

BETWEEN MARS AND VENUS: BALANCE AND EXCESS IN THE CHIVALRY OF
THE LATE-MEDIEVAL ENGLISH ROMANCE

A Dissertation

by

ILAN MITCHELL-SMITH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2005

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Between Mars and Venus: Balance and Excess in the Chivalry of the Late-Medieval
Romance. (May 2005)

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This dissertation is a study of how late-medieval romances construe ideal chivalric masculinity, and how aristocratic male violence was integrated into a beneficial model for masculine behavior. The focus is on the "fair unknown" romances of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and the final chapter reads Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" as thematically related to the "fair unknown" tradition in its treatment of chivalry and violence. By contrasting the masculine ideal of the romance with that of the chivalric epic, this study approaches chivalry in terms of multiple and competing models, and finds that, unlike the epic, the ideal of the romance was informed by the growing popularization of university-based philosophy and cosmology.

Between Mars and Venus argues that the most significant point of departure that the chivalric romance makes from the epic is its characterization of chivalric masculinity as a moderated avoidance of extreme behavior. Animalistic and monstrous references to knightly violence in the romance often result from episodes in which the knight has been overly amorous or courtly. By identifying both extremely amorous and extremely

aggressive behavior in terms of oppositional poles on a spectrum of excess, this study reads ideal masculinity as the mediated balance between the two extremes. The connection between the production of romances and the philosophy of the universities offers an explanation of chivalric masculinity in terms of Aristotelian virtue - as a mean between excess and deficiency of prowess. This reading of chivalric violence avoids the anachronistic assumptions of stereotypical male aggression that many critics rely on. By avoiding these assumptions, this dissertation offers a reworking of the feminine/masculine binary into a paradigm of competing masculinities, which is more attuned to the intellectual and philosophical contexts of late-medieval literary production.

DEDICATION

For Susannah

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of how late-medieval romances construe ideal chivalric masculinity, and how aristocratic male violence is integrated or refuses integration into this model. The focus deals largely with the two "fair unknown" romances *Erec et Enide* and *Libeaus Desconus*, but this reliance on the fair unknown tradition is in service to the larger project, which is to excavate a perception of ideal chivalric behavior that is evident in a large number of romances throughout the high and late medieval periods. The study touches on a wide historical period but does so with an awareness that the Middle Ages were characterized by significant changes, and so the attempt throughout has been to avoid generalities in favor of specifically situated readings following one trend in the literary treatment of chivalry.

Following recent tendencies in the study of gender, this dissertation approaches the question of masculinity in terms of multiple and competing models for male behavior, and focuses on one specific model, which seems to have emerged in the twelfth century and to have developed largely through the romance tradition of the later medieval period. Unlike the masculine model of the epic that preceded it, the chivalric ideal that emerges in the romance tradition seems to praise martial ability but to criticize martial displays when they are excessive and extreme. Likewise, whereas the knight of the epic tradition

This dissertation follows the style of *Speculum*.

is open to charges of effeminacy if associated with women and the court, such association is necessary for the hero of the romance. Excessive courtliness, however, is criticized as well, so that the resulting model is one in which martial and courtly behavior both define the knight's identity, but excessiveness in either of these behaviors complicates it.

Furthermore, when knights succumb to excess in these narratives, their behavior is depicted in terms of animalistic savagery and irrational aggression, connecting the idea of moderated avoidance of excess to the realm of reason and rationality. The differentiation between the divine rational soul and the animalistic temporal body is an element of the university-based cosmology that was becoming widespread in roughly the same period as the romance. This perception of mind/body interaction also has clear connections to more populist theories of human health and psychology, such as humoral medicine and astrology, which treat the fluids of the body or the influence of planets (respectively) as immoderate urges that require continual moderating by the rational soul. These theories are often examined in studies of medieval health and philosophy, but critics seldom consider them in relation to more popular literary forms such as romances.

Between Mars and Venus argues that the most significant point of departure that the chivalric romance makes from the epic is its characterization of chivalric masculinity as a moderated avoidance of extreme behavior. Descriptions of animalistic and/or insane knightly behavior in romances (most clearly in the fair unknown tradition) often result from episodes in which the knight has been overly martial or overly courtly. By identifying both extremely amorous and extremely aggressive behavior in terms of oppositional poles on a spectrum of excess, this study reads ideal masculinity as the

mediated balance between the two extremes. Possible connections between the production of romances and the philosophy of the universities offers an explanation of chivalric masculinity in terms of Aristotelian virtue - as a mean between excess and deficiency of prowess. This reading of chivalric violence avoids the anachronistic assumptions of stereotypical male aggression that many critics rely on in their shared assumption that chivalry was, in essence, a cult of prowess. By re-imagining the way that violence and chivalry interact in the romance, this dissertation offers a reworking of the feminine/masculine binary into a triune paradigm of reasoned masculinity moderating between oppositional excessive and bestial masculinities, which is more attuned to the intellectual and philosophical contexts of the late-medieval worldview.

The first chapter of the dissertation offers a critical survey of the intersecting bibliographies of medieval masculinity studies and critical treatments of violence in the Middle Ages. Despite a historicist shift in this scholarship (as seen in the work of scholars such as Susan Crane, D.M. Hadley and Jody Enders), there is a persistent reliance on the masculine/feminine binary as a universal descriptor for gendered behavior. Resulting from this reliance, chivalry has largely been considered only in terms of its aggressive and martial character. This chapter explores a masculine ideal that is not characterized in opposition to femininity, but in opposition to excessive and faulty forms of masculinity. By doing so, it interprets chivalry as a preferred form of masculine activity along a spectrum of male behavior.

The second chapter reads changes in the chivalric tournament tradition as exemplifying a widespread cultural shift in the perception of chivalric masculinity. Pointing out previously ignored points of contact between the evolution of the

tournament, the emergence of Aristotelianism in the growing universities, and a new perception of identity (which some scholars have misread as an emergent individualism), this chapter unearths a major shift in the perceptions of knighthood from the late-twelfth century through the early fifteenth century. Evident in the history of the tournament is a shift from excessive displays of group-based force and martial ability to individual spectacles of self definition that balance martial feats with courtly displays. The emergence in this period of the chivalric romance is part of this cultural movement, and in its focus on individual identity it breaks away from the more political subject matter of the chivalric epic, the previously dominant literary representation of knightly behavior.

The third chapter explores how Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* criticizes the hero for both overly aggressive and overly courtly behavior, and (by negative example) characterizes chivalric maturation as a process of balancing extreme versions of these opposed behaviors. This chapter notes Chrétien's possible exposure to Aristotelianism, following the argument that Aristotle was known in France from the twelfth century, before Grosseteste's translation. The parallels between Chrétien's model for balanced chivalry, humoral psychology, and an Aristotelian model for virtue suggests that the "fair unknown" tradition of romances had a continuing connection with university philosophy. The chapter identifies how the fair unknown romances use a moderated model for chivalric masculinity in order to open a discussion of the romances from Chaucer's period that use this same model.

Chapter IV traces the moderated model of chivalry in the "fair unknown" romances of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and find that they use the space of the court and the space of the wilderness to physically situate the discussion of

the chivalric ideal. These romances depict proper behavior as alternating between the behavior in the martial wilderness and in the courtly space of the castle and the court. The chapter focuses primarily on *Libeaus Disconus*, arguing that it genders space not in terms of masculine exteriors and feminine interiors, as has been the assumption among medievalists, but in degrees of excessive and moderated masculinities. Finding similar prescriptions for male behavior in contemporary late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth-century fair unknown romances such as *Generides*, and *Sir Tryamour*, this chapter also draws comparisons between the fair unknown tradition and seemingly unrelated romances from the same period, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*. The similarity between these romances demonstrates a larger presence of balanced chivalric masculinity in late-medieval romance production during the time that Chaucer was adapting the "Knight's Tale." By concentrating on romances from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, this chapter contextualizes Chaucer's literary moment in order to inform a study of his use of the romance genre and the chivalric identity with which it is concerned.

Chapter V reads Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" as a narrative of excesses, in which the protagonists are characterized in terms of their extreme behavior. Using the frame of the romance of antiquity, Chaucer places the model of moderated masculinity in the context of medieval astrology and cosmology. Simultaneously reworking Boccaccio's *Teseide* and contemporary philosophical theories of cosmology and astrology, Chaucer creates a philosophical romance that critiques its own genre by depicting all knightly combat as inherently excessive and injurious. By writing a romance of antiquity, Chaucer is able to present a world in which the gods of pagan antiquity are symbolic of the essentially

excessive planetary influence of contemporary astrology - an influence that was very much accepted as a part of the fourteenth-century worldview. Using this setting, he provides a terminology for the poles of excessive behavior with the terms of astrological inclination, so that the worship and subservience to the gods Mars and Venus (by Arcite and Palamon, respectively) is simultaneously understood by the reader as excessively *marcien* and *venerien* planetary influence. Moreover, Chaucer makes a departure from the romances of the previous chapters and places the model of balanced chivalry within a Boethian framework, connecting planetary influence with an over-reliance on the urges of the temporal world. This chapter places the "Knight's Tale" more firmly in the literary context of university-based philosophy, and it also strengthens the connections between contemporary romance writers and Chaucer's treatment of the genre.

CHAPTER II

MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE

Interest in the study of gender has been growing steadily for the last four decades, and it has become an active topic in both popular and academic discourse. Interest in the study of masculinity specifically has had a more sudden and less even growth and has been the target of some valid criticisms. Perhaps the most important criticism is the suggestion that the popularized "Men's Studies" view of gender has as its project the establishment of an essentialized notion of masculinity¹ that recasts traditional patriarchy in the form of the new "sensitive man" who reigns gently with emotional availability – but reigns nonetheless – retaining the authority of the public sphere while projecting a new authority into the private sphere. Popularized and self-help versions of masculine theory tend to appeal to “natural” or “primeval” manhood, a gendered identity that is so universal that it exists in the subconscious of all men in exactly the same form. Getting in touch with this "manhood" becomes the way that men can heal themselves of crises in their masculine identities that are brought about by the complications of modern life. One example of this kind of popular theory is Robert Bly's bestseller *Iron John*, which argues that "when contemporary man looks down into his psyche, he may, if conditions are right, find under the water of his soul, lying in an area no one has visited for a long time, an ancient hairy man. The mythological systems associate hair with the instinctive and the sexual and the primitive...Every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet. Making contact with this Wild Man is the step that the Eighties male or the Nineties male has yet to take."² In

this example (and in many popularized versions of masculine theory) the final emphasis is on talking about the way that “men” act, and what “men” need, and the problems that “men” encounter. The discussion never answers the questions that we should all be asking; *which men? In what period? In what cultural context?* While many men find popularized, “men's studies” approaches to masculine theory to be helpful in dealing with their own masculine crises, as academics we must see that these discussions fail in terms of accurately discussing masculinity because they overlook differences in the way that men of different times and places think about themselves, and they are ignorant of the way that masculinity, like all elements of culture, might take different forms in different cultural contexts.

We may be forgiving of the universalizing tendencies of these texts because, when understood to be directed at (and referring to) a very specific audience, they might work as a salve for what many believe is an American masculine model that does not work. The problem is that such appeals to a universal manhood (even if understood to be universal in a given culture) very often encourage the reader to see whiteness, heterosexuality, Christianity, fatherhood, and a host of other traits as “normal” and part of a genetically based masculinity. For example, in the self-help men's studies book *Fire in the Belly*, Sam Keen complains that the men's studies sections of most bookstores offer only books devoted to the homosexual experience or to what he calls “warmed over feminism with a reverse twist” instead of what his book is presumably meant to do: “stir the head, the heart, or the gonads.”³

According to this model, the homosexual male has different concerns than those of “men,” as does the man who does not use the “head, heart and gonads” approach to the

question of masculinity. It is important to see that, by describing a universal masculinity that excludes certain men and (especially) other groups of men, writers such as Keen and Bly are participating in the subjugation of variant masculinities, and their actions, however unintentional or subconscious, will serve to uphold not one, universal system, of masculine ideals, but *the* one that furthers its own legitimacy by denying legitimacy to variant forms of masculine behavior.⁴ Reliance on a universal "normality" is a resurrection (albeit in a different form) of the stereotypical hegemonic masculine model, whose adherents habitually deny masculine identity to those sub-cultural groups of men who do not or cannot conform.⁵ This kind of denial occurs mainly from the perspective of the dominant group because self-contained masculine models are easily uncovered in numerous subverted sub-cultural groups. Within these sub-cultural groups men define and participate in masculinities that, while affected by the labeling of other groups, often work as enclosed masculine systems (which provides a framework under which the men can think of themselves as "men"). An important project of the gender theorist is to identify and define specific forms of masculinity so that their larger political and social significance can be unearthed, especially in the way that they relate to other masculinities.

It is fairly clear that texts like *Iron John* are written for a popular audience, and so one might not expect from them any degree of academic rigor. This tendency to rely on universal systems of gender can also be found in academic writing, however -- in studies that would seem to have much more academic merit than the popularized interpretations of masculine theory. In *Manhood in the Making*, for example, anthropologist David Gilmore makes the argument that masculinity in almost every culture shares the same basic elements. He argues that masculinity is tenuous and fragile in virtually every

culture, and the right to a masculine identity must be claimed and continuously proven in order for the male not to lose it.⁶ Furthermore, he argues that the process of proving and claiming masculinity has to include the threat of physical danger and/or be physically trying.⁷ This approach to masculinity has great currency with the reader, as it speaks to and soothes a general perception of male behavior as genetically based in physicality and aggressiveness. Gilmore's study has serious problems, however, not the least of which is a lack of attention to what happens to groups of men who cannot or do not (through their own choice) participate in this elaborate and genetically based practice of seizing and defending masculinity. Gilmore suggests that his study is widespread, and uses a cross-cultural analysis to argue for the international presence of this phenomenon. His cross-cultural study need not have taken him farther than the nearest Catholic priest, however, to find a representative of a male group for whom masculine identity has very little to do with dangerous feats and physically trying tests. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the priest is often feminized and denied a masculine identity by other groups of men has less to do with the priest's perception of his own masculinity than with the desires for hegemony of those whose definition of masculinity excludes him.

Gilmore is not alone in looking for a single way to view masculinity, and essentialized references to "the masculine" are common in the academy, such as Brittan's suggestion that "experience indicates that the masculine gender is a fragile and tentative thing, with weaker biological underpinnings than the feminine."⁸ Jo Ann McNamara relies on and adds to this idea, suggesting that "It requires strong social support to maintain fictions of superiority based solely on a measure of physical strength."⁹ Like the popularized conceptions of masculinity that would argue the opposite point of view,

this kind of statement is clearly directed at modern, western masculinity, but it carries the implication of a universalized gendered behavior. Regardless of how true or false this statement might be when applied to the way certain men act, it is like the popularized versions discussed above in that it ignores the various sub-cultural groups whose specific and unique definitions of masculinity might not follow this model. Academic approaches to gender have been shifting towards an awareness of multiple models, but much of the scholarship seems to be in transition, so that gender is considered culturally but not on a sub-cultural level. These studies, to their credit, focus on gender as a construction of a specific culture in a specific time and place, but they do not go far enough, and too often rely on assumptions that all men of a certain time and place act and think the same way.

For example, in a book designed to teach university students about just these issues, Gilbert and Webster summarize the stereotypical "real man" as exhibiting:

All the traits of a strong and self-assured person by being rational, competitive, proud, self-protective, physically powerful, and sexually active. Acting like a Real Man means standing up for your beliefs, pushing your opinions with determination and courage, even against seemingly insurmountable odds. Fighting for justice or doing evil, the Real Man approaches his tasks believing in the righteousness of his cause. If necessary the Real Man will protect those weaker than he, because it is his duty to use his strength for others. Even if he is tyrannical in exercising his power, he gains respect for the force of his will. He may

not enjoy conflict but enjoys a good fight since he can show his skills at winning – the only acceptable outcome to his struggles.¹⁰

This description is clearly meant to criticize the stereotypical modern western masculine model, but the assumption of a universal stereotype in the phrasing indicates a tendency towards essentialism, because it does not allow for varying and competing stereotypes, prescriptions, and displays of masculinity, even within modern western culture. David Rosen's *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity*¹¹ displays a similar tendency. Rosen allies himself resolutely with the project of seeing multiple masculinities,¹² but arranges his book around the reading of representative texts from different periods. For him, a text like *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or *Hamlet* is "an icon of human and masculine idealism in its period."¹³ By seeing these stories as *the* masculine voice of their period, however, he misses the interplay between various masculinities within their periods. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, defines masculinity in a way that is contrary to the definition found in some of the other chivalric texts of the late Middle Ages (as will be discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation), and this definition would be completely separate from the definitions of masculinity that would exist for members of different social classes and professions in the same period.

Another difficulty with the study of masculinity is one of definition. In western usage, the word "masculine" connotes two separate and possibly conflicting sets of meaning. On the one hand, most people in western culture tend to accept what Lindisfarne and Cornwall call a "positivist binary," which refers to a definition of

masculinity that is conceived as the extreme opposite of any traits defined as feminine, so attainment of masculinity is synonymous with rejection of femininity.¹⁴ Under this paradigm, "masculine" behavior is characterized by stereotypical attributes that can be generalized as aggressiveness, dominance, and strength formed in opposition to "feminine" passivity, submissiveness, and weakness. To this list we should also add the masculine intellect which is considered against feminine emotionality. This characterization of the masculine very often includes the ability not just to be aggressive and dominating, but to be so to the greatest degree. The "masculine" becomes a kind of gender-neutral adjective that can be used to describe men or women who display the marked traits. For example, women marching for suffragette rights, shouting and throwing stones are "performing masculinity,"¹⁵ professional wrestlers are hyper "masculine," and the stereotype of the "butch" lesbian is one of a masculinized woman. Conversely, the man who is "getting in touch with his feminine side" is able to cry, to be weak, and to be passive. This definition of masculinity (the most common and popular both in and out of the academy) describes masculinity (and femininity) only in terms of excess, either implicitly or explicitly. This is not to say that the adjective "masculine" is always used in a negative way, but that the hyperbolic or ultimate state of the masculine is undeniably excessive and dangerous. For example, a woman wearing short hair might be considered masculine (in that she has moved away from the "feminine" pole), but she would be more masculine if she were aggressive, more still if she were physically violent. The assumption of a polar and binary relationship between excessive gender types is something that we will revisit later, as it bears directly on medieval discourse on health, psychology, and cosmology. At present, however, we must address the notion that

masculinity (as a disembodied category) is defined in terms of negative excess, and see that this is often contrary to the second definition that is commonly used for masculinity.

This second definition is the more generalized set of traits outlining what it means to be a “man” for any cultural or subcultural group – those learned behaviors that are deemed appropriate by the larger community, as opposed to the disembodied categories of "masculine" and "feminine" outlined above. The process of attaining this second type of masculinity is one of trying to internalize a set of traits that define “manhood” and constitute a masculine identity. Sometimes these traits are synonymous with the first way that we think of manhood, in that learning aggression, dominance, and even the ability and will to commit violent acts are sometimes part of the process of becoming a man. To continue the earlier example, however, members of the Catholic clergy by necessity must consider their gender in ways other than aggression and sexual exploits (traits often assigned to American hegemonic masculinity), but we must assume that these men think of themselves as masculine. Because of these two definitions of masculinity (which coincide only occasionally), the discussion of masculinity is complicated, and requires specific cultural contextualization.

Medievalists have, in general, made great attempts to see gender as culturally dependant and to study the specifics of how gender in a given context is constructed. For example, Gillian Overing argues that masculinity in the early epic (specifically in *Beowulf*) is constructed and reinforced when the hero remains “heroically defiant” of the “other,” which she relates to death.¹⁶ Masculinity in this study is understandable only within the context of its literary and cultural construction. On the other hand, many medievalists dealing with gender fail to differentiate between the two meanings of

"masculinity" outlined above. In so doing, they fall into the habit of assigning masculinity and femininity to opposing roles in the "positivist binary" without first establishing that this binary system accurately depicts the construction of gender in the medieval culture under examination.

In his article entitled "On Being Male in the Middle Ages," Vern Bullough relies on psychoanalytical and anthropological theories to discuss general ideas of "the masculine" and relates them to the medieval male experience. Although he pays lip-service to the idea that forms of masculinity may vary, in the end he resorts to the statement that "The most simplistic way of defining [masculinity] is as a triad: impregnating women, protecting dependants, and serving as provider to one's family. Failing at these tasks", he writes, "leads not only to challenges in one's masculinity, but also to fear of being labeled as showing feminine weakness, however society defines that."¹⁷ In this argument Bullough is upholding the paradigm of the masculine/feminine binary without having established its specific presence in the cultural context of his study. Moreover, on closer inspection Bullough's simplification of masculinity does not actually apply to very many medieval men. For example, certain members of the clergy starting in the fourth century were at least theoretically devoted to celibacy, and students and laborers in the later middle ages would often avoid marriage (and impregnating women) due to economic and social concerns, and so the masculinity encouraged by their cultural groups would hardly have held procreation up as a gender marker. This is not to say that procreative ability and accomplishments did not play a part in medieval masculinity but instead to clarify the point that, while procreation was part of gender construction for some men in certain communities, it was not *necessarily* so, and we can easily find

examples that use different measurements for manhood.

Reliance on a binary model is also discernable in the way that medievalists have chosen to study the Middle Ages. In the recent growth of published works on masculinity, there has been a surprising dearth of critical material on the way that masculinity functions in the chivalric communities of the later Middle Ages. Chivalry, by definition, is the code of behavior that the men of a specific class and vocation were held to, and so the very term can be understood to be a kind of masculinity. It would seem, therefore, that Chivalry would be an obvious focus for medieval masculine studies, if for no other reason than the convenience of its labeled, pre-packaged form (its adherents are readily identifiable, it has a clear literature associated with it, and it even has guidebooks governing its prescribed behavior). Medievalists seem more eager, however, to discuss crises in marginalized or exceptional forms of masculinity than to address this more culturally popular ideology of masculine behavior. This preference seems to rely on the assumption that chivalry, being rooted in the practice of war, does not pose any interesting questions about masculinity. Chivalry, some might argue, imposes a code of violence and dominance (being based primarily, according to the pervading assumptions in medieval studies, on prowess), so the connections to masculinity (under a model that sees masculinity as inherently excessive) are obvious or even banal. The study of marginalized or problematized masculinities, on the other hand, poses more interesting questions because they do not seem to fit into the essentialized view (namely that violence is a default masculine trait) that scholars are implicitly supporting and strengthening. For example, in Bonnie Wheeler's edited volume *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*,¹⁸ the articles largely concern exceptional models

rather than the common; the marginalized in preference to the mainstream. Sponsler, for example, explores the "Outlaw Masculinities" of "Drag, Blackface, and Late Medieval Laboring-Class Festivities," Ad Putter looks at "Transvestite Knights," Ruth Mazo Karras investigates "Masculine Identity Formation in the Medieval European Universities," and there are no less than four articles (just over a quarter of the book) devoted to castrates (three of which are devoted to analyzing Abelard's problematized masculinity). The one article that deals significantly with knights (Cohen's "Gowther among the Dogs") does very little to see the theme of its subject (the romance *Sir Gowther*) in the context of a larger chivalric code of behavior.¹⁹ Claire Lees's edited collection *Medieval Masculinities* and Hadley's *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* are similar in that they deal with the question of chivalry very little or not at all, favoring the exceptional and the marginalized over the mundane and obvious because of the implicit assumption that the masculine ideal of chivalry must be constructed and maintained in an obvious, banal way. Concentration on exceptional and marginalized masculinities is absolutely important work, and it is a welcome addition to the academy. This approach assumes, however, that the more obvious forms of masculinity -- those that are dominant and hegemonic -- will take the same negatively excessive form as modern hegemonic masculinities. In other words, an approach to gender that allows for multiple models should allow for a discussion of both the exceptional as well as the seemingly standard models. Furthermore, on closer examination of the literature surrounding the chivalric tradition, it becomes clear that assuming this misses significant and important elements in chivalric literature, which are neither banal nor predictable.

This dissertation is concerned with the literary depiction of chivalric masculinity,

but accepts that the institution of chivalry (and the masculinity that it defined) was more of a dynamic process than a static event. As such, it was as subject to change as modern ideas of masculinity have been. This point is crucial. Too often medieval scholarship treats the notion of “chivalry” (just like the assumption of the universal “masculine,” as stated above) as a solid and defined commodity, one which has currency without attention to the details of cultural context, period, or place. For example, in *Chivalry*, Keen admits that the term “chivalry” is elusive and difficult to define, but he nevertheless provides a list of standard traits that, he argues, “remain the stereotype of chivalrous distinction” from the mid-12th-century to the end of the Middle Ages. He uses Chrétien’s romances as evidence for this, arguing that “the association of these qualities in chivalry is already established in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.”²⁰ It may be that the qualities Keen describes are present in the romances of Chrétien, and it may even be that we could find some of these qualities present in later romances, because chivalric discourse tends to rely on citation of previous examples, however fabricated they may be. Even the most cursory look at chivalry from different periods and places, however, reveals that the differences are at least as pronounced as the similarities.

One of the most compelling differences in a changing medieval chivalry is the way that violent behavior is perpetrated, received, and observed. The study of violence has recently become in vogue especially in medieval studies, with three panels devoted to a series on violence in the Middle Ages at the 2002 international conference on medieval studies at Kalamazoo, and five panels devoted to the question of violence at the 2004 conference in addition to the significant presence of papers dealing with violence at non-specific panels as well). Scholars such as Richard Kaeuper,²¹ Philippa Maddem,²² Guy

Halsall,²³ have started to explore the field with the realization that violence itself is a topic worthy of study. This new attention is important, because all too often scholars have navigated around a central fact of medieval studies, which is that many of the people we study, and many more of the characters about whom they wrote, encountered and perpetrated significant acts of violence.

Present in this growing field as well is a reliance on male violence as an uncomplicated commodity, which carries the assumption that violence is essentially connected to the interactions between men. While this assumption naturally leads to an important debate between evolutionary psychologists and cultural constructionists, it carries with it a more fundamental problem in that the word "violence" is nonspecific and vague, describing nothing substantial without an awareness of context. The term "violence" has very little meaning without further definition, because violence is always a result of some prior stimulus, and it affects the world in drastically different ways depending on the nature of the prior stimulus. The word "violence" evokes images of physical conflict, but this conflict only has meaning if we know the causes leading to it and the attitudes of those involved. For example, the spectacle of two men trying to knock each other down with their fists is, of course, a violent display. The meaning of the violence changes completely, however, if we imagine the ritualistic chest-striking of the Amazonian Yanomamo people (which is often done amongst friends), as opposed to an American bar fight. For an example closer to the topic of this dissertation, the specific details in the way that men exchanged violence during the Albigensian crusade has, on a superficial level, many similarities with other kinds of combat from roughly the same period. In general terms, a group of combatants in the field would consist of a core of

heavily-armored mounted men at arms, who would be supported by groups of foot troops. During this period, combatants fighting at tournament would seem almost indistinguishable from those fighting on crusade. There would be a core of armored men-at-arms who would often rely on foot troops (even to the point that some were armed with missile weapons). They would range over a roughly defined area, unmarked by the pageantry of the later tournament, and they would use real, sharpened swords and lances, wear real armor, and take prisoners. Regardless of these similarities, the rough category of "violence" does very little to describe these two very different situations. They are roughly the same only in the superficialities of appearance and technique, but the causes and the specifics of what they attempt to accomplish are completely different because on a basic, theoretical level, the ideology of a tournament (of any period) is different from that resulting from the rhetoric of heresy and demonization that was often part of the Albigensian crusade. Any results of these forms of violence would differ, possibly drastically, based on their differing contexts.

One final example extends this discussion of violence into the realm of both the literary and the theoretical, and reveals the interesting issues of masculinity that often lurk just under the surface of medieval narratives. In the beginning of Book One of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Uther becomes enamored with the duchess Igraine, and this drives her and her husband (the Duke of Tintagel) away from his court. When the Duke refuses to return to his court, Uther sends a message warning the Duke that he is coming, and telling him to prepare himself with provisions in his largest castle.²⁴ This part of the story, admittedly minor in comparison with Uther's shape-changing hijinks that immediately follow, is easily overlooked and taken for granted. Furthermore this kind of

"prepare yourself" message seems to be an obvious part of the medieval narrative, but the subtext of this moment is significant. Uther makes the war mainly for Igraine, but also because the Duke has shown disobedience by not returning to the court. Therefore, the goals of Uther's war are to get Igraine and to punish the Duke. The best way to accomplish both of these things is not to send a message warning of an attack, as Uther does. In fact, if we imagine this situation in realistic terms, sending advice and a warning as to when and how an attack will come is entirely counterproductive. What is evident here is that Uther's desire for both Igraine and a military victory is mixed with a homosocial desire to enter into competition with the Duke. By introducing a kind of "fair play" to the conflict, the imminent violence that will result from the war is read in terms of competition and ultimately self definition, as Uther's identity as knight and as king (and father of Arthur) will be cemented by the way in which he gets the duchess and punishes and dominates the Duke for his disobedience. In the conflict that follows, the Duke places Igraine in one castle, and then garrisons himself in a second one. When Uther arrives and chooses to attack the castle holding the Duke, his project of identity formation (or reformation) becomes even more transparent. The presence of violence in this story is, of course, important, but in this case it is secondary to the character motivations that cause it, and our critical reading of the episode depends on an awareness of these motivations before addressing the presence and role of violence.

This example provides a useful starting place for our discussion of masculinity and chivalry in the medieval period, because it demonstrates the need to define violence before using it as evidence. This is an important point because the task of defining violence in this way seems to be largely left undone, even in those texts that seem

specifically devoted to a discussion of the nature of violence. For example Kaeuper, in *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, makes the argument that prowess is the defining attribute of chivalry. This is in line with his general thesis, which traces the destructive nature of chivalry and the political structures and institutions that emerge to control it. His evidence, however, ranges widely and traverses uneven ground. By mixing historical and literary evidence from a wide historical period, he presupposes a similarity between literary references to fighting (from a number of genres) and historical ones, and assumes an unchanging chivalry regardless of period or place.²⁵ He also moves easily (especially in literary evidence) between the examples of warfare and examples of the tournament, relying on the assumption that the presence of fighting always equates with the unilateral praise of fighting, regardless of the cause or specific context of the engagement.

Perhaps the more stirring and obvious example of the lack of critical definitions of the nature of violence is the fact that the wide and prolific field of military history is now -- and seems always to have been -- completely separate from the history of violence and the identity formation of those who would profess chivalry. Verbruggen's seminal work²⁶ confronts the idea that the ability to perpetrate violence characterizes medieval chivalry but then transitions to a discussion of battlefield psychology that leaves the question of chivalric ideals behind. Likewise, Contamine's *War in the Middle Ages* has, as one of its main virtues, a section devoted to the discussion of themes and ideas associated with warfare. First among these is his call for a history of courage – a question of immeasurable importance to the study of violence and the way that it intersects with gender and identity formation. He then offers what he admits is a brief

gesture in this direction, but within this short discussion he suggests that courage for the medieval fighter would have followed the model of virtue from pagan antiquity in the sense of a moderated mean between two excessive urges. He quotes Aquinas, stating that "courage is a virtue that moderates fear and boldness for the common good."²⁷

Significant in this statement is the assumption that the conduct of knights on the battlefield would be dictated by a scholastic notion of a virtue based on moderation, which contradicts Kaeuper's argument that the ethic of chivalry favored excessive displays of fighting. Unfortunately, Contamine, like Verbruggen, is not interested in a full discussion of the nature of violent exchange and the attitudes surrounding it,²⁸ and the implications of his statement are not fully explored in his text, nor are they examined in the major military historians who follow him, despite a general consensus about the importance of his work. In fact, the trend in recent military historical scholarship has been in the direction of technological history, which removes the question of violence almost entirely from the realm of behavior and gender.²⁹

If we accept the idea that "violence" is inherently ambiguous without a discussion of context, we can start to focus on the causes of violence, and the correlation between the nature of violence and its intended (and unintended) purposes. The earlier example contrasts the violence of the crusade (in this case the Albigensian), which has as its purpose the eradication of a demonized group of people (or their ideology), with a violence that is based on sport, recreation, training, or the accumulation of honor or money (these are the motivations generally attributed to those fighting in the early tournament). More specifically, though, the important distinction between these two types of violent exchange is the economy of personal reward that each offers. While we

must always be mindful that individuals would engage in both crusade and in tournament for a myriad of reasons, we must also see that the advertised rewards for each are very different, and that this would have had at least some effect on the mindset of the participants. It would be too reductive to suggest that the participants in the Albigensian crusade undertook their warfare purely for remission of sins, but this would have certainly been part of their motivation. The Albigensian crusade was also, at least on the surface, an operation called for and encouraged by the growing authority of the bishop of Rome, so there is a sense that the personal accumulation of wealth, glory, reputation, etc. will be second in importance, at least on the level of appearances, to the spiritual rewards. This is not to say that soldiers were not interested in personal benefit, but that these benefits were not the advertised main intention of the enterprise.³⁰

In the tournament the opposite is true. While we must accept that generalizations can be misleading, on a very basic level we can see that the stated purpose of the tournament has to do specifically with the accumulation of various kinds of rewards that are not associated with larger political or religious issues, and for this reason the early tournament was problematic (if not condemned outright) by those concerned with harnessing martial ability for political and religious objectives.³¹ When tournaments occur in connection with warfare, they represent a shift in attitude from the concerns of the group to those of the individual, as is attested by the desertion of English knights from a Scottish campaign to attend tournaments in England in the early fourteenth century.³² Other examples of this shift are the numerous tournaments or individual jousts that would take place during sieges.³³ Militarily, the idea of the siege does not lend itself to pre-arranged men or groups of men fighting (sometimes to the death, sometimes not) a

"fair fight" outside the walls of the stronghold. The shift occurs clearly away from the political and military aims of the campaign to the personal desires of the individual. Again, the appearance of the violence would not have changed significantly, but the actions which result in violence are undertaken according to (in some cases) a completely different set of rules. An approach to the study of violence as it relates to masculinity, therefore, is to study the rules and conventions (sometimes largely unstated) that govern conflicts involving men.

Although (as we will explore more fully in the next chapter) the tournament tradition changed in emphasis and appearance over the course of the Middle Ages, a constant in its evolution is that it is a place where knights engage in violent behavior under a clear and regulated system of rules. The result is that the tournament becomes a good focus for questions concerning knightly violence and the chivalric identities that result from violent displays. This identity of the knight - his *chivalry* - is a measure of his worth and value, which can only be measured and expressed in relation to other men who are engaged in the same activities. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the violence of the tournament, which has self-definition as its intention, provides a very direct way to identify the ideals of masculinity for those who associate themselves with the chivalric profession. For this reason, our examination of the way that chivalry was conceived and the way that this conception changed, is best approached through an examination of the tournament tradition and how it came to emphasize specific traits as it evolved towards the end of the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER III

THE TOURNAMENT AND THE PROBLEMATIC DEFINITION OF CHIVALRY

Although often considered to be a chivalric tournament in the most generic sense, the melee-style tournament that William the Marshal attended in the twelfth century was altogether unlike the *Pas d'Armes* in which a knight like the Spanish Suero de Quinones would participate two centuries later. In the early tournament William, one of many knights fighting in teams against one another in a roughly defined area spanning a number of miles, would have been trying to subdue as many of the opposing knights as possible, gaining from them each a ransom (or promise of ransom) before returning to the event.³⁴ To this end, any tactic that would work was more or less accepted, and the introduction of infantry and even archers was, although uncommon, not unheard of.³⁵ Suero de Quinones, on the other hand, would not have fought on a field full of other knights. Instead, he would have waited for opponents alone, near a prominent feature of the countryside, like a bridge. He would have worn his own heraldic arms prominently displayed on shield and crest, while William would have worn the arms of the house of Tancarville for much of his career, clearly indicating his membership in a specific community. In contrast to the open melee of William's tournament, Suero would have met each knight that approached in a formal, one-on-one joust. An audience including -- and often featuring -- women would witness the combat, and success or failure at the competition would be based on his perceived behavior, not only the martial behavior of the combat but also the courtesy and gentleness that governed his actions.³⁶ This is a key difference between the early and late tournament,³⁷ and cannot be emphasized enough.

While courteous and friendly behavior between combatants could have, and doubtless did, occur in the early tournament, the late tournament institutionalizes these qualities, so that adherence to the code of behavior becomes as important, or more important, than the actual ability of the participants to perpetrate violence.

The tournament was, for our purposes, a male endeavor. While an exact definition of chivalric behavior must be avoided unless we consider context, it is clear a man's chivalry was an expression of his ability to participate in the male world of his contemporaries -- his ability to be a proper "Aman" within the confines of the reasonably high socioeconomic class to which most knights belonged (although there are some notable exceptions to the idea of a set class). For this reason, the study of chivalry should be seen as a facet of the study of masculinity. The term "Amasculinity" is like the term "Achivalry," in that both terms describe something that seems universal and essential, but on closer inspection is not. As discussed in the previous chapter, gender should not be seen in terms of essentialized attributes and behaviors, but should always be seen as the construction of a particular culture in a particular place and time. Studying gender, then, is the attempt to unearth *masculinities* rather than a single, monolithic masculinity. Chivalry is the prescribed code of behavior for men of a specific class and vocation (namely the higher social strata of the soldiery), and therefore chivalry *is* a kind of masculinity. The professional requirements of chivalry are, of course, based on military concerns, and so the gendered constructions of knights will also be based around the idea of war. The tournament, as an exercise that was an ideal kind of warfare (even in the early period, because of its pre-arranged, preplanned nature), is a window through which we can see the ideals of chivalric masculinity, and map the changes in these ideals.

The essential difference between the early and late versions of this martial sport makes an accurate discussion of "tournaments" in general problematic if not misleading, because finding any similarities between the two (beyond the purely categorical) is difficult. This difficulty in discussing tournaments in general terms is an important issue for the discussion of military history, but it also serves as a microcosm for a discussion of chivalry in general. If there is a point of commonality between tournaments in the Middle Ages, it is that they continuously serve as a stage for the performance of chivalric qualities. Chivalry should be seen as the intellectual framework under which the tournament flourished in any period. Unfortunately, this does less to define the tournament than to demonstrate that "chivalry" itself is just as fluid and dynamic a phenomenon as the tournament that manifested its code. Because of the close relationship between chivalry and the tournament, a comparison of these two stages in the evolution of the tournament highlights significant changes in the nature of chivalry, and suggests that our thinking about chivalry should avoid the broad strokes of generalization. The modern idea of chivalry is so steeped in romance and fantasy, however, that it is a difficult to find a definition that does not generalize.

There is a tendency, as discussed in the previous chapter, to reduce and define the nature of a monolithic and unchanging "chivalry" to a set list of qualities. We must avoid this tendency to reduce chivalry to a specific list of values, morals or ideologies because this attitude does not allow for the various and contrasting images of chivalry that survive in the literary and historical record. A close examination of relevant sources demonstrates that Chrétien, for example, is not always in agreement with his contemporaries, much less with everyone who came after him. We must accept that the

chivalry of one place and time could be, and very often was, very different from the chivalry of another, and that even within a given culture definitions must take into account conflicting ideologies. This is not to say that each version of chivalry is unrelated to another, but that we should see chivalry as a kind of process, continually in the state of becoming something new, influencing and influenced by literary trends and tied to the social and economic issues of the people interested in it.³⁸ Chivalry can only be understood against the context of a culture that was marked by significant change, and so the project of studying chivalry is to map and analyze certain moments in the process of a changing chivalry. Any definition of chivalry, then, must not only be tied to a specific time and place, but also must consider the evolution of certain trends in the way that the ideal was preached and practiced.

Identifying and defining this ideal in the daily life of knights is tricky, however, because many scholars use examples of unchivalrous behavior (knights failing to comply with the tenets of chivalry) to argue that a chivalric system of ideals never truly existed. For example, Kaeuper sees chivalry as inherently tied to violent disorder, stating that "The bloody-minded side of the code...was the essence of chivalry,"³⁹ and that we misunderstand chivalry unless we see it in the context of the proud, heedless violence of knights, their praise for settling any dispute by force, for acquiring any desired goal by force on any scale attainable."⁴⁰ It is important to recognize that violence *was* often associated with the knight's vocation, and Kaeuper is correct in that, in the study of medieval warfare, we should, on occasion, not forget to shudder."⁴¹ A clear example of a military practice that goes against what we would expect from those who practice chivalry is the "chevauchee," which can and should be thought of as institutionalized

raiding and pillaging. Aside from adding to the wealth and foodstores of the attacking force, this form of warfare was meant to undercut the economic base of the enemy and to force soldiers in the enemy's service to protect local interests at the expense of national ones. This could not be further from the ideals of chivalry during the period in which it was practiced, yet we must remember that those who practiced the *chevauchee* were often the self-proclaimed servants of chivalry and acted (as most people do) sometimes in strict adherence to their ideals, and sometimes not. When Jean Froissart⁴² describes the beginning of the Crécy campaign, he credits Godfrey of Harcourt (newly arrived at the king's court as an exile from France) with convincing Edward to land in Normandy instead of Gascony. After suggesting a new council, Godfrey says the following to Edward:

"Normandy," said Sir Godfrey, "is one of the richest countries in the world. I promise you, on my life, that once you reach it, it will be easy to land there. There will be no serious resistance, for the inhabitants have no experience of arms and the whole cream of the Norman knights are at the siege of Aiguillon with the Duke. You will find large towns and fortresses completely undefended, in which your men will win enough wealth to make them rich for twenty years to come... If you see fit to take my advice, you and all of us will profit by it. We shall have gold, silver food supplies and everything else in abundance."⁴³

Froissart continues with Edward's response, stating that AThe King of England, who was then in his prime and desired nothing better than to meet the enemy and see

action, readily agreed with Sir Godfrey...ordered his seamen to change course for Normandy and taking the admiral's flag from the Earl of Warwick, made himself admiral and led the fleet for that voyage."⁴⁴ The kind of warfare that Godfrey is suggesting is clearly a *chevauchee*, a fast-paced raid through an undefended region, aimed at the acquisition of wealth and supplies (an acquisition that also serves to deny the enemy these very things), and it is important that we not be misled by the political spin that Edward (or Froissart, as the case may be) puts on the event. They are, in fact, not rushing off to "meet with the enemy and see action," but instead are rushing off to where the enemy *is not*, so that they can more effectively pillage and probably kill the noncombatants in an area that contains few soldiers, if any at all.

It is equally important to remember that, while this activity was common in the warfare of the late Middle Ages, it was not the only activity in which practitioners of chivalry were involved, and its presence does not completely obscure the more idealistic displays and performances of the chivalric code. For example, immediately preceding the text above, Froissart describes Edward's founding of the Order of the Garter, an institution that is wholly based around romanticized notions of chivalry and camaraderie. It is unclear whether Froissart was aware of the seemingly ironic placement of the preparation for a *chevauchée* directly after the founding of an ideal chivalric order, but censure and parody are not his project, and so we must see that these conflicting examples could, at least in the minds of Froissart's audience, exist side by side without undermining the chivalric ideal. It is important to see the brutality that is essential to something like the *chevauchée*, it is also important to acknowledge the idealism of the founding of the Order of the Garter. In the midst of open warfare, any

enemy knight could, for the fifteen days surrounding St. George's day (the feast day of the order), travel to Britain, meet and know the enemy knights, compete with them in friendly tournament, and share a feast with them, as written in their charter. The Knights of the Garter, held to be the best in the kingdom, were not judged according to their ability to wage the *chevauchée* or according to the number of enemies whom they had killed, but instead by their bravery, their gallantry, and their nobility.⁴⁵ These traits, in fact, seem very often to have been emphasized not only on the field of the tournament, but also in the daily lives (at war and at home) of many members of the chivalric class.⁴⁶

Clearly, the study of chivalry is complicated by issues that are not as easily dismissed as the argument that Areal" knights were never chivalrous. We must see and understand that knights were not always true to their code, and that the ideal was often given short shrift or even ignored outright, but it is imperative that we do not mistake these failures for an instability in the ideal itself. The study of chivalry is twofold, then, and we must accurately identify and define what the *ideal* of chivalry was before we can accurately describe the extent to which its followers adhered to its rules. Although the medieval tournament continually served as a place in which knights could compete *as knights*, as adherents to the chivalric code, the nature of this code underwent a change during the evolution of the tournament. The acquisition of economic rewards was a major part of the early tournament, and this acquisition tied the tournament very closely to earnest warfare. The later tournament, as it lost the emphasis on economic gain, began to function as fighting *without* complications of real warfare. This is not to say that later tournaments were completely free from the influences that often made

real-life chivalry very difficult, but as the tournament became more and more separate from warfare as such, it became a stage for the theatrical playing out of chivalric ideals. During the move away from tournament-as-warfare, the primary objective became the performance and reification of the set of ideals that would define the masculinity of the participants. Whereas the ideal of the early tournament was, like warfare, based on the ability to perpetrate extreme violence and take prisoners, the later tournament would come to reflect something new: gentleness and courtesy.

The question of why knights entered and competed in tournaments is perhaps the most significant question that we can ask in order to define the chivalry that was so connected to the activity. Most scholars tend to treat the tournament as a static institution that can be described without differentiation of period. They cite the two main reasons for participation in the tournament as the pursuit of glory, and the desire or need for money. The idea that monetary gain was a motivator for knights in the early tournament (late-eleventh and early twelfth centuries) is well-grounded in evidence. In fact, Sidney Painter argues that the need for monetary gain was one of the main reasons that the tournament gained in popularity. He states that war itself was undergoing a centralization process, and could be called for only by the higher nobility. This left the lower feudal knight not only with more free time, but also with a lack of booty and ransoms that small-scale warring produced.⁴⁷ In his examination of literary sources, Larry Benson also brings up the importance of the monetary incentive for lesser knights. He cites *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*, observing that the nighttime activities of the early tournament knight largely consisted of arranging for payment or receipt of ransoms.⁴⁸ He also quotes Bertran de Born, who responds to the increased presence of

the upper nobility in tournaments by complaining that these rich nobles deprive the young, poor knights of the ransom that they desperately need.⁴⁹ "The object of fighting," Benson suggests, "as in much of the actual warfare of the time, was booty."⁵⁰

The early tournament was equally based on the acquisition of glory, as the career of William Marshal suggests. William Marshal's fame was widespread and widely celebrated, mythologized to the point that he became the subject of his own chivalric romance. This fame/glory, however, must be seen as a result of the knight's ability to win money through violent and aggressive activities. The general perception of William Marshal as the first professional athlete is likely a product of the role that money played in the formation of his legend. His glory and his virtue as a knight were based on his ability to take the largest amount of ransoms, to "win" at a "sport" that had very few formalized conventions for behavior. Glory, in its loosest definition, can be thought of as recognition of individual achievement in terms of comparison to others. In the early tournament this comparison was easily done, as the glory one received was tightly linked to the amount of money that the knight could win. The knight's chivalric prowess was proven by his material gains, and this served as a handy method for comparison and ranking in relation to other knights. In the case of William Marshal especially, we can see the intricate interplay between reputation and economic prosperity, as his success provided both the monetary means to continue tournament activities *and* sufficient reputation to secure an office that would normally be unexpected for a knight of his social background.

An essential difference between the early and late tournament is the growing presence of an audience of non-combatants, which would start to increase the

performative aspects of the sport.⁵¹ The presence and role of this audience complicated the clear relationship between glory and monetary gain, and as the tournament developed the accumulation of glory became dependent more on the attitudes of the audience than on the taking of ransoms. The audience, in its function as a collection of spectators who disseminate the events of a given tournament, began to dictate the amount, and the nature, of the glory that each knight received.

Benson supports this idea, arguing that Chrétien was the defining figure in this change in the way that the tournament (and chivalry itself) was seen. Benson argues that the early- to mid twelfth-century tournament was extremely harsh, a "brutal, informal affair"⁵² that had none of the refinements of the later tournament. Using the tournament of the period as a model, Chrétien consciously added the ideals of courtesy and the altruistic quest for glory to his fiction. For his heroes, "the object of the fighting is not to take captives, but to test one's prowess."⁵³ The result of this, writes Benson, is that the successive generations of tournament knights gradually accepted more and more of Chrétien's lessons, and began to move away from monetary incentives.

Benson's idea goes against some established theories, however, and many historians see the combined incentives of money and honor/glory as present during much of the tradition. Marc Bloch makes this point in his *Feudal Society*, writing that "the love of arms inextricably combined the ingredients of 'joy' [his term for the acquisition of glory] and the appetite for gain."⁵⁴ Others, like Carroll Gillmor, basically agree with this statement but admit that the contemporary sources stop mentioning monetary gain as a significant issue.⁵⁵ They explain this by arguing that, while it is

discussed less by the contemporary writers, it remained an incentive for engaging in the tournament. In response to these arguments, Benson would argue that most of the evidence for these tournaments was written after the wide-spread acceptance of Chrétien's romances, and this lack of evidence itself is proof of the presence of Chrétien's ideals even if the ideal sometimes is not directly implemented in actual events. Other historians argue that monetary incentives were discontinued altogether, such as Painter's statement that "by Froissart's time the profit motive as a reason for fighting had lost all respectability."⁵⁶ Furthermore, modern historians and literary critics seldom cite monetary gain as incentive for the late tournament.⁵⁷ It is clear that monetary gain in the tournament was losing respectability and that, whether present or not, it was no longer inherently tied to the way that knights achieved honor and renown. For example, Ulrich von Lichtenstein, that early enthusiast of what would become the later tournament, presented himself as King Arthur newly returned from Paradise to reestablish the roundtable. Any who fought against him were included in the role-playing, and as knights joined him, they took Arthurian names and participated in the spectacle.⁵⁸ While there might have been some monetary exchange in this behavior, it is clear that the role-playing, the spectacle, and the forming of fraternal bonds are the main focus.

While it is clear that the monetary incentive of the tournament tradition was either losing all respectability or falling out of use altogether, the incentive to gain honor and reputation was gaining in importance. Anthony Annunziata observes that "the purpose of the *Pas d'Armes* [a late form of tournament] was... to give the individual knight a formalized means of earning >worship,' that is, honor."⁵⁹ Maurice

Keen also argues along these lines, calling the later tournament "public tests of individual prowess."⁶⁰ He also suggests that "the tournament was an exercise for the elite, and simply to appear there, armed and mountedYwas in itself a demonstration of a man's right to mingle in an elite society, of his own social identity."⁶¹ Here we must see that, by "a man's right to mingle in an elite society," Keen means "an elite *male* society" (he is referring to behavior in the male homosocial group), and that words like "honor" and "prowess" in the context of the chivalric tournament relate specifically to the construction of masculinity. The knight's very presence verified his masculine identity -- it was a performance which allowed the male of the proper class and vocation to be considered a "man."⁶² While the early tournament linked the acquisition of monetary rewards with the chivalry of the participants, the presence of the audience and the changing nature of the attitudes about chivalry (started, perhaps, by Chrétien) meant that knights in tournaments of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had a different agenda, one inherently tied to the individual expression of their masculinities.

The early tournament was almost indistinguishable from an earnest war, and virtually the only elements that separated the two were the agreed-on time and place for the fighting, and the safe areas in which no fighting was allowed.⁶³ Infantry was often used,⁶⁴ and fighting in large groups or squadrons was the norm (single combats were sparse and disorganized, occurring just before the main charge of the melee, which was the main event).⁶⁵ Blunted or rebated weapons were seldom used, and the object of taking prisoners for ransom, while it does not fit with our sensibilities of what a soldier should be doing, was entirely appropriate for the soldier in the medieval war. The image of the tournament "as war" is difficult to assimilate, as the western audience is

used to depictions of the "joust" as affairs of single combat, in which the participants acted as individuals,⁶⁶ but this image of the early tournament (or rather this image of small-scale warfare, the rules of which classify it as tournament) is essential to our understanding of the *méntalite* of the medieval knight, and how his perception of himself as a knight (and as a man) would change throughout the medieval period. The crux of this change is the difference between a knight defining himself as a member of the group to which he belonged, and the knight defining himself according to his own actions, according to his sense of individualism.

The notion of individualism is important to the notion of masculinity because, as we will find, the masculinity that is the product of a group-based chivalry is very different from that of the chivalry that essentially depends on the idea of the knight acting alone and for his own benefit. The bibliography on the subject of individualism is, however, conflicted in its discussion of how, when and in what manner individualism (as we know it) was manifested in the Middle Ages. An examination of the theories of the emergence of individualism will reveal some very important notions that will inform our discussion of the differences between early and late chivalry (as seen in the changes in the tournament), and for this reason we must pause in our discussion of the tournament, and momentarily investigate the issue of medieval individualism.

William Marshal is often presented as personifying individualism because he proved his worth in combat and attained a high level of success through his own ability. In fact, Colin Morris states that the roots of individualism can be found in literary figures of the high Middle Ages similar to William, heroes like Roland who prove their

individual valor within the context of a group or community. He states that, in these stories, "the attitude of the individual was all important, and the conditions already existed which were to produce codes of chivalrous conduct and an interest in individual characteristics."⁶⁷ Georges Duby disagrees with this discussion of William Marshal, presenting William's position in a more nuanced way. Duby admits that, at times, William Marshal was left without a group and that his ability allowed him to thrive during these periods. With the statement "no knight, at this time, functioned independently for long,"⁶⁸ he suggests that William was thrust unwillingly into acting as an individual, and that, through his prowess, he was able to prove himself and once again join his group.⁶⁹ In the chapter devoted to the question of individualism in *A History of Private Life*, Duby discusses the experience of newly-made knights in the eleventh- and twelfth- centuries. "New Knights received their arms as a group," and as a group "they raced from tourney to tourney, court to court, skirmish to skirmish," in which they showed "the same colors and [shouted] the same rallying cry."⁷⁰ In fact, we find William Marshal wearing the arms of his liege lord and cousin, the Count of Tancarville, until he switched patronage, an indication that he defined himself, at least visually, by membership in his social group.⁷¹ Duby would not, like some scholars, deny the existence of individualism in the Middle Ages altogether, but instead he would place that individualism in the late Middle Ages, when the spectacle of the tournament *à plaisance* clearly suggests a difference in the way that knights were thinking of themselves.

Danielle Regnier-Bohler, in her argument for the emergence of the individual in the thirteenth-century, brings up the idea of the knight-errant. Using examples of

fictional knights (mostly from Chrétien), she shows how the image of "the outsider" was undergoing a change towards acceptance. She indicates that the idea of the knight who leaves the community to better himself and achieve personal goals was growing in popularity,⁷² and the single combat is a manifestation of this trend. Lois Roney agrees with this idea in her article "Chaucer Subjectivizes the Oath: Depicting the fall from Feudalism into Individualism in the *Canterbury Tales*," arguing that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the old ideals of feudalism were falling into individualism. She argues that *The Canterbury Tales* suggests a culture invested in individualism, which indicates the end of the (more group-based) feudal ideal.⁷³

John Benton, on the other hand, makes an argument against the existence of early individualism. Benton discusses the nature of warfare in the medieval period and suggests that stories like *The Song of Roland* were attempts to create the kind of loyalty and zeal that were required of soldiers. Because of this, he writes, the exploits of such epic heroes can and should be seen as encouraging a kind of conformity and not individualism. Benton is a sceptic as to the existence of medieval individualism whatsoever (he argues that this is a later phenomenon), and he states that "people in the Middle Ages found it almost impossible to tolerate those who are different."⁷⁴

What literary references like Benton's use of *Roland* and Morris's use of romance heroes fail to account for is that literary heroes like Roland are largely defined by the genre to which their literary works belong. The question of whether Roland's attitude celebrates the individual desire to encourage observers or whether he is an agent of conformity begs this question of genre, for he must be seen first of all as a hero of the epic tradition. As such, he is essentially a different kind of hero than the hero of

romance. Although the genre of the epic is present and popular throughout much of the period in which the romance dominates in Western Europe, we must see that its very *nature* is different. A careful discussion of the differences between romance and epic will be undertaken later in this dissertation, but for our purposes here, it is enough to note that warfare in the epic tradition focuses on a large group, while the romance tradition almost always focuses on a single combat. This is most evident in the general (though admittedly not universal) emphasis on the tournament in the romance tradition, whereas the epic tends to focus on political warfare that is nationalistic in character. This is an important issue, as the question of whether knights are depicted fighting for personal reasons or for the interests of a group often carries with it political agendas that influence the story's telling and reception. One such agenda is that romances that emphasize single combats rarely have the socio-political gains of the state intertwined with the hero's victory or defeat. For example, Arthur's warfare in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* is essentially tied to his success as king and therefore the welfare of his subjects. The story serves, then, (among other things) as a narrative that supports the nobility and the hierarchy under which it is empowered, because a break with this system signifies a fracture in the well-being of the state. The roughly contemporary *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, on the other hand, features a Gawain who has wagered only his own life and is the sole recipient of any rewards (and punishments) that his journey yields. While it may be tempting to see the Green Knight's affront to Arthur as an affront to the state, this is not the case. In the following section, in fact, the Green Knight makes it very clear that he has not come for any kind of actual fighting or warfare:

Bot for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyze,
 And þy burz and þy burnes best ar holden,
 Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,
 Þe wyztest and þe worþyest of þe worldes kynde,
 Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykez,
 And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,
 And þat hatz wanynd me hider, iwyis, at þis tyme.
 3e may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here
 Þat I passe as in pes, and no plyzt seche;
 For had I founded in fere in festyng wyse,
 I haue hauberze at home and a helme boþe,
 A schelde and a scharp spere, schinande bryzt,
 Ande oþer weppenes to welde, I wene wel, als;
 Bot for I wolde no were, my wedez ar softer.
 Bot if þou be so bold as alle burnez tellen,
 Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask.⁷⁵

Arthur's response to this is to assume that he has come for a combat out of armor, to which the Green Knight says again that he did not come for a fight, but to test the bravery of one of the knights in the hall by way of a game.⁷⁶ This is important, because the author is making a clear distinction between this kind of violent game and the kind of politically-driven combat that is common in the epic tradition. There is the

suggestion that Gawain is a representative of the court, but if Gawain is to help the court community at all, he will do so only through returning with the knowledge of what he has learned as an individual, through his personal experience and not through the direct relationship of political overlord saving his state through warfare.

Perhaps an even more pronounced example of this difference comes from the very beginning of the romance tradition. Chrétien's romances seldom feature knights fighting as members of a group, and when they do fight this way it is always in the context of a small engagement, in which political motivations are conspicuously absent.⁷⁷ In the *Song of Roland*, however, the exact opposite is true. The whole story, in fact, revolves around the war with the Paynim, and in this story the loss of the war endangers all of France and symbolically all of heaven. The warfare, although depicted as a series of jousts, takes place between huge armies, and the political agendas of the Frankish state are also the agendas of all of the heroic characters. In fact, the outright condemnation of the personal agenda of Ganelon is the opposite attitude that Chrétien takes with his knights, whose journeys are largely driven by personal motives.

The absence of large-scale warfare is by no means universal in the romance tradition, but most often depictions of larger conflicts emphasize different issues from what the epic would – namely that, despite a setting that implies social, political, and nationalistic concerns, the focus of the narrative is on the character and identity of the hero. For example, In *Sir Gowther* the combat with the Saracens serves a number of purposes, but whatever these may be (political and religious in the heathen otherness of the Saracens, romantic in the possible relationship between the Emperor's daughter and Gowther), the main theme of the story is the extent to which Gowther is able to deal with his fiendish ancestry. His battle with the Saracens, then, serves mainly as a

discussion of how he controls or releases the violent urges. The removal, at least directly, of political and/or group-based motivations from warfare and combat in many romances represents a general shift in the thinking about chivalry – a shift away from accomplishing set political and nationalistic goals and towards accomplishing metaphysical feats of self-definition.

The discussion of the emergence of the individual in the Middle Ages is doubtless fraught with the pitfalls of ethnocentric logic, in that it attempts to gauge a completely separate culture in the terms of our own value system and seems to place medieval (and later cultures) in a progressive narrative in which "development" has the assumed destination of our own way of life. What is significant about the discussion, however, is that the debate over when this "individualism" appears illuminates shifts in the *mentalité* of the later Middle Ages. While the emergence of "individualism" *per se* is not the project of this argument, it does seem that the identities of combatants were complicated by the conflicting ideals of a group-based identity and an identity that was based on individual achievement and the pursuit of personal goals.⁷⁸ The fact that evidence for this shift can be found in the relatively early period of the thirteenth century and (much more plentifully) in the later period suggests that both ideals were present and accepted to greater and lesser degrees (like the romance and epic genres that encouraged them) throughout the transition from high to late Middle Ages.

This distinction, this essential difference in the thinking about chivalry, is evident in our comparison of the early and the late tournament, and it seems that the early tournament almost always favors group activity over individual feats. Duby indicates that William Marshal had very definite opinions about individual feats and

personal agendas. Before the melee in which groups of knights would fight each other there were disorganized single combats which were "litigant" and/or "strictly for show." These, he argues, were "greatly despised by William Marshal," as "in them there was nothing to win and nothing to lose."⁷⁹ From this statement, we can see that William was not only bound by the cultural norms of belonging to a group but that he, like most of the knights of his period, staunchly supported them. This statement also makes clear William's purposes for entering the tournament. Glory might have been part of it, but money was the overlying principle.

Juliet Barker argues mainly that "the melee tournament accustomed the knight to fight as part of a military unit,"⁸⁰ supporting the idea that the early tournament emphasized the idea of the knight acting as a member of a group.⁸¹ She observes that in *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* praise is always given most to the cohesiveness of the squadron and to the combatants' ability to "maintain serried ranks."⁸² Keen also argues that the early tournament was a training device, detailing the need for this kind of training with the cavalry charge.⁸³ In this early tournament, importance is placed on capturing and ransoms, and to this end teaming up on a single opponent was considered good tactics.⁸⁴ This implies that, in the tradition of the combat as a group event, the way that knights presented themselves *as knights* depended on their ability to dominate the opposition physically, both by the strength of their lance arm *and* by the strength of their numbers. In short, the early tournament reflects a system in which success and renown is tied to excessive behavior and in which the masculine identity of the knights involved is therefore dependent on their ability to be excessively violent, dominating, and aggressive. This makes sense to the modern audience, because this is, in fact, the

way that the term "masculine" is often used (as discussed in the previous chapter). However, it is important here to remember that essential and universal treatments of gender are inherently flawed. This version of chivalric masculinity exists not as a reflection of monolithic masculinity, but as a series of cultural values associated with the idea of being a "man." As the culture producing tournaments changed, the nature of the tournament and the masculine identity gained from participation in the event also changed.

In the later tournament, the situation seems completely reversed, the best example of which reversal is the *Pas d'Armes*.⁸⁵ This term describes a kind of tournament combat that is a significant departure from the meleé of the earlier period, and it is characterized first and foremost by the single combat that it celebrates. As opposed to the small-scale warfare that the early tournament emulated, the *Pas* proceeded from a challenge issued by one knight to all comers, usually in defense of a certain object or location. In those cases when a *Pas* featured multiple participants, all combats would be conducted one-on-one to emphasize the feats of the individual participants. Keen helps to define the *Pas*, stating that "the whole concept of the *Pas d'Armes* seems to be an extreme development of the fashion for individual jousting encounters which [were] growing at the end of the thirteenth century."⁸⁶

It was not just in the *Pas* that the single-combat became common. Barker considers this a general trend in the "Changing fashions" of the later tournament in general. "Instead of two teams of knights with up to two hundred men on each side...fighting in their normal armor and with their normal weapons of war over a large area of countryside," she argues, "it became much more common to hold jousts in

which each knight would fight for himself in a restricted space marked out by fences. Though the jouster might be part of the home team proclaiming the jousts (the *tenant*) or one of the knights who arrived to take up the challenge (a *venant*), he fought on his own behalf and as an individual against a single opponent."⁸⁷ Painter agrees that this was a major change, suggesting that a major feature of the later fourteenth- and fifteenth-century tournaments was the "series of jousts arranged by individuals."⁸⁸

Not only was the later⁸⁹ medieval knight fighting alone against a single opponent, he was increasingly recognizable, as the tradition of wearing the heraldic arms of one's household or group gave way to the wearing of one's own heraldic coat of arms or the arms of one's family, complete with crest.⁹⁰ In addition to this, a general focus on the way that the combatants looked starts to make its way into tournament narratives, and seems to have been an important part of the event. We know that William Marshal, for much of his career, fought in the arms of Tancarville, bearing an emblem designed mainly to indicate his placement in a social group. We also know that he would have looked down on elements of the tournament that did not have to do with the monetary gain of capture and ransom. What would he have thought, then, of Ulrich von Lichtenstein's combative cross-dressing in his enactment of the power of Venus? Edward III like the presence of costume as well, as in his seven deadly sins tournament, which featured the king and his closest friends dressed as the seven virtues (some of which, if we are to follow the model of medieval drama, would have also been female), the theme of the tournament being the victory of the virtues against the vices. These dramatic and thematic events, so unlike the tournament in which Marshal thrived, are also an element of the late tradition and seem to be essentially tied to the ability of a

knight to present himself as spectacle, to define himself through the way in which he was seen. This kind of display of and focus on the individual exploits of a knight in single combat suggests a major shift in the way that chivalric masculinity was perceived, performed, and affirmed.

As we have already seen, combatants in the earlier tradition were aggressive towards each other, and the general feeling of the affair was warlike. In fact, Benson notes that the feudal and national affiliations common on each side of the early tournament created even more animosity.⁹¹ The way that knights dealt with and related to each other interpersonally is another element of the changing tournament tradition. The change that saw the individual knight (observed by an audience) replace the group of combatants was accompanied by a more general shift in the attitude of the participants. Tournament literature begins to emphasize the court and the feast as well as the martial activities, suggesting that physical prowess is only a part of chivalry and that a large part is also courtesy and a general code of behavior above and beyond the ability to fight well. The honor that knights were striving for was increasingly gained through a combination of physical ability and the good treatment of the other participants in the tournament, both combative and non-combative (i.e. Not only how the knight treated his opponents but also how he treated and was received by the audience, his compatriots, etc.). Writing about the introduction of a post-tournament feast to which both sides of the fighting were invited, Painter observes that "these social activities tended to increase the feeling of friendliness among the contestants and remove the tournament further from the animosities of war."⁹² Keen echoes this feeling with his own discussion of the courtesy of the opponents towards one another. He notes

the irony in the fact that the new tournament might have done more for the "civilized relationships" of enemies than did the papal bulls that outlawed tournaments on the grounds that they promoted violence without cause.⁹³ With the introduction of this "friendliness" also came the inclusion of more leisure activities and a general increase in the time devoted to each tournament. Events lasted multiple days, not only for individual feats of arms but also to allow more time for feasting and dancing, with the primary purpose of creating interpersonal relationships.⁹⁴

We see the same emphasis on the friendship of the participants in the themed tournaments sometimes referred to as "roundtables." Concerning these, Annunziata writes that "participation was restricted to select guests, who were specifically invited,"⁹⁵ and a feast and various social ceremonies always accompanied these events as well. Whether these "select guests" were friends of the host or potential contacts for business, military alliance, marriage, etc., it is clear that the emphasis of the activity was on the forming of relationships and on social interaction.

Perhaps more significant than the friendship of opponents during the tournament was the increasing presence of noble women as formal spectators.⁹⁶ Writers like Georges Duby, Jesse Crosland, and David Crouch discuss the presence of spectators, some of them women, at the early tournament,⁹⁷ but it is generally accepted that there was an increase in the number and importance of the female audience after the end of the twelfth-century.⁹⁸ This presence went along with the growth of the ideals of courtly love, and many of the elements of the tournament echoed courtly literature. A good example of this is the mid-fifteenth-century *Pas* of Jacques de Lalaing, in which the losers were forced to engage in acts of theatrical courtly love, like wearing a

golden bracelet until the lady with the key could be found or presenting a diamond to the most beautiful woman in France.⁹⁹ Keen also notes the inclusion of the female audience and writes that, in the increased pageantry of these later tournaments, "color and violence fuse together into a display of the male before the female."¹⁰⁰ While this description is, perhaps, overly dramatic, the image that it relates is a valid one - namely that the knight's chivalric status (his masculinity) had become dependent on the impression he would leave on a largely (or most importantly) *female* audience.

As the example above suggests, the involvement of women in the later tournament was largely in imitation of certain elements of courtly love,¹⁰¹ and although this seems obvious because of the stereotypes that this validates (the knight in shining armor fighting for the love of the damsel, who looks on lovingly or disapprovingly), it calls for a closer discussion when considering the role that it plays in a knight's construction of a masculine identity. It is tempting to see the involvement of women in the tournament as a move towards female agency (the knight is fighting *for* her, answering to *her*, doing *her* will) and towards the positive introduction a female presence in a traditionally male sphere. Under this point of view, we would see the increased presence of women as a step towards an integrated society that breaks the seemingly traditional and binding system that Duby suggests, in which exterior spaces are masculine, and interior spaces are feminine.¹⁰² While the presence of women on the tournament field does suggest a shift in gender relations, their prescribed purpose in the literature that inspired their presence is as *objects*. In courtly literature it is rarely the agency of the women that inspires the knights to great acts of fighting. Instead, the courtly literature indicates that it is their *presence* that has value for the tournament

knight, their visible presence and the association with it that the knight claims. This point is evident especially because the influence of female presence on a knight's ability to fight is often not even known by the woman whose physical presence is serving as the inspiration. For example, when Lancelot arrives wearing another knight's arms and armor in *The Knight of the Cart*, we see that, at least for much of the combat, the woman for whom Lancelot is performing is unaware of his identity, presence, and feelings. Yet the presence of the woman is essential for the knight to succeed, essential for the knight to act *as knight*, whether she knows it or not. The emphasis on female *presence* rather than female agency is not surprising, because most chivalric romances¹⁰³ concern a male knight and his ability to fulfill the requirements of knighthood (and indeed, to exceed in them). This is not to say that the audience of the romance was entirely male (quite the contrary) but instead that, regardless of the audience, the subject of most chivalric romances is the proper behavior of the knight, and the female presence (and any female agency that might be found in romances) must be seen in this context. Because this narrative is concerned mainly with the definition of the male chivalric identity, the romance does not tend to present women as fully realized people with their own agendas. Instead, the female presence serves the function of influencing and aiding in the formation of the main (male) character's chivalric masculinity.

In the sense that the tournament is used to claim the right to a masculine identity, we can see that the early and late tournaments serve more or less the same purpose. What *does* change in the tournament tradition is the way that chivalric masculinity, for which the knights are striving, is defined. During the late tournament, the knight still had to

display the martial aggression and physical power that defined the early tournament because much of the event was still based around the knight's ability to perpetrate violence. The change, however, was in the *attitude* that accompanied and informed this violence. Now, his actions had to be governed by a kind of friendliness towards the people with whom he was fighting. Equally important is the idea that, in order to obtain a valid masculine identity, he had to have a positive association with women. This association includes the tradition of courtly love (as in the theatrical displays of amorous submission) but in some circumstances does not have to be based on love or romance, in the sense that each knight should be in service to ladies (or the queen) in general and display *courtoisie*.

This general shift in the nature of chivalric masculinity is a move away from a masculinity defined in terms of excess (as in the early tournament) and towards a more complex system in which martial skill and ability is half of the equation, balanced by an association with women, amorous pursuits, the admittedly ambiguous ideal of *gentillesse*, and the life of the court (these qualities we will later come to call the *venerien*, after Gower). This is a complication in our definition of late-medieval chivalric masculinity, because these two qualities are absolutely necessary but at the same time are at odds with each other. The clearest example of this opposition is the eulogy that Malory writes for Ector when he hears of Launcelot's death. Important in this passage is not just the contrast of oppositional images, but also the idea that these opposite traits are the very thing that establishes Launcelot's status as the best knight.

'A Launcelot!' [Ector] sayd, 'thou were hede of al Chrysten knyghtes! And now I dare say...there thou lvest, that thou were never matched of erthely knyghtes hand. And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare shelde! And thou were the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest lover of a synful man that ever loved woman, and thou were the godelyest persone that ever cam emonge the prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mekest man and the jentylllest that ever ete in halle emonge ladyes, and thou were the sternest knyght to thy mortal foo that ever put spere in the reeste.'¹⁰⁴

The conflicting images presented here in praise of the dead Lancelot might be foreign to modern readers, whose perceptions opponents (in both warfare and sport -- the two possible modern analogues to the tournament) is often of competitiveness at the expense of amicability. When these two groups of qualities are thought of in more

generalized ways, their opposition to each other becomes evident: the exterior space of war and the tournament versus the interior space of the court/feast/lover's bedroom; courtly activities featuring women versus martial activities in which female participation is largely prohibited (an opposition that might be understood as the line between the tournament combatant and the tournament observer); the physical versus the verbal; the hurtful versus the kind, etc. Malory's use of oppositional qualities to describe ideal knighthood was part of a tradition in the genre of chivalric romance. In this tradition, chivalry depended on a continual balance and negotiation between conflicting and polar oppositional qualities similar to those above.

In the next chapter we will see that the idea of a chivalry based on oppositional attributes is common throughout the literary record of the late-medieval period, but has its roots in the early growth of the chivalric romance. In his romances, Chrétien de Troyes¹⁰⁵ emphasizes the importance of court life, courtly love, and service to women but emphasizes equally the opposite traits of martial ability, strength, and physical dominance. Furthermore, he presents these elements as conflicting so that a move towards one set of behaviors is a move away from the other. This seemingly impossible situation results in a masculinity that is a process of continual balancing and counterbalancing between two extremes of masculine behavior so that the ideal is a kind of unstable mean, only reached through continuous negotiations and renegotiations towards the center. This is significant for our understanding of the way in which late-medieval chivalric masculinity, taking its cue from the earlier romance tradition, would be constructed and maintained.

CHAPTER IV
CHIVALRIC MASCULINITY IN THE EARLY ROMANCE –
THE CASE OF *EREC ET ENIDE*

The last chapter began to unearth a cultural shift in the definition of male behavior for those professing chivalry. The discussion so far has been abstract, however, relying on the historical evidence of the tournament to draw conclusions regarding ideal chivalric masculinity. In the previous chapter I also connected the cultural elements of this new idea of chivalry with the growing popularity of the romance and the ideals that the romance promoted.¹⁰⁶ Stories, of course, do not always reflect life, and the question of whether or not knights acted according to the ideals of their literature is an important one. The project of this dissertation, however, is to identify and define an emerging ideal code for knightly behavior. The sporadic adherence to this code, or even the stark failure of knights to be aware of it, is less important for a study that focuses on prescriptions and ideals. For this reason, the romance genre provides useful evidence for the discussion of chivalric behavior and can be seen as a guide to and catalogue of this ideal.¹⁰⁷

It is immediately apparent upon examination of Middle English romances that they do not always agree on what chivalric behavior should be. This is to be expected, because the genre is broad enough to include a spectrum of themes and agendas. There is, however, a group of romances that follow a common theme in the way that they imagine chivalric conduct, and the thematic elements of these related romances mirror the cultural changes that are evident in the evolution of the tournament. We have seen that the tournament came to embrace the conflicting associations with (on the one hand)

aggression, dominance and the ability to perpetrate violence, and (on the other) the ability to be amorous, gentle, courtly, and (at times) restrained or passive. The idea that behavior should be defined by conflicting ideologies seems self-contradictory for the modern reader, but when seen in its cultural context this idea is in keeping with the cosmological worldview under which many romance writers and readers functioned.

I have argued in previous chapters that chivalric masculinity cannot be understood by relying on an essentialized masculine/feminine binary that places masculinity as an oppositional pole to femininity. It is, however, easy to see why scholars would tend to employ a gender-based bipolar model. The perception of late medieval chivalry uncovered in the previous chapter is oxymoronic, in that it holds sacred two sets of conflicting values, and this *does* suggest a kind of binary relationship, in that movement towards courtly behavior is, in many ways, a move away from combative, aggressive behavior. Furthermore women, as the objects of sexual and (more importantly) amorous attention, and as the medium through which knights are able to display their courtliness, *do* seem to be associated mainly with the courtly aspect of the model, which again does make it seem as if masculinity is being posed as oppositional to femininity. Finally, the rhetoric of feminization that is common to so many modern masculine models can be found in some discourses during this period, and accusations of feminization often revolved around the life of the court (attitudes and behaviors very similar to those detailed above). In fact, accusations regarding feminization were part of a larger cultural and literary debate concerned with chivalric identity starting in the twelfth century that questioned whether chivalric identity should emphasize fighting or the activities of the court. Ad Putter connects this debate to two twelfth-century adaptations (from Ovid) of

an argument between Ajax and Ulysses as to who will inherit Achilles's armor. Putter argues that the medieval audience for this part of the Troy narrative saw Ulysses representing courtly virtues and Ajax representing martial ones. Putter finds that the Ulysses of this debate is associated with Venus and is therefore vulnerable to accusations of feminization. He then compares this episode to one in Wace's *Brut*, in which Arthur is deciding whether or not to go to war, and is advised by Gawain and Cador. Cador, he argues, takes a roll similar to that of Ajax because he preferences aggression and argues that Arthur's knights need war to avoid preoccupations with pleasure, dalliance, and wantonness. Putter sees Gawain as similar to Ulysses, because his sound, convincing argument for peace and the avoidance of war gives preference to courtly abilities. Putter's important observations do not explicitly describe a bipolar model of gender, but this model is implicit in his discussion. Cador/Ajax, the aggressive male, is not vulnerable to criticism like Ulysses/Gawain is, because his aggression and interest in war guarantees that he is "manly," whereas Gawain's argument for peace makes his manhood suspect. While Arthur's choice to follow Cador's advice seems to agree with a masculine/feminine model, Putter does suggest that the Gawain-esque "new generation of courtly knights," while open to charges of feminization, would become a viable model for behavior.¹⁰⁸ This point is important because it demonstrates that a masculine/feminine model does not fully describe knightly behavior.

The problems with a universal or essential perception of masculinity in the study of gender have been explored in previous chapters. There is another, less obvious problem with the idea of binary thinking that emerges when considering how medieval people perceived their world. In *The Discarded Image* C. S. Lewis attempts to present

the worldview of what late-medieval people thought (he deals mainly with the high and late-medieval period).. While perhaps guilty of a zealous oversimplification, his work does apply to those medieval people who were exposed to education in the tradition of the universities, which focused largely on classical philosophy and cosmology. In fact, connections between aristocratic culture, literate culture, and university-based learning are significant enough that a common worldview among romance audiences seems probable, making his assertions about medieval people valuable in a literary discussion.¹⁰⁹ Medieval people, Lewis argues, saw the world in terms of triune relationships. For example, the binary model of body/soul for the medieval person could only be conceived with an understanding that the point of connection between the two represents a third entity (in this example Lewis suggests that the spirit is the third part of the soul/body relationship, so that madness is a malfunction of the spirit which interferes with the soul's ability to apply reason to the natural urges of the human body). Where Putter sees the episode in *Wace* in terms of oppositional attitudes regarding behavior (Cador as the aggressive war-monger, Gawain as the courtly advocate for peace), Lewis see the three characters as a comprehensive whole, with the inclusion of the figure who is being advised by the two – the literal and symbolic middle – who is Arthur. Putter argues that Arthur's final choice to follow the path of war does not invalidate Gawain's argument, and, because of this, the "Ulysses" part of this debate is still theoretically viable (not so feminized or demonized so as to be dismissed or discounted), but if we imagine the debate in terms of a triune relationship concentration shifts to Arthur, who must negotiate between opposing yet necessary expressions of Knighthood. Arthur, as the middle point between the conflicting personalities of the aggressive/warlike and the courtly/amicable,

starts to resemble the knight at the late-period tournament, who was continually forced to negotiate between the very same set of conflicting behaviors.

A triune model for behavior suggests connections between university learning and the reception of romance, because the doctrine of the mean is so present in it. An Aristotelian model of virtue negotiates a mean between two extreme or excessive (and therefore faulty) behaviors, like those of Cador and Gawain in Putter's example. With this in mind, we can re-imagine Putter's argument (at least in the context of the romance) by suggesting that courtly behavior (amicable behavior with men and dalliance with women) is faulty and criticized only when it becomes excessive, because at this point it starts precluding the activities associated with the other end of the spectrum, such as war, aggression, and physical competitiveness.

An interesting impasse occurs here in medieval studies, as there seem to be two areas of scholarship that, while connected in obvious ways, remain distinct from each other. On the one hand, those moments in medieval romance where a knight becomes "too courtly" evoke discussions of feminization and recreance¹¹⁰ (as in the case of Putter), with a focus on what a knight must do to correct, as aggressively as possible, the failure. On the other hand, the growing bibliography on violence (as I have discussed in the first chapter) sees chivalry and other social institutions as social controls for the essentially violent and destructive nature of young noble men. In other words, scholars dealing with excessively courtly episodes in romances suggest that correction rests on a move towards fighting and aggression, and scholars dealing with violence suggest the opposite. I will accept the risk of relying too heavily on Lewis's model for the way that (literate) medieval people perceived their world in order to suggest that these two schools of

scholarship could be united into a cohesive whole by imagining the question in the terms of a triune relationship. If aggression, dominance, and the ability to perpetrate violence are just as faulty in excess as indulgent dalliance, amorous pleasures, and courtly pursuits, and if both behaviors are beneficial in their moderate forms, then proper male behavior (ideal masculinity) becomes defined by the ability to balance the excessive poles in this model, engaging in both kinds of behavior, but not to the exclusion of the opposite behavior. This point is key to our understanding of chivalric masculinity in this period: A model for male behavior that requires participation in opposing behaviors defines masculinity as a process of continual negotiation, in which the act of balancing is the performance of a valid gendered identity.

Although this idea of masculinity might be alien to the modern reader (many modern masculinities are, after all, based on notions of excess), it is entirely in keeping with ideas of psychological and physical health of the medieval person. Humoric philosophy, the medieval ideology concerned with mental and physical health, holds that the mental and physical health of the individual is dependent on a balancing of four essential bodily processes, called humors. Each of these humors has attributes that affect the individual mentally and physically, and it is from excesses in these humors that mental and physical ailments come.¹¹¹ The important point here is that the four humors exist only in relation to each other, so that an absence of one humor necessarily indicates an excess of another. Health, therefore, both mentally and physically, can only be imagined in the terms of the triune relationship that Lewis defines because it is the point of connection of the four humors in balance. Modern medicine is based around the idea of removing the cause of illness or mental disorder, so that health is the extreme opposite

to the causes of illness. Humoric theories of health cannot have this kind of attitude, because complete removal of a humoric influence would result in a fatal excess of the humor opposite to the one excised. Like many aspects of medieval cosmology, this system of thinking about the human mind and body finds direct relation to the physics of the non-biological world in that each humor's quality associates with an element of the world (earth, air, fire, and water) and a planet in the sky so that the balance of the human body and psyche is part of the same process by which the earth and even the universe exists and maintains itself. This is significant for our study because it places the discussion of the way a person (a knight, in this case) should act as part of a much larger question of how the world works. Because we are seeing the romance as prescriptive as well as descriptive, the general idea of how well-being is achieved will figure prominently in the way that we read these texts as didactic guides to behavior.

The model of chivalry as an Aristotelian virtue based on the negotiated balance between oppositional poles seems to have been part of literary discourse starting in the period that saw a similar shift in the tournament. Chrétien de Troyes, a pioneer of the courtly romance genre, had great influence on the romances that would follow. This is especially the case with his first romance *Erec et Enide*, which clearly begins a discussion of the overly amorous knight which is revisited in later romances. It is therefore useful to analyze chivalric behavior in *Erec et Enide*, as Chrétien himself invites us to do; the prologue to this story is devoted to the idea that the romance should be didactic, as the author states:

Por ce dist Crestiens de Troies

que reisons est que totevoies
 doit chascuns panser et antandre
 a bien dire et a bien aprandre,
 et tret d'un conte d'avanture
 une molt bele conjointure,
 par qu'an puet prover et savoir
 que cil ne fet mie savoir
 qui s'escience n'abandone
 tant con Dex la grasce l'an done.¹¹²

(Therefore Chrétien de Troyes says / that it is reasonable / that each person
 think and strive in every way / to speak well and to teach well, / and from
 a tale of adventure he draws / a beautifully ordered composition, /
 whereby one may prove and know / that he does not act intelligently / who
 does not give free reign to his knowledge, / as long as God gives him the
 grace to do so).

From this introduction, we would expect to find a story that prescribes proper behavior
 and denounces behavior that is improper, especially when Chrétien defines his audience
 as those who "de conter vivre vuelent" ("try to live by storytelling").¹¹³

Erec et Enide is one of the texts that Putter uses to demonstrate the Ulysses/Ajax
 debate in the medieval romance and he argues that it clearly favors war and aggression
 because Erec's amorous dalliance after his marriage so obviously proves this point.

Putter proceeds from this moment in the story to show how Erec uses fighting to prove that he is not effeminate. For an example of Erec behaving more courtly than martial, however, Putter need look no further than the very beginning of the story. In contrast with the aggressive activities of the masculine homosocial group at the beginning of the story (riding in the hunt), Erec dresses in courtly finery, stays behind to ride with the women, and he has left his armor - all except for his sword - at home.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Erec's identity as a knight is clearly compromised when he meets the strange knight riding with a dwarf and a maiden and is unable to react to the verbal and physical assaults of the dwarf on both himself and the queen's maiden.¹¹⁵ The issue here is that Erec's inability to act casts his status as an effective knight into question, and he must spend the first part of the story rectifying this. The problem with reading the beginning of the story as an outright condemnation of courtly behavior (as Putter might do) is that Erec's choice to stay with the women, unarmed and dressed in fine clothing, is not treated by Chrétien in a negative way. In fact, the opposite is true. According to modern assumptions about masculinity and its polar opposition to femininity, Erec's failure to associate with the men and to participate in the male-gendered behavior would constitute a failure to be "a man" and would be seen as a move in the direction of being feminine. Chrétien's description, however, is not only un-condemning of Erec, it is outright praise, particularly for his "vaselage" (kighthood). He writes:

Aprés [the queen and her maiden] a esperon

Uns chevaliers, Erec a non.

De la Table Reonde estoit;

An la cort molt grant los avoit:
 De tant com il i ot esté,
 n'i ot chevalier si lo'e,
 et fu tant biax qu'an nule terre
 n'estovoit plus bel de lui querre.
 Molt estoit biax et preuz et genz,
 Et n'avoit pas vint et cinc anz;
 Onques nus hom de son aage
 Ne fu de si grant vasselage.
 Que diroie de ses bontez?¹¹⁶

(A knight came spurring after [the queen] / Erec was his name. / He was of
 the Round Table; / And had great honor at the court: / Of the time he had
 been there, / There had not been a knight so highly praised, / And he was
 so handsome that there was no need / To seek a handsomer man anywhere.
 / He was very handsome and valiant and noble, / And he was not yet
 twenty-five years old; / Never was any man of his age / So accomplished
 in knighthood. / What should I say of his virtues?)

Chrétien goes on to describe the clothing that Erec wears using language that can
 only be seen as praise and approval.¹¹⁷ It is clear from this description that Erec is in no
 way feminized or treated in anything but a flattering way, despite his seemingly distant
 relationship to the "masculine pole" of the commonly assumed masculine binary.

Chrétien depicts Erec's choice to go on the hunt unarmored and "for no other reason than to keep [the queen] company" as perfectly valid and acceptable as the behavior of a knight acting within the ideals of knighthood. The complication comes not from his preference for courtly behavior but from the moment when he is unable to redress the dwarf's insulting attack.

Erec is not in error at the outset of the story; In fact he is displaying behavior proper for knights - the courtly, amicable part. The unexpected encounter, however, requires his ability to be martial and aggressive; his ability to balance his courtliness with the *other half* of knightly behavior. This model does include a binary of sorts, and it is similar to the traditional masculine binary in that the poles are associated with what we might consider "masculine" and "feminine" traits. On the one end there is courtly dress, association with women, pleasantries, and amorousness, and on the other side there is the aggression, physical dominance, and violent homosocial competition. The difference between this prescription for masculine behavior and a more polarized modern model is the idea that masculinity (i.e. the way males should act) is a balance between excessive behaviors, instead of actually being one of the excessive poles, as it is in a masculine/feminine model. Erec's inability to react to the assault of the dwarf calls for his martial, aggressive ability, but Chrétien's outright praise of the seemingly "feminized" Erec suggests that each of these poles is equally important for Erec's chivalry, and that redemption of his chivalric identity must be done by assimilation of the martial, but not at the expense of the courtly.

Chrétien's use of a model that emphasizes balance rather than extremes is also supported by his clearly negative description of the dwarf as a creature defined by excess.

He describes the dwarf as a person "qui de felenie fu plains"¹¹⁸ ("who was full of evil") and "qui molt fu fel et de put' ere"¹¹⁹ ("who was very evil and base-born"), and that "Li nains fu fel tant con nus plus"¹²⁰ ("the dwarf was as evil as he could be"), clearly associating the dwarf not just with evil, but with evil of an excessive nature. Finally, when the queen remarks "Molt est li chevaliers vilains, / quant il sofri que tex fauture / feri si bele creature"¹²¹ ("the knight is very unchivalrous, / since he has allowed such a freak / to strike such a beautiful creature") Chrétien's contrast between the maiden and the dwarf suggests both the negative excess of the dwarf and (more importantly) the faulty chivalry of the enemy knight Yder, who allows this excessive aggression in his representative. While the dwarf clearly behaves badly, the narrative purpose of his character is to reflect on the chivalry of the knight whom he serves. This is evident throughout the resolution of this part of story, as the dwarf is always mentioned in association with Yder's behavior and Yder's chivalry.¹²²

The exposition of the first part of the story leaves the reader with the question of whether Erec will be able to balance his courtliness with the need to be aggressive and dominant. Yder serves as the negative example of aggression, and, by defeating him and then sparing him, Erec demonstrates that he is able to temper his perpetration of violence with gentleness. When he then demands that his victim be incorporated into the court of Arthur, Erec defines his violence as beneficial and politically constructive. Enide serves here also as a sign of Erec's balance between the two excessive poles, because Erec's active interest in Enide contrasts with Yder's master/servant relationship with his own lady, whose presence is so bland that one is tempted to forget that she is present (she follows orders, silently follows along after Yder, etc.) Yder's lady, however minor as she

might be, serves the very important purpose in the story of modeling the female role in a relationship that is out of balance.

The complication of the second part of the story is that Erec himself becomes out of balance. The beginning of the story and the first adventure details Erec's ability to integrate martial and aggressive activity into the courtliness of his chivalry as he gains balance between the two opposing poles. The praise Chrétien heaps on him at the tournament following his marriage is proof of his success. The second part of the story, as many scholars have suggested, explores Erec's excessive dalliance with his new wife, but this dalliance should be perceived as an inability to maintain a balanced chivalry.

It is clear that Erec's love is excessive from Chrétien's description of his post-nuptial dalliance and Enide's beauty. "Mes tant l'ama Erec d'amors / que d'armes mes ne li chaloit"¹²³ ("But Erec was so in love with her / that he cared no more for arms") he states, and the "mes" must be seen in its immediate following of the praise of Enide's qualities, as if to say that she was perfect *except* that this perfection had a negative effect on Erec. When the other knights disapprove¹²⁴ it is even more clear that Erec is not acting as he should, as they all lament that he is not taking part in the practice of arms – an act so central to chivalry that to ignore it is to become "recreant,"¹²⁵ and to accrue "granz diax ert et granz damages"¹²⁶ ("great shame and sorrow").

The notion that Erec is at fault here has been a standard response in Chrétien criticism.¹²⁷ It also tends to be understood in terms of the masculine/feminine bipolar model as that tension between the male homosocial group and the new heterosexual lover. What we must avoid, however, is the assumption that combat on the tournament field and the pursuit of arms are wholly homosocial activities. It is tempting to see the pursuit of

arms as something contrary to the association of women, especially because Erec's excessive dwelling with Enide *does* divert him from his use of arms. Chrétien's descriptions of the practice of arms, however, always include the presence of women. This is, of course, the case when Erec fights Yder, and although the reader is aware of other issues at stake in their combat¹²⁸, it must be understood that the fight itself revolves around the presence of women.¹²⁹ The tension in Erec's dalliance with Enide is not between homosocial and heterosocial/sexual behavior, but between excessive play in the bed chamber and the balanced activity of the tournament. Erec's conduct and activity at the tournament that precedes Erec's rejection of martial behavior should be seen as an example of the ideal of balance that the tournament represents.

Chrétien's use of vivid colors¹³⁰ and then vivid sound¹³¹ situate the reader as one of the physical and present observers of the tournament. It is not only the tournament's audience, but also the readers who, upon seeing the combat, "mervoilles s'an esbaïrent"¹³² ("were wonderfully astounded") and is convinced that "trop chier li coste / qui a si boen chevalier joste"¹³³ ("it costs too dearly / to fight against such a knight"). Clearly, Erec is being used here as exemplary. This exemplary behavior is essentially tied to the interaction with women because the tournament itself is a celebration and a result of Erec's marriage. Furthermore, Chrétien makes clear that women are an essential part of the tournament when he writes that:

La ot tante vermoille ansaigne
 et tant bloe et tante blanche,
 et tante guinple et tante manche,

qui par amors furent donees;¹³⁴

(There were many bright-red banners / And many blue and many white, /
And many wimples and many sleeves, / Given as tokens of love;)

This is important to note because Erec's recreance does not follow a polar model that places strong male behavior as oppositional to interaction with women; his fault is not interaction with women, and the solution is not a rejection of this interaction. Instead his failure is to balance the opposing-yet-necessary traits of martial and courtly behavior.

Erec's reaction when he hears Enide's lament that he has "relanqui / ...tote chevalerie"¹³⁵ ("completely abandoned all chivalry") must be seen in the context of his failure to balance martial and courtly behavior. When Erec first hears that Enide is distraught and questions her as to the matter of her complaint and her obvious weeping, his tone is significantly different than after he has heard the cause of the complaint. When he awakens and tries to convince Enide to tell him the matter, he continually addresses her gently as a friend and lover, using words like "dolce amie chiere"¹³⁶ ("cherished sweet friend") and "ma dolce amie"¹³⁷ ("my sweet friend") to discover the cause of her sorrow. After she has told him what has become of his reputation, his tone changes, and is decidedly clipped and short, so much so that Enide's first reaction is to assume that she is being sent away. In contrast to his formerly affectionate, concerned tone, he now addresses her only as "*dame*" (woman),¹³⁸ and curtly commands her to get ready to travel.

The change in Erec's behavior is equally curt and aggressive in the commands that

he gives his valet in lines 2627-2633, but Chrétien leaves it unclear as to why Erec is acting this way. Clearly, he is not angry at her for telling him about the state of his chivalric reputation, as the very first thing he says to her afterwards is "droit an eüstes, / et cil qui m'an blasment ont droit"¹³⁹ ("you were right to do so, / and those who blame me are also right"). Furthermore, when Erec speaks to his father before his departure, we once again see his affection for his wife.¹⁴⁰ Erec's use of this tone when speaking to Enide is a bit of a mystery, especially because he is not actually angry with her. The plot of this mystery thickens when he refuses any company for his voyage, insisting that he must undertake it only with his wife as a companion. The reader is left with the idea that he is performing for Enide, correcting the perceptions of his feminization with an aggressive performance of identity. The idea that this corrective is valid and proper tends to be a standard reading of this section of the story. Regardless of the conclusions that scholars have made about the end of the story, most seem to rely on the idea that Erec starts a violent quest as a correction of his recreance.¹⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, for example, sees this story as reflecting literary depictions of courtship before the assimilation of troubadour conceptions of love into French courtly poetry. As a result, he sees in the theme an "inherent brutality"¹⁴² that relies on (and condones) Erec's lack of courtesy in order to present Enide's patience. Contrasting *Erec et Enide* against *Lancelot* (which he suggests reflects a concept of love influenced by the troubadours), Lewis finds reflected in the story an "archaic" model that comes from a world that is supplanted by the new concept of love.¹⁴³ Lewis demonstrates an important difference between two perceptions of love among chivalrous society, but by seeing *Erec et Enide* only as a reflection of cultural values, he does not allow for Erec's lack of courtesy to be seen as negative. As

the protagonist of a coming of age story, we would expect Erec to err along the way, and it is in the nature of this error that the theme takes shape. What the application of a triune model makes apparent is that Erec replaces one kind of excessive behavior with the opposite kind, which is equally out of whack. In an attempt to correct his problematized masculinity, he has overcompensated and has swung too far towards the opposite pole.

As discussed in the first chapter, there is a lack of critical work defining violence and violent encounters in narrative, possibly stemming from the assumption that violence can only be read in one way. The specific descriptions of the first three combats that Erec fights, however, contain moments of violent exchange that are directly suggestive of negative excessive behavior. This is only evident when we understand Chrétien's treatment of the different kinds of violent exchange. Treatments of violence in the academy tend to see it from the perspective of the outsider, of the person for whom violence is essentially and definitively destructive, unpleasant, and disruptive to social interaction. Thematic specifics in literary treatments of violence vary, however, and must be closely examined so that the narrative role of the violence is not ignored.

Chrétien clearly distinguishes between two basic kinds of violence, defined mainly by their results. Although the violence perpetrated by the dwarf is important to the story (and I have discussed this above), the first "chivalric" violence that we see in the book occurs during the tournament for the sparrow-hawk, in which Erec fights against Yder. In terms of the plot, this fight serves a number of purposes -- redressing the dwarf's attack on Erec and Guinivere's maiden, proof of Erec's devotion to Enide, etc. In a larger sense, though, this fight also serves the purpose of solidifying and uniting a fractured state. For Chrétien even more than in later periods when knighthood became

less firmly connected with land ownership, issues of chivalry were connected to the issues of the feudal system and the problems that the system represented. In its ideal form, the feudal system places all members of the landed aristocracy under a strong central leadership. Given the problems inherent in political realities, however, this strong central leadership often does not function in the way that it should. What we see especially in the problems surrounding political unrest in France around the year one thousand is that failures in the feudal system often result in rampant feuding between regional warlords and their subinfeudated followers. Chrétien, writing in the period directly after the feudal problems of the turn of the millennium, would be cognizant of these issues, especially when constructing a story that is meant to instruct the listener as to good behavior. Despite the preference that some of these feudal lords might have had (or still had in Chrétien's period) for an unregulated state, Chrétien's prescription for good violence aspires to unite and solidify the feudal system.

When Erec encounters Yder in the forest, the meeting itself raises the issues of a state fractured by a faulty feudal system. The queen, her maiden, and Erec are presumably on the king's land and are a good deal less than a day's ride from the very seat of Arthur's rulership. It makes sense, then, that the queen might want to know the identity of the strange knight whom she sees riding through her territory. The queen's (and by extension the king's) ultimate lack of authority and efficacy even to find out the identity of this rogue knight establishes a setting devoid of political stability. We are in an Arthurian fantasy land in which the kingship and authority of Arthur is in question.

When Erec defeats Yder, we see first that he is tempted to chop off his head and to indulge in the excessive aggression that he has made use of in order to redress the blow

he took from the dwarf. He resists this, however, and instead sends the knight as a prisoner to the queen after finding out his name. Upon reaching the queen and displaying the proper submissive behavior, his status as prisoner is changed to that of a fully functioning member of the royal household. Here is a total reversal of the situation in which Yder was first encountered. He was a strange knight, foreign and unaffected by whatever feudal authority Arthur would have as king (he rides across Arthur's territory, allows his servant to act as a kind of unjust lawmaker, disregards the queen's attempt to learn his identity), and the immediate and direct result of Erec's ability to commit violence is that Yder's identity is revealed, he makes amends for his misdeeds, and he is now not only under the authority of the state, but he is transformed into a supporter of it by joining the household of the king as a knight. This is violence in its ideal form: it mends the fractured polity, solidifies rather than destroys, and aids in the creation and maintenance of a clear and organized homosocial order.

While the description of Erec's fight with Yder is admittedly extreme, his choice to accept Yder's surrender and to use his victory in a way beneficial to the state encourages the audience to see that this violent exchange had positive results. Chrétien reinforces this point again at the end of the story, during the *Joi de la court* episode. In this final fight, Erec (who, as we shall discuss below, has achieved a balance that he now tries to encourage in others) is acting as the righter of wrongs, the one who, by battling against excess, is able to mend the damage done by excessiveness in the community. It is for this reason that Maboagrins is literally happy to have lost to Erec, just as Yder does not seem too displeased by having found a knight better than himself. In both the first and the last fight, Erec's job as knight is to use his ability for violence not to destroy but

to bring to heel those characters who are recreant in their excessive behaviors.

The tournament celebrating Erec's marriage supports this idea as well, in that the theme of the passage emphasizes Erec's desire "joster et bien feire"¹⁴⁴ ("to joust and to do well") rather than to take ransoms. By renegotiating his place on the masculine pecking order of knights and their worth (the order that Chrétien himself suggests when he lists the knights in terms of their value)¹⁴⁵ Erec is in fact enforcing and solidifying that order and strengthening the homosocial bonds of the court in the very same way that he does when he sends defeated knights to the court and requires that they now fit themselves into the official order of knights. Because this is another example of "good" violence, Chrétien omits descriptions of the wounds, suffering, and even ill-will, focusing instead on the solidification of the homosocial order by focusing on who unhorses whom, as this excerpt shows:

Erec sist sor un cheval blanc;
 Toz seus s'an vint au chief del ranc
 Por joster, se il trueve a cui.
 De l'autre part, encontre lui,
 Point li Orgueilleus de la Lande,
 Et sist sor un cheval d'Irlande
 Qui le port de grant ravine.
 Sor l'escu, devant le poitrine,
 Le fiert Erec de tel vertu
 Que del destrier l'a abatu;

Le chaple let et vet avant.
 Et Randuraz li vient devant,
 Filz la Vielle de Tergalo,
 Et fu coverz d'un cendal blo;
 Chevaliers ert de grant proesce.
 Li uns contre l'autre s'adresce,
 Si s'antre donent molt granz cos
 Sor les escuz qu'il ont as cos.
 Erec, tant con hante li dure,
 Le trebuchet a la tere dure.¹⁴⁶

(Erec sat upon a white horse; / All alone he came to the head of the ranks /
 To joust, if he could find an adversary. / On the other side, coming to meet
 him, / Spurred the Arrogant Knight of the Heath, / Seated on an Irish horse
 / That bore him violently forward. / On his shield, in front of his chest, /
 Erec struck him with such force / That he knocked him down from his
 charger; / He left the melee and went forward. / And Randuraz came
 towards him, / Son of the Old Woman of Tergalo; / He was covered in
 blue silk / And was a knight of great prowess. / Each headed for the other,
 / and they exchanged great blows / on the shields they bore at their necks. /
 Erec, with all the force of his lance, / Knocked him onto the hard ground).

The episode demonstrates that Chrétien sees violence – at least in some

circumstances, as laudable and beneficial and not necessarily destructive. It is necessary, however, to read the specifics of each combative episode, and not to rely on Chrétien's treatment of violence as purely one-dimensional. Fighting that is non-injurious, politically unifying, and merciful is proper violence for Chrétien, but the violence that Erec perpetrates when he rides into the wilderness with Enide is of a different kind altogether and is in keeping with his inappropriately harsh attitude towards Enide. When Erec fights with and defeats Yder the spectacle and anticipated gore of Yder's beheading is conspicuously avoided when Erec grants him mercy. This is not the case when the robber knights attack Erec and Enide in the first encounter after leaving the castle. The villainy of the attacking knights is as obvious as it is with Yder, but their status as robbers is somewhat ameliorated because they follow the conventions of knightly combat: they are armored horsemen presumably of the correct class, they do challenge him, and their covetousness of Erec's armor and horses evokes the self-serving knight of the early tournament more than it does the true highway robbery.¹⁴⁷

What we might expect from the earlier fights is that combat will be the medium through which these knights are corrected of their behavior and sent to Arthur's court, where they will confess, be absolved, and then be integrated into the homosocial/political body of the court of knights and ladies. Instead, we find the opposite. As the two come together, Chrétien tells us that:

andui poignant, si s'antre vienent;

les lances esloigniees tienent,

mes cil a a Erec faille,

et Erec a lui maubailli,
 que bien le sot droit anvaïr.
 Sor l'escu fiert de tel air
 Que d'un chief en autre le fant,
 Ne li haubers ne li desfant:
 En mi le piz le fraint et ront,
 Et de la lance li repont,
 Pié et demi dedans le cors.
 Au retrere a son cop estors,
 Et cil cheï; morir l'estut,
 Car li glaives el cuer li but.¹⁴⁸

(Both spurred there mounts and came together; / They held their lances
 lowered, / But the other missed Erec, / Whereas Erec maltreated him, / For
 he was skilled in the attack. / He struck his shield so violently / That he
 split it from top to bottom, / And the hauberk offered no protection: / In
 the middle of his chest he broke and ruptured it, / And he thrust a foot and
 a half / Of his lance into his body. / As he withdrew he turned it aside,
 And the other fell; he could not escape death, / For the lance had drunk
 from his heart).

This gruesome imagery is continued as Erec fights the second and third knights in
 this encounter. He runs the second knight through, impaling his chest with a quarter of

the length of his lance, and then savagely knocks his already-unconscious body out of the saddle. The third he chases down, yelling threats until he catches him and knocks him out of his saddle. The fact that he now takes the horses of the men should be seen in contrast to his behavior in the tournament, where he was explicitly described as not engaging in this behavior. As medievalists, we should always be aware that we are dealing with a significantly different culture which may operate under different rules than our own. As medievalists and scholars who are not in fact jousting, it is also easy to rely on a Monty Pythonesque view of the Middle Ages, in which gruesome violence and frank descriptions of brutality are commonplace literary norms meant to be happily consumed. While this may sometimes be the case, a practiced expectation of these preconceptions can lead to a misreading of a text that clearly is differentiating in its descriptions. In this section Chrétien changes his description from the beneficial violence that marked the first two (and last) combats of the story to something more brutal, self serving, and injurious. At the end of this episode one man is dead and another wounded, having had a quarter of Erec's lance thrust through his body with little hope of medical attention. The last man, ridden down in full rout and unable to ask for mercy, lies unconscious in the woods nearby as Erec rides away with their horses. No names have been exchanged, no vows of allegiance given or accepted. The society is fractured by the encounter instead of mended by it. In fact, Erec becomes like these knights when he takes their horses, mimicking their behavior and confounding the praise he won at the tournament for avoiding this very behavior.

In the next encounter Chrétien emphasizes this same theme again, concentrating on the extreme and destructive violence that Erec now commits. The robber knights are

clearly depicted as villainous, but it is important to remember the example of Yder, who suggests that villany is correctable and the errant knight is redeemable when confronted by proper chivalry. Erec, trying to correct his amorous excesses, is going too far because he is *too aggressive* with a violence that is injurious and destructive.

This contrast between the combats before and after the conversation in the bed-chamber is significant for the narrative because, for Chrétien, the fights in the wilderness are thematically the same as the first two combats, which take place within the context of tournament. All of the fights, for example, begin in more or less the same way: with the mounted lance charge in a single combat. As mentioned above, the knights in the wilderness come at Erec one at a time, making the combat thematically much like the tournament. The weapons seem to be the same in both instances as well, with no mention of rebated weapons in the early combats. The distinction between fighting with real and rebated weapons (combat *a outrance* or *a pleasance*) is absent from the story, obscuring the line between tournament and non-tournament fighting. Erec's sword-work in his first fight and his threat to behead Yder suggest, in fact, that weapons are real and sharp in all of the fights in the story and that the possibility of injury is what makes Erec's mercy so significant. In the fantasy world in which Erec lives, the socially-imposed line between tournament fighting and earnest, deadly combat is intentionally muddied so that the distinction between the two can be used as a commentary on the chivalric identity of the knight involved.

More convincing still of Erec's growing excessive violence is the second of his forest combats. It begins as follows:

Erec [the first knight] duremant le fiert
 que li escuz del col li vol,
 et si librise la chanole.
 Li estrié ronpent et cil chiet:
 n'a peor que il s'an reliet,
 que molt s'est quassez et bleciez.¹⁴⁹

(Erec struck [the first knight] with such force / that he tore the shield from the other's neck / and ruptured his windpipe. / The stirrups broke and he fell: / there was no fear that he would get up again, / for he was badly broken and wounded).

This knight's death, at the same time gruesome and mundane, evokes a destructive violence that is excessive. Here, even more than in the first fight, excessive violence can be seen to act against the idea of what Chrétien has defined as good chivalry and combat. The second knight in this encounter is impaled through the throat, and Chrétien describes with detail how the lance "toz tranche les os et les ners, / que d'autre part an saut li fers"¹⁵⁰ ("sliced through all the bones and nerves, / and the iron burst out the other side"). The third knight fares worse still, being knocked down and caught under his horse in the ford, so that he drowns. The fourth and fifth knights in this encounter try to run, but Erec, in a killing frenzy, rides after them, hitting one from behind and then hacking his shoulder from his trunk before leaving the other, who escapes only by throwing himself to the ground. In order to depict a violence here that is excessive and destructive

Chrétien uses the imagery of a "real" battlefield, replete with confusion and fear, suffering and injury, and that especially horrifying kind of killing that results from the pursuit of a fleeing enemy. Reactions from scholars on this section in the story are mixed, ranging from the assumption that Erec is acting correctly¹⁵¹ to an awareness of his destructiveness. Patterson, for example, insightfully defines the conflict in *Erec et Enide* as a tension between the individual and the community,¹⁵² but he relies on Duby's old argument that "prowess" is the definitive attribute of chivalry,¹⁵³ and therefore comes to the conclusion that chivalric identity is at odds with the social order. By casting chivalric identity as martial aggression at odds with the social cohesion of the culture Patterson misses the different and conflicting models for chivalric violence that Chrétien creates. Approaching romances in terms of the tension between individual and community is a viable approach, but here it must be noted that a chivalry as an ideal code will attempt to ease this tension, and in this case it relies on a choice between excess and moderation to do so.

The idea of excess also explains Erec's behavior towards Enide, the rudeness of which complicates the idea that Erec is acting in accordance with proper chivalry. His attitude is curt and angry, and his threats cannot be seen as anything but excessive. His anger and aggression make sense only in terms of an overcorrection for his previous, excessively amorous behavior. Upon being shown that he was, in fact, excessively amorous, Erec embarks on a misdirected pilgrimage of aggression and violence, in which he rejects not only gentle interaction with women, but also gentle or merciful interaction with anyone whatsoever. His gruff, unpleasant interaction with Enide, then, is a by-product of his overcompensatory and excessive rejection of the amorous, courtly part of

his chivalric identity. Enide, in this rejection, is forced to be the silent and passive observer to his dominance over the martial and aggressive world of the wilderness, much like Yder's lady, who was the passive observer to Yder's excesses. The resolution of the conflict between the two and the larger climax and resolution of the story in general, then, is based on the ability of Erec to balance his chivalric masculine identity between the two poles of aggression/violence and amorous/courtly behavior.

This balance only comes after the extreme expression of his excesses. Having refused to rest or take medical aid, Erec finally collapses from his wounds, leaving Enide vulnerable to the lecherous advances of the count.¹⁵⁴ The count here serves as a kind of double for Erec, because he is also excessively amorous, but even more so, to the point of outright villainy. As Erec lies, seemingly in a coma, the count makes advances on Enide that devolve into violence and the very real threat of rape. Erec, thought to be dead by all involved, hears Enide's resistance to the count's unreasoning advances, just as he heard her complaint of his own amorous excesses after their marriage. His near death coma (that resulted from excessively martial activities) becomes the reversed mirror image of his earlier sleep in Enide's bed chamber, which was a result of his amorous excesses, and Chrétien even tells us that he wakes up as if he had been asleep.¹⁵⁵ His awakening, therefore, signals a completion in his identity because he has now engaged in, and rejected, both amorous and martial excessive behavior. After he kills the count, his changed attitude towards Enide (they are affectionate, they ride together on the same horse and are reconciled) suggests that his excesses of both kinds have been effectively brought into balance.¹⁵⁶

A moderate model for chivalric behavior directly relates to the final segment of

the story, in which Erec is able to impart the idea of temperance and the avoidance of excess to another knight who is an exaggerated and condensed version of the out-of-balance Erec. In the *Joi de la Cort* episode, Erec is enlisted to confront a knight who, having promised his lover anything she desired, has been forced to defend a combination garden/bedchamber and kill all who might challenge him. The knight, Maboagrins, is characterized entirely by the excesses that Erec overcame. He is simultaneously overly martial and overly amorous, under the complete control of his romantic partner but commanded to commit continual acts of injurious violence, which always leads to the death and dismemberment of his opponents (their heads are displayed on poles in a gory spectacle). The reader is reminded of Erec's own excessive violence, which often ended in death rather than in a solidification of the homosocial order and a strengthening of the fractured homosocial and political body. It is only through Erec's now-beneficial use of "good" violence that Maboagrins can be saved from his own excess and be brought back into the ordered homosocial group. The garden imagery, suggestive of Eden,¹⁵⁷ only strengthens the message and suggests that a properly balanced chivalric/masculine identity is inherently tied to a religious identity, and that good violence not only forces the practitioner to avoid excess, but also corrects excessive behaviors that, if left unchecked, threaten the larger community. The fight between the two knights is extreme in its description, to the point that it becomes a wrestling match with both knights on the ground.¹⁵⁸ When Erec wins, however, the result is homosocial bonding as the two become friends immediately, Maboagrins thankful to have been freed from his promise.

This reading of *Erec and Enide* is necessarily brief because it is meant as an introduction to similarly-themed romances in the late Middle Ages. What this reading

demonstrates, however, is that at the very beginning of the romance tradition Chrétien was treating the idea of chivalry in terms of a negotiated balance between two oppositional kinds of behavior. It is clear in this model that amorous and courtly excesses are to be avoided just as much as martial and aggressive excesses, but that the knight must be engaged moderately in both behaviors. The image of chivalry as inherently tied to destructive and aggressive behaviors relies implicitly on the notion that men are, by nature, prone to destructive violence (which I have confronted more fully in previous chapters), but it also fails to see the triune model of balance that Chrétien is relying on and indeed encouraging in the audience.

It is important to note that celebrations of excessive behavior abound in medieval culture, and in the period of the romance these celebrations exist side by side with the model that this dissertation explores. For example, the late-medieval epic tends to rely on an escalation of excessive violence ending in an extremely destructive episode to define the heroism of the protagonist. The thousand or so years of the medieval period and numerous regional and cultural distinctions within that period make it impossible to consider anything as "medieval" without a great deal of specificity in the approach. For this reason, it is important to contextualize this model of balance as much as possible and to see this ideology in the cultural context out of which it would grow.

A chivalric identity that is Aristotelian in form has stronger connections to Chrétien's writing than it would seem at first. In his introductory material, Chrétien suggests that his project is to speak and teach proper behavior by making use of and not neglecting his "estuide."¹⁵⁹ Translators tend to render this word as "understanding," (the Choice that D. D. R. Owen makes)¹⁶⁰ as "learning" (Carroll's choice), or as the more

general "knowledge" (as Burgess does)¹⁶¹. These translations are serviceable, but "estuide" has the connotation not just of learning, but of *studies* – learning in an academic setting, which suggests a possible connection between Chrétien and an Aristotelian tradition which flourished just after Chrétien in the emerging universities. Carroll is aware of the influence of the classics on Chrétien, and while he does not directly connect Chrétien to the university tradition he does establish his education in the church schools starting at a young age. Sally Mussetter, arguing that the coronation episode of *Erec et Enide* concerns the quality *mesure* in kingship, also makes a strong argument that connects Chrétien to the philosophical traditions and book learning that were becoming widespread in the universities of the period. Relying on this connection, Kurtis Haas sees Chrétien's use of the word "estuide" as a marker for the tastes of the audience, and by arguing that Enide serves as a version of Boethius's personified Philosophy, he suggests another link to the reception of classical learning in the late twelfth century.¹⁶² This may seem a minor point, except that the cosmology resulting from the medieval reception of classical texts relies heavily on notions of balance rather than excess, such as humoral philosophy, its connection to physics and astrology, and the doctrine of the mean. It is important to note here that the Aristotelian definition of virtue also involves negotiation between two extremes. For example, Aristotle defines the virtue of courage as a mean between an absence and an overabundance of self confidence (i.e. foolhardiness and cowardice),¹⁶³ so that virtue itself is a balancing act between two kinds of excessive behaviors.

The chivalric ideal defined by Chrétien in *Erec et Enide* relies on this Aristotelian definition of virtue. Chivalry, seen as an ideal, is a virtue that should guide the behavior

of knights. If chivalry can be considered in the terms of an Aristotelian virtue, then the project of defining chivalry becomes the project of defining the excesses so that the mean becomes self evident. In *Erec et Enide* Chrétien defines these excesses as the unrestrained urge towards amorous, courtly behavior on the one hand, and martial, aggressive behavior on the other. He clearly depicts excesses towards either pole as negative, and the process of Erec's chivalric identity construction is first erring towards one pole, then to the other. Only after finding balance does Erec then help the community to avoid such error in the episode of the *joi de la cort*. When Erec has accomplished the construction of his identity he is crowned – the attainment of the state of king being symbolic of his new state as fully realized man/knight. Various arguments have been made suggesting that Erec's ascension to kingship is symbolic of a psychological shift much larger than the attainment of secular rulership, and these have been helpful in explaining Chrétien's imagery of the arts in the coronation gown, Macrobius's base text and, the presence and influence of Enide in the process. It is clear also, however, that this coronation is part of a much larger movement in the story to place secular noble masculine construction (as chivalry and eventually kingship) into the context of an academic cosmology of temperance and moderation.

Chrétien's use of this new system of thought for the redefinition of the chivalric model offers another aspect of the changing nature of chivalry during and after his period.¹⁶⁴ Before the twelfth century, codes of masculine behavior of the noble, non-clerical class seem to be based on the celebration of excess. For example, the code of behavior found in *Le Chanson de Roland* is similar to that found in *Beowulf* (a story that has very little else in common with the French epic) in the sense that a fighting man is

defined by his extreme and unyielding loyalty to his lord. This is a model reliant on excess and probably descendant from the ideal of the comitatus of the earlier period. The previous chapter discussed a shift in the perceptions of chivalry starting roughly in Chrétien's period, but if we can see this shift as part of a larger cultural trend, the change becomes even more evident as the emergence and influence of a system of thought that realigns the notion of virtuous and proper behavior, so that the excessive behavior of the earlier comitatus-styled chivalry would be competing with a model that defined itself by the avoidance of excess. Lewis sees *Erec et Enide* as a vestige of courtly literature before the influx of troubadour perceptions of love, and this argument is valuable in differentiating between the different kinds of heterosexual love in the romance tradition. For a discussion of the model for masculinity that proceeds from Chrétien, however, it is important to note that *Erec et Enide* (along with others of his romances, especially *Perceval*), are early forms of a genre of coming of age narratives generally referred to as the "fair unknown" romances.

CHAPTER V

CHIVALRIC MASCULINITY IN THE LATER ROMANCE: THE GENDERING OF
SPACE IN *LIBEAUS DESCONUS*

Libeaus Desconus is, in many ways, the direct literary descendant of *Erec et Enide*, but it is a romance often cited and rarely studied. As the most obvious manifestation of the English "fair unknown" romances, it has largely been used to ground or inform studies of thematically related works, such as Malory's "Tale of Gareth," Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, or Chaucer's "Sir Thopas,"¹⁶⁵ and recent critical treatments of *Libeaus Desconus* have been anecdotal or referential, employing the text as a generic standard against which critics measure more popular versions of its theme. Assumptions about what this theme is, however, can be misleading, especially when academic approaches to knighthood, masculine behavior, and violence are undergoing serious reconsideration. This chapter offers a close reading of *Libeaus Desconus* in order to examine the way that it stylizes aristocratic male violence in the formation and maintenance of the protagonist's chivalric masculine identity. Consideration of the way the *Libeaus* stylizes violence makes evident two important points that have been overlooked by previous treatments of the story: first, the story differentiates between violence that is good and beneficial to the larger community and that which is not; and second, this differentiation is anchored in a gendering of physical spaces that depicts both the court and the wilderness as oppositional locations between which masculinity must be balanced. An understanding the nature of this prescribed behavior will help our interpretation of *Libeaus Desconus*, but it will also unearth a connection between

romances that have not traditionally been grouped together and will inform a reading of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" in the next chapter.¹⁶⁶

The previous chapter traced the chivalric ideal proposed by Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*, and suggested that this form of chivalric identity varied from some of the more common forms of masculinity during the period in which Chrétien was writing. While Chrétien does not explicitly assign a terminology to these behaviors, his story argues that association with the court, lasciviousness, passivity, and amorous and amicable behavior are problematic in excess, as is the opposite behavior that is dominant, aggressive, violent, and destructive. Proper behavior for Chrétien's heroes, then, becomes a continual balance of these opposite-but-necessary traits, so that chivalry is an Aristotelian form of virtue, defined as a mean between two excesses.

A group of romances from around the year 1400 seem to be the direct descendants of this model for chivalry in that they rely on and prescribe the same ideal for how chivalry should be constructed and performed. Specifically, these romances contrast the two kinds of behaviors outlined above and often associate these behaviors with physical spaces in symbolically potent ways. Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* is the best known of these later English romances, but a reading of the tale and the way that it constructs gender is specific and exceptional enough that it will be best covered after the discussion of a more representative romance from Chaucer's period.¹⁶⁷ *Libeaus Desconus* is, in many ways, representative of a number of similarly themed later-medieval English romances¹⁶⁸ and, like the French *Le Bel Inconnu* on which it is superficially based, it uses literary material widely from the previous romance tradition, especially the "fair unknown" tradition which includes Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*.¹⁶⁹ *Libeaus Desconus* offers a reinterpretation of

the ideal offered in *Erec et Enide*, and serves as a handy representative of similar English romances from the late fourteenth century (some of which will be touched on later in this chapter).¹⁷⁰ In defining and reinterpreting this ideal model for male behavior, *Libeaus Desconus* uses physical spaces and their connection with either excessively violent or excessively courtly and amorous behavior to describe ideal chivalry in terms of a negotiated balance. Like *Erec et Enide*, *Libeaus Desconus's* concluding episode uses a set of religious symbols that places the act of balancing chivalry into the larger discussion of masculinity in a post-lapsarian world.

The argument that physical spaces can be divided into gendered categories is generally accepted among gender theorists, and Georges Duby and others have made the argument that exterior, masculine spaces, and interior, (largely) feminine spaces define the medieval world.¹⁷¹ We have seen in previous chapters that the reliance on an absolute and universal masculine/feminine binary is overly reductive and generalized, as are the archetypal characteristics drawn from such reliance, and for this reason Duby's argument is problematic, as is any argument that takes the notion of gendered spaces to the level of essentialism. We have also seen, however, that the problems with this binary system are primarily of terminology because the traits that have been assigned to the "masculine v.s. feminine" binary are, for the late-medieval knight, more or less present as excessive expressions of the masculine ideal. In other words, these oppositional traits existed in the minds of late-medieval people, just not as masculine/feminine, but as shades of masculinity. Therefore, we should see that Duby's argument has some merit in that it reveals an ideology of oppositions that was in tied to a categorization of physical space. For example, in *Erec et Enide* Erec foregoes martial behavior to spend all of his time in

bed with his new wife. The failing in his masculine identity results from excessive dalliance in the bedchamber, and his behavior is criticized because of his absence from the exterior space of the tournament field. While a binary view of gender would see this as a feminization that needs correction and reversal by asserting proper masculine behavior, when Erec enters the wilderness his behavior becomes excessively aggressive, martial, and ultimately bestial. The expected traits of the binary system are present (active versus passive, aggressive versus submissive, heterosocial versus homosocial relationships), but Chrétien places masculinity (i.e., the way men should act) as the middle point, the mean, between excessive behaviors. Spatially, the court becomes the apparent balance between these two necessary but excessive court and wilderness locations. Similarly, the *Joi de la court* episode connects the bedchamber and the garden with the type of fighting associated with the wilderness. This connection functions to make the central tension in the story into a more obvious allegory by combining the symbolism of the disparate spaces into one location. The Knight's excessively violent behavior is matched by (and results from) excesses in the opposite direction, represented by the presence of a bed on which a lover sits. When Erec defeats the other knight and frees him from his excessive behavior, he has re-established the court in the place of the bedchamber/wilderness, and has resurrected the balanced mean between the excesses of the world. The symbolic function of the Garden of Eden, therefore, reinforces the notion that without temperance the world would be given over to the excessive urges that result from the Biblical Fall. The amalgamation of bed chamber and wilderness in this final episode neatly ties together the spatial symbolism of excess so that the re-established court can emerge in contrast to the excesses of both settings.

The connection between behavior and space and the resulting gendered identity of the knight involved in the behavior, is most apparent in the later medieval "fair unknown" romances, which have specifically to do with the construction of identity when a knight comes of age. The motif of the fair unknown is most widely defined in romances whose protagonists' identities are unknown until they are revealed at a climactic moment. The revelation of identity usually relies on, and proceeds from, a process of learning and constructing a proper chivalric masculinity through trial and error, and so the fair unknowns are essentially "coming of age" stories. While the fair unknown motif can be applied to other instances of concealment on the part of the protagonist (for example the concealment at tournament of the knight whose identity and chivalry are already established), this dissertation sees the motif primarily as examining the formation of identity for a main character whose male parentage (and therefore masculine identity) is unclear, yet whose beauty and bearing make his nobility and the impending realization of his chivalric identity a foregone conclusion.¹⁷²

The protagonist of the fair unknown romances tends to be raised exclusively by a woman or women, in a space marked by the absence of men and male paternal figures. In *Libeaus Desconus*,¹⁷³ the second stanza gives sole parental authority to the mother of Gyngelayne, the protagonist of the story (also known as "Bewfis" and later known as Libeaus Desconus). It is clear from the following description of their relationship that Gyngelayne is fully in his mother's domain and has never encountered his father or any other significant masculine figure:

Gentyll of body and of face bryght,

Bastard though that he were;
 His moder hym kepte with hir myght
 That he schulde se no knyght
 J-armed in no maner,
 For he was full savage
 And gladly wolde do oute-rage
 To his ffellaves in fere;
 And all for dred of wycke loose
 His moder alwey kepte him close,
 As doughty childe and dere.¹⁷⁴

What is also clear from this passage is the characterization of Gyngelayne in these lines, which focuses on his being "full savage," and on the general fear on his mother's part that he would hurt other boys and/or men if he were to encounter them.

Gyngelayne's relationship with his mother defies the "momma's boy" narrative that a modern audience, with its reliance on the masculine/feminine binary, might assume. Clearly, Gyngelayne's maternal cloistering has resulted in a complication in his masculinity, but this is not a complication that can be resolved according to the bipolar model of a feminized male who needs remasculization. Instead, excessive association with just the maternal space has resulted in a young man who is so out of whack that he is a savage and physically dangerous.

It is important to note that even after Gyngelayne has made his way to the court of Arthur and been made a knight, he has not yet entered the martial space of the exterior

world, where men might interact in violent and aggressive ways. His entrance into the heterosocial world of Arthur's court is a move away from the excessive nature of his upbringing, and there is a completion of his character when he has finally receives the paternal gift of training in arms from his father Gawain. Nevertheless the court is a space governed by amicability and peaceful (even familial) interaction, and as such it cannot serve as the balancing force for his identity, for it is still too close to the maternal space of his mother. As was evident at the conclusion of *Erec et Enide*, the court has the potential to represent a balanced space between the bed chamber and the wilderness, but only for those knights who have already proven their ability to function in both spaces. This is evident upon the arrival of Maid Elene and the accompanying dwarf. Having come to request a knight to free the Lady of Sinadon, Elene rejects Gyngelayne (now called Libeaus Desconus), and accepts him only because Arthur will agree to send no other for the mission. When Elene hears of the decision to send this young, inexperienced knight instead of a knight like Percevel or Gawain,¹⁷⁵ she angrily doubts Libeaus's abilities and denounces Arthur as a result of his choice, saying "for-lorne is thy pryde / And thi lose shentt,¹⁷⁶ when thou wilt send a childe / that is witless and wild..." (lost is your pride/ and your fame destroyed, when you would send a child who is ignorant and wild...)¹⁷⁷ In fact, she continues to criticize Libeaus for the first three days of the journey, and after the episode of the court, it is clear that Libeaus must prove his manhood not only for his own, newly-formed identity, but also to reify (or maybe rectify) the reputation of Arthur and his court. The fact that Elene is able to call into question the masculinity of both Arthur and Libeaus so freely demonstrates that the court, as a place for realized knights to exist, is a temporary and potentially unstable sanctuary. The court

cannot be a permanent resting place because the identity of the knight requires a continued negotiation between excessive behaviors. The tension of the story at this point is that Arthur has gambled his own chivalric identity on the abilities of an unknown. Like the audience, Arthur must sit and wait while the knight (whose parentage and chivalric identity are unknown and unproved) tries to fashion a valid identity through adventures in the wilderness outside of the court.

In the next segment of the story, we find a series of combats against various opponents, all of whom Libeaus defeats. There is an important trend in these combats; a general theme that only becomes apparent when *Libeaus Desconus* is seen as part of the same tradition as *Erec et Enide*. In these stories, there is an escalation of violence and aggression and an increasing reference to beast-like or wild behavior of the protagonist similar to the progression of violence and aggression in *Erec et Enide*. This escalation, clearly criticized in the text as being bad behavior, has been misread by some scholars as a celebration of the excessive behavior rather than a condemnation of it.¹⁷⁸

In his first combat, Libeaus meets William Sellabraunche (or Delaraunche), who has vowed to fight anyone riding past him. This encounter, while completely unrelated to the quest, is immeasurably important for Libeaus because it follows Elene's numerous insults claiming that he will not be up to the task. It serves as the first test of his abilities – the first chance he has of constructing his chivalric identity by showing his ability to function in the martial space of the wilderness. Libeaus performs well in the combat and is victorious, but his and William's attitude before, during, and after the fight informs the way that the episode (and the violence in the episode) should be read. The meeting of the two knights has a kind of ideal, peaceful quality to it, in that it is friendly and courteous

on both sides, especially so on the side of William, the antagonist. For example, when William first sees Libeaus, his greeting is friendly and welcoming. When the two meet William's insistence that Libeaus either fight or give up his armor might seem like highway robbery to the modern audience, but it is important to remember that this is a stereotypical convention of the tournament. It is also stereotypical of chivalric behavior in the wilderness, and is meant to evoke competition and sportsmanship rather than the image of a mugging (which this behavior might suggest in later periods).

Whan he sawe Lybeous with sight
 Agayne him he rod right,
 And seyde, "Well-come, bewfer!
 Whoso ridis here day or nyght,
 He most nedys with me fight,
 Or leven his armes here.

The specific details of the combat combine with William's pleasant and friendly attitude to reinforce the ideal nature of this combat. There are no injuries in the fighting, and (despite some close calls) both combatants emerge from the fighting virtually unscathed.¹⁷⁹ In addition to this non-injurious fighting, throughout the fighting William takes the role of teacher, instructing Libeaus in how this kind of fighting is properly done. For example, Libeaus breaks Willaim's saddle strap when they meet with spears on horseback, knocking him to the ground. After jumping back to his feet, he says:

... "Be my faye,
 Nevyr a-fore this daye
 Ne fonde J non so wyght.
 My stede is nowe agoo:
 Sir, Ffyghte on fote also,
 Yff thou be a gentyll knight."

When William's sword breaks at the conclusion of the combat, there is again a suggestion of didacticism in the way that he asks Libeaus for mercy:

Tho gan William to crye,
 "For loue of Marie,
 On lyve now lett me passe!
 Hit were a grete vylonye
 To do a knyght to dye
 Wepenles in a plasse."

When Libeaus sends the defeated William to serve at Arthur's court, the ideal quality of the combat is reiterated and placed within the stereotypical ideal of earlier romances such as *Erec et Enide* (and many of Chrétien's romances). The assimilation of defeated knights into Arthur's court serves not only to underscore the homosocial bonding that takes place by way of courteous and friendly interaction, but it also connects the individual heroic quest of the knight to the concerns of the state, and mends the

fracture of an imperfect feudalism (i.e., feuding warlords) with the fantasy of a utopian feudalism in which everyone is strictly bound in tiers of homosocial service towards the monarch or overlord.

In Libeaus's second encounter, a drastic difference in tone is immediately evident. Whereas William Sellabraunche had met the young knight with a cheerful greeting, these knights, having already sworn to break apart his hauberk,¹⁸⁰ shout "Traytor, torne agayne and fight, / or leve here thi renoun!" (traitor, turn and fight, / or leave here your reknown).¹⁸¹ This more aggressive tone is suggestive of the devolution towards aggressive and hurtful violence that occurs in *Erec et Enide* (as discussed in the last chapter). Also like the escalation of aggressive violence in *Erec*, Libeaus's actions result in suffering and pain in a way that the first combat did not. Gower – the first of the knights to ride against Libeaus, is hit so hard that his thigh is so shattered that "evyr after [he] was lame."¹⁸² Then Libeaus, in an act much more aggressive than in the earlier encounter, holds him down while he groans in pain so that the dwarf can take away his horse.¹⁸³ The two remaining brothers then team up on Libeaus and succeed in giving him a head injury, and the combat ends with Libeaus grabbing the middle brother and throwing him so that he breaks his arm, after which the youngest brother concedes, made afraid by the violent spectacle of his brother's injury.

As Libeaus moves further and further from the home of his mother and from Arthur's court, the fighting in which he is involved becomes more aggressive, hurtful, and injurious. In Libeaus's third encounter, he faces a duo of giants. While the giantish nature of these assailants will be covered more fully below, it suffices here to overlook their physicality and merely map the details of the fighting in order to continue the

discussion. The absence of amicability in the second fight in comparison with the first becomes much more pronounced in this fight, and the violence progresses away from "friendly" fighting, towards a much more injurious and aggressive model. While Libeaus's fight against the three knights had shown none of the friendly interaction evident in the combat against William Sellabraunche, there had been verbal interaction of some kind, whereas with the giants Libeaus makes no attempt to engage verbally, and the interaction is purely physical. Furthermore, the outcome of this fight represents an extreme stage in the devolution towards wild and aggressive behavior. The result of the first fight (with William) – that an unaligned knight is incorporated into the political system, vitalizing the feudal hierarchy and mending a fractured homosocial system – is accomplished without suffering or injury. Libeaus's second fight yields the same political result, but the encounter leaves one man with a broken thigh and a second with a broken arm. These injuries, combined with their aggressive and angry interaction with Libeaus, complicate the beneficial results of the violence and suggest a less seamless mending of the political system and homosocial order than was evident in the first encounter. In his fight against the giants, all thought of a beneficial result is forgotten, as, without word of challenge or greeting, he rides at them and "the Blacke Giaunte can to smertt, / thorough lounge, and hert, / that neuer after can rysse."¹⁸⁴

The fight that follows between Libeaus and the second (red) giant is also brutal, and the events suggest a much more extreme and injurious version of Libeaus's earlier fights. When the giant's weapon breaks, we are reminded of the breaking of William's sword which ended that encounter. Instead of a peaceful ending here, however, the giant grabs a tree to use it as a weapon.¹⁸⁵ When, at the end of the fighting, Libeaus strikes the

giant's arm, the result is not a breakage as in the second fight, but the brutal severing of the appendage. Instead of this injury leading to the surrender of the injured combatant, Libeaus swiftly and wordlessly beheads his opponent in an act that would seem unnecessarily final and barbarically cruel if not for the monstrous nature of the victim.

This literal monstrosity (they are, after all, not human) is important here, because the increasingly violent depiction of Libeaus is not of an inappropriately violent man, nor is it an outright condemnation of extreme and aggressive violence. The narrator tells us, in fact, that when Libeaus rides up and unceremoniously impales the first giant, he is acting "be right assyse"¹⁸⁶ (with good judgment). Neither can we blame Libeaus for his more violent and excessive response to the three knights of the second encounter, for they themselves set the tone for the combat and, by fighting three against one, are the instigators of a combat less courtly than that of their uncle William.¹⁸⁷ Instead of outright condemnation, the fading amicability and the gradual loss of beneficial homosocial relations in this sequence of encounters seems to become more pronounced the further the knight travels from his mother's home and the very *locus* of homosocial amicability: Arthur's court. The devolution towards excessiveness, however justified by the surroundings and the circumstances, complicates Libeaus's identity because it threatens to spiral out of control from the restrained and more or less peaceful violence in the first encounter. While Libeaus might be acting "be right assyse," it is clear that he is acting with a growing excessiveness, and that the end results of this devolution threaten a complete loss of control.

The characterization of the combatants mirrors this progression towards excess and unrestrained violence. The three knights of the second combat, in their anger and by

their invective, are markedly more aggressive and bellicose than their uncle William, whose friendliness and didactic role as knight/teacher had characterized the first fight. The giants, then, are the hyperbolic expression of this progression, as they are so aggressive and bellicose that they are literally monstrous. Their monstrosity manifests in a general language of extremes – they are respectively completely red and completely black of hue, they are repeatedly described as "grimme and grise," and the rusticity of their encampment seems to be a wild and savage opposite to Arthur's court. The weapons of the giant who engages Libeaus enforce this image, as Libeaus weathers blows from a cooking spit (with a half-cooked boar still skewered¹⁸⁸) until it breaks, at which point his assailant assaults him with the uprooted tree mentioned above.¹⁸⁹

It is important that we see here the general trend towards a violence that is extreme, unrestrained, and hurtful and that this trend is also evident in the bellicosity and aggressiveness of the combatants, but it is also important that we see that this move towards excess is also a move towards wilderness and wild and monstrous opponents. As the fighting becomes more aggressive, both the opponents *and* Libeaus himself are increasingly referred to with animalistic imagery: he becomes "egre as a lioun" in this fight, the animal simile only seeing use when he is fighting monstrous opponents (670). Perhaps more telling than the seemingly flattering simile of the lion is the repeated and increasing descriptions of one or both of the combatants as acting without reason. We can rely on our twenty-first century associations with this descriptor of being "really angry" or acting frantically, but we first have to situate these associations in the cultural framework that the medieval audience of the romance would have brought to the text.

It is likely that medieval opinions on science, nature, and mental/physical health were as varied then as they are today, and any discussion of "the way medieval people thought" must be preceded by a caveat that specificity in terms of class and sub-culture are necessary for the discussion to have any meaning at all. The discussion of medieval *mentalité* is slightly easier in our case, however, because it is likely the late medieval literate audience would be influenced in their understanding of the world by a university-based Aristotelian mode of thinking.¹⁹⁰

Under the model of the triune relationship that emerges from the university tradition (as discussed in the previous chapter), the spirit is the point of contact between the soul (the source of reason and thought) and the body, and the medium through which the former exerts control over the latter. This interaction is more significant than it at first seems, because the soul is likened to God in this model and the body comes to represent those qualities that are temporal, temporary, and ultimately animalistic unless governed properly by the soul. Lewis (whose example of the soul I have relied on above and in the previous chapter) also notes that all objects of the medieval world could be divided into four categories: those things that have existence only, such as stones and sand, those that have existence and growth, such as plants, those that have existence, growth and sensation, such as animals, and finally those that have existence, growth, sensation and reason.¹⁹¹ Humans, because they have a rational soul, exist in the final category, and through the spirit the rational soul is able to control animalistic qualities – in other words, reason is what separates human beings from animals and animalistic urges.¹⁹²

There is also the prevailing ideology that, because the rational soul is eternal (made, in fact, of the same kind of material as God) the urges of the human body and a concentration on temporal matters interferes with the pursuit of the divine and the eternal.¹⁹³ The medieval scholastic notion of health is centered on the maintaining a balance between opposing humoric urges, each excessive in its own right. Medicine and proper diet are meant to accomplish this physically, but mentally the process of balances is more generally linked to ascetic attempts to resist the temporal world and to rely on rational faculties to elevate oneself above the basic urges of animals. This is a distinctly Boethian flavor to the model that I have been referring to as Aristotelian, but the integration of Boethius into the popular scholastic tradition is evident not only in the writings of Chaucer (as will be discussed more fully in the next chapter), but also in the continual presence of Boethius in vernacular literary circles throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁹⁴

The association between acting without reason (out of "witte") and acting like an animal (in a negative sense) illuminates our reading of the first three combative encounters of Libeaus Desconus. These encounters provide the reader with a continual redefinition of violence and combat, placing this redefinition into an Aristotelian/Boethian model of virtue in which excess, however necessary for the temporal aims of the actual fight, carries with it a sense of spiraling out of control, a failing in the faculty of reason to control the animalistic urges and maintain an identity that is virtuous *because* of its temperance and moderation. While we, as the audience, see that the fighting is necessary in the first three fights, we also see that Libeaus's aggression is becoming more and more unchecked in response to the increasing

aggressiveness (and monstrosity) of his opponents. The complication to the plot is not whether Libeaus should be acting this way, but instead whether or not, and in what way, he will be able to establish the virtuous mean after such behavior.

Libeaus's next adventure seems different in nature, as it is located in the less-wild space of the court of the knight called Giffroun. This space only serves to underscore the excessiveness that Libeaus is now immersed in, however, especially because the episode is almost parodic of what audiences might expect. The encounter is reminiscent of the *Joi de la Court* episode in the *Erec et Enide*, particularly in the finality of the challenge (Giffroun will kill anyone who tries to compare his lady to Giffroun's, and the heads of previous challengers decorate his castle).¹⁹⁵ In contrast to the friendly greeting of William Sellabraunche in the first combat, Libeaus's and Gyffroun's attitudes are aggressive and harsh. Gyffroun greets him with "lowed...crye" in a "vaise sharpe and shille," demanding why he has come, and Libeaus answers that he has "grete delyte" to fight against him.¹⁹⁶ The stakes in this combat are higher (death and beheading) than in previous fights, and the fighting is described in the same kind of excessive language that combines the idea of acting wildly, acting animalistically, and acting witless and without rational thought. The end of the fight comes abruptly and unromantically, as Libeaus weathers Gyffroun's blows until he throws him down, breaking his back. The contrasts between this event and the seemingly similar *Joi de la Court* episode of Chrétien's *Erec and Enide* are telling and suggest an intentional shift from the expectations of proper behavior in this kind of encounter. In the *Joi de la Court*, the end of the combat is ideal in the same way that Libeaus's first combat with William is: the homosocial order is mended, and violence becomes the judicial tool by which instability in that order is

corrected. Erec and his opponent become close friends after the fighting, their ladies form amicable bonds (even discovering that they are related), and joy abounds amongst the inhabitants of the castle. At the end of Libeaus's combat, Gyffroun's back is broken, and he is carried from the field amid the "reuthefull rowne" ("sad whispering") of his people.¹⁹⁷ The aggressive violence of this fight matches the fight with the giants, but in this encounter Libeaus directs this aggression not against monstrous giants, but towards another knight who could have been assimilated rather than maimed. This is also the first fight that wasn't necessary for any reason; William barred his way in the first fight, the three knights set upon him in the second, and the Giants of the third held hostage a maiden who required rescuing. In the adventure with Gyffroun Libeaus is driven by his desire to fight, despite the advice of the Dwarf who accompanies him:

"Thou dost a savage dede,
 for any man j-borne!
 Thow wilt not do by rede
 But faryst with thi madd-hede
 As lorde that will be lorne.
 For his loue forthe we wende
 That died for all mankynde
 And Bedlem was borne!"¹⁹⁸

The dwarf's accusations combine the notion of wild behavior (the "savage dede") with madness ("madhede") because Libeaus will not avoid Gyffroun's castle, reiterating

again that Libeaus's excessive violence comes at the expense of rational thought. The dwarf's accusations go further, in fact, and cite Libeaus's lack of reason in the context of divine will, so that failing to act according to reason is a failure to follow the example of Christ. However necessary the first three fights are, this episode shows that Libeaus is unable to correct, temper, and control his growing aggression.

Libeaus's next encounter takes this theme to an extreme. In the first three encounters Libeaus's behavior becomes more excessive in each successive combat, but his excesses seem to match the excessive behavior of those whom he must fight. In the fourth encounter (above), his opponent's excesses match his own, but he seeks out the fight and leaves the community worse than when he arrived, so that his victory accomplishes the opposite of what the audience expects of proper chivalric behavior. Libeaus's next encounter begins when, after hearing hunting horns, he, the lady and the dwarf see a brachet¹⁹⁹ which the lady admires. Libeaus catches it and gives it to her, after which Otis, the brachet's owner, arrives from his hunting and politely asks for it back. In the verbal exchange that follows, Otis's friendly demeanor is contrasted against that of Libeaus, who has become verbally aggressive and threatening, refusing to return the brachet (which clearly belongs to Otis) and then calling him a "chorle" for asking persistently.²⁰⁰ After going to arm himself and gather his men, Otis returns to fight against the dognapping Libeaus. When they meet, the imagery simultaneously characterizes Libeaus as animalistic (now he is depicted as the beast of the hunt), and as a devil, furthering the image of Libeaus acting against the wishes of God. The fact that this extremely violent encounter takes place as a result of Libeaus refusal to return a small dog underscores the excessiveness of his behavior.

And ther [Libeaus] boldly abode.
 As avauntors proude in pryde,
 With bowes and arblast,
 They shotten to him faste
 And made hym woundis wyde.
 Syr Libeaus stede ranne
 And bare downe hors and man,
 For nothing wolde he spare.
 All men sayde than,
 "This is the devyll Satan,
 that mankynde will forfare."
 For whomso Lybeous araught
 At his fyrst drawght,
 He slepte for euer-more;
 But sone he was be-sette,
 As dere is in the nette,
 With grymly woundis sore.²⁰¹

The language takes a more drastic turn than we have seen previously, as now Libeaus is described as animalistic and crazy. In the stanzas following, he is continually described as "wode" and "mad of mode," and during the fight his sword breaks and he takes up an ax to fight with, suggestive of the rusticity of the earlier giants. When at last

Otis tries to flee he is caught, yields to Libeaus, and is sent to Arthur. While we finally see here the courtly convention of a surrender that increases and solidifies the homosocial order, the convention is complicated and problematized by the death of three of Otis's men, and the fact that all of Otis's men were under the assumption that they were defending themselves against Arthur and his knight,²⁰² so that the resolution of the combat suggests a political order of conquest and dominance. The fact that Otis has been forced to give over all of his possessions, including castle and lands, only furthers this inversion of the courtly convention and effectively transforms Libeaus from dog-thief to full-fledged robber-knight.

Libeaus's next combat serves the same purpose as those which came before and demonstrates how excessive and imbalanced Libeaus has become by pairing him with his mirror image – Libeaus is the knight-become monster, and his opponent the monster-heathen become knight, whose courtly clothing is a mockery because it cannot mask his monstrosity. The brutal life-and-death struggle that results can only be seen in terms of its bestiality and excessiveness, especially because, at this point, the quest has been completely forgotten. Libeaus's distraction from his mission (for which the dwarf chastises him) is now his whole identity – a robber knight who is bent on defending his captured land. Literally this is a failure in his duty to Arthur, who has staked his reputation on Libeaus's ability to complete the quest, but this failure is symbolically significant for the question of chivalry and masculinity. The quest represents Libeaus's ability to claim and maintain a proper chivalric identity, and the devolution in the story links excessive behavior with distraction from this quest, once again connecting temperance with chivalry.

The first three fights devolve towards excessive violence and suggest that the further Libeaus ventures into the wilderness the more violent, injurious, and aggressive his fighting and interaction become. It is also clear that the increased animal imagery that surrounds the description of Libeaus and his opponents is accompanied by a more general description of them acting without reason. There is a sense, though, that this fighting is necessary, either (in the case of William and his nephews) because they bar the way towards his goal or (in the case of the giants) because fighting is morally necessary. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth fights the fighting ceases to be necessary, which brings Libeaus's devolution towards aggression to the point of villainy.

Many scholars analyzing violence in the Middle Ages use evidence such as this to argue that chivalry (along with other regulatory social structures) serves to control the violence that was ubiquitous in late medieval life.²⁰³ Clearly, the escalation of violence in Libeaus Desconus *does* seem to be regulated by the laws of chivalry, and the seat of chivalry – namely Arthur's court - seems to be the locus for the regulatory power of chivalry, especially because the presence of the court and Libeaus's ability to send defeated knights there instead of killing them is the most constant force limiting the injuries that Libeaus is willing to inflict (i.e., it allows/forces Libeaus Desconus *not* to kill and provides a chivalric convention under which his not killing makes him a better knight, and therefore a better man than if he had killed his opponent). The apparent truth in this view of chivalry and violence is, however, too simplistic when dealing with the way that violence, gender, and identity interact, because it relies on an implicit assumption that knights (and perhaps *men* in general) will inherently incline towards violent behavior, and that this unilateral urge towards violent, aggressive behavior is the natural state of

men. As we have seen previously in this dissertation, however, the model for masculine behavior does not seem to follow the idea of unilateral urges towards extreme expressions of identity. The first example of this is the very beginning of *Libeaus Desconus*, which finds Libeaus with a faulty, incomplete masculinity because he has never known a man. Our modern expectation that Libeaus would therefore act "like a woman" and be feminized is completely off-target as we learn that this failing results in an overly wild, aggressive male who is physically dangerous. Over-exposure to women does not feminize, it puts masculinity out of balance and therefore makes it bestial. The episode following Libeaus's fight with the heathen giant is perhaps a more clear example that the excessiveness that chivalric masculinity is prone to is not just martial and aggressive, but also amorous, courtly, and sexually indulgent. Immediately after fighting the heathen giant Libeaus meets Dame Amoure,²⁰⁴ and, falling under her various sorceries, he literally forgets his quest for the Lady of Sinadoun and spends the next twelve or more months under her influence in her excessively amorous court.²⁰⁵

This situation, of course, varies from Erec's excessive dalliance with Enide as discussed in the previous chapter (Erec was in love and Enide was neither a sorceress, nor an antagonist), but the similarities are important in terms of how the hero is constructing and maintaining his masculine identity (or failing to do so). Generally speaking, both Erec and Libeaus are characterized in terms of excessive behavior, and while the most apparent of these excesses is the continuing devolution towards aggressive, injurious violence that happens as both knights venture into the wilderness, they both also demonstrate excessive behavior towards women, amorousness, and the courtly, non-violent (non-wilderness) space. The two stories also share a similarity in their endings, in

the sense that the thematic message of both stories argues for the maintenance of a balanced chivalric identity that combines behavior that is martial and aggressive with behavior that is courtly and amicable and/or amorous. As discussed in the previous chapter, the end of *Erec et Enide* finds Erec freeing his symbolic double from a hyperbolic representation of his own excesses; Maboagrins was locked by his own promise into an excessive cycle of extreme injurious violence (killing any knights who approached him and putting their heads on stakes) and extreme amorous dalliance, personified by the presence of the bed and his lover right next to the location of his violent excesses. The placement of the adventure in the garden is clearly an allusion to the garden of Eden, and this makes Erec's interruption of the cycle even more significant because it links the avoidance of excess and the notion of a balanced chivalry with a larger theological discussion of the way that excessive behavior interferes with faith. At the end of the story we are left with the suggestion that proper chivalric masculinity, by encouraging balance and avoiding excesses, frees one from the animalistic urges of the world and allows one to focus on less temporal matters. Proper masculinity, in other words, is a corrective for Adam's fall, an event which might be considered to be the first lapse in masculinity, a lapse towards excesses and away from reason.

The end of *Libeaus Desconus*, while different in the character and nature of the events, serves the same thematic purpose as the end of *Erec et Enide*. Libeaus's final adventure comes when he must enter a castle in which two clerks are holding the Lady of Sinadoun captive. The presence of clerks as the antagonists excuses Libeaus from the courtly conventions of knightly violence because they have no claim to chivalry and could never be assimilated into the chivalric order of Arthur. This is especially the case

because the episode serves as an allegory for Eden, and the clerks represent the serpent/devil, responsible for the corruption and sexualization of Eve. After defeating the two clerks Libeaus sits to rest and a worm/dragon comes out of the stones in the wall and moves toward him. Libeaus is unable to defend himself against the dragon who, contrary to the stereotypical knight-against-dragon narrative that we might expect, kisses him on the mouth. This kiss triggers a transformation so that the dragon turns back into the Lady of Sinadoun, and we learn that her curse was to have been dispelled if she could kiss Gawain or one of his kin. Thus the fair unknown is made into the fair known, and the hero's paternity is established. The worm/dragon is suggestive of Eden in the sense that worms, dragons, and snakes are conflated in the medieval taxonomy, and because the sexual nature of the lady's imprisonment and the nature of her attack on Libeaus represents Eve's role in the fall. The climactic moment of seduction, however, is reversed as the seductress is purified, and upon her transformation her nakedness is covered. The castle where she is held – so different from the garden that held the *Joi de la court* - serves the same narrative function in that it is a locus of sexually excessive behavior and is described in terms of excessive decoration, minstrels playing, and a general description of setting completely opposite from the space of the wilderness. Symbolically, then, both Erec and Libeaus, in acting as a corrective for the fall, save Eve from her own sexualization and reinstate Mary with their chivalric doctrine of temperance.

The thematic connection between Chrétien's early romance and this relatively late romance is not exceptional, for the prescription for proper chivalric masculinity found in these stories and the thematic ending that they offer is common in a body of romances throughout the high and late Middle Ages. These romances by no means represent all

constructions of chivalric masculinity from the period, nor even those of the romance tradition, but instead suggest a significant movement within the genre of romance to define masculinity in terms of a negotiated balance between two oppositional and excessive poles.

Ad Putter notes the presence of an important debate in chivalric literature between warlike knights and those who are peaceful, whom he suggests were open to the charge of effeminacy. Putter's category of the peaceful knight conflates with the idea of the "courtly knight" (a term he uses to interchangeably with the "pacified knight"), and the qualities that he assigns to this figure are closely associated with the court and interaction with women.²⁰⁶ Likewise, his category of the warlike knight conflates all fighting with aggression, contrasting "aggressive fighters" against "elegant talkers,"²⁰⁷ and underscoring the warrior-knight's rejection of the court and courtly interaction. While Putter's study unearths significant trends in the rhetoric of effeminacy in chivalric literature, his model for male behavior is rooted in bipolar thinking, and misses or obscures those romances that posit male behavior between these poles. For example, he cites Chrétien's *Conte du Graal* and *Wigalois*, in which the protagonist's mother tries to keep him from the world of men, fearing for his safety. Putter reads the protagonist's departure and rejection of the maternal space as evidence of the "age-old connections between aggression and masculinity, and passivity and femininity."²⁰⁸ What follows in these two romances, however, is very similar to what happens in *Libeaus Desconus*, whose protagonist leaves his mother in precisely the same way: The knight leaves the maternal space of his mother (which Putter is associating here with the court), but then becomes too aggressive and destructive and cannot complete his quest until he integrates

into his identity the behaviors that he had too vigorously rejected. By casting this debate in the terms of the contrasting locations of the wilderness and the court, *Libeaus Desconus* prescribes a type of masculinity that negotiates between the sides of Putter's debate, so that the hero is defined by his ability to incorporate both behaviors, while committing to neither.

The theme of the "fair unknown" romances rests in a hero whose identity is unknown, but more specifically in a hero whose paternity is under question, both literally, in the sense that he does not know the identity of an absentee father, and symbolically in the sense that there is no one to instruct him in how to become a man or a knight. The hero's quest is a search not only for his real identity, but also for his masculinity, the first step of which is a move away from the female-dominated space of his mother's home. This move takes the hero (by way of the court) into the wilderness where there is the real danger of injurious and unrestrained interaction. As we have already seen with *Erec et Enide* to some degree but also in the general cultural shifts of the later tournament, however, the depiction of chivalry as a balance between excessive poles can be the driving force in narratives whose plot varies from the strict definition of the fair unknown. This perception of chivalric masculinity describes a heroic identity as a negotiation between wilderness and court, between field of combat and bed chamber, and between the oppositional urges that are tied to these physical places and are characterized by excess. This more general perception of chivalry leads to more specific and gendered readings of the romances that use the fair unknown motif, but it also allows for important similarities to be unearthed between romances that have traditionally seemed unrelated. For example, romances such as *Generides*, and *Sir Triamour* (all dating from around the

same period as *Libeaus Desconus*) could only loosely be classified as the fair unknown romances (along with the generally accepted English fair unknowns: Sir Percival, Sir Degare and Ywain and Gawain²⁰⁹), but thematically they are very similar to *Libeaus Desconus*. Furthermore, they are also thematically related to romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* and *Sir Gowther*, which would not normally be seen as fair unknown romances. The brief readings of these romances below are meant to draw connections between *Libeaus Desconus* and a number of other contemporary romances, and to establish the presence of this model of chivalry in the literary context of Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale."

Generides follows the general model of the fair unknown, depicting the space of the home and the court as excessively and negatively feminized by the cuckolding of the king, who ultimately has to flee and enters exile because the cuckoldry ultimately turns into outright treason. Generides, raised by his mother (a forgotten, one-time mistress of the exiled king) without the presence of his father, follows the theme of the fair unknown, in this case correcting the excessiveness of his father's court and reuniting a more balanced nuclear family. *Sir Triamour* also follows the paradigm of the fair unknown, in that the hero is raised by his mother, and, like Generides, his coming of age is meant to unite the nuclear family, wrecked because of the excessively amorous desires of Marrock (whose death when attacked by the family's pet dog suggests a kind of good dog vs. bad dog discussion of service and animalistic urges). Again here the main issue is the contrast between the excessive court and the aggressive and combative space outside the court, the hero being an agent to restore order and temperance to both spaces.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the giant (as Bertilak) serves such an important didactic role for Gawain, because his monstrosity functions as the aggression and martial ability that is lacking from the court of Arthur. When the Green Knight enters Arthur's hall it is clear that he is at once associated with wilderness and the space outside the court in an excessive way. It becomes evident, however, that the presence of the Green Knight, while definitely threatening to the protagonist, is not a dangerous presence for the larger society. Instead, his monstrosity is symbolic of the element of male behavior conspicuously absent from the long description of the court at the beginning of the story; an element of male behavior that Gawain (standing for the knights of the court) has forgotten and which he can only learn at the dangerous end of an axe. Throughout the story, violence and aggression are almost completely absent on the part of Gawain, and where mentioned they are so brief as to be entirely insignificant.²¹⁰ Instead, depictions of Gawain continually characterize him as unable and/or unwilling to participate in the aggressive behavior of the wilderness. Avoiding the hunt,²¹¹ for example, he is the passive partner in amorous play in the bed chamber and is submissive to Bertilak's dominant hospitality. In this way, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is thematically the same as the fair unknown romances – the hero starts in a space that is excessively courtly, opulent, and even decadent - a decadence (not unlike the clerks' castle at the conclusion of *Libeaus*) that has an obviously deleterious effect on the martial ability of the knights of the court, as no knight will take up the Green Knight's challenge. The lack of martial orientation in the court is most obvious upon the entrance of the Green Knight, whose symbolic presence as wilderness would be monstrous if it weren't in such short demand at Arthur's court. Many romances begin with a hunt episode, which,

by putting the knights into the space of the wilderness, serves to counter-balance their courtly behavior and their dalliance with ladies. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the opulence of the court lacks this counterbalance and the wilderness, in the symbolic form of the Green Knight, has to come to them.

The fact that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* seems to articulate the theme of moderated chivalry in such a nuanced way suggests that a chivalric identity based on balance was the subject of an ongoing discussion that relied on a set of symbols to tell stories that ultimately have very little to do with the fair unknowns, while still prescribing or critically discussing the construction of chivalric masculinity using the same theoretical caliper. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, for example, has very little to do with the standard plot of the fair unknown romances but has a thematic relevance to it in that it is a story essentially about excesses. The Carle is excessively aggressive, rash, and bellicose. Similar to the Green Knight, he represents the monstrosity of the wilderness, but he is worse because he is unable to be moderate or to employ his reason (unlike the Green Knight, who becomes Bertilak when the need arises in order to teach his lesson to Gawain). While the modern (and possibly the medieval) audiences of the story expect Gawain to initiate violence against this obviously monstrous giant (and so solve the problem in a stereotypical way), Gawain's behavior is just the opposite, and he reacts passively and submissively to the giant, whose monstrous and bestial nature is represented by the actual beasts that serve as his pets (a lion, a boar, a bear, and a bull). The story ends with Gawain beheading the Carle, but only hesitantly and at the command of the Carle himself (so that even this seemingly aggressive act is recast as submissiveness). Nevertheless, after the beheading we learn that Gawain, through his

obedience, has freed the Carle from a curse very similar to that of the imprisoned knight at the end of *Erec et Enide*, for the Carle was forced to kill any visitors who would not obey him. The curse forced the Carle to act excessively and in defiance of reason or rational behavior, and his excessively martial personality was only corrected by the Gawain's behavior; excessive in the opposite direction.

A clear demonstration of the malleability of this general model for chivalry in the late-medieval romance is the almost complete inversion of the fair unknown motif in the romance *Sir Gowther*. If the fair unknown romances negotiate the masculinity of the hero in terms of a move from the female-dominated space of the home (with the father and his influence absent) through the amicable and homosocial space of the court to the ultimately aggressive and violent space of the wilderness, the character of Gowther can be considered an *unfair known*, in the sense that his paternity is certain from the beginning (his father is a devil and he is told this), and knowledge of this paternity drives the hero's movement out of the aggressive, violent space (albeit of his own making) into the court, where he accepts his own monstrosity by taking on the submissive role of one of the lord's hounds. His project is like that of Erec, Libeaus, Triamour, or Generides in that he must learn the proper ways to engage in both violent and courtly relationships, but he does this by starting as a monster, and learning how to channel and direct his aggressive and violent energy in socially laudable ways (i.e., towards the heathen enemy).²¹²

The construction of chivalric identity that relies on negotiated balance more than on excess (as in the case of most chivalric epics) suggests a model for masculinity that is situated firmly in a philosophical tradition. These romances recast chivalry as a kind of

Aristotelian virtue, celebrating the temperate mean between two excesses. Stronger, perhaps, than the Aristotelian nature of the ideal prescribed by these stories is the connection to medieval cosmology in general, which relied heavily on a notion of balance to define an ideal state, as in humoral philosophy and astrology. The interrelatedness of Boethian, Aristotelian, humoral, and astrological models suggests that these romances are taking part in a literary discussion not only regarding chivalry or masculinity but also regarding the way that these two structures function in a more inclusive cosmology. It is with this larger project in mind that we must approach Chaucer's romance "The Knight's Tale.

CHAPTER VI

MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE IN CHAUCER'S *KNIGHT'S TALE*

Lois Roney, voicing an opinion shared by many Chaucerians, suggests that Chaucer's stories tend to be more philosophically oriented than contemporary narratives. Chaucer's works, she argues, are a "scholastic inquiry into universal human nature, into the structuring of its faculties and the activities of its mind."²¹³ This is an important point, but the project of using scholastic philosophy to explain or examine human experience does not, as we have seen in previous chapters, belong to Chaucer alone. Instead, what we have found is that some chivalric romances were a site for the popularization of scholastic philosophy. In fact, one of the major intellectual pursuits of the later Middle Ages seems to have been the continual assimilation and integration of classical and early-medieval learning (philosophy, medicine, astrology, etc.) into a universal cosmology that could account not only for human nature, but for *natura* in the abstract, for the movement of objects in the world and in the heavens, and for an explanation of divinity that would not be counterintuitive to this system. Chaucer's fluency with the literary genres of the period can be seen as an expression of this project of integration and assimilation, especially in the constant reliance on astrology, natural science, and Boethian philosophy that cuts across the generic lines of his work. In "The Knight's Tale" Chaucer relies on the ideal of balanced and moderated behavior discussed in previous chapters and places this theme into a cosmology that is thoroughly Boethian. This chapter seeks to trace Chaucer's integration of Aristotelian chivalry and Boethian philosophy and to examine

the ways in which this integration informs masculine behavior and the depiction of male, knightly violence.

It is clear that Chaucer was strongly influenced by Boethian philosophy – not only because of his Middle English translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, but also because the ideology of *The Consolation* serves as a recurring theme in so much of his writing. In *The House of Fame*, for example, the ephemeral nature of fame and renown restates a Boethian warning against pursuing and trusting in the random praise of the temporal world. This attitude is also reiterated by a number of Chaucer's short poems. Lines 15-21 of "Truth," for example, read as follows:

That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse;
 The wrasting for this world axeth a fal.
 Her is non hoom, her nis but wilderness:
 Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
 Know thy contree, look up, thank god of al;
 Hold the heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede,
 And trowth thee shal delivere, it is no drede.²¹⁴

The emphasis on looking upwards, and holding to the "heye wey" is connected to the cosmological scheme that Lewis details in *The Discarded Image*, in which the soul is continually trying to move upwards towards God (an inclination resulting from a similarity of makeup or, for Chaucer, of "kynde"), who exists beyond the planetary spheres. Upon the death of the physical body the soul is free to ascend towards its kind,

leaving behind the changeability of the temporal world.²¹⁵ The final stanzas of *Troilus and Criseyde* also rely on a Boethian worldview as Troilus's soul ascends to the eighth sphere and he laughs at the world below him.²¹⁶ The poem "Fortune" again reiterates this message, stating in first few lines:

This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,
 As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,
 Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun
 Governed is by Fortune's errour.
 But natheles, the lak of hir favour
 Ne may nat don me singen though I dye,
Jay tout perdu mon temps et mon labour;
 For finally, Fortune, I thee defye.

While Benson's commentary attributes this image of Fortune directly to Boethius because it takes the form of a complaint,²¹⁷ it is important to note that Boethius is often difficult to cite directly because the cultural presence of the images and themes of his *Consolation* is so widespread in later medieval and Renaissance art and literature that Boethius's actual text becomes more and more removed as a direct source. Walter Clyde Curry writes that a direct assignment of any source is difficult for Chaucer because he was working so firmly within a cultural context that was involved in commenting on, integrating and assimilating previous thinkers. Curry argues, for example, that Chaucer's perception of humoral philosophy was perhaps first arranged by Galen, but whether

Chaucer encountered it there or in any of the other writers he cites (such as Constantinus Africanus and Gilbertus Anglicus) is, for him, "manifestly impossible to determine."²¹⁸ In the same way, the idea of Fortune as an embodied deity who makes chance or luck govern the sub-lunar world is so accepted in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance that when, in the sixteenth century, Albrecht Dürer depicts Fortune as a woman balancing uneasily on a ball²¹⁹ it is impossible (and unnecessary) to attribute the image directly to a reading of Boethius. Chaucer's direct reliance on a Boethian base text is more probable because of his translation *Boece*, but references in this chapter to Boethian thinking should be understood to apply to the larger cultural notions that, while Boethian in the sense that they have the same philosophical underpinnings, are not meant to suggest a direct reference to the *Consolation of Philosophy* in every instance.²²⁰

As we have seen in previous chapters, ideal male behavior in chivalric romances is tied to the avoidance of excess. This view of chivalry is clearly related to Boethian notions of cosmology, in that excessive behavior in romances is often depicted in terms of over-indulgence in worldly desires or concerns: namely aggressive fighting or pleasures of the court. The theme of the *Consolation of Philosophy* is that the temporal world, subject to the random turning of Fortune's wheel, is undependable and always subject to change. In this kind of world, the only consolation is the understanding of this rule and the knowledge that permanence can only be found in the super-lunary world of God. According to this worldview, the divine is the true home of the human soul and above the influence of Fortune's random influence – humans are therefore separate from animals, which have no souls and therefore no escape from the urges and randomness of the temporal world. Concentration on this permanence (in other words the attention to

God that results from the awareness that the world cannot offer any lasting solace) can only be possible when the temptations of the world are understood as distractions to be avoided. The knight of the romance, then, is able to avoid the urges towards excessive behavior because of an understanding that excess is a distraction from truth, a distraction that appeals to that part of us that is unreasoning and animalistic. When Chaucer writes in the Poem "Truth," "Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse: / Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!" he is (aside from punning on his friend Philip de la Vache's name – Vache translates as "cow") calling for the reader to avoid being bestial or monstrous and, by doing so, to direct attention and spiritual movement (a pilgrimage) upwards towards God and heaven, and away from the temporal world. The religious overtones of this message are also often present in chivalric romances, placing religious awakening or epiphany at that moment when a balance between courtly and martial behaviors is achieved. Chrétien construes a balanced chivalric identity as the precedent for religious epiphany or maturity. This is evident not only in Erec's role as a savior from the excessiveness of the symbolic Eden (and to a lesser degree in his ascendance to kingship), but also (perhaps more clearly) in *Yvain* and especially in *Perceval*, whose ultimately religious story is only able to occur after Perceval has learned to temper his amorous and martial energies, which are completely out of balance during his youth. The idea of religious awareness as the ideal male state fits generally into the questing episodes of romances, as the knight's quest for the grail becomes a quest for viable and validated masculine identity. What is common in these episodes is that the knight will have a post-grail moment, in which he is able to project his learning onto the wider community, teaching them the proper ideal for male behavior. In "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer denies

the reader religious epiphany, and there is no post-grail moment for either of the protagonists of the tale, nor is there one for the slightly more marginal figure of Theseus. This difference has prompted scholars to attribute the somber, cheerless tone of the tale to its pagan setting,²²¹ but the veil of pagan antiquity is thin enough in Chaucer's work that he easily discusses Christian themes regardless of setting. The somber, un-cathartic ending of the tale should be seen as intentionally Boethian, because by denying the reader the post-grail moment Chaucer suggests that perfection in human nature is essentially unattainable in a world characterized by the random turning of Fortune's wheel. The protagonists of "The Knight's Tale" are not unlike Troilus, whose love story ends not in amorous bliss, but in the knowledge that bliss is not something possible in a world ruled by Fortune. Furthermore, whereas other romances that prescribe moderation seem to make a distinction between good and bad fighting, in "The Knight's Tale" Chaucer defines combat as inherently and entirely excessive and injurious. Unlike the romance heroes discussed in previous chapters, Chaucer's knights are more akin to Malory's Lancelot who, learning his own lesson of excess and moderation, eventually finds reclusion and asceticism to be the only satisfactory post-quest response, because his grail contains only awareness of the transience of the world.

The romance of antiquity serves as a perfect forum for the discussion of cosmology and *natura*, because Greco-Roman deities have a double meaning that delivers an intertwined symbolic and allegorical message: they are deities who follow their own agenda, but they also represent planets that, through astrological influence, affect the world in very specific and always excessive ways.²²² Planetary influence on the world carries with it the assumption of excessiveness because each planet, and each

planetary influence, is associated with one quality in the world (hot or cold, wet or dry) and therefore with a complexion of human psychology and one of the four bodily humors that were thought to have existed in the human body.²²³ Humoral philosophy proceeds from the assumption that human health (both mental and physical) is only possible when the four humors existed in balanced proportion to each other, as discussed in previous chapters. Chaucer's use of an astro-humoral model is by no means unique, in fact this worldview seems to have been so common among literate people that we find it not only in contemporaries such as Gower, but also in later writers such as Shakespeare (who explores the choleric complexion in *The Taming of the Shrew*, or the melancholic complexion in *Hamlet*), and this model seems even to exist as a palimpsest for many of our stories (*Winnie the Pooh* and *Star Wars* for example, rely on archetypal personalities strongly rooted in humoral thinking). When Chaucer writes a romance of antiquity – a story in which the world is literally ruled by deities who share a name with the planets which influenced Chaucer's world - we should expect moments in which a deity is connected with erroneous excess, and our reading of the thematic meaning of the story should rely heavily on an analysis of these moments.

The presence of excess is evident in "The Knight's Tale" most obviously because drastic, excessive behavior is the only tangible way that the audience can differentiate the two main characters, who are identical except for the specifics of their over-the-top romantic reactions upon first seeing Emelye.²²⁴ At the beginning of the Tale, the characterization of Palamon and Arcite is identical:

[The pilours] founde,

Thurgh-girt with many a grevous bloody wounde,
 Two yonge knyghtes liggyng by and by,
 Bothe in oon armes, wroght ful richely,
 Of whiche two Arcite hight that oon,
 And that oother knyght highte Palamon.
 Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede they were,
 But by hir cote-armures and by hir gere
 The heraudes knewe hem best in special
 As they weren of the blood roial
 Of Thebes, and of sustren two y-born.²²⁵

They are found in the same place (in the pile of the dead), in the same state (wounded), in the same heraldry, and are mirror images of each other in that they are the sons of sisters. They are also described as an undifferentiated unit, pulled together out of the pile of the dead, both brought before Theseus, sent to the same prison, and both denied ransom.²²⁶ In fact, Chaucer here omits the descriptions that Boccaccio uses to differentiate the two physically shortly after they are imprisoned.²²⁷ The only significant information that Chaucer presents about them as characters is that they are both from Thebes, which does little to illuminate their characters except that Thebes tends to be thought of by medieval and renaissance writers as a place where human desire and excess run rampant, to be contrasted with the more temperate and morally stable Athens. Like the heroes of the fair unknown romances, the protagonists enter the story with unclear paternity, defined only by their maternal lineage, but they are from Thebes, and they are

first seen in the story literally immersed (buried) in the gruesome result of excessive violence. In their sameness, the protagonists start with the implied suggestion of excess projected against their vulnerability and imprisonment.

The cousins are first differentiated from each other when Palamon, walking in the upper part of the tower/prison, sees Emelye and cries out, explaining that he "was hurt right now thurghout [his] ye / Into [his] herte, that wol [his] bane be."²²⁸ When Arcite falls in love with Emelye only a moment later and uses the same language of being injured (a common convention of courtly love), saying "The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly / Of hire that rometh in the yonder place,"²²⁹ the two remain undifferentiated. The way that each knight reacts to and represents his emotional response, however, indicates the first real difference in their characterization. This difference, however small, foreshadows what will ultimately become the driving theme of the romance. When Palamon first sees Emelye, he falls to his knees, adopting a submissive position, and addresses her as if she were the deity Venus, placing himself under her rule. He subjects himself to the will of this "Venus" throughout this story (finally transferring the devotion to the real Venus), praying and lamenting to her while he pines away in the tower. When Arcite first sees Emelye²³⁰ his attitude is different. Whereas Palamon fell to his knees and submitted to his imagined Venus, Arcite's reaction is more aggressive and relies on violent images of death and dying:

The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
Of hir that rometh in yonder place;
And but I have her mercy and hir grace,

That I may seen hire ate leeste weye,
 I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye.

This distinction is admittedly subtle at this point in the story, but Arcite's aggressive response and Palamon's submissive one are later elaborated upon when Palamon serves Venus and Arcite serves Mars in the final tournament. This point is significant because it is such a clear departure from Boccaccio's *Teseide*. In *The Teseide* Arcite sees Emilia first, and calls Palaemon to the window to look at her with him. Once they have both seen her, their reaction is virtually identical as they "enjoyed themselves, breathless and attentive, keeping their eyes and ears fixed on her, and marveling much over her..."²³¹ and when they speak of being injured by love, they both refer to two arrows shot from Emilia's eyes – one for each of them.²³² They spend the rest of their imprisonment sharing their complaints about love's pain. In Chaucer's retelling, the two cousins immediately become covetous and jealous, reinforcing the idea that their first differentiation (for themselves as well) is based on extreme and negative behavior.

Palamon's association with Venus in this episode (and later in the Tale) requires our attention because, as suggested above, Venus functions not only as a goddess, but also as the planet Venus, whose phlegmatic influence on the world carries the implication of excessive behavior. We also need to define this venerien influence because Palamon's increasing association with Venus in the tale goes slightly against the modern perceptions of Venus as a "goddess of love." In modern stories, for example, we might expect the devotee of Venus to be more lover than fighter, but this is not the case with Palamon. Palamon is eager to challenge his cousin to a fight when they first meet after escaping,

and in the two engagements in which he fights there is no question that he has the ability to be aggressive and to commit injury to opponents. In fact, he loses in the final tournament only because he is overpowered by a group of enemies who drag him to the post and who thereby win according to Theseus's rules. Whereas our expectations are that the servant of Venus is a "lover not a fighter," here Palamon is the exact opposite – his service to Venus leads to violence that is extreme in its ferocity. Chaucer changes the "courtly versus aggressive" convention that is so present in other romances into a model that is violent at both extremes, but the pairing of Venus and excessive violence does fit in with the model that we have unearthed in previous chapters. Libeaus Disconus, for example, had to face extremely dangerous and aggressive clerks who represented venerien monstrosity (their ferocity being located within the courtly space and their identity as clerks indicating a perversion of their assumed role as physically passive), and in the *Joi de la Cort* episode of *Erec et Enide* Mabinograin's excessive devotion to his lady and his imprisonment in the bed-chamber/garden was paired with the severed heads of those who tried to end his presence there.

Venus the goddess, as the modern audience might perceive her, seems safely categorized as passive and stereotypically "feminine," but astrological planets are harder to place into a stereotypical bipolar masculine/feminine categorization of gender because they can be dominant for a child of either biological sex, and the dominance of a "feminine" planet does not evoke the taboos that we might expect (no one would call Palamon a "girly man"). In other words, a male under the influence of Venus is not necessarily feminized, but instead is an excessive male, one with a tendency to act in a venerien way. Albertus Magnus, in describing the influence of Venus, lists qualities such

as pleasance and loveliness, but also lists lechery, indicating the possibility of excess.²³³ Chaucer himself provides us with a complete description of venereal traits in his description of the artwork in the temple of Venus that borders the tournament field.²³⁴ Chaucer describes these attributes as belonging to the realm of "love,"²³⁵ but here he is using the word "love" to describe both the positive and the negative aspects of amorous behavior. The temple walls display "pleasance" and "hope," but also "deceit" and "jealousy." The "charm" of love is found here but not without the harsh reality of "force."²³⁶ The fact that both "charm" and "force" are found together supports the idea that venereal attributes are not necessarily feminine and passive²³⁷ but instead are indicative of a specific kind of excess. Furthermore, the presence of these opposing attributes should immediately bring to mind the idea of balance and the dangers of excess that we find both in humoral thinking and in Aristotelian notions of virtue.²³⁸ Palamon confined in the interior space of the chamber, is clearly excessive because he becomes a comic caricature of the courtly lover, pining away for the lover who seems fated to remain ignorant even of his existence.²³⁹

Arcite serves Mars instead of Venus during the tournament that ends the tale, but, as discussed above, Chaucer gives us the suggestion that he sides with a martial (or to use a more appropriate term "marcien") inclination even as Palamon is tending towards the venereal when they first see Emelye. In this moment Arcite's personality is established for the rest of the story. Whereas Palamon's first action is to yield his autonomy and to subject himself to Venus, Arcite's first action is to appropriate Emelye and covet her (as quoted above). His response is active rather than reactive, as his first thought is of the action that he can take in his desire for her. This first impulse towards action and

covetousness continues as he is released from prison and is free to pursue Emelye in the outside world.

When Palamon and Arcite are separated, they become physically differentiated for the first time; Arcite's appearance changes because of his longing for Emelye. This change in appearance is, of course, important for the obvious reason that he is able to go unrecognized into Athens, but the change takes on significantly more meaning when we read it is a marker of humoral imbalance and planetary influence. Astrological influence on the human body affected the individual not only mentally, but also physically, so that excessiveness of personality would be physically apparent in their "complexion," a reflection of excesses in humoral makeup. Chaucer makes his excesses clear when he states that his brooding over Emelye is "nat oonly lik the loveris maladye / of Hereos, but rather lyk manye, / engendered of humour malencolik" (not just love-sickness, but more like mania, that comes from the melancholic humor [black bile]).²⁴⁰ The change in the physical description of Arcite is also towards the melancholic, as we learn that "Lene he wex and drye as is a shaft; / his eyen holwe and grisly to biholde, / his hewe fallow and pale as ashen colde, / and solitarie he was and evere alone" ("he grew thin and dry as a twig; his eyes [grew] hollow and severe to behold, his color grey and pale as cold ash, and he was solitary and always alone").²⁴¹ This description is suggestive of a general excessiveness and serves in the story to remind the reader that this is not a story celebrating courtly love (because he is literally more manic than a courtly lover should be). It also connects to the larger Marcien excesses that will characterize Arcite in the last part of the story because a move towards melancholy is also a move towards a part of the choleric complexion: melancholy is excessively cold and dry, whereas the choleric

humor is hot and dry. When Arcite becomes "drye as is a shaft," the excessive movement is along an axis shared by both the melancholic and the choleric complexions.

Furthermore, the change in Arcite's physical description, while melancholic, could also be interpreted as choleric. This is especially the case when, after he has returned to Athens and become Emelye's squire (and, we assume, is no longer solitary and brooding and so is less melancholic) there is a second reference to his physicality that is suggestive of the hot and dry temperament more than the cold and dry.²⁴² Arcite's association with the temple of Mars in the final tournament makes his marcién inclinations explicit, but it is important to note that his marcién attitude ultimately leads to his gruesome death. His prayer to Mars in the temple is a hyperbolic version of his first reaction upon seeing Emelye. His concentration is on what he must do to get her, and what action must be taken, and this aggressive attitude leads to Saturn's solution: Arcite will get his wish and be the most aggressive fighter (i.e., his prayers for victory will be answered), but Palamon will get Emelye, because his prayer didn't stipulate victory in the tournament.

Here again is the polar relationship that we found in *Erec et Enide*, *Libeaus Disconus*, and the other romances touched on in the previous chapter. The gods Mars and Venus form two poles of an oppositional relationship (with even the locations of the temples standing in opposition, one in the east, one in the west) that is easily projected onto the court/wilderness model, especially towards the beginning of the tale when Arcite is characterized by his physical abilities in and among the homosocial group in exterior spaces²⁴³ and Palamon is left to pine away in the tower, confined to an interior space and separated from both physical activity and other men. Even the method by which both men escape is suggestive of this model, as Arcite is set free through a friend's homosocial

ties (the relationship between his friend Perotheus and Theseus²⁴⁴) and Palamon escapes when his friend brings him a sleeping potion to drug the guard.²⁴⁵ Astrologically Venus and Mars are also oppositional (Venus being of cold and moist makeup, represented by the element of water and Mars being hot and dry, represented by the element of fire) but in the context of humoral health and the larger (and more abstract) notion of Aristotelian virtue, Mars and Venus must be seen as excessive (and therefore faulty) extremes of the same spectrum of human behavior. It is for this reason that a single, clear protagonist is so hard to locate in the story: each character is essentially flawed, and we cannot clearly favor either because they both err in their failure to be temperate. Chaucer intentionally denies us any personality traits that we might use to prefer one over the other, except the single differentiating factor: Palamon is *venerien* and Arcite is *marcien* and both are excessively so.²⁴⁶

The excessiveness of the two cousins is also continually affirmed by comic denial of courtly love that resides in the fact that Emelye is unaware of, and then indifferent to, the feelings of the two knights. The relationship between the three has been read in terms of Eve Sedgwick's model of homosocial desire, in which the female in the triangular relationship is the medium through which the mutual desires of the men are played out.²⁴⁷ What has been missed with the application of this model, however, is the narrator's intentionality. Whereas the unearthing of the "real" relationship between the men is invaluable for stories in which it is hidden, the narrator in the "Knight's Tale" makes it explicit and comical that Emelye is a completely passive player in the love triangle, and the real relationship is between the excessive men who compete for her (or for the idea of her, as the case may be).

The fighting in the tale accentuates the excessiveness of the two knights even more than the irony of their infatuation with the unaware Emelye. In the romances discussed earlier in this dissertation authors differentiate between what constitutes good and bad violent exchange. Largely these authors cast non-injurious combat (the kind that strengthens the bonds between the male homosocial group, like the tournament) as a balancing act between the aggressiveness of the wilderness and the amicability of the court. Chaucer, on the other hand, recasts the courtly aspect of the model as a violent Venus (in the form of Palamon), and by doing so depicts all violence as destructive and injurious. When the audience's hopes and expectations of beneficial violence are continually confounded, the resulting disappointment reinforces the notion that Fortune rules the temporal world and attempts to control it ultimately end in failure.

The violent excess of the end of the tournament make clear the idea that violence in the tale is inherently injurious and destructive (as will be discussed below), but this notion is evident from much earlier in the tale. Violent episodes in the romance tradition are conventionally moments when the hero is expected to moderate himself and reify his identity through moderate acts of combat. The standard convention that we have seen is that the romance will feature an episode or episodes of good, non-injurious violence that is beneficial to the state and the male homosocial order, and then the hero will engage in a number of violent encounters that are excessive and injurious, in which the hero is continually depicted and referred to as acting against reason, crazy, or witless (often the words "mad" and "wode" or "wood" are used for this, or acting out of "witte"), and the imagery is overwhelmingly animalistic or bestial. In the end, the hero finally corrects his excesses and behaves according to the model of moderate behavior. In Chaucer's

description of fighting, he uses these conventions of fighting without moderation but never provides an example of good violence and denies the audience the moment in which the hero learns the lesson and becomes moderate in his use of violence. This is an important point, because critics have assumed that the knight-teller of the tale unilaterally praises fighting and violent acts. Pearsall, for example, characterizes the teller as an "exhibition of the typical traits of the chivalric ideal of the fighter."²⁴⁸ The ambiguity of the Knight's absence from the battlefields of the Hundred Years' War (except for the passing reference to the knight's lord's war) complicate this idea, however, as does the image of the knight as dirty and tired, embarking on pilgrimage even before returning home. These ambiguities set the stage for a discussion of violence that is not necessarily positive.

The first detailed fighting in the Tale (the first that contains sufficient details to serve a narrative function), occurs when Palamon and Arcite fight secretly just after Palamon's escape from prison. The mood of this fight is set even before the fighting starts, as Arcite, confronted by Palamon, proposes that they return the next day with armor and weapons, so that they can fight as knights, and he even offers to send food and bedding down to his cousin. This interaction mimics the conventions of "good fighting" in the romance tradition, but clearly satirizes it because the overt verbal aggression between the two is so excessive that it eclipses even the veneer of amicability and homosociality. Just before their agreement, when Palamon hears Arcite singing, he jumps out and confronts him:

..."Arcite, false traytour wikke,

Now artow hent, that lovest my lady so,
 For whom that I have al this peyne and wo,
 And art my blood and to my conseil sworn,
 As I ful ofte have told thee heerbiforn,
 And hast byjaped heere duc Theseus,
 And falsly changed hast thy name thus!
 I wol be deed, or elles thou shalt dye.
 Thou shalt nat love my lady Emelye,
 But I wol love hire oonly and namo;
 For I am Palamon, thy mortal foo."²⁴⁹

Arcite responds by drawing his sword "as fiers as leon"(as fierce as a lion)²⁵⁰, and calls Palamon "sik and wood for love" (sick and acting against reason because of love).²⁵¹

We miss the significance of this statement unless it is placed in the context of the romances that we have discussed in previous chapters. The animal imagery and the lovesickness are not praise here; they are markers of a dangerous kind of excess that leads to injury and death.

When they do meet on the following day they arm each other in the way that brothers might,²⁵² but again Chaucer is careful to contrast this seemingly chivalric and friendly act against their absolutely unfriendly and aggressive fighting.²⁵³ When the two begin to fight, the description of the fighting relies so heavily on the imagery of excess found in other romances that it becomes a kind of satiric commentary on those conventions:

...with sharpe speres stronge,
 They foynen ech at other wonder longe.
 Thou mightest wene that this Palamoun
 In his fighting were a wood leoun,
 And as a crueel tygre was Arcite;
 As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,
 That frothen white as foom for ire wood.
 Up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood.²⁵⁴

Clear here is the association of acting like an animal with acting without reason, as the repeated reference to various animals is paired at every instance with a reference to insanity or acting wildly or savagely.

In fact, the repeated reference to acting crazily and without reason occurs throughout the Tale, and is not only paired with the combative imagery of fighting animals (as above, and later in the tournament, as we will see), but also with the idea of our inability to control Fortune. For example, Palamon, when lamenting his continued imprisonment after Arcite's release, likens himself to an animal by referring to his prison as a "cage."²⁵⁵ Just after this the narrator tells us that "...the fyr of jalousie up sterte / Withinne [Palamon's] brest, and hent him by the herte / So woodly that he lyk was to biholde / The boxtree or the asshen dede and colde" ("the fire of jealousy rose within Palamon's chest, and grabbed him by the heart so insanely that he looked like a boxtree or dead cold ash").²⁵⁶ The animal imagery is then made more explicit and brought in line

more directly with a Boethian message when, only a few lines later, Palamon addresses Fortune as a goddess, saying, "What is mankynde moore unto you holde / Than is the sheep that rouketh in the fold? / For slayn is man right as another beest, / And dwelleth eek in prison and arrest, / And hath siknesse and greet adversitee, / And ofte tymes giltelees, pardee." (Is mankind more obligated to you than is the sheep who cowers in the fold? Because people are killed just as is any beast, and [they] also are imprisoned and restrained, and have sickness and great hardship, and are very often guiltless).²⁵⁷ This pairing of animal imagery, acting without reason or "woodly," and the suggestion of our complete helplessness at the hands of Fortune puts the combat between Palamon and Arcite (which uses the same references) into a Boethian context and again evokes the poem "Truth," which exhorts the reader not to trust Fortune ("hir that turneth as a bal"²⁵⁸) and, through religious devotion, to be free from the fate of being like an animal (as he commands "Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth beste out of thy stal!"²⁵⁹).

Conditioned to romances such as *Libeaus Disconus*, the audience would not necessarily be surprised by excessive behavior that defies reason on the part of the protagonists. In fact, we find in many romances that moments of excessive action (including or even featuring extreme, injurious violence) are almost necessary as a contrast to the moment when the protagonist balances his chivalric masculinity and learns to perpetrate violence in the properly prescribed ways. Chaucer denies the audience this moment, however, with the activity surrounding the final tournament increasing in excessiveness, and the actual fighting becoming so extreme that it acts as an ironic commentary on the idea of beneficial fighting (the conventional treatment of the tournament in such romances as *Erec et Enide*, as we have seen).

The second chapter of this dissertation argued that there was a shift in definitions of chivalry around the thirteenth century and that part of this shift was a change in emphasis in the staging of tournaments from fighting as a group to fighting as individuals. The romance, whose popularity coincides with this new form of tournament (and which follow this new ideal of chivalry), also emphasizes the individual combat over fighting in a group, especially in the final, cathartic encounter. Chaucer's choice to depict the final combat in terms of a grand *mêlée* is significant because it goes against the expectation of the final fight in the romance tradition. Instead of a single hero reifying his balanced chivalry through controlled and beneficial violence, we find a group combat where the violence is entirely destructive and out of control. In this tournament the reader is also divorced from the chivalric, masculine performance of the knights who are fighting because Chaucer shifts the focus of the combat from the knights and their prowess (which would be the conventional way of depicting the fighting) to the weapons and the victims of the violent exchange. In other words, we are more concerned with the destructive force of the weapons and the people whom they hurt than we are with the abilities of the knight who wield them:

Ther shyveren shaftes upon sheeldes thikke;
 He feeleth thurgh the hert-spoon the prikke.
 Up spryngen speres twenty foot on highte;
 Out goon the swerdes as the silver brighte.
 The helmes they tohewen and toshrede;
 Out brest the blood with sterne stremes rede;

With myghty maces the bones they tobreste.
 He thurgh the thikkeste of the throng gan threste;
 Ther stomblen steedes stronge, and doun gooth al;
 He rolleth under foot as dooth a bal;
 He foyneth on his feet with his tronchoun,
 And he hym hurtleth with his hors adoun;
 He thurgh the body is hurt and sithen ytake,
 Maugree his heed, and broght unto the stake;
 As forward was, right there he moste abyde.²⁶⁰

The excessive violence of this encounter is not surprising because excessiveness marks the tournament from its very preparation. The temples, in their suggestion of the opposing astrological influences of Mars and Venus, are monuments to excess (as mentioned above), but the descriptions of Lygurge and Emetrius (the allies of Palamon and Arcite) that follow the description of the temples once again combine the imagery of excess with the imagery of animals and animalistic behavior. Lygurge, Palamon's general, is described as having yellow and red glowing eyes that glare about like a griffon, riding on a chariot pulled by bulls, wearing a bear skin instead of armor, and with black hair combed back "as any ravenes fethere," with twenty giant wolfhounds following him.²⁶¹ Less obvious but even more significant is the description of his body – he has a large brow,²⁶² great limbs with hard, strong muscles, and broad shoulders with long round arms.²⁶³ He is a giant, and the "cole-blak" of his bear skin is even more reminiscent of the monstrosity of giants, as black and red are characteristic colors of giants in romances

(as seen in *Libeaus Disconus*). While Emetrius, Arcite's general, does not ride a chariot or wear a bear skin, the animal imagery is just as present: he looks about "as a leon,"²⁶⁴ carries an eagle on his arm, and is accompanied by a herd of lions and leopards.²⁶⁵ His clothing, while less savage in aesthetic, carries with it the same sense of excess in that everything that he (and his entourage) wears is extreme in its metallic and jeweled decoration. Emetrius is even likened to Mars,²⁶⁶ to bring the marcien imagery to the fore and leave no question as to the nature of the combat and the combatants at the tournament. Lygurge and Emetrius embody an excess that is monstrous and devoid of moderation (evocative of the symbolic wilderness of the romance tradition, which contains the giant and the lion, where men cast their predatory gaze about as animals instead of as men).²⁶⁷ The excess and bestial/monstrous nature of these two characters strongly influence our perception of Palamon and Arcite, and for an audience familiar with humoral cosmology and the Aristotelian model of virtue, the message would be clear. Both protagonists, in their distracted infatuation with temporal concerns, have failed to construct an identity that incorporates both marcien and venerien aspects into a controlled and balanced identity of moderation, and their followers are a hyperbolic representation of this imbalance.

In many ways Theseus represents an attempt at this ideal of balance throughout the story, albeit in a detached way because he is only episodically involved in the plot. From the very beginning of the tale, we find Theseus engaging in seemingly contradictory behaviors that mix marcien and venerien behaviors. He makes war with the Amazons and conquers them, only to marry their queen and integrate her family into his court. This move might be seen to be just as aggressive as his warfare (forceful marriage

is, after all, a kind of rape), but the queen and Emelye's presence with Theseus is depicted as pleasant and active, and is much more suggestive of integration than of dominance or abduction. Immediately after this integration, Theseus places himself in the service of a group of women, symbolically reversing the power relationship resultant from his conquering the Amazons. He then wages war on their behalf, but this war is conducted in order to correct the wrongs perpetrated by Creon and his Thebans, who represent earthly excess and worldly corruption.

Theseus's characterization as moderate in his use of aggression continues as he finds Palamon and Arcite fighting in the gardens. As he intervenes between the two, it is clear that, while invoking Mars and adopting an aggressive tone, he is doing so in order to stop the destructive, injurious fighting that the two are engaged in:

And whan this duc was come unto the launde,
 Under the sonne he looketh, and anon
 He was war of Arcite and Palamon,
 That foughten breme as it were bores two.
 The brighte swerdes wenten to and fro
 So hideously that with the leeste strook
 It semed as it wolde felle an ook.
 But what they were, no thing he ne woot.
 This duc his courser with his spores smoot,
 And at a stert he was betwixt hem two,
 And pulled out a swerd and cryed, "Hoo!

Namoore, up peyne of lesynge of youre heed!

By mighty Mars, he shal anon be deed

That smyteth any strook that I may seen.²⁶⁸

When Palamon confesses his and Arcite's identity, Theseus's anger explodes, and he invokes Mars, promising that they "shal be deed, by myghty Mars the rede,"²⁶⁹ but his anger and warlike aggression is curbed as the queen, Emelye and all of the ladies in the company plead for the lives of the two men. This episode is interesting because of the way in which Theseus allows himself to be swayed by the women in his company. As they beg him to spare their lives, Theseus considers the men and their motives, and literally tempers his anger with reason when "in his resoun he hem bothe excused"²⁷⁰ (in his reason he excused them both). When he solves the conflict by calling for the tournament between the two, this solution must be seen in terms of his application of temperance as a salve for the wild and excessive aggression in which both men were involved. They will still fight, but they will do so in a controlled manner, supported by friends, with a clear judge (Theseus) present who can continue to act as a moderator in both the sense of a referee and also in the sense of a force for moderation.²⁷¹ Theseus even situates himself spatially as the mediation between the two, his seat being mid-way between the temples of Venus and Mars. Theseus, by redefining the conflict in terms of chivalric competition, follows the conventions of the romance genre by creating the space in which knights can define themselves by constructing a good, balanced chivalric masculinity by exchanging "good" violence.

This view of Theseus is somewhat widespread in the critical tradition of the Knight's Tale,²⁷² with scholars reading the issue of Theseus' control in a variety of ways. Patterson, for example, argues that "the knight . . . intends it to celebrate both Theseus as a model of rational governance and chivalry as a force for civilization,"²⁷³ later reiterating that the knight's objective is to show that Palamon and Arcite can be brought under control.²⁷⁴ Patterson cites scholars such as Robertson, Kean, Gaylord, Minnis, and Lawler to support this basic assessment,²⁷⁵ to which list we might also add Ingham, who argues that Theseus's masculinity relies on the suffering of his men for its creative power of governance, assuming that the depictions of the fighting are celebratory as opposed to purposefully gruesome. Crane also relies on an assumption of Theseus's authority, suggesting that the circular tournament field could be seen as a Foucauldian panoptikon in which the authoritative Theseus takes the role of the state, watching and controlling the combat which has been redefined from a private to a public concern.²⁷⁶

But Theseus fails. Both the participants and the fighting that they generate, as discussed above, become obviously excessive and injurious, resulting not in a more solid homosocial and political order (what Theseus and the audience would expect from the "good" fighting of the tournament), but instead in moments of extreme injurious violence. Theseus, far from the controlling and regulating force at the center of the panoptikon, must watch as a powerless observer as his attempts to control the events unravel. Chaucer has, until this point in the story, been very specific about the function and results of violence in the tale. Relying on the convention of excessive, destructive violence common to other chivalric romances, Chaucer never takes the second step that the standard romances take – he never makes a case for the way that good, beneficial

violence could work. While this is clear from the ironic inversion of amicable, chivalric fighting when Palamon and Arcite first exchange blows, it is even more clearly the case in the final tournament. When Theseus orders the destructive conflict of the two cousins to be settled in terms of a chivalric tournament (a "liste"), he directs their fighting towards the conventions of good chivalric behavior and creates the expectation of a conventional ending to the story, in which the protagonist finds a balanced identity and strengthens the community with the resulting knowledge.

Before the tournament starts Theseus takes an even stronger stance against injurious violence by creating rules that will limit the injuries resulting from the fighting. First he limits the weapons that are used in the tournament to those that do not have a points for thrusting²⁷⁷ (including lances, which he commands to be blunted), and he changes the rules of the tournament so that victory can be attained by dragging opponents to a stake instead of killing them:

Tho [the herald showed] the myghty dukes wille:

"The lord hath of his heigh discrecioun

Considered that it were destruccioun

To gentil blood to fighten in the gyse

Of mortal bataille now in this emprise.

Wherefore, to shapen that they shal not dye,

He wol his first purpose modifye.

No man, therefore, up peyne of los of lyf,

No maner shot, ne polax, ne short knyf

Into the lystes send, nor thider brynge;
 Ne short swerd, for to stoke with poynt bytinge,
 No man ne draw ne bere it by his side.
 Ne no man shal unto his felawe ryde
 But o course with a sharp ygrounde spere;
 Foyne if him liste, on fote , himself to were.
 And he that is at mischief shal be take,
 And noght slayne, but be broght unto the stake
 That shal ben ordeyned on either side;
 But thider he shal by force, and ther abyde.²⁷⁸

The thrusting weapons that Theseus prohibits would be inherently more injurious because thrusting weapons deliver deep wounds that are difficult to heal, easily infected, and least impeded by armor. Theseus wants what the audience of the romance has been conditioned to want: a fight using real weapons so that the element of danger excites the spectator but a fight free from the injuries and death that can result from unrestrained violence and weapons that cause the most harmful wounds. The Theseus of Boccaccio's work also encourages the combatants to fight in non-injurious ways, but his prohibitions are preceded by a poetic ode to love and the celebration of love through fighting: "Love is the reason for this contest, as I have already said" says Boccaccio's Theseus. "Therefore, this contest ought to be a matter of love, if I judge it aright, not hate. Let hatred be the business of anyone who works to do evil, or of anyone who does not have a good sense of other things."²⁷⁹ The shouts of approval from all of the assembled lords²⁸⁰

foreshadows the actual fighting which largely follows Theseus's rules (which are basically the rules of a tournament, as opposed to Chaucer's which almost resemble late-medieval football), and is depicted enthusiastically with praise for the fighting, and a decided lack of injuries shown.²⁸¹ Where there are injuries, Boccaccio seems eager to exonerate the participants, stating that when Artiphilos dies because of a blow from a two-edged axe, it is "because of his wicked luck."²⁸² Chaucer's choice to abbreviate the violence so that only the worst, most injurious parts are evident serves the purpose of accentuating Theseus's inability to control the events.

Arcite's fall from his horse at the end of the tournament is the final and resounding example of Theseus's failure to create a non-injurious, beneficial event because injury and imminent death occur even after the fighting has ceased. Control over the violence is not possible, since the gods and goddesses (here understood to be also planetary influence) won't allow Theseus to control what happens. This injury at the end of the tale recasts Theseus's inability to control the violence of the tournament as the more universal inability to control the temporal events of the world, a lesson especially applicable to Theseus because, in the final moments leading up to the tournament, he takes a role that is imitative of God. He has already been established as the most powerful ruler in the world, a characterization that sets the stage for a Boethian message because a person at the apex of Fortune's wheel is poised for some kind of fall. In his tournament arena, Theseus creates a microcosm of the world, over which he tries to rule as creator and judge.²⁸³ He sits between the extremes of Venus and Mars, "arrayed right as he were a god in trone. / The peple preeseth thiderward ful soone / Hym for to seen, and doon heigh reverence, / And eek to herkne his heste and his sentence."²⁸⁴ His

prohibitions are announced as law – as an expression of his control over this microcosmic world, but when the violence immediately goes out of control, it accentuates just how little control he has.

While Theseus seems to be a flat, static, supporting character in the beginning of the Tale (albeit a praiseworthy one - a foil for the excesses of Palamon and Arcite), the last part of the Tale focuses on him and his disappointment at losing Arcite and the absence of the control that Arcite's death proves. When he laments and cannot understand the way the world works, his character becomes the main focus of the tale especially because his disappointment coincides with our disappointment over an ending that countermines our expectations of how a climactic tournament in a romance should end. In other romances we would expect the protagonist to restore balance and order (part of which is the beneficial exchange of violence) in the political body and into the world after he has done so within himself. Chaucer's Boethian agenda in the Tale reverses this move, so that the disappointed attempt becomes yet another example of how untrustworthy the temporal world is. The wisdom of Egeus serves as a truncated version of *The Consolation of Philosophy* for the audience of the chivalric romance: the "consolation of Egeus" explains a seemingly cruel Fortune who punishes and destroys at random:

No man myghte gladden Theseus,
 Savyng his olde fader Egeus,
 That knew his worldes transmutacioun,
 As he hadde seyn it change both up and down,

Joye after wo, and wo after gladnesse,
 And shewed hem ensamples and likenesse.
 "Right as ther dyed never man," quod he,
 "That he ne lyvede in erthe in some degree,
 Right so ther lyvede never man," he seyde,
 "In al this world, that som tyme he ne deyde.
 This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
 And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
 Deeth is an ende of every worldly soore."
 And over al this yet seyde he muchel moore
 To this effect, ful wisely to enhort
 The peple that they sholde hem reconforte.²⁸⁵

Egeus's words are meant to define how Fortune works in the world, but his speech should be seen as the conclusion of a continuing discussion of Fortune throughout much of the story. The Theban noble women, for example, cite Fortune as both the reason for Theseus's success²⁸⁶ and also as the reason that the queens and duchesses have now become "caytyves" (miserable wretches).²⁸⁷ Arcite then suggests that bad Fortune is the reason that he and Palamon are imprisoned,²⁸⁸ but after being freed he laments Palamon's good Fortune at being imprisoned²⁸⁹ because he is still close to Emelye and might have good enough Fortune to gain her desire.²⁹⁰ Arcite goes on to demonstrate his fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Fortune as he complains that the world holds no comfort for him, saying:

"...ther nys erthe, water, fir ne eir,
 ne creature that of hem maked is,
 That may me helpe or doon confort in this,
 wel oughte I sterve in wanhope and distresse.
 Farwel my lyf, my lust and my gladnesse!
 "Allas, why pleynen folk so in commune
 on Purveiance of God, or of Fortune,
 That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
 Wel better than they kan himself devyse?"²⁹¹

In this statement (made because his bad Fortune is now his desire – to remain in prison and stay near Emelye), it is clear that he is equating God with Fortune. This confusion is most obvious when he uses the two words interchangeably, but it is significant also that he laments that there is no earthly element, nor creature made from these elements, who can offer him consolation. It makes sense that Arcite is so easily distracted by the influence of Mars, because at this point he is unaware of what Egeus (and Boethius) teaches: consolation cannot be found in earthly things. According to the ideology of humoral philosophy (in which humors are connected not only to planets but also to the four elements), Arcite is clearly looking for comfort in the wrong place.

Palamon also suffers from this problem, as is evident in his lament when Arcite is freed.²⁹² His lament about his Fortune, like Arcite's, continues the repeated dialogue about Fortune in the story, but it also serves to create an ironic commentary on the

changing favors of Fortune, as both knights lament their state and wish for the good Fortune of the other. When the narrator asks the reader who has it better (Palamon who is imprisoned and gets to see his lady, or Arcite who is free but may not), the subtext is that they are both errant in their dependence on Fortune and misunderstand the way the temporal world works.

The reversal of Fortune that occurs around this episode foreshadows Arcite's death at the end of the tournament, which should also be seen as a reversal of Fortune resulting from the granting of both knights' wishes. Theseus, in fact, cites and praises Fortune when Arcite wins, stopping the fighting and declaring "Arcite of Thebes shall have Emelye, / That by his Fortune hath hir faire ywonne"²⁹³ (Arcite of Thebes shall have Emelye, who by his good Fortune has fairly won her). After Arcite falls and suffers his mortal wound the narrator again uses the idea of Fortune to describe not only the fall, but also the events of the tournament from the perspective of Palamon, so that Fortune, just cited as beneficial by Theseus, is seen as entirely reversible and beyond human control (as neither knight should be blamed or considered cowardly because of the events²⁹⁴). Lee Patterson makes the argument that in Theseus's world there is not room for the beneficial presence of Jupiter,²⁹⁵ and this is true. This absence, however, does not necessarily equate to a general absence of God, as scholars such as Minnis have argued.²⁹⁶ Instead, the reversal of Fortune and the overwhelming power of chance in the tale suggest the absence of a beneficent deity in the temporal world, which reinforces the Boethian view that the randomness of the temporal world *is* in fact God's beneficence.

The funeral that serves as the penultimate episode in the Tale also serves as an excessive display, but this excessiveness seems to be a kind of didactic statement on the

part of Theseus, who has learned his lesson from Egeus and creates the funeral as a symbolic ode to the passion with which Arcite pursued Emelye. In considering where the funeral and sepulcher of Arcite should be held, he decides:

That ther as first Arcite and Palamon
 Hadden for love the bataille hem bitwene,
 That in that selve grove, swoote and grene,
 Ther as he hadde his amoureuse desires,
 His compleynte, and for love his hote fires,
 [Theseus] wolde make a fyr in which the office
 Funeral he myghte al accomplice.²⁹⁷

The fire serves a double purpose here, as both a funerary pyre and a testament to Arcite's own excessive "hote fires." This double meaning is furthered by the ambiguity of Theseus's statement that the fire "might accomplish" the funerary offices, as opposed to a definite statement about a fire made specifically for that purpose. The fierce blaze serves not only as the destruction of the man, but also as a temporary fury that is destined to end, like Arcite's (and all people's) desires. The description of Arcite's excessively decorative clothing and bier (reminiscent of the descriptions of Emetrius and Lygurge) that follows must be imagined in the context of the fire that will consume them. The specific mention of the clothing and finery²⁹⁸ surrounding Arcite just before the fire is lit reinforces the consumptive symbolism of this fire, as do the actions of the attendees, as they start to throw items symbolizing wealth and temporal life onto the fire (jewels,

shields and spears, clothing, wine, milk, and blood²⁹⁹) into the fire before loudly mourning by riding around the pyre clashing their arms.³⁰⁰

The didactic payload of the funeral fire should also be seen in contrast to the wedding, which might have symbolized the climactic conclusion of Palamon's burning passion if the Tale had a more conventional agenda. This is not the case, however, and the reader is left with a much more sober affair in which all of the parties involved seem to be aware of the folly of earthly passions, Palamon not even having taken off his black mourning clothing. The wedding is so sober that it disappoints an audience who is primed for a more stereotypical romance ending. For example, after Theseus performs the marriage the narrator tells us that the marriage occurs with "blisse and melodye,"³⁰¹ but this follows a digression explaining the larger context of how Boethian Fortune fits in with divine will and the chain of love. Theseus's wedding sermon is not a celebration of the passion attained, but instead it is an encouragement to see good in the chance events that torture those who try to control them. Chaucer does not allow us the joyful celebration of *Erec et Enide*, nor does he create a hero to save fallen humankind by redeeming Eve, as Libeaus Disconus does. Instead, the Tale ends with both the characters and the reader having learned the lesson, and having been better equipped to avoid the excessive seductions of the world.

This Tale resembles *Troilus and Criseyde* much more at its conclusion than its beginning would indicate. Both Tales end with a protagonist who has learned the transience of the world and who understands the futility of distraction in earthly excesses. Both Tales also tease the audience's expectations of a more standard romance, and then confound these expectations in order to reveal a more critical agenda. "The Knight's

Tale" does this by recasting the goddess of love in terms of the Planetary influence of Venus, redefining amorousness as excess and distraction. Violence also repeatedly serves this purpose by following the convention of excessive chivalric violence and then by denying the audience the "good violence" that they expect. In doing so, the central message of the Tale is much more Boethian because it removes the attainment of ideal masculine behavior from the realm of worldly pursuits.

There exist a number of attempts to explain the connection between "The Knight's Tale" and the knight as the teller, and many of these have produced interesting results.³⁰² Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) of these attempts is Terry Jones's argument that virtually every part of the "General Prologue" referring to the knight paints him as a bloodthirsty mercenary of the worst kind. This argument sees the tale as an ironic commentary on the teller, so that what Jones perceives as the lofty chivalry of the tale becomes instead a round condemnation of the knight and his way of life. This argument has been successfully rebutted, and it is not my intention here to rehash what seems to be a closed chapter for most Chaucerian scholars.³⁰³ While Jones's conclusions do not seem to hold up to the scrutiny of academic rigor, his book does raise some interesting questions about the relationship between the tale and the teller and about the way that a real knight (not the symbolic knight of romance) might interact with the ideal prescribed to him. Jones makes the argument that the knight, returning from campaign and still wearing his worn and dirty military clothing, is the opposite of what we would expect from a knight in all of his splendour.³⁰⁴ The careful reader would not, as Jones suggests, expect to see "A glorious figure in shining armour, with banners flying, a dragon on his shield and a crested helm glinting in the sun,"³⁰⁵ but instead would expect the description

in the "General Prologue" to be a realistic portrayal of what an actual knight might look like when returning from campaign. Chaucer, who would have witnessed warfare in its many forms during his time on campaign with Edward from 1359-1360,³⁰⁶ is depicting here not heroic fantasy but something far more mundane. The irony that Jones finds in the knight requires and assumes that the tale itself serves to valorize knighthood and especially fighting, which it clearly does not. Instead, Chaucer has created a teller who, experienced in real fighting and real warfare and having experienced all kinds of combat, retells Boccaccio's chivalric epic as a chivalric romance.³⁰⁷ In so doing, he corrects and redirects the celebrated view of violence towards a more sober view of the world, in which the convention of a balanced *marcien/venerien* identity is made distinctly Boethian and pacifist with the suggestion that violence itself is inherently subject to excess and any masculine identity dependant on it is continually subject to the whim of Fortune.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Combat and violence are an undeniable part of chivalry and knighthood, but unilateral associations between violent activity and knightly identity are often a result of modern perceptions about male behavior in an imagined barbaric past. This is not necessarily to suggest that chivalric masculinity was ever completely divorced from aggressive and/or violent behavior, and as scholars such as Kaeuper have demonstrated, there is considerable evidence that this was indeed a version of the chivalric ideal. However, the literary and historical evidence does not render a single, all-encompassing image of the way that medieval culture construed knightly behavior. The question of knightly masculinity, like the question of masculinity in general, is only understandable when the masculine ideal is seen as an ongoing debate, with multiple participants who argue for multiple and varied manifestations of the ideal.

The most obvious way that this is apparent is in the differences between the romance genre and that of the epic. While the generic boundaries of both of these types of narrative are difficult to map (especially in those cases where they might overlap), a general distinction can and should be made between them. The epic tends to deal with the concerns of the state, and the romance tends to be concerned with the identity of the individual. If, as many scholars have found, the concerns of the state are often a topic in some romances, then they tend to be so because they are closely entwined with the identity and personal quest of the protagonist. This same distinction between emphasis on the group and on the individual is evident, as was discussed in the second chapter, in

the changing ways that tournaments were arranged and fought; whether knights grouped by political/familial affiliation would meet *en masse*, or whether individuals would engage in a more nuanced and negotiated personal display. Queer studies has recently revealed an interesting distinction between actions that imply a larger identity and those that do not (homosexual behavior versus homosexual identity), but perhaps this model can be applied more broadly than the question of homosexual acts. In the instance of the tournament (as well as that of many romances), there seems to be a distinction between knighthood as a vocation, in which military exploits become the defining factor, and knighthood as an identity, in which the knight engages in a set of metaphysical behaviors that affirm and continually establish his identity.

Because romances tend to be concerned with a discussion of personal identity, the presence of fighting and violent behavior has a much wider range of narrative purposes than in the epic. There are, of course, romances such as *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* that seem to present violent chivalric behavior with unilateral praise. As the examples of *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *Sir Gowther* show, however, violence is often presented in much more complicated terms, ranging from strict sanctioning of aggression (as in *Gowther*) to an outright avoidance of violent behavior in situations where fighting would seem justified (as in *The Carle of Carlisle*). An example of this problematized treatment of violence is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. While the exchange of axe-blows (both at the outset and at the conclusion of the tale) certainly has a violent tone to it, the description of the event and the attitude of the participants demonstrate the *non-combativeness* in the episode. The passive attitude of the victim and his willingness to stand stock-still and accept the beheading is, of course, violent, but

cannot be considered any kind of combat, and the reader's response to the beheading game is not the same escapist excitement that occurs when reading an extended combat from the epic tradition. In fact, both beheading scenes become a kind of parody of chivalric fighting, in which violence is not able to occur. First this is because of the Green Knight's magic (his head proves resistant to decapitation) and second because, when the positions are switched at the end of the tale, the Green Knight's intention is not to kill Gawain, but rather to teach him a lesson. The role and presence of violence in this story is complicated especially because there is no death, no pain and no suffering, which have a tendency to occur in narratives that treat fighting and violence in more unilateral terms. Clearly, the ideal chivalric identity in the romance tradition manifests in drastically different ways, and because of this, the romance is best approached as a forum for an ongoing debate about male knightly behavior.

The romances that this dissertation has dealt with have revealed one a group of voices in this debate that describe and prescribe a certain kind of chivalry. This construction of chivalry focuses on fighting and the heterosocial martial community, but also on the life of the court, and heterosexual community that suggested or allowed amorous behavior. More importantly, the chivalric ideal that these stories explore relies very heavily on a philosophical model for virtuous behavior that, either directly or indirectly, is Aristotelian in form. By depicting these two emphases of chivalric identity as equally essential yet mutually exclusive, and also as dangerous when excessive (often through a gendering of physical spaces), this construction of chivalric identity becomes a popularization of the more scholastic ideas of human behavior and psychology from the period. Namely, virtue and psychological health become a continual negotiation between

oppositional poles, and, as in the humoral model that saw great popularity in the period, it is only through the avoidance of excess that proper identity can be maintained. This is an important point, because it considers ideal masculine behavior according to a model that does not integrate with traditional bipolar assumptions that masculinity is inherently structured against, and opposite to, femininity. In the bipolar perception of gender, masculinity is formed and affirmed through continuous rejection of those traits deemed "feminine." In romances such as the fair unknowns, however, the rejection of the stereotypical feminine attributes (the overly maternal space of childhood and youth, amorous behavior in the bed chamber, etc.) sparks an uncontrolled descent into aggression and violence. The hero attains a valid identity only after negotiating a moderated balance between the maternal and the martial, between the court and the wilderness.

Susan Crane, in *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*,³⁰⁸ argues against bipolar assumptions of masculinity in "The Knight's Tale." She argues that the traditionally polarized view of gender is too "sterile" to fully describe Chaucer's view of human psychology.³⁰⁹ Jill Mann takes a similar approach, arguing that Chaucer's "fully human ideal" is one that integrates both stereotypical masculine and feminine traits.³¹⁰ She, like Crane, finds this ideal in the character of Theseus, who displays an integration of attributes that the protagonists of the story do not. Chaucer is clearly relying on the model of the fair unknown romances as the point of departure for his retelling of Baccaccio's chivalric epic, but it is important to note that Chaucer's tale is significantly different from the fair unknowns because, however balanced he may be, Theseus fails in his attempts to control the events of the world. The fair unknown romances have, as their

penultimate or final episode, a post-grail moment in which the hero attains the ideal state. For Libeaus this occurs when his paternity is revealed after the serpent's kiss, for Erec it is his coronation after the *Joi de la Court*, for Perceval it is the grail and for Gowther it is the completion of his penance. Unlike these romances, "The Knight's Tale" is too invested in Boethius to allow the attainment of perfection in the temporal world, and the reader is left with a tale that critiques amorous and (especially) martial excesses much more aggressively than previous romances.

Bipolar models of gender are very often useful in that they characterize the way that gender is described, prescribed and encouraged in a great number of narratives. The danger is in assuming that a bipolar model of gender is the driving paradigm for all narratives that discuss gendered behavior. In the case of the romances discussed and touched on in this dissertation, the bipolar model fails. This failure can also be difficult to detect because the modern western assumptions about masculinity and violence often rely so heavily on a masculine/feminine binary. When read on their own terms, however, these these romances reveal a model that is more tripartite, in that proper identity is positioned between two conflicting poles. This model, and its appearance in certain romances, is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost it is important because it allows us to see romances as a constant discussion about knightly identity, and it demonstrates that the question of violence was as debated in medieval narratives as it is in modern ones. Unearthing this non-polar model for masculine behavior is also important because it reveals connections between the literary production of romances and medieval scholastic theories about virtue and human behavior. This dissertation has touched on these connections, but the idea that romances might have served as a site for

the popularization of scholastic philosophy is a question that deserves more in-depth study. Finally, this ideal for chivalric masculinity has implications for the wider discussion of how masculinities of various classes and vocations interacted in the medieval period. *Libeaus Disconus* uses physical spaces to arrange the masculine ideal more than any other romance, and in doing so, the negative excesses become epitomized not by errant knights, but by clerks (who are excessively courtly) and by rustic and ignoble giants (who are excessively martial). By depicting chivalric masculinity in terms of avoiding the excesses of rural rustic folk and effete and overly amorous clerks, *Libeaus Disconus* seems to be not just describing chivalric masculinity, but describing it in relation to these two other medieval categories of male behavior. In a world in which people are categorized (theoretically, at least) as working (the peasantry), fighting (the chivalry) or praying (the clergy), romances that use the tripartite model for masculinity raise interesting questions about the way that the three estates became subject to prioritizing and hierarchizing, and the ways in which they might have competed for hegemony in the arena of literary production.

NOTES

¹ Accusations of "essentialism" in the study of masculinity are part of an ongoing debate in the field of gender studies as to whether, and to what extent, gender is biologically determined, and to what extent it is socially or culturally constructed. By and large the targets of the accusations of essentialism seem to be straw men, in that they are aimed at popularized versions of masculine studies, and do not address some of the interesting evidence that has emerged from the fields such as sociology, anthropology, or Psychology). These findings suggest a biological underpinning for some gendered (in the case of this dissertation male-gendered) behavior. This dissertation operates under the assumption that cultural constructionists (those who concentrate on the way that culture informs behavior) is not necessarily at odds with a biological approach. The variation in masculine performance between sub-cultural groups, for example, does not necessarily counteract the argument that general behavioral inclinations can be biologically situated. For example, the argument that men have a tendency to act violently encourages a discussion of the cultural norms that shape this impulse. This dissertation, and the discussion of male behavior undertaken in it, begins its analysis separate from the question of whether these biological underpinnings exist, and proceeds from the clear presence of cultural groups in dictating and informing the choices of male activity. For a more specific discussion on the impact of biology on (specifically male) behavior, see *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Difference* (Washington, DC, 1998).

² Robert Bly, *Iron John* (New York, 1990), p. 6

³ Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly* (New York, 1992), p. 6. For other examples of this approach to masculinity, see Warren Farrell's *Why Men Are the Way They Are: The Male-Female Dynamic* (New York, 1986) and *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex* (New York, 1993) and Herb Goldberg's *The Inner Male: Overcoming Roadblocks to Intimacy* (New York, 1988).

⁴ For a broader discussion of hegemonic masculinity see Andrea Cornwall's and Nancy Lindisfarne's introduction to their edited collection *Dislocating Masculinity* (London, 1994).

⁵ For a further discussion of the interaction between "normative" masculine models and subverted groups (such as homosexual men) see R.W. Connell's *Masculinities* (Berkeley, 1995), especially pp. 216-220.

⁶ David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making* (New Haven, 1990).

⁷ His claim goes far beyond the suggestion of biological or evolutionary roots to behavior, arguing in the end that the end-results of male behavior resemble each other while ignoring sub-cultural variation.

⁸ Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford, 1989), p. 46.

⁹ Jo Ann McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis, 1994), p. 3.

¹⁰ Lucy Gilbert and Paula Webster, "The Dangers of Femininity," in *The Gender Reader*, eds. Evelyn Ashton-Jones and Gary A. Olson (Boston, 1991), p. 42.

¹¹ David Rosen, *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity* (Urbana, 1993).

¹² Rosen, *Changing Fictions of Masculinity*, pp. xii-xiii

¹³ Rosen, *Changing Fictions of Masculinity*, pp. xvii

¹⁴ Lindisfarne, *Dislocating Masculinity* (see above, n. 4), pp. 11-23.

¹⁵The idea of the performance of gender has become very popular in academia, resulting largely from Butler's *Gender Trouble* (New York, 1990). This notion of "performance" is problematic mainly because people have interpreted it in ways that Butler did not intend. As she mentions in the introductory material to her book *Bodies That Matter* (New York, 1993), Butler did not intend gender to be seen as a something that could consciously be put on or taken off depending on the needs or desires of "such a willful and instrumental subject" (x). Instead, her use of the "performative" follows Austin's idea of the speech act (in *How to do Things With Words* [Cambridge, 1975]) – an act that creates a truth that is already believed by the actor(s) and the observers, so that the way that truth is created is not at all transparent. In Butler's words, "that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality" (*Gender Trouble*, p. 136).

¹⁶ Gillian Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale, 1990).

¹⁷ Vern Bullough, "On Being Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities* (see above, n. 9), p. 34.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997).

¹⁹ When Cohen does address chivalry in the story he relies on an overly-simplified description of how chivalry can be defined, and only does so in order to prove that Gowther (his subject) is the antithesis of the chivalric ideal. This does more to excuse the article from an awareness of chivalry than it does to address it, because it is essentially placing the romance (and the romance's hero) in the realm of the exceptional, the anti-

chivalrous, which places it in the context of the other articles of the collection; dealing with exceptional and the problematized models of masculinity because of the assumption that the most obvious codes of masculinity pose no interesting questions.

²⁰ Namely *prouesse*, *largess*, *courtoisie*, and *franchise*. See Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven, 1984), p. 2.

²¹ Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999).

²² Philippa Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia 1422-1442* (Oxford, 1992).

²³ Guy Halsall, *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 1998).

See also Jody Enders's *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca, 1999), Jean Jost's "The Role of Violence in Adventure: 'The Ballad of King Arthur and the King of Cornwall' and 'The Turke and Gowin'," in *Arthurian Interpretations 2* (1988), 47-57.

²⁴ Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford, 1947), Book I.

²⁵ On p. 131, for example, Kaeuper cites Malory's *Morte Darthur* together with *Mort Artu* to show that committing violence was key in chivalric identity formation, and then immediately supports his assertion by citing the historical William Marshall, who won great fame and wealth through his success at the early tournament.

²⁶ J. F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe During the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 37-40.

²⁷ Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1984), p. 252.

²⁸ Contamine does, however, deal with different kinds of violence much more effectively than Kaeuper does, recognizing that theoretical categories such as the just war or the

private war are thematically very different. See p. 273, for example, where he differentiates between types of violence in relation to the Truce of God movement, implicitly demonstrating that the intentions of medieval combatants dictated and defined the violence that they perpetrated and the attitude that they had about that violence.

²⁹ Kelly DeVries, for example has a strong emphasis on technology in his *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, which follows his earlier work *Medieval Military Technology* which is devoted to the topic. The concentration on technology results in part from Lynn White Jr.'s controversial (in *Medieval Technology and Social Change* [Oxford, 1962]) argument about the impact of the stirrup in the high Middle Ages and the various responses to this ongoing debate (by various scholars including Bachrach, Morillo and Ayton).

³⁰ For a more complete discussion of the motivations of combatants in this crusade see Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusade* (Ann Arbor, 1971), especially p. 53 and following.

³¹ See Juliet Barker's *The Tournament in England 1100-1400* (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 45 and 70 (for a discussion of the problem of tournaments for political leaders and the criticism and sanctioning by the church).

³² See Richard Barber's and Juliet Barker's *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (New York), p. 41-43.

³³ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, p. 61.

³⁴ See, for example Sidney Painter's *William Marshal: Knight Errant, Baron, and Regent of England* (Toronto, 1982), 24.

³⁵ Barber and Barker, *Tournaments* (New York, 1989), p. 16.

³⁶ Anthony Annunziata, "The Pas d'Armes & Its Occurrences in Malory," in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on the Relationship between Literature and Life in the later Middle Ages*, eds. Larry Benson and John Leyerle, (Kalamazoo, 1980), pp. 39-40.

³⁷ The tournament, according to the strict definition, refers to a combat in which groups of knights fight over a large tract of land, in roughly defined areas, attempting mainly to take ransom rather than kill their opponents. "Hastilude" is the more generic term referring to martial sport undertaken with lance on horseback. In common usage, however, the term "tournament" has come to mean all kinds of medieval martial sport, so much so that even those who acknowledge this difference rely on it as a universal term. This dissertation relies on this commonly accepted terminology for reference to the martial sport in general. Although the activities of William Marshal are more accurately described as "Atournament" than the activities of the later-medieval knight, this dissertation will make explicit distinctions as to early or late periods, and will use "tournament" as a general, categorical term. For a more complete discussion of the terms, see Juliet Barker's introduction to *The Tournament in England* (see above, n. 31).

³⁸ For a discussion of the interaction between narratives and behavior see Elspeth Kennedy, "The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance," in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend: Essays in Honor of Valerie Lagorio*, eds. James P. Carley and Martin R. Shichterman (Albany, 1994).

³⁹ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 29.

⁴¹ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 2.

⁴² The use of Froissart as an historical source can be problematic, as can many of the

primary sources for medieval military history. This example relies on Froissart as a reflection of contemporary notions of proper chivalric behavior more than as a describer of real events.

⁴³ Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Brereton (London, 1978), p. 69.

⁴⁴ Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Keen makes a strong argument for the real-world presence of chivalric ideals in *Chivalry* (New Haven, 1984), p. 190 and following. In *The Art of War in Western Europe* (Woodbridge, 1997) Verbruggen argues that knights were continually motivated by self preservation and self interest, but were continually balancing these motivations with the demands of chivalric conduct on the battle field, and that in the later Middle Ages "knightly customs" were becoming more prevalent (pp. 57-58).

⁴⁷ Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry* (Baltimore, 1940), p. 46.

⁴⁸ Larry Benson, "The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes & L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Marechal," in *Chivalric Literature*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Benson, "The Tournament," p. 5.

⁵⁰ Benson, "The Tournament," p. 8.

⁵¹ Barker argues (in *The Tournament in England*) that the spectacular aspect of the tournament was present from the early romance tradition, and traces the idea of the tournament-as-spectacle from the twelfth century (p. 85). She accepts, however, that most scholars see an overwhelming change in the tournament towards spectacle in the fifteenth century. My use of the terms "early" and "late" in describing the tournament is meant to track the general shift in the tournament's emphasis (towards a showcase for

masculine values), not to suggest that spectatorship was absent in the early forms of tournament.

⁵² Benson, "The Tournament," p. 10.

⁵³ Benson, "The Tournament," p. 15.

⁵⁴ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon, (Chicago, 1989), p. 305.

⁵⁵ Carroll Gilmore, "A Practical Chivalry: The Training of Horses for Tournaments and Warfare," in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, vol. XIII (New York, 1992), p. 20.

⁵⁶ Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that there is far less emphasis placed on the idea of the monetary reward in the later tournament, whereas in the early tournament monetary gain drives the activity. When material gain is mentioned in the later tournament, it seems to be a symbolic and/or ceremonial rather than economic. For example, Jaques de Lalaing's pas of the Fontaine des Pleurs was centered around a series of single combats with various weapons (See Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 201-202). A golden weapon representing the weapon chosen in the fighting (an axe for the combatant who chose combat with axes) was awarded to the person who gave the best account of himself, and this was the only award in the tournament. The fact that these "awards" serve more as gifts (Lalaing was not planning on keeping any of them) is significant, as is the fact that the loser in the combat (the man brought to the ground with an axe) was also awarded a collar of gold, which could only be opened by a Lady in possession of the key. Gold can, of course, be used for its monetary value, but this was clearly not the purpose of the award.

⁵⁸ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, p. 89

⁵⁹ Annunziata, "The Pas d'Armes" p. 41.

⁶⁰ Keen, Chivalry, p. 100.

⁶¹ Keen, Chivalry, p. 90.

⁶²This is not to say that female presence was not, in some cases, essential to the tournament. Speaking in the most general terms, however, female observers of the tournament are primarily the audience, whose observation fashions the chivalric/masculine identity of the participants (although we must remember the very active role that women often played in the non-combative moments of the tournament in general).

⁶³ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, pp. 4-5. Although Barker's book concerns England and not France, she states that tournaments in both countries were closely related, and that the English gentry often went to tournament on the continent.

⁶⁴ Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Keen, *Chivalry*, 86-87. See also Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 50, and Barker, *The Tournament in England*, pp.14-15.

⁶⁶Modern understandings of medieval warfare are further complicated by anachronistic assumptions about the way that warfare works. "Warfare", by its very nature, always takes place under specific rules and conventions, and the difference between these rules and conventions indicates the type of war being fought. This definition of warfare, allows an approach to the medieval tournament as a kind of warfare, as opposed to as a "sport", which might be considered the opposite of "real" warfare.

⁶⁷ Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (Toronto, 1987), p. 26.

⁶⁸ Duby, William Marshal: *The Flower of Chivalry*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1985), p. 74.

⁶⁹ Duby, William Marshal, p. 75.

⁷⁰ George Duby, "The Emergence of the Individual," in *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 509

⁷¹ Duby, William Marshal, p. 75.

⁷² Danielle Regnier-Bohler, "Imagining the Self," in *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 313, 331.

⁷³ Lois Roney, "Chaucer Subjectivizes the Oath: Depicting the Fall from Feudalism into Individualism in the *Canterbury Tales*," in *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and Their Decline* (Gainseville, 1994).

⁷⁴ John F. Benton, "Individualism and Conformity in Medieval Western Europe," in *Culture, Power and Personality in Medieval France* (London, 1991), pp. 320-321.

⁷⁵ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1925), lines 258-274.

⁷⁶ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 274-290.

⁷⁷ Exceptions to this general trend are numerous, but often when group combat does occur in the romance it is almost always in the context of a small group, and the fighting is depicted in terms of separate, individual combats. For example, when Chrétien must include a larger engagement for the purposes of plot, he does so with summary, from a removed point of view, and in a limited way. For example, when Clamedeu besieges Beurepaire the action is presented in summary, almost from the point of view of Clamedeu, who is distant from the fight (*Perceval* lines 2460-2491).

⁷⁸ This tension seems to be present in other aspects of military history as well, suggesting a larger cultural shift. For example, there shift during this general period in the rhetoric of compensation of those calling for crusades. In the early crusades, remission of sins was inherently tied to the conquest of Jerusalem, so that the personal goals of the pilgrims (crusaders) were one and the same as the socio-political goals of those calling for the crusades. By the thirteenth century, however, the idea of the remission of sins was combined with the feudal limit of 40 days service in the Albigensian Crusade, which allowed soldiers to fulfill their service and receive their personal rewards regardless of the overall success of the movement. This change marks a gradual shift in the crusading movement, in which the goals of the individual (remission of sins) slowly start to be separate from those of the state (taking Jerusalem, or in the later case, expunging the Catharist heresy).

⁷⁹ Duby, William Marshal, p. 98.

⁸⁰ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, p. 22.

⁸¹ See also Richard Barber's and Juliet Barker's *Tournaments*.

⁸² Barker, *The Tournament in England*, p. 19

⁸³ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 89.

⁸⁴ Painter, William Marshal, p. 24.

⁸⁵ The specific dates of this shift from what I call the "early" to the "late" tournament have been left intentionally ambiguous, because this shift takes place differently in various places and periods, sometimes gradually, sometimes in drastic shifts. Barker (p. 107) places the flourishing of the Pas in the fifteenth century, which does seem to be the period in which it was most widely accepted. There are earlier examples, however, and

even as far back as Chrétien we can find the beginnings of the general attitude of the Pas. For example, in the Joie de la Cort episode of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, Maboagrins has agreed to his lady's request to defend the garden against any who would come (lines 623-631). The defense of a certain terrain feature or location against all comers is the central idea behind the Pas d'Armes, as is the presence and influence of women. These early (earlier than the 15th century) references to this form of tournament are the beginnings of what would come to be the dominant form in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

⁸⁶ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 203.

⁸⁷ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, p. 13

⁸⁸ Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 50-51.

⁸⁹ The paradigm that I have laid out here is a general trend, and subject to exceptions. For example, we have seen that the attitude of the Alate" tournament became popular literarily fairly early with Chrétien, and even in the middle of the fourteenth-century we find Geoffroi de Charny ranking the melee as the most important and praiseworthy type of tournament combat. Richard Kaeuper rightly argues, however, that this attitude is in response to the serious military defeats that Charny would have been witness to at the hands of the English and to the perception that these defeats were due to a lack of sufficient training.

⁹⁰ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, p. 180-181.

⁹¹ Benson, *The Tournament*, p. 8.

⁹² Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 49.

⁹³ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 101

⁹⁴ Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 59

⁹⁵ Annunziata, p. 39.

⁹⁶ Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 50.

⁹⁷ See their respective books on William Marshal.

⁹⁸ See, Benson, p. 16.

⁹⁹ Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁰ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 92.

¹⁰¹This is a difficult term to use without explanation, especially when discussing the late-12th and 13th centuries. Due largely to C.S. Lewis' influence, Courtly Love has long been seen as essentially adulterous, and as a strategy for preserving this definition, the numerous exceptions that disprove the rule have been redefined love of different kinds. The many examples of unadulterous love in courtly literature, however, are often part of the same tradition as the adulterous love. In the final analysis, the feelings and activities associated with courtly love are common to both adulterous love and to love as a proper precursor to marriage (although the literary record from the time of Chrétien does seem to emphasize the non-adulterous variety. For this reason, the term "courtly love" in this dissertation will be used to describe the love most often celebrated in romances, the conventions of which are largely set down by Chrétien.

¹⁰²For a discussion of this division of space according to gendered boundaries, see Duby, "The Emergence of the Individual."

¹⁰³Although we should see that the romance genre has various manifestations and some feature female protagonists, such as Silence or "The Man of Law's Tale," this dissertation deals with the construction of chivalry in what Crane would call "courtly romances" - those common romances dealing with male knights and the ideals that they follow.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford, 1947), Book XXI, p. 1259.

¹⁰⁵The discussion at this stage must rely, to some degree, on generalities, as we are mapping out basic notions about chivalry and masculinity in a roughly defined period and place. Specificity will come in the next chapter as we examine specific evidence, and at that time we will deal with the problems of proposing an overall model for a cultural phenomenon that was under constant discussion and various redefinition by its own adherents.

¹⁰⁶ The term "romance" is itself a hard one to define, and (as stated in the previous chapter) romances often vary greatly in the ideals that they prescribe. The discussion in this dissertation will be limited to what Susan Crane calls the Courtly Romance, which serves as a forum for the openly "didactic" presentation of new models for courtly behavior (*Insular Romance*, [Berkeley, 1986], p. 12), or what Stephen Knight more specifically refers to as the "Knight Alone" romances, in which the focus is on the identity formation of a single knight ("The Social Function of the Middle English Romances," in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers [New York, 1986]).

¹⁰⁷ The question of exactly who was the audience of the medieval romance is a complicated issue, especially when dealing (as this dissertation does) with romances that are in the vernacular. It is likely that vernacular literatures saw a wide readership (and a still-wider audience of hearers), and that this readership would become less and less aristocratic. This dissertation operates under the assumption that, at the end of the fourteenth century, romances were part of aristocratic culture as well as an emerging

wealthy merchant culture. Both Keen (*Chivalry*) and Kaeuper (*Chivalry and Violence*) rely on the literary evidence in romances to discuss chivalric ideals of noble society, despite their differing opinions on the nature of chivalry and its practice. This reliance is justified by a number of specific discussions as to its value. See Elspeth Kennedy's discussion of this (in "The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance").

¹⁰⁸ Ad Putter, "Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of "Effeminacy," in *Arthurian Romance and Gender*. Ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Chaucer's reliance on and use of classical texts and themes suggests this connection, as does Sally Mussetter in "The Fairy Arts of Measure in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*," in *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 31.1 (1984) and Janet Coleman who, in *Medieval Readers and Writers 1350-1400* (New York, 1981), suggests that there was a general move in English culture in the last half of the fourteenth century towards university education.

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of recreance and in the chivalric romance, see Nancy Bradley-Cromeey's "The 'Recreantise' Episode in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*. *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches*, ed. Howell Chickering and Thomas Seiler (Kalamazoo, 1988). On the topic of feminization in the Middle Ages, see John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1980). On a more general level, the perception of feminization in courtly culture is furthered by the numerous scholars who follow Duby in the assumption that prowess is the essential marker for chivalry.

¹¹¹ There is an asymmetry in the humoric system that complicates this reading, as the sanguine temperament is generally perceived as more necessary than the other complexions. A full exploration of this system is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the idea of balance between excessive poles need not rely on the terminology of

complexions because the qualities associated with the model (hot, wet, dry, moist) are so suggestive of balance (i.e. one cannot be too sanguine, but one can suffer from being too hot or too moist). Literary examples tend to rely on the notion of excess and balance as well (ignoring the asymmetry) such as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, both of which examine human excesses along the Sanguine/Melancholic axis.

¹¹² Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. and trans. Carleton W. Carroll (New York, 1987), lines 9-18 (hereafter cited as Chrétien). Translations are also taken from Carroll, except where otherwise noted.

¹¹³ Chrétien, line 22

¹¹⁴ Chrétien, lines 103-104

¹¹⁵ Chrétien, lines 181-220

¹¹⁶ Chrétien, lines 81-93

¹¹⁷ Chrétien, lines 96-102

¹¹⁸ Chrétien, line 164

¹¹⁹ Chrétien, line 171

¹²⁰ Chrétien, line 218

¹²¹ Chrétien, lines 198-100

¹²² For example, see Erec's accusation of misconduct directed at Yder for what he allowed his dwarf to do (1016-17) and again when Yder is surrendering to Guinevere and he represents the dwarf's action in terms of his own guilt (lines 1193-1195).

¹²³ Chrétien, lines 2396-2397

¹²⁴ Chrétien, lines 2405 and following.

¹²⁵ Chrétien, line 2428

¹²⁶ Chrétien, line 2422

¹²⁷ For a more full treatment of this behavior see Nancy Bradley-Cromeey's "The Recreantise Episode in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*" in *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches*, pp. 449-471.

¹²⁸ The most obvious of which is that Erec wants to avenge the injuries sustained by himself and Guinever's maid at the hands of the dwarf. The relationship between the knights and their ladies in this event is a medium for a more significant and (for the purposes of the story) the more important homosocial relationship between Erec and Yder. Sedgwick's work on homosocial desire in the 19th century serves surprisingly well as a theoretical text for male relations in the medieval romance.

¹²⁹ Here I am not necessarily arguing for female agency in the tournament or the tradition of knightly combat in the medieval romance. Instead I am noting the more significant presence of women as markers of courtly and/or amorous behavior that is necessary for the male protagonist, but only when properly balanced with oppositional homosocial behavior.

¹³⁰ Chrétien, lines 2100 through 2119

¹³¹ Chrétien, lines 2120 and following

¹³² Chrétien, line 2174

¹³³ Chrétien, lines 2175-2176

¹³⁴ Chrétien, lines 2100-2103

¹³⁵ Chrétien, lines 2465-2466

¹³⁶ Chrétien, line 2477

¹³⁷ Chrétien, line 2481

¹³⁸ This translation contains a crux in which Carroll's hand is more heavily felt than in other moments of his translation. He renders both "amie" and "dame" as "lady," no doubt because a more accurate translation of "amie" in lines 2477 and 2481 brings up uncomfortable ambiguities as to Enide's status and title. This choice obscures an essential difference in tone, however, between the affectionate, loving "amie" and the curt, business-like address of "dame".

¹³⁹ Chrétien, lines 2538-2539

¹⁴⁰ Chrétien, lines 2688-2693

¹⁴¹ For example, Lee Patterson (*Negotiating the Past* [Madison, 1987]) and Sally Mussetter ("The Fairy Arts of Measure in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*." *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 31.1 [1984]) see Erec's attitude after leaving the bed-chamber in terms of a reconciliation of the two aspects his identity. Others, such as Grace Armstrong, Penny Sullivan and Norris Lacy see a shift after this episode towards Enide as protagonist, but the assumption that Erec's behavior is redemptive drives their readings. Deborah Nelson ("Role of Animals in *Erec et Enide*." *Romance Quarterly* 35.1 [1988], pp. 31-38) represents a standard response to knightly conduct in the story, arguing that in these combative episodes Erec is "proving his worth" and is meeting the "requirements of a knight...he helps those in need, protects his lady from danger, and serves as a faithful friend."

¹⁴² C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1948), p. 26.

¹⁴³ Lewis, p. 23

¹⁴⁴ Chrétien, line 2179

¹⁴⁵ Chrétien, line 1679 and following

¹⁴⁶ Chrétien, lines 2133-2152

¹⁴⁷ Chrétien, lines 2798 and following

¹⁴⁸ Chrétien, lines 2823-2836

¹⁴⁹ Chrétien, lines 2976-2981

¹⁵⁰ Chrétien, lines 2987-2988

¹⁵¹ For example, Sally Mussetter ("The Fairy Arts of Measure") argues that Erec's quest in the story is for a moderate identity, and she makes important connections between Chrétien's notion of chivalry and the clerical tradition of learning that informs the coronation sequence of the story. She therefore sees the episode in the wilderness as Erec attempting to find temperance (or "measure") in his overly amorous identity. This argument is important, but ultimately incomplete without awareness of the excesses in the other direction, towards violence and aggression.

¹⁵² Patterson, Lee. *Negotiating the Past*, p. 183

¹⁵³ Duby, Georges. "Au XIIe Siècle: Les Jeunes dans la Société Aristocratique." *Annales* 19 (1964), pp. 835-865.

¹⁵⁴ This episode culminates in line 4795 and following.

¹⁵⁵ Chrétien, line 4807.

¹⁵⁶ Deborah Nelson ("The Role of Animals in Erec et Enide,") touches on the connections between the two awakening moments in the story, but concentrates on the role that horse plays in demonstrating Eric and Enide's reconciliation.

¹⁵⁷ Chrétien, lines 5693-5719 especially, in which the garden is described as holding all plants of the world, existing in a perpetual Spring, and being bound by impassable barriers of magical air.

¹⁵⁸ The fight culminates in line 5959.

¹⁵⁹ Chrétien lines 4, 6

¹⁶⁰ Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D.D.R. Owen (New York, 1991).

¹⁶¹ Glyn Burgess, *Chrétien de Troyes' Erec et Enide* (London, 1984), p. 9.

¹⁶² Kurtis B. Haas ("Erec's Ascent: The Politics of Wisdom in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*," in *Romance Quarterly* 46.3, [1999]) in fact, argues that Enide, as a figure of guidance, tries to direct Erec towards moderation and temperate behavior, just as Philosophy does in Boethius. He also argues that, in the middle section of *Erec et Enide* "it is painfully obvious...that Erec is the problem here" (p. 137) and defines Erec's behavior as "storming about England looking for adventure rather than finding a more moderate way to get back his reputation" (p. 136). He does not apply the notion of moderation and excess, however, to the violence in the episodes, and therefore misses the overall model for chivalric behavior presented in the text, despite the fact that his very good reading of Enide's role reinforces this larger message.

¹⁶³ See Book 2 of *Ethics*, for example.

¹⁶⁴ *Erec et Enide* is the most useful of Chrétien's romances for this dissertation because of the obvious way that it details the model of balance and, to a lesser extent, because of its connection to later romances. This dissertation is not meant to be a survey of Chrétien's romances, but it is important to note that the description of chivalry as balance occurs in others of his romances, suggesting a common theme in his writing. *Perceval* is the obvious example, the amorous and martial excesses explored in the young knight's process of coming of age being almost as clear as those in *Erec et Enide*. The model is also clearly evident in *Yvain*, and to a lesser extent in others of his romances. The

exception seems to be his treatment of Lancelot, but this is not the only element that makes *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* exceptional to Chrétien's other romances.

¹⁶⁵ For the use of Libeaus in Malory see, for example, Thomas L. Wright's "On the Genesis of Malory's Gareth" (*Speculum* 57:3 [July, 1982], 569-582), Robert H. Wilson's "The 'Fair Unknown' in Malory" (*PMLA* 58:1 [March, 1943], 1-21), and Charles Moorman's "Courtly Love in Malory" (*ELH* 27:3 [September, 1960], 163-176). For the use of Libeaus in the analysis of Spencer's *Faerie Queene* see Broadus's "The Red Cross Knight and Libeaus Desconus" (*Modern Language Notes* 18:7 [November, 1905], 202-204), and John Draper's "The Narrative Technique of the *Faerie Queene*" (*PMLA* 39:2 [June 1924], 310-324). See also Francis Magoun's "The Source of Chaucer's Rime in *Sir Thopas*" (*PMLA* 42:4 [December 1927], 833-844), and Mills, M. "The Composition and Style of 'Southern' Octavian, *Sir Launval* and *Libeaus Desconus*." (*Medium Aevum* 31:2 [1962], 88-89) for a general discussion of Libeaus's influence on other romances.

¹⁶⁶ In *Insular Romance* (see above, n. 106) Susan Crane has provided a useful way to roughly categorize romances by thematic elements while maintaining that the genre itself is undefined and in many ways artificial. The thematic elements that inform her classification tend to be social, and have to do with the way that social institutions (religion, heredity and land ownership, courtly love) direct the action of the narrative. If, as Crane suggests, "romances contemplate the place of private identity in the society at large" (p. 11), then it becomes possible not only to classify romances in terms of the social institutions that drive the events of the stories, but also by the shape of this "identity," and shape that can transcend the details of the social setting and suggest a classification organized on different lines. This dissertation argues that the kind of

identity formation found in *Erec et Enide* in the last chapter, while sharing a commonality with other courtly romances (Crane's classification for romances set against the institutions of love and marriage), will also share a commonality with any romance of land and lineage or any hagiographic romances (others of Crane's system) which create ideal masculine identity in terms of a balanced negotiation of urges.

¹⁶⁷ I rely here and elsewhere in this dissertation on commonalities in some of the romances dated from Chaucer's period and their interaction with each other. My intention is not to delve into a discussion of source materials and influences, but instead to rely, as Crane does (in *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* [Princeton, 1994]), on the "resonances" between romances of this period, and the general trends in the genre.

¹⁶⁸ For an overview of the relationship between *Libeaus Disconus* and other versions of the fair unknown motif see Maldwyn Mills, *Libeaus Desconus* (Oxford, 1969).

¹⁶⁹ Mills, Maldwyn, "The Composition and Style of 'Southern' Octavian, Sir Launval and *Libeaus Desconus*" in *Medium Aevum* 31:2 [1962]), 88-89.

¹⁷⁰ The connections between *Libeaus Disconus* and *Erec et Enide* are admittedly not as strong as those between LD and Chrétien's *Percevel*, but the use of *Erec et Enide* is more useful for this dissertation. *Percevel* is clearly part of the fair unknown tradition, and so in some ways *Libeaus Disconus* is a direct descendant of it. I am arguing that the behavior prescribed in these romances offers connections between romances not so directly related. For this reason *Erec et Enide* is offered as the early example of the chivalric model under discussion, although *Percevel* contains the same prescription for male behavior, albeit with a more directly religious ending.

¹⁷¹ See Duby's introduction to *A History of Private Life*.

¹⁷² This is, in some ways, a more narrow definition of the motif than is commonly assumed, as it excludes those moments in romance when the protagonist conceals identity for different purposes. For a discussion of gender, however, it must be seen that the majority of the fair unknown romances deal with the construction of chivalric masculinity for a protagonist whose gendered identity is somehow complicated. The group of romances considered to be part of the fair unknown tradition are linked by a thematic similarity much stronger than the somewhat superficial presence of concealment without attention to its narrative function.

¹⁷³ *Libeaus Disconus's* textual history is complicated by the variants present in the extant manuscripts. A full exploration of these variants would be beneficial to the discussion of chivalry and romance, but such an exploration is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I rely on Mills's argument that Lambeth Palace MS. 306 is the best text available to us, being free of the omissions, interpolations and defects of the other extant manuscripts (*Libeaus Disconus*, p. 12).

¹⁷⁴ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 14-24.

¹⁷⁵ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 187-188

¹⁷⁶ It is worth noting that the British Museum MS. Cotton Caligula A.II Contains the variant reading "And þy manhood y-schent" for the corresponding line, suggesting that the "lose" of Arthur might be inflected more towards an issue of gender in the reading offered above.

¹⁷⁷ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 182-185

¹⁷⁸ Stephen Knight, for example, finds in *Libeaus Disconus* proof that "feudality was based on violence and self-interest, and all the romances at some stage recognize this disturbing reality, in order to make valid their cultural concealment of it" ("The Social Function of the Middle English Romances" in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers (New York, 1986). Here Knight allies himself with a school of criticism (including and possibly springing from Huizinga) that sees late-medieval chivalric discourse in terms of the barbarity and aggression that it conceals (see note 39, below for a discussion of Kaeuper's reliance on this attitude). This approach to late-medieval culture has been confronted by scholars such as Keen, Goodman and Benson and Leyerle.

¹⁷⁹ William is, apparently, bleeding by the time his nephews (who are the three knights of the second combat) approach him before the next encounter, but we only learn this at this later moment (in lines 414 and 419). Because the presence of blood and any wounds that this presence suggests is left unmentioned in the narrative of the combat, the fighting is meant to be read as non-injurious.

¹⁸⁰ *Libeaus Disconus*, line 45

¹⁸¹ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 471-473

¹⁸² *Libeaus Disconus*, line 489

¹⁸³ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 490-494

¹⁸⁴ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 631-633

¹⁸⁵ *Libeaus Disconus*, lines 662-664

¹⁸⁶ *Libeaus Disconus*, line 630

¹⁸⁷ Cotton Caligula contains a variant reading just before this combat, in fact, in which the three knights swear to find Libeaus and kill him (to "sle þat kny3t so yenge") in line 440.

¹⁸⁸ Libeaus Disconus, lines 646-647

¹⁸⁹ Libeaus Disconus, lines 660-664

¹⁹⁰ For a full discussion of the audiences of the medieval romance, see Janet Coleman's *Medieval Readers and Writers 1350-1400* (New York, 1981), especially her discussion of *Piers Plowman* (232-349) which discusses the diffusion and popularization of theology and logic into the literary tradition. See also Robert S. Sturges's *Medieval Interpretation* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1991) which tracks university-based philosophical movements along with the emergence and popularity of the romance, linking the two traditions thematically.

¹⁹¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 153

¹⁹² Lewis, *Discarded Image*, pp. 154-155

¹⁹³ Here we have moved our discussion of philosophy in a distinctly Boethian direction, but this move seems to have a precedent for the medieval thinker, as in the case of Chaucer's *House of Fame*, which seamlessly mixes natural science (e.g. "kyndly inclyning") with the Boethian view of fame and renown as inherently undependable and temporary.

¹⁹⁴ The popularity of Boethius in the Middle Ages is widely accepted in the academy. His popularity in the vernacular is furthermore suggested not only from Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *Consolation*, but also from Alfred's much earlier translation, Jean de Meun's slightly earlier translation into French, and John Walton's slightly later

English translation (not to mention translations and editions in the Renaissance, such as Elizabeth's).

¹⁹⁵ Libeaus Disconus, lines 750-753

¹⁹⁶ Libeaus Disconus, lines 797-802

¹⁹⁷ Libeaus Disconus, lines 999-1001

¹⁹⁸ Libeaus Disconus, lines 850-857

¹⁹⁹ a small hound, customarily a Lady's pet

²⁰⁰ Libeaus Disconus, lines 1074-1088

²⁰¹ Lineaus Disconus, lines 1144-1160

²⁰² Otis tells his knights to arm against Arthur's knight in lines 1111-1112, and their arming, evocative of war rather than courtly combat, occurs 1119 and following.

²⁰³ The most recent adherent to this approach to chivalry is Richard Kaeuper's *Chivalry and Violence*, which argues that chivalry was an attempt to regulate and put a fair face on the endemic violence of the Middle Ages, extolling the audience "not to forget to shudder" at the brutality of the period. The "do not forget to shudder" approach to history, literature (Kaeuper relies largely on literary evidence to establish the argument) and cultures of the past is part of a larger camp that prefers to see medieval culture in general as squalid and brutal, usually in contrast to the more refined Renaissance (See note 13). Kaeuper's more recent edited collection *Violence in Medieval Society* (Rochester, NY, 2000) presents a more balanced approach to the question of violence), but his writing still proceeds from the assumption that chivalry is defined in terms of unilateral aggression.

²⁰⁴ Libeaus Disconus, line 1462

²⁰⁵ Libeaus Disconus, line 1479

²⁰⁶ Putter, "Rhetoric of 'Effeminacy,'" pp. 37-38 especially.

²⁰⁷ Putter, "Rhetoric of 'Effeminacy,'" pp. 44.

²⁰⁸ Putter, "Rhetoric of 'Effeminacy,'" pp. 40.

²⁰⁹ This grouping seems to be common, see Stephen Knight, "The Social Function of the Middle English Romances."

²¹⁰ Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 713-731.

²¹¹ This thematic element of the story relates it to *The Awntyrs of Arthur at the Terne Wathelene*, in which Lancelot prefers the amorous company of Guenevere to the homosocial company of the hunt, and the behavior is literally condemned by the ghost of Guenevere's mother, and symbolically condemned when compared to Gawain's ideal combat with, and assimilation of, the Scottish knight whose amorous excesses have put him under the control of his lady.

²¹² Cohen does an interesting Freudian analysis of the role that animals play in *Gowther*, but he does not give enough attention to the fact that the presence of animal imagery (in connection with the monstrous, but also in connection with other, less elicited images) is something that many romances (and most of those with which we will be dealing) make use of, either explicitly or subtly.

²¹³ Lois Roney, *Chaucer's Knight's Tale and Theories of Scholastic Psychology*. Tampa, 1990. pp. 2-3.

²¹⁴ All citations of Chaucer's work in this dissertation are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

²¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, pp. 95-97.

²¹⁶ A solid reading of the morality of the end of Troilus and its relation to the Tale is still the introduction to *The Book of Troilus & Criseyde* ed. Robert Root (Princeton, 1952), pp. xlix and following.

²¹⁷ Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 635

²¹⁸ Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*. New York, 1960. p. xxi.

²¹⁹ See Albrecht Durer's, *Nemesis (The Large Fortune)*, currently in the Baltimore Museum of Art.

²²⁰ Chaucer's reliance on, and use of Boethius in "The Knight's Tale" does seem to rest mainly in books II, III and IV of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which deal with the nature of the world, the nature of God and goodness, and the way that interaction of people with both.

²²¹ See Barbara Nolan's useful study of Chaucer's use of the romance of antiquity (*Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* [Cambridge, 1992]).

²²² The nature of this influence is particular, especially when fit into a Christian worldview that includes the idea of free will. Influence should be understood as inclinations and tendencies, rather than the more deterministic view of astrological influence that might inform modern versions of astrology. For a more full discussion see Peter Brown and Andrew Butcher's *The Age of Saturn* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 205 and following.

²²³ The interconnectedness of planetary influence on the world, human health and human psychology seems to have been widely accepted. Lewis (*The Discarded Image*) summarizes the concept well, but for primary reference see line 740 and following in book six of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, ed. G.C Macaulay (Oxford, 1899).

²²⁴ William Frost argues a similar point, suggesting that the audience of the Tale cannot choose a favorite because both of the main characters are equally flawed. See "An Interpretation of Chaucer's Knight's Tale." In *Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Richard Schoeck (Notre Dame, 1960).

²²⁵ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1009 - 1019

²²⁶ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1020-1024

²²⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Book of Theseus*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York), Book III, pp. 49-50.

²²⁸ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1096-1097

²²⁹ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1118-1119

²³⁰ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1114-1117

²³¹ Boccaccio, Book 3, 16-17, p. 80.

²³² Boccaccio, Book 3, 15, p. 80.

²³³ Magnus, Albertus. *The Book of Secrets* (London, 1965), p. 71

²³⁴ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1918-1966

²³⁵ Chaucer tells us as much in lines 1932-1935: "...and alle the circumstaunces / Of love, which that I rekned and rekne shal, / By ordre weren peynted on the wal, / And mo than I kan make of mentioun."

²³⁶ "The Knight's Tale," lines 1925-1928

²³⁷ This is an important point, because even with a recent emphasis on studying specific constructions of gender, scholars often implicitly or explicitly rely on stereotypical traits for masculine and feminine behavior, and then employ the binary of the two. For example, Jill Mann (in *Geoffrey Chaucer* [New York, 1991]) that Chaucer's "human

ideal" mixes both masculine and feminine traits. Crane (in *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*) argues a similar point (that Chaucer's masculine ideal incorporate attributes of the feminine), while at the same time criticizing our reliance on a "too sterile" masculine/feminine model (p. 21).

²³⁸ Nolan (*Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*) makes a convincing argument that the virtue celebrated in the tale is more Senecan and Stoic than Aristotelian. This dissertation is primarily interested in the ways that the tale uses images of excess in order to identify a moderate model for behavior. It is in this sense that I rely on the idea of the Aristotelian virtue, contrasting it less with Stoicism and Senecan philosophy and more with the Christian tradition that sees virtue as the extreme opposite to vice.

²³⁹ It is important to note here once again Chaucer's choice to change the narrative of the Teseide. In Boccaccio's work, Emelye is not only aware of the two knights from the beginning of their imprisonment, she engages them with flirtation and enjoys being the object of their love. By removing any awareness whatsoever of the two, Chaucer presents an infatuation that is more eagerly criticized by the audience.

²⁴⁰ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1373-1375

²⁴¹ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1361-1365

²⁴² Albertus Magnus' description of how planetary influence affects physicality lists leanness and paleness under the influence of Saturn (who is cold and dry and associated with melancholy), but lists leanness and hardness of face also under Mars, as well as smallness of the eyes – another of Arcite's traits. Furthermore, the description of line 1424 ("he was long and big of bones") coincides with Magnus's description of the influence of the Sun, whose quality, like Mars, is also hot and dry.

²⁴³ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1420-1450

²⁴⁴ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1204-1207

²⁴⁵ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1470-1475

²⁴⁶ In Chaucer's translation of this story from epic to romance, his emphasis on balance and excess are key. Boccaccio's work plays with the notions of excessive love, but seems to do so in order to accentuate and romanticize the pain of love (possibly his own love for Fiammetta). Chaucer's project, on the other hand, is the criticism of excess, and so he emends his source so that Mars is primarily associated with Arcite (and less with Theseus) so that he and Palamon mirror each other.

²⁴⁷ Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985). Sedgwick's book, while describing love triangles in a much later period, has found reception among medievalists. For the use of her model in "The Knight's Tale" see Patricia Ingham's "Homosociality and Creative Masculinity in the 'Knight's Tale'" (in *Masculinities in Chaucer*, ed. Peter Beidler (Cambridge, 1998]) and Susan Crane's *Gender and Romance*, p. 49-54.

²⁴⁸ *Canturbury Tales*, p. 115. Pearsall goes on to suggest that the tale, containing more fighting than in all of Chaucer's other works combined, reduces the fighting in the Teseide to the essentials of good fighting. While this argument applies to the seemingly balanced and virtuous Theseus, the specific nature of the fighting in the rest of the tale, especially when contrasted with the notions of good and bad violence in the romance genre, is depicted in an overwhelmingly negative way.

²⁴⁹ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1580-1590

²⁵⁰ "The Knight's Tale" line 1598

²⁵¹ "The Knight's Tale" line 1600

²⁵² "The Knight's Tale," lines 793-794

²⁵³ Here again Chaucer's intentions in his retelling Boccaccio's story are felt. This episode of the Teseide more earnestly tries to combine the two knights' love for each other with their desire for Emelye, which makes them fight. The description of their fighting is, as in all of the combats in the Teseide, laced with the praise of men who have great prowess (Book V, 65, 73-76). The use of both animal imagery and the suggestion of acting without wit are specific to "The Knight's Tale."

²⁵⁴ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1653-1660

²⁵⁵ "The Knight's Tale" line 1294

²⁵⁶ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1299-1302

²⁵⁷ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1305-1307

²⁵⁸ "Truth" line 9

²⁵⁹ "Truth" line 18

²⁶⁰ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2605-2619

²⁶¹ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1275-1291

²⁶² "The Knight's Tale" line 1276

²⁶³ "The Knight's Tale" line 1278

²⁶⁴ "The Knight's Tale" line 2171

²⁶⁵ "The Knight's Tale" line 2186

²⁶⁶ "The Knight's Tale" line 2159

²⁶⁷ Chaucer's statement that Emetrius has a sanguine color complicates this reading, especially if we assume, as many scholars of medical philosophy do, that the humoral

system is asymmetrical, giving preference to the Sanguine complexion as the most healthy. This reference does not, however, make invalid the obviously excessive description of Emetrius in every other way (including his comparison to Mars in line 2159), nor does it have a positive influence on the fighting of the tournament, in which Emetrius is a major player. For the purposes of this dissertation it must suffice to note this seeming incongruity, and allow for the idea that, for Chaucer, the humoral system might not have been asymmetrical, and excess might have defined even the hot and wet pole of the sanguine complexion. This stance would certainly be supported by a humoral reading of *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which the Melancholic Troilus seems to be counterbalanced by the equally excessive Pandarus, who is, I would argue, Sanguine to a fault.

²⁶⁸ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1696-1709

²⁶⁹ "The Knight's Tale" line 1747

²⁷⁰ "The Knight's Tale" line 1766

²⁷¹ Roney (in *Chaucer's Knight*) makes the argument that Theseus's role as moderator could be understood in terms of a debate between will (represented by Palamon) and intellect (represented by Arcite) over which Theseus presides in a triangular model akin to medieval scholastic debate.

²⁷² The critical tradition of "The Knight's Tale" is often thought of in terms of a debate between order and disorder, a debate which hinges on the corrective power of Theseus to control the morally corrupt actions of Palamon and Arcite. For a review of this history, see Lee Patterson's *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, 1991), pp. 165-167.

²⁷³ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 198.

²⁷⁴ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 208.

²⁷⁵ See Patterson's note 91 in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*.

²⁷⁶ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 34-35.

²⁷⁷ The "polax" here should be understood to be the very common weapon of the medieval footman consisting of a pole, which mounts an axe head and a thrusting point, so that it is used both for thrusting and for cutting. Its inclusion in this list refers to the thrusting aspect of the weapon.

²⁷⁸ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2536-2554

²⁷⁹ Boccaccio, *Book 7*, 7-8, p. 168

²⁸⁰ Boccaccio, *Book 7*, 14, 169

²⁸¹ Boccaccio, *Book 8*, 6-131, 212-236

²⁸² Boccaccio, *Book 8*, 15, 213. There are, of course, other instances of injury in the vast account of fighting that Boccaccio gives, but over all, he mentions injuries instead of deaths, and then only briefly.

²⁸³ Minnis (*Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* [Cambridge, 1982], p. 121 and following) argues particularly that Chaucer accentuates Theseus's role as judge in the tale, and finds support for this in the way that Chaucer edits *Il Teseide*. Minnis misses, however, the fact that inherent to the end of the tale is Theseus's failure to make his will and judgement affect the judicial fight between the cousins.

²⁸⁴ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2529-2532

²⁸⁵ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2837-2852

²⁸⁶ "The Knight's Tale" line 915

²⁸⁷ "The Knight's Tale" line 925

²⁸⁸ "The Knight's Tale" line 1086

²⁸⁹ "The Knight's Tale" line 1238

²⁹⁰ "The Knight's Tale" line 1242

²⁹¹ "The Knight's Tale" lines 1246-1254

²⁹² "The Knight's Tale" lines 1313 and following

²⁹³ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2658-2659

²⁹⁴ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2721-2730, which compare Arcite's fall with the helplessness of Palamon, who was dragged by twenty knights"and haryd forth by arme, foot, and too, / And eke his steede driven forth with staves / With footmen, bothe yemen and eek knaves-" (lines 2726-2728).

²⁹⁵ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 203

²⁹⁶ Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p. 135.

²⁹⁷ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2858-2864

²⁹⁸ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2935-2940

²⁹⁹ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2945-2949

³⁰⁰ "The Knight's Tale" lines 2951-2955

³⁰¹ "The Knight's Tale" line 3097

³⁰² See Derek Pearsall's *Canturbury Tales* (*Canturbury Tales* (London, 1985) for a full discussion of the Knight (and see note 93, below). John H. Pratt, for example, argues that Chaucer describes the knight in ways that would remind the reader of important battles against non-Christian enemies, and in doing so depicts the knight as a representative of just war. See *Chaucer and War* (Lanham, MD, 2000), 132. See also North, who reads the Knight in terms of his Astrological attributes in *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford, 1988).

³⁰³ Derek Pearsall is perhaps the most significant opponent to this view of the knight. Pearsall criticizes, on a general level, the tendency to read irony into Chaucer when he seems to be saying something that does not coincide with our modern sensibilities (this view is found throughout, but see p. 42 for Pearsall's reaction to Jones). See also Keen's more specific criticism of Jones's condemnation of the crusade in Prussia and Lithuania (in *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* [London, 1996]). Through citation of a number of the courts of chivalry Keen shows that participation in this crusading action was a mark of honor, and not the shameful activity that Jones would suggest (see pp. 103-113 and following for this discussion and for further dispute of Jones's assumptions, such as the perception of crusading).

³⁰⁴ Terry Jones, *Chaucer's Knight* (Baton Rouge, 1980), pp. 126-130.

³⁰⁵ Jones, *Chaucer's Knight*, p. 125

³⁰⁶ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 35

³⁰⁷ H. Marshall Leicester, Jr. (*The Disenchanted Self; Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* [Berkeley, 1990], pp. 224 and following) provides a convincing argument that the knight actively says that he will take and retell an existing story, but make it more appropriate for the circumstances of the pilgrimage, calling the tale "romance grafted onto epic" (p. 225). He suggests that "the knight's maintenance of chivalry and his disenchanted criticism of it" (p. 223) is evident in his telling of the tale.

³⁰⁸ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance*.

³⁰⁹ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance*, 21

³¹⁰ Mann, Jill, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Harvester, 1991), p. 185.

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