Performative Prowess: Adventure and Gender in the *Roman de Silence*

Overview

This chapter will examine the concept of adventure and its relationship to gender in the thirteenth-century Old French verse romance known as the *Roman de Silence*.[1] The *Roman de Silence*, a text in which a woman, dressed and living as a man, becomes an accomplished knight, offers the opportunity not only to examine some of the assumed gendered features of adventure, but also to view the effect that gender subversion has on a text's presentation of adventure. What is the significance of knightly adventure when undertaken by a woman, even or especially if she is disguised as a man? I intend to show that the *Roman de Silence* does not simply place a woman in a position typically occupied by a knight, but rather that this very transgression brings about, or is accompanied by, other transformations in narrative structure and in the content and significance of adventure. As Caroline Jewers (1997) observes in her article on the *Roman de Silence* and Marie de France's *Lais*, "prioritizing the feminine requires the destabilization of romance convention; in particular, it calls for a reevaluation of the meaning of adventure" (88). Indeed, I will show in this chapter that Silence's adventures do not adhere to a conventional image of knightly proving, but rather that they employ the structure of adventure to stage a more discursive, performative content.

In particular, I argue that the *Roman de Silence* repositions performance and discourse as sites of prowess and as the narrative material of adventure. Despite Silence's clear demonstration

[1] I will be using Sarah Roche-Mahdi's edition for my citations, in Old French and English, unless otherwise noted: Sarah Roche-Mahdi, ed. and trans. 2007 (first edition 1992). *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

of prowess in battle and of knightly skill, Silence's adventures[2] rather reveal a performative prowess rooted in minstrelsy and discursive skill, along with the ability to *perform* as a knight, both in living as a social male and excelling at knightly activities. In addition to Silence's own performative prowess, I show how the text distills adventure into a language that is employed in more intimate contexts, namely the travails of desire. I thus do not entirely agree with Jane Tolmie (2009) when she states that "The Nature of Silence's adventure does disable even the possibility of any model for female adventure and heroism that is not male – effectively, to have adventure, you must be a man socially" (18).[3] While it is true that Silence's male identity and resulting freedom of movement enable her to participate in combat and to traverse the geographic space in which her adventures take place, these adventures are not at all typical of the knightly variety. Instead, they propose a new version of adventure rooted in examinations of identity, gender, and narrativity.

First, I will show that there is a significant connection between adventure, marriage and genealogy that situates women within the realm of adventure's motivations, while simultaneously excluding them from its content. Secondly, I will show how the *Roman de Silence* utilizes language as a means of creating or emphasizing a sense of adventure in realms that are not part of the knight's traditional combative proving ground. This is especially apparent in the love and courtship episode involving Silence's parents, Cador and Eufemie. Third, I will

[2] By Silence's "adventures," I mean the sequences in which she travels from place to place, away from home or court, sometimes with no particular destination, and faces a series of challenges, some of which contain elements of the marvelous.

[3] Along these lines, Jane Tolmie makes a number of observations regarding the social aspects of Silence's cross-dressing, noting for example that "This male paradigm for heroism or adventure is not diminished by the inclusion of female participants, because their participation as social men does not threaten the stability of the available models for heroism, adventure, or participation in public affairs" (20).

argue that the *Roman de Silence* presents the reader with scenes of *aventure* and *mésaventure* that, again, do not involve the typical knightly or combative scenario, and that serve to rewrite the conditions of adventure. These can be seen in the jongleur episode and in Silence's conflict with the queen. Finally, I will look at the Merlin episode to show how, despite initially taking the form of a more conventional adventure, this episode likewise replaces combat with performance and a particular interest in the disjuncture between body, self, and appearance.

The *Roman de Silence* was discovered in 1911 in a box marked "old papers-no value."[4] It is a unique manuscript both in the material sense – there is only one known version – and in the sense that its narrative uniquely features a woman cross-dressing as a knight.[5] The *Roman de Silence* dates from the second half of the thirteenth century[6] and its manuscript can be found today at the University of Nottingham, MS. Mi.LM.6, folios 188 recto to 223 recto. It was apparently written by a certain Heldris of Cornwall (Heldris de Cornuälle), who names himself twice as the author (lines 1 and 6684). He is unattested outside of this self-attribution.[7]

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[4] Roche-Madhi (ibid., xi). According Roche-Mahdi, also included in this box of "old papers - no value" was a letter from Henry VIII.

[5] However, as I showed in the introduction, it calls upon a fairly established trope of saints' lives.

[6] See Lewis Thorpe (1972, 9-10). Following a summary of the evidence for the dating of the manuscript and the opinions of various scholars, Thorpe concludes that "The language is that of the second half of the thirteenth century; and I find it difficult to be more precise. When all the evidence of handwriting, decoration, contents and language is taken into account, such an approximate statement seems the only possible one for the manuscript as a whole: that it was compiled and copied at some time between 1250 and 1300, probably nearer the end of the century than the beginning" (10).

[7] Sarah Roche-Mahdi (2007) writes in the introduction to her edition: "As Heinrich Gelzer has convincingly argued, 'Master Heldris' seems to be a name picked from the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth because of its connection with Cornwall […] Is this *Lokalpatriotismus* (as Gelzer suggests), the desire to please a patron (e.g. Richard of Cornwall)? Is the author, like the heroine, a transvestite she? Or does he just want to make us think so?" (footnote, xi). These questions raise the possibility that the *Roman de Silence* was written by a woman, a possibility that we can, at this point, neither validate nor refute.

The *Roman de Silence* tells the story of a girl born to noble parents shortly after the king has unjustly outlawed female inheritance. In order to preserve their estate, her parents decide to raise their daughter as a son, giving her the significant name Silence. Knowing that living as a male is her parents' wish, and in many ways preferring the freedom that her masculine disguise affords her, the adolescent Silence participates in the ruse as both a dutiful daughter and a successful son. After a period of time during which she runs away and lives as an itinerant and accomplished jongleur, Silence returns home and grows up to be a talented and much-admired knight, at one point saving the kingdom through her prowess in battle. The primary obstacle that she encounters, a perfidious queen, brings Silence's gender trouble to center stage and is eventually overcome through a combination of her noble heart, courage, and some mystical intervention, as she is obligated to capture and bring Merlin back to court. Her eventual unmasking leads to what would conventionally be considered a happy ending, that is to say, female inheritance is restored and she marries the king, but this ending can come across as deeply unsatisfying against the backdrop of the work.[8] It is also accompanied by a barrage of misogynistic sentiments, notably that a woman's main purpose is to keep silent,[9] that sit uncomfortably within a story that has featured such an exemplary and sympathetic female protagonist, though she herself is named Silence. Even the narrator is compelled to apologize to his female audience at the end, though this apology is not much better than the statements and portrayals that have prompted it. It is these sorts of unresolved tensions that underpin the entire

[8] Mary Ellen Ryder and Linda Marie Zaerr (2008) begin their article with the straightforward observation: "The ending of the Roman de Silence is almost universally unsatisfying for modern readers." (22).

[9] "Sens de feme gist en taisir. / Si m'aït Dex, si com jo pens, / Uns muials puet conter lor sens. / Car femes n'ont sens que mais un, / C'est taisirs" [A woman's role is to keep silent. / So help me God, I think / a mute can tell what women are good for, / for they're only good for one thing, / and that is to keep silent] (6398-6402).

work, which even stages ongoing quarrels between the allegorical figures of Nature and Nurture, who battle for control of Silence's gender. As Howard Bloch (1986) puts it, "Silence represents the systematic refusal of univocal meaning" (88).

Thus, not only does the *Roman de Silence* place a born-female knight at its center, it also articulates what seems to be a rather modern sex/gender discussion through the figures of Nature and Nurture, calling into question whether a *chevalier* – and by extension, a man – is male by birth or by activity. That Nature ultimately wins the war does not negate the fact that Nurture has quite a few victories of her own along the way. In a sense, up until the very end, Silence's entire narrative is one long success story for Nurture. To further complicate matters, the text frequently equates one's nature with customs (*us*), using the two terms interchangeably, so that it is a woman's nature to be in the sewing chamber, for example.[10] Thus, the text's discourse assumes that social gender roles and one's birth sex or nature are one and the same, while simultaneously providing an extended example of this not being the case. That this argument is even being made in regard to gender is surprising. As Simon Gaunt (1990) has noted, "the very fact that [the author Heldris] should feel the need to refute the idea that gender might be a cultural construct is curious, for the idea has no currency in the Middle Ages" (203). However, given that *the Roman de Silence* dedicates so much narrative space to adjudicating the conflict between Nature and Nurture, it appears that the idea must have had *some* currency, as it evidently does in this romance.

Such complexities and subversions of accepted norms have understandably drawn a considerable amount of critical attention to gender in the *Roman de Silence*. Some scholars, like

[10] For example, Nature scolds Silence, telling her: "Va a la cambre a la costure, / Cho violt de nature li us" [Go to a chamber and learn to sew! / That's what Nature's usage wants of you!] (2527-2428). In the Old French, it's clear that women's *us* are also what Nature commands.

Simon Gaunt (ibid.) and Peter Allen (1989), have argued that the narrative in fact ends up reinforcing misogynistic sentiment and systems, while others have argued that its portrayal of Silence and its staging of the Nature vs. Nurture conflict at the very least make it proto-feminist discourse, raising questions of the sex/gender distinction, regardless of how they are resolved.[11] Ultimately, the narrative blends what appear to be almost modern ruminations on whether gender is innate or learned, and an extensive portrayal of a strong woman - the romance's heroine - who performs admirably as a man (and generally in all she/he does), with interludes of misogynistic discourses about women. My primary interest is not to come down on one side or the other of this debate, but to show how Silence's female body – and the disjuncture between this body and Silence's male appearance and activity – is used as a site for reframing adventure around questions of identity, signs, and performance, rather than amorous desire or physical prowess. Likewise, whatever Heldris or the narrative's male characters (primarily King Evan) may say about women,[12] the *Roman de Silence* displays an evident interest in women's roles, both social and literary, and a nuanced treatment of gender, threading these interests through transformations of romance conventions, in a manner that puts these conventions in an uncomfortable or problematic light, though it does so with a laugh and a wink.

In light of the romance's treatment of gender, it is worth taking a moment to consider the narrative's use of pronouns, and my own use of pronouns when referring to Silence. Because the

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[11] See for example Regina Psaki (1997, 3-8) and Kathleen J. Brahney (1985), the latter of whom posits a female authorship for the romance. Suzanne Conklin Akbari (1994) strikes a middle ground, noting both the misogynistic overtones of much of the work, and also the way in which the author has reworked the allegorical figure of Nature to be "far more 'feminine' than that found in the preceding literary tradition" (45), concluding that "The misogyny undoubtedly present in the work is not evidence against female authorship, for misogyny is and was not unique to men. If Heldris was indeed a woman, she may not be an ancestress we can comfortably claim as our own" (46).

[12] In terms of the king, the narrative gives us several opportunities to doubt his wisdom.

English language requires the use of gendered pronouns (or the pronoun "they" which in a sense becomes its own gender through its very refusal of the gender binary), any choice of pronoun to refer to Silence verges simultaneously on the political and the highly personal. Though Silence embodies a masculine social identity throughout most of the romance, Silence's female body is at the same time a significant aspect of her identity within the romance. Indeed, it is hard to see how this romance would be of much interest if its primary source of tension – Silence's cross-dressing – were not a major part of the narrative. The difference between Silence's female body and her male social identity is the largest theme of the romance and is its entire *raison d'être*. In this circumstance, no pronoun seems correct, as each one elides an important aspect of the narrative and of Silence's own gendered identity and dilemma. The narrative is of no help in this respect, as it uses both masculine and feminine pronouns and is always quick to remind us that Silence is not a boy under her clothes.[13] Nor is Silence's own approach to her gender very clarifying. When Silence is old enough to realize that she has a female body, and confronts her parents with this fact, her inner thoughts reveal that she feels that she is doing something wrong in living like a boy – that this is in fact a lie.[14] We have no indication that Silence *feels* like a

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[13] Simon Gaunt (1990) notes, however, that the narrative does usually use masculine pronouns when Silence is living as a boy or man: "with one significant exception, Silence is designated by masculine pronouns and adjectives throughout the period she lives as a man, even by people who know she is really female. What is the effect of the one exception? In the second exchange between Nature and Noreture Silence is addressed as feminine. It is hardly surprising that Nature addresses Silence in the feminine (2510, 2512), but Noreture's use of feminine forms when talking of Silence to Nature is more striking" (207).

[14] "[S]ilences forment s'enasprist, / Car ses corages li aprist / Ke si fesist par couverture" [Silence was deeply disturbed about this, / for her conscience told her / that she was practicing deception by doing this] (2497-2499). The narrative also describes Silence's situations as a torment, because Silence must work against her will and heart: "Et por cho di jo de Scilence / Qu'i ert de moult grant abstinence, / Que ses pensers le tormentoit / Et il le sentoit et sofroit. / Et tols jors ert pres a contraire / A cho que ses cuers voloit faire. / Et qui ouevre contre voloir / Soventes fois l'estuet doloir" [And that is why I say that Silence / showed such great forbearance / for his thoughts tormented him, / and he felt this and suffered from it. / He was always ready to

male, and I would hesitate to equate enjoyment of masculine activities and liberties with some kind of deeper male identity. Although, as Gabriela Tanase (2006) observes, Silence clearly states "Car vallés sui et nient mescine" [for I am a young man, not a girl] (2650), she also views her male identity as a sham, for example in the lines cited by Tanase (5): "Jo sui, fait il, nel mescrées, / Com li malvais dras encrées / Ki samble bons, et ne l'est pas" ["I am," he said, "believe me, / like an inferior piece of cloth powdered with chalk, / that looks good, but isn't"] (3641-4643). Indeed, Silence fears and reasons that, as a female, she may not succeed at masculine activities (she turns out to be wrong about that, but it does show that Silence views female identity as something essential to her identity or personhood).

Within the narrative, Silence's female body is her "nature" while Silence's male identity is his "nurture." Based on circumstances ("nurture"), Silence is living as a male and agrees to continue doing so out of obedience to her parents, in order to receive her inheritance, because it's what she's been raised to do, and because she estimates men's lives to be superior to women's within her society. The narrative suggests repeatedly that living like a male does not make one male, whether in Nature's eventual triumph over Nurture, in the narrator's repeated references to Silence's female body, in Silence's own awareness that her body is female (and apparent acceptance of this fact, too), and in Silence's eventual public revelation of her body resulting from her capture of Merlin, who can only be captured by a woman. Likewise, the idea of gender neutrality, or of denying or subverting the gender binary in the way that we mean today, does not seem to occur to the narrator, to Silence, or to either Nature or Nurture. The tension of the romance revolves around whether Silence *is* a man or a woman, what she does as a man (as a

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go against / what his heart wanted him to do, / and whoever works against his will / finds himself often in a state of unhappiness. / Silence's heart was divided against itself] (2673-2681)

woman), why she is a man or a woman, and how she will continue being a man when it is actually her "nature" to be a woman. All of these questions are treated with ambiguity, complexity, contradiction, humor, and irony, but the narrative does not suggest that a gender-neutral existence or social identity is really an option, particularly in a society that places such a high value on lineage.

In this context, I believe that "she" is usually the most logical pronoun for speaking about Silence generally, although I sometimes opt for "he/she" or "he" when it clarifies the circumstances. The gender-neutral pronoun "they" would be another available option, but it too assigns Silence a kind of third gender or a non-gender that I do not believe the narrative supports. The narrative conflict resides precisely in the tension between Silence's highly conventional masculine appearance and activity, and female body.

Ultimately this discussion raises questions of whether a gender is what one *feels* one's gender to be, what one's body or genetics are (whether male, female, or intersex), what gendered conventions one's external appearance and activities most closely adhere to, and/or what gender one presents as socially. All of these questions are at stake in the *Roman de Silence*, and they are still at stake in discussions of gender today. One key difference between Silence's situation and the way gender is talked about today, however, is that Silence's social gender identity cannot very easily be seen as a choice.[15] True, Silence chooses to maintain a male identity when she

[15] Silence in fact puts the entire responsibility for this "choice" on her father: "Mes pere fist de moi son buen... / Et quant jo ving a tel aäge / Que gent comencent estre sage / Mes pere me fist asavoir / Que jo ja ne poroie avoir, / Sire, ireté en vostre tierre. / Et por mon iretage quierre / Me rova vivre al fuer de malle, / Fendre me dras, aler al halle, / Et jo nel vol pas contredire" [My father did with me as he saw fit... / and when I reached / the age of understanding, / my father explained to me / that I could never inherit / in your land, Sire. / And in order to claim my inheritance, / he asked me to live as a man, to wear men's dress and not protect my complexion. / I didn't want to go against him] (6592-6601).

could refuse to do so, but the circumstances are such that to choose another option would be extraordinarily difficult if not impossible: to do so would be to go against the wishes of her parents, to lose her inheritance, to learn entirely different skills and a different way of life than the one to which she is accustomed, and to lose many of her freedoms in favor of a kind of indoor imprisonment.[16] At the same time, selecting any particular pronoun for Silence is a problematic choice, and I wish to make clear that throughout this chapter, whenever I refer to Silence as "she," I am not intending to make a larger statement about the immutability of gender, or to assert that in general someone who identifies as male is still female. But I do believe that in Silence's specific case, the idea that Silence's "nature" is female is essential to an understanding of the romance, and in particular to an understanding of how the narrative is rewriting a certain model of knightly adventure based on the body of its protagonist.

Marriage, Lineage, and Displacement

The *Roman de Silence* does not, in fact, begin with Silence's story, but rather with a series of marriages that each highlight the differing ways in which the exchange of women, to employ the concept that Gayle Rubin analyzes,[17] has the capability to both create and resolve conflict within

[16] See the passage discussed at the beginning of the introduction, verses 2863-2872.
[17] Gayle Rubin's analysis of the "exchange of women" is vast and nuanced, largely based on a combination of readings of Marx and Lévi-Strauss, in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory and Lacan. She presents a feminist reading of Lévi-Strauss's observation that women are exchanged between men within kinship groups, later moving from this analysis to a reconsideration of psychoanalysis and possibilities for a dissolution of the sex/gender system, and systems of exchange, that oppress women. She writes: "Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and *people* - men, women, and children - in concrete systems of social relationships. These relationships always include certain rights for men, others for women. 'Exchange of women' is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to the male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound

particular political and social arenas. These marriages frame Silence's story within a context that foregrounds questions of lineage and women's rights. At the same time, in terms of narrative adventure, the physical mobility implicated by an exchange of women – particularly between territories – also reveals how this kind of mobility does not typically function as a site for adventure even for narrative. This marital model is the one referred to by Simon Gaunt (1995) when he writes that, in contrast to *chanson de geste*, "Romance, on the other hand, consciously makes the role of the exchange of women in the formation of masculine hierarchies within a feudal society a central theme. It thereby offers a new model of masculine identity, constructed in relation to the feminine, but which proves to be no less problematic than the epic model" (73-74). In the *Roman de Silence*, this model will ultimately prove problematic for women too, resulting in unhappy marital outcomes that impose onerous, unjust circumstances on Silence and are ultimately resolved through an undoing of the first of these marriages. At the same time, following these series of exchanges, the *Roman de Silence* challenges the narrative conventions by which women are constitutive of male identity. In what follows, I discuss these marriages in terms of gender, and how they frame and bring about Silence's own adventures and dilemma.

In the first of these marriages, a war between King Evan of England and King Begon of Norway has lasted so long and proven so devastating that the Norwegian king's counselors advise him to offer his daughter Eufeme's hand to King Evan in exchange for ending the hostilities. Despite Evan's statement that "Et bien mon traval emploié / Se jo a feme puis avoir; /

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perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves. The exchange of women becomes an obfuscation if it is seen as a cultural necessity, and when it is used as the single tool with which an analysis of a particular kinship system is approached" (177). The "exchange of women" is thus seen to be a means of establishing relationships between power holders (men) within a kinship system that establishes different kinds of rights on the basis of gender.

Il n'a el mont si chier avoir" [it was well worth the hard work / if I can have this woman to wife, / for there is no greater treasure on earth] (180-183), the marriage is unquestionably motivated by political concerns. In fact, the statement that there is nothing "si chier avoir"as Eufeme foregrounds the ambiguity between personal and material value. The story involves no prior courtship, meeting or even reference to desire, to Eufeme, or to marriage. As Sharon Kinoshita (1995) succinctly puts it, "it is clearly political, a homosocial compact in which the exchange of a woman guarantees the resolution of conflict" (398).

Fittingly, the majority of the episode involves a sort of diplomatic to-and-fro that emphasizes the geographical space traversed by the kings' delegations (first to bring the offer to Evan, then to accept the offer and to bring Eufeme to England). This geographical crisscrossing can be viewed as representative of the political space that must also be traversed in order to create peace between two remote sides. The arrival of Eufeme in England marks the end of the war between Evan and Begon. Their mutual destruction is brought to a halt by an act of alliance made material in marriage, and this marriage is enabled by the exchange and displacement of a female body, figured prominently by Eufeme sailing across the sea to her new home:

> Cange li vens, si s'en retornent
> C'onques plus longues n'I sojornent.
> En Engletiere prendent port.
> Li rois Ebains n'a nient de tort
> […]
> Et puis sil fait bien aäsier,
> Car son cue rot un poi amer
> De la lasté et de la mer. (235-238, 244-246)
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> [As soon as the wind changed, they returned; / they didn't stay there any longer. / They reached the English port. / King Evan omitted none of the niceties / […] / and then saw to her comfort, / for her heart was a little bitter / from the tiring journey across the sea]

In this sense, it is the concrete representation of both the corporeal and symbolic action of Eufeme's movement from one royal household to another. The allusion to the journey's physical

effect on Eufeme reinforces this sense of displacement. Notably, Eufeme is almost completely silent during this entire episode. She displays no desire for Evan, and if Evan has or does indeed desire his wife there is no indication that this is reciprocal. Her primary emotion is weariness from the sea and from travel. The potential for this journey across the ocean to an entirely new home and life to represent its own form of adventure is foreclosed in the text by recounting nothing that happens along it, although its described effect on Eufeme suggests that it was indeed a wearying experience and that Eufeme has responded to it, perhaps been changed by it, both in body and in mind (or heart).

The second and third marriages immediately follow the description of Eufeme and Evan's wedding ceremonies, creating a direct narrative connection between the two events: "Grans fu la fieste en Engletiere. / Atant vint uns cuens en la tiere / Ki avoit .ii. filles jumieles" [The festivities in England were magnificent. / Then a count with twin daughters / came to the land] (277-279). The two daughters marry two counts, their father dies, and the counts then quarrel over who will inherit their recently deceased father-in-law's estate, since they can't prove which daughter is older than the other. The counts duel, kill one another, and King Evan outlaws female inheritance as a result. It is another form of kinship exchange, this time leading to conflict rather than resolving it. The arrival of the twins creates a destabilization of the narrative and social order that in turn opens a space for narrative action and a change of circumstances.[18]

The king's injunction against female inheritance is portrayed as unjust and occasioned by grief and rage, but it also sheds light on women's marital displacements as mirroring the transfers of wealth and prestige that accompany them. These sorts of movements of goods along

[18] Logically, the fact that the twins arrive from a different (and unidentified) land also serves to explain why no one can attest to their respective birth order.

with female bodies, likewise alluded to in the inclusion of valuable animals that sail to England along with Eufeme as a gift for Evan,[19] form a very different model for displacement than that of knightly adventure. Medieval noble women can do little on their own accord to increase their assigned value beyond marriage (though knights can improve their reputations and wealth through feats of prowess and combat), a decision over which characters such as Eufeme are shown to have little control. They may only decrease their potential material worth by giving their bodies away in an unsanctioned manner. The ability to seek wealth, renown, and increased honor, on the other hand, is essential to the motivation of the figure of the adventuring knight, as Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986) has shown.[20]

Women's displacements through marriage, which we might reasonably imagine could have constituted a form of risk and journey into the unknown, as evidenced by Eufeme's own tiring journey into what was only recently enemy territory, do not apparently contain the elements necessary to make narratives of them in the medieval romance genre as it developed in the twelfth century. As Caroline Jewers (1997) writes, "The story of [Eufeme's] marriage is described in masculine terms as a public merger inscribing a limited, passive space for women," and "Similarly, the second narrative, involving the two counts, also belong the paradigm of the *chanson de geste* and its traditional subject matter of dynastic feuding. Once more, women denote access to power and wealth without possessing either themselves" (99). Within this system of exchange, women's itineraries may be mapped out, but do not themselves constitute the setting of adventure. At the very least, they are not treated as such in narrative.

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[19] "Cil prendent la fille al Norois / Et maint cheval avoec morois, / Et ors et ostoirs et lyons" [They took the Norwegian king's daughter / and many black horses as well, / and bears and fowlers and lions, too] (231-233).

[20] See my discussion of Chênerie and the model of knightly adventure in the introduction.

At the same time, the enclosed, domestic, amorous and marital spheres of noble women are not exempt from feudal politics. On the contrary, Eufeme's marriage, as well as those of the count's daughters, illustrate how lineage, genealogy, inheritance and family alliances constituted the foundation upon which medieval power and politics were built. These concerns were dependent upon advantageous marriages and arose from within the familial and domestic sphere. The *Roman de Silence*'s overt interest in gender and inheritance foregrounds these concerns to such a degree that they become the primary anxiety and motivation of Silence's noble parents, and ultimately of the romance itself. In a sense, the romance's *aventure* turns entirely around the problem of female inheritance and the transfer of wealth. Its largest (and largely unspoken) dilemma is that the work's gender trouble, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, cannot be resolved by simply engaging in the outward trappings of knighthood, as Silence remains fundamentally unable, as a cross-dressed knight, to produce her own heir if she continues to live as a social male. Julie Orlemanski (2011) addresses this dilemma when she writes that "genealogical society creates circumstances in which Silence's gender cannot be sustained in independence from anatomy. […] Genealogical discourse insists on the non-arbitrary correspondence of the linguistic with the corporeal, of the gendered with the sexual" (35). In other words, the very genealogical concerns that motivated Silence's parents to raise her as a boy make it impossible to sustain this identity while still participating in genealogical society.

Disguise, identity, and suspense

One important effect of this dilemma is that it establishes for the reader an expectation of Silence's unmasking, and it is this eventuality upon which the work's suspense is largely built. The genealogical impossibility of Silence's circumstances creates a primary form of suspense

that overarches each individual episode, as the reader awaits the moment at which Silence will no longer be able to maintain her male appearance. In this sense, it is significant that Silence's eventual unmasking marks not the mid-point of the story, nor its turning point, but rather its end. It was always the conclusion of the story because it constituted the primary conflict. A comparison can thus be drawn between the *Roman de Silence* and the myth of Iphis and Ianthe, recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Iphis's mother conceals the (female) birth sex of Iphis from her husband, so that they will not have to kill their daughter, being unable to afford a future dowry. The couple thus raise her as a son, with the father being none the wiser. When a woman, Ianthe, is later promised in marriage to Iphis, the two fall in love with one another. Iphis prays to Juno before the wedding, hoping for a divine intercession to resolve her dilemma, as she knows she will have to reveal her body on their wedding night. Juno takes pity upon them and transforms Iphis into a male, avoiding the potential genealogical sterility of their match, as well as the dangerous revelation of Iphis's transgression. This myth points to an alternate possibility – not employed in the *Roman de Silence* – of some kind of magical intervention that could solve Silence's dilemma. However, the narrative, like the saints' lives discussed in the introduction that served as important intertexts for the romance,[21] instead opts for a drama of disguise in which revelation is the anticipated outcome.

Another useful comparison can be made between the *Roman de Silence* and an influential romance that utilizes a disguise-suspense tactic, namely Chrétien de Troye's *Chevalier de la charrette*, in which Lancelot operates in disguise for a significant portion of the story. In writing about this disguise as both a plot element and a narrative device, Ernst Soudek (1972) outlines several reasons that Chrétien might have employed this form of identity secrecy in the context of

[21] Specifically, I refer to the Lives of Eugenia/Eugenios, Euphrosina, and Marina.

Lancelot's story. The first of these gets right at the heart of how disguise – or a discrepancy between external/social identity and internal/individual identity – function in narrative: "Chrétien's primary reason for creating this intricate scheme of secrecy around his hero's identity is at once clear: it is simply to increase the suspense of his audience" (221). In addition, the revelation of this identity proves to be a key moment for Lancelot's ascension to heroism:

> [I]t is possible, and even probable, that Chrétien, in an age when literature abounded in symbol and proleptic devices, intended the revelation of the hero's identity at the height of the battle with Meliagant, that is, long before Gauvain's misfortune at the water-bridge becomes known, as a subtle hint that Lancelot was about to become the best of all knights. (221)

The revelation of Lancelot's identity is thus correlated with his self-actualization, the moment at which his abilities, feats, and prowess accrue to a social individual in the form of a name that also represents the individual's true identity. For Lancelot, the name is the knight.

It is clear that for both the *Roman de Silence* and the *Chevalier de la charrette*, the hero/heroine's unknown identity serves the narrative function of suspense. However, for *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, this suspense is generated between the disguised knight and both the audience and other characters; the audience, assuming they have not heard the story before, is no more "in the know" than the characters who encounter the mysterious knight and wonder who he might be. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the revelation of the knight's identity will in any way be deeply problematic for him, because, unlike for Silence, there is no established back story to suggest as much. Instead, the name will lead to greater renown because it will provide an identity to which renown might accrue.

When his name is eventually revealed, by Guinevere herself, the importance of it having been hidden in the first place is downplayed:

> Lors vint a la reïne et dit:
> Dame, por Deu et por le vostre

Preu, vos requier, et por le nostre,
Que le non a ce chevalier
Por ce que il li doie eidier
Me dites, se vos le savez.
--Tel chose requise m'avez
Demeisele, fet la reïne, / Ou ge n'antant nule haïne
Ne felenie se bien non.
Lanceloz del Laz a a non
Li chevaliers, mien esciant. (3650-3661)

[She then went to the queen and said / My Lady, in God's name and in your own interest, / and in ours, I ask you / to tell me, if you know it, / the name of this knight, / so that we can come to his aid. / In what you are asking me, / damsel, said the queen, / I see nothing hostile / nor mean, quite the contrary. / Lancelot of the Lake is the name / of the knight, as far as I know][22]

This revelation occurs near the midpoint of the romance (as opposed to the endpoint in the *Roman de Silence*) further highlighting that while disguise and secrecy are important themes and devices of *Le Chevalier de la charrette* (for example, corresponding to the hidden nature of Lancelot and Guinevere's love), they are not essential to Lancelot's knightly identity, nor to the continuation of the narrative, nor its central and primary conflict. Naming Lancelot is a real and symbolic step along his quasi-mystical path to becoming a savior and a renowned knight. In direct contrast, the *Roman de Silence* is entirely reliant upon the hidden identity of its title character. Importantly, this identity has very little to do with a name. Silence, is, after all, Silence's actual name, with the potential transition from *Silentius* to *Silentia* marking the passage from man to woman and the neutral *Silence* employed in both situations:

Sel faisons apieler Scilense
El non de Sainte Paciensce,
Por cho que silensce tolt ance.
Que Jhesus Cris par sa poissance
Le nos doinst celer et taisir,
Ensi com lui est a plaizir!
Mellor consel trover n'i puis.

[22] Translation my own on the basis of both the Old French and Charles Méla's (1994) modern French translation.

> 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.
> Se nos li tolons dont cest -us
> Nos li donrons natural us,
> Car cis -us est contre nature. (2067-2082)
>
> [We shall call her Silence, / after Saint Patience, / for silence relieves anxiety. / May Jesus Christ through his power / keep her hidden and silent for us, / according to his pleasure. / I can't think of a better plan. / 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. / If we deprive her of this -us, / we'll be observing natural usage / for this -us is contrary to nature, / but the other would be natural.]

Here, we see that the name is merely a custom, referred to in the Old French by the word *us*, while the *-us* ending of Silence's male name (Silenti*us*) goes against both usage (*us*) and against nature.[23] Nature is also shown to operate according to its own customs (*us*) in the *Roman de Silence*, further blurring the distinction between what is natural and what is normal, in the sense of social norms. The name itself – ostensibly a marker of identity, particularly in genealogical society – conceals Silence's nature by going against custom, and it is mutable rather than stable.

Silence's identity, in the form of a name, is thus always out in the open, plain for everyone to see: she really is named Silence, really is noble, really is the child of Cador and Eufemie, really has become an accomplished knight, really has saved the kingdom. What counts as identity for Lancelot – a name, the basis of renown – is not the same form of identity that is significant for Silence. That her name is a word representing the absence of sound, and therefore the absence of the circulated utterances that make up knightly reputation, underscores the level to

[23] About this change in name, Simon Gaunt (1990) makes the claim that "[Heldris] does not play at all on the truly indeterminate French form of Silence's name, only the Latin version, which must be either masculine or feminine. For Heldris, to call Silence Silencius, rather than Silencia, is not legitimate play, it is simply wrong" (207).

which the naming that stands in for identity in other narratives contains little of substance, resolution or promise for Silence.[24] While the revelation of Lancelot's identity (a name) is a moment at which he fully comes into being as a knight, the revelation of Silence's identity (a gendered identity) is his/her undoing as a knight. In this sense, it is more akin to the eventual public revelation of Lancelot and Guinevere's hidden and socially forbidden love (not in the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, but later in the Lancelot cycle) than it is to the revelation of Lancelot's identity. The consequences might not be so grandly devastating for Silence as they are for Lancelot, Guinevere and Arthur in *La Mort du Roi Arthur*, for example, but they ultimately mark the destruction of his/her knightly identity, and of the very possibility of Silence being a knight at all. It coincides with his/her narrative silencing,[25] and ultimately silences the narrative as well.

The suspenseful risk of revelation has little to do with one's named identity, and everything to do with the implications of this identity vis-à-vis social customs. Silence must not only live as a male in order to inherit her family estate, in doing so she is also put in the impossible position of being, herself, unable to produce heirs to whom she may in turn transmit this wealth. What this points to is a shift from the disguise-suspense model presented in *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, in which naming and identity are forms of self-actualization, to a model in which naming is emptied of implied identity, and what is hidden is destructive, rather

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[24] Gabrial Tanase (2006) makes an interesting comparison between the masculine and feminine forms of Silence's name: "Ce n'est donc pas par hasard si en latin classique silentius s'associe à l'absence de bruit ou de paroles, tandis que silentia désigne le repos, l'inaction, l'oisivité, ou la patience, telle que l'exprime le texte lui-même" [It is thus not an accident that in classical Latin silentius is associated with the absence of sound or spoken words, while silentia designates rest, inactivity, idleness, or patience, as the text itself tell us] (3).

[25] Silence speaks for the last time – whether as a dialogue or as an inner monologue – during the scene in which she is revealed to be a woman. We do not hear from her again after that, nor are we privy to any emotion or thought she might have.

than constitutive, of one's social self. Lancelot, through the various episodes of Chrétien's romance, enacts a form of proving that make his name increasingly socially meaningful, while Silence performs a series of feats that will be undone by her "unmasking." Her feats and reputation as a knight do not adhere indefinitely to her name as a knight-protagonist, and indeed, it is a name that she will be unable to pass on as a knight.

This difference illustrates one of the ways in which the centering of female inheritance in the *Roman de Silence* enacts a reframing of adventure around lineage and the preservation of a family's estate. While *amour courtois* served as a motivation for knightly adventure, and while the knight may conventionally be rewarded with a (politically, socially, economically) good marriage, Silence's adventure takes this concern many steps further by imagining inheritance issues and genealogical unviability as a primary source of suspense and conflict. It is important to note that while Silence's specific form of gender transgression is a rarity in romance,[26] in actuality, romance's concerns for inheritance and lineage were never absent from either the social or the narrative-adventure aspects of knighthood. As Sharon Kinoshita (1995) writes:

> [I]n the High Middle Ages, as fiefs became hereditary and monarchical power became centralized, the preservation of lineage came more and more to be the feudal aristocracy's primary function. In this perspective, the recoding of Silence as female reflects a shift in the way aristocratic bodies mattered: less as *bellatores* charged with maintaining order in the land than as link in a genealogical chain charged with maintaining dynastic legitimacy. (406)

This increasing emphasis on the individual as a "link in a genealogical chain" was likewise mirrored, according to Christopher Callahan (2002), in the desired outcome or end goal of the fictional knight's adventures as well:

> The key to [chivalric heroes'] success in life is to seek adventure, acquire a reputation for prowess, and in the end marry an heiress, who is ideally of superior rank. As genealogical records have revealed, the primary anxiety, the primary envy, that motivated young men

[26] Not, however, in saints' lives, as discussed in the introduction.

> of this rank was marriage envy. For although knightly activities were a source of wealth and renown, marriage was the only means to property and security and was perforce acquired outside the family. (17)

However, since Silence can never expect to marry a woman and produce an heir from this marriage, the genealogical concerns of the romance become a source not of motivation, but of instability and absence, or as Orlemanski puts it "a silence in the family tree."[27] Addressing the same issue from another perspective, Craig Berry (2005) writes that "since marrying an heiress was one of the few methods by which a medieval nobleman could add to his patrimonial holding and increase his status, Silence also functions as the desire object of the quest" (195). Indeed, Silence's inheritance, if she were to receive it, would be substantial - substantial enough that her parents have taken the extraordinary step of raising her as a boy in order to pass it down. But the text cuts off – almost literally castrates – the potential realization of this desire: either Silence is an impotent man, or she is a disinherited woman. The only way in which this desire for lineage and inheritance can be realized is through the undoing of Silence's knightly persona and the restoration of female inheritance, both of which occur in the narrative's conclusion. For Silence, the object of the quest must thus be the undoing of her social identity. Her adventures are mere placeholders on the road to this end goal, and they are suspenseful and meaningful only because we know that they must somehow be dissolved in the end.

Marriage and lineage are also problematic for many of the knightly models of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Lancelot and Tristan are well-known examples of knights motivated by an impossible, and ultimately destructive and infertile form of desire. What is key to their success as knights is not key to the success of their narratives. Instead, it is their failure to live up

[27] From the title to Orlemanski's 2011 article: "A Silence in the Family Tree: The Genealogical Subject in Heldris of Cornwall's *Silence*."

to an ideal that in many ways constitutes the real suspense and interest of their stories. Likewise, for figures such as Yvain in Chrétien's *Chevalier au lion*, marriage is only the beginning of, and in fact the reason for, a series of obstacles that the knight-protagonist must overcome in order to *win back* his own wife's trust and love.

However, Silence's story is not a love story. This is, in fact, one of the *Roman de Silence*'s most unique and potentially disruptive characteristics, and one of the ways in which it maps onto the saints' lives that served as models for Silence's cross-dressed identity. The only real love in the romance exists between her parents, whose courtship will be the subject of my next discussion, while Silence's experiences with the desires of others – namely the queen, Eufeme – are revealed to be sources of danger, conflict, and false accusations. Unlike the typical knight-protagonist, and unlike the emplaced lady as object of the knight's desire, the impossibility of Silence's position, and/or its motivation, has nothing to do with love. Love does not inspire her to great or greater feats. She does not require the sort of coupling that forms the basis of Lancelot's legend, or, more importantly, that lends narrative substance to female characters such as Guinevere, Enide, or Laudine. She is, most notably, a female character who is portrayed as being without amorous desire.[28] Silence is apparently unbound by sexual desire, but she is entirely bound by considerations of inheritance and genealogy, and her ostensible lack of desire proves to be just as problematic as the unsanctioned desires of Tristan and Iseult, or Lancelot and Guinevere.

[28] See also Peggy McCracken (1994) and, as cited by Craig Berry (2005): Barbara Newman. 1995. *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 165; Barbara Newman. 2003. *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 122-134.

Desire and the Language of Adventure

While love and amorous desire may be absent from Silence's motivations, they nonetheless play an important role in the narrative, first in the context of the marriage of Silence's parents, and second in Silence's conflict with the queen. Having shown how desire, lineage, and marriage are intimately linked to knightly adventure as sources of motivation, conflict, and reward, in this section I would like to explore how desire – even when sanctioned and resulting in marriage – can itself be cast in romance as a form of adventure. This recasting of adventure as an intimate, corporeal experience of desire does not substitute for or displace adventure as an active engagement with the external world; desire is not equally "adventure" in that sense. However, it does reveal the degree to which adventure is a narrative phenomenon, constructed by and within the text through the employment of certain kinds of language. The emphasis on the narrativity of adventure in turn sets the stage for what I will later show is the *Roman de Silence*'s staging of performance and language as forms of prowess and as the material of adventure.

The interiority of desire may indeed at first seem counter to the notion of adventure, and such a recasting does involve a rupture with at least one of knightly adventure's most prominent and consistent features, namely a spatial displacement outward, away from the familiar and the domestic. This displacement is, according to both Marie-Luce Chênerie and Philippe Ménard as cited in the introduction, one of the first and most essential aspects of the figure of the *chevalier errant*. Certainly, any model for intimate adventure will by necessity need to express a basic distance from, and transformation of, the classic understanding of romance adventure. I do not mean to argue that the intimate adventure fulfills all of the qualifications according to which romance adventure has been broadly defined. I do mean to suggest, however, that it is presented in language that that overtly echoes knightly or risky adventure.

Cador and Eufemie's romance begins after Cador, Silence's future father and one of the best of King Evan's knights, has slain a dragon, saving the king and his men from what is depicted as real risk of demise. The dragon slaying episode calls upon one of verse romance's enduring tropes (the knight vs. the dangerous beast) and serves to position the narrative within the romance conventions of bodily risk, the triumph of a worthy knight, and the motivating force of love (Cador kills the dragon so that he may have Eufemie, whom he loves, as a reward, as the king promises any eligible woman to anyone who can defeat the dragon). Following this episode, it is notable that Cador and Eufemie's courtship will involve many of these same elements and will blur the lines between the harm incurred from fighting the dragon and from love.

As promised, the king rewards Cador's valiancy with a gift of land, and the promise that he may marry anyone he wishes, as long as that person is not already betrothed. While Cador already has Eufemie in mind, it quickly becomes clear that he has not told her this. More immediately pressing for Cador is the fact that upon returning to court, he falls gravely ill, which the text tells us is the result of having inhaled too much of the dragon's smoke. It just so happens that the most skilled healer in the land is Eufemie. In a mirroring of the reward bestowed upon Cador for his knightly prowess, the king promises Eufemie that she may marry whomever she wishes if she succeeds in curing Cador, who is moreover a relative of the king and much beloved by him. Cador and Eufemie's mutual desire, their mutual inability to communicate their desire to one another, and the marital nature of their rewards, constitute the primary objects and obstacles of their courtship. This episode – from Cador falling ill until the two obtain permission to marry – extends over more than a thousand lines, with the majority consisting of descriptions of their emotional state, its bodily manifestations, and their tormented thoughts. What sustains the episode over this length of text during which the primary action is emotional are the tensions

created between a multitude of contrasting elements, including active terms depicting bodily harm and/or reflecting the language of knightly combat and adventure. These contrasting elements can roughly fit into binary categories such as hidden/revealed, speech/silence, pain/pleasure, harm/cure, action/inaction, nearness/separation. The interplay of these concepts forms a model of discursive and intimate adventure that repositions and re-genders the content and form of knightly adventure, while simultaneously maintaining its risks and rewards.

The most immediately evident of these oppositional pairings stages a vicious cycle between illness and cure. While it is the dragon's smoke that has caused Cador's initial malady, it is the woman who is charged with healing him (and who succeeds in doing so) who inflicts another type of harm on his body, this time in the form of the intensely felt pains of desire. As Cador laments: "Ele m'a fait d'un mal délivre, / Mais d'un moult gregnor voir m'enivre, / Car ivres sui et esmaris / Quant jo languis, si sui garis" [She has saved me from one malady, / but now, truly, a much worse one poisons me, / for I must be drunk or mad / if I still languish now that I am cured] (660-663).

Eufemie thus becomes like the dragon in that she metaphorically poisons Cador, but she also embodies his only hope for a cure. Not only does she nurse him back to health from the dragon's harmful smoke, but it is likewise only she who can cure Cador of his second affliction, by reciprocating his desire. This situation is a literary trope in which love is an illness and the desired woman is the infecting body, but also the only possible cure.[29] It also conflates the

[29] In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, for example, an exaggerated reference to this trope presents Nicolette's body as having healing powers even for those ill of something other than love: "L'autr'ier vi un pelerin, / nes estoit de Limosin, / malades de l'esvertin, / si gisoit ens en un lit, / mout par estoit entrepris, / de grant mal amaladis; / tu passas devant son lit, / si soulevas ton traïn / et ton peliçon ermin, / la cemisse de blanc lin, / tant que ta ganbete vit: / garis fu li pelerins / et tos sains, ainc ne fu si; / si se leva de son lit, si rala en son païs / sains et saus et tos gari" [The other day I saw a pilgrim / from Limousin; / he was sick with madness, / lying in bed, / doing

physical effects of bodily harm from the dragon's smoke with those suffered as a result of unrealized desire. This alternation between sickness and cure turns the state of falling in love into an active and bodily exchange and ordeal. Notably, Eufemie has also been infected: "Par Deu, ai mainte gent sane[e], / Al daërrain sui engane[e] / Car or sai tres bien par verté / Que par Cador ai l'enferté. / Trestolt l'ai par cest damoisiel" [My God, I have cured many a man, / but I have been badly repaid by the last one. / For now I know the truth very well: / I caught this disease from Cador. / This young man is highly contagious] (779-783).

Now they are both ill. This situation lends to love a physical, risky and active dimension, while also opening up an abundance of oppositional discursive possibilities that are explored through extended metaphors and the mirroring of Cador and Eufemie's emotional and physical states. Indeed, the physical effects of this love are quite serious:

> Vellier la nuit, jaindre, pener,
> Qu'Amors le prent a demener,
> Fai le fremir, suer, tranbler.
> Pis que fievre li puet sambler:
> Car fievre est lués de tel nature
> C'om le piert sovent par froidure
> U par bien durement suer;
> Mais Amor ne violt remuer
> Ne por grant froit, ne por calor;
> Ne n'espargne home por valor,
> Ne por fierté, ne por promesse
> […]
> A Cador pert bien qu'ele est fierce. (719-732)
>
> [He was awake all night, suffering, groaning, / for Love had seized control of him, / made him shiver, sweat and tremble. / It was worse than the symptoms of a fever, / for fever is such that / a man often loses it through chill / or by sweating copiously. / But Love

very poorly / and gravely ill. / You passed before him, / lifting your train / and your tunic lined with ermine fur, / and your shirt of white linen, / so that he saw your little leg. / This pilgrim was straight away cured, / he regained his full health. / He got up out of bed, / and returned to his homeland, / completely well, completely cured] (XI). Translation my own, based on the Old French and Philippe Walter's modern French translation.

refuses to give way / to extreme heat or cold; / he doesn't spare a man for valor / or yield to threats or promises. / […] / Love seemed very fierce to Cador.]

Love itself becomes like an opponent, and the ability to endure it is akin to a form of combat, though its effects are those of a malady. This dual language of illness and embattlement saturates Cador and Eufemie's narrative. It is not merely a feeling, but rather a physical battle through which they each suffer and are wounded. When Love strikes Cador, it is violent:

Amors que fait? .i. dart soslieve
Qui plus est trançans d'almiele,
Si l'a feru sos la mamiele.
'H[e]las!' fait il, 'qui si me point?'
Et Amors pries del cuer se joint
Et tant li greieve l'envaïe
Qu'il gient, et crie: 'Aïe! aïe! (680-686)

[And what did Love do? He took up a dart / sharper than a lance's point, /and struck Cador just beneath the breast. / 'Alas!' he cried. 'What has pierced me so?' / And then Love pressed him close to the heart, / and this attack hurt him so / that he moaned and cried, 'Ah! Ah!']

Cador is physically wounded by Love's attack, and the attack is described in terms of weaponry and bodily trauma: "dart," "plus est trançans d'alemiele," "grieve et l'envaïe." In contrast to Silence's donning of men's clothing and subsequent movement through the space of the exterior world on the model of knightly adventure, Cador and Eufemie's love scenes employ the language of risk, danger, and combat to describe an event that is largely interior, both in terms of the rooms in which it is contained as well as its essential psychological and emotional character. The combat is figurative, but its effects on the body are at the same time real and physical. The risk is not only bodily harm, but in fact a radical alteration of the body's integrity. The effects of this destabilization are like a denaturing of the body:

Si grans cals ne puet vaintre mie
Le froit que j'ai, bele Eufemie.
Li frois ne puet avoir valor
Ki puisse vaintre ma calor.

Anbedoi sunt ivel en force;
Li uns enviers l'altre s'esforce,
Ne puet l'uns l'altre sormonter.
Oïstes vos ainc mais conter
De calt, de froit, qui sunt contraire,
Que en un cors peüscent faire?
S'en moi peüst valoir Nature,
Ja voir si estrange aventure
A mon las cors n'en avenist;
L'une viers l'altre ne se tenist.
Mais jo sui tols desnaturés
Et si cuic ester enfaiturés. (1017-1033)

[There is no heat hot enough to conquer / the cold I feel, belle Eufemie. / There is no cold that has the strength / to overcome my heat. / Both are equal in strength; / one contends with the other. / Have you ever heard tell / what the opposition of heat and cold / can do inside the body? / If Nature could assert her strength in me, / this strange state of affairs / could not occur in my weary body; / the one would not struggle with the other. / But I am totally dis-natured; / I think I am bewitched.]

The play of contrasting binary elements (hot/cold) is evident here, even more so in the Old French, with the lyrically suggestive and sequential reversals of the terms uns/altre ("Li uns enviers l'altre s'esforce, / Ne puet l'uns l'altre sormonter," 1022-1023) and the clear declaration of their opposition ("De calt, de froit, qui sunt contrarie," 1025). This play of opposites whose simultaneous existence should be precluded by the mutual exclusion of their terms, leads to a state of being that is described as "desnaturés" (1032).[30] This suggests that passionate love or desire enacts a form of destabilization and denaturing, similar to the text's treatment of Silence's gendered identity, that opens up a space for the reformulation of assumed relationships between bodies, and between the self and body.

[30] The connection between the desiring body that is "desnaturés" and Silence's "unnatural" cross-dressing (in terms of Nature's strong opposition to it) is hard to ignore, although the direct relationship is unclear. At the very least, they each participate in a shared thematic of destabilization and denaturing, each of which engender new narrative and social possibilities.

Significantly, Cador describes this denaturing as a "si estrange aventure" (1029). This language highlights both the way in which adventure is being rewritten as an interior event (or vice versa), and in which this rewriting alters the notion adventure itself, making it "si estrange." The language of malady, risk, bodily harm, and combat becomes the narrative material for adventure as an affective experience of desire. The model for intimate adventure is thus one that is simultaneously at odds with other forms of knightly proving, while at the same time often described and understood in terms that were proper to these more externally displaced masculine feats.

The portrayal of love as combat, illness or suffering is not unique to the *Roman de Silence*.[31] Its extensive treatment in the text echoes, for example, Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Cligès*, in which Soredamor and Alexandre's love for one another unfolds over roughly 600 verses. In Chrétien's text, Soredamor is the first to be wounded:

> Or la fera Amors dolente
> Et molt se cuide bien venchier
> Dou grant orgueil et dou dangier
> Qu'ele li a touz jorz mené.
> Bien a Amors droit asené,
> Qu'au cuer l'a de son dart ferue.
> Sovent palist, et si tressue,
> Et maugré suen amer l'estuet. (456-463)
>
> [Now Love is going to make her suffer / and thinks it will avenge itself / for the refusal and great pride / that she always showed him. / Love aimed true / With his arrow, he struck her in the heart. / She often goes pale, sweating, / despite herself, he made her love][32]

[31] Ovid, for example, speaks of love in terms of war and armies (*Amores*, Book I, poem IX), although he is not referencing the pain of love but rather its obstacles and efforts.
[32] For all English translations of Cligès, translations are my own, on basis of the Old French and Charles Méla and Olivier Collet's (1994) modern French translation.

The narrative then enacts a long discourse that plays upon oppositional pairings such as strength and weakness, pain and pleasure, partially in the form of Soredamor's extended inner monologue. For Soredamor and Alexandre, as for Cador and Eufemie, love is a form of battle: "Amors les .II. amanz travaille, / Vers cui il a prise bataille" [Love torments the two lovers, with whom it is engaged in battle] (573-574).

Here too, the physical suffering is prolonged by the fact that neither of the embattled lovers is able to communicate their desire: "Alixandres aime et desirre / Celle qui por s'amor soupire, / Mais il nel set ne ne savra / Jusqu'a tant que il en avra / Maint mal et meint ennui sofert." (575-579) [Alexandre loves and desire / she who sighs for his love / but he does not know it; and he will not know it / until the moment when he will have / suffered much pain and many torments].[33] Again, love and desire are not equivalent to the more outward, and outwardly displaced, activities of the *chevalier errant*, but the language used in these passages positions the experience of love and desire in direct relation to this model.

In medieval romance, both men and women suffer the same bodily affliction in love, and both are equally capable (or incapable) of doing battle with this emotion, and equally capable (or incapable) of resolving this conflict through its communication and consummation. In *Cligès*, it is ultimately the queen who must broker understanding between the two lovers, and in the *Roman de Silence*, this is accomplished nearly inadvertently through a slip of tongue, when Eufemie accidentally exclaims "Ah mi!" instead of "Ami," alerting Cador to her inner state (882-915). Significantly for our comparison between these two works, each of these episodes of love displays a mirroring of the two lovers, and this reflective equality will ultimately result in

[33] And again: "Et ce que li uns l'autre voit / Ne plus n'osent dire ne fere / Lors torne molt a grant contraire" [And that one sees the other / without daring to say or do more / is for them a source of torment] (588-590).

producing a child (Cligès and Silence), the romances' respective titular heroes/heroines, who will each end up in a sort of genealogical bind. For Cligès, this takes the form of a mutual desire between himself and Fénice, who must nonetheless marry Cligès's uncle, Alis, even though the latter had engaged a contract with Alexandre to never marry, as a condition for their sharing of power over Constantinople. Fénice and Cligès thus share a love that is illicit and complicated by familial ties. Like Silence, Fénice must give up her identity as a solution to her dilemma, faking her death and living for years (voluntarily) hidden in a tower that Cligès can regularly visit, before being understandably overcome by a desire to once again be outside, thus leading to her discovery.

Both *Cligès* and the *Roman de Silence* ultimately resolve their genealogical dilemmas through a form of revelation: a passing knight sees Cligès and Fénice, assumed to be dead, in the garden, and tells Alis, whereas Silence reveals her own identity after capturing Merlin. For Cligès and Fénice, their troubles are resolved when Alis dies and they are able to openly marry. Cligès transforms from fugitive to emperor; Fénice moves from literal non-identity, having performed her own death, to reclaiming her identity and becoming queen. Silence, however, moves from being a knight of great renown to a silenced queen who is married to someone she does not apparently love, or at least the text never suggests that she does. The fact that King Evan openly silences his first wife, Eufeme (6398-6407) only reinforces the extent to which silence is a condition for Silence's transition to womanhood, and his directive to the queen to "alés en vostre canbre" [go to your room] (6407) echoes Silence's earlier fears about her own potential imprisonment in a room if she were to live as a woman. Interestingly, this possibility seems to reflect the conclusion of *Cligès* not for Fénice, but rather for the women who follow, as the text tells us that Fénice's example was henceforth used as a reason to keep the empress of

Constantinople in guarded enclosure: “Por ce einsi com an prison / Est gardee an Costantinoble, / Ja n’iert tant riche ne tant noble / L’empererriz, quex qu’ele soit” [It is thus that as if in prison / the empress is kept guarded in Constantinople / no matter who she is, / no matter how powerful and how noble she is] (6690-6693). Thus, despite the two texts’ many similarities, the resolution of Silence's circumstances is more akin to a loss of identity and bodily autonomy than to the triumphant return-to-being-and-power experienced by Fénice and Cligès.

Cligès and the *Roman de Silence* also portray love and desire as forces that are potentially disruptive to the social order. The same denaturing of the body that made love a *si estrange aventure* is reflected by love’s influence on the body politic as well. Indeed, desire itself engenders the possibility of a rupture with the most important feudal aspect of coupling, namely the aforementioned preservation and transmission of wealth, political power, and lineage. This potential disruption is evident in Fénice and Cligès’s illicit love, although their circumstances ultimately turn out to their advantage and to the advantage of the empire. Similarly, for Cador and Eufemie, the destabilizing effect of love ultimately prompts the possibility of permanent displacement, as Cador contemplates exile with Eufemie if the king doesn’t approve their marriage:

> Cador a dit: ‘Que c’est tolt nient!
> Se on droiture ne nos tient,
> Amie, j’en ferai mervelle,
> Car mes corages me conselle
> Que en essil o vos m’en voise,
> Tolt a laron, sans faire noise.’
> Ele respond: ‘Tel n’oï onques!
> Bials amis, mervelliés vus donques
> S’essil sofrés por vostre amie,
> Or voi qu’es homes nen a mie
> Si grans cuers come g’i ai creü.
> Amis, or ai jo bien veü
> Et sai de fi et sui certaine
> Que del mal don’t ne suis pas sainne

> Que vos estes en grant fretel.
> Mais jo certes ne m'esmervel
> S'en bos vois o vus u en lande. (1345-1361)
>
> [Cador said, 'It doesn't matter/ if they don't deal fairly with us, love, / I'll give them a surprise, / for my innermost being counsels me / to seek exile with you, / in all secrecy, without making a noise.' / She replied, 'I've never heard of such a thing! / Dear love, it would certainly be amazing / for you to suffer exile for your beloved! / Now I see that men's hearts / aren't as great as I had thought. / Beloved, now it's clear to me, / I've seen for certain, / that you are profoundly disturbed / by that illness from which I suffer, too. / As for me, I certainly wouldn't think it strange / to wander with you in forest or field]

Cador and Eufemie thus communicate their willingness to forgo the social, financial and political possibilities of their union – or of any other potential unions – in order to preserve their love. Eufemie's reaction to Cador's proposal is one of both surprise and agreement: she's never heard of such a thing ("Tel n'oï onques!", 1351) and she tells Cador that he is "en grant fretel" (1359). The *Dictionnaire Godefroy* shows that this word (from "frestel") refers to both a noisy racket or cacophony and, in verbal form, such actions as "faire retentir, parcourir en galopant à grand bruit" [to make ring out, go galloping around with great noise] and "s'agiter, avec diverses nuances de signification" [to grow restless, with diverse nuances of meaning]. The state of being in "grant fretel" is thus essentially destabilized and without harmony and suggests the notion of a spatial displacement that borders on the out of the control. Significantly, this instability is also expressed partially in terms of a disruption in gendered expectations, as it suggests to Eufemie that men's hearts aren't as "grans" (1354-1355) as she once thought. Clearly, Cador's passionate heart does not fit in with her notions of masculinity. Knights may wander to seek certain types of adventure, but not this kind of adventure. Nonetheless, Eufemie accepts the possibility of displacement, and though she recognizes it as unusual and perhaps also unreasonable, it is one that ultimately "ne m'esmervel" (1360); she wouldn't find this strange adventure of wandering indefinitely in the woods and fields to be very astonishing after all.

In fact, as Georges Duby (2002) reminds us, courtly love was always defined by a certain level of risk, which he refers to as a form of adventure: “Aimer de fine amour, c’était courir l’aventure” [To love with fine amour, is to run to the risk of *aventure*] (325). *Aventure* here means something very different from the knightly variety and refers rather to a romantic affair. However, as we have seen in the *Roman de Silence* (and this is the case for medieval romance more generally), the difference between these kinds of adventures becomes blurred through a language that situates desire in direct relation to physical adventure. They are not the same, but *aventure* is clearly a capacious category that can include the romantic as well as the chivalric. The meaning of adventure is in fact formed through its use in these medieval narratives - it may comprise different models and may interrogate the space between them.

Fine amour itself differs from the amorous experiences of Cador and Eufemie, in that *fine amour* is built on the model of a young man falling in love with a woman who is already married to someone else, or who is otherwise unattainable. The risk run by the lovers is of being caught or found out and the risk run to society is of the destabilizing of the institution of marriage and of lineage. This form of adventure, which is both interior and interpersonal, is largely played out through the fabrication of signs and other means of intimate communication: “Obligé à la prudence, et surtout à la discretion, il lui fallait s’exprimer par signes, édifier au sein de la cohue domestique la clôture d’une sorte de jardin secret, et s’enfermer avec sa dame dans cet espace d’intimité” [Obligated to remain prudent, and above all discrete, it was necessary [for the lover] to express himself through signs, to construct within the midst of the domestic crowd the enclosure of a kind of secret garden, and to shut himself in with his lady in this intimate space] (ibid, 325). The intimacy of the domestic space, paradoxically offset by the controlling gaze of those who share it, necessitates that the conditions for this form of adventure are ever-

greater intimacy, an ever-more-private interiority. In Georges Duby's formulation, the physical space of the room or garden where the lovers meet must be figuratively shrunk to an even smaller space of mutual understanding, a new enclosure in which to meet.

Spatially, this form of adventure is in complete opposition to the model of the outward travelling and adventuring knight, who, as Marie-Luce Chênerie (1986) notes, was always "lancé vers un ailleurs, dans un déplacement fictif qui devait donner un sens à sa vocation, le combat, à ses aptitudes, la force et la liberté, et à d'autres aspirations distinctives" [set out on his way towards somewhere else, in a fictional displacement that was meant to give a meaning to his vocation, combat, aptitudes, force, and liberty, along with other distinctive aspirations] (18). The essential directionality of the knight is an outward one, creating an ever-larger space for adventure. The *estrange aventure* of desire, on the other hand, is deeply interwoven with another body and must be resolved through the sharing of language and signs between these two bodies as a substitute for, and means of attaining, the corporeal communication of realized desire. Georges Duby suggests in fact that for *fine amour*, no resolution of physical desire *within the other* is truly possible:

> Ce que chantaient les poètes retardait donc indéfiniment, repoussait toujours dans le futur le moment où tomberait l'aimée, où son servant prendrait en elle son plaisir. Celui-ci, le plaisir de l'homme, se trouvait déplacé. Il ne résidait plus dans l'assouvissement mais dans l'attente. Le plaisir culminait dans le désir lui-même. C'est ici que l'amour courtois révèle sa vraie nature : onirique. L'amour courtois concédait à la femme un pouvoir certain. Mais il maintenait ce pouvoir confiné au sein d'un champ bien défini, celui de l'imaginaire et du jeu. (325)
>
> [What the poets sang thus delayed indefinitely, always put off into the future the moment when the beloved would fall, when her servant would take his pleasure in her. This, the man's pleasure, found itself displaced. It no longer resided in fulfillment but in waiting. Pleasure culminated in desire itself. It is here that courtly love reveals its true nature: oniric. Courtly love concedes to the woman a certain power. But it maintains this power confined within a well-defined field, that of the imaginary and games]

The form of displacement described here is that of a body which one is forever approaching and yet never reaching. The displacement is of desire, but also of the desired. It is a form of adventure in which *adventure itself* is the only reward and outcome. For Duby, this eternal displacement essentially reduces women's power even within the realm of intimate adventure reserved for them: what is viewed as their triumph is to remain unattainable. They must sustain desire but never fulfill it. The risks of this game are considerable.

In contrast to this particular courtly model, however, the desire shared by Cador and Eufemie is at once intimate and attainable. In it, there is little risk of discovery. They are neither betrothed nor yet married; they are each free to choose one another, and this choice would be wise and socially celebrated. There are no external obstacles to their love. The king has promised both of them that they may marry whomever they please. When they try to hide their desire from the king while waiting for his permission to make good on their rewards, they ultimately fail to completely dissimulate their feelings, and there are no negative consequences for this.[34] Nevertheless, the basic structure of their *aventure* resides in the tension of unfulfilled desire and the necessity of language as a means of accessing it. This adventure is not the equivalent of the adventure story, or of the knightly model of adventure, but it reveals how adventure is constructed through a narrative language that is flexible enough to encompass other seemingly vastly different circumstances. In other words, it highlights the narrativity of adventure.

[34] "Li cuens de Cestre est moult voiseus: / Ainc nen oïstes mains noiseus. / Voit les cluignier et lor esgart: / Dés or n'a il mais nul regart / Qu'il n'ait trestolt lor vol seü. / Fait quanses qu'il ne l'ait veü" [The count of Chester was very prudent; / you never heard of anyone less rash. / He saw their lowered eyes, their looks, / he didn't need a second glance, / he saw at once what they wanted, / but he acted as if he hadn't noticed] (1399-1404).

From *estrange aventure* to *male aventure*

More darkly, the risks of desire can be later glimpsed, once the narrative turns its attention to Cador and Eufemie's daughter/son Silence, in Queen Eufeme's attempted seduction of Silence, who does not reciprocate the queen's desire.[35] Like other forms of intimate adventure, the episodes is built on a language of adventure, but its risks and physicality are heightened, as Silence is placed in a truly perilous situation, both in responding to the queen, and when her response prompts the queen to vindictively accuse her of rape. Caroline Jewers (1997) examines the queen's seduction scene in relation to Cador's slaying of the dragon:

> [T]he vocabulary used of the queen recalls that used of the serpent. The beast of Malroi shares Eufeme's carnal and voracious nature, and her inner and outer blackness. The narrator says of her that 'le cuer el ventre a noir' (3716) [her heart was black in her chest]. Furthermore, the dragon exhales smoke from its venomous mouth, while the queen burns with rage and ardure (3698), and uses dangerous wiles to poisonous effect. Although she protests, 'Jo ne sui mie mordans beste' (3831) [I am not a biting animal], her mordant behavior contradicts that claim. Because Heldris turns the episode into a test of loyalty to Ebain, and uses almost mock-heroic language to convey Silence's staunch resistance, one might forget that the heroine is female were it not for the continual reminders of her predicament in the form of juxtaposed gender terms […] Silence thinks in masculine, chivalric terms and longs for escape from the predatory Eufeme, who plots a further *male aventure* (3965) with another locus classicus of chivalric romance, the staged rape. (104)

As Jewers points out, this is not an *estrange aventure*, but rather a *male aventure*. It is the wrong sort of adventure, an adventure that has gone wrong, a perversion of adventure. Here, enclosure is not the intimate space of interpersonal communication and shared signs, but rather it is a

[35] This is what the text suggests, at least. The specter of homosexuality is however raised in the romance, with the queen accusing Silence of being a homosexual male. Regardless, the text explicitly states that the queen would be disappointed with Silence's anatomy. As Jane Tolmie observes, "The Queen's rage at Silence's rejection of her body is also a rage at homosexuality and Silence's imagined contempt for women ('il despist femes et desdaigne' l. 3940), raising of course the issue of separate constitution(s) of gender identification and sexual orientation, and the apparently problematic instability of such constitution(s) – thus the inapplicability of discourses of stability." (Ibid, 21)

battleground between unfriendly foes. If Love waged war on the bodies of the Cador and Eufemie, here desire wages war between the bodies of Silence and Eufeme. There is good reason to believe that the masculinized, physical combat that serves as metaphor for this scene of seduction would be more easily overcome than the feminized, desiring one the that instead rears its head. Silence's impulse here is to flee – to enact a physical displacement and spatial distance – rather than to fight. The enclosure of the scene and her lack of appropriate weaponry – in contrast to her prowess in physical combat – instead leave her mute and motionless, unable to give the queen what she wants, unable to explain why, unable to act.

What this scene emphasizes is that there is one arena in which Silence can never perform as a man, regardless of her other knightly accomplishments. The ability to carry out men's external, social or political activities has never in fact been the most radical aspect of female cross-dressing, in the Middle Ages or otherwise. Instead, it is sexuality that circumscribes cross-gendered boundaries. Michèle Perret (1985) describes how this phenomenon differs for men and women:

> De fait, la cause du travestissement n'est pas la même pour les hommes et pour les femmes : on remarque que les hommes se travestissent pour avoir plus facilement accès à la femme désirée, alors que les femmes le font, parfois pour fuir un homme, et en tous cas pour bénéficier des privilèges masculins: droit d'héritier, de voyager seule… Donc, alors que la période de travestissement est une période d'intense activité sexuelle pour l'homme, elle est le plus souvent, pour la femme, une période de vie asexuée. (329)
>
> [In fact, transvestitism does not have the same cause for men as for women: we may observe that men cross-dress to have greater access to the desired woman, while women do so sometimes to flee a man, and in any case to benefit from masculine privileges: the right to inherit, to travel alone... Thus, while cross-dressing represents a period of intense sexual activity for the man, it is most often, for the woman, an asexual phase of life]

The fact that Eufeme is eventually revealed to have been having an affair with a man disguised as a nun reinforces Perret's distinction between the sexualized cross-dressed male and the desexualized cross-dressed female. Silence's apparent asexuality, and lack of male anatomy,

proves to be not only an absence, but a nearly fatal obstacle made very present in her interaction with the queen. In case there were any doubts, the text forcefully reminds us that Silence lacks both male desire and sexual ability, and it does so in part by presenting this intimate conflict as a physical combat in which she has no weapon, understood both figuratively and anatomically. She also finds herself caught up in another dilemma, which is that the proof of her innocence in the queen's rape accusation lies in the revelation of her female body. She must thus choose between maintaining her male identity and proving her innocence, potentially saving her life. She chooses to maintain her male identity, and although her life is spared, it is the queen's later revenge, in the form of forced exile justified by a search for Merlin, that is the impetus for Silence's eventual unmasking.

Intimate adventure can thus be both *estrange* and *male*, marking its distance from typical forms of knightly wandering and proving. For Silence, however, cross-dressing turns desire into a peril. The possibility that desire and intimacy can themselves be forms of adventure is at once highly transformative of the traditional adventure model, while also firmly based in existing tropes already evident in the romances Chrétien de Troyes. The language used to describe such scenes of desire reveals how it is discourse - or narrative itself - that constructs the content of the knight's adventures and that ultimately constructs our own notion of adventure as well.

The Adventure of Performance

Even for the knight-protagonist that Silence becomes, adventure takes a very different shape from the masculine, chivalric, Arthurian variety. Silence is not, it turns out, motivated by an innate desire for knightly adventure. While Silence enjoys and excels at knightly activities, she does not simply ride off in search of adventure. She goes to court at the insistence of the king and

is sent to France following the queen's false rape accusation. While she is successful and gains great renown in France, we are not privy to any adventures she may have had there, if any. There is no indication that she enacts the sort of displacement that would distance her from the court in the mode of the *chevalier errant*. She returns to do battle at the king's command, and while she proves to be an excellent warrior, this is not in itself an adventure in the narrative sense: it is war.

The overarching feat of prowess in the *Roman de Silence* consists instead of the very fact of Silence's cross-dressing and success as a male, or the performance of gender. Within this context, the work's sequences of what might more properly be called adventures each stem from a particular conflict brought about by Silence's gendered circumstances. The sequences to which I am referring are Silence's two movements away from home or the court, in which she faces unknown circumstances, displays a specific kind of prowess, and overcomes particular challenges, returning to court each time with a newfound identity. Such sequences occur twice in the narrative, first when Silence runs away from home to join a pair of traveling minstrels, and second when Silence is sent away by King Evan to find and capture Merlin.

In the first instance, Silence's departure is occasioned by an inner conflict in which he/she does not know how to choose between the twin poles of "chivalry" or "embroidery," or between his/her male and female identities. Silence reasons that minstrelsy will instead enable an existence between these categories, as music can serve as both a feminine and a masculine activity. In the second instance, Silence is sent away from the court following a false rape accusation by the queen Eufeme, an accusation that she cannot fully dispute without revealing her female body. As an added gendered dimension, Silence's exile involves having to capture Merlin, who can only be captured by a woman. As we will see, each of these adventures involves

a form of performance rather than physical combat, and each highlights different aspects of discourse or discursive prowess as a subject of conflict and a way out of this conflict.

I discuss both of these adventure sequences in the remainder of this chapter, beginning chronologically with the first wandering adventure, which at first glance bears very little resemblance to any form of knightliness. This is the episode in which Silence disguises herself as a jongleur, marking the transitional moment between Silence's childhood and her coming of age. In this episode, though Silence is living as a boy, she is not yet a knight, nor does she know if she will become one. At a certain moment, Silence wonders at her own potential cowardice – since women do not usually perform knightly tasks nor do battle – and also at her lack of feminine skills, and deliberates upon her situation:

> S'il avenoit del roi Ebayn
> Que il morust hui u demain,
> Feme raroit son iretage.
> Et tu iés ore si salvage,
> Ne sai a us de feme entendre.
> Alques t'esteveroit aprendre
> Dont te seüsces contenir,
> Car tolt cho puet bien avenir.
> Et se coze est par aventure
> Que si fais us longhes te dure,
> Bien sai, tu ieres chevaliers
> Puet sc'estre coärs, u laniers,
> Car ainc ne vi feme maniere
> D'armes porter en tel maniere.
> Tolt cho repute avenir bien.
> Se ne ses donc alcune rien
> Por tes conpagnons conforter,
> Ne te volront pas deporter.
> Car t'en vas vials en altre tierre
> Sens et savoir aprendre et quere.
> […]
> Se lens iés en chevalerie
> Si te valra la joglerie.
> Et s'il avient que li rois muire,
> Es cambres t'en poras deduire.
> Ta harpe et ta viële avras

En liu de cho que ne savras
Orfrois ne fresials manoier.
Se te porra mains anoier
Se tu iés en un bastonage
Ke tu aies vials el en gage. (2831-2850, 2863-2872)

[If it should happen that King Evan / died today or tomorrow, / women would inherit again, / and you know nothing of women's arts. / You really need to learn something / that would serve you in good stead, / for all that might come to pass! / And if it should turn out that / you have to keep up this pretense for a long time, / you'll become a knight, as you well know, / and then maybe you'll be a terrible coward, / for I never saw a woman fit / to bear arms in such a manner. / All that may well happen. / If you don't know a single way / to entertain your companions, / they won't want to spend their time with you. / Why don't you at least go abroad / to gain some experience and some expertise? / […] If you are slow at chivalry, / minstrelsy will be of use to you. / And if the king should happen to die, / you will be able to practice your art in a chamber, / you will have your harp and viele / to make up for the fact that you don't know / ho[w] to embroider a fringe or a border. / You will be less bored / in your captivity / if at least you have something to fall back on]

This reasoning serves as motivation for Silence to run away from home and to join up with the jongleurs who have stopped at her caretaker's home for the night. She reasons that if she fails at being a good knight, as least her musical skills will encourage others to want to be around her, and if she must instead live as a woman, she will at least have a skill to keep her occupied, since she doesn't know how to embroider.

This passage illustrates a few important points for an analysis of the jongleur episode as a form cof adventure. First, it highlights the difference between what Philippe Ménard describes as a pre-Chrétien de Troyes notion of adventure visible in the *romans antiques* – namely, that it was something that happened to someone, and was to be endured or overcome from a position of circumstance – and a medieval romance understanding, which is that it is something to be sought out.[36] This distinction is highlighted in the *Roman de Silence* through the use of the terms "par aventure" and "quere." Silence realizes that it could happen *par aventure* that she must remain a

[36] As cited in the introduction (p. 26).

knight for a long time, and thus continue to participate in male activities. Silence's cross-dressing is thus *aventure* in the sense of being situational and the result of bad luck. In this way, her knightly activities, and even her unusual circumstances and the great degree of fortitude they require, do not fulfill the conditions for the form of adventure that is specific to the knight-protagonist model. On the other hand, Silence does at this particular moment of the narrative choose to leave home and to embark on a journey into the unknown, into a land that is unfamiliar to her, with strangers, to perform a task that she has never performed, with uncertain results. This is described in the text as a form of pursuit, perhaps even a form of quest: "sens et savoir aprendre et *quere*." This last word describes a form of seeking that is more in line with a model of adventure as errant displacement. Her decision to run away and live as a jongleur is explicitly shown in opposition to a mere state of situational endurance, and also to a state of enclosure (*bastonage*) that defines feminine activity. Its essential characteristic is displacement.

Moreover, Silence's decision represents a pivotal moment of autonomy for a character whose primary motivation has up until this point been obedience. She has also valued her male privileges, illustrated for instance following her exchange with the allegorical figure of Reason, when she realizes that she would lose these privileges if she were to give up her male identity:

> Raisons ja od li tant esté,
> Se li a tant admonesté
> Que Silences a bien veü
> Que fol consel avoit creü
> Quant onques pensa desuser
> Son bon viel us et refuser,
> Por us de feme maintenir.
> Donques li prent a souvenir
> Des jus c'on siolt es cambres faire
> Dont a oï sovent retraire,
> Et poise dont en son corage
> Tolt l'us de feme, c'est la some. (2625-2638)

> [Reason stayed with him for so long / and admonished him so severely / that Silence understood very well / he had listened to bad advice / ever to think of doing away / with his good old ways / to take up female habits. / Then he began to consider / the pastimes of a woman's chamber - / which he had often heard about - / and weighed in his heart of hearts / all female customs against his current way of life, / and saw, in short, that a man's life / was much better than that of a woman.]

Nevertheless, her circumstances were also put upon her, not created by her, and she has never disputed them with her parents.[37] While Silence is not yet a knight in this episode, and is less sure than ever about becoming one, her decision to leave home as a jongleur does however share some of knightly adventure's defining characteristic – such as autonomy (or freedom of movement) combined with displacement toward the unfamiliar – than any of her subsequent or previous experiences. It is in this episode, then, that the central adventure unfolds, which moreover occurs at the midpoint of the narrative.

It is thus significant that the jongleur episode is the only one that the narrator describes, in knightly adventure fashion, as a marvelous adventure: "Oiés mervellose aventure" (2689). This proclamation might seem odd in context, as the episode is not particularly *merveilleux* in the magical or quasi-mystical sense commonly present in other marvelous adventures of medieval romance. Instead, we are likely meant to understand that it is incredible, singular, or unbelievable. This is the translation that Sarah Roche-Mahdi gives, which does seem to capture the verse's expressive tilt ("Now you're going to hear something amazing!"). However, even this connotation might seem like a bit of an exaggeration in the context of a young person who runs away from home as a traveling minstrel, succeeds at this, escapes potential danger without any

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[37] "'Tolte l'oquoison, fils savés. / Si chier come l'onor avés, / Si vos covrés viers tolte gent.' / Et cil respond moult dolcement, / Briément, al fuer de sage enfant: / 'Ne vos cremés, ne tant ne quant, / Car, se Deu plaist, bien le ferai, / Viers tolte gent me coverrai'" ['Now, son, you know the whole situation. / As you cherish honor, / you will continue to conceal yourself from everyone.' / And he replied very sweetly, / briefly, as befits a well-bred child, / 'Don't worry the least little bit. / So help me God, I will do it. / I will conceal myself from everyone'] (2455-2462).

harm, and returns home. In any case, it is clearly being presented as an *aventure*, and the term *mervellose* contains an entire universe of romance adventures.[38]

What kind of adventure does the jongleur episode represent, then? First it will be useful to outline what occurs in the episode, which begins when two minstrels, one of whom is apparently the best jongleur in the world, leave Cornwall for the coast and find themselves without a place to stay at nightfall. Seeing the home where Silence lives in the distance, they make their way there, and are welcomed into the household, where they are given supper and play music in exchange. Silence serves them that night, helping them to get ready for bed, after which she lies awake in her own bed pondering her situation and reasoning that minstrelsy would be a good skill to learn (as previously cited). At daybreak she bids farewell to the minstrels, finds out where they are headed, pretends to go out hunting, and instead goes into the forest and uses some herbs to darken her complexion. She makes way for the coast, boards a ship which is soon after boarded by the minstrels, who discuss whether or not she is the same boy from the night before (one thinks yes, another no). She accompanies them upon arrival in Brittany. After serving them well at an inn, the minstrels recognize her with certainty, and are happy to let him/her join up with them. In the meantime, the seneschal who cares for Silence realizes that she is missing and is forced to tell Silence's parents. Everyone grieves profoundly, and scenes of

[38] Speaking of what she sees as "the point at which a narrative shaped itself into the pattern we now recognize as medieval romance," namely Geoffrey on Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (*Historia Regum Britannie*), Geraldine Heng (2003) describes how an admixture of fantasy and history underpins the romance genre: "Geoffrey's story is remarkable for many exemplary demonstrations: chief of which perhaps is how, in a resourcefully accommodating cultural medium, historical phenomena and fantasy may collide and vanish, each into the other, without explanation or apology" (2). Heng is not referring to the marvelous *per se* (or to the marvelous alone), but romance has always involved phenomena that we see now as something beyond fiction and that enters the realm of fantasy.

their lamentation fill many verses. Because her parents believe that Silence has been abducted by the minstrels, they outlaw minstrelsy in their land, punishable by death.[39]

As for Silence, she and the jongleurs travel from town to town, from estate to estate. As part of her disguise, she has taken the name Malduit, meaning badly brought up. The jongleurs are welcomed everywhere, and Silence eventually surpasses her masters, becoming an accomplished and renowned minstrel. Very little occurs during this time, and a number of verses are taken up in explaining how accomplished Silence is and describing her performances and her audience's opinion of her. Because of her great skill, these same audiences are no longer interested in hearing the other jongleurs, and although she puts all of her money into their communal funds, they plot to get rid of her. They plan to kill her, and after waking from a dream in which "wild dogs wanted to tear him apart" (3361), Silence overhears the minstrels discussing how they will kill her. Instead of fighting back or running away, she lies awake until morning, at which point she and the minstrels engage in a double-entendre dialogue, a mark of verbal prowess, in which she makes it clear that she knows that continuing to follow them will be dangerous to her, offers to take a small share of the money, and leave them to travel on their own. They accept this offer, and Silence heads back home.

Once back across the sea, an innkeeper informs her that as a jongleur, she will have to be brought to Cador (who is actually her father, although no one knows this) and put to death. This does not appear to upset her, and she plays her vielle into the night, with people coming from all around to hear her. The next morning, Silence heads into town playing her vielle, and is brought before Cador, who is still heavily grieving the loss of his daughter/son. An old wise man tells

[39] A decision reflective of the king's unjust decision to outlaw female inheritance, thus implying a connection between women's circumstances and the act of performance and composition (and thus the very act of storytelling).

him that Silence is really his son, but he doesn't believe him. So, changing tactics, he tells Cador instead that the jongleur is *not* his son,[40] but that he knows something about his son's whereabouts. Cador speaks with Silence in private, and Silence reveals to him her identity, proving it by means of a birthmark and by allusions to her cross-dressing. Cador is overjoyed, everyone celebrates, minstrelsy is allowed again, and Silence performs for her parents.

Two aspects of this episode that I would like to highlight are that the primary conflicts encountered by Silence are generated by and resolved through language and performance, and that the majority of the episode consists of detailed descriptions of performance and the performers' itinerary. While running away from home does throw her parents and the kingdom into grief and could be detrimental to any minstrels who happen to travel to Cornwall, this aspect of the adventure does not prove particularly challenging for Silence. She is able to maintain her jongleur disguise with little issue, even though the other jongleurs recognize him/her almost immediately. She learns quickly and becomes a highly successful performer. The outlawing of minstrelsy does not affect her until she once again crosses into Great Britain, at which point she summarily ignores the law. Instead, she passes half a year in relative ease, until the moment when her fellow jongleurs plot to kill her. Here, though, this mortal challenge does not involve hand-to-hand combat or any form of physical proving. Instead, Silence engages in a playful discourse, and an act of generosity, that alone liberate her from danger. The dialogue between Silence and the jongleurs turns around mutual points of understanding and hidden meaning, essentially forming a clever combat of words, in which the jongleurs make the opening move, quickly parried by Silence:

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[40] In the logic of the narrative, as will particularly be seen in the Merlin episode, this latter statement is the more accurate as it sees "beneath the surface": Silence is not Cador's son, but rather his daughter.

‘Levés!’ / font il. ‘Petit savés
Com grief jornee a faire avés.'
‘Chi n’a’ fait il, ‘mestier de gloze,
Car grief jornee est male coze,
Et bien doit remanoir el mal
Ki de son gré se met el val.’
Sa parole ont cil trestornee:
Dient que il ont grief jornee
Por cho que lor voie est pesans,
Et lor jornee est longhe est grans.
Si tornent le plus bel defors,
Mais malfés ont dedens les cors. (3417-3428)

['Get up!' they said. 'Little do you know / what a hard journey you have to make.' / 'That needs no interpretation,' said Silence. 'A hard journey is dreadful indeed, / and he richly deserves his evil fate / who deliberately puts himself at a disadvantage.' / The two minstrels turned his words around: / they said that they had a hard journey ahead / because the road was difficult, / and that would make for a long and strenuous day's travel. / Thus they affected goodness, / while they were evil on the inside.]

Silence's strength lies in both her knowledge of what the jongleurs are plotting to do, and also in her ability to verbally navigate this situation *without* provoking or engaging in physical combat. Despite later evidence of her knightly prowess, when she will demonstrate great physical skill in battle, at this point Silence is still a girl-raised-as-a-boy confronting two older men, and perhaps it is unclear to her what the outcome of a physical confrontation would be, or whether she would in fact be victorious. Her earlier musings on whether or not, as a woman, she might in fact turn out to be a coward suggest just such a hesitation. Instead, she confronts the jongleurs with hidden meanings, so that she neither has to directly reveal to them that she knows their plot, nor does she have to go along with it. The "grief jornee" is thus both a (false) reference to the difficult journey, and a reference to something that is physically harmful and quite serious. Similarly, Silence mentions the possibility that someone, some unnamed enemies, might do her harm:

‘Segnor, vos me dirés
Ains que jo mueuje, u vos irés,
Car aler poés en tel liu
U l’on me feroit malvais giu,

Se l'en m'i peüst atraper,
Ains que jo peüsce escaper.' (3431-3436)

['Gentlemen, before I make a move, / you must tell me where you are going, / because you could be headed for someplace / where someone might do me a bad turn / if they happened to catch me / before I could escape.]

The jongleurs reply to this by implying that they will protect her against any criminals, while also obliquely referencing their own intentions, saying that "S'il i fierent, nos i ferrons" [If they strike, we strike, too] (3446). Silence responds in kind:

'Dirai vos,' fait il, une rien:
Je ne cuic pas, ains le sai bien
Que vos i ferrés volentiers.
Et cil se guart endementiers,
Se il violt, qui a garder s'a,
U s'il nel fait que fols fera.
Segnor, jo que vos celeroie?
Mes enemis enconterroie
Se jo aloie o vos en France,
Cho sachiés vos tols a fiänce;
U s'o vos aloie en Espagne,
En Alvergne, u en Alemagne.
Si me vient chi miols remanoir,
Qu'aler allors por pis avoir.
Jo remanrai, cho est la some,
Et vos end irés com prodome
Et bone gent, bien le savés.
Si com vos viers moi fait avés,
Vos rendie Dex le gueredon;
Port el deserte altretel don.
Moult m'avés fait, plus eüsciés
Se moi faire le peüssciés.
En vos servir ai jo perdu.' (3447-3469)

[I think, or rather, I know very well, / that you will be only too happy to strike. / In the meantime, the one who has to protect himself / had better be on his guard, if he wants to defend himself; / and if he doesn't do this, he is a fool. / Gentlemen, why should I not speak openly? / You know very well indeed / that I would encounter my enemies / whether I went with you to France / or whether I went with you to Spain / or Auvergne or Germany. / Therefore, it would be much better for me to stay here / than to go somewhere else and be worse off. / In short, I'm staying here. / And you will go off, like upright / and honest men, make no mistake about that. / As you have done to me, / may God do to you in return, / may you receive your just desserts. / You have done much for

me, / and would have done more if you could have. / I haven't been able to do enough for you.]

This sequence of clever double-entendres acts as a discursive weapon against the machinations of the jongleurs, who are defeated by her discourse and . As the text tells us directly following Silence's speech: "Li jogleör sont esperdu" [The minstrels were undone] (3470). This reflects (and forms a rhyming couplet with) Silence's statement in the verse prior, that "En vos servir ai jo perdu" (3469). While Roche-Mahdi has translated this verse for its level of meaning suggesting that Silence has not succeeded in serving the jongleurs as well as she could have, the line also suggests that serving them has become, for Silence, a losing proposition. Though she says that she will speak openly ("jo que vos celeroie?"), her speech continues to be hidden in plain sight, fully transparent to herself, to the jongleurs, and to the reader, and yet still indirect, simultaneously provocative and non-confrontational. Her claim to openness is itself cleverly worded, because in asking "What would I hide from you?" she suggests a possible answer to that question, one that manages at the same time to reference another thing that Silence is hiding - the minstrels do not know that she is "really" a woman - as a bit of a wink from the author.

Similarly, Silence's return to her own land, and her escape from the death that awaits minstrels there, is marked and resolved by shrewd and indirect speech. Initially, the wise old man who recognizes Silence tells her father rather plainly that she is his son: "Al conte dist sa consience: / 'Veés la vostre fil Silence, / Si a apris des estrumens" (3561-3563) [He spoke his mind to the count: 'That is your son Silence; he has learned the minstrel's art']. This open and true statement is met with hostility from the king, who calls the old man a "traistor" (3564) and tells him he's lying and crazy. The old man thus switches his approach, and speaks to Silence, asking for his/her name, to which Silence replies "Malduit." The old man, somehow privy to

family secrets or to what lies beneath appearances,[41] immediately understands that this is in reference to Silence's cross-gendered upbringing and says as much in only slightly veiled language:

> Bien sai que vostres nons despont,
> Car malduis cho est mal apris,
> Si estes vos, qu'il n'i a pris
> Ne los a vos n'a vo parage
> D'avoir mené si fait usage. (3578-3582)
>
> [I know very well what your name means: / Malduit means 'badly brought up,' / and that suits you well, for neither you / nor your family wins any praise or prizes / for such a counterfeit upbringing.]

He then returns to Silence's father, moving away from open meaning back to the realm of the cunningly veiled, and tells him:

> Sire, or sai bien que jo mespris
> De vostre fil, que jo vos dis.
> Cho n'est il pas, mais j'ai oï,
> Se Dex me doinst ester esjoï,
> Que cis vos dira tells novieles,
> S'il violt, et vos, ki seront bieles.
> De vostre enfant set la verror
> Et si vos metra fors d'error. (3601-3608)
>
> [Sire, I know now that I was mistaken / in what I told you regarding your son. / That's not he, but I have heard, / may God grant me the joy of it, / that this boy can tell you some wonderful news – / if you and he are willing. / He knows the truth about your son / and will clear the matter up for you.]

Once again, indirect or veiled speech proves a powerful device, and Silence's father listens to the old man this time. Speaking together in private, Silence reveals to her father her true identity. It is curious that Silence does not do this earlier (she could have conceivably taken the initiative to

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[41] Sarah Roche-Mahdi believes that the wise old man is a manifestation of Merlin: "This old man is certainly Merlin in disguise, penetrating Silence's disguise and unmasking her, just as he appears later as a white-haired old man (i.e. in human form, not stag, as in 'Grisandole') to help with his own capture. Thus, Heldris forges a link between the two parts of the narrative." (Roche-Mahdi, ibid, 325).

reveal her identity to Cador without the intervention of the old man - she would need only say "I am your son" and not even risk any other kind of public exposure), and that this meeting is only arranged on the basis of an understanding that must be expressed in veiled terms. But such acts of veiled speech are ultimately how the conflicts in the jongleur section are resolved, which make the adventure equally one of language – and the disjuncture between appearance and truth or meaning – as of risk or danger.

This veiled speech is in turn reflective of Silence's veiled identity, as Silence's "self" exists under the cover of misleading clothing, and yet is entirely constituted by her experiences wearing this clothing and living as a boy, and now also as a jongleur. Just as veiled language proves to be a useful and successful weapon in the jongleur episode, it is Silence's male identity that resolves (at least temporarily) the problem of female disinheritance. Though Silence is eventually "unmasked" and women are again able to inherit, this conclusion is only brought about through Silence's double existence. Merlin's revelation of not only Silence's female identity, but also of the queen's affair with a cross-dressed nun, is what enables the king to simultaneously punish his wife, reward Silence, and reinstate female inheritance. It is thus through her performance as a man that Silence ultimately receives her inheritance, even though she does so as a woman.

The performative aspect of the jongleur episode therefore gains particular significance within the context of the text's focus on appearances, but also because the episode itself offers up performers and performance as narrative subjects. While Silence take on the disguise of the jongleur as a means of leaving home and gaining musical skills, these pragmatic reasons are not necessities of her situation; it would have been acceptable for noble men to learn to play musical instruments without having to engage in the socially unacceptable act, for a noble, of performing

for money. But the text is somewhat unconcerned with these practicalities, and instead uses the opportunity afforded by the jongleur disguise to richly explore the jongleurs' itinerary and performances. Indeed, throughout the jongleur episode, Silence's gendered dilemma becomes conspicuously unimportant. She is not worried about being exposed, nor about how her female body might affect her musical performance. Throughout this episode, the primary source of the romance's suspense, and its entire *raison d'être*, namely Silence's gender, is temporarily lifted in favor of staging the concerns of a performer.

Paradoxically, though, this unmooring is enabled by Silence's gendered dilemma, because as a protagonist exempt from the requirements of amorous desire or knightly motivations, she is able to disappear into the role of the jongleur without any competing interests. Typically, female characters who disguise themselves as jongleurs in medieval romance and related genres do so for a particular end, almost exclusively related to desire or to their role as one half of a couple. In this context, the jongleur disguise is used as a means of disseminating a particular narrative, giving a public voice to women who were otherwise without one. In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, for example, Nicolette is motivated to disguise herself as a jongleur in order to reunite with Aucassin, and she maintains her jongleur disguise once she has finally made it back home to Aucassin, so that she can narrate her own adventures to him incognito in order to discern his unguarded reaction. In doing so, she takes control of her own narrative, which becomes part of the actual narrative of the text, told through Nicolette's voice.

Similarly, in her work on poet heroines, Brooke Heidenreich Findley (2012) examines the romance *Galeran de Bretagne*, in which the heroine Fresne disguises herself as a female jongleur in order to figuratively conquer her lover Galeran, publicly identifying herself to him by singing a song known only to the two of them. According to Findley, "Fresne suggests that her singing is

an act of aggression and prowess. This is a combat she has won" (32). As for the *Roman de Silence,* the line between action and narrative becomes blurred in each of these texts, as the female protagonists use their disguise and new narrative position to recount past actions, and the narratives themselves become actions to elicit a response. As Findley reminds us, the very act of public performance was, for a noble woman, "a transgressive crossing of class and/or gender lines" (45), highlighting the extent to which discourse was a form of action for medieval women in both historical and fictional settings.[42]

For Silence, on the other hand, who is not bound by the same considerations that inscribe either feminine or masculine identities in romance, the end that she seeks in this episode is simply to gain the skills of the jongleur; the skills themselves are what she set out to *aprendre et quere*. In this sense, Silence's gendered situation positions her in a liminal space between narrative gendered expectations, and this position enables a third type of narrative subject to take the stage, namely the performer. As with other female characters disguised as jongleurs, Silence's conflicts are resolved through a form of language performance rather than direct action. However, the conflict that the disguise is meant to resolve (Silence's position between the male and female) is achieved not through the telling of a particular narrative, but rather through the simple act of becoming a jongleur. This act places the figure of the jongleur in the narrative spotlight.

Developed depictions of characters other than noble men and women are rare in medieval romance of the twelfth century, although the voice of the narrator plays a prominent role in both framing and commenting upon both the story's action and the artfulness of its telling. The

[42] Furthermore, Findley notes that "Fresne's claim of military prowess through the double act of singing and self-naming constitutes a classic performative utterance, according to the terms established by Benveniste and summarized by Felman" (46).

performer-as-character begins to become more visible in the thirteenth century, not only the *Roman de Silence* but also in works such as *Guillaume de Dole*, which features the elusive and pivotal figure of the jongleur Jouglet. However, the extended depiction of jongleurs' wanderings, performances, and material existence are notably more prominent in the above analyzed episode of the *Roman de Silence* than in its romance contemporaries. Ultimately, the *Roman de Silence* utilizes the text's gendered circumstances as a space for expanding the narrative possibilities of whose story can be told, or of what constitutes narrative interest, positioning the performer outside of the male or female romance typecast.

Silence's "mervellose aventure" is, in the end, an adventure of performance and of language. It is the adventure of a jongleur, a figure whose peripatetic existence, while in some ways parallel to that of the knight, is never meant to produce the same forms of combat or conflict, nor necessarily to seek the strange and *merveilleux*. It is the jongleur, however, who *creates* the marvelous through the very act of storytelling and narration. Knightly adventure itself is only marvelous within narrative, brought to life by storytellers and performers, and it is this aspect of the romance model that comes into focus through Silence's own highly discursive and performative adventures.

In turn, the very act of performance-as-adventure recalls, of course, Silence's gendered circumstances. Aside from Silence's own conflicted thoughts about her gendered body and social identity, the narrative also stages a direct conflict between the allegorical characters of Nature and Nurture who engage in a verbal battle for control of Silence. Their battle brings to mind works such as Prudentius's *Psychomachia* and in this sense they provide more of a scene of single combat than can be found elsewhere in the *Roman de Silence*. Silence's gendered performance thus reveals itself to be its own kind of adventure, one that is playing out inside

Silence but also in all of Silence's subsequent adventures and interactions. In her book *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France*, Daisy Delogu shows how in the later Middle Ages – in the centuries following the *Roman de Silence* – gender operates as a significant feature of allegory as female allegorical bodies were used to represent entities such as the nation of France and the University of Paris. Her larger observations regarding the relationship between gender and allegory are valid for earlier time periods as well, given that most medieval allegorical figures – at least in the Latin and Old French traditions – are in fact women. As she writes: "If allegory is a woman, it is not, as has too often been claimed, simply on the basis of grammar. Rather, it is because the very processes of allegorical writing and reading are imagined by their practitioners in gendered terms" (2015, 19). The use allegory in the *Roman de Silence* is thus even more striking in light of the consistent correspondence between gender and allegorical representation during our time period. Two female allegories – Nature and Nurture – fight over a female body precisely as it relates to the correspondence between the body and the body's covering, using gender as a means of interrogating the space between the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, or the very space occupied by allegorical writing.[43]

The particular form that allegory takes in the *Roman de Silence* has been analyzed by Gloria Thomas Gilmore (1997). She writes of the Merlin episode in particular that "The delivery of Merlin into the hands of society implies the delivery of meaning to the understanding of men.

[43] See Jon Whitman (1987) who writes that "The basis for the technique [of allegory] is obliquity – the separation between what a text says, the 'fiction,' and what it means, the 'truth.' This very obliquity, however, relies upon an assumed correspondence between the fiction and the truth. The apparent meaning, after all, only diverges from the actual one insofar as they are compared with each other. In these two conflicting demands – the divergence between the apparent and actual meanings, and yet the correspondence between them – it is possible to see both the birth and the death of allegorical writing. […] In this way, allegory tends to be at odds with itself, tending to undermine itself by the very process that sustains it" (2).

The use of silence to capture the deliverer of meaning is at the heart of whether allegory can keep its promise" (155). Regardless of what promises allegory makes or can keep, the relationship between how language is used and what language signifies is at play in both of the extended adventure sequences of the *Roman de Silence*, and the protagonist of these sequences embodies this very tension. The fact that Reason intervenes on behalf of Nurture appears to signal in the text both the validity of Silence's male identity and the potential truth of the covering. However, this reading is complicated by the fact that Reason does not state that Nurture is inherently correct, but rather that it is more practical for Silence to remain a male:

> [...] Raisons
> Li monstre, et dist les oquoisons
> Que poi le valt mains de la mort
> Se il s'acostume et amort
> A deguerpir sa noreture
> [...]
> 'Ja n'ieres mais vallés apriés.
> Tolt perdrés cheval et carete.
> Ne cuidiés pas li rois vos mete
> En l'onor, por estre parjure,
> S'il aperçoit vostre nature.'
>
> [Reason / started her case, citing examples / as to why, if she abandoned her nurture / to take up the habits of nature, / it would be almost as bad / as killing herself. / [...] 'believe me, / you will never train for knighthood afterwards. / You will lose your horse and chariot. / Do not think the king will go back on his word / and acknowledge you as rightful heir, / when he finds out your true nature']

Though Roche-Mahdi translates the end of this passage as the king "going back on his word," in the Old French we see that the king will not put Silence "en l'onor," for having been "parjure." Reason thus seems to agree somewhat with Nature that Silence's male identity is a lie (or at least that it will be seen as such by others) but reasons that the possible consequences of revealing her "nature" will far outweigh the transgression itself. Silence stands to lose not only her honor and inheritance, but also notably her "cheval" and "carete," things that Silence might be remiss to

part with (who would want to lose their horse?) It is after this passage that Silence decides that being a man is better than being a woman, an opinion that Silence owes to Reason, and not to either Nature or Nurture, who seem to confuse Silence more than convince her. The reader is left to wonder which is the greater truth, given that Silence performs admirably as a male and that the use of veiled speech is shown to be a source of performative prowess.

Deceitful Appearances and Veiled Language

A final example that illustrates another aspect of the reworking of adventure in the *Roman de Silence* is the Merlin episode, which at first glance appears to fulfill at least some of the requirements for knightly wandering. In this episode, Silence is sent by the king and by Eufeme to capture Merlin, a task that they believe will be impossible, as Merlin can only be captured by a woman and they believe that Silence is a man. This task thus amounts to effective banishment, curiously coming right on the heels of Silence's remarkable victory in battle. It is occasioned by the lustful and vengeful queen's second mendacious rape accusation. For unexplained reasons, and in direct contrast to his response to the previous rape accusation, the king decides to believe the queen and to punish Silence. Instead of having the now-hero and savior of the kingdom killed or officially banished, the king and queen agree to send Silence on a search for Merlin, intending to sentence Silence to indefinite wandering beyond the margins of the familiar world. And indeed, Silence sets out and spends six months wandering the woods, far from people and from civilization, a time period which the text covers in just two verses: "Tant ne porquant d'anchoi assés / Que li demi ans fust passés" [And yet, not quite / half a year later] (5873-5874). This textual condensing of time insinuates that nothing of interest has happened during Silence's months of searching, which takes the form of an adventure (wandering past the edges of the

cultivated world, attempting to capture Merlin) but empties it of its content. When Silence does then encounter a mysterious man who tells her where Merlin is and how to capture him, it becomes clear that she succeeds not by her own prowess, but rather by the intervention of a mystical figure who is perhaps Merlin himself. The capture, too, constitutes an odd form of adventure: following the mysterious man's advice, Silence captures Merlin by way of cooked meat, and by making him drunk and bloated as he attempts to quench his thirst with honey, milk and wine. The episode that in many ways employs the most typical narrative conventions surrounding adventure – the marginal and solitary wandering of a knight, the mystical, a difficult challenge – thus also finds its resolution in tactics that prove relatively little about the protagonist other than her ability to follow instructions, and the fact that she is a woman (per Merlin's statement that he could only be captured by a woman). The outcome of her success then is inverse to that of the knight: she does not bolster her reputation and knightly identity, but rather undoes it. The indeterminacy of her wandering, meant to remove her from society with no hope of return, is thus mirrored in the dissolution of her social identity as a knight. In this way, the Silence who departed – the Silence who was a knight – never does return.

Equally problematic for Silence's final adventure is that it breaks with the tradition of the autonomy or freedom of the knight's adventure. This lack of autonomy can be glimpsed in Silence's capture of Merlin only through the actions of another male character, but even more significantly it stems from the fact that this is an adventure that Silence herself has not chosen: her movements lack freedom, an essential quality of the *chevalier errant*. Indeed, as Chênerie reminds us, the mere choice of the term *chevalier* in medieval romance convention contained within it an echo of the knight's freedom:

> [L]e terme de chevalier ne comporte pas la connotation de dépendance à l'égardd'un seigneur, comme celui de *ministeriales*, les guerriers montés, non nobles, qui existèrent

> en Allemagne plus longtemps qu'en France. Sans lien non plus avec l'idée de service contenue dans *militare*, la dénomination littéraire était tout entière disponible pour l'idée aristocratique de la liberté, conçue comme engagement volontaire envers soi-même. Ailleurs, *Ritter*, *knight* se libérèrent aussi de l'étymon du latin classique, *miles*. (9-10)
>
> [The term *chevalier* does not connote dependence on a lord, such as in the case of *ministeriales*, the non-noble, mounted warriors who existed in Germany longer than they did in France. Unconnected as well to the idea of service contained in the word *militare*, the literary denomination was entirely available for an aristocratic idea of liberty, conceived as a voluntary engagement towards oneself. Elsewhere, Ritter, knight, were also liberated from the classical Latin etymon *miles*.]

The *knight* as such, as has been previously shown, is thus both a historical reality and a literary construct imbued with aristocratic values, of which liberty, and therefore autonomy ("engagement volontaire envers soi-même") are paramount. Silence's lack of autonomy is clear from the outset of the Merlin adventure. She protests when the king commands her to go on this journey:

> 'Coment, sire?' cil le respont.
> 'Coment prendroie jo celui
> C'ainc ne se lassça a nului
> Baisier, ne prendre, ne tenir,
> N'a cui nus hom puist avenir?.' (5844-5848).
>
> ['What, Sire?' Silence replied to him. / 'How could I capture the one / who has never let anyone / kiss, catch, hold / or come anywhere near him?']

Again, we must make a small correction to Roche-Mahdi's translation, which is nonetheless a major difference: it's not just that Merlin hasn't let anyone come near him, it's that he hasn't let *nus hom* (any man) do so. This is a key difference, because it insinuates that Silence already knows that this adventure will be a dead end. Either she will prove unsuccessful and spend the rest of her life wandering the margins of the known world (in which case, what is the point of the inheritance?), or she will succeed and in doing so reveal her "nature" as a woman, thus losing her inheritance. The king cannot be moved by her reasoning, however, and Silence departs,

> Pensius et tristres, tolt plorant

Et Dameldeu sovent orant
Que il son traval li aliege
Qu'il puist prendre Merlin al piege
Et qu'il soit vengiés de la dame
Ki por noient l'alieve blame.
[…]
Il est moult las et moult delis. (5859-5864, 5872)

[pensive and sad, weeping bitterly, / and praying frequently to God / to ease his burden / and help him trap Merlin / and let him be avenged on the lady / who persecuted him for no reason. […] He was very miserable and discouraged]

It is interesting, in light of this passage, that Silence goes on the adventure at all, rather than revealing her body right then and there, which would avenge her against the queen's accusations without having to capture Merlin. Perhaps, in a way, it is a test that Silence sets for herself, a kind of final decision about her identity that will be made by external forces.

More broadly, if we take a view of the text as a whole, it becomes clear that Silence's knighthood is entirely predicated on a kind of obedience and obligation that separates her from the chivalric hero, even within a feudal system of loyalty and rigid social expectations. While one could make the argument that all male knights exist as such only out of a form of obedience to norms over which they have no control, these norms are treated in the *Roman de Silence* as inherently natural. Throughout the text, Nature's conflation of customs (*us*) and human nature underscore the level to which gendered roles, and likewise class roles, are perceived as being intrinsic to the individual, just as Nature's use of the finest flour to create Silence is responsible for both her beauty and – more significantly – her nobility.[44] What Nature suggests is that one's

[44] "Tolt si com cil qui prent un crible, / U tamis, u un buletiel, / Quant faire violt blanc pain e biel, / Et quant la farine i a mise / Dunt crible, u bulette, u tamise, / Et torne le flor d'une part, / Et le gros terchuel en depart, / Et fait adonc un entreclos / Entre le fleur blance et le gros, / Si qu'o le fleur n'a nule palle, / Ne busce nule, ne escalle, / Ne entre tolt l'autre monciel / De fleur vallant un botonciel, / Et de la fleur fait ses gastials, / Et del tercuel torte a porciels, / Tolt si com cis fait sans dotance / Que chi ai mis en la sanblance, Si fait Nature, c'est la some, / Quante faire violt un vallant home / Que voelle ovrer par majestyre." [Just like the one who takes a sieve / or

social standing and social role (whether as a noble or non-noble, man or woman, knight or jongleur) is "baked" into the substance of the individual. The obligation to be a noble, a man and a knight is thus equivalent to the obligation to eat food – or more precisely, as demonstrated in Merlin's case, to eat cooked food.[45] In this sense, Silence's obligations differ from those of the knight-protagonist, because they are not born from the "natural customs" of gender and class norms, but rather from uncustomary circumstances. As a result, the reputation that Silence gains as a knight accrues to an identity that is unstable, because it slips off as easily at the end as does her man's clothing.

Within this space of difference from the knight-protagonist, the *Roman de Silence* constructs another version of adventure in the Merlin episode that, like the jongleur episode, rests on a play of language, the correspondence (or divergence) between the sign and its meaning, and the correspondence (or divergence) between body and gender, Nature and Nurture, and even identity and the body. The very construct of the adventure, as revolving around the truth revealed in Silence's capturing of Merlin, since Merlin can only be captured by a woman, sets up the

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sifter or colander / when he wants to make beautiful white bread, / and sifts the flour through / the sifter, sieve or colander, / and puts the extra-fine flour on one side / and the course bran on the other, / and carefully keeps / the extra-fine flour separate from the course, / so that the fine flour has no straw / or chaff or husks in it, / and the other little heap / doesn't have the little bit of fine flour / and makes find cakes of the flour / and loaves for the pigs out of the bran - / just like this, without a doubt, / like the one we have depicted here, / does Nature, to be brief, / proceed when she wants to make a noble human being / that she wants to be a masterpiece] (1808-1828).

[45] "L'appétit irrésistible de Merlin pour la viande grillée, incontrôlé par la raison, semblerait renvoyer à sa nature animale plutôt qu'à sa nature humaine. Mais cet appétit pour la viande cuite est précisément ce qui rend Merlin humain, selon le vieillard qui conseille Silence. C'est sa dernière caractéristique humaine après qu'il a abandonné l'humanité pour l'état sauvage, cela constitue la limite de définition de la culture humaine." [Merlin's irresistible appetite for grilled meat, uncontrolled by reason, would seem to stem from his animal, rather than human, nature. But this appetite for cooked meat is precisely what makes Merlin human, according to the old man who advises Silence. It is his last remaining human characteristic after having abandoned humanity for a wild state, it constitutes the outer limit of the definition of human culture] (Robert S. Sturges 2014, 42).

circumstances by which Silence's knightly identity will be undone. This identity proves not to reside in Silence's name (which does not change, although perhaps it becomes Silentia), and not in Silence's corporeal reality (Silence's body hasn't actually changed), and not in Silence's actions and feats of prowess (those haven't been erased). Rather, it resides in an assumed correspondence between Silence's external features, name, actions, and some sort of natural or essential self as represented by the gendered body. For a social class highly concerned with issues of lineage and genealogy (and we will recall that just such concerns are what prompt Silence's cross-dressing in the first place), the body represents not only a gender but also what that gender is expected to (re)produce. In this sense, Silence's enduring reputation is not assured by her prowess; rather it is assured by the assumption that she is what she appears to be.

The relationship between gender and Merlin is not specific to only this episode in the Merlin tradition.[46] As Sarah Roche-Mahdi (2002) shows, it borrows heavily from the Grisandole episode of the Arthurian *Vulgate*, in which a lady, Avenable, who is disguised as a seneschal named Grisandole, captures Merlin. As Roche-Mahdi points out, "When Grisandole asks why Merlin is laughing at her, he bursts into a tirade" (8), calling her an "Unnatural, shape-shifted creature, deceptive and deceitful in every way" and telling her to "be silent" (8). Merlin then reveals at court that he laughed at Grisandole "Because the most beautiful and best woman in the kingdom did what no man could do," (9) and as in the *Roman de Silence*, the emperor then marries Avenable. The resemblance of these two episodes is evident. Moreover, Roche-Mahdi

[46] Lorraine Kochanske Stock (1997) notes that "Heldris's choice of Merlin as arbiter of the clash between the various constructions of male and female power in the denouement is appropriate, most obviously because of the tradition that he is fated to be trapped by the *engien* of a female. In various Arthurian romances, Merlin relinquishes his own male-gendered knowledge to females who, empowered by that appropriated knowledge, use it against their teacher" (25).

analyzes the difference between Merlin as truth-teller in the Grisandole episode and in the *Roman de Silence*:

> As in 'Grisandole,' Merlin's role at the end is to reveal the truth veiled by unnatural language and dress, to reestablish 'straight' sexuality and feudal laws of inheritance. But in Silence, the elements that persuade the reader he is a genuinely 'friendly helper' are absent, and much is added that reinforces the impression that he is playing a malicious game. (17)

Whether or not the truth that Merlin reveals is thus desirable, or preferable to its continued concealment, is thus left ambiguous in the *Roman de Silence*, an ambiguity that becomes even more evident when read in relation to the broader Merlin legend.

As in the Grisandole episode, Merlin's reaction to Silence's situation is to find it almost unbearably comical. He laughs so much at court that he cannot speak and is only silent when threatened with death if he will not explain himself. The fact that no one seems to know what he is laughing *at* is what is so aggravating and discomfiting. The king and the court need to know that there is a correspondence between Merlin's behavior and some rational basis for laughter, and they need to know what that basis is. Merlin then reveals a series of observations he made while traveling with Silence to the court, such as his foresight that a man he saw carrying a new pair of shoes home from the market would die before he got there and would never be able to enjoy them. Merlin's word is not sufficient, however, and the king sends messengers to verify Merlin's story: "Li rois l'a fait enquerre en oire, / Si l'a tolt altressi trové" [The king quickly sent messengers to look into the matter, / and found it was just as Merlin had said] (6324-6325). For the king, the story must thus correspond to a visible, verifiable truth – something someone must go see in person – in order to be believed, perhaps because the king suspects that Merlin, despite his mystical insight and reputation for truth telling, might not exactly be the most literal or reliable of speakers.

Merlin may be a truth teller, but he also takes various forms, thus making him another "Unnatural, shape-shifted creature." The issue of appearance and shape-shifting arises when Silence first captures Merlin, although not initially in relation to Silence's own transformed appearance. In an unexpected revelation (nothing prior to this episode has prepared us for a deep dive into Merlin lore), Silence accuses Merlin of having "as good as killed" one of her ancestors, and claims it is for this reason that she is taking her revenge on him:

> Merlin, assés le me tuas
> Quant Uterpandragon muas
> En le forme al duc mon a[n]cestre
> Et toi fesis altretel estre
> Com fu ses senescals avoec.
> Uter en menas droit illeuc
> U il o la feme al duc giut,
> Quant a Artu le preu conciut. (6147-6154)
>
> [Merlin, you as good as killed him / when you transformed Uther Pendragon / into the likeness of my ancestor, the duke / and you yourself likewise pretended / to be his seneschal and accompanied him. / You led Uther right to the spot / where he lay with the duke's wife, / and she conceived the noble Arthur]

Merlin's response to this accusation is not to deny it, but to claim that it was done for the best ("Cho fu graindres prel," 6155), as the great Arthur, "qui fu si preus" (6156) [who was so worthy][47] was born from this deception.[48] For Merlin, then, the ends justify the means, even when this means taking on a deceptive appearance, a stance at odds with his invective against the lady-as-knight in the Grisandole. In manner similar to Reason, Merlin appears not to argue about whether or not changing one's appearance is right or wrong, but rather to view it in practical terms for its outcome. Does it ultimately matter what the truth is if the outcome is good?

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[47] Translation my own.

[48] Sharon Kinoshita (2002) compares this history with Silence's own subsequent marriage to King Evan: "The illicit conscription of the women of Cornwall to the king's pleasure has a long history" (73).

In the Merlin adventure, gender is used as a site for exploring the correspondence between signs and their meaning or interpretation, but the outcome of the "truth" is ambiguous at best for Silence. This ambiguity is evident in gendered terms for Silence, but also for how utterances (laughter, for instance, or truth telling) come to signify, and what they in fact signify. Gloria Thomas Gilmore (1997) has argued that the Merlin episode represents an interrogation of the function of allegory. As she writes,

> More than a character, Merlin is the embodiment of writing itself, polyvalent and a shape-shifter; the Middle Ages knew him as the personification of reading [...] Merlin reads the signs of the times, uncovers truth veiled by 'figura,' and as a translator of allegory delivers meaning. (111)

The Merlin episode thus reveals itself to be another adventure predicated on forms of performance and discourse. Gilmore observes that "Merlin translates the signifiers, but the signifieds remain the same" (118). And yet, these signifieds are viewed in a dramatically different light when the signifiers shift – Silence loses her ability to save the kingdom as a knight, and loses everything she has trained and worked for in becoming a woman, because these activities and feats of prowess will not remain part of her social identity and function as queen. The signifier is not only a manner of speaking, but a way in which this speaking generates subjects and has real consequences for the signified.[49]

In becoming a woman, Silence's many feats of prowess – we will remember that she unequivocally excels in combat and saves the entire kingdom – are no longer part of her social

[49] Similarly, Howard Bloch (1985) reminds us that "Silence participates in a long and respected Latin and vernacular tradition according to which nature, writing, and sexual difference are allied" (83). Comparing the *Roman de Silence* to Alain of Lille's *De Planctus Naturae*, Bloch further notes that "Nature in the *Roman de Silence* considers her work to be have been linguistically perverted by an act of false naming" (86), later comparing the notion of silence and speech to the poet's art: "The troubadour or trouvère is one who attempts to fill the silences or 'trous' in speech (which he also makes by speaking)" (90).

identity or subjectivity. The combat episodes in romance are always distinct from those of adventure. While the knight may prove his valor in battle, facing off against a great many enemies with bravery and panache, it is through adventure that the knight proves something about himself, about who is he, sometimes even literally gaining a name in the process (as with Lancelot or Guinglain). It is this quality of adventure that has led to the theory that subjectivity begins with chivalric romance, in the persona of the knight errant. In the adventure sequences in the *Roman de Silence*, however, what is at stake is always the performance and instability of identity. Like many romance heroines, Silence proves to be discursively adept and to use narrative in her favor, but she is also thwarted by her need to remain silent about her own body, most notably in response to the false accusations of the queen. The identity that is "discovered" at the end is hardly one that Silence seems to relish. She will now have to give up her *cheval* and perhaps even learn to embroider (we can only hope that her minstrelsy will serve her well). Roche-Mahdi provides an excellent description of the disappointment of this ending:

> The wicked queen is punished and the heroine marries the king. Inheritance rights are restored. Yet few readers are comfortable with the dénouement of *Silence*. Can we assume this marriage will be happy? Is this for a greater good? In 'Grisandole,' the reader is assured that the heroine lives happily ever after. Heldris's version of the conclusion differs obviously and drastically. The heroine's sadly banal, brutally realistic destiny is to be a young heiress married to a much older man. A politically, sexually and morally inadequate ruler ends up with a young, loyal and fertile wife who embodies the most important piece of real estate in the kingdom. No one, least of all Heldris, says she lives happily ever after. (15)

Returning to some of the earlier arguments I made in this chapter about adventure as a form of language, a thematic thread can be drawn from Cador and Eufemie's courtship all the way to Silence's "unveiling," in which adventure becomes a highly narrative phenomenon. Reading the *Roman de Silence* in terms of its apparent interest in narrative and language does not in itself

represent a novel critical stance.[50] However, my reading shows how this interest enacts a transformation in the generic material – the Arthurian adventure – in which *Silence* embeds itself. In particular, while it does not present a resolutely feminine version of adventure (Silence maintains a male identity throughout), it mobilizes Silence's gendered dilemma to stage a form of adventure that is not predicated on feats of physical prowess, even though we know from the text that Silence is capable of these feats. Instead, the thematic of identity, present in other Arthurian romances in the naming of knights and in the building of a reputation, is explored through the adventure sequences along with language, discursive prowess, and the very act of performance. By changing the body of the knight, the narrative changes not the outward structure of adventure – displacement, the marvelous, conflict, etc, – but rather its content, or what we might call the body of adventure.

[50] See for example: Campbell (2019), Séguy (2018), Terrell (2008), Johnson (2005), Bibbee (2003), Gilmore (1997), and Bloch (1985).