evidence, then that knowledge

will be also of great value. In the sciences, negative results are published far less

frequently than positive results, and so skew the literature in serious ways, but

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118 Including word frequencies, topic models, TF-IDF, network analysis and visualization, and others.

humanistic appreciation for narratives of discovery, revision, and negation provide a welcoming space for such a possible outcome.

I envision a digital scholarly product that would provide a dynamic, interactive environment for the exploration, reading, and research into these works, a set of accompanying texts as support and framing for the works, and guided visualizations to argue for my particular interpretations of the genre at hand. The next steps would consist in taking these findings and expressing them as appropriate and clarifying information visualizations, exploratory tools for reading and discovery, and, ultimately, a digital platform for the further investigations of these works. Moreover, the methods and assumptions I use throughout would require thorough explanation so that those with other research questions or contradictory theoretical frameworks might understand the limits and possibilities of such work. Such a platform could be further extended to become a more general purpose research tool that could be entirely agnostic towards language and text, thereby enabling new research questions (and answers) on new corpora. Granted, such work would require a large, collaborative team of researchers and developers, institutional support, and years of labor to complete, but the rewards would extend beyond this particular project to make create, in essence, a textual laboratory in which scholars could run experiments on their own corpora. There are, of course, platforms along these lines already: SEASR,[119] GATE,[120] and others come to mind

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119 SEASR is an acronym for the "Software Environment for the Advancement of Scholarly Research"

immediately, but they do not to my knowledge incorporate level 5 TEI encoding,

parallax views through multiple methods, or the other syntheses of existing

methods, tools, and practices that such an environment would provide nor are they

easy to understand and deploy for even advanced digital humanities scholars.

Folsom asks: "What happens, then, when we move Whitman's

rhizomorphous work into a database, put it online, allow for the webbed roots to zig

and zag with everything the database incorporates?" (1573) In the approach I have

outlined above, the first step towards making genre into a queryable database is the

encoding of texts, which allows us to operationalize theoretical notions of genre in

digital research environments that would allow for the exploration of genres and

testing of hypotheses. Throughout this dissertation, my object of study has not been

the individual texts, but their relationships among one another and the cognitive

structures that enable us to make meaning from them. Moretti writes: "The first

thing that happens, when a literary historian starts using computers to think about

literature, is that the object of study changes. Not just the tool; the object itself....

reading a book from beginning to end loses its centrality, because it no longer

constitutes the foundation of knowledge. Our objects are much bigger than a book,

or much smaller than a book, and in fact usually both things at once; but *they're*

almost never a book" ("Changes"). Even though this dissertation has not used

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and may, in fact, be a platform that would make this type of research possible, but further evaluation
would be needed to determine that answer.

120 GATE is an acronym for the "General Architecture for Textual Engineering" software packagin,
another promising avenue for this project.

computers to think about literature, the scale of analysis has been such that the

book or the individual poem has already lost its centrality. To continue beyond close

reading requires a synthesis of the theories and the computational methods I have

covered and a great deal more work preparing texts, evaluating software, and

exploring the results. This is, then, an appropriate place to pause before beginning

again.

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