Lady Killers: Women, Violence, and Representation in Medieval English Literature

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ABSTRACT

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The women of medieval English literature kill children, invade kingdoms, torture devils, and murder their enemies. Lady Killers: Women, Violence, and Representation in Medieval Literature engages the representation of such women in a wide variety of hagiography, epic, historiography, religious writing, and secular *legenda*. The relationship between women and violence often conforms to binary gender: women are passive while men are aggressors. When women are violent, they are often read as mimicking masculinity. The women in Lady Killers often defy such categorization; they exist outside of intelligible systems of representation. Only by moving outside the male/female or masculine/feminine binary, Judith Butler argues in Undoing Gender, can we begin to take on the challenge of such a character. In Lady Killers, I use gender as a category of analysis that disturbs rather than enforces essentializing claims about the relationship between gender and violence. By considering both how violent women are rendered intelligible and how their unintelligibility is represented, I explore the limitations of binary gender and argue that its failure opens up new ways of using gender to represent identity.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Robert P. Olson and Elizabeth Q. Olson, who taught me to read, to write, and to imagine.

Preface: Women Warriors, Violent Women, and the Problem of Gender

In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir famously proclaimed that:

> One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (p.267)

The category of woman is a social construct, but, according to de Beauvoir, there are also real biological differences between men and women. Rather than assuming that those biological differences translate into stable, coherent, and oppositional experiences of male and female bodies, de Beauvoir argues that every body is inhabited differently. The experience of being in a female body is far from monolithic; the presumption that all female bodies are the same only serves to perpetuate and naturalize sexism. Moreover, culture assigns significance to the differences between the male and female body, turning them into opposites and hierarchizing them. While biological differences are uncontestable for de Beauvoir, she also insists that they are responsible for defining Man as Self, the absolute human type, and Woman as Other, the inessential, and that this dialectic underwrites and perpetuates the secondary status of women.[1]

Even as de Beauvoir begins The Second Sex with an analysis of the biological differences between men and women, she rejects essentialism, which Diana Fuss defines as, "a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which

[1] De Beauvoir's Self and Other dialectic borrows and refines G.W.F. Hegel's Master and Slave dialectic, which Hegel perceived as a universal truth. De Beauvoir argues, rather, that Self/Other is culturally constituted.

define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (p. xi). If essentialists believe in a fundamental and unvariable essence, De Beauvoir's work could be described as anti-essentialist as she rejects consistent core definitions. Her distinction between the female body and the category of woman introduces the distinction, now so critical to feminist theory, between sex and gender that intends to disrupt essentializing claims by keeping the performance of gender apart from the body. However, in the late 1980's, as second-wave feminists rallied around constructionists and attacked essentialists, de Beauvoir was labeled a latent essentialist. The far-reaching scope of her work, one of its many widely acknowledged virtues, suggests a trans-historical female experience that runs counter to postmodern tendencies to understand historical and cultural specificity as the enemy of essentialism. Any return to the biological and, in particular, to the female body substantiates the universal applicability of the category of woman. By contemporary feminist standards, de Beauvoir is a biological essentialist because she accepts the materiality of the body even as she distinguishes sex from gender. But to dismiss her as an absolute essentialist is to overlook that her use of essentialism anticipates, if not perfectly, recent feminist conversations about the potentially powerful role such categories can play in the political organization of oppressed peoples. By beginning The Second Sex with an account of biological difference, de Beauvoir is open to contemporary attacks that she would probably have been hard pressed to anticipate, but she also draws attention to a persistent problem in feminist theory. If feminism addresses the subordination of women and feminists reject the materiality of the body and the biological category of woman, for or about whom does feminism speak? How can that group be constituted? Can the category of woman be both coherent and unstable? Throughout The Second Sex, de Beauvoir

investigates on-going, iterative efforts to define women by their material essence and by their biological and reproductive function. Even as she accepts a biological definition of female, she is more engaged by the use of that category and the process through which biological differences assume cultural meaning and underwrite a sex gender system in which women are inferior. Her interest in the contexts in which the sex gender system is naturalized looks ahead to the work of Joan W. Scott on gender as an analytical category. By creating an interpretive position from which she critiques the invocation of biological difference, de Beauvoir anticipates the work of Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak on strategic essentialism that seeks to invoke and dissect essential categories simultaneously, to make use of their functionality without accepting them entirely.

Despite de Beauvoir's investment in thinking about women who were not like her and about the parallels between racism and sexism, Elizabeth V. Spelman, in Inessential Woman, argues that the women whose condition she seeks to understand and critique are "white middle-class women in Western countries" (p.66). Even as Spelman applauds her subject's efforts, she deciphers moments in which de Beauvoir cannot move past her assumption of what it means to be a woman and its reflection of her own experience. Spelman's reading of de Beauvoir reflects the interest of second wave feminists in identifying and critiquing the latently racist assumptions of feminism. The best-known Audre Lorde is the best known advocate of such interventions. In her famous essay "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Lourde accused white feminists of perpetuating racism by insisting on the monolithic applicability of the category "woman" and by refusing to acknowledge the many different experiences of being a woman. De Beauvoir even came to be grouped with Luce Irigaray, who

understands a shared biological or essential female experience, and Betty Friedan, whose Feminine Mystique elided the female experience with that of the post-industrial white, middle-class Western woman.

Spelman argues that the exclusive feminist focus on male privilege had led to a grievous oversight: "a measure of the depth of white middle class privilege is that the apparently straightforward and logical points and axioms at the heart of much feminist theory guarantee the direction of its attention to the concerns of white middle-class women" (p.4). Her purpose is not to reject or disavow feminism, but to make feminists aware of the implications of their assumptions and better equipped to talk about what she calls "differences": "in many ways this book is about whether attempts to talk about "difference" simply preserve the privilege they were supposed to challenge" (p.164). In other words, even as Spelman tries to disrupt current feminist discourse, she is unconvinced that talking about "differences" from a place of privilege does anything but reinscribe hierarchical structures. Moreover, she lacks a language to talk about those differences as her book focuses on identifying moments in which differences have been ignored. In Essentially Speaking, Fuss critiques essentialism from a different perspective, one closer to current feminist strategies. She defines the essentializing of woman as "appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence" and constructionism as "insist[ing] that essence is itself a historical construction [...] [that] previously assumed self-evident kinds (like "man" or "woman") are in fact the effect of complicated discursive practices" (p.2). Fuss focuses on the intersection of constructionism and essentialism, noting the tendency for even the most confident constructionists to move from the singular "woman" to the plural and general "women".

She suggests that "there is no essence to essentialism, that essence *as* irreducible has been *constructed* to be irreducible" and that essentialism can best be understood and used as an analytical category that acknowledges its many forms (p.4). Fuss identifies a circular logic to the rejection of all essentialist claims and, even as she self-identifies as an anti-essentialist, she wants to preserve it as a category of analysis.

Throughout the eighties, many feminists worked to expose essentialist claims as imaginary and, more precisely, as a crucial component of the oppression of women. The materiality or biological underpinnings of the female body, however, persistently curtailed the absolute rejection of essentialism. In the early nineties, Judith Butler published Gender Trouble and three years later, Bodies that Matter. By rendering sex and gender performative, Butler created productive language for escaping essentialism that continues to dominate feminist scholarship and that broke from de Beauvoir's assertion of biological differences. Bodies, according to Butler and to other philosophers of the body such as Moira Gatens and Elizabeth Grosz, are formed and take meaning from the culture. Rather than being the essential glue that linked all women, bodies, according to Butler, were contextual, specific to their lived culture and time. Even as Butler remains the definitive theorist of the materiality of the body and the process by which it is constructed and given significance, in her introduction to the tenth anniversary of Gender Trouble, she reveals that she has changed her mind about nominal essentialism. When Gender Trouble was first published, she was entirely opposed to essentializing categories, but her work in political activism has persuaded her that there is a power in the simultaneous invocation of the universal and acknowledgment of its un-reality:

> I came to see the term [universality] has important strategic use precisely as a non-substantial and open-ended category [...] the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met ("Gender," pp.vxii-i).

Butler distinguished between what could be called empirical and nominal essentialism; while the former defines women by their sex, the latter imagines the strategic and political possibilities of universalizing categories. Like Fuss, who argues that the problem is not essentialism *per se* but its use, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coined the phrase "strategic essentialism" to discuss the ways in which disempowered groups can benefit politically from presenting themselves as a unified front. In an interview with Ellen Rooney, Spivak explains that "the strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of the nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized. This is the impossible risk of a lasting strategy" ("Outside," p.3). Like Butler, Spivak understands the value of an essential category whose un-essential qualities are also acknowledged. Even as she perceives the benefits of essentialism, Spivak worries that such titles will simply be accepted as inherent identities; she has subsequently distanced herself from and even disavowed strategic essentialism because she perceives that it has been misinterpreted and misapplied.

Spivak and Butler are two of the best-known and most influential feminist critics of third wave feminism. Their agreement on the need for nominal or strategic essentialism for political purposes leads to questions about the limits of representational language. Despite the wide spread discrediting of empirical essentialism, we rely on the

very language that we have identified as underwriting the oppression of women through universals to talk about women and even sub-sections of women; we lack an alternative and affirmative language with which to communicate. In Undoing Gender, her recent collection of essays, Butler thinks through the boundaries language places on what we can imagine and what we can imagine as human. She argues that in order to get past these representational boundaries we need to understand the limits language and law put on the individual who seeks recognition as human. We must be open to many of our most fundamental and essential categories collapsing:

> It may be that what is right and what is good consist in staying open to the tensions that beset the most fundamental categories we require, in knowing unknowingness at the core of what we know, and what we need, and in recognizing the sign of life in what we undergo without certainty about what will come. ("Undoing," p.39)

If, as Butler argues, every human desires recognition and cannot live without it, to be unrecognizable is akin to being invisible, spectral, and even non-existent. To give recognition to such humans means to step outside of the essential and to accept a fundamental "unknowingness" and uncertainty. By acknowledging and theorizing the unintelligible, Butler moves closer to providing a language for discussing, understanding, and recognizing that which is impossible.

In Lady Killers, I argue that the violent women of medieval literature push the boundaries of representational language because their use of violence puts them in defiance of the sex gender system. When women are violent, they are no longer performing their naturalized feminine role as passive victim; moreover, by being violent,

they are adopting behavior that is often represented as an essential quality of men and masculinity. Violent women upset the definition of male and female, masculinity and femininity as opposites and, in doing so, profoundly de-essentialize gender. When Spivak and Butler return to nominal essentialism, they acknowledge the failure of language to describe and render coherent that which defies categorization and, in doing so, call attention to those terms that we rely on to make sense of the world. The authors I consider struggle with the classification of violent women. How or where do they fit into the grids of intelligibility? Are they still women and, if so, what does that mean about the category of woman? Is it entirely undone? Able to be rescued? If violent women are no longer discernibly women, what are they and what will happen to language and representational categories in describing them? Unlike the women warriors and Amazons who appear throughout medieval literature, violent women are not simply women acting like men, but women who defy the essentialism of the sex gender system as such by disturbing the way violence naturalizes the sex gender system and by being neither entirely feminine nor masculine.

Lady Killers is divided into two sections. In the first two chapters, I consider the literary representation of violent women, their destabilization of binary gender, and the consequences of the confusion and chaos that they create. In the second two chapters, I look at the representation of female figures that are institutionally required to be violent to fulfill their purpose. If the first half of my dissertation sets up the representational problems and strains on language and systems of meaning that violent women pose, the second half explores the resolution of those problems and the mechanisms by which

violent women are able to become imaginable and receive recognition as female, human, and, even, icons.

...

As the tyrant Metabus flees his city with his enemies in pursuit, he comes to a river. Desperate to spare Camilla, his infant daughter, he ties her to a lance, dedicates her to Diana, goddess of the hunt, and successfully hurls her to safety on the opposite riverbank. To his credit, Metabus keeps his promise and raises Camilla to be a warrior woman. In the eleventh book of Virgil's Aeneid, Diana explains Camilla's exotic etiology before she laments her devotee's inevitable death in the war between the Latins and the Trojans:

> Utque pedum primis infans uestigia plantis
> Institerat, iaculo palmas armauit acuto
> Spiculaque ex umero paruae suspendit et arcum.
> Pro crinali auro, pro longae tegmine pallae
> Tigridis exuuiae per dorsum a uertice pendent.
> Tela mann iam tum tenera puerilia torsit
> Et fundam tereti circum caput egit habena
> Strymoniamque greum aut album deiecit olorem.
> Multae illam frustra Tyrrhena per oppida matres
> Optauere nurum; sola contenta Diana
> Aeternum teleorum et uirginitatis amorem
> Intemerata colit.

> [As she took her first steps, he places a pointed/ Lance head within her hand, and from that little/ Girl's shoulder he made bow and quiver hang./ In place of golden hairbands and long robes,/ A tiger skin hangs from her head and down/ Her back. And even then her tender hand/ Would hurl her childish shafts and whirl about/ Her head a sling with its smooth thongs and bring/ To earth Strymonian cranes or snow-white swans./ And there/ were many mothers in the towns/ Of Tuscany who wanted her, in vain,/ As daughter-in-law. But she is happy with/ Diana; intact she cherishes an endless/ Lover of her arms and of virginity.] (11.573-84)[2]

Unlike so many of the characters and scenes in Virgil's Aeneid, Camilla has no Homeric precedent. Although she fights against the Romans, Virgil portrays her in detail; she merits sympathy for her early death and awe for her stalwart dismissal of the sexist mockery of her opponents and for her excellence as a warrior. When Trojans taunt her or each other for fighting against a woman, she kills her detractors with more skill and brutality than her enemies can muster. Had her rampage continued, Virgil suggests, the fate of future Rome might be very different.

According to Diana, Camilla is unequivocally female. In her description of Metabus' tutelage of his daughter, Diana contrasts the young Camilla's feminine body and her training in war, emphasizing Metabus' transformation of his daughter into a warrior in spite of her sex. Despite her training, however, her innate femininity powerfully identifies her to other women not only as a woman but also as a potential wife. In the final lines of this portrait, Diana notes that Camilla chooses to remain a

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[2] All references to the original are from the Oxford edition of Virgil's Opera, edited by R.A.B. Mynors; translations are from Allen Mandlebaum's The Aeneid of Virgil.

virgin and follower of the goddess rather than marry; marriage and the loss of her virginity would threaten the effective quality of her training as a warrior and institutionally define her as a woman. The reference to marriage at the end of the passage suggests that Camilla's performance is just that, and not a naturalized or permanent identity; irrespective of her training, she remains female and, therefore according to normal social processes, destined to become a wife. Although Camilla has no interest in marriage, she cannot help being a living exhibit of the rift between her natural female identity and her performance of masculinity.

Ultimately, Virgil will not allow Camilla to survive. Soon enough, what he stages as her natural female instincts overpower her father's pedagogical program and she is distracted from fighting by the glittering purple and gold armor of Chloreus. Greed, rather than sexual desire, turns out to be Camilla's fatal flaw, a flaw that Virgil explicitly attributes to her sex:

> Hunc uirgo, siue ut templis praefigeret arma
> Troia, captiuo siue ut se ferret in auro
> Uenatrix, unum ex omni certamine pugnae
> Caeca sequebatur totumque incauta per agmen
> Femineo praedae et spoliorum ardebat amore
> [The virgin singled him out in battle;/ And whether she wanted to hang up/ The Trojan/ arms of Chloreus in the temple/ Or just to dress herself in captive gold./ She hurried after/ him, blind to all else,/ A huntress. Fearless, with a female's love/ Of plunder and of spoils, she raged through all the/ The army.] (11.778-82)

Irrespective of her virginity, her devotion to Diana, or her thorough training, Camilla cannot resist Chloreus' armor. While she pursues her prize, the cowardly Trojan Arruns strikes her and runs away, only to be killed by one of Camilla's fellow Amazons.[3] Camilla suffers a death unfit for a warrior of her caliber, but perhaps fit for a woman.

While Turnus' army seeks safety in the city and the women lament the deaths of the soldiers and their own impending doom from the walls, Virgil concludes his description of the Latins in Book 11 with an image of the city mourning Camilla:

> Ipsae de muris summo certamine matres
> (monstrat amor uerus patriae, ut uidere Camillam)
> tela manu trepidae iaciunt ac robore duro
> stipitibus ferrum sudibusque imitantur obustis
> praecipites, primaeque mori pro moenibus ardent
> [Even the mothers,/ Along the walls, remembering Camilla,/ Are rivals in their eagerness to cast/ Their shafts with anxious hands; true love of homeland/ Points out the way; they rush to imitate/ Steel with their sturdy oak clubs and charred stakes;/ Each burns to die for her city's sake.]
> (11.891-5)

Although the mothers burn to fight and die for their country, they remain on the wall. Their desire to be violent, to participate in the war, is, for Virgil, directly tied to the patriotism Camilla stirs in them. Still, while these mothers can be roused to violence, they do not join the war and, in keeping them on the wall, Virgil reminds his reader of the

[3] Virgil refers to Camilla's fellow warrior women as "Amazones" although he does not seem to think they come from the magical Eastern land of Amazonia as other warrior women explicitly do.

normative relationship between violence and gender. Battle is, after all, the work of soldiers and, therefore, men. Camilla's learned violence, in other words, her performative masculinity, could neither last nor overcome her fatal, innate female desire for goods. In the end, Camilla is essentially and definitively female. Virgil is willing to give her a glorious interlude, but only a brief one: such a figure has no enduring place in the classic Roman epic.

Medieval literature follows Virgil in depicting warrior women as women who act like men on the battlefield. The Eneas is one of the *romans d'antiquité* that were probably written for the powerful court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine in the second half of the twelfth century.[4] These "romances" retell the classical stories of Thebes, Rome, Troy, and Alexander the Great. They resonated with a courtly audience interested in associating itself with Trojan and Roman ancestry and rulers who wished to perceive themselves as natural successors to such ancestry. Amazons, not women warriors, appear in the Roman de Troie, the Roman d'Alexandre, and Thomas of Kent's Roman de Toute Chevalrie. As Susan Crane writes, there is a "preoccupation very early

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[4] I write "probably" because, as Christopher Baswell points out in "Men in the Roman d'Eneas: The Construction of Empire":

> While only Benoît de Saint-Maure, author of the Roman de Troie, is definitely connected with the literary patronage of the court of Henry II, all the antique romances (otherwise anonymous) fall within the periods and dialectical realm of the Angevin court. (p.149)

For a comparative discussion of the classical and medieval versions, see the introduction to John A. Yunck's Eneas: A Twelfth Century French Romance. In the important essay, "Camilla, or, the Rebirth of the Sublime," Erich Auerbach writes disparagingly about the alterations the poet made to Virgil. Aesthetically, The Aeneid is a superior text, but the poet of Eneas makes the most of parallel structure as he shoulders the hefty burden of turning revered piece of imperial literature into a romance. The conversion of a story for political, social, or cultural reasons raises questions about the medieval perception of genres, their significance, and their function. See Simon Gaunt, "From Epic to Romance: Gender and Sexuality in the Roman d'Eneas".

in the history of romance with Amazonian prowess and chastity as a potential model for femininity", but, with the exception of the romance Silence, in which a young girl is raised as a boy and excels at chivalry, women warriors only appear in passing until the Early Modern period ("Gender," p.77).[5]

Unlike Tuscan Camilla, the women warriors of these *romans* are mostly Amazons, geographical outsiders who live in matriarchal communities in a mythical and magical East. In the Roman de Troie, for example, Benoît de Saint-Maure describes the exotic, warm, and fertile geography of Amazonia along with the traditions and customs of the Amazons who dominate the battles of three of his books. In his best anthropological mode, he describes the structure of Amazonian society: some women are trained as warriors and remain virgins while others meet men and head to an island off mainland Amazonia designated for procreation. Because there is no marriage, male children are returned to their fathers. Unsurprisingly, the Amazons primarily subscribe to twelfth century courtly values; for instance, they pick the fathers of their children according to a system of values that echoes the logic of a heroine of a romance picking a suitor. Furthermore, in Amazonia, the women have adopted an all female system of organization and prestige. This matriarchy exercises an exclusionary and hegemonic control over its territory that mimics and exaggerates the patriarchal system of the twelfth century court as described in courtly literature. Such a colony does not so much subvert, but rather parallels, stabilizes, and reaffirms the literary and courtly world from which Benoît writes. In other words, Amazons and their matriarchy function very much as warrior women do: they are women who live like men. They affirm the naturalization of

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[5] The most recent discussion of Amazons in the Early Modern period Kathryn Schwarz's Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance.

a hetero-normative sex gender system that defines masculinity and femininity as opposites.

In the Eneas, Camilla is Turnus' closest ally; her death pains him. Camilla only merits approximately five hundred lines in Virgil, but the twelfth-century Camile is a major character. The author provides three relatively repetitive, detailed descriptions of her: as she enters with the other Italian lords, as she first speaks with Turnus, and as she fights. Like Penthiselea, the leader of Benoit's Amazons, Camile "molt ert sage, proz et cortoise/ et molt demenot grant richoise;/ a mervoille tenoit bien terre" [is very wise, brave, and courteous, and possessed great wealth and she ruled her land wonderfully well] (7. 3965-7, p.134).[6] Soon after her introduction, the narrator explains Camile's transformation into a warrior:

> El fu toz tens norrie an guerre
>
> Et molt ama chevalerie
>
> Et maintint la tote sa vie.
>
> Onc d'ovre a feme ne ot cure,
>
> Ne de filer ne de costure;
>
> Milas prisoit armes a porter,
>
> A tornoier et a joster,
>
> Ferir d'espee et de lance:
>
> Ne fu feme de sa vaillance. (7. 3968-76)
>
> [Raised always amid warfare, so that she loved chivalry greatly
>
> and upheld it her whole life. She had no interest in any women's

[6] References to Eneas come from J. J. Salverda de Grave's Eneas, Roman du XIIè Siècle. Translations refer to John A Yunick's Eneas: a Twelfth Century French Romance.

work, neither spinning nor sewing, but preferred the bearing of arms, tourneying, and jousting, striking with the sword and the lance: there was no other woman of her bravery.] (p.135)

This narrative digression both parallels Benoit's anthropological descriptions of the Amazons and emphasizes Camile's decision to learn chivalry rather than the fleetingly described category of "ovre a feme" (7.3971). In a later passage, the author describes Camile in specifically feminine terms, focusing on her physical beauty and creating a contrast similar to the one Diana institutes between Camilla's body and the training and trappings of a warrior:

De biauté n'ert o li igaus
Nule feme qui fust mortaus;
lo front ot blanc et bien traitiz,
La greve droite an la vertiz,
Les sorciz noirs et bien dolgiez,
les ielz rianz et trestoz liez;
biaus ert li nes, anprés la face,
car plus blanche ert que nois ne glace;
entremellee ert la color
avenalment o la blanchor;
molt ot bien faite la bochete,
n'ert gaires granz, mese petitete,
menu serreess ot les denz,
plus reluisent que nus argenz.

Que diroie de sa bialté? (7.3987-4001)

[No mortal woman was her equal in beauty. Her forehead was white and well formed, the part of her hair straight on her head, her eyebrows black and very fine, her eyes laughing and full of joy. Her nose was beautiful and also mingled harmoniously with the whiteness. Her mouth was very well formed, not large but small, her teeth fine and closely set, more sparkling than any silver. What shall I say of her beauty?] (p.135)

With her perfectly formed face, Camile looks very much like a heroine from the *romans* of Chrétien de Troye. Later on, the author lingers over her elaborate and expensive accoutrement, even her multi-colored horse and its costly saddle. Although Camile has chosen chivalry, her inherent beauty and femininity persevere alongside her learned skills, preventing her from being anything but a woman who chooses to act like a man.

In the medieval literary canon, Camile and the Amazons are joined by Silence, the hero/heroine of the eponymous thirteenth century Old French romance, who is raised as a boy and masters chivalric violence in order to avoid arbitrary inheritance laws imposed by the king.[7] Heldris, the narrator, imagines the life of Silence as a battle between nature and nurture. The description of her internal debate over whether to favor her learned masculine identity or her natural feminine identity resonates with the descriptions of the conversion of Camile and Camilla into warriors:

Raisons ja od lit ant esté

Se lit ant admonesté

Que Silences a bien veü

---

[7] References to and translations of Silence come from Sarah Roche-Mahdi's 1999 edition.

Que fol consel avoit creü

Quant onques pensa desuser

Son bon viel us et refuser,

Por us de feme maintenir.

Donques lip rent a sovenir

Des jus c'on siolt es cambers faire

Dont a oï sovent retraire,

Et poise dont en son corage

Tolt l'us de feme a son usage,

Et voit que moils valt li us d'ome

Que l'us de feme, c'est la some.

"Voire," fait il, "a la male eure

Irai desos, quant sui deseure.

Deseure sui, s'irai desos?

[...]

Por quanque puet faire Nature

Ja n'en ferai descoverture."

[Reason stayed with him for so long/ And admonished him so severely/ That Silence understood very well/ He had listened to bad advice/ Ever to think of doing away / With his good old habits./Then he began to consider/The pastimes of a woman's chamber –/ Which he had often heard about –/ And weighed in his heart of hearts/ All female/ customs against his current way of life,/ And saw, in short, that a man's life/ Was

much/ better than that of a woman./ "Indeed," he [Silence] said, "it would be too bad/ To step/ down when I'm on top./ If I'm on top, why should I step down?/ [...] Whatever Nature may do,/ I will never betray the secret.] (Ll. 2624-41; 2655-6)

Silence excels at warfare and chivalry, "passing" as a knight of the court and as a traveling minstrel. Finally, and perhaps in order for the narrative to conclude, Silence comes out as a woman to avoid accusations of sodomy. Heldris concludes the romance with a description of the victory of Nature; he moves smoothly from the physical reconstruction of Silence to her inevitable (and enviable) marriage to the king:

D'illuec al tierc jor que Nature
Ot recovree sa droiture
Si prist Nature a repolir
Par tolt le cors et a tolir
Tolt quanque ot sor le cors de malle.
Ainc n'i lassa nes point de halle:
Remariä lués en son vis
Assisement le roze al lis.
Li rois le prist a feme puis –
Cho dist l'estoire u jo le truis-
Par loëment de ses princhiers,
Qu'il plus ama et plust tint ciers.

[After Nature/ Had recovered her rights,/ She spent the next three days refinishing/ Silence's entire body, removing every trace/ Of anything that

being a man had left there./ She removed all traces of sunburn:/ Rose and lily were once again/ Joined in conjugal harmony on her face./ Then the king took her to wife – / That's what it said in the book where I found this story –/ On the advice of his/ Most loyal and trusted advisors.] (Ll.6670-80)

In three days, Nature undoes the physical aftermath of years of performed masculinity; Silence's discovery of her innate femininity is concluded by her crowning marriage to the king. Heldris uses the ritual to reinforce institutionally the dominance of her sex over her gender. In re-becoming a woman, Silence becomes the heroine of her own romance.

Critics debate the "nature" of the end of Silence: does it suggest that Nature, regardless of a brief setback, always ultimately trumps Nurture?[8] Or does the body of the narrative actively scrutinize the generically expectable ending?[9] The portrayal of

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[8] For a good discussion of the debate over the conclusion of Silence, see Simon Gaunt's "The Significance of Silence" in which he points out that:

> The length of the narrative (over 6600 lines, of which over 4000 are devoted to Silence) suggests that Heldris is fascinated by what he is trying to censure and the very fact that he should feel the need to refute the idea that gender might be a cultural construct is curious, for the idea has no currency in the Middle Ages. Indeed it could be said to be a product of twentieth-century feminism (p. 203).

This idea does seem to have currency in the Middle Ages, even if it is not heavily documented, given its presence in both this text and the Eneas.

[9] Master Heldris leaves his reader with tantalizing words that could be read ironically or as generic misogyny:

> Maistre Heldris dist chi endroit
> C'on doit plus bone feme amer
> Que hair malvaise u blasmer.
> Si mosterroie bien raison:
> Car feme a menor oquoison,
> Por que ele ait le liu ne l'aise,
> De l'estre bone que malvaise,
> S'ele oeuvre bien contre nature.

Silence, in agreement with the descriptions of Camilla, Camile, and the Amazons, suggests that these female characters choose to lives their lives as men and that that choice overwhelms their femininity and not their sex. The terms of the debate in Silence suggest that "customs" or "habits" are the signifiers of gender, not of biology. I do not want to underplay the importance of the fact that these characters choose to perform a gender that is at odds with their sex. In that regard, these texts do suggest that medieval literature theorizes gender as performative and not as the natural consequence of biology. But consider how these characters meet narrative resolution: Camile and Camilla die in battle, the Amazons return to Amazonia, and Silence marries the King. Women warriors are iconic, compelling, exotic, tantalizing, but not finally subversive. They pose no threat to the binary opposition of masculinity and femininity. They are women who adopt masculine behavior, but who remain, for better or worse, contained by their female bodies and the feminine behavior that those bodies dictate and naturalize.

Lady Killers takes as its focus another group of violent women of medieval English literature: those who kill children, invade kingdoms, torture devils, and murder their enemies. Using both Anglo-Saxon and Middle English literature and a wide variety of hagiography, epic, historiography, and secular *legenda*, I investigate the representation of violent women who are not warriors, but who are violent in homes, cells, and halls, as well as battle fields and rivers. Rather than reinforcing the stability of gender and violence as warrior women do, these violent woman disturb the male/female binary and,

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> [Master Heldris says here and now/ that one should praise a good woman./ More than one should blame a bad one. / And I will tell you why:/ a woman has less motivation,/ provided that she even has the choice,/ to be good than to be bad./ Doing the right thing comes unnaturally to her.] (Ll. 6684-91)

in doing so, they expose the limitations of representational language and question the relationship between gender and identity. Lady Killers is divided into four chapters and two sections. The first two chapters focus on the unresolvable quality of violent women; despite the best efforts of characters, narrators, and authors to make such figures fit into traditional categories of femininity, they defy classification. While the first section considers exclusively literary texts, in the second section I look at examples from historiography, saints' lives, and religious writing to argue that the role of the queen and of the penitent can require women to be violent and, therefore, must make violent women both classifiable and intelligible. Both queens and penitents escape the boundaries of traditional binary gender systems and, in doing so, save themselves and their communities from invidious threats.

Procne and Medea, infanticidal mothers, Grendel's Mother, avenger of her homicidal child, Philomela, rape victim and retaliator, and Judith, the righteous seductress and decapitator of Holofernes, all defy resolute classification through models of femininity and each in her own way proves unintelligible, illegible, or unspeakable to their authors and fellow characters. Lady Killers begins with Beowulf and Anglo-Saxon adaptations of the Book of Judith. The epic world of Anglo-Saxon literature aligns masculinity with retaliatory and aggressive violence and femininity with victimization and the resolution of that violence, often through peace weaving marriages. Judith and Grendel's Mother, however, use violence as a corrective. Judith kills Holofernes to save the town of Bethulia and the Hebrew people. Grendel's Mother attacks Heorot after Beowulf kills Grendel; in stark contrast to her son, who killed and ate men irrationally, she takes Hrothgar's advisor Æschere in exchange for Grendel according to the terms of

wergild. Gender intelligibility, according to Butler in Undoing Gender, relies on the stability of the male/female binary; those that defy that binary do not receive recognition as human. Although they physically exist, culture and language define them as impossible, as non-existent. Although it would be hard to imagine a Christian reader explicitly criticizing Judith, she creates representational chaos. Judith subverts the substantial efforts of Ælfric, Aldhelm, and the Judith poet to turn her into a proto-saint, a maiden, a warrior, a model of chastity or purity, or a Christian; these recastings of her character mark efforts at containing her meaning and justifying her problematic sexuality and use of violence. Even as Judith resists definition as feminine, she is a celebrated human model of virtuous behavior. Grendel's Mother, on the other hand, is neither discernibly gendered nor human or monster. By being female, monstrous, law-abiding, and powerful, Grendel's Mother similarly confounds almost all of the binaries that underwrite the heroic code; her presence in Beowulf reveals an unstable, often contradictory landscape. Although there is a cultural or social logic underpinning both killings, the use of violence by these female figures makes them, in the case of Judith, a fundamentally uncontainable model of Christian or Germanic femininity and, in the case of Grendel's Mother, "unintelligible" to the other characters despite her undeniable and very physical presence.

Ultimately, although Judith and Grendel's Mother both undermine the relationship of violence to the sex/gender system, they both perform violence that is logical and within reason. Judith's decapitation of Holofernes is finally necessary for the victory of her people; only good comes to the Hebrew people from it. Grendel's Mother follows the tradition of using relatively contained retaliatory violence intended to end a

feud. In the following chapter, I look at women whose violence is not socially, morally, or institutionally justifiable.

In Ovid's myth of Philomela in his Metamorphosis, Philomela is raped brutally by her brother-in-law Tereus who subsequently cuts out her tongue to prevent her from telling what has happened to her. Philomela manages to send a tapestry depicting the rape to her sister, Procne, who assumes the role of avenger. The sisters kill Procne's and Tereus' son, Itis, and feed him to his father in a stew. Before Tereus can kill the sisters, the gods turn all three adults into birds; metamorphosis definitively ends this cycle of violence. That women can be so violent suggests that egregious violence is not simply the realm of men, but a possibility for both men and women. That conclusion becomes an unspeakable impossibility in Geoffrey Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and John Gower's Confessio Amantis.

In their respective adaptations of the myth, Genius, the high priest of Love and Gower's narrator, and Chaucer's narrator both try and fail to present the myth as an example of virtuous and tragic female suffering. Such a reading would fit within their respective projects. Genius uses the story as an example of why Amans should not rape his beloved, and Chaucer's narrator uses it as an illustration of men treating women badly. In the Legend, a secular hagiography in which the narrator "corrects" the misogyny of classical literature, the narrator omits the second half of the myth, ending this legend with the unavenged sisters weeping together. Retaliatory violence is not a possibility for a good woman. In his gloss of the characters' metamorphosis into birds, Genius, who has narrated the entire Ovidian myth faithfully as an example of the evils of rape or *ravine*, asserts that Tereus is the villain and the sisters, his victims; in his gloss, he

tries to advert what he has already narrated in detail. His story paints a far more complicated picture than his gloss would suggest. An infanticide, Procne rejects her domestic identities as wife and mother. By forcing Tereus to eat his own child, she turns his body into an unwilling receptacle for their son, rendering him a victim of rape and undermining the gender binary rape asserts. According to Genius, a *Raviner* must be masculine because only men could have such power, but his narration of Procne's metamorphosis from angry wife to infanticide, from victim to *Raviner* herself suggests otherwise, as Ovid's myth does. Genius' inability to acknowledge this display of female violence becomes part of Gower's larger project of critiquing the advice Genius, high priest of Love, can offer Amans, a forlorn lover and, by extension, critiquing the limitations of his project.

Genius and Chaucer's narrator try to exercise authorial control over the second half of Ovid's myth, but these efforts draw attention to Procne and the ways in which her use of violence compromises the unproblematic alignment of femininity with victimization. By cutting the myth short, Chaucer's narrator both highlights and avoids the representational problems the sisters cause; by telling the entire myth, Gower's narrator finds himself with characters for whom he does not wish to have either language or category. If women can become not only avengers but also rapists, then the intersection of systems of violence and the sex/gender system no longer creates stable definitions of masculinity and femininity. Judith, Grendel's Mother, Procne, and Philomela all find themselves in situations in which they have no recourse. While the violence of Judith and Grendel's Mother can be understood within the social or moral order of the respective text, Procne and Philomela are violent in order to get revenge in

which they also take sadistic pleasure. Ultimately, these violent women reveal that the act of violence is a critical moment in deciphering gender, not because it defines the figure as either masculine or feminine, but because it reveals gender to be a transitional, murky, transformative process of determining meaning. This process defies clear definition even within its own terms. Such murkiness is well and good in the fictional world, but once such figures exist in both literary and institutional settings, they require resolution, definition, and explanations.

Although decapitating heroines, vengeful mothers, and infanticides do not exist exclusively in epic and myth, neither are they institutionally necessary. Procne and Grendel's Mother can function as critiques of binary thinking in their respective literary works precisely because these violent women have no institutional equivalent. Royal queens and quotidian penitents, on the other hand, require both institutional recognition and permission to be violent in order to fight literally and metaphorically the wars that threaten their security. In the twelfth century British historiography of Geoffrey of Monmouth and two of his thirteenth century vernacular translators, Wace and Lawman, Gwendolyn, one of the first queens of the British, stages a military invasion of her husband's kingdom to defend her people from invaders and a distracted king who is no longer acting in the best interest of the British. Gwendolyn represents the fantasy of an ideal queen, one who is able to perform masculine and feminine roles with ease: to lead a battle against her husband, drown his lover, and rule as a regent for her son. Even as her gender is fluid, however, her sex is not. Gwendolyn is always and resolutely female; she is contained by the materiality of her body.

In the Gwendolyn and Estrildis episode, Locrinus, King of the British, manages to defend the British from Humber, a Hunnish pillager who invades the island. In Humber's ships, he discovers Estrildis, the beautiful daughter of the King of Germany, and tries to extract himself from a previous agreement to marry Gwendolyn, the daughter of Corineus, the leader of Cornwall. Even though he finally marries Gwendolyn, he hides Estrildis under the earth until Corineus dies. Banishing Gwendolyn to Cornwall, he lives openly with Estrildis. Gwendolyn attacks Locrinus' kingdom with an army that she rallies in Cornwall, wins the battle in which Locrinus dies, and drowns Estrildis and her daughter in a river. She rules as a regent until her son by Locrinus is old enough to rule on his own.

In my third chapter, I argue that this critically over-looked episode reflects historical concerns about invasions and queens and shifts registers into the fantastic to offer a resolution to the concerns that surround both. As an invader, Humber is the perfect other to the British; his invasion raises questions about the construction of British identity through genealogy and territory and the effectiveness of those terms as indicators of identity. As king, Locrinus is the quintessential masculine defender of the British; he protects his people and his land from invaders. However, he is entranced by Estrildis and overlooks the threat she poses as an invader who threatens both the genealogical purity of the British and their hold over their land. As a fantasy object, Estrildis is feminine, beautiful, silent, exotic, and irresistible; she is also deadly and Locrinus' susceptibility to her harms the British and leads to his death. Locrinus' exaggerated masculinity and Estrildis' hyper-femininity nearly destroy the British, but they are resolved in Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn represents the ideal queen because she is biologically female

and gender performative, genealogically British and a member of two territorially distinct kingdoms. In her rule, she invades her husband's kingdom, executes his lover and her daughter, divides territories, unites the kingdoms of her father and her husband, and restores genealogical purity and peace. As overlapping categories, invaders and queens expand the genealogical, political, and geographical boundaries of the British. While Estrildis brings violence and contention to the British, Gwendolyn uses violence to reinstate British purity and control of the land. However, as the perfect combination of essentialism and fluidity, she is unique in these texts. The British will suffer similar queens and invaders, and because Gwendolyn is never duplicated, the British inevitably continue to loose their grasp on their island and the purity of their genealogy.

In my final chapter, I argue that the gender confusion and unintelligibilitiy that violent women generate can be resolved through the construction of the penitential body as *omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis* in the twenty-first canon of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. I place the Katherine Group, a late twelfth or early thirteenth century collection of Middle English religious writings for women in the West Midlands, and its companion work, Ancrene Wisse, a guide book for anchoresses, in a post-Lateran Four context. In Ancrene Wisse, the author explicitly analogizes Judith's decapitation of Holofernes to the act of confession. By identifying with Judith as she decapitates Holofernes and violent virgin martyrs who beat and torture devils, the penitent is asked to imagine him or herself outside of the material body and as a genderless soul that uses the weapon of confession to fight the devil. The violence of the penitent is both metaphorical and literal; as the penitent confesses, he or she assaults the devil through language that functions as weapon. I use this analogy to read the central

scenes of the lives of Margaret and Juliana in which the virgins physically torture devils who try to tempt them in their dungeons. When the penitent confesses, he or she wages war on the devil with the weapons offered by new confessional practices.

By torturing the devil, the penitent becomes a member of the spiritual elite through identification with the virgin and iterating the battle between devil and individual that defines Christian history. In confessing, penitents can experience the "genderlessness" of the virgin martyrs that frees them from the constraints of their body and allows them to inhabit an alternative order of intelligibility free from the constraints of the normative gender identity that structure daily existence. That genderlessness contrasts with the gender inclusivity of the queen who exists exclusively in her own body in the material world. The penitent achieves genderlessness imaginatively by resisting and rejecting the material limitations of the body and by inhabiting a spiritual realm in which it is possible to be defined by the soul and to join a community of souls defined by "all the faithful" and in communion with martyrs and crusaders. An ideal queen can use violence to save her kingdom and her people; penitents wage a trans-historical battle with the devil, the ultimate invader and violent evil-doer. In doing so, they identify with the male and female martyrs who died for the eternal salvation of their own souls and the crusaders who protect them and their eternal souls.

Representing the Unrepresentable: Violent Women in Anglo-Saxon Literature

In Undoing Gender, Judith Butler suggests that, in human society, there have always been people who in various ways exceed prevailing categories of social understanding. Because they challenge standards of normativity, they are victims of discrimination and violence. Butler sets herself the task of accounting for these unintelligible subjects in order to recognize them as human. For Butler, a subject becomes unintelligible when "the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility" ("Undoing," p.30). She traces the intellectual genealogy of the intersection she forges between recognition, intelligibility, and survival through Spinoza and Hegel, summarizing her own position here:

> It was Spinoza who claimed that every human being seeks to persist in his own being, and he made this principle of self-persistence, the *conatus*, into the basis of his ethics and, indeed, his politics. When Hegel made the claim that desire is always a desire for recognition, he was, in a way, extrapolating upon this Spinozistic point, telling us effectively, that to persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition. If we are not recognizable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility. ("Undoing," p.31)

Life, according to Butler, is unlivable without recognition from other people. Those who "have been foreclosed from possibility" are unrecognizable to others and, consequentially, victims of violence intended to assert the power, stability, and truth of

"those laws of culture and language" that make up the rigidly construed boundaries of the human. Despite these efforts to eradicate those who defy "the norms of recognition" and fall outside those boundaries, the unintelligible human exists. In the essays that comprise Undoing Gender, a political project and utopian exercise in thinking through forms of resistance to dominance, Butler formally recognizes them by interrogating their representation, the analytical and representational terms she uses for them, and the challenges that they pose to the recognizable, the intelligible, and, above all, the human.

In "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," Butler confronts the following ethical and analytical quandaries:

> How might we encounter the difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that difference delivers? [...] To be willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be? ("Undoing," p.35)

To address the representational problems embodied by an existence that albeit physically present has been foreclosed as a possibility, Butler argues for the expansion of the categories of the human and, by extension, the sub-terms through which we make sense of the human. The naturalization of a rigid gender binary underwrites the formation of the category of human; to resist the "structure, either natural or cultural, or both" of the gender binary is to undermine its essentialism and to risk being ostracized from the human (Butler, "Undoing," p.35). Inevitably, for Butler to recognize the unintelligible, she must revisit the defining terms of gender and the means by which those terms garner fixed meanings.

Writing about gender as a critical category, Butler explains in "Gender Regulations" that

> Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine takes place along with the interstitia forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic and performative that gender assumes. [...] To conflate the definition of gender with its normative expression is inadvertently to reconsolidate the power of the norm to constrain the definition of gender. Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. [...] Thus a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a *regulatory* operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption. The conflation of gender with masculinity and femininity, man and woman, male and female, thus performs the very naturalization that the notion of gender is meant to forestall. ("Undoing," pp.42-3)

The fixed categories of man and woman can enact "a regulatory operation of power" that defines what is thinkable and what is not, what is intelligible as male, female, or human and what is not. To fall outside the boundaries of the gender binary effectively undermines the normative definition of masculinity and femininity as opposites, rendering gender an open, fluid category of analysis rather than an essentialized identity. As a category of analysis rather than a naturalized identity, gender "undoes" itself,

enabling the deconstruction and disruption of essentialism that its "normative expression" so effectively forecloses.[1]

In exploring how gendered categories unravel and undermine themselves even as they are invoked to assert essentialism, Butler overlaps with the work of Joan Scott. A pioneer in gender theory, Scott worries that the use of gender as an analytical category can inadvertently reassert norms; as an antidote, she argues that critical attention must turn to the processes through which gendered identities are given meaning, fixity, and power and their inevitable dissolution.[2] Scott critiques the presumptive stability of the male/female binary, attending to the conditions under which gender is invoked to interpret the simultaneous inscription of its essentialism and its simultaneous tenuousness. Scott writes:

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[1] This is not to say that Butler's theory of performativity suggests that anyone can perform anything at any time without historical or physical restraints or points of reference. Bodies that Matter, Butler's second book, refutes this critique, frequently lobed at Gender Trouble. Rosalind Morris sums up this critique of gender performativity here:

> A fantasy of utterly unfettered, purely elastic gender seems to underlie much of the work on performativity. And often, the pursuit of a freedom from essential categories seems to entail the ironic effacement of gender itself. When is ambiguity a principle of "general" emptiness in this theory? And when does the emptiness become the vehicle for an asocial, ahistorical idealism. [...] Beyond the ideal of idealism, however, it is still not clear that a proliferation of gendered forms necessarily constitutes a resistance to hegemonic sexuality. (pp.585-6)

[2] In the new introduction to the revised edition of Gender and the Politics of History, Scott laments the current state of "gender" as a category of analysis. She writes

> They [books that purport to offer a 'gender analysis'] rarely examine how the meanings of 'women' and 'men' are discursively established, what contradictions inhere in these meanings, that the terms exclude what variations of subjectively experienced 'womanhood' have been evident in diverse 'regimes of truth.' Indeed many feminist scholars who use the term 'gender' do so while explicitly rejecting the premise that 'men' and 'women' are historically variable categories. This has the effect of denying "gender" its radical academic and political agency. It is, these days, a term that has lost its critical edge. (p.xii)

> We can write the history of that process only if we recognize that "man" and "woman" are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcending meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative denied, or suppressed definitions. [...] If we treat the opposition between male and female as problematic rather than known, as something contextually defined, repeatedly constructed, then we must constantly ask not only what is at stake in proclamations or debates that invoke gender to explain or justify their positions but also how implicit understandings of gender are being invoked and reinscribed. (pp.48-9)

To turn gender into an analytical category, Scott begins by rejecting definitions of male and female as opposites. Rather, she defines them as simultaneously "empty" and "overflowing" categories, always in the process of contextual recreation and redefinition. When violence and gender overlap as signifying systems, they appear to reinforce the gender binary rather than reveal its fluidity. Because masculinity is almost always associated with aggression just as femininity is associated with victimization, the relationship between violence and gender is, to return to Butler, one of "the mechanism[s] by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized" ("Undoing," p.421). That relationship, however, can also enable the deconstruction and denaturalization of masculinity and femininity as binary and essential categories, revealing them to be dangerously "empty" and "overflowing" (Scott, p.48).

The Hebrew heroine Judith and Grendel's Mother, the best-known violent "women" of Anglo-Saxon literature, defy the boundaries of intelligibility because they

are violent and, moreover, violent in ways that their respective literary worlds would find unremarkable if they were male. Judith's decapitation of the Assyrian general leads to the salvation of Bethulia and Grendel's Mother avenges Grendel, her son whom Beowulf has killed. Even though Judith's assault receives divine approval and Grendel's Mother's vengeance is in line with the principles of righteous revenge by which the warriors abide, their uses of violence render them unintelligible to their authors and the other characters as "women," and, in the case of Grendel's Mother, as human or monster. Described simultaneously by multiple and often contradictory registers of gender, sanctity, and militancy, Judith undermines the intelligible construction of gender in relation to violence. Judith makes sense within the well-established tradition of religious militancy, but the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition and heroic code imagine violence as the exclusive realm of men. In other settings, Judith's violence might not merit any concern, but Anglo-Saxons authors, religious and secular, worry over a woman who decapitates a general. In the hands of Aldhelm, Ælfric, and the Judith poet, she is an example of chastity, a warning against physical adornment, a model of purity, an exploration of the dangers of feminine sexuality, a pre-figurement of the Church, a proto-saint, a warrior, a maiden, a military leader, and a proto-Christian who prays to the Trinity.[3] In seeking to

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[3] We know very little about Aldhelm, besides his writings; he was Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne. He appears briefly in the fifth book of Bede's History of the Church. There are two lives of Aldhelm. The first, by an Italian named Faricius, dates from between 1080 and 1100. William of Malmesbury dedicated the fifth book of his Gesta Pontificum (1125) to Aldhelm (Lapidge, pp.5-7).

Ælfric of Eynsham lived from 955-1010. Perhaps the most prolific Anglo-Saxon author, Ælfric wrote two series of Catholic homilies in Anglo-Saxon between 989 and 995 that are often read alongside his Lives of the Saints. Calder and Greenfield describe the purposes and scopes of these texts here:

> The First Series of Catholic Homilies is largely scriptural and exegetical in content, while the Second is more legendary, less didactic, and more

capture Judith for a particular purpose or in a particular identity, these models undo themselves, revealing their own dependence on gender norms and Judith's disruption of the binaries that underwrite them. Like Judith, Grendel's Mother also undermines the binary gender system, but she further compromises the boundaries of intelligibility by being both theoretically inconceivable and physically un-seeable; she is manifestly unrecognizable. Although she undermines binary gender, Judith is a human in a female body; Anglo-Saxon authors edit her story, but they neither destroy nor erase her. Grendel's Mother is entirely unintelligible to the Danes in Beowulf and, therefore, requires destruction. Depending on the context and the speaker, she is female, male, mother, righteous avenger, powerful warrior, weak woman, hall-keeper, enemy, non-human, and human-like. Rather than trying to define her in the terms of the poem, the poet uses the challenge she poses to the characters to critique their own binary world vision. By requiring the simultaneous invocation of contradictory categories of identification, Judith and Grendel's Mother raise questions about what happens to

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> concerned with the development of Catholicism in England...in the First Series Ælfric speaks directly to the lay congregation, using the preacher only as his voice, whereas in the Second Series he provides a collection of homiletic material designed for the preachers themselves. [...] The Lives of the Saints, however, seems to have been intended primarily for a reading audience. This series contains the passions and lives of those saints whom the monks themselves honor by special services, not those celebrated in the general Sanctorale. (p.78)

Judith is an anonymous poem extant only in Cotton Vittelius A.15, fol.202a-209a.. Originally two separate manuscripts, the first section has two twelfth century hands and the second has two tenth century hands; Judith is the last poem in the manuscript, following immediately after Beowulf. Judith is, for the most part, written in a late West Saxon dialect. The hand that copied Beowulf from "moste" at 1939b also copied Judith. Because of the condition of the final page of Beowulf and the apparent imperfection of the first page of Judith, R.W. Chambers argued that the epic was originally the last poem, but this position is no longer accepted (Dobbie lix-lxvi; Timmer, pp.1-8; Chambers, "Beowulf," p.509).

representational language when it encounters figures that exist and persist in existing despite being nearly or entirely unrecognizable and to the binaries through which authors, texts, and their characters construct intelligible and recognizable lives and universes.

Judith: the Undoing of Gender Opposition

Writing nearly two hundred years apart, Aldhelm and Ælfric use Judith to exemplify appropriate sexual behavior. Aldhelm wrote De Virginitate for the mixed house of Barking and its Abbess Hildelith.[4] Although he praises the chaste virgins who are rigorous examples of Christian militancy, he breaks from orthodoxy and earlier treatises on virginity by creating a category of chastity for the once married and even the currently married. Judith is a prime model of widowed chastity.[5] Ælfric seems to have

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[4] This work has two parts; the first, which I treat here, is the prose De Virginitate and the second is in verse, the Carmen de Virginitate. Nineteen manuscripts survive, "twelve of which were consulted in tenth- and eleventh-century England" (Lapidge, p.70). The manuscripts contain a large number of Latin and Anglo-Saxon glosses that reflect Aldhelm's style, resemble those found in curriculum authors, and indicate interest in and use of the text. All references to Aldhelm come from Scott Gwara' edition of Aldhelmi Malmesbireiensis Prosa de Virginitate. All translations come from Aldhelm: The Prose Works, edited and translated by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren.

Aldhelm is far from the first writer to create a working definition of virginity or to compile examples. He is closest structurally to Ambrose whose treatise De Virginibus ad Marcellinam (377) begins with a theory of virginity and then gives examples of female virgins. Ambrose focuses on female virgins while Aldhelm "catalogues seventy-three male saints compared to forty-three female saints across both texts" (Pettit, p.10). His introduction of male virgins is, according to Carol Braun Pasternack, "unprecedented in patristic treatises on virginity" (p.109). Aldhelm begins with introductory remarks on virginity, before treating male and then female virgins; the Hebrew and Christian Bibles provide him with examples that he supplements with martyrs and Church Fathers. Ultimately, he returns to the Patriarchs (Lapidge, pp.56-7).

Barking was a mixed house and Aldhelm's directions to "brothers" would confirm that he had both sexes in mind. Emma Pettit asserts that "in early Anglo-Saxon England these communities, over which abbesses normally presided, housed nuns, monks and clerics, who lived together in carrying degrees of proximity" (p.10). Recently, Gawara has suggested that Aldhelm imagined a network of mixed houses as his audience (pp.47-55).

[5] Aldhelm defines chastity here:

intended his Judith for both religious and secular readers: the "nunnnan þe sceandlice libbað tellað to lytlum gylte, þæt hi hi forlicgon" [nuns who live shamefully and reckon it an insignificant sin that they fornicate] and Sigeweard, an English nobleman and friend of Ælfric.[6] In "Letter to Sigeweard on the Old and New Testament," Ælfric makes Judith a model of national defense for the noblemen who defended England from Danish raids with inconsistent success:

> Iudith seo wuduwe, þe oferwann Holofernes þone Siriscan ealdorman, hæfð hire agene boc betwux þisum bocum be hire agenum sige; seo ys eac on Englisc on ure wisan gesett eow mannum to bysne, þæt ge eowerne eard mid wæmnun bewerian wið onwinnendne here.
>
> [The widow Judith, who overcame Holofernes, the Assyrian general, has her own book among these books about her own victory; it is also

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> Castitas uero, quae pactis sponsalibus sortita matrimonii commercia regni caelestis causa contempsit, iugalitas, quae ad propagandam posteritatis sobolem et liberorum procreandorum gratia licitis conubii nexibus nodatur. (19.20-6)
> [Chastity on the other hand which, having been assigned to marital contracts, has scorned the commerce of matrimony for the sake of the heavenly kingdom; or conjugality which, for propagating the progeny of posterity and for the sake of procreating children, is bound by the legal ties of marriage. (pp.75-6)]

Aldhelm defines chastity in relationship to virginity; while virginity is indisputably preferable, the chaste also have a significant relationship to God. Pasternack perceives in Aldhelm an anxiety about the preclusion of family:

> In the definitions of chastity and conjugality and in the terms describing them, we can see quite clearly the problem of virginity: as a sexual practice, it runs completely contrary to the continuing generation of families. (p.108)

[6] There are two extant manuscripts of Ælfric's text: Cotton Otho B.x (Worcester, s. xi med) and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 (Rochester, s.xii1). The former includes the final story of Malchus; the latter does not. (Klein, "Ælfric") All translations of Ælfric are my own unless otherwise noted. All references come from S.D. Lee's on line edition.

prepared in English in our manner, as an example to your men that you should protect your land from the invading army with weapons.]

For his nuns, as Ælfric explains in his concluding gloss of his translation of the Vulgate Book of Judith, the widow is also a model of *clænnysse*, which, according to Hall, can mean purity, chastity, or innocence.[7] For the religious, Judith serves as an example of chastity, while for warriors and, by extension, men, she is a defender of her people and their country. Although she is an intelligible model of chastity, or purity, or national defense, she must always be circumscribed; Aldhelm and Ælfric transparently worry that these categories complicate and cancel each other; they perceive them as irresolvable.[8] Unfortunately for Aldhelm and Ælfric, any citation of Judith inevitably references the overt sexuality of the seduction, the near-rape, and the violence of the decapitation. In response, to borrow Mary Clayton's term, both authors try to "contain" Judith and what she can mean even if the process of containment draws attention to those alternative meanings. But while they work to finesse rogue interpretations of Judith as an endorsement of sexuality, the Judith "fragment" focuses on the most violent scenes from the Biblical narrative and it is in crafting a stable definition of what Judith is in relation to

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[7] How, if at all, Ælfric perceived his text as serving these audiences and their particular needs is far from clear. Ian Pringle argues that Ælfric is suggesting that a lack of chastity on the part of secular and monastic Englishmen resulted in English susceptibility to Danish raids. He understands Ælfric's initial exhortation of the English to fight "mid wæmnun" allegorically, arguing that chastity will allow the English to defend themselves. Mary Clayton disagrees with Pringle's efforts at unifying the two audiences; she finds his allegorical reading of the call to arms "both unnecessary and highly unlikely" (p.217). For her, Ælfric imposes "two meanings [...] on the text [...] oddly incongruous with the text itself" (p.225). Instead, she focuses on Ælfric's heroic efforts to make the story of Judith fit either of his intended needs.

[8] Stacy Klein in "Ælfric," Mary Clayton, and Heide Estes argue that Judith's seduction of Holofernes is the most significant point of anxiety for Aldhelm and Ælfric because her use of sexuality undermines their efforts at interpreting her as a model of widowed, Jewish sexual abstinence that looks ahead to Christian vows of abstinence.

these scenes of violence, rather than in reconciling the moments of explicit sexuality, that the poet runs into trouble.[9]

A quick reading of Judith might conclude that the parallel scenes of decapitation and battle delineate the boundaries of masculine and feminine violence. Judith's decapitation of Holofernes in his tent enables the men of Bethulia to rally and destroy the retreating army; the decapitation and the battle work in tandem towards the common

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[9] Some critics have linked the poem to current events, like the Danish raids, or understood parallels between Judith and historical figures, in particular Alfred's stepmother and Queen Aethelflaed of Mercia, Alfred's daughter (Timmer). Timmer, in his introduction to the poem for AASS, defines the poem as a "religious epic describing the deeds of a fighting saint" (p.7). Distinguishing between heroic or historical epic and religious epic, he argues that there is no evidence of historical figures being presented as religious figures and that Judith is described as an ideal rather than a historical personage. Political readings often underplay the allegorical, arguing instead that Judith was intended to motivate the English to act against the Danes. In these readings, the near rape refers to the many Danish rapes of English women while Judith's resistance becomes an ideal model for resistance. To this end, Judith can be read alongside Wulfstan's well-known sermon in which he decries the English men's inability or unwillingness to prevent or fight over the rape of their women (Lochrie, "Gender").
A thorough description of Judith's treatment by Christian authors and commentators can be found in B.F. Huppe's The Web of Words: Structural Analyses of the Old English Poems *Vainglory, the Wonder of Creation, the Dream of the Rood,* and *Judith*. Judith has also been read as allegory and as partial allegory. A relatively recent cluster of articles has attempted to move outside of allegorical and political or historicizing readings and arguments over the respective length of the original poem. See, for example, Stacy Klein in "Ælfric," Heide Estes, Susan Kim, and Karma Lochrie in "Gender".

There exists a long and well-documented argument over whether the poem is a fragment, what the original looked like, and how its relative fragmentation should shade criticism. Until recently, most critics used the section numbers in the manuscript and the length of the Latin Vulgate version to argue that approximately three quarters of the poem were lost, making the original between 1200 and 1300 lines long. Still, it would be hard to call the poem anything but a very loose translation; moreover, there is not exact correspondence between the sections in the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon. Susan Kim provides the following solution:

> Although some important considerations such as generic expectations must depend on assumptions about the poem's original length, surely the poem as we have it can be read, and read productively, without conclusion or even speculation as to the original length. (p.286)

For my purposes, I will treat the poem as a whole entity, but my argument does not draw substantively from the potential length of the poem.

Jewish goal of destroying the pagan enemy. The particularly gory and detailed depiction of the decapitation and the lengthy description of the punishments that Holofernes will meet in hell make him an enemy who deserves defeat by the resolute and indisputably good Jews. Drunkenness renders Holofernes a debauched figure that merits the final humiliation of being killed by a woman. While the fragment supports this reading, the poet's use of multiple explanatory registers and generic markers to portray Judith complicates this reading construction of gender in relation to violence. In a compelling analysis of the poem alongside its religious counterparts, Estes argues that Judith works to make its protagonist a "model of idealized, heroic Christian femininity," but that her seduction of Holofernes is better explained by her "devout observance of Jewish law" (p.330).

Estes identifies a core tension in the representation of Judith, but the number of tensions that combine in her character make Judith better defined by tension than anything else. Like Aldhelm and Ælfric, the poet interprets Judith as a proto-Christian, but that reading often conflicts with the concurrent readings of Judith as a warrior that appears throughout the poem. Furthermore, the poem vacillates between describing Judith as a warrior and aggressively feminizing her.[10] The poet's invocation of these often-contradictory systems of meaning suggests that Judith does not fit into any particular mold: Christian, saint, exemplary women, Jew, or warrior. As the poem concludes, there is still no judgment as to what Judith is: she has become a near-cipher.

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[10] Jane Chance argues that, like Eve and the Virgin Mary, Judith is a "major Biblical model[s]" for Anglo-Saxon women (p.13). Her beauty, for Chance, reflects her chastity. Chance classifies Judith, Juliana, and Elene as Anglo-Saxon fighting saints, focusing on Judith's three allegorical battles: she is a chaste soul battling lechery; a soldier of God fighting the devil; a prefigurement of the Church triumphing over pagans and Jews (p.36).

Burton Raffel wrote "of there being something – not perhaps wrong, but certainly not quite right" in Judith and critics like Susan Kim, John P. Hermann, and Karma Lochrie have pounced on this summation of Judith for good reason (p.124). For me, that "something [...] not quite right" lies in the unresolved tension between the representation of Judith as a successful and violent woman who saves herself and her people and the failure of the models of femininity, sanctity, and militancy that the poet deploys to contain such a figure conclusively or satisfactorily.

Judith begins and ends comparing Judith's relationship to material gifts to her praiseworthy faith in God. In the first lines, the poet celebrates Judith for spurning earthly gifts; her abstinence translates into divine help and protection: "(t)weode/ gifena in ðys ginnan gr(un)d(e). Heo ðær æa gearwe fu(n)de/ mundbyr(d) æt ðam mæran þeodne, þa heo ahte mæste þearfe/ hyldo þæs hehstan Deman" [...she doubted the gifts in this wide world. So she readily found protection in the splendid Prince when she had most need of the favor of the sublime Judge] (Ll. 1-4).[11] Judith's rejection of material goods and protection in favor of the heavenly links her to a hagiographical tradition in which the saint separates him or herself from the secular and material world by shunning goods and their value. In the concluding lines, the poet returns to Judith' relationship to earthly gifts, repeating, as Cook points out in his argument for the coherence of the extant poem, *tweode*, the first word of the poem (p.7). In these final lines, however, it is not Judith's rejection of gifts that reveals her faith; rather, her reception of Holofernes' armor reflects the relationship between her belief and her victory. In accordance with the warrior tradition, Judith receives the armor of Holofernes, her slain enemy:

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[11] All citations to Judith come from Beowulf and Judith, edited by E.V.K. Dobbie. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

> [...] Holofernes/ sweord + swatigne helm, swylce eac side (by)rnan,
> gerenode readum golde, + eal þæt se rinca baldor
> swiðmod sinces ahte oðde sundoryrfes,
> beaga + beohrta maðma.
> [The sword and gory helmet of Holofernes as well as his huge mail-coat adorned with red gold; and all that the ruthless lord of the warriors owned of treasures or private inheritance, of rings and of beautiful treasures.] (Ll. 336-40)

This impressive catalog of gifts reflects that the "eorlas æscrofe" [brave earls] perceive her as their leader and situates her and the poem firmly in the generic register of the epic (Ll. 336). The act of decapitating Holofernes makes Judith the leader of the people of Bethulia and she, in turn, receives their gifts out of respect.

Judith's relationship to earthly goods, especially Holofernes' armor, betrays the representational problems she causes. In the Biblical source, Judith does not keep the armor, but donates "Holfernes' spoil" to the temple in Jerusalem (Judith 16:23). Her willingness to accept the gifts makes Ælfric deeply uneasy. In his gloss of this scene, he insists by reference to his Biblical source that Judith did not want the gifts, explaining defensively that:

> Heo nolde agan, swa swa us sægð seo racu,
> þæs wælhreowan hærereaf, þe þæt folc hire forgeaf,
> ac amansumode mid ealle his gyrlan,
> nolde hi werian, ac awearp hi hire fram,
> nolde þurh his hæþenscype habban ænige synne

> [She did not wish, as the account tells us, to possess the savage one's war-spoil, which the people gave her, but cursed his battle-gear altogether; she did not want to keep them, but threw them away from her; she did not wish to have any sin because of his heathenism](424-8)

In order to read Judith as a pre-figurement of the Church and a model of *clænysse*, Ælfric distances her from the pollution of paganism, which he links to violence and victory. His aside betrays his awareness that her reception of the gifts turns her into a secular warrior and his desire to reject that reading of her. In Essai Sur le Don, Marcel Mauss theorizes that exchange is not economic, but an interaction of multiple significances. The obligatory reciprocal gift system creates and cements social and political relationships; violence is often the understood consequence of not participating:

> [...] Such exchanges are acts of politeness: banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs, in which economic transaction is only one element, and in which the passing on of wealth is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract. Finally, these total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat voluntary form by presents and gifts, although in the final analysis they are strictly compulsory, on pain of private or public warfare. (p.7)

In Germania, Tacitus explains the system of total services that underwrites *comitatus* and the gift system that governs the relationship between an overlord and his thanes. In peace times, the retainers and neighboring lords send reciprocal gifts to the leaders. During war, however, the people fight for the prince in exchange for goods, both those that are necessary for fighting and those that are taken from the defeated:

> Principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe. Si civitas, in qua orti sunt, longa pace et otio torpeat, plerique nobilium adulescentium petunt ultro eas nationes, quae tum bellum aliquod gerunt, quia et ingrata genti quies et facilius inter ancipitia clarescunt magnumque comitatum non nisi vi belloque tueare; exigunt enim principis sui liberalitate illum bellatorem equum, illam cruentam victricemque frameam. Nam epulae et quamquam incompti, largi tamen apparatus pro stipendio cedunt. (p.8)
>
> [The leaders fight for victory, the retainers for their leader. If their native state grows sluggish from prolonged peace and leisure, many well-born youths actively seek tribes that are then involved in a war, because peacefulness displeases that people and they can win renown more easily in the midst of hazards, while a large retinue is hard to maintain except by violence and war. For the men demand of their leader's liberality their martial steed and their *framea* convered in gore and glory: banquets and a lavish if unpolished pomp serve the men as pay] (p.83)[12]

In a scene that I will treat later from Beowulf, the hero emerges victorious from Grendel's Mother's mere with a sword hilt that he ceremoniously hands to Hrothgar in recognition of his status as lord. That the poet has Judith accept the gifts as Hrothgar does and not donate them to the Temple underscores her place in the warrior system. As Estes argues, Judith's willingness to accept the gifts in the poem "suggests that she belongs literally to a non-Christian world," a reading that Ælfric knows would topple the premise of his interpretation, but that the poet is willing to explore (p.340).

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[12] The Latin text comes from Duane Reed Stuart's The Germania; the translation is by J.B. Rives. All references are to page numbers.

In Erin Mullally's analysis of the poem, Judith's reception of the gifts identifies her differently; rather than inscribing her as a warrior, the relationship marks her transformation from object of exchange to recipient of object. Mullally concludes that: "Judith enters into a masculine system of exchange which clearly demonstrates that femininity and heroism are possible within the Anglo-Saxon warrior cultures' structure of exchange" (p.257). For Mullally, the exchange system and Judith's place in it turns her into a female warrior; Judith' relationship to gifts transforms her from a potential rape victim to a recipient of war booty. Her varying relationship to gifts, however, does not generate a linear reading of her character; instead it reveals the poem's placement of her in irreconcilable systems of meaning: the masculine and the feminine, the Christian and the pagan, and the saintly and the heroic. In the first lines of the poem, the poet voices Ælfric's reading of Judith as a proto-saint or, at least, a pre-Christian advocate of hagiographical values who disavows the earthly and material. In the Anglo-Saxon Juliana, the virgin rejects her suitor despite his great wealth. Her father pleads with her, "wiðsæcest þu to swiþe sylfre rædes/ þinum byrdguman, se is betra þonne þu,/ æþelra for eorþan, æhtspedigra/ feohgestreona" (Ll. 99-102) [too strictly you refuse, upon your own advice, your bridegroom who is a better person than you, of higher birth in the world, wealthier in riches (p.304)].[13] In her rebuttal, Juliana rejects wealth as a determinant of value. Like Judith in the beginning of the poem, Juliana knows that belief in God trumps all:

> Næfre ic þæs þeodnes þafian wille
>
> mægrædenne, nemne he mægna god

[13] References to Juliana come from The Exeter Book, edited G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie. Translations come from S.A.J. Bradley's Anglo-Saxon Poetry.

geornor bigonge

[...]

Ne mæg he elles mec

bringan to bolde. He þa brydlufan

sceal to oþerre æhtgestealdum

idese secanæ nafað he ænige her. (Ll. 108-10;113-6)

[Never will I accept a relationship with this lord unless he accepts the worship of the God of hosts. [...] By no other way may he take me into his house. He with his wealth must seek a bride's love from some other woman; he shall have none here (pp.304-5)]

Cynewulf, the author of Juliana, uses her rejection of the material to define Juliana as a Christian and to differentiate her from her father and pagan culture and worship. She places herself outside of the secular gift exchange system by insisting on a Christian value system.

By defining Judith as trusting only in heavenly and not in earthly gifts, the poet implicitly identifies her as a proto-saint; as Ælfric makes clear, that identification contrasts with the later description of her receiving the gifts as a warrior leader. Her relationship to gifts changes over the course of the poem, but not linearly. Instead, gifts identify Judith varyingly and without resolution, depending on the immediate context. Moreover, the final description of Judith aligns earthly and heavenly rewards, complicating the poet's separation of them in the first lines:

Ealles ðæs Iudith sægde

wuldor weroda Dryhtne, þe hyre weorðmynde geaf,

> mærðe on moldan rice, swylce eac mede on heofonum,
> sigorlean (inswegles)wuldre, þæs ðe heo ahte soðne geleafan
> a to ða(m) Ælmihitigan. Huru æt ðam ende ne tweode
> þæs lea(nes þe he la)nge gyrnde.
> [For all that Judith ascribed to the wonder of the Lord of hosts who gave her honor and glory in the kingdom of earth and likewise a reward in heaven, the reward of victory in the glory of the heavens because she always had true faith in the Almighty. Certainly at the end she did not doubt the rewards for which she long had yearned.] (Ll. 341-46)

In his final, glossing comments, immediately before he prays to the Lord, the poet declares Judith's earthly reward analogous to her heavenly reward, making the two value systems parallel and not opposite as they are in the first lines of the poem. The gifts, which originally marked her as a Christian and proto-saint, now signify her success as a warrior and a holy figure. The poet insists that these gifts are signifiers of God's approval and of his future rewards, but this interpretation contradicts the distinction he creates in the first lines of his poem and Ælfric's disavowal of the gifts as markers of paganism. The poet never resolves or even tries to resolve these conflicting readings of Judith as Christian and warrior.[14]

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[14] There are warrior saints, but that the literal nature of Judith's violence, her association with actual war, and her Jewishness all complicate reading her in that tradition. In her work on Wealtheow, Helen Damico theorizes that the warrior is not a gender specific category for the Anglo-Saxons. She writes that

> The treatment of the warrior-women Elene, Judith, and Juliana corresponds closely to the treatment given the Anglo-Saxon heroic male warrior. [...] Patricia Belanoff has demonstrated that the epithets used to define Beowulf, the exemplar of Germanic heroic conduct and thought, and Andreas, the paragon of Christian virtue, are likewise employed to

Stacy Klein argues that, for the Anglo-Saxons, gender is designated by militancy. She theorizes that

> Sexual difference did not simply reside in power but in a highly specified form of power, namely, military power as it was manifested in the roles both men and women played in the constant aggression that was intrinsic to Anglo-Saxon culture, even during times of relative peace. This is not to say that the Anglo-Saxons were unaware of physiological differences between men and women. Rather, these physiological differences were not the primary factors distinguishing men and women from one another. The more important dividing line between members of Anglo-Saxon society was the particular relationship to militancy a person took up in his or her behavior and thoughts – an idea that is most clearly expressed in the Anglo-Saxon's use of the term *wæpnedmann*, "weaponed person," as a common means of designating a male person. ("Ruling," p.92)

For the famously violent Anglo-Saxons, Klein surmises, an individual is gendered by his or her relationship to militancy: to be weaponed is to be masculine just as to be without weapons and a potentially defenseless victim is to be feminine. The decapitation of Holofernes allows Judith to be weaponed, to assume the traditionally masculine role of leader and the poem goes to some length to describe her in warrior terms, but that

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> distinguish the Cynewulfian and Old Testament heroines. Although the female characters undergo slight alteration, their femininity is usually diffused [...] the heroic temperament is apparently equally appropriate to male and female. (p.27)

As Judith demonstrates in full, men and women can be heroic, but it is critical to look at the variation in depictions of feminine and masculine heroism. The warrior woman does not simply become masculine; there is a need to preserve her femininity in ways that qualify her assumption of the role of the warrior.

performance of aggressive violence is not the only act that genders Judith. The poet links affirmations of Judith's success as a ruler with her effeminizing experience of near-rape; in Holofernes' tent, violence fails to gender Judith conclusively: the decapitation of Holofernes masculinizes her while the near-rape feminizes her just as her position as leader of the warriors masculinizes her and her absence from the battlefield recalls her sex. Judith's relationship to violence genders her, but it genders her differently at different moments in the text; she is both subject and object of violence, both masculine and feminine, a prime example of the failure of binary gender.

The depiction of Judith as a warrior receiving booty from her thanes is the culmination of depictions of her as a warrior that begin in Holofernes' tent. As Judith approaches Holofernes' bed, she draws a battle sword, literally weaponing herself. As she prepares to leave the tent with the head carefully hidden in a bag, the poet exalts that "Haefde ða gefohten foremærne blæd/ Iudith æt guðe, swa hyre Gode uðe,/ swegles Ealdor, þe hyre sigores onleah" [Judith then had gained illustrious glory by fighting in war as her God the Lord of heaven granted, who granted her victory] (Ll. 122-4). The description of Judith as a warrior contrasts with the setting and context. Judith is only in the tent because of her extraordinary beauty; Holofernes intends to rape her. Before Judith speaks to the people, revealing the head as evidence of her victory, the poem describes the head as *behðe*, evidence or proof, of "hu hyre æt beaduwe gespeow" [how she had availed in battle] (Ll. 174;175). In her speech, she neither effeminizes herself nor disavows her violence. She exhorts the men to fight, to prepare themselves for battle; the head should assure them that God guarantees their victory and the death of their enemies:

Nu ic gumena gehwæne

þyssa burgleoda biddan wylle,

randwiggendra, þæt ge recen eow

fysan to gefeohte

[…]

fylla<ð> folctogan fagum sweordum,

fæge frumgaras. Fynd syndon eowere

gedemed to deaðe + ge dom agon,

tir æt tohtan, swa eow getacnod hafað

mightig Dryhten þurh mine (h)and.

[Now I wish to ask each one of the men among these citizens, each warrior, that you immediately prepare yourself to fight […] cut down the commanders, the doomed leaders, with gleaming swords. Your enemies are condemned to death and you shall have honor and glory in battle according as the mighty Lord has betokened to you by my hand.] (Ll. 186-9; 194-8)

By describing Judith as a warrior leader, the poet simultaneously solves and creates a problem. In her speech, Judith explicitly genders warfare, urging the men of the citizens to arm and fight, to become "weaponed"; her call to war puts her in the position of leader, but does not require her appearance on the battlefield as it would if she were one of Tacitus' princes who fight alongside his men. The head symbolizes the effectiveness and completion of her work. As a speaker, rather than a decapitator, Judith is explicitly not "weaponed," even as she urges weapons on her men. Judith is always identified as

feminine even as she is represented as a warrior and leader of men; that femininity qualifies her relationship to violence.

While Judith calls for battle, the Assyrians perceive the attack and alert their senior officials who surround Holofernes' gold draped tent, looking for a similar call to war. The paralleling of the scene confirms Judith's position as leader of her people and suggests her equivalence with Holofernes; however, that the men think Judith is in the tent with Holofernes serves as a reminder of her near rape. Because Holofernes can see out of the tent, but no one can see in, the men assume that they are interrupting a liaison. As their men are slaughtered and, as the poet explains, their "dom geswiðrod/ bælc forbiged" [glory destroyed, pride based,] the leaders "ongunnon cohhetan, cirman hlude/ gristbitian gode orfeorme,/ mid toðon torn þoligende" [began to cough, to cry out loudly and to gnash their teeth and, destitute of good, suffering grief with their teeth] (Ll. 266-7; 270-2). When even these suggestive clues fail to rouse Holofernes, a brave soldier penetrates the tent, only to find a headless body. The Hebrew men understand Holofernes' head as a sign of the inevitability of their victory; the Assyrians interpret their lord's body as a sign of their demise. Tearing at his hair and clothes, the soldier who discovers the body laments: "Her ys geswutelod ure sylfra forwyrd,/ toweard getacnod, þæt þære tide ys/ mid niðum neah geðrungen, þe (w)e sculon <nu>losian,/ somod æt sæcce forweorðan" [Here is revealed our own destruction, betokened approaching, that the time is pressing forward with afflictions that we must now perish, perish together in battle] (285-8). The Assyrians soon fall into a chaotic retreat as the Hebrew army pursues and destroys them. Holofernes and Judith perform parallel functions for their people; their state of being dictates the condition and merit of the group. This parallel

confirms that Judith is the leader, but it also highlights that gender can circumscribe her. Just as Judith is made like Holofernes, she is also explicitly effeminized. She is not on the battlefield with her men, as his men hope Holofernes will be, but within the walls of Bethulia. Holofernes' men assume that she is in his tent and, by extension, his sexual object.

Throughout the beginning of the poem, the poet describes Judith in explicitly feminine terms. The killing of Holofernes marks a shift in the narrative, but not a complete one; the poet layers his description of Judith. Early on, she is described as: "ides ælfscinu" [beautiful/elfin virgin,] "þa eadigan mægð" [perfect/blessed maiden,] "Iudithðe…ferhðgleawe" [prudent/wise Judith,] "þa torhtan mægð" [radiant maiden,] "snoteran idese" [prudent virgin,] "halige meowle" [holy maiden/virgin,] and "beorhtan idese" [bright virgin] (Ll.14; 35; 40-1; 43; 55; 56; 58). These epithets explicitly associate Judith with an ideal form of femininity and sanctity that clashes with her role as either a weaponed or a weaponless leader of her people. Similarly feminizing and purifying phrases dominate Aldhelm and Ælfric's descriptions of her; feminization both contains Judith and reveals, in accordance with Scott's analysis, the failure of femininity as a category to signify coherently or stably. For both Aldhelm and Ælfric, chastity marks Judith's inherent Christianity and femininity. According to Aldhelm, she deserves praise for embracing widowhood. In order to bolster his reading of Judith as pre-figuring Christian chastity, he reminds his readership that Judith rejected a second marriage without having read Corinthians: "Now to the unmarried and widows I say: it is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am" (7.8). For Ælfric, Judith's chastity is the more remarkable because it looks ahead to Paul:

> Nimað eow bysne be þyssere Iudith, hu clæenlice heo leofode ær Cristes acennednysse, ne leogað ge na Gode on ðæs godspelles timan þa halgan clænnysse þe ge Criste beheton, forðan þe he fordemð þa dyrnan forligras þa fulan sceandas he besengð on helle, swa swa hit on Læden stent æfter Paulus lare 'Fornicaores & adulteros iudicabit Deus.
>
> [Take example from this Judith, how chastely she lived before Christ's birth, and do not betray to God in the time of the Gospels the holy chastity which you promised to Christ, because he will condemn the secret fornicators and he will burn the foul wretches in hell, as it stands in the Latin according to Paul's teaching: God will judge fornicators and adulterers.] (Ll. 429-41)

Ælfric quickly dispenses with Judith as if to curtail more ambiguous readings of her character: admirable for remaining chaste before the birth of Christ, she is a model for those who have read the Gospels and may still succumb to fornication, adultery, or second marriages when they know such actions result in judgment and damnation. In the poem, however, explicitly feminine descriptions of Judith emerge as she kills Holofernes. For Aldhelm and Ælfric, Christian and feminine descriptors separate Judith from the decapitation scene; in the poem, on the other hand, they simply add to the chaotic, layered nature of her identity, contributing to her dissolution of binary gender. As a warrior and saint, a wielder of weapons and an object of lust, the Judith of the poem becomes indecipherable in her excess.

In Christian interpretations of Judith, the decapitation is frequently treated as allegory; the scene can be handily explained as an example of the eternal battle between

the Church and evil, but the decapitation never passes without commentary and the need to interpret the scene is striking.[15] In the poem, the violence also presents a problem, but its resolution contrasts starkly with allegorization. Adhelm and Ælfric write in religious settings and, at least partially, for religious audiences; the poem Christianizes Judith even as the associations of Judith with the warrior culture secularize her. Although the sexuality surrounding Judith's seduction of Holofernes makes her a questionable model of chastity or purity, Adhelm and Ælfric never depict her as a warrior or a pagan to make sense of her violent behavior; they never rely on secular registers of meaning. That the poem does suggests the ways it differs from the explicitly religious adaptations. In an article about the double-bind that Judith's violence creates for the warrior code embedded in the poem, Karma Lochrie argues that

> Judith's appropriation of violence is unsettling because [...] she disables masculine identity in the process. Heroine though she is, Judith is also a threat to the masculine heroic order she exploits. ("Gender," p.10)[16]

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[15] See Clayton, p. 220, note 16. In "Feasting with Holofernes," Estes provides a summary of these allegorical positions:

> Jerome prefaces his Latin Vulgate translation of the Book of Judith with the comment that she is exemplary for her chastity. Isiodore describes her as a prefiguration of Ecclesia and praises her among virtuous widows for her triumph over Holofernes, while Ambrose credits her chastity and her refusal to drink wine with her defeat of the drunken Assyrian general. (p.326)

[16] Lochrie concludes that

> The Anglo-Saxon Judith poem reveals the conjunction of sexual and military violence with fear of the feminine at the same times that it exposes the failure to "conquer femininity within and without." Thus instead of resolving masculine fears of femininity, it forces a crisis in which these fears are made palpable by the feminization of Holofernes and his troops. ("Gender," p.14)

While the poet praises Judith as a warrior, Lochrie argues, he also worries about her appropriation of that rank and, by extension, that gender. In killing Holofernes, Judith becomes what she has destroyed and, in doing so, reveals that the rank is not available exclusively to men. Judith's assumption of violence does threaten the "masculine heroic order," but her assumption of the role of warrior and usurpation of Holofernes' rank are also inconsistent and incomplete, interwoven with descriptions of her as a pseudo-saint, a proto-Christian, and an innocent woman. Because she willingly deploys violence to achieve her ends, Judith renders problematic and unstable the heroic order and the Christian order and, in doing so, embodies the failure of those systems of representation. In doing so, Judith becomes a cipher.

In his translation and his gloss, Ælfric, according to Clayton, tries to contain the sexuality of Judith's seduction of Holofernes by making small changes and inserting appropriate adjectives, acting "like a dog worrying over a bone, Ælfric circles around and round…unable to find a safe resting place" (p.222). This "circling" contrasts with the ease with which Ælfric interpretively dismisses Judith's violence. He begins his commentary by foregrounding the unbelievable quality of the story: "Nis þis nan leas spel! Hit stent on Leden þus on ðære bibliothecan" [This is not a lie! It is written thus in the Latin book]. In order to confirm both the outrageous nature of the story and its veracity, Ælfric calls on the authority of his source, which is Latin and Biblical. What exactly is unbelievable about the story is, however, not entirely transparent; the clearest hint is that Ælfric immediately shifts into a typological reading of the decapitation that turns the violence into allegory or metaphor. He writes that:

On hire wæs gefylled þæs hælendes cwyde:

Ælc, þe hine ahefð, sceal beon geeadmet,

se ðe hine geeadmet sceal beon ahafen.

Heo eadmod *clæne*, ofercom þone modigan,

lytel unstrang, alede þone micclan,

forðan þe heo getacnode untweolice mid weorcum

þa halgan gelaðunge, þe gelyfð nu on god,

þæt is Cristes cyrce on eallum Cristentum folce,

his an *clæne* byrd, þe mid cenum geleafan

þam ealdum deofle of forcerf þæt heafod,

æfre on *clænysse* Criste þeowigende.

[In her the Savior's saying was fulfilled: "Each one who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." She was humble and chaste and she overcame the proud one; unimportant and weak and she conquered the great one; therefore she undoubtedly symbolized in her deed the holy church, which now believes in God, that is Christ's church in all Christian people, his only pure bride, who, with brave faith, always serving Christ in purity, cut off the head of the old devil.] (Ll. 407-17, italics my own)

By implication, what is so potentially untrue is that a lowly widow could be violent, but Ælfric defends her transformation as further evidence of the power of God, so great that it can render a widow a devil slayer. By beginning with Matthew 23.12, he declares his intention to read Judith as a prefigurement of the Gospel and, by extension, the Church. *Clænysse* allows Judith to triumph over the proud just as it allows the Church to triumph

over the devil. Ælfric links her killing of Holofernes to her purity and, by extension, to her prefigurement and fulfillment of the Church; in doing so, he turns the violence and the purity into defining qualities of her position in Christian chronology.

Aldhelm omits any overt reference to Judith's decapitation of Holofernes; instead, he focuses on how the beauty of her face and her adornments are her weapons and, as such, the source of Holofernes' undoing. Judith, according to Aldhelm, used her beauty as a last resort: "Haud secus decipiendum credidit nec aliter obtruncandum rata est, nisi cum natiua uultus uenustate ornamentis etiam corporalibus caperetur" [She did not believe he could be deceived in any other way, nor think that he could be killed otherwise, than by ensnaring him by means of the innate beauty of her face and also by her bodily adornment] (Ll. 57.9-11; p.127). Aldhelm is quick to justify this use of beauty in terms that preserve Judith as a model of chastity, even chastity under duress. Although Holofernes is the villain and Judith the exemplary heroine, Aldhelm's narrative shifts as he writes about Judith not just as a model of chastity but also as a warning about the violence inherent in feminine sexuality. As if to underscore the dangers of physical beauty and feminine sexuality, Aldhelm turns to textual authority, quoting a passage from the Septuagint in which Judith adorns herself and then exclaiming: "En, non nostris assertionibus sed scripturae astipulationibus ornatus feminarum rapina uirorum uocatur!" [You see, it is not by my assertion but by the statement of scripture that the adornment of women is called the depredation of men!] (Ll. 57.15-7; p.127). Aldhelm uses the head and canopy to signify her victory and stand in for the actual violence; he conflates the seduction and the violence. In doing so, he suggests that the seduction is a form of violence. Through omission and conflation, he renders equivalent sexual seduction and

female violence. Initially, Judith served as an ideal figure for straddling the gap between the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel and the married and the virginal. Although Judith's widowhood fits his model of chastity, the fatal consequences of the seduction convey the violence of female sexuality. Moreover, Judith's violence is literally unspeakable for Aldhelm. By conflating the decapitation with the seduction, he revises the episode in sexual terms, those that might be most easily associated with deviant femininity. Her beauty, which tempted and destroyed Holofernes, acts as a substitution, a way of talking and not talking about physical violence.

To clarify how Judith illuminates his definition of chastity, Aldhelm, immediately following the uneven conclusion to his analysis of Judith, treats another seductress, this time from Proverbs who "necnon" [similarily] prefigures the Synagogue; in this instance, the seduction leads a "uirum proprium integro" [foolish young man] to destruction "caecae cupiditatis petulantia captus nefandum" [by the wantonness of his own blind desire] (Ll. 57.23, 57.24-5, 57.28-9; p.128). Aldhelm continues to conflate feminine sexuality with danger, but by placing this woman alongside Judith, he differentiates between the two: Judith seduced Holofernes out of necessity while this woman simply destroyed her victim. The pairing suggests that Aldhelm wishes to make Judith as a model of chastity whose use of sexuality was entirely purposeful and pragmatic; in her dedication to the greater good of her people, she is pointedly unlike her counterpart. Aldhelm reads Judith in sexual and not in classically violent terms, associating sexuality with destruction. In doing so, he emphasizes her femininity, gendering her in ways that her violence might undermine even as his obvious efforts at containment recall that Judith is both a seductress and a decapitator.

In the poem, the build up to and narration of the decapitation encapsulates the tension surrounding the representations of Judith as a proto-saint, a prefigurement of Christianity, a warrior, and a maiden. An exceedingly drunk Holofernes intends to rape Judith: "þohte ða beorhtan idese/ mid widle mid womme besmitan" [he thought then to pollute the bright fair woman with defilement and sin] (Ll. 58-9). She is brought to his carefully draped tent, but the poet interjects that God prevented Holofernes from success, explicitly shifting the agency and responsibility for the violence. In the next lines, as Judith ponders how she will kill Holofernes, the poet associates her with God by describing her as "Nergendes/ þeowen þrymful" [glorious handmaiden of the Savior] and "Æscyppendes mægð" [maiden of the Creator] (Ll. 73-4; 78). Armed with a sword that marks her transition from rape-victim to warrior, she calls upon God in her first speech of the poem.[17] As she prepares to decapitate Holofernes, she is not just a Jewish warrior. Judith asks God for help: "þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote/ geheawan þysne morðres bryttan" [that with this sword I may slay this distributor of sin] (Ll. 89-90). She names him three times: "frymða God frofre Gæst/ Bearn Alwaldan" (Ll. 83-4). In her final invocation to him, she addresses him anachronistically as "Drynesse Drym" or "Majesty

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[17] Ælfric, on the other hand, takes advantage of this rape setting to differentiate Judith from Holofernes in sexual terms. The violence of this scene is not as compelling for him as it is for the poet or as fearsome as it is for Aldhelm. He explains that:

> Heo com þa geglenged for nanre *galnysse*
> and stod him ætforan swiðe fægres hiwes,
> and his mod sona swiðe wearð ontend
> on hire gewilnunge to his *galnysse*.
> [Then she came adorned, not because of lust, and stood in front of him, very beautiful in appearance, and his heart was immediately inflamed with desire for her, in lust.] (Ll. 287-90, italics my own)

In this equation, Judith is definitively without the *galnysse* that defines Holofernes' reaction to her appearance; their opposition is described through sexuality. Although the difference is emphasized, Judith also emerges from this scene as a femme fatale.

of the Trinity" (Ll. 86). At this transitional moment in the text, as Judith moves from pseudo-saint to warrior leader, the Hebrew Judith speaks to the Christian God of the Trinity. In an effort to explain the decapitation, the poet Christianizes Judith, but his Christianization of her is anachronistic. Rather than reading her, as Ælfric does, as a fulfillment and prefigurement of the Church, the poet compresses history by making her Christian rather than a figure from the past that looks ahead to the Gospels. Such an editorial decision is significant. In the moment of violence, Judith straddles identities and history. At her most violent, she becomes Christian; the decapitation and the prayers that accompany and justify the violence transform her into a warrior leader and a Christian even as the poet continues to describe her in classically feminine terms that recall the rape-context. As she performs her iconic act, Judith is masculine and feminine and Jewish and Christian.

The poet lingers over the killing and the punishments that Holofernes will meet in hell. Instead of reading the violence allegorically or ignoring it, he draws attention to its corporality. Dragging Holofernes by his hair, Judith maneuvers the body into a convenient position. Her first cut into his neck does not kill him:

> Sloh ða wundenlocc
> þone feondsceaðan fagum mece
> heteþoncolne, þæt heo healfne forcearf
> þone sweoran him, þæt he on swiman læg
> drunken + dolhwund.

[Then the woman with braided locks struck the hostile enemy with a shining sword so that she cut through half his neck, so that he lay aswoon, drunk, and wounded.] (Ll.103-7)

Passive and drunk, Holofernes is not much of a foe; his body proves difficult to deal with, but without agency, he is a body and nothing more.[18] In a long passage describing her eventual success, Judith strikes a second time and the poet dignifies the act with a lengthy and gleeful fantasy of Holofernes' hellish fate.

[...] Næs ða dead þa gyt,
ealles orsawale: sloh ða eornoste
ides ellenrof (o) þre siðe
þone hæfdenan hund þæt him þæt heafod wand
forð on ða flore. Læg se fula leap
gesne bæftan, gæst ellor hwearf
under neowelne næs +ðær genyðerad wæs
susle gesæled syððan æfre,
wyrmum bewunden, wifum gebunden,
hearde gehæfted in hellebyrne
æfter hinsiðe. Ne ðearf he hopian no
þystrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote
of ðam wyrmsele, ac ðær wunian sceal
awa to ladre butan ende forð

[18] The symbolic quality that Holofernes' corpse assumes suggests Beowulf's angry and gratuitous attack on Grendel's corpse that allows him to emerge with the head as a trophy, a signifier of his success. Judith attacks a not-quite-dead, but passive body to get the head that will signify her success and the future success of the Hebrew army.

in ðam heolstran ham, hyhtwynna leas.

[He was not then yet dead, wholly lifeless. Then the brave woman vehemently struck the heathen hound a second time so that his head rolled forth on the floor. His foul body lay behind, dead; his spirit departed elsewhere under the deep ground and was there oppressed in torment, bound ever after, surrounded by worms, bound by torments and grievously imprisoned in hellfire after death. Nor need he hope at all, enveloped in darkness, that he might get out of that serpent hall, but there he shall dwell for ever to eternity henceforth without end in that dark home, without the joys of hope.] (Ll. 107-21)

The poet deviates from his Biblical source as he imagines that afterlife with such apparent pleasure – the snake filled prison that Holofernes will occupy where he will be prostrated and chained, tortured without hope. The pain and suffering that his soul will suffer are far worse than what Judith could do to him. The decapitation becomes less significant and any mention of her as a warrior leader falls away. She only facilitates her enemy's eternal punishment, which he will experience much more acutely and consciously than he has his death.

The poet's fantastic digression has two effects: it downplays what Judith does to Holofernes by making the decapitation an easy preliminary to the terribleness that is to come while also aligning the decapitation with the divine. The punishments justify what Judith has done and frame the violence in both earthly and eternal terms. Just as the poet will end his poem by trying to render earthly and heavenly gifts analogous and maintain the superiority of heavenly reward, the poet here suggests that the decapitation will be

exceeded by what Holofernes will find in hell. After assigning Judith a series of contradictory roles, he understands her violence in both literal and metaphorical terms. Still, just as the double, almost allegorical reading of the earthly fits awkwardly into the poet's interpretation of the gifts that Judith receives in the final lines of the poem, the anachronistic and double readings of her violence reveal the fundamental misfit between the different systems of meaning at work in the poem.

Judith poses similar problems for Aldhelm and Ælfric, but Christian reading practices allow them to construe her as prefigurement and fulfillment, turning her violence into a metaphor for the struggle of the Church in a fallen world. For Aldhelm, Judith's decision not to remarry makes her a convenient model of widowed chastity, but the sexual context of the decapitation proves problematic and the violence is finally unspeakable. He omits the scene and alludes to it through references to symbolic objects: the head and the tent. For Aldhelm, female sexuality is violent and a type of violence; it is the cause of Holofernes' death. His interpretive gesture turns the decapitation into metaphor. Like many of the Church Fathers before him, Æfric treats Judith's violence in the first lines of his gloss of the translation, turning it into prefigurement and metaphor. Like the Church, Judith battles against the Devil; the decapitation defines her as a proto-Christian. For both Aldhelm and Ælfric, Judith is a compelling, if problematic, example of feminine virtue that requires editing and interpretation, but not destruction. Aldhelm and Æfric both insert Judith into a Christian timeline to overwrite the complications she might pose to their interpretations, even as their means of reading Judith often betray the tensions between her and the values and assumptions of their respective texts.

Judith differs from these explicitly religious texts. Time becomes confused as Judith, at her most violent and most iconic, becomes Christian through her invocation of the Trinity. Instead of relying on an exclusively metaphorical reading, the poet treats Judith and her violence literally, using the decapitation to make Judith literally Christian. By the end of the poem, Judith's relationship to violence has turned her into a proto-saint, a Christian, a rape victim and maiden, and a warrior leader. No particular system of meaning emerges dominant and no one in particular succeeds in gendering her conclusively. While her character undermines binary gender, she is not strictly unintelligible; Judith remains recognizable even as she is censored. In Beowulf, the poet grapples with a similarly defiant figure in Grendel's Mother, but he uses her illegibility as a meditation on the limitations of human knowledge and as a critique of the world-view of his characters.

Grendel's Mother and the Crisis of Unintelligiblity in Beowulf

To the great relief of his fellow-Danes, Beowulf surfaces alive from Grendel's Mother's mere. He does not come empty handed, either. Beowulf brings two emblematic souvenirs from her lair: Grendel's head and the hilt of a giant's sword with which he decapitated his hostess and her son:

> Ne nom he in þæm wicum, Weder-Geata leod,
> maðm-æhta ma, þeh he þær monige geseah,
> buton þone hafelan ond þa hilt somod,
> since fage; sweord ær gemealt,
> forbarn broden mæl; wæs þæt blod to þæs hat,
> ættren ellor-gæst, se þær inne swealt.

Sona wæs on sunde, se þe ær æt sæcce gebad

wig-hryre wraðra, wæter up þurhdeaf

wærob yð-gebland eal gefælsod,

eacne eardas, þa se ellor-gast

oflet lif-dagas ond þas lænan gesceaft.

Com þa to lande lid-manna helm

swið mod swymman, sæ-lace gefeah,

mægen-byrþenne þara þe he him mid hæfde.

[The man of the Weders took nothing more/ from the dark gift-hall, despite heaped treasure,/ except the head and the hilt, jewel bright./ Already the sword had melted away,/ its blade had burned up; too hot the blood/ of the poisonous spirit who had died within./ And soon he was swimming who at battle withstood/ the mortal attacks of two evil creatures,/ rose through the waters; the current were cleared,/ the broad expanse, now the alien spirit/ had finished her days and this fleeting life./ And thus the man came, protector of sailors,/ strong swimmer, to land; rejoiced in the weight/ of the great water-booty he carried with him.]

(Ll.1612-25)[19]

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[19] All translations of Beowulf come from Beowulf: a dual-language edition by Howell Chickering. All Anglo-Saxon citations refer to Frank Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg. Like Judith, Beowulf is damaged and only extant in British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.15 manuscript. On the monstrous and cannibalistic nature of the manuscript, see Orchard and Blurton. There is no or, at best, little consensus concerning its dating. A wide array of conclusions can be found in C. Chase's The Dating of Beowulf. Roberta Frank, in a recent article, narrates the rise and fall of competing theories that date the poem from the seventh and into the eleventh centuries. About the impossibility of a decisive answer and the need to keep looking, she concludes that:

Within the logic of Beowulf, the hero's taking of Grendel's head makes perfect sense. Their battle in Heorot concludes with Grendel escaping, leaving his arm behind. As the telling signifier of the incomplete nature of Beowulf's victory, the arm hangs in Heorot until Grendel's Mother comes in the night to avenge her son and takes both the arm and Æschere, one of Hrothgar's most beloved thanes. At the end of their underwater battle, after Beowulf decapitates Grendel's Mother, her hall fills with light and Beowulf, full of rage and yearning for payment for Grendel's victims, attacks Grendel's corpse. The body bounces from his strike as if to underline its lifeless-ness and the futility of the violence enacted upon it; the corpse poses no threat to Beowulf, but it represents his real enemy just as the decapitation of the corpse will mark the real close of the feud. The Danes struggle under the great weight of the head as they parade it back to Heorot where the banqueters stare at it in awe. As the arm failed to do because of its fragmentary nature, the head signifies the complete victory of Beowulf over Grendel, the conclusion of the feud, and Beowulf's achievement of true heroic status.

The symbolic value of the hilt, however, is another matter entirely. Beowulf narrates his near fatal encounter with Grendel's Mother and the poet tells the story in detail as it happens; all accounts confirm that this fight is by far more dangerous than the

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> Invention is needed, because most problems, from the existence of God to the dating of Beowulf, are just too hard for us, involving propositions that we can neither prove nor refute. [...] The elusiveness of Beowulf is not much different from that of all other long Old English poems, none of which can be securely situated before the tenth century. [...] Old English poems – not entirely oral in style, not entirely fixed in text - give no intelligible or adequate answer to ordinary modern questions about authorial styles, literary indebtedness, schools, genres, performance, theme, and structure, even beginnings and endings. (p.863)

My argument does not rely on a particular dating of the poem. In terms of dating, Nicholas Howe's point that there are no extant references to Beowulf in extant Anglo-Saxon literature is compelling and points to a late date.

battle with Grendel in which the hero's handgrip suffices. Beowulf goes so far as to suggest that without divine intervention, he would have died:

> Ic þæt unsofte ealdre gedigde,
> Wigge under wætere, weorc geneþde
> Earfoðlice; ætrihte wæs
> Guð getwæfed, nymðe mec God scylde.
> [Not very easily did I save my life/ in battle under water;
> performed this work/ with greatest trouble; at once the fight/ was
> decided against me, except that God saved me.] (Ll. 1655-8)

In a preventative measure that echoes his preparation for the swimming contest against Breca, Beowulf arms for this underwater swim through the mere. Nevertheless, Grendel's Mother snatches him up with her terrible claw; her grip recalls Beowulf's own handgrip:

> Grap þa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng
> atolan clommum. No þy ærin gescod
> halan lice; hring utan ymbbearh,
> þæt heo þone fyrdhom ðurhfon ne mihte,
> locene leoðosyrcan laþan fingrum
> [Then she snatched him up, seized the good warrior/ in her horrible claws;
> but none the sooner/ broke into his body; he was ringed all around,/ safe
> from puncture; her claws could not pierce/ his close-linked rings, rip the
> locked leather.] (Ll. 1501-5)

Despite his armor, Beowulf barely seems to survive either the clutch or the nosey sea monsters.[20] In Heorot, his grip proved dominant and his armor unnecessary; captured by Grendel's Mother, he is a passive figure who seems to let himself be carried to the bottom of the mere.[21]

Once Beowulf and Grendel's Mother arrive in the underwater hall, lit by a fire, and protected from its watery surrounding by a "hrof-sele" [vaulted roof,] Beowulf relies heavily on his armor (Ll.1515).[22] The chain mail serves its purpose, but once he enters the hall, his sword fails despite the application of his "mægen-ræs" [whole force] (Ll.1519). As it turns out, he and Grendel's Mother both rely on arm strength. Beowulf grabs Grendel's Mother's shoulder, detaching only Grendel's arm from his shoulder. Although she falters briefly, she rallies and captures him in her arms. The handgrip that played such a pivotal role in Beowulf's success against Grendel is co-opted and adapted by his mother to pin Beowulf. The hero ends up in an undignified position: he lies on the

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[20] In recent film adaptations by Sturla Gunnarsson and Robert Zemeckis, Beowulf does not win through arm strength alone, but relies on technology to defeat Grendel.

[21] This passivity looks ahead to Grendel's corpse and echoes the descriptions of Holofernes passed out on his bed. Only M.F. Godfrey studies decapitation in both Judith and Beowulf.

[22] In her work on Wealhtheow, Damico compares the relationship she and Grendel's Mother have to their halls:

> A similar, somewhat subtler relationship exists between the sweeping intrusion into the hall by Grendel's mother and the measured stately progress by Wealhtheow. Whereas one woman attacks, the other welcomes; one kills a chosen champion, and the other bestows honor on another. Wealhtheow, the ideal queen, reigns over a hall resplendent with light and resounding in song; the sea-wife, an exemplar of savage, corrupt womanhood (as evidenced by her half-bestial, half-human physical form), inhabits a dank, forbidding underwater cave [...] Grendel's mother and Wealhtheow do, in fact, exist in an antipodal relationship. They are contrapuntal, not only in their structural positioning, but [...] in the status each assumes in the poem. (pp.9;21)

I agree with Damico that they are set up as opposites, but the binary is over-emphasized as the terms of their apparent dissimilarity reveals their underlying likeness.

floor, underneath his hostile hostess who sits on him and hacks at his chest with her knife.[23] Only divine intervention keeps her stabbing from penetrating his war shirt and killing him. Despite her strength and the physical challenge she poses to him, Beowulf leaves Grendel's Mother's head in the mere, but he returns with the sword hilt. The omission is significant. For the rest of this chapter, I will argue that the hilt should be understood as standing in for Grendel's Mother and that both the use of an object to represent her and the nature of the hilt itself reveal the representational problems she poses in the poem.

The poet provides a surprising number of details about the hilt, explaining the service it provides Beowulf in defeating the Grendel family, its history, and its appearance:

> Geseah ða on searwum sige-eadig bil,
> eald-sweord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig,
> wigena weordð mynd; þæt wæs wæpna cyst,
> buton hit wæs mare ðonne ænig mon oðer
> to beadu-lace ætberan meahte,
> god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc.
> [...]
> Da wæs gylden hilt gamelum rince,
> harum hild fruman on hand gyfen,

[23] Chance argues that the poet exploits parallels between sex and battle in this scene to emphasize inversion. She sees the parallels between Judith and Beowulf, equating Holofernes impotence and Grendel's Mother's aggression and concluding that " a perversion of the sexual roles signals an equally perverse spiritual state" (p.104). Alan J. Frantzen makes a similarly sexualizing argument about the fight.

enta ær geweorc; hit on æht gehwearf

æfter deofla hryre Denigea frean,

wundor smiþa geweorc;

[...]

Hroðgat maþleode, hylt *sceawode*,

ealde *lafe*. On ðæm wæs or *writen*

fyrn-gewinnes, syðþan flod ofsloh,

gifen geotende, giganta cyn;

frecne geferdon; þæt wæs fremde þeod

ecean Dryhtne; him þæs ende lean

þurh wæteres wylm Waldend sealde.

Swa wæs on ðæm scennum sciran goldes

Þurh run-stafas rihte gemearcod,

geseted on gesæd, hwam þæt sweord geworht,

irena cyst, ærest wære,

wreoþen-hilt ond wyrm-fah.

[Then he saw among the armor a victory bright blade/ made by the giants, an uncracking edge,/ an honor for its bearer, the best of weapons,/ but longer and heavier than any other man/ could ever have carried in the play of war strokes,/ ornamented, burnished, from Weland's smithy. [...] Then the strange gold hilt was placed in the hand/ of the gray bearded king, wise war leader,/ old work of giants; after the fall of devils/ it came to the hands of the lord of the Dane-men,/ from magic smithies [...] / Hrothgar spoke,

> examined the hilt,/ great treasure of old. There was engraved/ the origin of past strife, when the flood drowned,/ the pouring ocean killed the race of giants./ Terribly they suffered, were a people strange/ to eternal God; their final payment/ the Ruler sent them by the rushing waters./ On its right gold facings there were also runes/ set down in order, engraved, inlaid,/ which told for whom the sword was first worked,/ its hair-keen edges, twisted gold/ scrolled in the hilt, the woven snake-blade.] (italics my own, Ll.1557-62, 1677-81, 1687-98)

In these passages, the poet provides the genealogy and history of the hilt. Rune markings record the first owner of the sword; when Hrothgar receives the hilt from Beowulf, he enters that chain of ownership. Originally made for giants, the hilt survives in Grendel's Mothers's mere until Beowulf, whose own strength the poet makes suspect by comparing it to that of monsters and giants, finds it and uses it to kill its owners.[24] The hilt not only comes from the time of the giants, it is also engraved with an etiological myth for war and the dire consequences the giants suffered for such a terrible creation. Like many weapons in Beowulf, the hilt, as a *lafe* or remnant of the past, carries its history with it as if to warn its future owners of what may be in store for them and to link them to a past that they may not know. In this sense, it looks ahead to the rusty treasure of the Last Survivor upon which the dragon, Beowulf's final enemy, sits and which turns out to be Beowulf's final gift to his people.

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[24] For more on the comparison between Beowulf and the monsters and the blurring of the boundaries between the monstrous and the human, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Monster Theory, O'Keefe, and, more recently, Koppelman.

Beowulf is attracted to the extraordinary size of the sword; for him, it is a useful and size-appropriate weapon for his current predicament. As he explains to the court, he was lucky to catch sight of a "wlitig hangian/ eald-sweord eacen" [a bright sword hanging/ gigantic heirloom] (1162-3). Once Grendel's blood melts the sword, Beowulf is left with the hilt, the *lafe* of the original weapon. Although Beowulf never seems to look at the hilt, the poet not only describes it but also lingers over the description, making the sword an emblematic object. But, while the audience knows exactly what is on the hilt, whether or not Hrothgar can interpret it is far from clear. Once he receives the hilt, the poet says that he *maðelode*, but Hrothgar does not speak for twelve lines. Instead he *sceawode* what is *writan* on the hilt.[25] According to Hall, *writan* can mean "incise, engrave, draw (p.422). Hall offers the following definitions for *sceawian* in Beowulf: "look, gaze, see, behold, observe" (p.293). None of these definitions suggests that the hilt is legible or that Hrothgar can read what is on it, let alone understand or interpret it. Hrothgar's interpretive relationship to the hilt is pointedly ambiguous.

Overing articulates the interpretive difficulty the hilt poses: "Is Hrothgar actually *reading* the sword as text, or is he making it his own text, or are we as readers claiming it

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[25] As Frantzen points out, this is the only occurrence of *writan* in Beowulf (p.184). He uses the verb, associating it with *forwritan*, which describes Beowulf's assault on the dragon, to think about the association between cutting through and writing. The hilt is the only written story in the entire poem. In his work, Frantzen responds to a tradition of criticism that dismisses the significance of the hilt and assumes that it is directly linked to Hrothgar's speech:

> Criticism of the poem, to the extent that it notices the sword hilt, imagines that Hrothgar's harangue somehow expands on or constructs an exegesis of the story on the hilt. [...] I now invite us to suppose that these two texts diverge and that Hrothgar's speech counteracts the text on the hilt. (p.188)

as our own text?" (p.61).[26] The poet makes the nature of what Hrothgar looks at as ambiguous as his interpretive relationship to it; *writan* renders opaque whether he sees figures or a written narrative and whether or not what is depicted is interpretable without the background information provided by the poet about the giants' defiance of God.[27] The poet concludes the description with the runes that identify the original owner to whom Hrothgar is now unknowingly linked through his possession of the hilt. That the runes differ from the rest of the hilt imply that the myth of the giants is drawn and not written, but if the hilt comes from a time before, it seems unlikely that that time shares a language with the Danes. Marjane Osborne cites a "rune-inscribed sword pommel in Liverpool City Museum" to argue that "what is written about the ancient fight suggests that the poet has in his mind's eye a combination of runic and nonrunic inscriptions, which is quite possible in his own time but is improbable in Beowulf's" (p.977). The hilt itself is out of time, anachronistic like Judith's prayer to the Trinity. Just as the story

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[26] Overing goes on "from the point of view of sign interaction" to think through the relationship between Hrothgar's interpretive experience of the hilt and his speech (p.61). Lerer suggests that "both the text [on the hilt] and the speech address problems in the order of the world and in the place of social remembrance in the reverence of divinity" (p.173). I agree with Frantzen that the hilt and its text offers an example of an unreadable moment in the poem and that we cannot assume, given the vagueness of the verbs, that Hrothgar performs "an exegesis of the story on the hilt" (Frantzen, p.188).

[27] Osborne argues that Hrothgar cannot read what he sees, but the poet construes his interpretive relationship to the hilt even more opaquely. It is not clear what Hrothgar can see, much as it is not even clear what is literally on the hilt. In this argument, I suggest a middle ground between Osborne and Lerer, who argues that:

> The poet tells us what is written on the hilt both to associate us with the king as readers and to distinguish us as a different kind of reader from him. [...] Our sense of events precisely matches his, as we are drawn into the narrative time of the poem's fiction. (p.165)

He goes on to argue that different understandings of the hilt suggest not the gap between Christian and pagan, but "the differing conventions of interpretation" (pp.171-2). In contrast to Frantzen and Osborne, Lerer sees the sword as a "unified whole [...] the inscription is wholly runic" (p.171).

cannot be known to the characters, but is in their world nonetheless, the hilt is an impossibility that exists amongst them. Once Hrothgar starts to speak, what he says has little relation to what the audience knows is on the hilt.[28] He pledges his friendship to Beowulf, tells the story of Heremod, warning Beowulf about the dangers of abusing power, and laments the ephemeral nature of life and youth. Both physically present and indecipherable, the hilt is unintelligible, rendering it the ideal emblem to stand in for Grendel's Mother.

Throughout the poem, the relationship between the characters and Grendel´s Mother mimics that between Hrothgar and the hilt; they find it difficult to identify exactly what Grendel's Mother is or what exactly renders her their enemy. This puts her in stark contrast with Grendel whom both poet and characters agree is the sworn enemy of the Danes and whose head, like his arm, confirms his rank and role. Grendel kills men for the sheer gustatory pleasure of it, to silence the hall, and to destroy the happiness he associates with the human community. On his last trip to Heorot, after he rips open the doors, the poet describes him thus:

> þa his mod ahlog;
>
> mynte þæt he gedælde, ærþon dæg cwome,
>
> atol aglæca, anra gehwylces
>
> lif wið lice, þa him alumpen wæs
>
> wistfylle wen

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[28] As Seth Lerer neatly summarizes the effect of the hilt on the audience,

> The hilt confronts the reader with an alien set of signs; it challenges the viewer to interpret and explain; and it impress the beholder as a work of artifice, whose intricate and possibly otherworldly workmanship reflects on techniques of verbal craft that shapes its literary presentation. (p.159)

> [Then his heart laughed;/ evil monster, he thought he would take/ the life from each body, eat them all/ before day came; the gluttonous thought/ of a full-bellied feast was hot upon him.] (Ll.730-4)

On the other hand, the poet never tells what happens when Grendel's Mother comes to the hall; like the characters, we only witness her escape and the aftermath. Still, the language that surrounds her attack differs from the poet's descriptions of the pleasure Grendel enjoys in anticipating his kills. In taking Æchere, the poet explains that Grendel's Mother seeks compensation for the life of her son:

> Hream wearð in Heorote; heo under heolfre genam
> cuþe folme; cearu wæs geniwod,
> geworden in wicun. Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til,
> þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon
> freonda feorum.
> [Shouts came from Heorotæ she had seized in its gore/ the famous claw-arm; then grief was renewed,/ came again to that building. No good exchange/ that those on both sides had to pay with the lives/ of kinsmen and friends.] (Ll.1302-6)

The killing of Æshere is described as a *gewrixle*, an exchange or purchase (Hall, p.423). The language of exchange continues with the infinitive *bicgan*, "to buy, pay for, or acquire" (Hall, p.61). According to the poet, the death is an unfortunate example of retributive violence in which life is exchanged for life. Her removal of the arm acts as an interpretive clue, underscoring that she perceives Æshere as a payment for her son and that she wishes to repossess Grendel.

As a marginal figure, Grendel's Mother cannot receive a man price for Grendel, but she does exact revenge; she achieves *wraec* [vengeance] and a symbolic *wergild* [compensation of a man's life] (Hall, p.421; p.405).[29] As Carol Clover explains about the Germanic world, "women were, in theory, exempt from feud violence" ("Regardless," p.366). She continues, clarifying that they could be involved in revenge: "women's role, in blood feud, in 'choosing the avenger' involved them centrally in the family politics of honor and inheritance" ("Regardless," p.366). Grendel's Mother's efforts at feud resolution distinguish her markedly from her son who, as the poet explains, has no interest in the resolution of the feud:

> [...] Sibbe ne wolde
>
> wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,
>
> feorh beao feorran, fea þingian,
>
> ne þær nænig witena wenan þorfte
>
> beorhtre bote to banan folmum

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[29] In the Germania, Tacitus explains that homicide is successfully handled through payment and exchange so that peace amongst families can be preserved:

> Suscipere tam inimicitias seu patris seu propinqui quam amicitias necesse est; nec implacabiles durant: luitur enim etiam homicidium certo armentorum ac pecorum numero recipitque satisfactionem universa domus...
>
> [All the enmities of your house, whether of your father or of your kindred, you must necessarily adopt; as well as all their friendships. Neither are such enmities unappeasable and permanent: since even for so great a crime as homicide, compensation is made by a fixed number of sheep and cattle, and by it the whole family is pacified to content.]

[He wanted no peace/ with any of the men in the Danish host/ to put off his killing, settle it by payment;/ none of the counselors had any great need/ to look for bright gifts from his reddened hands.] (Ll.154-8)

In Hrothgar's description of what Grendel's Mother has done by taking Æschere, his vacillations reflect both how hard she is to imagine for him and that her attack makes sense to him. He explains that

Wearð him on Heorote to hand-banan
wæl-gæst wæfre; ic
ne wat hwæder
atol æse wlanc eft-siðas teah,
fylle gefrægnod. Heo þa fæhðe wræc,
Þe þu gystran niht Grendel cwealdest
[...]
He æt wige gecrang
ealdres svyldig ond nu oþer cwom
mihtig man scaða, wolde hyre mæg wrecan,
ge feor hafað fæhðe gestæled.

[Here within Heorot a restless corpse-spirit/ became his killer. I do not know/ where she went with his body, a flesh-proud, terrible,/ infamous in slaughter. She avenged that feud/ in which, last night, you killed Grendel [...] In battle he fell,/ life-forfeit in guilt; now another has come,/ mighty in her evil, would avenge her son, and too long a way has she pushed her revenge.] (Ll.1330-34, 1337-40)

As Hrothgar begins, he imagines Grendel's Mother as a Grendel-like figure, raging in the hall, rejoicing in her escape, and eating the corpse of his thane. Within three lines, however, he returns to the logic of the poet, providing a sensible rationale for her attack: she wants to *wrecan* or avenge her kinsman who died in a fight. (Hall, p.422) *Wrecan* reappears as Grendel's Mother and Beowulf wrestle in the under-water hall; interrupting the battle, the poet reminds the audience again of the logic behind the feud: "Ofsæt þa þone sele-gyst ond hyre seax geteah,/ brad, brun-ecg; wolde hire bearn *wrecan*,/ angan eaferan" [She sat on her hall-guest and drew her broad knife,/ a sharp weapon, to buy back her son,/ her only kinsman] (Ll.1545-7). The Danes and the heroes of the poem find such an instinct both coherent and heroic; their ambivalence about sympathizing with Grendel's Mother indicates the representational problems she poses. Initially terming her *atol*, Hrothgar attributes human logic to her only to describe her later with the suitably ambiguous *oþer* and the gender indefinite *mihtig man*. In using a neuter pronoun as well as *heo* as he describes her violence in logical, retributive terms, Hrothgar raises questions about gendering and humanizing her and introduces a potential pun as *man* can mean "one" or, as a noun, "evil deed, crime, wickedness" (Hall, p.228). Beowulf also acknowledges the gender confusion she creates by referring to her with the masculine pronoun *he* instead of the feminine *heo* as he describes how he will stop her escape: "no he on helm losaþ,/ ne on foldan fæþm, ne on fyrgen-holt,/ ne on gyfenes grund, ga þær he wille" [he will find no escape/ in the depths of the earth, nor the wooded mountain,/ nor the bottom of the sea, let him go where he will] (Ll.1392-4). The inconsistency of Hrothgar's and Beowulf's description of Grendel's Mother and her actions underscores her illegibility. Butler's crisis emerges clearly: Grendel's Mother exists, but the culture

and language of the poem find her to be an impossibility because she defies representational language and systems. She is physically and conceptually unrecognizable.

Unlike Grendel, then, Grendel's Mother defies clear classification in gendered or human terms. Like literary critics, her fellow characters are not quite sure what she is, although they are sure, as with Judith, that there is something not quite right about her. Overing, who omits Grendel's Mother from her analysis because she is not human, argues, "Grendel's Mother is not quite human, or, rather, she has her own particular brand of otherness; her inhuman affiliation and propensities make it hard to distinguish between what is monstrous and what is female" (p.230).[30] Grendel's Mother complicates the negotiation and representation of difference; she undermines stable categories. Klein argues that what makes Grendel's Mother so offensive to the poem is that she acts as the "agent of retaliatory violence," an exclusively masculine role ("Ruling," p.105). She construes Grendel's Mother as an example of the necessary challenge female violence poses to masculine heroism. In avenging her son, Grendel's Mother embodies a gender transgression and enables the construction of masculine heroism in opposition to her:

> In a culture in which heroic masculinity is predicated on violence, women's enactment of violence must be fiercely curtailed in order to maintain clear boundaries of sexual difference. At the same time, because

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[30]Overing writes that Beowulf is the "most accomplished binarist in the whole poem" (p.84). In Beowulf and Anglo-Saxon poetry, women, she contends, function as "hysterics," outside of "the symbolic system" of the gender binary:

> One of society's anomalies [...] those who fall between the cracks of the symbolic system [...] the hysteric's essential quality is that of ambiguity: is she a heroine or victim, does she dismantle or reinforce the structures that contain her. (pp.75-6)

> the making of male heroes in the poem is premised in part on the hero's ability to overcome, with no small difficulty, an almost-female antagonist, female insurrection must be perpetually reproduced in order to allow the creation of the male hero. ("Ruling," p.111)

For Klein, the instability provided by a violent female character is cancelled out by the role such a figure plays in stabilizing the construction of the male hero. When Beowulf kills Grendel's Mother, he performs the double function of restabilizing the gender system that makes men the unique retaliators and asserting his masculine heroism. However, while masculine heroism is defined in opposition to defiant feminine figures, Grendel's Mother also reveals the tenuous status of the categories of femininity, masculinity, and humanity in the poem. Ultimately, the failure of the gender binary or any of the other binaries in the poem to identify Grendel's Mother works as the poet's critique of the stability of binaries and the reliance of the heroic world on them.

In describing Grendel's Mother, characters and the poet confuse gendered pronouns and create species-crossing compounds.[31] Grendel's Mother has no specific name, and is only identified by her relationship to her son. Compounds that are unique to the poem confirm the multiple registers of her identity: *mere-wife* [mere woman,] *brim-wylf* [wolf of the sea or lake,] and *grund-wyrgenne* [water evil].[32] The poet describes her

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[31] Jane Chance interprets Grendel's Mother as an epic anti-type of the virgin and the queen. Described in human and social terms, she is, for Chance, an inversion of the ideal Anglo-Saxon woman and a parody of the Virgin Mary.

[32] These are points of description that have been consistently used since Chance. Kevin Kiernan argues that

> By putting aside her monstrous pedigree and the ugly fact that she gave birth to Grendel, a devil's advocate can find plenty of evidence for defending Grendel's Mother as a heroic figure. Because she is a monster,

strength in an awkward and vague comparison: "Wæs se gryre læssa/ efne swa micle swa bið mægþa cræft,/ wiggryre wifes, be wæpnedmen" [terror was the less/ by just so much as the strength of women,/ attack of battle wives, compared to armed men] (Ll.1282-4). By comparing Grendel's Mother to a *wig-gryre wifes*, another compound unique to this poem, the poet highlights how non-normative her use of violence is; women and in particular wives function not as warriors in battle, but as peace weavers who merge the potentially conflicted interests of two masculine parties. The term *wiggryre wifes* also suggests that righteous female violence might be contained on the battlefield whereas Grendel's Mother, like Judith, is not violent on the field, but in the allegedly safe space of the hall and in her own mere. Like a peace weaver, Grendel's Mother seeks to end the feud: she does not do so through marriage, but through violence. With the well-known exception of Modthryth whose violence is tamed by her marriage, the women of Beowulf suffer the burden of being exchanged objects in failed marriages.[33] The example of Modthryth suggests the effectiveness of marriage as an institution that stabilizes gender difference by publicly transforming her into a wife and queen.[34]

The relationship between women and violence is, for the most part, defined by feud resolution in Beowulf; these efforts almost always fail. Wealhtheow moves through

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> however, her case turns out to be an indictment of the kind of heroism she represents. (p.31)

[33] This is not to say that these women can be dismissed as passive victims. Overing assesses and resists this critical consensus on Anglo-Saxon women:

> No one can deny that women suffer a great deal in Old English poetry, what I am objecting to in these arguments is the basic conceptual assumption of women as passive, suffering victim, which is then placed in binary opposition to, and measured against male aggression...This denies the power of the hysteric and the vitality of the poetry. (p.78)

[34] Overing describes Modthryth in her pre-marriage state as "vain, mean, proud, apparently gratuitously violent, aggressive, power hungry [...] display[ing] an almost causal contempt for men" (pp.102-3).

the first welcoming feast at Heorot to offer Beowulf a cup, a gift that should guarantee his help: "grette Geata leod, Gode þancode/ wis-fæst wordum, þæs ðe se willa gelamp,/ þæt heo on ænige eorl gelyfde/ fyrena forfre" [She greeted him well, gave thanks to God, wise in her words, that her wish came to pass,/ that she might expect help against crimes/from any man] (Ll.625-8). Immediately after the *scop* tells the story of the fight at Finnsburgh, Wealhtheow approaches Hrothgar and Hrothulf, their nephew, passing a cup at the feast. While she first celebrates the joy of the feast, the victory of the Geats, and the cleansing of the hall, her tone changes as she suggests to Hrothgar that Hrothulf, her nephew, would treat their sons fairly were Hrothgar to die (Ll.1169-87). At the end of her speech, the poet remarks that she turned to look significantly at their sons, but the speech is ominously preceded by the poet's warning that Wealhtheow's words are in vain since the current peace between Hrothgar and Hrothulf is ephemeral: "þa cwom Wealhþeo forð/ gan under gyldnum beage þær þa godan twegen/ sæton suhterge-fæderan; þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere, æghwylc oðrum trywe" [Wealhtheow came forth,/ glistening in gold, to greet the good pair,/ uncle and nephew; their peace was still firm, each true to the other] (Ll.1162-5). Wealtheow's failed efforts at literal peace weaving in her family come pointedly after the Finnsburgh episode in which Hilderburh, a peace weaver, loses her brother, husband, and son in two battles. The *scop* begins and ends the episode by lamenting the fate of Hildeburh. He sings that:

> Ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte
> Eotena treowe; unsynnum wearð
> beloren leofum æt þam [l]i[n]d-plegan
> bearnum ond broðrum; hie on gebyrd hruron

gare wunder; þæt wæs geomuru ides!

[No need at all that Hilderburh praise/ the faith of the "giants"; guiltless herself,/ she lost her loved ones in that clash of shields,/ her son and brother – they were born to fall,/ slain by spear-thrusts. She knew deep grief.] (Ll.1071-5)

After her husband is killed, the Danes load Hildeburh on the ships along with other goods and take her home; the *scop* concludes with the terrible image of Hildeburh on the ship: "Hie on sæ-lade/ drihtlice wif to Denum feredon,/ læddon to leodum" [Over the sea/ they carried the queen back to the Danes,/ brought her to her people] (Ll.1157-9). When Beowulf returns home and reports to Hygelac, he imagines that the peace weaving marriage Hrothgar has arranged for Freawaru, his daughter, to Ingeld, a Heathobard, will fail. Neither the marriage nor the failure has transpired, yet Beowulf feels sure of his prediction: "Oft seldan hwær/ æfter leod-hryre lytle hwile/ bon-gar bugeð, þeah seo bryd duge!" [But seldom anywhere,/ after a slaying, will the death-spear rest,/ even for a while, though the bride be good] (2029-31). Once the older men in the hall spy the weapons that were once theirs on her retainers, the memory of old feuds will return and incite violence in the young men. That violence and the renewal of the feud will cancel out any unity or passion promised by the marriage.

Grendel's Mother does not peace weave, even if her retaliatory violence seems intended to end the feud between her family and Heorot; she assumes the masculine role of avenger and, in doing so, troubles not only the gender binary but how the Danes define their enemies. The Danes perceive Grendel's Mother as an enemy, but she has kept to herself until provoked by the death of her son, rendering her enemy status less apparent

than Grendel's and putting her story more in line with the many convoluted human feuds that preoccupy the digressions. In fact, her quest to avenge what she seems to perceive as the murder of her son recalls the bloody, muddled context of the fight at Finnsburgh, sung by the *scop* at the banquet celebrating Grendel's defeat and immediately preceding her attack. The Danes emerge victorious, but the story delves into the personal and communal tolls such feuds take. Unlike Hildeburh, Grendel's Mother actively intervenes in the feud. Much as Hengist cannot let Hnaef go unavenged, despite his promise to the contrary, she will not forego retribution for Grendel's death; both are troubling, if sympathetic avengers. The stories of Grendel's Mother and Finn suggest the difficulty in bringing a feud, especially one whose origin lies in a malicious, relatively arbitrary attack, to conclusion. Their convoluted, emotional nature makes murky the definition of an enemy. Again and again in Beowulf, the characters listen to the songs of the *scop* that tell of how difficult it is to decipher an enemy from a friend, how peace weaving and *wergild* fail, how heroes become selfish, but they act without heeding these warnings and history is allowed to repeat itself.

In Beowulf, Grendel's Mother is impossible to classify. She has no name. She is described as masculine and feminine, as animal and human. Her quest for *wraec* is both logical and unacceptable. Although her strength is described as less than that of a man, she nearly kills Beowulf. Grendel's Mother only attacks the Danes, only becomes violent, when she is provoked by the death of her kinsman; her violence has a coherent cause, but as a violent woman she is unintelligible. Her death receives no official acknowledgment as her son's does in the parade and banquet; instead, she becomes part of the narrative lore that makes Beowulf a hero. Butler theorizes what it means not to

recognize a death and, by extension, how the official recognition of death can serve a larger goal. In writing about the effect of violence against people who are not recognized as human, Butler wonders how that which does not exist can be destroyed:

> What, then, is the relation between violence and those lives considered as "unreal"? Does the violence affect that unreality? Does violence take place on the condition of that unreality? If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated (again and again). [...] The derealization of the "Other" means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral. ("Precarious," pp.33-4)

Dead or alive, Grendel's Mother is an entirely unseen and unintelligible figure, but she still must be "negated" even if that negation suggests that her unintelligibility is far from negligible but, in fact, a dangerous threat to the orderly continuation of the poem's world. In "Violence, Mourning, and Politics," Butler considers the implication of the obituary, the impossibility of the post-mortem narration of a life that never existed, and the central problem posed by the cessation of such a life. She argues that

> I think we have to ask, again and again, how the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. It is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes note-worthy. As a result, we have to consider the obituary as an act of nation-building. The matter is not a simple one, for, if a life is not grievable, it is

> not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable. ("Precarious," p.34)

If Grendel's head functions as an obituary, a physical rather than a narrative acknowledgment of a life lived and real that has ended, then Grendel can be a grievable and endable life. Moreover, his death allows the Danes to unite against an entity that they perceive as a monstrous, violent other who has attacked their hall and killed their people for twelve winters. At the two banquets that celebrate Beowulf's victory over Grendel, the arm and then the head signify his reality and the end of that reality. His death, even if it is at the hands of Beowulf, another outsider, marks their communal victory and the victory of the ostensibly good and human that the hall represents. Grendel's Mother's death, unlike her son's, does not receive recognition and cannot serve such a unifying purpose.

In Robert Zemeckis' 2007 film adaptation of the poem, the questions of whether Grendel's Mother can die and what constitutes her existence resolve, albeit suspiciously, the ambiguity of the feud between the Grendel family and Heorot. Zemeckis turns Grendel's Mother into an eternally spectral figure that haunts the poem, brings about violence, and cannot exist; although she is the principal driving force behind the conflicts at the center of the poem, she is neither human nor monster, but something else. In the film, Grendel's Mother turns out to be the source of the problems that plague Heorot. In fact, Zemeckis turns the battle between Heorot and the monsters into an inter-generational struggle that plagues the humans and feeds on male susceptibility to the sexual charms of Grendel's Mother, played conveniently by Angelina Jolie in animated foot-stilettos. In the final frame of the film, Grendel's Mother rises from the waters to

seduce Wiglaf, who has become Beowulf's heir, in order to perpetuate her hold on Heorot. An immortal figure, she provides a link between the past experience of Hrothgar (who allegedly fathered Grendel by her), the kingship of Beowulf (who fathered the Dragon, also by her), and potentially the future rule of Wiglaf. She embodies the fear of irresistible female sexuality in a particularly uncanny way: she is both unavoidably desirable and entirely destructive, even deadly. Her children, the products of these cursed liaisons, are destined to kill their fathers. Although the film is, at best, a very loose adaptation of the poem, the depiction of Grendel's Mother draws attention to the fact that the characters never receive any physical evidence of Grendel's Mother's death; they must rely on Beowulf's testimonial. While the poet does not outwardly suggest that there is anything suspect about Beowulf's account, the film turns that testimonial into a lie, more precisely, a cover story for forbidden sex. As she comes at Wiglaf from the water in the final frame, she embodies the spectral problems her figure poses. Grendel's Mother cannot be killed because she cannot really exist; she persists, as Butler explains, only in her spectral existence. That spectrality is far from negligible; as a source of violence and destruction, she must be destroyed even as the narrative insists that she does not exist.

Ownership of the hilt links Grendel's Mother to the world of the giants, their unchecked violence, and the retributive and violent destruction of them by God. The hilt records a violent time before the poem, a time from which a violent female figure could survive, as a *lafe* from that past.[35] As a recorder of that time, the hilt serves a purpose

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[35] Frantzen, Lerer, and Estes assume that the story on the hilt is "a story about the race from which Grendel and his mother descended" (Frantzen, p.186). This assumption, however, does not mean, as Franzten goes on to argue, that the content of the story is

very much like the *scop* whom the poem defines as "guma gilp-hlæden, gidda gemyndig,/ se ðe eal fela eald-gesegena/ worn gemunde, word oþer fand/ soðe gebunden" [glorying in words,/ the great old stories, who remembered them all,/ one after another, song upon song,/ found new words, bound them up truly] (Ll. 868-71). Like the *scop*, the hilt carries the past into the present through narrative and, in doing so, links the past and the present by trying to make the stories of the past relevant to the present. The poet also functions in parallel to the *scop*; his matter, as he explains in the first lines of the poem is: "Hwæt we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum/ þeodöcyninga þrym gefrunon,/ hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon" [Listen! We have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes/ in the old days, the kings of tribes - / how noble princes showed great courage!] (Ll.1-3).[36] The language of the poem and its subject matter further asserts his distance from his material as the poem is written in Anglo-Saxon about the Scandinavians. Beowulf is a poem about a past and the poet, like the *scop* and the hilt, serves as his audience's interpreter of that

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either transparent or a link to the race of Cain, which would imply that Beowulf has vanquished the Biblical line. As he explains, the nature of the story on the hilt is far from clear:

> The sword hilt is not necessarily a story of endings; it may quite possibly be a story of beginnings. It may tell of the beginning of an evil line, rather than its end, and in Beowulf it may serve to establish continuity between the curse of Cain, the descendants of creatures who escaped the flood, and the evil that has escaped Beowulf's own retribution and that will destroy him. (p.188)

[36] Even as the poet concludes his glorious description of the fall, he wraps up on an ominous note:

> Sele hlifade,
> heah ond horngeap, heaðowylma bad,
> laðan liges; ne wæs hit lenge þa gen
> þæt se ecghete aþumsweorum
> æfter wælniðe wæcnon scolde
> [The hall towered high,/ cliff-like, horn gabled, awaited the war flames,/ malicious burning; it was still not the time/ for the sharp-edged hate of his sworn son-in-law/ to rise against Hrothgar in murderous rage.](Ll.81-5)

time. Grendel's Mother comes from a past and as an object from the past she requires explanation and interpretation, but without the interpretive voice of the poet, the hilt would be simply an object. For his audience outside of the poem, the narrator provides a number of passages that contextualize the Danes and clarify what they know and do not know; he insists that Grendel and his mother come from a past that is indiscernible to them. As stories and relics from the past, the hilt and Grendel's Mother are implicitly connected to the present, but to the characters of the poem, they are unknowable. The characters lack the knowledge that the audience has that allows them to interpret the hilt and Grendel's Mother, if not to understand them completely. The tragedy of the Danes is that only knowledge of the past will allow them to understand their present and the poet conjures their relationship to the past as ambiguously as possible.

The hilt is not the first time that the narrator has associated Grendel and his mother with the past. The poet links Grendel to the early chapters of Genesis, as a way of introducing the character and opaquely describing the feud he has with Heorot.[37] Feuds and their often complex genealogies drive the narrative momentum of Beowulf; the absence of a clear source for this feud stands out. The poet offers one clue to why Grendel attacks Heorot. Grendel hates the song of the *scop*; his rage stems, the poet explains, from the pain it causes him. Hearing the din, Grendel despises the joy in the hall:

> [...] þær wæs hearpan sweg,
> swutol sang scopes. Sægde se þe cuþe
> frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,

[37] Hebrew Bible and other religious references are mostly isolated to the beginning of Beowulf and the first scribal hand.

cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worhte,

wlite-beorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð:

gesette sige hreþig sunnan ond monan

leoman to leohte land buendum,

ond gefrætwade foldan sceatas

leomum ond leafum; lif eac gesceop

cynna gewylcum, þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.

[The thrum of the harp, melodious chant,/ clear song of the scop. He spoke, who could tell/ the beginning of men, knew our ancient origins,/ told how the Almighty had made the earth,/ this bright shining plain which the waters surround:/ He, victory-creative, set out the brightness/ of sun and moon as lamps for earth-dwellers,/ adorned the green fields, the earth, with branches,/ shoots, and green leaves; and like He created,/ in each of the species which live and move.] (Ll.89-98)

As a descendant of Cain, Grendel is repelled by this joyous creation of the world; he is not part of the human celebration, but a descendant of the outcast. By rendering the content of the song potentially Biblical, the poet links Grendel with Genesis, but the details are vague enough to make this a generic creation myth, even the Germanic myth of creation. To the Christian poet and audience, however, the song can easily refer to Genesis even as the characters would then be listening to a song that they could not understand.[38]

[38] Marijane Osborn identifies two frames in the poem "the cosmic" and "the heroic," arguing that these frames are not in conflict, but reveal the different levels of knowledge in the poem. The *scop*'s song marks one of those moments in which there is a basic

The poet continues to paint a convoluted portrait of Grendel, providing a human and biblical genealogy that renders him ageless and mythic:

> [...] fifel-cynnes eard
>
> won-sæli wer weardode hwile,
>
> siþðan him Scyppend forscrifen hæfde
>
> in Caines cynne - þone cwealm gewræc
>
> ece Drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog.
>
> Ne gefeah he þære fæhðe, ac he hine feor forwræc,
>
> Metod for þy mane, man-cynne fram.
>
> Þanon untydras ealle onwocon,
>
> eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas,
>
> swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon
>
> lange þrage; he him ðæs lean forgeald.
>
> [Unblessed, unhappy,/ he dwelt for a time in the lair of the monsters/ after the Creator had outlawed, condemned them/ as kinsmen of Cain – for that murder God/ the Eternal took vengeance, when Cain killed Abel./ No joy that kin-slaughter: the Lord drove him out,/ far from mankind, for that unclean killing. From him sprang every misbegotten thing,/ monsters and elves and the walking dead,/ and also those giants who fought against God/ time and again; He paid them back in full.] (Ll.104-14)

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contradiction in the poem. The poet tells us that the Danes are pagans and yet their *scop* is singing a song of creation that parallels that of Genesis. In her reading of this scene, Osborn writes that "in these passages *the explicitly scriptural element is carefully kept separate from the perceptions of persons in the poem and is presented solely as a gloss for the audience*" (p.974). Osborn sees this difference operating, as I do, in the scene in which Hrothgar looks at the hilt, when the poet only tells the audience what is on it.

Grendel derives from the introduction of murder into the world, the first act of human violence.[39] From this moment of human violence comes a series of non-human figures that resemble Grendel in their marginal, questionably human existences. In a compelling overlap that winks at a narrative consistency hard to come by in Beowulf, the poet mentions the giants again who disdained God with their introduction of war.[40] While the poet links Grendel to Biblical history for his audience, he explicitly warns that Hrothgar's people are not privy to such critical information:

> Hwilum hie geheton æt hærg trafum
>
> Wig weorþunga, wordum bædon,
>
> Þæt him gast bona geoce gefremede
>
> Wið þeod þreaum. Swylce wæs þeaw hyra,
>
> Hæþenra hyht helle gemundon
>
> In mod sefan, Metod hie ne cuþon,
>
> Dæda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God
>
> Ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cuþon,
>
> Wuldres Waldend.
>
> [At times they prepares sacrifice in temples,/ war-idol offerings, said old words aloud,/ that the great soul-slayer might bring some comfort/ in their country's disaster. Such was their custom,/ the hope of the heathen; they

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[39]The narrator only cites the beginning of God's curse on Cain. Once Cain laments that he will wander an exile who will be slain, God replies: " 'Not so! If anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any one who came upon him should kill him" (Genesis 4.15). Following the logic of Genesis forward would suggest that Beowulf inherits this curse.

[40] These giants also fit into Genesis and the Germanic creation myth: Ymir, the first man, is a giant.

> remembered Hell/ in their deepest thoughts. They knew not the Lord,/ the Judge of our deeds were ignorant of God,/ knew not how to worship our Protector above,/ the King of Glory.] (Ll.175-83)

In this section of the poem, the poet specifically orients his reader as to what his characters know and cannot know. As pagans, the Christian world is outside their realm of knowledge. Later on and throughout the poem, characters will evoke God, God's mercy, and divine intervention, potentially contradicting the boundaries of knowledge that the poet sketched earlier. Beowulf is admittedly and fascinatingly inconsistent in this (and other) areas; nevertheless, these interruptions of the narrator, which cluster around the fights with Grendel and his mother, consistently reiterate the boundaries of human knowledge, explicitly emphasizing its limitations. Christianity occupies a similar space in the poem to that given to Grendel's Mother: both exist in the poem and are verbally acknowledged, but neither fully exists or fits into the world of the poem. The Danes live in a world that is influenced and penetrated by systems and figures that they can never fully decipher or know. They speak and hear the words of Christianity, but they never articulate any sense of the religion that would contradict the poet's descriptions of their ignorance. Similarly, they examine the hilt and its narratives and witness Grendel's Mother and experience her violence, but are ultimately unable to see what either is or benefit from that sight. In this case, knowledge of what Grendel and his family are might help the Danes, but once again they are confronted with a present, and not an interpretable, reality.

After Grendel's Mother's attack on the hall, Hrothgar describes the rumors he has heard about her and Grendel:

Ic þæt lond-buend, leode mine,

sele-rædende secgan hyrde,

Þæt hie gesawon swylce twegen

micle mearc-stapan moras healdan,

ellor-gæstas; ðæra oðer wæs,

þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton,

idese onlicnes oðer earm-sceapen

on weres wæstmum wræc-lastas træd,

næfne he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer;

Þone on gear-dagum ´Grendel´nemdon

fold-buende; no hie fæder cunnon,

hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned

dyrnra gasta. Hie dygel lond

warigeað, wulf-hleoþu.

[I have heard land-holders among my people,/ counselors in hall, speak of it thus:/ they sometimes have seen two such things,/ huge, vague borderers, walking the moors,/ spirits from elsewhere; so far as any man/ might clearly see, one of them walked/ in the likeness of a woman; the other, misshapen,/ stalked marshy wastes in the tracks of an exile,/ except that he was larger than any other man./ In earlier days the people of region/ named him Grendel. They know of no father/ from the old time, before them, among dark spirits./ A secret land they guard, high wolf-country.] (Ll.1345-58)

Hrothgar begins by citing his sources, underscoring the mediated nature of the information and his distance from it; the people who told him live under his rule, but not near Heorot, the emblem of Hrothgar's civilization. The figures live apart among animals and in an uninviting and almost magical place that Hrothgar lingers on and finally decrees: "Nis þæt heoru stow" [Not a pleasant place!] (1372). Eye-witness accounts are murky at best; they can just make out two figures that look like a man and a woman. The male creature, which seems to be more discernable, is huge and received his name from humans in *gear-dagum*. That he can be made out seems to mean that he is sufficiently intelligible to be named. Grendel's Mother, on the other hand, receives no name; the sources cannot quite see her. Hrothgar explains that they do not know their paternity and their ancestry in general is hidden, unknowable. Here, most strikingly, Hrothgar articulates the limits of his knowledge. He cannot know their ancestry or their paternity; these details exist outside his scope much like the Christian tradition into which the poet has inserted them. Not only can they not know their past, they cannot clearly see the monsters and, in particular, Grendel's Mother who can only be made out as shapes from a distance and translated into human terms.

When Grendel's head emerges from the mere, the Danes literally see the face of their enemy and celebrate their victory over their known enemy. Grendel's Mother's corpse, however, is physically relegated to the mere; the Danes never see her. She remains spectral. In death, she is as physically elusive to them as she was in life. Just as Hrothgar sees the hilt, but cannot interpret it, the Danes see Grendel's Mother, but they cannot see her well enough to decipher her or know what she is. In both cases, the Danes lack the knowledge to understand the significance of what they see, and this failure

condemns them. Beowulf's choice of object represents Grendel's Mother well, but his insistence on leaving her head in the mere also restores order and stability to the poem that her interruption of it threatened. By leaving the head in the mere and simply narrating the fight and what he witnessed there, Beowulf insists that Grendel is the enemy of the Danes and that his defeat marks the end of the feud. In doing so, he implicitly effeminizes Grendel's Mother, resisting the complications she poses to the poem's understanding of the relationship between violence and gender. Still, the poem resists and counterbalances Beowulf's repressive urges; he may wish to erase her unintelligibility, but the poet has described her in full and Beowulf's rejection of her head further confirms her as an impossibility to the characters. While Grendel's head can represent him physically because his status as masculine homicide fits within the gender matrix of the poem, his mother becomes another story that will enter the corpus of stories that surrounds Beowulf and compounds his heroism. As a story, moreover, Grendel's Mother becomes like the other digressions in the poem and the hilt, part of a messy past that is analogous to the present, but damningly ignored by the characters.

In this chapter, I have used Butler's theory of unintelligibility to engage the representational problems that Judith and Grendel's Mother embody in their respective texts. Although both women are violent in understandable and intelligible ways, they defy clear categorization and, in doing so, undermine the naturalization of binary gender. The character of Judith defies the substantial literary efforts of Aldhelm, Ælfric, and the Judith poet to define exactly what she is. Because she is violent, Judith undermines efforts at being used as a clear and simple example of chastity, purity, or national defense; instead, she fluidly adopts identities and genders as the situation demands. The

result is a figure that undermines the stability of the gender binary, but remains intelligibly human. Aldhelm and Ælfric try to contain her, but such efforts always fail as they transparently point to the less obedient aspects of the narrative. The Judith poet may embrace all of Judith's character and narrative, but the result is the portrait of an incoherent, if celebrated, figure. She undermines the naturalization of the gender binary and other binaries, such as Christian/Jew, warrior/Christian, past/present that underwrite what is intelligible. In the end, however, Judith is not a victim of textual, authorial, or physical violence; she is a cipher, a role that by definition renders binaries un-essential, but she is anchored by her presence as a Biblical heroine, considered canonical by the Anglo-Saxons.

Grendel's Mother also defies binary gender in her use of violence, but she is both physically and conceptually unintelligible, so much so that the characters in the poem cannot see her. Best represented by the remnant of a broken sword, Grendel's Mother is spectral, a presence that cannot be recognized despite her use of physical violence, a prime example of the threat posed to the system of intelligibility by that which has been deemed unreal but actually exists. The Danes want and do destroy her even as they seem to understand why she acts as she does; their violence, as Butler explains, is a reaction to the ways in which her presence, despite its impossibility, undermines their organization of their lives through binaries that persistently collapse, revealing an unstable and dangerous territory.

In the following chapter, I continue to explore the fundamental unintelligibility of violent women and the challenges they pose to generic or ideological systems that rely on binary gender. In this chapter, the women who are violent differ from Judith and

Grendel's Mother in that their violence would be morally unacceptable even if it were committed by a man. Judith rescues her people and Grendel's Mother avenges her son, but Procne and Philomela are simply vengeful and, in being vengeful, they take another innocent victim: Itis, Procne's son. In killing Itis and preparing him as a stew that his rapist father eats, Procne becomes a full -fledged infanticide who uses her son's body to rape her husband orally. Her own heinous act upsets the distinction between masculinity and femininity that the act of rape violently asserts. While in his version of the myth in the Metamorphosis, Ovid spreads the guilt for the crime across the three adult actors, turning them all into birds marked by their crimes, Chaucer and Gower set their narrators up to try to contain and erase this depiction of femininity as capable of such violence. In The Legend of Good Women, Chaucer's narrator defines the limits of "good" femininity by ending the myth before the sisters' revenge, while Genius, Gower's narrator, tells the whole story and then finds himself in the impossible situation of coherently interpreting a story that upends binary gender completely and violently. In order to make the story "fit" into his larger narrative, to make it intelligible in the larger work, he interprets the story along gender binary lines, making the women the victims and the men the aggressors. The mismatch reveals that violent women terrifyingly compromise naturalized gender and that such a vision is impossible to Chaucer's narrator and Gower's Genius.

Procne as Tyrant Raviner and the Crisis of Infanticide

As the Man of Law prepares to tell his tale in The Canterbury Tales, he laments that Chaucer has told all the tales worth telling, even if he "kan but lewedly/ on metres and on rymyng craftily" (lines 47-8).[1] He does not end his complaint there, but goes on to list "thise noble wyves and thise loveris eke" who appear in "the Seintes Legende of Cupide" and comprise the "thrifty" material that the Man of Law would deign to make his own (61; 46). The two stories that have not been ruined by Chaucer's imprimatur in the Legend of Good Women, that of Apollonius of Tyre and of Canacee, he deems too terrible for either reading or telling. As his prologue draws to a close, he declares his freedom from anxiety about Chaucer or any of his other predecessors and his intent to forge ahead in prose. Or, as he puts it, "but nathelees, I recche noght a bene/ Though I come after him with hawebake" (94-6).

Once he has told his tale of Custance, it becomes clear why the Man of Law felt that Chaucer had run through all the good story-telling material in the Legend: his tale could easily pass as a Christian addition to the secular legends that the narrator of the Legend adapts to appease the God of Love. To fulfill the terms of his penance for misogynistic writing, the narrator turns classical heroines into victims of male abuse and betrayal, adapting their stories as necessary to fit his criteria. The tale of Custance would need little editing to join this collection. Early in the tale, the Man of Law quotes the

[1] All references to Chaucer come from The Riverside Chaucer, edited by Larry D. Benson, and will be to line number.

"commune voys of every man" to describe Custance, the Christian daughter of the Roman Emperor:

> In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
>
> Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
>
> To alle hire werkes vertu is hir gyde;
>
> Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.
>
> She is mirour of alle curteisye;
>
> Hire herte is verray chamber of hoolynesse,
>
> Hir hand, minister of fredam for almesse. (Ll.155;162-8)

As if in acknowledgment of a potentially hyperbolic quality to his portrait, the Man of Law verifies the judgment of the "commune voys" which agrees that "al this voys was sooth, as God is trewe" (Ll.169). But, in the tradition of both courtly literature and lyric, romance, and hagiography, such a "mirour" of feminine perfection cannot be known to be true until the subject has been tested and proven; oaths and verbal testimonials will not suffice. And so the Man of Law, having declared his genre with his description of his saintly heroine, announces that the tale, inevitably a narrative of testing intended to verify this opening gambit, will begin: "But now to purpos lat us turne again" (Ll.170).

Married to the Muslim Sultan of Syria who promises to convert, Custance suffers the machinations of pagans, mother-in-laws, and spurned suitors, murder accusations, and a year-long boat trip without protest, trusting completely in the grace of God. Although, like the narrator and the "commune voys," merchants attest to her beauty and virtue, the Man of Law fulfills the "purpos" of his story by proving Custance's value through a series of daunting trials. In despair over her father's willingness to marry her to a pagan,

Custance laments that she is powerless to disobey his wishes because "women are born to thraldom and penance,/ And to been under mannes governance" (Ll.286-7). The perils she endures, the "thraldom and penance," are a birth right of her sex; like her counterparts in the Legend, Custance is a secular saint in a literary tradition in which victimization "under mannes governance" demonstrates both her merit and the essentialism of her gender.

The Man of Law's meditation on his relationship to Chaucer, his list of "thise noble wyves and thise loveris eke," and his choice of tale put him transparently in conversation with the Legend and with John Gower's Confessio Amantis.[2] While the tale of Custance could easily find a place in the Legend, it is equally well suited to the Confessio, as yet another example of the sins that lovers commit against women. Unsurprisingly, then, the tale does appear in the second book of the Confessio as an

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[2] Gower began writing the Confessio around 1386, approximately the time Chaucer started the Legend. From approximately 1374 through the 1390s, Chaucer and Gower were part of a similar literary and intellectual coterie. Paul Strohm writes that "in Gower and Strode, Chaucer invokes what might be considered a special "interpretive community" within the larger community comprised by his whole contemporary audience" ("Social," p.59). The existence of this "interpretive community" along with the thematic similarities between the Confessio and the Legend have led critics to imagine that the texts were written alongside each other or in competition (Watt, "Amoral," p.5). In his detailed study of the similarities between the two texts, John Fisher goes so far as to argue that "both the historical context and the special resemblances support the inference that the Confessio and the Legend were designed for concurrent presentation, their "metiere et sens" dictated by their royal patrons" (p.242). Comparative work on the authors has been (in)famously unkind to "moral Gower" whose work appears relatively limited in scope and style. Eric W. Stockton sums up the relationship when he writes that "since Elizabethan times he [Chaucer] and Gower have been contrasted, rather than compared [...] The important difference between the two poets is, of course, that Chaucer is of imaginative genius while Gower is not" (pp.43; 44). Recently, Elizabeth Allen, Karma Lochrie, and Diane Watt have tried to rescue Gower from the unflattering implications of his epithet and to portray him as an under appreciated and subversive poet whose corpus reflects fourteenth century sensibilities. Gower has become significantly more popular as suggested by the 2008 First International Congress of the John Gower Society "1408-2008: The Age of Gower".

example of envy.[3] The Confessio was written before the Canterbury Tales and the Man of Law's prologue lingers over the problem of sources and adaptations and flirts with reference to Gower's work. It is hard to imagine that Chaucer did not knowingly give the Man of Law a story that Gower had used to connect the prologue and tale by continuing to engage what it means to recycle well-known material.[4] While the Confessio and the Legend frequently overlap in translated material, some of which the Man of Law mentions, Gower also includes the incestuous stories of Appollonius of Tyre and Canacee that the Man of Law explicitly dismisses as full of "swiche unkynde abhomynacions" (88).[5] Canacee appears in the third book of the Confessio as an example of why lovers should avoid wrath; Apollonius is the final exemplum of the Confessio, extending over thousands of lines in the eighth and final book as an example of incest. Although the Man of Law's slighting reference to two of Gower's better known tales has been taken as an example of hostility between the two authors, his choice of tale along with his reference to these particular tales in his prologue links him and his tale to the Confessio and, moreover, to a literary tradition shared by the Confessio, the story of Custance, and Chaucer's legends. Despite the Man of Law's disdain for them, those "cursed stories"

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[3] All references to the Confessio come from G.C. Macaulay's edition of The Complete Works of John Gower. See Book II, lines 587-1603.

[4] Chaucer and Gower may have been friends, which might suggest a joke underlying this overlap. In 1378, Chaucer named Gower one of his legal attorneys before going on a second diplomatic trip to Italy. He refers directly to Gower twice: in the dedications of the Troilus to "moral Gower" and in the Man of Law's Prologue. Gower praises Chaucer in an early version of the Confessio and subsequently removed the lines in a second revision. While much has been made of this subtraction, for Anne Middleton, a coterie reference to Chaucer may have seemed inappropriate or unnecessary to Gower as his work gained a larger audience. In "Rivalry, Rape, and Manhood: Gower and Chaucer," Carolyn Dinshaw suggests that the legacy of the fight fueled a comparative approach to the poets that aggrandized Chaucer.

[5] The Squire, in his interrupted tale, tells a version of the story of Canacee, but is interrupted before he can finish.

follow his and Gower's tale of Custance in defining exemplary femininity by the passive acceptance of victimization. In accordance with Custance's dismal proclamation, the heroines of these texts accept their own suffering as a defining attribute of being women and, more specifically, of being good women.

Ovid's myth of Philomela appears in both the Legend and the Confessio; it is a curious addition to both texts. Once Tereus, Procne's husband, has raped Philomela, her sister, the women kill Itis, Procne's son, and feed him to his unknowing father in a well-seasoned stew. The myth ends when the gods interrupt the cycle of violence by turning the three adults into birds.[6] Gower's Genius, high priest of love, confessor, and narrator, and Chaucer's penitent narrator both try to make Ovid's myth an example of virtuous and tragic female suffering by focusing on the rape and mutilation of Philomela to the exclusion of the sisters' revenge and by turning Tereus into the lone villain. By focusing on the rape and not on the infanticide, critics have, for the most part, followed suit.[7] Ever since the publication of Susan Brownmiller's Against our Will, feminists have written about rape and its consequences for individuals and for a society in which rape and fear of rape are defining features of the female experience. This fear, as Brownmiller argued and others continue to argue, defines women as victims of masculine violence, shapes power dynamics, and (re)asserts gender hierarchies.[8] Since the 1990s, feminist critics have used the myth of Philomela and its many literary adaptations to pursue the

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[6] Ovid refers to Procne while Gower spells Procne variously and Chaucer spells the name "Procne." For the sake of clarity, I have modernized Chaucer's spelling and so refer to "Procne" throughout.

[7] E. Jane Burns, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Diane Watt draw parallels between rape and cannibalism, but they do not consider the larger implications of the parallel for the coherence of Gower's text.

[8] See, to name a few, the work of Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin, Susan Brisson, and Catherine A. Mackinnon.

representations of rape, the possibility and range of female responses to rape, and for authorial misogyny.[9] Both Chaucer's narrator and Genius consistently express unqualified disapproval of rape, and both narrators use the scene of the rape to assert the stable gender identities that Brownmiller associates with rape. The essentialism of female fear and male aggression suits the framing theory of the Legend and the courtly love backdrop of the Confessio.

Genius uses the myth as an example of why the good lover should not rape his beloved, and the narrator of the Legend uses it to illustrate that badly men treat women. In order to make the myth support their premises, the narrators must contain the second half of the myth in which Procne disrupts the well-established tradition of feminine passivity by violently avenging her sister. Chaucer's narrator omits the scene, leaving the sisters weeping together; his editorial gesture implicitly equates good femininity with passive suffering. Genius, on the other hand, tells the entire story, but then finds himself in the impossible situation of making the myth fit his meaning, a meaning that is underwritten by the same binary assumptions about gender and violence that are inherent in the Legend and the Man of Law's tale. As it is for Chaucer's narrator, if less explicitly, the myth, for Genius, exemplifies the perils of rape and aligns masculinity with

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[9] A great deal of work on the myth in the nineties was in reaction to Evelyn Vitz's attack on Katherine Gravdal's Ravishing Maidens, one of the earliest studies of rape in medieval literature. Gravdal identifies images and references to rape through Old French literature; by rereading courtly literature through the lens of rape, she argues that rape and the devaluation of women underwrite this culture. Vitz uses Gravdal to argue that medievalists treat rape anachronistically and are subject to modern obsessions with free choice, victimization, and what she terms "compulsion and consent". According to Gravdal, the "first purpose [of her book] is to scrutinize the cultural ideology that supports rape as a stock narrative device in various medieval genres. (p.1)
For a representative sampling of feminist readings of Philomela, especially in relation to Chaucer and Gower, see the work Isabel Mast, Corrine Saunders, Karma Lochrie, Diane Watt, and Gravdal.

aggression and femininity with passive suffering. Sharon Marcus deciphers a "cultural script" of rape that defines women as victims and encourages them not to fight their assailants. Despite evidence that resistance deters rape, women are encouraged to be fearful, reinscribing the passivity of legitimate femininity and the aggressive violence of the male attacker (p.389). Marcus writes that

> Masculine power and feminine powerlessness neither simply precede nor cause rape; rather rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing women. A rapist chooses his target because he recognizes her to be a woman, but a rapist also strives to imprint the gender identity of "feminine victim" in his target. A rape act thus imposes as well as presupposes misogynist inequalities; rape is not only scripted – it also scripts. (p.391)

The model of the rape script usefully theorizes that the act of rape "imposes as well as presupposes" masculinity and femininity as opposites by aligning femininity with passive victimization and masculinity with the perpetration of violence. Marcus argues that the script is so well inscribed in both men and women that any disruption to it, especially in the form of women fighting back, undermines both the rape and its codification of masculinity and femininity as opposites. In Ovid's myth of Philomela, such a disruption occurs and the rigid correlation between gender and violence is upended; Ovid depicts Tereus, Philomela, and Procne as all behaving viciously and violently, irrespective of their genders. In both the Legend and the Confessio, the narrators resist the disruption of female violence because it undermines the stable gender order the act of rape underwrites.

In his gloss of the metamorphosis, Genius turns Tereus into the villain; the sisters are victims of his violence and abuse. Carolyn Dinshaw argues that such a depiction of gender derives from the tradition of courtly literature:

> What Gower's text helps us suggest is that at base courtly discourse encodes the bodily violation and sexual destruction of a woman. Courtly love discourse is the discourse of sexual indifference *par excellence*, and its literal ground is revealed here to be the violation of the woman's body. ("Rivalry," p.141)[10]

In the Legend and the Confessio, the myth of Philomela does reflect Dinshaw's classification of courtly literature, but not without an interest in revealing and critiquing it. Chaucer's narrator cuts the myth, but, as he brings the legend to a close, his close translation of Ovid recalls what he has omitted. His nominal slippages should not go unnoticed in a text that begins with a passionate discussion about the power of a single word to evoke an entire story. By omitting the sisters' revenge in his gloss, Genius creates a tension between the substance of the myth and his limited vision of the possible relationship between gender and violence. This strain between exemplum and moral reveals Gower's investment in critiquing Genius, a critique that culminates in Amans' rebellion against Genius' teachings and, by extension, the tradition of courtly love that he embodies; that rebellion signals more complexity than is usually attributed to Gower. Genius can literally *narrate* what Philomela and Procne did to Itis and Tereus, but he lacks the language to *interpret* their assault on Tereus. The sisters have crossed over the

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[10] Dinshaw is not alone in this summation of courtly literature. See, also Roberta Krueger and Gravdal. Joan Ferrante offers a more optimistic counterargument in Woman as Image in Medieval Literature, from the Twelfth Century to Dante.

limits of recognizable and intelligible femininity by taking revenge. Furthermore, their means of revenge has shown the fluidity rather than the essentialism of gender: by becoming an infanticide, Procne undercuts the assumption that maternity is a "natural" feminine instinct and by turning not just any man, but a rapist, into a rape victim whose son is fed to him unwillingly, she suggests that the role of suffering victim, just like the role of rapist and avenger, can be performed by men and women alike. Genius, then, in his treatment of violent women, has unwittingly introduced a vision of the world into the Confessio in which violence does not tether gender to sex, but rather, reveals its basic, undeniable, and terrifying fluidity.

Ovid and the Chaos of Violence

Tereus' rape of Philomela in the sixth book of the Metamorphosis is full of pathos and gory, vivid details; the events leading up to the rape, the rape itself, and the subsequent violence stand out for their physicality. From the beginning, Ovid develops parallels between the characters and their actions that ultimately destroy assumptions about the boundaries of masculine and feminine behavior, especially in relation to violence. Much as it ends with violence, the myth begins as Tereus, a barbaric Thracian, rescues the Athenians from war and, in return, is given Procne, the daughter of the king of Athens. Five years after their Fury-attended wedding, when Tereus comes to collect Philomela for a visit, the sight of her dramatically transforms him from a husband and converted barbarian into a rapist: "non secus exarsit conspecta virgine Tereus,/ quam si quis canis ignem supponat aristis/ aut frondem positasque cremet faenilibus herbas" [the sight was quite enough; the flame of love/ had taken Tereus, as if one had set/ afire ripe

grain, dry leaves, or a hay stack] (Book VI, lines 455-7; p.195).[11] Ovid explains that such a transformation is inevitable for a Thracian: Tereus is essentially and naturally violent: "digna quidem facies; sed et hunc innata libido/ exstimulat, pronumque genus regionibus illis/ in Venerem est: flagrat vitio gentisque suoque" [It's true [Philomela]'s fair, but [Tereus] is also spurred/ by venery, an inborn tribal urge/ The vice flaming him is both his own/ and that dark fire which burns in Thracian souls] (Book VI, lines 458-60; p.195). Inflamed by lust, Tereus remains logical: he presumes that raping Philomela will end in war or the loss of his kingdom, but he pursues his plan anyway, weighing the relative merits of bribing her friends or nurse or simply attacking her. Despite his deliberation, the actual consequences of the rape are, for Tereus, unimaginable. His divinations of war or the loss of his kingdom imply that he imagines that his sister-in-law will be avenged conventionally and by men. From early in the myth, Ovid critiques the reliance of such assumptions on binary gender, setting up an ironic contrast between what Tereus, the binarist, can imagine and the unimaginable violence of which he will be the victim.

As if to erase any doubt about the nature of Tereus' crime, Ovid forces his reader to be a spectator of the rape. He renders absolutely explicit what many poets suggest through omission, allusion, or displacing analogy.[12] Elaine Scarry investigates the lack of

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[11] Latin citations come from the Loeb edition of The Metamorphoses, edited by F.J. Miller. English translations come from Allen Mandlebaum's The Metamorphoses of Ovid.

[12] Scarry contends that our lack of language for pain stems from the human desire not to be associated with the enforcer. Susan Brisson contends, on the other hand, that we do not empathize with trauma victims for fear of being associated with victimization:

> The prevalent lack of empathy with trauma victims [...] results [...] not merely from ignorance or indifference, but also from an active fear of identifying with those whose terrifying fate force us to acknowledge that we are not in control of our own. (p.x)

language for pain and subsequent reliance on analogies, especially domestic analogies, to describe it. In The Body in Pain, she writes about the experience of torture as unmaking the world of the victim (p.45). She argues that "to attach any name, any word to the willful infliction of this bodily agony is to make language and civilization participate in their own destruction; the specific names chosen merely make this subversion more overt" (p.43). Because giving language to pain makes the speaker complicit with the enforcer, speakers express pain through references outside of the body, relying on "*analogical verification*" or "*analogical substantiation*" (Scarry, p.14). In Ovid's myth and in the medieval versions of it, the use of analogies, as Scarry argues, likely reflects that narrating violence identifies the speaker with the enforcer. The analogies Ovid uses to describe the rape may seem like generic poetic dodges, intended to avoid saying what is happening or to dress up the violence in euphemistic language. Rather than functioning as displacement, however, the analogies reflect Ovid's interest in dissecting the function of violence and reciprocal violence. Ovid's analogies draw important parallels between the acts of violence that permeate this myth, theorizing the effects they have on all participants and showing that reciprocal acts of violence horrifyingly reflect each other. Tereus drags Philomela into a hut and begins his assault:

> Atque ibi pallentem trepidamque et cuncta timentem
> Et iam cum lacrimis, ubi sit germana, rogantem
> Includit fassusque nefas et virginem et unam
> Vi superat frustra clamato saepe parente,
> Saepe sorore sua, magnis super omnia divis.

Illa tremit velut agna pavens, quae saucia cani

Ore excussa lupi nondum sibi tuta videtur,

Utque columba suo madefactis sanguine plumis

Horret adhuc avidosque timet, quibus haeserat, ungues.

[...] She shakes with fear;/ and pale, in tears, she asks to see her sister./ And he confesses to her his foul passion/ And rapes her – she's a girl, and all alone;/ Again, again, she calls upon her father,/ Her sister, and – above all – the great gods./ She trembles like a lamb that's terrified,/ That, wounded, cast off from a gray wolf's jaw,/ Cannot feel safe, or like a shuddering dove/ Whose feathers now are drenched with blood,/ That still recalls the avid, clutching claws/ That caught it.] (Book VI, lines 522-30; p.198)

Alone, Philomela cries out in vain for her father, sister, and the gods. Ovid's animal analogies illustrate the rape, comparing Tereus to a wolf and Philomela to a dove and a lamb, and suggest the anticipatory state of a survivor: not dead, but "wounded" Philomela is consumed both by the crime and the possibility of its repetition.

After the rape, Philomela threatens to reveal what Tereus has done. Unwilling to let her besmirch his name, Tereus cuts out her tongue. Ovid's narration of the mutilation is even more repulsive than the rape, especially in its use of adjectives and analogies:

[...] Iugulum Philomela parabat

spemque suae mortis viso conceperat ense:

ille indignantem et nomen patris usque vocantem

lucantemque loqui conprensam forcipes linguam

abstulit ense fero. Radix micat ultima linguae,

ipsa iacet terraeque tremens immurmurat atrae,

utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,

palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit.

Hoc quoque post facinus (vix ausim credere) fertur

Saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus.

[And Philomela offers him her throat –/ She has seen the sword, and death is her dear hope./ But its her tongue he seizes with a pincer;/ And even as it calls upon her father, / Protests and struggles hard to speak, he lifts/ His blade and – without mercy – severs it./ Its root still quivers, while the tongue itself/ Falls to the ground; there, on the blood-red soil,/ It murmurs; as a serpent's severed tail/ Will writhe, so did that tongue, in dying, twist/ And try to reach its mistresses' feet. Though this/ Indeed defies belief it's said that Tereus/ Again, again, gave free reign to his lust/ Upon that mangled body.] (Book VI, lines 553-62; p.199)

Philomela assumes and prefers death, but Tereus demonstrates his power over her and her body by keeping her alive and cutting out her tongue; in doing so, he silences her, destroying what he wrongly perceives as her sole means of revenge. Philomela is literally cut off in mid-sentence; her tongue is still moving as Tereus chops it and the root continues to quiver. That quivering is answered by the snake-like slithering of the tongue, now a severed tail, as it tries to return to its body. The mutilation of Philomela's mouth and her vibrating, clitoral tongue suggests an oral rape that thematically pursues the first half of Tereus' attack, reinforces his domination of her body, and ironically sets

the tone for the unconventional oral rape that he experiences at the feast. Locked away, Philomela defies Tereus by weaving her attacks into a tapestry that she sends to her sister. If the myth ended there, it could be read, as it often is, as a celebration of feminine ingenuity, artistry, and survival.[13] Instead, Ovid shows the ease with which a victim can become an attacker.

Upon receiving the tapestry, Procne transforms herself into a Bacchante, and tells her sister that "[...] 'non est lacrimis hoc' inquit 'agendum,/ sed ferro, sed si quid habes, quod vincere ferrum/ posit. In omne nefas ego me, germana, paravi" [no tears are needed here; it's time for steel,/ or if you know of something harder still,/ then give me that. I'm ready now to kill/ in any way however criminal] (Book VI, lines 611-13;p.201). Ovid explicitly and with great premonition links Procne to the Thracian women and their Bacchic ritual. In Euripides' Bacchae, Pentheus, king of Thebes, angers Dionysius by doubting his divinity. Once the god vindictively possesses Pentheus, he persuades the king to cross-dress and observe the rituals of his followers, who mistake him for a lion and kill him. Agave, Pentheus' mother, parades his head into town, unaware that she has killed her own son, and shows her prize to her horrified father. Costumed as a Bacchante and writhing appropriately, Procne storms the hut where her sister is hidden and dresses

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[13] In her often-cited article, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours," Patricia Klindienst Joplin contends that the myth fashions the image of the "woman artist as weaver" (p.39). Ovid posits the violence of Tereus against the art of Philomela; the murder of Itis marks the failure of art. Joplin wonders how Ovid expects his reader to believe that Philomela moves so fluidly from weaving for a year to participating in an act of violent retribution. She ends her article with a plea for actively engaged feminist readings of such material:

> But if the myth instructs, so does Philomela's tapestry, and we can choose to teach ourselves instead the power of art as a form of resistance. It is the attempt to deny that Philomela's weaving could have any end apart from revenge that makes the myth so dangerous, for the myth persuades us that violence is inevitable and art is weak. (pp. 53-4)

her as a Bacchante as well. The transformation of the sisters sets the tone for the infanticide and suggests that such an act requires an altered state. The comparison between Procne and Agave also recalls the differences: Procne, like Tereus, premeditates her violence. She knows that she is killing her son; she is not a misled or tragic victim of divine revenge.

Procne deliberates whether or not to burn Tereus' palace or mutilate his tongue, eyes, or penis, but no solution seems right until her eyes fix on Itis who resembles his father. Briefly undone by maternal love, Procne cannot resolve why her son can speak if her sister cannot, and so sets her course. In narrating her revenge, Ovid carefully parallels the rape and mutilation and the murder of Itis and the preparation of his body:

> Nec mora, traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae.
> Lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas,
> Utque domus altae partem tenuere remotam,
> Tendentemque manus et iam sua fata videntem
> Et "mater! Mater!" clamantem et colla petentem
> Ense ferit Procne, lateri qua pectus adhaeret,
> Nec vultum vertit. Satis illi as fata vel unum
> Vulnus erat: iugulum ferro Philomela resolvit,
> Vivaque adhic animaeque aliquid retinentia membra
> Dilaniant. Pars inde cavis exsultat aenis,
> Pars veribus strident; manant penetralia tabo.
> [She does not hesitate; she drags her son/ Away, just as a tigress on the Ganges/ Hauls off a suckling fawn through the dark woods;/ And when, in

> that vast palace, they have reached/ a far-off room, while he, with hands outstretched,/ already senses what his fate will be/ and cries out, "Mother, Mother," while he tries/ to throw his arms around her neck, her knife/ strikes him – she does not turn aside her eyes – / between his chest and side. That blow was quite/ enough to kill. But Philomela strikes;/ she hacks his throat. And then the sisters slice/ his limbs, still quivering with some warm life./ Some pieces fill a boiling copper kettle,/ And others sputter on the spit. His blood/ Drips everywhere in that secluded room.] (Book VI, lines 636-46; pp.202-3)

Vengeance, as depicted here, reproduces the initial crime only to exceed it: again, in an isolated space. The victim anticipates the act and pleads with his parent, who, unlike Philomela's father, is ironically able to hear the cries. To depict Procne's menacing hunt of her son and apparent pleasure in the kill, Ovid uses a haunting, gendered animal analogy: a tigress, a potential mother, hunting a fawn, a baby animal of another species, that she drags from the river into the impenetrable darkness of the forest. Like the differences between Procne and Agave, the difference between Procne's and the tigress' ends should not pass unnoticed: one hunts to eat from another species, the other hunts its own child to force-feed to his father. The animal analogy also links this scene to Tereus' hunt for Philomela: "non aliter quam cum pedibus praedator obuncis/ deposuit nido leporem Iovis ales in alto;/ nulla fuga est capto, spectat sua praemia raptor" [not unlike the sacred bird of Jove,/ in his nest on high, sets down the hare/ he's caught with his hooked claws; the captor stares - / his eyes are fixed upon his helpless prize] (Book VI, lines 515-8; p.198). Animal analogies in this myth underscore the irrationality and

brutality of the attacks, their literally inhuman nature, but Ovid also uses these analogies and their specificity to draw attention to the differences between the violence of humans and that of animals and to the various forms of human violence. Before she strikes, Procne neither flinches nor looks away and, although her blow is sufficient, as Tereus' rape might have been, Philomela cuts Itis' throat gratuitously, much as her tongue was cut. His limbs continue to move, like Philomela's tongue, after their severing. The crime complements and outdoes Tereus' double acts of violence. The victim has become the killer and can become the killer because she survived.

In preparing Itis' body as a stew and feeding it to his father at a sacred feast, the sisters turn Tereus into "bustum miserabile nati" [the miserable tomb of his own son] (Book VI, line 665; p.203). Tereus eats alone and asks for Itis, only to hear from Procne that "intus habes, quem poscis" [The one you want is with you now] (Book VI, line 655; p.203). Philomela completes her Bacchic role with a flourish by throwing her nephew's head at his father, lamenting that she cannot shout her joy. Tereus, who made Philomela an unwilling receptacle for his body, now contains his son. He wishes that "et modo, si posset, reserato pectore diras/ egerere inde dapes semesaque viscera gestit" [he could rip his chest/ and rid his body of the horrid feast,/ the innards he has swallowed] (Book VI, lines 662-4; p.203). As his body unwillingly and unknowingly receives another body, Tereus moves fluidly from rapist to victim. Metamorphosis into animals ends the cycle of violence by preventing Tereus' revenge. As if their calculated acts of violence deny them human standing, the three adults are frozen as birds in their guilt, neither dignified nor justified:

Corpora Cecropidum pennis pendere putares:

> Pendebant pennies. Quarum petit altera silvas,
> Altera tecta subit, neque adhuc de pectore caedis
> Excessere notae, signataque sanguine pluma est.
> Ille dolor suo poenaeque cupidine velox
> Vertitur in volucrem, cui stant in vertice cristae.
> Prominet immodicum pro longa cuspide rostrum;
> Nomen epops volucri, facies armata videtur.
> [But you'd have said that those Athenians/ had taken flight with wings. There, they are poised:/ one sister wings her way into the dark woods,/ the other rises to the roof – her breast/ still bears the signs of their atrocious crime:/ her feathers are blood stained. And Tereus speeds -/ spurred by his grief and need to seek revenge-/ and he, too, changes form, becomes a bird,/ a bird whose head is crowned with a stiff crest,/ whose beak is huge, a long, protruding lance:/ the hoopoe – ever ready to attack.] (Book VI, lines 667-74; p.204)

Philomela flies away into the woods in shame; Procne's bloody feathers recall the murder of her child; and Tereus' grotesque physique signifies his crime and the unnatural state of his body after he has eaten his son. Ovid denies redemption and resists easy associations between gender and violence; men and women are equally capable of committing and being victims of hideous crimes.

The Narratorial Dilemma: Containing Violence to Contain Meaning

As the God of Love ponders the literary tradition of unflattering depictions of women in spite of their "verray vertu and clennesse," he wonders: "What seyeth also the

epistle of Ovyde/ Of trewe wyves and of here labour?" (G297&305-6). On the topic of good women, the God of Love suggests consulting the Heroides, a collection of letters written by the women of classical literature to the men who had wronged them. His choice is unsurprising as Ovid's collection does the sort of corrective work that the God of Love intends the narrator to do. In the first line of the tale of Acteon, Genius starts his first exemplum by paying homage to his source: "Ovide telleth in his bok" (1.333). The authority on love, amongst other subjects, Ovid appears throughout medieval literature and with special frequency in both the Legend and the Confessio.[14] As Michael Calabrese points out, Ovid and his vast literary corpus take on multiple forms and functions in medieval literature: "noble *auctor* of history, doctor of love, father of antifeminist lore, advocate of female power, prophet of mutability, and, at times, dreaded corrupter of youth and peer of Satan" (p.1). His work was frequently glossed, especially as Christian allegory as it is in the Ovide Moralisé. Calabrese sums up Ovid's pervasive, multivalent medieval presence and means of transmission:

> Ovid was not only the poet's own primary texts, which were schoolbooks in Chaucer's time, but also the copious glosses, categorizations, moralizations, and allegorizations that introduce or literally surround the words of any medieval text by an *auctor*. (pp.1;3)

Because Chaucer and Gower's coterie readers would have been familiar with the Heroides and Metamorphoses, adapting, translating, or commenting on Ovid's work,

[14] The majority of Genius' rapes come from the Metamorphoses in which there are, according to Isabelle Mast, fifty "examples of rape, attempted rape, and cases of sexual coercion close to rape," and from the Gesta Romanorum, which also contains many rapes (p.111).

while frequent, also meant altering a well-known quantity.[15] His myth of Philomela was hugely popular in the Middle Ages, reappearing throughout medieval literature in distinctive "hermeneutic codes" and genres; changing the myth radically makes for a pronounced act of revision, one taken by an author who knows his audience will be aware, at least, of other versions and, perhaps, of the original (Amsler, p.61).[16] The differences the gaps between original and new, would have been immediately noticed by learned readers and would be what defined and stood out about these adaptations. Unlike the Man of Law, who claims to have moved past worry over his relationship to his sources, Genius and the narrator of the Legend find themselves in the impossible position of trying to make their audiences, inside and outside the text, overlook and even forget the dramatic differences they create.

The Confessio and the Legend have long been maligned as failures: self-contradictory, incoherent, boring, and overly long. The conflict between their critical detractors and champions often comes down to the fraught question of authorial intention: did Chaucer and Gower intend their texts to be as they are or are the extant works unself-conscious disasters? The monolithic, iterative quality of the legends along with the maligning of men as a corrective to the literary tradition of misogyny has won the Legend few champions. Sheila Delany, in one of the very few book length studies of the poem, concludes by arguing that the Legend is a "*writerly* poem, a poet's poem offering little comfort to cling to (such as narrative, character, or dialogue) and requiring a good deal of work to excavate" (pp.235-6). Her defense hardly recommends the work,

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[15] See Wendy Pfeffer for a history of Philomela in the Middle Ages. Bruce Holsinger also discusses the tradition of the nightingale.
[16] Mark Amsler provides a thorough and concise history of medieval treatments of Ovid.

but it does suggest that what is difficult about the poem is not the result of authorial incompetence, but rather the poem's complicated, ironic, and meta-critical nature. Likewise, in the Confessio, the off-putting choices of stories with which to illustrate the vices of the lover, the inconsistencies surrounding the definitions of pivotal terms like Nature and the usefulness of others, such as Reason, and the impossible, forced alignments between the political, the ecclesiastical, and the courtly create a nearly incoherent literary landscape. Arguing against critical efforts to make these points of disjuncture coalesce, Karma Lochrie writes that:

> The many structural and thematic disjunctions in the poem draw attention to themselves, calling into question both the exemplary mode of narrative and the confessional taxonomy that gives the text its moral structure. ("Covert," p.206)[17]

At the end of the poem, unity becomes impossible since Amans' liberating dismissal of Genius' total deference to reason challenges the entire logic of the poem. Gower and Chaucer both hint that the problematic qualities of their texts deliberately engage the limitations that their guiding principles place on their range of expression: is misogyny corrected if men are unqualifiedly maligned? Can reason solve the problems of all

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[17] In The Allgory of Love, C.S. Lewis defends the logic of the cohesion, arguing that

> Except on certain obviously intractable points, the virtues of a good lover were indistinguishable from those of a good man; the commandments of the god of Love for the most part were mere repetitions of the commandments of the Church. (p.199)

Watt concurs with Lochrie on this point, but she argues that Gower is ultimately conventional in the second part of the Confessio and that these contradictions undermine his "moral project" ("Amoral," p. xviii). His poem explores the division of the world, but "fails to give straightforward and coherent guidance about either how to govern or to live one's life" ("Amoral," p.xviii).

lovers? Furthermore, can all lovers, like all men or all women, be reduced to singular definition?

The treatment of the myth of Philomela in both texts reveals the sort of complicated, if not entirely successful, critical enterprises that guide both projects and that question the wisdom of the generalizing, binary logic that underscores claims about all men, all women, and all lovers. Chaucer and Gower use their narrators and their fumbling in telling the myth to enact a meta-critique of their own larger projects. By asserting the rape as the primary and only act of violence in the myth, both narrators iteratively reinscribe binary gender at its core. Simultaneously, however, their narratives betray their concerns about containing the myth and its actual support of binary gender in their endless reading instructions and aggressive, framing interpretations. Genius and the narrator struggle to keep the infanticide and cannibalism of Ovid's Philomela from toppling the gender hierarchies at work in their project; their failed efforts suggest that both Chaucer and Gower use their narrators to engage the rigid construction of the intelligible relationship between violence and gender that the narrators seek to affirm. For the narrator and Genius, the containment of violence becomes equivalent to the containment of meaning, but those efforts at containment persistently reveal themselves as futile efforts at making Ovid's myth support a vision of gender that it explicitly resists.

Having angered the God of Love with his translation of the heretical Romance of the Rose, not to mention his misogyny, the narrator of Chaucer's Legend, an inept lover himself, does penance by "making of a glorious legende/ Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,/ That were trewe in loving al hire lyves;/ And telle of false men that hem bytraien" (Ll. 483-6). By dutifully following the command of the God of Love, however,

the narrator reveals its inherent problematic: by simply reversing the roles played by men and women in each story, he creates a repetitive and monolithic collection that celebrates "goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves" and condemns "false men".[18] Not only, however, is the logic of the penance flawed, his material and his management of that material persistently compromise his penance. The reputations of women like Cleopatra, Medea, and Philomela mean that well-known narratives must be violently reconfigured to become legend-worthy and to replace the original misogynistic version. The narrator must not just edit; he must rewrite.

When the God of Love tells the narrator to begin with Cleopatra, her lusty, violent, Eastern legacy signals the amount of recreation the narrator has ahead of him. He turns Antony and Cleopatra into martyrs, pursued by "stoute Romeyns, crewel as lyoun" because of Antony's treacherous treatment of Caesar's sister, duly mentioned by the narrator who insists that "natheles, for sothe, this ilke senatour/ was a ful worthy gentil werreyour" (Ll.596-7). The lovers finally die tragically. Neither Antony nor his death is the point. Once Antony dies, the narrator laments Cleopatra's eminent demise and corrects her reputation:

> His wif, that coude of Cesar have no grace,
>
> To Egipt is fled for drede and for destresse.
>
> But herkeneth, ye that speken of kyndenesse,
>
> Ye men that falsly sweren many an oth

[18] Dinshaw argues that the narrator's project embodies how such "reductiveness" fails to provide a satisfying representation of male and female experiences by succumbing to "the techniques of reading like a man – imposing a single pattern, insisting on reducing complexity to produce a whole monolithic structure, thus constraining the feminine" ("Chaucer's," p.87).

> That ye wol deye if that youre love be wroth,
>
> Here may ye sen of wemen which a trouthe
>
> This woful Cleopatre had mad swich routhe
>
> That ther is tonge non that may it telle. (Ll. 663-700)

Cleopatra's death may become tragic, but the narrator's aggressive shaping of her life and assertion of perspective both affirms that he wishes to have her be perceived and that easily she could be read as a seductress who brought about the fall of Roman Antony. To complete his task, the narrator must manage potentially discrediting information (Antony's marriage) and the problems posed by competing perspectives (he will view Cleopatra as a martyr in spite of her reputation as a whore). The narrator cannot simply erase a tradition of misogyny; he will add another competing perspective, monolithic and uncompromising in its depiction of gender. In order to do so, he must do the sort of violence to his source material that the evil men of his legends infamously do to the saintly women.

There may be no better clue to Chaucer's intentions with the Legend than the quality of the material with which his narrator wrestles and the absolutist terms of his assigned genre. Sheila Delany provides a historically grounded, working definition of the *legenda*:

> It [the legend] was to be read aloud, in church as part of a liturgy during the nocturnal office in an annual mass commemorating the anniversary of a holy person's death. The "legend" was originally a tributary biography or memorandum compiled by the local archivist from community memory

> and testimony as to the *gesta, signa et virtutes* (deeds, signs and powers of holiness) of the deceased. (p.64)

Dismissive of the Legend, Carolyn Dinshaw points out that the genre is "*based on* a principle of imitation" ("Chaucer's," p.73). As a genre, then, the legend is a perfect match for the narrator's assignment as it recounts a stand off between good and evil during which both sides perform their inherently dichotomous natures. Since legends historically take as their subject encounters between Christians and pagan rulers, the narrator must translate these roles into secular and gendered terms by pitting men and women against each other. In a religious legend, the admiring reader and the saint know that earthly suffering will translate into heavenly reward; in the Legend, however, the narrator makes no such promise. He is simply showing, according to the God of Love, what happens rather than what has been reported. Without the promise of greater rewards, the suffering of these women represents the unspoken reality; no change or hope is in sight, only the endless iteration of the same scenario.

In its eighth and final book, Gower sums up the Confessio: "And now to speke as in final,/ Touchende that y undirtok/ In englesch forto make a book/ Which stant betwene ernest and game" (Ll.3106-9).[19] In order to cover the spread between "ernest and game," Gower begins his English language work with the declining and divided state of the state, the church, and the commons. After a contemplative prologue, he situates the Confessio firmly in the courtly love genre of the Romance of the Rose, the allegorical story of a

[19] In Amoral Gower, Diane Watt lays out the complicated manuscript history of the Confessio. Of the forty nine complete or almost complete manuscripts, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 3 is considered authoritative. These manuscripts are often divided into two groups based on their dedication to either Richard II or the future Henry IV. For a full discussion of the manuscript history, see Peck, Watt, and Echard.

lover's pursuit of a rose, and the work of Andreas Capellanus, who prescribes rules for the lover. His narrative takes its shape from the popular confession manual: each book defines and illustrates through exemplum a potential sin of a lover. Amans, the protagonist, is a self-pitying lover who is visited by the God and Goddess of Love. Amans describes his love sickness, but the Goddess is suspicious of his sincerity because of the many "faitours" who pretend to be her servants; Genius, her high-priest, who cements his courtly love pedigree with appearances in Jean de Meun and Alanus de Insulis, must confess him (Ll.174).[20] Gower links these seemingly disparate frames by placing responsibility for the divided state of the world on men who have abandoned love: "And this men sen, thurgh lacke of love/ Where as the lond divided is/ It mot algate fare amis" (Ll.892-4). This cohesion, however, is undercut by Amans' rebellion against Genius and his conclusion that he, the now explicitly named John Gower, is too old to be a lover. How can love be the answer if the protagonist has rejected it? Genius' failure to persuade his penitent is not entirely surprising. Forging through countless examples, Genius is undaunted and uncompromising, as if blind to how his exempla complicate and even negate the message of his moral, undermining the rule oriented world of the confessional and of courtly literature.

Unlike Genius, Chaucer's narrator is self-conscious about the inevitable ineffectiveness of his revisions. In the prologue to Philomela, he speaks to his dilemma, especially as it pertains to this memorably violent story. His concerns are three fold: that his version will not replace the Ovidian original for the reader, that the grotesque content will infect the reader with physical ailments, that the content could inspire a male reader

[20] For complete discussions of the role of Genius and his genealogy, see Baker and Economou.

to duplicate what he has read. The narrator's quandary, he must tell the story, but he is not sure that he can do so responsibly, is amplified by his claim that reading it made his eyes "foule and sore" (Ll.2240). To be responsible, the narrator must contain the masculine violence of the rape and, a more difficult task, the female violence that he omits from the unspeakable original. Illustrating the peril and difficulty of his task, he laments that Tereus' falseness spreads infectiously through the heavens and the earth by even the mention of his name: "that fro this world up to the firste hevene/ corrumpeth whan that folks his name nevene?" (Ll. 2236-7). Even if the narrator only narrates the rape of Philomela, the act of retelling the story, let alone uttering "Tereus" could infect the reader or, worse yet, recall the Ovidian original and its depiction of violence so utterly in contradiction with the commandments of the God of Love.

From the beginning of the Confessio, Genius shares the narrator's concerns about the transmission of proper and intended meaning through language and the dangers of misinterpretation. Like any good confessor, he worries whether Amans will come to the proper conclusion about what a good lover should and should not do or whether the slippery ambiguity of language will confuse and distract him. Upon entering the "swote grene pleine" where Amans has been lamenting, Genius describes his method, intended to counteract interpretive chaos; his process functions as one of the poem's organizing principles:

> Noght only make my spekynges
> Of love, bot of other thinges,
> That touchen to the cause of vice.
> For that belongeth to thoffice

Of Prest, whos ordre that I bere,

So that I wol nothing forbere,

That I the vices on and on

Ne schal thee schewen everychon;

Wherof thou myht take evidence

To reule with thi conscience. (1. 114; 1.239-48)

Genius will speak of love and of other vices, but once he presents his "evidence," Amans must use his "conscience" to determine the correct conclusion.[21] Because he illustrates vices rather than virtues, he risks Amans taking his illustrations as incentives. In order to prevent confusion and disaster, Genius determines a proper style for confession:

I wol thi schrifte so enforme,

That ate leste thou schalt hiere

The vices, and to thi metiere

Of love I schal hem so remene,

That thou schalt knowe what thei mene.

For what *a man schal axe or sein*

Touchende of schrifte, it mot be plein,

It nedeth noght to make it queinte,

For trowthe hise worde wol noght peinte. (italics my own, 1.276-84)

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[21] In Image on the Edge, Michael Camille discusses the interpretational problems posed by visual exemplum and anti-exemplum:

> The medieval world-image was, like medieval life itself, rigidly structured and hierarchical. For this reason, resisting, ridiculing, overturning and inverting was not only possible, it was limitless. Every model has its opposite, inverse anti-model. [...] Such images work to reinstate the very models they oppose (p.26; p.30)

Because so much is at stake in confession (even one conducted by the high priest of Love), Genius and Amans must use plain language. In his procedural rules, Genius identifies major concerns of the confessional genre that echo the narrator's concerns about his Ovidian source: that illustrations of vices will spark the imagination, that language and its interpretation will prevent clarity, that critical information will be garbled in transmission between speaker and audience. Genius and the narrator both feel the pressure of having to control the reception of their material; a great deal is at stake in each text, the material is inherently dangerous, and, moreover, each narrator seems aware of the difficulty, if not the impossibility of his task.

Throughout the Legend, the narrator is always in conversation with his sources. He frequently tells his reader that he will skip a detail, that the reader should consult the source for the rest of the story, that an Ovidian letter is too long to translate. In the second to last legend of Phyllis, his complaints and interruptions overwhelm the plot. These asides reaffirm his position as transmitter and, more importantly, the editorial power it gives him. The narrator may cut "these olde approved stories" as he likes, (theoretically) keeping the reader from dull or harmful material (p.21). Despite these assertive gestures that seem intended to pronounce his power over his sources, the narrator, like Genius, provides less than subtle reading instructions that suggest his insecurity. His hyperbolic concern about Tereus foregrounds his role as adaptor and honors literature with a power it may or may not deserve. Those references, along with the omission of the revenge, transform the legend of Philomela into an exemplum of the evils of rape:

> And, as to me, so grisely was his dede

> That, whan that I his foule storye rede,
>
> Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also.
>
> Yit last the venym of so longe ago,
>
> That it enfecteth hym that wol beholde
>
> The story of Tereus, of which I tolde. (Ll. 2238-2243)

The narrator aggressively turns Ovid's myth into "the story of Tereus" and his "grisely [...] dede," an angle he will pursue by cutting out the sisters' revenge so that the content fits his frame.[22] Before he concludes by reminding his implicitly male reader not to rape women, he dismissively sums up "al and som" of the "remenaunt": "the remenaunt is no charge for to telle,/ For this is al and som: thus was she served,/ That nevere harm agilte ne deserved/ Unto this crewel man, that she of wiste" (Ll.2383-6). In concluding, he cements his editorial work, decreeing Tereus a "crewel man" and Philomela his victim, violently forcing the myth to accommodate the gender binary proscribed as a righteous corrective by the God of Love. Unfortunately for the narrator, as his own words reveal, the "remenaunt" is quite a bit more than that "al and som".

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[22] Chaucerian critics read this omission of the retribution as either sympathetic, assuming that it is preferable to be tragic than violent and that the use of violence elevates the sisters to the status of Tereus, or as the ultimate silencing of woman. While Dinshaw argues that Chaucer's "chops" both tale and woman, Mark Amsler writes

> Chaucer's textual erasure works to protect Philomela and Procne from the authoritative mythographic discourse that condemns the two, especially Procne, as vengeful, bad women who transgress their natural feminine maternal natures and commit infanticide and cannibalism. (p.88)

Corrine Saunders agrees, arguing that:

> Like the modern readings that emphasize Philomela's creativity [...] Chaucer's version removed the graphic violence from the story in order to focus on the victim and her narrative [...] The story becomes one of tragedy rather than of revenge, and [...] ends with a shift of power back towards the woman through her regaining of a voice. ("Rape," pp.275-6)

By violently editing the myth, the narrator, who claims to have the best intentions, mimics the violence of Tereus. Tereus worries about Philomela reporting her rape; the story could spread and pollute his reputation:

> For fere lest she shulde his shame crye
>
> and don hym openly a vilenye,
>
> And with his swerd hire tonge of kerveth he,
>
> And in a castel made hire for to be
>
> ful pryvley in prisoun everemore. (Ll.2332-6)

The silencing of Philomela is always a grotesque act that signifies Tereus' control over both his victim's body and the story of its mutilation, but in this version, it takes on new significance as it aligns Tereus with the narrator; for different reasons, both wish the myth to end with the rape. Tereus hopes to avoid the consequences of being a known rapist while the narrator, despite his insistence that Tereus is dangerous both to characters and readers, wishes to avoid the challenge the sisters' revenge poses to the God of Love's edict. His willingness to edit these stories into one-sided examples of the naturalization of binary gender takes on a more sinister quality: the myth must be cut in half, literally silenced like Philomela in order that its vision of the relationship between gender and violence be contained and made literally unrepresentable and certainly unspeakable by him. Happily, perhaps, both the narrator and Tereus fail to control the transmission of the story. News of Philomela reaches Procne, propelling her to violence that belies the premise of the Legend and guarantees the ineligibility of her and her sister for secular sainthood. Just as Tereus' decision to leave Philomela alive undoes him, the narrator's

own slippages recall the violence he has tried to stymie. Like Philomela, Ovid's myth survives all efforts at silencing.

Delany argues that the narrator's anxiety about Tereus functions as a critique of his subjectivity:

> That Narrator is (only) a poet; his work is necessarily the expression of a (particular and tainted) subjectivity; literature possesses neither the power the Narrator ascribes to it here, nor the power Eros ascribes to it in the Prologue; interpretation is a function of will. (p.216)

Like other Chaucerian narrators, the narrator of the Legend is far from objective, frequently falling prey to his own (mis)perceptions. The hysterical quality of his anxiety about the consequences of interpretation and the power of Tereus' name and literature in general should not be taken literally, but as part of Chaucer's analysis of the narrator's project. However, Procne's subjective reading propels the narrative impulse of the myth and confirms all of the narrator's fears about his audience (mis)reading the rape, becoming infected by its violence and tyranny, and mimicking Tereus' violence. Ovid's Procne reads the tapestry and fantasizes about revenge. The narrator's Procne, on the other hand, finds her sister and weeps with her. The narrator worries that Tereus will become an example to his male readers, but it is Procne, a wife, mother and sister, who duplicates his violence. Although the narrator omits her revenge, his references to Ovid suggest that he is well aware that his readers know the conclusion to the myth and its confirmation of his divination about the danger of reading the story and undermining of both his editorial censorship and the God of Love's decree.

As he brings Philomela to a close, the narrator refers to images that the Ovidian text associates explicitly with Procne's revenge: her silence at seeing the tapestry and the Bacchae. In doing so, he undermines his editing through reference to literary evidence that defies the categorization of woman as victim that his focus on the rape seemed to affirm. The allusions also highlight the subversive potential of the simplest nominal reference to recall an entire narrative. Once Procne has "read" the tapestry, the narrator quickly summarizes her reaction:

> And whan that Procne hath this thing beholde,
> No word she spak, for sorwe and ek for rage,
> But feynede hir to gon on pilgrymage
> To Bacus temple; and in a litel stounde
> Hire dombe sister sittynge hath she founde,
> Wepynge in the castel, here alone. (Ll.2373-8)

By having Procne go on a pilgrimage and explicitly identifying the setting of the reunion as a Bacchic temple, the narrator alludes to the infanticide and female violence that he has worked so hard to censor. Such a pilgrimage suggests that Procne will take on the mantle of the Bacchae as she does in Ovid; that she does not is all the more pronounced. Her reaction to the tapestry is equally revealing of the narrator's omissions: "no word she spak, for sorwe and ek for rage" (Ll. 2374). While this silence marks the beginning of Procne's revenge in Ovid, this Procne's "sorwe" significantly overcomes her "rage"; after all, to be a good woman, Procne must experience "sorwe" – otherwise her goodness would go untested - but never "rage" (Ll.2734).

In spite of his allusions to the rage that propels the conclusion of Ovid's myth, Chaucer's narrator reasserts his Tereus-like power over his female protagonists by leaving them to dwell in sorrow:

> Allas! The wo, the compleynt, and the mone
>
> That Procne upon hire doumbe syster maketh!
>
> In armes everych of hem other taketh,
>
> And thus I late hem in here sorwe dwelle. (2379-2)

Female "sorwe" serves as the refrain of the narrator's conclusion. Ovid's complicated depiction of violence and gender nearly becomes a monolithic enactment of the God of Love's rubric. "[G]oode wymmen, maydene and wyves" can not avenge themselves; their goodness depends on their victimization even if such an equation demonizes men for the sake of amplifying their power (484). However, the narrator's heavy handed framing comments, allusions to the Ovidian original, and references to the Bacchae and Procne's "rage," all prove that containment is as hopeless as he suspected. The narrator loses control of the story as he predicted and the violent sisters of Ovid's myth escape, reminding the reader of what must be erased for binary gender to be iteratively asserted.

Genius performs similar editorial conniptions and violations, also failing to censor the revenge. Because he narrates the entire myth, however, he must contain not only allusions to the female violence, but the violence itself. The fifth book of the Confessio is dedicated to Avarice, and the story of Tereus, Philomela, and Procne provides Genius with an exemplum for a particularly invidious form of it: *Ravine*. A *Raviner*, an extortionist who "among the maistres duelleth," abuses his stature physically and socially, filling his larder without paying and leading poor people into debt only to steal

from them (V.5509). By beginning with the *Raviner*, Genius frames the myth as an example of rape, which he defines as an abuse of physical and social power; the analogy should contain the meaning of the myth and the definition of the rapist, but as in Ovid, it opens up the possibility for comparison and analysis. For Genius, *Ravine* is both an analogy and a synonym for rape, a way of theorizing the violence without explicitly talking about it in sexual terms. In translating the *Raviner* into sexual terms, class is exchanged for gender: Tereus is the powerful and implicitly masculine *Raviner* while the women are the poor victims without recourse to justice. Genius slides easily from the power hierarchies that govern the public realm of debts and extortion to those that govern rape; such a rhetorical gesture underscores the momentum towards seamless parallels and cohesion that govern Genius' penitential approach:

> Ravine makth non other skile,
> Bot takth be *strengthe* what he wile.
> So bent her in the same wise
> Lovers, as I thee schal devise,
> That whan noght elles mai availe,
> Anon with *strengthe* thei assaile
> And gete of love the *sesine.* (V.5521-7, italics my own)

A Ravine uses *strengthe* to take advantage of the weak; a lover will also rely on *strengthe* to achieve his ends. The term *sesine*, which derives from the Old French *saisine* or to take possession of, exemplifies the rapist's assertion of his possession of his victim.

Genius gives Procne the last word of the exemplum as she decrees Tereus a Raviner and, in principle, neatly concludes the study: " 'O Raviner, lo hier thi preie,/

With whom so falsliche on the weie/ Thou hast thi tirannye wroghte" (V.5919-21). That Tereus is the only *Raviner*, however, is far from clear. While the analogy does compelling theoretical work, it also gets Genius into trouble in its implication that Tereus' rape of Philomela is only one type of *Ravine*. By having his audience consider the similarities between the extortionist and the rapist, Genius alludes to even wider application of *Ravine*. Furthermore, in the Confessio, *Ravine* also applies to animals that pursue prey.[23] The initial description of the *Raviner* in a social context, compounded by the animal analogies that Genius uses to describe the actual rape, associates the rapist with a predatory masculinity. Like the narrator, Genius intends his framing analogy to direct Amans' attention to the rape and its effect on the rapist so that he does not follow suit. As the exemplum goes on, however, the category of *Raviner* proves to apply equally well to predatory animals and extortionists, not to mention men and women.

Loss of reason is the worst vice of the lover, the one singled out by Genius for Amans to avoid at all cost because it turns humans into animals. In the Vox Clamantis, Gower's Latin work, his unsympathetic use of animals to describe the peasants who

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[23] For a full discussion of rape and abduction in the Middle Ages, see Corrine Saunders' Rape and Ravishment, especially the first chapter in which she argues that the terms need to be distinguished and looked at together; Christopher Cannon's "Chaucer and Rape" investigates the ambiguities surrounding the term *raptus* and medieval legal terminology for rape. Although the ambiguity of the legal term *raptus* in the Middle Ages makes it very difficult to distinguish between instances of rape and abduction and the large grey area in between, there is no ambiguity surrounding what happens to Philomela: she is taken under false pretences from her father and sexually assaulted. In "'Raptus' and the Poetics of Married Love," Elizabeth Robertson explores the representation of rape in the Wife of Bath's Tale and the Kingis Quair by James I of Scotland. By identifying, amongst other things, that men are victims of rape in both texts, she argues that both texts idealistically uphold mutual relationships between men and women in which both parties have agency and subjectivity, "offering critiques of the forms of love poetry that deny equality between men and women" and "com[ing] to value companionate, non-hierarchical relationships between the sexes based on mutual recognition" (p.318).

participated in the 1381 Revolt underscores his association of animals with the loss of reason and the abuse of power. In the Prologue to the first book of the Vox, Gower imagines the peasants' revolt as a dream vision; the peasants are domestic animals that turn wild:

> Dumque mei turbas oculi sic intuerentur,
>
> Miror et in tanta rusticitate magis,
>
> Ecce dei subito malediccio fulsit in illos,
>
> Et mutans formas fecerat esse feras.
>
> Qui fuerant homines prius innate racionis,
>
> Brutorum species irracionis habent.
>
> [And while my eyes gazed upon the crowds and I was greatly amazed at so much rowdiness, behold the curse of God suddenly flashed upon them, and changing their shapes, it had made them into wild beasts. They who had been men of reason before had the look of unreasoning brutes (I.173-8; p.54)][24]

Domestic animals depart from their natural identities and desert any sense of "proprii [...] status" [proper rank]: pigs act like wolves and, subsequently, class hierarchy is completely overturned: "Hec erat illa dies, virtutum dira nouerca/ Subdidit et proceres, nec sinit esse pares" [This was the day which raised peasants to high places and put down the nobles, and did not allow them even to be their equals] (I.424; p. 59, I.659-60;

[24] All Latin references come from the fourth volume of G.C. Macaulay's The Complete Works of John Gower. All English translations are from Eric W. Stockton's The Major Latin Works of John Gower.

p.64).[25] Genius, to his credit, is consistent in his warnings about the loss of reason; throughout the Confessio, he belabors the perils of action divorced from reason:

> Forthi, my Sone, I wolde rede
>
> To lete al other love a weie
>
> As love and reson wolde acorde.
>
> For elles, if that thou descorde,
>
> And take lust as doth a best,
>
> Thi love may noght ben honeste (VIII.2093-2099).

When Tereus rapes and mutilates Philomela, he becomes an animal whose lack of reason leads him to an inhuman act of violence.[26] Genius compares him to a wolf, claiming that "he was so wod/ that he no reson understod" (V.5639-40). "As a Lyon wod," he cuts out Philomela's tongue, "a litel part therof belefte" (V.5698). Before he locks her away, he is a "wode hound" (V.5701). Governed by his sexual appetite, he acts violently and outside his human identity. Genius emphasizes Tereus' loss of reason because it accommodates his use of the myth as a warning against rape. As an animal acting without reason, Tereus becomes the exemplary Raviner and bad lover, the ideal anti-model.

In the Vox and in the Confessio, loss of reason turns humans into animals, but the value of reason to all circumstances also proves to be the point on which Amans

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[25] In "The Imaginary Society: Women in 1381," Sylvia Federico argues that the role of women in 1381 has been largely ignored by critics. She cites Susan Crane's article, "The Writing Lesson of 1381" and the connection she draws between the violence the Wife of Bath does to texts and the burning of documents by revolutionaries as the sole example of critical work that includes the possibility of female involvement. In the course of her article, Federico cites the representation of women involved in the rebellion in Chaucer and Gower. While Chaucer is sympathetic to the peasants in the Nun's Priest's Tale, Gower blames the peasants.

[26] R.F. Yeager argues that the act of rape deprives Tereus of reason, and by consequence, that which separates animals from humans (pp. 150-5).

disagrees with Genius. After Genius concludes his lengthy tale of Appolonius, Amans challenges him. *Resoun*, it seems to Amans, after eight books of countless exempla celebrating its virtue, is a faulty antidote to the miseries of the lover. More precisely, Genius's rules for the lover, which take *Resoun* as their guiding principle, do not speak to his own subjective experience. Undaunted, Genius warns Amans that submission to will leads only to disaster and even death:

> My Sone, and if thou have be so,
>
> Yit it is time to withdrawe,
>
> And set thin herte under that lawe,
>
> Te which reson is governed
>
> And noght of will
>
> [...]
>
> For I can do to thee nomore
>
> Bot teche thee the rihte weie:
>
> Now ches if thou wolt live or deie. (VIII.2132-6;2146-8)

Resoun, after all, could have counteracted the lust that turned Tereus into an animal. Amans uses Genius' own terms to craft his rebuttal; in doing so, he identifies the problem with Genius' logic here and throughout the Confessio:

> My resoun understod him wel,
>
> And knew it was sothe everydel
>
> That he hath seid, bot noght forthi
>
> Mi will hath nothing set therby.
>
> For teching of so wise a port

Is unto love of no desport;

Yit myhte nevere man beholde

Reson, wher love was withholde,

Thei be noght of o governance (VIII.2191-99)

Amans' "resoun" comprehends Genius' argument "wel," but it can mean little to the lover consumed by will and confident of the value of his own subjective, unique experience. Finally, a moment of explicit crisis occurs in a text that seems to prize the cohesion of the many worlds it brings under one literary roof. Reason plays a complicated and uneven role in Gower's corpus. Gower may believe that rebellious peasants and rapists desert their reason and become animals, but that does not mean that, by extension, reason requires constant, positive application. Just because loss of reason can be dehumanizing and revolting does not mean that reason must be applied rigorously by all lovers in all situations. In Amans' attack on *resoun*, Gower makes apparent the underlying case against Genius that he has been building for eight books: his rigid adherence to generalizing claims means that his analysis and arguments are not applicable on a case by case basis. Throughout the Confessio, Genius undermines his own work: he assumes the naturalization of binary gender only to come upon an exempla, like the myth of Philomela that render his claims obsolete. As a generalist, like the God of Love, he will never be able to address the complicated world that his literary examples reflect nor provide a persuasive catalog of advice for a lover who lives in the fluid world in which the assertion of generalizations, binaries, and rules reveal their own short-comings.

After Tereus' rape of Philomela, the myth becomes a significantly more complicated example of *Ravine*, one that expands its embrace dangerously. The rape affirms the myth as an example of *Ravine* in sexual terms that reinforce the essentialism of binary gender. As a *Raviner*, Tereus takes what is not his and, as a victim of *Ravine*, Philomela suffers the consequences of losing what was once hers, but these roles are horrifyingly inverted by the sisters' revenge. To avoid this complication, Genius concludes by returning to the analogy of the *Raviner,* aligning it exclusively with rape:

> Bewar, mi Sone, er thee so falle;
>
> For if thou be of such covine,
>
> To gete of love be Ravine
>
> Thi lust, it mai the falle thus,
>
> As it befell of Tereus. (V.6048-52)

Genius insists that the story exemplifies the pitfalls of succumbing to lust and seeking "love be Ravine" (V.6050). Amans takes him at his word and expresses horror ("Mi fader, goddess forbode!) at the thought of becoming like Tereus, "the brid falseste of alle" (V.6046-7). Genius, as his confessional form would have him, relates the example back to his male audience, but his evasions do not stop there. As he interprets the metamorphosis for Amans, he cements his interest in forgetting the actual consequences of rape.

Once he realizes that he has eaten his son, Tereus leaps up from the banquet table to kill the sisters, but the gods see "the meschief" and "echon of hem in his degre/ Was torned into brides kinde" (V.5934; V.5938-9). The phrase "in his degre" confirms that each avian transformation directly reflects the state of the character. The metamorphosis

shapes the reader's judgment of the characters. As a nightingale, Philomela sings about "loves maladie"; she gets back her voice so that, lamenting the loss of her virginity, she can sing about the perils of love as her maidenly modesty permits (V.5991). Her "degre" is rape victim. Genius concludes with Tereus' transformation as if to emphasize its importance to the moral. His abuse of Procne and Philomela affects their avian natures: both sisters fear men because "for evere it duelleth in here mynde/ Of that thei founde a man unkinde,/ And that was false Tereus" (V.6027-9). While the women's transformations reflect their suffering, Tereus is punished: "And natheles in rememebrance/ I wol declare what vengance/ The goddess hadden him ordained,/ Of that the Sostres hadden pleigned" (V.6035-38). He becomes an ugly, earth bound, lappewinke, a bird known for its falseness (V.5991). His crest "in tokne he was a kniht" recalls his earthly status and the extent of his fall. By concluding with Tereus, whose transformation reflects his crime, Genius refocuses on the rape, making Tereus the *Raviner*. The description of Procne, however, buried between that of the direct participants in the rape, reveals the extent to which Genius tries to keep Amans focused on his moral.

In the final metamorphosis, Procne becomes a swallow that sings about "Tereus the Spousebreche" (V.6014). As a swallow, she is a wronged wife who sings to other wives about the evils of husbands and the burden of marriage. Because of the civic service she performs, she does not live, as her sister does, in the woods, but out in the open, near her audience. The matter of her song reinforces the primacy of the rape narrative. Genius' depiction of the sisters coincides with Gower's in the Prologue to the Vox as he describes the beauty of the day that precedes the Revolt of 1381. He insists on

the sisters' victimization: "Amissamque sue suplet Philomena loquele/ Naturam, que suis predicat acta notis:/ Concinit et Procne de virginitate sororis/ Lesa, dum tanti sunt in amore doli" [Philomela recovered her lost property of speech and by her notes proclaimed what had been done. And Procne sang too of her sister's lost virginity – for so great are the tricks in love] (I.99-102; p.53). In this edenic paradise, amongst singing birds, there is no room for singing about anything but the tragedy of love. In both instances, the sisters' crimes are erased officially by their final *degre*. By putting Genius in such an unstable literary world that renders problematic the tenets of the Confessio, Gower suggests the limitations of Genius' project and the ways in which the meaning of the story has escaped him to reveal the lack of conformity between tale and moral. Ultimately, such a mismatch between tale and moral provides a critique of the rigidity of the courtly love view that is confirmed by Amans' ultimate decision that not only is he too old to love, but that these morals do not apply to his experience as a lover.

To make Ovid's myth exclusively exemplify the evils of rape, Chaucer's narrator excises the revenge while Genius glosses over it in his final remarks. Both do so in order to make the myth comply with the dictates of their project: Chaucer's narrator must write about good women and Genius must depict the vices of the lover. Because Ovid undoes binary-driven assumptions, the myth of Philomela seems particularly ill suited for such monolithic uses. Chaucer and Gower use their narrators' treatment of the infanticide and cannibalism to make manifest the limitations of their projects and what the narrators include and exclude in order to accommodate them. The anxiety of their authors surrounding the containment of the myth and its reception by audiences both within and outside of the text becomes justified as the potential for female acts of violence emerges

in both the Legend and the Confessio. If the story of Philomela ended with rape, then it would offer a vision of the relationship between gender and violence that corresponded with that in the Man of Law's tale, but the myth goes on, critiquing the perception of femininity as exalted passivity.

I now want to consider infanticide and what makes maternal infanticide so disruptive to binary structures of gender, especially as it is imagined in the Confessio. Genius begins his exemplum with the analogy of the *Raviner*, as if in the hopes of using it to delineate absolute definitions of masculinity and femininity. That analogy, however, gets out of control as it draws explicit parallels between Procne and Tereus. Genius charts Procne's transformation through multiple gendered identities into a *Raviner*, a category he ultimately reveals, despite its original association with masculinity, to be gender inclusive. Moreover, Procne takes her husband and son as her victims, denaturalizing maternity and turning her husband into a victim. By the end of his myth, despite his efforts at making the characters fit back into their rape-centered roles, Genius has exemplified the fluidity of gendered categories. While such a vision may pass as part of the chaos inherent to the Metamorphosis and the motion it charts from creation to chaos, in the Confessio, that same process compromises the coherence and intelligibility that Genius' rule oriented world fights to naturalize.

The Crisis of Infanticide

The history and study of infanticide in the classical and medieval West is fraught with ethical and practical dilemmas. Little research exists because documentation is scant and references are heavily veiled, making it nearly impossible to cull information about rates of infanticide from extant legal and ecclesiastical documents. What we do

know overwhelmingly suggests that child killing, often referred to as positive infanticide in order to differentiate it from accidental killing or negative infanticide, was morally condemned and a point of anxiety in medieval England. Emily Coleman, in her study of infanticide in the ninth century, argues that "infanticide did not shock the sensibilities of the laity in the Middle Ages," claiming that negative infanticide was probably more common than positive infanticide (p.58). In her research on medieval childhood in London, however, Barbara Hanawalt concludes that although there was a "qualitative difference in the care and nurturing of male and female children" that favored the former, "societal attitudes certainly oppose infanticide; a slander charge in the church courts was "that sche schuld [did] sley her own childe" (pp.58; 45). In the later Middle Ages, literary examples also indicate that positive infanticide was taboo. In Marie de France's Le Fresne, for instance, the slanderous queen considers killing her child to protect her reputation until one of her women persuades her to leave the baby at a church, saving her from complete moral condemnation. The narrator of the Legend extracts infanticide from the legends of Medea and Philomela to turn them into "goode wymmen". In the Clerk's Tale, Griselda, (in)famous for her extraordinary "patience," allows Walter, her husband, to have their children killed. Her vow of obedience to her husband trumps her maternity and makes her morally suspect, even to Walter, whose fixation on testing his wife makes him, at best, an indisputable sadist. After he orders his constable to take the children, Walter wonders what Griselda's passivity actually suggests about her:

> This markys wondrerd, evere lenger the moore,
>
> Upon hir pacience, and if that he
>
> Ne hadde smoothly knowen therbifoore

That parfitly hir children loved she,

He wolde have wend that of *som subtiltee,*

And of malice, or for crueel corage,

That she hadde suffred this with sad visage. (Ll.687-93)

The Clerk undercuts his own representation of Griselda as a model of feminine *pacience* by mentioning that had not Walter been assured of his wife's perfect love for her children he would have been concerned about her *subtiltee*, *malice*, and *crueel corage*. Walter's moment of non-doubt suggests that his test has, perhaps, succeeded in casting doubt, if not upon "hir sadnesse" as he intended, then upon her maternity (Ll.452). By making Griselda complicit in infanticide, the Clerk reveals both the radical extent of her obedience to Walter and the moral hazard of such obedience.

In his study of classical and medieval child abandonment, John Boswell concurs with Hanawalt about the general condemnation of infanticide and disagrees with Yves Brissaud who, while acknowledging his own lack of evidence, suspects that infanticide was a wide spread phenomenon (pp.410-1). Boswell argues that abandonment in the classical and medieval periods was not perceived as unethical and was highly differentiated from positive infanticide; parents who abandoned their children relied ethically on "the kindness of strangers" to rear and employ them. Canonical documentation also supports Boswell's claim that a real, if hard to enforce, distinction existed. Around 906, Regino of Prum compiled "the first of the authoritative collections of canonical decrees to influence the whole Western church" (Boswell, pp. 222-3). In the four canons are rules for abandonment and warnings against infanticide. While there is canonical silence about abandonment in the twelfth century, three papal rules from the

period condemn infanticide (Boswell, pp.278-9). Boswell argues that abandonment decreased between 1000 and 1200 because of prosperity and economic growth and that it became increasingly popular in the fourteenth century as churches began functioning as "clearing houses" for unwanted children and the number of foundling homes, which first appeared in the early thirteenth century, increased (p.431).[27] Canonical, legal, and literary evidence suggests that abandonment and infanticide were known evils in the Middle Ages that required surveillance and exact definition because, in part, the difference between the two could prove hard to maintain.

Classical, medieval, and modern studies of infanticide share the desire to understand why parents and, more often, mothers kill their children; in order to do so, they weigh circumstances, intentions, motivations, and gender even when knowledge of those factors can be next to impossible to divine or assess. Such work lends nuance to a morally fraught topic while also revealing that we assume parental affection to be natural and that it is extremely difficult to imagine a parent wanting to kill a child and not doing so out of need, by accident, or for reasons outside of their control. My interest is not in disputing the naturalness of parental love, but in suggesting that maternity is a deeply essentialized instinct and that infanticide undermines that naturalization. When Procne kills her child, it is not merely that she has become violent, it is rather that the object of that violence is the person whose existence defines her maternity and, by extension, her femininity. In his representation of Procne and her transformation into an infanticide, Genius tracks the process through which she rejects maternity; moreover, he suggests that

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[27] Children were also sold, as the punning, widely popular story of the Snow Child demonstrates. Boswell points out that the ancillary quality of the sale suggests how such events were neither unheard of nor sufficiently outrageous to over power the joke (pp. 282-3 and see appendix, pp. 449-51).

when women do reject maternity and render femininity fluid, they also compromise the stability of masculinity.

Boswell's introductory chapter traces the problematic conflation of abandonment and infanticide in the classical and medieval periods and the methodological problems surrounding his study. He argues persuasively that the distinction between infanticide and abandonment was well known and critical to distinguishing between an act of murder and one of practical despair, but he also acknowledges that the difference is far from absolute. Fundamentally, he contends that abandoning children was morally acceptable while killing them was not; however, the unknowable variables of context and parental intention trouble this distinction. In the classic feminist study of motherhood, Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich focuses exclusively on maternal infanticides, creating a similar problem as she differentiates between moral and immoral circumstances. For Rich, there are two categories of infanticides: women who kill children whom "they knew they could not rear, whether economically or emotionally, [...] [were] forced upon them by rape, ignorance, poverty, marriage, or by the abuse of or sanctions against birth control and abortion" and those who use " infanticide as deliberate social policy, [...] against female or malformed children, twins, or the first-born" (pp. 258-9). Rich only considers positive infanticide, crafting nuanced moral categories that rely entirely on agency, context, and intent. She accepts that women can be forced by exterior powers or circumstances to kill their children, but she is unwilling to be as generous with women who make active choices to do so. The women of the former group are, like their children, victims while the women of the latter group supports institutional or social "policy"; they act with "deliberation" and agency and not out of necessity. Like Boswell's distinction between

infanticide and abandonment, Rich's categories cannot finally sustain scrutiny; such distinctions reflect the desire to uphold the naturalization of paternity, and especially of maternity, but they are destined to dissolve under pressure, revealing a murky middle ground that can be hard to reconcile with an image of natural parental affection.

Rather than differentiating between the acts or circumstances that cause the death of children, Peggy McCracken investigates the various perceptions of paternal and maternal infanticides ("Ingendering"). She argues that the "paternal sacrifice" of children in Old French literature is always justified by a higher good that does not transfer to maternal infanticide. While maternal infanticide is often associated with revenge, as it is with Procne, male infanticide follows the Biblical model of Abraham and Isaac, affirming the patriarchal devotion to a higher good.[28] That model receives further affirmation when it is interpreted within Christian dogma as prefiguring God's sacrifice of Jesus, his only son, to save the sins of the world. The sacrificial model of paternal infanticide, however, often functions as a transparent euphemism. In his reading of Soren Kierkegaard's work on Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Jacques Derrida doubts the morality of Abraham's decision, arguing that there is no difference between the decision to kill Isaac and the act

[28] McCracken focuses on Old French literature, but the pattern she deciphers seems more generally applicable throughout medieval literature. Even in the Clerk's Tale, where the model is heavily scrutinized, Walter seems to think of himself as willing to "sacrifice" his children for the higher good of testing Griselda and Griselda treats Walter like a god who has the right to sacrifice their children. As far as I know, Aeschylus' depiction of Agamemnon is one of the few to deviate from this pattern. In the Oresteia, he describes Agamemnon's "sacrifice" of Iphigenia, his daughter, in order to please the gods and assure winds appropriate to the Greek's journey to Troy. The scene, narrated by the chorus, epitomizes the tension between Agamemnon's efforts to make the act appear to be a sacrifice and the brutal reality of his decision. The murder of Iphigenia becomes one of many bad omens for the Trojan War and one of the major catalysts for the fall of Agamemnon's House of Atreus.

of killing him. He resists religious defenses of the decision and sacrificial interpretations, translating them into moral terms:

> This is the instant in which the sacrifice is as it were consummated, for only an instant, a *no-time-lapse*, separates this from the raised arm of the murderer himself; this is the impossible to grasp instant of absolute imminence in which Abraham can no longer go back on his decision, nor even suspend it. (p.95)

What makes the Hebrew Bible story so morally daunting, Derrida contends, is that it is at the non-moment that God intervenes and gives Abraham back Isaac, saving him from the act, but not from repudiation for the act. That Isaac has not been murdered does not change what the reader has witnessed. To view Abraham morally is to condemn him as a murderer, but to view him as a devoted, unwilling sacrificer, as McCracken argues he and other paternal infanticides are viewed, is to shift the context and the terms from the human to the divine. Such men, then, cannot be perceived as infanticides who kill for human reasons, but as virtuous studies in piety who act under the highest duress and with the greatest devotion. Read alongside Derrida's critique of the paternal sacrificer, McCracken's theory identifies the aggressive reassertion of binary gender to render masculine violence intelligible and even morally acceptable. The attention McCracken draws to the extent to which male infanticide is excused and even translated into divine terms underscores that maternal infanticide is defined in opposition to paternal infanticide as an inexcusable female failing. Moreover, paternal infanticide furthers differences and power structures that are taken as normal while female violence upsets and compromises the construction of those differences. While the father's "sacrifice" of his child serves to

strengthen human/divine relations and confirm the gap between the human and the divine, a mother's murder of her children undermines the intelligible construction of difference between masculinity and femininity that binary gender underwrites.

Mary Poovey's theoretical work on maternity and abortion clarifies what is at stake for the intelligibility of binary gender when women kill their children.[29] Writing about the "abortion question," Poovey cites Foucault to argue that the late seventeenth century marks the "constitution of maternity as the essence of the female subject" (p.243). The relationship between sanctioned femininity and maternity, however, is already born out in fourteenth century literature. Poovey writes:

> For, if the normative woman is a mother, then the mother-nature of woman is one of the linchpins of sexed identity and therefore, by the oppositional logic of gender, one ground of the intelligible masculinity of men. If women are allowed to question or to reject their maternity, then not only is the natural (sexed) basis of rights in jeopardy, but so is the natural basis of identity and, by implication, of masculine identity as well. (p.243)

Like abortion, infanticide undermines the conception of gender differences; when women reject maternity, as they do when they abort or commit infanticide, they subvert the definition of an intelligible masculine identity in opposition to femininity. If femininity is linked to the creation and nurturing of children, then the destruction of those children

[29] This is not to say that abortion and infanticide constitute the same act, but that they are often perceived as doing so.

by women suggests that they are equally capable of the opposite behavior.[30] Genius links the role of the *Raviner* and, by extension, the rapist with masculinity, but his description of Procne shedding her maternity parallels her with Tereus, undermining the oppositional definition of masculinity and femininity and rendering the category of *Raviner* gender fluid. Just as Tereus was overcome by lust as he raped and mutilated Philomela, according to Genius, Procne is "mad/ of wo, which hath his overlad" as she prepares to kill her son (V.5891-2). She acts "withoute insihte of moderhede/ Foryat pite and loste drede" (V.5893-4). Instead of losing *resoun*, as Tereus did, Procne neglects *pite*, *drede*, and *moderhede*. If Procne can reject maternity, avenge her sister, kill her child, and feed him to his father in a recreation of both the rape and her sister's oral mutilation, then gender is fluid and that fluidity is revealed in Procne and Tereus' multivalent relationships to violence. Amans need not worry only about becoming a *Raviner*, he must also be aware of becoming a victim. Genius' detailed narration of the process through which Procne transforms herself into a *Raviner* and the effect of that transformation on those around her suggests the inherent performativity of gender. Procne does not become a man; she becomes a terrifying combination of gendered identities that undermines the rules and categories on which Genius relies to construct an intelligible world for Amans.

In Genius' adaptations of Philomela in the Confessio Amantis, infanticide defines the denouement as the final act of violence.[31] Arguing that Gower is sympathetic to victims of rape, in particular Philomela and Lucretia, Mast suggests that the rape of

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[30] Maternity is a naturalized bond in medieval literature, but the bond between siblings is often even stronger.

[31] The fifth book of the Confessio contains the bulk of the rape narratives; it is also interrupted by Genius' long history of world religion.

Philomela becomes "the function of the story" (p.112). Mast is right that the rape is the "function of" Genius' story, but she overlooks that Procne's transformation undoes that function. In his twelfth century Old French version of the myth, Chrétien de Troyes makes Procne solely responsible for Itis' murder; in Ovid, Procne holds her child and stabs him and Philomela cuts his head off.[32] Chrétien's alteration is partially responsible for demonizing Procne in medieval literature, but it also dramatizes the act as maternal infanticide. (McCracken, "Engendering," p.55) Genius, following Chrétien, turns Procne's decision to avenge her sister into the dramatic crux of his story. Tereus' rape of her sister signifies a forceful change in their natural and familial roles. The transformation that Procne's carefully chronicled decision to kill her son requires and the consequential redefinition of the characters become the terrifying focus of the myth.

Once Philomela's tongue has been cut out, Genius conveniently recounts what "withinne hir herte [...] sche seide" (V.5740). Tongueless, Philomela prays to Jupiter for revenge: "Bot, goode lord, al is in thee,/ Whan thou therof wolt do *vengance*/ And *schape mi deliverance*" (V.5750-2, italics my own). A few lines later, as Philomela speaks to her

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[32] Chrétien de Troyes' story of Philomel is buried within the 72,000 octo-syllabic lines of the Ovide Moralisé, a massive text composed by a Minorite friar between 1291 and 1328 for Jeanne de Champagne, the queen of Philip the Fair. The friar inserted translations that already existed when he could and added his own "exposicion moralle et allegorique" at the end of each "fable." There has been a fair amount of scholarly debate over whether Chrétien is the author of this fable; the author's self-identification at line 734 as "ce conte Crestiiens li Gois" and the introductory material in Cliges, which identifies the author as the same "man who wrote of Erec and Enide, translated Ovid's Commandments and his Art of Love, [...] and about the metamorphoses of the hoopoe, the swallow, and the nightingale," all suggest that the author is Chrétien (p.87). This resume does not link Chrétien de Troyes conclusively to this Philomela; the text, however, does reflect twelfth century romance styles in its use of monologue, its association between love and madness, and the state of mind of the lover, its use of what we call "psychoanalysis," etc.. De Boeur believes that the authors are the same and that Chrétien was familiar with more versions of the story than Ovid's (Pferrer, p.138).

sister in her heart, she replaces Jupiter with Procne as her avenger, repeating similar language: "Ha, Soster, if ye knewe/ of my astate, ye wolde rewe,/ I trowe, and *my deliverance/ Ye wolde schape, and do vengance/* On him that is so fals a man" (italics my own, V.5759-62). And Philomela is quite right to name her sister her avenger because once Procne receives the "cloth of Selk al whyt/ With letters and ymagerie,/ In which was al the felonie,/ Which Tereus to hire [Philomela] hath do," she assumes that role from Jupiter (V.5770-4). As Chaucer's narrator predicted, being an audience to Tereus' violence provokes violence. In this case, however, Philomela, the author, actively wishes her target audience to interpret the tapestry as she does and bring a bloody conclusion to the story she has begun to tell. In Beowulf, when Grendel's Mother takes Æschere, the hero explains that he must act rather than grieve: "Ne sorga, snotor guma! Selre bið æghwæm/ Þæt he his freond wrece, Þonne he fela murne" [Grieve not, wise king! Better it is/ for every man to avenge his friend/ than mourn overmuch] (lines 1384-5). Once Procne learns of what her husband has done to her sister, she decides, in agreement with Beowulf, that 'of suche oultrages [...] wepinge is noght the bote':/ And swerth, if that sche live mote,/ It schal be venged otherwise" (V.5792-6). Assuming a heroic role, as her fellow infanticide Medea does, Procne eschews weeping and bears responsibility for the crimes: "[...] and I therefore/ in al the world schal bere a blame/ Of that my Soster hath a schame" (V.5850-2). In her husband's land and away from their immediate family, Procne actively takes on the typically masculine role of kin avenger.

Medea and Procne complicate the absolute condemnation of infanticides because their murders are motivated by violence and abuse, not by masochistic instincts to test or to obey. At the end of Euripides' Medea, Medea flies towards the sun on a chariot with

her sons' bodies dangling over the edge. Jason watches from below, horrified by what he has seen. Throughout the play, Medea seduces and manipulates her audiences, aligning herself as she sees fit. Jason has betrayed and deserted her and she persistently deploys heroic language to explain why she must avenge herself. Still, her need to attract the sympathy of anyone who will listen suggests both the evil of her character and her awareness that her infanticide will be unforgivable. In concluding her study of the play, Lillian Corti analyzes what makes Medea so hard to dismiss:

> What is exhilarating about the Medea is the successful revolt against corrupt and abusive authority [...] By daring to act, Medea throws off the bonds of an unbearable external domination and becomes the master of her own destiny, apparently heedless of the fact that nothing so much reveals her affiliation with her oppressors as the infanticidal nature of her rebellion. (p.58)

Corti's analysis applies well to Procne: we applaud her unwillingness to let her sister go unavenged and her husband escape repercussion, but we simultaneously acknowledge that her means of revenge equates her with her abuser. Although Medea and Procne resist their oppression, their means of doing so condemns them. Helene Foley argues that Medea fails to create a unique feminine response to the violence around her; she undoes the possible integrity of her act by pursuing the commands of a flawed heroic code that renders her the equivalent of her oppressors (p.79). But Medea's assumption of the heroic code is complicated by her sex and her use of infanticide to enact her revenge. Like Procne, Medea can become, as she does in the Confessio, the arbitrator of her own justice and her own avenger, but to do so she does not simply kill her enemy; as

infanticides, Medea and Procne undermine binary gender by not being entirely masculine or feminine. Infanticide becomes a unique, if horrifying, feminine response to violence, an alternative to killing an enemy. Because Genius follows the Ovidian myths of Medea and Procne closely, he must grapple with depicting women who are at once sympathetic and despicable, masculine and feminine, who defy the neat categorization that Chaucer's narrator and Genius prefer.

According to Genius, Medea is a victim of perjury.[33] Jason, an anti-model like Tereus, exemplifies why Amans should not perjure himself: "thus miht thou se what sorwe it doth/ To swere an oth which noght soth,/ In loves cause namly" (V.4223-5). In the hopes of turning Medea into a relatively sympathetic victim, Genius asks rhetorically "lo, what mihte eny man devise,/ A woman schewe in eny wise/ Mor hertly love in every stede,/ Than Medea to Jason dede?" (V.4175-80). More than one thousand lines of Jason's treacheries precede Medea's murder of her children as if to explain almost defensively, as Rich and Boswell do, the circumstances that compelled Medea. Unlike Benoît de Saint-Maure,[34] who tries to salvage Medea's reputation by omitting the

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[33] For Chaucer's narrator, Jason's betrayals are sufficient to accord Medea a legend despite her well-earned reputation as a witch or, at least, an active user of magic. Converting Medea into a saint, the narrator laments that

> This is the mede of lovynge and guerdoun
> That Medea receyved of Jasoun
> Ryght for hire trouthe and for hire kyndenesse,
> That lovede hym beter than hireself, I gesse [...] (Ll.1662-1665)

[34] In Le Roman de Troie, Benoît de Saint-Maure devotes much time to the story of Medea with whom he is extremely sympathetic, but he omits her revenge on her children. Joan M. Ferrante writes about Benoît's treatment of women that

> Many women in the poem are presented as victims of male violence or betrayal, even when they have extraordinary abilities, like Medea and Cassandra, who was wondrously learned and knew divine arts and secrets thoroughly... ("To the Glory," p.117)

infanticide, Genius includes it, creating a parallel scenario to the one he creates with Procne in which the exemplum resists easy equation with the moral:

> Tho cam Medea to Jason
>
> With bothe his Sones on hire hond,
>
> And seide, 'O thou of every lond
>
> The most untrewe creature
>
> Lo this schal be thi *forfeture*.'
>
> With that sche bothe his Sones slouh
>
> Before his yhe, and he outdrouh
>
> His swerd and wold have slayn hir tho,
>
> Bot farewell, sche was ago,
>
> Unto Pallas the Court Above. (5.4210-9, italics my own)

The term *forfeture* provides a clue to Medea's perception of her crime.[35] Medea assumes the role of arbitrator of justice: Jason will lose his sons, who represent both the perpetuity of his life and his property, in retribution for his crimes.[36] Murdering their sons in front

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[35] The MED lists the first definition of *forfeture* as "a transgression, offence, or crime," but the second meaning captures better Medea's meaning: "loss of life or property as punishment for crime, penalty".

[36] Ovid narrates Medea's killing spree with decidedly unsympathetic speed:

> Sed postquam Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis
> Flagrantemque domum regis mare vidit utrumque,
> Sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis,
> Ultaque se *male mater* Iasonis effugit arma
> [And it was here, in Corinth, that Medea/ now took atrocious vengeance, killing Jason's/ new wife: the sorceress burned her with poison,/ then fired the royal halls; the seas that bathe/ the two sides of the Isthmus saw the flames./ That done, the blood of her own infants stained/ her sacrilegious sword. And she escaped/ her death by fleeing Jason's upraised sword] (italics my own, Book VII., lines 394-7; p. 225)

of Jason makes overt the oppressive violence of his perjury that might otherwise go unacknowledged. She reveals Jason for what he is through a reenactment of his crimes against her family. In order to escape from her father with Jason and the Golden Fleece, Medea kills her brother and scatters his body parts behind her ship, guaranteeing that her father's ships will stop to gather them. Her murder of her children manifests her own betrayal of her father while also allowing her to avenge her father and her brother. Jason becomes her victim, a bereaved father without heirs. Unlike Procne's assault on Tereus' body, however, Medea's crime stops short of re-gendering Jason; rather, it uses his masculinity and his desire for and entitlement to perpetuation through his sons to punish him.

Medea's murder of her children and of Jason's wife destroys his immediate and future family. Procne's attack on Tereus also reflects her meditation on familial relationships and the effect Tereus' incestuous rape has had on them. Her revenge will undo naturalized familial relationships. In Ovid's myth, Philomela worries that her rape has destroyed her relationship with her sister by turning her into a concubine and Tereus into a bigamist; she explains that his actions have reconceived their family relations with no regard for natural order:

> [...]'O diris barbare factis,
>
> o crudelis' ait, 'nec te mandata parentis
>
> cum lacrimis movere piis nec cura sororis
>
> nec mea virginitas nec conugialia iura?

In just four lines, Medea manages to set Jason's bride and his palace on fire and kill her children. As she flees the earth, Ovid condemns her by referring to her as "mater" and placing the noun next to "male"; it is a mother who has done such a deed and there is no justification for the murder.

Omnia turbasti; paelex ego facta sororis,

Tu geminus coniunx, hostis mihi debita Procne!'

[What have you done, barbarian!/ My father's plea and his fond tears, the love/ my sister feels for you, and, too, my own/ virginity; your bonds of marriage – none/ of these could move you. All is now askew./ I am a concubine, and you've become/ a bigamist; it's only right for Procne/ to punish me like any enemy.] (Book VI., lines 533-8; p.198)

The rape has potentially destroyed the alliances made between the families when Pandion married Procne to Tereus. Moreover, Tereus has become husband to both sisters, turning Philomela into Procne's enemy. Philomela's articulation of their new family situation and what has been lost aggrandizes Procne's decision to become an avenger of her husband's concubine and suggests the righteous logic behind her decision to feed her son to his father: as Philomela does, Tereus will know what it is to have the body of a family member inside of him. In order to avenge her sister, Procne makes a choice between her original and new families.[37] But, it is not only that Procne picks between two families, it is that incest simultaneously unites those families and dissolves their bonds. The revenge perpetuates that destructive conflation. That Procne chooses between her original and new families is also significant in gendered terms: when she rejects her new family, she also rejects her role as wife. She will no longer link the families as the object of exchange. Her choice is manifested by the new sleeping arrangements in Tereus' home. Once Procne discovers her sister, she feigns illness to sleep away from Tereus without

[37] In "The Daughter's Text," Jones suggests that she makes this choice and that the Old French version rewrites the myth to examine twelfth century court life, its violence, and the exogamous marriage practice that could introduce treacherous wives to the court.

raising suspicion. He unwittingly agrees, enabling the sisters to reform their alliance and plot. By switching sleeping partners, Procne reverts to her original family, rejecting her roles as Tereus' wife and mother of their child and freeing herself to avenge her sister.

As soon as Procne sees Philomela, her thoughts go to her husband and that "he so untreuly wrogthe/ and hadde his espousaile broke" (V.5815-6). According to Genius, rape turns Tereus into an animal and a *Raviner*; Procne also perceives the rape as transformative. She claims that by attacking her sister, Tereus has destroyed their marriage and, by consequence, obliterated his identity as husband. Praying to Venus and Cupid, Procne reminds the gods that she has always been a model wife, "trewe in mi degree," and that Tereus has become her opposite, "the most untrewe and most unkinde" (V.5829; V.5836). If Tereus is no longer her husband, then she is no longer obliged to perform her role as wife. She dubs his crime unforgivable, freeing herself from the obligation to act as a wife or repair their marriage:

> And wel I wot that he ne may
> Amende his wrong, it is so gret;
> For he to lytel of me let,
> When he *myn oughne Sister tok*,
> And me that am *his wif forsook.* (V.5838-42, italics my own)

Rhyming *tok* with *forsook* and paralleling *myn oughne sister* with *his wif* renders explicit that she imagines the crime in familial terms; Tereus, the subject of the verbs, is responsible for the exchange of a sister for a wife and the ensuing chaos. Procne's prayers do not end with the god and goddess of love; had they, she could remain in the permanent lot of wronged wife where Genius tries to leave her. Once she has asserted

that her husband's crimes as a lover cannot be remedied, she turns to Apollo for help with revenge. "These wofull Sosters" require divine guidance (V.5858).

In her prayers, Procne emphasizes that the incestuous nature of the rape further vilifies Tereus; she does not, as Philomela in Ovid suggests, come to hate her sister, but her sense of the betrayal as one in which a bloodline or familial connection has been perverted clearly feeds her interest in mimicking that crime through having father eat son, permanently destroying that relationship and rendering it deeply unnatural. Like Medea, Procne is not a victim of physical violence, but she suffers within a patriarchal system that has normalized violence against her and given her little, if any, recourse. She perceives herself as a victim of her sister's rape because she is both an aggrieved sister and a forsaken wife with no options; feminized, her solution is to take on the masculine role of avenger while simultaneously conceiving of a crime that undoes the stability of masculinity and femininity. In the conclusion to these prayers, Procne predicts that she will take possession of the story and its outcome by shifting the focus from the rape and the victimization to revenge: "[...] 'It schal be *wreke*,/ That al the world therof schal speke'" (V.5869-0, italics my own). Tereus cuts out Philomela's tongue to prevent exactly this end; Procne's desire to tell the world about her revenge both avenges her sister and turns her *wreke* into the moral of the story. She takes authorial control. In her prayers, Procne combines feminine and masculine responses to violence. She insists on the power of the narrative and its recital; everyone will talk about it as her sister wanted and predicted when she was raped. By usurping Tereus and his rape with her revenge, she acts in accordance with Beowulf's dictum that the hero must resist tears and seek violent retribution in their stead.

In acknowledgement of the transformation violence has induced in them, Genius laments that these "felle" sisters were only made bitter by "the grete wrong/ which Tereus hem hadde do"(V.5882-3). Genius places responsibility for the infanticide squarely on Procne's shoulders, but he avoids attributing maternal hesitation to her. In doing so, he deviates from the tradition of the story in which Procne recalls her love for her son. In Ovid's Metamorphosis, the sisters murder Itis together. Procne hesitates while Itis embraces her; she must actively quell her maternal instinct:

> Sed simul ex nimia mentem pietate labare
> sensit, ab hoc iterum est ad vultos versa sororis
> inque vicem spectans ambos "cur admovet" inquit
> "alter blanditias, rapta silet altera lingua?
> quam vocat hic matrem, cur non vocat illa sororem?"
> [But sensing that maternal love has swayed/ her purpose, Procne turns aside her gaze/ from Itys to her sister, thinking this:/ "And why can he still speak endearingly, while she is mute, her tongue cut out? If he can call me mother, what can't she say "sister"?] (Book VI., lines 629-33; p.202)

Procne wavers, but chooses her sister over her son and redirects her gaze; if one cannot talk, neither will the other. In the Ovide Moralisé, Procne is wondering how she will avenge her sister when Itis appears; the Devil prompts her as she weighs the innocence of her son against his resemblance to his father. In Chrétien, as in Ovid, Procne hesitates because of her attachment to Itis, but this bond is trumped by her demonic-inspired desire to avenge her sister:

> Tant la beisa et conjoi

Que Procne deust ester ostee

Del panser ou ele iert antree,

Si con requiert droiz et nature

De tote humainne creature

Et si con pities le deffant,

Que mere ne doit son anfant

Ne ocire ne desmanbrer

[...]

Einsi puet sa seror vangier

Del felon qui l'a afolee.

[So warmly did he kiss and greet her that Procne might have forgotten all these thoughts. Law and nature and pity, too, forbid all human creatures this, that a mother should kill or dismember her child [...] Thus she could avenge her sister on the scoundrel who had mutilated Philomena.]

(Ll.1312-9; 1326-7)

Both Chrétien and Ovid highlight Procne's maternal deliberation, her sense of the parallel between the rape and the infanticide, and choice of sister over child. Neither, as Genius will do, suggests that Procne premeditates such an act: "his moder wiste wel sche mihte/ Do Tereus no more grief/ Than sle this child, which was so lief" (V.5889-0). Specifically calling her *moder*, Genius affectively asserts that the mother kills her child because she understands that the child is so *lief* to her husband that nothing will cause him *more grief*. Such a cool maternal calculation is almost unthinkable, but it also shows that Procne has become nearly inconceivable in gendered terms. Like the *Tyrant Raviner* and, by

extension, like Tereus, Procne preys upon a weaker creature to achieve her ends. She is without pity or remorse, driven entirely by her desire to get what she wants. She is both avenger and mother, but her maternity, the defining feature of her gender, has been outweighed by her desire for revenge. In fact, it is her clear understanding of parental love that allows her to see infanticide as the most affective course of action.

By tricking Tereus into eating Itis, Procne provides a compelling take on the act of rape between family members. After she kills Itis, she cuts him into little pieces, seasons him with "diverse spieces," and turns him into a stew that she will feed to her husband. In essence, she turns Itis from human to food, but the transformation can never be complete. Procne takes their child, once part of her body and the manifestation of their marriage, and gives him back to his father. As her child, Itis is the only person over whom she can exert this sort of control, and by killing him, she manages to exert control over Tereus as she could not before. Procne destroys Tereus' progeny, but she also turns Tereus into an unknowing accomplice in his own victimization. Procne metaphorically rapes her husband, using their child as a phallus to penetrate Tereus' body with the most incestuous body she can find, his blood relative. Poovey asserts that abortion undermines the clear sense of masculinity and femininity as opposites; Procne's infanticide and cannibalism disturbs binary gender by making a rapist the victim of a rape by his own wife. Her infanticide not only undermines the construction of masculinity and femininity as opposites, it also conflates family roles, turning the three adults and one child into unidentifiable, nearly unintelligible figures.

In her work on the Old French version of the story, E. Jane Burns argues that Procne, as reader of the tapestry, continues the story she sees and "rewrites her own

gruesome past: the tale of her marriage to Tereus and the motherhood that followed it" ("Bodytalk," p.133). Reading the rape and the feast as two instances of bodies being forced into unwilling bodies, she concludes that the murder of Itis ends a cycle of male violence that he would perpetuate, effecting "a [much needed] realignment of the patrilineal configurations" that order the kinship relations in the text ("Bodytalk," p.147). While her use of violence does affect a feminist corrective to domestic abuse, it also aligns Procne with Tereus, enlarging the scope of the *Tyrant Raviner* to include not only men and extortionists, but also women. As a category, then, for understanding both Procne and Tereus, it works well in its lack of gender specificity; it represents a stable meaning in a text in which familial and gendered identities have become fluid and characters take on multiple roles simultaneously. Philomela is a victim of rape and mutilation as well as a sister who has become a concubine and who yearns to have her sister avenge her. Itis is son, food, phallus, and part of his father's body. Tereus is rapist and mutilator as well as victim of an oral rape that mimics his own incestuous attack. Moreover, by eating his child, he will become a receptacle, a digestive gravesite. Procne is mother and infanticide, wife and enemy of her husband, avenger, and sister. The insight of the text is not that women use violence differently from men, but perhaps more terrifyingly to the reader, that women can use violence in the same way as men to transform their objects into victims whose victimization is not laudable. Male victims do not fit easily into the frame of courtly love, and so Genius works to cram Tereus back into the frame of violent aggressor in his gloss and his active framing of the story. Those interpretive efforts, however, do not override the textual revelation that identities are fluid

and that men and women alike can become *Tyrant Raviners*, a conclusion that Genius both leads his reader to and finds fundamentally unacceptable.

By the time Genius is ready to move on to his next example, Procne has accomplished the near complete disruption of the gendered roles around which her narrator operates and which his examples, like Chaucer's narrator's legends, and the Man Of Law's tale reinforce. Although Amans' horrified oath that he would never rape suggests that Genius may have persuaded, at least temporarily, his immediate audience, the contrast between moral and tale can never be resolved without the explicit acknowledgment of the failure of binary gender to account for or imagine the *human* capacity for violence.

In this chapter, I argued that sanctified suffering is a naturalized attribute of femininity, an association that the rape script affirms. I began with the Man of Law's Tale of Custance to suggest that assuredly and aggressively good women are depicted as long suffering, constantly being tested to prove their value and their sex. That equation, which I argue underwrites the operating assumptions of both Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and Gower's Confessio Amantis, is entirely subverted by Ovid's depiction of the relationship between violence and gender in his myth of Philomela. According to Ovid, the capacity for grotesque acts of violence is not gender specific, but a human quality. Both Chaucer and Gower understand the gender-inclusive nature of Ovid's vision and use their narrator's inability to conceive of that vision to critique the reliance on binary gender that appears throughout secular hagiography and courtly love literature. Irrespective of their best editorial efforts to guard the definition of sanctified femininity and resist the possibility of female violence, the narrators allow the infanticide to creep

into their narratives. In Chaucer, the violence appears in references while in Gower, Genius narrates the entire myth as an example of the evils of rape only to have his own exemplum compromise his moral. Infanticide provides a particularly disastrous affront to binary gender. Infanticide is a horrifying reality and fantasy because it questions the naturalized love of parents for their children; maternal infanticide is particularly disturbing because it undermines the oppositionality of masculinity and femininity. If women are not fundamentally mothers, if that is not their defining and most powerful instinct, then the binary gender system falls into chaos as it does at the end of Ovid's myth.

Despite his insistence on the rape script and its inherent vision of masculinity and femininity as opposites tethered by their antithetical relationship to violence, Genius' exemplum reveals a world in which family relationships are multivalent and gendered identities are as well. Men and women are simultaneously attackers, rapists, victims, cannibals, and infanticides. Amans must worry not just about being a rapist, but about being raped; the premise of the Confessio, that men must learn not to commit crimes against their beloveds, is undermined by the possibility of women not acting as passive victims but as retaliators who match violence with violence. The term *Tyrant Raviner*, with which Genius began as a way of theorizing rape, becomes a pointedly gender-less and useful way of understanding the human capacity for tyrannical acts of violence that take innocent victims, children, women, and animals as their prey. Violent women persist in being inconceivable, unable to be fully integrated into their literary spaces in as wide a variety of texts as Judith, Beowulf, Confessio Amantis, and Legend of Good Women. In the following chapters, I examine examples from British historiography and

hagiography in which violent women are institutionally necessary; they require new language and terms when they exist in the real world as queens and penitents.

Men, Women, and Queens in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century British Historiography

Marriage, asserts Claude Lévi-Strauss in his 1949 foundational The Elementary Structures of Kinship, is the exchange of a woman between two men. That exchange expands the social and political alliances of both men and their respective communities and "prevent[s] those two calamities of primitive society [...], namely, the bachelor and the orphan" (Lévi-Strauss, p.39). A man cannot marry just anyone; culture overrides the potentially arbitrary and chaotic forces of nature to ensure that his marriage is exogamous, that his wife is not a part of his group (Lévi-Strauss, p.32). The definition of that group is culturally specific, but this regulation of marriage asserts and iterates the taboo status of incest, thereby enabling the survival and organization of the community (Lévi-Strauss, p.43). In spite of its various terms and expressions throughout time and space, exogamy, according to Lévi-Strauss, is a universal rule:

> As opposed to endogamy and its tendency to set a limit to the group, and then to discriminate within the group, exogamy represents a continuous pull towards a greater cohesion, a more efficacious solidarity, and a more supple articulation. [...] [Exogamy is] the archetype of all other manifestations based upon reciprocity, and [...] provides the fundamental and immutable rule ensuring the resistance of the group. (pp..480-1)

Building on the work of Marcel Mauss that I discussed in relation to Tacitus's Germania and Anglo-Saxon warrior culture, Lévi-Strauss concludes that of the countless reciprocal exchanges that shape and order primitive communities, the exogamous marriage exchange is the most fundamental, the most essential to the survival of both the

individual and his group because it assures the expansion of geographical, ethnic, political, and ideological boundaries.

By the 1970's, feminists had reworked Lévi-Strauss' theory of marriage, profoundly expanding its implications. Gayle Rubin, a feminist anthropologist, made the de-essentialization of female degradation a central goal of her work. Arguing that female subordination is at the heart of all culture, she develops Lévi-Strauss' thesis on the productive capacity of marriage to form essential alliances, and shows that the exchange of women generates the sex-gender system. Circulating women provides order, stability, and meaning to communities by naturalizing the object status of women and making that status central to the survival of the community. She writes:

> "Exchange of women" is a short hand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin. [...] If Lévi-Strauss is correct in seeing the exchange of women as a fundamental principle of kinship, the subordination of women can be seen as a product of the relationships by which sex and gender are organized and produced. ("Traffic," p.177)

Marriage, according to Rubin, compounds male power by creating alliances and by reproducing a sex-gender system in which men act as exchangers and women as exchanged objects. This hierarchical structure is culturally, institutionally, and psychically affirmed and even mandated by its participants. By orienting the oppression of women within social systems, however powerful and pervasive, rather than within biology, Rubin creates the possibility for reform through disruption and subversion.

In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler builds on Rubin's argument, asserting that marriage codifies binary gender by making heterosexuality compulsory. The iterative reproduction of hetero-normative kinship practices naturalizes binary gender by enforcing the monolithic and causal operation of sex, gender, and desire:

> Gender can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self- and desire- where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. That institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system. (Butler, "Gender," p.30)

Heterosexuality derives from the assumption that male and female are opposites and, as opposites, desire each other. The meeting of these opposites in a heterosexual union codifies their absolute difference and promises the achievement of a natural and even perfect wholeness. Almost twenty years after the publication of Gender Trouble, Butler is still best known for her theory of gender performativity that furthers Rubin's disruption of the naturalized status of binary gender. She has argued that neither sex nor gender is essential, but performative, that the body becomes male or female, masculine or feminine through the repetition of stylized and signifying acts. This is not to say that any gender can be performed at any time, that material, historical, psychic, and physical limitations

do not curtail performances, but that bodies and genders attain meaning through processes and those processes can be productively disrupted and subverted.

That the institution of marriage generates and perpetuates the sex gender system and, in doing so, benefits and empowers men and subordinates and harms women is an assumption held dear by some feminist critics and vigorously contested by others. Medieval marriage served a wide variety of purposes, some of which are more particular to the medieval period than the modern. Marriage created political alliances, smoothed out inheritances and problems of succession, saved souls in accordance with Saint Paul's well known dictum, "it is better to marry than to burn," enabled sanctified procreation, and resolved disputes between families, clans, and larger communities (1 Corinthians 7:9).[1] Moreover, as the work of historians like Dyan Elliot and Sarah Salih has shown, marriage did not always organize or further conventional heterosexual desire.[2] Arguing that spiritual marriage offers insight into the intersection between "the history of marriage and sexuality" and "female spirituality," Elliot explains that:

> Although theoretically available to either sex, spiritual marriage was most frequently identified as a female religious practice. In particular, women seem to have availed themselves of this model as a means of attaining

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[1] Thorough discussions and histories of marriage in the Middle Ages can be found in two works by George Duby: The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: the Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France and Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages. More recently, see Conor McCarthy's Marriage in Medieval Europe: Law, Literature, and Practice and Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe by James R. Brundage.

[2] See, for example, Salih's "Queering "Sponsalia Christi": Virginity, Gender, and Desire in the Early Middle English Anchoritic Texts," Pamela Sheingorn's "The Maternal Behavior of God: Divine Father as Fantasy Husband," and Dyan Elliot's Spiritual Marriage.

> autonomy in marriage through chastity, which is represented as a way of more closely aligning themselves with celestial favor. (pp. 11-2)

Although, as I will suggest in my next chapter, Ancrene Wisse, Holy Maidenhood, and the popular lives of the virgin martyrs represent marriage as an institution that perpetuates heteronormativity with all its implications, they also redeploy the power dynamic marriage garners to make sense of other relationships. Salih reveals the fluidity with which the Christian and Jesus are imagined to exchange the roles of desirer and desired. In essence, these texts identify the essentializing and normalizing effects of marriage and hijack them as a model for their own ends.

Karma Lochrie argues that heteronormatity may be a modern rather than a medieval assumption. About the title of her book, Heterosyncrasies and its project, Lochrie writes:

> I have chosen the title of this book, Heterosyncrasises, to perform such a denaturalization of the category of heterosexuality and to resist especially the presumption of heterosexual normativity for the Middle Ages. [...] This book will seek out a more nuanced heterosexuality that is fissured and cross-sected by any number of unnatural desires and acts and, at the same time, an emerging female sexuality that is likewise unorganized by modern heteronormative assumptions. ("Heterosyncrasies," p.xix; p.24)

According to Lochrie, the assumption of heteronormativity as a norm against which all other desires are measured is anachronistic. By stepping outside of the feminist narrative that marriage reproduces a sex-gender system that naturalizes heterosexuality, Lochrie allows for the complication of the relationship between marriage and binary gender and

the widening of the intelligible spectrum of desire, sexuality, and gender. Marriage becomes a fluid exchange, capable of more than simply (re)producing heterosexuality. The royal kinship system as depicted in the twelfth-century British historiography of Geoffrey of Monmouth and two of his thirteenth century vernacular translators, Wace and Lawman, creates something very different from a subordinate, exclusively feminine woman. In the Gwendolyn and Estrildis episode, which is set less than thirty years after the British have arrived in Britain, the ideal queen is represented as an institutionally necessary figure that is indisputably biologically female and able to perform masculinity and femininity with equal ease, as the situation demands. As a body that gives birth, she is foundational to the sex-gender system even as her performance of masculinity and femininity deconstructs binary gender.

Since this episode is infrequently treated by critics, a brief summary is useful: according to Geoffrey, author of the Historia Regum Britannie (HRB), Locrinus, Kamber, and Albanactus, the sons of Brutus, founder of Britain, peaceably divide the island amongst themselves after their father's death.[3] Soon afterward, Humber, a skillful and

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[3]All references to Geoffrey's Latin will be to page numbers and will come from the 2007 edition of HRB edited by Michael D Reeve and translated by Neil Wright. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. All citations to and translations of Wace will come from Judith Weiss' edition and refer to line number. Weiss primarily follows the 1938 edition of the Roman de Brut that Ivor Arnold made for the Société des Anciens Textes Français, using "MS P (BL.Add.45103) up to 1.11999, and MS D (Durham Cathedral C iv. 27 (I)[...] from 1.1200 to the end of the poem" (Weiss, p.xxv). All references to the original of Lawman's Brut will be to line numbers and will come from the E.E.T.S. edition by G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie. Translations will also refer to line numbers and will come from Rosamund Allen's edition, which uses MS. Cotton Caligula A.9 for a base.

There are approximately 217 extant manuscripts of Geoffrey, approximately thirty-two manuscripts of Wace, and two manuscripts of Lawman. In his introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth: the History of the Kings of Britain, Reeve provides an exhaustive discussion of the relationship between the manuscripts and his rationale for

well-traveled pillager, invades the island, killing Albanactus. As Humber marches through Britain, Albanactus' people flee to Locrinus who rallies the men of Britain in a counter attack. Humber fights the surviving sons of Brutus until the British prevail and Humber drowns.

Prior to the attack, Locrinus had agreed to marry Gwendolyn, the daughter of Corineus, Brutus' greatest and fiercest ally; the marriage would merge Loegeria and Cornwall and guarantee the preservation of a royal British line with a pure Trojan pedigree. While dividing the booty from Humber's ships amongst his men, Locrinus discovers Estrildis, the beautiful daughter of the King of Germany, and plans to jilt Gwendolyn. Corineus does not take Locrinus' change of heart lightly: brandishing a battle-ax, he persuades Locrinus that it is in his best interests to keep his word. In the face of these threats, Locrinus marries Gwendolyn, but hides Estrildis in an underground cave and visits her secretly. When Corineus dies, he banishes Gwendolyn to Cornwall, her family holding, and lives publicly with Estrildis and Habren, their daughter. Unwilling to remain in exile, Gwendolyn rallies the men of Cornwall and attacks Loegeria; her husband is killed and Gwendolyn rules successfully as a regent for Maddan, her son by Locrinus. Leaving nothing to chance, she orders Estrildis and Habren to be drowned in a river, which she names after Habren.[4]

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collating eleven of them "in full and six in part" rather than relying on a single base text (p.xi). Neil Wright argues that Wace used the shorter, First Variant version of Geoffrey's text as his base (pp. xi-cxiv). In his prologue, in particular lines 19-23, Lawman cites Wace, along with Bede, Saint Albin, and Saint Augustine, as his sources.

[4] Geoffrey, Wace, and Lawman all spell character names inconsistently. I have streamlined the spellings as Gwendolyn, Estrildis, and Locrinus and indicate the specific version by reference to the name of the author.

In The Vision of History in Early Britain, Robert W. Hanning describes Geoffrey's break from the Christian historiographical tradition of linear narrative. His new form of writing reflects his theory of the cyclical nature of history: similar, but not identical, situations illustrate the rise and fall of individuals, empires, and ethnic groups (pp.162-72). The questions about gender, violence, sovereignty, and royal kinship that emerge prominently in this episode are recycled throughout HRB, Wace's Roman de Brut, and Lawman's Brut without definitive resolution. When Humber attacks Britain, his invasion raises interwoven questions about the role of the king as guardian of the British against outsiders and, by extension, about what determines the boundaries of the British identity that the King must protect. Initially, Locrinus seems to have successfully protected the British from this attack and created unity amongst his and his brothers' kingdoms, but his discovery of Estrildis in Humber's ships creates discord between him and his future father-in-law and ultimately brings the British to civil war. Ethnically exotic, exaggeratedly feminine, and entirely objectified, Estrildis is a male fantasy, one that is both inevitably attractive and entirely destructive. She distracts the King so that he no longer protects his community; her attractiveness keeps him from realizing the threat she poses to the British as an invader. Furthermore, from under the earth, she creates an ethnically diverse female heir with a claim to the throne. Britain has fallen into chaos, and Gwendolyn manages to save it. She rallies her father's allies, attacks her husband's kingdom, and drowns his lover and their child. Her use of violence genders her as masculine, associating her closely to the role Locrinus played at the beginning of the episode, but she also remains resolutely feminine and female as she acts as a regent for her son and steps aside for him.

When Renwein's marriage to Vortigern gives the Saxons entry to Britain or Guinevere's affair with Mordred undermines Arthur's hold on Britain and his empire, no Gwendolyn-like figure enters to provide resolution, and consequently the British lose their hold on the island. Only Gwendolyn fulfills the British fantasies of territorial unity and genealogical purity that this episode explores. She is essentially female and also able to perform masculinity and femininity; moreover, she is genealogically British even as she belongs to two distinct British kingdoms, territories that she unites through invasion and sovereignty. If, as Rubin and Butler suggest, binary gender is a fiction, a fantasy that upholds and naturalizes male dominance and female subordination, Gwendolyn is a fantasy of a royal figure that is intelligibly female and gender fluid, unhindered by social norms in her pursuit of the good of the community.

The Men of Britain: Violence, Gender, and National Identity

For British historiographers writing after the Norman Conquest, that alien men would attack Britain is a foregone conclusion; moreover, it is a topic that creates easy parallels between the British past and present as the Anglo-Saxon and Norman inhabitants of the island grapple with the cultural, political, and linguistic repercussions of 1066. Geoffrey wrote in Latin prose in a period of vast civil unrest as Stephen and Mathilda fought for control of the English throne. Robert of Gloucester, his patron and the illegitimate son of Henry I, was also a non-contender for the throne.[5] Wace and Lawman follow Geoffrey in self-consciously fashioning their works to reflect the present. Born in Jersey, Wace worked in the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine; by translating HRB into octo-syllabic French of England verses, he appropriates British

[5] See Michelle Warren, "History," pp.26-9, for a full discussion of Geoffrey's dedication.

history for his ruling French patrons in the Roman de Brut, incorporating them into the history of a people who once had imperial claims. Little is known about Lawman except that he wrote from Arley in the diocese of Worcester. To reclaim British history for post-Conquest English speakers, he composed his Brut in a traditional Old English alliterative verse form with a relatively archaic Middle English in a SouthWest Midlands dialect.[6] As Geoffrey's narrative is adapted for audiences with various mythical, political, and ideological stakes in the history of Britain, questions about the nature of invasion and its effect on the construction of British identity persevere, preoccupying these texts.

The first invader of newly founded Britain, Humber, a pirate by profession, tries to take the land that, Geoffrey tells us, the British feel entitled to by prophetic decree. In England the Nation, Thorlac Turville-Petre argues that both "outside attack" and civil war can foster the development of national identity (p.4). The enemy becomes a physical and theoretically coherent other against which a national identity can be formulated. By aggressively self-identifying in opposition to Humber and his gang of Huns, the British will become possessors of the island; in times of future "internal strife," the invocation of that identity should refer to national unity and the peace that accompanies it (p.4). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen describes the process by which group identities formulate and develop meaning in language that echoes Butler's theory of performativity: "Collective identity, like personhood and gender, is substantiated through repetition and citation. It is therefore best described as bodily praxis, as an interminable process of embodiment"

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[6] The relationship of these texts to the British history of conquest and invasion has been treated by Michelle R. Warren in History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300, and, more recently, by Kenneth J. Tiller in Lawman's Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History. Both authors make use of postcolonial theory to understand the questions of power and hierarchy that preoccupy post-Conquest British historiography.

("Hybridity," p.13). The difference between man and woman, like that between the British and the Huns, is created through enactment and process; such a difference is never as definitively as it is first represented to be. In this episode, the absolute nature of British identity is revealed as a fantasy: its genealogical and territorial bases are questioned, and the clear image of the British king and his men who defend their land with virtuous violence collapses.

From a British perspective, the descendants of Brutus are the divinely decreed settlers of the island and Humber is a pillager with no rights to the land and nothing underwriting his attack except for his desire to conquer as much land as possible. Humber's attack takes the most transparent military and masculine forms, beginning the episode with the postulation of an absolute masculinity that is entirely distinct from femininity and expressed by the use of violence and, more precisely, the use of violence for the obligatory and justified defense of the island. Throughout the Brut, Lawman appeals to his English speaking audience by dramatizing and romanticizing moments of proto-British nationalism. To imagine the brave men of Britain doing righteous war against Humber, he makes Humber a radical enemy, a fantasy of masculine alterity against which an ideal British masculinity can be constructed. His hyperbolic description of Humber and his henchmen serves his purpose well:

> Æfter seouentene ȝere, sone Þeræfter,
>
> Cum liðen to londe Þat wes an leodisc king,
>
> [...]
>
> vuele weoren his Þewes, his Þeines weoren kene.
>
> He hefde moni lond awest and leodene biswikene

> And moni hundred eitlonde Þa weoren bi sæ-stronde,
>
> Mesten-dal alle heonne to Alamaine.
>
> [Once those seventeen years were passed, speedily after/ came traveling to this territory an alien tribal king,/ [...] evil were his habits, his henchmen were very bold,/ He had laid waste many lands, and conquered those who lived there/ And many hundred islands more which lay beside the sea-shore,/ Nearly everyone of them from here to Germany.] (Ll. 1071-2; 1073-77)

For Lawman, Humber is the perfect invader of Britain because he represents the opposite of everything that a mythologizing account would wish to associate with its subject. A "leodisc king," his inherently evil ways and aggressive henchman have helped him pillage hundreds of islands. He travels and raids for profit, destroying and conquering people and their lands before moving on. When Humber fights Albanac, he is armed not only "mid fure and mid here," [with fire and with warfare] but also "mid feole kunne hærme" [with frequent wretchedness] (Ll. 1080). Although fire and warfare are unsurprising war tactics, Lawman caps off this description with the pointedly vague "hærme," inviting his reader to imagine the true extent of Humber's evil. In his past conquests, he has partially stripped his victims of their ethnic identities by pillaging their land and the coherent definition of their masculinity as intertwined with the protection of that land.

Lawman's narration of the military confrontation between Humber and the British uses the exclusively male battlefield to exaggerate the polarity of the two sides, making it an ideal physical and ideological forum for the formulation of masculine British identity

in opposition to Humber. Humber will marshal all of his "hærme" to force the British to retreat and the British will fight heroically to avenge Brutus' son and defend their new home. Fully embracing the dramatic potential of this scene as a conflict between good and evil, Lawman writes that:

> Togædere comen mid soðe Þat weoren Þa tweiene broðeren,
> Locrinus and Camber, and al heora leoden
> mid alle Þon kniten Þe heo biȝeten mihten.
> Heo ferden toward Humber mid hæȝere strengðe,
> And Humber wes swa swiðe wod for al Þat lond on him stod.
> He ferde ouer Scotte water mid alle his wæl-kempan,
> And mid bisie ifihte Brutlond heo wolden iwinnen.
> [Together came in full trust those two remaining brothers, Locrinus and Camber, and all their loyal men,/ With each of the knights they could summon to fight/ They marched towards Humber in such heavy strength/ That Humber was utterly enraged: the land to him was all engaged;/ He crosses the Scottish Water with his deadly warriors;/ by battling intensely they wanted to win Britain.] (Ll. 1091-7)

According to Lawman, loyalty and strength are as much proof of British righteousness as Humber's anger is of the illegitimacy of his claim. In fighting for possession of Britain, the two armies travel across the land both hope to control, meeting at a river that significantly divides them. As the armies attack each other, the British are the norm against which Humber's alterity is weighed; he is other, evil, and dangerous. After Locrinus and Kamber kill the Huns, Humber drowns in a river where he joins his men

who have already met watery ends. While Lawman has Humber drown, Geoffrey and Wace turn him into a suicide. In any case, his death and that of his followers affirm the totality of the British victory; they vanquish Humber completely. The Huns will not come back to defend the honor of their leader; rather, their bodies will decompose in the river whose name inscribes their loss into the geography of the island. In fact, in dying in the river, rather than winning the land of Britain, they become part of British history and geography; their loss is memorialized and concretized in the territory they wished to control.

Despite the extraordinary barbarity and masculinity of the Huns, the British prove superior as warriors and thus as men. The island and people of Britain unite as they have not since the sons divided the kingdoms.[7] Humber's attack has a number of narrative effects. It enables the British to perform a group identity that is essentially linked to their genealogy and their possession of the land: they inherited the land from Brutus and they reaffirm their right to that inheritance in this battle. The protection of the land becomes an obligation and a duty of the King and of his men. Masculinity, violence, and ethnic identity are as coherently and seamlessly linked as Butler argues sex, desire, and gender are in the practice of heteronormativity. If, as Turville-Petre argues, the invader becomes the other in the forging of a coherent national identity, women are an alternative

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[7] One of the clear virtues of Gwendolyn's rule is her control of all the territory, but even then there is ambiguity. Wales, for instance, is introduced and disappears. Kamber and his Welshmen help Locrinus, but are never acknowledged again. The omission could suggest that Britain has already suffered a division that is both ethnic and geographic or that the Welsh are already being marginalized from the very middle of the island governed by Locrinus. For a full discussion of their treatment in this material, see John Gillingham's The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity, and Political Values.

unspoken other in this scene. Their omission from this scene furthers the construction of masculinity in absolute, biological terms; if women are opposite of men, then they have no place fighting, protecting the land, or formulating a communal identity. As Joan Scott writes, however, the repression of the feminine always comes at a cost:

> The principle of masculinity rests on the necessary repression of feminine aspects – of the subject's potential for bisexuality – and introduces conflict into the opposition of masculine and feminine. Repressed desires are present in the unconscious and are constantly a threat to the stability of gender identification, denying its unity, subverting its need for security. (pp.38-9)

The definition of masculinity in exclusion of femininity denies, according to Scott, the potential for bisexuality because it compromises binary gender. But, the repression of ambiguity that binary gender demands can never be complete; there are always reminders of what has been forgotten and ignored. Just as femininity must be forgotten to constitute a pure masculinity, the very recent past must be overlooked for the British to be perceived as righteous heirs and defenders of the island.

Lawman's transformation of Humber's invasion into a moment of British solidarity can be construed as a response to the parallels his sources construct between Humber's invasion and the earlier arrival of Brutus, who purged Albion of the giants, the original inhabitants. Michelle Warren writes argues that "the ideal of unified Insular space sustains the ideal of a unified Insular race, a single people possessing a single land through time in a seamless genealogical progression" ("History," p.43). She goes to explain that in HRB such a vision is unattainable even as it is upheld and that Geoffrey is

both suspicious of the kinship strategies and invaders that threaten that vision and able to imagine the benefits they bring to Britain and the British. In Sovereign Fantasies, Patricia Clare Ingham identifies in Arthurian narratives the desire for an uninterrupted, continuous British whole. For Geoffrey, the achievement of that whole is another matter. Wace and Lawman also negotiate the tension between narrating a glorious and mythic British history, rooted in Trojan genealogy, and the parade of peoples who conquer the British and rule the island and, in doing so, complicate the definition of British identity in relation to the possession of the land. An irresolvable dilemma surrounds the clear constitution of British identity and, therefore, all three authors seem content to use these texts to think through the problem, to balance the desire for a clear British identity alongside an acknowledgement and even celebration of the fluidity of the category of identity as such. Throughout HRB, Geoffrey relies on genealogy as an antidote to this fluidity, a way of concretely differentiating between peoples hierarchically. Francis Ingledew defines genealogy as "a narrative mode that not only inevitably confers structure on history but also conjures value out of time through the mystification of ancestry" (p.671). Genealogy creates a significant and cohesive history of the British that suggests a mysterious past and a continuity between that past and the present in which he writes. Robert M. Stein links the invocation of genealogy specifically to the fluidity of the British relationship to land: "Genealogical narrative both reflects political reality and intends to change it [...] the problematic that it especially engages grows out of a series of anxieties having to do with the instability of territorial occupation, ownership, and control" ("Making," p.105). Before Geoffrey launches into the inaugural event of British

history, Aeneas' flight from burning Troy, he classifies his characters by their ethnicity and relationship to the land, revealing his plot and its ending:

> Postremo quinque inhabitur populis, Normannis uidelicet atque Britannis, Saxonibus, Pictis, et Scotis; ex quibus Britones olim ante ceteros a mari usque ad mare insederunt donec ultione diuina propter ipsorum superbiam superueniente Pictis et Saxonibus cesserunt. Qualiter uero et unde applicuerunt restat nunc perarare ut in seubsequentibus explicabitur.
> [In the future, it [Britain] is inhabited by five races of people, the Normans evidently and the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts, and the Scots. Of these the Britons once before held everything from sea to sea until on account of divine vengeance at their overwhelming arrogance they were turned out by the Picts and the Saxons. It now remains for me to write how they came and from where, and this will be revealed in what follows.] (p.7)

Geoffrey concludes with a prophecy of British return, but he has rendered what it means to be British so ambiguous that this final decree becomes a haunting reminder of the failure of his system. If the British are defined by their genealogy, they have intermarried; if by their physical relationship to the island, they are outcasts. Who exactly will return to Britain, then, remains unclear.

In their adaptations of HRB for the ruling French and the conquered English, Wace and Lawman develop the ambiguity that surrounds Geoffrey's definition of what it means to be British. Their prologues replace Geoffrey's genealogy with general references to their interest in narrating the history of England, who lived there, and what they did. They imagine an entirely different relationship between the land and its people,

overlooking genealogy and focusing on the broad and ambiguous history of the English. In other words, they write the history of the many who have controlled the island. In the first lines of his Brut, Wace describes his work as a truthful and sequentially organized recounting of the kings of England (Ll.1-2). According to Lawman, it occurred to him to tell of the English: "Hit com him on mode and on is mern þonke/ þet he wolde on Engle þa æðelæn tellen,/ wat heo ihoten weoren and wonene heo comen/ þa Englene londe ærest ahten [...] " [There came to his mind a most splendid idea,/ That he would tell of England's outstanding men:/ What each had as a name and from what place they came,/ Those earliest owners of this our England] (Ll.6-9). In the next line, he shifts from the history of England into Biblical history and God's destruction of the world. Wace and Lawman, then, are less interested in genealogy and more interested in territory and territorial possession as the means of determining who is British and, more importantly for a post-Conquest audience, who is English.

A prime example of the different ways in which genealogy and territory assert identity comes in the letters exchanged between Julius Caesar and the British King Cassivelanus. The Romans and the British both proudly trace their ancestry to Aeneas' escape from Troy. By beginning his account with the escape, Geoffrey transparently situates British history in a classical and genealogically-oriented trajectory. In doing so, he overlaps with the tendency of European aristocrats to "trace[d] their genealogies back to Troy" in order to differentiate between competing families (Warren, "History," p.10). When Julius Caesar demands tribute from the British, the exchange exemplifies the constructed reality of territory and genealogy as essential indicators of identity. In the letters, both are marshaled to justify political claims. Their invocation, intended to assert

essentialism, only reveals their relativity: Caesar thinks that the British have become inferior to the Romans because they live on a remote island and the British argue that their shared genealogy renders them the equals of the Romans. According to Caesar, the relationship between the Romans and British is as follows:

> 'Hercule ex eadem prosapia nos Romani et Britones orti sumus, quia ex Troiana gente processimus. Nobis Aeneas post destructionem Troiae primus pater fuit, illis autem Brutus, quem Siluius Ascanii filii Aeneae filius progenuit. Sed nisi fallor ualde degenerati sunt a nobis nec quid sit milicia nouerunt, cum infra occeanum extra orbem commaneant.
> [By Hercules, we Romans and the Britons are from the same ancestry, being both descended from the Trojans. After the destruction of Troy Aeneas was our first father, theirs Brutus, whose father was Silvius, son of Aeneas' son Ascanius. But, unless I err, they have degenerated greatly from us nor do they know what it is to fight, since they live at the end of the world amid the ocean.] (p.69)

Caesar acknowledges their shared bloodline, but he understands that genealogy as gaining meaning through physical place. Cassivelanus believes that identity is portable, able to survive away from a geographical location. In his reply, he reminds Caesar of their shared heritage:

> Opprobrium itaque tibi petiuisti, Caesar, cum communis nobilitatis uena Britonibus et Romanis ab Aenea defluat et eiusdem cognationis una et eadem catena praefulgeat, qua in firmam amicitiam coniungi deberent. Illa a nobis petenda esset, non seruitis.

> [And thus you seek what is disgraceful to you, Caesar, since blood from Aeneas flows to British and Roman with a shared nobility, one and the same bond of consanguinity should shine forth which ought to join us in strong friendship, You should have sought friendship from us not servitude.] (p.69)

Neither genealogy nor territory emerges as a resolute or objective indicator of identity. In the consequent battles between the British and the Romans, the ability to distinguish them from each other collapses even further. As such, in these texts, invocations of national identity functions as binary gender does: both systems intend to make differences absolute, but the invocation of those differences always reveals, to return to Scott's language and paradigm, what is repressed, what is like.

At the beginning of his narrative, Geoffrey can still rely on genealogy to distinguish the British from all others, but even then, he draws attention to the quality of the British claim to their territory, raising questions about what their relationship to the island will be and the dependence of their status as Britons on their location. Although Brutus received a prophecy that he would found a second Troy, giants already inhabit Albion. Despite the justification of their entitlement, the British do not go uncontested; they are invaders who destroy the natives. Much as Locrinus and his brothers were unwilling to cede their home to Humber, the giants resist British settlement by attacking as the British celebrate their arrival. A fight ensues and men and giants are killed; the British finally persevere and capture the powerful Gogmagog. With Brutus as spectator, Corineus and Gogmagog fight for possession of the land until Corineus throws the giant over a cliff. The victory and the dedication of the cliff as "Gogmagog's Leap" link

British possession of the land not to the outcome of a battle, but to a staged fight between a monster and a human, a dubious measure of entitlement. Like Humber, the giants are other to the British; they are not even entirely human. However, unlike Humber, they inhabit the island and, as such, they have a claim to the land through their literal possession of it, a right the British wish to identify as inferior to their own. With the dedication of the cliff, the history of the giants enters the narrative of British history and the landscape of the island; it turns the giants into a story of a British conquest over the inhuman. The cliff functions as a nominal reference to a pre-origin that British imperialistic desire both destroys and preserves in order to claim the island as its own.

Using this example to discuss the preoccupation with naming in these histories, Michelle Warren argues that the act of naming encodes the honorees into the physical land and, by extension, the communal memory of the British ("History", p.37).[8] In British historiography, invasions and changes in leadership are reflected in the names of locations, borders, and rivers. Geoffrey uses names and language to chart control of the land: in Wace and Lawman, the shifting names of rivers and towns chronicle history and testify to the cycle of rule. Humber and Habren enter that narrative by giving their names to the Severn and the Humber rivers; in doing so, they join the ranks of Gogmagog. These rivers represent not only British possession but also introduce watery boundaries that divide the island early on and suffer endless flux, causing as much trouble as clarity and undermining the effectiveness of territory as an indicator of identity. The Humber,

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[8] For more extensive discussions of the historical, geographical, and political implications of naming, see Warren, "History," p.37, Otter, p.70, and R. Howard Bloch's Etymologies and Genealogies: a Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages. In her introductory remarks to History on the Edge, Warren identifies the parallels between etymologies and genealogies (pp.11-4).

located at the Southern border of Albania in the North and in the middle of Loegeria, often delineates kingdoms. The Severn separates Wales from Loegeria, codifying the gulf between Wales and the rest of the country.[9] As I will discuss, one of the clear virtues of Gwendolyn's rule is the breadth of the land she controls. Like the British men before her, she asserts her control through naming what is hers. She inscribes a warning about the dangers of the feminine and ethnic other into the river just as Gogmagog's cliff refers to the monstrous history of the island and Humber's river suggests the possibility of foreign invasion. The choice of Habren instead of her mother as memorialized enemy is significant and introduces the challenges she and her mother make to the construction of British identity in the terms of this episode: Estrildis is less dangerous than her half-Saxon child with a claim to a British throne because Habren would complicate and convolute the Trojan genealogy of the British and the usefulness of that ancestry in determining what constitutes membership in the British community. Invaders, as it turns out, do not always come in the shape of pirates, and invasion does not always create the opportunity for unity and definition.

Estrildis: Desire, Destruction, and the Feminine

In "The Origin of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Estrildis," J.S.P. Tatlock locates the sources for Geoffrey's Estrildis in William of Malmesbury's Gesta Pontificum and the Acta Sanctorum. After a series of misadventures, Elfildis is saved by her belief in God. In chapter 259 of the Gesta, Danish and Norwegian raiders kidnap Elfildis from her native England. A count rapes her and dies soon afterward. The King of Norway, the future Saint Olaf, also rapes her, but their relationship, according to William, changes

[9] The Thames is the other significant river that provides borders.

from that of victim and aggressor to one of mutual pleasure, and they have a son together. Elfildis hides with a bishop while the King is alive, but once he dies, she and her son flee to a remote section of Norway where they are discovered and her son dies. Rather than succumbing to despair, Elfildis promises God that she will not eat meat or greasy food. Her oath and dedication pay off, and she escapes to England where she lives happily until she falters and touches a piece of meat; her sin results in three years of paralysis that a visit to the shrine of Aldhelm reverses. The changes Geoffrey makes to Estrildis are critical to her function in all three accounts of British history. Abducted by men and taken to strange lands, Elfildis and Estrildis suffer in classically feminine terms; they are victims of violence, treated as pleasurable objects by the men around them. Elfildis, however, exercises discernible agency: she turns a rape into a good relationship (a dubious victory), and ends up shifting her generic register from abducted woman to model of religious devotion and testimony to the power of God. Because Estrildis is entirely silent and no one speaks for her, she is unknowable to the reader and, potentially, the other characters in her story. She becomes, in short, a fantasy object. Elfildis, on the other hand, ends up as a secular saint. She returns to England, finding salvation and forgiveness at the shrine of quintessentially English Bishop Aldhelm. She is rewarded for her suffering; moreover, she is responsible for bringing that suffering to an end. Estrildis never returns to Germany; instead, the deadly desirability of her body causes a civil war. Ultimately, she stays in the land, and more precisely in a river, of Britain, overshadowed by her daughter, her most effective means of invasion.

Unlike Elfildis, Estrildis will never save herself; she is an object, incapable of exercising any agency. She also differs, however, from the many women who are

exchanged as peace weavers, who are also institutionally objectified. In Geoffrey, Wace, and Lawman, some peace weavers actively intervene in disputes while others suffer more passively. Genvissa, for example, is exchanged as a peace weaver between Claudius, the Roman Emperor, and British Arvirargus, successfully mediating between the two leaders when she rides out on the battlefield; her marriage reconciles the two empires and guarantees that the British will acknowledge that they are under the jurisdiction of Rome. By definition, peace weaving marriages are exogamous; they negotiate a difference between groups. Because the two sides are in dispute, they are also well aware of each other's histories and genealogies. After Brutus and his fellow Trojans defeat Pandrasus, King of the Greeks, they debate how to proceed. Membritius urges them to go quickly because peaceful co-habitation between one-time enemies is never possible. The British ask for gold and silver and ships, but they also ask for Innogin, the king's daughter. According to Pandrasus, the hardship of losing Innogin is off set by his knowledge of Brutus' background, but such knowledge is not enough to appease Innogin. As Geoffrey puts it,

> At Innogin, in excelsa puppi stans, saepius inter brachia Bruti in extasi collabitur, fusis quoque cum singultu lacrimis, parentes ac patriam deserere conqueritur, nec oculos a litore auertit dum litora oculis patuerunt. Quam Brutus blandiciis mitigans nunc dulces amplexus, nunc dulcia basia innectit, nec coeptis suis desistit donec fletu fatigata soporu summittitur.
>
> [But Innogin, standing at the high stern, often collapsed into Brutus' arms, gasping with tears pouring out, she grieved to leave her parents and her

> home land, nor did she turn her eyes from the shore until her eyes were free from the shore. Now Brutus, soothing her with blandishments and sweet embraces, entwines her with sweet kisses, nor does he stop his undertaking until, tired from tears, she submits to sleep.] (p.19)

Cohen dubs Innogin's mournful boat ride the saddest scene in HRB, citing Hanning's comment that the passage literally "interrupts the flow" of history (Hanning, p.162). Cohen articulates that much of what is so terrible about this moment is that we are left to imagine Innogin's feelings:

> As Ignoge's home slowly recedes, lost are the possibilities for any life she might have desired for herself, for any history she might have dreamed. Destined to become an appendage of Brutus, the source of his progeny, we next see Ignoge in what appears to be an afterthought, legitimating the birth of three sons. ("Hybridity," p.75)

As Innogin leaves her home, she also leaves behind any control over her life or future. Her sadness is the price paid for the neat resolution to the feud between the heirs of the Trojans and the Greeks. When she falls asleep, the reader loses her perspective completely; she drops from the narrative as if she has entered another level of consciousness, one of total object. This image of Innogin also functions as a stark reminder that her perspective will be absent once she gets to Britain. Even as her personhood is obliterated, especially in comparison with Genevissa and her active peace weaving efforts, Innogin contributes to the formation of British society by bearing its next royal generation.

If the encounter between Humber and Locrinus associates masculinity with the aggressive use of violence to defend the community and associates British identity with genealogy and territory, Estrildis represents the opposite and, as such, she is a fantasy of the feminine as exotic, silent, beautiful, ethnically different, unknowable, and fertile. While she is highly and unavoidably desirable, she is also fundamentally destructive and responsible for the violence that nearly undoes the British. Unlike the peace weavers, whose femininity is linked to their resolution of violence, Estrildis' femininity generates violence. Estrildis never speaks and shows no agency, and that may be the point. To provoke overwhelming desire and destruction, she does not need to speak; she simply needs to be physically present and embody the perfect feminine object that she is.

In HRB, Locrinus discovers Estrildis on a boat, amongst the other objects and women that Humber has taken. From the onset, she occupies the position of feminine and feminine as object, rightfully won by the British. Dividing Humber's goods is another expression of the totality of the victory. That Estrildis is a product of a battle that asserted British superiority and was once the possession of a vanquished foe makes her even more desirable. Her apparent inaccessibility joins with her real charms to render her immediately irresistible to Locrinus: "Amore itaque illius Locrinus captus uoluit cubilia eius inire ipsamque sibi maritali taeda copulare" [And thus having been seized by love for her, Locrinus wished to go to bed with her and to join in the bonds of marriage with her] (p.33). Geoffrey lingers over Estrildis' extraordinary beauty, using romance-like tropes to describe her and to underscore the temptation that confronts Locrinus: "Erat nomen Estrildis, et erat tantae pulchritudinis quod non leuiter reperiebatur quae ei conferri poterat; candorem carnis eius nec Indicum ebur nec nix recenter cadens nec lilia

ulla vincebant" [Her name was Estrilids, and she was so beautiful that it would be no light thing to find again that which could be compared to her; neither Indian ivory, nor recently fallen snow nor any lily could triumph over her white skin] (p.33). The effect of Geoffrey's description of Estrildis suggests both his sympathy with Locrinus and his wish to align his reader's sympathies. Locrinus' failure is not his attraction to Estrildis, a fantasy figure of the perfect woman, but his desire to formalize the affair through a marriage that would render Estrildis queen. Sexuality and marriage occupy two distinct spaces for Geoffrey; while he forgives Locrinus his attraction, he cannot pardon nuptial plans that will instate a queen entirely defined by her overwhelming femininity.

Wace and Lawman develop Geoffrey's description of Estrildis as a mesmerizing object of masculine desire. Both accounts emphasize that Locrinus is the only actor in the scene. As his gaze turns on Estrildis, she becomes desirable; otherwise, she would pass unnoticed. Wace describes Estrildis' beauty as unmatched, but he does not dally with analogies; he moves immediately to the consequences of the affair: Locrinus will alienate Corineus, lie to his supporters, and dismiss his wife. Locrinus falls in love with Estrilids because her beauty pleases him:

> Locrin en ad Hestrild amee
> E a guarder l'ad comandee
> A muiller, ço dist, la prendra
> Ja alter feme nen avra,
> Kar sa belté mult li agree;
> A guarder fud Hestrild livree.

[Locrin fell in love with and ordered her to be protected. He said he would take her to wife and would never have any other, because her beauty greatly pleased him. So they took care of Hestrild.] (Ll.1329-34)

In this passage, Locrinus is the subject of the verbs and Estrildis is the object: Locrinus loves Estrildis, orders her protection, and takes her as a wife. His decision to marry her falls into a series of actions he takes and can take because he is a victor. For Wace, the error of Locrinus' choice comes down to his privileging beauty over political expediency. The choice will directly lead to his loss of power and to political instability:

Corineüs encore viveit
Ki une sole fille aveit
Que cil Locrin prendre deveit
Pur amur Hestrild la laissout
E convenant en trespassout.

[Corineus was still alive and had a daughter whom Locrin was supposed to marry, but he abandoned her for Hestrild. For the love of Hestrild he left her and broke his agreement.] (Ll. 1335-40)

In his summation of Locrinus' dishonesty, Wace emphasizes laws and covenant; his disregard for such principles should offend Corineus. The final lines of the passage neatly reveal that love for Estrildis leads to the severing of a contract with political consequences. Her appearance under Locrinus' gaze is, for Wace, entirely destructive, upending the political alliances and covenants that order society and that marriage is supposed to create and support.

Lawman dramatizes the encounter, providing dialogue and details that amplify its romance elements and the seductive potential of Estrildis. Her entrance into the narrative changes its register, moving it from the world of men and history to the intimate and feminine:

> Locrin iseh þer Æstrild and he heo leofliche biheold,
>
> And he heo mid armen inom - eð him wes on heorten
>
> And he hire to seide: "Sel þe scal iwurðen;
>
> wifmon þu eart hende, and ic þe wlle habben
>
> mid wurðscipen hæȝen to richen are queen.
>
> [Locrin set eyes on Astrild and with love-looks her beheld;/ He gathered her into his arms and gladness filled his heart;/ And he whispered to her: 'I'll see to your welfare:/ You're a lovely lady, and I'd like to have you/ (With highest reverence) as my royal queen.] (Ll. 1116-20)

Here, as in Wace, Locrinus has all the power: he sees Estrildis, he embraces her, and he speaks to her, telling her what will happen next. For Estrildis to speak would contradict her perfection, muddy it, and suggest that she might not coincide with his vision of her. Worse yet, insight into her perspective might, as it does as Innogin stares tearfully at her homeland, suggest that she does not desire that outcome. By ending Locrinus' speech with *queen*, Lawman asserts the consequences of this affair, agreeing with Geoffrey that Estrildis is not an appropriate queen, even if she is a lust object. Moreover, it is this love that: "Vnder þissere blisse þer comen muchele burstes" [Out of this delight came many great disasters] (Ll.1231). With this concluding forecast, Lawman captures the essence

of Estrildis in all three texts, she is the embodiment of a masculine fantasy of "blisse," but that "blisse" comes at great cost.

In Lawman's Brut, a political assembly concludes that the king will observe his promise to Corineus by marrying Gwendolyn and sending Estrildis out of the country. Britain and its survival must be placed firmly ahead of individual and royal interests; furthermore, the assembly cannot imagine that a woman could be worth internal conflict:

> Ah we wlleð ræden and we wlleð runan
>
> þat weo nimen Wændoleine Locrine to are queen,
>
> and halden alle vre aðes bitwux Corineo and Locrine,
>
> and halden hiredes luue mid soðfasten huiȝe,
>
> and senden Æstrilde vt of þissen londe.
>
> ['But we will give counsel, this advice we confer:/ That we give Locrin Gwendoline to be our Queen,/ And keep all oaths we made to Corineus and Locrin,/ And preserve the people's love with most profound intent,/ And send Astrild away, out of this country.'] (Ll. 1166-70)

The verdict values the preservation of the relationship between Corineus and Locrinus and the happiness of the people; the king's private life has explicitly articulated public consequences. Lawman concludes: "And Locrin þis biluuede, for hit wes his leodene read" [Locrin had to approve of this, as it was his people's advice] (Ll. 1171). But, approximately twenty lines later, writing about Locrinus' decision to hide Estrildis in an underground home and his order to one of his men to do so, he explains that: "þus dude þes riche mon swa Locrin hine hefde ihaten;/ for euerulc god mon ah his lauerdes heste to don" [And all this did that noble man, as Locrin had instructed him/ (After all, every

good man ought to do his lord's command!] (Ll. 1189-90). Lawman refines the terms of the problem as presented by Wace: a king should listen to his people, but a man should also do as his king orders, even if it means acting in contradiction to the assembly. This delicate power dynamic easily dissolves into violence: what happens if the people's advice is in conflict with the lord's command?

For Wace and Lawman, the conflicting interests of the lord and his men threaten political stability and cohesion. Counselors and friends in all three accounts believe that the exchange of Gwendolyn and the deportation of Estrildis will bring an end to the violence brewing between Corineus and Locrinus, restoring order to the court, but the weak marriage creates adultery, duplicity, and abuses of power that lead to large scale violence, war, the death of the king, and two drownings. In handing down their decision, the men assume that a marriage will reunite two communities of the British that have become exogamous because of a disagreement. What they do not forecast is that Locrinus will privilege his desire over the good of the communities and, more precisely, over the continued definition of the British through their genealogical and territorial integrity. Estrildis is not an object of exchange to Locrinus; he does not negotiate with her parents or expand his political or social alliances by marrying her. In succumbing to his own desire, he creates the potential for social destruction and death.

Locrinus' desire is so great that despite the warning of his counselors and the threats of his father in law, he keeps her. In order to so, he buries her in the earth, and turns her into the most destructive and dangerous version of herself. His efforts to hide their affair fortify her hold over him and the British. By burying her, Locrinus appears to assert his power, but she eludes his efforts at physical containment: "Nec tamen Estrildis

amoris oblitus est sed facto infra urbem Trinouantum subterraneo, inclusit eam in ipso familiaribusque suis honorifice seruandam tradidit" [Nor however did he forget his love for Estrildis, but with an underground chamber under the city Trinovantum, he enclosed her in it and he ordered her to be attended to by servants with honor (p.33). While Wace moves through these details quickly to focus on the consequences of the burial, Lawman lingers over the underground home, making it less of a tomb or hole.

> [...] An eorð-hus, eadi and feier,
> þe walles of stone, Þe duren of whales bone
> and þat inne swiðe feire stude from socne Þes folkes;
> and dude Þerinne muchel col and claðes inowe.
> pælles and purpras and guldene ponewæs,
> muchel win, muchel wex, muchel wunsum þing.
> [An earth-house, attractive and fine:/ The walls made of stone, the doors of whale-bone,/ And make it in a pleasant place, away from people's prying./ And put inside plenty of coal and sufficient clothing:/ Coverlets and purple cloths and plenty of golden coins,/ Plenty of wine, plenty of wax and plenty of welcome things.] (Ll. 1181-6)

These elaborate efforts at home-decorating appear both to dignify the interment and testify to Locrinus's sincerity. Estrildis stays enclosed for seven years. Hidden underneath Brutus' capital, she germinates. While Gwendolyn, Locrinus and the British, and Humber and the Huns fight their battles above ground, Estrildis wages her attack from below ground where the earth provides her with a convenient cover. In other words, Locrinus plants Estrildis in the ground of Britain, where her pregnancy will

cement her hold over him and his people. She takes over their land from below and creates an heir with a mixed genealogy; in other words, she undermines the vision of British stability and coherence that Humber enabled and Locrinus briefly achieved. The British are ill-equipped to deal with a threat that is neither explicitly military nor masculine. Femininity, as performed by Estrildis, is a transgressive and dangerous sexuality; when paired with ethnic difference, it temporarily overturns British political stability. If Humber's invasion enables the construction of a group identity, Estrildis' invasion suggests the permeability of the land and its men, the tenacity of their bonds, and the ease with which the unified British will turn on each other.

Corineus' angry confrontation with Locrinus reaches its climax when he accuses the king of choosing a "barbarian" over his own daughter: " 'Ut, filia mea postposita tete conubio cujusdam barbarae summitteres? Non impune feres [...] '" [Having neglected my daughter you will lower yourself in marriage to some barbarian? You will not go unpunished [...]] (pp.33). Wace and Lawman include a similar slur that identifies Estrildis as an outsider; Wace refers to her disparagingly as *quele aliene* and Lawman calls her an *alþeodisc meiden* (Ll. 1361; Ll.1151). According to John Gillingham, William of Malmesbury reconceived the term "barbarian" to accommodate the British imperial projects of the twelfth century:

> During the previous three centuries Latin authors use the word *barbarus* as a synonym for pagan. [...] But William adopted a distinctly different tone. For him the Celts, Irish, Scots and Welsh, are 'barbarians'. In other words he is discarding the familiar concept of barbarian as

> equivalent to pagan, and formulating a new one – one which allowed for the possibility of Christian barbarians. ("The English," p.10)

According to William, Celtic barbarians tended to laziness, savagery in warfare, and "animal like" sexuality. Like William, Geoffrey uses the term to evoke an alterity associated with geography, culture, custom, and sexuality. His translators continue this tradition of disassociating otherness from religion and attributing it to place of origin: Wace's *aliene* translates to "alien, strange, [...] from another place" (Hindley, p.24). The MED identifies Lawman as the sole user of the Anglo-Saxon derived adjective *alþeodisc*, which translates to "of another nation or class"; the term appears twice in the Brut and in each case it refers to a woman, Elene and Estrildis. By categorizing Estrildis as a *barbarae*, an *aliene*, and an *alþeodisc meiden*, Corineus is not calling her a pagan in the Roman sense (the British are pre-conversion, after all), but he is labeling her an outsider. Like Humber, Estrildis is not only ethnically different from the British but also the opposite of them, in particular, the opposite of Gwendolyn. While the comparison between Gwendolyn and Estrildis clarifies the function of the queen, just as a comparison between Humber and Locrinus suggests the function of the king, the parallel between the two women also conflates the role of the queen with that of invader. In Estrildis and Renwein, her Saxon counterpart, the validity of the conflation emerges as do the consequences of allowing an invader without a claim to Britain - neither genealogical nor territorial - into to the island.

By defining Estrildis as an outsider, Corineus airs his disapproval on a personal level and raises the question of whom the king should marry and what the effects of that marriage should be. Corineus' rage is not only that of a warrior and giant slayer; his

word choice suggests that he perceived the wedding of Locrinus to his daughter as a reward for his service to Brutus and that the denial of that reward is insulting and disappointing: "Haeccine rependis michi, Locrine, ob tot uulnera quae in obsequio patris tui perpessus sum dum proelia cum ignotis committeret gentibus" [Locrinus, is this how you repay me for all the wounds I suffered in your father's service while he fought with unknown peoples] (p.33). Corineus wants to enter into an exchange that includes those in Britain whose ancestors are traceable. According to Lévi-Strauss, kinship exchange always introduces questions of community identity: "Exogamous and endogamous categories have no objective existence as independent entities [...] each term is defined by its position within the system" (p.49). In order to classify a marriage, Lévi-Strauss explains that "it is merely a question of knowing how far to extend the logical connotation of the idea of community, which itself depends upon the effective solidarity of the group" (p.46). For Corineus, the community is defined by Roman lineage and thereby includes the ancestors of the Trojans who fled after the fall of Troy and whom Brutus and Corineus met in their travels. He is shocked by Locrinus' willingness to expand its boundaries into the unknown. The marriage of Gwendolyn to Locrinus is exogamous in that it unifies two geographically distinct areas but it also brings together two genealogically similar clans. As such, it does the work of carefully expanding the community of the British along lines that furthers their agenda of crafting a genealogically and territorially based identity.

Structuralists and Lévi-Strauss himself have revisited kinship systems, considering other forms of exchange, kinship arrangements, and the validity of universal

claims.[10] Critics like Butler and, particularly, David Schneider perceive kinship as a performance that produces a structure and set of norms rather than reflecting a universal or previous structure. As a practice that transmits culture, rather than a universal law, kinship exchange can be subverted, altered as it is brought into being. Originally, Lévi-Strauss argued that the incest taboo mandates exogamy. Currently, theorists focus on the use of exogamy to reproduce ethnic purity by curtailing who can and should marry. Writing about the hypostatization of heterosexuality, Butler concludes that

> The postulate of a founding heterosexuality must also be read as part of the operation of power – and I would add fantasy – such that we can begin to ask how the invocation of such a foundation works in the building of a certain fantasy of state and nation. The relations of exchange that constitute culture as a series of transactions or translations are not only or primarily sexual, but they do take sexuality as their issue, as it were, when the question of cultural transmission and reproduction is at stake. ("Undoing," p.124)

The policing of marriage reflects fantasies of coherent nations and cultures that will pass from one generation to the next. The question of royal marriage is inseparable from concerns about the formulation of British identity. Such concerns were of paramount importance in twelfth century England. Warren writes that

> In a structure of vertical lineage and primogeniture, anxiety about lineage runs high; this widespread twelfth-century anxiety permeates the Historia.

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[10] See, for example, American Kinship: A Cultural Account and A Critique of the Study of Kinship by David Schneider, Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon's Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies, and Gender and Kinship: Essays Towards a United Analysis by Sylvia Yanagisako.

> Exogamy, for example, can extend land holdings, but it also destabilizes group identity by introducing outsiders. Endogamy, by contrast, preserves land holdings but can destabilize allegiances within the group. In the Historia, the Britons both find and lose their identity through exogamous marriage. ("History," p.44)

By the end of the twelfth century, the Normans were well known for inter-marrying, blurring the distinction between Normans and English and perhaps speeding up the process by which "Englishness" was ethnically determined.[11] Richard FitzNigel and Walter Map, who both write in the 1170's, cite the frequency of intermarriage amongst the English and the Normans, but neither provides a starting date for this phenomenon.[12] FitzNigel describes intermarriage between freemen and Map refers to Henry I's failed agenda for arranging marriages between groups. In HRB and its translations, marriage also aligns ethnically diverse groups. In HRB, for instance, the Picts grew in numbers by marrying the Irish once the British had rejected their offer of intermarriage. In this case, the British distanced themselves from the Picts by resisting marriages that the Picts had identified as politically strategic.

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[11] I refer here to Richard FitzNigel's comment in his Dialogus de Scaccario that "nowadays, when English and Normans live together and intermarry, the nations are so mixed that it can scarcely be decided who is English by birth, and who is Norman" (Qtd. in Clanchy, p.34). In De Nugis Curialium, Walter Map applauds Henry's success "in arranging marriages between them for both parties, and by all other means he could contrive, he federated the two peoples in firm amity" (pp.436-7)

[12] Cecily Clark uses records of women's names to deduce the frequency of intermarriage after 1066 and how many women were imported from Normandy; her findings suggest that exogamy was a frequent practice. Although her evidence often reveals more about the origin of the name than the ethnicity of the carrier, in the twelfth century, women's names seem to lag behind the "Continental flow" of men's names perhaps because they were perceived as "vessels" of heritage.

Although she does not bear children, despite the self-proclaimed fertility of the Saxons, Renwein gives a figurative birth to the Saxon cultural, linguistic, and military invasion of the island through her pagan marriage to Vortigern. While there are other queens in HRB and its vernacular translations who undermine the British, Renwein, another Saxon princess, is Estrildis' closest counterpart and, in light of Geoffrey's cyclical treatment of themes, is worth exploring because of what she suggests about the sexually transgressive fantasy female turned queen.[13] In post-conversion Britain, her outsider status derives both from the Saxon blood that she shares with Estrildis and her paganness. Renwein's destructive influence on Vortigern and the British begins as she enters Hengist's banquet, carrying a cup of wine and offering Vortigern a seductive Saxon toast that, as all three authors make sure to mention, becomes a part of British culture.[14] Geoffrey underscores this inclusion by providing the words in Old English, making the ritual less incident than portent. Once in her father's banquet hall, Renwein, "cuius pulcritudo nulli secunda uidebatur" [whose beauty seemed second to no one's], curtsies and offers Vortigern a cup, toasting him in her native tongue, "Laverd King, was hail!" (p.129). An interpreter cues Vortigern to respond, "drinc heil"; he complies and kisses her

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[13] Martin B. Shichtman and Laurie A. Finke perceive Renwein as the first "evil woman" of HRB, arguing that her representation marks a significant change in Geoffrey's representation of women:

> Up until the reign of Vortigern and the arrival of the Saxons, then, Geoffrey's treatment of women is nothing if not conventional; most of the women conform to gender roles that serve the needs of a biopolitics of lineage. (p.24)

[14] The Renwein-toast episode has received a great deal of critical attention not only because it introduces the Saxons but also more recently because it is ripe for postcolonial analysis in its depiction of the seductive and erotic other's hold on the colonizer's imagination. See Hanning and, more recently, Ingham's Sovereign Fantasies or Warren's History on the Edge for complete discussions.

(p.129). By participating in and "mimicking" a foreign custom, as Warren points out, Vortigern vitiates his power as king, becoming "a partial colonial subject [...] [playing] the role of the colonized native" ("History," p.49). Like Locrinus before him, Vortigern cannot resist this combination of beauty and ethnic and religious alterity, here bolstered by Renwein seeking him out and speaking to him in her native tongue. His attraction to Renwein has everything to do with not understanding her, with not being able to know her. Like Estrildis, she is an accessible object on which all of his fantasies can be projected fully. Hengist perceives Vortigern's drunken susceptibility and the power that the marriage of his daughter to the King of the British will give the Saxons: he trades Renwein for Kent, claiming a formidable area of Britain for the Saxons. In exchange, Geoffrey tells us, "nupsit itaque rex eadem nocte paganae, quae ultra modum placuit ei" [that same night the king married the pagan women, and she pleased him greatly] (p.131). Vortigern trades political control for sexual pleasure; his sons and his leaders immediately turn against him, realizing that his choice has done nothing for the British.

Writing about Estrildis and Renwein, Robert M. Stein asserts that these moments of personal desire have real public and historical consequences, functioning as what he calls "historical engines":

> Much as transgressive desires are independent objects of writerly and readerly fascination in these famous scenes, they nevertheless function primarily as what we might call historical engines, since they have immediate and usually negative political consequences. [...] They are in this way among the many forms of historical explanation that Geoffrey deploys throughout the text. ("Reality," p.123)

Because Gwendolyn has Estrildis and Habren killed, the consequences of their invasion are only hinted at, but never articulated. The parallel between the episodes, however, allows the reader to understand what, in fact, could have happened if Saxon blood had been allowed to infiltrate in the first instance. Hengist invites more Saxons to Britain to help Vortigern hold his borders against the Picts. The British initially worry about rebellion, but soon their concern focuses on the alarming rate of inter-marriage between the Saxons and the British:

> Non enim debeant pagani Christianis communicare nec intromitti, quia Christiana lex prohibebat; insuper tanta multitudo aduenerat ita ut ciuibus terrori essent; iam nesciebatur quis paganus esset, quis Christianus, quia pagani filias et consanguineas eorum sibi associauerant. [...] At Vortegirnus diffugiebat consilio eorum acquiescere, quia super omnes gentes propter coniugem suam ipsos diligebat.
>
> [Pagans ought not to communicate or intermix with Christians, because Christian law forbids it; furthermore so many of them had arrived that his subjects were terrified; no one knew who was pagan and who Christian, because the pagans had joined with their daughters and relatives. [...] Yet Vortigern was reluctant to agree to their counsel because above all other people he loved them [the pagans] because of his wife.] (p. 131)

Geoffrey here describes the contagious effect that Vortigern's disproportionate love for his wife brings to his people. Once he intermarries, they do as well and it is no longer possible to decipher Christian from pagan. The inter-marriage of the British and the Saxons leads to ethnic and religious conflation, posing a double threat to the organizing

principles of the British: Christianity and genealogy. Moreover, it gives the Saxons a substantial piece of land. Much as Renwein's toast infiltrated British custom, her marriage works as a model for other marriages, filling Britain with half-Saxon/half-British children. Unlike Estrildis, Renwein does not have her own children to challenge the genealogical purity of the throne, but her marriage ushers in a trend of intermarriage that inserts Saxon traditions into British customs and undermines the ethnic purity or discernible Christianity of the British, comprising their ability to distinguish "real British" from outsiders.

Later in the text, the British are slaughtered by the Saxons at an assembly intended to unify the two groups. Hengist commands his men to keep daggers in their boots and on the command 'Nimet oure Saxes' to attack the Briton nearest them. This attack is evidence of Saxon treachery and evil while also clarifying the effect of indecipherable language on an audience. In his account, Wace clarifies the function language plays in this scene: "Quant il as Bretuns parlereient/ E tuit entremellé serreient,/ 'Nim eure sexes!' criereit,/ Que nulls Bretuns n'entend reit" [When they were mingling with the Britons and talking to them, he would call out 'Grab your knives!', which none of the Britons would understand] (Ll. 7235-8). Renwein seduced Vortigern with her Anglo-Saxon; her linguistic inaccessibility makes her more desirable, more compellingly exotic. Here the British inability to understand the Saxons has nothing to do with a sexual seduction; rather, the scene amplifies the dangers of not knowing, of not being able to understand and of letting the unknown invade. Wace develops the pun 'saxes' makes on Saxons as he traces the etymology of their name to this scene. In doing so, he links the Saxons etymologically to betrayal and the manipulation of linguistic difference.

Moreover, he permanently associates the Saxons with a destructive alterity that even the Saxons, according to Wace, try to disavow by changing the end of Saxon and the word for knife (Ll.7296-7309). Wace brings the episode to a close by explaining that: "Engleis le repruvier orient/ De la traïsun que cil firent,/ La fin de la parole osterent,/ Les nuns des cultels tresturnerent,/ Pur oblier la desonur/ Que fait orent lur anceisur" [The English heard themselves reproached for the treachery they had done, removed the end of the word and completely changed the name for knives, to forget the dishonor committed by their ancestors] (Ll.7300-8). The British die because they cannot understand the Saxons; had Vortigern not found that inability to understand so irresistible, they would never have been at the assembly. These kings desire Estrildis and Renwein and that desire will lead to war and death.

To escape alive, Vortigern hands over all of his holdings and runs away to Wales. The Saxons capture London, York, Lincoln, and Winchester, destroying the countryside and attacking the people who live there. Renwein's invasion of the British undermines their genealogical purity, literally their ability to know themselves from their enemies, and leads to the loss of their land. In the Renwein episode, Estrildis' full potential is revealed as is the need for an antidote to the male desire for the feminine other that endangers the British in both instances. The British emerge from this episode with neither their genealogical purity intact nor their possession of their territory unchallenged, but, in the Estrildis episode, Gwendolyn resolves both these problems and her means of doing so will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Queens and the Question of Gender

Research on medieval queens often engages the gap between the representations of queens, whether historical or fictional, and the real queens who lived in the Middle Ages. Because queens were a visible and critical part of the community, any representation of a queen is understood within a historical context. Paul Strohm articulates a useful way of thinking about this relationship when he writes that literature reveals "contemporary expectations of queenships" rather than insight into their daily function ("Hochon's," p.106). In his study of fourteenth century queens, in particular, Anne of Bohemia, he suggests that literary queens existed in "the ill-defined zone between imagination and social practice" ("Hochon's," p.96). For the most part, studies of medieval queens either focus primarily on the literary or the historical.[15] In either case, they always acknowledge the interplay between the two: in both literary and historical texts, queens are represented, most often by men with particular agendas.[16] In her recent study of the relativly under explored area of Anglo-Saxon queens, Stacy Klein understands queenship not as a fixed entity, but as an "idea that took its relative meaning from particular contexts in which it was enacted" and that was constantly in the process of being performed and redefined, "a nascent interpretive possibility that writers took power and pleasure in shaping within the fictional courts of their texts" ("Ruling," p.10;

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[15] Recently, there have been a number of studies of historical queens, in particular Isabel of Spain, Mathilda of Scotland. J.L. Laynesmith's The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship, 1445-1503 focuses on the queen in an under-examined period. More literarily oriented studies, such as Peggy McCracken's The Romance of Adultery that focuses on romance and French queens in the thirteenth century and Nancy Black's Medieval Narratives of Accused Queens follow Strohm's trajectory by understanding literary queens as reflective figures.

[16] For a full discussion of the implications of women being represented by men, see Anne Bartlett's Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature and Joan M. Ferrante's Woman as Image in Medieval Literature, from the Twelfth Century to Dante

p.15). Klein returns to the question of queens as typology, "understanding them as complex sites of intersection between literary and cultural formations" ("Ruling," p.7). In doing so, she redirects the study of queens, focusing on their function as symbols without fixed meaning. Klein's decision to avoid any attempt in carving out a theory of queens and instead to see them as undefined, fluid figures that took shape as necessary and reflected various cultural and literary concerns seems most useful, especially when it comes to historiographical queens.

The historiographical queen inhabits a peculiar space; she is neither a literal representation of a queen who lives or once lived nor is she an entirely fictional creation. Her historiographical status invites comparison to real queens and the mythical or fictional status of these British narratives makes her more of an imagined character. Estrildis and Gwendolyn highlight concerns about the potential queens have to shape and destroy political relationships, change ethnic identities through kinship exchange, and attack and bring violence to their own land. In doing so, they are consistent with much of what we know about queens and the shape their power took throughout the Middle Ages. Even as the power of the queen seems to have been curtailed by the increasing association of her with her body and her reproductive capacity, queens also appear to have forcefully wielded power through unofficial means. While the Gwendolyn and Estrildis episode engages historical realities, it also operates on a fantastic level, as an imaginative practice in thinking through the intersection of violence, gender, and sovereignty. About the function of the fantastic, Butler writes

> To posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as

> taking the body as the point of departure for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is. [...] Moreover, fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. [...] The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. ("Undoing," pp.28-9)

In this episode, the fantastic realm allows Geoffrey, Wace, and Lawman to explore what is possible, both in its best and worst embodiments. Estrildis and Gwendolyn are too radical to be actual efforts at representing historical queens, and yet, as characters, they embody real concerns and questions about queens even as they are the most extreme versions of those realities. Estrildis is a nightmare fantasy of a terrible queen consort: ethnically alien, entirely feminine, seductive, and destructive; she brings nothing to the community but destructive desire. Gwendolyn is also a fantasy queen, but, I will argue, she is the fantasy of the perfect queen: gender fluid, essentially female, territorially fluid, and genealogically British. While she is defined by her body, she also, on a more fantastic level, assumes the violence of the King to save the British, even if only temporarily.

As Lévi-Strauss assesses the value of women, he writes that

> It [the law of exogamy] applies to valuables – viz., -women – valuables *par excellence* from both the biological and social points of view, without which life is impossible, or, at best, is reduced to the worst forms of abjection. (p.481)

Of the many values that women and especially royal women represent as objects of exchange, their production of the heir was paramount. As Peggy McCracken writes, about queens' loss of formal power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, by the thirteenth century,

> Queenship in most European monarchies had become a public office with only symbolic and, of course, reproductive functions. While the queen's responsibility to produce a royal heir was always her most important role in medieval monarchies, as the queen was gradually excluded from other functions in the court her maternity was increasingly emphasized, both in the public rituals that demonstrated and defined the queen's position in the royal court and in books of private devotion used by the queen herself. ("Romance," p.6)

Pauline Strafford, John Carmi Parsons, and Paul Strohm agree with McCracken, identifying the increasingly formal and reproductive function of the queen by the end of the twelfth century. John Carmi Parsons explains that

> A queen-consort of England after 1066 rarely, if ever, exercised in her own right either of the central royal functions of warrior or lawgiver. Her role in the life of the realm was thus represented, or constructed, chiefly through such formalized ritual displays as her coronation, childbearing, intercession, pious exercises, or her reception by ecclesiastical or civic dignitaries. ("Never," p.317)

Research on continental queens confirms these claims about the exclusively formal function of queens. According to Armin Wolf, European queens frequently functioned as

regents, but rarely as rulers who inherited the position rather than marrying into it. Lois Huneycutt concurs that in the twelfth century women were acceptable as "regents or transmitters of power," but not as queens in their own right ("Female," p.191). Mathilda, for example, was the only genealogically English queen of the Middle Ages; she ruled for part of 1141, never receiving the title *regina*. Stafford finds many examples of female regency through the late tenth century in Europe, but she also tracks its reduction, which she links to the Gregorian reforms and finds evidence for in contemporary historiography. In the eleventh century, emphasis on the male line grew as instances of ruling queens became less frequent; this shift seems to be at least partially responsible for the decline in queenly power. According to Robert Bartlett, although aristocratic genealogies must be "surmise[d]," loosely identified family structures became increasingly agnatic, defined by the "single line of male descent" (p.50). But, even as historical queens lost power and became increasingly defined by their biological function, fictional and historiographical representations of the queen suggest that the power they wielded over the king and over his people was very real and could be positive or deeply destructive.[17] Historiographies along with the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, the *lais* of Marie de France, and Thomas' or Béroul's Tristan and Iseult, to name a few,

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[17]In the introduction to her study of fifteenth century queens, J.L. Laynesmith generalizes about the representation of medieval queens:

> In a profoundly male-dominated world the queen's position as sharer in the royal dignity, potentially more intimate with the sovereign than any other, made her an anomaly in the political structure. Ideas and assumptions about women in general were often contradictory in medieval society. Notions of women as weak, passive, nurturing, and conciliatory contrasted with fear of them as temptresses with a potential for creating chaos and tongues that could do the devil's work. These fears and expectations were enhanced by the public position occupied by the woman who was queen and they shaped all attempts to establish what her role meant. (p.2)

persistently return to the role of the queen, speculating over the nature and value of her power.

Queens did not only negotiate from marginal positions that they made powerful. During the twelfth century, royal women frequently added social and political prestige to their husbands through their own political connections and geographical holdings.[18] As Gillingham argues, the stakes for marriages that involved heiresses was higher because of the political implications.

> Why they marry is very clear from what happened when such marriages failed. The failure of the marriage between Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine was a disaster for the Capetian house. The failure of the marriage between Phillip of Flanders and Elizabeth of Vermandois was to bring endless trouble to the people of Flanders and Artois. ("Love," p.296)

Many successful marriages benefited from the prestige or holdings of the queen. By marrying Adela, Stephen of Blois benefited from her extraordinary pedigree as daughter of William the Conqueror and Mathilda of Flanders, a descendant of Alfred. The marriage of Henry I, son of William, and Mathilda, Princess of Scotland who traced her ancestry back to Alfred, pleased the Saxons and the Scottish. Their daughter, also named Mathilda, gained the title of Empress through her marriage to Henry V, Emperor of Germany, and brought it to her marriage to Geoffrey of Anjou; he and Henry II, their

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[18] Gillingham writes that

> In much of Europe by the twelfth century changes in the laws of marriage and in the customs of inheritance had led away from political conventions which simply took for granted that successions would be fought over to conventions which were slightly more peaceful. This is a development which seems to go together with the recognition of the rights of daughters as heiresses. ("Love," pp.16-7)

son, often referred to her as the "empress". Because the connections and holdings of aristocratic women could compound the claims and power of their husbands, these marriages were the products of exchange between men in which the object was a valuable and potentially powerful commodity in her own right.

Epistolae, Joan M. Ferrante's database of medieval letters to and from women, suggests the ample power aristocratic women exercised if not always through institutionally acknowledged channels. Even if queens and royal women were perceived as marginal, Ferrante argues, they themselves and the power they wielded were anything but marginal. Rather, they made use of their presumably marginal status to achieve their ends. Ferrante identifies aristocratic women and royal women as benefiting from their marginality and exercising significant power throughout the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. As abbesses and regents, aristocratic women negotiated politically as men could or would not; such tactics gave them powerful positions, especially when woman "combine[d] birth, wealth, connections, and experience with skill and a willingness to negotiate or compromise in ways that might be awkward for a man who has to protect his honor" (Ferrante, "Glory," p.12). The lives of Blanche of Castile and her famous grandmother Eleanor of Aquitaine affirm the subversive capacities of the queen. Both women controlled large territories and negotiated with men politically. Ferrante points to the introduction of Wace's Roman de Rou in which he lists Eleanor's vast holdings and emphasizes the power that accompanied them. Over the course of her lifetime, through marriages and her own inheritance, Eleanor controlled France (through her marriage to Louis), Poitiers (her native land), England, and "the coast land,/ between Spain and England, from shore to shore" (through her marriage to Henry II)" (Wace qtd

in Ferrante, "Glory," p.112). Lois Hunneycut's study of Mathilda of Scotland also supports Ferrante's argument, arguing that Mathilda masterfully and consciously deployed "familial connections, political alliances, and patronages of the church" for her own benefit (p.53). In Women of God and Arms, Nancy Bradley Warren argues that the goal of Isabel of Castile's representational program was to "transform[ed] accepted models of female spirituality and sanctity to validate her own less-than-traditional political participation and military leadership" (p.89). For instance, the Augustinian friar Martín de Córdoba's Jardin de Nobles Donzellas, a text in the tradition of "the mirror for princes, the female conduct book, the catalogue of famous likes" justified Isabel's rule during the Inquisition and her management of the expulsion of the Jews and the abuse of Muslims after the fall of Granada (p.103). In the Jardin, the Hebrew heroine Judith appears and functions, according to Warren, as a non-threatening model of a woman overcoming her innate weakness to become "a politically active, armed and assertive woman" (p.103).[19] The queen's power requires the disruption and intervention, even the mimicking, of social norms. That power, then, may not be best understood in a hierarchical system. By taking advantage of the perception of women as inferior, queens complicate their position in a binary gender system.

Real queens then appear to have used their secondary status to gain power, manipulating common assumptions about women to achieve their ends. When they married, they could bring with them valuable land and political connections. In the historiography of Geoffrey, Wace, and Lawman queens are both destructive and

[19] Another recent treatment of Isabel, outside the scope of this project, is Isabel Rules in which Barbara F. Weissberger pays particular attention to the overlapping construction of gender and sovereignty together.

constructive figures, acting for the benefit or the detriment of the community. Their representation often coincides with these historical trends: queens bring powerful connections and lands, they function politically effectively as women, and they are more often defined by their biological function than by their official power. Rather than explicitly representing the decline in queenly power, these accounts suggest that that power is paradoxically both circumscribed and empowered by sex and gender. J.S.P. Tatlock counts four queens who rule alone in HRB: Gwendolyn, Cordelia, Marcia, and Helena; of the four, only Cordelia and Marcia receive the title *regina* ("Legendary," p.286). In most cases, the value of the queen is explicitly tied to whether or not she improves the lot of the British or saves them from violence. Cordelia rules her father and husband's lands until her sisters' sons capture her during battle. Tanwen, mother of Brennius and Belinus, reunites her warring sons by pleading with them as their mother and baring her breasts. Genvissa's mediation between Claudius and Arvirargus reconciles the two empires and guarantees that the British will acknowledge that they are under the jurisdiction of Rome. Marcia writes the Lex Martiana, translated by Alfred, and is a regent for her son. Helena, mother of Constantine and peace weaver, finds the Cross. Destructive queens use their roles as mothers and sexual objects to undo the British, to create war and dispute. Judon kills Porreus, the son she favors least and the murderer of his brother, and begins a full-fledged civil war. Renwein's marriage to Vortigern allows the Saxons full entry into Britain and leads to inter-marriage between the two groups and their ultimate sovereignty. Moreover, as queen, Renwein takes vengeance on the British by poisoning Vortimer, son of Vortigern and potential savior of

the British. Guinevere's adulterous liaison with Mordred results in civil war, the fragmentation of Britain, and a less-than-idyllic end to Arthur's rule.

The study of medieval queens brings to the forefront the question of how to assess or evaluate marginal power. While some scholars focus on the decline in queenly power over the course of the Middle Ages, others privilege and value the non-traditional means through which queens exercised power. As Laynesmith nicely puts it, "in the majority of queenship studies an underlying theme has been the limitations and potential of womanhood in the context of kingship" (p.8). In other words, does class or rank trump gender and, if it does, in what ways and to what extent? Strafford, for instance, writes that:

> Power itself, or more correctly, authority and power, had its own language which was not entirely gender specific. Women in general and queens in particular enjoyed little of that "magisterial" authority that was considered legitimate though they derived some accepted authority from the role of mother and mistress of the household. On the other hand, they exercised much power through influence and control. ("Portrayal," p.145)

The status or value of the queen's power depends on the assessment of marginal power, of "power [exercised] through influence and control". Moreover, feminist work on queens often seems driven by a desire to locate a "golden era," to borrow Klein's terminology, in which women were powerful or even equally as powerful as men, and to determine what was responsible for ending that era. Rather than suggesting a golden age or focusing on the loss of feminine power, L.O. Aranye Fradenberg approaches the problem from a different perspective, arguing explicitly that sovereignty and gender are

intertwined and, by extension, that gender must function differently for the sovereign for him or her to be both like and apart from the people. In doing so, she shifts the performance of sovereignty partially out of the matrix of binary gender and provides a new way to evaluate it.

In her introduction to Women and Sovereignty, Fradenburg explains that "sovereignty, simply, does not exist apart from gender" ("Women," p.1). Moreover, she argues that "the plasticity of gender in the field of sovereignty" can be explained by a "sovereignty's urge toward totality, inclusiveness, and exemplarity (its need to gain a purchase on both sexes and on all the cultural functions with which they are severally associated)" ("Women," p.2). The queen is not the same as the king, but both must be able to be inclusive, to perform both roles. Sovereignty cannot be understood apart from gender, but the rules of binary gender, that distinguishes masculinity from femininity, do not apply to the sovereign. Rather than repressing masculinity or femininity to achieve an identity that fits within a binary gender matrix, the sovereign embraces that potential bi-sexuality. In City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland, she argues that the unique nature of the sovereign's relationship to gender manifests itself in the queen:

> And queenly power is itself likely to be a contradictory compound of what Bourdieu calls "official" and "unofficial" power – of secrecy and publicity, of "private negotiations" and public decrees. Thus, since the queen is likely to be considered in some sense a "masculine" woman as well as an exemplary Woman, her art of rule is likely to be riskier and more complicated than that of the king – especially since she is asked to

> take on risk and complexity for the king. [...] The often intense association of the queen with questions of division and unity, discontinuity and continuity, suggests that the role of queens in historical agency and experience may in fact be more critical and less purely ornamental than has traditionally been supposed. ("City," p.79)

Fradenburg's theorization of the queen complicates visions of her as solely tied to her reproductive capacity or consciously deploying what she perceived as marginal and resolutely feminine power. In the binary gender system that makes a king more powerful because of his masculinity, he will always prevail, but if we think, as Fradenburg does, of queens and kings as operating in an alternative order of intelligibility in which binary gender does not as rigidly hold court, then the power of the queen can be seen as something different from subordinate female power and, in new terms, sovereign power expressed by the female body. In Fradenburg's model, queens are not outside or remote from gender but not explicitly restricted by binary gender either.

In Gwendolyn, I suggest we get a fantasy of queenship that combines these accounts: she is gender inclusive as Frandenburg argues and that inclusivity both gives her more agency and makes her less ornamental and more critical than other critics have assumed. That inclusivity, however, is not ungrounded in the body; in fact, it is anchored and rendered intelligible and acceptable by the definitively female body that Gwendolyn refers to when she acts as a regent rather than a *regina* and steps aside for her son. Moreover, that gender inclusivity is mirrored in her relationship to the land just as the essentialism of her sex is matched by her essential British genealogy. Her territorial fluidity is grounded by her unification of the kingdoms and her British lineage, saving her

from becoming a rogue figure, an unintelligible body. As a sovereign, she is gender inclusive, but not indecipherable: she is resolutely female. To return to the language of Rubin and Butler, marriage to Locrinus turns Gwendolyn into a queen, a female body defined by its reproductive capacity that, as Butler understands the relationship between sex and gender, nevertheless performs gender fluidly. Gwendolyn is an ideal, not, perhaps, a reflection of a historical queen, but nonetheless an example of fiction imagining solutions to real problems.

Gwendolyn: Fantasy Queen

For Geoffrey, the question of when and in what capacity a queen should rule would have been pertinent to his twelfth century contemporaries. Geoffrey writes during the civil war between Mathilda and Stephen, her cousin. His triple dedication of HRB to the antagonists Robert of Gloucester, Waleran of Meulan, and Stephen of Blois confirms the connection of his work to the contemporary political strife caused by the war that went unresolved until the reign of Henry II in 1154. Many critics, most recently Fiona Tolhurst, have identified the influence of contemporary perceptions and depictions of Mathilda on Geoffrey, in particular on his representation of women. Both Mathilda and Gwendolyn married powerful men who would rule, publicly fought with men, and acted as "competent military rulers" (Tolhurst, p.80). Tolhurst also suggests that Geoffrey's disapproval of Gwendolyn's rage reflects the perception of contemporary chroniclers' that rage dissolved Mathilda's marriage to Geoffrey of Anjou. It is not surprising then that Geoffrey's initial criticism of Gwendolyn's coup is finally tempered by her submission to regency and to her sex; she does not become a *regina* as Mathilda wished to. Geoffrey's depiction of Gwendolyn entails a certain divide. He dismisses her military

invasion with an off-handed summation: "coepit inquietationem Locrino ingerere" [she began to heap disturbances on Locrinus] (p.33). Furthermore, he suggests that her decision to drown Habren and Estrildis proves that she is her father's daughter. Gwendolyn and Corineus are illogical hot heads: "perempto igitur illo, cepit Guendoloena regni gubernaculum, paterna insania furens" [After his death, Gwendolyn seized the management of the kingdom, inheriting all the fury of her father] (pp.33-5). Gwendolyn rages and invades, but she is a descendant of the Trojans and this pedigree can save her in Geoffrey's eyes. As Ingledew points out, the British, the Normans, and the Danes conveniently share a Trojan ancestry and Corineus, like the Normans, descends from Antenor (p.687). By making rage an inherited quality, Geoffrey returns to genealogy. Rage connects Gwendolyn to her father, his Trojan lineage, and his giant wrestling skills that enabled the defeat of the giants. Geoffrey sees her as nobly preserving the purity of the British royal line and as saving the British from a Saxon woman and her half British/half Saxon daughter. Gwendolyn is essentially female and essentially Trojan and British. Despite his misgivings about her anger and her invasion and despite his sympathy for Locrinus' susceptibility to Estrildis' beauty, Geoffrey perceives Gwendolyn as saving her country and being able to do so because her gender fluidity and her movement between her father's Cornwall and her husband's kingdom find resolution in her regency, her unification of the land, and instatement of her son. Gwendolyn performs the masculine role of defender of her country and feminine role of heir-producer; her multivalent relationship to the territories of Cornwall and Loegeria suggest the division of the British, but her unification of the two kingdoms also suggests

the possibility of a Britain unified by genealogy and territory. In essence, she concludes and perfects the work of Locrinus and her marriage to him.

While ambivalence and even begrudging acceptance determine Geoffrey's depiction of Gwendolyn, Wace breaks forcefully from his source with an unqualified endorsement of Gwendolyn's decisions. As Warren has suggested, Wace values political stability and the neat transfer of power, and he extols Gwendolyn as a defender of what can be valuable about the queen. For Wace, as for Lawman, a royal figure must value their public responsibilities over their private desires. When Gwendolyn brutally drowns Estrildis and Habren, she acts as Locrinus should have by placing the good of the British above all else. That violence is brutal and shocking and yet none of these chroniclers ever truly contests these executions; they are evidence of Gwendolyn's success as a sovereign. Wace turns Gwendolyn into a model of gender inclusivity: she is relegated to the "domestic" realm of wifedom and motherhood while she also upholds the public positions of ruler and military invader.

Gwendolyn is a female body that is both masculine and feminine and native and alien. She dissolves the differences that the episode originally set between masculinity and femininity, British and other. According to Wace, justified anger motivates Gwendolyn's attack:

> Guendoliene fu irree
>
> Del rei qui l'en out enveiee;
>
> En Cornoaille s'ala plaindre,
>
> La u sis peres soleit maindre.
>
> Tant ensembla de ses parens

> E tant request stranges genz,
>
> Grant ost mena de Cornoaille;
>
> Contre Locrin vint a bataille
>
> Come feme fiere e seüre.
>
> [Guendoliene was angry with the king who had sent her away; she went to Cornwall, where her father used to live, to complain. She gathered so many of her kin, and sought assistance of so many strangers, that she led a great army from Cornwall. She came to fight against Locrin, like a proud and resolute woman.] (Ll. 1415-23)

In his summation of Gwendolyn and her rationale, Wace takes particular care with his adjectives. She is a "feme" who is also "fiere e seüre". When she goes to Cornwall, she seeks help from her relatives and from strangers, a collective that emphasizes the extent of her patrilineal connections. She is neither woman warrior nor vengeful hysteric. In an article dedicated to the relationship between women and warfare, Corrine Saunders argues that the intersection of gender and violence draws on and naturalizes binary gender. She explains that

> Writing women into warfare allows for the opposition of passive and active, the exploitation of shock, pity and horror, and the possibility of setting against the structures of the political military world an ethic of pity, mercy, and reconciliation. ("Women," p.188)

For Saunders, women represent the opposite of the masculine, violent world of war; "writing women into warfare" codifies and exaggerates binary gender. Gwendolyn's relationship to violence, however, demonstrates that sovereignty supercedes binary

gender. Her attack on her husband is not gendered as feminine or masculine; it is the act of a queen. Wace explicitly avoids gendering her militancy or leadership skills; still, as the passage winds down, he makes sure to assert that she is a woman, acting as she should given the circumstances. For Wace, the practical gender fluidity of Gwendolyn functions as a corrective double foil to Locrin who fails as a king because of his masculine susceptibility to Estrildis' sexuality and to Estrildis whose exotic, seductive, feminine sexuality makes her destructive. When Locrinus fails to defend his realm from Estrildis and endangers the genealogical purity of his line, Gwendolyn invades the country herself, replacing him as leader of the kingdom and on the battlefield. Because she is queen, she can bring public and private conflict to quick resolution using institutionally sanctioned violence. She exemplifies that a queen lives simultaneously in the public and private and masculine and feminine realms; the impetus behind and the consequences of her actions resonate for her as a wife and mother and as a sovereign.

As Locrinus' wife and Corineus' daughter, Gwendolyn plays the double roles of invader and civil war leader. Ultimately, this double identity allows her to control the entirety of the land successfully, to transform from invader into defender of Britain. Banished to Cornwall, Gwendolyn enters a region of Britain outside of Locrinus's control where she can use her patrilineal connections, those relatives and strangers. Moreover, as Warren argues, Cornwall is not included in Brutus' original realm and, therefore, "[it] can reunite the island because it lies both inside and outside of Britain, set out in a cartography of paradox before Britain's own division" (p.35). Lawman describes her as "at hame" in Cornwall, gathering friends and mercenaries in order to march into "þisse londe/ to wreken hire teona of þon kinge and of þer queen" [this land [...] to avenge the

wrongs done her by the king and the queen] (Ll. 1233-4). She and Locrinus meet and fight at the river Stour, which divides Loegria from Cornwall; from there, she marches into her new kingdom: "Guendolien ki venqui/ La terre prist tute e saisi" [In victory, [Gwendolyn] took and seized the whole country] (Ll.1429-30). As Gwendolyn moves across southern Britain, she transforms herself from queen to outcast to invader to righteous ruler; in doing so, she also demonstrates how geographically and politically fractured Britain is as an entirety – she is a civil war leader who can invade her own people from her father's neighboring kingdom. The British susceptibility to Estrildis and its production of genealogical and territorial fracturing are resolved in Gwendolyn. She unites the kingdoms and restores genealogical order to the British.

Both Wace and Lawman praise Gwendolyn as a leader; they emphasize the control over the land that her victory gives her and that Humber, Locrinus, and even Estrildis sought. For Wace, control of land and the power that accompanies it are the best indicators of virtue. He writes that "Guendolien fu mult fere/ E merveilluse justisiere" [[Gwendolyn] was very proud, and a great dispenser of justice] (Ll.1441-2). Lawman expands Wace's position by describing in detail the skillfulness and geographical extent of her rule; according to Lawman, even her order to drown Habren and Estrildis is evidence of exemplary leadership. Gwendolyn

> Wes swiðe strong for al Brutenne wes on hire hond;
>
> and heo was swa swiðe wel biþouht Þat ælche monne heo dude riht.
>
> Ælch mon mihte faren ȝend hire lond Þaih he bere ræd gold.
>
> [...]
>
> al Brutaine heo wuste wel mid þon beste

inne griðe and in friðe - wun wes on folke.

[Was very strong, now she had all Britain in her hand,/ And she was very well advised, and to each man she gave his rights;/ Right through her land each man could travel even were he carrying gold. [...] All Britain she ruled as well as the best,/ In peace and in plenty: there was joy in the people.] (Ll.1256-8; 1260-1)

Gwendolyn becomes an iconic ruler who controls the land with ease. Lawman underscores the quality of her rule by emphasizing the ability of her people to move freely without fear of attack, much as she moved between the kingdoms that she united. The happiness of her people stems from their rights, and the country flourishes in peace and under one ruler. In his use of the totalizing geographical categories *al Brutenne*, and *al Brutaine*, Lawman dwells on the totality of her rule. After defeating Humber, Locrinus controls Loegria and Albania; through his future marriage, he had claims on Cornwall, adjacent to Loegria in the south and separated from it by the long arm of the Severn. Gwendolyn operates in both Cornwall and Loegria because of her patrilineal and married connections; she lives and rules in both kingdoms, turning them against each other and reuniting them under her regency and her son's rule. Once Gwendolyn hands Locrinus's land over to Madden, she returns to rule Cornwall whose people "weoren þe bliðere" [were the more content] (Ll.1264). As a ruler, she does what Locrinus failed to do by identifying an outsider who threatened British stability. By killing Estrildis and her child, Gwendolyn confirmed her position as queen, who as the king should have, identifies and kills invaders. The brutality of the drowning, rather than turning Gwendolyn into a morally suspect figure, suggests the extent of the threat Estrildis posed

and the extent to which a queen can use violence to defend her land. By invading Loegeria, Gwendolyn both settles a personal vendetta and achieves a political aim; in doing so, she takes on the role of queen who is mother and wife, military leader and executioner, guardian of Britain and British identity, and outsider.

What Gwendolyn achieves in Britain is only temporary, interrupted by the cycle of civil dispute and invasion that plagues the British. She rules well, Maddan takes over, and peace continues for forty years. With his death, the British are thrown back into a scenario that mirrors the events that followed Brutus' death. This time, however, they are without a queen to bring resolution, and the contrast suggests the full force of her role and its effect. A fight develops between Maddan's sons over the kingdom; they are unable to abide by the easy division of land amongst brothers that their grandfathers agreed to. Mempricius betrays his brother and kills him before ruling as a tyrant and killing all his heirs in an act that recasts his grandmother's murder of her competitor. Like his grandfather, he deserts his wife. Rather than succumbing to a fantasy of alien femininity, he becomes a sodomist. In doing so, he rejects the fantasy of binary gender by desiring the same rather than the other. Still, the desire of the sovereign drives the civil and political chaos in Britain.

Throughout their mythical histories of Britian, Geoffrey, Wace, and Lawman revisit these problems as they take different shapes and as some of the factors shift. There is perhaps no better example than that with which "British" history comes to a crashing end. Arthur's restoration of the British to their former glory precedes his marriage to Guinevere, a queen of exceptional parentage, education, and beauty who does not produce an heir: "Denique, cum tocius patriae statum in pristinam dignitatem reduxisset,

duxit uxorem Ganhumaram ex nobili genere Romanorum editam, quae in thalamo Caldoris ducis educate tocius insulae mulieres pulcritudine superabat" [Then, when he had reestablished the entire region to its former dignity, Arthur took as his wife Ganhumara, brought forth from noble Roman ancestry, raised in the court of duke Cador, she overtook the women from all over the island in her beauty] (p.205). Guinevere serves Arthur well as a social figure until her affair with Mordred destroys Arthur, his rule of Britain, and his empire. As Geoffrey describes it:

> Adueniente uero aestate, dum Romam petere affectaret et montes transcendere incepisset, nunicatur ei Modredum nepotem suum, cuius tutelae permiserat Britanniam, eiusdem diademate per tirannidem et proditionem insignitum esse reginamque Ganhumaram uiolato iure priorum nupitarum eidem nefanda uenere copulatam fuisse. Ne hoc quidem, consul aguste, Galfridus Monemutensis tacebit [...]
> [With the coming of summer, while he [Arthur] pursued an attack on Rome and he began to cross the Alps, it was announced to him that Mordred, his nephew, to whose protection he had entrusted Britain, had exhibited treachery by taking the throne and that Queen Ganhumara had violated her former vows of marriage and united with him in sinful love. Not about this, most noble earl, will Geoffrey of Monmouth be silent [...]] (p.249)

It goes without saying that Arthur must rush back to Rome to try and reclaim both his crown and his wife, but the trip and the attack overextend him and his army. He dies in battle. As Geoffrey explains in his subsequent comments, he will tell of the battle, but

not the affair. Romance is outside his purveyance, but reference to it in the context of his many other illustrations of the effect royal women can have on both King and country suggests for a final time that queens, despite their apparent insignificance, participate in the security and perpetuation of the realm. Other factors contribute to the dissolution of the British, and Arthur's death leads to a long period of Saxon rule, but Geoffrey's back handed mention of the affair reasserts the role sovereign desire plays in determining the British hold over the island.

These pseudo-histories conclude with the relatively apocalyptic banishment of the British from Britain until divinely dictated prophecies indicate otherwise. Geoffrey, Wace, and Lawman all conclude by noting that the Saxons, the future "English," persevered in their control of Britain. The British are the vanquished foe of the Saxons, and the Saxons will play a similar role for the victorious Normans. Post-Conquest audiences would have appreciated these parallels just as they would have heard many of their urgent concerns echoed throughout the texts. As a catalyst for Arthur's decline, Guinevere bookends Gwendolyn and Estrildis, suggesting that the ideal queen is not susceptible or party to romantic desire. She does not operate within the normative boundaries of binary gender. Her sex fails to determine her gender or her desire; moreover, her desire seems to be for the neat resolution of private and public disputes, for the success of the unified British.

In this chapter, I have argued that Gwendolyn represents the ideal queen because she is biologically female and gender performative, genealogically British and a member of two territorially distinct kingdoms. In her rule, she unites territorial division, restores genealogical purity, and brings peace, even if it is a peace that cannot hold. The

Gwendolyn and Estrilids episode reflects historical concerns about the effects and natures of invaders and queens and shifts registers into the fantastic to offer a resolution to the concerns that surround both. As overlapping categories, invaders and queens expand the genealogical, political, and geographical boundaries of the British; they can unify or destroy. Humber is a perfect other to the British, but his invasion raises questions about why the British need to assert their identity through genealogy and territory and the effectiveness of those terms as indicators of identity. As king, Locrinus is imagined as a masculine defender of the British, whose obligation is to protect his people from invaders. However, he is entirely susceptible to the feminine invasion that Estrildis enacts. As a fantasy object, Estrildis is both irresistible and deadly, and Locrinus' susceptibility to her harms the British and leads to his death. Locrinus' exaggerated masculinity and Estrildis' hyper-femininity are answered in Gwendolyn and her ideal balance of fluidity and essentialism. However, Gwendolyn is a unique figure in these texts; she is never duplicated, and the British inevitably continue to lose their grasp on their island and the purity of their genealogy. In my next and final chapter, I argue that the Ancrene Wisse and the saints lives of the Katherine Group compel the thirteenth century penitent to imagine themselves out of their bodies and their genders by identifying with violent virgin martyrs. Unlike the queen, who is anchored by her body, the penitent fights a battle with the devil that allows for a trans-historical identification with figures that defy both gender and the physical limits of the body.

Virgin Martyrs at War: Representations and Functions of Confession in the Ancrene Wisse Group

Saint Juliana, locked in her prison cell, receives an unexpected and unpleasant visit from Belial, "of alle unwreste unwihtes þe wurste ant meast awariet" (p.33).[1] Once the saint realizes that he is a devil disguised as an angel, she beats and binds him violently with her own chains. The author of the life describes her attack in vivid, unflinching detail:

> Ant grap a great raketehe þet ha wes wið ibunden, ant bond bihinden his rug ba twa hiw honden, þet him wrong euch neil ant blakese of þe blodeæ ant duste him ruglunge adun riht to þer eorðe, ant stondinde o þe steorue, no hire ahne bondes, ant bigon to beaten þen belial of helle. Ant he bigon to rarin reowliche, to ȝuren ant to ȝeien, ant heo leide on se luðereliche þet w awes him o lieu. (p.43)

In response to Belial's ingratiating pleas for mercy, Juliana, "þet eadie meiden," responds: "Stew þe, steorue of helle! [...] Merci nan nis wið þe [...]" (p.43). With Belial captive, she takes the opportunity to interrogate him about the harm devils have done to humanity throughout history, sexually tempting Christians, and corrupting even the most virtuous. Belial howls so loudly during the interview that he attracts the attention of people outside the prison. Guards are summoned to fetch the saint and Juliana comes forth to face Eleusius, the pagan sheriff of Nicodemia and her would-be-suitor, dragging the devil behind her for one and all to see.

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[1] I follow Nicholas Watson and Anne Savage in using S.R.T.O d'Ardenne's emended text of Juliana that she prepared for the E.E.T.S. edition. All references will be given in page numbers.

While she pulls him through the market place, Belial pleads with Juliana to let him go, lamenting that she has destroyed his reputation as a devil with Beelzebub, his leader, that he has lost face in the devil community, and that he will be beaten for his failure to tempt her. At the conclusion of his appeal, as merchants strike him in the street and their dogs attack him, he asks the question that any audience, medieval or modern, might have about a female saint, an exemplary Christian, who zealously assumes the role of torturer:

> Mihti meiden, leaf me o godes half, ich halsi þe. Ne beoð cristene men ȝef hit is soð þet me seið, merciable ant milzfuleÞ. Ant tu art bute reowðe. (p.47)

Juliana is unmoved by his plea, nor does she seem at all bothered by this potential contradiction between her "reowðe" behavior and that of a "merciable ant milzfuleÞ" Christian. Despite her disregard for his protestations, Belial's query raises questions about the nature of the violence in this scene and how to understand a saint who tortures anyone, even a devil. Is the violence real, metaphorical, or both? Should the reader attempt to emulate Juliana and, if so, what can devil torture mean in thirteenth century England? More importantly, how, if at all, can an average Christian or even an anchoress torture a devil? Or is such violence the exclusive privilege of the spiritual elite?

Much critical work has been done on the violence in the *passiones* of the Katherine Group *(*KG*)*, a late twelfth or early thirteenth century collection of Middle English religious writing for women that is linked thematically, linguistically, and historically to the better-known Ancrene Wisse *(*AW*)*. The focus is almost exclusively on the responses of Juliana, Katherine, and Margaret, whose lives appear in the KG, to

being tortured by their pagan suitors and what their responses - physical, verbal, and miraculous - suggest about the construction of virginity and the success of these lives in speaking to their audiences of anchoresses and widows, married and single women.[2] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's reading of these martyrs as models of aristocratic female autonomy confronted with marriage, especially as depicted in the vivid anti-marriage tract, Holy Maidenhood *(HM)*, has been highly influential. In clarifying the affective nature of virginity on medieval audiences, Wogan-Browne speculates that

> To its medieval audiences, virginity literature seems to have offered versions of autonomy – of a kind. Virginity texts announce themselves as seeking to sustain professed and vowed women with a romance script where the virgin is not only the object of quest, but in part the subject, the active selector of her bridegroom, Christ. This incontestably superior and self-chosen marriage is also offered as aristocratic freedom from drudgery:

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[2] Juliana of Nicomedia, Margaret of Antioch, and Katherine of Alexandria were beheaded in the early fourth century under the joint rule of Diocletian and Maximilian in Asia Minor. According to d'Ardenne, Juliana survives in Greek and Latin as well as Middle High German, French of England, Middle English, Middle Irish, and Anglo-Saxon. D'Ardenne proposes an original Latin version and a later Latin ancestor, Y, from which Cynewulf's Anglo-Saxon version derives. The Bodley and Royal manuscripts seem to share, if messily, this ancestry, despite the complications of their manuscript history.

Margaret was very popular in medieval England. Although she is mentioned in seventh century English litanies, her life first appears in full in a ninth century Latin martyrology compiled by Rabanus Maurus, the Archbishop of Maintz. The structure of her life is constant from the ninth century. In England, three Old English texts survive along with one pre-Conquest Latin text. The KG Margaret exists in independent copies in the Bodley and Royal manuscripts. Versions in the Golden Legend and the South English Legendary date from later in the thirteenth century. The KG Katherine is a translation of an eleventh or twelfth century Latin text that is extant in "at least a hundred MSS" and referred to as the "Vulgate" version (Watson and Savage, p.261). Like Margaret, Katherine's popularity in the Middle Ages is reflected in the large number of churches dedicated to her and in the translations of her life, many of which are based on Jacobus de Voragine's version in the Golden Legend.

> as, for example, a life which includes authorized space for reading and contemplation. ("Saints Lives and Women's," pp.4-5)

Other critics agree with Wogan-Browne, pointing to the models of independence, especially for resisting marriage embedded in the lives.[3] As models of "militant virginity," they affirm the anchoress' decision to live in a cell (Salih, "Versions"). The martyrs suffer for not marrying as some of their medieval audiences did, but even the most literal reader would have struggled to use the lives to justify binding and beating her persecutors.[4] After all, the texts provide sophisticated rhetorical justifications of the decision not to marry that could be marshaled against angry family members or overbearing acquaintances. If they are exclusively invested in "authorizing" virginity and not in addressing other concerns of their male and female audiences as well, it becomes hard to imagine why the compiler of KG chose two lives with virginal protagonists who torture devils. Belilal's claim that Christians are supposed to be merciful and mild draws attention to the possible contradiction between the behavior of a virtuous Christian and Juliana's vigorous assault on him but it also functions as a reading clue, urging the audience to evaluate his concern. Is his question simply a pseudo-comic aside or should the reader wonder how such scenes of torture as this and the parallel scene in Margaret fit into the KG and, by extension, the larger vision of the AW and its accompanying texts?

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[3] See, the essays in Medieval Virginities and Menacing Virgins, Kathleen Coyne Kelly's Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages, Kim Phillips' "Desiring Virgins," and K.A. Laity's "False Positives". Recently, in Choosing Not to Marry, Julie Hassel furthered Wogan-Browne's argument that the KG gives models to autonomous unmarried women by placing the lives in the intellectual, anti-marriage tradition of Jerome and Peter Abelard.

[4] In "Saints Lives and the Female Reader," Wogan-Browne points to how the medieval Saint Christina of Markgate endured family pressure and the threat of violence when she forewent marriage.

In this chapter, I suggest that any reader wondering what to make of these violent virgins need look no further than the passages in the AW in which the author analogizes the act of confession to Judith's beheading of Holofernes, explaining that "Judith" in Hebrew means "confession" in English:

> For Judith on Ebreisch is "schrift" on Englisch, thet sleath gasteliche then deovel of helle. Judith:Confessio. For-thi seith acre to euch preost, Confiteor on alre earst ant schriveth hire ofte, for-te beo Judith ant slean Oloferne – thet is, the deofles strengthe. (3.208-11, pp.171)[5]

When the penitent confesses, he or she becomes Judith and slays Holofernes, who represents "the deofles strengthe". I use this analogy to read the scenes in which Margaret and Juliana beat devils as performances of confession that are ultimately accessible to and required for all Christians - not only anchoresses or aspiring martyrs. Engaged readers of the AW Group, lay, clerical, anchoritic, and the many who fell in between social categories, could also use analogy to understand what it means to beat a devil in thirteenth century England.

The manuscript traditions of AW and the KG situate them soon after the revolutionary Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 that requires annual confession of all Christians. The twenty-first canon famously describes the body of eligible penitents in the broadest possible terms: "omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis" [all the faithful of both sexes after the age of discretion] (p.1350).[6] By

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[5] All references will come from Robert Hasenfratz's 2000 edition of Ancrene Wisse. Parenthetical citations will be to page and section number.

[6] All Latin references will be to page number and come from K.J. Hefele's Histoire des Conciles d'apres les Documents Originaux. All English translations are taken from H.J.

confessing, a penitent enters a community of Christians, defined not by normative social identifiers like gender or class, but by their participation in the sacrament. The character of the violent woman offers a similarly liberating point of identification. Margaret, Juliana, and Judith defy the normative associations of women with passivity and men with aggression because they are simultaneously aggressors and victims and therefore outside of the intelligible gender-violence matrix. In the *passiones*, Margaret and Juliana's relationship to violence marks them as exceptional: the virgin is beaten, but she uses her victimization to further her cause; shut up in her cell, she assumes the role of the torturer. Finally, her beheading, a sign of failure, signifies her victory. Metaphorically and literally, the penitent tortures the devil through the honest acknowledgment of sin and becomes a member of the spiritual elite through identification with the virgin. In confessing, the penitent can be like the martyr, inhabiting another order of intelligibility free from the constraints of normative gender identities that structure daily existence.

The act of confession bridges the extraordinary devotion of the martyrs and the more ordinary religious experience of the thirteenth century Christian.[7] While refusing to

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Schroeder's Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Texts, Translation and Commentary.

[7] Products of the Roman persecutions, martyrs were the first official saints. A period of religious persecution at the end of the Roman Empire, especially during Diocletian's Great Persecution in the third century, generated the political and religious agendas of the *passio*. These eyewitness accounts chronicle the triumphant power of God in the battle between the church and the Roman Empire. As Peter Brown points out, martyrdom was neither a frequent event nor was it particularly shocking to a culture accustomed to public executions. Even so, the scenes "turned the religious life of the cities into a religious battlefield" on which the power of the gods of the opposing parties were tested (Brown, "Cult," p.66). *Passiones* are defined by the culminating narrative moment of spectacle: a pagan ruler tortures the future martyr, usually surrounded by a crowd of spectators, until he or she willingly succumbs to death. By withstanding burning, cutting, torture implements, and more, the martyr commands the crowd, literally becoming a witness to the power of Christianity in the terms of the Gospel of John: "He came as a witness to

marry may have led to violence and persecution in the household, the unexceptional practice of Christianity certainly did not. Original audiences of these texts were safe from the Danish raids that had plagued coastal England in previous centuries, but stories of the violence done to and by crusaders abound in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and certainly inform both the interest in the East and its marvels that *romans d'antiquité* reflect and the preoccupation of British historiography with giants and exotic places.[8] Innocent the Third's final canon called for a new crusade, detailing not only that participation would remit sins but also that trade with Saracens and piracy had undermined previous efforts. He urged peace on Christian nations to avoid distraction from the larger war against those he deemed ungodly. Readers of the AW Group could still have imagined their community as openly at war with pagan forces in need of conversion and as under threat of forced conversion. While the canons of Lateran Four insist upon the visible and intelligible difference between the cleric and the layperson, and while the gap between the religious experiences of the average thirteenth-century Christian and the crusaders or the fourth century martyrs seems vast, confession allows penitents to do their part and to join the spiritual elite, creating a continuum between the

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testify concerning that light so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light" (1.7). Felice Lifshitz writes in her introduction to Bede's Martryology that: "Christians executed by the Roman Empire were not remembered as criminals, which they technically were at the time of their legal punishments, but rather as "martyrs": literally "witnesses" who had publicly testified, or borne witness, to their faith" (p.169). The testimonial spectacle distinguishes the *passio* from the *legenda,* a written tribute to a confessor who dies naturally. Like relics, the *passio* functioned as portable manifestations of the martyr, especially when burial was impossible. The burden fell upon the chronicler to preserve the memory of the martyr and to create a text that would attract an audience of potential converts (Robertson, "Medieval," pp.29-32).

[8] In "Cannibalism, the First Crusade, and the Genesis of Medieval Romance," Geraldine Heng argues that crusade anxiety shapes romance. For a more recent discussion, see Heather Blurton's Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature.

Christian past and its present. When the individual confesses, he or she re-enacts all of Christian history. In this iterative, annual performance of Christian identity, the penitent asserts that war with the devil is the defining aspect of that history and that perennial victories promise eternal rewards.

The Ancrene Wisse Group: Manuscripts, Language, and Audiences

AW, the KG, which includes the lives of Katherine, Margaret, and Juliana, HM, and Sawles Warde (SW), and the Wooing Group (WG) comprise a unique group of late twelfth or early thirteenth century Middle English religious texts written for women in the West Midlands of England. Bella Millett dubbed them the AW Group for convenience sake and in acknowledgment of their many common properties even as their original relationships remain mysterious. Originally a guide for anchoresses to master their interior and exterior lives, AW soon became popular with diverse and expanding audiences. The rule was first written for three anchoresses sometime before 1230, but after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.[9] It was later revised for a larger and growing anchoritic community and subsequently presented to a community of nuns at an Augustinian abbey. In the fourteenth century, it was translated into Latin and French and heavily reconceived by a Lollard sympathizer for men and women.[10] There are seventeen

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[9] There is little critical consensus concerning the dating of the AW Group. Wada argues that if we follow Millett, as most critics do with some lingering doubts, and assume Dominican authorship, the spread of dates for the earlier texts narrows to between 1221, when the Dominicans first came to England, and the middle of the thirteenth century ("Companion," p.19).

[10] British Library, Cotton Nero A.14 contains material that may be from the non-extant original text made for the sisters. Corpus Christi College Cambridge, MS 402 was composed for the recluses. British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C.6 has at least three scribes who revised, copied, and edited for the expanding audiences; at the end of the fourteenth century, a Lollard sympathizer compiled Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys 2498 for male and female readers.

extant manuscripts: nine in English, four in French, and four in Latin; they date from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.[11] While the KG and the WG may or may not have been written for the early audiences of AW, they contain cross-references and share a manuscript tradition along with overlapping thematic and linguistic qualities and enjoinments to multiple audiences. AW, Margaret, and Juliana all deploy the image of the violent woman to convey the importance of confession to a readership that included anchoresses and less rigorous Christians of all ilk and gender. In what follows, I will consider the tradition of and rationale for looking at the AW Group together, focusing especially on their shared interest in invoking diverse audiences and in the explicit convergence of these invocations with descriptions of confession in AW.

AW never appears in the same manuscript as the saints lives of the KG, but a provocative direction to its readers to consult Margaret suggests that the texts may have had similar audiences or, at least, been owned by or accessible to overlapping readers.[12] In the Fourth Part of AW, when discussing the anchoress' use of prayer to resist temptations, the author speaks first of Publius, whose prayers suspend the devil in the air

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[11] English manuscripts: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402; Cambridge, Gonville, and Caius College, MS 234/120; Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498; London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra C.16; London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.14; London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. 18; London, British Library, MS Royal 8.C.i; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a.1 (S.C. 3938-3942); Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. th. C.70.
French manuscripts: Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.14.7 (883); London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius F.7; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 90 (S.C. 1887); Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS ffr. 8276.
Latin manuscripts: London, British Library, MS Cotton Vittelius E.7; London, British Library, MS Royal 7.100.10; Oxford, Magdalen College, MS Latin 67; Oxford, Merton College, MS C.1.5 (Coxe 44) (Wada, "Companion," p.1).
[12] Two Middle English manuscripts contain the KG: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 34 and London, British Library, MS Royal 17 A.27, which is missing HM, but includes a section of the WG.

for ten days, and then of Margaret: "Nabbe ye alswa of Ruffin the deovel, Beliales brother, in ower Englische boc of Seinte Margarete?" (p.261, Part 4, lines 795-6). In this directive, rhetorical question, the author advises the reader to move fluidly between AW and Margaret for the clarification and continuity that I argue the representation of violent women provides. Other inter-textual references and manuscript groupings suggest that manuscript compilers and authors may have perceived these texts as a coherent group. For example, Cotton Titus D.18, a relatively early English manuscript in which AW contains pronoun shifts that suggest a mixed gender audience, includes AW, HM, SW, and the Wooing of Our Lord. Similarly, Cotton Nero A.14, also English and thought to include sections of the earliest, non-extant AW, contains one version of AW and four poems from the WG. HM urges its virginal readers to consider, among others, Katherine, Margaret, and Juliana, all of whom share a nearly identical trajectory towards martyrdom -threatened marriage, pagan torture, and victorious public execution. The absence of concrete connections between the texts certainly means that we need to proceed with caution, but manuscript groupings, overlapping references, and thematic commonalities suggest that medieval audiences may have perceived the AW Group as a unit and that there were readers who could consult the collection.[13]

In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the use of English, especially a Middle English with a small number of romance loan words, instead of French of England or Latin, differentiates the AW Group from contemporary religious and hagiographical writing. The South English Legendary, the earliest Middle English collection of saints'

[13]Millett and Wogan-Browne, amongst others, worry about reading KG, WG, and SW through the lens of AW; they think of the texts as a group and as differentiated entities. Recently, Hassel argues that thematic differences between the anchoritic material and the KG are often overlooked and questions the rationale for clumping the texts together.

lives, dates from between 1270 and 1285, significantly later than the KG. Early, influential twentieth century criticism on the AW Group emphasized its use of an "authentic" English language, moving away from inquiries into authorship and audience. Historically, the AW Group was read together because its Middle English was thought to signify an ideological choice in opposition to the popular continental and French influenced literature generated by the Norman Conquest. R.W. Chambers and J.R.R. Tolkien believed that this Middle English marked the West Midlands as a geographical and cultural site where French, Latin, and continental influences were policed and minimized. In a politicized and patriotic E.E.T.S. introduction to the lives of Saint Thomas More, Chambers argues that the survival of "the English nationality and the English language," despite near destruction and deeply seated resistance to the Norman Conquest, testify to English superiority ("Continuity," p. lxxxii). For Tolkien, AB, the Middle English he identified for its consistency in manuscripts of AW and KG as their language of composition, represented native resistance to the Normans.[14]

In a sentence frequently cited as evidence of the influence his patriotism held over his scholarship, Tolkien hails AB as a country gentleman, immune to Norman

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[14] Tolkien edited the Corpus Christi College, MS 402 manuscript for E.E.T.S.; it is generally accepted as the base for modern editions because, as Millett puts it, of its "linguistic consistency and generally high textual quality" ("Ancrene," p.49). AB exists in its purest form in Corpus (A), which contains an early version of AW, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 34 (B), which contains the complete KG.

Corpus contains its own unique expansions, and it can be linked to Cleopatra through its preservation of many of Cleopatra's expansions. Despite its value, Corpus does not contain any of the other texts associated with the AW Group, but does have the title "in the invocation on folio 1r [...] in the hand of the scribe who copied the text" (Wada, "Companion," p.1). The title Ancrene Riwle has no medieval authority; although E.E.T.S. published multiple manuscript editions under it, it is nothing more than a modern editorial creation.

"lewdness," and able to navigate the aftermath of 1066 with innate masculinity and aristocratic grace:

> It is not a language long relegated to the 'uplands' struggling once more for expression in apologetic emulation of its betters or out of compassion for the lewd, but rather one that has never fallen back into "lewdness," and has contrived in troublous times to maintain the air of a gentleman, if a country gentleman. ("Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meidenhad," p.106)

Despite his ground-breaking argument in "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics" that the poem be read as literature instead of a quasi-historical document, Tolkien treats the AW Group as a proto-nationalistic linguistic repository, connecting twelfth century England to its twentieth century counterpart and back to the Anglo-Saxons. Suspicious of such narratives because of their "hidden continuity" and "evolutionary point of view," Elizabeth Salter provides an alternative description of the English linguistic culture that produced the AW Group, dubbing it one of "co-existence" in which authors chose amongst vernaculars (pp.2-3; 5-6). By reading twelfth and thirteenth century literature in a multi-lingual context, she emphasizes the importance of the choice of a vernacular without attributing anachronistic significance to that choice (pp.29-35). Her approach has guided, directly and indirectly, contemporary critical assumptions about the significance of the Middle English in the AW Group. More recently, critical work on the AW Group has identified it as, amongst other things, a representative of the post-Conquest linguistic flux and the influence of a polyglot culture.

The use of a local vernacular means something very different to feminist-influenced literary scholars than it did to Tolkien. Since the early 1980s, Bella Millett,

Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Linda Georgianna, and Alexandra Barrett have linked the use of Middle English to the needs and interests of an aristocratic, educated female audience and to the convergence of multiple literary, intellectual, and linguistic traditions.[15] Of the many strands of this work, questions of audience, a topic disavowed by Tolkien, emerge prominently, especially the implications of the multiple audiences that AW and the lives of the KG invoke. Through manuscript and language work, Millett charts the speed with which the audience of AW changes from Cleopatra, the earliest version, which seems to primarily address three sisters, to Titus, in which there is evidence of a small community of anchoresses. Even in this transition, the text evolves, although not so overtly as when it is translated into French or Latin. Ultimately, Millett argues that AW and KG were written "with more than a single group of users in mind" ("Audience," pp.142-3). Not picking an exclusive or stable audience opens up critical approaches, as Millett explains here:

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[15] In a series of influential articles on the KG, Bella Millet critiqued the smooth line of succession and continuity Tolkien and Chambers drew between Anglo-Saxon and later Middle English. Her 1983 article, "'Hali Meidhad', 'Sawles Warde', and the Continuity of English Prose" connects HM and SW to the Latin rhetorical tradition, challenging the depiction of English as a pure and proud vernacular. Over the last twenty years, her claims have become more explicit and she shares responsibility for the current critical assumption that these texts represent a polyglot literary culture. Removing the KG from its middle-man position between the Anglo-Saxon past and the Middle English revival, she refutes Dorothy Bethurum's argument in "The Connection of the Katherine Group with Old English Prose" that the lives were directly influenced by Aelfric's Lives of the Saints. Her careful prose analysis makes the author more similar to Wulfstan in his use of the two-stress phrase. Instead of poorly imitating Old English religious writers, the author was carving out a style of his own for larger audience.

In "Women in No Man's Land: English Recluses and the Development of Vernacular Literature in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," Millett examines the inter-relationship between vernacular literature and recluses, crossing generic boundaries and revealing the intersection of genres and audiences and their development alongside each other.

> The intended audience of the AW seems to be made up of concentric circles: at the centre is the primary audience, the original group of recluses, then the other recluses who might also make use of it, and then the still wider circle of general readers assumed in the section of Confession. If we assume that the KG Lives, like AW, were written with more than a single group of users in mind, the apparently conflicting evidence for their audiences begins to make sense. ("Audience," pp.141-2)

Wogan-Browne concurs with Millett, identifying sections of AW in which the primary beneficiary of the directions are clearly the religious, but listeners who are neither enclosed nor virgins are not excluded ("Chaste Bodies," p.26). In speaking specifically to virgins and yet maintaining applicability to women from the three estates of the flesh, the authors involved themselves in multiple conversations with audiences who brought specific circumstances to bear on their identification with the material. The growing appeal of the AW Group to different audiences and the willingness of the authors to adapt the material to fit new demands reflects, as I will argue, a culture in which confession was not only mandated for all Christians but also perceived as an act that rendered martyrs, anchoresses, and lay people more alike than different.

In early work on the KG, Millett points out the apparently contradictory directions in which "the evidence of the surviving manuscripts (including that of the work they contain) and the internal evidence of the texts themselves" send a modern reader in search of audiences at any point in transmission ("Audience," p.128). While AW seems to have been intended for private reading despite some explicitly oral qualities, the style

of composition and invocations to their audiences suggest that Margaret and Juliana were intended for oral delivery.[16] In their openings, the authors delineate general audiences. The author of Juliana addresses anyone who cannot understand Latin: "Alle leawede men Þe understonden ne mahen latines ledene liðeð ant lusteð Þe liflade of a meiden Þet is of latin iturnd to englische leode"(p.3). Theochimus, self-professed author and translator of Margaret, lists his audience in a funnel shape, beginning broadly before narrowing to the maidens:

> Hercneð, alle Þe earen + herunge habbeð: widewen wið Þa iweddede, + te meidnes nomeliche, lusten swiðe ȝeorliche hu ha schulen luuien Þe liuiende lauerd + libben i meiðhad. (p.4)[17]

The invitation to listen to any one with ears who can hear suggests a broad, non-gender specific audience. Maidens should listen with particular care because they can imitate the virgin, but widows and married women should also pay attention. Later in her life, Margaret details the inclusive nature of God's love, referring especially to widows, married women, and maidens: "Þu art hope + help to alle Þet te herieð. Þu art foster + feader to helplese children. Þu art weddede weole, + widewene warant, + meidenes mede" (p.18). The repetition of *meidenes* here and in the initial address is provocative because, as Salih points out, the term could refer to men or women in early Middle

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[16] As a letter, HM seems to have had an explicitly virginal, listening audience. According to Millett, an oral version can account for the discrepancies between the two versions of Juliana:

> At some point in the line of transmission between the common ancestor and R the text was memorized – probably by someone other than the author but familiar with the same tradition of alliterative composition – and it is this oral stage in its transmission that accounts for the exceptional number and nature of the variations between B and R. ("Textual," p.50)

[17] Because it contains the most complete version of KG, all references come from the Bodley 34 text edited by F.M. Mack; citations will be to page number.

English ("Versions," p. 133).[18] In Margaret, *meidense* accompanies other feminine categories like *widewne*, but the ambiguity of the term means that it could reflect the expansion of the audience to include men. If we take *meidenes* as non-gender specific, then the address to *men* to listen to the *passio* of Juliana, a *meidene*, suggests that a variety of men and women could identify with a female maiden.[19] These audience descriptions suggest that the authors perceived, as the author of AW did, multiple points of identification with their virginal protagonists.

By returning to the difficult question of audiences at different points of transmission, Millett and Wogan-Browne have identified that AW, a text initially intended for three sisters, quickly spoke to enclosed, married, and widowed women and ultimately to men. Part Five has a disproportionate number of references to a larger audience including, according to Millett, recluses, nuns, married women, virgins, and even men. The author addresses these "concentric circles" of audience explicitly here: "Mine leove sustren, this fifte dale, the is of schrift, limpeth to alle men i-liche; for-thi ne wundri ye ow nawt thet ich toward ow nomeliche nabbe nawt i-speken i this dale" (p.342, Part Five, 486-7). In his assurance to his "sustren" that the subject of confession applies "to alle men i-liche," he situates AW within post-Lateran Four culture, canon twenty-one's requirement of confession, and the new need to transmit the importance of

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[18] In the second entry, the MED defines "meidense" as "a man who abstains from sexual experience for religious reasons; also, a man lacking sexual experience". According to Salih, men pick this identity actively while women exist as such by default. In one of the few articles to focus on masculine virginity, John H. Arnold argues against the critical tendency to polarize masculine and feminine virginity as generalizing about the gendering of virginity over-simplifies it.

[19] The ambiguous use of gender and sexuality also turns up in Titus, an early manuscript of AW; some pronouns changes from female to male suggest adaptations of the text from an early period.

confession to all the faithful. In this brief and perhaps apologetic disclaimer, the author renders confession a near equalizer amongst different levels of spirituality, a vision of confession that, I will argue, is shared by the lives as well.

Dedicated to the subject of penance, Part Six delineates different levels of the faithful, explaining that the sacrament is necessary for all of them even as the severity and rigor of their penance varies.[20] As the section concludes, he clarifies his previous admonitions about the necessity of painful and shameful penance. Such penalties are meant for those who are insufficiently harsh with themselves:

> Al thet ich habbe i-seid of flesches pinsunge nis nawt for ow, mine leove sustren – the other-hwile tholieth mare then ich walde – ah is for sum thet schal rede this inoh-reathe, the grapeth hire to softe. No-the-les, yunge impen me bigurd with thornes leste beastes freoten ham hwil ha beoth mearewe. (p.371, Part 6, 376-79)

In concluding his description of the violence of penance, he breaks his audience into groups. His target audiences are those readers who are too gentle with themselves and "young saplings" in need of thorns for protection. This division of the faithful begins much earlier, in the first lines of the section. Throughout Parts Five and Six, the author orders his audiences in relation to each other and their level of devotion, worrying that his advice will be misinterpreted and misapplied. AW, especially in its consideration of confession and penance, reflects an active awareness of its various readers and their specific requirements.

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[20] Hasenfratz points as well to a section of Part Six in which the author addresses "both advanced anchoresses (perhaps the original three) as well as newcomers to the anchoritic life" (p.18).

The author begins Part Six by speaking directly to the sisters who suffer perpetual penance as martyrs on God's cross: "al is penitence, ant strong penitence, thet ye eaver dreheth, mine leove sustren. Al thet ye eaver doth of god, al thet ye tholieth is ow martyrdom i se derf ordre. For ye beoth niht ant dei up-o Godes rode" (p.346, Part 6, 1-3). In its unapologetic rigor, the life of the anchoress comprises her penance, a "strong penitence". As if to qualify his first claim, the author repeats "al," explaining that all the good the anchoress does is not only penance but also martyrdom; she spends her nights and days suffering on the cross in imitation of Jesus. Penitential martyrdom is the exclusive realm of the anchoress, but there are other Christians, all of whom must be penitent: "threo manere men of Godes i-corene livieth on eorthe: the ane mahe beon to gode pilegrimes i-evenet; the othre, to deade; the thridde, to i-hongede with hare gode wil o Jesuse rode" (p.347, Part 6, 12-4). In this hierarchy, the anchoress differs in degree from the good pilgrim who travels the earth and the dead who resist life and material goods. Her willing self-subjugation to violence becomes the model to which all Christians should aspire, but not one that all will or can reach. This investment in multiple audiences understanding confession through the conflation of martyrdom, violence, and penance corresponds with the use of Judith as an analogy for confession and, I will argue, is fully developed in the KG as audience members are invited to identify with virgin martyrs who model confession for their audiences, inside and outside of the text.

The "concentric circles" of audiences make for a compelling commonality in Juliana and Margaret and the Fifth and Sixth parts of AW. While the author of AW articulates the connection between a larger audience and the matter of confession,

Margaret and Juliana also depict confession as crucial to their broad audiences. Although canon twenty-one links Christian identity to confession and construes the body of penitents in the broadest possible terms, the rest of the canons, like the confession manuals that mandatory confession necessitated, work to distinguish cleric from lay, to turn the confessor into a visibly powerful and respectable figure who could be trusted with the secrets of penitents. The assertion of the gulf between lay and cleric and confessor and penitent is complicated by the equalizing terms of canon twenty-one and reconceived in the passages of AW that delineate the brutal self-examination crucial to confession and focus on the interiority of the penitent.

The Fourth Lateran Council, the Confession Manual, and Ancrene Wisse

Convoked in his Bull of 19 April 1213, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was the indisputable highpoint of Innocent III's reign and attended by patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, abbots, and priors.[21] Of the topics proposed by Bishops, seventy became canons. They cover the theological and the quotidian, articulating the terms of transubstantiation and forbidding trials by ordeals and the founding of new religious orders. Some establish rules of tithing, the conditions of heresy, and the primacy of the Western Church, especially in relation to the Patriarch of the Eastern Church. Others regulate the dress of Muslims and Jews and denounce marriages performed in secret or between relatives of the second and third degree of consanguinity. Amongst these provocative decrees, many canons shape the hierarchies of the church, scripting the proper relationship between different branches and codifying the role of the cleric.

[21] The struggle between Frederick II and Otto IV over the empire looms over the Council as do the recent disasters on the Crusades. Frederick's elevation to Holy Roman Emperor was confirmed at the meeting. Innocent also hoped to render the Church independent from the empire and clarify the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.

The reformation of the clerics seems directly related to institutional and lay anxiety about confession. Priests who divulged confessions lost their sacerdotal office and lived out their lives in a monastery performing strict penance. As the Eucharist became more awesome and the other sacraments grew in importance, the problem of donatism increased as did concern about the moral valor of the priest. In his work on counseling as a component of confession, Alexander Murray points to how, in his Summa, Robert of Courçon approaches donatism when he urges penitents to seek out a priest who is trustworthy and able to offer formidable council ("Counselling," pp.71-2). Robert defends himself by explaining that, unlike the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, confession requires a wise counselor. Given Robert's willingness to question the relative merit of individual priests, canons fourteen through eighteen, which admonish clerics "continenter et caste vivere" [to live chastely and virtuously] and that they "a crapula et ebrietate [...] diligenter abstineant [...] cum ebrietas et mentis inducat exilium, et libidinis provocet incentivum" [carefully abstain from drunkenness...for drunkenness banishes reason and incites lust,] should be of no surprise (Can.14, p.1344, Can.15, p.1345). Hunting and fowling, along with the appropriate accoutrements, were also forbidden along with trips to the tavern, the theatre, games of chance, and mime or buffoon shows. Canon seventeen laments that the evenings minor clerics and prelates spent banqueting and gossiping, to say the least, kept them from celebrating the nocturnal and diurnal offices. While drunkenness and excessive indulgence would be undesirable in a non-cleric, in a cleric it suggests a lack of discretion ill matched with the role of confessor.

While earlier canons concern how behavior and accoutrement will distinguish the cleric, canon eighteen polices interactions between laymen and clerics by forbidding clerics to judge secular criminal cases, ordeals, duels or other judicial tests and by instructing them to leave death sentences to laymen. Other canons create a chain of command through which the Church could curb free agents and exercise control over remote areas. Bishops could take over an independent, but poorly run chapter and investigate criminal behavior. Canon twenty-seven forbids bishops from ordaining the "ignaros et rudes," [ignorant and unformed] preferring to have a few qualified priests who will administer the sacraments properly rather than many unqualified priests (Can.27, p.1356). Along with canons six and seven, canon twenty-six outlines the punishments for maliciously or negligently electing such a cleric. An annual provincial synod guarantees the correction of disobedience, the enforcement of canons, and the accountability of those responsible for moral order. These canons articulate the underpinnings of an ecclesiastical hierarchy that controlled priestly and clerical behavior, widened the divide between the clergy and their flock, and created uniformity in the execution of Christianity at all levels and in all places. These efforts to "clericalize" the church pervade the canons even as they exist in tension with the emphasis canon twenty-one puts on the individual as a vehicle of transformation.[22]

By instituting annual confession to a parish priest, canon twenty-one furthered the distinction between lay and cleric as well as opening up the possibility of a new category of Christian that dissolved hierarchical distinctions:

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[22] See, Jo Anne McNamara's "Women and Power through the Family Revisited" for a full discussion of "clericalize".

> Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, omnia sua solus peccata confiteatur fideliter, saltem semel in anno, proprio sacerdoti, et injunctam sibi paenitentiam studeat pro viribus adimplere, suscipiens reverenter ad minus in Pascha eucharistiae sacramentum: nisi forte de consilio proprii sacerdotis, ob aliquam rationabilem causam, ad tempus ab eius perceptione duxerit abstinendum: alioquin et vivens ab ingressu ecclesiae arceatur, et moriens Christiana careat sepultura. (p.1350)
>
> [All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own (parish) priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist, unless perchance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; otherwise they shall be cut off from the Church (excommunicated) during life and deprived of Christian burial in death.]

As Mary Braswell explains, "by this decree the Church not only affirmed its authority; it also gained control of the individual conscience" (p.26). Public rituals of penance had a long history and private penance had been practiced since the sixth century, becoming increasingly popular between the ninth and twelfth centuries (Lochrie, pp. 26-7). The Celtic system of penance, "with its private, repeatable character and its emphasis on man's inner nature," was introduced to European monks by the sixth century Saint Columbanus and his colleagues and predates other forms of confession; it is a likely blue

print for the practice in Europe (Braswell, p.23). Canon twenty-one necessitates a move away from the often public and general practice of penance to private confession (Georgianna, pp.82-9).[23]

To enforce the canon, the Church had to rely on traveling Friars and parish priests.[24] Leaving nothing to chance, the canon details that Christians will learn about the requirement and what it demands of the penitent and, in particular, the confessor. The decree "frequenter in ecclesiis publicetur" [was to be published frequently in the churches] was intended to eradicate pleas of ignorance. Acting as a physician to the soul, the priest considered the circumstances of both sinner and sin and decreed an appropriate, even multi-avenue, treatment.[25] Priests had always been responsible for the spiritual

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[23] This is not to say that public penance disappeared altogether after 1215. In The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France, Mary C. Mansfield argues that:

> Public penances of all sorts continued to be a familiar sight in thirteenth-century France. [...] Imposed by bishops and priests, on great nobles and poor peasants, for shocking crimes and for minor brawls, these public processions and pilgrimages survived the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. (p.1)

[24] Spencer narrates what he refers to as the "cumbersome" process by which parishioners were introduced to the canon. Instructions and responsibility for execution trickled down through English church hierarchy:

> The provisions of the general council were made known by means of the council for the Province of Canterbury, convened by Archbishop Stephen Langton at Oxford in 1222, and the special status of the Council of Oxford was recognized by canonists, such as Lyndwood, who regarded its canons as the starting point of English Provincial legislation. The canons of a Provincial council were publicly recited, and this formal reading sufficed to make them binding on the bishops and others present, but, lest their memories fail them, they were also issued with written copies. Bishops in turn were responsible for publishing them within their jurisdiction by means of statutes issued by diocesan synods. Within the diocese, the archdeacons were to publish the bishop's statutes at their own chapters and see that the parish clergy over whom they had authority obtained copies. (Spencer, p.201)

[25] John Baldwin writes that

health of their followers, but now they were participants in and witnesses to a speech-act that defined a practicing Christian and required assessment and judgment. By deploying performance to identify Christians, confession functioned like the dress requirements of canon sixty-eight for Jews and Muslims and as another means of scripting the roles of cleric and lay and enforcing the difference between them.

Products of these reforms, confession manuals further enforced the difference between confessor and penitent. Written in easy Latin, they quickly spread through Christian Europe, especially to England, training local priests in their new work. These manuals were intended to educate priests and unify their knowledge - as well as that of the laypeople they served - of the sacraments and the tenets of the Church "as set out in Athanasian and Apostle's creeds" (Spencer, p.202). As Alexandra Barratt writes, they "are precious evidence of the largest programme of mass education ever carried out in the West, maybe in the whole world" ("Works," p.413). The guides are not unprecedented; as Woods and Copeland explain: "the tendency towards a 'manual' for confessors based on general but systematic topics of enquiry is already in evidence in the years immediately preceding Lateran IV" (p.393). Yet they differed from earlier penitential canons - non-uniform lists that described sins and their appropriate penance - in their need for the priest to pay attention to context and be "free and flexible to apply subtly skills for curing the sinner" (Baldwin, p.55). By creating the sacrament discursively, the manuals quantify a good confession, quickly becoming popular reading for priests and

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> By the time of Pope Gregory the Great's Book of Pastoral Care, the priestly functions of the confessor were commonly envisaged in medical terms. Just as the physician's skills were devoted to curing the ailing body, so the priest's craft pertained to the health of the sinner's soul. (p.53)

their congregation.[26] Their success can be attributed to their practical approach, especially their "concentrat[ion] on individual and concrete moral questions," which they inherit from the work of Peter the Chanter and Robert of Courçon (Baldwin, pp.52-3).

In his best-known work, The Summa de Sacramentis, Peter focused not on the theoretical questions that had dominated twelfth century debates on confession, but the execution of the roles of penitent and confessor. In England, the earliest extant manual is Robert of Flamborough's Liber Poenitentialis.[27] As Braswell explains, Robert's Liber "was probably the first to make available to confessors in short, comprehensive, and readable form the new Canon Laws" (p.38). His five-part text provides priests with clear definitions of sins, broken down into component parts, questions and explanations for those questions, and guidance for follow-ups. The dialogues model how to deal with sensitive issues, chart the process and progress of the examination, and discursively reinforce the distance between questioner and respondent. Through leading questions, the priest provides his subject with the tools for self-examination needed to generate a sincere and thorough confession. By narrating questions and responses, the manuals give the confessor the means to assess the honesty of the penitent through his or her bodily performance of regret as expressed by tears, facial expressions, and physical reactions. However, the ever-increasing popularity of the manuals complicated whether penitents were simply following the script or being sincere. Institutional anxiety about detecting the sincerity of the penitent served as a reminder of the significant power that rested with

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[26] For example, Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln "wrote several treatises on confession, and also a short but elaborate manual on instruction for parish priests, named Templum Domini, which must have acquired some popularity, as some sixty-five manuscripts survive in English and foreign libraries" (Pantin, p.193).
[27] There are fifty-three extant manuscripts of the Liber Poenitentialis, which was probably written between 1208 and 1215 (Braswell, p.38).

the penitent in spite of the assertion of the power of the cleric in manuals and the canons of Lateran Four.

Although AW is related to the confession manual tradition, it de-emphasizes the role of the priest and emphasizes the penitent and the interior experience of confession. In the first book length study of AW, E.J. Dobson presented a tentative argument for Augustinian authorship that remained hesitantly accepted for years. Dobson perceived a conflict between textual evidence that indicates Dominican or Praemonstratensian authorship and linguistic evidence that suggests a Victorine community. In the early eighties, Barratt urged her readers to remember that "the anchoritic spirit of the treatise remains separate from the Augustinian matrix; and the springs of the spirit on which the author drew were not Augustinian" ("Anchoritic," p.32). She situates AW in religious communities and traditions that cross-pollinated throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Millett pursued her association of AW with overlapping, continental traditions to refute Dobson's claim of Augustinian authorship and press for Dominican authorship. In a crucial section of her argument, she links the representation of confession in AW with Dominican involvement in pastoral reform:

> The Dominicans [...] were actively involved in the implementation of the programme of pastoral reform laid down by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215; one of their main functions was to assist bishops with their increased pastoral workload by preaching, the hearing of confession, and the provisions of spiritual advice. Both the emphasis on confession in AW and the author's tendency to look over the shoulders of his primary

> audience to a wider relationship seem to reflect this pastoral concern. ("Origins," p.216)

AW allowed the Dominicans to extend pastoral reform to an audience that comprised, perhaps, the original sisters, the larger community of anchoresses, and the more general lay reader, all of whom would be interested in confession and its practical and spiritual implications.[28] According to Millett, AW can and should be read specifically in the context of Lateran Four and the Dominican's educational program; as such, what is interesting is that AW follows closely the spirit of canon twenty-one.

As Georgianna explains, AW critically differs from confession manuals:

> In that it is directed not toward priests but towards penitents, and in that it is written, therefore not in Latin but in English, this confession manual is unique in early thirteenth century literature. Not until late in the century do vernacular manuals for penitents reappear. (p.102)

AW emphasizes self-interrogation, underscoring the subsequent internal reformation, and rendering the presence of the priest almost a formality, if a necessary one. Here the author gives a provocative description of confession:

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[28] Ironically, Innocent's Council supported Franciscan attempts to prevent the official recognition of the Dominicans; Honorious III recognized them officially in 1216. Canon thirteen is aimed directly at the Dominicans:

> Ne nimia religionum diversitas gravem in Ecclesia Dei confusionem inducat, firmiter prohibemus, ne quis de cetero novam religionem inveniat: sed quicumque voluerit ad religionem converti, unam de approbatis.
> [Lest too great a diversity of religious orders lead to grave confusion in the Church of God, we strictly forbid anyone in the future to found a new order, but whoever should wish to enter an order, let him choose one already approved. Similarly, he who would wish to found a new monastery, must accept a rule already proved.] (p.1344)

> Schrift schal beo *wreiful*, bitter mid sorhe, i-hal, naket, ofte i-maket, hihful, eadmod, scheomeful, [dreful], hopeful, wis, soth, ant willes, ahne, ant stude-vest, bothoht bivore longe [...] Schrift schal be *wreiful*. Mon schal *wrein* him I schrift, nawt werien him [...]. (p.312, Part Five, 54-8)

True to his promise in the opening lines, the author conveys the power of confession and its performance. If the penitent only mimics a sincere confession, the act is hollow. He or she should move from self-accusation to hope and wisdom, willingly engaging in a full litany of emotions: shame, hope, fear, humility, sorrow, hope, and honesty. Earnest confession is an all-encompassing and cathartic act that renders the penitent *naket* "without sufficient clothing, bareheaded, naked," exposed for what he or she is (MED). That confession be performed often, in haste, and with consideration suggests that it takes on different forms, that it can be incorporated into life, and that it need not be singular in its expression or practice. The description begins and concludes with *wreiful* or "accusatory" (MED). Only if the penitent is the willing subject and object of self-accusation, can he or she experience the violent deluge of emotions that confession merits and promises. That violence is critical to the reconception of the layperson's role in the church that the sacrament enabled. According to Georgianna, "it could almost be said that with the arrival of moral theology the pain and individuality of temptation, sin and remorse now became the layman's privilege, and not just the saint's" (p.101). If confession manuals and the canons of Lateran Four construct an unbridgeable gulf between penitent and confessor and necessitate the confessor, AW imagines confession as a substantively self-generated act in which the confessor plays a secondary role. In doing so, AW implicitly decreases that gulf between penitent and confessor and, by

extension that between a layperson and any of the spiritually elect – saint, martyr or, for that matter, Hebrew heroine.

In his analysis of the power dynamic central to confession, Michel Foucault explains the alignment of witness, speaker, and subject:

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. ("History," pp.61-2)

Foucault's analysis of the triangulation that governs confession suggests that the canons succeeded in constructing the sacrament around a power differential. In his treatment, he captures the tension at the core of the sacrament: the act "unfold[s] within a power relationship" in which the confessor must assess, judge, and punish the penitent, but the penitent, as both subject and speaker of the narrative, controls its production and truthfulness. While the confessor, as representative of the Church, demands the confession, only the penitent stands to benefit from it, to be "exonerate[d], redeem[ed],

and purifie[d]". Foucault focuses on the immediate, human relationship between confessor and penitent; in doing so, he overlooks the sacrament's creation of a relationship between God and the penitent in which the penitent affirms his or her faith by acknowledging truths only he or she and an omniscient God know. Confession manuals could be and apparently were used as scripts by the unrepentant; if their original purpose were to instruct the confessor, the penitent could also use them to deceive his earthly confessor. Confession to another human, no matter how institutionally or socially powerful, can be falsified. Such a deception, however, is impossible with God. Consequentially, confession does not always reiterate the hierarchies upon which its earthly practice insists. Confession manuals and the canons of Lateran Four sculpt the spirituality of the Church official as distinct from and superior to that of the layperson in order, in part, to codify confession, but the actual power dispersal is not so transparent as the value of the confession hinges almost entirely on the penitent's honesty.

In AW, confession is a self-generated process that the confessor officially witnesses; in each truthful speech act, the penitent asserts his or her relationship with God. Canon twenty-one mandates that "all the faithful of both sexes" must confess irrespective of gender or socio-economic status; eligibility is defined by age and devotion. The comprehensive nature of the category contradicts the differentiation between lay and cleric that canons and confession manuals assert; rather, like the description of confession in AW, it equalizes Christians and focuses on the individual as a vessel of self-reform. Moreover, this official articulation of Christian identity places the penitent outside the scope of dominant social differentiators, much as the Christian is in Paul's Letter to the Galatians in which he famously affirmed the equality of all

Christians and, by extension, the sexlessness of the soul: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3.28). The category of Christian shares with the category of the penitent a comprehensive, egalitarian definition, an oneness in Christ. Social, sexual, ethnic, and religious distinctions are secondary.

Obvious tensions exist in the practical, social articulation of this identity and its idealistic, theoretical articulation. Critiquing the theological tradition, Jacqueline Murray historicizes "the weighting of the sexless soul towards an increasingly male definition" that manifests itself in the confession manual ("Gendered," p.80). She concludes damningly that:

> An examination of the literature which served to disseminate this theology, however, suggests that the equality of souls was overshadowed by the patriarchal ideology embraced by the clergy. Theoretical notions of the sexless soul and the spiritual equality of men and women disappeared when theological doctrines were condensed in practical manuals written for confessors. The manuals convey an ideology in which the sexless souls belong to men. Women's souls were assigned qualities based on earthly categories; in effect, women's souls were gendered female. ("Gendered," p.91)

In her collection of essays on female spirituality, Barbara Newman traces the adoption of "gender strategies" by women. These strategies address their second-class status in the Church, moving from the virago or the "unisex ideal" to what she dubs the "womanChrist model" or the "Goddess ideal" (p.3). For Newman, the virago, in "her sexless, angelic

state" is "an honorary male" much as, according to Murray, the sexless soul is inherently masculine (pp.4-5). On the other hand, the "womanChrist model" lets women "practice some form of the *imitatio Christi* with specifically feminine inflections and thereby attain a particularly exalted status in the realm of the spirit" (p.3). In Newman's equation, the adoption of the latter model allows women to stand apart from and even surpass men; the achievement of exalted spirituality need not involve mimicking masculinity. I would normally agree wholeheartedly with Murray's and Newman's feminist concern that the egalitarian category of Christian is underwritten by the unspoken assumption that the non-gender specific subject is inherently masculine, but the use of the violent woman to convey an ideal and potentially egalitarian spiritual state alters the equation. The violent women I consider in this chapter are sexed bodies that perform a wide range of gendered actions in relation to violence that render them masculine, feminine, both and something else. In essence, the use of violent women as models first for female and then for mixed audiences suggests that the identity of Christian when performed in confession allows the penitent literally to be all and both sexes simultaneously and not simply biological females performing masculinity. Through the genderless figure of the violent woman as a model for the penitent, the AW Group affirms and even insists on the possibility of what I refer to as genderlessness. In doing so, this group of texts follows Paul and Canon twenty-one closely, even literally, to offer its readerships an intelligible Christian identity definitively at odds with their quotidian, socially defined lives.

The model of confession in AW differs from its conceptualization in confession manuals in that it requires an imaginative leap. By analogizing the penitent as Judith, the author suggests that confession re-enacts the deed of a famous violent woman who defies

the constraints of normative gender identity and achieves victory over the devil. By extension, when read in the context of Judith, Margaret and Juliana become figures who can be emulated. Imprisoned in a cell, the torture of the devil becomes both an instructional scene in which the devil confesses to his means of tempting Christians and a staging of the internal battle that confession demands as the saint, in her physical assault on the devil, performs the violence the subject must undergo to confess truly. In her cell, in accordance with AW, the saint is both confessor and penitent and the successful beating of the devil becomes the act that marks the sincerity of the confession. In understanding confession as a repetition of these violent acts, Margaret and Juliana allow a penitent to be like the martyr in her ability to fight the devil and to join the spiritual elite. Such a possibility closes the gap between martyr and layperson and layperson and cleric even as it was opened by theological development in the thirteenth century.

Carol Clover, the Final Girl, and the Virgin Martyr

In the midst of his discussion of martyrs and their popularity amongst twelfth-century audiences, Simon Gaunt poses the following query:

> By the twelfth century the historical circumstances that produced martyrs were long gone. Martyrdom, once so central to Christian identity, had become part of Christian mythology rather than of Christian life. Yet the continued production of narratives about martyred saints indicates martyrdom still had powerful symbolic value. Saints' lives about martyrs were not offering models that

> medieval men and women could easily imitate, so what did they mean to contemporary audiences? ("Gender," pp.188-9)[29]

To his own question, Gaunt offers this tentative answer: "Possibly the meaning was different for men and women, but the virginity of female martyrs was evidently central to their value for both sexes" ("Gender," p.189). In this sequence, he raises three intertwined questions: what is the indisputably "powerful symbolic value" of the *passiones* for Christians who were not immediately experiencing persecution? How do men and women identify with martyrs, especially when there are few, if any, opportunities for imitation? And how do virginity and the gender of the martyr enable same-sex and cross-gender identification? To pursue these questions in the context of the AW Group, I turn to the theoretical work of Carol Clover on audience identification and slasher films.

In Men, Women, and Chainsaws, Clover, a medievalist, examines how the audiences of slasher films, mostly young men, identify with their female protagonists. She contests the classic feminist claims that male audiences simply cheer on the killer as he stalks and tortures his female victims and that they watch only to take pleasure in the violence done to women. This "sadistic voyeurism" was not to be completely overlooked, but requires complication ("Men," p.19). Clover's interest is in the possibility of male identification with the female figure, the relatively androgynous "victim hero" who undergoes physical trials to survive and whose perspective the

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[29] In "Rerouting the Dower," Wogan-Browne writes that "among post-Conquest vernacular lives of women saints, reworkings of the *passio*-narratives of legendary virgin martyrs form the largest single category" ("Rerouting," p.27). Duncan Robertson argues that the Gregorian reforms and religious renewal incited by the crusades increased the popularity of hagiography, which functioned as reading material for the religious and inspired conversion (pp. 11-2).

cameras take for at least the second half of the film. Clover christens this character "the Final Girl," defining her as "a physical female and a characterlogical androgyny: like her name, not masculine but either/or, both, ambiguous" ("Men," p.63).[30] The male audience, Clover argues, is ultimately aligned with the Final Girl and not with the male killer; their ability to participate in cross-gender identification is the focus of her book and, she argues, a complicated moment of gender identification that had been overlooked by feminists and film critics alike.[31] In what follows, I argue that the violent virgin martyr offers a similar point of identification for its various audiences, male, female, lay, anchoritic, clerical, and the spiritually elite.

Men, Women, and Chainsaws responds to at least two strains of feminist scholarship: psycho-analytically oriented film theory and work on pornography. Film theory and feminist film theory, in particular, question the implications of the viewer's positioning. Laura Mulvey and Tania Modleski's argue that the spectator is aggressively aligned with the perspective of the camera and that the viewer of either sex identifies with the camera and its perspective - a perspective that invariably objectifies the female body in its view. The work of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon on pornography essentializes representational art and the scope of audience identification. They assume that identification follows strict gender lines: men identify with men and women identify with women and that, as Clover nicely paraphrases their position, "this identification along gender lines authorizes impulses towards violence in males and

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[30] Clover argues that the Final Girl often has a name that could be given to either a man or woman.

[31] In "Rape and the Pedagogical Rhetoric of Sexual Violence," Marjorie Curry Woods makes a similar argument about school age boys identifying with the female heroines, who are victims of rape and other masculine abuses of power, of the Ovidian selections they read in school.

encourages impulses towards victimization in females"("Men," p.43). The male spectator of pornography identifies so heavily with the male actor, the artist, or the camera that he does not distinguish between the real and the fictional. In the introduction to Pornography: Men Possessing Women, Dworkin explains that she and McKinnon perceive pornography as duplicating a sexist social order and supporting the naturalization of the inferiority and victimization of women:

> Pornography incarnates male supremacy. It is the DNA of male dominance. Every rule of sexual abuse, every nuance of sexual sadism, every highway and byway of sexual exploitation, is encoded in it. It's what men want us to be, think we are, make us into; how men use us; not because biologically they are men but because this is how their social power is organized. ("Pornography," p.18)

Pornography offers an idyllic fantasy world to its male audience who, according to Dworkin, only identify with the possessing men and never with the possessed women.[32] Taking the possibility of cross gender identification seriously, Clover suggests that feminist politics have not been well served by this insistence that sadism is the end and beginning of horror films. Resisting the conflation of the real with the fictional and insisting that identification with characters is complicated and contextual, she argues that assuming only like-gender identification naturalizes gender and makes it impossible to understand what it means for a character or an audience member to occupy multiple gendered positions in relationship to violence, as Margaret, Juliana, and Judith in fact do and as their characters enable their audiences to do as well.

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[32]In Ravishing Maidens, Kathryn Gravdal generally agrees with this theoretical approach and applies it to medieval literature. Elizabeth Robertson makes similar arguments in Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature.

In explaining how cross-gender identification works in slasher films and how it enables the male audience to move fluidly through multiple points of identification, Clover argues:

> That the slasher film speaks deeply and obsessively to male anxieties and desires seems clear – if nothing else from the maleness of the majority audience. And yet these texts in which the categories of masculine and feminine, traditionally embodied in male and female, are collapsed into one and the same character – a character who is anatomically female and one whose point of view the spectator is unambiguously invited, by the usual set of literary-structural and cinematic conventions, to share. The willingness and even eagerness [...] of the male viewer to throw in his emotional lot, if only temporarily, with not only a woman but a woman in fear and pain, at least in the first instance, would seem to suggest that he has a vicarious stake in that fear and pain. If it is also the case that the act of horror spectatorship is itself registered as a "feminine" experience – that the shock effects induce in the viewer bodily sensations answering the fear and pain of the screen victim – the charge of masochism is underlined. This is not to say that the male viewer does not also have a stake in the sadistic side; narrative structure, cinematic procedures, and audience response all indicate that he shifts back and forth with ease. It is only to suggest that in the Final Girl sequence his empathy with what the film defines as the female posture is fully engaged [...] that the viewing

> experience hinges on the emotional assumption of the feminine posture. ("Men," pp. 61-2)

Because the Final Girl incorporates some aspects of the masculine experience, her character enables a taboo and vicarious identification with the feminine. That "feminine" figure, however, is far from classically feminine. In slasher films as in *passiones,* gender is not a consequence of sex: you do not cry because you are a woman, rather crying, or any legible performance of femininity, identifies you as a woman.[33] Clover theorizes gender in these films as following a one-sex model. Anticipating Butler's work on the performativity of gender, she writes that "the gender of the function proceeds from the real-life perceptions of social and bodily differences" ("Men," p.16).[34] The Final Girl has been, at different points in the film, masculine, feminine, and something all together different that combines both. Ultimately, there is neither a full celebration of masculinity or femininity, but a privileged figure in a female body with masculine qualities: "masculinity in conjunction with a female body – indeed, as the term victim hero

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[33]See Judith Butler's Gender Trouble and Bodies that Matter.

[34]Thomas Laquer makes a similar argument about the perceived relationship between sex and gender in the Middle Ages:

> It is a sign of modernity to ask for a single, consistent biology as the source and foundation of masculinity and femininity [...] The one sex body, because it was construed as illustrative rather than determinant, could therefore register and absorb any number of shifts in the axes and valuations of difference. Historically, differentiations of gender preceded differentiations of sex. (pp.61-2)

In this approach, he is at odds with Joan Cadden who argues that the one sex model reduces the complexity and instability of medieval concepts of gender. Rather, in her rebuttal of Laquer, she claims that:

> There is no coherent set of concepts that can be said to constitute the medieval gender framework. Similarly, the vast and evolving body of knowledge which constituted medieval medicine and natural philosophy [...] did not offer a single model of the sexes, much less one which could be said to shape or to be derived from a clear system of gender roles. (p.2)

contemplates, masculinity in conjunction with femininity" (p.63). Tortured and victorious, the Final Girl and the martyr offer audiences of both sexes the possibility of vicarious identification as masculine and feminine and of entering a world in which biological sex fails to generate gender.

Clover has argued that Men, Women, and Chainsaws is much more in conversation with the medieval than might be immediately apparent; the generic similarities between slasher films and medieval *passiones* as well as the critical role violence plays in determining gender in both makes them a productive pairing. The plot of the *passio* and the film is set and the ending is pre-determined in both; although there can be (but not often) plot twists and deviations that generate intrigue, if not suspense, the end is a given: the Final Girl will survive and the virgin will die.[35] Physical violence is the threat made good on; while the female protagonists suffer all sorts of imaginative physical attacks, neither virgins nor Final Girls appear to fear rape. The omission of rape is surprising, but may be a by-product of the instability of desire and sexuality in determining gender in both genres. Rape, as Sharon Marcus suggests and I discussed in the context of the representation of Procne in Chaucer and Gower, scripts male and female roles through violence, re-inscribing the passivity of a legitimate femininity and the near-inevitability of masculine aggression. *Passiones* and slasher films coincide in their use of violence to undermine the naturalized gender roles that rape affirms. No longer determined by biological sex or by an exclusive relationship to violence, gender becomes fluid, contingent on perception rather than the body.

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[35] Clover defines slashers as "the intensely generative story of the psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived" ("Men," p.21).

Final Girls and virgin martyrs actively resist classification as feminine. Martyrs reject normative sexuality and marriage by insisting on virginity and their overwhelming desire for God; the Final Girl has no real object of desire and barely seems to generate any in either the killer or her lack-luster suitor (who typically dies early in the film). The pagan suitor of the virgin usually begins in the heated throes of desire, but his sexual desire is overcome by a desire to see the virgin submit and acknowledge the superiority of his beliefs. Both pagans and slashers are gratuitously violent, but biologically female characters defeat them. Although the Final Girl is pursued, crying and victimized, she takes revenge. In one particularly compelling example, she wields an unavoidably phallic chainsaw. While slashers end up dead or maimed, pagans either suffer the humility of public defeat or, in the case of Juliana, are ship wrecked and eaten by wild animals. The pagan intends to torture the virgin until she professes the "truth" of his belief system, but her disregard for her body renders corporal punishment ineffectual. Moreover, she uses his spectacle both to convert observers and to prove her extraordinary love for God. When Margaret and Juliana torture and beat the devils who visit their cells, they complicate even further the construction of their gender in relationship to violence as they become, like their pagan enemies, torturers fulfilling their Christian duty to wage war on the devil.

Like the Final Girl, the virgin fits awkwardly in the sex-gender system; she is nearly unintelligible within a strict male/female binary. About the effect of virginity on gender stability, Salih writes that:

> Being a woman, then, is inseparable from being a wife and mother. It is social role and sexual activity, not genital anatomy that determine gender

> [...] Positing "virgin" as a distinct gender identity offers an escape from this paradox. The virgin martyrs' distinctive qualities – their eloquence, determination, and strength – can then be categorized as neither masculine nor feminine but proper to virgins while retaining a sense of the malleability of gender categories [...] The virgins should not be understood as a mixture of male and female but as a separate category altogether. The rejection of heterosexual relationships, a standard element of the virgin martyr legend, allows the binary opposition of male and female required by the heterosexual hegemony to be broken down, and a third gender, "virgin," to be produced. Virginity constitutes a "culturally consistent gender," in which the virgin's desire is directed towards God and her body is whole and impenetrable. ("Performing," pp.99-100)

In other words, virginity should not be equated with a singularly sexed body that performs both masculinity and femininity. Nor is it a bodily performance in active defiance of normative gender roles. Theorizing virginity as a gender, Salih escapes from the binary inherent in identifying the virgin within discursively rigid terms. As evidence of her point, Salih cites scenes in which the virgin is tortured to argue that her lack of shame at the exposure of her body indicates her defiance of femininity, but does not make her masculine. The logic of Elizabeth Robertson, the only critic I know of to explain Margaret's physical power in her confrontation with the dragon, demonstrates the limitations of interpreting violent women as acting like men.[36] For Robertson, the

[36] Robertson argues that physicality and sexual temptation are the critical components of these saints' lives: "female saints not only experience temptation through the body, but also triumph over temptation through the body" ("Early," p.113). In linking female

purpose of Margaret's strength is two-fold: to show the weakness of the devil (he fears a maiden) and to show God's limitless power (he has made a maiden physically powerful). She dismisses counter-arguments that, in her words, Margaret's "display of strength, as well as the devil's recognition of that power, here reverses the accepted gender roles" ("Early," p.112). In Robertson's equation, being violent means acting male and not female; the possibility of gender-fluidity goes unexamined.

While the appeal of the slasher is, in part, that the Final Girl is a "regular" person who performs extraordinary acts to survive, the appeal of the *passio* lies in the extraordinary virgin whose love for God allows her to defy all expectation. Unlike the Final Girl who does not seek out her unpleasant circumstances, the virgin looks for opportunities to perform her exceptionality publicly, to demonstrate that she is unlike those around her. If, as Salih argues, virginity is a gender, then it amplifies the inaccessibility of the martyr's religiosity to those who cannot biologically or socially perform virginity. The audience of the slasher can identify with the protagonist because of her "averageness" and the possibility it creates for emulation, but the audience of the *passio* would seem to read to admire, rather than emulate. Still, as Gaunt wonders in his question about the appeal of virgin martyrs, it is tempting to think that medieval audiences identified with martyrs despite their different experiences of religion and that that identification partially explains their great popularity. Because the virgin occupies a wide range of gendered identities in relation to violence, she is also unlike the average Christian. Instead of thinking of virgins as performing a gender, I suggest that their

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religiosity to the physical, Robertson follows the work of Caroline Walker Bynum in, to cite one instance, Holy Feast, Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.

performances in the text, especially in relation to violence, indicate their defiance of gendered categorization. Likewise, the penitent, whose identity is scripted in genderless terms, can achieve an analogous alternative state, outside of the restrictions that gender places on intelligible behavior. As a genderless figure, the Final Girl of Middle English hagiography enables a broad range of audience identifications that allow any penitent to be like a martyr by fitting into the category of all Christians and both sexes.

Judith and the Violence of Confession

When Judith kills Holofernes, she saves herself and her people; like the hero-victim of the slasher film, she is simultaneously victim, woman, hero, and savior without contradiction. As I discussed in my first chapter, the Anglo-Saxon Judith inhabits multiple identities simultaneously without resolution, and in AW to be like the Judith is to be a model anchoress, virtuous penitent, savior, military leader, and cleansed soul. Because of her widow's status, her trust in God under the threat of violence, and her Biblical pedigree, Judith seems like a perfect icon for the widows, married women, virgins, and anchoresses to whom the author of AW writes, but her function in the text is unexpected because of the wide range of roles she performs and identifications she invites.[37] Although the author first directs only the anchoress to Judith and only later offers her as a figure of identification for the larger audiences of Part Five, the representation of Judith as ideal anchoress and as a model penitent are inter-woven from the beginning. The anchoress, whose enclosure both links her to Judith and separates her from the outside world, would discover in Part Three that her isolation exists only in

[37] The Book of Judith is a deuterocanonical book, included in the Septuagint, but without an extant Hebrew exemplar. It is canonical in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian Old Testament of the Bible, but excluded by Jews and Protestants.

relation to the social world, much as Judith's anchoritic identity cannot be separated from her role as penitent. Similarly, lay readers are invited to take into account all of Judith's roles, since the act of confession enables them to be like the anchoress and like Judith, to pick and choose amongst her roles or to inhabit them all.

In Part Three, the author introduces Judith through a condensed Latin citation from the Book of Judith that describes her enclosure: [38]

> Judith clausa in cubiculo jejunabat omnibus diebus vite sue, et cetera. Judith bitund inne, as hit teleth in hire boc, leaded swithe heard lif – feaste ant werede here. Judith bitund inne bitacneth bitund ancre the ah to leaden heard lif as dude the leafdi Judith, efter hire evene – nawt ase swin i-pund i sti to feattin ant to greatin ayein the cul of the axe. (3.104-8, p.164)

Judith's credentials are asserted by the existence of "hire boc," written and quoted from in Latin, which describes her, like an anchoress, *clausa in cubiculo*. In accord with standard medieval reading practices, she is decontextualized from her Biblical narrative even as the citation of the "boc" recalls it. As an anchoress should, Judith lives a hard life in her enclosure, resisting the temptations of the world in the isolation of her cell and not resting on her laurels when she is safe from surveillance. Unlike a pig, the author explains, that luxuriates in its sty, waiting for slaughter, Judith practices active contemplation.[39]

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[38] Hasenfratz, p.164, notes for lines 104-5.

[39] Georgianna uses Judith's two appearances to further her argument about AW's simultaneous engagement with and disavowal of the world outside of the cell (p.104).

Judith is not only an example of thoughtful, active enclosure in Part Three. Through dubious, if authenticating etymologies, the author turns the decapitation into a scene of confession:

> For Judith on Ebreisch is "schrift" on Englisch, thet sleath gasteliche then deovel of helle. Judith:Confessio. For-thi seith acre to euch preost, Confiteor on alre earst ant schriveth hire ofte, for-te beo Judith ant slean Oloferne – thet is, the deofles strengthe. For ase muchel seith this nome Oloferne as "stinkinde in helle." Secundus nominis ethimologiam Olofernus, "olens in inferno," secundum interpretationem "infirmans vitulum saginatum." On Ebreische ledene Oloferne is "the feond the maketh feble ant unstrong feat kealf" ant to wild – thet is thet flesch the awildgeth sone se hit eaver featteth thurh eise ant thurh este. (3.208-15, pp.171-2)[40]

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[40] In doing so, the AW author appears to rely on the Pseudo-Jerome's Book of Hebrew Names that gives Christianized interpretations of Hebrew names (Hasenfratz, p.171, note for 3.209). Pseudo-Jerome describes his etymological/translation project of 388 thus:

> Philo, the most erudite man among the Jews, is declared by Origen to have done what I am now doing; he set forth a book of Hebrew Names, classing them under their initial letters, and placing the etymology of each at the side. This work I originally proposed to translate into Latin. It is well known in the Greek world, and is to be found in all libraries. But I found that the copies were so discordant to one another, and the order so confused, that I judged it to be better to say nothing, rather than to write what would justly be condemned. A work of this kind, however, appeared likely to be of use; and my friends Lupulianus and Valerianus urged me to attempt it, because, as they thought, I had made some progress in the knowledge of Hebrew. I, therefore, went through all the books of Scripture in order, and in the restoration which I have now made of the ancient fabric, I think that I have produced a work which may be found valuable by Greeks as well as Latins [...] Moreover, I have added the meaning of the words and names in the New Testament, so that the fabric might

According to the author, "Judith" means confession while Holofernes' name translates to "stinkinde in helle" or, in Latin, "olens in inferno". In both cases, he is responsible for tempting and undoing Christians. The extent of the description of Holofernes suggests that the author wishes to personalize and dramatize his assault on the virtuous. He is no longer a military general and would-be-rapist; rather, he is a stinking fiend from hell who intends to compromise Christians. Just as confession manuals script dialogues, this description of the relationship between penitent and devil captures the intensity and necessity that the author wishes to instill in his reader. The battle may seem dire and the chances of a Christian, even an anchoress, slim, but sincere confession can secure victory.

After leaving no doubt as to which side of this eternal battle the anchoress should be on, the author describes how she may become Judith through both confession and rigorous enclosure:

> Ah ancre schal beo Judith thurh heard lif ant thurh soth schrift, ant slean as dude Judith thes uvele Oloferne, temie ful wel hire flesch, sone se ha i-feleth thet hit awilgeth to swithe, mid feasten, mid wecchen, with here, wit heard swinc, wit heard disciplines – wisliche thah ant wearliche. (3.219-22, p.172)

The rigor and attention with which the anchoress approaches her enclosure is rewarded by her ability to imagine the consequences of her spiritual life in physical and violent images. Even enclosed, she is not involved in a solipsistic or isolated exercise of self-

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receive its last touch and might stand complete. (http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vii.ii.iii.html)

control, but in slaying the devil and saving her people; her virtue benefits her fellow Christians.

In Part Five, the author offers Judith as a point of identification to non-anchoritic readers through her embodiment of confession, affirming that the sacrament and the figure of the violent woman unite the spiritually elite and the average Christian. Part Five clearly states its purpose to draw its audience's attention to "schrift": "twa thinges neometh yeme of schrift i the biginnunge: the earre, of hwuch mihte hit beo; the other, hwuch hit schule beon" (5.1-2, p.308). Confession has six powers: three against the devil and three for the benefit of the penitent. In describing those benefits, the author anticipates Foucault who explains that confession "exonerates, redeems, and purifies [...]; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation" ("History," p.62). In a description of confession that shapes his subsequent discussion, the author suggests Judith without explicitly referencing her: "schrift schent then deovel, hacketh of his heaved, ant todreaveth his ferd" (5.6-7, p.308). Early in Part Five, he encourages the reader to see the confluence between Judith's function here and in Part Three: "Judith – thet is, schrift, as wes yare i-seid – sloh Oloferne – thet is, the feond of helle. Turn th'ruppe ther we speken of fuhelene cunde the beoth i-evenet to ancre" (5.9-11, p.308). Emphasizing her previous appearances, he cites the memorable passage in which Judith is first introduced that explains the role of the anchoress through a comparison with different types of birds and those that link her to confession. Like the author's exhortation to his reader to consult Margaret, these cross-references encourage

motion between sections. Judith should be understood in relation to her earlier citation and not as exclusively pertinent to the anchoress.[41]

In Part Five, the author further develops the analogy between the decapitation of Holofernes and confession, concretizing and complicating what he already described for the anchoress in Part Three:

> Ha hackede of his heaved ant seoththen com ant schwade hit to the burh-preostes. Thenne is the feond i-schend, hwen me schaweth alle hise cweadschipes: his heaved is i-hacket of, ant he i-slein i the mon, sone se he eaver is riht sari for is sunnen ant haveth schrift on heorte. Ah he nis nawt the yet i-schend hwil heaved is i-hulet, as dude on earst Judith, ear hit beo i-schawet – thet is ear the muth is schrift do ut the heaved sunne – nawt te sunne ane, ah al the biginnunge th'rof, ant to fore-ridles the brohten in the sunne - thet is, the deofles heaved, thet me schal totreoden anan, as ich ear seide. Thenne fli[t]h his ferd ana as dude Olofernes; his wihles ant his wrenches thet he us with asaileth, doth ham alleof fluthe ant t burh is arud thet had hefden biset. Thet is to seggen, the sunfule is delifret. (5.11-21, p.308)

The "sunfule" can be like Judith when they are contrite, which decapitates the devil, and then when they confess to a priest, which exposes the devil's head as Judith did to the people of Bethulia, turning the sin into a truth that can slay and destroy the devil. The army then takes flight; like the citizens of Bethulia, the soul can rejoice in victory, freedom, and literal salvation. By confessing annually, the penitent can reiterate the

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[41] Georgianna argues for an inherent consistency in AW that many critics had overlooked when she wrote, but has now been accepted.

beheading and, in doing so, reenact and become part of this historical moment. Still, to be like Judith, the penitent must endure the lonely and violent process of identifying the sin. The decapitation is only the first step; in the tradition of the confession manual, the priest must be shown the head, the sin, so that he can assign a penance that will destroy it and cause the army's flight. The violence of confession is both metaphorical and efficacious; the penitent will identify with Judith, but he or she will also do violence to the devil in order to effect the salvation of his or her soul and identification as a Christian. The literal violence of confession will assure that "the sunfule is delifret".

When discussing how she can use prayer to resist temptations, the author of AW directs the anchoress to her "Englische boc of Margarete" and specifically to Margaret's gruesome escape from the belly of the dragon (4.796, p.261). Judith uses confession and Margaret uses the sign of the cross to very similar ends: the physical splitting of a devil's body in two.[42] Both do violence to devils that is metaphorical and efficacious: prayer disturbs devils and proper confession destroys them as does the sign of the cross. Margaret's dragon is exotic and glistening: his tongue darts out; he stinks; he is gold. Once swallowed, Margaret symbolically reenacts the crucifixion to make him explode: "for þe rode taken redliche arrude hire, þet ha wes wið iwepnet, t warð his bone sone, swa þet his bodi to-bearst o-midhepes otwa" (p.24). Just as confessing reenacts the killing of

[42] Even though the details of Margaret's life have been contested since the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church only suppressed her cult (as well as Katherine's) in 1969. For some, Margaret's life followed Christ's too closely, but most objections settled on the devil scene. Symeon Metaphrastes, the famous Byzantine hagiographer, and Jacobus de Voragine, the thirteenth century Dominican, doubted the veracity of the explosion because the devil should be impossible to destroy. In "The Virgin and the Dragon: the Demonology of Seinte Margarete," Wogan-Browne stresses the virtuosic handling of the devil in Margaret, but avoids speculating on her use of violence, citing Aquinas among others to argue that there is nothing theologically remiss about destroying a devil.

Holofernes, making the sign of the cross allows Margaret to perform a defining historical moment: the crucifixion and Jesus' willingness to purchase souls by dying. In doing so, she underscores the efficacy of the sign as a weapon against the devil. For the dutiful cross-referencing reader of AW, Margaret confirms the efficacy of prayer in combating temptations.

Margaret celebrates her victory over the dragon by praying to God in thanks; in doing so, she harms the devil that appears in the form of the dragon's dark, scaly brother. Ever complaining, the devil speaks to the physical effects that prayers have on him:

> Marherete, meiden, inoh þu hauest ido me: ne pine þu me na mare wið þe eadie beoden þet tu bidest se ofte; for ha bindeð me swiðe sare mid alle, + makieð me se unstrong, þet uch ne fele wið me nanes cunnes strengðe. (pp.26-8)

Prayer, especially when it is offered often, causes the devil physical pain. The author of AW precedes his reference to Margaret with a comparable description of the effects of prayer:

> In-warde, ant meadkese, ant ancrefule, bonen biwinneth sone sucurs ant help ed ure Laverd ayeines flesches fondunges – ne beon ha neaver se ancrefule ne se ful-itohene, the deovel of helle duteth ham swithe. For teke thet ha draheth adun sucurs ayein him, ant Godes hond of heovene – ha doth him two hearmes: bindeth him ant bearneth. (4.786-91, p.260)

While prayer enables Margaret's escape from the dragon and helps her overcome the devil, it condemns the devil to ever more suffering, binding and burning in particular. Because it tortures the devil, prayer renders him the victim of righteous violence and

empowers the person who prays, turning the tables on the devil and underscoring the fluid and performative potential that participation in Christian warfare offers.

Confession, according to Margaret's devil, is even more powerful than prayer. While the latter may harm the devil and even burst a dragon, the devil hates confession the most; it represents the greatest possible assault on him. When Margaret and Juliana torture their devils in the isolation of their cells, they not only play confessor to the devil's penitent but they also allow the reader to see that the penitent can violently confess him or herself, that the role of the confessor and the process can be powerfully and productively internalized. During Margaret's bloody interview with the devil, he explains his hatred for confession:

> For þet is under sunne þinge me laðest, þet me ofte eorne to schrift of his sunne; for þet lutle ich mei makien to muclin unmeaðliche ȝef me hut + heleð hit; ah sone se hit ischawet bið birewsine i schrifte, þenne scheomeð me þer-wið + fleo ham form, schuderinde as ich ischend were. (p.34)

The devil reiterates much of what has already been said about confession in AW. When concealed, a sin grows, but once turned into a public truth, the devil must retreat as Holofernes' army did. The sacrament must be completed and the penitent is the singular, driving force behind the performance and its completion. Military and single combat images capture what confession can do, that it can enable any sinner to emerge victorious in battle. The violent saint and her tools - prayer, the sign of the cross, and confession – are images shared by KG and AW. They provide a model for the anchoress to combat temptations in her cell as well as for a less devout reader to combat the devil in the outside world and within him or herself. By fighting the devil, the penitent becomes a

violent woman, a figure who defies gender definition, a hero-victim who occupies multiple genders and escapes from the gender inscribed constraints of daily life.

Judith is not only a model anchoress and penitent in AW. She is also compared to Judah, the Hebrew general who held his Judean provinces despite the advances of the Greeks and whose name, the author explains, also means confession. Eligible penitents in search of figures for identification have their choice of the male Judah or the female Judith. The settings of their victories are gendered in that Judith's success begins in the bedroom while Judah triumphs on the battlefield, but the doubling of their figures enables a mixed gender audience to experience cross or like gender identification indiscriminately - to appreciate the different terms of the victories and to disregard them. While the comparison of Judith and Judah could introduce a stable gender paradigm in which male readers identify with Judah and female readers identify with Judith, the figures are conflated without mention to gender. Both cause the retreat of the devil's army and parallel the violence of the penitent; their conflation suggests the gender-inclusivity of the state of victor. Explicitly equating the military violence of Judah with the spiritual violence of the penitent, the author explains: "schrift reaveth the feond his lond – thet is, the sunfule mon – ant al todriveth Chanaan the feondes ferd of helle. Judas hit dude licomliche, any schrift thet hit bitacneth deth gasteliche the ilke" (5.29-31, p.310). As with Margaret's destruction of the dragon or Judith's slaying of Holofernes, the penitent can perform Judah's singular victory iteratively and, in doing so, work toward personal salvation by recreating a victory over the devil that is emblematic of the central drama of Christian history. Each battle marks a victory, but that victory requires

repetition and confession offers the ideal means with which the thirteenth century Christian can continue that war.

After comparing her to Judah, the author effeminizes Judith by counting her rejection of her widow's garments and donning of festive dress as two of the three things that "thet hit deth us-seolven": "and thet wes bitacnet tha Judith wesch hire ant despuleded hire of widewene schrud, thet wes merke of sorhe – ant sorhe nis bute of sunne: Lavit corpus suum et exuit se vestimentis sue viduitatis" (5.35-7, p.310). Confession can liberate a mourning widow from her sadness and status, a compelling possibility for an audience of widows and women who were socially identified by marital status. It can also be restorative: "This wes bitacnet thurh thet Judith schrudde hire mid halidahne weden ant feaheded hire ute-with as schrift deth us in-with: with alle the feire urnemenz the bliss bitacnith" (5.40-3, p.311). After readers have joined Judah and Judith in defeating the devil and imitated Judith in her rigorous enclosure and escape from widowhood, they are encouraged to imagine the rewards of the penitent soul through the feminized trope of clothing. Just as the introduction of the explicitly male Judah drew attention to the role of gender in the construction of the penitent, the adorned soul is an exaggeratedly feminine image that contrasts with the gender-fluid depiction of Judith as a violent woman. The lack of continuity is unavoidable; perhaps, it is the point. The inconsistency captures the wild fluctuation in the gendering of these figures: the penitent can kill an enemy, lead an army to victory, reject the clothing of a widow, and then adorn his or her soul as a final reward. In essence, the penitent can inhabit all these identities at different points and simultaneously, embracing fully the genderless category: "omnis utriusque sexus fidelis".

Being a true penitent, like Judith, Judah, or Margaret, renders gender fluid, allowing anchoresses and lay people to escape normative gender association. Judith's fluidity and the attention the author draws to it by emphasizing her multiple, nearly contradictory identities suggest the gender-neutral role that the confessing soul, anchoritic or otherwise, assumes. That neutrality is not a euphemism for masculinity, but a description of a penitent Christian identity undetermined by either the body or social status and capable of assuming a range of socially conflicting, gendered identities. When Margaret and Juliana both dismiss rather than kill the devils who taunt them, they reveal the critical difference between being Judith and being like Judith: the penitent must re-enact Judith's decapitation of Holofernes because the battle between individual and devil is not finite, but constant. The martyrs' lives follow a clear pattern: both are tortured, torture devils, and then are tortured and martyred. In the first scene of public torture, the saint defies her pagan torturer by dismissing her body and professing her belief. Alone in her cell, each saint is tempted by devils. When the saint tortures the devil, she both confesses him and demonstrates the violent, invasive, internal process that renders the penitent "wreiful, bitter mid sorhe, i-hal, naket, ofte i-maket, hihful, eadmod, scheomeful, [dreful], hopeful, wis, soth, ant willes, ahne, ant stude-vest" (p.312, Part Five, 54-8). The world of the devout Christian points to a final battle with temptation that is waged incrementally and never won in this lifetime. Annual confession offers a temporary victory that can and must be reiterated. And this continual reiteration creates an existence for the Christian penitent alternative to socially circumscribed identities governed by gender.

Margaret and Juliana: Virgins at War

Rejected by a beautiful and virtuous virgin to whom the promise of earthly wealth and power means nothing, the pagan ruler in pursuit of Margaret or Juliana is initially and predictably shocked. Quickly, however, he alters his tactics and turns to torture to demonstrate his sovereignty. Whipping and burning the maiden asserts the power over her and her body that marriage would have done in more conventional and socially acceptable terms. In the fourth century pagan world as depicted in these lives, marriage and torture function as organizing forces in a violent, oppressive, and decaying society that persecutes Christians because it cannot withstand dissenters, especially those like the virgin who represent a competing truth.[43] When explaining the rationale informing public torture, Foucault writes that

> If torture was so strongly embedded in legal practice, it was because it revealed truth and showed the operation of power [...] it also made the body of the condemned man the place where the vengeance of the sovereign was applied, the anchoring point for a manifestation of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces. ("Discipline," p.55)

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[43] In The Body in Pain, Elaine Scarry theorizes that reliance on torture reveals the contestability of power:

> It [torture] then goes on to deny, to falsify, the reality of the very thing it has itself objectified by a perceptual shift which converts the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory but, to the torturers and the regime they represent, wholly convincing spectacle of power. The physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of "incontestable reality" on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used. (p.27)

Public torture demonstrates on the body of the victim the unfathomable gulf between the power of the sovereign and the powerlessness of the victim; the public display of violence essentializes and verifies this power dynamic. The juridical face of marriage does similar work by publicly asserting hetero-normativity: a man takes a woman as his wife in a ceremony that enters her into a matrix of gender intelligibility through official effeminization. Torture uses public violence to alter and damage the body visibly; to the virgin martyr, however, undergoing torture signifies a faith in God that disentangles her from earthly and physical concerns. Although she welcomes torture, she must avoid marriage at all costs. While the ceremony would make her a wife, the sex that inevitably follows the ceremony would destroy her virginity. Because Christian logic is opposed to pagan logic, the maiden happily chooses physical harm instead of marriage to prove her love for God and keep her hymen intact.

Having beaten his daughter briefly and in vain, African threatens to turn Juliana over to her fiancée. Faced with impending death at the hand of her suitor, Juliana crystallizes the relationship between violence and the maiden seeking martyrdom:

> For, eaver se ȝe nu her mearreð me mare, se mi crune schal beon brihttre ban at fehere; for þi ich chulle cliðeliche ant wið bliðe heorte drehen eauer-euch derf for mu leofmones luue [...] ȝit mahen ane pine me here; ah hit ne hearmeð me nawt, ah helpeð ant heueð up ant makeð mine murhðes monifalde in heouene. Ant ȝef ȝe doð me to deað, hit bið deore to godd, ant ich schal bliðe bicumen to endelese blissen. (p.17)

Juliana joyously proclaims the relationship between earthly pain and heavenly reward, making heavy use of alliteration that reflects how talk of what is to come requires a shift

in rhetoric. She does not fear death, as she explains to her father; in fact, the worse her earthly suffering is, the better and brighter her rewards in heaven will be. Martyrdom will make her all the more precious to God.[44]

In his work on the scaffold in Discipline and Punish, Foucault challenges this very logic:

> But all the pains here below may also be counted as penitence and so alleviate the punishments of the beyond: God will not fail to take such a martyrdom into account, providing it is borne with resignation. The cruelty of the earthly punishment will be deducted from the punishment to come: in it is glimpsed the promise of forgiveness. But, it might be said, are not such terrible sufferings a sign that God has abandoned the guilty man to the mercy of his fellow creatures? ("Discipline," p.46)

Foucault's critique is useful because it is, in fact, the logic of the pagan: what kind of God permits the suffering of his most devout followers or deserts the guilty to human arbitration? The position of the virgin - that this suffering serves as a penance that will improve eternal, heavenly status - is, in fact, nearly inconceivable in human terms. Even as the martyr appears to be spotless, she is human and, therefore, inevitably susceptible to original sin and physical violence. The reader and the spectators are aware of the humanity of the martyr, her desire to reject that humanity, and the literal and physical impossibility of such a rejection. Moreover, although God intervenes in the torture and

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[44] In the South English Legendary, Margaret has read many *passiones*, implying that she seeks them out as models and, by extension, seeks the sort of conflict that results in martyrdom.

provides serendipitous miracles, if the virgin does not physically experience pain, then the spectacle becomes meaningless as does the testimonial to her faith.

The willingness to endure what most humans find intolerable marks Christianity's transformation of its adherents. As if to emphasize the unnatural quality of Juliana's response to violence, her would-be suitor Eleusius complains bitterly towards the end of the life:

> Iuliene, sei me ant beo soð-cnawes: hwer were þe itaht þeose wicchecreftes, þet tu ne tallest na tale of nanes cunnes tintreohe, nene dredest nowðer deaðne cwike deoflen? (p.47)

For Juliana, torture enables her achievement of the ideal end, but to Eleusius, her reaction renders her inhuman or possessed. Margaret confirms Juliana's logic as she dissects Olibrius' less than romantic efforts at persuading her to marry: "Ich wulle bitechen my bodi to eauer-euich bitternesse þet tu const on biþenchen, ne bite hit ne se sare, wið þon þet ich mote meidene meded habben in heouene" (p.12). In these rebuttals, the maidens align maidenhood explicitly with victimization and physical suffering that are defined by their desirability.

The spectators to the torture of Margaret and Juliana are alienated and horrified; they do not take personal affront at the maiden's nonchalance as the pagan does when he brutalizes her, but they cannot comprehend why she perpetuates her own suffering.[45] Despite the shared humanity of pagan, martyr, and spectator, their antithetical perceptions

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[45] In "Spectators of Martyrdom," Julie E. Fromer argues that the emphasis on the female body has nothing to do with the rejection of sexuality or desire. Rather, the emphasis on the physical lets the spectators, potential converts, understand the experience of the saint. Her body, in turn, exhibits the pagan's effort at enforcing his power and God's triumph and makes the invisible power of God corporeal.

of the spectacle reveal that violence conveys the transformative effect of Christianity: to be a virgin martyr is to insist on a reconfiguration of the relationship between the body, pain, and violence.[46] The descriptions of the bloody beatings and their effects force the reader to confront the extent of the violence Margaret suffers:

> Hwil þet ha sec þus, me to-lec hire swa, þet te luðere reue for þe stronge rune of þe blodi stream, ne nan oðer þet ter wes, ne mahte for muche grure lokin þiderwardes; ah hudden hare heafden þe heardestei heortet under hare mantles, for þet seorfule sar þet heo on hire isehen. (p.16)

In this passage, the narrator brings together the multiple factors at work in the spectacle. Margaret talks almost non-stop. She chastises her torturer and the crowds for not anticipating the heavenly translation of her suffering; she prays to God for support and miracles; she gives short lessons on Christianity, citing and paraphrasing scripture. All the while, her body is beaten with bitter birches, swords, and an awl so that blood runs from her open wounds. The spectators, even the most weathered, must look away in horror; their reaction gauges the extremity of the violence and clarifies the inhumanity of her reaction to the pain even as the blood of her wounds recalls the resoundingly human nature of her body.

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[46] In The Body in Pain, Scarry theorizes torture's reconfiguration of the victim's relationship to language and to the world, literally "unmaking" it:

> Besides the overwhelming fact that a human being is being severely hurt, the exact nature of the weapon or the miming of the deconstruction of civilization is at most secondary. But it is also crucial to see that the two are here forced into being expressions and amplifications of one another: the de-objectifying of the objects, the unmaking of the made, is a process of externalizing the way in which a person's pain causes his world to disintegrate; and, at the same time, the disintegration of the world is here, in the most literal way possible, made painful, made the direct cause of the pain. (p.41)

Margaret is both inhuman in her endurance of pain and human in her body's reaction to the pain; she can disavow her body, but it persists as a shell, connecting her to Olibrius and the spectators. When Juliana's father threatens her with a beating to her breasts that will make her wish she had not been born a woman, he demonstrates that he has missed the point of her resistance: "[...] for þu schalt on alre earst as on ernesse swa beon ibeaten wið bittere besmen, þet tu [wani þet tu] were wummon of wummone bosum to wraðer heale eauer iboren i þe world" (p.15). Juliana has rejected the very body that identifies her outwardly as a woman. The qualified victimization the maiden experiences becomes a defining feature of her new identity as virgin martyr and critical to her unlocatable identity that defies the binary definitions that violence ought to enforce: torturer/victim, powerful/powerless, Christian/pagan, living body/corpse, and male/female.

Although virginal ambition distinguishes Margaret from the pagans, the spectators, and the reader, the penitent has access to her rhetorical tools. The pagan looks to prove that truth and power exist exclusively within his domain; he is proven wrong on both counts. In the verbal debates, the virgin proves sensible and persuasive. Literally articulating the truth of Christianity, as the penitent does, affirms her Christian belief and identity and enhances her powers and resistance. The narrators frame the initial meeting between virgin and pagan as an antagonistic debate between ignorant brute force and the pure articulation of truth. As Wogan-Browne writes about Margaret's exchange with Olibrius, "torture as the pagan's mode of producing meaning is opposed and answered both by the virgin's own arguments and prayers and by God's production of miracles for the saint" ("Saints," p.107). Olibrius draws attention to Margaret's loquaciousness by

complaining twice that she: "Let [...] ne beoð þeos word noht wurð" (p.10). The longer they debate, the more frustrated and powerless he seems. At the beginning of Margaret, torture was used by the pagan as a juridical means to extract truth. Ironically, what the torture extracts from the maiden, unlike the words of submission that it is intended to elicit, is "truth" and in being Christian, it proves that what the pagan believes to be true is a lie. In this scene and in the scene in which Margaret interrogates the devil, torture turns out to be an excellent means of producing truth even as it also signifies the pagan's evil and Margaret's power. Despite his secular power, from the outset, the pagan lives at the margins of reality. Because of this initial and framing disadvantage, a thirteenth century Christian reader could perceive him as a potential rapist or a representative of the threat of forced conversion that the Saracens posed to crusaders and to the Church in general. Despite his self-importance and apparent power, the pagan is a plot device, a cipher that represents the indisputably wrong side of the argument and is generically destined to fail. Moreover, he pales in comparison to the devils that visit the cell and understand fully and deeply the power of God.

Juliana stages her arguments with her father and suitor as debates over whom she should marry and whether or not she should be able to choose her own suitor. Like Katherine and Margaret, Juliana is born to a powerful, pagan family. Early on, African, her father, negotiates her marriage to Eleusius, whom the emperor favors. In order to keep her "meiðhad from monnes man unwemmet," Juliana, now engaged to Eleusius explains that she will only marry him once he achieves the lofty status of high-sheriff (p.7). Once he achieves that rank, Juliana explains her predicament. Cast as a courtly lover who shivers and melts because of Juliana's flower-like beauty, Eleusius tries to

persuade her to reconsider.[47] In a *legenda* or even a romance, he might be a likely convert to a spiritual marriage. By the end of the *passio*, however, the rejection has turned Eleusius into a devil figure, complete with gnashing teeth: "balefule beast, as eauer ei iburst bar þet grunde his tuskes, ant feng on to feamin ant gristbeatien grisliche up o þis meoke meiden" (p.61). Juliana hijacks the generic trajectory of their romance towards hetero-normative marriage. Here she explains to African why such a conclusion is impossible:

> Schulde ich do me to him, þet alle deoflen is bitaht ant to ech deað fordemet, to forwurðe wið him worlt buten ende i þe putte of hele, for his edlackes weole oðer for ei wunne? [...] ich am to an i weddet þet ich chulle treowliche to halden ant wiðute leas luuien, þet is unlich him ant all worltliche men. Ne nulle ich neauer mare him lihen ne leauen for weole ne for wunne, for wa ne for wontreaðe þet ȝe me mahen wurchen. (p.13)

Juliana reconceives of marriage as a relationship with Jesus; desire and marriage direct her not towards sex but towards God.[48] About this redeployment of marriage in the AW Group, Salih theorizes that:

> If one crucial function of earthly marriage is to define and fix binary difference, to be expressed in the superiority of husband over wife, then it

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[47] When Eleusius first sees Juliana, he immediately falls in love with her, succumbing to a litany of symptoms that often plague medieval lovers:

> As he hefde en-chere bihalden swiðe ȝeorne hire utnume feire ant freoliche ȝuheðe, felde him iwundet inwið in his heorte wið þe flan þe of luue fleoð, swa þet him þute þet ne mahte he nanes-weis wiðute þe lechunge of hire luue libben. (5)

[48] In her analysis of the absence of heterosexual desire in slasher films, Clover argues that a romance would definitively effeminize the Final Girl, ruining the potential for cross-gender identification.

> is far from clear that *sponsalia Christi* in the anchoritic texts is doing the same work. The virgins of the *Katherine Group* and the speaker of *Wohunge* look forward to equality and identity with their spouse in heaven, and, while they are on earth, their desire for Christ is kept dynamic through a continual exchange with him of weakness and strength, might and humility. The sexualization of *sponsalia Christi* thus does not necessarily imply its heterosexualization, and the virgin may be a bride without becoming feminized in the process. The eroticism of the *topos* is if anything destabilizing. The likeness between the virgin and Christ may be in signs marked as masculine, such as power, or feminine, such as beauty. ("Queering," p.175)

Juliana construes marriage to Christ in genderless terms that are explicitly in conflict with the rigorous femininity asserted by conventional marriage. Moreover, in this new form of marriage, the virgin does not simply become the wife of Jesus; rather both parties fluidly adopt masculine and feminine roles, turning the trope of marriage on its head. For the pagan rulers who desire and confront Margaret and Juliana, torture and marriage are public events that stabilize gender and power dynamics. Thirteenth century Christianity, however, subverts them to reveal an existence outside of the body and beyond social definition.

Alone in her cell, Margaret sees "an unsehen unwiht, muche deale blacker þen eauer eani blamon, se grislich, se ladlich, þet ne mahte hit na mon redliche areachen, + his twa honden to his cnurnede cneon heteueste ibunden" (p.24). Earlier on, Margaret demonstrated that speaking the truth of Christianity effectively undoes a pagan; in her

cell, her sign of the cross disintegrates a dragon. Confronted by a new devil, however, Margaret herself, and not a sign or a word, attacks her enemy:

> þet milde meiden Margarte grap þet grisliche þing þet hire ne agras nawiht, + heteuests toc him bu þet eateliche top + hef him up + duste him dunriht to þer eorðe, ant sette hire riht-fot on his ruhe swire (p.28)

Margaret, "þet milde meiden," is graphically violent in her physical assault, throwing the devil to the ground and holding him in place with her foot. Margaret and Margaret alone can do this work of assaulting the devil and she seems more than well prepared to do so. The encounter suggests a final temptation for Margaret, a scenario that would further the controversial comparison between her and Jesus.[49] However, given Margaret's reliance on her own physical strength, the devil's declaration of his hatred for confession, and the lens Judith provides for understanding female violence as an analogy for confession in the AW Group, something more emerges. Imprisoned by the pagan, Margaret and Juliana both play confessor to an unwilling devil who confesses to his means of tempting Christians of all varieties. By beating their devils, both virgins achieve the desired ends of torture and confession: the admission of truth and wrong doing. Anchoritic and lay readers, along with those lucky enough to be peeking through the window of Margaret's cell, witness a brutal, painful, and honest, if demonic, confession that instructs them in

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[49] Writing about what transpires in the virgins' cells, Wogan-Browne speculates that:

> The Katherine Group martyrs [...] are all virgin martyrs, and in conformity with the early thirteenth-century audiences for whom they were compiled, have a spectacular inner theatre in their tyrant's dungeons (a kind of interior cell-drama, comparable with *vitae patrum* desert temptations, but intensely feminized). ("Saints," p.147)

Wogan-Browne's delineation of the dungeon as a stage is borne out by the central conflict between the virgin and the devil, but her gendering of that setting overlooks how the narrative bucks rigid gender alignment.

the devil's trickery. In the context of AW and the confession manual tradition, this scene teaches the audience how temptations work, but it also offers an effective antidote to those temptations. If Judith's decapitation of Holofernes signifies confession, the beatings Margaret and Juliana give their devils in their enclosed cells demonstrate the violence the penitent must be willing and able to do to him or herself; the penitent must rely on his or her own strength to achieve a sincere confession. As a post-Lapsarian subject, the virgin is a potential penitent, but, as her rigorous and effective devil beating suggests, she has managed to internalize the role of the confessor. She is subject and object of her narrative and, in playing both roles, she overcomes the devil physically and metaphorically.

As pseudo-penitent, the devil asks a series of questions that draw attention to how the use of violence renders the saint (un)intelligible. The devil's complaint that he cannot respond to Margaret's questions while she is standing on him emphasizes the physical (and comic) quality of the violence; like the saint, he physically responds to the pain, but unlike her, he complains. Margaret, in response, "lowsede + leoðede a lutel hire hele" (p.30). The devil questions Margaret about what she is. He often refers to her as a maiden, and this category seems to explain her strength to him: "Margarete, meiden, to hwon schal ich iwurden? Mine wepnen, wumme, allunge aren awarpen. ȝet were hit þurh a mon – ah is þurh a meiden" (p.36). He complains bitterly:

> þu haldest me i bondes ant hauest her iblend me, + art mi broðeres bone Rufines, þe rehe[st] + te read-wisest of alle þeo in helle. Crist wuneð in þe, for-þi þu wurchest wið us al þet ti wil is. Ne nawt nart tu, wummon, oþre wummen ilich. (p.30)

For the devil, there is a contradiction between what Margaret has done to him and how a woman, more precisely a Christian woman, might act in such a situation; like Juliana's devil, he complains that her behavior does not comply with his preconceptions. He ticks off her binding of him and destruction of his brother; this violence renders her definitively unfeminine. In the final sentence of the passage, he seeks to define her in the performance of the address by calling her "wummon" and rhetorically and damningly declaring her sex, only to insist that she is unlike any other women. To him, Margaret is both woman and not woman and this paradox clarifies that her use of violence makes her uncategorizable. Her gender works to the devil's disadvantage, adding to his shame; her sex indicates that she is not a worthy opponent, but her adept chaining and beating of him suggest the opposite. Like Olibrius, the devil has erroneously assumed that Margaret is a "wummon," that her body accurately signifies her gender and that she is thereby susceptible.

Margaret, however, defies more than simple gender categorization; according to the devil, she stands out amongst all who are tested:

> þis ȝet me þuncheð wurst, þet al þet cun þet tu art icumen + ikennet of, beoð alle in ure bondes, ant tu art edbroken ham: alre wundre meast, þet tu þe ane hauest ouergan þi feader + ti moder, meies + mehes ba, + al þe ende þet tu + heo habbeð in ieardet [...] Wei! wake beo we nu a[nt] noht wurð mid alle, hwen a meiden ure muchele ouergart þus auealleð (p.36)

In his disbelieving cry of despair, the devil differentiates Margaret from her family and the local people. Juliana's devil has similar concerns about what she is. Instead of becoming more combative as he is beaten, he becomes increasingly plaintive, equating

her flatteringly with "apostel, patriarchen ilich, ant leof wið alle martyrs, englene feolahe, ant archanglene freond" (p.43). His pandering compliment is met only with disdain even as it suggests that she has defied social and gender differentiators to join a trans-historical tradition of Christians. Although her power has received clear recognition, "þet eadie meiden" says threateningly: "Stew þe, steorue of helle! [...] Merci nan ni wið þe; for þi ne ahest tu nan milce to ifinden. Ah sei me swiðe, mare of þe wa þet tu hauuest mid woh iwraht mon" (p.43). The response contrasts with the dignified list of those with whom she shares a slot in the devil's eyes. The ferocity of her belief coupled with her virginity makes her unique. If her insusceptibility to violence rendered her inhuman and certainly unfeminine, her use of violence in this battle suggests that she is like no one else.

In Margaret and Juliana, gender becomes unstable because it no longer derives naturally from a relationship to violence. In the lives, Margaret and Juliana have been the victims of violence, but have disabled its powerful, identifying effects, and they have used violence for their own ends. Ultimately, by wishing to be beheaded, they render obsolete the system of violence and its determination of social hierarchy. The virgins do not fear violence, but invite it, imitating their torturers and proving their exceptional belief; they are, in essence, unworldly. In fact, Margaret and Juliana are defined completely for the devils by their use of violence. Like Judith, they are model penitents when they are most violent since to be a penitent is to be able to defy normal social identification and to enter the transcendently defined group of "all the faithful of both sexes".

Juliana's devil complains about how well maidens are armed for war, suggesting that their "milde ant meoke" nature functions as a shell for the viciousness both maidens

demonstrate in the cell. He laments: "O þe mihte of meiðhad, as þu art iwepnet to weorrin aȝein us! ȝet tu wurchest us wurst of al þet us wa deð, as þu didesr eaure!" (p.45). Although confession is the obligation of all thirteenth century Christians, both lives, especially Margaret, privilege the maiden as best loved by God. Her devil's description of his methods seems to apply more specifically to the spiritually elite. Still, Margaret's foster-mother and other admirers observe her battle with both dragon and demon through the window to her cell, suggesting the application of what they witness to them and an even wider audience. That Margaret is in a cell that is enclosed and permeable suggests the enclosure of and tortures specific to the anchoress; the presence and placement of witnesses offers a point of identification for the non-anchoress who can admire if not emulate what they see, and what they see, in fact, is what martyrs, anchoresses, and lay people must do to themselves to confess honestly. In Juliana, the author privileges maidens and women, but this privileging is counterbalanced by his invocation to those who are not educated well enough to understand Latin and his gestures towards this larger audience. Juliana's interrogation of Belial focuses on the temptation of the average person; he pointedly describes his perversion of "mon oðer wummon" who try to do good and "Cristes icorene" (p.37; p.41). Even as Margaret and Juliana exhalt the life of the virgin, they include the *mon oðer wummon*; if they are not exactly egalitarian, they value the average Christian as the twenty-first canon does in its unequivocal demand on all Christians to repent. While maidenhood allows Margaret and Juliana to beat the devils in their cells and emerge victorious, their violence, when understood as a performance of confession, is not the exclusive realm of the maiden or anchoress. Margaret and Juliana deny the reality of the pain their bodies experience

during torture; they reject the social prestige, power, sexuality, and passivity that marriage and the identity of "wife" would both offer them and enforce upon them. In doing so, they hope to be virgin martyrs; their rigorous rejection of the earthly and human prepares them for battles in which, like Judith and Judah, they do physically what confession does spiritually to the devil. Not only virgins need to fight the devil and Juliana ends with an example of how even the most ordinary merchant can join the battle.

By bringing the devil into the open and having him reappear at Juliana's sentencing, the author literally represents that violence against the devil is not simply isolated to the anchoress in her cell or even to the initiated who can watch through the cell window, but also accessible to those who are in the crowd or market place. Far from being a mark of Juliana's lack of sophistication, the violence includes the lay audience that the text addresses by offering an image of devil beating that happens in the marketplace.[50] Like Judith, then, who appears in a section of AW explicitly intended for general consumption and application, Juliana's violent battle against the devil is everyone's.

Like Margaret, Juliana begins her time in prison with a prayer. She asks for help in preserving her faith and in overthrowing her enemies, acknowledging that without God

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[50] Juliana is often described as the goriest and least sophisticated of the lives in the KG. Savage and Watson link the lack of sophistication of the work to its violence:

> There are obvious similarities between both Margaret and Katherine, but Juliana is, if anything, the least sophisticated of the three works, concentrating more on the harsh battle that is fought between its heroine and her enemies (spiritual and human), less on theological discussion arising from this battle. (p.429)

In "The Liflade of Seinte Iuliene and Hagiographic Convention," Wogan-Browne argues for its innovative literary qualities and the ways in which the author actively differentiates it from its predecessors, but she alone could not salvage its maligned reputation.

no human is capable of withstanding the devil. Immediately after her prayer, a devil disguised as an angel appears and urges her to give in to Eleusius' demands. Juliana, who "nes nawt of lihe bileaue," consults God in her heart (p.31). A voice from heaven assures her that her lover will keep her safe and orders her to:

> Ga nu neor ant nim him, and wið þe bondes þet ter beoð bind him heteueste! Godd almihti ȝeueð þe mahte for te don hit, ant tu schalt leaden him al efter þet te likeð, ant he schal al telle þe, unþonc in his teð, þet to wilnest to witen, ant kenne þe ant cuðen al þet tu easkest. (p.33)

Taking advantage of this invitation, Juliana confesses this unwilling, but truthful penitent, grabbing the devil and demanding to know "hwet tu beo ant hweonene, ant hwa þe hider sende" (p.33). As in Margaret, the devil explains not only his methods but also, in this case, the decisive role he has played in sacred history. He is responsible for the expulsion of Adam and Eve, Cain's murder of Abel, all idol worship, the persuasion of the Jews to desert God, the suffering of Job, the deaths of John the Baptist and Saint Stephen, and the war against and deaths of Peter and Paul (pp.33-4). In this overview of his most significant and best-known victories, Belial places himself and the war he wages against religious people at the heart of Christian history. The battle going in on in this cell has been played out repeatedly, from the beginning of time, on stages large and small.

Juliana tortures Belial with unquestionable glee, binding his hands behind his back and beating him with her own chains "þet him wrong euch neil ant blakede of þe blode" (p.41). She throws him backwards on the ground and continues to beat him until "he bigon to rarien reowliche, to ȝuren ant to ȝein, ant heo leide on se luðerliche þet wa we him o liue" (pp.41-3). The assault becomes so intense that Belial begs Juliana "leaf

þe hwiie, ant hald þine eadi honden!" (p.43). Here Belial begins moving towards the apparent contradiction with which I began this chapter. He attributes her physical strength to maidenhood that arms the mild virgin for war, but her zealous use of violence seems much more in line with the violence of her pagan suitor or her father than with the behavior of a dutiful Christian woman. Belial seems to take comfort in the knowledge that Juliana's power is specific to maidens, but what happens next suggests the extent of his error.

The devil's howling reaches Eleusius who orders his people to see if Juliana is still alive. The howling breaks the frame of the cell, penetrating the ears of anyone who figures in the *passio* just as the narrator intends the *passio* itself to move beyond the boundaries of anchoritic audience. Unlike Margaret, Juliana has no initiated observers of her dungeon. She and Belial leave the cell, the enclosure of the anchoress, the refined world of the spiritually elite; their witnesses, who are outside on the street, participate actively in torturing him. As Juliana drags Belial through the streets, he asks the question with which I began this chapter: "Ne beoð cristene men, ȝef hit is soð þet me seið, merciable ant milfule? Ant tu art bite reowðe" (p.47). Belial cannot reconcile the contradiction between the meek Christian and the one beating him with her own chains. These texts depict a Christian identity that mobilizes victimization for its benefits and fluidly adopts violence in the on-going war with the devil. Pagan and devil alike would prefer the maiden to be a passive, essentially feminine figure when in fact her allegiance to God allows her to transcend the constraints of binary gender. By reading the scene within a confessional context, we see the battle between individual and devil played out

as it has been so many other times, but we also see that maidens and laypeople can match and exceed those patriarchs who faltered in their conflicts by practicing confession.

As Juliana drags Belial, he suffers further indecencies: "Ant heo leac him eauer endelong þe cheping chapman to hutung; ant heo leiden to him, au wið stan, sum wið ban, ant sleatten on him hundes, ant leiden to wið honden" (p.47). In their attacks, these merchants make a local gesture of resistance to the devil, and they cause him enough pain that his howls reach an even larger audience. A crowd gathers around him so that he "wes imaket tus earmest alre þinge, ant berde as þe ful with" (p.47). In the next lines, Juliana throws him away into a "put of fulþe" and appears before her accuser, "schiminde hire nebscheft schene as þe sunne" (p.47). With Juliana as an example, these average people participate in Belial's humiliation and physical torture. Their integration into the violence recalls the passages from Part Six of AW that hierarchize Christians: although anchoresses may experience martyrdom in their penance, other Christians must also experience a harsh and painful penance that, if not identical to the experience of the martyrdom, is a lesser version of the same violence, appropriate to a lesser level of spirituality. Juliana performed penance in her cell, and the merchants perform their own penance on the street.

As her life draws to a close, Juliana continues to address her broad audience. She gives a history of the earth and creation that repeats the triumph over the devil iterated in each act of confession, winding her way through an overview of the Hebrew Bible and concluding with the Resurrection. Finally, about to be decapitated, she addresses the many who have congregated to repent and confess: "Lusteð me, leoue men, ant liðeð ane hwile. Bireowsið ower sunnen ant saluið wið soð schrift ant wið deadbote" (p.65). The

life fittingly ends appealing to its general audience of laypeople and urging confession on all of them. With the introduction of annual confession and the possibility of more confessions, the devil will find himself under siege from all directions.

Epilogue

In While They Slept, Kathryn Harrison chronicles a gruesome inter-generational family murder. The purpose of her account is two-fold: to penetrate the family dynamic, dysfunction, and violence that led to a son murdering his parents and little sister and to understand why her own experience of incest draws her to this story and others like it. In April of 1984, after years of failed interventions by social workers and counselors, Billy Gilley brutally beat to death his emotionally and physically abusive mother and father with a baseball bat. He ordered Jody, his beloved sister, to keep Becky, the favorite of their parents, with her in the bedroom, but Becky left to find out why her parents were screaming and Billy beat her to death as well. Meanwhile, Jody remained in her bedroom where Billy found her and proclaimed them "free" from years of abuse. Jody left the house with Billy despite her suspicion that Becky was still alive, and the two went to play cards at a neighbor's house. After persuading her brother to go for cigarettes, Jody told her neighbors what had happened, and the police found Billy at home, resting with the bodies.

Harrison delves into the Gilley family history, but she frequently returns to Jody's psychic survival of the murders: her graduation from Georgetown, her successful class mobility, her intelligence, and her coping mechanisms, whether writing a senior thesis that recounted the murders from her brother's perspective or reading countless harlequin novels as a child. While Harrison narrates Jody's decision to stay in her bedroom, the likely reason she survived the night, she moves past it quickly, suggesting that to dwell on it would complicate the narrative of survival and redemption that allows Jody to be an unqualified success. Harrison, along with the social workers, police officers, and lawyers

whom she interviews, all seem to agree that Billy's murder of his parents is understandable, almost morally justified by their horrendous treatment of their children. They are villains who met a fitting end. The murder of Becky, however, turns Billy into an unqualified villain, out to kill rather than to protect himself and his sisters. As the final indictment of her brother, Becky's murder functions as Cassandra's does in Aeschylus' Oresteia. While Clytemnestra may be excused for killing Agamemnon, her infanticidal husband, her murder of Cassandra, an innocent war victim with the unfortunate gift of seeing a future no one believes, is inexcusable, a blatant abuse of power and show of anger. Once doctors decreed that Becky would not have survived the beating even with earlier medical attention, Jody was freed legally from any culpability in Becky's death and even testified against her brother. From the perspective of the legal system, the press, and the social service workers, Jody became an innocent, an unwitting witness to and victim of an unspeakable event. Although family members, with the explicit intention of exonerating Billy, continued to question whether or not Jody and Billy had a romantic relationship, whether she implicitly encouraged Billy, and whether she knew or even guessed what he planned to do, Billy's life sentence and the official version of the event purified her. Like her sister, Jody was an innocent victim of her parents and her brother.

My interest in Harrison's account is not in the quality of Jody's participation, her real intention, or the consequences of her actions, but in the palpable relief of the characters and the narrator that Jody's delay in contacting the police did not actively lead to the death of her sister. That technical and scientific decree cancels any other potentially incriminating or complicating details. Although Jody recounts hearing her

parents' screams, as Becky did, she never leaves her bedroom to investigate. By her own account, she neither tried to prevent Becky from going downstairs nor followed her. Her desire to save her own life, coupled with her hatred of her parents is more than understandable, but her decision to stay in her room raises questions about what could have happened and what she could have done. Could she have, at least, prevented the murder of Becky? While Harrison and the investigators revisit and interpret every other detail of the murder and the events that lead to it, they let Jody slide on the matter of Becky. Their omission allows moral responsibility to fall neatly and absolutely along traditional gender lines even as the actual narrative suggests a more complicated, realistic, and horrifying picture of multiple, conflicting intentions, ambivalence, and ambiguities. Billy is violent and abusive, overflowing with potentially incestuous desires for his sister. He is an unqualified and inexcusable male monster. As the survivor and the success of the Gilley family, Jody is beyond reproach, a paragon of female victimization and virtue. For her to be so, any question surrounding her involvement in Becky's death must be resolved and dismissed. Otherwise, Jody would come to close to enabling the murder of her family, to being in tacit agreement with her brother's revenge, and the clear distinctions that the characters make between masculinity and femininity, aggression and suffering, and immoral and moral behavior would collapse, revealing an ambiguous landscape in which absolute judgments become nearly impossible.

In Lady Killers, my interest in the alignment of gender and violence drove my exploration of the representation of violent women in a wide range of medieval English literature. While the first two chapters investigate the failure of representational language to identify conclusively figures that do not comply with binary gender, the second half

explores the reconception of the sex gender system and quotidian, normative social order to provide a coherent representation of an ideal queen or a model penitent, violent figures whose institutional roles require them to be so. Scenes of violence consistently beg of their witnesses, both inside and outside the text, to assign moral judgments: who was in the right and who was in the wrong? In doing so, the witness aligns him or herself with good or evil and gains a moral perspective from which to judge the characters and the events that comprise the narrative. Such assignments ask us to table ambiguities and details and apply binary logic. The figures and texts I consider in Lady Killers do ask their readers to come to such conclusions about right and wrong, but they do so only after presenting complicated, nuanced, and murky depictions of moral responsibility and its intersection with violence. The critical tension I discovered was between that murkiness and the desire of characters and narrators to find resolution in spite of that lack of clarity. That tension tries our assumptions about the consistent and reliable alignment of masculinity with aggression, responsibility, and often culpability and femininity with victimization, passivity, and innocence. Is Grendel's Mother right to avenge her son violently? Can the decapitation of Holofernes be an absolutely virtuous act? Was Philomela's desire for revenge morally justified? Was Procne justified in avenging her sister and harming her husband, but not in killing her son? All four characters are both victims and aggressors, masculine and feminine, morally justified and murderers.

The discomfort and ambiguity that surrounds the representations of Jody, Grendel's Mother, Judith, Procne, and Philomela stems in part from their existence in worlds, whether literary or real, that have clear, if not explicitly articulated, assumptions about the relationship between gender, violence, and moral rectitude. Gwendolyn and the

virgin martyrs of the Katherine Group exist in worlds that are not determined by the normative sex gender system; resolutely clear lines persist, however, in distinguishing between good and bad characters. In essence, moral distinctions remain paramount, but they are no longer inherently liked to sex. A female character can become good by adopting violence in order to achieve a perfect end that is without moral complication or ambiguity. The story of Gwendolyn, Locrinus, Estrildis and the lives of Margaret and Juliana are good and compelling stories in part because they ask their readers to suspend belief and imagine systems of violence, gender, and moral judgment that are not entirely anchored by everyday morals and binaries. In the fantastic account of Gwendolyn, the queen must embrace both roles of king and queen to right the wrongs that her husband and his lover have introduced to Britain. When she kills and drowns Estrildis and Habren, the reader is not asked to consider the real implications of the act or to think about the potential problems of with agency, intention, or innocence, but to cheer Gwendolyn on as an avenger and a righteous one, driven by her desire to cleanse Britain geographically and ethnically. In its unabashedly fantastic representation of queenship, the episode does not ask the reader to consider consequences and victims, but rather to embrace a gender inclusivity that can correct the wrongs in the world without thought to victims or ambiguities. When the virgins beat the devils, they act as their pagan tormentors have, mimicking that violent abuse of power and prestige that the narrators have so vilified in their depiction of pagan despair and evil. The saints are different, however, from their pagan counterparts because their violence is not only against the unqualifiedly evil devil but also because they exist in an alternative order of intelligibility in which they are freed from the normative constraints of gender and moral order. Like

Gwendolyn, they are fighting a fight, here even more extreme, in which there is no ambiguity and in which alternative rules, power structure, and orders apply.

Gwendolyn, Margaret, and Juliana escape the normative world of gender and social order, but these violent women are subject to alternative power structures and orders that offer them apparently coherent identities: British rather than ethnic or geographic outsider and Christian rather than pagan. While the historiography generates a definition of what it means to be British, the hagiography defines the Christian in a post-Lateran Four context. Gwendolyn, Margaret, and Juliana all assume stable and coherent identities that trump the significance of their gender and, in the case of the martyrs, their sex as well. However, if the unraveling of binary gender and the sex gender system are any indication, those other organizing binaries, those divisions, which are presented as so essential, will collapse and creak, revealing a murky order in which absolute distinctions fail to accommodate or capture the world of the text or the world of its reader.

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