

**REIMAGINING GENDER, REIMAGINING KINSHIP: CROSS-DRESSING, SEX  
CHANGE, AND FAMILY STRUCTURE IN FOUR MEDIEVAL FRENCH  
NARRATIVES**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2016

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
KENNETH P. DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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In this dissertation, I show that instances of cross-dressing and female-to-male sex change in four thirteenth- and fourteenth-century French texts have both a disruptive purpose and a healing function in their relation to family structures. The alterations in identity due to cross-dressing and/or sex change provoke situations in which links of kinship are re-imagined: sometimes simply restructured, at other times erased from the narrative. I examine the representation of gendered personhood through the lens of kinship ties, and correct the tendency of previous scholarship on these texts to separate questions of gender identity from the intricate web of familial identity. By including what happens after sex change – namely, the engendering of sons – I show the ways in which sex change is coded as a holy event that begets new forms of masculinity and new relationships to kinship, inheritance, and lineage.

In my first chapter, on *Le Roman de Silence*, I argue that the decision to cross-dress Silence and raise him as a boy forces a reconstruction of Silence's family itself, and that Silence's masculine gender identity becomes a stable referent against which kinship bonds are made and unmade. In chapter two, I show that Aye d'Avignon, the cross-dressed grandmother in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, reaffirms her role as a mother despite her Saracen masculine disguise, while at the same time she remakes herself into the carrier of lineage through the representation of her lactation and breastfeeding. In my third chapter, also on *Tristan de Nanteuil*, I show that the construction of Blanchandin(e)'s identity, from pre-cross-dressing, to cross-dressing, to sex

change, is connected to disruptions caused by incest and same-sex marriage, as well as concepts of religious identity and conversion. In chapter four, I analyze the effects of sex change on masculine identity and the establishment of lines of lineage between fathers and sons in *Yde et Olive II* and *Croissant*. In chapter five, I examine Blanchandin's son Saint Gilles, who has a special role as a saint, a redeemer of those who have committed incest, and as the unifier of the fractured Nanteuil family.

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## PREFACE

Many people have supported me along the way as I wrote this dissertation. I thank my dissertation adviser, Dr. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, who has mentored me since I began graduate school. Her gentle but rigorous guidance and her warmth and kindness throughout this process have been invaluable, and her scholarship and intellect continue to inspire me. I thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Chloé Hogg, Dr. Todd Reeser, and Dr. Jennifer Waldron, who have read my work carefully and offered constructive questions and feedback that keep me thinking. I am grateful to Dr. Bruce Venarde for his attention to my work and his advice, and to Dr. Peggy McCracken, who has generously given of her time reading this dissertation and has provided insightful comments and suggestions.

I would like to thank my fellow graduate students in the Department of French and Italian as well as other departments at the University of Pittsburgh for providing such a supportive and energizing intellectual and social community. I thank the professors in the French and Italian department, who are inspiring teachers and role models. I am grateful to the administrators of the department, particularly Monika Losagio, who is always ready to offer help and advice with a smile.

I am also very grateful for my family's support throughout the process of dissertation writing: my father and sister, and especially my mother, who selflessly provided much-needed

child care for my son. I thank my husband and fellow medievalist Charles-Louis Morand Métivier for his constant support and advice on the dissertation and all manner of things, and for knowing when I just needed to see some funny cat pictures. I dedicate my dissertation to our son Malo, who grew into a little boy as this work itself changed and grew.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Trevor McDonald's 2016 memoir, he recounts his experience as a transgender man becoming pregnant, giving birth, and breastfeeding (or "chestfeeding") his son.<sup>1</sup> Trevor, assigned female at birth, took testosterone and had male chest contouring surgery a few years before his pregnancy, which greatly relieved his gender dysphoria. However, upon deciding to start a family with his partner, Ian, he realized that not only could he become pregnant, but that he also might be able to produce a small amount of milk. Indeed, Trevor was able to produce some milk. With his baby latched on to his minimal breast tissue, he nursed using a supplemental nursing system in which a tube is placed near the nipple so that the baby can suckle and receive human milk or formula from a bottle at the same time. (They chose donated breast milk, and much of the book is details what they went through to get it.) Trevor had a second child a few years later. He started a blog about his experience, got involved with a network of breastfeeding activists, and eventually became a member of his local Canadian La Leche League chapter, which had to amend its policy in order to accept a man.

In this dissertation, I write about characters from medieval French literature that are born female and then cross-dress and/or have a miraculous sex change to become male. It is not so much the similarity concerning gender change in Trevor's story that intrigues me, but rather its

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor McDonald, *Where's the Mother? Stories From a Transgender Dad* (Winnipeg: Trans Canada Press, 2016). Some transgender men prefer the term chestfeeding.

focus on the interaction between transgender identity and family formation. This interplay brings forth some of the same issues that concerned my medieval poets: the relationship between a person who has changed sex and his child/children; the difficulty of describing this unusual family situation to others who are curious, and sometimes befuddled or even hostile; the extremely important role of breastfeeding and breast milk in the parent-child relationship, both in its physical closeness and in the substance of breast milk itself. Although he gave birth and breastfed, Trevor is a dad, not a mom. Trevor's situation highlights the way in which the decision (or in my medieval texts, the imperative) to reproduce makes transgender identity not only about the self but also the relationship to family. Kinship bonds shape identity along with changing or changed gender, as "I'm a man," becomes "I'm a husband," "I'm a dad," "I'm a nursing dad," or, in the case of *Tristan de Nanteuil*'s character Blanchandin, "I'm a father who was once a mother."

Two of Trevor's statements in his memoir about gender dysphoria and queerness and visibility also struck me as particularly relevant to questions about gender and kinship that are raised in the medieval French literary context. While pregnant and doing research about the possibility of breastfeeding after having most of his breast mass removed, Trevor worried that even if he were able to do it, the act of breastfeeding, traditionally coded feminine, would induce gender dysphoria.<sup>2</sup> (As you probably guessed, in his case, it didn't.) At another moment, while recounting instances of breastfeeding in public, Trevor notes that "the act of nursing screams my queerness, whether I feel like coming out or not."<sup>3</sup> In the fourteenth-century *chanson de geste* *Tristan de Nanteuil*, reproductive and lactating functions are on the contrary clearly separated by

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 160.

sex, and genital sex matches with the expected gender role. The female character Blanchandine gives birth to a son and breastfeeds him. She later cross-dresses (out of necessity), gets married to a woman, has a miraculous sex change, and then as a man engenders a son - whom his wife breastfeeds. In this context, the sex change resolves the issue of a non-normative family, creating a heterosexual couple that can reproduce. Thus at first glance, the medieval model appears more normative and less queer than what has occurred in contemporary society, in which in some contexts a broader range of gendered possibilities exist, and a person who identifies as male can give birth and breastfeed. In both the medieval literary and contemporary real-life examples, however, changing sex and/or gender produces some anxiety, both in terms of reaching a comfortable place with one's own identity and in terms of explaining one's life and family structure to others. Trevor was able to find a balance that worked for him, in which nursing was the right choice and did not undermine the work he had done to feel comfortable with his gender identity and body. But with that decision came the reality that his reproductive and breastfeeding choices make him stand out as "queer" to others – not so much for being transgender, but for being a transgender man who doesn't fit into societal norms for masculine behavior. Being transgender only becomes problematic or intriguing to others when Trevor no longer passes as a cisgender male, and that in turn is evidenced by his pregnant and lactating body.

In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, that normative family created by Blanchandin's sex change, upon further consideration, is revealed to be queer in its own way. This family is not, after all, simply "father, mother, and son who will inherit," but a complicated group of two families that have blended together as a result of Blanchandine/Blanchandin's two gender identities. The new heteronormative family does not resolve all problems, but rather creates new and different complications, and requires the creation of a new model of family that accommodates the fact

that Blanchandin has changed sex. In the past few years in America, there has been increased media interest (in fictional television series, reality television, and real life) in not only transgender people and their stories, but particularly in how transgender people deal with issues concerning family and relationships. Laverne Cox, a transgender actress, plays the role of a transgender woman (and father) in *Orange is the New Black*; the Amazon series *Transparent* in which a father comes out as a transgender woman has won critical accolades; Caitlyn Jenner announced on national television that she was transitioning, and discussed the impact this was having on her reality show-famous family; the reality show *I am Jazz* depicts the life of an adolescent transgender girl and her family. All of these stories put an emphasis on how kinship ties change or stay the same when a person changes gender and/or sex, and show how such a transition can be both fundamentally disrupting and healing to family life. This dissertation will demonstrate through an analysis of four medieval French texts – *Le Roman de Silence*, *Yde et Olive I and II*, *Croissant*, and *Tristan de Nanteuil* – that cross-dressing and sex change in the medieval literary context functions similarly to draw attention to patterns of disruption and resolution in family structure, kinship bonds, and modes of recognition between family members, as well as to the possibilities and problems surrounding spiritual and material inheritance.

## **1.1 TRANSGENDER STUDIES IN THE MEDIEVAL CONTEXT**

If the thematic similarities between the contemporary and medieval representations of transgender people and their families lends a certain universality to the stories, the basis for the use of the motif of gender and sex change in my medieval texts nonetheless differs significantly



from the contemporary context. For this reason, I would like to address some of the specificities of discussing the fictional instances of cross-dressing and sex change in the medieval context, and how these particular texts relate (or do not relate) to both the field of transgender studies in a general sense, and to the use of the adjective “transgender.” The short answer is that I do see this dissertation as fitting into the field transgender studies, but I have also decided not to focus on terminology; I do not discuss, for example, whether I consider my characters to be “transgender” or not. One of the reasons for my decision not to use the word transgender specifically in reference to my characters is that for them cross-dressing and changing gender and/or sex does not originate in gender dysphoria, the feeling that the gender role associated with one’s assigned birth sex does not correspond to one’s felt gender identity.<sup>4</sup> In my texts, female characters cross-dress for the following reasons: to maintain an inheritance, to escape from an unwanted marriage and sexual violence, to avoid recognition, or to accomplish tasks that are normally reserved for men. Silence’s parents raise him as a boy from birth and Blanchandin’s husband chooses her disguise; Yde and Aye choose to cross-dress out of necessity to protect their own bodies and lives. Hence, in comparison to the real-life contemporary context, these medieval characters do not change gender or sex because of a felt inner gender identity.

A second, related reason for my choice not to call my characters transgender has to do with language and the medieval literary style of the texts that I work with. Medieval texts often

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of “transgender” from the website of the National Center for Transgender Equality: “Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. ‘Trans’ is shorthand for ‘transgender.’ (Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus ‘transgender people’ is appropriate but ‘transgenders’ is often viewed as disrespectful.)” Note, of course, that this is one definition and cannot encompass the experience of all people who consider themselves trans. <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>

leave out what contemporary readers might expect to find, having become used to reading novels in which characters are highly psychologically developed. Oftentimes the scholar of medieval literature, on the other hand, is left scratching her head trying to figure out how characters feel and why they do what they do and say what they say, because the authors simply do not include this type of content. This is most definitely the case with *Yde et Olive*, *Croissant*, and *Tristan de Nanteuil*, in which I have had to read into the omissions, and think about what *is* said, rather than what I wish had been said, such as what Ydé (the male Yde) and Blanchandin think about their sex transformations. *Le Roman de Silence*, however, is different stylistically, and contains a fair number of asides in which the narrator/author expresses his opinion about matters having to do with gender, along with nature, nurture, misogyny, and nobility. The character Silence is also the only one to come close to representing the contemporary concept of gender dysphoria; as he approaches puberty, Silence debates whether he should continue living as a boy, the gender his parents chose for him, or whether he ought to be a girl, since this is the “natural” state that corresponds to his body.<sup>5</sup> For the other three characters, Aye in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, Yde/Ydé, and Blanchandin(e), their thoughts or feelings about their gender(s) remain mysterious, even when they undergo a sex change. In sum, although there are thematic similarities that make it intriguing to consider the parallels between these texts and transgender issues in contemporary society, I have no compelling reason to refer to my characters as transgender. Rather, I endeavor to allow these medieval representations to speak for themselves, and to be open to the discovery of what the themes of cross-dressing and sex change mean in this particular medieval context.

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<sup>5</sup> I usually refer to Silence as “he,” since, despite some inner conflict, for the most part he identifies with the masculine gender identity into which he was raised.

That being said, the perspective of transgender studies in a general sense certainly influences the way I have approached these texts and the questions I have asked myself while reading and writing. In Susan Stryker's definition of the field of transgender studies in the essay opening *The Transgender Studies Reader*, she articulates several points that also resonate in the medieval context.

The field of transgender studies is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood.<sup>6</sup>

In the medieval context, we find the same themes but with significant variations. The theme of disruption of normativity is present in my texts, but there is also a strong counter-current of a type of normativity that is, in fact, associated with the act of cross-dressing or with sex change. In *Le Roman de Silence*, cross-dressing is becomes normative because it ensures that Silence keep her inheritance, and it is also endorsed and enforced by a strong patriarchal figure, Silence's father. Sex change (preceded by instances of same-sex desire or same-sex marriage) can function to reinforce normative (i.e. heterosexual reproductive) values. For example, in *Tristan de Nanteuil* and *Yde et Olive*, when women undergo sex change, this is not considered to be a disruption of the natural order, rather, it is perfectly natural because God commands it and enacts it – and he wants the new men to then go off to immediately engender a son. In this sense, “the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood,” as Stryker says, actually sustain the gendered personhood of the woman-turned-

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

man, because it is the work of God and it carries on that man's lineage. Just when you think this is the whole story, however, something else will happen to nuance the picture. Cross-dressing has to end at some point, according to the text's logic, because Silence has a woman's body and must marry a man. In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, sex change may very well be considered normative, but what about the same-sex marriage that preceded it? Why does the man who changed sex have his arm cut off soon afterward? The narratives go on and on (and on, in the case of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, stretching to more than 23,000 lines) and constantly add more twists that force the reader to reconsider what is normative in these texts. What is being disrupted, and what is being resolved by these changes of sex and gender?

In terms of the question of the relationship between the body, gender, and social expectations of gender, these texts are a gold mine; as a result previous studies have, not at all surprisingly, largely focused on that angle. The instances that I study no doubt interrogate to what extent the sexed body determines gendered abilities and roles. The most obvious example of this is Silence and Aye's performance as cross-dressed knights. At moments, the narration depicts them as women in body and yet performing perfectly the role of a knight, and doing so in a way superior to "real men." The texts acknowledge in this sense that gender is constructed, yet still consider the character's essential being to be based in the sex (in this case, genital sex) of the body. The preceding example is an over-simplified reading, but I point it out to say that many scholars have already thoroughly studied in a more complex way the varying ways that gender, body, and language relate to each other in these texts. In extending my thought to familial relationships and constructions of kinship, I began to see other ways in which the body and gender could be viewed rather than solely in the context of social roles and expectations. I show instances wherein the female body of my characters seems to disappear, retroactively, and where

families can be imaginary; I show that changes in the body, whether by appearance in cross-dressing or by transformation of sex, can cause changes in kinship ties. In turn, knowing that the instances of cross-dressing and sex change could not be separated from the depiction of kinship, the ways in which the stories depicted the gendered personhood of my characters became more and more intriguing. Is a woman who changed into a man still the same person? Is he still related to the people to whom he was related as a woman? In the next section, I will show how I have used questions about kinship, genealogy, and inheritance to structure my thinking about gender and sex change. These points, combined with the role of religion and spirituality in the sex change narratives, to my mind form the specificity of thinking about “transgender” characters in the medieval French context.

## **1.2 PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AND THE ROLE OF THIS DISSERTATION**

Because I decided to approach *Le Roman de Silence*, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, *Yde et Olive I and II*, and *Croissant* from the angle of kinship relationships, my work falls between two scholarly perspectives: scholarship that directly addresses issues of kinship, inheritance, and genealogy in medieval literature, but is not necessarily concerned with my body of texts or questions of gender, and on the other hand scholarship that is focused on my texts, but which concentrates on questions of gender and language, often from a feminist or queer theory perspective, and less often is specifically interested in kinship. Both of these types of scholarship have helped me identify a productive way of approaching my texts. Concerning the broader questions of kinship and genealogy, Zrinka Stahuljak’s work has encouraged me to be attentive to the ways in which cross-dressing and sex change interact with ideas about genealogy, incest, and recognition. In

*Bloodless Genealogies: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor*, Stahuljak argues using examples from medieval French literature that the relationship of filiation, the “blood tie” between father and son, is actually depicted as a linguistic alliance. Incest, a “perversion of genealogy,” she argues, both disrupts the narrative and “at the same time, the narrative of genealogy, inherently and simultaneously, contains and resolves the sinful fractures by means of a genealogical totality.”<sup>7</sup> One of Stahuljak’s examples of this type of disruption and resolution is that of Charlemagne’s sin of incest, a sin that Saint Giles forgives before Charlemagne even confesses it – revelation and redemption occur simultaneously. Charlemagne’s sin is also an essential plot point in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, in which the character Saint Gilles also happens to be the son of Blanchandin, the man who changed sex. In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, two incestuous relationships produce two sons, one of whom is Gilles. Thus incest in *Tristan de Nanteuil* functions similarly to the model of Charlemagne’s sin: born of incest, Gilles simultaneously becomes the redeemer of incestuous sin.

My texts associate gender change and sex change with behaviors that are considered sinful and yet in some ways set them apart as a different category. We see this in the normative function of cross-dressing and sex change, which are depicted more positively than the instances of real or threatened incest or rape, same-sex desire and eroticism, and/or same-sex marriage, that accompany them. In this way, changes of gender and/or sex are not depicted as “perversions” in themselves, but narratively they provide a vehicle to discuss other issues that are more explicitly depicted as sinful. Wrapped up with these troubling issues, cross-dressing and sex change simultaneously disrupt and seek to resolve genealogical problems (those of

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<sup>7</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 10.

inheritance, reproduction and/or marriage). This disruption causes a need to reconsider the structure of family and re-establish relationships that have been interrupted or forced to change. As for the question of sin, whether and to what degree any of these issues are classified as sins or as cause for punishment varies in the different texts. Overall, however, there is a strong, positive connection between sex change, sin, and redemption; same-sex marriage and desire, occasioned by cross-dressing, represent a different and more troubling category of problem.

Also providing a useful framework is Stahuljak's attention to the processes by which recognition occurs, and to the significance to genealogy and lineage that the act of recognition imports. The process of recognition can be convoluted or straightforward in different instances in my texts, and I have found that it is important to pay attention to why this is case, and to what precisely is being recognized and in what order; for example, the gender or religion of the person in question, but also the specific kinship relationship between two people. Finally, the father-son dyad is also an essential structure in my texts, but the instances of cross-dressing and sex change force an interrogation of the nature of this relationship, particularly in comparison to mothers and sons. By what means do a cross-dressed mother and her son recognize each other? Does a man who was once a woman pass on his lineage to his son in the same way as a non-sex-changed man? The unusual relationships created by movement in gender and sex identity forces a different consideration of how recognition occurs and what kind of inheritance is being passed down, or passed between, father and son.

In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, one of the key issues intertwined with recognition is religion. Saracens or pagans, as they are alternately called, play an essential role in this text and generally, their role corresponds to a pattern established in earlier *chansons de geste*. Saracens in this text are military enemies, with whom the Christians fight constantly for land, and Saracen women are

the love interests and potential brides of Christian knights, for whom they want to convert. The *Sarrasine amoureuse* is the model we also see in *Tristan de Nanteuil*; however, the occurrence of cross-dressing and sex change in the text creates some unusual situations related to three issues: identity, inter-religious marriage, and familial recognition and reunion.

Being Saracen or being related to Saracens is both an essential defining element of identity, and one that is easily changeable through the will to convert. In the case of Blanchandine and her cousin Clarinde, two Saracen women, we see how changes in religious identity interplay with changes in gender identity (through cross-dressing) and sex change. I show that the change in religious identity from Saracen to Christian is accompanied by a gradual elimination of kinship bonds with Saracens (and hence with each other) for both Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde, and that this culminates with the sex change, which solidifies the end of both Saracen personal and family identity. Before Clarinde converts, their marriage is both inter-religious and same-sex, although Clarinde is unaware of the latter fact. Clarinde fails to recognize that her love interest is not only a woman, but also that she is her (formerly Saracen) cousin. Blanchandine must change sex and Clarinde must convert in order to regularize this marriage in the realms of both religion and gender.

Through conversion, marriage, and the sex change, Saracens are integrated into a new Christian family. Denis Hüe writes about medieval French *chansons de geste*, “le monde sarrasin est celui qui permet de retrouver les enfants, de régler les successions et d’identifier les héritiers.”<sup>8</sup> This is certainly the case in *Tristan de Nanteuil*. For example, the jail cell in which the Saracens have placed the captured Christians becomes the location of Christian family

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<sup>8</sup> Denis Hüe, “La chrétienté au miroir sarrasin,” in *La chrétienté au peril sarrasin*, (Publications de l’Université de Provence, 2000), 96.



reunions and scenes of recognition, allowing the continuation of Christian lineage. At the same time, within that space, a Saracen could be converted (the figure of Saint Gilles is essential for that project), or a non-Saracen person could be at first recognized as a Saracen (as in the case of Aye). In these ways, there is but a fine line between the Saracen as an “Other” and as an integrated family member. At the end of the text, all the Saracen lands have been conquered and its peoples have converted, in addition to the various Saracen women who have converted and married Christian knights. Quite a bit of this conversion is thanks to the efforts of Saint Gilles, a man who was born of two people who began their lives as Saracen girls.

As for the broader question of how kinship is portrayed, my reading of these texts shows that gender and sex change affect the ways in which characters are related to each other; sometimes the characters address this directly in their conversations, and at other times changes in relationships are subtly implied by the narrative. My analysis shows that we must ask who is related to whom, how closely, and for what reasons the text depicts those relationships as significant. Because my texts feature cross-dressing as a form of disguise, we know from the start that the question of recognition is going to be essential, but it turns out that recognition of gender always interplays with recognition of family identity. In my examples of cross-dressing, women pass as men, generally without a problem, and because of their circumstances, their goal is to *not* be recognized as female. However, my examples also show that the question of recognition is always more complicated than just the issue of passing as a man. The same character who needs to pass as a man in some situations may in others need to reveal not only that she is female but also her name, which in turn expresses to whom she is related. Revealing one’s name then can protect the character from physical harm or establish a particular familial link that is beneficial or desired. The relationship in question may be that of cousins, mother and

son, father and son, grandmother and grandson, and so on; regardless, my texts are constantly putting the cross-dressed or sex-changed characters into situations wherein there is some kind of confusion about relationships, a confusion which then needs to be resolved. Thus, I show that the issues of gender, disguise, and recognition are working simultaneously with those of kinship, and cannot be separated from one another.

Although these texts share common themes and have generally sparked scholarly interest since the 1980s, the amount and type of scholarship done on each text or group of text varies greatly. For *Le Roman de Silence* there is copious article-length scholarship; *Yde et Olive I* has similarly inspired scholars, but the continuations that follow the sex change episode and tell of Ydé's further adventures and those of his son (*Yde et Olive II* and *Croissant*) have received practically no attention. Scholarship on *Tristan de Nanteuil* falls somewhere in between these two extremes. Among the abundant *Roman de Silence* scholarship, most helpful to me has been Sharon Kinoshita's work on what she calls "the feudal politics of lineage."<sup>9</sup> She and other scholars such as Peggy McCracken and Heather Tanner,<sup>10</sup> who have written about marriage, inheritance, and reproduction, have helped provide support for my original argument about Silence's "surrogate parents" and their role in preparing Silence to become the male heir of the family.

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<sup>9</sup> Sharon Kinoshita, "Heldris de Cornuälle's *Roman de Silence* and the Feudal Politics of Lineage," *PMLA* 110.3 (1995): 397-409, and "Male-Order Brides: Marriage, Patriarchy, and Monarchy in the 'Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 12.1 (2002): 64-75.

<sup>10</sup> Peggy McCracken, "'The Boy Who Was a Girl': Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*," *The Romanic Review* 85 (1994): 515-534; Heather Tanner, "Lords, Wives, and Vassals in the *Roman de Silence*," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no.1 (2012): 138-159.

*Yde et Olive I and II* and *Croissant* are part of a sequence of continuations to an earlier text, *Huon de Bordeaux*. Generally, the sex change episode in *Yde et Olive I* has been examined separately from the rest of the continuations. I chose instead to only briefly discuss that episode and rather to contextualize it by studying the episodes that describe what happens to Ydé after he becomes a man, and then the adventures of his son Croissant. The only studies on these sequels are a 1977 dissertation by Barbara Ann Brewka (her dissertation is an edition of the *Huon de Bordeaux* sequels), and a book-length critical analysis by Caroline Cazanave, published in 2008.<sup>11</sup>

Critical works on *Tristan de Nanteuil* include several articles that focus only on the cross-dressing and sex change episodes. Works on the text as a whole include the edition prepared by Keith V. Sinclair in 1971; Sinclair published a lot on *Tristan de Nanteuil*, including a book on the themes and motifs that populate the entire text and their relationships to other medieval texts and folklore.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Alban Georges published an expansive critical study of the entirety of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, including a study of the theme of incest and its relation to sainthood.<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu has written on problematic sexuality, including adultery

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Anne Brewka, “‘Esclarmonde,’ ‘Clarisse et Florent,’ ‘Yde et Olive I,’ ‘Croissant,’ ‘Yde et Olive II,’ ‘Huon et les Geants,’ Sequels to ‘Huon de Bordeaux,’ as Contained in Turin MS. L.II.14: an Edition” (PhD Diss., Vanderbilt University, 1977); Caroline Cazanave, *D’Esclarmonde à Croissant: Huon de Bordeaux, l’épique médiéval et l’esprit de suite* (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté), 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Keith V. Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure and Literary Creation* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983); *Tristan de Nanteuil, chanson de geste inédite*, ed. Keith V. Sinclair (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Alban Georges, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Écriture et imaginaire épiques au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2006).

and rape in addition to incest, in *Tristan de Nanteuil*.<sup>14</sup> However, although these works acknowledge the cousin relationship between Blanchandin(e) and her/his wife, no scholar has previously done a close reading as I do of the depiction of this relationship and its relation to the text as a whole. In addition, a few studies of *Tristan de Nanteuil* have examined the religious implications of Blanchandin's sex change, but none except Georges have studied the role of his son Saint Gilles. Therefore, my goal was to do a truly thorough study of Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde's relationship and progeny, including what happens to all of them after the sex change, instead of continuing to focus only on the episode in which Blanchandine cross-dresses and changes sex. In addition, given that Ydé also has a son who has a religious experience, it became evident that there was a trend (even if only between two texts) that needed to be investigated. My chapters three, four, and five thus contain new close readings of passages from *Yde et Olive II*, *Croissant*, and *Tristan de Nanteuil* that have not previously been examined. By expanding my study to the post-sex change experience of the fathers and then of their sons, this dissertation provides a more complete picture of the functions of cross-dressing and sex change in the medieval French context.

### **1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION AND CHAPTER OUTLINES**

Following this introduction, this dissertation is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. Chapters two and three deal with *Le Roman de Silence* and *Tristan de Nanteuil*, and focus on

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<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, "Adultère et inceste dans *Tristan de Nanteuil*" in *Les perversions sexuelles au Moyen Âge: 29<sup>e</sup> congrès du cercle de travail de la littérature allemande au Moyen Âge* (Greifswald: Reineke, 1994), 169-81.

cross-dressing. The fourth chapter, also on *Tristan de Nanteuil*, serves as a bridge between chapters two and three, which consider cross-dressing, gender identity, and recognition, and the last two chapters, which focus on sex change and its consequences. Chapter four concerns Blanchandin(e)'s experience of cross-dressing, the move to sex change, and the immediate consequences of the sex change. In chapter five, I examine Ydé's post-sex change experience and the life of his son, Croissant. In chapter six, I return to *Tristan de Nanteuil* and study another case of a sex-changed father and his son. In each chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which changes in gender and sex interact with questions of kinship in repeating patterns of disruption and resolution.

In my second chapter, I argue that the decision to cross-dress Silence and raise him as a boy forces a reconstruction of Silence's family itself, and that Silence's masculine gender identity becomes a stable referent against which kinship bonds are made and unmade. I re-examine the debate between Nature and Nurture by showing how Silence's surrogate parents, a seneschal and a nursemaid, are utilized in this project. Misogynistic stereotypes underlie both the conception of the gender change project, and the text's conclusion, in which Silence marries the king. In chapter three, the questions of recognition and lineage come to center stage in the context of Aye d'Avignon's cross-dressing in *Tristan de Nanteuil*. Links of kinship undergo moments of disruption because of the confusion occasioned by cross-dressing in combination with a complicated plot of separation and reunion. Aye's link to her family members is reconstructed and reaffirmed through the metaphor of her lactation and breastfeeding of her sons. In my fourth chapter, I examine the questions of gendered personhood and identity through the lens of kinship relationships and bonds created by marriage. I show the ways in which the construction of Blanchandin(e)'s identity, from pre-cross-dressing, to cross-dressing, to sex

change, is connected to disruptions caused by incest and same-sex marriage. In chapter five, I begin my study of the consequences of sex change, starting with Ydé, who has had a miraculous sex change, his wife, Olive, and their son, Croissant. I show that the post-sex change identity is formed through the establishment of lines of lineage between fathers and sons. Inheritance from father to son is on the one hand depicted as a given by the fact of maleness; on the other, the process by which the son comes to inheritance becomes convoluted due to the sex change. Finally, in chapter six, I examine Blanchandin post-sex change and his son Saint Gilles. Gilles has a special role as a son of sex change, a saint, and a redeemer of those who have committed incest. I show that sex change creates an unusual familial relationship between Gilles and members of the Nanteuil family, a link that then allows him to become the unifier and redeemer of a fractured family.

#### 1.4 MY CORPUS OF TEXTS

As the final section of this introduction, I will provide information regarding the extant manuscripts of my texts and their provenance, time period, authorship, and basic linguistic characteristics, and the state of current editions.

*Le Roman de Silence* was unknown to medievalists until 1911 when it was discovered in a manuscript in an attic in Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire, England. This manuscript, which contains several other romances and fabliaux, is now located at the University of Nottingham Library, MS. Mi.LM.6. *Le Roman de Silence* has been dated to the second half of the thirteenth century. The author identifies himself twice in his own text as “Maistre Heldris de Cornuälle,”

but this may be an invented name.<sup>15</sup> The poem, written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, is 6,700 lines long, and the linguistic characteristics are Francien and Picard. There are three modern editions of the text. Lewis Thorpe first edited the text in serialized form from 1961 to 1967, and then published it in book form in 1972.<sup>16</sup> In 1991, Regina Psaki published an English translation; Sarah Roche-Mahdi's facing page Old French-English translation followed in 1992.<sup>17</sup> I have used Roche-Mahdi's translation.

The sequels to *Huon de Bordeaux*<sup>18</sup> (*Esclarmonde*, *Clarisse et Florent*, *Yde et Olive I*, *Croissant*, *Yde et Olive II*, and *Huon et les Géants*) are found in MS L.II.14 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria in Turin, Italy. The manuscript dates from 1311, and the sequels were probably written after the second half of the thirteenth century. According to Brewka, the language indicates a likely origin in northern France, in Picardy or Wallonia.<sup>19</sup> The group of sequels from *Esclarmonde* to *Huon et les Géants* consists of 8,459 lines of decasyllabic verse.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Gelzer, *Nature. Zum Einfluss der Scholastik auf den altfranzösischen Roman* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1917), cited in Sarah Roche-Mahdi, introduction to *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century Romance* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992), xi.

<sup>16</sup> Heldris de Cornuälle, *Le Roman de Silence: A Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Verse-Romance*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (Cambridge: Heffer, 1972).

<sup>17</sup> Heldris de Cornuälle, *Le Roman de Silence*, trans. Regina Psaki (New York: Garland Press, 1991); Heldris de Cornuälle, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century Verse Romance*, trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 31-33. There is some disagreement on the dating of *Huon de Bordeaux*; estimates range from the early thirteenth century to the 1260s.

<sup>19</sup> Brewka, *Sequels*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Max Schweingel edited and published the first three sequels in 1888 and 1889,<sup>21</sup> but Barbara Anne Brewka was the first to present an edition of all the sequels found in the Turin manuscript, in the form of her 1977 dissertation at Vanderbilt University. Thus, I have relied on Brewka's edition and followed her decisions regarding naming and division between sequels.

*Tristan de Nanteuil* exists in a single fifteenth-century manuscript, Français 1478 at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Keith V. Sinclair published an edition of *Tristan de Nanteuil* in 1971, and this remains the only available edition.<sup>22</sup> It is by far the longest text that I work with, at 23,361 lines of alexandrine verse. Based on linguistic evidence and the text's use of geographical locations in what is now northern France and Belgium, Sinclair believed the anonymous author was from the Hainaut region. It was likely written in the middle of the fourteenth century, much later than the rest of the *geste de Nanteuil*, which was composed between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. Sinclair identifies the other components of this cycle as *Doon de Mayence*, *Doon de Nanteuil*, *Aye d'Avignon*, *Gui de Nanteuil*, and *Parise la Duchesse*. *Tristan de Nanteuil* was written to fit in chronologically plot-wise after *Gui de Nanteuil* (Gui is Tristan's father), and as a prequel to *Parise la Duchesse*.

A note on proper names: for place names that have a recognizable English equivalent, I have used the English equivalent (e.g. Babylon for Babilone). For first names with variations that are sometimes case-inflected, I have chosen the modern French spelling (e.g. Beuve for Beuves), and I have simplified the spelling of proper names that contain double consonants (e.g. Murgafier for Murgaffier).

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<sup>21</sup> Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 21. The name was printed as "Schweingel" in 1888 and "Schweigel" in 1889.

<sup>22</sup> The information in this paragraph has been summarized from Sinclair's introduction to *Tristan de Nanteuil*.



## 2.0 CROSS-DRESSING AND IMAGINARY KINSHIP IN *LE ROMAN DE SILENCE*

In the thirteenth-century romance *Le Roman de Silence* (hereafter *Silence*), Silence, born female, is raised as a boy from birth. Silence's father's idea to raise his baby girl as a boy in order that Silence may inherit is completely successful: not only does Silence live as a boy without anyone suspecting the gender deception, he even becomes an ideal young man; his manners are impeccable and his knightly prowess is without compare. The utter success of Silence's cross-dressing exposes that gender is constructed through environment - nurture (represented by the allegorical figure of the same name in *Silence*) can quite handily defeat nature. The idea that biological sex must dictate gender is thus shown to be unstable. In the past thirty years, many scholars have studied the text's contradictory messages concerning gender stability, queerness, nature and nurture, feminism, and misogyny.<sup>23</sup> *Silence* certainly questions how gender is

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Newman, "Testing the Norms: Nature, Nurture, *Silence*," in *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 122-134 (Nature and Nurture); Roberta Krueger, "Women Readers and the Politics of Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*," in *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101-127 (gender politics, "women's nature," and misogyny); Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "The Importance of Being Gender 'Stable': Masculinity and Feminine Empowerment in 'Le Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 7, no.2 (1997): 7-34 (masculinity); Katherine H. Terrell, "Competing Gender Ideologies and the Limitations of Language in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Romance Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2008): 35-48 (gender and language); Robert L. A. Clark, "Queering gender and naturalizing class in the *Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 12, no.1 (2002): 50-63; Elizabeth A. Waters, "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender in 'Le Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 7, no. 2 (1997): 35-46 (queer readings).

constructed and whether biology determines gender, and the ending in which Silence “returns” to her “natural” womanhood seems to undermine the previous success of nurture. Scholars have also shown that the political context of marriage and inheritance in the thirteenth century is essential to understanding gender and power relations in the text.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, I approach the question of Silence’s gender identity from the perspective of family relationships, and specifically the ways in which kinship bonds are made and imagined in the context of the disruption caused by Silence’s gender change. I argue that Silence’s masculine gender identity is so successfully constructed by Nurture that it forms a stable referent, in comparison to which family identity becomes unstable. As a result of the constant vigilance that is required in order to maintain that constructed masculine gender (because, nonetheless, the text still portrays gender as a struggle for Silence, as a fight between nature and nurture), Silence’s family bonds and relationships are continually being shifted, adjusted, re-invented, and sometimes distorted by outright lying, in order to accommodate the maintenance of that other “lie,” Silence’s gender.

In *Silence*, Nature and Nurture appear as allegorical female figures with influence over Silence’s upbringing. The two women periodically argue with each other and chide Silence for what they perceive as injustices against them. Silence is actually raised, however, by a seneschal and a nursemaid whom Silence’s father recruits; Silence only sees his biological parents from time to time. Silence’s father Cador specifically recruits them because they are members of his and his wife’s family, and because he needs them to enact the gender change that he plans for

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<sup>24</sup> Sharon Kinoshita, “Heldris de Cornuälle’s *Roman de Silence* and the Feudal Politics of Lineage,” *PMLA* 110, no.3 (1995): 397-409 and “Male-Order Brides: Marriage, Patriarchy, and Monarchy in the ‘Roman de Silence,’” *Arthuriana* 12, no.1 (2002): 64-75; Peggy McCracken, “‘The Boy Who Was a Girl:’ Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*,” *The Romanic Review* 85 (1994): 515-534 (politics of gender and inheritance).

Silence. Hence, the seneschal and the nursemaid temporarily replace Silence's biological parents and their purpose is to form his masculine gender identity. For these reasons, I refer to them in this chapter as Silence's surrogate parents, and not just his caregivers. The process of putting Silence and his surrogate parents into a location separate from his biological parents' home in order to enact the gender change then creates an alternate reality wherein it appears that Silence was born a boy.

The first part of this chapter examines how Silence's gender identity is formed through the efforts of two sets of parents, his biological and his surrogate parents, and how the depiction of these parents corresponds to the text's depiction of Nature and Nurture. Cadour's plan relies on the cooperation of the three other parents and their acceptance of his dominance and authority, including his use of money to get the result he desires, a male heir. His relationship with them shows that misogynistic perceptions of women are built into Silence's upbringing. Secondly, I show that at the threshold of adolescence, Silence's family identity is thrown into flux when a pair of minstrels enters Silence's life, because Silence must invent a new description of his family to explain himself to them. After this, he then takes on an entirely new identity as a minstrel himself. Thirdly, I argue that Silence's masculine identity is "naturalized;" by this I refer to the creation of an alternate reality and an imagined kinship with surrogate parents that suggests that Silence has always been male. The creation of another family also causes competition between the two families, which both claim him as their own. The surrogate parents are then eliminated from the narrative, concealing the process of gender change. In conclusion, I move ahead to the end of the text wherein Silence becomes a woman and marries King Ebain, her great-uncle. This seemingly conservative conclusion shows that adulthood as a woman was pre-destined for Silence, and yet Silence's relationship to her new husband still requires elements

of her previous life as a man and a knight. Moreover, the fact that their marriage is not portrayed as consanguineous shows another way in which gender change is accompanied by instability in the construction of kinship ties.

## 2.1 A SURROGATE FAMILY: MISOGYNY AND SHAME

King Ebain of Cornwall declares that women can no longer inherit after two knights are killed fighting over twin ladies; there had been a dispute as to which one was older and thus the heir. Ebain makes this decision quickly, without consulting with his advisors. When Count Cadour (Ebain's nephew) learns that his wife Eufemie is pregnant, he immediately makes a rash decision himself, and devises a plan to cross-dress his child should she be born female. In order to carry out this ruse, Cadour also decides to recruit members of his and his wife's family who will help him and keep Silence's sex secret. While explaining his plan to his pregnant wife, and even before she acquiesces, he says that he will bring in a female relative of his to attend to Eufemie at the birth. He explains that "la dame si est ma cosine / Et somes trestolt d'une orine" [the lady is my cousin: we are very closely related].<sup>25</sup> Cadour summons his cousin, and when the lady arrives at the court, Cadour and Eufemie explain the situation to her and she agrees to attend to Eufemie and to participate in the deception if the child should be born female in exchange for "many

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<sup>25</sup> *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992), 1743-44. I will be using Roche-Mahdi's translations unless otherwise noted. All references are to lines of verse.

things,” which are not yet specified.<sup>26</sup> Cador explains that his cousin is recently widowed and childless. He does not say so precisely, but this means that she does not have many resources and would likely rely on the generosity of relatives like Cador, or, as in this case, remuneration for a task. Cador’s cousin attends to Eufemie during her labor as she had promised, and Eufemie safely delivers a girl. When the lady announces to Cador that his “son” is born, the narrator indicates that she is Cador’s “cozine germaine” - not just a cousin, who could be a very distant relation, but a first cousin.<sup>27</sup> This is also interesting considering that King Ebain is Cador’s uncle. Thus, the lady cousin could actually be Ebain’s daughter. However, this seems unlikely given that it is not specified, and she would probably not be in a precarious financial situation if that were the case. Regardless, the repetition of the fact that she is a close relative indicates that this influences Cador’s decision to ask her to be the caretaker.

Cador had informed his cousin to announce to all that he has a son, whether or not the child is male. Since Cador has no way of knowing the child’s true sex from his cousin’s announcement, he goes to Eufemie directly after the birth (which, the narrator notes, is against practice and embarrasses Eufemie), who informs him that in fact he has a daughter. Speaking to his wife, he then begins to develop a more elaborate plan for how to raise his female child as a boy. He mentions his cousin again and gives further details on why he thinks she will make a good nurse:

Et ceste dame i mettra painne,  
Ki est ma cozine germainne,  
Devenra por m’amor norice.  
Se jo sui manans ele iert riche.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1771-72.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1967.

Mar avra ja de honte soig  
S'or me secort a cest besoing.

and the lady who is my first cousin  
will take care of everything.  
She will be nursemaid out of loyalty to me.  
If I prosper, she shall be rich.  
She will never have to worry about being poor and abandoned  
if she helps me now with this task.<sup>28</sup>

Now that Cador has “hired” his cousin to attend at the birth and has assurance of her cooperation, he adds more to her job description: he wants his cousin to be the child’s “nорice” as well. Since, as we soon learn, Silence is to be isolated in the woods with only this lady, the seneschal, and a child servant, it is clear that by “nорice” Cador must be including the responsibility of breastfeeding the baby. Cador had explained to Eufemie that his cousin was pregnant when her husband died and she subsequently went to live with Cador’s aunt, where she gave birth to a son who lived only one week. Although the timeline is not very clear, this backstory may be meant to account for the cousin’s physical ability to breastfeed Silence on Cador’s command, although it is still not terribly realistic since Eufemie had not even given birth yet when the cousin’s child died – and we do not know whether the cousin even breastfed her own child for the one week that he was alive. Thus, the text does not address any physiological questions about lactation, but the lack of another source of milk implies that Cador’s cousin will breastfeed Silence. Further in this chapter, I will discuss why the cousin’s breast milk has a special significance for Silence.

The cousin will become Silence’s nursemaid because of Cador’s love for her (“Devenra por m’amor nорice”), or her “loyalty” towards him, as Roche-Mahdi translates. It is clear, though, from Cador’s plan, that love is not enough. The nursemaid cousin will also have to be provided with material goods that will allow her to live comfortably. As Cador says in the above

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2057-62.

passage, he will give her these material goods “s’or me secort a cest besoiing,” “if she helps me with this now.” The “if” highlights the transactional nature of their relationship. Heather Tanner has written about the role of generosity in good kingship in *Silence*, noting that King Ebain consistently provides examples of bad lordship because he does not give generously to his lords, but rather in terms of exchange of goods or services.<sup>29</sup> Cadour operates similarly to King Ebain when it comes to his cousin; he does not display liberality but rather he exchanges “finite wealth for specific services which must be rendered in full.”<sup>30</sup> This transactional relationship between the nursemaid cousin and Cadour exemplifies the condition of women in *Silence*; “good” women are sometimes forced to do things with which they do not necessarily agree, either in exchange for material support or because they feel they must lend moral support to a male relative. For example, although Cadour informs Eufemie of his plan to cross-dress Silence and she consents to the plan, the idea that she could comfortably voice any opposition to this plan is certainly not a given. Similarly, Cadour may say to Eufemie that he thinks his cousin is accepting his offer to her out of love, but in fact he is offering a monetary reward for her work, and he expects her to be happy to accept this reward. His cousin *would* have to worry about being poor and abandoned if it were not for his offer. In this sense, Cadour certainly does not display the qualities of a generous lord, and he also places a woman in a position wherein, in order to support herself, she must commit a rather serious form of deception involving inheritance.

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<sup>29</sup> Heather Tanner, “Lords, Wives, and Vassals in the *Roman de Silence*,” *Journal of Women’s History* 24, no.1 (2012): 141.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen D. White, “Giving Fiefs and Honor: Largesse, Avarice, and the Problem of ‘Feudalism’ in Alexander’s Testament,” *The Medieval French Alexander*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 136-137. Cited in Tanner, “Lords, Wives,” 141.

Cador's idea to cross-dress Silence, while it gives Silence an advantage because he retains his inheritance, on the contrary disadvantages the nursemaid (making her subject to bribery, essentially) and places his wife Eufemie in a very uncomfortable position wherein she cannot realistically oppose her husband's plan to cross-dress their child. I disagree with Tanner's statement that "Cador never assumes her [Eufemie's] consent."<sup>31</sup> In fact, he uses persuasive religious language in order to convince her that it is her duty to agree with him, hence leaving her no option of freely given consent. Before Cador first brings up his plan to Eufemie, he prefaces it with a monologue about Adam and Eve being of one mind and one flesh. The same is true of a married couple, he says, and thus, "Sor als est puis s'il ne se tient" [It is upon their heads if they don't hold to this thereafter]. Eufemie responds, "Bials sire, / Ja rien que vostres cuers desire / N'orés par moi estre escondie" [Sweet lord, nothing that your heart desires will I refuse you].<sup>32</sup> Her answer indicates that she agrees to support Cador in his decision, not that she agrees with what he has proposed. Cador thus controls the decisions of his wife as well as those of the nursemaid, while making it seem as if they were both freely consenting to the plan.

Elizabeth A. Waters notes that "images and evocations of shame surround Silence's cross-dressing." She references Eve Sedgwick's discussion of shame as formative to identity in some queer childhoods, and shows that Silence's motivation for *not* giving up cross-dressing is fear of shaming his family, the opposite of the expected situation in contemporary society, in which a child might be shamed *into* giving up cross-dressing.<sup>33</sup> Shame is also a useful tool in

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<sup>31</sup> Tanner, "Lords, Wives," 150.

<sup>32</sup> *Silence*, 1720; 1725-27.

<sup>33</sup> Waters, "The Third Path," 39-40.



Cador's relationship to the nursemaid. He admits that he is putting his cousin into a situation that she or others in their society might find shameful, because a noblewoman would not normally become a nursemaid. This shame becomes advantageous to Cador because it would explain why she chose to isolate herself in the woods:

Et se la fole gens demande  
Porqu'ele est o l'enfant si seule,  
On dira que n'a soig de peule,  
Qu'ele a de l'enfant norrir honte  
Por cho qu'ele est parente a conte.

And if foolish people ask  
why she stays so isolated with the child  
we will say she doesn't want anyone around,  
that she is ashamed to be nursemaid  
because she is of noble birth.<sup>34</sup>

Cador believes that his cousin might reasonably be expected to be ashamed to be a nursemaid in her noble position. Whether or not she actually does feel shame is not a matter of concern to him, but rather this imagined shame is useful to scare off any nosy neighbors. By removing Silence from the court, Cador avoids the possibility of bringing shame upon himself - and transfers that possibility of shame to his cousin. The change of gender, if discovered, brings the possibility of shame and humiliation to all involved - the parents, the surrogate parents, and Silence himself. But Cador's decision to remove Silence from his presence creates a layer of distance and protection from this humiliation, while still affording Cador the benefit of the pride of having a son who will inherit from him. While explaining that the nursemaid cousin will receive money from Cador, the narrator even inserts his own commentary, giving his approval of this monetary transaction:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2170-74.

Moult funt de doner, de promeitre  
A la dame por en grant mettre  
Qu'ele nen ait pas en porvil  
De norir lor fille por fil.  
E jo certes n'i voi nul blasme  
Se grant loier donent la dame  
Car de mescine avront valet,  
Et de lor fille un oir mallet.

They gave many gifts and promises  
to the lady to secure her good will,  
so that she would not disdain  
to raise their girl as a boy.  
And I certainly see nothing wrong  
with rewarding the lady handsomely,  
for they will be getting a boy for a girl,  
a little male heir instead of a daughter.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that the narrator feels the need to sanction Cador's behavior indicates that it could be seen as "un-lordly" behavior of the nature that Heather Tanner described – a transactional relationship that places Cador in bad light. Essentially, the narrator says that the "ends justify the means:" Cador's buying of his cousin is legitimate simply because such a great reward, a male heir, comes out of it.

## 2.2 THE SENESCHAL AND THE NURSEMAID: GENDER AND DECEPTION

After the baby has been baptized as a boy named Scilentius without anyone noticing the ruse, Cador can move forward with the next phase of his plan.<sup>36</sup> He asks Eufemie's cousin, a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 2203-10.

<sup>36</sup> Although he is referred to as "Silence" throughout the text, Silence is baptized Scilentius, a Latin name grammatically coded masculine, which his father reasons can be changed to Scilentia if they have to change him back into a girl. Ibid., 2074-82.

seneschal, to provide shelter for Silence and the nursemaid and shield them from prying eyes. The seneschal and the nursemaid create a couple that parallels their cousins, Silence's "natural" parents. The seneschal's main task is to build a house in the woods for Silence and his nursemaid, apparently at a distance from where Eufemie and Cador live, although its exact location is never made clear. Just as with the nursemaid, the seneschal's close blood relationship with one parent, Eufemie, is emphasized. When the seneschal arrives at the court to speak to them after being summoned, they receive him "as an intimate friend" ("par grant amor").<sup>37</sup> As they are speaking, it is indicated that the seneschal is Eufemie's cousin: "Li cuens meïmes dont l'encline / et la contesse sa cozine" [the count himself bowed low to him, as did the countess, his cousin].<sup>38</sup> At another moment when the narrator describes the seneschal, the word "norris" is used to indicate that he and Eufemie were raised together. The seneschal is a relative of Renalt, Eufemie's recently deceased father, and although the text indicates that the seneschal and Eufemie were raised together, he may be somewhat older than Eufemie, since the author compares his love for her to his love for his own daughter:

En la tiere ot un senescal.  
O la contesse estoit norris,  
Parens Renalt, kist ja porris  
Cil amoit plus bele Eufemie  
Qu'il ne fasoit sa fille mie.

There was a seneschal in the land  
who had been raised with the countess  
and was a close relation of Renald, who lay moldering.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 2189.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2201-02. My translation. Roche-Mahdi's translation of the second line, "as did the countess *to* his cousin" (my emphasis), is incorrect. "Sa cozine" is feminine and refers to Eufemie. The seneschal is her own cousin, not her husband's cousin.

He loved belle Eufemie  
even more than his own daughter.<sup>39</sup>

The selection of cousins who are either closely related by blood (first cousins) or emotionally close like the seneschal and Eufemie, indicates that Cador, who crafts this plan, deems it important for Silence's surrogate parents to be biologically related to him/her; they are not selected solely for their caretaking abilities.

Both the seneschal and the nursemaid are being asked to participate in a scheme of deception that will benefit Cador and Silence. However, their characters are associated with the idea of deception in different ways. As we saw above, Cador is the author of the ruse, but never says that he fears being shamed for what he has done, nor does he ever mention any negative association between himself and the plan of deception. Cador expects that his cousin might be ashamed to be a nursemaid, and, as we have seen, he pays her for this task. The seneschal's role is quite different from that of the nursemaid - he is recruited to make plans, build a home, and provide materially for the nursemaid and Silence. There is nothing shameful about his association with this plan. As for monetary concerns, it is not explicitly stated whether Cador is helping the seneschal by providing him with some of the money for this project. Cador says about the seneschal, "une maison li ferai faire el bos," [I will have him build a house in the woods], and "Li seneschaus li face avoir / Quanqu'il onques porra savoir / Que ele avoir voelle et commande" [The seneschal will see that the lady has whatever she wishes and commands whenever he hears of any need].<sup>40</sup> These statements do not indicate who is providing the money for these projects, but the second statement implies that the seneschal is independent from Cador

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 2142-46.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2153-54; 2167-69.

in terms of his decision-making and his use of funds to provide for the nursemaid and Silence. The fact that Cadour does not buy the seneschal's services as he does with the nursemaid allows the seneschal to be independent and does not expose him to possible shame for taking money as remuneration. The narrator's description of how the seneschal goes about setting up the home in the woods for the nursemaid and Silence emphasizes his ingenuity and independence. He takes the nursemaid and Silence under his protection, traveling with them from Cadour's court to the undisclosed location in the woods: "La dame otolt l'enfant enmainne / Or monte l'engiens et la painne / Al seneschal de celer l'uevre" [He took the lady and the child. Now it was up to the seneschal to conceal the matter by clever planning and hard work].<sup>41</sup> The *Dictionnaire Godefroy* defines "engiens" as "habileté, adresse, ruse, fraude, tromperie, artifice, expédient."<sup>42</sup> The word thus has negative connotations of trickery and fraud, but also that of ingenuity, skill, and acumen. The seneschal has a house built for them that provides physical protection, with a wall and a strong gate locked with two bars, two bolts and four keys! He keeps two of the keys and gives the other two to the nursemaid, so he will always have access to the house. Finally, the narrator indicates that he provides for them plentifully, and gives the nursemaid a child servant, someone who is too young to understand the gender deception, so that all will remain secret.<sup>43</sup> The nursemaid is very grateful to the seneschal for all the trouble he has gone to in order to protect her and the child: "Li seneschals atant s'en vait / Et la dame lie s'en fait / Quant prise s'est a si prodome" [The seneschal took his leave, and the lady, happy, realized how much she

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2215-17.

<sup>42</sup> "engin," *Dictionnaire Godefroy*, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/engin>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2231-43.

owed to this good man].<sup>44</sup> The seneschal's actions do contribute to a plan to trick others, and this is evident in the nuances of the word "engiens." However, his efforts in setting up the house seem almost heroic in this description, and they place him in a position of authority over the nursemaid, since she is reliant on him for sustenance and protection.

The nursemaid is also clever and works hard to enact Cador's plan. However, a misogynistic association between women and deception is evident in descriptions of the nursemaid. She swears to the count and countess that she will *deceive* everyone through her nurturing of Silence:

Et si lor jure durement  
Qu'ele fera tel couverture  
En cele soie noreture  
Que tolt gent en decevra,

and [she] swore a solemn oath to them  
that she would do such an excellent job  
of concealing things, in her role as nursemaid,  
that everyone would be deceived;<sup>45</sup>

The nursemaid indeed brings some creative deception to the scene of Silence's baptism. Cador had declared that his son was very sick and needed to be baptized immediately with a cloth covering his lower body. The nursemaid plays along with the ruse, and even adds her own flair to it: she lets Silence's head droop as she is carrying him to the church, so that it appears as if he is sick. The narrator then comments that she was clever to let the child's head droop: "Ki ert voisose, et moult recuite, / Si est de barat tres bien duite" [which was very clever of her indeed.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2249-51.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 2178-81.

She was quick to learn deception].<sup>46</sup> A more literal translation of this sentence is “which was clever and very cunning; she is quite gifted in trickery.” One of the examples given in the *Dictionnaire Godefroy* for “recuit” is from the *Roman de la Rose*, and interestingly, the lines cited match up almost exactly to *Silence*’s author’s use of “recuite,” “barat,” and “duite:” “Mes les dures vieilles ridees / Malicieuses et recuites / Sunt en l’art de barat si duites” ([But hard old wrinkled women, malicious and cunning, are so skilled in the art of trickery]).<sup>47</sup> In the *Roman de la Rose*, written between approximately 1230 and 1275, *la Vieille* (the Old Woman) is a character whose personality contains the whole gamut of misogynistic stereotypes: she is old and unattractive, but in her youth was very sexually active and had a habit of deceiving men in order to use them for material items. She speaks constantly about her youth and her past glories, and encourages the rose, who represents a young woman, to behave deceitfully with men in the same way as she did in the past. I do not know if this close correspondence between the passage in the *Roman de la Rose* and the one in *Silence* indicates that *Silence*’s author Heldris de Cornuälle read the *Rose* or if the combination of the rhyming words “recuite” and “duite” was simply a misogynistic literary trope that both authors used.<sup>48</sup> In either case, the use of such words in *Silence* to describe the nursemaid sends a misogynistic message that women are naturally gifted in the art of the ruse; the use of the same sequence of words indicates that this was a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2117-18.

<sup>47</sup> “recuit,” *Dictionnaire Godefroy*, accessed June 8, 2016, <http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/recuit>. The translation of the quote from the *Roman de la Rose* is my own. “Recuit” can also be translated as “bad, nasty.” “Recuit,” *Old French-English Dictionary*, ed. Hindley, Langley, and Levy (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 519.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Newman writes, “*Silence* can be read as an elaborate, ambivalent gloss on a speech Jean de Meun puts in the mouth of la Vielle.” In this speech, *la Vieille* says that “Nature passe norreture,” “Nature surpasses Nurture.” Newman, “Testing the Norms,” 123.

misogynistic commonplace. On the whole, the description of the seneschal's behavior is quite positive because he is seen as acting independently with his own power and authority. That authority is used for the greater good because it allows him to help the nursemaid and Silence, who are vulnerable and in need of his protection. On the contrary, the nursemaid's behavior is described with multiple words that indicate cunning or trickery. The word "recuit" can even mean "perverse."<sup>49</sup>

Although both the seneschal and the nursemaid are responsible for concealing Silence's sex and raising her as a boy, the woman's role is depicted with an explicit link to ruse and deceit. Thus, the fact that the nursemaid agrees to help her cousin Cadour and that she accepts money for her involvement is perhaps not meant to be surprising, but rather in keeping with her womanly nature. At the very end of *Silence*, Heldris de Cornuälle names himself and comments in his own voice on the difficulty that women have in being good. It is harder for women to be good, he says, because they are given fewer opportunities to be good or do good – and also because they are working against their nature.<sup>50</sup> This comment is directed at King Ebain's wife's adulterous behavior, which is revealed at the end of the text. The nursemaid also suffers from constrained choices; she is constrained by her gender to accept a somewhat humiliating paid job. Because of this, she is put in a situation where she is being asked (by a man) to change Silence's gender, and she will do this whether or not she thinks it is a good idea. (The reader does not know her opinion.) Similarly, as I noted above, we never know whether Eufemie actually agreed with her husband that it was a good idea to cross-dress their child. She, too, has fewer choices and thus

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<sup>49</sup> "recuit," adj., fin, rusé, madré, pervers, *Dictionnaire Godefroy*, accessed June 8, 2016, <http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/recuit>.

<sup>50</sup> *Silence*, 6684-91.



fewer opportunities to make the right ones. Eufemie and the nursemaid make choices that align with those of their male relatives because they are constrained to do so. The question of how Silence will be raised is at the outset, then, a question of gender and power. It originates from two decisions that are made by powerful men who do not consult with anyone else before making the decision: King Ebain's irrational edict that females can no longer inherit, and Cadour's subsequent decision to cross-dress his daughter.

### 2.3 NOURISHMENT AND EDUCATION: SILENCE'S CHILDHOOD

When Silence reaches puberty, the allegorical figures Nature and Nurture fight over which one of them ought to control Silence. Nature appears first, and upbraids Silence for wasting all the beauty she has bestowed on her – a thousand women are in love with Silence, and Silence is deceiving all of them. She tells him he has no business hunting and jousting, but rather he should learn to sew.<sup>51</sup> Nurture is furious with Nature and addresses her directly. Instead of listing specific things that are good about Silence's upbringing, she simply says that she has succeeded in “de-naturing” Silence (“Jo l'ai tolte desnaturee”) and commands that Nature leave, which she does.<sup>52</sup> Nurture does not list all the things that the surrogate parents have done, but it is clear that they carry out work that is pleasing to her, and that they are defying Nature. At the same time, if we look at all four of the parents, dividing them into the camps of Nature and Nurture is not

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 2513-29. Of course, learning how to sew could be considered Nurture, not Nature.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 2593-2604.

simple, it turns out. One can see the biological parents as nature and the surrogate parents as nurture. In some ways this is explicit in the text, as the nursemaid is described as using nurture to change Silence into a boy, and the seneschal has to use his ingenuity to conceal his involvement in the gender deception. They are changing nature by raising Silence as a boy. On the other hand, one can also see the actors in this deception as divided by gender, with the men representing nurture and the women nature. This is because the idea to change Silence's gender originally comes from Cador, so he is truly the intellectual force behind the idea of "de-naturing" Silence, while making others carry out the dirty work. The seneschal chooses with relative freedom (compared to the nursemaid) to participate in the nurturing scheme. As for the women, Eufemie does not express her own preference about changing her daughter's gender, and the nursemaid cannot make a free choice because of her social and financial status. From this perspective, the women only participate in the scheme because a man is telling them to do so, and thus would represent nature or the maintenance of the status quo. All parents are participating in some way in this deception, and all, particularly the women, are influenced by Cador's authority.

However, what *Silence* ultimately shows is that the line between nature and nurture is never easy to draw; one of the best examples of this is the question of how exactly Silence becomes a boy. For this does not occur simply because he is dressed in boys' clothes and treated like a boy; we also hear of physical changes in Silence's young body even before he begins to wear gender-specific clothing. Although the narrator never explicitly says that the nursemaid is breastfeeding Silence, I am working under this assumption, since she is the only woman to live with Silence. The information that we heard earlier that the nursemaid had given birth to a child who died at one week old seems to be present in the story as an explanation for her physical

ability to lactate, although things may not quite add up in terms of the timeline between that one week of motherhood and the birth of Silence.

In itself, the act of nursing a child evokes both nature and nurture. The verb “norir” is linked etymologically with “noretire,” and it means to feed or suckle and to raise or educate children.<sup>53</sup> (This is the word that was used to describe the fact that Eufemie and the seneschal were raised together.) Coming from the same root is the word “norrice,” a woman who is responsible for a child’s nourishment and social education.<sup>54</sup> The process of nursing a child is associated with the natural and with femininity because after pregnancy, lactation generally occurs in the female body naturally without intervention – or at least this fictional text portrays it as easy and natural, as we have seen by the shaky connection between the nursemaid’s first lactation with her child and her ability to lactate again for Silence. On the other hand, breastfeeding also represents nurture, for one thing simply because breast milk is food, which enters the child’s body and changes her or him physically. Particularly in the medieval context, breastfeeding was seen as having a strong social effect, because not only does nursing create a social bond between the nurse and the child, but it was also believed that the wet nurse could pass on personality characteristics through her milk.<sup>55</sup> By both providing nourishment from her own body and by bonding with, raising, and possibly influencing the personality of a child, the nursemaid represents the junction of nature and nurture.

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<sup>53</sup> “norir,” raise, bring up, nurture, foster; suckle, feed, nourish; maintain, provide for, keep in one’s household, in one’s service. *Old French-English Dictionary*, 448.

<sup>54</sup> “norrice,” foster-mother, wet-nurse, nanny. *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>55</sup> Finn Sinclair, *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the “chanson de geste”* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 19.

This combination of roles is played out in the text if we look specifically at what the nursemaid does for Silence once installed in the cottage. The allegorical figure Nature gives an angry speech condemning Silence's gender change and Nurture's role in it. The narrator then takes over and continues to support Nature's argument. He goes on to explain that despite Nature's anger with Nurture, Silence was effectively changed from a girl to a boy within a year, and that he grew more in a year than others do in three. The text implies that the nursemaid's breast milk contributes to Silence's growth and thus to his gender change:

De maltalent [Nature] fremist et groce,  
Viers Noretire se coroce.  
Mais ne li valt pas une tille:  
Silence n'iert a un an mais fille.  
Dire vos puis seürement  
Que l'enfes croist moult durement  
Plus en l'an c'uns altres en trois.<sup>56</sup>

She scolded and shook with anger;  
she was furious with Nurture.  
But it didn't help a bit:  
Silence wasn't any more of a girl in a year.  
I can tell you one thing for certain –  
the child grew more sturdily in a year  
than others do in three.

Silence's unusual growth is attributed to Nurture's power: Nature's anger didn't do any good, because Silence was changed into a boy. The evidence for turning into a boy at this early age is that he grew more than other children, but the text doesn't say what actually happened to allow this growth. Since infants' and toddlers' clothing was not gender-specific in the Middle Ages, his size would be the author's only way of indicating boyishness in infancy. If indeed this growth was entirely due to Nurture, as the narrator claims, Silence must have grown this way because of

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<sup>56</sup> *Silence*, 2347-53.

the *noretur* of her *norice* – did her breast milk contain a special ingredient that made Silence masculine? Since it was believed that the wet nurse’s disposition could be passed on to the suckling child, this does not seem far-fetched. As Catherine Léglu points out in her work on wet nurses in different versions of *Le Roman de Mélusine*, the use of wet nurses, although popular, was nonetheless a conflicted issue because of this belief. Despite the pragmatic advantages of using a wet nurse (contraception for the wet nurse and the ability to conceive again more quickly for the noble mother, who may still have been looking to produce an heir), it was still believed that “maternal feeding was the best way of directly inculcating lineage identity, social rank, and religious doctrine in a young infant.”<sup>57</sup> In *Silence*, the use of a wet nurse does *not* have a negative effect on Silence’s nobility, which can be attributed to Cadour’s careful selection of his noble cousin, a woman who would not normally be a wet nurse because of her rank. The nurse’s ability to contribute to Silence’s gender change with her milk shows that while her nobility is necessary to preserve Silence’s rank, the fact that she is not Silence’s biological mother helps in “denaturalizing” Silence’s gender – perhaps Silence’s mother’s milk would not have been as effective. On the other hand, if we were to imagine that Silence’s growth was *not* due to his nurse’s milk, then we would have to assume it was indeed due to Nature, which would contradict the text’s assertions in the above passage. In modern terms, Silence would then have to be genetically pre-disposed to grow big and strong “like a boy,” which would have been a happy coincidence for his parents.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Catherine Léglu, “Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French Versions of the *Roman de Mélusine*,” *Medium Aevum* 74, no. 1 (2005): 77.

<sup>58</sup> According to a medieval medical treatise by Jacobus Forliviensis, male embryos grow more quickly in the womb because they have more heat. Making Silence grow larger as a baby boy seems to correspond to a notion that boys are supposed to be bigger than girls. One can

At an older, unspecified age Silence begins to wear boys' clothing. At around this time, the seneschal decides that Silence should start to learn his letters, but it is the nursemaid who does the actual teaching.

Al doctriener n'a que la dame:  
Si bien le fait que n'i a blasme,  
C'ainc ne veïstes tel norice.  
L'enfant estruist et si l'enthice  
De bones mors de faire honor  
Et al gregnor et al menor.  
Li enfes pas ne la desdegne,  
Ainz est moult lies de l'apresure  
Car cho li fait bone nature.  
Li enfes est de tel orine  
Que il meïsmes se doctrine.

There was none but the lady to teach him.  
She did it well, beyond reproach.  
You never saw such a devoted nurse.  
She instructed him, taught him principles  
of good conduct, to honor  
both great and humble.  
She taught him and instructed him very well.  
The child was not ungrateful;  
he was very glad of such learning –  
that was the effect of his good nature.  
The child's innate qualities were such  
that he taught himself.<sup>59</sup>

The nursemaid is thus responsible for the child's physical nourishment as well as his education, moral and academic. Here, along with *norice*, we see other words associated with education: *doctriener* and *doctrine*, *estruist*, and *apresure*. The vocabulary of education is not used as extensively when the narrator describes the seneschal teaching Silence, for example when he

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imagine, then, that since she was a female embryo and fetus, she would have to catch up in size to become an infant boy. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 171.

<sup>59</sup> *Silence*, 2375-86.

teaches Silence to ride.<sup>60</sup> The statements “Al doctriener n’a que la dame” and “ainc ne veïstes tel norice” make it sound as if the nursemaid is doing something unusual by being responsible for a child’s, particularly a boy’s, academic education. It seems that this is also linked to Cador’s plan to keep Silence’s female sex secret, since a noble boy would normally have had a male teacher. The constraints of the gender disguise make it acceptable and even preferable that the nurse teach Silence, contrary to practice.

Silence’s instruction and education are associated with nurture, and specifically with the nursemaid, who is called upon to change his nature. Nature is still present, though, because as the above passage indicates, Silence is naturally inclined toward learning because of his *bone nature* and his *orine*, his origin or family. Thus, Silence’s education and ability to learn are facilitated by a mixture of nature and nurture. Silence’s qualities are also shown to come from both the influence of his nursemaid and from his parents. While the text implicitly attributes Silence’s boyish growth to his nurse’s milk, his good attitude towards learning clearly comes from his *orine*, his biological family. The nursemaid is necessary to carry out the education towards which he is already inclined. The fact that the nursemaid also shares her family origin with Silence, as Cador pointed out many times, makes her the perfect candidate for feeding and educating Silence – she combines the best of both worlds.

After the description of how she educated Silence, the nursemaid is barely mentioned in the rest of the text. The nursemaid’s absence coincides with Silence’s transition to a primarily male world, where he will learn to ride, wrestle, and joust. As Ruth Mazo Karras notes, “women

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2469-78.

were not absent, but peripheral” to young noble men’s lives and educations.<sup>61</sup> At this point, responsibility for his education transfers to the seneschal. It is also at this time that there is a brief interaction between Cadour and Silence. Cadour sits him down to explain to him that “il est mescine” [he is a girl]; he tells him that they cross-dressed him because of King Ebain’s decree against women inheriting. Silence accepts this information as the “sage enfant” [well-bred child] that he is, and he agrees to keep his sex concealed.<sup>62</sup> Silence’s transition away from his nursemaid and towards a closer relationship with the seneschal, as well as this moment of intimacy with his father (his mother is not present for that discussion), signal a transition into a society of men. Cadour’s original plan that Silence be completely isolated is no longer necessary, the seneschal decides, because Silence is so self-disciplined and discreet. He begins to allow him more freedom, and so Silence becomes part of a community of boys his age. Silence’s interactions with these boys show how peers influence Silence’s perception of his self and his gender identity, and his relationship to sexuality.

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<sup>61</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 29.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 2440; 2459.



## 2.4 PEER PRESSURE

So far Silence has been an exceptional child in his size, his intelligence, and his overall noble demeanor. It should come as no surprise, then, that when Silence begins to interact with other boys his age, he surpasses them in every sport and activity:

Et quant il ot .xi. ans passes  
N'i a un seul de lui plus maistre.  
Quant il joent a le palaistre,  
A bohorder, n'a l'escremir,  
Il seus fait tols ses pers fremir.

And by the time he was in his twelfth year,  
none was his master anymore.  
When they practiced wrestling,  
jousting, or skirmishing,  
he alone made all his peers tremble.<sup>63</sup>

Silence's great successes, instead of giving him confidence, begin to contribute to an increasing sense that he is an imposter and that he is doing something morally wrong by living as a boy. Silence is visited by and hears convincing arguments from both allegorical figures Nature and Nurture, and is quite torn between them. When he is beginning to feel convinced by Nature's argument, he decides to sit out some of the boys' games. However, this only brings the boys' mockery upon him – and even threats of violence. The boys say, “Cis avra moult le cuer felon / Si il vit longhes entressait” [This one will be a terrible coward, if he lives that long!].<sup>64</sup> The possibility of sexual violence is also hinted at in this scene, as Silence references the fact that for their sporting games, he sometimes has to get dressed and undressed in front of the other boys, saying “Se me desful par aventure / Dont ai paor de ma nature” [Whenever I happen to get

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 2491-95.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 2568-69.

undressed, I am afraid my sex will be discovered].<sup>65</sup> Although Silence considers giving up his disguise, this is not actually a realistic solution. At age twelve, he is already integrated into a community that believes him to be a boy, and accepts him, as long as he conforms to their ideas of what boys should do. Moreover, the potential exposure of Silence's body and the revelation of his (female) sex put him at risk for violence.

Nurture now appears and makes her argument that Silence ought to remain a boy, but Silence still does not know what to do. Then Reason, another allegorical figure who has not previously appeared in the text, comes on the scene, and supports Nurture's argument. Reason warns Silence that if he stops being a boy, he will lose his ability to train for knighthood, and he will lose his horse and chariot. She also expresses the opinion that the king will never allow Silence to inherit if he sees that she is female.<sup>66</sup> Reason thus emphasizes practical concerns and also appeals to Silence's emotions, since Silence is attached to his identity as a boy and enjoys knightly pursuits, and he also feels pressure from his parents to remain the heir to their property. After hearing Reason's arguments, Silence cites respect for his father as a compelling reason to maintain his disguise – “Ne voel mon pere desmentir / Ainz me doinst Dex la mort sentir” [I don't want to prove my father a liar. I would rather have God strike me dead!].<sup>67</sup> The pressure from his community and from his father make it such that Silence does not really have a free choice to give up being a boy.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 2571-72.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 2609-24.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 2653-54.

Silence has now finalized his decision to remain a boy, but he still has the problem of sexuality with which to contend: “Donques li rent a sovenir / Des jus c’ on siolt es cambres faire / Dont a oi sovent retraire” [Then he began to consider the pastimes of a woman’s chamber – which he had often heard about].<sup>68</sup> The question of sexuality concerns Silence for two reasons: one, he thinks that his skin is too rough to be embraced and kissed like a woman, and two, because for him, sexuality is directly linked to power and the advantages that he has as a boy/man. In the middle of this same internal monologue about sex, he asks himself, “Deseure sui, s’irai desos?” [If I’m on top, why should I step down?].<sup>69</sup> Silence’s identity as a young man is formed not just by the debate between Nature and Nurture (this debate is essentially Silence’s internal monologue about what is happening to him), but also by his surroundings. Silence specifically says that he has heard people talk about women and sex, and presumably this conversation occurred among his peers. Silence has been completely accepted into this society of young men and thus has been party to their locker room conversations about girls and sex. Given that his peers see themselves as “on top” and women as “below” them, Silence is not likely to think that being a woman is a good choice. He values the opinions of his peers and he is also intimidated by the possibility of their mockery.

This situation with his peers points out that the concept of nurture operates in multiple ways in this text, depending on the group of people with which it is associated. “Nurture” is the opinion of the allegorical figure Nurture, expressed in her tirades; it is the influence of the surrogate parents, and it is also the influence of Silence’s peers and the overall community in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2632-34.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 2641.

which he lives. In this scene, Nurture is in fact vague about what she has done to make Silence a boy; all she says before departing is “Jo noris tres bien, c’est la some, / D’un noble enfant un malvais home” [I have succeeded very well in turning a noble child into a defective male].<sup>70</sup> Nurture’s assertion is vague because in fact her work is carried out by the surrogate family and by a group of peers. Thus, Nurture is revealed to be a more complicated concept than Nature, because it is composed of so many different environmental factors. At the end of this scene, Silence decides to remain a boy, although his internal struggle continues. The next plot development is the arrival of two minstrels, an event that completely changes the direction of Silence’s life.

## 2.5 FAMILY IDENTITY IN FLUX

The arrival of two minstrels at the seneschal’s home sets in motion Silence’s entry into an independent life, as he decides to leave both his surrogate parents and his biological parents behind and join the minstrels, who are traveling to France. Their arrival also necessitates that Silence invent a new identity in order to tell the minstrels who he is and to whom he is related. In the following section, I show that Silence’s description of himself references his surrogate family but does not exactly correspond to the seneschal and the nursemaid. His description demonstrates that Silence must construct his identity by imagining himself in terms of his kinship to the seneschal, while on the other hand his masculine gender remains a stable element of his identity. The description of his family identity also shows the ways in which Silence’s nobility, which up

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 2601-02.

until this point has been a stable reference point of identity, changes because he invents a family origin that is of lower social status than that of his biological parents. This is the first time that Silence comes in contact with people from the “outside world.” The minstrels have no connection to either his parents or to the seneschal, so they have no preconceived notions about who Silence is, and they base their judgments on him solely on their observations and the questions they ask him. This interaction thus allows us to see how Silence appears to outsiders who have no idea of his parentage, nor of his cross-dressing.

The minstrels stay overnight at the seneschal’s home on their way to France. Silence attends to them; he helps them undress and prepares their bed covers and pillows. They are very impressed by how well he serves them at such a young age, and ask him, “*Qui est tes pere?*” [Who is your father?]. Silence responds, “*Un vavasors, si est ma mere / Norrice a cel enfant gregnor / Ki est aiséns fils al segnor*” [A vavassor; my mother is nurse to an older child who is the lord’s elder son].<sup>71</sup> With this answer, Silence invents a family identity that does not exactly correspond to either his biological or his surrogate family. It is not clear whether this mother he has in mind is the same as his own nursemaid, and if in fact she did become the nursemaid of the seneschal’s son after Silence grew up, or whether he is inventing an imaginary personage. In any case, the parents he describes are not his biological parents and they are not the seneschal and the nursemaid. Because he identifies his family as other than either his biological or surrogate parents, this in turn creates a new personal identity – if he is not the son of the count of Cornwall, or even the son of the seneschal, then he is not presenting himself as “Silence” at all.

There is no indication in the text as to why Silence feels he cannot tell the minstrels the truth about his family origin, that his parents are the count and countess of Cornwall, and that he

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 2795-98.

is being raised by the seneschal. This moment in the text reveals the extent to which his identity in the seneschal's community may be masked to the larger group outside of the seneschal and the nursemaid. Although the text does state that Silence's parents visited him, and there is no indication that the visits were secret, Silence's reluctance to reveal to the minstrels who his real parents are seems to indicate that his origin is not something that everyone knows about. When he meets the minstrels, people from the outside world, Silence is suddenly confronted with the necessity to describe himself in relation to his family. While he had debated whether or not to maintain his gender disguise, he had never been previously called on to explain himself to others why he, the son of a count and countess, was living with a nursemaid and a seneschal. Silence's solution to this problem is to invent an identity that reflects a lower social status than the one he was born into (son of a vavasor and a nursemaid, not the son of a count and countess). A few years later, Silence serves his great-uncle Ebain at his court. It seems likely that the reason that Silence does not go to King Ebain's court at age twelve to begin his knightly education is because Cadore would think it a riskier situation regarding the gender deception. Noble families typically had their sons educated outside of their own homes, and would prefer to send them to a household of higher status than their own.<sup>72</sup> Silence's family invention thus conforms with what would be expected of a young man – if he is the son of a vavasor, he would benefit from serving in the household of a seneschal, who is of higher status than a vavasor. Although he lowers his status, his explanation corresponds better to an expected itinerary for a young man, as opposed to his true situation wherein his father, a count, sent him to live with a seneschal.

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<sup>72</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 29, 30.

When the minstrels question Silence, they wonder why it is Silence who serves them and not the seneschal's own two sons, since this honor is usually reserved for sons of the household. Silence brushes this question off by saying that a wise man is often more severe with those he holds dearest, and then concludes his explanation of his family situation and relation to the seneschal by saying to the minstrels, "Et jo si resui se fillols" [As for me, I am his godchild].<sup>73</sup> Silence's statement is not accompanied by any commentary from the narrator as to its veracity. In the scene of Silence's baptism mentioned above, the seneschal is not present. Only the nursemaid is present, but she is not identified as Silence's godmother. Thus, we cannot tell for sure if he really is the seneschal's godson or if that is part of Silence's excuse for being favored over the sons. Similarly, Silence's vavator father and nursemaid mother exist in a partly imaginary realm. They are the slightly altered double of Silence's surrogate parents. The "vavator" is an imaginary person, but one that finds its inspiration in the figure of the seneschal. The nursemaid of which he speaks could refer back to his own nursemaid or could be an imaginary person.

Within this confusion of semi-imaginary characters, this passage also brings up the question of blood and godparent kinship. Silence's explanation that he is the seneschal's godson, while we are not sure of its veracity, draws attention to the fact that he has usurped the role of the biological sons of the seneschal. The narrator says that the seneschal and his court will be sorry the minstrels ever came to his land, because it will trigger Silence's disappearance, and that those who once praised the minstrels' music would soon think badly of the minstrels:

Mais ainz qu'il voient mais .ii. vespres,  
Orront voir canter altres vespres,

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<sup>73</sup> *Silence*, 2818.

Dont plus dolans sera li sire  
Que s'il veïst son fil ochire.

But before two nights have passed,  
they will sing a very different tune, believe me!  
- one that will make the seneschal sorry  
as if he had seen his son get killed.<sup>74</sup>

When the narrator says that the seneschal will be “as sorry as if he had seen his son get killed,” this is not an exaggeration, since Silence truly is like the seneschal’s son. Reversing the pattern of nurture “corrupting” nature’s work, their relationship has developed from a nurturing one *into* a more natural one, as Silence becomes so dear to the seneschal that he effectively replaces his sons. The seneschal’s tendency to replace his own children has already been seen in the description of his relationship with Silence’s mother Eufemie, whom he loved more than his own daughter. The scene in which Silence serves the minstrels also indicates that Silence’s abilities in serving and his especially noble comportment are to be seen as natural, since the seneschal’s sons presumably received the same education as Silence, yet did not excel as he did. In the Middle Ages, godparents and godchildren were considered to be related to each other in the same way as people related by blood or by marriage.<sup>75</sup> In any society or time period, which people one considers part of one’s family is determined by social norms; “family” is not an unchanging entity. We know that Silence is related by blood to the seneschal (they are cousins, to what degree we do not know) and we know that they *may* be godfather and godson. These two aspects of kinship are both based on some kind of family imaginary, as there is an unspoken agreement in the society in which they live that they are family in these two different ways. As part of an

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 2771-74.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 28.



imaginary, the relationship between Silence and the seneschal keeps developing over time: from the description of the seneschal as Silence's protector and provider when he is a baby, to his teacher in riding and jousting, to being his godfather, and then to being so much like a father that he prefers Silence to his sons. Their relationship originates in Cadour's choice to raise Silence as a boy, but then develops in ways that could not have been predicted. The development of their relationship demonstrates that simply cross-dressing a child to change gender is only the very beginning of Silence's growth; his identity is constructed not only by the explicit project of the gender change, but by the family, friends, and community to which he is exposed.

Finally, I want to note that Silence does not name himself at all in this scene. Earlier, when Nature is berating Silence, she tells him that he is not Scilentius. (Although the narrator refers to him as "Silence," he was baptized Scilentius, a Latin name grammatically coded masculine.) Silence responds that he is indeed Scilentius, or he must be someone other than he thought he was. He concludes, "Donques sui jo Scilentius, / Cho m'est avis, u jo sui nus" [Therefore, I am Scilentius, as I see it, or I am no one].<sup>76</sup> Barbara Newman writes about this scene, "[w]ithout his carefully nurtured masculine identity, Silence is either a social nobody or a naked female body – which may after all amount to the same thing." (*Nus* can mean "no one" or "nude.")<sup>77</sup> In this scene, however, Silence *is* able to imagine himself as someone else; not a social nobody or a woman, but a boy of lower social status. However, this identity is not fully formed; the son of the vavator and the nursemaid does not have a history or a name. In the next section, I show that Silence goes on to create yet another partially-developed identity in order to move on to the next stage of his life wherein he becomes a minstrel – and in that case, he does

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<sup>76</sup> *Silence*, 2537-38.

<sup>77</sup> Newman, "Testing the Norms," 130.

name himself. These moments wherein identities are briefly developed and discarded underscore that throughout this process, one thing remains the same - Silence maintains a masculine gender identity. Eventually, Silence gives up his new/false identities in order to return to that of Silence, the noble boy who is the son of Cadore. Thus, the discarding of these false identities and the return to being Silence (really, Scilenti) serves to confirm that Silence's "original" identity of noble boy is the correct one, which in turn masks the fact that he was born female.

## **2.6 "MALDUIT" AND CHANGING SOCIAL CLASS**

With the introduction of the new set of parents, the vavasor and the nursemaid, Silence creates an alternate family that replicates the situation imposed on him by his father. In reality, Silence was sent away by his father, a count, to be raised by a man of lower status than a count, a seneschal. Now, in Silence's invented family, his father is a vavasor, a position that ranks lower than a seneschal – it is as if one imaginary family begets another, and gradually brings Silence lower and lower on the social ladder. Silence's (imaginary) social descent reaches its lowest point when, the morning after he serves the minstrels, he runs away with them to France. In order to escape the seneschal's grounds unnoticed, he disguises himself as a nameless, low-born boy with skin darkened by an herb. However, this identity only lasts about twenty-four hours until the dye fades and the minstrels recognize Silence, not as "Silence" but as the boy they met the night before, the one who was the son of a vavasor and a nursemaid. Under this "true" identity, Silence then travels with the minstrels and serves them, and within three years learns to play the vielle and the harp so well that he surpasses the minstrels in musical skill. By this point Silence is calling himself Malduit, which translates to "badly raised;" this name, the narrator says, is "plus

estranger,” [stranger]. Stranger than what he doesn’t say - stranger than a female being named “Scilentius”? Silence calls himself Malduit “Car il se tient moult por mal duit, / Moult mal apris lonc sa nature. Et sil refait par couverture” [because he thought himself very badly brought up, very badly educated with regard to his nature, and also to conceal his identity].<sup>78</sup> What Silence is covering with the “Malduit” identity is his “Silence” identity, because he does not want his family (the two sets of parents) to find out where he is. The identity that Silence offers to the minstrels when he first meets them, that of the nameless son of a vavasor and a nursemaid, is both the same and different from Malduit. The minstrels continue to believe that the young man they travel with is the son of a vavasor and a nursemaid, but the name Malduit is mentioned only after Silence has been traveling for three years with these minstrels and he has successfully become a minstrel himself. Therefore, this identity is specifically a stage name that he uses when he plays music at court: “A cort se fait nomer Malduit” [At court he called himself Malduit].<sup>79</sup> “Malduit” is not a full identity, because it exists only to identify himself in those situations of public musical performance, and, as a public figure throughout these three years and more, Silence does not develop any deeper relationships with anyone who would further question him about his identity.

This series of Silence’s imagined identities has its origin in the first change of identity, from girl to boy, which itself necessitated a change in family structure. That first change sets in a motion the series of changes that we see at Silence’s adolescence and at the moment when he meets the minstrels. Silence makes the decision by himself to leave home and join the minstrels. At a moment when noble adolescent boys would be training for knighthood and wooing women,

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<sup>78</sup> *Silence*, 3178-80.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3177.

Silence instead makes a life change to lower his social status and become a minstrel, which allows him to set aside the problem of sexuality for the moment, and be independent. His ability to make decisions for himself and name himself at this point seems to be linked to his entering adolescence. Silence does not want the minstrels to know who his parents are because presumably they would not accept to be served by a boy of such high station. He does not want to be found out as noble because this would prevent him from living his own life as a minstrel. However, Silence does *not* worry about being found out as female. This is particularly striking considering that he travels in close company with the minstrels for a few years, and also because his gender disguise has troubled him so much previously. On the other hand, we do know that Silence's choice to escape with the minstrels is linked to his gender crisis; before leaving, he says to himself that if he learns how to play an instrument, he will then have some skill as a woman if King Ebain happens to die and he can give up his disguise.<sup>80</sup>

Silence had succeeded in mentally casting aside his gender deception problem for a while, after the big debate between Nature, Nature, and Reason, but the question of gender rises again when the minstrels ask him "who is your father?" Silence lies to them about his family identity, but never about his gender - they never ask him about his gender. For Silence, his identity as a gendered person is directly linked to his perception of himself as a member of a family; lying about one causes anxiety about lying about another. However, instead of the conversation with the minstrels being the final straw that pushes Silence to abandon his gender disguise, it is rather the trigger that pushes him to throw away the whole noble male identity that he has been cultivating for twelve years, and trade it for the identity of a male minstrel. I see this pattern of evasion and constant creation of new identities as an attempt to escape the untenable

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 2865-72.

situation of his imposed gender disguise. That situation offers no possible solutions that are wholly acceptable to Silence – remaining a disguised man is the best choice, he decides, but by no means an ideal one. His solution to that problem is to remain a man but to become a different male person, and one who is not beholden to any of his four parents, by becoming a minstrel named Malduit.

## 2.7 SILENCE'S COMMUNITY

Let us now return to the people that Silence left behind when he ran off with the minstrels. Their reaction to Silence's departure shows that Silence's male identity has always been a reality in their world, to the extent that the narrative around the event of Silence's departure serves to hide Silence's female origin. The seneschal and the nursemaid are then eliminated from the narrative after Silence becomes a minstrel. I argue that their disappearance, which goes unmentioned upon, demonstrates that their work turning Silence into a boy is done. Their role is forgotten, as if Silence had been born male.

I have shown above that Silence's male peers are an important influence on him. Nature reveals that Silence is also surrounded by and beloved by women when she says in one of her tirades that “.m. femes” [a thousand women] are in love with Silence because of his beauty.<sup>81</sup> These are women who live in the same community as Silence. When the narrator explains that Silence decides to shirk Nature's advice and continue to be a boy, he concludes this passage by saying that Silence was “larges, cortois, amés de tols” [generous, courteous, beloved by

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2315.

everyone].<sup>82</sup> Shortly later in the narrative, when Silence disappears with the minstrels, these same people (“tols”), and specifically women, lament Silence’s disappearance:

Plorer ces dames, ces mescines,  
Ronpent ces anials de ces mains  
Al tordre qu’il funt, c’est del mains!  
Car li sires et cele dame  
Ki nori l’avoit dont se pasme.

Ladies and girls wept loudly,  
they wrenched the rings from their fingers  
with the wringing they did; that’s the least of it,  
for the lord and the lady who had raised the youth fainted.<sup>83</sup>

While the nursemaid and the seneschal fall into a swoon at the loss of Silence, other ladies from their community are also mourning him. When one considers Cadour’s original fears that Silence be found out as female, and the great efforts he went to remove him from his court, it is striking that Silence ends up living as a well-socialized, well-liked boy among many other men and women. This community seems to defeat the purpose of Cadour’s initial plan that so emphasized secrecy and protection (recall the gate with the four bolts, the child servant, etc.). Silence’s community is an extension of Silence’s “Nurture” family (his surrogate parents), and they serve to create and subsequently reflect back to him an image of Silence as male. All of these people – the boys and the ladies and girls mentioned – do not know that Silence is female; they believe that he is a boy and thus they assume that he is male as well. Because he is raised in this community, Silence’s masculine gender is naturalized in people’s minds. No one has reason to believe that there is a discrepancy between Silence’s anatomy and his gender. This naturalization

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 2686.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 3000-04.

of Silence's maleness can also be seen in the way that Silence's biological parents react to his disappearance.

When Silence leaves, both the members of the community of the seneschal as well as Silence's biological family are devastated. The narrator goes on for about a hundred lines about the count and countess's despair, as well as that of the members of their court, and how the courtiers try to hide their grief in order not to exacerbate that of Silence's parents.<sup>84</sup> Although the seneschal does come to Cador's court to explain to him how Silence disappeared, there is no textual acknowledgment of the fact that the count and the countess were living separated from their child. When the parents mourn their loss, they say, "Trestolt duel nos vienent ensemble / Quant nostre fils *de nos s'en emble*" [We are afflicted with all sorrows at once, having our son run away *from us*] (my emphasis).<sup>85</sup> Firstly, the parents call Silence their son. This is necessary, of course, because they are mourning in public. However, the complete lack of commentary on this by the narrator, when the idea of gender deception has previously taken up a lot of space in the text, is significant. It shows the extent to which for his parents, Silence really *is* a boy – he really is their son and not their daughter. Second, they also say that Silence ran away *from them*. While this is in part an emotional departure (Silence has abandoned his parents), it also makes it sound as if he lived with them and left their shared home, when in fact he lived with the seneschal and only visited with his parents.

The residents of Cador's Cornwall also believe that Silence ran away from them. When Silence returns home after three years on the road, he stops first at an inn, still carrying his

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 3009-96.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 3061-62.

musical instruments. He is unaware that as a result of his presumed kidnapping by the minstrels, his father Cador has banned minstrels and ordered their execution (another rash decision). The innkeeper explains to him why minstrels are banned, saying, “Chi vindrent l’altre an jogleör. / Li cuens lor fist molt grant honor. / N’ot c’un enfant: celui enblerent” [A few years ago, some minstrels came here. The count bestowed great honors upon them. He had only one son: they kidnapped him].<sup>86</sup> According to the innkeeper, the minstrels were received by Cador himself, and Silence was kidnapped from Cornwall. Based on what actually is recounted in the passage where the minstrels arrive, the seneschal receives the minstrels, not Cador, after which they depart immediately for France. This discrepancy is not remarked upon by Silence or by the narrator. Now, it is possible that the minstrels had stopped at Cador’s court before they met Silence, but the way that the innkeeper recounts it makes it sound as if everything occurred in one location, and that Silence was kidnapped from that same location. I emphasize this discrepancy, as well as the community’s love for and proprietary feeling for Silence, because these points demonstrate that Silence is being claimed by both his Nurture community and by his biological parents as their own. In both of these cases, nor is there any comment on Silence’s experience of gender change.

Although both sets of parents and communities consider Silence their own, from Silence’s perspective, he now only identifies with one side: after Silence becomes a minstrel, he only identifies Cador and Eufemie as his parents. In fact, after Silence departs from the seneschal’s grounds, there is no textual evidence that Silence ever mentions or thinks of his surrogate parents again. When he realizes that the minstrels are plotting to kill him out of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 3503-05.



jealousy over his musical talent, Silence convinces them to leave without him, and he stays at the court of the Duke of Burgundy. Eventually, Silence decides that he wants to end this chapter of his life, because he begins to think of his parents and his relatives who must be worried about him: “Puis li prent pités de son pere, / De ses parens et de sa mere” [Then he was seized with pity for his father and his mother and his relatives]. He gathers up his money and makes arrangements to cross the English Channel: “Plus tost que pot vint en *sa terre*. / Vient la u on plus le desire” [He reached his *own lands* as quickly as possible. He’s arrived at the place where he’s most wanted] (my emphasis).<sup>87</sup> It is never clear where exactly Silence was raised in relation to Cornwall; the text gives the impression that it is nearby, but not right next door to his parents. He departed from the nursemaid and the seneschal, but without even appearing to think about it, he returns to his biological parents and their land – also his land - Cornwall. This is the land where he is desired, where he is most missed – although the nursemaid, the seneschal, and the seneschal’s entire community also mourned his disappearance.

Silence’s forgetting of the seneschal and the nursemaid is surprising given the emphasis that was placed on them, and particularly on the father-son-like relationship between the seneschal and Silence. Silence does not articulate his feelings about his nursemaid, but we do know that she raised him alone, except for the child servant, for many years and taught him until the seneschal took over with his physical education. For these reasons, I believe that the nursemaid and the seneschal serve as surrogate parent figures, but I do not want to claim that Silence always considered them to be his parents to the detriment of his biological parents, since whenever he speaks of or thinks of “mere et pere” in the text he is referring to his biological parents. Nonetheless, I do think that Silence’s choice to ignore his emotional connection to the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3479-80; 3484-85.

pair who raised him is significant to the text's representation of the development of gender identity. Silence's biological parents are sometimes relegated to the background of the story, but they reappear periodically. In contrast, the surrogate parents are completely eliminated from the narrative after Silence leaves them. They no longer exist for Silence, who returns to Cador and Eufemie. They no longer exist for Cador and Eufemie, nor for the residents of Cornwall, who consider that Silence ran away from them, although he never lived with them. The nursemaid and the seneschal's nurturing is so effective that it becomes natural, making it seem as if Silence has been male from birth. The success of their nurturing scheme then authorizes their effacement from the narrative. Nonetheless, the desire to naturalize masculinity and hide Silence's female origin is interrupted by periodic reminders to the reader of Silence's (supposed) femininity. In the last section of this chapter, I briefly examine two passages towards the end of the text that display the relationship between this naturalized masculinity and perceptions of ideal, "natural," masculinity, and show how King Ebain is implicated in this question. Finally, I will conclude by examining King Ebain's perception of his new wife Silence, in the context of their kinship bond and Silence's masculinity.

## **2.8 ENGENDERING THE PERFECT KNIGHT**

After Silence's happy reunion with his parents, he then goes on to serve King Ebain at his court. The king's wife, Queen Eufeme, falsely accuses Silence of a rape attempt when he rejects her advances. Silence is sent away to the French king's court with a note that the queen had written requesting that Silence be killed, although King Ebain wanted to preserve Silence's life.

However, the French king has already greeted Silence in a friendly manner before he reads the letter; he consults with his advisers and they come to the conclusion that they should not kill Silence. Silence then stays at the French court; he is knighted at seventeen and a half years old and goes on to win a tournament that is held in his honor. Concerning Silence's impressive athleticism during this tournament, the narrator comments that with Silence, Nurture really had succeeded in overcoming Nature, because she was able to teach Silence, a "feme tendre et mole" [weak and tender woman], to be a strong knight.<sup>88</sup> The narrator then says that the knights against whom Silence competed would be ashamed if they knew that a woman had defeated them. But just when it seems that nature is triumphing, the narrator notes that

Silence ne se repent rien  
de son usage, ains l'ainme bien.  
Chevaliers est vallans et buens,  
Mellor n'engendra rois ne cuens.

Silence had no regrets  
about his upbringing, in fact, he loved it.  
He was a valiant and noble knight;  
no king or count was ever better.<sup>89</sup>

King Ebain utters the exact same words about engendering at the end of the text, just after the moment when Silence is stripped naked and it is revealed that she is female. The very first thing that the king says after this revelation is, "Silence, moult as esté prols, / Bials chevaliers, vallans et buens; / Mellor n'engendra rois ne cuens" [Silence, you have been a very valiant, courageous and worthy knight; neither count nor king ever fathered better].<sup>90</sup> Instead of simply saying that there never *was* a better knight, in both instances the verb *engendrer*, to engender or to father, is

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 5156.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 5178-80.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 6579-81.

used: “No king or count ever fathered [a] better [knight].” Both the narrator and King Ebain state that the biological fathering of a knight (implied: a male baby who would grow up to be a knight) does not match up to the creation of a knight “from scratch” – who happened to be made from a female baby. Silence is portrayed throughout the text as an ideal knight, and these two statements confirm the notion that the ideal knight is created by education and training, and is not found in nature. Yet, the narrator insists that the other knights would be ashamed if they knew they had been beaten by a woman. By drawing attention to her “femininity” in this moment, the narrator conceals the fact that even male children need to be thoroughly trained in order to become successful knights – no baby, male or female, is born ready to joust. When Silence jousts, the reminder of nature (Silence’s supposed femininity) ultimately serves to legitimize Silence’s masculinity because it questions Nature’s ability to create good knights simply by making noble males. While the narrator may remind us of Silence’s weakness as a woman (which, in fact, doesn’t really exist), his and the king’s subsequent statement on chivalric behavior actually casts doubt on the effectiveness of nature in creating ideal masculinity. In addition, as Lorraine Kochanske Stock has pointed out, with this statement King Ebain draws attention to his own failure as a man, the fact that he has been unable to engender an heir himself.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Stock, “The Importance of Being Gender ‘Stable,’” 16.

## 2.9 SILENCE: GOOD VASSAL OR GOOD WIFE?

Right after Silence wins the tournament in France, some of King Ebain's subjects rebel against him. He is in such dire straits that he asks Queen Eufeme's permission to bring Silence back to him so that Silence can lead an army against the rebellion. Silence succeeds in quelling the rebellion, but then gets in trouble again thanks to Eufeme. She is so enraged that Silence continues to reject her that she asks the king to make Silence complete an impossible task. She wants Silence to capture Merlin, about whom it is said that he can only be captured by a woman's trick, thinking that Silence will surely fail in the effort. Silence is able to capture Merlin and bring him back to the court, but then Merlin reveals to the king, with the queen and the whole court present, that Silence is actually a woman. He also reveals that Queen Eufeme has committed adultery with a man dressed as a nun. King Ebain orders the "nun" and Silence to undress in front of everyone so that they can confirm Merlin's statement. Upon seeing Silence naked, the king's first reaction is to declare that Silence has been a great knight and that no king or count had engendered better, as in the passage cited above. It is not until a moment later that he says "Nos veöns bien que tu iés feme" [We can see for ourselves that you are a woman] and asks her to explain why his wife Queen Eufeme claimed that Silence was trying to rape her.<sup>92</sup> Silence's explanation for his behavior cites his desire to retain his inheritance, but also emphasizes all the things that he has done to serve King Ebain and preserve his reputation – he didn't want to anger the king or compromise the queen by saying what she had really done; he returned from France to put down the rebellion for King Ebain. After hearing Silence's

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<sup>92</sup> *Silence*, 6586.

explanation, King Ebain declares that she is a wonderful, virtuous woman. But when he says that she is a virtuous woman, he continues to speak of her as he would of his vassal, saying that she was loyal to him. By saying so, he is referencing those statements that Silence just made about her continuous service to Ebain through all kinds of adversity.

“Silence, moult estes loials.  
Miols valt certes ta loialtés  
Que ne face ma roialtés.  
Il n’est si preciose gemme,  
Ne tels tresors com bone feme.  
Nus hom ne poroit esproisier  
Feme qui n’a soig de boisier.  
Silence, ses qu’as recovré  
Por cho que tu as si ovré?  
Amer voel et manaidier.”

“Silence, you are very loyal.  
Indeed, the price of your loyalty  
is far above that of my royalty.  
There is no more precious gem,  
nor greater treasure, than a virtuous woman.  
No man can assess the value  
of a woman who can be trusted.  
Silence, know that you have saved yourself  
by your loyal actions.  
I give you my friendship and protection.”<sup>93</sup>

In addition to praising her vassal-like loyalty, Ebain also says that a woman who does not care to *boisier*, to trick or betray, should be treasured. Ebain’s statement that Silence did not use trickery contradicts what has just been revealed, that in fact Silence *did* trick everyone by cross-dressing. King Ebain’s assessment of Silence’s behavior declares that she is a woman (she is a woman who can be trusted), yet at the same time praises her for behaving in a manly fashion. He praises her knightly behavior, and those actions that aided him as king and preserved his power. While ignoring Silence’s cross-dressing as trickery, the king may be referring to the fact that, as

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 6630-39.

Silence has just explained, he never did anything with Queen Eufeme that would have betrayed the trust of the king. At the same time, Silence has just revealed that such a betrayal would not have been possible – since the text never admits the possibility of homosexual sex between Eufeme and Silence, Silence would not have been capable of betraying the king anyway. Yet, the king speaks of Silence’s loyalty as if he still considered her a man who would have indeed been capable of seducing or raping Eufeme. The king ends by saying that he wants to love and be merciful to Silence, which is very similar to his reaction when he first heard Eufeme accuse Silence of attempted rape. At that time, Ebain was concerned with saving face, and maintaining his bond with his vassal Silence. In this final scene as well, the king’s love for Silence as a good vassal influences him to completely forgive her and even ignore her cross-dressing. Although he recognizes in words that she is a woman (“Nos veöns bien que tu iés feme”), the reasons for which he praises her remain linked to the faithful behavior of a vassal, not those of a virtuous woman.

## **2.10 MARRIAGE AND KINSHIP**

After Ebain praises Silence’s loyalty, he says that he will reward her by allowing women to inherit again. Then Nature works on Silence for three days, polishing her body and eliminating sunburn to remove all traces of masculinity. Finally, the narrator says that King Ebain took Silence as a wife. Their marriage is potentially problematic for two reasons: King Ebain is Silence’s great-uncle, and, as we have just seen, Ebain persists in thinking about Silence as a man (a vassal). Earlier in the text, it is mentioned several times that the king is Cador’s uncle,

and that he cares for Cador very much. Silence is thus Ebain's great-niece - or great-nephew. As Sharon Kinoshita has noted, Silence and Ebain's marriage is thus consanguineous and contrary to Church law, and the fact that Silence does not consent to the marriage (that the reader hears of) defies the reformist requirement for both parties to consent to a marriage.<sup>94</sup> Although the consanguinity is not mentioned, the narrator distances himself from this choice by claiming that he read in a book that Ebain married Silence.<sup>95</sup> The narrator also says that Ebain married her upon the advice of his advisers, which distances the king from responsibility for the decision.

I would like to offer a theory here as to why this marriage may not be considered consanguineous. It is clear throughout earlier portions of the text that King Ebain knew the knight Silence as his great-nephew, but here Silence is never identified as his great-niece. The narrator's possible discomfort with the consanguinity could explain why he doesn't care to mention it, just as he distances himself from the fact of the marriage. If we look back earlier in the text, however, there are already signs that the blood relation between Silence and Ebain begins to be de-emphasized, and I believe this has to do with the process of Silence's gender change. The last time their relationship is directly referenced is in the scene wherein Queen Eufeme is trying to seduce Silence, and Silence calls on his blood relationship to the king in order to explain why he is uncomfortable with her advances: "Car jo sui hom vostre segnor, / Et ses parens ne sai con priés, / Ki me feroit jamais confiés?" [for I am you lord's vassal, and his blood relation, I don't know to what degree. Who could ever absolve me of such a sin?].<sup>96</sup> One

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<sup>94</sup> Kinoshita, "Male-Order Brides," 72.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. See line 6677.

<sup>96</sup> *Silence*, 3806-08.



would think that Silence would be well aware that the king is his great-uncle, considering that his father was so close to the king, and that such a relationship is very beneficial to Silence. Silence's reference to needing to confess for this sin implies, though, that he knows that the relationship is close enough that if he slept with Eufeme, this would be a grave sin not only as adultery but also as incest. Later, when Queen Eufeme subsequently accuses Silence of a rape attempt and the king decides to send Silence to the French king's court, Ebain on the contrary does not mention that he is related to Silence at all. He says to Eufeme, "Cis [Silence] est moult de halt parenté, / Et si est fils a moult prodome" [Now, this youth comes from a very good family and is the son of an important man].<sup>97</sup> The fact that he says that Silence comes from a good family but does not indicate that he is his great-nephew is odd, considering that in the first section of the text before Silence's birth, much is made of the fact that Ebain loves his nephew Cadour.

The king's failure to reference Silence's relationship to him and the fact that they are later married with only a subtle discomfort on the part of the narrator indicates a narrative elimination, or at least softening, of their kinship bond. In my fourth chapter on Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, I show that Blanchandine's sex change from female to male causes a textual elimination of her blood tie with her wife. Although Silence never undergoes a sex change to become male, something similar operates through the gender changes that Silence undergoes ("changes" plural because Silence is made into a boy as a baby, and then from a man into a woman at the text's conclusion). I see Silence's gender changes in two possible ways. One theory is that since we are to understand that nurture overpowered nature when Silence was changed from a girl to a boy at birth, such an altering of nature could also mean that Silence and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 4234-35.

his great-uncle are no longer related. After having shown in this chapter the way that kinship is re-imagined due to Silence's gender change to a boy, the idea that Silence and the king are somehow not related to each other anymore, or that this tie can be made and unmade according to what works for the narrative, does not seem far-fetched. The idea of a lesser degree of relation between them is reflected when Silence mentions their blood tie, but is unable to precisely name it ("Et ses parens ne sai con pries"); the blood tie then seems to be eliminated later when Ebain talks about Silence and does not mention their kinship at all. However, Silence's gender change to a woman at the end of the text can also be seen as the great gender change of the text: Silence is a boy/man for eighteen years and then suddenly becomes a woman. One wonders, then, if this event re-makes that kinship bond between King Ebain and Silence. Does returning to her "natural" state make her Ebain's niece again? The fact remains that their kinship relationship to each other is never mentioned throughout this passage, so the text's conclusion does not offer a resolution concerning kinship, only a convenient marriage. Ebain allows women to inherit again, but Silence does not benefit from this, as her lands will pass to him through marriage.

If we believe what the text says about the return to nature, then we can imagine a parallel return to nature concerning their kinship bond. If that is the case, their marriage remains problematic because it is consanguineous. On the other hand, considering that Ebain has interacted with Silence as his vassal for so long up until this point, and the fact that he still values him/her as a loyal and trusted vassal/wife, if they are not related to each other, their marriage is virtually one between two men. Hence, the marriage that conveniently finds a social position for a female Silence to occupy is nonetheless problematic in at least one way.

## 2.11 CONCLUSION

I demonstrated in the beginning of this chapter the ways in which misogyny underlies Silence's upbringing; it structures ideas about deception, determining who is capable of deception and who benefits from it. *Silence* ends with punishments for deception: the adulterer and liar Eufeme, and her lover who impersonated a woman, are both executed. Meanwhile, Silence, who also deceived the king, is "rewarded" by getting her inheritance back and marrying the king. Since Silence's gender change into a woman at the end of the text is so abrupt (she has spent her whole life as a boy/young man), King Ebain has no behavior on which to look back that is not coded masculine. This would explain why King Ebain, although he calls Silence a "bone feme," is so lenient with her punishment for a quite serious form of deception – he simply cannot fathom that his vassal would employ feminine trickery, whereas he easily believes that his wife could. On the other hand, to the extent that Silence is socially identified as a woman at the end, we can also see misogyny in the fact that she is considered solely responsible for her own cross-dressing. None of the characters nor the narrator ever question who else may have been responsible for Silence's cross-dressing, namely Cador and the three other parents. Again, we see misogyny in that a woman is being blamed for something that was a man's idea and that, moreover, was imposed on her at birth. Silence's escape from punishment for her responsibility in this matter comes at the high price of marrying Ebain, losing her autonomy, and having her inheritance pass to him.

*Silence's* conclusion indicates that the formation and maintenance of kinship ties is dependent on not only political wants and needs, but also on an imaginary that defines and redefines family relationships in accordance to what Silence needs in order to change his/her gender identity. The very first step in changing Silence's gender is to create a new family that will be responsible for carrying out this change. This family is real in the sense that the

nursemaid and the seneschal are anchored to Cador and Eufemie by blood, and because they are responsible for Silence's day-to-day care as his surrogate parents. Their existence is imaginary in a sense, too, since the world that they create for Silence is an alternate reality in which Silence was born male, and because their parental bond with Silence is ephemeral; they disappear when their work is done. In the final scene, Silence is recognized as a woman, and her womanhood is depicted as a return to Nature and thus to her first and original identity. In fact, this identity is simply the latest, and probably last, iteration of Silence, and one that will have to be constructed as well. There is no textual acknowledgment of the need to construct this feminine identity, save for the fact that Nature polishes Silence's tan away. This view of Silence as naturally and easily an adult woman was already evident back when Nature made Silence as a fetus: Nature described her as a beautiful young woman with a full set of teeth, a long neck, breasts, and curvy hips, not as a cute, round baby.<sup>98</sup> Silence may never have been a girl, but Nature made her to be a woman.

The co-existence and competition between Silence's two sets of parents replicate the relationship between Nature and Nurture; neither force truly triumphs. In fact, through Silence's "naturalized" masculinity, they become interchangeable and symbiotic. In the next chapter, I will examine the depiction of another cross-dressed woman, but one who cross-dresses later in life after having established herself as a mother of three sons with two different men. Nature and nurture are not present as allegorical figures in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, but these ideas play an essential role in the complicated process of recognition between a cross-dressed mother and her children, and the notion of lineage that connects them.

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<sup>98</sup> *Silence*, 1931-42.

### 3.0 NATURE, RECOGNITION, AND LINEAGE: AYE D'AVIGNON IN *TRISTAN DE NANTEUIL*

“Cross-dressing grandmother” is certainly an intriguing character description, and yet, Aye d’Avignon has garnered less attention than *Tristan de Nanteuil*’s other cross-dresser, Blanchandine, whose miraculous sex change overshadows Aye. Aye is, however, fascinating in her own right. Her character is already well developed in an earlier (late twelfth/early thirteenth-century) *chanson de geste* bearing her name, but in the more typical role of a Christian maiden, a niece of Charlemagne, who is courted by various suitors.<sup>99</sup> In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, she has since become a grandmother (her son Gui fathers Tristan), but this does not stop her from cross-dressing and successfully performing all the duties of a Saracen knight, including killing other Saracens and rescuing maidens. On the other hand, Aye’s maternal role remains essential in the construction of her identity. In this chapter, I show how Aye’s cross-dressing becomes entwined with the issues of lineage and maternity, and in particular, with lactation and breastfeeding. I argue that breast milk functions as a metaphor similar to that of blood, used to illustrate the connection between a mother and her sons. I explore how this physiological process (one which today is promoted as the most “natural” and beneficial way to feed a baby) is depicted as both connecting Aye to her children in a bodily, natural way, but also allowing for the creation of a

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<sup>99</sup> *Aye d’Avignon: chanson de geste*, ed. François Guessard and Paul Meyer (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1861). *Aye d’Avignon, chanson de geste anonyme*, ed. S. J. Borg (Geneva: Droz, 1967).

“linguistic alliance,” as Zrinka Stahuljak has described it, between mother and son.<sup>100</sup> I understand this linguistic alliance to be formed in the moment of recognition between Aye and her sons/grandson. Recognition is a major theme when it comes to cross-dressing in my texts, as the cross-dressed character spends a lot of time worrying about being recognized by those who would do her harm if they realized her secret. The enjoyment for the reader comes in large part from his or her knowledge of the disguise, which, in comparison, many of the characters in the story do not share. In the scenes that I will examine in this chapter, suspense is created from the opposite situation - Aye *wants* to be recognized by her family members. As I will show, these scenes are suspenseful because a lack of recognition would put Aye in bodily danger.

Although most studies of cross-dressing in *Tristan de Nanteuil* focus on Blanchandin(e), a few scholars have examined Aye d’Avignon’s role in this text in particular. Keith Sinclair and Alban Georges discuss Aye’s cross-dressing as a literary theme and connect it on a larger scale to folklore and other medieval French texts dealing with these same themes.<sup>101</sup> Sarah Jane Dietzman discusses Aye in a chapter of her dissertation, wherein she argues that Aye is what she calls a “Trans” character because of the way that she identifies both as a mother and as a knight.<sup>102</sup> Victoria Turner examines both Aye and Blanchandin(e) from the perspective of gender and racial identity construction. She argues that Aye’s “true gender” (feminine) in the end

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<sup>100</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 2.

<sup>101</sup> Alban Georges, *Tristan de Nanteuil: écriture et imaginaire épiques au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006); Keith V. Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure and Literary Creation* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983).

<sup>102</sup> Sarah Jane Dietzman, “Miracle (Wo)men: Transgender and Transsexual Identities in *Tristan de Nanteuil*,” in “En Guize d’omme: Female Cross Dressing and Gender Reversal in Four Medieval French Texts” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2005), 203-237.

trumps a successful performance of a Saracen racial-religious identity. Her analysis does not consider the role of motherhood in the case of either character.<sup>103</sup> My focus on the question of breastfeeding in the context of lineage is a new approach to this text. I do not seek to define Aye's gender identity per se, but rather to examine how her cross-dressing interplays with the issues of recognition, kinship, and lineage.

### 3.1 MATERNAL VS. PATERNAL RECOGNITION

Although I will be focusing on Aye d'Avignon in this chapter, I would like to begin with a scene that features Blanchandine, because it displays clearly in a very short scene the issues of gender, nature, recognition, and lineage that will be the main themes of my study.<sup>104</sup> Just after Blanchandine takes on her disguise, she is reunited with her toddler son, but cannot identify herself as his mother because she has to maintain her disguise to protect herself. This dilemma brings up the questions that will be essential for this chapter: how does a son recognize a mother,

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<sup>103</sup> Victoria Turner, "Performing the Self, Performing the Other: Gender and Racial Identity Construction in the Nanteuil cycle," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (2013): 182-196.

<sup>104</sup> Blanchandine's maternal role has also largely been ignored in scholarship. Alban Georges mentions this scene, noting that Blanchandine must dissimulate her maternal affection for Raimon in front of Clarinde. Georges, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 562-563. Francesca Canadé Sautman notes that Blanchandin loses his connection to his son Raimon once he changes sex: "Once she has become male she knows no parental gestures other than those of a father." Francesca Canadé Sautman, "What can they possibly do together? Queer epic performances in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 212. Scholarly discussions of Blanchandine otherwise concentrate on the scene of her sex change and on gender and sexual identity, and do not mention her son.

as opposed to a father? Does the fact that the mother is cross-dressed change this difference in recognition? What is the role of “nature” in this process of recognition, and linked to this, how are cross-dressed mothers incorporated (or not) into lineage?

Blanchandine and Tristan’s son Raimon is born in the woods, and they live there together until Raimon is four months old. One day when his parents are off searching for food, Aiglentine, Tristan’s mother (whom he has not seen since *he* was four months old) finds Raimon alone and, thinking him abandoned, takes him back with her to the Saracen court where she lives. She raises him, not knowing that he is her grandson. Two years later, after various adventures, Tristan and Blanchandine (disguised as the knight “Blanchandin”) are at the same Saracen court. One night during a feast between the Christian mercenaries and the Saracens, Aiglentine joins the festivities with two-year-old Raimon in tow. Raimon immediately heads towards Tristan, although he has not seen his father since he was four months old. “Devant son pere vient, sy a joué et ris / Nature le semont que lez lui est toudis” [He came to his father and played and laughed. Nature teaches him to always be near him.]<sup>105</sup> Neither Tristan nor Blanchandine recognize their child at first, but when they learn that he was found in the woods they realize that it is Raimon. Tristan rejoices and announces to everyone that this is his son, but because Blanchandine is cross-dressed, she is not able to publicly express her joy at her reunion with her son, and is very sad: “De ce fut la roïne a son ceur tormentee / Qu’a son filz n’ose dire: ‘Je fis de toy portee’” [The queen was tormented in her heart that she didn’t dare say to her son

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<sup>105</sup> *Tristan de Nanteuil, chanson de geste inédite*, ed. Keith Val Sinclair (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), lines 13410-11. All further references to *Tristan de Nanteuil* will be abbreviated *TN*, and will refer to line numbers rather than page numbers, unless otherwise noted.



“I gave birth to you.”]<sup>106</sup> Raimon naturally or instinctually plays near his father, indicating a kind of recognition – different from the reasoned recognition of an adult, but showing nonetheless that Raimon knows somehow that this is his father.

Out of these three family members, Raimon is the only one capable of this type of recognition, since his father and mother do not recognize him immediately. In addition, Raimon’s instinctual recognition is reserved for his father, but the text gives no indication if the fact that Blanchandine is disguised plays into this. However, it is specified that *nature* is what taught Raimon to approach his father, and as the scene progresses, it becomes evident that nature is also associated with kinship relationships between males in general. At this moment in the text, Clarinde, Blanchandine’s first cousin once removed, is already in love with “Blanchandin” – the disguised Blanchandine. Clarinde is shocked when she sees that Blanchandin is kissing and hugging this child, and asks him to explain why. Blanchandin says that Raimon is the child of his sister, and this is why he loves him: “Sy que, se j’ains l’enfant d’amoureuse pensee, / C’est bien droit et raison; nature s’y agree. / Car se je ne l’amoye, je seroie desguisee” [Thus, if I love the child, it is right and correct; nature agrees to it. Because if I didn’t love him, I would be strange.]<sup>107</sup> Speaking as Blanchandin, Blanchandine claims that it is natural for an uncle to love his nephew.

When the narrator speaks about Blanchandine as a mother, he does *not* bring up nature to describe her relationship with her son, but the idea of childbirth seems conceptually linked to nature nonetheless. When Blanchandine sees Raimon again later that night (this time without

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 13488-89.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 13502-04.

Clarinde nearby), the narrator does mention childbirth, as Blanchandine did when she lamented not being able to identify herself to him. At this point, the narrator also says that Blanchandine loves Raimon, using almost the same exact phrasing as “Uncle Blanchandin” did when he talked about his nephew: “Et quant elle le vit, sy en fut forment lye, / Car elle amoit l’effant, et raison s’y ottrye: / Elle s’en delivra par dessoubz la feullie” [And when she saw him, she was very happy because she loved the child, and that was as it should be, since she gave birth to him under the leafy branches].<sup>108</sup> Whereas the uncle’s love for the child is simply explained by the vague “nature,” the mother’s love is portrayed as a logical consequence of the fact that she gave birth to the child. Although the word nature is not used in the second quote, “raison” stands for something similar to nature – it is “natural” or “normal” that mothers love their children after giving birth. For the mother, then, the body is linked to the natural whereas for the father, or for the imaginary uncle, the natural is something that does not require reference to a body; the very fact that the two males are related by blood suffices to create a bond between them.

Zrinka Stahuljak shows in *Bloodless Genealogies* that the relationship between father and son in medieval French literature is often depicted as one not of blood but of linguistic alliance; this linguistic alliance is nonetheless subsumed by the metaphor of blood as a carrier of lineage.<sup>109</sup> In the case of Tristan, Blanchandine, and “Blanchandin,” there is clearly a difference in the way that the linguistic alliance, in this case recognition and what that entails, plays out depending on whether the person is a mother, a father, or an “uncle.” Tristan’s investment in his son has to do with the preservation of his lineage, as Raimon is his first-born son to whom he

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 13782-84.

<sup>109</sup> Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 2.

will pass on Nanteuil, if only he can return to it. Blanchandine longs to be able to say to Raimon that she gave birth to him, but doing so would not have an effect on his inheritance or influence the larger narrative of the quest to recapture Nanteuil. Women carry children and give birth to them, but do not have heirs.<sup>110</sup> This is evident in the character of Blanchandine/Blanchandin, if we compare a description of her relationship with her son Raimon, to whom she gave birth, with a description of his son Gilles, whom he “engendered” after his sex change. In this same scene, the narrator digresses to explain that Blanchandin, after the sex change, “engendra en la belle loee / Ung hoir ” [engendered an heir in the beautiful woman [i.e., he engendered Gilles in Clarinde]].<sup>111</sup>

Aye d’Avignon, in comparison, never changes sex, so we cannot make such a direct comparison between her as a mother and as a father. However, in the time that she is cross-dressed, she meets her grandson for the first time and she is reunited with her three sons and her husband after a few years and many trials and adventures. As we just saw with Raimon and Tristan, the idea of nature is used in this text to explain the connection between father and son. I argue that for Aye, the metaphorical use of breast milk as a link serves a similar purpose between mother and son, serving to re-create a kinship tie that was previously severed by time and distance, and which is further confused by an initial lack of recognition. This lack of recognition can be due to cross-dressing, but also to other circumstances, such as darkness, or a character’s inability to reason. The very fact that Aye is seeking recognition from members of her lineage

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<sup>110</sup> Since Blanchandin loses his land, and his son and heir becomes a celibate monk, his ability to found a lineage even as a man is clearly called into question. I will address this in chapter six.

<sup>111</sup> *TN*, 15535-36.

places her in a role usually held by men in the *chanson de geste*. Cross-dressing, when combined with separation and then reunion with family, creates a situation wherein kinship ties must be re-imagined and re-constructed during those reunion scenes. In these situations, Aye's maternity and the prominence of her (formerly) lactating breasts co-exist easily with her idealized masculinity. Although she is disguised as a Saracen man, her masculinity takes the form of that of a Christian man, since she begins to take on the characteristics of a patriarch of the Nanteuil line.

### 3.2 AYE D'AVIGNON BEFORE *TRISTAN DE NANTEUIL*

*Tristan de Nanteuil* takes Aye d'Avignon's character from a much earlier *chanson de geste* bearing her name. Before moving on to *TN*'s three recognition scenes involving Aye, I will give here an overview of her character as it appears in *Aye d'Avignon*, a late twelfth or early thirteenth century text; *TN* dates from the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>112</sup> In *Aye d'Avignon*, Aye, a niece of Charlemagne, is married to Garnier de Nanteuil and together they have Gui, who will become Tristan's father. A Saracen king, Ganor, falls in love with Aye but respects her wish to remain with her husband. However, Garnier is killed when Gui is still young, and Ganor subsequently kidnaps Gui and raises him at his court. After the teenage Gui returns to France to avenge his

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<sup>112</sup> My summary is adapted from Ellen Woods, *Aye d'Avignon: A Study of Genre and Society* (Geneva: Droz, 1978).

father's death, Ganor converts to Christianity in order to win Aye's hand.<sup>113</sup> Aye and Ganor marry and have two sons, Antoine and Richer. At this point the narrative of *Aye d'Avignon* ends. In *TN*, Aye, Ganor, Antoine, and Richer first appear as they are fleeing their home, Aufalerne, during a pagan attack; the men are imprisoned, but Aye escapes and eventually takes on the disguise of a Saracen knight in order to more easily find out where her husband and sons are imprisoned.<sup>114</sup> In the meantime, she continues to search for her first-born son Gui and her daughter-in-law Aigentine, who were lost at sea on their way to Aufalerne. As "Gaudion l'Espagnol," Aye's disguise and adoption of a male Saracen identity are extremely successful. She becomes a favorite of the pagan king of Armenia, Galafre (Blanchandine's father), and leads his armies. Aye lives as Gaudion for about fifteen years; much of this time is spent in prison with her son Gui.

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<sup>113</sup> To my knowledge this is the only instance of a Saracen man converting to Christianity in this cycle. (A Saracen woman converting is much more common in this and other *chansons de geste*).

<sup>114</sup> The moment in which Aye decides to cross-dress is unfortunately lost in a manuscript lacuna, but her motivation to do so is explained in flashbacks.

### 3.3 AYE AND TRISTAN

#### 3.3.1 Cross-dressed woman and wild child

In terms of *TN*'s storyline, Aye meets her grandson Tristan for the first time when she is in the thick of her campaign (as Gaudion l'Espagnol) to help Galafre defeat Urbain d'Amarié, who is holding Galafre's daughter Blanchandine under siege in a tower. This means that Aye is in the clothing of a Saracen knight, and it is this disguise that allows her to travel alone in the forest where she will find her grandson Tristan. Because Tristan is a toddler, who moreover has no knowledge of human customs, having been raised by a hind of supernatural strength and ferocity,<sup>115</sup> Aye's masculine disguise is not directly implicated in her meeting with her grandson: he has no idea that she is his grandmother, nor does he know how grandmothers usually dress. Nonetheless, the lack of direct focus on cross-dressing opens up a space for the text to comment on how people are recognized in general, and thus, to comment on what constitutes identity. When Tristan and Aye meet, we see the role of nature in recognition, and its relationship to paternity, maternity, the female body, breasts, and lactation, and this recognition occurs through/by a cross-dressed body. *Recognition* requires cognition but not necessarily the use of reason: some things can be recognized "naturally" without thinking, which is what occurs in this text with animal or animal-like beings. Ultimately, the cross-dressed character of Aye/Gaudion creates an impetus for a discussion of how characters are related to each other and how they recognize each other as kin. This recognition occurs because of, and in also in spite of, cross-

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<sup>115</sup> The Middle French for this animal is "la cerve" or "la serve," a feminine version of "le cerf," stag.

dressing; however, cross-dressing is far from the only difficulty in recognition and relationship forming with kin when it comes to the wild child Tristan.

While on her way to help the kidnapped Blanchandine, Aye hears about a savage hind that has been terrorizing pagans, and is intrigued. In fact, this hind is Tristan's adoptive mother. I will give a brief summary of Tristan's babyhood here to explain how this came to pass. At the very beginning the only extant manuscript of *TN*, Tristan is born on a boat when his parents are on their way to Aufalerne to help Aye and Ganor, who are under attack by Saracens. Aigentine nurses Tristan for four months on the boat after they are lost at sea. When their ship drifts into pagan territory after a storm, Gui goes to look for provisions, and while he is gone Aigentine is kidnapped by a pagan fisherman who then sells her to the sultan of Babylon. The fisherman untethers the boat and baby Tristan floats out to sea alone, where he would have died if not for a mermaid who finds him and nurses him for fourteen days, until another pagan fisherman finds both of them. The fisherman brings them home and his wife then nurses Tristan; they plan to sell the mermaid. However, the mermaid begins lactating again and fills a large bowl with milk. A hind enters their home and drinks the milk, which causes her to become giant, savage, and bent on killing Saracens. She kills the fisherman, his wife, and their children, and then runs off with Tristan into the woods. The hind does not nurse Tristan, but rather feeds him food stolen from pagans.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Peggy McCracken argues that because the hind drank the mermaid's milk, she is actually Tristan's milk sibling and that her relationship to him is based on this bond of shared milk rather than being a type of mother-child bond, which would also explain why she herself does not nurse him. Peggy McCracken, "The Wild Man and His Kin in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Human and Animal in Medieval France, 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Irène Fabri-Tehranchi and Anna Russakoff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 26, 28.

Aye is unaware of all these details. When she asks some pagans she comes across to explain to her the story of the vicious hind, they inform her that the hind has a child with it, about three years old, who walks on all fours and who was stolen from a fisherman. As soon as she hears this, “tout le sanc lui mua” [her blood rushed] and she swears that she will see this child.<sup>117</sup> I believe that the rush of Aye’s blood, which I understand to be an adrenaline rush or a surge of emotion, indicates an intuition that the child in question is her kin, and perhaps even her grandson. The beginning of the *TN* manuscript is incomplete, and we don’t have any clear indication of whether or not Aye is aware that her son Gui had a son, although she likely knew that his wife was pregnant. Aye’s intuition about this child is strong enough that it provokes her to go into the woods alone to look for the hind and the child, and risk being mauled to death by the hind. She kneels down to pray that the hind may not harm her, and her prayer is answered by a visit from an angel. (This is only one of two appearances of an angel in *TN*, and both times they appear to cross-dressed characters, Aye and Blanchandine.) The angel informs her that she will not be harmed and that she will find the hind “qui ung enfant nourrit qui est de ta lignye, / Fil Guion de Nanteul a la chere hardie” [that is raising a child who is of your lineage, the son of valiant Gui de Nanteuil].<sup>118</sup> The angel explains that the child will have to remain in the woods for seventeen years but that he will later reunite their family, who will continue to suffer until that time, according to God’s will.

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<sup>117</sup> *TN*, 2391.

<sup>118</sup> *TN*, 2424-25.



### 3.3.2 Aye's lineage

The fact that the angel appears to Aye and informs her that she will find a child of her lineage puts Aye in an unusual position for a female character in a *chanson de geste*. In *TN*, the genealogical narrative is generally focused on the line between fathers and sons; in principle, the family seat of Nanteuil passes from Garnier to Gui to Tristan and then to Tristan's son Raimon. In this case, however, the angel implies that the line goes from Aye to Gui to Tristan, rather than originating with Garnier. Aye is a female character with power and influence even aside from her cross-dressed adventures, given that she is a niece of Charlemagne, and her second marriage seems to be as high-ranking as her first, despite the fact that her husband Ganor is a former Saracen. With her first husband dead, and her second husband and her three sons currently in jail, she is at this point in the narrative the only one holding down the Nanteuil fort, so to speak, despite the fact that she is only a member of this family by her first marriage. Thus, the narrative choice to put Aye in male dress, which gives her power, influence, and glory in warfare, is in keeping with a character that already must call the shots in the absence of a living paternal figure.

The structure of the Nanteuil cycle and the content of *TN* generally follow a patrilineal ideology, wherein a direct line of descent is seen between fathers and sons; mothers and daughters are also part of this lineage, but by observing the prominence of male characters in the text, we can see that males are deemed more important in its continuance.<sup>119</sup> The fact that Aye *is*

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<sup>119</sup> In anthropological terms, women in medieval Europe were part of "lineage" since descent was bilateral and people understood themselves to be related to their female, and not just their male kin. Emphasis was nonetheless placed on the male line: "Above all, at least in the upper classes, there was a 'patrilineal ideology' – a widely expressed feeling that sons, and not daughters, carried on the 'line' by continuing the family name and serving as its heirs." Linda

so important shows the way in which as a cross-dressed female she can be incorporated into this model of ideal masculinity. Here, she is placed in the role of the father and the head of a line of Christian men. Even as “Gaudion,” Aye is never forced to stray from the values of a Christian knight, because Galafre only asks her to fight other Saracens with whom he is at war; this demonstration of Galafre’s depravity (the fact that he fights his own people) conveniently allows Aye not to betray any Christians. However, even considering all of these points about Aye’s masculine role, the very appearance of the angel to Aye indicates that her disguise has not changed Aye’s “inner self,” since the angel knows who she is under the disguise. The angel knows that she is Tristan’s grandmother, and thus knows that she is female and Christian. These are things that the angel knows because it has supernatural intelligence, not because of anything Aye said or did to identify herself. Aye uses her masculine disguise in order to move about the world in safety; she can go into the woods without fearing anyone will harm her, aside from perhaps the hind. On the other hand, in the woods her disguise then becomes irrelevant, since she is only interacting with a wild boy, a supernatural hind, and an angel. As the angel explains, their meeting will not result in her rescuing Tristan from his life in the woods: as a matter of fact, nothing happens at all plot-wise as a result of their meeting; it is just an interlude in Gaudion’s knightly adventures. The fact that the plot does not advance shows that it is important that Aye meet her grandson simply because he is her grandson and a carrier of her lineage, but also that,

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Stone, *Kinship and Gender: an Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 238. This is evident in the literary context by the way that most installments of cyclic *chansons de geste* are titled by the names of fathers and sons, and the fact that those male characters are also their main characters. However, in the *geste de Nanteuil*, there is no *Garnier de Nanteuil* - that installment is called *Aye d’Avignon* and features Garnier but also follows Aye after Garnier’s death. A nineteenth-century editor, Paul Meyer, gave *Tristan de Nanteuil* its title, but Tristan is not the main focus of the text throughout all of its 23,000 lines.

as a female character there are still limitations on her influence on major plot changes and developments in the narrative.

### 3.3.3 Nature and recognition

Aye, still dressed as Gaudion, quickly finds Tristan in the hind's lair at a moment when the hind is absent and Tristan is playing with a monkey. Aye marvels at the fact that Tristan has survived here "sans dame et sans meschine" [without a lady or a serving girl].<sup>120</sup> She immediately tries to embrace and kiss him, but he runs away from her crying. He has not seen a human being since he was four months old, so his reaction has both to do with his lack of recognition of his grandmother, but also his lack of socialization with humans in general. Aye, however, is upset and surprised that her grandson does not recognize her, saying "Enffes...ne congnois ta cousine?" [Child, don't you recognize your kinswoman?] and says that she wants to bring him back to the palace and have him raised there.<sup>121</sup> Aye seems to expect that the child recognize her instinctually as his grandmother, or at least accept human embraces. It may not only be Tristan's wildness that causes the lack of recognition of his grandmother – one wonders if, based on the fact that Raimon later instinctually recognizes his father, if Tristan would have recognized and accepted his father's presence.

Tristan lacks the ability to recognize his grandmother, and he also lacks the desire to be close to other humans. Tristan's cries bring the hind back to her lair, but she does not harm Aye - she even kneels down before Aye to show her submission. The hind, unlike Tristan, is able to

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<sup>120</sup> *TN*, 2469.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 2476.

recognize Aye, although her recognition may not be as complete as that of the angel – it is unclear whether she recognizes Aye as “Tristan’s grandmother.” However, her submission to Aye shows without a doubt that she does recognize Aye as Christian (recall that this hind only hates Saracens!). As for gender, since we are not sure whether she recognizes Aye as “Tristan’s grandmother,” it is also unclear whether she recognizes her as a man or as a woman. (Moreover, we do not know whether she even perceives human gender, or just the difference between Christian and Saracen.)<sup>122</sup>

The angel and the hind are the only beings that can recognize Aye (that is, see through her disguise in some fashion) without any help or hints from her; in fact, before this point in the narrative, Aiglentine has already spoken with “Gaudion” and has failed to recognize her mother-in-law. As Peggy McCracken has pointed out in her work on this episode of *TN*, the hind and the other animals of the forest that are allied with her display traits of human sociability and social organization.<sup>123</sup> In addition to this sociability, the hind’s ability to distinguish between Christians and Saracens gives her a humanoid type of cognition, but which surpasses human ability. While it may be easy for humans in *TN* to distinguish between Christians and Saracens in general by their dress and perhaps by their behavior, no humans so far in the text have been capable of recognizing Aye simply by looking at her. In the realm of the supernatural (the magical animal and the angel), the fact that Aye is cross-dressed has no meaning, since the hind and the angel

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<sup>122</sup> An indication that the hind indeed recognizes gender is that she later helps Tristan kidnap Blanchandine, knowing that Tristan desires a female companion. She also finds a serving woman for Tristan and Blanchandine after they are established as a couple in her lair.

<sup>123</sup> McCracken, “The Wild Man and His Kin,” 29-30.

immediately recognize her Christianity and/or her name and relationship to Tristan, without recourse to reason or thought. Because of this, their ability is quite similar to the way that Raimon instinctually recognized his father. Since a two-year-old cannot reason as an adult does, in this case Raimon's cognitive abilities are comparable to those of supernatural creatures.

Tristan is unlike his future son in this sense, because his human nature has been partially altered by his savage life in the woods and his relationship to the hind. Simply meeting Aye does not have particular meaning for him. Aye remarks upon the strangeness of this situation – the fact that a wild beast will accept her presence, but that her own grandson will not.<sup>124</sup> She assumes that the fact that they are kin would be enough to provoke the child to accept her. Seeing that her overtures are not working at all, she finally decides to show Tristan her breasts. There is no explanation as to her thought process regarding this decision, but it does seem to be a last resort, something she thinks will finally win him over – and she is right.

L'enffes s'en veult aller adés ensus de lui  
Jusqu'a tant que dame Aye au gent corps seignory  
Lui monstra ses mamelles dont son pere nourry,  
Hors de son sain les trait que l'enffes les choisy;  
Par dessus les mamelles se coucha et cati:  
C'est nature d'enffant, pour ce c'y assenti.<sup>125</sup>

The child kept trying to get away from her until finally noble Lady Aye showed him her breasts, which had nourished his father. She drew them out so that the child could see them. He lay down on them and nestled into them: this is a child's nature – that is why he consented to it.

The author reiterates, after a *laisse* break:

Quant Tristan le Sauvage dont je fais mencion,  
Vit les blanches mamelles dame Aye d'Avignon,

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<sup>124</sup> *TN*, 2528-31.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 2537-42.

Doucement se coucha d'umblé condiciön.  
C'est nature d'enfant, sy qu'il y ot raison.<sup>126</sup>

When Tristan le Sauvage saw Aye d'Avignon's white breasts, he lay down humbly and sweetly. This is a child's nature, and it was right to do so.

Aye simply shows her breasts to Tristan (she is not breastfeeding him) but the very appearance of her breasts makes the wild child return at least somewhat to his most "natural" state – that is, lying against a female, human breast, even if it is not providing milk. At the same time, the idea of breast milk as a substance is still important here, since the narrator specifies that Aye formerly fed her own child with these breasts; the former presence of breast milk consumed by Gui creates the "natural" link between Aye and Tristan. The specificity of "*ses mamelles dont son pere nourry*" indicates that he accepts her due to some instinctual recognition tied to his father's suckling from these breasts, rather than just because she is a human female.<sup>127</sup> In this way, the presence of the father, even if only by reference or as an intermediary, is again shown to be linked to nature.

Gabrielle Spiegel's work on genealogy in the Middle Ages has shown that the perceived seamless continuation between fathers and sons is one which is also seen as natural and connected by blood. Although as Zrinka Stahuljak has pointed out "blood" itself was usually not mentioned in medieval texts as a marker of kinship, at least not until the middle of the fourteenth century, it seems reasonable to compare the metaphorical use of Aye's breast milk to that of a

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 2543-46.

<sup>127</sup> See also McCracken, "The Wild Man and His Kin," 32.

father's blood in this context.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, since in medieval medical texts breast milk was understood to be refined from the mother's menstrual blood, it makes sense that breastfeeding and breast milk stand in for blood when a mother, rather than a father, seeks to be recognized by her children.<sup>129</sup> For a father, recognition occurs through "nature," which contains within it the metaphor of blood kinship. Aye's moment of recognition with her grandson parallels this, and the metaphor of breast milk is helped along by the intermediary figure of the father.

The action of breastfeeding, as we have seen in the previous chapter, contains a mixture of nature and nurture. In this scene, Aye's milk stands in for blood and the Nanteuil lineage. Aye is not lactating at this moment, but the capability of her breasts to lactate for Gui in the past sends a "natural" signal to Tristan that he should accept her affection toward him. The narrator deems Tristan's behavior as natural for a child, but his desire to lie down against her breast is a more complicated gesture. "Nature d'enfant" is not just the instinct of seeking nourishment from a breast, but also seeking the solely comforting aspect of being held against a female breast. Tristan does not seek food from Aye's breast, because the hind provides him with food. He is forming an emotional attachment (at least momentarily) that is based not on food but on the comfort that Aye can offer. The fact that Tristan snuggles with her without getting any milk places Aye in competition with the nurturing and loving hind, who provides for Tristan but does

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<sup>128</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: the Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 100-107; Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> McCracken, "The Wild Man and His Kin," 34. Finn Sinclair, *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the "chanson de geste"* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 22.

not nurse him. Hence, although the narrator labels Tristan's desire to snuggle with Aye as something like a natural instinct, this action is also linked to emotions and socialization.

Before the end of this scene between Aye and Tristan, the narrator makes a more explicit statement about the role of nature and nurture in Tristan's behavior, as well as the role of love:

De dame Aye diray la pourtraiture;  
L'enfant Tristan tenoit qui par cours de nature  
Dormoit sur les mamelles, quoy qu'euÿst nourriture  
De la cerue du bois qui l'amoit d'amour pure;  
Nature lui faisoit lesser son apesure.<sup>130</sup>

I will paint a picture of Lady Aye: she held Tristan, who by nature's influence was sleeping on her breasts, although he received food from the hind who loved him with a pure love. Nature made him forget his education.

Here, in using the word *apesure*, or education, and remarking upon the love that she has for him, the narrator marks Tristan's relationship with the hind as one of nurture, and his desire to sleep on his grandmother's breasts as natural. The narrator notes that Tristan's desire to sleep on his grandmother's breasts is somewhat surprising ("quoy que") since he receives food from the hind, implying that since he does not *need* Aye's breasts for nourishment, one might expect him to be less drawn to them. Here "*nature*," which causes him to forget his upbringing with the hind, refers to the blood relation between the two characters, and/or more broadly, a natural affinity between human children and human adults. However, in a contrary reading to the narrator's assertion, Tristan's choice of an emotional bond with his grandmother and not food could easily be read as the work of nurture, since it involves love and human socialization. This is not the narrator's perception of Tristan's action, however; he specifically links the fact that Tristan is *not* seeking food *to* nature. Nature in this "pourtraiture" is not linked to the instinct for food and survival, as one might think, but rather to the simple fact of Aye and Tristan's link of

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<sup>130</sup> *TN*, 2591-95.



kinship. In this portrait of Aye we also see that the line between the human and animal mother figures is blurry, just as is the line between nature and nurture: both of them can offer love and comfort; neither of them nurse Tristan but both of them are or would be capable of finding him other kinds of food.

Although Tristan's instinct to lie down with his grandmother makes nature dominant for the moment (according to the narrator), at the end of this scene, the nurturing hind triumphs over Aye. Aye attempts to take Tristan back with her, but the hind and many other animals of the forest threaten Aye such that she must put Tristan down and climb a tree for safety. The hind then takes Tristan and hides him somewhere in the woods, but comes back to show her good will towards Aye. She kneels before Aye and then kindly leads her out of the woods. Tristan is destined to be raised by the hind and not by his grandmother, despite the natural connection that was just displayed between them. In practical terms, it is unclear how Aye would have raised him or explained to the Saracens why she had brought this child back, considering that she was still presenting herself as Gaudion. Although Aye, of course, is not really a Saracen man (and the hind recognizes this), the fact that the Saracen-hating hind keeps Tristan with her, rather than letting him go with his grandmother, seems to indicate again a sort of supernatural cognition, as if she knew that Tristan would be surrounded by Saracens if he went with Aye.

### **3.3.4 Breasts, maternity, and femininity**

Throughout this entire scene, it does not matter to the hind nor to young Tristan that Aye is dressed as a Saracen man, neither does the narrator make anything of it. Does it matter at all that she is cross-dressed at this moment? Is Aye's gender important to the manner in which she is recognized by Tristan and the hind? The fact that Aye does take out her breasts from under her

Saracen disguise emphasizes a disjunction between physical body and dress; however, there is no element of surprise for the reader in this reveal. Nor does it surprise Tristan, since he is unaware of human gender conventions. However, the importance of Aye's breasts in this scene is not so much linked to a revelation that she is simply female, but specifically that she is Aye d'Avignon, Tristan's grandmother. This is in keeping with the portrayal of breasts in this text as a whole, since they are not designated as an important element of femininity.<sup>131</sup> For Aye and Blanchandine's disguises, breasts are not problematic at all - they never need to bind their breasts, for example. When Blanchandine changes sex, the narrator says that her appearance did not change except for the addition of male genitals, leaving the question of breasts unaddressed.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, when breasts do appear in this text, it is in the context of lactation, and this does occur several times – for Aye twice more, which I will discuss in this chapter. Lactation also appears later in the text in a more spectacular fashion when Blanchandin's wife Clarinde miraculously lactates a literal boatload of milk in order to feed her child (Gilles) and herself when they are lost at sea and starving.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> I agree with Dietzman on this point, who writes, "Although not proof of feminine gender, Aye's breast links her to her former familial identity." "Miracle (Wo)men," 218. Dietzman clearly distinguishes between feminine gender and female sex, however, saying that when Aye shows her breasts they are "physical proof of her female sex and maternal identity," comparing this action to Blanchandin showing off his new penis, which also designates his sex. (229).

<sup>132</sup> "Mais onques son semblant qu'ot devant ne changa" *TN*, 16200 [But the appearance that she had before did not change]. There is an indication that something about Blanchandin's chest confused Doon, but the meaning of this passage is still mysterious to me: "Quant sa robe perceut, dont ot pensee estraine, / Nel congnut pas sy tost, quant il vit sa poitrine." [When he [Doon] saw his clothing, he thought it strange; he didn't recognize him right away, when he saw his chest]. *Ibid.*, 16223-224. I discuss this scene in detail in chapter four.

<sup>133</sup> *TN*, 18210.

Breasts, then, are linked to lactation and maternity in this text rather than femininity in general.<sup>134</sup> In the scene between Tristan and Aye, Aye's breasts serve to identify her as Tristan's grandmother, and their revelation also leads to a narrative continuation of the Nanteuil bloodline. As Aye is holding Tristan, the narrator digresses to explain that Tristan will engender a son, Raimon, in these very woods, and also mentions his second legitimate son, Beuve. Aye also notices as she is holding Tristan that he has the birthmark of "la croix vermeille," [the vermillion cross] which commonly appears in medieval texts to indicate that a lost child is noble.<sup>135</sup> In this digression, the narrator emphasizes the nobility of Tristan and his sons and the fact that Tristan will later govern two kingdoms. At this moment of the narrative, Aye's presence and specifically her female breasts are seemingly the triggers for a discussion of Tristan's (legitimate) sons and their nobility. As Gaudion, Aye is a "sterile" character – in this disguise she must remain celibate, and "Gaudion," of course, cannot engender children. But when she is with Tristan and the hind, she is in a space in which her disguise does not mean anything to those looking at her. Once she reveals that she is Aye d'Avignon, the mother who nursed Gui, notions of reproduction and inheritance again come to the forefront of the narrative. Her disguise gives her the freedom to travel alone and find her grandson, and because of this, ironically, the male disguise is actually

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<sup>134</sup> Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 180. In medieval medical texts, breasts are not cited as a proof of femaleness: "In contrast to modern expectations, mammae are not often mentioned in the context of sexual differentiation, although breasts are the subject of various instructions and remedies in obstetrical treatises."

<sup>135</sup> Keith Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 750.

what allows her to reveal that she is a woman and a grandmother, and specifically, a woman whose bond to her grandson is mediated by the memory of her breastfeeding his father.

It is important to note, though, that Aye is evoking a memory of lactation, and that she is in fact depicted as no longer fertile. As we will see shortly, Aye's husband still considers her sexually attractive, but there never seems to be any question that she could possibly still become pregnant and lactate again. In this way, Aye does not fit into expected models of femininity for a female character in a *chanson de geste*. She is neither a young woman of appropriate age for marriage and childbearing, nor is she depicted as "old." She is around forty-one at this time in the story,<sup>136</sup> and her stage of life could be compared to that of the famous medieval women discussed in *The Prime of their Lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-Industrial Europe*: Hildegard of Bingen, Juliana of Cornillon, Birgitta of Sweden, Margery Kempe, and Christine de Pizan. These women were in their "prime:" they had reached maturity but not old age, and were very productive intellectually in a way that was not possible earlier in their lives. Aye is at the prime of her life as well; she is no longer tied to young children but still has an amazing amount of physical and mental energy.<sup>137</sup> The necessity for a great deal of energy and physical strength on the part of Gaudion perhaps also keeps Aye young: Gaudion behaves more like a young man than a man Aye's age – he rides horses, does battle, and rescues princesses, and he is unmarried, of course. And as Gaudion, Aye deals with unwanted marriage proposals, a problem that usually falls on young female characters like Blanchandine, rather than young men.

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<sup>136</sup> *TN*, 1487. The narrator specifies that Aye is thirty-eight years old at the time she flees Aufalerno, which is approximately three years before this scene takes place.

<sup>137</sup> See the introduction to *The Prime of their Lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Renée Nip. (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), and in the same collection, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The Compensations of Aging: Sexuality and Writing in Christine de Pizan, with an Epilogue on Colette," 4-11.

After the excitement of Aye's successful bonding with her wild grandson, one might find the conclusion of this scene rather anti-climactic. Her success does not change anything in the story: Tristan will remain in the forest until his young adulthood, and Aye as Gaudion will continue looking for her three sons and her husband. The scene does, however, establish Aye as a carrier and a guardian of the Nanteuil lineage, and establishes how specifically this occurs with a female character as opposed to a male. The angel and the hind recognize naturally or instinctually Aye's position as the Nanteuil matriarch, but Tristan does not. Aye then chooses to show her formerly lactating breasts to him as a guarantor of her identity - as Aye d'Avignon, not just as a woman. This choice demonstrates that for her as a female character, a bond of blood is not unspoken as it might be for a father-son duo, but rather must be proven by the evocation of breast milk as a substance that bonds mother to son, and then to grandson. This breast milk does not even have to be present physically, but just evoked as a memory; however, the female breasts must be present as a physical reminder of the action of breastfeeding and the substance of breast milk. The presence and absence of breast milk follows a theme in Tristan's life up to this moment. He was nursed by two women (his mother and the Saracen fisherman's wife) and by a mermaid, and then was given food (not her own milk) by a supernatural hind. His biological mother's milk, lost after the age of four months, does not need to be replaced by the milk of another woman of his lineage, his grandmother, because his animal mother gives him all he needs. However, Aye's bond with her grandson is still deemed as natural even without her having to nurse him. At the same time, it serves to remind the reader that Aye is also a force of nurture and human civilization; in good time, Tristan will join human society, he, like her, will become a force working to reunite the Nanteuil family.

### **3.4 AYE, GANOR, ANTOINE, AND RICHER**

#### **3.4.1 Blood, lactation, and memory**

Aye and Tristan have no mutual memories, so Aye has to use her connection to Gui to connect to her grandson through her son. The case is entirely different in the recognition scenes between Aye and her sons. When they find each other after a long separation, mutual memories of breastfeeding are key to revealing Aye's true identity to her sons. Ganor, Antoine, and Richer have to work through the layers of Aye's disguise (from Saracen and male to Christian and female, and then beyond that to her name and kinship ties) before they fully recognize her as their mother or wife. The series of misconceptions between them is sometimes playful, but borders on violence at times – Aye is threatened with bodily harm and even fears rape at points during their meetings. When it comes to her bodily safety, the revelation that she is female puts her in danger, and only the revelation of her name protects her from harm. She must be revealed as their mother and as Ganor's wife to be fully protected from any sort of violence, whether anti-Saracen or misogynistic.

Aye finds her husband Ganor and their sons Antoine and Richer in prison shortly after she leaves Tristan behind in the woods. Gaudion successfully leads Galafre's troops in battle against other pagans, and rescues Galafre's daughter Blanchandine, who had been kidnapped and imprisoned. As a reward, Aye/Gaudion enjoys a feast seated next to Blanchandine. (This is before Blanchandine meets Tristan. She is about thirteen years old, which means she is about ten years older than Tristan, an age difference that is never mentioned later.) Blanchandine asks what Gaudion would like as a reward for having won the war, and he says that he would like to check the prison for a certain Christian, one of Ganor's sons, who killed his (Gaudion's) brother. This

story is completely invented, of course – Aye simply distorts her true family situation slightly in order to reach her imprisoned family; as we have seen, Blanchandine will later do the same thing to explain her relationship to Raimon. Blanchandine happily hands over the keys and Aye is able to enter the prison.

Once inside, Aye overhears a conversation between her husband and sons before she actually interacts with them. They hear someone enter, and fear that it may be their executioner, so they begin to discuss whether it would be better to die than to remain in prison. Ganor gets very upset at this thought, so Antoine tries to comfort his father by singing a cheerful song: “Adoncques commença / A dire chançon que mainte fois chanta / Dame Aye d’Avignon, quand l’enfant alla” [Then he started singing a song that Lady Aye d’Avignon sang to him many times when she nursed the child].<sup>138</sup> When Aye hears this song, she swoons and begins bleeding from her nose and mouth:

Quant son filz entendi que doucement ama,  
Qui en sa povreté ainsy se delita,  
Sy grant pitié en ot que la couleur mua,  
Et de grande destresse a terre se pasma  
.x. fois en ung tenant pour le grant deul qu’ell’a;  
Et par bouche et par nez le sanc lui deffilla.<sup>139</sup>

When she heard her beloved son, who delighted such in his poverty, she felt such great pity that her color changed and she swooned in great distress ten times at once because of the great pain that she felt. And blood streamed from her nose and mouth.

As when Aye first suspected that her grandson was in the woods and “tout le sang lui mua,” here the sound of her son singing their nursing song also provokes a physical change related to blood. This scene in contrast to Aye/Gaudion’s relation to blood in a violent context is striking, since

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<sup>138</sup> *TN*, 2956-58.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 2962-67.

only a few lines before this she had been engaged in combat and had no problem cutting off “testes et bras et piés” [heads and arms and feet] and running pagans through with lances.<sup>140</sup> These scenes describe extreme violence, but blood is never mentioned, whereas the emotional contact with a family member and the memory of nursing her child actually causes blood to flow from her mouth and nose. Peggy McCracken’s study of blood in medieval French literature has shown that there is a sharp distinction in the representation and symbolic value of men’s blood compared to that of women’s blood. She has shown that men’s blood shed in warfare has a lasting effect on the rest of the narrative or resolves an issue, whereas women’s blood is either absent, or its significance is confined to their own bodies without a similar symbolic effect on the narrative.<sup>141</sup> Aye’s blood in this scene both corresponds to and disrupts this vision of women’s blood. Aye/Gaudion has just participated in battle and has shown her prowess by killing specific pagan enemies that need to be killed in order for the narrative to progress, and in order for Blanchandine to be rescued from imprisonment. In this way, Aye (disguised as a man) sheds the blood of others in a way that is appropriate for a male character; she is causing bloodshed for a “greater” purpose. As a woman, Aye sheds her own blood because of a visceral emotional reaction to a memory of nursing her (now adult) son, whom she has not seen in about three years. The loss of blood in this scene shows Aye’s strong maternal attachment to her children, but this is its only mention and it does not have a further effect on this particular part of narrative; even when her husband and sons recognize her they do not comment on the fact that she was bleeding.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 2712.

<sup>141</sup> Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 18-20.



Aye's relation to blood changes depending on whether she is acting as a man or as a woman, and does seem to correspond to McCracken's thesis in this way. However, Aye's blood certainly holds a specific value in this scene. Previously, we saw that breastfeeding was evoked, although not enacted, as the trigger for recognition between her and her grandson. In this scene, breastfeeding serves a similar purpose, since Aye, in the shadows, recognizes her children and husband through the nursing song, and she will momentarily reveal herself to them. In that sense, her blood shed upon hearing the song is part of the chain that leads to an important recognition and reunion scene in the plot. McCracken also notes in analyzing the scene from *Le Chevalier de la charrete* where Guenevere claims to have had a nosebleed to explain blood on her sheets, that bleeding from the nose or the breast was thought to be the result of a menstrual disorder, so a nosebleed could stand in for menstrual blood. Menstrual blood, in turn, was believed to be refined into breast milk.<sup>142</sup> In this scene, there is a direct correspondence between the memory of breast milk and her nosebleed. It is as if through the evocation of the time spent nursing her children, Aye is brought back to this state, and the bleeding is a stand-in for lactation.

The fact that Aye is so intensely associated with lactation but also, as a grandmother, has symbolically passed the age at which she would bear children and lactate is, I believe, related to her cross-dressing. As I discussed above, Aye is a young grandmother, no longer considered fertile, but also not elderly. She is strongly associated with maternity, and yet at this point in the narrative is living an almost purely masculine lifestyle, and is recognized as a man by almost everyone with whom she interacts. Aye represents not a fertile or active maternity, but the memory of maternity. Her relationship with her children is expressed both linguistically (through

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 13.

song and memory) and through blood and breast milk. In this scene in which recognition occurs between a mother and a son, the paths to recognition are both linguistic and corporal. Among the female characters in *TN*, the fact that the grandmother is the one who is cross-dressed, but does not change sex, puts her in a unique position wherein her maternal image coincides more easily with her cross-dressing, since the bodily nature of her maternity is in the past. Her exposed breasts serve to identify her as a mother, but they are not currently used for maternal purposes and their exposure does not lead to the abandonment of her disguise. In this particular case, the revelation of her body has a positive outcome for the characters in the story, because it brings them together, rather than the negative outcome that is usually associated with the revelation of a cross-dressed woman's body, which normally exposes her to danger.

Since Aye is in a Saracen prison that is presumably full of Christians, she could conceivably have revealed her name immediately to Ganor, Antoine, and Richer without fear. However, regrouping after her swoon and nosebleed, Aye takes her time and at first only greets them in Jesus' name. Hearing her voice is the first step in the men's recognition of Aye. Ganor seems to recognize this person right away as possibly his wife, but he then is confused by her physical appearance: “‘Qui estes,’ dist Ganor, ‘qui parlés de Jhesum? / Au parler me semblés dame Aye d’Avignon, / Et quand je vous regarde, ung Sarrasin felon’” [“Who are you,” said Ganor, “who speaks of Jesus? Your voice resembles that of Aye d’Avignon, and when I look at you, I see a cruel Saracen.”]<sup>143</sup> Although Aye/Gaudion's voice had never previously raised any suspicion for the Saracens, it on the other hand immediately makes Ganor think of his wife. “Ung Sarrasin felon” is gendered masculine, but Ganor's question is more focused on religion

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<sup>143</sup> *TN*, 3015-17.

than on gender – he takes it for granted that the person is a man, and then remarks upon his religion. He seems confused that someone with a voice like that of his Christian wife, invoking Jesus’ name, could have the appearance of a Saracen (man). The Saracen appearance outweighs the clue of the voice for him, however, and he threatens to beat the “stranger” if he has any intention of trying to harm them. He shows some goodwill, however, and continues, “Mais se chrestiens estes par bonne entencion, / Se me voulés conter la vostre estracion / Et ou vous feustes nez në en quel region” [But if you are Christian, please in good faith tell me your origin and where you were born and in what region].<sup>144</sup> This question shows that he is willing to believe that this person may be Christian, but he cannot yet quite believe that this person is his wife, since he continues to ask for information on his origin and family. Ganor continues to assume that this person is male, but he entertains the thought that this person is indeed a Christian dressed as a Saracen.

Antoine, however, recognizes his mother:

Lors soupira dame Aye qui ne dist o ne non.  
Anthoine se leva pour la voir au menton,  
Les yeulx lui regarda, qui sont vers con faucon,  
Et la bouche petite n’ot barbe ne grenon,  
Lors dist a haulte voix: “Pere, par Saint Simon,  
Vecy vostre mouller a la clere façon,  
Commant qu’elle ait vestu se haubert fremillon.  
J’ottroy que je soye ars en ung feu de charbon,  
Se ce n’est nostre mere qui tant a de renon.”<sup>145</sup>

Then the lady Aye sighed and said nothing. Antoine got up to look at her chin; he looked at her falcon-green eyes and her small mouth without beard or moustache. Then he said clearly, “Father, by Saint Simon, here is your beautiful wife, although she may wear a shining coat of mail. May I be burned in fiery coals if this is not our renowned mother.”

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 3022-24.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 3025-33.

Antoine points out the chin and the small mouth surrounded by neither a beard nor a moustache, which show that she is a woman, and the green eyes, which show that she is his mother (her eye color was previously mentioned in a description of Aye). Aye also points out her chin and her mouth to Aigentine in a later scene when she wants to reveal herself to her; this helps Aigentine recognize her, despite the fact that the two had frequently interacted previously and Aigentine was always oblivious that Gaudion was her mother-in-law.<sup>146</sup> The one factor indicating to Ganor, Antoine, and Richer that the person standing before them may *not* be Aye d'Avignon is the *haubert* that she wears, but Antoine is quite sure, based on the other points, that this is indeed their mother. In Ganor and Antoine's comments, focus vacillates between various types of identity. Ganor comments on voice and religious identity. Antoine's comments point out facial features and have nothing to do with religion; the contrast he draws is more directly between femininity and masculinity (delicate features and no facial hair vs. *haubert*). Ultimately, though, both are using all these elements to arrive at the conclusion that this person is not a Saracen man, but rather their wife or mother.

Thus, in identifying Aye, Ganor and Antoine move from "Saracen man" to "Christian man" and then skip to "Aye d'Avignon" without the intermediary of "Christian woman." Aye does not exist as an anonymous Christian woman before being identified as herself, Aye d'Avignon. Victoria Turner has pointed out the extent to which Aye successfully performs as a Saracen, and specifically that she mimics Saracen behavior. For example, Aye praises Saracen gods, and this is part of her success in that disguise, not just how she is dressed. However, Turner argues, her successful performance as a Saracen man is undone by her gender (feminine), which

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 3360.

is shown to be the “constant against which her race-religion is defined.”<sup>147</sup> (“Race-religion” is Turner’s term for the whole Saracen identity, as it is described in the Nanteuil cycle.) I agree that Aye’s feminine gender is presented as her “true” identity and that it is seen to trump her performance as Gaudion. However, I still want to consider the question that Ganor poses to himself that precedes Aye’s full identification, because that question indicates which part of identity he considers to be unstable in that moment. In the short period of time in which her identity is unknown, Ganor finds masculine gender to be the constant and “race-religion” to be in question. As I understand it, when he says that he hears Aye’s voice but sees a “Sarrasin felon,” he indicates that he believes the person likely is male and Saracen and is thus confused by the voice. In a following mental step, he is willing to consider that the person may indeed be Christian, as Aye greets him in Jesus’ name, but he does not return to the idea that this person could be his wife. He thus subtly shifts to the idea that this person may be a *Christian* man – but not a Christian woman.

Aye’s eldest son Antoine observes his father’s confusion but evidently is quite sure that this person is indeed his mother, as he begins to look for facial features that will confirm this for him. He does not focus on religion as indicated by Aye’s clothing, nor does he react to her greeting them in Jesus’ name; he seems to be unconcerned with these clues and rather looks closely at her face. One might say that Antoine’s recognition of his mother’s face is merely a plot device to facilitate a dramatic scene of recognition, especially considering that no one had previously been able to recognize her. But it is significant that the recognition based on facial features is preceded by another type of recognition through the nursing song, and that the son who recognizes his mother first is Antoine, the one who was singing the song. His focus on her

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<sup>147</sup> Victoria Turner, “Performing the Self, Performing the Other,” 188.

face, which he then recognizes, and the fact that he is the only family member able to recognize Aye simply by looking at her, is akin to Raimon's instinctual recognition of his father and Tristan's natural desire to lie down on Aye's breasts. The nursing song serves as a bridge between nature and nurture when it comes to recognition: the song recalls a bond between mother and son that in one sense can be deemed natural, but also represents nurturing, education, and memory. Antoine specifically cites the element of memory when talking about this song: "Ceste chançon chantoit quant elle m'alaita, / Et depuis la m'aprint et la me recorda. / Oncques puis le mien corps, certes, ne l'oublia [She sang me this song when she nursed me, and afterward she taught me it. I certainly never forgot it since].<sup>148</sup> The word "corps" is often used in this text instead of simply saying "I" or "me" (as here, "le mien corps ne l'oublia" means "I didn't forget it"). In this case, saying "my body didn't forget it" actually seems quite accurate. As his mother's milk became part of his body, so did the song that she sang to him while nursing, by becoming a beloved memory. While the fact that Aye taught her son this song represents her nurturing education, this emphasis on the body (a sort of bodily memory) returns us again to nature, and to Aye's bodily reaction (bleeding) to hearing the song.<sup>149</sup>

As we saw in the scene with which I opened this chapter, nature is not only associated with women and with bodies in this text, but also with a natural tie between father and son, one that "goes without saying." Aye's blood creates a new paradigm here: her nosebleed may be beyond her control, like menstruation, but the fact that its purpose in this scene is to lead her to a

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 2971-73.

<sup>149</sup> "La chanson comme thème de reconnaissance est célèbre en France depuis le temps de Richard I<sup>er</sup>, Coeur de Lion et Blondel. Mais le thème est plus ancien et se trouve dans les traditions folkloriques de plusieurs peuples; cf. S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd., 6 vol. Copenhague, Rosenkilde et Bagger, 1955-1958, t. III, p. 370, H 12." Keith Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 753.

scene of linguistic alliance, that is, recognition, with her sons gives it a “masculine” quality. The possibility of recognition, though, is dependent on the evocation of breastfeeding and breast milk, which itself rests in memory in the form of the nursing song, and is part of that linguistic alliance. The power of the recognition between Aye and her husband and sons is still limited, though, by a few factors. Antoine and Richer’s liminal role in the text also limits the effects of this recognition: they are not members of the Nanteuil line, so their reunion with their mother is not very important in the larger scope of the narrative. Part of this also comes from the fact that their father is imprisoned with them – they are not lacking a father, he is simply powerless at the moment, like them. They think of their mother as powerful (“nostre mere qui tant a de renon”), but they do not seem to expect her to be able to liberate them from the prison. Finally, Aye’s inability to save them is another limit on the power of recognition. Her inability to do so seems to be linked to her “true” feminine gender, because as Gaudion, she/he was perfectly capable of fighting Saracens and rescuing Blanchandine. Hence, her ability to rescue a person seems to be linked to whether she is acting as Gaudion or as herself. Even as she recounts to Ganor, Anthoine, and Richer her adventures as Gaudion, Aye does not propose using those same skills to rescue them. As Dietzman notes, she also rejects Ganor’s request to speak to her privately (i.e. have sex), objecting, rather reasonably, that the prison smells too bad and there are too many people around!<sup>150</sup> This shows that towards the end of this scene, Aye is focused on Gaudion’s next task, which is to rescue Aigentine, and is not dwelling on her husband’s and sons’ problems. She is practical about having to leave them; she even re-locks the prison and hands the

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<sup>150</sup> Dietzman, “Miracle (Wo)men,” 221.

prison guard the keys “par courtoisie,” and then returns to chat with Blanchandine.<sup>151</sup> Thus, Aye clearly prioritizes Gaudion’s duties over “her own;” she does not seem to consider that she is capable of freeing her husband and sons as she is capable of rescuing Aiglentine. Meanwhile, Ganor and their sons remain helpless in the prison for another fourteen years, until Tristan comes to rescue them.

### 3.5 AYE AND GUI

#### 3.5.1 Disguise and the threat of rape

In the final scene from *TN* that I will examine in this chapter, Aye experiences yet another recognition scene in a prison cell, this time with her son Gui. The scene of recognition and reunion between Aye and Gui begins with neither party aware of who the other is, and in the complete darkness of a dungeon, which causes the recognition to take place in a suspenseful manner over several steps. The darkness parallels cross-dressing as a type of impediment to recognition, and makes Aye’s cross-dressing no longer the primary focus in the question of recognition. Because of the way that they misunderstand who one another are, the scene displays the importance of the recognition of the kinship tie, specifically mother-son, in order to protect Aye from violence. As a counterpoint to the scene between Aye and Gui, I will also refer back to two earlier scenes in which Aye, because of her masculine disguise, finds herself as either a perceived threat to a woman, or in danger herself. These scenes contextualize the question of rape, which appears periodically in the *TN* narrative.

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<sup>151</sup> *TN*, 3176.



Aye ends up in prison through the following circumstances. After he proposes Aigentine as a wife for Gaudion, Galafre falls in love with Aigentine himself. He becomes so jealous of Gaudion that he organizes a plot with his former enemy, Murgafier (yet another pagan king), to betray and imprison Gaudion. This is not an entirely unhappy turn of events for Aye, as she avoids the forced marriage with Aigentine, and she happens to be placed in the same prison as her son Gui de Nanteuil. (Gui is in prison because soon after he left his wife Aigentine to go look for food, he fell in love with and impregnated Murgafier's daughter Honorée, and Murgafier had him imprisoned for this.)

When Aye first is thrown into the dark prison, Gui hears someone but does not yet see anyone, and shouts that he will attack this person if he tries to do him harm. It is specified that Aye does not recognize Gui's voice. Aye begins by introducing herself simply as a fellow prisoner. Gui cannot see her very well if at all, but takes her for a man, calling her "vassaulx." When Gui tells her that his name is "Quetis maleürés" [miserable unfortunate one], Aye responds in surprise that this is a "non desguisés" [a strange name] and that she has never heard of a Christian being called such a thing.<sup>152</sup> As with Blanchandin(e), the use of the word "desguisés" here seems to be a purposeful reference to its other meaning of "disguised," since Gui is "disguising" his true identity by calling himself "Quetis maleürés," and inadvertently delaying his mother's recognition of him. As this scene begins, the play of disguise is on both sides, with the dark hiding them from each other, and neither of their voices recognizable to the other.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 3615-17.

Aye then descends the steps further into the prison, where it is still dark, and sits down on a bench near Gui. When Gui says that he has been in the prison for two years, Aye responds with pessimism and says that she thinks he will never get out, which makes Gui angry. She apologizes and then asks where he is from, but Gui is still angry and says that she has insulted him. Since Aye does not yet know this is her son, she begins to worry about her safety with this angry man, to the extent that she wonders if he would rape her if he knew she was a woman:

Quant Aye l'entendi, le sanc lui est mués;  
Ne s'oze descouvrir qu'i ne soit racusés.  
Paour a, s'elle dit toutes ses privetés,  
Que par celui ne feust le scien corps violés.<sup>153</sup>

When Aye heard him, her blood rushed. She did not dare reveal herself for fear that she be denounced. She was afraid that if she revealed her secrets, this man might rape her.

The recurrence of a reference to blood in the expression “le sanc lui est mués” is significant in the context of Aye and Gui’s meeting, since Aye’s feeling is provoked by fear of what would be an incestuous rape – although she is not aware of the threat of incest, the narrator and reader are. Aye’s fearful thought here puts her for the second time in a situation wherein incest and rape are threatened. However, in the first instance, it was “Gaudion” who appeared threatening to Aiglentine. In that earlier scene, Gaudion is proposed as a potential husband for Aiglentine, who is horrified at the thought of both marrying a Saracen and betraying her husband, with whom she has had no contact in a few years. (She, of course, has no idea that Gaudion is actually her mother-in-law disguised, but Aye does recognize her daughter-in-law.) Aiglentine defiantly declares to Gaudion that she will never lie naked with him, that she would rather be burned than ever do so:

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 3646-49.

Et se vous m'espousés, sur sains vous suis jurans,  
Ja bien ne vous feray, ne ne seray couchans  
Avec vous nu a nu; ains seroie souffrans  
C'on m'arzist en ung feu c'on feroit sur les champs.<sup>154</sup>

And if you marry me, I swear on the saints I will never make love to you, nor will I ever lie naked with you. I would rather be burned in a fire in the fields.

Aigentine tells Gaudion that her husband is Gui de Nanteuil, so Aye/Gaudion latches on to this as a way to reassure Aigentine, saying that Gui once did him a service and he would thus be happy to help her get back to France and find her husband. He then promises her that if they travel to France together, “Pour l’amour de Guyon a la brasse quarree / Serés tout mon vivant de mon corps honoree; / Ja ne serés par moy a nul jour violée” [For the love of Gui, I will honor you for my entire life and I will never rape you].<sup>155</sup>

Kathryn Gravdal’s work on the depiction of rape in Arthurian romance has shown that “rape constitutes one of the episodic units used in the construction of a romance.” The hero of a romance is given the opportunity to act in a chivalrous manner by protecting a noble woman who is threatened by rape. Rape is aestheticized in this manner, and the audience’s focus is on the knightly behavior, not on the “literal consequences of violence against women.”<sup>156</sup> In the scene between Aye/Gaudion and Aigentine, a cross-dressed woman finds herself in the literary role of the potential rapist, as well as that of the protector. Simply by being seen as a man, Aye/Gaudion becomes a potential, even expected, rapist. The cross-dressing disguise, when it goes undetected, not only protects Aye from rape but also puts her in a position where she is so fully taking on the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 1949-52.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 2035-37.

<sup>156</sup> Kathryn Gravdal. *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 43-44.

role of a man that she becomes a potential rapist. Aye/Gaudion as a cross-dressed character conforms to the dichotomy that men are potential/likely rapists and women are at risk of being raped. Since Aye conforms to chivalric values, however, she vows to protect and never rape Aiglentine. This vow is not entirely unproblematic, since his/her statement above implies that, as Gaudion, he might be expected to rape her if it were not for his respect for Gui! The homosocial bond between knights is what Gaudion cites as his reason to protect Aiglentine, rather than a desire to protect Aiglentine as a human being. The fact that Aiglentine is given voice to express her disgust at the thought of this forced marriage and implied consequential rape, however, does provide at least a brief perspective from a female character. As for Aye, if her disguise ever is discovered, she is actually at a higher risk of rape, because her attempt to hide her true identity could be viewed as deception and reason for retribution – and this is something that Aye fears, as I will show. The disguise also simply allows Aye to be in all-male spaces such as this prison cell, which automatically increases the risk of violence. Aye/Gaudion's ability to see rape from both male and female perspectives nuances the representation of rape in this text, such that we see the female characters' fear of rape, rather than solely the use of the rape threat as a literary device that exalts the male hero.

In the role of Gaudion, Aye identifies herself as a potential rapist, but with the intention of negating this notion. Aiglentine does not specify that her horror at the thought of marrying him and sleeping with him have to do specifically with his religion. Her preference to be burned rather than sleep with him, though, does evoke burning at the stake as a punishment for heresy. In Aye's situation in the prison with Gui, she knows that her fellow prisoner is Christian and still fears him as a rapist, so potential rapists can be either Saracen or Christian in this text. These two scenes also evoke incest and/or homosexuality, which are then rejected or neutralized: Gaudion,

who is really female, rejects the idea of sleeping with another woman, Aiglentine, and once Aye knows she is sitting next to her son, she no longer fears rape. I will now examine how that mother-son recognition comes to pass.

### **3.5.2 Recognition, maternity, and lineage**

To return to the scene in the prison, Gui has just expressed anger at Aye concerning her comment that he may never get out of prison, so Aye now keeps quiet. At this point, she has a few choices in terms of how she can identify herself to her fellow prisoner: she can make up a name and present herself as a Christian man, she can reveal that she is a woman but not say her name, or she can tell him her real name, and thus reveal her gender. Up until this point in the scene, she has chosen only to confirm that she is Christian when Gui asks her about her religion (presumably because she knows she is in prison with other Christians), but lets him assume that she is a man. When she worries to herself about revealing her “privetés” to this man, it is because she is considering revealing to him that she is female, and perhaps that her name is Aye d’Avignon. The liminal space of the prison, similar to that liminal space of the woods where she met Tristan, makes this confession possible, since she no longer has to pretend to be Gaudion; however, it is also be a dangerous place full of men where she could potentially be raped. This threat of violence to her female body emphasizes the extent to which recognition of both the female body *and* the familial bond/name are essential. If the person to whom she is revealing this information is her son, then all that matters is that she is Aye, his mother – the femaleness comes along with this, but is subsumed under her name. If her fellow inmate is a stranger, all that matters is that she is female, since that fact subsequently exposes her to the threat of rape. Since

Aye does not know that she is speaking to her son, she assumes that she is most safe if she presents herself as a Christian man – when in fact she would be safest revealing her name.

Aye uses the word “privetés” when she worries about revealing her identity to Gui, and she used this same word when she was with Ganor, Antoine, and Richer in the prison, when she described to them that Galafre wanted her to marry Aigentine. In both of these instances, the word is paired in rhyme with “racusés,” which has multiple possible meanings: accused, denounced, or revealed.<sup>157</sup> In describing the situation with Aigentine, Aye tells her family that she is reassured by the fact that if she and Aigentine did have to marry, Aigentine would surely protect her secret once she found out her true identity. Aye believes that if she were forced to marry a female stranger, on the other hand, the woman would be vengeful when she found out that “Gaudion” was not really a man:

Mais se s'estoit une aultre, mal seroit arrivés:  
Elle vourrait avoir de moy les ammitiés,  
Et quant elle saroit toutes mes privetés,  
Tost seroit le mien corps aux paiens racusés.<sup>158</sup>

But if it were another woman, something bad would happen: she would want my affection. And when she found out my secret, I would immediately be denounced/revealed to the pagans.

Sinclair's definition of “privetés” is “affaires privées.”<sup>159</sup> However, it is clear that in these two instances it refers more precisely to the secret that she is female, which in turn refers to her physical body. In both uses of “privetés,” a sexual situation is referenced – here, the cross-dressed woman's marriage night dilemma, and previously, when Aye fears rape in the prison. In

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<sup>157</sup> “racusé,” *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, accessed April 19, 2016.

<sup>158</sup> *TN*, 3125-28.

<sup>159</sup> Keith Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 828.

the above example, “*racusés*” seems to correspond most to the definition, “to reveal, unveil;” Aye fears that she (and literally, her body) would be revealed to the pagans once her hypothetical wife had let the secret out. At the same time, she would also be “accused” of a crime once her body was revealed. The same thing occurs when Aye speculates about what would happen to her in the prison with Gui: the revelation of her femaleness might lead to the revelation of her body, and violence to it, if the revelation occurs in front of a hypothetical man, a non-relative. Aye’s disguise allows her the freedom to access her relatives in dangerous places (the hind’s lair, a Saracen prison, and with Aigentine, a Saracen palace) and in a dangerous situation (potential marriage to a woman). However, her presence in these places would put her in danger if it were not for the subsequent recognition of the familial bond. Thus, in Aye’s case in the prison, being “revealed” and recognized in this private and familial context is precisely what Aye wants and needs, which is the opposite of her usual desire to keep her true identity secret.

In a scene that is similar to that of her meeting with the young Tristan, Aye now uses her maternal breasts in order to identify herself to her son Gui. When evening comes, the prisoners are brought two candles. The space is now lit, and Gui makes another attempt at communication and asks Aye, “*Chevalier, estes vous du royaume des Frans?*” [Knight, are you from the Frankish kingdom?].<sup>160</sup> Gui’s question is now close to the truth (geographically, at least), and simultaneously Aye finally sees, thanks to the light, that it is her son. As with her husband and other sons, her reaction is physical – she feels a rush of blood and then swoons several times:

Dame Aye vit Guyon, dont luy mua ly sancs.  
De destresse cheÿ pasmee entre deux bans,  
Que ne pot nul mot dire, tant fut ses ceurs pesans

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<sup>160</sup> *TN*, 3664.

Et triste pour son filz qu'elle fut congnoissans.<sup>161</sup>

Lady Aye saw Gui and her blood rushed. She fainted from distress between two benches, and, recognizing her son, her heart was so heavy and sad that she was speechless.

Here, the visual recognition of her son again causes the movement of her blood, and she is completely overcome with emotion at the sad thought that her son is imprisoned. But this is still not the conclusion of the recognition scene - the narrator yet again prolongs the mutual recognition; since Aye is unable to speak, Gui still does not recognize her and thinks that his fellow prisoner is simply having a bad reaction to the sudden illumination of the room, so he quickly blows out the candles. Aye then speaks and reveals herself, this time evoking both pregnancy and breastfeeding to describe her relationship with him:

Beau filz, beau doulx amis, beau doulx leaulx amans,  
Ta jouvente et ton corps portay dedens mes flans;  
Tu es Guy de Nanteul que je fu allaitans.  
Je suis Aye ta mere, la roÿne poissans,  
La femme au roy Ganor et mere aux deux enfans  
Qu'o lui tiennent prison entre les mescreans.<sup>162</sup>

Beautiful son, beautiful sweet friend, beautiful sweet loyal lover, I carried you in my womb; you are Gui de Nanteuil whom I nursed. I am your mother Aye, the powerful queen, wife of Ganor and mother to two children who along with him are in prison among the infidels.

Aye first identifies herself to her son through the physical connection of pregnancy and breastfeeding. Her identification is also two-sided; that is, instead of just identifying herself *to* Gui, she also identifies Gui by his name and describes him. She evokes her pregnancy, but specifically through a reference to *his* body – essentially she says, “I carried your body inside my body.” As in the scene I analyzed above wherein the angel identifies Tristan as part of Aye’s

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 3665-68.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 3674-79.



lineage, here Aye similarly places herself in a position of a carrier of lineage. She does not mention Gui's father Garnier de Nanteuil at all when describing their family structure. Instead, she speaks of her pregnancy and her breastfeeding of Gui. She then speaks of Ganor, who in fact raised Gui, but she mentions him as her husband, not as Ganor's stepfather. In this way, she remains the sole parental reference in terms of Gui's connection to the Nanteuil lineage. As in the previous scene with her two other sons, the way Aye connects to her child is both bodily and linguistic. Just as medieval medical understanding tended to identify the father as the child's creator (the mother providing matter but not contributing a "seed"), here Aye creates Gui without the help of a father, at least linguistically.<sup>163</sup> Aye creates and names her child with a reference to breast milk; she speaks of nursing him in the same phrase as she names him, and she does not mention his father. At the same time, in terms of the text's vocabulary, she remains a mother; she does not "engender" a child as man does, she "carries" one, as women do.

Although she is currently cross-dressed, there is no mention of this fact as she describes herself to Gui, and since Gui has snuffed out the candles, he does not yet notice her appearance. Whereas in the earlier scene with Ganor, Antoine, and Richer her disguise provoked some confusion and discussion of her identity, in this case such a discussion is delayed by both the darkness and Aye's decision to leave out this information. The first thing that she and Gui discuss once they mutually recognize each other (but Gui still has not noticed her outfit) is the fact that she has recently seen her husband and sons as well as Aiglentine and Tristan – very important news for Gui, since he did not know if his wife and child had survived. With this

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<sup>163</sup> Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 24; 121. Whether or not women produced seed was up for debate among medieval scholars. The Aristotelian view was that women provided only the matter, whereas men's sperm provided the essence/soul of the human being.

knowledge, he declares that he will do penance for his adultery with Honorée. Once the discussion of Aye's recent adventures is over, though, the candles are re-lit and Gui finally sees that his mother is in disguise.

La clarté ot reprinse, sy voyent sa et la.  
Guyon voit la roÿne, qui .ix. mois le porta,  
En abit de paien, dont moult s'esmerveilla.  
Les mamelles lui montre dont elle l'alaitta,  
Et trestout son affere lui dit et recorda.<sup>164</sup>

It was light again, so they could see. Guy saw the queen, who carried him for nine months, in pagan clothing, about which he marveled greatly. She showed him the breasts that nursed him, and told him everything that had happened to her.

In this description of Gui's first full recognition of his mother, Aye is described in terms of the relationship of pregnancy and breastfeeding between her and Gui, which occurred about twenty years earlier. References to her pagan clothing and her adventures in this clothing are sandwiched between the references to her pregnancy and breastfeeding, and in this way emphasize the strangeness of seeing someone who appears to be a Saracen man, but who in fact is a Christian mother. Although Gui marvels at her Saracen costume, its revelation is not exactly shocking, because Gui already knows she is his mother. Through the series of misconceptions, recognition has been completely separated from the fact of her cross-dressing. It remains an interesting side-note for them to discuss, not an obstacle to recognition.

However, there is one small point that indicates that proof of identity is still needed - Aye still shows her breasts to her son. The choice to do so seems rather gratuitous, since her identity has been well established at this point. This gesture could perhaps be understood as part of the way that she tells her story. After showing her breasts, she then recounts to Gui what happened

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<sup>164</sup> *TN*, 3726-30.

to her in her adventures as Gaudion. It is as if her breasts guarantee that she *is* Aye d'Avignon, despite what she is about to tell Gui; in addition, her breasts are part of the story, because she tells Gui about the moment when she showed her breasts to Tristan, and how he lay down and slept on her breasts. The sight of Aye's breasts connects Gui to the son that he hasn't seen in three years, and for all he knew, was dead. The revelation of her breasts immediately followed by the recounting of her adventures as Gaudion does not clear up identity confusion but rather emphasizes the marvel of what she has accomplished in that role, while at the same time she remains herself, Aye d'Avignon. The effacement of the disguise in this scene is similar to what happens with Tristan and with her son Antoine, for whom the disguise has little or no meaning, because they are able to see through it or ignore it. Similarly for Gui, by the time he becomes aware of the disguise, it no longer matters in terms of his recognition of her. In a practical sense, Aye will also need to wear this same clothing for the rest of the time that she spends in prison, which will be many years. She will only have to act the part of Gaudion when a prison guard passes by. This shows just how much the character of Gaudion is formed through Aye's mimicking of Saracen behavior in the presence of other Saracens, and not just the adoption of Saracen dress itself. In the prison, Aye will remain Aye, despite wearing Saracen clothing, because her son recognizes her.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

Recognition might most frequently be thought of as a visual experience, but the scenes I have examined here from *Tristan de Nanteuil* demonstrate that recognition can be a long process that involves speech/voice, hearing, thought, memory, and intuition. A character's voice can hint at

or conceal identity, or her speech can actively choose to reveal it, and hearing a song can trigger a memory that leads to recognition. In the case of Aye d'Avignon, visual clues like those of her breasts or her facial features work together with these other kinds of clues to produce a moment of recognition between family members, which is, importantly, a recognition of her *as a member of their family*, not just as a woman. The recognition of the familial bond is a joyful moment, but the frightening possibility of non-recognition reveals the ways in which female characters in this text are always potential victims of violence.

In the absence of her first husband, Aye takes on the role of the carrier and guardian of the Nanteuil lineage, which she preserves for her son and grandson, and she does this through references to breastfeeding her children. When Aye exposes her breasts, or when she hears the nursing song, these visual or aural references trigger a memory of lactation and breastfeeding. That memory is the primary way that Aye communicates her maternal relationship, and thus her true identity, to her sons and her grandson, with breast milk creating an alternate metaphor to that of blood as a carrier of lineage. The fact that Aye is cross-dressed stimulates a discussion of the processes of recognition, but the cross-dressing is not the primary focus of the recognition scene itself. Instead, focus is shifted to the relationships between people who are related by blood but who have been separated by circumstance, and to the processes that will allow them to recognize each other. Aye's cross-dressing is thus part of a large and complicated picture of the many relationships in *Tristan de Nanteuil* that are constantly being negotiated through various impediments to recognition. In the next chapter, I will examine how cross-dressing in the case of Blanchandine leads to a lack of recognition between her and her cousin, and even the effacement of this kinship bond through the event of a miraculous sex change.

#### 4.0 KISSING COUSINS: SEX CHANGE, INCEST, AND IDENTITY IN *TRISTAN DE NANTEUIL*

At the beginning of chapter two, we saw that when the cross-dressed Blanchandine is reunited with her long-lost child, she cannot even reveal to him that she is his mother. This is only the beginning of Blanchandine's complicated and sometimes uneasy relationship with the kin that knew her before she was disguised as a man. Tristan's idea to disguise Blanchandine so that her relatives at the sultan's court do not recognize her works all too well: her first cousin once removed, Clarinde, falls in love with her, thinking that the imagined character "Blanchandin" is a man unrelated to her. It is Clarinde's love and her demand that they marry that then set in motion the need for the divine intervention of Blanchandine's sex change. However, although this section of the text portrays the sex change as the result of God's pity on Blanchandine (Clarinde will have her executed if she finds out that Blanchandin is a woman), as well as Blanchandine's own desire to be a man in order to avenge Tristan's (supposed) death, earlier foreshadowing in the text claims that the sex change was predestined primarily so that Blanchandin might engender Saint Gilles. Compounding this conflicting information, the presumably all-knowing angel who presents Blanchandine with the option of changing sex does not tell her that her decision to become a man is based on a false report of Tristan's death. Blanchandine's "choice" only gives her some semblance of agency in a plan for which God has already selected her. The text thus presents many different and conflicting reasons, both theological and practical, for the

sex change, and also varies in its moral reactions to it. While the sex change itself is sanctioned, the text expresses discomfort at times concerning the same-sex marriage that preceded it.

Most scholarship on the sex change in *Tristan de Nanteuil* (c. 1350; hereafter *TN*) focuses on the moment of its occurrence and the episodes immediately preceding and following it, and has only touched on Blanchandin's further adventures in the last third of the poem. Scholars have approached the sex change episode in a variety of ways, focusing on questions of same-sex desire, sanctity, transgender identity (or lack thereof), and gender performance.<sup>165</sup> Alban Georges and Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu have studied the representation of incest in the entirety of *TN*, including some brief comments on the fact of Blanchandine and Clarinde's kinship.<sup>166</sup> However, scholars have not considered the cousin relationship between the two women to be of much importance in the analysis of cross-dressing, sex change and gender identity. I argue that this relationship is indeed essential to an understanding of the sex change; to summarize why this is the case, one only needs to look at the fruit of their relationship: Saint Gilles, a hermit monk who

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<sup>165</sup> Kimberlee Campbell, "Acting Like a Man: Performing Gender in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Cultural Performances in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Nancy Freeman Regalado*, eds. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Roberta L. Krueger, E. Jane Burns (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 79-89; Sara Jane Dietzman, "Miracle (Wo)men: Transgender and Transsexual Identities in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in "En guise d'homme: Female Cross Dressing and Gender Reversal in Four Medieval French Texts" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2005) (gender and trans identities); Paula Leverage, "Sex and the Sacraments in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-historical and Literary-anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 517-533 (sanctity); Francesca Canadé Sautman, "What Can They Possibly Do Together? Queer Epic Performances in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 199-232 (queer reading).

<sup>166</sup> Alban Georges, "Mythe et *senefiance*: les schémas oedipiens," in *Tristan de Nanteuil: Écriture et imaginaire épiques au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2006), 667-706; Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, "Adultère et inceste dans *Tristan de Nanteuil*" in *Les Perversions sexuelles au Moyen Age: 29<sup>e</sup> Congrès du cercle de travail de la littérature allemande au Moyen Âge* (Greifswald: Reineke, 1994), 169-81.

is responsible for confessing others of the sin of incest. Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde are never accused of committing incest, but their son's life of penitence and his redemption of others who have committed incest certainly implies that he inherited this association from them.

The text gives no absolute answer as to whether sex change eliminates the bond of kinship between Blanchandin and Clarinde. While it no longer explicitly portrays them as related to each other post-sex change, their child's destiny implies that they are still at least associated with incest. The blurriness of this case is a good starting point from which to think about other elements of Blanchandin(e)'s identity that change or remain stable pre- and post-sex change. In some ways, Blanchandine and Blanchandin are two completely different people: they have different roles in society, different desires, and accomplish different tasks. Such is Victoria Turner's assessment of Blanchandin(e): "Her disguise does not simply exploit her pre-existing identity, but is actually the impetus behind the creation of a completely new being: she has a new name, new partner, new social position, and most importantly, a new body."<sup>167</sup> While it is true that all of the listed elements have changed completely for Blanchandin(e), this view does not take into consideration the ways in which Blanchandin retains some of Blanchandine's emotions and memories, specifically those associated with Tristan. The interchange of emotions between Blanchandin and Blanchandine also goes in both directions, since before Blanchandine changes sex she begins to feel some of "Blanchandin's" emotions. Blanchandine negotiates family and romantic relationships, political power, sexuality, memories, and emotions as she becomes Blanchandin, and this change raises many questions. How should a king who used to be a woman acquire his lands? Once Blanchandin is male, what happens to his feelings for his former

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<sup>167</sup> Victoria Turner, "Performing the Self, Performing the Other: Gender and Racial Identity Construction in the Nanteuil Cycle," *Women's History Review* 22, no.1 (2013): 191.

husband, and his memories of their time together? What does Clarinde think when she learns that her husband used to be a woman? Blanchandin(e)'s gender and sex change is an ongoing process of identity-building before, during, and after sex change. As with Silence, the process of identity building does not only consist of one's own feelings about gender, but it is also a relational experience negotiated with Blanchandin's former husband, his new wife, and other friends and family.

#### 4.1 CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGE

Before entering into the body of this chapter, I will briefly contextualize the questions of incest, same-sex marriage, sin, and sanctity as they appear in *TN*. The fact that the explanation for Blanchandine's sex change rests in a reproductive imperative is essential to my understanding of its meaning. The sex change is specifically ordained in order to bring Saint Gilles into the world; thus the change not only affects Blanchandin and his individual role in society, but it also creates a new father-son relationship. By engendering a son, Blanchandin also then fits into the pattern established for men in this *chanson de geste* and others; he becomes a father like Tristan and Gui.<sup>168</sup> The change of sex itself and the child produced from it are both treated as a gift from God. However, the change and the child bring along with them implications of incest and of homoerotic desire, since Clarinde desired her female cousin before Blanchandine changed sex. Alban Georges notes that after the sex change, "l'inceste n'est jamais présenté comme tel, que ce

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<sup>168</sup> François Suard, *Guide de la chanson de geste et de sa postérité littéraire, XI<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2011), 105-116. Suard discusses the genealogy of *la geste de Nanteuil* on page 126.



soit par l'auteur ou par les personnages eux-mêmes, comme si la transsexualité de Blanchandin avait aboli le lien de parenté qui l'unissait auparavant à Clarinde."<sup>169</sup> Georges does not explore further the reasons for this apparent severing of kinship. Blanchandine and Clarinde's cousin relationship is mentioned numerous times in the text, up until the point that Blanchandine undergoes the sex change. After the sex change, it is never mentioned again. The miraculous change of sex solves not only the problem of a same sex marriage, but also serves to (apparently, textually) sever the tie of kinship between the two spouses. The textual elimination of their blood kinship corresponds to a realistic fourteenth-century social anxiety about consanguineous marriage. Regardless of the canon laws banning marriages of a certain degree of closeness, such cousin marriages often took place among nobles. Studies have shown that both the clergy and nobles were concerned about the difficulty of contracting marriages that would be within the acceptable degree of kinship.<sup>170</sup> Before the Fourth Lateran council in 1215, marriages were forbidden between relations to the seventh degree; after the council, the restriction was reduced to the fourth degree. First cousins once removed Blanchandine and Clarinde are related in the third degree, well within the forbidden range even after reform.

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<sup>169</sup> Georges, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 696.

<sup>170</sup> Although they date from an earlier time period, the examples in Constance Bouchard's article on marriage and consanguinity show the difficulties that nobles had contracting marriages that were not considered incestuous and that were also appropriate to their rank. Constance Bouchard, "Consanguinity and Noble Marriages in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Speculum* 56 (1981): 268-287. As James Brundage notes, "Since seven degrees of relationship computed according to canonical rules could encompass thousands of persons, the incest rules created potentially serious problems for individual couples and for society as a whole." James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 356. For examples of consanguineous relationships between cousins in medieval literature, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 224-225.

*TN*'s interest in cousin marriage is not confined to Blanchandine and Clarinde: Tristan has sex with his first cousin Clarisse and has a child with her. Both couples of cousins are referred to as *cousins germains* in the text, although Tristan and Clarisse are related in closer degree, as their mothers are sisters. The sinfulness of their actions is also completely different for each couple, according to what we can tell from the text. Tristan and Clarisse need to confess their sin, and their child, raised pagan, later kills his own father; Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde do not need to confess, and their son becomes a saint. *TN*'s narrative never explicitly explains why one couple is condemned but not the other. However, the theme of incest reappears in the depiction of their son Saint Gilles' life.

## 4.2 SAINT GILLES

Gilles is a historical saint who died in the early eighth century in Provence. Aside from his fantastical parentage, much of what is said about Saint Gilles in *TN* lines up with hagiographical accounts. According to the tenth-century *Vita Sancti Aegidii*, the twelfth-century Old French version of his *Vita*, and the episode as it appears in *TN*, Gilles was saying mass for Charlemagne when he received a heavenly letter stating that Charlemagne had not confessed a certain terrible sin. Gilles then is able to confess Charlemagne of the sin, which, although not named in the *Vita*, is specified in *TN* as the sin of incest – Charlemagne slept with his sister, and Roland is said to be the fruit of this union.<sup>171</sup> In *TN*, Gilles also confesses Tristan of the sin of incest with his first

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<sup>171</sup> Miranda Griffin, "Writing Out the Sin: Arthur, Charlemagne, and the Spectre of Incest," *Neophilologus* 88 (2004): 506; 515. Griffin notes that *Tristan de Nanteuil* is the first French text wherein Charlemagne's sin is explicitly identified as incest with his sister; see *TN*

cousin Clarisse. Tristan and Clarisse's son Garcion/Grevesson is raised by Saracens and unknowingly kills his father at the end of the poem. The two children of incest thus have completely different destinies; as Alban Georges writes, "[l]'engendrement du futur Saint Gilles n'est pas le fruit du péché mais celui du miracle. Cet aspect désincarné de la procréation constitue l'antithèse, et donc le rachat du péché lié à la naissance de Grevesson, le fruit de l'inceste."<sup>172</sup> And while Gilles' presence in the world is positive because he is able to confess and heal others, his adoption of a monastic lifestyle, living as a hermit and subsisting only on herbs, indicates that some sort of penitence is taking place – perhaps penitence for his parents' sin(s) of incest and same-sex desire?

*TN* indicates explicitly at only one moment that Clarinde was punished for having desired and lain with Blanchandine:

Sachés que la roïne ne disoit se voir non,  
Car il advint tel chose a bien brefve saison  
Que par force convint oultre droit et raison  
Qu'elle eüst Blanchandine dont je fais mencïon,  
*Et espousa la belle a la loy de Mahon,*  
*Et geust avecques lui dedens son pavillon,*  
*De quoy il lui advint puis grant perdicion.*<sup>173</sup>

Know that the queen spoke the truth, because such a thing soon came to pass: against [Blanchandine's] will and against right and reason, she [Clarinde] had Blanchandine whom I mention, *and she married the beautiful woman according to the Saracen law, and lay with her in her tent, for which reason great calamity befell her.*

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lines 21705-10. For the Old French poem, see *La Vie de Saint Gilles par Guillaume de Berneville, poème du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Alphonse Bos and Gaston Paris (Paris: Firmin Didot et cie, 1881).

<sup>172</sup> Georges, *TN*, 597.

<sup>173</sup> *TN*, 13055-61.

This one instance of clear disapproval of homoerotic desire is unusual in the text, as Clarinde's desire for Blanchandin(e) is generally treated as if it were something humorous and not to be taken seriously. The passage places the blame entirely on Clarinde and speaks only of the calamity that befell her, not Blanchandin. However, Blanchandin also suffers greatly. After the sex change and when Blanchandin and Clarinde are living in newly conquered Greece, a traitor attacks their castle and cuts off one of Blanchandin's arms;<sup>174</sup> he wanders homeless for thirty years, and is separated from Clarinde and Gilles, who also suffer hardship. In comparison to this passage that indicates that same-sex desire is sinful, incest is never explicitly mentioned as a problem for Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde's marriage; it is never entirely clear if this is because the degree of kinship is not close enough to cause alarm, or because the cross-dressing and sex change alters their kinship. However, it is worth noting that the issues of homoerotic desire and cousin incest are the only two in the text to require any character's confession. The men in this text, and particularly Tristan, variously commit fornication, adultery, and rape, but these do not elicit condemnation. Rather than representing another instance of deviance that would sit alongside incest and homosexuality, sex change is presented as a positive event that renders Clarinde and Blanchandine's relationship normative: after the sex change, Clarinde is married to a man, and he is apparently no longer her cousin.

I will begin the body of this chapter by presenting Blanchandine and Clarinde as they appear in the earlier part of the text, in which they are both still Saracen princesses. The two cousins are never shown to interact in this portion, but their individual portraits offer some clues as to how their characters will later develop. I will then show how the author foreshadows the

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<sup>174</sup> In the scene where the arm is reattached, it is clearly identified as his right arm (*TN*, 22812-17). Another scene, however, implies that it is the left (*Ibid.*, 22639-43).

sex change before I enter into the heart of the cross-dressing, marriage, and sex change episodes. During cross-dressing, Blanchandine identifies with aspects of “Blanchandin’s” masculine identity, and the continuity or discontinuity of emotions and memories between the male and female personas inform us about how gender and sex change alters (or doesn’t) human identity in this text. Finally, I examine the relationships between the newly male Blanchandin and his companions Doon, Tristan, and Clarinde, showing how *TN* constructs masculinity and how the dynamics of gender and power adjust in light of sex change. All of this change and continuity occurs in the context of Saint Gilles’ holiness and a vague sentiment of sin that overhangs Blanchandin and Clarinde’s relationship.

### 4.3 TWO SARACEN PRINCESSES

Blanchandine and Clarinde both begin life as the daughters of Saracen kings,<sup>175</sup> and they both lose their mothers in violent incidents: Blanchandine’s mother is murdered by a pagan enemy, and Clarinde’s mother is murdered by Blanchandine’s father Galafre. (Out of the pagan kings depicted, Galafre is without a doubt depicted as the most depraved, stooping to killing his nephew’s wife over a petty intrigue.) Each of them thus lacks a mother figure and is at odds with her remaining parent; Blanchandine has an overtly contentious relationship with Galafre because she has converted and married Tristan, and nothing in particular is said about Clarinde’s relationship to her father except when he dies, and then only to say that she is happy because she now has the freedom to marry whomever she wants. The absence of a mother creates a dramatic

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<sup>175</sup> *TN*’s author uses *paien* and *Sarassin* interchangeably; I will also use both terms.

dynamic between the young female character and her father, as she is more vulnerable to his will. In fact, the relationships between these fathers and daughters are particularly fraught, because Blanchandine and Clarinde pay no attention to what their fathers tell them to do – and thus the conflict between the threatening father and the risk-taking daughter creates an exciting storyline.

Sarah Kay has summarized the important aspects of the “Saracen princess” storyline that appears in many *chansons de geste*: “she is virtually always the first to declare her love, she always converts to Christianity, the attachment - when reciprocated – always leads to marriage, and there is nearly always explicit conflict between her and other members of her community: her father, a rival suitor, or a husband who then has to be scripted out (as in *Les Saisnes*).”<sup>176</sup> As we will see, Clarinde follows these points quite precisely, but Blanchandine’s story does not contain all of these elements, and those that do correspond to her occur in unusual ways.

Although Blanchandine says “bien me cognoist Clarinde mieulx que nulz homs mortelz” [Clarinde knows me better than any mortal man], we never see the two interact before the feast scene wherein Clarinde notices “Blanchandin.”<sup>177</sup> Both women are minor but important characters before the cross-dressing plot development, but in completely separate plotlines. Galafre constantly tries to marry off Blanchandine to various allies and enemies throughout the text. There is no explicit discussion of misogyny in the text, but Galafre’s cruel treatment of Blanchandine makes her life with Tristan, even though he makes decisions for her, certainly seem more tolerable than life under her father’s control.

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<sup>176</sup> Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>177</sup> *TN*, 12754.

### 4.3.1 Morinde/Clarinde

Clarinde appears in the earlier part of the text as the sisterly companion of Aiglentine (Tristan's mother, who lives with the sultan of Babylon for many years). To make a complicated text even more confusing, at this point Clarinde has a different name, "Morinde." The prefixes Mor- and Clar-, although indicating darkness and light respectively, are actually both common prefixes in Saracen names in *chansons de geste*,<sup>178</sup> but in this case the name change does seem to have to do with her later conversion to Christianity, since the narrator states that she will become Clarinde *after* her baptism.<sup>179</sup> However, the author does not follow through on this statement, because she is called Clarinde starting when she meets "Blanchandin" at the feast, an event that precedes her baptism by thousands of lines. Perhaps the decision to call her Clarinde here has something to do with her *willingness* to be baptized, which indeed manifests itself well before the cross-dressing episode. In two scenes, Morinde/Clarinde states clearly that she wants to be baptized. In one of these scenes, her motivation is vaguely religious: she is so amazed by what Aiglentine is recounting to her (the story of Tristan's childhood in the woods) that she says she would like to be baptized because it must be a miracle.<sup>180</sup> In another scene, which I will examine here, she wants to convert for the love of a Christian man.

As the daughter of a sultan, one would expect to see Clarinde offered in marriage to a pagan king, but in fact she is never the object of marriage negotiations except those that she undertakes herself in order to marry Blanchandin. On the contrary, even before her encounter

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<sup>178</sup> Georges, *TN*, 357.

<sup>179</sup> *TN*, 4561.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 9306-12.

with her cross-dressed cousin, she has a tendency to court men rather than be courted, as the *Sarrasine amoureuse* does.<sup>181</sup> Alban Georges describes the way that Clarinde falls for “Blanchandin” as “une parodie du motif épique de la *Sarrasine amoureuse*,” noting “la brusquerie de l’aveu, le silence gêné du chevalier, l’interdit religieux, le don de l’anneau.”<sup>182</sup> Clarinde’s straightforwardness (and inappropriateness) in matters of love is also seen in an episode wherein Aiglentine’s husband Gui is briefly released from prison to serve as Aiglentine’s guarantor in a joust against Galafre, long before the cross-dressing episode. (Aiglentine has been accused of murdering Morinde’s mother, the sultanness, a crime of which Galafre is in fact guilty, and she requests a champion.) Morinde observes Gui’s actions on the battlefield and is impressed by his good looks and valor, but she does not know that he is Aiglentine’s husband. After Aiglentine’s name has been cleared, Morinde immediately enquires after the handsome knight, saying,

Dites moy, belle seur, et belle douce amye,  
 Qui est cilz chrestïen qui tant a seignorie?  
 Pleust a Dieu que je feusse es sains fons baptisie,  
 S’euÿsse ung tel vassal en la moye baillie!  
 J’entens qu’il est grant maistres en la soie partie.<sup>183</sup>

Tell me, beautiful sister, and beautiful sweet friend, who is this Christian who has such strength? Would that God had granted that I were baptized, if I could have had such a vassal to myself! I hear that he is a great lord where he comes from.

Just as she will later with Blanchandin, Morinde wishes that she were Christian in order to have sexual access to a Christian man. Aiglentine quickly sets Morinde straight, telling her that in fact

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<sup>181</sup> Georges, *TN*, 368-69.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

<sup>183</sup> *TN*, 4264-68



this man is her husband. Showing a fickle nature, Morinde takes this news well: her only reaction is to say that the story of Aigentine's marriage to Gui is a "fait desguisés" [a strange thing], and she quickly forgets her own desire and offers to help Aigentine get him out of prison.<sup>184</sup> As we saw in my chapter three, the proposed but unrealized marriage between Aigentine and her mother-in-law Aye foreshadows the issues of same-sex marriage and incest that will be addressed with Blanchandine and Clarinde. Similarly, Clarinde's desire for Gui foreshadows both her desire for someone already married, and, I would argue, her incestuous desire. Because of her nobility, Aigentine is treated like a member of the sultan's family, not a prisoner, so much so that she becomes a sister figure to Clarinde. Thus, Clarinde desires a man who is essentially her brother-in-law, although she is not aware of this at first, just as she is unaware of Blanchandin's true identity. The depiction of Clarinde as a *Sarrasine amoureuse* makes her a rather typical unmarried Saracen woman in a *chanson de geste*, but her tendency towards incest is her particularity. It is also noteworthy that Clarinde is exposed to Christianity through her "big sister" Aigentine, and thus her later conversion in order to win Blanchandin is preceded by a familial connection to Christianity.

### **4.3.2 Blanchandine**

Compared to Clarinde's typical trajectory, Blanchandine's story is unique for a Saracen princess. At first, she is a teenager under her father's control; she later abandons her father and Saracen family once she falls in love with Tristan and becomes Christian in spirit, although not yet baptized. She also becomes a mother in this time period: she becomes pregnant with Raimon

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 4295.

after Tristan rapes her. She does not follow any particular literary paradigm of a Saracen woman, since she establishes a relationship and becomes a mother before both marriage and conversion. Moreover, her romantic relationship is with a man who is Christian by blood, but who is still in his uncivilized state when she meets him, and thus is not actually Christian since he is not baptized and he lacks a Christian education. (Recall that Tristan was born at sea and was not baptized, even before his kidnapping by the hind.) Tristan's unusual situation creates a dynamic wherein Blanchandine must teach him how to be civilized; hence, the first "conversion" that occurs is really Tristan's conversion to civilized life through his love for Blanchandine. She is comparable in that way to Aye, the text's other cross-dressed woman, since Aye's husband Ganor converts to Christianity in order to marry her. In addition, because of the secrecy of the relationship between Tristan and Blanchandine, even when the two are later married just prior to the cross-dressing episode, they never establish a household, and they never get a chance to live together with their child again after he is taken away from them at four months old. The fact that they have no household is also due to the fact that Tristan has been deprived of his right to Nanteuil, so they have no land over which to rule. Unlike Aye who is powerful in her own right as well as through her marriage, Blanchandine is never a Christian queen before she becomes a Christian king after sex change. These unusual aspects of her character development set Blanchandine up for the singular destiny of sex change. She is neither a typical Saracen princess, nor is she a typical Christian princess after conversion. Blanchandine does not show any particular "masculine" traits or desire to be a man, but neither does she fit in as a Saracen or Christian woman.

Nothing in the earlier storylines about Blanchandine and Clarinde would indicate that they are destined to marry each other. All we know is that they are cousins, but we don't see

them interact; they are only obliquely linked plot-wise by Aiglentine, who is both Blanchandine's mother-in-law and Clarinde's sister figure. The reader does constantly anticipate the event of their marriage, though, because of the author's frequent use of foreshadowing, which occurs for the first time within the first four hundred lines of text.

#### 4.4 FORESHADOWING: MARRIAGE, SEX CHANGE, AND SAINT GILLES

The first mention of the future union of Clarinde and Blanchandin(e) and the birth of Saint Gilles occurs when Aiglentine (after being kidnapped) joins the sultan's family and becomes the sultanness' lady-in-waiting. The author then digresses to talk about the sultan's daughter, Clarinde:

La dame ot une fille que Jhesus ot plus cher,  
De luy yssy saint Gille qui en Prouvence yert,  
Sy l'engendra ung roy que Jhesus voult changer  
En figure d'un home, car devant femme yert;  
A Tristan le Sauvaige fut sa bonne mouller,  
Celle fut Blanchandine d'Ermenie arrier,  
Mais par grande miracle la voult Dieu figurer  
En figure d'un home pour son non essaucer,  
Et engendra saint Gille quant il voult noçoier  
Clarinde qui se fit es sains fons baptisier,  
Et avecques lui bien lx millier  
Ainsy que vous ores ou livre retraittier.<sup>185</sup>

The lady [the sultan's wife] had a daughter whom Jesus held most dear. From her was born Saint Gilles who was in Provence, he was engendered by a king whom Jesus wanted to change into a man, because she was a woman before. She was the good wife of Tristan *le Sauvaige*, she used to be Blanchandine of Armenia, but by a great miracle God wanted to shape her into a man to glorify his name, and he [Blanchandin] engendered Saint Gilles when he married Clarinde, who was baptized in the holy waters and along with 60,000 others, as you will hear told in this book.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 375-386.

The reader thus learns from the beginning of the poem that Blanchandine's sex change is divinely sanctioned, and that the reason it occurs is so that Saint Gilles can be born. Nothing is said of Blanchandine's gender identity, which accurately reflects the circumstances of the later sex change: Blanchandine cross-dresses in order to hide from her family and at the suggestion of her husband, not because she wants to be a man. For an unexplained reason, Jesus has chosen these two Saracen women to eventually become Gilles' parents. The specific citation of Jesus' love for Clarinde and his desire to change Blanchandine's sex makes the selection of these two women a reflection of an intimate spiritual relationship between them and Jesus, rather than just a vague desire for the conversion of Saracens on the part of the Christian God. The reference to love for Jesus rings true for Blanchandine, whose sex change is accompanied by scenes of penitence and religious fervor, as we will see later. Their selection as the parents of Saint Gilles remains nonetheless puzzling. As we saw above, Clarinde does not have spiritual reasons for wanting to be Christian (she just wants to be with Christian men), and it is never explicitly explained why it is important that Gilles' father be a former woman. In this instance of foreshadowing, the author says nothing about the fact that Blanchandine and her future wife Clarinde are cousins. (The reader is also not aware of their kinship until about 1400 lines later, when we learn that Blanchandine's father Galafre is the sultan's uncle.) The first time their kinship is mentioned explicitly is in another foreshadowing moment, after Blanchandine is kidnapped by Tristan.

At that point in the text, Blanchandine is being taken by guards to be married to Aggrapart, an eighty-year-old pagan king, when Tristan, still in his "sauvage" state, comes upon her in the woods. With the help of his hind surrogate mother, he fends off her guards, kidnaps her, and brings her back to his den in the woods. There, he rapes her, but nonetheless

Blanchandine falls in love with him. She gives herself to him a second time and they begin a relationship of mutual love. While talking about the love between Blanchandine and Tristan, the author moves to a description of Blanchandine's later sex change and the effect this has on her/his sexual relationships:

La se nourrit amour par tel conjonction  
C'onques puis la danzelle n'ama se Tristan non,  
N'oncques a homë aultre n'ot fornicacion,  
Në home nul a lui, que moult bien le scet on  
Car Jhesus le mua en tres belle façon  
D'omme vray et nobile...<sup>186</sup>

By this union love developed there to such an extent that the lady never again loved anyone but Tristan, and never fornicated with another man, nor did any other man fornicate with her, as we well know, because Jesus changed her into the wonderful shape of a man, true and noble...

The author's description indicates that Blanchandine remained faithful to Tristan not so much because of her loyalty, but because she turned into a man, and being a man rendered Blanchandin unable to have sex with another man; this is according to the text's logic, which implicitly rejects the possibility of same-sex sexual relations. This statement also offers a perspective into the sex change's effect on personhood, since it is said that Blanchandine never loved *anyone* but Tristan. But what about Clarinde? The text never says whether or not Blanchandin loves his wife Clarinde, but if we suppose that he did, then this passage would indicate that Blanchandine's emotional life ended at the moment when Blanchandin's began: even if Blanchandin loves his wife Clarinde, this does not have any effect on Blanchandine's past love for Tristan. If we assume, on the other hand, that Blanchandin does *not* love Clarinde, his marriage to her still would not compromise his love for Tristan. It is also possible to imagine same-sex love (without sexual relations) in this second scenario, if we assume that Blanchandin continues to love Tristan

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 4552-57.

after he becomes a man. In fact, Tristan and Blanchandin do spend fifteen years of their lives together, traveling and looking for Gilles – certainly not with their respective wives. I will say more about the relationship between Tristan and Blanchandin later in this chapter, and in chapter six.

Although the narrator begins with a description of the relationship between Blanchandine and Tristan, once he mentions that Blanchandine changed into a man the narrator then segues into Blanchandine and Clarinde’s marriage and the engendering of Gilles, as well as the supposed transition by baptism from “Morinde” to “Clarinde:”

...s’engendra par raison  
Saint Gille de Prouvence en Morinde au crin blon;  
Et s’estoit sa cousine germaine, se scet on,  
Mais elle l’ot a femme au vouloir de Jhesum,  
Et se fut baptisee et Clarinde ot a non.<sup>187</sup>

...and he [Blanchandin] consequently engendered Saint Gilles of Provence in the blonde Morinde; and she was her first cousin, as we know, but she [Blanchandine] took her as a wife as Jesus desired, and she [Morinde] was baptized and took the name Clarinde.

“Se scet on” indicates that we are supposed to know that they are first cousins, but this has only been mentioned obliquely previously, when we learned that Galafre is the sultan’s uncle. The tone regarding their kinship and subsequent marriage is ambivalent, if not apologetic, and emphasizes the religious approval of what otherwise might seem a strange relationship: “*mais elle l’ot a femme au vouloir de Jhesum.*” This foreshadowing moment is the only one in which some ambivalence is shown toward the marriage for the specific reason that they are cousins. What is also interesting here is what is happening with gender: if we look closely, there is a relationship between Blanchandin(e)’s gender and whether or not she/he is related to Clarinde.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 4557-61.

The mention of their kinship comes after the explanation of the sex change, but is in the past tense (“s’estoit”) and fits in grammatically with the information that follows about their marriage. Since personal pronouns are not always used, and possessive adjectives do not indicate the gender of the person who possesses, I have translated “he” or “she” according to what corresponds appropriately with the storyline. “He” engendered a child (this clearly follows the description of the sex change) but “she” (Blanchandine) was her (Morinde’s) cousin, since in the next line she (Blanchandine) takes a wife, which occurs before the sex change. The way that their relationship is recounted places their kinship alongside their marriage (saying, “they were cousins, but they married”), but their kinship is *not* linked with the sex change. The sex change is a separate issue associated with the end of Blanchandin(e)/Tristan relationship, in the first section of the quote.

To further clarify how the sex change is depicted here, it must be understood that there is a discrepancy in the order of events as they occur later in the text versus how they are described in this quote. The narrative order as it later plays out in the text is as follows: Blanchandine and Clarinde marry, then Blanchandine becomes a man, and then Clarinde is baptized. The foreshadowing quote re-orders the narrative. First Blanchandine transitions from female to male (“Car Jhesus le mua en tres belle façon / D’omme vray et nobile”), and subsequently engenders Gilles. Then, the narrative goes backwards and then forwards again, saying that Blanchandine (the woman) married her cousin, fast-forwards through the sex change again, and notes that Clarinde was baptized. Given that this story is told in the context of Blanchandine and Tristan’s relationship, the most important matter that the narrator considers first is why their relationship had to end: it ended because of the sex change and because of the need for Saint Gilles, so this is what is mentioned first. Secondly, he mentions with some hesitancy the marriage that preceded

the sex change. The “mais” seems to cast doubt on the appropriateness of two female cousins marrying, and perhaps also on the fact that they married before Clarinde’s baptism. For the moment, though, there is no specific condemnation of the fact that they *are* two women, or of the fact that Clarinde desired another woman.

In these two instances of foreshadowing, the author shows some uneasiness with the issue of incest and same-sex marriage. However, the sex change itself is always regarded in an entirely positive manner, because it produces Saint Gilles. The division between the two events, the same-sex marriage and the engendering of Gilles, is also evident in the way that the foreshadowing narration separates the sex change from the marriage between women - these are two distinct events and treated differently. Interestingly, the author never foreshadows Blanchandine’s cross-dressing nor the circumstances surrounding it, which indicates that her cross-dressing is not considered to be an element that leads directly to the sex change. By failing to mention her cross-dressing, the situation is greatly simplified and makes the holy imperative behind the sex change appear to be the one and only valid reason for the sex change. The narrative as it later unfolds belies this, since Tristan’s choice to cross-dress Blanchandine, and Clarinde’s desire for Blanchandin, are both practical impetuses for the eventual sex change. However, if we are to believe the message in the author’s foreshadowing, Blanchandine’s cross-dressing is only a detail that facilitates a sex change that is already predestined for reproductive and religious reasons.



#### 4.5 CROSS-DRESSING AND THE BEGINNING OF TRANSFORMATION

There is no doubt that the author wants to draw attention to the fact that the two women are related, whether he states it as simple fact or whether he shows some ambivalence about their marriage. Either way, he creates excitement about the upcoming storyline. By all accounts, Clarinde should recognize her cousin, which is what Blanchandine most fears as she arrives at the sultan's court with Tristan, Doon, Ganor, Anthoine, Richer, and a large group of Christian soldiers who are serving Murgafier, a pagan ally of the sultan. (The sultan and Murgafier have teamed up against Galafre, and have employed Christian mercenaries.) When Blanchandine expresses worry about being recognized, Tristan suggests that she dress as a knight; men's clothes are produced Blanchandine complies and puts them on. Tristan and the other men find this amusing, and we do not hear what Blanchandine thinks, except that she acquiesces to Tristan's suggestion.<sup>188</sup>

Despite the fact that the two cousins do not appear together in earlier plotlines, the idea that Clarinde would or should recognize Blanchandine, even when cross-dressed, seems plausible. In fact, the most implausible and surprising aspect of the cross-dressing plotline is the fact that Clarinde does *not* recognize her cousin. When Clarinde does see Blanchandine for the first time disguised as Blanchandin (at a feast that the Christians and Saracens share), the author notes their relationship and Clarinde's lack of recognition.

La fille du soudant que Clarinde on nommait  
Sur tous les chevaliers tengrement regardoit  
Blanchandine la belle qui sa cousine estoit  
Germaine au roy son pere, mais ne la congnoissoit,

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 12815-26.

Ainçois pour chevalier moult bien el le tenoit.<sup>189</sup>

The sultan's daughter Clarinde was looking tenderly out of all the knights at the beautiful Blanchandine, who was her cousin, the first cousin of her father the king, but she didn't recognize her. Rather, she thought he was a good knight.

Clarinde is looking at Blanchandine "sur tous les chevaliers," so he/she is labeled as one of the knights, and yet at the same time is still Blanchandine, Clarinde's cousin. This is also the first and only time that their kinship bond is identified so specifically: Blanchandine and the sultan (Clarinde's father) are first cousins, hence in today's terms we would call Blanchandine and Clarinde first cousins once removed. In the next line we see an opposition: "mais ne la congnoissoit, / Ançois pour chevalier moult bien el le tenoit." I read this scene as distinguishing between the female cousin, Blanchandine, and Blanchandin, an imaginary male knight who is *not* presented as a cousin. When Blanchandine takes on the male persona of Blanchandin, she becomes a Christian knight with an imaginary past – "Blanchandin" is not just the male version of Blanchandine, but a different person entirely. He has to be a different person in order for the ruse to work - a successful disguise depends on the effacement of Blanchandine's entire history and connection to her Saracen family, and the creation of a new identity.

#### **4.5.1 Cross-dressed Blanchandin as an intermediary persona**

"Blanchandin's" past is in fact never articulated, except for in the scene I discussed in chapter three, wherein Blanchandin tells Clarinde that Raimon is his sister's son (when he is actually her own son). Thus, since Clarinde also knows that Tristan is Raimon's father, for her, Blanchandin is Tristan's brother-in-law, and that is the extent of her knowledge about him. (And she is quite

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 12939-43.

uninterested in even this information.) As Sarah Jane Dietzman has noted, Blanchandine maintains her identity as female and as Tristan's wife throughout the time that she is cross dressed – she does not desire to be male, and she is very much in love with Tristan.<sup>190</sup> While this is true, saying that “she does not undergo any real change in self-perception” is not entirely accurate.<sup>191</sup> The reader is never privy to Blanchandine's thoughts during this time, but a study of her behavior and speech when cross-dressed and when interacting with Clarinde reveals Blanchandin's imaginary identity to be an intermediary persona between Blanchandine and the post-sex change Blanchandin. The effacement of the kinship tie between Blanchandine and Clarinde begins to take place through the development of this persona.

The “Blanchandin” identity is one of a number of transformative steps that Blanchandine goes through. First she converts to Christianity, which creates a significant separation between her and her Saracen cousin. Then she adopts a new male persona who, in the way that he is imagined, is not related to Clarinde, and is also Christian. By this point, she has already gone from Saracen to Christian and, in her external persona, from a woman to a man. The very fact that the disguise succeeds so well, at least when it comes to Clarinde, implies that the change in religion, the change in (external) gender identity (how she/he is identified by others), and even the imaginary change in family history that goes along with the new gender identity, all combine to create a disguise that is more than a disguise – it actually begins to create the history and personality of Blanchandin, the same Blanchandin who will later complete this process by having a sex change.

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<sup>190</sup> Sarah Jane Dietzman, “Miracle (Wo)men,” 243.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

When Blanchandin and Clarinde marry, the emotional line between Blanchandine and Blanchandin becomes blurred. As Blanchandine becomes more invested in her role as Clarinde's husband, she begins feeling responsibility for "Blanchandin's" lack of virility. At the same time, Blanchandine never stops loving Tristan, and mourns his supposed death. In the following section, I examine the Saracen marriage of the two women and its emotional and political repercussions.

#### **4.5.2 Conversion, sin, and a same-sex marriage**

While Blanchandine tries to stall Clarinde's marriage plans, the sultan and Murgafier decide to attack Galafre and his troops, aided by Tristan and his group of Christian soldiers. Clarinde forces Blanchandin to stay out of battle in order to protect him, while Tristan must fight. After the battle, Tristan is nowhere to be found and is thought to be dead. Two other deaths due to this battle are pivotal: both the sultan and Galafre are killed. There is no scene wherein Blanchandine learns of her father's death, as if it would matter little to her, but Tristan does actually express some sadness simply because of the fact that Galafre was his father-in-law. As for Clarinde, she can scarcely muster up some regret for her father's death, since she is now free to choose her own husband.<sup>192</sup> Clarinde inherits the kingdom upon her father's death - she is "le drois hoirs" [the rightful heir] of a large region that includes Babylon and Persia.<sup>193</sup> There is no commentary from the narrator or from any of the characters on the fact that she is the heir, but in contrast, Christian women in this text are not depicted as being able to inherit. Clarinde will subsequently

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<sup>192</sup> *TN*, 14255; 14333-37.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 14984.

also rule Armenia, Blanchandine's homeland, after the residents surrender to her following Galafre's death. Although her subjects appear to have no objection to a woman ruling the kingdom, Clarinde herself finds that "dame sans seigneur ne vault un esperon" [a lady without a lord is not worth a spur], and she feels that they will be more vulnerable to attack without a lord.<sup>194</sup> Apparently she does not need to marry in order to rule, but Clarinde still wants to take a husband.<sup>195</sup> She also wants to give some of her land to her husband, saying to Blanchandin, "De la grant Babilone je vous en fais le don" [I give you the great Babylon as a gift].<sup>196</sup> It appears that Clarinde is doing this of her own will, not because it is the custom of her people that a husband receives a wife's lands upon marriage.

Clarinde proposes marriage to Blanchandin in front of a group of her advisors, and Blanchandin's first response is to say he is a poor man and is not worthy of her – and besides, he says, if the sultan were alive, he would never let Clarinde make such a match. Clarinde declares that she does not care at all about his origin, and her councilors support her in her disregard. The narrator offers no commentary on this situation, but the fact that Clarinde has absolutely no care for the family origin nor the financial status of her future husband certainly makes her (and her advisors) seem foolish, for one thing, and also guilty of transacting a marriage between herself and her cousin. That is, it is not just that she is fooled by Blanchandine's disguise; rather she is

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 14991-93.

<sup>195</sup> Clarinde uses her newly found sovereignty to get what she wants by intimidating her councilors, and she acknowledges that this would not be the case were her father alive. Addressing Blanchandin, she threatens him with violence if he does not marry her: "Se le soudant vescu, ne vous eüsse ja...Ne me reffusés ja, / Car souveraine suis de tous ceulx qui sont ça, / Sy sera cil honnis qu'a moy n'obaïra" (Ibid., 15126-30) [If the sultan were alive, I would never have you...don't refuse me, because I reign over all the people here, and whoever fails to obey me will be condemned].

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 14627.

purposefully turning away from information that Blanchandin is trying to give her. On the one hand, Clarinde's hot-headedness and lustfulness looks like a criticism of imprudence in the transacting of political marriages, and perhaps simply a stereotypical picture of a foolish Saracen. On the other hand, the fact that the two are destined to come together in order to engender Saint Gilles attenuates Clarinde's outlandish behavior. Still, the birth of Gilles is only a positive outcome for the world that is granted Saint Gilles, whereas Blanchandine and Clarinde will undergo punishment for their marriage. In the next section, I show that the sinfulness of their marriage is, in the text, associated with inter-religious sexual relations; however, the problem of inter-religious relations also reads as a veiled reference to the sin of homoerotic desire, the sin that the text claims brings about Clarinde's troubles.

#### **4.5.3 Same-sex and inter-religious marriage**

Blanchandin finally agrees to marry Clarinde, but he gravely informs her that he will not have sex with her unless she is baptized. The plan to stall the revelation of Blanchandine's sex by demanding Clarinde's baptism is actually Aiglentine's idea; she proposes that they all escape at night before Blanchandine's secret can be exposed.<sup>197</sup> In Blanchandin's speech to Clarinde declaring his opposition to inter-religious sex, he maintains that such a relationship is a terrible sin. This twenty-one-line speech is peppered with strong language; he says that any man who has sex with a Saracen woman "va contre la foy et va s'ame dampnant" [goes against the faith and damns his soul]. He will not do such a thing: "Ains veul sauver mon ame, ne m'yray delitant / Mon corps en tel peché" [Rather, I want to save my soul; my body will not have pleasure in such

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 15060.

a sin].<sup>198</sup> This speech is significant for both its implications about the sinfulness of their marriage and also for what it says about Blanchandin(e)'s gender and sexual identity. To begin with the question of identity, note that as soon as Blanchandin has agreed to become Clarinde's husband, she/he begins to take on the voice of the future sex-changed Blanchandin. Within his objection to having sex with Clarinde, Blanchandin speaks as if he already has had a sex change. That is, his adamant insistence upon Clarinde's baptism makes it sound as if he truly would, and could, have sex with her once she is baptized; since Clarinde's expectation is that she will have penetrative sex with a man who has a penis, the pleasure that Blanchandin imagines for himself is linked to the presence of this organ. After their first sexless night together, Blanchandin emphasizes specifically male pleasure when speaking to Clarinde, who wonders why he cannot at least put his arm around her and kiss her. Blanchandin replies that he shouldn't even think of this, "[c]ar char d'omme eschauffee ne se peut reffroidier" [because a man's flesh, once heated up, cannot cool down].<sup>199</sup> Here, the line between Blanchandine's and Blanchandin's thoughts on sex is blurred. On the one hand, Blanchandine takes on Blanchandin's thoughts, feelings, and potential pleasures, and imagines himself as a man with a penis who will be able to feel this pleasure and please Clarinde once she is baptized. On the other hand, the text gives no indication of whether Blanchandine is "acting" or whether she really implicates herself in the idea of this pleasure. Will kissing and embracing arouse Blanchandin, or Blanchandine (or a little bit of both)? While Blanchandine's erotic thoughts lend a homoerotic tone to the scene, in a later scene that I will

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 15318; 15320-21.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 15490.

discuss shortly, some of *TN*'s characters deny the possibility that two women could have sexual pleasure together.

Blanchandin continues his speech, saying that he will not have sex with Clarinde or kiss her (“a vous n’abiteroye nē yroie baisant”) unless she is baptized,<sup>200</sup> and that he would sleep next to her for all the days of his life, before he would ever have sex with her – but if she is baptized, only then he would obey her (“Tous les jours de ma vie yroye o vous couchant, / Ançois qu’a vostre char jē alasse abitant. / Mais s’estiés baptisiee, je feroye vo commant”).<sup>201</sup> Blanchandin’s frequent insistence upon baptism does stall sexual relations, but also sets him up for failure, because his demand is effective – Clarinde is so in love/in lust that she will be baptized at the earliest possible opportunity now that she knows that her religion is the only impediment to her sexual fulfillment. Once she is baptized, Blanchandin will, in principle, have to have sex with her in order to uphold his end of the agreement. Indeed, upon hearing Blanchandin’s ultimatum, Clarinde responds immediately that she will gladly be baptized; she even wants to go to France with him to do it. Clarinde also says that she knows well that her gods are worth nothing and she now believes in his religion (“vo loy tieng a vraie”).<sup>202</sup> Since Clarinde will go to any lengths to be baptized, Blanchandin’s insistence on baptism is a doomed stalling method. Moreover, the plan begins to sound genuine on his part, as if he truly expected to be able to fulfill his promise once Clarinde is baptized.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 15324.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 15329-31.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 15342.



Concerning the question of sin, although Blanchandin identifies the sin in their possible sexual relationship very clearly as that of inter-religious sexual relations, this is in fact an imaginary sin that would result from the imaginary relationship between Blanchandin, a Christian man, and Clarinde, a Saracen woman. This sexual relationship, as it is conceived of as one of heterosexual penetrative sex between two people of different religions, cannot actually occur because Blanchandin does not have a penis. So, on one level, we have what Blanchandin qualifies as a terrible sin, but which is imaginary in the sense that it can never happen in Blanchandin's current physical state. That sin could not actually be committed.<sup>203</sup> However, on another level of reality wherein we think of Blanchandine as a woman, two other sins are about to be committed: a marriage between two women, and a marriage between cousins related in the third degree. As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, the author/narrator only makes one direct statement about the sinfulness of same-sex homoeroticism, saying that Clarinde will be punished for marrying Blanchandine: "Et espousa la belle a la loy de Mahon, / Et geust avecques lui dedens son pavillon, / De quoy il lui advint puis grant perdicion" [And she married the beautiful lady according to Saracen law, and lay with her in her tent, and for that reason great calamity later befell her].<sup>204</sup> Clearly the author is interested in presenting a plotline involving the titillation of possible sex between women. However, unlike the author of *Yde et Olive*, he does not portray these two women kissing and embracing in bed; even so, he condemns Clarinde simply for having lain next to Blanchandine. At the moment in the narration wherein

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<sup>203</sup> Regarding punishments for miscegenation in the Crusader settlements, according to the Council of Nablus in 1120: "a Latin man found guilty of miscegenation with a Saracen woman was to be castrated, while the woman was to have her nose removed. Western canonists ignored miscegenation; presumably it was not a pressing issue." Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 207.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 13055-61.

Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde are sharing a bed, however, he locates the issue of sin in inter-religious sex rather than in incest or in homosexual sex. This ambiguous treatment of sin continues throughout the text.

Perhaps making Blanchandin so adamant about the imaginary sin between them is a way to speak about homosexuality and incest, which are otherwise treated in a much more oblique fashion throughout the text. Concerning incest, the fact that they are cousins has been stated several times, as we saw above, with some ambivalence but no direct criticism. The homoerotic aspect of their relationship is treated in a humorous fashion for the most part, and the other characters' reactions show that they do not believe two women can please each other sexually. When Blanchandine first takes on her disguise, her male friends laugh and make jokes; Antoine says, "[a] moy recouvreroit trop mieulx sa medecine. / Maisement est aidee poulle de la geline" [I would do better to receive her charms. A chicken doesn't get much from a hen]. Richer then adds that he would also like to have sex with her, particularly since he has not touched a woman in seventeen years.<sup>205</sup> Their commentary, light-hearted for them, reveals Clarinde's objectification and the dismissal of the possibility of same-sex pleasure.

Regarding the sinfulness of their marriage and the question of religion, it also stands out that Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde are married according to the Saracen law or custom. I can find no evidence that, subsequent to Blanchandine's sex change, they are remarried by a priest. It is possible that the medieval audience understood their Saracen marriage to be binding because of the fact that Blanchandin and Clarinde later had sex; as James Brundage explains, "[i]f [new converts] had sex even once with their pagan partner after conversion, that transformed their

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<sup>205</sup> *TN*, 13390-95.

prior, non-Christian marriage into a full-fledged Christian union, which was indissoluble.”<sup>206</sup> In the scene in which the two are married, the Saracen nature of their marriage is emphasized; it is treated as a rather exotic, sumptuous event. First, as soon as Blanchandin agrees to get married, Clarinde commands that everyone stop mourning her father, which underscores a certain depravity on her part: her sexual obsession trumps even the proper mourning period. Then Aiglentine dresses Clarinde in a rich gown, and the ceremony commences:

Aiglente la roÿne moult bien appareilla;  
Sa cousine germaine tantost espousera.  
Sarrasin mainent joye, mainte trompe sonna.  
Ou palais d’Ermenie ou maint paien y a,  
Fut Mahon apportés que chascun honora.  
...  
Blanchandine la belle ou tant de beauté a,  
A la loy Mahon Clarindë espousa,  
Mais oncques n’y offry, car elle ne daigna.  
Moult fut riche la feste ou palais d’Ermenie,  
Blanchandine espousa la roÿne jolie.  
Ly ung et l’autre est femme, Clarinde nel dit mye,  
Cuide bien qu’i soit homs, ainsy est affaitie.<sup>207</sup>

Aiglentine readied the queen properly; she will marry her first cousin shortly. The joyful Saracens sounded trumpets. [An idol of] Mohammed was brought into the Armenian palace where many pagans were gathered so that they could each worship it...The beautiful Blanchandine married Clarinde according to Saracen law, but she never offered herself there, because she did not deign to. The celebration in the Armenian palace was sumptuous. Blanchandine married the pretty queen. Both of them are women, but Clarinde says nothing – she thinks that he is a man, since he looks like one.

The passage emphasizes Blanchandine and Clarinde’s kinship, as well as the fact that they are both women, while exoticizing the Saracen marriage. The pagans are unaware of the consanguinity and the fact that Blanchandine is a woman, but their joyous celebration of the

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<sup>206</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 296. The passage refers to a twelfth-century opinion in a debate over marriage and conversion.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 15353-57; 15367-73.

marriage highlights their ignorance of this fact, and this corresponds with the emphasis on their worshipping of an idol; their behavior is depicted as wrong on multiple levels. Even so, this scene does not place all the blame for the marriage on the foolishness of paganism/pagans; rather, it implies that Blanchandine is partially guilty as well by placing her in a position of knowledge and decision-making. Note that of the two women who marry, Blanchandine knows that they are both women, and Clarinde does not. In both of the lines declaring that they married, Blanchandine is the actor: “Blanchandine married Clarinde according to the Saracen law;” “Blanchandine married the pretty queen.” Clarinde is lustful, but she is also innocent, at least consciously, of desiring another woman. Of course, Blanchandine’s cross-dressing forces her into a life-or-death position (Clarinde would have her executed if she finds out), so she cannot really be blamed for accepting the marriage. This section of text, though, places her in the position of a husband taking a wife, and thus she appears as the actor who made the decision. By portraying Clarinde’s lust and Blanchandine’s knowing entrance into a same-sex marriage, neither woman appears entirely guilty or entirely innocent in this marriage. The distribution of guilt between the two women helps explain why both later undergo some kind of punishment, although the text claims only Clarinde was punished. In the next section I show that Blanchandine continues to be portrayed as virtuous in the early days of their marriage, in comparison to the lustful Clarinde.

#### **4.5.4 Blanchandin: a virtuous husband**

The above marriage scene is followed by one displaying Blanchandine’s great Christian piety, which also corresponds to her refusal to have sex with, and her lack of desire for, Clarinde. After the wedding, Clarinde is ready to “mener joye et deduit, estre souvent basisie,” [enjoy pleasure

and be kissed often] whereas Blanchandine not only completely rejects her, but also is thinking that she would gladly replace Clarinde with Tristan.<sup>208</sup> Blanchandine then prays that she might lie down next to this queen who is “sy eschauffee / Et sur la convoitise d’estre depucellee” [so hot and bothered and dying to be deflowered] “sans estre ravisee” [without being found out].<sup>209</sup> God answers her prayer, and makes Clarinde fall asleep right away; God thus protects Blanchandine from Clarinde’s lust and also the revelation of her sex.

This bedroom scene shows Blanchandine to be a virtuous Christian woman devoted to her (supposedly) dead husband, but her wifely role coexists with her identification with Blanchandin’s husbandly role. Earlier, Blanchandin took quite seriously the interdiction of inter-religious sex, and he acted as if he really were a virtuous Christian husband looking after his own soul. After Blanchandin’s marriage to Clarinde, he also shows respect for his new wife and a desire to protect her from other men, but specifically because she now believes in God. During the Saracen marriage ceremony, Doon nudges Blanchandin and whispers a plan in his ear: when night falls, he will come into their bedroom and replace Blanchandin; Clarinde will not know the difference. But Blanchandin is shocked by this idea: “ja ne lui avenra. / Puis qu’elle croit en Dieu, ja ne consentira / Qu’elle soit point deceue, ançois l’eslongera” [that will never happen to her. Since she believes in God, he will never allow her to be deceived at all, rather he will keep her away from it].<sup>210</sup> This passage offers an interesting comparison to the previous scene wherein Blanchandin claimed that inter-religious sex was a sin. When Doon proposes this plan,

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 15413.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 15426-28.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 15364-66.

Blanchandin's objection is *not* for the reason of Doon and Clarinde's differing religions. Doon's offer to have sex with Clarinde and Blanchandin's reaction thus show that Blanchandin's fear of the sin of inter-religious sexual relations is specific to his relationship with Clarinde and does not represent a general sentiment in the text. Doon himself is the product of a Christian-Saracen relationship, being the son of Gui and Honorée.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, no one expressed concern when Antoine and Richer said they wanted to have sex with Clarinde. The fact that these other inter-religious relationships are proposed or actually occur without problem makes Blanchandin's insistence on Clarinde's baptism seem out of place. His insistence functions as an effective delay to what up until now appears to be the inevitable conclusion of Blanchandine's exposure as a fraud. The insistence that inter-religious sex is wrong, but only when associated with Blanchandin and Clarinde, also offers a clue that the discourse around inter-religious sex substitutes for that of same-sex sexual relations, the elephant in the room throughout the section on Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde's marriage.

It also seems that Doon's proposal is offensive to Blanchandin because it would amount to rape. As with Aye, who as a cross-dressed woman experienced both the threat of rape and being perceived as a possible rapist, Blanchandin(e) also sees rape from male and female perspectives. She was raped by Tristan, and now in the role of a man, she wants to protect Clarinde from rape. Blanchandine's adoption of the role of a protector mimics what she has learned from Tristan and Doon in terms of chivalrous behavior, but she clearly exceeds them, since their behavior is at times excessively violent or morally wrong. It is Tristan who suggests the disguise that will protect her from her relatives, but he then fails to see that Clarinde's love

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<sup>211</sup> Doon is raised by a Christian foster family. Though the fact that Doon is a bastard bars him from inheriting from Gui, he is not treated any differently because he is the child of an inter-religious relationship.

for Blanchandin puts Blanchandine in real bodily danger – instead, he and the other men laugh about her situation.<sup>212</sup> In becoming Blanchandin, Blanchandine strives for ideal Christian masculinity, and she surpasses the models of the men around her by truly protecting Clarinde.

#### 4.5.5 Virility and shame

To conclude this section on Blanchandin pre-sex change, I will show that Blanchandin identifies with his potential sexual role as Clarinde’s husband and feels shame for his lack of virility. He takes quite seriously the mockery of other women who learn that he and Clarinde did not have sex on their wedding night. In response to their teasing, instead of telling them that he did not have sex with her because she is not baptized, he says that he was sick that night. There is no narrative explanation for telling such a lie (he is not supposed to be hiding the fact that he is Christian from anyone), and his explanation does not make him look better in their eyes – in fact, it appears as a poor, invented excuse in comparison to a legitimate religious concern. The four queens to whom he is speaking call him a “faulx mary” [a false husband] and leave Blanchandine with a great deal of shame (“La souffry moult de honte la belle et endura” [then the beautiful woman suffered and endured great shame]).<sup>213</sup> It is the female Blanchandine (“la belle”) in particular who feels shame for Blanchandin’s lack of virility – it seems to be both *her*, and his, lack of virility. Blanchandin really is a “faulx mary,” but not in the way that they think. This scene creates an equivalency between an impotent or sexually uninterested man, and a

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<sup>212</sup> “When a bothered Blanchandin(e) complains of the situation to her husband, he merely chuckles in response: ‘Quant Tristan l’entendi, sy seigna sa facon / Et puis en print a rire dessoubz son chaperon (13089-90).’” Dietzman, “Miracle (Wo)men,” 247-248.

<sup>213</sup> *TN*, 15550.

cross-dressed woman who can't respond to her wife's demands. The excuse of illness also seems to come from a place of panic and shame; when she is confronted by these women whom she does not know, she loses her cool and the story that she has repeated so many times to Clarinde goes out the window. After this incident, she goes right back to "Blanchandine" mode - she calls upon Jesus, laments her lost husband, and cries on Doon's shoulder. Naturally, Blanchandine is affected by the terrible situation in which she finds herself, and she cries for the loss of her husband and essentially, her former life, to which it appears more and more that she cannot return. However, the fact that she feels shame for her lack of virility, something that is not at all her fault or in her control, indicates that she is beginning to conflate her own emotions with those of "Blanchandin."

Blanchandin(e) will retaliate against Clarinde for this humiliation. The day passes and the night comes again, and Blanchandine is still feeling shameful, to the point that when she speaks as Blanchandin to Clarinde that night, she harshly blames Clarinde for the mockery that he has undergone, specifically using the words "blasme" and "honte" against Clarinde several times. He tells her that if Clarinde tells others that they did not have sex, she brings shame upon herself by drawing attention to her own lasciviousness. In the final line of his speech, Blanchandin threatens her: "Taisés vous en atant ou maux vous en venra" [Keep quiet about it or something bad will happen to you].<sup>214</sup> The usually gregarious and forceful Clarinde is finally silenced by this threat, and turns away from Blanchandin. We see here that in the married relationship between Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde, gender and power dynamics replicate those of a male-female couple. Blanchandin(e) is the victim of women's gossip, and instead of seeing herself as one of these women and shaking it off since she knows it's not her fault that they are not having

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 15582.



sex, rather she sees herself as Blanchandin the man, who must be hostile to these accusatory women. It is as if by becoming a victim of women's gossip, he becomes a "real man," and he allies himself with other men who have been previously accused and humiliated in this way. As Blanchandin, he then turns the tables on Clarinde by using gossipy speech against her in the same way (essentially slut-shaming her), such that again he sees himself as allied with other men who have had the duty of putting a woman in her place. Clarinde is not allowed to speak, because her speech humiliates him and insults his virility. Thus, in this case, it does not matter that Blanchandin is not "really" a man; he is a man in the context of these gender dynamics and uses the power that he has simply by being perceived as a man to regain control over a situation that is unfavorable to him.

We have seen that cross-dressed Blanchandin begins to see himself in a husband's role in a marriage: he desires to protect his wife, but also to maintain a position of power over her, and he feels embarrassed when he is publicly shamed about his lack of virility. Meanwhile, Blanchandine's overall feeling is nonetheless that of despair at the thought of being found out as a woman, and at the loss of her husband; she still has not expressed any desire to stay in the role of Blanchandin. In the next section I examine the crisis that leads to the sex change, how Blanchandine understands her impending sex change, and what it will mean to her past.

## 4.6 THE CHANGE OF SEX

### 4.6.1 Bodily and spiritual rebirth: change and continuity

Blanchandin's power over Clarinde's speech is brief, because within four days Blanchandine's situation reaches a turning point and crisis. A messenger sent by Blanchandine's (never before mentioned) brother recognizes Blanchandine as soon as he sees her, although she is still in disguise. The messenger is alarmed enough about this situation that he goes to Clarinde and tells her that her husband is a woman – but he does not identify her specifically as Blanchandine of Armenia. His ease of recognition highlights Clarinde's continued ignorance of Blanchandin's identity. Her ignorance is depicted as willful, as she puts the messenger in prison “sans lui demander la sienne estracion” [without asking him where he is from].<sup>215</sup> She plans to have the messenger executed if she finds out that he is lying about Blanchandin being a woman, which she will determine by forcing Blanchandin to take a bath in front of her.

When Clarinde proposes the bath, Blanchandine realizes that there is no longer anything she can do to save herself, and is ready to accept death. Alban Georges notes that in medieval literature one often finds a similar scene wherein a woman is forced to reveal herself naked to a powerful man.<sup>216</sup> With this in mind, Clarinde's demand does appear to be “un abus de pouvoir, à connotation masculine.”<sup>217</sup> Although Clarinde never directly threatens Blanchandin, she mutters

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 15661.

<sup>216</sup> Georges, *TN*, 570. He cites le roman du *Comte de Poitiers*, les romans du cycle de la Gageure, and le *Lai de Graelant*.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 571.

threats to herself in a few monologues, first saying that she will kill him if he does not marry her, and in this scene saying to herself that she will have Blanchandin burned if she finds out that he is not a man.<sup>218</sup> Blanchandine's expectation that she will be executed after her exposure in the bath is therefore not unreasonable. In historical context, Clarinde's plan to have Blanchandine killed also corresponds to what might have happened to a woman caught pretending to be a man. According to medieval court records, the women in same-sex relationships who were condemned to death were those who were seen as usurping the role of men, by courting women or by having sex with them using dildos.<sup>219</sup> Although Blanchandine is avoiding sex, she is presenting herself falsely as a man and given Clarinde's powerful position, she certainly could have her executed. On the contrary, Clarinde does not see herself as guilty of a crime for having possibly desired a woman, she only chastises herself for her stupidity when she realizes she might have made a mistake. Although homoerotic desire in itself could not be grounds for an accusation in a court of law, it is noteworthy that same-sex sexual activity was nonetheless considered sinful, since penitentials condemned sexual contact between women.<sup>220</sup> In *TN*, we can see such a split in the types of punishments that Clarinde and Blanchandine might be expected to undergo: Clarinde desires another woman, and her punishment will be physical and spiritual, but not judicial.

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<sup>218</sup> *TN*, 15698.

<sup>219</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 142.

<sup>220</sup> Karras describes a moralized bible illustration representing sin and temptation in which two women embrace and kiss each other (*Ibid.*, 139). "Female masturbation with a dildo or other device carried a penance of one year if done alone, or three years if done with other women" (*Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 167). Sex between women was routinely condemned in penitentials, but it did not receive nearly as much attention as did incest, inter-religious marriage, fornication, and adultery (*Ibid.*, 213).

Blanchandine falsely presents herself as a man, and she is depicted as facing judicial punishment (tyrannical judicial punishment, since Clarinde would be her sole judge); it is only thanks to her sex change that she does not undergo this punishment.

The dire prospect of impending death that Blanchandine faces is now followed by a series of events that leads to her sex change, and thus the avoidance of death. Paula Leverage has noted that the sex change in this text is “as much about religious transformation as about a change of sexual identity.” There is clearly a link between the proposed bath and an idea of baptism of a new body; Blanchandine comes perilously close to death, and then receives a new body that allows her to enter the bath and continue living.<sup>221</sup> I am interested in the religious context of Blanchandine’s sex change for two reasons: first, our understanding of their same-sex marriage, of Clarinde’s homoerotic desire, of their consanguineous marriage, is invariably linked back to the narrative choice to make them Saint Gilles’ parents. This makes their union and the sex change appear in a positive light. It is not just Gilles who is holy, but also the situation from which he is born: in some way, both Blanchandine and Clarinde must be holy as well. The next sections of this chapter explore how their problematic behaviors are reconciled with their holy destiny. Second, the idea of rebirth is also important to consider regarding the new Blanchandin’s identity. It is easy to see a parallel between baptism and rebirth, and the act of changing sex. But what kind of rebirth is actually occurring? What parts of Blanchandin(e) are renewed or regenerated, what parts are lost, and what parts stay the same?

The sudden and unexplained arrival of a rampaging stag at court gives Blanchandine an opportunity to escape the proposed bath. This is the second deer in *TN* with magical or mystical

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<sup>221</sup> Leverage, “Sex and the Sacraments in Tristan de Nanteuil,” 519. Concerning the connection between the bath and baptism, Leverage also notes that baptism by immersion was the norm until 1311, when sprinkling began to be allowed (523).

properties; we saw the role of *la serve*, Tristan's surrogate mother, in chapter three. In the ensuing havoc, Blanchandine grabs a sword hanging on the wall and runs after the stag, first through the city and then through fields into the woods. It is specified that Blanchandine is using this as an opportunity to escape from Clarinde's nefariousness and leave this situation entirely; at first, she does not really have the intention of finding the stag and killing it. In this moment she is uninterested in accomplishing a task that will fortify Blanchandin's masculinity; she is interested in preserving her (female) life, even without Tristan, whom she still believes is dead. After this situation has been established, a new *laisse* begins and the tone changes; the narrator explains that what follows is a true story "de sains et de saintes que Jhesus ot tant cher...on la pourrait moult bien ou moustier prescher" [about men and women saints whom Jesus held so dear...one could very well hear it preached in a church].<sup>222</sup> This statement sets the scene: we know that we are finally about to hear about the tantalizing sex change that has been mentioned so many times, the sex change that will allow the birth of the holy Gilles. But since the upcoming story as a whole is characterized as holy, it also seems that it is Blanchandine's very change of sex that is worthy to be preached in a church. With this change in narrative tone, we leave behind Blanchandine's "selfish" desire to save herself and we turn to a different model wherein Blanchandine undergoes a Passion-like experience in which she gives up her body to God. As Alban Georges notes, by mentioning both *sains* and *saintes*, it is also implied that

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<sup>222</sup> *TN*, 15773-75.

Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde are considered saintly figures themselves; however, the only “official” saint that appears in the subsequent text is Saint Gilles.<sup>223</sup>

Because she wants to be sure no one will find her, Blanchandine goes deeper and deeper into the forest and off the paths, such that she begins to go through thorny places. Her legs and feet are cut up, and her clothing is ripped to shreds. As Paula Leverage notes, her experience is “a sort of way of the Cross, in both its contents and rhythm, through which she suffers Christ’s Passion.” She falls more than once, and thorns pierce her foot and head.<sup>224</sup> Once she begins to undergo this painful, Christ-like experience, she prays to the Virgin to thank her for sending her sufferings. She also addresses a prayer directly to Tristan, saying that if she were a man she would kill Aggrapart, Tristan’s supposed murderer, but this is not expressed in the form of a request to be a man. The content of Blanchandine’s continued prayers gives us clues about the continuity of Blanchandin(e)’s personhood after changing sex. Blanchandine says here that she will remain faithful to Tristan even after his death:

Puis que jë ay perdu le dansel de jouvent,  
Jamés j’aray mary ne de home abitement.  
Ains veul pour son amour vivre sy povrement  
C’on ne sache mon non ne qui sont my parent.  
Sy que la turterelle vourray fere ensemment:  
Quant elle pert son mazle a nul aultre ne prent.  
Ainsy veul maintenir mon corps et mon jouvent.<sup>225</sup>

Since I lost the young man, I will never have another husband nor have sex with another man. Rather, for his love I want to live so poorly that no one will know my name nor who

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<sup>223</sup> “Le souci du trouvère semble de préfigurer la sainteté du fils à travers les épreuves de ses parents. Ces derniers ne seront toutefois jamais canonisés, fût-ce dans l’imagination de l’auteur.” Georges, *TN*, 585.

<sup>224</sup> Leverage, *Sex and the Sacraments*, 525-26.

<sup>225</sup> *TN*, 16099-105.

my parents are. I would like to do as the turtledove: once she loses her mate, she won't take another. In this way I want to preserve my body and my life.

Blanchandine's declaration here is the elaborated version of the foreshadowing scene that I examined earlier, wherein it was said that Blanchandine would never love or have sex with anyone besides Tristan. Blanchandine declares here that she will not have another husband nor have sex with another man. As we know, after the sex change, Blanchandin will go on to have sex with Clarinde, and at this moment, she is already married to Clarinde. The specificity of not taking a *husband* or having sex with a *man*, as opposed to never marrying or having sex again in general, shows that there is a clear split between Blanchandine and Blanchandin when it comes to sex. Blanchandin's later sexual activities do not "count" towards those of Blanchandine: the fact that he has sex with Clarinde does not destroy Blanchandine's promise to preserve her body. Whereas we have seen that emotions and desires have some continuity so far in Blanchandine's gender transition, there is on the other hand a split between Blanchandine and Blanchandin's sexual integrity; their differently-sexed bodies each experience sex separately and independently. The sexed body (that is, presence of female or male genitals) is exclusively linked to its sexual and reproductive purposes: the female body is for sexual enjoyment with Tristan, the male body is for pleasing Clarinde and engendering Gilles.

The second part of her statement concerns how she expects to live her life now that Tristan is gone: she wants to live in a humble fashion, without anyone knowing her name or her parentage. The fact that she mentions her relatives is intriguing, since these relatives are Saracen, and even before changing sex, her connection to her Saracen family is compromised. Her main goal is to keep away from her family and not be recognized; her mother is dead and she has no interest in contact with her father, who then dies as well. Blanchandine's wish to reject her noble origins highlights the fact that one does not obtain new parents or other relatives upon

converting, even though one might reject one's Saracen parentage. Blanchandine desires to break with her family, which implies that she still *has* family to reject. When she becomes Blanchandin after the sex change, however, a connection to her Saracen family (even in terms of a rejection) is never mentioned again, as if that bond had already been broken by the sex change. Concerning her desire to live poorly, Blanchandine's vow to live in humble poverty in fact will be transferred to *Blanchandin's* experience: he will wander in penance for thirty years, no one knowing that he is the formerly-great King Blanchandin. Thus, the break from her family and the cutting off from the world are both accomplished through the sex change.

Shortly after she states her intention to remain loyal to Tristan, the stag appears and bows down before her, and then an angel appears and asks her if she wants to be a woman or a man. At first Blanchandine does not want to make this choice and hopes to defer to God's wishes in the matter, but the angel insists that she choose. In her response to the angel, she uses the words "le mien corps" or "mon corps" three times, emphasizing that this sex change is a sort of sacrifice of her female body. In particular, the body is cited for three purposes: one, she is giving up her (female) body to God ("Puis qu'il est ainsy chose que Dieu m'ordonnera / En icelle maniere que le mien corps vourra, / Ungs homs veul devenir" [Since it is thus that God will command me in this way that he desires my body, I want to become a man]); two, she will use her new body to avenge Tristan ("mon corps le vengera" [I [my body] will avenge him]); and three, the reason she will use her body to avenge him is because she loved him ("Et ens ou non de lui que mon corps tant ama, / Veul devenir ungs homs" [And in the name of the one whom I [my body] has loved so much, I want to become a man]).<sup>226</sup> Through these statements, we see her body transitioning from female to male, but there are also moments of blurriness wherein the integrity

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 16165-67; 16169; 16170-71.



of the body and mind cause the split between a male person and a female person to be less clear-cut. Her female body is clearly sacrificed, but in some way still lives on because it is the love that her female body experienced that causes her new male body to then enact vengeance. It is also interesting that she says that her *body* “ama” Tristan. The verb is in the past tense, and she mentions her body rather than just saying “je.” By emphasizing the body, she reveals the reality that will come to pass after the sex change: Blanchandin might in fact still love Tristan, but their bodily love (i.e., sexual activity) will be in the past.

#### **4.6.2 Physical changes and recognition**

In the following scene, Blanchandine finally becomes a “real man” through the acquisition of male genitals. Because the physical change so radically alters Blanchandin’s destiny, causing him to be accepted by others as a man, at first glance it appears that it is simply the presence of the genitals that imparts all “masculine” abilities. Blanchandin immediately returns to the palace, has sex, engenders a son, is crowned king, and leads an army in battle. However, when we look more closely at how these events actually unfold, it becomes clear that Blanchandin’s identity as a man develops *through* these events; they do not automatically result from his acquisition of male genitals. According to Ruth Mazo Karras, the following elements contribute to the construction of knightly masculinity in the later Middle Ages: military prowess, courting/acquiring a woman, getting married, and engendering children, particularly a son. Most importantly, these accomplishments take place in competition with other men: men define their masculinity in relation to other men, by competing with them for superiority in military exploits

and in competing for the attentions of noble women.<sup>227</sup> In *TN*, these elements of knightly masculinity are certainly apparent, particularly since Tristan's story so explicitly outlines his development from a wild boy to a knight: we see him having to *learn* to become a man and a knight. Tristan's behavior is far from ideal, but he strives to be a good knight. Similarly, Blanchandin learns to be a knight, relying on the cooperation, help, and eventual approval of other Christian knights. He mimics their actions and adopts their values, but distinguishes himself from them through his superior moral behavior.

After Blanchandine tells the angel that she wants to become a man, the angel speaks to her about what will happen when she (he) goes back to the palace as a man. Then, after the angel departs, the sex change actually occurs. For this reason, as the angel is speaking to the still-female Blanchandine, it is addressing her as the man that she will become a few seconds later. The angel tells her to go back to the palace and to have sex with her (his) wife, once Clarinde is baptized by an archbishop who will arrive there that very day. It tells Blanchandine that she (he) will engender Saint Gilles that very night. Then the sex change occurs; it is described in terms of new flesh and a new name:

Nouvelle char lui vint, en aultre se mua  
Et devvint ung vrais homs, car Dieu lui envoya  
Toute nature de home tant que besoing en a  
En maniere d'un home et tout lui ottroya,  
Mais oncques son semblant qu'ot devant ne changa.  
La fut homs Blanchandine et sy endroit faurra  
Le non de Blanchandine, car appellés sera  
Blanchandins d'ores mes, car bien appertendra.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 10-16; 25; 57-65.

<sup>228</sup> *TN*, 16196-203.

New flesh came to him, she changed into another and became a real man, for God sent to her everything of a manly nature which she needs to be a man and he granted her everything, but did not change her appearance which she had before. At that moment Blanchandine was a man, and here the name of Blanchandine will disappear, because he will be called Blanchandin from now on, since this will suit him.<sup>229</sup>

When Blanchandin shortly afterwards exposes his genitals to Clarinde as he steps into the bath, his penis is described as “gros et quarrés,” large and thick or hefty.<sup>230</sup> Here, at the moment of the actual change, it is never directly said that he has gained a penis, nor are testes mentioned, but we know he must have both since the angel told him that he will have sex with Clarinde and engender Gilles.<sup>231</sup>

Upon seeing himself changed into a man, Blanchandin praises Jesus Christ. He then cuts off the stag’s head and begins to head back towards the Saracen castle, carrying the stag’s head. While still in the woods, Blanchandin runs into Doon who has come looking for him (thinking he’s still a she). This scene is important in the in the development of Blanchandin’s post-sex change character, but it has not been very much discussed in scholarship; in particular the cryptic references to Blanchandin’s clothing and the appearance of his chest have not been previously examined in detail.<sup>232</sup> The scene plays out in a similar way to the recognition scenes that I examined in chapter three, wherein the character’s true identity is slowly revealed through a

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<sup>229</sup> The first sentence is translated by Paula Leverage, “Sex and the Sacraments;” the second sentence is my own translation.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 16357.

<sup>231</sup> Joan Cadden notes that just as breasts do not appear as an important element of sex differentiation in medieval medical texts, neither do testes. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 180.

<sup>232</sup> Sautman and Dietzman briefly discuss this scene, noting the oddity and humor in Doon’s lack of recognition. Sautman, “What Can They Possibly Do Together?,” 216 and Dietzman, “Miracle (Wo)men,” 261.

series of misunderstandings. In this case, Doon initially perceives Blanchandin as “cross-dressed Blanchandine” upon seeing him, and becomes very confused when he sees that Blanchandine is actually a man.

Doon calls to Blanchandin, calling him “dame,” although when he first sees his clothing and chest, he is a little confused: “Quant le bastart le voit, vers lui s’achemine; / Quant sa robe perceut, dont ot pensee estraine, / Nel congnut pas sy tost, quant il vit sa poitrine” [When the bastard saw him, he went towards him. When he saw his clothing, he thought it strange; he didn’t recognize him right away when he saw his chest].<sup>233</sup> Why is Doon surprised when he sees Blanchandin’s clothing? It could be that new clothing appeared miraculously along with the new genitals. As Blanchandin is leaving with the stag’s head, the narrator indicates that he is dressed in a “robe bien fourree d’ermine” [a robe amply lined with ermine];<sup>234</sup> it does not explicitly say that this is *new* clothing, but it seems quite likely that these are heavenly clothes that appeared with the sex change. It is never mentioned previously that Blanchandine was dressed in such a robe, and moreover, her clothing was ripped to shreds by the thorns. The supernatural acquisition of such luxurious clothing is also appropriate to his new station as king, a role that he will fully take on once he returns to the palace.

As for his chest, it is never said *what* is different about it that Doon notices. Leverage translates *semblant* as “appearance,” but the word can also mean more specifically the

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<sup>233</sup> *TN*, 16222-24.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 16213.

appearance of the face.<sup>235</sup> If one translates *semblant* as “face” rather than “appearance,” a different interpretation of the significance of Blanchandin’s chest is possible. It is said that his *semblant* stayed the same, so if his face was unchanged, that could imply that the shape of his body may have changed in some ways that are not specified. As I noted in chapter three, breasts are not necessarily considered an important part of a feminine appearance in medieval texts; they are however specifically associated with lactation in *TN*. This is the case for Blanchandine as well; she is depicted nursing her newborn baby Raimon.<sup>236</sup> Since breasts were never before mentioned as an impediment to Blanchandine’s cross-dressing, it would be strange if Doon noticed now “son absence de poitrine,” as Georges says.<sup>237</sup> If Doon believes he is looking at “cross-dressed Blanchandine,” he would not be expected to focus on the appearance of her chest as a marker of feminine gender. Could it be that, rather than having his breasts taken away, Blanchandin’s chest had changed shape and become more muscular, and this is what Doon notices? A knight who is strong enough to hold weapons while riding a horse (as Blanchandin will now be expected to do) would likely have a more muscular chest.

The different appearance of his chest, whatever it may be, is not enough to thoroughly confuse Doon, though, since he still calls out to him as “dame.” Blanchandin ignores him and continues on his way. Doon calls him “dame” again and says he has news about Tristan, and Blanchandin finally stops and tells him that he is talking nonsense, because he is not a woman.

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<sup>235</sup> “semblant,” mine, manière d’être, Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 833-34; “semblant,” aspect de qqn, image, physionomie, visage, *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, accessed March 11, 2015.

<sup>236</sup> *TN*, 6030-32.

<sup>237</sup> Georges, *TN*, 576.

To prove that he is not a “dame,” Blanchandin shows Doon his genitals: “Dont lui monstra sa char qui toute estoit changie / Par dessoubz le braiel sy con par felonnie” [Then he showed him his completely changed flesh under his belt in an angry way].<sup>238</sup> Rather than clearing things up, this revelation causes more confusion. Doon does not understand that Blanchandine has had a sex change; rather, he thinks that he is entirely mistaken, and that he is now talking to a stranger. Blanchandin decides not to identify himself as Blanchandin-who-used-to-be-Blanchandine to Doon, even though Doon was previously a trustworthy friend. Instead, he uses his new masculine body to intimidate his male friend. He seems to be genuinely angry that Doon does not immediately recognize him as a “real man,” and the expression “sy con par felonnie” might not only refer to anger, but also the intent to commit violence.<sup>239</sup> The angry exposure of genitals certainly makes one think of a rape threat, which recalls Blanchandine’s anger at Doon for suggesting that they take advantage of Clarinde, as well as Blanchandine’s own rape by Tristan. Previously, Blanchandine wanted to protect Clarinde from Doon’s sexual predation, and she herself was a victim of rape. Now, Blanchandin is displaying more aggressive behavior that aligns with that of Doon or Tristan. Doon’s hurried apology to this “gentleman” upon seeing Blanchandin’s penis is funny rather than upsetting because we know that Blanchandin is playing a trick him and that Doon is not actually in danger. Blanchandin’s decision to poke fun at Doon is also significant because it shows that he is imitating the behavior of the men in his life: as I noted above, Tristan had previously done the same to Blanchandine. Instead of trying to help her or sympathize with her situation, he simply laughed at the fact that Clarinde had fallen in love

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<sup>238</sup> *TN*, 16240-41.

<sup>239</sup> “felonnie,” *colère, fureur*, Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 811; “felonie,” *cruauté, violence, fureur*, *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, accessed July 12, 2016.

with her, totally dismissing the actual danger to Blanchandine's life. Here, Blanchandin teases Doon, but his joking does not have the potential to actually harm Doon – unlike Doon and Tristan's behavior towards women.

### 4.6.3 Sex change and kinship

As the recognition scene with Doon progresses, Blanchandin continues to try to manipulate him and confuse him. There is no reason for him to do this except that it gives him a chance to enjoy a power trip over Doon, to have a joke at his expense. The back and forth continues for a little while longer; Blanchandin now says that he is planning to bring the stag's head back to King Blanchandin, further dissimulating his identity. When Doon asks if he has ever seen this King Blanchandin, Blanchandin replies that Doon himself has seen King Blanchandin many times and is amazed that he doesn't recognize him (“Or me vois merveillant que nel cognoissés mye”).<sup>240</sup> In saying this, Blanchandin indicates that he now considers himself to be the fully-formed version of the imaginary “Blanchandin” who was first invented through cross-dressing. When Blanchandin does finally explain who he is and who he was, he describes his former self in relation to his (former) father Galafre and his former husband Tristan:

Blanchandine eus a non, sachés, par mainte fye,  
Fille au fort roy Galaffre qui a perdu la vie.  
A Tristan le Sauvage feus espeuse et amye.  
Or soyés bien certains, amis, que suis changie,  
Et devenus ungs homs, nel tenés a faillie,  
Par le vouloir de Dieu filz sainte Marie.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> *TN*, 16256.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 16259-64.

My name was Blanchandine, you know well, I was the daughter of the powerful king Galafre who lost his life. I was the wife and lover of Tristan *le Sauvage*. Now be certain, friend, that I have changed, and become a man, do not doubt it, by the will of God the son of holy Mary.

As Blanchandin explains it, there is a change not only in his sexed body but also, as a result of this change of sex, an alteration in kinship. His name *was* Blanchandine, and only when he was Blanchandine was he Galafre's daughter and Tristan's wife. By mentioning these two particular relationships of father/daughter and husband/wife, Blanchandin highlights that for a woman, these two relationships are necessary to define her identity, in addition to her name. Once he says that he is now a man, he does not say to whom he is related; his identity does not have to be explained in relation to another man. However, I believe this also has to do with the fact that, once he changes sex, he does not really *have* a family. The change of sex, indeed, raises questions as to how kinship ties function post-sex change beyond even the question of the cousin relationship between Clarinde and Blanchandine. Once he becomes a man, and he is no longer the daughter of Galafre, does that mean that he is also not his son? And if he is not his son, does that mean that he simply does not have a father? I argue that this is indeed that case. This process already began when he, as Blanchandine, rebelled against his father's wishes, became Tristan's lover, and converted. It was through the conversion in particular that the split from his father became more definitive, and when Galafre dies, Blanchandine is not even shown to have any reaction (much like Clarinde, who didn't mourn her father). With the sex change, the loss of his father is definitive, and without a father, Blanchandin is essentially starting a new lineage - one that is, however, short-lived since his son Gilles will not have his own son.

Given that in this context it seems possible for one to become fatherless upon changing sex, the fact that Blanchandin and Clarinde are no longer presented as cousins does not seem unusual in comparison. Their kinship relationship has not been mentioned since the wedding



scene, and it will not come up again. Since this kinship relationship is not mentioned, this also means that Clarinde never learns “who” her husband is, although she does later learn that her husband was once a woman. Any information about Blanchandin’s origins continues to be irrelevant to Clarinde. When Blanchandin comes back to the palace and takes a bath, Clarinde simply sees that he has a penis and is satisfied with that. If Clarinde had asked him to describe his family, he would have been at pains to describe to Clarinde his non-existent parentage. As a man, Blanchandin lacks the power of a noble family name, but this doesn’t matter as his masculinity will be constructed by engendering a son, doing battle, and conquering lands.

#### **4.6.4 Becoming a king and knight**

It is only upon Blanchandin’s arrival back at the palace, and after his first night with Clarinde, that he is officially crowned king, and it is Clarinde herself who crowns him.<sup>242</sup> In keeping with his lack of a personal family history and hence his lack of lands, Blanchandin acquires everything through his queen. Ironically, this includes Armenia, *Blanchandine*’s homeland, since Clarinde’s forces captured it after Galafre’s death. In a way, Blanchandin finds himself back where he (she) started, although now in male and Christian form. Blanchandin now gathers together his troops, which include members of Tristan’s family and the now-Christian Armenians (they convert along with Clarinde), and they attack Agrapart and his men; Blanchandin is still intent on getting revenge on Agrapart, even though he has learned from Doon that he did not kill Tristan. (Agrapart is also the same king that a few years earlier Blanchandine was going to be forced to marry, before Tristan kidnapped her.)

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 16803-05.

Although his crowning as King Blanchandin gives him the power to raise and lead armies, Blanchandin wants something more: he asks King Ganor to dub him a knight: “La colee lui donne le roy sans destrrier. / Bien oÿ Aiglentine et dire et desrainier / Commant Jhesus de gloire le volt fere changer” [The king knighted him right away. He had heard Aiglentine explain how glorious Jesus wanted to change him].<sup>243</sup> By specifying that Ganor had heard Aiglentine explain that Blanchandin was now a real man, it is implied that his maleness is necessary in order to be knighted; Ganor presumably would not have knighted the cross-dressed Blanchandine. It is also noteworthy that Ganor himself is a converted Saracen; he converted many years earlier in order to marry Aye. Blanchandin is knighted by the only character who comes close to being his homologue: they are both men, and they are both former Saracens, which is a rather unusual situation since conversion narratives usually involve Saracen women. The battle is over very quickly as Blanchandin kills Agrapart almost immediately with a very severe blow, causing Doon to remark, “Par foy...n’est pas cop de meschine” [By faith...this is not a maiden’s blow].<sup>244</sup>

This brief scene of Blanchandin’s first battle (his first battle either as a man *or* as a cross-dressed woman; recall that Clarinde previously kept him out of battle) shows that Blanchandin’s masculinity is constructed post-sex change in different ways depending on if he is interacting with Clarinde or with other men. When Blanchandin returns to the palace after battle and reports that he has killed Agrapart, Clarinde is pleased, but she was not present when Blanchandin was knighted. Clarinde’s interest is almost entirely in Blanchandin’s ability to have sex with her, and she does not require proof of masculinity other than his penis. Contrary to this one-step process

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 16897-99.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 16930.

with Clarinde, Blanchandin's masculinity is constructed over several steps when interacting with other Christian men. First they hear of his change of sex and they witness his crowning; after this they accept him as their leader in battle, and right before the battle Ganor does not hesitate to knight Blanchandin. As Ganor's thought process demonstrates, the very knowledge of the sex change solidifies their confidence in him as a man rather than putting it in doubt. This confidence turns out to be the very opposite of Clarinde's reaction to finding out about the sex change, as we will soon see. After his knighting, Blanchandin then displays bravery and the willingness and ability to commit violence. It is not specified that the knighting itself gave him strength in warfare, but the sequence of events does imply this. The change of genital sex is the most important element in making him a "real man," but he must also continue to develop and prove himself after this event, particularly with other men. His development is partially accomplished by the knighting ritual, which brings him into knightly manhood in a visual, social way. At the end of the battle, Blanchandin distributes booty fairly and makes sure that all of the Christian knights who have been killed have proper burials in churches. These two points are never mentioned subsequent to any other battles in the text, so Blanchandin is portrayed as an ideal knight in comparison to his comrades.

#### **4.6.5 A love triangle**

Blanchandin's time enjoying his success as a knight and king is short-lived. When Tristan arrives back in Armenia, Blanchandin becomes a pawn between his former husband and his current wife, and his relation to both endangers the continued successful development of his knightly and kingly masculinity. The questions of recognition, sexual sin, and penance appear in a new light as Clarinde comes to understand that she desired a cross-dressed woman. Motivated by this

discovery, Clarinde takes control of the situation. She gives Tristan land in compensation for the loss of his wife and she sets new parameters for Blanchandin to prove his masculinity.

When Tristan first sees Blanchandin, he, like Doon, assumes that the person he sees is Blanchandine cross-dressed. This scene displays in a few different ways how misogyny is still at work in the relationship between Tristan and Blanchandin, even though Blanchandin is now a man, simply because from Tristan's point of view he has lost his wife, and specifically sexual access to her body. Blanchandin's reaction upon seeing Tristan indicates that he still considers Tristan to have power over him: "Adonc se teust ly roys qui de paour rougie" [Then the king, who blushed in fear, became quiet].<sup>245</sup> Upon recovering speech, the very first thing he says to Tristan is that he will no longer be able to have sex with him: "Jamés ou corps de moy n'arés vo druerie" [You will never have your pleasure with my body again].<sup>246</sup> When Blanchandin then explains the whole story of his sex change, Tristan comes to understand the situation and is both sad and enraged. His anger is directed solely at Clarinde, whom he then moves to kill with his sword, calling her a "pute mauvaise" [bad whore] and blaming her "ribaudie" [lechery] for the situation.<sup>247</sup> This extreme reaction shows the extent to which the loss of a wife and access to her body is perceived as meriting the death of the ravisher, who would normally be a man, but in this case is Clarinde. Tristan's choice words also highlight that although Clarinde plays the role of a husband here since she stole Tristan's wife, she is also to be blamed for her perceived excessive sexuality, an accusation normally leveled against women. The change of sex creates some

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 17565.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 17567.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 17588-89.

confusion in this way: under “normal” circumstances, Tristan would perhaps call his former wife a *pute* and then brandish a sword at her new husband. In this case, Clarinde becomes the scapegoat for both genders. She is responsible both for coercing a woman into marriage and for the lustfulness that brought them together in the first place.

Tristan’s accusation against Clarinde does not specifically blame her for desiring another woman. Nonetheless, I believe that Tristan’s accusation of lechery is linked to the author’s previous statement that Clarinde would be punished for lying with Blanchandine, particularly because Tristan uses the word *peché* when he speaks to Clarinde – he says that she has committed a great sin by separating them.<sup>248</sup> This is noteworthy since the word *peché* is rarely used in this text. The words *pute* and *peché* come just at the moment when Clarinde learns of the sex change and hence learns that she desired a woman. However, in Clarinde’s own speech, she shows no signs of wanting to blame or punish herself for this desire, nor is she angry at Blanchandin for the deception. However, her reaction, as I show below, demonstrates that the knowledge of sex change does cause her to question Blanchandin’s masculinity.

Eve Sedgwick has shown in the context of English literature that homosocial bonds between men are created when they compete for the same woman.<sup>249</sup> In the love triangle between Tristan, Blanchandin(e), and Clarinde, cross-dressing creates differing scenarios of competition and desire pre- and post-sex change, which do not function in the same way as Sedgwick’s model because the genders of the desirers and the desired in the triangle are different, and changing. Before the sex change, Tristan and Clarinde desire the same (cross-

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<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 17602.

<sup>249</sup> Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1-5; 21-27.

dressed) woman, but their competition with each other does not create a bond between them. Clarinde displays behavior typed as masculine in courting Blanchandin, but Tristan nonetheless dismisses her as a serious rival since she is woman; he neither actively competes with her nor creates any kind of bond with her: he ignores her. It is only once the sex change has taken place and the three characters find themselves together that Clarinde and Tristan perceive themselves as in competition with each other for Blanchandin; although Tristan does not expect to re-form a romantic relationship with the now-male Blanchandin, he does act as if he has or should have some ownership over him, as evidenced by his violent reaction. Clarinde's reaction to Tristan's menaces confirms her role as a second husband competing with a first, spurned husband, and she sees herself as in the wrong: she is apologetic, and immediately offers to make Tristan ruler of Babylon. It is clear from her language that the gift of the kingdom is meant to compensate for the loss of his wife: "Se j'ay ver vous meffait, preste suis d'amender / De toute Babilone vous feray couronner" [If I have wronged you, I am ready to make up for it. I will have you crowned king of all of Babylon]. Clarinde also later refers to this exchange as *amandise*, or compensation, and throws Armenia into the deal as well.<sup>250</sup> Although Blanchandin has just led an army in order to defend Babylon and Armenia, here it is Clarinde who still wields the political power in the couple. She makes this decision, and Blanchandin subsequently chimes in that he is in agreement with her, and that Tristan should take their land: "Prenés toute la terre qu'avons a gouverner, / Mais que lessés la dame sans son corps vergonder" [Take all the land that *we* control, but please

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<sup>250</sup> *TN*, 17595-96; 17634-35.

don't hurt the lady] (my emphasis).<sup>251</sup> Indeed, Blanchandin only controls this land thanks to his wife.

At first, Tristan refuses Clarinde's proposed exchange. In this way, he continues to reject Clarinde as legitimate competition. On the other hand, their common desire for Blanchandin creates a bond in that Tristan does at least listen to her proposal and consider it, acknowledging her as a rival and as someone with whom he can negotiate, while Blanchandin merely seconds Clarinde's opinions. Clarinde does not stop at her first proposal. As she continues to apologize to Tristan, she then adds a vow that she will never rule over any land unless her husband conquers it, and she links this directly to his sex change:

Je veue a celui Dieu qui tout a a sauver,  
Que jamés je n'aray royaume a gouverner,  
Se mes sires loyaulx ne le va conquerer.  
Car puis que Dieu lui veult telle grace impetrer  
Qu'a la guise d'un home l'a voulu figurer,  
Aussy bien lui peut il force et pouvoir donner  
De conquerre la terre dont se puist couronner.<sup>252</sup>

I vow to the God who saves all that I will never have a kingdom to govern if my loyal lord does not conquer it. Because since God wants to fill him with such grace that he wanted to shape him in the manner of a man, then he surely can also give him the strength and the power to conquer land over which he may reign.

Clarinde shows that she sees Tristan as having a legitimate complaint and also that he has some power over her because of the fact that she wronged him by stealing his wife. However, she also puts herself in a position of power in relation to Blanchandin by doling out both a punishment and a challenge to her husband. In addition, she simultaneously punishes herself because she says that *she* will not rule over any lands unless her husband conquers them. The idea of her own

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 17598-99.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 17620-26.

punishment is emphasized in the next few lines when she says that she will always stay by his side in good times and bad.<sup>253</sup> I believe that this is the beginning of that “grand perdicion” of which the author wrote concerning Clarinde, because the “bad” will surely come: when their palace is burned down and Blanchandin injured, she and Gilles escape alone and undergo many trials. Instead of rejecting a husband who deceived her with regards to his sex (something about which she previously threatened to kill him), Clarinde is loving and devoted towards him in her declaration to follow him down this road of troubles. On the other hand, if they suffer together it is because of her proposal that they give up their land. In her new proposal, she also will benefit from his successful conquering of lands, by becoming queen yet again, but in this case, she would only become queen thanks to him – she no longer would have her own power. She seems to be confident that her husband can complete this task (with God’s help) but she also presents it as a challenge that will determine whether or not he can truly live up to this change of sex; she certainly would not have challenged him in this way had she not known about the sex change and had she not been confronted by Tristan.

It is the loss of Blanchandin’s arm, and not Clarinde’s challenge to Blanchandin, that the text later identifies as Blanchandin’s punishment. However, Clarinde’s challenge is certainly what sets them on the road that will lead to that loss. It is also remarkable that when Clarinde decides that Blanchandin will need to conquer lands, she puts herself in an almost godly role. God has just ordained this sex change, and now Clarinde is challenging that God-given masculinity. Such power is in keeping with Clarinde’s role in the whole of the sex change episode; as I pointed out earlier, the text portrays the sex change as destiny, and does not explicitly acknowledge the ways in which Clarinde’s actions are actually a moving force behind

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 17630-32.



it. This conflict between God's will and human actions underlies the whole cross-dressing and sex change episode, and explains to a certain extent why it is difficult to draw a conclusion concerning the sex change's moral value in the text.

#### 4.6.6 Gender, power, and speech

In the above passage, Clarinde is again confident and in control. But in one way, Clarinde is still ignorant – she still does not know, or at least does not acknowledge, that her husband was once her female cousin. When she does speak about his sex change, she only focuses on Blanchandin's sex, and nothing else about his identity. Before making a deal with Tristan, Clarinde does react more precisely to Blanchandin's deception, saying that she suspected something when he did not want to kiss or embrace her, but this all dissipated once she saw him bathe: “Mais pourtant que le vi en celle cuve entrer, / Et que le pos droit home congnoistre et adviser, / C'est ce qui m'a fait taire, c'est leger a prouver” [But the fact that I saw him enter into that tub, and I could tell that he was a real man, that is what kept me quiet, it's easy to prove].<sup>254</sup> Clarinde's explanation is given in order to appease Tristan, to explain that she did not know that she was stealing his wife: how could she have known that she stole his wife when the person before her was a man? Her statement that his maleness made her keep quiet also acknowledges that she had some doubts about his sex, which was why she asked him to bathe in the first place. The information that Clarinde gives here about her understanding of Blanchandin emphasizes her visual recognition of his genitals. When she was cross-dressed, Blanchandine feared that Clarinde would recognize (*congnoistre*) her as her cousin, and that fear went unrealized; in the

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 17611-13.

above passage, *congnoistre* and *adviser* emphasize visual recognition or simply seeing something (*adviser* can mean to recognize but also to see or observe).<sup>255</sup> For Clarinde, to recognize Blanchandin is to *see* that he is male, not to understand who he is and where he comes from. The importance of this visual recognition of Blanchandin's sex is emphasized with a pun on the word "saw," *vi* or *vit*. *Vit* is also a word for penis, and the same pun appears in the earlier bath scene:

Devant mainte pucelle est nuz dedens entrés.  
La lui paroît le membre qu'estoit gros es quarrés;  
Que bien le vit Clarinde – bien estoit figurés –  
Dont ne feust aussy lye pour xxx royautés.<sup>256</sup>

Before many maidens he entered [the tub] naked. There his member appeared to her; it was big and thick. Clarinde saw it well - it was quite apparent - for that reason she would not have been happier with thirty kingdoms.

This scene shows that the visual, public nature of Blanchandin's exposure is just as important or more important than Clarinde actually experiencing penetrative sex with Blanchandin later that night. After all, Clarinde could have lied about them having sex, but there is no way around the exposure of the public bath. Seeing his penis is what confirms his maleness for her, similar to the way that seeing Blanchandin knighted confirms his maleness to his male friends and family.

The frequent use of the verb *taire/se taire* (to silence or to be silent) also highlights how silence and speech are linked to the visual assessment of Blanchandin's masculinity. The "mainte pucelle" that are present at the bath are probably the same ones who mocked Blanchandin for not having had sex with his wife, so this moment is quite triumphant for him both with regards to Clarinde and to these ladies. Blanchandin chastised Clarinde in that scene for exposing his lack

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<sup>255</sup> "adviser," *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, accessed March 2, 2015.

<sup>256</sup> *TN*, 16356-59.

of virility to a group of women, and he demanded that she keep quiet about it. Clarinde herself indicates above that the very presence of Blanchandin's penis is what finally silenced her concerning her previous doubts about his sex. Thus, Clarinde keeps quiet at those moments when she has most confidence in Blanchandin's masculinity, or when he attempts to dominate her. In the narrative of the battle that takes place following Blanchandin's sex change, Clarinde barely appears and we hear no direct speech from her; it is clear that the marriage and pregnancy have "tamed" her, and she certainly is no longer obsessed with sex. When her ladies in waiting ask her how her night was after Blanchandin reappears, "toute coye se teust" [she didn't say a word], and the ladies laugh.<sup>257</sup> These interactions between Blanchandin and Clarinde show how women's silence is expected when men are around, and that women's sexual enjoyment is not to be discussed, even if this sex act has been anticipated for thousands of lines of verse! The ups and downs of these power relations are dependent on who is present in each situation, as Clarinde regains her speech and Blanchandin becomes fearful and quiet when Tristan reappears.

With the reappearance of Tristan and the revelation of the sex change, Clarinde again adopts a more "masculine" role of speaking and making decisions for her husband. Her obsession with political power is also seen in the way that the author describes her happiness at seeing Blanchandin's penis – she wouldn't have been happier if she had thirty kingdoms. Clarinde wants to have her cake and eat it too – she wants a "real man" for a husband and she wants to be a powerful queen as well. And while she still has her real man, her new knowledge of his sex change causes her to challenge him to earn the masculinity that he supposedly already had. As we saw in the knighting scene, when other men gain knowledge of Blanchandin's sex change, they accept him *because* of that knowledge, now considering him eligible to be a knight.

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 16409.

Clarinde accepts Blanchandin because she sees that he has a penis, but does not care to consider whether or not he had this penis before, nor does she want to know about his family history. Upon learning of the sex change, her change in perception about Blanchandin specifically has to do with a new doubt in his ability to acquire and maintain political and military power, but not his ability to please her sexually or impregnate her.

#### **4.6.7 Male bonding and homoerotic desire**

Tristan's arrival and Clarinde's challenge to Blanchandin thus completely alter the triumphant feeling that had accompanied Blanchandin's sex change. Now, rather, there is anger, sadness, and disappointment circulating among the three characters in this love triangle as they negotiate new relations to one another in light of the revelation of the sex change. Tristan and Blanchandin's reunion is just a prelude to another separation, as Blanchandin is determined to carry out Clarinde's vow that she will not rule over land unless Blanchandin conquers it. As Blanchandin declares his decision to leave, he and Tristan cry: "Adonc ont commencé ly baron a plorer" [Then the gentlemen started crying]; when Blanchandin gathers his army and they prepare to leave, everyone is crying: "De Tristan se partirent, sy prinrent a plorer, / Et ly ung et ly aultre prinrent deul a mener [They went away from Tristan and they began to cry, and they all grieved].<sup>258</sup> The loving but not sexual relationship between Tristan and Blanchandin continues for the rest of their lives. Although Tristan almost immediately remarries (his new wife is Florine, another converted Saracen and Doon's great-aunt) and Blanchandin leaves with Clarinde, both men will be separated from their wives in very brief time. In fact, Tristan will

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 17642; 17681-82.

leave his pregnant wife so that he can search for Blanchandin, and he and Blanchandin subsequently spend about fifteen years together.

Looking back to Blanchandine's thoughts as she considered changing sex, we saw that she declared that she would always love and be faithful to her husband Tristan, whom she believed to be dead at that point. Upon their reunion, the only thing that prevents them from rejoining each other as a couple is Blanchandin's male sex – otherwise, their love for each other appears to remain unchanged. This type of unchanged emotion also applies to others. Blanchandin maintains relationships with Doon and Aiglentine that includes a full understanding of his history, and Blanchandin is still close to them upon his change of sex.<sup>259</sup> His former in-laws and extended family also do not want him to leave Armenia, even Gui de Nanteuil, just liberated from prison and whom he has just met.<sup>260</sup> These emotional bonds show that determining whether Blanchandin's change of sex changed him into a different person is not something that can be answered easily. It depends on what aspect of his personhood one considers: gender, kinship ties, sexual activity, memories, or emotions. Blanchandin is conscious of himself as having formerly been a woman, and he still loves and cares about the same people he did as a woman. But in terms of sex, Blanchandin will not continue to have a sexual

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<sup>259</sup> Blanchandin describes his change of sex to Aiglentine in lines 16385-97.

<sup>260</sup> *Maugré le bon Tristan qui tant fist a doubter,  
Et Guyon de Nanteuil qui le volt engendrer,  
Et la franche duchesse qui son corps volt porter,  
Et maugré tous les aultres, se vorent dessevrer.* (Ibid., 17677-80)

In spite of good Tristan who inspired fear, and Gui de Nanteuil who engendered him, and the noble duchess who carried him, and in spite of all the others, they wanted to depart.

relationship with Tristan; he even considers that he can still be faithful to Tristan while having sex with Clarinde.

Blanchandin specifically referenced the fact that he and Tristan can no longer be lovers in the earlier scene when he revealed his sex change to Doon. When Blanchandin learns that his decision to become a man was based on a false report of Tristan's death, he is very upset; he says that if he had known, he would not have made the same decision. He describes his separation from Tristan in bodily terms:

Se le cuidasse ainsy, pour voir le vous affie,  
Ja ne feust ma jouvente de la soye partie.  
Mais ore ne peut estre, car Dieu ne le veult mye  
C'oncques homs ne fist aultre en celle mortel vie.<sup>261</sup>

If I had known it was so, I swear to you, I would never have separated my young self from him. But now it cannot be, because God does not want a man to ever be with another man in this mortal life.

*Faire* has many meanings in Middle French, and there are examples of the verb referring to sexual activity or to courtship.<sup>262</sup> The context supports the notion that Blanchandin is using it in this sense, since he is wishing that he had not changed his body so that he could still be with Tristan romantically. This is the first evidence, even before he and Tristan meet and cry over their separation, that the sex change has done nothing to alter Blanchandin's feelings for Tristan. But both Blanchandin's and Tristan's feelings of devotion for each other coexist with a desire to have wives and to engender children with them. Their relationships with their wives are primarily for status and for reproduction, and it is never indicated that they love their wives,

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 16281-84.

<sup>262</sup> "Faire," *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, accessed March 4, 2015. "Faire dame," Obtenir les faveurs d'une femme; "Faire cela; (Le) faire," Faire l'amour.

although it is clear that their wives love them. Lying alone in bed the night before Blanchandin leaves Armenia, Tristan already considers taking Florine (whom he had met during his absence from Armenia) as a wife, but even in thinking about a new marriage, his main goal is to help Blanchandin: “Et s’il peut nullement la cité conquister, / A Blanchandin le roy le vourra presenter, / A matiere d’eschange bien fait guerredonner” [And if he could at all conquer the city [Rochebrune], he would like to present it to King Blanchandin in exchange and proper compensation].<sup>263</sup> It sounds as if Tristan wants to compensate Blanchandin for giving him Babylon and Armenia, which would be over-compensation since Tristan received those lands in exchange for the loss of Blanchandine.

Tristan’s profound desire to make things up to Blanchandin shows that his understanding of him works on two levels. While he still thinks of Blanchandin in some way as his lost wife, he accepts Clarinde’s compensatory gifts reluctantly. His desire to transact an exchange directly with Blanchandin (Babylon and Armenia in exchange for Rochebrune) indicates that he also sees Blanchandin as an equal, as a man and a king with whom he can negotiate. He accepts Clarinde’s offer, but he then wants to change the terms in order to benefit Blanchandin. Sedgwick’s erotic triangle is re-formed: instead of bonding with Clarinde in competition for Blanchandin, Tristan bonds with the man Blanchandin in a way that he never did with his wife Blanchandine. Later, Clarinde is eliminated from the picture and Tristan and Blanchandin become a sort of couple again.<sup>264</sup> Their bond is not created over their mutual desire for a woman, but rather it is a combination of their past romantic love for each other and a new respect borne simply from the fact that they are both men who wish for the same things: political power, marriage, and

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<sup>263</sup> *TN*, 17669-71.

<sup>264</sup> See my chapter six.

successful engendering of sons with their new wives. It is hard to say whether these two types of love, romantic and platonic, are actually different in themselves, or whether they only differ in their manifestation: Tristan and Blanchandine have sex with each other; Tristan and Blanchandin do not. The negation of the possibility of same-sex sexual relations is thus seen in both couples, Clarinde and Blanchandin(e) and Blanchandin and Tristan. These two potential relationships differ in that Clarinde's goal was to have sex with Blanchandin, whereas Blanchandin specifically states that he cannot have sex with Tristan. In both cases though, there is ambiguity of some sort: Clarinde, of course, thinks that she desires a man, but it turns out she desired a cross-dressed woman. In the second case, Blanchandin states that he *cannot* be with Tristan, but he does not state that he does not *want* to be with him. In both cases, there is some space left open for homoerotic desire, but not for same-sex couples who have sex. However, there is a definite difference in the way that each relationship is depicted: Blanchandin and Tristan's post-sex change relationship, with its homoerotic undertones, is always portrayed as positive and desirable, whereas Blanchandine and Clarinde's relationship carries with it an ambiguous association with sin.

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

Although the text states that only Clarinde will be punished for her desire for Blanchandine, the ensuing difficulties implicate both Clarinde and Blanchandin, and it is clear that Blanchandin undergoes greater hardship than Clarinde. Once they leave Armenia, Blanchandin and his troops conquer and convert Greece. Gilles is born there, but when he is only about two weeks old, a traitor attacks Blanchandin at night, cutting off one of his arms at the shoulder. Clarinde and



Gilles flee in a boat, and end up living as beggars until a kind bishop takes them under his wing. They then live in peace and security until Clarinde dies about fifteen years later and Gilles decides to become a hermit. Blanchandin, however, wanders for thirty years until he finally finds Gilles, who reattaches his arm, which miraculously never decomposed, and which he carried with him in a case. Why is Blanchandin punished in such a disproportionate manner? When a Greek man asks Blanchandin why he has been dismembered, Blanchandin says, “Par mon peché...je suis deshonorés” [I am dishonored by my sin].<sup>265</sup> As Sarah Dietzman has noted, the nature of this sin is never explained, leaving the reader to wonder whether he refers to his general misfortune or something specific that he did to cause this misfortune.<sup>266</sup> Nothing in the text has indicated that the sex change was sinful – quite the contrary. This chapter has shown that many other behaviors associated with his sex change, though, could indeed be sinful. Did he sin by lying in bed with a woman when he was still a woman? Was cross-dressing sinful, because he lied about his identity, and then married a Saracen woman according to the Saracen law? Did he sin by marrying his cousin? The text does not give us a clear answer. As I understand it, the sex change is a strange event that both pushes Blanchandin(e) and Clarinde toward and away from sin. God’s decision to choose Blanchandine and Clarinde as Gilles’ parents means that, by some logic, Blanchandine must cross-dress and marry her cousin in order to reach the sex change. In that way, the sex change invites the two women into a sinful situation. But since the sex change is pre-ordained, and since Blanchandine resists her cousin’s sexual advances, the cross-dressing and marriage episode also appears as a kind of test that Blanchandine passes in order to move on

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 17895.

<sup>266</sup> Dietzman, “Miracle (Wo)men,” 266.

to the next level – becoming a man. In that way, the sex change invites Blanchandin (and Clarinde with him) into a more saintly realm.

Considering that Blanchandin’s punishment appears to strike symbolically at his masculinity by dismembering him,<sup>267</sup> it is hard not to think that there actually was something sinful in his sex change, despite the fact that it was God who granted him this transformation. On the other hand, if Blanchandin and Clarinde are holy figures, as the text wants us to believe, then perhaps we must simply understand their sins and subsequent sufferings to be part of that holiness, and not something that signals their distance from God. As with Saint Gilles, sufferings can in fact show that God has selected them for a special purpose. Each of them also experiences a miracle in the presence of their son: Clarinde miraculously produces an abundance of breast milk in the boat even though she is starving to death, and Blanchandin’s arm does not decompose and is as good as new when Gilles reattaches it. Although they are not explicitly portrayed as saints like their son, the fact that they experience miracles may be the reason that the author claimed that this section of the text is populated with *sains et saintes*.

In chapters five and six, I examine further the nature of masculine identity for sex-changed men through the lens of fatherhood and the question of inheritance and lineage. Blanchandin’s sex change was destined so that he could engender Gilles, and thus engendering a son is the foundation of his masculinity. However, Gilles becomes a celibate monk and does not carry on his father’s new lineage, calling into question its very founding. In chapter six, I examine more closely Blanchandin’s and Gilles’ adventures, and show the ways in which the religious theme, with questions of sin and penance, dominates the last part of the text. In chapter

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 266-67; Sautman, “What can they possibly do together?,” 210. I will discuss the implications of this dismemberment in chapter six.

four, however, I leave Blanchandin and Gilles aside for a moment in order to examine a parallel case of sex change and fatherhood, that of Yde from *Yde et Olive* and his son Croissant. As I have done for Blanchandin, I follow Yde past his sex change into his life as a man, and show how he and his son re-acquire lost kingdoms while negotiating questions of gender (change) and power. I examine the saintly parallels between Croissant and Gilles and show that Yde's sex change is a miraculous event that has lasting effects on the questions of masculine identity, kinship, and inheritance.

## 5.0 AFTER SEX CHANGE: KINGSHIP, INHERITANCE, AND DIVINE INTERVENTION IN *YDE ET OLIVE II* AND *CROISSANT*

*Yde et Olive II* and *Croissant*, two thirteenth-century continuations to *Huon de Bordeaux*, offer another example of a new family formed by sex change: in *Yde et Olive I*, Ydé miraculously changes sex from female to male thanks to an angel, and then engenders his son Croissant. Thus Yde of Aragon becomes Ydé of Rome by marrying a Roman princess and changing sex.<sup>268</sup> This double Aragonian/Roman lineage sets in motion a series of obstacles to good governance for Ydé and Croissant: Ydé must prove that he is the rightful heir to his deceased father's kingdom, and Croissant loses his kingdom and then regains it through yet another Christian miracle and marriage. This chapter is a study of the sex change's effect on this newly formed family, and examines specifically how father and son attain and maintain legitimacy as kings. Problems of authority, kingship, and inheritance for both characters are related to both the family disturbances that led to the sex change (the threat of incest) and those that result from the sex change (Yde's double lineage which results in him abandoning his son). As in *Tristan de*

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<sup>268</sup> Jacqueline de Weever, "The Lady, the Knight, and the Lover: Androgyny and Integration in *La Chanson d'Yde et Olive*," *Romanic Review* 81 (1991): 388. Yde's naming according to sex and/or gender is not entirely consistent throughout the poem and scholars disagree on whether there are clear distinctions between her/his name pre-cross-dressing, during cross-dressing and after sex change. According to Jacqueline de Weever, she is called Yde before cross-dressing, Yde, Ydé, Ydés, Ide, Ydee, and Idee while cross-dressing, and Idé/Ydé after the sex change. I will refer to the pre-sex change character as "Yde" or "cross-dressed Yde" and the post-sex change character as "Ydé" for clarity.

*Nanteuil*, there is an important element of support from religious authority, both earthly and heavenly, that allows for a happy outcome for both Ydé and Croissant. Croissant repeats his father's experience, becoming king of Rome (again) by marrying another woman named Olive. In the cases of both Croissant and Ydé, Lombard relatives temporarily usurp their kingdoms.

At the end of *Yde et Olive II*, we learn that Ydé and Olive have another seven children when Croissant is already an adult. Meanwhile, Croissant is not said to have any children. Croissant's repetition of his father's experience and the fact that he has no children raises the question of the sex change's effect on the genealogical narrative. Certainly Ydé is not sterile - he engenders eight children - but since we do not hear anything about him having grandchildren, the reader leaves with the impression that Croissant's generation is the end of Ydé's lineage. However, the sex change is one among many other strange events in the *Huon de Bordeaux* sequels, which also do not always follow a linear genealogical timeline from father to son. For example, Huon de Bordeaux's line is female until the sex change - he has a daughter Clarisse and then a granddaughter Yde. While the sex change appears to "correct" the female line, the necessity to do so was never a foregone conclusion. In addition, Huon and his wife drink from a fountain of youth, such that they are able to have another child, a son, when they are already great-grandparents. Thus, a repetitive narrative is normal for the *Huon de Bordeaux* cycle, and Ydé's second generation of children parallels his grandparents' second generation.

Even given the unusual family situations in the *Huon de Bordeaux* continuations, Croissant stands out as a non-reproductive male character, especially considering that Ydé and Huon reproduce abundantly or at an advanced age. This religiously didactic and non-reproductive masculinity represented by Croissant and Saint Gilles is certainly different from that of Ydé and Huon, or Tristan. Although he is not a saint like Gilles, Croissant's experience of

poverty and disinheritance also links him to the model of sainthood. His purpose in the narrative is to show that God can intervene in men's lives, and to see him become a monk rather than to marry at the end of the narrative would not have been strange. However, both sons of sex change are not completely divorced from the pursuit of secular power; Croissant does finally inherit Rome, and Gilles helps his brother inherit, as we will see in chapter six.

In this chapter, I will begin with a study of *Yde et Olive II* and then conclude with *Croissant*. In my analysis of the titular characters Yde/Ydé and Croissant, I will depart from the majority of scholarly studies in examining in detail the events *after* Yde's sex change and the birth of Croissant, rather than Yde's itinerary *towards* sex change. That is, I will primarily study those sections labeled *Croissant* and *Yde et Olive II* by Barbara Brewka in her 1977 dissertation and edition of the Turin manuscript, rather than *Yde et Olive I* (hereafter *YO I* and *YO II*).<sup>269</sup> The content of *YO I* has already been thoroughly studied in many articles and book chapters. Scholars have discussed its representation of gender performance, lesbian desire, same-sex marriage, and incest.<sup>270</sup> An equally thorough study of *Croissant* and *YO II* seems to me necessary in order to

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<sup>269</sup> Barbara Anne Brewka, "'Esclarmonde,' 'Clarisse et Florent,' 'Yde et Olive I,' 'Croissant,' 'Yde et Olive II,' 'Huon et les Geants,' Sequels to 'Huon de Bordeaux,' as contained in Turin MS. L.II.14: an Edition" (PhD Diss., Vanderbilt University, 1977), 64-65; *ARLIMA*, s.v. "Huon de Bordeaux," accessed July 12, 2016, [http://www.arlima.net/eh/huon\\_de\\_bordeaux.html#fr10](http://www.arlima.net/eh/huon_de_bordeaux.html#fr10).

The Turin manuscript was composed in 1311, and the six continuations contained in it were probably written between the mid-thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries. The decasyllabic *Huon de Bordeaux* has been dated to between 1260 and 1268, although some estimates go earlier into the thirteenth century. Caroline Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant: Huon de Bordeaux, l'épique médiévale, et l'esprit de suite* (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2008), 31-33.

<sup>270</sup> Robert L. A. Clark, "A Heroine's Sexual Itinerary: Incest, Transvestism, and Same-Sex Marriage in *Yde et Olive*," in *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in Old French Literature*, ed. Karen J. Taylor, 89-106 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998) (an anti-Freudian reading of the incest theme); William Robins, "Three Tales of Female Same-Sex

fully understand how Yde/Ydé's sex/gender change imports on the larger narrative; in *YO II*, we get to see Ydé "in action" as a man, unlike in *YO I*, which ends abruptly after the sex change.<sup>271</sup> Before beginning my analysis of these two neglected texts, I will give a summary of *YO I* and take care to highlight those characters who will reappear later. I will then begin with my study of *YO II* before moving on to *Croissant*.

### 5.1 SUMMARY OF *YDE ET OLIVE I*

Yde is the granddaughter of Huon de Bordeaux, whose story forms the first *chanson* of this cycle. He and his wife Esclarmonde have a daughter Clarisse, who marries Florent, the king of Aragon. Clarisse dies while giving birth to Yde, their only child. Florent mourns Clarisse for many years, but when Yde is fourteen he decides that he wants to marry her "pour l'amour de sa mere" [for the love of her mother], and the shock of his councilors does nothing to dissuade him.<sup>272</sup> Yde is horrified and tries to convince him that this is a terrible sin. He prepares a bath for Yde but while she is bathing, Desier of Pavia, Florent's uncle, arrives unexpectedly, and Florent

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Marriage: Ovid's *Iphis and Ianthe*, the Old French *Yde et Olive*, and Antonio Pucci's *Reina d'Oriente*," *Exemplaria* 21 (2009): 43-62; Marguerite C. Walter, "Cross-Gender Transformation and the Female Body in *La Chanson d'Yde et Olive*," *Mediaevalia* 22 (1999): 307-322; Diane Watt, "Behaving Like a Man? Incest, Lesbian Desire, and Gender Play in *Yde et Olive* and its Adaptations," *Comparative Literature* 50 (1998): 265-85; Jacqueline de Weever, "The Lady, the Knight, and the Lover;" Angela Jane Weisl, "How to be a Man, Though Female: Changing Sex in Medieval Romance," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 45 (2009): 110-137.

<sup>271</sup> The only critical analyses of *Yde et Olive II* and *Croissant* are found in Barbara Brewka's introduction to her dissertation and in Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*.

<sup>272</sup> *YO I*, 6398. All references from the *Huon de Bordeaux* sequels are to line, not page, numbers.

must greet him. Yde seizes this opportunity to escape, grabbing men's clothes and riding off on a horse. Yde then has a series of adventures in which she passes as a man, first joining a group of German soldiers who are on their way to serve King Oton of Rome, then fighting a group of thieves. Eventually she arrives at Oton's court, where she presents herself as a man with a false genealogy, and serves Oton's daughter Olive. She then successfully leads Oton's army against the king of Spain. Olive declares her love for Yde and Oton decides that the two should marry, specifying that Yde will inherit the kingdom of Rome upon Oton's death. Yde is afraid since this marriage will expose to Olive that Yde does not have a penis ("n'a membre nul qu'a li puist abiter" [she has no member with which to have sex with her]), but she decides to go forward and accept the marriage proposal.<sup>273</sup> At first Yde claims that she is sick and she and Olive only kiss and embrace for fifteen nights. When Yde finally confesses to Olive that she is a woman, Olive declares that she will remain faithful to Yde despite this fact. However, a servant overhears them and tells Oton that he has given his daughter and all of Rome to a woman. In order to verify this story, Oton draws a bath and orders Yde to join him; when Yde refuses, Oton tells her to take off her clothes and declares that if he finds that she is a woman both she and Olive will be burned. An angel then appears to rectify the situation, declaring before Oton and all his court that Yde was indeed female but is now a man in the flesh ("hom carnés").<sup>274</sup> The angel never reveals Yde's true genealogy as the son/former daughter of Florent of Aragon. The angel declares that Oton will die in eight days and that Yde will engender Croissant, and predicts Croissant's later poverty. This is the last *laisse* of the section that Brewka labels *Yde et Olive I*; immediately following this is *Croissant*, and then *Yde et Olive II*, the continuation of Ydé and Olive's

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 7104.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 7261.



adventures post-sex change, follows *Croissant* in the Turin manuscript. I have chosen to discuss *YO II* first, however; in terms of the chronology of the two narratives, *YO II*'s events occur at the same time as those in *Croissant*, but in a different location.

## 5.2 *YDE ET OLIVE II* (VV. 7680-8105)

### 5.2.1 Ydé and his father: rewriting the past

Thirteen years into his reign in Rome, when *Croissant* is twelve years old, Ydé decides to go to Aragon to visit his father. This decision is depicted as a sudden memory of his father, and is not explained any further: “Du roi Florent est Ydain sosvenu” [Ydé remembered King Florent].<sup>275</sup> (The decision and the memory occur in *Croissant*, and the arrival in Aragon is picked up in *YO II*.) Neither Ydé nor the narrator comments upon Florent’s previous incestuous desire for Yde as a young woman. Considering that the young Yde fled from her father’s marriage proposal, the lack of commentary about how Ydé feels about his father or what he expects to discuss with him when they meet is surprising. Ydé soon discovers that his father died more than ten years ago; with this knowledge, Ydé’s interest then becomes to claim his father’s land as his inheritance. Thus, Ydé’s sex change creates a new kind of bond with his father by allowing him to become his heir. The fact that the bond is only created narratively once Florent is dead, however, indicates that the bond of father and son, as opposed to that of father and daughter, is most importantly a linguistic alliance of inheritance, rather than a lived relationship. As Zrinka

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<sup>275</sup> *Croissant*, 7298.

Stahuljak has argued concerning *Le Roman d'Eneas*, “[t]he relation between ‘father’ and ‘son’ is performed in the mutual act of linguistic alliance,” one that “bridges the disjunction between the dead father and the living son, thereby continuing the lineage. Genealogy, then, is linguistic relation.”<sup>276</sup> In the underworld, Eneas’ father Anchises tells Eneas about his future lineage. In the case of Florent and Ydé, there is no such supernatural meeting, but as I will show, Ydé must explain to others in Aragon who he is and how he came to be a man. Once they understand the genealogical link to his dead father, they believe Ydé has a right to the kingdom.

In chapter four, we saw that Blanchandin’s masculine identity was accompanied by religious conversion and a definitive split from his birth family and particularly from his father, who dies shortly before the sex change. While Ydé’s new masculine identity develops in Rome, where he has no contact with his father, it does not cause a psychological split from his birth family or an understanding of himself as a new person. On the contrary, in Ydé’s case, the sex change reinforces the bond with his family because it allows him to become his father’s heir. Starting as a Christian girl and ending as a Christian man, Ydé’s reincorporation into his father’s lineage takes place simply by Ydé becoming male. Because of the fact that he is male, Ydé assumes that he can now inherit Aragon. Although Ydé’s masculinity is not directly called into question in *YO II*, the “feminine” way in which he becomes king of Rome (through marriage) means that his family identification and his geographic location are split apart - he identifies with his Aragonian lineage, but he lives in Rome because of his marriage. In order to resolve this, he must return to Aragon, and as a result, the young Croissant replaces Ydé as emperor of Rome. Ydé’s new relationship with his (dead) father Florent thus alters Ydé’s relationship with his own

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<sup>276</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 35.

son: they have no further relationship with each other after Ydé leaves. Instead of following in his father's footsteps, Croissant then follows those of Oton, his maternal grandfather.

Why does Ydé decide to return to his father? (Not knowing that Florent is dead, Ydé even tells Croissant he might not ever come back to Rome if Florent needs him in Aragon.) Does Ydé not remember that his father tried to marry him when he was a girl? Does he remember, but has he forgiven his father? Or does he remember, but consider that his father's behavior towards him as a young daughter has nothing to do with his father's behavior towards him as an adult son? The fact that Ydé goes to visit his father at all implies that his new masculinity has altered the past in a way, such that Florent's behavior towards the young Yde, for all intents and purposes, never happened. If we return briefly to *YO I*, it becomes evident that Yde's separation from, or even forgetting of, the traumatic experience of her father's advances occurs almost immediately after she began to cross-dress. Soon after Yde runs away, as she is about to fight a group of bandits, she says to herself, "Bien doi avoir prouece et hardement / Quant je sui fille au rice roi Florent" [I must have prowess and strength, since I am King Florent's daughter].<sup>277</sup> Like Ydé's later decision to visit his father, the fact that Yde speaks positively of her father is surprising given his recent behavior. It indicates that for Yde, her blood relationship to her noble father gives her certain qualities, like this physical prowess, which is in itself valuable regardless of Florent's behavior towards her. As Diane Watt explains, "rather than expressing despair at being the daughter, not son, of Florent, she is seeking inspiration by reminding herself of her own noble birth."<sup>278</sup> It is unusual, however, that a woman would speak of the prowess inherited

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<sup>277</sup> *YO I*, 6800-01.

<sup>278</sup> Diane Watt, "Behaving Like a Man?" 278.

from her father. Since Yde says she ought to have prowess just from being Florent's daughter, she implies that prowess is *not* imbued by the fact of her cross-dressing. Nevertheless, without running away and cross-dressing, she would not have been in a situation wherein she could display this prowess, nor would she have had occasion to reflect on it. In this way, Florent's sinful behavior provides an opening for a new life in which Yde can take full advantage of her abilities. In both citing her father as a source of power and in later deciding to visit him, Yde/Ydé shows that Florent's previous behavior towards the girl Yde has no import on his relationship with him as a man. Her prowess may not be a direct result of cross-dressing, but her feelings about her father change (they become more positive) as a result of her taking on masculine dress. This separation from his father's previous behavior reaches its pinnacle when Ydé, now an adult man, goes to visit his father and even contemplates staying with him and helping him run his kingdom.<sup>279</sup>

The timing of Ydé's decision to leave Aragon is also linked to Croissant's age. Ydé and Olive apparently consider the twelve-year-old to be mature enough to take over the administration of Rome permanently, since they think they may not come back. Conveniently, Croissant's age and news of Florent's death coincide such that Ydé can comfortably pass Rome to Croissant and return to Aragon as its sole and rightful heir. In this way, despite the troubles that both Croissant and Ydé will have in keeping hold of their kingdoms, neither of them has any conflict with either a present or living father: each is ready to succeed his father, but this

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<sup>279</sup> When the cross-dressed Yde is at Oton's court, she often prays for her father, despite of (or because of) what he has done: "Souvent prioit pour roi Floire son pere / Pour cui ele est si tainte et mascuree / Et d'Arragonne est en fuiant tournee: / Si [l]'a li rois de sa char engenee." [She often prayed for King Florent her father, because of whom she is so stained and sullied, and fled from Aragon, even though the king engendered her of his own flesh.] *YO I*, 6917-20.

transition comes at an unorthodox life stage for both of them. Croissant does not become king of Rome when Ydé dies, but rather when Ydé decides to leave and when he thinks Croissant is mature enough to become king.<sup>280</sup> As for Ydé, he has reached adult manhood: he is about thirty years old, married and a father, and already a king.<sup>281</sup> But because he was born female, he was not originally meant to be Florent's heir. In his absence from Aragon, his great-uncle Desier has taken over, and now Ydé must prove that he deserves the inheritance and depose him.

Part of the proof of Ydé's legitimacy as heir will lie in the question of how he acquired his male identity. In the scene from *YO I* that I analyzed above, the cross-dressed Yde specifically refers to herself as Florent's *daughter*. When Ydé later changes sex, the narrative portrays him as Florent's son both post-sex change *and* retroactively, as we saw with Silence in my second chapter; that is, various moments in the narrative indicate or imply that he was born male. For example, in *YO II*, the narrator says that Aragon is the place "ou [Ydé] fu engenuis" [where [Ydé] was engendered], and makes no commentary on the fact that Yde was born there as

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<sup>280</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003): 14; 23. Medieval texts offer differing opinions on the age of manhood, but generally in the period of the teens and early twenties young men were thought of as and expected to be rather wild and undisciplined. A man would be knighted at around twenty-one and marry later. It seems that twelve is very young to be left alone to become king, especially with no advisers. Exceptional knights were known for bearing arms at a very young age, but Croissant is never described as learning the arts of chivalry.

<sup>281</sup> Concerning the succession of generations, Caroline Cazanave notes that Oton's death coincides with Croissant's engendering: "la vie de Croissant succède à celle d'Oton, la faisant en quelque sorte disparaître." Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 188. The angel announces that Ydé will engender Croissant and that Oton will die eight days later. In this way, there are only two generations on the scene at a given time. However, Ydé does not die before Croissant becomes king, and Ydé's grandfather Huon is still living. In *YO II*, Huon, Ydé, and Croissant are all together at one moment (see vv. 8080-91).

a daughter and not as a son.<sup>282</sup> By using language that matter-of-factly establishes Ydé as Florent's son and heir, the narrative leaves no room for doubt about his legitimacy. Returning to the place "where he was engendered" emphasizes that his rightful kingdom is the one where he was born, rather than Rome, into which he married. The importance of Ydé's current relationship with his now-deceased father lies in the fact that Florent engendered Ydé and hence engendered an heir. As we have seen above, the previous incest threat that caused turmoil between father and daughter has been completely eliminated in favor of a symbolic relationship of genealogy.

Ydé's "retroactive maleness," while it is effective at legitimizing his inheritance claim, does not erase all traces of his past as female. In fact, part of Ydé's work to claim his throne will require him to explain to others in Aragon how he came to be male. This understanding of Ydé as a transformed person coexists with moments like those above, in which Ydé is portrayed as always having been male. In Aragon, Ydé will meet a woman who was once his childhood friend, as well as a count, an abbot, and the current king of Aragon. Each of these characters knows of his itinerary from female to male, and with this sex change in mind, they are recruited to support his claim to Aragon.

### **5.2.2 Ydé's childhood friend: a glimpse of an alternate reality**

When they arrive in Aragon, Ydé and Olive first visit a woman with whom Ydé was raised, and perhaps with whom she even shared a wet nurse ("qui ot esté nourie o li jadis" [with whom she

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<sup>282</sup> *YO II*, 7693.

was raised in the past]).<sup>283</sup> This nameless woman and her husband, a count, welcome Ydé and Olive into their castle, and it is this lady who informs Ydé that his father is dead. Being the only character that knew Ydé before his sex change, she is, in the absence of Florent, Ydé's only link to his female past. However, just as Ydé's feelings about his father remain mysterious, the narrative does not include a scene wherein Ydé explains his sex change to his childhood friend, and we do not see her reaction to the sex change. Since no one in Aragon knew anything about Yde's whereabouts since her disappearance fifteen years earlier, it is reasonable to assume that Ydé was indeed obliged to explain to his friend what had happened to him. Although the reader does not see her specific reaction to this story, the lady views Ydé and Olive in a positive manner, as they are greeted warmly and treated like the royals they are: "Ce jour fu d'iaus Ydés mout bien servis" [That day Ydé was very well served by them].<sup>284</sup>

*YO II*'s poet does not imagine a scene of confrontation and/or reconciliation between Florent and Ydé, but the presence of a childhood friend serves to shed light on the father-daughter, and now father-son, relationship. I see the lady as representing what Ydé's life would have or could have been if she had grown to be an adult woman, and hence, the lady represents Florent's failings towards his daughter. Because of his incestuous desire, Florent refused to marry Yde to a worthy nobleman, and his absolute failure to secure a proper marriage for her (proposing himself as a husband instead) is what causes Yde to flee and don men's clothes. The

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 7702. See definitions of the verb "norrir:" *Petit Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français*, s.v. "norrir," nourrir, élever, éduquer, accessed July 22, 2016. <http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/vandaele-dictionary/norrir>. *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, s.v. "nourrir," élever [un enfant]; [dans un cont. évoquant la familiarité qui devrait exister entre pers. ayant grandi ensemble dans le même village...]; allaiter, accessed July 13, 2016. See also my discussion of Silence's (wet) nurse in chapter two.

<sup>284</sup> *YO II*, 7713.

narrative emphasizes that Ydé's friend has married well: her husband is a "haut quens" [great count] whose castle is "riches et bien garnis" [rich and well equipped].<sup>285</sup> Presumably Yde would have married someone rich and befitting to her rank had her father done his duty toward her. The lady's successful marriage shows a desirable life outcome for a noblewoman. However, her life also displays the everyday misogyny that Yde would have encountered: for example, the lady is excluded the next day from Ydé and Olive's consultation about Ydé's inheritance with the count and an abbot. Her exclusion is typical for a woman, but it is also significant because Ydé sought her out first and presumably explained his sex change to her; despite this, she is not deemed worthy to be taken into confidence regarding the political issues brought up by the sex change. For these reasons, the lady represents both Ydé's lost possibilities for happiness and success as a woman, and the misogyny that Ydé would have encountered had he remained female. Both sides of this coin derive from the same situation, that is, the fact that women and girls rely on their male relatives to transact their marriages: they depend on male family members to make choices in their best interest. Ydé's change of sex delivers him from these problems of everyday misogyny, but it confers the problem of inheritance. Now Ydé, who has a right to this land by virtue of his new sex, must fight for it because he was absent from Aragon at the time of his father's death, and Ydé's great-uncle Desier, a Lombard, seized it.

Although Ydé's friend is excluded from the conversation about inheritance, notably, Olive is not. In fact, it is Olive who recounts in detail to the abbot and the count the story of their marriage and who then begins to advocate for Ydé's right to his inheritance. In this scene, which in many ways is analogous to the scene in *Tristan de Nanteuil* in which Clarinde reacts to news of Blanchandin's sex change, Olive explains their same-sex marriage, their chastity, and how

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 7703-04.



Ydé's sex change came about. Olive's explanation also serves as a confession to a religious authority, or rather a declaration of innocence regarding their same-sex marriage; as a result of her "campaigning" for her husband, the abbot accepts Olive's explanation and supports Ydé's right to his inheritance. Why is Olive different than Ydé's childhood friend in her greater access to political discussions? Olive is a necessary tool for legitimizing Ydé's male authority. Olive's explanation, which I will examine in the next section, functions to clear her and Yde's name of any sexual wrongdoing. In addition, by declaring that they only engaged in sex after Ydé became male and that he engendered a child in her, her bodily experience guarantees Ydé's masculinity, rather than just his linguistic declaration that he is a man.

### 5.2.3 Same-sex marriage, sex change, and religious authority

The day after their arrival in Aragon, Ydé and Olive hear mass said by an abbot and then meet with him and the count. The narrator says that Ydé explains what happened to him after he left Aragon, and although it is not specified, it appears by his audience's reaction that he tells them that he had a sex change:

Li rois Ydés o sa moullier de pris  
A conseil a le conte et l'abbé mis:  
Che qu'il ot fait puis qu'i s'en fu fuïs  
Et son pere ot et ses amis guerpis  
Lor a conté par sens et par avis;  
Cascuns d'iaus .ij. en fu forment pensiz.<sup>286</sup>

King Ydé, along with his wife, took counsel from the abbot and the count. [Ydé] carefully recounted to them what he had done since he ran away and left behind his father and his friends. Each of them [the abbot and the count] was very pensive about it.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 7722-25.

The abbot and the count are “pensive” after hearing Ydé’s story, and the abbot immediately asks Olive whether what Ydé says is true. The abbot’s question is no more detailed than this; he does not accuse Ydé/Yde and Olive of having had sex when they were both women, nor does he ask Olive whether she believed Yde to be a man when she married her. However, when Olive speaks up, her concern is to make sure that the abbott knows they were innocent of any sexual sin: she immediately says that she thought he was a man upon marriage, but quickly found out that he was not. Olive’s speech then goes on to emphasize three points: that she and Yde remained chaste as women, that Ydé is now a “real man,” and that hence he has a right to his inheritance.

Olive volunteers more information about their relationship than the abbot asked for, saying:

Et quant de li le voir li ot conté  
Qu’en l’onnour Diu, le roi de maïsté  
Avoit gardé sainte virginité.<sup>287</sup>

And when he had confessed the whole truth about himself, she had kept her holy virginity in honor of God, the king of majesty.

Olive then explains that she had such pity for Yde that she would have stayed with her for her whole life and “gardé caästé” [remained chaste].<sup>288</sup> As I showed in chapter four, in medieval penitentials, sexual activity between women was considered a sin. A woman found impersonating a man and having sex with another woman could be tried and executed for this crime.<sup>289</sup> Olive’s pre-emptive declaration of innocence indicates that their sexual activity or lack

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 7734-36.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 7739.

<sup>289</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 139; 142; James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 169; 213.

thereof would be a matter of concern to the abbot. In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, when incest and same-sex marriage appear in the narrative, so does a religious figure, Saint Gilles, and scenes of confession. Similarly, in *YO II*, the question of same-sex marriage and sexuality brings forward a figure of religious authority, the abbot. Olive's recounting of events accurately portrays what occurs in *YO I*. However, in that text, although indeed Yde and Olive do remain chaste, and Olive says that she will keep Yde's secret, Olive never directly expresses that she would have remained in a chaste relationship with a female husband if he had not been granted a sex change, neither does she nor the narrator specify that she remained a virgin throughout those fifteen days. Although the bedroom scene in *YO I* is more erotic than Olive's matter-of-fact recounting here (the two did embrace and kiss in bed) her insistence upon her chastity implies knowledge that sex between women is possible, and that a woman could lose her virginity with another woman.<sup>290</sup> This fact, which remains unspoken in *YO I*, is only brought up in order to be immediately negated in *YO II*. However, the fact that Oton threatened to burn both Yde and Olive indicates that he saw their crime as very serious and assumed that they had *not* remained chaste.

Brewka believes that *YO II* may be the work of a different poet than the one who wrote *YO I*, so some of the differences in the representation of Yde and Olive's relationship between these two texts may be due to that.<sup>291</sup> In each text, religious authority is present in different forms, and these authorities sanction or condemn the two women's relationship in different

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<sup>290</sup> See lines 7164-90 (*YO I*) for the scene of Yde and Olive's first night together.

<sup>291</sup> "The text that follows *Croissant* [*YO II*] in the Turin MS may be a reworking of the last part of a text that originally included *YO I*, or it could be a completion of *YO I* by a different author. The influence of a second poet is undeniable, however." Brewka, *Sequels*, 35.

ways. In *YO I*, there is no priestly figure; it is Olive's father Oton, with the support of his courtiers, who orders that Yde and Olive be burned. Oton's command that *both* be burned implies that he believed both were guilty of sexual misconduct; he did not just want to execute Yde for impersonating a man. Oton's authority over Yde and Olive pertains to their same-sex marriage and possible sexual activity, but Oton has no authority over Yde's sexed body: it is rather the highest religious authority, God himself, who grants Yde's sex change through an angel. Similarly, when Olive explains their experience to the abbot, she seeks his approval concerning their behavior during their marriage, previous to the sex change. She does not seek his approval concerning Yde's change of sex, since it lies beyond the purview of earthly authority. However, she still needs the abbot to believe in the legitimacy of this sex change, as his support will greatly help Ydé regain his throne. As Olive explains it to the abbot, it is clear that God's intervention was desirable: it occurs in order to prevent their deaths, and it also allows Croissant to be engendered:

Arsses fussiens, qui qu'en eüst mal gré,  
 Se Dius n'eüst en mon segnour ouvré:  
 Homme le fist par sa grande dignité  
 Puis a en mi .j. biau fil engené.<sup>292</sup>

We would have been burned, even though people would have been unhappy about it, if God had not done his work in my lord. In his great dignity, he changed him into a man. Then he [Ydé] engendered a beautiful son in me.

The abbot is not shown to have any reaction, negative or positive, to Olive's statement about their innocence, nor to her explanation that God changed Ydé's sex. Olive then explains to the abbot and the count that Ydé crowned his son king of Rome before leaving for Aragon, and that

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<sup>292</sup> *YO II*, 7745-47.

“[o]r est venus Ydés pour s’ireté [now Ydé has come for his inheritance].<sup>293</sup> After Olive says all of this, Ydé chimes in that she is speaking the truth, and adds that he even has a sealed letter from the pope supporting his claim to the throne. The sudden appearance of this letter is strange, since when Ydé and Olive departed from Rome, they did not know that Florent was dead. Nonetheless, they have arrived fully prepared for the eventuality of Florent’s death and a fight for Ydé’s inheritance. The pope’s approval of Ydé’s claim is the clincher for the abbot, who finally reacts; he begins to cry with pity. He promptly gives a sermon to the people of Aragon exhorting them to accept Ydé as their king. The count is never shown to react to Ydé and Olive’s story, beyond his initial pensiveness, but after the sermon, he joins the abbot in pledging himself to Ydé as his lord.

Ydé and Olive’s explanation of their past is clearly sufficient evidence for the pope, the abbot, and the count, as well as all the people of Aragon once they hear the sermon, that Ydé is the legitimate heir to Aragon. There is presently only one obstacle to Ydé claiming his inheritance, and that is the fact that he departed from Aragon, therefore leaving it open to be taken by Desier, his great-uncle (Florent’s mother’s brother).<sup>294</sup> The fact that Ydé was not born male does not present a problem; this information is presented matter-of-factly to the abbot and the count, and they agree that Ydé’s present state as a man is sufficient reason for him to become king. Of course, Ydé would not *be* a man had he not departed from Aragon in the first place, so the one obstacle to his inheritance is also what created the one possibility of him inheriting. As I noted above, the cross-dressed Yde is able to display her prowess because of her father’s sinful

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 7750.

<sup>294</sup> Desier has a larger role in *Clarisse et Florent*; see Brewka, *Sequels*, 15.

behavior (because she is put in a situation where she can live as a man). Similarly, Ydé can now become the heir of Aragon, ironically, because his father forced him to depart from Aragon. Yde's departure originated in her father's desire for her, and that departure ultimately led to Ydé's sex change.

In *YO I*, Yde declares that her father's plan to marry her is a sin and she asks her father if he has lost his mind.<sup>295</sup> Florent's behavior is portrayed as both morally shocking and as a disturbance to laws that were meant to keep marriages exogamous – his advisers specifically tell him that he cannot marry within four degrees of kinship.<sup>296</sup> They are also worried about the marriage as a sin, as Yde is: the first thing one of Florent's advisers says to him is “A ceste loi que Dix nous donnee / Dedens enfer sera t'ame dampnee” [According to the law that God gave us, your soul will be damned to hell].<sup>297</sup> However, as horrible as Florent's behavior is, it is the impetus for Yde turning into Ydé and becoming his heir, which is a much preferable alternative to either Yde marrying her father or even to Yde marrying exogamously, since in the latter case Florent would still remain without a direct male heir. In this way, sex change does clearly solve a problem of inheritance for this family. However, Florent's incestuous desire, while it creates an opening for Yde to become Ydé, remains unacceptable and is perhaps the reason for his death

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<sup>295</sup> *YO I*, 6535-36.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 6488.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 6401-02.

and effacement from the narrative: instead of re-establishing a relationship with his father now that he is a man, Florent dies and Ydé replaces his father as the patriarch of Aragon.<sup>298</sup>

Ydé and Olive's brief conversation with the abbot and the count reveals much about the portrayal of sex change in this text. First, the change of sex becomes a topic of conversation and of potential controversy only because Ydé is trying to claim his inheritance – if they had remained in Rome, the question would not have come up. Thus, sex change as something even mildly controversial is linked to Ydé's relationship with his father and his inheritance. Before this point, we could call Ydé's experience and new life as a man a success, since he engendered a son and rules over Rome without any issues. Second, as we saw with Blanchandine and Clarinde, same-sex marriage and sex change, although linked, are two separate issues that are treated differently. Olive's explanation to the abbot that they did not have sex before the sex change shows that she recognizes that he has some religious authority concerning this question. The sex change, on the other hand, has simply been ordained by God and essentially is none of the abbot's business. The abbot, however, is more influenced by his earthly religious superior, the pope, than he is by the tale of the miraculous sex change. Finally, Olive, like Clarinde for Blanchandin, is perhaps the ultimate authority on Ydé. Although Ydé speaks for himself at first, Olive's verbal corroboration of his story appears to be necessary to convince the abbot and the count of its legitimacy. Olive not only verbally attests to what happened to Ydé, but also recalls the physical proof of her pregnancy with Croissant.

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<sup>298</sup> In the later prose versions of *Yde et Olive*, Florent is still alive and Ydé returns to Aragon to help him rule his kingdom. See Michel J. Raby, *La Chanson de Croissant en prose du XVème siècle* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

#### 5.2.4 Inheritance resolved

Ydé now has the abbot and the count's support, but he still needs the help of his grandfather, Huon de Bordeaux, to reclaim his kingdom. Huon, the hero of the first *chanson de geste* that inspired these sequels, has been living in fairyland in a castle called Dunostre, where some time ago he and his wife Esclarmonde drank from a fountain of youth. As a matter of fact, Esclarmonde is pregnant at this moment in the story, although she is a great-grandmother. In addition to eternal youth, Huon also has the power of omniscience, which is how he comes to know of Ydé's dilemma. Huon's interest in the affair is also related to Desier's actions, not just a desire to support his grandson. For Huon, Desier has betrayed a promise to Florent. Desier and Florent had already fought and then made peace back in *Clarisse et Florent* (the sequel that precedes *Yde et Olive I*). Huon says that at that time Desier had pledged to serve Florent,

mais li cuivers mesprent  
Envers Ydé, fil au roi Flourient:  
Tollir li vieut sa terre fausement.<sup>299</sup>

but the dishonorable man is mistreating Ydé, Florent's son: he wants to take his land from him unjustly.<sup>300</sup>

This is the first time in any of the sequels that Huon has spoken of Yde/Ydé. Since he is omniscient, he must also know of Ydé's sex change, but he makes no comment on it, only

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<sup>299</sup> *YO II*, 7913-15.

<sup>300</sup> In *Clarisse and Florent*, Florent and Desier do resolve their conflict; however, Desier's specific promise to serve Florent is only mentioned in *YO II*. In *Clarisse and Florent*, in fact, he makes a different promise: "Desier makes Florent heir to his lands because of the damage he had done to Florent's property." Brewka, *Sequels*, 18. Hence, if anything, Ydé should have inherited Desier's lands.



declaring that Ydé is Florent's son.<sup>301</sup> Huon represents another kind authority along with the abbot and the pope; it is important both that Huon has fairy powers and that he is Ydé's grandfather. With the support of both Christian religious authorities and the supernatural power of his grandfather, Ydé is in a good position to defeat Desier.

Huon is obviously already convinced of Ydé's legitimacy as an heir. As we have seen, he does not even mention the sex change; this is another example of a willingness to believe that Ydé was born male and was always Florent's son. He reiterates this point when he mediates a meeting between Desier and Ydé, telling Desier that "li rois Ydés fu en ma fille nés" [King Ydé was born of my daughter] and that he is Florent's heir: "Li rois Idés, que vous ichi veés, / Est li siens hoys et siens est cis regnés" [King Ydé, whom you see here, is his heir and this is his kingdom].<sup>302</sup> Desier accepts this information as legitimate and is ready to step down, but his decision is also largely influenced by the appearance of Huon's army in addition to the one that Ydé had already assembled. Huon's explanation to Desier includes no information about the sex change, but somehow Desier knows about it. He cites the change of sex to his men in order to convince them that it is correct that Ydé become their lord:

Mellour segnour que ne sui avés:  
Idee fu, or est Ides nonnés –  
Homme l'a fait Diex par ses dignités –  
Ses peres fu Floires, ja n'en doutez.  
Alés a lui, honmage li feréz.  
Com vo segnour honnerer le devéz.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> The poet of *YO II* has Huon declare upon seeing Ydé that he has not seen him in thirty and a half years (8027), but there is no scene in *YO I* where Huon meets his granddaughter.

<sup>302</sup> *YO II*, 8038; 8040-41.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 8054-59.

You have a better lord than I am. He was Ydée, now his name is Ydés: in his dignity, God made him a man. His father was Florent, do not have any doubt about this. Go to him; you will do him homage. You ought to honor him as your lord.

When Huon spoke of Ydé, he simply stated that Ydé was Florent's son and heir, and that Ydé was born of his daughter (Clarisse), whereas Desier's explanation to his men specifies that Ydé changed sex. Since Desier needs to convince a large group of men to accept Ydé as their lord, it is interesting that he chooses to reveal here that their new lord was not born a man. This moment is similar to the one in *Tristan de Nanteuil* in which Ganor knights Blanchandin only *after* hearing that he has changed sex.<sup>304</sup> Just as Ganor does, Desier has a positive reaction to the fact of Ydé's sex change, even to the point that he uses this information to convince his men that they should switch allegiance.

In *YO II*, Ydé is not required to do battle in order to win back Aragon. Ydé comes to Aragon with an army, and is prepared to fight Desier, but he never has to do so because of Huon's intervention. However, the poet is careful to point out that Ydé has all the qualities of a good and generous king. In assembling his army, he distributes horses, armor, weapons, and money to his soldiers.<sup>305</sup> "En faire amis est tout son desiriers" [making friends is his only desire]: Ydé wants to be loved by his soldiers and subjects, so he distributes his wealth generously but not excessively.<sup>306</sup> Ydé's behavior contrasts with that of his son Croissant, who gives away his wealth indiscriminately, as we will see in the next section. In a rare intervention, the poet/narrator describes Ydé's royal philosophy: "Roi qui ses gens ainsi tient et a chiers / N'est

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<sup>304</sup> See my chapter four.

<sup>305</sup> *YO II*, 7841-47.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 7856.

mie mout a desconfir legiers” [A king who rules and loves his people in this way is not at all easy to betray].<sup>307</sup> Thus, Ydé’s generosity is a demonstration of the reciprocal relationship between him and his subjects: he provides for them and they remain loyal to him. In describing Desier in the beginning of *YO II*, the poet concedes that he is a good king despite being a Lombard: “Lombard estoit, mais mout estoit hardiz” [He was a Lombard, but very valiant]; he was loved by “des grans et des petits” [the nobleman and the common man].<sup>308</sup> (I will say more about the depiction of Lombards in the section on *Croissant*.) Desier is never described as a bad or malicious king in comparison to Ydé: both are good to their people, but Ydé simply ought to be king because he is Florent’s son.

### 5.2.5 Masculinity, marriage, and new families

Explaining his situation to the abbot, assembling his army, and distributing goods are the only things that Ydé does independently during this episode. It is the abbot who goes to Desier and explains to him that Ydé is the rightful king and says that Ydé is ready to fight him. When Huon appears, Desier surrenders to him without a fight. In fact, Ydé is not even present until Huon “wishes” Ydé and Olive to him. (Huon has the ability to transport people by thinking about it – and it seems Ydé and Olive are nearby but not close enough to walk over!) At this point Huon also orchestrates the reconciliation between Desier and Ydé seen above. In these scenarios, the abbot and Huon replace Ydé as an active authority figure, and Ydé remains relatively passive. However, I do not believe that their interventions necessarily indicate that Ydé lacks kingly

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 7859-60.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 7697-99.

authority. Despite his passivity, he still receives high praise for treating his soldiers and subjects properly. Ydé's age and maturity, and his unusual experience of sex change, seem to exempt him from having to go through the process of displaying his prowess in battle. Blanchandin's first battle and his knighting come to mind as a comparison. Ydé differs from Blanchandin in that cross-dressed Yde had already proven herself as a successful knight, whereas Blanchandin had to accomplish this rite of passage post-sex change. Ydé is also already a mature man around thirty and a father, and youthful knightly exploits are in his past. Finally, the very knowledge of the sex change is shown to trump any doubts about his legitimate role as king, so battle is simply not necessary. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the abbot and Huon's roles in this episode are pivotal. They do serve to confirm and legitimize Ydé's masculinity, but less in the sense that they compensate for a lack in him, and more as a service to Ydé whom they already respect and honor. The abbot pledges himself to Ydé as his lord; Huon does not have to do so because of his position of power in relation to Ydé, being his grandfather and a king of fairyland, but he is willing to put all his armies behind him because he believes in his claim to Aragon.

In *YO II*'s closing lines, we learn that Ydé rules over Aragon for forty years, governing his people peacefully, and that he has seven children, four sons and three daughters. With this ending, *YO II*'s poet creates an alternate timeline compared to that of *YO I* and *Croissant*: at Croissant's birth, it had been specified that Ydé and Olive would not have any other children. The events in *Croissant* take place over the course of fifteen years, and *Croissant* precedes *YO II* in the manuscript. Although it is never said that it takes Ydé and Olive fifteen years to travel to Aragon and reclaim it from Desier, the narrative of *YO II* proceeds as if this were the case, since at the end of *YO II*, Huon wishes the adult Croissant along with his wife Olive to Aragon for a brief visit. Thus, Croissant still exists in the *YO II* timeline as Ydé and Olive's firstborn son, but

he has aged fifteen years rather than the expected few months. At the same time, he is not considered part of the subsequent family of seven children, as he is not mentioned aside from this quick visit. Since they are absent from Rome, Ydé and Olive are not at all involved in the arrangement of their son Croissant's marriage, just as Florent had nothing to do with Yde's marriage. On the other hand, the literal last words written about Ydé in this sequel describe his good relationship with his other seven children: "Mout bien les assena / Et en haus lieus et fors les maria" [He provided for them and married them well].<sup>309</sup> The lines previous to these mention first his four sons and then his three daughters, so I believe the poet is distinguishing here between a father's different duties towards his sons and daughters: he provides lands for his sons and marries his daughters to worthy noblemen.<sup>310</sup> Ydé re-establishes good parenting and marriage practices in Aragon - practices from which his father had deviated, to say the least.

Croissant and these seven children are thus presented as essentially two different families, almost as if Ydé had remarried. The separation between Croissant and his siblings emphasizes again that Croissant belongs in Rome whereas Ydé belongs in Aragon. In this way, Ydé has the opportunity to bring his wife to his family seat, when originally it was Olive who incorporated him into her Roman lineage. Ydé's new life and family in Aragon further work to solidify the idea that he has always been male; one could imagine that after forty years reigning in Aragon that very few people would think of or be aware that Ydé was once Yde. Ydé's new lineage presents a better version of Ydé as a father than his abandonment of Croissant: on the second try, Ydé does well by his children. However, *YO II*'s ending is not as clean as it would

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 8102-03.

<sup>310</sup> *Dictionnaire Godefroy*, s.v. "assener," *assener quelqu'un d[e] quelque chose*, assigner, destiner quelque chose à quelqu'un; "assené," marié, accessed July 17, 2016, <http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/assener>.

first appear, as it again raises questions about inheritance. Ydé's firstborn son in Aragon is not his true firstborn son, but one would presume that he would inherit Aragon since Croissant already rules over Rome. Who is to say, though, that Croissant would not one day fight his brother for control of Aragon, especially given the history of conflicts over inheritance in this family? The neatly tied together ending is only satisfying if one does not consider this question.

The events recounted in *YO II* show that in this text sex change resolves family problems but at the same time creates new ones. The main problem that is resolved by the sex change is Florent's lack of a male heir. In Ydé's new home in Rome, the fact that he becomes male also resolves the issue of the same-sex marriage, and hence, it also avoids another potential situation wherein a male heir is lacking. (Olive is Oton's only child.) In these situations, sex change is a positive and unifying event for families who can then conserve their property and lineage in the way that they desire. However, Florent's incestuous desire for his daughter, the original problem that caused the sex change to eventually occur, also creates the situation wherein Ydé no longer lives in Aragon. Ydé's absence from what is now his inheritance is the foundational conflict of *YO II*. The conflict's origin in the father's sin shows the fault lines in the otherwise positive situation of the sex change: the origin of the sex change lies in a disturbing situation that is fundamentally disruptive to the family unit. Ydé has no problems in Rome until he "remembers" Florent; his troubles post-sex change are caused by the unsettled nature of the relationship with his father, rather than by a doubt about the legitimacy of the sex change or about his masculinity.

The author's choice to have Ydé return to Aragon and seek his inheritance shows that his "real home" is the one associated with the direct line of lineage from his father, not the Roman lineage into which he married. The existence of two family lines creates potential conflicts in terms of first-born sons and inheritance, but Croissant remains the son whose story is told; Ydé's

other seven children are not named or described. In the next section of this chapter, we will see that Croissant falls to the depths of poverty and then rises up again to become king and emperor of Rome. Ydé's decision to leave Croissant alone in Rome, while not as extreme as Florent's sin, presents another situation wherein a father's negative or threatening behavior causes difficulty for his son. Croissant's dilemma, like Yde's, however, leads to an unexpected reward. His circular itinerary connects him to his father, but his re-establishment as king of Rome confirms that he is Oton's, not Ydé's, heir.

### 5.3 *CROISSANT (VV. 7284-7679)*

When Ydé left behind twelve-year-old Croissant, he crowned him king of Rome. However, as Croissant's story develops, it becomes clear that in terms of a symbolic genealogy, Croissant inherits Rome not from Ydé, but from Oton, his maternal grandfather. As I stated in my introduction to this chapter, Huon's first descendants are female, and hence at marriage they move to their husbands' lands. Huon's daughter Clarisse marries Florent of Aragon, and has a daughter, Yde. With Yde's sex change and the birth of Croissant, Huon's lineage becomes male, but, as we have seen, is split between Aragon and Rome. Neither of these kingdoms originally belonged to Huon – Aragon is inherited from Huon's son-in-law and Rome is Oton's land. In the last continuation, *Huon et les Géants*, Huon and Esclarmonde finally return to Bordeaux after thirty years' absence, and Esclarmonde gives birth to yet another son, establishing a completely new generation.

The lack of a strict linear narrative and a male lineage in the *Huon de Bordeaux* sequels is important to keep in mind when considering what effect Yde's change of sex might have on his

own life and that of his son, because the narrative stalling and repetition in *Croissant* also marks the continuations in general. Croissant's story is unique, however, in the set of sequels because of its didactic and religious nature. I argue that the miracle of the sex change sets in motion a generic change seen in *Croissant*; this is the text that immediately follows the sex change in the narrative, and it continues in the same religious tone. *Croissant* presents a parable-like story in which Croissant learns to be generous but reasonable with his wealth. Croissant is a character whose purpose is to teach a lesson, and specifically through undergoing troubling times of disinheritance and poverty, which are partially caused by Yde's abandonment of his son. Croissant's redemption is accomplished not by his own intellect, strength, or bravery, but by miraculous interventions that guide him back toward his kingdom and his treasure. *YO I* had already departed from the fairyland themes of the earlier sequels and instead turned to Christianity with the intervention of God and his angel in Yde's life, and this emphasis on the divine continues in *Croissant*. Croissant's birth and his future poverty are prophesied at the same moment that the angel declares that Yde will become a man and that Oton will die. In fact, the angel speaks directly to Oton, making it clear that upon departing from this life, Croissant will effectively replace him:

Otes, bons rois, dedans .viij. jours venrés  
En l'autre siècle, de cestui partirés,  
Et vostre fille avoec Ydain lairés:  
.I. fil auront, Croissans iert appellés.<sup>311</sup>

Oton, good king, in eight days you will come into the other world, you will depart from this life, and you will leave your daughter with Ydain: they will have a son who will be named Croissant.

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<sup>311</sup> *YO I*, 7274-77.



Thus, when God created Ydé's male sex, he almost simultaneously caused the death of Oton and the engendering of Croissant; Croissant is "created" in such a way as to inscribe him as Oton's successor, and his birth also has a divine flair from his father's sex change. Croissant, a gentle, kind, innocent, and naïve character, deals with his poverty and disinheritance in a saintly manner. For example, he continues to give away his clothing even when he is being mistreated, turning the other cheek without hesitation. Unlike Gilles, however, who becomes a monk, Croissant remains in the secular model of political power as a king, since he is restored to the throne. Croissant is able to prove that he is the rightful king of Rome after it is taken over by yet another Lombard, but Croissant only comes to power again through divine intervention.

### **5.3.1 Croissant and Guimart: young squire versus powerful knight**

When Ydé and Olive depart from Rome, the narrator specifies that part of the treasure they leave to Croissant is Oton's: they leave him both "lor grant avoir" [their great wealth] "et le le trezor qui au grant roi Oton fu" [and great Oton's treasure].<sup>312</sup> Given that Ydé did not bring any wealth or lands into his marriage, the distinction between the two sources of wealth is puzzling. I believe that the specific mention of Oton's wealth is linked to the story's dénouement, wherein Croissant finds a treasure that is designated as his but which seems to come from Oton's coffers. Oton's treasure mentioned above is not the same as the one Croissant later finds, but it highlights the fact that the deceased Oton remains Croissant's only family connection, as Ydé and Olive have left Rome permanently. Before leaving, Ydé tells Croissant to give of his wealth to the

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<sup>312</sup> *Croissant*, 7301-02.

counts and dukes, and that he will be liked if he does so.<sup>313</sup> This is the extent of Ydé's instructions, despite knowing that he might not be coming back at all, and he does not leave Croissant with any particular advisers or older relatives. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, then, within the next fifteen years Croissant gives away all his wealth, providing horses and clothing for his men and giving parties. At the beginning of this time, Croissant is merely an "enfes" [child] and an "escuiers gentis" [noble squire]; he clearly is not depicted as being mature for his years.<sup>314</sup> He sets up his household in the city instead of staying in the castle, and invites other young people to join him ("la assembla les escuiers gentis" [there he assembled noble squires]).<sup>315</sup> Croissant then gives his money away to young people and people of lower status, not just counts and dukes as his father had advised.<sup>316</sup>

Once he realizes his wealth is depleted, Croissant dejectedly leaves Rome alone. He wanders for a long time, but it is not specified exactly where he goes. At the moment he leaves Rome, fifteen years have passed since his parents left, but Croissant is not represented as older and wiser – he laments his condition but he does not yet reflect on the foolishness of his behavior.<sup>317</sup> No one misses him, since he doesn't have any money to give them anymore, and the Romans soon find a new ruler, Guimart. Guimart is identified as Desier of Lombardy's nephew

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 7307.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 7310.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 7314.

<sup>316</sup> "Croissant rajeunit la classe d'âge des personnages admises à profiter de ses biens de famille (car pour lui, un *escuiers gentis* donne en priorité aux *escuiers gentis*, aux *pucelles* et aux *meschins*, v.7310-16)." Caroline Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 183.

<sup>317</sup> *Croissant*, 7340.

and as arriving from “Ispolite,” which Brewka believes may be Spoleto.<sup>318</sup> Guimart’s uncle Desier of Lombardy seems to be the same man who appears in *YO I* and *II*: in *YO I*, he is called Desier of Pavia and it is he who arrives just in time to disrupt Florent’s bath and allow Yde to escape. In *YO II*, Desier is the king who has taken over Aragon, as we saw above. This family of Lombards is thus represented as always waiting in the wings to take advantage of a power vacuum. Such a representation of Lombards may reference historical conflict between the Lombards, the Franks, and the papacy: in the mid-eighth century, the Franks ousted the Lombards from Italy and gave their land the pope.<sup>319</sup> The last Lombard king that Charlemagne defeated was named Desiderius, in fact, like our Desier.<sup>320</sup> The Lombards in the *Huon de Bordeaux* continuations find it completely legitimate to seize land that is not destined for them by inheritance, and to use force to obtain it, and so they stand in opposition to the heroes of these sequels who attain their power legitimately through inheritance or marriage. Guimart indeed comes to Rome ready to attack (“A Romme vint moustrer son estandart” [He came to Rome bearing his standard]), but when the Roman noblemen see him arrive, they begin to think that he would make a nice replacement for the recently departed Croissant, and go out to greet him in a friendly manner.<sup>321</sup> Their thinking regarding Guimart demonstrates that Ydé’s departure has truly become problematic for the kingdom. When Ydé left, he took his entire army with him,

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<sup>318</sup> Brewka, *Sequels*, 564.

<sup>319</sup> Francis Oakley, *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 73.

<sup>320</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Holy Roman Empire,” accessed July 22, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Holy-Roman-Empire/Empire-and-papacy>.

<sup>321</sup> *Croissant*, 7358.

leaving Rome defenseless, and we never hear anything of Croissant being knighted or raising an army. The Romans appreciate Guimart's military power – they say he has a “cuer de lupart” [the heart of a leopard], and reason that at some point they will have “.i. encombrier mortal” [a serious problem], implying that it will be good to have this man on their side if ever anyone attacks them.<sup>322</sup> The author may have even chosen Guimart's name because of its meaning, “famous in war or battle.”<sup>323</sup> Guimart, a strong military man, thus contrasts sharply with Croissant, who was occupied with life's pleasures rather than the protection of his city.

### 5.3.2 Croissant's treasure

As a result of mismanaging his treasure, Croissant goes from being a king to a beggar, and the narrator begins to refer to him as “le musart,” “the fool.”<sup>324</sup> He first has to sell his horse to survive, and then meets a group of disreputable men playing dice. In a scene reminiscent of *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, Croissant naively plays with these hooligans and ends up having to pay his debts with his clothes and shoes.<sup>325</sup> Finally he returns to Rome in rags, but there is no scene of mistaken identity here. The Romans (it is not specified who they are; they are referred to as *on*)

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 7360; 7362.

<sup>323</sup> *The Dictionary of Medieval Names from European Sources*, Edition 2016, no. 3, s.v. “Guimar,” edited by S. L. Uckelman, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://dmnes.org/2016/3/name/Guimar>.

<sup>324</sup> *Croissant*, 7370.

<sup>325</sup> Casanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 184-185. Casanave sees the scene of dice-playing hooligans in *Croissant* as thematically linked to *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas* (ca. 1194-1202) through the intermediary of another text, *Courtois d'Arras* (first quarter of the thirteenth century) which is itself an adaptation of the biblical story of the prodigal son.

recognize him right away and inform him that he has lost his “fief” and his “yreté” [inheritance], and threaten him with violence: “Se t’em paroles, t’aras le cief copé” [If you say anything about it, you will be beheaded].<sup>326</sup> At this point Croissant has a full realization of his situation, and chides himself: “com jou ai mal ouvré / Et mon avoir folement assener” [how I have acted badly, and foolishly given away my wealth].<sup>327</sup> He then says a prayer to ask God to help him get Rome back. While Croissant is depicted as being at fault for his foolish behavior, the Romans certainly do not appear blameless in the situation, as they abuse Croissant’s generosity, reject him once he is poor, and then reject him again when he returns to Rome. Similarly, Guimart is also guilty of very un-Christian behavior towards Croissant:

Li emperes a tout chou escouté  
Que Croissans est drois hoys de la cité  
Et nonpourquant ne li a riens donné.

The emperor heard all this (that Croissant was the rightful heir of the city), and yet he did not give him anything.<sup>328</sup>

The un-Christian behavior of the emperor and of the Romans is emphasized by the fact that these events all take place during Lent. After begging and continuing to be refused help for a few more days, on Easter day Croissant finally comes upon the ruins of a palace of antiquity. It is through a treasure guarded by angels in this palace that Croissant will be able to regain Rome.

Although the palace as it is depicted in *Croissant* does not correspond exactly to any historical Roman palace, the castle that is today known as Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome can be connected to the name Croissant or Crescentius. The Castel Sant’Angelo was built as Hadrian’s

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<sup>326</sup> *Croissant*, 7435-36.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 7439.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 7451-53.

mausoleum, the director of which was a man named Crescentius, and was converted into a fortress in the early Middle Ages.<sup>329</sup> In the tenth and eleventh centuries, three generations of men - Crescentius the Elder, Crescentius the Younger, and John Crescentius - rebelled against the imperial power of the Holy Roman Emperors Otto I, II, and III. In particular, Crescentius the Younger seized control of Rome from Otto III, who was a child at the time. Crescentius was later deposed and imprisoned at Castel Sant'Angelo, and then executed.<sup>330</sup> Apparently owing to this historical event, references in medieval texts to a "chastel Croissant" or a "tour Croissant" can be found after the tenth century.<sup>331</sup> In a different text, *Le Roman des Sept Sages*, there is a treasure belonging to the emperor Octavian in a "Tour Croissant."<sup>332</sup> Thus, in historical and literary sources there is certainly a connection between a Roman emperor named Otto (Oton), a certain Crescentius, and a treasure. Interestingly, both Guimart and Croissant resemble the historical Crescentius: Guimart in his grab for power and Croissant in his downfall, although of course Crescentius did not have the happy ending that Croissant does. In *Croissant*, the power struggle does not include a conflict between imperial powers and Roman family powers, since Croissant is a member of the imperial family himself (he is both king and emperor, as was Oton). The text specifies that Guimart is also emperor and not just king, but says nothing about how the pope was convinced to support him; perhaps we are to assume the pope followed along with the

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<sup>329</sup> Gaston Paris, "La Chanson du *Pélerinage de Charlemagne*," *Romania* 9 (1880) 45-46 cited in Caroline Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 190.

<sup>330</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, s.v. "Crescentius," by Francis Schaefer, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04484c.htm>.

<sup>331</sup> Paris, "*Pélerinage de Charlemagne*," 45-46, cited in Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 190; Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 192.

<sup>332</sup> Cazanave, *D'Esclarmonde à Croissant*, 193.

reasoning of the Roman nobles who preferred Guimart to Croissant. However, the fact that Guimart is not a member of Oton's imperial lineage seems to prevent him from remaining in power.

Guimart's conscience begins to bother him after having received the Eucharist on Easter. He says to himself, "ne doi avoir homme deshyreté" [I should not have disinherited a man].<sup>333</sup> Guimart's cooperation is an essential part of Croissant's rehabilitation: God helps Croissant get Rome back, but Croissant needs Guimart to believe in his right to rule in order for things to proceed in that direction. Guimart's change of heart, provoked by religious reflection, is the beginning of this process. He decides to visit Croissant in the ruined palace. The palace has not been occupied for a long time and that it is "gasté" [ruined] and full of "creutes" [hollow areas].<sup>334</sup> The fact that the palace is ancient and in ruins certainly links it to the historical Castel Sant'Angelo, first built in the second century CE, and in general to ancient Roman history. The presence of Croissant's treasure in a palace of antiquity, rather than in the palace that Guimart currently occupies, emphasizes a link between the Holy Roman Emperors and the ancient Roman emperors from whom they believed they inherited their sovereignty. In fact, this idea of *translatio imperii* became more firmly entrenched in the mid-tenth century with Otto III, the emperor most closely associated with our literary Oton.<sup>335</sup>

When Guimart arrives in the ancient palace he finds Croissant sleeping; Croissant had also received the Eucharist earlier in the day but had had nothing to eat other than that. Guimart

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<sup>333</sup> *Croissant*, 7490.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 7475-76.

<sup>335</sup> Oakley, *Empty Bottles of Gentilism*, 179.

then sees an immense treasure guarded by two “serjant” [guards] in white coats of mail.<sup>336</sup> In addition to the white of the guards, Guimart also sees light around the sleeping Croissant, as well as a great deal of light emanating from the piles of gold treasure. Somewhere near the treasure is a letter explaining that the treasure belongs to Croissant.<sup>337</sup> The presence of the guards in white, bright light, the written word, and the fact that this all occurs on Easter, indicates that the treasure is protected by the Christian God, rather than simply being enchanted. The question of the treasure’s origin arises in conversation between Guimart and the two guards, who function as angelic figures with a message to convey. Guimart asks them if the treasure is “fäés,” enchanted or bewitched. They reply that it is not “fäés” but rather “conjuré,” another word meaning enchanted; the distinction that the guards make seems to imply that the treasure is supernatural but not evil or cursed.<sup>338</sup> When Guimart says that he is king of Rome and the treasure should be his, they reiterate that the treasure belongs to Croissant. At this point, it is clear to Guimart that this treasure belongs to Croissant and that he is the rightful king of Rome; it does not seem that he should require more evidence or another test in order to give the kingdom back to Croissant. However, Croissant’s marital status is revealed to be important when the two guards tell Guimart that he should also give his daughter in marriage to Croissant.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> *Croissant*, 7510.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 7501.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 7529-30.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 7522.



### 5.3.3 Marriage, identity, and status

Croissant now goes through a marriage process very similar to what his father, at the time still a cross-dressed woman, went through with Olive. First, Croissant must arrive at Guimart's palace. This is accomplished by way of a test that the guards tell Guimart to employ: they give him three *besants* that he is to throw out to a crowd of poor people, saying that Croissant will be the one to find all three of them and that he will return them to Guimart. This is exactly what happens: Croissant finds the *besants* and returns them to the lord of the city because they are gold and he feels that he is not worthy of them.<sup>340</sup> Guimart is convinced by this final test that the treasure belongs to Croissant. Although the type and result of the test is quite different in the two cases, using a treasure as a test of God's favor also recalls *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas*.<sup>341</sup> Guimart then dresses Croissant in fine clothing and presents him to his daughter, wife, and court and informs them that he wants Croissant to marry his daughter. Since, however, he has not informed his wife nor anyone else at his court who Croissant is, they do not approve of this match to an unknown man. (Apparently these are Lombards who would not recognize Croissant as the Romans do.) Guimart's behavior, and the reactions of Croissant and the crowd of onlookers to the idea of this marriage, present an alternate version of Yde's experience at Oton's court when Oton proposed a marriage between Ydé and Olive. A king would be expected to thoroughly vet a potential husband for his daughter: he would want to know about the suitor's wealth, family, and social

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 7588.

<sup>341</sup> In *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, a Saracen king wants to find out if a statue of Saint Nicholas placed on his otherwise unguarded treasure will protect it from thieves. The statue fails to protect the treasure, but this test results in the Saracen king and his subjects' conversion after Saint Nicholas himself appears. Jehan Bodel, *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, trans. and ed. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).

status. Oton was foolish to offer his daughter in marriage to Ydé, because, of course, he did not know that Yde was actually a woman. On top of this, he also ignores the fact that Ydé has no land, a fact that Ydé revealed in the first scene in which he meets the king: “Escuiers sui, n’ai de terre .j. arpent” [I am a squire; I don’t have an acre of land].<sup>342</sup> Oton does not do his own research on Ydé; he is convinced that Ydé is an appropriate husband based on his military prowess and his courtliness, and he also believes the false genealogy that Ydé recounts to him. Ydé says that he is from “Terrascoingne” and he names relatives who turn out to be relatives of Oton as well.<sup>343</sup> Later, when Oton offers his daughter in marriage and says that Ydé will have Rome upon his death, Ydé reminds him that he is penniless, but Oton and Olive do not care; they are completely convinced by his ability as a warrior.<sup>344</sup> In Croissant’s case, Guimart *does* know Croissant’s true lineage, so he knows he is making a good choice for his daughter. His wife and the nobles assembled protest at first, but Guimart assures them that Croissant has a treasure and that he is the rightful lord of the kingdom.

For his part, Croissant does not understand that Guimart knows who he is, and so he feels that by wearing the rich clothes that Guimart gives him he is essentially in disguise, and presenting himself falsely. Yde/Ydé had tried to get out of marriage to Olive by saying that she/he was not from a family worthy of Olive. Croissant now falls in love with the second Olive the moment he sees her, and in an internal monologue, he expresses worry that he is not of high enough status to marry her, and reflects on his unfortunate situation:

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<sup>342</sup> *YO I*, 6833.

<sup>343</sup> *YO I*, 6856-62. Clarisse also gives a false identity of lower status to her future father-in-law, and he objects to the marriage. Brewka, *Sequels*, 15.

<sup>344</sup> *YO I*, 7064-69.

“Que devenrai, las, dolerous caitis?  
Jehui estoie povres hom et mendis;  
Or m’a cis rois si ricement vesti.”  
Puis dist après: “Si li jus fust partis  
Que li bons rois seüst dont jou issi,  
Encore peüsse a sa fille venir  
Et le roiaume et sa terre tenir;  
Mais c’est pour nient: on m’en a dessaisi.  
Ahi! poverte, pour vous sui dessaisis  
D’avoir honour, dont jou sui malbaillis.”<sup>345</sup>

“Alas, what will become of me, sad, miserable one? Today I was a poor man and a beggar; now this king has dressed me so richly.” Then he said, “If things were fair and the good king knew where I come from, then I would be able to come to his daughter and have his land and his kingdom. But it’s all for nothing: it was taken away from me. Oh, poverty, because of you I am deprived of honor, that is why I am mistreated.”

For Croissant, being poor is not merely a description of his financial status or a temporary setback. Rather, he believes that being a poor man and a beggar marks his identity and determines to what he can aspire: he knows that he is the rightful king of Rome, but his current poverty trumps that right. Deprived of the role of king, and lacking his parents, Croissant has no identity other than that of a poor man. In itself, the fact that he is still Ydé’s son even in his poverty does not make up for the loss of his title and social role as king. In fact, he never once mentions his parents in his laments. His relationship to Ydé is not even a factor that plays a role in his reclaiming of Rome – quite the opposite of Ydé’s situation in Aragon, where his relationship to his father was his sole claim to that land. Croissant cannot raise an army to oust Guimart, and his parents will not return to help him. In this pathetic situation, it makes sense then that marriage into Guimart’s family is the only path back to kingship. Croissant’s laments reveal that he sees himself as deprived of his kingdom (“on m’en a dessaisis”), but at the same time, he sees Rome as Guimart’s land (“sa terre”) and not his own.

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<sup>345</sup> *Croissant*, 7603-12.

Croissant's poverty has a parallel narrative function to Yde's female sex: it is the one thing that is preventing a happy marriage, while nobility and good character are in place. When Yde claimed she was not of high enough status for Olive, it was in order to avoid the marriage and thus detection of her cross-dressing. The invented family that Yde claimed as her own was not as high in status as her true parentage. In reality, Yde was equal to Olive in noble status, but was a problematic husband for Olive because she was female. Her sex change allowed the marriage to continue, and it directed all focus on the question of Ydé's sex, rather than on his family and noble origin – after the sex change, the angel simply declares that Ydé is now male, not where he is from.<sup>346</sup> Ydé's noble status and lineage are not discussed until *YO II*, in which text it is assumed that Ydé ought to inherit Aragon. Yde's cross-dressing adventures and masculine persona thus did not change her status as a noble person and the daughter of Florent of Aragon; the sex change in turn has no effect on this nobility in itself, but facilitates the transition from daughter to son and heir and, of course, to being Olive's husband and king of Rome. As for Croissant, becoming poor does not change his kinship ties to his father nor does it affect his nobility. However, we only know this by his later interaction with his father in *YO II*: in the above monologue he never names his father nor cites his nobility as something that would help him get the kingdom back. Croissant still sees his poverty as an insurmountable obstacle to marriage, which marriage he also sees as necessary to regain "Guimart's" kingdom. In both cases, each character is also placed in a threatening or uncomfortable situation because of a father who failed to provide for or educate his child properly (Florent's incestuous desire/marriage failure and Ydé's abandonment of Croissant). The solution to Yde's problem

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<sup>346</sup> *YO I*, 7263-72.

was a divine intervention to change her sex. God also intervenes for Croissant by guiding Guimart to the fabulous treasure. In the last line of Croissant's lament, he says that he is "malbaillis," which means mistreated, but in a figurative sense can also mean denatured or falsified.<sup>347</sup> This word also creates an interesting link to the theme of Yde's sex change. It is poverty that has caused Croissant to be "malbaillis," in the same way that Yde's cross-dressing "denatured" her. Although Yde does not explicitly bemoan a "denaturing" in the way that Silence does, her falsification of her identity causes mental anguish and almost leads to her death at the stake. And yet, she "deserves" to marry Olive because she has in all other ways acted as an ideal man. Similarly, Croissant's poverty falsely represents his identity; he deserves his kingdom by virtue of his nobility and lineage, but is temporarily denied it by his poverty.

Returning to the scene of the marriage proposal, Guimart reassures his wife, daughter, and courtiers that Croissant is a very rich man and explains that he has a large treasure. (Croissant is not shown to react to this information, although at this point he does not know about his own treasure.) Guimart's daughter agrees to marry Croissant and they officially pledge themselves to one another in a church. One day presumably not long later, Guimart brings Croissant back to the ancient palace, and, calling him his son, he tells him to ask who is inside the palace. When Croissant calls out, a voice answers him, saying, "Ves la Croissant, c'atendons grant piecha; / Cor li rendons l'avoir que siens sera" [There is Croissant, for whom we have waited so long; so we give him back the wealth that will be his.]<sup>348</sup> The guards continually identify the treasure as belonging to Croissant. But where did it come from? Although it is

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<sup>347</sup> *Dictionnaire Godefroy*, s.v. "malbaillir," accessed July 20, 2016, <http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/malbaillir>.

<sup>348</sup> *Croissant*, 7657-58.

described as “conjuré,” I do not believe it is meant to be understood as treasure that appeared out of nowhere by magic. Its presence in a “palais d’antiquité” and the fact that Croissant did not previously know about it indicates that it is perhaps a hidden treasure of Oton’s (or Oton’s ancestors), which, upon the death of Oton and in the absence of Ydé, would then belong to Croissant.

On the same day that Guimart reveals to Croissant his treasure, Croissant marries Olive and thus becomes king and emperor of Rome again. *Croissant* ends with his coronation with a golden and blessed crown, and the rendering of homage and fealty of the Roman nobles. The text specifies that separate from this first coronation as king of Rome, he also becomes emperor and Olive empress. We never hear what happens to Guimart after Croissant is crowned. In the prose *Chanson de Croissant*, Guimart and Croissant split the treasure in half and Croissant is not crowned king/emperor of Rome until Guimart dies.<sup>349</sup> Here, however, it appears that Guimart has departed and left Croissant completely in charge. Since Croissant’s restoration is partially dependent on his marriage to Olive, and thus the establishment of a household and the potential for legitimate children, one might expect the last lines to mention Croissant engendering a son, but this is not the case. Instead of following Croissant’s potential son, the text instead returns to Huon and Esclarmonde, who have another son at the end of the last sequel of *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Huon et les Géants*.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Raby, *La Chanson de Croissant en prose*, xxv.

<sup>350</sup> *Huon et les Géants*, 8459. There is no sequel concerning the life of Huon and Esclarmonde’s son, despite the poet’s claim at the end of *Huon et les Géants* that his story will be told. Brewka, *Sequels*, 590. The son is not named in the text at his birth, but in a rubric describing an illustration of his birth he is called Godin.

*Croissant's* conclusion presents two different ways to come into inheritance: through marriage and through family inheritance. What is unusual is that in *Croissant's* case, both of these methods are necessary and dependent on each other. *Croissant* inherits Rome from his father (but really from *Oton*), loses Rome, and then gets it back through marriage – but he becomes a marriage candidate only because he already is the rightful heir of Rome. The *Otonian* lineage and the treasure associated with it take slight precedence over the marriage, because the lineage is necessary for him to even be considered for the marriage. On the other hand, nothing indicates that *Guimart* would simply have given the kingdom back to *Croissant* without the accompanying marriage to his daughter. There is no explicit explanation in the text as to why *Croissant* undergoes his time of poverty and then returns to power in such an unusual way. The different choices made by the author of the later prose version of *Croissant's* story show that there is no one way that *Croissant's* (and *Ydé's*) story must transpire. For this story, though, I believe the narrative choices are linked to the preceding story of *Yde/Ydé*. *Croissant's* unusual adventure connects him back to his father, because it replicates *Ydé's* experience of becoming a king through marriage. The circular nature of the itinerary that *Croissant* takes to learn his lesson (leaving and then returning to Rome) mirrors his father's circular journey away from and back to *Aragon*. This thematic connection is all that remains of *Croissant* and *Ydé's* relationship. Otherwise, *Ydé* is not at all present; rather, *Croissant* forms a symbolic relationship with his dead grandfather *Oton* and becomes his heir, much as *Ydé* became his dead father's heir. At the same time, by marrying *Olive Croissant* also integrates into *Guimart's* family, and thus experiences marriage and inheritance in the same way that his sex-changed father did.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

The stories of Ydé and Croissant present a study of two elements of medieval literary masculinity, kingship and paternity. The two men contrast with each other in the representation of their behavior as kings and specifically their relationship to money and generosity. Ydé is portrayed as a wise and moderate king. He desires his subjects' love and loyalty, and obtains it through his generosity. Croissant, however, does not know how to properly control the distribution of his wealth, and ends up losing his subjects' loyalty because of this. This brings us to the question of paternity, because his father's failure to educate him contributes to his folly. Although each text has a happy ending, the events recounted demonstrate a concern about paternal involvement (or lack thereof) in a son's life, beyond simply engendering a son. The lack of proper paternal guidance in both texts is solved by a divine intervention. Croissant also lacks natural talent (and charisma as a literary character): if we compare him to his father, cross-dressed Yde was naturally intelligent, strong, and resourceful, and she attributed these qualities to being Florent's daughter. Florent, too, never taught Yde/Ydé to be a good knight and king, but upon cross-dressing she is suddenly able to lead an army. As for Croissant, his father neither teaches him nor does he have natural talent, but the conclusion to the story implies that Croissant will be a good king nonetheless; this new ability is something of a miracle itself.

*YO I*'s conclusion with the engendering of Croissant could be a "happy ending" and the end of the sequels, simply because Ydé was able to engender a son. However, the continuation of the story in *Croissant* and *YO II* shows that these texts place value on the father-son relationship post-engendering, because it influences how the son will become a king, and whether he will be a good or bad one (at least temporarily, in the case of Croissant). In the case of Ydé and Florent, Florent never had the opportunity to educate a son, but gets retroactive credit for having



engendered a son and passed on his inheritance, thanks to the sex change. Croissant himself does not engender a son; the text does not indicate any particular reason for the line ending with him. The following sequel, *YO II*, however, which may have been written by a different author, seeks to correct Ydé's lack of continuing lineage by returning him to Aragon and giving him seven more children who all marry well, and who presumably have children themselves.

Accompanying these issues of kingship and paternity is the role of God in the sex change and the events that follow it. Since Gilles and Croissant are the only two examples in medieval French literature of sons whose fathers changed sex from female to male, I cannot say that they correspond to a recognizable literary type. However, I do find it striking that these two examples have in common a Christian religious experience and a miracle or miracles. The presence of this religious theme around sex change and the children of sex change is distinctive even in comparison to the rest of *Tristan de Nanteuil* and to *Huon de Bordeaux* and its sequels, which are otherwise not very much occupied with Christianity. Yde/Ydé and Croissant are both chosen by God to experience a type of miracle and the intervention of an angel or another messenger. However, Ydé's and Croissant's stories do not have the same religious intensity as those of Blanchandin and Gilles because Ydé undergoes a sex change in order to save her from death, but not because he was destined to engender a saint. Croissant's story, nonetheless, teaches a lesson about good kingship and God's power to intervene on earth. Finally, I believe that Croissant's apparent sterility is related to this religious theme. Although he eventually marries and becomes king again, his brief interlude of poverty and his lack of an heir simultaneously place in him the model of a holy man, like his counterpart, Saint Gilles. In the next and last chapter, I will examine *Tristan de Nanteuil's* more fully developed depiction of the intersection of sex change and saintliness.

## 6.0 GILLES, SAINTLY SON OF SEX CHANGE

In the concluding portion of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, Blanchandin's son Gilles becomes the central character. His story is told in an entirely new plotline that also draws in his half-brother Raimon, Tristan, and of course his father Blanchandin, whose arm he reattaches in one of the culminating moments in the last lines of the text. Saint Gilles has a unifying and healing purpose in the text; he is a holy man who can absolve others of sins of incest, heal physical wounds, and restore inheritance. In this chapter, I will examine three miracles that Gilles experiences, either as a miracle-maker or as the receiver of a miracle. Through the study of these miracles, I show that Gilles, in his actions and in his personality, is a generic hybrid who serves many different functions in the text, and that the origin of this unusual role lies in his father's sex change and the new family configurations it creates. Gilles' primary function is to serve as an example of a holy man, but he is also a warrior monk who fights to advance the secular ambitions of his Nanteuil stepfamily. *TN*'s author makes a concerted effort to convince his readers that his Gilles is one and the same as the hagiographical Saint Giles, while at the same time he creates a new, more well-rounded Gilles who is wrapped up in family intrigue and drama due to his strange genealogy. I will first describe the relationship between Saint Giles' hagiography and *TN*'s

version of Saint Gilles.<sup>351</sup> I will then sketch out the three miracles and show how the chapter's themes will be structured around them.

## 6.1 THE TWO SAINT GILES: INTERSECTION OF HAGIOGRAPHY AND FICTION

Saint Giles died at the beginning of the eighth century in Provence. His cult, however, migrated northwards: it was widespread in England, Normandy, Belgium, and northern France in the Middle Ages.<sup>352</sup> In the tenth-century Latin *Vita* and in the twelfth-century Old French *La Vie de Saint Gilles*, Saint Giles is Greek. Born in Athens to royal parents, he travels to Provence, becomes a hermit, and eventually confesses Charlemagne of a sin that the king had kept secret. (Given that Saint Giles most likely died before Charlemagne (c.742-814) was born, his interaction with him must be fictional.) *TN*'s author retains from the hagiography Giles' Greek origins, his move to Provence, and his confession of Charlemagne, and he tightly interweaves the hagiographical Giles into *TN*'s complicated plotline. It is Gilles who facilitates his brother Raimon's reclaiming of his inheritance. He gives up his life as a hermit in order to help the Nanteuil family recapture lands under Saracen rule, and most importantly, he reattaches his father Blanchandin's severed arm and baptizes Tristan's bastard son Garçon. All of these

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<sup>351</sup> I use "Giles" for the hagiographical saint and "Gilles" for the fictional character.

<sup>352</sup> See *La Vie de Saint Gilles par Guillaume de Berneville, poème du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Alphonse Bos and Gaston Paris (Paris: Firmin Didot et cie, 1881) and E. Rembry, *Saint Gilles, sa vie, ses reliques, son culte en Belgique et dans le nord de la France*, 2 vol. (Bruges: Gaillard, 1881-82).

elements, of course, are inventions of *TN*'s author that do not appear in the hagiographical texts.<sup>353</sup> However, at a few moments in *TN*, the author makes points to show his readers that he is knowledgeable about Saint Giles and his cult. He thus seems to expect that they are already familiar with the story of Saint Giles, and he encourages them to verify for themselves his statements about the saint. At the same time, because he makes a point of linking his fictional character to the saint, he seems confident that his audience will accept his new and even more fantastical version of Saint Giles' life as in keeping with his hagiography.

The overall sketch of Saint Gilles' life matches up with the hagiography, and there are three specific mentions in *TN* of geographical locations either in the hagiography, or which subsequently have become holy places due to the presence of Gilles' relics. First, in a preview before Blanchandine and Clarinde marry, the author explains that a place in Provence formerly called "Barbemont" is now called "Saint Gille" in reference to Gilles' body, which was interred there, and which caused miracles when it was raised from the ground.<sup>354</sup> Here, *TN*'s author adds a new element to connect the miracle of Gilles' relics to the Nanteuil storyline: he claims that Gilles' brother Raimon, a character who only appears in *TN*, was responsible for moving the body into a reliquary once its holy power was recognized.<sup>355</sup> Second, the author says that anyone who would like to hear the truth about Saint Gilles should go to "Saint Gille en Provence" -

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<sup>353</sup> For a detailed comparison of Gilles in *TN* and the saint in *La Vie de Saint Gilles*, see Keith V. Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure and Literary Creation* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983), 113-118.

<sup>354</sup> *TN*, 13539-45. The name Barbemont may be an invention of the author. Keith Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil, chanson de geste inédite*, ed. Keith V. Sinclair (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), 764. Saint-Gilles is now a city in the Gard department in southern France and the abbey that Saint Giles is said to have founded in the seventh century is still there.

<sup>355</sup> *TN*, 13546-48.

where one can also see Tristan's body!<sup>356</sup> This claim is never elaborated upon or mentioned again, not even at Tristan's death at the poem's close; however, it is very much in keeping with the strong connection between Gilles and Tristan that develops in the last third of the poem, and which will become evident in this chapter. Finally, after the scene of Gilles' birth, the author cites "sainte escripture" [holy writing] that tells of Saint Gilles' life, and says if anyone does not believe him, he should go to "Notre Dame de Tournay" to verify his statements.<sup>357</sup> Following the geographical names one finds in *TN* and the author's Franco-Picard language, Keith Sinclair believes *TN* was written in the Hainaut region (now part of Belgium). This was an area where the cult of Saint Giles was very popular; for example, he was the patron saint of Valenciennes, and there was a chapel dedicated to him in the cathedral in Tournai in the Middle Ages.<sup>358</sup> Saint Giles was also the patron saint of cripples, lepers, and nursing mothers.<sup>359</sup> Although *TN*'s author never mentions this fact, it seems he was aware of a connection to two of these groups, as his Gilles is implicated in miracles related to crippling and lactation: he heals his father's arm, and his mother miraculously produces an abundance of breast milk when she and baby Gilles are on the verge of death. In his hagiography, his connection to lactation is the fact that a hind nurses him when he is living as a hermit. In *TN*, the hind does not nurse him, but rather sprinkles the

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 16852-53.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 17715-17.

<sup>358</sup> Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 58. These cities, as well as Liège and Namur, are all locations where action takes place in *TN*.

<sup>359</sup> Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c.1100-1400* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 129.

herbs that he eats with her milk so as to soften them.<sup>360</sup> Concerning Gilles being a child of cousin incest in *TN*, there is no such story in the hagiography. However, Saints Gregory and Alban were said to have been children of nuclear family incest - and then even unwittingly married their own mothers - before becoming holy men, Gregory a pope. These more extreme cases show an acceptance of the idea that great holiness can come out of the sinful situation of incest.<sup>361</sup>

Using supposedly verifiable points of reference, the author of *TN* anchors his Saint Gilles in hagiography and then deftly adds his own fictional characters into those already established elements of Gilles' life; many of the events that he recounts occur in the "correct" geographical location, as per the hagiography. However, it must be emphasized that in the Latin and French *Lives*, Gilles' parentage certainly bears no relation to that of *TN* except in that his parents were king and queen of Greece when he was born. In the *Lives*, the saint was born in Greece of a king and a queen named Theodore and Pelagia - but Theodore was by no means a man who had once been a woman. This is where the two stories most clearly differ, and this is why the author's choice to make Gilles the son of a man who has changed sex is so important. By adding this one significantly different element to Gilles' life, he makes a clear statement that sex change is miraculous and belongs in the same narrative category as a saint's life. Blanchandin's change of sex and the resulting birth of Gilles are catalysts for many more miracles in the remainder of the text. Approximately the last third of *TN* differs in tone and content from the earlier adventures. With its emphasis on sin and confession, and the presence of multiple miracles, this last part of the text displays overtly religious themes that were not present earlier. The main way in which

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<sup>360</sup> *TN*, 20227-29; 21389-90.

<sup>361</sup> Kathryn Gravdal, "Confessing Incests: Legal Erasures and Literary Celebrations in Medieval France," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no.2 (1995): 285.

these religious themes are displayed is through a series of miracles that occur thanks to Saint Gilles.

## 6.2 MIRACLES

I will now outline the three miracles that shape the construction of Gilles' character as a holy man, as a member of the Nanteuil family, and as the son of a man who has changed sex. First, Gilles is falsely accused of raping and impregnating a young woman, and he is saved in a miraculous fashion from being burned at the stake for this crime. The rape accusation and the risk of execution connect Gilles' experience to that of his father and other cross-dressed female characters, including the "transvestite saints," women living in monasteries and passing as male in several early Christian *Lives*. Since Gilles' accuser is impregnated by a demon that takes the form of a man, this episode also constitutes a potentially disturbing parallel to Blanchandin's bodily transformation. Secondly, Gilles confesses Charlemagne of the sin of incest. As *TN*'s author rewrites the Charlemagne confession scene found in *La Vie de Saint Gilles*, he manages to make it not just about Charlemagne's salvation; conveniently, Charlemagne is also forced to realize the importance of restoring Raimon's inheritance. The third miracle I will discuss is Gilles' reattachment of Blanchandin's arm. In this section, I rely on ideas from disability studies in the context of Christian miracles and healing to contextualize Blanchandin's dismemberment. The scene of reattachment takes place as the Nanteuil family is waging another long war against Saracen enemies, and is the culmination of Gilles' role as a holy healer and unifier. Not only is he able to heal his father, but he is also a confessor, a motivator and a supporter of the Nanteuil family in their battles against Saracens. He shows himself to be the spiritual and practical glue

that holds Tristan and company together, and he gives up a quiet life in his hermitage in order to become a warrior monk.

By serving as a model of religious life, by confessing others of sin, and by aiding his family in their goal to defeat Saracens and reclaim their land, Gilles is the ideal blend of sacred and secular in his concerns and his actions. However, he and his father Blanchandin ultimately remain outsiders to the family that Gilles has effectively saved. While Gilles is depicted as a member of the Nanteuil lineage, he and Blanchandin do not materially benefit from its restoration, as far as we know. (The narrative ends rather abruptly after Tristan's death and Garçion's baptism.) As for Blanchandin's lineage, it can go no further than Gilles, since Gilles decides to remain celibate, and Blanchandin does not remarry and have other children. Blanchandin's and Gilles' function in the text is thus to demonstrate God's power and the miracles he makes on earth. They may participate in the propagation of the values of paternal inheritance by helping Tristan and his sons, but they never directly benefit from the restoration of land and power. Blanchandin and Gilles thus present a model of masculinity that differs from that of Tristan, Doon, and Tristan's sons. Although Blanchandin begins his life as a man in a traditional *chanson de geste* manner, winning battles and conquering land, he soon becomes a beggar. He believes that his destiny is to wander in poverty, and that the loss of his arm, kingdom, and family is punishment for his unnamed sins.

### 6.3 GILLES' YOUTH

The first trial that Gilles undergoes as an adult is the rape accusation. However, as a baby Gilles already survived that great calamity that the narrator spoke of when predicting Blanchandin and



Clarinde's troubles. Let us catch up on what happened to the infant Gilles when traitors set his parents' palace on fire. Blanchandin is separated from Clarinde and Gilles when he is attacked and his arm is cut off. Clarinde, holding fifteen-day-old Gilles, escapes from the palace and gets into a boat. They come very close to death as they float out to sea without any food or water. Clarinde had insisted upon nursing Gilles herself, so she is able to breastfeed him for two days while they drift in the boat. After not eating or drinking for three days, her breasts are completely empty and Gilles is screaming with hunger. In desperation, Clarinde threatens to throw herself overboard, but she then miraculously produces such an abundance of milk that it fills the boat and sustains both her and Gilles until they reach land in Lombardy. Clarinde then travels on foot to "Couvelances" (modern-day Koblenz in Germany), and survives by begging. In Couvelances, Clarinde and Gilles are saved from a life of begging when the bishop, the very same bishop who had baptized Clarinde back in Armenia, recognizes her. He installs her and Gilles in his palace and takes care of Gilles' education; this explains how Gilles then becomes learned in theology at a young age. As Gilles grows up, Clarinde explains to her son his father's story, telling him "par quel covenant / Son pere devvint home et mua son semblant" [under what circumstances his father became a man and changed his appearance].<sup>362</sup> Clarinde does not tell Gilles anything about the fact that she desired the cross-dressed Blanchandine, nor does the fact that they were/are cousins ever come up. For the young Gilles, his father's story contains no moral ambiguity - it is a miracle and it inspires religious fervor in him: "Le miracle son pere le va enluminant / Tellement qu'a Jheus, le pere tout puissant, / Mist entente et courage et tout son essient [His father's miracle so illuminated him that he put all his heart, intention, and

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<sup>362</sup> *TN*, 19765.

knowledge into Jesus, the father almighty].<sup>363</sup> With his father's miracle as his inspiration, Gilles then sets out on a typical narrative itinerary for a young saint. We fast-forward to age fifteen, when Gilles amazes the clergy with his theological knowledge; he gives away his clothes to the poor and prays often in his room. Clarinde then falls ill and dies, which leaves Gilles devastated and begins the phase of his trials: he is then accused of rape.

#### **6.4 "EN SEMBLANCE D'UN HOME C'EST VOULU FIGURER:" A DEMONIC POSSESSION**

Gilles' troubles begin when the bishop's niece falls in love with him. Marie has not previously appeared in the text, but she is now described as living with the bishop. She is, of course, very beautiful. Gilles, too, is very handsome and this inspires lust in Marie. She suffers in silence for a year and a half before succumbing to her "grande frenaisie" [great frenzy] and inviting Gilles into her room.<sup>364</sup> In her lust and forward behavior, Marie recalls other young women in this text, both pagan and Christian, like Honorée, the pagan woman who desired Gui, or Clarisse, Tristan's cousin and one-night stand. However, Marie is the only such lustful young woman to desire a very religious man who wishes to remain completely celibate. Because of his religious convictions, Gilles rejects Marie's proposal that he take her as his "amye," saying that he would rather pray and fast.<sup>365</sup> Infuriated by this rejection, Marie calls upon the devil, who comes to her

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 19767-69.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 19841.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 19849-56.

in the form of a man and impregnates her. When she can no longer hide the pregnancy, Marie then tells her uncle that Gilles raped and impregnated her.

Marie's behavior recalls that of her fellow young women in this text, but her love object's religious convictions and his rejection of her proposition liken this scenario to those found in the "transvestite" saints' lives. The theme of a false rape accusation and sometimes an impregnation appears in different variations in the lives of saints Marina, Eugenia, Margaret, and Theodora.<sup>366</sup> For example, Marina, after being disguised as a monk in a monastery for many years, is accused by an innkeeper's daughter of raping and impregnating her (when in fact she was impregnated through consensual sex with a soldier who had spent the night at the inn). Marina takes the blame, living outside the gates of the monastery for many years in punishment and even raising the woman's child. After Marina's death, the other monks discover that she is a woman and hence could not have been guilty of this crime. The woman who lied about the rape is later seized by a demon and is healed by visiting Marina's tomb. In the *Life of Saint Eugenia*, a

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<sup>366</sup> My examples here refer to the stories as they are told in the *Golden Legend*. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). The *Life of Saint Marina* also exists in French in two fifteenth-century manuscripts. Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: a Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). For studies of transvestite saints, see John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," *Viator* 5 (1974): 1-32 and Simon Gaunt, "Straight Minds/'Queer' Wishes in Old French Hagiography: La vie de Sainte Euphrosine" in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, 155-173 (New York: Routledge, 1996). For a historical example, see Martha G. Newman, "Real Men and Imaginary Women: Engelhard of Langheim Considers a Woman in Disguise," *Speculum* 78 (2003): 1184-1218.

woman pretends to be sick in order to get “Brother Eugene” into her bedroom, attempts to seduce him, and then claims that he raped her when “he” rejects her. Marie and Gilles’ story also resembles that of Silence and Eufeme in *Le Roman de Silence*. King Ebain’s wife tries to seduce Silence many times, driven wild by Silence’s beauty, and finally accuses him of rape when he continually rejects her. The theme of a false rape accusation thus appears in both hagiography and romance wherein the hero/heroine is a cross-dressed female, and in these instances mentioned above, a female character disguised as a man must reject a woman’s sexual advances, in part because she does not want her disguise to be discovered.

In making Gilles the victim of a false rape accusation (an incident that occurs neither in the Latin nor the French *Life*), the author of *TN* combines elements of hagiography and romance that are both already linked to cross-dressed women.<sup>367</sup> When Gilles’ father Blanchandin was a cross-dressed woman, Clarinde never accused her of rape, but Blanchandine similarly was unable to respond to Clarinde’s sexual advances because of her fear of being revealed as a woman. In this episode with Marie, Gilles resembles both his father (in his former incarnation as a woman) and those transvestite saints who underwent false accusations. Gilles stands out as an unusual male character in this text because of his holy calling, which causes him to reject the reproductive imperative. Since he chooses celibacy, Gilles aligns himself with the bodily choices of the transvestite saints and Silence, who must remain celibate in order to conceal that they are female. In this way, while Blanchandin(e) is the character who moves from one gender to another, it is Gilles who displays gender ambiguity or fluidity. Gilles’ gender and his choices

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<sup>367</sup> Focusing on the theme of the incubus, Keith Sinclair sees this episode rather as adapting elements from *La Vie de Saint Jean Bouche d’Or* (end of twelfth/beginning of thirteenth century). Sinclair, *Thematic Infrastructure*, 119-122.

concerning sexuality align him with what is sometimes called a third gender, that of the celibate monk or nun.<sup>368</sup> There is one major difference, however, between Gilles and these transvestite saints or disguised women: physically, he could indeed have raped and impregnated Marie, although he did not. All of the transvestite saints aside from Eugenia take the blame and do penance for a sin that is not their own. Gilles, however, fights to clear his name of this sin. Gilles' redemption and Marie's downfall reveal that Gilles benefits from his position of power as a man under the protection of a respected bishop. As for Marie, her function in the story is to represent a misogynistic stereotype of a weak and sinful woman.

Like the inkeeper's daughter in the *Life of Saint Marina* who had to be exorcised of a demon, the lustful Marie associates with a demon. Once Marie realizes that Gilles will not cede to her advances, she becomes desperate and begins to summon the devil. The devil responds promptly: "Adonc vint un diable par devant lui ester, / En semblance d'un home c'est voulu figurer" [Then a devil came and stood before her; he wanted to shape himself into the appearance of a man]. He then convinces her to have sex with him: "ly ennemis volt a lui abiter, / Et volt en celle dame ung enfant engendrer" [the enemy wanted to have sex with her and engender a child in this lady].<sup>369</sup> This passage is striking for the very presence of such a demonic summoning, which is unique in the text. In addition, the author uses the same or similar words ("semblance," "figurer," and variations thereof) at the numerous moments when he describes Blanchandin's sex change. In addition to Clarinde's comment noted above, wherein she says that Blanchandin "mua

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<sup>368</sup> Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 34-51.

<sup>369</sup> *TN*, 19889-90; 19894-95.

son semblant” [changed his appearance], Blanchandin’s sex change is also described in the following ways: “en aultre se mua” [[he] changed into another person], and “changer en figure d’un home” [[Jesus wanted to] change [him] into the shape of a man].<sup>370</sup> Blanchandin is either depicted as transforming himself or as being transformed by God: another example of this is “Jhesus le mua” [Jesus changed him].<sup>371</sup>

In the above passage where the devil takes the form of a man, a new body is formed for the purpose of a sexual encounter and the engendering of a child; these are the very same purposes that the author of *TN* has reiterated many times for Blanchandin’s sex change. However, the idea that the sex change could potentially have a demonic element to it has already been negated throughout the text, since it is always depicted as God’s work. The difference between the demonic incarnation and the sex change is seen in the stark contrast between the two bodies that are engendered by a shape-shifting father. While the devil engenders in Marie what turns out to be a demon child, Blanchandin engenders a saint. But the demon’s and Blanchandin’s transformations have similar narrative uses: when this devil and Blanchandin engender a child, they both prove that their bodies are real and functional. This serves a didactic purpose in the case of the devil, showing readers that the devil really does exist and can do harm to those who are susceptible to him. Blanchandin’s body also serves a didactic purpose, showing that God can work miracles and change a person’s sex. As Walter Stephens has shown in *Demon Lovers*, late medieval and early modern theologians concerned with accounts of witches having sex with demons were very interested in the question of the *reality* of copulation between

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 19765; 16196; 375-76.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 4556.

humans and demons, because such a reality would prove that demons really do exist – a point that they wanted to prove. On the other hand, the physical reality of demons was hard to reconcile with the idea that in fact angels and demons were not supposed to have bodies.<sup>372</sup> *TN*'s depiction of Marie's demonic encounter leaves no doubt about the physical reality of the devil. Just as Olive and Clarinde's pregnant bodies prove that Ydé and Blanchandin are really men, Marie's pregnancy proves that the devil really did take human form and impregnate her. Unlike Blanchandin, however, the devil's time in a human body is impermanent; he leaves after impregnating Marie.<sup>373</sup> And, as we will see shortly, the demon fetus he engenders is also banished through God's intervention. Blanchandin, on the other hand, stays in his body and remains a man for the rest of his life. The devil's incarnation is an evil mirror image of Blanchandin's sex change, and the similarities and contrasts between the two scenes do more to emphasize that Blanchandin's sex change is miraculous than to link it to anything demoniacal.

#### 6.4.1 Gilles on trial

Once Marie is visibly pregnant, the bishop asks her who is responsible. At this point, the episode begins to bear a resemblance to the scene at the end of *Yde et Olive* when Oton threatens to burn his daughter and her cross-dressed husband. Marie, who is the bishop's niece as you recall, declares to him that Gilles has raped and impregnated her. It has already been made clear throughout this section on Gilles' upbringing that the bishop is like a father to him; as we saw

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<sup>372</sup> Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 7-23.

<sup>373</sup> Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 23. Stephens notes that the inexplicable disappearance of the demon after sex was thought to prove that he (or she) really was a demon, and not a human.

above, he kindly took Clarinde and Gilles under his wing after recognizing Clarinde as the woman he had baptized, treating them like his wife and child.<sup>374</sup> We also learn in this episode that Marie is very precious to him; although the words “like a daughter” are never used, the text does say that “C’estoit la riens ou monde que ses corps mieulx ama” [She was the thing that he loved more than anything in the world].<sup>375</sup> He is also disappointed that Marie now will not be able to get married, showing that he would have been in charge of arranging her marriage. These details show the bishop’s paternal care and responsibility for Marie.<sup>376</sup>

Marie describes to the bishop a rape facilitated by sorcery. Omitting her own role in calling upon the devil, of course, she places Gilles in the role of the demon, saying, “Il contrefait le Dieu, mais le diable ou corps a” [He acts like he’s God, but he has the devil in his body]; she also says that Gilles used herbs to enchant her: “Et s’est porveüs d’erbes, ne sçay commant les a; / Je vous ay en convent, tellement m’enchanta / Que j’obeÿ a lui sy tost qu’i m’en pria” [And he made use of herbs; I don’t know how he got them. I swear to you, he so enchanted me that I obeyed him as soon as he asked me].<sup>377</sup> Marie’s invented story and the “real” story of the

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<sup>374</sup> *TN*, 18404-06. It seems rather odd for a bishop, but he specifically says that he will treat Clarinde and Gilles like a lover and child. He says to Clarinde: “Je vous levay filleulle des sains fons beneïs / Pour ce sera vo corps honorés et servis / Con vous feussiés m’ame et l’enffes feust mes filz” [I baptized you, goddaughter, in the blessed waters, and for that reason you will be honored and served, as if you were my lover and the child my son]. Despite his use of this language, it is never implied that he and Clarinde are actually lovers.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 19922.

<sup>376</sup> I have found that in modern English dictionaries the word niece was once a euphemism for the illegitimate child of a priest. I have not been able to find the same connotation in dictionaries of modern or medieval French, but the bishop’s strong connection to Marie makes me wonder if the author intended to put that idea into the reader’s mind.

<sup>377</sup> *TN*, 19948; 19951-53.



demonic rape combine a few different medieval ideas about demons, sorcery, and sexuality. When the devil comes to Marie, it is because she summoned him (“Au diable d’enfer se print a commander” [She began to summon the devil of hell]).<sup>378</sup> In Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s book on Ermine de Reims, a poor widow who suffered through many torments of demonic visitors, some of a sexual nature, she discusses the relationship between such demonic assaults and ideas about witchcraft in the late fourteenth century. The fact that Marie summons the devil, and that she later describes Gilles as using herbs to bewitch her, align this episode with ideas from “traditional” magic in which witches summoned demons to do nefarious deeds.<sup>379</sup> As the scene is described, Marie does not summon the devil in order to have sex with him, but rather out of desperation; however, the fact that she allows herself to be convinced to have sex with him recalls later views about witches found in the *Hammer of Witches* (1486-87), that is, that witches voluntarily had sex with demons.<sup>380</sup> The idea that a demon could take the shape of a human (and presumably a sexually attractive one) was common in medieval hagiography and miracle tales.<sup>381</sup>

Marie is responsible for calling the devil to her, and for being too weak to resist his seduction. In her invented story, she paints Gilles as both a devil and a sorcerer. Marie’s sexual

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 19888.

<sup>379</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 99. Blumenfeld-Kosinski cites a 1391 Jean Gerson sermon in which he speaks of this kind of witchcraft.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 101; 106. Blumenfeld-Kosinski cites the miracle tales of Caesarius of Heisterbach (1220-35), in which demons “woo or rape young women,” and a story about Arnulf of Villers who was propositioned by demons in the form of beautiful women.

experience with the devil is not termed as a rape (that is, it is not said that the devil took her by force, as rape is usually described in medieval French texts, but rather that he tempted and convinced her), but when she describes her experience to the bishop, she does say that Gilles forced her into sex: “Ce fut Gilles qu’ainsy me viola [It was Gilles who violated me in this way]; “ce fut maugré moy qu’a ma char adesa” [He touched my body against my will].<sup>382</sup> The discrepancy between Marie’s invented story and what she and the devil actually did portrays Marie as both a liar and as weak-willed, not as a victim. The way in which she propositions Gilles also places her in the role of a demonic woman trying to tempt a saint, and Gilles is given the chance to show that he has no problem resisting her. Marie’s guilt is also reiterated in a later scene when a townsman from Couvelances explains to Blanchandin what happened to Marie. He says that she

Se rendi au diable qui sy l’ala tenter,  
En la forme d’un home la vint enamorer.  
Et elle le lessa a son corps abiter,  
Dont l’anemi volt oir en son corps engendrer.<sup>383</sup>

gave herself to the devil who tempted her thus; he came to in the form of a man to make her fall in love. And she let him have sex with her; thus the enemy wanted to engender an heir in her body.

The townsman’s description very clearly places the blame on Marie: she allowed herself to be seduced. Note also that the child that the devil engenders is an *heir*. This word is sometimes used interchangeably with “filz” or son, but emphasizes the idea of an inheritance being passed down. In this case the devil would be creating an heir who would help him to administer his kingdom of evil, so to speak. The presence of an heir also emphasizes what could have been if Gilles had

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<sup>382</sup> *TN*, 19944; 19946.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 20311-14.

chosen to become Marie's lover, and possibly her husband. Gilles would have engendered an heir, and carried on his father Blanchandin's line. However, Gilles' choice to remain celibate and become a monk and then a saint creates more heirs for the kingdom of heaven than he could have created through reproduction on earth; he sets an example for others and confesses them, therefore saving souls. Although of course this first experience with sexuality is more traumatizing for Marie than for Gilles, it demonstrates that reproduction is the wrong choice for Gilles.

The bishop has complete confidence in Marie and immediately believes that Gilles raped her. He laments that he had such confidence in Gilles and was so deceived. Just as Oton consults his noblemen to take a final decision about whether he should burn Yde and Olive, the bishop then consults with his prelates and asks them how he should punish Gilles; they advise that he either be burned or imprisoned. The bishop makes the final decision to burn Gilles, who is then brought before him for his condemnation without ever being given the chance to defend himself. Gilles maintains his innocence, refuses the bishop's exhortation that he confess his sin before dying, and prepares himself to enter the flames. However, at the last minute Gilles thinks of asking Marie to be brought in so that she might have a chance to recant. She arrives, and he asks her why she lied about him, but she maintains that he raped her, here using the words "vïolee" [violated/raped] and "m'enforca" [forced me/raped me], and she implores her uncle to burn Gilles.<sup>384</sup> It is at this moment that God finally intervenes to save Gilles from the flames, causing the demon fetus to speak and reveal itself to be the child of the devil.

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 20109; 20113.

The demon fetus speaks in its own voice, but it is God that causes it to speak. God's decision to make the voice speak up at this point is indeed a miracle, because it exposes Marie's lie and saves Gilles: "...la voix d'un enfant en son corps s'escria. / Mais je croy, se fut voix que Dieu y envoya, / Car la voix tout en hault a la dame parla..." [the voice of a child in her body cried out. But I believe that it was a voice that God sent, because the voice spoke from above to the lady.]<sup>385</sup> The fetus is demonic (or at least half-demonic), but it is caused to speak through God's intervention, hence the child of the devil is speaking with a holy voice and denouncing itself and its mother. The voice also specifically addresses the bishop, telling him that he will never burn Gilles because Gilles never touched Marie, and that he should instead burn Marie. I mentioned previously that there was no equivalent of a false rape accusation in the *La Vie de Saint Gilles*. There is, however, a scene involving demonic possession that is so similar that it seems *TN's* author was likely aware of it and mixed elements of it with his story of the rape accusation. In the *Vie*, Giles encounters a man who has been restrained and attached to a pillar because he has been possessed by a devil. When Giles enters the room, the devil starts to speak and declare that he cannot leave the man's body because of Giles' holy presence. Similar to the way that the demon fetus' speech is described as coming from a vague place above Marie's body, the voice does not come out of the man's mouth or directly from his body; rather, witnesses hear the voice but can't see where it is coming from. However, unlike the demon fetus, this devil is not being caused to speak by God – the devil is speaking for itself. Giles is then able to expel the devil simply by commanding that it leave.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 20118-20.

<sup>386</sup> See lines 2912-2955 in *La Vie de Saint Gilles* (pages 88-89 in the Bos and Paris edition).

Contrary to the depiction of demonic possession that we see in *La Vie de Saint Gilles*, wherein the demon speaks for itself and does not have the benefit of God's intervention, the demon fetus' voice in *TN* functions in the same way as the angelic voices that are heard in *YO I* and in the sex change scene in *TN*. We have seen that angelic voices intervene to protect cross-dressed women from being burned at the stake. In addition, as we will see later, an angelic voice also comes to Blanchandin to explain that Gilles will be able to reattach his arm, and again later at the moment of its reattachment. Like an angel, the demon fetus' voice protects Gilles, the son of a formerly cross-dressed woman; it seems strange that God would choose a half demon to speak up and clear the name of a saint, but then again he chose two Saracens to be the parents of a Christian saint. The narrator's "mais je croy" concerning the origin of the voice indicates a distancing from something that might not make a whole lot of theological sense. In Yde's and Gilles' cases, these angelic voices also oppose and critique the voices of Oton and the bishop, paternal authority figures who both make a rash decision based on false information to have their own child or foster child executed. (The bishop even lights the fire himself!)<sup>387</sup> *YO I* and *TN* indicate that the paternal authority figures are in the wrong by having both Oton and the bishop die shortly after these incidents. (In *YO I*, the angel announces Oton's imminent death, which occurs within eight days.) In the *TN* episode, after the fetus reveals the truth, Marie throws herself into the fire before Gilles and the bishop can grab her and do it themselves. In a dramatic scene recalling the crucifixion, the demon separates from her body with a great ruckus, the skies darken, the roof of the episcopal palace collapses, and the bishop passes out. At the end of the whole dramatic incident, the bishop offers to give up his episcopal seat to Gilles so that he, the

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<sup>387</sup> *TN*, 20037.

bishop, can become a hermit. Gilles refuses, wanting to become a hermit himself, and the two depart for Provence, but the bishop dies along the way in Champagne. Gilles finally settles in a hut in the woods outside of Avignon.

The end of the ordeal of the rape accusation marks Gilles' passage into adulthood, which in his case is his holy calling to become a hermit monk. Gilles rejects Marie's proposal that he begin a romantic relationship with her, and her pregnancy by the devil is a deformed image of what their future life could have been. (Presumably the bishop would have approved of their marriage, had Gilles not had his own religious objection to it.) Gilles thus thoroughly rejects any secular model of masculinity; he has no desire to rule over land, marry, and engender descendents. Blanchandin's sex change and engendering of Gilles is the "good" mirror image of the devil episode, therefore confirming the positive value of Blanchandin's changed body. The incident's thematic connections to stories of transvestite saints confirm that Gilles is not only a holy man but, because of his father, also a sort of honorary member of the cross-dressing club.

## **6.5 GILLES AND RAIMON: A STRANGE FRATERNITY**

Since Blanchandin lost the kingdom of Greece, even if Gilles had desired an inheritance, he would not have had one. The fact that Gilles becomes a monk appears to be his choice, but on the other hand this has been predestined since the moment Blanchandin engendered him. In this father-son dyad, rather than the father modeling a life for his son, the son's destiny to be a saint models a new life for the father: Blanchandin becomes a monk-like figure like his son. When he first loses his arm, Blanchandin sees poverty as his own destiny but not that of his son. Blanchandin worries that he cannot provide an inheritance for his son; he laments that Gilles and

Clarinde will now be poor, and prays that they be provided with “aucune seignorie” [some land]. (He, however, specifies that he has no interest in land or riches for himself.)<sup>388</sup> In this way, Blanchandin shows that he is concerned about providing a traditional inheritance to his son. He assumes that his son would want this, since of course, as a fifteen-day-old baby, he has not yet expressed interest in becoming a monk. However, Blanchandin begins to understand that Gilles will not need these earthly things when an angel appears to him and tells him that Gilles will be able to reattach his arm. The angel also says that Gilles will have “grant seignorie” [great lands] and “bon royaume” [good kingdom].<sup>389</sup> The angel does not explain what precisely it means by this, but presumably it is a reference to the heavenly kingdom that Gilles will enter after death. After Blanchandin hears this information from the angel, he no longer expresses worry about not being able to provide land for his son. Hence, the angel’s message liberates Blanchandin from his responsibility towards his son as far as land and wealth are concerned. Blanchandin is responsible for at least trying to find his son, but not in order that he may provide for him. On the contrary, it is his son who is more powerful than him and who will be able to do him a great service by reattaching his arm.

Gilles, on the other hand, is not aware that he is destined to reattach his father’s arm; he doesn’t know that his father was dismembered, nor whether his father is even alive. Gilles simply goes about his business, and step-by-step is brought into the orbit of the Nanteuil family, which will eventually lead him to his father. The first step in this process is his meeting with his half-brother Raimon at Gilles’ hermitage outside of Avignon. Heavenly rewards are certainly Gilles’ only interest as far as he is concerned. However, when he finally meets his brother

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 18003.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 18015.

Raimon, he has no problem using his religious influence to help his brother take back his inheritance (Avignon) from administrators appointed by Charlemagne. Before turning to Gilles' interaction with Charlemagne, I will examine the unusual fraternal relationship between Gilles and Raimon. The Charlemagne confession scene, borrowed from hagiography, takes on a new narrative use because of the connection to Raimon; it demonstrates the power of a fraternal relationship that has been formed only by virtue of Blanchandin's sex change. It also becomes a moment to reflect upon the ways in which the two family units that exist before and after sex change (that is, Tristan, Blanchandine, and Raimon, and Blanchandin, Clarinde, and Gilles), have been transformed into one large family connected by Blanchandine/Blanchandin as mother and father.

Gilles' implication in the Nanteuil family comes from his complicated genealogy, being the son of Blanchandin, who before his sex change, gave birth to Raimon, Tristan's firstborn. Gilles and Raimon thus share one parent, Blanchandine/Blanchandin, and have no other parent in common. They are referred to as either "brothers" or "brothers of direct lineage," although they only share one parent. The text generally presents this definition of their relationship as brothers in a straightforward manner. However, there is one particular passage that complicates a simple view of the relationship between these five/six people - that is, Gilles, Raimon, Tristan, Clarinde, and Blanchandine/Blanchandin. In this passage, which I will examine below, Gilles explains to Raimon what happened to their parents, and through his comments he reveals the way in which he believes himself and Raimon to be related to each parent in that equation. That configuration of relationships turns out to link Gilles to Tristan as well as to his own father Blanchandin.

The scene in which Gilles and Raimon meet takes place in Gilles' hermitage, seven miles outside of Avignon. Why Provence? The author has to get Gilles to Provence somehow, because



this is where the hagiographical Saint Giles ends up after he leaves his home city of Athens. The author also claims that *TN*'s Gilles selects Provence as his destination because this is the land of his ancestry. Gilles is from Greece, and his parents were from Babylon and Armenia. So who are these ancestors?

Et tout droit en Provence, pour voir le vous affie,  
S'en alla ly sains homs dont je vous signiffie.  
Et pour cë y alla, sy con l'istoire crie,  
Que la terre venoit de son ancesserie,  
Mais n'y avoit nul hoir, siegneurs, a celle fye.  
Dame Aye d'Avignon avoit perdu la vie  
Et ses trois filz aussy a deuil et a hachie;  
Mort fut le roy Ganor. La terre ot en baillie  
Charlemaine le roy, que Jhesus beneÿe!<sup>390</sup>

And the holy man whom I am telling you about went straight to Provence, it's the truth. And the reason he went there, as the story recounts, is that the land came from his ancestry, but at that time there was no heir there. Lady Aye d'Avignon had lost her life and, sadly and cruelly, her three sons as well; King Ganor was also dead. King Charlemagne – may Jesus bless him – governed the land.

This passage indicates that *Raimon*'s paternal relatives are also Gilles' relatives: Raimon's great-grandmother Aye, his great-step-grandfather Ganor, as well as his grandfather Gui and his great-uncles Antoine and Richer. This is the first sign that something odd is going on in the author's construction of Gilles' ancestry. Lest we forget, all four of Gilles' grandparents were Saracens. And yet, in a matter-of-fact way, the text indicates that these are all Gilles' ancestors. *TN*'s author's omission of any details about the precise way that Gilles is related to them leaves the reader to deduce that the fraternal relationship between Raimon and Gilles (they share one parent, Blanchandine/Blanchandin) also leads to a link of kinship between Gilles and all of Raimon's relations, even (and particularly) to those from Tristan's side, the side to which Gilles

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 20205-13.

has no blood relationship. Although it may seem odd to the modern reader, this is in keeping with medieval views about kinship, which considered relationships created through marriage (and even former marriages or sexual relationships that have since ended) to have the same import as blood relationships when it came to determining whether two people were related to each other.<sup>391</sup>

This new information concerning Gilles' link to Tristan's side of the family also imports on the construction of Blanchandin's personhood post-sex change, which I explored in chapter four. When Blanchandin became a man, his relationship with his Saracen family disappeared, even to the point that it appeared he was no longer related to his wife and cousin. He retained, however, his memories of his time with his former husband, Tristan, and love for him, while remaining a good husband to Clarinde. Gilles' relationship to Tristan's family reveals that the sex change does not alter the creation of a link of kinship through marriage; that link created through a marriage that Blanchandine experienced while a woman still remains even though Blanchandin is now a man. Hence, the two families of Blanchandine, Tristan, and Raimon, and Blanchandin, Clarinde, and Gilles, are treated as an example of an average remarriage and stepfamily, not as anything unusual because of the change of sex. Note, however, that we only hear about Raimon's ancestors being Gilles' ancestors, not the other way around. This seems to be both a matter of convenience for the author and related to that breaking of the relationship with the Saracen family that occurred at the time of the sex change, which also had to do with Blanchandine's conversion to Christianity. In the world of *TN*, Raimon would hardly desire a connection to Saracen grandparents. The family structures may in reality be complicated, but the

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<sup>391</sup> James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 194.

narrative indicates that there is simple connection between Gilles, his ancestors, and Avignon, which provides a logical explanation for his implication in their affairs. Gilles wants not only to help his brother Raimon and to wage holy war against Saracens, it is also a personal crusade for him to help *his* family.

The first two mentions in the text of the fraternal relationship between Gilles and Raimon occur well before the scene wherein they meet for the first time. They follow the scene of Gilles' birth and appear in the form of the previews that *TN*'s author likes to employ. First, the author simply states that Gilles will later be found in his hermitage by "son frere Raymon" [his brother Raimon].<sup>392</sup> A few lines further, he elaborates that Gilles will realize after speaking to Raimon that "c'estoit le scien frere de droite estracion / Et filz a Blanchadine, qui ceur a de lion, / Qui .ix. mois le porta et puis devint ungs hon" [it was his brother of direct lineage and lion-hearted Blanchandine's son, who carried him for nine months and then became a man].<sup>393</sup> Before meeting Raimon, Gilles was already aware that he had a brother, since Clarinde explained this to him when she was on her deathbed.<sup>394</sup> The fact that Blanchandin changed sex and that he/she is the father of Gilles and the mother of Raimon is mentioned two more times right before the scene in which Gilles and Raimon actually meet and then a third time during their meeting.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 17725.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 17736-38.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 19794-96.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 21146; 21344; 21366.

All of these mentions simply state that they are brothers, or, as in the one case above, specify that they are brothers of “direct lineage.”<sup>396</sup>

Raimon is in Avignon with his uncle Doon and his younger brother Beuve (Tristan’s son with Florine), advocating for the return of his inheritance. Aye and Ganor were never able to return to Avignon before their death, and a man named Antheaulme has been appointed by Charlemagne to rule Avignon. Tristan would be next in line for this land, but since he has been gone so long looking for Blanchandin (about fifteen years), Doon, Raimon, and Beuve believe that he is likely dead, and so they want it to pass to Raimon, Tristan’s eldest son. When Antheaulme realizes that the Nanteuil men plan to take back the city, he captures and imprisons Doon and Beuve. When he sees what is happening, Raimon is able to grab a horse and flee into the woods, where he just happens to find Gilles’ hermitage. When Raimon introduces himself to him as Tristan’s son, Gilles realizes that this is his long-lost brother, because of what his mother Clarinde had told him. Gilles then recounts to Raimon the story of his parents’ (Blanchandin and Clarinde) departure from Armenia and their exile from Greece. In so doing, he also describes his and Raimon’s relationship to these three (four) parents: Clarinde, Tristan, and Blanchandin/Blanchandine:

Bien sçay que Blanchandine en ses flans vous porta,  
Et puis devint ungs home, et depuis m’engendra  
En la belle Clarinde qui doucement l’ama.  
Depuis le roy no pere nostre mere lessa  
Par dedens Ermenie, et dedens Gresse alla.  
Traÿ fut au royaulme. Ma mere ainsy entra  
Dedens la haute mer; en ung bael entra.

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<sup>396</sup> Brothers who share a father and not the same mother are the norm in this text, and are never depicted as what we would call “half siblings.” All three of Tristan’s sons have different mothers. See line 11955 for the scene wherein Tristan and Doon realize that they are brothers (they share a father).

Oncques ne vis mon pere; je croy qu'i mourut la.<sup>397</sup>

I know well that Blanchandine carried you in her womb, and then became a man, and then engendered me in the beautiful Clarinde who dearly loved him. Then our mother left our father the king in Armenia, and went to Greece. He was betrayed in the kingdom. My mother therefore got in a boat and went onto the high seas. I have never seen my father; I think that he died there.

Gilles' speech to his brother Raimon starts out simply repeating the same story of the sex change that had been mentioned several times previously in the text: Blanchandine gave birth to Raimon, changed sex, and engendered Gilles. However, once he begins to describe their relationship to Tristan and Blanchandin(e), it is difficult to follow to whom he is referring. Who are "nostre mere" and "le roy no pere?" "Nostre mere" is the subject of the sentence, so she must have left "le roy no pere" in Armenia. Since Tristan is the only character who is left behind in Armenia, he is clearly the "our father" of the sentence. Blanchandin is the one who leaves Tristan behind to go to Greece, hence he must be the "our mother" of the sentence, even though he had already undergone his sex change at that point and was male. The next sentence, "traÿ fut au royaulme," also refers to Blanchandin, who was betrayed in Greece. Thus, up until this point, Gilles has referred to Tristan as "our father" and Blanchandin as "our mother." After this, Gilles then refers to his own two parents, Clarinde and Blanchandin, as "ma mere" and "mon pere."

The term "nostre mere" reveals the difficulty that Blanchandine/Blanchandin's children have speaking about her/him. Gilles has to name his father in a way that also references the fact that his father is Raimon's mother. He chooses to emphasize the commonality of the parent ("nostre") but refers to Raimon's parental relationship with Blanchandine ("mere"). When he says that Blanchandin left Tristan behind in Armenia, it makes sense for him to refer to Blanchandin as "nostre mere" because he wants to refer back to the relationship he has just

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 21364-72.

defined for Raimon (“Blanchandine en ses flancs vous porta”). And if he had said “*vostre/ta mere*,” he might have implied that Blanchandine still existed, when in fact she was gone, having turned into Blanchandin.

The choice to refer to the male Blanchandin as “mere” does sound strange, however, and his reference to Tristan as both of their fathers (“le roy no pere”) is even more puzzling, since he clearly is only Raimon’s father. Referring to both Tristan and Blanchandin(e) as shared parents may be related to some kind of logic about which couples “belong together.” If we consider that otherwise Gilles would have had to say “my father [Blanchandin] left your father [Tristan] in Armenia,” we then see that this does not properly reference the former relationship between Tristan and Blanchandine that produced Raimon. By keeping Blanchandin gendered feminine as a “mother” even after the sex change, Gilles places “her” in a couple with her former husband Tristan. Keeping Blanchandin gendered feminine also avoids what sounds like a reference to a same-sex couple, Blanchandin and Tristan. And although gendering Blanchandin female at this point in the narrative does not properly reflect circumstances, it does reflect the importance of the former relationship between Blanchandin and Tristan and the deep sadness that they felt at the moment when Blanchandin left Armenia. Recall that in this “break-up” scene, they both shed copious tears and moved everyone around them to tears as well. Furthermore, Gilles’ reference to Tristan as “our father” indicates how important Tristan’s relationship to Gilles indeed will be in the development of the text. Since Blanchandin and Tristan were formerly married, Tristan is some kind of stepfather to Gilles. This stepfather relationship now causes him to be related to all of Tristan’s relatives, such as Aye and Ganor, as we saw above. Gilles certainly seems to consider his relationship with Tristan to be of great importance, since he later does everything in his power to help Tristan, Raimon and Beuve, and Doon: he advocates on their behalf to

Charlemagne, and he even gives up his chosen life as a hermit to join his brothers in warfare against Saracens.

Raimon and Gilles thus have a shared interest in Tristan, for the simple reason of their relation to him. However, for Raimon, who hasn't seen his father since he was a toddler, his whole concept of his father has to do with the inheritance that he can gain through his paternal grandmother. On the other hand, Gilles' relationship with his own father has nothing to do with inheritance, since Blanchandin cannot offer that to him. Gilles hopes that his father is still alive and wishes to see him simply for the fact that he is his father – he doesn't know about the severed arm. As for Blanchandin's relationship with Raimon, it is non-existent: Raimon never mentions an interest in seeing Blanchandin, his "mother." Aside from the fact that he listens to Gilles' matter-of-fact explanation of Blanchandin(e)'s birthing Raimon and then engendering Gilles, Raimon does not notice or care that Blanchandin is/was his mother. Blanchandine only exists as a mother in the memory of and recounting of the fact that she gave birth to Raimon, not in the present reality of the family members discussed in Gilles and Raimon's conversation. In confining Raimon's interest to his father, Tristan, the text implies that Raimon no longer has a mother, and also that her absence is not problematic at all.

Raimon's lack of interest in his mother could also be part of his character in a general sense: he is uncaring and selfish in a number of ways, particularly in comparison to the saintly Gilles. While Gilles helps Raimon get Avignon back by advocating for him to Charlemagne, Raimon does not similarly aid Gilles in finding Blanchandin. He does nothing at all for him in return, and in fact he tells Gilles that he finds his choice to fast and pray ridiculous and tries to convince him that one can just as easily serve God "en seignourage" [as a lord] as one can as a

hermit.<sup>398</sup> He practically disdains Gilles' lifestyle. Gilles is not convinced by Raimon's mockery that he should give up being a hermit, but then Charlemagne's men appear at Gilles' hermitage, asking him to come confess Charlemagne, who has heard about his holiness. Gilles agrees, and Raimon is pleased with this turn of events because it will present an opportunity for Gilles to intervene on his behalf.

## 6.6 CHARLEMAGNE'S CONFESSION

The Charlemagne confession scene in *TN* is taken directly from *La Vie de Saint Gilles* and only differs in a few details. The most notable difference is that *TN* names the sin that Charlemagne confessed and the *Vie* does not. In both texts, the story goes as follows: Charlemagne confesses to Gilles, but then tells him that there is one sin that he refuses to utter. Gilles then says mass, during which an angel appears and gives him a letter; we learn that the unconfessed sin is written in this letter, but we do not find out what the sin is at this point. In the *Vie*, the letter says that God has already pardoned Charlemagne but that Gilles still needs to hear his confession. Charlemagne then admits to this sin after Gilles reads the letter to him.<sup>399</sup> During this whole narration in the *Vie*, the nature of the sin is never explained. The notion that Charlemagne had sinned in some terrible way was present in earlier texts, but the French *Vie de Saint Gilles* is the

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<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 21465.

<sup>399</sup> Thus, Charlemagne is forgiven before he even confesses the sin, and he does not really confess it, he only admits to it. Vincent de Beauvais criticized this as "contrary to the catholic faith." Miranda Griffin, "Writing out the Sin: Arthur, Charlemagne and the Spectre of Incest," *Neophilologus* 88 (2004): 508.



first to describe Charlemagne needing to confess such a sin.<sup>400</sup> In *TN*, Charlemagne's terrible sin is finally revealed: the author explains that Charlemagne had sex with his sister Gisele, and that she became pregnant with Roland as a result. Miranda Griffin notes that *TN* is the first medieval text in which this notion of "Charlemagne's sin," something that had only been hinted at in other texts, is explicitly identified as incest with his sister.<sup>401</sup> *TN*'s author intervenes in his own voice to give this information, but he hesitates to take personal responsibility for writing down this sin:

Le peché fut orribles, on ne le sot neant;  
Mais ly aucun esponent et tous ly plus sachant  
Que se fut le peché quant engendra Rolant  
En sa sereur germaine; se va on esperant,  
Car il n'est nul qu'au vray vous en voit recordant,  
Mais ensemment le vont plusieurs signiffiant.<sup>402</sup>

The sin was horrible and no one knew about it at all; but some, and all the wisest people, explain that it was the sin when he engendered Roland in his sister. This is what people believe, because there is no one who speaks truthfully to you about it, but many people make implications in this way about it.

Even in saying what exactly the sin was, the author prefers to pass responsibility off to "the wisest people" as the source of the information. Incest is a particular concern in *TN*, as we have seen. There is one occurrence of enacted incest between first cousins (Clarisse and Tristan) and another between first cousins once removed that remains ambiguous because of the sex change (Blanchandin and Clarinde). Then there are also moments scattered throughout the text in which the possibility or the risk of incest exists: when Doon meets his mother Honorée for the first time (he had been abandoned as a child), and she finds him attractive; when Tristan's mother

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<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 500.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>402</sup> *TN*, 21705-10.

Aiglentine is proposed as a wife to him; and when Aye fears that her son Guy may rape her in the prison, before she knows who he is. Charlemagne's sin as it is recounted in *TN* creates a narrative moment that draws these other incidences of incest into its orbit. The rumor of Charlemagne's incestuous behavior, which is implied to be common, but unspoken, knowledge among people of the author's time, is not just an interesting anecdote, but a link to the instances of incest or possible incest in the text. Charlemagne's sin of incest with his sister parallels in particular the sin between first cousins Tristan and Clarisse. Both are considered to be grave sins requiring confession, and in both cases, Gilles confesses and absolves the sinners. (Gilles confesses Clarisse and then Tristan towards the end of the poem, during the last wars between the Christians and Saracens.) Part of Gilles' earthly mission is to confess others of incest, when he, technically, is a child of incest himself. As I showed in chapter four, *TN* describes Blanchandine and Clarinde as cousins when they are both women, but ceases to identify them as cousins after the sex change, implying that the change of sex has solved this problem. But the text's insistent return to the issue of incest in relation to Gilles shows that the problem has not been forgotten and in fact is essential to his character. Gilles becomes a mirror in which we can see his parents' otherwise invisible sin. From another point of view, Charlemagne's sin also serves to relativize the other instances of incest in the text, showing that there is a different degree of gravity of sinfulness depending on the degree of kinship of those involved. Charlemagne's sin is nuclear family incest, and thanks to Gilles' intervention, even that sin can be absolved.

*TN* also uses Charlemagne's confession scene as an opportunity to further develop issues surrounding inheritance in this text. When Charlemagne will not confess all his sins, Gilles begins to upbraid him about being a bad king in other ways. Gilles uses his influence as a figure

of religious authority to make Charlemagne feel guilty about his poor treatment of Raimon (depriving him of his inheritance). Gilles does this by berating him for treating other princes badly:

Ja as fait maint peché par le tien ceur felon,  
Et guerroié tes princes a tort et sans raison;  
Tu fezis moult de maulx Regnault le filz Aymon,  
Sy guerriás a tort Girard de Roussillon ;  
Or amende ta vie, car il en est saison.<sup>403</sup>

You have already sinned many times because of your evil heart, and made war against your princes wrongly and without justification. You have done many bad things to Renaut, son of Aymon, and you wrongly waged war against Girard of Roussillon. Now amend your life, for it is time.

In *chansons de geste* about Renaut of Montauban and Girard of Roussillon, Charlemagne wrongs these characters, and Gilles compares this behavior to the way that Charlemagne has disinherited Raimon.<sup>404</sup> This comparison is somewhat unfair, because Charlemagne had no way of knowing that Tristan was still alive or that Raimon even existed until his appearance in Avignon shortly before this scene. However, Charlemagne's incompetence in matters of political administration is a theme that reappears periodically in *TN*; Charlemagne has the habit of appointing men to administrate cities in the absence of the true heir, and this never goes very well.<sup>405</sup> Gilles connects Charlemagne's sinfulness in a general sense with the specific sin of disinheriting others. Above, he uses the word *peché* to describe Charlemagne's behavior towards these men, and he

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 21613-16.

<sup>404</sup> Girard and Renart are titular characters of twelfth-century *chansons de geste*. Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, 768-69.

<sup>405</sup> For example, this occurs in Nanteuil when Gui is absent. The *bourgeois* hate Persant, appointed by Charlemagne, because of his high taxes.

later adds that “D’aultruy desheriter vous allés vous dampnant”<sup>406</sup> [You are damning yourself by disinheriting others]. We saw that in *Croissant*, Guimart also came to the realization that he should not disinherit Croissant after having a religious experience (taking the Eucharist on Easter). Gilles indicates that Charlemagne is actively damning himself by his political decisions, not just his personal behavior. Charlemagne, faced with such a threat immediately after he has confessed a horrible sin and been absolved by Gilles, certainly would not desire to go against Gilles’ exhortations. Hence, he readily concedes to Gilles’ request that he reestablish Raimon as lord of Avignon as well as of Nanteuil. Gilles succeeds in helping Raimon get what he wants, using his saintliness to resolve this matter of inheritance.

## 6.7 GILLES AS WARRIOR MONK

The resolution of the Charlemagne confession scene marks the end of the narrative section on Gilles’ development as a boy and man: his birth, education, choice of a religious vocation, and then his maturity as a holy man. He first lives as a hermit, but then is forced back into worldly affairs by the arrival of his brother and then Charlemagne’s request that he give him confession. Gilles’ life in the hagiography ends shortly after the Charlemagne scene. However, in *TN* Gilles remains present in an essential role in the last act of the poem, in which the Nanteuil family (those that remain - Tristan’s sons and his brother Doon) battle for Rochebrune and Aufalerne, both of which have been taken over by Saracens. Let us take a moment to review the importance of these two locations in the text up until now. Aufalerne was Aye d’Avignon’s land through her

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<sup>406</sup> *TN*, 21729.

husband Ganor; Aye, Ganor, and their sons are all dead by this point in the narrative and Aufalerne is back in pagan hands. Rochebrune was originally pagan land that became Tristan's through his marriage to Florine, whom he married after Blanchandine's sex change, and who converted for him.<sup>407</sup> Tristan then left Rochebrune to search for Blanchandin when Florine was still pregnant with Tristan's third son, Beuve. While Tristan is gone, Florine dies, and pagans capture Rochebrune.

The pagans who capture Rochebrune are in fact closely linked to Tristan. After Tristan impregnated his first cousin Clarisse, she married a pagan named Guintelin and convinced him that the son she gave birth to, Garçon, was his. Tristan believes that Clarisse became pregnant as a result of their encounter, but has never seen her again. Now, Guintelin and Garçon have conquered Rochebrune. Raimon, Beuve, Gilles, and Doon (along with the troops they have amassed) wage war on Guintelin and Garçon – the young men unaware, of course, that they are fighting their own brother. If the Christians win the war, this land will be Beuve's since he is heir to Rochebrune. The young men who ally themselves (Raimon and Beuve), as well as the man they fight (Garçon), are all Tristan's sons from different mothers. Gilles, considering himself part of this family, agrees to join the fight.

Once Gilles agrees to help his brothers, he enthusiastically takes on the role of a warrior monk. As Keith Sinclair notes, the Gilles of this portion of the poem is completely different from his earlier hermit saint iteration; "he has been transformed by the narrator into a religious warrior who conducts himself in the customary epic manner, by performing prodigious feats in battle

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<sup>407</sup> Rochebrune is also where Gui, Aigentine, and Tristan wash up in the beginning of the text, when Tristan is just a baby. At that time, Gui slept with Honorée, Murgafier's daughter and the princess of Rochebrune; she gives birth to Doon. Tristan's second wife Florine is Murgafier's much-younger sister and hence Doon's great-aunt.

alongside other major characters.”<sup>408</sup> Like his brothers, he is fighting for land, but one of his motivations is also the eradication of Saracens. In fact, he is the only character in this text that is depicted as hating Saracens for religious reasons: “il haÿ tous ceulx qui Dieu n’avoient cher” [he hated all those whom God did not love].<sup>409</sup> Gilles’ appearance and behavior while fighting paint a paradoxical picture of a man who appears to be a weak, frail monk, but who is actually a great warrior. While the others ride horses, he fights on foot (barefoot) and uses a hatchet. He has no problem chopping Saracens to pieces, and his war cry is “Prouvence!” (the location of his hermitage, which he chose because of its connection to his ancestor Aye d’Avignon).<sup>410</sup> His ascetic practices are evident in his appearance, as he is called “Gilles a la palle coullour” (“Pale Gilles”); however, the narrator specifies that although he only dined on apples, he was just as strong and as capable as the other men, and moreover, he did not boast about his asceticism.<sup>411</sup> Gilles’ warrior monk persona is another way in which he recalls a cross-dressed woman, in addition to the rape accusation scene and his choice of celibacy. A frail, underfed monk performing just as well as a trained knight presents a wondrous scene, much like when Aye d’Avignon, as Gaudion l’Espagnol, cut down Saracens despite the fact that she was a woman who had never previously done battle. Gilles’ and Aye’s violent behavior is valued and is all the more marvelous for the fact that women and monks under most circumstances would not be able

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<sup>408</sup> Sinclair, *Thematic Infrastructure*, 127. Gilles’ role as a warrior in *TN* does not correspond to his hagiography. For the depiction of the warrior monk in the Middle Ages, see Esther Dehoux, *Saints guerriers: Georges, Guillaume, Maurice, et Michel dans la France médiévale (XI<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014).

<sup>409</sup> *TN*, 21823.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 21895-905.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 22250; 22329.

to perform gloriously as knights. Given that it is Aye d'Avignon whom Gilles sees as his ancestor, this connection is all the more striking. In the scene where Gilles prepares to go into battle, we see that he has a personalized shield that symbolizes his role as a warrior monk:

Saint Gilles s'adouba qui fut de leur lignie,  
Et a prins une targe qui bien estoit vernie,  
Paint y ot ung ermite qui son corps signiffie,  
Car d'occire paiens avoit si grant envie  
Qu'i ne povoit dormir tout nuyt annuytie.<sup>412</sup>

Saint Gilles, who was of their lineage, armed himself. And he took a well varnished shield (there was a hermit painted on it that symbolized him) because he had such a great desire to kill pagans that he couldn't sleep the whole night.

Note that that the author again identifies Gilles as a member of “their” lineage, that is, the same lineage as Raimon and Beuve. Gilles then does battle at Rochebrune but is captured and imprisoned; Clarisse visits him in his cell and he confesses her of her sin of incest with Tristan, and is absolved. Gilles spends four years in prison until Raimon finally captures Rochebrune and liberates him. Raimon then sets out to capture Aufalerne, which he also considers his land through his great-grandmother Aye d'Avignon.<sup>413</sup> Gilles accompanies his brothers on this new adventure as well. Their enemies from Rochebrune, Guintelin and Garçon, are able to escape from the city just as Raimon captures it, so Guintelin and Garçon join Aufalerne's leader Clariant in fighting the Christians. This sets up the second act of the last battle in this text. At this point, *TN*'s narrative goes back in time to explain what has happened to Tristan and Blanchandin

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 22523-27.

<sup>413</sup> Raimon says he is “ly drois hoir de vraye encesserie” [the direct heir of true ancestry] of Aufalerne (Ibid., 22198). Aufalerne was originally pagan and Ganor's land. Ganor was Aye's second husband and the father of Antoine and Richer. Perhaps because Antoine, Richer, and Gui are all dead, and Tristan is presumed to be dead, Raimon thinks he is next in line.

while the others were fighting. Then the two men finally arrive in Aufalerne and are reunited with their offspring.

## 6.8 DISMEMBERMENT AND DISABILITY

Before examining the scene in which Gilles reattaches Blanchandin's arm, let us return to the circumstances in which Blanchandin found himself at the moment his arm was severed, and examine the meaning that the text attributes to this dismemberment. Blanchandin loses his kingdom, his wife, his son, and his arm in the space of minutes. Blanchandin manages to wander out of the city and comes across a "bourgeois" who offers to help him. Blanchandin's arm is just barely still attached at the shoulder, and the *bourgeois* stops the bleeding and bandages it. At first, Blanchandin is so bitter that he says he would prefer to just cut the arm off completely and bury it!<sup>414</sup> Later, we see that Blanchandin carries his severed arm with him in a case or bag, so evidently it completely detaches at some point, although that moment is not depicted. Blanchandin believes his dismemberment is linked to sin, but he can hardly decide who or what to blame for these terrible circumstances. At first he tells the *bourgeois* that he has been dismembered because of his *own* sin - "par mon peché."<sup>415</sup> A few minutes later, he blames Clarinde's desire for him as the cause of his troubles, but at the same time wishes her well. He backtracks after this and says that he must have deserved his downfall because of "aucune folie"

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<sup>414</sup> *TN*, 17912.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 17895.



[some folly] of his own.<sup>416</sup> At this time, he does not even know if Clarinde and Gilles are alive or dead.

Keith Sinclair has noted the many parallels between Philippe de Beaumanoir's *La Manekine* (second half of the thirteenth century) and the episode of the cut-off arm in *TN*.<sup>417</sup> *La Manekine* starts off like *Yde et Olive*, with a king who wants to marry his daughter. Like Yde, the daughter escapes, but she cuts off her hand, and has many subsequent adventures. At times, Blanchandin resembles Manekine; at others Clarinde experiences trials similar to those of Manekine, such as being cast adrift on a boat with her infant son. In *La Manekine*, there is no cross-dressing or change of sex. The most notable similarity for our purposes is that at the end of *La Manekine*, the Pope reattaches her hand after it is found preserved inside a fish that had swallowed it, just as Blanchandin's arm is miraculously preserved in a carrying case. These two narratives, as well as many other medieval texts that share these themes,<sup>418</sup> show an interest in the relationship between sin, particularly incest, and punishment by dismemberment, and the necessity of a religious authority figure to enact miraculous healing.<sup>419</sup>

Concerning the effect of this dismemberment on the narrative of *TN*, it is useful to consider two models proposed by disability theory. The first is the idea of impairment versus disability. As Edward Wheatley explains, "impairment is the particular physical

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 17956-59; 17966.

<sup>417</sup> Sinclair, *Thematic Infrastructure*, 105-113.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>419</sup> For *La Manekine*, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) and Nancy B. Black, "The Handless Queen," in *Medieval Narratives of Accused Queens* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

condition...while disability is constituted by the restrictive social and political practices that construct the environment of a person with an impairment.”<sup>420</sup> Irina Metzler, working under the premise that impaired people in the Middle Ages may have been “disabled” or not in a variety of ways that do not correspond to twenty-first century notions of disability, identifies examples of disability caused by impairment, such as the inability to work long-term, or limited mobility that caused what was perceived as a burden on others.<sup>421</sup> Secondly, both Metzler and Wheatley consider impairment and disability in the medieval religious context; of particular relevance to Blanchandin and Gilles is Metzler’s study of the representation of impairment and disability in stories of miraculous healing at saints’ tombs, and, related to that, the question of wholeness of body in theological discussions of the bodily resurrection. I will return to these questions of bodily wholeness and perfection when I get to the scene of reattachment.

As Wheatley explains in his book on the depiction of blindness in medieval France and England, medieval religious discourse creates a certain understanding of disability: that impairments can be the result of sin; that the sick or impaired should confess, and that miraculous cure is possible, and should be sought. In addition, the reliance of some impaired people on alms limited and controlled their behavior.<sup>422</sup> Wheatley shows that just as the medical model of disability in contemporary society views disability “as an absence of full health that requires a cure; similarly, medieval Christianity often constructed disability as a spiritually

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<sup>420</sup> Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>421</sup> Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 157-161.

<sup>422</sup> Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, 13-14.

pathological site of absence of the divine.”<sup>423</sup> As a result, a sick or impaired person might seek a miraculous cure through prayer and penance, and possibly through the intervention of a saint or a living holy person. This is precisely how Blanchandin views his situation. As we have seen, he does consider his dismemberment to be the result of sin, though whose sin is unclear. As he leaves the city, he begins to pray to the Virgin. While he is praying, a bright light and an angel appear to him. The angel tells him that Clarinde and Gilles will be saved. It then says that Blanchandin should keep his severed arm with him because Gilles will be able to reattach it. This brings Blanchandin much joy; he says “Benoiste soit ly heure que mon corps l’engendra!” [Blessed be the hour that I engendered him!].<sup>424</sup> Blanchandin’s second experience of contact with an angel shows that his dismemberment, though it may be the result of a sin, does not cause him to be cast away from God – he still is privileged to have an intimate relationship to him. The information that the angel gives him then creates his new purpose in life, which is to find his son in order to have his arm reattached.

Any pain or discomfort caused by the arm’s severing, or his inability to do certain things, is not an essential factor of his choice to continue begging for alms and searching for Gilles – rather, it seems to be a given that he would want his arm reattached regardless of what specific sufferings, or not, it causes him. If we consider the question of impairment versus disability, Blanchandin’s impairment is the loss of the use of one of his arms. The disabilities caused by this impairment in *TN* are clearly related to a religious notion of disability; that is, he immediately understands his dismemberment to be the result of sin, and he thinks that he must now do

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<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. Both Wheatley and Metzler are clear, however, that illnesses and impairments were not *always* considered to be the result of sin. Metzler, 63. Wheatley, 14.

<sup>424</sup> *TN*, 18043.

penance by begging for alms and wandering homeless. In this way, Blanchandin self-identifies as a “crippled” person just by the fact of having his arm cut off, whether or not his impairment would in reality prevent him from supporting himself. (Later in the text, in fact, his impairment does *not* prevent him from becoming a mercenary.) Thus, being a beggar is really a choice that Blanchandin makes in order to do penance, although in the text it is presented as more of a given than a choice. In the scene preceding the sex change, however, Blanchandine did say that she wanted to live in poverty and anonymity, and the dismemberment is now a fulfillment of that wish.<sup>425</sup> All of these points about impairment, disability, poverty, and religion bring up three questions that may seem to have obvious answers at first glance. Is Blanchandin depicted as “disabled” by his dismemberment, and in what ways? How is his social status affected by it? And, what are the reasons given for his desire to have Gilles reattach his arm? The answer to these questions will help us understand what meaning the author ascribes to Blanchandin’s dismemberment and how that relates (or not) to his earlier sex change.

The question of Blanchandin’s disability due to his dismemberment is addressed in a later section when Blanchandin finally meets up with Tristan again. Two thousand lines later, and after wandering alone for fifteen years, the two find each other in Namur, where they are both attending a tournament. (Tristan is jousting but Blanchandin is not.) The first night that they dine together in Namur, after Tristan has won the tournament, Tristan takes it upon himself to cut Blanchandin’s meat for him; this is in fact mentioned two times.<sup>426</sup> While Tristan is cutting Blanchandin’s meat, he says, “Sire, je suis dolant / Que vous n’avés c’un bras; moult m’en va

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<sup>425</sup> See my chapter four.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 20758; 20768.

anoyant” [Sire, I am sorry that you have only one arm; it grieves me greatly].<sup>427</sup> In this episode, Blanchandin cannot joust and he cannot cut his own meat: there are things he simply can’t do, or that he needs help with. When discussing a notion of disability due to impairment in medieval miracle stories, Metzler looks for “themes of defectiveness, liminality, or burdensomeness of impaired people,” as well as “evidence concerning questions about the livelihood of impaired people, or what mobility aids may have been available to them.”<sup>428</sup> In the above scene, we see that it is the fact that Blanchandin has only one arm that makes Tristan sad; it is not entirely clear whether it is the resultant impairment or the simple fact that saddens him, but it is probably a little bit of both. On the other hand, he does not think of Blanchandin as a burden or as defective. After this scene we see that others do not view Blanchandin as generously as Tristan does, but this is because he is a beggar, not specifically because he has one arm. A count whom Tristan has agreed to serve sees him embracing Blanchandin when they are reunited. He is shocked that Tristan is associating with this “truant” [beggar], and he has to take Tristan’s word for it that Blanchandin is actually a gentleman.<sup>429</sup> The next day, as they leave Namur together, Tristan gets on horseback and guides Blanchandin who is behind him, apparently on foot.<sup>430</sup> Overall, this episode depicts Blanchandin as weaker than Tristan and dependent on him, but certainly not as a burden. Tristan also tries to elevate Blanchandin in the eyes of the count by telling him that Blanchandin lost his arm specifically because he was fighting Saracens. He tells Blanchandin

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 20769-70.

<sup>428</sup> Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 184.

<sup>429</sup> *TN*, 20730-36.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 20810-13.

that he has killed Caudas, the Greek traitor who fomented the rebellion against Blanchandin.<sup>431</sup> Thus, Tristan associates Blanchandin's dismemberment with a traditional *chanson de geste* issue of "Christian versus Saracen" and the necessity for revenge. His mention of the fact that Blanchandin was injured fighting Saracens places the injury in a different light – for him, this is a standard battle wound, not the result of a sin.

Although the above scenes identify some problems caused by his dismemberment, the next portion of Blanchandin's life indicates that he does quite well despite them. Once Blanchandin and Tristan are together again, they excel as a team; Blanchandin no longer lives on alms, and they spend a long period of time in one place. First, they serve the king of Jerusalem for ten years and receive wages from him.<sup>432</sup> Then, they are able to conquer lands in Sicily, Apulia, and Cyprus, where they "regnerent longuement" [reigned a long time].<sup>433</sup> No details are given about what occurred during the time that they reigned together or how sovereignty was divided between them. Did they rule together as two kings? In their fifteen years of adventures, although they are not romantically involved with each other, it is clear that they compose a kind of couple. These later episodes depict Blanchandin and Tristan's relationship as sweeter and more caring than when they were lovers or married. As we saw in chapter four, Tristan laughed at Blanchandine's predicament when Clarinde fell in love with her. He often joked about his sexual relationship with her with his friends. Now, Blanchandin's impairment brings out kindness in Tristan, which we saw in the detail of him cutting Blanchandin's meat. Their first

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 20750-51; 20720-27.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 22637.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 22648.

night together in Namur, they continue to show their affection for one another as they “vont ensemble couchant” [go to bed together] and “toutes leurs adventures vont illec devisant” [there they recount all their adventures to each other].<sup>434</sup> Blanchandin’s change in sex allows for a friendship with Tristan that was not possible when they were a romantic couple. Instead of going off to bed to have sex, they are now long-lost best friends having a slumber party and catching up.

During these fifteen years, then, Blanchandin is not greatly bothered by his arm. He can still fight well enough to be employed as a mercenary, and conquer lands, and he and Tristan are having what appears to be a kind of backpacking adventure across Europe and the Middle East. It almost seems that they have forgotten the point of setting out in the first place, which was to find Gilles. However, there is always a reminder of Blanchandin’s problem and his ultimate goal – he continues to carry his severed arm in a small case hanging around his neck.<sup>435</sup> Although it was cut off many years ago, the severed arm is still fresh:

Dedens une mailete aloit son bras portant  
Et fut aussi vermaulx et sy bel apparent,  
Et aussi coulourés et de cuir aussy blanc  
Que tout le premier jour quë on l’ala coupant.<sup>436</sup>

He carried his arm in a small case, and it was as beautiful as the very first day that it was cut off: it was just as rosy and so beautiful, and just as glowing, and the skin was just as white.

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 20788-89.

<sup>435</sup> “Et Blanchandin aloit aussy Gilles querant / Et adés a son col aloit son bras portant.” Ibid., 20257. [And Blanchandin was also looking for Gilles, and he always carried his arm around his neck.]

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 22360-63.

This small case, and the fact that the arm stays so fresh, certainly links Blanchandin's situation to relics and reliquaries (particularly arm reliquaries) and to stories of saints whose bodies miraculously did not decompose. On top of this, yet another intriguing detail emerges concerning Blanchandin's arm. During the time in which they serve the king of Jerusalem, but before they become kings again, Blanchandin obtains a metal arm (how he does so is not specified). It is implied that this is what allows him to fight again, presumably because he can hold a shield:

Et avoit Blanchandin par euvre bien ouvree  
Ung bras et une main de fer bien asoudee,  
Et l'avoit a l'espaule loiee et acouplee;  
Et avoit de ce lez sa grant targe acolee,  
Et de la destre main sachoit le roy l'espee;  
Et tout pour venger Dieu qui fist ciel et rosee,  
Furent longtems en guerre contre la gent dervee<sup>437</sup>

Blanchandin had a well-made arm and hand made of quality iron, and he had it attached to his shoulder. And on that side he hung his large shield, and with his right hand the king unsheathed his sword. In order to avenge God who made heaven and dew, they [Blanchandin and Tristan] were at war against the heathens for a long time.

It is never said that he can move this metal arm, but it seems to help him hang his shield on his left side; its purpose is functional rather than aesthetic. (This is one instance where it is clear that it is his left arm that is missing.) During this time in which he obtains the metal arm, he leaves behind his identity as a beggar and becomes a soldier and then a king again, apparently not at all hindered by only having one fully functional arm. The metal arm seems to indicate an improvement in quality of life, but Blanchandin's re-entry into military service apparently happened before he got the arm, so how much his lifestyle change is dependent on the presence of the metal arm is unclear.

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 22639-45.



What conclusions can we draw from Blanchandin's itinerary, and his abilities and disabilities, during these thirty years? It is evident from these years that the specific state of his arm and the presence or absence of a prosthesis change his social status and hence perception of his disability. With his arm severed and carried around in a case, and wearing rags, Blanchandin is capable only of subsisting by begging for alms. When he meets Tristan again, he gets new clothes, and is able to do more with Tristan's help. Later, it seems that his prosthetic arm is at least partially responsible for returning him to a higher degree of respectability, to the point that he essentially regains the lifestyle he had at the time of his sex change (being a warrior and king). However, he still has his severed arm with him and still seeks his son so that it may be reattached, so the prosthetic arm does not fully replace the real arm. The severed arm that he keeps with him is a visual reminder of his connection to his son Gilles, whom he has not seen in thirty years, and its miraculous quality of incorruptibility connects it to Gilles' saintliness. The text never makes a direct statement about any kind of idea of bodily wholeness that is lacking because Blanchandin does not have his fleshly arm attached to his body. Yet the insistence that he must have it reattached, despite his ability to function well in society without it, shows the importance of his bodily integrity.

Finally, Blanchandin's dismemberment likely strikes today's reader as an attack on his maleness, a symbolic loss of his penis, which is accompanied by the loss of his wife, son, and ability to rule. It is true that Blanchandin temporarily loses his ability to fight and to rule over land. He also permanently loses his wife, since he never sees her again before her death, and he never engenders another child. I would argue, however, that these difficulties are not truly an attack on his maleness, because he has been destined for a different model of masculinity in the first place. Since he was destined to engender a saint, his son's saintliness sets up a model for

Blanchandin to follow, rather than Gilles following his father's example to become a king. Blanchandin actually only spends about nine months out of thirty-one years as a man as a king with a wife and a baby on the way. Blanchandin's troubles due to the dismemberment give him the opportunity to demonstrate his patience in the face of adversity, and his faith throughout thirty years that he will eventually find his son. But Blanchandin is still a hybrid, because he does regain his ability to fight and conquer lands. In these ways, Blanchandin and Gilles resemble each other, both eventually becoming something like warrior monks after long periods of quiet penance. Thus, they do not correspond to all aspects of typical *chanson de geste* masculinity, but they are still male, and serve their own purpose. In the final section of this chapter I will show how Gilles is used as a tool to refocus attention on those traditional *chanson de geste* issues of paternity, lineage, and conversion of Saracens, while he and his father remain outside this model of secular masculinity.

## 6.9 FATHERS AND SONS REUNITED

After stopping in Armenia and picking up troops, Tristan and Blanchandin arrive at the encampment of the Christian soldiers at Aufalene. (At this point, Rochebrune has already been recaptured and Aufalene is the last Saracen city needing to be recaptured.) The Armenians recognize Tristan, their former king, even though he has been gone for thirty years. Those who can get close to him bow; others salute him. Although they also celebrate Blanchandin's arrival, there is no indication that they recognize him specifically as the former Saracen princess from

Armenia, nor as the king that preceded Tristan.<sup>438</sup> Given that Blanchandin and Clarinde gave Tristan Armenia as compensation for losing his wife, it is striking that their memory is focused on Tristan.

Blanchandin sees Gilles in the distance (who is on his knees and crying), and he asks the Armenians to tell him who that man is. Here we are reminded again of the unusual relationship between Gilles, Raimon, Blanchandin, and Tristan. When the Armenians explain to Blanchandin that this man is Gilles, his son, they also describe the relationship between these two sets of fathers and sons: “C’è est Gilles l’ermite, par Dieu, je vous creant. / Freres est a Raymon, le filz au roy Tristan; / C’est cil que vous alastes en Clarinde engendrant [This is Gilles the hermit, by God, I swear. He is the brother of Raimon, Tristan’s son; he’s the one you engendered in Clarinde].<sup>439</sup> Before even mentioning that Blanchandin engendered Gilles, Gilles is described in terms of his relationship to Raimon (and hence to Tristan). The Armenians seem to be interested in Tristan because he is their former king who has returned, and they are also unaware of the fact that Blanchandine gave birth to Raimon. For Blanchandin, this *could* be a double reunion with his two sons, but it is not presented as such. Blanchandin no longer has any parental relationship with Raimon, and, unlike when Blanchandine in disguise lamented that she could not tell Raimon that she was his mother, here Blanchandin himself has no interest whatsoever in his son.<sup>440</sup> Is Raimon even his son anymore? It would seem not, as the characters’ reactions show that paternity is the only parental connection that anyone is concerned about. Blanchandin is

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<sup>438</sup> See *Ibid.*, 22666-79 and 22745-50.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 22756-58.

<sup>440</sup> See my chapter three.

Gilles' father, and Tristan is Raimon's father; who their mothers are does not matter. Tristan and Blanchandin also do not acknowledge that Raimon is their child together. The absence of Blanchandine as a mother, and hence the elimination of the parental relationship between Blanchandin and Raimon, is strange considering the emphasis that has been placed on Raimon and Gilles' fraternity, which only exists thanks to Blanchandin in both his male and female forms. While the fraternal relationship made possible by sex change is held up as a completely legitimate and real relationship, the maternal relationship that created it is eliminated in favor of a simpler paternal relationship between fathers and sons that does not take mothers into consideration. As Zrinka Stahuljak has argued, this simplification of genealogy through the elimination of the mother supports the idea that there is a seamless, uninterrupted continuation of patrilineal blood genealogy; all we are left with is the father-son dyad.<sup>441</sup> Behind this attempted simplification, in *TN* it is easy to see in this stepfamily how complicated genealogy can in fact be.

### **6.9.1 New flesh (again)**

When Gilles hears that his father has arrived, he is overjoyed and immediately calls a group of priests together so that they may process out singing *Te deum laudamus* as they go out to greet Blanchandin.<sup>442</sup> With this *Te deum* (which is the only Latin that appears in this text), Gilles immediately sets the tone of the reunion with his father as not only spiritual but ecclesiastical,

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<sup>441</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (University Press of Florida, 2005), 11; 14.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 22750.

requiring the presence of other members of the Church. (Although we never actually see Gilles take orders, he is nonetheless depicted as having the authority to say mass, as we saw earlier with Charlemagne.) Once they recover from their initial emotion at their reunion (they kiss and swoon over and over), Gilles comments that he is glad to have found his father “sain et sauf et vivant” [safe and sound and alive]. Blanchandin corrects him, saying “Je ne suis mye sain” [I am not at all sound] and points to his severed arm.<sup>443</sup> Gilles’ use of the expression “sain et sauf” indicates that he believes that his father has escaped unscathed from whatever he has experienced before his arrival there, which also highlights that Gilles is not even aware until this moment that Blanchandin has had his arm cut off. (And somehow Gilles has not noticed the metal arm while hugging his father.) Gilles then finds the severed arm in its case and treats it with reverence: “Quant Gilles tint le bras, adonc le va baisant, / Entre ses bras l’acolle et l’alla estraignant, / De ce qu’est sy vermeil se va esbahissant [When Gilles held the arm, he then kissed it, held it in his arms and embraced it; he marveled at the fact that it was so rosy].<sup>444</sup> He begins to pray to God and ask him for a miracle, so that his father may “rait tous ses membres par quoy d’or en avant / Puis ferir de l’espee sur la gent mescreant [from now on, regain all his members through it [the miracle], and then strike the heathen peoples with his sword].<sup>445</sup> As we saw above, Gilles participates in the war specifically because he wants to strike down pagans, and he now assumes that his father will want to use his reattached arm for the same purpose. Blanchandin has been fighting Saracens, but Gilles is not aware of this and assumes that he will not be able to fight

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<sup>443</sup> *TN*, 22779.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 22790-92.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 22797-800.

without having his arm reattached. He also treats the incorrupt arm as a relic, and by praying that Blanchandin regain all his members, he indicates that it is important for Blanchandin simply to be in one piece again.

Looking at the bigger picture of bodily integrity in a medieval religious context, it is notable that most theologians agreed that people would not retain their physical impairments upon resurrection.<sup>446</sup> The specific question of loss of limb appears in some art and writing; Metzler describes an image in a German manuscript from 1255: “the resurrected are shown emerging from their tombs with a perfect body, and those who had been mutilated in life (by war or by wild animals) have their missing limbs (or other bodily parts) restored to them at this moment.”<sup>447</sup> Saints were an exception to this rule: they would keep any impairment that they had sustained during their martyrdom. One final detail that is also relevant: people will retain their sex at the resurrection.<sup>448</sup>

All of these points pertain to Blanchandin and Gilles and this scene of reattachment. The angel’s indication to Blanchandin that he can be healed places his injury in a miraculous context, in which he is seeking healing from a saint, rather than seeking further medical treatment beyond the attentions of the kind *bourgeois*. Given that Saint Giles was the patron saint of cripples, Blanchandin’s imperative to find his son places him in a position with which a medieval reader or listener could potentially identify, since people frequently sought cures at the tombs of saints.

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<sup>446</sup> Metzler, *Disability in the Middle Ages*, 55-58. Metzler cites Church fathers Tertullian and Gregory the Great as well as twelfth century theologians Otto of Freising, Peter Lombard, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and Herman of Reun.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Blanchandin is, however, exceptional because he himself displays a trait usually associated with saints after death, the incorruptability of his arm; he is also unusual in that he is seeking a cure from a living saint who happens to be his son. Although Blanchandin is not literally experiencing the bodily resurrection here, the miraculous nature of the reattachment certainly links it to that idea of wholeness and perfection that can only be experienced after death by those who merit it. The fact that martyrs retain their impairment is seen metaphorically in the thirty years' time that Blanchandin carries around his severed arm; this corresponds to medieval images of martyrs, for example those showing a saint holding his decapitated head or with a blade still lodged in his skull. Finally, the question of the retainment of sex at the resurrection is certainly relevant to Blanchandin, who has been both a Christian woman and man. Presumably a theologian would say that he would be resurrected as a man, since the body ought to be at its most perfect form, and men were believed to be more perfect than women.

With this in mind, we see that Blanchandin's body at the moment of his sex change was the creation of some kind of perfection, to which he can now return by having his limb reattached. After getting a response from a voice from heaven that he should proceed, Gilles reattaches his father's arm:

Le bras destre<sup>449</sup> son pere fist oster maintenant,  
Le mognon remest nuz, Gilles le va seignant.  
Devant .xx. mille Ermins et devant roy Tristan  
Va la brace tranchee au mongnon resoudant,  
L'une char contre l'aultre aussy que fut devant;

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<sup>449</sup> This seems to indicate that Gilles is having the right, metal arm removed in order to expose the stump. Thus, it is the right arm that has been severed, which is not consistent with my reading of the scene or the description of the metal arm. Regardless, the identification of the severed arm as the right arm in the final scene adds some drama, since the right arm is Blanchandin's sword-holding arm; it also creates a nice parallel with Gilles making the sign of the cross with his right hand.

Et puis de sa main destre le va Gilles seignant.  
La fist Dieu tel miracle, se trouvons nous lisant,  
Ançois c'on feust allé ung demi tret courant,  
Va l'une char a l'autre tellement ressoudant  
Què oncques n'y parut c'on lui alast trenchant,  
Et l'estraint et remue, amont le va levant.  
Adonc se va le peuple trestout agenoullant  
Et au baron saint Gille se vont humiliant,  
Saint Gilles les seigna du pere royamant.<sup>450</sup>

He now had his father's right arm taken off and he exposed the naked stump, over which he made the sign of the cross. Before 20,000 Armenians and before King Tristan, he joined the severed arm to the stump, one flesh against the other, as it was before. And then with his right hand, Gilles made the sign of the cross over it. We have read that God then made a great miracle: in the blink of an eye, Gilles joined one flesh to the other so well that it appeared as if his arm had never been cut off. And he [Blanchandin] made a muscle and moved it, lifting it up. Then all the people knelt and prostrated themselves before Saint Gilles, and he blessed them in the name of the savoir.

There is a certain humility and vulnerability for Blanchandin in the exposure of his stump, which recalls the intimacy of the moments in which the reader saw Blanchandine at her most desperate when she prayed before her sex change. This scene of the reattachment of his arm is yet another instance of physical transformation for Blanchandin. At the time of the sex change, Blanchandine put her body completely in God's hands and allowed an essential and intimate part of it (her genitals) to be changed. Just as with the sex change, here flesh is radically transformed because Blanchandin is willing to put his destiny in the hands of God and a holy person. Paula Leverage has shown the ways in which the moments that precede Blanchandin's sex change resemble Christ's Passion, and how the sex change itself, with its new flesh, is a sort of death and resurrection, followed by a baptism in the bath where Blanchandin exposes his penis to all.<sup>451</sup> The reattachment of his arm is now a sort of second rebirth, but one that returns

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<sup>450</sup> *TN*, 22812-25.

<sup>451</sup> See my chapter four.



Blanchandin to his physical state after the sex change. Because of all that has happened in the past thirty-one or so years, the purpose of the reconstitution of an unblemished body is totally different from that of the sex change. His first rebirth as male was for the purpose of engendering another male body, Gilles. The second rebirth demonstrates that son's holiness, and rewards Blanchandin for his years of poverty and his determination to find his son. Although this is not explicit in the text, it also may serve as an absolution of whatever sins caused him to be dismembered in the first place (perhaps his same-sex and consanguineous marriage); this makes sense particularly because we have already seen Gilles in the role of confessor. He has confessed and absolved Charlemagne and Clarisse of the sin of incest, and will shortly do the same with Tristan.

Blanchandin now is "whole" again with the purpose of fighting Saracens, as his son indicates, but he does not seem to be returning to a life where he will remarry, have more children, and become a king again. Blanchandin is mentioned a few more times after the reattachment scene as part of the group of Nanteuil family members, but he does not do anything remarkable. Blanchandin no longer has any narrative purpose in this text, having had his arm reattached. Rather, focus returns to Tristan and his sons, and the poem ends shortly. Tristan is killed by his son Garçon (not before Gilles has had a chance to confess Tristan of his sin with Clarisse), and Gilles then fulfills his final purpose in the text by baptizing Garçon and renaming him Greveçon. Garçon's renaming then allows him to fulfill a prophecy that a man by that name will kill Clariant, the king of Aufalerne. As Alban Georges writes, Tristan's descendance has been put in peril by his incest and the resultant child who then waged war on his own family, and

the figure of the saint is necessary to resolve this problem.<sup>452</sup> Gilles and Garçon's interaction at the end of the text brings together the two sons of cousin incest; the one who is bad simply for the fact that he is pagan is redeemed by the Christian saint.

In the final scenes, Gilles is also still very eager to kill Saracens; when Greveçon says he does not want to kill his adoptive father Guintelin, Gilles enthusiastically volunteers to do it (although he is convinced to spare him). By the end of the text, all the formerly Saracen/pagan peoples are either dead or have converted to Christianity, and Tristan's sons regain the various lands that are theirs either through inheritance, marriage, or conquest. Thus, the text turns back to the thread that (at least somewhat) draws together the expansive poem: fighting with and converting Saracens, and the maintenance of inheritance through the engendering of sons.

## 6.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown Gilles and Blanchandin to be unusual models of masculinity in the *chanson de geste* universe because of their saintliness and their exclusion from the system of reproduction and inheritance. Blanchandin was destined to engender Gilles, and Gilles, as a figure of hagiography, already had his path set out before him. In this way, Gilles' character determines what and who Blanchandin can be once his son is in the world; Gilles sets him on the path of poverty and abstinence. *TN*'s author's choice to make Blanchandin's son a saint, and to foreshadow this many times as the ultimate meaning of the sex change, thus attributes a holy meaning to the sex change itself. Neither father nor son can have the same purpose as characters

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<sup>452</sup> Alban Georges, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Écriture et imaginaire épiques au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2006), 704.

like Tristan and Raimon, who have not been chosen by God for such a special destiny. However, as we have seen, Gilles does not completely extract himself from the world of the Nanteuil family and all of their marriages, children, inheritances, and wars. In fact, Gilles' hybrid persona of sacred and secular is necessary in order to resolve family problems for other characters.

As in *Yde et Olive II* and *Croissant*, sex change solves a family problem only to create a new one. In *TN*, the problem of same-sex and consanguineous marriage is eliminated. But given that Blanchandin also is destined to lose his arm so that Gilles can reattach it (that is indeed the logic of the text), the new problem of dismemberment is immediately created out of that solution. Sex change also simplifies and then disrupts notions of kinship in a similar pattern. The male Blanchandin creates a clean model of a new family, and yet this family tree is now very complicated because of Blanchandine's former marriage and child. I have shown that the language of the text struggles to define how Tristan and Blanchandine/Blanchandin are related to their sons and stepsons, and that eliminating Blanchandine as a mother is an attempt to simplify this problem. In fact, Blanchandine as a mother is sacrificed to Blanchandin the father, whose engendering of Gilles takes precedence over her birthing of Raimon. And even as a father, Blanchandin is sacrificed to the larger Nanteuil narrative, because he and his son are not depicted as carrying on their own lineage, but rather as being part of Tristan's.

Finally, the scene of the miraculous healing of Blanchandin's arm in front of 20,000 Armenians closes the text in a way that highlights both the big picture of Saracen conversion and brings us back to the person of Blanchandine/Blanchandine who has been so fascinating throughout. Armenia is Blanchandine's original home, where she began as a Saracen princess. The Armenians converted to Christianity thirty years earlier because Clarinde had converted – and Clarinde had converted for Blanchandin, as soon as he returned to the palace a man, so his

sex change was really the impetus for mass conversion. But as we have seen, the Armenians do not recognize Blanchandin as the former Blanchandine, who was once their princess. Blanchandin's final appearance in the text thus is also a confirmation that Blanchandine is now truly gone, which is also evident when Blanchandin and Raimon do not recognize each other as mother and son. Blanchandin's sex change is the reason for which the conversion of this whole people occurred, so it makes sense that they are present to witness the miracle carried out by his son, the son who was engendered thanks to the sex change. Just as there is no longer a memory of Blanchandine d'Ermenie, the Saracen woman, the Armenians' Saracen past is also forgotten as a whole. The fact that the moment of Blanchandin's healing takes place in front of the Armenians, and the fact that they demonstrate their veneration for Gilles as a holy man, serves to bring closure to the text's fifty-year journey from paganism to Christianity.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

I have shown in this dissertation that cross-dressing and sex change in *Le Roman de Silence*, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, *Yde et Olive II*, and *Croissant* disrupt and restructure family relationships as they interrogate the meaning of gendered personhood and personal identity. My readings show that changes of gender and sex are not just another part of the intricate family dramas portrayed in the texts, but rather that they create their own drama and their own meanings by generating new families or by redefining how kin recognize and describe each other. The focus on questions and problems concerning lineage and inheritance that are foundational in romance and *chanson de geste* in a general sense, when combined with a spotlight on the gendered body, produces a striking emphasis on how those gendered bodies reproduce themselves, and then produce new families or integrate into already existing ones. This dissertation corrects the tendency of previous scholarship on *Yde et Olive* and *Tristan de Nanteuil* to analyze gendered and sexual identity in these texts separately from the larger picture of family structure in the texts. By including an analysis of what happens after sex change, I have shown that sex change literally engenders new relationships to kinship, inheritance, and lineage.

The diversity of the texts' approaches to the depiction of cross-dressing and sex change is partially due to their different genres, but also to authorial choices that show us that the same themes can have varying effects on the narrative. In *Le Roman de Silence*, the romance structure focuses on the development of a single character, Silence, and gives the reader access to his

thoughts and feelings about his experience with cross-dressing and gender change. The text focuses on a relatively limited family group. In *Yde et Olive II*, *Croissant*, and *Tristan de Nanteuil*, the families depicted are expansive and the texts feature the adventures of multiple generations. Throughout, the main themes are the importance of engendering sons, passing on an inheritance, and a more general sense of a lineage connecting the characters to each other. In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, this sense of lineage, which is largely patrilineal, sets itself in opposition to Saracen/pagan enemies who tend to be either killed or integrated into Christian lineage through marriage and conversion. Though the *Huon de Bordeaux* sequels and *Tristan de Nanteuil* both fall into the *chanson de geste* category by their structure and contents, the former is thirteenth-century, and presents each episode as a sort of short vignette, whereas *Tristan de Nanteuil* is mid-fourteenth century, and on the other hand is a late, “baroque” *chanson de geste*, with many different plotlines interweaving with each other throughout. The expansive nature of *Tristan de Nanteuil* creates an openness that likely accounts for some of the bizarre happenings in the text.

These texts present both diversity in genre and also diversity of the effects that cross-dressing and sex change have on the plots, while at the same time there is a thematic commonality throughout the four texts. These commonalities indicate that questions about gender and identity struck at particular chords with thirteenth- and fourteenth-century authors and audiences, namely concerning the religious and ethical implications of changing sex or disguising oneself as a boy/man. In *Silence*, the ethical concern about Silence’s “choice” to remain disguised or not plays out in those scenes wherein Nature and Nurture fight over him and Silence ponders his role in the deception; I have also shown the ways in which coercion and misogyny are part of the plan to change Silence’s gender. This text has no overtly religious content, but as I have shown, it brings up the question of a consanguineous marriage (which is

not labeled as such) at its end. In my study of *Aye d'Avignon*, the moral question is not found in Aye's choice to cross-dress, which is fully supported by the narrator and the characters. However, similarly to *Silence*, Aye's experiences while cross-dressed expose misogyny and women's vulnerability in that society, particularly to rape.

In *Yde et Olive II* and *Croissant*, and then even more so in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, the texts turn to a more direct contemplation of the spiritual and religious implications of cross-dressing and sex change. In the medieval literary imagination, the only way to have a sex change is through God's intervention; we can thus deduce that it was even more mind-boggling to imagine someone changing sex through surgery than through a miracle. Moreover, a human performing surgery, even in the imaginary realm, would presumably have been seen as infringing on God's role as the creator of human beings, including their sex. Since only God can perform these sex changes, then, it is not surprising that the sons created thanks to sex change would have a privileged relationship with God, both undergoing hardships and receiving or performing miracles. Sex change is related to a notion of rebirth and baptism (with the repeated scenes of bathing), and to a model of saintliness including an experience of poverty or abstinence. These two narratives of sex change literally construct masculinity by forming a (partially) new human being, who then goes on to immediately engender yet another male human being. However, the different outcomes subsequent to their sex change for Ydé and Blanchandin show that a permanently saintly or ascetic life is not necessarily the result of changing sex. Croissant has his period of poverty, but regains his kingdom, and Ydé has a brief period of uncertainty, but is never brought low or punished. The authorial decision in *Tristan de Nanteuil* to make Saint Gilles the son of the sex-changed man determines the text's concentration on religious themes, as well as the destiny of Blanchandin, who also lives a saintly life for a period of time.

The religious aspect of the two *chansons de geste* also appears in ideas about sin, confession, punishment, and redemption, which are linked to incest/consanguineous marriage (whether nuclear family, or between cousins) and same-sex marriage. I have shown that there is a clear divide between sex change, which has a positive and redeeming power, and same-sex marriage brought on by cross-dressing, which is sometimes treated as a sin – something that merits either punishment (Clarinde’s “grand perdicion”) or at least an explanation (Olive’s speech to the abbot). Both texts also link same-sex marriage in some way to incest: Yde flees her father’s incestuous desire, and ends up marrying a woman, and Blanchandine marries her female cousin. *Tristan de Nanteuil* goes the furthest with this theme, associating Gilles with incest in multiple ways: he is the son of two cousins, and he confesses other characters who have committed different degrees of incest, from nuclear family to first cousins. Gilles’ redeeming power indicates that there is indeed something or someone to redeem: the positive result of the sex change comes from a circular logic that demands the creation of a problem (same-sex/consanguineous marriage) which itself creates the solution to its own problem (sex change/engendering of Gilles).

Religion in these texts is also linked to the development of personhood and identity, not just questions of sin. Aye d’Avignon successfully performs Saracen male identity to the extent that she is able to win battles and free a Saracen princess; she is also proposed as a husband to her own daughter-in-law. However, this exterior religious and gender identity that determines her behavior when in the presence of Saracens is slowly chipped away in recognition scenes with her kin, which serve to identify her specifically as a mother and a grandmother, not just a woman. In *Ydé et Olive II* and *Tristan de Nanteuil*, we saw that religious identity greatly changes the meaning of sex change. Since Ydé changes from a Christian young woman to a Christian young



man, his identity remains fairly consistent before and after the transition (remaining his father's child, and becoming his heir) compared to Blanchandine/Blanchandin, whose conversion is part of a longer process of identity change from Saracen woman, to Christian woman, to cross-dressed Christian woman, to Christian man. In all of these scenarios, I show that religious identity, like gender identity, is always linked to familial identity.

In terms of what further work can be done to expand on the approach I have taken to these texts, I would be interested in exploring the questions of genre and time period that I briefly discussed above. As I noted in chapter five, the later prose *Croissant* contains major plot differences compared to the poem I have analyzed. In an earlier iteration of my plan for this dissertation, I was going to include an analysis of a theatrical version of *Yde et Olive I*, from the late fourteenth-century *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*, which also differs in significant ways from the *chanson de geste*.<sup>453</sup> A focus on these questions of plot variations, time period, and generic differences would provide a way to test what factors play into the specific effects of cross-dressing and sex change on kinship ties and conceptions of identity in different contexts. I also would like to further my study on the subject of my sixth chapter, Blanchandin's dismemberment and Gilles' holiness. Thinking about the dismemberment in terms of disability studies has helped me to theorize its role in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, and a larger study could be done with a central focus on that issue. Finally, the role of Saint Gilles in *Tristan de Nanteuil* raises more questions than I have been able to answer in the bounds of this dissertation. The author's choice to make a recognizable saint a character in a *chanson de geste* has been explored to a

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<sup>453</sup> "Miracle de la fille d'un roy," in *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*, tome 7, ed. Gaston Paris and Ulysse Robert (Paris: Libraire de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1868).

certain extent by Alban Georges and Paula Leverage; Leverage believes that *Tristan de Nanteuil* may have been read to a confraternity audience, perhaps on Saint Giles' feast day.<sup>454</sup> However, there remain many links to explore concerning Gilles' multi-faceted role in the text and the question of why the author chose to make a known saint into a fictional son of sex change as well as the son of two formerly Saracen women.

The progression from chapters one to five demonstrates that cross-dressing and sex change are two different issues that provoke different kinds of discussions. Cross-dressing, although it may at first glance appear less radical than sex change, has been shown to be disruptive, problematic, and provocative, in part because it creates a space to depict same-sex marriage and eroticism. As I reiterated above, those issues are in turn related back to incest and sin, and so create a negative association with cross-dressing. Cross-dressing is also in some ways normative, because it seeks to maintain the status quo in terms of which gender has privilege. In all of the cases that I studied, cross-dressing specifically speaks to questions of family creation and recognition between family members, and shows that recognition between kin can both be portrayed as natural and also as a prolonged, artificial process that requires deep consideration of different aspects of identity. Sex change, while a radical bodily change, is less subversive because it eliminates the question of deception. The fresh new body created, however, then complicates present and former familial relations, because the old body's connections to others are not completely erased.

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<sup>454</sup> Paula Leverage, "Sex and the Sacraments in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 532.

In conclusion, it is the very nature of the idea of changing gender or sex that forces the texts to address equally fundamental questions about kinship. Since gender is one of the base components of personhood, the presence of changing and multiple gender identities in the narratives pushes the boundaries of the medieval way of thinking about family structure itself. In some ways, this thinking becomes more open and inclusive, because families are expanded and redefined (e.g. Gilles and the Nanteuil family). Cross-dressing also creates an opening in possibilities for different roles for women (if only for cross-dressed women), and family structure in these cases also opens up and makes room for a sort of family imaginary. However, the restructuring or reimagining of family structure, which opens up the imagination to different possibilities, at the same time does not really liberate the cross-dressed or sex-changed character from the confines of binary gender expectations, whether they be expectations for women, or expectations for newly formed men.

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