"Everything in Its Proper Place": Unruly Bodies and Prosthetic Narratives in *Le Roman de Silence*

"One is not born, but, rather becomes, a woman"
— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)[1] —

"That don't look like no sexual identity crisis to me. . ."
— Brendan Sexton III as Tom Nissen, *Boys Don't Cry* (1999)[2] —

In *Boys Don't Cry*, Kimberley Pierce's film about the infamous rape and murder of trans-man Brandon Teena in 1993, both hate crimes perpetrated against Teena, played by Hilary Swank, are preceded by a violent act of looking. Having grown suspicious of Brandon after seeing his birth name in a newspaper, his former friends John Lotter (Peter Sarsgaard) and Tom Nissen (Brendan Sexton III) drag him into a bathroom, forcibly strip off his clothes, and reveal his female genitalia, prompting the appalled Nissen to voice the "verdict" above. For Teena's assailants, the baring of Teena's crotch yields a legible truth that pivots their interrogation of his body ("What the fuck are you?" cries Lotter) into judgment ("That don't look like no sexual identity crisis to me").[3] Confident that the human body can produce only one reading, Lotter and Nissen subject Brandon Teena's body to an "empirical" trial by look and use what they see to authorize the brutality to come. Their intrusive, reductive gaze is the film's *ur*-crime — the initial violation on which further violations of the trans body are based.

Heldris de Cornuälle's thirteenth-century romance, *Le Roman de Silence*, concludes with a similar scene of stripping, nominally in service of a happy ending. The text's hero(ine), raised as a boy for inheritance reasons and named "Silence," is "outed" as a woman by Merlin in front of the King and his court. Astounded that his own courtier could be a woman in disguise, the King orders that Silence be undressed and discovers that "it was just as Merlin said: / he found everything in its proper place [Tost si com Merlins dist les treuve. / Tolt issi l'a trové par tolt.]".[4] Following the examination, the King declares Silence to be a "virtuous woman [bone feme],"

orders that "she" be dressed in female attire, and "[takes] her to wife [le prist a feme puis]".[5] While the narrator of the romance finds much to celebrate in these arrangements, the revelation of Silence's "true nature" coincides with the disappearance of Silence's voice and inner subjectivity from the text, making the supposed recovery of Silence's identity into an act of erasure. Though with less deliberate malice than in *Boys Don't Cry*, the King's examination of Silence's naked body violently imposes meaning upon Silence's flesh that denies his/her individual subjectivity, facilitating continued attacks on his/her bodily autonomy.

While the results may be similar, however, the processes of meaning-making appear to be different. When Lotter and Nissen accost Brandon in the film, their dialogue ("What do you see?" "If there's something down there, it's the tiniest I ever saw") makes it clear that they are searching for the presence or absence of a penis.[6] In *Le Roman de Silence*, the narrator's euphemism for what the King sees — "everything in its proper place" — does not neatly adhere to this binary system of reading.[7] The word "everything" affirms presence, rather than the absence that Brandon's attackers associate with the female body, and the notion of "proper place" implies a range of "improper" anatomical possibilities beyond and between "male" and "female." These distinctions suggest that, although the epistemological premises of the trial by look may seem to be the same in both cases, the assailants in *Boys Don't Cry* and the King in *Le Roman de Silence* approach the bodies that they strip bare with fundamentally different conjectures and fears about what lies beneath their targets' clothing. As the audience of *Le Roman de Silence* is not made privy to Silence's nude body (besides what the King clothes in euphemism), the majority of the narrative would have been colored by its contemporary audience's historically contingent expectations about the relationship between embodiment and gendered behavior. Consequently, the relationship between the text and reader can be construed as a dialectic of silence — the

constant interplay between the narrator's refusal to reveal Silence's genitals and the reader's unvoiced speculation about what Silence's breeches are hiding.

Further compounding this silence, the critical literature on *Le Roman de Silence* subjects its protagonist's body to relatively little scrutiny. Many scholars approach the text's treatment of gender through Butler's theory of performativity, which argues that gender is "an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" that create "the *appearance of substance*".[8] While this theoretical framework has produced numerous readings of the romance which examine how Silence's trajectory shows the gulf between embodiment and gender performance, these readings are typically confident in categorizing Silence as biologically female.[9] Arguments about the ultimate ambiguity of Silence's status tend to restrict themselves to the realm of language, noting the narrator's inconsistent, bordering on incoherent, use of the pronouns "il" and "elle"[10] to describe Silence.[11] Several scholars come tantalizingly close to acknowledging alternative terms of gender and embodiment for Silence. Drawing on E. Jane Burns's claim that Silence requires "a third term between the dyadic pairs to structure her existence," Elizabeth A. Waters argues that investigating a "third path" for Silence may lead "toward a valuation of cross-dressed, drag, or transgendered [sic] identities: queer identities".[12] R. Howard Bloch suggestively uses phrases like the "oxymoronic impossibility of the hermaphrodite" to assert that "very undetermined nature of Silence, and in particular her undefined sexuality" make her character the representation of "the systematic refusal of univocal meaning".[13] Nevertheless, both Waters and Bloch retreat from the possibility that Silence's indeterminacy may be reflected in his/her flesh. Waters insists on "the truth of [Silence's] biological difference as a female," and Bloch sublimates the figure of the hermaphrodite into an allegory about the craft of the troubadour-poet, pointedly reminding his reader that "beneath the ill-fitting masculine clothing of Silence

lies a female anatomy".[14] While the existing literature appears to be in consensus that Silence's anatomy is inarguably female, I contend that medieval beliefs about the relationship between human anatomy and gendered behavior would have accommodated the possibility that Silence's male upbringing could alter her body's morphology — a detail with that dramatically recasts the epistemological stakes of the stripping scene and of medieval readers' experience of the narrative as a whole.

Simone de Beauvoir may insist that "[t]he division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history," but the work of early modern scholars like Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated that the historical record does not bear out this claim.[15] In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), Laqueur states that, from the time of the Greeks through the early eighteenth century, Western anatomical science adhered to a "one-sex model" which perceived the female reproductive organs as an inverted version of the male genitals.[16] In some versions of the one-sex model, atypical gender behavior or overexertion potentially led to anatomical slippage. In particular, women who were overly active or boisterous ran the risk of causing their innards to prolapse, forming a functional penis and testicles.[17] Although Laqueur's account has been criticized by some historians of science for collapsing multiple anatomical theories into a totalizing model, a number of medievalists suggest that Laqueur's claims are at least partially reflected in texts from the period.[18] Miri Rubin cites an anecdote from the *Annales Colmarienses Minores* (1308-14) in which a woman who could not have sex with a man has her vagina cut open by a surgeon, causing a hidden penis and testicles to emerge.[19] Karma Lochrie examines the medieval figure of the "virago": a masculinized woman who may not undergo genital prolapse, yet whose menstrual retention may cause her to acquire muscles, facial hair, and a heightened libido.[20] Most suggestively, in her article "How to be a Man, Though Female:

Changing Sex in Medieval Romance," Angela Jane Weisl juxtaposes the case of Silence with "the true sex changes" of the twelfth-century *Chanson d'Yde et Olive* and the Blanchadin(e) episode in *Tristan de Nanteuil*.[21] As in *Le Roman de Silence*, Yde and Blanchadine, who have been successfully passing as men, are stripped naked, but, by the grace of God, reveal male bodies that they then use to procreate with their wives.[22] Although Silence may not experience a miraculous transformation, these precedents clearly establish the possibility that the Silence's innards could have descended from their "proper place" over the course of the narrative, making the King's examination of Silence a moment of genuine suspense.[23]

One man's suspense, however, is another man's anxiety. Though Daston and Park observe that medieval portrayals of transvestism were largely positive, Silence's male garb and uncertain anatomy seem to disturb the *Roman*'s narrator.[24] Heldris's narrator refers to reading the story in "the Latin version [Qu'en latin escrite]," and, knowing how Silence's narrative will end, repeatedly insists that "[n]o man has the power, in the long run, / that he can vanquish and outwit / Nature, or betray heredity [Car nus hom tel pooir n'aroit / Qu'il peüst vaintre et engignier / Nature al loig, ne forlignier]".[25] Nature herself, however, voices the possibility that "Nurture's power will be proven / stronger than mine [Dont puet plus certes Noreture / Que jo ne puissce]," suggesting that the narrator's smug tone masks a deeper anxiety about Silence's abilities to radically self-fashion.[26] If the romance's pat ending reflects a desperate attempt to short-circuit this anxiety, Silence's simultaneously present and absent phallus can be read as a version of what David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder call a "narrative prosthesis." Writing from a disability studies perspective, Mitchell and Snyder use this term to characterize a narrative arc that uses bodily deviance as a trope to open and propel the story, yet requires the ultimate "extermination of the object of its fascination" to restore homeostasis and to allow the story to conclude.[27] While

Mitchell and Snyder's concept is chiefly concerned with visible difference, in *Le Roman*'s case, the central fear is Silence's ability to pass. Occluded from the moment of his/her birth, Silence's genitals are made monstrous by their indeterminacy until the narrative forces "the truth" of his/her body out into the open for public scrutiny.[28] While prosthetics often play a literal role in modern stories of transgender passing ─ we see Brandon Teena "stuffing" the crotch of his jeans in *Boys Don't Cry* ─ in Silence's case, the prosthesis is a detachable phallic signifier that the reader fixes to Silence's body, based in belief or conjecture that Silence may be becoming physically male.[29] Hence, the prosthetic narrative of *Le Roman de Silence* is driven by a looming threat of difference that is ultimately played out in the mind of unsettled readers, rather than on its hero(ine)'s body, making the revelation of Silence's body a violent, but not fully successful, attempt at "extermination".[30] Regardless of how one might categorize or resist categorizing Silence ─ as simply crossdressed, as proto-transgender, or as a medieval "androgyne," "hermaphrodite," or "virago" ─ the metaphor of the narrative prosthetic demonstrates how the arc of the *Roman* depends upon Silence's physical indeterminacy, yet crumbles under the weight of his/her body's subversive possibilities.

In order for the threat of bodily change to have any weight, *Le Roman de Silence* must first present an integrated body for Silence. Rather than describing the newborn, the text presents a lengthy sequence in which Nature crafts Silence's body prior to her birth. Like a Pygmalion seduced by his own creation, Nature repeatedly coos that the beautiful child "will be my girl [C'iert ma fille]" ─ a Butlerian act of interpellation that stamps her as female before her body is even finished.[31] Nature crafts Silence, however, out of "the finest clay [la terre chiere]," suggesting that her handiwork may continue to be malleable.[32] The text's references to Silence's primary and secondary sexual characteristics are also notably ambiguous. In Roche-Mahdi's

translation of the romance, Nature's aside that "I would be sorry / if anything were lacking [Jo m'en duel / Se rien i falt]" could read as a prescient phallic joke, but Nature's use of the verb "falir" also demonstrates Irigaray's claim in "The Sex That Is Not One" that in a visual "system of representation and desire, the vagina is a flaw, a hole in the representation's scoptophilic objective".[33] Even before Silence's status as male or female is contested, her sex is still not one. More pressingly, in the creation scene, neither is her body. As Nature conducts a blazon of the beautiful "girl" she has created, she mentions "the bosom well-turned, slender sides/ [. . .] the hips rounded, / the thighs soft and shapely [Le pis bien fait, graisles les flans / [. . .] les hances si fait voltices / Les cuisses moles et faitices]" making it clear that Nature is forming an adult, not an infant. [34] While this is a relatively common trope in medieval and early modern creation narratives, the conceit of Nature using adult molds to create human life normalizes the idea of a body divided by a gulf of possibility.[35] From the moment of her birth, Silence's "body" is already split between the ideal mold made by Nature and the enfleshed, immature body that will presumably grow to approximate it. To rephrase Simone de Beauvoir, Silence is both born *and* expected to become a woman, yet the space between these two terms of existence provides room for her path to deviate.[36]

Initially, Silence's unwilled departure from Nature's plan is constructed as purely linguistic. In accordance with her parents' plans, the baby girl is publicly announced as a "most beautiful son [un bel fil]," so that her father, away at the time of the child's birth, must return home before he knows whether his "fine son / [. . .] was a boy or a girl [Que qu'il eüst, malle u femiele]" ─ a remark which already severs the social role of "son" from maleness.[37] Having learned "the truth," Cador tells his wife, Eufemie, that "I want to make a male of a female [Faire en voel malle de femiele]," and, if they are blessed with another son, "we'll turn this one back

into a girl [Cesti ferons desvaleter]".[38] Cador's alarming flippancy here reflects his apparent assumption that all these transformations require is an act of renaming:

> He will be called Silentius.
> And if by any chance
> his real nature is discovered
> we shall change this –us to –a
> And she'll be called Silentia.
>
> [Il iert només Scilenscius;
> Et s'il avient par aventure
> Al descovrir de sa nature
> Nos muerons cest –us en –a,
> S'avra a non Scilencia][39]

Silence's parents perceive performative language as serving the specific — and ultimately, reversible — function of altering her gendered role within their household, constituting him/her as a son or daughter as needed. They fail to recognize, however, that the effects of making "a male of a female" at the seemingly superficial level of language may be more global or permanent.[40] While Shakespeare's Romeo may tell us that "that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet," in the twelfth-century tract *Du Planctu Naturae* ("The Plaint of Nature"), Alain de Lille insists that grammatical gender must reflect a clear sexual identity to prevent the corruption of nature and language, and connects the perversion of rhetoric to bodily disfigurement.[41] Hence, Cador's first reference to Silence as "Il" represents more than a charade or slip of the tongue.[42] The accrual of male pronouns around Silence — whether contributed by the other characters, by the narrator, or by Silence him/herself — may actively contribute to the re-shaping of Silence's body and spirit to make "him" more masculine. Consequently, the narrator's attempts to periodically clarify Silence's sex, turning muddled phrases like "[w]hen the child was old enough / to understand he was a girl [Quant l'enfes est de tel doctrine / Qu'il entent bien qu'il est mescine]," blur the boundaries between linguistic incoherence and bodily

incoherence, potentially reifying Silence's embodied deviance as he attempts to deny its existence.[43]

Due to the demands placed on Silence to pass, however, the material effects of this linguistic slippage cannot be verified. Silence's parents know that, in order for their ruse to succeed, they must "watch her closely and keep her covered up [De priés garder et bien covrir]".[44] Their first act after Silence's birth is to "put a cloth around the child's hips [Un drap li loie entor les rains]" to keep her genitals from view.[45] When Silence eventually comes "to understand that he was a girl [entent bien qu'il est mescine]," he promises "to conceal [him]self from everyone [Viers tolte gent [li] coverrai]," exchanging his parents' scrutiny for constant self-surveillance.[46] From the time of his/her first swaddling, Silence's body is made unavailable to everyone else, readers included. Between Silence's birth and the revelation of his/her body in front of the king, the reader is implicitly presented with two possible outcomes for the narrative: either Silence's body becomes male under the cover of his clothing or remains female. The text arguably presents evidence to support both scenarios, so the romance's readers are left to interpret the signs as they see fit and — if they happen to share the narrator's conservatism — to entertain two threatening outcomes: Silence turns into a man, thwarting Nature, or wields phallic authority and social capital while still inhabiting a female body. Although, ironically, Cador names his daughter-son Silence because "silence relieves anxiety [silensce tolt ance]," it is precisely the text's silence on the subject of Silence's genitals that permits the audience's anxieties to proliferate, attaching themselves prosthetic signifiers which seek to explain the riddle of Silence's hidden crotch.[47]

While the extent of the changes is not made clear, the text conveys that Silence's male upbringing is affecting his body. The child is described as "beautiful [biele/bel]" in both the

masculine and feminine form of the adjective, yet the narrator remarks that, as the youth grew, "Silence wasn't any more of a girl in a year [Silence n'iert a an mais fille]" and "the child grew more sturdily in a year / than others do in three [l'enfes croist moult durement / Plus en l'an c'uns alters en trois]".[48] Although the narrator insists that Silence wears male clothing "in order to deny her nature [Por se nature refuser]," his emphasis on the child's heartiness and pervasive use of male pronouns treats Silence's masculinity as more essential than the product of a masquerade.[49] The narrator continues, however, to fixate on Silence's genital anatomy as a site of difference. While conceding that "he was so used to man's usage / [. . .] that little was lacking for him to be a man. / Whatever one could see was certainly male! [Il a us d'ome tant usé / [. . .] Que poi en falt que il n'est malles: / Quanque on en voit est trestolt malles] the speaker maintains that "the he's a she beneath the clothes [Il est desos les dras mescine]".[50] Silence seems to confirm the narrator's reading after Nature upbraids him/her for his/her conduct by conceding that "[w]henever I happen to get undressed / I am afraid my sex will be discovered [Se me desful par aventure / Dont ai paor de ma nature]".[51] Nevertheless, both Silence and, uncharacteristically, the narrator destabilize this reading almost immediately. While Nature and Reason tell the youth that s/he must stop denying "her" true self and resume women's ways, the narrator refers to their rhetoric as "spurious argument [Que Nature li fait sofime]" and "bad advice [fol consel]," making Silence's male identity seem wrongfully contested.[52] In a key shift, Silence also lays claim to his male identity, purportedly after realizing that "a man's life / was much better than that of a woman [que moils valt li us d'ome / Que l'us de feme]".[53] Although this seems to attribute Silence's rationale to a combination of uncomfortable social fact and internalized misogyny, Silence then makes the remarkable statement that

> I have a mouth too hard for kisses
> And arms too rough for embraces

One could easily make a fool of me
In any game played under the covers
For I'm a young man, not a girl!

[Trop dure boche ai por baisier
Et trop rois bras po racoler
On me poroit tost afoler
Al giu c'on fait desos gordine,
Car vallés sui et nient mescine.][54]

Silence may not specify why he would be made a fool under the covers, but his insistence that his body is "trop dure" and "trop rois" for womanly usage indicates that he has passed some physical point of no return: though perhaps not a man, he cannot be a woman. After having promised Nature that he will no longer "live like a boy [vivre a fuer de garcon]," Silence's words here suggest that he now recognizes himself as living *as* a boy, instead of "*like* a boy," adding credence to his claim that "I am Silentius / as I see it, or I am no one [sui jo Scilentius / Cho m'est avis, u jo sui nus]".[55] Hence, while Nurture may describe its task as "turning a noble child into a defective male [D'un noble enfant un malvais home]," Silence clearly defects from being female based, in part, on his physical attributes, leading the reader to speculate what other bodily changes might be in store.[56] Silence may not yet have undergone a sexual transformation along the lines of the cases described by Rubin, Weisl, Parker, and Laqueur, but these signals suggests that such a transformation may occur, eliciting anxiety or anticipation from the *Roman*'s audience that the story's narrative prosthetic phallus may become real flesh.

Not all medieval readers of the *Roman*, however, would necessarily believe that Silence's transvestism would alter her sex. As Daston and Park have observed, the connection between sex transformation and transvestism was not made truly "urgent" until the early modern period.[57] Nevertheless, readers who persisted in the belief that Silence maintains a stable anatomical identity are still not exempt from the internalized narrative prosthesis arc. In lieu of Silence's

gradual metamorphosis into a man, however, the target of fascinated anxiety is Silence's drag — a prosthetic that depends on visibility, rather than occlusion. In *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber describes how the design of the codpiece ("the ultimate detachable part" worn to accentuate the genital area) "confounds the question of gender, since it can signify yes or no, full or empty, lack or lack of lack," making it a (re)movable fetish object in addition to an emblem of undecidability.[58] While Silence may not wear a codpiece specifically, his/her male attire is poised to inspire similar "fetish envy".[59] During his/her childhood days, Silence's simple "garments split at the sides [Fendre ses dras]" and paired with "breeches [braies]" are intended to make the youth blend in.[60] As he ages, however, Silence's attire grows more and more ostentatious, flaunting the body that it also conceals. In a particularly extreme example, the narrator spends twenty-five lines describing the youth's battle attire in almost pornographic detail.[61] Silence's "padded silken tunic [un ganbizon de soie]" evokes images of the drag king molding a v-shaped upper body and stuffing his crotch, making gender into spectacle.[62] During a royal joust, Silence shows off a transparently phallic prosthetic when he charges his opponent with his "well-positioned lance [Le lance sor le falter mise]" — a tool Silence uses to unseat other men that never goes soft and can be picked up or discarded at will.[63] While both the narrator and Silence state that Silence has "only the complexion, clothing / and bearing of a man [rien n'a d'ome fors le halle, / Et fors les dras et contenance]," the narrative suggests that these assets are just as, if not more, important to performing maleness than male anatomy.[64] If Silence's body has not changed under his fine clothes, then the texts suggests that clothes do indeed make the man and that masculinity is truly a matter of prosthetic accessories — an insight that the exposure of Silence's naked body cannot dispel.

Whether Silence's growth into manhood is interpreted as bodily *and* social or simply social, his level of success and personal comfort in a role "contrary to nature [contre nature]" presents the *Roman*'s narrator with a problem.[65] The speaker's early narrative of "a tender child / who had to force herself to live that way [enfant si tendre. / Ki doit a tel usage entendre]" falls apart as the grown Silence finds that he "had no regrets / about his upbringing, in fact, he loved it [ne se repent rien / De son usage, ains l'ainme bien]".[66] Since Silence has no motivation to take up a female identity that he has never owned, the narrative needs to find another way to abject his gender deviance and restore equilibrium. The contrivance of the romance's ending begins to take shape when Silence, defending his honor after being falsely accused of rape by the queen, is charged with the task of capturing the now-feral wizard Merlin and delivering him to the king. A prophecy foretells that Merlin can only be caught "by a woman's trick [par engine de feme]," so Silence's success would seem to affirm his essential femininity.[67] Nevertheless, the *Roman* blatantly subverts this justification, as Silence catches Merlin only after a wizened old man gives him explicit instructions how to do so.[68] Not only does Silence not supply the "woman's trick," but Sarah Roche-Mahdi convincingly argues that the old man is actually Merlin in disguise, suggesting that the entire enterprise of trapping the wizard is really a set-up for Silence.[69] The absence of a true "woman's trick" already leaves Silence's remaining ties to womanhood in doubt, but this doubt is particularly salient after Silence's prayer to God to "strengthen / that in me which Nature has made weak [Cho qu'afoiblie en moi Nature / Cho puist efforcier T'aventure]".[70] Silence's entreaty does not specify precisely how he hopes to be strengthened, yet God could conceivably respond to Silence's prayer by furnishing him with a fully male body. In their respective romances, Yde and Blanchandin(e)'s transformations into men are wrought by God's grace just before their bodies are to be exposed — the trial that soon awaits Silence.[71] The

combination of the prayer and the Merlin affair undoes the initial, conservative promise of the "woman's trick" prophecy, so that stripping scene becomes the moment on which Silence's identity and function within the narrative rests, either bringing his embodiment into concord with his identification or forcing his gender identification to match the female anatomy of his birth.

Le Roman de Silence, of course, follows the latter ending, banishing the spectre of Silence's phallus and the prosthetic accoutrements of his clothing. As Cador foresaw, "her" name is changed from "Silentius" to "Silentia," and "she" is wed to the king without any recorded voicing of consent. The disappearance of Silence's voice from the text fulfills an earlier play on words: when Silence proclaims "I am Silentius / as I see it, or I am no one [sui jo Scilentius / Cho m'est avis, u jo sui nus]", the phrase *jo sui nus* ("I am no one") can also be translated as "I am naked".[72] Indeed, once Silence is denuded and the King sees nothing — the Irigarayan void that is the vagina — as far as the text is concerned, Silence becomes no one.[73] Nor is the King the only figure who claims Silence's body as property. The narrator describes Nature "recover[ing] her rights [recovree sa droiture]" as she spends "the next three days refurbishing / Silence's entire body, removing every trace / of anything that being a man had left there [Nature a repolir / Par tolt le cors et a tolir / Tolt quanque ot sor le cors de malle]".[74] With respect to the narrative prosthetic arc, Nature's show of scrubbing Silence's history from "her" body is a shockingly literal variant on the erasure of bodily deviance which is deemed unnatural or unnecessary when it no longer has a story to support. The necessity of spending these "three days refurbishing," however, ultimately demonstrates how significantly Silence's experience of "being a man" has altered the body that Nature made.[75] As the reader never sees the topography of Silence's body, the reality of his/her physical difference is not fully reified until this moment of nominal erasure. The narrator's phrasing further adds to the ending's ambiguity. Rather than

presenting Silence as reclaiming her womanhood, the narrator relates that "[t]hey dressed Silence *as* a woman / [. . .] And so he was called Silentia [Silence atornent come feme / [. . .] si est només Scilentiä]," making the transition seem like an uncomfortable masquerade.[76] While seeming to follow through with the elimination of the romance's narrative prosthetics, the *Roman de Silence* reinscribes the corporeal and social deviance that the ending purports to correct, so the silencing of Silence still fails to quiet the anxieties raised by his/her embodiment throughout the text.

The central narrative of *Roman de Silence* hinges on the possibility of deviance from what the King calls "proper place" ─ whether this displacement be genital, social, or both. While theoretical contributions from disability studies have not previously been part of the conversation about the *Roman*, apparati like Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis provide frameworks for understanding Silence's body as manifesting not simply maleness or femaleness, but a spectrum of exceptional departures from his/her "proper place." Unlike most narrative prostheses, however, the extent of Silence's physical difference remains unclear to the *Roman*'s audience, defamiliarizing the concept of proper place to the point that the status quo cannot be fully rehabilitated. While Silence may be ushered into marriage and out of sight, the narrative prosthesis ─ like the codpiece ─ is fundamentally detachable, mobile, and able to signify independently of the silenced character. Consequently, while the ending of the *Roman* may disempower Silence, the readerly anxieties that propelled the narrative may endure and refocus themselves on the gender norms that the romance destabilizes, refusing to be resolved by a single story's trick.

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.
[2] *Boys Don't Cry*, Directed by Kimberley Peirce (1999; Los Angeles: Fox Searchlight, 2000), DVD.
[3] Ibid.

[4] Heldris de Cornuälle, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State U P, 1992, 1999, 2007), 6573-74.
[5] Ibid., 6634, 6664, 6677.
[6] *Boys Don't Cry*, Peirce.
[7] Heldris, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, 6574.
[8] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 520.
[9] Peggy McCracken, "'The Boy Who Was a Girl': Reading Gender in Le Roman de Silence," *The Romantic Review* 85.4 (1994): 517-37; Jane Tolmie, "Silence in the Sewing Chamber: *Le Roman de Silence*," *French Studies* 63.1 (2009): 14-26; Elizabeth A. Waters, "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 35-46; Kathleen M. Blumreich, "Lesbian Desire in the Old French *Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 47-62; Caroline A. Jewers, "The Non-Existent Knight: Adventure in 'Le Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 87-110; Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "The Importance of Being Gender 'Stable': Masculine and Feminine Empowerment in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 7-34; Helen Fulton, "Gender and Jealousy in *Gereint uab Erbin* and *Le Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 24.2 (2014): 43-70; Gloria Thomas Gilmore, "'Le Roman de Silence': Allegory in Ruin or Womb of Irony?", *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 111-128.
[10] As you may imagine, the inconsistency of the narrator's gendered pronoun use presents me with some difficulties as I endeavor to discuss Silence's embodiment. When referring to specific moments in the text, I have chosen to call Silence "he" or "she" depending on his/her outward performance at this point in the narrative, but to use the combined pronoun "s/he" when referring to his/her general arc.
[11] R. Howard Bloch, "Silence and Holes: The *Roman de Silence* and the Art of the Trouvère," *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986): 81-99; Erin F. Labbie, "The Specular Image of the Gender-Neutral Name: Naming Silence in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 63-77; Katherine H. Terrell, "Competing Gender Ideologies and the Limitations of Language in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Romance Quarterly* 55.1 (2008): 35-48; Mary Ellen Ryder and Linda Marie Zaerr, "A Stylistic Analysis of 'Le Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 18.1 (2008): 22-40. In the introduction to her translation of the romance, Sarah Roche-Mahdi also characterizes Silence as a "human metaphor" fraught with "grammatical inconsistency"; Sarah Roche-Mahdi, "Introduction," *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, by Heldris de Cornuälle, trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State U P, 1992, 1999, 2007): xxi.
[12] E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993), 245; Elizabeth A. Waters, "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender in 'Le Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997), 37-38.
[13] R. Howard Bloch, "Silence and Holes: The *Roman de Silence* and the Art of the Trouvère," *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986), 89, 88.
[14] Waters, "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender in 'Le Roman de Silence,'" 37; Bloch, "Silence and Holes: The *Roman de Silence* and the Art of the Trouvère," 95.
[15] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 9.
[16] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1990), 4.
[17] Ibid., 126-17. Laqueur presents Montaigne's tale of the case of Marie-Germain, a peasant girl who had male genitalia drop between her legs while she was chasing pigs, as the most famous example of these sex-change stories. For more, see Patricia Parker, "Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain," *Critical Inquiry* 19.2 (1993): 337-64.
[18] For critical reactions to Laqueur, see Joan Cadden, *The Meaning of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1993); Katharine Park and Robert A. Nye, "Desire is Anatomy: Review of Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*," *The New Republic* 18 (1991): 53-57; Monica Green, "Bodily Essences: Bodies as Categories of Difference" in *A Cultural History of the Human Body, Vol. 2: In the Medieval Age*, ed. Linda Kalof (New York: Berg, 2010).
[19] Miri Rubin, "The person in the form: medieval challenges to bodily 'order'" in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1994), 101. Rubin also quotes Henri de Mandeville's words (c. 1320) that "the generative apparatus of women [is] similar to the generative apparatus of men, save that it is inverted" — an affirmation of some form of the one-sex model (106).
[20] Karma Lochrie, "Before the Tribade: Medieval Anatomies of Female Masculinity and Pleasure" in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, eds. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013): 347.

[21] Angela Jane Weisl, "How to be a Man, Though Female: Changing Sex in Medieval Romance" in *Medieval Feminist Forum* 45.2 (2009): 113.
[22] Ibid., 113.
[23] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 657.
[24] Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, "The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature: Sexual Ambiguity in Early Modern France" in *Premodern Sexualities*, eds. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 122.
[25] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 1661, 2296-98.
[26] Ibid., 2293-94.
[27] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000), 57.
[28] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 2003.
[29] In alluding to "stories of transgender passing" above, I do not mean to imply that Silence is transgender, in the word's modern sense. Rather, I make use of Judith Halberstam's methodology of "perverse presentism," a model that "avoids the trap of simply projecting contemporary understandings back in time, but one that can apply insights from the present to conundrums of the past." Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Chapel Hill: Duke U P, 1998), 53.
[30] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, 57.
[31] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 1874, 1927; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 2, 107, 232.
[32] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 1846.
[33] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 1920-21; Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which Is Not One" in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, eds. Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2013), 427.
[34] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 1939, 1941-42.
[35] Richard Halpern remarks on this medieval and early modern trope in his commentary on Shakespeare's Sonnet 20, stating "[t]he odd thing about all scenes in which a mythological Nature fashions human beings is that real nature doesn't work that way. People originate as tiny embryos and grow into adulthood; they aren't sculpted as fully grown creatures [. . .] inevitably invok[ing] God's fashioning of Adam and Eve in the first chapter of Genesis"; Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare's Perfume: Sodomy and Sublimity in the Sonnets, Wilde, Freud, and Lacan* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002): 25.
[36] "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"; Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 283.
[37] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 1992-93.
[38] Ibid., 2040, 2047. Perret reads the neologism "desvaleter" as modeled on the verb "despuceler" (to take a young girl's virginity). Whereas Gaunt and Jewers discuss the term "desvaleter" as evidence of Heldris' misogyny, Hess interprets "desvaleter" as clever wordplay that "extends a traditionally female problem to a young man, thereby blurring again the boundaries between the two genders" (82). Michele Perret, "Travesties et Transsexuelles: Yde, Silence, Grisandole, Blanchadine" *Romance Note* 25.3 (1983): 328-40; Simon Gaunt, "The Significance of Silence" *Paragraph* 13.2 (1990): 202-16; Caroline Jewers, "The Nonexistent Knight: Adventure in *Le Roman de Silence*" *Arthuriana* 7.2 (1997): 87-110; Erika E. Hess, *Literary Hybrids: Crossdressing, Shapeshifting, and Indeterminacy in Medieval and Modern French Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[39] Ibid., 2074-78.
[40] Ibid., 2040.
[41] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 2.2.47-48; Rubin, "The person in the form: medieval challenges to bodily 'order,'" 106; Rita Copland, "The Pardoner's body and the disciplining of rhetoric" in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1994), 147.
[42] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence*, 2074.
[43] Ibid., 2439-40.
[44] Ibid., 1755-56.
[45] Ibid., 2087.
[46] Ibid., 2440, 2459.
[47] Ibid., 2068.

[48] Ibid., 2019, 1993, 2350, 2352-53.
[49] Ibid., 2360.
[50] Ibid., 2475, 2477-78, 2480.
[51] Ibid., 2570-71.
[52] Ibid., 2540, 2628.
[53] Ibid., 2637-38.
[54] Ibid., 2648-50.
[55] Ibid., 2561, 2535-36.
[56] Ibid., 2602.
[57] Daston and Park, "The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature: Sexual Ambiguity in Early Modern France," 122.
[58] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (*New York: Routledge, 1992), 122. As "cod" could signify a "fool" or "hoax" in addition to male genitals, Garber punningly observes that "[t]he anxiety of male artifactuality is summed up, as it were, in a nutshell" (125).
[59] Ibid., 127.
[60] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence,* 2055, 2056.
[61] Ibid., 5536-60.
[62] Ibid., 5336. For more on contemporary drag king subcultures and performance traditions, see Judith Halberstam's chapter, "Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance," in *Female Masculinity,* 231-66.
[63] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence,* 5153.
[64] Ibid., 5162-63, 3644-46. Emp. mine.
[65] Ibid., 2081.
[66] Ibid., 2665-66, 5178-79.
[67] Ibid., 5803. One hears echoes of the idea of the "woman's trick" in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* as everything from the Green Knight's charade to the sexual temptations of Castle Bertilak are revealed to have been arranged for Gawain by Morgan le Fay, who appears earlier in the guise of an "auncien lady"; Anon, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967): 2463.
[68] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence,* 5913-5986.
[69] Sarah Roche-Mahdi, "A Reappraisal of the Role of Merlin in the 'Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 12.1 (2002): 6-21.
[70] Ibid., 5607-8.
[71] Weisl, "How to be a Man, Though Female: Changing Sex in Medieval Romance," 113.
[72] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence,* 2535-36; Weisl, "How to be a Man, Though Female: Changing Sex in Medieval Romance," 121.
[73] Irigaray, "The Sex Which Is Not One," 427.
[74] Heldris, *Le Roman de Silence,* 6669, 6670-72.
[75] Ibid., 6672.
[76] Ibid., 6664-6668. Emp. mine.