Discourse in Steel

Aspects of Interpersonal Violence, Anxiety, and the Negotiation of Masculine Identity in Western European Literature, 1100–1600

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B.A. (Hons) Medieval and Early Modern Studies

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Early Modern Studies of The University of Western Australia

School of Humanities

2016
Summary

This dissertation seeks to update scholarly understandings of literary representations of interpersonal violence during the Middle Ages and Renaissance in order to bring them into line with the latest historical and sociological understandings of the relationship between violence and culture. Among modern scholars of medieval literature there remains a tendency to interpret violence in a limited sense as the intentional or threatened use of physical force to cause death or injury. Although this conception of violence allows scholars to work with a precise definition which is amenable to analysis, by restricting acts of violence to the intentional and the direct this framework fails to recognise the fact that medieval societies understood violence to extend beyond the realm of the physical.

Through a series of literary case studies from France, England, Germany, and Italy across the period 1100–1600, I argue that representations of violence and single combat participated in larger debates over the relative value of competing ideals of masculinity, debates which were themselves underpinned by a conception of violence that encompassed not only physical force but also the social and ethical realms of human conflict. I argue that these debates were responsible for shaping the genesis and development of the codified Western martial arts traditions from as early as the thirteenth century and suggest ways in which literary representations of violence offer the modern world alternative taxonomies of violence which are conducive to human flourishing.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank both The University of Western Australia and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions for supporting me over the last few years. I could not have wished for a more welcoming or stimulating environment.

I would also like to thank the many training partners who have joined with me in exploring the practical application and reconstruction of the historical European martial arts; their thoughts, labours, and companionship formed the seed of the present work. Particular thanks are due to Luke and Patrick, who have been with me from the start and whose unflagging enthusiasm has helped keep my own passion alive.

I owe profound debts to my three supervisors. Bob White played the role of the wise sage to perfection, lighting a multitude of intellectual paths with judicious interjections. Danijela Kambaskovic offered both stylistic advice and emotional support in my hour of need; I owe her an unpayable debt. Andrew Lynch has been outstanding through and through, sharp in his critique and gentle in his encouragement; I am honoured to call him a mentor.

My family — Wayne, Sharon, and Dani — have been for me through thick and thin. We have had our disagreements and I can be something of an absent figure within the household, but their love and support has been unfailing. I am blessed to have both parents who support me in my strangest endeavours and a sister who loves me despite my absence.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Imogen; her love, companionship, and scholarly rigour have enriched both life and labour beyond what words can tell.
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'The prize of all history is the understanding of modern times.'

—Frank K. Crowley
A Note on Translations

All translations are based on published academic editions, cited where appropriate, which I have modified where paraphrase or idiom rendered them ill-fit for purpose.
Introduction

On the 25th of November 1936, J. R. R. Tolkien delivered a lecture to the British Academy in which he addressed the critical belief, popular at the time, that the Old English poem known as *Beowulf* exhibited a ‘radical defect, a disproportion that puts the irrelevances [i.e. Beowulf’s battles with the monsters] in the centre and the serious things [i.e. the poem’s historic allusions] on the outer edges’.¹ ‘The fault of *Beowulf,*’ according to W. P. Ker,

> is that there is nothing much in the story. The hero is occupied in killing monsters, like Hercules or Theseus. But there are other things in the lives of Hercules and Theseus besides the killing of the Hydra or of Procrustes. Beowulf has nothing else to do; he goes home to his own Gautland, until at last the rolling years bring the Fire-drake and his last adventure.²

The single combats of medieval and early modern literature occupy much the same position today that the monsters of *Beowulf* occupied in the early 1930s. Where critics once saw in *Beowulf* a certain ‘dignity of style’ which persisted despite its deficit of plot, today they perceive in the single combats of medieval and early modern literature certain ‘issues of character, structural patterning, and thematic development […] rather than their direct narrative content’.³ Such critics tend to either brush off the blows,

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parries, and wounds of these mortal struggles as a form of literary spectacle – ancient equivalents of those Hollywood special effects which are ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’ – or read them as signifying a psychosexual fascination on the part of the author in such a way that every weapon becomes a phallus and every wound a yonic emasculation. The situation is scarcely better in the neighbouring discipline of history where ‘both the significance of [the martial] arts, and the fact that they have been largely ignored by historians, are easily established’.  

This is true even of those historians of violence and chivalry who argue that ‘we will radically misunderstand the medieval view and the medieval reality if we push the bloody, sweaty, muscular work done with lance and sword swiftly and antiseptically to the side and hasten on to speak of more abstract, more appealing qualities’. Though admirable in their goal to move beyond ‘naïve and simplistic views about what the ideals of knighthood actually were in the middle ages’, the ‘realities’ which they recover appear to owe as much to twentieth-centuries understandings of war as mud, blood, and slaughter as they do to medieval conceptions of interpersonal and intergroup conflict.

This dissertation demonstrates that representations of medieval and early modern single combat participated in societal debates over the relative value of competing ideals of masculinity, debates which were themselves underpinned by a conception of violence that encompassed not only physical force but also the social and ethical realms of human conflict. Through a series of case studies from France,

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6 Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xii.
England, Germany, and Italy across the period 1100-1600, I argue that these debates were responsible for shaping the genesis and development of the codified Western martial arts traditions from as early as the thirteenth century and suggest ways in which literary representations of single combat offer the modern world alternative taxonomies of violence which are conducive to human flourishing.

**WHIG HISTORIES OF SINGLE COMBAT**

The modern misperception that medieval and early modern combat was a brutal, senseless affair has its origins in what is known as ‘whig history’, the tendency to ‘emphasise certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present’. This mode of history remains with us today but was particularly pronounced in the late nineteenth century when Victorian England turned away from romantic primitivism and embraced a kind of neo-Hobbesian worldview in which ‘the state of men without civil society (which state we may properly call the state of nature) is nothing else but a mere war of all against all’ (*conditionem hominum extra societatem civilem, quam conditionem appellare liceat statum naturæ, aliam non esse quam bellum omnium contra omnes*). Capturing the mid-century zeitgeist, Charles Dickens called natural man a ‘savage […] a something highly desirable to be civilised off the face of the earth’. The faults of man

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in the state of nature, according to Dickens, were many, but one which stands out is their predilection for violence:

The noble savage sets a king to reign over him, to whom he submits his life and limbs without a murmur or question, and whose whole life is passed chin deep in a lake of blood; but who, after killing incessantly, is in his turn killed by his relations and friends, the moment a grey hair appears on his head. All the noble savage’s wars with his fellow-savages (and he takes no pleasure in anything else) are wars of extermination — which is the best thing I know of him, and the most comfortable to my mind when I look at him. He has no moral feelings of any kind, sort, or description; and his ‘mission’ may be summed up as simply diabolical.  

This whig association between savagery, violent conflict, and diabolical evil defined the nascent histories of European single combat under development at the time. The sport of small-sword fencing, as seen in the modern Olympics, was in the process of formulation in the late nineteenth century, with the first formal competition being held at the inaugural Grand Military Tournament and Assault at Arms in 1880 prior to the incorporation of the Amateur Gymnastics and Fencing Association in 1888. The histories of this sport, in typical whig style, suggested that ‘changes in the modes of fencing [i.e. single combat] at different periods correspond in a general way to the changes in manners’, defining their own present art and epoch as ‘nearly perfect as can be hoped for in an imperfect world’. Working backwards, these English historians of self-defence traced the history of their art through increasing imperfection to the sixteenth century and the ‘rapier and point, the peculiar and especial weapon,

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10 Egerton Castle, Schools and Masters of Fencing: From the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 2.
offensive and defensive, of Southern Europe, Spain, Italy, and France’, in order to ‘show clearly how tardy was the development of fencing’. Medieval swordsmanship, meanwhile, was hardly considered an ‘art’ at all, but rather a ‘rough, untutored fighting’ which ‘represented faithfully the reign of brute force in social life as well as in politics’. The histories and attitudes of these Victorian fencers remain one of the chief influences on today’s popular accounts of medieval and early modern combat where so-called ‘experts’ liken the use of a medieval arming sword to ‘carrying a piece of log and trying to wield it like a steak knife’.

Historians are not the only ones to blame for this misunderstanding. In his novel *The Talisman* (1825), the Scottish novelist, playwright, and poet Walter Scott wrote of a fictional encounter during the Third Crusade (1189–92) in which he compared the brute strength of Richard the Lionheart with the grace of his civilised adversary, Saladin, who exclaims that had he not seen Richard’s mighty sword wielded in battle then he ‘scarce could believe that human hand could wield so heavy a blade’. The idea that medieval arming swords were exceptionally heavy, upwards of ten kilograms in some accounts, is a myth, but one which Scott appears to have bought into and, in turn, perpetuated. Drawing this mighty sword, Richard demonstrates his

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prime attribute – strength – by cleaving in twain the haft of a sturdy steel mace. Impressed, Saladin takes from the floor a cushion of silk and down, asking Richard if his sword could cut the soft and yielding cushion, to which Richard answers that ‘not even the sword of Arthur can cut that which offers no resistance’. Smiling, Saladin unsheathes a slender scimitar and proceeds to draw it across the pillow, slicing it neatly in two. As an encore, Saladin draws the fine silk veil from his face and places it across the upturned edge of his sword. With the merest tremble of his arm the scimitar slices the veil into pieces small enough to float on the breeze, demonstrating in dramatic contrast the supposed superiority of civilised Oriental grace to medieval Occidental power.

The result of this whig narrative of conflict and civilisation has been to equate the concept of violence with political, legal, and moral evil, producing an ‘artificial zone of reflexive invalidity’ which has concealed the social and ethical aspects of medieval and early modern single combat. Violence, as it is now understood, is the act of fist meeting face, of bomb meeting building, of predator meeting prey; defined, it is the illegal or illegitimate application of physical force with the intent to cause harm. This intuitive understanding of violence is frequently resistant, if not outright hostile, to challenge from those researchers who seek to expand the definition of violence to include psychological, structural, and symbolic acts of violence. These researchers, it has been suggested, are wasting time and resources which would be

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better spent ‘getting on with the real job of reducing something that is obviously evil’.\textsuperscript{19}

This reflexive invalidity – the knee-jerk belief that violence is ‘senseless’ – has distorted the critical reading of medieval and early modern single combats by eliding the direct narrative context of these struggle. Jeff Westover’s reading of Arthur’s death-blow as a genital wound in the fifteenth-century \textit{Alliterative Morte Arthure}, in which the ‘felettes [lit. ‘filets, loins’] of the ferrer side [Mordred] flashes in sonder’, can be taken as an example \textit{par excellence} of this approach.\textsuperscript{20} Acknowledging the ‘potentially serious objection’ that his reading of Arthur’s death-blow as a genital wound rather than a thrust to the lower back makes the words ‘felettes of the ferrer side’ (ie. ‘genitals of the farther side’) make no spatial sense, Westover nonetheless opposes the ‘literal’ meaning of the combat narrative to the ‘symbolic’ meaning of Arthur’s wound:

Nevertheless, I wish to repeat my caveat against too literal a ‘parsing’ of the swathe of Mordred’s blade through Arthur’s bleeding flesh. I want to argue instead for an interpretation of Arthur’s deadly wound as a symbolic culmination of an ongoing process, for I see a pattern of threats to Arthur’s honour and read that pattern as a symbolic parallel to his fall from political prominence. It is by virtue of this parallel that the poem represents the end of a lineage as well as a kingdom.\textsuperscript{21}

Westover’s opposition of narrative action (the ‘swathe of Mordred’s blade through Arthur’s bleeding flesh’) to thematic significance (‘[Arthur’s] fall from political prominence’) in this scene is typical of contemporary literary approaches to


\textsuperscript{21} Westover, ‘Arthur’s End’, 312.
single combat where the particulars of narrative are bent, broken, or brushed aside to make room for critical fancies. Although there are as many ways of interpreting literary texts as there are readers, I have come to believe that the prevailing critical approach does not accurately represent the way most medieval readers would have interpreted direct narrative representations of medieval combat.

COGNITIVE STYLE

I was first alerted to an alternative method of reading these interpersonal combat narratives through my work on the didactic martial arts treatises of late medieval and early modern Europe. These treatises, which offer (typically male) readers a masterclass on how to fight and win with a variety of medieval weapons, demand of their reader both an understanding of the spatial dynamics of combat and an ability to translate static words and (on occasion) pictures into dynamic bodily movements. Consider the following example from a fifteenth-century fencing treatise authored by the German master Sigmund Schining ain Ringeck:

> When you strike a wrath-cut and he deflects it and remains strong at the sword, oppose with strength. Then slide the strength of your sword up to his sword’s weak part, turn the hilt of the sword in front of your head, and stab him in the face from above.

Passages like the one above demand of their reader an advanced ability to visualise narrative action in three dimensions. This ‘spatial ability’, as it is known in cognitive psychology, is a key predictor of success in fields which involve mental manipulations.

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of spatial relationships, such as mathematics, physics, and gymnastics. It is, furthermore, an ability which can be practiced and improved. This improvement can take one of two forms: specific improvement, whereby repetition of a specific spatial task increases performance on that task, and general improvement, whereby repetition of a specific spatial task improves performance on other spatial tasks. Spatial ability has been positively correlated with a facility with mental rotation, a process in which individuals can manipulate mental representations of three-dimensional objects in a manner analogous to the kind of real-world motions found in representations of direct narrative action. This ability, in other words, forms the cognitive foundation on which readers are able to build mental images of the visuospatial dynamics of medieval combat.

Yet raw spatial ability alone is rarely enough to permit a reader to form mental images of the kind of complex narrative actions found in literary representations of interpersonal combat. Rather than attempt to visualise the movement of bodies, limbs, and weapons as a series of mental transformations, readers will often use pre-learned mental scripts known as ‘schemata’ – ‘cohesive, repeatable action sequence[s] possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning’ – which are then filled with sensory information (or representations

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thereof) in order to short-cut the meaning-making process. In the example from Ringeck above, a reader might utilise the common attack-defence-redouble schema which frames the reader as a martial aggressor who is seeking to continue an offence after an opponent defended against their first attack. This schema is then, through the application of the reader’s spatial ability, filled with the sensory information associated with representations of the descending blow known as the wrath-cut (Zornhau), the opponent’s deflection (Versetzen), and the turning (Winden) of the sword to put the point in the opponent’s face. To borrow a linguistic metaphor, we might consider this schema to constitute a spatial ‘grammar’ which connects, through the application of the reader’s underlying spatial ability, specific spatial ‘words’ drawn from a vocabulary of sensory information.

Treatises like the one above – and, crucially, the practice of the fighting arts themselves, even in the absence of literary accompaniment – would have developed in their readers not only the ability to interpret spatial relationships but also the tendency to apply this method of interpretation to written texts. This kind of hermeneutic tendency is known as a ‘cognitive style’, a set of psychological dimensions or factors which represent certain consistencies in an individual’s manner of acquiring and processing information.27 Although there exist many different kinds of style, the dimension most relevant to the study of direct narrative action is the ‘object-spatial-visual’ style which distinguishes between ‘object visualisers’, who have a tendency to process information as concrete and detailed images, ‘spatial visualisers’, who prefer

to schematically represent the spatial relations and transformations of objects, and ‘verbalisers’, who tend to process information linguistically or propositionally.\(^{28}\) Using this frame of reference, the martial gentry-men of late medieval Europe would – owing to their regular physical training\(^ {29}\) – have likely exhibited a stronger tendency towards a spatial style of visualisation than the average post-industrial reader for whom physical labour is, by and large, a responsibility delegated to machines.

Although this dissertation focuses on the gentle male readers of direct narrative action, it is possible to make certain assumptions about the cognitive styles of other medieval audiences based on what we know about how cognitive style is shaped by genetic predispositions and life experiences. Studies have shown that a whole host of factors – from tertiary education major, biological sex and even left- or right-handedness – can influence an individual’s cognitive style.\(^ {30}\) With respect to spatial visualisation, one of the most powerful predictors of a spatial (as opposed to a visual or verbal) cognitive style appears to be participation in sports and other physical activities. Although there are (as yet) no studies exploring the link between the object-spatial-visual model of cognitive style and athletic performance, multiple studies have shown a strong correlation between participation in general physical activity and


spatial ability which may indicate a corresponding inclination towards spatial visualisation.\(^3\) Given the higher incidence of day-to-day physical activity at all levels of preindustrial society, it would seem reasonable to suppose that medieval and early modern audiences exhibited, on the whole, a stronger tendency towards spatial visualisation than the average (post)modern audience.\(^2\)

This gap between premodern and (post)modern approaches to direct narrative action only widens when we turn our attention to humanities and social science professional who, as a group, tend to favour a linguistic or verbalising cognitive style.\(^3\)

Although we have seen some change in recent years with the advent of the ‘spatial turn’, this turn has, by and large, focused on the spaces associated with macronarrative structures such as setting, plot, and architecture rather than the micronarrative relationships of bodily action.\(^4\) An example *par excellence* of this tendency to overlook bodily action-spaces is the distinction, deployed by Roland Barthes and Seymour Chatman, between a text’s ‘cardinal functions’, elements without which the plot could not progress, and ‘catalysing functions’, which merely ‘fill in’ the narrative

31 For an overview of previous studies see Mirko Schmidt, Fabienne Egger, Mario Kieliger, Benjamin Rubeli, and Julia Schüler, ‘Gymnasts and Orienteers Display Better Mental Rotation Performance than Nonathletes’, *Journal of Individual Differences*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2016, 1–7 (2).


space between cardinals.\textsuperscript{35} Barthes and Chatman illustrates these concepts meaning by way of an example from Ian Fleming’s \textit{Goldfinger}:

One of the telephones rang in the dark room. Bond turned and moved quickly to the central desk and the pool light cast by the green shaded reading lamp. He picked up the black telephone from the rank of four.\textsuperscript{36}

For these two critics, the only cardinal functions in this extract are ‘One of the telephones rang’ and ‘He picked up’. The function of spaces and motions between – Bond’s bodily turn, his swift movement, the location of the telephone and the lamp – becomes, by contrast, ‘attenuated, unilateral, parasitic; it is a question of purely chronological functionality’.\textsuperscript{37} It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that detailed analysis of the spatial relationships involved in direct narrative representations of interpersonal combat remain remains an underleveraged methodology.

\textbf{METHODOLOGY}

The methodology of historically-informed literary critique I have chosen to use in this dissertation has been determined, in large part, by the ‘unreliability’ of those nominally factual accounts of single combat produced during the medieval and early modern period. Sydney Anglo has demonstrated the unreliability of chronicles and other narrative accounts of single combat through cross-referencing multiple accounts of the same historical event, such as when Anthony Woodville met the Bastard of Burgundy in a chivalric contest at West Smithfield in 1467. Although the various reports agree


\textsuperscript{36} Quoted in Chatman, ‘New Ways of Analysing’, 13.

\textsuperscript{37} See Grünbaum, ‘Action between Plot and Discourse’, 300–03 for a detailed discussion.
on the overall shape of the contest they differ in the particulars so much as to make any attempt to reconstruct a blow-by-blow version of the battle impossible. Where one witness attests that the Bastard’s horse was blinded and subsequently died from a blow with an iron spike on Woodwille’s horse, another claims there was no such spike; where one observer was unable to decide whether the battle was brief or continued at some length, another described it as one of the longest and fiercest battles ever fought.  

This inconsistency, which is typical of chronicles and other historical narratives, makes it close to impossible to get at the historical practice behind representations of single combat.

An alternative means of interpreting narrative accounts of single combat, historical and otherwise, has been proposed by Jeffrey Forgeng in an essay on the genre of fifteenth-century didactic fencing literature from Germany known as the Fechtbücher, or ‘fight books’. Forgeng’s essay engages with the emerging field of study known as the historical European martial arts, the largely para-academic research and reconstruction of the fighting arts of medieval and renaissance Europe, to suggest that the ‘primary functions of the Fechtbücher were, in fact, not practical or pedagogical, but intellectual and emotional; they do not teach the reader how to fight, but how to think and feel about fighting’.  

On this analysis, representations of violence and single combat ‘can be said to both construct and fulfil the practitioner’s desire for the art,’ a desire which is essential for ‘the kind of long-term, disciplined

38 Anglo, The Martial Arts, 18–19.
work’ that is required to become a master.\textsuperscript{40} The fight-book thus becomes decoupled from ‘any serious practical function in the practice of fighting arts’ to function instead as a motivational tool, an indicator of social status, and a tangible symbol of the intangible art which an owner of a book can then be said to possess.\textsuperscript{41}

Though I believe he goes too far in completely divorcing the \textit{Fechtbücher} from any kind of serious pedagogic purpose, Forgeng is correct in choosing to look beyond mere correlations of representation and practice. Rather than viewing representations of violence and single combat as either pure fantasy or pure mimicry, this dissertation adopts the position that the authors of narrative accounts of violence and single combat shaped these representations in order to reflect their ideas and judgments according to extant societal discourses, particularly those surrounding social status. Such judgments and discourses are particularly receptive to literary analysis, where a literary analysis is understood as one which seeks to recover not the factual occurrences behind a representation but rather the purpose and function of a representation itself.

My thinking about social status has been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s work on distinction which, in its simplest form, suggests that ‘social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat’ (\textit{l’identité sociale résidant dans la différence, c’est par rapport au plus proche, qui représente la plus grande menace}).\textsuperscript{42} Today, many literary interpretations of violence focus on the manner in which representations of combat are used to demarcate protagonists from distant ‘Others’ drawn along racial, geographical, or

\textsuperscript{40} Forgeng, ‘Owning the Art’, 172.

\textsuperscript{41} Forgeng, ‘Owning the Art’, 174.

national divides. Such readings often fail to distinguish between the ‘mass combat’ of warfare between strictly divided social groups and the intensely personal confrontations with one’s peers or near-peers that often takes place in single combat, distinctions which are crucial in evaluating the cultural function of a specific representation. In short, this dissertation explores the proposition that representations of violence and single combat serve to distinguish protagonists from antagonists who are in fact more proximate than Other — antagonists whose social proximity represents their greatest threat.

I have adopted the format of a series of case studies in order to explore the connection between lay ‘gentle’ masculine dominances and hierarchies and literary representations of violence and single combat across a wide range of geographical regions, literary traditions, and time periods. Each chapter will explore a different way of representing violence and single combat and, for the purpose of engaging with this argument, may be read individually or in a linear progression. The specific examples have been chosen in order to follow, and thereby revise, traditional Anglophonic histories of the martial arts as linear progressions from savagery to civilisation.

This dissertation will begin with a groundwork discussion of the medieval concept of violence in Chapter One (‘Violence and Christian Identity in Late Antique and Medieval Europe’) before outlining in Chapter Two (‘Prowess and the Distinction of Knights from Rustics in Chrétien de Troyes’) the development of the French representative form of virtue combat from epic heroism and its relationship to the chivalric virtue of prowess. The English method of representing single combat, which followed the French for much of the medieval period but underwent a mutation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, will then be discussed in Chapter Three (‘Faith as Distinction in Arthur’s Battles with the Giant of Mont St-Michel’). The focus will then
switch to an exploration of medieval German courtesy in Chapter Four (‘Peace, Violence, and Masculinity in Kudrun’) before proceeding to an analysis of renaissance Italian attitudes towards rational combat in Chapter Five (‘Rationality and Violence in the Three Crowns of Renaissance Ferrara’). The final chapter (‘Reframing Medieval Violence in Shakespeare’s I Henry IV’) will both explore the attitudes of early modern England and investigate Victorian appropriations of the period’s societal debates. By following the shape of this history through Italy, France, Germany, and England, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the history of the martial arts beyond the individual contributions of its case studies.
Violence and Christian Identity in Late Antique and Medieval Europe

In the apocryphal third-century romance known as the ‘Acts of Thomas’, the eponymous apostle is proselytising at a royal banquet in India when a servant strikes him on the cheek. Thomas, recalling Jesus’s command to ‘turn the other cheek’, elects to forgive the servant — after a fashion. ‘My God will forgive thee in the life to come this iniquity’, Thomas declares, ‘but in this world thou shalt show forth his wonders and even now shall I behold this hand that hath smitten me dragged by dogs’.¹ As the servant leaves the banquet to draw water from a nearby well he is attacked by a lion who tears him to pieces, leaving behind his hand to carried by a dog to the banquet, thereby fulfilling Thomas’s prophecy. A century later, Augustine of Hippo would use this story to explain how Jesus’ command to ‘turn the other cheek’ may be fulfilled by a ‘disposition of the heart, though it is not exhibited in bodily action or in words’ (praeparatione cordis, etiamsi non exhibeatur gestu corporis, et expressione verborum) — that when it comes to violence, in other words, it is the thought which counts.²

This story is a useful illustration of how poorly modern Anglophonic conceptions of violence map onto the intellectual history of late antique and medieval Europe. To the modern reader for whom violence is typically defined as the illegal or illegitimate application of physical force with the intent to cause harm, being torn to pieces by a lion is an act of clear and extreme violence; yet for Augustine and his Christian contemporaries, what matters is not the state of the body but rather the state of the soul — the ‘disposition of the heart’. This subordination of bodily harm to spiritual health, I argue, offers a new method of reading representations of physical conflict in Christian texts from late antiquity through to the high medieval period whereby violence functions as the representation of a spiritual conflict between virtue and vice.

VIOLENCE AND WAR IN AGAINST FAUSTUS

When it comes to conceptions of violence, few texts have matched the impact of Augustine’s *Against Faustus the Manichean* (Contra Faustum Manichæum). Composed some time after Augustine’s conversion in 386–87, *Against Faustus* — together with the seminal *City of God* (De civitate dei) — established the framework of discussion on matters of violence, war, and peace from late antiquity through to the high medieval period and beyond. However, where *City of God* is concerned primarily with state actors and the justifications of war — a topic which is outside the scope of

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the present study — Against Faustus discusses in detail the nature of violence at the interpersonal level; for this reason, I will focus my attention primarily to an exploration of this latter text.

Against Faustus is structured around a lengthy series of objections by the fourth-century bishop Faustus of Milevis to various Christian orthodoxies which Augustine addresses one by one. With respect to violence, the key passages in this treatise can be found in book 22 where Faustus objects to the morality of the Old Testament prophets, who are described as having committed adultery (Genesis 26:2–4), incest (Genesis 19:33, 35), polygamy (1 Kings 11:1–3), and murder (Exodus 2:12).\(^4\) It should be observed that although these objections are concerned primarily with the Old Testament on account of Faustus’s apparent antipathy towards the Israelites, Augustine’s response draws upon examples from both the Old and New Testaments — an inflection which permitted Against Faustus to serve as a normative text for the thousand years after Jesus, who in ‘speaking of a new covenant, [made] the first one obsolete’ (Hebrews 8:13).

With respect to physical violence, Faustus and Augustine adopt as a case study the prophet Moses, who is said to have murdered an Egyptian man who was beating an Israelite slave (Exodus 2:12), led the Israelites in the plunder of Egypt (Exodus 12:35–36), and ordered the massacre of the Midianites (Numbers 31:15–18). Faustus’s objection is simple: given that the Ten Commandments prohibit killing and that Moses is shown to have killed, either the infallible Old Testament must be in error or Moses must guilty of transgressing God’s eternal law. Augustine begins his defence of Moses by considering his murder of the Egyptian man. Though Augustine ‘views the action

\(^4\) All Biblical quotations are drawn from the New International Version (2011).
as having no symbolical meaning’ (ommnino tamquam nihil significaverint facta illa discutio), he offers a hypothetical defence upon which he would subsequently ground his ‘divine command’ justification of war:

It might be shown that, though Moses slew the Egyptian, without being commanded by God, the action was divinely permitted, as, from the prophetic character of Moses, it prefigured something in the future [...] In the light, then, of the eternal law, it was wrong for one who had no legal authority to kill the man, even though he was a bad character, besides being the aggressor. But in minds where great virtue is to come, there is often an early crop of vices, in which we may still discern a disposition for some particular virtue, which will come when the mind is duly cultivated [...] so the disposition of mind which led Moses to take the law into his own hands, to prevent the wrong done to his brother, living among strangers, by a wicked citizen of the country from being unrequited, was not unfit for the production of virtue, but from want of culture gave signs of its productiveness in an unjustifiable manner.5

This is a complex passage. Acknowledging that killing without divine command is contrary to the ‘eternal law’ of the Ten Commandments, Augustine contends that Moses was justified in this case because he acted out of certain ‘disposition of mind’ (animi motus). The ‘disposition of mind’ to which Augustine refers is the Platonic-Aristotelian division of the mind (or soul) into the rational, concupiscible, and irascible faculties of psychological motivation — hence the phrase animi motus, which can be translated literally as ‘movement (i.e. motivation) of the mind/soul’, but which is more

5 ‘Ut interim omittam, quod cum percussisset Aegyptium, quanquam illi Deus non praeceperit, in persona tamen prophetica ad hoc divinitus fieri permissum est, ut futurum aliquid praesignaret [...] consultaque illa aeterna lege reperio non debuisse hominem ab illo, qui nullam ordinatam potestatem gerebat, quamvis injuriosum et improbum, occidi. Verumtamen animae virtutis capaces ac fertiles praemittunt saepe vitia, quibus hoc ipsum indicent, cui virtutis sint potissimum accommodatae, si fuerint praeceptis excultae [...] sic ille animi motus, quo Moyses peregrinum fratrem a cive improbo injuriam perpetuentem, non observato ordine potestatis, inultum esse non pertulit, non virtutum fructibus inutilis erat, sed adhuc inculcat, vitiosa quidem, sed magnae fertilitatis signa fundebat’: Contra Faustum, PL 42, col. 444; Reply to Faustus, NPNF I.IV, 299.
commonly rendered as ‘emotion’, from the French émouvoir (to move) and the Latin emovere (to move out). In broad terms, the rational faculty can be considered the intellectual or cognisant part of the soul which motivates individuals to pursue immutable truth; the concupiscible is the part of the soul which motivates them to pursue pleasure and flee pain; and the irascible is the faculty by which man is roused to anger and action despite opposition. The ‘disposition of the heart’ referred to in the story of the apostle Thomas, though rooted in a Stoic conception of the soul, can be considered functionally identical to the tripartite Platonic-Aristotelian model in Against Faustus; in both instances, what is described is the psycho-spiritual motivation for performing the nominally violent act, which Augustine describes as ‘not unfit for the production of virtue’ (non virtutum fructibus inutilis erat). Although Augustine does not explicitly define virtue in this passage, the explanation offered in his treatise On the Morals of the Catholic Church (De moribus ecclesiae catholicae) — ‘I hold virtue to be nothing else than perfect love of God’ (nihil omnino esse virtutem affirmaverim nisi summum amorem Dei) — accords at all points with the use of the term in Against Faustus, and so forms a useful working definition.

What justifies Moses’ killing of the Egyptian, therefore, is the capacity of his psychological motivation to incline him towards the love of God. To illustrate the point, Augustine introduces a New Testament example — the story of how Peter, when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, drew his sword and struck off the right ear of one of the

7 Augustine, De moribus ecclesiæ catholicae et de moribus Manichæorum. PL 32, cols 1300–78 (col. 1322); trans.: On the Morals of the Catholic Church, trans. R. Stothert, NPNF LIV, 37–64 (48).
men accosting his Lord. Like Moses, Peter committed an act of physical violence without divine sanction; indeed, he is immediately rebuked by Jesus, who tells him to put away his sword because all who take up the sword will perish by the sword. With regards to Moses and Peter, Augustine explains that

In both cases there was resentment against injury, accompanied in one case by love for a brother, and in the other by love, though still carnal, of the Lord. Here was evil to be subdued or rooted out; but the heart with such capacities needed only, like good soil, to be cultivated to make it fruitful in virtue.

To summarise, then: Augustine’s argument is that the acts of self-motivated physical violence performed by both Moses and Peter are justified because their emotional states — an irascible resentment against injury and a concupiscible love for a brother or for God — incline them towards the love of God.

It is important to note that the justice or injustice of a self-motivated act can, on Augustine’s account, be known only in retrospect. Emotional states do not have a one-to-one correlation with virtue, for the brotherly love which inclines one man to follow the word of God may incline another to elevate family loyalty above religious piety. Nor are these inclinations detectable at the moment of action; it took fifty days from the death of Jesus before Peter was made a pastor of the Church and a number of years before Moses became leader of the Israelites in Egypt, the two occurrences which Augustine identifies as the manifestations of their virtuous inclinations. These self-motivated acts differ significantly, then, from those acts which arise from a direct

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9 ‘uterque odio improbitatis alienae, sed ille fraterno, iste dominico, licet adhuc carnali, tamen amore peccavit. Resecandum hoc vitium vel eradicandum; sed tamen tam magnum cor, tanquam terra frugibus, ita ferendis virtutibus excolendum’: Contra Faustum, PL 42, col. 445; Reply to Faustus, NPNF L.IV, 299.
command of God, whose command is itself indicative of a just act; however, it is important to recognise that the difference between a self-motivated and commanded act is one of degree rather than of kind. What makes those actions performed according to the commands of God is just God’s foreknowledge of which acts will incline an individual towards, and which will drive him away from, virtue. Augustine explains this with reference to the Israelite plunder of Egypt, which Moses commanded and God permitted:

> Then, as for Faustus’ objection to the spoiling of the Egyptians, he knows not what he says. In this Moses not only did not sin, but it would have been sin not to do it. It was by the command of God, who, from His knowledge both of the actions and of the hearts of men, can decide on what every one should be made to suffer, and through whose agency.  

Today, Augustine’s explanation of God’s just commands is often read within the context of ‘just war’ theory which is concerned with both the ‘right to go to war’, or *jus ad bellum*, and the ‘right conduct in war’, or *jus in bello*. Within this tradition, it is commonly held that both Augustine and the medieval scholars he influenced were ‘preoccup[ied] with the *jus ad bellum* to the almost total exclusion of any explicit consideration of the conduct of war itself’, it being believed that divine command admitted ‘no limit’ to the punishment of evil ‘nor any corresponding right to escape divine retribution’. The problem with this reading is that the *ad bellum / in bello* distinction, though phrased in archaic Latin and ‘consistently accepted by virtually

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10 ‘*Quid ergo jam de expoliatis Aegyptiis Faustus objicit, nesciens quid loquatur? Quod faciendo Moyses usque adeo non peccavit, ut non faciendo peccaret. Deus enim jussisset (Exod. III, 21, 22; XI, 2, et XII, 35, 36), qui utique novit non solum secundum facta, verum etiam secundum cor hominis, quid unusquisque, vel per quem perpeti debet?*’ Contra Faustum, PL 42, col. 445; Reply to Faustus, NPNF I.IV, 299.

every major just war theorist of the modern period’, is in fact an invention of the twentieth century, one which reflects and reproduces modern understanding of violence as a primarily external phenomenon. If we consider the four Geneva Conventions — the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field; the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea; the Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War; and the Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War — we can discern, simply from their names, an emphasis upon those physical acts and treatments which influence the well-being of the human body. Augustine, by contrast, is strident in his rejection of physical well-being as the grounds upon which a *jus in bello* ought to be framed, declaring that what is required for a just act of violence or war is ‘not a bodily action, but an inward disposition’ (*praeparationem non esse in corpore, sed in corde*): What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are desire to harm, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like ...

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14 *Contra Faustum*, PL 42, col. 448; *Reply to Faustus*, NPNF IIV, 301.

15 ‘*Quid enim culpatur in bello? An quia moriuntur quandoque morituri, ut domentur in pace victi? Hoc reprehendere timidorum est, non religiosorum. Nocendi cupiditas, ulciscendi crudelitas, impacatus atque implacabilis animus, feritas rebellandi, libido dominandi, et si qua similia, haec sunt quae in bellis jure culpantur*’: *Contra Faustum*, PL 42, col. 447 (XXII.74); *Reply to Faustus*, NPNF IIV, 301. I have substituted Stothert’s translation of *nocendi cupiditas* (‘love of violence’) with the more specific ‘desire to harm’.
The desire to harm (nocendi cupiditas), revengeful cruelty (ulciscendi crudelitas), fierce and implacable enmity (impacatus atque implacabilis animus), wild resistance (feritas rebellandi), and the lust of power (libido dominandi) — all of these are emotions or inward dispositions which lead away from virtue and the love of God and are, therefore, unable to justify acts of violence. It should be noted that Augustine is not making a radical argument here; rather, he expresses the general consensus of the time in which he is writing. The New Testament is replete with injunctions to prioritise spiritual health over physical suffering, as in Matthew 10:28 — ‘Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell’; or Mark 9:43 — ‘If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out’. Tertullian, writing at the close of the second century, argues that ‘these [earthly harms] are but trifling sufferings to obtain a celestial glory and a divine reward’ (modicæ sunt istæ passiones ad consecutionem gloriae caelestis et divina mercedis). Origen, meanwhile, responds to the criticism of Celsus — that if everyone, like the Christian, were to abstain from martial service then the Empire would collapse under the weight of barbarian invaders — championed the superiority of the Christian’s spiritual struggles over the physical struggles of the army: ‘And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them’ (‘Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ ταῖς εὐχαῖς πάντας δαιμόνας, τοῖς ἐγείροντας τὰ πολέμικα, καὶ ὅρκους συγχέοντας, καὶ τὴν εἰρήνην

This subordination of physical suffering to spiritual health is, in essence, an outgrowth of that ascetic impulse which drives certain individuals of faith to seek a martyr’s death. Those in the modern West have little difficulty conceiving of the relationship between religious asceticism and death — one needs only consider the various descriptions of ISIS / ISIL / Daesh, a regional Islamic power in the modern Middle East, as a ‘death cult’ to see this understanding in action — but they have a harder time recognising the connection between religious asceticism and physical violence which is neither mortal nor self-inflicted. This connection is critical, however, for understanding not only late antique theologies of violence, but also the concept of the milites Christi — a concept which underpinned much of the ‘bloody, sweaty, muscular work done with lance and sword’ in high medieval literary representations of interpersonal violence.

**MILITES CHRISTI**

The concept of the milites Christi, or ‘soldiers of Christ’, was born from the military metaphors early Christian writers used to describe their spiritual struggles. Within the New Testament these metaphors range from descriptions of the ‘armour of Christ’ (Ephesians 6:10–17), to Paul’s exhortation to join him in suffering ‘like a good soldier of Christ Jesus’ (2 Timothy 2:3–4), to the image of the ‘wages (ὀψώνια) of sin’ — a

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technical term for the wages paid to Roman soldiers. Outside of the New Testament we can find Christians framed as soldiers with Christ as their commander in the first-century *First Epistle of Clement* — ‘And so, brothers, with all eagerness let us do battle as soldiers under his blameless commands’ (Στρατευσόμεθα οὖν, ἀνδρεῖς ἄδελφοί, μετὰ πάσης ἐκτενείας ἐν τοῖς ἀμώμοις προστάγμασιν αὐτοῦ) — and also in the second- and third-century writings of Tertullian, who describes the Christian lay person as a ‘common soldier’ (gregarius miles), bishops, priests, and deacons as ‘officers’ (duces), and Christ as a ‘general’ (imperator). The extent to which Christian writers of the first three centuries of the common era imagined their spiritual struggles to be a literal form of violence or war against evil is open to debate, but by the time that Martin of Tours took his famous stand against military service in the fourth century we can see the equivalence of physical and spiritual struggle on full display:

Hitherto I have served you [Caesar] as a soldier: allow me now to become a soldier to God: let the man who is to serve thee receive thy donative: I am the soldier of Christ: it is not lawful for me to fight.


Although the latter half of this statement is often adduced as evidence for the pacifism of the early church, in asking to become a soldier of Christ (miles Christi) Martin asks to pursue a higher form of spiritual violence against evil and the Devil. That this spiritual service was considered to be an active act, as opposed to a passive resistance to violence, is demonstrated by Origen’s response to the criticism of Celsus, who argued that if everyone were to abstain from war like the Christian then the Empire would be overrun by barbarians:

In the next place, Celsus urges us ‘to help the king with all our might, and to labour with him in the maintenance of justice, to fight for him; and if he requires it, to fight under him, or lead an army along with him.’ To this our answer is, that we do, when occasion requires, give help to kings, and that, so to say, a divine help, ‘putting on the whole armour of God’ [...] And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them [...] And none fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God.23

When Origen was writing early in the third century, the milites Christi concept was a label applied to all Christians, clergy and laity alike, who were contrasted with the pagani or non-Christian ‘civilians’; once Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, however, the label was swiftly reserved for the fledgling monastic traditions who contrasted themselves both with the laity, for

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23 Εἴθεξις προστέπται ἡμᾶς ὁ Κέλσος ἀρήγην τῷ βασιλεῖ παντὶ σθένει, καὶ συμπονεῖν ἀυτῷ τὰ δίκαια, καὶ ἐπεμμαχεῖν αὐτῷ, καὶ συστρατεύειν αὐτῷ, ἢ ἐπείγη, καὶ συστρατηγεῖν. Λεκτέον δὲ καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα, ὅτι ἀρήγην κατὰ καρύν τοὺς βασιλείας θείας, ἵνα ὁλοκληρωθῶν, ἀρήξῃ, καὶ πανοπλισθῆναι ἀναλαμβάνοντες Θεοῦ. [...] Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ ταῖς εὐχαῖς πάντας δαίμονας, τοὺς ἐγείροντας τὰ πολέμικα, καὶ ὅρκους συγχέοντας, καὶ τὴν εἰρήνην ταιρίσοντας, καθαροῦντες, μᾶλλον βοηθοῦμεν τοῖς βασιλεύοντες, ἢπερ οἱ δοκοῦντες στρατεύεσθαι. [...] Ἡμεῖς καὶ μᾶλλον ὑπερμαχοῦμεν τοῦ βασιλέως· καὶ οὐ συστρατεύομεθα μὲν αὐτῶ, κἂν ἐπείγη· στρατεύομεθα δὲ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶ, ὅσον στρατόπεδον ἐσοβείεις συγκροτοῦντες διὰ τῶν πρὸς τὸ Θεῖον ἐντεύξεων: Origen, Contra Celsum, PG 11, cols 1625–28; Against Celsus. ANF IV, 669.
whom they formed an ‘advance guard’, and the Roman army, to whom were given the label *milites seculi.* It is of no small significance that both instantiations of this early *milites Christi* concept appeared at moments of existential threat — the threat of persecution under a succession of Roman emperors from the first to the early fourth century, in the first instance, and the threat of dissolution in the second as the sudden influx of merely nominal converts during the late fourth century erased the Christian–pagan contrast, forcing a re-evaluation of Christian identity and prompting a monastic flight to the desert. I have chosen to read these episodes of existential threat and response through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of distinction, which suggests that ‘[c]ommonplaces and classificatory systems are the stake of struggles between the groups they characterize and counterpose, who fight over them while striving to turn them to their own advantage’. Bourdieu’s theory offers a powerful model for understanding both how social, political, and economic hierarchies form collective identities and how these identities frame themselves in opposition to one another. Through this lens we can observe in the case of the primitive church a struggle to reclassify the political persecution of Christians as a form of spiritual struggle, while

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24 Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 14–32. The Latin *paganus* was a polyvalent term used to denote an individual outside a particular group. Although its opposition to the *miles Christi* concept is generally accepted to connote ‘civilian’, it could also be understood to mean a country–dweller as opposed to a city–dweller. Thomas Jürgsach, ‘Christians and the Invention of Paganism in the Late Roman Empire’, in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, eds Michele Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzie Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 115–38. On Augustine’s view of monks as the ‘advance guard’ of Christianity, see Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 365.


26 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 479.
in the fourth and fifth centuries we can observe the application of the *milites Christi* concept to the monastic orders in an attempt to shore up the identity of devout Christians through contrast with both the nominal laity and the secular soldiery. This latter contrast of *milites Christi* and *milites seculi* would persist through to the end of the ninth century, as the Carolingian scholar and abbot Smaragdus attests:

There are secular soldiers (milites seculi) and there are soldiers of Christ (milites Christi); but secular soldiers bear feeble and perilous arms, while those of the soldiers of Christ are most powerful and excellent; the former fight against their enemies in such a way that they lead both themselves and those they kill to everlasting punishment; the latter fight against evil so that after death they may gain the reward of eternal life ... 27

Not long after Smaragdus wrote of the difference between the ‘feeble’ secular soldiers and the ‘powerful’ Christian soldiers there emerged a ‘third wave’ of Christian militarism which aimed at reconciling both physical and spiritual warfare in the singular figure of the *milites Christi*. This movement was born following the collapse of the Carolingian Empire, whose monarchs had transformed the church into ‘collaborators in the work of government, providing advice, staffing rudimentary bureaucracies and disseminating royal orders through society’. 28 This arrangement, under which ‘the church existed within the empire, dependent like all other privileged

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bodies on imperial government for its sustenance’, meant that the eventual fragmentation of imperial authority during the reign of Charles the Fat in the ninth century produced a rapid shift of power away from both the imperial court and the church in favour of those regional counts known as *castellans*.\(^{29}\) Their political and economic power under threat, the church sought to subjugate the power of these *castellans* through a series of political and intellectual reforms, one of which was the rapprochement of the *miles Christi* and *milites seculi* concepts over the course of the tenth and eleventh century.\(^{30}\) Although the new *miles Christi* concept fused both the earthly war of the soldier with the spiritual war of the monk, the church ensured that the spiritual element maintained its traditional superiority through a renewed focus on Augustine’s concept of the ‘inner disposition’ in the form of the ‘right motive for battle’ (*proeliandi recta voluntas*).

**THE RIGHT MOTIVE FOR BATTLE**

One of the key texts for the third wave of the *miles Christi* concept was the mid-tenth-century ‘Prayer for the Army’ (*Oratio pro exercitu*) from the Romano-Germanic Pontifical, which asks for God to protect the army and to provide, among other things, a ‘right motive for conflict’ (*proeliandi recta voluntas*).\(^{31}\) Although the exact meaning of this phrase is left unstated, the other elements which the prayer asks for God to provide the army — ‘a way without dread, a way of life without monotony, moderate

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\(^{29}\) Nelson, *The Frankish World*, 133.


weakness without terror, an abundance of things (meatus sine formidine, conversatio sine fastidio, moderate fragilitas sine metu, fortitudo sine terrore, copia rerum) — are indicative of that balance and harmony considered desirable by contemporary clerics schooled in the mode of conduct known as ‘courtliness’ (curialitas).

    Courtliness was, at its heart, a set of methods for manifesting on the outward body the inward virtues of an individual. These methods originated as part of an attempt to justify the cleric’s life at a worldly court in the late ninth and tenth centuries by framing ‘elegant behaviour’ (elegantia morum) as a form of conduct which, like the acts of Moses in Exodus, were ‘not unfit for the production of virtue’ (non virtutum fructibus inutilis erat). These practices would subsequently spread from the clerics at the Ottonian courts of the ninth and tenth century to liberal humanists and courtly knights across Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. An example of what courtliness typically entailed can be found in an episode from Herbord’s thirteenth-century Dialogue on the Life of Otto of Bamberg (Herbordi dialogus de vita Ottonis episcopi Babenbergensis) in which Otto, a German cleric of the twelfth century, is praised for the elegance of his proselytising mission to Pomerania. As the narrator explains,

    It is small wonder that you are amazed. We who were present were amazed also, not only at this but at many other indications of his manners and his virtues. For in every one of his acts [...] he showed a special gift of singular fastidiousness and, if I may say so, of elegant and urbane breeding. Never under any circumstances, in eating, drinking, in word, gesture, or dress, would he tolerate anything indecorous, inappropriate or unbecoming, but rather in every act of the outer man, he manifested.

the harmony that reigned within him, conspicuous as he was for his goodness, good breeding, and far-sighted wisdom.\textsuperscript{33}

We can observe in this extract the same emphasis upon the relationship between interiority and exteriority found in Augustine’s ascetic theory of violence and the inner disposition, albeit with some differences in the specific behaviours and virtues considered desirable — the ‘elegance’ and ‘urbanity’ for which Otto is praised, in particular are the same qualities which Augustine rejected as the vanities of his youth.\textsuperscript{34}

Where Otto’s ‘inner harmony’ (\textit{composicio interioris}) and Augustine’s ascetic violence are reconciled is in the high medieval model of the \textit{milites Christi}, particularly as it was expressed in Bernard of Clairvaux’s early twelfth-century exhortation \textit{In Praise of New Knighthood (De laude novae militiae)}. Bernard was simultaneously a fervent preacher of crusade and a strident enemy of courtly mannerisms, criticising the Cluniac order for what he perceived to be their excessive wealth and worldliness\textsuperscript{35} and mocking the fashionable attire of courtly knights as that of women rather than warriors.\textsuperscript{36} Yet despite his hostility to courtliness, the virtues for which Bernard praises the Templars are not dissimilar to those for which Otto was praised:

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\textsuperscript{33} My emphasis. ‘\textit{Nec mirum te ista mirari. Etenim, qui ea vidimus, mirabamur et ipsi tam hec quam alia complura morum eius atque virtu tunc insignia. Ipse namque in omni accione sua \ldots quandum a Spiritu sancto—hoc enim potissimum credo—cuiusdam singularis mundicie atque, ut ita dixerim, elegantis et urbane discipline prerogativam habebat, ita ut nichil unquam indecens aut ineptum quid in cibo aut potu, sermone, gestu vel habitu admitteret. Sed in omni officio exterioris hominis, quenam esset composicio interioris, ostendebat, bonitate, disciplina et prudencia cautela conspicuus’: quoted in Jaeger, \textit{Origins of Courtliness}, 129.

\textsuperscript{34} See Jaeger, \textit{Origins of Courtliness}, 129–33.

\textsuperscript{35} Bernard of Clairvaux, \textit{Apology to William, Abbot of St. Thierry (Apologia ad Guillelmmum Sancti Theoderici Abbatem)}, PL 182, cols 893–918.

\textsuperscript{36} ‘Are these the trappings of a warrior or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman?’ (\textit{Militaria sunt haec insignia, an muliebria potius ornamenta?}): Bernard of Clairvaux, \textit{De laude novae militiae ad Milites
There is no distinction of persons among them, and deference is shown to merit rather than to noble blood. They rival one another in mutual consideration, and they carry one another's burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ. No inappropriate word, idle deed, unrestrained laugh, not even the slightest whisper or murmur is left uncorrected once it has been detected [...] At the same time, they are not quarrelsome, rash, or unduly hasty, but soberly, prudently and providently drawn up into orderly ranks, as we read of the fathers.  

Bernard praises those acts which are moderate, appropriate, and harmonious — the same attributes which Herbord attributed to the courtly Otto. To these courtly virtues Bernard added aspects of Augustine’s ascetic leanings, noting with praise that ‘[the Templars] seldom wash and never set their hair — content to appear tousled and dusty, bearing the marks of the sun and of their armour’ (Nunquam compti, raro loti, magis autem neglecto crine hispidi, pulvere foedi: lorica et caumate fusci). The debt which Bernard owes Augustine in formulating his praise of the ‘new knighthood’ of the Templars is at its clearest, however, in the passage where he speaks of the martial role of the Christian soldier’s disposition of the heart (affectum cordis):

Indeed, danger or victory for a Christian depends on the dispositions of his heart and not on the fortunes of war. If he fights for a good reason, the issue of his fight can


37 ‘Persona inter eos minime accipitur: defertur meliori, non nobiliori. Honore se invicem praeeviant; alterutrum onera portant, ut sic adimpleant legem Christi. Verbum insolens, opus inutile, risus immoderatus, murmur vel tenue, sive susurrum nequaquam, ubi deprehenditur, relinguatur inemendatum [...] Deinde non turbulentii aut impetuosii, et quasi ex levitate praecipites, sed consulte atque cum omni cautela et providentia se ipsos ordinantes, et disponentes in aciem, juxta quod de patribus scriptum est’: Bernard, _De laude_, PL 182, cols 926–27; _In Praise_, 140.  

38 Bernard, _De laude_, PL 182, col. 927; _In Praise_, 139.
never be evil; and likewise the results can never be considered good if the reason were evil and the intentions perverse.  

This is essentially a paraphrase of Augustine’s argument that the outcome of a battle depends on the dispositions of the Christian’s heart. Where Bernard differs from Augustine, however, is in his attitude towards the martial motivation of hatred: in describing the Templar in battle, Bernard praises the manner in which he sets aside his civil gentleness and quotes with approval Psalm 139:21–23 — ‘Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord; am I not disgusted with your enemies?’ (Nonne qui oderunt te, Domine, oderam, et super inimicos tuos tabescebam?). In this, Bernard was not alone; the English chronicler and Benedictine monk Orderic Vitalis, writing of a pagan blockade of the town of Jaffa, puts into the mouth of the defending Christian king words of exhortation to sorrow and anger: ‘Review in your hearts all your injuries and wrongs [...] Let your fresh sorrow at the death of your friends kindle in your hearts and goad you to destroy your enemies’ (Iniurias uestras et damna medullitis recensete [...] Recens dolor de morte amicorum: inflammmet uos et exacerbet ad perniciem inimicorum). This contrast between civility towards one’s friends and enmity towards one’s foes appears later in the secular writing of the fourteenth-century knight Geoffroi de Charny:

- There is a supreme rule of conduct required in these good men-at-arms as the above-mentioned men of worth inform us: they should be humble among their friends, proud and

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39 ‘Ex cordis nempe affectu, non belli eventu, pensatur vel periculum, vel victoria christiani. Si bona fuerit causa pugnantis, pugnae exitus malus exitus esse non poterit; sicut nec bonus judicabitur finis, ubi causa non bona, et intentio non recta praecesserit’: Bernard, De laude, PL 182, cols 922–23; In Praise, 131.
40 Bernard, De laude, PL 182, col. 927; In Praise, 140.
bold against their foes, tender and merciful toward those who need assistance, cruel avengers against their enemies, pleasant and amiable with all others ...  

It is important to note that this binary ideal — that the Christian should appear ‘gentler than lambs, yet fiercer than lions’ (agnis mitiores, et leonibus ferociiores) — appears to have been held by only a minority of clerical writers who were outnumbered by those who held love as the ideal motivation for Christian warfare. This is arguably true even of Bernard’s own writings; in his Sentences, he claims that Christ was said to be armed with three arrows — chaste fear, devout love, and virtuous desire — with which ‘the Lord wounds those whom he invites to taste the sweetness of his love’ (Dominus etiam eos sauciat, quos ad degustandum dulcedinem suae dilectionis invitat). Nor was the milites Christi model put forward by Bernard and his ilk the only model of knighthood proposed in the high medieval period: alongside the familiar romantic model of knights as curiales (‘courtiers’) who loved God and respected women there existed also the model of knights as the tripartite society’s bellatores, the ‘protectors of the churches’ (tutores aecclésiarum) and ‘[d]efenders of the people, of both great and small’ (Defendunt uulgi maiores atque minores). What unites these three models — that of the knights as milites Christi, curiales, and bellatores — is their sociopolitical function: the restoration, through a process of social and political

43 Bernard, De laude, PL 182, col. 927; In Praise, 140.
distinction, of that power and prestige lost by the church following the collapse of the Carolingian empire. Indeed, Bourdieu identifies the tripartite society, ‘which fixed a state of the social structure and aimed to make it permanent by codifying it’, as a particularly salient example of the process of social and political distinction. There is, however, a major difference between these twelfth-century attempts at sociopolitical distinction and the late antique milites Christi movements: where the late antique writers sought to define themselves in response to an existential threat, these high medieval writings sought to define an external group whose power and prestige were in the ascendant — the secular knights.

KNIGHTS, PROWESS, AND DISTINCTION

The social, political, and economic power of the eleventh and twelfth-century knight — a mounted warrior, vassal, and armed retainer called miles in contemporary documentation — was grounded in his military service as heavy cavalry for a castellan. Knights were masters of a new style of warfare in which a charge of heavy cavalymen holding their lance ‘couched’, or tucked under the armpit and pointed at the enemy, would decide who carried the day on an open battlefield. In order to fight in this manner, the knight needed access to an expensive set of equipment; according to Henry II’s continental Ordinance of Le Mans (1180) and insular Assize of Arms (1181), a knight was expected to provide for himself a horse, helmet, shield, lance, sword, and mail coat, the cost of which could range from six months to a year’s wages

for the average knight. This, alone, would have placed the knight’s style of war out of the reach of common foot soldiers, who typically earned less than one eighth of a knight’s wage, and peasant families, whose plough teams were worth one tenth of a single knight’s equipment. Compounding this sartorial limitation was the extensive training required to control both lance and horse while hurtling towards an opponent in the manner of a living projectile; individuals born into a knightly family could expect to be tutored in the arts of mounted combat from as young as five or seven years old and to keep their skills sharp through frequent participation in tournaments, which in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were essentially mock wars conducted over open terrain between townships. Participation in this kind of training required the investment of a certain amount of time which would otherwise have been committed to agriculture, trade, or other kinds of subsistence employment, thereby restricting the membership of the social class of knighthood to those in possession of some wealth, typically in the form of landed property.

The existential security provided by these economic barriers to entry permitted knights to indulge in a fantasy of martial meritocracy, believing themselves to be society’s warriors par excellence on the basis of individual virtue rather than economic

51 Richard Barber, The Knight and Chivalry (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 16.
privilege. This fantasy manifested itself primarily within the theme of ‘prowess’, a constellation of personal qualities — ‘great skill, strength, and hardiness in using arms on horseback or on foot as well as [...] courage and determination’ — upon which was grounded a warrior’s martial performance. Demonstrations of prowess performed with sword in hand were a motif of seemingly inexhaustible appeal, with both imaginative literature and historical accounts picturing knights ‘enjoying a privileged practice of violence; it suggests that they found in their exhilarating and fulfilling fighting the key to identity’. The literal ‘worship’ of prowess and martial skill as the hallmarks of a warrior identity during the high medieval period produced, among its many fictions, a mythic origin story first recorded in the thirteenth-century *Lancelot do Lac* and subsequently adapted in didactic works of chivalry by Ramon Llull and William Caxton, whereby knighthood was claimed to originate in a prelapsarian meritocracy whereby one man in every thousand was chosen to become a knight. Within this fantasy, ‘tension between lineage and prowess is suppressed; the assumption, almost without exception, is that honour originates, is merited, proved, and increased sword in hand by those who whose lineage leads them to such deeds’.

However, we ought to be wary of not overstating the extent to which knighthood existed as a hermeneutic fellowship of arms. Several historians have suggested that a knight’s equipment was not as onerous a financial burden as first appears, particularly when factoring in its capacity to be inherited, won at a tournament, or otherwise acquired in a manner not indicative of personal wealth; many knights were themselves ‘of extremely modest economic resources, some being no

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52 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 32.
53 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 32; 143.
54 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 131.
better off than well-to-do peasants’. The knight was also subject to increasing competition from mercenaries, whom monarchs would hire with money levied from their vassals in lieu of military service. Meritocratic fantasies of martial distinction, though a compelling narrative for knights of the eleventh through to the thirteenth centuries, were not always enough; of the forty-three knightly families around 1100 near Cluny in Burgundy, six had vanished by the end of the century to be replaced by three new ones, one of peasant origins.

Clerical ideals of knighthood offered alternative methods through which knights could produce for themselves a collective identity of strength and stability based upon factors beyond martial skill; indeed, it was the adoption of certain aspects of these models — an ‘ethical and spiritual content […] a specific social status and a distinct ethos, *ésprit de corps*, [or] mentality’ — which contributed in no small part to lay conceptions of chivalry. The *bellatores* model of knighthood permitted distinction through a conception of loyalty and duty, protecting those Christians whom some Other — be they Saracen, monster, or devil — sought to destroy; the *curiales* model allowed distinction through consumptive and behavioural taste; and the *milites Christi* model enabled distinction through participation in the two-fold fight of both spirit and body. Advanced by clerics and accepted by certain knights as a ‘flattering and valorizing representation of their profession’, these models advanced a view of the

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58 Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 3.
world which was prescriptive rather than descriptive, showing us ‘what clerics ardently wanted knights to be, even how knights might have liked to see themselves portrayed’.  

Although presented as hermeneutic ideals by certain clerics — Adalbero of Laon, in his eleventh-century ‘Song for King Robert’ (Carmen ad Rotbertum Regem), simultaneously exhorts knights to assume the model of bellatores and castigates Odilo of Cluny, ‘master of the warlike order of monks’ (domínun monachorum bellicus ordo), for breeding disorder by blurring the distinction between bellatores and oratores — once in the cultural wild the three prescriptive models of knights as bellatores, curiales, and milites Christi mingled and cross-pollinated to contribute the spectrum of behaviour known today as ‘chivalry’.

This mingling of the various models of knighthood, both clerical and secular, allowed the twofold conception of warfare associated with the milites Christi model and the ‘right motive for conflict’ to move beyond its original crusading context, a context which was itself not so much a coherent ideal as it was ‘a magma of images, beliefs, fantasies, expectations, feelings, and sentiments’. This mingling, in turn, offers a new method of reading literary representations of violence as engaged with questions of the inward disposition, of love and hate, and of the coexistent nature of

61 The extent to which even spiritually–inflected chivalry matched the desires and expectations of the clergy, who asked one another whether chivalry out to be considered militia (idealised, pure knighthood) or malitia (evil), is another problem in and of itself; for a brief overview see Richard W. Kaeuper, ‘Chivalry and Fear’, in Writing and Fantasy, ed. Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White (London: Longman, 1999), 62–73.
62 Mastnak, Crusading Peace, 56.
spiritual and physical conflict. We should be wary, however, of applying this as a blanket or ‘one size fits all’ strategy of interpretation; as Andrew Lynch and Richard W. Kaeuper has shown, literary texts often made nuanced use of representations of violence which depicted physical conflicts of prowess with little, or any, associated spiritual significance. The question becomes, then, how one is to identify which interpretive modes are privileged within a literary text.

INTERLACE, LOVE, AND HATE IN CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES’ YVAIN

The medieval technique of interlace offers a practical guide to the manner in which a reader might identify privileged strategies of interpretation with respect to specific literary representations of violence. The term interlace (entrelacement) refers to an organisational structure which involves the introduction, abandonment, and resumption of a large number of episodes and themes both within and between texts. This latter style of thematic interlace, through which the poet draws attention to certain salient comparisons and contrasts while pushing less important material out of focus, is not unlike the process of polarisation in modern liquid crystal displays. In order for these displays to function, two special polarising filters must be placed perpendicular to one another in order to control the amount of light passing through the display and into the user’s eye. With only a single filter — or, in literary terms, a single narrative episode — what is presented to the audience is an undifferentiated field of bright white light.


light; only when certain elements are removed through the introduction of a second filter can we discern a differentiated, and thereby intelligible, field of information.

Few high medieval works of literature explore the conceptual tension between the martial motivations of love and hate as eloquently as Chrétien de Troyes’ twelfth-century romance *Yvain, the Knight with the Lion* (*Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion*). Critics have tended to perceive in this poem a central conflict between the knight’s duties to chivalry and love which is mapped onto a contrast between the supposed ‘violence’ of combat and the ‘non-violence’ of amorous emotion; on this reading, Yvain’s broken promise that he would return to his wife within a year of leaving for the tournaments represents an improper balance of these two duties, a balance which Yvain redresses during his adventures in the latter half of the poem. Based on Laudine’s warning that if Yvain were not to return from the tournaments in the allotted time then ‘[her] love will turn to hate’ (*Mes l’amors devanra haïne*: 568), I propose an alternative reading which builds on an opposition of the the motivational states of love and hate associated with the twofold warfare of the *milites Christi* concept. This

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65 All in–text quotations from *Yvain* will be from Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*, ed. and trans. William W. Kibler (New York: Garland, 1985).

reading is at its most forceful during the interlaced Yvain–Laudine and Yvain–Gawain conflicts in which first Yvain and then the narrator engage in an explicit discourse on the opposition of Love (Amors) and Hate (Haïne). The Yvain–Laudine conflict takes place early in the poem at the funeral of Laudine’s husband, Esclados; as he watches his future wife bury the husband he had killed, Yvain is wounded by Love and subsequently muses on the antagonism of Love and Hate. The Yvain–Gawain conflict, by contrast, takes place towards the end of the poem when Yvain and Gawain, their identities concealed beneath armour, unwittingly battle one another as champions for opposing causes while the narrator ponders the riddle of how Love and Hate can coexist in such circumstances. These two conflicts — one framed in the terms of an internal emotional struggle, the other in terms of an external physical struggle — are so similar in execution that they deserve to be quoted side by side:

[Yvain–Laudine]
I shall love my enemy forever,
for I must not bear [Laudine] any hatred
if I do not want to betray Love.
I must love whoever Love chooses.
And should she consider me her friend?
Yes, indeed, because I love her.
Yet I must call her my enemy
because she hates me, and rightfully so,
since I have killed the one she loved.
Am I therefore her enemy? 

[Yvain–Gawain]
My lord Gawain truly loves
Yvain and calls him his companion;
and Yvain loves him, wherever he might be.
... 
Is this not true and total Love?
Indeed, yes! And the Hatred,
is it not fully in evidence?
Yea, for it is certainly clear
that each doubtless would like
to cut off the other’s head... 

67 'toz jorz amerai m’anemie, / que je ne la doi pas haïr / se je ne voel Amor traîr. / Ce qu’Amors vialt
doi je amer. / Et doit mē ele ami clamer? Oïl, voir, por ce que je l’aim. / Et je m’anemie la claim / qu’ele me het, si n’a pas tort, / que ce qu’ele amoit li ai mort. Donques sui ge ses anemis?’: Yvain, 1454–63.
68 ‘Por voir mes sire Gauvains aime / Yvain et conpaingnon le claimme; / et Yvains lui, ou qué il soit... / N’est e Amors antiere et fine? / Oïl, certes! Et la Haïne, / don ne rest ele tote aperte? Oïl, que cē est
chose certe / que li uns a l’autre sans dote / voldroit avoir la teste rote...’: Yvain, 6009–22.
These explicit disquisitions on the antagonism of Love and Hate subsume the modern Western opposition of non-violence and violence within the larger category of conflict in order to question what is meant by the ‘right motive for conflict’ (*proeliandi recta voluntas*). If we consider first the battle between Yvain and Gawain, we can observe an apparent endorsement of Love over Hate as the nobler disposition to hold in conflict. The battle begins with Love ‘blind and vanquished and confused’ (*avuglee / et desconfite et desjuglee*: 6063–64), unable either to recognise the two combatants or to stop Hate — who sits ‘in the saddle’ (*Haïne molt an coche*: 6045) for this fight — from driving the knights to seek the death of one another:

What? Does Yvain wish to slay
his friend, my lord Gawain?
Yes, and the desire is mutual.\(^69\)

Their struggle is so fierce that onlookers remark that ‘[t]hey will never receive / their just merits and rewards’ (*Les merites et les desertes / ne lor an seront ja rendues*: 6168–69). On one level, of course, these ‘just merits and rewards’ can be read as referring to the prowess and glory which would accrue to the survivors of such a fierce fight; in light of the narrator’s comments about how Hatred induced a mutual desire to kill one another, however, it is possible to read these also as the spiritual rewards for a hard-fought battle as a judicial champion which are forfeited by their desire to kill one another, an overriding desire for the death of one’s opponent being considered a sure path to damnation:

If you happen to be killed while you are seeking only to kill another, you die a murderer. If you succeed, and by your will to overcome and to conquer you perchance kill a man, you live a murderer. Now it will not do to be a murderer, living or dead,

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victorious or vanquished. What an unhappy victory—to have conquered a man while yielding to vice, and to indulge in an empty glory at his fall when wrath and pride have gotten the better of you!  

The hateful disposition of Yvain and Gawain’s heart, then, can be read as inclining Yvain and Gawain not to virtue but rather to vice. It is worth recalling that the concept of hatred at work here is not the kind of ideological or personal enmity associated with persecution, vengeance, or what we might today call a crime of passion; rather, hatred aligns with the concept of the irascible faculty of the tripartite soul, the faculty by which man is roused to anger and action in the face of opposition. Within such a framework, hatred may be considered analogous to the evolutionary ‘flight or fight’ response insofar as both states are thought to be physiological (i.e. ‘spiritual’) responses to an antagonistic physical confrontation.

A similar intersection of the physical and the spiritual in circumstances of antagonistic conflict takes place during Yvain’s earlier encounter with Laudine, during which Love strikes him like an arrow through the eye. This is an image and a metaphor which Chrétien likely acquired during his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which Cupid takes up two arrows — one which engenders love, the other which banishes it — and looses them into Apollo and Daphne. Ovid likens the lover’s chase which ensues to the asymmetrical chase of a wild hunt, where the hunter pursues and the prey flees; Daphne ‘fled the very name of love, rejoicing in the deep fastness of the woods, and in the spoils of beasts which she had snared, vying with virgin Phoebe’

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(protinus alter amat, fugit altera nomen amantis / silvarum latebris captivarumque ferarum / exuviis gaudens innuptaeque aemula Phoebes: I.474–76), while Apollo pursues as a wolf hunts a lamb, a lion stalks a deer, or an eagle chases doves.\(^71\) Chrétien, though opening with this conventional hunting metaphor — ‘[love] has made a foray into his lands, / where it’s captured its prey’ ([amor] par sa terre a fet .i. cors; / s’a tote sa proie acoillie: 1362–63) — transforms the asymmetrical pursuit into an antagonistic confrontation when he describes how ‘the lady, although she doesn’t know it, / has fully avenged the death of her husband’ (Bien a vangiee, et si nel set, / la dame la mort son seignor: 1366–68) by inflicting a ‘blow more enduring / than any blow from lance or sword’ (cos a plus grant duree / que cos de lance ne d’espee: 1373–74). Love has ‘completely overwhelmed him’ (s’est tote a lui randue: 1381) and, in so doing, granted Laudine the active role more commonly associated with mutual antagonism than the passive role associated with the role of prey in the metaphor of the lover’s hunt.

This Yvain–Laudine confrontation, much like the Yvain–Gawain battle, interrogates a narrative of conflict — in this case, a conflict of the heart — in order to explore which of love and hate is the more righteous disposition. Prior to granting Yvain an audience, Laudine imagines herself interrogating her husband’s killer as to his intentions:

‘Do you seek to deny,’ she asked,
‘that my husband died at your hands?’
— ‘That,’ he said, ‘I cannot deny,
and I fully grant it.’ — ‘Then tell me why
you did it. To hurt me,

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Yvain’s answer is but a half-truth, for although (as he claims) he did not intend to hurt Laudine he omits to mention the hatred and spite which drove him to seek her husband’s death — an irascible hatred for Esclados, which emerged as a response to the antagonism of their conflict, and a spiteful disposition towards Arthur’s seneschal Kay, whose scorn and mockery had spurred Yvain to seek out Esclados in the first place. This exchange, in which Laudine takes Yvain’s half-truth at face value and considers him to have ‘done no wrong to me / and you did not wrong [Esclados]’ (rien vers moi mespris / ne vers lui n’eïss tu nul tort: 1773–74), serves as a peculiar kind of explanation as to why Laudine falls in love. Love, here, is presented as the alternative of hate; we are told she falls in love when she ‘found / that she had no right to hate him’ (trueve / qu’an lui hain n’a ele droit: 1778–79), but little is given in the way of positive explanation for her love other than Lunete’s avowal of his great prowess.

Indeed, although the two are married and she ‘so honoured / [Arthur’s court] ... / that some fool among them might have thought / that the favours and attentions she / showed them came from Love’ (la dame tant les enore / chacun [...] / que tel foi i a, cui il sanble / que d’Amors veignent li atret / et li sanblant qu’ele lor fer: 2459–62),


there is reason to believe that her love is a fragile thing which may not deserve the name:

But we can consider simple-minded
those who believe, when a lady
is polite to some poor wretch,
and makes him happy and embraces him,
that she’s in love with him;
a fool is happy for a little compliment,
and is easily cheered up by it.74

It is true that the narrator, in this extract, refers nominally to the love which Laudine shows to Arthur’s court, but its resonance with Laudine’s marriage to Yvain ought not to go unnoticed. Recall that, in persuading Laudine to grant Yvain an audience, Lunete’s argument revolved around the twin observations that Laudine needed a new defender of her lands and that Yvain, as the man who bested her husband in combat, was the most qualified to do so; Laudine’s imagined parlay with Yvain comes immediately after this argument, at which point she — knowing nothing about Yvain other than that he was a great warrior and that she ought not to hate him — begins to fall in love. Laudine’s treatment of the knights of Arthur’s court brings to the reader’s mind the fragility of her love for Yvain, for although Yvain’s prowess in battle never comes into question, her belief that she has no reason to hate him is based on a lie by omission. Laudine’s warning that ‘[her] love will turn to hate’ (Mes l’amors devanra haïne: 568) if Yvain does not return from the tournament within a year, though not literally connected to Yvain’s earlier lie, nevertheless harkens back to it and stems

74 ’Et cez puet an nices clamer / qui cuident qu’el les voelle amer, / qant une dame est si cortoise / qu’a un maleüreus adoise / qu’ele li fet joie et acole; / fos est liez de bele parole, / si l’a an molt tost amusé’: Yvain, 2463–69.
from the same internal flaws — flaws which Yvain must overcome if he is to truly embrace love and win Laudine’s heart.

As in the Yvain–Gawain battle, love is here presented as the more noble disposition to hold, the main point of difference being that where love triumphs in the latter physical conflict it is vanquished in the former emotional struggle. The interlaced relationship between these two episodes forms part of the poem’s broader narrative of sin and redemption in which Yvain transgresses against God in the first half of the poem and redeems himself in the latter half. Indeed, this theme lies at the very crux of Yvain’s puzzling (and, to a modern reader, morally troubling) decision to regain the attention and love of Laudine through bringing a storm upon her kingdom. When Yvain first summoned the storm he did so with hatred and spite in his heart, hoping only to slay Esclados and gall the wicked Kay, but when he summons the storm for the second time he does so out of love for Laudine, hoping to win back her affection. The physical effects of the storm in both cases is secondary to its spiritual effects. Consider the nature of Esclados’ complaint, in which the physical damage to his forest functions primarily as ‘evidence’ (garanz: 500) to the ‘shame and injury’ (honte et let: 492) he has suffered, and Laudine’s response to discovering that the mysterious knight commissioned to protect her is in fact her estranged husband:

‘[...] Every day of my life I would have harboured, as fire smoulders under the ashes, a pain I no longer want to bring up and which it is no longer fitting to mention, since I must be reconciled to him.’

My lord Yvain heard and understood that his cause was proceeding so well that he’d have his peace and reconciliation;
he said: ‘Milady, one should have mercy on a sinner […]’

Although Yvain’s observation that his cause was proceeding well may appear ironic, it is not inaccurate. The anger which Laudine had held in her heart can be understood as constituting a venial sin which puts her in danger of damnation in Hell, a fate alluded to first by her description of how ‘fire smoulders under the ashes’ (li feus cove an la cendre: 6779) and then by Yvain’s comment about having mercy on a sinner. Yvain, having saved himself from sin through his reformation as the ‘knight with the lion’, has saved also Laudine.

Although these episodes would seem to suggest that Chrétien stands on the side of Love in this poem, we must bear in mind that these episodes form only a small part of the larger tale. The Yvain–Gawain encounter, in particular, appears to be an exception rather than the rule, as it is the only encounter in the second half of the poem in which the lion does not take part. The character of the lion, I suggest, offers an alternative understanding of the relationship between Love and Hate in which the knight is exhorted to show love to his friends and hatred to his enemies. In his manner of fighting, the lion is the very embodiment of wrath; we are told how in battle with the giant the lion ‘sprang in anger and with great force’ (saut par ire et par grant force: 4223), how he tore apart the Seneschal such that ‘he exposed the entrails’ (les entrailles li perent: 4533), and how he ‘shook with rage’ (d’ire tranble: 5536) at the sight of the demons. Given Chrétien’s naturalistic approach to the behaviour of the

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75 “‘Tor jorz mes el cors me covast, / si com li feus cove an la cendre, / ce don ge ne voel or reprendre / ne ne me chaut del recorder / des qu’a lui m’estuet accorder.’ / Mes sire Yvains ot et antant / que ses afeires si bien prant / qu’il avra sa pes et s’accorde, / et dit: ‘Dame, misericorde / doit an de pecheor avoir’”: Yvain, 6778–87.
lion it is unsurprising that we do not find an explicit association of the human concept of ‘hatred’ with an animal, but Chrétien’s description of the lion’s behaviour, both generally in combat and specifically at the sight of the demon brothers, strongly suggests an association between hatred and the lion:

The lion began to tremble
as soon as he saw [the demons],
for he well knew and recognised
by the arms they carried
that they had come to fight his master;
he bristled and snarled,
shaking with rage in his eagerness to fight,
and beating the earth with his tail [...] 76

Gawain differs from Yvain’s previous opponents in that he is — or rather, ought to be — Yvain’s friend rather than his enemy, a point which Chrétien stresses through his contrast between ‘enemies’ (anemi: 6052–53) and ‘friends’ (amis: 6052, 6104), as well as his description of ‘my lord Gawain his friend’ (mon seignor gauvain son ami). These pairings of love and hate, friend and enemy, evoke what has been called ‘the Christian distinction and innovation’, 77 namely the injunction to love one’s enemy:

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:43–45)

With this injunction we return to the high medieval debate over what, exactly, was understood to be the Christian soldier’s ‘right motive for battle’ (proeliandi recta voluntas). If we associate Yvain’s lion with hatred and observe both its central role in

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76 ‘Li lyeons comance a fremir / tot maintenant quë il les voit, / qu’il set molt bien et aparçoit / quë a ces armes quë il tienent / conbatre a son seignor se viennent; / sie se herice et creste ansanble, / de hardemant et d’ire tranble / et bat la terre de sa coe’: Yvain, 5530–37.

the defeat of Yvain’s enemies and its notable absence in the battle against Yvain’s friends (with which we may include its quiescence in the reconciliation scene with Laudine), then we are led toward a reading of Yvain which endorses the martial framework in which violence against friends can be justified if done with love and violence against enemies can be justified if done with hate.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have proposed two main arguments — first, that there exists a significant difference between modern concepts of violence/non-violence and medieval concepts of physical/spiritual violence which must be accounted for in any discussion of medieval literary representations of violence, and second that the concept of the disposition of the heart regulated the legitimacy of conflict within certain mainstream models of violence in the medieval and early modern church. The case study from Yvain, with its explicit discussions on Love and Hate, offers a fairly straightforward entry into the question of how these conceptual models of violence influenced literary representations, but as the dissertation progresses we will start to explore how dispositions of the heart (and other methods of legitimisation) are encoded not just in explicit statements on the conflict between emotional states but also in narrative actions themselves. My argument, in short, is that violence, whether in its presence or absence, is not the primary phenomenological category of medieval literature; violence — physical violence — functions instead primarily as a representation, the sign of a deeper conflict between virtue and vice, the right and the repugnant, the divine and the devilish.
Prowess and the Distinction of Knights from Rustics in Chrétien de Troyes

Having explored the conceptual boundaries of violence in the Middle Ages it is time to see how representations of violence, both physical and non-physical, shaped the production of courtly (or ‘knightly’) masculinity, a fragile gender construction predicated upon differences in social station. Although this social station was determined through the construction of difference from stations both above and below, few scholars have explored the way in which this particular form of masculinity was constructed in opposition to, and was indeed threatened by, the courtly knight’s social inferiors.¹ This oversight is arguably in part the result of a belief that the genres of chansons de geste and romance — two of the primary vehicles for the transmission of courtly masculinity — were symptomatic of the gentry’s desire to escape into fantasy from a social and economic reality that was somehow hostile to the existence of knighthood, a desire which caused the ideal of the courtly masculine to become ‘more self-reflexive, more specular and more bounded, evincing a blindness to alterity’.² Yet

¹ One notable exception is Dominique Barthélemy, ‘Chivalric One–Upmanship in France, ca. 1100’, in European Transformations, eds Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 75–92. Many scholars, by contrast, have explored how courtly masculinity was constructed in relation to the monarchy; for a brief overview, see Simon Gaunt, Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42–43, n. 35.

² Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 44. Though developed with great insight by Gaunt, in its less sophisticated forms this belief has been damaging to our understanding of the relationship between chivalric ideals and society; as Craig Taylor has observed, ‘debates about the impact of chivalric culture on warfare
as Judith Kellogg has observed of the twelfth-century author of romance Chrétien de Troyes, although ‘cloaked in a fanciful, other-worldly veil, his romances are not the safe haven for aristocratic values that they seem, but at underlying levels actually prepare nobility to accept some of the fundamental changes in their attitudes towards society and themselves which they most openly and consciously resist’.  

This socio-ethical approach to twelfth-century romance, pioneered by Erich Köhler and extended by subsequent scholars, offers a new reading of romance combat as struggles between competing social identities.  

In this chapter, I argue that in the depiction of three linked episodes from two romances of Chrétien de Troyes — the encounter between Erec and a wicked dwarf in *Erec et Enide*; the dialogue between Calogrenant and an ugly peasant in *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion*; and the conflicts between an anonymous lord (championed by Yvain) and the giant Harpin of the Mountain, also in *Yvain* — we can observe a sustained inter- and intratextual representation of shame and symbolic violence being inflicted by representatives of the broadly-conceived ‘lower class’ upon members of the social class of knighthood. All three of these ‘low-born’ individuals — dwarf, peasant, and giant — embody the natural qualities of strength and courage which have effectively been scuppered by naïve and simplistic views about what the ideals of knighthood actually were in the Middle Ages’. Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood*, xii.  


received classical wisdom attributed to farmers and rustics. I will demonstrate how the display of this strength and courage by the three ‘rustics’ of Erec and Yvain imputes to the romantic knights a shame or honte for which they are obliged, but unable, to seek redress. Yvain’s battle with the giant Harpin collects the anxieties created by these frustrated desires and releases them in a cathartic martial showdown that affirms the superiority of the courtly over the rustic masculine.

THE RUSTIC DWARF

Erec’s confrontation with a dwarf ‘who was very evil and baseborn’ (qui molt fu fel et de put’ ere: 171),5 composed by Chrétien de Troyes prior to his writing of Yvain, provides a useful starting point for Chrétien’s representation of rustics. Early in the narrative we find Erec, one of Arthur’s knights, out riding with Guinevere and a damsel when they encounter the knight Yder, a damsel, and a wicked dwarf who is carrying a knotted whip. When they attempt to approach the knight, the dwarf strikes first the damsel and then Erec with a knotted whip and forbids them from passing. Though Erec’s ‘neck and face / were striped by the blow’ (Le col et la face ot vergiee / Erec del cop: 221–22), his greatest concern was not the wound to his flesh but the wound to his honour. ‘I will avenge / my shame,’ he swears, ‘or else I’ll augment it!’ (je vangerai / ma honte, ou je la crestrai!: 245–46). Erec is prevented from retaliating against the dwarf – ‘[Erec] knew full well that he could not / have the satisfaction of striking the dwarf’ (Il sot bien que del nain ferir / ne porroit il mie joir: 225–26) — by the presence of the dwarf’s master, for he had left his armour at home that day and feared that if the knight stirred to his dwarf’s defence then he ‘would at once have

5 All in–text quotations from Eric et Enide will be from Chrétien de Troyes, Erec and Enide, ed. and trans. Carleton W. Carroll (New York: Garland, 1987).
killed [Erec], in his pride’ (*tost m’oceïst par son orguel*: 243). Erec resolves instead to follow the dwarf and the knight until he can ‘find some armour / to rent or to borrow’ (*armes trover / ou a loier ou a prester*: 257–58) in order to battle the knight and avenge his shame.

Erec’s confrontation with the dwarf is not unusual for a medieval romance. From the *Vulgate Lancelot* to the *Roman d’Yder*, there exist numerous examples of what Vernon Harward has described as the ‘romance convention of a dwarf who without provocation attacks the hero, his horse, or accompanying damsel and reviles the hero with an insolence likewise provoked’. The lack of provocation involved in this giving of violence and offence, Harward argues, is not a realist motif of the historical court dwarf but rather a side-effect of the attempt by the authors of medieval romance either to disguise or downplay the supernatural strength of the dwarfs of Celtic tales. The display or insinuation of great physical strength and concurrent martial ability on the part of a truculent dwarf threatens the protagonist’s masculine identity by implying that the protagonist possesses little in the way of strength and martial ability compared to the dwarf, an implication subsequently refuted by the protagonist’s overcoming of the dwarf in combat. Within such a context, the display or insinuation of the dwarf’s strength provokes enmity between the dwarf and the protagonist; thus the removal, in the romantic tradition, of the dwarf’s supernatural strength while retaining his confrontational role renders the dwarf’s challenge to the protagonist’s masculine identity seemingly ‘unprovoked’. In the case of the challenge in *Erec* it is possible to read the wicked dwarf’s apparently unprovoked striking of

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7 Harward has quite thoroughly put to rest the idea that the dwarfs of Arthurian romance were based on historical court dwarfs. See Harward, *The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance*, 21–27.
Erec’s face as a claim to possess a superior masculine identity, a superiority which comes not from the possession of any great strength or martial ability on the dwarf’s part but rather from the inhibition of Erec’s ability to display his own masculinity.

Among knights, a claim to possess a form of superior masculine identity would typically be interpreted within the framework of ‘vertical honour’, or ‘the right to respect enjoyed by those who are superior’.⁸ Within the honour group of knighthood or chivalry this framework typically refers to the quality of prowess, which can be defined as ‘great skill, strength, and hardiness in using arms on horseback or on foot as well as [...] courage and determination’.⁹ Though a claim to superiority within the vertical honour system of prowess accorded a superior individual with a right to respect it imputed no shame to an inferior, and it was in fact possible for a knight to gain prowess after being defeated in battle provided that he acquitted himself well.¹⁰ While dwarfs could be polite and even chivalric in medieval romances, Joan Brumlik has demonstrated that ‘Chrétien makes it clear in Erec that Yder’s dwarf is not noble’, but is rather quite vicious and low-born; that is to say, he is outside the honour-group of knighthood and its systems of vertical honour.¹¹ As a result of their altercation, Erec complains that he has suffered a honte (shame). Speaking to the dwarf’s master, Yder, Erec explains to him that

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⁹ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 32.
¹¹ Though it’s possible that Chrétien’s description of the dwarf as ‘fu fel et de put’ ere’ (lit. ‘very wicked and of whore’s birth’: *Erec*, 171) could be a generic expletive, both Brumlik and Carroll consider this to be a remark on the dwarf’s common birth, a position with which I agree. Joam Brumlik, ‘The Knight, the Lady, and the Dwarf in Chrétien’s “Erec”’, *Quondam et Futuras*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1992), 54–72 (58).
you held me in very low esteem:
your action was far too haughty,
when you saw such an outrage,
and yet allowed it and were not displeased
on the part of such a freak and a dwarf,
who struck the maiden and me.
For this injury I must hate you\(^\text{12}\)

Erec is concerned not with the physical injury to his face but with what this injury signified. As a member of the honour-group of knighthood, Erec is supposed to be treated with respect by individuals of a lower social station than him. The dwarf’s unpunished, and therefore tacitly condoned, blow to Erec’s face implies that Erec does not possess the privileges of knighthood; it represents a challenge not to his prowess or vertical honour but to his ‘horizontal honour’, or ‘the right to be treated as a full or equal member of the honour group’ of the courtly knight.\(^\text{13}\) Erec describes this challenge as a *honte*, which (for our purposes) can be defined as a state of dishonour comprised of a challenge to one’s courtly or chivalric masculine identity — that is to say, the right to be identified as a true knight.\(^\text{14}\)

Erec’s desire to physically punish the dwarf for this insult appears to have struck at least one reader of Chrétien’s romance as troubling. A derivation of *Erec*, the

\(^{12}\) ‘*molt me tenis lors anpor vil: / trop grant orguel asez feïs, / quant tu tel oltrage veïs, / si le sofris et si te plot / d’une tel fauture et d’un bot, / qui feri la pucele et moi. / Por ce forfet haïr te doi*’: *Erec*, 1020–26.

\(^{13}\) Stewart, *Honor*, 54.

\(^{14}\) Though there exists much debate over the contrast between ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ and the extent to which each concept is an internal or external affect, the semantic field of *honte* in the twelfth century was invariably social even when it was also internal; ‘a person literally “has shame” when society has given it to him’: David Hult, ‘Lancelot’s Shame’, *Romance Philology*, vol. 42, no. 1 (1988), 30–50 (33). For an overview of this debate see Bill Burgwinkle, ‘Guilt, Shame, and Masculine Insufficiency: The Case of *La Fille du Comte de Pontieu*’, in *Guilt and Shame: Essays in French Literature, Thought and Visual Culture*, eds Jenny Chamarette and Jennifer Higgins (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 15–29.
anonymous Roman d’Yder of c. 1119–1216 adopts Erec’s antagonist Yder as its protagonist and has him come across a fortified house one night and decide to enter, dismounting and removing his armour as he does so. Yder approaches the fireplace beside which a dwarf is turning a spit. Without provocation the dwarf begins to hurl abuse at Yder, calling him a ‘mad glutton [...] come [...] to put his hand on my master’s food’,15 before picking up the spit and trying to strike Yder with it. In these events the poet has mirrored the outline of the events in Erec, where the unarmoured protagonist encounters a truculent dwarf who attempts to injure him. Yet once the dwarf has spent his energy on the attack, the poet changes the response of his knightly protagonist:

Yder jumped up, full of anger, and sighed deeply from the heart. The dwarf would have paid for it if it had not been shameful for a knight to take notice of anything that someone his size did.16

If we assume that Yder’s comment about the dwarf’s size pertains not to his literal size but to his ‘low’ social status (there is, so far as I can tell, no taboo on striking short people in medieval romance), the poet appears to be offering a moral correction to the events of Erec, suggesting that rather than become angry Erec ought to have ignored the dwarf’s boorish behaviour and sought amends from the dwarf’s master instead.17 Although Erec does indeed seek retribution from the dwarf’s master, Yder, he does so only because he was forcibly prevented from punishing the dwarf. This failure to

16 ‘Yder salt sus qui plein fu d’ire, / E mult parfont del quor sospire. / Ja le comparast, se ne fust honte / A chevalier de tenir conte / Del feit d’ome de sa mesure’: The Romance of Yder, 3877–84.
17 The poet’s interpretation selectively ignores the fact that where the whip connected in Erec the spit misses in Yder.
voluntarily follow the proper etiquette of knighthood encourages the reader to see this early version of Erec as a problematic, if not flawed, representative of knighthood.

THE UGLY PEASANT

Jean Frappier and T. B. W. Woods, among others, have noted the existence of a ‘striking parallelism’ in the narrative structures of *Erec* and *Yvain*.\(^\text{18}\) Robert G. Cook, on the assumption that ‘a pattern twice used must have had some importance in the author’s mind’, has traced this parallelism in greater detail and correlated the narrative role of the evil dwarf in *Erec* to the ugly peasant in *Yvain*.\(^\text{19}\) Although the similarities of these two episodes suggest that we ought also to look for signs of a *honte* within Calogrenant’s encounter with the ugly peasant, many critics have seen in this encounter no challenge to Calogrenant’s masculine identity at all. Carl Lindahl asserts that ‘the herdsman is clearly a social inferior to the questing knight, designated a churl and ignorant of adventure, the courtly ethic of the quest’,\(^\text{20}\) while D. D. R. Owen labels the peasant a ‘solitary, forbidding, yet ultimately helpful, herdsman’.\(^\text{21}\) Though Joseph M. Sullivan recognises that there is something unusual occurring in the relationship between Calogrenant and the peasant, he lays responsibility for this on Calogrenant’s shoulders by suggesting that the narrator’s unusual recollection is perhaps ‘an artefact of a confused mind that, as Joan Grimbert has remarked, has difficulty discerning


between appearance and reality’. Although these interpretations appear contrary to the idea that the peasant deliberately imputes a *honte* to Calogrenant they are not necessarily incongruous with it, for there appears to be a deliberately engineered ambiguity surrounding Calogrenant’s encounter with the peasant that is absent from the other encounters examined thus far. Calogrenant’s encounter, I argue, offers only a potential or implicit threat to his masculinity that is sufficient to impute to him a *honte* but insufficient to elicit a violent response.

The importance of masculine identity to the dialogue between Calogrenant and the ugly peasant is signalled at its very beginning when Calogrenant asks of the peasant, ‘Come now, tell me / if you are a good creature or not?’ (*Va, car me di / se tu es boene chose ou non*: 328–29) and the peasant responds that ‘he was a man’ (*qu’il est uns hom*: 330). Mid-way through the dialogue the peasant makes a claim to possess a superior masculine identity through a rhetorical display of his control over the herd of wild bulls which formed the first point of contact between Calogrenant and the peasant. Calogrenant, upon first spotting the bulls, reveals an un-masculine fear of the bulls when he tells his audience ‘that [he] backed off a little way, / for no beast is as fierce / nor more bellicose than a bull’ (*c’une piece me treis arriere, / que nule beste n’est tant fiere / ne plus orguelleuse de tor*: 285–87). The peasant exhibits no such timidity, explaining to Calogrenant how whenever one of the bulls try to escape

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{I grab it so by its two horns} \\
&\text{with my tough and strong hands} \\
&\text{that the others tremble in fear}
\end{align*}
\]

The strength and courage required for this feat, both of which are implied through Calogrenant’s expression of incredulity and the peasant’s claim that if anyone else attempted this feat ‘he would be killed at once’ (qu’il ne fust maintenant ocis: 354), would have conferred a great deal of status within the system of courtly masculinity — status which the peasant claims when he observes after this rhetorical demonstration that ‘Thus I am lord over my beasts’ (Einsi sui de mes bestes sire: 355), a statement which juxtaposes (through rhyme) his title of sire with Calogrenant’s inferior title of chevalier. The relative status of the peasant to Calogrenant is encoded not only through this rhetoric of relative prowess but also within their spatial relationships; as Sullivan has observed, ‘the herdsman’s assumption of vertical superiority [atop the tree stump] and Calogrenant’s resultant position at the herdsman’s feet would arguably suggest an odd elevation relative to the hero of the herdsman’s worth — an elevation that is completely out of line with the herdsman’s actual social status as a peasant pastoralist’. We can also witness a reversal of the power relationships within the dialogue. When Calogrenant first approaches, the peasant is silent; Calogrenant observes that ‘[the peasant] looked at me, without saying a word, / no more than a beast would have’ (si m’esgarda, ne mot ne dist, / ne plus c’une beste feïst: 323–24). The peasant speaks only when spoken to, all of his dialogue uttered in response to Calogrenant’s questions. After his assertion of lordship, the pattern changes; now the peasant is the one asking the questions. First he demands that ‘it’s [Calogrenant’s] turn

23 ‘si l’estraing si per les .ii. corz, / es poinz que j’ai et durs et force, / que les autres de peor tranblent / et tot environ moi s’asanblent, / ausi com por merci crīer’: Erec, 347–51.

to tell [the peasant] what sort of man you are and what you’re seeking’ (tu me redevroies dire / quiex hom tu ies et que tu quiers: 356–57), before pressing Calogrenant further by asking him, upon being told that Calogrenant is seeking what he cannot find, ‘And what do you wish to find?’ (Et que voldroies tu trover?: 361). Calogrenant’s responses, meanwhile, are ‘conspicuously obsequious and clearly below the dignity of one of Arthur’s knights’.25

The peasant’s claim to be ignorant of the kind of adventure Calogrenant is seeking is one of the most interesting examples of how his ambiguous speech is able to create insult without permitting retribution. The first line of the peasant’s claim, once uttered, is undeniably insulting: informed that Calogrenant seeks adventure, the peasant replies that ‘In this [...] you will surely fail’ (A ce [...] faudres tu bien: 367). Ambiguity enters only after these insulting words linger in the air for a moment, after which the peasant ‘explains’ that ‘I know nothing of adventure, / nor have I ever heard talk of it’ (d’aventure ne sai je rien, / n’onques mes n’en oï parler: 368–69). This explanation can, and has, been construed as meaning that Yvain will fail in his search for adventure because the peasant knows nothing about it and therefore cannot advise him, but this retrospective nullification of insult is somewhat undermined when the peasant then proceeds to direct Calogrenant to the stone and the spring — that is to say, to precisely the kind of adventure which Calogrenant sought. Leaving aside the issue of whether the peasant actually knows what is meant by ‘adventure’, we can observe that in their dialogue the peasant repeatedly asserts a masculine identity that is superior to that possessed by Calogrenant, an assertion in which Calogrenant eventually becomes complicit. Like the dwarf from Erec, the peasant’s location

outside of the honour group of knighthood turns what would have been a friendly competition of prowess among knights into a honte, a threat to Calogrenant’s right to be identified as a true knight.

**HARPIN OF THE MOUNTAIN**

In addition to his cross-textual comparison with the dwarf of Erec, Chrétien encodes an intratextual comparison of the ugly peasant of Yvain with the giant Harpin of the Mountain from later in the romance. Though the giants of medieval romance are often seen as monstrous Saracens, ‘Wild Men’, or indigenous peoples, representatives of the ‘dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster [as] an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond’, in this case we are encouraged to read Harpin as a proximate or interior Other, a monstrous version of the ugly peasant we met earlier.26 The giant is presented to the imagination as a blank slate etched only with minimalist descriptions of his ‘large, squared stave’ (*pel [...] grant et quarré*: 4095), his ‘bearskin’ (*piax*: 4203), and his habit of ‘bellowing and roaring like a wild bull’ (*si bret et crie come tors*: 4230) — all features which point back to the club-wielding, skin-wearing, bull-herding peasant. This connection between the giant and the peasant appears not to have gone unrecognised by the illustrator of the version of Yvain found in MS BnF fr. 1433, who depicts Harpin in the guise of an oversized peasant riding a horse while his four abducted knights huddle pale and frightened in the background, ‘trembl[ing] in fear’ (*de peor tranblant*: 349) like the peasant’s subdued bulls. The appearance of this rustic giant was also foreshadowed in the description of the ugly peasant’s great stature. Though mistakenly interpreted by a number of critics as meaning that the peasant was

of monstrous size, the peasant only attains this height once he has ‘climbed upon a tree trunk, where he towered a good seventeen feet high’ (et fu montez desor i. tronc, /s’ot bien xvii. piez de lonc: 321–22). The long description of the peasant’s large head, flat face, dark colouration, excessive body and facial hair, and humpbacked spine (which would have likely made the peasant shorter than Calogrenant had he been standing on the ground) are in fact characteristic features of the romance dwarf, which — when combined with narrative parallels between Erec and Yvain identified by Cook and the peasant’s enhanced stature upon the tree trunk — create a subtle double allusion to both the evil dwarf of Erec and the giant Harpin of Yvain.

Like the dwarf, the giant challenges the masculine identity of a knightly individual. With his great strength Harpin besieges the city of a nameless lord and makes a mockery of his duty to protect both land and people. Unable to find a knight within the town who is mighty enough to do battle with the giant, the lord begs Yvain to help, and Yvain agrees on the provision that the giant arrives before he has to leave the next day. The giant arrives just in time and begins to bellow threats and insults until Yvain rides out to confront him. The giant, with ‘fierce bravado’ (fier hardemant: 4184), attempts to intimidate Yvain by claiming that whoever sent him must have wanted revenge, implying that the giant’s victory was a foregone conclusion, but Yvain scorns this bluster and defeats the giant in battle.


28 Harward, The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance, 30.
Harpin’s enormous strength functions to emasculate the lord by reducing him to feminine passivity. As Ruth Karras has argued, ‘the line between active and passive partner in the Middle Ages was very sharp, and closely related to gender roles. To be active was masculine, regardless of the gender of one’s partner, and to be passive was to be feminine.’ Harpin takes what he wants on account of his enormous strength, while the lord can do nothing but lament, weep, and await help from God. When the giant finally arrives and begins to cry his insults, ‘[the lord] kept bemoaning his sad fate, / and wept profusely and sighed’ (Molt se claimme dolanz cheitis, / et plore formant, et sopire: 4134–35). Yvain, meanwhile, cries for someone to ‘Bring me my horse and my armour!’ (Ça, mes armes et mon cheval!; 4147) The lord is left behind, crumpled in the corner, as Yvain rides out to face the giant while behind him the whole town waits fearful and silent, each ‘afraid / that the wicked devil’ (molt grant peor / que li maufez: 4174–75) would slay Yvain as they ‘prayed to God silently’ (prie Deu molt dolcement: 4183).

It is significant that the giant demands the lord’s daughter not for himself but in order that he may turn her over to his stable-boys. A medieval audience looking for a social analogy to the giant may have found it in his campaign against the town which ‘feared no assault / by mangonel or catapult, / for it was extremely well fortified’ (ne cremoit assaut / de mangonel ne de perriere, / qu’il estoit forz a grant meniere: 3778–80) a representation of the siege and the knightly mode of warfare. Such an analogy

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29 On giants and sexuality in general, see Cohen, Of Giants; Barbara Creed, The Monstrous–Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1993); and Oswald, Monsters, Gender and Sexuality.

could potentially locate the giant within the honour-group of knighthood, rendering his challenge to the lord a challenge to his prowess (vertical honour) rather his right to be identified and respected as a knight (horizontal honour). Through the giant’s claim that he will turn the daughter over to the serving boys rather than taking her for a wife, Chrétien indicates that the giant has no interest in advancing his social station through marriage, and therefore no interest in taking part in the hierarchy of vertical honour. In this way, the giant’s offensive against the town is imagined not so much as a form of siege warfare between knights as it is a siege against the very concept of knighthood itself.

In addition to the giant’s emasculating strength, Chrétien appears to have taken pains to establish the giant’s opinion of himself as courageous while simultaneously undermining this opinion by implying that the giant is in fact not courageous but rash. The medieval virtue of courage was understood as an Aristotelian mean between fear and confidence, where the man who exceeds in fear is a coward while the man who exceeds in confidence rash. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that the rash man is ‘thought to be boastful and only a pretender to courage; at all events, as the brave man is with regards to what is terrible, so the rash man wishes to appear’. We can see evidence of the indirect transmission of this attitude into Yvain when Kay,

31 Kellogg makes this reading in *Medieval Artistry and Exchange*, 79–80, where she argues that the episode with Harpin ‘is in many ways an emotional and symbolic double for the Count Alier episode’, both of which describe ‘the same problem, the devastating effect of pillage and plunder on the aristocracy’.


upon arriving at the magic spring, claims that Yvain had boasted of his desire to defeat the knight of the spring ‘out of overweening pride’:

There’s a big difference between the braggart and the brave;
the braggart tells tall stories
about himself around the fire,
thinking all his listeners are fools
and that no one really knows him.
But the brave man would be very upset
if he heard his own valiant deeds
being told to another.34

Kay’s criticism of Yvain is echoed in Yvain’s criticism of the giant, whom he labels as ‘vile and conceited’ (fel et estolz: 4138) upon hearing him boast about what he would do the king’s children. The giant continues to bluster with ‘fierce bravado’ (fier hardemant: 4184) as Yvain rides up to confront him, claiming that whoever had sent Yvain must not have cared much for the knight and would soon have ‘good vengeance / for whatever wrong [Yvain] did him’ (molt a bien so vengence prise / de qanque tu li as forfet: 4190–91). Yvain’s scorn of the giant’s words, telling him to ‘do your best, and I’ll do mine, / for such idle chatter wearies me’ (fai ton mialz et je le mien, / que parole oiseuse me lasse: 4194–95), can be read as both a repudiation of either his own earlier behaviour or Kay’s description of it (depending on whether you believe Yvain to have acted rashly or not) and as a dismissal of the giant’s supposed courage as nothing more than a rash excess of confidence.

This latter interpretation is reinforced by the appearance of the giant’s companion, an ugly dwarf who was ‘beating [the captive sons] constantly / with a six-

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34 ‘Molt a entre malvés et preu: / que li malvés antor le feu / dit de lui une grant parole, / sit tient tote le gent por fole / et cuide que l’en nel conoisse. / Et li preuz avroiet grant angoisse, / s’il ooit redire a autrui / les proesces qui sont an lui’: Yvain, 2195–202.
knot whip, / thinking to show his bravery in this manner’ (onques ne les fine de batre / d’unes corgiees a .vi. neuz / don molt cuidoit feire que preuz: 4108–10). The dwarf’s contemptible striking of a defenceless captive not only undermines the giant’s own pretensions to courage by juxtaposing it with fear, the opposite end of the spectrum of courage from confidence (for who would strike an unarmed adversary but the one who fears striking an armed one?), but also serves to provide an interpretive gloss upon the episode with the wicked dwarf from Erec. The wicked dwarf’s unprovoked whipping of the damsel and Erec appears to be glossed here as an attempt by the dwarf to demonstrate a semblance of courage which is in truth born of fear and bluster, the implication being that the dwarf would not have dared strike Erec had he been armed and prepared for battle with his master, Yder. In this way, Chrétien retrospectively adjusts his audience’s interpretation of the events of his earlier romance, Erec, in order to create a new intertextual theme surrounding the relationship of strength, courage, and social class.

**WHAT MAKES THE RUSTIC A THREAT**

Although the social mechanisms through which the dwarf, the peasant, and the giant are able to safely boast of their strength and courage, thereby inflicting a honte upon their knightly adversaries, have now been discussed at some length, we have yet to explore how the proximity of the group I have called ‘the peasantry’ or ‘rustics’ to the social class of knighthood exacerbated, and perhaps even created, the threat posed by these three literary characters. Contrary to the classic image of a largely static Middle Ages or the more sophisticated contrast between the mobile insular and static continental societies, there was a great deal of movement both up and down the social
ladder in most parts of Western Europe, especially at the level just below the nobility.\textsuperscript{35} It was this mobility which permitted the slow growth in the social prestige of a new class of martial aristocracy, that of the knights, whose members sought to distinguish themselves from the non-noble stock from which they were descended.\textsuperscript{36} Many individual knights and their families achieved only mixed success for, as previously noted, this mobility worked in both directions.\textsuperscript{37} In England we can see evidence of what Jean Camel has called ‘occasional’ or ‘agrarian’ knights, ‘men who held free land but not by a specifically military tenure [...] armed as knights if and when their lord needed them, perhaps only for a few weeks in their entire lives’.\textsuperscript{38} Though a relatively normalised part of the English system, the status of such knights in France appears to have been frowned upon; in the statutes of Fergus from 1235 we can find a proclamation stating that if a knight spends all his time ‘ploughing, digging, carting [...] or doing other agricultural labour, he should not have the knight’s liberty’ (\textit{arando, fodiendo, ligno adducendo cum asino [...] et alia opera rustica faciendo pro magna parte, non habeat militis libertatem}).\textsuperscript{39} What made the peasantry threatening to the knightly aristocracy of the twelfth century was in fact their social proximity; the threat


\textsuperscript{37} Mundy, \textit{Europe in the High Middle Ages}, 170.


of an ill-attired peasant with a pitchfork to a fully armed knight on a charger was not physical, but existential:

If the squire should be dubbed a knight because of fineness of features or a well-built, well-proportioned body, or because he has fair hair or carries a mirror in his purse, you could make a knight of the fine son of a peasant farmer, or of a fine woman, and if you do so, you dishonour and scorn the antiquity of an honourable lineage and diminish to baseness the greater nobility that God has bestowed upon man than woman. And for such scorn and dishonour you debase and diminish the Order of Chivalry.40

Sigmund Freud described the existential threat posed by an Other who is in fact more proximate than distant as ‘the narcissism of small differences […] the phenomenon that it is precisely communities with adjoining territories, and related to each other in other ways as well, who are engaged in constant feuds and ridiculing each other’.41 Anton Blok has affirmed the validity of this particular theory by tracing its reception across the twentieth century through thinkers as varied and important as Émile Durkheim, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Norbert Elias.42 Perhaps the most significant thinker, for our purposes, is Pierre Bourdieu, who affirmed and expanded Freud’s theory in his work on distinction. ‘Social identity lies in difference’, he asserted, ‘and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat’

40 *Si per bellesa de faysons ni per gran cors cordat, per rosses cabeyls ni per mirayl en borsa, escuder deu ésser adobat a cavayler, de bell fiyl de pagés o de bella fembra poràs fer cavayler; e si ho fas, entequitut de linatge honrat desonres e menysprees, e la nobilitat que Déus ha donada a home major que a fembra devales en viltat. E per aytal menyspreu e desonor aviles e baixes l’orde de cavaylaria*; Ramon Llull, *Llibre de l’orde de cavalleria*, ed. Albert Soler i Llopart (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1988), III, 7, 191; trans.: *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, trans. Noel Fallows (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 57–58.
(l’identité sociale résidant dans la différence, c’est par rapport au plus proche, qui représente la plus grande menace). It would appear that the ever-present danger that a knightly family could find themselves reduced to the status from which they had only recently arisen, a danger brought into sharp focus by the upward mobility of the lower social orders, created a sense of existential anxiety on the part of these newly noble families.

The adoption of Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus’s late Roman treatise De re militari as ‘the bible of warfare throughout the middle ages’ embedded the existential threat posed by the socially mobile peasantry within the didactic foundations of the martial aristocracy.44 Though readers appear to have skipped over Vegetius’s advice on the height and geographic origins of the ideal recruit, judging from the evidence of reader responses left on the more than two hundred extant medieval copies of the De re militari it would appear that they lingered over his advice on the question of whether the rural or urban youth is better suited for military service and in which trade the ideal youth ought to be found.45 Vegetius extolled the virtues of the boy ‘who grows up in the open air and is kept in condition by hard work, who has borne the heat of the sun, is scornful of the shade, unaccustomed to the baths, unfamiliar with luxuries, who is of simple spirit, content with little’ (quae sub divo et in labore nutritur, solis patiens, umbrae neglegens, balnearum nescia, deliciarum ignara, simplicis animi, parvo

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43 Bourdieu, Distinction, 481.
45 Allmand, The De Re Militari of Vegetius, 18–20.
contenta), and advised recruiters to look for recruits among the rusticam plebem, the ‘men of the country’, who included ‘blacksmiths, carpenters, butchers, and hunters of stags and boars’ (fabros ferrarios, carpentarios, macellarios, et cervorum aprorumque venatores), but not ‘fishermen, fowlers, confectioners, linen-weavers, and all who seem to do things that pertain to womanly affairs’ (piscatores, aucupes, dulciarios, linteones, omnesque, qui aliquid tractasse videbuntur ad gynaecea pertinens).46 His closing remark in the chapter advising recruiters to look among the rusticam plebem attracted reader responses in fifty extant manuscripts, almost a quarter of all surviving Latin manuscript versions of the treatise:

It seems, therefore, that the strength of the army ought to be recruited chiefly from the rural areas; for I do not know what man can fear death less than one who knows less about the luxuries of life.47

The selection of appropriate recruits was of no small importance to Vegetius, who in his chapter on the professions asserted that ‘this is the thing on which the safety of the entire republic hinges, that recruits be chosen who are outstanding, not only in corpibus but also in animis’ (hoc est in quo totius reipublicae salus vertitur, ut tirones non tantum corporibus sed etiam animis praestantissimi diligantur).48 Although the meaning of corpibus, within the context of the bodily characteristics of strength and vigour previously discussed, is relatively unambiguous, the meaning of animis is less clear. The Latin word animus could mean the spiritual or rational principle of life, but it could also mean courage or confidence. Though it is tempting to read this instance

47 ‘Ex agris ergo supplendum robur praecipue videtur exercitus; nescio quomodo enim minus mortem timet qui minus deliciarum novit in vita’: Vegetius, Epitoma, 14–15.
48 Vegetius, Epitoma, 18–19.
of the word in the light of Vegetius’s ‘emphasis towards the intellectualisation and rationalisation of war’, this intellectual aspect applied primarily to the ‘cerebral qualities of the prince and his lieutenants’ and not to ordinary soldiers or knights. A better interpretation would be to read animis as meaning ‘courage’; that is to say, recruits ought ideally to be outstanding in both strength and courage. The danger of such a reading is that it would elevate members of the rustici — such as the dwarf, peasant, and giant of Erec and Yvain — above the sons of knights in terms of who would be the better military recruit. The surrounding text provides no definitive answer as to how we should interpret animis, an interpretive uncertainty which may have contributed to the unusually high number of marginal comments added by readers who appeared intent on nullifying the transgressive interpretation of the peasant-as-ideal-soldier by stressing the importance of good breeding (genus) for the possession of moral virtues.

To say that readers of Vegetius sought to erase the transgressive potential of Vegetius’s writing on the rustici through marginal commentary is not to say that the knightly aristocracy of the twelfth century imagined that they needed to distinguish themselves from the ploughmen or indentured serfs who worked the land. Though tripartite schemes of medieval society are the most well-known, more common

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50 This reading is perhaps undermined by Vegetius’s later aphoristic claim that ‘nature gives birth to a few brave men, but effort with good training render many men brave’ (*paucos viros fortes natura procreat, bona institutione plures reddit industria*), which may imply that we ought to read animus as the capacity to acquire ‘practical courage and cowardice [...] dependent on experience, particular circumstances and the present state of army morale’. See Lynch, ‘Beyond Shame’, 6.
51 One reader took it upon himself to clarify Vegetius’s words by writing in the margin ‘strength of body and wisdom of mind’ (*fortitudo corporis et sapientia animi*): Allmand, *The De Re Militari of Vegetius*, 20, n. 7.
between the fifth and eleventh centuries were bipartite schemes which distinguished between the clergy and the laity, or the strong and the weak, or the rich and the poor, or the free and the unfree. This latter category of the weak, poor, and unfree was construed broadly by medieval writers, who tended to use the words *rusticus*, *pauper*, and *villanus* interchangeably. Among the writers of romance, Michel Mollat notes that it became a literary cliché to associate peasants with paupers, where their material poverty and physical ugliness was used to reflect their moral poverty and spiritual ugliness. The example Mollat uses to support his point — the peasant Rigaut from the *Geste de Garin le Lorrain*, who had ‘enormous arms, huge limbs, eyes a hand’s breadth apart, broad shoulders, an enormous chest, bristling hair, and a face black as coal’ — bears more than a passing resemblance to the ugly peasant from *Yvain*. Such characters in romance, I suggest, should be seen as examples not specifically of herdsmen or serfs, but of the ‘common folk’ more generally.

A more nuanced view of the social hierarchy of medieval France which distinguishes between the *rustici* and the higher echelons of the common-born can be found in the late twelfth-century treatise *De arte honeste amandi* by one ‘Andreas Capellanus’ which features Chrétien’s own patroness, Marie de Champagne, ruling over the courts of love with her mother and other noble ladies. The largest portion of

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Andreas’s work is given over to a series of dialogues between amorous lovers and recalcitrant beloveds of various social stations — the common plebs, the lesser nobiles, and the greater nobiliiores. Separated from these dialogues, the chapter De amore rusticorum (‘Of the Love of Peasants’) contrasts the ‘middle-class’ plebs with the lower rustici, ‘lest you should consider that what we have already said about the love of the plebs applies also to agricultores’ (Sed ne id, quod superius de plebeiorum amore tractavimus, ad agricultores crederes esse referendum). Andreas identifies the rustici by their hard labour and the solace of their work with plough and mattock, claiming that they are rarely found in Love’s court but are instead driven by base animal drives to mate like horses or mules. The plebs, on the other hand, are defined (in dialogue with a female beloved of the lesser nobility) as one who ‘for the space of a whole week devotes all his effort to the various gains of business (varii mercimonii lucris) and then on the seventh day, his day of rest, tries to enjoy the gifts of love’ (totius hebdomadae tractu varii mercimonii lucris toto mentis intendit affectu, septima suae quietis die quaeat amoris vacare muneribus). The noblewoman’s talk of ‘varii mercimonii lucris’ suggests that we identify Andreas’s plebs with the growing social class of the burgesses, those common-born townspeople who had grown wealthy on the profits of mercantile and industrial enterprise.

(Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), 88–110 (96), n. 34, for an overview of the scholarship surrounding the provenance of this text.

56 Andreas Capellanus, De amore libri tres (Castelló de la Plana: [Sociedad castellonense de cultura], 1930), 136; trans.: The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1941), 149.

57 Andreas, De amore, 21; The Art of Courtly Love, 46.

At the height of their social dominance and political control between the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries many burgesses sought to gain entrance to the nobility. Having acquired nobility, these new-minted men tended to turn their backs on the trades that had brought them wealth and strove to distinguish themselves from the common folk from whom they were descended. We might be tempted therefore, like Dominique Barthélémy, to see ‘the trend among knights at the turn of the twelfth century to affirm solidarity among themselves and to engage in chivalric one-upmanship with the support of their princes [...] as a response to the emergence of a new urban bourgeoisie that was threatening them in some way’.59 To judge from the opinion of Andreas’s beloved noblewoman, this (perceived) threat was the potential dilution, if not dissolution, of the social class of the nobili:

It is not without cause or reason that this distinction of rank has been found among men from the very beginning; it is so that every man will stay within the bounds of his own class and be content with all things therein and never presume to arrogate to himself the things that were naturally set aside as belonging to a higher class, but will leave them severely alone. Who are you, then, to try to defile such ancient statutes and under the pretence of love to attempt to subvert the precepts of our ancestors and so presumptuously go beyond the limits of your own class? If I should so far forget my senses as to be induced to assent to what you say, your heart would not be able to endure such great things.60

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59 Barthélémy, ‘Chivalric One-Upmanship’, 75–92.
60 ‘Non enim otiose vel sine causa fuit ab aevi primordio inter homines ordinum reperta distinctio, sed ut quisque intra generis saepta permaneat et per omnia sui ordinis finibus contentus existat, et ea, quae maioris sunt ordinis stabilita natura, sibi nullus usurpare prae sumat, sed ipsa tanquam aliena relinquat. Quis ergo tu es, qui tam antiqua conaris temerare statuta et sub amoris commento maiorum praecepta subvertere tuisque generis tanta niteris praesumptione metas excedere? Nam si adeo mei sensus obliviosa manerem, ut tua verba me cogerent his, quae dicis, annuere, cor tamen tuum non esset tam grandia tolerare sufficiens’: Andreas, De amore, 21–22; The Art of Courtly Love, 46. See also

When talking about how ‘the peasantry’ threatened the class identity of the knights it is necessary to bear in mind the perspective from which this statement is made.\textsuperscript{61} Within the context of \textit{Yvain} and other high medieval romances, ‘the peasantry’ forms a largely undifferentiated class whose salient feature tends not to be their wealth, occupation, or residence, but their social status. Though we, as scholars, may look back and argue that ‘this new class [of the burgesses], for all its prudence, was itself a kind of aristocracy, and one far less close to the common people of town and country than used to be thought in the nineteenth century’,\textsuperscript{62} this is no guarantee that members of the aristocracy — and particularly the lower aristocracy (who had the most vested interest in casting the burgesses as ‘common’ and therefore ‘Other’) — differentiated between the burgesses and the peasants in any meaningful way.\textsuperscript{63} In a poem (mis)attributed to Bertran de Born, a southern French baron and troubadour from the latter part of the twelfth century, we find precisely this kind of conflation of the various kinds of lower classes:

\begin{quote}
A peasant has the habits of a pig, for he is bored by noble living; when such a man rises to great riches, his wealth drives him mad [...] So a man’s a fool who doesn’t...
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{62} Barthélemy, ‘Chivalric One–Upsmanship’, 87.

\textsuperscript{63} We might see in the attitude of the aristocracy something of twentieth–century scholars’ tendency to conflate the upper bourgeoisie and the serfs under the singular label \textit{laboratores} when in fact ‘in the society of what has been called the first feudal age, up to about the middle of the twelfth century, the mass of manual workers quite simply did not exist’: Le Goff, \textit{Medieval Civilisation}, 270.
knock him down when he sees him climbing up, because once a peasant has established himself [...] he has no peer in evil, for he spoils everything he can reach.\textsuperscript{64} ‘Once a peasant, always a peasant’ appears to be the message. This poet is not unique, for the vernacular poets of southern France ‘often voiced repressive hostility towards upwardly mobile peasants who threatened class barriers and obtained power and influence desired by troubadours and minor nobility’.\textsuperscript{65} What this means is that when looking for traces of the gentry’s attitudes towards the socially mobile upper crust of the peasantry we ought not to restrict ourselves to just the obvious representations of burgesses as a kind of mercantile ‘Fourth Estate’. Rather, if we adopt the perspective of aristocrats like the pseudo-Bertran de Born then we can see in representations of even rustic peasants — Erec’s wicked dwarf, who is described as ‘very evil and baseborn’ (\textit{fu fel et de put’ ere}: 171); Yvain’s giant Harpin of the Mountain, who exists as a \textit{simulacrum} of the peasantry, a monstrous distortion of the representation of the ugly peasant; and the ugly peasant of \textit{Yvain} himself — we can see traces of how the gentry perceived themselves and their proximate social inferiors.

\textbf{THE VIOLENT GIFT OF SERVICE}

So far we have discussed the knightly protagonist’s inability to respond to his \textit{honte} in terms of the specific narratives of Chrétien de Troyes’ romances. Erec is unable to respond to the ugly dwarf due to the presence of his master; Calogrenant is hampered

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] ‘\textit{Vilas a costum de trueia / que de gent viure s’emueia; / e quan en gran ricor pueia / l’avers lo fai folleiar [...] Per qu’es folhis qui non l’amerma / qan lo ve sobrepuiar, / quar vilas, pus si coferma [...] de maleza non a par, / que tot quan cossec aderma’}: Bertran de Born, \textit{The Poems of the Troubadour Bertran de Born}, eds William D. Paden, Jr., Tilde Sankovitch, and Patricia H. Stäblein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 321–22.
\item[65] Paterson, \textit{The World of the Troubadours}, 139.
\end{footnotes}
by the ambiguity of the ugly peasant’s insults; the lord lacks the martial strength to defeat the giant. In this final part I will argue that these are not narrative idiosyncrasies but rather representations of the historic social protections afforded to the common-born by members of the honour-group of knighthood. Yvain’s ability to confront and subsequently vanquish the giant Harpin, meanwhile, will be revealed as possible because the giant falls outside of Christian society, rendering him a valid target for aggressive, violent, and cathartic retribution.

Although the abuse and exploitation of peasants was rife in the medieval period, the necessity of the peasant to the survival of his social and economic superiors meant that such abuse was rarely condoned in theory. Drawing upon Plutarch’s analogy of the political body to the human body, the twelfth-century political writer John of Salisbury wrote that the ‘husbandmen correspond to the feet, which always cleave to the soil [...] Take away the support of the feet from the strongest body, and it cannot move forward by its own power, but must creep painfully and shamefully on its hands, or else be moved by means of brute animals’ (Pedibus vero solo iugiter inhaerentibus, agricolae coaptantur [...] Pedum adminicula robustissimo corpore tolle, suis viribus non procedet, sed aut turpiter, inutiliter, & moleste manibus repet, aut brutorum animalium ope movebitur). The importance of the peasantry to the social order in turn provided them with a certain degree of protection which was more than merely theoretical. The oath imposed upon two warring nobles by Bishop Warin

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of Beauvais in 1023, where the nobles were sworn to ‘not seize villeins of either sex, or sergeants or merchants, or their coins, or hold them for ransom, or ruin them with exactions on account of their lord’s war, or whip them for their possessions’ (Villanum et villanam vel servientes aut mercatores non preudam nec denarios corum tollam, nec redimere cos faciam, nec suum habere eis tollam ut perdant propter werram senioris sui nec flagellabo eos propter substantiam suam), can be taken as an example of the kind of duty imposed upon knights by clerics and royalty to protect the lower classes.68 This duty would, over time, come to be adopted as a chivalric ideal by the knights themselves; in the thirteenth century we find Ramon Llull claiming that it ‘the office of the knight to own a castle and horse in order to guard the highways and defend the peasants’ (Offici de cavayler és aver casteyl e cavayl per guardar los camins e per deffendre lauradors).69

In order to present peasants as outside this protection — as ‘not human, as meriting no consideration as fellow Christians by the dominant elements of society’ — they had to be represented as ‘exaggerated and grotesque’ in the manner of Saracens, Jews, lepers, and other groups normally outside societal protection.70 The ugly peasant of Yvain however, though skirting the edge of monstrosity, remains sufficiently within the bounds of normalcy to receive the privilege of protection from his social superior. The protection afforded by this social contract, as implicit as the protection afforded a child by an adult today, frustrated Calogrenant’s need for redress, and specifically violent redress, that both the honour code of chivalry and the gender norms of courtly masculinity demanded of a courtly knight who had suffered a blow

70 Freedman, Images of the Medieval Peasant, 137.
to his honour, status, or wealth. Perhaps the most well-known act of redress in the medieval period was the betrayal of Roland by Ganelon in the *Chanson de Roland*. In counsel with Charlemagne, the knight Roland suggests that his stepson Ganelon take a message to the Saracen King Marsile in Saragossa. Ganelon, believing this to be a suicide mission and his nomination an affront to his honour, accuses Roland of having ‘subjected [him] to an unjust judgment’ (*sur mei avez turnét fals jugement*; 307) and swears to take revenge. He goes on to betray the movements of Charlemagne’s army to the Saracens, who subsequently ambush and slay Roland. Ganelon’s treachery is discovered and he is brought to trial, at which point he claims to have done no wrongdoing as he acted in accordance with the knightly prerogative to seek redress for insults of honour:

I challenged Roland the warrior  
and Oliver and all their companions;  
Charlemagne heard this, and his noble barons as well.  
I took vengeance, but there was no betrayal.

Ganelon’s arguments, aided by the threat of his kinsman Pinabel who stands ready to take up a trial by combat, sway the assembled barons. It is only when the knight Thierry stands up and claims that Roland’s service to Charlemagne ought to have protected him that an opposing voice is heard:


73 ‘Jo desfiai Rollant le poignëor / e Oliver e tuiz lur campaignun; / Carles l’oïd e si noble baron. / Vengët m’en sui, mais n’i ad traïsun’: *Chanson*, 3775–78.
By ancestral tradition I must make this charge: however much Roland transgressed against Ganelon, that he was in your service should have protected him. Ganelon is a felon in that he betrayed him; in regard to you he has committed perjury and broken his oath.  

Thierry’s argument is that Ganelon’s right to seek vengeance was in conflict with Roland’s right to be protected by his service to Charlemagne. In making this argument it is important to note that Ganelon’s defence is not judged invalid, but is rather overruled by the competing protection afforded to Roland as a man in service of the Emperor. Roland’s (posthumous) defence is substantially the same as the defence invoked by both the truculent dwarf of *Erec* and the ugly peasant of *Yvain*, both of whom are afforded protection on account of their servile status; the difference is that where Erec and Calogrenant both hold, however tenuously, to their duty not to harm individuals protected by servitude, Ganelon betrays this higher duty in his pursuit of honourable redress. 

Thierry’s claim that Roland was in service to the Emperor, like the peasant’s deployment of his servile status in claiming to be ‘just a man’, can be read as an act of ‘symbolic violence’; that is to say, the deployment of a moral obligation (in this case, the obligation to protect an individual) that is created and maintained by the exchange of a ‘gift’ (in this case, the ‘gift’ of indentured servitude). Though classic gift-giving theory has tended to focus on the use of gifts to create social solidarity,  

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74 ‘par anceisurs dei jo tel plait tenir: / que que Rollant Guenelun forsvesist, / vostre servise l’en doïst bien guarir. / Guenes est fels d’iço qu’il le traït, / vers vos s’en est parjurez e malmis’: *Chanson*, 3826–30.  
anthropologists and social theorists since the 1980s have begun to explore the concept of antagonist gift-giving whereby the giving of a gift can be interpreted as an aggressive act of attempted domination.\textsuperscript{76} The peasant’s servitude, to the extent that it is believed to be freely given, can be interpreted as an antagonistic gift because it generates an obligation on the part of the lord receiving it, an obligation typically understood in terms of protection — the knight’s need to guard the highways and defend the peasants. This creation of obligation through the giving of a gift was described by Pierre Bourdieu as an act of ‘symbolic violence’, which he defined as ‘\textit{censored, euphemized, i.e. unrecognized, socially recognized violence}’.\textsuperscript{77} It is this mode of violence, he argues, which is most appropriate to those individuals for whom overt violence ‘meets with collective reprobation and is liable either to provoke a violent riposte from the victim’ — a particularly apt description of the fate liable to befall any peasant bold enough to challenge directly a fully-armed knight.\textsuperscript{78} From the perspective of an individual aggrieved by such a relationship — from the perspective of a Ganelon who feels wronged by a Roland, or a knight who feels threatened by the socially mobile peasant he is sworn to protect; that is to say from the perspective of an individual who is normally seen as either villainous, privileged, or both — such a relationship perhaps did indeed appear to be a relationship of violence which created a restriction of their liberty, as men of knightly status, to seek redress for shaming acts done to them.


\textsuperscript{77} Bourdieu, \textit{Outline}, 191.

\textsuperscript{78} Bourdieu, \textit{Outline}, 192.
Unable to retaliate, or even acknowledge, the shame imputed to him by the peasant, Calogrenant’s need for redress is displaced onto the giant Harpin of the Mountain and taken up by his kinsman, Yvain. Unlike either the dwarf or the peasant, the giant stands outside the protection afforded to servile Christians by virtue of his moral/geographic location outside of Christian society. The giant is linked with the figure of the ‘Wild Man’, a figure of nature and excess whose attributes were so similar to that of the giants that ‘confusion between wild men and giants was [...] almost inevitable’. He is a dweller of the wild, non-Christian parts of the world, ‘prior to, but also lesser than man because he is removed from civilisation.’ He is precisely the kind of ‘exaggerated and grotesque’ representation of the peasantry that Paul Freedman has argued is required in order for violence to be visited upon them. The exertion of violence upon the body of the giant recurs throughout the myth, literature, and historiography of the West, where they often ‘function formally as a rite of passage, inextricably linking the defeat of the monster to a political, sexual, social coming of age.’ The second half of Yvain, dealing as it does with the redemption and rediscovery of Yvain’s chivalric identity, can be read as a kind of ‘rebirth’ which is signalled by the comic, quasi-baptismal episode in the forest where a damsel revives Yvain by anointing him liberally with an ‘ointment’ (l’oignemant: 2995). The battle with the giant, therefore, can be seen as part of this social ‘coming of age’ for Yvain who, as a

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80 Oswald, *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality*, 161.
representative of the youthful knighthood of the twelfth century, must distinguish himself from the class of the ‘common man’ from which his social station was born.

Yvain initially attempts to respond in kind to Harpin’s overwhelming strength by charging directly at the giant with his lance and then with his sword, slicing from the giant’s cheek a great piece of flesh. This head-on assault fails to make much progress; for each blow Yvain delivers the giant returns an equal if not more powerful blow, first hitting ‘Yvain so hard / with his stave that he doubled him over’ (*li jaianz del pel le roille / si fort que tot ploier le fet*: 4206–07), then striking him ‘a blow / that made him fall forward / onto his horse’s neck’ (*une donee / tel que tot le fet anbrunchier / jusque sor le col del destrier*: 4118–20). At this point Yvain’s companion for the second half of the poem, the lion, enters the battle. The exact function of the lion in the romance is a subject of long and unresolved critical debate, but — broadly speaking — we can say that the lion is associated with Yvain’s journey of redemption in the second half of the poem and that its entrance in every battle signals the turning point where Yvain goes from potential defeat to assured victory. When the lion joins the battle in this episode he is accompanied by a change in Yvain’s combat tactics which allows Yvain to obtain victory over the giant. Rather than rushing head-on at Harpin, Yvain dodges the giant’s next attack so that ‘[the giant] missed his blow and it fell / harmlessly to one side of my lord Yvain’ (*si pert son cop et chiet en vain / par delez mon seignor Yvain*: 4235–36). Seizing the opportunity, Yvain then delivers ‘two quick blows’ (*ii. cos entrelardez*: 4239) in response, one a cut to the shoulder and one a thrust through the liver, slaying the giant. These strokes encode a repulsion of the shame offered by the ugly peasant together with a return to the status quo. We have already seen how Yvain verbally repudiated the giant’s claim to courage by revealing it to be mere bravado; in this battle he now moves to nullify the giant’s
claim to great physical strength. The opening trade of blows where Yvain is knocked about on his horse makes a concession to the physical strength of the rustic peasantry, which was encoded not only in Vegetius’s *De re militari* but also in the justifications deployed by theologians to justify the peasant’s servile status. Though slavery was not believed to be part of God’s divine plan, most medieval theologians were prepared to follow Augustine’s argument that the existence of slavery (and, as it was later interpreted, serfdom) was a licit, if not desirable, state of affairs which stemmed from an ‘overarching sinfulness that affected humanity in general as a result of the Fall’.  

Augustine’s ideas were indebted to Aristotle and Plato’s earlier works on slavery, a debt which became only clearer with the recovery of the Aristotelian corpus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*, Thomas Aquinas suggested that

> nature intends to differentiate between the bodies of free persons and those of slaves. This is so that the bodies of slaves are strong for carrying out necessary tasks suitable for them, namely, digging up fields, and performing like services. But the bodies of free persons should be erect and useless for the servile works necessary to support their tender constitution but useful for the civic life in which free persons engage. And those with bodily members useful for civic life are disposed sometimes for advantage in war and sometimes for advantage in peace, namely, have bodily members fit for combat and other military activities in time of war and for performing other civic tasks in time of peace.

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82 Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 71–79.

83 ‘*natura vult, idest habet quemdam impetum sive inclinationem ad hoc ut faciat differentiam inter corpora liberorum et servorum, ita scilicet quod corpora servorum sint fortiæ ad exercendum usum necessarium, qui eis competit, scilicet ad fodiendum in agro, et alia similia ministeria exercenda: sed corpora liberorum debent esse recta, idest bene disposita secundum naturam, et inutilia ad tales operationes serviles, quod exiguit complexio delicata: sed tamen debent esse utilia ad civilem vitam, in qua liberi homines conversantur. Iste autem qui habet membra utilia ad civilem vitam, habet dispositionem divisam ab bellicam oportunitatem et pacificam; ut scilicet tempore belli habeat membra apta ad pugnandum, et ad alia militaria opera, tempore vero pacis ad exercendum alia civilia opera*’.
Aristotle’s claim that the bodies of free persons should be useless for servile work is at odds with Vegetius’s praise of the halcyon days of the Republic where ‘the same man was both a soldier and a farmer, he changed only the type of iron implement he carried’ \((idem\ bellator,\ idem\ agricola,\ genera\ tantum\ mutabat\ armorum)\).\(^{84}\) Medieval writers tend to gloss over this aspect of Vegetius’s writing in favour of those elements which emphasised the knightly virtues of skill-at-arms and acquired courage.\(^{85}\) In \textit{Yvain} we can see the knightly protagonist deploy this distinguishing virtue of skill-at-arms once the lion enters the battle, dodging the giant’s blow and delivering targeted counter-attacks. The blow to the shoulder appears to be a targeted strike intended to hamper the giant’s strength. Although we have no equivalent records from the twelfth century, a blow to the shoulder known as the ‘\textit{Schilhaw}’ or ‘Squinting Strike’ is precisely the method which fourteenth-century German fencing masters recommended to use against those fighters who fought with great strength but no skill.\(^{86}\) Such opponents were known in the fencing tradition as a \textit{büffel}, which translates literally to a wild bull, ox, or buffalo and idiomatically to a churl or a peasant, a term which builds on a long association of the peasant with his beasts of burden.\(^{87}\) Having ‘severed his

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\(^{85}\) Allmand, \textit{The De Re Militari of Vegetius}, 254–61.

\(^{86}\) The ‘Squinting Strike’ is a method found in the rhyming verse of Johannes Liechtenauer which is extant in any number of late medieval manuscripts. The translation I use comes from the appendix to Paulus Kal, \textit{In Service of the Duke}, ed. and trans. Christian Henry Tobler (Highland Village, TX: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2006). Tobler’s translation can also be found online at <http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Johannes_Liechtenauer>.

\(^{87}\) ‘[The Schilhaw] breaks what the \textit{büffel}, which is a peasant, can strike from above to below, as they are wont to do’ (\textit{der selbe haw der bricht als das püffel das ist eyn pawer / mag geslaen / von oben neder als sie phlelen czu tuen}): Cod. HS.3227a, fol. 28°, trans. David Lindholm and friends.
shoulder from his chest / with his sword’s cutting edge’ (au tranchant de s’espee, / l’espaule del bu dessevree: 4241–42), Yvain follows up with a thrust in which ‘sword pierced the liver’ (de s’espee parmi le foie: 4245). The liver is a curious target to call by name. Within the physiological theory of the four humors which dominated medical thought in the Middle Ages, the liver produced the ‘warm and moist’ humor of blood.88 An individual in whom blood predominated was said to be of a ‘sanguine’ temperament and tended to be physically handsome, cheerful, and charming; it was also ‘generally correlated with health and mental balance, serenity, sensuousness and optimism’.89 The sanguine was, unsurprisingly, considered to be the most desirable temperament, which makes it puzzling as to why it ought to be associated with the giant. We might read the association of the liver with the giant, and its subsequent destruction, in two complementary ways. The first is that the destruction of the liver signifies the destruction of the giant’s capacity to produce blood, and therefore the repudiation of the giant’s claim to the desirable qualities of the sanguine temperament; the inherent (humoral) inferiority of the giant is thus re-established through what is in essence a violent act of surgery. The second reading deals with just one aspect of the sanguine temperament, the tendency for the sanguine individual’s health and optimism to inspire courage.90 Complementary to the first reading, the destruction of the liver

89 Arikha, Passions and Tempers, 10.
(as opposed to any other body part) can be read as a repudiation of both the giant’s
sanguine temperament and, more specifically, his claim to courage.

Taken together, Yvain’s blows to the shoulder and liver of the giant Harpin can
be read as a form of erasure, a process which occurs when ‘works of art become victims
of an attack that seeks to destroy all or parts of them’. 91 Such an attack is never
completely successful, ‘for once you rub something away, you tend to draw attention
to what was there before the obfuscation’. 92 Erasure can be applied to not only physical
but also textual works of art, ‘as when a scribe or artist decides to leave out or change
unacceptable parts of a narrative in a new version of a text [...] Traces of that which
was erased remain, whether it is the blank spot on the page that results from scratching
out part of an image or the void in the narrative left by Grendel and his mother once
they have been killed and decapitated’. 93 As a result, ‘erasures can tell us a great deal
about what kinds of images were considered powerful and dangerous’. 94 In Yvain’s
battle with Harpin, his attack on the giant’s shoulder and liver can be read as attempts
to erase his strength and courage, those two elements which correspond to the threat
posed by both the wicked dwarf of Erec and the ugly peasant of Yvain and which, I
have argued, drew upon masculine class anxieties about the relationship between the
new knightly aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie whom the knights grouped together
with the serfs and villeins under the label of ‘peasant’ or ‘rustic’. Yvain’s battle with

91 Michael Camille, ‘Obscenity Under Erasure: Censorship in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts’, in
Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski
(Leiden: Brill, 1998), 139–54 (139). The following discussion of erasure is indebted to Oswald,
Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality, 13–18.
93 Oswald, Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality, 16.
Harpin, therefore, can be read as an attempt to erase the strength and courage of the medieval bourgeoisie, an attempt which leaves behind traces of the perceived threat that these qualities and this class posed.

CONCLUSION

In each of the three episodes from the romances of Chrétien de Troyes — Erec’s encounter with a wicked dwarf in *Erec et Enide*; the dialogue between Calogrenant and an ugly peasant in *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion*; and the conflicts between an anonymous lord (championed by Yvain) and the giant Harpin of the Mountain, also in *Yvain* — the reader is presented with a situation where a representative of the broadly-conceived lower class aspires to the privileges of knighthood. The dwarf aspires to the privilege of coercion through force by striking Erec; the peasant to the privilege of respect by demanding questions of Calogrenant as an equal; the giant to the privilege of war by laying siege to the lord’s castle. In each case this aspiration is represented as an act of destructive usurpation and emasculation of the representatives of chivalry and knighthood, yet in each case this same representative is unable to seek immediate redress against the one responsible, either because he has a duty to protect the very individual who shames him (as with the dwarf and the peasant) or because he lacks the masculine strength to retaliate (as with the giant). Yvain’s eventual defeat of Harpin of the Mountain functions as a simultaneous cathartic release of the anxiety created by these frustrated desires for redress and an affirmation of difference between knights and the members of the lower social stations.

What these three episodes from the work of Chrétien de Troyes suggest is that these early medieval romances and masculine identities were designed to engage with, respond to, and shape social reality. Unlike chronicles and other ‘hard’ historical
accounts which were overwhelmingly composed by and for clerics, romance literature offers to the modern scholar a view of the social dynamics of medieval knighthood from the perspective of its own members. In the case of *Erec* and *Yvain*, what these romances reveal is that even individuals in a position of privilege might have considered themselves to be the victims of violence perpetrated by those individuals in a position of disempowerment. To the extent that they inform the conduct of individuals, especially those in power, it is vitally important that we can understand and comprehend beliefs about the perpetration of violence from the perspectives of all individuals involved.
Faith as Distinction in Arthur’s Battles with the Giant of Mont St-Michel

English representations of violence and its relationship to courtly or ‘gentle’ culture followed the lead of the French for much of the Middle Ages. Both countries developed the concepts of chivalry and knighthood (whereby common-born warriors were granted status and often land in return for their military service) at approximately the same time, producing anxiety amongst those gentles seeking to distinguish themselves from the lower orders, as explored in the previous chapter. The close cultural ties between England and France extended to their vernacular literature, which in England was primarily Francophonic until the development of ‘literary’ Middle English in the fourteenth century.¹ The emergence of this particularly English literary voice coincided with the development of professional, common-born military forces across Europe in the wake of such battles as Courtaí (1302), Bannockburn (1314), and Poitiers (1356) which saw the public defeat of knightly cavalry by organised groups of infantry.² The mounted knight’s displacement from the pinnacle of the military pyramid disrupted existing conceptions of knighthood, which distinguished between knights and common folk through their military service, and produced new methods

of representing violence which emphasised a knight’s faith as the primary means of distinguishing him from those men of common birth — a distinction which would continue in England through to the sixteenth century.

This chapter demonstrates how the anonymous poet of the English Alliterative Morte Arthure (hereafter, Morte) resha pes twelfth-century accounts of King Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel in an attempt to redefine the contrast between Arthur’s courtly masculinity and the giant’s rustic masculinity. Many analyses of Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel in the Morte have been hampered by an enduring belief that this battle is a ‘purely romantic (i.e. fictional) element in the story’, one deriving from a purely aesthetic tradition of heroes fighting giants. Scholars such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Fiona Tolhurst, and Dana Oswald have pushed back against this aestheticism by reading this encounter through the lens of psychoanalysis, seeing in the giant an Other who is derived from an inherently contradictory account of gender; the giant is ‘humanity writ large’, the possessor of a ‘violently gendered body’ that cannot be assimilated, only dismembered. While these aesthetic and psychoanalytic approaches have yielded some results, they have yet to account for the Morte-poet’s emphatic historicisation of the giant of Mont St-Michel.


as simultaneously Genoese, French, and common-born. By locating Arthur’s battle with the giant in its social and historical context as the Morte-poet does, it becomes possible to read this battle as indicative of gentle attitudes towards changing ideals of courtly masculinity in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century as faith supplanted the role of skill-at-arms in distinguishing the masculine and courtly Arthur from the emasculated and common-born giant. Rather than defeating the giant with dexterity and a flurry of sword-blows, Arthur turns to prayer, the ‘craft of Christ’, and his misericorde — the knight’s dagger of mercy and a symbol of his faith in God. In so doing, the poet is able to redefine the limits of courtly masculinity in terms favourable to the established aristocracy.

TROJAN IMPERIUM AND THE HISTORIA REGUM BRITANNIAE

Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel in the Morte is an adaptation and significant expansion of a battle found in the Roman de Brut of Wace (c. 1150)\(^5\) and the Brut of Laȝamon (c. 1190),\(^6\) narrative poems which are themselves adaptations of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae (c. 1136).\(^7\) The purpose of Geoffrey’s Historia, it is generally agreed, is explicitly political: Geoffrey seeks to legitimise the rule of the Norman conquerors of 1066 by casting them as the

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\(^5\) All in–text references to Wace will be indicated by a ‘W.’ and will refer to Roman de Brut: A History of the British, trans. Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

\(^6\) All in–text references to Laȝamon will be indicated by a ‘L.’ and will refer to Laȝamon’s Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Laȝamon’s Brut, trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

disinherited rulers of ancient Britain (formerly Albion). He does this by rewriting the existing doctrine and history of the *translatio imperii*, which was the transfer of imperial authority from Troy to ancient Rome, in such a way that Britain becomes the new inheritor of Trojan *imperium*. Though a number of critics have interpreted Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel as alluding retrospectively to Brutus’s defeat of the aboriginal giants of Albion earlier in the *Historia*, this connection is overshadowed by Arthur’s prophetic dream of the dragon and the bear, which immediately precedes the arrival of news about the giant of Mont St-Michel. This dream, interpreted in different ways by Arthur and his companions, functions to link this battle with Arthur’s future struggle against Lucius, the emperor of Rome, who stands for the ‘traditional’ inheritors of Trojan *imperium*:

Arthur awoke and told the dream to his retinue. They interpreted the dragon as meaning the king, and the bear as a giant he would fight; their battle meant the impending combat between the king and the giant; and the dragon’s victory foretold that of the king. Arthur understood the dream differently, thinking that it concerned himself and the emperor. Rather than cancelling one another out, these differing interpretations reinforce one another and serve to connect Arthur’s battle with the giant to his later struggle with

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9 ‘*Expergefactus ergo Arthuras astantibus quod somniauerat indicauit. Qui exponentes dicebant draconem significare eum, ursum uero aliquem gigantem qui cum ipso congrederetur; pugnam autem eorum portendere bellum quod inter ipsos futurum erat; uictoriam uero draconis illam quae ei proueniret. At Arturus aliud coniectabat, existimans ob se et imperatorem tales uisionem contigisse*’: G. X.24–29.
Rome. This connection between the giant of Mont St-Michel and the struggle for Trojan *imperium* is reinforced through his use of the name ‘Helena’ for the giant’s abductee. The name Helena carries a double signification within the *Historia*. First, it functions as an allusion to to Helena, mother of the Roman emperor Constantine I, who was popularly believed to be of British descent; in the *Historia*, Arthur references this Helena to legitimise his upcoming war against Lucius:

> If Lucius judges that he ought to receive tribute from Britain because Julius Caesar and other Roman emperors once conquered us, I likewise judge that Rome owes tribute to me, because my predecessors once captured her [...] Helena’s son Constantine and Maximianus, close relatives of mine who were crowned king of Britain one after the other, have both sat upon the throne as emperor of Rome. Should we then demand tribute from the Romans?11

Second, the abduction of Helena to the natural sea-side fortress of Mont St-Michel alludes to the abduction by sea of Helen of Sparta to the fortified city of Troy, an event which was the principal cause of the Trojan War and, consequently, the legendary founding of both Britain and Rome. In Geoffrey’s subsequent development of the narrative, Arthur comes to represent not the Greeks come to save their princess (for Helena is already dead by the time he arrives) but rather the ‘true’ inheritors of Trojan *imperium* come to battle with the Trojan abductors of Helen of Sparta, represented here by the giant through his assumption of the role of the Trojan seducer-abductor, Paris of Troy. The interpretation of Arthur’s dream of a dragon and a bear and the twin


11 *Nam si quia Iulius Caesar ceterique Romani reges Britanniam olim subiugauerunt uextigal nunc debere sibi ex illa reddi decernit, similiter ego censeo quod Roma michi tributum dare debet, quia antecessores mei eam antiquitus optiinerunt [...] Constantinus etiam Helenae filius nec non Maximianus, uterque michi cognitio ine propinquus, alter post alterum diademate Britanniae insignitus, thronum Romani imperii adeptus est. Censetisne ergo uextigal ex Romanis petendum?’: G. IX.466–75.
allusions of the name ‘Helena’, therefore, can be read as distancing Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel from Brutus’s cleansing of the aboriginal giants from Albion in favour of connecting it to Arthur’s broader struggle for the reclamation of Trojan imperium for Britain.

The contrast between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Trojan imperium in this episode is signalled, in part, through ascribing to the giant the signs of an inferior, ignoble form of masculinity, an inferiority which is heightened through comparison to the legendary beauty of Paris and the chivalry of Arthur. The giant’s club is the clearest sign of the his rusticity, for the club — a weapon ‘made from a branch wrenched from a tree and so made without forethought or art’ — was often associated in twelfth-century romances with both giants and peasants, individuals possessing (it was believed) inferior intellectual capacities. We have seen this association already in Chrétien de Troyes’ twelfth-century romance Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion, where a ‘peasant’ (vileins) carrying a ‘great club’ (grant maçaue) foreshadows the giant Harpin of the Mountain and his ‘large, squared stave’ (pel [...] grant et quarré). Though clubs are often associated with Western illustrations of the Saracen threat of the crusading era, there is no evidence to suggest that the historic ‘Saracens’, unlike the historic peasantry, used simple mass weapons with any greater frequency than their Western counterparts. It seems far more likely that the club, a rudimentary weapon as old as

12 For a slightly later illustration of the same scene, see British Library MS Egerton 3028, fol. 49.
14 Chrétien de Troyes, Yvain, 288; 293; 4095. See also MS BnF fr. 1433, fol. 90v, for an illustration of the giant of Mont St-Michel as an oversized peasant riding a horse.
15 It could be argued that one point of difference is that the armies of the East developed the flanged mace prior to its adoption by the West, but the flanged mace not only lacks the rudimentary connotations
time itself and easily available to even the poorest of individuals, was originally used as a symbol for the peasantry before it was co-opted into a symbol of generic alterity and associated with the Saracens as part of a process whereby ‘artists sometimes arbitrarily assigned unrelated attributes to those they despised’.  

In wielding his club, the giant signals a lack of martial skill by relying on the most biomechanically natural of strikes, a descending percussive blow aimed at Arthur’s head. Though such a blow was an effective mainstay of armed combat, an excessive reliance on such a simple strike was scorned throughout the medieval period as a rough and untutored form of fighting; as Anne Baden-Daintree observes, ‘we are clearly meant to understand a distinction between the clumsy and brutish wielding of clubs and the cruel efficiency of slaughter through exemplary swordsmanship’. Flavius Vegetius Renatus, the author of the influential *De re militari*, claimed that the Roman legions ‘learned to strike not with a slash but with a thrust’ (*non caesim sed punctim ferire discebant*) and that they scorned those enemies who fought just with cutting blows, ‘for a slashing blow, with whatever force it might come, frequently does not kill, since the vital organs are protected by both armor and bones; but on the other hand a thrust driven in two inches is mortal’ (*caesa enim, quovis impetu veniat, non frequenter interficit, cum et armis vitalia defendantur et ossibus; at contra punctua*

of the wooden club, it is also generally absent from illustrations of Saracen alterity. See David Nicolle, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era, 1050–1350*, 2 vols (White Plains, NY: Kraus, 1988), ill. 918.  

16 Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, vol. 1, 156. Such signs of otherness could also include red hair, black skin, and Jewish or fiendish heritage. See Douai BM MS 880, fol. 66r, for a twelfth–century illustration of Arthur fighting a churlish giant wielding a spiked club.  

This does not mean that the Roman legions never slashed with their weapons, but rather that it was believed necessary to learn how to thrust, whereas a slash was thought to come naturally to the soldier; later on in the *Epitoma*, Vegetius suggests that ‘it is particularly fitting that [the soldiers] also be trained at the stake, or with wooden weapons, where they learn to attack, either the sides or the feet or the head with both piercing and slashing blows’ (*ad palum quoque vel sudibus exerceri percommodum est, cum latera vel pedes aut caput petere punctim caesiumque condiscant*). The belief that a slashing blow, particularly one which strikes from above to below, is a ‘natural’ or untrained movement was also held by the late medieval German masters of the Liechtenauer school of swordsmanship, who called the kind of descending percussive strike delivered by the giant of Mont St-Michel a ‘Rage-Strike’ (*Zornhau*), because ‘when you are angry and raging, then no strike is as ready as this upper strike struck from the shoulder at the opponent’ (*weneyn itzlichem in syme gryme und czorne / zo ist im keyn haw als bereit / als der selbe aberhaw slecht von der achsel / czum mane*). In its untrained form this strike was considered characteristic of the ‘buffalo’ (*püffel/büffel*), a fighter who relied on brute strength without skill — qualities which the fencing masters explicitly associated with peasants when they taught the strike known as the ‘Squinting-Strike’ (*Schilhau*),

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20 Cod. HS.3227a, trans. David Lindholm and friends, fols 22r–23v. The distinction between the ‘untrained’ Rage–Strike and the ‘masterstrike’ (*‘meisterhau*’) also known as the Rage–Strike was precisely the use of the point; where the buffalo cut the Rage–Strike with the edge, the master used the point. A similar strike can be found in Prudentius’s fifth–century allegorical poem *Psychomachia*, where the allegorical embodiment of Wrath delivers a blow where her sword ‘rises high over her right ear and then [...] smites her foe’s head in the very middle’ (*conisa in plagam dextra sublimis ab aure / erigitur mediumque ferit librata cerebrum*): Prudentius, ed. and trans. H. J. Thomson, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 138–39.
a technique which ‘breaks what the buffalo, which is a peasant, can strike from above to below, as they are wont to do’ (bricht als das püffel das ist eyn pawer / mag geslaen / von oben neder als sie phlelen czu tuen). In delivering this kind of simple blow from above to below, Geoffrey imputes to the giant of Mont St-Michel that lack of martial skill which, among other qualities, distinguished the peasant from the knight in the twelfth century.

The adaptations of Geoffrey’s *Historia* by Wace and Laȝamon emphasise the class-based aspects of Geoffrey’s distinction between Arthur and the giant. Although the account of Wace is quite close to Geoffrey in this episode, he adds to his version a description of the giant’s club as ‘so large and square that two peasants could neither carry it nor lift it from the ground’ (ki mult esteit grosse e quarree / dui païsant ne la portassent / ne de terre ne la levassent: W. 11492–94). Although Laȝamon significantly revises the narrative actions of his account, he preserves the same basic structure of masculine social station by transforming this battle into a comic encounter where Arthur slices off the giant’s chin (and his beard with it) before taunting him into making a return blow that smashes his club into pieces against a tree. Arthur then lures the disarmed giant into chasing him around said tree, overtaking him after three revolutions to strike an incapacitating blow on the back of his thigh. Both of these adaptations function to accentuate, rather than revise, Geoffrey’s characterisation of the giant of Mont St-Michel as predominantly rustic and peasant-like.

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21 Cod. HS 3227a, fol. 28v.
22 It is important to note that the reading I offer is not true of all giants. The giant was a remarkably plastic figure in medieval romance which was capable of signifying different things in different contexts.
CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE Morte

The Morte-poet’s substitution of Genoa for Spain when describing the origin of the giant of Mont St-Michel signals a dramatic revision of the giant’s political purpose within the narrative.23 Genoa, an independent city-state in the north of Italy, had a complex relationship with England over the course of the fourteenth century. First supplying mercenary crossbowmen to the armies of the French during many of the early battles of the Hundred Years War, including Sluys (1340), Brest (1342), Crécy (1346), and Poitiers (1356), in 1371 the Duke of Genoa switched sides by entering into an agreement with the English Crown which resulted in numerous payments made to Genoese captains of crossbowmen during the mid-to-late 1370s.24 The Duke’s actions appear to have been motivated primarily by a desire to preserve the safety of Genoese merchants in London, whose increasing dominance of the English export trade had caused a great deal of resentment in the City;25 a proclamation preserved in the Calendar-Books of the City of London sought to ‘forbid any molestation of the merchants of Genoa so long as they paid the King’s customs and dues and did not aid the King’s enemies’.26 The extent to which this agreement actually worked for the Genoese is open to debate; in August 1379 a wealthy Genoese merchant who sought to undercut the price of pepper set by the London grocers was murdered by a local mercer, who revealed under interrogation that he feared the Genoese ‘would destroy

23 All in–text references to the Morte will be indicated by a ‘M.’ and will refer to Hamel, Morte Arthure. Translations are my own.
and ruine all the wool merchants in London and elsewhere within the realm of England.  

The acquittal of the murderer by jurors on the grounds of ‘self-defence’ — when pressed on how this murder could have been self-defence, the jurors admitted that ‘they in fact do not know’ — offers a fair indication of the low opinion in which the Genoese merchants were held by the English even in this time of nominal peace.  

In any case, this period of ‘good’ relations between the English and the Genoese was short-lived; in 1396 the Genoese, having run into a great deal of hardship following a war with Venice from 1378 to 1381, requested the French king to take over administration of the city-state, resulting in the return of Genoese mercenaries to the armies of France by at least the time of Agincourt (1415).  

The Morte-poet’s allusion to Genoa in casting the giant of Mont St-Michel as a ‘great giant of Genoa’ (grett geaunte of Geen: M. 843) appears to draw upon the English perception of the Genoese as suppliers of mercenary forces to the French rather than as economic competitors. Unlike the solitary twelfth-century giants of Mont St-Michel, all of whom are connected symbolically but not logistically to the forces of Rome, the Morte-poet’s giant is made explicitly part of a larger contingent of Genoese giants that are annexed to the forces of Rome in the same way that Genoese mercenaries were annexed to the forces of France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Among the forces that the Roman emperor Lucius sends to ambush Arthur he includes ‘many giants from Genoa, masterful jousters,’ who were to ‘meet [Arthur]  

in the mountains and martyr his knights, / strike them down in passes and destroy them
forever (Many giaunts of Gene, jousters full good. / To meet him in the mountes and
martyr his knightes, / Strike them down in straites and stroy them forever; M. 556–61).
This literary use of Genoa ties into a long and distinguished scholarly tradition of
reading Arthur’s war against the Roman empire in the Morte as implying some
comment on Edward III’s war against Philip VI and Charles IV of France, which
makes it all the more surprising that Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel
has been regarded as a purely fantastic or generic element within the story.30 Such an
historically decontextualised position appears to me untenable given how forcefully
the Morte-poet historicises the giant, not only through ascribing to it a Genoese identity
but also through replacing the name of the abducted Helena with the denuded title of
‘duchess of Brittany’ (Duchez of Bretayne: M. 852). Although the region of Brittany
figured throughout Geoffrey’s Historia as a sister-colony to Trojan Britain, the
omission of this Galfridian backstory in the Morte and the coupling of this episode
with the subtext of the Hundred Years War potentially locates the giant within the
context of the mid-fourteenth-century War of the Breton Succession, where the French
king Philip VI backed Joan de Penthièvre as rightful duchess even as the English king
Edward III backed Jean de Montfort as rightful duke — an early flashpoint of the
Hundred Years War. This is not to make the naïve argument that the giant is a vulgar
allegorical rendition of the historical events of the Breton War, but rather to suggest
that it performs in the poem the same political function that the Breton War performed

30 For an overview of the scholarship surrounding the poem’s historical analogies, see G. R. Keiser,
for the Hundred Years War — namely, that of a microcosmic skirmish which signals the beginning of violent hostilities between opposing sides.

Returning to the *Morte*-poet’s characterisation of the giant as Genoese, if we assume that this description alludes to the political and historical context of the Hundred Years War we can begin to see how the poet reinforces the masculine class-based distinctions made in Geoffrey’s *Historia*. The Genoese mercenary troops supplied to the French were overwhelmingly composed of groups of crossbowmen, men of common birth who carried a weapon many believed to be antithetic to the spirit of chivalry. Froissart tells of how the Genoese crossbowmen at the battle of Crécy, upon being ordered forward to begin the battle, told the constable that they were fatigued after having marched a long way on foot and in armour. The earl of Alençon, upon hearing this, made clear his opinion of the Genoese when he said, ‘This is what one gets by employing such scoundrels, who fall off when there is any need for them’ (*On se doit bien cargier de tel ribaudaille qui fallent au plus grant besoing*).31 When the Genoese broke ranks soon thereafter, the French king Philip VI spared them neither thought, pity, nor mercy. ‘Kill me those scoundrels’, he cried, ‘for they stop up our road, without any reason’ (*Tués toute ceste ribaudaille: il nous ensonnient et tiennent le voie sans raison*).32 It must be noted that despite the strong association between the Genoese and their crossbowmen in the Hundred Years War, the one time that the *Morte*-poet places a group of crossbowmen under the narrative gaze they are explicitly identified as ‘Dutch-men’ (M. 2101), while it is the infantry they accompany that are

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32 Froissart, *Chroniques*, vol. 1, 578; *Chronicles*, vol. 1, 166.
identified as Genoese. This suggests that the defining feature of the Genoese mercenaries, for the Morte-poet, was not their role in battle as ignoble missile troops but rather their social status as men of common birth.\textsuperscript{33}

**COMMON BIRTH IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY**

The social status of the common-born underwent a dramatic transformation during the fourteenth century following a series of peasant uprisings which swept the continent from the late 1350s through to the early 1380s.\textsuperscript{34} These revolts were portrayed by establishment chroniclers as bloody, violent affairs in which the lower classes overturned the natural order of society. One of the most famous of these uprisings was the northern French peasant revolt of 1358 known as the ‘Jacquerie’, a two-week uprising which began with a series of successful offensives against the nobility but ended in a slaughter. Jean le Bel, the Flemish chronicler, wrote that the peasants

first went to the house of a knight, broke down his door, killed him, his wife and children, and then burnt the house [...] They did the same with many other castles and good houses [...] [A]mong other indecent acts, they killed a knight, put him on a spit, and roasted him with his wife and children looking on. After ten or twelve of them raped the lady, they wished to force feed them the roasted flesh of their father and husband and made them then die by a miserable death.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} It is worth noting that the Morte–poet’s repeated references to the French may have something to do with the role of the French serving as ‘the enemy’ of the English during the Hundred Years War, just as the English served the role of ‘the enemy’ for the French during the same period. See Christine Bousquet, ‘L’image de l’ennemi dans les chroniques au temps de la guerre de Cent Ans’, in Images de la Guerre de Cent Ans, eds Daniel Couty, Jean Maurice, and Michèle Guéret–Laferté (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 65–79.

\textsuperscript{34} Samuel K. Cohn, Jr, Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France, and Flanders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 87–92.

\textsuperscript{35} ‘Ainsy premierement s’en alerent […] en la maison d’ung chevalier; si briserrent l’ostel et le tuerent, et sa femme et ses enfans, et puis ardiren l’ostel […] Ainsy firent ilz en plusieurs chasteaux et bonnes
Though clearly partisan, Jean le Bel’s account was not unusual among his contemporaries, all of whom ‘condemned the peasants for their excesses and for violating the hierarchy of the feudal orders’. This uniformity of opinion was undoubtedly the product of a bias in the production of history surrounding the event; of all the chronicles and accounts of the Jacquerie, nothing written by the insurgents themselves has survived. Not to be outdone by their continental rivals, in 1381 large numbers of English peasants engaged in a series of revolts following the attempted imposition of the poll tax of 1380–81. This tax was the tipping point for a complex set of grievances stemming, in part, from the increased tax and military burdens of the Hundred Years War and a decreased capacity to meet those burdens after the ravages of the Black Death. As with the Jacquerie, the chroniclers present deeply partisan accounts which often conflict factually with one another but which nevertheless give us some insight into how the uprising was perceived by figures of the establishment. The peasantry is, again, represented as monstrous, wicked, or inhuman. Thomas Walsingham, a chronicler and Benedictine monk working at St. Albans Abbey, described how among the peasants ‘words could not be heard among their horrible shrieks but rather their throats sounded with the bleating of sheep, or, to be more accurate, with the devilish voices of peacocks’ (non tamen resonabant verba inter horribicos strepitus, sed replebantur guttura multisonis mugitibus, vel quod est verius, maisons [...] entre les aultres deshonnestes faiz, ilz tuerent ung chevalier et le mirent en haste et le rostirent, voyant la dame et les enfants. Apréz ce que x out xii eurent enforcié la dame, il lay en voulurent faire mengier par force, puis ilz le firent morir de male mort’: Jean le Bel, Chronique de Jean le Bel, eds J. Viard and Eugène Déprez, 2 vols (Paris: Renouard, 1904–05), vol. 2, 256–57; trans. Cohn, Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe, 151–52.

36 Cohn, Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe, 143–44.
vocibus pavonum diabolicis). Walsingham’s characterisation of the peasants as speaking with the ‘devilish voices of peacocks’ ties into an established belief that the peasantry were somehow ‘bestial’: that is to say, less than human. By giving peasants the voices of animals, the ‘chroniclers and poets cast rebels not only as inferiors but also as traitors to the naturally ordained order of things’.

This is the context in which the _Morte_-poet ascribed to the giant of Mont St-Michel elements of ‘common birth’ through his allusion to the Genoese and his deployment of the sign of the club — elements which are accentuated through the _Morte_-poet’s expansion of his predecessors’ description of the poor hygiene and rude manners of the giant, whose ‘back, buttocks, and loins / he bakes by the fire, seemingly without trousers’ (bakke and his bewschers and his brode lendez / he bekez by þe bale-fyre, and breklesse hym semede: M. 1147–48) as he ‘roasts rude and rueful roast meats, / men and beasts together’ (rostez full ruyde and rewfull bredez, / beeynes and bestaile brochede togeders: M. 1149–50). Where the twelfth-century peasant offered relatively little in the way of a tangible or physical threat to the aristocracy of knighthood, by the

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end of the fourteenth century the ranks of the common-born posed a much more significant danger to the established power structure, not only in the form of popular unrest but also in direct military action such as at the battle of Courtrai (1302), which became known as the ‘Battle of the Golden Spurs’ on account of the number of golden spurs collected from deceased knights.\(^\text{40}\) This may, in part, explain why the battle with the giant in the Morte ‘is a harder and more perilous battle for Arthur than in any other version, just as the giant is more emphatically evil and loathsome’ — the historical referents from which he is constructed had changed.\(^\text{41}\)

THE MAN-AT-ARMS OF MONT ST-MICHEL

In making this argument I have so far not distinguished between the various types of lower station — the division of the non-noble into serfs, villeins, yeomen, burgesses, etc. Although there are strong grounds for grouping these types together when attempting to reconstruct the perceptions of the gentry as I have sought to do here, by the same token it is clear that the Morte-poet alludes not just to the common-born as a whole but to a specific kind of soldierly elite produced by the social and technological upheavals of the fourteenth century, a group that I will call, for lack of a better term, the ‘common-born men-at-arms’, or simply ‘men-at-arms’.\(^\text{42}\) Although men of common birth composed the numerical majority of most armies throughout the medieval period, they did so within capacities that were easily distinguishable from


\(^{41}\) Hamel, Morte Arthure, 294–95, n. 1112–14.

the mounted knight — as archers, crossbowmen, spearmen, and so on. In the fourteenth century we see the emergence, and rapid dominance, of a new kind of enlisted soldier who fought with the arms and armour of the knight in spite of his common or ungentle birth.\textsuperscript{43} Despite their martial utility, such men were often treated with suspicion by the knights they were beginning to replace, perhaps precisely because their skill-at-arms eroded the courtly-masculine distinction between the skilled knight and the unskilled commoner. In his account of the Hundred Years War, Sir Thomas Grey — a ‘man of that order which is enlightened by good customs, a support for the old, for maidens and for Holy Church’ (\textit{Si estoit del ordre enlumine de bons morez, as veues, as pucelis et a Saint Eglise succours}): that is to say, a knight of noble birth and tradition\textsuperscript{44} — described how, during the peace which followed the English capture of the French king Jean II, ‘many of the English who lived off the war set out for Normandy [...] and inflicted great oppressions on the country’ (\textit{lez plusours dez gentz Engles, qu vesquerent sure la guere [...] sez mistrent en Normendy [...] qi grauntz mestries firent hu pays}).\textsuperscript{45} To his surprise and apparent dismay,

they achieved so much, that all Christian people marvelled. And yet they were nothing but a gathering of commoners, young men, who until this time had been of little account, who came to have great standing and expertise from this war...\textsuperscript{46}


\textsuperscript{45} Grey, \textit{Scalacronicra}, 152–53.

\textsuperscript{46} ‘\textit{Mais taunt firent, qe toutz gens Cristiens sez meruaillerent. Et si nestoint fors comunes de coillet, ioens gentz, qe deuaunt le hour nestoint fors de poy account, qi durement deuindrent pussauntz dauoir et sachauntz de cel guere}’: Grey, \textit{Scalacronica}, 152–53.
We can ascertain something of the attitude of these upwardly mobile common folk in the anonymous mid-fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn*. The story follows Gamelyn, the youngest son ‘born of a lady and geten of a knight’ (108), as he pursues a series of violent confrontations in an attempt to recover the inheritance wrongfully seized by his smooth-talking older brother. As Kaeuper has observed, the violence of *Gamelyn* — which features foot-combat with wooden staves, a public wrestling competition, and Gamelyn’s taunt that he would teach his brother a commoner’s ‘play atte bokeler’ (136) — is ‘peculiar to xiv-century England [and] characteristic of one particular (if broad) social stratum [...] the amorphous social level of minor landowners, lesser knights and retainers’. The tale illustrates the resentment and ambition of the country gentry and yeomen, represented here by Gamelyn, as they seek to establish their ‘rightful’ place in the world of late medieval England, represented here by the restitution of Gamelyn’s inheritance. Significantly, the manner by which these well-off common folk seek to impose their will upon the aristocracy and lesser gentry is reversed compared to the narratives of Chrétien’s twelfth-century *Erec* and *Yvain*. Where previously the common folk fought with words and wiles against their martially superior adversaries, in *Gamelyn* it is the enfeoffed elder brother who resorts to symbolic violence while the common folk wield weapons of wood and steel in acts of violence which are direct, physical, and effective.


48 For the common-born associations of the buckler in medieval England, see the next chapter.

For their own part, the ennobled knights who had for centuries dictated the art of war with crashing waves of horse and man were increasingly forced to fight on foot with the common infantry. Though the tactic of using dismounted knights in battle was common up to and including the twelfth century, the entwining of mounted combat and chivalric identity made it increasingly difficult to persuade knights to leave their horses until, by the middle of the thirteenth century, there was ‘no question of knights fighting other than from the saddle’. Several major defeats of mounted knights at the hands of organised bands of infantry — most notably at Courtrai in 1302 and Bannockburn in 1314 — prompted military leaders, first among the English and later among the French, to institute changes in both recruitment and tactics in order to ensure that knights both could and would fight on foot when necessary. The loss of the knight’s privilege and distinction of fighting on horseback must have been a blow to the self-worth of the knightly class, particularly at the battle of Poitiers in 1356 when the French knights were ordered to cut down their lances and to remove their spurs in order that they might fight as infantry. After fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with the common-born upon whose sword-arm turned the course of battle, those members of the armigerous aristocracy who still partook in battle must have felt the old method of distinguishing knights from commoners through skill-at-arms becoming increasingly untenable.

In discussing historical violence and warfare it is important to recognise that the depiction of violence in medieval romance has a great deal in common with the representations of violence in chronicles and martial treatises. Combats between

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knightly adversaries, such as the skirmish between Gawain and Priamus, are in essence ‘hyperrealistic’; they accentuate strikes and blows which, were it not for their superhuman effect, would not be out of place in the real world. Central to the combat ‘style’ of the romance knight is his hyperreal ability to both inflict great blows and to sustain the same without significant adverse effect. Both of these abilities are on full show in the Gawain–Priamus fight, where their spears ‘shot through shields and sheared through mail; / both shear through shoulders six-inches deep’ (Thorowe scheldys þey schotte and scherde thorowe ma[i]les; / Both schere thorowe schoulders a schaftmonde large: M. 2545–46), they ‘fight and flourish with flaming swords’ (féghtten and floresche with flawmande swerdez: M. 2555), and are ‘in these ways both worthily wounded’ (thus worthyley þes wyes wonede ere bothen: M. 2547) by blows that would have slain an ordinary man. Though extreme in their effect, the methods and weapons used by these romance knights — couched lances aimed at the shield, sword-strikes to the helm, sword-thrusts to the breast — are drawn quite clearly from their historic counterparts.

In contrast to the twelfth-century giants of Geoffrey, Wace, and Laȝamon, the Morte-poet imbues his giant with the hyperrealistic fighting style of the romance knight by tripling the volume of his blows, enhancing their impact, and rendering him immune to Arthur’s counter-strikes — blows which are themselves duplicates of the strikes delivered in previous accounts. In all three twelfth-century versions of this battle the giant delivers a single, unskilled strike from above to below.51 This blow is slow and clumsy enough to allow Arthur to intercept it with his shield, sustaining little

51 This excludes the strike where the giant hits the tree in Laȝamon; but even if this strike were included, thus giving the giant two strikes, the overall effect remains unchanged.
to no harm. In the *Morte*, Arthur is unable to defend himself before the giant can deliver his blow, which is so swift and powerful that it is only ‘through the craft of Christ that the giant failed’ (*thugh he crafte of Cryste ȝit he carle failede*: M. 1107). Having already outperformed his predecessors, the *Morte*-giant proceeds to deliver two more blows. The first comes so close to Arthur that ‘had he not avoided that blow, evil would have triumphed’ (*ne had he eschapede þat choppe, cheuede had euyll*: M. 1117); the second ‘strikes a sword-length into the earth / that the king nearly swoons at the sound of his blows’ (*a swerde-length within þe swarthe he swappez at ones, / that nere swounes þe kynge for swoughe of his dynttez*: M. 1126–27). Clearly the giant of the *Morte* is no bumbling rustic, but is rather a dangerous opponent who combines the strength of the peasant-like buffalo (*püffel*) with the dexterity and skill of the trained knight.

When it comes to the giant’s capacity to withstand the violence Arthur inflicts, meanwhile, the *Morte*-poet appears to have taken special care to emphasise the threat of his giant by linking the first two of Arthur’s counter-strikes to specific techniques used by his literary ancestors. Arthur’s first blow is a savage duplicate of the blinding strike to the forehead delivered in Geoffrey and Wace, in whose accounts ‘the giant had parried the sword with his club, so protecting his forehead from a lethal wound’ (*interposuerat namque clauam ictui et frontem suam a letali uulnere muniuerat*: G. X.85–86; cf. W. 11509–16). The *Morte*-poet omits any mention of the giant parrying Arthur’s strike such that he instead ‘strikes the front of the face / so that the burnished blade reaches the brain’ (*Full-butt in þe frunt the fromand he hittez, / That the burnyscht blade to þe brayn runnez*: M. 1112–13). This unimpeded blow not only fails to kill the giant, but the giant merely ‘wiped his face with his foul hands’ (*He feyede his fysnamye with his foule hondez*: M. 1114) and continued to fight unimpeded.
Undeterred, Arthur proceeds to duplicate the crippling strike from Laȝamon’s account where Arthur ‘cut through [the giant’s] thigh so that he fell to the ground’ (and ṭat ṭiȝ him ofsmat, and eotend adun wæt: L. 13012), which now strikes not just into the thigh but ‘even into [the] in-meat […] / through to the genitals, and tore them apart’ (Ewyn into [pe] inmette […] / Just to pe genitales, and jaggede ṭam in sondre: M. 1123). In response to this wound the giant simply ‘bellowed and roared and rudely strikes / eagerly at Arthur’ (romyede and rarede, and ruydly he strykez / full egerly at Arthure: 1124). Not even a disembowelling stroke, an original addition by the Morte-poet where ‘both the guts and the gore gush out at onces, / covering the grass on the ground where he stands’ (Both þe guttez and the gorre guschez owte at ones, / þat all englaymez þe gressse one grounde þer he standez: 1130–31), is able to stop this monstrous giant-knight.

The Morte-giant has absorbed not only the hyperreal fighting style but also, to an extent, the attire of the romance knight. As Rebecca S. Beal has noted, the Morte-poet’s emphasis on narratively unimportant aspects of Arthur’s attire — that is to say, the armour and weapons which play no role in the upcoming battle with the giant — ‘serves to focus a reader’s attention on Arthur as the bearer of civilisation’.52 Paired with Arthur’s arming scene is an extensive description of the giant, whose ‘near nakedness [...] combined with his gluttonous cannibalism construct him powerfully as the antithesis of the Arthur who commands lavish feasts and wears beautiful armour, whose prosperity mirrors and contributes to that of his subjects’.53 Yet the opposition between Arthur and the giant is not as clear as it might first seem; though the giant

carries a club like his predecessors, this club is ‘a club of pure iron’ (*a clubb all of clene yryn*: M. 1105), and a ‘keen weapon’ (*kene wapen*: M. 1106). The salient feature of the peasant club is its inartful construction. A club of iron — especially *pure* iron — would have required the use of the blacksmith’s art in order to refine, purify, and shape the metal, undermining the rude connotations of the wooden club. The description of the club as ‘keen’, meanwhile, is something of a paradox, for a club, by definition, cannot be ‘keen’ (i.e. ‘sharp’).\(^{54}\) Consider also the poet’s description of the ‘club’ striking a ‘sword-length into the earth’ (*a swerde-lenghe within þe swarthe*: M. 1126). The giant’s impossible iron club, it would seem, wavers somewhere between the knightly sword and the peasant-like club.

Support for the interpretation of the *Morte*-giant, like the club, as wavering between knight and peasant can be adduced from an illustration in the copy of the *St. Alban’s Chronicle* that is contained in the mid fifteenth-century Lambeth Palace Library MS 6. Like the *Morte*, the *Chronicle* is a late medieval text which draws on the Galfridian account of Arthur’s battle against the giant of Mont St-Michel, but unlike the *Morte* the *Chronicle* omits any physical description of the giant. Into this suggestive silence the illustrator of this manuscript has inserted a depiction of the giant as an enormous late-medieval man-at-arms, dressed in fine plate armour with a soldier’s helm. The association between the giant and the common-born man-at-arms in this illustration is communicated through the illustrator’s choice of armour and weapon with which to equip the giant. The illustrator, as was conventional, has attired his figures in armour considered fashionable in his own time: the ‘blued’ appearance

\(^{54}\) It is possible that the word ‘*kene*’ refers to its alternative meaning as fierce, savage, cruel, or bellicose. This would still, however, be consistent with the *Morte*-poet’s ambiguous presentation of the weapon as both club and sword.
of the steel in particular, created by heating the metal to a specific temperature and then rapidly cooling it, was popular in the fifteenth century but rare before it. What is most striking about this illustration is undoubtedly the similarity of Arthur and the giant, both of whom wear almost identical leg, arm, and head defences, and even share a common blue–red–gold colour scheme. In this the two characters reflect the visual homogeneity of late medieval men-at-arms and gentle knights, both of whom employed similar equipment and technique. This visual homogeneity could make life difficult for knights who wanted to surrender to a worthy individual on the battlefield, forcing them to enquire of their captors whether or not they were of noble birth. The difference between Arthur and the giant in this illustration ultimately comes down to detail; the giant lacks the delicate craftspieces of gauntlets and sabatons (which protect hands and feet respectively) and wears a brigandine — a relatively affordable piece of armour made of iron plates riveted to a fabric vest — instead of Arthur’s more costly plate cuirass. In this contrast between costly plate and inferior brigandine, perhaps we might also see the Morte-poet’s contrast between Arthur’s artificial armour and the giant’s natural armour in the form of a ‘hide as harsh as a hound-fish all over’ (harske as a hunde-fisch, hardly who so lukez, / so was pe hyde of pat hulke hally al ouer: M. 1084–85) — a description unique to the Morte. Returning to the Chronicle, we can observe that the visual clues encoded in the armour serve to both locate the giant as

57 Although the brigandine was worn by a wide cross-section of society, the lack of decoration in this image indicates that this is a simple commoner’s brigandine. See Jim Bradbury, The Routledge Companion to Medieval Warfare (London: Routledge, 2004), 253–54; Kelly DeVries, Medieval Military Technology (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1992), 75–87.
Arthur’s social inferior and to imply a connection between the giant and the common-born man-at-arms.

Beyond their armour, the difference between the two figures is accentuated by the giant’s weapon, located in the lower-left corner of the image. A curved sword of the type depicted is often named (correctly) by modern literary scholars as a ‘falchion’, but described (incorrectly) as a ‘Saracen sword’. To judge solely by literary and pictorial evidence there would indeed appear to be some support for the belief that the falchion was a Saracen weapon, for there are many pictures of Saracens carrying curved swords and many documents describing such weapons as ‘falchions’. However, this kind of artistic representation must be treated with a certain degree of caution since archaeological records suggest that straight swords were almost universal in both the Islamic and Byzantine regions for much of the crusading years, while the ‘true’ curved sabre did not come into great prominence until at least the end of the conflict. The falchion — a single-edged blade, which may or may not be curved, that characteristically swells towards its tip — was in truth a European weapon carried by and associated with common-born soldiers from as early as the eleventh or twelfth century, but whose period of greatest use was the thirteenth and fourteenth.

centuries. Though made of steel and edged like a sword, the weight distribution of the falchion mirrored that of a club or axe, both of which had centres of percussion further towards the tip than a typical arming or ‘knightly’ sword. Like many medieval symbols of alterity, it is possible that the Morte-poet’s description of the giant’s keen iron club, an impossible weapon fusing the characteristics of both sword and club, was intended as an allusion to the falchion as a symbol of generic alterity; but when combined with the giant’s hide and fighting style, the Morte-poet skews this alterity sufficiently far in one direction to identify him specifically with the common-born man-at-arms of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

**The Destruction and Distinction of Knighthood**

In addition to his social station as a man-at-arms, the Morte’s giant of Mont St-Michel is depicted as culturally (and parodically) French. The Morte-poet has introduced to the giant’s customary consumption of human flesh a description of how he ‘chopped in a charger [i.e. dish] of chalk-white silver / with pickles and powders of precious spices / and plenty of spiced Portuguese wine’ (*choppid in a chargour of chalke-whytt syluer, / with pekill and powdyre of precious spycez, / and pyment full plenteous of Portyngale wynes*: 1025–28). Though romance giants were notorious gluttons, the peculiar delicacy of this grisly feast, when coupled with the giant’s Genoese origin, appears to be a parodic allusion to the French habit of using significantly more spices in their cooking than their English counterparts in the thirteenth and fourteenth

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61 In physics, the centre of percussion is the point where a perpendicular impact will cause no reaction at the pivot of a rotating object. This is the optimum point at which to strike a target with a percussive weapon.
centuries. Additionally, the image of ‘chopping in a charger of chalk-white silver’ performs a double function in the text by alluding to the poet’s frequent use of the phrase ‘chalk-white’ to describe war-horses in battle. This phrase occurs in connection with the Genoese giants later in the poem when the poet describes how the giants ‘chopped’ down many of Arthur’s knights upon their ‘steeds’:

With clubs of pure steel they clanked in helms,
Crashed down crests and crashed brains,
Killed coursers and covered steeds,
Chopped through chevaliers on chalk-white steeds.63

These Genoese giants, both the solitary giant of Mont St-Michel and the army at the fictional battle of Soissons, embody both the mastication and maceration of chivalry by the composite spectre of the common-born French men-at-arms of the Hundred Years War, a figure which combines both the English hatred of their French adversaries and the knightly resentment of the upwardly mobile militant lower class. Against the army of giants at Soissons, the English knight Arthur singles out one, the giant Golaplas, and literally cuts him down to size by cutting clean through his knees, saying to him, ‘Come down [...] and talk to your peers! / You are too high by half, I assure you in truth’ (Come down [...] and karpe to thy feryes! / Thow arte to hye by þe halfe, / I hete þe in trouthe: M. 2126–27) — a reference which plays on the double meaning of the giant’s literal height and his unnaturally high social standing as an upstart commoner striking down knights. Arthur’s slaying of Golaplas, which turns the battle so that ‘the giants are destroyed, / and at that battle overthrown by gentle lords’

63 *‘With clubbez of clenste clenkkede in helmes, / Craschede doun crestez and cruschede braynez, / Kyllede cou[r]zers and couerde stedes, / Choppede thurghe cheualers on chalke-whytte stedez’: M. 2113–16.*
(the geauntez are distroyede / And at that journey fortjustede with gentill lordez: 2133–34), allows him to metaphorically put the upstart mercenary soldiers back in their social place.

Arthur is able to defeat Golapas because he has already ‘learned’ how to defeat a giant from his earlier battle atop Mont St-Michel. Recall that in the twelfth-century accounts of Geoffrey, Wace, and Laȝamon, Arthur deployed his skill-at-arms in order to construct a knightly masculinity that was both distinct and superior to the common-born giant. By the end of the fourteenth century such martial skill was no longer a reliable means for distinguishing between noble and common men: the men-at-arms had proven themselves capable warriors, both in their own right and against the members of knighthood. In this context we can read the failure of Arthur’s sword, the symbol of his knightly prowess in battle, to stop the giant of Mont St-Michel as a failure of martial skill to function as a sign of distinction for the aristocracy; for if we accept that the battle against the giant represents a struggle for masculine superiority and that the method of victory encodes the method of distinguishing knightly masculinity from common masculinity, then the sword will (pun intended) just not cut it.

Unable to vanquish the giant with his sword, Arthur turns instead to his dagger. One of the most popular hilts for the late medieval dagger had two distinctive swellings at the base of the blade that resembled the male genitalia. The ‘ballock dagger’, as this style was known, was an unmistakably phallic symbol often worn hanging from the front of their belt with the lengthy blade (commonly as long as a man’s forearm)
hanging somewhat suggestively down the wearer’s left thigh. The description of Arthur’s dagger as an *anlace*, which describes only its tapering blade, is certainly consistent with the blades of a number of extant ballock daggers curated at the Royal Armouries in Leeds. If we read Arthur’s *anlace* as a ballock dagger then it would seem that, having already castrated the giant with a blow to the thigh that cuts ‘through to the genitals, and tore them apart’ (*Just to þe genitales, and jaggede þam in sondre*: 1123) — a castration which appears to function more as a cathartic release for Arthur than as an injury for the giant — Arthur proceeds to drastically assert the superiority of English knightly masculinity over the masculinity of the common-born French man-at-arms by thrusting his large steel phallus into the giant ‘up to the hilt’ (*up to þe hiltez*: 1149) — that is to say, up to the ballocks.

The *Morte*-poet fuses the implied sexuality of the dagger with a spiritual reading of Arthur’s dagger as a *misericorde*. Unlike the ballock dagger, which was defined by its physical attributes, the *misericorde* was defined by its function as a weapon of last resort or a tool for delivering the *coup-de-grace* to wounded or incapacitated enemies. In his glossary of knightly armaments, Ramon Llull described the *misericorde* as a symbol of the knight’s faith in God:

> The *misericorde* is given to the knight so that if he is lacking weapons he may turn to the *misericorde*, for if he is so close to his enemy that he is unable to wound him with the lance, sword or mace, he should stab him with the *misericorde*. Thus, the weapon — the *misericorde* — signifies that the knight must trust neither in his arms nor in his

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64 Contrary to the argument made by Dana Oswald, this means that it is unlikely that Arthur’s dagger would have been a ‘tiny weapon’ or considered emasculating in the period. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality*, 179.

65 I would like to thank the curator of edged weapons at the Royal Armouries at Leeds, Bob Savage, for giving me a tour of the collection in 2014.
strength, and he must come so close to God through hope that with hope and with God he may fight against his enemies and those who are contrary to Chivalry.\footnote{Llull, Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria, V, 7,203; trans. Fallows, 68. Finlayson correctly interprets Arthur’s recourse to the dagger as meaning that ‘Arthur’s victory is due to his championing of the Right and to his trust in God’, but does not expand on this point: Finlayson, ‘Arthur and the Giant’, 119.}

In the Morte-poet’s rendition of Arthur’s battle with the giant of Mont St-Michel, Arthur is failed by both his arms and his strength before coming so close to the giant that he is unable to bring his sword to bear — all elements which point towards a reading of Arthur’s anlace as a misericorde, a reading which (in turn) forms part of a broader representation of the power of faith to distinguish between Arthur and his rustic opponent. Failed first by his shield, which he is unable to raise in time to ward off the giant’s opening blow, and second by the strength of his sword-arm which cannot slay the giant, Arthur is failed a third time by his armour, through which ‘three ribs in [Arthur’s] side [the giant] breaks asunder’ (three rybbys in his syde he thrystez in sundere: M. 1151). Though compromised every time he attempts to rely on his material tools, Arthur is nevertheless able to emerge from the battle victorious and unscathed by turning each time to the power of Christ. In the first instance, Arthur is protected from the giant’s blow to his head not by his shield but ‘through the craft of Christ’ (thurgh þe crafte of Cryste: M. 1107); in the second, when wounded in the side by the giant’s death-throes he is saved not by his armour but by a miracle seemingly brought on by a prayer from those ‘sad maidens’ (balefull bierdez: M. 1136) who clap together their hands and pray that ‘Christ comfort this knight and keep him from
sorrow, / and do not let this fiend take him from life’ (Criste comforthe zone knyghte and kepe hym fro sorowe, / and latte neuer zone fende fell hym of lyfe: M. 1139); and when, in the third instance, he is drawn so close to the giant that he can no longer strike with his ineffective sword, he is able to slay the giant with his misericorde, a symbol of faith triumphant in material defeat.

The Morte-poet places an additional spin on the relationship between faith and knighthood through Bedevere and Arthur’s post-battle banter about the giant and sainthood. ‘It seems that my lord / seeks saints but seldom’ (it semez be my lorde, / he sekez sentez bot seldon: M. 1162–62), quips Bedevere of the giant:

By Michael, of such a fellow I have much wonder that our sovereign Lord should suffer him in heaven!
If all the saints that serve our Lord are such as he, I shall never be a saint, by my father’s soul.67

Mont St-Michel was a famous site of pilgrimage in the medieval period, particularly for those who sought the blessing of Saint Michael — the warrior archangel and patron saint of many medieval knights. In comparing the giant to the archangel Michael, Bedevere alludes to the aspirational goals of the common-born men-at-arms who sought to assume the role of the archetypical warrior in medieval society — a claim which he subsequently counters on the grounds that the men-at-arms were insufficiently pious. Bedevere’s quip is, to certain extent, defeatist; by conceding, if only in jest, the usurpation of sainthood (i.e. knighthood) by the giant, Bedevere swears off his own aspirational identity as a saintly warrior. Arthur, by contrast, is more

67 ‘Be Myghell, of syche a makk I hafe myche wondyre, / That euer owre soueraygne Lorde suffers hym in heuen! / And all seyntez be syche þat seruez oure Lorde, / I sall neuer no seynt bee, be my fadyre sawle’: M. 1166–69.
assertive of his position relative to the giant: commanding Bedevere to take out his sword and pierce the giant through the heart, he dismisses the giant in the end as neither saint nor knight but as a ‘sergeuant’ (M. 1173), a play on the word ‘geaunt’ (giant) that means ‘common soldier’ or ‘serving man’.

CONCLUSION

Arthur’s battle in the Morte is a struggle to prove the masculine worth of the knightly class of the fourteenth century against the aggressively historicised giant of Mont St-Michel. Genoese, parodically French, common-born, and militant, he is a disassemblage of the fourteenth-century common-born French man-at-arms rebuilt in the shape of a monster. Though conceding to the common a capacity for martial skill, the Morte-poet reduces this skill to a form of ‘brute strength, passion and instinct, a blind, unpredictable force of nature, the unreasoning violence of desire’, while attributing to the knightly class a ‘spiritual and intellectual strength, a self-control that predisposes them to control others, a strength of soul or spirit which allows them to conceive their relationship to the dominated — the “masses”, women, the young — as that of the soul to the body, understanding to sensibility, culture to nature.’ With prayer and misericorde, Arthur proves his superior courtly masculinity through the power of his faith; thus is the giant slain, and the stature of knighthood restored.

68 Bourdieu, Distinction, 481.
Peace, Violence, and Masculinity in *Kudrun*

The history of literary representations of violence and single combat bifurcated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as Germany followed the lead of France and England in the widespread adoption of courtliness by the lay gentry. The relatively late closing-off of the social category of knighthood that accompanied the adoption of courtliness meant that the lower levels of German chivalry included in their social self-consciousness the practice of sword-and-buckler fencing (or *schirmen*) which had developed during the latter twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The art of sword-and-buckler fence, treated as a pastime of ruffians and scoundrels in both France and England,⁴ thus became elevated to a sport played before emperors and kings in the Holy Roman Empire.² It was this art which was the ultimate root of all systems of Western fencing during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and which would shape the representation of single combat in Western literature through to the seventeenth century.

Beginning with an exploration of the existing scholarship on the early art of sword-and-buckler fence, this chapter proposes a close reading of the art of fencing in the anonymous Middle High German (MHG) poem *Kudrun* and the treatise known as

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¹ See below.
² For a visual example, see the fourteenth-century ‘Codex Manesse’, Codex Palatinus Germanicus 848, fols 190v, 204v.
the ‘Nuremburg Hausbuch’, HS 3227a. Through these readings, I argue that this new method of representation drew upon existing clerical discourses of peace to promote among the warrior classes the ability to control and moderate their emotions. This method of emotional moderation foreshadows a later emphasis within representations of interpersonal conflict upon rationality and intellectualisation which would compete with the innate focus upon morality of the coextant virtue combat tradition already discussed.

EARLY REPRESENTATIONS OF SWORD-AND-BUCKLER FENCE

The earliest references to the art of sword-and-buckler fence comes from England in several legal documents produced during the reign of Edward I (1274–1307). The first of these is a writ, composed in 1281, that is directed to ‘the Mayor and Sheriffs of London enjoining them to punish all bakers, brewers, and other misdoers walking the City by night with swords and bucklers and assaulting those they met’. This writ was followed by a statute four years later providing ‘that none shall keep school for, nor teach the art of fence within the City of London under pain of imprisonment for forty days’. If we take the authorities at their word then it would appear that the London schools of fence were veritable dens of iniquity; in 1310–11 we find record of the imprisonment of the aptly-named Roger le Skirmisour for the crime of ‘holding a school for fencing and drawing young men together, sons of respectable parents, to the

wasting of their property and injury of their own characters’. These early writs and statutes were to be revisited in Shakespeare’s time under the guise of a series of Vagrancy Acts which grouped fencers with players of interludes, bearwards, gypsies, and other undesirables under the label of ‘rogues and vagabonds’ — a label alluded to in Shakespeare’s frequent descriptions of Falstaff as a ‘rogue’.

One of the few licit contexts in which one could practise the art of sword-and-buckler fence was the trial by combat. Introduced to England by William I after the Norman Conquest of 1066, the trial by combat was a method of resolving legal disputes in which litigants would engage in physical battle on the assumption that God would grant victory to the righteous party. Although the original writ issued by William does not specify the weapons that were to be used in these trials, by extrapolating from continental sources we may consider it likely that the nobility insisted upon the right to use their own arms and armour while the common folk would be restricted to the weapons of club-and-shield or sword-and-buckler, wielded without armour. It is in the service of the upper echelons of these common folk — that is, those with wealth but who were not professional warriors themselves — that we occasionally find evidence of fencers in gainful employment. In circumstances where an individual was physically capable of participating in a trial by combat but lacked the requisite martial skills they could pay for lessons from a fencing master; in one instance a certain Walter de Stewton was given leave from the Tower of London ‘so

that he may live on his own resources and learn fencing’. When litigants were unable to fight for themselves on account of infirmity, age, or gender, professional fencers could instead act as a champion to fight on the litigant’s behalf. Yet despite these niche professions, the art of sword-and-buckler fence remained disreputable in England until the middle of the sixteenth century, at which point the incorporation of a society for the ‘Maisters of the Noble Science of Defense’ under the reign of Henry VIII granted licensed practitioners a certain degree of legitimacy.

Although the paucity of early references to sword-and-buckler fence makes it difficult to compare like sources, one notices a markedly different attitude towards the art of fence in the MHG romances of the late twelfth century as compared to the legal sources of Anglo-Norman England. The latest research on literary representations of the German art of sword-and-buckler fence, or schirmen as it was known, comes from Rachel E. Kellett’s doctoral dissertation and her subsequent article on the literary context of the earliest extant European fencing treatise, Royal Armouries MS I.33. Kellett has found a number of texts where schirmen is mentioned in passing, such as when the hero of Gottfried von Straßburg’s Tristan is said to have been taught schirmen alongside traditional knightly disciplines such as wrestling, running, jumping, and archery or javelin throwing, and two texts in which the art of schirmen is depicted in practice, the Der Trojanerkrieg by Konrad Von Würzburg and the

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anonymous Kudrun. Although chivalric romances like Tristan may suggest that ‘schirmen was used as an entertainment and as a form of training for young knights, along with riding, jousting, and other athletic pursuits’, Craig Taylor has pointed out that it is of fundamental importance [...] that chivalric texts were not simply mirrors to the world around them but sought to be an active social force, shaping attitudes and advancing ideals for what the aristocracy ought to become, rather than simply celebrating and commemorating an existing social reality.

Although this is a comparatively new idea in the historiography of French chivalry — Taylor complained recently that ‘debates about the impact of [French] chivalric culture on warfare have effectively been scuppered by naïve and simplistic views about what the ideals of knighthood actually were in the middle ages’ — in the field of German chivalry we find this idea in the works of seminal scholars such as Joachim Bumke, who describes chivalric literature as a ‘guide and model’ to the process of social change, and Stephen Jaeger, who sees in romantic representations of courtliness ‘the civilizing of the knightly class’.

If we are to use these literary texts as documentary sources for the historic practice of schirmen in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany, therefore, it is necessary to locate each literary instance of schirmen within its thematic, ethical, and social context.

11 Kellett, ‘Royal Armouries MS I.33’, 42.
12 Taylor, Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood, 8.
13 Taylor, Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood, xii.
The paucity of information available in those texts in which schirmen is accorded a merely nominal place in the listing of knightly pastimes makes it difficult to evaluate the manner in which such representations were intended to be read and so I have, with a few minor exceptions, omitted such texts from the present analysis. Of the two detailed representations of schirmen identified by Kellett, I have elected to undertake a detailed analysis of Kudrun over Der Trojanerkrieg due to the availability of three English translations of the MHG text: Brian Murdoch’s translation for the Everyman’s Classics series (1987), Winder McConnell’s translation for Medieval Texts and Translations (1992), and Marion Gibbs and Sidney Johnson’s translation for the Garland Library of Medieval Literature (1992). Der Trojanerkrieg, by contrast, has never been translated into English.

**KUDRUN AND THE COURTLY–HEROIC DICHOTOMY**

*Kudrun* is a MHG epic of love and dynasty whose relationship to its near contemporary, the canonical epic known as the Nibelungenlied, troubles the relationship between courtly and heroic masculinity. Although critics have long recognised the presence of what Friedrich Neumann called ‘layers of ethics’ (*Schichten der Ethik*) in the Nibelungenlied, the contrast between courtly and heroic

15 Brian Murdoch, *Kudrun* (London: Dent, 1987); Winder McConnell, *Kudrun* (Columbia: Camden House, 1992); Marion Gibbs and Sidney Johnson, *Kudrun* (London: Garland, 1992). Quotations of the original MHG are from Karl Bartsch and Karl Stackmann, *Kudrun* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1980). Unless otherwise noted, I have chosen to use Gibbs and Johnson’s translation on account of its close adherence to the original text. All English–language quotations have been verified against the MHG original and, on a handful of occasions, amended to take into account certain nuances that would otherwise be lost in translation; such emendations, when they occur, have been recorded in the footnotes.

masculinities in the older poem has traditionally been viewed in terms of an irreconcilable dichotomy; as Jan-Dirk Müller has put it, ‘courtly Frauentendienst [love-service] remains alien to the heroic epic: ambiguous, discriminating, and discriminated’. This well-trod critical approach has implications for the interpretation of Kudrun, which is often read as an ‘anti-Nibelungenlied’. If both of these traditional readings — that of the dichotomy of courtly and heroic masculinities, and that of the antipathy between Kudrun and the Nibelungenlied — are taken as valid, then one might expect to find in Kudrun’s representation of schirmen a courtly riposte to the heroic spear- and stone-throwing contest of the Nibelungenlied. A close reading of these two texts, however, reveals that the application of these traditional readings to the contest of schirmen in Kudrun results in a certain inconsistency of interpretation which undermines its hermeneutic validity.

The stories of both Kudrun and the Nibelungenlied are structured around several ‘bride-winning’ episodes, a narrative formation typically associated with the genre of literature known as the Spielmannsepen (‘minstrel epics’). The first bride-winning episode in Kudrun deals with King Hetel of the Hegelings’ attempt to win

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Hilde, daughter of King Hagen of Ireland. Hetel is unable to deliver his suit in person due to Hagen’s reputation for killing anyone attempting to woo her — a common motif among the Spielmannsepen — and so enlists the aid of several of his vassals, who disguise themselves as merchants in order to woo Hilde secretly on their lord’s behalf. The second bride-winning episode deals with the wooing of Hetel and Hilde’s daughter, the titular Kudrun, by not one but three suitors: Herwic of Zeeland, Hartmuot of Normandy, and Sivrit of Moorland. Dismayed by Kudrun’s rejection of his suit, Hartmuot abducts Kudrun and holds her captive for thirteen years until she is eventually rescued. The story ends somewhat unusually with the reconciliation of all parties involved in the second bride-winning episode through a complex interlocking of marital bonds.

The episode of schirmen occurs during the first bride-winning episode after Hagen welcomes Hetel’s disguised suitors into his court. Hagen invites the ‘merchants’ to join him for an evening of entertainment at court, an invitation which the Hegelings readily accept as means of gaining the king’s confidence. The evening’s entertainment features chess (zabelen), schirmen, and ‘hurling javelins at sturdy shields’ (gabilôte geschozzen / vil üf guote schilde: 256.3–4). Hagen asks one of the Hegelings, an old warrior named Wate, if he had ever seen the contest of schirmen in his own country. When Wate demurs and claims to know nothing of it, Hagen calls for his fencing master (schirmmeister) to teach Wate ‘three strokes’ (dri swanke: 359.3). As soon as the instructor begins to teach, ‘Wate took up a defensive posture, as if he were a professional fighter’ (Wate stuont in huote, / sam er ein kemphe wäre: 360.3–4) before proceeding to outclass the fencing master in every way. Hagen then calls for his sword and takes over from his fencing master, promising to ‘teach [Wate] four of my thrusts and give him something to thank me for’ (ob ich in müge lêren der mînen...
slege viere, / daz mirs der recke danke: 362.3–4). The men are evenly matched — although ‘however great their strength was, Hagen showed more of it’ (swaz man sach ir sterke, doch êt ir Hagene dâ bezeiget mère: 365.4) — and fight until their swords come loose at the hilts. After both men have sat down, Wate’s companion Irolt reveals that the Hegelings have indeed ‘seen combats like this in our master’s country, and both knights and squires practise it there every day’ (wir hân ez ê gesehen / in unsers herren lande. wir habenz uns ze rehte, / daz sîn aller tegelige phlegent <beide> ritter und die knehte: 369.2–4). Everyone laughs at this revelation before Hagen gives them leave to carry on with the night’s entertainment, at which point we are told that when the Hegelings ‘became bored, they would have contests hurling heavy stones or throwing the spear’ (begunde verdriezen, / dô wurfen si die steine und begunden mit den scheften schiezen: 371.3–4).²⁰

The Kudrun-poet’s closing description of ‘hurling heavy stones or throwing the spear’ alludes to the first bride-winning contest of the Nibelungenlied, where the Dutch prince Siegfried attempts to help his friend, King Gunter of Burgundy, woo the mighty Queen Brunhild of Iceland with a competition of spear-throwing, rock-hurling, and leaping. In order to win Brunhild’s hand in marriage, Gunter — like Wate — is required to engage in a public display of his masculine abilities at court. Strength, more than any other quality, is represented as the key to victory in these contests. After Brunhild’s selection of a monstrous iron spear and an enormous boulder ‘made it terribly clear how strong she was’ (sterke vil grözliche schein: 449.1), Siegfried — who possessed the strength of twelve men — secretly dons a magic cloak of invisibility to help Gunter win the challenge. Brunhild throws her spear at Gunter with great

²⁰ I have elected here to use the translation by Murdoch as it better captures the sense of this phrase.
strength (*vil krefteclîche*: 456.1), is knocked over by Siegfried’s return throw in spite of all her strength (*kreften*: 460.3), and used her strength (*krefteclîche vil*: 462.3) to throw the boulder. Her opponents, meanwhile, returned the spear ‘with Siegfried’s strength’ (*des starken Sifrides*: 458.4) and were able to beat Brunhild’s stone-throw only because ‘Siegfried was tall and very strong, [and] nothing frightened him’ (*Sîfrit der was kîne, vil kreftec unde lanc*: 464.1). This raw physical strength is one of the hallmarks of the ‘heroic’ masculinity of the early medieval period, which took as its foundation certain early medieval perceptions of bodily strength and the anatomical differences between males and females. ‘A man (*vir*) is so called’, explains Isidore of Seville in his seventh-century *Etymologiae*, ‘because in him resides greater power (*vis*) than in a woman […] These two are differentiated by the respective strength and weakness of their bodies’ (*Vir nuncupatus, quia maior in eo vis est quam in feminis [...] Utrique enim fortitudine et inbecilitate corporum separatur*).21 This is true even in cases where a woman displays great strength, as in Brunhild’s case: her great strength is represented as a transgression that must be punished if the ‘natural order’ is to be restored.22 The poet’s repeated emphasis upon strength in this bride-winning episode suggests that the contest between Gunter and Brunhild is operating according to the framework of heroic masculinity, which, if extrapolated, suggests that the *Nibelungenlied* can be read as ‘a thirteenth-century attempt to revive a warrior’s


“golden age” and with it, a heroic definition of feudal relations, warrior kingship, masculinity, and femininity’.  

The *Kudrun*-poet’s relegation of the *Nibelungenlied*’s pivotal contest of spear-and stone-throwing to an act undertaken by Wate and his companions out of boredom implies a downgrading of the heroic masculine framework involved in Gunter and Siegfried’s contest with Brunhild. This diminishment ties into, on the one hand, the critical tradition which views courtliness and heroism as jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive forms of gentle masculinity and, on the other, the tradition of viewing *Kudrun* as a riposte to the *Nibelungenlied*. What emerges from the intersection of these two traditions is an interpretation of *Kudrun* as representing ‘a new era of (Christian) forgiveness and human understanding in place of a rigid Germanic ethos of blind loyalty to the family and commitment to the pursuit of blood revenge’.  

If we were to apply this theme to the contest of *schirmen*, it would appear that the *Kudrun*-poet deploys *schirmen* as a courtly bride-winning alternative to the heroic spear- and stone-throwing contest of the *Nibelungenlied*.

This juxtaposition between a heroic *Nibelungenlied* and a courtly *Kudrun* is, however, undermined by the larger themes of the *Nibelungenlied* which attempt to reconcile the heroic oral tradition with the literary codes of courtesy. Neil E. Thomas has highlighted certain aspects of Siegfried’s relationship with Kriemhild which are consistent with courtly love (*hohe minne*), such as their ‘glances’ (*ougen blicken*: NL 293.3) and how ‘if a white hand was pressed tenderly, / out of heartfelt love, I do not know’ (*Wart iht dâ friwentliche getwungen wiziu hant / von herzen lieber minne*:

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arguing that these elements indicate that Siegfried is neither wholly courtly nor wholly heroic but is rather ‘shown in the dual state of knight and warrior’ — that is to say, both courtly and heroic.\(^{25}\) This duality appears to be the result of an incomplete assimilation of the courtly ethos into the heroic, for, as Müller put it, the ‘heroic world can apparently only integrate a part of the minne [i.e. courtly love] concept, and only at a high cost’.\(^{26}\) What emerges from this more nuanced reading of the Nibelungenlied is not a poem that asserts the continuity and longevity of the heroic ethos, but rather one that delivers an ‘admonishment of the unrestrained violence so characteristic of warrior culture’.\(^{27}\)

Further undermining the perceived dichotomy of a courtly Kudrun and a heroic Nibelungenlied is the ascription of courtly behaviour to the antagonist Hartmuot in Kudrun. From his ‘courteous manners’ (höhen zühten: 622.2), to his ‘bearing’ (gebære: 622.3), to the fact ‘that he strove accordingly for the noble love of high-born ladies’ (daz er edeler minne an hòhe frouwen gerte billîche: 622.4) and exchanged ‘secretive glances’ (tougen ougen blicke: 624.2) with Kudrun, we can observe that the ‘gestures of Frauendienst are all present’.\(^{28}\) To these signs we might add the observation that Hartmuot, whose ‘thoughts were filled sometimes with love and sometimes with foreboding’ (Hartmuoten mit gedanken vil liebe und ouch vil ande: 598.4) and was ‘in a state of mind that was sometimes hopeful and sometimes

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\(^{26}\) Müller, Rules for the Endgame, 396.


\(^{28}\) Müller, Rules for the Endgame, 397.
pessimistic about how he might gain success in wooing the lady’ (jâ was sîn gedinge übel unde guot, / wie er verenden kunde daz werben nàch der frouwen: 628.2–3), is the only suitor of the poem to demonstrate the kind of pensive vacillation between joy and sorrow which was thought to be characteristic of courtly lovers through to the seventeenth century. Hartmuot’s melancholy is provoked in the first instance by the uncertain fortunes of the love-letter he has sent and in the second by the rejection of his suit, leading him to swear that ‘if she would consent to love him [...] then he would serve (dienen) her as long as he lived’ (ob si in minnen wolte, als er ër ê enbôt [...] daz wolte er immer dienen die wîle er möhte leben: 754.1–3). Hartmuot’s suit — which utilises messengers, secret glances, and the language of service (dienst) — falls clearly within the pattern of courtly Minnedienst (‘courtly love service’), while his imprisonment of Kudrun and use of force against women serves to delegitimise this same ethos of courtly masculinity.

What these revisions leave us with is a reading of Kudrun as a poem that rejects the Nibelungenlied’s attempt to temper traditional heroic masculinity with the new ethos of courtliness. Although it would be tempting at this point to reverse the traditional interpretation and thereby read Kudrun as a pro-heroic text, such a reading is denied to us by the Kudrun-poet’s clear criticism of the violent excesses of the heroic Wate ‘the Old’ (der alte), whose slaughter of innocent women and children at the end of the poem leads the reader to ‘imagine no one more wild, ruthless, kampfestlustig and demonic, less chivalrous than Wate once the fever of battle and the lust for vengeance are upon him’. 29 To the extent that we are inclined to see the confrontation

29 Campbell, Kudrun: A Critical Appreciation. 22–24. For more on Wate see Winder McConnell, The Wate Figure in Medieval Tradition (Berne: Peter Lang, 1978).
between heroism and courtliness as a conflict between two jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive forms of masculinity, we appear bound to accept Kudrun as a text that is disconcertingly inconsistent in its presentation of masculinity and, therefore, ill-suited to offering a clear picture of the role of schirmen in medieval German society.

**PEACE AND MASCULINITY**

Edward R. Haymes has identified a way out of this impasse by proposing three, rather than two, forms of masculinity at work in Kudrun’s immediate predecessor, the Nibelungenlied. In addition to its courtly and heroic forms, Haymes identifies what he calls an ‘aristocratic’ form of masculinity, an ethos concerned with social stability and the maintenance of the status quo through the judicious use of diplomacy and force. He associates this aristocratic masculinity with both the Burgundian court and the character of Etzel, who is ‘concerned with the protection of the status quo’ and who, if he had known, would have attempted to prevent the outbreak of violence at the poem’s end ‘because it was a threat to his power and status’. A similar concern with the preservation of social stability can be detected in Hagen’s behaviour during Kudrun’s contest of schirmen. Soon after taking his fencing master’s place in the contest against Wate we are told that ‘the king quickly recognised Wate’s mastery and would have become angry if it had not been damaging to his honour’ (der künic vil schiere erkante die Waten meisterschaft. / ein teil begunde er zürnen, warenz im niht ân êre: 365.2–3). Though these lines are brief, they appear to indicate what Haymes has described as an aristocratic ability to control anger in a situation where such control


31 Haymes, ‘Heroic, Chivalric, and Aristocratic’, 103.
is advantageous to the maintenance of his social status. When this aristocratic concern with preserving the status quo is later placed at odds with a conventionally heroic desire for revenge that is caused by the abduction of his daughter Hilde, Hagen exhibits an ability to shift rapidly from a violent berserker rage to a mood of amiable reconciliation by yielding swiftly and with good cheer when given the opportunity to make a peace that works to his advantage, even complimenting the Hegelings for the skill which they displayed in abducting his daughter.

Hagen’s rapid shift between mirth and violence is similar to what twentieth-century historians like Richard Southern have considered to be ‘the alternation of headlong violence with abrupt acts of remorse and atonement, which characterises the early feudal age’. For Southern and his contemporaries, the tenth and eleventh centuries were an era characterised by the violent depredations of a ‘mentally unstable’ post-Carolingian warrior class who enforced their authority through the use of violent raids known as chevauchées during which soldiers on horseback would extract levies and taxes from both clerics and peasants, pillaging those communities which refused to comply. Marc Bloch, one of the foremost historians of the twentieth century, suggested that it was the characteristic modes of thought, or mentalités, of medieval men which gave these centuries their violent tenor:

Finally, violence was an element in manners. Medieval men had little control over their immediate impulses; they were emotionally insensitive to the spectacle of pain, and they had small regard for human life, which they saw only as a transitory state before Eternity; moreover, they were very prone to make it a point of honour to display their physical strength in an almost animal way.34

To the remarks of Southern and Bloch we might add Johan Huizinga’s famous description of the extremities of life in the middle ages as ‘so violent and motley […] that it bore the mixed smell of blood and roses’.35 Though composed in the context of a study of France and the Netherlands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Huizinga’s characterisation of these years can be taken as representative of certain kinds of historiography that were influential throughout most of the twentieth century.

In response to this ‘blood and roses’ interpretation of the Middle Ages, historians such as Dominique Barthélémy, Stephen D. White, and Warren C. Brown have suggested that the violence of the tenth and eleventh centuries may have been more apparent than real, the product of biases within the documentary evidence rather


than the mentalités of the warriors themselves. The watershed moment in the debate between these two schools of thought occurred in 1994 when Thomas N. Bisson — who advocated for a millenarian ‘crisis of fidelity’ model which, though rejecting the essentialism of Southern, Bloch, and Huizinga’s mentalités, maintained their interpretation of the tenth and eleventh centuries as a period of endemic violence and disorder — published an article in the journal Past & Present where he argued that violence in post-Carolingian Francia was ‘as normal and enduring as the public order it afflicted’. Bisson’s article produced a joint reply from Barthélemy and White, followed shortly thereafter by Timothy Reuter and Chris Wickham, who argued for the importance of contextualising documentary evidence produced by clerics within the context of medieval discourses on power. Faced with evidence of a breakdown of social order, Barthélemy cautioned that ‘the historian must, on the one hand, recognise the role of force and cruelty, which is too often concealed, and, on the other, relativise the selective polemic which reveals it’. At the same time, a number of scholars have demonstrated the often ritualised and performative nature of medieval violence. What emerges from these analyses is the strong probability that the

36 See, for example, Dominique Barthélemy, Chevaliers et miracles: la violence et le sacré dans la société féodale (Paris: Colin, 2004); Stephen D. White, Feuding and Peace-Making in Eleventh-Century France (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); and Brown, Violence in Medieval Europe.


chroniclers of the tenth and eleventh centuries exaggerated the violent tendencies of the *castellans* for their own political gain.

Once this proposition is accepted, the *actual* outbreak of violence in the tenth and eleventh centuries becomes less important than what Kathleen G. Cushing has described as the ‘increased perception of disorder by those members of society whose position at this juncture was most ambivalent and in many ways under threat: the clergy’. In order to appreciate fully the precarious position of the clergy in the tenth and eleventh centuries, however, it is necessary first to understand the history of the Western church within the Carolingian Empire. Under the reign of the Carolingian kings Pippin (d. 768) and Charlemagne (d. 814) the church had its wealth and authority yoked to the machinery of imperial governance, transforming the clergy into ‘collaborators in the work of government, providing advice, staffing rudimentary bureaucracies and disseminating royal orders through society’. This arrangement, under which ‘the church existed within the empire, dependent like all other privileged bodies on imperial government for its sustenance’, meant that the eventual fragmentation of imperial authority during the reign of Charles the Fat (d. 888) produced a corresponding collapse in the authority of the church. The rapid shift of power away from the church appears to have sparked off the peace movements known as the *Pax Dei* (‘Peace of God’) and *Treuga Dei* (‘Truce of God’) whose nominal goal was to curb the violent excesses of the *castellans* and protect the politically

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powerless.\textsuperscript{44} Despite its name, peace (in the modern sense of the word) ‘was not, nor ever had been, the sole objective’ of the Pax Dei and its successive peace movements; the peace, or pax, at which these movements aimed was the restoration of the power of the church within post-Carolingian society.\textsuperscript{45}

The medieval concept of peace was understood to be not the absence of war but rather a sense of ‘stability derived from a shared acknowledgment of political, social, and power relations’.\textsuperscript{46} The leading voice on matters of peace during the medieval period was Augustine, whose work was critical to the development of just war theory. In his work \textit{De civitate dei (The City of God)}, Augustine defined peace not in terms of violence or its absence but rather in terms of order and harmony:

\begin{quote}
The peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious repose of the appetites, and that of the rational soul the harmony of knowledge and action. The peace of body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life and health of the living creature. Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law. Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord. Domestic peace is the well-ordered concord between those of the family who rule and those who obey. Civil peace is a similar concord among the citizens. The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquillity of order. Order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} Cushing, \textit{Reform and Papacy}, 39–41.
When peace is understood in this way, the ninth-century breakdown in the institutional contract between church and state can be read as a major disruption of the holy peace of God on earth. The restoration of the authority of the church, on this interpretation, is more than self-interested Realpolitik: it is divine will.\textsuperscript{48}

From this understanding of peace as a form of order and harmony there emerges a surprising amount of overlap between the aims of the peace movements and the clerical institutions of education that were developed by the first emperor of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, Otto I (d. 973). Together with his brother, Bruno of Cologne (d. 965) Otto oversaw the creation of the cathedral schools, institutions whose primary purpose was the education of future statesmen and administrators. The curriculum at these (predominantly clerical) schools was based around the Carolingian model which sought to impart ‘courtliness’ (curialitas), a collection of outward behaviours intended to reveal the inward virtues in an individual, through instruction in literature and ethics (litterae et mores).\textsuperscript{49} The importance of harmony between the inner and outer man is revealed in a vignette from the life of the court-educated Otto of Bamberg (d. 1139) in which Otto baptised the heathens of Pomerania in such a way that ‘in every act of the outer man, he manifested the harmony that reigned within him’ (in omni officio exterioris hominis, quenam esset composicio interioris).\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} For an example of how the breakdown in order was interpreted in theological terms one needs go no further than ‘three orders’ view of medieval society; see Georges Duby, \textit{The Three Orders: Feudal Society Reimagined}, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

\textsuperscript{49} Scaglione, \textit{Knights at Court}, 127–75.

\textsuperscript{50} Scaglione, \textit{Knights at Court}, 128–29.
manifestation of internal harmony associated with courtliness is, in the terminology of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a manifestation of peace. In this way, it becomes possible to see in the educational institutions of the Ottonian court an interface between reform-minded clergymen and the lay gentry responsible for the perceived breakdown in public order.

Although the institutions of courtly education were first developed in Germany, it was in France that the ideals of courtliness reached their first mass audience. Following the decline of the Carolingian Empire in the ninth century, power had shifted from the centralised imperial court to a dispersed set of regional counts known as castellans, each of whom owed nominal allegiance to the French king. This process, known as the ‘feudal mutation’ or the ‘feudal revolution’, meant that there was no one centre around which either power or education could accrue, an arrangement which encouraged the broad dispersion of Ottonian courtliness and education throughout the French lay nobility over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.51 The knightly protagonists of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, who typically ‘possess more than the practical literacy needed to get by: they have attended school, and can publicly read out messages and personally copy letters’, hint at the degree to which this new courtly education had spread throughout France by the end of the twelfth century.52 Chrétien’s knights embody a gendered ideal that fused heroic battle prowess, or chevalerie, with clerical learning, or clergie; in the prologue

to Cligès, Chrétien asserts ‘That Greece was of chevalerie / And also clergie the foremost; / Then chevalerie passed to Rome / With all clergie, / Which now is found in France’ (Que Grece ot de chevalerie / Le premier los et de clergie, / Puis vint chevalerie a Rome / Et de la clergie la somme, / Qui or est en France venue).\(^\text{53}\)

Although the origins of the social class of knighthood itself are a subject of ongoing debate, on the basis of the available evidence it would appear that the greater penetration of courtly education throughout eleventh- and twelfth-century France played an important role in the development of the ideal of chivalric or courtly masculinity previously discussed in relation to Kudrun.

In Germany, by way of contrast, the concentration of power associated with the founding of the Holy Roman Empire in 962 produced a two-tiered society where education, literacy, and courtliness were concentrated at the imperial court to the detriment of the relatively rustic dioceses; one often finds scholars of medieval German education and courtliness refer to the Burgundian cleric Wipo’s claim that ‘only in Germany it seems unimportant or disgraceful that someone should be educated unless he wants to be a cleric’ (Solis Teutonicis vacuum vel turpe videtur / Ut doceant aliquem, nisi clericum accipiatur).\(^\text{54}\) Wipo’s claim that education held little appeal for the German laity held true until the latter part of the twelfth century, at which point a rapid blooming of romantic literature and ideology carried with it an enthusiasm for courtliness which outpaced German society’s capacity for institutional change. Despite urgings from the poet Thomasin von Zinclaere in 1216 that all lords and nobles should keep at their court a ‘master for learning’ (meister wol gelert) in order to teach

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\(^{54}\) Trans. Bumke, Courtly Culture, 430; see also Scaglione, Knights at Court, 142ff.
their children ‘discipline and courtesy’ (zuh und hüfscheit), education, literacy, and courtliness remained a predominantly literary phenomenon among the lay nobles of Germany until at least the end of the thirteenth century, a situation which Jaeger has described as ‘the cause or at least a major symptom of the German laity’s lagging behind the French’ in the development and adoption of courtly masculinity.\textsuperscript{55}

The delayed development of German chivalry means that the traditional contrast between heroic and courtly masculinity, which views courtly masculinity as the continuation of heroic masculinity under the influence of clerical reformers like Bernard of Clairvaux, is inapplicable to \textit{Kudrun}. The collision between heroic masculinity and the clerical peace movement which took place in France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries never happened in Germany because the institutions of courtly education which brought them together did not exist outside of the imperial court. Instead of the hybrid French ideal of courtly masculinity, exemplified by the educated knight who excelled in both martial prowess and intellectual learning, we can observe in texts like the \textit{Nibelungenlied} varying degrees of demarcation between an untempered post-Carolingian warrior ethos, the ideals of the clerical peace movements, and the literary model of knighthood associated with Arthurian literature.

\textbf{TENSION AND MASCULINITY IN THE NUREMBERG \textit{HAUSBUCH}}

This tension between the established courtly-chivalric ideals and the new peace-based ideal associated with the clergy can be found in one of the earliest extant European fencing treatises, the ‘Nuremburg \textit{Hausbuch}’ HS 3227a of \textit{c.} 1389 — a manuscript

which, though composed some two centuries after Kudrun, emerges from an intervening tradition born of the same masculine tensions.\textsuperscript{56} Nestled between treatises on alchemy, medicine, and fireworks, the Nuremburg contains eleven separate fencing treatises which together constitute approximately one third of the manuscript. The first six of these eleven treatises advise, gloss, and expand upon the teachings of the German grand master Johannes Liechtenauer, whose cryptic Zettel, or brief rhyming notes, on the three arts of unarmoured fencing (Bloßfechten), mounted fencing (Roßfechten), and armoured fencing (Harnischfechten) serve as a foundational text for much of the extant fencing literature from medieval and renaissance Germany. Although the two treatises on mounted fencing and armoured fencing are little more than recitals of Liechtenauer’s verse, the four treatises which deal with the art of unarmoured fencing with a longsword — a two-handed weapon favoured by fencing masters of the later Middle Ages — incorporate a significant degree of commentary upon the art of fence.

The three anonymous unarmoured fencing treatises — which span fols 13\(^{v}\)–17\(^{v}\); 18\(^{r}\)–40\(^{r}\); and 64\(^{r}\)–65\(^{r}\) — indicate a certain sympathy with the courtly precepts of virtue combat outlined above by emphasising the necessity of courage (kunheit), caution (vorsichtkeit), cunning (list), and wisdom (klugheit) in a good fencer.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the Nuremburg Hausbuch are from the transcription and translation produced by David Lindholm and friends, \textit{Cod. HS.3227a, or Hanko Döbringer fechtbuch from 1389} (document circulated online). Reference has been made to facsimiles of the original manuscript and the translation found in Grzegorz Zabinski, ‘Unarmoured Longsword Combat of Master Liechtenauer via Priest Döbringer’, in \textit{Masters of Medieval and Renaissance Martial Arts: Rediscovering the Western Combat Heritage}, ed. John Clements (Boulder, CO: Paladins Press, 2008), 59–116.

\textsuperscript{57} See, among others, fols 17\(^{r}\), 21\(^{r}\), 27\(^{r}\).
Though they do provide a series of techniques and strategies which a practitioner can commit to memory before deploying them in earnest combat, these three treatises are quick to point out that the acquisition of technique is less important than the inculcation of habit which unified the inner self and the outer body. ‘Motion (Motus), note that word well,’ advises the author of the first treatise, for ‘it is to fencing a heart and a crown; it is the very matter of fencing’ (Motus das worte schone ist des fechtens eyn hort und krone der gancze materiaz des fechtens: 17°). The ‘art’ (kunst) of motion is returned to in the third anonymous unarmoured fencing treatise, where the reader is informed that with the art of ‘remaining in motion’ (in motu seist) it will often happen that ‘a peasant or untaught person will beat up a good master if they strike first and push boldly forward’ (eyn pawer ader eyn ungelarter eyn guten meistern slet mit deme das her den vorslag tuet und künlich dar hurt: 38°). The general attitude which these three treatises adopt towards the balance between cognitive learning and habits of virtue and body is summed up in what is without a doubt one of the most quoted passages of the entire manuscript:

Note and know also that it is not possible to explain the art of fencing as well with words as one can show it with the hand. Therefore open your mind and ponder well and the more you train yourself in play the more you will think of it in earnest. For practice is better than art, your exercise does well without the art, but the art is not much good without the exercise.58

The primacy of experiential learning intimated here follows on the footsteps of a long tradition of medieval military training that stretches back to the fourth-century De re...
militari of Vegetius. Unlike Plato, who advises a holistic programme of intellectual and physical development for the ideal guardians of his Republic, Vegetius advises military recruiters to seek out men who are outstanding ‘not only in body but also in spirit’ (non tantum corporibus sed etiam animis) and then train them at a wooden post or pell, against which they would practise ‘as if a real enemy were present’ (quasi praesentem adversarium), acquiring their martial education by leaping, dodging, and striking at the post with double-weighted swords and shields.59 Vegetius’s advice was adopted by medieval military theorists who supplemented training at the post with the mock-warfare of the tournament;60 according to the twelfth-century chronicler Roger of Hoveden, it was believed that ‘he is not fit for battle who has never seen his own blood flow, who has not heard his teeth crunch under the blow of an opponent, or felt the full weight of his adversary upon him’ (Nec potest athleta magnos spiritus ad certamen afferere, qui nunquam suggillatus est. Ille qui sanguinem suum vidit; cujus dentes crepuerunt sub pugno).61 The kind of training advocated in the anonymous late medieval fencing treatises, though more intellectual than the regimen of the twelfth-century knight, has more in common with a martial apprenticeship than a classical scholarly education.

Nestled between the three anonymous treatises of the Nuremberg Hausbuch is a fourth work on unarmoured fencing whose authors take the unusual step of identifying themselves by name. These authors — Andres the Jew, Josts of Nyssa, Niclas the Prussian, and Hanko ‘The Priest’ Döbringer — position their work as a continuation of Liechtenauer’s art by adopting the poetic and glossary form of the

59 Vegetius, Epitoma, 26–29.
60 On the medieval reception of Vegetius, see Allmand, The De Re Militari of Vegetius.
61 Quoted in Keen, Chivalry, 88.
preceding treatises and by including a brief observation on the positive relation of this treatise to those which came before. The authors’ attempt to position their own work as a continuation of Liechtenauer’s extends to the addition of several lines of original text to Liechtenauer’s Zettel, which can be distinguished through a change in scribal hand and by comparison to other extant copies of the Zettel, that foreshadows the advice they would later provide in their own treatise about fighting ‘four or six’ opponents. The treatise itself presents three new pieces of advice, the first of which is that fighters ought to moderate their emotions: ‘who fights with easy heart / with knowledge and without anger / such a fighter will never be lost’ (wer do fight mit geringen mut / witzickleich an allen czorn / der fechter wirt selden vorlorn) — advice which accords with the ideals of the clerical peace movement. The connection between this treatise and the peace movement is reinforced by the second piece of advice which cautions against fighting four or six opponents at a time. This advice in unlikely to refer to fencers challenging four or six of their peers, for such a challenge would have been well beyond the capacity of even the most experienced swordsman; rather, we may discern in it also an attempt to discourage trained warriors from attacking unskilled individuals, likely peasants. In addition to the long history of medieval knights terrorising peasants and a handful of treatises that instruct a fencer how to defeat unskilled opponents who throw ‘peasantly blows’, one finds in a late fifteenth-century German treatise a technique that begins with the words ‘So you want to rob a

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62 ‘I have decided to leave out several of the master techniques since they are well described in the art of Liechtenauer, and that is a true art’ (ich vil deser meistergefechte underwegen lasse dorumbe daz man sie gar und auch gerecht yn lichtnawers kunst und fechten vor hat noch worhaftiger kunst: 44).
63 ‘who wants to beat four or six men / will often take much injury / as there will often be a strike / which he cannot deflect’ (der vier ader seche slaen wil / der nymmet often schaden vil / wenne im wirt vil ofte eyn slag / den her nicht abewischen man: 43).
peasant’ (*ob du ainen pauren wild schaczen*) before going on to describe a technique whereby one takes a knife and thrusts through a pinched fold of skin on a peasant’s neck so that the peasant (falsely) believes himself to be mortally wounded, allowing the ‘fencer’ ample opportunity to relieve the peasant of his purse. The third and final piece of advice offered by the Nuremburg authors is that ‘you should not learn to fight / so that you do unto someone unjustly’ (*du salt nicht dorüm lernern fechten / das du eyme czu unrechte: 43*) and that you ‘should not / fight with a pious man’ (*saltu nicht pflegen / fechtens mit eynem fromen man: 44*). These two pieces of advice, when coupled with the presence of the ‘priest’ (*pfaffen*) Döbringer, drive home the connection between this treatise and the late-medieval continuation of the clerical peace movements associated with the earlier *Pax et Treuga Dei*.

Although the authors of this fourth treatise attempt to position their work as a continuation of the chivalric Liechtenauer tradition, a close reading of the text reveals a number of significant departures and contradictions from the anonymous works that surround it. One of the more interesting features of the anonymous unarmoured fencing treatises is their disparaging attitude towards so-called *Leychmeistere* (lit. ‘play master’ or ‘melody master’), masters of fencing for sport and public entertainment who are criticised for overcomplicating the art by introducing new techniques that are insufficiently different from existing techniques:

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Many leychmeistere say that they themselves have thought out a new art of fencing that they improve day to day. But I would like to see one who could think up a fencing move or a strike which does not come from Liechtenauer’s art.⁶⁵

To be clear, the substance of the anonymous authors’ complaint is not that the Leychmeistere use the art in order to win praise; the prologue to Liechtenauer’s verse on Bloßfechten instructs young knights to ‘Practice knighthood and learn the Art that dignifies you, and brings you honour in wars’ (Übe ritterschaft und lere kunst dy dich zyret und krigen sere hofiret: 18⁶).⁶⁶ Rather, the problem these authors have is that the Leychmeistere divorce the art from its serious and, above all, practical martial function by introducing ‘showy’ techniques that do not exist within the original art of Liechtenauer. It is precisely these kinds of ‘new and improved’ techniques that one finds included in the fourth treatise, where the authors describe how to perform novel techniques like the ‘serpent’s tongue’ (noterczunge), ‘weed hoe’ (krawthacke), ‘wedge master’ (weckemeister), and ‘peacock’s tail’ (pfobenczagel), together with advice on how a fighter should conduct themselves in both ‘school fencing’ (schulfechten) and play-fencing (schimpf), two contexts in which a Leychmeistere could expect to be found.⁶⁷ The authors’ advice to moderate one’s emotions by fighting with ‘easy heart / with knowledge and without anger’ is also at odds with the general tenor of the anonymous treatises, which focus on courage and praise the use of a technique known

⁶⁶ I have elected to use the authoritative translation of Liechtenauer’s Zettel by Christian Tobler, which can be found online at <http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Johannes_Liechtenauer> or printed in the appendix of Kal, In Service of the Duke (1460).
⁶⁷ Fols 47r–52v.
as the ‘rage-strike’ (zornhau), which is so named because ‘when you are angry and raging, then no strike is as ready as this upper strike struck from the shoulder at the opponent’ (wen eynem itzlichem in syme gryme und czorne zo ist im keyn haw als bereit als der selbe aberhaw slecht von der achsel czum mane: 23r–v). In light of these inconsistencies, it would appear that the named authors of the fourth treatise sought to integrate themselves into the Liechtenauer tradition as part of a rhetorical strategy to represent themselves as reformers rather than iconoclasts in order to further their clerical agenda.

The tension between the chivalric-heroic ‘traditionalist’ and the peaceful ‘reformist’ authors of the Nuremburg manuscript indicate the development of an association between masculine ideology and the practice of fencing by the close of the fourteenth century. Importantly, what distinguishes these two ideologies — the cultivation of proper emotion and experiential learning in the traditional paradigm compared to the moderation of emotion and the acquisition of cognitive learning in the new clerical paradigm — matches up to what we see earlier in Kudrun when we apply to this poem the tripartite model of masculinity as heroic warriors, literary courtiers, and religious pacifists.

**EDUCATION AND PEACE — HEROISM AND HAGEN DER WILDE**

Returning to Kudrun, we can see that the poet positions Hagen within the masculine spectrum of heroism, courtliness, and peace through the narrative device of a childhood spent in the wilderness.68 Although the concept of ‘wilderness’ was

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68 On the significance to Hagen’s character of a childhood spent in the wilderness, see Campbell, Kudrun: A Critical Appreciation, 6–61.
dizzingly broad in the medieval period, the Kudrun-poet narrows down this vast field of signification by connecting the wilderness of Hagen’s youth to his lack of an education at court.⁶⁹ An elite male child’s education in this period would typically begin at age five, at which point tutors would be introduced as a prelude to the beginning of his formal education between the ages of seven and twelve.⁷⁰ Hagen’s infancy, in which ‘knowledgeable ladies and many beautiful maidens took care of him, and his father and mother thought him the shining apple of their eye’ (sîn phlâgen wise frouwen und vil schœne meide; / sîn vater und sîn muoter sâhen an im ir liehten ougenweide: 23.3–4), matches this normative pattern up until the age of five, at which point ‘he was entrusted to the care of bold men’ (man sach ez dicke recken ūf ir handen tragen: 24.2).⁷¹ At each stage of Hagen’s education, the Kudrun-poet foreshadows his upcoming absence from the court and its educational institutions; after telling us of Hagen’s time with the ladies and maidens the poet tells us that ‘later he was parted from them and taken far away’ (sît wart ez in fremede; ez wart von in gefüeret verre dannen: 24.4), while after he is introduced to the warriors we learn that ‘later he was deprived of them, and his hopes [of becoming a warrior] were completely dashed’ (daz <wart> im sît fremede: dô gelac <…> gar sîn gedinge: 25.4). Hagen’s foreshadowed absence from these educational structures primes the reader to interpret his childhood

⁶⁹ On the various medieval symbolisms of the wilderness, see Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination, 47–59.
⁷¹ Depending on how this passage is translated, Hagen could have been given into the care of the warriors either until his seventh birthday or upon his seventh birthday. The difference, however, is not significant for the argument proposed here.
in the wilderness as an absence from not only the physical location of the court but also the institutions of a courtly education.

The literate audiences of *Kudrun* would likely have associated an education at court such as Hagen’s with an education in courtly masculinity on the strength of the sudden flourishing of chivalric MHG literature and ideology toward the end of the twelfth century. Although members of the Hohenstaufen dynasty (1138–54) were crucial in bringing French courtliness to Germany, the great majority of courtly literature appears to have flourished in the regional dioceses outside the imperial court where actual courtliness was a romantic ideal rather than a lived reality. The protagonists of courtly romances often embody the aspirational desires of these aristocratic outsiders, who grew up without the benefits of a courtly education but desired to enter the world of the imperial court — most notably Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s *Lanzelet*, which features a young protagonist who is forced to flee his kingdom to a wild island where he is raised by fairies, and Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, which borrows from Chrétien de Troyes’ unfinished *Perceval* the story of a man who spends his childhood in the wilderness only to learn chivalry in his adolescence and become one of the greatest knights of the Round Table. These romances would have worked together in the mind of the early thirteenth-century audience to associate an absence from the court from the age of seven years, such as Hagen endures, with the omission of an education of the specifically ‘courtly’ type.

This literary understanding of Hagen’s missed education is coupled with the *Kudrun*-poet’s representation of the specifically heroic nature of the court of Hagen’s father, Sigeband. As a young man, Sigeband’s education consisted primarily of martial

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training so that he might ‘use arms to better advantage whenever he might encounter enemies’ (só er zúo den vinden kæme, daz ers dester bâz möhte geniezen: 3.4). As a mature king, he restricts courtly finery such as ‘lace trims, precious stones, and many expensive silks’ (borten und gesteine und manigen phelle rîchen: 41.3) to women who, like his wife Uote, exhort their husbands to battle:

A king as mighty as you are supposed to be, or as I hear tell you are, should see guests more often. He should frequently engage in knightly contests with his men so that he might enhance his inherited lands and his own reputation. It is a sign of base attitude if kings accumulate property without measure and don’t willingly share it with their men. How else shall one heal the deep wounds that the men bring back from battle?73

Uote’s advice on the conduct which becomes a warrior is echoed by Wate, a paragon of heroic masculinity, who later declares that he would be unable to pretend to be a merchant because he has no experience in leaving his possessions lying idly about: ‘I have always shared them with warriors, and I still hope to do that. I’m not very good at bringing trinkets to lovely ladies’ (ich teiltes ie mit helden, daz ist noch mîn gedinge. / ich bin niht só gefüege, daz ich kleinet schaenen frouwen bringe: 253.3–4). Hagen, growing up in the midst of his father’s heroic court, appears destined to become a warrior like his father — the poet makes this clear with the aside, ‘if he turned out like his kinsmen, he was sure to become a hero’ (geriete ez nâch dem künne, só wurde ez wol ein degen: 23.2) — up until the point at which he is abducted by a griffin, who carries him away from the court and toward the island wilderness.

73 ‘ein künic só richer der solte dicker <geste> sehen, / al sir sît genennet und ich iu hære jehen. / er solte mit sînen helden ofte burhurdiern, / dâ mîte er sîniu erbe und sich selben solte <….> zieren. / Ez ist an rîchen førsten harte kranke mut, / die zesamene bringent âne maze guot, / ob siz mit <….> recken niht willeclîchen teilen. / die si ûz stürmen bringent, tiefe wunden, wie sol man die heilen?’: 31.1–32.4.
This griffin — a monstrous hybrid of lion, king of beasts, and eagle, king of birds — possesses a dual symbolism within the medieval bestiary tradition. Although its constituent parts typically associated it with the concept of nobility, the Kudrun-poet’s description of the griffin as an ‘evil devil’ (übele tiuvel: 54.3), ‘savage’ (wilder: 55.1), ‘strong’ (starken: 55.4), and ‘fierce and ill-disposed’ (grimmic ware und übele gemuot: 58.3) alludes to its alternative representation as an ‘enemy to both horses and men’, one which is often pictured with an ox in its claws. The negative, rapacious symbolism alluded to by the Kudrun-poet conjures in the mind the warrior aristocracy’s (apparently) endemic perpetration of war and pillage that first engendered the Pax Dei. In this way, it is possible to read Hagen’s abduction not as a removal from the court of his father, but rather its continuation into the dimension of the symbolic. This reading is supported by Hagen’s surprisingly ‘courtly’ reception by three maidens, who remark (ironically) that they had seen neither their cupbearers nor their stewards for some time, and his rendering of courtly ‘service’ (dienst) to the maidens. Only once Hagen defeats the griffins is he able to leave the closed court-world of the cave, symbolically rejecting his father’s court so that he can acquire his own education in the wilderness.

Having defeated the griffins, Hagen subsequently acquires the ability to control his emotions by emulating the animals around him, learning to become ‘so courageous, so daring and yet so docile’ (baldes herzen, só frevele und só zam: 98.1). This ability to control one’s emotions forms a key part of both the medieval concept of peace and behaviours associated with the quality of courtliness, which counted amongst its

74 On this point see the commentary by Gibbs and Johnson, Kudrun, 154: ‘Irony is used frequently by the poet, as in this instance, along with litotes and understatement. The stranded ladies obviously had no cupbearers or stewards at all. The girl is making Hagen realize how ridiculous his request is.’
virtues the inculcation of ‘restraint, moderation, and self-control’. Reading Hagen’s emotional extremes as a manifestation of peace may help shed some light upon his curious encounters with a gabilûn and lion as he goes about acquiring his wilderness education:

[Hagen] left his shelter and walked into the woods, where he saw many bold and daring animals. Among them was [a gabilûn] that wanted to devour him, but he slew it with his sword. It got to know his wrath the hard way […] He wrapped himself in the skin of the creature, and then nearby he found a lion that couldn’t escape him. How swiftly did he approach him! But the lion remained unharmed, and the hero greeted him in a friendly fashion.

These two encounters follow on directly from an account of Hagen’s almost patristic education in the wilderness, a connection which is reinforced by the poet’s description of the animals of the wilderness as being both ‘bold and daring’ (frevele und balt) — an almost word-for-word repetition of Hagen’s new qualities of being ‘so courageous [and] so daring’ (baldes herzen [unde] sô frevele: 98.1). Although Hagen’s encounter with the gabilûn is a clear allusion to Siegfried’s slaying of the dragon in the *Nibelungenlied*, his subsequent encounter with the lion is something of an enigma among critics. Within the medieval bestiary tradition, the lion’s three main natures — that it erases its tracks with its tail; that it sleeps with its eyes open; and that it roars


over its stillborn cubs to bring them to life — were taken as representations of the various natures of Jesus, the ‘Prince of Peace’. In addition to having these three natures, the lion was often thought to offer an example of how man ought to live, through its reputation for being wrathful to its enemies but merciful to captives and men who prostrated themselves. Based on this reading of the lion as a noble creature, the juxtaposition of Hagen’s friendly behaviour towards the lion with his wrathful slaying of the wicked gabilân serves to demonstrate his ability to manifest ‘peace’ — that is to say, the ability to display wrath to the wicked and hospitality to the good.

It is this ability to manifest peace that allows Hagen to win honour in the contest of schirmen. Although the fight ends with a technical draw, Wate accepted the contest under false pretences by claiming to have never before seen schirmen when he was in truth something of an expert. When entering into his ‘lesson’ with Hagen’s fencing master, ‘Wate took up a defensive posture, as if he were a kempe’ (Wate stuont in huote, / sam er ein kemphe waren: 360.3–4). A kempe, like the English champion, was an individual who made it his profession to fight on behalf of a person who had been challenged to a trial by battle. This profession was considered to be ‘disreputable’ (unecht) within Germanic society, marginalised in both the social and legal spheres to the point of being grouped with robbers and thieves in the Sachsenspiegel:

Kempen and their children, minstrels, all who are born illegitimate, and all convicted robbers and thieves who are to make restitution or have done so and were convicted of their crime are all without legal rights.

78 See, for example, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomaeus Anglicus, trans. Robert Steele (London: Alexander Moring, 1905), 159–62.
79 ‘Kempen unde er kinder, spellude, unde all de ‘in’ unecht geboren sin, unde de duve oder rof sunet oder weder gevet, unde se des vor gerichte verwunnen werden, oder de er lif unde hut unde har ledeget, de sin alle rechteles’: Sachsenspiegel: Landrecht, ed. Karl August Eckhardt, Monumenta Germaniae
In this grouping of *kempen* with illegitimate children, robbers, and thieves, we find reinforced the idea that *kempen*, together with prostitutes and minstrels, debased the pastimes of the nobility (battle, romance, song) through their solicitation of payment. This disparagement of mercantilism goes all the way back to Aristotle, who dismissed as merely ‘mechanical’ arts all those ‘which tend to deform the body, and likewise all paid employments, for they absorb and degrade the mind’. When coupled with a description of Wate as a wild Saxon or Frank, what emerges is a representation of Wate as an unsophisticated and ‘tradesmanlike’ man. In contrast to Wate’s ‘vulgar’ behaviour, once Hagen takes his fencing master’s place we are told that ‘the king quickly recognised Wate’s mastery and would have become angry if it had not been damaging to his honour’ (der künic vil schiere erkante die Waten meisterschaft. / ein teil begunde er zürnen, wäre im niht ân ère: 365.2–3). In this moment we are shown Hagen drawing upon his pseudo-clerical education in the ways of peace in order to demonstrate a praiseworthy capacity to control his emotions in a situation where his honour is at stake. The behaviour of both Wate and Hagen is repeated during their battle on the shores of Wales after the abduction of Hagen’s daughter, Hilde. Again their fight ends with a draw when Hetel separates the two men; but where Hagen is swift to forgive and acknowledge the bravery of his opponents, Wate callously refuses to bind the wounds of Hagen’s warriors until an official accord is struck. It would seem


81 Although both Gibbs/Johnson and McConnell read this line to mean that Wate is treating Hagen like a savage Saxon or Frank, Murdoch suggests (rightly, in my opinion) that this description applies to Wate.
that Hagen’s ability to negotiate between extreme emotional states during moments of change, juxtaposed with the rigid warrior ethos of Wate, reflects an idealised masculine quality considered desirable by those individuals who were invested in the issue of peace.

**CONCLUSION**

From these readings of *Kudrun* and the Nuremburg *Hausbuch* it would appear that the German art of sword-and-buckler fence known as *schirmen* became entangled with aristocratic male self-identities during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries where it produced a bifurcation in the representation of single combat. Both against and in conjunction with the old style of ‘virtue combat’, in *Kudrun* we see the beginning of a new convention of using single combat to indicate characters’ intellects and also their capacity to manipulate their emotional states in accordance with medieval ideals of peace and order.

A great deal of work remains to be done on the development of *schirmen* in medieval Germany. Space does not allow for a deeper investigation of how these literary representations of masculinity tied into the issues of social class associated with the rise of both the *ministeriales* and the *Reichsfürstenstand*, or the relationship between the clerical peace movements and the secular *Landfrieden*; I can but encourage other scholars to explore the mechanisms by which *schirmen* transcended its lower-class origins in Germany.82

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82 For more on this, see Benjamin Arnold, *German Knighthood, 1050–1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
Rationality and Violence in the Three Crowns of Renaissance Ferrara

So far we have considered changes in the representation of violence and single combat across France in the twelfth century, Germany in the thirteenth, and England in the fourteenth. Although this approach is useful for establishing the broad methodological utility of exploring representations of violence as cultural phenomena, it leaves us in danger of mistaking national differences for historical change. In order to offset this limitation, this chapter will take a relatively long-term view of the representations of violence and single combat produced in the Italian city-state of Ferrara between the years 1400 and 1600. These years witnessed the patronage of the ‘three crowns’ of Ferraran epic poetry — Matteo Boiardo (d. 1494), Ludovico Ariosto (d. 1533), and Torquato Tasso (d. 1595) — together with several manuscripts of one of the most valuable sources for the study of the medieval martial arts, the *Fior di battaglia* of Fiore dei Liberi (fl. 1400–25). When read together, the texts of these authors provide a diachronic counterpoint to the synchronic analyses of the previous three chapters.

This chapter will explore in depth how changes in social ideals of gentle masculinity drove change in both the didactic and literary representation of violence and single combat. The introduction of didactic material to the historical record, first hinted at in the previous chapter’s discussion of the Nuremburg *Hausbuch*, is an important step that ties literary violence to practised violence — a central premise of this dissertation, and one which has been derived from a study of treatises and their
cultural context. The lack of extant martial treatises prior to the fourteenth century limits the degree to which it is possible to link works such as the romances of Chrétien de Troyes to historical practice, but as we move into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we find ourselves on increasingly firm footing as treatises and accounts of practised combat begin to appear with greater regularity.

The pivotal change enacted by Italian fencers, scholars, and artists with regards to the representation of fencing was a development of the idea, first seeded in thirteenth-century Germany, that the art of fencing could be a rational, liberal art. This ‘rational’ interpretation of fencing was to develop organically from the extant virtue-combat tradition in Italy, but its sudden introduction to England in the sixteenth century — discussed in the following chapter — would come to shape modern ideas about violence, rationality, and historiography.

### FENCING FROM VIRTUE IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

We will begin with a study of the fencing master Fiore dei Liberi and his patron, Niccolò III d’Este. The four extant treatises Fiore committed to posterity are unique among the late medieval and renaissance corpus in that they demonstrate a ‘before’ and ‘after’ process of external intervention, in this case by Niccolò. They are additionally valuable to the present study because it would be Niccolò’s descendants who would patronise Matteo Boiardo, Ludovico Ariosto, and Torquato Tasso.

Most of what we know about Fiore comes from his own treatises. These treatises, composed between 1400 and 1430 and arranged in chronological order of composition, are the ‘Morgan’ MS M.0383, the ‘Getty’ MS Ludwig.XV.13, the Pisani-Dossi MS (available only in fascimile), and the ‘Paris’ MS Latin.11269. Fiore claims to have been born in the Patriarchate of Aquileia, a diocese in the far north-east of Italy.
that straddled the border between Italy and Germany — a location that apparently
provided him with ample opportunity to travel and learn the art of fencing from many
German and Italian masters ‘in the courts of great lords, princes, dukes and marquises,
counts, knights and squires’ (*in corte di grandi signori principi duchi marchesi e conti
chavalieri e schudieri*). ¹ Alongside his instruction to many German and Italian knights,
some of whom he lists by name, we find in the city of Udine municipal records of a
certain ‘*Magister Fiore*’ who, during a civil war between Udine and Cividale (1381–88),
was tasked with the inspection and repair of the city’s ballistic weaponry, and
shortly thereafter assigned to serve as a peace-keeper in the city of Gemona.² Though
Fiore does not offer his date of birth, in the Pisani-Dossi treatise of 1409 he claims to
have practised the art of fencing for fifty years, which would place his birth sometime
in the 1440s.³ The description of Fiore as ‘*Magister Fiore*’ — elsewhere, ‘*Maestro
Fiore de Cividale, dimicator*’ — suggests a reputation established by the time he was
in his thirties; by the time he sat down to pen the first of his works to posterity he
would likely have been pushing his sixtieth year.⁴

As Russ Howe has demonstrated, it is highly probably that Fiore’s name, *dei*
(or *della*) *Liberi*, indicates his ‘free’ social status within the social structures of the late

¹ Transcription obtained from scans of the original Getty manuscript, MS Ludwig.XV.13; translation is
² David M. Cvet, ‘A Brief Examination of Fiore dei Liberi’s Treatises *Flos Duellatorum & Fior di
Battaglia*, Journal of Western Martial Art (September 2008), <http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2008/
(Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d’Arti Grafiche, 1902), 122.
⁴ This can be supported by Fiore’s claim to be suffering from ‘old age’ (*tempo uechio*) in the introduction
to the Pisani-Dossi treatise.
medieval Holy Roman Empire. From the twelfth century there emerged in Germany a class of individual known as ministeriales, servile knights whose lords held ‘hereditary, proprietary rights over their actual persons, services, and possessions’. These ministeriales were juxtaposed with the liberi, legally free individuals engaged in voluntary service to their vassal lords. Although originally secure in their sense of superiority, the increasing status and influence of the ministeriales within German society pushed the original liberi to the brink of extinction by the fourteenth century. Acceptance of Fiore’s description of himself as dei Liberi likely accorded him with both a certain degree of status, which he draws attention to by describing himself as the ‘son of the late Sir Benedetto of the noble family of the liberi of Premariacco’ (che fo di messer Benedetto de la nobel casada de li liberi di Premariacco), and sufficient wealth to fund what was apparently a lengthy and expensive tuition in the martial arts.

Fiore’s noble lineage is reflected in the structure of his first treatise which he claims to have ordered ‘in a way that everyone can easily understand’ (per modo che zascaduno lo sapia intendere lezieramente). The treatise follows the order of the chivalric duel of honour that was fought by his students, in which battle began on horseback before moving to foot with progressively smaller weapons; the combat between his student Giovannino de Baio and a German squire named ‘Sirano’, in which the two men agreed to fight ‘three strikes with the sharpened lance, three of pollaxe, three of sword and three of dagger’ (tre colpi di lancia affilata, tre di azza, tre...  

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6 Arnold, German Knighthood, 54.
7 Fiore, Fior di battaglia, 1.
di spada e tre di daga), can be considered a typical example.\textsuperscript{8} The exact order of the treatise runs (1) mounted fencing; (2) spear on foot; (3) sword in armour; (4) sword without armour; (5) pollaxe; (6) single-hand sword; (7) wrestling; (8) dagger. It should be noted that these divisions are not always clear cut, and that much of the material which is treated under the heading of the sword without armour (Bloßfechten in the Liechtenauer tradition) is in fact applicable to fencing while in armour. This same ‘chivalric’ pattern is found, with some slight changes, in Fiore’s last (and posthumous) treatise, the recently discovered Paris manuscript.

Having established the chivalric context of his teaching through the order of his work, Fiore proceeds to frame the path to victory in terms of the Augustinian concept of the inner disposition. Praising his past students once for their caution (cauteloso) and goodness (bono), twice for their nobility (notabel) and gallantry (gaiardo), and eight times for their valour (valoroso), Fiore goes on to caution his reader not to put too much faith in his armour, knowledge, or technique he lacks valour:

\textit{Yet I also say that someone fighting in the lists with good armour, good knowledge of the art of combat and with all the advantages he can gain, might as well hang himself if he does not possess valour.}\textsuperscript{9}

Fiore doubles down on this sentiment in his third treatise, the Pisani-Dossi, in which he claims that ‘All else is missing, if you lack audacity of heart; / Such audacity and virtue lies in the art’ (Deforet et totum, cordis si audatia deesset; / Audatia et uirtus

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\textsuperscript{8} Malipiero, \textit{Il Fior di battaglia}, 94–96.
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\textsuperscript{9} ‘E sì digo che l’omo che de’ combatter in sbarra esendo ben armado, e sapiando l’arte del combattere e habiendo li avantaçi che se pon pigliare se ello non è valente’: Fiore, \textit{Fior di battaglia}, 3.
\end{flushright}
talis consistit in arte) — an assertion which locates Fiore firmly within the epistemological frame of medieval virtue combat.\textsuperscript{10} 

Against this point it may be objected that Fiore quotes with approval his student, Galeazzo de Mantova, who claimed that ‘without books, nobody can truly be a Master or student in this art’ (sença libri non sarà çamay nissuno bon magistro nè scolaro in questa'arte) and adds that the art of fencing ‘is so extensive that even the man with the keenest memory in the world will not be able to learn more than a fourth of it without books’ (si longa ch’ello non è al mondo homo de si grande memoria che podesse tenere a mente senza libri la quarta parte de questa arte).\textsuperscript{11} I have my reservations about the sincerity with which Fiore quotes Galeazzo, given that he also claims that ‘none of [his] students [...] has ever possessed a book on the art of combat, with the exception of Galeazzo da Mantova’ (nessuno di miei scholari [...] non ave may livro in l’arte de combattere altro che Misser Galeazo da Mantva [sic]).\textsuperscript{12} Are we to suppose from this statement that none of Fiore’s students were ‘true’ students of the art? Rather than reflecting a sincere belief in the necessity of books for an education in the art of fencing, I suspect that Fiore quotes Galeazzo in furtherance of his own personal desire to be remembered:

\textsuperscript{10} The translation here is mine as Leoni omits this part from his translation. Fiore, \textit{Pisani–Dossi}, 121.
\textsuperscript{11} Translation from Fiore dei Liberi, \textit{Fiore Morgan M.S. – Concordance with the Getty M.S.}, trans. Tom Leoni (document circulated online). This document was provided as part of the purchase of Leoni’s translation of the \textit{Fior di Battaglia} direct from the publisher.
\textsuperscript{12} Fiore, \textit{Fior di battaglia}, 3.
Fiore’s concern with being remembered is perhaps unsurprising. As a teacher of the fighting arts, his tuition appears to have been excised or glossed over in those chronicles and songs recounting the deeds of his students in order to preserve the illusion that they, like many of the heroes of Arthurian romance, were natural born warriors from birth. Fiore stresses the need to be remembered again in the Pisani-Dossi treatise, composed after the apparently lacklustre reception of the Getty, in which he begs his patron to recommend his book. The picture which emerges of Fiore, in both his own words and the external records of his deeds, is that of an aging master of the medieval virtue combat tradition is seeking to make his way in the new world of the Renaissance.

Fiore’s patron, Niccolò, was, on the surface, a natural fit for the kind of chivalric fighting arts for which Fiore was famous, having cultivated a reputation in his early years as an aggressive military man who ruled over an atypically ‘feudal’ city. Yet Niccolò was also the first in his family to have been tutored by a humanist and among the first to hire humanist tutors for his sons, demonstrating both interest and familiarity with the latest developments of intellectual and educational culture.

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13 ‘Considerando io predetto fiore che in quest’arte pochi al mondo sen trovano magistri e vogliando che di mi sia fatta memoria in ella io farò un libro in tuta l’arte e de tutte chose le quale i’ so e di ferri e di tempere e d’altre chose’: Fiore, Fior di Battaglia, 3.
14 Fiore, Pisani–Dossi, 122.
16 Niccolò’s tutor was the humanist Donato degli Albanzani, who in 1411 dedicated his translation of Boccaccio’s De claris mulieribus to his illustrious pupil.
Niccolò’s keen interest in intellectual studies and his developed taste for art and culture fused with his military upbringing to produce what has been described as a ‘curious blending of mediaeval ferocity with the first germs of Renaissance culture’.

In accepting, commissioning, or patronising the older Fiore’s work (for we do not know the exact relationship between these men), Niccolò — who would have been in his early twenties at the time — made several changes to the structure and contents of the manuscript, resulting in Fiore replacing his claim to have ordered the manuscript according to his own intellect (mio intelletto) with an assertion that he has ordered the book ‘according to the order of my lord the Marquis’ (segondo l’ordinamento del mio signore marchese). These changes offer us a unique window into how competing frameworks of representation can shape the same underlying acts of combat.

The most significant change Niccolò made was to reverse the order of Fiore’s original manuscript, the Morgan. Using the same numbering system for each section as before, Niccolò’s Getty manuscript (and, with one or two minor differences, the Pisani-Dossi) follow the order (7) wrestling; (8) dagger; (6) single-hand sword; (4) sword without armou; (3) sword in armour; (5) pollaxe; (2) spear on foot; (1) mounted fencing. By reversing Fiore’s order so that the treatise progresses from the man without weapons through to the man fully armed, Niccolò makes the unarmoured, unarmed, and unadorned man of renaissance humanism the prime focus of the Getty and Pisani-Dossi treatises. This interpretation is reinforced by the inclusion of a cross-armed


18 Fiore, Fior di battaglia, 4.
Niccolò at the centre of both manuscripts in which the marquis is surrounded by the allegorical figures of prudence, audacity, celerity, and fortitude in a style not dissimilar to that of Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘Vitruvian Man’. Fiore also inserts a new passage into the Getty — at, one can only assume, Niccolò’s suggestion — in which he waxes lyrical on the apparently fundamental importance of wrestling to the art of fence:

The guards of wrestling [...] act as the pillars of the art of wrestling, both in and out of armour. Similarly, they support the art of the lance, with their weapon, guards, Masters, and students; the same they do for the axe, the sword in one and two hands, and the dagger. Overall, these Masters and students support the whole art of arms, on horseback and on foot, armoured and unarmoured — through the principles they follow in wrestling.

If we were to take Fiore at his word and assume that the guards of wrestling do, indeed, support the whole art of arms, we would have to wonder why this statement was left out of his first treatise, the Morgan, in which the complex system of Masters, Students, and Remedies is explained without reference to wrestling. Wrestling, it would appear, underpins Niccolò’s understanding of the art rather than Fiore’s, a point to which Fiore alludes in the Getty’s dedication:

I will start this book according to the order of my lord the Marquis. I’ll make sure nothing is left out, so that my lord may thank me out of his nobility and courtesy. Let’s therefore start with wrestling. (emphasis mine)

19 See the Getty, fol. 32r; Fiore, Pisani–Dossi, 151.
20 ‘le guardie d’abrazare [...] reçere l’arte d’abrazare in arme e sença arme chosì àno questi magistri e zugadori a reçere l’arte de la lança cum le lance e loro guardie magistri e zugadori. Et per le simile cum la azza e cum la spada d’una mano e de doy mani. E per lo simile cum la daga. Si che per efetto questi magistri e zugadori detti dinançi cum le insegne loro e divise àno a reçere tutta l’arte d’armizare a pe’ e da cavallo in arme e senç’arme’; Fiore, Fior di battaglia, 6.
21 ‘Començamo lo libro secondo l’ordinamento del mio signore marchese e facemmo che non gli manchi niente in l’arte che io mi rendo conto che lo mio signore mi farà bon merito per la sua grand’ nobiltà e cortesia. Començemo a lo abraçare’; Fiore, Fior di battaglia, 4.
Fiore goes on to explain that wrestling calls for strength (forteça), speed (presteça), and knowledge (savere) — three qualities which encompass the humanist ideal of the man who is powerful in both body and intellect.\textsuperscript{22} When these passages on wrestling are taken together with the structural reversal of this manuscript we can observe an attempt by Fiore and/or Niccolò to translate the representation of chivalric virtue combat found in the Morgan into something more amenable to Niccolò’s humanist-inflected sensibilities.

This cultural translation appears to have met with little success, with no record having survived of Fiore being present at Niccolò’s court or of his teachings gaining any significant traction within broader Italian society. According to the humanist educators of fifteenth-century Italy, the benefits of fencing lay not in the acquisition of specific martial skills but rather the strengthening and limbering of the body in order that it might better fulfil its function as a ‘framework for the athletics of the mind’\textsuperscript{23}. To this end, tutors from Vittorino da Feltre through to Baldassare Castiglione grouped fencing with such bodily activities as running, leaping, swimming, and javelin-throwing. In spite of his apparent success as a teacher, the humanist framework of fifteenth-century Italy appears to have been largely inhospitable to written treatises on the art of defence.

**FENCING AS PRIVATE DESIRE IN BOIARDO’S *ORLANDO INNAMORATO***

The humanist conception of fencing as a form of bodily exercise left a notable mark on Boiardo’s epic poem *Orlando Innamorato* (1483–95) in which representations of

\begin{footnotes}
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fencing are used to twist the literary trope of knights battling rustics which has been explored throughout this dissertation. Variations of the word *scrimere* (‘fencing’) appear on nine separate occasions within this poem, five of which refer to a knight’s dexterity and martial prowess in battle against a mighty rustic. These are the battles between Ranaldo and a demon in the form of Gradazzo; Orlando and the giant Zambardo; Ranaldo and Marfisa, the Saracen warrrior-queen of India; Brandimarte and the giants Oridante and Ranchiera; Ranaldo and a churl that lives upon a lake. Each battle follows a similar narrative structure that serves to upset the expectations of a reader familiar with the medieval genres of romance and *chanson de geste*. This structure is introduced by either a description or a demonstration of the strength and savagery of the knight’s adversary, thereby serving to characterise them as a rustic. Both knight and rustic then proceed to battle, sometimes for several stanzas, until the rustic delivers an attack which the poet singles out for its particular strength and ferocity. The knight then avoids the blow and delivers a counter-attack, two feats which Boiardo attributes to the knight’s fencing skill. This attribution can be direct, such as when we are told that ‘truly Orlando knew how to fence / and hit [the giant] Zambardo in four places’ (*Verò è che Orlando del scrimere ha l’arte; / Già ferito è il gigante in quattro parte*: I.6.10.7–8), or it can be indirect, such as when Ranaldo ‘stood ready with his sword held low’ (*Sta su l’aviso e tiene il brando basso*: I.5.40.6) in his battle against the demon in Gradasso’s shape. So far, this structure — which is used, with some variation, in both these five fights and a number of other battles which do

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25 Interestingly, a ready position with the sword held low is typical of Fiore’s teachings.
not explicitly mention the word *scrimere*, such as when Brandimarte battled against a savage brute armed with a wooden club and a shield made of bark (I.23.1–18) — follows the pattern of the romance and *chanson de geste* discussed earlier, a pattern which establishes an expectation that the knight is about to win the battle.

Boiardo reverses the expected outcome of these battles with a powerful attack from the rustic which pushes the knight to the brink of defeat. Ranaldo’s battle against Marfisa is a particularly clear example of how Boiardo works this narrative device. Although Marfisa is introduced as a warrior of ordinary size, Boiardo supplies her with a rustic identity through his description of her primitive (but enormous) lance of sinew and bone, her uncouth cursing in which she threatens to burn Paradise (*ardo il paradiso*: 1.18.10.8), her enormous strength, and the huge horse that serves to enlarge her overall size like the tree stump did for the ugly peasant in *Yvain*. Following several exchanges, Ranaldo crosses blades with Marfisa in what the poet curiously calls ‘the last test’ (*l’ultima prova*: 1.18.17.6) and breaks the tip off Marfisa’s sword, enraging the queen so much that she rained down a flurry of angry blows upon Ranaldo — the rustic’s mighty attack. Ranaldo, who ‘had instruction in fencing’ (*del scrimire ha la dottrina*: 1.18.18.6), then defends himself and strikes a counter-blow that knocks the broken sword from Marfisa’s hand. At this point, an audience familiar with medieval literary tropes would expect Ranaldo’s swift victory to follow, but Boiardo has a trick up his sleeve:

No frenzy ever equalled hers when she saw her sword fall to earth: she spurred her horse with all her might; she charged him like a maddened boar. Her face aflame, she socked that knight, punching him on his left cheek-guard,
battering him so very hard,
she made their former joust seem light.26

Marfisa’s reversal, in which she enters in a frenzy like a maddened boar’s and punches Ranaldo in the face, serves to both accentuate the uncouth aspects of her character and emphasise the impotence of her opponent’s fencing skill. We can learn something about how this reversal goes against the expectations of Boiardo’s audience when the poet asserts the truth of these events through reference to the alleged ‘source’ of his poem, the forged chronicle Historia de vita Caroli Magni et Rolandi attributed to the eighth-century Archbishop of Reims, Turpin:

I marvel at such fisticuffs,
but I say what Turpin writes,
that red blood spurted from the bleared cavalier’s nose and mouth and ears.27

References to the supposed authority of Turpin as the originator of the Orlando frame narrative is used in the Innamorato to establish truth in situations where the audience may express doubt, among other things.28 In this case, the idea that brute force can overcome agility and knightly skill-at-arms is considered so implausible that Boiardo invokes the authority of Turpin to establish its allegorical truth — that a brutish rustic can defeat a skilled knight through strength alone.

26 ‘Quando essa vide la sua spada in terra, / Non fu ruina al mondo mai cotale; / Il suo destrier con ambi sproni afferra, / Urtà Ranaldo a furia di cingiale, / E col viso avampato un pugno serra: / Dal lato manco il gionse nel guanziale, / E lo percosse con tanta possanza, / Che assai minor fu il scontro de la lanza’: I.18.20.1–8.
27 ‘Io di tal botta assai me maraviglio, / Ma come io dico, lo scrive Turpino; / Fuor delle orrechie uscia il sangue vermiglio, / Per naso e bocca a quel baron tapino’: I.18.21.1–4.
This device of the rustic’s reversal is used to indicate a moral failing on the part of the knightly protagonist. In the battle between Ranaldo and Marfisa, this failing is Ranaldo’s choice to joust with Marfisa when duty demanded that he pass her by in order to continue his time-sensitive quest to rescue Orlando from Dragontina’s palace. This conflict between duty and adventure is first established when Ranaldo, upon hearing of a potential adventure to be had in the magical garden of Falerina, has to weigh his desire to go on this adventure against his duty to rescue Orlando. As Jo Ann Cavallo has demonstrated, such dilemmas signify ‘a moment of choice between public good and private desires’, where the morally righteous action is understood to be the suppression of emotional desire in order to pursue the rational public good. Although Ranaldo is able to stay the course in this first instance he is tested again mere moments later when he spies Marfisa, a woman whom Ranaldo’s companion Fiordelisa declares to be fiercer than any knight in the realm. Again Ranaldo is warned not to pursue this adventure, which is framed in the same terms of public good (rescue Orlando) against private desire (go on an adventure). This allegorical set-up helps to make sense of Boiardo’s curious description of the clashing of Ranaldo and Marfisa’s blades as a ‘final test’ (*l’ultima prova*: I.18.17.6) in the allegorical struggle between ethics and desire. Ranaldo’s defeat in this instance is a case of both poetic and allegorical justice. Having delayed his quest to rescue Orlando by riding off on another adventure, Ranaldo is knocked unconscious by Marfisa and carried away from the adventure by his horse — the horse being, in humanist discourse, a popular symbol for the kind of desire that a human rider is supposed to tame. Ranaldo’s fencing skill — or rather, the desire to prove his fencing skill — in this scene takes on the same incentivising role.

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that prowess played in the medieval French romance, but where Chrétien identified adventure with the public good, Boiardo contrasts the two such that fencing skill becomes emblematic of a knight’s private and unethical desires.

The role of fencing skill as a symbol of unethical private desire in the *Innamorato* becomes even clearer when we turn from these five battles against rustics to the four other instances of *scrimere*, the first of which comes when Ranaldo battles a centaur. Curiously, it is not Ranaldo who is said to possess fencing skill in this battle, but rather the centaur:

> The prince wore plate and mail; it’s true, the centaur was completely nude, but it was also a master of fencing and kept itself behind its shield.30

The idea that a centaur, a creature with the lower body of a horse and the upper body of a man who — like the rustic — bridges the gap between animal and man, could be proficient in the art of fencing would have been abhorrent to someone like Fiore, who cautioned Niccolò against allowing peasants to learn how to fence because ‘that sort of man was created by Heaven to be of blunted faculty and incapable of agility, and to be saddled with burdens like cattle’ (*ipsos enim obtusi sensus et agilitati ineptos ac ut iumenta oneribus applicandos cellum generauit*);31 but for Boiardo, the centaur’s position as a man who does not rule over his mount (i.e. his desires) but is rather defined by it functions as an ideal symbol through which to critique the inability of fencing skill to protect a man from moral, as opposed to physical, danger. Boiardo

30 *Vero è che il bon Ranaldo ha piastra e maglia, / E quel centauro è tutto quanto nudo: / Ma tanto è destro mastro de scrimaglia, / Che coperto se tien tutto col scudo’: I.14.6.3–6.
makes this point particularly clear in his final allusion to *l’arte del scrimere* when the lady Doristella tells the tale of her cruel husband, Usbego, and how she came to be imprisoned by him — a tale whose moral, she says, is that ‘fence cannot protect a jealous man’ (*un zeloso mai scrimir non vale*: I.26.21.7). In the course of her tale, Doristella reveals that Usbego was in fact a peculiar giant with whom Brandimarte fought in the previous canto. When Brandimarte first encounters this giant he finds the monster engaged in a struggle with an enormous serpent, but upon seeing Brandimarte the giant seizes the serpent by the tail and uses it to strike Brandimarte like some kind of flail. No sooner does Brandimarte slay both giant and serpent, however, than the serpent magically transforms into the giant and the giant into the serpent, both of whom continue the battle. This happens six more times, ending only when the giant flees and is separated from his serpent. If we connect this peculiar battle with Doristella’s tale, in which she relates how her husband — ‘valiant and a mighty man, / but he was negligent in bed’ (*tenuto e molto ardito, / Ma certo che nel letto era un poltrone*: II.26.31.3—4) — had conceived a terrible jealously which led him to refuse to leave his wife alone with anyone else, we can see how Boiardo’s remarks about how the art of fencing cannot protect a jealous man indicates that the serpent represents Usbego’s jealousy. For all Usbego’s physical might, he remains locked in a perpetual struggle which no amount of personal combative skill can relieve.

In place of personal skill, Boiardo champions fortune and virtue as the greatest characteristics of the gentle male. This ethic can be seen most clearly in Boiardo’s praise of Fulco I, ancestor of Boiardo’s patron Ercole I d’Este, where his description of Fulco as a man ‘to whom fortune and virtue is not lacking’ (*A cui ventura né virtù non manca*: II.25.44.8) can be taken as *de facto* terms of high praise within the context of the *Innamorato*’s patronage. As Jo Ann Cavallo has demonstrated, fortune can mean
one of two things within this poem. The first meaning of fortune is analogous to that of providence in traditional Christian doctrine: the personified understanding of the universe as an ordered and justly ruled creation in which the good prosper and the wicked suffer. The second kind of fortune is similar to that of chance or aventure in the French romances, an opportunity in which an individual can prove their worth through demonstrations of virtue, a term which ‘implies moral virtue and valor as well as prowess and cunning’, as when Orlando pursues the fey Morgana — here playing the role of chance or aventure — in order to free his companions from her stone prison:

not by wisdom, strength, or threats,  
or daring, or a pleasing speech  
can you make that stone open if  
Morgana won’t produce the key.  
[...]  
Virtue can conquer anything.  
He who persists with virtue wins.

Boiardo’s fundamentally Augustinian representation of masculine greatness as the result of both providence and innate virtue leaves little room in which to recommend the trained art of fencing. Though his representations of violence in chivalric battles against rustic opponents may at first appear to overturn traditional medieval frameworks which emphasise virtue over brute strength, what Boiardo achieves through these representations is to criticise not the ethics of medieval romance but what he considers to be the undue focus on personal (martial) education in his own time.

32 Boiardo, Orlando in Love, 577–78.  
33 ‘Ma non per senno, forza, o per ardire, / Non per minaccie, o per parlar soave / Potresti quella pietra fare aprire, / Se non te dona Morgana la chiave [...] Ogni cosa virtute vince al fine: / Chi segue vince, pur che abbia virtute’: II.8.54.1–4; 55.1–2.
CIVILITY AND INTELLECTUAL FENCING IN ARIOSTO’S ORLANDO FURIOSO

An important exception to the general humanist hostility towards intellectual systems of fence in fifteenth-century Italy can be found in those cities which contained a prominent university. The records of university fencing masters are exceedingly scant but they do match the pattern of university fencing found in Germany, where the University of Heidelberg saw it necessary to forbid fencing among its students within four years of its founding in 1385.  

In Padua the humanist and historian Michele Savonarola recorded in 1450 the presence of a fencing master known as Michele Rosso, who was so well respected for his art that he was to be found painted in many public places. The fencing master Filippo Vadi, whose treatise De arte gladiatoria dimicandi introduced scientific principles to a copy of Fiore’s work he apparently discovered during his time in Ferrara, was supposedly born in the city of Pisa, though little else can be said with certainty about his life. There may also be records of a fencing master in Salerno, though I have been unable to verify this independently.

34 Anglo, The Martial Arts, 8.
35 Michele Savonarola, Libellus de magnificis ornamentis: regie civitatis Padue, ed. Arnaldo Segarizzi (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1902), 44–45; cited in Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (Mineola: Dover, 2010), 91.
The most important university-affiliated fencing master of the fifteenth century was, without doubt, Lippo Dardi of Bologna. Dardi was remarkable for being an expert not just in fencing but also astronomy, geometry, and mathematics — three of the four branches of the medieval quadrivium that formed one-half of the traditional curriculum of the liberal arts. Having obtained a licence to open a fencing school in Bologna in 1412, Dardi was subsequently named Professor of Geometry at the University of Bologna in 1434 on the strength of a treatise he wrote on the relationship between fencing and geometry. Although this treatise is now lost (assuming, that is, it was ever produced), the association between fencing and geometry implied by Dardi’s twin appointments in fencing and geometry marks a radical departure from both medieval scholastic and renaissance humanist thought on the fundamentally moral and physical nature of combative skill.

Although Dardi and his disciples were well known in Bologna his teachings did not penetrate into mainstream culture until the development of a specifically Italian form of civility in the early sixteenth century. Italian civility was first and foremost a behavioural code that dictated how gentlemen ought to conduct themselves in civil life and conversation in order to ‘purchase worthy praise of their inferiors: and estimation and credit among their betters’. Paramount was the emphasis upon surfaces and appearances which were thought to reflect the inner life and virtues of an individual; civility was considered to be the ‘outward honesty’ which mirrored and projected the

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37 The following account of Lippo Dardi’s life is drawn from the introduction to Vadi, *Arte gladiatoria dimicandi*.

38 S[imon] R[obson], *The courte of civill courtesie* (London: Richard Ihones, 1577), title page. For more on the development of civility in Italy, see Scaglione, *Knights at Court*, 218–76.

virtue of the soul, while the body and its accoutrements were as the ‘habit and apparel of the inward mind’. The private life of an individual was considered secondary to his public life insofar as reputation and honour were concerned, to the extent that if a person became aware of a conflict between the private and public lives of another then ‘[he] ought to satisfie rather others than [himself], and [...] give place to the common custome’. If, for some reason, a man was to give offence, it was the responsibility of the offended party to rebuke the offence immediately and forcefully lest it be taken as true on the strength of the reputation of the one giving offence. A man who redoubled his offence — holding to be true that which another called a lie — was then left with little opportunity but to prove the truth of his statement through the strength of his body in a form of single combat known as the duel of honour. The ever-present threat of the duel of honour served as deterrent for those who might otherwise be tempted to utter offensive statements.

Civility developed in part as a response to the exhaustion of the system of vendetta which preceded it. The vendetta was part of the greater Mediterranean culture of the feud in which the aristocratic kinship groups sought compensation for social and physical injuries through a loose ‘eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth’ principle of exchange, typically exacted at sword-point through violent raids against the properties and persons of the offending party. Although originally serving as a limit on aristocratic violence — the so-called ‘peace in the feud’ — the gradual escalation of enmity across generations of aristocrats produced a situation in the late fifteenth and

early sixteenth centuries in which the vendetta came to be seen as a producer, rather than limiter, of aristocratic violence.

The tipping point after which the vendetta was no longer acceptable as a means of limiting aristocratic violence appears to have been the Friulian peasant revolt of 1511, sometimes called the ‘Cruel Carnival’. The prime cause of the revolt was the undue socioeconomic burden levied upon the peasant population by the noble families of Friuli in their escalating pursuit of vendetta. The resentment this engendered was harnessed by the nobleman Antonio Savorgnan, who whipped the peasants into a fury and directed them against his rivals, who were slaughtered, dismembered, and fed to dogs in a carnivalesque parody of the vendetta and its controlling metaphors. As Edward Muir observes,

[Dogs] provided an observable model for the transformation from domesticity to savagery and not just when they became rabid. There was something in any dog’s nature which could go inexplicably wild, something dogs shared with their close relatives the wolves, animals that often preyed on human society. In the two natures of dogs, the servile and the wolfish, humans saw an especially revealing mirror of themselves, of both their need for community and the tendency of some men to tear society apart from murdering others.⁴²

The carnival was both a symptom of and contributor to the sixteenth-century exhaustion of the vendetta and its governing metaphors of vengeance which permitted a controlled blurring of the line between human and animal in the pursuit of vendetta. The code of civility which developed in the carnival’s wake had a twofold effect upon the culture and representation of violence in sixteenth-century Italy, the first of which was a marked increase in the discourse and training of single combat. It is important

⁴² Edward Muir, Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta in Renaissance Italy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 145.
to recognise that training for single combat cultivated different aptitudes and skills than training for war; as Roberto Valturio remarked in his 1472 homage to Vegetius, ‘Although this kind of training, which is sought in such exercises, is by far unequal to that learned amid the tumults of war in all its terrors, it nevertheless wonderfully and easily renders the body very light for riding horses and heavy armour.’

During the fifteenth century there were relatively few opportunities in which to practise fighting in single combat outside of sport and expensive tournament-style duels of chivalry. The development of civility, which mandated that certain verbal offences could only be settled through recourse to a duel, resulted in a vast increase in single combats and the opportunity to practise the art of fence.

Civility’s second effect was to reverse the vendetta’s porous ontological boundaries and insist upon the separation of man from beast in conduct, speech, and battle — a task for which the university systems of fence were uniquely suited. The first extant author to describe fencing in terms of its intellectual (and, therefore, uniquely human) attributes was the fencer Filippo Vadi, whose treatise De arte gladiatoria dimicandi predated the Carnival by some thirty years. In this work, Vadi likens the art of fencing to geometry and music, two of the four disciplines of the mathematical quadrivium. Vadi’s work attests to the existence of an educated, intellectual tradition of fencing in the latter fifteenth century, but his failure to make


45 Vadi, Veni, Vadi, Vici, 35–36.
any impact on the subsequent development of Italian fencing suggests a continuation of the hostile anti-intellectual martial environment that saw the works of Fiore fail to thrive.

A certain amount of insight into how gentle Italian society viewed the intellectual fencing tradition in the aftermath of the Cruel Carnival can be gleaned from the battle between Ruggiero and Rodomonte in Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, first published in 1516 and then extended by six cantos in 1532. This battle, which spans twenty-five important strophes just prior to the poem’s abrupt end in both editions, has been written off by generations of scholars as an unproblematic allusion to Virgil’s *Aeneid* whereby, in the words of Ariosto’s sixteenth-century translator Sir John Harington, ‘in the death of Rodomont, to shew himself a perfect imitator of Virgill, [Ariosto] endeth just as Virgil ends his Aeneads with the death of Turnus’. Although this view has been subject to some well-deserved criticism in recent years, particularly that of Daniel Javitch who observed that in only the last octave of the twenty-five-strophe battle is there any imitation or even allusion to the closing segment of the *Aeneid*, scholarly analysis of the battle rather than the events which surround it remains thin on the ground. Such an analysis would serve the threefold function of

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(1) shedding light upon the characters of Ruggiero and Rodomonte, (2) displaying something of the representation of intellectual fencing in early sixteenth-century Italian society, and (3) further demonstrating the scholarly utility of literary representations of violence and single combat.

Some brief words by way of context. Ruggiero is introduced in Boiardo’s *Innamorato* as a both a Saracen knight and the ancestral link between Hector of Troy and the house of Este. Together with his fellow-knight Rodomonte, Ruggiero invades France under the banner of King Agramante, but falls in love with the warrior-woman Bradamante and converts to Christianity. Ruggiero and Bradamante are preparing to be married in the final canto of the *Furioso* when Rodomonte appears and declares Ruggiero a traitor to both his lord and his god, challenging him to a duel to prove it otherwise. The two men arm and battle in single combat, with Ruggiero eventually emerging the victor. The poem ends with the image of Rodomonte’s soul fleeing to the cold shores of the underworld.

Ariosto turns his readers’ attention to the armour of the two knights through his description of how, on their first pass, Rodomonte’s lance makes no impact on Ruggiero’s Vulcan-tempered shield (*lo scudo [...] temprato avea Vulcano*: 46.116.2–4) while Ruggiero’s shield of steel-plated bone (*dentro e di fuor d’acciaro, e in mezzo d’osso*: 46.116.7–8) is pierced through. Ruggiero’s shield, forged by the classical god of the forge, is part of a suit of armour which he won from Mandricardo, King of the Tartars. This armour, emblazoned with the house of Este’s arms of a white eagle on azure, was once the property of Hector of Troy, and Ruggiero’s acquisition of it from Mandricardo represents a straightforward metaphor for his religious conversion and the transfer of Trojan *imperium* to the house of Este over the course of the poem.
Rodomonte’s armour, on the other hand, is significant not because of what it is, but what it is not:

Today Rodomonte did not have the tough dragon’s-hide breastplate on his chest, nor did he have Nimrod’s sharp sword nor his usual helmet on his head
[...]
He had other arms of highest quality but not as perfect as his usual ones

Rodomonte’s normal armaments, inherited from his ancestor Nimrod, symbolise the arrogant pride which defines him for much of the poem. A full description of these arms is provided earlier in the poem in which the Biblical character of Nimrod is recalled as he ‘who built the tower of Babel, / thinking to hurl God out of His golden abode / and wrest from Him the government of the stars’ (quello avol suo ch’edificò Babelle, / e si pensò cacciar de l’aureo albergo, / e torre a Dio il governo de le stele: 14.118.4–6). Rodomonte’s loss of this armour, left to hang on a shrine of his own making, indicates not his escape from the pride of his ancestor but rather his decline into madness. As with Orlando and any number of chivalric knights before him, a fall into sin, folly, or madness is symbolised by the loss or destruction of the knight’s armour, which itself is used to externalise the inward characteristics of the wearer.

It is significant, however, that Rodomonte is neither entirely nude nor entirely mad when the battle begins, for this allows Ariosto to demonstrate in miniature the fall from reason into madness which forms one of the poem’s major narrative and thematic arcs.

49 ‘Non si trovò lo scoglio del serpente, / che fu si duro, al petto Rodomonte, / né di Nembrotte la spada tagliente, / né ’l solito elmo ebbe quel di alla fronte [...] Egli avea un’altra assai buona armatura, / non come era la prima già perfetta’: 46.119.1–4; 120.1–2.
At the battle’s commencement, when both Rodomonte and Ruggiero are fully armed, Ariosto describes their movements in conjoined and worthy terms: after breaking lances they both ‘seized their swords / and returned to strike each other with cruel savagery […] they applied their pointed swords / to testing each other’s armour for flaws’ (preso il brando, / si tornaro a ferir crudely e fieri […] con le pungenti spade incominciaro / a tentar dove il ferro era più raro: 46.118.3–4;7–8) — an description which reinforces the emphasis on armour, lineage, and ethics. Rodomonte’s slowly degrading armour, ‘pierced in many places’ (in più d’un loco fora: 46.120.8), provokes a rage that causes him to cast aside his shield and strike a two-handed blow upon Ruggiero’s head (an act used throughout both the Innamorato and Furioso to symbolise a warrior’s excessive rage) that shatters his unnamed sword. The degradation of his armour, the casting aside of his shield, and the shattering of his sword leaves Rodomonte as figuratively naked as Orlando was literally, having regressed to the level of a frenzied, bestial rustic.

Contrary to Rodomonte’s wild bear-hug, in which ‘he spun [Ruggiero] this way and that, clinched him, / and strove to make him fall’ (quinci e quindi lo ruota, e lo tien stretto, e per farlo cader molto contende: 46.133.5–6), Ariosto’s description of Ruggiero’s deadly reversal is a case study in linguistic precision which echoes the exactitude of a Renaissance fencing treatise:

After trying several holds,
good Ruggiero put a lock on Rodomonte,
heaved his chest over to the left,
and bent all his might to holding him there;
at the same time he advanced his right leg,
thrust it between the other’s knees and strained:
this lifted Rodomont clear of the ground.
He flung him down on his head.\textsuperscript{50}

What appears to be described is a variant of what is known today as the ‘fireman’s carry’ in which Ruggiero places his shoulder against Rodomonte’s stomach in order to lift him up into the air before throwing him down head-first on the ground. More important than the specific technique, however, is the elegance and precision with which it is described. In Ariosto’s description, Ruggiero demonstrates his ‘agility, skill, / and experience as a wrestler’ (destrezza, avea grande arte, / era alla lotta esercitato molto: 46.132.3–4). Contrary to the medieval tradition of representing wrestling as an act of gross bodily strength — as explored as early as Arthur’s battle with the Giant of Mont St-Michel in the Alliterative Morte Arthure and as late as Brandimarte’s battle with a wild man in Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato — Ariosto’s representation of the battle between Ruggiero and Rodomonte draws upon the humanist ideal of the educated, rational, and balanced man. This ideal had its roots in both the medieval peace movements, which sowed the seeds of rationality and the moderation of emotion, and the classical ideal of the paideia, an educational curriculum which stressed strength and grace of both mind and body.\textsuperscript{51} The influence of the paideia on representations of wrestling in classical Greece can be seen during the games at Patroclus’s funeral in the Iliad, where mighty Ajax and cunning Odysseus wrestle with one another:

\textsuperscript{50} ‘Tanto le prese andò mutando il franco / e buon Ruggier, che Rodomonte cinse: / calcogli il petto sul sinistro fianco, / e con tutta sua forza ivi lo strinse. / La gamba destra a un tempo inanzi al manco / ginocchio e all’altro attraversogli e spinse; / e da la terra in alto sollevollo, / e con la testa in giù steso tornollo’: 46.134.1–8.

\textsuperscript{51} D’Elia, Pagan Virtue, 69–111.
[Ajax] spoke, and heaved; but not forgetting his craft Odysseus caught him with a stroke behind the hollow of the knee, and unnerved the tendons, and threw him over backward, so that Odysseus fell on his chest as the people gazed upon them and wondered. Next, brilliant much-enduring Odysseus endeavoured to lift him and budged him a little from the ground, but still could not raise him clear, then hooked a knee behind, so that both of them went down together to the ground, and lay close, and were soiled in the dust.  

According to the rules of Greek wrestling, Odysseus takes an early lead in this contest by forcing Ajax’s back to touch the ground. Significantly, he does this not through raw strength but through a wrestler’s technique that hooks behind the hollow of his opponent’s knee. This lead is then either extended or maintained by the ambiguous side-by-side fall, but the contest is called off by Achilles who declares both men equal winners. This resolution avoids demeaning physical strength, instead stressing the need for the intellect to be balanced with a powerful physique — an ideal borrowed by the renaissance humanists and embodied in Ruggiero’s technical style of fighting. The contrast between the rational, balanced Ruggiero and the wild, rustic Rodomonte is crystallised in the poem’s final lines as Ruggiero straddles his opponent and invites surrender at dagger’s point. Rodomonte’s inarticulate refusal, in which ‘he jerked and twisted, and to turning Ruggerio below / he applied all his strength, but answered not a word’ (si torce e scuote, e per por lui di sotto mette ogni suo vigor, né gli fa motto: 46.137.7–8), unites in one image the dumbness of beasts and the polyphony of Babel which have defined the Saracen knight.

Although Ariosto does not describe armed battles with the same precision as he does wrestling, Ruggiero’s triumph over Rodomonte through the use of the *grande arte* (46.132.3) of wrestling alludes to a growing belief that technical martial skill was a worthwhile field of study — a belief which, in turn, paved the way for the acceptance of fencing as an intellectual art in its own right. Between the publication and expansion of the *Furioso*, the fencing master Antonio Manciolini first published (1523) and then revised (1531) the earliest extant treatise in the Dardi / Bolognese university fencing tradition, *Opera Nova* (‘New Work’) — a portentous title, given its position at the cusp of the new code of civility. Manciolino commences this work on what he calls ‘the art of the rational blows of fencing’ (*de l’arte, che de li colpi ragioneuole Schermitrice*) with a remark on his competitors, whom he claims ‘place a long stretch of paper in the highest and noblest part of their school, bearing (they say) the principles of their instruction’ (*nel piu alto, & solenne canto de la Scola apporre un longo spiegamento di Carta, oub gli loro capitoll esser scritti dicono*) — a claim which suggests that the practice of composing explicit principles of the art had become widespread.\textsuperscript{54} This is a practice which Manciolini himself follows, prefacing his work with a series of ‘principal rules’ (*regole principali*) which include:

Always keep an eye on the opponent’s sword-hand rather than his face. By looking at his hand, you will be able to devise all that he intends to do.

The skilful parrying of a blow is of no little profit or beauty, and can be of equal or greater elegance than a good attack. Many are able to deliver good blows, but few have the skill to parry them (without getting hit) to the satisfaction of those watching.

It is necessary to develop the knowledge of tempi, without which your fencing will remain imperfect. Therefore, let me advise you that as the opponent’s attack has

passed outside your presence, this is the correct tempo in which to follow with the riposte you deem most appropriate.55

Explicit principles of this kind were subsequently bolstered with the application of geometrical proofs and demonstrations by fencers such as Camillo Agrippa, Ridolfo Capo Ferro, and Gérard Thibault, who argued for the existence of an immutable, deductive art of fencing — developments which have led many historians to see the sixteenth century as the birth of ‘systemic’ fencing in contrast to the mere tricks and techniques of the medieval traditions.56 While this is an unfair judgment upon those medieval traditions which encouraged the organic acquisition of principles through the practice of technique, the turn of the sixteenth century remains important as the first time in which it was believed possible to separate and communicate the theory of fencing from its instantiated practice.

FENCING AND FURY IN TASSO’S GERUSALEMME LIBERATA

Torquato Tasso, the third of the ‘three crowns of Ferrara’, differed from both Ariosto, insofar as he deployed the language of fencing in his poetry, and Boiardo, in that his representation of fencing was generally positive despite something of a bleak view


within his epic *Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) as a whole.\(^57\) The poem, originally titled *Il Goffredo*, follows a number of interwoven tales set against the backdrop of a mythologised First Crusade in which a Christian army under the command of Godfrey of Bouillon seeks to liberate Jerusalem from its Muslim occupation. Like his predecessors, Tasso twists character archetypes and set pieces from literary sources both contemporary and ancient in order to make a statement upon the changing circumstances of sixteenth-century Italian society.

Representations of, and allusions to, the art of fencing in the *Liberata* are at their clearest in those scenes which depict the enmity between the Christian Tancred and the pagan Argant. The fates of these two knights become entangled during the early stages of the siege of Jerusalem in Canto 6 where Argant, impatient behind the city's besieged walls, issues a challenge of single combat to whomever among the Frankish army is willing to accept. Tancred is appointed the designated Frankish champion by Godfrey, but before he can enter the battle — he is delayed by the sight of his beloved, Clorinda — a youthful knight by the name of Otho runs impetuously into battle and is humiliated by Argant, who tramples his horse over the fallen body. Incensed, Tancred rushes into battle and remains locked in combat with Argant until nightfall, at which point the two men are separated with equal honour accruing to each. The rivalry between the two men then slumbers until, in the penultimate canto, they meet atop the walls of Jerusalem and withdraw to settle the score. Tancred is able to

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\(^{57}\) References to *Gerusalemme liberata* in Italian will be to Torquato Tasso, *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, eds Severino Ferrari and Pietro Papini (Florence: Sansoni, 1957), and in English to Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, trans. Anthony M. Esolen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). Owing to its absence from most modern editions, references to Tasso’s *Allegoria del Poema* will be to the version found in Torquato Tasso, *Il Goffredo: novamente corretto, et ristampato* (Venice: Perchacino, 1581).
slay Argant, but not before receiving wounds that take him to death’s door and grant newfound respect for his adversary.

When interpreting this scene, it can be useful to refer to the prose Allegoria del Poema (‘Allegory of the Poem’) which Tasso appended to the first editions of the Liberata. The Allegoria was for many centuries considered to be a critical red herring, an interpretation which Tasso ‘superimposed on his poem ex post facto’,\(^{58}\) but more recent scholarship has demonstrated both the utility and validity of using this essay as an interpretive guide to the poem.\(^{59}\) With respect to the rivalry between the knights Tancred and Argant, Tasso has the following to say about Tancred and the Christian army of which he is a part:

The army, composed of various Princes and Christian soldiers, signifies the virile man, composed of body and soul. The soul in turn is not simple, but in itself contains many distinct faculties and powers […] Godfrey, captain of the assembled troops, stands in the place of the intellect […] By the will of God and of the princes he is chosen Captain of this enterprise, for the intellect is from God, constituted by nature Lord over the other powers of the soul and over the body, commanding the former with a civil and the latter with a kingly power. Rinaldo, Tancred, and the other princes stand for the other powers of the soul, and the lesser soldiers signify the body.\(^{60}\)

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\(^{60}\) ‘L’esserco comosto di varii Principi, & d’altri Soldati Christiani, significa l’huomo virile, ilquale è comosto d’anima, & di corpo: & d’anima non semplice, ma distinta in molte, & varie potenze […] Goffredo, che di tutta questa adunanza è Capitano, è in vece dell’intelletto […] egli per voler d’Iddio,
The division of man into body and soul, and the soul itself into multiple faculties or powers, derives from ancient Greek thought which was available to Tasso through both the scholastic tradition of Aquinas and the translated works of Plato and Aristotle. The key division with which we are concerned here is the separation of the soul into rational, concupiscible, and irascible faculties discussed in Chapter One. The relationship between these three faculties, alluded to in Tasso’s *Allegoria*, was perhaps best expressed by Plato in his allegory of the chariot from the *Phaedrus*. Within this allegory, the soul is compared to a chariot which is pulled by two horses (the concupiscible and irascible passions) and guided by a single charioteer (the rational intellect). The rational faculty seeks to control the two horses, each of which inclines towards a different direction, such that the chariot as a whole can move towards enlightenment. Through this allegory, Plato establishes the necessity of each faculty of the soul: the concupiscible and irascible faculties for imparting motive force to the chariot, and the rational faculty for steering the chariot in the right direction. These faculties were each thought to be capable of subdivision into a number of sub-faculties, the exact quantity and quality of which was a subject of some debate throughout the medieval period. The exact nature of pride, in particular, was a vexed question. Where Augustine argued, following a reading of 1 John 2:16–17 — ‘For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh (*concupiscentia carnis*) and the concupiscence of the

& de’Principi è eletto Capitano in questa impresa; pero’che l’intelletto è da Dio, & dalla Natura costituì Signore sovrà a l’altre virtù dell’anima, & sovrà il corps, & comanda à quelle con potestà civile, & à queste con Imperio regale. Rinaldo, Tancredi, & gli altri Principi sono in luogo dell’altrè potenze dell’animo, & il corpo da i soldati men nobili ci vien dinotato’: Allegoria; trans. Jerusalem Delivered, 416.
eyes (concupiscentia oculorum) and the pride of life (superbia vitae) — that pride belonged to the faculty of concupiscence, Aquinas responded that pride belonged to the irascible faculty because of the difficulty of its object, its defining mark being believed to be the difficulty in achieving or avoiding its object.

Tasso further distinguishes between two different forms of the irascible faculty in his Allegoria, one of which is governed by reason while the other is unruled. ‘Just as it is the soldier’s duty to obey his captain’, writes Tasso,

so it is the duty of the irascible part of the soul, warlike and robust, to arm itself with reason against the desires, with the vehemence and ferocity it needs to beat back and put to flight whatever might hinder the attainment of happiness. But when it does not obey reason, allowing itself to be carried away by its own force, it can happen that it does not fight the desires at all but joins their side, like a bad watchdog biting the sheep and not the thieves.

Tasso’s principal vehicle for the signification of this structure is the character of Rinaldo, one of the greatest Christian knights within the poem. The Allegoria singles out a particular line from Canto 16 when Rinaldo breaks the bonds of love and enchantment woven by the witch Armida in order to return to war — ‘Anger, fierce warrior guarding Reason’s seat’ (sdegno guerrier de la ragion feroce: 16.34.4) — as

61 For a more in-depth discussion of Augustine’s position on the emotions, including with respect to 1 John 2:16–17, see Barbara Rosenwein, Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 24–34.


63 ‘così è debito della Irascibile parte dell’animo guerriera, & robusta armarsi per la ragione contra le concupiscenze, & con quella vehemenza, & ferocità, che è propria di lei ribattere, & discacciare tutto quello, che può essere d’impedimento alla felicità; ma quando essa non ubidisce alla ragione; ma si lascia trasportare dal sue proprio impeto, alle volte avviene, che combatte non contra le concupiscenze: ma per le concupiscenze, ò à guisa di Cane reo custode non morde i ladri, ma gli armenti’: Allegoria, trans. Jerusalem Delivered, 418.
an example of how anger should be ruled by reason. In this case, the irascible faculty provides the emotional impetus for Rinaldo to act on what his rational faculty knows to be right, which is to leave behind the garden of pleasures and return to war. Curiously, Tasso does not appear to make a sharp distinction between the concupiscible and irascible faculties in this episode, describing his enchanted love as a form of ‘anger ungoverned by reason’ (*l’ira non governata dalla ragione*).64 The focus, it would seem, is on the opposition of the intellect to the irascible and concupiscible faculties jointly considered, sometimes known as the passions.

This conflation of the passions helps to explain why the first battle between Argant and Tancred, the latter of whom Tasso in the *Allegoria* identifies with the concupiscible faculty of the soul, is described in terms of the irascible temperaments of pride (*orgoglio*), anger (*ira*), and fury (*furia*). The description of both men’s emotional state as *furia* alludes to the broader meaning of the word as a kind of frenzy or madness not unlike the state which afflicted Ariosto’s Orlando, who was ‘driven raging mad by love’ (*che per amor venne in furore e matto*: 1.2.3). Such a state is characterised by the absence of the guiding voice of reason, an absence which Tasso makes explicit when he later describes how ‘Reason and fury are conquered now by wrath. / Ministering fury makes their forces grow’ (*Vinta da l’ira è la ragione e l’arte, / e le forze il furor ministra e cresce*: 6.48.1–2). The battle begins, however, with the combatants demonstrating not rage but reason in their fighting art:

> Each moves his watchful right hand well prepared to parry the blow — each shifts his eyes, his feet to answer stance for stance, to keep on guard; now they circle, or lunge forward, or retreat,

now feint as if to strike here, and now there,
looking to wound where they have made no threat;
now leave themselves defenceless in some part,
art trying to make mockery of art.  

Tasso’s description of how the two men feinted at one another is a relatively new addition to the vocabulary of European combat. The earliest extant master to write at length on the use of the feint was Giacomo di Grassi, whose 1570 treatise *Ragione di adoprar sicuramente l’arme* (*Principles on Wielding Arms with Safety*) includes a chapter on feints entitled ‘Of Falsings or Deceits’ (*Dell’ingano*) which is deliberately appended after the ‘end of the true art’ (*al fine della verà arte*) as a concession to the mutable instantiation of an immutable art. In this manner, we can read Tasso’s allusions to feints in this battle as suggesting the presence of folly in even the most rational (or artful) part of Tancred and Argant’s battle.

As in the *Furioso*, what prompts the unravelling of reason’s control is the wounding of one of the combatants. In this case it is Argant who is on the receiving end of two blows from Tancred, blows which draw blood and provoke him to retaliate

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65 *Cantamente ciascuno a i colpi move / La destra, a i guardi l’occhio, a i passi il / Si reca in atti varii, in guardie nove; / Or gira intorno, or cresce inanzi, or cede; / Or qui ferire accenna, e poscia altrove, / Dove non minacciò, ferir si vede; / Or di sè discopirire alcuna parte, / E tentar di schernir l’arte con l’arte*: 6.42.1–8.

66 Giacomo di Grassi, *Ragione di adoprar sicuramente l’arme si da offesa, come da difesa, con un trattato dell’ingnanno, & con un modo di effercitarsi da se stesso, per acquistare forza, giudicio, & prestezza* (Venice: Ziletti, 1570), 119; trans. Giacomo di Grassi, *His True Arte of Defence, plainlie teaching by infallable Demonstrations, apt Figures and perfect Rules the manner and forme how a man without other Teacher or Master may safelie handle all sortes of Weapons as well offensive as defensive: With a Treatise of Disceit or Falsinge: And with a waie or means by private Industringes to obtaine Strength, Judgment and Activity*, trans. I. G., gentleman (London: [G. Shaw?] for I. [aggard], 1594), sig. Aa1.

67 For more on the relationship between feints and folly, see Capo Ferro, *Italian Rapier Combat*. 
with ‘reckless daring’ (temerario ardire: 6.46.1). Tancred responds by attempting to hold fast to his fencing technique, but Argant’s fury is unrelenting:

But since the pagan’s rage did not subside,
[Tancred] had to let himself be swept away,
and, anger and fury overwhelming sense,
whirled his sword with his utmost violence.  

Tancred’s abandonment of reason signals the lowest point in the battle where both reason and art have been conquered by wrath. Before the fight can be resolved and a winner determined, however, the battle is postponed by the fall of night and resumed only during the storming of Jerusalem in the penultimate canto of the poem. Withdrawing from the siege to a quiet place, Tancred and Argant begin their battle in much the same way as before, only this time Tasso makes the role of fencing in establishing the nature of these two combatants more one-sided. Tancred is portrayed as the quintessential fencer, lean and lithe (agile e sciolto) with a whirling (girar) style of combat in which he seeks the sword of his opponent. By contrast, ‘Argant is taller by his head held high, / surpasses [Tancred] in muscle and sheer weight’ (sovrasta a lui con l’alto capo, e molto / di grossezza di membra Argante eccede: 19.11.3–4) and strikes directly to his opponent’s heart rather than his sword, a style of fighting much more like the ‘medieval’ traditions of longsword fencing than the renaissance traditions of civil duelling.

The contrast in style between the two men is heightened by Tasso’s weighted ascription of fencing (schermo) to Tancred. Contrary to their earlier fight, where both men began from a point of art until wounded, Argant begins with swift and violent

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68 ‘Ma, poi che non s’allenta il fier Pagano, / È forza al fin che trasportar si lassi, / E cruccioso egli ancor con quanta puote / Violenza maggior la spada rote’: 6.47.5–8.
blows which prevent Tancred from defending himself. Seeing Tancred wounded by his onslaught, Argant cries that ‘Fencing has done the fencer in!’ (Lo schermitor vinto è di schermo: 19.14.8). Again we can observe the warrior — here Tancred — who suffers a wound throw aside his fencing skill and adopt a more savage style of fighting:

Gnawing himself for shame and indignation,
Tancred now tosses his usual guards away
[...] Not giving an inch,
Tancred now goes half-swords, to fight in the clinch

The half-sword (mezza spada) is a form of close-quarter armoured fighting in which a combatant places their non-dominant hand on the blade of their own sword for additional leverage. Though still associated with the fencing tradition — as alluded to by Tancred’s retort upon wounding Argant, ‘That’s the reply the beaten fencer gives / to the victorious master!’ (Questa [...] al vincitor maestro / il vinto schermidor riposta rende: 19.16.5–6) — in this case the half-sword appears to function as the first step on the path to a brutish form of wrestling and violence in which ‘less art than horror in the sight they make’ (la pugna ha manco d’arte ed è piú orrenda: 19.19.8). It is, significantly, the self-destructive aspect of this brute combat, not Tancred’s skill, that leads to Argant’s defeat as he overbalances and falls upon the ground — ‘self-fall, fortune thus far if at all, / no one will ever boast he made you fall’ (per te cadesti, aventuroso in tato, / ch’altri non ha di tua caduta il vanto: 19.24.8). Yet though Tancred emerges the victor in this battle, such was the struggle and the loss of blood that he is nearly vanquished himself, passing out in such a wretched state that ‘none /

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69 ‘Fra lo sdegno Tancredi e la vergogna / Si rode, e lascia i soliti riguardi / [...] e risoluto / Tancredi a mezza spada è già venuto’: 19.15.1–8.
could tell the conquered from the champion’ (*I vincitor dal vinto / Non ben saria, nel rimirar, distinto: 19.28.7–8*).

For the purposes of the present study’s exploration of literary representations of violence, it is significant that even in Tasso’s *Liberata* — a poem which is notoriously pessimistic about the limits of human rationality — the art of fencing and of learned combat remains associated with the rational ideal from which both Tancred and Argant fell. What this suggests is that the association between fencing and rationality, which developed concurrently with the adoption of civil courtesy, was so well established as to persist in even those texts which questioned the possibility of the kind of human rationality from which fencing was thought to derive.

**ITALY AS THE ‘SPORTING-PLACE OF MURDER’**

There is another aspect to Tasso’s ascription of the art of fence to Tancred and Argant that we would be remiss to overlook, and that is the relationship of this rivalry to the duel of honour as it developed over the course of the sixteenth century. According to its advocates, the duel of honour associated with civility was thought to function as both a guarantee of the truth of a gentleman’s speech and a form of deterrence which dissuaded individuals from giving voice to the kind of insult which might occasion violence. Although a paucity of statistical information makes it difficult to estimate the extent to which, if at all, the duel functioned as a brake on aristocratic violence in Italy, its efficacy was beyond doubt for many contemporary writers:

> for slaunders, naughtie reports in absence, and present spiteful speaches, men ought for the maintenance of good name, sometimes use an lawfull manner of correction (this spoken not of the scripture) for the sharpe sword makes a blunt blockhead beware

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As the above quote from the Englishman Thomas Churchyard’s treatise *Churchyards Challenge* (1593) suggests, the duel found a welcome home over the course of the sixteenth century. The French, in particular, took to the duel with great zeal, to the extent that in 1614 Sir Francis Bacon was led to believe that it was from France that the duel of honour ‘seemeth chiefly to have flowne’. It was not, however, without its critics, and as time passed and the number of duels increased as the kinship violence of the vendetta faded into memory we can observe the emergence of a powerful Italian opposition that was spearheaded by the church. The first attempt to prohibit duelling in papal territory took place in 1509 when Pope Julius II decreed excommunication and forbade church burial for the fighters, and excommunication and a fine for the nobles who granted a duelling field; this prohibition was repeated more sharply in 1519 by his successor Leo X, who stated both that the foregoing prohibition was not obeyed and that duels were fought daily throughout the papal territories. The turning point after which the enormous popularity of the duel began to subside appears to have been the ecumenical Council of Trent (1545–63), the final session of which imposed heavy penalties upon the practice and support of the duel. Recollecting his visit to Milan in

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73 J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), 274–75.
1565, Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme recalled how in Milan he saw ‘groups of people with quarrels, particularly in the city, that met to battle and to kill’ (quadrilles de ceux qui avoient querelles, se pourmenir ainsi dans la ville, et se encontroant se battoient et se tuoient), leaving behind every morning ‘an infinity’ (une infinite) of bodies; yet, by the time he had come to set down his memoirs, the duel had been abolished by the council of Trent in all parts of Italy save for Naples.74

Though the Council of Trent appears to have imposed the most effective prohibition of the duel in its time, its sharpest critics were arguably those members of the gentry who doubted the duel’s capacity to deliver on the promise of limiting violence in civilised society. The capacity for the duel to exacerbate aristocratic violence — and, by extension, Italy’s reputation as ‘the Academie of manslaughter, the sporting place of murder, the Apothecary-shop of poison for all Nations’75 — is perhaps best attested by an anecdote recounted by one of the duel’s supporters, the fencing master and honour theorist Vincentio Saviolo, who described the manner the manner of ‘certaine undiscreet men’ who ‘either stand or go in streets, so to stare and looke men passing by them in the fact […] which breedeth such an offence unto some men so marked, that they cannot take it in good part’. Having caused offence, these quarrelsome men would then fan the flames of insult through speech, in one case claiming to look ‘because they had eies’, provoking the other men to reply

‘[that] is the crowes fault, in that they have not picked them out. To bee short, in the end one word added on the other, and one speech following the other, the matter come from saying, to doing: and what the tung had uttered the hand would maintaine.\textsuperscript{76}

It is in the light of such circumstances that Tasso’s ascription of both the combat mannerisms and linguistic patterns of the duel to the passionate Tancred and Argant gains additional significance. Their departure from Jerusalem — a city which, for Tasso, signifies ‘civil happiness’ (\textit{felicità civile})\textsuperscript{77} — to fight their duel in a secluded place as was the habit of his time can be seen to symbolise the duellists’ departure from enlightenment and civil order. Honour, Tasso appears to suggest, was in theory capable of being ruled by reason, but was in practice subjugated to the tempests of human passion.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Coupled with the first stirrings of fencing literature, the three Ferrarese epics of Renaissance Italy offer a unique opportunity to undertake a longitudinal study of how cultural norms are able to shape both literary and didactic representations of violence within a (relatively) discrete community. In the figures and works of Fiore, Niccolò, and Boiardo we can observe a gradual transition from the medieval Augustinian-Bernardian tradition of virtue combat to the neo-Aristotelian / humanist conception of the martial arts as a foundation for the universal citizen, here figured in terms both male and gentle. In Ariosto and Tasso we see this conception of fencing as a rational art brought to its apex, standing in for the gentleman’s dual responsibilities as both

\textsuperscript{76} Vincentio Saviolo, \textit{His Practice, in Two Books: the First Entreating the Use of the Rapier and Dagger, the Second of Honor and Honorable Quarrels} (London: John Wolff, 1595), sig. P3\textsuperscript{v}.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Allegoria}; trans. \textit{Jerusalem Delivered}, 416.
man of war and man of learning. The expression of emotion, which was vital within the medieval tradition of virtue combat, has now become suspect through its opposition, by way of the concupiscible and irascible faculties, to the faculty of reason. Through the extension of the medieval German ideal of moderated emotion, the Italians develop an understanding of rational fencing that is predicated upon the suppression of emotion.
Reframing Medieval Violence in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry IV*

The preceding chapters have traced two divergent methods of representing and interpreting violence and single combat during the medieval and early modern period, one by way of England and France, the other by way of Germany and Italy. In this chapter we explore how these methods met in sixteenth-century England by way of the import of fashionable Italian courtesy, a collision which produced both a hybrid model of English civility and a hard-fought debate that would be picked up by Victorian historians as evidence for the supposedly endemic violence of the medieval world.

The primary lens through which we will explore these sixteenth-century attitudes will be the relationship between Henry ‘Hotspur’ Percy and Henry ‘Hal’ of Monmouth in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry IV*. The multiple levels of opposition between these two characters — chivalry against civility, combat against speech, medieval against renaissance — can be understood as working, in the words of Gail Kern Paster, to ‘reveal the historically specific regulatory reforms of the civilising process’.¹ This civilising process, owing to a widespread English-language misunderstanding of Norbert Elias’s use of the term, is often conceived in terms of a sense of moral or

ethical progress from inferiority to superiority, a sense which Elias disavows in his seminal work *The Civilizing Process*:

For the [English and French], the concept [of civilisation] sums up in a single term their pride in the significance of their own nations for the progress of the West and of mankind. But in German usage, *Zivilisation* means something which is indeed useful, but nevertheless only a value of the second rank, comprising only the outer appearance of human beings, the surface of human existence. The word through which Germans interpret themselves, which more than any other expresses their pride in their own achievement and their own being, is *Kultur* […] the German concept of *Kultur* refers essentially to intellectual, artistic, and religious facts, and has a tendency to draw a sharp dividing line between facts of this sort, on the one side, and political, economic, and social facts, on the other.²

This chapter proposes an alternative interpretation of the relationship between Hotspur and Hal which is more in line with the *Prozeß der Zivilisation*, as Elias titled his work in German, than the civilising process as understood in conventional English discourse. The chivalric violence of Hotspur, I will argue, was understood not as a dark or shameful past to be progressed beyond, but rather an era of worthy individuals who, through no fault of their own, were unable to reach what Shakespeare’s contemporaries considered to be the civilisational apex of their own time. Progress is understood in *1 Henry IV* in terms of upward, not forward, motion, the act of standing upon the shoulders of giants. Hotspur, on this reading, becomes not a relic of a bygone age but rather an aspect of the past which lives on in the renaissance character of Hal.

In addition to its historiographical argument, this chapter will attempt something new by reversing the methodological relationship between violence and social discourse so far investigated. Theatre is unique among literary forms in that its representations of single combat are typically left to the interpretation of performers

rather than the instructions of playwrights. By taking as a given the position, argued throughout this dissertation, that violence is a phenomenon which was understood to extend beyond the physical and to be enmeshed in societal discourse, it is possible to advance certain interpretations of how late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century performances might have rendered the battle at Shrewsbury between Hotspur and Hal.

Given the unmanageable wealth of scholarship on the social context of Shakespeare’s plays, I have chosen to limit myself to an exploration of the relationship between violence, society, and the humors in 1 Henry IV. Humoral theory is of particular value to historiographical and methodological readings of this play because of its simultaneous fashioning in sixteenth-century English society and twentieth/twenty-first century Shakespearean scholarship. I am particularly interested in the idea that the character of Hotspur may have been represented not as a one-dimensional choleric, as many modern scholars suggest, but as a nuanced atrabilious hero not unlike Lear or Hamlet. Such a divergence of opinion between sixteenth-century and twentieth-century opinions of the play, if it can be demonstrated, may offer some insight into how Victorian attitudes towards the ‘savage’ or anti-cultural nature of violence have shaped modern understandings of the play.

Martial Myth and Martial Art

There exists within both scholarly and popular discourse a dismissive attitude towards the martial sophistication of the kind of medieval knight represented by the character of Hotspur. We can see this attitude at work in Grace Tiffany’s suggestion that ‘Hal represents the more modern military opponent, rapierlike and flexible, superior to the
heavy and rigid broadsword that — again, symbolically — is Hotspur’, and even in the otherwise landmark work on the martial arts by Sydney Anglo, who considers the medieval German masters to have ‘thoroughly disorganized the material’ with which they worked. In popular accounts we read that the medieval ‘broadsword’ — an anachronistic label for the single-hand, cut-oriented weapon known as the arming sword — tipped the scales in excess of ten kilograms, that they were wielded as little more than glorified ‘can openers’, and that it was ‘only when armor finally fell into disuse in the 1500s [...] that complex offensive and defensive systems of swordplay began to appear’. On television, Ser Vardis Egan, a knight-captain from the multi-award winning HBO series Game of Thrones, fights with a crude style described as ‘the knight’s dance, hacking and hammering’, while one particularly egregious documentary likened the use of a medieval sword to ‘carrying a piece of log and trying to wield it like a steak knife’.

The reality is that the average single-hand sword of the Middle Ages weighed between one and two kilograms and required a high degree of dexterity to use

4 Anglo, The Martial Arts, 128.
correctly. Superbly designed to defeat the strongest armour of the early medieval period, the medieval sword was adapted to keep pace with developments in defensive technology well into the sixteenth century. Even its two-handed variants were light and balanced enough to be used gracefully in a single hand should the need arise. The surviving works of the medieval masters at arms attest to a systematic treatment of combat which included thrusts and rapid changes of direction with their weapon — techniques which would be impossible to achieve with the kind of caricatured meat-cleaver depicted in popular twenty-first century media.

Frequently opposed to the medieval sword is the sixteenth-century weapon known as the rapier, a slender, thrust-oriented sword with a complex hilt to guard the hand that was as much a social statement as it was a tool for self-defence, it being commonly believed that ‘he was held the greatest gallant, that had the deepest Ruffe, and longest Rapier’. English fashions around the turn of the seventeenth century were notoriously fickle and sought their inspiration from a procession of foreign courts. Spanish, French, and Italian costumes adorned the public body in turn, changing so fast that the physician Andrew Bourd found himself naked with indecision:

I am an Englishman, and naked I stand here,
Musing in my mind what garment I shall weare,
For now I will weare this, now I will weare that,
Now I will weare I can not tell what:

10 Loades, Swords and Swordsmen, 167–71.
All new fashions be pleasant unto me,
I will have them whether I thrive or thee.¹²

It is perhaps no surprise that these three centres of fashion — Spain, France, and Italy — were also the home of the three fencing traditions that most influenced the exercise of the rapier in England, for the fashionable implications of the rapier extended beyond its appearance to its manner of use; as the self-proclaimed patriot and English fencing master George Silver bitterly observed in his *Paradoxes of Defence*, ‘Fencing […] in this new fangled age is like our fashions, everie daye a change, resembling the Camelion, who altereth himself into all colours save white; so Fencing changeth into all wards save the right’.¹³

Despite their mutability, the three schools of fencing were united in their focus on the use of the rapier in the duel — an armed and pre-arranged encounter between gentlemen for the purpose of settling a point of honour, the Italian development of which was outlined in the previous chapter. It is important to recognise that, although Anglo-Saxon England had shared in the Mediterranean culture of feud and vendetta whose exhaustion occasioned the development of Italian civil courtesy and the duel during the sixteenth century, the violent pursuit of aristocratic quarrels had been severely curtailed in England from as early as the twelfth century.¹⁴ The feud thrived in, and was engendered by, a society with a weak rule of law, but the ability of the


post-Conquest English monarchs to enforce their will across their relatively small realm proved inhospitable to the feud.\textsuperscript{15} It was the arms race of fashion which spurred the development of duelling in England, a practice which some contemporary critics believed to have actually increased interpersonal violence by encouraging a particular sensitivity to insult among gentlemen.\textsuperscript{16}

Such critics of the duel often called out the rapier in particular for increasing the lethality of what would have been otherwise harmless confrontations. This is a point on which both supporters and critics of the duel agreed, though for different reasons: where critics saw this lethality as needless harm, supporters of the duel such as Thomas Churchyard considered the rapier to be ‘most perilous, therefore most feared, and thereupon most feared, and thereupon private quarrels and common frays [are] soonest shunned’.\textsuperscript{17} Precisely what it was about the rapier that made duels more lethal than encounters with other weapons was a subject of some debate. Silver, pursuing his defence of traditional English weapons, argued that the high risk of death in a duel with rapiers came about ‘not by reason of their dangerous thrusts, nor cunningnesse of that Italienated fight, but in the length and unwieldinesse thereof’.\textsuperscript{18} The idea that the rapier’s excessive length was the cause of its lethality garners some support from an English proclamation in 1562 in which it was prohibited to ‘wear any sword, rapier, or any other weapon in their stead passing the length of one yard and


\textsuperscript{17} See Churchyard’s introduction to Grassi, \textit{His True Arte of Defence}, sig. ¶2\textsuperscript{v}, ¶¶1\textsuperscript{v}.

\textsuperscript{18} Silver, \textit{Paradoxes of Defence}, 9.
half a quarter of blade at the uttermost’, a prohibition which was justified in terms of the undue focus on offence such weapons engender:

a usage has crept in, contrary to former orders, of wearing of long swords and rapiers, sharpened in such sort as many appear the usage of them can not tend to defense, which ought to be the very meaning of wearing of weapons in times of peace, but to murder and evident death.\textsuperscript{19}

The ‘former orders’ to which the proclamation alludes are likely the traditional English method of fence with the cut-oriented sword-and-buckler style whose masters had been incorporated during the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII (1509–47).\textsuperscript{20} The exercise of sword-and-buckler fence had been a common sight in London prior to the introduction of rapier fencing. The corporation of the ‘four ancient maisters of the noble science of Defence within the City of London’, as the traditional English masters were known, put on frequent demonstrations of their art at playhouses and inns such as Richard Burbage’s ‘Curtain’, the Holywell ‘Theatre’, the Bell Savage, and the Bull.\textsuperscript{21} On the public street we can read in Edmund Howe’s continuation of John Stow’s \textit{Annales} that there were frequent clashes between sword-and-buckler men in the late 1570s, just prior to the adoption of the rapier as general fashion:

This field commonly called West Smithfield, was for many years called Ruffians hall, by reason it was the usall place of Frayes and common fighting, during the time that Sword and Buckler were in use. When every Servingman, from the base to the best, carried a Buckler at his backe, which hung by the hilt or pommel of his Sword which hung before him. This manner of fight was frequent with all men, until the fight of rapier and dagger took place and then suddenly the general quarrel of fighting abated which began about the 20. yeare of Queen Elizabeth, for until then it was usuall to


\textsuperscript{20} Anglin, ‘Schools of Defense’, 393–410.

have frayes, fights, and Quarells, upon the Sundays and Holidayes; sometime twenty
thirty and forty Swords and Bucklers, halfe against halfe, as well as quarels by
appointment as by chance.22

Death was surprisingly rare in this sword-and-buckler fight, the style of which
Lawrence Stone has described as allowing ‘the maximum muscular effort and the most
spectacular show of violence with the minimum threat to life and limb’.23 It is
important, however, to recognise this relative safety as a feature rather than a flaw of
the sword-and-buckler fight; where modern audiences tend to evaluate weapons in
terms of their ‘killing efficiency’, many renaissance swordsmen believed, as Silver
did, that if two men ‘have both the prfection of their weapons, against the best no hurt
canbe don [sic]’.24 This inherent safety allowed even theatrical swordsmen to fight in
a manner evocative of a real fight, safe in the knowledge that they were able not only
to offend but also to defend with efficiency.

ELIZABETHAN STAGE COMBAT

When it came to the performance of combat on the Elizabethan stage we know that
actors were often trained swordsmen, being expected to possess ‘many excellent
qualities: as dancing, actiuitie, musicke, song, eloquution, abilitie of body, memory,
vigilancy, skill of weapon, pregnancy of wit, and such like’ (my emphasis).25 This
personal skill would have been enhanced through the wearing of functional (if
incomplete) battlefield armour on the stage, a costuming decision which — when

22 John Stow and Edmund Howes, Annales, 1024–45.
25 T[omas?] G[ainsford?], The Rich Cabinet: furnished with varietie of excellent descriptions, exquisite
characters, witty discourses, and delightfull histories, devine and morrall. Together with invectiues
against many abuses of the time (London: I. B. for Roger Jackson, 1616), fol. 117v.
coupled with the use of bated, or blunted, blades — would have permitted actors to strike at one another with safety and bravado. Far from the hackneyed blade-clashing of many modern theatrical productions, battles on the Elizabethan stage would have likely been vigorous and exciting.

Although such flashy stage combat has often been dismissed by theatre historians as a concession to groundlings and the patrons of down-market venues, Evelyn Tribble and Lois Potter have suggested that ‘bodily practices such as gesture, dance, and swordplay were crucial forms of kinetic intelligence honed by the early modern player within particular cognitive ecologies of skilled practice’.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the final ‘exchanging of blades’ scene in *Hamlet*, where Hamlet trades weapons with Laertes. The left-hand seizure, by which the exchange of weapons is commonly considered to take place, was a technique common among rapier fencers, but it is the instruction of the French fencing master Henri de Saint-Didier which is commonly referenced in the critical literature. This technique involved closing with the opponent and seizing the hilt of their rapier with your left hand (dropping your dagger in the process if you were using one), before twisting the hilt to free your opponent’s weapon from their grasp. The opponent’s best recourse was to mirror the

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action and grasp your rapier’s hilt and twist. Both men would thus lose their rapier and gain their adversary’s, enacting a skilful exchange of weapons.

The execution of such a skilful technique — particularly one which is to be found in a contemporary French fencing treatise — accentuates the play’s central correlations between murder, France, and the rapier. Matched against Laertes, an exceptional duellist, in what is supposed to a friendly bout with rapiers, Hamlet acquits himself surprisingly well. So masterful is Hamlet’s bladework that he scores two unanswered hits on his opponent, surprising Horatio who feared that he ‘[would] lose this wager’ (5.2.141). It might be argued that this unforeseen turn of events was due to Laertes’ hesitation to deliver a killing blow with a sharp and envenomed sword, but Hamlet was confident of his victory even before the foils were chosen; confiding to Horatio, Hamlet said that ‘since [Laertes] went into France, I have been in continual practice: I shall win at the odds’ (5.2.143–4). When we look back at precisely when this ‘continual practice’ began, we find that the scene in which Laertes departs for France coincides almost exactly with the first stirrings of revenge in the ‘book and volume’ of Hamlet’s brain (1.5.97–118); save for Polonius’s brief advice on love to Ophelia, the play moves directly from Laertes’ departure to the introduction of the ghost and the revelation of Old Hamlet’s ‘foul and most unnatural murder’ (1.5.29). Hamlet’s growing proficiency with the rapier becomes directly correlated to his growing madness and thirst for revenge on the man who murdered his father, Claudius.

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28 This argument has been considered at greater length in Michael Ovens, ‘France and the Norman Lamord’, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, vol. 87, no. 1 (2015), 79–86.
Hamlet is associated with the rapier five times over the course of the play, each association charting a steady decline in his mental state. The first time is when he asks Horatio and Marcellus to swear on his sword *hic et ubique*, here and everywhere:

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Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword:
Never to speak of this that you have heard,
Swear by my sword. (1.5.175–8)
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The chivalric tradition of swearing upon the sword is Hamlet’s thematic starting point. Here, he is still of ‘noble mind’; Laertes has only departed for France two scenes earlier (1.3.85–91), and he has not yet been in the ‘practice’ of either revenge or the rapier for very long. Swearing upon the sword lays on Hamlet’s rapier the symbolic trappings of chivalry’s association with virtue and justice and provides the audience with a glimpse of the height from which Hamlet is to fall.29

The next four connections of the rapier with Hamlet chart his gradual decline into murderous revenge. The next time Hamlet draws his sword, he has found Claudius at prayer. Although he has the opportunity to slay his uncle, he is able to restrain himself, albeit for reasons that are less than noble: ‘Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent’ (3.4.91). The third time Hamlet draws he commits a ‘rash and bloody deed’ (3.4.31), slaying Polonius by accident; ‘I took thee for thy better’, says Hamlet, his mind on Claudius (3.4.37). The fourth time, Hamlet slays Laertes by accident as well (his exclamation, ‘The point envenomed too!’ (5.2.266) indicating surprise that the blade was poisoned), but in anger this time; he is ‘incensed’ with Laertes (5.2.245).

29 For a discussion of the symbolic associations of the sword, see Billacois, *The Duel*, 191–96.
Finally, Hamlet murders the defenceless Claudius with full knowledge of his actions; ‘venom, to thy work […] Follow my mother’ (5.2.266–72).

These five connections chart Hamlet’s continual decline into the spiral of murderous revenge which correlates with his ‘continual practice’ at the rapier. From the chivalric act of swearing on the sword, to his self-restraint from committing murder in the church, to the accidental murder of the innocent bystander Polonius, to the accidental murder of Laertes while enraged, to the outright murder of Claudius, the rapier’s presence in each situation lends its association with death to Hamlet’s downward spiral.30

THE ‘HUMOR RADICALL OF VIOLENCE’

The climactic battle of 1 Henry IV, by way of contrast, has relatively little in the way of stage directions or descriptions of combat as compared to the Hamlet–Laertes duel. Given its location in the battlefield and Vernon’s earlier description of how Hal was ‘furnished, all in arms’ (4.1.102) it is reasonable to assume that both combatants were dressed in some form of battlefield plate with a sword and, perhaps, a shield; but in terms of stage directions and descriptions of the performance of this combat, we have only the perfunctory description of ‘Fight’ or ‘They fight’ as the battle commences, some words of encouragement from Falstaff (‘Well said, Hal! To it Hal! Nay, you shall find no boy’s play here, I can tell you’: 5.3.76–77), and a direction to the effect that Hal kills Hotspur as the battle concludes. In order to reconstruct potential Elizabethan

stagings and interpretations of this combat, therefore, it is necessary to accept as given
the fundamental argument of this dissertation — namely, that representations of
violence and single combat can be read as participating in cultural discourses of lay
gentle masculine dominance and hierarchy — and work backwards from the (humoral)
discourses at work in Shakespeare’s construction of Hotspur and Hal to the point
where these discourses intersect with the performance of violence on the theatrical
stage.

Beginning with the work of Lily B. Campbell in 1930 and John W. Draper in
1945, scholars have increasingly turned towards Elizabethan interpretations of
humoral theory in order to understand the constructed emotional affects of
Shakespeare’s characters.31 Humoral theory posited that the human body is composed
of four humors or fluids — melancholy, choler, phlegm, and blood — which arise
from the body’s fundamental pairings of hot or cold, wet or dry, and whose excess or
deficit was thought to determine an individual’s temperament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor</th>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Temperament</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>air</td>
<td>sanguine</td>
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<tr>
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<td>water</td>
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<td>fire</td>
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<td>aggressive, passionate, extroverted</td>
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<td>cold, dry</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>melancholic</td>
<td>gloomy, creative, introverted</td>
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The Four Humors and the Four Temperaments.

This theory was predicated on a unified cosmological model where human beings were
considered to be analogous to the greater cosmos such that each of the humors

31 Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare’s Tragic Heroes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930),
112–13; John W. Draper, The Humors and Shakespeare’s Characters (Durham, NC: Duke University
Press, 1945), 67–68. For an overview of the subject, see Robert L. Reid, ‘Humoral Psychology in
corresponded to one of the four Heraclitean elements (earth, fire, air, and water), to one of the four seasons, to one of four periods of the day, to one of four stages of life, and so on — a model which connected the internal production of humors to external conditions of heat, cold, moisture, or dryness. Marsilo Ficino, in his De vita libri tres (‘Three Books on Life’), provides a list of those things which could induce the production of melancholy, which includes ‘heavy and thick wine, especially if it is dark; food which is hard, dry, salted, bitter, sharp, stale, burnt, roasted, or fried [...] and whatever causes warmth or cold, and likewise dryness and everything that is black’ (crassum turbidumque vinum, praecieue nigrum; cibi duri, sicci, salsi, acrs, acuti, veteres, usit, assi, fricti [...] et quaecunque calefaciunt vel frigefaciunt simul atque desiccant, et omnia nigra). Emotional states such as ‘anger, fear, pity, [and] sorrow’ (ira, timor, misericordia, dolor) and intangibles such as ‘idleness, solitude, and whatever offends the sight, smell, and hearing, and most of all, darkness’ (otium, solitudo, et quaecunque visum et olfactum auditumque offendunt, omnium vero maxime tenebrae) could also promote the formation of melancholy. Conversely, its production could be ‘resisted with things which are moderately hot but as moist as possible’ (resistendum est rebus quidem modice calidis, humidis vero quam maxime), which included ‘foods that have been thoroughly boiled’ (cibis elixis assidue) and ‘easy occupations, diversified unburdensome business, and the constant company of agreeable people’ (facilesque occupationes diversaque negotia non molesta, assiduam hominum gratiosorum consuetudinem), because heat and moisture were the antithesis of cold and dry melancholy.32

Those scholars who have analysed Hotspur’s character through the lens of humoral theory have typically described him as possessing a sanguine or choleric temperament. U. C. Knoepflmacher argues that Hotspur appears to possess the sanguine quality of ‘unbounded optimism’ as he strides confidently through the play with a cry of Espérance! (‘Hope!’) and the desire to cross danger with honour and ‘let them grapple’ (1.3.197–201).\textsuperscript{33} Robert L. Reid suggests that Hotspur is shown to possess a choleric temperament of the kind which Fulke Greville called ‘the humor radicall / Of violence’.\textsuperscript{34} He is described by Worcester as a ‘hare-brained Hotspur, governed by a spleen’ (5.2.20–21), the spleen being associated with anger and impulsivity, and by Bolingbroke as ‘Mars in swaddling clothes’ (3.2.113), the conventionally hot and dry planet of Mars being associated with the humor of choler. Paster, meanwhile, stakes out a position between the two hot humors by suggesting that Hotspur is ‘conspicuously marked by traits of high spiritedness — by vigorous strength, athleticism, spontaneity, and all the other behavioural products of hot bloodedness’ — rather than the attributes of either the choleric or sanguine temperaments.\textsuperscript{35}

There is, however, evidence to suggest an alternative reading of Hotspur’s character as founded on a temperament derived from a combination of the humors of choler and melancholy, the latter’s cold and dry elements being present in Hotspur’s


\textsuperscript{34} Reid, ‘Humoral Psychology’, 478–80.

\textsuperscript{35} Paster, \textit{Humoring the Body}, 195.
first lines on the stage during which he recalls how at Holmedon he was ‘dry with rage and extreme toil […] all smarting with my wounds being cold’ and disturbed by a ‘popinjay’ who ‘made me mad’ (1.3.32; 50–51; 54). Such a combination, which F. David Hoeniger has identified also in King Lear,36 would have been understood by Shakespeare’s audience as the product of a process whereby excess heat in Hotspur’s brain had ‘burnt’ the humor of choler to produce what was known as burnt melancholy or melancholy adust, sometimes known as ‘head melancholy’ because of the brain’s role in its production.37 Hot passions — particularly anger, but including even joy if it is immoderate in degree — were capable of engendering melancholy adust through burning of the humors.38 Although melancholy adust could be produced from any of the four natural humors, that produced through the burning of choler was particularly harmful for, to quote Thomas Elyot’s popular Castell of Health (1536), ‘when that humor is hette, it maketh men madde, and when it is extincte, it maketh men fooles, forgetfulle, and dulle’.39 The belief that melancholy adust produced from burnt choler could make men both forgetful and mad is reproduced in Hotspur’s opening speech, in which he claims to have ‘Answer’d neglectingly I know not what’ after being made ‘mad’ by the courtier’s brisk mannerisms (1.3.53–54).

37 On the burning of the humors, see Ficino, Three Books, 116–17; on head melancholy, see Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy: What It Is, with All the Kinds, Causes, Symptoms, Prognostics, and Several Cures of It in Three Partitions (Philadelphia: Claxton, 1883), Pt. 1, Memb. II, Sub. I.
Holmedon is not the only situation in which Hotspur is shown to suffer the effects of burnt melancholy. In its cold state, both natural melancholy and melancholy adust were thought to induce forms of rumination and contemplation, activities which served to exacerbate the cold and dry symptoms of melancholy for, according to Ficino, ‘black bile continually incites the soul both to collect itself together into one and to dwell on itself and to contemplate itself’ (\textit{atra bilis animum, ut se et colligat in unum et sistat in uno contempleturque, assidue provocat}). Contemplation ‘greatly dries up the brain’ (\textit{mentis cerebrum vehementer essiccat}) so that ‘the nature of the brain becomes dry and cold’ (\textit{natura cerebri sicca frigidaque evadit}). Hotspur engages in precisely this kind of melancholic rumination when he reads aloud the letter from an anonymous lord at the opening of Act 2, Scene 3:

\begin{quote}
He could be contented? Why is he not then? [...] What a lack-brain is this? I protest, our plot is as good a plot as ever was laid; our friends true and constant; a good plot, good friends, and full of expectation. An excellent plot, very good friends. What a frosty-spirited rogue is this? (2.3.1–24)
\end{quote}

Hotspur’s solitary letter-reading mirrors Hal’s famous ‘I know you all’ soliloquy, a pivotal episode in the character arc of the young prince where he reveals how he has hidden his noble behaviour under a cloak of ‘loose behaviour’ so that his ‘reformation, glittering o’er my fault, / Shall show more goodness and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off’ (1.2.145–52). Through a contrast between the prosaic speech of the Boar’s Head Tavern and this soliloquy, Hal both enacts and describes his public persona as a ‘most comparative, rascalli’st, sweet young prince’ (1.2.55–56) and his private persona as the noble sun ‘Who doth permit the base contagious clouds / To smother up his beauty from the world’ (1.2.135–36). Hotspur reveals his own

\textsuperscript{40}Ficino, \textit{Three Books}, 112–15.
hidden, melancholic nature within the meandering, circular nature of this twinned soliloquy. This soliloquy is subsequently reinforced by the concerned questioning of his wife, Kate:

Tell me, sweet lord, what is’t that takes from thee
Thy stomach, pleasure and thy golden sleep?
Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth,
And start so often when thou sit’st alone?
Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks,
And given my treasures and my rights of thee
To thick-eyed musing and cursed melancholy? (2.3.28–34)

The connection between melancholy and the warrior is not unique to Shakespeare and can be found in one of his probable sources, the *Troy Book* by John Lydgate. The *Troy Book* is a translation and adaption of Guido delle Colonne’s thirteenth-century *Historia destructionis Troiaie*, begun in 1412 and completed in 1420, which combines Guido’s narrative with a number of secondary accounts to create a new history of the Trojan War. Lydgate’s stated purpose is to write in detail about war, but Andrew Lynch has argued that in doing so Lydgate contrasts the heat that arises from the act of combat itself with what Lydgate represents as the cold, envious motivations of warfare. Lydgate’s Mars, a deity who is typically associated with ideas of military glory and courage, ‘has a strong admixture of Chaucer’s melancholy Saturn; anger in the *Troy Book* will typically bear the pale face of vengeful envy, not the red, heated complexion normally associated with Mars’ influence’.\(^41\) The pale envious face of anger in Lydgate’s *Troy Book* can perhaps be detected within Hotspur’s desire to ‘pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon’ (1.3.205). Bearing in mind Henry IV’s description

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of Hotspur as ‘Mars in swaddling clothes’ (3.2.113), we might read this metaphor as a comment on the resting places of honour — the melancholic moon and the phlegmatic ‘bottom of the deep’ (1.3.206).

When Hal finally makes good on his promise to make Hotspur ‘exchange / His glorious deeds for my indignities’ (3.2.146–47) at Shrewsbury, the two men change more than just honour — they change also their public and private faces. As the once publicly disrespectful Hal delivers a kindly epitaph from his private heart, Hotspur — as at Holmedon — exchanges his burning choleric temperament for cooling melancholy adust:

HOTSPUR: O, I could prophesy,
But that the earth and the cold hand of death
Lies on my tongue. No, Percy, thou art dust
And food for—

HAL: For worms, brave Percy. (5.3.84–88; my emphasis)

This image of Hotspur as a tragic hero flawed by his hot temper and brash manner is consistent with the positive nostalgia with which early modern England viewed its chivalric heritage — not as a remnant from a brutal, warlike time dominated by the kind of duelling rogues that would continue to strut the London streets into the sixteenth century, but as a time of great men who sadly lacked the kind of ‘roundness’ that defined early-modern knights like the Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux. An accomplished poet and courtier, Essex self-consciously fashioned himself in the mould of a medieval knight when he thrust his pike into the gate of Lisbon in 1589, ‘demanding alowd if any Spaniard mewed therein, durst adventure forth in favour of
his Mistress to breake a [lance] with him’. The ‘worthy temper’ (1 Henry IV 5.2.95) of Hotspur’s sword comes not from a fusion of chivalry with civility but rather from battle alone. Hotspur’s sword, stained ‘With the best blood that I can meet withal / In the adventure of this perilous day’ (5.2.96–97), ultimately comes to stand as an emblem of his incomplete chivalry.

The Fashionable Melancholy of Hotspur

What separates Hal from Hotspur — and, by extension, the renaissance gentleman from the medieval knight — is the latter’s lack of education in civil courtesy. Hal learns from the mock-schoolroom of the tavern to converse with his fellow man and to wield language and wit with rapier-like agility, abilities which he adds to his concealed chivalric virtues to emerge as an idealised English gentleman. Despite his ‘blemish’ of ‘speaking thick’, Hotspur is given the opportunity to receive this same education and undergo this same transformation. Hotspur’s companions Glendower, Mortimer and Worcester, who recognise that Hotspur is ‘not tempered to attend’ (1.3.241) to the ‘secret book’ (1.3.191) of linguistic subterfuge, attempt to educate him in the same arts of rhetorical and intellectual flexibility that Falstaff is busy imparting to Hal. They tell Hotspur that his impetuosity may give him ‘greatness, courage, blood’, but without temperance it leads to ‘harsh rage, / Defect of manners, want of

government, / Pride, haughtiness, opinion and disdain’ — a warning to which Hotspur flippantly replies, ‘Well I am schooled. Good manners be your speed!’ (3.1.179–90)

Hotspur’s lack of education influences both his civility and his chivalry. The primary literary vector for the transmission of chivalric values to Elizabethan society was the figure of the knight-errant, the lonely knight who wandered the countryside in search of adventure. The promise of personal justice and individual responsibility inherent in the knight-errant’s fictional travels must have proved alluring to an England wracked by civil wars.43 At the very least it served to fire the imagination of Sir Thomas Malory, whose knights are a close fit for this literary mould. Sir Ector’s eulogy for Lancelot provides a useful outline of the virtues of the knight-errant:

Ah Launcelot, thou were head of all Christian knights […] thou were never matched of earthly knight’s hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bore shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou were the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest.44

Individualism, magnanimity, love — these were the overarching virtues of the literary figure of the knight-errant. Though Hotspur possesses the individualist’s internal fire in abundance, his lack of magnanimity — the complex virtue inseparable from service to the common good45 — can be detected during the scene where Hotspur, Glendower, Mortimer, and Worcester divide up England amongst themselves in anticipation of a

successful rebellion. When an argument between Hotspur and Glendower erupts over the impact of the river Trent upon their lands, Hotspur exclaims

    I'll give thrice so much land
    To any well-deserving friend;
    But in the way of bargain, mark ye me,
    I'll cavil on the ninth part of a hair. (3.1.137–40)

Hotspur’s unwillingness to give a hair’s leeway to his adversaries contributes to the tragic, zero-sum nature of the Shrewsbury combat with Hal. In the chivalric romances to which the character of Hotspur harkens, a kind of gregarious competition prevails which permits the winning of honour without taking it from someone else. We can see this in the aftermath to the battle between Yvain and Gawain in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain* where the two knights fall over one another in declaring themselves vanquished, safe in the knowledge that even in defeat — in their situation, especially in defeat — honour is theirs to win. Hotspur’s acquisitive conception of honour — his desire to ‘pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon’ (1.3.205) — forces Hal to take both his honour and his life. This helps to explain, in part, Hal’s epitaph, ‘If thou were wert sensible of courtesy, / I should not make so great a show of zeal’ (5.3.95–96). Within the context of civility, Hotspur’s lack of courtesy can be read as part of his lack of education in civil courtesy; but within the context of chivalry, a lack of courtesy indicates that lack of magnanimity which drove him — like those heroes of Italian epic who refused surrender when at their opponent’s mercy — to death.

    Hotspur lacks not only the virtue of magnanimity but his duty to love ladies as well. We are given a singularly penetrating look into Hotspur’s mind when he is alone with his wife, Kate, in the second act. Kate questions Hotspur as to why she has ‘this fortnight been / A banished woman from my Harry’s bed’ (2.3.26–27), confessing that she is fearful when she hears him ‘murmur tales of iron wars’ (2.3.36) that bestir his
sleep. Hotspur evades the question, and when pressed for a direct answer he loses his
temper and denies his love — ‘Love? I love thee not. / I care not for thee, Kate’
(2.3.80–81) — protesting that only when he is ‘a-horseback’ will he ‘swear / I love
thee infinitely’ (2.3.90–92), echoing in negative Sir Ector’s praise that Launcelot was
‘the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse’. Although he values courage and
prowess as the guarantors of justice and honour and possesses the knight-errant’s
radical individualism, Hotspur lacks magnanimity and an idealisation of love. Through
these shortcomings, Hotspur serves as a mirror to the deeply flawed prince of the first
half of the play.

This interpretation of Hotspur suggests a slightly different take on the Hal-
Hotspur-Falstaff dynamic. Typically, the characters of Hotspur and Falstaff are taken
as representatives of extreme attitudes towards honour — one the ‘theme of honour’s
tongue’ (1.1.80), the other who believes that ‘Honour is a mere scutcheon’ (5.1.136)
— between whom Hal must find an Aristotelian mean. It is indeed true that Hal’s
personal narrative weaves between the archetypes of each character, but if we cleave
to the view that Hotspur embodies the excesses of honour, choler, and war then we are
in danger of underestimating the extent to which this character was seen as ‘the mark
and glass, copy and book / That fashion’d others’⁴⁶ — a label which he shared with
Hamlet, ‘The glass of fashion, and the mould of form’,⁴⁷ and one apparently congruent
enough with audience receptions of the play for the 1612 performance of 1 Henry IV

⁴⁶ William Shakespeare, ‘The Second Part of Henry the Fourth, containing his Death and the Coronation
of King Henry the Fifth’, in The RSC Shakespeare, 963–1025 (2.3.31–32).
2003 (3.1.151).
by the King’s Men to be recorded simply as ‘The Hotspurr’.  

Luminous actors often played Hotspur while Hal was relegated to supporting roles, likely owing to what Scott McMillin describes as the interpretive centrality of the Hotspur–Falstaff dynamic:

For nearly three centuries, with Part One usually being played by itself, the plot ended with Hotspur defeated and Falstaff claiming victory. It is no wonder that the play was regarded both as a historical romance with Hotspur as its centre of heroic pathos and a comedy with Falstaff as its presiding spirit.

If Shakespeare’s audience saw Hotspur the way Lady Percy did — as one who ‘fashion’d others’ — one can almost be assured that he possessed at least a touch of melancholy, for there were few things more fashionable at the turn of the seventeenth century than the melancholic temperament. The roll of literary melancholics contained some particularly impressive names — Sir Philip Sidney, Thomas Nashe, John Lyly, Francis Bacon, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, Robert Burton — who were emulated by a number of would-be intellectuals, men whom Ben Jonson, in a sonnet prefacing Nicholas Breton’s work Melancholike Humors, criticised as ‘wearing moods, as gallants doe a fashion, / In these pide times, only to shewe their braines’. This fashion for melancholy appears to have stemmed, in part, from a resurgence of interest in Aristotle’s Problemata XXX.1:

Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an

51 Nicholas Breton, Melancholike Humors, ed. G. B. Harrison (London: Scholaritis, 1929), 7.
extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes?\textsuperscript{52}

The Renaissance archetype of the melancholy genius was moulded by the fifteenth-century Italian Marsilio Ficino, whose writings ‘gave shape to the idea of the melancholy man of genius and revealed it to the rest of Europe — in particular, to the great Englishmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries — in the magic chiaroscuro of Christian Neoplatonic mysticism’.\textsuperscript{53} More proximate to Shakespeare’s own day was the enormously popular English translation of John Huarte de San Juan’s \textit{Examen de ingenios} in 1594 by Richard Carew, who Englished the title to \textit{The Examination of Men’s Wits}. In the \textit{Examination}, Huarte elevates the archetype of the melancholy genius above no lesser a man than Cicero, who, he claims,

\begin{quote}
confesseth that he was slow-witted because he was not melancholic adust, and he said true, for if he had been such, he should not have possessed so rare a gift of eloquence. For the melancholic adust want memory, to which appertaineth the speaking with great preparation.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Both characteristics which ‘Cicero’ claims to be present in the atrabilious man — a lack of memory and of eloquence — can be observed in Hotspur, first when he forgets the map at the conspirators’ meeting and then when, just prior to the battle of Shrewsbury, he urges his men to ‘Better consider what you have to do / Than I, that


have not well the gift of tongue, / Can lift your blood up with persuasion’ (5.2.78–80).

Huate continues:

[Melancholy adust] hath another quality which much aideth the understanding, namely that it is clear like the agate stone, with which clearness it giveth light within to the brain and maketh the same to discern well the figures […] when a man setteth himself to contemplate some truth, which he would fain known and cannot by and by find it out, the same groweth for that the brain wanteth his convenient temperature; but when a man standeth ravished in a contemplation, the natural heat that is in the vital spirits and the arterial blood run forthwith to the head, and the temperature of the brain enhanceth itself until the same arrive to the term behooveful. True it is that much musing, to some doth good and to some harm, for if the brain want but a little to arrive to that point of convenient heat, it is requisite that he makes but small stay in the contemplation, and if it pass that point straightaways, the understanding is driven into a garboil by the over plentiful presence of the vital spirits, and so he cannot attain to the notice of the truth.55

According to Huarte, a certain degree of heat functions as an aid to cognition, but overthinking leads to a frenzy which obscures the truth. This dynamic, too, can be found within the character of Hotspur, in particular when Hotspur, Worcester, and Northumberland begin to conspire after their audience with Bolingbroke. Hotspur is driven into a great fury — a passion known to heat the humors to burning-point56 — following Bolingbroke’s refusal to ransom Mortimer, declaring that ‘if the devil come and roar’ for Hotspur’s hostages he would not send them, but would rather ‘shed my dear blood drop by drop in the dust’ (1.3.125; 135). Worcester and Northumberland play the role of explanatory gloss to Hotspur’s exclamations, describing him as ‘drunk with choler’ (1.3.129), ‘mad’ (1.3.139), and being full of ‘heat’ (1.3.140). Having attained a certain degree of heat, Hotspur then comes so a sudden realisation: ‘But soft,

55 Huarte, The Examination of Men’s Wits, 144–46.
I pray you,’ he asks, ‘did King Richard then / Proclaim my brother Edmund Mortimer / Heir to the crown?’ (1.3.156–58) This sudden change of pace from choleric monologue to measured dialogue indicates Hotspur’s arrival at that particular lightness and clarity of melancholy adust which Huarte likens to the qualities of agate. Equally important as the change in style is the change in substance, as Hotspur switches blame from Bolingbroke to Worcester and Northumberland who ‘put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose, / And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke’ (1.3.177–78). Such a view reflects the nuanced view with which Bolingbroke was perceived in Elizabeth’s day, as Lancastrian usurper on the one hand and rallying-point for that discontent which came to a head with the rebellion of Essex, and so grants Hotspur the power to ‘prophesy’ ahead of his death at Shrewsbury. Yet Hotspur’s moment of clarity is short-lived. Even as Worcester offers to ‘unclasp a secret book / And to your quick-conceiving discontents / […] read you matter deep and dangerous’ (1.3.191–93), Hotspur has progressed from clarity to frenzy, speaking of the ‘jeering and disdain’d contempt / Of this proud king’ (1.3.185–86) and declaring that ‘the blood more stirs / To rouse a lion than to start a hare!’ (1.3.200–01). This lengthy speech would have offered a perfect opportunity for a skilled actor to play the full emotional range of an atrabilious Hotspur who rises through clarity and into frenzy. Viewed in this light, Hotspur’s description of the heights and depths of honour can be read as an insight into the mental state of an individual who veers from one humoral extreme to another.

LEGITIMISING VIOLENCE

In contrast to the chivalric and medieval Hotspur, the character of Hal has been read as a master of ‘linguistic agility’ whose ‘understanding [of power] is a responsive
agility, as the early modern English perceived the skill of the rapier fencer’.\textsuperscript{57} Such a reading is reinforced by Hal’s interactions with Falstaff in the Boar’s Head Tavern, where each casually gives the other the lie — an ordinarily grave insult — in a manner which suggests both the resilience of their friendship and their familiarity with the code of civility. Falstaff’s description of Hal, meanwhile, as a ‘tailor’s yard’, a ‘sheath’, a ‘bowcase’ and a ‘vile standing-tuck’ combine the phallic connotations and physical description of the thrusting rapier.\textsuperscript{58} This singular reading of Hal is, however, unable to account for the powerful chivalric notes at play in Hal’s character during the second half of the play, in which he promises to ‘wear a garment all of blood / And stain my favours in a bloody mask / Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it’ (3.2.130–38). There was, admittedly, a lot of bleeding involved in a civil duel, probably enough to ‘wear a garment’ of it, but Hal’s battlefield injury at Shrewsbury — which leads his father to declare ‘Thou has redeem’d thy lost opinion’ (5.3.48) — suggests a more martial bent to Hal’s thought and character.

The idea that Hal is ‘grounded in the mire of tavern dirt […] a metaphoric infantryman’ who is opposed to ‘Hotspur, prince of honor, [who] is a horseman, a soldier on horseback, a chevalier’, holds true for the first half of the play, but by the time we reach Shrewsbury, Hal has undergone a radical transformation:\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{quote}
HOTSPUR: Where is his son, 
The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales, 
And his comrades that daffed the world aside
And bid it pass?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} Low, ‘Those Proud Titles’, 279.
\textsuperscript{58} A ‘tuck’, in particular, is the anglicised version of the estoc, a stiff and often edgeless thrusting sword of the later medieval period. This weapon was, to a certain extent, similar in appearance and use to the rapier.
\textsuperscript{59} Low, \textit{Those Proud Titles}, 281–82.
Vernon: All furnished, all in arms

[...]

I saw young Harry with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly armed,
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into his seat,
As if an angel dropped from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus
And with the world with noble horsemanship. (4.1.98–115)

It is as if Hal has become an image of the very man he sought to fight, a ‘feathered Mercury’ to Hotspur’s ‘Mars in swaddling clothes’. Nor is this a sudden about-face, for even as Hal mocked Hotspur as ‘he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife “Fie upon this quiet life! I want work”’ (2.4.80–82), he hints at their eventual similarity when he says ‘I am not yet of Percy’s mind’ (2.4.80), with its silent corollary of ‘But I may yet be’. It is tempting to argue that perhaps this is another example of Hal’s linguistic flexibility — in this case, mimicking the speech, mannerisms and fashion that comprise Hotspur’s chivalric heritage — but then we would have to ask ourselves why Hal maintains this façade even after he believes himself to be alone on the Shrewsbury battlefield, where he laments that ‘the earth that bears [Hotspur] dead / Bears not alive so stout a gentleman’ (5.3.93–94). Instead, it appears that Hal undergoes a transformation whereby he adopts the chivalric elements that were part of his heritage as the Prince of Wales.60

We should, however, be wary of putting too much of an emphasis on Hal’s newfound chivalric heritage as there is evidence within the play to suggest that Hal retains the rhetorical flexibility learnt from Falstaff — his ‘princely tongue’ (5.2.58) — even after his ‘reformation’ (1.3.150). The classical art of rhetoric was considered

60 For the connection between Hal and chivalry see Edelman, Brawl Ridiculous, 98–100.
to be a form of battle often considered in terms of actual combat, such as in Cicero’s *De oratore* where Crassus tells his companions Sulpicius and Cotta that

> there is to my mind no more excellent thing than the power, by means of oratory, to get hold on assemblies of men, win their good will, direct their inclinations wherever the speaker wishes, or divert them from whatever he wishes… [For what] is so indispensables as to have always in your grasp weapons wherewith you can defend yourself, or challenge the wicked man, or when provoked take your revenge?

This discursive connection between rhetoric and combat made its way into the sixteenth century through the code of civil courtesy which treated injuries as being inflicted either by words or deeds — ‘in wordes’, according to the English soldier Barnaby Rich, ‘by unseemly speeches, as in giving the lie, or such like; in deedes no less by depriving men of their reputation & right, as in depraving them of their due by any other meane’. This pairing of words and deeds stemmed from a set of beliefs surrounding the social currency of honour and reputation which began with the idea that honour could not be won, only lost; a man was thought, through circumstances of birth, to be endowed with the good name of ‘gentleman’ which he could only ‘preserve […] unspotted, except through some greevous offence or suspition, he loose this good opinion’. Among its many benefits a gentleman’s reputation entitled him to be thought ‘honest, just, and honourable untill the contrarie bee proved’. This imputed honesty was understood to stem from an individual’s inward virtue, a complex

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64 Saviolo, *His Practice*, sig. S1r.
intersection of merit and old ideas of birth and noble blood, but it was expressed by his outward conduct, the ‘Outwarde honestie’ which mirrors and projects the virtue of the soul.65

The presumption of honesty associated with possessing a good name meant that an accusation of falsehood — known as ‘giving the lie’ — was considered a dire insult, for it struck at the very heart of a man’s identity as a gentleman.66 If delivered by a man of common birth who lacked the gentleman’s presumed honesty then such an insult could be simply ignored, the common man’s word alone being insufficient to prove the ‘contrarie’ of his honesty; but if delivered with the force of another gentleman’s honesty behind it, then the one accused had no choice but to respond. This could be done either by proving the truthfulness of the original statement and thereby proving the original accuser a liar, or by issuing a challenge to a duel. The duel functioned as a means of resolving conflicting claims to honesty by proving, through its manifestations on the body-in-combat, those inner virtues which were believed to give rise to the outward honesty of speech and act. This is, in many respects, a continuation of the view, inherited from Augustine and his contemporaries, that what matters in the Christian life are the internal virtues and disposition, the primary difference being the way in which these internal states are expressed. Rather than revealing these internal states through divine revelation or final judgment, an individual’s internal states are now thought capable of being revealed through the

outward signs of bodily comportment — a belief which brought fencing onto a new aesthetic trajectory; according the Italian fencing master Antonio Manciolino,

We shan’t therefore call him victor who wins by chance and throws random blows like a brutal peasant, nor shall we call vanquished him who proceeds according to the correct teachings. It is indeed more respected among knowledgeable men to lose with poise than to win erratically and outside of any elegance.67

In addition to its role in resolving conflicting claims to honesty, the challenge to a duel functioned to legitimise an act of physical confrontation between gentlemen. Explanations as to why this should be the case varied from theorist to theorist, but the general consensus among its advocates was that the private process of challenge and duel was analogous to the civil (i.e. judicial) process of suit and trial; in describing the process of delivering a written challenge, the anonymous author of the Booke of Honor and Armes can be seen to state a relative commonplace when he claims that, in theory, as ‘Combat is a kind of Judgement, it behoveth no lesse therein, than in civill triall that particular prooves & circumstances should be expressed’.68 In practice, it would appear that ‘proof and circumstance’ were sometimes taken as self-evident, leading to the omission of a challenge and the commencement of a duel immediately upon the giving of a lie as in the opening scene of Romeo and Juliet:

67 ‘Conciosiacosa che ne ragioneuolmente diremo uno hauer uento, se fortunosamente uincesse, et se da rozzo rustico gli srego lati colpi tirsse, ne hauer perduto quello, che haura fatto il suo douere, che piu lodeuole cosa è appresso gli intendenti huomini, gratiosamente perdere’: Manciolino, Opera Nova, sig. C3v; trans. Manciolino, The Complete Renaissance Swordsman, 95. Such a position was cold comfort to the man who survived, arrested for taking part in an unlawful duel; for this reason, it was sometimes held sufficient proof of a gentleman’s virtue to issue or accept a challenge without having to then follow up the words with his body. On the unlawfulness of the duel, see Peltonen, The Duel in Early Modern England, 75–79; on the sufficiency of a challenge alone see Weinstein, ‘Fighting or flying?’, 204–20.

68 [Anon], The Booke of Honor and Armes (London: Richard Jones, 1590), 17.
GREGORY: Do you quarrel, sir?

ABRAHAM: Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

SAMPSON: If you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as you.

ABRAHAM: No better?

SAMPSON: Well, sir.

Enter Benvolio

GREGORY: Say ‘better’ — here comes one of my master’s kinsmen.

SAMPSON: Yes, better.

ABRAHAM: You lie.

SAMPSON: Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow. They fight.69

That this confrontation was premeditated is made clear by Sampson’s aside to Gregory, ‘My naked weapon is out. Quarrel, I will back thee’ (1.1.27), yet although they observe the Montagues approach they do not immediately engage them in battle. Absent a quarrel, such violence would be illegitimate in the eyes of both law and honour. Abraham’s delivery of the lie and Sampson’s (implicit) challenge does not change the standing of this combat in the eyes of the civil law — the entry of the Prince and his command that all disperse upon pain of death makes this abundantly clear — but it does confer a degree of legitimacy on the battle in the name of private honour.

It is within this discourse of private honour that Hal, at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1 Henry IV, interprets Hotspur’s cry, ‘If I mistake not, thou art Harry Monmouth’ (5.3.59). Hotspur opens the exchange by verbally identifying his opponent, which Hal interprets as a fumbled attempt to elicit the lie — ‘Thou speak’st as if I would deny my name’ (5.3.60). When Hotspur presses on to identify himself, Hal responds, ‘Why, then I see / A very valiant rebel of that name’ (5.3.62–63). This response can, today, appear almost petulant, an insult which leads nowhere; when performed, there is

almost inevitably a momentary pause between ‘valiant rebel of the name’ and the subsequent ‘I am the Prince of Wales’, two lines which possess at best an ambiguous semantic relationship. Interpreted as part of the conventions of civil conduct, however, Hal’s lines can be seen as an attempt to bait Hotspur into giving the lie by denying the charge that he is a ‘rebel’. When Hotspur fails to recognise his social cue, Hal continues in the mode of civil courtesy:

I am the Prince of Wales; and think not, Percy,
To share with me in glory any more:
Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,
Nor can one England brook a double reign,
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales. (5.3.64–68)

Hal’s description of the ‘two stars’ has two layers of meaning. On the level of narrative history, these ‘stars’ refer to the competing claims to monarchical authority put forward by Bolingbroke and Mortimer, while Hal’s claim that England cannot brook ‘a double reign, / Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales’ (5.3.67–68) references their role as future successors to these men. On the level of civil courtesy, these contrary stars allude to the mutually exclusive presumptions of virtue which drove gentlemen to manifest on their bodies that outward honesty which their words could not prove. Just as two gentlemen, each asserting the truth of a position contrary to the other, can not both be honest, so too can ‘two stars keep not their motion in one sphere’.

Hotspur, on the other hand, engages in these speech acts according to the conventions not of civil courtesy but of medieval chivalry, his verbal identifications reminiscent of Thomas Malory’s literary tournaments with their closed helms that conceal a combatant’s identity. Neither lie nor injury are required to legitimise battle

70 Edelman, Brawl Ridiculous, 109–11.
between rival knights in the chivalric tradition, only the recognition of an opponent’s noble status and their hostile or contrary intent. Such an intent is taken for granted on a battlefield between adversaries, which is why Hotspur, once he identifies his opponent and himself, proceeds directly to declare that ‘the hour is come / To end the one of us’ (5.3.69–70). Hal, having not yet obtained either lie or challenge, continues to taunt Hotspur in the hope that he will give the lie but Hotspur, still operating in the mode of medieval chivalry, dismisses Hal’s words as mere ‘vanities’ and begins the combat without further ado.

This contrast between Hal’s civil and Hotspur’s chivalric attempts to legitimise their violent interpersonal confrontation ties directly into the heated English debate over the origins of the duel, whereby supporters sought to connect the duel to the history legitimacy of the trial by combat while opponents stressed the legal and institutional differences between private duels and sanctioned judicial combats.\(^1\) On this reading, Hotspur — who seeks to encounter Hal ‘hot horse to hot horse’ (4.1.127) — represents the discontinuous interpretation of the anti-duellist camp, whereas Hal — who combines a challenge to single combat with a ‘double spirit / Of teaching and of learning’ (5.2.65–66) — stands for the view that the civil duel was a legitimate successor to the trial by combat.

**Performing the Combat at Shrewsbury**

With all this in mind, we can speculate that the Elizabethan actors playing Hal and Hotspur would have sought to enact, through their bodies, physical signs of the societal conflict between tradition and fashion, chivalry and civility. If this were indeed the

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case, they could have turned to no better model than the contemporary, and much publicised, conflict between the traditional English masters of defence and the immigrant Italian masters which played out in London during the latter part of the century.

The first Italian master of defence to take up residence in London was Rocco Bonetti, a soldier of Venice who married the wealthy English widow Eleanor St. John around 1571 before founding a school — which he called a ‘Colledge, for he thought it great disgrace for him to keepe a Fence-schoole, he being then thought to be the onely famous Maister of the Art of armes in the whole world’ — in Blackfriars sometime between 1576 and 1584. The founding of Bonetti’s school attracted the ire of the English corporation of the ‘four ancient maisters of the noble science of Defence’ who claimed — but could not prove — a royal monopoly, granted by Henry VII, on the teaching of the art of defence in London. Unable to enforce their claim to a monopoly due to lost (or non-existent) paperwork, the English masters proposed to Bonetti a compromise whereby they would waive the required fourteen years’ apprenticeship to an English master provided that he agreed to ‘play his prizes’ by demonstrating sufficient skill in a public display of arms to be granted licence by the masters. Bonetti, however, was a gentleman of some social standing, whereas the

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masters were of low — even ignoble — station; accordingly, Bonetti refused to even acknowledge, let alone parlay, with the English masters.\textsuperscript{73}

Bonetti died in 1587 and was succeeded shortly thereafter by Vincentio Saviolo and ‘Jeronimo’, a man who may have been Bonetti’s English-born son, who opened their own fencing school in 1590. Saviolo, like Bonetti before him, looked down upon the English masters, saying that ‘Englishmen were strong men, but had no cunning, and they would go backe too much in their fight, which was great disgrace unto them’. Saviolo’s publicly-stated opinion on the English art of defence attracted the ire of George Silver, who — together with his brother, Toby Silver — drew up ‘five or six score bills of challenge’ calling Saviolo and Jeronimo to a contest of arms upon the scaffold at the Bell Savage, a location which meant that ‘he that went in his fight faster backe then he ought, of Englishman or Italian, shold be in danger to breake his necke off the Scaffold’. Saviolo, like Bonetti before him, refused to even acknowledge the challenge despite the Silvers sending ‘many gentlemen of good account’ to their school and the arrival of ‘a multitude of people [at the Bell Savage] to behold the fight’.\textsuperscript{74}

The very public animosity between the English and Italian masters of fence has been used to great effect in the reconstruction and interpretation of Shakespearean combats from \textit{Hamlet}, \textit{Lear}, and \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, but it has not yet found a home in the scholarship surrounding \textit{1 Henry IV}. Two main features distinguished the Italian style from the English, the first of which was a perceived focus on offence over defence. This is attested to not only by Silver’s report of Saviolo’s claim that the


\textsuperscript{74} Silver, \textit{Paradoxes}, 66–67.
English go back too much in their fight and the public legislation that accuses the Italians of teaching skills of offence rather than defence, but by Saviolo’s own ruthless advice on what to do if forced to fight a friend:

I would wish everyone which is challenged into the feeld, to consider that he which challenges him, doth not require to fight with him as a freend, but as an enemye, and that he is not to thinke any otherwise of his minde but as full of rancour and malice towards him: wherefore when you [?] with weapons in his hand that will needs [?] with you, although hee were your friend or kinsman, take him for an enemye, and trust him not, how great a freend or how nigh of kin soever he be.75

The second distinction between the Italian and English styles of fence was the latter’s tendency to use more cuts than the former. The Italian school of fence had been renowned for its prowess with the point ever since the publication of Camillo Agrippa’s geometrical proofs of the supposed superiority of a thrust over a cut in 1553. On the perceived superiority of thrusting attacks with the point over cutting blows (which, in accordance with general Italian terminology, are labelled mandritto and riverso), Saviolo himself wrote that he ‘would not advise any friend of mine, if he were to fight for his credit and life, to strike neither mandrittaes nor riversaes, because he putteth himself in danger of his life: for to use the point is more ready, and spends not the like time’.76 Silver, on the other hand, proposes as a ‘generall rule, wheresoever the Thruster lyeth, or out of what fight soever he fighteth, with his Rapier, or Rapier and Dagger, the blow in his course commeth as neare, and nearer, and more swift and stronger than doth the thrust’.77 Although we should not exaggerate this difference — both Saviolo and Silver agree that there is a time and a place for both cuts and thrusts

75 Saviolo, *His Practice*, sig. E3r-v: [?] denotes words illegible.
76 Saviolo, *His Practice*, sig. E2r.
77 Saviolo, *His Practice*, sig. D2r.
— there was nevertheless a clear difference in preference between the two styles, both of which would have been recognisable to a contemporary Elizabethan audience.

This contrast between cuts and thrusts is actually one which most modern productions of 1 Henry IV share with Elizabethan theatre. The Victorian privileging of the ‘rapier and point, the peculiar and especial weapon, offensive and defensive, of Southern Europe, Spain, Italy, and France’ in their history of Western swordsmanship, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, persists in Western mainstream discourse to this day.78 Television and stage productions of the play are almost universal in their depiction of Hotspur’s death as the result of Hal delivering a thrust between Hotspur’s wild, often two-handed, cutting strikes. With the exception of a slight reduction of the degree to which Hotspur is presented as leaving himself open for the thrust, the performance of such a death on the Elizabethan stage would have highlighted the extent to which Hotspur is identified with traditional English values while Hal stands for the new Italianate gentleman.

The perception that Italian fencing is more focused on offence than the English may, however, indicate a sharper difference in staging between modern and Elizabethan productions. In most modern productions it is Hotspur, the impassioned veteran warrior, who takes the fight to Hal; as fight director Terry King remarked of his own interpretation in the recent Royal Shakespeare Company production of 1 Henry IV, ‘Hotspur does have the early initiative, and Hotspur does have the drive, and Hotspur does, at the very beginning, expect to win’.79 There is an alternative,

however, which would allow the expression of both Hotspur’s martial advantage and his focus on defence. There existed a great debate among fencers in the late sixteenth century as to which man has the advantage in a fight: he who moves first and gains the initiative, or he who moves second and is able to counter the actions of the first. Answers varied from person to person, but if we take as given the perception that Italianate gentlemen such as Hal were more prone to offence than traditional Englishmen like Hotspur then we might conclude that it is Hal who — at least initially — takes the initiative in each ‘stanza’ of the fight, with Hotspur then responding. This does not mean that Hotspur is forced backwards or on the defensive; he may be ruthless in stalking Hal, coming so near that his opponent is left no choice but to strike in order to keep his opponent at distance (as rapier-fencers prefer to do when faced with a sword-and-buckler man). Hotspur would then be able to bat Hal’s attack aside with ease and deliver a counter-blow to an armoured location of Hal’s body, since the actors were known to wear a certain degree of practical armour on stage.

The tempo of the fight could gradually increase as Hotspur knocks aside blow after blow, simultaneously demonstrating his martial advantage and representing in his mannerisms that rising excitement and mania which characterised his first appearance on the stage. For Hotspur, it should be observed, is not a perpetual manic; in delivering his account of the battle of Holmedon to the king he demonstrates both manners and courtliness, impatience and bluster, when he beseeches Bolingbroke to not let the courtier’s report ‘Come current for an accusation / Betwixt my love and your high majesty’ (1.3.69–70). It is the progressive heating of his humors through physical or

emotional exertion that Shakespeare portrays as being the cause of his heat, his burning clarity, and the subsequent cooling of burnt melancholy which characterises the ‘cold hand of death’ (5.3.85) that settles upon him at play’s end.

CONCLUSION

The proposed reading of Hotspur as a complex, tragic, atrabilious character suggests a renaissance understanding of the concepts of chivalry and the medieval which differs from modern conceptions of the medieval as a ‘dark age’. Although Hotspur’s death at Shrewsbury suggests that the audience is being prompted to side with the fashionable new Italianate gentry, Hal’s epitaph — ‘If thou were wert sensible of courtesy, / I should not make so great a show of zeal’ (5.3.95–6) — is surprisingly sympathetic to his fallen opponent. It was in the same sympathetic spirit that the poet Petrarch, often called the ‘Father of the Renaissance’, framed both his praise of the Roman orator Cicero, who had the misfortune to die before ‘the end of the darkness and the night of error’ that was to precede ‘the dawn of the true light’, 80 and his eulogy of the classical world as a whole:

Amidst the errors there shone forth men of genius, and no less keen were their eyes, although they were surrounded by darkness and dense gloom; therefore they ought not so much to be hated for their erring but to be pitied for their ill fate. 81


81 ‘Nullo enim modo diuinarum illis uerum ueritas apparere illis poterat, quibus nondum uerus sol iustitiae illuxerat. Elucebant tamen inter errores ingenia, neque ideo minus uiuaces erant oculi quamuis tenebris et densa caligine circumsepti, ut eis non erranti odium, sed indignae sortis miseratio
Hal’s eulogy for Hotspur, like Petrarch’s for the classical world, demonstrates how progress need not come at the expense of the past. By harmonising chivalry’s magnanimity with civility’s rhetorical edge in the character of Hal, Shakespeare demonstrates a method of understanding history where the past becomes a foundation upon which to stand rather than a milestone beyond which to pass.

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to frame a new understanding of the relationship between violence and culture through an exploration of the role played by social identity in the formation of medieval and early modern representations of violence, both literary and didactic. I have argued that representations of how a character or actor performs violence has the potential to tell receptive audiences a great deal about why a particular act was bloodless or gory, civil or vengeful, through their participation in discourses of both ethics and identity. In particular, I have focused on the way in which representations of violence involving lay gentlemen have worked to distinguish — based on differences in virtue, prowess, faith, courtesy, and reason — the group identity of this upper-middling social station through contrast with both the rustics below them and the nobles above them.

I have advanced two arguments — one methodological, one historical — over the course of six chapters, each of which explored a different historical concept of what ‘violence is’ or was thought to be. In Chapter One (Violence and Christian Identity in Late Antique and Medieval Europe) I outlined how the Augustinian concept of the ‘inner disposition’, or an individual’s internal emotional and ethical state, was used to determine the legitimacy of both physical and non-physical violence in Chrétien de Troyes’ Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion. Chapter Two (Prowess and the Distinction of Knights from Rustics in Chrétien de Troyes) continued the focus on the works of Chrétien within the context of French chivalry, exploring the twelfth-century transition
from epic heroism to virtue combat in a series of linked episodes from *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*. I then suggested in Chapter Three (*Faith as Distinction in Arthur’s Battles with the Giant of Mont St-Michel*) that the rise of professional English infantries in the fourteenth century influenced the representation of Arthur’s battle with the Giant of Mont St-Michel in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* by shifting the dominant chivalric virtue away from prowess towards faith. The focus then shifted sideways to thirteenth-century Germany, where in the fourth chapter (*Peace, Violence, and Masculinity in Kudrun*) I argued that in the anonymous poem *Kudrun* we can read the first stirrings of a rational, emotionally moderated manner of representing combat that would come to define the renaissance fencing tradition. Following these developments in Germany, Chapter Five (*Rationality and Violence in the Three Crowns of Renaissance Ferrara*) took a longitudinal approach to three major vernacular epics of Renaissance Italy – Matteo Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato*; Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*; and Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* — in order to demonstrate both that the changes identified in the previous chapters are a function of time as much as geography, and that the development of early modern representations of ‘rational’ combat participated in a contested negotiation between chivalric and humanist masculinities. Finally, in Chapter Six (*Reframing Medieval Violence in Shakespeare’s 1 Henry IV*) I argued that Elizabethan audiences read the character of Hotspur in *1 Henry IV* as a complex and fashionable embodiment of England’s chivalric past rather than as the two-dimensional medieval berserker he is often depicted as today.

Methodologically, these chapters have advanced a new method of reading representations of violence and single combat in the medieval and early modern period which acknowledges the interpenetration of physical and non-physical acts of violence. Through this approach it becomes possible to read representations of
physical conflict as participating in discourses both social and ethical through appeals to a shared set of physical signs whose meaning changed over time. Grasping a sword in two hands, for instance, and striking at an opponent with vehemence was typically read as signifying dedication and intensity in twelfth-century France, whereas fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italians would have been more likely to read in this movement the uncontrolled, animalistic rage of beast, brute, and vendetta. These shared languages of violence would, in turn, have fed into social and ethical discussions about the role of emotion, positive or negative, in the formation of ideal constructions of group identity.

Turning from the methodological to the historical argument of this dissertation, the specific literary texts, geographical regions, and temporal periods analysed in this dissertation were chosen in order to extend the revisionist English-language accounts of the history of the European martial arts. Victorian historians such as Egerton Castle, Alfred Hutton, and Richard Burton proposed a history of the sword and the martial arts which saw change in the methods of use as reflective of change in the social mannerisms of a society. Although correct in recognising the interpenetration of physical and social violence, the Victorians erroneously viewed this history in teleological and pseudo-Darwinian terms as a progression towards the martial ‘perfection’ of the late nineteenth century. Revisionist accounts produced at the end of the twentieth- and start of the twenty-first century have rejected this whiggish Victorian account by demonstrating the sophistication and efficacy of even the earliest recorded European martial arts; but in the process they replaced the comprehensive Victorian understanding of violence with a more limited technology-driven account of the martial arts. Shifts in the representation of violence and single combat, it has been asserted, come about from advancement in the technologies of combat (swords,
armour, gunpowder) and representation (perspective, mathematical notation, geometry) with either minimal or detrimental influence from societal identities. My position has sought to chart a middle ground whereby culture can be seen to shape the performance and representation of violence through its influence on an agent’s choice between multiple competing technologies, be they technologies of combat (such as the choice between sword and rapier in sixteenth-century England) or technologies of representation (such as Fiore dei Liberi’s transition from prosaic to poetic explanation of his fighting art in the Fior di battaglia).

Through this historical argument I have sought to make a case for the inclusion of the burgeoning study of the historical European martial arts (HEMA) within the activities of the academy by connecting the interpretation of these arts to the interpretation of cultural and historical documents from the medieval and early modern period. At present, the study of HEMA is a para-academic field conducted primarily by martial artists and museum professionals who, though lacking the specialist training of faculty-based historians and literary critics, have made great advances in areas typically underrepresented in the academy. These include lobbying for the digitisation and public release of manuscripts like the Getty’s Fior di battaglia, collaborative translations and transcriptions of vast amounts of unpublished primary-source material, and the physical interpretation of didactic fencing literature. In all of these areas there exists an enormous scope for collaboration and integration with traditional academic disciplines.

I have, in addition, sought to rectify the neglect of representations of violence in literary criticism. The situation here is not unlike the state of historical research into violence at the turn of the century, a state which has since been rectified by the publication of a number of sociologically-influenced works on the cultural nuances of
violence and its medieval and early modern representations. In this, literary criticism has lagged behind the larger scholarly consensus. A greater understanding of medieval and early modern representations of violence of the kind proposed in this dissertation has the potential to enhance the aesthetic, cultural, and historical appreciation of literary texts.

All that said, the most important function which I anticipate this dissertation will perform is to further, in some small way, the debate over the role of violence in the modern English-speaking West. Despite the work of sociologists from Michel Foucault to Zygmunt Bauman there remains a widespread understanding of violence as the illegal or illegitimate application of physical force with the intent to cause harm. Such a strict delineation of violence from non-violence has, like the delineation between licit and illicit substances that lies at the heart of the so-called ‘war on drugs’, marginalised strategies of harm prevention in favour of outright prohibitions which can cause as much harm as they prevent. In this dissertation I hope to have contributed to the argument that violence is more than the breakdown of order and reason by demonstrating that violence, like substance use, fulfils certain personal needs which must be addressed and to suggest that unless we recognise the productive capacities of violence we will be unable to regulate its harmful aspects.

In making this argument I am keenly aware that there exists a vast chasm between the representations studied within this dissertation and the realities of historical, let alone modern, practice. For this reason, I offer this dissertation not as a definitive statement on the relationship between violence and culture in the medieval and early modern period but rather as an invitation to take up both pen and sword in the pursuit of knowledge and human flourishing. Violence is not a superfluous phenomenon to be excised from the body politic, but rather a relationship upon which
is predicated all human society. By acknowledging this we, as both scholars and citizens, can make possible new strategies to minimise the harmful aspects of violence and to encourage the flourishing of individuals, communities, and societies.
Bibliography

The importance of language in the study of violence has led me to provide, wherever possible, the original text of translated passages which are quoted in the body of the dissertation. Where translators have indicated their use of a particular version of a text, that version has been consulted; otherwise I have endeavoured to ensure a match between the translation and the transcription of texts quoted. In the overwhelming majority of cases I have quoted published translations, but when referring to specialist terminology (e.g. schirmen) I have modified these published translations for clarity.

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